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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with James Coan
Conducted by Kelly Crager
24 July 2008; 25 July 2008
Transcribed by Cecily Darwin**

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an oral history interview with Mr.
2 James Coan. Today is 24 July 2008. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections
3 Library at Texas Tech University, and Mr. Coan is joining us from his home in Sierra
4 Vista, Arizona. Good morning, Mr. Coan.

5 James Coan: Good morning.

6 KC: We are very pleased that you are taking time out of your day today to speak
7 with us here at the Vietnam Archive. To begin with, let's start with a little biographical
8 information. When were you born and where?

9 JC: I was born July 15, 1942, San Antonio, Texas.

10 KC: So you are native Texan, then.

11 JC: Two months later I was taken right out to Tucson and then spent my early life
12 in Tucson, Arizona.

13 KC: I am sorry. Can you hear me?

14 JC: Yes.

15 KC: Okay. Okay. What were you parents' names?

16 JC: My mother was Mary Ruth Hale and my father was Marshall Livingston.

17 KC: Okay. What did your parents do for a living?

18 JC: My father was a wholesale tobacco distributor and my mother was a house
19 wife.

20 KC: Okay. How would you describe your childhood?

21 JC: I would describe it as—I didn't have television until I was eleven. I played
22 outside a lot and walked around the neighborhood with a BB gun and nobody said
23 anything and, you know, it was different back then.

24 KC: Sure. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

1 JC: Yes, I had a half-brother and a half-sister.

2 KC: And what are their names?

3 JC: Those are Patricia and Spencer Coan.

4 KC: All right. What was school like for you?

5 JC: School was—I was very, very happy in school. I was the captain of the school
6 patrol in elementary school. In school I played a lot of sports, football, baseball,
7 basketball, ran track, and continued in high school into sports and athletics.

8 KC: What about academics? What were your favorite subjects there?

9 JC: I was more interested in sports but I was an average student.

10 KC: Sure, sure. Okay, well, when did you make up your mind to join the military?

11 JC: Probably at an early age. We had in our family, I had a great uncle who
12 served in France, had served with the Marines in France in World War I. My step-brother
13 was with the Marines in the Pacific in World War II. The seed was kind of planted early
14 that if I was ever going into the military I would join the Marines.

15 KC: Why the Marine Corps?

16 JC: How much detail do you want?

17 KC: Anything that you want to add.

18 JC: I can tell you how the watch works, you just tell me how much detail.

19 KC: Well, anything that you want to—that you think is important to add here.

20 JC: Okay, well I got in some trouble in college. I was with some guys and one of
21 them threw a cherry bomb out of the car and it went off under a police car. It was turned
22 over to the campus police and the dean of men had me on probation. Then my senior
23 year, junior year, I got into a rumble with some rival fraternity members at a local bar. So
24 I was charged with public intoxication. The dean of men said, “Well, you are already on
25 probation so now you are suspended for a semester.” This is the University of Arizona in
26 Tucson. I came back to school thinking I need to redeem myself somehow so I started
27 getting serious about school—I had two fraternity brothers who had gone through the
28 Marine Corps platoon leaders course. I was so impressed with them when they came back
29 after their summer training. So when I graduated from college, I was in the five-year
30 plan. Vietnam—I applied for officer candidate school—I had a misdemeanor arrest

1 record but they needed officer material. They kind shined it on and gave me a wavier and
2 said go for it.

3 KC: Interesting. Now, what were you studying here at the University of Arizona?

4 JC: I was a law enforcement, government major.

5 KC: Okay. And it was going to be the Marine Corps, then. Now, attending the
6 University of Arizona and having this inclination toward the military and toward the
7 Marine Corps, how aware were you of the United States in the world, its foreign policies
8 and especially the United States in Southeast Asia?

9 JC: Honestly, I couldn't even pick out Vietnam on a map.

10 KC: Really?

11 JC: But I became curious and I started searching. At the time I seriously believed,
12 excuse me, I seriously believed that SEATO, S-E-A-T-O, Southeast Asian Treaty
13 Organization mentioned that we would come to the aide of South Vietnam. It was the
14 '50s when there were bug-a-boos and there was a lot of paranoia about communists
15 wanting to take over or domino theory, so, yeah, it seemed like a logical thing for us to
16 do.

17 KC: Okay, so it was going to be the Marine Corps, and like you said, you weren't
18 particularly aware of Vietnam, for sure, but became more and more aware of it as time
19 went on. What about protests on the campus of the University of Arizona? Did you
20 witness any of that?

21 JC: No, I didn't and I didn't even know what marijuana was in 1965. I came back
22 two years later and half the campus was stoned. There was just a transformation of our
23 society that happened really fast. When I when I was over in Vietnam, yes, I was aware
24 of the protests but before I went into the Marine Corps I did not know. There weren't any
25 protests. There were a few nuts over in Berkeley that might have been waving banners
26 but, you know, I didn't pay much attention to that.

27 KC: Well, you say that there was this transformation and to some degree this is
28 getting ahead of our story a little but I want to pick up on this. What do you think caused
29 that transformation in those few years?

30 JC: That is a mystery to me. I really don't know. All I saw was the change and it
31 was just a lot of it was happening on the campuses around the country. We kind of like

1 here in Arizona whatever starts in California we follow in trace and we pick it up so it
2 came over to Arizona from California, I have no doubt. Like I say, I was in the military, I
3 was in the Marine Corps, and I was doing all that so I just came back and noticed the
4 change. They changed the hairstyles, the clothing, the sandals, it was just a totally
5 different setting from when I had left in 1965 than when I came back in 1967.

6 KC: Now, when you left in '65 you are going to OCS (officer candidate school),
7 Quantico, Virginia. Describe OCS for me.

8 JC: Actually, I am sorry it was 1966 not—

9 KC: '66 okay, very good. What was OCS like for you there?

10 JC: OCS was the toughest thing that I have ever gone through in my life. It is
11 normally twelve weeks and they had condensed it down to ten weeks because they
12 needed officer material and the Vietnam War was taking casualties, they had to have
13 replacements. I will just tell you, out of fifty that started OCS that started with me ten
14 weeks later there were only twenty-nine of us still standing in formation when we
15 graduated.

16 KC: Why such a high washout rate?

17 JC: Physical, guys had old football injuries and sports injuries and stuff that they
18 lied about or covered up and they made sure that they put us through things that would
19 find out if you had any old knee injuries or shoulder injuries. Then we had a peer review
20 process that everyone—they would rate us—we would all rate each other from one to
21 however many were left. If you got rated down in the bottom two or three you were out
22 of there.

23 KC: Where were you in this progression?

24 JC: What was that?

25 KC: Where were you ranked in this progression do you think?

26 JC: I was usually in the top five.

27 KC: Okay, very good. So you said it was very, very difficult for you, the physical
28 part, the training.

29 JC: It was difficult for all of us.

30 KC: Sure. Sure.

1 JC: I remember going out to run an obstacle course in December and the bar was
2 frozen and my hand stuck to the bar. When I got through officer candidate school I had a
3 sprained elbow, I had a pulled groin muscle, I had a sore throat that wouldn't go away
4 and it was just really difficult but it was intended to be that way, you know. They wanted
5 to eliminate all the sick, lame, and lazies and those that couldn't think fast on their feet.
6 We would go on this thing called the Hill Trail, H-I-L-L, but we called it Hell Trail and it
7 was three miles of switchbacks up a steep hill. People would just pass out and fall off the
8 trail and the attitude of officer candidate school is a lot different than regular enlisted
9 boot camp. Enlisted boot camp is one for all and all for one. If one guy messes up
10 everybody pays the price. When you are in an officer candidate program like I was in,
11 you have to be able to look out for yourself and not take care of anybody else. That was
12 kind of strange—my inclination if somebody fell down is I was going to run over and
13 pick them up and we weren't supposed to do that. Somebody else coming up in the back
14 of the line would tend to someone who fell or passed out but we weren't supposed to
15 stop. We had to keep forty inches behind the person in front of us, exactly forty inches,
16 and if you lag back or said, "I can't keep up," whatever, you got a yellow leadership chit.
17 If you have got two or three leadership chits you were gone. It was really tough.

18 KC: Did you ever receive any of these chits?

19 JC: No, sir.

20 KC: Very good. What about the classes you were taking there? What kind of
21 classes were you taking at Quantico?

22 JC: We had basic military orientation classes, military history, map and compass,
23 tactics, those kind of things, small-unit tactics. That was officer candidate school and then
24 we went to what they called the Basic School as second lieutenants. Then you would
25 have a week where you would have an assignment to be—say, one week you might be a
26 squad leader and then the next week you would be a platoon leader. There would be one
27 weekend there where you would act as the company commander. It gave us experience of
28 doing all those different types of jobs.

29 KC: So this Basic School, was it at Quantico, as well?

30 JC: Yes.

1 KC: Okay. You mentioned how very difficult it was but it sounds like you did
2 pretty well by the sounds of it.

3 JC: Yeah, I did pretty well. I got a hold of my service records years later and I
4 finished in the top fifteen percent of my class, so I know I did okay.

5 KC: Well, what do you think led to your success there?

6 JC: Just the attitude that I had something to prove. I needed to redeem myself
7 from getting arrested and kind of causing some embarrassment and shame to my family
8 over that incident and being kicked out of college. I just kind of wanted to prove some
9 things to myself and other people. I think that motivated me.

10 KC: Now, when do you finish OCS and Basic School?

11 JC: Okay, I got commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps on
12 December 10th of 1966. I had a little leave and came home and reported back to Basic
13 School the first of January and then graduated Basic School in I think it was about the
14 middle of April, got a little more leave and was sent to tracked-vehicle officers' school at
15 Camp Pendleton, California.

16 KC: Now, why tracked-vehicles? Is this something that you wanted, that you
17 applied for?

18 JC: When you are in Basic School you are getting close to the end they ask you to
19 put down three of your choices for MOS (military occupational specialty). I put down—I
20 always had this thing about tanks. I just thought tanks were really great and I thought I
21 would want to be in tanks so I put tanks down and then artillery and third I put infantry.
22 Had I been in a class after mine, anyone that put infantry in one of the three choices that
23 is what they got. I fortunately was able to be in the class before where if you put down
24 tanks as your first choice you would get your first choice, so I did. That's why I went to
25 tracked-vehicle officers' school.

26 KC: Okay, and that was in Camp Pendleton. Well, describe what it was like there
27 at this school out in California for you.

28 JC: Well, that's where I really fell in love with tanks. They put me in the driver's
29 compartment and said—we had an automatic transmission so it wasn't too difficult to
30 drive, just aim it. They had us do everything that a tank crewman has to do, you know,
31 adjusting, going out to the firing range and learning how to zero in your weapons, how to

1 care for the suspension on the tank, how to break track, replace road wheels, and all of
2 that that goes along, how to lubricate it, how to refuel it. Then they said, “Now, you are
3 not going to be able to get tank infantry tactics because we need you over in Vietnam so
4 you will pick it up through on-the-job training, which was as big mistake because when I
5 first got over to Vietnam I knew how to operate a tank but I knew nothing about
6 operating with the infantry, but we will get to that later.

7 KC: Sure, sure. What type of classroom time did you do here at Pendleton?

8 JC: We spent about, oh, I would say twenty percent of the time in the classroom
9 and the other eighty percent was out in the field or on the tank ramp working on the tanks
10 or driving them or shooting them or something.

11 KC: What kind of classes would you take there, this twenty percent of the time?

12 JC: You know, in your gunnery classes you would have to learn how to zero in
13 your weapons. You would have to learn how to use your ballistic computer. You would
14 have to know how to stow your ammunition so that—you know, you couldn’t have any
15 moisture on the base of the round because if it rusted and you put it in and put that round
16 in the main gun chamber it was liable to pull your cartridge in half and that had happened
17 a few times over in Vietnam where they allowed moisture to get down the barrel and then
18 it rusted the cartridge to the inside of the barrel. When they went to extract it, it ripped in
19 half, you know, some real problems like that. All these little tricks of the trade they
20 taught us.

21 KC: What did you find to be the most difficult thing at the tracked school?

22 JC: I don’t know. Rally, nothing that I couldn’t handle.

23 KC: Okay. So as time is wearing on here we are looking at 1966, 1967 and then
24 to—as we are going into 1968, I guess, how aware are you of how the war is being
25 prosecuted, in Vietnam of course? Were you following it closely?

26 JC: Not too much. All I knew is that the odds were, you know, really high that
27 once I finished Basic School that I was going to go to Vietnam. There was a chance I
28 wouldn’t but, Kelly, I wanted to go. I was very curious about what was going on over
29 there and I wanted to see it myself and I would have been really disappointed had I got
30 orders to go elsewhere. I wanted to go to Vietnam.

31 KC: Very good. When do you get your orders to go to Vietnam?

1 JC: As soon as Basic School was over. Let's see, no, I went, no that wasn't it.
2 While I was in tank school in Pendleton I got orders to WESTPAC (Western Pacific
3 Command). Now, WESTPAC could mean that you would go as far as Okinawa and that
4 was as far as you could go or it could mean you would go on to Vietnam, so I really
5 didn't know for sure at the time until I got to Okinawa if I was actually going to Vietnam.

6 KC: Is that right? Well, describe your trip over to Okinawa for me? How did you
7 get there?

8 JC: We flew. I don't remember much about that flight except that it was long and
9 there were a whole lot of us Marines on the plane. I don't remember much about it. What
10 I do remember is when we landed in Okinawa and got off the plane the humidity just
11 about suffocated me. I mean it was just awful. They put us up in the BOQ there, bachelor
12 officer quarters, and I had a room to myself with a little fan mounted up on the wall near
13 the ceiling. I just laid in that bed and just the sweat soaked the sheets and the fan blowing
14 on me evaporated the sweat a little bit and that's how I managed to get a little sleep. We
15 were there three days and then I got my orders to get on a plane and head to Vietnam.

16 KC: So you were—you got your orders at the end of three days that you were
17 there, so you were in Okinawa waiting to see where you would be assigned at this time.

18 JC: I have told people there is nothing more worthless in the world than a green
19 second lieutenant with no orders trying to decide what's going to happen to him.

20 KC: So you were obviously very pleased with receiving the orders to go to
21 Vietnam.

22 JC: Yeah, I was. When we flew into Vietnam and I looked down, I remember
23 looking out the window and I saw one of our, I don't know if it was a destroyer or cruiser
24 or what it was, firing inland and I thought, "Whoa. Okay, welcome to Vietnam." Then we
25 landed, we landed in Da Nang. They put us up in some tents along the runway there and
26 no one got any sleep all night. Jet planes were coming in and taking off all night long. I
27 don't know how close we were to the runway but it sounded like we were only about a
28 hundred meters from the runway. I didn't know that a few nights earlier a rocket had
29 impacted one of those tents and killed a bunch of people. Fortunately, I didn't know
30 about that. We spent a very awful sleepless night and then got called up to this little shack
31 and there were sixteen of us Marine lieutenant tank officers that had come over together

1 so eight of us were assigned to go up north to the 3rd Marine Division, eight of us went
2 south to the 1st Marine Division.

3 KC: Okay.

4 JC: As a little aside, all of the eight of us that went up north were either wounded
5 or killed before the end of that year.

6 KC: Incredible. What did you think of the hustle and bustle of this crowded place
7 at Da Nang, so incredibly busy, so many people? You just got off the plane and here you
8 are in this foreign environment. Describe what that was like if you could, please.

9 JC: It just seemed like we were in just a small city that, you know, jeeps and
10 trucks hustling around, people knowing where they are going from point A to point B and
11 planes landing and taking off. Yeah, it was pretty busy.

12 KC: You received your orders to go up north. Did you know exactly where it was
13 going to be up north?

14 JC: I knew I was going to 3rd Tank Battalion headquarters up by Phu Bai.

15 KC: Okay.

16 JC: 3rd Tank Battalion was actually located a little bit away from Phu Bai at a
17 place called Gia Le, G-I-A L-E, that's two words. When I got there I noticed that they
18 weren't living in sandbag bunkers or anything. They were living in what they call
19 hootches, H-O-O-T-C-H-E-S (hooches) which were made out of wood, plywood with
20 corrugated tin roofs and they had screened-in windows and that's where we lived for a
21 while. I was assigned to be the assistant S-3. The 3 officer is the one that—let's see, you
22 have got S-1 is intelligence, I am not sure what S-2 is. S-3 is tactics and S-4 is supply. I
23 was the assistant to the major who did the briefings for the colonel and his staff every
24 evening and tell them where the tanks were deployed and if they had been involved in
25 any encounters. I did that for about a month in Gia Le. But I got to tell you a little story
26 about what happened there. I had been there about a week and was thinking, "Hey, you
27 know, this war is not too bad. This is kind of nice here." Then one night there was a
28 South Vietnamese artillery unit that fired a short round and it landed on one of those huts
29 that I was describing, one of those hooches and it was full of Navy Seabees. It hit right on
30 the roof and showered shrapnel down. I went over there because their compound was
31 adjacent to ours and I was curious. I walked over and they still had, all the sheets on

1 every single bunk were bloody. That means to me that every single one of those guys that
2 were sleeping in that hooch that night were a casualty, either killed or wounded. That's
3 when I began to think, "You know what? You could really get hurt over here and it could
4 be totally by accident. You are just in the wrong place at the wrong time." I think at that
5 point the great adventure fun thing that I was heading off into, I started to worry a little
6 bit about maybe it's not going to be such a great fun adventure after all.

7 KC: Now, how old were you? What? Twenty-five, twenty-six?

8 JC: I was twenty-five.

9 KC: Twenty-five years old. What were your duties here as a second lieutenant
10 assistant to this briefing officer, to this major, what were you doing on a daily basis?

11 JC: I would read all the communications that came into the battalion and I would
12 help put together the information for the evening briefing. That was my main duty.

13 KC: You were doing this for a month, I believe you said.

14 JC: Yeah, and occasionally the colonel would go out on a field trip, a trip out in
15 the field to visit some of the deployed units and he would bring along mail and some beer
16 and I would go along and I would sit in back, the colonel would sit up front with his
17 driver. I got to see where we had all of our tank units deployed. We had one close call up
18 in a place called Gio Linh, G-I-O L-I-N-H, by the DMZ (demilitarized zone). Our jeep
19 pulled in and we had just gotten out of the jeep and I heard a whistling noise and saw
20 everybody running so I thought, "Well, I'm not just going to stand here. I'm going to run,
21 too." The colonel jumped into a trench and I jumped right in on top of him. They say the
22 one that you hear you don't have to worry about it, it's the one you don't hear. I was
23 pretty green and I didn't know what was going on so that was my first experience with
24 incoming artillery. The North Vietnamese had artillery, rockets, and mortars that they had
25 hidden up in the southern half of the demilitarized zone and up in maybe even some north
26 of the Ben Hai River, especially their 130-mm artillery. They could fire about twenty
27 miles and so they had them up there terrorizing everybody that was within range up in the
28 northern part of I Corps. I won't say terrorizing, but you never knew when they were
29 going to drop one in on you. You were always alert and always listening and never—I
30 always—I got myself trained that wherever I went I always knew where there was a

1 bunker or a trench so that I could jump in one without thinking fast, without thinking if I
2 had to real fast.

3 KC: Sure. Now, while you were working here, did you ever have any desire to be
4 in combat with the tanks?

5 JC: Boy, that's a hard question. I was curious, yes. I wanted to know what it was
6 like but I was not—I knew I wasn't going to be facing any enemy tanks so the thing that
7 we worry about was anti-tank rockets and mines. I think it progressed—the more I was
8 over there the less anxious I was to get involved in any kind of combat. I figured I was
9 going to have to do it, it was going to be part of my job. When it came to me I would pray
10 that I did it right and none of my men got killed and I didn't screw up. As far as
11 chomping at the bit and saying, "I can't wait to get out there," no, I wouldn't say that.

12 KC: Well, where were you assigned or to what duties were you assigned after this
13 initial month?

14 JC: Okay, there was a place—there was a strong point just two miles south of the
15 demilitarized zone and it was called Con Thien, C-O-N T-H-I-E-N. That's two words.
16 Con Thien was a main, how would they call it the lynch pin in McNamara's wall which
17 was the high-tech system that McNamara and General Westmoreland had devised to keep
18 the North Vietnamese from infiltrating across the demilitarized zone into South Vietnam.
19 We were going to be part of a system of strong, they called it the SPOS, Strong Point
20 Obstacle System, of fire bases mutually supported with artillery and then we would be
21 able to go out and look for the North Vietnamese coming across that demilitarized zone.
22 One of the lieutenants that had come over with me on the plane his name was Tom Barry,
23 B-A-R-R-Y. Tom had picked up three Purple Hearts in about two weeks up there at Con
24 Thien from incoming mortars and artillery and stuff. Well, the policy at that time was if
25 you had two Purple Hearts they would pull you out of the field because if you had three
26 Purple Hearts you had to go back Stateside. Well, Tom already got his third Purple Heart.
27 Before they could get him out of there he picked up two in one day. I was called into the
28 colonel's office and said, "Jim, you're going to go up to Con Thien and you are going to
29 take over the 1st Platoon of Alpha Company." I said, I swallowed hard and had a few
30 butter flies but said, "Aye, aye, sir." Two days later I was up in Dong Ha, D-O-N-G H-A,
31 two words. Dong Ha is where the 3rd Marine Division had their supply, I guess you call it

1 a giant supply base. A lot of the units had their headquarters there. So Alpha Company of
2 3rd Tank Battalion was located at Dong Ha. I reported in there and then the next day I
3 went on up to Con Thien. Con Thien was a pretty bad place because they were under a
4 siege. A siege was beginning at that time where General Giap, G-I-A-P, had decided that
5 he was going to put pressure on the Marine bases there with artillery, rockets, and
6 mortars. He was going to put enough pressure on them that we would pull out. It was
7 getting increasingly, increasingly more dangerous every day. I knew when I went up
8 there to relieve Tom Barry that I was going into a really perilous situation.

9 KC: Sure. Now, let me add this if I might. I know that you are an expert of sorts at
10 the battles there at Con Thien and especially the siege, that you have written a book on
11 this, a very credible book. I read it yesterday, as a matter of fact. I think you did a really
12 good job on that. Please feel free to go into as much detail as you would like in your
13 description of McNamara's wall, the trace, Con Thien, and the siege, as well.

14 JC: Okay. Well, there was an area that we call Leatherneck Square, which if you
15 looked in a map the bases form kind of almost a square, not quite. You had the northwest
16 corner was Con Thien and then the northeast corner was Gio Linh about six miles away.
17 There was a bulldozed out strip that linked Con Thien and Gio Linh. It started out as 200
18 meters wide and it was eventually bulldozed out to be 600 meters wide. You could look
19 from Con Thien, you could look east towards Gio Linh and look beyond Gio Linh out
20 into the South China Sea. You could even see war ships patrolling up and down along the
21 coast there. Directly to our—if you are at Con Thien and you look south you would see
22 one of the fire bases called Charlie 2 that was a couple of miles south of us. Then another
23 couple of miles south of us was a place called Cam Lo, C-A-M L-O, two words. Then
24 east of Cam Lo was Dong Ha, so that formed roughly a square. The eastern border of the
25 square would have been Highway 1, the southern border was Route 9, the western border
26 of the square was Route 561 that was also called the MSR, main supply route, for us up at
27 Charlie 2 and Con Thien. So when I got there in September of 1967 the siege was really
28 getting going. I walked in and took over and introduced myself to the platoon. The rains
29 hadn't started yet so the ground was still baked hard, sunbaked hard, dry. When tanks
30 moved around they put up a lot of dust and so everything at Con Thien, the bunkers, the
31 vehicles, the individual Marines themselves, were all coated with this pink dust. That was

1 what I thought it was going to be like. I had no idea that the monsoon was coming pretty
2 soon and that pink dust was all going to turn to chocolate mud, but that came later.

3 KC: Now, what did you think about this idea for this wall of McNamara? What
4 was your impression when you were there?

5 JC: Kelly, I really didn't have much of an opinion about it. The opinions that I
6 had, pro and con, came later when I started studying or researching why we were there
7 and what we were doing there but at the time it seemed to make sense to me.

8 KC: All right, here you are twenty-five years old, you are facing your first battle
9 command position. What's going through your mind here?

10 JC: What's going through my mind is I don't want to do anything stupid to get
11 somebody hurt. That was the main thing. I didn't want to do anything ignorant,
12 uninformed or stupid that I would regret. I had a learning curve there. I had to learn a lot
13 real fast. It was all new to me and so I just was just constantly, eyes, ears, brain alert so I
14 could know what was going on and plus I didn't want to get myself hurt. I didn't want to
15 walk around out in the open and have an artillery shell drop in on me, either. I had to find
16 out what that was all about. I knew enough that when you are a young lieutenant like that
17 you have to rely on your experienced non-commissioned officers. I had a platoon
18 sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Hopkins, who had been in Korea, been in the Marine Corps
19 about eighteen years, so one of the first things I did was take my tank over to where
20 Gunny Hopkins was, Gunnery Sergeant Hopkins, and introduce myself and find out
21 what's up and who do I have and what are the names of the men in the platoon. Where
22 are the tanks located? I had to get myself oriented. When I pulled over there to that
23 northern part of the perimeter the gunny's tank was all buttoned up and his main gun
24 barrel was pointing out to the northeast. As I pulled up alongside of him all of a sudden
25 their loader, this corporal, stood up and was waving me away, get away, get away, get
26 away, so I said, "What's your problem?" you know. Then within about five seconds a
27 recoilless rifle round came in and landed right between our two tanks and so that was
28 what that was all about was two tanks attract fire. Anyway, I managed to hook up with
29 Gunny Hopkins and we talked and I found out where all the tanks were located, who the
30 tank crewman were, who was in charge, what the infantry unit in charge of security—for
31 Con Thien at that time was the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines. My next step was to go touch

1 bases with the CO up there, the commanding officer and his staff and I did that so that
2 was pretty much my first day at Con Thien.

3 KC: What was your relationship like with Gunny Hopkins?

4 JC: Real good. He was a guy from West Virginia. His life's ambition was to drive
5 a beer truck when he retired from the Marine Corps. He was just a good old country boy.
6 I think, you know, some senior NCOs (noncommissioned officers) like that will resent
7 the young officer coming in. He was glad that I came there because it took a lot of the
8 pressure off of him. He didn't have to go to the CO's briefings, he didn't have to run
9 around and to be checking on every tank to make sure that everybody was—you have to
10 patrol the lines so our lines were tanks and I would have to go from tank to tank to tank to
11 tank sometimes ducking in the bunkers and ducking into trenches if we started getting
12 any incoming. When I got there no longer did he have to do that and he was very happy
13 to have me there.

14 KC: He worked with your friend Lieutenant Barry earlier?

15 JC: Yes. No, as a matter of fact, no. Hopkins had gotten there about four or five
16 days before me. He was also new.

17 KC: Okay. So there was somewhat of a learning curve for him there, as well.

18 JC: Yeah.

19 KC: Okay. Now, how many tanks were in this, were you responsible for?

20 JC: We had five tanks in a platoon.

21 KC: Okay. Could you describe your relationship with the men who served under
22 you there in the platoon?

23 JC: Well, I was the new guy. A lot of the tankers had been through the fighting
24 that had gone on that spring and summer around the DMZ and they were getting short,
25 they were what they call short timers. They had pretty much been there, done that, and
26 seen it and they didn't want to—they were pretty much like, "I'm not getting out of my
27 tank. I have only got three or four days to go and I am not going to get killed here." It
28 was a little bit difficult to get those guys together to sit down and have a little discussion
29 about anything because they didn't want to get out of their tanks and I understood. But I
30 told myself, "Well, in a few days they will all be gone and I will get all new replacements

1 so I will no longer be the new guy lieutenant. I will be the old salt lieutenant because I
2 will have been there before the new guys that came.” Do you understand my thinking?

3 KC: Sure, sure.

4 JC: So, yes, I lost, didn't lose but about—there were twenty men on the five
5 tanks, almost half of those guys just got on a helicopter and flew out one morning and the
6 same helicopter that flew them out had brought in their replacements. Now, for half the
7 platoon I was the old salt, for the other half I was still the new guy but it worked out
8 pretty good.

9 KC: What does that mean to you, a young lieutenant just taking over this platoon,
10 and after a few days half of your platoon with all of this experience is gone and you have
11 brand new fresh faces coming in, what does that mean to you?

12 JC: I was glad to see them go.

13 KC: Really?

14 JC: They were basically worthless.

15 KC: Okay.

16 JC: They weren't even going to stick their head out of the turret. If you had
17 known—I didn't understand until years later what they had gone through that summer but
18 they had been on some very bad operations and seen lot of people killed and wounded.
19 They were the survivors and they wanted to go home and I didn't blame them one bit.

20 KC: Sure. Did it bother you to lose their combat experience in your platoon?

21 JC: No.

22 KC: You would rather have them gone?

23 JC: The new people that came in were good and good to go and they looked to me
24 for leadership. They weren't like, “Oh, god. Here comes that lieutenant again,” you
25 know. They were glad to see me.

26 KC: Sure. Now, you arrived, let's see, it would have been at the very beginning of
27 the siege of Con Thien?

28 JC: It had started right after the election. Right around the first of September the
29 pressure began to get serious as far as the amount of incoming and the ambushing of the
30 infantry patrols around there area. It started to pick up right around the very end of

1 August and the first part of September. So I got there September 10th and it was already
2 pretty much a full-blown siege by then.

3 KC: We should probably also point out that although there was this incredibly
4 intense siege that lasted, like you say, for forty days, Con Thien was a place of an awful
5 lot of activity prior to the siege itself and a number of operations there against North
6 Vietnamese units in I guess beginning in 1965 with Hastings and Operations Prairie, etc.

7 JC: Yeah, '66, yeah.

8 KC: So you knew that you were heading into a place that was incredibly busy and
9 incredibly dangerous and shortly after you get there the siege begins. Knowing what you
10 knew about the history of Con Thien and its position, what are you trying to do mentally
11 to prepare yourself for what you are seeing there?

12 JC: You mean before I got there?

13 KC: No, when you got there, when you are on the ground and you saw it
14 firsthand.

15 JC: I am just trying to—I'm basically trying to make sure that we stay in
16 communication with battalion there, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, and that I'm on top of
17 things, you know, and I'm communicating so that we don't get caught in a position where
18 we have to go out and rescue somebody and we don't have ammunition or we are all out
19 of fuel. I just wanted to make sure that we were good to go, as they say, if they called on
20 us to go do something. Then the rains came. We had a night attack, we traded—I am
21 getting ahead of myself. We would take turns occupying a firing space on the northern
22 part of the perimeter so every night a different tank would go over there. The night it was
23 my tank's turn to be there we had a major probe of the northern perimeter. It was my first
24 experience, really, in combat, as you would say, because we could see they had fired
25 flares out once the shooting started and we could see figures running towards us. We
26 fired quite a few rounds from our machineguns and we fired out quite a few 90-mm
27 rounds. We also knocked out a machinegun that was about 800 meters out. We knocked
28 that out and the next morning when the sun came up we looked out and did not see an
29 enemy body anywhere out there but, oh, we saw a lot of holes in the ground and a lot of
30 holes in the wire that had been blown up by artillery. I didn't know if it was our artillery
31 or their artillery, but I know when the battalion commander came by, the colonel and the

1 XO (executive officer) came by and said, “Did you get any of them, Lieutenant?” I said,
2 “Well, I think so, sir, but we don’t see any out there.” He said, “Well, yeah, they have
3 people that come haul their KIAs (killed in action) away but I want you to know you did
4 a good job.” I said, “Thank you, sir,” and he moved on. What I found out later is that four
5 Marines were killed and I think twelve wounded. It kind of was a senseless attack to me
6 because it was nothing like the original May 8th attack where a couple of battalions had
7 tried to overrun Con Thien and had been beaten back. Now, this was probably only a
8 company of North Vietnamese. We began to think, “Well, maybe they are just probing to
9 see how strong we are” because there was no way they could over run us, we were too
10 strong over there. That was my first experience. Nobody got hurt. We didn’t know how
11 much damage we had caused because we couldn’t see the results of it but all we knew is
12 that they hadn’t gotten through the wire and we were pretty exhilarated over the whole
13 thing after it was all over, actually. I mean, after you are in a fight like that you don’t
14 think about anything but the fighting the enemy itself, spotting the enemy, firing the
15 guns, da-da-da-da-da. Then after it’s all over and you sit back that’s when your hands
16 start to shake and you—then you feel the anxiety and everything but during that actual
17 attack it was just take care of business. I remember coming away from there with a
18 feeling of confidence that we could handle anything that they threw at us. If they tried to
19 overrun us it would be a pretty horrendous defeat for them because we were very strong.
20 If you have ever been in a situation like that and you see our machineguns criss-crossing
21 across the open area, the red tracers interlocking, artillery coming in, our mortars firing
22 and everything you just feel like we are invincible.

23 KC: If you could, please describe the defensive set up of Con Thien. How were
24 the defenses set up there?

25 JC: Okay, well, we had a battalion of Marines but we only at that time we had two
26 companies which is about 400 men on the hill itself and then about four or five hundred
27 meters south of us was a little tree-covered hill called Yankee Station where we had two
28 companies out there as a reaction force. They could go if there was a penetration of the
29 perimeter the reaction force would be able to respond. We had a couple of tanks out with
30 the reaction force, too. Then that was around the perimeter we had the infantry and
31 spaced periodically along the perimeter we had one of our tanks. Each tank had a bunker

1 that they had built, pretty flimsy, a sandbag and ammunition crate bunker but anyway that
2 was a place to get out of the tank and go in and cook your C-rations and sleep. Then
3 inside the perimeter we had two landing zones, one for bringing in personnel and
4 evacuating casualties. That was by the battalion aid station. We had another landing zone
5 on the other side of the perimeter which was for bringing in supplies. Then further up the
6 hill we had a battery of 105-mm artillery. We had 81-mm mortars. We had the four-duce
7 or 4.2-inch mortars and then we had a couple of recoilless rifles, search lights. The
8 Marine Corps had a tank-destroying vehicle called an Ontos, spelled O-N-T-O-S,
9 mounted six 106-mm recoilless rifles on it. We had several of those little Ontos tank
10 destroyers inside the perimeter. Then Con Thien the hill actually was three little hillocks
11 connected with a saddle but the whole area of Con Thien was about two city blocks. Each
12 one of the peaks of those three hills we had an outpost for the artillery observer. We had
13 an OP-1, OP-2 in the middle, and an OP-3 on the eastern flank of the hill. That was pretty
14 much it. The Army had some vehicles there. There was a vehicle called a Duster that was
15 a tracked vehicle and it mounted two Bofors or—two Bofors or one Bofors, but anyway
16 they were two 40-mm anti-aircraft guns. The Army had a couple of those Dusters there
17 and they also had some trucks that had quad-fifty machine guns mounted on the trucks. I
18 think that pretty much explains what we had there.

19 KC: So you felt pretty confident that you could repel a North Vietnamese attack.

20 JC: Yeah, because our big trump card was we could get helicopter and aircraft to
21 come in, too. Then we had artillery batteries at all the other places around that I had
22 described earlier at Leatherneck Square on Gio Linh, at Gio Linh, Dong Ha, Cam Lo, and
23 Charlie 2. We could put a firestorm of artillery fire down on any enemy that was trying to
24 attack us.

25 KC: Did you also have artillery support from the Navy?

26 JC: We could call on that, too. I didn't see much of that. I think a year or two later
27 they had the USS *New Jersey* offshore firing in but I was gone home by then.

28 KC: As you mentioned, in September the siege sets in. What did you think the
29 North Vietnamese were trying to do? What do you think they were trying to accomplish
30 with the siege of this area?

1 JC: I think they were trying to kill so many of us that we would abandon the base
2 and pull back. To make it untenable for us to be there.

3 KC: Now, they expended a tremendous amount of their resources, human,
4 materiel, etc. Explain to me what it was like from your perspective going through this
5 siege. Feel free to start at the beginning and work your way through.

6 JC: Switching hands here, my left hand is getting numb. I think the—I think I
7 was, number one, I was extremely impressed with the bravery of those Marines,
8 particularly the engineers and what we call “cannon cockers,” the guys in the artillery.
9 We would start getting incoming, maybe it was artillery. Excuse me—the artillery men
10 would go out while the incoming was crashing around and they would get out behind
11 their guns and they would fire counter-battery fire. I actually—I was in my tank one time
12 looking out through the vision rings and I was looking across about thirty meters or forty
13 meters away at the artillery battery near us or the gun, not the battery but the gun near us,
14 the 105-mm gun, and an incoming round landed on the parapet, the sandbag parapet that
15 they had around their enclosure there. All three guys in there went down wounded. Three
16 more guys came running out and pulled them out of danger and picked up an artillery
17 shell and put it in the breech and started carrying out the fire mission and I thought,
18 “God, those guys are brave.”

19 KC: Now, these three men were from the same battery, I assume.

20 JC: Yeah. Then there is the engineers who they would have to go out and work in
21 the minefields. You know, they had that look in their eyes like dead men walking because
22 if any incoming came in while they were out working in the minefield they had no
23 prayer. They couldn’t run. They’d just have to lay on the ground and pray. You know—I
24 am getting choked up talking about this.

25 KC: That’s perfectly fine.

26 JC: But anyway, I think that impressed me the most.

27 KC: What type of tactics did the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) employ in this
28 siege most typically?

29 JC: They were just there to mainly just, you know, put pressure on us. Like we
30 would have snipers that would hide out in the brush and, you know, try to pick off a few
31 Marines walking around. If the sniper was bad, you know, he didn’t hit anybody, nobody

1 shot back at him because they didn't want a replacement to come in who was a better
2 shot. They would—I remember a couple of guys being brought down to the aid station
3 who had been hit by a sniper. I saw a lot of shocking things. I mean I would have to go,
4 my route from my tank's position up to the CO's bunker on OP-1 or just below OP-1. I
5 would have to go by the battalion aid station and sometimes I would walk by there I
6 would see dead Marines laying under a blanket with their boot toes pointing up and
7 puddles of blood underneath them. It was war. This is what it's all about. I always
8 wondered what it was about and I finally got to find out.

9 KC: For sure.

10 JC: One day I went to a briefing and I came back and the two Marines that were
11 in the bunker next to us were dead. An artillery shell came in and just—I talked to them
12 about a half hour before I went to the briefing just something like, "You guys got any
13 more—or we have got some extra C-rations. Would you guys like some franks and
14 beans?" One guy said, "No, we've got plenty of that," so then I come back from the
15 briefing two hours later and both of those guys are dead. That was the thing that got me
16 was how you could just be alive one minute and an hour later you're dead. I think that
17 was the main thing that kind of—you don't think about things like that, if you had never
18 been in a combat situation you don't think about how you can be here one minute and
19 gone the next.

20 KC: How—

21 JC: Despite that, and we all knew that, what I just came away from then and I will
22 carry the rest of my life is how everybody—nobody went and sniveled and crawled under
23 a tank and cried and said, "I can't take it anymore." They just went out and did their jobs
24 and did what they had to do.

25 KC: How did this affect you personally? Did this create a sense of fatalism or was
26 I would think—

27 JC: Very much so. I began to—well, it was a strange mixture. I got real religious.
28 I started reading my—I had a pocket Bible and I started reading that frequently,
29 particularly the Psalms, and they provided a certain amount of comfort but I also had this
30 when your number is up, it's up. Not that there is some great plan in mind for who is

1 going to survive and whose not. I just figured if you were in the wrong place at the wrong
2 time, that's it. You're gone. There might be a little contradiction there.

3 KC: What kind of sense did you get from the men who were around you? How
4 did it affect them? Was it something similar or was it something different?

5 JC: I think it was pretty much—some men become—turn to their religion for
6 support, others turn to their family. I hadn't told my family that I was in Vietnam. I didn't
7 want them to worry about me.

8 KC: They did not know that you were in Vietnam?

9 JC: I would write letters home because we—my letters home wouldn't say that I
10 was in Vietnam. They would be an FPO and a number and so I told them I was in
11 Okinawa. I didn't want them to know I was in Vietnam. That is a long story and I will get
12 to that, I guess later. I couldn't really write home and say, "Gee, this is what I am going
13 through and pray for me," and all of this kind of stuff. I didn't have that kind of support.

14 KC: So your family didn't know you were in Vietnam the entire time you were
15 there?

16 JC: They found out. They found out. I had been in-country about eight months
17 and I started thinking, "You know, you are being kind of selfish. You think you are being
18 kind to your family but you are not. What if something happens to you? What if you get
19 killed and they are going to find out that you were in Vietnam and they are not going to
20 be prepared for it." So I wrote a letter home and I 'fessed up and I told my mom and my
21 sister and brother. I said, "I haven't been very truthful with you. I have been in Vietnam
22 all this time, but I can see the light at the end of tunnel and I am going to make it home
23 okay, so don't worry about me," and then a week later I got wounded.

24 KC: What was their reaction to your letter? Do you know?

25 JC: Well, I don't know. I think my mom was kind of upset because she had
26 believed that I wasn't in harm's way, but anyway I made it home okay.

27 KC: Well, let's go back to Con Thien, back to the siege.

28 JC: All right.

29 KC: You mentioned the sniper fire was very, very common. What else were the
30 NVA doing to depending on the siege?

1 JC: We had 60-mm mortars and they had a 61-mm mortar. It is a small one and of
2 the mortars that is the smaller one. They would—just about dusk a couple of those guys
3 would get out in the shrubs or trees and the bushes somewhere, you know, five or six
4 hundred meters, eight hundred meters away and wait until it got dark and then they would
5 drop two or three mortar shells—boom, boom, boom, boom—and then pick up their
6 mortar tube and run, run away. By the time the mortar shells landed on us those guys
7 were long gone. There was no way to fire a counter-battery. We couldn't see where they
8 were firing from because they were in defilade or they were in the bushes or they were
9 behind a hill or something. A lot of the counter-mortar fire that we tried to do was just for
10 morale purposes, it wasn't hitting anything. Where we were very successful, though, was
11 our artillery observers up on the outposts, OP-1, OP-2, OP-3, they could see if the enemy
12 was firing artillery at us, they could spot that. They could have counter-battery fire on
13 that location just real quick. Also we had aircraft up flying around during daylight hours,
14 now. Night time was different but during daylight hours they would fire at us and we
15 could pretty much hit them with counter-battery fire or hit real close to where we could
16 make them think twice about doing it again from that location. The worst part really was
17 the—then the other thing that was really bad and caused a lot of casualties was mortars.
18 When they come in they just make a whoosh sound. They don't make a screaming
19 artillery type shell or a rocket sound, they just kind of make a whoosh sound coming
20 down. If during the day with all the hustle and bustle of trucks moving around and
21 helicopters flying and our 105 artillery firing you could have a mortar shell coming right
22 down on top of you and not hear it coming and that was the thing that we all worried
23 about is we couldn't hear those mortars coming in on us. The first time you knew that
24 you were being targeted was when the first shell landed. I think that was probably the
25 worst part. Being the platoon leader, I couldn't just stay in my tank or my bunker all the
26 time I had to be going around the perimeter every day checking on my tanks and my tank
27 crews and I had a real—then going to the CO's briefing up the hill every afternoon I had
28 a pretty—I was in a lot of danger there and it was pretty stressful.

29 KC: About how many of these mortar rounds would you take there at Con Thien
30 in a given day?

1 JC: I don't know, maybe sometimes 100 or 150 rounds of mortars. Maybe a
2 couple hundred rounds of artillery and sometimes we would get some 140-mm or 122-
3 mm rockets that they would fire in on us. The rockets, if they fired in the daytime, they
4 would fire them and then boogie out of there, the North Vietnamese would, because we
5 could have counter-battery on those rockets right away. The rockets left a trail so where
6 they were fired from, you know, was a dead giveaway.

7 KC: Sure. Well, tell me about their artillery. They had artillery positions, like you
8 say, hidden in this DMZ.

9 JC: They had artillery up in the southern half of the demilitarized zone and we
10 weren't supposed to be up there. You asked what we thought, well, one of things that we
11 were real frustrated about is that we were only supposed to go up to the southern border
12 of the demilitarized zone. We weren't supposed to go in the demilitarized zone. Well,
13 that is where the enemy was, that is where they had their artillery guns. They had all of
14 their guns and rockets and artillery up in the demilitarized zone and we couldn't go in
15 after them and that was very frustrating. We could drop bombs on them, our artillery
16 could fire at them but we weren't supposed to go send any troops in after them. We did
17 that during Operation Hastings we went in on the ground with tanks and infantry and
18 everything but since then we weren't allowed to go up in there and that was very, very,
19 very frustrating to us that we couldn't go get those guys that were shooting at us.

20 KC: What does that do to morale in general there?

21 JC: Say again.

22 KC: What does that do to morale in general of the Marines?

23 JC: It's more of a frustration thing. I wouldn't say that we are sitting around
24 sulking and depressed about it. We were there very much for each other and, you know,
25 the guy on your left and the guy on your right. We were there looking out for each other
26 and trying to keep each other alive and we weren't too worried about the grand scheme of
27 things. It was a source of maybe anger, just anger and frustration especially if you lost a
28 friend to incoming and then you knew that you couldn't go out and get the guys that were
29 shooting at you.

30 KC: Sure. What would you do as this tank platoon commander on a daily basis
31 during this time? What were your duties? Take me through an average day.

1 JC: We were going outside the perimeter to escort the engineers out into the mine
2 field and back and occasionally if an infantry unit got ambushed or something we would
3 send out a tank reaction force but when the rains came on September 12th, seventeen
4 inches in twenty-four hours in that area of northern I Corps.

5 KC: Incredible.

6 JC: Roads washed out, bunkers collapsed, trenches had three feet of water in
7 them, the whole thing changed. Everything we did changed because we could no longer
8 move around the perimeter without sinking down in the mud. We pretty much became
9 stationary at that point. That was—did I say the 12th? No, I think it was more like maybe
10 the 15th. I had been there about five days when the rain happened.

11 KC: Okay. Tell me what the rain does to your defenses there within the perimeter.

12 JC: Well, one thing that the monsoon has a lot of overcast and drizzle. Once that
13 big deluge happened that was the end of the big heavy rain. From then on it was just
14 misting and sprinkling. It went from being blazing hot to cold. In fact, they brought us
15 out some rainy weather gear to wear because, you know, we were damp in the drizzle and
16 it was cold at night. Cold for us is down in the forties but it still felt really cold. Anyway,
17 the enemy now could move around especially in the fog they could get closer to us.
18 Snipers could get closer to the wire. The guys shooting the mortars, of course, they were
19 now shooting in the blind because they really couldn't see Con Thien very good because
20 there was so much fog and mist. Their view of us was impaired and our view of them was
21 impaired. Walking around in the mud was kind of a lifesaver, though, for—I remember
22 one time I got bracketed. I was out there walking for some reason and an artillery shell
23 came in and landed about twenty meters from me but hit in the mud and all the shrapnel
24 shot straight up in the air. Had it been hard ground I wouldn't be talking to you right now.
25 I remember one time a Marine was from the artillery—one of the artillery guys had gone
26 over to supply and picked up a case of C-rations and he had it on his shoulder and he was
27 walking back towards his unit when we were getting some incoming. There was nothing
28 he could do. You know, he tried to run and he stepped in some muck and he sunk down
29 about three feet, two feet maybe, so all he could do was just bend forward at the waist
30 into the mud and pray. Well, he didn't get hit by—as it turned out, he didn't get hit by
31 any shrapnel but he started yelling for help and people of course looked out and thought

1 this guy had been hit. All it was, was he was stuck in the mud and couldn't extricate
2 himself. When they finally pulled him out he was covered with chocolate mud from head
3 to toe. I remember him walking over to a shell crater that was full of water and he was
4 just sitting down there rinsing himself off. But, yeah, the mud and then the main supply
5 route from Dong Ha to Con Thien got washed out and so our helicopters had to resupply
6 us then. We could no longer get truck convoy supplies. We had to have all of our supplies
7 and our ammunition brought in by helicopter.

8 KC: What did the rain do to that?

9 JC: Actually I don't know. I don't think it did affect it that much and if anything it
10 maybe even helped because if it was foggy the North Vietnamese couldn't really see
11 where to aim because they would try to shoot down those helicopters coming in.

12 KC: What about other air support, did the rains—you mentioned the overcast, did
13 that limit it in any way?

14 JC: It seemed like our air support diminished greatly once we had the, what the
15 French call the crachin, or crachin, I don't know C-R-A-C-H-I-N which it was the
16 monsoon with the drizzly rain and the cold, cloudy overcast.

17 KC: I guess the positive aspect of the monsoon season was that it slowed the
18 enemy down as well and limited their capabilities.

19 JC: Yeah. One tank platoon, a whole tank platoon got stuck in the mud outside of
20 Con Thien. The story is that they were operating with an infantry unit and they came
21 across some old, some ancient rice paddies. Well, they sucked up all that rain and now a
22 couple of the tanks tried to go across there and sank in and were stuck. Then the platoon
23 leader and the platoon sergeant told the infantry, you know, "We can't go through there."
24 This hot-headed captain came out and pulled his pistol and pointed it at the platoon
25 sergeant and said, "You get in there and get those tanks out of there or I am going to blow
26 your blankety-blank head away." Gunny said, "Okay, sir. Aye, aye, sir." Then his tank
27 got stuck and now there is three tanks stuck.

28 KC: Oh, no.

29 JC: Then the lieutenant who was—he had been around for a while, he was pretty
30 experienced. He wasn't a new boot like I was. Anyway, he also ended up so all five tanks
31 were stuck in the mud. This is all happening about the same time. So what the tankers

1 had to do was disable their radios, take the firing pins out of all their guns, and make sure
2 the tanks couldn't be fired and then padlock the hatches so the hatches couldn't be
3 opened and then go off on foot with the infantry. Interesting was that was none of the
4 tanks were touched by the North Vietnamese. Our thinking is they were just as miserable
5 as we were and they didn't want to go traipsing around out in the countryside in the mud
6 and all that so they were holed up, too. As a result they managed to extricate all of those
7 tanks, no worse for the wear and that was the end of that.

8 KC: Sure. I would think that the NVA would know that the Americans would
9 eventually be back for those tanks and didn't want to spend a whole lot of time around
10 them either, I would think.

11 JC: Yeah, but they didn't mess with the tanks or the retriever crews that came out
12 to get them. They didn't bother them.

13 KC: That takes me to a point here. What does all this rain do to the tanks? You
14 are in charge of a tank platoon, how does all this heavy rain at first, of course, and later
15 on the cost of it, how does it affect them?

16 JC: We are immobile, we are not going to be able to go anywhere. If we go
17 anywhere we are going to have to stay on a hard-packed road, we can't go out off the
18 road so we are road bound. That constant moisture did affect one or two of the tanks were
19 just sitting there and then we tried to start them and we couldn't get them to start. That
20 was a problem.

21 KC: So what about this heavy deluge—you say over seventeen inches in a
22 twenty-four-hour period—what did this do? You mentioned that it washed out the supply
23 road but what about the local hard pack around Con Thien? What did this do there? Did it
24 completely immobilize your platoon?

25 JC: Well, we really didn't have hard pack around Con Thien. We just had a road
26 coming in the south gate and heading south to Charlie 2 and Cam Lo and Dong Ha. Well,
27 Highway 9 was paved. That was the road from Cam Lo to Dong Ha that was paved but
28 the Sea Bees and the Marine engineers had put in crushed-rock road along 561 that
29 headed from Cam Lo all the way up to Con Thien and that would support our tanks. The
30 problem was that where the culvert was there at a place called The Washout, the road
31 washed out. So that for about two weeks we were getting nothing but helicopter resupply

1 and then the engineers and Sea Bees came in and replaced that with a bridge that would
2 support armored vehicles and then the road was open again. As far as maneuvering
3 around the perimeter of Con Thien or—oh, they also had three tanks stuck in the mud
4 outside of Gio Linh, I found out. Yeah, it was not good, not good tank time. Not a good
5 time for tanks.

6 KC: I can imagine not. Well, is there anything else you could like to cover while
7 we are here at Con Thien?

8 JC: For the siege mentality thing there?

9 KC: Yes.

10 JC: The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines came in the first part of October and replaced
11 the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines. The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines had been given the nickname
12 “The Walking Dead” because they had taken so many casualties around the DMZ
13 fighting that spring and summer. They were also the ones, I don’t know if you have ever
14 heard of Operation Buffalo, but the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines almost got wiped out on that
15 operation.

16 KC: Right.

17 JC: That was in July. That was July 2nd of ’67 so here we are in October. This is a
18 new battalion coming in with new officers and completely rebuilt with replacements. I
19 found them rather irksome to work with. The 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines that were there
20 first seemed to understand what tanks did, how they operated and how to use them. The
21 1st Battalion, 9th Marines came in and right away I was having conflicts with their staff.
22 They wanted me to have two of my—we have four crewmen on a tank. They wanted two
23 of my crewmen to be on the lines during the night out of the tank and manning a foxhole.
24 I had to go up there and practically pound the desk in front of the major and the colonel
25 and tell them there are four crewmen on a tank because it takes four crewmen to operate a
26 tank in a firefight. You can do it with two. Say they decided to come through the lines
27 and we have to move our tank, well, if we don’t have anybody sitting in the driver’s
28 compartment, who is going to drive the tank? They looked at me like, “Oh, you’ve got a
29 point there, Lieutenant.” They finally gave in to me and I didn’t have to—as it was we
30 were already spending—each crewman would stay awake for two hours during the night
31 on watch and we would rotate the watch so that—you know, I took a turn with my tank

1 crewmen so sometime during the night for two hours I would be up with my binoculars
2 sticking up out of the turret looking around seeing if I could see anybody trying to crawl
3 towards our perimeter. I suppose the worst thing that happened to me and it has taken me
4 a long time to get over it was a friend of mine from the Basic School named Ted
5 Christian was the executive officer of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. Ted
6 called me Ice Cream because of my last name Coan and his nickname in the Basic School
7 was Warthog. He was a sort of homely looking guy and had a rather strange nose. He had
8 also played full back at West Virginia State and pretty much built like a fire plug. We ran
9 into each other one day after they had been there, after one night of being in the perimeter
10 about three or four days and I noticed that none of the men there were wearing their flak
11 jackets and helmets. By this time the rain had pretty much stopped and now the sun was
12 back out and the ground was drying up. I went over to Ted and his company commander
13 and I said that, “You know, I had been here for a month, guys, and this is a dangerous
14 place and I see you men are walking around here with no helmets and flak jackets on.”
15 Ted or his commanding officer or the battalion chaplain were sitting out there sunbathing
16 with their shirts off and I said, “You know, you guys are really asking for it.” Ted says,
17 “Well, you know, it doesn’t seem that bad here, you know. We have been here a few
18 days. We’ve seen worse.” I said, “Ted. Ted, buddy, listen to me. Put your flak jackets and
19 helmets on, man. Trust me on this.” He said, “Yeah, okay, well, whatever.” I said, “Okay,
20 I will see you later.” I wasn’t gone from there but about two minutes and I heard this
21 whew, bang. What had happened was the North Vietnamese had decided to fire a
22 recoilless rifle airburst at us. It went off right over Ted and his people. I didn’t know it at
23 the time that he—that first round had killed him and mortally wounded his captain and
24 the battalion chaplain somehow came through unscathed. Then I saw all of these people
25 running up to where the explosion was and I was thinking, “Oh no. You don’t do that.”
26 These guys are stupid because where one artillery shell or rocket comes in there is going
27 to be another one. Sure enough, a minute later another one came in right in the same
28 place and got all the guys that had, all the lookey-loos and all the thrill-seekers and
29 everybody that had gone up to see what happened they all got hit with the second round. I
30 still didn’t know at the time that Ted had been killed so I was—at four o’clock I had to
31 walk up the hill to the briefing and I see this body, you know, a body laying under a

1 blanket on a cot by the battalion aid station and I just glanced over at the man's forearm. I
2 looked at his watch and I said, "That looks just like Ted Christian's watch." I called the
3 corpsman and I said, "Who is that man?" He said, "We don't know. He was down by the
4 south gate where they took a direct hit. His dog tags got blown off or something and we
5 don't know who he is." I said, "Well, pull the blanket back and let me look at it." He
6 pulled the blanket back and there it was, it was Ted Christian my good friend from Basic
7 School just laying there like he was asleep. I told him who it was and then I went into the
8 aid station and the chaplain was there and he says, "Don't worry, Lieutenant. I got to Ted
9 in time." I went off on the chaplain and said, "You got to him in time? Ted is dead and
10 you got to him in time?" Then I realized, "Oh, geez." I am talking to the chaplain about
11 this, a Catholic chaplain. You know, I turned around and left and I went on up to the
12 battalion CO's bunker and he was standing out there and he was looking at me, I guess he
13 saw the expression on my face and he said, "What's wrong, Jim?" Or, no, he said, "What
14 is wrong, Lieutenant?" You know, I was having a hard time keeping my upper lip straight
15 and I told him that Ted had been killed. He turned around and he walked out and we
16 didn't have a meeting that night. He was so upset about it. That briefing was cancelled. I
17 don't know why I get emotional talking about this stuff. But anyway, shortly after that I
18 think it was the next day we got the word to—our platoon was going to be rotated off of
19 Con Thien and the 2nd Platoon was coming up, the platoon leader was Bill Brignon and
20 the platoon sergeant was Gunnery Sergeant English. They replaced us and we pulled out
21 in the morning. As we were driving our tanks down the road towards, you know, heading
22 south we came to where the new bridge was and that's when we learned that a battalion
23 of North Vietnamese had attacked that bridge that night. The Marines there had managed
24 to hold the perimeter and fight them off. One Marine, Sergeant Foster, had been awarded
25 the Medal of Honor for what he did there. He threw himself on a grenade that had been
26 tossed into the command bunker and sacrificed his life to save the whole command group
27 so he was given the Medal of Honor. Anyway, that was a pretty big battle, too. I think I
28 mentioned that in my book. Then we headed on south and for a while we had a little
29 respite from it because we were at Charlie 2 in a nice fantastically built bunker that had
30 several layers of dirt that had been bulldozed over the top of the bunker. Gunny Hopkins

1 and I shared the same bunker and we actually managed to get some ice and had some
2 cold beer, cold fruit, cold milk. It was nice living for a while.

3 KC: What did it feel like?

4 JC: Huh?

5 KC: What did it feel like when you finally received orders to leave Con Thien?
6 Was it relief? Could you explain that to me?

7 JC: A lot of relief but you know you are not going home. It is just like a ten-round
8 fight and you have made it through round one so you are going to go sit down and catch
9 your breath and then you will be back in it again later somewhere else. We were just kind
10 of glad to be out of Con Thien but we weren't out of danger. We figured, "Well, this is
11 just a little time out here but we will be back into it pretty soon."

12 KC: Mr. Coan, I think that leaves us at a good place to take a break for the day.

13 JC: Okay.

Interview with James Coan
Session [2] of [2]
25 July 2008

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. James
2 Coan. Today is 25 July 2008. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Coan is joining us again
3 from his home in Sierra Vista, Arizona. Good morning, Mr. Coan.

4 JC: Good morning.

5 KC: When we left off yesterday we had just finished the topic, or discussion, of
6 the siege, the forty-day siege at Con Thien. Can you pick up the story from there? What
7 became of you after the siege?

8 JC: You know, if I could, excuse me, I would like to add a few things I left out
9 from yesterday.

10 KC: Oh, please do.

11 JC: Probably because about 75% of what I experienced over in Vietnam was in
12 that forty days at Con Thien so there were a few things I was thinking, excuse me, a few
13 things I was thinking about last night that I neglected to mention and might clarify a little
14 bit about the experience there.

15 KC: Please do.

16 JC: Okay. I think the first thing was why Con Thien? Tactically, the Marines
17 really had to hold that high ground because the high ground was really crucial to the
18 overall strategy of McNamara and Westmoreland, which was to have this strongpoint
19 obstacle system working and Con Thien was a key observation post. Whoever held Con
20 Thien really could dominate the whole area, the whole DMZ area, so that was why there
21 was a Con Thien. I didn't mention that before. Another thing was the tanks that we had
22 there, and we had the M-48A3 Patton tanks. The difference between the M-48A3 and
23 other tanks of that genre were that we had diesel engines and we had infrared capability.
24 We had an improved vision ring. So I know we ran into army units that had the old M-
25 48A1's and A2's who had gasoline-powered engines, we had diesel-powered engines
26 which made a really big difference as far as crew survivability. That was something I
27 failed to mention yesterday.

28 KC: Well, explain that to me a little bit, the gasoline versus the diesel engine.

1 JC: Well, yes. As far as being a fire hazard, if you get gasoline fumes anywhere
2 around a flame your tank is going to blow up. With diesel engines, with the diesel engine
3 that we had and the diesel fuel not being flammable like that, I mean we even sometime
4 cooked our C-rations over an open flame inside the turret. It was much safer and a hit by
5 an anti-tank rocket it would not blow up the tank. It might put a hole in the side of your
6 tank and throw hot metal around but it is not necessarily going to destroy the tank and I
7 think that was really important for us to not have to worry about that. The other thing
8 about the siege of Con Thien is after about thirty days the U.S. government declared that
9 the siege was broken and that the North Vietnamese had suffered a horrendous defeat,
10 thousands of casualties. Because we had had the attention of the media, a lot of the media
11 pundits were comparing the siege of Con Thien to that 1954 battle of Dien Bien Phu
12 where General Giap and the North Vietnamese, well they didn't call them North
13 Vietnamese, the Vietnamese had defeated the French, so there was a lot of concern that
14 we were going to be another Dien Bien Phu. Those that didn't know the facts or those of
15 us that knew the facts, I should say, weren't really concerned about that because we—in
16 addition to the battalion of Marines we had at Con Thien proper, I found out subsequently
17 that we had two more Marine battalions within a half a kilometer of us. The 2nd Battalion,
18 9th Marines was south of us and the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines was east of us. There was a
19 full regiment of Marines there ready to come to our aid if the North Vietnamese decided
20 they were going to overrun Con Thien. They could have made a good try because they
21 had thousands of their soldiers hidden in the jungles and in DMZ area that had they
22 wanted to they could have tried to overrun us. That was a point I didn't make yesterday
23 and, let's see—oh, yeah. Well, our casualties, the official casualties were all over the
24 place as far as what it cost us to hold that high ground. I can tell you from what I have
25 gathered that we had about 140 Marines killed and maybe 1,000 wounded during that
26 battle. I know Khe Sanh got a lot of publicity and is kind of like—whenever they talk
27 about the Vietnam War they talk about Khe Sanh but I have talked to Marines who were
28 in both places and they said Con Thien was much worse. We were in a smaller area, and
29 the amount of incoming that we took was more concentrated. But anyway, that's neither
30 here nor there. I just don't think that the reporting on the battle was as accurate as it
31 should have been. So I am trying to say some things that might clear that up.

1 KC: Sure, sure. I think in your book on Con Thien certainly shows the intensity of
2 that siege very, very well for sure.

3 JC: I had—when I left Con Thien I had suffered only two casualties in my
4 platoon. I had two men wounded from shrapnel, which I felt pretty fortunate considering
5 what we had gone through for forty days to have two men, and they weren't really
6 seriously wounded. So I felt pretty good about that. Another thing you did yesterday or
7 when we last spoke was you asked me how I felt about things and I think sometimes we
8 confuse how do you feel about this, we start talking about what we are thinking instead of
9 the emotions involved. I have got to tell you that we were all scared, scared to death. We
10 just never knew when that one was going to come in on our heads and wipe us off the
11 face of the earth, so there was that emotion going of fear and anxiety and anger and we
12 were really angry that our government had decided we couldn't go up into the DMZ after
13 those guys that were shooting at us. I think those were the three prevalent emotions that
14 we were feeling at the time. The other thing I mentioned was how proud I was that in
15 spite of being scared and in spite of the fear, everybody did their jobs and they carried out
16 their duties. You know, they don't give medals for that and they don't give out
17 recognition for that but that seemed to be a common thread that I was very impressed
18 with was how everybody knew that at any second that their life could be over and that
19 they never held back and said, "No, I can't take this anymore. I am out of here." There
20 was nowhere to go. That is where we had to stay and we had to just do what we had to do
21 to survive. It was a feeling I walked away with immense pride in all those Marines that I
22 was there with. It wasn't only Marines, you know, the Navy corpsmen and the Army
23 dudes driving around in their open what we call Dusters. If a mortar shell came around
24 those guys they were toast because they couldn't hide in the turret like we could.

25 KC: Sure.

26 JC: So those were some points that I wanted to make.

27 KC: Sure and I am very glad that you mentioned those. You had mentioned
28 yesterday, as well, that there was this sense of fatalism among yourself and among those
29 who are with you which—

30 JC: Yeah, I think that it's a survival technique that—when the 1st Battalion, 9th
31 Marines had the moniker of "The Walking Dead." My fatalistic attitude happened when I

1 first reported to Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks in Dong Ha just a few days before I went up
2 to Con Thien. I reported into the CP, what we call the hooch, you know, those plywood
3 and corrugated tin structures that Sea Bees built. Above the doorway they had the Alpha
4 Company honor roll and it was a white piece of wood and hand lettered in black paint
5 they had the names of all the Alpha Company tankers who had been killed in action in
6 Vietnam. I was looking at those names and about every third or fourth name was a 2nd
7 lieutenant or 1st lieutenant and I was beginning to think, “You know what? This is not
8 going to turn—this could very well not turn out good for me.” All of a sudden it just hit
9 me that the odds of me surviving a year there were not good. So you have a couple of
10 choices, you can choose to be a worry wart and nervous wreck and, you know, jump at
11 every noise that you hear or you can just accept that the chances are pretty good I am not
12 coming out of this alive or if I come out of it I am going to come out of it wounded and I
13 hope that I am not wounded too bad. Then you get busy about doing your job and you
14 don’t think about it anymore and that’s what I did. I just didn’t worry about, you know,
15 what if and that sort of thing, if you know what I am talking about.

16 KC: Sure, sure.

17 JC: You just have to just accept that the odds are pretty good you are not going to
18 make it out alive. You maybe have a 50/50 chance you are going to make it out alive but
19 at least you have a chance so there is always that little hope that is floating around in the
20 back of your mind that hopefully I will beat the odds. There was that—I consider it like a
21 survival technique that you just don’t worry about those things. Then as a little story here,
22 when I got down to my last week or two and I was out of the field, I was back in the
23 company headquarters, I was executive officer of Alpha Company at that time, and then I
24 started worrying about getting zapped at the end of my tour. I started having chest pains,
25 indigestion, headaches, all sort of psychosomatic complaints. I went to the base doctor
26 and he asked me, he said, “Jim, are you worried about anything?” I said, “Yeah, I am
27 worried about getting killed here my last week in-country.” “Well, I have a pretty good
28 hunch that once you get on the plane and get out of here those chest pains will go away,”
29 and he was right.

30 KC: I bet in some ways you were probably better off when you had accepted this
31 attitude that you probably wouldn’t make it out.

1 JC: Yeah.

2 KC: Okay, now, is there anything else you would like to add about the siege here
3 at Con Thien before we move on?

4 JC: You know, I talked about the wash out and I kind of glanced over that but I
5 was an eye witness to that situation, maybe I could talk about that.

6 KC: Yes, please. As a matter of fact, I was hoping that you would go into more
7 detail on that.

8 JC: Okay. The night that the rain started my tank and another tank were assigned
9 to go out as part of a reaction force outside of the main perimeter. We spent the night at a
10 little piece of high ground called Yankee Station, which was 500 meters or so south of
11 Con Thien's perimeter wire. We were just there in the event that something happened at
12 Con Thien and we would be there to go to wherever the breach in the wire was we would
13 go there. Nothing happened that night except that it started to rain and then it rained
14 harder, and harder, and harder. Also, as part of that assignment we would have to escort
15 the mine sweep team clearing the road from Con Thien down to the artillery fire base at
16 Charlie 2. We got on the road finally and headed south and I noticed when we got to an
17 area that had been called the Rocky Fjord in years past, we saw like a lake of water that
18 was backed up on the western side of the road. Water was shooting out of these
19 corrugated tin culverts like a rooster tail like you see these racing boats on the lake, you
20 know, when they shoot out a rooster tail, well, that is the way the water was shooting out
21 of the other side of the culvert. I thought about maybe turning around at that point
22 because I didn't know if the road bed was safe. I said, "Well, let's go. It looks like it will
23 hold us." So it did and we had no problem. We went across and continued on to Charlie
24 2. On the way back from Charlie 2 we got back to this same area again. About 20% of
25 that roadway had crumbled and that lake of water that was backed up was even larger and
26 I was really having some doubts about it. I jumped off the tank and went over and looked
27 at it, looked back, and I thought, "Geez, I don't know about this." I asked one of my
28 drivers, his name was, his last name was Bores, Lance Corporal Bores and we called him
29 "Piggy." I said, "Piggy, what do you think? Can we go across?" He said, "Oh, yeah. Sure,
30 Lieutenant. We got to go now. Let's go. If we don't do it now we are not going to be able
31 to get across." I jumped up on the tank and got in my tank commander's cupola and

1 reached back for my communications helmet and I was looking in the eyes of those
2 engineers and grunts that were on the back of my tank and their eyes were like huge
3 white eyes looking at me like, “You’re really not going across are you, sir?” I thought,
4 “Man, I don’t know about this.” In that moment of hesitation the whole thing just went,
5 the whole road way just washed away.

6 KC: Wow.

7 JC: The tragedy of all of this was there were Marines walking on that road when it
8 washed across. I saw one man get washed into some trees and a few of his buddies threw
9 off their equipment and jumped into that water which was just a raging torrent at this
10 time. They jumped in there and pulled him to the shore and I believe they saved another
11 guy a little further downstream by doing the same thing. Then the word came back that
12 one man was unaccounted for and that was their corpsman who had been washed away
13 and obviously drowned. There was nothing we could do at the time except turn around
14 and go back to Charlie 2, and we did. We spent the next five days back at that artillery
15 fire base called Charlie 2 waiting for the rain to stop. One morning the captain, my
16 company commander came out with XO of the battalion and said, “You guys are going
17 back to Con Thien.” They had a tank retriever with them which was going to be used to
18 pull out some of the other tanks that had been stuck in the mud from Gunny English’s
19 platoon. I said, “Okay, sir.” So we got all of our stuff together and as we headed north I
20 knew that the road hadn’t been swept for mines. I told my driver to stay off the road and
21 just go parallel and the other tank followed me and so did the retriever. The only one
22 foolish enough to be going down the road was the captain in his jeep and I was waiting at
23 any second to see a big boom and see the jeep go flying through the air. But by some
24 miracle they didn’t hit a mine and I wasn’t—you know, you had to understand the
25 relationship. I didn’t have a good relationship with my CO. He had been kind of a jerk to
26 me and I didn’t like the man and I am not going to mention him by name. I kind of had a
27 “Well, screw you” attitude, you know, if you are going to be arrogant with me, you
28 know, you can face the consequences of your own arrogance. He headed on up the road.
29 We got to the washout which was now dry as far as depth of water. It was only maybe a
30 couple of feet now. To make a long story short we hit a mine. The other tank that was
31 with us went in a different direction and they hit a mine and now we have two disabled

1 tanks. It was getting late in the afternoon. I had inexperienced crewman with me and I
2 had only been in charge of the platoon about five days.

3 KC: Uh-huh, right.

4 JC: We ended up trying to short track the tanks so that they could be towed back
5 but every time we would get out there and start working a sniper would open up on us. It
6 was—we would fire back with our machineguns and then we wouldn't get any sniper fire
7 and then we would start working and then the sniper would start pinging away at us
8 again. By the time that the captain and his tank retriever got back to us towing one of the
9 stuck tanks, by the way, that they pulled out of the mud, here we were. It's getting dark,
10 both tanks still hadn't had them. Short track means that you bypass the damaged road
11 wheels and you hook up the track and so you can kind of limp out. You just kind of can
12 move but you are handicapped and you have been trying to move. But we weren't able to
13 short track the tanks so he was in a predicament of what do we do now? He called back to
14 the rear and he said, "Get out of there. There is a B-52 strike due imminently in that area
15 so get your tankers out of there and leave the tanks." So we had to abandon our tanks and
16 take away the firing pins and dismantle the radios and put a padlock on the turrets and
17 hope that the North Vietnamese didn't mess with the tanks until they could be retrieved
18 the next day. I was sent off on foot with my two tanks crews and we spent the night with
19 some infantry in some muddy foxholes. I shared a foxhole with a grunt who had
20 nightmares all night long and tossed and turned, and groaned and moaned. It was just
21 awful. I didn't get any sleep at all that night, plus I was up to my knees in mud and water,
22 freezing cold mud and water and it was just a really bad night. We did manage to get
23 back up to Con Thien the next morning. That is when we were waiting for a helicopter
24 ride back to company headquarters and we got some incoming. That is when I lost my
25 two crewmen, Private Manchego and Bores, they got hit by it. We were at the helicopter
26 LZ and took some incoming and both of them got shrapnel wounds and so they had to be
27 medevac'ed. I figured the only way I was going to get out of there was to—they had
28 some dead Marines on stretchers covered with ponchos by the landing zone there, the
29 helicopter landing zone. I thought, "Well." What I had noticed is if you carried a stretcher
30 to the side door of the helicopter and pushed it in then you could jump in afterwards and
31 you could get out of there. Myself and another Marine waited until the next helicopter

1 came in and landed. We picked up a dead Marine on a stretcher and we carried him over
2 to the helicopter and the door gunner said, “We are not taking any dead Marines. We only
3 want the wounded.” I looked at him—I was a little crazy by this time—I said, “You are
4 taking this guy.” And think he could tell by the look in my eye that he was taking him. I
5 pushed him in there on the floor and I jumped in and I pulled that other Marine in with
6 me that was waiting for a ride out and we took off and that is how I got back to Dong Ha.
7 The door gunner was kind of miffed and wouldn’t make eye contact with me. You know,
8 after all we had gone through and no sleep, I will admit I was just a little bit cranky.

9 KC: I could certainly understand that.

10 JC: That’s the story of the Washout. It was repaired within two weeks and they
11 put a bridge over that washout area that would handle tanks and any kind of vehicles. The
12 night of [October] 13th, 14th I believe it was, the North Vietnamese did attack the unit of
13 Marines that was defending the bridge. They knew that it was important to keep the
14 supply route open but those Marines were able to hold onto the bridge and not let it get
15 captured or destroyed. I think that was pretty much the end of the siege.

16 KC: Okay. Were there Marines permanently stationed there at the bridge to hold
17 it?

18 JC: There were, yes. In fact, I guess we will get to this later but I ended up
19 coming back a couple of months later and my tanks were part of the detachment of
20 Marines that guarded the bridge.

21 KC: Okay, alright, very good. Well, what about after the siege? You make your
22 way to Dong Ha. How long were you in Dong Ha?

23 JC: Actually, we only went as far south as Charlie 2.

24 KC: Oh, is that right? Okay.

25 JC: We went as far south as Charlie 2 and we—it was kind of like an R&R for us
26 in that we—any incoming was very infrequent. We had gone that whole forty days
27 without any showers, so here was our chance to get some showers and use soap and wash
28 our clothes and eat some hot food. We had gone forty days without any of those luxuries
29 and actually not have to use a latrine at night because the fear of incoming we could
30 actually use one in daylight. That was definitely a breather for us but after thirty days
31 there we got the word to go back up to the washout. We had three tank platoons in the

1 company so we were taking turns every thirty days of rotating between those three
2 locations, Charlie 2, the Washout, and Con Thien. We would spend thirty days at one
3 place and move up, you know, musical chairs type of thing.

4 KC: Sure. If you could Mr. Coan—

5 JC: What's that?

6 KC: If you could, could you describe for me the base there at Charlie 2? From a
7 physical standpoint what did it look like?

8 JC: Okay. Charlie 2 was primarily an artillery fire base.

9 KC: Okay.

10 JC: Because of this dye marker operation which was the strong point obstacle
11 system with all of these mutually supporting fire bases, they had come in and put bunkers
12 in that were called dye marker bunkers that were put in by Marine engineers and they had
13 12 X 12 beams, they had stairs, electrical lights, you know, battery-powered lights. They
14 even had places along the walls kind of like for bunk beds so you could just throw out
15 your inflatable rubber lady there, whatever you call them, your mattress, put them down
16 and it was clean, it was dry, it was safe, had a lot of protection overhead, and probably
17 only like 152-mm artillery shell was about the only thing—a direct hit with that might
18 penetrate but anything else wouldn't penetrate so you were relatively safe in those dye
19 marker bunkers.

20 KC: Okay.

21 JC: That's what they were trying to do at Con Thien but because of the rain and
22 the mud and the harassment by the North Vietnamese up in the DMZ they weren't able to
23 get those dye marker bunkers built until later that spring. But Charlie 2 was actually—
24 they even had a mess tent there that you could go get hot food. We were a couple miles
25 south of Con Thien.

26 KC: Okay. What things were you doing here? You say you were at Charlie 2 for
27 thirty days. Is that correct?

28 JC: Yeah, mainly just we—you know, tanks need daily preventive maintenance
29 and if they don't get that they break down. We had been pretty slack about that sort of
30 thing when we were taking incoming at Con Thien and a lot of that preventive
31 maintenance, you know, is it more important to grease up your road wheels or stay alive?

1 Of course, all the maintenance stuff got put on the back shelf. We got to Charlie 2, we
2 did, we spent a lot of time just kind of getting our sensibilities back and relaxing and
3 working on our tanks. Alpha Company would send out their maintenance men and they
4 would work on our tank radios and anything else that wasn't up to par.

5 KC: What sort of things did you do here for relaxation or recuperation?

6 JC: Oh, mainly played cards. Cards, chess, checkers, write letters. I couldn't write
7 any letters home so that was out for me.

8 KC: Right, right, right.

9 JC: But I had a man in my platoon, Lance Corporal Trevail, who was a Canadian
10 citizen, had spent two years in the Canadian army and had a little experience—he had
11 been a tanker in the Canadian army and had also had a couple years of college under his
12 belt. Trevail was a genius and when we would pull into a location like that his favorite
13 thing was to take his chess board over to another unit, artillery unit or infantry unit, and
14 find out who the officers were and challenge them to a game of chess. He never lost.

15 KC: Really?

16 JC: He never lost. I played a little chess myself. I wouldn't even take him on he
17 was so good. As a little aside, while we were there at Charlie 2 Trevail worked on a
18 couple of our tank radios. He did work that they do back in Barstow, California. He did
19 some work on our radios and subsequently an inspector came out from battalion
20 headquarters—I got a commendation for my outstanding tank radios thanks to Trevail.
21 Yeah, he was something else. That is how we passed the time.

22 KC: Sure.

23 JC: We did some gambling. Yeah, we gambled. We gambled on cards, poker or
24 whatever.

25 KC: You spent this time here at Charlie 2 and then you go back to the bridge, I
26 believe you said.

27 JC: It is still called the Washout Bridge.

28 KC: The Washout Bridge. What was it like, you knew that you had to go back,
29 what was it like to leave the relative comforts at Charlie 2 to go back to the Washout
30 Bridge?

1 JC: Well, we were—now we were on potential combat but we knew there had
2 been a big battle there the month before so we were pulling watches at night and they had
3 us doing something really stupid though, but you just have to follow orders. The infantry
4 captain wanted us periodically through the night to put a canister round, which is like a
5 giant shotgun shell, put a canister round in the chamber and just blast away in case any
6 sappers were trying to sneak up on our position. We didn't have the wire, we didn't have
7 the minefields. We had a lot of trees around there so it would have been easy to have a
8 unit sneak up to us and try to overrun us. Instead of having a five-tank platoon there they
9 gave us three more tanks so we had eight tanks at that location because the higher ups,
10 the brass were pretty concerned that the North Vietnamese would try again to destroy that
11 bridge and cut off our supply route to Con Thien. What I understand is that the incoming
12 and the bombardment that we had been taking in September and early October by this
13 time which was November and early December all of that had slacked off. The siege was
14 broken so the guys that went up there subsequently did not face what we faced during the
15 siege. I went back up—remember I went back up—my turn to rotate was the end of
16 December of '67 and my first night there was Christmas Eve and about midnight on
17 Christmas Eve—the military has these pop up flares. They are in an aluminum tube about
18 a foot or sixteen inches long. You take the cap off the top and you put it on the bottom
19 and you bang it on something and it fires the flare up in the air and you have red flares,
20 green flares, white, you know, all these kind of colored flares to signal, maybe to signal
21 aircraft or whatever. I noticed I kept hearing some pop, woosh sounds around our
22 perimeter there at Con Thien and red and green and white flares were shooting up. I
23 looked out towards Gio Linh down the trace and their base had red, green, and white
24 flares popping up. I looked back at Cam Lo and I could see back to Dong Ha and I could
25 see Charlie 2, every one of our fire bases had guys popping those flares. Well, you know
26 this is a serious breach of security. You just don't fire a flare like that unless you have
27 cleared it all the way up to the president of the United States. It's a strange thing. All
28 these Marines just broke loose on Christmas Eve, it was really something to see. Of
29 course, you had your what we called the lifers, the senior NCOs and officers running
30 around and trying to, and yelling over the radio, "Stop this! Stop that! Don't do this! We

1 will court martial you, da, da, da, da. It didn't faze them. It didn't faze them at all. If
2 anything they fired up even more flares. That was pretty memorable.

3 KC: Well, it was the Christmas season and the colors were right.

4 JC: The colors were right. I remember they brought in a Christmas dinner for us,
5 turkey and mashed potatoes and stuff like that. Well, what they didn't know was that we
6 had all been on a C-ration diet for so long that when we got that rich food it just tore us
7 up. Every one of us was running to the bathroom. That was—you know, it was different.
8 When we went back to Con Thien then and into the new year, January and it was just so
9 much calmer and I was just not worrying every second about something blowing me up.
10 It was a different experience. The ground was a little harder so occasionally we were still
11 going out to protect the infantry and engineers on the road, mine sweeps and occasionally
12 we would go outside the perimeter. If a unit stepped into something, maybe ran into an
13 ambush or something we would go out there and be the reaction force. The ground was
14 still pretty soggy. There were places we couldn't go because we knew we would get stuck
15 and then that would make a little problem into a major problem.

16 KC: Sure.

17 JC: So they were a little reluctant to use us and I wasn't disappointed at that
18 because I didn't want to have to go through getting stuck in the mud. I know what a
19 nightmare that can be for a tanker.

20 KC: Sure, being exposed when you are trying to get out, as well.

21 JC: Yeah.

22 KC: Well, this takes us into January of 1968 and obviously you know what is
23 coming next here.

24 JC: You're right.

25 KC: What did the beginning of the Tet Offensive mean to you? Were you still at
26 Con Thien?

27 JC: I was still at Con Thien.

28 KC: Okay. Explain to me what happened there.

29 JC: Hardly anything.

30 KC: Okay.

1 JC: It was like—it was very strange. We heard about the attacks all over the
2 country and we were on ultra-high alert but nothing happened to us at Con Thien.

3 KC: Do you think that was—excuse me, do you think that was due in part to the
4 fact that there was so much activity there in that area before that perhaps the NVA had
5 spent themselves or were they just bypass Con Thien and focus more on the more heavily
6 populated centers?

7 JC: I think that is what it was. I think they wanted to have us focus on these
8 outlying areas, these fire bases and Khe Sanh and other places like that when they really
9 wanted us not to be thinking about those highly populated areas where they were going to
10 attack. I believe that was what it was.

11 KC: Okay.

12 JC: We had served their purpose. By the time Tet rolled around they had no more
13 need for us.

14 KC: It was easy to bypass you at that point on, then. So you really saw no action
15 during the offensive?

16 JC: Nothing more than we had seen previously.

17 KC: Okay, interesting. Well, did you get a sense of what the—you said you heard
18 about the attacks all over the rest of the country. Did you get a sense of the size, the scale
19 of the Tet Offensive while you were up there at Con Thien?

20 JC: No, I didn't. I really didn't know of the extent of it except that we had been—
21 the word came down to us that the North Vietnamese MiGs were headed south and that
22 they were going to attack positions south of the DMZ and so we had better be ready that a
23 major offensive was headed our way. I remember—I have a cupola-mounted .50-caliber
24 machinegun that fires one box of ammunition, fifty rounds and then you have to open
25 another box, scrape your knuckles on the inside of the top of the cupola hatch trying to
26 reload the .50-caliber. I was looking at—I didn't have a hydraulic—any way electrical of
27 rotating that machinegun. I had to crank it, one crank, one handle would crank it up and
28 down and one would crank it left and right, traverse left and right. I said, "You know
29 what? There is no way that I would ever be able to shoot down a jet coming at me." It
30 would be impossible. Not only that, if you didn't have your timing exactly right on the
31 solenoid you might get off two or three rounds and then you have to crank the charger

1 handle manually, get off two or three more rounds, crank the—it was a worthless
2 weapon. Subsequently, they improved that and the new Abrams tanks, of course, has a
3 magnificent cupola-mounted machinegun but ours was just really poorly designed and
4 impractical and worthless in a situation like that. We all kind of looked at each other like
5 I wonder if we put a canister round in the cannon and aimed it as high as we could maybe
6 we could shoot at it like a shotgun. But, no, thankfully we never saw any jets and we
7 never saw any tanks coming our way and that was just a rumor that never materialized.

8 KC: Sure. Well, tell me about—and this is roughly the same time up in that area
9 south of the DMZ—about Operation Kentucky. Were you a part of Operation Kentucky?

10 JC: Yes, I was.

11 KC: Could you explain the purpose of that and your role in it?

12 JC: Okay. I went up—okay, first of all, I made 1st lieutenant in February of '68.

13 KC: Okay.

14 JC: Then we had rotated back, sometime in February we rotated off of Con Thien
15 and we went back to Charlie 2 again. Then in March at the end of March of '68 I was told
16 to get everybody loaded up and get ready because you are going up to Con Thien to stay.
17 In March of '68 we went back up and this was going to be our permanent home, it was
18 going to be Con Thien. The rains had pretty much stopped. The ground was firm so we
19 were ready to go on operations or do whatever we needed to do to support the infantry
20 that was there. They really didn't utilize us, Kelly, much other than just protection for
21 road sweeps and sometimes we would go out on an operation where we would go on a
22 search-and-destroy operation and we would accompany the infantry but we didn't really
23 make any contact. That changed in April of '68 when—let's see. I am trying to think of
24 the unit I was with. They did come across a unit of, a large unit, of North Vietnamese that
25 were coming across the trace and headed south. They had trapped them in Leatherneck
26 Square so they weren't able to keep going south, they couldn't go east or west, and they
27 couldn't go back across the trace. Then the whole area was under the command of the 9th
28 Marines and the 9th Marines brought in—oh, they surrounded them with about three or
29 four regiments, not regiments, three or four battalions so they had more than a regiment
30 of Marines surrounding this unit and pretty big battles happened. I had gone on R&R
31 and—

1 KC: Where had you gone for R&R?

2 JC: I went to Hawaii for R&R. I kept getting bumped up on the R&R list and
3 finally I positioned when a plane came up for Hawaii and I said I will take it because I
4 had been wanting to go to Australia but for some reason and I don't know how the
5 politics worked, I kept getting bumped. I came back to find out that my platoon while I
6 was gone had been a reaction force that went out and got involved in some pretty serious
7 fighting southeast of Con Thien. None of the tankers were casualties and they didn't lose
8 any tanks but there was an area southeast of Con Thien called Phu Oc, P-H-U O-C, two
9 words, and the unit that had gone in there had been ambushed and took some pretty
10 serious casualties. My tanks were part of the reaction force that went in there and helped
11 rescue those that were wounded and pulled out those killed. As the envelopment of that
12 North Vietnamese unit progressed and they kept pushing, pushing, pushing the North
13 Vietnamese were retreating across the trace. As I described before, it was bulldozed flat
14 and you could see it was just like a golf course fairway. Groups of the North Vietnamese
15 that were trapped were trying to break out and they were in the afternoon in full daylight
16 trying to run across that 600-meter bulldozed clear trace. The tankers at Con Thien that
17 were sitting up on OP-3 and the grunts with their recoilless rifles, the helicopter gunships,
18 the people at Gio Linh, it was a turkey shoot, it was a massacre. They will never—hardly
19 any of those trapped North Vietnamese who tried to run back north hardly any of them
20 made it alive across there. But I missed that. I didn't see it. All I heard was stories about
21 it. That was one of the big actions in our area during Kentucky. In July, Operation Thor
22 that was next and the reason for Operation Thor was that our 3rd Marine Amphibious
23 Force or the headquarters decided that they had had enough of this area up in the southern
24 DMZ that we weren't allowed to go in after the North Vietnamese so they decided that
25 they were going to go after them. It started the 1st of July with a really heavy
26 bombardment from air, sea, and our own artillery. They pulled a unit of eight-inch guns
27 into Con Thien and they were firing over our heads. If you don't think that kept you
28 awake all night, the eight-inch guns firing over Con Thien up into the demilitarized zone
29 and even firing over the Ben Hai River up into North Vietnam. That went on for several
30 days and when we looked out there the whole area was just blanketed with smoke and
31 dust. You couldn't hardly see what was going on but you knew that something pretty

1 serious was going on up there. Then we went out with the infantry, the whole 9th Marine
2 Regiment, 1st Battalion, 2nd Battalion, and 3rd Battalion. My platoon from Con Thien was
3 assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines. We were to rotate around Con Thien in like a
4 wagon wheel formation with the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines on our left and we were the
5 battalion that was closest to Con Thien. Then the other battalion, the 1st Battalion, 9th
6 Marines was to come up from Cam Lo up through Leatherneck Square and we were all
7 supposed to meet at the trace. We started that operation around July 5th and that was the
8 first time I had really been on an operation where tank/infantry coordination was
9 required. Even though I had been in-country about ten months I had that platoon for
10 about eight months this was a new experience for me. We didn't hardly contact any of the
11 enemy up there. It was pretty much a piece of cake until the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines,
12 which was the outside battalion on the sweep going around like a wagon wheel, they
13 actually went up into the southern part of the demilitarized zone and that is where they
14 made contact. That was probably the time I came the closest to not making it home. I was
15 in my tank sitting up looking around with my torso sticking up out of the tank
16 commander's cupola and for some reason I decided, you know, "I need a drink of water"
17 and I dropped down into the tank turret for just a second to grab my canteen cup and an
18 artillery shell landed right next to the tank. If I had been standing up two seconds longer I
19 wouldn't be here right now.

20 KC: Wow.

21 JC: That was probably the closest call I ever had except, well, there was
22 another—no I didn't even mention the time I got wounded. That was a very close call.

23 KC: No you didn't. I wanted to talk to you about that, as well.

24 JC: Let me finish this Operation Thor.

25 KC: Sure.

26 JC: Well, I will tell you what. Let's come back to that, yeah. Where I got
27 wounded was in May of '68. I had a new platoon sergeant and that was my fourth platoon
28 sergeant that I had gone through and all together I went through five platoon sergeants
29 during my ten months because of personal reasons, being wounded, one of them had a
30 nervous breakdown, there were different reasons but he was my, I think, fourth platoon
31 sergeant. I had him out in my tank, we were sitting up, he was sitting up in the loader's

1 hatch and I was in the tank commander's cupola and we were watching an air strike being
2 run out in Leatherneck Square. I had my binoculars up to my face. I was looking, and the
3 gunny was on my right and I guess a forward observer spotted us. It was something I
4 would have never had done months earlier because, you know, I would have been
5 worried about that but we hadn't taken any incoming for two or three weeks up there at
6 Con Thien I thought, you know, "Well, they are paying attention somewhere else. They
7 are not even looking at us anymore." Well, I was wrong. An FO (forward observer)
8 spotted us and the first—like I said, you don't ever hear the first mortar shell if you have
9 all this noise going around of trucks and tanks and helicopters and stuff, you don't hear it.
10 The first shell landed right next to the tank on Gunny Thomason's side and he took most
11 of the shrapnel and I got one piece in the back of my wrist. I am thinking had I not had
12 my binoculars up to my face that shrapnel probably would have hit me in the eye or the
13 face. Anyway, it hit me in the hand and that is how I got wounded. I wasn't paying too
14 much attention to myself. I really had to get the gunny down inside the turret and start
15 applying direct pressure because he was pretty well riddled and he was shooting blood
16 everywhere. I managed to get all of his bleeding stopped and then we—some of tankers
17 ran out and saved us. We got him to the aid station and he is all right. He got medevac'ed
18 out. I was not considered serious enough to be medevac'ed. I went into the aid station and
19 the Navy doctor there started probing around and he said, "You know, Lieutenant, I could
20 do a lot of nerve damage to your hand if I don't do this right. It might be better to leave
21 the shrapnel in there," so he did and that was the end of that.

22 KC: Do you still have the shrapnel now?

23 JC: So I stayed there at Con Thien. I didn't go anywhere. My hand swelled up
24 twice its size and turned purple but that was the only effect I had from that.

25 KC: Do you still have the shrapnel in your hand?

26 JC: No, I don't. About twenty years later I was out—we had this stuff on the side
27 of our house called pampas grass, P-A-M-P-A-S grass and a huge thing. I took a machete
28 and I was trying to chop it down and by the end of a couple hours of that my hand—I
29 couldn't move my wrist, my hand. It was extremely painful and I couldn't hold a cup, I
30 couldn't hold a pen or anything so I went to the doctor and he said that that shrapnel had
31 worked its way into the base of the thumb joint and he would recommend operating on it.

1 I went to one of the best—I didn't go to the VA (Veterans Administration), I went to a
2 physician there in California who was known for his hand surgery, he was known all over
3 the world as an expert. He opened up that joint and took the shrapnel out. I still have that
4 piece of shrapnel as a little war souvenir. About the size, do you know what a pellet looks
5 like that you fire out of a pellet gun?

6 KC: Sure.

7 JC: Well, that is about the size of what it was. It is interesting to me that I carried
8 that around in my wrist all these years and it never bothered me until that one day, so I
9 did have the shrapnel removed.

10 KC: Okay. Well, let's go back to Operation Thor. You said you wanted to get
11 back to that.

12 JC: That was my last operation and I was—after we got done with the wagon
13 wheel sweep and I found out subsequently that we had uncovered—there were also
14 bulldozers with us that I didn't know about that were following in trace of us. When the
15 infantry would come across a bunker that had supplies in it or anything like that the
16 bulldozers would—the engineers would set charges, detonate it, blow it up and then the
17 bulldozers would come in and level it and it was like a scorched earth policy. I think 3rd
18 MAF (Marine Amphibious Force) decided they had had enough of what General Giap
19 and his North Vietnamese were doing to our grand plan to put an anti-infiltration barrier
20 across the southern part of the DMZ and they were going to make sure that this was a
21 significant setback for the North Vietnamese and it was because they destroyed hundreds
22 of supply caches, ammunition, food and things like that and just basically leveled the
23 place out there. We continued our operation south into Leatherneck Square and we didn't
24 really—we never made any contact. It was a deal where the infantry would go from point
25 A to point B, we would go along with them. They would see a tree line and say, "Fire a
26 few rounds in there." We would fire a few rounds into the tree line and then they would
27 check it out, there would be nothing there. Nothing was really going on except that it was
28 so blasted hot. It was like 120 degrees in the middle of the summer. I remember there
29 were times when I was thinking, "You know, I have been out here ten months," and
30 usually for an officer like that you would expect to be out in the field for six months and I
31 was out there ten months. I was beginning to feel kind of unappreciated. I think the only

1 people that appreciated me were the guys in my platoon because I was pretty experienced
2 and I wasn't about to do something stupid to get them hurt so they didn't want me to go
3 away and get a brand-new, green lieutenant in there. One day we were—we had stopped
4 for a water break and a helicopter landed nearby and this 2nd lieutenant walked up to me
5 and said, "Are you Lieutenant Coan?" I said, "Yeah. So what?" "Well, I am your
6 replacement. I am Frank Blakemore and you are supposed to get on this helicopter and
7 leave and go back to Dong Ha." I think within two minutes I had grabbed everything that
8 was important to me, said goodbye to all my tank commanders and jumped on that
9 helicopter.

10 KC: Just like that? You had no idea it was coming?

11 JC: Huh?

12 KC: You had no idea this was coming?

13 JC: Had no idea, had no idea at all.

14 KC: What day was this? Do you remember?

15 JC: This was on my birthday, too, July 15th. The best birthday present I ever had.

16 KC: Incredible, that is truly incredible.

17 JC: When I got back to Dong Ha and got off the helicopter I got a jeep ride to
18 Alpha Company headquarters where the captain said, "Lieutenant, I am making you the
19 executive officer of the company. I was monitoring your radio communications and I
20 really liked the way you directed your tanks so you are going to be my XO." So that is
21 what I did the rest of the time I was in Dong Ha, I was the executive officer.

22 KC: So what was that, about two months I guess?

23 JC: About two months, yeah.

24 KC: What were your duties here as XO?

25 JC: Kind of—not much. Walk around the tank ramp and make sure that nobody
26 was doing anything that was going to get them hurt, do some paperwork, monitor, go
27 down to the radio shack and monitor communications with the other units that were
28 reporting into the company. Occasionally the captain would say, "I want you to make
29 sure everybody gets the word on this and this." I would make sure that the information
30 got disseminated to the other units. The closer I got to my going home date the less and
31 less I left the company area. We would go over to the 9th Motor Transport Battalion

1 where they had a really good kitchen and I ate three good meals a day. When I went to
2 Vietnam I probably weighed close to 190 pounds. I was less than 160 by the time I got
3 back to Dong Ha so I was a frequent visitor over at the 9th Motors Transport kitchen
4 trying to put some of that weight back on. That was very much it. There was one
5 operation that came up when I had about two or three days left to go. It was a joint
6 Marine Corps/South Vietnamese Army operation called Lam Son 250. L-A-M and then
7 S-O-N two words, 250. Two platoons of Marine tanks were going to escort an ARVN
8 (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), that is ARVN that is South Vietnamese, up to an
9 area above Gio Linh near the ocean because they had been, intelligence, they had gotten
10 some intelligence that the North Vietnamese were, a large unit of North Vietnamese,
11 were camped up there. I missed this operation but they—the tankers, those two tank
12 platoons were credited with over 200 North Vietnamese KIAs. The South Vietnamese
13 army troops that rode on the back of our tanks, our guys were pretty impressed with their
14 bravery. You know, the South Vietnamese army kind of gets a bad rap, that they really
15 didn't win a fight for their country and it was only the marines and the rangers and those
16 that were really ready to fight and die. Well, not these guys. These guys were very brave
17 and very good. The mission Lam Son 250 was a smashing success. They totally
18 destroyed that North Vietnamese battalion and they ran back across the river and weren't
19 heard from for a long time. That was a very good joint Marine Corps/South Vietnamese
20 Army operation. I missed that. Every one of the tankers that was there when they got
21 back into Dong Ha, a South Vietnamese general had those tankers lined up and
22 personally awarded each one of them a Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. But, you know, I
23 was not part of that. I just decided I just needed to be on a plane and going home.

24 KC: Sure, sure.

25 JC: I think this pretty much covers what happened to me, what I did over in
26 Vietnam.

27 KC: You mentioned the Vietnamese. I have got two questions here, they are large
28 questions, I think. Offer me your impressions of, first, the South Vietnamese military
29 capabilities, both the military, civilians. What were your impressions of the South
30 Vietnamese?

1 JC: Okay. I am going to have to clear my throat, just hang on a second. Hello,
2 okay. Yeah, it was a surprise to me that when I first reported in-country the Vietnamese
3 civilians appeared to be just tolerating us. I thought we would be treated like we are here
4 to save their culture and their lives literally and it was kind of like they were just putting
5 up with us, tolerating us. That was my first impression. I didn't really have much contact
6 with the South Vietnamese army at all. I can't really tell you about the military because I
7 just really had almost no contact with them except I can tell you that that time that we
8 were getting our tanks over to the Qua Viet to get them on the mike boats so they could
9 go up the Qua Viet for that Lam Son 250 operation. I got the strangest feeling walking
10 around the South Vietnamese civilians there because I saw these hard-looking young men
11 in civilian clothes and they were not friendly. They looked at me like they would like to
12 come over and stick a knife in me and I am pretty sure that they were Viet Cong
13 infiltrators who were—no one wanted to give them up because it would be a death
14 sentence for them if they told somebody that, hey, these people aren't from here, they are
15 not on our side. The only other thing that I can tell you was we would go into these villes
16 to do some shopping and get some what we called Ho Chi Minh sandals which were
17 these—made out of automobile tires with the inner tube strap, a piece of inner tube that
18 they would secure to the sandal to make what you put between your two toes to hold your
19 sandals on. We called those Ho Chi Minh sandals and we would get candles. If we could
20 we would buy some beer, once and a while we would get some alcohol. As far as any
21 hanky-panky or anything with the South Vietnamese women there, my experience was
22 they wanted nothing to do with us where we were and there would be *papasan* we called
23 them, some guy with a beard, old man would be eye-balling the girls. Kind of the look
24 was don't talk to those Marines, don't have anything to do with those Marines, and you
25 stay out of sight until they are gone. One interesting experience I did have is I went into
26 the ville there at Cam Lo when I was at Charlie 2 to get a haircut but I took my insignia
27 off and I made sure I said, "Don't call me Lieutenant. My name is Jim. Okay?" I guess
28 there was something that they sensed or picked up, they could tell that I wasn't just Jim,
29 Lance Corporal Jim, you know, that I was the platoon leader. I would sit down and I
30 would have my .45, I always carried a .45 in a shoulder holster. I always had that .45, my
31 hand, on that .45. My antenna were up, I just—I had heard too many stories and the guy

1 would put the sheet over me and give me a pretty good haircut and crack my neck and all
2 of that. I went back again in another month or so and got another haircut, same thing, no
3 problem. Then during Tet of '68 the night that the Cam Lo district headquarters was
4 attacked the river that ran by there, the Cam Lo River, and they had a Marine Corps
5 installation down the road called Charlie 3 which was south of Charlie 2 by several miles.
6 Charlie 3 Marines had their sniper, had a sniper team watching the bridge at night and
7 they picked up through their sniper scopes some frog men swimming towards the bridge
8 pushing some sort of a, it was like some stuff wrapped and floating in front of them as
9 they swam towards the bridge. Well, the snipers opened up with their Starlight scopes
10 and picked them off. When they pulled the bodies up on the bank, guess what? One of
11 those frog men was the barber that had been cutting my hair.

12 KC: Incredible. Absolutely incredible. Out of all these times you had been there.

13 JC: What is that?

14 KC: And all of the times that you had been there for him to cut your hair.

15 JC: Yeah, he cut my hair two or three times and was smiling and showing me his
16 teeth and very friendly. The guy was a Viet Cong frog man.

17 KC: Wow. Have you had a chance, I am sure you have, had a chance to reflect on
18 that since you have come back over the years?

19 JC: Well, yeah, it was—it is just, you just have to shake your head at what we had
20 gotten ourselves into. What we had gotten ourselves into as a country. You know, the
21 parameters that we set for ourselves as far as how far we could go north up into, across
22 the DMZ and the fact that we couldn't go into Cambodia and we couldn't go into Laos
23 and if we did it was going to create a huge uproar in this country. In fact, it did around
24 1970, the great student protest. The parameters that we set for ourselves and how we
25 decided we were going to wage this war was not winnable, but this is looking back on it
26 years later. It was a no-win situation. There was no way we could walk out of there with a
27 win. Until Nixon got really tough and started bringing the B-52s into Hanoi and got the
28 North Vietnamese to the peace table we were—it was just, you know, I don't want to say
29 we sacrificed a lot of lives for nothing. I mean we were well intentioned, we thought we
30 were doing the right thing, and we thought that the strategy and tactics that we were
31 employing were going to lead to victory but when I think about the things that I

1 experienced like that with the friendly town barber being a Viet Cong sapper and the
2 other civilians knew it but nobody would come forward and finger him and say, “You
3 need to get this guy out of here.” I don’t know how you can win a war against people like
4 that.

5 KC: Very interesting. Well, my other big question had to do with the other side,
6 the enemy. What were your impressions of the—mostly, of course, you faced NVA. Did
7 you encounter other VC in combat?

8 JC: You know we might have, me personally I believe that what we encountered
9 were NVA hard-core units. It is possible there were some Viet Cong. The unit that
10 attacked the Cam Lo district headquarters was made up of Viet Cong and North
11 Vietnamese army. Yeah, we had a lot of respect for them as warriors. They were tough,
12 would fight to the death, wouldn’t surrender unless they were incapacitated and unable to
13 fight back, maybe wounded, really, you know, just hard-core indoctrination. They were
14 pretty, how shall I say, sadistic to any of our side that got captured alive. But were we
15 afraid of them? No. Did we think we could defeat them? Yes. Did we respect them? Yes,
16 we respected them as a worthy enemy. They were very smart, determined, they were
17 quite the adversary for us. We got outsmarted sometimes by them because they had a lot
18 of time to figure out what we were doing. We tended to do—we tended to fall into
19 patterns and we would do things repeatedly the same way and so they would see that as a
20 weakness they could exploit and they often did exploit that weakness of us. But they
21 would hang in there if they were surrounded and out-gunned, they would not just say,
22 “All right, you have got us. We quit.” They wouldn’t quit. That was that indoctrination, I
23 believe, the indoctrination that they received from early on. They did the same things that
24 we did. I mean, the loyalty that you have for your comrades is so powerful and we had
25 that same loyalty amongst us Marines and I am sure soldiers and sailors did the same
26 thing. You really fight and die for the guy on either side of you and behind you. It is not
27 this great cause. I think that the difference between us and our North Vietnamese enemy
28 is that not only were they fighting for each other but they totally believed that their cause
29 was worth dying for. We didn’t think that our cause was worth dying for but the men on
30 either side of us they were worth fighting for. If you can understand what I am trying to
31 say.

1 KC: Sure, absolutely.

2 JC: So for them surrender was not an option. Often it was fight to the death. You
3 know, I think we experienced some of that in World War II against, with the Japanese for
4 different reasons. To try to fight an enemy that is not going to surrender even if they run
5 out of ammunition they are going to hang in there, that is a pretty tough group to fight.

6 KC: Well, tell me about receiving your orders to go home, then, in September.

7 JC: Okay. I had put in—every time they would hand us a dream sheet, I would
8 call it a dream sheet because you would put down where you want to have your duty
9 stations 1, 2, 3. I always wanted to go back to the West Coast somewhere because I was
10 from the West Coast. Of course, my duty station was going to be Camp Lejeune, North
11 Carolina, on the East Coast. I got back to Camp Lejeune and was assigned to the 2nd Tank
12 Battalion, 2nd Marine Division. Within two or three months there an opening came up
13 with Charlie Company, 2nd Tank Battalion and I was offered the job as the company
14 commander. So I was a 1st lieutenant company commander. All of the other company
15 commanders were captains.

16 KC: Why were you chosen as a junior rank?

17 JC: It could be my combat experience. It could be that we went to some training
18 in—loaded up all the battalion tanks on flat cars and went to an Army, I think it was Fort
19 Stewart, Georgia, and we went down there for some live-fire gunnery and when we got to
20 the base there where they put us there was no recreation for them, for the men. They had
21 no library, no pool tables, no ping-pong, no nothing for them to do at the end of the day. I
22 was kind of like, I was kind of a fifth wheel staff officer. I really didn't have too much
23 responsibility for anything so I went out with my NCO and we went all over the base and
24 we connected with the library, we went to the base recreation officer. So as a result of my
25 efforts these trucks pulled up and they started unloading ping-pong tables, and pool
26 tables, and bringing in books for the guys to read and things like that. I think some people
27 were impressed that I was looking after the men and their morale. What I heard was some
28 of the senior NCOs went to the colonel and said, "You know, this Lieutenant Coan is
29 good people. He looks after his troops," you know, "File that away for future reference,"
30 so I think that helped. The next time they had a company commander opening I was
31 given the job. I wasn't the only 1st lieutenant, by the way, there was a 1st Lieutenant

1 Marty Steele who had Alpha Company. Marty was the youngest, I believe, was the
2 youngest company commander in the Marine Corps. He was only twenty-two years old.
3 He was prior enlisted, served as a lance corporal in Vietnam in 1965, came back and
4 finished college, went to OCS (Officer Candidate School), and now he was a 1st
5 lieutenant. Marty would go on to become a lieutenant general and was quite influential in
6 the Marine Corps having Abrams tanks. But back in those days I was about twenty-six or
7 twenty-seven and he was twenty-two. He was kind of like my little brother. I called him
8 Marty and he called me Jimmy. I am in the Vietnam Tankers Association so the first time
9 we had a board of directors meeting, General Steele walks in and he walks over to me
10 and he says, “Jimmy, how are you doing?” And I said, “Marty, how are you?” And we
11 gave each other man hugs. Everyone in the room was saying, “Can you imagine this?
12 Here is a general giving this guy a hug.” So anyway, that was pretty much the experience.
13 I had the company of heavy tanks, the Marine Corps doesn’t have those M103-A2s
14 anymore. They had a 120-mm gun, they weighed sixty-two tons, they had a five-man
15 crew, and they were just considered too heavy for being able to negotiate around terrain
16 that we thought we might be going into so the Marine Corps got rid of those and now
17 they have the Abrams tanks which are just as heavy and have 120-mm gun.

18 KC: Now, you came back to the United States in 1968.

19 JC: Right.

20 KC: The protests, of course, are raging, the impression of the American soldier
21 returning from Vietnam in many people’s eyes in the United States was not a positive,
22 they were not looked at in a positive way. What were your experiences upon coming back
23 to the U.S. in regards to the war protest, etc.?

24 JC: When I got on the plane in Okinawa—oh, yeah. When I was in Da Nang
25 waiting for my flight out on Flying Tiger Airlines, I was standing with a bunch of new
26 boot Marines that had just come in-country and they heard a rocket coming in. The
27 enemy would occasionally fire rockets towards the air base. I knew from my experience
28 that that thing was going to land a mile away. I wasn’t too worried but all these new guys
29 panicked and ran towards a ditch. Well, there was a barbed-wire fence along the edge of
30 that ditch and I got carried into it and my utility trousers got ripped from my ankle all the
31 way to my knee. Well, I didn’t have time to change because the plane was coming in. So

1 I got onboard the plane with my trousers ripped. I didn't think too much about it. Landed
2 in Okinawa and got off the plane and I'm walking across the tarmac and this captain, this
3 little Banty rooster type captain walked up to me and called me to attention. I am a 1st
4 lieutenant now and I am a pretty salty 1st lieutenant having survived a year of combat and
5 this guy with spit-shined jungle boots, starched utility trousers and shirt, has me at
6 attention chewing me out for wearing torn trousers. There was a moment there where I
7 was ready to punch this guy out and then I thought, "You know what? I want to see my
8 family again." I just apologized and said, "Aye, aye, sir. I will take care of it" and all this
9 stuff and left but that was the first really experience that I had to make me wake up and
10 realize I am not in a combat zone now, now I am back in the picky world of spit and
11 polish. We went—a few nights later we were at the officer club and I ran into some guys
12 that I had served with in Vietnam and a couple of guys that I had known since Basic
13 School so we got pretty snookered and we were acting inappropriate. This major told us
14 to step outside and he chewed us out pretty good and said, "You guys aren't in Vietnam
15 anymore. You are back in the World and you have got to start acting like officers and
16 gentlemen." So okay, alright, that woke us up again that we are now back in the real
17 world. I got on my plane in Okinawa and headed towards the States and got off in Los
18 Angeles International. Here I am still, I am down about twenty pounds from what I was
19 when I went over there. My trousers are cinched up on me and I am seeing—I sit down
20 on one of those seats waiting to board my plane back to Tucson and some girls walked by
21 and they were shouting—they were kind of making these comments about baby killer and
22 they were looking at my direction and I am looking around like, "Who are they talking
23 to?" Because I was in uniform, right? They were flipping me off and talking about "You
24 blankety-blank baby killer." What is this? This is all new to me no one had prepared me
25 for anything like this. When they announced that I was to board when I stood up there
26 was a hippie type individual, you know, long hair and flowered shirt and stuff sitting
27 there with his guitar on a seat near him. As I walked by, I accidentally kicked his guitar and
28 it fell over. So he stood up and said something to me and then deliberately stepped on my
29 spit-shined low-quarter shoe. Well, here again, the impulse inside me was to pick him up
30 and toss him across the room. I had to just sit there and take it because, you know, if I
31 cause an incident like that then I would be charged with battery and I would go to jail and

1 da, da, da. I wanted to go home so I just walked away and got on the plane and went
2 home. But that was my first experience that all was not well here. These people weren't
3 blaming our government for what we were doing in Vietnam, they were blaming—don't
4 blame the—they were blaming the warriors and we were the ones that were taking the
5 abuse. I am sure you have heard this story many times but that was my first experience
6 with it. But I never again wore my uniform when I traveled because I wasn't sure what I
7 would do if somebody came up again and said something like that to me.

8 KC: Sure. In many ways—of course, there is this transition period, trying to
9 become acclimated while you are in-country and combat and all of those incredibly
10 intense period as you are learning, trying to get used to it. There is also, I think it is safe
11 to say, a similar transition period without, of course, the weapons and the life-threatening
12 situations, but certainly a transition period from being in-country, from being in combat,
13 back to the World. Like you said, in Okinawa was your first experience with this. In that
14 aspect of it, to spit and polished military but then back to the United States. It is, and I
15 don't know how something we could address but it is certainly a difficulty in this trying
16 to put yourself in a position to be re-acclimated into a society that is completely different
17 from the environment that you just experienced intensely for the last year.

18 JC: Yeah. Very true. Fortunately, I was put back on a military base and I tried
19 living in the bachelor officer quarters at Camp Lejeune. I kept running into this one
20 lieutenant, 1st lieutenant who had been shot and then wounded and the bullet had
21 penetrated his torso and he could hardly walk up the stairs and the captain in the room
22 next to me had his room, had every surface in his room lined with empty Jim Beam
23 bottles and he was just a drunken sot. He was in that room and I would hear him yelling
24 and screaming sometimes. I didn't even want to talk to him. I didn't know what he had
25 gone through. I figured I had to get out of there and I rented a small little house in Surf
26 City, North Carolina, which was just down the beach from Camp Lejeune and I had this
27 little beach house just on the other side of a berm that I could hear the waves coming in at
28 night. I would take long walks along the beach in the evening, sometimes I would get out
29 in the morning about five o'clock just as the sun was coming up and I would have the
30 whole beach to myself and that was really the best therapy for me was being able to kind

1 of just unwind. I am really thankful that I had that beach house to go to and I didn't have
2 to—I could get away from the military for a while.

3 KC: Sure.

4 JC: Why did I get out of the Marine Corps? Okay. Because I had joined to make it
5 a career and I was pretty sure until I got to Camp Lejeune that I was going to stay in and
6 make it a twenty-year career. Do you have time for this?

7 KC: Yes, absolutely.

8 JC: Okay. The first thing that happened, the first nail in the coffin was having my
9 whole company stand at attention in the rain one afternoon while we were told that we
10 had to have a certain percentage of our men contribute to the Navy Relief Fund, which
11 was for Marines that were having trouble making their rent payment or had fallen on
12 some hard times and they needed to have some extra food, and maybe they couldn't pay
13 their utility bill, you know, something like that. Well, I had Marines in my company who
14 were E-4s married with a couple of kids barely surviving on the pay that they were
15 making and they had to stand out there in the rain and agree and they would have part of
16 their paycheck taken from them for the Navy Relief Fund. Okay, that was the first straw,
17 that was the first nail in the coffin. Then the second nail in the coffin was they had this
18 Operation Ever Ready which meant that every Friday night one battalion on the base, it
19 could be from any unit, tanks, artillery, supply, infantry, they would get the word that
20 they had to mount out. They had to get everybody loaded aboard trucks, get down to the
21 rail site and be ready to head out, theoretically because something had happened over in
22 Saudi Arabia or somewhere. So every Friday night instead of our men being able to take
23 off for liberty to get away after working their tails off all week, now they had to hang
24 around and wait to see if the 3rd Tank Battalion was the one that drew the short straw and
25 had to mount out. This went on every week for months and then someone would call
26 about eight o'clock that night and say, "Oh, okay. Stand down. It is not your battalion."
27 So it is too late now for these guys to get out and head down to Myrtle Beach or go up to
28 Washington, D.C. or wherever they needed to go, it was too late. Morale was so far
29 down. I am the company commander and I am responsible for everything that happens
30 with one of my men, one of my pieces of equipment. I am the one that has to answer for
31 everything and I was feeling really, really bad about what some general or colonel up

1 there was doing to enhance his career at the expense of everybody else there at Camp
2 Lejeune. That is the way I felt about it, so that was really the second nail in the coffin.
3 There was something else that happened. I guess it is being responsible for things you
4 have no control over. If I had a private down at the PX (post exchange) and he's standing
5 there with his flak jacket open, or I mean his field jacket open and some senior officer
6 walks by and he doesn't salute, well, that officer is going to find out what the man's
7 name is and what unit he is with and they are going to report to my battalion commander
8 that Private Smith failed to salute a colonel at the PX and then I will be called down to
9 the colonel's office and I will be standing there at attention getting chewed out because of
10 something Private Smith did the day before. You know, it takes a special kind of person
11 to be able to put up with that kind of stuff and I just decided that wasn't me. I can't live
12 with being responsible for things that I don't have any control over.

13 KC: Sure.

14 JC: Theoretically, you know, the captain goes down with the ship and everybody
15 in your, everyone in your chain of command you are at the top so if they mess up or
16 anything happens to them you are ultimately responsible. That was a hard one. I didn't
17 realize that when I was thinking about making the Marines a career. I think it is the same
18 way in the Army, Air Force, Navy. It is just mentally and emotionally I couldn't see
19 myself doing twenty years with that sort of stuff because it doesn't stop. I mean, if you
20 promote up the line you go to captain to major you are going to experience the same
21 thing. If you go from major to colonel it is the same thing, just higher up people chewing
22 you out.

23 KC: Well, when did you get out, then?

24 JC: I got out in 1970, early 1970.

25 KC: What did you do from there?

26 JC: I went back to graduate school at San Diego State and got a master's degree in
27 public administration and planned to have a city government career. I worked in the city
28 government in Tucson as an assistant city manager, hated it, didn't like being cooped up
29 in a room with a calculator and a stack full of tax records and public documents. I needed
30 to have some human contact, some interaction and feel like I was solving problems with
31 people and things. So I went back to the University of Arizona Career Guidance

1 Department and said, “I don’t think I know what I want to be when I grow up.” He sat me
2 down and gave me a whole battery of inventories, aptitudes, interest tests and things. It
3 came up all over the place loud and clear that I needed to be in a helping profession. The
4 administrative stuff I was okay, but that wasn’t going to make me feel self-actualized. I
5 still had the GI Bill, anyway I went out to the Arizona Youth Center in Tucson and I
6 volunteered with those boys that were incarcerated as a counselor and I loved it, I mean I
7 said, “This is what I want to do.” They hired me, didn’t do a background check or
8 anything, just hired me as a youth supervisor and that is what I did for the next year and a
9 half to two years. I quit my job with the city, took a cut in pay, went out to the Arizona
10 Youth Center and loved every day of work. I just couldn’t wait—usually Sunday nights I
11 would think, “Oh, geez. I have to go to work tomorrow,” but in this job it was, “Yay, I
12 get to go to work tomorrow.”

13 KC: That is terrific.

14 JC: I knew I had found my niche and then I went back to graduate school again to
15 get a master’s in social work at Arizona State. My thinking was that I would not only
16 know how to work with delinquent kids and do some treatment with them but I would
17 probably be real promotable with two master’s degrees. So I did. I completed that
18 master’s in social work in 1974. I got on with the California Youth Authority as a parole
19 agent and spent the next thirty years working with the California Youth Authority and
20 worked my—at one point I was the superintendent of an institution and that is what I was
21 doing when I retired.

22 KC: And when did you retire?

23 JC: So then when I retired I started thinking, “Well, now, I have got some time on
24 my hands. How about getting to work on that book that I have been thinking about all of
25 those years?” So I did. In 2000 I started working on it and then 2004 I was told—I
26 encountered quite a few rejections and was thinking maybe this was never going to fly
27 but there is a historian that—oh, God, I am blanking on his name right now—but anyway
28 I talked to him and he said, “You know, you ought to try the university presses. Your
29 book is historical and of interest probably in the military history crowd. Go to some of
30 the university presses.” I contacted the University of Alabama press and it so happened
31 that the senior editor was a Vietnam veteran and he called me as soon as he got my

1 manuscript and said, “Jim, this is exactly what we are looking for.” After I got done
2 jumping up and down and, you know, hollering and hooting and celebrating we got down
3 to business. Anyway, I got the book published in 2004, *Con Thien: The Hill of Angels*.

4 KC: That is terrific.

5 JC: And it is not about me, it is about Con Thien and all the stuff I could dig up
6 on it is how, why, when, and where this all happened. Part of my motivation was that I
7 was pretty worried that everything that we had done at Con Thien would just get buried
8 and it wouldn’t come to light that Khe Sanh and other places when they thought about
9 Vietnam and the Vietnam War they would go to Khe Sanh and Tet and that’s what would
10 be covered. I wanted to try to insure that, you know, hey, what about what we did at Con
11 Thien?

12 KC: Well, I have read your book and like I said yesterday I found it to be very
13 well done work.

14 JC: Thank you, it is in its second printing now. The first printing sold out and the
15 second printing came out in paperback and I understand it is doing pretty well, too.

16 KC: Well, terrific. I have got one more question to ask you, Mr. Coan, and it is
17 this: looking back on your experiences relative to the Vietnam War, what is it that stands
18 out the most clearly to you? I think the question I want to ask you is what did you learn
19 about yourself personally the most from your experiences in Vietnam?

20 JC: About myself? Well, I think—I had always heard it said that bravery is the
21 ability to function in spite of your fear, and so I can relate to that. Despite being scared
22 out of my wits sometimes I managed to hold it together okay and still do what I had to do
23 and be effective. So I think that was one of the main things I learned about myself was
24 that, yeah, you get butterflies, you get terrified, you get scared, but I wasn’t the type that
25 was just going to lay down in a hole and get in a fetal position. About myself I would say
26 that was probably the main thing I came with, that I could handle it, that I passed the test.
27 I think the—was there anything else? I am sure, you know, when we hang up the phone I
28 will think about some other things. That was the most important thing was that I learned
29 that in the face of fear I wouldn’t freeze up, that I would take action and keep moving and
30 do what I had to do.

31 KC: Well, is there anything else—

1 JC: I came away with tremendous sense of pride, though, in the young Marines
2 because, you know, I was twenty-five years old and those were kids barely out of high
3 school, you know, nineteen year old. I remembered when I was eighteen, nineteen years
4 old that this whole idea of danger and getting wounded and killed and all that stuff was a
5 lot—I don't know. I was philosophically much more ready to be in combat at twenty-five
6 then I was at eighteen or nineteen.

7 KC: Sure.

8 JC: I just had this highest respect and admiration for those Marines that I served
9 with and I will never forget that.

10 KC: Well, is there anything else you would like to add before we put an end to
11 this interview?

12 JC: No, I think it is fantastic that Texas Tech University has this Vietnam War
13 archive and that what happened there will be there hopefully forever as long as there is a
14 Texas Tech University. I am just really, really pleased that there is a place in the country
15 where all of this stuff is recorded for posterity and any researchers that want to go there
16 to find out what happened and all that, I am just very happy that you guys exist.

17 KC: Well, thank you very much. We are very pleased with the work we are doing
18 here and very, very proud that we are able to do it.

19 JC: Good.

20 KC: Well, this will put an end to the interview with Mr. Jim Coan.