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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Joel Rosenbaum  
Conducted by Jason Stuart  
July 24 2009  
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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

1 Jason Stuart: This is Jason Stuart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech  
2 University, conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. Joel Rosenbaum. Today is  
3 July 24, 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus  
4 of Texas Tech. Mr. Rosenbaum is joining me by phone from Eatontown, New Jersey. Is  
5 that correct, sir?

6 Joel Rosenbaum: That is correct.

7 JS: Okay, if you don't mind if we could begin by if you tell me a little  
8 biographical information about yourself. First of all, when and where were you born?

9 JR: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, in the Margaret Hague Maternity  
10 Hospital on January 9, 1945. My family lived in Jersey City for the first four years of my  
11 life and my father was a postal clerk, he worked on 90 Church Street in downtown New  
12 York. Actually, right across from the ex-World Trade Center.

13 JS: Oh, okay.

14 JR: Actually, that building was damaged in 9/11, that part of the post office.

15 JS: Okay.

16 JR: My family moved to Linden, New Jersey, about eighteen miles roughly south  
17 of New York City around 1949.

18 JS: Okay.

1 JR: We lived walking distance to the train station. My family never owned a car,  
2 but public transportation was nearby. My father commuted to New York City everyday  
3 until he retired. I went through the entire Linden, New Jersey, school system from grade  
4 school to high school. As a matter of fact, very interestingly is that a well-known  
5 Vietnam POW (Prisoner of War) also spent most of his life in Linden. He was born and  
6 left Amarillo in 1951 down the street from you and his family settled in Linden for his  
7 growing years, it was George Coker.

8 JS: Okay.

9 JR: He is mentioned in what's his name's book—John McCain's book, *Faith of*  
10 *My Fathers*. He's one of the few prisoners that escaped for a while and was recaptured  
11 and it's quite a tale. Anyhow, as I said I grew up in Linden. It was basically—it's a big  
12 industry town. The Texas eastern oil pipeline from Texas ended up there, it was eastern  
13 terminus, built there in World War II. Large oil refineries, large GM plant which recently  
14 closed a couple of years ago, and —(Amtrak's) Northeast Corridor. I only was two  
15 blocks away from the railroad station. It's kind of noisy, we were on the approach path to  
16 Newark Liberty Airport and there was also a local airport that was about a mile and a half  
17 away that was built there in World War II. They were building Grumman Wildcat navy  
18 fighters at the GM plant and built the airport there to test them. I'm Jewish, there was a  
19 small, but active Jewish community that my life revolved around. I was a member of the  
20 Boy Scout Troop [and later] Explorers. I worked very hard in high school. My parents  
21 didn't have much money, but they put away some money to help me through college. I  
22 got a state scholarship to Rutgers University and upon graduation I entered Rutgers in  
23 New Brunswick, New Jersey. I went through ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) for  
24 four years at [Rutgers], Air Force ROTC. I always wanted to be a meteorologist and I  
25 couldn't afford the schools that had the program for BS in meteorology. Rutgers had a  
26 couple of [undergraduate] courses and a master's program, so the other thing was is the  
27 air force, at that time, had a shortage of weather officers.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JR: And if you had some calculus and physics, if you got commissioned, [The  
30 USAF] would send you to one of about a dozen universities. So I was [in AFROTC] with  
31 that in mind. I liked AFROTC (Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps), and Rutgers

1 had an active Army and Air Force ROTC. It became voluntary in 1961 so they had to be  
2 aggressive. The instructors were really interesting. One of the instructors was Major  
3 Hess.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JR: Had been shot down and was a POW on the Schweinfurt raid. These were  
6 really interesting people. The commandant of Cadets, Colonel Clatinoff was instrumental  
7 in converting the American Eagle squadrons in England over to the Army/Air Forces  
8 when the United States entered the war. These people were living history, they were  
9 approachable. I went through what was called the College of Agriculture and  
10 Environmental Sciences at Rutgers which was changed to Cook College and now it's  
11 been changed again to the College of Environment and Biological Sciences. The Ag  
12 (Agriculture) school was a lot like Texas A&M. A lot of the instructors were reserve  
13 military officers, relatively conservative, helpful. The downtown [Arts & Sciences]  
14 campuses, a lot of the instructors were nasty, unhelpful, they wouldn't show up for, you  
15 know appointments with students. Rutgers at that time had really too many students, so  
16 they tried to flunk people out. When the air force sent me to Texas A&M it was a totally  
17 different atmosphere. Now, the Ag school wasn't like that, but unfortunately at that time  
18 the liberal arts courses that were required you had to take them at the downtown campus.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JR: And again, the instruction, a lot of it was by student assistants you know,  
21 graduate students.

22 JS: Sure.

23 JR: A lot of the top names, the professors were involved in research work. I  
24 actually taught myself integral and differential calculus from an outline book, it was so  
25 terrible. So I learned a lot of discipline. I had the same instructor for two of the different  
26 advanced courses.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JR: So I saw what the handwriting on the wall was and I played the game. I  
29 bought a Schaum's outline series at Barnes and Noble and forced myself two hours a day  
30 [to study calculus problems]. I would go to the lectures, but they were useless, and I  
31 disciplined myself to do problems and learn it myself.

1 JS: Right.

2 JR: So out of a class of twenty, I was one of four people that passed and got a C.  
3 It was terrible, but again, totally different at Texas A&M, I was pleasantly surprised. But  
4 the Ag instructors were excellent, I mean, they were down to earth. One of the graduates  
5 of the [Rutgers] Ag school from years ago had been a Russian immigrant Jew, Selman  
6 Waksman, who got the Nobel Prize for discovering streptomycin.

7 JS: Oh, okay.

8 JR: His face was on the cover of *Time* magazine; I think in the 1940s or 50s. And  
9 he donated the royalties to the microbiology institute at Rutgers. And as an immigrant  
10 Jew, he was not treated very well in 1914 or 15. When he went there, they ripped his  
11 clothes and everything. Again, he rose above it.

12 JS: Right.

13 JR: It was an interesting time to be at Rutgers because the anti-war movement  
14 started. Unfortunately, it started to be taken out on ROTC which was, "Hey, we had the  
15 draft hanging over our head."

16 JS: Sure.

17 JR: I had people arguing with me when I went into the advanced program. I said,  
18 "Well, I like weather." I said, "I'd rather do something that I enjoy doing for four years  
19 rather than wait to be drafted and hate it."

20 JS: Right.

21 JR: So there was a number of people that went through the first two years that just  
22 dropped out, "I don't want to go in for four years." Of course, the way to get out of it was  
23 to keep on going to graduate school up until they had the lottery.

24 JS: Right.

25 JR: I had no problem with it. There weren't a lot of Jewish guys in Air Force  
26 ROTC. I'd say, out of a graduating class of sixty of us that were commissioned in Air  
27 Force ROTC, I'd say four or five. But Rutgers, being in the northeast did have a fifteen to  
28 twenty percent Jewish population.

29 JS: Okay.

30 JR: Fairly heavy. As a matter of fact, in Army ROTC, who graduated with me at  
31 the same time, Jack Jacobs got the congressional medal of honor.

1 JS: Okay.

2 JR: In Vietnam, and he fortunately lived to tell about it. He retired as a colonel in  
3 the army and he's on MSNBC and sometimes NBC as their military analyst. There was  
4 also a lot of hard feelings when the anti-war movement started in the mid sixties because  
5 New Brunswick had a large anti-communist Hungarian population. They were brought in  
6 after the turn of the century. Johnson and Johnson's headquarter was in New Brunswick  
7 which it still is. It's a big pharmaceutical and medical supply company. And they  
8 imported a lot of Hungarians to work in their factories. And there was a further influx in  
9 1956 with the Hungarian uprising.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JR: They reopened Camp Kilmer, which was closed about 1953 to receive  
12 Hungarian refugees, knowing that the New Brunswick area had a large Hungarian  
13 population, but these people would be comfortable in being absorbed. Camp Kilmer  
14 actually was right behind the Edison, New Jersey transit station and extended almost all  
15 the way to the, I would say the east bank of the Raritan River across from Rutgers.  
16 Eventually most of it became the Livingston College of Rutgers. But anyhow, you had  
17 this huge Hungarian population. When the anti-war movement started, they were angry  
18 because they were strongly anti-communist.

19 JS: Sure.

20 JR: So you had a lot of liberal professors. One became relatively, I should say  
21 infamous, Eugene Genovese. He, I believe was either political science or history. He got  
22 up there at the teach-ins and I went to one of them just out of curiosity, so I personally  
23 observed it. He said he'd welcome a Viet Cong victory in Vietnam. You know, just didn't  
24 go over too big with some of the population. Some of the New Jersey legislators wanted  
25 him fired. It became an issue in a gubernatorial election, but they kept him. And then he  
26 left on his own. Interesting, at the teach-in that I went to, one of the members of the  
27 audience son was serving as a coast guard officer in Vietnam. And he asked everybody to  
28 get up and say the Pledge of Allegiance which I thought was nice, whatever. But it got  
29 worse after I was commissioned and left. Again, the students, in some cases encouraged  
30 by professors were aroused. They tried to burn down one of the Air Force ROTC  
31 buildings. They disrupted drill. I mean, you want to take it out on the politicians, that's

1 one thing, but if you —we were going into the military because it was our duty. We  
2 didn't make the decision to commit troops to Vietnam, the politicians did. But this is one  
3 of the unfortunate things about the Vietnam War is that the veterans and the people that  
4 served really took the heat and some of it was propagated by politicians for their own,  
5 you know, advancement. Again, for me, ROTC at Rutgers was a good experience. During  
6 the seasons when we wouldn't have drill, we had drill eight weeks in the fall and eight  
7 weeks in the spring. In the meantime, for extra credit, they used to, if you wanted to you  
8 could see [USAF training] movies [for extra credit], which was great. [Such as] "Survival  
9 on the Tundra." The narrator on a lot of the movies was [actor] Jimmy Stewart who  
10 eventually became a brigadier general in the reserves.

11 JS: Right.

12 JR: It was interesting. And then the junior year I went for advanced summer  
13 training at Maxwell Air Force Base [Alabama]. For some reason everybody else [in  
14 AFROTC at Rutgers] went to Plattsburg [AFB] up near the Canadian border, I went to  
15 Maxwell. It was great because they had the best food in the air force, they flew us all over  
16 because it still is home of the Air [University]. You had a bunch of colonels that had to  
17 get inflight time. They flew us down to Eglin [AFB], they flew us on orientation trips,  
18 they flew us to Tennessee, I got a chance to ride in a two-seater T-33 Trainer. These  
19 facilities were nice. I actually was there a month or two after the famous Selma March, so  
20 I got to see some of that. It was a little bit awkward; I was the only Jewish guy among  
21 three hundred cadets from the south. Most of them were friendly, one guy, he refused to  
22 shake my hand when he found out where I was from. He said, "This here's rebel  
23 country." Alright, who cares.

24 JS: Right.

25 JR: It was an experience for me. Like I said, the first time in my life, not only that  
26 I ever flew down to Montgomery, Alabama, from Newark, but I got a chance to meet  
27 people from Texas A&M, VMI, The Citadel. And what was interesting is Rutgers had a  
28 good program for Air Force ROTC.

29 JS: Okay.

30 JR: But some of these guys, not from Texas A&M, but from The Citadel and from  
31 VMI, they were so sick of having to do the military things 24/7. Some of them had real

1 bad attitudes down there. I mean, there's no question that they knew the drill manual  
2 better than I did, but I enjoyed myself. To me, it was a treat and that's the advantage of an  
3 ROTC program at a diverse school. You get diverse people, diverse opinions. When you  
4 start just concentrating on military schools, you get one point of view, it doesn't give you  
5 the diversity that you get when you have people coming from different educations and  
6 parts of the country and even different backgrounds. After I applied for weather officer  
7 training and I was accepted. What it was is after you got commissioned, if you had the  
8 required physics and math and calculus you would be sent to one of about a dozen  
9 schools. I wanted to go to NYU or Penn State, Texas A&M was my third choice.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JR: Just as well, it worked out very well. At that time Texas A&M was under  
12 populated as supposed to what it is today. It had six to seven thousand students, very  
13 quiet town. The weather department was very well staffed. Of course, they had a lot of air  
14 force contracts for graduate study and weather officer training. The only downside was it  
15 was all male at that time. You had to be a female who lived in Bryan-College Station in  
16 order to be accepted. They started accepting women in '63 on a very limited basis. So the  
17 social life was not great, but I enjoyed what I did.

18 JS: Right.

19 JR: You know, there wasn't the parking problems that there is today or anything.  
20 And being a train buff, I took out on around the countryside, you know, and I watched  
21 Texas trains and visited railroad stations in my free time. I later developed that interest.  
22 The other thing was they had a weather radar there that we used to go up and we used to  
23 watch it when storms are coming in. The instruction was very good. They were more  
24 concerned about keeping people in school and of course, the meteorology department  
25 depended on the contracts, you know, with the air force.

26 JS: Okay.

27 JR: So, it was an interesting experience. I used to drive over to Austin a lot of  
28 times just to see people. The University of Texas had a similar program at the time, but  
29 eventually it closed down. They no longer offer meteorology at the University of Texas. I  
30 believe Texas Tech has a program and Texas A&M, of course still had their program. So  
31 it was a twelve month intensive program. I had some meteorology at Rutgers, you know,

1 they had a couple courses. I had some climatology, I had some micrometeorology, and a  
2 few other courses as well. Plus, my undergraduate degree is in agriculture, so I had a  
3 broad environmental background. The only unfortunate thing about Texas A&M is  
4 because of the educational requirements of the state of Texas at that time, they refused to  
5 grant a BS degree for the program for us. Now, if there was other schools, and I got proof  
6 of this later, at Penn State, all the air force people that went through there got BS degrees.

7 JS: Okay.

8 JR: The problem was that the state of Texas education requirements at that time  
9 required a mandatory six credits in political science, six credits in history, which you  
10 couldn't take under the circumstances. So I got a certificate, they told us at the time,  
11 "Well, you know, the certificate is just as good. My first assignment was Otis Air Force  
12 Base, Massachusetts. It was a total change, that was a long drive from College Station,  
13 Texas to Falmouth, MA. Pretty location, but at that time, come September, the beaches  
14 would empty out. You had the run of the restaurants as opposed to the summer, but the  
15 weather was fog. You got fog, you got ground fog, you got sea fog, you got all kinds of  
16 fog. It was an interesting experience, but we had low priority. It was an air defense  
17 command base with the Vietnam War going on. So I was working six shifts on, one shift  
18 off. You could work like two-night shifts, two evening shifts, a day off, two-day shifts.  
19 You never got like a weekend off. You would get like part of a weekend. I would have  
20 extra duties; you'd end up going to your extra duty meetings on your day off. We had a  
21 non-usable weather radar that was useless out of a B-17. We had to call RAPCON (Radar  
22 Approach Control System) control; we would ask them for reports on echoes. One night  
23 when everything went down, I had my portable radio listening for static to indicate  
24 whether or not there was thunderstorms in the area. We also—they were flying out  
25 loaded EC-121 each radar observation planes with honeycomb of fuel cells and radar  
26 gear. These were the constellations with the hump on the top. They were replaced later by  
27 AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System), but they lost three of them and they  
28 weren't really survivable in the water because again they were, you know, over heavy,  
29 fuel cells, radar gear. I did fly a volunteer mission with them just to understand what it  
30 was about. I was the only one that volunteered to do it. [During] The mission I flew on  
31 we had to make an emergency landing in Langley Air Force Base, Virginia.

1 JS: Oh, boy.

2 JR: And it was quite a sight coming in. It was at night; we were about two  
3 thousand feet above the surface. You could see the lights from the Chesapeake Bay  
4 Bridge Tunnel, and we were dumping fuel, but it was an adventure.

5 JS: Sure.

6 JR: We made it in and then we were stuck there for like a day or two because they  
7 had to fly down parts from Otis and they weren't real happy to see us at Langley because  
8 the planes were heavy and it'd tear up the runway. Also, there was a Vietnam unit that  
9 was secretly training in Otis that only years later, did I find out what they did. They were  
10 using the constellations, the four-engine aircraft. They called them the Bat Cats later on. I  
11 think it was the 553<sup>rd</sup> Recon Wing. All we know is that they flew daily missions from  
12 Otis down to Crestview, Florida. Down towards Eglin, Hurlburt Field. What it turned out  
13 later on, they were involved in what was called Igloo White.

14 JS: Right.

15 JR: They were involved with the—they didn't drop the sensors on the Ho Chi  
16 Minh trail, but apparently, they received radio signals from them. They flew out of  
17 Thailand. Initially we thought, they took off [from Otis] in mass secretly and they had  
18 priority on everything from toilet paper to you name it. Again, what they did was hush,  
19 hush. And after that to resupply them we used to brief C-141 Starlifters from Otis and fly  
20 from Otis through Canada, up to Alaska, until you go to Japan, and then over to Thailand  
21 to resupply them with stuff. Unfortunately, I think they lost about two planes due to  
22 weather related accidents in Thailand. I have contact with the group because they raised  
23 some questions that I was able to answer. Again, only years later did I find out what they  
24 did because I just knew that it was hush, hush. I believe they were going by the name of  
25 Bat Cats. Then, when I got to Otis, I loved history and I liked meteorology, I volunteered  
26 for Vietnam. I couldn't see the sense of—the morale at the base was low. These guys  
27 didn't want to fly these Connies (Lockheed Constellations). They had EC-121s and they  
28 had F-101 Voodoo interceptors. Interestingly enough when we had to make the  
29 emergency landing at Langley Air Force Base, when the crew got up the next morning,  
30 they made a joke, they said, "You know, I couldn't get any sleep last night, I was

1 worrying about all the Russian planes that were getting through while we had to make an  
2 emergency landing here.” I mean, they knew in the missile age that this was a joke.

3 JS: Right.

4 JR: Anyhow, so you know, I thought, “This is what I was trained for. This was  
5 history. As long as I’m doing something as a weather officer, I have no problem with it.”

6 JS: Right.

7 JR: The other thing that did concern me being Jewish, that the Russians were  
8 arming the Arabs to the teeth with missiles, planes. I’m sure whatever we learned in  
9 Vietnam would go back and forth.

10 JS: Right.

11 JR: I know the Israelis had snagged a MIG-21, they got a defector and during the  
12 six-day war, they actually captured even more. And I know a lot of that was going back  
13 and forth between the United States, so you know, I figured, hey. So I was at Otis slightly  
14 less than a year. I got my orders to go to tropical weather school, which was good  
15 because the weather in Vietnam and in the tropics is very different in how it’s predicted  
16 and what you experience in Texas or any part of the United States. Not everybody was  
17 sent to tropical weather school and that was unfortunate. It was a great opportunity. I was  
18 sent to Chanute Air Force Base out in Rantoul, Illinois. They had to put me up in a motel  
19 because there were so many people being trained. I lived well, my friend fixed me up—  
20 one of my friends from Otis was from Chicago and fixed me up with a girl from Chicago,  
21 we hit it off, she’d come down every weekend or I’d go up to Chicago. So you know,  
22 before I went over I spent some time with her. We had an understanding after I came  
23 back. It was a nice way to go off. My parents were upset, obviously.

24 JS: Sure.

25 JR: I’ll never forget my mother crying on the phone when I made my last call  
26 from McChord Air Force Base with the 141s taking off all night. McChord was a major  
27 resupply base and transport base in the Seattle, Tacoma area.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JR: I stayed over at the VOQ. Actually, visiting officers’ quarters had the  
30 ominous name, and I actually saved my stationary from there, called the Monsoon Inn.  
31 What an interesting name for a visiting officer’s quarters.

1 JS: Right.

2 JR: The reception area, you know for where we were taking a plane to Vietnam,  
3 there were army and air force guys there, it was something out of the Twilight Zone.  
4 Dirty coffee cups, kind of sloppy, some Red Cross workers there, nobody was in a real  
5 great mood. On the flight over we stopped briefly in Hawaii to refuel for about two hours.  
6 Had a chance to get off a post card to my parents. And then it was a long flight for twelve  
7 hours. Now, my seatmate, I remember to this day, he came from Las Cruces, New  
8 Mexico. He was an army captain from—he had graduated from New Mexico State in  
9 Agriculture. So we had an interesting conversation going on because, you know, my  
10 initial degree was in agriculture. He was saying how he couldn't believe the army justice  
11 system. He said he saw guys getting a book thrown at them for minor infractions and  
12 some guys, if the people were in a good mood, they had a major infraction, they let it slip  
13 by. He said it was the most unfair system he ever saw. Our next stop was stopping in the  
14 middle of the night at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines for two or three hours. And  
15 then it was about an hour and a half to two-hour flight to Cam Ranh Bay. We landed in  
16 the dark, there were all kinds of flares going off. A terrible stench, like a backed-up  
17 sewer, I'll never forget that smell. It was kind of spooky because it was at night with  
18 flares going off.

19 JS: Right.

20 JR: They picked us up in a truck, to take us over to the visiting officer's quarters.  
21 I told one guy, "Get down, you don't know what the hell they expect. Don't have your  
22 head standing up."

23 JS: Right.

24 JR: And then one guy was showing me you weren't allowed to bring your own  
25 personal weapons, he didn't care. He wrapped his pistol up in parts. He had it totally  
26 disassembled. Of course, they didn't have metal detectors at that time, and he  
27 reassembled it at the visitor's officer's quarters.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JR: They had no one to pick me up and orient me in the middle of the night, so I  
30 had to wait for the morning, and they took me up to our officer's quarters on top of what  
31 was called RMKBRJ Hill. It was a pretty spot, but it was kind of remote. In terms of Cam

1 Ranh [Bay] was not in a city or anything, which was to its advantage. Nha Trang it was  
2 about twenty miles north, was much more of a city.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JR: But that was a disadvantage because there was a problem with infiltration.  
5 The Vietnamese had to get off the base when the sun went down. So people in the cities,  
6 the infiltration and rocket attacks were a lot more frequent. I lived in a tin Quonset hut  
7 without air conditioning, but again I compared notes with some weather officers that  
8 were with the army, they were living in tents, so I mean this was a step up.

9 JS: Right.

10 JR: The base facilities were decent. I mean, they weren't luxurious by any means.  
11 My friend Wilson Castillo, who was a weather officer with me at Otis, he got sent to Da  
12 Nang about four or five months after I was sent to Cam Ranh. And I went to visit him at  
13 Da Nang before I went home. They had nice facilities up there. They had regular brick,  
14 air-conditioned barracks you know, comfortable beds. But they got hit a lot with rockets,  
15 so you take your choice.

16 JS: Sure.

17 JR: The officer's club wasn't real great, but they were open until like four in the  
18 morning at one time. I could always get a hamburger and fries. There was a BX (Base  
19 Exchange) that was open seven days a week, that's one of the things I liked about  
20 Vietnam was. As a shift worker on a state side base, to work on weekends you're screwed  
21 because most [facilities] of the stuff is, you know, closed.

22 JS: Right.

23 JR: But in Vietnam it was 24/7 which was fine for me. When I got there initially,  
24 I was just a staff weather officer and they had about—it was made up of four officers,  
25 about three [NCOs weather] forecasters and maybe about twelve or fourteen enlisted men  
26 that were weather observers and maintenance men. But it was a problem, the commander  
27 was a major who was not real adapted at leading a weather detachment. He had been in  
28 computers.

29 JS: Okay.

1 JR: In the forecast [area] and he was out of his element. And a lot of this stuff that  
2 there was screw ups in the weather assignments in Vietnam, is out on in a book called  
3 *Thor's Legions* by Fuller.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JR: And this is published by the American Meteorological Society. It's very  
6 frank, there's a whole chapter on Southeast Asia where the air weather service was just  
7 taking people to fill slots, not really, you know, not really seeing what their background  
8 was. And this major was totally out of his atmosphere. He was terrified of having to make  
9 forecasts. He ended up getting a letter of reprimand at the end of his tour which is  
10 unusual. So he picked me, he had a couple of lazy captains, I was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, but I  
11 had been to tropical weather school, I was interested in weather. He picked up on it, he  
12 fired his captain who was chief forecaster, made me his chief forecaster and I was in  
13 charge of three captains. But I liked what I did, I used to—what I would do is Cam Ranh  
14 [Bay] was an extremely busy base.

15 JS: Okay.

16 JR: We had the 12th TAC (Tactical Air Command) fighter wing which flew F-4  
17 phantoms. The commander I believe when I was there was Colonel White, who at one  
18 time flew [the experimental] X-15s. One of the other colonels was a real gentleman,  
19 Colonel Rushworth also flew the [experimental] X-15s. These guys were a pleasure.  
20 They were going to fly no matter what the weather. I mean, these were great pilots, you  
21 could tell them there was a thunderstorm over the base with forty miles an hour wind.  
22 You know, they're a pilot, they're going to fly it. You've got—some of the guys got  
23 thrown in the cockpit, majors and lieutenant colonels that weren't real happy about it and  
24 they gave—they thought you made the weather and you know, if the forecast wasn't to  
25 their liking, they would be up your behind. For the first month or two that I was there,  
26 they were still flying missions over the southern part of North Vietnam. I think by about  
27 November, December they had a bombing halt in effect, and they were just flying  
28 missions in South Vietnam. But they also had aircraft that would scramble [quickly] that  
29 in case, you know, friendly troops got into a fight and they were pinned down, these guys  
30 would scramble real quick and, you know, provide air support. It was on order twenty-  
31 four hours, everything was going. They had C-7A Caribous, two engine transports that

1 could land in the smallest of air strips that provided tactical support to remote army bases.  
2 They had C-130s in and out of there all the time. They had a command post [for the C-  
3 130s]. Some of them [C-130 crews] came TDY from Ching Chuan Kang Air Base on a  
4 southern part of I believe Taiwan, and some I believe from Okinawa. We had R&R (Rest  
5 and Recuperation) flights run out of Cam Ranh to Darwin, Australia to Penang in  
6 Malaysia, to Hawaii. We also had incoming troops on charter flights as I, myself came  
7 over. We have 141s coming in all the time, there were major air force and army hospitals.  
8 We had aerovac flights in and out on 141s. We had some C-118s that used to come in for  
9 briefings that would fly aerovacs to Clark Air Base. We also briefed and gave [a  
10 Vietnam] climatological briefing to the army light [aircraft] aviation outfit at Dong Ba  
11 Thin. It was about two or three miles across from us, you could actually visually see  
12 them, but they had their own small airfield for their light aircraft and helicopters. We had  
13 secret CIA outfits; they went under the name of Continental Air.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JR: They would ask, "I need a briefing." And you would say, "Where you  
16 going?" [Their response was] "I can't tell you it's a secret." We played twenty questions  
17 and what we'd end up doing was giving them a general briefing for all of Southeast Asia.  
18 There was some strange operating units, army radio research. Well, I found out later what  
19 that was. They were flying P-2Vs, which were actually two engine naval maritime patrol  
20 [planes], but they weren't using them for that. They were using them for gunships, and  
21 they were using them for the Igloo White Project of sensors and sensor monitoring and  
22 also, they monitored VC (Viet Cong) communications. And the navy was flying out of  
23 Cam Ranh. They were flying P-3 [aircraft on] market time patrols and at that time that I  
24 was there, John Kerry [the senator that ran for President] he was attached to a swift boat  
25 unit out of Cam Ranh. So it was an extremely busy place with an interesting history,  
26 which I will send you. I belonged to the C-7A Caribou Association because did a lot of  
27 briefing with them. I wrote a history of Cam Ranh Bay for them.

28 JS: Okay, great.

29 JR: Very fascinating history that it turns out it's more interesting and  
30 (unintelligible) than I even thought it was. Back in 1905, around 1905, the Russian Fleet  
31 assembled there for a battle with the Japanese in the Japanese Russian War.

1 JS: Right.

2 JR: Of course, the Russians lost. My grandmother and grandfather on my  
3 mother's side came from Russia. My mother told me that her mother used to sing [her]  
4 sad Russian songs about losing the war in Japan. It's very strange and here I am.

5 JS: Right.

6 JR: For X number of years. It turns out the Japanese occupied it from the French  
7 and used it as a jumping off base to invade Singapore and Malaysia. The United States  
8 made two attacks on Cam Ranh. One, by B-29s and the other was [US] Naval [planes  
9 from aircraft carriers], I think six—I have it typed up.

10 JS: Sure.

11 JR: They had two attacks on there and then of course the French used it as their  
12 evacuation port from 1954 to 1956, when they evacuated Indochina. The Americans  
13 surveyed it in 1964.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JR: With the naval hydrographic ship [surveying the area] *Epping Forest*. And  
16 then they decided that was going to be a major base and by I believe November of '66, the  
17 runway opened for the F-4s. They wanted to build the second concrete runway, but there  
18 wasn't any time, so they used steel matting and when I was there, I heard the plan was the  
19 United States wanted it as a permanent base, and there was talk that Pan AM [airlines]  
20 wanted to take it over as like a club Med. So there was a lot of interest in it. In terms of  
21 weather, in Vietnam basically there's really two seasons. And it's governed by the  
22 monsoons. The idea that monsoon is heavy rain is totally fallacious.

23 JS: Okay.

24 JR: You know, the monsoon, by strict definition means seasonal wind. And what  
25 it is for several months out of the year, in Vietnam the wind is from the Northeast which  
26 comes in off the South China sea. What happens then roughly from September through  
27 about January is it's real rainy along the coast, along the mountain side of the South  
28 China Sea.

29 JS: Okay.

30 JR: Inland generally it's relatively dry. In North Vietnam, because there's fronts  
31 that come down and a lot of their areas exposed to the coast, the weather is crappy during

1 the north east monsoon. But in turn it's mainly a morning phenomenon most of the time.  
2 When the sun would set at Cam Ranh, an hour or two later you feel these drops falling on  
3 you and it would rain intermittently, all night. The sun would come up and you'd look out  
4 over the water and there were ominous looking clouds, but they actually topped off at like  
5 nine thousand feet. Usually, by afternoon the skies were generally clear. Sometimes if a  
6 front would hang up or there would be a speed max, things like that, you would get  
7 prolonged rain. The problem was, as the Russians found out when they occupied Cam  
8 Ranh Bay, during the periods of rain with the mountains so close to the shore; you have,  
9 you know, clouds [obscuring] the mountains. Particularly along the coastal bases, if you  
10 misjudge, you're going to buy the mountain and that's what happened in a number of  
11 cases, even in peacetime with the Russians.

12 JS: Okay.

13 JR: Anyhow, and then there'd be a transition period from about February through  
14 April when basically not much would be happening. You would have a lot of haze with  
15 the burning of the crops, but not much in terms of weather other than sometimes valley  
16 fog in the low-lying valley. Then, again, the thing with the monsoons, it's not like spring  
17 and summer where you have spring starts, you know March 20<sup>th</sup> through 22<sup>nd</sup>. It's when  
18 the intertropical convergence Zone moves up and back and forth, and it's not an exact  
19 date, it's just when it occurs. It generally occurs within a thirty-day period, but again,  
20 there's some fluctuation there.

21 JS: Okay.

22 JR: So one of the things the weather people did at the weather centrals was  
23 tracking the intertropical convergence zone when it was moving up, to at least give  
24 people an indication. When the southwest monsoon started up, that's when you really had  
25 the worst weather over most of Vietnam except on the coast. Anything on the land side of  
26 the mountains away from the coast, Saigon, Pleiku, all of Thailand, then you get the  
27 heavy afternoon thunderstorms. Which again, for light aircraft helicopters are  
28 horrendous. And this caused a number of accidents and other things. Nothing you can do  
29 about it other than avoid it. What we would encourage people to do on their routes is—  
30 there was a term, "Feet dry and feet wet." During the southwest monsoon we would  
31 encourage aircrafts to fly feet wet. In other words, if you flew up the coast and flew over

1 water, you weren't generally going to hit thunderstorms. If you flew inland, you're going  
2 to be dodging thunderstorms the whole time. Again, places like Pleiku would get huge  
3 amounts of rain in these thunderstorms. And the odd thing was that Cam Ranh, we had a  
4 relatively simple weather radar. It was nice, but it wasn't very sophisticated. Pleiku,  
5 which was almost in the center of the country, and they didn't have high performance jet  
6 aircraft, they had lighter jets and lighter army aircraft, [they] had a very sophisticated  
7 weather radar. The only thing that I could figure out at the time is they're using it to  
8 measure rainfall over the Ho Chi Minh Trail because Pleiku wasn't that far. But it was  
9 much more sinister than that. What it came out was, the Americans were seeding the  
10 clouds to make it rain more over the Ho Chi Minh trail particularly during the southwest  
11 monsoon. Because they found out, in spite of all the American bombing, that it was the  
12 rainfall that slowed the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) from coming down the trail more  
13 than all the bombing. So they figured if they could make it rain more, they could reduce  
14 the traffic. So they were seeding which was illegal by international convention.  
15 Supposedly, you're stealing the rain from somebody and giving it to somebody else.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JR: So when you do it, you have to do it under real careful circumstances, but it  
18 was kept secret until, I think one of the columnists revealed and let the cat out of the bag,  
19 but that was the real reason they probably had the sophisticated radar at Pleiku. Not just  
20 to measure the rainfall from the southwest monsoon, but to measure estimated rainfall  
21 differences before seeding and after seeding. It came with mixed results. There was a  
22 feeling that there was an increase. However, it had a downside too. By making the  
23 conditions worse, and increasing the rainfall, it also hampered [US] military operations  
24 and air operations.

25 JS: Okay.

26 JR: So it was damned if you do and damned if you don't.

27 JS: Right.

28 JR: The other thing that I did as chief forecaster is, I would brief—at eight o'clock  
29 in the morning I would go over to the Caribou [transport] units and I would give them the  
30 briefing of the day of their major bases and for Vietnam. And of course, you had  
31 typhoons, which are basically just the same as a hurricane on the east coast here.

1 JS: Right.

2 JR: Except that in the Pacific they tend to be more destructive because the Pacific  
3 Ocean is so much larger than the Atlantic.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JR: And it can generate a lot more strength. So I did work typhoon Nina, I did  
6 mention it in my diary. They evacuated the caribous to Thailand, but it split just as it  
7 came to shore. It was some flooding, but it wasn't as bad as it could have been. This was  
8 another concern too while keeping the units informed during the typhoon season, so any  
9 of their aircraft coming from the States or the possibility of what its effect on Vietnam  
10 was very important. At five in the afternoon, we had the five o'clock follies. I would brief  
11 the F-4 TAC fighter wing on, you know, the weather in South East Asia, their proposed  
12 targets, their alternate [air] fields, what our weather would be for the next twenty-four to  
13 thirty-six hours. It was like the five o'clock news, they even showed movies of bombing  
14 damage, the intelligence officer would brief. It was a lot of good, interesting experience.  
15 There was a briefing amphitheater for about three hundred people.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JR: I also tried to help our forecast ability. Occasionally, during the southwest  
18 monsoon, the thunderstorms occasionally slip over the mountains. Very difficult to  
19 predict [when they will slip over the mountains to the coast]. What I did by going through  
20 the weather records that were available for about five or six years, was that—what I  
21 determined was that if it did it on one day, it would usually occur another two or three  
22 days [in a row]. So I warned our forecasters, “You may not be able to forecast for the first  
23 day, but if it occurs, forecast for it for the second and third day.” And it did work about  
24 seventy percent of the time. I did whatever I could to increase our forecast performance.  
25 Detailed bombing strikes in Laos though were prepared out of Tan Son Nhut [airbase] in  
26 Saigon.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JR: They had access to a secret weather satellite that the United States didn't want  
29 to admit to was a military satellite and only a few organizations had access to it. This is  
30 mentioned in [the book] *Thor's Legions*. The navy carrier units, their weather people on  
31 board didn't have access to these satellite photos of the cloud cover and weather over

1 North Vietnam until much later and they weren't happy when they found out about it.  
2 Everybody had their own little secret war. I actually stumbled onto a secret by accident.  
3 Cam Ranh was an emergency base for B-52s.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JR: Generally, it wasn't a problem until later in the war when they started flying  
6 over North Vietnam. They either came out of Guam or Thailand and bombed the trail, but  
7 if they had a mechanical malfunction, their preference was to come into Cam Ranh Bay.  
8 We actually did have one that made an emergency landing, and they were on their phone  
9 like crazy trying to get the plane out of there because they were afraid the VC might hit  
10 it. They got off before we had any attack, but the other thing that was going on, my  
11 commander, the second detachment commander I had in Vietnam that was a world of  
12 difference from the first guy that was there for six months who got a letter of reprimand,  
13 he was good. He had been an [enlisted man and later a commissioned officer]—he  
14 worked at global weather central at Offutt, AFB for SAC (Strategic Air Command), prior  
15 to coming to Vietnam.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JR: He let it slip about the SR-71 when he had a couple of drinks with me once.  
18 He mentioned that they had a plane that could fly at a hundred thousand feet, see a pack  
19 [cigarettes] and they could identify the pack, brand of cigarettes of the North Vietnamese  
20 soldiers, he didn't say too much about it.

21 JS: Right.

22 JR: Anyhow, I was supposed to go to a safety officers meeting which was part of  
23 my extra duties.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JR: I got there early at the command post. I'm sitting there and I don't see  
26 anybody. I'm sitting there and I'm sitting there, and I see all these colonels coming in.  
27 And I'm thinking to myself, "Wait a minute, usually this is a junior officer thing." [And  
28 here its packed with senior officers mostly] Packed with colonels. The MP [Air  
29 Policeman] walks to the door and he said, "Alright, is everybody here that's supposed to  
30 be here?" You know, I just sat there like, "What the hell is this?"

31 JS: Right.

1 JR: They closed the door and they're pulling out all kinds of diagrams. "We  
2 called you here from different bases in Vietnam because we're concerned about the SR-  
3 71." Well, I'm not about to stand up among three hundred people and say, "Oh, I thought  
4 this was a safety officer's meeting."

5 JS: Right.

6 JR: I sat there and looked through the manual what the problem was, was one of  
7 them had to make an emergency landing in Thailand and they didn't want the locals to  
8 see it and they didn't want it to create an international incident. This was a top-secret  
9 plane. What they wanted was primarily they preferred it would land at Cam Ranh Bay if  
10 it had to land somewhere.

11 JS: Right.

12 JR: So, they wanted the base commander to hide the plane. He said, "We don't  
13 have a hanger to hide it, what do you want me to do?" I mean they came up with the  
14 conclusion we don't want to see—we don't want the locals to get a look at this plane.  
15 They suggested he throw a big sheet over it. I don't know if they had a sheet that big, but  
16 that was the conclusion. So I slithered out of there, I expected to be court marshaled. I  
17 told my commander, he just laughed. He said, "They called the detachment." You know,  
18 I usually get to meetings early. He said, "They called the [weather] detachment to let you  
19 know that the meeting was cancelled." But I was already there, so I wasn't aware of that.  
20 And it was cancelled because they had a secret meeting on the SR-71. So I knew about  
21 the plane. Again, it's kind of frustrating when you figure we had a plane that could fly  
22 over North Vietnam at will and take pictures from one hundred thousand feet and we still  
23 couldn't bring them to their knees. We also had some screw balls. Some older guys that  
24 were still on flying status that shouldn't have been, one guy created a ruckus. Colonel  
25 Page, older guy, he's probably getting senile.

26 JS: Okay.

27 JR: He claimed when he was coming in on landing in the daytime, he went into a  
28 fog bank and he almost crashed. The visibility was zero, zero. And he yelled at us and for  
29 the next three days when they gave the briefing, he had to put a little show and tell. "And  
30 your weather people, you need to get your people on their stick to report the fog because  
31 they missed it. I almost crashed my plane." I put up with it, I'm a captain, you don't say

1 anything to a colonel. One of his junior people pulled me a side and told me this senile  
2 old coot forgot to turn on his defoggers.

3 JS: (Laughs)

4 JR: And he refused to admit it. He was pointing at us. Hey, if there's one thing I  
5 know it's fog. Cam Ranh hardly gets any fog at all; we would have known about it. I  
6 mean, Otis Air Force Base we had the fog coming and going all the time. He was just  
7 trying to cover his behind by blaming it on somebody else. I was happy to see him go. On  
8 the other had you had Colonel Rushworth who flew the X-15, I watched him bring in a  
9 plane with its landing gear shot up, he could have bailed out, he chose to bring it in. They  
10 foamed up the runway and he made a perfect landing. So I mean, some of these guys  
11 were a real joy.

12 JS: Right.

13 JR: Again, it was quite a bit of history. I enjoyed military history, I don't have a  
14 professional degree in history, but I've written railroad history books. I've written some  
15 histories of Texas railroads, too. So I had a chance to participate in a piece of history and,  
16 of course, it's from my point of view, I understand that. We've all worked hard; it was a  
17 matter of trying to do whatever we could to make it as safe as we can for the other  
18 person. We did get hit a number of times; it was scary. You're ten thousand miles from  
19 home. It wasn't as bad as places like Da Nang, but you were still in harms way. There  
20 wasn't any internet, and the mail was slow, it took five, six days, on our end it was free.  
21 My local newspaper, *The Asbury Park Press*, I've got to give them credit. They sent a  
22 free Sunday edition to any family member in Vietnam. You know, when other people are  
23 going through all kinds of riots and everything else and disparaging veterans, they did the  
24 right thing. I have a great deal of respect for them. On my R&R I met my girlfriend in  
25 Hawaii, that was great. The only thing that was sad about it, I sent her home a little bit  
26 before me by a few hours because I had an inkling. I'll never forget the scene, because a  
27 lot of families came there with their kids to see their husband and their kids. When it  
28 came time for us to board the plane back to Vietnam, I can't tell you the crying. I mean,  
29 some of these guys may not return.

30 JS: Right.

1 JR: And that's why I sent my girlfriend back home a few hours ahead of time. I'll  
2 never forget that scene. I can't tell you what I had for lunch three days ago, but I  
3 remember that scene. That'll stick in my mind forever. It's something that only if you've  
4 been there, I think you can understand. The other thing was my father was a postal clerk  
5 for forty-two years. The military post office was next to the weather station. So when the  
6 mail would come in, these guys you know, I got talk to them. They knew my father was a  
7 retired postal clerk. They would bring me my own mail in person, which was nice, it was  
8 nice on their part. And, of course, on the other side, my parents when they would get mail  
9 from me, the postal clerk that delivered the mail in Asbury Park knew my father was a  
10 retired postal clerk, he used to bring it [upstairs] personally. You know, it was nice  
11 [thoughtful] of him whenever there was a letter from Vietnam [from me].

12 JS: Sure.

13 JR: My parents did not talk about my service in Vietnam. Not that they were  
14 ashamed of it, but there was a lot of harassing calls. When some of these anti-war groups  
15 got a hold of information that such and such was serving in Vietnam, families would get  
16 harassing calls. I mean, this is part of the legacy of the Vietnam War.

17 JS: Right.

18 JR: Where you still have—and this was about three months ago I was watching a  
19 commentator on CNN. Somebody that was an instructor at a university was saying, “I  
20 still believe the real heroes of the Vietnam were the college students.” I was getting ready  
21 to be scraped of the wall.

22 JS: Sure.

23 JR: These people had no idea.

24 JS: Right.

25 JR: And towards the end my tour, well, there was other things that went on there  
26 that were interesting too. We got called in for a special briefing with a unit out at  
27 Kirkland Air Force Base that was involved in air force munitions. They showed us a  
28 picture of something we would be briefing on. It was called commando vault. They  
29 strapped [a] ten-thousand-pound bomb that was originally designed for the B-36 bomber  
30 in the back of C-130s. You drop them in the middle of a forested area, and it flattens  
31 everything and looks like an atomic explosion. I think now they're calling them daisy

1 cutters, but [at that time] they called it commando vault in Vietnam. You would have an  
2 instant helicopter landing pad for two helicopters in the middle of a forested area in  
3 Vietnam. My understanding later was that these C-130s would fly a bombing mission in  
4 the morning and in the afternoon, they would fly cargo. So these guys were doing double  
5 duty.

6 JS: Right.

7 JR: It was a little spooky for me because I was privileged to secret information.  
8 Not only were the ten-thousand-pound bombs at Cam Ranh Bay, but there's other stuff  
9 that I can't talk about. It's still classified. If one of those bombs went off, they could have  
10 sent me home in an envelope, it was a bit scary.

11 JS: Sure.

12 JR: There was commando vault and like I said, there was all this secret stuff going  
13 on, everybody had their own, you know, little war. Again, I had a privilege to actually,  
14 you know, hit on this. And the other thing we did at Cam Ranh, we were a part of entry  
15 for a number of weather officers that would go into other parts of the country. It was my  
16 job to meet them, get them temporary quarters and, we had a tailor shop on base. If they  
17 didn't have jungle fatigues, we would get them a set of jungle fatigues. The Vietnamese  
18 would sew on their insignia. Once, we had to bring [one] back because the Vietnamese  
19 sewed it on upside down. But it was nice to see them and we would talk on the phone.  
20 Some of them I went to tropical weather school with and there were [some interesting]  
21 personalities there. One guy that I went to tropical weather school and help get set up, he  
22 went to the weather central at Tan Son Nhut. He later on was one of the three air force  
23 forecasters that's mentioned in *Thor's Legions*.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JR: He made the forecast for the Iran rescue raid that got hit by the dust storm. He  
26 got cleared from that. They decided it was not the military forecaster's fault, you know,  
27 what happened with the mission. But I'm sure that ended his career with them, with the  
28 air force.

29 JS: Right.

30 JR: It still didn't look good.

31 JS: Sure.

1           JR: I'm certain it wasn't his fault, you know, he was cleared. The other thing is,  
2 again, being a minority, Jews make up only two percent of the population. There weren't  
3 a huge amount of Jewish [servicemen] in Vietnam. [Some in] Technical services,  
4 medicine [Judge Advocate General], things like that. So a lot of people didn't know what  
5 to make of me. I worked very hard, I understood that. I would probably be the first one  
6 that they met. I wanted to make a good impression. I did have a couple officers come up  
7 to me and say, "I want you working for me after the war." You know, they liked my work  
8 ethic. Actually, this is documented that is in two books that I'm willing to, if you don't  
9 have them, I'm willing to turn over to your archive. It isn't covered real well. *Jungle*  
10 *Jews of Vietnam*.

11           JS: Okay.

12           JR: It was printed in 1993. And a fascinating book called *Saigon to Jerusalem*  
13 about interviews with eighteen American [Jewish] Vietnam War veterans that were so  
14 disgusted by the treatment they got as returning veterans of the United States. They  
15 upped and they took citizenship in Israel, most of them served in the Israeli Army.  
16 Interesting stories because I had a similar experience, but I wasn't ever interested in  
17 going to Israel, even though my sister had lived there for a couple years.

18           JS: Okay.

19           JR: So again, I wouldn't say an odd ball, but people did a double take when they  
20 looked at my name tag. Interestingly enough there were, among the POWs, there were  
21 three, actually three were in North Vietnam were Jewish and two were mentioned in  
22 *Jungle Jews of Vietnam*.

23           JS: Okay.

24           JR: One was a back seater in an F4 and retired eventually as a lieutenant colonel.  
25 The other one was a Para rescue man that as an enlisted man, he tried to save a downed  
26 pilot and was captured in the process. Him, he survived. The president gave enlisted men  
27 that were POWs in North Vietnam direct commissions. They made him an officer. He  
28 eventually became a pilot and retired as a major.

29           JS: Okay.

1 JR: Unfortunately, *Jungle Jews of Vietnam* didn't mention the third guy which is a  
2 real sad story. Alan Brudno was a graduate of MIT, was a back seater in an F4, was shot  
3 down in 1965. He had a technical degree from MIT; he wanted to become an astronaut.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JR: He was captured, was in there for seven and a half years. There was some  
6 allegations that the Vietnamese were helping the Arabs at that time. I believe that during  
7 the Yom Kippur War, some of the North Vietnamese pilots were flying for the Arabs  
8 when they were starting to run short. They singled out some of the Jews for particular  
9 treatment for that reason. But in a bizarre twist, which I wasn't real happy about and I'll  
10 send you a copy of it—in 1946 Ho Chi Minh became real friendly with David Ben  
11 Gurion, [a leader in the fight for Israel Independence and its first prime minister].

12 JS: Right.

13 JR: He offered him a [Jewish] state in exile in Vietnam when the British were  
14 giving him a hard time.

15 JS: Right.

16 JR: Shimon Peres [Israel's President], last month, greeted the first Vietnam  
17 ambassador to Israel. He complimented how courageous the Vietnamese were and all  
18 that. I wasn't real happy about that.

19 JS: Sure.

20 JR: I did write the editor [reporter from the Jerusalem Post who covered the story]  
21 a letter and they kind of crossed it [off] and said, "Well, he wasn't commenting on who  
22 was right or wrong, he just said the Vietnamese were courageous fighters." I wanted to  
23 throw up, I don't care.

24 JS: Right.

25 JR: Anyhow, Brudno returned and he was in such mental anguish that four  
26 months later he committed suicide. Eventually, through the efforts of his brother, this guy  
27 was a POW for seven years. That was, you know, how should we say it this POW. They  
28 finally put his name up on the [Vietnam Memorial] Wall [in Washington, DC].

29 JS: Okay.

30 JR: In 2004, The Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington.

31 JS: Right.

1 JR: So again, a lot of people said none of the Jews went and all this, I could say,  
2 “We’re two percent of the population, a lot are college educated.” So just like Vice  
3 President Cheney and other people, they took their deferments in some cases.

4 JS: Right.

5 JR: In some cases, they didn’t. But they’re considering our percentage of the  
6 population when you can see these two books there were a number of doubts and a lot of  
7 anguish went on. I decided—I had one last assignment, I was assigned to Blytheville Air  
8 Force Base, [AR] which was bizarre. After being in a war zone I went to a SAC base that  
9 is closed now.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JR: Johnny Cash grew up a few miles from Blytheville, [AR], that gives you an  
12 idea the country it was.

13 JS: Right.

14 JR: Not a lot to do in a town, still better than Vietnam. I mean, you could go to a  
15 restaurant anytime you wanted to, you know, you weren’t restricted from that. But it was  
16 a SAC base and there were like, you know, all your I’s got to be dotted, your T’s crossed.  
17 And after coming from a war zone, I mean, I didn’t have an attitude problem, but you  
18 know, what is this? It was interesting because they had a very sophisticated weather  
19 radar. But, you know, then I got my discharge out of there and was going back to grad  
20 school. I felt now was the time to do it because if I had a master’s degree I wanted to  
21 work for the government, you know, I’d get a higher salary.

22 JS: Sure.

23 JR: So the meteorology department at Rutgers, [Chairman of the Dept] the  
24 professor [Vaughn] Havens had been a weather officer in World War II, was recalled  
25 during Korea and he was still a reserve major in the air force and he was sympathetic.  
26 You know, “We’d like you to share your experience with us.” He was very helpful and  
27 respectful, but he did tell me, with all the stuff going on there at the college of  
28 agriculture, the faculty was so upset with the anti-war activity and the harassment of  
29 ROTC that some of the faculty was shaving off the Rutgers part of their parking sticker  
30 because they didn’t want their neighbors to know they worked there. They were so  
31 embarrassed about, you know, the shenanigans going on.

1 JS: Right.

2 JR: They wanted to throw ROTC off campus which would have been a mistake.  
3 They did it at Princeton. Basically, from my understanding, I think Rutgers is one of the  
4 few colleges in New Jersey that has an Air Force and Army ROTC program because all  
5 the others threw theirs off. And what they do is they allow people from other colleges to  
6 enroll at ROTC at Rutgers, but it's easier said than done.

7 JS: Sure.

8 JR: You [have] Monmouth [University] down the street here, in West Long  
9 Branch, it's a forty-five-minute trip to Rutgers in the non rush hours. So you really have  
10 to do a hard ship to try to get enrolled. I mean, it's there, but it's not like having it on  
11 campus. But I got to give Rutgers credit, they've still maintained their ROTC.

12 JS: Right.

13 JR: I had some harassment from professors. I couldn't believe what I was hearing,  
14 you know, they would ridicule veterans in some of their classes, not on the Ag [campus],  
15 but on the main campus. I also had some harassment at the graduate student center from  
16 one student in Malaysia was giving me crap about Vietnam. I mean, this is—I'm not  
17 saying we were one hundred percent right, but when you see people coming to this  
18 country for the education and putting the United States down.

19 JS: Right.

20 JR: For me that's a bad guest. And some of the students, too, you know were  
21 snotty. I mean, I didn't throw it around, but sometimes we'd get into discussions and it  
22 this whole year to now, you know, I have a feeling that a lot of the war resistance was  
23 people that just didn't want to go; they didn't want to interrupt their careers. I don't think  
24 what the United States did was wrong, I think that I still believe, regardless of people  
25 have argued about the Domino Theory, it would have been a signal to the Russians  
26 because we're undermanned compared to them in Europe.

27 JS: Right.

28 JR: I think they would have tried something in Europe, and I think that they  
29 would have tried to overthrow the governments of Thailand and the other places. And I  
30 think it was a signal to them, "Look, we're willing to tough this out." So, I don't disagree  
31 with the war at all. The way it was fought, well, I'm not a military strategist. In

1 meteorology we have a thing called hind casting. You know, when somebody puts out the  
2 wrong forecast after the event happens, they come back and they say, “Well, if you had  
3 done this, this.” After the event happened. So this is what I’m saying, a lot of this  
4 Vietnam War stuff is hind casting. I actually met [retired General] Curtis Lemay when he  
5 was running for president. He visited Cam Ranh Bay; I actually had a chance to see him.  
6 And I have the feeling there were people in the air force that would have loved to start a  
7 war with China, figuring out someday we’re going to have to fight them, we might as  
8 well do it now and on the horizon, I think some people are afraid that we’re going to have  
9 a confrontation with them when the time is right.

10 JS: Right.

11 JR: On their grounds, not on ours. But, again, the bottom line was it’s still better  
12 than the nuclear war and that’s what Johnson had to deal with. In terms of job  
13 opportunities, because so many people getting out at the same time and the air force  
14 needing less weather officers, I was offered a regular commission [and a slot] in graduate  
15 school if I stayed in. I saw the handwriting on the wall and also, they were sending some  
16 weather officers into missile silos because there was a surplus of them. So I mean I’m  
17 glad that I spent my time in the military, it was the adventure of a lifetime. I got to see  
18 and do things and meet people that I never would have met, but it also had a downside in  
19 terms of employment. I couldn’t get a job with the government even though I did a good  
20 master’s thesis. The interview I had was really nasty with a well-known member of the  
21 NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). He eventually went to jail  
22 for molesting little girls. It was somewhat of an embarrassment, but he was downright  
23 nasty to me. All he had to say was, “Joel, you’ve had interesting experience, it was nice  
24 meeting you, I don’t now if you’re fully qualified for this.” Instead, he was snotty and  
25 nasty to me. And when jobs became so difficult, I took at that time what was called the  
26 Pace Exam for social security and internal revenue, I scored high. I had an interview with  
27 social security and the first thing the interviewer said to me, “Well, you’ve been a captain  
28 in the air force, you wouldn’t be good for this job, you guys are used to pushing people  
29 around.” I couldn’t believe what the hell I was hearing. I got totally disgusted. I joined at  
30 unit of the Jewish War Veterans and even then, there was a thing going on in our state  
31 about eliminating veteran’s preference at the time and they got up and they said, “Well,

1 that's not going to affect us, we're all approaching retirement." I said, "Wait a minute."  
2 And they gave me a hard time, I couldn't believe it. So they said, "Alright, you get us a  
3 statement and we'll look at it, we'll think about it." And the guy that gave me a hard time  
4 was a municipal judge, no less. So, you know, I went the route, I got the wording of what  
5 the bill and the legislator was and all this. They gave me lip service; they passed a  
6 resolution. Yeah, we're opposed to it. I lost interest in them. I'm sure that they've done  
7 some good things, but eventually I [hooked] up with the Vietnam Veterans of America.  
8 And they are more much in tune. Their attitude is, "Look, we don't care if our  
9 organization eventually dissolves, but we'll do the best we can for all veterans, you  
10 know, not just one group." And they have, they've done [honorably]. I changed fields,  
11 went back to a community college, got a degree in respiratory therapy even though I  
12 maintained my professional membership in the American Meteorological Society.

13 JS: Okay.

14 JR: I was a registered respiratory therapist for twenty years then I became sick.  
15 People thought I had tuberculosis and in turn it wasn't that. It was Non-Hodgkin's  
16 Lymphoma from Agent Orange.

17 JS: Okay.

18 JR: And my doctor stood up for me and she fought for me and the VVA (Vietnam  
19 Veterans of America) told me what needed to be said on the doctor's report, so first they  
20 gave me a hard time. They said I'd be fine and when I went back for a re-exam and I  
21 went into everything that was going on, not only did I end up with one hundred percent,  
22 but I ended above that for something else that I acquired as a result of the Agent Orange  
23 Exposure. So by being so hard ass, the VA (Veterans Affairs) ended up, you know paying  
24 more than they would have if they hadn't insisted on putting me through the ringers. But  
25 again, I paid a price. My wife and I separated [and divorced], but I raised [my] two  
26 stepdaughters and one still lives with me. Their father was never involved with them. I  
27 used my VA money to put the older one through college and I bought the younger one a  
28 car and I've helped her financially and stuff. We're still on friendly terms, but part of it  
29 was the illness. Even though she's a nurse, she didn't want to deal with the stuff. Like I  
30 said, it's been a long journey. The other thing that I acquired is when I became sick, I  
31 said, "You know, I deserve a degree from Texas A&M." So I contacted the American

1 Meteorological Society, they contacted Texas A&M, contacted my congressman. They  
2 went through the records to deal was this. Texas A&M eased up on the requirements and  
3 I guess the state of Texas on what you need to get a BS. And they also gave credit, as I  
4 said, initially you needed six credits of political science and six credits in history. But  
5 what they did, they eased up on the requirements over the years and they give you three  
6 credits for ROTC, three credits for military service. What they came up with was between  
7 the American Meteorological Society, my congressman Rush Holt and Texas A&M was,  
8 “We’ll give you the degree if you take a three-credit course in political science and three  
9 credit course in history from Southwest Texas.” Which they offer correspondence, which  
10 I did. And after I did, I sent them a copy of a letter from—because the air force denied  
11 that anybody was received a degree for the program unless somebody had graduated from  
12 Texas A&M in another field and then, you know, was commissioned and went through  
13 the weather program there as well. That’s the only exception. I produced a letter from  
14 Doctor John Dutton, head of the meteorology department at Penn State at the time. And  
15 he noted that every one of the air force people in the weather officer program got BS  
16 degrees. They arranged their program, so I got an apologetic letter from the provost at  
17 Texas A&M, he hit a panic button apologizing and he says, “Well, I see you’ve  
18 completed your six credits and you’re getting your degree.” So I’m on a list there as of  
19 December of 2001, they gave me a BS in meteorology. I am a member of their  
20 association of former students and I even have a Texas A&M ring. The reason I did it  
21 was because at Rutgers there was a lot of hard feelings. Not the Ag School, they were  
22 good people, but there was a lot of stuff that went on there that just wasn’t right and  
23 wasn’t happy about. Texas A&M has their muster. When I pass on which, may not be too  
24 much longer, they do remember you and they trained me well, so I thought it was  
25 important that I be a member of them, even though I did it by correspondence. I’m also a  
26 member of Alpha Zeta, which is an honorary agricultural society similar to Phi Beta  
27 Kappa. You have a chapter there at Texas Tech and in Texas the other chapter is at Texas  
28 A&M. But again, I’m glad that I’m apart of Texas A&M, I’m a proud of the degree, [part  
29 of the Aggie network] that I’m a part of Texas. You know, it played an influential role in  
30 my development as a weather officer and I didn’t want it to be forgotten.

1 JS: Sure. Alright, well, before we wrap things up, I do have some questions for  
2 you if you don't mind.

3 JR: Sure.

4 JS: Let's see, well, first of all, how did you become interested in weather to begin  
5 with?

6 JR: Well, because my parents never owned a car and I had to walk to school, and  
7 nobody was going to pick me up when it was raining or if it was raining. So I was always  
8 interested in what the weather was going to be because I needed to know how to dress.  
9 There wasn't going to be anybody there to pick me up and I walked everywhere. My  
10 parents didn't have a car. I generally got around by public transportation. So I was more  
11 attuned to what was going on because I had to. And my father, even though he only had  
12 an eighth-grade education, was always interested in the weather too because he didn't  
13 have a car and he had to be prepared. Ever since I was a little kid, since I was about seven  
14 or eight years old that's what I wanted to do. And I would take out all the weather books  
15 out of our local library and read up as much as I could. A school trip we went to the  
16 Hayden Planetarium in New York City

17 JS: Okay.

18 JR: And I bought a nice little book which I still have now that was written by a  
19 former weather officer, Robert Moore Fischer, called *How to Know and Predict the*  
20 *Weather*. It's one of the nicest weather books I've ever read, even though it's yellowing;  
21 it's still among my treasured possessions. It also kept me in school, too. I had a goal; I  
22 knew what I wanted to do and the same with the military. I knew what I was going to be  
23 doing after graduation and a lot of people were floating, you know, they were either  
24 trying to figure out how to get out of the draft or I don't know what I want to be when I  
25 grow up. And again, the air force gave me the opportunity to be a weatherman, and not  
26 only that, to participate in weather forecasting in a military situation, which I had read  
27 about as a kid. The forecasts for the D-Day invasion, a lot of that stuff is really  
28 interesting.

29 JS: Alright, you talked about this a little bit, but how about the military aspect of  
30 it? Were you interested in that as a kid as well? Or—

1 JR: Yeah, you know, everybody had to be concerned about the military because  
2 the draft was still in effect and you had to figure out how you were going to meet your  
3 obligation. Now, my parents wanted me to go to college and I wanted to go, too. But if  
4 for some reason I couldn't go to college, my route would have been either the navy  
5 aerology program which is what the navy calls their meteorologists, the call them  
6 aerographers, or going into the air force as an enlisted man and to [the] weather field. I  
7 think again, depending upon age, anybody who was of college age in the early sixties, it  
8 was a concern of how do you meet your military obligation type of thing. Again, it's my  
9 thing that I told people [who] dropped ROTC after two years. I said, "Look, what's four  
10 years if you enjoy what you're doing?"

11 JS: Sure.

12 JR: And the experience, too. Unfortunately, we're told when we went into the  
13 military as officers, people are going to want you because you lead men, you're  
14 organized. That fell apart after Vietnam and that did not count. It counted internally in the  
15 way I handled people as a supervisor, as a respiratory therapist. I was a respiratory  
16 therapy supervisor in the hospital I worked at in that I was much more adept at handling  
17 people as opposed to people who just went to a community college and were elevated to  
18 supervisor, a world of difference in the way you deal with people.

19 JS: Okay, alright. Speaking of the issue of military obligation and all of that, did  
20 you have any relatives that had served in World War II?

21 JR: Yes, I did.

22 JS: Okay. Hello? Whenever I heard a click, I had just asked you if you had any  
23 relatives that had served in World War II.

24 JR: Yes, I did, and this was the difference between—and this was part of the  
25 problem with Vietnam. My mother had three brothers and they all actually served. The  
26 first one was let out early because he had a medical condition, but the other two, her  
27 brother George I had worked with for three years in high school; I worked on weekends  
28 with him.

29 JS: Okay.

30 JR: He had been in the army—he was actually one of the first people drafted [and  
31 served] from 1940 to 1945. He was a master sergeant; he was the brightest one in my

1 mother's family. I actually saved his letters. He was originally in the army chemical corps  
2 and then he served with Mark Clark in the invasion of North Africa and Sicily. Like I  
3 said, I still have his letters and his pictures. He died young; he died when he was forty-  
4 nine. He used to tell me stories all the time, interesting stuff. And her younger brother  
5 was also drafted and fought in the Battle of the Bulge and I still have some of his letters,  
6 but he dropped out of high school, so [his letters weren't as interesting as his brother  
7 George]—he never talked about his World War II experiences. His brother [George]  
8 talked about it all the time and a lot of the people that I delivered to as his customers were  
9 also in World War II. And this is the thing that I brought out to people that during World  
10 War II, everybody had a son, a father, a brother, maybe even a sister that had served.  
11 Vietnam was much more selective; it was not as universal, and a lot of people just  
12 couldn't relate to it for that reason. The things that were done on campus and to Veterans  
13 that were done during Vietnam would have been inexcusable in World War II.

14 JS: Sure.

15 JR: And most of my relatives were not in the military during Vietnam. A few  
16 distant ones were and, you know, one that had connections to get a medical excuse, the  
17 other that was extremely athletic when the time went to go for his military physical, he  
18 had a trick knee. I was the only one in my family ever to be an officer too, so that  
19 somewhat set me apart. My mother's family was good to me. They sent me packages. I  
20 never went to the Jewish religious services; I didn't feel that it was right. If I had been out  
21 on the field, it was different. They, during Passover season would send me a box of  
22 Matzos and a cake tin of macaroons, that was fine. If I had been out in the field it would  
23 have been different, but we were shorthanded, so I feel that the job that I was doing is  
24 more important. But if I had been out sleeping in the tent in the bush, I would have made  
25 an effort.

26 JS: Right, right. Okay, if it's alright with you I'm kind of going through as you  
27 were telling your story I was writing down some questions, so the questions I have are  
28 kind of in chronological order, but not quite. I might skip around a little bit if that's okay.

29 JR: That's fine.

30 JS: When you were talking about the teach-ins and stuff at Rutgers, I wonder if  
31 you could talk a little bit more about that if you could tell me a little bit about what types

1 of things—say if you could elaborate a little bit more about what types of things they  
2 were saying about the war.

3 JR: Well, what it was was in an auditorium, I believe in one case it was a  
4 gymnasium and one case it was in a [lecture hall], a rather large grouping of students and  
5 professors and even some townspeople that were somewhat angry about the whole thing.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JR: They were discussing the history of Vietnam, American involvement, you  
8 know, what should or should not be done. It was mostly a academic discussion of  
9 America's involvement in Vietnam and whether this was the correct or incorrect thing to  
10 do. And of course, Professor Genovese who was a Marxist, but he didn't [force his views  
11 on students]—one of my friends graduated number one at Rutgers and was a Henry  
12 Rutgers Scholar.

13 JS: Okay.

14 JR: And he had him for a professor, he said, and other people said he never  
15 brought his views about Vietnam into the classroom. I do have to give him credit for that.

16 JS: Sure.

17 JR: His remarks were insensitive of course because there were Rutgers graduates  
18 that were fighting and dying in Vietnam, as well as local people.

19 JS: Right.

20 JR: Later, much later, he admitted he was wrong. This is like thirty years later.  
21 But it was interesting, I got to say, I didn't agree with some of the things that were said,  
22 but in terms of an academic environment, this is something that was happening as  
23 opposed to development of western civilization or the history of the Civil War. This was  
24 going on now and it was being discussed by academicians who were—how should we say,  
25 well versed in the history. So it was interesting from that standpoint.

26 JS: Sure.

27 JR: It's just that I think Professor Genevese's remarks were basically out of  
28 hand.

29 JS: Right.

30 JR: But he did say something that wasn't covered either because I was there and I  
31 heard him say that. And what he said was, "All you people judging me, if you are so

1 much in favor of the war, then why don't you take the place of all the Blacks and Puerto  
2 Ricans that have been drafted and are dying over there." Now, that was included in the  
3 press [reports], but I heard him say it.

4 JS: Right, okay. How widespread do you think the anti-war movement was on  
5 campus?

6 JR: At Rutgers it was very widespread, but you have to understand that this is  
7 New Jersey, it's the North East.

8 JS: Right.

9 JR: You had more minorities coming to school. Blacks, Puerto Ricans, foreign  
10 students as well, some who were anti-American, you know. So you had this kind of  
11 element. Now, I have a friend from Texas A&M that was a weather officer that we go  
12 back and forth with. A&M was totally different, the president, when I was there, was Earl  
13 Rudder, who they said should have gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor for what he  
14 did on D-Day. At A&M they had a rally in support of the war. So this, you know, it  
15 wasn't universal, I think it was more concentrated on the east coast and the northeast in  
16 particular and on the west coast particularly at Berkley, you know. Those are the two big  
17 hot areas of the anti-war movement so to speak.

18 JS: Alright. You mentioned that at times it turned, I guess you could say  
19 somewhat violent in the fact that students attempting to burn down the Air Force ROTC  
20 building. Being in the Air Force ROTC, did you ever have any confrontations yourself?

21 JR: At the time that I was there, there weren't confrontations.

22 JS: Okay.

23 JR: But after I left, there were confrontations where every year in the spring, the  
24 military would hold a—ROTC would hold military review at the university at the  
25 Piscataway Stadium, where Rutgers plays the football games. There were disruptions and  
26 of course, the parents and families of kids that were in ROTC and wanted to go in the  
27 military, had some confrontations with the anti-war kids. As a matter of fact, when I was  
28 a graduate student at Rutgers, I met a weather officer at McGuire [AFB] that was also  
29 had been a Rutgers student at the time and an AFROTC student. He said Air Force  
30 ROTC sent people into the community to try to smooth things over to say, you know, the  
31 whole university is not like that.

1 JS: Right.

2 JR: And that some of us support the military and our government and we want  
3 you to know that the entire university is not that way. So at least AFROTC reached out  
4 and unfortunately Rutgers wanted to throw ROTC off campus. Fortunately, they backed  
5 down on that, but I know Princeton got rid of its ROTC programs, I believe Columbia  
6 did, too. And that's a shame because what you want in the military is you want a  
7 diversity of opinions. You don't want people coming from just one sector of the  
8 population. And again, it's a matter of how much longer we were going to be able to have  
9 a volunteer military.

10 JS: Right.

11 JR: It's broken, they're taking the same people and, you know, rotating them  
12 again and again. They're having mental and job problems from here on out. I certainly  
13 sympathize with them.

14 JS: Right, sure. Another question I have, you may have mentioned this, I can't  
15 remember, I'm sorry, but what were your dates of service in country?

16 JR: It was from October 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1968.

17 JS: Okay.

18 JR: Until October 4<sup>th</sup> of '69. I was supposed to go out on a Seaboard World  
19 airlines charter flight, but they had a bad reputation. I was supposed to go out on October  
20 2<sup>nd</sup>. Seaboard World had one of their military charter flights straying over [Russian held  
21 Japanese Islands] and it was forced down. They kept the people on the ground for twenty-  
22 four hours and then they let them go. But when I saw that, we had people from the 14<sup>th</sup>  
23 Aerial Port, both Army and Air Force officers [living in our quarters]. So I took it to them  
24 and they said, "Give it to us, we'll get you on another flight."

25 JS: Okay.

26 JR: So they changed my flight, they could only make it for two days later to  
27 another charter airline, but I was not going out on Seaboard World, not after what they  
28 did. They were fortunate that's all they were, were forced down, they could have been  
29 shot down too.

30 JS: Right.

31 JR: And they didn't have a real good reputation.

1 JS: Sure.

2 JR: So I left two days later than I was supposed to.

3 JS: Right, alright. As far as your detachment, it was the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup>, is that  
4 correct?

5 JR: Detachment, 18<sup>th</sup>.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JR: 30<sup>th</sup>, weather squadron.

8 JS: Okay.

9 JR: And 30<sup>th</sup> weather squadron was all the air force detachments in Vietnam.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JR: They worked there at the headquarters was considered [out at] Tan Son Nhut  
12 [Airbase in Saigon]. The air force [weather forecasters] assigned to army [units] in  
13 Vietnam were under the fifth weather [squadron].

14 JS: Okay, alright. As far as the detachments 18<sup>th</sup> weather responsibility, was it the  
15 Cam Ranh Bay area or did it extend out further?

16 JR: Well, it was basically our responsibility was Cam Ranh Bay people that were  
17 operating in and out of there.

18 JS: Okay.

19 JR: But in terms of weather briefings, I mean, we were responsible for the  
20 weather briefing of aircraft going on missions over North Vietnam, Laos, South Vietnam,  
21 flying market time patrols out over in the South China Sea. Military cargo and aircraft  
22 flights to Okinawa, Yakota, Japan, Clark Air Force Base, Hickam Air Force Base,  
23 Hawaii. So we're narrowed there.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JR: We did use, you know some—how should we say, maps and forecasts  
26 provided for by weather centrals, but we still had to prepare it and modify it for people  
27 going to those areas.

28 JS: Okay, alright. You mentioned in the questionnaire I believe you mentioned, as  
29 well earlier that you were acting as that detachment commander at a point.

30 JR: The second commander I had, he was a great commander, but he had some  
31 family problems, he had to go on emergency leave for a month.

1 JS: Okay.

2 JR: And I had to act as not just chief forecaster, but as detachment commander, as  
3 well.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JR: So I had to wear two hats and interestingly enough, he had three kids. The one  
6 that got a letter of reprimand had eight kids and he had them so well organized that his  
7 wife didn't have to get up in the morning. So he ran basically his household better than he  
8 ran the detachment. The other guy ran the detachment great, but he had problems with his  
9 household.

10 JS: Okay, what type of additional duties did that entail for you?

11 JR: It involved disciplining people. It provided writing letters, basically—also the  
12 guns were locked up in the detachment so, you know in case we were infiltrated, you  
13 know, releasing the guns to the detachment. Now, we would also sign out the guns when  
14 we left the base. My first commander was so afraid of getting killed he sent me on an  
15 aircraft accident investigation up at Dalat, so I took guns with me. Whenever I left the  
16 base I was always armed.

17 JS: Okay.

18 JR: We weren't really trained very well. That's one of my objections. If it would  
19 have been up to me there would have been a lot more retraining and proficiency going on  
20 in military weapons.

21 JS: Sure, okay. Speaking of weapons training, how much weapons had you had at  
22 that point?

23 JR: Not a lot. They gave me an hour on an M-16 at Otis Air Force Base and about  
24 an hour on a .45 pistol. I went to Boy Scout Camp, [as a teenager, and was taught to use a  
25 22-caliber rifle] as a matter of fact the heroic prisoner of war, George Coker was actually  
26 a—not only did he go to camp Winnebago where I went up in northern New Jersey in  
27 Marcella, New Jersey, he was not only there as a camper, he was an Eagle Scout; he was  
28 on the staff there for two or three years. The camp historian at Camp Winnebago had  
29 mentioned that to me because his troop was sponsored by Saint Elizabeth Church that  
30 used to be diagonally across from our Synagogue. His was troop thirty-two, we were  
31 thirty-one. They actually mocked on him and I believe it was a movie called *Hearts and*

1 *Minds*. They cut and pasted some of his return home to Linden, New Jersey, as a hero  
2 after being a prisoner of war.

3 JS: Right.

4 JR: And they did it in such way to make him look like a fool. I knew I recognized  
5 a policeman and some of the people in the film clip. The guy was a hero, he actually  
6 escaped for fifteen hours and, you know, he was tortured. The way they cut him apart  
7 made me want to puke.

8 JS: Sure.

9 JR: And again, this is a personal thing because he grew up in [my home] town and  
10 he was an Eagle Scout and was active in scouting after he was released, and he made a  
11 career out of the navy. He was also a Rutgers student a year before me. He was supposed  
12 to graduate in '65 but left in '63 to go into the naval aviation cadet program and he  
13 eventually—after he was released, he got his degree, I believe from San Diego,  
14 somewhere out on the west coast.

15 JS: Yeah, now that you mention it, I do remember seeing that section on him in  
16 the film. I know it's certainly a very controversial film and its take on the war.

17 JR: And that's why I'm saying I'm an eyewitness to history because not only did I  
18 go to the scout camp, probably at the same time he was there. But he was on staff later on  
19 and again, he went to Rutgers as well as did Jack Jacobs, one of the two Jewish  
20 Congressional Medal of Honor winners [from the Vietnam War]. The other was [Jon]  
21 Levitow who [later] died of cancer. He's the one that was the air force enlisted man. In  
22 the C-47, I think it was, one of the [flares] got loose and was burning, he jumped on it  
23 and with his body, he was severely burned. He survived, but I think he died of cancer  
24 about ten years ago.

25 JS: Right. Another thing that you mentioned earlier, you talked about being in  
26 charge of a couple of captains when you were lieutenant. If you could say a little bit more  
27 about that and how did they take to that?

28 JR: They didn't care.

29 JS: Okay.

30 JR: They had an attitude problem, they were—one guy, he was planning to kill  
31 my commander, I was real nervous. He had extended and he was entitled to another R&R

1 and the [detachment] commander that got the letter of reprimand wasn't going to give it  
2 to him. He was telling me exactly how he was going to do it and I was nervous. I mean,  
3 this was the father of eight kids.

4 JS: Sure.

5 JR: What he was going to do was he made friends with some of the Vietnamese  
6 across the mainland there and they'd kill anybody for fifty dollars. He was going to invite  
7 him out to dinner and have the truck jumped and ambushed. Fortunately, he called the IG  
8 and it was straightened out, but I was nervous because, you know when push came to  
9 shove, I was getting ready to intervene and it would have been a real touchy situation  
10 there.

11 JS: Right.

12 JR: Fortunately— he was serious about it though. He was crazy enough that he  
13 would have had it done.

14 JS: Wow.

15 JR: No question in my mind and I was on pins and needles.

16 JS: Right.

17 JR: Yeah, actually he was the chief forecaster and he got fired because he didn't  
18 care. The other two guys could care less. You know, again, part of the thing was being  
19 the only Jewish guy in the detachment and probably the first one they ever met. I wasn't  
20 going to let them down, so I was going to do more than my job. I would probably be the  
21 first and last Jewish person they ever met up close. And the same guy, the one that was  
22 going to kill my commander when he left, he shook my hand and said, "Joel, after the  
23 war I want you working for me. I like you."

24 JS: (Laughs)

25 JR: It was a private beach that we weren't supposed to use.

26 JS: Okay.

27 JR: And he would go swimming there, he would take me with him. He says, you  
28 can call for help. (Information removed per interviewee's request)

29 JS: Okay.

30 JR: Finally, one day he went swimming in a restricted area and it was a shark  
31 sitting there and scared the crap out of him. But he told me what his attitude was. Rules

1 are made for ninety-nine percent of the people. He said, “I’m the other one percent, I  
2 don’t follow them.”

3 JS: Wow.

4 JR: A piece of work, but he was a graduate of one of the—not West Point, but he  
5 was a graduate of one of the military schools.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JR: And that’s what spooked me. Some of these guys really, you know, were out  
8 in left field. The way they described their life, certain weekends they weren’t allowed off  
9 the campus, the hazing that went on and stuff. To me it’s not a way to go to college, I  
10 don’t care. You know, it doesn’t expose you to real life.

11 JS: Right, okay. I know you’ve mentioned in the questionnaire that you had found  
12 that in some cases the air force wasn’t always sending—and I’m not trying to criticize  
13 and all, but I believe you mentioned something about the air force not always sending the  
14 best personnel in the case of Vietnam and in Gulf War I. Are you familiar with what I’m  
15 talking about?

16 JR: Yeah, and this is outlined in this book, *Thor’s Legions* by John Fuller. And  
17 this is published by the American Meteorological Society. Yeah, it was a matter of people  
18 that were intensively trained in tropical meteorology. They should have been running  
19 some of the stuff and they weren’t. It was a matter of punching a ticket, you know, “We  
20 need somebody to fill a slot in Vietnam for a year. Alright, his name is up, we’re sending  
21 him.” The fact that my first detachment commander had done nothing but write computer  
22 programs for a number of years didn’t make him very well qualified to run a weather  
23 detachment even though he was a major.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JR: But they didn’t care. Part of the problem was the one-year tour. And I agree  
26 with that, you know, sending somebody to Vietnam for two or three years is stretching it.  
27 That was a morale fact; you knew that you were going to be there for a year, you counted  
28 down the days. But if you were there for the duration, I don’t know, I’m not so sure.  
29 What they did offer was people that would extend by six months. They would offer them  
30 another R&R and they would generally offer them any assignment they wanted out of  
31 Vietnam. And there were people, enlisted men that did it, that did it to get out early. They

1 would let them out early in addition. But people were starting to flip out after a year and  
2 starting to have mental problems. You were in isolation, you didn't, you know the mail  
3 was slow. Communication was virtually impossible, there were some phones in Saigon,  
4 you know, that maybe you could call through, but it's not like the internet with today  
5 where you can communicate daily back and forth.

6 JS: Sure.

7 JR: There was extreme isolation; even the TV was just Armed Forces Vietnam  
8 Network. New York Times I would read in the library that was a week, week and a half  
9 hold to catch up on the news. And I did meet people over there interestingly enough. I  
10 met some army guys on a shuttle bus between our Quonset hut and the weather station.  
11 They were coming back for their second and third tours. I said, "Your number's going to  
12 come up, you're playing with your chances." The guy told me, he said, "I got out of the  
13 army, I went back to Louisiana, there was nothing for me in a small town, people didn't  
14 give a crap. Here, I have good friends, I enjoy what I'm doing, it's an interesting life." So  
15 that's another way to look at it, too. And I know that there are books that have been  
16 written about Americans that went back to Southeast Asia because they didn't like the  
17 way they were treated in the United States.

18 JS: Right.

19 JR: A number of men, when they got older, you know, they'd go after younger  
20 women who would just laugh at them. They go over to Thailand, a young girl with an  
21 older man? It's perfectly okay.

22 JS: Right.

23 JR: And sometimes being somewhat less sophisticated when I was younger than  
24 some people, some of the old sergeants were funny, they would say to me, he said, "Well  
25 after the war I'm going to Thailand and work on the railroad." And of course, being a  
26 train buff and written train books and histories, I'm thinking to myself, "What the hell?  
27 What's so great about the railroad in Thailand?" And they say, "Yeah, I'm going to  
28 Thailand and work on the railroad to lay Thais [sounds like railroad ties]." It took you a  
29 little while to catch on.

30 JS: Right, okay.

1 JR: I mean these guys were funny; I enjoyed the NCOs more than the officers.  
2 They had been around the world quite a bit. A lot of these guys had been in the service,  
3 got out, couldn't make it, went back into service. They were a little bit of a cut up, I  
4 guess, when they were, you know younger and it straightened them out. They were real  
5 interesting to talk to. The places they've been and the things they had dealt with. To me,  
6 that was just as much as fascinating as being in the air force as learning about weather as  
7 talking to these guys. It was a real education.

8 JS: Sure. Alright, another thing I wanted to ask you about, I know you talked  
9 about the typhoon, but were there other memorable weather phenomenon that happened  
10 that you could possibly talk about?

11 JR: Well, actually in our part of Southeast Asia, climatology and persistence were  
12 the two main tools.

13 JS: Okay.

14 JR: Once the monsoon started, the monsoon seasons, the temperatures were pretty  
15 steady. I mean, it was like during the northeast monsoon the high temperature would be  
16 in the high eighties. The low temperature would be in the high seventies. Except if you  
17 were like up high or in the valley somewhere. Then it would be different. I heard that up  
18 at Dalat which was a really pretty place that I flew up on an aircraft accident  
19 investigation.

20 JS: Okay.

21 JR: It used to be a French resort and there used to be an interesting cog railroad  
22 that ran from [Thap Cham], or it's actually called [Phan Rang] on the coast about thirty  
23 miles south of Cam Ranh, through the mountains into Dalat. It actually would snow there  
24 up at Dalat every few years, just a few flakes.

25 JS: Right.

26 JR: And then, of course, during the southwest monsoon at Cam Ranh the  
27 temperatures would reach the high nineties and the low temperatures would be in the  
28 eighties, very persistent. It's just occasionally you would have disturbances in the  
29 atmosphere like a speed max, which was an area of let's say of twenty to thirty mile an  
30 hour winds up at two to three thousand feet that would create a disturbance and a light  
31 rain shower.

1 JS: Okay.

2 JR: There was a thing called Crachin, which was low ceilings and fog that you  
3 would expect [in places] like the sea fog in New England.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JR: That would occur [during the northeast monsoon], from basically—from  
6 about Phu Cat, north of Da Nang, up through North Vietnam a front would hang up and  
7 you would have low ceilings and fog. It wouldn't happen as far south as Cam Ranh Bay,  
8 but the terminology for it was Crachin.

9 JS: Okay.

10 JR: Also, you would have the burning of the rice throughout Southeast Asia in, I  
11 would say around February and March. This would create haze problems, not so much at  
12 Cam Ranh Bay, but inland along the mountains and stuff when the sun got lower in the  
13 sky, the slant visibility would play havoc with some of the air missions. Winds, too, was  
14 another thing. Particularly at Cam Ranh Bay during, I believe certain of the monsoons the  
15 winds would really pick up and the sand would be blowing like crazy. They did issue us  
16 goggles, I did wear them once, I believe it would cut into your eyes. It didn't happen that  
17 often, but when it did, you know, blowing sand. Very strange experience. On YouTube  
18 there's a couple of videos on Cam Ranh Bay now and then.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JR: And one of them is Cam Ranh is now the civilian airport for Nha Trang. They  
21 closed the civilian airport in Nha Trang, they built a better road. It's about twenty miles  
22 away [north of Cam Ranh Bay].

23 JS: Okay.

24 JR: There's a YouTube video of a Vietnamese jet airliner landing at Cam Ranh  
25 Bay and I got totally spooked out by it, I had nightmares of it. If you ever saw the movie  
26 *Twelve O'clock High*.

27 JS: Right.

28 JR: Dean Jagger, first part of the movie he walks across a runway that's  
29 overgrown, that's part of a pasture.

30 JS: Okay.

1 JR: Oh, did I get that feeling. As the plane lands, the runway is there. They built a  
2 small, very small modern air terminal, but all the buildings are gone.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JR: They're all overgrown with brush. Eventually they want to redevelop it. It  
5 was like I had nightmares that following night after seeing it on getting lost on the plane  
6 and being left there with nothing.

7 JS: Right.

8 JR: It's a strange feeling because the base was bulging with all kinds of buildings  
9 and military and airplanes and all you see is scrub brush, mountains, water, and a small  
10 terminal and a long runway.

11 JS: Wow.

12 JR: I felt like I was stepping back into that scene out of *Twelve O'clock High*. It  
13 totally spooked me out.

14 JS: Right.

15 JR: Now the Russians occupied it from 1979 to 2002.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JR: Interestingly enough, the C7A Caribou Association and I'm a member of,  
18 they were contacted by a Russian woman meteorologist, actually a meteorological  
19 technician that was stationed there with her husband in the 1990s and had a grand time.  
20 Her and her husband are divorced now, she's an American citizen. To her, it was the time  
21 of her life and she loved to go back there because it was peace time, the life there was  
22 good, they ate well, they didn't have to worry about attacks, they had freedom to go  
23 wherever they wanted. To her it was paradise, to me, it's interesting, but I have no desire  
24 to go back. We've e-mailed back and forth some things.

25 JS: Right.

26 JR: We also found out that the Russian planes flying out on Cam Ranh had  
27 dolphins on their tails. Now, the Americans it came out later on, they had trained  
28 dolphins to attack VC swimmers at Cam Ranh. I was thinking that some of the dolphins  
29 defected, but it turned out, she told me the story, and I'll submit some of this stuff to you.  
30 That was the symbol, the dolphin was also the symbol of the Russian military unit from  
31 Sevastopol that was stationed in Cam Ranh and it turns out they were doing the same

1 thing the Americans did. After [WWII] war they were training dolphins at Sevastopol to  
2 attack swimmers and do military intelligence work. So on the pennant that she e-mailed  
3 me, there's a mean looking dolphin with a sword in its mouth.

4 JS: (Laughs)

5 JR: It ain't flipper, so it's a bizarre complete circle from the fact that my  
6 grandmother used to sing sad songs about the defeat of the Russian fleet that actually  
7 assembled at Cam Ranh Bay, to this Russian woman who is now an American citizen,  
8 actually Ukrainian, but she's an American citizen now who was stationed there and had a  
9 great time as a meteorological technician.

10 JS: (Laughs)

11 JR: And I compared notes with her.

12 JS: Right.

13 JR: And, you know, she would love to go back there. I don't care, I have no  
14 desire, none whatsoever.

15 JS: Right. It is certainly an interesting circle there. Alright, you talked a little bit  
16 about the equipment that you had. I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about just  
17 what different types of monitoring systems you had for the weather.

18 JR: Well, we had a weather radar, I believe it was an FPS-105.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JR: What I'm told it was from the nose of a 707, but it was still better than what  
21 we had at Otis Air Force Base which was a set taken out of a B-17 that was totally  
22 useless.

23 JS: Okay.

24 JR: It was totally useless, worthless [locally]. We could pick stuff out far out to  
25 sea. The problem was is the mountains were within a mile or two of us and that's what  
26 you call ground clutter, and it was a problem picking up stuff that was, you know, I'd  
27 guess you'd say west of us. But it was useful, but Tan Son Nhut had a CPS-9, which was  
28 sophisticated and also Pleiku had a sophisticated weather radar, too. I believe possibly  
29 some of the bases in Thailand may have had it. We did have FAX, which meant that we  
30 got printed [weather] maps every couple of hours. We would also make up copies of  
31 maps as needed for different units on an Oslet machine. It was a primitive copy machine,

1 but it worked, and we had it maintained. We had a pilot to forecaster radio, so that pilots  
2 in the air could actually contact us and ask for a weather briefing, you know, as they were  
3 in the air. They would also ask us what field the condition was. There was certain [color  
4 coded security] alert levels. We weren't allowed to give that over the pilot the forecaster.  
5 There was a strange story that was recorded in *Thor's Legions* where we also had a  
6 recorded daily weather message that the Red Cross girls would do for morale factors.  
7 People would call up and get a general weather briefing. Da Nang had one, too.  
8 Sometimes people also would call up the weather station with heavy Vietnamese accents.  
9 Now they claimed that they were getting information for the charter flights like  
10 Northwest Airlines and Pan Am [charters], I assume they were, I'm not really sure, but  
11 they had a heavy Vietnamese accent. At Da Nang that was going on too and they couldn't  
12 figure out why the artillery, you know, they were hitting them with rockets and mortars,  
13 and they were pretty accurate. Then one day they found out they were way off. And then  
14 the weather officer up there realized that the guy calling with the Vietnamese accent was  
15 calling from the VC to get winds and temperature readings for their mortars. And when  
16 he gave him the wrong information by accident that was the day that they were off  
17 course.

18 JS: (Laughs)

19 JR: So I'm not so sure that some of those phone calls that were made were  
20 really—I mean, they were real thick accents, you could hardly understand them. For all I  
21 know I could have been giving information to the wrong side. We did have a secure  
22 phone though for certain information, but some of the other information came over non-  
23 secure. The thing that was a little spooky was that there was a small window at the end of  
24 the Quonset hut of the weather station that we shared with Base Ops.

25 JS: Okay.

26 JR: But, you know, you were too busy to actually walk away from the weather  
27 station and look out at the window. So sometimes you would just take a walk outside just  
28 to make sure that was reported was actually going on. The strange feeling you walk into a  
29 weather station, you know, at three o'clock in the afternoon sometimes and it's bright sun  
30 outside. And you don't see any light for eight hours and you walk out at eleven o'clock  
31 and it's pitch black or vice versa.

1 JS: Right.

2 JR: It's a very strange feeling. It's almost like being in a block house. And we  
3 were busy enough that you couldn't walk the twenty or thirty feet down to the Plexiglas  
4 window to look out very often to see what the weather was just from your own  
5 observation or point of view.

6 JS: Right, sure.

7 JR: And the other thing that was nice is that in tropical forecasting school, in the  
8 tropics, fronts and highs and lows are not really a tool that you'd deal with in the tropics  
9 in terms of weather movements and things like that. More applicable to the northern part  
10 of North Vietnam, yes, but not South Vietnam and Thailand.

11 JS: Okay.

12 JR: You mainly deal in the analysis of winds, winds at lower level, speed maxes,  
13 easterly waves, neutral points, cyclonic winds, anti-cyclonic winds. I still to this day  
14 could analyze—I would know how to do it, it stuck with me. The fact that I kept a  
15 weather diary, too, I put it in the drawer for a long time. I thought maybe I might use it  
16 for a graduate degree. My graduate degree was in satellite meteorology [though].

17 JS: Okay.

18 JR: It [my graduate thesis] had nothing to do really with Vietnam. And I pulled it  
19 [weather diary] out after all those years, it refreshed my memory about a lot of things. I  
20 wrote explanations in it. One of the people that wrote the weather discussion out of Tan  
21 Son Nhut had been my instructor at tropical weather school at Chanute Air Force Base,  
22 so it was interesting. It was Captain Lavin at the time, he retired as a colonel. And I  
23 would make notes of that in my diary. It was a different aspect of weather. There's a copy  
24 of it in the national archives and there's a copy of it in the air weather service history  
25 office. It's online, the Caribou Association put it online, but I had it printed up for your  
26 records too so that it's easy to get to and understand. It's something very different and  
27 every time I look at it, it spooks me because I remember exactly what was going on. I'm  
28 glad that I kept it. I didn't, you know—the original diary I had some other [personal]  
29 things, I had a girlfriend at the time. When the air force asked me for it, I said, "I can't  
30 give you the original for that reason." He said, "Well copy it." So I covered over those

1 sections of the diary that I wrote in that were personal. But the weather stuff, you know,  
2 they have both my typed version and the original.

3 JS: Oh, okay.

4 JR: Handwriting.

5 JS: Another thing I wanted to ask you about, if you could talk a little bit about just  
6 your impressions of the Vietnamese.

7 JR: Well, fortunately at Cam Ranh Bay it wasn't that much exposure. We had  
8 them as like cleaning ladies.

9 JS: Okay.

10 JR: They were pleasant. I mean, some of the younger girls spoke English, but you  
11 really never knew anything about them or which side they were on. Vietnamese troops,  
12 the little experience I had with them, not too disciplined.

13 JS: Okay.

14 JR: When I went to visit my friend up at Da Nang the army aerial port officer  
15 escorted me to the plane. He was a big guy and these two little Vietnamese about half my  
16 size enlisted men just cut in front of me and ran on the plane. You know, they were in  
17 uniform.

18 JS: Right.

19 JR: He [The US Army Officer] looked like he was going to take them together  
20 and rub their heads together and stick them in the ground. I was pissed, but hey, I'm not  
21 going to make a big deal of it. My little impression was that a lot of them weren't too  
22 well disciplined. I know one of the other army aerial ports officers that lived with us, he  
23 had been at Ban Me Thuot for six months and was wounded and as a reward, they gave  
24 him a cushy job as an aerial port officer.

25 JS: Okay.

26 JR: He hated the Vietnamese. He claimed he got to hold a gun to their head to get  
27 them to fight. But of course, the war was going on there, you know, for years there and  
28 some of them had relatives fighting on both sides, I understood that.

29 JS: Right.

30 JR: What I will say, the Vietnamese women that worked in the kitchen they said,  
31 while eating American food, they gained on the average of twenty, thirty pounds right

1 away. Their kids were cute, but again, we didn't have very much contact with them. We  
2 know that you couldn't get [buy] Coke Cola at the BX. For some reason they either  
3 bribed somebody or stole it. They had little stands on base where you could get it from  
4 the Vietnamese, but you could never get it at the lower price at the Base Exchange. So  
5 either there was some graft going on or who knows what kind of stealing was going on.  
6 But at Cam Ranh, there was only a few small villages along and near the base. Some of  
7 the army guys had contact and were friendly with the girls. Some actually got in trouble,  
8 they were found sleeping with their [young] hooch maids and were told, "Get rid of your  
9 hooch maid or you're going out in the field." This was not a bad assignment. Some of  
10 them, you know, the army pulled a raid and said, "We warned you bye, bye. You're  
11 going out into the field."

12 JS: Right.

13 JR: But again, you know, I didn't touch base with them until much years later. I  
14 met a Vietnamese doctor when I was working at a community hospital in New Jersey. He  
15 couldn't afford to re-go [re-train in the US] through med school and had been put through  
16 a reeducation camp in Vietnam because he was on the wrong side. He finally got out, but  
17 you know, he went to nursing school in America so he could have a profession. And he  
18 was doing his rotation at the hospital. We got to talking, very nice, very pleasant. I gave  
19 him a book of Vietnam that I had gotten, and I didn't want it anymore and he was  
20 appreciative. He was very nice. I also get a kick out of CNN, Betty Ngyuen.

21 JS: Right.

22 JR: She actually graduated from The University of Texas I believe, and her father  
23 was an American service man, her mother Vietnamese. And he was living in Vietnam  
24 and he—I think when she was six years old, he was lucky to get them out on a C-130.  
25 When I was there, I didn't have very much contact with the Vietnamese. My feeling was  
26 there was a culture gap.

27 JS: Right.

28 JR: The other very strange thing is when I was filling sandbags under a mountain  
29 when we were increasing our sandbags for protection of our Quonset hut, you had the  
30 feeling that there was a presence there in a mountain. I know the Vietnamese in some  
31 sense worshiped their ancestors. I can tell you there was a presence there in the mountain.

1 I'm not talking about VC, I've never had that feeling in any other place before, but there  
2 is something to that. Those Vietnamese who came to the United States, I think, you  
3 know, they're appreciative, I respect them, and they've worked hard. Asians in general  
4 are a hard-working group, but at the time in a war, again, I think during World War II,  
5 Americans had more of a closer association with the British and French. The Vietnamese  
6 was an alien culture.

7 JS: Right.

8 JR: So it was, you know—at Cam Ranh being what it is, I didn't have the contact  
9 the people who were in Saigon or Nha Trang, you know who lived in hotels and all that.  
10 They obviously had more day-to-day contact. I had the day-to-day contact with the hooch  
11 maids and stuff. Most of them were older women. Again, there was no intellectual  
12 discussion or anything like that.

13 JS: Sure.

14 JR: Again, you didn't know what they did when they went home at night, you  
15 know, they might have given intelligence to their friends.

16 JS: Right.

17 JR: You just don't know.

18 JS: Right, sure. Okay, what about the civic action programs? Did you or anyone  
19 within your unit—?

20 JR: Well, I was asked to—there was A Love of the Cross Orphanage and some of  
21 the junior officers were involved in it. Truthfully, I was working six days a week.

22 JS: Right.

23 JR: And the other thing is, I don't know whose side these people are on, I'm not  
24 about to risk my neck.

25 JS: Sure.

26 JR: It's different if I was continuously out in the field. So I declined the offer plus  
27 the fact I'm not a Christian, I was not that comfortable in that kind of situation.

28 JS: Right.

29 JR: I'm going to be totally alien to them. So I just politely declined, but there was  
30 some air force officers that were involved in that.

31 JS: Okay.

1 JR: We had a Baptist minister living up in our Quonset hut with us and he was,  
2 you know, he looked after me. He mentioned about, you know when the Jewish services  
3 were and where I could go and I appreciated it. It was nice of him.

4 JS: Right.

5 JR: But again, you know, I was not out in the boonies and my relatives were  
6 pretty thoughtful for me when it came to the holidays and stuff.

7 JS: Right.

8 JR: I was appreciative of that.

9 JS: Okay, how would you spend your downtime when you weren't on duty? It  
10 sounds like you were pretty busy over there but when you did have —

11 JR: Really, basically I liked the library. They had a pleasant little library. A pretty  
12 Vietnamese girl, who was kind of classy maintained it. Never hardly anybody in the  
13 library, I was able to read the New York Times. You know, it was usually a week and a  
14 half old, some books; it's just a pleasant place to escape. The BX, usually the BX on  
15 cameras and expensive watches and stuff. People had advance notice; it's usually gone  
16 within a day.

17 JS: Okay.

18 JR: I couldn't understand why people would buy expensive stereo equipment  
19 particularly being in Vietnam with the sand and the moisture, but I guess they figured  
20 they had nothing to spend their money on. I just had a cheap instamatic. I did take a  
21 couple of pictures, but I couldn't see the sense of buying an expensive camera.

22 JS: Sure.

23 JR: With the heat and the moisture, you know. We had an officer's club annex  
24 was really nice was built up on top of a hill right by our Quonset hut. It served food; I  
25 believe like two days a week. You could get a steak and a baked potato and beer. It would  
26 be a nice way, if I wasn't working hours that conflicted to have a supper over the South  
27 China Sea, you know, with the clouds [billowing], straight out of [the movie] *South*  
28 *Pacific*.

29 JS: Right.

30 JR: There were times that I felt like I was living [the movie] *South Pacific*. And in  
31 *South Pacific*, Bloody Mary is Tonkinese. That was the name for the Northern

1 Vietnamese during French Colonial times. And the woman that played Bloody Mary was  
2 a native of Keyport, New Jersey.

3 JS: Oh, okay.

4 JR: My best friend is involved with the historical society there. But I always  
5 halfway felt I was living out two movies, *South Pacific*, although it didn't have the  
6 women. There were Red Cross girls, but some hard feelings with them, some of them  
7 tended to go after the pilots. And the other movie, which was ironic that I saw the first  
8 week, I believe I was on the campus of Rutgers, one of my favorite movies, *The Bridges*  
9 *at Toko-Ri*.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JR: Very haunting movie and I didn't realize that in a few years I would be sort of  
12 living that one out too.

13 JS: Right.

14 JR: Which makes it hard to relate to people my age that didn't go, family  
15 members that didn't go. I mean, I'm in a totally different world. What's important, what  
16 isn't. I've experienced things completely different then they'll ever experience.

17 JS: Sure, sure. Okay, another thing, you alluded to the aircraft accident  
18 investigation a few times. I wonder if you could talk a little more about that and what  
19 actually happened.

20 JR: Well, in this case apparently a C-130 was damaged on landing at Dalat.

21 JS: Okay.

22 JR: It's a lot—like I said, it was in the center of the country was in the time of the  
23 French it was a resort. They used to hunt tigers up there. It's still popular because  
24 particularly in the heat of the summer, it's up in the mountains, it's cooler, it's pleasant.  
25 Anyhow, my commander was supposed to go, they wanted to find out if there was any  
26 weather element involved in the crash. So he chickened out of going, he told me I'm  
27 going and I said fine. So I went across the field to the C-130 unit, they flew me up there.  
28 They said, you know, if I gave a good enough report, they'd give me a free trip to Yokota  
29 Air Base in Japan. Well, I knew better. My thing was not to hang the guy, my thing was  
30 just to report what affect, you know, the weather might have had.

31 JS: Right.

1 JR: And I got up there and I saw right away that it was terrain effects. The  
2 weather was good, I mean it was not a matter that it was in a rainstorm or in heavy winds  
3 or anything. The air crew [hinted] to me that the pilot was kind of a screw up, but I  
4 wasn't going to take—that wasn't fair to take into consideration. I spoke to the weather  
5 observer up there and I noticed it coming in, we were over almost evergreen vegetation.  
6 It went from evergreen vegetation to a hot, dusty runway and I could feel what happens  
7 when you have a situation like that. You have strong updrafts and downdrafts. You have  
8 downdrafts over the cooler green area where there isn't as much heating. When you come  
9 over an open area where there's a big difference, you have thermals that have forced the  
10 air up. So depending on how bad it is, you hit like a bump. You go from—all of a sudden  
11 something forces you up. Generally, a good pilot's going to compensate for that, but  
12 again, it's something to be considered.

13 JS: Right.

14 JR: When we got back, they you know, questioned me and I said, "Well, you have  
15 thermals there that definitely would affect a pilot on landing." "Well, how much would it  
16 force the plane down?" And I told them, I said, "I'm not an aeronautical engineer." I said,  
17 "You're going to need an aeronautical engineer." "Well, give us an estimated guess."  
18 "Well, I'm not about to hang the pilot on my estimated guess." I'm saying, "Again,  
19 you're going to have to talk to an aeronautical engineer." I said, "All I can tell you is  
20 what I felt coming in, what I saw there, what I observed." I said, "You definitely have,  
21 you know, up drafts and down drafts because of the change from heavy green vegetation  
22 which is going to be cooler than coming up on a heat island of a runway in the middle of  
23 this green, lush, vegetation." And they kept on pressing me and I said, "I can't tell you."  
24 And they finally backed off. Later on, of course, I guess they felt my testimony wasn't  
25 convincing enough, so I didn't get the trip and I didn't care about that, but they said an  
26 aeronautical engineer did figure out that what it was, but it wouldn't have affected his  
27 landing. I don't know what the end result was, but you know, all else I'm going to tell  
28 them is just what I saw, what I felt, what it might do to the plane with the weather in  
29 terms of the weather was clear. In terms of wind there was no rain, there was no  
30 thunderstorm, but the updrafts and downdrafts obviously would have had an affect. But  
31 it's a job of an aeronautical engineer to figure that out. And that was the end of that. I will

1 say, on the flight up there, it was one of those days, see forever weather, I couldn't  
2 believe it. I mean, you know, most of the time I'm confined to the base. I did make some  
3 aerial trips to other places in Vietnam, but I couldn't believe the scenery. [John] Gillespie  
4 Magee [Jr.], I believe his name was, has a poem called "High Flight".

5 JS: Okay.

6 JR: He was, I believe a British or Canadian fighter pilot killed in World War II.  
7 And his poem is famous and in there there's a line about him flying and being able to  
8 reach out and touch the face of god. I swear to god, on that day, looking out of that plane  
9 on the way to Dalat, over those mountains you could see clear to Cambodia.

10 JS: Oh, wow.

11 JR: Off miles in the distance, not a cloud in the sky.

12 JS: Right.

13 JR: Had no feeling that I was in Vietnam anymore and I came the closest I ever  
14 felt to actually holding your hand out and touching the face of god. I mean, that poem  
15 came alive to me that day.

16 JS: Right.

17 JR: So that was one of the interesting things about that aircraft accident  
18 investigation.

19 JS: Sure.

20 JR: It's unfortunate that the Cog Railway doesn't exist anymore. It used to be  
21 nice—that, I would [have] traveled back to Vietnam to ride on. The Cog Railway is a  
22 railway through the mountains. They're more common in like Switzerland—has  
23 perfected it. As a matter of fact, they bought two of the old engines from the Cog  
24 Railway from Vietnam. I've gone on the internet and seen pictures of them going back to  
25 Switzerland. I actually have some materials to make a little scale model of it. I'm always  
26 curious of—I'm a pretty good model builder and I have pictures of it. What happened  
27 was the French built it in the 1930s. It was in service until 1964. The North Vietnamese  
28 claimed the Americans [had] destroyed it, [but] the VC were sabotaging it.

29 JS: Okay.

30 JR: When the Vietnamese reunified Vietnam, they tried to remove all the rails to  
31 put it on the main system that runs along the coast from Da Nang to Saigon and they

1 destroyed it, they ripped everything up. It turns out the rails were a different type. They  
2 were for a different type train than was used on the Coastal Line. Now, they want to  
3 rebuild it. They feel it would be a great tourist asset, but its price tag is fifteen billion  
4 dollars. Interestingly enough when I was in Vietnam, they were getting trains magazine at  
5 the BX and they had a two-part article, which I still have, on Vietnamese railways which  
6 was interesting. The Vietnamese term for train translates into, “The conveyance which  
7 runs by fire”. And I’ve gone on to sites and even though the Vietnamese railway service  
8 is much better now, and you can actually go from Ho Chi Minh City or Saigon to Hanoi  
9 without getting blown up, some of the stuff they supposedly have modernized it, but I’ve  
10 seen pictures of urine-stained sheets on the trains. I mean, they’ve modernized their  
11 equipment, but I don’t think it’s anything like American trains. Even though they show  
12 pictures of upgraded equipment and stuff, it is relatively slow and it’s not a journey in my  
13 health that I would even try to make.

14 JS: Right.

15 JR: It is one of the interesting aspects of Vietnam. That railway runs right along  
16 the coast from many miles. And of course, during the Vietnam War, only small sections  
17 of it operated. There was a train that used to run—I never saw it, but it ran from Phan  
18 Rang up to Nha Trang.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JR: There’s pictures of it in *Trains* magazine, too. But again, today they don’t  
21 have to worry about bombings and stuff, so—

22 JS: Sure.

23 JR: You know, under a different type of system.

24 JS: Right, right. Okay, alright, just a few more questions for you if that’s alright.  
25 Some of the interesting things that you’ve mentioned in the questionnaire that I want to  
26 ask you about. You talked about receiving information and being briefed about how to  
27 handle possible defecting enemy planes.

28 JR: Yeah, that when I was acting detachment commander, I couldn’t believe the  
29 letter that came down. It was that letter and another letter which I can’t discuss about  
30 things that were being stored at Cam Ranh Bay.

31 JS: Okay.

1 JR: Yeah, it was—I can't remember the exact procedure, but it was a single page  
2 letter outlining procedures and what to do with a defecting plane or pilot. Now, I had no  
3 idea whether the CIA was planning to get somebody to defect or maybe they thought  
4 somebody would get fed up and defect. I believe at the end of the Korea War, one of the  
5 North Korean pilots defected in the MIG-15.

6 JS: Right.

7 JR: I think that was slightly after the war, though, it wasn't before. But yes, I did  
8 see the letter that came into the detachment commander's office about how to handle  
9 defecting planes and pilots.

10 JS: Okay, alright. Another thing that you mentioned in the questionnaire, you  
11 talked about an air force fireman losing his arm while trying to save it.

12 JR: Yeah, yeah, I remember that distinctly. I mentioned earlier that the F-4  
13 Phantoms kept, I believe one or two jets were always kept on alert status. We used to  
14 make a special—prepared a special briefing package for them. They were there to go at a  
15 moment's notice. In other words, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week as opposed  
16 to the regular missions where they were going to strike this target this day and or this  
17 location. This was strictly, you know, troops in contact, under fire, being pinned down,  
18 we need you to help us. And they would scramble them, and they were scrambled. I  
19 guess it was just before the sun came up because I was reporting in for work. And  
20 apparently what had happened was the—I guess the pilot, you know, the F-4 had a front  
21 seater and a back seater. The pilot might have been somewhat sleepy, and he apparently  
22 became disoriented on takeoff and he mistook the line for the [side] of the runway for the  
23 center of the runway and went off the runway. You know, the plane crashed and caught  
24 on fire. One of the firemen went in there and tried to drag them out and the firemen  
25 survived, the two crew members died. The fireman lost his arm in the process. But this  
26 gives you an idea, you know, why I was upset when people protested against veterans of  
27 Vietnam, you know, servicemen. People did above and beyond their job.

28 JS: Sure.

29 JR: It wasn't a matter that they were instituting policy, it was a matter of, you  
30 know, they were doing what they were supposed to do, it's the government that does the  
31 policy.

1 JS: Right.

2 JR: And the fact that this fireman, you know, lost his arm, and along with this  
3 Jewish para-rescue man in attempt to rescue a pilot was made a POW for seven years.

4 JS: Right.

5 JR: I don't think people fully appreciate, you know, the extent that people went  
6 to, to do their job and to help their fellow servicemen.

7 JS: Sure, sure. One more question I want to ask. When we talked on the phone the  
8 other day you mentioned—you talked about the Rutgers memorial. Can you talk about  
9 that again?

10 JR: Yeah, not at all. What happened was the class of 1965 at Rutgers which was  
11 the class that graduated the year before me and decided that as their class gift they wanted  
12 to do something for the Rutgers Serviceman that were killed or missing in action in  
13 Vietnam.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JR: What they came together was actually a memorial which in some ways is  
16 more striking than the memorial in Washington D.C.

17 JS: Okay.

18 JR: There's fifteen or sixteen names there. I have— (Call cuts off) Hello?

19 JS: Hello?

20 JR: Yeah, okay, that means somebody else is trying to call through, but don't  
21 worry about it. What it was is they have a—they set up each name on like a little column  
22 and as the sun rises in the sky, each column with a name underneath it lights up just as a  
23 person's life does. As the sun, you know, starts to set in the sky, slowly one by one, each  
24 one of these columns goes into the shadows. This was to be dedicated, I believe it was  
25 October 30<sup>th</sup> of 1993. I mean, this is like over twenty years after the war ended. A couple  
26 days before it was going to be dedicated, it was defaced. And the Air Force ROTC set up  
27 a twenty-four-hour honor guard around it to make sure that no more defacement would  
28 occur to the monument before dedication. To me, something like this after World War II  
29 it would have never been done. It's sad.

30 JS: Sure.

1 JR: This is part of the reason why I pushed to get my degree from Texas A&M. I  
2 have no animosity against the Ag school. They were good to me, they helped me, they  
3 were nice people. But there's this general thing that goes on at Rutgers that, again, the  
4 atmosphere, such that it led to that defacement of the monument, that's their way of being  
5 a hero.

6 JS: Right.

7 JR: These people can't speak for themselves anymore, they're dead.

8 JS: Right.

9 JR: That really upset me. I was going to go. My mother gave me some money to  
10 get a good dinner, I couldn't. I was just sickened after that. The thing that really hurt  
11 because I know two of the people up there personally.

12 JS: Okay.

13 JR: One, Mark Chenis, went through four years of [AF] ROTC [with me] at  
14 Rutgers in the air force, was a pilot. He was flying F-100s out of Phan Rang, which was  
15 about forty miles south of Cam Ranh.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JR: I was in-country two weeks [before] he was killed. His plane had to make an  
18 abort on take off and blew up and I have heard stories of planes blowing up and people  
19 are beginning to question whether the Vietnamese were sabotaging them because some  
20 had access to base. On some bases there was more Vietnamese action than others. And  
21 there were a number of aircraft accidents that couldn't be explained. Again, I didn't know  
22 him real well, but we knew each other. When you go through four years of a large state  
23 school and you have the same class together for four years. And, of course, once you go  
24 into advanced ROTC in the mid-60s, you are with generally fifty, sixty [advanced cadets]  
25 at the most at that time.

26 JS: Okay.

27 JR: So you knew each other by first name, I felt bad about that.

28 JS: Sure.

29 JR: The other one is Phil Mascari, is a real sad story. He's a real bright kid, very  
30 friendly, very nice. He dropped out of Rutgers for a year to pick up his grades. All he  
31 wanted to do was be a pilot. He graduated a year after me, but I knew him because, like I

1 said, we went through the first couple years of ROTC together, real friendly. He probably  
2 could have been a governor of New Jersey eventually. He was shot down over Laos  
3 flying as a forward air controller. His father went on all kinds of missions to see if they  
4 could find them or if he was a prisoner of war. Eventually, supposedly they recovered  
5 parts of his remains. His name was up there, too. I mean, these were not guys, you know,  
6 “Let’s go kill the commies” type.

7 JS: Right.

8 JR: It was their way of fulfilling their military obligation, was to serve as pilots in  
9 the air force. And they were killed in that process so they should be honored.

10 JS: Absolutely.

11 JR: To deface their monument [is awful], so I do have a picture that I’m going to  
12 send to you that I scanned of the dedication of the monument and an article from the  
13 Rutgers Targum [newspaper] about the defacement and about the monument. Again, it is  
14 really nice the way it’s set up. It’s across from the dormitory that [I once] used to live in,  
15 in the main part of the campus. And again, the fact that it represents passage through life  
16 and the fact that all of these students once traversed this area where the monument is.

17 JS: Right.

18 JR: It’s strange. It’s again, it’s like I mentioned the scene from *Twelve O’clock*  
19 *High*. You know, walking over the busy airfield that is now a cow pasture.

20 JS: Right.

21 JR: It’s just [a little late], but at least they were remembered, so I’m grateful for  
22 that. New Jersey also has a large Vietnam Memorial and Education Center at the Garden  
23 State Art Center on the parkway.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JR: But, of course, the Rutgers memorial is, I guess more poignant to me because  
26 of the teach-ins that were held there, the fact that a number of these people went through  
27 ROTC, two of them that I knew.

28 JS: Right.

29 JR: There was also, my squadron commander when I was a freshman at Rutgers,  
30 Joe Milligan was shot down, was a POW. Interestingly, he stayed in the air force, he went  
31 back to Rutgers under an air force [program on] active duty. He wore his uniform all the

1 time. He got his master's degree and eventually I think the air force either sent him for  
2 his PhD somewhere else or his veterinary medicine [degree]. And he eventually retired as  
3 a Colonel, but either a PhD in animal science or as a veterinarian.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JR: [I was] told [later]he did wear his uniform to class all the time. He was treated  
6 well with respect at Rutgers.

7 JS: Okay.

8 JR: But of course, most of his classes were at the Ag school which, again, never  
9 had a problem with ROTC or military and a lot of the faculty were reserve officers  
10 anyhow.

11 JS: Right, okay.

12 JR: I was glad to hear that, that's one of the better stories.

13 JS: Sure, absolutely. Alright, before we wrap things up is there anything else we  
14 should mention? Anything else we should cover?

15 JR: No, I think that pretty well covers it. I think the only thing that I would say is  
16 it's been an interesting journey for somebody that loves weather and history, and military  
17 history. I paid a price for it, but I don't regret it. I got a chance to do some very  
18 interesting things. I just regret at the way I was treated by both the government and a lot  
19 of civilians when I returned.

20 JS: Sure.

21 JR: I don't think anything can ever rectify that. Hopefully it'll never happen  
22 again.

23 JS: Right.

24 JR: And I do have the two books that you're interested in then I'll mail it to your  
25 address there.

26 JS: Absolutely.

27 JR: And I printed up part of the diary and some stuff on Cam Ranh Bay that may  
28 be of interest.

29 JS: Okay, well thank you. We certainly appreciate that. And also, I want to say  
30 thank you for your time, for taking the time to do this. But let me go ahead and stop the  
31 interview.