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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Jim Ford
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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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.

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1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History Interview with
2 Mr. Jim Ford. Today is February 16, 2010; we are in the Special Collections Library on
3 the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. Mr. Ford, to begin this
4 interview, I'd like to ask you some biographical information if I could. Could you tell me
5 when you were born and where?

6 Jim Ford: Born April 23, 1949, in Andrews, Texas.

7 KC: Andrews, Texas. What were your parent's names?

8 JF: My father's name, he went by his initials, JD, which stood for Geraldine Ford
9 and my mother's maiden name was Hill, her first name was Vita. And he worked out in
10 the oilfield.

11 KC: I was going to ask you about what he did for a living, working out in the
12 oilfields.

13 JF: Yeah, we moved around a lot.

14 KC: I bet you did. What sort of work did he do in the oilfields?

15 JF: Most of the time he was a driller on an oilrig. The oil industry has always been
16 the same then and as it is now. It's famine and so we moved from job to job, and town to
17 town where the work was at. When he was working, we lived good and when he didn't
18 work, we were on the poverty line.

1 KC: And did you have brothers and sisters?

2 JF: I have one brother and one sister.

3 KC: One brother and one sister.

4 JF: Both younger.

5 KC: Both younger, so you're the oldest of the family. If you could, go into some
6 more description or more detail about this. It's not an itinerate lifestyle, but you did move
7 around quite a bit all things considered. Tell me what it was like for a young child to
8 grow up in this kind of environment?

9 JF: Well, I really didn't have a taste of it because by the time I started school they
10 had finally decided that Kermit (Texas), where I grew up, was where they were going to
11 call home. We only moved once during all that time. I think when I was in the fourth
12 grade and that was to Winters, Texas, and we stayed there for about a year. A very
13 traumatic experience for me. I did not like it; it was a cultural shock for me.

14 KC: Tell me about that.

15 JF: Winters was mostly an agrarian type of town, you know, most people farmed.
16 And I was an oil kid, and we just didn't get along very well. I didn't understand where
17 they were coming from; they didn't understand where I was coming from. When dad
18 came in one day from work and made the announcement that we were going back to
19 Kermit it was the happiest day of my life.

20 KC: How about your brother and sister? Did they do okay with the change?

21 JF: You know, it was just about a month ago I went back to visit my mother, she's
22 elderly and I was talking to my sister, and we were kind of reminiscing about her
23 childhood. I said, "You know, remember when we moved to Winters?" and she says,
24 "Yes, I hated it." I said, "I didn't know you felt that way." She says, "Oh yeah."

25 KC: End of the first fifty, sixty years?

26 JF: Yeah, it was a different culture and a different mindset, and we just didn't
27 click with those people.

28 KC: Well, although you didn't move all that much other than this one time. What
29 sort of things did you do as a young child growing up? The typical things, was your
30 childhood extraordinary in anyway? What was the day-to-day life like for you?

1 JF: Oh, it was pretty typical. You know, most of the people in Kermit were in
2 some way or another were linked into the oil industry because that's what made the town
3 thrive and that's what it lived on was oil revenue. So, everyone, everyone's parents in
4 some aspect or another was related to the oil industry, so we were off it like we were
5 pretty much akin to one another. It was pretty ordinary. Living out in Kermit, it wasn't a
6 very big town to begin with. I think in the late sixties when I was going through high
7 school was really the apex of the city as far as population and industry. I think they were
8 running somewhere around fifteen thousand maybe. It was a wonderful community I
9 thought growing up and we were all close knit. Like most small towns we know each
10 other's business, but we looked after one another. I can recall us going to bed as a family
11 at night and not locking the doors or windows. Just had no fear, you know, and that sort
12 of thing. I shudder, now when I think about it, but we had no problem with it.

13 KC: Well, certainly a different time and a different understanding for sure.

14 JF: It was in a way it was kind of lonely. Kermit's kind of out by itself, it was a
15 small community and there wasn't a lot of recreation for kiddos to do other than going to
16 matinees on the weekends. There were some sand hills between us and Andrews that we
17 used to go out and have some fun in. Other than that, for a boy growing up, sports were
18 kind of our lives and it was for myself. I started running in track and loved it and that was
19 kind of my outlet until a little later on in life and I discovered art and that was an outlet. I
20 had those two things that kind of ran my engine, so to speak, and made life tolerable.

21 KC: What about school there in Kermit? How well did you do?

22 JF: I wasn't an outstanding student, but I think—I was an As and Bs student, but I
23 probably could have been a straight A student if I put the effort to it, but really didn't.
24 Track took up my time and school came second and I kind of regret that now. I didn't put
25 a better effort to it.

26 KC: Now, growing up when you did, growing up in the 1950s and the 1960s, the
27 overwhelming global issue of the day, of course, was the Cold War with the United
28 States and the Soviet Union. What sort of things do you remember about the Cold War
29 growing up?

30 JF: I remember being curious about Russia and I worked in a library during my
31 lunch hour in junior high and high school and I had access to all these books, and I start

1 trying to find information on Russia about the people and about their history and there
2 was nothing, there was nothing. I was amazed. I guess I can understand in retrospect now
3 why that was they were enemies and I guess we could justify it that there was no useful
4 purpose of publishing information about them. At that time, I could not find anything.
5 There's no saying, you know, you should know your enemy and I guess that's what
6 prompted me to start investigating in our researching about Russia, but I could not find
7 anything about them. As far as the Cold War, I remember the courthouse downtown had
8 designated their basement as a fallout shelter. Of course, all the kids that grew up in the
9 fifties and when you're at school they would have these drills. I remember as a kid, "This
10 is ludicrous; you can't survive a nuclear blast. We're just kidding ourselves."

11 KC: So, should these Russians who we don't understand decide to nuke Kermit,
12 Texas, we're going to be in trouble.

13 JF: Yeah, big trouble, big trouble. We had some instructors that had fallout
14 shelters in their backyard, and they'd invite us over and we'd look at them and wish we
15 had one.

16 KC: Just for a little measure of comfort, I guess.

17 JF: Yeah, I guess.

18 KC: And that's kind of strange when you look at this lack of information on the
19 Soviet Union that was available. And again, Kermit's a small town that just didn't have
20 the budget. Also, you have to wonder if this is the biggest concern that we have in terms
21 of our security. Why wasn't some sort of information available to the public in current to
22 help us understand a little bit better? Things as they were, I guess.

23 JF: Me being a child and thinking of this, now it mystifies me that the adults
24 didn't have that same thought, you know? We need to know these people if they're
25 enemies.

26 KC: What about the major events in the Cold War? Things like Sputnik or the
27 Berlin crises or Bay of Pigs and things like that.

28 JF: Cuba, I remember I was in junior high, and I had several male instructors that
29 were draft age, and they were terrified that they were going to be called up. They enjoyed
30 teaching, they had this career, they had their lives mapped out for them and they felt that
31 their lives were going to be invaded and changed forever. I can remember their fear. I

1 didn't know that I really understood it much at the time, but I did understand they were
2 fearful. Other than that, it didn't really have that much impression on me. That's about all
3 I remember from the Cold War.

4 KC: So, you would have been, oh, late or early teens I guess, something like that
5 for the Cuban Missile Crisis down to the Watershed, the events, of course, of the Cold
6 War. You remember anything about that?

7 JF: Just that everyone feared that we were going to go to war, and it wasn't going
8 to be good because our enemy was going to Russia and they had nukes, we had nukes,
9 not good. (Both laughing)

10 KC: Right, right. Well, you talked about your instructors or your teachers there at
11 school who had their lives kind of planned out for them. They knew what they wanted to
12 do and joined their jobs. What about you as a teenager? What sort of things did you want
13 to do when you grew up, so to speak?

14 JF: To tell you the truth, I really didn't know. I know I had this talent of drawing
15 and I thought maybe that was my avenue, but I wasn't sure exactly how I was going to
16 get there or how that was going to work out later in life. I've always had a problem being
17 an artist, especially growing up in a very machismo type of atmosphere in Kermit, Texas,
18 where everyone would work out in the oil field all rough and tough. They went to the
19 bars, and they fought with their fists, and I had a father that was part of that culture and
20 he didn't understand art at all. And he didn't want a son that was involved in art because
21 that was feminine, and I was supposed to be masculine. And we had a lot of trouble
22 communicating to begin with, but that we just never came to—we just never saw eye to
23 eye on it and he just wished it would go away and I thought, "This is something I need to
24 hang onto because I have it and a lot of people don't." It was difficult.

25 KC: That's very interesting. Was your father a veteran of the Second World War?

26 JF: No, he had a heart condition that kept him out of it. An enlarged heart or
27 something or other and he was given a 4F, so he didn't have to serve. He didn't like the
28 military, didn't have a good opinion of the military and didn't want me in the military.

29 KC: Huh, what do you think about that?

30 JF: I'm not sure. I know he and I did clash when I finally came in and told him
31 after I graduated from high school that I was going to enlist. He didn't like that at all. He

1 told me that that was a stupid idea, that I shouldn't be doing that and that I'd regret it. I
2 remember getting on a bus and I was going to go to El Paso, Ft. Bliss, and they were
3 going to give me a battery test, the Army was, before I enlisted and give me options of
4 what I could enlist for. When he put me on that bus, he had a big smile on his face as
5 though this was a big joke and he says, "You're going to be sorry." (Both laughing). And
6 two years later, I'd come back from Vietnam. I served two tours in Vietnam. My first
7 tour I came back after my first for a thirty-day leave. And I announced to him that I was
8 going to go back and do another tour and he couldn't understand why, and I tried to
9 explain it to him. He offered to get in the car then and he was going to drive me to
10 Canada.

11 KC: Really?

12 JF: I said, "Dad, I can't do that. Besides, I don't want to." And he couldn't
13 understand why I didn't want to. He says, "This is just ludicrous, why do you want to do
14 this?" So, we never did come to an understanding. After I'd come back eventually on my
15 second tour, we came back, and it was one of the few times we ever really got down and
16 communicated with one another. He finally, for the first time in my life that he told me
17 that he was proud of me. And I said, "Proud for what?" "For serving in Vietnam." I said,
18 "You know, that's no big thing, a lot of guys are doing it." "Yeah, but you're my son and
19 you've done it." That was the first time we really clicked and really communicated and
20 understood one another. I guess nothing of my experience that came out of Vietnam was
21 good, that was one I could point to and say, "Yeah, I'm glad for that experience because
22 this happened as a result."

23 KC: That's really interesting. You said you were not sure what you were going to
24 do once you got out of high school. You had this drawing thing that you liked to do
25 despite your father's position. Was college an option for you? Did you have any interest
26 in it or any interest in going to the oil fields?

27 JF: There was this paradox when you graduate in the late sixties, and you have
28 this war going on and there's a draft at the time. Okay, my parents were poor, relatively.
29 Could not afford to send me to college, so I thought that college was not an option.
30 "Well, what's my next option?" "Go to work." While you have this draft hanging over
31 your head as a young teenager out of high school and I tried getting jobs in that area and

1 they wouldn't hire me because they said, "Well, your draft age. We can hire you and
2 spend the time and money training and you may be gone tomorrow when they call you
3 up. We really don't want to go that avenue." I couldn't find employment, but what's my
4 next option? I didn't feel like I had one except join the Army. I didn't want to wait
5 around for the draft because I'm a coward and I didn't want to be a grunt out in the field
6 carrying around a rifle getting shot at. So, I thought, "Well, if I'm smart about this, I'll try
7 to enlist and at least get an option of what I will be doing and where I'll go." As it
8 worked out, that didn't work either, but as a young teenager I thought that was my best
9 option.

10 KC: Right, you're going to go eventually most likely giving your socioeconomic
11 background and the government's need and military's need.

12 JF: And I did have a desire, I really did want to go to college because I knew that
13 in order to have a better life, I needed an education. At the time, the Army was saying, "If
14 you give us three years of your life, we'll give you four years of college." And in my
15 mind, that was a pretty good trade off. Especially if I could survive this Vietnam thing
16 and not get shot at, that might be a smart thing to do.

17 KC: Now when did you graduate high school?

18 JF: May of '68.

19 KC: May of 1968. And do you know when you graduate that you're going to
20 enlist?

21 JF: No, like I say, I spent about three months trying to find a job and I couldn't.
22 My parents started getting antsy, you know, "what are you going to do? You need to
23 make a decision in your life", and I felt pressured that I needed to do something. At the
24 time, as I say, I just thought I had no other option and thought I would try to make the
25 best out of a bad situation as I could and try to enlist in something that might keep me out
26 of Vietnam. So, I went to Bliss, and I took these tests and I made relatively high scores
27 and they gave me, I think, three options. One was helicopter pilot, one was
28 communications, I forget what the third one was. It's been too many years. I always had
29 this love of flying and I thought, "Well, a helicopter pilot might not be a bad avenue to
30 go." So, I picked that as my first option. It was the only time that anyone in the military,
31 especially the cavalry, ever did anything good for me. My recruiter, the sergeant that was

1 reviewing my score says, “Son, you might want to reconsider because the life expectancy
2 of a Vietnam helicopter pilot is about three months.” And I said, “Okay, I’ll take
3 communications.” I took that avenue and they sent me up to Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey,
4 to go to communication school up there. I thought I was doing the smart thing until I got
5 up there and finally, I discovered that the entire school was geared into feeding Vietnam
6 communication specialists; too late now.

7 KC: You’ve talked about knowing that the war is going on here. When did you
8 know about the Vietnam War? There in Kermit you graduate high school, the Army’s an
9 option for you. What did you know about the war at this point?

10 JF: Not a lot, I was fascinated by it, and I think a lot of young people were at the
11 time because young people were fighting the war. So, we kind of felt a connection to it. I
12 remember talking in class. We’d have these long class discussions about the war.
13 Philosophical and tactical and the tragedy of it and the whole thing, but never really came
14 to a conclusion. In retrospect, I kind of bought into the reason that our government was
15 giving for being in the war and that was to give the Vietnamese people an option as what
16 kind of governmental form they wanted to be under and the domino theory that came out
17 in the fifties that Vietnam went and all of Southeast Asia would go and that would be a
18 bad thing for us, and I bought into that. I thought that was a good argument and okay, I’ll
19 buy that. It was only after I got to Vietnam that I decided, “No, I don’t think that’s the
20 reason we’re here and if that is the reason we’re here, we’re not getting it done.”

21 KC: Alright, now in May of 1968 you graduated high school. Of course, one of
22 the defining moments of the War in Vietnam was the Tet Offensive in 1968. As an
23 eighteen-year-old—you’d be seventeen years old at this time I guess, a young man. What
24 did you hear about it and what kind of affect did it have?

25 JF: You know, somehow that got passed me. I didn’t understand or hear about Tet
26 until I got in-country in August of ‘69. And even though it was eight months after the fact
27 or seven months, I could see Tet everywhere; buildings blown up. When I got in-country,
28 our battalion headquarters in Cam Ranh Bay right below us down towards the shore line,
29 there was an Army hospital that the VC (Viet Cong) had come in by sea and went into
30 that hospital and were slitting guys throats and that was a war story of all these veterans,
31 guys that had been in-country for awhile were telling us new guys and it terrified me and

1 the guys I was with because what have we got ourselves into? I saw the aftermaths of it,
2 but really didn't hear about it in the states, though, which is odd.

3 KC: You said that you wanted to go into the Army. Why the Army? If you want
4 to—often times, people don't volunteer for the Army, they volunteer for the Navy or the
5 Air Force where they might be less likely humping the bush with an M-16? Why did you
6 volunteer for the Army?

7 JF: I was naïve. I was naïve, number one because I really didn't know about how
8 the different branches served and how they served, one that was naive. The other was
9 then my father who had four or five aunts that were all married to military men and all of
10 them were Army, so I had a connection there. I had a couple cousins that had already
11 gone in and were telling me that the Army's great and going to get three squares and a
12 roof over your head and it's not a bad place. "Okay, I'll go Army."

13 KC: Was there any sort of military influence on you from these older male figures
14 in your life; about military involvement or anything like that?

15 JF: I had a cousin that when I was a senior in high school, he had dropped out of
16 high school. He was a year younger than I. He had dropped out of high school and
17 enlisted and was writing me regularly. "This is what I'm doing in boot camp; this is what
18 I'm doing at AIT (Advanced Individual Training). I hope to do this, I hope to go to
19 Germany and serve in this capacity." In my adolescent mind, that just sounded like an
20 adventure, why not? You get out of high school, and you have the options, why not see
21 the world? I was a kid from West Texas and had never been anywhere or done anything
22 and it appealed to me.

23 KC: When do you report for boot camp and where was it?

24 JF: It was Ft. Bliss, Texas, the exact month I'm not sure. I guess it lasts about
25 three months so it's probably October of '68 when I went down there.

26 KC: Describe boot camp for me at Ft. Bliss in 1968. Don't spare any details.

27 JF: Three months of hell. (Both laughing).

28 KC: Alright, now expand on that for me.

29 JF: I did not like boot camp at all. Number one because I understood the premise
30 of it that they were supposed to make your life miserable and make it difficult and also to
31 brainwash you into following orders when they were given without question. I

1 understand that, but the process of getting there and breaking you down and taking away
2 your individuality and giving you a mindset that you're apart of the unit and the unit
3 comes first was foreign to me and the process of me getting there was traumatic.

4 KC: Tell me about that process.

5 JF: Well, I remember when a little light finally came on. We were out at the rifle
6 range. They would take us out by bus to the rifle range because it was way out in the sand
7 hills outside of El Paso. So, they'd bus us out there and then there was a fellow in my
8 squad. I was a squad leader who wasn't quite with the program, and he was always
9 messing up and this particular day he messed up in the way that cost him dearly. He
10 dropped his weapon in the sand out there and the drill sergeant saw him so he had me and
11 several others dig a pit so that he could stand upright and then we buried him, with his
12 weapon, standing upright in the sand up to his chin. And then we went off into the rifle
13 range to do our stuff and left him there buried all day. When we came back, he had
14 passed out and didn't look good at all. I could see the fear in the drill sergeant's eyes that
15 if this fellow croaked; he was going to be in big trouble. So, we dug him out as quickly as
16 we could. We gave him some water and he finally came too and to make a long story
17 short he was okay. The drill sergeant was okay, but it gave an illustration to me of the
18 power of the drill sergeant, of the cadre and the power that they had over you. And it
19 would probably be a good thing if you didn't cross that line. In other words, when they
20 told you to do something, you better do it.

21 KC: Or be buried up to your neck in sand.

22 JF: And do it as well as you possibly could. Another instance, especially in El
23 Paso, I don't know if other boot camps were this way, but we had a lot of Hispanics
24 across the border from Mexico and enlisting in the United States Army without even
25 speaking English. In my company, we had maybe half a dozen or more of those, those
26 guys. And we felt sorry for them. Number one, because they couldn't understand the drill
27 sergeant. So, naturally they got in a lot of trouble. Another story, the rifle range we were
28 out there we had spent a whole day and we were going back to the base at the end of the
29 day on the buses and there was commotion on the back of the bus. Some of these
30 Hispanics had found a live mortar round out on the rifle range and had hid under their
31 field coats and were going to, I guess, take them back as souvenirs and send them home. I

1 don't know what their motive was, but the drill sergeant knew something was going on
2 back there. He went back and investigated and found it and he was merciless in his
3 retaliation for these guys doing such a dumb thing. I mean, he beat on them all the way
4 back to the base.

5 KC: Physically?

6 JF: Physically beat them, yes.

7 KC: How many of them were involved?

8 JF: I say probably three that were the instigators, but in the military justice was
9 applied to everyone involved or was in the area so they all suffered. We got back to the
10 barracks, and I remember discussing with some of my buddies, you know, those guys
11 didn't know what they were doing. And they came yelling and beating on them really
12 didn't tell them what they had done wrong, either. They didn't understand. We finally got
13 it over to them, you know, you don't pick up a live round and take it back with you, that's
14 not too smart. But that was common illustration of me of what military life was going to
15 be like. I remember my dad's comments about the Army ringing in my ears and I finally
16 decided, "Maybe he was right. Maybe this wasn't a very smart thing for me to do." I
17 didn't function very well. I mean, I got along. I did my stuff, and I didn't get in trouble,
18 and I did fairly well. In fact, I was one of the few out of my company to make PFC
19 (Private First Class) right out of boot camp, but I didn't enjoy it. It wasn't something that
20 I thought was a life for me. I wasn't going to make a career out of it, that's for sure.

21 KC: Right. Now you've talked about this, the Army's interest in breaking down
22 the individual in an effort to build up the group. What does that do to you mentally or
23 emotionally, psychologically? What does it do? Because you're an individual when you
24 came into this and they're taking that away from you. You've always been an individual
25 and they're taking this away from you. What's that like?

26 JF: It's an attack on your identity. Like you say, our culture, the U.S. culture I
27 think is built on individuality. That's what makes us a great country, I think. And then
28 your thrust into this organization that takes that away from you and says, "No, that's not
29 the way you're supposed to act, this is the way you're supposed to act." Even though I
30 understood it, I resisted. I had a sergeant in Vietnam that I was getting ready to go back
31 home and I was going to be mustered out and he was trying to convince me that I need to

1 reenlist. I said, "Sarge, there is no way I want to reenlist. I do not like this lifestyle." And
2 he says, "Well, let me tell you about my lifestyle. I was in the Army about your age, and I
3 was in for three or four years, and I decided that I didn't like it and I got out and went
4 back to civilian life and got me a job." He says, "I didn't function very well in civilian
5 life." He says, "I decided that the Army was a good option for me. I went back in the
6 Army and I'm making it a career and I love it." He says, "You may find that to be true
7 with you." And I said, "Maybe, maybe not." (Both laughing).

8 KC: Give you a few years.

9 JF: Yeah, at least let me get a taste of it.

10 KC: Right.

11 JF: I did not like it and that was the reason I volunteered for a second tour. I tried
12 to explain that to my dad when I was going to go back for another tour. Then, if I go
13 back, I could get out early and I can be done with it and get it behind me and I can move
14 on with my life. He saw it from the prospective where if you go back, you're increasing
15 your options of catching a bullet and that's not very smart. In retrospective he was
16 absolutely right, that was not a very smart move on my part. I just didn't like the military
17 and I wanted to get out the quickest way I could, and they gave me an option of
18 decreasing that and I thought, "I'll take it." Because it was worth it to me.

19 KC: When do you finish basic? You said about three months? So, at the end of
20 1968? Probably December of 1968.

21 JF: Yeah, we got our right before Christmas. They sent us home right before
22 Christmas.

23 KC: You come back home briefly with thirty days of leave once you're done with
24 boot camp. You go back to Kermit, I assume?

25 JF: Right.

26 KC: You've been through boot camp so your individuality was stripped away,
27 taken away from you and you're now part of this larger group that is the platoon, that is
28 the unit, whatever it might be. How did you feel upon returning to Kermit? You know
29 you've got Vietnam in your future. So, when you've had your individuality taken away
30 from you, you're apart of the group, you've seen a lot more of the world. I'm sure you've

1 changed physically and changed emotionally and psychologically once you go back to
2 Kermit. What was it like going back to Kermit in this kind of in-between stage for you?

3 JF: It sounds like I was disconnected, I was another person. Number one, I went
4 in as a boy and when I came out, I felt like I was a man because I had accomplished this
5 great feat of going through Army boot camp. Number two, I had orders to Vietnam and
6 that set me apart and I remember some of my classmates, my male classmates that I went
7 to high school with that had not been in the Army yet and I'd get with them, and we'd get
8 out and we'd drink a few beers together and we'd start talking. I had this realization that
9 we didn't connect anymore. They were who they were when I knew them in high school,
10 and I was someone else. To a certain degree I feel a certain sense of superiority. And
11 even though I didn't like the Army, you're right, I had this connection with the Army that
12 I was apart of a unit and a unit has a certain amount of pride. The work that you do, and
13 you identify with them, I was getting there even though I didn't like it. They had done
14 their work wimble.

15 KC: Alright, you talked about this time back at home. This disconnect that you
16 felt, but you know you're going to go back in. You're going to AIT. Where did you go to
17 AIT?

18 JF: Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey.

19 KC: Ft. Monmouth, now you're going to go into the communications specialty
20 there, right? Describe what you've been through there at Ft. Monmouth. Describe the
21 classes you took, the train you received. Describe all that for me.

22 JF: My job at MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) is 32 Delta which is fix
23 station technical control room and basically what we did in Vietnam was to trouble shoot
24 telephone, telegraph, fax simile and radio circuits that ran through our facility which was
25 called a Double E building. So, you received training there starting out with basic
26 electronics, ACDC, and all the basic concepts of that and then you moved into tube
27 theory. I think it was week three or four tube theory and that was the only time that I had
28 a hiccup in that school. I think the way it was set up, when you went through two weeks
29 of instruction; you had a test everyday on the material that you covered that day. At the
30 end of the week, and then a month and then you had a test at the end of two weeks. If you
31 didn't pass the last test at the end of two weeks, they gave you one more opportunity to

1 go through that segment of instruction again, be retested. If you failed that time—I think
2 the rumor at that time was they'd send you down to Ft. Ord or somewhere to become an
3 Army cook and that was incentive enough for me because I flunked that second week of
4 tube theory, for whatever reason and they told me to get my tool box and come to an
5 office where a councilor would council me. "Do you understand what's happened?"
6 "Yes, sir." "You understand the repercussions?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Well, you know
7 we're going to give you an opportunity to go through the second week?" "Yes, sir." "And
8 do you understand the repercussions of not passing the second time?" "Yes, sir." And I
9 never had a problem after that. I saw the light and other than that I didn't have much
10 trouble. It was basically just going to school. We had some misunderstandings with some
11 of the cadre and yes, we were students, but yes, we were also soldiers and they wanted
12 this and do other things and they wouldn't give us time to study. There was a certain
13 amount of hours per day for us to go to a study room to prep for next day's instruction
14 and they weren't doing that, so we had some clashes there, but other than that it was
15 pretty uneventful. I seemed to do pretty well there. I enjoyed Ft. Monmouth. It had a
16 reputation of being like a country club instead of an Army post and it was. It was a nice
17 little post, it wasn't very big, but it had lots of facilities for recreation for the soldier on
18 there. It was well kept, it was a nice fort, I enjoyed it. And it was close to New York City
19 so when the weekend passes, we'd run into New York and see the big city.

20 KC: What was it like for a country boy from Kermit, Texas?

21 JF: Again, it was a culture shock. Number one, just the bigness, number two was I
22 remember how dirty and grimy it was, and the crime. Even in the sixties I remember
23 seeing people mugged and these guys on the street that were homeless digging their lunch
24 out of a trashcan. I never experienced that before, and I didn't like it much. After awhile,
25 I quit going in New York and I went back the other direction, back towards Atlantic City.
26 I think there was a home of Bruce Springsteen, New Jersey, Asbury Park. We'd go to
27 Asbury Park and that was a little more pleasant. There was a board walk there and a
28 beach and there were girls. That was better than New York.

29 KC: All the things that makes life worth while.

30 JF: Yeah, yeah. In my mind it was. So, Ft. Monmouth was pleasant, and we even
31 got rumors about halfway through that maybe our class, not all of us was to go to

1 Vietnam. They were talking about sending some of those to Korea and even a few to
2 Germany. And that was basically what I was promised when I took the test before basic
3 was if I took communications, the worst I could do would be probably Frankfurt,
4 Germany. That's probably where I'd end up. I thought, "Great, I've always wanted to see
5 Europe."

6 KC: And you bought it?

7 JF: I bought it, yeah. Again, I was naïve, and I remember the night we came in
8 and I was in night classes, and we came in about two or three o'clock in the morning.
9 One of the things we had to do before we sacked out that night was checked the day
10 board and see if any of us were on special detail or something. They had all of our orders
11 for all of us to go to Vietnam except for two; the two with the highest scores in the class.
12 I think one was going to Naples, Italy and the other at Frankfurt, Germany. The rest of us
13 all went to 'Nam.

14 KC: How big was the class?

15 JF: Two to three hundred, I think.

16 KC: So, there were a lot of you communications guys coming out of that class
17 going to Vietnam. Alright, Jim Ford, PFC, AIT in Ft. Monmouth. You look at that board,
18 it's got your name, you're going to Vietnam, what's it like?

19 JF: It was a death warrant. I've never heard some many gnashing of teeth and
20 wailing going on including myself. You know, we just couldn't comprehend. I think in
21 the back of all of our minds we thought that's probably where we were going. To actually
22 see that on a board in black in white it's just hard to comprehend.

23 KC: Can you see that board in your mind right now?

24 JF: Absolutely, burned in my memory. I really couldn't believe it, you know.
25 How am I going to do this? And we kind of got this mindset in signal school that since
26 we were students, we were maybe a cut above the regular Army Joe, therefore we were
27 going to have a better life. When we saw those orders to Vietnam, reality came back into
28 View, and it wasn't pleasant.

29 KC: Most people got thirty days, thirty days of leave once they got their orders
30 from Vietnam. Was this the case for you?

31 JF: Yeah.

1 KC: Kermit, Texas, you've seen El Paso, you've seen Ft. Monmouth, you've seen
2 New York, Asbury Park, and you've seen all of that. You know you're going to Vietnam,
3 and this is a wacky world you're living in. What do you do for the next thirty days?

4 JF: You know, to be honest I don't have any memory of it at all. I remember
5 going home and flying back into Odessa, the airport. My folks were there to pick me up
6 and take me back to Kermit. I was looking down at the countryside and your right I was
7 thinking, "Why would anyone want to live out in this god forsaken country, especially
8 me? And yet that's where I grew up and that's where my parents were, but I remember
9 having kind of a fleeting thought of, "I'm probably never going to live here again. This is
10 not for me. I have lots of options. All I had to do is survive twelve months in Vietnam
11 and then I'll be done with that, and I can go on with my life." As far as being home and
12 what I did and what I thought, I really don't have any memories of it. I guess I just
13 blocked it out.

14 KC: Alright, when do you report for—I guess you went to the west coast to
15 Vietnam. When did you report, do you remember?

16 JF: The report date I'm not really certain. I got in Vietnam in August, and I think
17 it took probably—I think we were in San Diego maybe a week for processing and I
18 remember they put us in this big warehouse affair. There were some partitions between
19 certain areas where they had the bunks for us to sleep at night, but the lights were kept on
20 24/7. They had PA's paging people for whatever reason 24/7. So, you didn't get any rest
21 there. They wouldn't let you out to go to a mess hall that had vending machines that we
22 ate out of for a week. I really don't understand a reason other than I guess they figured
23 guys were going over the hill since we all had orders. In fact, there was a couple guys that
24 didn't show up there that were supposed to in our graduating class, and I started asking
25 questions. I knew one of them personally was from Missouri and I remember him telling
26 us when we graduated out of communications school that he wasn't going to 'Nam even
27 though he had orders. I said, "Well how are you going to do that?" And he didn't have a
28 response. Well, we found out when we got there because he didn't show up and we
29 started asking questions. Some guys knew him and lived close to him, and Missouri says,
30 "We know why he didn't show up. He drove himself off a bridge to injure himself bodily
31 so he wouldn't have to go to Vietnam." And it worked for him, but I thought that was a

1 pretty drastic measure for a fellow to risk his life not to go to a place where he would risk
2 his life. It just didn't compute, but he did it. I thought it was very strange.

3 KC: It is very strange.

4 JF: But guys do strange things I found.

5 KC: Yes, we do.

6 JF: Especially under stress.

7 KC: Alright, here you are, you're out a warehouse, kind of a clearing house
8 waiting your time to board. Did you take a plane to Vietnam? A jet, a charter flight?

9 JF: Yeah, it was a charter flight. I think it was Flying Tigers Airlines. Which I had
10 never heard of before. I was familiar with the Flying Tigers out of Vietnam, you know,
11 that were in Indo China, and I thought, these are the fellows that are flying this plane? It's
12 kind of odd. We had civilian stewardesses, that was kind of odd, we thought. We landed
13 in Tan Son Nhut, and they were under a rocket attack. That was our welcome to Vietnam.
14 We taxied down at the end of the runway and the pilot, as he was turning the plane
15 around to take off again, they told us we were going to open up the back of the plane and
16 y'all get off, just get off. And there was some sergeant out there in the darkness was
17 telling us to get over here and get in this ditch until the attack is over. We had no
18 weapons, no understanding what was going on other than our lives were in danger and
19 thought, "Man oh man, how am I going to do this."

20 KC: So, you arrived at Tan Son Nhut at night?

21 JF: Yeah.

22 KC: And is being shelled and being rocketed? This is your welcome to Vietnam.

23 JF: Yeah.

24 KC: alright, describe your first impressions of the country under those
25 circumstances.

26 JF: Well, my very first impression is when they opened the back of that plane up
27 and the heat hit us. It was like a furnace; you couldn't even breathe. And even though I
28 was used to dry heat in West, Texas, I wasn't used to this humidity. I think the processing
29 before I actually got to my unit probably took a week or two. I can't recall, it was a long
30 time. I couldn't understand why it was taking so long and then the process of waiting, I
31 was trying to get acclimated to the weather and I was having trouble. I was sweating like

1 a pig. In fact, everyday I spent there I sweated like a pig. It was a hard life just dealing
2 with the weather. I remember seeing the Vietnamese people and I didn't have a very good
3 impression of them.

4 KC: Why not?

5 JF: I guess their looks. They gave me the impression that they were uneducated,
6 that they were backward. We could smell them cooking their food and basically a fish
7 diet and that smell didn't set well with me or others. I saw the way they lived and just got
8 a very bad impression of them initially. As the days, months, and years went by, my
9 impression of them changed, but initially it wasn't good.

10 KC: How did it changed over the time you were there?

11 JF: Just by coming in contact with them. We had a Vietnamese Liaison officer
12 and there was ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), but he was also Rhade
13 tribesman. His father was the chief of a Rhade tribe that was close to us where I was at in
14 Ban Me Thuot and probably the smartest fellow I've ever met in my entire life. Brilliant,
15 spoke four or five languages and knew more about electronics and communications than I
16 would ever and just a very articulate friendly fellow. And just by rubbing elbows with
17 him everyday, I started slowly changing my opinion. In a way I've seen mamasons that
18 we've let come on and do our laundry and house keeping and stuff like that. They'd
19 invite us back to their homes occasionally to have meals with them and slowly my
20 opinion about them started to change like the rest of the fellows. They were just in a bad
21 situation; they can't help where they born in or what conditions they were born under and
22 why judge them for that. And even later—I did not have a very good impression of
23 ARVN; I didn't like ARVN at all. When I came home, I held a prejudice towards ARVN
24 and maybe the Vietnamese people to a certain degree, too. It was only a few years ago
25 and I told my wife about this. It's amazing the evolution that I came through over the
26 years. I started working for the post office and there's this little Vietnamese girl that
27 worked on the same shift with me and finally I started talking to her and she's very
28 personable. She was single. I was going to a church that I was a member of and there was
29 a fellow that came in who was also Vietnamese. He had just come into the United States
30 and hadn't been here for about six months and was struggling to get started: language,
31 possessions, job, and the whole thing. He asked me one day at church, "Do you know of

1 anywhere I can get some Vietnamese food ingredients where I can make my home dishes
2 here in town?" I said, "Well there used to be a market here that catered to Vietnamese,
3 but it's closed down, but I work with a little girl, and I'll ask her tonight because I'm sure
4 she knows." So, I confronted her that night, you know, "I met this fellow at church and
5 his name is so and so, here's his telephone number. Would you mind called him cause
6 he's looking for food ingredients so he can make his home dishes?" She says, "Sure."
7 Make a long story short; they end up marrying one another. I forget the name they call
8 me. I was like a matchmaker for them and in Vietnam; a matchmaker is number one, so I
9 made instant friends. I am friendships in both of them and my wife and I are still friends
10 with them, very nice people. I've come full circle. I didn't have any bad things about
11 Vietnamese people at all. I kind of feel guilty about having those initial feelings when I
12 was over there.

13 KC: Sure. Well, I think that that could be certainly understandable for somebody
14 who hadn't been exposed to an awful lot of things, especially this culture. You're in the
15 middle of their culture and you obviously feel stress, strain, and pressure being involved
16 in a war. There's this lack of cultural connection between you and them. And not just
17 you, but other Americans who tend to look disparagingly to a large degree on the
18 Vietnamese civilians and to the ARVN's as well and often times did. If you're around
19 other people who feel this way, you you've got to feel this way, it would make sense if
20 you kind of decasualize your experience and look at those as the other. I think that makes
21 perfect sense. Now, you've got yourself here at Tan Son Nhut. Now, did you stay at Tan
22 Son Nhut, or did you go up to, say, Bien Hoa, to the 90th replacement battalion?

23 JF: No, landed at Tan Son Nhut and I think we stayed there a night or two and
24 then they shipped us to the 1st Signal Battalion's battalion headquarters in Cam Ranh
25 Bay. And we stayed out there until they decided where they were going to put us and then
26 they decided after about a week they sent me to Nha Trang which was the 361st 2nd
27 Battalion's headquarters was in Nha Trang there at the Air Base. I went up there and they
28 finally decided that they were going to put me in Ban Me Thuot and I probably spent
29 another week there just waiting on air transportation. They tried to get me fix wing up
30 there and for some reason they couldn't and finally the 1st sergeant just took me out to the
31 helicopter pad, and he says, "Each time a chopper lands here, go out and ask the pilot

1 where they're headed and if they're going to Ban Me Thuot get on. So that's how I got
2 the Ban Me Thuot.

3 KC: How many choppers did it take before you found something?

4 JF: I lost count; it was a lot though.

5 KC: Really? How long? Was it an entire day?

6 JF: Oh, I spent probably two or three days out there on that helicopter pad.

7 KC: Oh really?

8 JF: Yeah, all day long waiting on choppers and finally I caught one. That's how I
9 got to Ban Me Thuot. Even when I got there, I really didn't know what to do. There were
10 two airports in Ban Me Thuot. There was one that was right outside the outskirts of the
11 city which where my camp was where I lived and finally worked. And then there was
12 another one that was really the civilian airport that was outside kind of about five or six
13 miles and that's where the chopper landed. I looked around and I remembered asking the
14 chopper pilot and of course, he's got his engines running and can't hear me that well and
15 he says, "Now what?" He didn't have time to talk to me so off he went. I thought, "Okay,
16 now what do I do?" So, I started asking questions, mostly ARVN out there. Finally, I
17 found the GI and I said, "You know, I just landed here by chopper. I'm supposed to go
18 with the signal unit, but I don't even know where it's at or how to get there." He says,
19 "Well, there's a telephone inside, they'll let you use it. Maybe you can find out
20 something that way." So, I started making phone calls and finally I got a hold of the
21 signal unit that says, "I'm so and so and I'm supposed to be in this unit, how do I get
22 there?" He says, "Where are you at?" And I told him, and he says, "Okay, just stay there
23 and we'll come get you." A half an hour later these guys ride up in a jeep full of beer.
24 Says, "You speck-four-four?" And I said, "Yep." He said, "Well come with us." And
25 that's when my adventure started.

26 KC: Okay, I'm going to come back to this thing that we've discussed so far. Here
27 you are, eighteen-year-old individual, lived your life by individual rules taking away
28 from you in boot camp like you discussed before you become part of the group. You go
29 back home and you're not really part of that group anymore, but you go to AIT and
30 you're around other people. Again, it's advanced individual training so you're working it
31 as an individual. They ship you to Vietnam again, as an individual. You show up, you're

1 dropped off. Tan Son Nhut, Cam Ranh Bay, left here on Nha Trang, and left to your own
2 devices to find out where you need to be. Again, you're an individual who's been trained
3 to function with any unit. Literally, they've dropped you off without even saying good
4 luck. Now what's that like who had been told you're not an individual, your part of a
5 unit? You're part of a unit; you're part of a group. Your job is to function to help a group
6 perform as it's supposed to perform. Ever since you leave AIT, you've got this mindset,
7 like this is what you're supposed to be doing, but there's no group to be apart of. What's
8 it like?

9 JF: It's strange that you bring this subject up because I've studied this through the
10 years of my reactions and how I felt about it in my final conclusions. And yes, I felt
11 abandoned. It's like being left for another man by your wife because they're supposed to
12 take care of me. I'm part off the unit and they're not taking care of me, they're expecting
13 me to function as an individual now. I'm supposed to make my own decisions and go my
14 own way. They've been drumming into me that's not the way it is. "We'll take care of
15 you." And they weren't. Now, after I got to my unit, and I'd been there awhile. My unit,
16 which is a small detachment. There might have been a dozen guys there, maximum at any
17 point in time so we got real close. We ate together, we worked together, we got shot at
18 together, we went what we call a fun together. Those guys became my brothers, literally.
19 I am closer in relationship with those guys than I ever did my actual blood brother. And
20 that was one of the reasons I gave my dad when I came back home. He asked me why I
21 was going back for another tour. I said, "Dad, that's the only place I really felt like was
22 home." I felt comfortable there after awhile even though I didn't like the atmosphere or
23 being under the thumb or the Army being told what to do or my individuality being taken
24 away from me. It's the first time I ever felt like I belonged somewhere that was apart of
25 something that was important. I guess that's what I needed because that was really my
26 motivating factor other than getting out of the Army early was going back so I could be
27 with those guys again. I remember when I went back. After I went back and got my
28 thirty-day leave and went back for another tour, almost those same guys showed up in the
29 jeep to pick me up when I got out to the airport in Ban Me Thuot again. I remember
30 telling myself, "Finally, I'm home." I just came from home, but it wasn't home anymore,
31 that was home. I know it doesn't make any sense, but that's the feelings that I felt. It was

1 a great relief, you know, I felt totally relaxed and I just finally identified with something,
2 I suppose. And that's really my motivation for being here today and getting this oral
3 interview. I looked online and I've Googled things about the Vietnam War, and I've tried
4 searching that unit out. Some guy had a website out or searching for buddies from that
5 old unit during that time period and I found nothing. I think it is very important for me or
6 someone from that unit to talk about them, to tell their story because I think we did
7 important work and there were important relationships that were developed there, and I
8 think needs to be told. That's really why I wanted to come in today.

9 KC: Okay, now tell me about the end of this unit. These guys show up in a jeep
10 with beer. Tell me about meeting them; tell me about becoming involved in the unit,
11 where you go, where your bunk is, what you're going to be doing.

12 JF: Well, the compound—I think the drive from the airport was five, six, seven
13 miles. You drive through this two-lane highway, and it's got these huge tea trees growing
14 on both sides with a canopy over it. A very pleasant drive. It's up in the highlands, it's
15 not like where I just came from down the lowlands where all the humidity. The humidity
16 is relatively dry. The heat is not as bad, and you have all these trees. There's lot of
17 vegetation. The scenery is very pleasant. We drive into town or Torch Town and the
18 compound is maybe half a mile, maybe a mile from the outskirts of Ban Me Thuot and I
19 guess the whole base—I think it was Camp Coryell what they called it, but I don't recall
20 it ever being called that when I was there, or I wasn't paying attention. But basically, it
21 housed the 155-assault helicopter group and then there were other units that were
22 stationed there inside of concertina that were basically supporting that unit. We provided
23 communications. There was a recon outfit that flew little tiger cubs for recon for them.
24 There was a small air force unit there that ran radar, but the whole affair probably didn't
25 cover two football fields, it's very small. You had a good arm you could almost throw a
26 baseball from one end to the other. So, it was pretty tight, pretty tight confines and we
27 stayed in the wire most of the time. Once I got there in my unit I was shown where the
28 double E was and that's where most of our lives were spent was inside that building. I felt
29 thankful that I was there because even though it was cooler than down in the Delta, it was
30 still pretty hot. The equipment that we worked on was run by tubes at the time and tubes
31 create—the old vacuums create a lot of heat so it needed to be air conditioned to keep

1 them cool or the equipment would burn up in that type of atmosphere so even though the
2 air conditioning wasn't for us, we got to enjoy it because we had to work on the
3 equipment so we thought that was a pretty good deal. Because we were working on
4 electronic equipment, we would also need electricity, so we had a big generator shack
5 that created enough AC for the equipment, but also for a lot of other things. So, we felt
6 fortunate because even on Camp Coryell, a lot of people didn't have what we had. So, of
7 the other units would come over and we had a small little unauthorized beer club that
8 they would come over and drink beer at. And they'd marvel at our surrounds at how well
9 we lived. We thought, "Yes, we're very fortunate." And we were. Most of our days were
10 like it was twelve on and twelve off. My first month there I was just exhausted. I don't
11 travel well so once I got there, I remember pulling my first twelve-hour tour and I slept
12 for twelve hours non-stop. They had to come wake me up to go on my next tour. I
13 thought, "Well, I just got to sleep." And I said, "No man, you've been asleep for twelve
14 hours. You just died." And I did that for a week or so until I caught up. After I was there
15 for a while, they started slowly giving me more duties. A lot of times you'd have to pull
16 guard duty at night, even after you pulled a twelve-hour shift and usually guard duty was
17 anywhere from two to four hours depending on what bunker they pitch in. So, some
18 nights were long. And if you got hit on that night, then you'd pull a twelve-hour shift,
19 four hours of guard duty, and then you stayed up a couple extra hours because Charley
20 decided he wanted to keep you awake. It was no excuse; you had to show up the next day
21 for your next twelve-hour tour. It was good that we were young.

22 KC: What would you be doing when your twelve hours are on? What sort of work
23 would you be doing with this communications equipment?

24 JF: Okay, my MOS, we had this big patch board. It was kind of like what you see
25 in the movies of the old telephone patched boards where the ladies would have these long
26 patch cords and they'd put in these pigeonholes. That's basically what we worked at.
27 What it did was we had all this equipment that would convert radio waves back into
28 physical electricity where we could send it through the wire and vice versa. So, all this
29 equipment had to be configured in certain ways for teletype or for telephone or fax
30 wherever it was going, and we would hardwire all this equipment through a patch, a
31 mainframe, and then the patch would allow us to monitor all the surface that ran through

1 us to trouble shoot them. So, my job was you'd sit around until the phone rang. You'd
2 answer it and it might be in Nha Trang, it might be Saigon, it might be Da Nang saying,
3 "We have—" and in all the circus we're given a nomenclature and they'd spill out the
4 nomenclature to you. "We have a problem in the circuit, get up on it." So, you'd go over
5 there and throw a patch into it where you could monitor it and I could talk to this fellow
6 that just called me on the phone, would be talking on the circuit and he'd tell you, "Okay,
7 I have this problem, is it in your house?" So, I would trouble shoot in house to see if it
8 was. If it was, I would fix it. If it wasn't, I would tell him it's on your end or it's further
9 down the line. He would continue on until he got that fixed up. And that was basically
10 my job was just trouble shooting. I wasn't very good at it even though I'd had the
11 training. Some guys are good at it, and some aren't. It took me awhile. I even had a guy
12 that had been there for awhile challenged me one night. "You're not pulling your weight,
13 Jim. You're not troubleshooting the circuits you should. What's your problem?" He says,
14 "I just don't really understand—I understand the equipment, but I don't understand how
15 to troubleshoot because they didn't teach us that in school. They taught us concept, but
16 that's not getting me there." He says, "Are you willing to learn?" I say, "Yes." He says,
17 "Show up tomorrow on your day off. "He says, "I'll be on. Come in and I'll show you
18 how to troubleshoot." So, I showed up and he showed me, and I never had any trouble
19 other than that. He showed me how to troubleshoot because I just didn't have it naturally,
20 I guess. It helped me a lot. Just before he went back home, he and I were on duty one
21 night together and he confided to me, he says, "You know, when you came to this unit,"
22 He says, "I didn't think you'd ever make a controller, you just didn't have it." He says, "I
23 have to eat my words." He says, "You're probably as good as I am if not better." I don't
24 know if he was exaggerating or not, but I took it as a compliment and I enjoyed
25 troubleshooting after I learned how to do it.

26 KC: Right.

27 JF: It was a challenge. Every time that phone rang, "I need to get this done."

28 KC: Take me through the technical aspects of this. You say you were trained for
29 the equipment works and all of that, the trouble shooting was giving you difficulty. Tell
30 me about what was difficult and how you managed to overcome those difficulties?

1 JF: Well, tropospheric scatter was kind of a new concept at the time. The
2 microwave had been out for awhile, but microwave had its limits in there. One antenna
3 has to see another so the curvature of the earth, the maximum range for a microwave is
4 about twenty-three miles. After that, the curvature of the earth, the two antennas have to
5 see one another. The tropospheric scatter overcame that in that it could shoot over
6 mountains, and it didn't have to see the other receiving antenna so basically you shot up
7 into the troposphere of the Earth's atmosphere. We used to think brambly that it would
8 bounce off the atmosphere and bounce to the other antenna. Actually, what it did is it
9 went up through the troposphere and the troposphere would scatter that information,
10 that signal. And the receiving antenna could take a fraction of it and reproduce it and
11 clean it up and present it again without any defect.

12 KC: Let me interrupt you here. Would there be any—because I know nothing
13 about this. Would there be any danger of someone else being able to pick this up if
14 they—

15 JF: Absolutely not and that was the beauty of it, too.

16 KC: Okay, tell me about that.

17 JF: Because with a microwave, you could put something in between the two
18 antennas and the signals would cease to flow or our hard line, we had a lot of hard lines
19 that ran in Vietnam that Charley would use at night, and he'd slice into it and use it as his
20 own and then slice it together in the day for us to use. But the troposphere, there was no
21 way to intercept it. It was a beautiful concept at the time and worked perfectly in Vietnam
22 because of the terrain. You know, the mountains and the jungles weren't great. The only
23 trouble we had with it was in the summertime when we would have sunspot activity. We
24 would get a lot of static which was nothing we could do about it. Other than that, it
25 worked beautiful.

26 KC: That's really interesting. Like I said, I know nothing about that.

27 JF: It's antiquated now. They don't even use it anymore, I don't believe. At the
28 time it worked perfect. I was told when I got out of communications and with that MOS I
29 would have no trouble going to work for Bell Telephone or the M or something like that
30 which I attempted, and they didn't want to hire me because I was a Vietnam Veteran.

31 KC: That's a whole other issue.

1 JF: Yeah, don't even want to go there.

2 KC: Right, well we will eventually. Okay, now pick up where you were on the
3 troubleshooting.

4 JF: Okay, to troubleshoot a circuit, sometimes—like I say, the patch, the patch
5 board enabled us to monitor the circuit and then all of the equipment was wired into a
6 main frame which had blocks of wood with turmoils on it so that we could interface all
7 this equipment and then sauder. You could take a hand phone with alligator leads on it
8 and go to that circuit and we would put like a sixteen hundred hertz tone on that circuit
9 in-house and I would trace it through all the equipment seeing if I could get that sixteen
10 hundred tone on either side of each equipment that was allot to that circuit. As long as I
11 could follow that sixteen hundred Hertz tone from start to end, I knew I didn't have a
12 problem in-house. If I lost it, I knew I had a problem. And that's where the trouble
13 shooting would start. So, I would go to that equipment and then I'd start basically just
14 troubleshooting just narrowing it down to the actual component that's giving you the
15 problem. So, you start very generally, and you keep working down until you find it. It's
16 kind of a process, but you have to know where to look and what you're looking for and
17 initially, I didn't get that. I understood how the equipment worked and I didn't
18 understand how you troubleshoot it with the mainframe because no one told me. They
19 just signed me to a twelve-hour tour of duty and go in there and do your job. I didn't
20 know how to do my job basically.

21 KC: You come in not knowing how to do your job. You said that the sergeant, he
22 called you out one time and said you're not pulling your weight. As someone who's
23 trying to fit in, as we all try to fit in, what was that like for you knowing that here's this
24 vital piece of work that you're supposed to be doing and that you're not doing it
25 accurately?

26 JF: I've always thought of myself as a high achiever or at least I grew up being a
27 compliant child, I want to please others. If pleasing them means doing your job the way
28 you should, then that's what I should do. I took it hard. I didn't enjoy hearing that I
29 wasn't pulling my weight even though I knew that I was. I struggled with it and just
30 decided the only way I was going to get out of it was imply more effort, you know? I had
31 to imply myself better. Having shown them that I wanted to do it and until I did that I was

1 going to be disconnected, I wouldn't be part of the unit. After I started pulling my weight,
2 I started hearing these things, you know. Before we found this problem that we couldn't
3 find. I remember one incidence very clearly. We had a circuit that no one could trouble
4 shoot. There was something wrong with it and we did not know. They couldn't diagnose
5 it. There was four of them working on this thing. They'd worked on it all day. I was off
6 duty, I just happened to walk in the double E one day and they were up there at the patch
7 board and had an oscilloscope on it and they'd gone through that circuit high and low and
8 could not figure out what was wrong with it. I thought, "Well, if they can't I can't either."
9 I just happen to wander over there, and I was watching them work. They had patch cords
10 running, they looked like spaghetti up there because they had all this stuff trying to
11 troubleshoot and I just happened to say that one of the patch cords had not been pushed in
12 all the way. So, I just reached over and pushed it in and made a go to contact and that
13 circuit came to life and all four of them turned around and looked at me and said, "What
14 did you do?" I said, "I didn't do anything, I just nudged at the patch cord there, it wasn't
15 pushed in all the way." And that was the answer, and I was part of the unit. That was the
16 decided moment, I guess.

17 KC: What does that mean to you to be part of this unit?

18 JF: It meant that I belonged. At that time, you're in this small unit. You don't
19 want to be segregated for any reason or ostracized and any way disconnected because you
20 want to be apart of them. For one thing, they're protecting your rear at night when we get
21 hit. Everyone looking out for one another, and you don't want some guy having ill
22 feelings about you. If the ships are down, you want to make sure that you can count on
23 him. So, I felt for me for me to be apart of them. I'm glad that happened, I'm glad that
24 happened.

25 KC: Tell me about this group, and you don't have to mention any names if you
26 don't like. Tell me about the group, the personalities, the things that you would do
27 together. Tell me about the men you served with.

28 JF: The fellow that called me out, and I can not recall his name so I can't mention
29 it, I can't even remember his name. I remember he was from Michigan. He was off of a
30 cucumber farm; his family grew cucumbers in Michigan which he thought was
31 humorous. And he and I did not click. He didn't like me, and I didn't like him. It finally

1 came to a head one day. This is even after he showed me how to trouble shoot. And he
2 says, “Why don’t we just go outside?” I said, “Fine.” I had, had enough of him by that
3 time.

4 KC: What was the personal conflict?

5 JF: Our personalities didn’t click. I’m not much of a fighter. I don’t think it really
6 solved a whole lot of problems, but in this particular incidence it did. We went out to the
7 bunker just me and him and we hit on one another, and it was basically a draw. And after
8 that we were great friends. Never, never had a problem after that. I guess we had to get
9 the pecking order right and from then on it was okay. He and I were pretty tight. As far as
10 the other personalities—one thing about the Army is you meet all kinds of personalities
11 from bad to worse and everything in between and our small unit, even though it was
12 about twelve guys we had—every personality. One fellow we called Mad Guss because
13 we really thought he was crazy. There was a fellow in a sister unit of ours, the 362nd, it
14 was next door. He was an American Indian and when he’d get drunk, he’d get a grenade
15 and pull the pin and come around and say, “I’m going to pull the pin and kill myself.” All
16 the guys who want to pull the pin were fine, but don’t bring us into this. Walk out there
17 about thirty yards and let go of the lever and you’ll have your wish. He never did, but it
18 was just another personality we had to deal with.

19 KC: Why was Mad Guss mad in your opinion?

20 JF: I don’t know, no one else did, either. We thought he was crazy because he
21 would challenge Calvary like the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge) of an
22 officer. He didn’t push him off the wall and grab him by the throat. For whatever reason
23 that he was mad at the time, so guys kind of walked him a wide berth. We thought he was
24 unpredictable and why tempt fate.

25 KC: Any sort of punishment meted out to this guy?

26 JF: Yeah, he would get disciplined, but it didn’t seem to slow him down. His
27 attitude always stayed the same. Mad Guss was—he saw in a magazine one time where
28 you could write in and enter a contest where you could win a brand-new corvette. And he
29 decided he was going to win the corvette so every waking moment when he was not on
30 duty, he’s filling out these sheets of paper with his name and address on it and mailing
31 them off. We would tell him, “Guss, there is no way. The odds are you are not going —

1 yes, I am.” And he did that for months. And when he found out he didn’t win his
2 corvette, he was especially crazy. He was not a happy camper.

3 KC: Who else did you have in this unit?

4 JF: We had a fellow that liked the houses of prostitution that were right outside
5 the gate. That was different. As soon as we’d get paid, he would run down there and
6 spend his entire month’s pay on one day of entertainment with the ladies. And most of
7 the time he would end up with some sort of venereal disease which you would think
8 would slow him down, but it didn’t. As soon as he got well, and he got another paycheck
9 he’d be down there again. He did this repeatedly over and over and over and I thought,
10 “Okay, what doesn’t he understand about this?” It’s just another personality. Everyone
11 had their own priorities and I think that was his. He had a fellow that got a Dear John. He
12 was ready to go home. He got a Dear John with a girl he was going to marry, and he just
13 went off the deep end. A good buddy of mine and he just disappeared for like a week and
14 a half. Sarge started asking questions, “Where is he and why didn’t he go on his duty?”
15 By the time I was ranking man, I just thought, number one he was my friend and number
16 two, it was my duty since I was part of the organization to protect his butt. So, I started
17 making excuses for him and I even pulled a couple shifts for him and finally he shows up
18 and I say, “Where in the world have you been? You know how much trouble you’re in?”
19 He says, “I got the Dear John, and I went down to one of the houses and a girl took me by
20 the hand and took me home” and says, “I just lost all track of time and space and where I
21 was at in reality.” I said, “Okay, I get that. Let’s hope Sarge buy’s it.” and he did. That
22 was another personality and then there was myself and I was kind of an oddity in a way. I
23 was one of the few that didn’t go to the houses and the guys didn’t understand that and
24 they started questioning me and after awhile I thought I got it. “Okay, they think I’m not
25 of their persuasion.” If you get my drift and as much as I talked, I don’t think I ever
26 convinced some of them that I wasn’t because I didn’t think that was the thing to do
27 morally. Number one, it was exploiting the women, number two; I just didn’t understand
28 the whole concept even though I was lonely. I kind of set myself apart that way. And in
29 retrospect, I wish I hadn’t of. Again, you don’t want guys noticing what you’re doing or
30 your values or anything like that. I don’t think it’s a good thing.

1 KC: Huh, so you wish that you would have given into, say, the peer pressure
2 then?

3 JF: Yeah, if my wife hears that she probably wouldn't appreciate me saying that,
4 but I'm trying to be honest.

5 KC: Right. Huh, that is really a refreshing honesty there. Now, you use the word
6 loneliness. What kind of loneliness are you talking about? Describe this for me.

7 JF: Just interaction with anyone besides the guy you've just been with for—when
8 we'd go on alerts, they wouldn't let us off this little camp for months at a time. Basically,
9 we had no entertainment. The 155 had a beer club that occasionally would bring in bands
10 from Australia or even Vietnamese bands, but that was sporadic. Occasionally they
11 would send us 16-millimeter movies, but by the time it got to us, either a reel was
12 missing, or the film was so torn up by being seen so many times on an old worn out
13 projectors that you couldn't see the movie. So, most of the time, when we were off duty,
14 we just drank. And I wasn't that much of a drinker, but after you get so lonely and so
15 bored after a certain amount of time, I found myself drinking to the point where I
16 remember telling myself going out of the country after I'd done two tours there that I
17 needed a drink and I caught myself in mid sentence. "Did you understand what you just
18 said?" and I said, "Yes." To myself. "Yes, you said you had to have a drink instead of I
19 want a drink, I need a drink. There's a difference." And then I decided I had a drinking
20 problem, and I probably did, but it wasn't because I liked it, it was just something to do.

21 KC: But habit then becomes the routine which that kind of routine can become
22 much more than that, of course.

23 JF: After I came back to the states, I didn't have a drinking problem, I just had a
24 drinking problem there because it was just something to do and that's where you
25 socialize.

26 KC: Well, tell me about drinking and tell me about drugs in Vietnam.

27 JF: It was bad. The first week I was there in my unit I was approached by one of
28 the old fellows that had been there for awhile and he wanted to know which way the wind
29 was blowing with me. I didn't really understand where he was coming from. "I don't
30 know what you're asking me." He says, "I want to know what side your on." I said, "I
31 still don't know what you mean." "What side are you on?" He says, "I just want an

1 answer one way or another.” I said, “Well you’re going to have to expound upon that a
2 little bit because I’m just stupid and I don’t understand what you’re saying.” He says,
3 “Okay, I’ll spill it out to you. We have two camps here. We have the juicers which are
4 the people who drink alcoholic beverages, and we had the heads who take drugs which
5 are you.” I said, “Well, I don’t know that I want to take sides.” He says, “No, you don’t
6 understand. You have to be one or the other. You can’t be switching, and you can’t be
7 neutral here.” I say, “Okay, if I have to pick a side, I guess I’d pick the alcoholic side, the
8 juicers.” He said, “Okay, that’s all I wanted to know.” And the two never mixed. The
9 only time you ever mixed was on duty. The guys that took drugs went out to the bunkers
10 and they did everything out there and the guys that drank alcohol went to the club where
11 the alcohol was served. And the two just didn’t mix much.

12 KC: Why not?

13 JF: Different mindset. It seemed like the guys that took the drugs were a little
14 more liberal minded. At least in my case, I don’t know if it was demographics or
15 something, but most of them seemed like they were from either the east coast or the west
16 coast from the big metropolitan areas. I don’t know if that had something to do with it,
17 but that was just something that I observed and I thought, well maybe that’s the reason
18 they’re the way they are. That they pick drugs as a recreational tool. As months went by,
19 especially in my second tour, drugs became a real big problem in all the units. It amazed
20 me that the cadre basically ignored it. I mean, there was no way you could ignore it. You
21 could get out at night and if you were downwind from a barracks, you knew what was
22 going on. You could smell it; I mean it permeated the air. How could they not see that or
23 smell that? But they ignored it and they let it go on. And I saw it ruin a lot of fellas’ lives.
24 You see a guy come in-country use grain right out of high school just like I was and in
25 three months, he was a heavy drug user to the point where I had fellas—I came in on a
26 group that was supposed to be pulling a night shift. I was a ranking man, there were three
27 of them on duty and when I walked in the double E, they were all asleep on the floor. The
28 whole patch board was lit up with calls that had not been answered. It was obvious to me
29 what had gone on. They were all drug users. They had just taken so much drugs that they
30 just passed out. So, I was not a happy camper. I got them all up and I gave them a write
31 up. “Do you understand what ya’ll have just done? You’re on duty, in a combat zone, and

1 you're asleep at the wheel. Do you know what the repercussions of this are?" And they
2 were still so stoned I don't think they understood what I was saying. If I wanted to, I
3 could have had their heads, but I didn't. I just gave them a talking to and warned them
4 they better not do that ever again and not let me know about it. To my knowledge it never
5 did, but it showed me how bad things were getting. Guys would rotate back home and
6 since I was ranking man, I'd go inside the barracks and I'd have to get their area ready
7 for their replacement and I see these little plastic capsules, hundreds of them in a guy's
8 room. Well, that's the way they purchase cocaine over there was in these little—it was
9 rampant. You couldn't get guys to do their job. They wouldn't pull guard duty. You were
10 afraid for them to pull guard duty because they were supposed to be alert and protecting
11 your butt when you're asleep. It's just not a good thing.

12 KC: Let's talk about this a little bit, this morale. It seems to me this is clearly a
13 break down in morale, a break down in discipline. What led to this? I mean, give me as
14 many examples as you can.

15 JF: Specifics, I'm not really sure. Just generally I think it was just the attitude of
16 the soldier in Vietnam as things started winding down. I remember being on a convoy on
17 my second tour and the back of the convoy had gotten hit and hit a couple of vehicles that
18 caught on fire. So, the convoy went on down the road with a couple of clicks and they
19 called an airstrike in to get the enemy away. And the convoy commander asked for
20 volunteers to go back and retrieve these vehicles, no one volunteered. He says, "If you
21 don't volunteer, I'm going to volunteer someone to go back and get them." No one
22 volunteered so he started pointing out guys. "I want you, you, you, and you to go back
23 and retrieve these vehicles, we'll wait here." He says, "No, we're not." I've never heard
24 that said to anyone to a cadre in the Army. He says, "I'm giving you a direct order." "We
25 ain't going." "Why?" He says. And I'd never heard a cadre ask why he didn't obey
26 orders. they said, "It's stupid. We've been in-country long enough, they're just vehicles.
27 If we go back, they'll be waiting for us. We risk getting ourselves killed for a vehicle.
28 That's an inanimate object." And he backed off. We left the vehicles there and we went
29 on. I thought, "This is very strange", and you just told me that morale was—I think guys
30 just finally decided that it wasn't worth it. If they were given an order that they thought
31 didn't make any sense, they weren't going to obey it. You just see little instances like

1 that, and I don't know if that's a little incident, that's big. When you don't obey order in a
2 combat zone, you can get in a lot of trouble. I would have never done that, but there were
3 guys that were, and I think it's just the general attitude. Guys just didn't care anymore.

4 KC: Now let me ask you this, we just finished talking about drugs and alcohol.
5 Did you find one particular group, one particular size, either the heads or the juicers who
6 would be more inclined to do this as disobey orders?

7 JF: You know, I hate to bring judgment and throw stones, but to be really truthful
8 I think it was the people that were on drugs. Why that is, I'm not really sure. Maybe it's
9 because the people that consumed alcohol as a recreational drug were a little more
10 conservative. I'm not really sure, I'm not really sure. But these fellows that I woke up
11 that morning were all on drugs, heavy drugs. I will mention one other fellow. There was a
12 guy right before I left. He rotated back home before I and I guess I was home maybe two
13 months, and I got a telephone call at my parents' house. I was outside working on my car
14 and my mother comes out and says, "Jim, there's a telephone call for you inside. It's a
15 fellow that you served with in Vietnam." I thought, "Man, that's odd. Who could that
16 be?" I answer the phone and there's this fellow. He'd gotten back stateside; he'd been a
17 civilian for awhile and he was calling me. He says, "Jim, I want to thank you." I said,
18 "Thank you for what?" he says, "If it wasn't for you, I'd still be a drug addict." I
19 recognized when he was 'Nam that he was on drugs and one night we were on duty and
20 he says, "Jim, I have this problem." I said, "Yeah, I know." He says, "You know I'm on
21 drugs?" I said, "Yeah, I know you're on drugs." He says, "I don't want to be." I said,
22 "Well, why are you?" He says, "Well, I've got an automatic, can't seem to get off of
23 them." He says, "I get so bored that I need something." I say, "Well, makes sense to me if
24 you have a problem, pick something else to occupy your mind." I said, "What do you like
25 to do?" He says, "I don't know. When I was in high school, I could put together these
26 airplane models." I said, "Well, do that." He says, "You're absolutely right." He says,
27 "I'll write home to my parents, and they'll send me some." They did and he started
28 putting those together and I guess he got off drugs because what prompted his telephone
29 call was, he felt like that was a deciding moment on which way he was going to land on
30 this issue, and it got him away from drugs. And he thought that I was responsible for that.
31 I don't feel like I was, I just suggested something to him. He was the one that followed up

1 on it. But that was prompted the telephone call. He says, "I really felt like I had a drug
2 problem. If I came back to the states, then I'd be in big trouble." I tried talking to some of
3 these guys that were druggies that were going back to the states. I said, "Man, don't you
4 realize what's going to happen? You can afford your drug here because it's cheap. You
5 go back to the states and you're going to be in trouble." They just didn't get it, you know.
6 I thought it was real stupid but to each his own his own.

7 KC: When do you think the drug problem became a problem in Vietnam?

8 JF: Availability, I think. It was just there, and it was cheap, and he were all bored
9 out of our gourd. You see these war movies where, you know, you get this concept of
10 what combat's like. Well, it's not like that at all. Most of the time it's about ninety-nine
11 percent boredom and the other two percent is when you're terrified and leading with that
12 ninety percent where you're just bored out of your gourd, and you need something to
13 entertain your mind before you go crazy. That's the problem. And so, they were bored,
14 and it was available, and it was cheap. If the cadre had come down and really made some
15 examples of people, they would have maybe slowed it down or even stopped it, but they
16 didn't.

17 KC: Why do you think there was no effort to do this?

18 JF: I don't know, other than maybe they feared we'd rebel or a mutiny, or I'm not
19 sure, I'm not sure. You know, Vietnam was complicated to begin with and that was just
20 one more element that I think that not only were they dealing with the war and the
21 protests against the war in the states and then they had these young guys over here taking
22 drugs and they were digging with the enemy. It was just too many balls for them to have
23 in the air at one time. I don't know. And I don't know if it's that way in the military now
24 or not. If they've come to some resolution of how to deal with this problem or if it's still
25 a problem in the military, I'm not sure. I work with some guys that were in Desert Storm
26 and they didn't mention drugs much. I don't know the reason for that.

27 KC: How much do you think it could have been a reflection of the so-called drug
28 culture in the United States in the later part of the sixties and early seventies?

29 JF: You know, it could have been, I'm not really sure. It never appealed to me as
30 a lifestyle. Again, it might have been where I grew up. I remember hearing about
31 marijuana when I was like a junior in high school and I really didn't understand, I'd

1 never heard of it before, didn't understand why someone would want to do that. In boot
2 camp in Bliss, we had a fellow in my barracks that was sniffing glue. I'd never heard that
3 before and it just—I could not understand. You know, why does a fellow have to sniff
4 glue? Well, he gets high. What for? I didn't understand. It just wasn't part of the way I
5 grew up. I guess others had other influences in their life that would be attracted to them.
6 It never was attractive to me. I still don't understand it to tell you the truth.

7 KC: Another one of the controversial issues dealing with morale and discipline in
8 the armed forces in the United States during the Vietnam War, especially toward the end
9 were issues of race. Did you see any racial issues? Discrimination or anger on one side or
10 one race against another? Tell me about that.

11 JF: I saw some of it, I guess the first time I saw it with my own eyes was in basic.
12 We were almost through with our training. It was on a weekend, so we were all kind of
13 just milling around the barracks. Two black guys from another unit that we did not know
14 came into our barracks and they were just visiting, didn't think anything about it. There
15 was a fellow in our unit that was the Deep South, and he took offense that they were in
16 our barracks, and he voiced that to them, and they just jumped on him and basically beat
17 him to a pulp in front of my eyes. And our drill sergeant, when he found out about this
18 wasn't too happy. And he disciplined those that didn't come to our fellow soldier in his
19 distress and my attitude was, he was stupid. His attitude and stupid for voicing his
20 attitude and what he got I felt like he had coming to him, so I didn't feel like I needed
21 defending.

22 KC: Did your DI (Drill Instructor) do this on racial terms or in terms of unit?

23 JF: Unit.

24 KC: Okay.

25 JF: You were part of the unit; he was part of your unit. Someone from outside of
26 our unit was putting physical harm on him; you should have come to his defense. And I
27 just didn't see it that way. Now in 'Nam, in our unit, we had guys that were in our unit
28 and in sister units. There was never any problem, we had no problems. It was only
29 towards the end of the war right before I left, maybe the last six months, eight months
30 that I started noticing there were changes going on. When you go to drinking clubs or
31 you're out, the groups didn't mix. There was a lot of animosity, and it was voiced, you

1 know, “Why aren’t they mixing with us? We’re all in the same Army; we’re all
2 Americans, why are we segregating ourselves?” And it was self-inflicted. The groups
3 decided that they would segregate, and I didn’t understand it because I hadn’t seen that
4 before in the war. It was only towards the end. I guess it had something to do with morale
5 or the drugs or maybe all three, I’m not sure. But it was getting pretty bad.

6 KC: Okay, let’s talk about something a little bit lighter. When you had some time
7 off, wasn’t much of it. What sort of things would you do in your off time?

8 JF: (Laughing) Well, I hate to admit it, but we did some real stupid things. Like
9 we would float up a deuce and a half or a jeep with beer in our weapons and we’d go,
10 what we call, joy riding. We’d go out to the countryside and just drive around on these
11 dirt roads. Not very smart, but there in Ban Me Thuot was up in the highlands and there
12 were a lot of plantations left behind from when the French were there. A lot of rubber
13 trees, coffee trees, pineapple, a lot of plantations so we’d just go out there and drive
14 around for hours on end drunk as skunks. In retrospect, I don’t know why we’re all here
15 today to admit it, you know, because that was not a very smart thing to do, but that is
16 what we called recreation other than going to the houses of prostitution. Occasionally we
17 would go downtown. There was a couple of restaurants there that we trusted enough to
18 eat some of the local food. Other than that, that was about recreation. We did a lot of
19 reading. These Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops would send us these care packages of
20 paperbacks and they were like gold, we loved those. We passed them around until
21 everything was read and then we’d wait on the next package. I became a very well-read
22 individual and time kept on. Other than that, that was about it, that was it.

23 KC: Any leave or R&R (Rest and Recuperation)?

24 JF: I got two R&R’s, went to Australia both times.

25 KC: Tell me about that.

26 JF: I loved Australia. It was clean and the people were friendly. Especially if they
27 knew you were from Texas. I remember the first bar, of course, with my accent they
28 recognized that I was a GI and they started questioning me. “Oh, “I’m from Texas.” “Oh,
29 you’re from Texas.” I couldn’t buy another drink.

30 KC: Yeah, the Australians are famous in their hospitality for Texans.

31 JF: Yeah, I think they identify with us that pioneer spirit or something or other.

1 KC: Yeah, individualism, general rowdiness, yeah, a lot of things.

2 JF: I just fell in love with Sydney. I met a fellow—I went to a movie there in
3 Sydney and sat by a fellow that was an ex-GI that when he got out, instead of going
4 home, took up residence in Australia and was homesteading in the outback. I could
5 hardly understand him because he had picked up this Aussie accent and he almost
6 convinced me that that's what I should do, which I didn't. It was tempting. He was telling
7 me how great it was and how friendly the people were, and he'd never go back to the
8 states. Especially what was going on with the war and protests and everything, he just
9 thought that this was a better place. And he might have been right, I don't know. I would
10 just think just to get home. A side story to that, I guess, right before I left home—towards
11 the end of the war, you know, there was a Vietnamization program and because we were
12 kind of a high-tech outfit, they started sending us some ARVN that had been through
13 language and communication school that we were supposed to train. Also with that
14 program, they brought in some civilians from stateside, I think they were called con-vets.
15 Some companies stateside, they had gotten a government contract and these civilians who
16 were mostly ex-military were hired by this company to come over and do basically our
17 job and then to finish up the training for the ARVN so that when we all left, the ARVN
18 could come in and run this communication facility by themselves that would be theirs. I
19 was debating my options of what I was going to do when I got home. I was aware of the
20 living. And one of these con-vets, the supervisor approached me one day and says, "Have
21 you ever thought about working for con-vets like I have and like all these other guys
22 have?" He had never gone home. Gotten out of the military and the con-vets have been
23 all over the world and everywhere. He says, "You can do that." And that would appeal to
24 me, seeing the world. He says, "If you consider it," He says, "I'll put a word in for you,
25 I'll give you a letter of recommendation and you go down and interview for a job in
26 Saigon." I said, "Okay." So, I went down and interviewed, and they offered me a job.
27 Well, all I had to do when I got out was go home and they were going to give me thirty
28 days of leave of vacation. I was supposed to show back up in California and they would
29 fly me back. Basically, I go right back to the same job I was doing, I'd just be doing it for
30 them and getting paid. So, I accepted, and I came home with my thirty days, and I started
31 thinking about it. It was the few times that I ever thought I exercised good judgment. I

1 decided, "That wasn't a very smart thing to do." So, I called them up about two weeks
2 out from me supposing to show up and said, "You know what, I changed my mind." And
3 they were not very happy with me. Rightly so, but I think I did the right thing, not smart.
4 I'd already done two tours.

5 KC: What about communications when you're off time. Did you write letters
6 home? Did you make tapes to send home? Did you correspond with your family at all?

7 JF: I didn't, I wrote a few letters and most of the time it was to my mother. And
8 most of the time she answered, but neither one of us were what you called prolific
9 writers. I'm not a very wordy person, probably even less so back then. I didn't talk much,
10 didn't communicate much and writing the letters were down at the bottom of my to-do
11 list. A lot of guys sent tapes home and stuff like that, I didn't. Mail call was a big event
12 for all the guys. For me, it wasn't. I got a letter, great, but if I didn't, it didn't hurt my
13 feelings. I know that doesn't sound right, but that's just the way I was at the time. I just
14 didn't communicate.

15 KC: What did you know about what was going on in the United States and why
16 you're in Vietnam?

17 JF: Not much, because I was in a communication facility, Armed Forces Radio
18 came through us so we monitored that so we could listen to it. So, we monitored it a lot.
19 You know, the information you get out of Armed Forces Radio, you don't get the whole
20 truth. You just get what they want you to hear. I was really surprised when I got back to
21 the states eventually and started hearing the whole truth. I noticed it was only part truth
22 on both ends. Some things they were saying about the Vietnam War on network news, I
23 knew wasn't true, it wasn't the whole truth. You know, they were talking about, you
24 know, morale's bad and guys are mutinying and there's drugs. Yes, there was that, but it
25 wasn't to the extent that they were saying that it was. So, it was exaggerated. And then on
26 Armed Forces Radio it was just the opposite. They told us a little bit about what was
27 going home, but they certainly didn't tell us all the riots that were going on and the racial
28 riots and the burning of the cities. We didn't hear that, so it was kind of censored on both
29 ends, I felt. Why is that? You know, you do that to control people, do you not? I can still
30 see that going on today. I'm pretty sure those guys over in Afghanistan aren't getting the

1 whole truth. Maybe I'm wrong. I suspect they are, and they should. Did that answer your
2 question?

3 KC: Yeah, yeah absolutely, absolutely. You talked a little bit ago about Ban Me
4 Thuot being fired upon. Was it rockets, was it VC sappers? What kind of attacks would
5 you get there at Ban Me Thuot?

6 JF: We got a little bit of everything. After I'd been there for awhile it was
7 explained to me that basically we were there to monitor the Ho Chi Minh trail to see what
8 kind of movement was coming down and what kind of threats they were offering and not
9 necessarily to confront them, but to monitor troop movements. And I believe that because
10 of the way we would be attacked because most of the time—and we could tell whether it
11 was VC or the regulars from up north. The VC, their rounds would be sporadic, half of
12 them wouldn't go off, they'd be duds and it would just be haphazard. The NVA (North
13 Vietnamese Army) would come through, you knew it because their arouse would be
14 everyone would explode and they were right at a line, well coordinated. They were
15 professionals and we knew it. I think they just hit us as they were going through just to let
16 us know that they were passing through, you know what I mean? Just to let their presence
17 be known. They really weren't serious in rattling our cage much. They could have
18 overrun us anytime they wanted to. All of us were pretty confident of that fact. We just
19 didn't have a whole lot of ornament on our perimeter to hold off a big attack. Tet of '69,
20 they sent us some laws which were anti-tank weapons and they sent them down because
21 the recon had heard that there were going to be tanks in our area at tech during Tet and
22 they were just wanting to be sure that we were prepared, you know, somebody could take
23 out a tank. Our perimeter was mostly just sixty M-16 machine guns and I think there was
24 250 Cals. There was a mortar unit that would try to return fire if we got mortar rounds in.
25 And then occasionally, when I was there with my first tour, when we'd get hit, they'd
26 send out choppers to try to retaliate. They'd send up three choppers, one with his lights
27 on to try to draw fire. If he did, he would shut off his lights, bank over, and then two guys
28 behind him would open up on the position and that worked real well until they
29 mistakenly sent a rocket into town one time and supposedly killed some civilians. And
30 then they wouldn't let us to that anymore. So, you basically had to sit there and take it.
31 To answer your question, basically we got 82-millimeter rocket, got mortars. We got

1 mortared a lot. Occasionally we would get 122-millimeter rockets which were the most
2 feared. If nothing else, just for the sound; it sounded like a freight train coming. And the
3 rumor was they didn't explode on impact, they didn't explode until the propellant was
4 fully used up which means they'd go right through the bunker and then explode. That got
5 my attention. If you had spare moments, you always went out and put another role on the
6 bunker that you were assigned to.

7 KC: Sandbags?

8 JF: Yeah, just in case. You could never have too many rolls of sandbags. And then
9 occasionally we got recoilless rifle, I think it was a 75-millimeter. There was only one
10 time they penetrated the perimeter and the individuals that got inside the wire had satchel
11 charges and they put those on the choppers and that was the only time they ever got
12 through the wire.

13 KC: Tell me about these attacks. If anyone particularly stands out in your mind,
14 take me through it from the time you find out what's going on and what you're doing,
15 what the base is doing. Tell me about that.

16 JF: Well, it depends on how long you've been in-country. When you first got
17 there, you had to tune your ear to recognize incoming from outgoing. There was an
18 ARVN artillery unit not far from us that had a bad habit of shooting over us. And they
19 were so narrow that you could hear their rounds lead the two and you could hear them
20 impact, you could hear them going over head and then you could hear them impact,
21 okay? And for a new guy, it sounded like incoming because you could hear the two and you
22 could hear them impact, but after you're there for awhile, you could tell one from the
23 other. And it kind of became an unwritten law that the old guys would let the new guys
24 know which was which. And it usually only took to the second round. And when the
25 second-round kind of confirmed your first impression, "I think that first round was
26 incoming." So, you'd lay there if you were off duty. You'd wait for the second round to
27 confirm and then you were up yelling, incoming, so you'd let the new guys know what
28 they were dealing with. And usually by the third round, they had a siren on our camp that
29 if someone was awake and he'd realize what was going on, he had hit the siren and let the
30 whole coast know that we were being under attack. And the routine was that whether you

1 were on or off duty, you grabbed your weapon and you were assigned a bunker and you
2 went there to your bunker and you waited to see what happened.

3 KC: You would leave the board then when you were under attack?

4 JF: Except for one fellow.

5 KC: Okay.

6 JF: And one fellow is left behind and he always thought that when you were
7 under fire you sought cover, but our rule in the communication outfit was, if you're under
8 attack, that's when communications is needed the most. You don't abandon your post so
9 we let one guy inside the double E who was the most vulnerable, but he stayed there and
10 keep the circus up so we could be talking.

11 KC: Would you just switch whose turn it was?

12 JF: When you came on duty, usually you'd just flip a coin and whoever lost, if
13 you got hit that night, then you stayed.

14 KC: Hate to be cruel that way.

15 JF: Yeah, the first couple times it's not a pleasant feeling even though the building
16 was pretty well protected we had revetments that went up all the way around the building
17 that's filled full of dirt, and it's pretty well protected except for a direct hit. If it was a
18 direct hit than you were in trouble, which never happened, but it could happen. After we
19 got out to the bunkers, mostly we just waited around to see if they were going to try to
20 destroy the wire or not. Like I say, it only happened one time and it was on the other side
21 of the perimeter, so we were looking the other way. We heard stuff going on over there
22 and we really didn't know what was going on until after the fact. The recording, I've told
23 you, that I've sought out on the internet last night was that very attack. I think we got
24 about thirty-two rounds that night. The fellow who was doing the recording was in a hard
25 observation tower. I think they had a 50 cal up there and he just happened to have his
26 recorder on, and he saw a B-40 come out. On that side of the perimeter there was a rubber
27 tree plantation and some of the rounds were coming out of there and he said he saw a B-
28 40 come straight for the tower he was in right at eye level. Fortunately, the guy who fired
29 a round, apparently, he hadn't wadded in wind engine that missed him by a few yards
30 and landed harmlessly, but they came into wire that night and they didn't leave the wire.
31 We were probably—we handled the situation anyway.

1 KC: Now how do you handle the situation? You get up and you fire at these guys,
2 are you bringing down artillery? Probably not artillery, I don't think, but mortars or
3 something like that?

4 JF: Like I said, we had a mortar unit with the radar, and they'd trace the incoming
5 with the radar and if they zeroed in on them then it was the duty of the mortar crew to try
6 to return fire. And sometimes that worked and sometimes it didn't. That night, I don't
7 remember the mortars replying to them, but the tape that I was listening to and brought
8 back memories, it sounded like it was mostly M-60 machine gun fire and 50-cal and a
9 few small arms. On their end, there was some AK in there, so they were shooting at us,
10 too, with AKs. That's basically all it was, was some small arms. I think that night, the
11 choppers did go up, but I think it was all over by the time they got up. Mostly mortars
12 and rockets; B-40s and small mortars and on our side, we were wondering what was
13 going on over there. If something was going on over there, it might on our perimeter. The
14 bunker that I was assigned to, there was a road that ran parallel to it. On the other side of
15 that road, there was a Vietnamese police station and sometimes we would get small arms
16 fire from there, so we were kind of alert. If we received fire from there, we weren't going
17 to fire back so we'd kind of zero in over there and really concentrating, but that night
18 nothing happened. Just further down the road there was a Vietnamese filling station that
19 sometimes they set up their tubes behind and the station got shot up so much that they
20 quit doing business there and moved on because it was a bad location. Just not a good
21 idea. But usually after we got hit, and it was obvious that the attack was over, we'd wait
22 another thirty, forty, fifty minutes to make sure. Sometimes they come back and do a
23 second attack and wait for you to get your guard down and they come back and try to
24 surprise you. We were sure that that danger was over, you'd go back to your duty, or
25 you'd go back and try to get some sleep that night. The NVA was very tricky. We could
26 always tell. The VC, he'd just pump his rounds in, and he'd be gone. The NVA would
27 put four, five, or six rounds in. They'd wait a minute or two before you get out of your
28 barracks and start running to your bunker and then they would open up. So, they knew
29 their business.

30 KC: Pretty cagey.

31 JF: Yeah, we thought so, we thought so.

1 KC: How often would you get a rocket attack or a mortar attack?

2 JF: It was real sporadic, it's hard to say. Now, my memory was that 1970 was
3 pretty bad, we got hit pretty regularly. I'm saying, maybe twice a month. Sometimes it'd
4 go by for months and nothing. Like I say, when they had nothing better to do, they'd just
5 set up their tubes and pump a few rounds in just to let us know that we're out there and
6 for them to keep their fighting skills homed. I don't know, we always thought it was kind
7 of weird that we didn't get hit more regularly.

8 KC: What's it like trying to get used to or accustomed to or dealing with. You
9 might get twice in a month; you might not get it at all for other ones. How do you go
10 about your daily routine?

11 JF: Again, I'm beginning to think that I'm sounding real foolish saying some of
12 these things, but I'm trying to be honest. After awhile, we welcomed getting hit because
13 it broke the monotony. I remember going on a tour and we'd all be sitting around saying,
14 "Man, I really hope we get hit tonight" just so we can do something.

15 KC: Really?

16 JF: Yeah, it gets the adrenaline going. It gives you something to talk about after
17 the fact. We'd sit around for days talking about the attack. "Boy, that mortar round
18 landed real close." Or "Boy, that guy got hit and I'm sorry for him." It just makes for a
19 good conversation.

20 KC: You must have really been bored.

21 JF: Yeah, we were. Our 1st sergeant would come down and occasionally he would
22 visit us because we were kind of a sight that was forgotten, plus we were out in the
23 boonies. I think he felt sorry for us because we were one of the few detachments in the
24 361st that never got hit. Most of them were around big Air Force bases, around country
25 that rarely ever got attacked. So, he felt sorry for us, I think, and he came down one time
26 and we were telling him—we usually get hit around one or two in the morning. "We have
27 this feeling tonight's the night." He thought we were just bleeding down the path and sure
28 enough we got hit that night. He never came back, we just lucked out.

29 KC: You're going to go through this for a year. Tell me about being a short timer.

30 JF: It's not a good feeling. I think I was a special case because towards the end
31 right before I left, they started standing down units and they started going home. So, a lot

1 of guys started leaving even out of my unit. And as it played out, I was the last GI to
2 leave my unit at Ban Me Thuot. When I left, I was sharing a barracks with about fifty
3 other ARVN, twelve or fifteen.

4 KC: So, they were really cranking out the ARVN. Being trained in language and
5 communications and then replacing Americans.

6 JF: Whether they could do a job or not and I was pretty confident that they were
7 not going to do our job.

8 KC: Tell me about that. What sort of drawbacks, what sort of efficiencies did you
9 see in the ARVN? What was your opinion in this policy?

10 JF: You know, ARVN in general I didn't respect because we had an ARVN
11 detachment on Camp Coryell that protected a couple of our exits. And our job when we
12 got hit was to close that gate up and to defend that gate because that was a weak point in
13 our perimeter. Every time we got hit, those guys disappeared, and we don't know where
14 they disappeared to, but they wouldn't come back until the shooting stopped so we didn't
15 have a high opinion of them to begin with. Now the fellows that they sent to us were
16 pretty well educated. They were bright fellows. And they sent them to language schools
17 and even gave them not only the English language so they could speak GI lingo. They
18 would come in and they'd speak this lingo, and we'd laugh at them because it wasn't
19 right. It was coming from the wrong source. I was assigned to one fellow in particular.
20 My duty was to train him to do what I did. I liked him, he was a personable fellow, but as
21 far as training, I would explain something. I said, "This is how you do it." And I said,
22 "Okay, now regurgitate to me. Tell me what I've just told you and tell me what you
23 know." He couldn't repeat it, so I'd repeat it to him again and I'd do this over and over
24 again. In my opinion, he wasn't absorbing it. He just wasn't getting there. I said, "Okay,
25 let me look at your notes." He had wonderful notes, his handwriting was beautiful.
26 Obviously, he knew what I was telling him because he had it in his notes, but he couldn't
27 tell me verbally. So, we struggled with that for a while, so I decided I'd use a different
28 strategy. I said, "Okay, from now on we're doing hands on. I'm not going to tell you
29 anything. I'm just going to let you work and when you get to a problem where you don't
30 know the answer I'll help you, okay?" So, I get him on the board, and I say, "Okay, we
31 had a problem with this circuit, you troubleshoot it." He didn't have a clue. I felt sorry for

1 him. I said, "Okay, maybe he's like myself. He doesn't know how to troubleshoot. I
2 explained how you troubleshoot and still couldn't do it. And eventually, and I even admit
3 it, I just gave up on the fellow. I mean, I was supposed to give my sergeant monthly
4 reports on the progress of his training, and I hate to admit it on tape, but I lied. I just gave
5 up on the fellow and I gave these false reports to how wonderful he was doing.
6 Eventually he came to me, he says, "Why aren't you training with me anymore?" He
7 says, "I'll level with you. I don't see you getting it." I don't think he had it. He accepted
8 that and he never confronted me again. And that was the reason why. I was pretty sure
9 when we left country; they were not going to be able to keep that side up. They were not
10 going to have communications.

11 KC: Now, this is your first tour, right?

12 JF: Second tour.

13 KC: This is your second tour.

14 JF: I'm on my way out.

15 KC: Okay.

16 JF: I told him, "If I'm not here and you're having trouble and problem with a
17 circuit, I'm not going to be here and look over your shoulder and tell you what to do." I
18 said, "You're going to be here on your own. That should be motivation enough for you to
19 try to knuckle down and learn this. If for nothing else, to defend your country. You're a
20 soldier in your country's army; you should have more motivation than this." In his
21 defense, I'll say this for ARVN, and I observed this personally. The ARVN Calvary were
22 the worst of the worst. And this unit that was staying with us in our barracks when we
23 were having responsibility of training, they had a 2nd "louey" (Lieutenant) ARVN that
24 was in charge of this Vietnamese unit and one of them confided in us one day, we were
25 going to go town on town and eat at a restaurant and we invited him to come. He says,
26 "No, I can't. I have no money." "Why don't you have any money?" He says, "Our 2nd
27 Lieutenant takes it." I said, "What?" he says, "Yes, he's taking our money. When we get
28 paid, he takes a portion of our money." He says, "We have no money left at the end of the
29 month because he takes it." I said, "Why does he take it?" "Because he's a lieutenant." I
30 said, "Yeah, that doesn't sound right to me." So, I got on the phone, and I called our 1st
31 Sergeant, "We have a situation down here, do you know about this?" He says, "Oh yeah,

1 that's common practice in the Vietnamese Army." I said, "Well, I don't think it's right.
2 These guys have no money to do anything with. These guys are basically." He said, "It's
3 not our problem. Not our army, not our problem." "Okay." I didn't think it was right. Just
4 another reason why I have a low opinion of the ARVN Army, it's not right to steal from
5 your own men.

6 KC: Also helps explain the lack of motivation. If there was a lack of motivation,
7 that would help explain part of it. Alright, let's go back to you being a short timer here.
8 On your first tour, do you know what your DEROS (Date Expected Return From
9 Overseas) is, or you have a good idea what your DEROS is going to be. You're going
10 back in August of 1970 after your first tour is over. What's it like being a short timer?
11 Just from your day-to-day activities? And your thoughts and the things that you want to
12 do.

13 JF: Well, it varies from guy to guy. I saw some guys would take a casualty litter,
14 set it up in a bunker, and that's where he lived until he got on the plane to leave because
15 he was afraid, he'd catch a round. That was one extreme. The other extreme, I guess was
16 myself. I counted the days and all of us had calendars and you'd just mark off the day as
17 it came and went which is not a good idea because it just makes—it elongates the time.
18 That was the culture, you all did that. You would make jokes about how short you were.
19 "I'm so short I could do this."

20 KC: Give me an example of that.

21 JF: "Oh, I'm so short I could sit on the edge of penny and swing my legs off the
22 sides." You know ridiculous stuff like that. Up there at Ban Me Thuot they have some
23 tradition. I do not understand the premise of it, but guys would carry these things called
24 short-timer sticks. It was a short stick that was carved, maybe, fourteen or sixteen inches
25 long and had a brass tip to it and the carving up there is usually elephants. And you'd
26 carry this around to let everyone know that you were a short timer. It was a badge; you
27 were showing off. I carried one too, but in retrospect it was kind of silly, but that's what
28 we did. Basically, you waited, and you fantasized what it was going to be like when you
29 got back home.

30 KC: What was it going to be like when you got back home? From your
31 perspective on Ban Me Thuot?

1 JF: My motivation was food because I lost count of the number of times, I got
2 food poisoning. Most of the time it was out of the Army mess hall we were eating at to
3 the point where I finally started eating downtown. I'd eat the indigenous food instead of
4 the stuff the Army was feeding us because it was making me sick. So, to get home I
5 wanted to get a burger and I wanted to get a coke, pizza. My motivation was food. When
6 I got home the taste of the food was indescribable. It was like going to heaven. I guess the
7 surprise was I had trouble sleeping when I was home. Again, it sounds silly, but it was
8 too quiet to sleep. Because we were a communications outfit, we had generators running
9 all the time. We had choppers on base that taxied up and down the runways right by our
10 hooch. So, we had noise all the time and you just got used to that. I got home and I
11 couldn't sleep because there was no background noise. When I eventually got home
12 eventually after my second tour, it took my three to six months, I guess, to finally
13 acclimate myself to sleeping in a quiet atmosphere.

14 KC: What was it like to leave Vietnam and leave these guys in your unit?

15 JF: Like I say, they were my brothers. I really didn't want to go home. Even
16 though I had the motivation of going back, I knew I was coming back for another tour.

17 KC: So, you knew at this time that you were coming back?

18 JF: Yeah, I had already signed the papers and had the paperwork in. I knew I was
19 coming back. I told you I has a hard time explaining that to my father. I had a hard time
20 explaining it to the guys I was serving with. I was one of the rare ones that took
21 advantage of this opportunity, and they didn't look at it as an opportunity. They looked at
22 it as tempting fate. "You pulled your twelve months, why in the world why would you
23 want to do this again? Very stupid, Jim." They were probably right. I did a lot and tried to
24 explain it to them, but they didn't comprehend why I was doing it. Now I've lost what
25 you asked me originally.

26 KC: No, it was just about leaving the unit, about leaving the men. These guys that
27 you eventually formed this bond with, with this group and the importance of that.

28 JF: you know, at that time I was ranking man. Our NCOIC had taken some leave
29 home, he had a death in the family and there were some complications. I think he spent
30 twice a normal time at home. It was like sixty days or more. And since I was the next
31 ranking man under him, I was given responsibility for the whole sight, these twelve other

1 GIs plus a barracks full of ARVN. I was only about twenty years old, so it was a lot of
2 responsibility. When I went home, I thought, “Who’s going to take over when I leave?”
3 Well, it was the next ranking fellow, but I didn’t feel like he was really up to the job. He
4 probably was, I just didn’t feel like he was, you know. And that was, I guess, arrogance
5 on my part because he probably could do the job as well as I could. I just felt this duty of
6 responsibility or whatever you want to call it. I was responsible for these fellows, and I
7 was going to go home and who’s going to take care of them?

8 KC: What about leaving Vietnam? What was it like to leave even though you
9 know you’re coming back?

10 JF: I don’t have much memories of leaving the first time. It was only that last
11 time. We called that plane we were leaving the Freedom Bird and I remember the areas
12 that they were processing our paperwork and we had to wait on a plane. These feelings
13 and emotions and memories came over me and it was like, it was like a movie in front of
14 my eyes. You know, all the guys that I had met, all the times we had together and the jobs
15 I’d done and responsibilities. All of it, it was just like a movie, and it just kept playing
16 until I got on the plane and then I kind of snapped out of it and started to think about
17 home and then I got excited.

18 KC: This is the end of your second tour you’re talking about?

19 JF: Yeah, in ‘71 when I finally went home. You know, to a certain degree that
20 was the time I had made arrangements and I was going to go back and work as a civilian.
21 I was trying to get all my work out exactly why I was doing it and how that was going to
22 work out. Was I going to work the rest of my life overseas for this company and never go
23 back to the states or should I finish up in Vietnam and when it wound down, I would quit
24 and go home? A lot of things were going through my mind. It was a lot of stuff I was
25 trying to iron out. Of course, my whole life’s been that way. Each post in life you stop,
26 and you take stock, and you decide, “Where am I going to go from here?” Some of my
27 decisions haven’t always been the best. I regret some of the decisions that I’ve made.
28 You know, I’ve always struggled that my whole life. My first decision out of high school
29 was join the Army. In retrospect that was a bad decision. My first decision as an adult
30 was a bad one. I struggled with that for a lot of years, and I had trouble when I came back
31 to the states for many years and finally, I broke down and took some counseling and I

1 finally got through that. I wish I had done that a lot earlier. There're some issues that I
2 just wouldn't let lie and I should have. I tried using my artwork as an avenue and it
3 worked to a certain extent. I told you earlier when we were talking that I had a lot of
4 photographs and tapes and stuff that I had. It got to the point where this is my therapy.
5 This is how I was going to get this behind me. I was going to destroy all that, all the
6 photographs so I would have nothing to look at or to listen to or to think about to get me
7 back into reality instead of in the past because I was moving from one or the other or just
8 stuck and I couldn't move on. That was my remedy for moving on and it worked to a
9 certain extent, but only up to a certain point when finally, I swallowed my pride and
10 decided I need get some counseling. That lasted about a year. Since that counseling I
11 finally found out what my problem was. I finally moved on and it's no problem anymore.

12 KC: Why don't we take a break?

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Interview with Jim Ford

Session [2] of [2]

Date: February 16, 2010

1 Kelly Crager: Okay, Mr. Ford, when we left off and we took the break we were at
2 the point where we had you coming back off from your first tour. So, you've already re-
3 upped, you know you're going to go back to Vietnam, you've got thirty days leave at
4 home. Describe for me, what it was like to come home. And I mean, both in the reception
5 that you received, your impression of the people in Kermit, and how your family received
6 you. What was it like to come home?

7 Jim Ford: It depended on who I ran into. Old schoolmates wanted to hear war
8 stories which I really wasn't in the mood for. Some of them just wanted to go out and
9 drink beer and that was fine with me. The family, I think initially, after I was there for a
10 week or so noticed that there was a difference in me and started questioning me. "What's
11 your problem?" If I knew what it was, I didn't voice it to them or I just didn't know, but I
12 didn't communicate much. In retrospect—and I've talked to my wife a little bit about this
13 recently. She had a previous marriage to a Vietnam Vet who died of cancer, and we
14 married a few years later. He voiced the same thing that I've come to the same
15 conclusion so it must have been probably a lot of Vietnam Vets that came back, but what
16 I noticed was that I was missing out. The guys who had not been drafted or had not
17 volunteered and gone to Vietnam, who had stayed home, went to college or else they'd
18 gotten jobs and started families. It came to my attention real quickly that they had a life.
19 While I was gone in the Army and basically on hold, so to speak, they were moving on
20 with their lives and had homes and cars and families and careers. They were getting on
21 with life and I wasn't, and I felt like I was being hamstrung, that I was behind a year
22 already. And the fact that I was going back for another year of Vietnam and by the time I
23 got back I'd be two years behind them. So, I felt like I was being handicapped and I felt
24 like that for years and I finally voiced it to her one night and she says, "You know, my
25 first husband felt the same way. And he felt that way the rest of his life like he was
26 always trying to play catch-up." I agree with that. I felt that way then and now.

27 KC: Is there a sense of envy, jealousy, anger, resentment?

28 JF: Not so much, it was kind of like what the card's fate had dealt me and I just
29 had to play the handout. Yeah, envy to a certain degree. I certainly wanted to go to

1 college and some of them were already in and had gotten through junior college and
2 gotten out and gotten fairly good jobs and had the things that I wanted. I wanted a home
3 and a family, and a nice car. What'd I have? Basically nothing; I just felt like when I got
4 home, I was really going to have to knuckle down and work hard to catch up. Both in
5 careers and just living. I didn't even have a steady girlfriend, let alone somebody that
6 might be a prospect for a wife. From that aspect I felt like I was being picked on or there
7 was a certain amount of unfairness to it or something. I didn't like it and I recognized it
8 and I recognized that I have a problem, you know. I got this problem, you know, I've got
9 this problem and how am I going to solve it when I get home. I'm just going to have to
10 try real hard to catch up.

11 KC: You mentioned that you had friends who wanted to hear war stories. You
12 said you weren't really in the mood for that. And that's something I commonly hear from
13 Vietnam Veterans returning home. Why weren't you in the mood for it?

14 FJ: I talked to the Vietnam Veterans through the years and we pretty much agreed
15 that the only time we're willing to tell war stories is if it's to another vet because it's like
16 walking in another man's shoes. You only know it if you've been there, done that to
17 really understand. And if you tell someone that hasn't been there and done that, they may
18 try to understand, but they're just not going to get there. They won't understand so why
19 take the effort. And that was kind of my mindset. They wanted to hear something to be
20 entertained and I certainly didn't want to entertain them, not in that aspect.

21 KC: You mentioned earlier that your father was number one of those do you join
22 the Army in the first place because you also mentioned that he was very much opposed to
23 your going back to Vietnam. You've reasoned it out in your mind, and you do what you
24 believe is the best for you. And he even offered to drive you to Canada. Here he is in
25 Kermit, Texas, and he's willing to get in a car and drive you to Canada to keep you from
26 having to go despite the fact that you've already made up your mind. What was the basis
27 for his opposition and you're going back? Was it the war; was it his son going to the war
28 again? What was the basis of his opposition?

29 JF: I can only speculate. You know, I was his first born, I was the oldest. As
30 growing up, he always would tell me that he had great expectations for me. He only had
31 like a fourth-grade education. He worked out in the oil field and came from an Agrarian

1 background, and he hated farming. He's wanted something better for me, so he had great
2 expectations for me. I voiced that I wanted to go to college and that was part of his plan
3 for me. He wanted me to do that because he thought that would get me ahead in life. At
4 least, more than what he experienced. So, from that aspect I think that his objection was
5 that I wasn't doing what he thought I should be doing to be successful in life. That the
6 Army wasn't going to do anything or give me anything that would be worthwhile. It'd
7 just be, well, the conclusion I came to when I came home on leave was that I was behind
8 my peers. I think that was his biggest objection. He just didn't like the military. When I
9 told him I was going back he objected, and he made the offer to drive me to Canada. And
10 then the day I was to leave, they were going to drive me over to the airport in Midland so
11 I could start the process of going back over. He was really trying hard to communicate.
12 He wasn't a real good communicator. He was trying hard to communicate with me that
13 he really wished I wouldn't go. He didn't know exactly how that was going to manifest
14 itself, but I really think he feared that I wouldn't come back, and I think that was his
15 biggest objection. He just had this gut feeling that I wouldn't. It never entered my mind,
16 really. I thought I knew exactly what I was doing, and I made a good decision, and I was
17 okay with it, but he wasn't at all.

18 KC: Now you have been thoroughly indoctrinated in the ways of the military, of
19 the Army. You have a sense of duty, sense of honor. Right and wrong in the military has
20 taught you, according to their rules of right and wrong. Of course, part of this would
21 definitely have precluded you going to Canada where you signed up. But, if your father
22 made this offer to you, what was your reaction to that? You alluded to it earlier in our
23 interview, but give me some more of your reaction of your father's offer?

24 FJ: Well number one, it surprised me because my dad was from the old school,
25 and you didn't disobey the law and you kept your nose clean. You did what was right.
26 That was totally unlike him, I thought. It struck me how uncharacteristic it was of him,
27 and he must have very strong feelings to make an offer like that. So, I was kind of curious
28 about it and kind of questioning, you know, was he really serious. And he assured me,
29 "Say the word right now and we'll gas the car up and we'll go." It shocked me. I told you
30 earlier I read the novel by Tim O'Brian, *The Things They Carried* and there was a chapter
31 in there where he talks about when he got his draft notice into the Army he contemplated

1 going to Canada and even made some steps in going that direction and was there on the
2 border between the United States and Canada deciding what he was going to do, and he
3 finally backed out. I must admit, it was tempting. I was kind of like Tim O'Brien. I toyed
4 with the idea, "Okay, let's see, how would that work? Well, if I got to Canada, I certainly
5 wouldn't have to go back to Vietnam and I would have to worry about the military
6 anymore, but then what? Once you get there you can't come back. The authorities would
7 be waiting on you and there'd be a price to pay." I was toying with the idea and deciding
8 that that wouldn't be an option. It wasn't a good idea even though it was tempting to try
9 to get out of my obligation. I was kind of like my dad. He taught me once you take on an
10 obligation; you stuck by it and saw it through. I thought that was the thing to do so I
11 declined, and he thought I was crazy, and I went back to 'Nam.

12 KC: Do you think that when he's processing all this at the time and then
13 afterward, do you think that he believes you came to the right conclusion of you've made
14 this commitment and you have to stay with it?

15 JF: No, that wasn't his thought at all.

16 KC: He never did reconcile?

17 JF: He says, "You don't owe them anything, we're family and if you do this, we'll
18 stand behind you and that's all that matters." He thought I had no allegiance even though
19 we all swear when we go in the military that we're going to do what we need to do and if
20 you swear you stick by it and that was my thought. I can't shirk. Besides, it was my idea,
21 how could I change my mind?

22 KC: Okay, what was it like leaving your family? I don't necessarily mean the
23 townies there in Kermit because you're giving me the impression that you've grown
24 separate from a lot of these guys other than something superficial, when I'm drinking
25 beer, and things like that. What was it like leaving your family to go back to the warzone
26 again?

27 JF: As we talked about earlier, it was anticipation of getting back to my family
28 and my buddies and my unit and my job and wondering how the war was going. And
29 really, just anxious to get there, if I could have gotten there earlier, I would have. If there
30 was a way I could have, I would have. And really did regret leaving home. Like I said, I
31 felt kind of separated and I didn't feel an allegiance to Kermit growing up there. Even

1 though my family lived there I just made my mind up that my family and my connections
2 were elsewhere now and felt pretty good about it. I felt like it was for better lack of an
3 expression, a manly thing to do. So, all the way back I was anticipating how it was going
4 to be and what my reception was going to be and who was going to be there and who had
5 already rotated back. I was just anxious to see who I was going to spend my second tour
6 with. Right before I had left there was a transition. The old Cadre that I had been under
7 had rotated home and we were supposed have new men in and I was wondering who he
8 was going to be and how I was going to relate to. As it played out, we became real good
9 friends. He was not only the guy above me barking out orders, but we also became really
10 fast friends and really felt fortunate to ever have met him. He's a good man.

11 KC: You brought up this last little vignette that you've offered here, and you've
12 used the word rotation or rotated out or rotated in. Let me ask you about that. What was
13 your opinion of the one-year rotation system employed for the Vietnam War?

14 JF: From a military standpoint, I think it was a big mistake because you're
15 sending experience home every twelve months and then having to retrain. That's not very
16 efficient. But from an individual standpoint of having to endure more than twelve months
17 there, I think for the individual it was a good thing. From the military, I think it was a bad
18 thing. I know during World War II guys were in for the duration and even though it
19 increased their possibility of getting injured physically, it also gave the military more and
20 more experience and they became very good at what they were doing. By the time you
21 got very good at what you're doing in 'Nam, it was time to go home. And I think that's
22 one of the reasons the military offered this program of letting you out early if you would
23 go another tour in 'Nam because they were keeping experience and wouldn't have to
24 retrain. When I walked back from my second tour, I had a full year of experience in
25 troubleshooting, and it was to their advantage.

26 KC: What kind of affect do you think this rotation system had on this group or
27 unit coherence or not coherence, but cohesiveness? We talked about this before, yet
28 people moving in and people moving out at a different pace, one in then one leaves. What
29 kind of affect did it have on their unit group personally as individuals?

30 JF: I'm not really sure. Certainly cohesiveness, you know, you have someone
31 that's stable that's been there and could put the new guys under wing and say, you know,

1 show you the ropes and this is the way we do things and not the way we do things. To
2 know that's someone's been around that you can go to and ask questions if you have
3 them from a new fellow's standpoint even though when you come in there's always guys
4 there that have more experience and have been there prior to you anyway. But a guy
5 that's been there a full twelve months has a wealth of information, especially in a foreign
6 country and a war zone that he can deal out and help fellows. You know, don't make this
7 mistake, don't get on drugs. And I tried doing that a lot and when the guys came in, I did
8 a lot of preaching on my soap box, you know. Please don't get on drugs. You're setting
9 yourself up from a lot of heartache. Some of them listened and some of them didn't, but I
10 felt like that was my responsibility and I don't know if that came out of just being there a
11 year before. You know, anybody with eyes and ears can see that, that was a mistake. That
12 I just used it as an opportunity because, number one, I was a ranking man, so they'd listen
13 to me. At least they had to listen.

14 KC: What was your rank, by the way, at this time?

15 JF: E5 (Sergeant) and towards the end of that second tour before I went home the
16 Army decided that guys that were troubleshooting—we would get on telephones with
17 fellows that ranked this—I'd get on the phone with a full colonel, you know, trying to
18 help him get his circuit back online and I was a Spec 4 (Specialist). In their wisdom, they
19 decided that a hard striper, that is like a buck sergeant would have a little more authority
20 on the phone. So, they decided to make all the guys who were E5s hard stripers and that
21 happened toward the latter part of my second tour. I don't think it really amounted to
22 much, you know, as far as having any authority in the phone. The only authority you had
23 was that you had the ability to fix it and that's all they cared about. They didn't care
24 about rank. I had officers make threats to me on a circuit. "You need to get the circuit up
25 now or else." And "Exactly what is your name and what is your rank?" And I gave it to
26 them freely, but there was nothing they could do. I was doing the best job I could. I
27 couldn't ask anymore. It put us under a lot of pressure. I kind of liked being a hard
28 striper. I don't know why other than all the guys that I was serving with, and I came out
29 of school with. Those job specialties were all specialists-grade ranks and to be a hard
30 striper was something kind of something odd. In fact, when I was going out of the

1 country, people questioned me. “How did you get hard stripes on you?” “Well, they just
2 gave them to me, I didn’t ask for them. I certainly didn’t do anything to deserve them.”

3 KC: Alright, describe, for me, coming back to Vietnam the second time. Where
4 do land, Tan Son Nhut again? Coming to Cam Ranh Bay? Where do you go?

5 JF: Yeah, the same routine. We land in Tan Son Nhut, went through the battalion
6 headquarters in Cam Ranh Bay then they cart me to Nha Trang, and then from Nha Trang
7 I went back to Ban Me Thuot. Same old routine.

8 KC: Anybody there left from your last tour?

9 JF: There was one fellow in Nha Trang in our company headquarters. He was a
10 fellow from California, and we struck up a friendship and he was the only one left.
11 Occasionally, I would go down to company headquarters in Nha Trang to carry pieces of
12 equipment that were broken, and they had a facility down there. Of course, they had to
13 repair those, and we could pick them up and take them back to our facility. When you did
14 that, we had no place to sleep up there. They didn’t have like a billet for someone that
15 was traveling or anything. I’d always hit him up for his bunk and he’d let me use his
16 bunk when he was on duty and that worked well for me. So that was about the only one I
17 saw in-country other than the guys in my unit in Ban Me Thuot. Most of them were
18 familiar. I think there was two new guys that had come in sense I’d been home. I had to
19 familiarize myself with. Basically, it was the same old bunch, and we just took up where
20 we left off.

21 KC: What was it like to get back to the unit, to the equipment, to the guys in the
22 unit? What was it like to get back?

23 JF: To me it was a stabilizing agent, you know, I had my routine of doing my
24 tours, twelve on, twelve off. Because I had rank, I had set out duty rosters and decided
25 where to put people. I always enjoyed the troubleshooting and just getting back in. I
26 really enjoyed doing that. It gave me a sense of accomplishment. So just getting back into
27 my routine would kind of stabilize me and was real relaxed about the whole situation.
28 And then we have the element of combats coming in and the ARVN units and the
29 responsibility. So, I had a lot to do, I had a lot to keep on my mind. It wasn’t so much
30 recreation my second tour, mostly I was doing a lot of work. Our unit—because we were
31 detachment, we never had an officer. Mostly a non-com and towards the latter part, they

1 didn't even have a non-com, they just more or less never were put on paper, but I was a
2 ranking man, so I was in charge. A lot of that responsibility just pushing paperwork a lot,
3 which all Army units do, I had to do in addition to my job, so I was busy.

4 KC: Tell me about the process of Vietnamization that you saw on your second
5 tour that's specific to your detachment? You talked about it earlier in one specific
6 example, but tell me about your work in general?

7 JF: Well, I understand the concept of it was they were trying to turn the war over
8 to the Vietnamese. That we'd kind of come in and taken over and made it our war and it
9 was really their war so that was the process that they were going to use to get the war
10 back to the Vietnamese. I understood that for the very first, not only myself, but everyone
11 else thought it was a bad idea because number one, we had already seen, in our view, that
12 the ARVN wasn't willing to fight. And I don't know the reason behind that, but we just
13 didn't witness it. There were a few good units that had good reputations of the
14 Vietnamese Army. I think the Ranger Unit had a very good combat record, but just from
15 my personal view, I didn't have much confidence in their ability to stand their ground and
16 fight when they had to. As far as our unit and what we were doing, you know, I talked
17 about the training and not just the fellow that I was paired up with, but all of them. We all
18 got together GIs that were doing the training of the ARVN in our job descriptions, and
19 they didn't have what it took to get the job done. They didn't have the will to do it or I'm
20 not really sure what the reason was, but from my standpoint it was just a big flop. With
21 South Vietnam falling as soon as it did after we finally withdrew kind of, you know,
22 cemented my idea that my idea was right, they were not ready, and they were not willing
23 to fight. That's a pity. I didn't think much of the program, and I've already admitted to
24 you and whoever listens to this tape that I kind of gave up on it anyway and was
25 dishonest about reports of my training because I just felt like the fellow couldn't do the
26 job for whatever reason.

27 KC: What did you find in your specific case, to be the greatest hurdle for them,
28 for the ARVN?

29 JF: I think it was just the concept of electronics and communication. I'll give you
30 an illustration. We had a teletype shack downtown; it was run by the Vietnamese. It
31 wasn't military, it was civilian, and I think what they did was they gave weather reports

1 and took in weather reports for the civilian airport outside of town. Their teletype circuits
2 ran through us, and they were notorious for blowing fuses out there because they had
3 their own generator shack and I guess in their way of thinking, if twelve volts are good,
4 than twenty-four must be even better. So, they cranked the juice up and they'd blow
5 fuses. And they called us and warned us to fix it. Well, we couldn't fix it because it was
6 their fuse, and they were there, and we were where we were, so we tried to explain it to
7 them. Go out there and check your fuses. You've probably blown a fuse as you have
8 umpteen times before this. And they never got it. I kept telling them, "Have you cranked
9 your voltage up?" "Yes, it was fluctuating so we turned it up." I say, "Do not do that, it
10 blows your fuse and that's your problem now as it always has been." Two weeks later
11 they call me up with the same problem. "We have this problem." I said, "Did you mess
12 with your voltage?" "Yes." "Well, you have a blown fuse, go out and change your fuse."
13 It was maddening. Why they didn't get that, I don't understand. They were not dumb
14 people. The fellow that ran the shack was an intelligent fellow, but I don't know why he
15 didn't understand that.

16 KC: Was there any one particular thing that they did well that would give you
17 some hope that they could latch onto this and move forward?

18 JF: I'm going to be real honest, no, not one thing. We had the same thing with the
19 civilian airport out there. They had a teletype and I think their problem was a landline
20 that was giving way and it was shorting out, but it would only occur sporadically, and it
21 was because of the rains and humidity and stuff because it was laying on the ground. I
22 went out there personally, several times, because we had this reoccurring problem over
23 and over again and I tried to explain to the fellow, "It's probably your landlines and you
24 probably need to get them off the ground, get them elevated so moisture won't be an
25 issue and you probably won't have this problem anymore." He wouldn't do it. You know,
26 I wanted to grab the fellow by the lapel and just shake him. "What don't you understand
27 about that? That's not rocket science." But he just didn't get it and he wouldn't do it even
28 though I told him to do it.

29 KC: What kind of changes did you see in your unit, your activities, your duties
30 compared to your first tour? Had anything changed?

31 JF: Yeah.

1 KC: Morale or anything like that?

2 JF: You know, towards '71, when it was getting real close for me going back
3 home for the final time, war was really kind of winding down and I could really tell that
4 we were finally having an affect on what was happening there. My first tour, the 155
5 assault choppers would go out and just shoot up the countryside all day long and at night
6 we'd get hit. The next day, they go out and shoot out the countryside and two or three
7 days later we get hit. I didn't see anything changing. Towards the latter part of the war,
8 we rarely ever got hit. It was very quiet. Everything was really winding down. I could see
9 a big change.

10 KC: Why do you suppose that was?

11 JF: I think the enemy changed strategies, especially in our area and you being a
12 scholar in the Vietnam War knows that that's where they came in was Ban Me Thuot to
13 start their final offensive because they knew it was a soft spot and we were, and we knew
14 that. And we were for a reason because we were just there to monitor. And I think the
15 enemy finally woke up and said, "Okay, here's a weak spot. All we have to do it wait a
16 while for them to get weaker and get lackadaisical and this is where we need to make our
17 push." And they were right. So, I just think it was a change of strategy on their part. They
18 were trying to force their will and they weren't getting much of anywhere other than
19 increase casualties. If you wait awhile, then the Americans think that they're winning the
20 war and you know where their weak spot is to begin with, and you be patient and it'll pay
21 off for you. That's my cracker barrel philosophy.

22 KC: You talked about drugs, alcohol, race issues, morale issues, discipline issues
23 in your first tour. Did it continue at the same pace in your second tour? Was it better, was
24 it worse?

25 JF: No, everything regressed. Morale increased not only drug taking, but
26 alcoholism. Guys were really going to the houses and meeting up with the girls and
27 venereal disease was just ramped. I just saw a lot of deterioration in everything, even
28 logistics. In Tet of '69, I told you they sent us laws for fear that we were going to see
29 tanks, but even though they did that, we were low on ammunition, and we let the higher-
30 ups, let them know that we needed more ammo. We couldn't get it. We had to beg ammo
31 for Tet of '69 for whatever reason. We told them we needed it; Tet was coming up. They

1 already told us they were expecting tanks in our area, why can't we get ammo? So, we
2 had to go begging from other units, you know. Ammo here and a grenade there and
3 finally we got it to where we felt like we had enough. It was like a coil had been wound
4 up and it was losing it's spring and it's winding down. I could tell, everyone could, and
5 things are changing. We thought we were winning the war, it's what we thought.

6 KC: Interesting. I've never heard anyone put it that way before. Were there any
7 specific incidents or episodes in your second tour that really stand out to you as being a
8 great significance or were you just head down busy all the time?

9 JF: Well, let me think. Nothing except the 155, when the American forces made
10 the push into Cambodia, the 155 kind of spearheaded that because we were real near the
11 Cambodian border, 0so they ferried a lot of ARVN and our troops in and out of there and
12 they paid the price for it. We used to sit around on sandbags and watch the big chinooks
13 bring in these Huey's that were just shot up like Swiss cheese. The 155, just one chopper
14 after another. They were paying a high price. And not long after that, they made an
15 announcement that they were standing the 155 down and they were sending them home.
16 They'd had enough. And we all looked around and say, "This is probably an indication
17 that we're getting near the end. Either they're going to win or we're going to win." That
18 really stuck out to us not only that, but just the sheer magnitude of us moving into
19 Cambodia. We knew locally because we were woken up about 2 AM in the morning with
20 a rumbling. We didn't know what was going on, it was like an earthquake. There were
21 tanks moving down the road and they were all moving towards Cambodia, and we
22 thought, "Something's up." And it was a big push.

23 KC: Did your job, as a result of this big push into Cambodia, did your job change
24 at all? Was there more communication, more troubleshooting?

25 JF: Yeah, that's why we knew for sure that something was up because the traffic
26 probably increased 3-fold. I thought, "Man, something big is going on." We don't know
27 what it was because they don't tell you. We have an offensive going on, but we could tell.
28 There was a lot going on and then we saw the choppers coming in and I was like, "Yep."
29 They ran into a buzzsaw. So yeah, that stuck out. Plus, Armed Forces Radio that we were
30 always monitoring, the news was telling us that—I think at the time Nixon was denying
31 that we were in Cambodia. We were saying, "Oh yeah? Guess what." So that was another

1 indication that something was big going on and your president's lying about it in the
2 national news.

3 KC: Well, it used to be a big thing. Nowadays it's common.

4 JF: It's common, yeah, but back then it was kind of unusual.

5 KC: Surprises are honest cause.

6 JF: Yeah, absolutely.

7 KC: What did you think about this incursion into Cambodia? A lot of people
8 thought it was a great idea; a lot of people thought it was a terrible idea. What was your
9 opinion of it?

10 JF: I think it was a good idea strategically from a military standpoint. They had to
11 do it because we were always hamstrung. The troops from the north would come down
12 Cambodia and basically had a safe haven and they could decide when they were coming
13 in-country and exactly where they were going to concentrate their troops. It was a big
14 advantage to them. And for us to hamstring ourselves like that, we always thought it was
15 ludicrous. When we heard it was a big push into Cambodia, well finally we got it, we're
16 going to do something about this. It will not give them a safe haven and it will end the
17 war quicker. So, we were all for it. I know a lot of guys lost their lives in that endeavor
18 and it didn't work, but I thought it was a step in the right direction; it was like bombing
19 the north. It was always on and off, on and off and we thought, "Let's just bomb them
20 until they all quit." Maybe it made good sense and we couldn't understand why it was
21 always on and off.

22 KC: What is your overall opinion on these restrictions on the way the war was
23 fought by the military? Political restrictions and military restrictions from your
24 perspective there in Ban Me Thuot. And I don't expect you to have an expert opinion
25 about what was going on in Saigon or what was going on in Da Nang or anything like
26 that, but what was your perception of these seeming restrictions on American efforts?

27 JF: It's strange, we kind of looked at it as an intrusion that you have standing
28 armies for a reason. That's for defense and it's about to do battle and to set up certain
29 criteria that you can and can't do this. To us, it made no sense at all. If you're going to
30 fight a war you have one purpose and that's to win. I think that's the reason morale
31 started deteriorating. We finally woke up and all decided we're not here to win, it's a war

1 of attrition and the best you could do is just try to survive it. We're not off to win. How
2 could you keep your morale up with that kind of mindset? So, from that standpoint, that's
3 what I thought. Let's just get in here and get it over with and go home. Just like I told you
4 we had a police station across the street from us where my bunker was at, we had
5 received small arms fire. After a certain amount of time, I can't remember the exact point
6 was we got post commanders orders and we wouldn't have to fire on that police station
7 no matter what even if we received the small arms fire, it made no sense. If you're
8 receiving fire, you should return fire. "As a Vietnamese police station, you will not fire
9 on it." I don't understand that it makes no sense.

10 KC: Compare and contrast your first tour with your second tour. You've already
11 discussed a number of different things, but in broad or narrow ways, compare and
12 contrast your first and second tours.

13 JF: First tour was a learning experience; second tour I think was a character
14 builder from a personal standpoint.

15 KC: Why do you say that?

16 JF: Even though it was my idea to go back, I was still battling with loneliness. I
17 told you I was the last guy to walk out of there and I saw a lot of guys—I took a lot of
18 guys to the airport and put them on a plane or a chopper to go home and that's hard to do
19 knowing you got to stay. And I did that a lot, but it got harder and harder. Especially
20 when I started seeing the barracks start emptying and it finally dawned on me, "Jim,
21 you're the last one out of here." And I was and it was hard for me to take. So, it built a lot
22 of character if that's what you want to call it. I didn't enjoy going to that barracks at night
23 when I was the only GI in it, I didn't really trust them. I slept with my weapon because I
24 did not trust the ARVN. I just felt like if they wanted to, they could do whatever they
25 wanted with me and make up some story and it'd fly. So, I slept with my weapon, and I
26 tried not to expose my back to them. I tried to not associate with them as little as possible.
27 I just thought it was a bad idea. I tried to keep it on a very professional basis and, "You
28 do this, and you do that and stay away from me." That was basically my attitude. So,
29 from that standpoint I don't know if they'd want to call that character building or not, but
30 that was my mindset, too.

1 KC: Were there any specific instances of you being uncomfortable around them?
2 Was there any sort of threat from the ARVN that you were working with?

3 JF: Not directly. Sometimes they'd make some comments and I started thinking
4 about, "What exactly did they mean by that?" And they were all pretty bad about pointing
5 out to me that I was the only GI there. And they wanted to know how you feel about that.
6 Yeah, I wouldn't tell them because I didn't want them to know and I really couldn't think
7 of a good lie, you know? So, I just kept my mouth shut. "Let's just keep this on a
8 professional basis. I don't want to talk about what I think. It doesn't really matter; we
9 have a job to do and that's all I want to do." They'd make comments like that and maybe
10 I was paranoid. I probably had nothing to worry about, but I just thought it would be
11 better safe than sorry.

12 KC: But you clearly felt threatened?

13 JF: Oh yeah, you bet you.

14 KC: Whether it was implied or whatever.

15 JF: Or just sort of the same point we got hit. Just from past experiences I knew
16 that they weren't going to back me up. You know, I might be out there by myself and
17 look around expecting back up and they wouldn't be there, and I thought that was the
18 biggest threat as any. I just couldn't trust them.

19 KC: Were you still pulling a guard duty at night?

20 JF: No, because I was ranking man, you know, I used the opportunity to take
21 myself off because I thought if I was too fatigued, I wouldn't be able to do the other
22 assignments so I started delegating that out so that was a blessing. Other contrasts
23 between the two, just the aspect of the war, you know, the two contrasted and we got hit a
24 lot and the second tour, it almost became non-existent. I think White Alert was the most
25 secure alert. Recon said there was no threats and we stayed on White Alert for months on
26 end, so it was real quiet. It was almost like state-side duty. You had your job; you did
27 your job and there was no stress to it.

28 KC: Did you feel there in your second tour—that's a leading way to ask this
29 question. Were you as mentally, emotionally set in the second tour as you were in the
30 first? Was it grinding on you, was it more liberating for you?

1 JF: To tell you the truth, I guess the best description is I felt like a Vietnam Vet, I
2 felt like a Vet. I was a veteran, you know. I've been baptized by fire and all that
3 nonsense. I knew the ropes, there were very few things that were happening that surprised
4 me. And I felt pretty comfortable to tell you the truth. And it was one of the few times in
5 my life I actually felt like that. I'm pretty bad about second guessing and feeling insecure
6 about decisions, but that second tour, I felt pretty comfortable. That's about the only
7 feeling or thoughts I had about it, I guess.

8 KC: You mention that you were signed up for this civilian outfit to do the same
9 thing. You're thinking, "Young man, no real ties at home, I can make some money doing
10 what I've been doing. I know that I'm good at it. I can see some of the world." And you
11 signed up. You're going to go home; this is what you're going to do. When you left
12 Vietnam the second time, what were your thoughts on your future?

13 JF: I thought I was set. I had my military obligation behind me, I already had a
14 job; it was a good job. I didn't try very hard to do it—to get it. The job I was going to be
15 doing was the same job I had in the Army. I mean, that's pretty easy. I thought I just fell
16 into it and finally all my dominoes were lining up. I just really thought I was set for the
17 future. I really didn't know how it was going to play out. Like I say, if I was going to stay
18 with them or I go to another foreign country I felt pretty good about it. Until I got home
19 and started thinking about it and my parents started talking to me and I saw how good it
20 was living back in the states and I thought, "Why, would I go back and do that?" And
21 then I started thinking second thoughts and finally weaseled out of it. Initially I felt real
22 good about it. I thought I'd done a really good thing and I was fortunate to make a living
23 out of something I already had experience in. The guys, the civilians, that I was going to
24 be working with, we rubbed elbows with them daily. Once I made the decision, I started
25 talking to them. "What's it like not to go back to the states?" They say, "Oh, it's not that
26 bad." I think something to do with tax laws they could come back for a certain amount of
27 time, you could only stay in a certain window of time and then they have to leave, or
28 taxes would kick in and they'd have to cough up taxes. They said it's wonderful. You see
29 the world, you can marry a foreign wife if you want to, you don't have to pay taxes,
30 there's lots of adventure in it, you know your job already. They said it's a great life. They
31 had no regrets. Well, if they can do it, I can do it and it doesn't sound bad for a single

1 fellow. So, it was really attractive to me. Through the years I've kind of looked back and
2 had regrets. I wonder where I'd have been at if that had fallen through, but who knows.

3 KC: We can all do that.

4 JF: Yeah, absolutely.

5 KC: For all the good does it does us to do that. What was your return home like
6 from your second tour in terms of, again, how were you greeted, how were you treated,
7 how has the country changed, how are you relating with people? What was it like coming
8 back the second time?

9 JF: I see a big change in the country as I remember in the United States. Gasoline
10 had gone up; I could see the drug culture had really taken hold and had a life of its own
11 here in the states which I really wasn't aware of. I saw it in 'Nam, but I had no idea what
12 it was in the states. I remember going to a bar and trying to purchase a drink and it was a
13 lady bartender and she questioned me on my age, and I took offense and as calm as I
14 could I tried to explain to her who I was, where I'd been, what'd I'd been through, and
15 that age shouldn't be an issue. I was twenty-one anyway. I think drinking age in Texas at
16 the time was twenty-one. I had just turned twenty-one. Apparently, I didn't look it. She
17 still wouldn't serve me a drink and I started getting very, very angry to the point where I
18 was making a scene and just about that time the deputy sheriff there in Kermit walked
19 into the bar and wanted to know what the problem was. I explained to him, and he took
20 my side. He dressed the lady down and says, "This guy's been to Vietnam, I don't care if
21 he's sixteen years old. Get him a drink." I said, "Well sir, I'm drinking age." He says, "I
22 know you are. It doesn't matter, give the fellow a drink." And I appreciated it. I don't
23 know whether I needed the drink, but I appreciated the respect. I felt like she was
24 showing disrespect.

25 KC: Okay, let's expand on this. We are all familiar with the stereotypical return of
26 a Vietnam Veteran to the United States. It was true for a lot of people; it wasn't true for a
27 lot of people. What was your experience in terms of how you were treated by American
28 society in general? And what did you see in more broad terms?

29 JF: Well Kelly, you're going to be probably the second or third person I've ever
30 told this. And I don't like telling it because it brings up bad experiences or bad memories
31 and it made me so angry, and I was angry for years about it. My reception back home was

1 when they flew us back, they flew us into Seattle and we did initial paperwork there and
2 then wherever you lived and if you were mustering out, if you were getting out then
3 they'd fly you to wherever your home was. We landed in Seattle and before we got into
4 the busses to take us to the fourth to do our paperwork, there was a shakedown. They had
5 shaken us down half a dozen times before we left 'Nam and I think we landed in Alaska
6 once and once in the Philippines to refueled. Both those times when we got off, they
7 shook us down again looking for drugs. Well, here we were in Seattle and everyone's
8 shaking us down one last time. So, they had these long tables, and we were all lined up
9 waiting our turn. You'd throw your duffle bag on there. I think they called those fellows
10 CID (Criminal Investigation Division), some kind of police force in the Army. I forget
11 exactly what their function was. Anyway, they were going through our baggage. There
12 was a fellow in front of me. He was from some infantry unit down south. I don't
13 remember what unit it was, but I didn't know him from Adam. I hadn't even spoken to
14 him. We'd sit together on the bus on the way from the airplane when we landed. I noticed
15 when they were going through his stuff they finally, about halfway through, took out his
16 civilian clothes and the suit and ties came up behind him and took him off with his
17 baggage. I didn't think anything about it. I was next up, and I threw my duffle bag on
18 there and they were going through my stuff and the same two fellows came up from
19 behind me and asked me to do the same thing. "Will you come with Sergeant Ford?" And
20 I said, "What for?" "Never mind, just come with us we're CID." And they took me back
21 into a broom closet and they told me to strip. I said, "What for?" and they said, "Never
22 your mind, we're CID, we're asking you to strip." We're going to do a body search on
23 you." I said, "Well I ain't stripping until you tell me the reason for it." He says, "Okay, if
24 that's the way you want to be about it." He says, "Your buddy, we found drugs on him."
25 It was the fellow in front of me that I didn't know. "And he says that you have some,
26 too." I say, "I don't know that fellow." I said, "Look at my patch; we're not even in the
27 same unit. I don't know that fellow from Adam and plus I don't do drugs and I don't
28 have drugs." "Doesn't matter, still strip." So, when I finally decided that they were not
29 going to buy my story and I was not going to get out of that broom closet until I stripped.
30 In fact, they told me that, "Either you strip, and we search you or you're not getting on
31 the bus to go home, your decision." Well, that's a no brainer. So, I stripped, they searched

1 all my orifices. He says, "You're clean." I said, "I tried to tell you that." This is the insult
2 and something that I've never gotten over was they never said, "We're sorry for accusing
3 you falsely. We're sorry for the disgrace of making you strip in front of us and checking
4 all your orifices." There was no apology whatsoever. Simply a commander, "Put your
5 clothes back on and get on the bus." And that was my welcome home. And it took me—
6 I'm still not over it. I didn't expect for them to throw me a parade. I didn't expect for
7 them to tell me how much they appreciated what I did because I'm pretty sure that they
8 didn't. I just wanted them to show me some respect of someone who'd been through an
9 ordeal and commanded some kind of respect just from the point of being a survivor, I
10 guess is what I wanted. And then in return, that's what I got. And I just never have been
11 able to come in grips with it. It really bothers me and that's pretty mild through some of
12 the receptions that other GIs got in their welcome home. I didn't get spit on or anything
13 like that or people say ugly things to me. It was the military who gave me that kind of
14 welcome home. I almost expected it from a civilian, but this is the military. I didn't
15 understand it then, I don't understand it now. I did my job and yet I was shown no respect
16 for it. They even wouldn't let us—I think some of my memories are coming back. They
17 wouldn't even let us leave that area. They burned our uniforms. I wanted my uniform. I
18 sweated a lot of sweat in that uniform, I wanted it. They took them off of us and they said
19 they were going to burn them. Whether they did or not, I don't know. And the reasoning
20 for that, I'm not sure of either. We were proud of our uniforms, and we wanted them.
21 They wouldn't let them have this. Another insult, when we finally got to the fort at
22 Seattle, they were doing our paperwork, they measured us for our dress greens. That's the
23 fellows that were getting out which I was included. After that we expected them to give
24 us an opportunity to take a shower. I hadn't taken a shower in two weeks. I'd been up for
25 four days straight without any sleep, but I really wanted a shower: a hot shower. They
26 wouldn't allow us a shower. They said, "No, if you take a shower it's going to delay you
27 and you won't get on your plane in time so no showers. I resented that. If I was going to
28 get my dress greens, I wanted to be clean and I wasn't, I was grody. I had two weeks of
29 filth on me, you know. I had two weeks of filth on me, and I don't understand that either.
30 I don't think they were purposely trying to be disrespectful. There probably was a reason

1 behind it, but I think they should have allowed us a half and hour to shower. That would
2 have really been nice. And this is small potatoes, but you asked so I'm telling you.

3 KC: No, no, it might be small potatoes to someone's and not small potatoes to
4 someone else.

5 JF: When they're measuring you for your dress greens, they asked you want unit
6 you were from so I told them my unit, 1st Signal Brigade. When I got my uniform, I was
7 getting a gray dress; they put the wrong unit patch on my uniform. So, I pointed it out to
8 them, "This is not my unit and I'm not going to wear it. I don't deserve to wear that unit's
9 patch; I didn't serve with them. I served with another unit, and I want my unit patch on
10 there." Again, they gave me the same excuse. "Well, we can change the patch on you, but
11 you're going to miss your plane." Well, that's a big incentive, forget it. Again, it was an
12 insult to me. I served with my unit, identified with them, I wanted it on my dress greens
13 on my way home, but I didn't get that opportunity. I still have it sitting in my closet with
14 the wrong patch on it.

15 KC: I was going to ask you if you ever received the right patch.

16 JF: Mm-mm, nope.

17 KC: Did you ever try?

18 JF: No, I just decided, you know, that's in the past and I just want to get on with
19 it. I tried to explain it and my daughter has it now. I went out to Seattle and visited her
20 shortly after I retired here last year and she still has it and she has no idea that it had the
21 wrong patch on it and I don't have the heart to tell her and it really doesn't a difference in
22 anyone, but me anyway. I really feel for those guys that came home and really got badly
23 treated. They did not deserve that in my opinion.

24 KC: Why do you think that happened?

25 JF: It's kind of like the comment I made for you when we broke for lunch. I think
26 this country was impatient. When we get into wars, we're always gung-ho, but if it lasts
27 an X amount of years then we lose patience and we want to move on. And maybe those
28 fellows that don't have an option of moving on. If you're in the military and there's a war
29 to fight, then you have no option. You have to do what they tell you to and maybe that
30 frustration is personified on them. I'm not really sure. You can kind of see it now in
31 Afghanistan and Iraq. We've been there long enough. I hear people saying, "Let's get out

1 of there.” Well, if there’s a reason of getting in, there ought to be a reason enough to stay
2 and make sure that it’s done before you leave. That’s my fault pattern. It’s just a bad
3 example to set for the other world. It sets you up saying if you get in the war with the
4 United States and it lasts long enough, it’s just a war of attrition. They’ll get up if you just
5 stay the course for long enough. That’s the way to win the war. Well, that’s a bad thing to
6 be telling your enemy or for them to realize that the Iraqis and the Afghan’s have realized
7 that yet or not. I think they had to be brain dead not to because we’re already wanting to
8 cut and run. I’m not really in agreement of why we’re there, but since we’re there, just
9 like Vietnam let’s go finish the job and then go home. It just seems like good sense to me.

10 KC: How had this nation changed while you were gone? Or how have your views
11 on this country changed?

12 JF: I don’t know, it’s been so many years it’s hard to remember back in what I
13 saw and what I didn’t. I know I had a hard time getting a job. I interviewed for a lot of
14 jobs and shortly after I got back, I started growing a beard just because I could, and it was
15 the first opportunity that I had to do so I had grown a beard and I remember one fellow
16 telling me he’s more than willing to hire me about how I felt about my beard. I didn’t
17 even know why he was asking this and I said, “I feel pretty good about my beard.” And
18 he says, “Well, we have a policy of no facial hair at this company, and we can’t hire you,
19 thank you very much.” He didn’t give me the opportunity that I might be willing to shave
20 it off. Some prospective employers admit that there’s no way they were going to hire a
21 Vietnam Veteran, period. And that shocked me.

22 KC: How do you react to something like that?

23 JF: I never do because to this day I still don’t know how to react. What do you say
24 to someone that kind of has an opinion of you? I didn’t do anything to them. I only did
25 what I felt like I needed to. I know there was a lot of resentment over war crimes that
26 were being talked about at that time, but I wasn’t involved in anything like that. All I did
27 was do my job, that’s all I did. I didn’t disgrace anybody to my knowledge and for an
28 employer to tell me that the only reason he’s not going to harm you is because I did that
29 and how to you argue against that. I was just dumbfounded, I still am. They were missing
30 a big opportunity. I had a lot to offer, I thought, to a prospective employer, but they
31 wouldn’t give me a chance simply because I’d served my country in a war that had gone

1 bad. It didn't compute. At least we've come that far in this country. At least we
2 understand. We separate the war from the warriors and in Midland Odessa, I really
3 admire them. When we have a local boy come home from those two wars, there's a group
4 that goes out to the airport and throws flags, salutes him, welcomes him home, makes
5 him feel welcome. That's the way you do it, that's the way you do it. So at least we got
6 that right. Maybe if we've learned anything from Vietnam is how you treat your warriors.

7 KC: What did you do when you finally landed a job?

8 JF: My first job was working for a television station as an art director of all
9 things. I had an interest in art, but I had no background, no form of training. I just went
10 over there and told the guy I had this little bit of talent, but I never really used it. He gave
11 me a chance. He says, "Go home, and I'll give you a week." I'll give you three
12 companies and you dream up a logo design for all three, you come back and show them
13 to me, and we'll talk from there." So, I did that, and he was impressed enough by what I
14 did he's willing to give him a chance. That was a good job. I didn't make much, but it
15 was my first job and I enjoyed it a lot. It was a lot of fun. Shortly after that I think I
16 stayed there about two years. I got married and decided since I'm married, I need to start
17 doing something pretty constructive like going back to college and then I started
18 entertaining the idea of getting on the GI Bill and going back to college, which I did. It
19 was only then when I went back to college, I really thought I was making some headway.
20 Finally, that was going to be my process of finally catching up and getting some college
21 education.

22 KC: Where'd you go to school?

23 JF: University of Texas at Permian Basin, right there in Odessa. At the time, they
24 started out just a just a double-level university. It was junior/senior year, so I did my first
25 two years at Odessa College and then transferred out there to graduate. I felt fortunate
26 that it was local, and I had a university I could go to and work nights. With the GI bill we
27 struggled by. I had my first child my last semester in school which was pretty good
28 timing. I didn't really plan it that way, but that's how it turned out. I enjoyed college a
29 lot. I felt like I had a purpose and I put my nose to the grindstone. I went every time they
30 opened the doors; summers, in between semesters, you name it. I went full time and got
31 through in about three years and I was out of there and started looking for jobs and can't

1 really say. I was an art major and it's kind of hard-to-find jobs in that area, in art. I went
2 and took a couple of jobs trying to make art a living and never really was successful and
3 finally got on with the postal service and retired from there after twenty-seven years. I
4 didn't enjoy it, but it put bread on the table, and it was a good living, so I don't have any
5 regrets.

6 KC: What was your opinion at the time of the Paris Peace Accords which
7 essentially handed the fighting between the United States and North Vietnamese?

8 JF: Number one it was a sellout. I guess I should say the biggest failure was we
9 sold out the Vietnamese. As soon as I heard that I started thinking about the Vietnamese
10 that I had contact with. What's going to happen to Sergeant Singh; what's going to
11 happen to our Mamasans, how is that going to play out in their lives? I knew they were in
12 for it, and I felt like we just sent them up the river. That was not a good thing. It got us
13 out of the war, but it has made things worse for them. The couple that I mentioned earlier,
14 the Vietnamese couple, his father after the war, was a physician and he was put into one
15 of their reeducation camps and I can't imagine what took place in there. It broke him
16 physically, mentally, and his health was never the same. I regret that we did that to them.
17 I know a lot got out and a lot didn't and that's unfortunate that we treated our allies that
18 way. I don't have a lot of good to say about those Accords. It was a sell out.

19 KC: What do you remember about the fall of Saigon, April 1975?

20 JF: Not much. I didn't think that much; I just knew it was inevitable. What caught
21 my attention is when I heard that the initial offensive was started in Ban Me Thuot and I
22 thought, "Wow." And things started clicking about everything we've discussed so far and
23 why it happened that way. Again, I started thinking about those Vietnamese and
24 everything clicked so far about everything we've discussed so far and why that happened
25 that way. Again, I started thinking about those Vietnamese even though the Rhade
26 tribesmen, the Montagnards that were in our area, I knew that they and the North
27 Vietnamese did not get along very well. Even the Vietnamese discriminated against the
28 Rhades and I just thought, "Man, they are really going to have a living hell on their
29 hands." I just wish we could do something for them, but we sold them out. I guess that's
30 it.

1 KC: Here's a large question for you. And feel free to answer it however you like.
2 In as much or as little detail on what level you would like. How has your experiences,
3 how have your experiences in the Vietnam War most affected your life?

4 JF: In a lot of aspects, I think I grew up there as a man. I learned a lot about
5 getting along with people. We talked about relationships, and I learned how to get along
6 with a lot of different types of people. I think that's a good people skill. I learned a lot
7 about myself, what I could and couldn't do and I found out that I could do a lot more than
8 I ever dreamed that I could. Both mentally, physically, and emotionally. When I left
9 Vietnam, I thought that I was probably the strongest individual who ever lived. I thought
10 I was invincible. I could do anything, and nothing would affect me ever and I was wrong.
11 After about ten years of marriage, my marriage fell apart and one of the fallouts of
12 divorce is you lose the custody of your children, which I did. And that's when I found out
13 that I wasn't invincible anymore. That there was something that would happen to me in
14 my life that I couldn't control anymore and really couldn't cope in any aspect and in
15 retrospect it was a good thing because it got me to growing again as a person. It was a
16 painful process. I wouldn't wish that on anybody. My ex-wife thinks that part of the
17 reason of the divorce was my Vietnam experiences and not being able to put them behind
18 me. To be perfectly honest, she was probably right. I just couldn't lay it down. Don't
19 know that I would if I could, but the divorce got my attention. I decided there were things
20 that I needed to start doing in my life to change things. And that's when I started growing
21 again. In a roundabout way, I have Vietnam to thank for that. It's strange to say, strange
22 to say. In a lot of ways, it impacted me in ways that I had no idea and it manifested itself
23 many, many years later. So would I go back and do it all over again if I had the chance,
24 absolutely not. Am I thankful for it? You bet you. Now, Vietnam Vets want to go back
25 over in-country and do the memory tour. No, thank you. Been there done that. I think
26 that's the part— I'm not doubting those guys. I'm sure everyone deals with that situation
27 differently and if it worked for them, great, but I found in my own life it's best to leave
28 the past where it belongs and that's in the past. Learn from it and move on. If they need
29 to go back and re-live some of that stuff for them to be able to do that, you bet, go ahead
30 and do it, but not me. No thank you.

1 KC: You mentioned about learning from the past. One of the things that we do,
2 we have done since the Vietnam War as a nation is look at Vietnam to determine what
3 lessons we should learn from it. Do determine the legacy of the Vietnam War. As
4 someone who was there for two tours at your capacity and who has dealt with these
5 issues, what do you think the United States should learn from the war and what was the
6 war's legacy?

7 JF: You know, Kelly, I could probably say some things that would probably be
8 true. To be perfectly honest, though, every time I see the wall, the Vietnam Memorial in
9 Washington and all those names up there, I have a hard time justifying anything in their
10 name. For that many lives to be cut short in the prime of their lives, for any cause, I have
11 trouble dealing with. Especially Vietnam and all those issues, you know, that were going
12 on then. It's hard for me to justify that other than they're being foreign boots on our soil.
13 Short of that, I can't justify it. I'm not a dove by any means. I think if there's a good
14 reason to fight, there is, but from the Vietnam standpoint, I still have trouble with it. Not
15 just to guys that never came back home, but just the sacrifices that all of us guys make.
16 What can we point to and say, "That was the reason." I have trouble pointing my finger at
17 anything. I don't know what the reason was. Maybe it's because I never graphed the
18 whole picture. From my own standpoint, to put it in one word it's just a waste. It was just
19 a waste. The manpower, what this country's capable of, the anguish that it put us through,
20 it wasn't worth it. Don't do that anymore. And that was my biggest fear when we moved
21 into Afghanistan because of their history and no conquering army has ever stayed there.
22 When we went in, I told my wife, "This is not good." I really feared that we'd get into a
23 quagmire because there's so many aspects of it like Vietnam and we don't need to be
24 there. And we're still there and it makes me nervous. I wish we weren't, and I wish we'd
25 get out. I just told you earlier that we shouldn't, but I think in our own best interest it's
26 time to leave. We won't, but I wish we would.

27 KC: Is there anything else you'd like to add to the record before we end the
28 interview, Mr. Ford?

29 JF: No, just to sum it up I want to mention the 360-1st, the Ban Me Thuot
30 Attachment. We called ourselves Long Pines. We were a proud little outfit, and I can't
31 conjure up all those names of those guys that came through, but I appreciated all of them,

1 they were my brothers and I wish I could get together with some of them. I made
2 attempts and I can't trace down any of them but one. We met a couple years ago. We
3 kind of felt like we were unsung heroes. We were a little detachment out from the rest of
4 our company. We were one of the few elements in our company that actually got shot at
5 on a regular basis and we did our jobs well and we just felt like we got a lot of
6 recognition for it. I've gone online and found other units who are there on Camp Coryell
7 and kept looking for the 360-1st and there's nothing. I just feel like the least I could do
8 when I have an oral interview like this is to at least mention the unit and at least give me
9 some kind of recognition. I guess that's all I want to say.

10 KC: Alright, thank you very much.