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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Jerry Williams
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date 8 April 2010
Transcribed by Cole Edwards**

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

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University, conducting an Oral History interview with Mr. Jerry Williams. Today is April
3 8th, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of
4 Texas Tech and Mr. Williams is joining by phone from West Virginia. Is that correct, sir?

5 Jerry Williams: Yes, sir. Harpers Ferry.

6 JS: All right, okay. Why don't we begin, if you could tell me a little bit of
7 biographical information about yourself? First of all, when and where were you born?

8 JW: I was born in 1947 in Western Kentucky.

9 JS: All right. Yes, sir. Okay, could you tell me a little bit about your parents?
10 What were their names and what did they do for a living?

11 JW: Well, my mom was Margaret Williams. She was a homemaker, I guess. My
12 dad was Marvin Williams, a coal miner. All around good guy, I guess.

13 JS: Yes, sir. All right, did you grow up there in Western Kentucky?

14 JW: No, I was born there. I grew up in Southeast Asia.

15 JS: Yes, sir.

16 JW: I was just a kid like everybody else when we left, you know?

17 JS: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir.

18 JW: Sixteen years old, seventeen, eighteen years old.

1 JS: Right, right.

2 JW: I got that many years there, I just couldn't never go back.

3 JS: All right. As a kid growing up, did you have any interest in the military?

4 JW: Yes, sir. I wanted to be a Marine all my life.

5 JS: Mm-hmm. What was it that attracted you to the Marines?

6 JW: I don't really know, just always felt that's where I should be.

7 JS: Yes, sir. Did you see any of the movies or anything as a kid? Like the John
8 Wayne movies or anything like that?

9 JW: Well, they were few and far pleasing in my younger days.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JW: Just didn't have the money to go to the movies.

12 JS: All right.

13 JW: I just was an ol' country boy.

14 JS: Yes, sir. If you don't mind, could you talk a little bit about your time as a kid
15 in Kentucky before you actually joined the Marines, and what that was like for you?

16 JW: Okay. Well, I was a typical kid growing up in Western Kentucky in coal
17 country, I guess. My dad was a coal miner. We lived on the farm, moved around quite a
18 bit. He was a laundering man or something. He always liked to move around, so we
19 moved from farm to farm and coal mine to coal mine. I went to thirteen different schools.

20 JS: Oh, wow. That's quite a bit.

21 RW: Yeah. (Chuckles) Which I guess, it was just more or less gypsies, I don't
22 know. That's just the way he was. He'd work for a mine a while, it worked out, he'd
23 move to another one, strip mining. He just got as close as he could to the mines. He just
24 kind of raised us out on a farm. Played in the woods and trees, pine trees. Raised hogs
25 and fished and swam. Did all of the good stuff, I guess.

26 JS: Right, right.

27 JW: Just anything to keep me busy.

28 JS: Sure.

29 JW: School was kind of hard. Especially when I got a little older, I didn't
30 particularly like the way it moved around anything. You know, I couldn't really get into

1 sports or anything. So, I just had to do my own thing when I did it, I guess. I guess I was
2 a poor country boy. That's about it.

3 JS: Sure. Yes, sir. Well, given your interest in the Marines as a kid, had you had
4 any other relatives who had served, say in WWII or anything like that?

5 JW: I had an uncle. He was in the Army Air Corp.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JW: I used to listen to his stories and things like this. It was kind of hair-raising,
8 you know. Those Air Corp guys, they had to be about the bravest people in the world, I
9 guess. He was, I guess, my hero if you want to talk about it. He was a tail-gunner on a B-
10 29, I think—or B-17, then went to 29 or something. I don't know—45's. You know, I
11 can't remember all them numbers.

12 JS: Sure, sure. Did his stories and his experience, did that have any impact on
13 you?

14 JW: It sure did. It made want to feel honored to be American and honored to have
15 my chance at it. To serve and do what had needed to be done.

16 JS: Yes, sir. Did he serve in Europe or the Pacific?

17 JW: Served in the Pacific.

18 JS: Okay, just wondering there. As you were getting a little older and approaching
19 that age of joining the Marines, at what point did you really just decide, "This is what I'm
20 going to do"?

21 JW: Oh, there was no doubt in my mind all my life. I thought about the Air Force,
22 but I think in 1966, something like that— '65, '66, I think that's what it was. The draft
23 was '65 through '66. My birth date was the fifth number coming. I wasn't about ready—I
24 knew where I was going. I knew I was going to have to go, so might as well get the best
25 training I could. It sort of seemed to work out for me, I guess. I was just very
26 disappointed when PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) hit me. When I come back,
27 couldn't make my career out of it. Pretty rough.

28 JS: Yes, sir.

29 JW: The last forty years. Other than that, I'm still alive. I guess that's one good
30 thing.

1 JS: Yes, sir. Prior to going in and prior to joining the Marines, had you paid much
2 attention to the Cold War and what was going on? And what was going on in Vietnam?

3 JW: Oh, yeah. I knew what was going on there and I knew that the Cold War was
4 going on. I was kind of torn between the two, really. I didn't want to join a reserve or the
5 National Guard. I was torn between serving here or serving there. I kind of made up my
6 mind to go to Vietnam. I figured that's the best way to get there. The Marine Corps was
7 building up—well, like I said before, it wasn't really nothing to think about, I just had a
8 little bit of joining the Army Reserves and staying around the country. Of course, they
9 would have probably gotten me anyway.

10 JS: All right. You mentioned being aware of what was going on in the Cold War
11 and of course, in Vietnam too. Had you formed any sort of opinion about the war at that
12 point? What were your feelings about it prior to joining?

13 JW: I guess we was indoctrinated or whatever you want to call it. Brainwashed or
14 how the politicians say it, the communists were the bad guys and they was taking over
15 South Vietnam. We decided to help them, so I decided to help too.

16 JS: Yes, sir. All right. So when did you actually join and if you could talk about
17 the experience of signing up for the Marines?

18 JW: Oh, right after I graduated from high school in June of '66.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JW: Well, I don't know. I wasn't even out of high school. I think I joined before I
21 got out of high school.

22 JS: Okay.

23 JW: Didn't go on active duty until June, that's what it was. I think I started going
24 in April of '66. I was signed up; you know, just like a promissory contract. I guess, you
25 know, I don't know what they called it. They said I could finish high school before I went
26 to boot camp. That's what I did.

27 JS: All right. Did you just go down to a local recruiting office or someone at the
28 school? How did that work?

29 JW: Oh, no. We had local recruiting offices.

30 JS: All right. When you went down there to the recruiting office, did you tell them
31 actually that you wanted to go to Vietnam?

1 JW: Yes, sir. Certainly did.

2 JS: Okay. All right.

3 JW: I figured that it was about the quickest way to get there, and they agreed with
4 me.

5 JS: Right, all right. Yes, sir. You reported for boot camp in June then?

6 JW: Yes, sir. I think it was around June 6th. I was reported in six days after
7 graduation.

8 JS: Okay, all right. Could you talk a little bit about, I guess boot camp and what
9 that experience was like for you?

10 JW: Well, it was sort of like, you know, going—where I lived at in the country, if
11 you felt like going swimming, you just stripped off butt-naked and you jumped in the
12 water anytime. If I would have had a cow pod or an ol' strip mine or something full of
13 water, we'd just go swimming. It was kind of like getting there on the bus and jumping
14 off the bus because this guy said this was his bus, he didn't want me on it.

15 JS: Right.

16 JW: Something like that. He said, "Your feet better be on the yellow." I went
17 from there just to strip me down of everything. They cleaned me up a little bit and refined
18 my ability to do things. Gave me time to become a Marine and now, "You're a Marine."
19 My dad was pretty strict, so it wasn't nothing new to me. Dad didn't just get in my face
20 as much, that's all.

21 JS: Yes, sir.

22 JW: It was an experience. It's part of something. I guess, growing up. People just
23 don't really understand what it means to be a Marine. It's not for your average guy. Of
24 course, back then, they did. They took just about everybody. I guess I was lucky getting
25 in because I wasn't real smart, but I was smart enough to get in.

26 JS: Yes, sir. What did your family feel about your decision to join?

27 JW: Oh, they knew I was going anyway, long before I did. It wasn't no surprise.
28 My mom, of course—my dad and everything, he had never been to World War II. He
29 was a coal miner and they needed coal, so they didn't take him for some reason. My older
30 brother was in the Army Reserves. He was married and had two kids. I figured, "Well,

1 they call up his reserve outfit, I'd be the one going, and he won't have to go over." That's
2 the way it worked out.

3 JS: Yes, sir.

4 JW: They called up his outfit and he had orders. I guess he got kind of mad at me
5 because I wouldn't let him go. Back then, if two brothers are over there, you had to sign a
6 waiver or something.

7 JS: Right, right.

8 JW: He was mad because they wouldn't let him go and I went. I guess he kind of
9 held it against me the rest of his life, but that's okay. That's okay. He got over it, I guess.
10 If he didn't, at least his kids didn't have to worry about him being over there.

11 JS: Right. Yes, sir. Where did you actually go to boot?

12 JW: I went to Parris Island.

13 JS: Parris Island.

14 JW: Parris Island, yeah. That was an experience. That's about all I can say about
15 it.

16 JS: Yes, sir. How long was the training?

17 JW: Twelve weeks.

18 JS: Twelve weeks, okay. All right.

19 JW: No, it wasn't. It was nine or ten weeks. I don't remember. I think it was eight
20 weeks actual training, but we had to wait. We did something else for a couple of weeks.

21 JS: Okay.

22 JW: I actually had to wait for people to get there before they could build a
23 company. So we sort of waited around a couple weeks.

24 JS: All right. Were the drill instructors there, were they Vietnam vets?

25 JW: One of them was. The other two wasn't. They are still my heroes. I couldn't
26 be here without what them guys did.

27 JS: Did you feel then that the training you got there was pretty good as far as, well
28 I guess, as good as it could be for preparing you for what was to come?

29 JW: I thought it was the best possible. I really did, that's why I more or less went
30 in for it.

31 JS: Yes, sir.

1 JW: I knew where I was going. You only get out what you put in. If you go in and
2 you just want a job, then it's there. I wanted to be a Marine, that's going to be my life. I
3 didn't quite make it, but that's another story. We might get into that a little later.

4 JS: Okay, all right. How about weapons training at this point? Was it still M14s or
5 had they moved to M16s yet?

6 JW: We were still with the M14s. I was familiar with weapons. I would shoot a
7 lot growing up. A lot of kids did, living in the country. I could play combat at ten years
8 old with a .22, you know.

9 JS: Right.

10 JW: Shoot the hell out of trees. It was okay—the weapons training. The only thing
11 we really trained with in boot camp was the rifle.

12 JS: All right. Did you feel that you were adjusting to the life of a Marine then
13 pretty well or no?

14 JW: Well, I had my ups and downs, you know at the age of eighteen years old.
15 Basically, I was pretty well set in my life. It wasn't the best; it wasn't the worst. Did my
16 job, kept my mouth shut, stayed out of trouble most of the time.

17 JS: Right.

18 JW: I only got in trouble after I come back.

19 JS: Yes, sir. How about discipline and things like that? How would it have been
20 enforced at that time by the drill instructors if there was a problem with someone?

21 JW: Well, take you out behind the woodshed if it's bad enough.

22 JS: (Laughs) Right.

23 JW: I mean, probably wasn't supposed to but it happened. I'm not saying who's
24 the eyes, mine or the instructors, but they weren't afraid to take them out there and show
25 them the right way how to do things.

26 JS: Right.

27 JW: It was Marine Corps training, bottom line. That was the way it was. I just
28 can't find my cigarettes nowhere man. Go ahead, I'm here. I'm thinking out loud here
29 and I'm trying to figure out what I did with them.

30 JS: That's fine, no problem. Are there any memorable moments or anything like
31 that from boot camp that stick out in your mind that you could possibly mention?

1 JW: Well, probably every day. Of course, they drilled it in your head you know,
2 “You have a better chance of staying alive if you listen to what I say.” You know, they
3 went there. They knew exactly what it was going to be. To me, they were some of the
4 greatest guys in the world. I don’t know what I did with them. I remember just as well as
5 I do right now. I’ve never seen them after I left but I could mention their names, I would
6 love to. My Senior G.I. was Gunner Sergeant Van Court. He was a Marines Marine. You
7 know who he looked like? He looked a lot like—remember Sergeant Carter on *Gomer*
8 *Pyle*? He reminded me a lot of him. There was Staff Sergeant Provost. He was a Vietnam
9 vet. He was about my favorite DI (Drill Instructor). He’s the one that really bestowed on
10 us what it could be to be there and be wounded in a combat situation. He didn’t make it
11 back without being wounded. He had a real bad wound in the back of his head or his
12 back, or somewhere.

13 JS: Right.

14 JW: Had a big scar back there. He never talked about it much, so we never pushed
15 the subject. Sometimes, he would come loose with a couple war stories that make you
16 chill.

17 JS: Sure. He would give y’all some advice then, about things to do to stay alive?

18 JW: Yes, sir.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JW: He was the one that we listened to, the ones that wanted to be a Marine. What
21 it meant to be a Marine and what the ultimate sacrifice would be—not coming back and
22 you learn to accept that. You listen to him and if you didn’t, I don’t know how many
23 came back. I lost track with everybody. That’s in further on up, I can tell you about that
24 later. Then, there was Sergeant Scott. He was the young guy. He was what I wanted to be.
25 You know, calm, disciplined, clear Marine. He wanted to be in Vietnam very bad. I guess
26 he went after boot camp because he was finishing up his tour there at Parris Island. I
27 think “Gunny” Van Court was also going. Of course, Sergeant Provost, he was staff
28 sergeant provost. He was physically—I would say he was, but I don’t think they sent him
29 back. I really don’t. At times, he could have a real rough time but, I’m sure. Pray to God
30 they all went and came back. I really don’t go looking for people that I knew because I’m
31 afraid where I’ll find them.

1 JS: Right. Sure, sure.

2 JW: Praise the good Lord for them. I keep them in my prayers still to this day.
3 What do you think of that?

4 JS: I think that's great. Yes, sir.

5 JW: Those guys, they did their job, and they did it well on my part.

6 JS: Yes, sir.

7 JW: And it helped me very much.

8 JS: All right. I know you talked about the one drill sergeant telling a little bit
9 about his experiences from Vietnam. But during your basic everyday training that you
10 were going through during this period, was there much mention of Vietnam or was it
11 more generalized?

12 JW: They were preparing us. It was mentioned every day. This is pretty much
13 where ninety percent of us were going. He knew, we knew it to prepare us for it. You
14 know, what to expect. It wasn't going to be a picnic. In what we was going through in
15 boot camp, sometimes don't seem like a picnic compared to what you did. It motivated
16 you to the point where you wanted to strive to do better. That's what I see on television
17 now, is how they train these Special Forces. Well hell, we did all that crap in boot camp,
18 you know.

19 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

20 JW: We were just rifleman, basically. All Marines are riflemen. You knew that.
21 I'm sure you've heard that.

22 JS: Yes, sir.

23 JW: We all went into the basic infantrymen into the 0300. If you got lucky of the
24 draw or had a little bit of smarts with you, you got a good MOS (Military Occupational
25 Specialty). I was lucky, I drew an artillery MOS. So I was with an artillery battery on the
26 05 guns. I pulled time with as a forward observer. I thought I lucked out pretty good.

27 JS: Yes, sir. Did you receive your MOS at the end of boot?

28 JW: Yes. You got your basic MOS. Either you're 008 number—I was a 0800,
29 which is basic artilleryman. 03 was infantry and com was 2300. You know, you got the
30 last two numbers when you're waiting for what kind of job you had. You know where
31 you was going. Infantry school, artillery school, things like that right out of boot camp.

1 Sergeant Provost, he wanted me to be a sniper. He gave me a name of a guy at Camp
2 Lejeune. That was a little scary for me, so I never contacted the guy. I wish I had now,
3 but I might have been able to really adjust to what I was doing and the impact it was
4 going to have on me. For that particular job, you know what your there for and when
5 you're going to do it and how you're going to do it. Most battles, whether you was in the
6 field or in the rear—I can speak from both sides, from the artillery point because I loved
7 the guns. Also, I wanted to go out and experience the infantry side of it. That's why I
8 become a forward observer. That left a lasting impact on me.

9 JS: Yes, sir.

10 JW: I get a little tight in the chest sometimes talking about this like this. You
11 know that?

12 JS: Sure. Yes, sir.

13 JW: I'm getting a little frustrated now because I can't find my cigarettes.

14 JS: Would you like to take a break for a moment, so you can try to find them, or
15 you want to continue?

16 JW: How long you got for this interview?

17 JS: We can go as much as two hours today.

18 JW: Two hours today?

19 JS: Yeah.

20 JW: Okay. You'll come back to me when you want to or when you get back to
21 me?

22 JS: Whenever you have— (Audio cuts) Yes, sir.

23 JW: But I like it back here, it's quiet most of the time. A few houses in here and
24 ol' dirt road. Nobody bothers me and I don't have to bother nobody back here.

25 JS: Right. Yes, sir.

26 JW: Of course, all of them know I'm up here so they don't come messing around
27 anyway. They think I'm about half crazy. Of course, my wife has known that for years.
28 I'm just a little loose in the head sometimes, that's all. I get scary to some people. The
29 ones that know me know that I got artificial shoulders and a broken back. Just a wore-out
30 old man. 250 pounds of nothing but fat. I call it muscle, but my wife calls it fat. We
31 should let that go. I had a broken back, just found it this year.

1 JS: Really?

2 JW: Well, end of last year I had the operation. Fixed it in December. The doctor,
3 he looked at the way of the bones. It was broken three places. He said, “It happened at
4 least ten to fifteen years ago.” The way the bones were worn. People want to know
5 how—you hear my new coffee pot?

6 JS: Yes, sir.

7 JW: People ask me, “How in the world could you do that? Ten years live with
8 your back broken.” I said, “Well, Marine Corps taught me to improvise, adjust, and
9 overcome.”

10 JS: (Laughs) Right.

11 JW: Just like my shoulders, I wore them out completely. It was bone on bone. It
12 ate the ball and socket completely out of my shoulders.

13 JS: Goodness.

14 JW: I went as far as I could with them before I stopped. That was in 2000. I’ve
15 been sitting on my butt ever since, getting fat. It’s about, I guess about eighty degrees.
16 Nice little breeze, mid humidity here today. My dog barking in the background. That’s
17 what kind of day I’ve got, so I’m going to sit out here on the deck. Will that be all right?

18 JS: That’s perfectly fine.

19 JW: Okay, maybe I can sit down now and catch my breath and have a cigarette.
20 How’s that?

21 JS: Sure. That sounds good.

22 JW: If I get too far away or you can’t understand me, or can’t hear me, let me
23 know, I’ll pull the phone closer.

24 JS: Okay, not a problem.

25 JW: Let’s go at it. Where do you want to go from here?

26 JS: Okay. Well, we were just talking about, of course your experience at boot
27 camp. After you got your MOS and before you went to AIT (Advanced Individual
28 Training), did you have any time off?

29 JW: No, went right straight from boot camp, right straight into AIT.

30 JS: Okay. Where was AIT?

1 JW: AIT was at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Camp Geiger, that's where I was
2 supposed to meet up with Sergeant Brown. Sergeant Provost told me I should look up
3 when I got there, and he would hook me up because he liked the way I shoot. Come to
4 find out, Sergeant Brown was in charge of the sniper squadron.

5 JS: Right.

6 JW: Well, I forgot to go see him. Didn't forget, I just got second thoughts.

7 JS: Sure.

8 JW: I wish I would have took that experience. But then I'd probably be in a
9 rubber-room for sure, if I would have went that far. Ain't enough like you do. I'm out of
10 way, I'm a hundred percent disabled PTSD.

11 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

12 JW: If you're wondering why I sound a little shaky or chest is heavy, or things
13 like that, it affects me that way.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JW: I hope you realize that your ears start burning, probably because I'm cussing
16 tonight because I can't go to sleep. No, I wouldn't do that.

17 JS: (Chuckles) Yes, sir. All right. Let me ask you this. When you received your
18 MOS to the artillery, how did you feel about that assignment?

19 JW: Well, it wasn't what I picked. I picked actually—put on my “what would you
20 like do”, I actually wanted to go be with the infantry.

21 JS: Okay.

22 JW: I tried to get that changed but they said, “This is where we need you. You
23 made a high enough score on your IQ test.” Or whatever they called it. I was just two
24 points above a grunt anyway. It's really that far out of the field—infantryman.

25 JS: Okay, right.

26 JW: Marine Corps artillery in Vietnam brought the face of combat artillery into
27 play. From there, I went to Camp Pendleton at the artillery school. They basically just
28 give you a four-week training course. They jammed it down your throat and not no time
29 off. You would get weekends off, but damn you're so tired, you wanted to stay in the
30 barracks and sleep. I did anyway. I didn't leave the base that much. I started doing things
31 on the base and just getting used the Marine Corps, I guess you might say. I figured I was

1 in about my three and a half, four months in the course. I was still learning a lot—
2 practicing my salutes. I used to go to the PX (Post Exchange) down there, so I could
3 salute officers, get it right. Artillery school was what it was. They'd teach you, basically,
4 nomenclature of a 105 Howitzer, which is the easiest one to teach. But even with a 0811,
5 you could go to SPs, self-propelled guns, or you could go to eight-inch guns or 155 guns.
6 It was all basically the same, but it was all trained on a 105 Howitzer. How to basically
7 take care of the weapon, to set up the weapon, to carry the stakes out, get it level, level
8 your gun, your bubbles and how to load it without losing your fingers. That was the easy
9 part. All you do is level the bubble and pull the string, right? The crew chief always took
10 that job. I was hollering at everybody else to hurry up. I thought it was kind of funny, but
11 that's okay.

12 JS: (Chuckles) All right. How long did you say this training lasted?

13 JW: Four weeks.

14 JS: Four weeks, okay. Was it mostly field training? Were there some classroom
15 training as well? Or how did that work?

16 JW: That first week you had your classroom where you learned nomenclature.
17 How to field strip the weapons clean, make sure the breech block, and how to grease it—
18 things like that. That was basically the first week and the other three weeks was actual
19 dry-fire and fire, learning the stations, learning what you need to do to get ready to fire
20 and how to close up, get the hell out of dodge, need it be.

21 JS: Right. Did they teach you anything about being a forward observer there?

22 JW: No, no. They wanted to send me to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where they trained
23 the FOs (Forward Observers) there at the Army base. They trained other people there, I
24 think the FDC (Fire Direction Center) people. They are the smart guys. I asked them not
25 to. I volunteered because I found out that they could teach you over there. I'm kind of a
26 hands-on guy, I wasn't too good with my books and stuff in school. So show me how to
27 do something and I can do it. I asked, I didn't choose to go. They needed bodies, so I
28 decided that my chances were pretty good. So I talked to a sergeant. Thank goodness he
29 was about forty miles from my house, where he lived. He kind of agreed with me and let
30 me go on to Vietnam as a 0811.

1 JS: All right. How about other things like, I guess—I know some of the other
2 assignments you could possibly have in Vietnam, like guard duty and things like that, for
3 actually protecting the weapon. Was that part of the training as well?

4 JW: Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, we were actually on what we called a
5 compound base. Called them compounds. We pulled our share of guard duty just like
6 everybody else, or mess duty, whatever. We even guarded the whore house across the
7 street. I was sneaking off and going over there.

8 JS: Right.

9 JW: That was my first guard assignment when I got to the battery. I guess I was
10 there about three days and they decided to put me on whore house watch. I had to stand
11 alongside route nine and watch the whores come in and out. Keep the GI's out. That
12 wasn't too bad. The scenery was pretty good. As a matter of fact, it was real good.

13 JS: (Laughs) Sure, right.

14 JW: Being an ol' country boy, you better believe it was good. Have you got that
15 cough checked? I remember you had a cough last time.

16 JS: Yeah. It was just about gone, and then we had another dust storm come
17 through here. I just can't get rid of the damn thing.

18 JW: Pollen is about ready to start falling around here and I'll be jammed up next
19 month. Everything is starting to turn green and pollinating the neighbor, I guess. I don't
20 know. We come through a pretty bad winter this year. I had about four foot of snow on
21 my deck and then we had about four foot on top of that two days later.

22 JS: Wow.

23 JW: It's all right. My wife didn't break the snow-blower until afterwards. It was
24 my wife. You heard that, right? Okay. I've got a very understanding woman. I wouldn't
25 be alive today if it wasn't for her, in America anyway. I owe my life to a couple other
26 guys. We will get to that too maybe, depending on how I feel like when we get there, all
27 right?

28 JS: All right, sure. That's perfectly fine. Is there anything else we should cover
29 about your advanced training, artillery training before moving on to Vietnam?

30 JW: Well, not really. Of course, we went from there to staging battalion, Camp
31 Pendleton. So I just had to get on a bus and move to the other side of the bay. That was a

1 lot of school-housing. Like I said, I wasn't too good at school-housing. I'm one of them
2 hands-on type. They really didn't teach me personally much more than Sergeant Provost
3 did at boot camp. I learned most of my survival skills at boot camp. It was, I guess just a
4 refresher course, trying to get you a little bit better disciplined and tell you about the
5 country and what to expect.

6 JS: Right. Did you feel the information that they were giving you—looking back
7 on that I guess, about telling you what to expect and information about the country, and
8 everything, did you feel that it was pretty accurate?

9 JW: The landscaping and things like that. The teachers had different MOS's over
10 there and each teacher was taught his way. It wasn't a two-fit-all. Different jobs had
11 different ways of looking at the country. We was only getting from a com guy's, or a
12 truck driver's perspective, or something like this. I don't know what these guys MOS
13 was. (Noise in the background) My dog sees a squirrel. He'll do that every once in a
14 while. As far as the actual staging part, it didn't fit my shoe or my foot didn't fit the shoe,
15 is what they said. I did know what to expect of the landscape.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JW: But some people, I'm sure it helped them and especially if they had the same
18 kind of MOS he did. He was going to wind up in the same spot that he was in.

19 JS: Right.

20 JW: It was different once they got there and actually got in a battery. Like the
21 training just went out the door. I'm sure that it would have fit somebody's criteria at the
22 time they were getting it. (Dog barks in the background) It's a damn cat. He ain't gone
23 stop. A squirrel will run away. A cat will sit there and look at him. I'm going to move to
24 the other deck, but I can talk while I move. Go ahead dog, bark away. It was just
25 according on what your job was whether it was fit. I was very interested in the E&E,
26 Escape and Evasion.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JW: The training would give you just a feel of it. Of course, I knew that it was
29 going to be a little bit different than the actual thing. They tried to make it as realistic as
30 possible. Of course, they never captured me, so I got off pretty good. You know, an ol'
31 country boy, he know how to move around the woods.

1 JS: Sure. Yes, sir. If you could talk a little bit about what that training was
2 actually like, the E&E training. How long did it last and all that?

3 JW: When you join the staging battalion, when they got enough people, then they
4 just took you down, threw you on an airplane and shipped you out. You were in
5 constant training all the time you was there. Basically, I would say it was more of the
6 lines of an infantry type training. If you got in a situation where the infantrymen got into,
7 you'd be able to hide yourself, feed yourself, and escape detection. I never really worried
8 about that part. They wasn't going to take me alive, I'll tell you that much. As far as the
9 training stuff, again I would say that I'm sure it helped some more than others.

10 JS: Right, right.

11 JW: I don't think you could have found any better training next to being there.

12 JS: Was there—I don't want to jump too far ahead, but was there also some
13 training when you first arrived in country? Was it like a charm school of sorts, or no?

14 JW: No, no. I arrived in Da Nang and checked in. They made a call, and I spent
15 the night in Da Nang. The next morning, bright and early they was there to pick me up.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JW: Then you just went into regular combat mode or whatever—protect yourself,
18 protection mode, and battery protection mode. The training that you got from there is
19 what you learned the hard way.

20 JS: All right. Before getting into that, anything else stateside before actually
21 talking about going over to Vietnam?

22 JW: Not that I can think of.

23 JS: Okay, all right. In that case, what was the trip over like for you?

24 JW: It was long. I'll refer to being a country boy for a long time. I can remember
25 seeing the first jet fly over with the contrails—my second time on a jet. He's going to fly
26 this thing eighteen hours over nothing. You keep looking out the window hoping you see
27 something. You can't see nothing but water. I guess there was an air of certain people of
28 excitement, fear, just a mixture of different—you could almost tell, when talking to
29 somebody, that they're scared shitless. You could talk to people—other Marines I should
30 say cause we had the whole plane, that were kind of like me, accept it as it comes along

1 one day at a time. Of course, the fear was always there but you tried to overcome that. If
2 you didn't, you was going to hurt yourself or somebody else. Way I always felt about it.

3 JS: Yes, sir. Was it a commercial airliner?

4 JW: Continental Airlines. Yes, sir. It was a one of them four engine jobs. Again,
5 being a country boy from Kentucky, I never seen women look like that in my life. They
6 were some pretty stewardesses at that time. That's one thing about it and they was all
7 female. We didn't have stewards at that time. Airlines were just coming of age
8 themselves, so they were basically a younger crowd of 1960s—young ladies.

9 JS: Yes, sir. How did they treat you guys? I've heard different stories from
10 different people about the way the stewardesses reacted. How did they treat your group?

11 JW: They treated us real nice. They would sit there and if you couldn't sleep. It
12 was psychological help. They would sit and talk to you or stoop down beside there. Oh,
13 man. My phone is beeping. Hold on, let me see if I can grab the other one before this one
14 runs out.

15 JS: Sure, not a problem.

16 JW: I hope I can because if it goes away, your battery is running down but I got
17 another one in here. It has been charging, so maybe I can get that before the beep goes
18 away. We'll just keep charging them up here. How's that?

19 JS: All right, that's fine.

20 JW: Now, I'll just close that other one off there. We got a full battery on this one.

21 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

22 JW: I wish you would quit "sir'ing" me. Every time you say that I look around for
23 my daddy. They "sir'd" him all the time.

24 JS: (Chuckles) I'm sorry about that.

25 JW: Call me Jerry.

26 JS: Okay, all right.

27 JW: "All right" is fine. You don't have to "sir" me or "yes", "no", "fine".

28 JS: Okay. I'll try not to do it, but it could be difficult.

29 JW: I know. You was raised that way, right?

30 JS: Right, yeah.

31 JW: I figured you was.

1 JS: I almost said it again, but yeah.

2 JW: Are you from the South?

3 JS: I'm from Alabama originally.

4 JW: Okay. I know how you was raised. I grew up there. I just moved out here to
5 Texas about a year and a half ago. The rest of the time was spent in Alabama.

6 JW: Did you go to school in Texas?

7 JS: I got a job out here. (Audio cuts)

8 JW: Oh, that's great because I wish more people would understand it better. It
9 wasn't our fault.

10 JS: Yes, absolutely.

11 JW: Some of them don't want to. They think we all volunteered. Well, if we
12 wanted to. A lot of Marines did volunteer because didn't get the draft—they drafted, I
13 think the year after I went in. I think it was when President Johnson had that big build-up
14 in '67. He had the draft because he couldn't recruit enough.

15 JS: Right. That brings up a question that I hadn't thought about before. Let me ask
16 you about that. With Marine draftees, I know that's kind of something—I know it
17 happened in Vietnam but kind of a rare thing prior to that it was always a volunteer force.
18 Those Marines that were drafted, did you run into many of them and if so, were they
19 treated any differently than volunteer Marines?

20 JW: Well, there was myself and Tom, and Phil was a draftee.

21 JS: Okay.

22 JW: Phil just passed away in 2008. Tom, Phil, and I are the closest of friends. We
23 miss Phil dearly. He was treated no different. I never would have known he was drafted if
24 he hadn't told me. I just didn't care. If he could do the job and I could trust him, and rely
25 on him when I needed him, that's all that counts to me.

26 JS: Right, all right. I guess getting back to the chronological stories, as far as your
27 trip over there, did you actually arrive in country, in Da Nang?

28 JW: Yes, yes. We landed in Da Nang. We flew nonstop to Hawaii and then stop
29 to Da Nang, South Vietnam. Stopped thirty minutes in Hawaii to refuel, then we was
30 airborne. I guess we changed pilots and crew. I don't really remember, but I'm sure we
31 did.

1 JS: Yeah. Did y'all even get to get off the airplane at all?

2 JW: No, no. Wasn't there long enough to get off. If you got off the airplane, some
3 of them wasn't going to get back on.

4 JS: Right. Upon arrival in Da Nang, what was your first impression of Vietnam
5 upon getting off the airplane?

6 JW: My first impression was getting my outfit so I could get a helmet and a flak
7 jacket because the rockets were coming in as we was landing.

8 JS: Oh, wow.

9 JW: That was my first introduction. We debarked rather fast.

10 JS: Okay. Did you come in at night or was it in the daytime?

11 JW: It was about midnight, I guess. They ushered us off that plane and into a nice
12 steel bunker real quick. They was pretty good about that. The next day, I wanted to get a
13 flak jacket and a helmet some kind of bad.

14 JS: Sure, all right. How much of an in-processing was there? What was that like?

15 JW: Well, we started as soon as we got there and just wait your turn. It was just
16 basically give them your orders to go and stamped orders that you got there. Then, they
17 would stamp them where you was going. You would just wait for them to come get you.

18 JS: All right. How long did you have to wait?

19 JW: They came after me next morning.

20 JS: Okay. Where were your orders to?

21 JW: Battery B 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Division, 13th Regiment.

22 JS: 13th Regiment, all right. Where were they at that time?

23 JW: They had just came back from DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). They had been
24 back about a month, I guess. They was refitting. Getting repairs and resupplied, and
25 everything else. We stayed there about three weeks. They boxed us all up and sent us
26 north.

27 JS: All right. During that three weeks, they were there in Da Nang?

28 JW: Just outside of Da Nang, I guess maybe seven or eight miles.

29 JS: Okay. That's when you had your first guard duty there.

30 JW: Right, exactly. My first keeping house duty.

1 JS: All right. What other kind of things were you doing in the first couple of
2 weeks there in Da Nang before moving up north?

3 JW: My primary job was hydrate myself but stay away from the water buffalo. It
4 was very draining. I'm glad that I got the chance to hydrate there before we went, that's
5 for sure. I pulled guard duty and hydrated myself, basically. I was assigned to a gun of
6 course. We had to take one or two guys; the new guys are going to get the guard duties.
7 You know how that goes. During the daytime I'd be on guard duty. Overnight, we slept
8 in the bunkers, stayed out in the bunkers overnight. Daytime, you just pull regular duty.
9 They got a couple fire-missions underway while we was there. Kind of a little bit of
10 advanced training of what we was going to get. It wasn't near enough what we was going
11 to get into. It kind of warmed you up to what you was going to have to do.

12 JS: Right. So, did you actually have any contact with the enemy during that time
13 then?

14 JW: Not at Da Nang, no. Da Nang was pretty secure. It was a pretty secure area. It
15 was mostly VC (Viet Cong). I pulled my first patrol there. We didn't contact because,
16 like I said, it was a pretty fortified place. There was a reactionary portion to be anywhere
17 at any time. They just, more or less, hit and run type tactics they used down there.

18 JS: Right, all right. You talked about pulling guard duty quite a bit. Besides
19 guarding the whorehouse, what else did you have to guard?

20 JW: Perimeter watch.

21 JS: Perimeter watch? Okay.

22 JW: It was basically to see over perimeter at night. They hit the wire a couple
23 times. Again, it was throw a grenade and run like hell, basically. We were inside a
24 compound. We would fix the wire. I guess it was a pretty permanent place. When most of
25 the batteries come back for repairs and things like that, they would go there. When we
26 left, we never came back.

27 JS: Okay. During those three weeks, what were your quarters and things like that?
28 The quarters and the housing, what was that like?

29 JW: I thought, "Man, this ain't going to be too bad." We had us a tipi tent, slept
30 about ten guys, had a wooden floor, and a good outhouse, and a shower. I said, "Man,
31 artillery is all right." Boy, did I learn quickly it wasn't. It was a lot softer than you would

1 think it would be, right there. I broke in pretty easy. Of course, the gun had a fairly decent
2 tour over there. The battery didn't. It was actually part of our LT-26 that I joined. They
3 were just getting ready to start rotating back out of country. The next three months, the
4 guys that came over on our LT-26, most of them had already rotated back to the States.
5 After three months, I'd say ninety five percent of the battery was just about as young as I
6 was there.

7 JS: Right. You were eighteen at the time?

8 JW: Yes, sir.

9 JS: All right. Could you talk a little bit about your first impressions of the unit
10 itself? You don't have to discuss specific names if you don't want to, but some of the
11 personalities and some of the people that you came across when you first got there.

12 JW: When I first got there, I was kind of disappointed because all they could think
13 of, "You should have been at Khe Sanh with us." Khe Sanh in '66, not '68 when we was
14 there. Come to find out, these guys—first Khe Sanh was pretty lame considering what it
15 was in '68. They seemed to think that was hard. They shot a lot of rounds and everything,
16 but they never had the incoming. They had some, but it wasn't much. They fed well and
17 they had hooches, and things like this up there. They thought, I guess, that was their
18 biggest thing then. All I heard was, "You should have been there with us." I didn't want
19 to hear that. I had my own duties. I thought they was kind of arrogant actually.

20 JS: They did kind of hold it against you, you being the new guy?

21 JW: They let me know real quick that I was the new guy.

22 JS: Right, okay. How long did it take for that, I guess that new guy status, to wear
23 off?

24 JW: Our next trip north.

25 JS: Okay. Once they saw you during combat, then you were one of them at that
26 point?

27 JW: Pretty much. I was looked at with a little bit of respect, I guess you might
28 say.

29 JS: Okay, all right. How was morale at that point among the guys in the unit?

30 JW: Well, like I said, they were within three months of rotating. A lot of them
31 were gone in less than three months. It took three months to get them all out of there

1 because we couldn't replace them fast enough. CO (Commanding Officer), he left there. I
2 guess maybe a quarter of the battery got out while I was still there. As soon as everybody
3 would get a replacement in, they would send one out. The XO (Executive Officer) and
4 the FDC (Fire Direction Center) officers, they all rotated out within three months.

5 JS: Okay, all right. The new guy status that you had at first, was it anything like
6 the stereotypical thing like you hear about in the books and movies, where you being a
7 new guy, they didn't really even want to talk to you at first?

8 JW: Some parts. I probably didn't want to talk to them. I can make people talk.
9 They didn't have much choice. My presence was felt, let's put it that way.

10 JS: All right. I asked you about morale, how about racial tension? Was there any
11 racial problems at that point?

12 JW: Never in my life have I seen racial tension there. Of course, there wasn't as
13 many different nationalities. We had Hispanics, we had American Indian, we had Black
14 Americans. In '67 I guess, when I was there, we didn't even hear about it. It was a non-
15 issue as far as we were concerned in our battery. I don't know about anybody else.

16 JS: All right, okay. After those first two or three weeks there in Da Nang, when
17 you guys moved north up towards DMZ, where'd you go to?

18 JW: Went right straight from there into Con Thien.

19 JS: Con Thien, okay. Had it already started yet, the battle? Had it already begun?

20 JW: No, no. We went in and there was nothing out there man. It was a blank field.
21 I think it was the 9th Marines. I don't remember who, could have been the 4th Marines, I
22 don't really remember, 7th Marines. I really don't know, or I don't remember. We shot
23 primarily for 2nd Battalion 26th Marines. At Con Thien, we were sent right in with the 9th
24 Marines. I'm pretty sure it was the 9th Marines up there first. At Con Thien—my fifteen
25 minutes of fame is at Con Thien. We went there and we dug in. It was our first actual
26 taste of combat artillery. They had just introduced the Beehive round. I guess we was one
27 of the first batteries to shoot it. On the way up, the gun truck broke down. They sent a
28 duster out to help it. They had stay out there overnight by itself. I felt sorry for them
29 boys. They sent a duster out and it was fried. There were a lot of new guys on the gun
30 too. Fortunately, we lost none. We actually didn't lose any until second Khe Sanh.

31 JS: Okay.

1 JW: We just dug in the hill. The first night there, I think we shot like fifty-two,
2 fifty-three hours straight.

3 JS: Oh wow.

4 JW: They would have a picture of my gun. I was standing right in the center
5 drinking a cup of water in the book, in this little red book. I was surrounded by the
6 canisters that we had shot that night. We'd pull, of course we'd pull guard duty on the
7 line and watch the Seabees out there trying to build McNamara's Wall. You've heard of
8 that, huh?

9 JS: Yeah.

10 JW: It got back to Congress and some lance corporal at Con Thien asked, "What
11 do you think about McNamara's Wall or what do you think about digging this buffer?" I
12 just told him, I said, "Well hell, I'll just walk around it." I didn't remember that until I
13 actually heard that it was actually commented and used in Congress. That was my fifteen
14 minutes of fame. They didn't even get my name. That's all right, I know I did it. That
15 was our first taste of actual incoming mortar, artillery, and rocket fire. Which kind of
16 makes an artilleryman feel left out because all you heard about was the 9th Marines or
17 whoever was there watching perimeter. Of course, they patrolled and everything like that.
18 I'm not taking nothing away from them. They was on the combat base there at Con
19 Thien. All they did was sit on guard duty. Incoming rockets and mortars, or whatever
20 came in. Somebody had to get out there and expose themselves in a thirty-five foot
21 parapet and shoot back, and that's what the artillerymen did. You never hear about that.
22 Everybody thinks that back in Korea and WWII that artillery always stayed in the rear
23 with the rusty rifles sitting off from the front. I always thought that the Vietnam War was
24 like the Civil War. There was no set battle. It was just wherever you met, that's where the
25 battle was and you fought with what you had.

26 JS: Right.

27 JW: A lot of times they would pull guns down on the line—the grunts with the
28 Beehive rounds. Con Thien is the first time we had two o'clock Homer. We never could
29 get this guy. He had a recoilless rifle. He would sit over in North Vietnam. Every day at
30 two o'clock, you could set your watch by him, he's going to fire a couple rounds at you.
31 That was pretty neat. It was just that he never could hit nothing. He basically would head

1 for the hills. Everybody was looking. They never did find that guy, I don't think—they
2 guys. It got to be more of a joke than anything. You know, it's what guys do, they always
3 look for some way to laugh at a serious situation and to calm your nerves. I'm going to
4 date it. I didn't fear dying. The thing I most feared was letting somebody down. That was
5 my fear. I hope and pray to God that I never did even if you guys fold up under it. When I
6 got my gun and my position, I was a loader or ammo hump, or whatever it was. I did the
7 best I could, and I was worried about my job at the time, nothing else mattered.

8 JS: Yeah. All right.

9 JW: Not to say that I wasn't afraid. I'm really proud of myself that I never let it
10 show anyway.

11 JS: All right. Was it a 105 crew?

12 JW: Yes, sir.

13 JS: Okay, it was the 105's, okay. All right. How heavy would they daily incoming
14 be there at Con Thien?

15 JW: First time?

16 JS: Yes, sir.

17 JW: We'd get maybe 1000 rounds, 800 rounds. Maybe a little less instead. They
18 didn't count them at Con Thien that time, as they did the next time we went. We just
19 pulled out of there and replaced. We were sent back to Phu Bai then after we left Con
20 Thien. We was on one operation, or two operations up there, then they bulled us out and
21 sent us to Phu Bai.

22 JS: All right. How long at Con Thien that first time?

23 JW: We weren't there maybe a month. Enough to get your juices flowing, give
24 you a good taste of what's to come. If you could handle that, you could probably pretty
25 well—we had a few that couldn't handle it, but we'd never send nobody back. Somebody
26 would always knock the shit out of him, he'd go back to his job. Most of the people
27 were—a brave bunch of guys, I'll tell you.

28 JS: Yeah, absolutely. During that first time that you guys were there at Con Thien,
29 was it all incoming rounds or did you have sappers hit the wire at all?

30 JW: It was pretty much incoming, just the rounds. They started that buffer and
31 they had absolutely no idea what was going on. The Seabees out there cutting that

1 buffer—they got hit a lot. They killed them. A lot of good Seabees died up there. They
2 were some other guys that were pretty great guys out there on this heavy equipment. You
3 know, out in the open tearing down trees.

4 JS: Right. Would you guys provide artillery support for them?

5 JW: When we could. Most of that was danger close. It was really too close. We
6 couldn't elevate our tubes. Mortars did more than that. We would shoot the background
7 where they could run into their supplies point.

8 JS: Right, okay. The incoming that you guys were coming under, was it mortars,
9 rockets, and artillery?

10 JW: Yes, sir. All three.

11 JS: All three, okay.

12 JW: Like I said, it was basically rockets and recoilless rifles, and artillery—it's
13 basically what they used there. Of course, we really didn't hit nobody in the wire until we
14 got to CoBi Thanh Tan. That's a story after Phu Bai.

15 JS: Okay, all right. Before we get into after Con Thien and from that point on, if
16 you could talk a little bit, I guess about—you mentioned it, but if you could talk about
17 your duties in the unit. What your job would be and about the gun crew itself, what
18 everybody's jobs would be and kind of what that was like, if you don't mind?

19 JW: Never had a full complement crew. I'm trying to think of how many was on
20 the gun at the time—one, two. I think there was five or six of us. I don't even know what
21 the full TO (Tactical Officer) was for the gun. I don't think we ever did have a full gun.

22 JS: Okay.

23 JW: Basically, shot with five guys. We could do it with four. We did do it with
24 four a couple times. When you first pull into a spot, it would level out to XO and steel
25 would go out. They would do all their GPS stuff that they do, find out where we was at,
26 then they'd put a naming stake where we all had to adjust our guns on that. We would
27 adjust on the main center of wherever it was and then we would set the pin pill, on ours,
28 we would set such and such west, so many minutes, seconds, all that stuff. Then, we
29 would run a rear aiming stake.

30 JS: Right.

1 JW: You always had—they could get back azimuth. We put our two stakes out.
2 We would line them up so we would be in line with—our two would be in line with the
3 main stakes, the battery stakes. Everybody was aligned on it. Then, we would shoot that
4 azimuth and then let FDC know where we was at, then tell them our back azimuth on the
5 rear end of stakes. We had a gunner and an A-gunner. The A-gunner would line up, he
6 would make sure that the gun was level and was on the aiming stakes. Then, the crew
7 chief, he would make sure that the rear azimuth, the gun was level and the rear azimuth
8 was okay. You had a guy cutting powder, there's seven charges of powder in a .05 gun to
9 go the distance, whatever it was. They had all that figured out, FDC. That's why we
10 called them the smart guys. They'd tell us what to put on the gun with the information
11 and we would run the elevation, reflection, and all of that. Get the gun set up and a guy
12 would cut the charges. He would take the rounds to the loader and the loader would—
13 usually had one guy unpacking ammo, one cutting charges and setting fuses, and one guy
14 would carry the round to the loader. Then, the loader would load it. So, I guess about
15 seven men is what we really needed but I don't think we ever had a full complement.
16 That was the way it was supposed to work. A lot of times you had two jobs to perform.
17 We would probably shoot the gun in a lot of times. After we set the battery up, they
18 would give us an empty spot to shoot at. The gun would seat itself with the trails and
19 everything. But sometimes, if you had to turn the gun around, you had the two trails. We
20 didn't have the SPs, we had the split trails. We had to pick the gun up and turn it, then
21 reset your aiming stakes, and all that stuff. Sometimes, you had about thirty seconds to do
22 that. We could take—my gun at Khe Sanh, we was pretty good during the Tet Offense of
23 '68. In forty seconds, from time we got to fire, we could have a round in the air.

24 JS: Wow.

25 JW: We'd gotten pretty good by that time. There's a lot in between that to give us
26 the practice.

27 JS: Sure.

28 JW: Basically, that's what it was. You just had a guy that would unpack the
29 ammo. Of course, we would have a certain amount sitting out ready to go, that way he
30 could be cutting charges, setting fuses and then we would unpack as we went from then,
31 if we shot arms or take them head out. We had the guy that was unloading the ammo,

1 pack it, and then we had the cutter—the powder guy. He was cutting the bags and then
2 we dropped a round on top of it. The guy would set the fuse and give it to the assistant
3 loader. He would give it to the loader, and it would be down range. I don't think we ever
4 had anybody, like I said. I don't think we ever had seven complete men on any one gun at
5 any time.

6 JS: Right, right. Were there different kinds of fire missions?

7 JW: Of course, ATPD, you know point detonate, and we could set up to—I think
8 it was a thirty second time fuse. If the FO (Forward Observer) was good enough, we
9 could put the round on the ground and by the time they got to it, it would go off. That was
10 used a lot in a running fire fight, I guess what you would call it. A lot of it was PD, point
11 detonate, we'd shoot white phosphorus. Illumination, a lot of illumination missions at
12 night of course. Like I said, we were one of the first units to get the Beehive round when
13 we went north. We had fire one mission of Beehives. I don't remember if it was Con
14 Thien, could've been at Cam Lo, I don't know. Yeah okay, yeah. Because they used the
15 Beehive around at Cam Lo. I guess you know what the Beehive round was.

16 JS: Yeah, I do. But for future listeners who may not know, could you just describe
17 the Beehive round?

18 JW: That round was a time delayed fuse regular artillery round but inside was
19 something like 10,000, I guess three quarter inch, maybe an inch, darts. They were real
20 sharp. They had fins on the back of them and this round would explode, and 10,000 darts,
21 nailing people to trees. That's what it was. Was that a good one?

22 JS: Yes, sir.

23 JW: Basically, what it could do—a Beehive round would shred a body pretty bad.

24 JS: That would be used for direct fire against infantry hitting the wire and things
25 like that?

26 JW: Yes, sir.

27 JS: Okay, okay. Was another part of your duties—was nightly H&I (Harassment
28 and Interdiction) fire? Was that a big part of it as well?

29 JW: Well, we had to take—two guns a night would shoot H&Is.

30 JS: Okay.

1 JW: They would, ever so many, shoot four rounds and then wait a couple hours,
2 and then shoot four more rounds and then continue this overnight. Spots or places where
3 they had either seen or suspected to be enemy activity. We had some secondaries on
4 H&I, a couple or three times, maybe more than that. I remember one in particular. We
5 was shooting H&I's—I thought we blew up the whole damn north end of Vietnam. We
6 hit something. I don't know what it was. I had never seen an explosion like that.

7 JS: On nights when your gun would not be one of the ones firing the H&I fire,
8 what would you be occupied with at night? Would you actually get some sleep time, or
9 would you be doing other things?

10 JW: Well, if you didn't have guard duty or phone watch. We called it phone
11 watch. We have a phone watch for—gun was manned twenty-four hours a day. An armed
12 guard with earphones, which we had a fire mission any time during the day, FDC would
13 call fire mission. He would have earphones and a mic on fire mission. He would take the
14 information that FDC gave him—the battery, what size round, which round, powder
15 charge, time delay. Like I said, forty seconds was the time we got the missions, and we
16 could get a round in the air. There was your azimuth, your displacement—oh, what's the
17 word I want? I can't even remember the word. They're horizontal, you know, where the
18 tube goes up and down. Reflection I guess, I don't know. Once you got that information,
19 unless it was changed to a different type of mission, you had what you called a shifting
20 zone. Would drop maybe six rounds here, and then you'd set in a new azimuth on your
21 gun, and shoot six here, then go back and forth, back and forth. Then, just bring it down
22 as you're coming in walking out or in, either way where you needed the rounds. Covered
23 a pretty good area and most of the guns could do about the same time. I'd have to say, it
24 got to a point where our gun was fastest. How's that?

25 JS: Right. Okay, let's see. Anything else about your duties and about just the
26 basics of being an artilleryman before moving back to the chronological story?

27 JW: No. I covered it pretty good—just different duties that you had to perform
28 sometimes. The vision you would have to take, ride a roughrider. If they need a driver
29 and a co-driver, or guard I guess—ring mount guy, then we had to supply a truck for that.
30 That was something you always looked forward to.

1 JS: Okay, all right. Oh, I remember one thing I wanted to ask you while we're on
2 this subject here. Your daily routine, if there was such a thing—just a typical day, if there
3 was such a thing. If you could go through the day?

4 JW: Well, each day changes according to the situation. Me personally, I wake up
5 when I could, where it would be morning or whenever. I felt like I was waking up. I
6 would, you know, brush your teeth, do your business, grab a box of C-rations, sit down,
7 and have your feast. Then, you'd go to the ammo dump and replenish what you shot the
8 night before. Then, just clean your rifle and clean the guns. Just anything to keep you
9 busy until you were needed.

10 JS: Right.

11 JW: It was, I guess just like any kind of job. It was sort of like a fireman that lives
12 in the firehouse, you know. You just tried to keep it as clean as you could and basically,
13 take care of yourself. Chill a little bit, write a letter, read a book if you got time or didn't
14 get caught. That's basically what it was. Just any other job until you were needed and
15 then you did your job.

16 JS: All right. This first time when you were at Con Thien, what about living
17 arrangements there? Was it just a foxhole?

18 JW: That was it. I had my little foxhole there. It was dug just about as wide as I
19 was. At that time, I was 6'1, I weighed about 185 pounds. They dug it wide enough for
20 me to get in and down inside there. You dig out little shelves to put your personals on.
21 You know, what you needed. Then, you'd take your poncho, and you'd dig you a trench
22 around your hole. Stretch your poncho over it to keep the weather out as much as
23 possible. I did it a little different. Mine was just about as wide, a little less than an ammo
24 box wide. I put two ammo boxes—well it was actually three covered with holes, so I took
25 two. You tried to make it as small as you could now because it's kind of harder to hit a
26 small target.

27 JS: Right.

28 JW: Mine was about three ammo boxes wide. At night, I could get in it, and I'd
29 pull the ammo box over the top of me. I had three ammo boxes over the top of me full of
30 dirt, sand, or clay, or whatever was available, depending on where I was at. And uh, you
31 lived in that hole. You had your candle. If you didn't make no light, then they never knew

1 you had a candle, but if you made light, then they would get you. My candle was blocked
2 off where nobody could view it. I could sit there and read at night, write letters, whatever
3 I wanted to do. Clean the gun, clean my rifle. You get used to it. It's like anything else, a
4 way of life. Going back to my growing up days, I grew up in the South, in Kentucky.
5 Hey, it was nothing to stay out in the woods a couple of nights. I was pretty well versed
6 on how to take care of myself out there.

7 JS: Right. Was this pretty much your living conditions for the whole tour?

8 JW: Pretty much. I think at Phu Bai we had hooches. That was a real good duty
9 there for a couple of months. When they sent us out different places, that's when you
10 actually had the—where combat artillery came into it because we would take one gun and
11 send it with the company that's going to take over watch out. Like I said, we'll get to that
12 story later in Phu Bai.

13 JS: Okay.

14 JW: It was what you made it. It could be hell if you grew up in the city, or you go
15 around the store—can of beans or something. I had a nice stockpile of peaches, beanie-
16 weenies, and all the good stuff. I'd save them for my nighttime, that's what I'd eat.
17 Daytime, I'd have to eat the stuff I didn't like. I'd save the good stuff for night, and I'd
18 would keep it in my hole, in the care of my shelf, dug back in the ground, you know.

19 JS: Right.

20 JW: So if I wanted midnight snack or a midday snack or whenever I was in the
21 hole, I'd usually eat. Kept my mind off of what was happening outside.

22 JS: Sure, sure. You mentioned in the daytime that eating the stuff you didn't like.
23 The beanie-weenies and stuff, would this be stuff you'd get from home or was this stuff
24 in the C-rations?

25 JW: No, they come out of C-rations.

26 JS: It was C-rations, okay.

27 JW: You save your little surprise package which usually had the C-ration boxes.
28 Of course, they were dated in 1947 or '45. We had a lot of those. I've opened some up
29 that had green packs of Lucky Strike in them. I saw a Chesterfield. That's when I started
30 smoking, had to do something to calm your nerves.

31 JS: Right.

1 JW: I didn't smoke or drink, neither one until I went over there. Sure gave me hell
2 when I got back though. That's another story altogether. You had what you call "ham-
3 motherfuckers." There were lima beans and pieces of ham in them. No matter what you
4 could put in it, it would still taste terrible. You had scrambled eggs in a can. They were
5 powdered eggs or something and they put them in a little tin. You always hoped you'd
6 get something different. Each can was marked different, I don't remember—with a letter.
7 Of course, you know how they pack them in there. I think C was—that's where you
8 opened it up, you got lucky you'd get some peaches and some peanut butter cookies. If
9 you was unlucky, you got dried apricots or some shit like that.

10 JS: (Laughs) Right.

11 JW: A piece of poundcake. Man, poundcake and peaches, that was the good thing.
12 I have to say, you wouldn't get them very often but when you got them you saved them.
13 That's what I'd eat at night. Nobody else could see me because everybody wanted
14 poundcake, and peaches, and beanie-weenies. It was pretty good. It wasn't nothing like
15 what we used to be eating at home, I'll put it that way.

16 JS: Sure. How about packages from home? Did you or any of the other guys ever
17 get food from home and things like that?

18 JW: Oh, yeah. That was good. Mail service was good. I didn't get a whole bunch
19 but that was okay with me too, as long as I got a letter. You know, ol' coal mining
20 farming type community, parents sure didn't have a silver spoon. They were far and few
21 between but they were welcomed when I got them and wasn't thought of when I didn't.
22 Didn't think nothing about it if I didn't get one.

23 JS: Right, all right. We're getting close to the two hours here and before getting
24 back into Phu Bai, you want to go ahead and stop for today?

25 JW: Yeah, if you want to. It's cool, that's fine.

26 JS: Okay. I just don't want to—with having such little time left, I don't want to
27 get back into that yet.

28 JW: Right, I understand.

29 JS: All right. Well, I'll go ahead and stop the recording.

Interview with Jerry Williams

Session [2] of [3]

Date 13 July 2010

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University, continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Jerry Williams. Today is July
3 13th, 2010, and this is interview session number two. Okay, last time when we left off
4 several months ago, we were talking about—your unit had just left Con Thien and I guess
5 had been transferred to Phu Bai at that point?

6 Jerry Williams: Okay.

7 JS: Could you talk about what was going on at Phu Bai and kind of describe Phu
8 Bai, if you wouldn't mind?

9 JW: Phu Bai. That was pretty good duty. That was more like Rudy in the rear with
10 a rusty rifle, I guess you might say. It was a nice place. It was quiet. Big enough place, it
11 really didn't have much action there. That's where Tom and Phil and myself—this is one
12 of the fun times I guess I had over there. At compound—between our compound and the
13 compound over there was a gate between the two of them. I'm thinking it was Phu Bai,
14 I'm sure it was. We was over there with another outfit and we was drinking over there
15 with them. I'll tell you man, it was late in the afternoon, quiet, and everything, so we just
16 sat down and started drinking. Having a good ol' time. Before you know it, it was eleven
17 o'clock at night. We went staggering back over to our compound and lo and behold, we
18 didn't know there was a gate between the two, or we forgot it, or something. So we were
19 locked in the compound. We said, "What the hell we going to do, man." I don't
20 remember who it was, but they said, "Well hell, we can just walk around it." Being all
21 screwed up on that beer and cheap whiskey, hell we didn't know what it was. We got
22 tangled up in some of the God-awfulest tanglefoot and concertina wire.

23 JS: Oh no.

24 JW: Yeah, man. Pop-flares went off and everything. There was all kinds of noise
25 because on the concertina wire, they'd hang cans and put rocks in them, and everything,
26 so it makes a lot of noise. We was all out of there and we started laughing. Man, it was so
27 funny. You know, you're so drunk. The gunnery sergeant he come—he had the keys, so
28 he let us in on the compound on the other side. It was so funny. We're laying there and he

1 said that he started laughing. He said he'd never seen nothing so funny in all his life. Just
2 these three drunks hanging up in the concertina and tanglefoot. Utilities all up and you
3 know, scrape this up and everything. I remember just lying there laughing because there
4 is nothing else we could do. If anything, if we got shot, we would have died laughing.
5 Just the way that happened, it was really funny at that time. Our first sergeant, I don't
6 remember his name. I don't remember other names. I'm sure that he went to a better
7 resting place because he had quite a few years in then. Next morning, we was all
8 bandaged up and everything. Band-Aids all over us. After he took the reports, he called
9 us in. He just looked at us and just started laughing himself. He was tickled so hard, he
10 just waved us out of the office. But just the way it happened, it was so funny man. I guess
11 I told you before—I guess like the three musketeers. All the trouble, all the stuff we got
12 into, we never got into a whole bunch of trouble.

13 JS: Right. So no troubles or problems from that then at all?

14 JW: None whatsoever. Of course, the guys noticed but none of the staff or office
15 said a word to us about it. I don't know what they could have done but they didn't say a
16 word. It was so funny. I guess anybody that stupid done been punished enough.

17 JS: (Laughs) Right.

18 JW: That was pretty good.

19 JS: How long were you there at Phu Bai?

20 JW: We was at Phu Bai, I guess maybe three months. Maybe, give or take—I
21 guess it was three months.

22 JS: All right. What time period would this have been? Do you know?

23 JW: It was—I guess, July, August, and September. Something like that. Another
24 time we had listening posts out. This was pretty serious, but it was still funny. Three of us
25 were out there on the listening post—went out on the listening post. I don't know what it
26 was. We got to arguing. I don't know what it was about. They had to call us in because
27 we were out there and started arguing or laughing, or something. I don't remember what
28 it was. Making so much damn noise out there that the people next to us on the other side
29 started shooting pop-flares and everything. About ready to get the fight out. That's just
30 the kind of guys we were. You know, we never heard nothing about that either. We got

1 called in, I guess. I think battalion had said something about it. I don't know. We never
2 heard nothing about it. That was just funny as heck.

3 JS: Right. Were both of your buddies there—were they both on same gun crew as
4 you?

5 JW: Yeah, sure were. We stayed together quite a bit of time. As a matter of fact,
6 we lost one in 2008. Phil, he passed away in 2008. Yeah, 2008. I miss him quite a bit,
7 man. It's just like losing a brother, you know.

8 JS: Right. Did you stay in touch with both of those guys after the war quite a bit
9 then?

10 JW: No, we actually lost each other for about thirty years.

11 JS: Really?

12 JW: I think it was about 2002 or 2003, we got back together. Then, we was just
13 thick as thieves then. We couldn't get rid of each other. As a matter of fact, we got back
14 together through the Khe Sanh Veterans Organization.

15 JS: Okay. So did you meet at a reunion or some other way?

16 JW: That's how we got back together, the reunion. I think it was '97. No, wait a
17 minute. Tom and Phil got back together in '97 and then I didn't catch up with them for
18 another six years, in 2003. I thought just having Phil back for five years was a real short
19 time of my life.

20 JS: Yes, sir.

21 JW: Anyway, I looked for them for years. I couldn't remember where they was
22 from. I thought—Tom was from Pittsburgh, only about two and a half hours from me
23 here. Thought for sure he was from Fall River, Massachusetts. I must have knew
24 somebody from Fall River. I called everybody in Fall River. Even sounded like I knew
25 their name and asked them if they knew where Tom Keaton lived. Maybe I shouldn't say
26 the names. I don't know. I guess it's all right. I never asked him, so I don't know. He
27 lives out in Pittsburgh. He was, still is, the best friend I got. Phil, they said he died of a
28 massive heart attack in 2010. It took me a couple of years—well, I'm not over it yet.
29 What had happened, a couple guys had bought about eight acres of land up in the hills of
30 North Carolina. Turned into a little campground for the guys. There was six of us that
31 actually got together, pretty close right now. They was cleaning it out one night. Well, it

1 was 4th of July 2008. They was up there and my wife and I were going to take the
2 camper, and go on down and meet them on the third. The morning of the third, we was
3 getting ready to leave and Tom called me and said, “Wasn’t no need in coming down.
4 Phil had a massive heart attack down there, passed away.” He had actually fell into a
5 burn-pit that had been burning the cuttings from trees and everything that they had cut
6 down. He’d sit around the fire late, well not late, I don’t know exactly when he fell in.
7 Anyway, Tom said that Phil just wasn’t feeling good when he got down there. He went
8 and laid down and when he laid down, got back up about eight o’clock that evening.
9 They was sitting around the fire and sat out there for a couple hours, maybe drank beer
10 for a couple hours. That wasn’t no beer. Two hours’ worth of beer wasn’t nothing. The
11 other guys had been working all day. They decided to go in, and Phil had taken a nap. So
12 he said, “Well, I’m going to stay out here by the fire by myself.” The next morning, they
13 found his arm, I think his shoulder and his skull, and one foot.

14 JS: Oh, no.

15 JW: The rest of him had fell in the fire-pit.

16 JS: Oh, goodness.

17 JW: The coroner had said that he must have had a massive—when he stood up, I
18 don’t remember what time it was during the night. I don’t remember exactly what time
19 they placed the death. Well, they couldn’t. There was really no way of determining. They
20 said the guess or speculation was that he had stood up, and maybe getting ready to go to
21 bed or something, had a massive heart attack and fell in the pit.

22 JS: Goodness, right.

23 JW: There was no struggle marks. You know, if somebody had grabbed a rock or
24 something out of place. There wasn’t no rocks out of place. There wasn’t no—where he
25 even struggled trying to get out of it. That was pretty horrific. We was just down there
26 this year. I took a little statue down and put it on his grave. Well, we considered his
27 grave. There was still some bone fragments. We even had the state to certify that as a
28 grave. They did. Then, we had the church do the same thing. What little ashes they had,
29 they sent to his sister in New Jersey and his wife in Florida. We still found some remains
30 and bones, and things. You know, fragments. The church decided or agreed that it’s a
31 grave. The priest come down and blessed it and everything. I took a small statue of St.

1 Barbara. She's the patron saint of field artillerymen. I didn't know if you knew that or
2 not.

3 JS: I didn't know that, no.

4 JW: She is and we put that on the grave. Every time I go down there, it's pretty
5 hard on me. Just can't get over it, you know. Like I said, I didn't have him long enough. I
6 guess it's out of my control or anybody's control. The Good Lord had called him home. I
7 figured he had done his job. The Lord needed him worse than I did. Anyway, he was one
8 hell of a guy. He was a funny guy and never met a stranger. I can say that much for him.
9 If he was a stranger when he met you, he never left a stranger. Maybe that's what I
10 should say.

11 JS: So, you met him in Vietnam then?

12 JW: Yes, sir. I met him and Tom both. I think that was all of my loss. I had lost—
13 I don't if I told you before that four guys that I run around with at home when I was a kid,
14 five of us were real close. I'm the only one that came home.

15 JS: Oh, wow.

16 JW: I couldn't stay there. You know, my hometown down in Kentucky. I just
17 couldn't stay there. It was a place where you grow up. You've been around with these
18 five guys in high school and everything. They were in different areas. When I was in high
19 school, we all met. As a matter of fact, there was two in my hometown. I guess about a
20 forty-mile radius, we all lived in a forty-mile radius. They went to different schools and
21 everything. We was all the same age and everything. We got to be friends. Three of us
22 went to the Marine Corps and one was a Navy Corpsmen. The other was in the 101st
23 Airborne. I'm the only one that come home. Everywhere I went, that's all I see. I'd see
24 John's mom and dad, and they would look at me like—I remember John's sister looking
25 at me like, "What am I doing here?" That was the feeling I got. I just know I couldn't
26 stay there. I couldn't stay in that area at all. So I left and went to Baltimore, stayed there
27 until I met my wife. I moved out here twenty years later. But that's a different story.

28 JS: Right. All right. Well, regarding Phu Bai—

29 JW: I got off Phu Bai, didn't I?

30 JS: No, no. That's quite all right. Interesting stories there about your friends that
31 you met while you were there. Is your other friend still living?

1 JW: Oh, yeah. My mom would say—she moved in with me last month or two
2 months ago. Eighty-seven years old, she said, “You two are thicker than thieves.” Yeah,
3 Tom and I still get together. Call each other every couple of days and just make sure
4 everything is all right. Just make sure we’re still here, I guess.

5 JS: Right, right.

6 JW: We was definitely close. I was blessed to find him because I had looked—
7 thirty years looking for him. He didn’t have no idea. Where did he work? If he’s still
8 alive or anything? That was hard. I never forgot him. When the three of us got together
9 again, you know it’s just like we hadn’t been gone. It was like we had been together all
10 them years. I mean it just picked up right where it started. You know, where it left off,
11 our friendships that it was.

12 JS: Yeah. It’s a shame you guys couldn’t have reconnected sooner.

13 JW: Oh, boy. I don’t know. It might not have worked out then. It wouldn’t have
14 been so bad. The first seven years of my marriage and fourteen years after I come back,
15 was pure hell. I went to the VA (Veteran’s Affairs) back in ‘81, come back in ‘68. What
16 is that, thirteen years?

17 JS: Twelve or thirteen years.

18 JW: Anyway, it doesn’t make any difference. I had been diagnosed by three
19 psychologists, social worker. They said that it was called PTSD then, but nobody knew
20 what it was. I filed a claim with the VA, and they sent me a letter that says, “In
21 accordance with what everything said—” What they said was that I had a drinking
22 problem. That was what’s causing all my problems. I quit drinking then, and I haven’t
23 had a drink since, in thirty years, about thirty years. I didn’t even get any PTSD claim or
24 anything until 2006.

25 JS: Oh wow, that long.

26 JW: I had put in for it, but they just denied it. I had been going to therapists and
27 everything on my own because the VA wouldn’t recognize it. I got a letter stated in 1980
28 where the VA agreed that something was wrong with me psychologically. They
29 concluded that it was because I drank too much. Pretty much says, “Go to hell and have a
30 nice life.” It’s not what it said in so many words. It took me twenty-six years to convince

1 them and then, I guess they got tired of me filing claims that they would only pay me six
2 months back-pay.

3 JS: That's it, wow.

4 JW: That wouldn't even buy a new car. I still got it all written down.

5 JS: What was it—do you know what it was that finally convinced them?

6 JW: Well, they'd give me fifty-five percent or fifty percent. That's all I got. The
7 rest of it is different things. The agent orange, my lungs are screwed up. Diabetes and
8 things like this, that's why I'm disabled right now. I got the ninety percent, and they gave
9 me ten percent for un-employability. It's a good thing I was able to work with that, where
10 insurance would pay for my mental health—I'd probably been dead twenty years ago, I
11 guess. I'm a bitter vet. That's why people can't understand. I don't mean to be a bitter
12 vet. I think I'm a halfway-decent guy when I'm not bitter. I don't trust the Veteran's
13 Administration, as far as their control.

14 JS: I don't blame you after taking twenty-six years.

15 JW: But anyway, let's get back to Phu Bai. I don't want to get upset on that thing.
16 We start on the VA, we never will stop.

17 JS: Well, if you'd like, we could certainly talk about some of those issues towards
18 the end of the interview.

19 JW: That would definitely let the people know what I had to go through. I'm sure
20 there are some out there just as bad.

21 JS: Yeah, I think that would be something good for the record. For people to
22 understand how the VA has handled these types of issues and how the government has
23 treated its veterans.

24 JW: Oh man, it's horrible. They treat their employees better than they treat the
25 veterans. I'll put it that way. But again, that's another story.

26 JS: Right. Like I said, we can certainly talk more about that towards the end, if
27 you don't mind talking about it.

28 JW: No, I don't mind talking about it.

29 JS: Okay, all right. Moving back to Phu Bai for the moment.

30 JW: Okay. Well, it was a pretty laid-back time. I guess it was like R&R (Rest and
31 Recuperation) for me because I didn't take any. I didn't get that stress, I don't guess.

1 Well, I guess I did but just didn't know it. I didn't take any R&R. I didn't even take any
2 in-country R&R.

3 JS: Right, okay. Was that a choice of yours?

4 JW: Yes, it was my choice, I guess. I didn't come from a very well-to-do family
5 in Kentucky. I lived on sixteen dollars a month. I sent everything else home to my mom. I
6 didn't have a whole lot of money to go on R&R or anything with. I survived and that's
7 okay. Yeah, it wasn't very eventful there. I was there when—as a matter of fact, the
8 mortar that killed General Hochmuth, I think he was Vision Commander or something for
9 the Marine Division. He's one of the few General Officers that got killed. The one that
10 killed him fired that right in front of our perimeter. There's nothing we could do about it
11 because the borders were fired. You kind of almost had to—if it wasn't hitting the wires,
12 you had to get permission to shoot.

13 JS: Oh wow.

14 JW: So there wasn't a whole bunch we could do. That's about the most exciting
15 things that really happened. You know, just little things that was more fun than anything,
16 I guess. A bunch of guys had a lot more time to gamble and time to breathe, keep clean
17 and everything else. It was a pretty decent place where we were at, Phu Bai. Take a
18 shower every night and a hot meal. I guess three months of that kind of ruined us because
19 we left there and went to a place called CoBi Than Tan. I don't know if you've heard of
20 it.

21 JS: No, sir.

22 JW: That's after we left Phu Bai. Did you have any more questions over Phu Bai?

23 JS: Just a few more. You talked about showers and things like that and having a
24 much nicer standard of living there. What were the living arrangements like? Did you
25 guys have hooches?

26 JW: Yeah, we had hooches. It almost felt like we was in the Army.

27 JS: Right. So a brief time without having to live in foxhole then?

28 JS: Pretty much. That was about the most we stayed where we didn't live on the
29 ground, you know.

1 JS: Right. I know you talked about the things you guys did to occupy your time,
2 the fun things, spending times together. What about your duties there at Phu Bai? What
3 were the duties at that point?

4 JW: Well, it was more or less just to maintain.

5 JS: Okay.

6 JW: Just to, you know, keep the guns clean, take care of the area. Had a lot of
7 spare time. There wasn't a whole bunch we could do. We stayed those three months. I'd
8 say it was excellent conditions compared to a lot of people for three months. I'm sure
9 they didn't get that much. Like I said before, we were Rudy in the rear with a rusty rifle.

10 JS: Right. Did you guys still do some shooting, like H&I type?

11 JW: Oh, yeah. Our battery, of course would shoot H&I's every night. We had no
12 real big fire missions, but we had a lot of small ones. The guns had 6.99 miles as a range,
13 so anything within 7 miles of Phu Bai. The location was right—I don't know why there
14 was no action there. I really don't because there wasn't a whole lot of action at that time I
15 was there at Phu Bai. It was kind of like living in Da Nang, I guess. You know, hit a
16 couple rounds every once in a while, and then take off. Our part of the wire never got hit
17 or anything. Maybe it was just where we was located. The compound itself got hit a few
18 times but never where we could do anything but shoot illuminations. You know, tube-up.
19 This is as close in as we could get it. Shoot illuminations, that's about all we could do for
20 the other side of the compound. We never hit anything. I think we was shooting for 226
21 then, I think it was—It might have been 126. One of them was there with us at that time. I
22 think they moved out a little before we did. So they had a brief pause too. The infantry
23 units, they kind of came and went, so I don't know who all we shot for to be honest with
24 you—at Phu Bai. I think the 9th Marines were there for a little while. They just kind of
25 moved them in and out. We just got lucky. It was actually a calm period for I Corps
26 during that time, actually. There wasn't a whole lot going on at any one place, I don't
27 believe. I guess they was regrouping.

28 JS: Yeah, I guess this would have been the build-up prior to Tet?

29 JW: Yes, sir.

30 JS: Okay.

1 JW: Actually, the build-up was up on the—I would say the North Vietnamese
2 were building up at Con Thien. That’s where we went after we left—after we left Phu
3 Bai, we went to CoBi Than Tan and then to Con Thien. So the build-up to the fall
4 offensive at Con Thien the second time.

5 JS: All right. So you were there at Phu Bai for three months and then went to
6 CoBi Than Tan?

7 JW: CoBi Than Tan. That was maybe five miles up. I don’t really know how far it
8 was, I’m not even going to say.

9 JS: Okay.

10 JW: But anyway, I knew we went up route one and all at once we made it in—I
11 don’t know, maybe half a day, maybe a couple hours. I don’t even really remember. We
12 went up from there and then made a left and we went out into the A Shau Valley, to a
13 little place called CoBi Than Tan. I don’t know if you wanted to leave Phu Bai yet or not.

14 JS: No, yeah. We can go ahead and move on, unless there’s anything else you
15 wanted to mention.

16 JW: No, that was just about the most memorable things. That’s where somebody
17 fragged the CO, at Phu Bai too.

18 JS: Oh, really.

19 JW: The regular CO had left. We got this, I guess he was a mustang, I don’t even
20 really remember who he was or not. You know what a mustang is right?

21 JS: No, I don’t.

22 JW: A guy that had come up through the ranks, become an officer.

23 JS: Oh, right.

24 JW: We had gotten one. He didn’t stay very long right after they fragged him. He
25 thought he was state side still. He was a Marine’s Marine, I guess you might say. He
26 looked like a little bulldog running around all puffed up.

27 JS: When you say, “He thought he was state-side”, was it like paying attention to
28 little details, like spit-shine kind of stuff?

29 JW: Kind of like that. He only lasted a month I think, if that long.

30 JS: Before he was fragged?

1 JW: Yeah. Thank God he wasn't in the hooch when they did it. Still, they took
2 him out of there pretty quick, let's put it that way.

3 JS: Okay. So that was more of a threat before the actual—

4 JW: I don't really know. I never did find out and I never really cared to know who
5 did it. You know what I'm saying?

6 JS: Sure, yeah.

7 JW: That way, you know—like the monkey. The less you know, the less you see,
8 the less you hear. I didn't get into those conversations, I just stayed away. When the
9 conversation came up, I just kind of moved away from it. That way I couldn't lie to
10 anybody who asked me because I wasn't going to tell them, "Oh my gosh, he knows
11 that." If I didn't know it, then I couldn't lie about it.

12 JS: Sure, sure. That's certainly understandable. From your perspective though, did
13 you have the view that this guy is not fit for leading troops into battle?

14 JW: Yeah. That was my opinion. I wasn't the only one that thought that. I'm not
15 condemning him. The guy was, like I said, he was a Marine all the way through and
16 through. We had a lot of guys—most of us were in our first, second year in the Corps.
17 We was in a situation that we didn't need all that stuff. He wanted to discipline us a little
18 bit too much. He liked to salute and all that stuff. I mean, that was the Marine Corps.
19 He's following the manual. He made us wear our rank insignias and everything. I didn't
20 mind cleaning utility but some of the guys, you know, they did get a little dirty. He was a
21 state-side marine, bottom line.

22 JS: Okay. Prior to getting the promotion, like you said being a mustang—prior to
23 getting a promotion to being an officer, was he a career NCO (Non-Commissioned
24 Officer)? Had he been in for a long time?

25 JW: Yeah. He had been in for a while. At the time, I don't know how they made
26 mustangs. They just, I guess sent them to classes. I really don't know. I think you had to
27 have a pretty high IQ, I guess is what you'd say. You had to have a little bit of smarts in
28 your head. Most of them I had met, but I had met some that I don't know how they
29 become what they were. That's beside the point too. I didn't have no problem with him. I
30 went ahead and did everything like you're supposed to. Of course, I had nothing like ill-
31 will towards him because he was that way. You just went ahead, and did it as you'd been

1 in the Corps. Some people didn't look at it that way. They got him out of there the same
2 day that—it had to be three weeks to month is about all we had him. They got rid of him
3 pretty quick.

4 JS: Right. How was the next CO?

5 JW: Oh, he was great. He was another mustang.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JW: I liked him. A lot of other people didn't like him because they got it
8 confused, especially my buddies. I had to reeducate them because they gave him all the
9 blame. They remember somebody getting fragged there, but they got the next one
10 confused with the one that left because he was there such a short time, I guess.

11 JS: Right.

12 JW: The next CO was—he was a mustang, but he was cool. As long as you did
13 your job, kept yourself halfway squared away, the area clean, he just laid back and let us
14 do our thing, more or less. I thought he was pretty good. He knew his stuff, I know that.
15 He could lay the guns and on a fire mission, he was right there. He wasn't down in FDC
16 bunker watching us. He was on the guns. He was pretty good. We had him, I guess about
17 four months prior to going into Dong Ha before Khe Sanh—going back to Khe Sanh. But
18 anyway, we started—we went to Con Thien next. No, CoBi Than Tan. Like I said, we
19 was going up route one, I don't remember how far out of Phu Bai. It could have been an
20 hour, two hours, could have been a half a day, three quarters. I don't know exactly the
21 location and I can't spell it right, so I don't really know how to find it on a map.

22 JS: Sure, that's fine.

23 JW: Anyway, I know we took a sudden left off of route one and headed towards
24 the A Shau Valley and Quang Tri, in the northern end of it. If you look out over the
25 valley, we set us up on a little knob there. We set the battery—stretched the battery out
26 there. Hell, the last three months, I guess everybody get a little relaxed, so we just put
27 three wires of concertina up. A little stream running behind us. Come to find out, that was
28 the wrong thing to do. The only thing really memorable that happened there was we shot
29 a lot.

30 JS: Right. Firing into the A Shau?

31 JW: Yeah.

1 JS: Okay.

2 JW: We shot a lot into the A Shau Valley. One night, they got in real close. They
3 had overrun our perimeter guard. I don't remember who it was, maybe it was 226 or
4 something. Anyway, they had overrun those guys. I don't know, they got into a trap or
5 something. They had set them a trap and don't know exactly what all went down. They
6 had come over those three pieces of concertina wire we had. We was trying to shoot
7 illuminations but they was in too close. We couldn't get our guns right. All at once, I
8 guess maybe twenty-five, thirty of them, come through that wire on our end just like it
9 wasn't even there.

10 JS: Oh, wow.

11 JW: I dot even think they fired a shot or anything. It was kind of like coming
12 behind us. Once you see this guy running along beside you, "Hell, it's a damn gook."
13 They just kept on going man, right in one side and out the other. It's kind of funny
14 afterwards. Sit down and think about it, it could have turned pretty nasty. You stand there
15 and some guy runs beside you, just keep on running out in front of the guns. Again, that
16 was one of them comical things. I think that was about the last time we did any laughing.
17 That was it—CoBi Than Tan. We was just there for a couple days maybe. Maybe a week.

18 JS: All right. Were these sappers or mainland infantry?

19 JW: No, they were just troops. They weren't sappers because if they had been
20 sappers, we would have been in a world of trouble. Them guys, they are all hopped up on
21 something. They would have definitely caused some damage inside the wire. They
22 wouldn't have kept running, put it that way. These guys, they just come running in one
23 side and out the other. Again, after we all got out of shock and started thinking about
24 what happened, it was funny as hell. Of course, you know, you had to look for humor
25 over there where you could find it. It didn't come looking for you. Tom, Phil, and I, we
26 loved to laugh. We were a good gun crew and Tom was well respected as a crew chief.
27 He had funny way—a real small guy. He'd come back from Vietnam and grew two
28 inches. That's how young he was.

29 JS: Wow. Were most of you guys eighteen, nineteen years old?

30 JW: Yeah. At that time, I guess we was all still about eighteen, nineteen. I was
31 eighteen, eighteen years old. I was nineteen at Con Thien the second time during the

1 second battle of Con Thien. I guess it was. Those are things that you think about. When
2 people ask me where I grew up, I usually tell them, "Vietnam." I was born in Kentucky,
3 but I grew up in Vietnam. Somewhere along the line, I had learned to survive. I don't
4 know how, I don't know why. I died a little bit every time I would read guys from home
5 names in *Stars and Stripes*.

6 JS: Right.

7 JW: Everyone I seen, it seemed like it got a little harder. David was in-country for
8 about a month. He was the one that was in 101st. I did contact the corpsman he was with.
9 He said, "He jumped in front of a claymore that they had put on the trees to save his
10 guys." All he got was a Purple Heart. I've seen so many heroic actions at Khe Sanh, I
11 guess there should have been about twenty Medal of Honors, as far as I'm concerned,
12 given out in just one outfit. But you know, if a man didn't see you do it, they don't take
13 nobody's word for that. Still there?

14 JS: Yeah, I'm just listening.

15 JW: Sometimes I just sit out here and start thinking about myself. I don't even
16 know if you're there or not.

17 JS: I'm certainly still here. I've heard stories about guys diving on grenades.
18 Someone will win a Medal of Honor for it and someone else will do it, and just get a
19 Purple Heart. Like you said, it just depends on who saw it.

20 JW: That's about it. I guess the first CO that I had, the other guy like I said, they
21 joined the battery after me. He didn't believe giving out Purple Hearts. I guess he wanted
22 to keep his record clean. You know, got no man hurt. That's beside the point, I ain't
23 through fighting that one yet. But anyway, CoBi Than Tan like I said, the next day they
24 pulled us out. I guess they thought we was hurt or something. They should have seen the
25 after action report because hell, they didn't even stop to shoot. We didn't even shoot at
26 them. We were laughing so hard. I was just figuring out what was going on. We didn't
27 even know it was them until they were gone. That was really funny.

28 JS: Did you guys ever stop to ask why they didn't do anything else? Why they
29 only just ran through?

30 JW: I thought about that for years. The only thing I could figure out is that they
31 probably a new outfit that's in the wrong place at the wrong time and they didn't know

1 what the hell to do. Like us, you know? They were pretty hardcore soldiers man. I'll tell
2 you, you had to respect them.

3 JS: That brings up a question I was going to ask you a little bit later, but we could
4 do it know if you'd like. I was going to ask you to talk a little about your impressions of
5 the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and your thoughts on them.

6 JW: Well, I seen mostly Viet Cong. I kind of put them in the same category of our
7 Revolutionary War. I don't know if it was right, wrong, or indifferent, or if we had any
8 reason to be there. Us guys, probably our age, we grew up listening to war stories and
9 everything. We just felt it was our duty to serve if the country calls. Just like our
10 forefathers, when they called, we went. We didn't question them. We didn't do anything.
11 Anyway, what I felt, I felt it was kind of like they were basically—a lot of them that I'd
12 seen were scared kids, just like we were, or young men. There were some that was just
13 defiant as hell. You know, "You go ahead and blow me away. I don't care." They were
14 just doing what they thought was right, just like we were doing what we thought was
15 right. I wasn't a politician. As a matter of fact, a farm boy out of Kentucky, hell I didn't
16 even know nothing about Vietnam—while we was there or anything. They said, "Go." At
17 that time, we didn't question our government, we didn't question the Military. You know,
18 as a whole. Of course, you know you're going to find some that know—when you got a
19 country as big as ours, you're going to find a whole lot. People think there's a whole lot.
20 A couple hundred thousand protesters compared to nine million troops that went through
21 Vietnam. That wasn't such good odds, I don't think. They seemed to be running more
22 than we were because we were just doing what we was told to do. That's all a different
23 story too. I've got my feelings about them.

24 JS: Well, that's something else I'd like to ask you about later on as well.

25 JW: Okay. I'll tell you what I think about them too. We can get out of that and go
26 on up to Dong Ha or at Con Thien.

27 JS: Okay, all right. Well, one more question about the enemy in general terms,
28 since we were just talking about the enemy. Could you talk a little bit about, from your
29 perspective, some of the strengths—what were the strengths and some of the weaknesses
30 of the enemy from your view?

1 JW: Courage. They were very courageous. It's a very courageous race. It was
2 inner strength because there's nothing over that I'd seen that I would fight for. I'd let
3 anybody have it if they wanted it. That was their country, so they were going to fight.
4 You had to respect them because if you didn't, they'd find out you didn't respect them,
5 and you still get hurt. Anytime we did small patrols into the villages and things, I
6 respected them, just like I would if I was home. I still have a lot of respect for them. I'm
7 not begrudging anyone of what happened except our government. I still don't know—I
8 understand why we were there, but I still don't know why in my mind or my inner-self to
9 really tell you why we were there. I do understand that it's a commitment that our
10 country had made to the South Vietnamese government. Whether that was right or
11 wrong, I'm not going to get into the politics of it because I'm just not a politician. They
12 were very courageous. Of course, you know, it could have come out of a bottle. Courage
13 could have come out of a needle. It could have come out of pills or drugs. A lot of them
14 seemed to be on a lot of drugs. That's where their courage comes from. In our daytime
15 patrols though the village, they were a meek, caring, loving, family type people of what I
16 could see. That's the way they lived. That's the way that they didn't seem to want to
17 change. That wasn't my business. That was between them and their God. I still respect
18 them as soldiers, they were pretty darn good. That's just my interpretation.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JW: I don't know what else I can say about them besides—the ones that I had
21 seen, I talked at them. I don't think they understood what I said, and I sure-to-hell didn't
22 understand them. They seemed to be a friendly people. But you never knew if you was
23 talking to a Cong or you was talking to a guy in the village. After a while, you could
24 probably pick them out, especially if they was from a different village. You could tell that
25 some of the guys were—you know, speculate that they were Viet Cong because they
26 were a little more determined look in their eyes. You know, they looked at us with hate. I
27 don't know. You could just feel when they looked a certain people and tell that they were
28 the enemy. There's nothing you can do. You can't shoot him because you thought he was
29 the enemy. Again, like I said, I have a lot of respect for their ability to make war. I could
30 just imagine what it would have been like if they would have had some decent weapons.

1 JS: Right. I know you've talked about the North Vietnamese, and the Viet Cong,
2 and the people in the villages, but how about the South Vietnamese Military, the ARVN
3 (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)? What was the impression of them?

4 JW: Ah, the regular army. It wasn't North Vietnamese I was talking about. I was
5 mostly talking about the Viet Cong.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JW: I had very few contact with the North Vietnamese because they were up
8 North. I just didn't have that much personal contact with them.

9 JS: Right, yeah.

10 JW: I had a lot of contact with the ARVNs. They seemed to be well fed. They had
11 good clothes and weapons. It was like they were in a big—a lot of times you know,
12 especially in the compounds, they were—it seemed more like they were having more fun
13 than anything. Didn't seem serious enough, I guess it would be what I want to say. Of
14 course, you know like I said, we like to have good times too. It's probably the better way
15 of living being in the South Vietnamese Army than it was worrying about the Viet Cong
16 in the villages. They, as a fighting unit, I'm sure they—I never really seen them in that
17 much action, as far as the infantry skills and things. What my personal opinion was, they
18 seemed to be having more fun than anything. They were living the high life. They were
19 outstanding and they were outstandingly equipped, I should say. Most of them seemed to
20 be enjoying life better than the ones in the villages. I guess that's what I want to say.

21 JS: Okay.

22 JW: Then again, they come from a village just like them. The village that we were
23 in had to be an improvement. Found out that there was people that actually cleaned every
24 day and ate something besides rice every day. You know, just enjoyed life, I guess. To
25 me, they was more of a—they were happier. They were actually happy to be in the
26 Army—to be out of that village.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JW: Can't blame them. I left Kentucky to go to the Marine Corps because I didn't
29 want to live on a farm and work in a coal mine. At that time, that was my only way out of
30 there. '65, '66, that was the only way out for a lot of guys. They sure didn't mind getting
31 me out of it either. You know that?

1 JS: Right, sure.

2 JW: I think it made a better man out of me. I can't say life hadn't been any easier
3 anywhere else. I think I lived it a little bit wiser. A little bit wiser after I sobered up, put it
4 that way. It was the only way out. I keep getting off the subject, don't I?

5 JS: That's quite all right.

6 JW: My mind wanders.

7 JS: Not a problem at all. Well, regarding CoBi Than Tan and Con Thien, was
8 there anything else would you say about CoBi Than Tan?

9 JW: No. I guess it was like a prelude to war, I guess what you might call it. Got a
10 little bit of taste of living in the ground again and all that good stuff. You find out that
11 after three months in Phu Bai, sitting in the rear there—I guess it was the rear, like I said
12 I don't think there was a whole bunch going on at that time. I think it was during the
13 build-up of '67 because a lot of troops moved through there. A lot of the guys that came
14 in RLT-26 (Regiment Landing Team) in '66, they were getting ready to rotate, so they
15 had to have somebody to replace them guys. A lot of replacements were starting to come
16 in. Like I said, when President Johnson had that big build-up, needed those troops, he
17 replaced the ones that were coming home. It wasn't so much as the build-up in Vietnam, I
18 don't believe. There might have been more Army over there, but I don't think that many
19 more Marines. I think they were just more replacements.

20 JS: Okay.

21 JW: That's what basically Cobi Than Tan was. It was experience though, when
22 they overrun the wires. That was uncommon, I'm sure. I just thank the Good Lord that it
23 wasn't sappers like you said, because sappers would have definitely come in there and
24 wouldn't have cared. I don't think that they would have stopped until they were all dead
25 or they destroyed us altogether. They kept on going. Just one of them lucky times, I
26 guess. I feel that I used all my luck in Vietnam. Boy, I haven't had no luck since. All hard
27 work. A lot of trials and tribulations in my life.

28 JS: Yes, sir.

29 JW: Now you sit back and see what I got, where I was going, I think I did all
30 right.

31 JS: Yes, sir.

1 JW: I have no complaints. Lucky I found my second wife, who is a loving and
2 caring person who's been with me ever since I come back. Two years after I got back
3 anyway. If I could sit down and write this down, I'd make one hell of a story, wouldn't
4 it?

5 JS: (Chuckles) Well, you should consider it.

6 JW: I just like to talk but I don't like to talk to myself. I had both of my shoulders
7 totally replaced in 2000. I couldn't work anymore. All the guys my age and all my
8 friends, they still had to work in their early fifties. My wife still works. Now she don't
9 have to, she wants to. For what it's worth—she's a younger lady than I am. She's about
10 six years younger. She just says that you know, if anything happens, she couldn't live off
11 the social security she had—you know, if she would have quit when I did. She's pretty
12 smart. I don't begrudge her for it at all. Again, that's another story. Boy, I got a whole
13 bunch of stories, don't I? We left Con Thien in—like I said, we was only there—it could
14 have been two weeks. I don't know.

15 JS: Okay. So just a short time?

16 JW: Yeah.

17 JS: At that point, was the fighting at Con Thien—had it begun yet?

18 JW: No, not really.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JW: We went in from there into Dong Ha.

21 JS: Oh, okay.

22 JW: It was just on our way to Con Thien. I don't really remember about the
23 second time a whole bunch about Con Thien. I just remember that for some reason, I
24 guess—Con Thien, being the second time there, we got almost as many rounds, it just
25 didn't last. It lasted thirty-four days. We was in a pretty good battle for about thirty-five,
26 thirty-six days. I think thirty-four. I don't know. It was like Khe Sanh. We stayed there
27 October and November. I don't remember a whole bunch about it for some reason. I
28 don't remember a whole bunch about—because we went from there back to Dong Ha.
29 Then, we went into Khe Sanh. I do remember going from Dong Ha because we—like I
30 said, we spent the night there and then went on into Con Thien the next day. Going in,
31 you could see an Ontos had been blown up. I guess it had already started. I think they hit

1 the little compound there the night before we went in. I actually think that we were going
2 to stop at Dong Ha and stay there. They kind of just kept us moving because we was
3 already packed up. They just moved us on into Con Thien the next day. I think we might
4 have surprised the North Vietnamese there because we were there so quick because they
5 didn't have a whole lot of support there, as far as artillery support. We was there and I
6 think that's the way it went down. I wouldn't swear but it seems like we had heard over
7 that the night before there at Dong Ha, that Con Thien was getting hit pretty bad that
8 night. They moved us in. They didn't even let us stay right there inside the compound.
9 They didn't even set up the kitchen or anything. You didn't have C-rations. They
10 supplied us with everything we needed that night. Moved us right in to Con Thien the
11 next morning. I think we just happened to be a little unlucky on that one. Still there?

12 JS: Yeah. Yeah, I am.

13 JW: I keep looking at my battery on my telephone. I don't have my glasses on,
14 but it looks like I got plenty of battery. It starts beeping, I'm going to run and get the
15 other one.

16 JS: All right. Okay, that's fine.

17 JW: Like I said, we pulled into Dong Ha and they just kept us right on the truck.
18 Kind of staged the trucks, you know, spread them out a little bit. We stayed just right
19 there the next morning with a convoy going in. I guess we had a company of infantry
20 going in. Of course, we was artillery support. Going in, we lost a truck. As a matter of
21 fact, I don't know why. It might have been—I don't know why. That was Tom's truck.
22 They lost a truck. They had to sit out there on the side of the road all night. I don't
23 remember why I wasn't on the truck. I did some FO'ing while I was there too. I might
24 have been with them. I don't know which infantry company. But anyway, when we got
25 there, I went back to the guns. That's another thing I forgot about Phu Bai. I did do some
26 FO'ing there. I took OJT (On the Job Training) there.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JW: It wasn't a real eventful time. That's what made me think maybe it was a
29 calm time all over Vietnam because we really didn't—around Phu Bai there, there wasn't
30 that much going on. I guess I was with the infantry company going up. I think I was. I
31 think I went to the infantry company the night before and went up with them on the same

1 convoy. But anyway, I didn't stay with them, I just rode up with them. We passed Tom's
2 truck sitting on the side of the road. That's right, they started hollering at me when I went
3 by. Man, I wanted to off of that infantry truck and get down there with my guys, you
4 know?

5 JS: Right, right.

6 JW: But I knew better. They had to spend the night out there. It was uneventful.
7 Tom said it was quite scary sitting on the side of that road cause it's only a quick two out
8 of Con Thien.

9 JS: Right.

10 JW: They must have left a platoon or something there with them—the infantry
11 guys. So, they had protection. No, they didn't neither. The only thing they had—they sent
12 a duster out. That's what it was. They sent a duster out and that was the only protection
13 they had. That duster on the way in, it hit a mine. It blew up. It was sitting on the side of
14 the road, an Ontos. Lost a real good friend on an Ontos. I hadn't really thought about him
15 a lot lately. Santiago, that's all I called him. I don't know what his first name was. He
16 was a gunner on an Ontos. Boy I tell you, good man. Anyway, we pulled into Con Thien.
17 We started digging in and they had a TD-15 there because there was a lot of Seabees
18 there. We told them where we wanted parapets and they put them in. They dug out holes
19 for them and they asked us if we wanted to dig us a bunker out. I didn't want no bunker.
20 I'll just dig my own hole. It was like it was the first time, everybody just dug their hole
21 down about four or five foot and climbed in it. It's just big enough for one—make a
22 smaller target. If you was in the open up there, to me it was scarier than Khe Sanh
23 actually, for some reason. I guess we had maybe 10,000 rounds dropped on us in those
24 thirty-four days.

25 JS: Oh, wow. Was it mostly—

26 JW: It was artillery rockets.

27 JS: Artillery rockets, okay. 10,000, wow.

28 JW: That's probably a rough estimate. I know we had a lot. I know one day, I
29 mean, it was constant. I know for about twenty-four hours, a couple days. When I say
30 "constant", it was constant. We shot back—oh hell, I don't know. We run out of ammo

1 again, I know that. I remember the canisters just being stacked up all around the parapet,
2 you know.

3 JS: Right.

4 JW: I was loading the guns, I guess. It seemed like close to twenty-six, twenty-
5 seven hours we constantly shot. But anyway, it was good training for what was to come
6 though, that's for sure. We had a recoilless rifle sitting over in North Vietnam. We called
7 it "Two o'clock Homer." Every day at two o'clock, it was just like the monsoon season.
8 Every day at two o'clock, that guy would shoot one or two rounds and then pop back in
9 his hole. We called him "Homer" for some reason, I don't know why. He never hit a
10 thing. Not that I remember anyway. I don't know if he was actually really shooting at us
11 or just shooting H&Is. I don't think we ever got the guy. Other than that, it was just a lot
12 of shooting. There wasn't nothing. There was just a lot of shooting and return fire, I
13 guess. We fired a lot of missions. Took a lot of rounds but nothing. Of course, they
14 couldn't get to us from the north. I don't think they ever even probed the wires on the
15 south. Well, I guess they were kind of afraid of getting shot by their own people, I guess.
16 I don't know, but just never had a whole lot. Just everything came out of the north, that
17 was mostly artillery. It was that buffer there. They had about a mile buffer between us
18 and them. First Con Thien, where they dug it out. Mostly just, I guess a lot of small
19 tangle-foot and brush and things, just to slow them down. That was more or less an
20 artillery duel, I guess. They seemed to get out and sometimes they wouldn't duel with us
21 for some reason. They would get us busy, get us going. They wouldn't go toe-to-toe with
22 us, I guess with artillery because they couldn't put as much in the air as we could. Of
23 course, they had to watch for the air strikes and everything too because the artillery
24 placed the airstrikes up behind the mountain or the hill there. What's in front of us, I
25 guess a hill. It wasn't a real mountain. I guess the hill—they did a lot of damage on the
26 backside of that hill where were using others for indirect fire. I guess we was about four
27 miles apart. Those 05s did a lot of shooting. We had canisters as high as our parapet wall,
28 all the way around it in that one fire fight—well, that one mission. They seemed to stay
29 out. It was raining or something. Anyway, you couldn't get airstrikes in. Somehow, I
30 don't know whether it was a recon team or Green Berets or what it was up on the hill, but
31 they were actually in North Vietnam there and they was spotting targets for us. As long

1 as they could find a target, we would shoot. They'd spot them, we'd shoot them. But
2 anyway, that was two months of shooting, constant shooting, and hiding. That was about
3 it—getting in your hole.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JW: You didn't get out and move around. The only time you got out of the hole—
6 you know, because sniper fires and everything else. They would bring snipers up there
7 and they would snipe at us, so you didn't get out of your hole much during daylight
8 except go out get supplies of the truck or something. We did that real fast. You never
9 seen ten guys get on a truck. Five minutes later, the truck was gone. You didn't move
10 around a whole lot in the daytime up there. It didn't matter where you was at, you was
11 going to get sniped at. That was the only bad thing about it. I was more scared of the
12 snipers than I was the artillery because I don't think they knew—they just had a general
13 area of where we was. If that round hit me, I never would have known it anyway.

14 JS: Right.

15 JW: Sniper fire always scared me because I was afraid of snipers. You never
16 knew when they was going to shoot at you.

17 JS: Right. Yes, sir. Did you guys take many casualties during Con Thien?

18 JW: Nope. We sure didn't. That's why I say I don't even think there was a whole
19 lot Marine casualties at second Con Thien. I don't understand why. When I say "a whole
20 lot", it's nothing compared to Khe Sanh or anything like that.

21 JS: Right, right.

22 JW: My outfit—we had lost a couple of FOs. A couple guys got shrapnel, but I
23 don't think we lost anybody. Another one of them times the Good Lord was with us.

24 JS: Yes, sir. Speaking of FOs, I know you mentioned that you had done a little bit
25 of forward observing by this point. Could you talk a little about that? What a forward
26 observer did, that type of thing.

27 JW: Well, I more or less just went out and—I had forgotten all about that. I just
28 went out with an infantry outfit and when we needed artillery help, you'd just call back in
29 and give your location. They would just tell them how far and FDC, Fire Direction
30 Control Center, would take your call and plot the shot, and it would come in. Just more or
31 less like surveying, you know. You just take where you was at, your front different points

1 in front of you, and then you shot a back azimuth. They could pretty well pinpoint where
2 you was at, where you wanted the shot, and then you just more or less just adjusted the
3 shot. You know, where it was needed to go up or down, or left or right, or whatever. It
4 probably fired two rounds. I like to have two rounds because that way, you could get a
5 better idea of which way to move it, forward or backwards or left or right. Once you got
6 them zeroed in, it was artillery's turn to play games. You know what they say about
7 artillery, don't you?

8 JS: What's that?

9 JW: Without artillery, it brings some dignity to a brawl, that's all.

10 JS: (Chuckles) I think I have heard that before.

11 JW: Yeah, I thought you might have heard that one. What was the other one?

12 Artillery is the king of battle.

13 JS: Right, yeah. I've heard that too.

14 JW: Then, you had to go out and count the bodies. Now that, I hated. I recall one
15 mission that I had to count—I know 250 bodies. That kind of sticks with you.

16 JS: Oh, wow.

17 JW: Try to forget that.

18 JS: Yeah.

19 JW: Anyway—

20 JS: All right, about being a forward observer, was that a volunteer thing? Or—

21 JW: Yes, sir.

22 JS: Okay.

23 JW: Well, they had people that were schooled with it but sometimes they didn't
24 last very long. Then, you just had more artillery than you had FOs.

25 JS: Right, okay.

26 JW: Had more artillery than you had FOs, so you could go to the First Sergeant,
27 or the gunny or whatever, and tell them you would like to be an FO. They would give you
28 OJT. I just don't talk about that much, that's all. I could understand why some of the
29 infantry guys are the way they are. I can tell you that.

30 JS: Right. I don't want to ask you too many more questions about that then, but
31 would you talk about what made you decide to volunteer for that, to be an FO?

1 JS: Other than it seemed it seemed like a good idea at the time?

2 JS: Uh-huh, right.

3 JW: Will you accept that?

4 JS: Sure.

5 JW: I don't know. I don't know why I did it or what made me do it. It's just
6 something that was needed. So, I just did it.

7 JS: How many times did you do it? When you were an FO.

8 JW: Oh, maybe a half a dozen.

9 JS: Okay.

10 JW: It wasn't a whole lot. Actually, it was an officer's billet. They would get
11 officers to come in and medal of tour, the end of tour, or whatever. So they would go out
12 and do it. Then, when they didn't have an officer, they would come get one of us, a
13 volunteer. For some reason, they just couldn't keep enough officers wanting to do it.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JW: I didn't like that part. That wasn't the happiest part of my life, especially
16 doing the body counts. To this day, I don't know why they needed a body count to send
17 back to the United States. That was the most saddest thing they ever asked an American
18 soldier to do—is to count bodies. Let him go ahead and do his job, take care of your
19 wounded and dead, and let them take care of their wounded and dead. Don't worry about
20 how many. Of course, I'm from West Virginia now, I guess. I guess I'm from Kentucky
21 under West Virginia influence. I have to take my shoes off and throw my pants down to
22 count to twenty-one now. By now, it's twenty and half, I think. I'm sixty-three years old
23 now, come on.

24 JS: (Chuckles) Right, all right. Anything else we should say about Con Thien?

25 JW: I think—what I've heard over the years, I don't know for sure I've heard it,
26 but I heard it was the third longest battle in Marine Corps history. Of course, Khe Sanh
27 was the longest—seventy-seven days. I think Iwo Jima has fifty-five days. I think thirty-
28 four or thirty-six days at Con Thien was third longest. A lot of people don't understand
29 that battles don't last very long. It was more or less like it was in the Civil War. Where
30 the two armies met, that's where the battle was. I don't think that they actually—I'm sure
31 there was some planning it, if they knew exactly where they was. A lot of times, you

1 never made the objective. Everywhere they'd run into us or we ran into them, that's
2 where the battle commenced. Places like Con Thien and Khe Sanh, of course they were
3 planned. A siege is always planned. I don't think there was that many Marines at Con
4 Thien as we had at Khe Sanh. I could be wrong. I think there might have been a battalion
5 infantry out there, I don't know. You know, three or four companies. I know we shot for
6 all of them. I know that. We were the only artillery outfit, that was for sure.

7 JS: Okay, all right. Did your unit remain there much longer after the battle ended?

8 JW: No. We went back to Dong Ha and started shooting out of Dong Ha. That
9 was another place that was kind of like Phu Bai. It was in the rear—rear as you could be,
10 I guess. If you want to call it your rear cause it wasn't that far from North Vietnam, so
11 you can call it a rear. We was up on a high hill there. I guess Dong Ha was on a plateau,
12 they had a big air base there. It was a little higher ground than Phu Bai was. We stayed
13 there until the month of December. Come out of there in late November—out of Con
14 Thien in late November, went to Dong Ha for about a month, and then Khe Sanh blew up
15 in a month and a half. When Khe Sanh blew up, I was a short timer by that time.

16 JS: Right, right.

17 JW: It wasn't very memorable because there was a lot of brasses at Dong Ha. You
18 still had to wear your flak jacket and your helmet all the time. You know, I recently
19 picked up a helmet. My God, I'd never think the thing was that heavy.

20 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

21 JW: I don't ever remember them being that heavy or—I picked up a flak jacket
22 too, I couldn't believe how heavy they were. I just don't remember them being that
23 heavy, you know. It was like putting a shirt on with a baseball cap. Them things were
24 pretty heavy. You ever picked one up?

25 JS: Yeah, I have.

26 JW: They're pretty heavy, aren't they?

27 JS: Yeah, they are. I was surprised how heavy they were the first time I picked
28 one up.

29 JW: I was surprised that you wore them like a shirt though, every day.

30 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

1 JW: I guess that's what happens when you're young. You just get used to it. I
2 really never dreamed they were that heavy in my life. Of course, I haven't had one on my
3 head in forty years or put a flak jacket on in forty something years. I had my wife pick
4 them up. She was surprised too. She said, "You wore that thing every day?" I said, "And
5 night, most of the time."

6 JS: Right.

7 JW: That was another thing, at Phu Bai, I don't even think we wore flak jackets or
8 anything. You could carry them or something with you, but around the compound, I don't
9 even think we wore flak jackets. That's how laid back it was. Then, after we left there, I
10 don't think I ever took it off.

11 JS: Right. So at Dong Ha, you definitely did have to wear it though?

12 JW: Yes, it was close enough that you had to wear them. We were in range at
13 Dong Ha of many—a lot of the artillery and rockets. We got quite a bit, but it was mostly
14 they went for the airport. That was their big target—was the airstrip. They'd shoot over
15 our head and go to the airstrip. We was on the perimeter I guess—I guess the northwest
16 side of the perimeter. They wanted to inflict more damage within the compound than
17 where we were at. We never got a whole lot of rounds there. Again, we would catch a
18 sniper or two. It was pretty well fortified; it was a pretty high plateau.

19 JS: Right. Could you talk a little bit about Dong Ha itself? What it looked like and
20 the facilities there.

21 JW: It reminds you a lot of Da Nang. It was a lot of logistics there. It was more of
22 a Military-like compound. You had your little PX (Post Exchange) and things like that. It
23 was a secure and an unsecure area.

24 JS: Right.

25 JW: If that makes sense to you.

26 JS: No, it does.

27 JW: You felt a little safer. You could go—they had a club there where you could
28 get you a couple beers or whatever. PX, like I said, haircuts. You could take showers and
29 everything like that there. It was a pretty laid-back area too, but again, that was the place
30 where you definitely wanted to wear a flak jacket and helmet. Being so close, you never
31 knew. They bombarded the airstrip pretty good, more so than Da Nang. Of course, it was

1 a smaller area, a smaller target to hit than Da Nang. Dong Ha itself was—inside the
2 compound, it was decent. Like I said, they couldn't get up the plateau to get to us. The
3 only way they could get to us was come up the road. Sometimes, I had doubts about their
4 sanity, but I don't think they was that crazy is what I mean.

5 JS: Right.

6 JW: It was one of them places where you could take a breather and not have to
7 really worry. You didn't forget where you was because you knew you had to wear the
8 flak jacket and helmet there.

9 JS: Right.

10 JW: It was more like a battalion headquarter area or regiment. I'm trying to
11 remember which is bigger, battalion or regiment? I think it's regiment. Regimental
12 headquarters, I guess was there.

13 JS: Right, yeah.

14 JW: You had a lot of brass running around all the time. They were constantly
15 coming through everybody's area from time to time. Make sure that they were squared
16 away, I guess. I don't know. On the Northside, it was pretty well fortified with a lot of
17 infantry and everything. Again, you'd always have to shoot down at the enemy if you had
18 to shoot. They even had it cleaned out. The village itself was down below the plateau. If
19 they come in there, you could pretty well see the mortars if they tried to mortar us.

20 JS: Okay, right.

21 JW: Of course, the sniper teams—our mortar teams could take them out pretty
22 quick. It was a very good strategical safe place for us. If there was such a thing.

23 JS: Right.

24 JW: But compared to a lot of the other places, it was safe.

25 JS: Right. How long were you guys there?

26 JW: We were there for, I guess two months. A month and a half maybe. The first
27 of December, we come out of Con Thien. We went there until January 20th. We went in
28 on the 20th, the day before they started the siege—Khe Sanh. It was the 21st I think, of
29 '68. We went in the morning of the siege, as soon as the ammo dump quit going on the
30 first time.

31 JS: All right.

1 JW: We were there from the 1st of December to January 21st at Dong Ha. I don't
2 really know what you've been told but there was a lot of contact. I've seen a lot of stuff.
3 There was a lot of safe areas around Vietnam. Everything wasn't a constant battlefield.
4 JS: Right, right.
5 JW: It was like any wartime. I think the average combat days of a Vietnam vet
6 was like 260 days I think, in a one-year tour.
7 JS: Wow, right.
8 JW: Whereas compared to World War II, I think the average was like forty-four
9 days for a four-year tour.
10 JS: Right, yeah.
11 JW: I think Korea was, the actual combat time—this is an average now, this is
12 going for your rear guys and everybody else.
13 JS: Right, right.
14 JW: Some guys had it a lot worse than others. I don't remember exactly what it
15 was. Maybe thirty-five, twenty-five days of actual combat time.
16 JS: Okay.
17 JW: The guys in Iraq, the way I understand it, the average was like eight days.
18 JS: Okay.
19 JW: Again, I'm going to saying this is an average. They had a lot more people
20 probably been through Iraq than they did in Vietnam, and the other places.
21 JS: All right.
22 JW: World War II is of course, the more people you got, the lower the average is
23 going to be. I don't know what you've heard, and I really don't care what other people
24 have told you. I'm telling what I know.
25 JS: Right. Yeah, I have heard something similar to that. The combat time for
26 Vietnam was much higher than the other wars. Yeah, I've certainly heard that. Before
27 getting into Khe Sanh, why don't we go ahead and take a break for today?
28 JW: That sounds like a good idea because it's starting to rain right here, right
29 now.
30 JS: Okay, all right.

Interview with Jerry Williams

Session [3] of [3]

Date 3 August 2010

1 JS: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University,
2 continuing an Oral History interview with Mr. Jerry Williams. Today is August 3rd, 2010,
3 and this is interview session number three. Okay Jerry, last time when we left off, you
4 guys were at Dong Ha and were just about to move into Khe Sanh. When did you guys
5 receive those orders to go into Khe Sanh?

6 JW: About three o'clock, four o'clock, January 21st, 1968.

7 JS: Okay. Had the siege begun at that point?

8 JW: No, it didn't start until five.

9 JS: Okay. So you guys got there right before then?

10 JW: No. It was about the time we got organized and out of the way, it had already
11 begun.

12 JS: Okay, all right. Were you helicoptered in?

13 JW: Yes, sir.

14 JS: Okay. All right.

15 JW: When we got there, they dropped their guns. Is that part of your question?

16 JS: Well, I guess. I guess if you could just describe the situation when you guys
17 got there, what you saw and what you experienced.

18 JW: When we got there, the rounds were still going off in the ammo dump. They
19 put us up in the north end of the base. I guess it was north, I don't know. Anyway, the
20 choppers coming in setting guns down. We were disembarking. On our turn to go in, the
21 guy decided he didn't want to get close enough to the ground, I don't guess. Mortar
22 magnets, you know what I mean?

23 JS: Right.

24 JW: About six or eight foot from the ground, he dropped our guns. About three
25 foot from the ground he says, "Get out of here." They opened the back, and we ran like
26 hell.

27 JS: Right. Him dropping the gun from that, did that cause any damage to the gun?

28 JW: Well, no. I didn't think it did.

29 JS: Okay.

1 JW: Crew chief didn't think it did. I guess the CO and the gunny—we had a staff
2 sergeant who was active gunny. One of them other things that you don't like to talk
3 about, you didn't have a whole lot of confidence in them. I'm not going to go there,
4 neither one of them.

5 JS: Okay, sure.

6 JW: Because I don't begrudge any man for doing his job, it's just how he does it.
7 Anyway, Tom and I got—they called a formation, believe it or not, and I jumped in a
8 hole. Tom jumped in there with me. We refused to get out of it. The damn things were
9 shooting at us. They threatened us with court-martial, of course. I said, "You go ahead
10 and court-martial me. I don't care, but I ain't going to get my ass shot off for nobody."
11 Nothing came of that, thank goodness. Then, everything kind of mellowed out a couple
12 hours and they decided to move the guns. Well, they were trying to figure out where to
13 put the guns, actually. Of course, I don't think it was incoming, I think it was more or less
14 the dump blowing up than anything else.

15 JS: Okay.

16 JW: You could see it blow it up when we was coming in but we figured we would
17 be at the north end. I guess it was north, I don't know. Yeah, it had to be north because
18 they eventually pulled us down, right next to the ammo dump.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JW: But anyway, most of them were fairly new to country. I guess I was about
21 senior man by this time, in-country. Anyway, I didn't have a short-timers calendar. I just
22 lived day to day. I knew I was getting close.

23 JS: About how much time did you have left?

24 JW: I had fifty-four days.

25 JS: Fifty-four days, okay.

26 JW: Didn't think I would know that do you?

27 JS: (Laughs) So then, not to jump too far ahead, the siege was still going on when
28 your DEROS (Date Estimated Return From Overseas) came up then, correct?

29 JW: Yes, sir. On the fifty-fourth day, I went out on the beach. That's another hair-
30 raising story but we'll get to that one later.

31 JS: Okay, all right.

1 JW: Anyway, we had figured gunny and the CO decided they wanted to test fire
2 the gun. So we loaded it up and I went up and grabbed the lanyard, and I go shoot. Boy, I
3 thought they was going to go crazy. They made us rig up a hundred-foot lanyard on that
4 thing to pull. It was exposed. Everybody else was exposed and everything. If we had just
5 fired it and get the hell out of the way, we wouldn't have had to worry about it. They
6 decided they wanted to do all the "by the book" stuff. I mean, what they did was right and
7 by the book, but it wasn't the right place and the right time, I didn't think. I was just a
8 corporal. I had no idea what was going on. But anyway, we fired the gun. Then, they
9 moved us down. No, maybe I'm getting ahead of myself here. I'm getting a little mixed
10 up here today.

11 JS: That's all right.

12 JW: But anyway, that happened. They first took us in, they were still receiving
13 rounds. We couldn't get down, but the guy on the chopper dropped the door and then he
14 told us, "Once the door drops, you jump off." Of course, Tom being gun chief, he jumped
15 off. About the time he did, the crew chief on the helicopter hollered, "Get back in here."
16 By the time he did close the door, we took off. We had to leave Tom there for all night by
17 himself, man.

18 JS: Really?

19 JW: A couple hours anyway, it seemed like forever. We thought that was kind of
20 funny afterwards. They come up and asked him, "Did you just get off that helicopter?"
21 Tom says, "Yeah." They say, "Well, you better take cover." Anyway, a couple hours later
22 they finally got us in there. We got in close enough to where—my timetable has got to be
23 off here because I got all this stuff whirling in my head right now. Maybe I better hold off
24 a minute so I can get it together.

25 JS: Okay, that's fine.

26 JW: I've been having a lot of trouble lately sleeping and everything. I went to my
27 therapist yesterday.

28 JS: All right.

29 JW: Anyway, my life just growing up—I have an anniversary date coming, I
30 guess. Well, I guess it is.

31 JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

1 JW: But anyway, I was just about ready to go into Con Thien the first time, I
2 think about this time.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JW: I don't know, but anniversary dates get me screwed up. Anyway, getting
5 back into Khe Sanh. The first time we tried to get in there, they were still receiving
6 rounds and the gun was going off. That's when they open-doored and Tom jumped out.
7 He was standing there in the open. It was funny watching him when we took off. We had
8 to circle a couple more and then he set us back down about seven or eight o'clock. I think
9 about seven o'clock, we were there.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JW: Then, they started all that other stuff about dropping the gun and getting the
12 hell out of there, all that good stuff. I don't blame them. If I would have been smart, I'd
13 have stayed on the chopper, I guess. I couldn't do that though. No way I could do that.
14 Anyway, we got off and all the other bullshit started. Finally, at about nine o'clock, they
15 let us get the guns down to—what they did, they assigned two guns to Charlie Battery
16 113. We were one of the guns assigned to Charlie. They had taken one or two of their
17 guns up on the hill, 881. They assigned us to one of the gun pits. When we got in there, it
18 was blowed all to hell. It might have been where guys in A Battery got killed, I don't
19 know. I'm thinking maybe the A Battery was there, they just moved us around. I don't
20 really know. I know that the pit was in shambles. Still a lot of personal stuff in there and
21 things like that. It was kind of an eerie feeling because A Battery had lost, I think a whole
22 gun crew in there.

23 JS: Oh wow, all right.

24 JW: I don't know, I'm pretty sure that's where they were. That must have been a
25 hell of a thing. Anyway, we had to get a TD-15 come in there. It was a Seabee, I think it
26 was. Boy, they had gonads that you wouldn't believe. I loved them Seabees. We was
27 right next to the ammo dump. We was the gun closest to the ammo dump.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JW: There was still rounds going off, but he come in there. He dug the old bunker
30 out. It had been blown up, we had to rebuild it. The guy that rebuilt it, he had come back
31 and brought us some of that landing strip matting. He put that on top. It was already

1 blown up where they had blown the runway all to hell—where they had replaced it, I
2 guess. It was pretty mangled. He set it up on top of it and then we built our bunker around
3 the matting bags and boxes of dirt sand, whatever that stuff was, clay.

4 JS: All right.

5 JW: Old red clay. Khe Sanh is red clay, man. Man, when it rained, everything was
6 red. Then, it was dusty. Everything was red.

7 JS: Yes, sir.

8 JW: You were red. Your clothes were red. The guns was red. That wasn't the first
9 thing. The first thing we did, when you set the gun up of course after he said it was okay,
10 we started shooting pretty soon after that. My timeline don't seem to be on today. I can't
11 keep everything in one place. My mind is running all over the country.

12 JS: That's okay. It's not a problem.

13 JW: I'll do the best I can.

14 JS: Sure, not a problem. What was your position on the gun at this time? Had it
15 changed at all?

16 JW: No, I was still loading. Davis was the A-gunner. Tom, of course, was the
17 gunner and I was the loader. Phil didn't come on until later. You know, we lost Phil a
18 couple years ago. He had a massive heart attack. He was my—I don't know if I told you,
19 he was my sounding-block. Wake up two or three o'clock in the morning and didn't
20 know what the hell was going on, you always called Phil or Phil would call me.

21 JS: Right, right.

22 JW: I miss him, that's for sure. Anyway, I think we fired the rest of that day and
23 made the best we could.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JW: Then, we got our bunker together the next day and maybe later that
26 afternoon. I don't remember exactly when. Then the active gunnery sergeant, he come
27 over. He must have been a com guy because he moved us out of our bunker and put some
28 com guys in there for the night. Of course, we didn't use the bunker. We shot all night
29 long—H&Is or missions, or whatever. I don't remember. I think it was more missions
30 than anything. We shot all night. The next day we had to run them guys out. I remember

1 one of the guys on the gun, I'm not going to tell you who, it might seem as a threat to
2 them.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JW: One of them said, "If any of my men get hurt on this gun tonight, I'm going
5 to come blow your head away." That's what he told the gunnery sergeant. It was the staff
6 sergeant actually, active gunny. I believe he would have done it because if he wouldn't
7 of, I probably would of. But anyway, that's neither here nor there. That was just one of
8 them times when judgment overruled common sense, I guess. Judgment was lacking a
9 little bit, let's put it that way. Most of the night we snoozed around the gun when we had
10 a chance—if you could sleep. I don't think anybody slept that night. We shot a lot. The
11 next morning, they started again at about four o'clock in the morning.

12 JS: When you guys would—you said you snoozed around the gun there—

13 JW: I'm sorry, I didn't hear you.

14 JS: I'm sorry. When you said you snoozed there for a little bit around the gun,
15 when you had the opportunity, did you guys have foxholes dug near the gun?

16 JW: No. You can't dig a foxhole in a parapet. You could step in and break your
17 leg.

18 JS: Okay, all right.

19 JW: You have a three-foot parapet about thirty-five foot wide diameter next to
20 your foxhole. Anybody that could throw baseball could hit that thing, if they tried real
21 hard you know. It made a pretty good target. I never could figure out—I guess they had
22 very good ranging or target because they didn't hit a lot of the guns. Every once in a
23 while, they would get lucky and sneak a round in on a couple of them. As far as being
24 able to pinpoint their rounds, I don't think they pinpointed them very well. You get
25 mostly random shots. They could hit the mile circle. They couldn't hit the little circles.
26 Anybody that got hit over there at that time was unlucky—just happened to be at the
27 wrong place at the wrong time. That's my feeling.

28 JS: All right. What kind of incoming were you guys having at that point?

29 JW: At that point, I think they was—I would say from the whole base, there was
30 maybe 150, 200 rounds an hour, something like that. They would shift the guns from
31 north to south. They would just walk them back and forth across the base. Basically, what

1 we had to shoot at was—somebody saw a gun go off in that general area. I don't think we
2 did a whole lot of damage the first night because we didn't have no FOs out or anything,
3 that I was aware of. I think the hills got it pretty good that night. The next day, we
4 replaced our ammo where we could get it. They had started dropping it in or bringing it
5 on C-130s. I don't remember how many guns were exactly on that. I would say there was
6 about twelve 105s on the combat base I think, maybe less. We had our guys down there
7 scrounging for ammo as soon as it came in, you know.

8 JS: Right.

9 JW: What we could get, we got if we tried. We tried to get all we could. They was
10 rationing it pretty good because they didn't want bring it from one end of the base to the
11 other.

12 JS: Right. At this point, had the runway already been shut down? Were they just
13 pushing the ammo out?

14 JW: No. It stayed up for a few days, or a week or two after the siege started. They
15 were still pretty much—hadn't zeroed in on the runway at that time. When they did get
16 some guns zeroed in, that's when they shut it down. At present time, they were still
17 shooting off the base. If they get anything on the runway it was pretty lucky. I think they
18 got lucky with one the second or third day. I don't know the day. I don't know the
19 timeline.

20 JS: Sure.

21 JW: I can't give you days. I can't give you weeks. I'm not even going to try. I
22 don't even know.

23 JS: That's fine.

24 JW: It wasn't long after we was there. Evidently, the gun that hit the ammo dump
25 that got back into order or whatever—but anyway, he lowered his tube a little bit and he
26 got a C-130 when it was turned around at the south end of the runway, right next to the
27 ol' dump.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JW: Or new dump, whatever it was. It was where the dump blew up. It wasn't
30 soon after that—then they started making the helicopters quit coming in. They was pretty
31 close with them mortars. They could hit the runway with them mortars. Of course, they

1 couldn't do enough damage to those to stop a C-130 unless they hit direct. They run the
2 choppers off pretty quick. They could take the small 81s or whatever—50s. You know,
3 lob them out on the runway and it was pretty close. It was just a few days after that, that
4 we stopped bringing choppers in because every time a chopper would come in, them
5 rounds would fly. Started getting too close to them so I guess they decided it's best not to
6 do it that way anymore. I guess they got them shot up. I don't know if they were shot up
7 or what. The C-130s coming in there landing, they decided to stop that after they got the
8 runway repaired. A C-130 would usually come in from the north and go south, turn
9 around and kick stuff off as it was going back. The jumpmaster or loadmasters would
10 kick the stuff off the airplane.

11 JS: Right.

12 JW: He would pick up; he wouldn't even stop. He would just turn around and go.
13 That's the way I went out of there. You had to run and catch the plane if you was getting
14 on it. You got to the point where you get a lot of people going in and out because they
15 wouldn't even stop for the body bags. You had to carry a body bag if you was going to
16 get on the plane. You get one in and somebody else grabs the other and go with it. I don't
17 even know where I'm at.

18 JS: I had just asked you about, of course the C-130s bringing in resupply and
19 things.

20 JW: They'd come in and of course, they'd head for somewhere. All the infantry
21 would run for the ditches and the holes. All the artillerymen would run to the guns for
22 counter-fire. Of course, if we had a counter-fire we'd just put it on our fire back, where
23 they felt it might be or whatever. Just something to know that we was returning fire. This
24 is hard this time. I can't get Phil out of my head.

25 JS: It's all right.

26 JW: The rest of January, it was just getting ammo when we could—real stuff. I
27 mean, it was coming in every day, I think. One day, we got like 3000 rounds in eleven
28 hours. That's when we shot everything and we was returning fire. We shot everything in
29 our bunker. Everything was Beehive around us. I guess you've heard about those from
30 other people.

31 JS: Yes, sir.

1 JW: We shot everything with them. We shot everything we had. Shooting flares,
2 shooting illuminations, shooting HE (High Explosive), WP (White Phosphorous). We
3 shot everything we had in the bunker, but we run out of ammo. Then, we run out of
4 chow. We was very vulnerable at that point in time, I guess. We did that a couple of
5 times. Sometimes, the C-130 jockeys couldn't get in close enough, so they would try to
6 parachute it in. It would land outside the wire, I don't know. Tom, he wound up one
7 day—we was out of ammo—well, we was out of chow, we had some ammo. We was out
8 of chow. A C-130 come through there and he drops it. It all fell outside the lines. Tom
9 says, "Man, we got to get out there and get our share." He disappeared and about thirty
10 seconds later, he had come back with a mighty mite and a trailer. There we go. Me and
11 him go out through the wire. We was out there with this mighty mite trailer throwing
12 these C-rations in on the truck. Dirt was kicking up around us. We would laugh at each
13 other, I don't know why. We was throwing boxes and C-rations. You hear the bullets
14 pinging off the mighty mite and the trailer, and the dirt clicking up around your feet. I
15 guess there wasn't nothing else to do. If they was going to get us, they was going to get
16 us, might as well laugh about it. Anyway, we got some on the trailer. The mighty mite
17 got shot up pretty good, but good thing we was throwing C-rations. If I would have been
18 sitting in the seat, somebody else throw them on, I would have definitely got it because
19 my seat had about three or four holes in it. Then, we got back through the gate—through
20 the hole in the wire. I guess it was a gate of some kind, I don't know. Then, you pulled
21 the wire back. Guys coming our way, going to take our C-rations. No, no, no, no, no.
22 That wasn't about to happen.

23 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

24 JW: I just got up and sat up on top of the load. There wasn't that many in there,
25 maybe a week for a team of six, if that much. I used to sit down on top of it locked and
26 loaded and backed off. I always said that, "locked and loaded," but I never did figure out
27 how they did that.

28 JS: (Laughs) Right.

29 JW: I mean, I could understand the gun being locked and loaded but I don't see
30 how I could lock and load. It would seem to me like you would load it first and lock it
31 second.

1 JS: Right.

2 JW: I had a couple beers today, is that all right?

3 JS: That's perfectly fine.

4 JW: Okay, all right. I haven't had a bunch now.

5 JS: (Chuckles) Right, right.

6 JW: Anyway, we got back to the—then, some of the other gun crews come over
7 to us. Them guys, we would just run them off by looking at them. After that, Tom
8 disappeared with the mighty mite and the trailer, and he come “ditty-bopping” back. I
9 don't know, whatever. Never heard nothing about that neither. Of course, we shoot
10 sometimes for twenty-four hours a day. I would say there was never four hours of sleep at
11 any one time we was there. You now, I can't ever remember going to the bathroom up
12 there. (Laughs) I'm sure I did but I couldn't remember it.

13 JS: Right, right.

14 JW: Anyway, I never seen the CO all the time while I was up there since the first
15 day. Where were we?

16 JS: Let me ask you this real quick. You said that by that point you were pretty
17 much the senior man there. Was the CO a relatively new guy or had he been around a
18 while?

19 JW: He was real new. As a matter of fact, he was less than a month in-country,
20 maybe a little bit more. It wasn't very much. I don't think he had two months in-country.
21 The active gunnery sergeant, I think he got there about two days before we went into Khe
22 Sanh. I don't even remember his name. That's how much it was. I knew about him. He
23 got indoctrinated pretty quickly, I'm sure. Anyway, time went on. Of course, all we did
24 was shoot and then took a direct hit in the parapet. The only one was me and Davis
25 outside then. He got hit above the eye. I run and got doc. It was hitting the ground pretty
26 good, so I went and got the doc. What was his name? Haskins. That was his name, Doc
27 Haskins.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JW: He wasn't about four foot nothing little corpsman. His helmet looked like he
30 had—it looked like you could have put two heads in it. That's how small he was. I'll tell
31 you, he was a game guy. I tell you, he had some gonads as big as watermelons. He had a

1 job to do and he did it. He did it in such a way that you would—just unbelievable.
2 Anyway, after Davis got hit, then it was mostly just shooting here and there. Of course,
3 taking twelve, eleven hundred rounds every day—it was every day, twenty-four hours a
4 day. Mostly in daylight hours, that way they could see where they landed, I guess.
5 Nighttime, we would get the smaller stuff with mortars. We didn't get no big guns
6 because we could see the flash of those. They could, you know, flash brightens up
7 mortars, things like that. (Dog barks in the background) The dog sees a squirrel.

8 JS: Right. Let me ask you this. You had, of course already been through Con
9 Thien. Did you realize as you were going through Khe Sanh—was it the worst for you?

10 JW: In a sense, yeah. Because at Con Thien we didn't have parapets. We just had
11 about in the open where we could dig our hole so we could dig a one-man hole.

12 JS: Okay.

13 JW: I had small parapets. They weren't really reinforced much when we got there.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JW: First few weeks anyway, we didn't have the time, we was shooting. I think
16 eventually we did. Con Thien was a little bit more intense because the openness of the
17 place we was at. That had been a base for a couple of years the time before the siege. It
18 was built up fairly well. It wasn't blown to hell during the first hours of the siege when
19 the ammo dump went up. Then, the random hits. We had an FDC (Fire Direction Center)
20 guy stand outside the bunker. He was definitely drunk. I'm not going to recall his name
21 but took a mortar round right in the shoulder. You can imagine what happened to his
22 head.

23 JS: Yes, sir.

24 JW: Put it this way, pretty sure it was a closed casket when he went home. He was
25 decapitated.

26 JS: All right.

27 JW: (Unintelligible), nice guy, big guy. Must have used him for an ammo sneak, I
28 guess. Anyway, I don't know. Some time, after Davie got hit—he was laid about dusk.
29 Tom had always said he was fast on his feet. That afternoon, I proved him wrong. He had
30 a mortar round—they was just firing mortars at us, so it was close. It was an 81 round and
31 it landed right in front of the gun. He seen it and I seen it. The thing was still smoking.

1 He took off and I took off. Both of us were headed towards this mortar round. I got to it
2 first. I just tossed it over the parapet wall. Man, that thing went off. If it would have went
3 off inside, I don't know, I guess it would have gotten four of us at least. I just tossed it
4 over the wall. It no sooner hit the ground and Tom got up laughing, making jokes. "I
5 thought I was fast. You was the fastest man I ever seen in my life." Then you sit down,
6 and you think, "Why in the hell did I do that? Why didn't I just hit the ground or
7 something?" If it would have landed on top of ground like that, it would have probably
8 just blew straight up if it went off. Still, you never know.

9 JS: Right.

10 JW: I just thank him for being there beside me. I wouldn't have went by myself,
11 that's for sure. Anyway, I don't know the details, days or times. I can't tell you none of
12 that. A few days after that, we took a—it had to be a 122 rocket or something. Anyway, it
13 hit our parapet wall and when it did, it blew all of the fires out of our guns. Tom got hit in
14 the elbow. I got hit in the face, the head. Just about everybody was down. I don't know if
15 concussion or what. I think about five or six of us got hit that time. Of course, I run and
16 got Doc Haskins. While I was there at Charlie-med, they fixed my head up. Of course,
17 they wanted me to stay there. I wouldn't go. I had to get back to the gun, man. So he just
18 put a big old bandage on it and I run to the gun.

19 JS: Right.

20 JW: I knew they was down. There had to be something I could do. He didn't get
21 my name or something, I don't know. When Doc filled out the report, he just filled it out.
22 It took me thirty-three years to get my Purple Heart, man

23 JS: Oh wow.

24 JW: Thirty-four years, something like that. Of course, that was after I found Phil
25 and Tom. They had asked me if gotten it because I hadn't gotten mine. I said, "No.
26 Evidently, they didn't report it or what." But anyway, they wrote the statements. We sent
27 it off and I finally got it. There isn't a whole lot you can say about that.

28 JS: All right.

29 JW: I really didn't care. They decided they wanted me to have it. I just assumed
30 not knowing about it. What you do, you appease them guys. They insisted that I earned it
31 and I should get it. I was bitter at the beginning because I never got it, but after a while it

1 didn't mean that much, you know. Once I found out that them guys were alive, it even
2 meant less. It wasn't long after that, my fifty-four days was up in-country. I think I got hit
3 on the 23rd of February. I went out on the 28th of February.

4 JS: Okay, all right. Before we talk about leaving, I wanted to ask you, were the
5 arc light strikes going on at that point and could you see them?

6 JW: I could see them. That was funny. Yeah, they would come in. If you was
7 laying down, it would knock you out of your bunker or your feet if you wasn't careful.
8 That's how close they were.

9 JS: Right.

10 JW: Well, there are some war things I can tell you too. I saw them coming. You
11 know, little bits and pieces. I ain't ready to leave yet.

12 JS: Sure.

13 JW: Can we take about five minutes?

14 JS: Sure.

15 JW: I'm going to go get another cigarette. (Audio cuts)

16 JS: All right.

17 JW: I thought about a couple other things that were kind of interesting about the
18 place. You said arc light, that reminded me.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JW: One night we had this—they had run an arc light, I don't know, maybe nine
21 or ten o'clock at night, or something like that. It might even had been a day when—I
22 don't remember. It had to be daytime. We was kind of standing on the parapet wall
23 watching it. It was maybe 1500 meters away, maybe a little bit shorter—2000 feet,
24 something like that. It was pretty close.

25 JS: All right.

26 JW: That way, we could see the stuff flying up in the air when they hit something.
27 We're standing there watching it and all at once Tom yelled, "Ah!" Then he flipped
28 backwards off the wall. He was laying there on the ground. He had this piece of shrapnel
29 stuck to his flak jacket, right at his chest, right at his heart area.

30 JS: Oh, wow.

1 JW: Yeah, I know. He was laying there. It knocked the wind out of him. By the
2 time we got down there, he says, “I can’t look. Did it go all the way though? I can’t look,
3 it hurts so bad.” It was funny the way he was doing it because he was kind of crying, kind
4 of giggling, kind of scared, kind of unscared, the whole nine yards was running through
5 his mind, I guess. None of us really wanted to look. We didn’t see any blood or anything.
6 I reached down, I pulled it back, and I peeped in there a little bit. I said, “Oh, shit Tom.”
7 He says, “Oh, no, man. What the hell is going on?”

8 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

9 JW: I said, “Tom, I don’t want to tell you. Here Phil, you tell him.” Phil, he gets
10 down there and looked at it. He says, “Oh my gosh Tom. What are we going to do?” It
11 was that last plate. I don’t know. We had the old-style flak jackets where they had
12 different plates, I guess. I don’t know if it was Kevlar or asbestos, or whatever, the old-
13 style flak jackets. We never did get none of them new ones.

14 JS: Right.

15 JW: They were in there with the plates in them. I guess it was Kevlar plates, I
16 don’t know. Fiberglass or something. What had happened, it went through every bit of
17 his flak jacket. It was only about eight or ten inches long. It was sticking out of his chest
18 through his flak jacket. It hurt so bad he could hardly move. There was a bruise on him
19 the size of a basketball. It just got to the last plate, man. In that last plate, it stopped. It
20 didn’t go through that last plate.

21 JS: Oh, wow. Wow.

22 JW: We finally got him straightened out and settled down and told him what it
23 was. He liked to have a fit, man. He was still laughing, crying, jumping, hollering, and
24 screaming. I thought he was going to whoop both of our asses.

25 JS: (Laughs) Right.

26 JW: It was funny, you know. A couple days after that, had this Air Force jet come
27 in. I don’t generally drink beer during the day, and I generally don’t do it this time of the
28 month. I don’t drink a whole lot anymore. I don’t know, the way it’s been, I figured,
29 “Hell, I’d have one or two.” My telephone, hold on there.

30 JS: Sure, no problem.

1 JW: Anyway, this Air Force jet come in. We'd been getting some heavy, I guess
2 20 mm guns shooting at us, or maybe 40 mm. They kept shooting at us from the
3 southeast corners of the runway. They had sent a, I guess they called an air-strike on them
4 or something. The jet come in. He made a pass—fired the guns. I don't remember what it
5 was. I really don't remember. It might have been a Skyraider. No, he didn't have guns
6 with him. What it was, it had guns on it or a pod. I know it wasn't an F-4. But it came in
7 and assaulted the area right good. Nothing happened. He come around the next time. He
8 assaulted it again. He got him a secondary explosion. He hit something up there. I guess
9 he was thrilled or whatever. You've heard of an Air Force victory roll, right? Where they
10 roll the planes coming out?

11 JS: Right.

12 JW: He did that and another one opened up on him and assaulted his behind. He
13 was going down. He circled the base, we watched him circle the base. He go back down
14 over the south end. He bailed out. They went out and got him. That was funny as shit
15 though because of that thing. I mean, I say "funny", I don't mean "funny". It's just
16 something to break up monotonous hell. Anything to give us a good laugh. We thought it
17 was funny that he got the victory roll and then they powdered his behind. None of this is
18 really funny but again, like I said, anything to break up the thoughts. Just to get us to
19 laugh at something.

20 JS: Right, sure.

21 JW: I promise you, I don't think it would have been a laugh if he didn't make it.
22 But he made it out to the ground, and they got him. We actually had a force that went out
23 and got him. We knew they was coming. We could hear them. They was coming up to
24 the wires there on the south end of the base. They was tunneling up to us and we could
25 hear them at night. They got within a hundred yards of south of the base. They decide
26 that they wanted to battle from there, I guess. They set up a 106 recoilless rifle in broad
27 daylight. Of course, the 05s, they didn't have no mortars down on our end. The 05s on
28 the other end, it was too close. They didn't want to shoot the 05s at this gun. We tried to
29 lower our two, blowing up where we could get to them. We couldn't get them down low
30 enough for the parapet wall. It was in that close, underneath our guns. They had pretty
31 good position. Everybody over there is giving ideas and everything. I just come up out of

1 the bunker and took my rifle and started target practice. After about six of them come up
2 out of the ground—every time you would hit one, one of them would come up and take
3 his place, push him down the hole. I was more or less aiming for the breach block or a
4 round they was bringing up, or something.

5 JS: Right.

6 JW: I guess I was that good a shot. After three or four of them, they decided they
7 didn't want to do that no more. They pulled the gun back down. That night, they dropped
8 an arc light real danger close. Of course, we were told when it was coming down. I can't
9 imagine being underneath that. They hit within 500 feet of our wire, I think. I'm sure it
10 was. I can't imagine what the North Vietnamese soldiers felt like when that thing started.
11 That was devastating to us. They made us all get down in the bunkers, lay down on the
12 ground, make sure we were bundled up, and put anything we could over us to keep the
13 shockwave, a concussion down off of us. I mean, it would literally, while you lay down
14 on the ground, pick you off the ground six or eight inches and then drop you back down
15 on the ground.

16 JS: Wow.

17 JW: I don't know how close it was but boy, I'll tell you, it was one of them times
18 I actually felt sorry for them guys. I can't imagine being in an arc light strike attack. No
19 wonder they had to chain them to the steering wheels and things. You knew they did that,
20 didn't you?

21 JS: Yes, sir. Yeah, I have heard that before.

22 JS: You hadn't heard that?

23 JW: No, I have.

24 JS: Yeah, they'd chain them to the steering wheels. But anyway, anything else
25 you might know that might strike up a memory or something. I'm just lost today.

26 JW: That's fine. What do you think was about the closest that the enemy got to
27 you guys?

28 JW: Oh, hell. We could see the whites of their eyes, buddy. I guess they got
29 within about fifty yards of our perimeter.

30 JS: Oh, wow, okay. Tunneling, digging, getting closer?

1 JW: They were digging tunnels; they were digging trenches up. The way that
2 ground was, it was really hard to see them. You couldn't really see. I guess they would
3 tunnel it and then they collapsed it. I don't know exactly how they did it. They would
4 tunnel so much then they would collapse it. You could see the trenches. They was on
5 their way. Then, they found out that we spared no expense. We trusted the bombers. We
6 had a lot of trust in the Air Force, I'll say that, especially them B-52 pilots. I come back
7 about ten years later, maybe a little longer. I got a phone number of one of them guys. I
8 called, talked to him, and I thanked him for being there, man. Those B-52 pilots—boy,
9 they were good. They were really good. I've never seen a pilot that wasn't any good, put
10 it that way. As far I was concerned, anyway.

11 JS: Right. Were you guys also getting air support from other types of aircraft as
12 well?

13 JW: You know, I don't remember seeing any Sandies. They very could have very
14 well been there, I don't remember. If they did, they was few and far between. I think we
15 did get a couple of those one time. Those Skyraiders or Skyhawks, whatever they were,
16 those propeller jobs.

17 JS: Right, the A-1s.

18 JW: Yeah, had a lot of small jets come off the Navy carriers—Air Force. We had
19 air support. I'd like to seen more but it was kind of hard to do where we was at. Then,
20 they was getting so close to us.

21 JS: Right.

22 JW: I take that back. I did know one—I didn't know him, but you get tired of
23 asking questions, I'll tell you about him. That was the day I come out of Khe Sanh. It was
24 a Skyraider, that little, small jet that the Navy had. It had actually had one land one on the
25 runway there at Khe Sanh. They fixed it up and got it out of there before they hit it. That
26 kind that Senator McCain was shot down in. You know, that small—

27 JS: Oh, yeah. Oh, man. I can't remember what the name was.

28 JW: It was the mainstays for a carrier fleet, I think. But you know what I'm
29 talking about?

30 JS: Yeah, I do. I just can't think of the name of it for some reason.

1 JW: We had one of those land up there having some kind of mechanical failure. It
2 wasn't shot down or anything. He didn't have any bombs on him. He must have been
3 coming back from the north, you know.

4 JS: Right.

5 JW: They could stay there for the longest time before they got it fixed. They never
6 even fired it while it was down there, if I remember correctly. Probably couldn't figure
7 out what it was doing there. I can't think of anything else exciting that happened. I told
8 you about the guy that when we first got there was hanging from a tree, didn't I?

9 JS: No, you didn't.

10 JW: I didn't tell you that?

11 JS: Mh-hmm

12 JW: When we first came into Khe Sanh, there was a—I guess he was a North
13 Vietnamese, he was hung on about a forty-foot tree. Put a sign on him, "Welcome to Khe
14 Sanh."

15 JS: Right.

16 JW: It had "Compliments of 19," or something. I don't remember exactly who it
17 was. I don't want to say it was 19. I don't remember who it was. They sure had the motto
18 straight. I never seen the sign at Khe Sanh but they said there was one there, "Home is
19 Where You Dig It."

20 JS: Right. I believe I have seen a documentary that showed Khe Sanh that had that
21 sign.

22 JW: Yeah. That was in the early days I guess, because I don't remember seeing
23 the sign. Of course, it was blown all to hell by the time we got in there.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JW: I don't even remember it the first time. Evidently, it got put up after we had
26 been there. I just don't remember it. The first Khe Sanh, that was a pretty good place. It
27 wasn't too bad. The second time around, oh boy, it was—

28 JS: Right. Were things pretty heavy as far as incoming and all, when your
29 DEROS hit?

30 JW: When my what was hit?

1 JS: When your DEROS came up, when it was time to go home. Were things still
2 pretty heavy?

3 JW: Oh, yeah. It was winding down, but it was still pretty—I guess every two or
4 three days, they would hit us real hard. Of course, every time a plane would land or
5 something, they would hit us. You could feel the momentum shifting from the heavy stuff
6 to the downsizing.

7 JS: Right.

8 JW: It was still twenty, ten, fifteen days left. I don't know what. Fifty-four from
9 seventy-seven is what? I don't know. I can't count that good, fifteen days?

10 JS: Let's see, fifty-four from seventy-seven?

11 JW: Yeah.

12 JS: Let's see, twenty-three days.

13 JW: Twenty-three days, all right. It was starting to wind down then, I think. I
14 don't know—I'd had mortars in my hand for about four days before I could get a plane
15 out of there. I was pretty excited to get the hell out of that place.

16 JS: Right, right.

17 JW: I got to Dong Ha. I tried to get them to take their orders back, but they
18 wouldn't do it. They said, "No, you got orders. You got to go." So I had to leave the guys
19 there. I didn't want to do that. I tried to argue with them back at Dong Ha, but it did no
20 good. They had me orders to the next duty station. I had to fill a spot. But anyway, the
21 day that I finally got out of there was—Phil was making a mail run to Dong Ha. We
22 grabbed body bags and the plane went down to the south end, turned around, and then got
23 back up. As soon as it turned around, we took off. We was one of the first ones on the
24 plane. We sat up towards the front. Boy, I could hear the rounds hitting the plane. I just
25 knew that somebody's going to go down again. Started leaving the trail—we made it into
26 Da Nang. I don't know how—I don't know why we went to Da Nang instead of Dong
27 Ha. Evidently, he didn't think it was bad enough. As soon as we got to Dong Ha—I
28 mean, not Dong Ha, Da Nang is where we went.

29 JS: Right, okay.

30 JW: We went into Da Nang. As soon as we hit the runway at Da Nang, come to a
31 stop. You seen the crew chief going up the window, going up the ladder. The pilot and

1 copilot done jumped out, kicked the windows out, and they got out and left us in this
2 damn airplane. We followed them right out.

3 JS: Wow, right.

4 JW: Luckily, they undid it from the outside pretty quick. All the hydraulics was
5 shot up on the airplane. That kind of pissed me off a little bit. I don't know where the
6 pilot or crew chief, or any of them were. I guess I would have shot them if I would have
7 seen them. They left us in the airplane—didn't tell us nothing about it. When I see them
8 going out the window, it's about time they opened it. I was about ready to go right out
9 behind them. That was wrong, man. I guess they didn't want to panic. Maybe it was the
10 right thing to do. It just felt wrong at the time.

11 JS: Right.

12 JW: I guess that was the only Air Force pilot and crews I had any—it's a good
13 thing I didn't know who he was. I wouldn't be afraid to name names.

14 JS: (Laughs) Right. Was this a C-130?

15 JW: Yeah, 130 or 23. It might have been a 23, I don't remember. It seems like it
16 was a 30 but could've been a 23.

17 JS: Okay.

18 JW: For the past month I've been chain-smoking, not drinking too much. Just
19 been a bad time for me.

20 JS: Right.

21 JW: I go through these every couple years though, so it ain't nothing new.

22 JS: Right.

23 JW: People just don't want to understand. My wife, we'll be married forty years
24 this November—thirty-nine years, thirty-eight. Hell, I'll get it right in a minute.

25 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

26 JW: I'll get it right before November, I guarantee you. I think it's thirty-eight
27 years. She can understand, but she just can't understand why it keeps coming back. This
28 is something I've been living with the rest of my life.

29 JS: Right.

30 JW: It's a horrible thing. I think it was because while I was at Khe Sanh—one of
31 the mail runs, we had gotten a stack of *Stars and Stripes*. Of course, you know a few

1 weeks old. I'd learned that one of the guys that I grew up, he was in the 101st. Only been
2 in-country six weeks. I found out later before he got hit. His name was David Jamison,
3 went to high school with him—ran with him.

4 JS: Right.

5 JW: Then when I got to Dong Ha the next morning, my buddy Ron Dempsey—
6 that was the morning of the 28th, February. I get these dates mixed up. I'm sorry. It's
7 from the jives. It's not my fault.

8 JS: No, that's perfectly fine.

9 JW: Forty-five year old screwed-up memory here.

10 JS: That's all right.

11 JW: You know, I come out—I left the 6th of March. No, I left the 4th of March.

12 JS: Okay.

13 JW: I left country the 4th of March.

14 JS: All right. Out of Da Nang?

15 JW: Yeah, well I had to go to Dong Ha and then come back to Da Nang.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JW: I had to muster out.

18 JS: Right.

19 JW: Anyway, when I got there, the chopper just come out—just loading up. I
20 come in on a C-130 from Da Nang to Dong Ha. Another guy from home, Ron Dempsey.
21 It had to be the 28th, that's when he was killed. 28th of February, 1968. He was just
22 extended for his third tour. He just come back off a thirty days leave. I was coming off
23 and he was loading up on the 54 or 53 chopper, 53. I don't know. The one that had the
24 two blades on it. What was that? Is that a 53?

25 JS: Oh, the Chinooks?

26 JW: Chinooks, yeah.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JW: "You know where you're going don't you?" He said, "No—yeah, I know
29 where I'm going." He said, "That's okay." He says, "The Good Lord loves guys like me."
30 "Where's your flak jacket?" He said, "I don't got one." I took my flak jacket, took it off,

1 and threw it to him. I said, “It’s been good luck for me.” At fourteen clicks out of Khe
2 Sanh, they shot it down. It was all twenty-two aboard.

3 JS: Oh, no.

4 JW: The last thing I said to him was, “Ron, you don’t have to worry about it. Only
5 the good die young.” He lived about forty miles from me.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JW: Me and Davie—did I tell you the stories about them guys?

8 JS: I believe so.

9 JW: The five of us used to run around together?

10 JS: I believe you talked a little bit about it.

11 JW: We decided we were going to go and join the service. I wanted to go to the
12 Marine Corps. Brian wanted to go to the Marine Corps. Paul Price wanted to go to the
13 Marine Corps. Davie Jammers wanted to jump out of the airplane for some reason. He’s
14 still in the 101st.

15 JS: Okay.

16 JW: Don Burden, he said, “I’ll just go to the Navy. Where they put me is where
17 I’ll go.” He went to the Navy, and they made him a corpsman. Don and I’s paths crossed
18 in Okinawa. I was over, he was coming over a little after me. I’ve never Paul since we
19 left home, you know on leave.

20 JS: Right.

21 JW: He had just got married. He was a machine-gunner. Don was a truck driver.
22 Davie was an airborne ranger, or airborne. I don’t know if he was a ranger or not. I don’t
23 know if he got that far into it. He was airborne.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JW: While I was at Khe Sanh, I found out that Davie got killed. By that time, Paul
26 and Don were already gone. Ron went in on that day, the 28th. Never went back home but
27 one time. Then, I could have stayed about three days. Ain’t been back home since. Well,
28 I could go down on vacation and stay a couple days. I’d have to get the hell out of there.
29 That’s life, I guess. It makes you wonder. You know as close as we were, you say, “Why
30 me Lord?” The question that will never be answered in this world, I don’t guess.

31 JS: Yes, sir.

1 JW: I visit them all graves. I thought about the good times, talked to them just like
2 they was there. I felt like a baby, man. Crying so much. I can't go to the wall though. I
3 only live about fifty miles from it. I've been over there one time, see where it was at. I
4 could sit up there behind—got down to the street where I could cross over it and get
5 across. I don't remember the name of it. I sat on that corner for six hours. I couldn't cross
6 that street man. Cops got scared, they finally run me off and I went back home. Then, I
7 went down with Khe Sanh Veterans Association a couple years ago. I got a little closer,
8 but I couldn't get to the wall. I think I'll go up Christmas Eve this year and spend
9 Christmas Eve up there. How's that sound?

10 JS: Right, that'll be good.

11 JW: Think that would work?

12 JS: Yeah, that would be good.

13 JW: They won't run me off.

14 JS: Hopefully not.

15 JW: That's about my life there.

16 JS: Okay. Well, do you mind if I ask you a little bit about coming home and life
17 after Vietnam?

18 JW: No, I don't mind. Ask me anything you want.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JW: I was about six days out of Khe Sanh when I come home.

21 JS: Okay. All right. What was out-processing like?

22 JW: I was out-processed. I was processed to my next duty station in Okinawa.

23 JS: Okay.

24 JW: Once I hit the States, I was on my own. I was processed out there, so that was
25 pretty lucky.

26 JS: Okay. How much time did you have in Okinawa?

27 JW: About a day and a half. Just enough to clean up, get a haircut, get your stuff
28 out of holding, get your uniform on, and get the hell out of there.

29 JS: Okay.

30 JW: The process was pretty quick out of there.

31 JS: Did you go back on a Military transport or civilian?

1 JW: No, it was a civilian. Continental Airlines.
2 JS: Okay.
3 JW: Of course, I guess it was contracted or something to the government because
4 it was all military that was on there.
5 JS: Right.
6 JW: It landed in El Toro, California. I had an uncle that was a general in the Air
7 Force. At that time, he was stationed at George Air Force Base in Victorville. He picked
8 me up there at El Toro. He wouldn't let me come home until he straightened me out a
9 little bit. I was a mess. It's a good thing too. Mom and dad, neither one of them knew
10 how to handle me.
11 JS: Right.
12 JW: God knows what had happened. He kept me for about six or seven days,
13 calmed me down, real food in me, talked to me a lot. See a doctor out on the base, trying
14 to figure it out. And come home—I flew from LAX to Chicago and then I had to get a
15 fight to Evansville, Indiana.
16 JS: Okay.
17 JW: Boy, you talk about a lucky flight. They had some of the prettiest
18 stewardesses I think I ever had.
19 JS: (Chuckles) Right.
20 JW: There was only two people on the plane, just me and some other guy.
21 JS: Oh, really?
22 JW: Yeah. I guess they call it the red eye of Chicago. It left like three or four
23 o'clock in the morning—two o'clock in the morning got in there. I don't know. We left
24 dark and got there when it was daylight so that would be around four o'clock, I guess,
25 three o'clock. Anyway, I know they couldn't feed me enough booze, I know that. It
26 didn't cost me nothing either. Of course, my brother was there to meet me at the airport. I
27 called him from Chicago.
28 JS: Right.
29 JW: It was maybe—I say six days, it could have been ten days, I don't know. It
30 was between six and ten days I was back at home out of Khe San.
31 JS: Right.

1 JW: I was a wreck.

2 JS: On your transition home, did you run into or see any of the war protesters?
3 Anything like that?

4 JW: I seen them. You know, like if they was at the gates of El Toro. Uncle
5 Tommy, he was an old vet. He didn't give a shit, he would run them over.

6 JS: Right.

7 JW: He didn't stop for them. When they waved him through the gate, he just kept
8 on getting it.

9 JS: (Laughs) Right.

10 JW: I had an encounter. It was in DC, I think. I was going to Camp Lejeune after
11 my leave was up. I had an encounter with a couple of long-haired freaky type, you know.
12 I think that's the way the song says. I'm not saying—I got nothing against long hair,
13 believe me. I mean, I'm not bitter. They did what they thought was right. I just did what I
14 thought was right. They had no right messing with me. I told them flat out, "Get the hell
15 away from me or I'll kill you. I'm not lying." They went on their way and leaved me
16 alone.

17 JS: Right.

18 JW: I think they started, "How many babies did you kill?" I look them square in
19 the eye and tell them it was only one that I knew of. Whole other story. I'm going to get
20 that one, okay?

21 JS: All right, sure. After getting back, you had a short leave before going to Camp
22 Lejeune?

23 JW: Yeah. I had thirty days.

24 JS: Okay. Right.

25 JW: Wasn't that much.

26 JS: How much time did you have left in the Corps?

27 JW: I still had two and a half years. I was with them for four years. They extended
28 me a year for reasons I can't tell you, but they extended me a year. I think it was—then
29 they sent me a duty station where at the time, my MOS (Military Occupational Specialty)
30 was given up to eighteen months cuts out of the service for veterans.

31 JS: Right.

1 JW: Then, they sent me to a duty station where that did not apply. So why they
2 extended me, I have no idea. I had to spend five years instead of four.

3 JS: Right.

4 JW: I always thought it was the MOS because—my secondary MOS, not my
5 primary as an FO because it was a pretty hard job to get somebody to do that.

6 JS: Right.

7 JW: That's just a guess on my part. I don't know. I do know why but can't tell
8 you that.

9 JS: Okay.

10 JW: That's just what my first guess was, put it that way.

11 JS: Right, okay. Did you have any desire at that point to stay in or were you about
12 ready to get out?

13 JW: Oh, no. I was a clear Marine. I was at that time. Then, about '69, PTS (Post-
14 Traumatic Stress) started kicking in. '68— '69, yeah. About a year and then it kicked in. I
15 was still a full-on Marine at that time. It's all I ever wanted to be in my entire life was a
16 Marine. PTS kicked in, started screwing up, drinking, running with women, and
17 everything else. After a year of putting up with that shit that time, they done sent me to a
18 psychiatrist and decided, military people—they said there is something wrong with me,
19 but they didn't know what it was. They blamed it on the drinking after I got out.

20 JS: Right.

21 JW: I went to the VA, said all my problems was because of my drinking. Well, I
22 quit drinking—thirty years. Now I just drink a beer every once in a while. I've had three
23 today though. You better watch out, I might pass out on you. I just drink a beer every
24 once in a while, but other than that I don't. I'm not considered what you call a "drinker".

25 JS: Right, okay.

26 JW: That was my life. The first seven years of my marriage—well, my first wife,
27 she didn't even last a year. The second one is still lasting thirty-nine years so far—thirty-
28 eight years. I'm going to get it right before this day's over.

29 JS: (Laughs) Right.

30 JW: She's still with me. I tell you right now, if it wasn't for her, you wouldn't be
31 conducting this interview because having somebody doesn't kill me. I couldn't sit down

1 and ordered a better wife. If the Good Lord gave me a pencil and paper saying, “Write
2 down the best wife you could ever pick. What would you pick?” I couldn’t have picked
3 her out. So I guess he picked her out for me.

4 JS: Oh wow, right.

5 JW: The first seven years of our marriage was pure hell, buddy. We both knew
6 something was wrong. We had no idea what it was.

7 JS: Right.

8 JW: We thought it was drink. So I quit the drinking like I said, for thirty years. It
9 never got no better. You know, life got a little easier. A drink can mess you up, man,
10 especially if your head is already messed up somehow.

11 JS: Right.

12 JW: But then, my head started hurting. It hurt for twenty years after I come back.
13 The only way I could get to sleep, drink. Drink myself—passed out just about every
14 night. But the last seven years was pure hell. I got physical and violent. If I was her, I
15 wouldn’t have put up with my shit. You ever find a woman like that—I don’t know if
16 you’re married or not.

17 JS: I am.

18 JW: You better just hold on to her. Everything you got because they’re there
19 through thick or thin.

20 JS: Right.

21 JW: If you ever met her, you would agree that she is one of the nicest people you
22 ever talked to in your life.

23 JS: Yes, sir.

24 JW: I can’t say enough about—I was very, very fortunate in finding her, or found
25 me, or whatever it was. My life would have been forfeited a long time ago, I’m sure. I
26 would have either drank myself to death or somebody would kill me in a back alley, in a
27 fight or something. I just wasn’t no good for anything. I didn’t know why. After I sobered
28 up, they started talking about the PTSD bullshit in 1980. That’s when I finally decided to
29 get sober. I married my second wife in ‘72. It was pretty good for the first couple of
30 years. It just took over my life completely. I was a complete—I don’t know. I don’t know
31 what I was. I don’t have the words to describe it. To top it all off, man I still get

1 compliments. She's not only smart, she's also a beautiful lady. I've had compliments
2 from many that didn't even know her. They would compliment how nice looking this
3 woman was, then she would come over and peck me on the cheek or something. It makes
4 you feel pretty good.

5 JS: Right. (Chuckles)

6 JW: She stuck with me to this day. Man, there's not a day that goes by that I don't
7 try to apologize making up for the way I was. She would just hold me and tell me that it's
8 okay. Don't get me wrong, it hasn't been all peaches and cream. We've had our rounds,
9 but nothing to the point where she wanted to leave me. There's nothing we couldn't work
10 out. Are you married?

11 JS: Yeah, I am.

12 JW: Anyway, you go to bed mad? I mean, if it's too personal, you can ask me.
13 I'm going to interview for a little bit.

14 JS: No, that's fine. It has happened, sure.

15 JW: That's one thing the wife and I had always heard, "Never go to bed mad."
16 There's been many nights I would get into a cold sheet. I'd feel like a chunk of ice laying
17 there beside her with her back to me.

18 JS: (Laughs) Right.

19 JW: We always figured that even though we don't care how bad we were at night,
20 get a good night sleep on it. If it hasn't worked itself out by the next morning, you need
21 to sit down and talk about it.

22 JS: Right, right.

23 JW: That worked for us. I don't never give nobody that advice of "Don't go to
24 bed mad". It happens quite a bit.

25 JS: Yeah.

26 JW: Well, not no more but it used to when you was younger of course. You get
27 this age, and you don't get mad at anything. After thirty-eight years, we've done been
28 mad at everything. So hell, there isn't nothing left to be mad about. When she comes
29 home this evening and catches me with this beer, she'll probably be mad at me. She'll get
30 over that quick too.

31 JS: (Chuckles) Right.

1 JW: Jason, I want to say that I really appreciate what you're doing, and I think it's
2 a great thing. A lot of people, maybe not enough, will listen to these tapes and know what
3 we went through. People like you that make me proud to be an American, that you really
4 still care enough to want to let people know exactly what went on.

5 JS: I appreciate that, and it's been my honor to talk to you about it.

6 JW: Believe me, it was really my pleasure. I still can't sit down and talk to my
7 son. He's thirty-seven years old like this. I didn't start talking to him until about six or
8 seven years ago about this. Six or seven years ago, I would have probably told you, "Go
9 to hell", if you would have asked me that. I've been getting a lot of good counseling. I
10 guess I took it upon myself in the early '90s to get it. I went through a lot of personal
11 outside counseling. The VA—I had mentioned to them and I had a family to support, I
12 couldn't just stop when they said, "Here's a class. You got to be there." I couldn't do
13 that. They didn't seem to understand that, so I had to find my own psychologist to work
14 with me after hours or Saturdays, or whatever. I was fortunate enough to know that
15 something was wrong, and I needed it. Of course, they told me it's best to talk it out. My
16 life seems a little simpler now that I talk about it more and more. Anybody's got any
17 second thoughts about it, you should talk it out. You know, it's hard sometimes. I can't
18 give you the whole story. I wish that I could, but there's just some things that I can't talk
19 about.

20 JS: Sure, I understand.

21 JW: To me, it's a real honor to speak to you on the phone and maybe someday I'll
22 get to meet you and thank you personally. What you guys are doing there, not only you,
23 but the whole group of you there, it's fantastic. I think it's one of the best things that's
24 happened to a Vietnam vet.

25 JS: Well, thank you Jerry. I appreciate that.

26 JW: Tell your lovely wife that I said, "Hi." And that it's okay to go to bed mad.

27 JS: Will do.

28 JW: All right, you through with this?

29 JS: Yeah, we can go ahead and bring the interview to a close.

30 (Interview audio ends)