

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Jerry Goller
Conducted by Kelly Crager
Date: January 15, 2010
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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.

The transcription of this interview was paid for by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History Interview with
2 Mr. Jerry Goller. Today is January 15, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of
3 Texas Tech University and Mr. Goller is joining me from his home by telephone in it
4 Murray, Utah?

5 Jerry Goller: Yes, sir.

6 KC: Okay, in Murray, Utah. I'm interviewing Mr. Goller today in order to gain
7 the reminiscences of his experiences in Vietnam. Mr. Goller served with the United
8 States Marine Corps as part of Kilo Company 3rd of the 3rd Marines in 1966 and served in
9 a number of combined action platoons up until 1968. Mr. Goller was also involved in the
10 Battle of the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the famous battle at Cam Lo. Mr. Goller, to begin
11 this interview I'd like to get some biographical information if I could. Could you please
12 tell me when you were born and where?

13 JG: I was born March 8 1947, in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

14 KC: Tulsa, Oklahoma. What were your parent's names?

15 JG: Jim and Betty.

16 KC: Jim and Betty Goller. What did they do there in Tulsa for a living?

17 JG: My mother was a stay at home mom and my dad was an electronics tech.

1 KC: An electronics tech. Now where did he work there in Tulsa? Who did he
2 work for?

3 JG: My dad? Ridlea's Sound. He was a telephone and sound system
4 troubleshooter.

5 KC: Okay, if you could, give me a brief description of your time there in Tulsa
6 growing up as a young child.

7 JG: Tulsa was a small town that grew up, but never really changed its attitude. It
8 was probably a pretty nice town to grow up in except for the fact that it was extremely
9 segregated. As a matter of fact, it was segregated to a point that I didn't realize how
10 segregated it was. I was a senior in high school when I met my first black and I went to a
11 high school that had twenty-eight hundred students and we had one black student my
12 senior year.

13 KC: Wow.

14 JG: Yeah, I didn't realize how segregated my home city was. Obviously, I had no
15 benchmark; I had nothing to reference it to. I had a reasonably normal childhood and
16 shortly before graduation I knew that I probably didn't know where I was going to go or
17 what I was going to do. I had some number of opportunities open to me, but to be
18 perfectly frank I was eighteen going on twelve.

19 KC: I know that feeling.

20 JG: Yeah, and although my parents were more than happy to pay for my college,
21 and I qualified for some scholarships. I knew it was probably going to be a waste of my
22 parent's money and my time. I just wasn't mature enough to go yet. I was a casting about
23 for something to do as an alternative and a friend of mine decided to join the Marine
24 Corps and he talked me into it. Mostly because I had absolutely no concept of what was
25 coming and so I joined the Marine Corps.

26 KC: Very interesting. Let me back up here a little bit if I may.

27 JG: Sure.

28 KC: Did you have any brothers or sisters that you grew up with?

29 JG: Yes sir, I had an older brother, he's four years older than me.

30 KC: Four years older than you, okay. You've talked about how Tulsa was a very
31 segregated city. You mentioned your time in high school. Take me through your time in

1 high school. What was it like? What sort of subjects did you like? You obviously must
2 have done pretty well all things considered academically. Were you into sports and things
3 like that? What was high school like for you?

4 JG: I was pretty much academic although I belonged to a car club, I liked cars. I
5 was studying primarily to be a commercial librarian. The only organized sport I ever got
6 involved in was war. I didn't really get involved in any of it in high school. My grades
7 were excellent until my sophomore or junior year when my mother became very ill. She
8 had been fairly sick all her life and she spent quite a bit of time in ICU units in my junior
9 and senior year and my grades dropped dramatically. As a matter of fact, as a junior I had
10 enough credits to graduate except for junior and senior English which they wouldn't let
11 you take early which was probably the only thing that saved me. Things didn't go well
12 after that, and she was in finally better shape by the time I graduated.

13 KC: When did you graduate?

14 JG: I graduated in August of 1965; I was in the Class of '65.

15 KC: August of 1965. Now you've mentioned before that—

16 JG: I mean, I'm sorry not August, but—

17 KC: In May probably.

18 JG: Yeah, May.

19 KC: Okay, May of '65. Now you mentioned that you really didn't know exactly
20 what you wanted to do. The phrase you used was eighteen going on twelve. What sort of
21 concept did you have about the larger world outside as a young man finishing high
22 school?

23 JG: Probably the usual sophomore, you were the world that most kids my age had.
24 I was aware that there was a war going on in Vietnam, most people in the United States
25 were, but I didn't know a lot about it other than we were writing forth from the bastion of
26 democracy to save the Vietnamese farmers from communist tide in Vietnam which later
27 proved to be somewhat less than accurate. But I had a very bucolic world view. I didn't
28 know a lot that was going on although I suppose I did, actually now that I think of it, one
29 of my hobbies were short-wave radio. And I used to listen to various stations around the
30 world and one of my favorite past times was picking news events that were sufficiently
31 newsworthy that would be reported around the world and then listen to the various

1 stations like “Radio Moscow” and BBC 2 and radio browsers on the Cuban, “Radio
2 Oslo”, and “The Voice of America” and “Radio Peeking” and so forth. I would listen to
3 how each of the various entities would report the same news story. And frequently it was
4 really hard to tell they were all reporting about the same event.

5 KC: That is really interesting. What sort of events would you follow? Things like
6 the Cold War developments or the assassination of Kennedy?

7 JG: Yeah, the Cuban Missile Crisis, just perhaps a riot of the United States. Just
8 various things, none of them really come to mind. I had about ten or fifteen stations that
9 every morning when I woke up, the first thing I’d do is turn on my short-wave radio and
10 just scroll down through a list of stations I had listening to the morning news. I listened to
11 “Radio Cuba” and just different places. It was quite entertaining to listen to how different
12 groups reported the same piece of news and slanting it to their own views which, if
13 nothing else, taught me that truth is a relative thing.

14 KC: Right.

15 JG: Also, there are many facets to a truth.

16 KC: Absolutely.

17 JG: So, I guess maybe I was possibly more sophisticated than I thought I was
18 although my perception of myself wasn’t terribly sophisticated or mature either. I didn’t
19 ever join the Marine Corps. I’ve often said I only made two serious mistakes in my life.
20 One was joining the Marine Corps and the other one was getting out.

21 KC: Well, I’m going to get to these things in turn here. Let me ask you about this
22 radio hobby that you had. How did you get into this?

23 JG: I don’t actually know. I had a background in electronics. I made my first
24 television when I was seven.

25 KC: Wow.

26 JG: My dad had been around electronics all my life. I couldn’t actually remember
27 not being involved in electronics on some level. I knew about computers although they
28 hadn’t come out of huge rooms yet, they were still pretty big. But electricity and
29 electronics in general I was pretty familiar with. It was just a hobby I got into.

30 KC: Well, what sort of events would you listen to in particular? Do any of them
31 stand out in your mind?

1 JG: Oh, all we listened to is the news. There was a publication, I believe, called
2 *Sams*, I can't remember. Anyway, the publication listed the times and frequencies of all
3 English language news reports in the world. So, it was easy to track them down. I
4 remember another station I used to listen to was "Queen of Ecuador" which was a
5 Christian station. I tried to get them as varied as I possibly could just to—more for
6 entertainment than anything else. I'm not sure at that stage of the game I was beginning
7 to understand that the truth is an extremely hard thing to come by. And I'm not one
8 hundred percent sure such a thing even exists. It cracks me up when people will ask me
9 about Vietnam and they say, "Well, you were there." "Yeah, I can tell you about nine
10 grid squares in Vietnam."

11 KC: Right, right.

12 JG: I had no idea what was going on in the rest of the country. I didn't find out
13 where I was until 1978.

14 KC: Really?

15 JG: I finally saw a full-size map of Vietnam. I had absolutely no idea where I was
16 in relation to the rest of the country. I was always in the field; I never got to any cities.

17 KC: Right.

18 JG: Very, very rarely.

19 KC: Now, you talked about how these different radio stations in these different
20 countries would put different spins on different things. I want to ask you about one in
21 particular that obviously had great international significance. I would think would be
22 right for varying interpretations and that's the Cuban Missile Crisis. How was that
23 covered in all of these radio stations that you listened to?

24 JG: This is going to sound odd, but I was born in Vietnam. My life before
25 Vietnam is pretty vague to me. I can remember certain major events, but there's a lot
26 about my life before I joined the Marine Corps that I don't particularly remember. I can
27 remember doing it, but as far as specifics on how they reported it, I don't remember
28 actually, a lot of reporting about it. I know this sounds odd to say it, but it was almost like
29 most of my life before the Marine Corps was wiped out. I remember just certain really
30 high-point incidences, but most of that, to be quite honest, I don't remember.

1 KC: Sure, now you mentioned a moment ago that you didn't have a really good
2 grasp on who you were as a young man. Do you care to go into that anymore?

3 JG: I think it was probably pretty common. I think the people that really knew
4 themselves well were either unusually introspective or unusually self-delusional, one or
5 the other. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was still probably a little adrift back then.
6 The continued illness and frequently having people tell me that my mother was dying to
7 go say goodbye to her was pretty disconcerting to say the least. I just hadn't really
8 thought about what I wanted to do. I suspected that I wasn't going to be a very good
9 student because I just wasn't settled enough. So, I was kind of looking for, to be perfectly
10 frank, a legitimate way to put my life on hold. Joining the military gave me a pretty good
11 solution to that problem. This friend of mine joined the Marine Corps and my dad was an
12 ex-marine. He was a marine in the Second World War.

13 KC: Is that right?

14 JG: Yes.

15 KC: So, did he serve in the Pacific?

16 JG: I'm sorry?

17 KC: Did he serve in the Pacific?

18 JG: Yes, sir. He was an air ordinance man with a Marine Corps Night Fighter
19 Pack.

20 KC: Okay.

21 JG: He told me when I joined, he said, "You know son, you haven't listened to
22 me for eighteen years and I'm sure you won't listen to me now, but I'll tell you one thing,
23 you're going to listen to them one way or the other." Prophetic words.

24 KC: Do you think your father's experience in a war and in the military influenced
25 you in any way, shape, or form?

26 JG: No.

27 KC: You don't think so?

28 JG: My dad never talked about his experience in the Second World War.
29 Although, to be perfectly frank, he was proud of being a Marine, but my dad never saw a
30 Japanese that didn't have a barbed wire fence between him and the calve. He never fired
31 a shot in anger through the Second World War. When I called home from boot camp, my

1 dad asked me if I had an MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) yet. And although he
2 didn't know what MOS's was, he just asked me if I had a job specialty yet and I said,
3 "Yup." And he said, "What did you get?" and I said, "O311." And he said, "What's
4 that?" and I said, "Infantry Rifleman." And he said, "Oh god, a mud marine." He said,
5 "Do you have a duty station?" and I said, "Yes, I'm going to Okinawa." And he said,
6 "That's where the division headquarters is, where is the division is?" "Vietnam." When I
7 joined, I had a GCT of 137 with 148 in electronics. That basically meant I could go to
8 any school the Marine Corps had that I wanted to. And I hadn't become familiar with the
9 term "needs of the Corps" yet and I wanted to be an armor for reasons I don't know. I'm
10 pretty sure at that point I'd seen just about too many John Wayne movies and had really
11 no concept of what war was. Unfortunately, they had an overriding need for cannon
12 fodder at the time although that's a really untrue statement. They needed infantry
13 rifleman, so I ended up in the infantry. I found it to be a very interesting experience.

14 KC: I'm sure you did. When did you join the Marine Corps?

15 JG: I actually joined the Marine Corps before I graduated from high school. I
16 joined on what was called the 120 Day Plan. So, I went in and technically I joined the
17 Marine Corps one hundred and twenty days before I actually went in. So, I went ahead
18 and graduated from high school and then when I physically went into the Marine Corps, I
19 automatically had a four month time engraved. So, I actually showed up in August of
20 1965.

21 KC: Okay, now what I'd like for you to do now is to describe your time in boot
22 camp there in 1965 and what was it like?

23 JG: Really interesting.

24 KC: Expand on that for me.

25 JG: I remember one of the first things you do is we would line up along a T-
26 shaped table that is raised to about chest height with a small divider at the back and
27 dividers along each side and then there's a guy standing directly across from you that's
28 got a similar situation on his side. And you take off absolutely everything you have on.
29 You strip down to nothing. At the time I joined the Marine Corps, I was 6'2" and
30 weighed 121 pounds. I had never been—well, to a lie, I had been in two fights in my life,
31 both of them with nerds I had lost and the other one was a draw. I was a completely non-

1 violent person. The guy across the way from me was a college football player. One of
2 those guys that had no neck and would have made about six of me and he was standing
3 there shaking as he was taking his clothes off. I'm thinking, "If that big son of a bitch is
4 scared, I ought to be terrified." Then they put us into platoons, and they started turning us
5 into marines.

6 KC: And how did they do that?

7 JG: I had an IQ of about somewhere around 140 and I knew what they were doing
8 at the time, and it still worked really, really well. I didn't truly understand the purpose of
9 boot camp until two or three years later. The purpose of boot camp is to teach you to
10 automatically react. It's to teach you how to obey orders. I know a lot of people are under
11 the mistaken impression that infantry in general, and of course marine infantry in
12 particular, is full of stupid people. Of course, the reality is on probably any battlefield in
13 history, but certainly on a modern battlefield, stupid people don't last very long. Smart
14 people like me kill them so the Marine Corps doesn't look for stupid people. They look
15 for people that can think because they know you're going to be autonomous out there, but
16 they do want people that can obey instantly and the reason for that is to save your life.
17 You all have to work together. As long as you're working together, you're going to make
18 it. If you don't work together, you're not going to make it. So, the primary function of
19 Marine Corps boot camp was A, teach you that and one other thing. The most important
20 thing they had to teach you. The subject that you studied the most in Marine Corps boot
21 camp by fifty percent more than any other subject wasn't small infantry tactics or
22 marksmanship or anything else. It was history and traditions of the Marine Corps. It's
23 pounded into you from the day you walk in the gate. And in 225 years no marine unit has
24 ever turned from the attack and you're not going to be the first. It just isn't done. Peer
25 pressure is extremely strong. Peer pressure is probably the only thing that is stronger than
26 the survival instinct. The Marine Corps is a religion, and the Marine Corps teaches you
27 an afterlife and it had virtually every facet that a religion has. The Marine Corps teaches
28 you that if you keep faith with them, if you die in the service of the Corps, they will
29 remember you forever, that you'll never die. You'll always be in the history of the
30 Marine Corps. It took me a little bit to realize that when these people say come home
31 with your shield on it, they're not kidding. They're serious of heart attack. The Marine

1 Corps does not expect you to win, but the Marine Corps does expect you to die trying.
2 Now, they don't think they expect you to be stupid, they consider you to be a very
3 expensive piece of equipment. A very well trained, very expensive piece of equipment.
4 And they did not want you to die foolishly, but by the same token they want you to
5 realize that when the time comes, if the time comes then you need to do it right. In hand
6 to hand combat class, there was a huge picture that covered one entire wall in the hand-
7 to-hand combat classroom. It was a dead marine laying there and he was surrounded by
8 dead Japanese. There was a bird below it that said, to the effect, that he shot five or six of
9 them and then he stabbed three or four of them to death with a bayonet and his rifle
10 jammed and he beat a couple of them to death with a rifle until his rifle broke. He beat
11 some more to death with a barrel and receiver group and then he killed a couple of them
12 with an entrenching tool. He strangled two of them and the last one—through the course
13 of this, by the way, he was shot twenty-three times. The last one, he grabbed him by the
14 back of the head and pulled him into his abdomen which was open and drowned the
15 Japanese in his own blood. At the bottom of it, it says, "This man died like a Marine."
16 That is what is expected of you.

17 KC: That's a pretty powerful image.

18 JG: Yes, it is. It was a very powerful image. They were a very interesting group of
19 people. It was fairly unforgettable. Later on, stuff like that became automatic and I later
20 on understood why they do that. The Vietnamese didn't particularly like to attack Marine
21 units, they didn't particularly like to attack Marine compounds because they knew what
22 were coming. They had run into a group that was just as fanatical as they were, if not
23 more so. A group that would, in fact, fight till the last man and fight like tigers to the last
24 man. It just wasn't going to be a walk; it didn't make any difference what the ratio of
25 troops were. They had a fight on their hands everything they ran into us. And that's the
26 whole idea behind Marine Corps indoctrination is to save lives believe it or not. You have
27 an almost automatic psychological advantage over your opponent in that he knows what
28 he's dealing with. It's the same thing they've dealt with for, you know, almost 250 years
29 now. They're going to have a fight on their hands when they run into this. And it does
30 give you an edge. Your turn.

1 KC: Describe your daily routine in boot camp. What was it like from the time you
2 got up way to early to the time you went to bed way too late? What was your daily
3 routine like in boot?

4 JG: If I remember right, we got up something like four thirty in the morning. I
5 can't remember if we ate breakfast first or had PT (Physical Training) first but let's say
6 we went to chow first. We'd march to chow and of course, there's no sticking at all.
7 We'd march to chow, and we'd line up outside the chow hall and we'd go in two at a
8 time and you'd march up to the chow line and you'd put both hands forward, grab a tray,
9 and then you'd side-step down the chow line looking straight ahead. As you go down the
10 line, the servers of the line put food on your tray, and they'd pop it all down. And then
11 when you hit the end you do a right face, and you march over where the drill instructors
12 lining at people on the tables. And the tables were two or three tables long, they seated
13 probably, oh, twenty or thirty guys per table and they had benches on it. You would side-
14 step down the benches until you reached the end of the bench and then you would just
15 stand there. The drill instructor would say, "Platoon 362." We'd serve Platoon 362 trays
16 down. "Trays down, everybody set your tray down." But you're still standing. And then
17 he would say, "Ready, seats." And everybody would drop at once, but he would never
18 think if we dropped it once, so he'd say, "Get up, get up, get up." And then we'd play up
19 and down for a couple of times until we got bored with it. And then he'd say, "Ready,
20 eat." And we'd eat. You look straight at the guy across from you, you never looked
21 down, and you never say a word. You eat everything on your tray and when he feels that
22 you've had enough time to eat, then he'd tell us to stop and then we'd stand up. He'd
23 have us grab our trays and march out; march passed the trash can dumping our trays in
24 and then march outside to do formation. And then we did an hour and a half of PT in the
25 morning. Then we'd go to classes throughout the day. I think we had PT again in the
26 afternoon. At various times we'd go on a two or three mile run and we did the obstacle
27 course and first one and then the other. We'd come back and go to chow and eating and
28 then they'd have shower call and then we'd go to bed. Of course, we're all lined up at
29 attention in the billet. You'd be standing at the doorways. "Ready, sleep." And everybody
30 would jump in the racks because that wasn't fast enough, and they'd usually have us do
31 that three our four times and you'd turn the lights out and go to sleep.

1 KC: How well do you think you did at boot camp?

2 JG: I made PFC (Private First Class) out of boot camp.

3 KC: Really?

4 JG: Yeah.

5 KC: Very good.

6 JG: Yes, my drill instructor called me into his office and if you're familiar with

7 the procedure, the right guide, the squad leaders and the high shooter all made PFC

8 (Private First Class). I was the squad leader and the head drill instructor called me into

9 duty office and he said, "Even my beloved Marine Corps makes a mistake and

10 apparently, they've made another. Somehow, they've decided you deserve to be a PFC."

11 So, I had PFC out of boot camp.

12 KC: That must have made you feel pretty good.

13 JG: It mostly made me feel pretty good the boot camp was over. But by the same

14 coconut, the end of boot camp, I went in 121 pounds, I came out of 186. I had by far, the

15 most confidence I'd ever have in my life. I felt pretty strong both physically and

16 mentally. I had people later in life ask me, they say, "You always seem to have so much

17 confidence, where do you get that?" Well, it's always handy to know that the worst thing

18 that could ever conceivably possibly happen to you had already happened to you and you

19 survived that. You know, the stuff out here is pretty mundane.

20 KC: You mentioned that you wanted to go into armor; I believe it was when you

21 finish. Why armor?

22 JG: I have no idea. I couldn't tell you any idea what was going through my mind

23 at the time. Probably some war movie I'd seen. Like I said, I wasn't very sophisticated

24 when I joined. But later in life I was very glad I ended up in the infantry. If you're going

25 to join the fire department, you might as well fight fires.

26 KC: There you go.

27 JG: There's only two groups of people in the Marine Corps. You're either the

28 dick or you're the jock strap, one or the other. One of the things that I appreciated very

29 much about the Marine Corps and truly enjoyed about the Marine Corps is the Marine

30 Corps never blew smoke up my ass, at all, ever, they never do. The day you walk in the

31 gate, it is pounded into you that you now only have one function in life. Your only

1 function, your only reason for being is to destroy the enemies of the United States. They
2 didn't tell me that I could be on (inaudible) or that I could be an army of one or that I
3 could earn a college education or any of that crap. They told me I was there for one thing
4 and one thing only, to destroy the enemies of the United States. So, it's really quite
5 comforting, you know, to know what your job is, to know what your function is, to know
6 what is expected of you.

7 KC: So, you finished boot camp and it still would have been 1965, I guess.

8 JG: Yeah.

9 KC: Where do you go from there?

10 JG: Because I had an infantry on the list, I went to—well everybody went from
11 boot camp to ITR which was Infantry Training Regiment. And then from Infantry
12 Training Regiment you go on leave then you come back, and you go to—at the time I
13 was going through BITS which was Basic Infantry Training School. That was for people
14 that were going to be infantrymen. So, I got a little bit more advanced training infantry
15 weapons and small tactics and so forth.

16 KC: Well, go ahead and describe that training for me a little bit more. You're
17 going to be an infantryman in Vietnam, what was this training like?

18 JG: Certainly nothing like Vietnam.

19 KC: Explain that for me.

20 JG: That sure should work. Oh, we trained at Camp Pendleton, and we did
21 ambushing and daytime operations and stuff like that. I don't remember a lot about it. I
22 remember mostly they didn't have a lot to do with Vietnam. What it did probably more
23 than anything else and to be quite honest it was probably its whole purpose was to teach
24 us as the unit worked in small infantry units and larger units up to—I think the largest
25 thing we worked was a company. I'm not sure we did any battalion sized operations, but
26 mostly just taught us how things fit together and worked together. It did teach us about
27 the job of being an infantry rifleman but didn't if you see what I mean. There were no
28 specifics. I suppose what we could say was more the philosophy of infantry than it was
29 actual practice.

30 KC: Right, were any of the people who trained you with ITR at this level, were
31 any of them veterans of Vietnam? Had any of them been there and come back?

1 JG: Yeah, a number of them were.

2 KC: Were they able to tell you anything about it or how to prepare or what you
3 would need to do once you faced what was over there?

4 JG: Not really at that particular time. Particularly for the period of time I was in,
5 Vietnam was in quite an evolution. Are you familiar with the three stages of guerilla
6 warfare?

7 KC: Mm-hmm.

8 JG: Okay, the people that were my instructors were familiar with the first stage
9 guerilla warfare. And that was all they were familiar with. I was there during the
10 transition from first stage to second stage and the really screwed up the attempt to go
11 from second stage to third stage.

12 KC: Explain that.

13 JG: First stage infantry tactics, our first stage guerilla warfare is a small three to
14 five-man condries and basically, it's just being really annoying. They lay mines and they
15 try to blow up things to annoy people. The second stage guerilla warfare is operation of a
16 larger units. You're still not its major land warfare, but you're operating in squad to two-
17 sized units. You're setting larger ambushes; you might be attacking regional outposts and
18 police stations and so forth and so on. Mainly when we showed up in the classic guerilla
19 force, whenever the central government troops or the hard corps shows up then you fade
20 away. The perceptions of guerilla warfare are when the enemy approaches your retreat
21 when the enemy retreats you and you attack and when they're weak you attack. So forth
22 and so on. So, they were used to fighting three to five man condries. They were mostly
23 throwing hand grenades and harassing troops and maybe setting mines in a row and that
24 sort of thing. That's what we were facing when I first got there. And then through the
25 course of my time in the infantry, we began to transition into second stage guerilla
26 warfare where we were facing squad in the same-sized units and on occasion even
27 company-sized units. I believe the Army ran into second stage guerilla warfare much
28 sooner than we did. I think they started to see larger units sooner then they did. The Army
29 and the Marine Corps have a significantly different philosophy of combat. The Army
30 tends to be a bit more cautious than we are which makes the Marine Corps sound
31 incautious which it really actually isn't, but with the Marine Corps, we basically spent

1 from dawn to dusk roaming around looking for a fight. Whenever we got contact, we
2 would not only engage, but we would get on the radio, call in, and it would be a dog pile.
3 If they could get enough of them trapped, they'd start calling in guards from H&I
4 (Harassment and Interdiction) in the headquarters Marine Corps. They would fly the
5 entire Marine Corps in there if they had to. All they wanted was contact. Once they got
6 contact, they would not let go. They would keep shoving troops and overwhelmed them.
7 The Army didn't necessarily approach things that way. An instance like Hamburger Hill,
8 just completely mystifies me, I don't see how such a thing could happen. The Marine
9 Corps, they just don't let loose, they don't turn loose once they get a hold of them. Back
10 to your original question, not really. There wasn't much they could teach us at that stage.
11 War, more frequently it's pretty much OJT (On the Job Training). Once you get in the
12 theatre then you'll have older guys there that can teach you what's going on right now
13 and teach you how to deal with what's going on right now. By the time they rotate back
14 to the world and training schedules are set up and training methods are set up, generally
15 speaking the tactics they are teaching are no longer being used.

16 KC: Okay, now when you finish this level of training, where—or I should say
17 this, do you know that you're destined for Vietnam when you finish here?

18 JG: Oh yeah, we knew that when we joined the Marine Corps. You know, there
19 was a chance you weren't going to go, but there was a much greater chance that you
20 were.

21 KC: What are your thoughts about this?

22 JG: It just depended on your MOS. As soon as I had an infantry MOS I knew
23 where I was going.

24 KC: You know where you were going. What were your thoughts about this?

25 JG: I didn't really have any. At that stage of the game, it was still a lot of John
26 Wayne stuff. I had an incredibly unrealistic view of what war was going to be and just no
27 real concept of what was coming. I thought I was going to go into a war, whatever that
28 meant, and I was too eager to really have a feeling one way or the other.

29 KC: Sure.

30 JG: I had been thumped full of Marine Corps history, so I assumed we were going
31 to win and that was it.

1 KC: Now had you been following what was going on in Vietnam, the
2 developments there, the way the war was being fought? What was going on?

3 JG: Nope, when you're in boot camp you have no contact with anything.

4 KC: Right, I didn't know if in these later training stages that you had any sort of
5 contact, or anyone was talking about it or what you're reading in the newspaper or
6 anything like that.

7 JG: Not really, no.

8 KC: Okay.

9 JG: Pretty much caught up with what we were doing.

10 KC: Right, sure, sure. When do you receive orders from Vietnam?

11 JG: When I graduated from basic infantry training school, they passed out orders.

12 KC: And when was that?

13 JG: I'm sorry?

14 KC: And when was that?

15 JG: You mean month?

16 KC: If you can, sure.

17 JG: I know that I joined the Marine Corps in August and I know that I came home
18 from Vietnam in April of '68. Other than that—

19 KC: Not so much.

20 JG: Not so much.

21 KC: Right, sure, sure.

22 JG: We didn't carry calendars.

23 KC: Right, right.

24 JG: Can I tell you a quick story illustrating that?

25 KC: Please do.

26 JG: We were on Hill 55, I'm still in the infantry and we broke for lunch, and they
27 were passing out C-rations. There's only twelve C-rat meals and the way they would
28 normally do it is they just tossed one to each guy and then after you get yours; you can
29 swap around with other guys to get what you want. So, I got mine and it was turkey loaf.
30 Turkey loaf was okay, but it wasn't one of my favorites and I turned to the guy beside
31 me, and I said, "Hey dude, you want to swap?" he said, "Yeah, what you got?" I said, "I

1 got turkey loaf.” He said, “Oh shit, that’s what I got.” So, I went to the guy on the other
2 side, and I said, “Hey, you want to swap?” and he said, “Yeah, what you got?” I said, “I
3 got turkey loaf.” And he said, “Man, that’s what I got.” “No, shit?” Then he said, “Yeah.”
4 So, I get up and I go down the squad and the entire squad has got turkey loaf. I got up to
5 the squad leader and say, “Hey, what’s the deal? What are they passing these meals out
6 one at a time now? We’ve all got turkey loaf.” He looked at me like I was retarded, and
7 he says, “Don’t you know what day this is?” “Shit, I don’t know what month it is.” And
8 he said, “It’s Thanksgiving.” And I said, “You know, I’ll fight the man who says they
9 don’t have balls right there in the world.” About a month later we get a stars and bars or a
10 sea tiger, one of the other talking about the turkey dinners that the troops got Vietnam
11 got. Yeah, the troops in the rear, the troops in the field got turkey loaf. No, Vietnam had
12 two months. It had the wet month, and it had the dry month. There were two months a
13 year. I never knew—I rarely knew what month it was. I usually didn’t know what day it
14 was at all. If I was carrying a radio and actually handling radio traffic, I did in the
15 abstract, but dates just really didn’t mean anything.

16 KC: Alright, now regardless of when it was, you’re going to head over, and you
17 said that it’s not something you put a lot of thought into. You’re a marine and that was
18 your focus. Did you have any time; did you get any leave time before you went to
19 Vietnam?

20 JG: Yeah. I had one, thirty days leave between boot camp and basic infantry
21 training as I remember it.

22 KC: Okay, so you went from basic straight over to Vietnam, is that right?

23 JG: Pretty much, yeah.

24 KC: Okay. Describe that trip over for me. This would have been, what, early
25 1966?

26 JG: I actually got there, and I believe January of ‘66.

27 KC: Okay.

28 JG: I vaguely remember being—I think we left in ‘65 and got there in ‘66. We
29 took off in a military 707 and it didn’t even make it out of the state of California. It took
30 off at Hickam—no, it took off from a Marine Corps base and I think it took off from El
31 Toro and landed at Hickam. It didn’t even make it out of California. They spent

1 something like ten or fifteen hours gluing it back together and then it took off again and it
2 made it to Hawaii. So, Hawaii, we were there for ten or twelve hours. Can't go any place,
3 of course while they glue it back together and then it takes off again and it makes it to
4 Wake Island and I spent at least a month on Wake Island. If you spend more than an hour
5 on Wake Island, it's at least a month. Wake Island sticks out about three hundred meters
6 around the runway. There is absolutely nothing there. We were there for, I don't know,
7 another ten or fifteen hours when they glued it back together and it took off again and
8 actually made it to Vietnam this time.

9 KC: When you fly in Da Nang?

10 JG: Yeah, we flew into Da Nang. And if I remember, that's three or four days.
11 First you fly to Vietnam. Yeah, it's lots of fun. And then I arrived at Vietnam, and I was
12 assigned to Kilo O33.

13 KC: When you get off the plane there in Da Nang, describe what you saw,
14 describe what you remember what you felt, what you smelled, describe Da Nang when
15 you walk off that plane.

16 JG: They opened the doors, and it was like a blast furnace because we were in the
17 dry month and Da Nang was still a steel plate runway. Everything in Vietnam was some
18 shade of red because that's what color the dirt is. So, I looked out and the first thing that
19 crossed my mind was, "This is not a movie." And the second thing that crossed my mind
20 was, "You have fucked up."

21 KC: Why do you say that?

22 JG: It was real. The smells and the sight were very real. I honestly believe as
23 ridiculous as it sounds, that's the first time it actually hit me that it actually came over to
24 me that I had joined the Marine Corps and I was going into a war. I was fairly ill-
25 equipped to be in a war.

26 KC: You mean, psychologically or emotionally?

27 JG: Well, physically, you know, although I was significantly larger than I was, I
28 didn't realize that actually I was perhaps even designed for war. I didn't know it. I had an
29 extremely fast reaction time. I had extremely good vision. I could see as well at night as I
30 could in the daytime. I was an expert shot. Physically, I had everything I needed to have.
31 I had an immune system that would just scare you. I just never got sick, never got

1 infected so that mattered for more than a day or two. I think psychologically I was
2 probably ill-equipped for a war. I think I had made it up to eighteen going on eighteen. I
3 just had no concept of what was coming. I had gotten myself into something that was so
4 much bigger than I was. I just didn't really appreciate what I had done until then and then
5 it finally popped into my little, tiny mind that I was in Vietnam.

6 KC: Describe Da Nang for me when you arrived there in early '66.

7 JG: Dust, dust covered everything. It was a steel plate runway and all they had
8 was hardbacks and sandbag bunkers. I don't remember seeing any permanent structures
9 at the time.

10 KC: That was a pretty busy place at this time, was it not?

11 JG: Oh yeah, Da Nang was always busy. Every time I went through it, it was
12 pretty busy. All I really clearly remember is the dust.

13 KC: Alright, so you de-plane, you've got these things going through your mind,
14 you see the dust, and you're assigned to Kilo Company, three of the 3rd. Where were
15 they? How did you—where did you get your orders to go and how did you get there?

16 JG: They threw us together in groups and we were standing in our group, and they
17 start calling out our names. I was first assigned to 3rd regiment and then I was on to 3rd
18 battalion and from 3rd battalion I was assigned Kilo Company, so we just kept getting
19 broken down into smaller and smaller groups. They held us in the rear for three or four
20 days, five days to kind of calm down and somewhat acclimatize. The only thing I clearly
21 remember—I remember two things from that period. The first one was I remember a
22 gunnery sergeant giving us a class on snakes. Although this isn't accurate, this is the
23 thing that kind of sticks in my mind, it was something to the affect of there's one hundred
24 and thirty-two snakes in Vietnam and two of them are not poisonous and one of those
25 were the python and the other one was a boa constrictor. I thought, "This place doesn't
26 like people." There were some extremely deadly snakes in Vietnam. The other one was
27 they would put us out each night on home watch, on bunkers. Of course, we didn't know
28 that they would have had to get through virtually the entire marine division to get to us.
29 And while it was possible that we would face some kind of an attack, it was pretty
30 unlikely at that stage in the game. That would be the first time we'd be given live
31 ammunition. We had a ready box of frags and pop-ups and trip wires and stuff like that.

1 So, we'd go down to our holes and while I was there, there was a guy on home watch and
2 a corporal guard who was killed. There was an explosion in his bunker, and they pieced it
3 together later what had happened and apparently the corporal, the guard, was sitting on
4 top of the bunker so he probably wasn't actually watching what these kids are doing. I
5 have to admit, I didn't either, but the kid wanted to be ready in case he had an attack. So,
6 we opened his ready box and he pulled out the first frag and he pulled the pin on it, and
7 he set it up on the parapet and he reached down and picked up the second frag, pulled the
8 pin on it and set it on the parapet. He reached down, picked up the third frag, pulled the
9 pin and the first one went off. If I died, I wanted to run into that guy and ask him, "Just
10 out of curiosity, how did you plan on arming those things when you wanted to throw
11 them? Did you think you were going to put it up in your mouth and go, ready go?" So
12 that was kind of my initiation to Vietnam.

13 KC: Wow, wow.

14 JG: Everything in Vietnam was heavy and it would either hurt you or kill you. I
15 don't think there was anything benign in that country. Not that I ever saw. And then after
16 four or five days we were sent out to our company.

17 KC: Did Da Nang receive any rocket fire, rocket attacks while you were there?

18 JG: Not while I was there, no.

19 KC: Okay, this would usually come later is what I understand.

20 JG: Oh yeah.

21 KC: And then it was pretty constant.

22 JG: They did lots of them.

23 KC: Alright, you're there for four or five days, you're becoming acclimated as
24 much as you can, I guess, for the circumstances. You're coming to grips with where you
25 are and your role in all of this, but you know that you're assigned to Kilo Company.
26 Where was Kilo Company and when do you meet them?

27 JG: A chopper got to Field Company probably—I don't actually remember. Most
28 of this is projecting that. As soon as that four or five day period was over then I was set
29 on a resupply chopper to Kilo. And once I got to Kilo, they were in an operation just
30 outside Da Nang. I was sent to third squad, third platoon.

31 KC: Third squad of the third platoon.

1 JG: 333.

2 KC: Yes, I was going to say the threes are running wild here. Was Kilo Company
3 on its own performing company maneuvers or was this part of the larger battalion.

4 JG: At that particular time, they were using a series of flashes for about six
5 months, and they finally just decided this wasn't going to work. What they had was
6 battalion TAORs, tactical areas of responsibility. The four companies of any given
7 battalion would roam around in this battalion TAOR. We didn't have a base, so they were
8 just roaming around basically doing search and destroy and you're just running around
9 trying to bump into somebody and hook it up with them.

10 KC: Alright, now describe for me coming into 3rd of the Third, 3rd of the Third,
11 what was it like when you met these guys, what was it like when you're a brand new guy,
12 you're in-country for the very first time? You have to meet these guys who have been
13 there for awhile. What was it like when you encountered them? When you joined them"

14 JG: I have no idea; I don't remember when I first met them. I remember, I think
15 my second night there, what we were doing is we were running up and down some river
16 on Amtrak's. Some guy with a '57 Ricky rifle was shooting at boats going up and down
17 the river and Amtrak's, so they decided they were going to attack him, so they took three
18 or four Amtrak's and they put a couple squads on each track, and we cruise up and down
19 the river waiting for somebody to shoot at us. And I was thinking, you know, "This
20 probably isn't going to work." There was a couple of problems involved. The first thing,
21 to get an Amtrak outside of the water, it's kind of like delivering an elephant. Tracks are
22 not the most graceful things ever built and they're not very fast either. So, I'm thinking
23 that unless this guy's chained to a tree, we're probably not going to find him. Anyway,
24 we cruised up and down. On the first night, they pull up out of the water and they set up a
25 little perimeter there and the way that worked is we would sleep through the night, but
26 through the course of the night one guy would be awake on watch out of each squad. We
27 had the squad watch and as a guy would go off watch, he would hand the watch to the
28 next guy coming on. Well, unfortunately when we woke up the next morning everybody
29 was asleep, and I had a watch in my hand.

30 KC: Uh-oh.

31 JG: This is not good.

1 KC: Yeah, what became of that situation?

2 JG: They were not very happy with me. I probably would have taken a lot more
3 flack except I got wounded the next night, so I got to leave for awhile. They weren't
4 really happy with me.

5 KC: What did they say to you?

6 JG: "You're trying to get us all killed? What the fuck's a matter with you?" But of
7 course, I was exhausted. The things that I remember about Vietnam mostly are not
8 combat. The things I remember mostly are being absolutely exhausted starving to death
9 and filthy dirty. That's the three things I remember from this.

10 KC: So, after this first night I assume that you weren't successful in locating this
11 guy who was shooting at the boats going up and down the river?

12 JG: Oh no, no. The next morning one of the track guys left the engine cocks open
13 and one of the tracks had slid off in the water and it was under water and first one thing
14 and then the other. We weren't having a very good time.

15 KC: It doesn't sound like it.

16 JG: No, they never got them. And then the next night we were set up and they set
17 out OPs, outpost. So, I went out with my squad leader who was a guy named Goldie.
18 There was an interesting thing about 3rd Squad, 3rd Marines by the way. I was the only
19 flight guy in the squad.

20 KC: Is that right?

21 JG: Yeah.

22 KC: How did that come about?

23 JG: The platoon commander was a prejudice.

24 KC: Your lieutenant was?

25 JG: Yeah. So, he concentrated on the blacks in one squad and since I was a new
26 guy that had fallen asleep the first night, I was put in the squad.

27 KC: And that was his form of punishment to put you with the African American
28 Marines?

29 JG: Mm-hmm. It was really kind of funny because Goldie was a good dude.
30 When he brought me to the squad he'd stand there and say, "Hey, all you niggers come
31 here." So, everybody gathered in, and he says, "This here's a white nigger, he's new here

1 and he's going to get killed with the rest of us so we're going to make him an honorary
2 nigger." "Yes boss." So, for quite a while I was known as the white nigger. We had a
3 number of adventures, but the second night they sent us out on this OP and Goldie's
4 telling me what a tree line was, we ran a banana tree grove and so we're looking at this
5 little break in the tree line at the river and Goldie's tell me that I didn't have to worry
6 about behind me because the villa was behind me and that they wouldn't come from the
7 villa because we would fire back and the villagers could get shot and it was bad PR for
8 both sides so generally they didn't do it that way. Unfortunately, Goldie wasn't aware of
9 the fact that we were in that transition period for phase 1 to phase 2 throughout warfare.
10 So, Goldie crashes out and you're on the fifty percent whole watch so I'm lying there and
11 I'm trying to decide what to do. I go, well—I'm laying there looking at a river and if
12 you're familiar with the situation—if you start anything long enough, believe me, it's
13 going to start walking around. So, trees are moving, and bushes are moving, and I'm
14 convinced—have you ever seen the movie *Bataan*? It's a very Wallace there with his
15 machine gun and the Japs are coming in from the fog, thousands of them. That's kind of
16 what's in my mind. I'm surrounded by North Vietnamese or actually at this stage VC
17 (Viet Cong). So, as I'm lying there, I hear something come through the banana trees. You
18 know how they got the very big leaves. So, I heard something come through the leaves
19 and thud. Now, I know for a fact that this entire situation couldn't have lasted longer than
20 four and a half seconds max. But it seemed like it took ten or fifteen minutes. My first
21 thought was, "What the hell was that?" I was trying to decide was it somebody or
22 something? Because I wasn't sure what I'd heard. So, I laid down in the furrows between
23 the banana trees and I had an automatic M-14. And I laid the 14 along my leg thinking
24 that if they moved again, I'd shoot them. And about that time the frag went off. It was
25 actually laying about ten feet from me. So, the frag goes off.

26 KC: And this was an enemy fragmentation grenade that he threw at you?

27 JG: Probably, if it had been an M-26 it would probably kill me. At that stage we
28 were still playing running with your bongs so it could have been anything from a Mark 2
29 pineapple to a bucket full of dynamite. You know, just whatever they had on hand. I
30 suspect it was probably a Mark 2 if had to guess. It could have been a Tricom. Tricom
31 have a tendency to break in very large pieces and Mark 2s break into smaller pieces and

1 M-26s break into quite small pieces, but they also tend to wound you a lot more. So, it
2 goes off and that was really surprising. So, I laid there for awhile and I can't hear very
3 well so I go (whispering), "Goldie, Goldie, Goldie." And nobody answers. I was like,
4 "Oh shit, Goldie's dead and I'm out here by myself." In this situation, we had passwords
5 for if you had to come into the lines that something other than a scheduled return time for
6 an ambush, you could give this sign and countersign and they'd let you in. But of course,
7 the reality is you could come down the trail with an American flag in each hand singing
8 "Yankee Doodle Dandy" and they're going to blow your ass off. I wasn't about to try to
9 go back in the lines, I knew that wasn't going to work. So, I just laid there for awhile and
10 I figured, "Well, Don will come, or something will happen sooner or later." And some
11 period of time later I hear our lieutenant go—Goldie's actually name was Tyler, and he
12 says, "Tyler!" and Goldie answers him, he's right on the other side of the bush I'm laying
13 in." Then I hear, "Here, sir." I said, "Why didn't you answer when I called?" He says,
14 "Waiting to see if they threw anything else at you." That's when I learned my first lesson
15 in Vietnam. It was a full moon, and the lieutenant says, "Are you hit? And Goldie says,
16 "No sir, I don't think so." And he looks and he says, "What do you mean you don't think
17 so?" You know, I was pretty shook up so he said, "Well look." So, I'm looking over
18 myself and I notice that my right shoulder is all brown, my utilities are brown or black.
19 My head was itching really bad and that's when I discovered that blood looks black by
20 moonlight. I said, "I think I'm bleeding, sir." And he says, "What do you mean you
21 think? Are you bleeding, or aren't you?" I said, "Okay, I'm fucking bleeding. How's
22 that?" So, they look at me and I've been hit in the right shoulder and so they pull me back
23 to the corpsman and the corpsman rips my jacket open. I remember looking and there's a
24 big hole in my shoulder. Well, big, it was about the size of a 22 shot with blood shooting
25 out. It hit the artery in my arm and so he's working on that and the whole time he's
26 working I'm scratching the right side of my head with my left hand. I said, "Man the
27 mosquitoes are a bitch out here." He said, "Let me look at that." He looks up and two
28 pieces of shrapnel had hit me in the side of the head and traveled under the skin to the
29 back of my head. And they were actually under the skin at the back up my head. So, the
30 joke after that one was that Goller didn't need a helmet that his head was so hard, he
31 would deflect shrapnel. So, they sent me to the rear because they were worried about the

1 head hit. So, they put this tag on me, a casualty tag and they loaded me onto an Amtrak.
2 So, I knew it couldn't be too awful bad if they're medivacing me on an Amtrak that's
3 about one step above walking. So, I get to the battalion aid station and when a track
4 comes up out of the water, the first place, when it comes up out of the water, there was a
5 Vietnamese prisoner on the track with me. There was a number of people on the track.
6 They had the standard deal where they had a bamboo stick stuck through right where his
7 elbows were and then his hands were tied in the front. There was a staff sergeant there on
8 the ground and he said, "Toss me that gook." So, I did. And when he landed this heap on
9 the ground, this staff sergeant said, "I meant handing down, you moron." So, I go to the
10 aid station and awful long, people would walk up to me, read the tag and go, "Hmm."
11 And walk off. I'm thinking, "What am I, a refugee? I speak English." But I finally get to
12 the aid station and the aid station was a hard back and plywood floors and plywood table.
13 The people that were doing triage were corpsmen. The first thing I saw was a corpsman
14 comes in and he's got a full-front apron, a rubber apron and hose and he's hosing the
15 blood down from the floors and hosing off these two tables that were on Plywood
16 tablecloths. So, he hoses it all down and the first thought that pops into my mind are,
17 "Hmm, slaughterhouse, this isn't good." Then they brought two Aussie Marines in and
18 they're working on them, and I remember it extremely clearly. One of them had been
19 shot straight through the knee, side to side. A corpsman's standing there with one of
20 those long, wooden q-tips running the q-tip through the wound going from one side of
21 this guy's leg to the other. The other one looked like he was about second or third man
22 back from 155 boobytrap. He had shrapnel, he was lying on his stomach, and he had
23 shrapnel from the soles of his feet to the top of his head down his back. And they were
24 washing him down with iodine and the only thing I could remember were the cheeks of
25 his ass. He's sitting there just vibrating like that. Neither one of them made sound
26 through all of this. They get them worked on; they come over to me and say, "What's
27 your problem?" I said, "I'm embarrassed to tell you, just give me a band aid and I'll
28 leave." "Naw, we better check your head." So, they x-rayed my head, and everything was
29 fine, and they wanted me to stay in the rear for a little while.

30 KC: They patched up the hole in your shoulder, I assume.

1 JG: Yeah, they dealt with that. They x-rayed it and it turned out the shrapnel was
2 right up against the ball joint, and they were afraid that they would do more damage than
3 good trying to get it out.

4 KC: So, they left it in?

5 JG: Yeah, they just decided to sew it up. I stayed in the rear for a couple of weeks
6 and my job inventorying sea bags and that's where they went before, they went home.
7 And I would go through the sea bag. I had the guy's service record book, and I would
8 check to be sure that any love letters in there were addressed to, or the salutation was to
9 the same first name as his wife. Any porno flicks or books I took them out and that sort of
10 thing. I basically sanitized the sea bag before it went home. And then after a couple of
11 weeks I moved back out in the field. By the time I got back in the field I wasn't the new
12 guy anymore. I'd been wounded so everything was okay after that.

13 KC: Now you say everything is okay after that. You weren't the new guy
14 anymore, but the last time the 3rd squad saw you, you were the new guy who had screwed
15 up on his first night and had managed to get himself hit with shrapnel from a grenade the
16 second night, and then you were back in the rear for a couple of weeks inventorying sea
17 bags and then you come back out. Were you really all that seasoned in their eyes?

18 JG: I don't remember taking any flak from it. I think one thing that might have
19 helped was I was given the radio just because I was the only one that could spell it. I
20 knew a lot about electronics, so they gave me the radio. It didn't bother me because what
21 they would normally do is they would give the radio to the littlest guy in the squad. The
22 Marine Corps does have a perverse fear. That struck me as kind of silly, so I carried it
23 and then being the new guy, I watched point and as it ended up, I always walked point.

24 KC: You had the radio and walked point?

25 JG: Yeah, that was the only two jobs I ever had.

26 KC: Did you do them both at the same though? Were you carrying the radio
27 while?

28 JG: No.

29 KC: Okay, okay, okay.

30 JG: I'm not going to carry the radio.

31 KC: I didn't think so, that sounded odd.

1 JG: No, I would do one or the other.

2 KC: Okay.

3 JG: And as it ended up about ninety percent of the time when I did go off point. It
4 didn't take long for everybody to figure out—I apparently had a sixth sense for ambushes
5 and booby-traps. Not so much booby-traps, but ambushes and I was incredibly,
6 incredibly lucky. I had guys kid me that ten guys died in Vietnam because I got all their
7 luck. I actually believe that what is referred to as a sixth sense, I thought I could sense
8 hostility. I thought about it a lot and the only thing I could think of is I could sense
9 hostility because I never walk them into an ambush. Through the course of the time, I
10 was in the infantry I probably went on two hundred and ninety ambushes at least. I
11 walked point on virtually all of them. I never walked them into an ambush, and I never
12 walked them into a booby-trap. So, they really liked to have me up on point.

13 KC: Sure, well tell me about this. You're a new guy here in country and you're a
14 pretty big guy. What was it like walking point for the first time?

15 JG: I don't remember the first time; I remember the first shootout I got into.

16 KC: Well, tell me about that then.

17 JG: I had been walking point for a couple of weeks and I used too kid that you
18 developed extremely sensitive feet. Your toes get really sensitive when they're walking
19 point. I could move very, very slowly and I could move pretty much dead quiet. We were
20 coming back from an ambush; it was about four in the morning. We were coming back
21 from an ambush so we were more relaxed than we should have been because if anything,
22 it's more dangerous coming back than it is going out. I was carrying a twelve gauge shot
23 gun. I do remember the first time they sent me out on an ambush. The squad leader
24 comes up and he says, "Give me your rifle, all your magazines, and your frags." I said,
25 "Why?" He said, "Just give them to me." So, I give them all to him and he hands me a
26 model twelve wind Chester and thirteen rounds." I said, "What's this for?" He says,
27 "You're walking point." I said, "I only got thirteen rounds?" and he said, "Yeah, it's for
28 good luck." I said, "Why do I have to carry a shotgun?" and he says, "That way if you
29 step on a mine and blow up it won't kill the rest of us." Everything in Vietnam was to
30 build your confidence. So, I carried the shotgun. Most of the people I kill, I killed with
31 shotguns. I'm walking back and I had my finger on the trigger, the shotgun up over my

1 shoulder carrying it like a giant pistol up on my shoulder. It's pointing backwards and it
2 was another full moon, and they would grow these hedge rows out of bushes. Bamboo
3 and bushes and that was what they would use for fences. So, I'm moving down this big
4 hedgerow and I stepped out into a clearing and from the other side of the hedgerow,
5 maybe fifteen feet away, a Vietnamese stepped out and he was tearing a thirty-caliber
6 carving. He was carrying like a pistol, but his was down at the side where the barrel
7 pointed at the ground. Now this entire exchange took probably two or three seconds, but
8 once again, seemed like I had all the time in the world to think about this. The first
9 thought in my mind was, "Son of a bitch, that's a gook." And this tag got so excited; he
10 pulled the trigger while he was still down at the ground and brought this carbine up
11 firing. And I'm thinking, "He's going to blow his foot off. Shit, that son of a bitch is
12 going to shoot me." So, I popped the shot gun off my shoulder and extended it straight
13 out and fired. Unfortunately, Newton's Third Law of Motion was still in effect, so I
14 caught the 12 gauge right, right dead in the sternum and knocked me on my ass.
15 Fortunately, I'm a good shot so I caught him with the hedgerow, and he took a full load
16 to his chest. So, I'm lying there and knocked the wind out of me. They thought I'd been
17 shot because I couldn't talk. I had finally gotten a jungle jacket. It took me like a month
18 or so to get a jungle jacket. So, I finally got a jungle jacket and the guy behind me that
19 was my backer comes out, "They got the point." So, the corpsman runs up, grabs him my
20 jungle jacket and I'm thinking, "No." And he rips it open, my only jungle jacket. And he
21 shines his red light down and he's saying, "Where're you hit, where're you hit?" I finally
22 go, "Heh." I got some air in and I said, "I did, and the fucking shotgun got me." So,
23 everybody looks at me and I got this huge bruise on my sternum. So that's when I got my
24 first nickname in Vietnam, Quick Draw McGraw. That was my first contact and certainly
25 not my last.

26 KC: Let's stop there and talk about this for a second. What did this do to you?
27 How do you react to this knowing this is your first contact and it had to have been utterly
28 frightening and then you've taken a life at the other end of this? What was that like?

29 JG: It wasn't frightening, it all happened too fast. It was more surprising than
30 anything else. It had just really surprised me. I don't think I had time to be scared. And as

1 far as taking another life I was damn glad it was me that took the life instead of him.
2 Because that seemed to be the two choices in that situation.

3 KC: Yeah, and then obviously it was.

4 JG: Yeah.

5 KC: Now was there anymore contact as a result of this or is it just that one guy
6 you ran into?

7 JG: No, at that stage of the game they were still—they were very reluctant to
8 stand and fight with because, I mean, we call in artillery, you know, you've got air,
9 you've got artillery. When you have absolute air superiority and about ninety-nine
10 percent artillery superiority, the opposing side doesn't stand in sight very often. It's just
11 suicide, you can't win. With the Marine Corps, as soon as we got contact, we'd call it in.
12 They'd start choppering in troops. They'd start shoving gun ships in there, air strikes,
13 troops, whatever they could get their hands on because it was fight and that's what we
14 were looking for.

15 KC: So that ended right there after you engaged this guy, that was it?

16 JG: They grabbed a hat and we re-grouped.

17 KC: What happens to you within your squadron within your platoon? You
18 mention that you received a nickname for this, but did you see that you were treated any
19 differently? Did you detect that you were held in a higher esteem because of this? What
20 was the process there?

21 JG: Not really, I was the point. As long as I walked point, they were just tickled to
22 death.

23 KC: Sure.

24 JG: That was the first incident. I don't remember any reaction after that. Most of
25 the guys in my company were in the original kilo company. They came over from Japan.
26 I was in the first replacement draft that went into Vietnam, so I was the first replacement
27 to show up. So, they didn't have a lot of experience with the place.

28 KC: Right, unlike it would be later on.

29 JG: Yeah, no FNGs (Fucking New Guy) yet.

30 KC: Right, right, right.

1 JG: It was just like joining any other unit as far as they were concerned. Yeah, I'm
2 the new guy, but there was a little bit of the old saw stuff. They did Operation Starlight,
3 and I can't remember what the one after that was. And I hadn't, but there really wasn't a
4 whole bunch of that I remember, discrimination because I was the new guy. I got
5 integrated pretty quickly. I got wounded the first time or the second night out. Within two
6 or three weeks of joining the company, I guess it was in three or four weeks. I don't have
7 a very good concept of time. I'm going to tell you right now. If you're going to try to get
8 things to fit chronologically, I'm probably not the person to talk to.

9 KC: No, no that's perfectly okay. Believe me, I understand that.

10 JG: Frequently in my own mind, I'll go over stuff that I know could not
11 conceivably have happened in the chronological order I remember them in, but I still
12 remember it that way. You know, time just doesn't mean anything. It doesn't matter so
13 time is not something you stay on top of.

14 KC: Sure.

15 JG: We went onward and upward after that.

16 KC: Well, tell me what happens next?

17 JG: It was incredibly boring. Basically, what we did is—well, when we get new
18 guys coming in—we had a new guy come in and he ask me, he says, "What do we do?"
19 "Your same question." And so, I told him, I said, "Well, we get up thirty minutes before
20 dawn and we move out and we search and destroy all day. We basically roam around
21 looking for a firefight. And then we set in thirty minutes after dawn, and we'd go on fifty
22 percent whole watch. One guy awake, one guy asleep. Sometimes through the course of
23 the night you'd go on a three hour ambush. Then when you get back, you'll go back on
24 fifty percent." And he's sitting there counting on his fingers. "If we get there before dawn
25 and we go to sleep after sunset on fifty percent watch when we had a whole watch, when
26 do we sleep? I smile at him and say, "You're pretty bright. I was here two or three weeks
27 before I thought of that question, we don't." We got by on about three hours of sleep a
28 night. Three to four hours if we were lucky. The thing I remember most about Vietnam is
29 being absolutely exhausted. By the end of the day Ho Chi Minh could have walked across
30 the trail in the front and he just wouldn't have the energy to shoot him. When I left
31 Vietnam, I weighed 121 pounds.

1 KC: You got back down to your normal weight again, I guess.

2 JG: Well, I don't know if it was normal.

3 KC: Well, the weight when you joined the Marine Corps, I guess.

4 JG: Right, I was back to that weight except I was twenty-two years old.

5 KC: Alright, you mentioned that you walked point quite a bit and this is

6 something I think is very, very interesting. You're walking point; take me through what

7 you have to do to walk point. The things you're looking for, the things you're trying to

8 prepare yourself for, the things that you think maybe out there. How does one walk

9 point?

10 JG: Well, you take everything off. And I usually would carry more than thirteen

11 rounds per shot gun, but you had a loaded shot gun, you got around the chamber with

12 safeties off. This is easy to show, but a little hard to explain on the phone. But basically,

13 your weight would rock back to your back foot and your front foot would go out at a kind

14 of a side motion. Your heel would go down first very, very lightly. And then you would

15 very slowly put the rest of your foot down. As soon as you had your foot completely

16 down, then you would slowly move forward putting all your weight on your left foot and

17 then your right foot would come forward and do the same thing. You're doing a couple of

18 things at the same time and the first thing you're doing is you're feeling the ground with

19 your feet. You're feeling for anything sticking up. You're also feeling for disturbed earth.

20 A lot of the times we would be on trails and the trails had been walked on for six hundred

21 years so they're basically like polished concrete. You're feeling the ground with your feet

22 and when you did this long enough, your brain really doesn't get into these conversations.

23 It's mostly just your body's just doing it and kind of notifying your brain and passing

24 what's happening. So, your feet—you very quietly, you never drag your feet. When your

25 foot goes down on that heel, it goes straight down, but it's a very light touch and you ease

26 forward. One night they timed me. Now granted, we were looking for a bunch of

27 bouncing betty's that the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) had an armored artillery

28 battery. Among other things, they stole 250,000 bouncing betty's so we went looking for

29 them and I figured we would probably don't find them. Of course, the bouncing betty's,

30 there is no plan B. You don't get a chance. If you set it off, you're dead. So, I was being

31 very cautious that night, but they timed me, and it took an hour to go 100 yards.

1 KC: Wow.

2 JG: But as you're moving, once you get the foot plant and it's solid, then I would
3 very slowly scan left to right and then back right to left and all the time I'm listening and
4 I'm smelling. You're listening for anything metallic. Something metallic carries a
5 tremendous difference in the jungle and it is so alien that it is extremely easy to pick up
6 on. If somebody bumps the rifle and particularly if somebody pops the safety off, you
7 could hear it from a surprising distance. Our eyes aren't geared for predators, ours are
8 geared for moving objects. You never look directly at an object; you look to the side of it.
9 If you're familiar with how the rods and cones work in your eye and the rods are on the
10 outer perimeter and they detect black and white. So, looking directly at an object you're
11 using your cones which are colored. They don't work nearly as well in the light. Your
12 kind of looking off to the side and you're slowly scanning and you're looking for
13 movement or you're looking for an odd shape. There are never any straight lines in
14 nature. It's extremely rare to find a straight line, except for bamboo. Bamboo is usually
15 all together. You're looking for something that doesn't look right, you're listening for
16 something that doesn't sound right, and you're smelling for something that doesn't smell
17 right. After you've done a scan you take the next step, and the next step, and you scan as
18 you go.

19 KC: Now is this something that someone taught you or do you have to learn it on
20 your own?

21 JG: I think I learned it on my own. I don't remember anybody teaching me. I
22 suspect I was probably a natural predator. If I was going to pick somebody as a natural
23 predator out of a group, I certainly wouldn't have picked me. I also believe this; the
24 veneer of civilization is extremely thin. Most civilian's perception of things is that killing
25 people is an aberration and it's very unusual and we don't naturally do it and so forth and
26 so on. This is not true; man is a predator at the top of the food chain, and we didn't get
27 there by accident. We are the end product of a few hundred thousand years of selected
28 breeding. We are extremely, extremely aggressive. Organizations like the Marine Corps
29 do not teach how to kill. You already know how to kill; they just teach you how to do it
30 in an organized manner to accomplish a stated goal. I myself am extremely surprised at
31 how thin the veneer of civilization was and how easily it came to me to do what I was

1 doing. It was kind of like playing chess, I just didn't get to see the other side of the horde.
2 It was an extremely intellectual game. It required a lot of thought, and it required a lot of
3 concentration and you had to keep your head plugged into your ass all the time. I've
4 never—I certainly never found anything since that was the challenging about it, but it
5 was an interesting game to play.

6 KC: Take me on an ambush.

7 JG: Our ambushes generally speaking weren't terribly successful in infantry. We
8 caught them every so often, but let's face it, when you got twenty or thirty marines
9 moving down through the jungle at night it sounded like a heard of elephants. We would
10 basically go out and moved to a pre-determined ambush fight. Once we got there then the
11 squad leader would select the ambush or how we were going to lay out the ambush and
12 we would set in and we basically laid there for a couple of hours waiting for somebody to
13 come down the trail and if somebody came down the trail, we hooked it up even if they
14 didn't which is what happened most of the time. At the end of the ambush, we'd get up
15 and go back.

16 KC: Now were these the standard L-shaped ambush?

17 JG: Generally speaking. Of course, it depends on the terrain.

18 KC: Explain how you would set that up.

19 JG: Well, as you're moving in, the ambush is a spot on a map so it's not precise.
20 The team leader or the ambush leader picks the exact location once you get in the area of
21 where you're supposed to be. If you can, obviously flaw in the terrain, but if you can, you
22 try to pick some terrain features that are going to channelize where you've got a ditch on
23 one side or bamboo which is pretty close to impenetrable or something on one side. Then
24 you set up on the opposite side and you might have the ambush might be a gun team or it
25 might be a couple guys with automatic rifles. It's predetermined that they're the ones that
26 set the ambush off. So, they wait until the opposition gets within a certain distance and
27 you try to get as much of opposition in the kill zone as you possibly can, of course.
28 They'll start firing and as soon as they start firing everybody opens up. Again, depending
29 on your situation, if you're in an extremely defensible position, you may actually stay
30 still and just keep firing at them. If it's like the vast majority of them, you're basically in

1 the open, once you've laid down your initial fire then you get up and charge. You run in
2 there and shoot as many of them as you can.

3 KC: About how many men would you generally take on an ambush?

4 JG: Anywhere from eight to fifteen. Usually, our squadrons were always really
5 under strength. They pulled a 3rd battalion 3rd Marines out and pulled us back to Okinawa
6 because we had become non-tactical. We had 112 troops in Kilo Company. Of course, a
7 fully company with supporting arms because that includes weapons, and we should have
8 had six hundred something that should have been in the company, and we had 112. We
9 could no longer effectively act like as a battalion.

10 KC: Now was this a matter of casualties that the company was taking?

11 JG: Yeah, basically they were leaving faster than they were coming in.

12 KC: Was the rotation part of this as well? Part of this natural attrition?

13 JG: Oh, sure. Some people rotated out. An interesting thing, just by the way, I'm a
14 one hundred percent PTSD vet. The mind is an interesting thing, I do not remember
15 anybody being killed in Vietnam. I do not remember anybody being wounded in
16 Vietnam. I remember a few being wounded, but it was only people I didn't know. I don't
17 remember anybody getting killed.

18 KC: But almost certainly you were around men who were killed, is that true?

19 JG: Well, intellectually I know that we were rendered non-tactical. In the calve
20 team I know that company calve ceased to exist of the 2nd of February 1968. I know
21 intellectually that the chances of me never having seen anybody killed in the time I was
22 in Vietnam was unlikely at best, you know. I just don't remember. When I got back, I
23 told everybody and believed myself that I was really lucky. I really never saw anything,
24 didn't see much fighting so I knew just enough to tell a few war stories and tell my
25 grandkids a few things, but that I had really been lucky, and I believe that. When they
26 dedicated the wall, I was watching it on television and as I watched it, I started to
27 remember. A lot of people knew there was something wrong with me because I had no
28 emotion. I never got mad, I never got sad, and I just never really got anything. I had
29 extremely fast reactions; I was always armed and was not a good person to piss off. But I
30 really hadn't seen much. I started to remember it all and I started to cry, and I cried for
31 eighteen hours, and I couldn't stop. I kept trying to get it back in and I couldn't get it

1 back in, but I did manage to get it hung. So, I was no longer the robot I'd been before, but
2 I still couldn't remember a whole lot. My life pretty much fell apart at that point and
3 within a year I was in federal prison.

4 KC: Wow. We can definitely get into that as we work our way through this
5 interview if you'd like.

6 JG: I chose to deal with Vietnam a different way than a lot of people did. I
7 chalked it up to death. I have always been more than willing, as some people will tell
8 you, way to more than willing to talk about Vietnam for as long as they want to hear
9 about it by the time, I dealt with it because at one point I realized that I needed to either
10 deal with it or kill myself, one or the other. It was very disappointing to realize that
11 Vietnam controlled everything in my life. It controlled the clothes I wore, the vehicles I
12 drove, the jobs I'd take, the women I married, the hobbies I had. It picked everything in
13 my life, and I found that pretty annoying.

14 KC: When did you visit the wall?

15 JG: I never went to the wall; I've never been able to do it.

16 KC: Oh, I'm sorry I thought you said that you—

17 JG: I watched it on television. So no, I've never actually been able to go to it.

18 KC: Okay. Let me take you back to I Corps here with Kilo Company and the 3rd
19 Squad of the 3rd Platoon. Say when you're not out on a night ambush, say when you're
20 not out on the search and destroy mission when you are there among the rest of the group,
21 the rest of the squad the rest of the platoon and the rest of the company what sort of
22 things are you doing? What do you do as time passes while you're not actually out
23 actively patrolling?

24 JG: Okay, for the first three or four or five months I was there, that situation
25 didn't happen. They were still using the battalion TLR's, but they found out that
26 physically we just couldn't deal with it. I remember them saying, "We can't understand
27 flight. If you people are having a problem, the Vietnamese live here." And I pointed out,
28 "Yes, but they don't sleep on the wall, they sleep in houses." We were taking so many
29 non-battle casualties. One battalion during that period of time was rendered non-tactical
30 due to emersion foot. The entire battalion was pulled out of the field.

31 KC: Wow.

1 JG: We had much higher non-battle casualties than we had battle casualties.

2 KC: What other things would get you?

3 JG: You had emersion—well, you're wet continuously. We're getting not even
4 three hours sleep at night, we're usually eating one C-rat meal a day. The Marine Corps
5 wasn't big on resupply, and we agreed with them wholeheartedly. There's nothing like
6 having a big green banana up in the sky right above you. You might as well have a neon
7 sign on it is saying, "We are here." So, we didn't resupply any more than we absolutely
8 had to. We carried one C-ration meal a day and as much ammo as we could carry. So
9 basically, we were getting by with very little food, very little sleep, and a lot of exercise.
10 That's a formula for injuries and illness and just all kinds of things. Guys would fall;
11 they'd just get sick and all kinds of stuff. Emersion foot—you know it starts raining in
12 September and rains until like April and it never actually stops. It goes from a fine mist to
13 a cow pissing on a flat rock, but it never stops. I could remember—you know what you
14 look like when you get out of the shower if you're staying too long you look kind of like
15 a white prune? We looked like that all the time during the monsoon. In the dry season,
16 you've actually got lines of grit on your teeth, following the edges of your teeth.
17 Everything is crunchy no matter what; the water's crunchy because it's got dust in it. The
18 physical privation was unbelievable. I look on it now and I can't understand how I
19 survived it. The reason why they use eighteen year olds in wars is because nobody else
20 could physically stand it.

21 KC: What kind of toll does this take on you psychologically?

22 JG: I suspect if I had to guess, I went numb fairly quickly in the game because I
23 don't ever remember being afraid. There were times when you'd be in a firefight, and
24 you'd hear something that sounded kind of like a fifty pound bumblebee go by your ear.
25 It's kind of a "zzz" and they're not shooting at just any old body, somebody's shooting at
26 you. And you get that kind of jolt that comes up from your nuts to your spine, but that's
27 as close to fear as I ever got. Mostly I didn't have time to be afraid, I was too busy. I just
28 took it as it came. Whatever it was, was whatever it was.

29 KC: Right.

30 JG: Actually, I tell people this and they think I'm crazy which they do anyway,
31 but Vietnam was probably the simplest time in my life.

1 KC: Why do you say that?

2 JG: Because you had almost no decisions to make. There were no quandaries;
3 there were no things to worry about. You didn't have to worry about your job and you
4 sure as hell weren't going to get fired. You didn't have to worry about the car because
5 you didn't have one. You didn't have to worry about making house payments because
6 you didn't have one. You didn't have to worry about whether you're going to get a raise
7 because you didn't have a place to spend the money anyway. You didn't have to worry
8 about what your girlfriend was doing because she was in another reality, certainly not the
9 only one you were in. You just had nothing to worry about. You didn't have to worry
10 about what you were going to eat for dinner because somebody was going to hand it to
11 you. You didn't have to worry about buying new clothes because the ones you had on
12 were rotting off and you'd get new ones whenever they got around to getting them to
13 you. It boiled down to one thing. There was really only one thing to worry about, and it
14 was the one thing that you had absolutely no control over whatsoever. So, there was just
15 no point in worrying about it.

16 KC: And that one thing was?

17 JG: Living.

18 KC: Living.

19 JG: I accepted my own mortality pretty early in the game and to the point where I
20 wondered why people are so afraid of death. It's the one thing you absolutely know is
21 going to happen, it's the one thing guaranteed in your life and the one thing you can
22 count on. Sooner or later, you're going to die and it's going to happen whenever it's
23 going to happen. There's very, very little you can do about it so there's no point in
24 worrying about it.

25 KC: Do you think your experience in Vietnam has created this fatalistic view for
26 you?

27 JG: I know you consider it fatalistic, but I consider it realistic.

28 KC: Sure, sure.

29 JG: Sure, and I had a lot of trouble dealing with people when I got out. I watched
30 people stewing over what to eat for lunch. It would take twenty minutes trying to decide
31 what to eat for lunch and you want to tell them, "It doesn't fucking matter, just eat it. It's

1 like going to a gas station; you're not having lunch with the queen. Next week you're not
2 going to remember what you ate anyway, what different does it make?

3 KC: That's a very good point.

4 JG: You know, they stew off the damndest things as if they were actually
5 important and if they made any difference whatsoever in the grand scheme of things, you
6 know? And the one that's really frustrating is when they decide not to make a decision
7 and not realizing you just made a decision. You decided to keep on doing whatever it was
8 you were doing, that was your decision. Of course, what if I make a mistake? Well,
9 you're probably going to, so what? Big deal. Try to learn something from it and try not to
10 do it again and hope that mistake doesn't kill you. They fascinate me with that. The
11 inability to make decisions. It's been my experience that generally speaking, you know,
12 everything you need to know to make a decision in the first second to second and a half.
13 The rest of the time you're just stewing around trying to find that non-existent third
14 alternative. Frequently life is full of trying to decide between—trying to decide the lesser
15 of the two available evils, you know?

16 KC: Tell me about the men in your outfit. And I mean the squad, the platoon, the
17 company, tell me about them.

18 JG: I didn't know much at all about the company. I didn't know a whole lot about
19 the platoon, I knew mostly about my squad. A lot of our stuff was squad-sized. Even
20 when we were on battalion-sized operations, the unit was the squad actually. I know that
21 one squad I was in; I was the only person in the squad born in the United States.

22 KC: Really? Where were the rest of them born?

23 JG: Oh, the squad leader was a guy named Marquis Lavaguere, he was from
24 Quebec. We had Azuma Yoshida he was a six foot Japanese, 6'4" or something. He was
25 a very, very big Jap. He was going to UCLA and a little known fact that if you are a
26 foreign national attending school in the United States, you're sectioned to the draft. And
27 if you get a draft notice, you've got one or two choices. You have to leave the country or
28 take the draft. So Azuma decided that the Marines killed his dad on Okinawa, so he
29 figured anybody tough enough to kill his dad was an outfit he wanted to be in, so he
30 joined the Marine Corps.

31 KC: Wow, that's incredible.

1 JG: Our gunner was gunning Alejandro he was from Tijuana. Most of the rest of
2 them I don't remember. I knew different people in different squads and sometimes they
3 had a tendency to blend together so I'm not sure exactly how it was. That was not the
4 first squad I was in. The first squad, like I said, was all black, but that squad was the
5 squad I was in later. It was just a mix of people. There were, strictly in the Marine Corps,
6 we had a lot of foreign nationals in the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps is somewhat
7 like an American foreign legion.

8 KC: Tell me about the relationship among these men.

9 JG: Oh, just guys I knew. I'm not sure, what do you want to know?

10 KC: Just the way they related to each other. What sort of things would they talk
11 about, what would their attitudes toward each other?

12 JG: Not in a philosophical way, because, you know, the shit that was happening
13 around us, what was probably going to happen where we were going, what we were
14 doing and what's the latest scuttlebutt. Guys would tell us about things that were going
15 on back in the world with their family. You'd talk about stuff that was going on back in
16 the world in your family and some people talked about what they were going to do when
17 we got out, but not a lot of people. Of course, the number one subject, how many days.
18 Most people had calendars on their helmets.

19 KC: Did you keep a calendar yourself? You weren't into days you said before.

20 JG: No, not really, it was too much trouble. I think I realized it when I became a
21 two digit midget that I had less than ten days to go, but that was quite a bit in the future. I
22 didn't get particularly close with anybody in my squad.

23 KC: That was my next question. Was there any particular reason for this?

24 JG: No, just didn't. There's no real reason to.

25 KC: Right.

26 JG: I mean, there were guys I knew and guys I like and guys I knew I could count
27 on. That was probably the thing I missed the most once I got out was, I was surprised
28 when I got out to find that the definition of friend is somebody you've known for at least
29 twenty minutes that will loan you twenty dollars. I had a bit different definition of
30 friendship than that. It was really, really hard for me to adjust to that. I take a lot of
31 people I hear misunderstand about relationships in the military there were guys in my

1 squadron that I wouldn't want to cross the street to piss on if they were on fire. But that
2 doesn't mean that if the shit hit the fan I wasn't going to go out and get them.

3 KC: Right.

4 JG: It just isn't done. It doesn't matter if you like each other or not. It doesn't
5 have anything to do with it. So yeah, I liked the guys in my squad, but did I know them
6 particularly well, probably not. Let's face it; we were in a pretty artificial situation.

7 KC: Sure. What other sort of things stand out to you during your time there in
8 1966 with Kilo?

9 JG: I can't remember one in particular. How obscene do we get to get?

10 KC: You can say whatever you like.

11 JG: Okay, so one night we decided to have a pop shop ambush. Do you know
12 what a pop shop ambush is?

13 KC: No, explain that for me.

14 JG: A pop shop ambush is when you decide you're just not interested in going
15 out. So basically, what we would do is go to a pop shop and sit there in the pop shop
16 drinking beer or sodas or whatever and the radio operator would call in sit reps and so
17 forth and so on as if we were at the ambush site. And then the time we were supposed to,
18 we'd pack up and go back. You know, some nights you just don't feel like going out and
19 it didn't happen very often. Frequently, the only reason we could have a pop shop
20 ambush in this particular spot is things had changed and they no longer using battalion
21 TOAR. We would actually set up what was known as platoon patrol bases. We would dig
22 in, build bunkers, and then patrol out of a fixed location. So that meant that we grew to
23 know the people in the area. We weren't the continuous nomads that we had been. That
24 was the only thing that allowed such a thing to happen. Anyway, we're out on the pop
25 shop ambush and we're sitting there drinking beer and I decided I had to take a piss. You
26 can't buy beer; you'd just rent it in the inevitable (inaudible). So, I'm walking out and I
27 had a .45 in my hand. I had a weapon in my hand the time I went to Vietnam until I left. I
28 was never, ever unarmed. I slept with the cock and lock .45 on my chest. I took a dump
29 with a cut down shot gun beside me. If I was showering on those rare occasions, I had a
30 carbine 15 handing by my head. I was never, never unarmed. So, I'm walking along and
31 you're always looking. You never—you're always extremely situationally aware. Well,

1 there were five or six guys asleep out in the yard in this prop shop taking advantage and
2 catching a few extra Zs. So, as I'm coming through the end of the house, I unbutton my
3 jungle utilities and pull my deck out. I don't have to look down, it's the same place it's
4 always been. I'm looking around to be sure something doesn't—and it happened
5 unexpectedly so as I step around the corner, I suddenly feel something warm and wet on
6 my dick in a big snort and I look down and I see this eyeball that was about the size of a
7 bowling ball. I watch my dick slowly disappear into the right nostril of a water buffalo.

8 KC: Oh no.

9 JG: Oh, yes (laughing). And another one of those situations where this probably
10 took a second and it maybe seemed like it took a minute and a half. My first thought was,
11 “Do they bit?”

12 KC: Oh man.

13 JG: If you're familiar with Vietnam, water buffalos hated marines. And we
14 weren't too taken with them either for that matter. The booeey turned his head sideways
15 and, of course, it was a toss of who was the most surprised, me or the water buffalo. And
16 what I felt was he blew his nose and snorted so I am now covered in water buffalo snot.
17 And this water buffalo just stiff legged. I'm trying to get the .45 round to shoot, luckily, I
18 didn't, I would have probably blown my dick off. This water buffalo, stiff legged, hops
19 straight back about five or six hops. So, I'm leaning up against and I hear this voice out
20 of the chargers, “Wow man, I ain't never seen anybody scare a fucking water buffalo
21 before.” Needless to say, I was not allowed to forget that one as long as I was with the
22 company.

23 KC: Yeah, I'm sure.

24 JG: We'd be walking down a paddy and, you know, some kid would be out there
25 playing with the water buffalo, and we'd stop and the guy behind me or the guy in front
26 of you was like, “Wow man, look at the nose on that bitch.” I go, “Fuck you.” Every so
27 often when you'd run into other outfits if you were together long enough, you know, you
28 start swapping war stories and there was always the one that ended it. “Man, that ain't
29 shit. Goller knows about your water buffalos.” I actually didn't remember a whole bunch
30 about my time in the infantry. It tended to blur together because we did the same thing
31 everyday. So, it was hard to pick out specific days. I can remember one time I was

1 walking point and as I stepped forward, I felt the ground give underneath and I
2 immediately collapsed forward, but I didn't move my foot. With most minds—as a
3 matter of fact, all the manufactured minds I know of except the bouncing betty, but they
4 actually detonate when the pressure's released, not necessarily when the pressure's
5 applied. So, you tried not to take your foot off if you could. The worst case situation,
6 you're going to lose your foot if you can get flat, but most mines blow up except the
7 bouncing betty, it flows down. So, as soon as I went down—of course, everybody behind
8 me went down so we all lay there for a minute, and nothing happens. My backer was a
9 guy named Dick Batagliano that carried an M-60 machine gun. Dick says, "What is it?"
10 "I don't know, but it's soft whatever it is." So finally, they slow to get up and they move
11 around, and they start probing the bayonets. They probe a square that's about maybe two,
12 two and a half foot square. It was the lid to a punji pit. I'm sure people have explained to
13 you how those work.

14 KC: But if you would, please explain for this interview.

15 JG: Okay, punji pits, they made the top out of bamboo, it was woven bamboo, and
16 it would have bamboo cross struts and the object of the game was you want to make
17 something that's going to stand up but will still break on the weight of an American. And
18 then they would cover it with dirt and foliage and whatever else they could. They would a
19 pit and the pit normally was anywhere from say, two to six feet deep. It would have
20 sloping sides, they would take the bamboo and sharpen it into—they'd split the bamboo,
21 sharpen it into steaks then heat it over a fire until it's carbonized and then it becomes
22 very, very hard. They would usually put steaks on each of the sides pointing down and
23 then down on the bottom they'd have steaks pointing up and the steaks pointing up would
24 be anything from a couple of inches long to thigh depth. Frequently they shit on them to
25 try to increase infection and the idea was that you'd step on this pit, break through, fall
26 down. Most booby traps were designed to wound, not kill because it takes anywhere from
27 none to one or two people to take care of a dead guy. It can take as many as six to take
28 care of a wounded. So, both sides did what they could to wound more than kill because it
29 tied up more resources. But in any event, so we knew it was a punji pit and sometimes
30 they would booby trap the pits and tie a trip wire to the cover so when you'd move the
31 cover it would go up. So, they got down the side with a bayonet and you'd get a flashlight

1 in and look it and there was nothing hooked to it and then they lifted it off and
2 everybody's sitting there looking at it and we all wondered the same thing, why didn't it
3 break? Don't know, don't know to this day. It never gave through. I went ahead and
4 stepped across it and the only thing I can say is, I can actually feel myself do this. I drew
5 the weight of my body up off that foot as I was going over because it never even cracked.
6 I had stuff like that happen to me a number of times where booby traps just didn't go off
7 or didn't trigger. I remember that and I remember another incident that was funny. We're
8 on line, I think we were off Hill 55 in Da Nang, I think, but anyway, we're sweeping into
9 this villa, a bright, clear, sunny day. The company is on line; we always had automatic
10 weapons unless you had some like blimp gun or a 60 mortar or something like that.
11 Anyway, we're sweeping online, and this dude breaks the tree line at about two hundred
12 meters, maybe 175, 200 meters and runs the lengths of a paddy dike parallel to the
13 company. As soon as he clears the bush, we started firing at him. Now, one of the things I
14 remember is you had a green plastic poncho tied around his neck and it's flapping in the
15 breeze behind him, and he would take three or four steps and then stretch out like a
16 cartoon character and three or four steps and stretch out. They estimated through the
17 course of this that we fired ten thousand rounds at this guy. It went on for so long, sixty
18 mortars had set up and they were firing mortar rounds at him, bluet guns are firing at him,
19 three M60s were set up firing at him. He ran the entire length of the company, and
20 nobody hit him. By the time he was, say, halfway down, the guys on the end that had
21 already fired at him; they're all cheering, "Run motherfucker, run." This guy is beating.
22 The old man is so mad he's shaking. He's red and he can't talk. I just happened to be
23 standing there, "How in the fuck could everybody fire at this guy, and nobody hit him?"
24 and I said, "What can you say, sir? It just wasn't his day." They got so mad that they
25 stopped the operation, had to set up rifle ranges, and made us all requalify.

26 KC: Oh, no kidding?

27 JG: Yeah.

28 KC: That's incredible.

29 JG: Vietnam—war in general would teach you about the randomness of death.

30 When it's time to go, it's time to go and if it ain't time to go then it just ain't time to go.

1 KC: Well that takes us to a good point. Speaking of time to go, let's stop there for
2 today.

3 JG: Okay.

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

Interview with Jerry Goller

Session [2] of [3]

Date: February 1, 2010

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Jerry Goller. Today is February 1, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas on the campus of Texas
3 Tech University and Mr. Goller is joining me by telephone again from his home in
4 Murray, Utah. Mr. Goller, just a few seconds ago before we started this session you said
5 to ask you about your little piece of Vietnam. Why don't you go ahead and tell me about
6 that?

7 Jerry Goller: When I got back and subsequently throughout my life people have
8 asked me very broad, general questions about Vietnam. You know, what was it about and
9 so fourth and so on. The reality is, I can tell you about a teeny-tiny part of my Vietnam. It
10 took me awhile to realize that there are probably as many different Vietnams as there are
11 people that went. My experience in the infantry was wildly different than the experience
12 of the people that were in the rear. As I'm sure you're aware, the ratio in Vietnam was
13 one in the field for every fourteen in the rear. So, the vast majority of people that went to
14 Vietnam were not actually in the field. Although they may have been, to a certain degree,
15 in a more frustrating situation. It took awhile to except that. When they first started doing
16 the groups the DAV (Disabled American Veterans), and then the VA (Department of
17 Veteran's Affairs), they found they had to have two different groups, one for combat vets
18 and one for non-combat vets because the combat vets were quite a bit of animosity
19 towards the non-combat vets. Our lives were so wildly different. It took a long time for
20 me to accept the fact that their Vietnam was just as bad for them as mine was for me. It
21 was just different. I remember one time we spent all of our time in the fields for all
22 practical purposes, particularly the early half of my time in the infantry. We had the
23 battalion TAORs, and the companies just roam around and then we had no base. But one
24 time that I can remember, they pulled us back to our battalion rear, 33's rear. So, we're
25 marching into Dong Ha, and we are filthy dirty, we are armed to the teeth. We're so
26 ragged we look like Zapata's Army and the people in the rear were afraid of us. You
27 could see the fear and disgust in their eyes as we walked by because, of course, we stank.
28 It had frequently been weeks since we'd had anything even approaching a bath or a
29 shower and apparently, we had a fairly scary look on our faces most of the time. They

1 could look into our eyes. I had one guy tell me that looking into you guys' eyes are like
2 looking into the eyes of a shark. It just doesn't seem to be anybody in there. So, we're
3 marching along or walking along and we're walking buy this air force compound. They
4 stopped our march so we're kind of standing around and we notice that these zumis are
5 inside their barbed wire doing exercises. I mean, they're working out with weights, it's
6 not formalized exercise. Working out with weights and so on. And that struck us as just
7 one of the funniest things we've ever seen. We're telling them through the wires, say,
8 "Hey, if you guys want a good work out you can help my M-60 or you can carry my
9 radio if you'd like. And it seems so bizarre to see that. And then we got to our battalion
10 rear. This is our own battalion and when we came in, they had secured the mess hall, they
11 had secured the club, and they had secured the flick because the animals are in from the
12 field and that's what everybody perceived this as being. It was starting to get a bit tense
13 in a little compound and our CO (Commanding Officer) who was captain went into the
14 —he was either a light colonel or he was a —I think he was a light colonel that
15 commanded 33. And he told him, he said, "Colonel, you need to open the mess hall and
16 feed these people something, even if it's bologna and cheese sandwiches. You need to
17 open the club, even if it's just warm Kool Aid and you need to get the flick going even if
18 it's training films. You need to get something going for these people." The lieutenant
19 colonel expressed a little surprise and said, "What's a matter, captain? Can't you control
20 these people?" and he said, "I don't control these people, but I'll tell you what, if you
21 don't start doing something with them, they're going to go through your pogs like shit
22 through a goose." And the colonel said, "Should I call the MPs (Military Police)?" and
23 our captain started to laugh, he said, "You don't actually think the MPs will slow these
24 people down, do you? Surely not." And the colonel says, "Well, we should disarm them."
25 And the captain really started laughing then. He says, "Knock yourself out, take your best
26 shot. If you think you can get their weapons away from them, have fun, colonel." So
27 shortly there after they opened the mess hall, they opened a club even though they didn't
28 have anything. They opened the flick and I think they had a gun smoke and a combat
29 rerun. We thought the combat rerun was pretty funny because then we get to find out
30 what we've been doing wrong because they always win in combat.

31 KC: Right.

1 JG: So, we're standing at the chow hall and there's this staff sergeant standing
2 there. He's got his little fluffies and buffies on. You know what fluffies and buffies are?

3 KC: Yes, but please explain it for the purposes of the interview.

4 JG: Okay, fluffies and buffies in an estate side, you have starched utilities, heavily
5 starched utilities and you have spit shine boots. When you're in the rear in the combat
6 zone, you wear clean, washed utilities, but no starch and you just brush shine your boots
7 and they're known as fluffies and buffies. So, he's standing there in his fluffies and
8 buffies and the first guy up was a guy named Battagliano who had an M-60 machine gun
9 on jungles going an assault pouch on it. The staff told him, he said, "Where's your
10 trays?" and I'm standing right behind Battagliano, and I said, "You know, surprisingly
11 enough, staff, we do not carry trays in the field. I know that's a starving piece of
12 information to you, but we just don't." He said, "Well, you can't come in without trays."
13 So, Vick just stands back and if you're familiar with an M-60 machine gun it fires from
14 the open bowl. If the machine gun isn't charged, that means there isn't a round up so you
15 double cock it. You go cock, cock, cock, cock. So Battagliano steps back and charges the
16 M-60 and brings it up and he's just going to blow the staff away. About that time our
17 captain came up, the staff snaps to attention and salutes you and the captain says,
18 "What's the problem, Seth?" and he says, "They don't have any trays." He says, "Of
19 course we don't have any fucking trays. What are you, an idiot? We don't carry trays in
20 the field." And the staff looks a little uncomfortable and he said, "But they have to have
21 trays." And the captain says, "No problem." And turned around to all of us and said, "Get
22 trays." So, we went out and collected trays. We go up to people eating and say, "Excuse
23 me." And grab their tray and their silverware, dump the food out on the ground and get in
24 line and walk down through the GP (General Purpose) tents walking on top of people that
25 were laying in their racks taking their trays off the line up against the walls in the
26 hardbacks and we got our trays, they fed us. The next morning, they made us leave.

27 KC: I'm sure they probably did.

28 JG: Fuck those people. We live like animals. I know people think that combat was
29 the worst part of Vietnam, it wasn't. Combat was probably the easiest part. At least you
30 got to release a little frustration. The things I remember most about being in the infantry
31 in Vietnam was being filthy dirty, starving to death, and absolutely exhausted. We didn't

1 carry anymore food than we absolutely had to, we carried mostly ammunition. So, we got
2 by on one C-Ration meal a day. We got something close to showers maybe every month
3 or two. The longest I ever went was seventy-eight days without taking my utilities off.
4 That was in Operation Georgia. They pulled us into; I think it was Hill 55. No, it was up
5 at the fort at Di Lac, and they told us that we were going to be gone for three days so drop
6 what little pitiful collection of gear we carry and all we were supposed to take with water
7 and ammo and weapons. 78 days later we came back.

8 KC: Wow.

9 JG: So finally, I think it was at three or four weeks they got us an SP pack and a
10 sundry pack which had cigarettes and toothbrushes and writing paper and so forth and so
11 on. They got that stuff in or I guess we just set out for seventy-eight days with nothing.
12 My mother has a collection of postcards that I sent her because of course you can send
13 mail free in Vietnam. That's assuming you get anything to write on. So, she's got the tops
14 of C-ration boxes, torn off a C-rat box and a little stamp drawn in the corner that says,
15 "Fly in" on it and it would be a post card for me because we had nothing to write on, but
16 C-ration boxes. Fortunately, the staff and lieutenants had pens that we could move the
17 pen down the squad writing notes. After I got home, I read all the letters and post cards
18 that I had written to my mother out of Vietnam. Basically, they said, "Hi, I'm still alive,
19 bye." You know, what are you going to write? "Hey mom, we had a great day today. Got
20 pushed a regimen and shit, we must have killed one hundred of them little fuckers." What
21 are you going to write your momma? I was the baby of the family. There was nothing to
22 write my mother about. Everyone of those letters is just words, but they don't actually
23 say anything. So, that was pretty much how things went in the infantry. It was close
24 enough to some unit that we could get in it and get some kind of a shower or sponge bath
25 or something. I remember off of Da Lat River so we could go swimming and wash up
26 and they put us in the river down stream of Da Lat and I'm out there watching turds
27 floating down the river from Da Lat. It's the only time I ever got in a river, washed off,
28 and got out and felt dirtier than before I got in.

29 KC: Well, I can imagine.

30 JG: When we went to the rear, we would try to get C-rations or a long range
31 patrol rations which were freeze dried food and they would force us to eat on the chow

1 line and they couldn't understand why we would do everything to try to avoid eating on
2 the chow line. It's because the chow line would give us the flying, screaming shits. The
3 food we ate was sterile out of C-ration cans.

4 KC: Right.

5 JG: And it wasn't real high in fat, either. We get to the rear and they're always
6 feeding us some greasy fat something and the mess kits probably weren't sterile or the
7 trays and so forth and so on. So, it wasn't at all unusual and it was rare occasions when
8 we went to the rear, and they made us eat in the chow line that we'd have the shits after
9 that for awhile. I can't remember if we ate peanut butter to stop up and cheese to flow or
10 the other way around, but the peanut butter and crackers out of the C-rations or the
11 cheese and crackers out of the C-rations. The cheese always kind of bothered me. The
12 first listed ingredients in the cheese were plastic. I found that disturbing. Plastic shouldn't
13 be an ingredient in food.

14 KC: Let me ask you this question here. You said the combat was perhaps the
15 easiest part of being there. And the reason you said that was because at least you were
16 able to release some frustration. Tell me about these frustrations. Tell me what sort of
17 things were frustrating you and what kind of affect did this have on you as these
18 frustrations built up?

19 JG: Well, of course part of the frustration is being filthy dirty and getting by on
20 three hours of sleep at night, getting one C-ration meal a day. All those are a little
21 annoying, but most of it was—I remember one period, we went for, oh man, it was some
22 like thirty or forty days, fifty days: a significant period of time without ever firing a shot.
23 We never saw anybody, we never fired a shot, but everyday we were inventorying two or
24 three C-bags from snipers and booby traps. So, you're sitting there with all this fire
25 power and you're in the Marine Corps in the richest, most powerful country on earth and
26 you can't stop your friends from dying. It's really, really frustrating. So, when we would
27 finally hook up into a firefight, it would just be ferocious. The Vietnamese did not care,
28 the North Vietnamese didn't particularly like to hook it up with us because we more or
29 less went bizurk whenever we hooked up with them. We would chase them to Hanoi if
30 we had to. We would not let them get away from us. We would not break connection, if
31 at all possible, we wouldn't break contact. I remember one time; I have no idea where it

1 was. I'm also not particularly proud of this, but it's something that happened. We were
2 sweeping and it was the usual Vietnam summer day, 98 degrees, 98 percent humidity.
3 Exhausted, filthy, and we actually got in a running gun battle which was really pretty
4 rare. We're on this running, rolling gun battle and the running gun battle ran through the
5 village and I remember the firefights starting and I remember it being on the other side of
6 the village and kind of snapping in and looking back and we had killed everything
7 between point A and point B. We killed all the VC, all the villagers, the water buffalos,
8 the chickens, everything. There was nothing alive in that village. I don't remember any of
9 it, but I remember thinking, "What the fuck just happened?" And I know what it was, it
10 was the pent up rage from that long period of time taking casualties with no ability to
11 fight back. I suspect that a lot of the civilian casualties was a result of something very
12 similar. It's really hard for civilians, I think, to understand just how frustrating it can be
13 and how everybody can go temporarily a little crazy.

14 KC: So, this rage I hear you saying had kind of blinded you through this firefight.

15 JS: I actually don't remember anything that's happened in the villa. I don't
16 remember where the villa was. I remember the opening firefights and the pursuit and then
17 I remember getting to the other side and the company finally stops and we all turn around
18 and look back to this ruining, you know. I never saw anything like mile high. I mean, it
19 was never planned, we just didn't do that, but every so often something like that villa
20 would happen.

21 KC: You say that you remember the beginning of the firefight and you remember
22 the end. Tell me about what you can remember.

23 JS: Like I said, we were on search and destroy sweeping through, started taking
24 fire. Once we had contact and we locked on them and they're trying to get away from us
25 and we're trying to catch them. It's basically just more or less a running gun battle. For
26 some reason, they went into a villa which was very unusual. Normally they would not go
27 in the villas because holding firefights is very bad PR for both sides. Both sides were
28 trying to ruin the hearts and minds of the people and blowing up villages is not the way to
29 do it for either side. So, they screwed up and we're trying to retrieve through a village,
30 and I guess maybe they thought we'd break contact from them and not pursue them
31 through the village. That was foolish; apparently, they're not hooking up with the Marine

1 Corps very often. So, I can remember seeing the village coming as we're sweeping and
2 then I remember being on the other side and all of a sudden there's just dead silence. It's
3 everybody stop shooting at the same time. And then I remember turning around because
4 we weren't very far outside the village at all. And I remember turning around and looking
5 back and saying, "What the fuck did we just do?" You know, I just, like I said, when I
6 say I don't feel bad about it that's probably not accurate. I wish it hadn't happened, but I
7 understand how it did happen. War isn't very tidy, particularly wars like that one, wars
8 like Iraq. Now, in Iraq they go under their ways to get in among the population. It is very
9 easy to Monday morning quarterback what somebody's doing when you've never, ever
10 been in the situation or been in that one. And when people want to discuss right and
11 wrong, discussing war, it's just the most childish thing I've ever heard. There's just no
12 point in discussing right and wrong when you're talking about a war, it's just a waste of
13 time. The who thing is wrong, you just try to be less wrong on the other side, you know
14 what I mean?

15 KC: That's very interesting, it's very interesting perspective. You also mentioned
16 that you were involved in something called Operation Georgia.

17 JG: Yeah.

18 KC: Tell me about that.

19 JG: That was a brilliant plan by somebody in the headquarters of the Marine
20 Corps.

21 KC: Tell me about that from the top level as you understood it down to your low.

22 JG: Okay, I start off with do you know what a hammer and anvil sweep is?

23 KC: Mm-hmm.

24 JG: I'm sorry?

25 KC: Yes.

26 JG: Okay, we were supposed to be the anvil and there were, I don't know, three or
27 four other companies that were going to be the hammer. So, they're supposed to sweep
28 them into us and then we're going to crush them between the two units when set in.

29 KC: Now, how big was this operation? Was this a battalion-sized operation?
30 Larger, smaller?

1 JG: Well, it was our company and a company of three others so it must have been
2 a battalion size.

3 KC: Okay.

4 JG: I don't actually remember, but I know there were three or four companies
5 involved in it, so it pretty much had to be a battalion-sized operation. The plan on paper
6 was they were going to send thirty-seven Amtrak's up the Da Lat River and they were
7 going to pull out at Da Lat and the grunts were going to hop down off the track and then
8 they were going to do this sweep into us. It may have looked good on paper, although I
9 can't imagine why. The first really big problem with it was the monsoon had just
10 stopped. So, the paddies were about six or eight feet deep in mud. The mud was so deep
11 and so mud that when I stepped off into it on foot, I sank up to my waist. So, they're
12 pulling these amphibious trackers off a solid road into these rice paddies. That was
13 probably an ill thought out plan. Amtrak's on paper can't float as I understand it. And
14 papers are the only place that can't float. I've seen them not float in water, too. When
15 they pull them out in this mud, I saw one Amtrak actually disappear. It sank so far down
16 you just see the bare top of it sticking out. So that was how Operation Georgia got
17 started. With thirty-seven stuck Amtrak's so they're having to send tank retrievers up to
18 pull them out. A platoon of Otters came up. Otters are like snow calves, they were, in
19 fact, the original snow calves. They came up the river and of course they had no problem
20 at all out in the mud. I remember that scene and I don't remember a lot about the
21 operation. I don't think it actually garnered anything; I don't remember any firefights
22 from it. By the time they got the tracks unstuck and got everything rolling I'd rather
23 imagine every VC within five districts do what was going down. I doubt seriously they
24 got anything. Then I remember being back up to Da Lat Fort and we'd managed to get a
25 chicken from some place and there was a lot of country boys in my squad and there was a
26 lot of country boys in the Marine Corps period. It tends to attract them and one of them
27 that sticks in my mind was a guy named Dale Cravens and Dale apparently knew how to
28 prepare any animal known to man. I think he lived off squirrels and rabbits, but we got all
29 of our C-rations together and he cooked them up in a number ten tin can we found, and
30 each watered the chicken and dressed it out. It was quite a meal for us. That's about all I
31 remember about Operation Georgia.

1 KC: But you said for seventy-eight days on this particular operation?

2 JG: Yes, sir.

3 KC: Huh.

4 JG: Our utilities, when your sweat evaporates the salt, of course, stays in the
5 utility. So, our utilities frequently were white across the front and back just from
6 crystallized salt. It had gotten so bad that the nylons were breaking. The nylon wasn't
7 ripping or tearing, it was actually starting to disintegrate. I was walking around with a pair
8 of utilities with the crotch ripped out and my dick floating in the breeze and I'm thinking
9 and "I'm in the Marine Corps, the richest most powerful country on earth and I can't
10 even get a pair of fucking pants." The Marine Corps at that time was a solution in search
11 of a problem, as they had been for a couple hundred years. They tried to operate on the
12 lowest amount of money they could conceivably get away with. They used to return part
13 of their budget every year until they finally passed a law saying they couldn't do that. So,
14 the newest six-by at motor transport was, I think its twenty years old. My first M-14 had
15 no sights on it and when you fired it on automatic the roller flew off the bolt.

16 KC: Wow.

17 JG: I was in-country for I think a month or so before I got my single pair of jungle
18 utilities. We had a little pouch in the middle of our cartridge belt and that's where we
19 carried our cleaning gear. When they activated the twenty-fourth, twenty fifth, and
20 twenty-sixth marine regimen, they sent the 26th over to Vietnam so they show up with all
21 brand new gear. That's when I found out that little pouch in the center was a first aid kit,
22 who knew? I'd never seen one with anything in it. I had a flak jacket with no plates in it.
23 Not that flak jackets were of any value anyway, but mine didn't even have the fiber glass
24 plates in it.

25 KC: That's not going to do you a whole lot of good I would think.

26 JG: Probably not. Flak jackets in general were kind of a joke. They got our point
27 one time, and I was carrying the radio that time and they got our point and I think it was a
28 couple frags on the side of the trail, I don't remember what the actual trap was, but he had
29 his flak jacket on. They had passed the word that we had to keep our flak jacket zipped
30 up and our chin straps clipped in our helmets which means their battle casualties went
31 down, but non-battle casualties due to heat stroke went through the roof, but this guy's up

1 there and the two frags go off and he's laying there. He didn't have a single piece of
2 shrapnel in his trunk or in the top of his head. Both legs were gone, both arms were gone,
3 he was dead, but there wasn't one single piece of shrapnel in his trunk or the top of his
4 head. A flack jacket and a helmet up against most booby traps and a buck and a quarter
5 will get you a cup of coffee at Denny's. The pressure wave's going to kill you. Most of
6 that crap was thought up by people in Washington that had never been in a firefight in
7 their life. They had no idea what was actually going on in the field, annoying.

8 KC: What would you have changed about the types of equipment that you had?

9 JG: What was my what?

10 KC: What would you have changed, if you could have, what would you prefer to
11 go to the field with, how would you have changed the equipment that you had?

12 JG: Rifles with sights on them would have been a good start. When the army shit
13 can, the XM16s out of the experimental models and they got the M-16 A-1, the shit can,
14 the XM16E1, they went to the M16A1, and nobody asked where all those old M-15s
15 went. I can tell you where they went; they went to the Marine Corps and the Vietnamese.
16 We received M-16s with no instructions, no cleaning gear, nothing. We knew nothing
17 about it. A lot of guys died over that decision.

18 KC: What was your opinion of the M-16?

19 JG: I loved it once I learned it. When I was carrying an M-14 I think I managed to
20 carry 14 magazines and it was like carrying a truck around. Granted, I could shoot
21 somebody at 600 meters but that was a limited value in an engagement where your
22 average contact was zero to fifty feet. Having a six hundred meter range, you know, was
23 worthless. You couldn't put an M-14 on full automatic. By the second round you're
24 shooting ducks. You know, King Kong couldn't hold an M-14 down on full automatic.
25 When we got 16s and once, I learned how to use them and got an M-16 A1 and a training
26 kit and understood the weapon, I absolutely loved it. I carried six hundred and forty
27 rounds from my M-16.

28 KC: On a regular basis you carried that many rounds?

29 JG: Yes, there's nothing as embarrassing as being in a firefight and running out of
30 ammunitions, really annoying. Now, I got an M-16 exactly halfway through. So, when I
31 went to a calve team, is when I got my M-16. No, I tell a lie. We got M-16s some

1 relatively short period of time before I left because I remember, I was in the infantry
2 when we got it, but by the time I got to a calve team, we had M-16s and I went into town
3 and stole some banana clips from the Army because the Marine Corps didn't have them
4 and managed to amass 24 magazines, 25 magazines from my magazine vest. So, I carried
5 two, 30 round magazines taped back to back in weapons and then I carried twenty round
6 magazines on a vest I had made. You just can't have too much ammo. It's just physically
7 impossible. You never know what's going to happen and you don't know how long
8 you're going to be there; you could get pinned down. I usually carried nine hand
9 grenades, too. We had three tier hand grenade pouches that hooked onto your cartridge
10 belt and then you had a strap that you could tie down to your leg. So, when I went in the
11 Calve team, I only carried nine frags or I might carry a couple of Willy Pete or White
12 Phosphorous flags and the rest M-26s. I liked both weapons, actually. I wish I hadn't—
13 once I understood that an M-16 should not lubricate, that was the first problem we ran
14 into. We lubricated it just like an M14 because nobody told us different. It had self-
15 lubricating ammo; you didn't have to lubricate it. So, once we found that out, and found
16 out that it was a little touchy about being kept clean, I fell in love with it. I thought it was
17 vastly superior to an AK-47.

18 KC: A lot of people don't say that, why do you say that the M16 was better?

19 JG: Oh, I had a couple of AKs. To start off, an AK is heavy. Now, an AK is an
20 excellent weapon in the hands of indigent personnel which is what it was designed for.
21 The AK was designed to be carried by people that had never seen a motorized vehicle
22 before in their life, including the ones in the Soviet Army. To say it was a real bust is an
23 understatement. I picked up AKs packed full of axel grease and dirt and grass, and it
24 would still fire. It has almost no moving parts in it. I think the bolt face rotates if I
25 remember right. The gas system is solid; the ejector is just a tab on the side of the weapon
26 that rides on a slot ion a bolt. The follower spring looks like it came off a tank. I was
27 suppressed at how the AK I actually carried was a '67 Polish AK and the entire gas
28 system was chrome, it was a well made weapon, but it was heavy, the ammunition was
29 heavy, the ammunition didn't have a whole lot of lock down power, and it had very
30 limited range and very limited accuracy. It was basically a hose for close combat. An M-
31 16 fired much faster. You shoot somebody with an M-16 and—I shot a lieutenant one

1 afternoon, a North Vietnamese Lieutenant and I shot him in the wrist and killed him. The
2 round deflected off the join of his wrist, went up his arm sideways, it split his arm open,
3 the bones in his arm looked like a Tom's peanut butter log that someone had taken a
4 hammer to. It deflected off of his shoulder joint and then it went sideways across his left
5 shoulder and then out through his neck and severed both arteries on the way out and he
6 blood out in just a matter of seconds. That was from one shot from an M16 on a wrist.

7 KC: Now, were you able to check out the damage that this had done to this
8 particular Vietnamese Officer?

9 JG: Oh yeah, I mean his left arm was split open; I shot him in the left wrist. His
10 left arm was split open and there was a big opening on the side of his neck, the right side
11 of his neck and you could see the path that the round took and tore the shit out of him.
12 Contrary to what people said, an M-16 round is not A-symmetrical, that wouldn't work.
13 It doesn't tumble in flight; you wouldn't be able to hit a barn with a round that tumbled in
14 flight. What the round was, was it was A-symmetrical longitudinal. In other words, the
15 round was long than it was wide. Most rounds are relatively close to being about as wide
16 as they are long, particularly assault rifle rounds, pistol rounds, submachine gun rounds,
17 and the little CTC bullet was significantly longer than it was wide. So, while it flew true
18 in flight, once it's hit something, it had a tendency to go ape shit when it hit anything
19 solid. Now, the downside was it could hit a twig, a branch, a leaf and it may deflect off
20 course. I also lost my entire fire team one afternoon out of a calve team while I was in
21 town at the PX because there were only two guys in my fire team and one of them was
22 sitting there cleaning his rifle on a rack and the other one was sitting beside him and the
23 guy that was turning his M-16, snapped it back together and pulled the trigger and there
24 was a round in the chamber.

25 KC: Oh no.

26 JG: So, he shot the guy sitting next to him right through the stomach. So, he goes
27 to the brig or goes up for court marshal and the other guy goes to Sick Bay, so I lost my
28 entire fire team. But at Sick Bay all they did was tape a four by four on each side of this
29 guy's stomach because he had a little 223 hole on one side and a little 223 hole in the
30 other, it didn't hit anything. It didn't hit any cartilage, it didn't hit any bone, and it didn't

1 hit anything solid. So, they basically put drains in on both sides and taped it up with four
2 by fours and sent him back.

3 KC: That's really interesting; I've never heard anything like that before.

4 JG: Oh, if you want to get shot an M-16 is either the best or worst thing to get
5 shot with. Usually it's the worst, that kid was incredibly lucky that it didn't hit anything.

6 KC: Now was this the two other marines I assume?

7 JG: M-hmm, yeah.

8 KC: Okay, alright. You said you were part of a calve team; I didn't know if you
9 were a part of the indigenous personnel.

10 JG: No, they were not, they were my fire team, and it was a double calve.

11 KC: Okay, take me back through some more of your time here with the 33 here at
12 Kilo Company. Any other of these engagements that you were on or any of the sweeps
13 that you were on, anything that stands out to you?

14 JG: I want to say one thing first then remind me to get back to mother's ridge.

15 KC: Okay.

16 JG: One of the things that I have no heard mentioned that stands out very clearly
17 in my mind is the two worst things in Vietnam were bamboo and elephant grass. Now,
18 bamboo, I'm sure everybody's familiar with what that is, but they've never seen it
19 growing free or growing as a hedge row. When it's grown like that, it is literally side by
20 side and it can be a mile deep if it's running free. It's almost impenetrable. And
21 something interesting about it, it has thorns. I had no idea that barbed wire had thorns or
22 that the bamboo had thorns until I got to Vietnam. And they're not like rose bush thorns,
23 they're like little talons, tougher than a boot. I've had bamboo tear my flack jacket; rip it
24 open when the plates fell out. We would be hacking through this crap with dull rusty
25 machetes, and we'd have to change the point about every ten minutes because it was just
26 too tiring trying to chop through it, it was horrible. Elephant grass, I always assumed they
27 called it elephant grass because it was tall enough to hide an elephant in, would run
28 anywhere from two or three feet high to fourteen feet high. It's long blades of grass,
29 they're about half to three quarters of an inch wide, but the interesting part about them is
30 the edges are serrated and they are like razor blades. My arms to this day, if you look on
31 the outside of my arms, there's just hundreds of little, tiny white scars, criss cross scars

1 across the outside of my arms. Its cuts from elephant grass. I had elephant grass cut
2 through a pair of jungle utilities one afternoon and opened my right pant leg up. So, for
3 the rest of the day, it sat there and hacked on my knee. By the time we set in at night, you
4 could see the bone in my right knee. It had cut it up so bad, of course, sweat's running
5 into it. You learned to really hate elephant grass plus it was real easy for them to hide in it
6 or put booby traps in it. As far as an operation concerned, when we were up at—we were
7 right on mother's ridge—we were at the rock pile. We were running operations out of the
8 rock pile, and we were running up to a ridgeline off the rock pile that we called Mother's
9 Ridge. And this thing is almost straight up. So, we would go out, go up this ridge—and
10 I'll tell you about this one time that stuck particularly in my mind. We're going up this
11 ridge—this is the first time we went up it and by the time we get to the last, I'd say, third
12 of it, it was almost straight up. So, we're trying to scramble up with this and I was in 3rd
13 Platoon, and I think 4th Platoon was on point if I remember right. They got up over the
14 top and immediately over the top, was a tin bunker complex with interlocking bands of
15 fire that had been there since the Second World War. You could be standing on them and
16 you wouldn't know it. So, they pretty much chewed the 3rd Platoon up. We got everybody
17 back—no we didn't. We didn't get the wounded back yet. So, we're trapped on the side
18 of this ridge and this lieutenant stands up and says, "Come on men, we've got to take
19 those bunkers." And I'm thinking, Bunch of weak shit, it ain't gonna be you. I saw the
20 most amazingly stupid thing ever done in my life. This guy stands up, tears off his flack
21 jacket, drops his cartridge belt, picks up two, M-26 frags and says, "I'll get him, sir."
22 Pulls the pins and runs to the first bunker. He throws a frag in the bunker and kills
23 everybody in it because they were just as surprised as we were. He runs to the second
24 bunker, got his hand caught to throw the frag in a bunker and somebody finally woke up
25 and stitched him from crotch to head. So, he falls down and then, of course, dropped the
26 frag and it went off. On the wildly off chance, he wasn't dead when he hit the ground, he
27 was damn sure dead after the hand grenade went off. The part that annoyed the shit out of
28 me is that that idiot got a Silver Star for that, awarded posthumously. Now, I'm sure his
29 wife and two kids took great comfort in that Silver Star. I thought he should have gotten a
30 BCD (Bad Conduct Discharge). It was just an amazingly stupid thing to do. That's
31 somebody that's seen about one too many John Wayne movies. It just doesn't work that

1 way, but anyway, we got this interlocking bunker set up and it's kind of really screwed so
2 we try to back, back down and now they're firing down on us and the slope going up to
3 Mother's Ridge was kind of concave. So, we reached a point where they couldn't actually
4 hit us, but we couldn't go down and we couldn't go forward because they had a number
5 of machine guns. We're kind of through so we're going to lay there. They couldn't fire
6 artillery because this particular location was in the shadow of something so they couldn't
7 get arty in there. By the time we figured out we ain't going up and we're not coming
8 down, it was starting to get dark, so we just laid in for the night. We were on such steep
9 terrain, I had to hook my cartridge belt over a root to go to sleep, otherwise I would have
10 slid off the ridge. So, we're laying there and the lieutenant on the radio is just right next
11 to me practically. I wasn't carrying a radio, but I could hear it. The CO of my company,
12 my 33 looked and sounded just like Hos Cartwright, it was scary. Making sounds just like
13 Hos Cartwright. So, I hear him on the radio, and I think our call sign name was pebble.
14 So, he would be pebble Mike 6 or Pebble Mike actual, either one. Pebble Mike just meant
15 the radio operator. So, I hear him over the radio, "Kilo Pebble Kilo, this here Pebble
16 Mike. I got my pounder standing by. You give me the word and I'll pound the devil out
17 of that ridge." Pounders was the brevity code for tanks. We're about, oh, I don't know ten
18 miles maybe from the rock pile across this valley. I'm thinking, "Oh shit, please don't let
19 him fire." Well, it finally got sticky enough for us because they kept trying to probe us
20 that the old man told mike to go ahead and fire. They were firing HEP, high explosive
21 plastic tracers. We were far enough away you could see the other flash from the tank and
22 then you'd see this giant ass tracer coming across the valley and it's about halfway across
23 the valley when you would hear the explosive tank firing and looking at it, it looked like
24 a round was coming right at you. And at the last second, it could kind of veer off because
25 they were firing right outside our lines. This is the whole thing, all I'm thinking of is,
26 "Gee, I hope nobody slept through tank school, I hope we get the best gunners in their
27 class." But they never hit us, and they kept them from us all night long. And then the next
28 day we got out of there. We went up Mother's Ridge three times that I can remember in
29 the time we were in the rock pile. We would go up the rock pile, get in a firefight, shoot it
30 out, kill a few people, and then come back home. Three or four weeks later we'd do it
31 again. It got to the point I was carrying the radio most of the time on that one. It got to the

1 point where when I wanted to call in artillery, I didn't even have to check a map. I had
2 memorized—we used short shackles which were an easy field code as apposed to long
3 shackles which required the code. So, I had memorized all the prominent training features
4 on Mother's Ridge, and I could call in the short shackles to artillery, to call in artillery
5 any place on that ridge without looking at a map. We've been up there so many times.
6 We're up there and it was the usual shit. We get up there. By now, we've blown the shit
7 out of the bunkers, they were not tactical anymore. We'd have the usual hook it up and
8 we had some casualties, and they had a bunch dead. So, I'm sitting there, and I look up at
9 the lieutenant and I said, "Sir, I've got an idea." And he looks at me and gives me his
10 usual sour look. I was just radio operator at that point, so we actually spent a fair amount
11 of time together. He said, "Yes?" "Now that we're up here, why don't we either keep
12 these fuckers or let them have the god damn thing. This coming up here every three or
13 four weeks to take this ridge is kind of getting fucking old, you know?" and he gets me
14 this disparaging look and just shakes his head, and he says, "You just don't get it, do you
15 Goller?" and I said, "Oh, no argument there, sir, I don't have a fucking clue." He says,
16 "We don't care about this ridge, we don't give a shit about this ridge. We just want a
17 firefight. You can't have a body count without a firefight." So that's what we did all the
18 time. We rolled around looking for a firefight so we could have a body count. And they
19 all counted. Men, women, children; it didn't make any difference how old they were, as
20 long as they were armed. I shot it out with a fourteen year old girl one afternoon.

21 KC: Really?

22 JG: Yeah, she had a French Mat 49 submachine gun, and I had a LAW (Light
23 Anti-Tank Weapon). I only fired once, but I won.

24 KC: Right.

25 JG: I hit her in the chest with a LAW, but they wonder why we came back with
26 problems. When your soul object everyday is to just try to find somebody to kill, it kind
27 of wares on you after awhile, you know? It's one of the reasons why I have so much
28 trouble with people here in this country today. Now, I've learned, I'm not a pacifist by
29 any stretch of the imagination, I've learned that there are certain classes of people that
30 unfortunately you just can't deal with on any other level. You can't reason with them
31 because it's not reasonable. About the only thing you can do is just kill them and I

1 understand that. What I want the people of this country to be goddamn sure they know
2 what they're doing before they send us into a war because they've got no clue of what the
3 people fighting the war are going to pay for that war. It's real easy to say, "Ah, we're
4 going to go over and kick their ass." "Which is wee shit, pale face, you're not going, and
5 neither is your son or daughter, and we all know it." It's hard on the people that fight the
6 wars. Killing people all the time tends to kind of warp your perceptions. Basically, for
7 eighteen years, your taught that there's a god and that there's right and wrong and there's
8 something's you're not supposed to do and pretty much at the top of that list is you're not
9 supposed to kill people. It's just considered poor form. So, one day this guy from the
10 government comes in and says, "Okay, new rules, not only can you kill all you want, if
11 you kill a lot of them in a really cool way, we'll give you pretty medals to wear." And it
12 goes for a year or two years or three years and then one day the guy from the government
13 comes back in and says, "Okay, original rules." The problem is in the intervening time,
14 you've discovered a number of interesting things like there is no god. That you can shoot
15 somebody and absolutely nothing will happen. And that's possible; the only thing that
16 will happen is you get a medal for it. It's kind of an eye opening experience for a young
17 man. War was pretty unusual for me. I could never remember us having any wars back in
18 Oklahoma. It was a pretty novel experience.

19 KC: Would it be safe to say then that your experiences there in the war and
20 Vietnam affected your religious beliefs?

21 JG: Affected my what?

22 KC: Your religious beliefs?

23 JG: No, I was an atheist long before I went, but any doubt I may have had was
24 certainly confirmed by Vietnam. There's nothing that will piss you off more than holding
25 a buddy of yours who's dying and he's screaming "God please save me." Unfortunately,
26 there isn't one, so he went ahead and died. That shit about there are not atheists in fox
27 holes, what a joke, what a joke of course there is. I never bothered to pray, obviously, I
28 was an atheist, but even if I wasn't, I didn't have time to pray, I was too busy staying
29 alive. I never saw it work. When I was in the calve team CO with Lt Antonio Loretta at
30 Poppa 5, he was the Poppa Company Calve commander; he was a mustanger and went
31 from gunner to 2nd Lieutenant. He taught Vietnamese at the Vietnamese Language

1 School, so we were very lucky; he was extremely conversion in Vietnamese. Of course,
2 Antonio Loretta was not a Baptist, he was a good Catholic boy, I was his bodyguard.
3 He's the one that gave me the nickname (inaudible). So, he's down in Arville from Cam
4 Lo, that's where our headquarters were and he's down and docked in where our Poppa 5
5 compound was and we're sitting at this pop shop right at the edge of the villa drinking
6 beer. There was this road called 558 and 558 was the local mine repository. When they
7 couldn't think of any place—we actually thought at one point that they were just storing
8 mines and 558s and putting them some place else. It got so bad we had to close the road;
9 we just couldn't keep it open. So, we're sitting there drinking beer, me and Loretta and
10 there was a Catholic priest that came down from Cam Lo once a month to give
11 communion at Dac Quyen. So, the priest is coming out of Dac Quyen and he's driving
12 one of those slab-sided renodes and he had gone 558 and I went down there and said,
13 "That son of bitch didn't go into 558, is he?" and Loretta gave me kind of a dark look and
14 he says, "He'll be okay." And I said, "Don't bet on that." And he said, "He's a priest, I'm
15 sure God will watch out for him." And I said, "I'd feel a lot better if I'd seen god on My
16 Lai." Loretta didn't seem to think it was that funny, I thought it was. Of course, naturally
17 the son of bitch makes it all the way to Cam Lo without a problem and I told Loretta,
18 "You and I both know the only reason that Renoe made it to Cam Lo is those are all four
19 hundred pound box mines and they're separate tanks. They don't want to blow up a
20 Renoe, they want to blow up a tank. But no, it merely confirmed my beliefs. I never saw
21 a single thing in Vietnam to indicate there was a god. And if there is one, he's nuts. I saw
22 too many things that disproved it shall we say. Your turn.

23 KC: Alright, now you've mentioned the calve teams and I know this was a big
24 part of your experience there. Before we get you to these calve teams, what I'd like you
25 to do is tell me about your, I guess, first thirteen month tour winding down. Were you
26 paying attention to the date you were going home? Supposed to go home?

27 JG: Uh, not really. I never put the calendar on my helmet. I remember when I
28 joined in my boot camp team there was this huge black guy named Henry James and
29 Henry James had done a tour in the Navy and then joined the Marine Corps. So, James
30 pretty much knew what time it was, certainly more than I did. For some reason, he took
31 me under his wing. I have no idea why. We both end up at Kilo 33. James, being the

1 intelligent lad that he is, worked his way into being the company driver. So, he stayed in
2 the rear with the calve and I always stayed out in the field. Our end date was coming up
3 and I'm sure you know the Marine Corps tour was thirteen months.

4 KC: Right.

5 JG: Everybody else did twelve and the marine corps did thirteen. I saw a lot of
6 people killed in that thirteenth month. Anyway, it's getting close to our—as a matter of
7 fact, I think our RTD coming up. So, James actually drives out to where we were to get
8 me. He was going to get me a ride back at the company jeep and he says, "Come on,
9 Goller, it's time to go home." And I said, "Eh, I don't know, James. I think I'm going to
10 stay." He says, "You're going to what?" "Yeah, I think I'm going to extend my tour." He
11 said, "You're going to get your white ass killed out here." I said, "Nah, I'll okay." So, he
12 went on back and a couple of weeks later I got a letter from my dad, and he said, "Didn't
13 you have a friend named Cpl. Henry James? Gee, I hope this isn't him." James was from
14 Little Rock, Arkansas which was how my dad heard about it. Charleston and Little Rock,
15 big cities are near each other. James was at the airport, and he was walking across the
16 parking lot with his wife, and they got hit by a ten ton sky shift truck and it killed both of
17 them. The only the I could think of, "Ain't this a fucking bitch, man. You cannot get out
18 of this place alive. There's just no way out of this shit hole alive. You know, life is full of
19 these little surprises. Anyway, I went ahead and extended my tour and you're probably
20 going to want to know why and I'm not sure I can give you an intelligent answer as to
21 why.

22 KC: Well, you know that I've got to ask that question.

23 JG: Yeah, I know (laughing).

24 KC: Can you come to an approximate answer for me?

25 JG: Yeah, it's going to sound a little crazy, but maybe not. Vietnam had become
26 normal to me.

27 KC: Explain that.

28 JG: Vietnam was easily—it was easy to understand. I knew exactly what to
29 expect, I knew what to expect from the people around me, I knew what the expected from
30 me. If was a job I was very comfortable in which sounds crazy, but the world had become

1 almost dreamlike, you know, almost like it was a fantasy. I'm sure we refer to the United
2 States as the world.

3 KC: Right.

4 JG: The world had taken on a somewhat unreal quality, so I stayed because I
5 honestly suspect I was afraid to go home. But in any event, I extended my tour.

6 KC: You've gone through this pretty quickly here and I'm going to ask you about
7 this.

8 JG: You know what tomorrow is, don't you?

9 KC: Ground hog day, over and over again.

10 JG: Tomorrow's the second of February, I've had enough trouble over this. We'll
11 go ahead and go over it, what do you want to know?

12 KC: You said that you may have been just afraid to go back home, back to the
13 world, back to the US where things were different, where things were more difficult in
14 some ways the more you were in your mind at this time. What would have made you fear
15 coming back to the states?

16 JG: Well, if you remember I went to Vietnam because I didn't know what else to
17 do. There would have been a lot of expectations from me or for me, I guess. People
18 would have expected me to do something, you know, like go to school, get a job, do
19 something and I didn't know anymore about what I wanted to do with my life than I did
20 the day I left. Vietnam was an honorable, respectable job. It was just a way to continue to
21 put my life on hold. And it had become quite normal for me. I didn't realize how normal
22 it was going to become for me. I became a little too normal before it was all over.

23 KC: Well, let me ask you this, what about this—maybe I should ask it this way,
24 what sort of things have to happen for this to become normal for you?

25 JG: You just got to be there awhile, I guess. I suspect if the truth was, that I burnt
26 out in the first couple three weeks and I just became numb. Like I said, I don't remember
27 fear, unless they were actually shooting at me. I just don't remember much of anything; I
28 was just pretty much indifferent to everything. I just rocked along. If you'd like, I just
29 thought of something that might give you a little bit of an idea. I'm going to read to you
30 the closest thing to a poem I ever wrote.

31 KC: Okay.

1 JG: This was written at the start of the first Gulf War which was kind of stirring it
2 all back up for me. It's called *Monsters in the Dark*. "When I was growing up as a child, I
3 was deathly afraid of the dark. I was afraid of the monsters that lived in the dark. I went
4 to Vietnam when I was eighteen going on twelve. No one was more poorly equipped to
5 be in the marine infantry than I was, I was still afraid of the dark. In Vietnam I found the
6 monsters in the dark. They were real and they wanted to kill me. I was very afraid of the
7 dark, but you can only maintain terror so long. Eventually it becomes normal. After a few
8 months of walking point I found that I was no longer afraid of the dark. I was surprised to
9 find that the dark had become my friend. It hit me and it protected me, and I grew to like
10 the dark. After a few years my transfer to a calve team, I found that I no longer liked the
11 dark, I loved the dark. The dark was no longer my friend it was my lover, we played
12 together. I didn't even think about the monsters in the dark. I wasn't afraid of the dark, I
13 made other people afraid of the dark. The dark and I worked well together. We would rise
14 up from nowhere with a heart-stopping suddenness and take their life before they even
15 knew we were there. I'd become one of the monsters in the dark."

16 KC: Wow.

17 JG: Interesting, eh?

18 KC: Yeah, that's really some powerful stuff there.

19 JG: That place enlisted some powerful emotions.

20 KC: I guess so, I guess so. What did it make you feel like to write this?

21 JG: Oh, I was pretty frustrated at the start of the Gulf War, the first one.

22 KC: Why?

23 JG: Little did I know that there was more coming that would make me even more
24 frustrated because it seemed like they really hadn't learned anything. This country goes to
25 war about every twenty years, pretty much like clock-work. One of the dangers of an all
26 voluntary military is that the society has become dethatched from the military and the
27 military has become detached from the society. I think it's a terrible, terrible mistake.
28 Now, it is no question that it's produced a much better military, we have a professional
29 military. Another word for that is mercenaries. They are extremely well trained, and they
30 have, for all practical purposes, a significant percentage of them made a career of war for
31 the United States. I'm not sure how good a thing that is. We ended up with a very good

1 military, but it also makes it much easier to send these people off to war because in the
2 back of everybody's mind is, "Hey, they signed up for it, they're volunteers, they're an
3 all voluntary military. They'll do whatever we want." Just be sure that chicken never
4 comes home to roost on you because if our military ever turns on us, we're fucked. I'm
5 sure you're aware, but originally, there was no federal army, there was no mechanics for
6 a federal army. The founding fathers specifically didn't want us to have a federal army
7 because the central government's army, via the king or whatever, was almost invariably
8 the instrument used to oppress the people. So, they had this idea of a citizen army and it
9 worked pretty well for two hundred and something years. Now granted, it made for a
10 relatively slow reaction time. The United States had no standing piece time army until
11 after the First World War. We had an army out west, but that was during the Indian Wars,
12 it was a war, but between wars, the military would go down to almost nothing. The only
13 thing that kept any size at all was the Navy and the Navy as less about war than it was
14 foreign policy for the United States historically. So, we had an army that was full of us,
15 you know, we had this little corps group of lifers that could provide the senior officers
16 and senior NCOs as we built up and trained this army, but of course, the war was also a
17 lot less sophisticated back then. After the First World War, for the first time in our
18 history, we maintained a standing peacetime army. It wasn't nearly as big as the one we
19 had in the First World War, but it was significantly larger, and it existed which it never
20 had before. After World War II, the military stayed relatively large and now, although it
21 is physically smaller than it was during World War II, it's vastly more deadly. A modern
22 day platoon could probably take on a World War II battalion and win. We had
23 unbelievable fire power. So, detaching this from the military is probably not a good idea
24 and I have lost my train of thought and have absolutely no idea what we're talking about.

25 KC: (Laughing) That's okay, that's okay. You were briefly reading me this poem
26 and talked about some of the memories and the feelings that brought this about.

27 JG: Oh yeah. What was your question that I was giving that long rambling answer
28 to?

29 KC: Well, no, it was along the same lines, certainly along the same lines. Well let
30 me ask you this, you say you're not keeping track of the days that you've got left. You're
31 far too busy, it's becoming normal for you here even though you're DEROS (Date

1 Expected Return from Overseas) is approaching, you are thinking about reupping, you're
2 thinking about staying again.

3 JG: Yeah, so I went ahead and extended my tour.

4 KC: When you did this, did this have sort of affect on your family? Were they
5 apprised to this? Did they know you were going to re-up?

6 JG: No, this sounds terrible, but I'd already become pretty much divorced from
7 my family. They weren't divorced from me, don't misunderstand, but they had become
8 so abstract that I remember there was one period of time that I believe I was in the
9 infantry when my CO comes down and says, "Write your parents." "Excuse me, sir?" he
10 said, "Write you parents, the contacted the Red Cross, they're worried about you." I said,
11 "I just wrote them the other day." And he said, "You haven't written them in three
12 months." Had no concept of time then and it really never crossed my mind it had been
13 three months since I'd written my parents. My parents hardly ever knew where I was.
14 Although, they did know I was a Cam Lo. The Marine Corps reported me dead three
15 times through the course of my tour in Vietnam.

16 KC: Forwarded to your family as being dead?

17 JG: Yeah, yeah. The first time, my dad had just gotten home from work and he's
18 sitting there in the living room and this green sedan pulls up in the driveway and a staff
19 sergeant gets out of one side and an officer gets out of the other and his stomach went
20 through the floor. My dad was an ex-Marine, and he knew what it meant. My mother and
21 I, by the way were extremely close. So, he answers the door and the lieutenant's standing
22 there and he says, "I'm sorry, sir. It's my duty to report that your son was killed in action
23 in operations outside of Da Nang." My mother walked up about right then and my dad's
24 just going, "Oh god, what are we going to tell her." She walked up and says, "What is it,
25 Jimmy?" and the Lieutenant said the same thing to her and looked at him and says, "He's
26 not dead, you guys just don't know it yet." Turned around and walked off. Everybody's
27 going, "Well, you know, she can't deal with the grief." No, I wasn't dead. I'd been
28 reported dead, but my mother knew I wasn't.

29 KC: What engagement were you reported dead?

30 JG: I don't even remember. I know I was reported dead out of Cam Lo. That was
31 kind of scary for her. My mother and I had an almost psychic bond which sounds silly,

1 but I will give you two examples of it. The first one was, my mother, in the middle of the
2 night woke up in hysterics. She was screaming and she told my dad, “He’s hurt, and he’s
3 scared.” And he finally got her calmed back down. I think they had to call a doctor and
4 sedate her. So, my dad wrote me about it, and I get the letter a couple weeks later and he
5 gave me the date and the time, and I couldn’t figure out what the hell, why’d she’d done
6 it. And then it dawned on me the date in time difference between Vietnam and
7 Oklahoma. She had woken up within fifteen minutes of me getting the wounded the first
8 time.

9 KC: From those early days in-country.

10 JG: Yep. You know, nobody could possibly imagine I would get wounded like
11 my second or third day in the field, she knew. And then the night of Cam Lo, the same
12 thing happened although dad couldn’t get her calmed down and she told him, she said,
13 “Jimmy, it’s bad. It’s bad, it’s the worst he’s ever seen. I don’t even know if he’s alive or
14 not. I think he is.” The next day I think it was or the day after they came with a letter and
15 said I was dead and she said, “No, he’s not dead.” She was very ill and when I came
16 home—every time I extended my tour I went to Oklahoma, I didn’t take any of the world
17 stuff I could have done, I just went home. My mother had been in intensive care, and they
18 had been giving her powerful drugs. She was seeing devils coming out of the ceiling and
19 the whole nine yards and hallucinating tremendously. Nobody knew I was coming home,
20 but they knew I extended my tour. I think this was my first time that I extended. So, the
21 first time I called them was from Travis in California, Travis Air Force Base. I called
22 home and nobody answered so I knew my mother had to be in the hospital because my
23 parents just don’t go out. So, I call my grandmother and she told me that my mom was in
24 the hospital, but my grandmother knew immediately. She said, “Where are you?” and I
25 said, “I’m in California.” And she said, “We have been trying to get a hold of you
26 everywhere. The Red Cross can’t find you.” And they couldn’t find me because I was in
27 transit. So, I call back to the house again and she said, “Your dad just left the hospital, he
28 should be home by now.” So, I called, and my dad actually talks to me for about ten
29 minutes before it dawns on him that he’s talking to me on the phone. And that’s when I
30 told him I extended my tour which he wasn’t overly happy about, but he said, “Well, you
31 know, get here as quick as you can.” I said, “I’m going as fast as I can fly.” So, when I

1 got there, I went straight to the hospital, I'm still in greens. As we're driving to the
2 hospital my dad's telling me, "Don't get upset, she doesn't know anybody, she doesn't
3 know me, she's hallucinating, she hasn't been coherent for weeks." I walk in the room
4 and she's laying there, and she looks up, smiles at me and says, "Hi honey. I've been
5 telling them you're on your way home and nobody will listen to me."

6 KC: Oh wow.

7 JG: She had been telling them that I was on my way home, and they just thought
8 it was part of the hallucinations. So, she's laying there, and she says, "I've been having
9 the strangest dreams, maybe you can explain them to me." And she told me the first
10 dream and what she was describing was our firebase at Ca Lu.

11 KC: Really?

12 JG: And no civilian could know what a fire base looked like because they didn't
13 have Vietnam movies then and they don't look like anything out of a World War II
14 movie. And then the second thing is she says, "Now this is really intriguing." And she
15 kind of laughs and she says, "But this is what I was dreaming." She said, "I dreamed that
16 you were in a shipping box, you were with a bunch of your friends, and you were in a
17 huge shipping crate that had addresses all over it." The hair on the back of my neck came
18 up. The transit facility at Da Nang was built out of huge packing cases and they had the
19 shipping information stencils on them. You know, I mean packing cases bigger than
20 trucks and that's what that building was made out of. Now, is that weird or what?

21 KC: That's incredible, that's really wild.

22 JG: I mean, I was stunned. I had gotten pretty used to my mother not being close,
23 but that one floored even me because it made no sense to her. Well, nobody could know
24 they made a transit facility out of packing cases. You know, they just knocked the
25 packing cases down and took them as panels, complete panels and built a building out of
26 them, weird.

27 KC: You've come home, and your mother is in the hospital and you're informing
28 them that you have re-up, but you're going to be home for what, thirty days?

29 JG: Yeah.

1 KC: Okay, what do you do for those thirty days and how do you deal with other
2 people in the world around you when you're back home in the world for thirty days
3 knowing that you have to leave?

4 JG: Of course, I only had three or four goals in life while I was home. I had no
5 real reason to believe I was going to survive Vietnam. So, my main goals while I was
6 home was eat, drink, shower, and fuck, not necessarily in that order. So, I had a date the
7 second night I was home and I made about fifteen minutes, and I had to pull over and she
8 had to drive for me. I had not seen anything brighter than a candle for over a year. The
9 car headlights gave me a splitting headache I couldn't see. A few nights later, I had
10 another date and I had gone out. I got my car, and I just knew I had forgotten something.
11 I couldn't start the car; I had to have whatever it was I had forgotten. I'm checking, I've
12 got my billfold, I've got my drivers license, I've got money, I've got keys to the car, I've
13 got cigarettes, I got a lighter, I got everything. And then it dawns on me what felt weird. I
14 didn't have a nine-pound helmet on my head, and I was unarmed. That made me so
15 nervous that the next day I went down and bought a 12-gauge pump shot gun, an M-1
16 carbine, and a .45 pistol. And I kept them in the jeep with me. I had been armed since I
17 joined the Marine Corps pretty much and I could not go out without a weapon. It was just
18 something I simply couldn't do. I remember one night I was dating a go-go dancer and
19 we were walking back to her apartment, and we were just walking down the street and
20 she finally says, "What are you doing?" and it dawned on me, she was walking on the
21 sidewalk, but I wasn't. I was over on the grass beside the sidewalk, and I had slowed
22 down and I was watching my feet and then looking around. I was walking point. A little
23 later we went to the movies, and we saw *Bonnie and Clyde* which what it was playing at
24 the time, obviously. So, we're walking along, and it was hard to go to a theater. As a
25 matter of fact, I didn't go to another movie for fifteen years, I think. But in any event,
26 we're in this movie and have you seen the movie?

27 KC: *Bonnie and Clyde*, yes.

28 JG: Okay, if you remember the last scenes where they shoot the shit out of them, if
29 there had been a lot more blood and miscellaneous pieces flying off, they'd have had it. It
30 was surprisingly realistic except for not enough blood and no pieces blowing off. So,
31 there's this big scene and it's dead quiet in the theater, you could hear a pin drop. And I

1 turned to her and say, "Now you know what I do for a living." Of course, everybody
2 looks at me kind of horrified. I don't know why I said it. It caused a little bit of a flash.

3 KC: So, what I hear you saying is that there was some difficulty there making the
4 adjustment back to civilian life.

5 JG: I was ready to go back by the time my leave was over. I was ready to go back.
6 I was ready to go back and get some piece and quiet because I accomplished all four
7 goals while I was home to excess.

8 KC: Alright, when you get back to Vietnam, you're no longer going to be part of the
9 infantry, but you're going to join a CAP program, the Combined Arms Program the
10 Marine Corps used with great success there in I Corps. Why did you join a CAP unit?

11 JG: They had hot showers.

12 KC: And that was enough?

13 JG: Actually (laughing), it was two reasons, that was the second reason. Also, do
14 not underestimate the desire ability of having on demand hot showers.

15 KC: I'm sure.

16 JG: In the compounds they'd take two, fifty-five gallon drums and cut them open
17 on one end and then wove them together length wise and cut a whole in it at that top. You
18 knock a faucet in, and do you know what an immersion burner is? Immersion burner
19 burns kerosene, and we had an immersion burner for it so one of the last duties for the
20 night watch going off was to light the immersion burner so we could have hot showers.
21 Now, you talk about shitting until the cotton. They have hot showers pretty much
22 invaluable. The main reason I went to was I kind of wanted to do something positive for a
23 change. We were the last gun company to withstand guard at the airbase at Da Nang after
24 the military police took it over. While we were there, I had one of the most demeaning
25 jobs I've ever had in my life. I rode shotgun on a garbage truck. They would take the
26 garbage off the base out to this big dump and the dump would be crawling with kids and
27 women to get the edible garbage. As this navy dump truck would back up to the dump
28 and start to dump, the kids would be climbing up the garbage up into the dump on the
29 truck and I was there to protect him incase they overwhelmed him. And I thought, "What
30 a fucking shit hole that the garbage trucks have to have shot guns on them." And Vietnam
31 was just a sea of misery. I've never seen so much misery in my life, it was just unending.

1 I saw kids with open soars on their heads that were ringed with green fungus. I saw kids
2 that were oval shaped legs and bandy legged from rickets. Rickets is not something you
3 see a lot of in the United States. It cracks me up when they talk about poor in the country.
4 This country has no concept of what poor is. When's the last time you saw somebody just
5 keel over and die in the street from malnutrition, it doesn't happen that often here? You
6 got to kind of work at it to die in this country. The kids in particular warred on me pretty
7 hard so I wrote my dad and had him send me—I was a boy scout, and my dad was in the
8 scouts and my brother was in the scouts, so I had my dad send me a troop first aid kit.
9 And when I would be sitting out on post, the kids would come up and I'd clean wounds
10 and put bandages on them and so forth and so on. This lasted for about a week and a half,
11 and the old man calls me into his GP tent, and he tells me to stop doing that. You know, I
12 just like to do something positive for a change. It reached the point in the conversation
13 that he threatened to court marshal me so I didn't stop, but that's why they had a med
14 cap, it wasn't my job, it wasn't duty and that I was to stop doing that immediately or he
15 would court marshal me, Motherfucker. So, I went to a calve team. I mean, it was a while
16 after that.

17 KC: Well, tell me about this, the CAP program, again, very interesting stuff here.
18 Tell me about your prospective, what was the CAP program about? How was it supposed
19 to operate and what was your role in it?

20 JG: OJT war.

21 KC: Explain that.

22 JG: On the job training. We had a couple of primary duties. Our first duty was to
23 train the Neuquén's or popular forces. This was the village militia, they were untrained,
24 they provided their own weapons, a carbine that cost a Vietnamese farmer one year's
25 income. So, they were quite valuable and basically what we did is we taught them how to
26 patrol, how to interrogate people, how to, you know, just be infantry rifleman,
27 supposedly. Our second duty was to provide heavy support because, of course, nobody in
28 their right mind is going to let a Vietnamese farmer call in artillery or airstrikes. So, that
29 was one of our functions, we provided heavy support. There were eight of us on my team
30 so whenever an ambush goes out, there would be two of us. I was the team leader, and I
31 carried a radio. The other guy would be up right behind the point. Of course, we both

1 carried rifles. Our corpsman carried a shotgun, there were no non-combatants on the CAP
2 team. They couldn't afford it, just not enough people. The third thing we did was
3 coordinate med caps. I'm sure you know what a med cap is.

4 KC: Alright, now the CAP program was designed to use marines working with
5 the popular forces, the PFs, in these villages. You're going to train them; you're going to
6 go out on some missions with them as well quite often. You're going to live with them,
7 you're going to, I guess, come to understand these people at their level of existence, is
8 that true?

9 JG: Sort of. You realize there are two different CAP teams, right?

10 KC: Yes.

11 JG: You have the CAPs before Tet, a '68 and the CAPs after Tet of '68,
12 completely different. I mean, they're just completely different. Calve teams before Tet of
13 '68 built compounds in the villages that they were working in. They had bunkers, they
14 had a hardback tent, and they had a small compound. Our compound was about an acre,
15 maybe. The PFs came in our compound at night and the ambushers worked out of there.
16 We had a 60 mortar and a few other things. During Tet of '68 I suspect all; if not most
17 calve teams were wiped out. They were a very easy target. So, after Tet of '68, they came
18 up with mobile caps and after Tet of '68 the Calve team never set in any place. They
19 would just either sleep through the day or cat nap at night. I am completely unfamiliar
20 with how they worked. I left Vietnam shortly after Tet so I can't tell you about that, but I
21 can tell you about the original CAP team.

22 KC: That's what I want you to do. I want you to tell me and describe in as much
23 detail as you can how this worked and how you worked within it.

24 JG: Okay, we worked with the village chief, and we would patrol in the daytime
25 and when we would go out there would be, like I said, two marines on a patrol and we'd
26 have a patrol meeting and we all spoke Vietnamese, in theory anyway. We'd go in these
27 daytime operations, and it'd be just a patrol, a squad patrol and then at night we'd go out
28 on night ambushes. Usually there'd be about twenty PF's and two marines. And it could
29 be as low as ten or twelve PFs and two marines or as high as twenty. Like I said, we
30 theoretically spoke Vietnamese. My Vietnamese was absolutely atrocious.

31 KC: How did you learn even that basic level?

1 JG: You went to a CAP school.

2 KC: Okay.

3 JG: They held a CAP school outside Da Nang.

4 KC: How long would the CAP school, the CAP training last?

5 JG: Couldn't tell you if you had a gun to my head. It was a few weeks. It wasn't a
6 come in for a long time.

7 KC: Right, do you remember the things that you did, things that you learned,
8 things that you were trained on?

9 JG: I remember absolutely nothing about CAP school.

10 KC: Alright, pick up the story again, I'm sorry.

11 JG: Yeah, so as kind of an illustration did, I tell you about ambush in the pigs?

12 KC: No, I don't believe you have.

13 JG: (Laughing) So one night we're out with the PFs and of course, the PFs did
14 everything they could to not get in an engagement. This actually was illustrated to me on
15 a number of levels. So, we're out, it's a full moon, we're going out, done the ambush,
16 we're coming back, and I don't even know why I did it, we just decided to do it. I hold up
17 my fist beside my head in the moonlight and the entire squad stops. I'm going, "Shit."
18 And I held both arms out straight to my sides. The line deploys on-line with excellent
19 spacing. I'm going, "Where did these fuckers coming from because they sure ain't my
20 PFs." So, then I did the two hands to the front, you know, and they start sweeping and I'd
21 hold one fist tight, and one had open so we're feeling left, we're wheeling right. Excellent
22 maneuvers and excellent spacing and everything and what we were doing was herding
23 wild pigs, hail. I was herding them down through this banana tree growth. And then I
24 stop, hold the fist up, they stop, do the double hands. They line up, they get in line, and
25 we move on into the compound. I was just stunned by this shit. So, we get to the
26 compound, and I go down to the Thuy Bunker, Thuy is a lieutenant. The PF lieutenant
27 and I said, "Thuy, I do not understand why can they ambush pigs, but they can't ambush
28 VC." And he looked at me like I was retarded and said, "Pigs don't shoot back." And that
29 was such an incredible logic, you know, that it was like somebody hit me in the head with
30 a rock. Well, that was reasonable. It dawned on me; I had PFs in my squad that had
31 fought the Japanese. All of the Vietnamese had never known a situation that wasn't war.

1 The country had been at war through two or three generations and the second revelation
2 from that was, PFs don't rotate, they ain't going anywhere.

3 KC: Right.

4 JG: It doesn't take a mathematical wizard to figure out that if you run an ambush
5 every night, you're going to get killed. The Vietnamese aren't stupid, so they didn't take
6 it quite as seriously than we did.

7 KC: Right.

8 JG: Because we knew we were going home. A few months later we would have
9 these patrol meetings and we'd be in the patrol meeting, and I'd be outlining where the
10 ambush sight was and what we were going to do and what we were going. All through it
11 I'd say, "Do you understand, do you understand?" They go, "Do, Do; good, good, yes.
12 We understand, we understand." And then I'd get them out there and of course they
13 didn't have a clue what I was talking about. It was painfully obvious they didn't have a
14 clue what I was talking about. So, back to the Thuy's bunker and I said, "Thuy, why did
15 they say they understand what I'm saying in patrol meetings when it's obvious they don't
16 understand?" And he looks very uncomfortable, and he said, "They couldn't tell you they
17 didn't understand." And I said, "Why not? This is pretty important, why can't they tell
18 me?" And he looked uncomfortable and mildly startled. And he said, "Well, if they said
19 they didn't understand you, that would infer that your Vietnamese was less than perfect."
20 And I said, "Thuy, my Vietnamese is atrocious, I'm aware of it, it's horrible, I'm sorry.
21 I'm just not good with languages, I'm doing the best I can." And he looked truly shocked,
22 and he said, "Well, if you admitted your Vietnamese wasn't any good you would lose
23 face." And I said, "Thuy, I'm going to lose my ass if they don't start telling me what's
24 happening. I'd rather lose my face than my ass. We're going to get killed out there one of
25 these nights.: Next patrol meeting, "do, do, do", nobody understood anything.
26 Ambushing the Vietnamese farmers was quite an adventure.

27 KC: What's the most memorable other than this herding of pigs, what was the
28 most memorable of these patrols you went on?

29 JG: The first patrol we went on we spent two or three weeks building our
30 compound. They gathered the CAP team up on Camp Carroll. So, they finally get

1 everybody in. By the way, when I left Kilo Company, we were at the FPL, the final
2 protective line on the jump off to assault and killed 881 and 861, ever heard of them?

3 KC: Yes, sir.

4 JG: I was going to be the right flank point. The last chopper going out after
5 dropping off ammo, they put me on it because I had my orders to a CAP team.

6 KC: Oh wow.

7 JG: I ran into my company two months later and I knew two guys. One of them
8 had been on R&R (Rest and Recuperation) and the other was in the hospital.

9 KC: Everyone else was gone.

10 JG: Dead or state-side wounds.

11 KC: Right.

12 JG: They had pretty much wiped Kilo Company out.

13 KC: That's incredible.

14 JG: They used to kid that ten guys died in Vietnam because I got all their luck.
15 Stuff like that was quite common for me to have happen. Rifles misfire: booby traps
16 don't go off, all kinds of just weird stuff. So, we moved down, and we set up a compound
17 and then we've got our first ambush. So, it's all hands on deck. I don't think we left
18 anybody in our compound although we must have, but there's like six marines out on it
19 and twenty-something PFs. So, we're moving along, and the Village of Dac Tin had a lot
20 of fingers coming into it where it had eroded. You know, the villages were like islands in
21 this sea of green, this sea of rice paddies and they were raised up sometimes significantly
22 higher than rice paddies around them. So, they got these erosion ditches going off the
23 raised dirt where the village was and by erosion ditches, I mean little valleys that are like
24 twenty, twenty-five, thirty feet deep and maybe ten, fifteen feet wide. So, we're going
25 and rolling up and down, up and down, up and down, and we're trying to show them how
26 to do it. So, we were doing the stop and kneel down and listen and look, you know,
27 really, really playing the game so the Vietnamese could see how to do it. Well, the drag
28 on this particular operation—the drag's the guy that's pulling. He's the last man on the
29 squad. The first man's point, the last man's drag. So, the drag was this guy named Roper
30 from Atlanta, Georgia. So, we're set in, and we had stopped to listen and when we
31 stopped, roper just happened to be down in one of the gullies. So, the VC were following

1 us, and they were silhouetting the skyline when they came over the hanger behind us and
2 it's dead silent and I hear this voice go, "Hey, there's gooks back here." And I'm
3 thinking, "Well fucking shoot them." So, we got in a firefight our first night out. We
4 killed three or four of them and we didn't take any casualties at all. They dumped them
5 all in the village square and the village chief made their families come and claim the
6 bodies in front of everybody and so on. So that actually got us off to a pretty good start
7 with the Vietnamese. The day to day was, I don't know, we just did all kinds of stuff.
8 What else to I remember? I remember we got hit one night and we got an A1 intelligence
9 that they were going to hit us. Are you familiar with the levels of intelligence?

10 KC: Yes.

11 JG: Okay, so we get an A1 which means they capture somebody from the unit,
12 what within twenty-four or thirty-six hours before this event is supposed to happen. So,
13 we get an A1 that they're going to hit the compound. We're in the compound and I had a
14 tower built out of sandbags and I was the guy in charge of—one of my secondary
15 (inaudible). So, I had done most of the defense for the compound and around our
16 compound we had probably three to four hundred feet of tangle wire and there was a
17 grove of banana trees and bamboo of the right rear corner of our compound, about maybe
18 fifty feet from the compound, one hundred feet from the compound and I was always
19 worried about that one. So I took five gallon buckets and put two and a half pound blocks
20 of C-4 in the center with a cap, an electric cap in it and then I filled the bucket full of
21 hand grenades and white phosphorous grenades and shit like that and I hung four or five
22 of those from the trees out there in that area and then I had the engineers takes some
23 sixty-five gallon drums and cut them in half length wise and I put 2, two and a half pound
24 blocks in the bottom of it with a hole in the bottom coming out the side. I filled it full of
25 linked off M-60 machine guns and .45 brass and M-16 brass, and M-60 brass and
26 chopped up barbed wire and so fourth and so on and then put a canvas over it. So
27 basically, what I ended up with, it was a two hundred fifty pound claymore mine. I had
28 six or eight of those around the compound and then I took some fifty-five gallon drums of
29 gasoline and put napalm in it, thickener in it and I buried those sideways and I buried
30 them when they were about, oh, maybe six inches underground and I had a two and a half
31 pound block under them and a two hundred pound block of C4 was just enough to pick it

1 up out of the ground and kind of crack it open like an egg and ignite it. So even though
2 everybody understood we could only stand twenty minutes and that's how we could stand
3 twenty minutes. So, they hit us one night and when I was up there, I had ten or fifteen
4 LAWs so I'm firing LAWs and setting off shit and blowing stuff up. We're doing pretty
5 good, and we had called for support, and they had a flight of Phantoms came in and they
6 were coming back from North Vietnam, so they didn't have anything except gun ammo,
7 and they made a few gun runs for us and then they ran out and they boogied. Then they
8 sent gunships—101st airborne was up at Quang Tre so their air transport section is 13th
9 area squadron and if you're familiar with the Emerald with the 13th Area Squadron, it's a
10 yellow ball, the moon, and it's got an arched black cat with its hair standing up.

11 KC: Yes, I've seen those.

12 JG: Okay, 13th area squadron. So, they're running down 558 because they know
13 that we're at the end of it. I could hear them coming. Quote doesn't cause flashbacks, gun
14 fire doesn't cause flashbacks, but the sound of the Huey will flash me every time. We
15 never got to fly so hooeys always met bad news. They were medivacs or support, one or
16 the other. So, I can hear them coming, "Wup, wup, wup, wup, wup, wup, wup." And I
17 know they're coming and the shits getting kind of close, and we couldn't see them, we
18 couldn't see them, couldn't see them and then all of a sudden, this gun ship breaks the
19 tree line right above our heads. The things I remember in Vietnam are like a movie, they
20 are very stark and razor sharp. When I remember seeing that yellow ball with a black cat
21 on that nose on that hooey and that sucker was spitting fire in all directions. All gun's fire
22 and all door gunners firing and my first huey when we finally got somebody that'd help
23 us. So, they beat them off and we make it okay, but as a matter of fact I don't believe we
24 even had any casualties. The next day we were out stripping bodies because a dead body
25 will tell you almost as much as an alive body will.

26 KC: Now were these VC?

27 JG: I'm sorry?

28 KC: Were these VC?

29 JG: Yeah.

30 KC: Okay, and how large would you say this group was that hit you?

31 JG: Oh, there were probably three or four hundred.

1 KC: Oh wow.

2 JG: There were plenty of them. That's why we were calling for anything we could
3 get. That's also why I probably set off five hundred pounds of explosives that night. So, I
4 came to this one body and you're looking at the condition to the body, you're looking for
5 a deep patch strap marks on the soldiers, that will tell you how long he's been in the field
6 and what's his weapon, you know? What's his condition? So, forth an so on. So, I role
7 this guy over and the hair comes up on the back of my neck. Now, I know they wouldn't
8 have done it because that's just not the way they work. The guy I rolled over was the
9 village barber and all I could think of was how many times he had shaved me with a
10 straight razor, and I could feel that straight razor at my throat. Like I said, he wouldn't
11 have done it because that's just not the way they work, but definitely a weird feeling.

12 KC: Wow, that's incredible.

13 JG: You frequently would find people we trained.

14 KC: Huh.

15 JG: What I used to say is it was a given in the CAP team that at least fifty percent
16 of your PFs were VC at least.

17 KC: That high?

18 JG: Oh yeah, yeah.

19 KC: Now you knew this going in?

20 JG: Oh yeah.

21 KC: How do you deal with that if you believe they're VC?

22 JG: I slept with a cocked and locked .45 on my chest. When I was in the shitter, I
23 had to cut down pumped shot gun laying on a plywood beside me. When I was in the
24 little shower cube taking a shower, I had a car 15 submachine gun hanging right above
25 my head. I was never without a weapon either in my hand or within a foot of my hand,
26 ever. They say that you can't stay on alert all the time. That's simply not true, yes you
27 can. Now, it's kind of hard on your brain to do it, but you can stay on twenty-four hours a
28 day, seven days a week. I never went completely asleep. I'd be about eighty percent
29 asleep, and twenty percent awake. I've come up out of a dead sleep and shot somebody.
30 Fortunately, on the other side. Just, I mean, literally raised up and hit him.

31 KC: What was the occasion for this?

1 JG: Oh, we were laying out an ambush and you try to—some of the guys on the
2 ambush are going to go to sleep in rotation. They're not supposed to, but sleep was just
3 so precious, and they hit us and just came up firing, you know? I was awake or on all the
4 time. You learn to watch everything. I'm going to have to go let me son out. We don't
5 have to stop.

6 KC: You're talking about being awake; I hear that your son just woke up. Why
7 don't we stop there for today, Mr. Goller?

8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31

Interview with Jerry Goller

Session [3] of [3]

Date: February 12, 2010

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr.
2 Jerry Goller. Today is February 12, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of
3 Texas Tech University and Mr. Goller is joining me by telephone from his home in
4 Murray, Utah. Mr. Goller, you were talking about, before we started the recorder, you
5 were talking about just very briefly about how you set up this 1st CAP Platoon you were
6 with, Poppa 5 there in '67, '68 and then into the Tet Offensive. Go ahead and pick up the
7 story there if you would, please.

8 Jerry Goller: Okay, a couple of days before Tet it must have been right at the
9 extreme end of January, the last day or two of January. We had a large force of VC move
10 in, about six hundred VC moved into the village of Doc Tin where Poppa 5 was, and it
11 was kind of surreal because it was like they took over our ID checks. They were walking
12 around the village, they were checking IDs, they didn't bother us, they didn't shoot at us,
13 and they basically just ignored us.

14 KC: A large group of six hundred VC moved into this village where you were
15 with your calve team with other marines?

16 JG: Yes.

17 KC: With the armed farmers and the whole bit?

18 JG: We were hold up in our compound and they just moved in, and it was kind of
19 odd.

20 KC: Yes.

21 JG: I think we had moved our compound down. There was an old French fort
22 down the road for Doc Tin and I can see the compound as it was and it doesn't look like
23 our normal compound, but that's unclear so I'm just not going to comment on it. In any
24 event, like said, they just ignored us, and we were kind of at a loss of what to do. We
25 were on the radio telling our headquarters in Cam Lo what was going on and nobody
26 would believe us. But if they weren't shooting at us so we sat there for actually a couple
27 of days and our company CO was not a very good officer. He was the first really bad
28 Marine Officer I ever saw. In any event, he wasn't doing anything, and our company
29 gunnery sergeant was a guy named Gunny Kilami. He was this huge Hawaiian and was

1 just an absolutely outstanding in the CO. One afternoon an Air America chopper landed
2 near our compound and everybody just, all the VC just kind of faded away and this
3 chopper lands and the gunny gets out and he says, “Well, I can’t get that son of a bitch in
4 Cam Lo to make up his mind, but at least I brought you three more guns.” It was him and
5 two clerks out of the office.

6 KC: So, they came out to your camp there?

7 JG: Yes.

8 KC: Out of Cam Lo, okay, okay.

9 JG: And at that point, an army major, a CORDS (Civilian Operations and
10 Revolutionary Department Support) major. CORDS was an army program that was kind
11 of like one level up from ours. We worked with the village chief and the popular forces,
12 and they worked with the district chief and the regional forces. He just kind of inserted
13 himself into our chain of command trying to get somebody to—he was trying to get
14 choppers to get us out, anybody to come and get us. Finally, they sent a convoy down to
15 get us and it was a 27 vehicle convoy, two of which were trucks. Everything else was
16 armored vehicles and two companies of grunts. As they moved in, the VC just faded
17 away. So, everybody was now convinced that we were having a mass hallucination. We
18 kept telling them there’s a lot off gooks around here someplace. They moved us to Cam
19 Lo because we had destroyed our compound. We destroyed all the ammunition, all the
20 medical supplies, the radios, everything. We just assumed we were going to get overrun
21 and they moved us to Cam Lo and two nights later the elements of three regiments hit our
22 compound in Cam Lo. So, afterwards when we put all this together, the six hundred
23 hardcore VC that moved into our village were actually the advanced scouts for the three
24 regiments that were assembling to attack Cam Lo. And they had been given orders not to
25 attract anymore attention then they absolutely had to which is why they kept fading into
26 the sunset whenever anybody showed up except us then they just ignored us.

27 KC: Right.

28 JG: There was an ambush in the S, route 9 formed an S going up to Camp Carroll
29 and that’s happened on the 1st of February just before in the afternoon of the 1st of
30 February. They ambushed a convoy, and they were dispersing from that, so some
31 engineers showed up at our place. There was a grunt squad. We never did figure out

1 where they came from. They just showed up just before sunset and couldn't make it back
2 to their unit, so they wanted into the compound. So, when I say there was thirty marines,
3 it was not a cohesive organization.

4 KC: Right, it was a varied group of different marines that somehow made it there
5 to Cam Lo as my understanding.

6 JG: Yeah, just wondered into the compound.

7 KC: Let me stop you there, Mr. Goller if I may. Before we got any further, can
8 you please describe the physical layout of Cam Lo? Because this plays an important part
9 in the battles to come.

10 JG: I don't really know much about the village itself, but I can explain the layout
11 of the compound. There was actually two compounds at Cam Lo. There was a marine
12 compound that also had the CORDS headquarters in it and then across the street was a
13 larger compound that had an army unit in it, and I don't know who they were. As an odd
14 aside, I had actually been in that larger compound a year before. There was a marine
15 artillery battery there about a year before when I was in the infantry. We had been sent to
16 guard it which was strange. I don't know who the army unit was. There was about forty-
17 eight of them and they had two, quad fifty gun trucks which is basically a five-ton
18 pinwheel truck that's got an anti-aircraft mount on the back of it, a hydraulic anti-aircraft
19 mounts four, fifty caliber machine guns. This thing fires fourteen hundred rounds a
20 minute so it fires a lot.

21 KC: You felt good about having those then?

22 JG: I'm sorry?

23 KC: You must have felt pretty good about having those in hand I would guess.

24 JG: We didn't actually have them. The army across the street had them, but I was
25 going to be good for them. They're great lawnmowers. For compound attacks they're
26 outstanding. Route 9 ran down through the middle of this compound set up and on one
27 side of the street was our compound which was about two acres, roughly and it had the
28 district headquarters, and it had a little hospital. There was a French block house in it
29 with a tower. Could you stop the recorder for just a second please?

30 KC: Sure.

31 JG: Okay, hit it.

1 KC: Okay, we're back.

2 JG: So, we had the small compound on one side of the street and a larger
3 compound across the street. The compound itself had about an eight foot parapet which is
4 just a berm, a berm of dirt about eight feet high that ran around it. There was a gun
5 bunker at each of the four corners. I know there were gun bunkers at the two corners
6 away from route 9. I'm not sure about on route 9. Oddly enough I really don't know the
7 compound all that well because we were only there—the second night we were there we
8 got hit so we didn't really know the compound all that well. In the center of the
9 compound was a com bunker, a communications bunker and these bunkers are dug into
10 the ground so, say, two thirds of them were under ground and the other third are above
11 ground. We had a sixty mortar and on top of the com bunker was a fifty caliber machine
12 gun. Up in the tower that night, the tower being the French block out, there was a guy
13 with an M-79 grenade launcher, and we had inside the compound, we had a couple of
14 hardbacks. Should I explain what a hard back is?

15 KC: Sure, please do.

16 JG: Okay, there's various tents in the military and one of them is called a GP tent,
17 a general purpose tent. It's a very large canvas tent. They came up with what they called
18 hardbacks because a GP tent doesn't have any mosquito protection or anything; it's just a
19 big canvas that's kind of like a small circus tent. They came up with the idea of building
20 a building inside it from one of a better term. You've got a decked floor; it's raised up off
21 the ground. It's got a decked floor and then it's got a complete two by four framework
22 and the canvas is pulled over it. The framework has mosquito netting, actually screen
23 wire. So, you end up with a much more permanent structure than just a tent. So, we had
24 some of those out and that's pretty much the layout of the compound.

25 KC: Okay, very good, thank you for doing that. Talk about the initial time that
26 you had here at Cam Lo before we get you into the attack. How much time did you spend
27 here, were you putting together defenses, and what were you doing?

28 JG: We had no idea Tet was going on. So, we had no real reason to believe that
29 anything else was going to happen, that it was just kind of a bizarre occurrence that our
30 compound was surrounded was, and as I said, nobody particularly believes this anyway. I
31 mean, the gunny believed it, he didn't see anything, but he believed us. The only people

1 that had actually seen these things were the six or eight of us that were at Cam Lo or
2 down at Doc Tin, so they didn't necessarily believe this. And then there's this big fight at
3 the S so we knew they were active in the area, but nobody had told us about Tet. We had
4 no idea they were attacking all over the country. At least the troops did, and I suppose it's
5 possible the captain did or one of the army officers, but we didn't know it so there wasn't
6 anything unusual being done at all. The actual assault started at five minutes to two on
7 the second of February and I was asleep in one of the hardbacks and I was just laying on
8 the floor asleep. Their opening gambit for the attack was the fired two RPG sevens from
9 each side of the compound right there where route nine was so the road corners of the
10 compound as it were. They fired two RPG 7s into the comm bunker and they destroyed
11 most of the radios and killed most of the radio operators. Tom Morton was one of the few
12 radio operators that wasn't killed, he was in that bunker. Then they started to push on the
13 compound. They started attacking the compound and I was still asleep. Having
14 explosions around you, even such things as two RPG 7s going off not very far from you
15 was really not enough to wake me up, believe it or not. It's not that you slept heavy, you
16 slept selective. I've slept through artillery barrages; I've slept through all kinds of stuff.
17 But a change in it, if the battle got heavier or if the artillery stopped or if something
18 changed, that would wake me up. If you couldn't sleep through loud noises, you wouldn't
19 be sleeping a lot in Vietnam. There were times when it was pretty noisy in there. So, the
20 initial contacts didn't really wake me up. I sat in my sleep registered the small arms fire
21 and I just thought it was a probe, but I slowly started coming awake when the volume of
22 fire kept going up. When the RPGs went off, I remembered that's what caused it. They
23 also started mortaring the compound. I went straight through the screen wire on the side
24 of this hardback. We had trenches on the side of the hardbacks the trenches dug and then
25 little mini bunkers where they were just kind of a cubby hole dug where they used steel
26 stakes and sandbags over them. So, I just went straight through the sandbag and rolled
27 down into one of these little mini bunkers. I could hear the fire and the volume kept
28 getting higher and higher, more and more fire. My first thought was, "I can't believe this,
29 shit, and you're actually going to actually try to take this compound." The reason I was a
30 incredulous was not that the compound was any great shakes, but we were sitting halfway
31 between Camp Carroll, we had something like 125 artillery pieces on it and around

1 twenty kilometers in one direction and twenty kilometers or so in the other direction
2 which Quang Tre, which had the 101st airborne and every gun ship ever built. So, it was
3 suicide trying to take this compound. It was certainly a different tactic for them. It was
4 not unusual for them to probe and that sort of thing, but they just didn't normally attack
5 some place that they couldn't possibly hold.

6 KC: Right.

7 JG: When it finally registered with me that they were serious and were actually
8 going to try to take the compound, I rolled back up into the hardback and grabbed my
9 magazine vest and my M-16 and ran out to the line out on the berm. In this berm we had
10 spider holes dug in the top of them and the spider hole is a whole not much bigger than
11 your body that goes down to, say, less than a quarter of your body is exposed. You'd just
12 be head and shoulders. So, I roll into a spider hole, and it's fairly confused at that point.
13 There are mortar rounds going off and a lot of fire out of the wire. To explain the
14 position, what it looked like from the berm mount, there was about a hundred yards or so
15 of cleared fields between Cam Lo headquarters and the rest of the village of Cam Lo. In
16 that was tangle foot, which was barbed wire laid out about six or eight inches above the
17 dirt in kind of a diamond pattern and the idea is they're going to trip up in it, so they try
18 to move through it. There was a lot of tangle foot and then there was one or two
19 concertina, layers of concertina between us and them. I can't remember if there was one
20 or two. And there was a mine field out there all the way around it and we were getting
21 fired. We couldn't really get a good picture of what was going on out there, so I wasn't
22 actually firing because I didn't have anything to fire at.

23 KC: And its pitch dark I would assume.

24 JG: Oh yes, two o'clock in the morning. So, they, of course, weren't putting up
25 flares and we hadn't put up flares yet, so we really didn't have an idea of what was going
26 on. We were getting a pretty decent volume of fire from the thermos, so we were sure it
27 wasn't a probe, it was bigger than that. And to my left, down at the bottom of the parapet
28 between the bottom of the parapet and the barbed wire was the shedder for the Cam Lo
29 compound. These things are made out of plywood, and they take two, fifty-five gallon
30 drums or four or eight. It depends on how big it is, but this one was relatively small one,
31 the two holder. They took a fifty-five gallon drum and cut it in half. No length wise, but

1 cross wise. And then normally what they do is they film, say, a third full or a quarter full
2 of diesel fuel. And then every couple of days they'd pour more diesel fuel in, and they'd
3 pull these drums out and they pour more diesel fuel, and they burn it off and then they
4 dump the ashes out. One of those cosmic coincidences, about two days I think it was
5 before the attack, the compound ran out of diesel fuel so those two, and fifty-five gallon
6 half drums had mo-gas in them. Regular vehicle gas, car gas. The guy in the hole to my
7 left was a guy named Pinky and he had an M-60 machine gun and he wasn't from the
8 Cam Lo compound, and you had asked if we were preparing for this assault to the point
9 Pinky hadn't even set up his left and right lateral stakes with a machine gun in a position
10 you don't really know very well. They will take these two stakes and they put them in the
11 ground on the left and right limits of the machine gun and they've got a very, very, very
12 low level light in them; one's red, one's green so it tells him what his left and right lateral
13 limits are. He didn't have stakes up or anything. So, Pinky sees the movement out in the
14 grass, he thinks, because they had not—the only way to cut the grass in the minefield is
15 use flame throwers because you're obviously not going to go out there and cut it. It's all
16 full of tangle fuel and mines. Apparently, this mine field hadn't been burned in awhile.
17 The grass was, I don't know, a couple feet high, two or three feet high. Pinky thought he
18 saw movement, so he traversed with his M-60. Every fifth round in an M-60 is a tracer
19 round. And Pinky reversed to the shitter and blew up. When it blew up, it threw a column
20 of fire, I don't know, thirty or forty, fifty feet in the air. A pretty good sized fire ball and
21 that was the first really good illumination we got. I remember they looked like giant
22 rabbits on the grass hopping around. It was a very large horse.

23 KC: How many do you suspect; you think you saw?

24 JG: I have no idea. There had to be a couple of hundred virtually directly in front
25 of me. Now, I can tell you what the after action reports said. The after action reports said
26 that they sent in six hundred sappers. Sappers are assault troops that breach wire and
27 break fortification. So, they send these six hundred sappers in, and they've got sapper
28 charges, which is basically a bag of TNT all fused together and Bangalore torpedoes and
29 whatever else they happen to have with them. So, they send these sappers in to breach the
30 wire. Behind the sappers, they had a guard company armed with light machine guns. The
31 guard company machine gunned any of the sappers that turned from the attack. They had

1 told these people that there were ten of us armed with pistols. Actually, there were thirty
2 of us and we were reasonably well armed and highly motivated. We had been shot at a lot
3 so, you know, shooting at us wasn't really going to really impress us all that much.
4 Between us and the guard company I don't think any of the sappers survived. They
5 probably didn't survive the first thirty or forty minutes of the firefight. But it startled be
6 because the sheer number. I remember pulling the trigger on my M-16 and spring which
7 turning around and yelling into the compound, "they're in the wire". I don't remember
8 too awful much after that. I do know I had twenty-seven magazines on me, twenty-seven,
9 twenty round magazines on me and two thirty round magazines in the weapon. That's six
10 hundred and forty rounds and they lasted me about two minutes, two or three minutes and
11 I went through every ground I had on me. One of the things that created a little bit of a
12 problem for us is it won our compound and there was a lot of ammo there, we just didn't
13 know where it was. So, at one point we were actually running out of ammunition and
14 finally somebody that was actually stationed at the compound started bringing ammo out.
15 As an aside, the next morning I had three empty cases of ammo around my whole three
16 thousand rounds to a case. I also had three burned up M-16s.

17 KC: Let me ask you this, when you're going through this, I assume that you've
18 got your M-16 full automatic. Are you just spraying out there or are you trying to find a
19 target in particular?

20 JG: No, when there's two or three hundred standing in front of you, you don't
21 bother to shoot individual people.

22 KC: You're just spraying?

23 JG: No, it's called spray and pray. You know, there's just so many. I mean, you
24 can't miss, it's virtually impossible to miss. So, I was just spraying, we all were just
25 throwing everything we could get out there. The battle at Cam Lo is a vignette; it's a slide
26 show in my mind. So, I can't give you a necessarily coherent recounting of that battle.
27 It's just a series of flashes. I have pretty severe seasonal depression right around this time
28 of the year. I have to admit, as an aside, this year's been particularly bad. I've had a lot of
29 things that keep drudging it up, this being one of them. I don't mind doing this, I just
30 hope somebody actually reads this and learns something from it. In any event, it's just
31 going to be a series of flashes, not necessarily coherent. Some of it doesn't even

1 necessarily make any sense, but I remember there was a lull in the fighting, and I stood
2 up on the parapet and looked out over the fields. By then, we had illumination up, quite a
3 bit of illumination. Illumination makes every very stark. It's extremely high contrast,
4 black and white, and it takes on a very surreal, almost movie-like quality. It's almost
5 dreamlike and so there's this illum up and I'm looking out across the fields, and it looked
6 like a World Cup football match. I had never seen that many Vietnamese in my life. They
7 seem like they were everywhere. My birthday's the eighth of March, I was twenty years
8 old. I was one month short of my twenty first birthday and as I looked out across those
9 fields and truly understood how big the attack was, my first thought was, "Ain't this a
10 bitch, I'm going to die a child. I'm not even going to make adulthood." Because I had no
11 doubts that we were not going to get out of Cam Lo alive. Had they been armed with ball
12 bats, there just weren't enough of us to kill them fast enough to keep them out. My
13 second thought was rage. I was just so mad that they sent so many of them to kill us in
14 such an unfair firefight that no matter what we did, we probably were not going to
15 survive this. And I knew that in a month or two, or weeks or whatever, when they were
16 sitting around a fire making tea and rice or the next day actually when they were out in
17 the village. They were going to be telling the villagers, "Oh, the marines aren't shit; we
18 went in last night and killed them all." Yeah, 2500 of you little fuckers killed thirty of us,
19 you know? It's just outrageous in the literal sense of the word. You know what subject
20 you studied the most in Marine boot camp by fifty percent?

21 KC: History of the Marine Corps I would assume?

22 JG: History and traditions of the Marine Corps. It was pounded into you the day
23 you walk in the gate. You come home with your shield on it. And the Marine Corps
24 actually had a philosophical position on what to do when you're in a situation like ours.
25 Unfortunately, the Marine Corp's been in situations like that fairly often. I knew at that
26 point I really only had one job left to do. It was to kill as many of them as I possibly
27 could before I went down. I was buying a psychological itch to the next marine unit. The
28 next time they were told they were going to hit a marine unit; I wanted the hair to come
29 up on the back of their neck because I wanted them to know what was coming. It didn't
30 matter if there was ten of us or one hundred of us or a thousand of us and there was a
31 million of them. It didn't make any difference; they were going to pay for every foot of

1 that compound. That it's never a walk, it's never a freebee. Think long and hard before
2 you attack a marine compound. So that's basically my attitude and I got the impression it
3 was the attitude of most people there. We, of course, never quit, we never gave up,
4 nothing. It just isn't done. Through the course of that night, I remember at one point I had
5 burned up on M-16, I hadn't found another one yet and a guy popped up right in front of
6 me climbing up the parapet and just as an automatic reaction, jungle utilities have left and
7 right leg pockets along with regular pockets. In my right leg pocket was a pop-up. A pop-
8 up flare is a long, aluminum cylinder and it's got a cap on one end. You take the cap off
9 that end and the cap has got kind of like a nail for one of the better term in the bottom of
10 it. There's an actual firing pin and there's a detonator cap on the other end. You take the
11 cap off, put it on the detonating end and just hit it, hit it with the bottom of your palm of
12 your hand and it ignites and shoots the flare up in the air and they have red star clusters
13 and green star clusters, and they also have parachute flares. This little thing shoots quite a
14 distance up in the air, ignites a flare and the flare floats down on the parachute. It just so
15 happens that I had a parachute flare and I have no idea why I did it. Apparently, it was
16 already ready to go because I remember pulling it out and pointing it at him and hitting
17 the bottom of the flare and I shot him in the chest with a popup, which by the way is
18 legal, it killed him. He went down with a flare buried in his chest and it ignited. I
19 remember claymore mines are a nine pound mine. It's amiable, it's concave and it's a
20 plastic mine. The construction is there's a steel plate then there's a layer of composition
21 B plastic explosive and then there's a Bakelite board with 840 steel ball bearings. The
22 bearings are about the size of double (inaudible) roughly. Then the face and it fires from
23 electric plastic caps, usually electric. I can remember at one point when we were running
24 low on ammo, I was actually creping blasting caps on claymore's, throwing them out into
25 the group and then setting them off. There wasn't any point in aiming them. I mean,
26 anything that blew up we threw it out there. I remember hearing the gun, the M-60 to my
27 left, machine guns slowing down. The barrel on an M-60 machine gun can be changed.
28 You unlock the barrel lock and then you could pull the barrel out in front of the machine
29 gun and replace the barrel. The reason for that is the barrels get pretty hot.

30 KC: Right.

1 JG: Eventually, the chamber in the barrel with expand to the point that the rounds
2 can no longer go down the barrel and it can't chamber around so the machine guns stop,
3 it ceases. I remember looking over and Pinky's M-60 looked like a light saber. It's just
4 this white bar with kind of a gray squiggle in the middle of it and that's the rounds going
5 down the barrel and that machine gun was getting ready to seize. I say Pinky's A gunner
6 stand up. All he had on was jungle trousers and he had no shirt on and normally a gunner
7 has a pair of asepsis mitts or at least one asepsis mitt. Usually, you change the barrel long
8 before it gets really hot.

9 KC: Sure.

10 JG: I found out why he had waited so long, he didn't have any mitts, he couldn't
11 find his mitts. I saw him stand up and take three or four deep breaths and my thought
12 was, "Aw shit, no." And he reached down with his left hand, grabbed a barrel, unlocked
13 it with his right hand and then threw the barrel. It pulled all the meat off his left hand and
14 went through it. He grabbed the spare barrel, stuck it in, locked it, and passed out. We
15 saw him a few minutes later and he had come back around, and he had a sandbag
16 wrapped around his left hand that he was building up ammo for the gun. I learned not too
17 long ago that he got a silver star for doing that.

18 KC: That's incredible.

19 JG: Yeah, well you do what you got to do. It cracks me up when people talk about
20 bravery. Frequently bravery is a lackifiable alternative. Most of the citations at Cam Lo
21 for those that got medals said things like, "For the heroic defense of the district
22 headquarters at Cam Lo." Well, it wasn't like we had a plan B.

23 KC: Right.

24 JG: We didn't have a teleporter. Had we had a teleporter, we might have given
25 them to calm down. You know, we had no place to go, but in any event, I remember a
26 corpsman, our corpsman actually from Poppa 5, he was bent over treating someone or
27 running towards somebody to treat them. This is kind of jerky. This is the closest to
28 somebody actually getting killed that I remember from Vietnam. The doc was running as
29 I remember it and a rocket round hit a bunker right beside him. When it detonated, it
30 opened the side of his head and his shoulder. By this time, they had blown through two
31 avenues through our wire. One directly in front of my position and another one over on

1 the back side of our compound, the opposite of route nine, they had blown in from there,
2 too. And these avenues were about, well, they were big enough to drive a bus through
3 where the sappers had actually made it through. So, by now we actually had troops in our
4 compound. We had North Vietnamese in our compound. A guy jumped out behind him, a
5 North Vietnamese jumped up behind him and shot him in the back. I shot the North
6 Vietnamese troop in the chest. I don't know when that happened; it's just a flash I see. I
7 remember they were calling for people over on the other side because they were bowling
8 through on the other side at that point. There was a guy named Anakowsky that was in
9 my team from Doc Kin. I looked at him and said, "Sorry Steve, you're the only thing I
10 got." I sent Steve over there and then a little bit later I went over there. I remember when
11 I got to the corner, there were some marines I didn't know and, in that corner, on the
12 corner gun bunker there was a thirty caliber machine gun, an old World War II caliber
13 machine gun up on a swivel mount and there was a dead marine draped over it. These
14 guys were down in the trenches firing out of the trenches. So, I climbed up on top of the
15 bunker and I tossed a dead guy over the side and his friends got kind of pissed, but he
16 was dead. I don't think he knew what was going on. The thirty had jammed and so I'm
17 trying to clear the thirty and the thirty calibers has got a cocking level that looks like the
18 handle of a shovel underneath the pistol grip where the trigger is. You pull this cocking
19 lever back and then move it and then pull it back and then move it forward and the
20 gunners charge. So, I'm working trying to clear this thirty and some shrapnel had hit the
21 cocking level mechanisms so I couldn't cock it. As I looked over the top of the gun about
22 fifty or sixty feet out, one hundred feet out, there was an NVA raised up and he had an
23 RPG. There was another guy trying to get around loaded in the RPG. And I remember it
24 was a race between the two of us. I had a foot braced on that thirty and everything I think
25 I try to get a cocking lever to move. Well, I finally broke it loose and cocked it just about
26 as the guy gets the rocket round loaded and I pull my trigger first. So, I hit him, I don't
27 know, eight or ten times at the chest with a 30 cal and that was the end of that
28 conversation. Then I remember sometime later I was over in the corner by route nine,
29 opposite of the side of the compound I had originally been on and the only Vietnamese,
30 South Vietnamese that had gotten in the fight—there were ninety regional forces in that
31 compound and regional forces were calling National Guard. They hid in the bunkers

1 pretty much through the entire fight. So, there was one gun team, South Vietnamese gun
2 team up, had an old sergeant in charge of her. They're just banging away and when I got
3 there, I asked the sergeant what they were shooting at and he said, "Nothing, I just want
4 the Americans to know we're still fighting." So, they're just shooting out in the field, not
5 anything in particular. He said he thought some VC were right there at the bottom of the
6 parapet and they couldn't deflect the gun enough off their bunker to get in there, so I took
7 the thirty up and that particular thirty was a ground mount 30. A ground mount 30 has got
8 a medal butt stalk on it and the top of the butt stock extends further back than the bottom
9 of the stock does so it looks kind of like a giant ray un. So, I picked the 30 up and none of
10 them were—they couldn't pick a thirty up, they're not very good people. And I picked it
11 up and sprayed the area right below it and at some point, along in there, I realized that
12 they were in the compound, and they were overrunning the compound. I found an old can
13 an ANPRC 10 radio. It's a two-type radio from World War II and I was just rolling down
14 through frequencies I knew calling for anybody and as an interesting story, there was a
15 guy that read the account of the battle at Cam Lo off another guy's sight that I know, and
16 that guy had included a conversation I had with him. The guy that read the story on the
17 internet contacted me. He was an army artillery observer and he had been on top of a
18 mountain, and they had an outpost up there. He had been asleep in his bunker with a
19 radio watch on. Sleep was a very precious thing, so people normally didn't wake up
20 unless they had to, and you don't wake somebody else up unless it's essential. He said he
21 came up out of a dead sleep, but he didn't know why. He just knew something was
22 wrong. And he was lying in his rack listening and he could hear a voice on the radio in
23 the other room and he couldn't tell what the voice was saying, but it sounded extreme.
24 So, he got up and walked into the other room and the radio watch had fallen asleep. The
25 voice he heard on the radio was me and what I was saying that any station, "This is
26 Poppa 5, we're being overrun, I need artillery support now." Poppa 5 was my call sign
27 for our original CAP compound. So, he started talking to me and he was lining up some
28 artillery fire missions. One of the things that you memorize is the coordinates of your
29 own compound. So, the fire mission I was calling was our compound because we were
30 overrun anyway. He gets a hold of someone on the artillery batteries and they're getting
31 ready to fire. There's a unit called the fire direction control center and the fire direction

1 control center's sole project in life is to keep people from shooting at each other. So
2 anytime there's a fire mission, an airstrike, mortars, anything, the coordinates are passed
3 to FDC, and they plot the back asthmas to see where you are. So, when they get two fire
4 missions that have corresponding targets and back asthmas, they know that two units are
5 firing at each other. So, they're getting ready to fire and FDC came up on the radio and
6 said, "Hold fire, hold fire." And he said, "Polish-5 do you realize what those coordinates
7 are?" I said, "I know what they are, they're the fucking flagpole. We're being overrun
8 you shoot the shit." There was silence for awhile. I know it couldn't have been more than
9 a few seconds, but it seemed like it was forever. I'm thinking, "Oh shit, they're not going
10 to fire it." He said, "Roger, Poppa 5. Get your head down, it's on the way. God help
11 you." And I was thinking, "I don't need god, I need artillery because we're being
12 overrun." Then he said, "All batteries, fire for Poppa 5." There were five artillery
13 batteries. There's five artillery pieces to a battery and they all fired five rounds so they
14 put something like 125 artillery shells on our compound. I think initially there was only
15 two batteries that fired. I was yelling incoming, incoming so we dropped into the trenches
16 and bunkers and, of course, I didn't say it in Vietnamese, so the NVA didn't. They killed
17 one of us and got quite a few of them. That drove them back out of the compound and
18 then there's a conversation after that about what happened next because artillery was
19 called in two more times, and I don't think I called it in the other two times. There was an
20 army artillery officer there and I know he called in at least two of them. He thinks he
21 called in all three of them, but the army forward observer he was talking to says, "No, I
22 know who called the first one in" and it was me. But in any event, the next thing that
23 happened, some of this is uncomfortable to talk about because I don't like to disparage
24 other people, but this is just how it went down. There was somebody in English tying up
25 the net and he was calling for his mother. So, we figured out it was somebody in the army
26 compound across the street, so I went outside the compound to get whoever it was,
27 mostly to get him off the radio. And like I said, the other compound had two quad 50 gun
28 trucks for apparently the plan that they had set up was if we got hit, that one of the quad
29 50s were supposed to drive out of the big compound into the little compound to provide
30 extra support for us. The gates to both compounds were opposite each other, they were
31 only separated by a two lane dirt road. It's a good plan, but apparently, they didn't clear it

1 with the north Vietnamese. When the quad 50 tried to break out of the big compound into
2 the little compound, probably the racketeers that had fired the RPGs into the comm
3 bunker were waiting for it to come out. So, they hit this quad 50 with arbor Gs from both
4 sides as it came out, so the truck blew up. So, there's burning in the middle of the street,
5 and I ran out and very shortly after I got past the quad maybe fifty feet down the road, I
6 came into a really big black guy. I mean, this guy was huge, and he was hit. Well, at that
7 time I only weighed 121 pounds and there was no way I could dead lift this dude and he
8 was still alive. So, I grabbed him by the shoulders of his flight jacket in where his
9 shoulders were, and I dragged him back to the main compound. I went back out and went
10 down to the corner and I finally found the guy that was calling for his mother over the
11 radio. He had been shot in the foot which I found pretty annoying. That's not a very
12 common combat wound. So, he wanted me to carry him to the other compound and I
13 wouldn't do it, but I did help him. I put his arm around my neck, and we hopped back
14 into the compound, or he did. Then I went over to the army compound to find out what
15 was left. It was completely bare, there was nothing in it. There was a bunker in the center
16 of the compound and over on one side of the compound with the quad 50 and a G8 cat. I
17 went to the opposite end of the compound, and I was walking. As I walked up to a
18 bunker, I heard some Vietnamese in it. So, I told them to come out and nothing happened.
19 The Vietnamese worked for hand grenades. So, I told him I was going to saw a frag in
20 since they didn't come out. So about six or eight Vietnamese come out and I had no idea
21 who's side they were on. So, by kind of spontaneous mutual agreement, because I was
22 holding a frag in my hand, they went over the parapet and left, and I didn't shoot at them.
23 I wasn't going to try to take on eight to one.

24 KC: Right.

25 JG: That works out in the movies, but in real life not all that well. So, then I
26 walked up to the other end of the compound, and I heard movement under the catapult
27 and so I said the same thing, "Come out." So, some guys answered in English, and it was
28 a couple of doggies and then I heard a groan on the quad, and I climbed up on the quad
29 and the gunner was sitting in the seat and his arm stretched out in back and his head back
30 and he's just laid back in the seat. He was still alive, and I said, "Where you hit?" and he
31 grabbed my hand and held it to his stomach, and it was wet. So, I asked two doggies,

1 “You guys got a flashlight?” They said, “You’re not going to light a flashlight, are you?”
2 “Get me a flashlight, your buddies hit.” And I had to threaten him to get him to come out
3 from under the D8 and then still laying on the ground they reached up over the door on
4 the gun truck and reached into the glove box and got a red flashlight and handed it to me
5 and I turned the flashlight on and of course the flashlight is red, and it looked like a dark
6 red and dark purple football laying on its stomach. And I just reflexively said, “Aw, shit.”
7 And the guy said, “Is it bad?” and I said, “No, no it’s not that bad, but it ain’t that good.”
8 Actually, he was split from side to side and what I was looking at was probably his liver.
9 I got down from the truck and ran over to the big compound. Things had started to slow
10 down quite a bit by this point, and I found a corpsman, I think he was the only corpsman
11 left alive and I told him this guy was hit real bad on a clad over on the other compound
12 and he said, “Well bring him here.” I said, “Well, his guts are hanging out, I can’t bring
13 him here.” And he said, “Well, I ain’t going over there. I got more to do here than I can
14 take care of. Just get him over here. It’s not going to kill him.” He says, “He’s going to
15 die anyway.” So, I found a cot and I ran back over and got the two doggies up and
16 between the three of us we got him down off the quad, got him onto the cot, and carried
17 him over to the other compound. I heard later the guy actually lived. And then that’s
18 about all I remember about that night. The next morning, about just after dawn, they’d
19 sent in a couple platoon tanks and a couple company’s crew chiefs to relieve us and they
20 were sweeping the field around us. There was the officer that appeared out of somewhere
21 and he was a flag officer. I don’t remember if he was a colonel or a general and he’s
22 standing up on a parapet watching these tanks sweep on vine. The fields were mostly just
23 like the moon. They just airburst on them. At that point there were sixty-eight bodies in
24 the center of the compound and 111 hung up in the wire and 1700 lying around the
25 compound and trenches around the compound. Artillery got the vast majority of them.
26 He’s looking out and there was this stand of bamboo out in the middle of this open field
27 and five or six North Vietnamese come out of the bamboo and they’ve got their arms up
28 and they’re going “Chieu Hoi, Chieu Hoi.” We had a program called Chieu Hoi which
29 translates to open arms and if they turned in their weapon and themselves, then we made
30 them Kit Carson Scouts. The Marine Corps did this, nobody else did it. We made them
31 Kit Carson Scouts so they’re trying to come into the Chieu Hoi program and two tanks in

1 the middle of the formation which later turned out to be the tank commander's tank and
2 the platoon sergeant's tank. I watched the barrels on both of these M48s traverse and fire.
3 They were loaded with canister rounds which basically turned them into 90 millimeter
4 shot guns. So, the five or six guys disappear which I thought was a good thing and this
5 flag officer starts yelling on the radio that if they shoot another Vietnamese trying to
6 surrender that he was going to court marshal him and I told him, I said, "Gee sir, it's a
7 shame you weren't here about three o' clock in the morning because they weren't taking
8 no prisoners." There was something else that flashes in my mind. Oh, I remember, earlier
9 in the battle when I was in my hole, I started getting pretty heavy fire off my right flag
10 about between one and two o' clock of my right flying. I kept firing at them and I didn't
11 seem to be having an effect. It was starting to get kind of annoying and finally a flare
12 went up and I realized that there was a grave about one hundred and fifty feet from the
13 parapet out there. A little backstory on that. Graves in Vietnam were everywhere. They
14 don't have a concept of cemeteries like we do. There's a religious dude that decides
15 where the lines of force are of whatever it is, where they line up, and that's where they
16 plant this person. You'd see graves in the middle of the highway, people's yards, they
17 were just all over the place and there was a grave out there. A Vietnamese grave is oval
18 and its high on the front and the back. On the back side, high point, you see they're going
19 to be reverse statue for a Buddhist or a cross for a catholic. And on the front side point
20 will be the break in the wall whereas the entry and the raised tomb will be in the center.
21 So, they were in this tomb firing at me and that's why I couldn't get them. So, I had one
22 of the guys in the holes beside me, the hole to my right had my two Chieu Hoi's laid out
23 on tins and they kept up on the high volume of fire throughout the night because they are
24 damn sure didn't want to get captured. I had them fire a pop-up and I had the M-79, and I
25 was ready, so they fired the pop-up, the flare goes up, and I fired around at the cross on
26 the end of the compound. So, I got an air burst about eight feet off the deck. And the next
27 morning when I looked in that grave there was five dead North Vietnamese.

28 KC: Wow.

29 JG: Yeah, I got them with the .79 round. At one point during the night, I don't
30 remember this happening. Pinky and the hole next to me told me that this happened. I
31 don't know for a fact that it did, but he just says it did and I know that I'm almost deaf.

1 He said, a guy crawled up on the— No, A guy threw a twenty pound sapper charge up on
2 the front face of the parapet and it landed about two feet from my hole. When it went off,
3 it blew me up out of the hole and it blew me about fifteen feet in the air and about forty-
4 five feet back. He said I would have kept going, but I hit a bunker upside down and the
5 only reason it didn't kill me is because it landed on the front face of the parapet. It
6 directed, you know, ninety percent of the blast out and away from me. He said, "You
7 landed crawling. Crawled back up, picked up an M-16, and shot the guy that through the
8 sapper charge." And I said, "Well that part sounds like me." I really hate it when people
9 fill high explosives at me. It really pisses me off. That was about all I remember about the
10 attack. I remember the next day.

11 KC: Tell me about that next day.

12 JG: The next day they had a D8 cat and a Michigan front loader, and the cat dug a
13 big trench and the front loader picked up all the dead Vietnamese and dumped them into
14 the hole and then they covered it up. I remember—we used to listen to—your sources of
15 music on the radio in Vietnam are pretty much limited. You had "Armed Forces Radio"
16 which was controlled by the old guards, so you had Lawrence Welk and his Polka music
17 and country western. Just basically crap. If you like rock and roll it just wasn't
18 happening. The only exception to that was John Busters. John Busters came on at six in
19 the morning and I do remember the first time I heard him go, "Good morning, Vietnam."
20 I'm thinking, "easy for you to say, motherfucker. You ain't out here." There is no such
21 thing as good morning if you woke up in Vietnam. So, you only had one hour of rock, but
22 you had two other sources. You had "Radio Pi Kin" and "Radio Hanoi." Both of them
23 played rock or they jammed all night long. You not only got to because they'd have the
24 latest hits within a day or two hit in the United States and they'd have it in North
25 Vietnam, so they'd be playing all the latest rock and you also got to listen to very
26 entertaining commercials. To say that their propaganda was crude would be a gross
27 understatement. I never could decide which I preferred, to be a capless lackey or a wall
28 street running dog. I also though wall street running dog, at least he was active, you
29 know. I mean, they were funny. We used to just roll when we'd listen to the commercial.

30 KC: What would you hear him say, for example?

1 JG: Oh, lay down your arms, you know, and they'd be talking to the blacks.
2 "Don't be fighting the white man's war." And "Why are you oppressing the poor little
3 Vietnamese people. Come to our side and you'll be greeted as heroes." I'm thinking,
4 yeah, I've seen some of your heroes. I think I'll pass on that. I don't really remember a
5 whole bunch of it. Mostly I just listened to rock. And so, the next morning we got "Radio
6 Hanoi" on, and you had Hanoi Han and Peikin Polly. And they spoke excellent English
7 and so Hanoi Han is on the radio and she's talking about how the flag is a glorious
8 people's army is flying over the compound of the capitalist lackeys at Cam Lo and she
9 started reading off the dead, the names and serial numbers of the dead.

10 KC: Of the NVA dead?

11 JG: Of the Americans.

12 KC: The American dead?

13 JG: Yeah.

14 KC: Okay.

15 JG: One of them she read off was Cpl. Gerald R. Goller, 2147465. I'm standing
16 on top of a bunker, and I actually yelled out, "Not today, bitch, maybe tomorrow, but not
17 today. And I'll tell you one thing, a lot of your little yellow brothers are yelling in the
18 fields around us and if they'd like to take the compound to Cam Lo, they can take another
19 poke at it if they'd like." That's about the only two things I remember. Shortly after that,
20 Poppa 5, I'm the only person that can say they were with Poppa 5 from its inception to its
21 death. I was with it on Camp Carroll as it formed up, and I was at Cam Lo the night it
22 died. I was transferred after that to Romeo five and six which was a double calve outside
23 between Quang Tre and Camp Hill? Oh, between Quang Tre and Dong Ha.

24 KC: Let me ask you about the aftermath of this battle if I may, Mr. Goller. After
25 you've been through an action like this, I mean, to call it extreme would be an
26 understatement. Everything considered that you were involved with. When it's over, do
27 you have a period of time to reflect on it, to kind of get your bearings to find your place
28 in the middle of all of this?

29 JG: The next day.

30 KC: The next day?

31 JG: Yeah, then I was sent to another CAP compound.

1 KC: What was it like the next day when you were trying to make sense of what
2 you've been through?

3 JG: Mmm, I remember in the middle of the compound there was a row of bodies
4 covered in ponchos and I don't know who's under the ponchos. I'd heard that, that night
5 we took eighteen dead and ten serious wound and two minor wounds, me and
6 Anakowsky. I remember that there was a wounded marine setting up on top of the bunker
7 with an M-60 machine gun covering. We had either twenty-five or fifty prisoners that we
8 took, and we're all wounded. Supposedly somebody else told me that the first North
9 Vietnamese sergeant major Chieu Hoi'ed at Cam Lo. We heard later—the after action
10 report said we were hit by the elements of three regiments. Actually, we were attacked by
11 a 2500 child mob. The saltiest guy in the attack had, I think, two days in South Vietnam
12 and the boots got there about thirty minutes before the attack. None of them had ever
13 fired a shot in their life. They were truck drivers and cooks and clerks and shit like that.
14 They'd never been in combat before. The officers and NCOs, senior NCOs included. We,
15 of course, had been shot at a lot. So, I think that they probably had a psychological
16 problem from the start. They trolled the troops, like I said, there were ten of us. There
17 was actually thirty of us. We didn't have thermal nukes, but that's about the only thing
18 we didn't have. We had everything in an infantry unit would have. One other thing I
19 remember that night, there's a guy sitting in a mortar pit throwing mortar rounds down a
20 hole in the ground. What have you done he fired so many rounds that he busted the base
21 plate on the mortar and had driven the tube down in the ground? And I asked him, "What
22 are you shooting at?" and he said, "Hey, I can't miss." The guy up in the tower had an M-
23 79 grenade launcher. He took a round through the barrel of the M-79. They kept shooting
24 at that tower all night. They had a 75 pack Howitzer which was amazing to have
25 something that big. And they kept firing rocket rounds and Howitzer rounds at this tower
26 trying to knock it down. What they didn't know was that the tower was solid concrete. It
27 was probably at least eight foot square and about three stories high and it was solid
28 concrete. The Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese who sometimes did odd things, had
29 sandbagged the outside of that tower. Probably as a punishment for somebody, but the
30 sandbags were two sandbags deep on a solid concrete tower. So, they thought it was a
31 sandbag tower and they fired it all night which was fine with me as long as we're

1 shooting big shit at that tower, they weren't shooting it at me. The next day we were
2 sitting in the hooch. Something happened during the battle that I'm not going to talk
3 about. It was the only time in a Marine Corps officer in that situation and I'm just not
4 going to talk about it. We're sitting in the compound the next morning just kind of going,
5 "Gee, what the fuck was that all about?" It was just really surprising to us that they had
6 tried to take our compound. We still didn't know then Tet had happened. As a matter of
7 fact, I don't know think I found out about Tet until I got back to the states.

8 KC: Really?

9 JG: It's funny because people ask me about Vietnam like you guys. I can tell you
10 about nine grid squares in Vietnam, you know? Out of the two and a half years I was in
11 Vietnam I can tell you about maybe twenty-five individual days, maybe. The vast
12 majority of the time I had no idea where I was, nor did I have a really good idea of what
13 we were doing or suppose to be doing. Mostly we just roamed around trying to get in a
14 firefight and the calve teams. What we would do is we coordinated Med caps for the
15 village, we tried to get them aluminum to make roof sheet aluminum and work with the
16 PFs and everything, but in the calve team, our TOR, tactical air responsibility was nine
17 red squares. That's not very big. I didn't actually know where I was in Vietnam until
18 1978. I was at a vet center, and I saw the first full-sized map of North and South Vietnam
19 I had ever seen. And figured out where I was off that map. Most of the time I didn't
20 really have a real good clue.

21 KC: Sure.

22 JG: It was just kind of a day to day thing, you know? It's not like they consulted
23 with me on the big picture.

24 KC: Sure

25 JG: It's kind of a day to day thing, you know? It's not like they consulted with me
26 on the big picture.

27 KC: Sure, of course, of course.

28 JG: I was just a grunt.

29 KC: How would you say that the action at Cam Lo most affected you while you
30 were both in Vietnam and after you came home?

1 JG: Oh, that's a hard question to answer. The Vets I've talked to from Cam Lo all
2 used the same pin number and bank account. I'm not going to tell you what it is. When I
3 have the flag show going in my mind it almost always was another Cam Lo. For about
4 ten years after I got back, even to this day for that matter, although it's after, I didn't take
5 life real seriously. I was of the opinion that anything after that was just gravy, if I made
6 another month that was just a freebie. For the first 10 years or so that I was back, I had a
7 sneaky suspicion in the back of my mind that this was all a dream because it was really
8 hard to accept that this reality and that reality existed in the same plane. I had no doubt in
9 my mind that Vietnam was real. It was just one real son of a bitch. So, the only logical
10 conclusion to draw from that was this was a dream because this place was just, to say
11 surreal is so feval, it's just so far out of context that it was extremely difficult for me to
12 accept this reality. So, I just kind of had a sneaky suspicion in the back of my mind that
13 maybe this wasn't real, that I was laying in a trench at Cam Lo dying and this was the last
14 twenty or thirty seconds of my life. Weird, huh?

15 KC: That obviously had a tremendous impact on you, and I certainly know why.

16 JG: It's not all necessarily bad. I've had people ask me why. Where do you get all
17 your confidence? You never seem to hesitate; you seem so confident. Well, it's kind of
18 handy to know that the worst thing that could ever conceivably possibly happen to you
19 has already happened and you made it through that. The shit out here, pretty mundane,
20 you know? I've seen people stew for ten minutes over what to eat for lunch and I tell
21 them, "Hey, it's just fucking lunch. It ain't like you're eating with the queen. It doesn't
22 fucking matter, just pick something and eat it." They seem almost paralyzed with
23 indecision. Frequently, they seem to be searching for that non-existent third alternative
24 because they're faced with two bad choices. Yup, that's frequently the case. And it's like
25 they think that there's always some good solution, you know? That there's always some
26 way they can pick up all the marbles. I spent most of my time trying to pick the best of
27 the available bad alternatives, you know? Which one was the least bad of what was
28 available to us? And they don't seem to realize that not making the decision is making the
29 decision. They've decided to continue doing whatever they were doing. When you come
30 to a junction and it's time to make a decision, you are going to make a decision, you have
31 no choice. For most of the time I was in the infantry, I really was pretty—I mean, I was

1 footloose and fancy free. I was walking point and it was actually a pretty quiet and
2 peaceful time in my life. I had no decisions to make, I didn't have to worry about if I was
3 going to get a promotion or if Suzy liked me or if I could get a new car or how was I
4 going to pay for the transmission or anything because none of that shit applied to my life.
5 I really only had one thing to worry about and by and large, I had absolutely no control
6 over that. And that was staying alive. So, I just didn't worry about it. There was no point
7 in it, it's like worrying about the sun coming up tomorrow. The only time I was scared in
8 Vietnam—I mean, obviously when somebody shot at me, that was different. If you hear a
9 round that sounds like about a fifty-five pound bumble bee going by, just kind of a “zzz”
10 they're not shooting at just any old body, and somebody's shooting at you. That came
11 very, very close to your head. I get that momentary thrill, that little punch of adrenaline
12 from my nuts up my spine, but generally speaking, you can only maintain terror so long.
13 Eventually it just becomes normal, and it had become normal. So, one night I never really
14 worried about anything because that was the problem with that idiot in the middle of the
15 squad, you know, the squad leader, the ambush leader. It wasn't my problem; my only
16 problem was to be sure of not walking into a mine field and if it was an ambush to trip it
17 before everybody else did. That was my soul project in life. The first night that I was that
18 idiot in the middle of the squad, that scared me, and I was thinking about nine hundred
19 miles an hour and trying to think of everything, which of course, you can't do. I
20 remember finally just saying, stop, you know how to do this, you've done it hundreds of
21 times. Knock it off and go to work. And I relaxed and ran the ambush. You want to know
22 what kind of impact Cam Lo had on me? I had about two months left to do in Vietnam
23 after Cam Lo. They sent to Romeo five and six, a double cap. When I got there, it's kind
24 of an uncomfortable situation because they don't know you and you don't know them.
25 You're supposed to take them out on ambushes. About the only thing you knew about me
26 is I'd come out of Cam Lo and that I had two and a half years in-country which made me,
27 by far, the senior man there as far as being in-country was concerned. So, I'd been there
28 for three or four days, and I got my first ambush. I took them out and my point was a
29 lance corporal named Nelson Pierson, Nelly Pierson. Nelly's moving along and all of a
30 sudden artillery started impacting a fair distance away from us. And as far as our
31 designated ambush, it was probably a mile off the ambush. I stopped the squad and I

1 called for the radio in a double cap. I think there was almost thirty of us or fifteen or
2 twenty. It seemed like a lot of guys, so it was no longer just two or three Americans on an
3 Ambush, there was like five or six of us. So, I call for the radio and the radio came up
4 and I called in and said I was going to secure the night activity because artillery was
5 impacting on an ambush sight. And Nelly's looking at me kind of funny and the radio
6 operators looked at me kind of funny because they both knew the artillery wasn't
7 anywhere near the ambush sight. So, the ambush leader controls everything, nobody
8 questions your judgment because he's the only one actually there. So, we turn around and
9 went back, but now I've got a nervous fire team because they know there's something
10 wrong with the team leader. A couple nights later I got another ambush and we're in the
11 ambush feeding and I'm sitting there looking at the map and I'm not hearing anything
12 that compound commander is saying. The name of the village that I was supposed to go
13 to set up an ambush in and this is the honest to god truth was a village named Phuc Mi.

14 KC: Oh know.

15 JG: I just kept looking at it thinking, "Yeah, and you're going to aren't you
16 motherfucker?" I knew if I went into that village I was going to die. So, I made about one
17 hundred yards on the ambush, and it was a fully moon, killer moon. And I stopped the
18 ambush, and I could see it in everybody's face, they're going, "Oh fuck, no." and I called
19 in and said, "I'm scaring the night activity." And they, "What?" I said, "I just am." They
20 said, "Wait one." So, the compound commander was a staff sergeant named Harper. So
21 naturally the sign over the interest of compounds at Harper's bizarre. Harper comes up on
22 the radio and he says, "What's the problem?" I said, "I'll tell you when I get back." He
23 said, "Okay, bring it back." So, I went back to the compound, and I went down to my
24 bunker and I'm pretty sure the runner team down and he said, "Harper wants to talk to
25 you." So, I went over to Harper's bunker and he's sitting there at the bunker, and he said,
26 "What's wrong?" I wasn't sure how he was going to react to this because the Marine
27 Corps' kind of funny about how they deal with things. I looked at him and I said, "I just
28 can't do it anymore." I said, "I'm trying to think, I'm trying to think of everything, and
29 you can't. It only just flowed, it was just automatic, it was like breathing or walking, but
30 it's not that way anymore. I'm going to get somebody killed and I just can't deal with
31 that. I can't go out anymore." And he looked at me for a second and I was curious to see

1 what he was going to say and then he broke out in this big old shitting grin. He says,
2 “You know, we were wondering when you were going to give this shit up.” He said,
3 “You realize that you could have voted in the last Vietnamese general election? You have
4 been here long enough to have established a residency in this country.” He said, “It’s
5 time for you to go home.” I stayed in the compound the rest of the time until I rotated out.
6 So that’s how Cam Lo affected me.

7 KC: You rotate back to the states in April of ‘68, is that correct?

8 JG: Mm-hmm.

9 KC: Describe leaving Vietnam for me?

10 JG: I really don’t remember. One day I was in Vietnam and the next day I was in
11 Tulsa, Oklahoma.

12 KC: What kind of reception did you have when you came home; family, friends,
13 community?

14 JG: It was kind of interesting. Nobody talked about Vietnam. Nobody asked me
15 any questions. It was like it hadn’t happened. In my mental state, I’m going; I really was
16 there one time. I mean, it really did happen. Nobody talked about it. Now, my dad he was
17 about 5’3”, 5’4”, he was pretty short, and he was a Marine Air Wing when he was in the
18 Marine Corps. So, my dad never fired a shot in anger in the Second World War. My dad
19 was a very good Christian, didn’t preach a lot, and just lived it. He didn’t cuss, didn’t
20 drink, you know, basic nice guy. I remember I met him for lunch at a barbeque place and
21 he wanted to—the waitress went to take my order and I asked for ribs and a beer, and she
22 wanted to see an ID. That must have been a relief because I wasn’t twenty-one yet and
23 she said I can’t have a beer. My dad says, “What do you mean he can’t have a beer? He
24 can go fight for you, but he can’t have a beer. Bring us two beers.” And my dad doesn’t
25 even drink. I remember one other funny thing happened when I was home, a couple
26 funny things actually. I didn’t get to vote at the time. I think it was eighteen that you
27 could vote and there was an election when I was nineteen and I was home on leave, and
28 they wouldn’t let me vote because I hadn’t registered in advance. I hadn’t registered in
29 time enough for an election. I told her, I said I was kind of tied up at the time. I never got
30 to vote that first time. I also remember we were on Dong Ha Mountain when I was with
31 the grunts, and I get my mail and it’s a post card from the draft warden in Tulsa telling

1 me that I had to report for my physical for the draft. So, I wrote him back and I said, “I
2 would be delighted to show up for my draft physical in Tulsa, could you please arrange it
3 for me?” Signed PFC Gerald R. Goller and with a return address of FPO San Francisco at
4 96602. The 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines. It amused me at the time, but after I got home my
5 parents were pretty sure there was something wrong. I was asleep in my bedroom one
6 afternoon and I was fully dressed just laying on the bed and the door to my bedroom as
7 immediately to my right and above my head. My family nickname, I was the youngest in
8 the family; my family nickname from my dad was peanuts. He stepped through the door
9 and said, “Hey, Peanuts.” And I rolled up and kicked him in the chest and kicked him
10 across the room. And he bounced off the wall and slid down the wall and he’s sitting
11 there trying to catch his breath and he said, “Is it that bad?” and I said, “Well, it ain’t that
12 goddamn good. You know, don’t come and yell in my ear when I’m asleep, a very bad
13 idea.” So, my parents decided that perhaps I needed somebody to talk to. I was still in
14 uniform for some reason and my dad wanted me to go down to the VFW and I said,
15 “Dad, I don’t think that’s a good idea.” And he said, “Yeah, yeah, it’ll be good for you,
16 son. You’ll be able to talk to people that are familiar with your experiences.” And I said,
17 “Dad, I don’t think it’s going to work out that way.” What my dad didn’t know is I had
18 run into a World War II vet on one of my leaves. He said, “I just don’t understand you
19 people. We give you all this money and we give you all these weapons and everything
20 and you just don’t seem to be able to win.” I said, “Yeah, I know man. I’m sorry about
21 that, but I’ll tell you what, it’s not from lack of trying because we’re stacking the little
22 fuckers like cordwood. We kill them as fast as we can. Just out of curiosity, what number
23 would make you happy? How many do we need to kill to make you happy?” We didn’t
24 get along all that well with Second World War vets or anybody else for that matter. They
25 thought we had an attitude. They were right, but my dad finally decided, yeah, you need
26 to go to the VA. So, I said, “Okay, whatever dad let’s go to the VA or the VFW.” So, we
27 got down to the VFW, keep in mind my dad does not cuss. And we go up to the guy at
28 the VFW and my dad says, “My son would like to join.” And the guy looked a little
29 uncomfortable and he said, “Well, he can’t.” My dad says, “What, what do you mean?” I
30 said, “Don’t worry about it, dad, let’s go.” And he said, “No, why can’t he join?” The
31 guy looked at him a little uncomfortably and he says, “Because he’s never been in a war.”

1 The VFW did not take Vietnam Vets until 1969 or 1970. I assume they figured out the
2 Second World War Vets were dying off and we were going to be the only game in town.
3 My dad starts to shake a little bit and then he says, "What do you mean he's never been in
4 a fucking war? Where do you think he got all of them god damn Purple Hearts, playing
5 ping pong?" and I looked down and I'm thinking, "Son of a bitch, little man's getting
6 mad." I told him, I said, "It's okay, Dad. Don't worry about it." I looked at the guy and I
7 said, "Dude, I know we've not been in a war, but I've seen all those John Wayne movies
8 and shit and trust me, Vietnam looks just like that. If we're not having a war, it's not
9 from lack of trying I'll tell you that." And then we left. Of course, to this day, I will not
10 join the VFW. The only organization that took Vietnam Vets from the start was the
11 Disabled American Veterans. I'm a lifetime member of the DAV.

12 KC: What kind of difficulties did you have adjusting once you came home?
13 Before you've talked about the rules that you live by until you're eighteen and then for
14 two years or so you learn a different set of rules and then after your time with the
15 Marines, you're taught to go back to or told to go back to the original set of rules. What
16 kind of difficulties did you have through this process?

17 JG: Well, I had a pretty fluid concept of right and wrong. I understood that right is
18 decided by whoever's got the most guns and wrong is whatever pisses them off. I had a
19 pretty intense dislike for this country. They had killed most of the people I knew, and it
20 didn't seemed to be all worth it. I probably stayed alive for awhile just waiting for the
21 Russians to nuke this place so I could watch the country die. But fucking Russians, you
22 just can't depend on anybody, you know? They don't make Russians like they used to,
23 that never happens. So basically, I just walked around pissed most of the time. I tried to
24 explain to a wife one time; I've had five of them that most people walk around about ten
25 to fifteen percent pissed all the time. They're pissed at the old lady or their pissed at their
26 boss or their job or something. So, they've got about eighty-five to ninety percent
27 headroom. People like me, walking around about eighty-five to ninety percent pissed all
28 the time. So, we don't have a lot of headroom left. And that's why somebody pops
29 officers, and we stab them. We're really pretty pissed most of the time. I intensely
30 disliked most of the people around me. Now, when I first got back, I didn't have any
31 emotions at all, none, zip. I never got mad, I never got sad, I never laughed, I never cried,

1 I never smiled, I never did anything. I remember my second wife yelling at me one time
2 saying, "You're like being married to a fucking robot. I just like to see you get mad one
3 time." And I told her, I said, "Mm, I don't think so." I don't think either one of us wanted
4 to see me get mad. That's how I kind of cruised. I was always armed, heavily. I always
5 had lots of weapons in my truck. I had somebody ask me one time, "Why do you carry so
6 many guns?" I said, "Well, faster than reloading." And they said, "What do you think
7 you're going to run into?" I said, "I don't know, but I'm going to win." And they said,
8 "But you need that many? And I said, "Yeah, because I don't know what's going to
9 happen. I can't do a really fine selection of the proper weapon, so I just want to be sure I
10 have the right one because there's nothing as embarrassing to either run out of ammo or
11 be unarmed in the middle of a firefight." It's just a really bad idea. I kind of cruised that
12 way for awhile and then I had told everybody and believed it myself that I had never, I
13 really hadn't seen that much. I never saw anybody killed; I never saw anybody wounded.
14 I couldn't remember any firefights except Cam Lo. I've probably seen enough to tell
15 some war stories to my grandkids, but really, pretty uneventful time. And then I watched
16 them dedicate the wall on television and I started to remember and all that stuff that had
17 long left me started to come out and I started to cry, and I cried for eighteen hours and
18 couldn't stop. It scared me, it scared the crap out of my wife, and I was trying to stuff it
19 all back in and I couldn't, but I couldn't get it out either. So, it's kind of stuck halfway
20 and I was that way for a long time. Within a year I was in federal prison. My life kind of
21 went down the tube after that.

22 KC: Now, you said after awhile you were what? I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you.

23 JG: Within a year I was in federal prison on drugs and weapons charges, big
24 surprise. It just wasn't a very good period. I remember thinking, there's a joke in prison
25 that they didn't incarcerate you, they rescued you. Well, they definitely rescued me. They
26 basically locked me up in bathroom for about four years so I could contemplate my
27 enable and try to figure out what the fuck is going on, why do I react the way I do? I used
28 to kid the other guys who I was pretty sure I was crazy that they thought all those barbed
29 wire fences were supposed to keep us in, but I knew it was to keep everybody else out. It
30 was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. It gave me time to just stop and put
31 my life on hold and just think, think about how my life was going the way it is.

1 KC: When did you seek treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

2 JG: I actually didn't. After I got out of prison, I found out that I was pretty much
3 unemployable and couldn't get a job. I've never been in that situation in my life, I just
4 couldn't get a job. Of course, this is also during the big recession they always talk about
5 now, about 25 years ago. Well, that was that period of time. I came down with
6 hemorrhoids of all things. And hemorrhoids are just not something you can ignore. I was
7 indigent completely so I did the only thing I could think of to do, I went to the nearest
8 VA hospital that I knew of which was in Kingston, Texas. I was living in Georgetown at
9 the time and turned myself in to get medical treatment. I knew that they would do
10 something. So, it took a couple of days for them because they have to certify your records
11 and so forth and so on and through the course of this, this guy says, "You were in
12 Vietnam?" I said, "I heard that." He said, "You were exposed to Agent Orange?" And I
13 said, "I heard that as well." He says, "Well, we're doing this Agent Orange screening and
14 we want you to go to this Agent Orange screening." I said, "As long as you'll fix my ass
15 up, I'll do whatever you want." At the time the government was doing blood test to detect
16 dioxin, which is interesting because dioxin isn't in the blood, it's in the fat. Dioxin is
17 stored in the body fat and the only way you'll find it is to do a biopsy unless you're
18 losing or gaining weight. If you're losing or gaining weight then dioxin will appear in the
19 blood, but biopsies were too expensive, so they did blood tests instead. The government
20 can be so funny sometimes. Particularly when you're talking about money. So, the Agent
21 Orange screening room was down in the basement of the Kingsville VA Hospital. So, I'm
22 sitting down there in the hallway and there's nobody there, just me. And the door to the
23 screen room is closed, but the door to the office next to it was open and there was a
24 woman sitting at her desk a couple years older than I am. She kept watching me and it
25 was starting to make me a little nervous. She finally got up and walked down to the
26 hallway and she said, "You're a Vietnam Vet, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah." She said,
27 "You're a combat vet, aren't you?" and I said, "Yeah, why?" and she started talking to
28 me and I don't remember what all she said, but we only talked for about ten minutes. The
29 next thing I remember, I'm crying and she's hugging me. She probably did more for me
30 in those ten minutes than anybody had done in the decade or, so I had been out. She said,
31 "I'm going to set up some appointments for you. Now, they're not going to be here

1 because this isn't your VA hospital. Actually, your hospital is in Temple, Texas. Now, I
2 want you to go to these important, very important that you go." And I said, "Why?" and
3 she said, "Okay, I want to get you evaluated. I think it's very important to you." I said,
4 "Evaluated for what?" and she said, "PTSD." And I said, "What's that?" and she said,
5 "It's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." And I said, "What's that?" and she said, "Don't
6 worry about it. You've got it in spades. Just go to the appointments, it's very important."
7 So, I went to the appointments and talked to a shrink up there and they also evaluated me
8 for my hearing loss. The audiologist kept my records on the desk in front of me and he
9 asked me, he said, "Mr. Goller, did this hearing loss, was it sudden or did it occur over
10 time?" "Oh, it's pretty sudden." He said, "When did you first notice it?" and I said,
11 "When I woke up." And he said, "You lost your hearing in your sleep?" "Read my
12 fucking health records you moron, I got blown straight across a fucking compound and
13 when I regained consciousness, surprisingly enough I couldn't hear very well." These
14 people are going to operate on me and I'm thinking, "Not today you're not." I didn't hear
15 anything so at the time I was kind of living on a corps project, Lake Georgetown playing
16 tag with the corps of engineers and mostly staying away from people. I was talking to my
17 brother one afternoon and he said, "Hey Bubba, you got a bunch of mail here from the
18 VA." Oh, in the intervening time I'd gotten a form from the VA and this form said,
19 among other things, "Give the date and time and location of the occurrence of your PTSD
20 and any of your friends that were killed there." The first thought that popped into my
21 mind, "I remember, I was walking down the trail, it was on Friday the 12th about three
22 o'clock. Pew, oh shit, PTSD." It's so fucking stupid. So, I wrote across the form, "Fuck
23 you." And mailed it back to them which apparently was the proper response. A couple
24 months later Jim's telling me he's got all this mail and I said, "Fucking trash it, they
25 don't have anything I want. I don't have any use for them." So, he kept going on so I
26 said, "Fine Jim, open one if it will make you happy." So, he opens one and there's
27 silence. He said, "Bubba, we might want to open these other ones." I said, "Why?" he
28 said, "Well this one's a check for 6,800 dollars and if they all are, you're shitting in tall
29 cotton, son." Whenever you file a VA claim, they don't post edit to the occurrence of the
30 event, but they do back date it to when you applied. So that first check by random chance

1 that he picked up was the catch-up check and one or two others were for eighteen
2 hundred dollars and a letter telling me I was one hundred percent disabled. You're turn.

3 KC: Do you still seek treatment, go in for treatment now?

4 JG: Yeah.

5 KC: How do you think that—this is a stupid question; how do you think you're
6 doing?

7 JG: It varies. Compared to the first ten years I was home, light years. I stopped
8 marrying cripples which was always a good first step. And to say cripples is a harsh
9 word, but I used to believe that I was so unclean and that I had done such horrible things
10 that the normal thinking person wouldn't want to associate with me, so I used to marry
11 people that were emotionally crippled. And oddly enough, two cripples do not, in fact,
12 make a whole person. They just make a really fucked up marriage. The time in prison
13 helped a lot because I got to think a lot. And it dawned on me that Vietnam controlled
14 everything in my life. It controlled the clothes I wore, the jobs I took, the vehicles I
15 drove, the houses I lived in, my hobbies; it controlled everything. And that was really
16 annoying to me. I'm about half smart and it was really, really annoying that a single two
17 and a half year period out of my life was controlling my whole fucking life, everything. I
18 also didn't seem to be able to do a whole lot about it. Thinking about it, prison was
19 probably my first steps to getting my self unfucked or as unfucked as I get. After I got out
20 of prison the VA started me on disability then I decided to go to a group because it was
21 obvious, I still had issues. I was working at a night club in Austin, Texas and I was
22 working as a bus boy because it was the only job I could get. My brother was one of the
23 assistant managers at the club, which is how I got the job. I couldn't even get a job as a
24 bus boy. Everybody knew that I had just gotten out prison, they also knew I spent a lot of
25 time in Vietnam. The first time it came up, there was some—surprising enough there's a
26 lot of drunks in bars, particularly in Texas and so there was a couple of drunks and they
27 were in a fight and security came up and this guy was hitting the security guard in the
28 back or something that was trying to break up the fight and I was on the dance floor and I
29 ran around to one of the openings in the rails, ran back up, and as I ran by, I just stuck an
30 arm around his throat and just peeled him off and kept going. And then I took him to the
31 floor and wrapped my legs around his waist and I had him in a hold that's actually

1 designed to break your neck, but I wasn't breaking his neck. I had him on top of me
2 because there were people standing around me trying to kick me. There was a guy at the
3 rail because there were chairs around the dance floor rail and later, he came up to me and
4 he was an FBI agent. He said, "You know, I was going to help you because you were
5 down on the floor and then I realized you were exactly where you wanted to be." And I
6 said, "Oh yeah, I was just using him to protect me." I got a couple of other incidences and
7 people found that I was, I think 45 at that time, but I was really, really quick. One night
8 we had the back door unlocked and we were breaking the boxes down and putting the
9 dumpsters in the back and all the bus boys were, of course, college students or the
10 barbacks were college students. So, we're walking back across the alley to the back door,
11 and I was turned around, had my head turned around talking to the guy behind me when a
12 barback in the door tossed an empty box at me. I ducked the box, and everybody just
13 stood there stunned. "How did you do that?" and I said, "Oh shit, I'm getting old. When I
14 was your age, I could have caught the box." I felt the air pressure off the box. One of the
15 things I noticed about what was different here; people here are so situationally unaware
16 as to be stunning. They seem to have absolutely no concept of what's going on around
17 them. I always do; I always know what's going on around me, always." One of the girls
18 that worked at the club was a little Porte Rican girl; she was just drop dead beautiful. She
19 was in her late twenties, early thirties and looked about nineteen. She had a cocaine and
20 drinking problem. Her husband had divorced her and her whole life was "woe is me" and
21 I had an apartment at the time, and I would hire girls out of the club to clean the
22 apartment for me because I just didn't want to do it. And I had the money, I was single.
23 So, she came in drunk and probably high, and I was sitting at a table by myself brooding
24 as I usually was, and she came up to me and she started telling me her tale of woe. I
25 finally said—her name was Pilar, but everybody called her Peely because they couldn't
26 properly pronounce her name. I said, "Peely, why are you telling me all this?" and she
27 said, "Well, I just needed to talk to a friend." And it was just one of those unguarded
28 moments when I wasn't acting. I looked at her and said, "Peely, what makes you think
29 I'm a friend of yours?" She looked kind of shocked, and she said, "I've known you for
30 two years and, you know, we're friends." And I said, "Peely, I hardly know you. What
31 makes you think I'm your friend?" She was really shocked and about that time I felt a

1 little bad, it was kind of like kicking a puppy, but she said, “Well, I’m your friend.” And I
2 said, “You are?” and she said, “Yeah.” I said, “Well Peely, what would you do for me as
3 a friend?” and she got kind of a coy look on her face because she was a very pretty girl
4 and she said, “I don’t know, what have you got in mind?” I said, “Well, supposedly we’re
5 sitting here, and an armed gang broke in the front door and I’m laying out there on that
6 dance floor wounded. Are you going to come out and get me, Peely? Suppose we get
7 backed into a corner and there’s a little bitty hole in the wall and you’ll fit through it, but
8 I won’t. Are you going to grab a hat or are you going to stay and die with me?” She just
9 looked truly shocked and started crying and I said, “Peely, I know what a friend actually
10 is and you’re not one.” Later I thought it was a pretty asshole thing to do, but I had found
11 on the outside that the definition of a friend was somebody you’d known for twenty
12 minutes that had loaned you twenty bucks. I had a little definition of friendship than that.
13 That was a hard thing for me to adjust to, too. That casualness of people throwing the
14 concept of friendship around, I still have a problem with it for that matter, but I had
15 stopped drinking. When I got out of Vietnam I shipped over because where was I going
16 to go? What was I going to do? The world just seemed totally bizarre to me, so I stayed in
17 the Marine Corps. At least there were people that I could talk to that had a concept of
18 what I was talking about, and I was an interest posted to Marine detachment in London,
19 England, which I had a lot of fun at. I woke up one morning in the sergeant’s quarters and
20 I realized that I was soaked in blood, and I think, “Oh shit, now what?” So, I got out, took
21 my clothes off, went in the shower and there was this guy named Big Bill Camel, a big
22 black guy who looked like he’d been pulling butts at a shot gun range, and he had pieces
23 of meat blowing out of him as big as my fist. I couldn’t remember where I’d been for the
24 last four days and I said, “Hey Bill, I feel like someone stabbed me. Where’d he get me?”
25 and Bill walks around, and he comes back and says, “Bad news bro, no holes.” So, I
26 stuck my fingers out of my nose in hopes that it was a nosebleed, but it wasn’t. So that
27 scared the shit out of me, and I read the papers for the next week or so to see if they
28 found the bodies yet because with the amount of blood that was on me, it was more than
29 one person. I never did find out what happened. It scared the crap out of me. I decided at
30 that point that I probably needed to either kill myself or quit drinking because it was
31 really unfair to the people around me. They didn’t have a really big chance. You know

1 how alcohol releases your inhibitions? Some of us need those inhibitions. Those
2 inhibitions should not be released. So, I struggled on the road to stop drinking and I
3 completely forgot what we were talking about.

4 KC: No, that's perfectly fine. As you look back on all this, if you had one thing
5 that you could say about your experiences in Vietnam and your experiences afterward,
6 and because, again, we're recording this for posterity, this is going to be available to
7 people who want to listen to this. What thing would you have to say to either offer
8 advise, to offer lessons? What would you want people in the future to know about your
9 little piece of Vietnam and the way it affected you?

10 JG: Be goddamn sure you know what you're doing before you send people into a
11 war. That sounds really good on paper and it's really cool when they stand there and say,
12 "Yeah, we're going to go in there and kick those raggy's ass" and your first thought is,
13 "What's this 'we' shit, motherfucker? Are you pregnant? You got a mouse in your pocket
14 because we all know you're not going, and neither is your son or daughter." Keep in
15 mind that all those cool wars your want to fight have to be fought by somebody and that
16 they will pay for that war for the rest of their life. And it doesn't matter if they killed
17 there or wounded, or come out of the place completely unscathed, they will pay for that
18 war for the rest of their life. Just be sure you know what you're doing before you send
19 them." I think an all voluntary military is a tragic, tragic mistake. The situation we have
20 today is the military has divorced from the population and the population is divorced
21 from the military. It becomes very easy to send people whose job in life is to fight wars,
22 but when you say, "Let's go kick those rocky's ass and you find out it may actually be us,
23 that it maybe you or your son or your daughter. Maybe they won't be quite so froggy.
24 Now, I'm not anti-war, do not misunderstand. I learned if nothing else, that there's a
25 certain class of people that you just can't seem to reason with on every other level
26 because they're not reasonable people and you have to go over and shoot them in the
27 head. So, I'm not against wars, I'm against frivolous wars. I'm against wars that have
28 accomplished nothing because they talk about the fifty-eight thousand dead in Vietnam
29 and for a long time, I wished I was one of them. I always thought that I should have died
30 in Vietnam with all my friends. Things could have been a lot better. Nobody walks out of
31 a war unmarked and this country, generally speaking, doesn't have a fucking clue about

1 what it's built. It has built the most lethal military in the history of the world. There is
2 nothing that can even get in the race with us. We may not worth a shit as nation builders,
3 but we're still number one as nation destroyers. They should keep that in mind. They
4 have no idea what war is actually about. They watch it on television and of course, people
5 like the shit-head George Bush doesn't want people to see the dead bodies because it
6 'desecrates' them. Bullshit, how can the population truly make a decision if all they see is
7 one side? They need to see both the downside and the upside before they can make a
8 good decision. Plus bringing those people in, in the dark with nothing is the most
9 dishonoring, denigrating thing I have ever seen done in my life. They gave their fucking
10 life to the country. The least you can do is look at them. That's the least you owe them.
11 So, that's probably the lesson I have for the world and I'm sure they'll listen.
12 KC: Okay, well thank you very much.