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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with John Yuill
Conducted by Dr. Laura Calkins
October 12, 2004; October 14, 2004; August 18, 2005; August 26, 2005
Transcribed by Jessica Fontenot**

1 Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University beginning an oral history interview with Col. John Yuill of the United States
3 Air Force. The day's date is the twelfth of October 2004. I am in the Special Collections
4 building on the campus of Texas Tech. I'm speaking with John by telephone. John,
5 you're in Fort Worth, is that right?

6 John Yuill: That is correct.

7 LC: Good afternoon, first of all.

8 JY: Good afternoon.

9 LC: I want to thank you for taking some time today to participate in the Oral
10 History Project.

11 JY: No problem.

12 LC: Is it all right if I call you John?

13 JY: It's all right.

14 LC: Okay. Thank you. First, John, if you wouldn't mind, please give us a sense
15 of first of all general biographical data and then where you grew up. Where were you
16 born and when?

17 JY: Boswell, Indiana. Twenty-nine July 1934.

18 LC: Boswell, Indiana, is where from anywhere that we might've heard of?

19 JY: Well, it's seven miles due west of Oxford, Indiana.

20 LC: Okay. I was gonna ask is that the county seat or something?

1 JY: No. We're not going that big yet. Now see, I don't want to rush you like you
2 don't want to rush me into Hanoi. I don't want to rush you away from Boswell, Indiana.

3 LC: Yes, sir.

4 JY: Let me put it this way. It is approximately twenty miles straight west of
5 Lafayette, Indiana, home of Purdue University.

6 LC: Yes, sir. Did you grow up sort of in the shadow of Purdue?

7 JY: I did.

8 LC: Did you go over there much?

9 JY: No. No. I didn't. I went to a business college in Lafayette, but I did not attend
10 Purdue.

11 LC: Okay. Well, I'm from Michigan and I know that, rural Michigan, and I know
12 that the big state universities do cast a shadow, that's for sure.

13 JY: That is correct. If you grew up in rural Michigan then this Boswell, Indiana,
14 is a thousand people. So it is essentially a rural community.

15 LC: Yes, sir. Now what about your family? Tell me about your dad first of all.

16 JY: Okay. My father was a funeral director. He grew up in Indiana, also. His
17 father was in the railroads and he was with the railroads. My father, like I say, a funeral
18 director, so he was self-employed. I am one of six children. I am the oldest. After me
19 were three girls and then two more boys.

20 LC: Tell me a little bit about the family business. Was that an established
21 business that your father bought into or did he create it on his own?

22 JY: Created it.

23 LC: Really?

24 JY: Yeah.

25 LC: How did he happen to do this in Boswell?

26 JY: He worked as an embalmer for the only funeral home in Boswell. When the
27 owner of the funeral home for which he worked died he started his own funeral home.
28 The wife of his former employer continued the funeral home. So he was in competition
29 with the funeral home he had worked at prior. She didn't remain in business very long
30 and then he was the sole funeral director in the little town of Boswell.

31 LC: Okay. What was his name?

1 JY: John. John Arthur.
2 LC: Is that also your name?
3 JY: John Harry.
4 LC: Where does the Harry come from? Is it a family name, as well?
5 JY: Yeah, interesting question. The, "Harry," was the name, the first name, of the
6 gentleman that he worked for.
7 LC: Oh, is that right?
8 JY: Isn't that interesting?
9 LC: Yes, it is.
10 JY: Yeah.
11 LC: He must have had a great deal of respect for that gentleman.
12 JY: He did. He did. He thought very highly of Harry Simpkins. Not so highly of
13 Harry Simpkins's wife.
14 LC: Sometimes that happens.
15 JY: Yeah. That is not too uncommon.
16 LC: Let me ask you a little bit about his father. You mentioned that he had
17 worked for the railroad. In what capacity?
18 JY: I'm sorry?
19 LC: Your dad's father had worked for the railroad.
20 JY: That is correct.
21 LC: In what capacity?
22 JY: He was a telegraph operator.
23 LC: Oh, is that right?
24 JY: Yeah. Does that mean anything to you?
25 LC: Click. Click. Click. Click. That kind of thing.
26 JY: That's it. You got it.
27 LC: Okay.
28 JY: That's when they used to communicate with the engineers on the trains and
29 to other locations, other stations, via Morse code.
30 LC: Now what railroad would've been going through there that he worked on?
31 JY: He worked for the Nickel Plate Railroad.

1 LC: Tell me a little bit about that if you know anything, John.

2 JY: Local. I don't know if they—I think they operated maybe in Kentucky. I
3 don't know if it was—or maybe it was strictly an Indiana railroad.

4 LC: So a small network maybe?

5 JY: Yeah. Yeah.

6 LC: What about your mother? Tell me what you can about her. First of all her
7 name, her maiden name.

8 JY: Marie. She was one of fourteen children.

9 LC: Wow.

10 JY: This was a farming family. Her parents were German. In fact, they came
11 from Germany.

12 LC: Is that right? Uh-huh.

13 JY: Yeah.

14 LC: Did they have their own land in the area?

15 JY: Yes, they did. They bought a farm and I forget. I want to say it was about two
16 hundred acres, but I'm not sure. I know it wasn't big by today's standards, but it was
17 average size by the size of farms back in the '30s and '40s.

18 LC: Were they able to hold onto that through the Depression?

19 JY: Yes. In fact their youngest son still owns the home place. That's a term we
20 use in rural Indiana.

21 LC: Yes, sir. He's still in the family business then?

22 JY: No. He is now retired, but he lives at the home place.

23 LC: That's remarkable.

24 JY: Yeah, it is.

25 LC: That really is. What kind of a woman was your mom? Can you talk about her
26 for a little bit?

27 JY: Yeah. She was probably one of the most impressive women I've ever known
28 in my life. A very religious woman, a very hardworking woman, a very disciplined
29 person. She was just—in fact, it's difficult for me to find fault with her. I know I'm sure I
30 have a tremendous amount of bias cranked into my observation, but I really do, trying to
31 be objective, it's difficult to find a fault with that woman.

1 LC: Any idea how old your parents were when—did they know each other
2 growing up?

3 JY: No. Well, yes and no. No. The answer is no. They did not. They met, I think
4 in—they were in high school although not in the same high school. Back in those days in
5 the '30s there were a lot of little high schools. That was before consolidation. I don't
6 know if it was the same in Michigan or not.

7 LC: Yes, it was I think. Yes.

8 JY: Yeah, a lot of little schools. My dad, of course, he was Boswell. That's where
9 he went to school. My mother went to this little school about seven miles away, a little
10 town called Ambia. Wait a minute. No, that's not correct. She went—there was a
11 Catholic school out in the middle of the farm land. They used to have a high school there
12 and she went to high school there. Then it was later they discontinued the high school
13 part of the school, had one through eighth grades. After she had gone to school, then they
14 started going to this little town of Ambia for high school. She actually went to school,
15 this Catholic school, in this little—all there was, was a church, the school, a little store,
16 and two houses and that was it and the cemetery. That was this huge town of Dunnington,
17 Indiana, which is still there, but no school.

18 LC: I was gonna ask you is there still a—

19 JY: Yeah. In fact, they've built two or three more houses. The church is still in
20 operation although not nearly as active as it was back in those days. The school's gone.
21 The building's gone, just a vacant lot where the school used to be now. Let me just give
22 you—can I work in just a quick war story here?

23 LC: Please do. Absolutely.

24 JY: This has something, although it's a stretch, but it does in a very disconnected
25 way tie in with my experience as a POW (prisoner of war). I used to go out to my
26 grandparents' farm and spend the summers on the farm probably about three summers in
27 a row when I was probably about ten, eleven, and twelve, somewhere in that age range.
28 One year I remember on the farm and it was time to jerk sweet corn. They used to use
29 German POWs to help jerk sweet corn. The camp that they kept these German POWs in
30 was just across the state line in Illinois about maybe ten miles from where my
31 grandparents' farm was. They would haul them out to farms all around the area there, to

1 jerk sweet corn. So they would start early in the morning. My grandmother set up a big
2 deal for them at lunchtime. They'd come into the farm yard and we're all there eating
3 lunch when the German POWs realized that my grandparents speak their language. So
4 there's a big conversation that's going on between my grandparents and some of the
5 POWs. In the course of one of the conversations, one of the POWs is standing with his
6 hands on my shoulders. He's talking to my grandparents. One of the guards got a little
7 spooky and thought maybe—I guess he thought the POW was gonna use me as an
8 attempt to escape or something because the guard started giving signs that he was about
9 to do something. My grandfather told him. He said, "No. No. No. This is no problem at
10 all." He said, "What that German is saying is he is very concerned about—he has a son
11 about his age and he's very concerned about the status of his son back in Germany." So
12 I've always thought that was kind of an interesting experience to be a part of.

13 LC: You remember this clearly, this whole, this incident.

14 JY: Yes, I do. Yeah.

15 LC: Did you ever talk to your grandparents about what other things the POWs
16 were talking about with them?

17 JY: I might have. I probably did. I would think I would have, but I don't
18 remember. That's the only thing I remember about that particular event.

19 LC: That's really quite an amazing story.

20 JY: Yeah. I find it so.

21 LC: Yes. Did you have occasion, I'm sure, to think about that when you were
22 yourself in captivity?

23 JY: As a matter of fact, I did. Yep.

24 LC: Those POWs, how did they strike you? Was this kind of a romantic thing or
25 was it a little scary or—?

26 JY: No. No. In fact, I couldn't figure out why the guard was concerned. I didn't
27 sense any problem. Looking at it through the guard's eyes I can see why he might've
28 thought there was something amiss. As best I can recall, my opinion of those POWs
29 was—these people are the same as everybody around this community. I can detect no
30 difference between them and us, from not being able to communicate with them, but they

1 just struck me as being like anybody else. So I was a bit confused about these people
2 don't appear to me to be the way we hear about them on the radio.

3 LC: Yeah. There was little mismatch there between the rhetoric and propaganda.

4 JY: Yeah, which is always the case.

5 LC: Yeah. How much attention did you pay as a youngster to the war?

6 JY: Not that much. The other vivid memory I have, and this tells you how old
7 this guy is. He's old as dirt. Paul Harvey. I remember my father listening to Paul Harvey
8 on the radio when I was a kid. This would've been in 1948, '49, '50, in that time range.
9 How old does that make Paul Harvey? He's getting up there.

10 LC: Oh, he sure is.

11 JY: At any rate, I remember that. I remember my father having maps of Europe
12 and listening to the news and following the war on his maps. Other than that, I guess that
13 was about the extent of my interest in the war. The other thing was my uncle, I couldn't
14 figure out why he was so excited when they announced the end of the war. It didn't seem
15 to be that big a thing to me, evidently, because I thought it was so unusual that he was out
16 there blowing the horn on his car. That's about all I remember about World War II.

17 LC: I take it then from that that you didn't have any immediate family members
18 who were in the services. Is that fair?

19 JY: That's a fair question. The answer is that's not correct because as you were
20 speaking, I thought, "Whoa, I've got to tell Laura the other big connection," and this is
21 big. One of my uncles, my mother's brother, George Puetz was a navigator in World War
22 II on B-24s.

23 LC: Oh, you're kidding.

24 JY: Another brother, in fact the youngest one, the one that lives on the old place
25 now, the home place now, he was in Japan and there was a third brother who was
26 stationed in Germany. Not in Germany, in England. So three of them were in World War
27 II and all three of them came home. None of them were even injured. The one I focus on
28 is this George, the B-24 navigator. Let's see. He came home in '45. So I was eleven years
29 old. You talk about somebody being impressed. He came home in those pink and greens
30 and does that term mean anything to you?

31 LC: No. Go ahead and explain it, please.

1 JY: Okay. Army Air Corps and it was Army Air Corps at that time before the Air
2 Force became a separate branch. Army Air Corps had some cool uniforms. What they
3 wore was the Ike jacket, that short jacket, and kind of a green, a sage green, pants. It was
4 one cool looking uniform. I don't know where the pink part came from, but pink and
5 greens is what they used to call them. He comes home in this uniform and I am some
6 impressed. He starts telling some war stories and I'm more impressed. I'm kind of starry-
7 eyed. Woo, wow this is cool. So I'm sure he influenced me. I wasn't consciously aware at
8 the time, but years later I'm sure that was a factor in my decision to go in the Air Force.

9 LC: Now let me just get his last name correctly.

10 JY: This is not a common spelling. P-U-E-T-Z.

11 LC: I wondered if it might be, because you mentioned the German.

12 JY: Does that sound a little German?

13 LC: Yes it does. As I said, I'm from rural Michigan, so we have a few Germans
14 there as well.

15 JY: Do you? Yeah.

16 LC: I may admit to being one of them if pressed. So he had how many missions?
17 Any idea?

18 JY: Gee, whiz, no. I don't remember. I know he flew out of New Guinea. He
19 probably had quite a few because he got there late. He got there in—I think he went over
20 in late '44 and flew missions maybe November, December of '44 and then '45. So he was
21 fortunate in that he got there late.

22 LC: Now did he have—well, what can you tell me about the rest of his career?

23 JY: Oh, no career. When the war was over, he came home, got out, went to
24 Purdue. He only went a year or two. Then started farming, not on the home place, but
25 bought his own land and farmed for a few years. Then he went with the postal service and
26 delivered mail for a number of years and now retired.

27 LC: Okay. Well, that's quite an interesting story. I'm sure it did have some
28 impact on you.

29 JY: I would think so.

30 LC: As time went on.

31 JY: Yeah. I think so.

1 LC: Well, tell me about your time in school. I'm thinking about your time either
2 as an elementary student or as you get on into middle school and later, were you a good
3 student, John?

4 JY: Not particularly. I did better in grade school. I went to the same—that
5 Dunnington school I told you about that my mother attended? I attended that same
6 school. An interesting side light on that is, in this town of a thousand people that I lived
7 in, I think there were either three or four Catholic families and that was it. About the time
8 that I was ready for school, these three or four families—the others also had children
9 about my age. The parents kind of formed some type of a group operation where they
10 would each drive us to and from school everyday. They'd take turns on the driving. Then
11 after a few years they were able to work out something with the county where they only
12 had to drive us halfway to a residential farm midway between this little town and the
13 town I lived in and then the buses would pick us up and take us in. For the first three or
14 four years they drove us all the way to the school and picked us up in the afternoon and
15 brought us back. So that was my elementary education. Then as a freshman I went to the
16 seminary for one year. Found out that that probably wasn't gonna work for me, so just
17 spent one year there. Then I went to a public high school and what I majored in in high
18 school and my interest was girls and basketball. Once you got beyond girls and basketball
19 I had very little interest in anything.

20 LC: Now girls and basketball in that order?

21 JY: Yes, in that order. Yep.

22 LC: Although basketball was probably useful for the primary target there.

23 JY: Yeah. Yeah. That's right. Didn't hurt.

24 LC: What kind of a team did you have and who did you play?

25 JY: Okay. We had a very mediocre team. In the state of Indiana, in fact, they just
26 went away from it about, I want to say seven or eight years ago. Indiana was one of the
27 last states—I think Kentucky still does it. Indiana was one of the last states. You saw the
28 movie or you've heard of the movie *Hoosiers*?

29 LC: Yes.

30 JY: You know the storyline?

31 LC: Yes.

1 JY: The little David goes up against the Goliath and that was a true story. I mean,
2 this little town of Milan did in fact beat Muncie Central, which Muncie was one of the
3 bigger schools in the state of Indiana. Back to your question, in the county I think there
4 were about nine little schools in the county. The three years I was there, we never won a
5 sectional tournament which is the tournament that you have with those nine little schools
6 in the county. Then if you win that you go to the next level, which was the regional.

7 LC: So you guys never really got out of the county?

8 JY: We never got out of the county, sad to say.

9 LC: Did you have people come to the games? Did people come along?

10 JY: Did people come to the games?

11 LC: I know its Indiana, so that kind of goes without saying.

12 JY: It was unbelievable, unbelievable. I mean, this gym would be packed with
13 people. Even though we were a mediocre team, it's amazing. Now I'll give you another
14 war story.

15 LC: Sure, absolutely.

16 JY: Okay. Here's the war story. We go forward years, years forward, when I'm
17 stationed at Altus, Oklahoma. The guy across the street, a tanker puke, and his son was a
18 good jock and he was a good basketball player. This Altus, which was a pretty good sized
19 town in Oklahoma, the basketball tournament was starting. So I wanted to see his boy
20 play in the tournament. So I'm going down to the game and I'm running a little late for
21 some reason or other. I'm even considering maybe not going 'cause I figured I won't
22 even be able to get in. Running a little late, I go in and there must've been fifty people in
23 the gym. I'm just flabbergasted. I'm saying, "What is the deal?" Evidently one of the fifty
24 saw this look on my face and, "Hey what's the problem there, sonny?" So I tell him. I
25 told him what it was like back in my home town for basketball. He says, "Son, when
26 football starts next fall come to one of our games," and you can fill in the rest of it.

27 LC: Yes, sir. That would be the difference between Oklahoma and Indiana.

28 JY: Yeah. You got it. Okay. So that's that war story.

29 LC: Okay. Well, it's very interesting that you had that much enthusiasm for local
30 games. I like sports history so it's very interesting to me. Now—go ahead, John.

1 JY: Oh, well, then you'll be happy to know I spent Saturday in Dallas at the
2 Cotton Bowl.

3 LC: Oh, you did? Just this past weekend?

4 JY: This is another war story. Do you mind me breaking in with these war—

5 LC: These are fabulous. This is great.

6 JY: Okay. Well, you won't like it because you're probably more a Texas—how
7 do you people in Lubbock feel about the Longhorns?

8 LC: I think there's general distaste.

9 JY: Let me rephrase the question. Who would you say most hate more, the
10 Longhorns or the Sooners or is it about even?

11 LC: Who does Texas Tech hate more?

12 JY: Yeah. Who does Texas Tech—?

13 LC: Oh, the Longhorns.

14 JY: They do?

15 LC: Oh, yeah.

16 JY: Then you'll like this story. Then you'll like this story if you are part of the
17 majority.

18 LC: Well, I'm sort of more of a Michigan State man, but that's okay.

19 JY: That's right. You told me that. Pardon me.

20 LC: That's right, but that's okay. Go ahead and someone will no doubt key into
21 this.

22 JY: Okay. Okay. Here's the story. Probably one of my five best friends is, and I
23 have trouble making myself say this, that one of my very best friends is one, a lawyer,
24 two, he's a Dallas lawyer, and three, he's a graduate of UT (University of Texas). That's
25 him. This guy is just a fabulous human being, really is. Any rate he is a big sports fan,
26 too. In fact, the way we met was playing each other on the tennis court years and years
27 ago. That's how we formed our relationship and became such good friends. He is, I
28 mean, he is an avid Horn fan. In addition to being an Oklahoma fan, I'm also a Notre
29 Dame fan. Years ago he invited me down to Austin for a Notre Dame-Texas game which
30 the experts had Texas winning big. Well, as it turned out Notre Dame kicked a field goal
31 on the last play of the game. So I really enjoyed the ride back to Fort Worth with him as

1 we did the post mortem on the game. Then, five years ago he invited me to the Texas, to
2 the Red River Shootout, the Texas-OU (University of Oklahoma) game and that year
3 Texas was heavily favored to win. So I wimped out and said, “No, I think I’ll pass.” I sat
4 home and watched the game on television and it was one of those wipeout games where
5 Oklahoma just killed Texas. I was so upset that I had passed up that opportunity.
6 Fortunately, the following year he asked me again. So then I thought, “Well, what the
7 heck?” I’ll do it and besides which I had heard what an event that Red River Shootout is.
8 So I thought it would be something to experience even if OU does lose, but lo and behold
9 now he has invited me back every year. I said, “Courtney, you are an idiot. Don’t you get
10 the connection? It’s me that’s the bad omen. As long as you let me go to this game, your
11 horns are gonna lose.” His take on it is, “You are going to go to this game until Texas
12 wins and then you’re never going again.”

13 LC: Then that’ll be it. That’ll be the end of the invitation.

14 JY: So as we went home Saturday, I said, “Well, gee, this is really a good deal
15 for me. I’ll probably attend the rest of the Texas-OU games because it looks like
16 nothing’s gonna change.” So that’s my Texas-OU story. That’s my story on sports.

17 LC: Well, you mentioned that you were a Notre Dame fan, as well.

18 JY: Yeah.

19 LC: Your club certainly had the better of mine this year.

20 JY: Yeah, how ‘bout that? Yeah, how ‘bout that? That was a big surprise.

21 LC: Yeah. That was an ouch.

22 JY: See that was the first university that I really had any connection with as a kid.

23 LC: How did that come about, just ‘cause you knew that they were there in
24 Indiana?

25 JY: No. There was something. I can’t remember what the event was, but I went
26 to the campus. I think it was with my parents or something. I think it was like a church
27 event or something, but I was on campus. I guess I’d heard about the Golden Dome or
28 something. I do remember being very impressed with the campus. It was the first college
29 or university campus that I’d ever been on. I remember being impressed with that. The
30 closeness to where I grew up and, of course, the mystique and the tradition of Notre
31 Dame football, I guess, is what probably caused me to become a Notre Dame fan. My

1 buddy, the two things he hates the most and he can't decide which he hates more. It's
2 either Notre Dame or Oklahoma. Those are his two main hates.

3 LC: It's a toss-up.

4 JY: Yeah. So we have a lot of fun when we get together.

5 LC: I guess. Well, did you give thought to going to college?

6 JY: I don't think I ever did seriously consider it and I don't know why I didn't. I
7 really didn't have a clear thing in mind. Another story, my uncle, the navigator?

8 LC: Yes.

9 JY: Okay. I was impressed and then another, his brother, who had a little flying
10 service on his farm in Indiana, he owned two or three little airplanes. He was teaching
11 other farmers around there to fly. He had a distributorship with Aeronca for the airplanes
12 that he owned. That was my first flight in an airplane. He took me up one day in the
13 airplane and I was so impressed I just thought, "Oh, this is what I want to do. This is what
14 I want to be is a pilot." In my junior year in high school taking the physical to play
15 basketball they found a heart murmur. So I thought, well—that's another story, but
16 anyway the next year the heart murmur, they said, "Well, we'll let you play, but the
17 conditional thing," or something. I just assumed being a pilot in the military was out of
18 the question with that heart murmur. So at any rate, that was a factor and that's what I
19 wanted to—now I know how it ties in. That's what I wanted to do. That's what I wanted
20 to be, but I thought, "That's not feasible. That's not possible." I don't think I really
21 consciously thought about school. I did think about not what I didn't want to do for a
22 living and one was I didn't want to farm. What I didn't like about farming was and I
23 think I would be a farmer today because now you can raise grain and you don't have to
24 raise livestock. I didn't like having to take care of those livestock at five o'clock in the
25 morning. I didn't like that they had to be fed on weekends and holidays.

26 LC: Right, there's no break.

27 JY: I just thought there's gotta be an easier—even at my young age I was aware
28 of how dependent farmers were on weather. That weather determined whether they were
29 going to be profitable or not. I thought, "This is hard work and it's too risky counting on
30 the weather to be just right. There's got to be an easier way." Then while I was in this
31 business college in Lafayette, I also worked at Alcoa running a draw bench in this

1 aluminum plant. I was making really good money. I thought for the first two weeks I
2 thought it was a great job as I learned to master this piece of machinery. On the third
3 week I said, “I just can’t believe that people can do this for more than a year.” I knew
4 people that had worked there for twenty and thirty years. I knew that there was no way I
5 could ever do something that repetitious. I mean, it got to be—I only worked there, I
6 think, three months. In the third month everyday seemed like it was about a week in
7 length. It seemed like a day in prison. It was just so boring. So that was something I
8 didn’t want to do for a living. I guess that’s one of the reasons why I went to this business
9 college. I’ve always kind of liked accounting. So I was thinking, “Well, I guess I’ll be an
10 accountant. We’ll see how that works.”

11 LC: Were you ever thinking that you might go into business with your dad?

12 JY: No. I never really seriously considered that, either. The things I didn’t like
13 about that job was in those days not only was he the funeral director, but he had the only
14 ambulance. Those ambulance calls coming at one o’clock in the morning and having to
15 go out on those calls and then a lot of the funerals back in those days were at the people’s
16 homes. So I had to haul all the chairs out to the house. Take the chairs down, haul them
17 back to the funeral home. Take the flowers out, all the go-fer stuff. My dad, I remember
18 him coming and said, “Look.” He said, “You can make a good living with this,” and he
19 said, “I’ve got the good will built up. I’ve got the name and it’d be a good thing for you
20 to step into,” but he said, “I’m telling you. There’s got to be an easier way to earn a living
21 than this.” So he really wasn’t that encouraging in that respect. I think he was being very
22 candid and I think he was disappointed that one of the three of us, one of his three boys,
23 didn’t choose to continue the funeral home. On the other hand he kept saying, “It’s a
24 tough way to earn a living.”

25 LC: Sounds like he was being really straight with you.

26 JY: He was. He was. In retrospect, I really admire him for being upfront because
27 I think emotionally that he would have liked to have seen one of his sons carry on the
28 business that he started.

29 LC: I think maybe a man with lesser character might’ve pressured kids into it.

30 JY: Yes. I agree. I agree.

31 LC: That is actually quite a statement about him.

1 JY: Another thing about both he, and this is more my mother than him.
2 Remember I told you I went that one year to the seminary?

3 LC: Yes.

4 JY: They were putting some pressure on me, but the way they couched it was
5 “Try it. Give it a shot.” I am certain as best I can recall there was no—they didn’t lean on
6 me at all. When I told them, “I don’t want to go back,” there was nothing about trying to
7 encourage me to go back. Their response to that was, “Fine. You did what we asked. If
8 you don’t think that’s for you, fine.”

9 LC: They really did then leave the decision with you?

10 JY: Yes. Yeah.

11 LC: Where was the seminary, John?

12 JY: It was a place called Wawasee, Indiana, a big lake up—in fact, not too far
13 from Notre Dame.

14 LC: Yes. Okay. I wondered.

15 JY: Working up towards your part of the world.

16 LC: That’s right. Well, how did you come then to the decision that you might
17 want to try the military since you had this sense that this wasn’t gonna work out for you
18 as a pilot?

19 JY: You’re gonna love this story.

20 LC: I’ll bet ya’ I will.

21 JY: You’re gonna love this one.

22 LC: Okay.

23 JY: You know how things happen in life? Change our life direction, little things?

24 LC: Yeah, you don’t see it coming.

25 JY: Yeah. No clue. No clue. Here’s the deal. Alcoa, remember, told you that
26 story? What I did, I went to business college in the morning, got out of school at two in
27 the afternoon, went to work at three, worked three to eleven at Alcoa. Well, this buddy of
28 mine who was doing the very same thing, he decided he wanted to get in the Air Force in
29 the worst way. So he goes down to visit the recruiter and he says, “Hey. Come on along.”
30 He said, “Just go with me.” So I thought, “Well, what the heck, he’s my buddy. I will.”
31 So I’m sitting there on the couch reading a magazine while the recruiter is talking to my

1 buddy. I just happened to hear the recruiter say to my friend, “When we send you over to
2 Chanute for testing we can get you out of work for three days at Alcoa, no penalty. You
3 can just have three days off from work.” My antenna went up and I thought, “Hmm, three
4 days off?” I held up my hand and said, “Hey. Can I go to the Air Force?” suspecting that
5 I’m not gonna pass the physical anyway, but it gets me out of work. So, of course, you
6 can imagine how the recruiter responded.

7 LC: I’ll bet he jumped all over you.

8 JY: Oh. Oh. He, “Come up here son.” He said, “Pull up a chair.” So anyway,
9 long story short, we both go off to Chanute for three days of testing. At that time the rules
10 were and they explained it to us when we were filling out all the paperwork. They said,
11 “Okay. Now for you guys who’ve had two years of college, you can apply for pilot
12 training. For those of you who do not have two years of college, you have to apply for
13 navigator training.” So I didn’t have any college—I mean, I’m going to business college
14 and that didn’t count. I thought, “I’m not gonna pass the test anyway,” so I just wrote
15 pilot on all my paperwork. Thought, “Well, I’m getting out of work.” So I go through all
16 the testing, all that good stuff. I go back home and life is going on. Lo and behold about a
17 month and a half later I get this letter from the Air Force. “Greetings. Be advised. You
18 have passed all of our tests. Since you do not have two years of college you can not go to
19 pilot training, but you qualify for navigator training.” George, my uncle, navigator,
20 World War II? I’m just flabbergasted. I thought, “How could I have passed that
21 physical?” I figured, let me not check into that too closely. This opens up a whole new
22 world of opportunity here. So I jumped on it. I thought, “Man, oh yeah. Then I thought
23 well, I’ll go to navigator school and then from there I can go to pilot training,” which is
24 exactly what happened. So that’s how my interest was stimulated into going in the Air
25 Force.

26 LC: Did the heart murmur issue ever surface again?

27 JY: After I got through nav-school and my first assignment and went in for my
28 first annual physical, I asked the flight surgeon. I told him the story. He had my folder
29 there. He looked and he said, “Oh, there was no murmur at Chanute and you took the
30 initial test.” He said, “Nothing showed up, but that’s typical.” He said, “Kids your age in
31 high school, they have what we call functional heart murmurs and you’re still growing.”

1 He said, “What it is, it’s a valve in your heart that’s not quite closing,” and he said, “But
2 as you mature then that valve seats and closes and everything’s normal.” So he said,
3 “That’s not an uncommon thing at all. You’ll probably—it’ll never show up again.”

4 LC: No kidding?

5 JY: So far it hasn’t.

6 LC: Well, knock on wood. We’ll go with that. What did your folks say when you
7 told them this?

8 JY: That I do not recall. I do not recall what their response to that was. Probably,
9 well, I really don’t have a clue, Laura. I don’t know, but just thinking out loud I’m
10 thinking, well we weren’t at war then. This is ’53. So we just signed the armistice in
11 Korea. So probably—of course, knowing George and his experience in World War II as a
12 navigator they probably thought this might be a good thing for this kid. It would be my
13 thinking on it looking back because I know I hadn’t said anything—there wasn’t anything
14 that I was clearly excited about and motivated towards being or doing except being a
15 pilot which I had given that up when I found out I had the heart murmur.

16 LC: Now you had a new lease on that as well.

17 JY: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Now I’m excited.

18 LC: Do you remember reporting to basic?

19 JY: I do.

20 LC: How did you get down to Texas?

21 JY: On a train. Rode the train down to San Antonio. Reported to Lackland Air
22 Force Base. Okay. Here’s the next war story.

23 LC: Okay, good.

24 JY: There’s so much of this I can’t remember the detail. Where were the rest of
25 the guys? I know there were some other guys, but what I’m thinking is, I think the rest of
26 them were going to basic, basic where I was going to preflight. I think what happened is
27 somebody told all the guys that were going to basic training where to go and they said,
28 “You’re in pre-flight. You’re over there somewhere,” and they just kind of pointed a
29 direction and probably gave me a building number. The part I remember, though, is I’m
30 walking around looking for probably a building. I’m walking by these open barracks. Up
31 on the second floor I see a guy in a window. So I said, “Hey.” I said, “Do you know

1 where building such-and-such is?" He said, "Yes. I know where building such-and-such
2 is." I said, "Well, where is it?" He said, "First what do you mean walking down this
3 sidewalk and saying, 'Hey, do you know where such-and-such building is?' You should
4 say, 'Sir, do you know where'"—anyway, after about a forty-five second conversation
5 I'm thinking, "I wonder if I can get back on that train and go back to Boswell. This really
6 isn't what I wanted." So that was my initial impression of the Air Force.

7 LC: So he took the opportunity to give you the dickens there.

8 JY: Yeah. He indoctrinated me very quickly as to what life was going to be like
9 in pre-flight and boy did he give me an accurate picture of what it was going to be like.

10 LC: He wasn't lying, huh?

11 JY: He was not lying. In fact, that was really mild as to what came on. Laura, let
12 me share with you and I've shared this with so many people, how people work on your
13 mind. This probably would be maybe of interest to you. It really, really depressed me.
14 When I thought about it, and this was a couple of years later, but I was the exact type of
15 person that they looked for coming in there. As they harassed us in the training, my
16 response to that was "If you think you're going to force me out of this program, you are
17 wrong." My only goal in life was to show them that I could take it. It wasn't until a
18 couple years after I had been commissioned and out in the field that it finally dawned on
19 me one day, "You idiot. That's exactly the way they wanted you to think about that.
20 That's what they wanted. So you thought you were showing them. You fell right into
21 their trap. That's what they wanted you to do."

22 LC: If you had to characterize what it was that they were pulling out of you and
23 counting on pulling out of you, what kind of words would you use?

24 JY: I would say that they were looking for someone who when faced with
25 adverse conditions or something, if they really felt strongly enough about what they were
26 doing or about something, if they had some core value, that they would do about anything
27 to follow that. That's what I think they were looking for.

28 LC: Standing up under pressure.

29 JY: Yes. I think that's why they had such a high washout rate. Their thinking was
30 "If we get rid of those people that are not inclined to resist this, it's gonna save us a lot of
31 money in the long run."

1 LC: A lot of money, a lot of trouble.

2 JY: Yeah.

3 LC: Maybe some lives.

4 JY: That was my impression. It was such a come down because I was so proud of
5 myself that I had showed them and it was only later that I realized just the way they set
6 the program up.

7 LC: Your whole house of cards kind of collapsed.

8 JY: Yeah. Yeah. I thought, “Oh, yeah. You really showed them.”

9 LC: Good job, John.

10 JY: Yeah. Atta boy, John, you showed them. Who’s in the Air Force? Who’s
11 flying now?

12 LC: Well, how many guys were in the pre-flight class roughly?

13 JY: Let’s see. Yeah. I’m trying to remember. I would guess there must’ve been
14 about two hundred.

15 LC: Is that right?

16 JY: Yeah, because I think half of the class went to Harlingen, which is where I
17 went. The other half went to Ellington. So probably a couple hundred, but boy that’s just
18 a wag. It could’ve been—nah. It had to be at least fifty to a hundred, no less than that. I
19 was just thinking about the size of our class. I think we had about ninety or a hundred in
20 our class when we started at Harlingen.

21 LC: Was that in a sense, was the time at Harlingen, that’s nav-school right?

22 JY: Yeah.

23 LC: That was after about how long at Lackland?

24 JY: Lackland was, let’s see, three months at Lackland and then it was almost a
25 year at Harlingen.

26 LC: Just on Lackland for a minute. Was there attrition in the class while you
27 were there or did that really come later?

28 JY: Most of us—let’s see. There was attrition at Lackland. I really don’t have a
29 good feel for that the percentage was nor do I have a good feeling for the attrition rate at
30 Harlingen, but I think it was fairly high. I would say that overall, from all of us that

1 started at pre-flight and then came out the other end of the pipeline, I'd guess maybe
2 about a thirty percent attrition rate.

3 LC: Wow. That's heavy.

4 JY: As I recall, and again this is just from a fuzzy memory, but I think most of
5 the attrition occurred early like in the first couple weeks at Lackland and then again once
6 we went on to Harlingen it occurred early there in the first couple months.

7 LC: Interesting. Tell me a little bit if you can about the routine at Lackland. What
8 was it that they were actually trying to get you to pick up during that three-month period?

9 JY: Well, the thing that I recall was the eating square meals, being constantly
10 intimidated by the upper class. You always had to turn square corners. You had to march
11 everywhere, like I say, eating a square meal. You had to learn the George Washington's
12 rules of war. You had to know the chain of command. You had to have all this stuff
13 memorized. Whenever you gave an incorrect answer or if you weren't marching in the
14 proper manner or if you did anything wrong, they used to do what they called "gig" you.
15 You had these slips of paper that you had to carry in your pocket all the time. We called
16 them "gig slips." So you had to give the upperclassman a gig slip. They kept track of
17 those, how many you had. Depending upon how many you had, you had to walk on the
18 tour path, which meant marching for an hour. That's the part I remember was the
19 constant harassment. I don't even remember much of the training, the basic military
20 training I received. I just remember the harassment. Then, really, after I was
21 commissioned and got out in the field and learned a little bit more about Annapolis and
22 West Point, realized that what we were, we were plebes. We were first-year cadets like
23 being at Annapolis and West Point. I know that that's what they built that cadet program
24 around was to compress it into a year, the first year. Really they made it a lot like the first
25 year at a military academy.

26 LC: Absolutely. That sounds very similar.

27 JY: That's what it was, a microcosm really of the four years at the military
28 academy. Although, you know, the worst year of the military academy is that plebe year,
29 that first year. That's when you get all the harassment. Of course, I'm sure they figured if
30 they make it through the first year they're keepers.

31 LC: Right. Exactly. The washouts really do seem to happen early.

1 JY: Yeah. So we had it for the whole year that we were in cadets, but it was only
2 for a year.

3 LC: Now, that year at Harlingen, what would you say were the main things that
4 they were trying to get across to you? Was it technical information? Was it conformity?
5 Was it something else?

6 JY: No. It was technical information. They were really—that program was really,
7 they were there—the purpose of the program was to train you to be a navigator, but the
8 thing that was unique about it as an aviation cadet, you still had this harassment, this
9 lower-class-upper-class thing that you went through. So it was a two pronged attack. In
10 fact one of the things I remember very clearly about Harlingen was about half of our class
11 were cadets and the other half were ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) guys. The
12 ROTC guys, of course, had none of this harassment, none of this cadet stuff. They were
13 already officers so they just went to school. Here we were as cadets having to put up with
14 all this harassment stuff plus the same curriculum that they were studying. So we
15 resented very much the ROTC guys.

16 LC: I'll bet.

17 JY: Another interesting thing about that program, this is 1954. It was a lot of the
18 curriculum had to do with electronics, with equipment. The philosophy at that time was
19 that you were going to be kind of an in-flight technician. If there was problems with your
20 equipment they were going to have you so knowledgeable in electronics that you could
21 repair the equipment in flight which was really a dumb, dumb philosophy.

22 LC: Why do you say that, John?

23 JY: Well, because none of us ever did it. I never did. I know my fellow
24 navigators that I talked to. I said, "Did you ever repair any equipment in flight,
25 particularly anything that all those classes we had in electronics would have prepared you
26 for?" Nobody else did either. My feeling was they should have focused more on basic
27 navigation like how to operate a section, how to navigate that type of stuff, which we got
28 a lot of, too. In fact the proof of this was that a few years later they really dramatically
29 reduced the electronic portion of the curriculum.

30 LC: Now, I'm just throwing this out there as a possibility. Was some of that
31 change driven by the fact that the actual components themselves were becoming so

1 sophisticated that there's no way during the flight that you're going to be popping it
2 open?

3 JY: Yes. I think that did have something to do with it and also the fact that what
4 it became as the electronic equipment became more sophisticated, then all you had to do
5 was pull out a black box. You had to have enough knowledge to know that if this is what
6 I'm experiencing with this radar set, it's probably this black box. So you had to be
7 knowledgeable enough to know which black box to remove and replace, but you'd pull it
8 out and you'd have spares and just plug a spare in and see if that fixed the problem which
9 didn't require any electronic knowledge, just a knowledge of which black boxes were
10 probably gonna be the culprit if you had a particular problem.

11 LC: So you needed to know the system.

12 JY: Yeah. You had to know the system, but you didn't have to have so much
13 electronic knowledge.

14 LC: You had these interchangeable components that you could pull out.

15 JY: That's correct. That was later.

16 LC: How much later would you say?

17 JY: Oh, gee whiz. Let's see. I know they were going to that probably five or six
18 years after I went.

19 LC: So around '60 or—

20 JY: Yeah.

21 LC: Okay. How did you do with the mathematics behind the navigation element?

22 JY: I was pleasantly surprised. I think I was—I know overall of my class of about
23 ninety, I think my overall standing was like six or seven.

24 LC: That's not bad.

25 JY: Yeah. I was pretty pleased with myself. My highest grade was in the training
26 and flight when we flew in the airplane and the actual navigation. That's where I did the
27 best. Then academically I was good. My worst grade was in military.

28 LC: Why was that, John?

29 JY: They used to have what they called "group boards" and a group board is
30 where you had to go before the upper-class cadets. If your violation was bad enough that
31 it required a group board, that's what you had to do. You had to appear before the board

1 and then the board meted out the punishment for you. I and one other guy tied for the
2 highest number of group boards during our tenure as cadets. I had a problem with this
3 harassment thing. You know the old thing about, “I’ll show you”?

4 LC: Yes.

5 JY: That got in my way a lot. It caused me a lot of grief. I would’ve played it
6 differently had I been a little smarter.

7 LC: So your resistance actually kind of crossed over the line to—?

8 JY: Yeah. Yeah, caused me a lot of grief. Yeah.

9 LC: So you set a record basically for most group boards.

10 JY: Yeah, and, oh. Probably you’re thinking, “Now, come on John. If you tied a
11 record for the most group boards, if your military bearing was that bad how did you end
12 up that high in your class.” Well, this is something they corrected, too. At that time,
13 fortunately for me, your military standing was how you were ranked by your peers rather
14 than your superiors, the officers who ran the program. Now why they did that I have no
15 idea, but I’m sure they used me as an example to change that.

16 LC: You became the poster child for it.

17 JY: Yeah. They probably said, “Look at this idiot that’s tied for the number of
18 group boards and yet his classmates rate him off the chart in military bearing. Now go
19 figure.”

20 LC: This screams out for reform.

21 JY: Yeah. This is saying, “Do we have a popularity contest here rather than
22 military bearings?” So that was changed fortunately after I went through.

23 LC: During this period in speaking to other navigators trained through the same
24 kind of process that you went through, I’ve heard one or two say that the intensity of the
25 training sort of killed the joy around flying. They weren’t becoming pilots. They weren’t
26 training to be pilots, but they were excited about flight and just the pressure cooker took
27 some of that away. Did you have any feelings like that, John, or was it the opposite?

28 JY: My feeling to me going through nav school, being a navigator, I was excited
29 because of my relationship with my uncle and the stories I’d heard him tell. That had me
30 excited. I loved flying, but the part I loved about flying was flying the airplane, being the

1 pilot, if you will. So to me navigation—my motivation as a navigator, to graduate as a
2 navigator, was so that I could then go to pilot training.

3 LC: You kept that clearly in view?

4 JY: Yeah, but what I didn't realize, again because I had had no military
5 experience. Again if I had been a little smarter, the normal way of doing for most people
6 was they washed out of pilot training and then they would go to nav school. In fact, I've
7 ran into a lot of contemporaries of mine later. They were always surprised that I did it
8 backwards. In fact, just before you called I talked to a buddy of mine from Boswell,
9 Indiana, who was a navigator and that's what he did. He went to pilot training, washed
10 out and then went to nav school, which is the way most people ended up as navigators.
11 Anyway, back to the motivation part of it. The academics, although I couldn't see the
12 rationale for all this electronic training, it was interesting. I found it interesting. So that
13 probably helped me out academically, too, because I had an interest in it. That kept me
14 motivated, but I would say in hindsight the thing that motivated me most was throughout
15 the whole program was I was gonna show them. I was gonna show them that they
16 couldn't drive me out of the program. I didn't care what they did. I was gonna show
17 them. As it turned out I was very fortunate because when I went through nav school your
18 assignments were determined by your class ranking. So I really more or less had my
19 choice of assignments coming out of nav school.

20 LC: Now you finished in early '55, is that accurate?

21 JY: Yes. Seven April 1955.

22 LC: Now that's when you were commissioned?

23 JY: Correct and given my navigator wings, same day.

24 LC: Was it at that time also that you were putting forward your choice or had you
25 already done that for assignment?

26 JY: No. I'd say it was about a week before graduation when they came down
27 with the assignments and the class standing.

28 LC: So you already knew where you were off to?

29 JY: No. The first thing they did is they said, "Okay. Here's the class standing.
30 Here's where you are in your class." Then they posted all the assignments. They said,

1 “Okay. Number one in the class here are ninety assignments. Which one do you want?”
2 and so on. That’s the way it worked.

3 LC: You had a pretty good choice because where you finished.

4 JY: Correct.

5 LC: What did you choose?

6 JY: I chose, now don’t laugh, Doctor. I chose the ferry command.

7 LC: That was based in California?

8 JY: Correct. That is correct.

9 LC: What was your thinking?

10 JY: Are you ready for another war story?

11 LC: Absolutely.

12 JY: Okay, here we go. J.T. Bailey and I, my buddy, I think he was a couple of
13 notches ahead of me and he was from New Jersey. So he was really much more worldly
14 and knowledgeable than I was. He was leaning heavily towards this ferry command
15 assignment in Sacramento, California. His motivation was Sacramento, California. Since
16 he grew up in New Jersey he wanted to see the left coast. So he told me. He said, “I think
17 I’m gonna take one.” There were two assignments, by the way, for this ferry command.
18 He said, “I think I’m gonna take one of those in Sacramento.” I was torn between that
19 and Miami because on an out and back, a weekend out and back a nav flight we had
20 RON’ed (remained over night) at Miami International. I thought Miami was pretty cool. I
21 was flip-flopping back and forth between those two. Well, this guy that was about
22 number eleven or twelve in the class, he had also been on that out and back. While we
23 were in Miami he fell in love. So he was really beating on me to go to Sacramento so he
24 could get that Miami slot. Then, as luck would have it, one day while we’re in this
25 process I just happened to overhear two of the instructors, officers. I just happened to
26 overhear a conversation they were having and the conversation was, “Can you believe
27 that there are two assignments to that ferry command out in McClellan Air Force Base up
28 on that list?” The other guy’s saying, “I can’t believe that.” He says, “I would give
29 anything for one of those assignments.” So I ran to my buddy J.T. and I said, “J.T., we
30 are going to that ferry command.” He said, “Why is that?” I said, “I don’t know, but,” I
31 said, “These two officers, and you know officers know everything. They think it’s the

1 greatest assignment in the world and they're all bent out of shape because they can't go to
2 it."

3 LC: This is just a chance overhearing of this—

4 JY: Overhearing this conversation because we as cadets, most of them were like
5 me, had no clue about the military. We'd never been in the military before. We didn't
6 know SAC (Strategic Air Command) from TAC (Tactical Air Command) from nothing.
7 We were going strictly by location. Then when I overheard that conversation—well, that
8 cemented the deal because I was thinking about Sacramento or Miami anyway. When I
9 told my buddy I said, "Man, that's gotta be a great assignment because I heard these two
10 guys"—I told him what the conversation was. So that's how I ended up picking
11 McClellan and the ferry command.

12 LC: Now did it turn out to be a good choice, John?

13 JY: I've told people that in my twenty-five years in the Air Force, that was my
14 second-best assignment. The best assignment I ever had was when I was in B-58s at
15 Grissom Air Force Base. The second best assignment was that ferry command at
16 McClellan.

17 LC: Why do you say that?

18 JY: Okay. Are you ready for a couple or three minutes of this?

19 LC: Sure. Absolutely.

20 JY: Okay here's the deal. Brand new second lieutenants, eh? We're right out of
21 Harlingen Air Force Base. We're going out into the real Air Force world. J.T. and I report
22 in—in fact, I was with another guy. This outfit, we only had about eight navigators in it. I
23 just got back about two hours ago from San Antonio and spent the night with this guy
24 who was also in the same organization at the same time. We were talking about—I was
25 telling him about when J.T. and I walked in and reported for duty to Major Ball. Major
26 Ball was a Tuskegee Airman and I didn't know it at the time. I knew he was black, but I
27 didn't know he had been a Tuskegee Airman. Great guy, but anyway J.T. and I report in.
28 He's sitting there shaking his head and giving this look of—I've never reported for duty
29 before. What's the deal here? He said, "Sit down. Sit down." So he says, "Look guys."
30 He said, "Let me tell you something." He said, "I am"—he kind of was reinforcing what
31 I'd overheard those two officers say back at Harlingen. He said, "I do not understand why

1 the Air Force sends cadets, guys right out of cadets, to this assignment.” He said, “This
2 assignment is for some old captain who has been a navigator in SAC for years and years
3 getting beat up on and this should be his reward assignment.” He said, “This is terrible to
4 send you brand new guys here.” He said, “If you forget everything else that I tell you
5 while you’re here, remember this. This is not the real Air Force. The Air Force is not like
6 this organization. Remember that please.” Then as the three years I was in that
7 organization unfolded I learned more and more of what it was he was talking about. For
8 example, in the three years I was in that ferry command I probably had an Air Force
9 uniform on maybe three or four times.

10 LC: No kidding.

11 JY: The only time that I had what could pass for a flight suit was when we were
12 ferrying airplanes. We ferried airplanes just one direction. Either we took them from the
13 plant to the receiving organization which was almost always in the Far East. We had
14 another sister organization on the East Coast at Dover, Delaware, which ferried airplanes
15 out to Europe. At any rate, we either ferried them one way to the receiving organization
16 or old airplanes that we were ferrying back to the States, either go to Davis-Monthan or
17 go to other units within the States. So that meant we flew commercial one way on almost
18 every trip.

19 LC: Oh, no. Wow.

20 JY: Yeah. Well, now it gets better. It gets better. We were acting—they made all
21 of us, the seven or eight navigators in this unit, they designated us on orders as acting
22 transportation officers. What that meant is they gave us blank TRs, travel requisitions.
23 They just gave us blank TRs. We filled them in on how we were gonna route ourselves.
24 The briefing that Major Ball gave J.T. and I was when we got to this part, he said, “Now
25 look. We’ve got a real good deal going here with these TRs.” He said, “If you’re coming
26 back or going to pick up an airplane and there’s someplace you want to go and spend a
27 day or two that’s fine as long as it’s roughly on your route of flight.” He said, “I don’t
28 want something ridiculous coming in here, like you’re going from Sacramento to San
29 Francisco by way of Honolulu. That’s not gonna cut it.” So that was a great deal. The fact
30 that—

31 LC: It needed to look reasonable.

1 JY: Yeah. Yeah. You had to look reasonable, but being a second lieutenant as an
2 acting transportation officer routing yourself on commercial air, not too shabby. In fact,
3 United Airlines set up an office in our building. The only purpose of the office was to
4 book us on United as much as they could. The deal was, they said, "Look. When you've
5 got a trip come to us. Tell us where you want to go and we'll take care of your booking
6 for you." Then they made us a member of their hundred thousand mile club and all of
7 this, which was a forerunner of American Advantage and all that stuff.

8 LC: Right. All the frequent flyer and everything.

9 JY: Yeah. Yeah. All that stuff.

10 LC: The million mile club and all that.

11 JY: Yeah. Right. Same deal. Same deal.

12 LC: Wow.

13 JY: Then the other thing was there were no additional duties. I mean when you
14 got back from a trip, when you ferried an airplane, we had a real, real involved complex
15 system of scheduling. You had each seven or eight names on the little boards and with
16 little nails on this board. Your name when you came back from a trip you went to the
17 bottom of the board and then you worked your way up. So when you came back from a
18 trip and you're on the bottom of the list and you'd say, "Hey, I think I'll go down to L.A.
19 for a week." They'd say, "Okay. Call in at ten o'clock every morning and see if we got
20 anything moving." That's all you had to do. You had to call in at ten o'clock every
21 morning and check to see where you were on this board, if you had moved up or if you
22 were still in the same place, what it was. That was it.

23 LC: So you'd know how quickly you had to beat feet back home.

24 JY: Well, what you knew was when you came home, when you got back home
25 from a trip you knew you were on the bottom of the list. Then, depending upon how
26 many airplanes you were ferrying at that particular time, if things were fast or if things
27 were slow. If things were slow you could say, "Well, it's probably gonna be two or three
28 weeks before I go out on another trip." So what you had to look forward to was two or
29 three weeks of picking up the phone at ten o'clock in the morning calling in saying,
30 "Where am I on the board?" "Oh, you're number five." "Okay. Thank you." That was it.

31 LC: Calling in from wherever you happen to be?

1 JY: Wherever you happened to be. Now, they kind of wanted you to be in the
2 local area, which we were anyway most of the time, but if you just had come back from a
3 trip and things were slow. You said, “Well, I would like to go down to Southern Cal for a
4 week.” They’d say, “Fine. Go ahead, but call in. If something unplanned comes up and
5 we have to ferry a lot of airplanes quick you may have to come back,” but that never
6 happened.

7 LC: You could just about handle that risk.

8 JY: Oh. You got that right. The bottom line being that was one hell of a good
9 deal. Major Ball was right. That should’ve been a reward assignment for some guy that
10 had had a bad assignment for years and years. The proof of it was and while I’m in this
11 assignment as soon as I can I apply for pilot training. I’m accepted, but I’ve got about a
12 two-and-a-half-year wait. Someone in the Air Force finally got smart enough to realize
13 that they really didn’t need a ferry command anymore. So they disbanded it and I was
14 about three months out from my pilot training date. So they sent me to Travis Air Force
15 Base in California to be a navigator on C-97s. That was considered a choice navigator
16 assignment at that time. Well, I go in there and these other navigators, they could not
17 believe me because all I’m doing is complaining. “What do you mean I’ve got to come in
18 if I’m not flying? What do you mean I’ve got to turn in a log when I get back?”

19 LC: They were running things a little tighter down there.

20 JY: Yeah. These other navigators are saying, “What is it with you, Yuill? This is
21 a choice assignment for a navigator.”

22 LC: You were having a little adjustment issues.

23 JY: Yeah. I said, “Not in my book it’s not a choice assignment. I just came from
24 *the* choice assignment.” So it was—well, that’s what I always tell people. I said, “Second
25 best assignment ever had in the Air Force was my one assignment as a navigator.”

26 LC: The best one was which years?

27 JY: Was 19—late ’66 through the beginning of 1970.

28 LC: At Grissom?

29 JY: At Grissom.

1 LC: Okay. Well, we'll get to that. I just want to ask you, John, a couple of
2 questions. Is there anything else you can tell me about Major Ball, his first name for
3 example?

4 JY: Howard. H-O-W-A-R-D.

5 LC: What else did you learn about him while you were there?

6 JY: Not that much because once we reported in and I told you what life was like
7 in that organization, you never saw other people in the organization unless they were
8 your buddies. I just don't remember another thing. The only thing I remember about
9 Major Ball, seeing him around once in a while and he'd say, "How you doing, John?"
10 Something like that. That'd be about it. But that initial meeting I remember very well, but
11 other than that I just don't remember very much about him.

12 LC: At what point did you find out what his flying record had been?

13 JY: Two or three—it was just two or three years ago. In fact, there was this guy
14 that I was telling you about I visited in San Antonio yesterday. He told me two or three
15 years ago. He asked me, he said, "Hey did you know that Howard Ball had been a
16 Tuskegee Airman?" I said, "No." He said, "I have an *Air Force Magazine*," and he said,
17 "They've listed. They had a picture of a group picture of some Tuskegee Airman." He
18 said, "I was just scanning through it," and he said, "Howard Ball was in that group." That
19 was the first I knew. So I didn't know until a couple of years ago.

20 LC: That's really interesting that it never came up.

21 JY: Yeah. Never did. He never mentioned it. Of course to us, you know, what our
22 response would've been?

23 LC: The who?

24 JY: What's a Tuskegee Airman?

25 LC: Right. This is the thing about history. We see things differently now.

26 JY: Yes. Isn't that the truth?

27 LC: Did you ever pick up anything on the edge of conversations with him? I
28 know you didn't seem him all that much, but suggested there might have been some race-
29 based tension there?

30 JY: Never did.

31 LC: Really?

1 JY: No.

2 LC: That's interesting.

3 JY: I got another great war story for you about that.

4 LC: Go for it.

5 JY: Okay. You ready?

6 LC: Yeah.

7 JY: I hate to keep jumping around on you.

8 LC: No. This is terrific. Go for it.

9 JY: See you prompt my memory circuit and make me think of something.

10 LC: Good.

11 JY: In fact, there's two of them, two race-based war stories.

12 LC: Okay.

13 JY: In fact chronologically we're right in line here because we're just about ready
14 to go to pilot training, eh?

15 LC: Sure.

16 JY: Okay. We're in the second phase of pilot training which is at Enid,
17 Oklahoma. This is in 1959, early 1959. Do you remember what the racial tensions were
18 in this country back or what the situation was—?

19 LC: Yes, sir, and in Oklahoma. Yes, sir.

20 JY: Okay. You've got the picture. So we're stationed in Enid. Probably my best
21 friend at Enid in the second phase of pilot training was a guy named Al Daniels. Al
22 Daniels was built about like Roy Williams, our Oklahoma Sooner football player who we
23 have on loan to the Dallas Cowboys now. That's about the way Al Daniels—in fact, I
24 never could figure out how he ever got in that T-33. Great guy. Big muscular guy and just
25 a fun guy. There were about four of us guys that kind of palled around together all the
26 time. There were—two of the four, this other guy was Catholic, too, and we had this little
27 thing where we'd go to Mass on Sunday and then we'd go to this motel for breakfast.
28 That was just a habit. We did it for many, many weeks. One day somehow or another, I
29 don't know how that came up in a conversation, but we said, "Hey, Al, how 'bout you
30 and Phil"— anyway the other guy—"Why don't you guys join us for breakfast next
31 Sunday? We always go to Mass at," whatever time it was, "and then we go to breakfast at

1 this President's Hotel," I think was the name of it. So the other guy says, "Oh, yeah. That
2 sounds good to me." Al is hesitant. You know, he's saying, "Mm, I don't know about
3 that." I said, "Come on, Al." He said, "Well, we've got a problem." I said, "What do you
4 mean a problem?" He said, "Well, blacks aren't allowed in that motel." We're kind of—
5 two things. I mean, we're halfway through pilot training so we're pretty cocky. Top Gun,
6 you know we've kinda got that Top Gun mentality. Then the other thing is we're white.
7 We don't really know what Al has probably put up with in his life. I guess we go back to
8 the cocky part and we put a little heat on him saying, "Come on, Al, you wimp. Let's go.
9 Let's test this hotel." He said, "Let me talk to his wife." So he did and they reluctantly
10 agreed. So off we go this Sunday morning. I can still remember the eight of us with four
11 guys and the four wives walk in and you know the normal crowd noise in a place. They
12 were doing a pretty good business this Sunday morning. We walked in and that place—
13 you could hear a pin drop in there. It got real quiet. So we walk over and we sit down.
14 We look over behind the counter. Here are three or four heads together and they're
15 having a pretty animated conversation. You know the conversation is, "What are we
16 gonna do?" I guess what they did was went to the management because time passed.
17 Then one of them finally came over and said, "May I help you?" Took our order and
18 from then on we went to the motel. Now in hindsight what we think probably happened
19 was that the manager's thinking, "God, I get a lot of business from that Enid Air Force
20 Base, and I don't know if I want to lose that business." So they served us, but that was
21 one. The second one, and now I'm going backwards because in primary, the first six
22 months of pilot training, I was at Bainbridge, Georgia, in this little town of Bainbridge.
23 We rented this little house next to the person that owned the house and his big house.
24 He'd built this smaller house for his son who had died kind of tragically. So the house
25 was vacant. We rented it. His gardener, I tried to get that guy to come in the house a
26 couple of times. He would not come in the house. My wife, Rose, a Canadian who had
27 never experienced anything in the South, was really having a hard time understanding
28 what that was all about. So that was another racial thing. Then the third one was, and this
29 is going after pilot training, stationed at Altus, Oklahoma, in B-52s. Our next door
30 neighbors were Air Force. He was an electronic warfare officer. He had gone through
31 Castle, through training with me. We were pretty good friends and lived next door to him.

1 One day there was someone coming around the neighborhood selling memberships to
2 some club in town there, a dinner club, or something like that. It just so happened they
3 visited our house first and then they went to Harold and Marty's house. We didn't know
4 at the time, but we found out later that they just said, "Oh, excuse us we must have the
5 wrong house," and they left. I guess that evening we were across the fence or doing
6 something and mentioned, "Hey, did you have anybody come by here today trying to sell
7 you a membership to this club?" Marty, she said, "No, but somebody did come to the
8 door." We checked the time. It was the same time. "When I opened the door they just
9 kind of had this surprise look on their face and they said, 'Oh, this must be the wrong
10 house,' and they left." Well, we put two and two together on that. So we confronted the
11 people. We had bought the membership. So we confronted them and said, "Hey, what
12 about our neighbors next door? They're interested in joining that." Of course, they didn't
13 know who our neighbors were, the people at the—they said, "Oh, no problem." They
14 said, "He's in the Air Force?" "Oh, yeah, he's an officer." "Oh, yeah. No problem." Then
15 we found out there was a problem. So we told all of our friends. We said, "Hey, if you
16 signed up for this thing they won't let Harold and Marty, they won't let them join. So
17 we're not gonna join." All the Air Force people backed out of it. I don't know if anything
18 ever happened after that, but that's because we just never paid any attention to that.

19 LC: What was Harold's last name?

20 JY: Bauduit. B-A-U-D-U-I-T. He had some stories that would make your eyes
21 water about some of the things he ran into in his earlier life.

22 LC: Do you remember any of those, John, that you could pass on to us?

23 JY: The only one that I remember. No, I don't remember specifically, but I
24 remember in general because he and Marty were describing—I guess Rose and I had just
25 been back to Indiana and we talked about a motel or something we stayed in. They were
26 telling us about when they went back. I think they were back from the East Coast
27 somewhere. How they had to plan a trip. They had to plan where they could stay, where
28 they could eat, where they could stop. I mean, it just blew me away when they were
29 explaining how detailed their planning had to be.

30 LC: To avoid segregated facilities.

1 JY: Yeah, when they would travel cross country. Unfortunately, Harold had a
2 huge chip on his shoulder, which is understandable to me. I mean, I could easily
3 understand why he was so upset. Marty was more even tempered. She just kind of blew it
4 off with the times and said, “Hey, that’s the way some people are.” Harold had a problem
5 with it.

6 LC: He had a harder time with these kind of—?

7 JY: Yeah. He had a hard time dealing with it. It really caused him some problems
8 in the squadron because most of the people in the squadron were willing to accept him,
9 but it just bothered him so much that he really turned a lot of people off.

10 LC: Was he out front about what it was that—?

11 JY: Oh, yeah.

12 LC: Was he confrontational?

13 JY: Yes. In fact, I used to really give him a rash of trash. I said, “Harold, you
14 should’ve been a lawyer.” Postscript, after he got out of the Air Force he went to law
15 school and became a lawyer, but I’d tell him. I said, “You should be a lawyer. You love
16 to argue.” I said, “You’ll argue any damn point.” One time I told Rose, I said, “You know
17 what I’m gonna do? I’m gonna”—which big deal—“I’m gonna get into one of our
18 normal discussions with Harold that’ll be emotional.” So I did. I said, “Then the next
19 night I’m gonna take the opposite side and see what he does.” So then the next time we
20 got together I did. I just took the total opposite approach from what I’d done three nights
21 before. Sure enough, he goes the other way. So we could have this argument going. I
22 said, “You just love to argue. You like that arena.” He was very combative and didn’t
23 mince no words about how he felt about something.

24 LC: As you point out though the background of his life, it probably shaped a lot
25 of that.

26 JY: Oh, yeah. I mean to me it was very understandable why he felt like he did.

27 LC: Do you know where he was from originally?

28 JY: Oh, boy. I want to say, like, Virginia. One of those states in there. I think
29 Marty, I think was from—I want to say East Coast also. I think they were both from the
30 Eastern seaboard.

1 LC: Yeah, and although there were variances there that would make being in
2 Oklahoma a little more difficult.

3 JY: That's correct. That's correct. That is correct. I think that was a factor, also.

4 LC: You've mentioned Rose a couple of times and that she was Canadian or is
5 Canadian.

6 JY: No, was.

7 LC: Is she still with you?

8 JY: I'm sorry.

9 LC: Is she still with you?

10 JY: Yeah, but it's on a trial basis.

11 LC: Okay. She's from Canada, correct?

12 JY: Yeah.

13 LC: Where had you met her?

14 JY: In Sacramento, California.

15 LC: Okay, so during this very sweet assignment that you had.

16 JY: That's correct.

17 LC: Okay.

18 JY: Ready for another war story?

19 LC: Absolutely.

20 JY: Okay. Here we go. Another friend of mine who was in another—he was in
21 cadets with me in my class, one of my good buddies going through cadets. He went to
22 Sacramento also, but he was in this other outfit, not the ferry command. He was a silver-
23 tongued devil. He was so smooth he should've been a politician. At any rate, he and I are
24 going to meet at the McClellan O-club. We're gonna go downtown and run 'em and see
25 what we can scare up. So that's gonna be our meeting point. So I get there before he does
26 and there are these girls at the club who I had never seen before. It turned out they were
27 some nurses from the hospital. One of which was Rose Ellen O'Neil. She's at a table with
28 two other girls. I thought, "Hmm. I better check this out before I start going downtown.
29 This looks like it has possibility." So I go over there and start chit chatting and doing
30 fairly well I think until my buddy shows up, Billy. Billy Byer shows up. Then he starts in
31 and this is where the story diverge. This is my version. If you talk to Rose her version is

1 totally opposite, but I swear to you, Doctor, he was making headway until he happened to
2 say, “Oh, you’re from Canada. Canuck, huh?” She goes ballistic. She said, “No, I’m not a
3 Canuck! I’m a Canadian! There’s a big difference!” You can tell she is mad. Well, I
4 thought that was really cool. One is because I’m seeing my silver-tongued buddy go
5 down in flames here in front of my very eyes. Two is I think maybe I might be back in
6 the game. Three is I had never seen a woman come on that strong about something, over
7 something like that. I thought, whoa this needs to be checked out.

8 LC: That’s right. She’s got something going on.

9 JY: Yeah. The rest is history. Now here again our stories diverge. I tell people, I
10 say, “Yeah, the reason she went to Sacramento was because she picked up one of those
11 nurse’s magazines up there in St. John and it said, ‘Sacramento, California, land of
12 sunshine and brand new second lieutenants, very gullible.’” I said, “She just went out
13 there ‘cause she knew it was a target-rich environment.” As you can imagine her story’s a
14 little different.

15 LC: Yeah. Well, we may have an opportunity to speak with her at some point and
16 get this all cleared up.

17 JY: Yeah, well, she lies and I speak nothing but the truth.

18 LC: I had a feeling you were gonna say that.

19 JY: So any rate, that’s how we met. Let’s see, that would’ve been—I guess, when
20 did she tell me we met? I can’t remember. I think it was like, yeah, must’ve been in June
21 or July. That would’ve been in ’55. Then she said I asked her to marry her in a week. I
22 don’t know if that’s true or not. She didn’t say “yes” until the following December. Then
23 the following April is when we got married.

24 LC: So you were married in 1956?

25 JY: Yeah.

26 LC: Okay. Am I correct in thinking seven children?

27 JY: That is correct.

28 LC: Okay, wow. What a terrific family. John, let’s go ahead and take a break
29 there.

Interview with John Yuill

Session [2] of [4]

Date: October 14, 2004

1

2 Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
3 University continuing the oral history interview with Lieutenant Colonel John Yuill.
4 Today's date is the fourteenth of October 2004. I am in the interview room in the Special
5 Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech. Colonel Yuill is in Fort Worth, Texas,
6 joining me by telephone. Good morning, sir.

7 John Yuill: Good morning.

8 LC: John, I want to ask you just a little bit carrying on from what we talked about
9 the day before yesterday. I'm interested in how you actually arranged to go from being a
10 navigator to getting into flight training as a pilot.

11 JY: Well, the process procedure was you could apply. I don't know if there was
12 any restriction as to if I had to wait for a certain period of time. The only thing I
13 remember that it was contingent on to apply for pilot training was taking the class one
14 physical. This physical was as I recall was a little more strenuous than the normal annual
15 physical for flying status. That's the way I recall it. I may or may not be correct on that,
16 but that's my recollection. So, again, as I recall all I did was take that class one physical,
17 submit my application, and then I think the next thing I found out was, well, there's about
18 a two-year wait for navigators applying for pilot training to get a slot because I know I
19 had to take at least one and maybe two physicals to keep my application current. Every
20 year I'd have to take that class one physical.

21 LC: What, if you remember, did the class one physical have as components that
22 the earlier did not, the early ones do not?

23 JY: That I don't recall. The only thing that I recall about that physical that I was
24 quite concerned about was the eye requirement. It was even more of a concern at the
25 particular base I was at, i.e.: McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, because this friend
26 of mine that I told you about, J.T. Bailey. The guy that he and I were the two in the cadet
27 class at Harlingen that took the two ferry command assignments up that we got the one
28 time good deal assignments. We both applied for pilot training at the same time. J.T., his
29 eyes were fine except that when they dilated them one eye was 20/30. The other one was

1 20/20, but they would not give him a waiver for that. So I remember having a lot of
2 anxiety and concern each year when I would retake that physical that I was still going to
3 be able to pass it. As a result of the anxiety and concern, I never had a problem with the
4 eye exam, but I did with elevated blood pressure. So I always had to retake my blood
5 pressure, which was okay. That's essentially the way it worked. Then the next thing in
6 the process was I found out that I had a class date and then just waited for that class date
7 to come up. That's the way I got into pilot training.

8 LC: Did you have to take any medication to regulate blood pressure at this point?

9 JY: No. No.

10 LC: Okay. Would that have been a complete bar?

11 JY: I think so. I really don't know, but I would assume it would've been. The
12 reason I say that, Laura, is at that time and you probably get the drift here, two to three
13 year wait for navigators applying to pilot training. I mean, the Air Force was in the
14 catbird seat. I mean they could accept or deny you for any little nitpicking reason because
15 obviously they had more applicants than they had slots.

16 LC: As you say, too, the anxiety of worrying about the exam would tend to
17 elevate one's blood pressure at the time it was being taken.

18 JY: Yeah. We're, what, a minute in into this conversation and it's time for
19 another war story? A guy by the name of Gail Golick who turned out to be a good friend
20 of mine, but in pilot training with me. Now keep in mind this story I just told you about
21 the anxiety about passing this test every year, of my buddy J.T. not passing it because of
22 one eye being 20/30. Going out to fly one day in pilot training, it just so happens that Gail
23 is climbing into his airplane to go fly. I just happen to be walking by when he's getting
24 strapped in. I see him pull out this pair of glasses that look like the bottom of Coke
25 bottles and put them on. So that evening in the bar I said, "Gail, let's talk." So he had
26 this—when I hit him with what I had observed he got this real sheepish look. I said,
27 "How in the hell did you ever get into pilot training?" He told me. He said, "Well," he
28 said, "it cost me a lot of bar money because I had to buy this flight surgeon at," whatever
29 base he was stationed at. He said, "I bought that guy a ton of drinks and we became real
30 good buddies and he gave me a waiver." Moral of the story, right place right time right
31 flight surgeon. He was able to get in where he could barely see without his glasses. My

1 buddy whose eyes were, for all intents and purposes, fine wasn't able to get in because
2 we just happened to have a flight surgeon who I don't know if he hated pilots or what the
3 deal was, but he just was not gonna give a waiver for anything. So that's my war story on
4 that.

5 LC: Wow. That's calling it pretty tight.

6 JY: Yeah. Boy, it just shows you how right place right time.

7 LC: Where did pilot training actually take place?

8 JY: Okay, for me the terminology used then was primary and basic, which I
9 never—well, primary I understood. Basic always kind of blew my mind. How in the heck
10 did they come up with basic when it was the final six months of pilot training? The first
11 six months for me the base I went to was Bainbridge, Georgia, about thirty or forty miles
12 north and a little bit west of Tallahassee, Florida.

13 LC: You were there for six months?

14 JY: Correct.

15 LC: How large was the class?

16 JY: Oh, man, I don't know. In our class I would guess maybe probably sixty or
17 seventy.

18 LC: Were you actually doing flying exercises as well as class work in the
19 classroom?

20 JY: Yeah. War story number two for the fourteenth of October.

21 LC: Okay.

22 JY: Having gone through nav school and now being in pilot training and my pilot
23 buddies don't like to hear me say this, but pilot training was a walk in the park compared
24 to nav school as far as academics goes. The academics in pilot training was a joke. All
25 you learned was aircraft systems, which wasn't that difficult. Really the thing in pilot
26 training was hand-eye coordination, how can you fly the airplane. So pilot training for me
27 was just really fun. I really enjoyed it, but fortunately I didn't have any trouble flying the
28 airplane. So to me pilot training was just so much easier than nav school. Of course, the
29 other thing that you have to factor in there is that going through pilot training I was an
30 officer and I had been out in the field for three and a half years, whereas going through
31 nav school I was an aviation cadet. So I have to factor that in, too, because that also made

1 it much more difficult going through nav school. Bottom line for me individually, pilot
2 training was just infinitely easier than nav school was.

3 LC: John, were you entirely being trained on fixed-wing aircraft?

4 JY: Correct. Yeah. In fact, the aircraft—the two aircraft I flew at primary at
5 Bainbridge, Georgia. One was called the T-34. It was a Beechcraft Bonanza, for all
6 intents and purposes, except for two big major modifications. Had tandem seating and
7 they did away with the V-tail and had conventional empennage on the airplane. Other
8 than that it was just a Beechcraft Bonanza. Only got about, probably my guess would be
9 fifteen, maybe twenty hours in that airplane. Then went to the, what they called the T-28
10 which there's still T-28s flying in the world today. In fact, they used them as attack
11 airplanes in Vietnam. This was a single-engine, reciprocating-engine prop airplane, but I
12 had just happened to be in the very last class to fly in that airplane. Then they transitioned
13 all the pilot training bases to the T-37, which was a little twin engine jet.

14 LC: So you were actually training in a prop?

15 JY: That's right, out of the last class to go through. In fact, our motto and our
16 class book was *Last of the Prop Busters*.

17 LC: You had fun with this I take it?

18 JY: Yeah. I enjoyed pilot training. Pilot training—fortunately for me pilot
19 training came very easy. I never had a problem really flying the airplane so I was always
20 doing well. Essentially in pilot training as compared to nav school, in nav school
21 probably most of your time was spent in the classroom academically. You did fly. You
22 did actually fly missions, but you could've easily performed your functions sitting in a
23 classroom. It just happened that you were in an airplane when you were doing it, but you
24 could've been doing it in a classroom. Whereas pilot training most of your time was spent
25 in the air and the minority of the time was academics.

26 LC: Where did you go after Bainbridge?

27 JY: After Bainbridge to Enid, Oklahoma.

28 LC: Was that where primary was?

29 JY: Yeah.

30 LC: Okay.

31 JY: No. No. Primary—I'm sorry.

1 LC: Sorry, basic. I beg your pardon.

2 JY: Yeah. Primary was Bainbridge and basic was—and I never understood that
3 term, basic.

4 LC: Right. Now I'm confused.

5 JY: Yeah, well and I still am like just now. Yeah, but anyway that was the
6 terminology they used at that time.

7 LC: What happened at Enid that was different from what had gone on at
8 Bainbridge?

9 JY: Not much, except—well, two main differences. Now I'm in a jet aircraft.

10 LC: Okay. Which one?

11 JY: The T-33.

12 LC: Okay. Uh-huh.

13 JY: If you're familiar with that, Laura, that was the trainer version of the F-80.
14 The first jet fighter we had in this country. Then they converted it to a trainer. That was
15 one major difference. The second major difference was at Bainbridge it was a contract
16 flying school, by that I mean the Air Force contracted out for all the instructors. The only
17 military pilots in the organization at Bainbridge were the check pilots.

18 LC: Now for somebody who doesn't get that reference, what's a check pilot?

19 JY: Okay. That's the one that rides with you when—let's take an example,
20 formation flying. Okay you might have thirty hours of training flying formation with your
21 instructor. When your instructor thinks that you're ready to get your check ride and that's
22 where a check pilot goes up with you and says, "Yes. This guy meets the criteria, the
23 requirement. We sign him off as being formation qualified in pilot training." That was the
24 big ride. At the end of your training missions with your instructor pilot, when he felt you
25 were ready, then he put you up for your check ride with this military pilot who flew with
26 you to see if you were meeting the standards, whatever they were, for a student pilot
27 flying formation. The same thing was true with instruments. The same thing was true
28 with what we called contact flying, that is you just looking outside the airplane. You're
29 not really focusing on the instruments or formation.

30 LC: What was the contractor there who was employing the trainers?

1 JY: Funny you should ask because the significance of that didn't hit me until a
2 few years later. It was an organization called Southern Airways. Does that mean anything
3 to you?

4 LC: Well, I have a feeling that they were contracting for a certain civilian agency
5 in the United States government.

6 JY: Well, that's it. The civilian agency was Southern Airways, but does that
7 name, Southern Airways, ring any bells in your mind?

8 LC: Well, I'm thinking a contract with the Central Intelligence Agency.

9 JY: You broke the code. That was it. Man that blew my mind later when I found
10 that out because I had no idea at the time. I don't even know if they were affiliated with
11 CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) at that time. This was back in '58. So they may not
12 have been. I don't know, but I do know they were in Vietnam. That's when I found out
13 when I was over there and saw all these weird airplanes flying around this secret stuff.
14 Somebody mentioned Southern Airways and I said, "Southern Airways? Stand by one.
15 Wait a minute, I'm familiar with that outfit." Yeah, so, interesting.

16 LC: Who were the—the instructors that you had, what kinds of flying experience
17 did they have? Did they talk about that?

18 JY: War story number three. Miles Eldrige, my instructor pilot, and man he was
19 old as dirt, I thought. He was probably 35 or 40, but he looked like a 135 to me. I
20 thought, "My God, how does this guy make it out to the airplane and climb in?" Little
21 guy, little scrawny guy. A man of very few words. Primarily the thing I remember
22 hearing him say and I talked to the other—most of the student-pilot ratio was four to one,
23 one instructor would have four students. It varied some. I don't think anybody had more
24 than four, but some had three. Some had two depending upon the make up of the class,
25 how many instructor pilots were available. I recall my classmates that were also students
26 of Miles, we all compared notes obviously. We all came to the same conclusion. Miles
27 didn't have a lot to say. The term I remember is, "Yuill, you're regressing." That was his
28 favorite comment. To answer your question, I will never forget my first instrument
29 training ride with him. It was kind of, with him, and it was kind of a dollar ride. One of
30 the things that changed there was all your rides up to instrument training were you, the
31 student, you were always in the front seat. The instructor was in the back seat because

1 you were learning to fly the airplane. You were taking off. You were landing. So you
2 were upfront where you could see better. The instructor sat in the back. Well, in
3 instrument training you changed seats. You went in the back and he was upfront. They
4 had a hood that you had to pull up over the canopy so you couldn't see outside the
5 airplane. You had to just fly on the instruments.

6 LC: Okay. Wow.

7 JY: So any rate, he's just—the first ride is what we used to call a dollar ride.
8 You're just along. He's gonna demonstrate a few things. He's gonna tell you how the
9 instrument training portion of pilot training is going to be. So he's flying along in the air
10 and he says, "Okay, Yuill, I'm gonna demonstrate a constant rate of climb. In the
11 constant rate of climb what we want to do is fly with a certain feet per minute number.
12 We want to maintain the same airspeed and maintain the same heading." So he's
13 demonstrating it. I can see him because he's in the front seat now. His head's all over the
14 place. He's looking around for other aircraft. I'm looking at those gages and they're all
15 frozen. I mean, nothing is off. Everything is nailed. I'm thinking, "How in the hell is he
16 doing that?" But those guys were just that good. I think most of them had a hundred
17 million hours or something. They were so experienced, but as far as war stories know
18 because of the student—I think the thing was the student-instructor relationship they
19 didn't fraternize with us. They were the instructors. We were the students and there
20 wasn't any fraternization going on.

21 LC: For example, he wouldn't say to you, "I flew such-and-such in Korea," or—

22 JY: No. Never did. Never did. Now it could very well be that some of the others
23 did with their students which I would imagine they probably did because I do remember
24 vaguely that some of the other students had instructors that were a little more outgoing
25 and gregarious than Miles was. So probably I wouldn't be surprised. They probably had a
26 beer or two and probably did talk about some of their prior experience, but Miles never
27 did. He was a commensurate professional. No laughing, giggling, being buddy-buddy,
28 none of that with Miles.

29 LC: Did you ever come across him again, John?

30 JY: Never did and I have no clue as to what happened with Miles.

1 LC: What about the other guys that were in your group with him, the other
2 trainees, the other pilot trainees?

3 JY: At our table?

4 LC: Yeah. Is that what it was called?

5 JY: Yeah. In fact, that's what it was. It was a big room with a series of like card
6 tables in the room. That's where you sat with your instructor. That's where you briefed
7 before you went out to fly. That's where you debriefed when you came in. You'll like the
8 next war story. Here we are.

9 LC: Okay.

10 JY: They had a procedure, a little thing that they would do on Friday afternoons
11 as we were buttoning up for the weekend. It was a formal ceremony and it was the
12 presentation of the "wedge of the week" awards. Somebody went over to the
13 woodworking shop and took a piece of wood and made a wedge out of it, just like a
14 normal wedge, lacquered it up, put an eyelet in the top attached to a string. This string
15 would be attached to the ceiling in this big room. This thing, this wedge, would be placed
16 over the seat, the chair, of the student who had won the wedge of the week award. The
17 thing I remember about the presentation—of course, his instructor would tell the whole
18 assembled group why his student was the recipient of this prestigious award for the week.
19 It stayed over that student's desk for the week until next Friday afternoon when it was
20 reassigned, hopefully reassigned that you didn't receive—you did not want to be a three
21 time or four time winner of this award. The way the presentation went was, "This week
22 Lieutenant Yuill is the recipient of the wedge of the week award. This award to remind
23 you is—to explain a wedge, a wedge is the simplest tool known to man. So this year or
24 this week Lieutenant Yuill has received this award for trying to land gear up," or
25 whatever the story might be. So that was a Friday afternoon occasion that we had for the
26 wedge of the week award.

27 LC: Now, John, did you take that prestigious honor once or twice?

28 JY: I never did. I never did.

29 LC: You never did?

30 JY: No. No. In fact, I don't think anybody at our table did, but it was really
31 interesting. The other—let's see Jared, Chuck Peough and Bill Heckendor. That's right.

1 The four of us were all pretty good students and none of the four at our table really had
2 much problem whereas there were a lot of guys washing out. Again, the attrition rate in
3 pilot training comes pretty heavily at the beginning. There were quite a few guys leaving,
4 but it just so happened—also, the other thing to mention here. In my class and again I
5 don't know—I'd say fifty or sixty maybe, but I do know that approximately half of our
6 class were navigators. That had just started a few months before that where there was
7 such a heavy influx of navigators going through pilot training.

8 LC: As opposed to—

9 JY: People out of ROTC.

10 LC: Yeah. Young men coming out of college.

11 JY: Right. Right. ROTC grads. They still had cadets at that time, I think,
12 although having said that I'm not really sure if the cadet program had not already been
13 phased out by '58. It might've been because I know we didn't have any cadets at our
14 base. I know half of our class—well, half of our class were ROTC. So I think maybe the
15 aviation cadet program had already been phased out of the Air Force by that time, which
16 was only, what, three years after I had graduated from nav school. Somewhere in that
17 three-year period they phased out aviation cadets. So half the class were navigators. Half
18 the class were ROTC guys coming right out of school.

19 LC: It's very interesting because you're sort of riding the cusp here between a
20 whole series of institutional and technical changes that were affecting the whole structure
21 of the Air Force and you're kind of riding right along with those changes. It's a very
22 interesting period.

23 JY: Yeah. You're right. That is interesting that I just happened to be in that
24 particular time. It was interesting. We had a huge advantage initially because we'd been
25 out in the field. We'd been flying. A lot of us had been flying in an aircraft that kind of
26 prepared us for the—for example, when I got to basic at Enid in the jet, I'd been flying,
27 I'd been ferrying jet aircraft. So I was used to the helmet, the mask, and all that stuff
28 whereas the ROTC guys, you know, they had never had a helmet on before. They'd never
29 worn an oxygen mask. It was just having that familiarity with the Air Force and being out
30 operational gave us a big advantage initially, but within a couple weeks that advantage

1 was gone. Then it depended upon what your skill level was. There was no advantage after
2 it. Once they got into the routine then the advantage was gone.

3 LC: Right, but still some of those things in the first days were probably—

4 JY: Oh, first days, a big advantage for we, navigators. Yeah.

5 LC: I want to ask you about the aircraft themselves. How much were you
6 learning about weapon systems that were going to be introduced or that were already
7 deployed on the aircraft that you were flying?

8 JY: In pilot training?

9 LC: Mm-hmm.

10 JY: Zero.

11 LC: No kidding?

12 JY: Yeah. Nothing.

13 LC: So this was all about handling the aircraft?

14 JY: It's all about flying an airplane, nothing tactical, nothing that has to do with if
15 you're going to fighters with fighter tactics, if you're going to bombers with bomb runs,
16 if you're going to transport, hauling cargo. Nothing specialized. It's strictly fly the
17 airplane.

18 LC: Now all of that would come later?

19 JY: That's correct. Then you went to what they called advanced training. For
20 example, out of pilot training I went to F-86s which was the Air Defense Command.
21 That's where I received specialized training in making intercepts on other aircraft and
22 how to shoot them down. That type of advanced schooling came after pilot training.

23 LC: That was at Perrin?

24 JY: Correct.

25 LC: Okay. I want to ask you about that, but first I want to just get a sense of your
26 own thinking about your flying skills during this period of pilot training. Did you think
27 that you were an intuitive flyer, that you could basically just do it by feel? You knew
28 once you got the system of the aircraft in hand that you could handle it on your own?

29 JY: Yes, as a matter of fact I did, but I didn't go in that optimistic. I didn't go in
30 thinking I was the world's greatest pilot, but after about two or three weeks in pilot
31 training then I started thinking I may be the world's greatest pilot because it came so easy

1 to me. Of course, talking to my friends daily and it was apparent a lot of them were really
2 struggling. I just thought, “Wow, am I ever lucky,” because to me it was just so easy. I
3 just didn’t have a problem. This I know really helped me the rest of the way through pilot
4 training because I’m sure that my confidence—it’s just like in sports. If you’re confident,
5 you’re gonna play better. You’re going to be a better player. How do I want to word it?
6 The chicken and the egg, yeah, if you’re confident you play well, but then if you start
7 going off your game and then you lose confidence now you’ve got to get back into that
8 cycle. It’s a vicious cycle and you see it with athletes all the time. They start losing that
9 confidence and then there goes the game and now how do you get it back?

10 LC: Then they got to dig out from both of those.

11 JY: Yeah. That’s right. That’s right. So it’s a vicious cycle you get into, but
12 fortunately I never lost confidence as I went through pilot training and I’m sure that had a
13 lot to do with my ending up really very near the top of the class at graduation.

14 LC: Now did that have something to do with your next assignment in—?

15 JY: It had everything to do with it.

16 LC: I figured.

17 JY: Yeah, in fact, the assignments worked the same way as they did out of nav
18 school, very same way. Your class standing, you got that list, and then they just put all
19 the assignments up and said, “Okay. Pick your assignment.” That worked the same way.
20 That changed, too, a number of times, but it just so happened again your comment about
21 when I came along and when all this transition was taking place, fortunately for me it was
22 still the student got to choose depending upon his class standing. That’s the way it was
23 when I went through, which was very fortunate. My son when he went through pilot
24 training, of course, this was years and years later. Then the instructors had much more
25 input as to where the student was going to go.

26 LC: About when did he go through?

27 JY: He went through in ’84. I think it was ’84 when he graduated from pilot
28 training.

29 LC: Okay. Tell me how you decided to choose the next, the advanced training
30 option that you went for.

1 JY: Well, back to the Top Gun syndrome. I mean there were probably—let's
2 assume there were fifty people in my class. There might've been three or four that wanted
3 airplanes other than fighters. Everybody wanted to be a fighter pilot. So that's what
4 everybody wanted, but there weren't that many fighter pilot assignments.

5 LC: How many were there?

6 JY: I don't recall the numbers, but I know that there were very few ADC
7 (Aerospace Defense Command) assignments, the F-86s in ADC, in Air Defense
8 Command. There were quite a few day fighter assignments in TAC. Now, this takes a
9 little explaining and it's one of my "poor John stories." Poor John, how unfortunate.
10 Everybody, normally all things being equally and no external forces working, everyone
11 would want the day fighters because there you're doing air-to-air. You're doing this kind
12 of stuff. ADC, the assignment I took in air defense command, the way you intercepted
13 aircraft you had your head down in a radar scope in your airplane. You were locking onto
14 this airplane on your radar set. You weren't looking outside the airplane. That's not the
15 type of flying that fighter pilots like to do. They like to be looking out the airplane and
16 seeing another airplane and getting into fur ball fights with that other airplane. The reason
17 I chose the F-86 in ADC and so did the other three or four—there were only like three or
18 four 86s in ADC that were available—was that this is 1959 now when I'm graduating.
19 SAC is at their apex. I mean, they are the six-hundred pound gorilla in the Air Force.
20 What Curt LeMay wants Curt LeMay gets. As you might imagine, the people coming out
21 of pilot training, the bottom feeders were going to SAC. Nobody wanted to go to
22 bombers in SAC. Curt and his boys were aware of this and they said, "Where are the top
23 graduates going?" Where they were going were to day fighters to TAC. So SAC, then, as
24 soon as they completed this advanced training which you were asking me about before
25 which lasted about six months. When they finished their advanced training, SAC stepped
26 in and gobbled them all up.

27 LC: So SAC was overriding the day fighters—

28 JY: SAC was overriding everything in the Air Force. Whatever SAC wanted they
29 got. TAC was furious. They spent six months and all this time and money training this
30 guy to be a fighter pilot and here comes SAC in and scarfs them up and takes them off to
31 SAC.

1 LC: Makes them—

2 JY: Makes them bitter. I mean the guys were, the pilots are bent out of shape
3 'cause they're in SAC. TAC's bent out of shape because SAC has stolen the guys they're
4 training to be fighter pilots.

5 LC: What would those trained fighter pilots, the day fighters, actually be flying
6 when they were scarfed up by SAC?

7 JY: B-47s.

8 LC: Ouch.

9 JY: They went to B-47s. So now that means immediately they go to another six-
10 month school to get the specifics on the B-47 and the bombing mission. So any rate,
11 Laura, where I happen to come along on this timeline is when this is taking place. So my
12 instructor told me. He said, "John." He said, "You don't want to go to day fighters.
13 You'll have six months and then you're gonna be in SAC. Go to ADC even though it is
14 air defense command. At least you'll stay in fighters." Sounded like a good idea to me.
15 So myself and these other three or four guys that's exactly what we did. Well, guess
16 what? As we are finishing up pilot training and as I am going off to my 86 assignment, by
17 this time the trend has changed in that other people have learned what's happening when
18 they go to day fighters. So now the bottom people in the class are going to day fighters
19 and the top people are going other places. Once again SAC says, "Well, where in the hell
20 are they going now?" They said, "Well, it looks like most of them are going to ADC so
21 they can stay in fighters." "Okay, we'll go get them there." I never did, Laura, I never ran
22 into one of my pilot training classmates who regrettably, reluctantly had to go to day
23 fighters and they stayed in fighters. Myself and the others that went to ADC all got
24 caught up by SAC. So that's my feel-sorry-for-John story.

25 LC: Gosh darn it, you had to go and fly B-52s.

26 JY: That's right and that's how it happened. Like I said, if I would've ever run
27 into one of those classmates of mine who was way below me in the class standing and
28 was still flying fighters when I was in a BUFF (big, ugly, fat fucker: nickname of the B-
29 52) I would've killed the guy. At any rate, that's the sad story on how that all transpired.

30 LC: So after finishing at Perrin you were thinking, "Great I'm gonna be in the F-
31 series. I'm gonna be flying fighters." When did you find out that in fact—?

1 JY: The class ahead of us. The class graduating ahead of us, like two classes
2 ahead of us, they were going to fighter assignments, but the class immediately ahead of
3 us, almost all of them went to SAC. That's when we all just kind of died on the vine in
4 my class. Almost all of us went to SAC.

5 LC: Just took the wind right out as it were?

6 JY: Oh, yeah. In fact—okay, next war story. Walter Dawes, my first aircraft
7 commander in B-52s and I remember the first ride with him. He, being a very observant
8 type person, picked up on the fact that I seemed to have an attitude problem. He knew the
9 history. He knew the story. So he and I did not get off to a very good start. He was
10 pointing out to me how much more complicated this stupid BUFF was and how more
11 demanding that was to be a co-pilot in a BUFF rather than a pilot in a fighter. So we had
12 totally different views of the world as to which was the more demanding and which
13 required the more skill. That went on and on for time. Now, I have to give ol'—and by
14 the way today we are best friends and have been ever since we flew together. We still
15 stay in touch and he's just a great guy. I have to give him credit for a good move on his
16 part. Shortly after I had crewed up with him and we were on a mission, training mission,
17 something came up about fighters versus bombers on the intercom. He said, "All right
18 Yuma." He said, "Here's the deal. You can have number eight engine for the next thirty
19 minutes. Do whatever you want to do with a number eight engine. Play like you're a
20 fighter pilot." Well, the rest of the crew thought that was kind of interesting. I had to give
21 him credit. That was kind of a good move. He was gonna give me that one engine to play
22 with.

23 LC: Yeah. That was sweet of him.

24 JY: Yeah.

25 LC: Now you said that he called you, "Yuma." Can you tell me how that
26 nickname came about?

27 JY: Yeah. Speaking of nicknames, that proved to be helpful throughout my
28 career and even today it's helpful because if someone from my long lost past calls and
29 they're starting to chat and they haven't ID'ed themselves yet, it's how they address me
30 gives me a real big clue as to where they knew me. If they call me "Bos" because that
31 was my nickname in aviation cadets when I went through cadet training because it just so

1 happened that the guys that I really got tight with, one was from Trenton, New Jersey.
2 The other one was from Boston, Massachusetts, and the other one was from Syracuse,
3 New York. I guess the other guy was from Fullerton, California. Cities and here I am
4 from Boswell, Indiana. These guys they just loved that they were—

5 LC: They couldn't resist.

6 JY: They could not and so that was my name, Boswell. "Hey, Boswell." It was
7 shortened to Bos. The Bos. So when anyone from my distant past would call and say,
8 "Hey, Bos," cadets, somebody I knew in cadets. Okay, so then I didn't have a nickname
9 until I got into SAC and they guy that gave me that, "Yuma," nickname was Walt Dawes,
10 my aircraft commander. When I was introduced to him for the first time, he said, "John
11 Yuill. John Yuill. Johnny Yuma." That was when this Nick Adams-Johnny Yuma was a
12 big TV series thing. So that's the way he said it. He just said, "John Yuill. Johnny Yuma.
13 Johnny Yuma." So he started calling me Yuma. Six years later when I left the B-58 or B-
14 52 and went to the best airplane in the world, the B-58, to tell you how nicknames can get
15 to be too permanent, identify you too strongly. I'm an instructor now on the B-52 by this
16 time. We've got a new pilot just come into the organization and he's going for an
17 orientation ride with me. We're in the squadron building mission plan. I happen to
18 overhear a conversation in the hallway and it's this pilot just come in the organization
19 and he's looking for me. I hear him ask this new co-pilot that's just been in the wing for
20 just maybe a couple of months. I can hear him saying, "Do you know where Captain
21 Yuill is at? I'm supposed to fly with him tomorrow." I hear this lieutenant say, "Captain
22 Yuill?" He says, "I don't know a Captain Yuill." He says, "Are you sure this is
23 bombers?" He said, "Yeah." I'm listening so I go out in the hallway and whoever this kid
24 was I said, "What the hell are you doing telling this guy you don't know who I am?" He
25 said, "Yuma!" I thought, "Uh-oh, this nickname is too embedded." When the guy doesn't
26 even know what my real name is. The only thing he knows is the nickname.

27 LC: Right. That is a little worrying.

28 JY: Yeah. Any rate, anyone that knew me for that six-year period, that's the way
29 they're gonna address me is Yuma.

30 LC: Now the six-year period we're talking about is 1960 to '66.

31 JY: Correct.

1 LC: Your assignment was in Altus, Oklahoma.

2 JY: Correct. That is correct.

3 LC: Okay. You started off doing what? You said you ended up instructing
4 actually in the B-52s.

5 JY: Yeah, and I went the normal route that everybody goes, co-pilot to pilot
6 which is aircraft commander, and then from there to instructor pilot. So that's just the
7 normal progression. If you're in an organization long enough that's the way you'll go.

8 LC: Which of those did you like best? I can guess which one you liked least,
9 but—

10 JY: Probably the instructor pilot.

11 LC: Why?

12 JY: Getting to fly with more people because normally even as a co-pilot or pilot
13 mostly your flying was with your crew. You very seldom flew with other people in the
14 wing. So as an instructor pilot you got to fly with more people.

15 LC: So you would have as co-pilot and as pilot you would have a set crew that
16 you worked with?

17 JY: Correct. That is correct.

18 LC: Okay. Tell me about the routine during those years. Were you essentially
19 trying to keep hours of flight or were you actually flying missions as well?

20 JY: A typical year during those six years—well, the earlier years when I was a
21 co-pilot and it was really essentially the same for the whole six years I was there.
22 Typically the way it worked was I think it averaged two, something like probably two out
23 of the four weeks, half the time you were on alert. Are you familiar with alert?

24 LC: Well, I am, but other listeners might not be so could you explain what that
25 means?

26 JY: Okay, alert. This means that you go into this heavily reinforced building that
27 usually was half underground and half above ground. It was out away from the main base
28 at the end of a runway. Surrounding this building were—at Altus where I was stationed
29 and this was typical of most SAC bases. I think we had usually seven or eight B-52
30 aircraft on alert. By aircraft on alert I mean they were fully loaded with nuclear weapons
31 and fuel ready to go instantly to strike targets in Russia. Also sitting out there on the ramp

1 around that building were an equal number of tankers because you would be mated up
2 with a tanker and you would air refuel on the way to your target. You would spend a
3 week at a time—now this varied. Some bases had an alert schedule where you would be
4 on alert three days and then off four. Our schedule all the time I was at Altus was, ours
5 was a week. You were on a week. So you spent a lot of time on alert with your crew and
6 with seven other bomber crews and seven other tanker crews.

7 LC: You were all segregated down in this special building which—

8 JY: Yeah. You weren't really segregated. Well, each, like—I'm trying to
9 remember how that worked. I think as far as rooms went I think the pilot, like the pilot
10 and the co-pilot had a room. Then the nav and radar were—that's right. There were two-
11 man rooms. That was it, two-man rooms. You'd have the nav and the radar in the room
12 and then the EW (electronic warfare) and the gunner were in a room by themselves.
13 Really the tanker people and the bomber people were kind of mixed in. The way alert
14 worked is you're in that building. When this klaxon went off, when this horn blew,
15 everybody ran to their assigned aircraft, got in the aircraft, started engines, and turned on
16 the radio to see if it was a practice mission or if it was the real thing. This is what you did
17 most of the time for those six years. Now when you weren't on alert you were flying or
18 mission planning to fly or going to ground training, getting ground training on any
19 number of subjects or mission planning to fly training missions. Normal training mission
20 was usually about eight hours. It took a day to mission plan it and a day to fly it. So that
21 was a typical life for a crew member in B-52s in the '60s. Now there was one other
22 exception. About every, I would say about every nine months maybe, your wing, your
23 base, would get their turn at flying airborne alert. This was something that went on
24 continuously. There were X number of B-52s in the air all the time. The philosophy
25 behind this was if all the bases were struck by Russian missiles at least we would have
26 some aircraft airborne with weapons aboard that we could strike the targets. So they
27 wouldn't catch us on the ground.

28 LC: Now these B-52s that were flying the airborne alert were fully armed with
29 nuclear weapons?

30 JY: That's correct. Those were twenty-four hour missions. I think it was about
31 when your wing picked that up you would fly two a day because you would take off

1 together. I think it lasted for about forty-five days to sixty days, I think, that you were
2 doing that.

3 LC: You would fly a twenty-four hour—

4 JY: Mission.

5 LC: Mission and how many times would you refuel over the course of that?

6 JY: Usually just once, but it was—I mean we were taking on a lot of fuel. We'd
7 have one refueling and it came, as you might imagine, not quite in the middle. A little
8 closer to the front end, probably maybe eight and nine hours after you took off. We were
9 getting pretty low on fuel at the time we'd have that refueling. We were taking on—the
10 way I remember it was if you hooked up, had no disconnect, it would take twenty-eight
11 minutes to transfer the fuel. You were transferring about—what was it—two hundred and
12 some thousand pounds of fuel.

13 LC: Wow.

14 JY: It was only one AR (air refueling) normally.

15 LC: One AR?

16 JY: Air refueling, I'm sorry. Yeah.

17 LC: Were the tankers also essentially flying twenty-four hour missions, too?

18 JY: No. No. No.

19 LC: They had a completely different pattern for—

20 JY: Yeah. They would just launch—the route that we flew most and although not
21 always, but the one that I flew the most was a Chrome Dome route was the name for it. It
22 went out over Spain. We used to refuel over Spain. The tankers would come up from a
23 base we had in Spain and they would take off, climb to altitude, hook up with us, offload
24 their fuel, and then land immediately. So their mission probably was less than an hour.
25 They went from a full load of fuel to no fuel in that hour because they were offloading
26 everything they had on board almost.

27 LC: Right. What year was the accident over Spain where some of the—I think it
28 was during a refueling wasn't it?

29 JY: Yeah, it definitely was. It was one of these missions.

30 LC: Was it '67 or—?

1 JY: Yeah. You're right. When would that have been? Maybe '64, '65. I don't
2 know. Somewhere along in there.

3 LC: Somewhere in there, okay. But you were flying essentially the same route
4 that that—

5 JY: Exactly the same route, same mission.

6 LC: That the Palomares—

7 JY: Right that was it.

8 LC: Did you have any difficulty with the twenty-four hour schedule there? How
9 did you guys handle that?

10 JY: Way it normally worked—the way I worked it with my crew was I wanted to
11 be as alert as I possibly could be for the critical areas of flight. The critical areas of flight
12 on an airborne alert were obviously take off, climb out, air refueling, and landing. So I
13 would try to get a little rest before the tanker. The other place I'd try to get some rest was
14 before we got back to base to land. They had a little area behind the pilot and co-pilot's
15 seats that you could stretch out on a sleeping bag and try to get a little sleep. The way you
16 did it was, the pilot would get out and go back and take a nap. The co-pilot would be
17 flying the airplane. Then when you were up there the co-pilot would go back and take a
18 nap. So you just switched off. The nav and the radar did the same thing.

19 LC: How much of the guidance systems where the aircraft were actually
20 automated at this point? Were you doing all of the flying?

21 JY: No. We had autopilot. Occasionally, occasionally, if you were that
22 unfortunate—I think it happened to us a couple of times where you would have an
23 autopilot malfunction. Then you'd have to hand fly that airplane for twenty-four hours.

24 LC: That's what I was wondering.

25 JY: Oh, that was brutal. That was brutal when that would happen, but fortunately
26 it didn't happen that often.

27 LC: When did autopilot actually come in, John?

28 JY: I have no idea.

29 LC: It was there when you were there?

30 JY: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

31 LC: Okay.

1 JY: Normally it worked fine. So, most of the mission was on autopilot.

2 LC: Were there any memorable times when it didn't, when autopilot failed or
3 some part of the mechanism—?

4 JY: No. I don't remember, but I've got—as you might imagine, I've got a few
5 war stories to tie into airborne alert.

6 LC: I'll bet you do. I was gonna ask about a couple of national crises that might
7 provoke some—

8 JY: How bout the Cuban Crisis? Okay.

9 LC: So this would be October '62.

10 JY: Yeah and I'm still a co-pilot now. Here's the deal. There was a party at the
11 O-club and everybody's drunk and disorderly and the wing commander calls for attention
12 and says, "All right, all you drunken idiots. Go home, get in bed, get some crew rest.
13 Things are happening. Be ready to go." Remember how I told you this airborne alert
14 cycled between the different bases and wings?

15 LC: Yes.

16 JY: Okay. Now with the Cuban Crisis every base is going to be flying airborne
17 alert.

18 LC: Every SAC base?

19 JY: Every SAC base is going to be putting up airplanes on airborne alert. So we
20 start getting the word on what's coming up, that we're gonna be flying airborne alert and
21 we know we're nowhere close to our cycle. We also know what's going on in Cuba. So
22 there isn't any mystery as to why this increased alert step.

23 LC: Did you know about this because of briefings or because of newspaper or—?

24 JY: Newspaper. Just read, you know, day because—remember how, well, you
25 may not. It was scary. In fact, one of my all time favorite war stories is coming up here,
26 the one I tell most is coming up shortly, but I'll try to keep it sequential here. Any rate,
27 we take off and now I'm a co-pilot. So we're taking off. We're in one of the first two
28 airplanes to launch from our base on this increased readiness mission. We're flying that
29 normal Chrome Dome route out over Spain. The news is ominous. This is just about the
30 time that the quarantine's going into effect. Everybody is sky high. I mean everybody is
31 peaked and tweaked. Emotions are raw. I can remember when we took off and I'm

1 wondering if I'll ever see Rose and the kids again because we really did believe the
2 balloon was going up. I already thought there was a good chance that Altus would not
3 exist when that mission was over. I'm trying to set the stage for the emotions and
4 everybody's feelings at this time.

5 LC: Yes, absolutely.

6 JY: Any rate, it just so happens that whenever we took off it's about—the war
7 story is that it was about two or three o'clock in the morning. The way this worked,
8 Laura, you would get a message over your radio that was what we called the “go code.”
9 This is how you executed. This is what gave you the authority to strike your target. So
10 everybody was listening intently for this message to come across the radio. Well, it's two
11 or three o'clock in the morning. My pilot is back asleep because he's trying to get some
12 rest before we hit the tanker. I'm up there by myself and in formation with this other B-
13 52. All at once, and it's a very dark night. All at once off in front of me the sky starts
14 lighting up like somebody turned the light on. I'm thinking, “Oh, my God. They just hit
15 Morón,” our tanker base in Spain. I'm thinking, “That's a nuke. They have just set off a
16 nuke. They have hit our tanker bases in Spain.” I called the other airplane. I said, “Hey,
17 do you see what I see?” The guy said, “Yes, I do.” I said, “Have you heard any message?
18 Have you heard anything on the radio?” He said, “I haven't heard a word.” About that
19 time, this light that was getting brighter and brighter breaks through the undercast we had
20 and what it was, was a full moon. I tell you, Laura, to this day I don't think I have ever
21 been as frightened as I was for those few seconds before that moon broke through that
22 undercast. I think I was more frightened then than I was with anything that happened in
23 getting shot down and being a POW. I just knew that World War III had begun. So to
24 continue, as it turned out we had some aircraft problems. We lost an engine right after
25 refueling. So SAC tells us to land at Morón, or at Torreón, not Torreón, what is the name
26 of that base? Anyway, Nuasur in North Africa. We had a base there. We land. We go in
27 the command post and the guy in the command post tells me. He said, “Okay. You tell us
28 how much fuel we can put on your airplane so that you can make a seven engine takeoff
29 and go strike your target.” So this was kind of the atmosphere of the situation that existed
30 during this crisis time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. That's my war story on that.

1 LC: Wow. Well, that's a heck of a story. John, what was the target for your
2 particular mission?

3 JY: I don't know now, the targets that we had changed. Every time you went on
4 alert you would have a different set of targets. In fact, you went on alert about nine or ten
5 o'clock in the morning. You changed over the box. The box is what had the go code in it
6 and all the maps of the target area and everything. This was under lock, a combination
7 lock that the pilot and the bomb aimer both had locks on this box. So you had to switch
8 that box over from the crew that was going off alert. You're coming on alert accepting
9 the airplane, accepting the box. Then in the afternoon you target studied whatever your
10 set of targets were for that particular sortie. So all I know is they were targets in Russia,
11 probably missile sites or airfields or something like that. Now that I think about it, a
12 couple other airborne alert stories before I forget them.

13 LC: Yes. Okay, good let's go.

14 JY: This is further down the road now. Oh, what makes me think of it is your
15 commenting on the accident over Spain when the nukes went in the water and all the
16 political implications of that. Okay, now by this time I'm an aircraft commander. I'm a
17 pilot. I'm flying a different airborne alert route. This is up over Canada in the Northwest
18 Territory. We had just come off the tanker, full fuel load and just about to engage the
19 auto pilot when the airplane starts shaking violently. I look at the engine instruments,
20 everything looks normal. Look at the airplane as best you can see it. Everything looks
21 okay. It's just really vibrating badly. So I called the gunner who sits in the back of the
22 airplane. I said, "Gunner, do you see anything unusual?" He looked around and he said,
23 "Well," he said, "on the left wing it looks like the aileron is just fluttering out there." I
24 said, "Mm, that could be the problem." By this time, we've already called SAC command
25 post in Omaha, Nebraska. They've got the Boeing people on the phone to talk to us about
26 it. When you get that far away from civilization—we were up way over northern Canada
27 into the Northwest Territory when all this is taking place.

28 LC: Yeah. Pretty remote.

29 JY: Yeah, and you're out of what we call UHF (ultra high frequency) range. The
30 radios you normally use, the UHF radios, had a range of about 150, 200 miles. In
31 Stateside no problem. You're always within range, but when you get way out there you

1 go to what we called an HF radio, high frequency. That radio works around the world.
2 This particular HF radio we had was overheating. It would automatically shut itself down
3 and there was about a three-minute cooling down cycle before you could turn it on again.
4 This plays into this story. So Boeing tells me, the Boeing tech rep says, "Okay. Try this."
5 They were having me try different things, air speed, configuration, put some flaps down,
6 put some spoiler up, whatever to try to see if we could streamline this aileron. On more
7 than one occasion right after they had given me instructions to try this, try that, the HF
8 radio would go off. Then when the cooling period had passed and we could turn it on
9 again, as soon as we'd get that radio on you'd hear every person in the world trying to get
10 us to answer them. This happened two or three different times. Well, long story short,
11 finally they came up with a configuration that worked, but it was a configuration that had
12 us totally dirty. By that I mean gear down, pull flaps, I think air brakes at position four or
13 something. Anyway, all kinds of trash hanging out of the airplane, the gear, the flaps,
14 everything, which means that in a way it was kind of good because now we have to
15 descend and we have to have a real high power setting because we're real heavy with
16 fuel. We're heading back south now back toward the United States. It just so happened I
17 had a brand new co-pilot who this was his first airborne alert mission. When we get back,
18 we're landing at the first base we come to when we get back to the States. It was
19 somewhere up in northern Michigan. I don't even remember the base. About ten o'clock
20 at night on a Saturday night and we're landing at the max landing weight. Everything
21 works fine and we're taxiing in. Billy Beeble, my co-pilot, he says, "Wow." He said,
22 "Look at who's out here to greet us." He said, "There's a three-star general." It just so
23 happened they were having a dining in at this base that night. This three star, the Air
24 Force commander, the numbered Air Force commander just happened to be the guest
25 speaker that night. So he's out there on the ramp to meet us when we come in. It was kind
26 of funny because he was down at the hatch when people were getting off the airplane. I
27 can hear him saying, "Are you the aircraft commander? Are you the aircraft
28 commander?" I'm thinking, "The hell with it. I'm not going off this airplane. I don't want
29 to tell him I'm the aircraft commander" because my fear was, Laura, I thought, with my
30 luck they're gonna say, "There ain't a damn thing wrong with this airplane. What made
31 you think you had a problem?" That's what I was afraid of.

1 LC: You were gonna get chewed out big time.

2 JY: Yeah. Yeah. For saying what the hell is this vibration problem, this mythical
3 vibration problem you thought you had? The three button, when I stepped down and I
4 told him, “Yeah, I’m the airplane driver.” He said, “You had a broken push-pull rod on
5 the aileron.” They’d already, I mean they had already gotten the stand up, looked at this
6 aileron and he said, “Yeah, the push-pull rod broke. That’s why you had the problem.”
7 He said, “God dang you,” he said, “do you know what kind of problems you’ve caused in
8 the Strategic Air Command here in the last few hours?” I said, “No, sir.” He said, “Well,”
9 he said, “you do remember a month ago when we lost those two airplanes over Spain and
10 all the problems we had with those bombs in the water?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said,
11 “Well, where were you when you were having all of your problems?” I said, “Mm.” He
12 said, “Yeah.” He said, “Every damn time you lost that radio of yours we thought we’d
13 lost you.” He said, “That would’ve been the death knell for airborne alert. We wouldn’t
14 have been able to continue airborne alert if we would have had another international
15 incident with the Canadians right after we’d had the international incident with Spain.”
16 That probably would’ve been the end of airborne alert.

17 LC: Thinking that the political fallout from that would’ve included shutting down
18 aerospace to SAC—

19 JY: That’s it. Well, I’m sure he was right that the international community
20 would’ve said, “Hey, this is too dangerous.”

21 LC: We’re done with this.

22 JY: “This is too dangerous. You can’t be flying these airplanes with nuclear
23 weapons on board over our country.” He was probably right. That probably would’ve
24 been it.

25 LC: So, John, you scared the hell out of SAC.

26 JY: And John.

27 LC: I can believe that, actually. How serious, stepping back from that, how
28 serious was the actual mechanical malfunction, the broken, what did you say it was?
29 Broken rod?

1 JY: Oh, the push-pull rod on the aileron tab. Yeah, that wasn't really that big a
2 deal once we were able to streamline it. Now if we wouldn't have been able to streamline
3 it, I think it would've broken the airplane up the vibration was so bad.

4 LC: It was that bad?

5 JY: Yeah. It was really bad. The vibration was bad.

6 LC: The design specs for a B-52 in terms of vibration analysis must be huge.

7 JY: Oh, it's great. I mean, it can take a hell of a lot punishment. In fact, I
8 remember many times flying low level in a B-52 and looking out at those outboard
9 engine pods. I mean, they're going up and down and that wing is flapping around.
10 There's thirty-two feet of flex at the wing tip of a B-52.

11 LC: Thirty-two feet?

12 JY: Thirty-two feet. You sit in that cockpit and you see that wing flapping around
13 out there and you think, "I don't care what the engineers say that wing is coming off," but
14 very few did. I mean the airplane was so tough.

15 LC: That's amazing.

16 JY: It felt like it was gonna—that vibration, it just felt like it was gonna tear this
17 airplane apart, but once we streamlined it, then it was just normal, normal.

18 LC: Was that the worst case of that kind of enormous vibration that you ever had
19 in a plane?

20 JY: I think so. I can't recall anything else similar to that.

21 LC: Wow.

22 JY: Yeah. That was probably it.

23 LC: Now at this point did you love the B-52?

24 JY: I hated it. I hated that damn airplane. I hated it from the minute I saw it.
25 Laura, you've got to watch the History Channel and watch the documentary they did on
26 the B-52.

27 LC: This is the one that you were interviewed for?

28 JY: Yeah. Yeah. My first appearance on the program is when they show me
29 walking around the B-52 and looking at wrinkled skin. I said, "You've got to be kidding
30 me. You want me to fly an airplane with wrinkled skin like this?"

31 LC: When you say wrinkled skin, what exactly are you describing?

1 JY: One of the unique things about the B-52 as compared to any other airplane
2 that I've ever flown, most normal aircraft, I mean the skin is tight. It's like you would
3 expect any airplane you've ever seen to be. The B-52, because of it's size, the skin
4 actually had wrinkles in it. With the flexing and the movement of the airplane in flight,
5 that skin was constantly flexing. On the ground you'd look at some of those and those
6 wrinkles in that skin just did not look right. I mean you thought, "What is this deal?" Me,
7 my first look at a B-52 coming out of F-86s and the guy walking us around the airplane
8 just happened to casually mention how much one of those external fuel tanks weighed
9 full of fuel. I forget what the weight was, but I do know this. It was more than the F-86
10 weighed.

11 LC: Than the entire aircraft?

12 JY: Than the entire F-86 airplane, this tip tank full of fuel weighed more. One
13 drop tank on a B-52 full of fuel weighed more than an F-86 airplane just to kind of give
14 you a feel for the size of that monster.

15 LC: The skin that you were talking about, what was the material that that was
16 made—

17 JY: It was metal, aluminum.

18 LC: No kidding.

19 JY: Yeah. I'm sure they had problems with skin fatigue where they probably had
20 to re-skin it, but I don't remember that much about it. There were so many things I hated
21 about that airplane.

22 LC: Tell me some of the other ones.

23 JY: Okay. Well, it flew like it looked. It looked like a big old eighteen wheeler
24 and that's the way it flew. Now I'm gonna tell you another war story and I really don't
25 like telling this one because it degrades my world's greatest pilot philosophy or theory. I
26 go to B-52 training, eh? Right out of—I'm a hot fighter pilot coming out of 86s, right?

27 LC: Right.

28 JY: Okay. So I'm going through training out at Castle Air Force Base at Merced,
29 California. Obviously the instructor pilot picked up real quickly my attitude problem.
30 Because he used to look at me like "Okay Yuill. I'm gonna get to you somewhere along
31 the line here. I'm gonna put you in the seat and we'll just see." I should've picked up

1 on—I had a lot of red flags that kinda just I didn't even notice. That was one of them.
2 Anyway, my pilot—I was, of course, the brand new co-pilot and my pilot, Vic Martin,
3 who was upgrading. He had been a co-pilot in B-52s for three or four years. He was
4 upgrading to aircraft commander. Vic was one sharp guy. I mean this guy was really
5 sharp except for one thing, he couldn't refuel. He had a terrible time refueling. I, as the
6 hot fighter pilot, sitting there in the instructor's seat observing these refuelings and I'm
7 thinking, "You know, Vic is such a sharp guy. He's so good at everything else. It's got to
8 be a mental thing with these bomber pilots. They must get so scared when they get close
9 to another airplane that they just can't fly formation." I'm thinking, "You know what this
10 is? This is trail formation." The way I flew trail in fighters was we were doing acro most
11 of the time. We were rat racing. We were trying to—we were all over the sky flying trail,
12 not having any trouble staying in it. I'm thinking here's this tanker up here in front of us
13 on autopilot maintaining the constant heading, constant air speed and this guy can't get
14 close enough to refuel. It's got to be mental. Wrong, but that's what I'm thinking. Again,
15 I think I was sending strong non-verbals to the instructor pilot because one day he told
16 me. He said, "All right, Yuill." He said, "If and when we get Vic checked out on
17 refueling you'll get your chance." Now that should've really told me something, but it
18 just went right on by me. So the magic day comes. Vic finally gets what he has to do to
19 get signed off as being qualified air refueling. This instructor pilot almost went berserk
20 getting Vic out of the seat and getting me in there. Man, talk about a huge red flag. I
21 should've known something bad was gonna happen.

22 LC: Yeah. He couldn't wait.

23 JY: He couldn't wait to get me in that seat. I look back and I think, "Yuill, you
24 are so stupid. What is the deal?" Anyway, confidence, lack of—I am so confident, Laura,
25 so confident that my plan is, Vic. I really like Vic. I am not gonna drive right in there and
26 hook up. I'm gonna sit back here and act like I'm having some trouble, then I'll drive in
27 and hook up. Okay. So I'm in the seat. The IP (instructor pilot) says, "Okay, Yuill. You
28 have the airplane." I was almost, I think, ninety degrees bank behind that tanker going
29 from one wing up to the other, all over the place. I can't even get close to that tanker.
30 Clemens, the IP, is just loving every minute of it. He said, "Oh, that is great. That's a

1 way, fighter pilot. Man, you're doing wonderful. I am so impressed." (Clears throat).

2 Excuse me.

3 LC: That's fine.

4 JY: So in the period of about, I'd say maybe ninety seconds to two minutes, I
5 went from supremely confident to saying there is no way I will ever be able to refuel this
6 stupid airplane if I'm in it forever. I just went from total confidence to no confidence in
7 about two minutes. Later, if you recall I think we talked the day before yesterday about
8 this neighbor of mine, Harold Bauduit, the black guy.

9 LC: Yes. Yes. Uh-huh.

10 JY: Harold was the EW on this crew.

11 LC: The electronic warfare officer.

12 JY: The electronic warfare officer. We get back on the ground. He said, "John,"
13 Harry said, "My God!" He said, "What were you doing up there?" I said, "This stupid
14 damn airplane." I said, "I don't know what the hell the deal is." He said, "You scared me
15 to death. I thought we were all gonna be killed." He said, "That stupid instructor pilot just
16 seemed that that's what he was hoping would happen." I didn't think about the other guys
17 in the airplane, what it must've been like for them. Here's the story. That stupid B-52
18 airplane, it has what they call spoilers. Instead of flying like a regular airplane which is
19 with aileron. That aileron that I was telling you about was a trim tab where I had the
20 problem. That's primarily the way you turn a B-52 is with spoilers. Spoilers are just
21 what—there's a correct term. It spoils the flow of the air over the wing. It's a hydraulic
22 actuated piece of metal that's on the top of the wing. When you move the yoke,
23 depending upon which way you want to turn, on one wing this spoiler will come up. It
24 spoils the lift and that's what causes the aircraft to turn. Okay, that's all fine and dandy
25 except for one thing. There is a lag. There is a time lapse in there.

26 LC: How much?

27 JY: It's probably just less than a second, but to a pilot flying an airplane it is an
28 eternity regardless of how fast you're going. Every airplane I flew in my life except for
29 that stupid B-52, when you moved the stick or the yoke, something happened. When you
30 moved the yoke something happened. When you moved the yoke the airplane was
31 moving. In the B-52, now in pitch it would react instantly, but because of this spoiler

1 system on the wing it had this delay built in. So what you had to do in the B-52 is learn
2 through experience that if you wanted to just bring the wing up a little bit you learned
3 through experience that you would make a movement on the yoke immediately take that
4 movement out and sit there and wait. If you waited long enough, the wing would come up
5 a foot or two. Until you learned that and being used to flying a real airplane, if you move
6 the yoke and the airplane doesn't move, what are you going to do? You're going to move
7 the yoke more. So you get into this envelope where you're overcorrecting, constantly
8 overcorrecting. Somebody else once put it—the way they said, "I can always tell a new
9 pilot in a B-52 because they're so friendly. They're always waving at the tanker or
10 they're waving at the runway." When you have to make small corrections, you're always
11 overcorrecting because nothing's happening when you move that yoke. One of the stories
12 that I like to tell and it was one of the most popular B-52 stories was the way the
13 system—it really wasn't a spoiler system. The way it really worked was, they built a little
14 squirrel cage under the pilot seat and it had squirrels in it. When he moved that yoke he
15 opened one side of the cage and the squirrel knew that he was supposed to run out to the
16 end of the wing and tell that wing tip that the pilot wanted it to come up two feet or
17 whatever it was. Then he'd run back and get in his cage. That's when the wing would
18 move. That's how much time would elapse. So it was the squirrel cage story about how
19 the plane actually moved in the role action.

20 LC: Well, that had to be pretty disconcerting at least at first.

21 JY: Yeah. Then once you got used to it. In fact as it turned out I ended up being
22 one of the probably the best refuelers in the B-52 wing that we were in. I went longer
23 without a disconnect than about anybody else once I learned it, but I never did like the
24 airplane. In fact, it wasn't for this program, the one that I did for the History Channel, but
25 another one that they were doing. It just so happened that I'd been over to Shreveport at
26 Barksdale Air Force Base for a photo shoot for this thing. I had taken my pilot son with
27 me. We were on the way back and this guy calls from England that's doing the program
28 and he's interviewing me like you are. We're doing this on cell phone. We're driving
29 back from Shreveport. He's asking me about the B-52 and I'm telling him essentially
30 what I'm telling you. He said, "So you really didn't like that airplane?" I said, "No, I
31 didn't," but I said, "There's somebody in this car that thought it was a great airplane,"

1 because my son also flew B-52s and he thought it was a great airplane. I said, “Here talk
2 to him. He’ll tell you how great the airplane is.” So I handed the phone to Mike. Mike
3 talked to him for about twenty minutes and gave his version of the B-52. So I guess it’s
4 just kind of what you like and what you don’t like. I was never—then the other thing that
5 I hated about that airplane was the landing gear. The gear on the B-52 is what we call a
6 bicycle gear. The reason we do is because it has two wheels—or it has a forward truck
7 and a rear truck kind of like the two wheels on a bicycle. The problem with that gear is
8 you can not really get a smooth landing because to do it you’d have to touch both down at
9 the same time and that’s almost impossible. So what you have to do is get the rear trucks
10 down first and then the forward truck just slams on the runway. So you never get really
11 smooth landings whereas in a tricycle gear, a normal airplane, like my B-58, the main
12 gear you touch them down, and like all airliners, and then you ease the nose down. So
13 that was another thing I didn’t like about it, but to me a B-52 was like driving an eighteen
14 wheeler. Flying an F-86 or a B-58 was like driving a Maserati. That’s the difference.

15 LC: Mike says that the B-52 isn’t all that bad.

16 JY: Mike liked it. He thought it was a good airplane.

17 LC: Of course, later on he flew B-1, is that right?

18 JY: Yeah, and he liked it a lot better.

19 LC: It’s quite remarkable the service life of the B-52 design.

20 JY: Oh, and you’ll like this story. The History Channel program, the
21 documentary on the B-52?

22 LC: Right.

23 JY: It points out, Laura, what a small planet we live on and how interdependent
24 and how interrelated we are to everyone on this little planet. I get this phone call one day
25 from this lady. Did I tell you this?

26 LC: No. No.

27 JY: Okay. So she, “Is this Colonel Yuill?” “Yes.” “Colonel Yuill, we’re doing a
28 documentary on the B-52.” I said, “Where are you talking to me from?” She said, “Oh,
29 I’m in London.” I said, “You’re in London. Is your company based in London?” “Oh, yes
30 this is where we are.” “You’re doing a documentary on a B-52?” She said, “That’s our
31 business.” She said, “We put together documentaries and we sell them to A&E (Arts and

1 Entertainment Network) and the History Channel and those type of—that’s our business.”
2 I said, “Isn’t it wonderful.” An English company doing a documentary on a B-52
3 airplane. I said, “Okay, fine.” She said, “Well, would you be willing to participate?” I
4 said, “Certainly. I’d be happy to.” She said, “Okay. Well, I’ll get back to you with dates
5 and times and places.” I said, “Just send me the tickets. Also, I need some tickets to
6 Wimbledon.” She said, “No. No. We come to you. We’ll be in the States and we’ll let
7 you know.” So she calls and anyway it’s fascinating the way they put these things
8 together. Any rate, while we’re doing the shoot and she’s interviewing me—we didn’t
9 have this conversation Tuesday?

10 LC: Well, you told me a little bit about this, right, but we didn’t do it on the
11 record.

12 JY: Oh, okay. Well, anyway, the thing that I like to tell people is about—it ties in
13 with my feeling about the B-52. Two-thirds of the way through the shoot she stops the
14 cameraman and says, “Hold it, John. This program is about the B-52. It’s not about the B-
15 58. We don’t care about the B-58 and you will say something nice about the B-52. This is
16 about the B-52. Say something good about it.” “Okay. Okay, I will.” The good things that
17 I said about it which are absolutely true. I would not be alive today if that airplane was
18 not as sturdy as it was. I took two direct SAM (surface-to-air missile) hits and it’s the
19 only reason I’m alive today is because the airplane is so tough because it could absorb
20 that kind of punishment. It was a lot like the B-17 was in World War II. The other thing
21 was what you were alluding to about the longevity of the airplane. If that airplane does
22 fly as long as they project it to into the ’40s that’s gonna be ninety years that that airplane
23 will be operational.

24 LC: Yes. It’s unbelievable really.

25 JY: Unbelievable. I told her. I said, “Did we get our money’s worth as taxpayers
26 out of that airplane?” You know, at this thing I go to at the Randolph every year, this
27 POW thing, our guest speaker a few years ago ran the air war on Kosovo. So I went up
28 and talked to him afterwards because Mike flew in Kosovo in his B-1. I said, “My son
29 wasn’t too happy with the air order battle that you assigned to the B-1s.” He said, “Oh,
30 the B-1s.” He said, “You know we had to use them.” He said, “It’s a great weapons
31 system,” but he said, “We couldn’t risk losing B-1s.” He said, “That’s why we had to

1 give them—their targets were right over the border.” In fact, Mike, whom I was telling
2 him about, he said, “God.” He said, “We barely got into enemy territory.” He said, “We
3 dropped our ordinance and we were out of there.” He said, “We didn’t even hardly get
4 into enemy territory.” This three-star, anyway, was telling me. He said, “You know what
5 I use primarily in Kosovo was your airplane, the BUFF.” He said, “That’s what we went
6 with. That’s what we used.” So yeah, we got—

7 LC: Now when he was saying that they couldn’t lose a B-1 in the Kosovo
8 operations, why was that? What was he essentially saying?

9 JY: Well, I think it was the same thing that—I’m gonna shift to another airplane
10 on you here, my B-58, my all-time favorite airplane, the Hustler. That airplane never
11 went to Vietnam, but we did have a fly off against F-4s back in ’66, I think, to see if it
12 could be used in Vietnam. Well, as the results of the bombing were that we were much
13 better than the F-4s were and we could carry more payload. We had it all over ‘em, but—

14 LC: We meaning the Hustlers?

15 JY: The Hustlers, that’s right, but the Air Force probably made the right decision.
16 They said, “Yes, but we can lose ten F-4s for one B-58. It’s not cost effective to be using
17 B-58s over there.” Plus, the F-4 was still in production. The cost per flying hour wasn’t
18 that much. B-58 was out of production. Cost for flying hour was very, very high. So it
19 just didn’t make sense to be using the B-58 even though it could perform the mission
20 better.

21 LC: That was a cost analysis decision?

22 JY: Yeah. Yeah. That’s what put the B-58 in the bone yard was cost analysis.
23 That’s why it went in the bone yard.

24 LC: What were the spikes in the cost pattern as a result of that decision? Where
25 were the problems in terms of costs for the Air Force?

26 JY: For the B-58?

27 LC: Yes.

28 JY: You mean putting it in the bone yard?

29 LC: Yeah. What was it about it that cost so much?

30 JY: In 1970, no 1969 I guess it would’ve been. Yeah, 1969. Nixon came out with
31 a big reduction in military spending. When it came down to SAC, SAC got their chop on

1 it and how much was gonna be theirs. In fact, went forward with two proposals. They
2 said, “We’ll do one or two things. Either we scrap the B-58 fleet entirely or we cut the B-
3 52 fleet in half.” In ’69 the BUFFs had been bombing in Vietnam already for two or three
4 years. They had that mission going, plus the cost per flying hour on the B-52 was much,
5 much less than it was on the B-58.

6 LC: Why was that?

7 JY: Okay.

8 LC: Was it fuel consumption or what was it?

9 JY: No. No. No. Two primary reasons. We only had—the B-58 was a limited-
10 production airplane. They built a 114 of them. We only had eighty left. It had been out of
11 production for three or four years so parts were getting more expensive. That airplane
12 was a very, very high maintenance airplane just due to a lot of things which would take a
13 long time to explain. When you did maintenance on a B-58 it was much more labor
14 intensive. It took more time to fix something to get to the components that you needed
15 replaced. Whatever, it was just a high maintenance airplane as compared to a B-52. So
16 they thought, well—and the B-58 had no Vietnam mission. So SAC said, “Well”—or not
17 SAC. Air Force. Air Force said, “Well, look. We’re using B-52s in Vietnam now.
18 They’re much cheaper to operate so we’re just gonna scrap the B-58s.” That’s what they
19 did.

20 LC: So essentially the Air Force decided based on what it was presented with by
21 SAC and probably others to keep the entire B-52 fleet and eliminate the entire B-58 fleet.

22 JY: That’s correct. Another thing that helped them with that decision, the 111
23 was already coming online which was a follow on airplane to the B-58.

24 LC: So the next generation was already in view?

25 JY: Right. Right.

26 LC: When was the 111 unveiled or made operational?

27 JY: Oh, gee whiz. That I don’t know. I know it had to be in, probably in the late
28 ’60s somewhere because the reason I know it was operational when we put the 58s in the
29 bone yard was because a real good friend of mine who had gone to the 111 program. He
30 was in the initial cadre and he was really leaning on me to go to the 111 program. I kept
31 asking him. I said—he was talking to me, telling me about the great avionics package

1 they had in the 111. I said, “Yeah, but Bill, which one’s more fun to fly?” Then he kind
2 of danced around that one. I said, “Okay, I think I’ve got my answer. I’m gonna stay with
3 the Hustler.” Well, then I know it was just like three months later when it came out that
4 we were gonna scrap the B-58s. Of course, by then the assignment had passed. I couldn’t
5 get in the 111 then.

6 LC: John, I want to ask you just a couple of essentially timeline questions.

7 JY: Yeah.

8 LC: We talked earlier about the Cuban Missile Crisis and some of your
9 experiences then. Do you remember Kennedy’s assassination, that time period?

10 JY: Oh, yeah.

11 LC: Where were you, at Altus?

12 JY: Yes, I was. Yes, I was. In fact, I had just gotten off alert, just walked in the
13 house and the television set was on in the den. I don’t think we were watching television,
14 but it was on. Heard this news flash, you know, alert, alert, alert, whatever. So I was at
15 Altus at that time.

16 LC: Did it make any difference to the activities on the base?

17 JY: I do not recall any change in activity on the base with that.

18 LC: Okay. I also want to ask another sort of Vietnam-related question. It has to
19 do with early 1965. Again, you were still at Altus. The initial commitment by the United
20 States of forces into the Vietnam conflict, and here I mean ground forces, the Marines, in
21 early ’65. Do you remember that or the build up to that? Did it affect your thinking about
22 what likely missions you might have in the future?

23 JY: No. I don’t remember being too intellectually involved or really paying that
24 close attention to Vietnam until probably my last year, ’66. I think it became more of an
25 issue then and for a couple reasons. One is if the escalation phase was there and also the
26 B-52s were starting to play a role, although we weren’t affected at Altus. The other thing
27 was we had a few of our crew members who had left Altus and volunteered to go to
28 Vietnam in other equipment. Not in B-52s obviously, but in other airplanes. So some of
29 our troops had already gone over there and were in Vietnam in different type aircraft.

30 LC: So they were volunteering?

1 JY: Yeah. A lot of people volunteered because, you know the old story, Laura, in
2 the military. It helps to have a war. You've got to have a war and a lot of guys—this is
3 where I was different from a lot of my peers. I love flying airplanes. I particularly love
4 flying high-performance airplanes, but I never had any desire to be shot at. I never saw
5 the glory or fun in being shot at. That never did have appeal to me, but a lot of my
6 friends, they were so excited when we put the 58s in the bone yard and they knew they
7 were going to be able to go to Vietnam then. They were excited. They thought, “Oh, this
8 is great. Now I get to the war. I get in to fight.” I guess to a large extent I can understand
9 why they would because you train and train to drop bombs or do whatever. Some guys go
10 through a whole career and all they do is train. They never get into—it's kind of like an
11 athlete. You go to all the practice sessions, but you never get put in the game. So I can
12 understand why they—but to me, I was perfectly content to just stay right here and fly
13 my airplane and I had no desire to go to Vietnam.

14 LC: Certainly as you told us today, John, there were some pretty hairy and tight
15 moments for you flying the missions you were flying.

16 JY: Yeah and nobody was shooting at me so I didn't need to complicate this
17 process.

18 LC: Okay. Well, let's take a break here, John.

19 JY: Okay. It was still Haines that was at Grissom with me in 58s. He went to the
20 111 program early, very early. He was part of the initial cadre that went to the 111
21 program. He would call me occasionally encouraging me to also get in the 111 program.
22 He was telling me about the wonderful avionics and all that good stuff about the airplane.
23 The one question that he would hedge on though when I would ask him, I'd say, “That's
24 wonderful. That's wonderful. Now tell me which airplane's more fun to fly.” Then he'd
25 go back to, “Well, but you've got to appreciate the avionics. This airplane is so smart,
26 blah, blah, blah.” I said, “Which airplane's more fun to fly, Haines?” “Yeah, well, I guess
27 maybe the Hustler.” I said, “Thank you.”

28 LC: Now, John, what was he so crowing about in the avionics package? Can you
29 remember any piece of it?

1 JY: Primarily the TFR, the terrain-following radar. That was the big thing in the
2 111. We had terrain-following radar in the BUFF, but it was in its early years and not that
3 great. I mean, it was something I didn't trust very far.

4 LC: What was its function, John? Can you just—?

5 JY: Okay. Yeah. Yeah. The terrain-following radar, the function was to be able to
6 take you down as low as possible to the ground when you were ingressing a target, to get
7 you down on the deck even in hilly terrain. What it would do is it would contour fly you.
8 It would tell you when there was a little hill or something in front of you so you'd stay
9 low until just the last minute. Then you'd pop up over that hill and then back down again.
10 Of course, the purpose of this was to evade the radars so that they couldn't see you as you
11 were coming in. As I say, back in the '60s they came out with this terrain-avoidance
12 radar. That's what they called it in the BUFF. The terrain avoidance was the precursor of
13 the TFR in the 111, the terrain-following radar. In the early days, as you might expect, it
14 had some glitches. It wasn't something you'd really trust to take you down there. Just to
15 give you an example, one of the stories that Haines told me about the TFR in the 111. He
16 said, "One of the most difficult things was the first night low-level mission." This thing
17 was tied into the autopilot. So he said, "In that airplane," he said, "It takes you down
18 quickly because the idea is to get you down low as quickly as possible so that you're not
19 gonna be picked up by radar." So he said, "This airplane really screams down." He said,
20 "It's just rushing down to the ground." He said, "It was all I could do to keep my hands
21 off the stick, keep from overriding the autopilot." He said, "It just waits until the last
22 second. Then it levels you out." He said, "That puppy flies you," and it will. It'll actually
23 fly you—he said, "Flying it in daylight when you can look out and see what it's doing."
24 He said, "It's just flying you as close as it can through all these hills and valleys and
25 everything else taking advantage of the terrain to keep you as low as possible." So it was
26 quite a thing and that was one of the—two biggest things about the 111 as compared to
27 the B-58 was that. We didn't have that package in the B-58 and the swing wing. The
28 movable wing which gave it more loiter time and also gave it the ability to operate out of
29 short field. So although the SAC 111s never were used other than on short fields they
30 operated out of the same runways that we used all the time. It was a capability they had
31 that we did not have.

1 LC: John, what is loiter time?

2 JY: The ability to just fly around and spend time in the air. By putting those
3 wings out they could slow down and be very fuel efficient. So those were two of the
4 advantages of the airplane. The other thing and back to Altus. There was a similar story
5 that I had with this guy and I don't know if I told you about that or not, the SR-71 pilot.
6 Anyway, Darryl Cobb, he and I were together. Now, this is going back to Altus in the B-
7 52 days. He and I both applied for the SR-71 at the same time. What we heard back was,
8 long story short and cut through the military language, was don't call us. We'll call you.
9 Essentially what the response was due to the high number of requests and applications
10 and the small number of slots because there weren't very many SR-71 aircraft, they said,
11 "We'll put you on the list. You both qualify, but we'll put you on the list and if an
12 opening comes up we'll call you." When I saw that, I said, "Okay, I'm gonna check out
13 the B-58." That's when I applied and was accepted and went to the B-58. I kept calling
14 this buddy of mine after I was at Grissom and the B-58, I said, "Darryl, get your
15 paperwork in. This is the airplane." His response always was, "Blackbird or nothing." I
16 said, "Okay, stupid it's gonna be nothing. You're gonna spend the rest of your life in that
17 damn BUFF." Then about a year or two later I get a call from him. "Hey, Yuma. I got
18 some orders to Beale Air Force Base." I said, "Oh, you're gonna be tanker support for the
19 SR, huh?" He said, "SR-71." Anyway, he got it and then he would call me and he'd say,
20 "Mach-2. Mach-2. Yeah we're just getting up on the step at Mach-2." That was another
21 story that was kind of similar to the one about the 111.

22 LC: Now who were they taking for SR-71 at that point? Do you know what the
23 profile was?

24 JY: No, I don't really because there were so few slots. Darryl told me because I
25 asked him. I said, "How in the hell did you ever get that anyway?" He said, "Willie
26 Sontag." Willie Sontag was a SAC CEGs, combat evaluation group guy, who evidently
27 and there were a couple of SAC generals that felt that there should be more B-52 types or
28 at least a B-52 type in the SR-71 program. He said that that guy really kind of made it
29 happen. I don't know if that meant they didn't have any B-52 people in the program,
30 could've been. There might've not been any. I know where most of them came from. The
31 story about the initial cadre for the 111 were primarily B-58 people?

1 LC: Yes.

2 JY: Well, the same is true for the SR-71. Most of the SR-71 people came out of
3 the B-58 program when they initially started it.

4 LC: Now do you think that has to do with the pilot's accomplishments in a B-58
5 or—?

6 JY: It has to do with the airplane. I'm sure they looked and said, "Hey. Where are
7 we gonna go for pilots to fly this SR-71, for the pilots to fly the 111?" The SR-71 in my
8 assumption would be, and particularly since SR-71 was a SAC resource. That was a SAC
9 airplane. So they're looking within the command and they're saying, "Well, do we have
10 any pilots that would be adaptable to the SR-71?" That would've been a no-brainer.
11 They'd look around and say, "What airplanes do we have in the inventory?" "Oh, here's
12 a B-58, single-pilot airplane, high speed high performing airplane." That's the logical
13 match. So that's why they went for the SR. The 111, there I'm sure the reason was that
14 the 111 was so similar to the B-58. It was a medium bomber, not a heavy bomber,
15 medium bomber. Again, single-pilot airplane and kind of the same mission as everything
16 else. Also, built by the same company. So there was a logical tie in there, too.

17 LC: Sort of like buying a Ford and just keep buying a Ford 'cause you know
18 where all the fits are, right?

19 JY: Yeah. Yeah. You got it.

20 LC: That's extremely interesting about the SR-71. I just want to ask, John, did
21 you ever have a chance to fly one?

22 JY: Never did. Never did.

23 LC: No?

24 JY: I wish I would have. I told my buddy, I said, "You know." I said, "I sure
25 wouldn't want to do this as a job," because those guys were in those space suits. They
26 had to go down and pre-breathe and all that trash. When they landed at a strange base,
27 man, it was quite an involved process, but I sure would've loved to have flown that bird
28 one time.

29 LC: How long a field do they have to have before they could—?

30 JY: They didn't need any more runway than we did.

31 LC: Really? That was how long?

1 JY: Oh, about, we usually operated off of runways twelve to thirteen thousand
2 feet. In fact, all the runways that the Blackbird operated off of were similar.

3 LC: So there was no special requirement there?

4 JY: No, runway linked. Well, there was a requirement. I have no idea how much
5 runway they needed, but I'm sure it was a fair amount, just like the 58. The 58 required a
6 lot of runway.

7 LC: Yes. Right.

8 JY: So I'm sure that that one did, too. See, that was the advantage of the 111. It
9 didn't require nearly the runway because of that swing wing capability.

10 LC: Oh, okay. How did that affect speed? Did that slow it down, did you say,
11 when you put the whole wing out?

12 JY: Yeah. That's right. As you extend the wing and make it more straight, if you
13 will, perpendicular to the fuselage then that allows you to fly slow. When you sweep the
14 wings then it looks like a B-58 and the wings are back and you can go fast.

15 LC: What's slow for the F-111?

16 JY: I don't know what their loiter speed would've been. I would've guessed—I
17 know they came down final with about 160 knots where we came down final at about 200
18 knots. They probably could loiter 200, 250 where as for us 250 was as slow as we flew in
19 the traffic pattern.

20 LC: In the B-58s.

21 JY: In the 58, yeah.

22 LC: You did get to keep flying your favorite aircraft, right, when you went to
23 Indiana?

24 JY: That's what I flew there. That's correct. When I went there I was going to the
25 B-58 wing up there in Indiana. I flew it until they put it in the bone yard.

26 LC: The B-58, what was the mission there at Grissom for what squadron you
27 were with?

28 JY: It was a bombing mission. In other words, we pulled alert and we were
29 targeted against targets in Russia.

30 LC: Were you there actually when the 1967 Middle East conflict flared up or was
31 that after?

1 JY: Yes, well, no. Yes, I was. I was there in '67, but that didn't affect us.

2 LC: It did not?

3 JY: No. We used to—the only deployment we ever did was just—and it was a
4 practice thing. In case we had to deploy we would go—I remember I went on a
5 deployment to Spain, but we were only over there for about a week. It was just to get you
6 used to operating out of a strange field. That was it. Primarily, the mission really was just
7 like the B-52 mission exactly. We pulled alert. We flew training missions. Our job on
8 alert when we were pulling alert was to strike targets in Russia just like in the B-52.

9 LC: Were the targets different, though?

10 JY: No. They were similar. I don't think there was much difference in the target
11 packages for the 58s versus the B-52.

12 LC: What kind of weapons would you have been carrying? Do you know
13 anything about that or can you say anything?

14 JY: Yeah, five nuclear weapons. We had four on the wings, external, and then the
15 big one in that pod that was underneath the airplane.

16 LC: What was the configuration, if you can say, of those guys hanging on the
17 wings, the weapons that were hanging on the wings?

18 JY: What do you mean?

19 LC: Were they—how big were they? Just dimensions.

20 JY: They weren't that large because to fit on the external storage they just
21 couldn't be that big. They were fairly small nukes, small nukes—

22 LC: Is still a—yeah.

23 JY: Yeah, if you get my drift.

24 LC: I sure do. The big guy inside that was just to fall freely out of the aircraft?

25 JY: Yeah, which is the same way that the ones under the wing were. See we
26 didn't have any guided munitions. Ours were just the old radar synchronous bombing.

27 LC: Did you ever feel nervous having those loaded on the plane?

28 JY: Yeah. Primarily when we'd have what they called a "Coco exercise." That
29 would be when the klaxon blew and the Coco as compared to a Bravo. Coco meant you
30 taxied. You taxied the airplanes out of the alert area, taxied them out to the end of the
31 runway, and then simulated take-off. You'd light the afterburners and start down the

1 runway. Then you just taxi off. Particularly in the winter time, up there in Indiana, if you
2 had some ice on the runway it could get a little dicey. Particularly when everybody's
3 trying to get out of those Hustler huts as fast as you can because the thing was all speed.
4 It was how quick could those airplanes be on the runway after that klaxon sounded. So
5 everybody was rushing. It got a little exciting sometimes particularly like I say if you had
6 some snow and ice on the taxiways, if it was night, it could get kind of exciting. In fact,
7 they lost one B-58. It was before I got there, but they had a guy—tower had given them
8 the wrong runway. They told them one runway was the active and it was actually the
9 other one. The guy turned around and went back to the correct runway. As he was turning
10 to simulate take off he hit a patch of ice. Airplane slid off the taxiway and burned up with
11 the nuclear weapons on board. It turned out—I don't even remember if there were any
12 fatalities. I think there were, a couple people died in that.

13 LC: Would it have been the pilot?

14 JY: No. I know the pilot didn't. Larry Johnson, he—this is so typical of the Air
15 Force. The guy ends up as—guess what his job was after that little event?

16 LC: I don't know. Chief of Staff? I don't know. I'm just guessing.

17 JY: You are so close.

18 LC: Am I?

19 JY: Chief of Safety.

20 LC: Really?

21 JY: Chief of Safety. This guy, he had a reputation for wanting to be first all the
22 time. So he was probably really humming down that taxiway and when he tried to do a
23 180 to get on the active runway and hit that patch of ice you can see why he kind of lost
24 it. Yeah, that used to be kind of exciting. Of course, the other exciting thing about pulling
25 alert and this is no—same thing. What I just told you is the same in the B-52. It was
26 exactly the same deal in the B-52.

27 LC: That exercise?

28 JY: Yeah, that exercise, that Coco and the same thing. When you taxied at night
29 with that B-52 fully loaded because that B-52 is kind of like an eighteen wheeler. You
30 know, when they get moving it's not so easy to stop them. The 58 was a little easier to
31 stop 'cause it was a much smaller airplane. That 52 fully loaded, when it got rolling if

1 something popped, if another airplane popped right out in front of you it's kind of hard to
2 get stopped. All the time I was in the B-52 I never, fortunately never had a taxi accident
3 with the nukes on board. The other thing that was always a concern was that klaxon,
4 every time it blew, you assumed every time it was a practice, but you never knew until
5 you got in the airplane and got your radios on. You didn't know if it was practice or if it
6 was the real thing 'til you got the message over the radio.

7 LC: That's wild.

8 JY: Yeah. So you never knew. Of course, I never got one—obviously never got
9 one to launch to go to war, but we did—there was an intermediate message you could get.
10 It would tell you taxi out to the end of the runway and keep your engines running which
11 was a high, high state of alert. It's kind of like the deal with Homeland Security now
12 where they've got the green and the orange and the red and all those color-coded things
13 about the state of alert.

14 LC: Right.

15 JY: It was the same thing in SAC at that time with the alert aircraft.

16 LC: Did you ever have one of those that was that higher threshold?

17 JY: Yes. In fact, that's what I was gonna tell you about.

18 LC: Sure.

19 JY: We had a real good indication that this was not a practice because the klaxon
20 went off at about four o'clock in the morning and that never happened. That was the only
21 time I've ever heard a klaxon go off that early in the morning. About four o'clock in the
22 morning the horn blows and we run out to the airplane and get on there and it's a blue
23 dot. Now all the practice, all the training missions, were always green dots. This was a
24 blue dot. Boy, everybody is really paying attention. That was pretty exciting. I mean
25 you're sitting out there with the engines running and you're kind of expecting the next
26 message to be "launch." Of course, we had no idea what precipitated it. The other clue
27 that maybe if I thought about at the time, but most of us didn't. We just thought, "My
28 God, it's happened. We're on our way." The other thing that should've been a clue to us
29 that we might not be going was that there hadn't been anything in the news. Like if—
30 well, you're too young, but with the Cuban Crisis we had a clue that something was in
31 the air there because we'd been reading about it in the paper. All the stuff that was going

1 on down there and then the blockade and all that. So when we were told that we were
2 going to be flying a lot of airborne alerts that was no surprise to us because we had seen it
3 building up. With this thing there was nothing in the news, nothing else. What it turned
4 out to be we found out later was it was a combination of they think, they don't know for
5 sure, but they had some power outages on the BMEWS (Ballistic Missile Early Warning
6 System) line up in Alaska and north of there where they had those radar sites. They had
7 some power outages which were unexplained. Also, I guess they had some flocks of
8 geese flying between the two they thought they might've seen inbound aircraft. That's
9 what put us at the end of the runway.

10 LC: Can you venture a guess as to sort of what time frame this was?

11 JY: This would've been probably, I would guess mid-'60s, like '65 '64 '65.

12 LC: So this is while you were at Altus, then?

13 JY: Yeah.

14 LC: Okay. Wow. That's chilling.

15 JY: Yeah. The most chilling thing of all, Laura, and I've told this so many times.
16 Well, it ties in with the Cuban Crisis. I told people. I said, "I think the most frightened I
17 ever was flying was," this thing I'm about to tell you. Even more so than my shoot down
18 and everything else because I will never forget it as long as I live. It was at the height of
19 the Cuban Crisis. In fact, what I was just telling you is when they put us into this airborne
20 alert posture and that is where you take off with the nuclear weapons aboard and fly these
21 predetermined routes. Ours was flying to Spain. We were refueling over Spain. Of
22 course, the purpose of that route was to get you closer to Russia in case they decide to
23 send you that you're that much closer to your target. They had just launched ourselves
24 and one other airplane on this airborne alert mission. It was at the time when the Russian
25 ships were headed for the blockade and nobody knew whether they were gonna try to
26 break through the line or whether they'd stop and let us inspect them. We were on our
27 way to Spain. It was about two o'clock in the morning. I was a co-pilot at the time. The
28 pilot was back trying to get a little sleep before we hit the tankers. I'm sitting there. Of
29 course, we're listening to the radio waiting for a message. All at once, we're about two
30 hours out of Spain and all at once I see—it's a real dark night. All at once I see the sky
31 starting to light up out in the middle of me at two o'clock in the morning. I thought, "Oh

1 my God. They've hit our bases in Spain. Those are the nuclear weapons detonating." I
2 called the guy on the other airplane. I said, "Hey. You see what I see out in front?" He
3 said, "I sure do." I said, "Have you heard anything on the radio?" He said, "No." I
4 couldn't think of anything else it could be other than just nuclear explosions. At about
5 that time, it had an undercast. At about that time a full moon breaks through the
6 undercast. I was never so relieved in my life to see a moon as I was when that moon
7 broke through that undercast. That's what was lighting the sky up out in front of me was
8 that moon before it came through the clouds. I just knew that that was the beginning of
9 World War III. By the way, Laura, my opinion on World War III always was that if it
10 ever kicked off that was it. The ball game was over. I can tie that in to the POW
11 experience in going through survival school that used to prepare you for being shot down
12 and captured. I went through with the worst possible attitude. Like, "I'm not gonna pay
13 any attention to this stuff because what difference does it make?" That was my opinion
14 was if we in SAC ever go to war it's gonna be all over anyway. I didn't care about
15 survival. As things turned out in my life, when I was sitting in jail up at Hanoi then I
16 thought, "You know, it probably would have behooved me to pay a little more attention
17 to that survival school they sent me to back there in the early '60s"

18 LC: Have you sort of passed on that hard-earned wisdom?

19 JY: Oh, I have. Yes. Particularly when I talk to military groups, when I talk to the
20 younger—

21 LC: I'll bet they pay attention, too, John. I would. I am.

22 JY: You're right, Laura. It's fit in beautifully because I've been able to tell them.
23 I said, "Now look, guys. Don't have the attitude I had when I went to survival school."
24 Then I tell them the story.

25 LC: You know, in some way you were justified because as a Strategic Air
26 Command pilot you were in a totally different environment than when you were flying—

27 JY: That's exactly right. I had no clue.

28 LC: Over Vietnam.

29 JY: Yeah. This was way before Vietnam. I didn't see a Vietnam coming.

30 LC: How was life at Grissom? Did you in addition to all of these duties manage
31 to have a good time and your family's growing? Was it a good place to live?

1 JY: Oh, yeah it was great because I was sixty miles from my hometown.

2 LC: That's right. I'd forgotten. You're right.

3 JY: Yeah. So I got to spend a lot of time with my parents that probably I
4 wouldn't have had otherwise. In fact, I know I did. While I was there, my father died. So
5 I was right there in the area when he died, which was a good thing. Good times, yeah.
6 There were some real good times. In fact, since you asked I happen to have a couple of
7 war stories.

8 LC: Okay, great.

9 JY: About the good times. The first one was coming—oh, my DSO, defensive
10 systems operator, and my navigator. Those were the two people that were in the airplane
11 with me all the time.

12 LC: In the 58?

13 JY: In the 58, of my career. I had a real strong desire to see what that B-58 flew
14 like upside down, but it was prohibited by SAC.

15 LC: Absolutely.

16 JY: My navigator was kind of a straight-laced guy, but my DSO had the same
17 desire that I had. He wanted to see what it was like upside down, too. I told him. I said,
18 "Okay, Larry." I said, "Here's the deal. Anytime you can talk Fast Eddie into going
19 upside down I'll do it, but I'm not gonna do it until he buys off because I don't want to
20 end my flying career now." So he was working—he would work on him and Eddie would
21 never agree. Finally one day we were up in northern Michigan and he's making practice
22 bomb runs and he's having a great day. Larry, the DSO, seeing his opportunity, says,
23 "Hey, Eddie. Come on. Let's try it. Let's let the driver get this thing upside down." So
24 Eddie starts weakening. He finally says, "Well, okay, but just don't spend too much time
25 upside down." "Okay." So we're just at the northern end of Lake Michigan coming
26 back—beautiful day like today. I say, "Okay, guys. Here we go." So I rolled the airplane.
27 Everything is beautiful and then get it back right side up. Larry says, "Man, that was
28 great." He said, "Do you think you could just get it inverted and keep it inverted for a
29 while." I said, "Sure. No problem." So I did. We're enjoying the view inverted when I
30 just happen to glance at the Mach meter. It was sitting at about .98. My whole life passed
31 in front of me and I thought, "Oh, my God. I cannot believe this." I got that airplane back

1 right side up and slowed as quickly as I could. For the next two or three days every time
2 the phone would ring I'd make Rose answer it because I just knew it was a call saying,
3 "Let's talk about your mission a couple days ago when you were coming down Lake
4 Michigan pointed straight at Chicago. We've gotten reports of windows broken and
5 things happening in Chicago. They're thinking it might've been a sonic boom. What do
6 you know about that, Yuill?" That was my fear. I thought, "Oh, my God. I've boomed
7 Chicago" because we're right on, just below the Mach. I was at the perfect altitude to do
8 the most damage with a sonic boom, about twenty thousand feet. I just knew that I had
9 ended my flying career there.

10 LC: You were close. In other words, you were way close.

11 JY: I was so close. I was terrified. I barely was able to fly that airplane back and
12 land it. I just knew I had bought the farm, theoretically speaking. I mean, I saw my wings
13 flying out of the cockpit.

14 LC: Right. You're never going to fly again.

15 JY: That's right. Yeah. That was another thing about the B-58s. We only had a
16 few of those airplanes and there were only maybe two or three flying at the same time. It
17 wouldn't take any mental giant to figure out who the pilot was in an airplane any event
18 that occurred which leads me to the next story.

19 LC: Okay.

20 JY: Sixty miles from my hometown, right?

21 LC: Right.

22 JY: Now, what could happen here? I mean if I'm sixty miles away from my
23 hometown I probably oughta go pay them a visit in my go-fast airplane, eh?

24 LC: Just kind of roll by one day. Sure.

25 JY: This gets a little involved, but this was—

26 LC: That's all right.

27 JY: This was the good ol' days, Laura, when you could do stuff like this. It took a
28 little bit of planning. For example, this is the first time I'm coming back. We're coming
29 from the south back up towards Grissom. About over Indianapolis I call the Indianapolis
30 center and I say, "Okay. Center cancelling my IFR (instrument flight rules)." Again it
31 was a day like today. Some things had to happen. In SAC if you were scheduled for an

1 eight-hour mission they expected you to fly eight hours. A lot of times if everything went
2 just as planned you'd get back and you'd have twenty or thirty minutes back in the local
3 area before your time was up. Usually, you used that shooting a couple of landings,
4 practicing a couple of approaches.

5 LC: Okay. Uh-huh.

6 JY: Always in the back of my head was "One of these days when I come back, if
7 it's a beautiful day, if I have enough fuel and if I have some time I'm gonna go visit
8 Boswell, Indiana." So this was the day. I cancelled my instrument flying rules which
9 means now center doesn't track you anymore. They don't control you. You're on your
10 own. So I cancelled IFR to go VFR (visual flight rules). Turn my IFF (identification,
11 friend or foe) off so they can't track me and go to visit Boswell. I do—now back to my
12 two crew members again. Remember the story—

13 LC: Same guys.

14 JY: Yeah, same two guys. Remember the story about the going inverted. Well,
15 we've got the same problem now on going to visit my hometown.

16 LC: Eddie wasn't gonna be doing this happily.

17 JY: Eddie is not real excited about it, but he's okay with it, but he's not excited
18 about it. As I'm dropping down to get a good look of my hometown so they can get a
19 good look at me, he is calling off the altitude as we're descending. His voice is rising as
20 we go, "Five hundred feet. Four hundred feet." Larry, my DSO, is saying, "Well, God
21 dang it. If we're gonna come over here we'll at least get down low enough so they can
22 see us." He's pushing me down and Eddie's trying to keep me up. Any rate, we make a
23 couple of low passes over Boswell. My relatives that live about ten miles out of the town
24 and I knew this because there was just a church out there. So I ID'ed the church. I knew
25 that there house was just a couple of houses down. So I made a couple of passes over
26 their house. Boy, when I got back home that day, the phone was ringing. I was getting
27 lots of calls from people in Boswell that had seen me fly over in my go-fast airplane. So I
28 did that a couple of times. Then the final chapter in this story comes. Let's see this is '05.
29 In '02 we had our fiftieth anniversary of my high school class. The school has long since
30 closed through consolidation in this little town of Boswell, but they have an alumni
31 banquet every year. It's for anybody that's graduated from good ol' Boswell High

1 School. They recognize the fifty year class, twenty-five year class, and so on and so forth.
2 Three years ago when it was our fiftieth, I was the spokesperson for our class. One of the
3 things I said to the assembled group was, I said, “I’m willing to bet that I have seen
4 Boswell, Indiana, from a vantage point that no one else has.” I said, “How many of you
5 have seen Boswell from two hundred feet at about five hundred miles an hour?” Of
6 course, no one had. So that’s the final chapter in that story. S, yeah, I had some good
7 times.

8 LC: It sounds like a blast. People on the ground must’ve just—I mean I haven’t
9 been two hundred feet away from a B-58, but I’ve been maybe six hundred feet below—a
10 flyover at a stadium or something like that. That’s one I remember particularly at
11 Michigan Stadium and I just couldn’t believe the feel of that as it goes by.

12 JY: I’m sure they could feel the vibrations from the noise.

13 LC: Unbelievable.

14 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Of course, it depends upon who you talk to. My parents were
15 saying, “Boy, you seemed to be awfully low.” Of course my buddies are saying, “Wow.
16 How do I get a ride in that airplane?”

17 LC: Did Eddie kind of lighten up a little as time went on?

18 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Eddie did. I think he just, it was getting comfortable with the
19 airplane. Getting comfortable with maybe me and that he was more adventuresome at the
20 end.

21 LC: Let me ask a little bit about the dynamics between the pilot and the two
22 support guys on a B-58. In general, did they put you together and you had to stay together
23 regardless?

24 JY: That was SACs way of doing it, which I thought was a pretty good idea. You
25 really got—it’s kinda like—you can use the analogy of a sports team. Bobby Knight and
26 his Texas Tech Raiders—but anyway, you read a lot and you hear a lot about the
27 chemistry of a team. It’s true. There is something about the chemistry that exists and if
28 you’ve got a good team, if you are three people in this case, in a B-58, if you are three
29 people that get along well that work well together there is an advantage to flying with
30 those same people all the time because you get to know, you have a sense of what the
31 other person is doing, what they’re going to be doing, how they perform. That’s the good

1 news. There is like everything else in life, there's a bad side to that, too, and it gets to be
2 where you count on that person to do what they've done all along. If they don't then you
3 can be in trouble, but overall I always thought it was a good idea. So, yes, the philosophy
4 in SAC was that you would be an integral crew that they'd try as best they could to keep
5 you together as a crew and try to limit the number of crew changes. I know when I first
6 went into SAC in 1960 the crew I went on, we didn't have a crew change for four years.

7 LC: That's just remarkable.

8 JY: Yeah. That is remarkable and that changed as the dynamics of the personnel,
9 when they started having more problems—as Vietnam cranked up people were being
10 pulled off to go to Vietnam. There was just more flux in the crew field that they just
11 couldn't keep crews together that long at the end.

12 LC: That was true inside SAC?

13 JY: That's within SAC, yeah. Yeah. In fact, one of the big problems was in
14 MAC, the Military Airlift Command, they ended up with a SAC four-star general that
15 tried to run MAC like SAC. He was going with this integrative crew thing. Man, they did
16 not like that at all. It really didn't make as much sense there because crew coordination
17 wasn't as big a thing. If you're trash hauling, you don't need the crew coordination as
18 much as you do if you're bombing. I think it made more sense from a SAC standpoint
19 than it would from some other commands.

20 LC: John, this is a question that sort of reads our history a little bit backwards,
21 but I just thought I'd throw it in. Were there any, as you were working in SAC from '60
22 all the way on, did you come across African American or Hispanic pilots and crew
23 members in the B-58 program?

24 JY: Well, '60 to '66 when I was in the BUFF, that's an interesting question,
25 Laura. Let me think. There were very few, very few. I know there was an EW who was
26 like a DSO on the B-58. In the B-52 we called them EWs, electronic warfare officers.

27 LC: Right.

28 JY: One was a black who I knew very well. I've got some war stories for you on
29 that, by the way.

30 LC: I think you mentioned him earlier. What was his name?

31 JY: Yeah. Harold Bauduit.

1 LC: Yeah. I think you told me a little bit about him.

2 JY: Right. Yeah I probably told you about and also I probably told you about—
3 God I'm having a blank on the name of the guy I went through pilot training with.

4 LC: Yes. Yes.

5 JY: The motel deal, the breakfast.

6 LC: Yeah. Exactly.

7 JY: Yeah. What the heck was his name? Anyway, but that was a different deal. I
8 probably told you about Bauduit. I'm sure I told you about—because we hooked up out at
9 Castle when we were going through training together when we both came into SAC. That
10 was a refueling experience I had where I was all over the place. Anyway, then there
11 was—we had a couple of Spanish American guys. One was a—he was also an EW by the
12 way. Other than that, there just weren't very many at Altus.

13 LC: Okay. Of course, you're becoming more and more a senior pilot, but could
14 you see younger guys coming in who were minority, members of minorities?

15 JY: Not that I recall.

16 LC: Really?

17 JY: No. I do not. You know, that's interesting. I never thought about that before,
18 but now that you bring it up and I think about it, it is kind of unusual that we didn't have
19 more minorities in that wing. I think it's unusual because I know they were in the military
20 by then in the '60s.

21 LC: Right and all over the Air Force, too.

22 JY: Yeah. Yeah.

23 LC: I wonder what the reasons for that were. I'm sure they're complicated.
24 That's the only thing.

25 JY: Yeah. I don't know. In 58s I remember we had one, two, I want to say three,
26 three black pilots, of which two were really good and one was just absolutely terrible. He
27 was just really bad. We had a few black crewmembers. In fact, one of my best friends
28 was a navigator. He was a big tennis buddy. He and I used to play tennis together all the
29 time.

30 LC: He was an African American guy?

31 JY: Yeah.

1 LC: Do you remember his name?

2 JY: Yeah, I sure do. Walt Ray. This guy, you talk about an interesting person. He
3 went to high school with Johnny Mathis.

4 LC: No kidding? Huh.

5 JY: Classmate of Mathis and he used to entertain sometimes at our parties. He
6 would sing and he was a good singer. He primarily said with Mathis, they were in
7 athletics together because this guy was a big jock. He told me one thing I never forgot.
8 He said, “Mathis was interested in singing even then in high school.” He said, “I told him
9 once,” I said, ‘Mathis, forget it. He said, “You’re never gonna make it as a singer. You
10 sound like a girl’.” The rest is history. He told me about what a great athlete Mathis was.
11 He was really good. At any rate, this guy and I got to be very good friends.

12 LC: This is while you’re at Altus?

13 JY: No, this was at Grissom.

14 LC: Grissom.

15 JY: B-58s. He was a navigator. He was never on my crew. We used to go down
16 to Indianapolis for the National Clay Court Tournament every year.

17 LC: Sure.

18 JY: We just did a lot of stuff together. The primary thing was the tennis. We had
19 a few—I guess on a ratio basis there were a few more at Grissom in the 58s. Whether that
20 was just—it might’ve just been that there were more and more minorities coming into the
21 military by that time. That might’ve been why, but—

22 LC: Did he or any of your buddies display any reaction or upset during that time
23 that you were at Grissom when Martin Luther King was assassinated?

24 JY: Not that I recall.

25 LC: Do you remember that happening?

26 JY: Yes. I do remember that happening and I don’t remember—the one I
27 would’ve been really focused on would’ve been Walt and I don’t remember anything out
28 of the ordinary that he had to say. Along that line, the only one that I ever knew that
29 really had a problem with the racial thing was Harold Bauduit, the EW back at Altus.
30 With, I’m sure, a lot of good justification. He had some interesting stories to tell. He
31 really had a chip on his shoulder. He was really not very well liked in the wing because

1 of his attitude. I always I really got along with him well. I enjoyed him because—but I
2 knew him better than most of the other people. We were next-door neighbors and we got
3 to be very good friends. He did have an attitude. I think it was primarily because of things
4 that had happened to him earlier. He was an Annapolis graduate. He had just gone
5 through some things that were pretty demeaning and bothered him a lot.

6 LC: I can imagine. How do you spell his last name? Do you remember John?

7 JY: B-A-U-D-I-T.

8 LC: Okay.

9 JY: He is dead now.

10 LC: Is he?

11 JY: Yeah, and Marty, his wife, we lost track of her. I don't know if she's still
12 around or not.

13 LC: We should look into it. Maybe we can include her and be very honored to do
14 that and see if we can't get something of his experiences recorded. Now, John, you're
15 flying the B-58s and you know that they're going out of style and they're gonna be
16 replaced. How did you feel about that? You knew that transition was coming up and how
17 it would affect you? Did you kind of think about those things?

18 JY: Yeah. The first thing is, really didn't know. We kind of got blindsided by this
19 thing. There was no advanced warning that it was going to happen, although there had
20 been the normal conversation that, hey we're in a limited production airplane that has
21 been out of production now for about four or five years. We're nuclear capable and we
22 don't have conventional capability. By this time, of course, we've been in Vietnam for
23 four or five years. So if you just start looking around and looking at the big picture, we
24 had a concern that we might be on the chopping block because our mission was so
25 limited. Our airplane was out of production. As it turned out, that's exactly why the
26 airplane was taken out of service was because of the limited number and the high cost of
27 operating the airplane since it was out of production. It was a financial decision that SAC
28 made. They came forward with two proposals, either scrap the B-58s or they'd have to
29 scrap about half the B-52s. At that time they were using the B-52s in Vietnam. DOD
30 (Department of Defense) said, "We'll just scrap the 58," because the B-52s we're using
31 in Vietnam and they can carry dumb bombs. They can carry just iron bombs which is

1 what we're using over there. So that was what brought about the demise. Really didn't
2 think about it until just one day we found out that they're gonna scrap the B-58s and then
3 all of us knew we were on our way to Vietnam because we had been exempt from
4 Vietnam as long as we were in the 58. We knew we weren't gonna go to Vietnam. None
5 of us had been to Vietnam. When the airplane went in the bone yard all of us, we knew
6 we were on our way to Vietnam. I certainly wasn't happy about that because I had just
7 upgraded to what they called CCTS, combat crew training squadron. That's the squadron
8 that checks out the new guys coming into the program. I had just gone to that squadron as
9 a new instructor pilot. One of the nice things, one of the many nice things, about being an
10 instructor pilot particularly in CCTS you had instructor pilots that were just squadron
11 instructor pilots, but if you were CCTS instructor pilot, which I was, in that training
12 squadron in the school house then you didn't have to pull nearly as much alert because
13 you were flying most of the time with your students.

14 LC: So your hours were already being—

15 JY: Yeah. So I was all excited about that. I had just upgraded to instructor pilot
16 and gone to CCTS just months before finding out the airplane was gonna go in the bone
17 yard. I had my whole career staked out. I was just gonna stay there, stay in CCTS until
18 my twenty years was up and then I was getting out. I had it all planned. So the abrupt
19 ending to my plan was when they decided to put them in the bone yard. Then realized I
20 was going to Vietnam because I knew as long as I was in the program I was exempt from
21 Vietnam. I had no desire to go to Vietnam as compared to a lot of my peers. A lot of my
22 peers were not upset at all about this happening because for career progression it really
23 helps to have a war while you're being evaluated. If you're in combat that helps your
24 chances of progressing within the military. So a lot of them saw this as a great
25 opportunity. Also a lot of them said, "This is where the action is. This is where I want to
26 be."

27 LC: Some guys felt like flying the B-58s was sort of being in a cul-de-sac that
28 they weren't gonna be able to get out of.

29 JY: Yeah. Yeah.

30 LC: This development, the SAC's cancellation—

31 JY: Yeah. Yeah.

1 LC: Okay. When did that actually happen? Was that '69?

2 JY: It was actually January of '70. The last alert tour, I was out on alert. It was a
3 short week because thirty-first of December at midnight we shut down the alert facility.
4 We got to go home early.

5 LC: That must've been a strange night.

6 JY: That was a strange deal to be on alert for the final alert tour for the B-58.
7 Two or three weeks later I was flying one out to Tucson to put it in the bone yard.

8 LC: That must've been really sad.

9 JY: Yeah. It was. It was. I just thought, "What is wrong with this picture? Putting
10 this airplane in the bone yard and knowing the B-52s go flying." It's still flying.

11 LC: It's still flying. Yeah. God. What aircraft if you can say, John, took up the
12 duties of the B-58 had been doing, like what you had been doing out of Grissom?

13 JY: The 111.

14 LC: So everything got picked up by the 111 right away?

15 JY: Yeah.

16 LC: Did they have a good inventory of 111s by then?

17 JY: Mm-hmm. Yeah, they were fully operational. They were not fully
18 operational, but they were coming on line so there was no problem.

19 LC: They had been in production for probably a couple, three years by then.

20 JY: Yeah.

21 LC: So when did you find out what your next beat was gonna be? Do you
22 remember?

23 JY: No. It would've been probably I would've guessed late January probably is
24 when the assignments came in when I found out where we were going in Vietnam. We
25 covered the whole waterfront. I mean, we went to about every airplane that they had in-
26 country. We had people going to everything. Of course, that's when I went over there in
27 130s.

28 LC: Were you sent to Guam first or directly to Tan Son Nhut?

29 JY: No. I was actually stationed in Taiwan, at a base called CCK (Ching Chuan
30 Kang), just about ninety miles south of Taipei in Taiwan. That's where we were
31 stationed. We operated mostly out of Tan Son Nhut in Saigon.

1 LC: This was the first time really that you'd flown the C-130s?
2 JY: Mm-hmm.
3 LC: What'd you think of this aircraft, John?
4 JY: Oh.
5 LC: Tell me the truth.
6 JY: Okay. Two things. One is I went from the most beautiful airplane to the
7 ugliest airplane in one giant step. It has got a severe case of the uglies. The other thing is
8 it's without a doubt the easiest airplane to fly that I've ever flown in my life. That
9 airplane was so easy to fly it was ridiculous. I will have to say that it was kind of like I
10 was forced to say about the B-52 and all the badmouthing I did at the B-52 I had to admit
11 it had some good points. Kind of the same way with the 130, highly reliable airplane.
12 Never had hardly any problems with the airplane and I was flying in and out of dirt strips
13 really bad places and the airplane was just very, very reliable. The thing I remember
14 specifically was the first approach I made in the airplane. I thought from the time I got
15 lined up on the runway on final, I thought I would never get to the end of the runway. It
16 just seemed to take forever to get to the end of the runway because we're flying so slow.
17 Coming out of the B-58 which when you turn final you blink your eye and you're over
18 the runway. Now in this 130 you just sit there and drive and drive and drive before you
19 get to the end of the runway.
20 LC: What was the sort of general speed, top speed of a 130?
21 JY: Probably in the B-58 we were usually about 210, 220 knots on final. The 130
22 was about 130 knots. We're about seventy to eighty knots difference in speed.
23 LC: Oh, my gosh. Yeah. That's a big difference.
24 JY: Yeah that is.
25 LC: Wow.
26 JY: Well, you kind of think about it. Put it in terms of automobiles. If you're out
27 on the interstate driving 30 or if you're driving a 110 or something, that's kind of the
28 difference.
29 LC: So you had a lot of reaction time in the 130?
30 JY: Oh, yeah. You had so much time.
31 LC: Maybe too much.

1 JY: You could take a nap coming down final.

2 LC: What was the crew structure like on the 130s?

3 JY: Okay. You had, of course, now you're back to pilot and co-pilot and you've
4 got a navigator. You've got a load master and he's the guy that is just as the name
5 implies. He's responsible for loading the airplane, making sure the loads are loaded
6 properly and all that good stuff. Then you had a flight engineer. He was the most
7 important guy on the airplane for me because I had limited knowledge of that airplane.
8 These flight engineers usually had been in the airplane for years and years. They're the
9 ones that were there to help you with all the systems in the airplane and everything else.

10 LC: Probably also tell you what it can do, what it can't do.

11 JY: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

12 LC: This is within the parameters, go ahead and do it?

13 JY: Yeah. Yeah. That was the guy that I really relied on heavily in that airplane.

14 LC: Okay, John. Let's take a break. John, tell me if you can what Rose thought
15 about you being set to go to Vietnam and actually being there.

16 JY: Yeah. As you can imagine.

17 LC: I can imagine.

18 JY: Yeah. She wasn't any more excited about it than I was, particularly with her
19 situation because now we have seven kids. So she's gonna be solo. The good news about
20 that, though, was it wasn't as dramatic a transformation for her as it might've been for
21 someone else that maybe had had a staff job or something that was home every night
22 because with all the alert that I had been pulling, I mean I was gone a week at a time even
23 though I was actually right in the area on the base, but still away from home for a week at
24 a time, usually every second or third week. To that extent it kind of conditioned her for
25 my being gone for the year, but still in all that's a pretty heavy load to carry.

26 LC: Where was she living?

27 JY: Well, we were living on base at Grissom. She was allowed to stay on base
28 while I went to 130 school, but then she had to move off when I finished school and went
29 to Vietnam. We moved her to a little town about eight miles from Boswell, this town that
30 I had visited where my mother had moved after my father died. She moved to this town
31 of Fowler, Indiana, which is quite a bit larger than the little town of Boswell was.

1 LC: So Fowler is where she was?

2 JY: Mm-hmm. We found a house to rent there for a year and that's where she
3 stayed, the thinking there that she had my mother and some relatives around there to kind
4 of help her out.

5 LC: Your mom had her, too, and the kids.

6 JY: Yeah.

7 LC: The kids' ages at this time, rough guess?

8 JY: Let's see. We're talking '70. So Susie was born in '57 so she's thirteen.
9 That's the oldest.

10 LC: Then on down from there.

11 JY: Stephanie was '68 so she was, November of '68, so she was just a little over
12 a year. She was about a year and a half. So from thirteen to a year and a half.

13 LC: They weren't going to see their dad for a year?

14 JY: Yeah.

15 LC: That's rugged. That's tough. Tough for you, too, of course, but boy, oh, boy.

16 JY: Yeah. I think toughest though for the mom.

17 LC: Oh my God, yeah. I can't even imagine. I can't imagine.

18 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Really, really, really a tough chore for her.

19 LC: She's some, she's some gal I'm sure.

20 JY: Yeah. Then as luck would have it, I forget what it was they came down with,
21 but she and most of the kids had this kind of coughing thing or something that was really
22 pretty bad. She was having to drive back and forth to Grissom from this town, which was
23 about sixty miles to go to the hospital all the time with those kids. So that further
24 exacerbated the situation. That was early after I left. Right after I left that she was having
25 all those problems. Then they diagnosed our oldest son, they thought he was gonna need
26 heart surgery which she never told me about. As it turned out, when they took a closer
27 look they decided he didn't need it. Those were some of the things she was having to deal
28 with.

29 LC: That's just, I mean, incredible. Of course, she made the strategic decision not
30 to worry you with what she would have to handle.

31 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

1 LC: Wow. That's incredible. I just cannot imagine.

2 JY: She's quite a girl.

3 LC: I guess so. Good choice. Good choicing skills.

4 JY: Yeah. Yeah. There you go.

5 LC: John, let me talk to you a little bit about Tan Son Nhut. First of all, what
6 were your quarters like? Where were you? Were you actually staying on base?

7 JY: Yeah. We were in a—as I recall, yeah. It was a two-story barracks type
8 building. The thing I remember about it was it had fantastic air conditioning. Man, you'd
9 walk in that building and it was like cold because it was so hot there in Saigon,
10 particularly in the summertime. The thing I remember—it's funny the things you
11 remember. Two things that I remember vividly was when you'd walk out of that building,
12 outside and if you had your sunglasses on they'd immediately fog up because of the high
13 humidity that you had around there and the temperature change. You'd be IFR with your
14 sunglasses on. The other thing was I can't remember ever, ever, on Tan Son Nhut outside
15 a building, not hearing helicopters. They had a big maintenance depot there, just a couple
16 of blocks from the officers club in our barracks where we lived. It was just twenty-four
17 seven, I mean, the helicopters. You just heard them all the time. Those are the things I
18 remember about Tan Son Nhut.

19 LC: The guys that you flew with, were they all essentially on one year in-country
20 rotations, too?

21 JY: Yes.

22 LC: So you didn't have the stability, or did you?

23 JY: No and also you weren't, you didn't have the crew integrity. Like SAC?

24 LC: Right. Exactly.

25 JY: Here it was just whoever was available to go in-country is who you went
26 with.

27 LC: Gosh. So would you be flying with different people every week?

28 JY: Yeah.

29 LC: Every couple weeks?

30 JY: Mm-hmm. Well, every couple weeks. The way it would work, Laura, and
31 I'm trying—you know, now I can't remember. I want to say maybe it was about two or

1 three weeks. I think when we'd go in—about three weeks, I think, we'd go in when we'd
2 fly out of Taiwan, fly into Tan Son Nhut and then we'd be there for three weeks flying
3 sorties for three weeks. Then we'd go back to Taiwan, usually we'd be back maybe a
4 week and then turn around and go back into Tan Son Nhut again. For about every fourth
5 trip instead of going to Tan Son Nhut we'd go to Utapao, Thailand, and fly the klong
6 hopper, which were just kind of like a Southwest Airlines type operation. We flew the
7 same route everyday to all the bases in Thailand. We were the local air carrier for
8 passengers between all the bases in Taiwan, in Thailand.

9 LC: So you got to see the bases, probably, and not much else in Thailand?

10 JY: That's it. Yeah.

11 LC: Is that fair?

12 JY: We were only on the ground long enough to offload and on load the people.

13 LC: You were based out of—

14 JY: Utapao.

15 LC: Utapao. What were the accommodations like there?

16 JY: You know, that's a good question. I can't remember. I know what I lived in
17 when I was there in B-52s a year later, in trailers, but I don't know if we stayed in
18 barracks when I was over there doing the trash hauling thing. Probably we did. I really
19 don't remember. I would assume we were in the barracks then. I know we were on base,
20 although some of the guys lived off base, but that was SAC. That was when I was over
21 there with the B-52s. With flying the klong hopper we must've been in the barracks.

22 LC: Did everybody call it—is it the klong hopper? Is that what you're calling it?

23 JY: Yeah. That's what we called it when we were flying this route in where we
24 went to all the bases, kind of like I say, like a Southwest—not Southwest Airlines. It
25 would be like—what's one of the feeders for American? Whatever the little feeder lines
26 are, that's really what we were. We just flew. Like I say, you had the same schedule
27 every day. You'd take off from Utapao. You'd go to Don Muang which was the airport in
28 Bangkok. Then you flew around to all the bases and that was your daily trip. The reason
29 they called it the klong hopper was, of course, all the klongs over there in Thailand, the
30 water. Somebody just came up with that name, klong hopper.

31 LC: It stuck.

1 JY: It stuck, yeah. That's what they referred to it as. Interesting because it was a
2 klong hopper when you were flying that mission in Thailand, but then when you got back
3 in Vietnam, then you were just a regular trash hauler.

4 LC: Right. Did you feel a difference when you were flying in Thailand than when
5 you did when you're flying around South Vietnam?

6 JY: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

7 LC: I'll bet you did.

8 JY: Totally different. Totally different. In Thailand, like I say, you were just—
9 then you had the feeling of what it must be like to be flying for the airlines 'cause that's
10 essentially what we were doing. We were just flying like an airline around there hauling
11 passengers. In Vietnam we hauled everything. I mean the old adage we had is "You call,
12 we haul." That was about it. You hauled all kinds of materials. You hauled people. You
13 hauled Vietnamese civilians that were being relocated. You just hauled, carried
14 everything. You were operating out of all types of fields whereas in Thailand going
15 flying into the bases you always had a big runway and support and everything else. Yeah,
16 they were totally different missions.

17 LC: In South Vietnam, can you remember the names of some of—or one of the
18 worst fields you had to negotiate?

19 JY: Oh, yeah. I know exactly. The two worst fields I operated out of—by worst I
20 mean no support and they were dirt, were Bu Dop and Gia Map. I don't remember—I
21 don't know how to spell those, but I know where they were.

22 LC: That's okay. Uh-huh. Where?

23 JY: At the Parrot's Beak in Cambodia because what we were doing were
24 inserting troops into Cambodia. We were landing right next to the Cambodian border and
25 inserting troops. Those fields were really, really challenging.

26 LC: You know, I should clarify what month you actually got over there.

27 JY: I got there in May of '70.

28 LC: The incursion is happening.

29 JY: Yeah.

30 LC: The U.S. incursion, probably.

31 JY: When was that incursion? I think it was—

1 LC: Started April twenty-ninth, I think.

2 JY: Did it?

3 LC: Yeah.

4 JY: Yeah. Okay. So that sounds about right.

5 LC: It fits perfectly.

6 JY: I know those were some of the earliest missions I flew over there was in to
7 Bu Dop and Gia Map. I was flying those right after I got over there. So that checks.

8 LC: So those were U.S. and ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops or
9 just U.S.?

10 JY: As I recall, just U.S. I don't remember carrying any ARVNs in there.

11 LC: Those fields were bad because they were dirt. There was nothing there,
12 probably?

13 JY: Yeah. They were short. I forget how long they were, but they were
14 challenging to get the airplane on the ground and then taking off, too. I got a war story for
15 you on that, Laura.

16 LC: All right. Here we go.

17 JY: You ready?

18 LC: Yes. Absolutely.

19 JY: Boy, this was a lesson learned and it really, really had an impact on me. It
20 has to do with how war affects people and it kind of reminds me of a movie. What was
21 that movie? *Full Metal Jacket*? No it wasn't that one. What was the one that Charlie
22 Sheen was in where—the opening scene—I digress here, but bear with me. The opening
23 scene of this movie is Charlie Sheen kind of not knowing what to do with his life. He's
24 out of high school and he gets caught up in the excitement of going to Vietnam and being
25 where the action is. He's all pumped. They show this scene, the opening scene, when he
26 lands at Cam Ranh Bay. They're taxiing in and they've got about twenty body bags out
27 on the runway that they're about to load on another airplane as they're parking his. To
28 watch his face when he looks out there and sees those body bags and realizes what they
29 are and you can just see what's going through his mind. Like he's thinking, "I wonder if
30 this was a real good idea I had, to come over here and be where the action's at."

31 LC: Yeah, the action's pretty—

1 JY: I think for the first time—what I got from that scene was now he realizes this
2 isn't John Wayne in Hollywood. This is the real deal. You can die in this environment
3 real easy, you can die. I just kind of got the feeling this is the first time he really realized
4 just—

5 LC: What the stakes are.

6 JY: Yeah. How big this deal is. Now back to my story. The same thing really. I
7 can remember vividly carrying these guys in and they're all pumped up. They're John
8 Wayne-ing it and everything else as they go in. Then we extract them a few weeks later.
9 These guys looked thirty years older and just like they had aged thirty years in three
10 weeks. Just amazing the difference in the demeanor of these guys when you carried them
11 in for the first time and then when you brought them out. I don't know what they ran into
12 in those three weeks, but it must've been life changing. I couldn't believe the difference
13 in them.

14 LC: Were they quiet, John, when they would get back on the plane?

15 JY: Oh, you better believe they were. So many of them had that thousand-yard
16 stare.

17 LC: When you think of that, is there anything you can say about how that felt for
18 you to be seeing that yourself as well?

19 JY: Yeah. It just made me think again of what I've always said about whoever
20 the famous person was that made that short observation, war is hell. Oh, I think it was in
21 the Civil War, wasn't it?

22 LC: I don't know, but it sticks. It works.

23 JY: Yeah. War is hell. I think it was. I think it might've been Sherman—I don't
24 know who it was, but anyway. The other thing that always crossed my mind is I think
25 supposedly we are the most intelligent species on this planet. Why is it that this is the
26 way we settle our differences? You know, we have to kill each other. You'd think that we
27 would be progressed to a point where we wouldn't have to do this, but it looks like it's
28 hardwired into our genetics that that's the way we solve our differences. It's just so
29 frustrating to me that that's what we have to go through to do it. Particularly, it's one
30 thing with somebody like me who I kind of look at it, the professional soldier. You know,
31 I chose that as a life, but what about these kids. These guys that we were inserting,

1 eighteen, nineteen years old. They don't have a clue what's going on and they're dying.
2 It's just a very, very sad sobering experience for me. It was then. It always has been. It's
3 just something that makes me very sad.

4 LC: John, did you have to also bring body bags out, too? Is that—?

5 JY: You know, I don't recall. It seems to me we might've carried some body
6 bags a couple of times, but if we did it was very seldom, very seldom.

7 LC: Well, that's probably a good thing.

8 JY: Yeah. You're right. It is a good thing.

9 LC: Yeah. It was better to carry those guys, whatever they've been through, out
10 of there still alive.

11 JY: Yeah to bring them out alive. Yeah. Yeah. You're right.

12 LC: Would you take them specifically back to Saigon or would you drop them
13 off somewhere else?

14 JY: No. We'd always bring them back to Saigon and then I don't know what
15 from there.

16 LC: Wow. Man, I bet they were never so happy to get on a plane, be my guess.

17 JY: I'm sure they were like we were up in Hanoi.

18 LC: Oh, gosh. Yeah, something like that.

19 JY: Yeah. I'm sure it was a similar feeling.

20 LC: Yeah. "Let's get out of here. Let's go." Were there times ever either going
21 up to the Cambodian border or elsewhere that you either saw enemy personnel or did you
22 take fire at any point?

23 JY: Used to take some fire, small arms fire, but very seldom.

24 LC: Did you even know that you were taking small arms fire?

25 JY: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

26 LC: In a C-130 you would know that?

27 JY: Yeah. Well, we did a couple of times. Funny, the most we took was pulling
28 into—gee whiz, I'm trying to remember the name of that base now. It was real close to
29 Tan Son Nhut, big base.

30 LC: Bien Hoa?

31 JY: Bien Hoa. That was it.

1 LC: Yeah?

2 JY: Bien Hoa. It was early in the morning, about six o'clock in the morning and
3 all at once tower—we're on final approach. The tower says, "Be advised. Be advised.
4 Bien Hoa is closing down. Enemy fire off the end of the runway." We looked down there
5 and here are these tracers coming up right at us. Really, enemy action was very limited.
6 We didn't see much in the 130 operation. I didn't see much. In fact, after I was an
7 instructor and started taking guys in for their in-country check out, of course they were all
8 concerned about getting shot down or about enemy fire. I told them all. I said, "That is
9 the least of your worries." I said, "If you buy it over here, the way you're going to buy it
10 is either on a landing or take off or more likely is a midair with a friendly. You're going
11 to fly into some friendly airplane before you get hit or shot down."

12 LC: Now, John, did you talk about the potential for mid-air because of how
13 much traffic there was or because there was bad controls?

14 JY: Oh, yeah. No. No. Just strictly a numbers thing. Number of aircraft in the air
15 and when it was really scary was when you'd have a low ceiling and everybody wants to
16 stay VFR. So now you've got the air—the air space is compressed because everybody's
17 trying to stay VFR so they're all trying to stay under the clouds. You've got so many
18 airplanes. It was really something to see.

19 LC: Was Tan Son Nhut the worst or Bien Hoa?

20 JY: Tan Son Nhut got usually—you get around Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang, Bien
21 Hoa, Cam Ranh Bay, the big airfields, that's where most of the traffic was.

22 LC: Yeah. Did you fly up into the Highlands at all?

23 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Did a few times.

24 LC: What was your impression—?

25 JY: Well, wait a minute. Da Lat?

26 LC: Da Lat is one place.

27 JY: Yeah. Yeah.

28 LC: Did you ever get off and walk around at Da Lat or Kontum or any of those
29 places?

30 JY: Yeah. We usually did there because a lot of times we'd be on the ground for
31 a couple hours while they're offloading and getting another—if we had something to

1 carry out or when they were loading the airplane. So a lot of times—but we never got off
2 the field. We never got off the airfield. So I never got into the local area around.

3 LC: Was that primarily because of safety issues?

4 JY: Yeah.

5 LC: Also, I guess, you're on duty so you're not gonna just—

6 JY: Yeah. Well, it was primarily safety, but the other thing was that you never
7 knew when they were going to finish loading. So you didn't want the crew strung out all
8 over the place and what was waiting. I'll tell you one thing over there, Laura. These
9 people did not like—now it was okay at the big bases, but when you got out into the
10 smaller airfields around there, they did not want you on the ground one minute longer
11 than they absolutely had to have you there because we were referred to as “mortar
12 magnets.” We were the mortar magnets.

13 LC: Mm-hmm. The C-130s?

14 JY: Yeah.

15 LC: Yeah. Oh, for sure.

16 JY: Man, if there was somebody out there with a mortar, that's what they wanted
17 to get was a 130.

18 LC: Did your aircraft while sitting on the ground ever draw a mortar round?

19 JY: Nope. It never did.

20 LC: What about guys that you were talking to at Tan Son Nhut?

21 JY: I don't remember. I was there '70 and '71. The ones that really had some
22 hairy stories were the '67, '68 guys, but most of them were gone. There were a few that
23 had been there '67 '68, gone back to the States for a year, and then rotated back over, but
24 most of them were gone. The few that were there, they had some real war stories about
25 being under fire and mortars and everything else in the '67-'68 timeframe. Really, I can't
26 remember anybody—there might've been a couple. I think there were. I think there were
27 a couple that talked about getting caught when they were out somewhere and taking some
28 mortar rounds, but that was rather limited.

29 LC: John, as you were moving all over South Vietnam, certainly central and
30 Northern Vietnam, did you have an impression? Were you kind of feeling sort of like an

1 observer, too, of the war and kinda how it was going? Did you think about those things,
2 you know, is the U.S. here operationally plan the right plan?

3 JY: You know, I don't think I did. I don't think I really thought about it that
4 much because we were just so busy flying our sorties every day and dropping off the
5 stuff. So I never really did think much big picture as much as I did a year later when I
6 was over back there in B-52s. That's when I started thinking about the strategy that was
7 being utilized, that was being employed and things like that. Started wondering about
8 "What is this deal." I really did a lot more of that type of thinking with the B-52 than I
9 did with the 130.

10 LC: Well, I'll make a note that I'll come back and ask you about that. Were you
11 at any time interacting with South Vietnamese personnel, military or otherwise?

12 JY: No. No.

13 LC: Not at all?

14 JY: No.

15 LC: Did you have any interaction with our allies who were drawing down their
16 forces at the same time we were, true?

17 JY: In a detached way I did with the South Koreans. I had an additional duty one
18 time to—I can't even remember what they called me, but they had a parachute drop zone
19 that was about, oh maybe, twenty, thirty clicks out of Saigon. That's just what it was.
20 They used to have their guys practice jumping. The ARVN were primarily the ones. Our
21 guys, some of our guys and the South Koreans. I remember specifically the Koreans.
22 They were a pretty impressive group. They always seemed to be more military than any
23 other country. One war story about that, and this was my 130 tour, was there was a resort
24 area on the south coast, south of Saigon, called Vung Tau.

25 LC: Yes, sir. Absolutely.

26 JY: Highway 1, it ran from Saigon to Vung Tau. There was some risk involved in
27 going—kind of like the highway from, well, not as bad as the highway from Baghdad to
28 the airport, but kind of along that same line. That snipers used to like to pick off a few
29 people on that highway on people going to Vung Tau.

30 LC: Sort of a gauntlet.

1 JY: Yeah. Yeah, but people caught on real quickly that there was a certain time
2 when you wanted—if you were gonna go to Vung Tau there was a certain time you
3 wanted to go. That’s when South Korea had responsibility for security on the highway. It
4 was like being back in the States when South Korea, when they were responsible for
5 security. You were safe then.

6 LC: Do you know what that was based on or can you say what it was based on?

7 JY: All I can do is guess. I think that probably what South Koreans did was shoot
8 first and ask questions later. I think the word got out to the VC that we don’t want to be
9 taking the chance when they’re—‘cause they’ll kill you before they—they’re not gonna
10 ask any questions or check you out. They’ll just flat kill you. That’s my guess.

11 LC: The VC would presumably dial it down a little during that time period.

12 JY: Yeah. I think they decided, “Maybe we better lay low while they have
13 security.”

14 LC: Now did you go down and hang at Vung Tau at all?

15 JY: No I didn’t. I flew in there a few times, but I never did drive down.

16 LC: That was pretty much an Australian area, was it?

17 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

18 LC: Did you ever get off the field?

19 JY: I think that, again if I did it was just on the ramp. I really didn’t go into the
20 town or anything.

21 LC: Essentially you were at the barracks on Tan Son Nhut flying away and then
22 flying back and that—

23 JY: Yeah. We’d fly sortie and you would fly usually eight or nine hours. You
24 flew your frag and that was it. You always took off and landed except for one time. You
25 ready?

26 LC: I’m ready.

27 JY: Okay. One time we go down to fly. Walk in there and they say, “Hey.” The
28 scheduler says, “Got a different frag for you today.”

29 LC: Now by frag—?

30 JY: Whatever they had mapped out for you to do. Like a frag would be, “Okay.
31 You’re carrying cargo to Vung Tau,” or say Vung Tau. “You’re carrying cargo to Vung

1 Tau. They're gonna load some stuff on there. From there you'll go to Loc Binh. From
2 Loc Binh you'll go to someplace." They'll say—they'd tell you what you were gonna be
3 carrying, from where to where. They had your whole frag laid out. I don't know why they
4 called it frag, but anyway that was your mission plan for that day, what you were gonna
5 do. This day they just said, "We've got a special mission for you today. You're gonna fly
6 empty to Cam Ranh and there'll be some people there to meet you when you land and
7 they'll brief you on what your frag's gonna be for the day." Well, that was unusual 'cause
8 you always got it right there at Saigon. At Tan Son Nhut you went and flew your frag and
9 then you came back and landed. So we go to Cam Ranh. Sure enough we park and when
10 they're parking us on the ramp here comes this vehicle. They say, "Okay come with us.
11 We'll load the airplane while we brief you on what you're gonna be doing." So we go in
12 and brief and they said, "You're gonna be going to Jakarta, but the deal is your cargo is
13 something that you are not to mess with." They were primarily talking to our loadmaster
14 and said, "Here's the deal. You will not mess with the load on that airplane." To me they
15 said, "The only way you get rid of that load is if you're gonna lose the airplane. If it's
16 between—if you think by dropping the load you can save the airplane, then and only then
17 will you jettison the load. Other than that you don't. You do not get nosy, loadmaster, or
18 any other crew member trying to see what this load is."

19 LC: Wow.

20 JY: Yeah. That's kind of interesting.

21 LC: Yeah. It makes you want to look.

22 JY: Jakarta? Where in the hell is Jakarta?

23 LC: Yeah.

24 JY: 'Cause we'd never been out of country and here we are going to Indonesia.

25 LC: Exactly.

26 JY: Then it gets more interesting. They said, "Now here's the deal." They said,
27 "Your flight plan shows that you're going to Manila. So when you're west of Manila on
28 the way to Jakarta, they're probably gonna be calling you wanting to know why are you
29 continuing southbound when you're supposed to be going into Manila. You don't answer
30 the radio. We have people in Manila Airways that know what your mission is. They'll
31 handle it." I'm thinking to myself, "Easy for you to say. I mean how do I know that?" At

1 any rate, that's the briefing. Sure enough, that's exactly what happened. We get out there
2 and they're calling us and we just don't answer them. I guess they had everything taken
3 care of like they told us because we didn't get jumped by fighters or anything or we
4 didn't get shot down. So we go in. We land at Jakarta. Interesting, on approach my co-
5 pilot says, "Hey, those look like MiGs there," which they were. MiGs on the runway.
6 That was interesting, landing at an airport with MiGs parked on the runway.

7 LC: How many did you see?

8 JY: Oh, I don't know. Maybe five or ten. That was interesting.

9 LC: Oh, yeah.

10 JY: So anyway we land. We get the same drill. They're there to meet us and they
11 say, "Okay. We're gonna be offloading this and we're gonna put a load on for you to
12 carry back. In the meantime we'll take you on a tour of Jakarta and we'll give you your
13 briefing for the flight back to Cam Ranh." So we do. We go back to the airplane. We get
14 back in the airplane, we look back in the cargo area, and it looks like the plane is empty.
15 When you look closer you see these wooden boxes on the floor of the airplane. Then we
16 look at the form-F and they show that the airplane is fully loaded that we're at max gross
17 weight. We're looking at that and said, "Something is wrong here." In fact, I let the co-
18 pilot make take off and I said, "I'd expect this airplane to come off the runway much
19 sooner than what we mission planned it at because I don't think this airplane's at max
20 gross weight." Well, the airplane was at max gross weight. My assumption is and the
21 crew kind of agreed with me, I think we carried AK-47s or some type of weapons into
22 Jakarta and what we brought out was gold because I can't think of anything else that
23 would be that heavy and not take up any more space than it did in that cargo
24 compartment.

25 LC: That they could just put in a wooden box with no protection or anything.

26 JY: Yeah. Yeah.

27 LC: Well, that's a little weird.

28 JY: Yeah. That was weird.

29 LC: You flew back into Cam Ranh Bay?

30 JY: I came to Cam Ranh. Same thing, they offloaded the airplane and then we
31 flew back to Tan Son Nhut and that was our sortie for that day.

1 LC: That's very odd.

2 JY: Yeah. That was the only off-the-wall mission I had while I was over there.

3 LC: Any idea when in your year that happened? Was it still in 1970?

4 JY: Yeah. Well, I don't know. It could've been '70 or '71. I really don't
5 remember when it was.

6 LC: That's a strange, strange thing.

7 JY: I could tell because I still had the manifest, although it's written in either
8 Indonesian or something, but I have the manifest from that load we carried down there.
9 What I ought to do is get somebody that might be able to break that out and maybe it says
10 what it was, but I doubt it. I'll bet whatever they had on that manifest wasn't really what
11 the cargo was or they had it listed as something else.

12 LC: Sure would be interesting to get that translated.

13 JY: Yeah. I never even thought about that. Maybe I need to do that.

14 LC: Maybe we could help you with that.

15 JY: Oh, okay.

16 LC: That's interesting.

17 JY: Yeah.

18 LC: Was there a scariest flight of this tour with those C-130s?

19 JY: Probably and this is just off the top of my head, I'm not sure. It might've
20 been taking ARVN up to Quang Tri for, I think it was Lam Son 714 or something like
21 that.

22 LC: Lam Son 719.

23 JY: 719?

24 LC: Mm-hmm.

25 JY: Yeah, okay. I know that was in—that would've been at the end of the year of
26 '70. That was December and January of '70-'71 because the reason I remember is when
27 my copilot at that time was a UT kid and I'm a big Notre Dame fan. It was the year that
28 Texas and Notre Dame played in the Cotton Bowl.

29 LC: Oh, really?

30 JY: We were listening to it on HF radio. I remember the weather. The weather
31 was just terrible. It was like it was when I was in Hanoi, just total overcast everyday. We

1 were carrying all these ARVN from Saigon up to Quang Tri. It was such a big operation
2 that we had. Airplanes stacked up, every thousand feet from about five thousand up to
3 twenty thousand feet in the holding pattern waiting to come down and land and offload
4 your troops. In that weather holding and knowing that there's an airplane a thousand feet
5 above you, a thousand feet below you and hoping they're on their altitude. That was
6 probably about the hairiest thing.

7 LC: That sounds a little itchy. Any idea how long you had to circle there until
8 you could get down?

9 JY: I would say probably, usually in the holding pattern usually they're about
10 twenty, twenty-five minutes. What they do is just walk you down. Every time a guy
11 would make an approach and land then they'd walk everybody a thousand feet lower. So
12 you were constantly descending another thousand feet.

13 LC: Do you know what airstrip you were going into? Was it Quang Tri city?

14 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We knew we were going in—well, I don't know. Do they
15 have more than one strip at Quang Tri? I don't know.

16 LC: Um, I don't think so. Probably not.

17 JY: I don't think so either. We knew, no, we knew we were going to Quang Tri.

18 LC: Okay. Wow. Did you have a sense of what the operation was or were you
19 just briefed on "You're going from here to here with this load?"

20 JY: The only sense I had—we weren't briefed on what the operation was, you
21 know. The only thing they ever briefed us on, just like the Jakarta thing was, "Here's
22 your frag. You're taking this. You're taking that. Here's where you go," and that's all.
23 You don't have a need to know why or anything else, but I just assumed from the size of
24 the operation that there were that many 130s carrying that many ARVN up there that
25 whatever it was it was big. That they were going about, but that was about all I knew.

26 LC: Wow. John, did you have any R&R (rest and recuperation) time off during
27 this year?

28 JY: Yes I did. The R&R that I remember most was when Rose and, remember
29 my DSO in B-58s?

30 LC: You mean Larry?

31 JY: Larry?

1 LC: Mm-hmm.

2 JY: Larry and I both ended up in that same 130 outfit.

3 LC: Oh, no kidding? Wow.

4 JY: It just so happened that his wife and my wife got together and flew to
5 Bangkok in December of '70. Yeah, they came over in December of '70. So we spent a
6 few days with our wives in Bangkok and down at Pattaya Beach, had a good time there
7 visiting with them. So that was R&R. One other R&R I had was about midway through
8 my tour I was able to take a 130 from Taiwan back to Marietta, Georgia, for
9 modification.

10 LC: At the Lockheed plant?

11 JY: Mm-hmm and that was—so I got to spend a few days at home on that.

12 LC: Did Rose come down to see you?

13 JY: No. You're ready for another war story?

14 LC: Absolutely.

15 JY: I brought a ton of Taiwanese furniture back. I did—the scheduler was a real
16 good friend of mine. Periodically we'd have these airplanes scheduled to go back to
17 Marietta for maintenance. That was a highly sought after trip, of course. He set me up
18 with this thing. Although I was scheduled for it from the time I got there, and this was six
19 months down the road, there were things that could happen. Like, if the airplane was still
20 needed in-country or the airplane broke or something like that that would preclude your
21 taking it back. So it wasn't a guaranteed thing, but it usually went. So I bet a lot of money
22 on the fact that I was gonna get that trip because I had all this furniture built over there.

23 LC: You had it built?

24 JY: Yeah.

25 LC: You arranged for it?

26 JY: Go to the furniture company and say, "Hey." I say "built." That's not really
27 true because a lot of the stuff, like the bedroom set and everything was just—go in their
28 show room and look at what they've got and bought it. When I say "built," I built a stereo
29 cabinet, built it around the components I had at that time, a reel-to-reel tape player and all
30 this different stuff, a phonograph table and all this stuff. I'm getting all this stuff and, of
31 course, to ship it back was gonna be pretty expensive so I decided, "Hey, I know what I'll

1 do. I'll just carry it back on this 130 and back to Grissom and where Rose was living in
2 Fowler." When I finally decided to do this I said, "Okay, Rose. Here's the deal." I said,
3 "You get my little brother, get a U-Haul trailer and come to Grissom, come to base
4 operations. We'll meet at about four o'clock in the morning because I know how security
5 is at four o'clock in the morning." So I landed at Grissom Air Force Base. It was about
6 four o'clock in the morning. Rose and my little brother were there with the car with the
7 U-Haul on it. Drove it out on the flight line, offloaded all that furniture onto that U-Haul
8 trailer. Rose and my little brother went back to Fowler with the furniture, and I flew on to
9 Marietta to drop the airplane off. Then I flew back up to Indianapolis and spent a few
10 days at home and then went back to Vietnam.

11 LC: So she did get to actually see you for a little bit, not just with the U-Haul and
12 all.

13 JY: Yeah. In fact, she got to see me twice. When I took the airplane back and
14 then when she went over to Bangkok that December.

15 LC: Okay. So the Bangkok trip followed the furniture run.

16 JY: Mm-hmm.

17 LC: Did you do well out of the furniture thing? Do you still have any of it? Did
18 you keep it?

19 JY: Oh, yeah. We still have it all. Yeah. That worked out beautifully. The other
20 part of that story was up until about three months before I took the airplane back, the
21 other people that were taking these airplanes back, they were doing the same thing. They
22 were taking furniture and stuff back. Usually when you'd go through customs at Hawaii,
23 all you had to do was just list the items on your customs declaration and they'd say,
24 "Okay." You just went your way. They didn't make you bring it in because it was
25 furniture off the airplane, but they had started tightening up their procedures. They were
26 saying, "Anything you declare you have to bring into the building." So essentially what
27 they were saying is, "Good luck. You're going to have to make a decision."

28 LC: Yeah. Declare or not declare.

29 JY: You could declare or not declare. I was still thinking about this about an hour
30 out of Hawaii and finally decided I better declare it because if they decide to inspect the
31 airplane and I haven't declared it then I'm in a lot of trouble. I thought maybe I can silver

1 tongue them. So I declare it and go in there. Of course, “Where’s this stuff at?” “It’s out
2 on my airplane.” “You have to bring it in.” “Come on get serious. How I’m gonna bring
3 in all this stuff?” “That’s your problem. You’re gonna have to do it.” Anyway, after quite
4 a conversation I finally get this customs guy to agree that he will have the customs guy at
5 McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, which is where we were going to fly to from
6 Hawaii, that he will meet our airplane and he will inspect the cargo.

7 LC: In other words, he’ll come out to the aircraft.

8 JY: Yeah. He’ll come out to the aircraft. I said, “Okay, fine.” I said, “Okay, guys.
9 We’re gonna land at McClellan at four o’clock in the morning,” using my same strategy
10 which worked. I mean we land. There’s nobody around anywhere. So that’s the way I got
11 through customs. Then from McClellan we went to Grissom. From Grissom to Marietta.

12 LC: That was quite a deal.

13 JY: Yeah.

14 LC: You still got the furniture.

15 JY: Yeah. Got the furniture off loaded. Got it and we still have it. So that worked
16 out very well as it turns out.

17 LC: That sure did. As you were coming to the end of your one year in Vietnam,
18 did you have a sense of what your next posting would be or did you just not care, get me
19 out of here?

20 JY: No. No. I knew that I was going to be going back to SAC. All of us were. All
21 of us were—we were just kind of, it was kind of a deal where the command just loaned
22 you to the Southeast Asia command while you were there. Then everybody knew they
23 were going back. I knew I was going back in SAC. So really what I was interested in was
24 base of choice. I was kind of between Barksdale and Carswell. Barksdale because a lot of
25 the guys that were over there in G models that were flying out of Barksdale most of them
26 seemed to like Shreveport. Carswell, of course, Dallas-Fort Worth, but that wing that I
27 was in at Altus had been an old B-36 wing. All of them had been stationed at Carswell.
28 All I ever heard people talk about was Fort Worth this, Fort Worth that, how great Fort
29 Worth was. So here was an opportunity to see how good Fort Worth was. So that’s how I
30 ended up back in B-52s at Carswell.

1 LC: Were you thinking at that time about where you might want to be after your
2 twenty years? I mean, is that why you were interested in Fort Worth or no?

3 JY: No. No. Really hadn't given that much thought.

4 LC: Basically, the rep for Carswell was that it was a good base because Fort
5 Worth was good?

6 JY: Yeah. If you're gonna be in SAC and have to go back to B-52s, Carswell
7 would probably be a pretty good base of choice.

8 LC: You were lucky enough, then, to get that?

9 JY: Mm-hmm.

10 LC: Okay. That was '71 to '72?

11 JY: Correct.

12 LC: Can you just outline the mission of the B-52s that you were flying, these are
13 back in SAC?

14 JY: Yeah. Yeah. It was the identical mission to what it was at Altus when I was
15 there from '60 to '66 and the same mission in the B-58 when I was at Grissom. That's
16 pulling alert, flying training missions and that type of thing.

17 LC: Were you thinking—?

18 JY: I—

19 LC: I'm sorry, John.

20 JY: No, go ahead.

21 LC: I was just gonna ask whether you were thinking that you'd done your year in
22 Vietnam and now you weren't gonna have to do that again.

23 JY: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. I thought, "Well, at least I'm through with the
24 Vietnam thing and now I've just got to go to a twenty now and that'll be it." Then I go on
25 to whatever in the civilian world.

26 LC: Well, John let's take a break there for today.

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Interview with John Yuill

Session [3] of [4]

Date: August 18, 2005

1

2 Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
3 University continuing the oral history interview with Lt. Col. John Yuill. Today's date is
4 the eighteenth of August 2005. As usual, I'm in the interview room in the Special
5 Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech. I'm speaking to John by telephone
6 and John is over in the Fort Worth area. Good morning, John.

7 John Yuill: Good morning, Laura.

8 LC: It's a pleasure as always to speak with you. Today we're going to start with a
9 discussion about your arrival in Guam and this was in 1972 and I believe April. You had
10 told a little bit about your receiving orders out of Carswell Air Force Base. Did you know
11 why you were going to Guam?

12 JY: Yes, but the way that worked, Laura, was I had—just to back up a step, I had
13 finished my Vietnam tour in C-130s in July of '71. That's when I was assigned to
14 Carswell. I was getting recurrent in the B-52. I'd flown the B-52 from 1960 to 1966 at
15 Altus, Oklahoma. So it was just getting recurrent in the airplane. In the process of doing
16 that and then I went out to Castle Air Force Base for D model training and that was, I
17 think, in the winter of '71, then came back in '72 to Carswell from Castle. That was just a
18 two week or a three week TDY (temporary duty). My first tour on alert at Carswell Air
19 Force Base in the middle of the alert tour and these were seven day tours. In the middle
20 of the alert tour the wing commander came out one evening to the alert facility and said,
21 "Okay, guys. We're shutting this place down. All of you go home, go in to crew rest,
22 pack your bags for a warm climate." The rumor was pretty strong all ready by that time
23 that probably more B-52s were going to be deploying to Guam and Utapao, Thailand.
24 That was exactly what it was. We were progged to go, I think in May, my crew was on
25 the schedule to go in May. I received a phone call from a scheduler a couple days after
26 we'd come off alert. He told me, "Get your crew ready. We're gonna have to send you
27 early." The reason was another guy who had been in Vietnam at the same time that I had,
28 I didn't know him, but he had the same background as I did. He'd been in B-52s, been
29 out, been to Vietnam and was getting recurrent, but he had a problem refueling. He

1 couldn't refuel. They couldn't send he and his crew over if he couldn't get the fuel
2 because you have to refuel to go from Guam to Vietnam.

3 LC: Was this a mechanical problem or a skill problem or he—?

4 JY: Skill problem, yeah. Yeah, because they kept putting him up, riding with
5 instructor pilots. He just couldn't get the fuel. It's just a matter of ability to aerial refuel.
6 So they said, "You're gonna have to go a month early." So we did and we arrived there
7 just after Linebacker I. Linebacker I was when the decision was made to bomb Hai
8 Phong, bomb the harbor. We did not get—I and my crew was not involved in that. We
9 were there flying missions out of Guam and Utapao. Let's see—I know my nav didn't go.
10 Oh, my new crew. I had a captain, a co-pilot, a first lieutenant navigator, a lieutenant
11 colonel bomb aimer, the RN, the radar navigator, the lieutenant colonel EW, and I think
12 he was a tech sergeant gunner. The gunner and the navigator were new. The nav had just
13 finished nav school. The gunner had just finished gunnery school. So that was my crew.

14 LC: John, just for the record would you go ahead and just give their names?

15 JY: Yeah. The gunner is Gary Morgan. The radar navigator was Lou Bernasconi.
16 The navigator was Bill Mayall. The electronic warfare officer was Bill Connolly. My co-
17 pilot was—oh, shoot. I'm drawing a blank here. I'll think of his name here in just a
18 second, but I'm just—Dave Dru—thank you, Rose. Dave Drummond.

19 LC: Go Rose.

20 JY: Yeah. Go Rose. There you go. Good girl Rose. Yeah, Dave Drummond.

21 LC: These guys were already had been working with each other. How did they
22 react to you coming in as the pilot?

23 JY: Well, my first impression was kinda business as usual, but I have to share
24 with you a little story about Lou Bernasconi, the radar navigator. Of course, he was a
25 lieutenant colonel as I was. I think the co-pilot and the nav probably were not too sure me
26 being a lieutenant colonel and one of them being a captain, the other one a first
27 lieutenant, but they probably weren't too sure about me until they got to know me. Lou
28 Bernasconi had no such problem. After our first mission out of Guam, he came up from
29 his seat after refueling, came up front and told me. He said, "John." He said, "You have
30 no idea how glad I am to have you on this crew." He said, "That is the first refueling that

1 I've been through in months where I wasn't strapped ready to eject." He said, "Oh, it's
2 gonna be so nice having you refueling." So I felt real good about that comment.

3 LC: He was reassured and you felt pretty good about it, too, I'm sure.

4 JY: Yeah. As it turned out, the crew chemistry worked out to be very good. I got
5 along very well with them. It was fine.

6 LC: Let me ask about the period just before Linebacker II started. What did you
7 find out in the way of briefings as to the change of policy?

8 JY: You mean with Linebacker II?

9 LC: Yeah.

10 JY: Okay. Standard operating procedure over there was you flew—out of Utapao
11 you flew everyday, like six or seven days in a row because the missions were so short.
12 The mission was only two, two and a half hours. So it was really, it was almost exactly an
13 eight-hour day from the time you left your trailer until you got back in your trailer after
14 the mission was usually just about eight hours. Of course, this eight-hour period was
15 around the clock. One day you might leave the trailer at eight o'clock in the morning. The
16 next day you might leave it at eleven o'clock at night. It just depended upon where you
17 were in the rotation because they were flying cells all the time. That was pretty much the
18 procedure you could count on six or seven days in a row, then three or four days off, then
19 six or seven days flying again. That was just the procedure. The way it worked for us as
20 far as the timing worked out, and I'm trying to remember, Laura, who went with me to
21 Pattaya. I know the radar did. I think probably the EW. I don't know. I think there were
22 either three or four of us. I know my navigator didn't go and you'll see why in just a
23 minute, but any rate we do our two or three days of Pattaya. We come back. We notice
24 something has certainly changed. There's just a different atmosphere about the base when
25 we come on the base. It might've been the guards at the gate when we came on, but it
26 was apparent that something was up. Of course, we're listening to the news all the time,
27 too. The latest news we'd heard was that the talks in Saigon had just fallen apart. That
28 Kissinger had gone back to Washington mad because—oh, what's his name? Who was
29 the—?

30 LC: President Thieu?

31 JY: It wasn't Thieu. Who—?

1 LC: Nguyen Cao Ky?

2 JY: No, it was after that. Trying to—was it Thieu? Maybe it was Thieu. Yeah. It
3 was Thieu. You're right. I'm thinking—you know who I was thinking of when you said
4 Thieu I was thinking of Ky, the pilot?

5 LC: Oh, right. No.

6 JY: Yeah. No it was Thieu. You're right. Thieu. Thieu said, "No way. We're not
7 going along with this deal." Kissinger was all bent out of shape. He huffed off and went
8 back. We knew that as far as the news was concerned. Then coupled with the atmosphere
9 on the base what I suspected is what came to be. I mean I thought, "Uh-oh. We've got a
10 problem now." The first person I ran into was my nav. I asked him, I said, "So what's
11 going on here, Billy?" He said, "I don't know, sir," but he said, "Everyone's restricted to
12 the base and you have to be in uniform. You either have to be in your flight suit or in a
13 uniform." I thought, "Hmm." We were scheduled to fly the next morning. So I call
14 scheduling and I said, "Just wanted to make sure we're still scheduled in the morning."
15 He said, "Oh, no." He said, "You're not flying." I said, "What about the other cells?" He
16 said, "Nobody's flying. Everybody's standing down," and that never happened. They
17 never stood the cells down. That was assurance that something big was in the works. The
18 way I remember it is we went to this briefing, and I don't know if I told you this—I might
19 not have told you this story. This is something that I mention in almost every speaking
20 engagement I have I mention this. A typical mission briefing for the typical missions we
21 were flying in Vietnam up to this time were in cells, three B-52s, six people on an
22 airplane. So there's eighteen people at the briefing. The way SAC operates rather than
23 just briefing in a little flight planning room or something, no, you briefed in the big
24 theater. You've got this huge theater and you've got the first three rows are occupied for
25 the three B-52 crews. Then you've got all these briefers. Well, a typical problem was, and
26 I did feel sorry for the briefers because nobody was paying any attention to what they
27 were saying. Everybody was talking to each other. The biggest problem the briefers had
28 was trying to keep control of those three crews. Usually it was something along the line,
29 "The sooner you guys shut up, the sooner you're out of here." That's usually what shut us
30 up. Now, you got the picture of what a typical briefing was all the time.

31 LC: Right.

1 JY: Okay now we go to this briefing. I guess I need to back up a step. They did
2 publish—they got a hold of everybody and told them what their schedule was. We were
3 told that we were gonna be wave lead, on the second wave out of Utapao the first night of
4 Linebacker II, the eighteenth of December. So we know that we're going to Hanoi. No.
5 We didn't know we were going to Hanoi. We just knew we were gonna go fly. We did
6 not know what the target was, but there was no question in almost every crewmember's
7 mind. It was one of the two Hs. We were either going to Hanoi or Hai Phong.

8 LC: Just for context, both of those had been previously banned as targets with
9 the—

10 JY: Well, with the exception of Linebacker I which was in April or May of '72
11 when they mined the harbor in Hai Phong.

12 LC: Okay, right.

13 JY: That was the only exception for BUFFs. You know, they'd hit them with—
14 they'd been up there a few times with fighter bombers, but not with the BUFFs.

15 LC: Not with B-52s.

16 JY: I think as far as we ever went with the BUFFs minus that one exception was
17 to Vinh. I think they did fly some missions to Vinh occasionally, but essentially you're
18 right. Hai Phong and Hanoi were off limits. So this was the first time we were gonna be
19 going to Hanoi, but we did not know that as we left our trailers to go to the briefing.
20 Now, the briefing. In the theater again, but this time the theater is packed with crew
21 members because this is a wave of airplanes, a wave being a series of cells and a cell
22 being three B-52s and a wave was comprised of X number of cells. With a divisible by
23 three you might have eighteen to twenty-one to twenty-four to twenty-seven airplanes in
24 a wave, depending. So you've got a lot of crew members in this briefing room. The
25 briefer could've briefed in a whisper without a mike and everybody would've heard
26 every word. It was so eerie quiet. I mean, it was interesting. Again, in speaking
27 engagements I always ask people if they've ever seen one of my all time favorite movies,
28 *Twelve O'clock High*. Does that ring a bell with you?

29 LC: Yes, it does. Uh-huh.

30 JY: Okay. I love that movie. Of course, I'm a big a Gregory Peck fan anyway. At
31 any rate, there's a scene in that movie when they're going on a particularly difficult

1 mission. There's a scene where the briefing is taking place and that is what flashed in my
2 mind at that briefing. I thought, "My God. This is what it was like for those 8th Air Force
3 guys flying out of England in '42." Only there with them every mission was like this. For
4 us, this was the first one, but that's what it reminded me of. It was really a sobering
5 experience. It sobered more after the briefing. Of course, that's when we found out we
6 were in fact going to Hanoi. As we came out of the briefing it just so happened that the
7 first aircraft from the first wave were landing and coming in to debrief. I remember in the
8 hallway meeting some of those guys. They didn't say a word. I didn't say a word, but
9 looking into their eyes I knew that it was gonna be an exciting evening. It was just eerie.
10 Eerie experience. That's how we found out what we were gonna be doing. So we took off
11 I think probably around midnight, one o'clock in the morning, somewhere in that area.

12 LC: This is on the eighteenth?

13 JY: Eighteenth, yeah. We do our thing and our target the first night was Hanoi
14 Radio. That was our target for our cell. We took it out of commission for, I think, about
15 twenty-four hours and then they were back up again. That didn't work out too well. Let
16 me go through, if you want I'll go through that.

17 LC: Yes, please, John.

18 JY: Okay. We came in—the route of flight was west of Hanoi, quite a bit west of
19 Hanoi. When we got a beam or just a little bit north of Hanoi, then we turned back to the
20 east and that was our bomb run heading, coming in. Just so happened there was a jet
21 stream at about our altitude so we were really smoking into Hanoi. I knew we were the
22 third wave of the night. The first wave had taken off from Utapao, the second wave from
23 Guam. We were the third wave. So I was expecting to see a lot of activity as we were
24 coming into the target. We're coming in and we're four or five minutes up away just out
25 from bombs away and everything's quiet. Nothing's happening. I thought, "Wow. This is
26 really weird."

27 LC: Meaning you can't see anything?

28 JY: Well, yeah. Nothing, I don't see anything. I don't see any SAMs coming up.
29 I don't hear anything. It's just like a normal training—not a normal training mission, but
30 a normal mission prior to Linebacker II, until, I'd say, we were about two minutes from
31 our target. Then what appeared to be flares were being—it looked like someone was out

1 lighting a flare. There was an undercast, which there was every night. You'd see this
2 bright light diffused a little bit by the clouds. I thought, what's this deal with the flares?
3 Then those quote unquote, "flares," broke through the undercast and you could see that
4 there was a rocket plume from the SAMs that were coming up. There were a lot of SAMs
5 on their way up to us. So for the next minute and a half, two minutes, it was real exciting
6 with all the SAMs coming up and trying to avoid them and all that good stuff.

7 LC: What did that look like coming at you?

8 JY: Well, like I say, the thing you see is—the only thing you could see was the
9 rocket plume of the engine. You couldn't actually see the SAM itself. You just saw them
10 everywhere. It was frightening. I'll tell ya, it was frightening. Plus, you're maneuvering
11 to get away from them, but you know that the last thirty seconds of the bomb run you've
12 got to keep that PDI (pilot's direction indicator) centered because that's—when the
13 radar's on the target, the needle that you're keeping centered, the pilot is, is a function of
14 that tracking handle that the radar is putting on the aiming point. So you've got to have
15 that needle centered, that bombs away if you're gonna hit your target.

16 LC: Did you have to do that regardless of whether you thought one of those
17 plumes was gonna run at you?

18 JY: Right. Right. My procedure was about thirty seconds prior to bombs away
19 I'm keeping the needle centered as best I can and keeping an eye out for SAMs and
20 who's helping me, of course, is my co-pilot and the gunner because the gunner can see
21 SAMs, too. The gunner, as I said, was the new guy. Every SAM that he saw he called
22 which was wrong because I finally had to tell him. I said, "Gary, don't call every SAM
23 you see because I can't be turning just because you see one. You're gonna have to make a
24 determination as to whether you think it's tracking our airplane or not." Same for the co-
25 pilot and myself. If we felt one was really locked onto us and tracking us, then we would
26 take evasive action.

27 LC: Would the electronic warfare officer be the one to potentially—?

28 JY: He would be the one. That's right. He would be the one that would say,
29 "Activate evasive action now." He was the primary guy, but we hadn't heard a word out
30 of him. Nothing, which is another story. At any rate, the procedure I kind of developed
31 for myself was with thirty seconds to go I'd just kind of look out over the nose of the

1 airplane to see if I saw any SAMs that were a direct threat. Then I just concentrated on
2 keeping that PDI centered and let the co-pilot and the gunner call the SAMs, plus the
3 EW.

4 LC: John, let me just stop you right there to ask you're flying in formation in a
5 cell of three, so you have some limits on what you can do.

6 JY: Yeah. That's right. Yeah. There are limitations as to what type of action you
7 can take. Oh, let me correct one thing, Laura.

8 LC: Sure.

9 JY: I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm thinking night four when we got shot down.
10 As best I can recall the EW was directing me to take evasive action that night. He was
11 seeing the SAM signals. He was doing his thing.

12 LC: On the first night?

13 JY: On the first night, yeah. Yeah.

14 LC: So you're going in—let's say you're at thirty seconds now and you have
15 decided that you're gonna hold on.

16 JY: Yeah. I'm gonna just focus on keeping the PDI centered and not be looking
17 for SAMs.

18 LC: Okay. Thirty seconds.

19 JY: Yeah. We drop our bombs and then we do a breakaway turn.

20 LC: What kind of—was that a banking?

21 JY: About sixty degrees of bank.

22 LC: Up?

23 JY: No. Just turning.

24 LC: Okay.

25 JY: Level turn.

26 LC: Level turn, okay. Mm-hmm.

27 JY: Yeah. We're at about thirty-five thousand feet. We're turning south to head
28 back to Utapao. So we do that. We get back and land and it's morning. We debrief. We
29 go to our trailers and then we go fly the next night. Let's see. I guess this would be as
30 good a time as any to—oh, yeah. One of the things that I usually mention in my talk,
31 speaking engagements, is about the way that briefing affected me. One of the things it left

1 me with was I said, “You know I’d been flying airplanes at that time”—let’s see this is
2 ’72 so I’d been flying airplanes for about fifteen, sixteen years at that time. “I had never
3 had the feeling I had in that briefing room that night.” Again this relates directly to that
4 movie, *Twelve O’clock High*, because as I was in that briefing room looking around at all
5 those other guys I thought, “You know, some of us are probably gonna be dead in about
6 two or three hours.” If you’re a statistically-oriented person you just figure the odds are
7 some of us aren’t coming back which turned out to be the case, but that was an eerie
8 feeling, too. I had never experienced that in my life.

9 LC: Even during some of the flights that you’ve described earlier.

10 JY: Yeah. Most of the other flights, you know, if something happened like my
11 first tour in Vietnam we got shot at a few times, but usually you kind of had the feeling
12 like, “Well, the odds are definitely in my favor. I mean the odds are that I’m not gonna
13 get shot down. I might get hit, but I’m not gonna get shot down.” I never really gave it
14 much thought. This I did because of the odds. I just figured, “We’re going to Hanoi in
15 this many B-52s. I just have to believe some of us aren’t coming back.” That was the
16 case. Some of us didn’t come back, but what a sobering experience. Like I said, I had
17 never experienced that before. I had one and I think we talked about this one. I told you
18 about the flying airborne alert and the moon coming up.

19 LC: Yes. Uh-huh.

20 JY: Yeah. Yeah. That was a bit similar.

21 LC: That was a scary time.

22 JY: That was probably the scariest feeling as far as feeling like it’s over. That
23 was—I felt it more than any other time was that was it when I saw that moon, but
24 this was a little different in that just realizing that looking around that room that some of
25 us were gonna be dead in two or three hours. I’d never really experienced that.

26 LC: This is much more on the individual level where you’re looking around at
27 the faces.

28 JY: Yeah. Yeah. So anyway, that was a rather sobering experience.

29 LC: Well, John. What about the debrief when you came back? Can you describe
30 what happened?

1 JY: I do not remember much at all about the debrief. What I do remember is
2 primarily they were interested in the SAMs, about the SAMs, how many SAMs.

3 LC: I'll bet they were.

4 JY: Yeah. So were we. The other thing they were interested in was the chaff
5 because we had F-4s laying chaff for us.

6 LC: At about what altitude, do you know?

7 JY: I would guess twenty-five thousand, thirty thousand, somewhere in there.
8 That was in my opinion it was a totally useless operation. To me the first problem with
9 doing that is if the North Vietnamese were wondering where we were gonna be coming
10 from, they sure as hell wouldn't be wondering after they saw all this string of chaff in a
11 line. I mean, it wouldn't take a mental giant to figure out where the airplanes are coming
12 from. That's the first problem I had with that strategy. Then the second thing is by the
13 time we got there the chaff was dispersed anyway. The chaff really—I think it was more
14 of a hindrance than a help. The other thing that was talked about was, and I think I'm
15 remembering this correctly. I think that they wanted you—the checklist called for you to
16 open the bomb bay doors sixty seconds before bombs away. I guess the reason was if
17 there was a malfunction with the doors it'd give you sixty seconds to figure out
18 something, get the doors open before you drop. There's an automatic system on that
19 airplane primarily for nuclear weapon delivery. If you put it in the auto mode it would
20 automatically open the doors five seconds prior to bombs away. A lot of us, including
21 me, chose to do that. We didn't want open bomb bay doors the last sixty seconds of the
22 bomb run. So there was a discussion about that policy.

23 LC: Can you explain why you wouldn't want those doors open?

24 JY: Yeah because it's just gonna give the SAMs operator that much better a
25 target with all those bombs. Boy, what a reflector that is.

26 LC: Yeah. They can hone in on that with more effectiveness.

27 JY: Yeah. Yeah. So any rate, the other thing that was talked about at some length
28 was a breakaway turn. We didn't like that breakaway turn because the jet stream, when
29 you put that airplane up into a bank you effectively block out your electronic
30 countermeasure equipment. At the most vulnerable point when we're in that breakaway
31 turn, now our ECM, our electronic countermeasure equipment's no good, and with that

1 jet stream it just about stops you. You just about park the airplane there in the most
2 vulnerable position.

3 LC: Can you explain what, just in very sort of brief terms, outline terms, what the
4 electronic countermeasure—is it the profile of the plane that is disappearing on the radar
5 or—?

6 JY: No, it's more of a jamming thing. What you do is the electronic warfare
7 officer, he's briefed on frequency bands that the SAMs operate in. There's also a
8 difference in whether they're in the search mode, i.e. looking for you as compared to
9 when they go to the tracking radar when they lock onto you. Then also when they launch.
10 The EW, he can tell those three things. He can tell if they're searching, if they're
11 tracking, and if they've launched a missile.

12 LC: When you go into that bank turn—?

13 JY: He'll call that after it's launched. Let's see, what else? That's essentially
14 what the electronic warfare officer—that's what he can detect, but he can also—he has
15 jammers. He can jam. If he gets a signal he can jam it which then makes it very difficult
16 for them to do whatever they're doing. I don't think our equipment was that effective
17 against breaking lock. I think once they locked on to you it was very difficult to break
18 their lock.

19 LC: In the period before that—

20 JY: When they were searching you could cause them a lot of trouble.

21 LC: By getting on their frequency.

22 JY: And jamming because then all they're gonna see is a lot of ground, what
23 looks like ground clutter. They can't pick the airplane up from ground clutter. That's the
24 beauty of having an effective jammer. The other thing was we did have chaff dispensers
25 so we could dispense chaff on our own. Some of the airplanes had flares for heat. That's
26 essentially what they did. Now the breakaway turn, Laura, was a very effective tactic
27 against a single SAM ring. When we used to go just into North Vietnam and hit targets
28 maybe fifty or sixty miles north of the DMZ (demilitarized zone), these targets were
29 usually defended by a single SAM ring.

30 LC: Meaning a series of sites around, located around, the—

31 JY: Yeah. I shouldn't say SAM ring. Just a site, a SAM site.

1 LC: Oh, okay. SAM site. Okay.

2 JY: Just one SAM launcher with however many SAMs they might have.

3 LC: Oh, okay. Sure. Okay.

4 JY: What was effective, an effective tactic was as you're going into your target is
5 say the SAM and normally this was the case, the SAM site was usually very close to
6 whatever your target might be. As you're driving in to your target, if you went into this
7 break away turn right after you dropped your weapon you could essentially—a lot of
8 times you could stay out of their lethal range by doing this sharp turn. You wouldn't get
9 in close enough to where they could really lock on to you. So it was very effective against
10 a single SAM site, but then when we went to Hanoi where they had, I think, twelve or
11 thirteen SAM sites now what you're doing is you may be breaking away from this lethal
12 range of one SAM site, but you're just a sitting duck for two or three others.

13 LC: Right. You're heading right into them.

14 JY: Yeah. You're just sitting there for the other. So that was not a good tactic
15 against multiple SAM sites, but that's what we were briefed to do. However, they did
16 change that tactic. Another thing we didn't like was all of us coming in from the same IP,
17 the initial point, which just made it that much easier for the SAM operators if all the
18 airplanes are coming from the same point. So one of the changes they made as a result of
19 debriefings and hearing what the crews had to say, they made two significant changes.
20 One was they came in from multiple IPs and they eliminated the breakaway turn. You
21 just overflew your target. In fact, the first night that procedure went into effect was the
22 night we got shot down. It was just before our target that we got hit. We got the change
23 we wanted, but it didn't help us any.

24 LC: That was on the fourth night of—

25 JY: Right. Right. Yeah. The second night was similar to the first night. Our target
26 was the thermal plant north of Hanoi. That was the easiest mission, the second night.
27 Third night we didn't fly. We were what they called DNIF cover, which the acronym
28 means duty not including flying. That meant that if for some reason somebody that was
29 scheduled to fly that night couldn't fly then you would substitute for them, whatever the
30 crew position might be.

31 LC: So you were the sort of second tier.

1 JY: We were the back up crew and we weren't really backing up a crew. We
2 were backing up individual crew members. For example, if that third night some pilot had
3 said, "I'm sick. I can't fly," then I would've gone and flown his crew in his place.

4 LC: Was that from your point of view smart that you could be sent on these kind
5 of missions flying with people you'd never—?

6 JY: Yeah. No. I didn't have a problem with that. I didn't see that as any—
7 although SAC's philosophy wasn't—and I agree with SAC's philosophy. SAC was very
8 big on the integrated crew concept.

9 LC: Yeah. Exactly.

10 JY: They believed that it made—and I agree with them. I think it did make sense
11 because just like the analogy would be as sports, Texas Tech. If you've got a bunch of
12 guys that have played together for three or four years they're gonna work much better as
13 a unit than if you got all new guys that never played with each other. It's the same way
14 with a crew. That was good and I agreed with that concept, but I also didn't have a
15 problem because SAC was so standardized. Everything was standardized. So it really
16 wasn't that difficult to step on an airplane, even if you're the odd crewmember, and be
17 effective.

18 LC: You could be assured of some consistent level of performance.

19 JY: That's right. Yeah. You wouldn't be quite as effective, probably, as an
20 integral crew that flew together all the time, but you wouldn't be far off.

21 LC: Got it. Okay. That was the third night. You were ready to go, but you did not
22 have to go.

23 JY: No. None, in fact, nobody on our crew which is another thing that I always
24 like to point out in speaking engagements was one of the big concerns, and I'm sure this
25 goes way back to Cain and Abel. One of the big concerns that the staff had about the new
26 crew members. "Yeah, they're okay now flying these milk run missions," which is all we
27 flew up until Linebacker II, but they said, "What if we really get in the fight? What if we
28 really get into it? How are they going to perform?" Well, the answer was I submit when
29 we were DNIF cover that third night and nobody on my crew had to go fill in for
30 anybody—in other words, everybody was stepping up to the plate. They were doing it. I
31 was really proud of the young guys that they came through like they did. That's an aside.

1 LC: It also shows, in some ways talks about the *esprit de corps* that—

2 JY: Right. Exactly.

3 LC: That was already—I mean it had obviously taken a lot of training to get to
4 that point, but it was in place when it needed in some ways.

5 JY: Yeah. Like I say, it must go back ever since there's been war. I'm sure that
6 the command level people are always concerned about the troops. Are they going to
7 perform or are they gonna cut and run? I mean it's a natural concern that you would have
8 as a commander. I think in the normal day-to-day activity when these young guys are
9 doing some dumb things and they're probably thinking "What the hell we got here?" It
10 really made you proud when it came time to do the job they did it and did it well. Let me
11 see here. I need to weave in another little story.

12 LC: Okay.

13 JY: This story is the little things mean a lot. What seems to be just small little
14 insignificant things that turn out to be huge later on. I briefed my crew. When we got off
15 the airplane after we knew we were going to Hanoi, I briefed my crew. I said, "Okay
16 guys. Here's the deal. We are gonna stay with that airplane. If we get hit, we're staying
17 with it until it blows up because it's not gonna do us any good to bail out because I don't
18 think they're gonna be taking any prisoners. I mean, we're bombing Hanoi. We're
19 bombing their capitol. So even if we successfully get out of the airplane," and I was
20 talking about in the immediate Hanoi area. If we could get out away from Hanoi then
21 different story, but I said, "If we get hit right over the target we're staying with the
22 airplane until it comes apart because I don't like the alternative." So that's what I briefed
23 them and that's what I fully intended to do. The night that we were shot down, at the
24 briefing an additional optional briefing item which didn't have to be briefed, but was, was
25 this. They said, "By the way, Cpt. Hal Wilson, his radar and his EW have been captured.
26 They are alive. They were captured and they are prisoners of war in the Hanoi Hilton."
27 Well, that really—I thought, "Wow. I am surprised to hear that." I was. I was surprised. I
28 didn't think they would be taking any prisoners. Any rate, I know now in hindsight that I
29 filed that away in the back of my mind because when it came time to make the decision
30 as to whether to get out of the airplane or stay with it, I know that was a factor in my
31 decision to bail the crew out. What scares me is when I think "What if they hadn't briefed

1 that that night? What if I didn't know that when we took off and when the situation arose
2 and I had to make a decision as to whether to stay with the airplane or get out of it? What
3 would I have done and what would've been the end result?"

4 LC: Sounds like part of a plan, though.

5 JY: Yeah. Our initial conversation, huh?

6 LC: Yes, exactly.

7 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Boy, it still brings chills to me when I think about that.

8 LC: Was Captain Wilson someone that you knew?

9 JY: Yeah. I did know Hal. In fact, just talked to him a couple years ago. He
10 ended up in 111s and ended up in Albuquerque. Well, he's just outside of Albuquerque.
11 My radar, Lou Bernasconi, that's where he lives is Albuquerque. So got together with
12 Hal a few times, but I did know him.

13 LC: So he had, just to clarify for listeners, his aircraft had taken fire on one of the
14 previous nights?

15 JY: The first night. He was shot down the first night. Yeah.

16 LC: So within three days they had hard information that he was a POW and
17 where he was.

18 JY: And briefed it to the crews. Yeah.

19 LC: Wow. Did you and other members of the crew or other of the pilots and
20 personnel at the briefings talk about that or did you—it just?

21 JY: I don't think so. As I recall Laura—that's an excellent question, but I don't
22 remember that we did. I would think we would have, but I just don't remember. I'll tell
23 you one thing it was pretty quiet around there.

24 LC: I'll bet it was.

25 JY: When you were on the ground there wasn't much conversation. Another
26 interesting story, do I have the stories or what?

27 LC: You sure do which makes this, of course, a terrific interview.

28 JY: After the first night, the next evening before we went to fly we were having
29 dinner at the O-club and one of the other pilots made this comment. He said, "Well, I'll
30 tell you one thing." He said, "If I get shot down and if I have to bail out I'm taking some
31 of those North Vietnamese with me. I'm gonna shoot as many as I can when I get on the

1 ground.” So now fast forward to about two weeks before we were released, the last group
2 to come out of Hanoi. One afternoon for whatever reason, I still to this day don’t know
3 why, but for some reason they let all of us in the Zoo, that camp, get together for about I
4 would guess maybe thirty minutes or an hour. They let us all get together in the
5 courtyard, which was the only time it happened and it just happened for a short time, but
6 who do I see but this guy. We just made eye contact. I’m sure I had this smile on my
7 face. “Yeah, like tell me again how you’re gonna take”—we never said a word about it.

8 LC: Well, thank God he changed his mind.

9 JY: Yeah. Isn’t that truth? Yeah, it’s funny how when it comes right down to it
10 you might have a different view of that thing. Now one of my favorite stories, all time
11 favorite stories. A guy by the name of Bill Elander. Bill Elander and I were in pilot
12 training together. While I went through pilot training, Miss Rose and I were married. We
13 had one daughter and another one that was born while I was in pilot training. Anyway,
14 the point is I was a married guy. Elander was a bachelor and a very, very good friend of
15 mine to this day who I went through cadets with way before pilot training. Bill Beyer, he
16 was also a bachelor. He and Elander were good buddies. When I was at Utapao during
17 Linebacker II, Bill Beyer was also at Utapao. He was in MAC and he was working in the
18 MAC command post at Utapao. He was on his way back to San Francisco the next day
19 and this would’ve been, like, the nineteenth or twentieth. He made this comment to me. I
20 had dinner with him before he went back. His comment to me was, he said, “Now look
21 Bos, if you get shot down in this thing and if you get captured be sure you look up
22 Elander because you know he was shot down and captured this summer.” I said, “Oh,
23 yeah, Beyer, that’s exactly what I’ll do. If I get shot down. If I get captured, trust me the
24 first thing I’ll say to that camp commander is, ‘Um, my buddy said that I, he wanted me
25 to say hello to Bill Elander. Can I see Bill for a minute?’” I said, “Get out of here Beyer.
26 Go to San Francisco, you idiot.” Any rate, back to this two-hour time when they let all of
27 us mingle. Who do I run into but Bill Elander?

28 LC: No way. That’s unbelievable.

29 JY: You’ve got to know this guy Elander, Laura. You would love Elander. He
30 was a Thunderbird pilot and he’s just crazy as hell, just a wonderful guy. Elander, I see
31 him and I go up to him and I say, “God, Elander, am I ever glad they let us get together

1 here. If we never get out of here at least I can do,” I said—and I told him the story. I said,
2 “The night I got shot down I had dinner with Beyer, of all people,” and I said, “Beyer’s
3 comment to me was,” and I told him. So I said, “If we ever get out of here, Elander, the
4 first thing I want you to do is call Beyer and tell him that I did as he asked.”

5 LC: You took care of business.

6 JY: “I took care of business. I looked you up.” I said—now Elander, he says,
7 “Okay. Okay.” He said, “Now look.” He said—now remember he got shot down in June
8 or July of ’72 just six months before we were shot down. Here’s his comment to me. He
9 says, “Bos,” he said, “We’ve been noticing you new guys.” I said, “New guys?” I said,
10 “What the hell do think you are, Elander? Like you think you’ve been up here all your
11 life?” He said, “Well, we’re old heads compared to you new guys.” I said, “Oh, the hell
12 you are.” He said, “Well, one thing we don’t like.” He said, “We noticed looking out
13 from our building we saw one of those guards slap one of your guys, hit him,” and he
14 said, “The guy pulled back when he hit him.” He said, “That’s not the way we do it up
15 here.” He said—he acted it out. He said, “We throw ourselves into those punches.” He
16 said, “We show those guards how tough we are.” He said, “If they hit us, throw yourself
17 into these punches.” I said, “Yeah. Yeah. Okay, Elander. I think I got it. I’ll go back and
18 share that with all the guys in our building that we’re doing it wrong.” Well, now fast
19 forward to—gee whiz, not too many years ago when we had a reunion in Seattle. You
20 could opt to go on a cruise. After the reunion they had a cruise for whoever wanted to go
21 on it up to Alaska. Well, Bill Elander at that time was a president of the chamber of
22 commerce in Anchorage. He was out of the Air Force and that’s his civilian job. So he
23 was the guy chosen to get us lodging in Anchorage because we’d bust up from the cruise
24 ship up to Anchorage. On the bus ride up, I’m telling all these old heads this story I just
25 told you. So we get to the hotel where we’re staying and who’s out in front meeting and
26 greeting but Elander. He’s shaking hands with each POW and his wife as they come off. I
27 stepped on the step of the bus and Elander looks up at me. I’ll tell you, Laura, we
28 couldn’t have scripted it better. Neither one of us said a word. All he did was make a
29 motion with his head like he was throwing himself into a punch and you should’ve heard
30 all those other guys on the bus. It just broke them up.

31 LC: Wow. He sounds like a great guy.

1 JY: Oh, he was and this guy Beyer, too. So any rate that was another interesting
2 little story from that couple hours that they let us all get together.

3 LC: That was about, what, a month or so before they let your group—

4 JY: No it was just a couple weeks before—

5 LC: Oh, was it? Okay.

6 JY: Yeah. Yeah because we were all in that—let's see the Zoo—see they had
7 positioned us so all the guys in the Zoo at that time were late shoot downs. So all of us
8 came home either on the last airplane or the next-to-last airplane. So just before they
9 released us is when they let us have that time together. Anyway, that's a big diversion
10 from where we were at. Let's see, we were somewhere around night three or night four.

11 LC: Yeah. I think you were about to run out to the plane on night four.

12 JY: Yeah. Night four was—oh, there was another big, big change here. Was it
13 night two? Something I can't remember the details, but there was some crew that got the
14 airplane back. They made it back. I think they made it back to Da Nang or someplace or
15 maybe Utapao. Anyway, they brought the airplane back. They landed. They told them
16 that, "Hey, you can sit out the rest of the war. You've had your deal." They wanted to go
17 fly the next night, which was our night four. So the wing commander said, "All right. If
18 you guys want to fly you can be wave lead tonight." So for the first time we're not wave
19 lead. We're back in the pack. Ironically that's the night we get shot down. That night was
20 just more or less, this night was not that much different than the other three except for, of
21 course, the two silver SAMs. The big difference here was when I went through my
22 procedure again about thirty seconds prior to bombs away. I looked out over the nose of
23 that airplane and there was a SAM. I just couldn't believe it, just under the nose. All I
24 could think about was, I thought, "Just detonate above us," because the pattern on those
25 SAMs when they detonated was upward and conical. So if the SAM detonated above
26 you, you probably were going to be okay, but if it detonated below you it's a direct hit.

27 LC: Because the debris is coming up?

28 JY: Yeah. Everything, all the shrapnel, everything's coming up just where they
29 want it. The next thing that happened—that was my thought. The next thing that
30 happened was the airplane goes up in about a thirty degree bank. All the wind screens
31 completely shatter, but remain in tact. About half the red lights in the cockpit are on.

1 Amazingly, the airplane when I go to level the wings, it responds. Get the wings back
2 level and start doing—go through the procedure just to determine how much the extent
3 damage—damage control, I guess you could say. The procedure was you usually start
4 from the back left side of the panels and just come on around with your eyes. In a B-52,
5 you have ten hydraulic packs and they sit right to the left. If you just dropped your hand
6 down in the seat you'd drop your hand on the hydraulic panels. There were ten red lights.
7 One red light for each hydraulic pack and about half of those red lights were on. The
8 procedure was to go ahead and shut them down, but I just looked. I saw. Okay I've lost
9 about half the hydraulics and then I kept coming around and to the front of the instrument
10 panel. I see number three and four engine fire lights are on. So I took a quick look out my
11 window and, yep, number three and four engines are both on fire. So I pull the T-handles
12 for those two engines, shut the throttles down. Then I look in front of the co-pilot and he
13 has a big—what we called a master fire light in front of the co-pilot. That meant that
14 somewhere in the airplane there was a fire or fires. The co-pilot over on his side had
15 about twenty little panels that would break out where the fire was. I can't see that as a
16 pilot. I couldn't see that. All I could see was a big red light, but just as I'm looking at that
17 red light is when the second SAM hit the airplane. This time the airplane goes up in about
18 a thirty degree bank once again and the same thing. I'm able to level the wings, but
19 another thing that happens is we now have explosive decompression. We've taken a hit in
20 the pressurized compartment. So now we're unpressurized. The noise level just goes
21 tremendously high and I'm sure it's because of wherever we were hit the air was rushing
22 through there and making all this noise. So that's one thing I remember was the noise was
23 just deafening. The way I describe it is if you were standing next to a railroad tracks and
24 a train went by about seventy or eighty miles an hour. That's what it sounded like. But, I
25 got rid of one of my problems because everything was dark. It went completely black so I
26 got rid of all the red lights. They were gone. So the airplane is now stable. I just look out
27 to check on those engine fires and now the wing's on fire. So here we are. We were just
28 seconds away from our target which was downtown Hanoi, Bac Mai airfield. So now it's
29 decision time. What do we do? Do we stay with this thing or do we get out of it? What
30 really concerned me—I wasn't that concerned about the hydraulic packs or the two
31 engines. What concerned me was the wing fire because I knew in this model B-52, the D

1 model, that the ejection seats for some reason were very reliable if you were in a 1-G
2 configuration, but they were not very reliable if you were in a high G load.

3 LC: Can you describe just quickly the difference between those two?

4 JY: Yes. 1-G is like you and I are sitting right now. We're in a 1-G configuration
5 right now.

6 LC: Gravity at it's—

7 JY: Gravity times one, which is normal. When you have an abnormal G load that
8 would be either negative or positive Gs. If that wing snapped, then the airplane is
9 automatically uncontrollable. Now you could very easily be in a high G load situation.
10 Ejections in that airplane in the high G configuration were not very reliable. The seats
11 tend to hang up when they fire. They don't totally clear the airplane. Whether it was a
12 problem with the rocket motor or whether it was a track design problem I don't know, but
13 whatever.

14 LC: You were aware of this.

15 JY: I was aware of that. I'm thinking if I don't get them out now probably all of
16 us aren't gonna make it out.

17 LC: Did you have communications inside the—?

18 JY: No communications. This is when I'm sure that one of the things that I was
19 weighing was that briefing item because now that's an option to bail out whereas before
20 in my mind it wasn't an option. Now it clearly is. So finally I decide I've got to get them
21 out now. It was so frustrating because I know I'm only eight or nine minutes from the
22 Gulf of Tonkin. If we go east and particularly with that jet stream we're only eight or
23 nine minutes from being over the gulf. If we're over the gulf and eject we'll be picked up
24 by friendlies because we own the Gulf of Tonkin. That is driving me, but I'm thinking,
25 "We'll never make it. We will never make it with that wing fire."

26 LC: Are you thinking that the fuel supply—was the fuel supply in the wing? I'm
27 assuming it was.

28 JY: Oh, yeah. You have fuel in the wings, but I wasn't—the biggest concern I
29 had was that wing snapping.

30 LC: Snapping off.

1 JY: Going uncontrollable. That was my biggest concern, but that was
2 definitely—that could've happened, Laura. You're absolutely right. With fuel in the
3 wings that could've easily exploded. It kind of looks like it did as we got after action
4 reports from—I was Blue 1. Blue 2 just saw a huge fireball. So did my navigator and
5 gunner, but that's still to come, that story. Anyway, I'm here trying to make this decision
6 on whether to stay in or get out. I finally decide I've got to get them out. Boeing, in their
7 infinite wisdom when they built the airplane, assuming that you could have a complete
8 electrical power failure which really is a misnomer. That's what we referred to it. That's
9 what we referred to as a complete electrical power failure, but like my old aircraft
10 commander used to say, "You don't have a complete electrical power failure until your
11 battery goes out, until your flashlight doesn't work anymore." Any rate, Boeing—what
12 drove everything electrically on the airplane were alternators. We had lost all of our
13 alternators. That's why everything was black in the airplane, but of course the airplane
14 has a battery, eh? It does power certain critical things like emergency lighting for basic
15 instruments like an altimeter, an air speed indicator, a turn indicator, and a heading
16 indicator. You just have seven little lights that are powered by that battery. The other
17 thing that you have is power to an emergency bail out light. It's like the red light I told
18 you in front of the co-pilot for fire.

19 LC: Yes.

20 JY: Well, each crew position had a big red light like that in front of their crew
21 position. In the event that you had complete electrical power failure, not complete, almost
22 complete electrical power failure, you still have a battery. The pilot has a switch that he
23 can activate which will turn that light on. You as a crewmember, if you see that red light
24 come on you're clear to eject. Normal ejection in a B-52 is over intercom. The pilot says,
25 "Bail out. Bail out. Bail out." Then there's an order in which you bail out.

26 LC: You mean a sequence?

27 JY: A sequence. That's right. It sure is. In fact, the sequence was, I think the EW
28 went first which is an upward ejection. Then the navigator ejected downward. Then the
29 radar navigator ejected downward. Then the gunner, he didn't have an ejection seat. He
30 had explosive bolts on his turret. He would fire those explosive bolts which just release

1 the turret, the gun turret. It just fell away and then the gunner just fell out that open hole
2 there.

3 LC: He fell out along with the gun?

4 JY: Yeah. Well, he—

5 LC: With the seat.

6 JY: He didn't really go with the guns. The guns went which left an opening for
7 him.

8 LC: Oh, okay for him to—

9 JY: Then he just stepped out of his seat and he was gone. The co-pilot and then
10 the pilot. That's the normal ejection order or sequence, but in this event when you have to
11 use a light then it's go when the light comes on. You don't worry about sequence. You
12 just bail out. As it turns out, as we reconstituted the crime later, the first person out of the
13 airplane was the EW and, boy, he went quick. I turned that light on and it seemed to me
14 like it was less than a second later I heard a seat fire. Then I'm listening for the next two
15 seats to fire, the navigator and the radar, and I wait and I wait and I wait. I don't hear
16 anything. I'm thinking, "I'm probably hyperventilating to the extent that they probably
17 did eject and I just didn't hear them." The noise level was so high anyway. I said, "I
18 probably just didn't hear them." So I motion to the co-pilot to eject. Well, he shook his
19 head "no" and with his hand was indicating, hey we're straight and level. I'm saying to
20 myself, "That's right David, but we've got a wing on fire," but there's no way he knows
21 that.

22 LC: He can't see it.

23 JY: He can't see it and I can't tell him. That's when I ejected. Funny talking to
24 David later. He said, he looked over there right after I ejected and he thought, "Oh, my
25 God. He's serious." He says, "I better go help him. He's gonna need my help." He said he
26 estimates about a second later he ejected. As best we can determine the aircraft
27 commander for a short time was either the navigator or the gunner. It was a tie between
28 those two. The reason is and this is all stuff I found out, of course, afterward. The
29 navigator, the new guy on the crew along with the gunner right out of nav school, his seat
30 malfunctioned. It didn't fire. He pulls the D ring or he pulls the lanyard and the seat

1 doesn't fire. Fortunately the radar navigator realizes what his problem is and he does the
2 right thing. He ejects so that the navigator has a hole that he can manually bail out of.

3 LC: So he can actually undo his restraints?

4 JY: That's what he had to do. Undo his seatbelt, shoulder harness, stand up, get
5 out of that seat, step to the side, and bail out of that open, where that radar seat had just
6 been which he did. So the time it took him to unstrap, get out and manually bail out—
7 now the gunner, what he's experiencing is he's not believing it when he sees the red light
8 come on because the airplane's not doing anything dramatic. It's not out of control. He,
9 of course, lost all of his lighting and electrical, but he didn't have the explosive
10 decompression. He's still pressurized back there. So he doesn't see things as being that
11 bad. He said when he saw the light he couldn't believe it that I was telling him to bail out.
12 About that time he looked outside and saw the flames coming back from the wing fire.
13 That's when he decided maybe he better go.

14 LC: Maybe you were giving him the right signal.

15 JY: Yeah. Maybe I was sticking to my idea. Any rate, we don't know for sure
16 who was the last one out of the airplane, but we know it was either the gunner or the
17 navigator. One of those two were the last ones out. Both of them, by the way, when their
18 shoots open saw the airplane fire ball, blow up in the air.

19 LC: You did not see that though, John.

20 JY: I did not see that. No. No. What I saw was—well, the first problem I had was
21 there was an emergency oxygen bottle on the parachutes put there just for a situation like
22 we were in where you're going to have to bail out at thirty-five or forty thousand feet.
23 Sine there's very little oxygen at that altitude.

24 LC: You'll just pass out, presumably.

25 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Well, that was the theory. So to preclude that life support had
26 put on all parachutes this emergency oxygen supply bottle, just a little pressurized bottle
27 that was sewn into this parachute harness. To activate that—the way that bottle activated,
28 you had to manually activate it with what we called a green apple. That's exactly what it
29 looked like. About the size of a ping pong ball, made out of wood on a wire cable. When
30 you pulled that green apple it sheared a nipple on that bottle and allowed that pressurized
31 oxygen to go through a little hose, just a small little hose that went from the bottle to your

1 oxygen mask. That was the idea if you had to bail out that you'd have that emergency
2 oxygen supply when you were descending, free falling. However there's a problem with
3 that green apple. When you're in that airplane, in that seat, with that seatbelt and shoulder
4 harness on, plus you've got water survival equipment on, plus you've got a survival vest
5 which has flares in it, your weapon, your .38 and all kinds of—your radio, your survival
6 radio. You get the picture? You got all this stuff on. To find that green apple was a
7 challenge. In fact, I used to particularly on missions out of Guam after we'd dropped our
8 bombs and heading back to Guam I'd sit there and just practice saying, "Well, what if I
9 had to bail out. Let's go through the steps." So I would. What was the thing I could never
10 find by feel? That damn green apple. I could never find that stupid thing. I'd always have
11 to turn a light on and see it to find it. Well, I wrote up an OHR on that, operational
12 hazardous report, which didn't change anything. Nothing ever changed. It just really
13 irritated me before the war. Well, now as it turns out when I eject, of course, I didn't even
14 think about that thing, but after I ejected—well, the first problem was upon ejection is all
15 at once I feel something pull away from me. I thought, "Oh, what the hell was that? I
16 thought that was my shoot. I've lost my shoot. It's over." Then I realized, "No, you idiot.
17 That was your ejection seat."

18 LC: The chair.

19 JY: Yeah. You want to lose that because that's a lot of metal, but there have been
20 people that have died that have successfully ejected from the plane. Their shoot opens
21 successfully and they get a death grip on those hand grips and hold on to the seat right
22 into the ground. So you'd want to get rid of that seat. I do. Now I think, "Oh, I'm at
23 thirty-five thousand feet. I've got to activate that oxygen bottle." Same old story. I
24 couldn't find that stupid green apple. My flight path in my freefall was not the way they
25 teach you. They teach you to arch your back, spread your arms and be in a controlled free
26 fall. My free fall I describe as if you blew up a balloon and released it the flight path of
27 that balloon, that was kind of mine.

28 LC: Because essentially you're grasping around trying to find—

29 JY: Trying to find the green apple. Now, I'm getting upset with this stupid green
30 apple. The shoot opens and the shoot opens at fourteen thousand feet automatically. I
31 know that I no longer need oxygen but, by God, I'm gonna pull that green apple and I

1 mean when I pull it, it is gonna be pulled. I finally find that stupid thing and I just pull it
2 for all it's worth. So here I am probably about to die and I'm still mad about some stupid
3 green apple. You wouldn't believe the satisfaction I had when I found that green apple
4 and pulled it. I just said to myself, "There. Take that you stupid thing." So any rate now
5 back to business. Here I am at fourteen thousand feet. All I can see is that undercast I was
6 telling you about that was there every night, plus I can see stuff. I can see small arms fire.
7 I can see the muzzle flash. I'm thinking, "How can I keep this chute airborne and just
8 float out to the Gulf of Tonkin?"

9 LC: Can you see any of your crewmembers?

10 JY: No. I didn't. I saw no crewmembers. The only thing I remember seeing were
11 small arms fire, the muzzle flashes. Of course, I thought, "How can they miss?" You
12 know here I am just hanging in the shoot. They probably didn't even see me. They're
13 probably just shooting. I don't know. Any rate, I come through the undercast, never saw
14 the ground. That's an abrupt stop. The parachuting is okay, not bad, but what I enjoyed—
15 one of the things that I really enjoyed when that shoot opened was for the first time in
16 about three minutes it was quiet, relatively quiet. That wind through the chute just
17 sounded so good after that extreme noise level I had just before that. So anyway I hit the
18 ground and I'm stunned with the landing. I do remember standing up looking around and
19 I can see I'm close to a barn in a farmyard. I stand up. I'm taking my helmet off and as I
20 take my helmet off I can hear voices. At about that time there's about a dozen
21 Vietnamese that come around the corner of this barn. I'd say maybe two or three of them
22 are armed. They encircle me. They're helping me get out of my parachute harness, my
23 helmet. They help me out of my flight suit. They take my boots. They take my socks.
24 They take my Sammy Seiko watch. I'm left there in my shorts. This was the first time I
25 was aware of the fact that it's cold in North Vietnam in late December. So for the first
26 time with all the adrenaline pumping that I feel cold. I notice that both shins are bleeding.
27 I figure, "Well, okay this is it. This is where it ends." Then I happen to notice—what I'm
28 expecting to see in their eyes is hatred. What am I seeing, though, is curiosity. They're
29 looking at me like, "Whoa. What is this thing?" I don't know. I might've been the first
30 Caucasian that these people had ever seen. That's what I saw was curiosity more than
31 hatred, which was a bit relieving. Then they kind of dabbed at the blood on my shins and

1 I thought that's not something they'd probably do if they were gonna shoot me here in the
2 next minute or two.

3 LC: Were these all men?

4 JY: Yes, they were.

5 LC: How many about?

6 JY: About a dozen.

7 LC: Dressed how—do you remember?

8 JY: I don't remember. I know none were in uniform.

9 LC: Okay. Nobody in uniform.

10 JY: They were all in civilian clothing. They're of course talking a mile a minute.
11 They're really pumped. They're excited. They walk me down to this path in front of the
12 farm. We're walking down this road and every once in a while they'll stop and there'll be
13 an argument. Of course, I'm thinking the argument is half of them are saying, "Let's take
14 him to the hamlet and turn him in and get all those goodies that the government's
15 promised us." The other half is saying, "To hell with that. Let's take him out over here to
16 the side of the road and just shoot him." My frustration is I don't know which side to be
17 cheering for because I don't understand any Vietnamese. Probably more likely, Laura, it
18 was probably half of them were from hamlet A and the other half were from hamlet B
19 and they were arguing about which hamlet they were going to turn me in to. What they
20 did do was took me to another farm, took me in the house, and obviously the residents of
21 this farm—now they were really kind. They gave me some hot tea and they were, I would
22 say, friendly. I was there with them and the dozen that had captured me when a couple of
23 guys come in, in uniform. They're young. They look about the age of my two boys that
24 they were at that time. Now I'm seeing what I had anticipated in the first place. This is
25 hatred. I mean they just—the hate in their eyes is unmistakable. So I'm thinking, what I
26 am reading in this one guy's eyes is if I can get you away from these people you're dead.
27 So my mission in life at that time was to make sure they didn't separate me from the
28 people that lived there in the farm. Oh, within minutes there's about six or seven other
29 military that show up. They take me out of the farm house, put me on top of this—I don't
30 know what they had on this truck. They had something on the truck bed with a tarp over
31 it. They put me up on top of the load and the tarp and then off we went to the hamlet.

1 They put me in this little room in the hamlet where I was—this is the middle of the night.
2 I got shot down about two o'clock in the morning so it's probably, what, three in the
3 morning? They put me in this little room and tie me up and that's where they leave me.
4 Then during the day they had a guard on the door of the room and about every minute or
5 two—well, not ever minute or two, but every once in a while he would open the door and
6 there'd be a group of four or five people. He'd let them look at me for thirty seconds to a
7 minute and then he'd close the door again.

8 LC: Now did you look back up at them or were you keeping—?

9 JY: Oh, yeah, and they weren't very friendly. These weren't very friendly people.
10 Some of them, the younger boys, would come around and pound on—there was one
11 window. I say window. There's no glass. There's just bars. They'd pound on that and
12 they were yelling. This went on until about mid-afternoon. Then about mid-afternoon I
13 could tell there was a crowd of people gathering out there. Then a guy with a bullhorn
14 starts talking to them. This guy was good. Boy, you could just hear that crowd. He was
15 working them up big time. Within minutes when the door opened I just knew that I
16 wasn't looking forward to this. The guy comes and drags me out. This guy with the
17 bullhorn, he's talking and pointing to me. The crowd's going crazy. But, they formed a
18 line and it's kind of a tunnel that obviously I'm gonna have to go down. At the end of it is
19 this truck. I notice that there's another line of people ninety degrees to the line that I'm
20 looking at. So we start down the gauntlet and there's myself. They're pushing me down
21 to go down this path and then two guards behind me. This was the one time where I was
22 getting hit with sticks and a few rocks and things like that. The people were upset. When
23 I got to where the people—there was a line of people ninety degrees, there was Lou, Lou
24 Bernasconi, my radar.

25 LC: No kidding?

26 JY: Yeah. They're running him down that gauntlet. They ran us together to the
27 truck. So they're putting us in the truck and then they blindfold us. Just before they put
28 the blindfold on I could see that my gunner, my co-pilot, and my navigator were already
29 on the truck. So for the first time in about two hours I have something to be happy about.
30 I'm realizing that five of the six of us are alive. I have not seen the EW.

1 LC: John, what was it like when you first saw Lou when your eyes met? Do you
2 remember?

3 JY: Well, no, I don't, but I would imagine it was probably—we were probably
4 really scared about what comes next, but in a way relieved to see that each other was
5 alive.

6 LC: I'm sure you must've been.

7 JY: Yeah. I think it was kind of mixed emotions.

8 LC: John, had you assessed in the time that you were sitting and all the crowd
9 was gathering. Had you assessed how well you were, whether things were broken or
10 what—?

11 JY: Yeah. Yeah. I knew I wasn't seriously injured.

12 LC: Okay. What were your injuries? Can you say?

13 JY: Yeah. I had shrapnel injuries in both shins. Surprisingly, I had a bad bruise
14 right on the middle of my chest. I'm sure it was from the opening shock of the chute with
15 that metal belt on the parachute harness. That was really the extent of my injuries.

16 LC: So you didn't think anything was broken?

17 JY: No. No.

18 LC: That's astounding.

19 JY: Yeah, and as it turned out it wasn't because so many guys had seriously
20 broken arms, dislocated shoulders from the ejection. In fact, the majority of the guys up
21 there had—

22 LC: Shoulders broken, pelvises broken, just really horrendous.

23 JY: Yeah. Well, you know and Laura, my closing, not my closing, but another
24 mandatory comment that I make in all speaking engagements is if you have to be a POW,
25 and God forbid that you would, but if you find yourself as a POW I pray that you are as
26 fortunate as I was. I mean, think about it. Those guys were up there seven, seven and a
27 half years. I was there a little over three months. We lost ten B-52s in the Hanoi area. We
28 had about a fifty percent loss rate, about half the crew members survived. One crew, the
29 entire crew survived and came home. I mean, if you have to be—I had no serious
30 injuries. I mean if you have to be a POW you couldn't ask for better luck than I had.

31 Another thing that bothered me in the last couple weeks we were up there talking to some

1 of the other aircraft commanders and one of the things they were concerned—when it
2 looked like we might get to go home. One of the biggest concerns they had was the visit
3 they were gonna have to make to the wife or the parents of some of their crew members
4 that weren't around, that didn't make it. I was spared that. I didn't have to do that since
5 my entire crew survived.

6 LC: Just to clarify, this was the only crew throughout the B-52 runs—

7 JY: That was shot down and went down in the Hanoi area. There was a B-52
8 crew that made it back to Utapao. They crash landed, but some of them were killed in the
9 crash landing. In fact, there were only two survivors, the co-pilot and the gunner were the
10 two survivors on that airplane. John Mize, he got his airplane back into northern Thailand
11 and bailed out. They all bailed out successfully, but they were not POWs. They weren't
12 captured. They were back in Thailand.

13 LC: Of the B-52—

14 JY: Of the B-52s that were shot down in the Hanoi area and subsequently their
15 crews became POWs, mine was the only crew where the entire crew survived and came
16 home.

17 LC: That's just amazing.

18 JY: Oh, it is. I mean I was just so fortunate.

19 LC: The fact that you were able to account for all but one within the first day you
20 knew that they were alive is—

21 JY: Yeah that night. I mean as they're—

22 LC: I can't even believe it.

23 JY: They're taking us to Hanoi and I know that five of six of us are alive. That's
24 why I say for the first time in about three hours I had something good—that I felt good
25 about something. The ride, I'll tell ya, the ride to Hanoi was really—that was exciting.
26 They had the driver, one guy riding shotgun up front and that was it. They've got the two
27 guys up front and they've got the five of us in the back. Of course, we're tied up and—I
28 mean we're tied up and blindfolded. We're in the back of that truck.

29 LC: Are you talking to each other?

30 JY: No. What was it—I think there might've been one other guy in the back with
31 us because I said something once and I got hit with a gun butt. I thought, "Well, I guess

1 that means we're not supposed to talk." I couldn't see him. So I don't think we did talk
2 on the way in. I know that the road that we went in on must've been bombed a lot 'cause
3 you could feel we were having to go out in the boonies to get around I assume bomb
4 craters or something on the road. We did a lot of that. Every hamlet we'd come into you
5 could hear the people as we'd come into the hamlet. So they must've alerted them. Said,
6 "Hey, there's a truck coming in with some American POWs." Then these kids, they'd
7 jump on the truck and they were rocking it back and forth. I thought, "This truck—we're
8 never gonna make it to Hanoi. They're gonna turn this thing over and that's gonna be it."

9 LC: That must've been horrendously frightening.

10 JY: Oh, it was. It was.

11 LC: I mean just on tenterhooks not knowing what—

12 JY: Yeah. Yeah. This goes on—this is probably a two-hour ride because of the
13 roads and everything else. I don't think they ever got over five miles an hour. Anyway,
14 we finally make it to the Hilton. Still blindfolded when they take me off the truck. I
15 remember that when they took me to my cell there were about three steps going up to the
16 cell they put me in. This guy walked me right into these steps. So I fall down when I hit
17 the steps. Then they take me in the room. Put me on a stool and then this guy would hit
18 me with just an open hand across the side of the face. As long as I was tensed up he
19 didn't hit me, but as soon as I started relaxing then I'd get hit again. This went on for a
20 few minutes. I had to take a drink, Laura, here.

21 LC: Sure, John.

22 JY: Anyway, that went on for a few minutes. Then he left and I was in this cell. I
23 was in the solitary confinement for a week before they moved me in with some other
24 guys. This is the morning of the twenty-second of December, and December the twenty-
25 fifth, Christmas, there's no bombing. That's the other thing. Every night, of course, when
26 the BUFFs comes you can hear the bombs going off, being dropped. You hear the air raid
27 war, sirens. They had some woman that I think they were driving her around in a truck
28 around the Hilton there with a loudspeaker system on the truck. Obviously she was
29 telling the people, "You better get in your shelters because they're coming." I would
30 imagine they could give them plus or minus five minutes when the bombs were gonna be

1 falling. It was interesting to hear these bombs going off every night when you're in the
2 cell.

3 LC: Were you restrained in the cell?

4 JY: No. No.

5 LC: What did you do when you heard her going around and you figured out that
6 meant the bombs were about to fall? Did you just get on the dirt?

7 JY: No, I didn't. Not until the twenty-sixth. Then I sure as hell did because
8 everything was pretty far away from the Hilton. There weren't any bombs dropping close
9 to the Hilton until the twenty-sixth of December. Of course, twenty-fifth that's a big
10 stand down day. I mean would anybody, would SAC ever bomb anybody on Christmas
11 Day? Heavens no. There was a bigger reason. The BUFFs were getting tired. The
12 airplanes were in bad need of some serious maintenance. So they wanted the day to stand
13 down and get the airplanes fixed, but it also helped the North Vietnamese because they
14 were running short of SAMs. So they were able to truck in some more SAMs. The big
15 show was the twenty-sixth, the day after Christmas. That was the big show. That night,
16 some B-52 put a string of bombs in about two blocks from the Hanoi Hilton. I am sure
17 that it was not by design. I'm sure there wasn't any target there. It was just the guy
18 probably had a similar situation to what we had. Probably the airplane was either out of
19 control or he was doing something. About that time the radar was dropping the bombs.
20 That was really frightening. I mean, you've heard the stories about the people that have
21 lived through Arc Light strikes in Vietnam and how they describe it. It's all true. I mean I
22 just couldn't believe it. The plaster was falling out of the ceiling. Your comment about
23 what did you do? Now I'm back in the corner of this cell huddled in the corner with my
24 fingers in my ears just as deep as I can get them because it just felt like my ear drums
25 were going to rupture from the noise, but the concussion was what really got me. Over
26 the bars and the window were wooden shutters. Those things were banging back and
27 forth like they were made out of cardboard. I can remember vividly thinking, "How
28 ironic is this? I get hit. I bail out. I survive the bail out. I'm captured. I become a POW.
29 This is the way I'm gonna check out."

30 LC: I'm gonna be killed in a B-52 bombing.

1 JY: I'm gonna be killed in a B-52 strike, dropped by buddies of mine who I was
2 up there flying with three nights ago. I thought, "This is the irony of ironies." I just really
3 did think this was it. I thought, "Well, I guess God has a sense of humor." I could just
4 imagine God saying, "So, John, tell me would you rather be the bomber or the bombee?"

5 LC: John, let me ask you. We've got a few minutes left today, but let me ask you
6 about if you don't mind and if you feel able to say anything about this, about that first
7 week of being by yourself and presumably—well, you were by yourself with God, I
8 would think.

9 JY: Yep.

10 LC: Can you talk about anything that you can provide I think will be interesting
11 about your spiritual feelings during that time?

12 JY: Yeah. I hear ya. I hear ya. The one thing that I, and this is in reflection
13 looking back. I'm convinced that one thing that made it—I mean, let me make a
14 statement before and that is and this is another thing I always say at speaking
15 engagements. My experience as a POW, it's a compared-to experience compared to the
16 real POWs, the seven year guys. My POW experience was like a stroll in a park on a
17 Sunday afternoon. Compared to anything else that I've experienced in my life it was the
18 most trying thing I've ever been exposed to. So I like to put it in that context. It was
19 nothing compared to what those guys went through, but when I compare it to anything
20 else in my life experience it was the most stressful and demanding thing I think ever.
21 Now having said that and back to your question. I really do truly believe, Laura, that I'm
22 a pretty religious guy and I have very strong faith and belief in God. I think it really,
23 really helped me in that situation. One of the things that I remember specifically was
24 looking at Dave Drummond and Gary Morgan and Bill Mayall, the three kids on our
25 crew, and I thought this is terrible for these guys. At least we had our seven kids. We had
26 had a good life. I said, "I've had a good life. I've had seven kids. I've had a great life, but
27 look at these guys. They're just starting their lives and how terrible for them if this is it, if
28 this is the end. How terrible for them." So that kinda made it easier for me when I looked
29 at it from that perspective. Oh, Laura, you wouldn't believe the praying I did in that week
30 in solitary. I mean this was what I called real praying, not reciting the Our Father or the
31 Hail Mary, but this is—I can remember saying, "God. I'm not gonna be formal with this.

1 I'm in deep trouble here and I need some help." I also believe that I have a very, very
2 strong family network. I know there was a lot of praying going on for me. I've got to tell
3 you along this line of faith and God and belief, there's a guy named Dan Gantsky. He
4 was a Braniff pilot. He was a Southwest pilot. He and I flew B-52s. We went to B-52s at
5 the same time. We both flew F-86s before B-52s. This guy is from Schulenburg, Texas,
6 an A&M graduate. I mean, is this the typical Air Force pilot type?

7 LC: Oh, yeah.

8 JY: A&M, good old boy. He is the typical A&M guy, just a wonderful human
9 being, but Dan, at the time I got shot down was flying for Braniff and he was flying out
10 of DFW. Well, I guess DFW wasn't even here yet.

11 LC: Maybe Love.

12 JY: Out of Love, yeah. Anyway, he was stationed here living in one of the
13 suburbs between here and Dallas. Of course, he and his wife came over here immediately
14 when they got word that I had been shot down. Later, when I got home and Dan had a big
15 party for me at his house. He said, "John." He said, "When you got shot down the first
16 thing I did was call Jessie." I said, "Who in the hell is Jessie?" He said, "Jessie"—I can't
17 even talk about it. (becoming emotional)

18 LC: That's okay. You can take a breath, John. It's fine. Do you want me to stop
19 for a minute?

20 JY: No. Let me just compose myself here if I can.

21 LC: That's fine. Of course. Take your time, John.

22 JY: This guy Jessie was a friend of Dan's from Schulenburg, Texas, and he said,
23 "Any time anybody has a serious, serious situation, Jessie is kind of the designated prayer
24 at this little community. When people are in big trouble, they go to Jessie. I called Jessie.
25 I told him to pray for you." I think that's—Jessie and many others is what brought me
26 back.

27 LC: John, let's take a break there. Here we go. Go ahead.

28 JY: Okay. You ready?

29 LC: Mm-hmm.

30 JY: Yeah. The way Rose found out is the way most spouses find out when the
31 blue car pulls up in the driveway. Of course, she was hearing the news too. In fact—let

1 me put this on speaker, Laura, and then Rose can chime in because sometimes I get the
2 facts wrong.

3 LC: Okay.

4 JY: Okay. Can you hear me?

5 LC: Yes I can. Hi, Rose.

6 Rose Yuill: Hi, how are you doing?

7 LC: Very good. How are you?

8 RY: I'm fine.

9 LC: Any help you can give us here would be great.

10 JY: I think the way it played out, Rose, was you—what was it? On a Sunday you
11 had taken the kids in—

12 RY: We had gone out shopping just before Christmas.

13 JY: Yeah, but it was one—whatever kid's turn it was to go shopping, but anyway
14 while you were shopping you heard on the news that another B-52—

15 RY: There were two more that had gone down.

16 JY: Had gone down.

17 LC: Two more?

18 JY: Two, yeah. She had heard on the news that two more B-52s had gone down,
19 but I think that was all the information they had.

20 RY: All they said.

21 JY: I guess it was that night then, wasn't it? When the blue car came.

22 RY: Yes, at one o'clock in the morning.

23 JY: Yeah, it was one o'clock in the morning and all the kids were home except
24 for Susie, our oldest, was at somebody else's house. Well, I'll let her tell you. So the blue
25 car pulls up.

26 RY: Well, they sent a buddy of Jack's, supposedly, and a psychiatrist and a
27 priest, I think. So they knew we had a bunch of kids. They came in. All I asked was, "Is
28 he alive?" They wouldn't answer me. They said they had to read that stupid letter. So
29 they did and they asked me if there was anything they could do. I said, "Yes. Leave."

30 LC: You said, "Yes, leave."

1 RY: So I just wandered around the rest of the night 'cause one of my kids was
2 sick. The next morning I got up and went to Mass. When I came home then the whole
3 world was in my yard, all the commanders from the base and people I'd never heard of
4 that—

5 JY: Were Dan and Jean there then?

6 RY: No they were gone somewhere. They didn't get there 'til that afternoon.

7 JY: Oh, they didn't?

8 RY: They were here when we got the call that you were alive.

9 JY: Oh, okay.

10 LC: How long did that call take to arrive, Rose?

11 RY: It wasn't bad. It was about two or three in the afternoon and I had heard
12 about it at about one o'clock that morning. So it was just about twelve, thirteen hours.

13 LC: That was a pretty long thirteen hours.

14 RY: Yeah, but not compared to years.

15 LC: No. I know. I know. I recognize what you're saying and honor that you're
16 paying to the other families and POWs, and I certainly respect that.

17 JY: Laura, let me interject another war story here.

18 LC: Okay.

19 JY: There was a *Fort Worth Star Telegram* reporter by the name of Martha Han.
20 Martha Han was assigned this story. So she calls Rose. In the course of the interview she
21 asks Rose, "Well, Rose, what are you gonna do about Christmas?" This is the—what was
22 this?

23 RY: The twenty-third, twenty-fourth.

24 JY: Twenty-third, twenty-fourth of December. Rose said, "Well, we're gonna
25 have Christmas. You know, seven kids." The article that came out in the paper evidently
26 said, was along the line of, "Well, the wife doesn't seem too concerned about the fact that
27 her husband was shot down. May be dead and she said, 'We're just gonna go on business
28 as usual.'" Martha never got to talk to Rose again after that.

29 LC: I'll bet she didn't.

30 RY: Neither did anybody else.

31 JY: All you have to do is mention Martha Han and Rose comes up freak.

1 LC: Good for you, Rose. I think that was an appropriate response to that.

2 JY: I'll tell ya, Laura. Rose was—we were so fortunate. Just like I told you about
3 me, if you have to be a POW?

4 LC: Yes. Yes.

5 JY: Same with Rose. Like she said one o'clock in the morning she gets the word
6 and what two o'clock in the afternoon she gets a call from Randolph. The way they were
7 able to determine that I had been captured was that some of our people in Havana, Cuba,
8 saw a television broadcast and it showed pictures of the latest B-52 crew shot down. They
9 sent copies of that back to the Air Force here, to—I don't know if they went through the
10 OSI (Office of Special Investigations) or who it was, but anyway they got the word back
11 to the Air Force that they had positive proof that we had survived and that we were
12 prisoners of war.

13 LC: That they had done some, clearly someone had done some recognition as to
14 who it was that had been identified in the group photographs.

15 JY: These were individual shots.

16 LC: Oh, okay. Do you remember being photographed, John?

17 JY: No. I don't remember that picture that I saw. Now I've seen since I've come
18 home. I don't remember that picture being taken, no.

19 RY: They were horrible pictures. They looked like they had been in there for
20 about a year already.

21 LC: Oh, gee.

22 JY: We had a bad day, Rose.

23 RY: I know that.

24 LC: After what he has just described about having to bail out and that entire
25 process, I just can't imagine anything other than looking like you've pretty much been at
26 the gates.

27 RY: Yeah. Like Rose said, a lot of it had to do with what you lose in clarity on
28 the pictures being shown—keeps going through those different levels, but at any rate
29 the—I mean, it's difficult for me to imagine how Rose was able to press on with and keep
30 the family going because she didn't know what was happening with me. At least I knew

1 that I was okay, relatively speaking. So I think it was a much more difficult experience
2 for her than it was for me.

3 LC: Well, I mean it's a remarkable testament to both your own, each of you, your
4 personal integration and integrity and faith and also the strength of your relationship. I
5 think those pieces are what's so important that people understand. Again, acknowledging
6 that John was there for less time than others, but in some ways it makes it more
7 understandable because it's on a somewhat smaller scale, I think, when we talk about the
8 families of flyers who were incarcerated starting in 1965. I mean, it's almost
9 incomprehensible to me, anyway. It's just unfathomable.

10 JY: You can imagine what it would be like to try to pick up their lives again after
11 that many years separated. For us, in fact, my old crew, Laura, I was telling you about,
12 the crew I had before.

13 LC: Yes. Yeah.

14 JY: It just so happened that they were on the same cycle that we were. So they
15 went back in November like we did and they got home, what? A week or two before I
16 did?

17 RY: They got home afterwards.

18 LC: They got home later.

19 JY: Yeah. Their normal rotation brought them back two days after I got back
20 from jail. So that was kind of interesting.

21 LC: So you got the VIP speed return.

22 JY: That's right. I didn't have to fly all the time I was gone. I didn't have a flying
23 schedule. I lucked out.

24 LC: Well, Rose, thank you, thanks for participating. Let's take a break for today.

25 JY: Okay.

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Interview with John Yuill

Session [4] of [4]

Date: August 26, 2005

1

2 Laura Calkins: This is Laura Calkins at the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
3 continuing the oral history interview with Lt. Col. John Yuill, U.S. Air Force. Today is
4 the twenty-sixth of August 2005. I'm on the campus of Texas Tech in Special Collections
5 building and John is speaking by telephone from his home in the Fort Worth area. I'm
6 right in that, aren't I, John?

7 John Yuill: You are.

8 LC: Not on the other side of the Metroplex.

9 JY: No. This is where the west began.

10 LC: You're on the heavenly side.

11 JY: We're not on the urbane and sophisticated side.

12 LC: Right. You're on the heavenly side.

13 JY: That's right.

14 LC: Okay I got that. Okay.

15 JY: On the Texas Tech side.

16 LC: There we go. John, we talked last time in some detail about the flights that
17 you took in December of '72 and how you and your crew survived a quite remarkable
18 experience and sure as hell a frightening one. You also told us about the path that you
19 took from landing kind of hard on your legs, on your knees, to the center of Hanoi and
20 that when you first arrived at the Hilton, as they called it, you spent a week alone. John,
21 at what point did you see another American who was not a member of your crew?

22 JY: That would've been a week after I was—to the best of my knowledge. Now,
23 Laura, I've got to qualify that.

24 LC: Okay, sure.

25 JY: This is the way and, of course, my memory isn't the greatest in the world
26 anyway. With the time that has elapsed I find I get a little fuzzy on some of the details.

27 LC: That's fine.

28 JY: Here's the way I remember it. I don't know if I told you or not, but we got—
29 yeah. I do. I do remember telling you that I got to the Hilton late afternoon and being

1 blindfolded. They ran me into the stairs going up into the cell and slapped around a little
2 bit. At any rate, the next event was. It was sometime after dark. It was dark out. They
3 came, got me out of the cell, took me out in their courtyard at the Hilton. Threw me in the
4 back of this truck and laying next to me was Lou Bernasconi, my radar navigator. We
5 were able to talk just a little bit, but as I recall there wasn't that much conversation. We
6 were just kinda trying to bolster each other's morale and saying things like, "We'll make
7 it through this. We're gonna get out of here," and that kind of conversation as I recall.
8 Then I don't know if it was the noise or what, but I had the strong impression that we
9 were in downtown Hanoi which we probably were. They took us to what I would guess
10 was probably a hotel or a conference center or something like that. This is where they ran
11 me in front of the cameras. This was what the people in Havana saw on television in
12 Havana, Cuba. As a result of our operatives in Havana seeing that, relaying that data
13 back, and then that's when Rose got the call that I was a POW. What I remember and this
14 is why—the reason I'm going back on this is there probably were two or three other guys
15 that were BUFF guys or maybe even an F-4 guy or two that were there that they were
16 also parading in front of the cameras, but I don't remember specifically. I know that Lou
17 was there. He's the only one I specifically remember, but I would guess that there
18 probably were three or four other guys there, too. Anyway, the way that worked was they
19 briefed you on what they wanted you to say when you were on camera.

20 LC: Was there a special person who spoke to you evidently in English?

21 JY: Yes, right. I don't remember ever seeing that person again. I think that was a
22 one-time deal with that person, again as I recall. I know there were some back and forth
23 about what they wanted me to say and what I was gonna say. I remember there were
24 some back and forth on that.

25 LC: You mean between you and them?

26 JY: Yeah. Yeah. They'd say, "You will say this." I'd say, "No. I'm gonna say
27 this." There was back and forth on how that was gonna go. Any rate, we did that and then
28 they put us back on the truck, took us back to the Hilton. I completed the seven days in
29 solitary confinement. Now when they took me out of solitary and moved me across the
30 courtyard to another cell which had, I would say, six or seven people in it. This would be

1 the first time that I know for sure that I saw or communicated with someone other than
2 one of my crewmembers.

3 LC: Do you know who it was?

4 JY: You know, I'm not really sure who was it. I know, definitely I know that two
5 of my crew members were in that cell, Bill Connolly, my EW, and Bill Mayall, my
6 navigator. I'm just as sure there was only the three of us that were in that cell. Now who
7 the other three or four were, I get confused between who I was in that cell with and who I
8 was in the cell with later when they moved us to the Zoo. So I'm not really, really sure of
9 who those other people were in that cell. Again, I don't remember exactly who those
10 others were in the room. I know it was pretty cozy in there. It was just a single cell and
11 there were six or seven of us in there. We all had our pallets on the floor so when you had
12 to use the honey bucket you had to step over a few people. I remember that. We were
13 free—I mean we could talk all we wanted inside the cell. Now what they would do, of
14 course—they were constantly coming and pulling people out for interrogations. That
15 went on every day.

16 LC: What were the kinds of things that the folks who had already been there
17 wanted to know from you, John? I mean, did they want to know how the war was going
18 or did they want to know stuff about the States?

19 JY: You mean the other POWs?

20 LC: Yeah. The guys who'd been there longer than you.

21 JY: Okay. Let me explain, and again this is not firsthand knowledge, Laura, but
22 as I have heard it. When I was back here in Fort Worth for that thirty days of R&R before
23 I went back in October of '72, during that timeframe they brought a lot of the old heads
24 in from the surrounding camps that were out, like Son Tay was. Brought them all into the
25 city of Hanoi, put them in these big rooms in the Hilton, like fifty or sixty guys to a room.
26 When they were talking ceasefire they left some of the late shoot downs in with these old
27 heads. Talking to some of those late shoot downs, like Elander, Bill Elander, he was one
28 of them that they put in with them. Elander said, "Those guys wouldn't let you shut up."
29 In fact, he said one guy the way he briefed me was, he said, "All right." He said, "Just
30 start talking and when we want you to change the subject or we have a question we'll ask

1 it. You just start talking.” Then he said, “They were interested in anything and everything
2 that I had to say about everything.”

3 LC: I’ll bet they were.

4 JY: I can’t remember, I can not remember how long they allowed those new guys
5 to stay in with the old guys, but it was long enough to get them up to speed on what was
6 going on back in the States. I guess that really—talking to a lot of the old heads since,
7 they really, really appreciated that opportunity to pick the brains of some of the late shoot
8 downs so they could get up to speed on what had been going on since they’d been shot
9 down.

10 LC: I can barely imagine it.

11 JY: Our group, the BUFF guys, the B-5—the SAC guys, we had no direct contact
12 with the old heads. They had us—you know we were segregated by building, or not by
13 building, but by room in the Hilton. Well, I guess by building, too, because in the Hanoi
14 Hilton there were actually a series of smaller buildings in that complex. They had us
15 sorted by shoot down dates. We were not anywhere close to any of the old heads. The
16 only contact, the only contact we had with the old heads while we were in the Hilton and
17 this was indirect contact was it was the last night we spent in the Hilton. They were
18 moving us the next morning to the Zoo. I don’t know. I don’t think we knew. I don’t
19 think we had a clue that they were going to be moving us. I think it was one of those
20 deals where they just woke us up before daylight, told us to pick up our pallets and go out
21 and get on the truck. They hauled us across town to the Zoo. That night we were having
22 our evening meal, which was the normal cabbage soup thing with one exception. There
23 was one big difference and that was we had chunks of potato in this soup which we
24 hadn’t seen before. So we were all pretty excited about these chunks of potato in the
25 soup. This one young co-pilot, Paul Granger, we were eating our cabbage soup and Paul
26 made the comment. He said, “Hey, there’s something in this chunk of potato.” We said,
27 “Yeah, right Paul.” Well, there was something in that chunk of potato. There was a note
28 folded up very small where they’d sliced in this potato. The note, as I recall, said
29 something like, “Welcome to the Hilton. We’ll get the plums to you soon.” We didn’t
30 have a clue what plums were. “Keep the faith. GBU (God bless you).” That was about the
31 essence of the note. Of course, the next morning—oh, and there was one other thing. “If

1 you received this note scratch an R under one of the handles on the pot,” which we did.
2 Then early the next morning we were gone. We were out of there.

3 LC: Did you find out what the plum was?

4 JY: Oh, yeah. The plums were, really if you want to think of it as the rules and
5 regulations that we operated by up there. It was the senior POWs that came up with what
6 they called the plums and they were just directives on this is what you can do, this is what
7 you can't do. As it turned out they never got them to us, but that was the intent. Of
8 course, they moved us to the Zoo.

9 LC: GBU of course meant—

10 JY: God bless you.

11 LC: Sure.

12 JY: Yeah. So that was the indirect contact that I had with the old heads as far as
13 our group had. That was it.

14 LC: I mean, but that must've been pretty thrilling.

15 JY: Oh, it was. I mean, we wouldn't—at first we figured Granger was
16 hallucinating or just making it up. Then when he passed the note around we thought,
17 “Whoa! What is this deal?” You know, something I've got—I keep forgetting to do this
18 when I'm with the old heads. I've got to ask them how they got that note to us. The only
19 thing I can figure is that they were using some of the old heads in the kitchen there at the
20 Hilton.

21 LC: Oh, yeah.

22 JY: Probably that's how they got it in there. That's the only way I can think of
23 that they would've been able to get that note.

24 LC: Well, you're going off to a reunion aren't you, John?

25 JY: Yeah, but this is a B-52 reunion, not a POW reunion.

26 LC: Oh, B-52s. Oh, okay. Well, next time you are hanging around—

27 JY: Yeah, I will.

28 LC: Boy that would be an interesting story.

29 JY: Yeah, and if I find out something I'll give you a call.

30 LC: Yeah do. I'd love to know and include it here.

1 JY: Yeah, because—anyway that was the only contact with the old heads in the
2 Hilton and never had contact with the old heads. I didn't and I don't think any of the
3 others did, too, when we were at the Zoo because in the Zoo we were all over there
4 strictly by shoot down date. I think the oldest guys as far as shoot time in jail were less
5 than a year. Breckner, Bud Breckner and Kittinger and some of those guys I think had
6 been up there like eight or nine months. They were the senior rank—they were the
7 longest time guys in the Zoo.

8 LC: Many people listening to this will have studied the POW experience and will
9 know all about this, but for someone who doesn't have any reference, what was the Zoo?
10 Do you know where it was? How did you find out where it was and what it was called at
11 the time?

12 JY: Well, that's the only name I—to this day it's the only name I know it by.
13 Now the Hilton is the Hoa Lo. That's the Vietnamese name for it, but the Zoo. I don't
14 know what the Vietnamese name is for it. Zoo is all I've ever heard. Then they named
15 each of the buildings, too, just like they did at the Hilton. They have names for each of
16 the buildings in the Hilton and the Zoo which the POWs assigned to them. All I ever
17 heard was Zoo. I don't know if I heard it while I was up there. Probably not. It was
18 probably after I got back. When they said, "Oh, yeah. You were in the Zoo." Then—

19 LC: It kind of clicked in.

20 JY: Part of the camp was what they called the Zoo Annex which none of us were
21 in when they moved it. What I found out is this Zoo, it's on the—to answer one question
22 there, it's on the south side of Hanoi. I don't know whether it's southwest, southeast. I
23 think it's pretty close to the river, to the Red River, because it was from there that that
24 escape was made. The three of them escaped and they caught them the next morning on
25 the river bank.

26 LC: Did that happen while you were there or beforehand?

27 JY: No. No. No. That was way before I got there.

28 LC: But you heard about it while you were there, I'm sure.

29 JY: No. No.

30 LC: No?

31 JY: I didn't hear about it until afterwards.

1 LC: Right because there was no contact.

2 JY: One of them was Atterberry, Ed Atterberry. He was the guy that died. He
3 was the one that they tortured to death when they brought him back. The other one was
4 Dramesi. I can't remember who the third guy was that was involved in that escape, but
5 the other two—of course, Dramesi is still around and the other guy is still around. It
6 might've been George McKnight. I can't remember for sure. For some reason or other I
7 think it might've been McKnight, but I'm not sure of that. I know Atterberry was the guy
8 that they tortured to death. It was from the Zoo. They escaped from the Zoo. They were
9 in the Annex when they—so that was one of the buildings that we weren't in when
10 they—I don't know when they moved everybody out of the Zoo initially, like maybe '69,
11 '70 somewhere along in there. I think they moved them out, out to those smaller camps
12 around.

13 LC: Right. Dispersing them. Yeah.

14 JY: Then after Linebacker II, or yeah, after Linebacker II is when they took us
15 back out there because there was collateral damage to the camp. We spent quite a few
16 days cleaning up all the debris around the camp, on the camp, in the camp. So we were
17 the first ones to go back into it. In the Zoo—I was in the Pigsty. That's the name of a
18 building. That was the name of that building. I was in the endest cell. There were three or
19 four other guys in there with me. Dick Johnson was one. Sam Cusimano, my nav Bill
20 Mayall. Who was the other guy? A nav out of Mather. I don't remember his name right
21 now, but anyway that was the four or five of us and there were five or six rooms in that
22 building. Then there were four or five buildings. So there were around a hundred or more
23 prisoners in this camp and like twenty-five to thirty in our building, same as the other
24 buildings. The way it would work there, Laura, with that was most of the time we were in
25 our cells. So, the only people you were communicating with were the four or five people
26 in your cell, but they let us out, I think, for a couple hours a morning, a couple hours in
27 the afternoon. So you were able to communicate freely with all the rest of the guys in the
28 building.

29 LC: So in a common area?

30 JY: In a common area, yeah. The one thing that we could not do was
31 communicate with anybody in any of the other buildings. By that I mean, they wouldn't

1 let us mix with them, but we were communicating with them all the time with notes and
2 with the flash code, like the tap code only you did it—one guy would be in the window of
3 one building where he could see a guy in a window of another, of our building, and then
4 they'd use the flash code to go back and forth.

5 LC: Flashes from what? Your?

6 JY: Just with your fingers and making letters. You could make letters.

7 LC: Using the grid system.

8 JY: Mm-hmm. So that's the way we'd communicate. That was the way you
9 communicated with other buildings, but as I say, there was no problem at all
10 communicating with everyone within your building.

11 LC: The Vietnamese guards didn't seem to be too concerned about ya'll hanging
12 out there for a while and talking, being able to talk—

13 JY: No. That's something they allowed. They had no problem with that at all.

14 LC: That's interesting.

15 JY: Yeah. Yeah. They didn't have a problem with that.

16 LC: John, tell me a little bit about, if you can, the mood at the Zoo up there both
17 in your cell and then in these common times out, I gather, in a courtyard of some kind
18 when you could all be together.

19 JY: Yeah. I know that the mood I remember primarily was in that cell after I
20 came out of solitary when I was there for another three weeks at the Hilton before they
21 moved us to the Zoo. Most of the conversation then was—well, everybody kind of told
22 their shoot down story. I mean there were three of my crew. Like I said, my EW and my
23 nav were in there. So three of us were on my crew and then the other guys were on two or
24 three different crews. So everybody kind of told everybody else about their shoot down,
25 what they knew about it, what they knew if anything about the other crew members,
26 things of that nature. Then the course of the conversation was a lot about what's going
27 on. We knew, of course, when Linebacker II ended because we weren't having the air
28 raids and the bombs falling every night.

29 LC: Right. It got quiet.

30 JY: Yeah. It got quiet. So we knew the bombing was over which was a big
31 concern for us. We were concerned because it stopped. We were wanting it to go on. The

1 primary reason with me anyway and I can't remember if everyone shared this opinion or
2 not, but my take on it was the pattern that I'd seen from the time I'd started following the
3 Vietnam War in '65, '66 and then when I got personally involved in it, it was the same
4 pattern that occurred over and over again. That would be we would escalate the military
5 action. We'd escalate the bombing, the flying, whatever. Then they'd call cease fire and
6 we'd stop flying while they went to Paris and talked or something or they'd negotiate.
7 Then that would fall apart. Then we would gradually start the bombing campaign again
8 and it would just gradually build up and then finally it would get to a real high level and
9 then stop again, go back to negotiating. You just saw this cycle repeat a number of times.
10 So when the bombing stopped we thought, "Oh, no"—or I thought, "Oh, no, here we go
11 again. Now we've got to wait for all this negotiating period of time to go by. Then they'll
12 probably start resuming bombing and then we've got to go through that cycle again." I
13 thought, "Man, we'll be up here"—I knew some of those guys had been there six years,
14 seven years. I thought we could easily be here another six or seven years from the way it
15 appeared to us.

16 LC: That was a little demoralizing.

17 JY: Yeah. It was demoralizing in that we wanted to hear some more bombs
18 dropping because we felt that would bring a quicker solution to the war.

19 LC: Some people have found it really surprising that the guys who were being
20 held there wanted Hanoi, essentially, and the environs to be hit by the B-52s.

21 JY: That's one of the funny stories, funny. I use that word loosely. In talking to
22 the old heads, I thought the same thing. In fact, in my early speeches I used to cover that
23 point. I used to say, "You know, I thought after I'd been captured and after I was in
24 prison and in solitary I thought, 'Man, I wonder what these old heads are gonna—I
25 wonder how they feel about us SAC pukes coming up here and bombing the hell out of
26 Hanoi.' They're probably gonna say, 'What the hell are you guys doing? You know, we
27 haven't had too much trouble up here lately and now you're raising all kinds of hell
28 dropping these bombs in downtown Hanoi.'" Of course, as we all know now it was just
29 the opposite. They were just what you were saying. They were so excited. In fact, John
30 Flynn, the SRO (senior ranking officer), the senior ranking guy at the White House for
31 the dinner he told Nixon. He said, "When we heard that first night that the BUFFs came

1 to town and we realized those were B-52s,” he said, “I told all the guys in our cell. I said,
2 ‘Pack your bags. We’re going home. This’ll do it.’” They were ecstatic, too, that finally
3 we were bombing Hanoi because up until that time the only bombing of Hanoi was the
4 fighters would go in there once in a while, but that was it. The B-52s had never been
5 there before. So they were all excited. I’ve heard the stories from these guys about the
6 guards when that air raid siren would go off. They’d go running for the shelters. Here’s
7 all the POWs cheering and clapping and laughing. They said the guards used to say,
8 “You are crazy. You are crazy. You are going to die.” So any rate, it was a weird thing. I
9 can see where someone would say, “You’ve got to be kidding me. They wanted the
10 bombing to be going on when they were in a prison in this city and they wanted them to
11 be bombing the city?” Yeah, it is.

12 LC: It’s very revealing about the point of view of the guys that were there is a
13 very different point of view from everyone else’s.

14 JY: It is. I can see someone that would, not associated or affiliated or have any
15 idea they’d say “What is wrong with this picture. Something doesn’t mesh here.” They’re
16 probably thinking to themselves “If I were up there I wouldn’t want any bombs falling.”

17 LC: Not a B-52 strike.

18 JY: Yeah. Yeah. So that was kind of our concern.

19 LC: When it stopped you were concerned?

20 JY: Yes. Very concerned. In fact, another thing I think almost every speaking
21 engagement I have, Laura, I’d always tell people. I’d say, “You know if it would’ve been
22 like survival training was, when I went to Stead through survival training I had the worst
23 attitude you could ever have because I went in there saying—well, one reason I wasn’t
24 really interested in survival training was I was going into SAC and I knew what SAC’s
25 mission was. I said, “If we ever go to war, a nuclear war, I’m not gonna have to worry
26 about survival training because it’s all over anyway. I mean, if we drop that many nukes
27 on this planet Earth there aren’t gonna be that many places where you can survive
28 anyway.” So I was never concerned about survival. If I went on that mission I figured it
29 was a one-way mission anyway. So I had a bad attitude. When I went to survival school I
30 knew that it was only however long it was, eight days, nine days, whatever the period of
31 time was. I knew I was only gonna be out in the boonies for three or four days. I knew

1 that they were gonna try to simulate a POW camp, but I knew they weren't gonna really
2 hurt me because it's training. So I had the worst attitude of all going in there, but it did
3 make it easier for me to get through the training, but my comment has always been, "If
4 some North Vietnamese as they brought us into the Hilton would've said, 'All right,
5 Yuill. You're only gonna be here a little over three months. We're not gonna torture you
6 like we did the old heads and a little over three months you'll be out of here.'" Oh, that
7 would've been so much easier, that time in prison, if I would've known that I was only
8 there for a little over three months.

9 LC: You mean psychologically it would've been—

10 JY: Oh, it would've made all the difference in the world because probably one of
11 the most difficult things was not knowing. I was not very optimistic about our getting out
12 of there quickly for the reason that I just went in to some detail on. I saw this pattern
13 displaying itself one more time where we're gonna go through these stages. I could easily
14 see us being there another seven or eight years. I wasn't too optimistic, but if I would've
15 had some magic way of knowing that it was only gonna be for a little over three months it
16 would've made that stay so much easier, as you say, psychologically.

17 LC: Yes, the uncertainty—

18 JY: That was one of the big hurdles.

19 LC: Yeah, and as you've said it. It weighed things down.

20 JY: I think, and this is just John Yuill talking, Laura, but my feeling is and I'm
21 sure you've heard it before and I can't remember what the three groups are. I think it's
22 doctors, pilots, and there's one other—engineers. I think it's doctors, pilots, and
23 engineers who as a group are normally control freaks. They've got to be in control. So
24 you figure most of us up there were pilots. So I think one of the most difficult things for
25 all of us, I know it was for me, was where you feel like you're pretty much—that you
26 have a fair amount of control in what goes on in your life as a pilot. Now you're in a
27 situation where you have no control. That is kind of hard to deal with.

28 LC: Especially under these circumstances and so quickly.

29 JY: Particularly under those circumstances where you know they don't—they
30 don't have your best interest at heart. That, coupled with the fact that you have no
31 control, really made it difficult to deal with psychologically.

1 LC: How, John, did you get to a point or did you, how did others, do you know,
2 get to a point of acceptance of the uncertainty?

3 JY: Yeah. About the others I don't know. Here's what I did. The thing that I
4 think helped me more than anything else was my religious faith. I think that really was
5 the big crutch that brought me through. Coupled with that, the other thing was my
6 rationalization after being there for two or three weeks was, you know, if this does turn
7 out to be seven years or if I don't get back from here I've had a good life. You know, we
8 had all of our kids. We had our seven kids. I've had a good life. I sure as hell don't want
9 it to end now when they're just little, but still I've had a pretty good life. I looked at those
10 young guys that were—some of them just married. Some of them not even married yet
11 and I thought, "But this is a real bummer for these guys because they're just starting their
12 lives." So I felt that it was another compared-to thing. I compared my situation to theirs
13 and I thought, "I've had it pretty good. I'm more fortunate than they are, I'm sure."

14 LC: John, I'm looking through my notes. I don't seem to have it right away. How
15 old were you?

16 JY: Let's see. When was this? '72. So I was born in '34. So I was coming up—no
17 it was '72, so I was thirty-eight.

18 LC: Yeah. It's interesting how in the larger part the guys who were being held up
19 there, including the ones who had been there for many years, were not younger men.
20 They weren't in their twenties. These were experienced pilots with a full career already
21 behind them.

22 JY: Yeah. Yeah, they were.

23 LC: That comforted you in some way.

24 JY: Yeah. Well, it did.

25 LC: That's interesting.

26 JY: I really did when I compared it to them I thought, "I've been pretty
27 fortunate." Of course, I'm sure everybody that ends up there thinks "How in the hell did I
28 end up here. What am I doing here?"

29 LC: Yeah.

30 JY: Yeah and—

31 LC: Did—go ahead, John.

1 JY: Well, I look back on my flying career. I was never really interested in being
2 in combat. You know, everybody says, “That’s what you want to do and that’s what
3 you’re trained to do,” but I’d rather just do the Top Gun stuff. The rat racing and the dog
4 fighting, but we don’t shoot real bullets. It’s just play like whereas a lot of my peers, I
5 mean, they were dying to get in the war. A lot of it was career progression. It’s a lot
6 easier to make rank if you’ve been in a war. So a lot of them were being frustrated that
7 hadn’t been to Vietnam, but I had never had a desire to go. That’s another thing that I
8 rationalized with was I had almost an entire flying career. I’d been flying for many, many
9 years and never been in combat until two years before when I had my first tour in
10 Vietnam and then went back again. So it was only in the last two years there that it
11 caught up with me. I thought, “You know, the Air Force didn’t hire me and they haven’t
12 paid me for twenty years just so I could go out and have fun in one of their toys.” There
13 was a reason why they checked me out in these airplanes and let me fly all these training
14 missions. The reason was they might tap me one day and say, “John, we’ve got a war
15 going on and, by the way, that’s why we trained you, buddy.”

16 LC: You’ve got the skills.

17 JY: Yeah. Get your butt over there and do it. So I said, “You know, this is what
18 they trained me for. This is what I’m here to do.”

19 LC: Did you go through that rational kind of review of your career while you
20 were—I mean you had the time, I’m sure, to sit and think about these things.

21 JY: Yeah, well I’d even done it before I got shot down when I was over there the
22 first time. That’s the way I rationalized it was I said, “This is what they’ve trained me for.
23 This is what they’ve paid me for. So what’s your bitch?”

24 LC: Right. Right.

25 JY: I’ll tell you what. This is getting off track, Laura, but it’s kind of like I feel
26 about these Reservists and Guard people that say, “Hey, I just signed up for the free
27 education. I didn’t want to go war.” Well, hello? You think that the government’s just
28 doing this just out of the kindness of their hearts so you can be educated?

29 LC: Getting deployed is part of the bargain.

30 JY: Well, it’s a chance you take. I mean, I’m sure I know what happened with a
31 lot of them. They were going on—it’s kind of like buying a mutual fund or a stock.

1 LC: Right. Betting on the market.

2 JY: Well, they're looking at the history. They're saying, "You know the Guard
3 and the Reserves, those guys aren't called up very often except to help after a hurricane
4 or something. Shoot, I can go there and I'll go to training once a month and I get a free
5 education and all this stuff," but what they didn't count on, what they couldn't foresee
6 was that we were gonna get into a war that was gonna tap in heavily to the Guard and the
7 Reserve units. When you sign up, that's one of the things that you know up front is a real
8 possibility that could happen. So I think they just rolled the dice and said, "The odds are
9 I'm not gonna be called up, or I won't end up in combat so it looks like a good deal."
10 You can't fault them for that. The only thing I fault them for is when they start
11 complaining because they were called up. It's kind of the way I feel about people that get
12 caught speeding and they complain because of a speed trap. Well, wait a minute what
13 you're saying is you're upset because you got caught. You're not denying that you were
14 speeding. It's kind of the way I look at—that's the way I looked at it with me. I was
15 saying to myself, "You don't have a complaint. You've been flying airplanes now all
16 these years doing just what you wanted to do. So unfortunately you didn't quite make it
17 to the end of your career before you got caught up in a war." There again, I was different
18 than a lot of my peers because a lot of my peers that's what they had lived for was to get
19 in to combat, be in a war. I wasn't one of them.

20 LC: John, if I can go back to the survival training and your, as you say, bad
21 attitude, was there anything that you got out of that experience that you called upon once
22 you were actually down and in captivity?

23 JY: I can't—let me answer it this way. The survival school that I was telling you
24 about that I had such a bad attitude about, I can't remember anything there that helped
25 me, but I've got to tell you, Laura, one thing that happened that just totally blew my
26 mind. In the training, in survival school, when they simulated you being a prisoner of war
27 and what they were going on—now I went through this in 1960. This was BV, this was
28 before Vietnam. What they were going on was the Korean experience. I'm sure you're
29 aware of the harsh treatment that those Korean POWs received, but that's another story.
30 Where I'm going with this is, in the mock up of the prison camp and in the training they
31 were trying to get you into a mindset, I guess, of what it would be like to be a prisoner

1 and one of the things they did was play this what I thought was a Chinese record or a
2 Vietnamese record or whatever it was. It was this music that they played real loud. I've
3 read articles about that's one of the things that they did purposely in Korea was pipe in
4 real loud music in the cells. They played this and they just kept it on. It just played and
5 played and played. Okay, now we fast forward to my being in prison in Vietnam. They
6 had what we called the camp radio up there. They had little two-dollar speakers in every
7 cell and then the camp radio would come on in the evening with the news report. They
8 played that—I swear, Laura, it was the same record. Fortunately they didn't play it all the
9 time, but I couldn't believe it. I told the guys in the cell. I said, "My God, that's the same
10 damn record they played at Stead in survival school. What is going on here?"

11 LC: It was almost like they were trading secrets.

12 JY: Yeah. Were they? How did that ever happen?

13 LC: Was it really obnoxious and irritating?

14 JY: It was okay for the first five or ten minutes, but after a couple of hours you
15 just wanted to climb the walls. You know, shut that stupid thing up. I couldn't believe
16 how similar it was.

17 LC: That's wild.

18 JY: Now back to your question. The survival school that I got a lot of good out of
19 was the one in the Philippines. This was what they called the "snake school" that you
20 went through just before you went into Vietnam. If you were assigned to Vietnam you
21 went to this survival school in the Philippines.

22 LC: So you would've done this right before your first tour?

23 JY: Right before—that's correct. In fact, I did it—that would've been in the
24 spring of '70 because we put the B-58s in the bone yard in January '70. Then I went
25 through the 130 school in Little Rock and in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and then right
26 over to Taiwan, on the way through this survival school in the Philippines. What was
27 very useful there was the POW part of the training they said, "We have gotten word back
28 from POWs that are in Vietnam. They have told us that name, rank, and serial number
29 isn't cutting it. So you can go beyond name, rank, and serial number and we're here to
30 help you based upon some of the information that we've gotten out from prisoners up

1 there on what works and what doesn't work. What you can talk about and what you can't
2 talk about." That was very useful information to have, very useful training.

3 LC: Do you have any recollection of what the parameters were?

4 JY: I do not. Generally, the parameters were you don't give them any tactical
5 information about what your unit's doing or what's going on or what's planned out or
6 anything about the tactics that you employ. That is stuff you don't talk about. They said,
7 "If they want to talk about the SAC organization," or they would say your organization.
8 "If they want to talk about how the military is organized or structured, that's something
9 you can talk about because that's general information that's available anywhere." So it
10 was things like that. That was the general type parameter—what they were saying
11 essentially was "If you think it's sensitive information and we're gonna give you some
12 guidelines on what would be sensitive and what isn't. Then you can use your judgment."
13 Now their position was you stick to name, rank, and serial number as long as you can, but
14 what they're telling us is "That's not gonna cut it. You're gonna have to have a fall back
15 position and that's what we're here to help you with is if you get to that fall back position
16 this is what you want to do."

17 LC: How much time do you think they spent on that particular part of it?

18 JY: That I do not remember. It seems to me when I think back about it not nearly
19 as much as I wish they would have, but that's probably because while I'm sitting there in
20 jail trying to make decisions I'm thinking, "God I wish they would've spent more time on
21 this."

22 LC: Right. "What did they say?" But you got the kernel of it, which was that you
23 were empowered or authorized to say a little bit more than—some press release kind of
24 thing you might be able to say.

25 JY: Yeah. In fact, I thought it was really interesting. Had breakfast one morning
26 with Robbie Risner. We were back for a rewrite of the Code of Conduct a few years after
27 we got back. I guess nine or ten years after we got back. They had a few from each shoot
28 down group back up at the Pentagon for the rewrite. I just happened to be involved in
29 that. I ran into Risner one morning at breakfast and just he and I—fascinating man.
30 Fascinating guy. Any rate, he was telling me about his experience. I'm sure you've
31 probably read about it where they broke him. He told me. He said, "I was confident they

1 couldn't break me." He said, "I just knew they couldn't." He said, "But they did." He
2 said, "That's the critical point. That's where it's critical is how"—he said, "Because they
3 can break anybody." He said, "But the critical thing is how do you respond to being
4 broken? Do you just say 'That's it and I'll give them anything or I'll do anything?' Or do
5 you still manage to resist even though they've broken you?" He said, "That's the
6 important part." That was kind of the thing I guess they talked to each other about all the
7 time up there was the bounce-back theory. That we can still resist even though they've
8 broken us. We can still resist. So that was his point which I thought was pretty
9 interesting.

10 LC: He's quite a wise man.

11 JY: Yes, he is. Yeah, and boy he is one tough guy. I mean if they can break him,
12 he's right. They can break anybody. They can break him.

13 LC: Were you aware of his presence anywhere while you were there?

14 JY: No. No. Didn't have a clue.

15 LC: Who did you understand at least at the Zoo was the senior officer? Was it
16 John Flynn or was it someone else?

17 JY: No, Flynn was never at—well, I should not say never at the Zoo. That's an
18 interesting thing, Laura. I've found out in talking to these old heads. Those damn guys,
19 they rotated them through all the camps, I think, because you talk to these six and seven
20 year guys, they were in almost every camp up there at one time or another. So I started to
21 say, "Well, Flynn was never at the Zoo." He probably was at sometime or another he was
22 probably there. He wasn't there when I was there because if you recall when I said the
23 way they segregated us.

24 LC: Yes.

25 JY: At the time I was there the guys that were the longest as prisoners were
26 probably less than a year, but our SRO, our senior ranking officer at the Zoo when I was
27 there was Joe Kittinger. Have you heard of Joe?

28 LC: Only generally by name. What can you tell me about him?

29 JY: Here's what I can tell you about Joe Kittinger. I can't accurately tell you the
30 time, Laura, but probably ten or fifteen years ago there was a guy who went across the
31 Atlantic Ocean solo in a hot air balloon and landed—he was planning to land in Scotland.

1 He overflowed Scotland, came down I think in Italy somewhere. It was Joe Kittinger. This
2 guy—

3 LC: Seriously?

4 JY: Remember what I was telling you about how I felt about going to war?

5 LC: Yeah.

6 JY: Joe was the other end of that spectrum.

7 LC: He was all over it?

8 JY: He was George Patton reincarnated. I mean he loved it. In fact, that was kind
9 of the sick joke among us up there. Every time things would settle down and be fairly
10 quiet in camp, Joe couldn't stand it. He'd start rattling the camp commander's cage or
11 start something up and get the guards all cranked up again. He was something else, that
12 guy. Quite a character.

13 LC: What did he fly?

14 JY: F-4s.

15 LC: What communication did you have with him?

16 JY: Indirect. I never really talked to him directly because he was in a different
17 building than I was in, in the Zoo, but I knew that he was the SRO. I knew he was the
18 senior ranking guy in the camp. For the short time we were up there, we really didn't
19 have that much in the way of structure and organization. I mean, the thing I remember
20 most, Laura, is that we strict—we did adhere to the fact that the only prisoner that would
21 talk to the camp commander was our senior ranking officer, which was Kittinger. So
22 Kittinger was our spokesperson. That used to drive them crazy. They hated that. That's
23 what they tried to break down. Their pitch was "You are all equal up here. It's not like
24 back where you came from where a senior officer is in charge. Here you are all equal."
25 There is no rank and because we wouldn't adhere to that that used to just drive them up a
26 tree. They'd get so mad. Particularly the camp commander. I can see why he didn't want
27 to talk to Kittinger, but at any rate. So I knew that, but it was only after—he and I went to
28 War College at the same time. That's when I really got to know him after we came home.

29 LC: If you can say anything about it, John, how did the Vietnamese guards try to
30 break down the sense of rank and order that you guys were maintaining?

1 JY: The guards really, the guards—I misspoke there. It wasn't the guards that
2 were really the ones. It was the interrogators and what I call the political briefers or the
3 ones that were trying to get you to see the errors in the way of our democratic society and
4 why a communist country was much better and better for the people. So whatever you
5 would call the political—

6 LC: So the propagandist guys?

7 JY: Yeah. Yeah. The ones that—they were the ones that were mostly concerned.
8 The guards, they got it down on a personal basis. They just didn't want any trouble from
9 you. That was kind of where they were at. The others, the interrogators, the staff, the
10 camp staff, they were the ones that were concerned and really frustrated with how
11 organized we were.

12 LC: Would they try, essentially, try to knock you around a little? I'm not trying
13 to be facetious.

14 JY: You mean physically?

15 LC: Yeah.

16 JY: No, they really didn't with us. We never had any physical—the only physical
17 thing I had was that first day when they slapped me around some and there were a lot of
18 threats. They were threatening all the time, but really physically, speaking again for
19 myself, they didn't do anything to me and I haven't run into any of the other SAC guys
20 that said they did anything to them.

21 LC: The propagandist briefers, would they get you alone? What would be the
22 process? They would try to get you alone and then—

23 JY: Yeah. Yeah. I can't remember ever being in a group setting. It was almost
24 always one-on-one and they were good. I mean they were really good. Their approach
25 was honey rather than a hammer. They would try to appeal to your reason and they were
26 very engaging. You really kind of liked them the way they came on. They were just very
27 pleasant people the way—they were pushing their agenda. It was the interrogators that
28 would get so emotional when you'd give them an answer they didn't like or something
29 like that. They were the emotional ones, but the political guys, they were pretty good.

30 LC: They were pretty smooth.

31 JY: Yeah. They were. They were good.

1 LC: How was their English? How good were they in terms of communicating
2 with say idiom and colloquial usage and all that?

3 JY: Again, the political ones their English was just about perfect, really, really
4 good. Interrogators it ran the gauntlet. Some of them were pretty good. Some of them
5 were marginal. With the guards even the best were kind of marginal. Some of them were
6 barely understandable. So it really kind of was a rank type thing depending upon what
7 their role was as to how fluent they were in English.

8 LC: At the Zoo, John, did you have your own experiences with interrogators and
9 anything you can say about that? What method were they trying to use? Like repeating,
10 screaming or—?

11 JY: No. No. Not much screaming. I don't remember much screaming except in
12 the early days. The first few or four days I was up there a lot of screams and threats then,
13 but of course that's when the information would be most meaningful to them.

14 LC: Yes. Tactical information.

15 JY: Yeah, that's right. Tactical information which they might be able to utilize.
16 After that, once you got through that then it was almost all general stuff. One I remember
17 particularly and this was while I was still at the Hilton, too. What was kind of neat about
18 this was when they'd take someone out for an interrogation, of course when the guy
19 would come back into the cell he would debrief everybody else in the cell. We would tell
20 each other what our interrogation was about, what they wanted to know, what we told
21 them. This one day, this guy, and this was Dick Johnson, they wanted to know about the
22 air divisions in SAC, the SAC air divisions. You'd have to know Dick Johnson to
23 appreciate this, but he just had a hell of a sense of humor. I guess he was feeling a little
24 frisky this particular day. So he told them about the Cosmic Air Division. I think you can
25 figure out from the name that there was no such thing. He spent the whole interrogation
26 period giving them all kinds of specific information about the Cosmic Air Division. I
27 think he kind of gave them the impression that it was like a black organization and there
28 wasn't much information that most people knew about it, but because he was such an
29 important person he happened to have, privy to all this stuff.

30 LC: Which they had never heard of before.

31 JY: That's right.

1 LC: This was gonna be a breakthrough.

2 JY: Evidently this interrogator took the bait and ran with it because the next day
3 and I don't even remember who it was, but whoever they took out for interrogation they
4 came back, threw him in the cell, he locked the door, the guard walks off, and this guy is
5 rolling on the floor laughing. We thought the guy's lost it.

6 LC: Right.

7 JY: He has lost it. We said, "What in the hell is wrong with you?" He said, "You
8 will never guess what this interrogation was about." We said, "What?" He said, "The guy
9 starts off, 'You will tell me everything you know about the Cosmic Air Division.'" So we
10 had three or four days of play on the Cosmic Air Division.

11 LC: I can't really think of anything that would probably have been as good for
12 morale as that.

13 JY: Oh, the other thing that was almost as good was—remember I told you about
14 the camp radio?

15 LC: Yeah.

16 JY: That damn camp radio. I'm sure it was set up as a psychological tool to
17 discourage us. It could've been an effective tool, but they were so stupid in the way they
18 utilized it. For example, in the early days, the first few days, they were talking about how
19 many B-52s they were shooting down. They ended up shooting down more B-52s than
20 were ever built and they built some, like seven hundred of them. They had shot down
21 more than that. So they were so off the wall with their stuff that it got to be comic relief.
22 We kind of looked forward to the evening news because it was gonna be just so
23 ridiculous.

24 LC: You'd get a chuckle out of it.

25 JY: Yeah. Yeah. So what it ended up being was a morale builder instead of a
26 morale depressor, if you will. The other thing that I need to tell you about was probably
27 my most—what's the word I'm looking for—unusual, yeah, I guess unusual
28 interrogations I had was go in this one day for interrogation. It started off just like any
29 other interrogation. This interrogator told me that "We are going to have a special
30 interrogation today. We are bringing in one of our MiG pilots to question you about your
31 B-52." So in comes this MiG pilot. He speaks no English so everything's having to go

1 through the interrogator. The upshot of it was the MiG pilot wanted to know about the
2 heat deflectors on the B-52. That's something we do not have on the B-52, but having
3 heard the Cosmic Air Division story a couple of months earlier from Johnson, for some
4 reason or other that just clicked in with me. I thought, "Well why not? What the hell?" So
5 somewhere in the archives in Hanoi, Laura, are drawings of heat deflectors on B-52s. I
6 gave them all this stuff about how they work, where they're located on the airplane, the
7 whole nine yards. So somewhere up there is a portfolio on heat deflectors on B-52s.

8 LC: Invented by John Yuill.

9 JY: Invented by John Yuill, yeah. See, one of the things that made it relatively
10 easy in the interrogation process was they didn't have enough basic knowledge of our
11 organizations or what we do. They couldn't really tell. Now they had a real good
12 technique which, again, thank heavens they covered in that snake school in the
13 Philippines. They said, "One of the ways, what we have heard from the old guys up there,
14 one of the techniques they really like to use is in your first initial interrogations they're
15 gonna ask you questions to which they already have the answers. That is to prove to you
16 that they know when you're lying and when you aren't." That's exactly what happened to
17 me in the first couple of interrogations. I was giving them bad information and they were
18 coming up with the correct answer every time. That is kind of intimidating when they can
19 do that, but having just gone through the school a couple years before that and to myself
20 "I'm thinking, my God they're right on the money here. That's exactly what they said
21 they would do and that's what they're doing." It was one of those things that after a
22 couple weeks then that didn't happen anymore. They had already gotten their message
23 across and then they just hoped or assumed that you would give them the correct
24 information because they were hoping or assuming that we would say, "Well, they know
25 the answer anyway."

26 LC: Right. That you would continue down the path.

27 JY: Yeah. That's exactly right. "We've got our message across that we know
28 when they're lying and when they aren't." Of course the opposite was just true. We found
29 out very quickly you could tell them about anything and they were clueless as to whether
30 it made sense or sounded logical or not.

1 LC: I mean that's really very interesting because it suggests that at this point
2 were not getting a lot of outside technical information.

3 JY: Which I don't think they were. Now which brings up another—which to me
4 is a fascinating story, Laura. It's kind of off the beaten path and that is that remember this
5 change in the Code of Conduct thing I told you about at the Pentagon?

6 LC: Yeah.

7 JY: Where I spent some time with Robbie?

8 LC: This was in the '80s at some point?

9 JY: Yeah. It would've been—well, it was probably—no that would've been '76,
10 '77, '78, somewhere in there.

11 LC: Oh, okay.

12 JY: Somewhere in that three-year time zone. Probably more like '76, '77. Any
13 rate, one of the things that came up in this conference was I remember vividly this guy
14 that was on staff at the Pentagon, a civilian, but he had been an interrogator in World War
15 II. His comment to me, of course I'd told him essentially what I've been telling you about
16 not being tortured or anything else, how the thing went. He said, "You know, one of the
17 things that just kills me about this war was how much torture and suffering you guys,
18 your old heads, went through protecting information that was meaningless." He said, "It's
19 just terrible that they went through all that." There were other ways they could've
20 handled that. He said, "One thing that I learned early on when I was interrogating
21 German POWs," he said, "What you look for, but very seldom find, but you do
22 occasionally find the open collaborator. You will find one that's anxious to tell you
23 everything they know." He said, "They are few and far between." Just to the extent that
24 you can just about eliminate them. He said, "The other thing I found out was the ones that
25 ultimately I came to the conclusion that the ones I had the biggest problem with were the
26 talkers. The ones that would talk to you and talk to you, but you had to spend so much
27 time trying to determine what was useful and what wasn't. When were they lying to you?
28 When weren't they?" He said, "I found the quickest way for me to get useful information
29 was to break a guy and then right after you broke him was your best chance to get valid,
30 useful information." He said, "So as a result of that I'm a proponent that you let them talk
31 to them," within the parameters kind of like they taught us at survival school. He said,

1 “Just let them talk because that causes an interrogator more problems than you’d believe
2 in trying to sort through the stuff and determine what’s useful and what isn’t.” He said,
3 “Now I’m not suggesting open collaboration. What I’m suggesting is that you just give
4 them a little bit of truthful information here that’s meaningless and then feed them some
5 stuff that’s totally off the wall that’s a total lie and then let them sort through all of it
6 trying to find out what’s right, what’s valid, and what isn’t.” I always thought that was
7 kind of an interesting view of things.

8 LC: It is. So that they have to—essentially you’ve forced them to devote a bunch
9 of resources to sorting everything out.

10 JY: Yeah. That was his point. He said, “It wasn’t time effective. It wasn’t
11 effective use of my time.” He said, “I was better served just to break them and then that’s
12 when you were gonna—if you were gonna get useful information that was the quickest
13 and easiest way to get it.”

14 LC: It would happen at that crisis moment.

15 JY: Yeah. That’s right. That’s right. He said, “That was better than trying to sort
16 through all the trash that some talker’s gonna do with you.” He said, “The ones that really
17 chatted it up a lot were eventually the ones that took a long time.” He said, “You might
18 ultimately get something useful from them, but it took a long time to do it.”

19 LC: It’s interesting, John, because of course these issues of how interrogators
20 ought to proceed and what the boundaries are and this is all very current.

21 JY: Yeah with Gitmo.

22 LC: And Abu Ghraib.

23 JY: Abu Ghraib. Yeah, you’re right.

24 LC: All these issues are on the front burner. Do you have any observations about
25 those issues?

26 JY: Well, it’s interesting. I noticed that most of the old heads are saying, “Name,
27 rank, serial number. You don’t give them anything. That’s the only way to go.” I can see
28 why they say that because that’s what they did. I kind of agree with the guy, this
29 interrogator in World War II. I think you might be better served sometimes to just feed
30 them some stuff and let them sort it out. I don’t know.

31 LC: It’s a tough one.

1 JY: It is a tough one and who knows. The other thing that I've always felt and
2 you'd be a better a judge of this than I am, Laura, is I always felt a reasonable person—I
3 mean if they see something in the paper. "John Yuill says North Vietnamese are very nice
4 people. He is getting wonderful treatment blah, blah, blah." Would a reasonable thinking
5 person not question something that some statement that someone would make that was a
6 prisoner of war? Would they really believe that this was something the guy is truthfully
7 saying?

8 LC: Right. It's obviously coerced. Everything—

9 JY: That's what I mean. I mean, how valid is something that a prisoner is saying?
10 I guess where I'm going with this is because a lot of the old heads, and God love them,
11 who went through so much torture to keep from writing something that's saying, "I
12 bombed civilian targets," or something like that and they tortured and tortured them. I
13 mean, my feeling always was I'm not suggesting that you do that, just give it to them, but
14 if you're getting the hell beat out of you, if they're threatening your life, I think, my
15 thought would be tell them whatever they want to hear because most reasonable thinking
16 people are gonna say, "Come on. That was obviously beat out of them. That's something
17 they didn't really mean. That's just something they were forced to say."

18 LC: The actual political utility of the statement is nil in some ways.

19 JY: That's my—

20 LC: Those guys, as you say, they were in pretty tough straights.

21 JY: I'll tell you another thing about those guys. See, because of the resistance
22 they put up, because of the problems they encountered and like Robbie and his story to
23 me and there's so many—well, there's so many of them up there. I mean so many of
24 them will tell you that "Yeah, I was broken and I didn't think I could be. It was how I
25 reacted after they broke me that I was still able to resist." The moral of the story there in
26 my opinion is that, yeah, they can break you, but how you deal with it afterwards—oh, I
27 know what the other thing I wanted to point out, Laura, was, because of their strong
28 resistance, their refusal to sign any of those statements, that then in turn when they got
29 the word out back that that was happening, that's what made it easier for us, the late
30 shoot downs, but it did cause a problem because some of those old heads they didn't
31 realize that the information they got back to the United States was being utilized in

1 training, in survival school, so that the rest of us wouldn't have to go through all they
2 went through, but when they saw us answering questions in interrogation they said,
3 "What the heck? Why are you doing this?" "Well, because of the word you got back to us
4 about what goes on up here and how it works." So in a way because we didn't have it as
5 rough was primarily due to what those guys did. When they went in it was name, rank,
6 and serial number. They didn't have the benefit of the training we had years later which
7 was only because of what they had told us or what'd they told the country.

8 LC: John, did that set up any tensions? Was there a feeling that they were being
9 undercut or did they understand that because of the intelligence that had been provided
10 you guys had been issued different orders?

11 JY: I think that once they understood why we were doing what we were doing
12 there was no problem with it at all. I'll tell you where they had a problem, and I never can
13 remember those guys' names, but there were two guys up there. I think one was a
14 Marine, one was Navy. Boy, those guys—now they were open collaborators with the
15 North Vietnamese. They caused a lot of torture of their fellow POWs. They were just bad
16 guys.

17 LC: Were these guys at the Zoo?

18 JY: Yes. I know one of them was. I don't know if both of them were, but I know
19 one was. They were, I think they were late shoot downs. Eldon Miller, I think, was the
20 name of one. I can't remember, but anyway. Man, I'll tell you what. Those two guys are
21 lucky to be alive because one of the big things that happened when we got back, a lot of
22 these old heads really wanted Nixon to hammer those guys. I think there were about
23 seven or eight of them that were open collaborators.

24 LC: Total over the period?

25 JY: Yeah. They wanted them hammered. Nixon was the one that finally said
26 "No." He said, "Nothing has brought this country back together like you guys coming
27 home." He said, "I don't want to open up a can of worms now by prosecuting these
28 guys."

29 LC: For treason or—

1 JY: Yeah, and that's what these senior POWs wanted. They wanted them to go
2 after them and just nail them. Nixon was the one that nixed it. Pardon the pun. A lot of
3 them were really bitter about that, really bitter.

4 LC: Do they, to your mind, still hold an animus toward the president because of
5 that?

6 JY: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. In fact, I'll tell you, Laura, for the first four or five years
7 after we came home I was expecting any day to read in the front page of the paper,
8 "Former POW mysteriously murdered." That's what I thought was gonna happen cause I
9 figured, man some of them were so upset they were gonna go after them. Since Nixon
10 wouldn't do anything they were gonna take it on in their own hands to do something.

11 LC: Now some of those guys would presumably—I mean certainly probably
12 went through the same debriefing and medical procedures that you guys all had to go
13 through.

14 JY: Oh, yeah they did. Yeah.

15 LC: So you would see them?

16 JY: Yeah.

17 LC: I mean not your personally, John, but they would be seen by the guys who—

18 JY: Yeah, and I don't know how that went. That is an interesting question, Laura.

19 LC: I can only imagine.

20 JY: That would be really interesting to talk to some of the guys that came back
21 on the same airplane that they did and how they went through—when they went through
22 the three days at Clark and how that worked out. I know one thing. They don't come to
23 any of our reunions.

24 LC: Oh, God, I'll bet they don't. Are they all still around as far as you know?

25 JY: Yeah. I know one of them is in California, and I think that guy's name is
26 Eldon Miller. It's something like that. He was either Navy or Marine. Yeah, in fact there
27 was some kind of a commercial or something that he did for Kerry in last year's
28 campaign.

29 LC: Oh, boy. Really?

30 JY: Yeah. He's still an item of interest with a lot of those old heads because of
31 the grief that he brought to them that they brought to them. Anyway, that was just another

1 interesting aside. I have never had one—and I've had a fair amount of contact with the
2 old heads now since I've gotten back. I've never had one ever bring up the subject about
3 what we did or didn't do as far as resistance goes. The other thing that I was mentioning
4 about one of my big fears was having survived shoot down and being in jail was what
5 was gonna happen when those TAC guys got a hold of me and said, "Why did you
6 disrupt everything up here?" Of course, we, almost all those old heads, we the SAC guys
7 are the heroes. They just think the world of that we flew the B-52s into Hanoi and that
8 they're convinced that's what brought them home.

9 LC: You know, John, how do you take that? I mean, I know just from what
10 you've said that you're a pretty modest guy.

11 JY: Well, they—like Ken Cordier is a guy that's very active. In fact, he was in
12 one of the Swift Boat ads here last.

13 LC: Mm-hmm. I remember.

14 JY: Yeah. Cordier is a real good troop. He was a six or seven year guy. Every
15 year at the Randolph—are you familiar with the Freedom Flyer thing?

16 LC: I am, but go ahead and just outline it briefly if you would for someone
17 listening who might not be.

18 JY: Okay. Well, the Freedom Flyers this thing what they used to do in-country
19 when you flew your last combat mission. They'd meet you when you landed, hose you
20 down with water in water hoses on fire trucks and everything. Take you to the club if
21 there was a club wherever you were flying out of which most places there were. Get you
22 bombed out of your mind and throw you on the Freedom Flyer the next day taking you
23 back home. That was what they called the freedom flight was your last flight.

24 LC: Out of the country.

25 JY: Out of the country, out of Vietnam. That's the way you left Vietnam after
26 you flew your last combat mission. Well, of course, all of us never got that ride at our
27 home base because our tour was interrupted. So somebody in the Air Force had that
28 brilliant idea. They said, "Hey, you know we ought to do something like that for those
29 guys and give them their freedom flight." That's when they started the T-38 rides at
30 Randolph and take up two or three of us returnees every year. I got my ride in '91. At any
31 rate, that was the Freedom Flyer program. Where I was going with this, we put on a—this

1 started about eight or nine years ago where they set up a symposium in the base theater at
2 Randolph when we have our annual reunion. There's about six or seven of us that talk for
3 about fifteen minutes each about a certain segment of the POW experience. Like Risner
4 usually talks about leadership, the leadership qualities that are needed in a POW
5 situation. Somebody always talks about the Son Tay Raid. Somebody talks about the
6 Hanoi March, downtown Hanoi. Of course, you know what I always talk about is
7 Linebacker II. So I'm usually the last one on the program and usually I follow Risner.
8 Cordier is the master of ceremonies. So he does a brief intro of each of us as we come up
9 to do our pitch. Now in the last few years I always thank Cordier for having me follow
10 Robbie Risner.

11 LC: Yeah, I'll bet.

12 JY: Yeah like thank you very much, Cordier.

13 LC: That's a tough act to follow.

14 JY: Yeah. How do you follow this? The other thing and it gets back to what you
15 asked me about how do I handle it. I have and I always have, I always say—I told you
16 earlier about the deal about the difference between what I consider the real POWs and
17 myself. You know the real POWs were the guys that were tortured that were up there
18 seven years. Then there are the guys like us that were there for three and a half months
19 and not really tortured. I mean, there's no comparison. It's night and day. Well, they
20 don't like to hear that.

21 LC: "They" being the old heads?

22 JY: The old heads, yeah. They don't want to hear that, but I always close in the
23 symposium when I finish my talk I always say, "I just consider it a privilege to be a
24 member, to be a part, of an organization." I said, "By that I mean to be associated with,"
25 and I use the term, "the real POWs." Then Cordier when he comes back on he always
26 chastises me. He said, "We go through this every year." He said, "If you're up there a day
27 you're a real POW." He said, "John is certainly a real POW." If you really think about it
28 there is no comparison. I think we all know that. I know it. They know it, but it's very,
29 very generous of them to have accepted me as openly as they have because they just treat
30 me like I'm a seven-year guy. I think primarily the reason they do is because I just
31 happened to be flying the BUFF and they really do feel that's what brought them home.

1 LC: It was the Linebacker II attacks.

2 JY: Yeah.

3 LC: Yeah.

4 JY: I think this beeping might be this phone about to die, but I'm not sure.

5 LC: Okay.

6 JY: Okay. I gotta share this with you. When we found out that a ceasefire
7 agreement had been signed which was about—I want to say the twenty—oh, man, right at
8 the end of January. I guess it was the twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth of January. Right at the
9 end of January anyway, just shortly—I'm trying to think. Yeah, it was just shortly after
10 they had moved us to the Zoo and they got all of us together in what I would call a theater
11 or a big briefing room or something. Everybody in the camp, all of us were in this
12 building. They briefed us on that a ceasefire had been signed. That all of us were going to
13 be released within sixty days and that we would be released, every two weeks another
14 group would go out. They wouldn't answer any questions about anything else. Okay. So
15 two weeks after the day of the signing of the agreement two 141s, we can hear them in
16 the pattern. They come in. They landed at Gia Lam. We hear them take off and go. The
17 second pickup, I think they were a day late on picking them up. The third group they
18 were like three or four days late. Now on the camp radio every night more and more
19 they're saying words to the affect that they are implementing every provision in the
20 ceasefire agreement while the Yankee imperialists and the South Vietnamese puppet
21 government, are constantly violate—it sounded like political rhetoric in a presidential
22 campaign.

23 LC: Mm-hmm.

24 JY: Same old, same old. But here's John Yuill again analyzing all this stuff.
25 Here's my analysis. Okay the first group they got out right on the mark. The second
26 group was a couple days late. The third group three or four days late. I can see what's
27 coming. I knew that we were very, very expensive bargaining chips in the whole process.
28 I knew that they knew that. The Vietnamese knew that we would pay a fair amount of
29 treasure to get our POWs back. So the way I saw this shaping up is, I thought, "They are
30 not going to release the last group and you know who is gonna be in the last group." It
31 made so much sense. In fact, Laura, to this day I do not understand, I really do not

1 understand why they ever released us because here's the way I thought. They're thinking,
2 "Man, our chip's gone. When we let this last group go that's it. Our bargaining chip is
3 gone. Why don't we say they are violating the terms of the cease fire. We are
4 implementing it." Until—then whatever it is you're gonna ask for, whatever your last ask
5 is "until you do this, that or give us this that then and only then will we release the last
6 group of POWs." It made so much sense. It was so logical and I thought they were
7 prepping us for that by the way they were getting later and later with each release group.
8 So when we were about four or five days late I just figured "Okay that's it. They're not
9 gonna release us." Well, then lo and behold here comes the magic day. They follow us
10 out in the courtyard, the common area in front of our building. We're standing out there
11 and we hear all this racket from the main gate to the camp. Of course, we can't see the
12 main gate from where our building is, but presently this huge group of people are coming
13 towards us and we are kind of in a loose formation there. You can tell it's the press corps.
14 Who do I recognize in this group, but Walter Cronkite? So I thought, "Man, if Walter's
15 here I think they are gonna release us." So anyway they're around there and the press is
16 taking pictures. They try to ask us questions, but the guards won't let us talk to them. So
17 on and so forth. Well, they put us on—let's see what was it? Four bus loads of us and
18 they take us from the Zoo which is on the south side of Hanoi to Gia Lam airport which
19 is on the northeast side of the airport, or of the city.

20 LC: The city. Mm-hmm.

21 JY: Across the Red River, across the Doumer Bridge. Anyway, we get to Gia
22 Lam. Now every pickup—it was always overcast so we could never see the airplanes, but
23 we could always hear them. There were always two 141s that came in, made the pickup,
24 and then departed. So we get out. We get to Gia Lam, four bus loads of us. Of course,
25 would you care to guess which bus I'm in?

26 LC: I would say number four.

27 JY: Laura, you are psychic. I'm in number four. Sitting on the ramp at Gia Lam
28 airport is one, I say again, one 141. That's like uno, one. Not two, one. We in buses three
29 and four watch the guys in buses one and two get out of the buses, get into a formation,
30 stand there patiently while they have this table set up with a one-star Air Force general
31 and an equivalent North Vietnamese guy. They've got their list of names. They call the

1 guys out one at a time and they go up. They're checked off on the list and they go into the
2 141. They button that 141 up. It taxis out and it takes off. Here we are sitting in buses
3 three and four, no 141 around. I thought, "You bastards." I said, "I thought you weren't
4 gonna release all of us, but to do it this way. To put us through the whole thing. To bring
5 us out here, let us watch our buddies go and then not let us go. That's dirty pool. That's
6 not fair." Oh, I was so upset.

7 LC: What about other guys on—?

8 JY: You know, I don't even remember how the other—I think they were more
9 stunned than anything like, "What the hell's going on?" All I can remember is how angry
10 I was. I was just so damn mad. Finally—it seemed like about a month to I'm sure all of
11 us on the buses. It was probably maybe twenty minutes when over the horizon here
12 finally comes another 141 and lands. Okay, we go through the whole drill. We finally get
13 on the airplane. We button up. Just as we break ground I'm out of my seat, I'm up in the
14 cockpit and I said to this pilot. I said, "I want to really thank you for changing your
15 procedure this time." He said, "Are you talking about just the one airplane being there?" I
16 said, "Yeah. That's what I'm talking about." I said, "You got any idea what we felt like
17 sitting in those buses watching that other 141 take off?" He said, "Oh, I can imagine." He
18 said, "But here's the deal," he said, "We weren't allowed to get within fifty miles of Gia
19 Lam airport until the North Vietnamese had received word from their people in Saigon
20 that by the terms of the ceasefire agreement certain personnel of ours were to be out of
21 Saigon. Until they received conformation from their own people in Saigon that that had
22 indeed happened that all the people that were supposed to be out of Saigon were then and
23 only then would they allow the last 141 to come in and land." So it was exciting right up
24 to the last second.

25 LC: So you were a bargaining chip.

26 JY: Well, yeah. To that extent we were, yeah.

27 LC: But as you said, there's—

28 JY: I just figured they'd made up their mind way before. "We're not gonna
29 release this last group."

30 LC: 'Cause they could've gone for bigger fish.

1 JY: Oh, yeah. It wouldn't have been any big deal because they could've easily
2 said, "Well, we've implemented the ceasefire," even if it was a lie. They could say it.
3 They could say, "Well, we've been implementing it. They were violating it and so this is
4 what we're gonna do." I just couldn't believe it when we got on the airplane and we did
5 get away. See, I was absolutely sure I was right when there was only one 141 on the
6 ramp. So I'll tell you what. I went through a lot of trauma right up until the time that
7 airplane broke ground on the release. So I've always thought that that was a particular
8 twist that—

9 LC: That had to hurt in a big way.

10 JY: That made it dramatic right up to the last minute.

11 LC: A little gut wrenching to the point of illness, I'm sure.

12 JY: Yeah. Yeah.

13 LC: I mean, John, what about that walk across the tarmac? I mean, did you still
14 think something could go wrong? I mean they've called your name out.

15 JY: No. No. By that time I was pretty sure we were on our way. Where I really
16 thought we weren't going home was when we were sitting on those buses and that first
17 141 had already departed and there was no other 141 in site.

18 LC: No other American personnel.

19 JY: That's when I thought that's it. It's all over. I think at the time I wasn't as
20 upset about being held captive longer. I was upset about the way they did it.

21 LC: Yeah, I can see that.

22 JY: That's what really irritated me. Of course, thank God once again, Laura, I
23 was wrong, dead wrong.

24 LC: You had it all figured out.

25 JY: I did. I was never so glad that I was wrong in all my life than that one. Man,
26 was I glad I was wrong.

27 LC: John, what happened on the flight? What kind of personnel were on the
28 plane?

29 JY: There were, I guess, there were doctors, nurses, the normal crew make up,
30 the flight engineer—you had a lot of personal attention, I mean, on the way out of there.
31 As you could imagine it was a pretty joyful flight. I think the 141 crews really got caught

1 up in it, too. They were pretty excited about being part of that mission. Then I remember
2 the flight from the Philippines back to the States. Boy, that was really first class
3 treatment. Each of us had a sleeper, a bunk, on the airplane. We had an escort officer and
4 it was usually somebody that you knew. Matt, this guy I'd know in B-52s, he was a radar
5 navigator and friend of mine. There he was when I got to the hospital at Clark. There he
6 was waiting.

7 LC: So they had selected people who you knew from your careers?

8 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Matt told me, he said, "Yeah." He said, "They came to me and
9 said, 'Hey a buddy of yours who's a POW up there is coming home. Would you like to
10 be his escort officer to escort him back to the States?'" Matt said, "Oh, hell yes."

11 LC: I bet he couldn't have jumped on that one fast enough.

12 JY: Yeah. Yeah. So he said, "That's the way it was." He said, "I assume that's
13 what they did with everybody. They identified people and then they just started asking
14 them."

15 LC: Good God. I mean that was actually pretty smart.

16 JY: Oh, and what a touch of class.

17 LC: Yeah, very much so.

18 JY: You know some things, Laura, about our government that really makes you
19 feel good and I'll just tick them off. One was my first tour in Vietnam. I've heard a lot of
20 other guys say this, too, particularly if you were offensive. Like we were dropping bombs
21 like fighter pilots. One of the things that gave you great comfort was the position that our
22 country took on crewmembers. I mean, I know many times when I was over there on my
23 first tour in 130s. If somebody got shot down, the whole war stopped. I mean they would
24 hit all the resources to wherever the shoot down was. They'd have airplanes flying cover.
25 They would have the helicopters coming in for rescue. Everything was directed to the
26 rescue of whoever was shot down. If you're going into combat that makes you feel pretty
27 good if you know that the whole world stopped trying to extract you and get you out. It
28 gives you a lot of confidence. One of the things that they did when we were released up
29 there at Gia Lam—this is what I'm talking about. I didn't know it until about three
30 months after I got home. One day in the mail from the Pentagon comes a manila envelope
31 and in it is a negative. I think it was a five-by-eight picture of me with the crewmember

1 who was escorting me to the 141. It's just after I'd been turned over from the North
2 Vietnamese back to the United States and I'm walking towards the airplane. They took an
3 individual picture of every POW as he's being—

4 LC: No kidding.

5 JY: Now that is a touch of class in my opinion. It just came with no fanfare or
6 anything else. Just came in the mail two or three months afterwards. So there are things
7 like that that really make you feel good. The other thing that I have mixed emotions about
8 is that we were given the hero treatment all the way around when we came home, but all
9 those guys that went over there and fought in Vietnam, particularly the kids. You know,
10 these eighteen, nineteen year old kids go over there. Their whole life changes in one year
11 in Vietnam. They come home and the way they were treated—it's kind of the way I
12 always felt about being part of this POW organization. I'm in there. I just got a pass. I
13 shouldn't even be in that group. It's kind of the same way that I feel about getting all this
14 hero treatment coming back and think about all those kids, the way they were treated
15 when they came home. It just makes you want to cry because they went through a hell of
16 a lot more than I did, probably, yet they were treated unmercifully bad, I think, when they
17 came home and here we get the hero treatment.

18 LC: I think that's a really important, of course very generous, but important
19 insight that you can contribute that when others come to listen to this interview, as they
20 undoubtedly will, to hear what you as a POW and that's a very select group of guys with
21 no doubt over the years a well earned cache has attached to this group, but to hear that
22 very generous statement I think will do a lot of good for some of those men who did
23 come back with things that happened to them in the space of twenty minutes changed
24 who they are forever.

25 JY: Life just isn't fair, Laura. I guess that's what this all comes down to: life is
26 not fair. It's just one of those truisms that we have to accept.

27 LC: It's a very generous thing for someone who in your position to recognize and
28 to speak out on that unfairness and to say that you see it. There's some comfort to be
29 drawn from that and you're right. A lot of the guys had very, very, and women, too, who
30 served in-theater had very difficult experiences coming home and still do, many of them.
31 Certainly that—to some extent of course that's also true particularly for the POWs who

1 were there for a good, long stretch, many years. Those guys continue to have medical
2 problems as well as psychological problems.

3 JY: Oh, yeah. The real POWs, I mean I just can't—one of the things I've said
4 about them is, "If we could've hand picked, if we could've picked who we wanted to
5 represent us as a country in a POW situation we could not have picked better people than
6 those old heads were." Those guys were the perfect people to be thrust into a situation
7 like that. They just dealt with it so magnificently. I'm just proud to be a part of that
8 organization.

9 LC: I can well imagine. John, if you would, can you outline for us what the
10 procedures were for taking care of the guys right away both medical and then there had to
11 be some debriefing and then what the follow-on care has been?

12 JY: Let me see. The way, and again, this is all kind of a blur with me.

13 LC: Okay.

14 JY: I know that the three days we were at the Philippines, or anyway this is the
15 way I understood it. They wanted to make sure that we weren't bringing back into the
16 country any communicable diseases that would maybe cause a problem in the country. So
17 that's essentially what they were looking for to make sure that we weren't gonna cause a
18 problem in the general population when we came back with some exotic diseases we may
19 have picked up while in jail. The other thing was to check everybody over and make sure
20 that nobody had any real serious problem. If they did they could take care of it
21 immediately there at the Philippines. I don't even know. I wouldn't be surprised if there
22 might not have been a few that maybe did have to stay at Clark for a while for immediate
23 medical treatment, but I'm not aware of that, but essentially that's what it was. A quick
24 going over—the other thing that I remember was, talk about kids in a candy store. They
25 just turned you loose in the BX (base exchange) because they bought everybody a new
26 uniform. They had to—when you think about it they had to get all the medals and awards
27 and the wings and all that stuff for these uniforms. Of course, they just kept feeding you
28 as much as you wanted to eat.

29 LC: Did they really?

30 JY: Yeah. Yeah. It was just—

31 LC: Without fear that you would get sick?

1 JY: Well, that's one thing they were afraid of that they would, but that didn't
2 happen.

3 LC: I suppose there's not really a lot they could do to control you.

4 JY: Yeah. That's right. It's funny because so many of the guys talk about the
5 food, but the thing I remember was the shower. I must've stayed in that shower for thirty-
6 five or forty minutes. I just did not want to get out of the shower. I don't remember that
7 much about food, but I remember the shower. Man, I just didn't want to get out of that
8 shower. That just felt so great to be in a hot shower. That's the thing that I remember
9 most vividly, but another thing they did they had it set up so that as soon as you got in the
10 building they had it all worked out where they would have a long-distance call set up so
11 you could talk to your wife or family member or whatever. It was really a well
12 orchestrated thing. Essentially, primarily it was to get you back in clothes, to get you into
13 a BX and look around and buy whatever you wanted. Then the physical part, to make
14 sure that you were physically okay to proceed on home.

15 LC: That must've been a thrill to talk to Rose. I can only—

16 JY: Oh, I guess. I guess, yeah.

17 LC: I just can't even imagine.

18 JY: Yeah. Yeah. That was really an emotional time.

19 LC: Did you get to be on the phone to your heart's content then?

20 JY: I think, no. I think there was a time limitation, but I think it was long enough.
21 I mean the big thing was "I'm okay. I'll be home within days." That was the big thing,
22 but it was such an emotional time all the way around. Then the crowds that were out there
23 greeting us when we landed.

24 LC: Landed at—where did you land? Travis or—

25 JY: Well, I mean at Clark.

26 LC: Oh, at Clark. Uh-huh.

27 JY: Yeah. It was just amazing. Then they bused us on to the hospital. Then the
28 flight back, like I say, we all had sleepers. They put up these bunks on the airplane. It was
29 just incredible. We stopped in Hawaii. We spent a few hours. I saw an old co-pilot of
30 mine who was stationed at Hickam at the time. He came down. It was about two o'clock
31 in the morning when we were there. I got to see him and then another guy I flew 58s

1 with. He was there. I saw him. Then I was on into Shepherd. We stopped in California at
2 Travis and left Lou Bernasconi, my navigator off, my radar navigator, because that's
3 where his mother lived. Then we were into Shepherd. Now at Shepherd we were there for
4 a week and that was extensive medical stuff and debriefings. The only thing I remember
5 about the debrief that went on for days was they just wanted you to tell them every thing
6 you could remember about every interrogation you'd had, everything you had said, and
7 so on. It was quite extensive. They were picking your brain. Just everything that you can
8 remember—

9 LC: About—probably and this is a guess. Correct me if this is wrong. Asking you
10 about the interrogations, but also the physical layout of the compound where you were?

11 JY: The thing that I remember primarily they were interested in were the
12 interrogations, what kind of questions did they ask you? What did you tell them—that
13 type of stuff. The other thing that they spent quite a bit of time on was “Do you have any
14 information about other POWs that didn't come back? Do you know anything about any
15 of the other SAC crew members?” I had an interesting story on that, or I thought it was. I
16 went to an interrogation one day and somewhere in the interrogation there was a knock
17 on the door. The interrogator got up to talk to whoever it was at the door. It allowed me
18 to look at the piece of paper he had in front of him on the desk. I could see names and
19 ranks of us. One of them was—it said, “First Lieutenant Paul,” and that's all. So when I
20 got back to the room, I think I told you that we used to debrief each other.

21 LC: Yes. Uh-huh. Sure.

22 JY: So I told them. I said, “I saw this list on the table.” I said, “One of them, I
23 guess they didn't have the guy's last name because it just said, ‘Lieutenant Paul.’” Mike
24 Martini who was a navigator out of—I think it was out of I don't know, Mather or
25 someplace. Anyway, he said, “Lieutenant Paul.” He said, “That was my EW.” He said,
26 “That's his last name.” I said, “You're kidding.” He said, “No.” He said, “He didn't make
27 it.” I don't know how Lieutenant Paul's mother found out, where she got that information
28 that I had said that in the debriefing, but somehow or another she—the only thing I can
29 think is that as they went through my debrief and they said, “We ought to pass this one to
30 this guy's mother that this guy at least saw his name on a list.” I think that's probably the
31 way it played out. One night, probably a month or two after I'd gotten home, the phone

1 rang and it was her. Boy, I'll tell you, Laura, this was difficult. This was a difficult
2 conversation. She was convinced and you can see why she would be as a mother. She
3 was convinced that because I had seen his name on this list that that meant that he had
4 been a POW and that for some reason or other they didn't release him and let him come
5 home. I told her. I said, "You know, Mrs. Paul." I said, "This could mean any number of
6 things." I said, "It probably was in interrogating one of his crew members they asked the
7 names of the other people on his crew and they probably gave him his name." I said, "It
8 could mean"—that would be my guess as to why his name was on that list. I said, "But it
9 could also be they might've found a copy of the flight orders that were on the airplane
10 and they saw his name on there." I said, "There could be any number of reasons for his
11 name being on that list." She said, "Well, I'm convinced that that means he was in a
12 prison camp and alive." So any rate I didn't do much to change her mind on that. That
13 was a pretty sobering conversation.

14 LC: That's extremely tough. I mean, have you checked at all to see what the
15 status was for him?

16 JY: No, but it seems to me that I talked to somebody else years later on that crew
17 and was telling them about that. They—I'm not sure about this, Laura, but it seems to me
18 that they said that they were pretty sure that either he was killed in the airplane or
19 something happened in the bailout that he died. So whoever it was, whoever this other
20 crewmember was, was pretty sure that he had not survived the shoot down. Of course, we
21 were all pretty sure that he hadn't been captured because we knew everybody that had
22 been captured, particularly the SAC people.

23 LC: One thing that I didn't ask, did you try to memorize names? We've heard
24 stories about that.

25 JY: No. Yeah. Yeah. No, that was way before.

26 LC: The old heads were doing that.

27 JY: That's why I say really you read all the stories and I've heard them all about
28 how structured and organized they were, which they were. Like you say they had their
29 memory banks, guys that were—that was their job to memorize names and everything.
30 Other guys were comm experts. Other guys were this, that and everything else. I think it's
31 primarily because of the short time and the dynamics that were going on. Things were

1 changing so much. Things were happening quickly while we were up there. In fact, I
2 asked this buddy of mine, Bob Purcell who's—he's the guy I want you to talk to. He's
3 here in Fort Worth. He was an over-seven-year guy. Highly, highly thought of by all the
4 old heads. Man, they just love him, but boy he's kind of hard to pin down. I'm gonna
5 work on him and see.

6 LC: Well, we'll see whether he might want to, either now or as time goes on.

7 JY: Let me talk to him, Laura, and see if he'd be receptive. If he his I might just
8 give you his email address or phone number and let you give him a call.

9 LC: Okay. I'd be happy to do that.

10 JY: He's a great guy. I just love him to death.

11 LC: I'm sure that for some of the guys there comes a point where they don't want
12 to talk.

13 JY: With Percy it's usually—my experience with him has been—I consider him a
14 very close friend now. In fact, I just talked to him a couple days ago. Usually when it
15 comes to the POW experience, I've got to pull it out. He'll answer a direct question, but
16 he won't elaborate. He's kind of reluctant to talk about it, but every time I go to a reunion
17 or the Freedom Flyer thing or something I always talk to these other old heads about
18 Percy. Two of them, man, they just love him. They just think he was such an inspiration
19 up there that they just think the world of him. He's a little reluctant to talk about it
20 sometime, but boy if you could get him Laura and if you could get him to tell some of his
21 stories.

22 LC: We'll see what we can do. It sure would be terrific as a contribution to the
23 historical record.

24 JY: He's a terrific guy. I know if I can get him hooked up with you because he
25 would open up with you, I think. I think he would really—you better have a lot of tape
26 because—

27 LC: Okay. Well, that I've got. That we have.

28 JY: He has some war stories. I'll tell you.

29 LC: Well, John let me ask you just a couple other things that I think will help
30 kind of roll the experience forward. You continued to be not only involved with the group

1 of POWs as you've mentioned, but also I think I'm correct in thinking going for annual
2 checks. Is that right?

3 JY: Yeah. Correct.

4 LC: Are those primarily medical?

5 JY: Yeah.

6 LC: To just see how you're doing?

7 JY: Yeah. Although there is a shrink there.

8 LC: There's a shrink. Okay. Well, that's kind of inevitable, I suppose.

9 JY: Yeah. Yeah. Now about the third or fourth visit I made down there I spent
10 about three hours with a shrink and long, long questionnaires. Now it's like very second
11 year you just go in and all you do is just chit-chat with him. I think what he's just gauging
12 is, "Is there any change in this guy. Do I see any signs of something I haven't seen with
13 him before?" It's the same guy—

14 LC: Same guy all the way through.

15 JY: Jeff—what the heck's his last name? Anyway, he's the guy on staff. I think
16 he knows most of us now personally for the ones that go down there.

17 LC: Does that seem like a healthy thing or does it feel a little intrusive or—?

18 JY: To me it's very healthy. I really think it's a great perk for us because Rose
19 gets a physical there, too.

20 LC: Jolly good. As well she ought to.

21 JY: We just make a trip down there.

22 LC: Down there being?

23 JY: Every February we go down and do that and visit friends in Florida.

24 LC: Where do these take place? Where do these—?

25 JY: Pensacola.

26 LC: Okay. John, let me ask you a couple of big-picture questions.

27 JY: Okay.

28 LC: We talked a little bit about President Nixon and some of the former POWs
29 have some hard feelings toward him because of his decision not to prosecute the guys
30 who were collaborators. As you think about it he's the one who ordered Linebacker II
31 that sent you on the mission.

1 JY: Oh, they love him for that.

2 LC: What do you think about him?

3 JY: I think he's right. In fact, one of the things that I get the biggest ovation when
4 I speak at this symposium at Randolph every year is I'll mention the fact that—I always
5 tell them about what I just told you about that pattern that I saw evolving. I said, "But
6 then in December of 1972, President Nixon made a decision that should've been made
7 six years earlier and that was 'To hell with it. I'm gonna get their attention. We're gonna
8 bomb Hanoi.'" I said, "If that decision would've been made in '65 or '66 these guys
9 wouldn't have spent seven years in jail."

10 LC: I bet the house goes nuts at that point.

11 JY: Oh, they do. Particularly the old heads, the old POWs. Man, they stand up
12 and cheer every time because—as a group, I mean, I would say eighty to eighty-five
13 percent of the returning POWs just thought Nixon was the man. The reason they do is
14 because he sent the B-52s to Hanoi. They think that's what brought them home.

15 LC: So is it fair to draw the conclusion that they're not so hot on LBJ?

16 JY: Yeah. Yeah. I think you find that most of the POWs are by nature
17 conservative, but certainly not all. I'll tell you where there is more of a split is over John
18 McCain. There are a lot of people that are not John McCain supporters.

19 LC: Does that lie back in the history of him—?

20 JY: No. As a matter of fact, it does not because what they will all say is as a
21 POW they all say he was as good as any of them. That his performance as a POW was
22 beyond question, that he did everything right. He was a good guy. Their problem is
23 political. Some of the political positions he takes now.

24 LC: Such as—

25 JY: That they have a problem with like normalization relations with North
26 Vietnam, which I kind of agree with McCain on that myself. I think, you know, "Enough
27 already." I'm ready to set up normal relations with them again. Some of these guys—I
28 can understand it. It's easy for me to say as being a three-month guy, but I'm not so sure
29 I'd be saying that if I'd been up there six or seven years and tortured for years. I'm not so
30 sure I'd be that forgiving. The other thing, Laura, and this is just me, but I've always said
31 it. This just confirms what I've always felt all my life is I don't think there is any country

1 on this planet that has a corner on the market as far as good versus bad people go. I think
2 if you really could do an in-depth, objective analysis you'd find out it pretty well breaks
3 out the same regardless of the country you're in. There are good people and there are bad
4 people. That's just the way it is. I found that out with the guards. Some of those guards
5 took advantage of the situation they were in and they would take liberties with you that
6 they wouldn't if you met them on the street. Other guards you could tell they didn't get
7 any enjoyment out of what they were doing. That was a job and they were doing it. I
8 think some of the guards actually felt for us. I mean they had some compassion for us.

9 LC: Do you remember any incident that crystallized that or was it a feeling that
10 you got from—?

11 JY: No. It was just an overall feeling I had like you know how we tend to
12 categorize people. I just had the feeling with some—I thought “This guy he's taking
13 advantage of his situation. He just hates you no matter what,” and yet I had the same just
14 as strong feeling about others that “This is just a normal guy. He's no different than
15 anybody else.”

16 LC: He got assigned to this job.

17 JY: Yeah. He doesn't have any real axe to grind. There are a lot that are very
18 upset with John McCain and his political stands on certain issues. That's one of them that
19 I just think of is about the normalization of relations. Any rate—

20 LC: Well, John, let me ask you about the resolution, attempts to offer resolution,
21 anyway, in the outstanding MIA (missing in action) cases. Is that something that you
22 follow at all?

23 JY: No. I used to have a tough time with that in the early years on speaking
24 engagements right after we got back because that was always the question. The question
25 was “Do you think there are still any POWs alive up there.” I said, “No. I don't think
26 there are any that were ever in the system.” I said, “I would grant you that there's a
27 possibility, but a very remote one that maybe some guys that were shot down were
28 captured and kept in hamlets somewhere and never got into the prison system,” but that's
29 hard to believe, too, because my understanding of North Vietnam is that everything—I
30 mean there are at least a few people in every hamlet that are loyal to the government.

31 LC: Party members and so on.

1 JY: Yeah, and if they were to capture somebody like that somebody in Hanoi
2 would've found out about it and something would've been done. So my feeling always
3 was I don't think there are any. The other reason I say that is how accurately—you know
4 you were talking about the memory bank and guys memorizing names and everything?

5 LC: Mm-hmm.

6 JY: It was amazing how the ones released matched the memory bank. Now
7 there's some that they called—what did they call those guys? Lonely hearts? Anyway,
8 some that were in the system and then all at once the next day they're gone and nobody
9 knows where they went or what happened. Now they have a pretty good idea with a lot of
10 them that they just died because they were in bad shape the last time they saw them.

11 LC: Right the last sighting.

12 JY: Yeah, but sometimes they just didn't, though. They just were gone.
13 Essentially most of the guys were accounted for that were in the system. So in that regard
14 my feeling is I don't think we left any up there behind, but that's just my opinion.

15 LC: Would you think that the Department of Defense has done everything they
16 can?

17 JY: I think so. I think so.

18 LC: Of course, this is part of why there was a restoration of relations with North
19 Vietnam. It was contention—

20 JY: That's right. To try to gain more information about them. I think they've
21 done everything reasonably that you could expect. I see no purpose being served, that
22 why would they withhold that kind of information now?

23 LC: At this point.

24 JY: Yeah. I just don't see what would be in it for them. Having said that, I
25 wouldn't say unequivocally that there weren't some left behind. It could very well be the
26 case, but my gut feeling is that we didn't.

27 LC: John, a lot of Vietnam Era veterans are considering or already have actually
28 gone back to Vietnam. Is that something that would ever occur to you?

29 JY: Yes. In fact, I really wish I would've gone back or could've gone back just
30 shortly after, but now I think it's been too long. I don't think—the Hilton's gone. I
31 would've liked to gone back and seen the Hilton.

1 LC: Some parts of it are there.

2 JY: Yeah, but how much of it's left? Is there very much of it left?

3 LC: We had a group of students who visited there last summer and the pictures
4 they brought back—there's some buildings of it right on a main street that there's a main
5 building there. I wish I could give you more data. I wasn't there.

6 JY: Well, the Hilton was on one of the main drags. In fact it was real close to
7 Embassy Row, not that far from Embassy Row.

8 LC: That's right which is really ironic. That part of it is still there.

9 JY: Yeah. Yeah, I really do enjoy doing things like that. Like I've gone back to
10 my old pilot training base in Bainbridge, Georgia, years and years after. I would've
11 enjoyed doing that. A lot of the guys, like you say, a lot of the guys have gone back. A lot
12 of them have been back three or four times.

13 LC: Yeah, and are starting to even make friends with some Vietnamese people
14 and, of course, recognizing that most of the population over there now has been born
15 since the end of the war.

16 JY: Yeah. It's like, say, your high school generation now. You know, to them the
17 Vietnam War is kind of like World War I was for me when I was growing up. "There was
18 a war way back there somewhere." Golly, you think it's been—that's forty years ago.
19 That's a long time ago.

20 LC: It is. It is.

21 JY: For these kids. I mean to them that's ancient history.

22 LC: Yeah, but it's something that you—would it do you good?

23 JY: Yeah. Well, I don't really think it would do—I've really not had a problem
24 with—I don't wake up at night. I never did. I never did wake up at night with nightmares
25 or anything like that. I've never really had— and fortunately I've never even thought
26 about going to the VA (Veteran's Administration) and saying I've got post traumatic
27 stress syndrome or something. I just don't have any of that, which thank God I don't.
28 That's got to be terrible to have that. I just haven't had any repercussions. I don't need to
29 go to settle anything psychologically or mentally, but it's just something I like doing. I
30 like going back and seeing—have you ever seen the movie *Twelve O'clock High*?

31 LC: Yes. Mm-hmm.

1 JY: I don't know if you remember the opening shot.

2 LC: Yeah. Yeah. You mentioned—

3 JY: Do you remember when Dean Jagger goes out there on the bicycle and goes
4 out on the old—where the grass is growing up through the concrete and everything. He's
5 standing there looking around. All at once he hears the engines of the airplane.

6 LC: Mm-hmm from the old—yeah.

7 JY: Well, that is a very, very special feeling to go back to some place. That's
8 what to me I would just like to go back and say, "Gee, I was a prisoner in this cell. This is
9 where I was at," or "I was in this building." I'd like to go back to Utapao where I was at
10 the night I got shot down in Thailand and see if the trailer's still there. Just revisit—

11 LC: Just have that sense of place.

12 JY: Yeah. That's right. Yeah. Yeah, I've always enjoyed doing that.

13 LC: That's interesting.

14 JY: Yeah. I would like to do that.

15 LC: John, just to reiterate, if you could, say a little bit more 'cause I think this is a
16 big part of who you are and why you are well with everything that's happened, about
17 your faith, if you don't mind, and anything that you can say about the role that that's
18 played in your life subsequent to your service and your captivity.

19 JY: Yeah. Well, if you recall, Laura, our last conversation when we got into the
20 area of faith and talking about Jesse is when I totally lost it.

21 LC: That was okay, though.

22 JY: Yeah. I think that I was fortunate in that I grew up in a family that had a
23 strong religious beliefs—my mother was a Catholic. Her parents came over from
24 Germany. They were farmers in Indiana. They had a strong faith. My dad was a convert,
25 but he turned out to be a very strong religious person. So they both were. I was brought
26 up in that environment. Then Rose is about as saintly as you can find a woman to be, so
27 that had it's affect on me. I just couldn't have been better prepared for something like a
28 POW experience in that regard. I mean, I am just convinced that a strong faith and belief
29 in God caused that experience to be so much easier to deal with than had I not had it. In
30 fact, I used to wonder about people that really don't have a strong faith or a belief in God.
31 How did they deal with that? It's just beyond me. I don't know—I just don't even want to

1 think about how I would've dealt with that without that. Then I really do believe that had
2 something to do with my—maybe with my only having such a relatively easy time as a
3 POW was the prayers that were said for me. I certainly had a huge support system that
4 was praying for me. It just gave me—the best I can remember, Laura, it gave me an inner
5 peace. Even being in prison, being in a situation that looked like it could be the end. I
6 really did believe there was a good chance I wasn't gonna be coming out of there. I was
7 just—a certain peace and contentment. I just don't know how to really word it or
8 verbalize it other than that.

9 LC: Well, I think you did a great job. That's important to hear. Where
10 someone—where do you get peace from in a situation like this or even something that
11 isn't as catastrophic or potentially catastrophic. Where does it come from? John, is there
12 anything that I haven't asked you about that you might like to contribute as we close the
13 interview?

14 JY: I think we pretty well covered it. If I think of anything afterwards like there
15 in the last half hour you would say something that prompted me to think of, "Oh, I've got
16 to tell her about this. I've got to tell her about that."

17 LC: You'll let me know.

18 JY: Yeah. Right now I can't think of anything, but I certainly will if something
19 comes up and I'll definitely let you know about Percy.

20 LC: Okay. Well, John, let me thank you very much both personally and
21 professionally for taking the time to participate in the Oral History Project. I will also
22 thank you on behalf of the people who will listen to this in the future because I think what
23 you've done here is a very important contribution.

24 JY: Rose. Wait a minute. Don't go away. Well, Laura, thank you very much, but
25 Rose just stepped in the room here and I wanted her to be able to say good bye to you,
26 Laura.

27 LC: Okay. I'll leave the tape running so that I can just get her.

28 JY: Okay. Okay. Laura and I are just wrapping up so I wanted—no. No. I want
29 you—Rose, I want you to say goodbye to Laura here. Oh, okay. So I'm gonna put you on
30 speaker here.

1 LC: Okay. Sure, of course. Rose, I was saying to John that I wanted to thank him
2 both on behalf of myself, but also on behalf of the people who none of us will know, but
3 who will listen to this in the future trying to find the source of his strength and also learn
4 from his experiences. We don't know who this will touch, but he certainly made not only
5 terrific important contribution in his service to the country, but also I think in sharing his
6 story, which I'm sure he's done many times, but in this way we have it captured for
7 generations to come. It's an important contribution and I want to recognize your standing
8 behind him, beside him, all through his service long before he went to Vietnam on his
9 first tour, while he was there on both of his tours, and subsequently. It's an important
10 contribution that you've made, too. Certainly you are owed the gratitude of the country,
11 as well.

12 JY: Well, Laura, thank you very much and it has been a pleasure working with
13 you.

14 LC: Thank you, John.

15 JY: I really mean that. You are a wonderful person and God love you. I hope you
16 outlive me darling.

17 LC: Thank you, John.