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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with John Mateyko  
Conducted by Jason Stewart  
Date: 22 July 2010  
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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

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1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech  
2 University conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. John Mateyko. Today is July  
3 22, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of  
4 Texas Tech and Mr. Mateyko is joining me by phone from Lansing, Illinois, is that  
5 correct?

6 John Mateyko: That is correct.

7 JS: Alright, why don't we begin with a little bit of biographical information? First  
8 of all, could you tell me when and where were you born?

9 JM: I was born in Hammond, Indiana, in 1940.

10 JS: Okay, could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were their names  
11 and what did they do for a living?

12 JM: My father's name was Robert. He was an engineer, but he wasn't a graduate  
13 engineer, more like a draft man for U.S. Steel on the south side of Chicago.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JM: When he met my mother, my mom was what these days would be called a  
16 dental assistant for Dr. Ritter in Whiting, Indiana. They were married in '39. I was born  
17 and raised in Calumet City. It's a small—it's the second suburb south of Chicago.

18 JS: Okay, so you grew up there in that area?

1 JM: Yeah.

2 JS: Okay, could you tell me just a little bit about growing up and what that was  
3 like for you?

4 JM: You know, we'd get out of school and be at the playground or come home  
5 and grab a snack off to the playground almost every day except in the harsh winter. We  
6 had to be home by the time the six o'clock bell rang at Saint Andrews Church for dinner.  
7 The normal baseball games, baseball during the summer. Swimming during the summer  
8 at the city swimming pool. Boy Scout Camp during the summer. High school, I earned a  
9 letter on the swim team.

10 JS: Alright, as a kid growing up, do you have any memories of World War II?

11 JM: Uh, the only thing I remember is afterwards—my family's Hungarian and  
12 Austrian and we had relatives over there and I remember packing boxes of clothing  
13 because of the devastation over there. During the war, sending boxes I'd say three or four  
14 times a year if not more often to relatives in Eastern Europe. Well, Europe and Eastern  
15 Europe. Also, the Boy Scouts had paper drives and we saved—we took apart wrappers  
16 that individual sticks of gum came in. We peeled the aluminum off of it and make an  
17 aluminum ball. When the aluminum ball got about the size of a sixteen-inch baseball, I  
18 don't know where we took it. We turned it into someone. The Boy Scouts had paper  
19 drives. I remember rag drives. I don't remember any metal drives. I think those were  
20 before the war and I was too young to remember that.

21 JS: You mentioned family in Europe during the war. Did they make it through  
22 the war alright? Did everyone make it through?

23 JM: I don't know. I was five years old when the war ended, and I just know what  
24 we did. There was never any discussion about who died in World War II or anything.

25 JS: Right, yes sir. Well, did you have any relatives in the U.S. that served in the  
26 war?

27 JM: My mother's youngest brother who is my Uncle Nick. He was on the USS  
28 Hornet. I think one of my aunt's husbands, Uncle Bill. I think he was in the service, but  
29 no one ever mentioned it.

30 JS: Okay, yes sir. Well, another question along these lines. Growing up in this  
31 time period whereas a very young kid and World War II is going on and then of course

1 the aftermath, did that create any sort of interest on your part in the military or anything  
2 like that as a kid?

3 JM: When I was—the last part of my grade school years there were a lot of books  
4 written by veterans, a lot of them. I think I read every submarine book about the subs in  
5 the pacific that were printed that I could find. I read the combat engineering books and  
6 my goal in life, I think when I was in the sixth or seventh grade was to become a combat  
7 engineer. I thought that was the neatest thing in the world to just blow up everything.

8 JS: Right, yes sir. Where'd you go to high school?

9 JM: Thornton Fractional Township High School, went through in four years. I got  
10 a letterman in swimming and National Honors Society, Spanish Club. I worked a part  
11 time job my senior year. In the fifties, it was not hard—well, it wasn't that easy, but it  
12 wasn't that hard if you really wanted to, to get a job in the steel mills when you were  
13 seventeen.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JM: No one did the background checks they do today.

16 JS: Right.

17 JM: There were a lot of small industries related to the steel industry so during the  
18 summer—probably if you wanted to, you could probably get a job between your  
19 sophomore and junior year. But between your junior year and your senior year, it was not  
20 unusual for us to be working in the steel mills or related industry. We had, oh god, had  
21 three steel mills on the Southside of Chicago and then over in Indiana at Indiana Harbor  
22 there were a couple of steel mills. Then we had three refineries in Whiting, Indiana. So,  
23 you know, if you wanted to hustle and go make—I think we were making a dollar eighty-  
24 five or two dollars an hour which, in the late fifties, that was a ton of money. Then you  
25 throw in overtime and double time and a half for Memorial Day and Fourth of July and  
26 there was more money that we could do with.

27 JS: So, plenty of opportunities for sure then.

28 JM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, all kind of jobs.

29 JS: Well, what year did you graduate from high school, '58?

30 JM: 1958.

1 JS: '58, okay. During this time, were you paying attention to what was going on  
2 in the world with the rise in tensions in the Cold War?

3 JM: Uh no because I found out that '57 Chevy's and chicks were more important.

4 JS: (Laughter) Right, sure. Well, after graduation was it onto college at that point?

5 JM: Yeah, our high school had a very good counseling system. Three years  
6 before—and I'm not exactly sure of the clash here, okay? But when I was a freshman in  
7 high school one of our graduating seniors got an appointment to Colorado Springs, the  
8 Air Force Academy. I don't know if Earl went to the first class or if that was the second  
9 class, okay? But he was in the first or second class at Colorado Springs. Then the man  
10 that was a year ahead of me, Bryan Schultz, Bryan got an appointment to West Point, and  
11 I got an appointment to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York.  
12 That is probably the best kept secret in all of academia. It's a four-year program, but the  
13 academic part you have to do in three, eleven-month segments, because your second year  
14 is spent on board a U.S. merchant ship. I mean, it's not a class ship, it's not a classroom  
15 ship, it's a regular ship. The most I've ever heard being on a ship was two cadets and  
16 usually you were the only cadet on it. The travel was just unbelievable. The first ship I  
17 went down to Cape Town, Africa, and up the east coast to Mombasa and back down  
18 hitting all the courts in-between and helping the chiefs meet on the cargo plans. The  
19 second ship was to the northern part of South America through the Panama Canal down  
20 to two more ports in Colombia and then back up. I did that twice. The third ship was a  
21 passenger ship over to South Hamptons and Bremerhaven and my last ship was two trips  
22 to the Mediterranean including all the way over to Beirut.

23 JS: Oh wow.

24 JM: Yeah, you know, we hit Tripoli in Libya, Catania, Sicily, Livorno, Venice. In  
25 every port, the mates and the captain made sure that I had time off to visit the important  
26 stuff. They gave me a day off to go to Pompeii.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JM: They gave me a day off to ride the equivalent of water buses in Venice to see  
29 the whole town, not just the Grand Canal. They were absolutely terrific. I came back,  
30 resigned my appointment and finished up at Indiana U.

31 JS: Okay.

1 JM: Where Bobby Knight later taught.

2 JS: Well, that sounds like a pretty interesting way to see the world.

3 JM: Yeah, it's terrific. The biggest mistake I ever made was not completing.

4 JS: If you don't mind me asking, what made you decide to resign?

5 JM: I was nineteen years old and knew everything.

6 JS: Right, right. So, then you went to, you said, Indiana?

7 JM: Right.

8 JS: Right, okay. Well, what were you majoring in?

9 JM: My degrees in business administration with a major in transportation and a  
10 minor in business law.

11 JS: Okay, alright. And while you were there at Indiana (University), did you get  
12 involved with the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) program or anything like that?

13 JM: No, when I walked out of Kings Point like a complete idiot. I came back to  
14 Calumet City, and I attended what at that time was called the extension courses. I don't  
15 know what they're called now. I attended Indiana U there and the extension courses for  
16 one year and then I went on campus for two years. When you get on campus for your  
17 junior and senior year there's no opportunity to take ROTC because I didn't have  
18 whatever that preliminary area of ROTC.

19 JS: Well, what year did you graduate from college?

20 JM: '63.

21 JS: '63, okay. And what did you do at that point?

22 JM: At that time, The U.S. Army had a program called the College Option  
23 Program, College OP for short. It was a program that was in effect—Jason, it was in  
24 effect I think for fourteen or fifteen months. It was a very short window. The Army  
25 thought—and the thought process was correct, the implementation was not. The Army  
26 thought that they could cut the training program down for officers. It used to be basic  
27 training for eight weeks and then advanced individual training for eight weeks and then  
28 OCS (Officer Candidate School). There were two OCS's. One at Ft. Benning, Georgia,  
29 for infantry and one at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma for artillery. They tried this fourteen-month  
30 window skipping AIT, Advanced Individual Training. So, if you were a college grad, the

1 program said eight weeks of basic directly into OCS. Okay, on paper that is one hell of a  
2 concept.

3 JS: Right.

4 JM: Okay, now this is looking back at this program for forty years and discussing  
5 it with guys. I don't mean, you know, an international world-shaking study discussing. I  
6 mean a cup of coffee or a beer. If they would have taken the college grads and segregated  
7 them and run OCS with only those guys in a specific graduating class, I think it would  
8 have been successful. Okay, prior to this—let me get the wording right here. OCS was  
9 originally meant to train enlisted people to become commissioned officers. Okay, by  
10 definition, those men entering OCS had prior service and prior knowledge about the  
11 military. Not necessarily how it worked, but about the different units, okay? They knew  
12 that at the company level, you call the artillery unit a battery, okay? Hence Battery Park  
13 in lower Manhattan. That's where the company of artilleries. They knew in Calvary that  
14 there were squadrons, okay? Alright, that is stuff not learned in basic training. That the  
15 college grads in this fourteen-month window, we went through basic training and into  
16 OCS and there was a presumption in the officer candidate schools that we knew that the  
17 batteries meant six artillery tubes. We knew that a squadron meant so many tanks, but we  
18 didn't, okay? So, there was a mixture of men who were in the College OP Program and  
19 men who were previously enlisted people. Anywhere from privates on up to staff  
20 sergeants and master sergeants. So, you had men anywhere from realistically from basic  
21 AIT travel time and assignment and back to OCS, minimum service time for a non-  
22 college OP man was a year in the Army up to twelve to thirteen years in the Army, okay?  
23 So those classes were geared for those men. I remember being in a class, an academic  
24 class and it happened to be named after Colonel or General Snow. So, it's Snow Hall at  
25 Ft. Sill where they had a wall-to-wall magnetic blackboard. And there was an instructor  
26 that was showing us what an Army division looked like in all the units. He's talking  
27 about artillery batteries and artillery battalions and how they're augmented and, you  
28 know, operation control and direct support, general support. I'm sitting there thinking,  
29 "What in the hell's this guy talking about?" And then he's got blue for infantry and red  
30 for artillery and yellow for armor and purple for medical service corps and he's flinging  
31 these things around. You know, half the guys in the class knew it because they had been

1 exposed to it for at least a year. While the other half of us are sitting there thinking,  
2 “What in the world are we talking about?” And then we’re analyzing it, is it important or  
3 not? So, all of that stuff thrown in and after a year, the Army realized, “We’re losing too  
4 many people. We’re bringing college graduates in here and they’re dropping out.” So,  
5 they analyzed it and they changed the program. I believe it is now eight weeks of basic  
6 training, eight weeks of AIT, the advanced individual training and then to OCS. So,  
7 they’ve got a fighting chance of staying in the program. Everyone cares about the object  
8 of the program is to flunk everyone out. Well, the object of the program is to get 2<sup>nd</sup>  
9 Lieutenants. So, if you’re flunking out college grads, who obviously can study there was  
10 something wrong with—you know, there’s a phrase, “There’s something wrong with the  
11 program.” There was something wrong with that program. The college grads didn’t have  
12 the solid base to go in there. They knew ‘ABC’, but they didn’t know ‘DEF’. So, when  
13 you started with ‘G’ there was a—so the Army changed the program, but fortunately I  
14 went through, and I was commissioned at the end of six months, so I guess I wasn’t as  
15 lost as I felt I was lost.

16 JS: Well, did this, I guess, lack of preparation because of the program, because the  
17 way it was designed, did that create any friction between you guys that were coming out  
18 of college and those at OCS was originally designed for? Were there any problems on  
19 that end?

20 JM: How did you figure out that question?

21 JS: Just as you were talking to me about it.

22 JM: Are you a grad student?

23 JS: Yes, sir.

24 JM: Okay, because that’s a grad student question, which is a complement.

25 JS: Well, thank you.

26 JM: If the guys, the prior servicemen saw what was happening, and among  
27 themselves it was not a command structure, they weren’t told to do it. I don’t know how  
28 they did it. I talked to a very good friend of mine about it and he said he doesn’t know  
29 how he did it, either. Because Mike was a prior serviceman. They took it upon  
30 themselves to help out certain of the college grads. There were some college grads they  
31 wanted to see flunk out and not graduate.

1 JS: Right.

2 JM: Now, some of those guys obviously made it on their own without their help,  
3 okay? Guys like me, the prior service guys, said, “we can help John by doing this for him  
4 or with him or help him out a little bit.” And they did and it helped me. You know, when  
5 your instructor is teaching, teaching, teaching and he’s not getting to you, maybe if  
6 someone comes in from a ninety-degree angle, they can present it a different way and  
7 they’ll get it. Well, that’s what these guys did for me. You know, I told four of them, I  
8 said, “Without you guys, I never would have been here.” Yeah, and then some they didn’t  
9 help at all, and it wasn’t a question of shunning them, they just didn’t—you know, no one  
10 said they had to help. There’s a cooperating graduate, but that only goes so far. If they  
11 don’t like someone, they don’t feel like helping them. I’m sure some guys, if someone  
12 would have taken another half hour for them, they might have gotten commission.

13 JS: The instructors there at OCS, were they Korean War Vets?

14 JM: No, no. We had—our tactical officers were either recent OCS graduates, 2<sup>nd</sup>  
15 Lieutenants—I’m sorry, I’m sorry I was wrong.

16 JS: That’s okay.

17 JM: Our platoons, our commissioned officers, our tactical officers and platoon  
18 leaders were 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenants, generally OCS graduates and some of them ROTC  
19 graduates. No military academy graduates. Our battery commander which is the  
20 equivalent of a company that had three batteries in it. Capt. Morrison was Korean War  
21 Artillery. The commandant who was a bird Colonel, Col. Gettis, he was a World War II  
22 Veteran. Now, I went through OCS in ‘63 and graduated in the end of March of ‘64. So,  
23 we were what, twelve years out of Korea? And nineteen out of World War II so it wasn’t  
24 unusual to have those guys.

25 JS: Right, so you and I’m assuming that you were in OCS when the Kennedy  
26 Assassination took place?

27 JM: Yeah, I can tell you exactly where I was.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JM: We had a—okay, I grew up in Cook County, Illinois.

30 JS: Yes, sir.

31 JM: Have you ever heard of Chicago and Major Daily?



1 JS: Oh yeah.

2 JM: Okay, Cook Country, Illinois, and Lake County, Indiana, without being  
3 factious, ninety percent of the people go into the boating booth, hit D, and pull the lever.  
4 Okay, my father—our family was staunch republican. It was almost as dumb on the other  
5 side of him going in and hitting the R lever. All I heard was when I was in college was,  
6 “Oh, god damn Kennedy and his wife is nothing but a da, da, da.” So, we were in OCS  
7 drilling. It was an afternoon drill and OCS has a program with if the tactical officers and  
8 the academic officers are ready to flunk out a candidate, they meet and discuss it and  
9 each vote or however they do it. “Is this man worth saving? Should we just let him  
10 resign, get him out of here? Or is he worth saving either setting him back four weeks or  
11 additional eight weeks? Or set him back one week or two weeks back?” Well, while no  
12 one is supposed to know he’s set back, when you’ve got forty guys in your class and all  
13 of a sudden there’s a 41<sup>st</sup> that joins you, he sure as hell didn’t come up from below.  
14 There’s only one way he came. He was set back. So, this guy was drilling, and everyone  
15 gets a chance to play platoon leader and count cadences and right shoulder arms and all  
16 that stuff. A tactical officer came out and told them to stop them and he reported—the  
17 tactical officer told him, he did an about face, put us at ease, and made the announcement  
18 that President Kennedy had been shot and died. Well, my first thought was, “Oh cool,  
19 dad’s going to be happy tonight.” And then this guy started crying and you know, the rest  
20 of us are looking around and most of them had dads of the same attitude that my dad had.  
21 And then it came out later that Ft. Sill OCS was one of the few units in the U.S. Army  
22 that did not change and schedule because of the death of President Kennedy. So that was  
23 that.

24 JS: Alright, well before moving on beyond OCS, I guess if you could talk just a  
25 little bit more about the experience, I don’t know, things like a daily routine typical day  
26 type thing as far as the training is concerned?

27 JM: It was a bitch. (Laughing)

28 JS: Alright.

29 JM: There’s no other way to put it. Supposedly it started at ten (AM) to six (PM)  
30 and went until either—Jason, it was eleven o’clock or five after eleven. It didn’t matter,  
31 but it was one of those two. Very regimented. When Reveille went off, we had twenty or

1 twenty-five minutes to get dressed into a physical training uniform which was either  
2 combat boots or tennis shoes depending on who set the uniform of the day. We had red  
3 sweatpants and red sweatshirts. Then, depending on how cold it was going to get we  
4 either had jackets or sweaters or something on top of that. We had twenty or twenty-five  
5 minutes to get dress, get our beds made, and take care of the toilet. Then we went out for  
6 either a twenty-minute PT (Physical Training) exercises right there, right outside our  
7 barracks, or I think it was a 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 mile run which really made you smell good for  
8 the rest of the day.

9 JS: (Laughter) Sure.

10 JM: I came back, changed into the uniform of the day which was either fatigues or  
11 greens. For underclassman it was generally only fatigues with combat boots. We'd make  
12 the bed because when we were out for either a run or PT one of the upper classmen didn't  
13 like the way our beds were made and rather than just saying, "Hey, your beds not made,  
14 do it again." They'd take the whole thing and throw it on the floor. Uniforms, it wasn't  
15 unusual to find you uniforms off the hangers. Captain Morrison sent me down one day  
16 and asked me what I thought the object of OCS was. Well, you know, being a smart  
17 college grad, I said to turn on 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants. "That's the dumbest fucking answer I've  
18 ever heard." He said, "The object of OCS is perfection."

19 JS: Okay.

20 JM: I didn't know that. And after that I thought about it and that was it. If your  
21 clothes weren't on perfectly and your books weren't perfect and if that bed wasn't made  
22 perfect and if your footlocker wasn't perfect, they'd just tear it apart and start all over  
23 again. Literally tear it apart. So, then I think breakfast—the first call for breakfast was at  
24 6:50 (AM) and then breakfast formation was at seven (AM), we marched on the battery  
25 in battalion straight to the mess hall. I think the first four weeks we ate at right angles, but  
26 I'm not sure. But the regimentation part didn't bother me because I'd been to King's  
27 Point. Well, OCS might be tough, but it ain't anything like King's Point was. But the  
28 nicest thing I liked about OCS, and I don't know where it stopped was every night, we'd  
29 say the "Our Father." Now, I don't know if that was just our platoon because each  
30 platoon only had its own two-story barracks. These were the World War II wooden ones.  
31 The upperclassmen were on the first floor. There were three, four, or five of them

1 depending on how many were left. And the second classman and the lower classmen; the  
2 middle class and lower class were on the second floor. Just to kick out a number, put  
3 three to four first classmen, four to eight middle classmen, and then thirteen to fourteen  
4 lower classmen in each barracks. So, you can either figure out who cleaned the toilets on  
5 both floors, polished the showers on both floors, and made sure the floors were waxed  
6 and buffed. There was no dust in those buildings. I mean, there was no dust. And so,  
7 we'd go to class, and I think one of the requirements was to always have either a dollar or  
8 two dollars in quarters. So, if an upperclassman was in the academic hall and he wanted a  
9 candy bar and he didn't have a dollar, you'd give him four quarters. Okay, one of the  
10 things that came to a screeching halt was, the 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants right out of college, the  
11 ROTC men, when were commissioned found out that OCS candidates had quarters. So,  
12 they would ask us if we had change. Well, we had to have change in case a tactical  
13 officer, one of our officers or one of our upperclassmen. So, now you lie to a 2<sup>nd</sup>  
14 Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, or do you give up your change? Okay, so here you've got a  
15 conflict and I don't know if it happened every month because you had different  
16 candidates and different 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants from college taking the basic course or it just  
17 happened to us, but it went on for about two weeks. And then those guys, those  
18 lieutenants stopped asking us for change. I don't know, you know, how that went through  
19 the chain of command and gave those guys a word not to fuck with us. And then we'd  
20 come back, we'd have lunch, and we were back about—I think our last academic class  
21 ended at four o'clock. And it was either an academic class or a class in like a motor pool  
22 class or we were out on the firing range, the artillery firing range. Sometimes we'd fire  
23 the weapons; the 105 and the 155 Howitzers and other times we'd practice being forward  
24 observers. None of which was difficult because it was caught so well. Just dynamite  
25 instructors. One of our instructors was a 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant marine and with little I knew about  
26 the Army was that if they sent you to a different branch for cross training, they sent their  
27 best. So, you know, the Army guys that went to the Marines and the Navy, those are  
28 probably the best Marines and the Army guys that came to a Navy post, they were  
29 probably the best. They could teach, they knew the subjects. Well hell, on artillery  
30 anyone could do better than I did. I'm a transportation major out of Indiana University in

1 Bloomington. The first time I saw a gun was in a World War II news clip. That was as  
2 close as I ever wanted to get.

3 JS: Right, sure.

4 JM: But then we'd have dinner and I think dinner was either at five (PM) or six  
5 (PM). Or maybe it was at five (PM)? We were back in the barracks at six and then we  
6 had an hour of regimentation which was just pure harassment and hell. To get under the  
7 barracks and count how many stones and that kind of shit. And then either seven to ten  
8 (PM) or eight to ten (PM) was supposed to be study hall. Well, that was a joke. There's  
9 no way any studying got done because of all the harassment going on. And then ten to  
10 eleven (PM) was outdoor formal regimentation as well as showering. I think it was five to  
11 eleven (PM) with lights out and caps to eleven. Then Saturdays was you walk off the  
12 demerits or march of the demerits Saturday morning and then Saturday afternoon and  
13 Sunday was really trying to study. I don't think I was off—I don't think I was off Ft.  
14 Sill—Thanksgiving I went to—I think Thanksgiving we just kept on going Thursday and  
15 Friday. And Christmas, Christmas I came home and then we went back and that was the  
16 quickest ninety days to graduating at the end of March I'd ever seen. You know, the days  
17 were packed full of either academic regimentation or trying to get some sleep.

18 JS: Well, overall, aside from the problem that you had early on because you guys  
19 weren't fully prepared outside of that, did you feel that the training was fairly sufficient  
20 as far as getting you ready to be an officer in the Army?

21 JM: Oh yeah. Yeah, it was top notch. Ft. Sill OCS and Ft. Benning Infantry OCS,  
22 you know, they were geared to put out knowledgeable, good looking in the extent of  
23 that's how our uniforms are looking, not Hollywood looking officers. You could put a  
24 hundred officers from Ft. Sill, line them up on a sidewalk and a slightly military trained  
25 eye could pick out the ones that were OCS, the ones that were West Point, and the ones  
26 that were ROTC graduates.

27 JS: Well, before moving on, any other memorable or funny moments or anything  
28 like that, that stick out in your mind?

29 JM: Yeah, I got a truthful one that you're never going to hear from anyone else  
30 but me. I was so damn tired. I was flat out dragging my tush. Four of the prior  
31 servicemen—it was Jerry Mitra, Jim Brooks, Bob Robelard, and Mike Sealy. Those guys

1 wanted to be pilots. I was the guy those four guys were looking out for. They said,  
2 “John’s got it, all we have to do is get him through this.” So, they said, “We’re going to  
3 take a flight visit.” I said, “Woopty-do for you.” And they said, “They’re going to dilate  
4 our eyes and when we come back from the flight visit, we’re going to sleep that  
5 afternoon.” Because even OCS isn’t going to mess with you with your eyes dilated. And  
6 all I heard out of that whole conversation was. “They’re going to take an afternoon nap.”  
7 I thought, “Well hell, how do you get to take a flight physical?” He said, “Well, go see  
8 the first sergeant, go tell him you want to go to Flight School.” “Alright, I’ll go to see the  
9 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant.” So, five of us drove—Mitra drove. He had one of those big Desoto’s, a  
10 yellow and white one. I don’t know how I remember that. We went over, got our flight  
11 physicals, got those big—oh, those guys all had sunglasses and I didn’t. So, we rode  
12 back, and we got to sleep that afternoon. “Oh, this is wonderful. I’m going to take a flight  
13 physical once a week.” So, all five of us passed and all five of us were on orders to go to  
14 Flight School after graduation. I think we got our orders—Jason, we had orders three  
15 weeks before graduation. Ours read that all of us were assigned to specific units at Ft.  
16 Sill, waiting for our flight class to begin. I think my flight class started either October of  
17 the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. Let’s say the middle of October.

18 JS: Okay.

19 JM: So, I was assigned to such and such, such and such for such use that the  
20 commander desires or whatever with a reporting date at Ft. Walters, Texas, of October  
21 15, 1964. All five of us had orders to that affect.

22 JS: Right.

23 JM: Okay, so Jerry Mitram got kicked out of OCS for conduct unbecoming.  
24 Thirty hours prior to graduation. Jim Brooks was on orders to Flight School, but instead  
25 requested a transfer out of Ft. Sill which meant he couldn’t make his reporting date for  
26 OCS because you can’t have PCS (Permanent Change of Station) transfers in six months,  
27 so he gave up Flight School. Bob Robelart, that summer, fell in love with a blonde and  
28 she gave him an option—she was a helicopter pilot widow already and she gave Roby the  
29 word, “If you want me, you have to give up any ideas of flying a helicopter.” So, he  
30 stayed with the blonde. And Mike Sealy was a pretty good buddy, was on orders for  
31 airplane school, for wing school. So, here’s me, the guy who took his flight physical so

1 he could take a nap is the only guy that completed helicopter school. So that's that. That's  
2 why I became a helicopter pilot.

3 JS: Okay, so Ft. Walters, Texas, is where they sent you?

4 JM: Right.

5 JS: Alright, if you could, talk a little bit about the rotary wing school and what it  
6 was like for you.

7 JM: (Laughter) Uh, there's two—what the hell do they call it? Well, for lack of a  
8 better term there's two classes of people at rotary wing. Well, the whole flight program.  
9 Those men who were commissioned officers or warrant officers belong to the U.S.  
10 Foreign Service or U.S. public health service or whoever that are already commissioned  
11 or warranted. Across the street are men in the Warrant Officer Candidate Program who  
12 were going through not only Flight School, but their Warrant Officer Candidate School,  
13 okay? And those guys, they had it tougher than we did because while Warrant Officer  
14 Candidate School and flight is nowhere near what OCS is, okay? But they still had to  
15 learn the regimentation, had to learn what the Army looked like on paper. So, they picked  
16 up in the same nine months what I took six months to learn in OCS and Flight School.  
17 The same nine months of Flight School. Flight School was—the instructors were  
18 outstanding. We had all civilian instructors and these guys had thousands of hours and  
19 they put hundreds of students through this program. They knew more about what I was  
20 going to do five minutes before I did it than I knew before I did it. They could see my  
21 mistakes coming because they'd seen it hundreds of times before. The first time—and  
22 any pilot that tells you this or who says, “No, I didn't do it.” Is full of shit. We went and  
23 got all of our books and our flight suits and our helmets. Our flight jackets and whatever  
24 they hand you. We struggled to get it back to our room and my roommate was from  
25 Cleveland, Carl Mickle. Carl is the nicest guy in the world, couldn't ask for a better man.  
26 So, he and I had all this crap in our room and I'm starting to arrange all these manuals.  
27 The field manuals and training manuals like I did in OCS. And Carl's looking at me and  
28 says, “What the hell are you doing?” I said, “Arranging.” And he said, “Why?” I said,  
29 “Well, we're going to have an inspection.” He says, “You're nuttier than a doorknob.”  
30 So. then what every student does, okay, is I put on my helmet, and I stood in front of the  
31 mirror and just realized how handsome and great I look with this flight helmet.

1 (Laughing) And I've talked to guys, and everyone did it, you know. It would play that  
2 visor that comes down over your eyes that are real dark when you play with that, and you  
3 stand there and look. "Boy, am I cool." You haven't strapped yourself into a cockpit yet.  
4 You know, you're a cross between Wilbur Wright, Igor Sikorsky and Neil Armstrong. So  
5 primary school we had a great instructor, Lou Murray. I remember the guys, you know,  
6 you'd call them stick mates, the guys that would have the same instructor. Lou got all  
7 four of us through which was very unusual. They take you up in a helicopter, a little  
8 observation helicopter and the first thing they do is take you up about a thousand feet in  
9 the air and then drop the connective stick and that thing comes down just the side of a  
10 safe. You know, your stomach is up in your throat real quick, and they do that to see if  
11 you're going to get sick or you're going to say I want out of here. Then when you don't  
12 say that, then they put you through some dosey-does to see if they can get you sick or get  
13 you to quit on the first hour, so they don't waste anyone's time. It's a necessary step and  
14 some guys do say, "I don't want to do this." But then they show you what the controls are  
15 and the hardest thing to do in a helicopter is hover. If you can hover a helicopter, you can  
16 do anything. If you start out—and you have to hover it because your approaches are, if  
17 they're not shot all the way to the ground, you're shot into a three-foot hover in your  
18 landings. You have to learn the hardest maneuver first. So, the way they do that is take  
19 you out into a huge field and by huge, I mean five hundred feet by five hundred feet. Five  
20 hundred yards by five hundred yards. Five football fields this way, five football fields  
21 that way and you're in the middle of it. The instructor lets you put your feet on the pedals  
22 so you're sitting there with your arms folded, your feet on the pedals. He says, "now, the  
23 instructor says that he will take his feet off the pedals and all you have to do, stupid John  
24 student, is keep it pointed in that direction." But Jason, there's no way that you can keep  
25 that thing pointed there. God and Wilbur Wright against you and Igor Sikorsky's  
26 laughing. So, once you halfway master that than it gives you the collective stick which  
27 holds it up and down. He said, "Okay, just hold us here." Well hell, you're bouncing it  
28 off the ground and you're eight feet in the air and you're twenty-five feet in the air. This  
29 thing's going up and down like an Otis Elevator. And then he gives you the cyclic which  
30 is the thing between your legs that says, "Up, down, left, right." But eventually within  
31 about twelve to fifteen hours of training you know enough and are still enough to hover

1 the damn thing and fly it, just barely. You're just barely safe. So, they let you solo, take it  
2 around the pattern. You know that night you say, "I really did it all by myself. There is  
3 hope." And then you get about four or five more hours of instruction and then it's a  
4 question of practicing and picking up your confidence in and out of confined areas on and  
5 off pinnacles which are very narrow hills or hilltops or cliffs on the side of a river. Just  
6 getting you the skills, you need to be—I think it's a program to see if you're teachable.  
7 And you obviously have the coordination necessary if you can hover a helicopter. Then  
8 it's a question, "Can you learn to do this the Army way?"

9 JS: Right.

10 JM: There are very few helicopter pilots who have tried to fly an airplane and  
11 could not master it. But there are a lot of airplane pilots that try to fly a helicopter and just  
12 couldn't do it. Not to say that every helicopter pilot is, you know, a great airplane driver,  
13 but that's the percentages. The Army also had a program, and these guys were with us at  
14 Walters. They'd have airplane drivers that wanted to or had to transition into helicopters.  
15 They stayed in the same BOQ's (Bachelor Officer's Quarters) that we did, and we'd be in  
16 the day room playing pool or something and they'd walk in with their army wings, and  
17 they looked like they were four feet wide to us because that was the goal. Yeah, we were  
18 there until either January or mid-February at Walters and then we all went to Rucker or  
19 those of us who were left.

20 JS: And that was for more specialized training?

21 JM: Yeah, that was a transition into the H-19 which was the helicopter that could  
22 carry about four to six troops supposedly. Then into the Huey's for instrument training  
23 and tactical training. The first time I got into a D Model Huey I thought I died and went  
24 to heaven. It couldn't have been out of the factory more than three months, okay? Do you  
25 know what a new car smells like?

26 JS: Yes sir.

27 JM: A new Huey smells better.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JM: I don't know what a new Rolls Royce smells like, but it could not be any  
30 better than that, that D Model Huey. That nose sets up higher. It had mesh seats in it all  
31 nice and tight. All the instruments were polished. When you get in something like that,



1 you just feel like, “Wow, I better know how to fly this thing right because this is the best  
2 helicopter in the free world and they’re letting me fly it.” What, are they crazy?

3 JS: So, did you make the transition in the Huey fairly easy, or...?

4 JM: Yeah, well our instrument phase we flew instruments without ever being  
5 checked out in the Huey even though we flew instruments in the Huey. So, I had, I don’t  
6 know, forty or fifty hours of flying it on instruments before I took the transition part. I  
7 don’t know, I know somewhere in there I know we soloed Huey’s, but it wasn’t a big  
8 deal to solo a Huey. Because we soloed in the observation ones, we soloed in the eight to  
9 nineteens. So, you know, go out and solo a Huey. What’s the object of this? You’ve done  
10 it. The time that it really hit me though, that I really was a pilot was when I took a non-  
11 pilot. One of the sergeants had to go somewhere and that was the first or second day after  
12 graduation. I stayed at Rucker as an instructor pilot for a couple months. One of the  
13 sergeants had to go—I don’t know if he had to go to Ft. Benning or Pensacola, Florida, or  
14 somewhere. They said, “John, hop in that Huey and take this guy.” Soloing is nice, you  
15 know, you’ve got to do it, it’s a big thrill. But the first time I got that thing in the air in  
16 real life, that person’s life is in my hands. That was the big responsibility. Putting on the  
17 wings and soloing and all that happy horse crap, that’s all nice. The first time you’ve got  
18 someone else’s life in your hands, that’s a whole different ball game. That becomes  
19 serious. You know, that’s when you’re getting paid to do what they taught you.

20 JS: So, were you overall enjoying the job of flying?

21 JM: Oh yeah, there’s no better job in the world than being an Army helicopter  
22 pilot. You’ve got all this great equipment and if you bang one, there’s fifty more. Oh,  
23 which is why Army helicopter training is the best helicopter training in the world because  
24 there’s a maneuver called—when you practice losing the power, you go into a maneuver  
25 called an autorotation. It’s a power off landing to simulate an engine failure. Okay, the  
26 Army teaches it to take it all the way to the ground, okay. You do practice landing with  
27 the engine at idle. It’s disconnected from the transmission. Okay, the instructor, sooner or  
28 later, has to sit there and let the student do it to take it all the way to the ground with the  
29 engine not in the power system. Sooner or later, someone’s going to prang one, okay?  
30 They’re going to end up left side low, right side low, nose it over. You’re going to have a  
31 training accident. In the Army it doesn’t matter. You know, we had 270 helicopters there.

1 You prang one, okay, you unstrap, it wasn't preventable. Here's what you do to get your  
2 ass back in another helicopter.

3 JS: Right.

4 JM: Civilians can't do that.

5 JS: Right, that's true.

6 JM: The insurance company says, "Whoa, you're doing what?" And practicing  
7 no-engine touch down autorotation, the insurance company says, "Not on my insurance  
8 policy, you aren't." We don't do that. You know, ask any army pilot how many touch  
9 down auto's he's had? You know, "oh hell we used to do them every day."

10 JS: Right.

11 JM: Civilian schools, they can't teach them. I'm sure one or two of them have  
12 done it, but you can't do it. The same thing with running landings. You come in, in an  
13 airplane and touch down twenty or thirty knots ground speed. Anything happens to those  
14 skids you end up rolling that thing on the Army, so what? Now, that's when you could  
15 get a Huey for a quarter of a million dollars. I don't know what a Huey cost today. I sure  
16 as hell don't know what an Apache or a Chinook cost. The maneuvers we did on up to  
17 the H-34's, there's no reason to do them with a Chinook and you couldn't do them with a  
18 Schnook if you wanted to. Then the H-53s that the Army and the Navy has, you can't  
19 cowboy those things, those things are little box cars.

20 JS: In the training, all of the Flight School training, how much of it, if you could  
21 estimate it, was a lot of classrooms and a lot of out on the field training?

22 JM: It was either morning in a classroom and afternoon out at the stage fields. Or  
23 morning at the stage fields and flying. Now, flying is a misnomer. Let's do in-classroom  
24 and out of classroom.

25 JS: Okay, sure.

26 JM: Okay, in-classroom, three to four hours a day every day of Flight School and  
27 there are exceptions to that, okay? And by classroom, that could be in the hanger looking  
28 at either actual mockup of transmissions, cross sections of roader blades, cross sections of  
29 the main frame. The other side of the instrument panel. I consider that classroom. So  
30 that's three to four hours a day.

31 JS: Right, alright.

1 JM: The other three to four hours a day we were at what's called the stage fields.  
2 Small fields other than the main heliport, okay? If you weren't flying, if you weren't  
3 physically with your instructor, you were either outside or inside the coffee shop looking  
4 out the windows or bullshitting. Watching other students and just not formally critiquing,  
5 but going over your mind what's he doing right now? You know, is he rolling off the  
6 throttle, is he applying left pedal? Does he realize he's too high? Does he realize he's too  
7 fast? Does he realize he's too low? Did he do his clearing turns right? Everything you  
8 have to do, that's what you're supposed to do. You're not out there reading comics.

9 JS: Right, sure.

10 JM: It was a good program. I don't think, you know, a long time ago someone  
11 said, "If you want to do something, let the military teach you." Because they've been  
12 doing it for so many years and they've made all the mistakes there is to be made. It may  
13 not be perfect, but it's a hell of a lot better than anything you're going to get in a civilian  
14 school. If you want to learn how to ski, go let the Army to teach you to ski. If you want to  
15 learn how to drive a boat, let the Army or Navy teach you how to drive a boat. You  
16 know, same way with airplanes. Let the Army teach you. Hell, you want to be good at  
17 parachutes, go to Army jump school, they'll teach you. They taught thousands of people  
18 how to do it right. All you have to do is listen. So, the Flight School was set up with the  
19 best utilization today and I don't think I cracked a book at night since Flight School.  
20 There just wasn't a need to. And the instructors were top notch. Just super.

21 JS: So, then you would definitely rate the training high.

22 JM: Oh yeah. I had all civilian pilots so that's not exactly right. I had one week in  
23 the Huey of what's called contact flying and I had an Army captain that he already had—  
24 I don't know if he had a second tour in Vietnam, but he had one which is more than  
25 enough. That's when you just play with a Huey for a week. You know, that's what he  
26 says, "This is what you're going to be doing for the next year, kid."

27 JS: So then was that aspect of it teaching you things like dropping off troops and  
28 things like that, or...?

29 JM: That was low level flying coming in hot.

30 JS: Okay.

1 JM: How to get rid of the lift in all the rotor blades right now. Everything that you  
2 might need in your next year. No, a lot of things that you'll probably use in the next year.

3 JS: Right, okay.

4 JM: There's no way to teach everything that you're going to need in a stateside  
5 environment.

6 JS: Right, yes sir. But you did feel that it prepared you I guess as best it could for  
7 what was to come?

8 JM: Yeah, definitely.

9 JS: Okay, alright.

10 JM: Let me add something to that.

11 JS: Oaky.

12 JM: I went through Flight School in '64, '65. I was in Class '65-7 so I graduated  
13 sometime in June of '65. I had all civilian instructors except with that one week from that  
14 army captain. My first instructor, I think he had ten thousand hours of teaching of  
15 instructing helicopter primary students. You talk about guys that ought to drink at night.  
16 If you ever get a chance—are you a pilot by chance?

17 JS: Oh no, sir.

18 JM: Okay, if you ever get a chance to ride in a helicopter up front and if that guy  
19 gives you the controls, you will quickly learn what an absolute bitch a helicopter is. Now,  
20 it's a tribute to the Flight Schools that they turn out pilots that are so good. Without  
21 patting yourself on the back, if you survived a year in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot, by  
22 definition, you are one hell of a helicopter pilot. My first Lou Murray had like ten  
23 thousand hours as an instructor in primary helicopter school. Now, that, by definition, he  
24 knows what he's doing. Okay, the middle ones, the H-19s that was more of a confidence  
25 builder and it's a bigger helicopter. It's a step up out of the training. And then into the  
26 Huey had the instruments and my instrument instructor was Bill Cook who had like four  
27 thousand hours with Air America in the Far East. By definition, he's a good pilot. You  
28 know, and then the army pilots that came back from Vietnam, by definition, he's a good  
29 pilot. So, I had all top-notch pilots as did everyone who went through Flight School at  
30 that time. There was no requirement to graduate a certain number of pilots because this is  
31 all before Vietnam build up, okay? So, when I was in Flight School they said, "Where do

1 you want to go?” And I said, “Where can I be guaranteed I’m out of country, out of the  
2 U.S.?” Cause hell, I came out of the merchant marine traveling that year at sea. I was  
3 ready to go overseas again. Well, they said, “Put down Vietnam, that’ll get you out of the  
4 states.” I put down Vietnam. You know, you’ve got to pick into the 7<sup>th</sup> page of the  
5 newspaper in ‘65 to find Vietnam. Well shit, I’ll do that. During Flight School I got  
6 orders for Vietnam and, “Oh, this is cool.” Some of the instructors say, “You’re doing  
7 what?” By the time my class graduated, hell I think two thirds of us went to Vietnam  
8 right away. Yeah, the instructors were top notch, there was no pressure to graduate  
9 people. I talked to guys later. In fact, I flew with a couple guys and said, “How in the hell  
10 did you ever get out of Flight School?” And this was after some time in Vietnam.

11 JS: Right.

12 JM: He said, “Well, the word was we had these Army instructors. They said if I  
13 don’t graduate you, I’m going to have to go back much sooner.” I said, “Whoa, Bill Cook  
14 never told me that.” So, if you hear anything about a change, you could probably get a  
15 story that’s probably 180 degrees out of whack with flying. But the guys in my class  
16 would probably all tell you something right along what I’m saying. And they guys five  
17 years afterwards you’re going to get a completely different story.

18 JS: Yes, sir. So, the demand for pilots in Vietnam changed things to the point  
19 where you didn’t have to be quite as good of a pilot later on, correct?

20 JM: Yeah, you had to be as good with the basic stuff, but then when it came to  
21 doing two or three things at once, I think that’s when they—you can graduate pilots that  
22 meet the criteria just to graduate pilots, okay? We had a guy who came over to Vietnam. I  
23 gave him a check ride in gunships, and he could not—he didn’t pass the check rides. I  
24 saw him at a reunion six years ago in Washington D.C. and I talked to some other guys,  
25 and he was one of the few guys who was a rattler who flew with the 501<sup>st</sup> and never got a  
26 call sign. So, he never became an aircraft commander. He never could pass the aircraft  
27 commander Vietnam test. He never had a call sign. Now, that’s embarrassing.

28 JS: Alright, you mentioned putting down Vietnam as your choice of assignment.  
29 How much has you actually heard?

30 JM: Not a damn thing.

31 JS: Okay, by the time you graduated, had that changed?

1 JM: Uh, not appreciably so. When I came home Christmas Eve in OCS, so that  
2 was winter of '63, '64, that Christmas, I was looking for a new car. I walked into the Ford  
3 dealership, and he had a brand-new mustang in back. I said, "What is that?" He said,  
4 "That's a mustang." I said, "I've never heard of it." He says, "You will." I said, "When  
5 can I have one?" He said, "What are you?" I said, "I'm an officer in the U.S. Army and  
6 I'm going to Flight School." He says, "You will like this car." On April 15<sup>th</sup> of 1964,  
7 when the first Mustang rolled off the truck in Lawton, Oklahoma, that blue one was mine.

8 JS: Oh wow.

9 JM: I'm in Flight School with more money than I can spend in a brand-new  
10 Mustang. Do you think I read the papers?

11 JS: No. So again, like earlier, like you said the '57 Chevy and the girls.

12 JM: Yeah. We lived off-base, so it was party heaven.

13 JS: Well, after you completed that last portion of Flight School, you said that you  
14 were an instructor pilot for a short time?

15 JM: Yeah, I stayed there for two months as an instructor pilot.

16 JS: Alright, one more question I meant to ask. For the total, the sum of Flight  
17 School, what was the wash out rate would you estimate?

18 JM: Oh boy, I don't think—looking over the roster and remembering guys  
19 leaving. Oh, Remind me to write down Smith and come back to that. I don't think we  
20 washed out a third. And I would attribute—how do I want to say this? If you got past the  
21 first two thirds of primary, okay, chances were, you were going to get your wings. Okay,  
22 because of the skills required. Once you acquire the flying skills at Ft. Walters, then it  
23 was just a question of just transferring those skills into a larger helicopter. When I started  
24 flying the larger helicopter, the H-19 at Ft. Rucker, I don't know what it was. Whether it  
25 was a mental block or a coordination block or I wasn't keeping my mind off flying  
26 helicopters and check rides. My instructors said, "John, I'm not getting through to you. It  
27 might be my fault, it might be your fault, but you just are not—you're behind the power  
28 curve on this. So, he said, "You're going to take a ride with so and so." I knew if I didn't  
29 pass this check ride, I was going to be an artillery unit by the end of the week. So, the  
30 pilot came out and he said, "Okay." I remember him. I don't remember his name, but I  
31 remember that he was under 5'8 and if he weighed 130 pounds, I'm an astronaut. He

1 said, "I'm going to give you a ride." He says, "Let's go up and fly around for about forty  
2 minutes. Do whatever you want, just show me how you can fly." And he said,  
3 "Somewhere in there I'm going to cut the throttle on you, but I'm only going to cut it  
4 once so don't be worrying about it the whole time." So, we went up and Jace and I flew  
5 that thing like I was Igor Sikorsky. Everything just fell into place. All the needles, they  
6 were where we belonged, and all the clearing turns went right, and the simulated engine  
7 failure went right. The approach into the traffic pattern went right and it was the best  
8 landing I ever shot. It was just, you know, I talked to guys about it, and they said, "Your  
9 acquisition skills are not a smooth curve, they're stair steps." So, you reach a certain level  
10 between twelve and fifteen hours where they can solo you and that's a gradual  
11 improvement. And then it kind of levels off and then you have another improvement, and  
12 it levels off and another improvement and it levels off. And he said, "Somewhere at each  
13 level off period, you're going to do something stupid and scare yourself." He said, "In the  
14 Army, that's written in the program. They knew you're going to do that. Okay, they  
15 know you're going to come out of a confined area and clip some branches, they knew  
16 you're going to do it." So, there's hours built in so when you scare the shit out of  
17 yourself, you're going to pay attention the next time the instructor's talking to you. I  
18 mean, you pay attention." Their training syllabus is written with that in mind. But then I  
19 went into the Huey it was no problem at all. And after that with the H-19 it was no  
20 problem. But right there, I reached a plateau where Johnny quit learning.

21 JS: Well, you asked me to write down the name Smith.

22 JM: Oh okay, our class leader in Flight School was Albert? It was either  
23 something Albert or Albert something Smith. Okay, there was a Smith, Johnsons—wait a  
24 minute, what the hell was he? He was either with the New York Times or the Washington  
25 Post and he was in the press corps, and he was the top press guy from that. I don't know  
26 if he was representing UPI (United Press international), AP (Associated Press), or as such  
27 the Washington Post or the New York Times. But he was very high up in the news world  
28 and the news media. And he was one of Johnson's pets. A pet newspaper guy. His son  
29 was Albert Smith who was my class leader. From the time we were at Ft. Walters—now,  
30 here's the exception to everything I just said. At Ft. Walters, Texas, Albert Smith was  
31 afraid of the helicopter, okay? I mean, we're walking around with smiles on our face

1 because all of us had new cars and more money than I had ever seen in my entire life. Not  
2 that it was a lot, but a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant on flight pay is, you know, you can't drink it all.  
3 Albert Smith was hesitant or reluctant or whatever you want to say about flying  
4 helicopters. We never picked it up to ask them, "What the hell are you doing here? He's a  
5 captain, we're lieutenants, he's class leader, hell with it." Thinking back on it, he was one  
6 of the last to solo which doesn't mean anything, because on your wings it doesn't say,  
7 "When did you solo?" On the back of them. Or what was your grade in Flight School?  
8 They're just wings. Then when he got into the Huey's you know, he just had this  
9 reluctance about him. He ended up with a wuss job in Vietnam and he also didn't have  
10 any gonads and he and the battalion commander flew into a high tension wire showing  
11 off one day there into the tower. He's one guy that probably should have been washed  
12 out, but for whatever reason, he got through the program. You know, every time we get  
13 around and discuss it, the guys found out that he was in my flight class. "Well, what do  
14 you think?" And I said, "Well, I don't know if, because he was a captain, they put some  
15 soft gloves on."

16 JS: Right.

17 JM: Or what. I could be completely wrong. Maybe they held him. He was on the  
18 same criteria we were, and it was just one of those things when you look back, it was  
19 possible for it to happen, but it may not have happened.

20 JS: Okay.

21 JM: But that's the end of the Smith story.

22 JS: Alright, well any other memorable or funny moments or anything like that  
23 from flight training that we should mention before moving on?

24 JM: Oh yeah, my instrument flight instructor was Bill Cook. Bill's a hell of a  
25 good man and one hell of a helicopter pilot. You know, hell, all those guys are good  
26 helicopter pilots. I was flying instruments one day and I was at one of those stages  
27 where—well, we had the windshields dropped out. We had the cloth over them so you  
28 couldn't see. I'm looking at the instruments and in instrument training, they are always  
29 pushing you, okay? If they think you've caught on, two minutes later they'll change  
30 something to knock the cockiness out of you. I was sweating. I mean, it was hot in that  
31 car. And they put stick-ems across some of the instruments. If you want to fly with five



1 instruments, they'll take one of them out by just covering it to simulate a failure. You're  
2 doing climbing turns and climbing descents and missed approaches and man, the sweat's  
3 just coming off me. I started chasing the air speed indicator. So, I was going between  
4 seventy-five and ninety five and the altitude's going up 100 feet up and down. I've got  
5 the instruments bobbing instead of going straight. Instead of steady, they're bobbing  
6 because I'm getting tired and getting hot and I'm scared shitless I'm going to flunk out.  
7 Bill looked over at me and says, "Hey, asshole." He says, "I heard you're from south side  
8 Chicago." "Yes, sir" He says, "Where the fuck's the knife between your teeth?"  
9 (Laughing) And with that, all the instruments stabilized. The rest of the day was just  
10 smooth, okay? But that's what those guys knew how to do. They were amazing.

11 JS: Alright, well once you completed the training and spent that time as an  
12 instructor pilot for a few months, was the next stop Vietnam?

13 JM: Yep, sure was.

14 JS: Did you have any—well did you have any time off before going?

15 JM: Yeah, I had three weeks off.

16 JS: Okay, alright. What did your family think about the assignment? About you  
17 going to Vietnam?

18 JM: My dad thought it was cool and I've never talked to mom about it. My mom  
19 is still alive. My dad, we had one of these landscape pictures with a florescent light bulb  
20 behind it down in the room where we had a ping pong table downstairs in the basement. I  
21 found out later that dad turned that light on and said he wasn't going to turn it off until I  
22 came home.

23 JS: Well, guess now if you could talk about the trip over. How did you get to  
24 Vietnam?

25 JM: Jet from either O'Hare or Midway to Oakland or Frisco, one of the two.  
26 Yeah, SFO. There's only one airport there. Then a charter bus for the military over to  
27 Travis and then I think it was continental. Hawaii, Clark Air Force Base, Saigon.

28 JS: Alright, and during this time as you're making the trip over, what were your  
29 feelings about it? What were you thinking about it? Were excited, nervous?

30 JM: No, just I'm going to work in Vietnam.

31 JS: What were your initial impressions upon arriving there at Tan Son Nhut?

1 JM: This place stinks.

2 JS: Alright. I think I had a duffle bag or a suitcase or a suitcase in a B4 bag, I'm  
3 not sure. A B4 bag is one of those bags like a suitcase, but it opens up and it's got a  
4 hanger on it so you can hang the whole thing up if you want. So, I went in and reported  
5 into the—they got me over to the helipad H3 which is called fanatically hotel 3. There  
6 was an operations room in there and said, "I've got these orders here for the 501<sup>st</sup>. Any  
7 idea where they are?" And he said, "Yeah, let me see them." So, he did his thing and  
8 made a couple phone calls and he said, "The helicopter will be here within an hour for  
9 you." So, in came this helicopter and oh shit, man. Machine guns, rockets, four guys that  
10 looked like they haven't had a meal lately, sun tanned, sunglasses, rifles, grenades,  
11 machine gun ammo. All this shit. "So, are you Mateyko?" I said, "Yes." They said, "Get  
12 in and strap your ass in." So, I strapped in back and I looked up and one of the pilots was  
13 Jim Dorcy who had been one of my tactical officers in OCS. Yeah, he was a gunship  
14 driver with the Rattlers and went over—It's a fifteen minute flight over to Bien Hoa and  
15 then we had a truck that took us from our main heliport to—we had a villa in town. Have  
16 you heard about the Rattlers?

17 JS: Just a little bit.

18 JM: When I got to Vietnam there were probably nine, nine and a half or ten and a  
19 half helicopter companies in all of Vietnam. Okay, most of the helicopter companies had  
20 their own villa, their own house. The rattlers were L shaped for the pilots. We had an L  
21 shaped villa. Inside the crotch of the L was a separate dining hall. Two men in each room,  
22 full bath in each room, individual air conditioning in each room, tile floors, stucco walls,  
23 ceiling fans. We had two floor-to-ceiling—each man had a floor to ceiling closet with a  
24 twenty-five watt light bulb in it to keep mildew out of our clothes. We had hooch maids  
25 and the hooch maids had either four or six rooms, Jason. I'm not sure how many they  
26 had. They took care of us. I think it was eight dollars a month for a hooch maid. Which  
27 put them on the high end of the scale. They would polish our boots, wash and iron our  
28 fatigues and we took the nametags off our fatigues and all the stuff and all the rank off  
29 them and had them taken to the local laundry and they embroidered everything in. Then  
30 we had— as soon as you became aircraft commander and got your call sign, we had  
31 white oxford claw shirts, short sleeved with Rattler on the pocket, a coil Rattler and then

1 beneath it our call sign. Mine was Rattler 21 and then the gunships had firebird call signs.  
2 I had a pool table in the main hall going to walk out and walk into the dining hall. I had a  
3 barber that came in either once or twice a week. It was good living. And we had a bar.

4 JS: What was your first impression of the unit itself? You don't have to go into  
5 specific names if you would prefer not to, but could you discuss some of the personalities  
6 you met there?

7 JM: The first commander, Lou Henderson—I told Lou this and I've told guys this  
8 for forty-five years. Lou Henderson was the best commander I'd ever had in the military  
9 and ever heard of in the military. The way Lou set that up, there's something about the  
10 Rattlers. We have a reunion every other year, every even numbered year. Now, in the  
11 Rattlers were guys that were drafted that were in there to serve two years.

12 JS: Okay.

13 JM: There were pilots that were career pilots. There were pilots that had been in  
14 the Air Force and came back into the Army. Or they came to the Army so they could fly.  
15 We had two men that became generals. We had infantrymen come over from the 25<sup>th</sup>  
16 Division. In Hawaii, temporary duty to fly as our door gunners, okay? On a helicopter we  
17 had a crew chief who was a door gunner on one side and on the other side we'd have an  
18 infantryman for the 25<sup>th</sup> Division in Hawaii on temporary duty. Now, some of these guys  
19 extend. There's something about the Rattlers. When you walked into any of the 501<sup>st</sup>, you  
20 were immediately a rattler. There wasn't any of this sophomore in college boy green  
21 beany bullshit, none of it, okay? When you walked in that door you were a rattler. So, the  
22 way Lou set that up at our reunions till this day, guys come back for those reunions  
23 saying that there's something special about the Rattlers. They don't go to other military  
24 reunions or if they do, they hang around with a very small clique within that reunion. The  
25 Rattlers aren't like that. It's just equal footing right now. And that's the way Lou  
26 Henderson set it up.

27 JS: Right, yes sir.

28 JM: I don't even know who the executive officer was. Never had any contact with  
29 him. The platoon leaders were all good and you can tell wild stories about anyone in the  
30 military. The first ones were good, the second batch we had—and here's where I don't  
31 know if it was because with the first one's I was a rookie and just in awe, but the second

1 ones, you know, I'd been there a couple months and didn't have any use for the next  
2 batch that came in. We were like oil and water. Those guys, they never would come to a  
3 reunion because they knew that they would probably get razzed a lot. Yeah, there was a  
4 definite change in the leadership.

5 JS: Alright, how was moral at the point that you arrived?

6 JM: Higher than the moon. The first combat mission I flew with my platoon  
7 leader, Duke Swim. It was a combat assault. That's when you have ten helicopters in a  
8 formation, pick up the ground troops and take them wherever they have business and  
9 drop them off. More flights required, fine, if not, you break into what is called single ship  
10 missions. Anywhere from hauling a Catholic Priest around to a Special Forces Camp so  
11 he can say mass to doing PX (Post Exchange) runs and take stuff up to the advisors in the  
12 different Vietnamese villages. Take USO (United Service Organization) girls around,  
13 take some members of the press around. Whatever has to be done we went out and did it.  
14 Well, it had to be my second or third or fifth day whenever I was on this first one. So, we  
15 broke off to go help some Special Forces guys at Tay Ninh. I'm sitting in the right seat,  
16 my platoon leaders in the left seat. Oh, to begin the morning, he got in and strapped a  
17 little teddy bear on the radio console between the seats up front. And the back one-third  
18 of it was blank so if you wanted more radio service bank. He went in and strapped the  
19 little teddy bear. My first thought was, "Oh my God. What in the hell? Alright, good luck  
20 Teddy Bear." So, we did the assault, and we broke off. We got our assignment to go help  
21 the guys up at Tay Ninh. We went up there and there's a hill about fifty miles north of  
22 Saigon called, Nui Ba Dinh. It's, I don't know, about thirty-two hundred feet tall. It's the  
23 only hill around. I mean, everything else is rice patties and then you have this hill.  
24 There's a Special Forces camp up there along the radio relay station. They had some dead  
25 bodies there that had to be taken out. So, on our way up there, these two creatures and  
26 one of his pockets and brought out a jar of vapor rub, Vicks Vapor. And he puts it under  
27 his nose, puts a slosh under his noses and passes it over to me and says on the intercom,  
28 "Here, put some above your lip under your nose." He said, "You're not going to like the  
29 smell of dead body." Oh my, hello. What am I doing here? So, he said, "Okay, you make  
30 the approach." Well, you know, here's where I better have been paying attention in flight  
31 school because this is one of those no shit approaches on the top of a mountain. So, I did

1 it and then they started loading bodies and I was like, “Oh, good god it’s going to be a  
2 long year in Vietnam.” It was okay.

3 JS: What was the unit’s—I guess, tactical area of operations? Where all would  
4 you guys fly to?

5 JM: Okay, we, because—we were in what was called III corps. If you take the  
6 State of Indiana and cut it north to south into four pieces, okay, the top piece—and use  
7 roman numerals, okay? So that the top quarter is I for roman numeral 1 for I corps, and  
8 then II Corps, III Corps, and IV Corps is just down south of Saigon. III Corps  
9 encompasses Saigon, maybe sixty miles north and south from the Cambodian border over  
10 to the ocean. That’s generally where we were.

11 JS: So, all of III Corps then?

12 JM: All of III Corps. Plus, a couple trips to IV Corps and then one trip up to II  
13 Corps. We supported the 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> Vietnamese Air Infantry Division. Any of the  
14 501<sup>st</sup> and the 118<sup>th</sup>, the Thunderbirds were primary support for the 173<sup>rd</sup> American  
15 Airborne Brigade that had the Aussie Battalion and the New Zealand Artillery attached to  
16 that. Then we had the Korean Infantry and when they got there, we taught the Aussies  
17 how to fly in Vietnam, the Aussie helicopter pilots. Okay, as they came in, we were the  
18 primary support until they could get their helicopters and their helicopter pilots up and  
19 running for the American 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and one brigade of the American 25<sup>th</sup>  
20 Infantry Division. So, we did a lot of flying.

21 JS: Right, yes sir.

22 JM: Have you talked to any Rattlers about their trip to Bien Hoa or to Bam Me  
23 Thuot.

24 JS: No, sir.

25 JM: Okay, this is one that goes down in military history. Our second commander,  
26 well, there’s no other word for it that was a jerk. He had a lot of ideas that would have  
27 been good if he was in the Pentagon, but in Bien Hoa Vietnam they weren’t such good  
28 ideas. I’m going to say this and you’re going to say, “That’s so fucking childish I can’t  
29 believe they even remembered it.” But it was the first of many. When Major Henderson  
30 left, our first CO (Commanding Officer), Jughead came in. His name was Donald J.

1 Hade. Well, that became Jughead real quick. He took all the toothpicks off our table in  
2 the mess hall. Now, go ahead Jason, say, “That’s childish.” So what?

3 JS: I suppose I could see where it leads to bigger things, though.

4 JM: His explanation was, this is October of ‘65. His explanation was, the war is  
5 all but over, you gentleman, you pilots will conduct yourselves as though your gentleman  
6 in garrison to the United States and gentleman, don’t use toothpicks.”

7 JS: Oh jeez, oh.

8 JM: “Okay, Jug, you know, okay no big deal. As long as we get our steaks once a  
9 week, we’ve got ice cream every night, and we’ve got more beer than we could possibly  
10 drink.” Now, to give you a feel—and this is one of the things you look back on that I can  
11 think about. The pilots were drinking about a case of beer a day, okay? And not getting  
12 drunk. It’s adrenaline. I’ve talked to doctors about this and it’s the adrenaline that will do  
13 it. We’d come in at two, three, four, five in the afternoon and we’d get a six pack. We’d  
14 get three or four beers to cut the trail right now. Then we’d take a six pack and go into the  
15 shower. While we’re showering—which makes it easy because you can pee it right out  
16 (Stewart laughing). Drink those six beers because we’re in individual showers. You  
17 know, we’ve got a shower with each room. Okay, then go back to the bar, grab a couple  
18 beers, and then take two or three more into the mess hall. Well, by this time you’ve got a  
19 half dozen—you’ve got a dozen and fifteen in you and it’s seven o’clock at night. Oh  
20 hell, it’s nothing that goes to another four or five or six or seven. So, it was about a case  
21 of beer a night. So, Jughead did that and he also said, in the paratroopers, the men that  
22 made combat jumps in World War II have a bronze star for each combat jump on their  
23 jump wings. Okay, Jughead came up with a brilliant idea that what was fair for them  
24 would be fair for us. Since we were combat pilots, we should have a bronze star on our  
25 pilot wings. Well, to do things like that there’s got to be army rigs, you know, it has to go  
26 through the department of Heraldry at Ft. Lee, it’s got to be approved by the Department  
27 of Army. Not for Jug, he just went and had him put on his. And then he’s getting mad at  
28 us because we won’t go along with that. You know, come on Jug, this is crazy. And then  
29 Major Henderson used to fly in the middle of the formation so he could look out and see  
30 what the hell was going on with the formation. You know, and were the gunships doing  
31 their job. How does the formation look? Is it tight? When do we fire going into these

1 landing zones? When do we fire coming out? Everything that a commander should be  
2 doing. Well, Jughead was watching too many movies and he decided he was going to  
3 lead. Well, that's a good idea if you can read a map. We made two passes at one landing  
4 zone. Oh, first he couldn't find it. We made passes at altitude looking for it. When you  
5 start making big loops with ten helicopters plus the gunships because you're looking for  
6 something because no one read the map right, there's something seriously wrong. So, the  
7 way he found it is one of our gunships when in and uncorked a pair of rockets in it and  
8 said, "Go ahead, see where the smoke is? That's where we're going." So, we did and it's  
9 just there was a lot of stuff that he probably shouldn't have been a combat commander.  
10 He might have been one hell of an airplane pilot. The Army did a lot of that. Once the  
11 calve came over, they started to need—that's when they realized when Johnson built up,  
12 they realized they needed a hell of a lot of helicopter pilots. You know, because we went  
13 from ten helicopter companies when we got there. I don't know how many they had at  
14 the max, but there were hundreds. You know, you need helicopter pilots for that. So, they  
15 grabbed a lot of the guys that were very good airplane instructor pilots, ran them through  
16 helicopter training position course and these guys, by this time, they're senior captains  
17 and majors. They're ready for command slots. So, you send them to Vietnam. This was a  
18 reflection of the system. It wasn't necessarily a reflection on the men. But they were put  
19 in positions that no one should have been put it. You know, you've got combat helicopter  
20 pilots that had been there, done that being led by guys that have less than one hundred  
21 hours in helicopters. That was not—it made for less than a smooth operation.

22 JS: Sure, sure. Question I have for you here. I know you said you started off in the  
23 right seat. How many hours did you have to have to experience before moving to the left  
24 seat and becoming an aircraft commander?

25 JM: Well, they kept me in slicks for, let's see, Jug got there in October so I  
26 probably had, I don't know, maybe one hundred, one hundred and fifty hours in slicks  
27 and then Jug wanted me to become a gunship driver so I could become a platoon leader  
28 in his buddy's company who was down at Vung Tao. I think it was '68. So, he switched  
29 me over to the Firebirds gunships and I flew—on gunships, the aircraft commander flies  
30 in the right seat and basically, the co-pilot flies in the left seat because he handles the  
31 machine guns and the grenade launchers. So, I flew there to learn—I didn't have to learn

1 how to fly a helicopter. Gunships are a lot different because they only land when they  
2 need to refuel or arm. They don't do all the landings that the slicks do so they, you know,  
3 one or two landings a day, big deal. And there was never, you know, never say never. It  
4 would be the exception for a helicopter gunship to land other than add an air fuel. So, you  
5 didn't have to worry about obstacles. So, I did that for two months and then I met with  
6 the guy at the 68<sup>th</sup> and he and I had words as soon as we saw each other. So, I said, "No,  
7 I'm going to stay up here." The first question I asked him is, "Are the rooms down at  
8 Vung Tao air conditioned?" He said, "No." Then I asked him, "Why should I change."  
9 He didn't have an answer. So, I went back to flying slicks and that's when I immediately  
10 became an aircraft commander and a check pilot for our platoon.

11 JS: Well, didn't mean to make you jump too far ahead yet, but we're running  
12 close to the time limit for today, but before stopping, I don't want to limit you on this.  
13 You can say as much as you'd like, but one more question for today. If you could just  
14 talk about, I don't know, the schedule for the day if there was such thing as a daily  
15 routine?

16 JM: I think we had two daily routines. Predicated on whether or not we had a  
17 combat assault.

18 JS: Okay.

19 JM: If we had a combat assault, that would entail anywhere from three, five, or  
20 ten helicopters going together to support an infantry unit that had a mission. They needed  
21 an infantry unit that needed transportation. Okay, once that was either a yes or a no,  
22 everything else built around that. Okay, we could have a four o'clock take off, we could  
23 have a six o'clock take off. We could have—now, here's where it got goofy. We could  
24 have a ten o'clock take off for the formation or an afternoon take off for the formation.  
25 Anything up to about ten, eleven o'clock we did nothing that morning except wait. If it  
26 was an afternoon formation takeoff, we would do what was called single-trip missions in  
27 the morning. If it was a morning assault, depending on how the assault went, we would  
28 either be on standby to support the troops we just took in, or we would come back to the  
29 snake pit which was our heliport and disperse and do single-ship missions. Single-ship  
30 missions could be two or three ships doing it, but they were called single-ship missions  
31 because they weren't formation assault missions.



1 JS: Alright.

2 JM: We'd start anywhere from, I don't know, 4 AM takeoffs and then break in the  
3 single-ship missions. One mission that was done every day was we had a flare ship, a  
4 slick, that had ten or fifteen flares and the flares were four or five feet long and five or six  
5 inches in diameter. That crew would sleep out at the snake pit at Bien Hoa Air Base in  
6 case the base came under attack, or the outpost came under attack. The Special Forces  
7 camp or a village with advisors there. We would fly over the area and kick flares out to  
8 light the area. We also had two gunships would stay there. We alternated that with the  
9 118<sup>th</sup>. They would take it for a week, we would take it for a week keeping a crew and two  
10 gunships out there. At sunset and at daybreak, a fighter team, two armed helicopters  
11 would fly around Bien Hoa Air Base. It's about a fifteen, twenty minute flight making  
12 sure bad guys weren't setting up mortars for that night and making sure bad guys won't  
13 hear our radios. As soon as the sun came up starting pumping mortars into Bien Hoa.  
14 After that, it was just single-ship missions and we could go somewhere, say, I had one to  
15 go to the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> Artillery in the U.S. Army unit, an artillery unit. I would go in  
16 there and report to our battalion commander, "What do you need?" "Well, I don't need  
17 anything right now, but sit around. We may need you in an hour." And that could be  
18 pushed off and you might sit there for four, five, or six hours and do absolutely nothing  
19 all day. There were other times where he needed ammunition taken to this battery or he  
20 needed people brought into rotation or a division priest had to go somewhere. A battalion  
21 doctor wanted to go to the Leper Colony. Take a Catholic Priest around camps. It was not  
22 unusual for us to be—say, we would be at Song Be which is about an hour away coming  
23 back. It's not unusual for us to be called on, on the radio, the FM radio by one of the  
24 Special Forces camps that we were flying. They'd come up and say—they had our FM  
25 frequencies. You know, a helicopter over Trang Bang or wherever we were. "If you can  
26 read me, give me a call." I come back. "2-1, what do you want?" "We've got a guy going  
27 on leave, can you take him to Saigon?" "Well, hell yeah." I drop down, pick him up, take  
28 him to Saigon. It was only fifteen minutes past if we were going to Bien Hoa. That's the  
29 type of thing we did.

30 JS: Alright, well, why don't we go ahead and take a break for today.

31 JM: Sure.

1 JS: Okay.

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**Interview with: John Mateyko**

**Session [2] of [3]**

**Date: July 29, 2010**

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech  
2 University continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. John Mateyko. Today is July  
3 29, 2010, and this is interview session number two. Okay, last time when we left off, we  
4 had gotten you to Vietnam. We talked a little bit about that already. I wondered today if  
5 you could talk a little bit about, first off, some off the different types of missions' you  
6 guys would be flying?

7 John Mateyko: Okay, because the units that we supported, the 118<sup>th</sup> out of Bien  
8 Hoa and the 501<sup>st</sup> how I was with out of Bien Hoa di just about everything you could do  
9 with a helicopter. We did combat assaults which were anywhere from a single ship to ten-  
10 ship to forty-ship to one hundred and twenty-ship missions. Part of them. We would  
11 participate in those. We also did single ship resupply. We did single ship missions that  
12 would take a minister or a priest around to different Special Forces Camps and advisor  
13 compounds for religious services. We'd take doctors around for basically the same thing  
14 including going into the Leper Colony north of Saigon. We took the USO troops around  
15 both. The USO would refer to it, 'Donut Dollies'. We'd take them and drop them off and  
16 pick them up a couple hours later. We would take foreign—well, U.S. and foreign USO  
17 shows around whether they were singing groups or small bands. We'd do medevacs on  
18 call. We would take, oh, people, ground troops and ground personnel out to their  
19 assignment. If a man was—if he was an advisor, he could be in a very small village  
20 where there would just be three or four or five Americans. And when they rotated,  
21 someone would have to take that person from the helipad in Saigon out to East Bong Son  
22 or wherever the heck he was going. The only way to do that was by helicopters. We  
23 grabbed him and took his luggage and his suitcases and take them out there. We'd do  
24 resupply parts. Generators, radios, ammunition. We did flare ship drops at night. We had  
25 flares that were, I don't know, four or four and a half inches in diameter and five or six  
26 feet long. We kept ten of them in one of our slicks at night. If there was contact anywhere  
27 in III Corps, we'd go out there and provide flares for the air spotters or the artillery  
28 spotters or the fighters coming in. We did a lot of resupplies both for American and

1 Aussie and South Vietnamese men. It'd be anything from water to hot food, cold food,  
2 and ammunition parts. The absolute best to work with were the Aussies.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JM: Australian troops. They knew what everything weighed. They understood  
5 that we were there to support them, but we weren't there for them to waste their time.  
6 Whereas, the American troops, some of them had a way different attitude. The  
7 Vietnamese were just anything we could help them out with they were happy. The  
8 Koreans, the same way. Well, the Aussies and the New Zealand's were just princes to  
9 work with. You know, if it could be done by helicopter, by Huey, we did swing loads for  
10 the New Zealand artilleries. That's about everything that sticks out.

11 JS: Okay. I know the first thing you mentioned was the combat assaults. Could  
12 you talk a little bit more about that? About how a combat assault worked?

13 JM: Okay, there's basically two kinds. There were the planned ones and then  
14 there were the spur of the moment ones. The planned ones—now Jason, this is generally  
15 speaking, okay. Everything I say someone can find, “No, we didn't do it that way.” The  
16 way we did it was, the night before we were told that we're having, say, a 6 A.M briefing  
17 at the snake pit, the heliport. So, we would grab our breakfast and we would—we had a  
18 truck that settled us back and forth. Our villa was about, oh two, two and a half miles  
19 from our heliport. We lived in Downtown Bien Hoa just south of the movie theater. We'd  
20 get there, we'd pre-flight the helicopters. Generally, the troops that used the gunner had  
21 already been there and they've got all the rifles and all the ammunition and smoke  
22 grenades and all that stuff on board the birds. The two pilots would pre-flight. The man  
23 that was going to be co-pilot that day, he stayed with the bird. The aircraft commander  
24 went in for the briefing. If it was just the rattlers, we didn't have to move our helicopters.  
25 If it was going to be a multi-company mission, we staged out a snake pit because we had  
26 the best heliport. We would move our birds, line them up in a row to the right and as the  
27 other helicopter companies came in, they'd come in on a trail of ten in a line, a row. They  
28 would line up next to us. The next company that came in would be to their left and then  
29 the fourth company that came in would take the left most part of the heliport. We had  
30 four lines. That's the most we could put on a snake pit. The aircraft commanders,  
31 obviously, with forty aircraft commanders and a couple of gunship aircraft commanders,

1 it's a lot easier to hold a briefing outside because we couldn't all get into one building.  
2 The briefing would last probably about fifteen minutes. A lot of us thought, "This is a big  
3 waste of time." There's an old adage and I'm sure some Roman legion came up with it.  
4 That all these plans are great until the first shot fires. We would get which company is  
5 going to lead, what formation the companies are going to fly in. The radio frequencies for  
6 the ground troops, about where we were going and how the landing zone was going to be  
7 marked. When the artillery support would stop—this is if we had it. When the air support  
8 would stop and whether we were getting propeller fighters for the preparation of the  
9 landing zone or if we were getting jet fighters. If we were getting jets, if they were Navy  
10 or Air Force. The only reason we cared about that was the weapons systems. The Navy  
11 had some rockets that weren't exactly as reliable as you'd like to have them. So, if they  
12 were going to be firing those rockets it was nice for us to know so we wouldn't get in  
13 front of them. Air Force, they didn't have any ordinance that could go wild on them. The  
14 Navy had it because sometimes they were armed to go up north, so they had different  
15 weapons systems because they were coming off carriers. The Air Force, we generally  
16 used the fighters based at either Bien Hoa or Saigon for fire support. Now that's what I  
17 think. You know, I don't know that to be exactly right, but it just seemed that way.

18 JS: Alright.

19 JM: And then if we had it at the snake pit and the troops were there, by the time  
20 the aircraft commander's briefing was done, we'd have four or five Americans near each  
21 helicopter, okay? Now, whoever had whichever aircraft, a company commander or a  
22 platoon leader was getting into, the pilots and that commander or platoon leader talked  
23 before takeoff, and we would let them know what signal we would give them if  
24 something had change. Like direction going into the landing zone, okay? If the ground  
25 troops were briefed that we were going to land to the north and their objective was to the  
26 east, they knew when they got out of the birds to move to the right. Okay, obviously if we  
27 came in, in a different direction, we had to tell them so we could orient their maps and go  
28 towards the objective. These are just little things, but if they weren't guns it'd get all  
29 screwed up real quick. Then there was—it didn't happen that often and I don't recall it. If  
30 it happened, I don't remember, but I know we always had an alternate landing zone. I  
31 never understood that. I probably never understood it because it never happened. I'm sure

1 we were given an alternate landing zone. And then we would also be given any  
2 information if we were going to go somewhere other than come back to the snake pit. If  
3 we were going to go somewhere to refuel and rearm or if we're going to sit down and  
4 wait for the grunts to see how they were doing to see if they needed to pull out right,  
5 then. Or, if they were going to stay for two days, five days, seven days, or thirty days.  
6 And it was all dependent on what the ground troops needed. The Ad-hoc Assaults say,  
7 one of the Rattlers was flying around and he landed at Special Forces Camp, and they  
8 came out and said that they needed a four helicopter assault right now. They needed to  
9 take twenty guys somewhere. We had a UHF (Ultra High Frequency) channel, 243 which  
10 is the guard channel. All military birds monitor that unless the pilots turn it off, okay?  
11 When you turn the aircraft on and start flipping radios on, 243.0 comes on automatically  
12 on the UHF. You can turn it off, okay? It's just a switch and it's obvious. Your UHF  
13 electric switch has the position where it says—you know, I don't even know what it says.  
14 The one with guard says UHF plus guard and the other says, UHF. So, you can turn off  
15 the guard. Anyway, you get on 243.0 and say, "This is Rattler 21, I need all Rattlers that  
16 can hear me come up for all Rattlers and all Thunderbirds. Give me a call on 247.5." And  
17 then you'd sit there and wait. Pretty soon you'd get guys calling in, "What do you need,  
18 what do you need, what do you need?" "Well, come on over to Tay Ninh, we're going to  
19 go do something this afternoon." They'd show up a half hour, hour later. And you'd put  
20 this together and the ground commander would say, "Here's what I need. Here's our  
21 problem. We're going to take twenty people over there. How do you guys want to do it?"  
22 They'd say, "Well, if we could get some artilleries and put some artillery in. If not, let's  
23 get some Air Force. If we can't get Air Force we've got gunships, fine, if not we'll take  
24 him by ourselves." We decided we were going to land in a trail or land in a V of 3 and  
25 two behind or V of 5. "Are there any friendlies in the zone? If not, we need the radio  
26 frequencies." We'd go do our little combat assault. And generally, on those, we'd go  
27 about two miles away and wait in the air. If they got in trouble and they wanted to get  
28 out, we'd be two minutes away. If everything went well or if they were just bringing  
29 some guys out, you know, we'd be back in in fifteen minutes or an hour and bring  
30 everyone home that we took in plus some other guys. There were times when we waited  
31 on the ground so long for the briefing that when we got to where the problem was, the

1 problem was long gone. There was a roadblock. The guys had a roadblock up and we  
2 took two hours to get organized. That roadblock was probably gone by the time we got  
3 the troops there. So, does that answer your question?

4 JS: Yes, sir. One question I had, though, regarding the combat assaults. Would it  
5 always be American troops?

6 JM: No. Americans, Aussies, South Vietnamese, and Koreans.

7 JS: Okay, alright. Let me about you about your impressions of the South  
8 Vietnamese. As you can imagine, other veterans that I've interviewed have gotten some  
9 pretty mixed reviews on them.

10 JM: Sure, I was highly impressed on one extraction we did. We went to extract a  
11 Vietnamese unit and it had to be an infantry company because it was about 140, 150  
12 people, something like that. It was a wide open field. A rice patty or something. There  
13 was no problem space wise, okay? We had plenty of problems to get ten helicopters.  
14 Jason, ten was the working unit because that's what maintenance—that was  
15 maintenance's target to give us ten flyable birds every day. However, many we had, if  
16 they could put ten on the pad, that's what the ground commanders and the aviation  
17 commanders planned on. A ten ship availability. There was no room problem. When we  
18 landed, someone on the ground gave a signal. The ground troops were in the perimeter.  
19 Imagine a circle the size of three football fields.

20 JS: Okay.

21 JM: They were there, they were all facing out which was, you know, this is  
22 something like out of Ft. Benning, Georgia, infantry school. They were all facing out in  
23 their firing positions. When we landed, every third man got up and walked or jogged  
24 backwards towards us, okay? Which pulled about fifty of them offline, five in each of ten  
25 helicopters. We took them out, we came back around and the same thing, but a little bit  
26 more. Maybe sixty, sixty-five of them came. That left about thirty or thirty-five of them  
27 on the ground. The third time in, they all came back and those were the machine gunners  
28 and the guys with the browning automatic rifles. So, he kept his firepower, you know.  
29 This guy must have been the—if he hadn't been to Ft. Benning on the exchange program,  
30 he'd listen to his advisor. And there were no American advisors on the ground. It was all  
31 these South Vietnamese 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenants. That amazed me. And then the other one that

1 amazed me, I think they talked about the South Vietnamese don't give a shit about  
2 anything. I picked up a South Vietnamese captain one afternoon and it was close to the II  
3 Corps border because it was a good hour and a half back to Bien Hoa. He was escorting a  
4 coffin, you know, oh boy here we go, that was going down to IV Corps. So, I got as far as  
5 Bien Hoa, and we were running out of daylight. I told him where he wanted me to go. We  
6 didn't want to go there at night, and he knew that. You know, I said, "What are we going  
7 to do with this coffin overnight?" And he said that he would wait in the helicopter with it.  
8 What? You know, I don't know who's in the coffin, but he was a South Vietnamese  
9 captain and he waited. I went into our Ops, and I said, "We're going to have a guy in a  
10 helicopter overnight." "Well, that's crazy, he can sleep in here." "He wants to stay in the  
11 helicopter." I said, "And put me down for the morning mission and I'll take off at five  
12 o'clock and take him wherever he wants to go." So, then we made sure that the guards  
13 that were going to walk post around our operations building that night knew that there  
14 was a Vietnamese in a certain helicopter. On the other side of that—I left off something  
15 on the assaults. There were times where we did not stage out of the snake pit. We would  
16 take our ten helicopters and associate it with gunships, and we would literally land on the  
17 Vietnamese road. Now, a Vietnamese road can be anything from a four lane highway  
18 down to—I don't know if it's latter-right or what it is. You're in Lubbock, right?

19 JS: Yes, sir.

20 JM: I don't know what you've got down there, but in Northern Texas and  
21 Oklahoma they've got this red clay that's part clay, part stone, and part rock. Okay, there  
22 was some Vietnamese roads made out of that.

23 JS: Okay.

24 JM: So that would be your lowest class of road and then anything up to an asphalt  
25 paved one lane road that had gotten kind of dicey when busses were passing. One and a  
26 half, two lanes wide. One in each direction. We would go out and land—now these are  
27 roads through rice patties. So, you're generally flat and then the road is built up higher  
28 than the top of the dike and we'd land in trail formation, one bird behind the other. If we  
29 were supporting—if we were going to transport a Vietnamese unit on a combat assault,  
30 They would be there when we landed. Now, there's a bunch of reasons, and the primary  
31 one is fog in the landing zones. If the area where we were going to take them, and there



1 was a forward air controller that, you know, he's thirty miles away. He knows where  
2 we're going. He's got the fighter aircraft waiting for this fog to lift. We can't land in fog.  
3 You'd get this ground fog and sometimes it wouldn't burn off until ten, eleven, or even  
4 noon because the sun wouldn't dissipate. There were times—and I know there were at  
5 least two times where we were there at 6 AM or seven or eight or whatever it was and an  
6 hour later the forward air controller called in and said there was still fog in the LZ  
7 (Landing Zone) and an hour later there's still fog, there's still fog. Finally, about eleven  
8 o'clock, the Vietnamese troops just started walking home because it was, you know, time  
9 for them to eat or whatever. That was it. We all looked around, "What are we going to do  
10 for the rest of the day?" Well, someone would call our battalion headquarters and that's  
11 when we would be assigned the single-ship missions. You know, four of you go back.  
12 "The four guys that are high time, go back and park your birds. John, you go here; Jerry,  
13 you go here; Bill, go over here and contact the Special Forces on this frequency and go  
14 do the single-ship." And then one time I was flying gunships and one of our guys had to  
15 extract the Vietnamese patrol and we ended up—he ended up dropping a rope ladder into  
16 the trees and letting them climb up the rope ladder. So, you know, the South Vietnamese  
17 were in contact and like anything else, they obviously weren't American infantry. Our  
18 guys and the Aussies and the Koreans were just plain good. They didn't have the—it  
19 seemed like a lot of their South Vietnamese didn't care one way or the other. All they  
20 wanted to do was plant rice and walk behind a water buffalo.

21 JS: Okay.

22 JM: It really didn't matter to them whether Saigon was ruling, Hanoi was ruling,  
23 or who was ruling. Someone was going to take twenty percent in taxes and whatever they  
24 could get after that was good for them.

25 JS: Right.

26 JM: That's about everything I know about that.

27 JS: Okay, alright. Well, switching gears, I guess. I was going to ask you about the  
28 makeup of the crew of a helicopter. Would it always be the same guys, or...?

29 JM: Not with the Rattlers.

30 JS: Okay.

1 JM: Well, just forget what I just said. The helicopters themselves, a crew chief  
2 was assigned to each helicopter.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JM: And that is ninety-nine percent right because I don't know for certain if our  
5 maintenance helicopter had a crew chief.

6 JS: Okay.

7 JM: It probably did on paper, but he wasn't like the other crew chiefs. Anyway,  
8 the crew chiefs, that was their helicopter. They're responsible for the 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon  
9 maintenance and I don't know when those guys left. You know, forty-five years later I  
10 can't figure out when those guys got an eight hour sleep.

11 JS: Wow, right.

12 JM: Because there was always something to be done. You know, working into an  
13 oil change inspection, patching bullet holes, sweeping the mud and blood out. Restocking  
14 it with rations or smoke grenades. We had our gunners, which was the man on the other  
15 side of the helicopter. He was an infantryman. A fully qualified infantry grunt, okay?  
16 They came over from the 25<sup>th</sup> division which was stationed in Hawaii. Now, here we had  
17 a bunch of eighteen, nineteen, twenty, a couple of twenty-six year old's and a lieutenant  
18 that came over as a platoon or what they call a platoon minor. It wasn't a full platoon.  
19 Now, they came out of Schofield barracks, Hawaii, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Which  
20 everything you've ever heard about commander in chief, specifically the Navy and  
21 Hawaii Army service, there was more chicken shit. Painting rocks, dress; do, do, do, do,  
22 do. Everything you heard was true. Okay, from there, they came TDY (Temporary Duty  
23 Travel) with the extra money a helicopter unit in Vietnam. All they have to do is wear  
24 fatigues, they get all their linen, all their clothes clean by housemates, boots shined. And  
25 for an infantryman assigned to a helicopter unit, all he had to do was clean the machine  
26 guns every night plus any rifles or pistols. And the most machine guns he had was two.  
27 Well hell, an American infantryman, those guys can strip down a machine gun in their  
28 sleep. Plus, they got to fly around, and bullshit and the food was better. You'd get air  
29 metals. If they didn't mind getting shot at, it was damn good duty. Okay, if they got along  
30 well with the crew chief and it was unusual for the gunner not to get along well with the  
31 crew chief because he would try to bend over backwards. Not kiss his ass, but just work

1 with him. He didn't have to take all his shit out of the helicopter. So, he was basically  
2 assigned to the crew chief who was assigned to the helicopter. So, you've got the crew  
3 chief and the gunner were with the helicopter. Okay, the way the rattlers ran it was we  
4 would get the pilot—we had a duty board, mission board, or whatever you want to call it.  
5 It had our helicopters listed—this was back in the villa. The helicopters listed by platoon,  
6 1<sup>st</sup> platoon and 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon. The 1<sup>st</sup> platoon leader would know if there was an assault you  
7 did it one way and if there was a single-ship missions the next day he did another. But  
8 generally, by eight o'clock at night, we would have our names up by our tail number and  
9 take off time, okay? If there was just five o'clock, five o'clock, five o'clock, this is  
10 obviously an assault. If John has a five o'clock take off, Jim has a seven o'clock take off,  
11 and Jason has a seven-thirty o'clock take off, we know we're on single-ship missions.  
12 Okay, we'll get all that tomorrow morning when we walk into our operations office. We  
13 don't need it tonight. Generally, we flew—we didn't call them pilots or co-pilots, we'd  
14 call them aircraft commander and pilots. There's a little technicality in the riggs why they  
15 do that, but it's the same thing.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JM: The aircraft commanders would make sure that the pilot knew that we are  
18 going to catch the 5 AM truck tomorrow morning and you will be happy about it. And  
19 then, you know, you'd go out and walk out to the ship and do whatever you had to do.  
20 That crew remained together for that day and when we went up to Ban Me Thuot on a  
21 four day trip, that crew stayed in that ship the whole time, but that was the only time we  
22 ever did that. Now, there might have been times where I flew the same ship two days in a  
23 row, but I really doubt if I checked my logbook, I would find where I flew the same ship  
24 three days in a row. It was a roll of the dice, and it just never worked that way. Now,  
25 other companies did not operate like that. They had a crew of four and unless someone  
26 was wounded or killed, those four men would be in that bird for, you know, until one of  
27 them was ready to rotate.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JM: You know, you can probably argue either way which is best.

30 JS: Well, would the aircraft commander and the pilot always be the same?

31 JM: No.

1 JS: Okay.

2 JS: They would switch off and one thing the platoon leader was aware of is he had  
3 to develop aircraft commanders. You know, you came over from the states and you, you  
4 know, you were green as all get out and you knew that what you learned in Flight School  
5 that wasn't going to be what you saw in Vietnam. That's a given. For the platoon leaders  
6 had to develop this basically a green pilot right out of Flight School into an aircraft  
7 commander in the quickest time possible. So, he'd assign them to different aircraft  
8 commanders and sometimes, just like the helicopters, you'd fly with the same two or  
9 three days, but that would be unusual when you switched every day. Now, what got  
10 dicey, it was an uncomfortable position where you'd have an aircraft commander flying  
11 with one of the company command pilots who—that's a bad term. One of the guys who  
12 normally didn't fly.

13 JS: Okay.

14 JM: Whether it was the executive officer, some platoon leaders, the pilots, the  
15 operation officers. Those guys normally didn't fly. When we were getting at least one  
16 hundred flying hours every month, these guys were getting ten to twenty flying hours a  
17 month. They had other duties. They were the admin part of the company. They were  
18 doing jobs that had to be done. They were also aircraft commanders. So now you've  
19 got—and they're mostly captains. So, they would haunt on the mission board, they were  
20 the aircraft commander, but they would also be flying with an experience 100 hours a  
21 month commander as their copilot. Sometimes it just didn't set right. So, depending on  
22 the guy, if he realized it—Bobby something or another. It's not Anderson, Bobby  
23 Armstrong or something like that. He was an operations officer and he understood it. I  
24 know the deal, you know, I've heard enough of this bitching from you guys (laughing). If  
25 I'm doing something wrong just let me know about it. But a couple of the other ones  
26 were real doozies, and I don't remember ever flying with my platoon leader because he  
27 knew that I knew he didn't know what he was doing. So, I didn't know who he flew with,  
28 and I didn't care who he was flying with. He knew that if he and I were in the same  
29 cockpit it was going to be an argument all day.

30 JS: Right.

1 JM: Yeah, that's about that. Oh, it also gave—the platoon leader would get  
2 feedback from the aircraft commanders about how Little Johnny's coming along. Does  
3 he, have it? Would he be better off flying guns if he was in guns? Would he be better off  
4 flying slicks? There were some companies in Vietnam, some helicopter companies that  
5 had missions. They didn't do what we did. They stayed out of the combat assaults. They  
6 were the VIP flights. So, this guy would be transferred—is he going to be a detriment to  
7 the Rattlers? You need a set of cohunes to do what we did and either this guy has it or he  
8 doesn't. If he doesn't have it or you don't think he's going to make it, let's transfer him  
9 out and let's get him out of here. And we had one guy who he was right on the line. So,  
10 we kept him, and I think he did a whole tour in Vietnam, and he was never aircraft  
11 commander. Which was, you know, he was a good pilot. Well, let me retract that because  
12 I flew with him. He was a good, basic pilot, okay? He couldn't stay ahead of the  
13 ballgame. You know, it's kind of like a game of pool. Where am I going to be after my  
14 third shot?

15 JS: Right.

16 JM: Larry didn't have that, and I don't think he ever—I looked on our website  
17 and he never did get a call sign, so he was in Vietnam a year and never—they didn't have  
18 enough confidence in them to make an aircraft commander. You know, there's nothing  
19 wrong with that. There're guys flying through the airlines that don't want to be captain.  
20 They just like sitting in that other seat changing radios, which is fine. Yeah, that was one  
21 of the platoon leader's jobs to get up to speed. They could also tell which guys could fly  
22 together and which guys better not put them together because it's going to be like the  
23 wrong order.

24 JS: One other question regarding combat assaults. How many troops could a  
25 chopper carry?

26 JM: Here's the worst answer you've ever heard.

27 JS: (Laughing) Okay.

28 JM: That depends, okay. The biggest restriction on a helicopter, any aircraft. One  
29 of the things you have to factor in is a weather phenomenon, a weather thing called  
30 density altitude. The altitude at sea level is obviously zero, okay. The altitude at five  
31 thousand feet on top of five thousand foot mountains is obviously five thousand feet.

1 Now, Jason, density altitude factors in heat and the humidity. So, you could be at sea  
2 level. I mean, you're right on the beach, okay? You can't get any closer to the sea level  
3 and zero than you are. But because of the heat and the humidity, the helicopter router  
4 system may fly as though it's at four thousand feet.

5 JS: Okay.

6 JM: Like twenty-five hundred feet, okay? So, a morning density altitude in  
7 Vietnam at twenty-five hundred feet was not unheard of. Okay, back to the question, if  
8 we were hauling Vietnamese troops, okay? And a Vietnamese troop fully loaded is  
9 probably 160 pounds. That's with his weapons and his rice bag and his canteen full of  
10 water. Okay, 160, yeah that'd be a good number. An American troop starts out at 175 and  
11 he carries one hell of a lot more pieces of equipment with him. So, I don't know what the  
12 paratroopers figured. You can probably look it up. I think they figured 220 for a  
13 minimum, okay? So, if you could haul seven Vietnamese troops, you're down to five  
14 American troops. Now, that goes out the window when you start hauling the 4.2 inch  
15 mortars or even your 81 millimeter mortars. You know what a mortar is?

16 JS: Yes, sir.

17 JM: Okay, a mortar has a base plate. So, you've got the tube and the base plate  
18 that obviously are made out of steel. You aren't going to haul—you have to figure that  
19 into the equation. So, if you haul six or seven Vietnamese troops and four American  
20 troops, it's possible you're only going to take two American troops because you've got  
21 the two with the 4.2 inch mortars, okay? And you can play that same game with the 81  
22 inch mortars or if you're taking their machine guns and boxes and boxes and boxes of  
23 ammo, okay? Or you're taking some artillery guys and they're going to take some of their  
24 105 ammos with them and those are those wooden boxes you've seen with the rope  
25 handles on them. You know, those things have to weigh 110 pounds a box. So, it just all  
26 gets thrown in. For planning factors, I would say four Americans and six Vietnamese.  
27 Now, that is for a 7 AM takeoff. When it starts to warm up and the humidity gets in the  
28 air and it's one in the afternoon, you can give me the same four Americans, but I'm going  
29 to need some room so I can make a running takeoff instead of a regular takeoff, okay?  
30 Now, you know, that felt well in good if we're at the snake pit where it's paved, but you  
31 get me out in a rice patty, a dry rice patty, where I've got that twelve-inch dike thirty feet

1 from me and I've got to lift up and get out. I can't do a running takeoff. So, we're going  
2 to either have to make more trips or get more helicopters or something because we can't  
3 extract the four Americans and their mortar plates. "Even though we brought you in this  
4 morning, we can't get you out this afternoon. Okay, now you being a smart graduate  
5 student you just leave some fuel on it, okay?" Well, that's a good idea, but you can only  
6 play that so far.

7 JS: Right.

8 JM: You know, when the indicator gets down to a quarter it's kind of like being in  
9 your car crossing in the Mojave. Yeah, I can do it, but let's not get into it. I never  
10 remember not fully fueling for tactical reasons once. And that was a big hullabaloo thing  
11 where I think we had one hundred or one hundred twenty slicks on the 26<sup>th</sup> commanding  
12 controls, you know, we're going to set the record and all this shit.

13 JS: Right.

14 JM: No, that's a good question, but for planning you have to know whether—and  
15 by Americans, I meant toss in the Aussies and the New Zealanders.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JM: The round eyes. And put the Koreans halfway between the Vietnamese.

18 JS: Alright, well I guess if we could switch gears again.

19 JM: Wait a minute, go back to that paragraph and put down, D-Model Huey's.

20 JS: Okay, D-Model Huey's.

21 JM: D, like in dog.

22 JS: Okay.

23 JM: When they got the H Models and the L Models, those guys had another two  
24 hundred horses they could play with so that they could haul more. I only flew one H  
25 Model, and it was at Ft. Eustis, Virginia, so I don't know what they did in combat. Okay,  
26 go ahead. Sorry about that.

27 JS: No problem. Well, we've talked quite a bit about the slicks. I wonder if you  
28 could switch gears for a moment and talk a bit about the gunships. I know you flew those  
29 as well. If you could talk about the differences in the gunship and the differences in  
30 missions as well.

31 JM: Well, there were three packages we had in our gunships.

1 JS: Okay.

2 JM: We had a package that had a seven round, seven rockets, a seven rocket pod  
3 on each side and two flexing machine guns on each side. We had a packet that had, I  
4 believe it was twelve or fourteen rockets on each side with a 40 millimeter grenade  
5 launcher mounted in the nose. Okay, and then we had one that had twenty-four rockets on  
6 each side. Okay, that bird was heavy. It was not unusual for the crew chiefs and the  
7 gunners to step out. Now, they've got their harness on. They are not going to get left on  
8 the ground. For them to hop off and let the aircraft commander get that thing and kick it  
9 so the skids are loose and then start forward on a running takeoff. About ten feet down  
10 the line the crew chief and the gunner hop in. Just to get it going. I only flew that thing a  
11 couple days and I flew it enough to know that it takes off like no other helicopter in the  
12 Army inventory took off. Okay, the gunships, obviously their mission was to put  
13 suppressing fire downward like the infantry wanted. They would also escort us or fly  
14 ahead of us, ahead of the flicks into the landing zones. Depending how much preparation  
15 was done by artillery or Air Force or Navy jets or prop fighters, what was left for them to  
16 go in. They would generally make a high speed reconnaissance over the landing zone  
17 before we landed. Now generally means generally. The ground commander didn't want  
18 that done or the aviation commander didn't want that done. So, they would literally escort  
19 us in. As we slowed for our approach, they would keep on going at eighty knots.  
20 Sometimes—when they went out—I flew guns for two months and I can't remember  
21 going into a Special Forces or an advisor compound with gunships without one of our  
22 slicks being there. We were never called upon to do what occurred to us as aerial  
23 artillery.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JM: I'm sure—well, I'm not sure, sure, but I'm fairly certain that guys in the  
26 division aviation company in the 1<sup>st</sup> Calve and the big red one in the 25<sup>th</sup>. The helicopters  
27 assigned to those units; they probably did an aerial artillery. The firebirds didn't. Now,  
28 there was a neat mission that our firebirds did. They flew off of a Navy LST (Landing  
29 Ship, Tank) or LSBT or some damn thing like that, that was stationed in the river south  
30 of Saigon. There were two of them on that thing. That was a neat mission. You know,  
31 they were out there flying off a Navy boat and I think they were out there thirty days or



1 something. You know, it was something different. They protected one of the petroleum  
2 storage areas down there. And then, let's see, what else? Once we did, I did, we did—me  
3 and the crew—we did one medevac because wherever we were, we were probably flying,  
4 and we got called up on our FM frequency. It wasn't unusual for the grunts to say, "Army  
5 helicopter over Bong Tong." Or wherever we were. The grunts had our frequencies.  
6 Yeah, you know, you've got, "Army 123" or you've got "Rattler 21" or "Firebird 97  
7 What do you want?" They say, "We've got a wounded down here you've got to take him  
8 down to a hospital." "Yeah, no problem." So that's what happened. That's why we ended  
9 up flying a medevac for the gunship. There was only one guy. If there would have been  
10 two guys, we had to bring both ships down, one on each bird. Gunships are full of—  
11 they've got as much ammunition to bring them up to a flyable takeoff. So, you don't have  
12 a lot to play with. I'm sure there have been times where a medevac was needed, and the  
13 gunships dropped off their rocket pods and their machine guns so they could carry the  
14 guys out. I never did anything.

15 JS: Alright, well this may be a silly question, but which did you prefer to fly? The  
16 slicks or the gun shields?

17 JM: The slicks.

18 JS: The slicks? Alright.

19 JM: That's a personal preference and I talked to a lot of guys about it and if you  
20 listen to them bullshit, okay, they like to fly gun shields to kill people. Now that's fine  
21 Jerry, who are you going to bullshit? That's part of the job, but flying slicks, it was so  
22 much more interesting because you did so many more approaches every day, so many  
23 more landings. Now, you're going to hear this again and again. Flying in Vietnam was  
24 about as boring as it could get. Except, when it got interesting, okay? And it got  
25 interesting real quick. The more landings you made, you were thinking, "Where's the  
26 wind, how much room do I have, how am I going to get out? If we get shot, what's my  
27 alternative?" Whereas gunships, they would fly around the sky until they run out of fuel  
28 or ammo and then they go get some more and then they do it again. Yeah, but the pure  
29 flying and the approaches and the landings and who you met. Plus, when we went  
30 somewhere we'd talk to the grunts whereas those guys, when they landed, they refueled,

1 rearmed, and got back up in the air. You know, we'd talk to them on the radio and tell  
2 them what we were going to do. Yeah, that's just a personal preference.

3 JS: Okay.

4 JM: Except the guys through the Cobras, those were probably just fun to fly. I've  
5 got a couple hours in them in the states, but nothing in Vietnam. That was a big  
6 improvement over the B and C model Huey's. Then the guys flying the Apache's now,  
7 that's got to be the best toy God ever invented.

8 JS: Right, right. You mentioned if things got interesting. Were there ever  
9 instances where on a combat assault or anything? Were there hot LZs or anything?

10 JM: Oh yeah, yeah.

11 JS: Alright.

12 JM: When we came out of the aircraft commander's briefing, it went something  
13 like we're going to have Air Force prep 0600 to 0615 (AM) and then we're going to have  
14 ten minutes of artillery prep followed by the white phosphorous. It'd be that big white  
15 smoke you'd see come out. White Phosphorous rounds.

16 JS: Right.

17 JM: And the gunships would escort us in. They won't go ahead of time.

18 JS: Right.

19 JM: If that was the case, we knew that going in our outboard machine gunners on  
20 the formation could fire all the way down, and all the way coming out the first time. If we  
21 were taking a second lift in, they would have to break off their firing in about 200 yards  
22 out so we knew we would not be shooting in an area where our own troops were or were  
23 likely to be. And then the same way coming out. We would hold off firing until we were,  
24 you know, 100 yards to two hundred yards out of the LZ and then they could open up if  
25 they saw something. Yeah, hot LZ's were not unusual. They weren't unusual on the  
26 assaults. On the extractions there was always a chance you were going to get fired at  
27 coming in or coming out. The extractions being the opposite of us.

28 JS: Alright, well that brings up the next set of questions I have then. If we could  
29 talk a little bit about the enemy. Your first encounter with the enemy and what you  
30 remember about that.

1 JM: Um, the person I saw was the dead one. I knew he was laying in the rice  
2 patty. He went down and grabbed his rifle and I think I still have it. It's around the house  
3 somewhere. I didn't understand—I never understood their tactics. What I thought—now,  
4 I was there when it was mostly Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

5 JS: Okay.

6 JM: '65, '66. After the build-up, we were there—the calves came in. I think the  
7 calve got in there early September of '65. The 1<sup>st</sup> Calve up in II Corps. And then the 1<sup>st</sup>  
8 Infantry Division came, and their home base was at Zion which is five or six kilometers  
9 south of Saigon. And then a brigade from the 25<sup>th</sup> came, the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. That  
10 was in III Corps. I don't know the other Corps, but I didn't understand, once we had  
11 however many troops we had there, 200,000 or 500,000. I don't remember what the  
12 number was. I didn't understand why they continued to fight. I thought if they take all  
13 their weapons, wrap them in grease paper and stick it in the bottom of the rice patty  
14 somewhere and plug that rice patty and not do anything for six months, it was all the  
15 protests that were going on and the U.S. Army doing nothing in Vietnam. You have to  
16 bring them home. Then go do the weapons and start making 1962 all over again. You  
17 know, but they didn't do that, and I think they got their asses clobbered in Tet. And then  
18 it was enough that we pulled out, but look, it's a lot easier to—I've been on some  
19 websites and have seen the tunnel systems they had around Cu Chi, which that was the  
20 25<sup>th</sup> brigade, the 25<sup>th</sup> American put a brigade there. I'm amazed that they didn't kill more  
21 Americans. You know, they didn't have their weapon systems, they didn't have our  
22 explosives and they sure as hell didn't have our pipeline. You know, so I was never—I'd  
23 shoot at them, or our ships would shoot at them, and they'd shoot back at us. Like the guy  
24 says, Vietnam's a beautiful country if they weren't shooting at you.

25 JS: Well, any particularly memorable combat assaults or other flights that you had  
26 interaction with the enemy that you could mention?

27 JM: Um, yeah, I went in on a medevac one day and it was the middle of a mortar  
28 attack. They were walking the mortars from one end of the open field to the other. So, we  
29 waited until they were being walked away from us and we'd land, load up. I think we  
30 brought out four guys at a time wounded and took them to the hospital back at the 25<sup>th</sup>.  
31 Then when we got there, we'd wait until we could see them walking all over again. We'd

1 land behind it. If they would have ever decided to walk them back the other way I  
2 wouldn't be here today. They were just—if you look at the way the armies of the world  
3 are trained and the big exceptions are the Brits, the Canadians, the South Koreans,  
4 Aussies, and probably the Indian troops from the sub-continent India. With those  
5 exceptions, and those are obviously British, you know, British Colonial training,  
6 including us. We're brought up on the baseball field or rugby field. If someone is hurt,  
7 someone else steps in right away. Okay, there are a lot of armies in the world where you  
8 do not step up unless you are told to step up. Which means that if a sergeant gets shot and  
9 he can no longer function, the corporals are not sure what to do, much less the PFC's  
10 (Private First Class). So, I don't know if that's the way the North Vietnamese Army ran  
11 or if that's the way the Viet Cong ran. I just never knew, and I didn't really care what  
12 their command structure was and what went.

13 JS: Right.

14 JM: And then oh, we had—Special Forces had these Chinese nuns, and I don't  
15 think they were exactly Chinese, everything over there could be mixed blood. You had  
16 the Japanese occupied Vietnam; the French were there. And you talk about raping a  
17 country. The French did nothing but rape Vietnam. They took everything out of their  
18 country they could and didn't do anything for the infrastructure or the schools. University  
19 of Saigon was, oh God, I don't think they could handle a thousand people.

20 JS: Oh wow.

21 JM: Yeah, to me it looked like they had three story classroom buildings. The  
22 French didn't, you know, they took all the rubber latex or whatever it's called out of the  
23 country, and they didn't put much back in. That's about it.

24 JS: Okay, well why don't we go ahead and stop for today?

25 JM: Sure.

26 JS: Alright.

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**Interview with: John Mateyko**

**Session [3] of [3]**

**Date: August 6, 2010**

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech  
2 University continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. John Mateyko. Today is  
3 August 6, 2010, and this is interview session number three. Okay, I was looking at the  
4 questionnaire that you had filled out for us. I noticed you mentioned that you were shot  
5 down once. Would you mind talking a little bit about that?

6 John Mateyko: It should have been twice.

7 JS: Oh twice, okay.

8 JM: Yeah, let's leave it with one and then one you decide if it was a shot down or  
9 not.

10 JS: Okay.

11 JM: The first time I was flying co-pilot on a gunship and Pat Waltney was the  
12 pilot. He was the aircraft commander. On that particular model helicopter, above the  
13 main rotor blades are two counterweights that are used to balance the rotor system. We  
14 took a round through the bolts that holds the counterweight up. When it was loose up  
15 there it had to obviously fall through the rotor system. When it fell through the router  
16 system it took a gouge out of the main spar of the blade; the main spar of the main blade  
17 as well as the honeycomb which set up a tremendous lateral vibration in the aircraft.

18 JS: Okay.

19 JM: You want to get it on the ground and shut down as quickly as you can before  
20 things start getting worse. Pat did a hell of a job of landing it. Found a flight spot in a trail  
21 in the jungle and he put it down right there. We were where the bad guys hung out so the  
22 crew chief and gunner, they had their handheld machine guns, and they took one of the  
23 ship's machine guns off and put a trigger housing group on it, so I had a machine gun.  
24 So, we're all walking around like we're Rambo heroes. They knew what they were doing,  
25 and I barely knew how to hold this thing. Pat was on the radio. We were flying wing with  
26 Jim Dorsey. So, Pat told Jim what happened, and Jim was circling overhead. Jim got a  
27 hold of a FAC (Forward Air Control), and an Air Force helicopter came over from Bien  
28 Hoa because all he heard was that we were going down. And he didn't know if there was  
29 going to be a fire or what, so he came over. He had a fire suppression bottle and we told

1 him to go back. We didn't need him. And then the FAC got a flight of four fighters over  
2 us and two flights of jets over us. And then Jim Dorsey got a hold of—I don't know, we  
3 were only about fifteen minutes out of Bien Hoa, and I think Jim did it on the radio, but  
4 he got a hold of Rattler, our operations people, and they send the maintenance ship out  
5 and all they knew for sure is that one of our blades was damaged and that we lost a  
6 counterweight. So, when they came out, they took the blade off, put the counterweight  
7 and need more parts so they flew out. They went back to the maintenance area and  
8 returned with whatever parts they needed. I think we were on the ground at three, three  
9 and a half hours. During that time, we heard, coming from the jungle, "Don't shoot  
10 Americans." And here came a long-range recon patrol that had been out in the jungle at  
11 least three weeks. If you ever want to smell some guys that are ripe, you know, it was  
12 these guys. We thanked them for coming and you know, to this date I don't know if there  
13 was a communication between our people that told military assistance command in  
14 Saigon and where we were, and they contacted the infantry units to see if anyone had a  
15 patrol in the area and let them know that we were there or if they just happened to  
16 stumble across us. You know, they saw some air activity so they figured some air crew  
17 might need help. But anyway, they were there and as they were about to leave, we asked  
18 if they wanted anything. Because we had water and C-rations and clean clothes and clean  
19 boots. And hell, I would have flown back naked if those guys needed my shoes and  
20 shirts. They said, "No, we're okay. We're only going to be out here another week." I  
21 thought, "Oh God, better you than me." So, one of our maintenance officers and pat flew  
22 the gunship out and I flew the maintenance ship out. The other time I took—I was flying  
23 a low recon. We had a couple of engineer officers on board and a small bridge had been  
24 knocked down into the water and they wanted to see it. So, we flew the high recon and  
25 then we dropped down and flew the low recon. We took three hits in the belly and the  
26 fuel started to leak. The fuel gauge was going south as we were going home. We ran out  
27 of fuel maybe a quarter mile south of our main heliport, but we had enough airspeed and  
28 altitude that it was one of the things we were trained to do and like dumb luck I got it on  
29 the ground safely and in one piece. Just proves that Army training works. That was the  
30 two times.

31 JS: Okay, so you were able—was that called autorotating?

1 JM: Yeah, when you run out of power you go into an autorotation.

2 JS: Okay, was it fairly common to take rounds into the helicopter to get hit?

3 JM: Yeah, there's about three ways to do it. One, when you know you're taking  
4 fire. You can see the flashes. And if the conditions are right and if they're using  
5 automatic weapons, you can see the tracers coming in. I think they're the equivalent of  
6 our 50 caliber machine gun was either a 12.5 or a 12.7 millimeter, okay? And it has green  
7 tracers. When you see green tracers coming at you, you know between every green  
8 there's one that's not marked. There's about four of them that aren't tracing. So, you  
9 could see them sometimes or one of our gunners or crew chiefs was, "Hey, we're taking  
10 fire from the right." "Oh, okay." Or that was one way to know you're being shot at.  
11 Another way is you hear the round go through the aircraft. Yeah, that's the second way.  
12 And then the third way is when you're doing the post-light inspection when you get done  
13 for the day and you go around and you say, "Holy cow, we took a hit back here."  
14 Because there were a whole bunch of places on the helicopter that you could put a round  
15 through it and all it does is make a hole going in and a hole going out the other side. And  
16 you'd never hear it because that aluminum is so thin. Now, there are obviously guys that  
17 heard one round and that put the helicopter out of commission right then and there. I've  
18 heard—it never happened to me, but the guys that have taken hits in the Plexiglas, that'll  
19 get your attention when that windshield shattered. Guys have taken hits that have broken  
20 one of their rudder pedals, you know, one of the foot pedals. Guys have taken hits in that.  
21 They've taken hits that have knocked out the push-pull linkage on the controls. So,  
22 there's all kind of hits that have taken any aircraft that won't do any damage. And then  
23 there's luck that knocks you out of the sky. If you're going to ask how many hits you're  
24 going to take, the answer is I have no idea.

25 JS: Well, any other aside from the two times being shot down? Any other combat  
26 experiences that we haven't already covered that stick out in your mind that you could  
27 possibly talk about?

28 JM: I don't know, did we talk about the trip up to Ban Me Thuot?

29 JS: I don't believe so.

30 JM: Okay, we had—our 2<sup>nd</sup> commanding officer, Donald J. Hade, everyone called  
31 him Jughead. I don't know if he wrangled it or a higher headquarters tasked us, but our

1 entire helicopter company, all the Rattlers and the Firebirds had a mission to go in direct  
2 support of the 155<sup>th</sup> at Ban me Thuot, the 155<sup>th</sup> assault helicopter company, whatever  
3 they were called at Ban me Thuot. Ban Me Thuot is about an hour and ten minutes, hour  
4 and twenty minutes north, northeast of us. Well, to get there, there was a mission at Phan  
5 Theit which was due east of us on the coast to support a Vietnamese operation on a  
6 specific day. The operation went: we would fly to Phan Theit, support the Vietnamese  
7 Infantry on that information and then we would go to Nha Trang fuel and eat, and then  
8 Nha Trang's also on the coast. We just flew up the coast and do everything we had to do  
9 at Nha Trang in the way of eating and refueling and then bounce over to Ban Me Thuot. I  
10 think we were going to spend three days or four days up there. I don't know because I  
11 never saw that whole op order. And it didn't matter to us because we were going to fly in  
12 a loose cross-country formation and when we got there, we got there, and it didn't matter  
13 to us one bit if we got there at one in the afternoon or five in the afternoon. When we got  
14 there, the fuel truck came out. Oh, to get there, when we were told to take everything  
15 with us that we needed, which meant we needed spare blades, spare main router blades,  
16 and a whole bunch of maintenance stuff. Plus, enough tents to allow, oh god, one  
17 hundred—better than one hundred guys sleeping. We took twenty-five helicopters—well,  
18 we probably took fifteen helicopters. So, I figure eighty guys. Sixty crew and twenty  
19 extra guys. We had enough tents to sleep in with eighty guys plus clean clothes and  
20 everything else you needed to live on for four, five, or six days. We could not carry that  
21 much by ourselves. With everything else, I think we had two U.S. Air Force cargo  
22 airplanes meet us at Ban Me Thuot civilian airport. Then we shuttled the stuff over once  
23 we got there. Anyway, when we landed, the 155<sup>th</sup> was out on an operation. When their  
24 fuel truck came up, he asked, "Where are you guys going?" And, you know, he thought  
25 we were just fifteen helicopters passing through. I said, "No, we're here." I said, "No you  
26 aren't. We don't know you're coming." Well, Jason, the immediate problem with that  
27 was, if the fueling guy didn't know we were coming, the club officer didn't know we  
28 were coming. Which means he didn't order enough beer for tonight. So, we sent one guy  
29 to go over to Ban Me Thuot airport to grab one of the Air Force cargo ships and have the  
30 Air Force run our guy back to Nha Trang to get a pallet of beer and then return. Okay, we  
31 got the important thing out of the way first (Stewart laughing). Then, we started setting



1 up our tents and in flew the 155<sup>th</sup> and their helicopters and gunships. You know, we  
2 didn't care whether they were just—and a couple of us knew a couple of the guys in that  
3 flight. You know, “Hi, how are you? What are you guys doing here?” “Well, we're here  
4 to support.” “For what?” “Well, we don't know. We were just ordered to come here.”  
5 Well, our commanding officer talked to their commanding officer, and it turned out the  
6 155<sup>th</sup> had no idea what we were doing there. Okay, because Jughead had his nose so far  
7 up our battalion commander's rear end, he didn't know what to do. He should have called  
8 in right away. Either call in or get in his helicopter or go up and contact him on radio  
9 from one of the high frequency radios. We've got an operational problem here. He didn't  
10 call the next day and finally, the second night we were there he called in and said, “They  
11 don't know what to do with us.” Well, our battalion had Saigon Bien Hoa area, they  
12 didn't know what to do with us. I checked my logbook, and I flew one helicopter up, the  
13 second day I flew another helicopter on just a quick mission and I don't even recall what  
14 it was. We waited a third day, and we came back on the fourth day. And all we did all  
15 day long was drink beer and swim in the river. Out of the swimming in the river, one guy,  
16 Chuck, contracted a stomach virus or animal or something. They took him—I think they  
17 took him to the big hospital at either Saigon or Long Bien for at least three weeks and he  
18 went back to Japan for about three months. Jim Moore was medevac'd by helicopter back  
19 to Bien Hoa to Long Bien and he was in the hospital two or three days, and they got him  
20 cured up to snuff. He wasn't up to snuff, but he was okay that he could come out of the  
21 hospital. So, there was—and Jim remembers it as the time—he lost his Flight School ring  
22 in that river. Which is, to him, that's more important than ending up in the hospital three  
23 or four days with a viral infection or a stomach infection. Those are the only two guys I  
24 know that had trouble with that water up there. Yeah, but all we did was play in the river  
25 and drink beer.

26 JS: So almost like an in-country R&R (Rest and Recuperation).

27 JM: Sure, sure. Then when we came back, we came back low level in trail which  
28 means one helicopter following another. That wasn't a good idea because I was tail end  
29 Charlie. I was the last ship. You know, Lee would wake up the bad guys, they'd shoot at  
30 the middle of the formation and I'm taking the hits. I said, “This isn't any fun back here.  
31 Let's go to a different formation. If we're going to stay low, let's go to a different

1 formation or let's get up high." Whatever formation we changed to; we didn't have a  
2 straggler way back there anymore. That was about the only goofy thing we did as a  
3 company. I took a three day R&R to go down to Tay Ninh to fly with an Air Force  
4 forward air controller for three days. It'd be a little exciting thing to do. That was it. I  
5 took an in-country R&R at Dalat and I think that was for three days. I don't think it was a  
6 five day one. And then out of country I went to Bangkok twice, Hong Kong once, and the  
7 Clark Air Base in the Philippines. All for a week each time.

8 JS: Any memorable moments from that time with forward observer?

9 JM: No, no. It was just something to do. It was the normal things they do. They  
10 go out and they look for bad guys and if they find bad guys, they mark it with one of their  
11 rockets and then the fighters come in and take care of the problem. I didn't—I had no  
12 time down there that he had a combat assault or a combat extraction going so I couldn't  
13 see what they do and how they physically control the fighters who were always  
14 supporting helicopters.

15 JS: Okay, alright. How did you end up getting involved in that?

16 JM: In that?

17 JS: Yeah.

18 JM: I was down there for—I don't know how I met this guy, but he was just down  
19 at Tay Ninh and I thought, "Well, might as well take a weekend off or a couple days off."  
20 I asked if I could fly with him and he said, "Yeah, come on down." So, I had one of the  
21 guys drop me off down there and then pick me up several days later. It was one of those  
22 things where he seemed to cut above the rest. If you want to learn something, learn from  
23 someone that's pretty good. I started hanging out with him for a couple days.

24 JS: Okay, alright. How about other things? Whenever you would have some free  
25 time, how would you generally spend it?

26 JM: We spent a lot of time at the bar.

27 JS: Okay.

28 JM: A lot of time at the bar.

29 JS: Alright.

30 JM: I tried to write my parents twice a week, but it was hard to write something.  
31 If I write, "Gee, we went out flying for two hours today and the grass is green, and the

1 rice is at three inches high and it's just starting to show above the water. We flew over  
2 the ocean today and the water's nice, blah, blah, blah." Well, you also don't want to  
3 write, "I went in today and we pulled four guys with our legs torn off and took them to  
4 the hospital." So, you've got to reach a happy medium in there. That was one of the  
5 hardest things to do. What do you write your parents? And I wasn't married at the time.  
6 I'm sure guys have a tough time. What do they write their wives? What do you write your  
7 kids? How do infantry guys write their kids for what they did that day?

8 JS: Right.

9 JM: I don't know the answer. I got one from my dad. See, when the calve came  
10 over, the 1<sup>st</sup> Calve came, they had all the newspaper headlines and the average guy didn't  
11 care who got the headline, okay? But the commanders started to care. So, the calve was  
12 up in II Corps and we were in III Corps so to outdo the calve, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps aviation  
13 officer or someone, and I don't know who did it, but someone came up with the idea that  
14 instead of using ten, twenty, thirty, and forty ship helicopters for assaults, we would have  
15 a hundred ship combat assault. So now they needed ten helicopter companies and their  
16 idea was, they would take a ship from every helicopter company and put it in each assault  
17 unit. Well, we caboched that right away. We said, "There's no way we're going to fly  
18 with guys from that outfit or guys from that outfit or guys from this outfit." You lose a lot  
19 of confidence in the guy on your left or on your right. So, we maintained our unit  
20 integrity and we went on this thing, and this isn't the right name, okay, but let's call it  
21 Operation Whitewater. So, we went on it, and this was a Sunday morning thing, and we  
22 went out and refueled in the middle of a field and the Chinook helicopters brought in  
23 these big fuel blotters and all this combat shit. So, I wrote my mom and dad. I said, "Hey,  
24 we went on a pretty big lift today. We had a hundred helicopters. A couple of things went  
25 wrong, but generally it went okay." Well, about a week and a half later, I got a letter from  
26 my dad he says, "Just knock off the bullshit." He said, "It made the papers, what you  
27 guys did, and what really happened. If you're trying to temper it, don't even mention it."  
28 So, then what do you write your parents about? Same with the guys who were married or  
29 had kids. We had a movie theater downtown, but the audio was either in Vietnamese or in  
30 French and it didn't matter to me because I didn't understand either one of them.

31 JS: Right.

1 JM: I just didn't like the idea of going into that movie theater. Too many things  
2 that happened and too few places to get out of it. We'd go to Saigon. Bien Hoa had  
3 roadside—what they called roadside cafes, alright? What your hometown?

4 JS: I'm from Mobile, Alabama originally.

5 JM: Oh, okay. Pick Podunk, Alabama, okay? And take the most dilapidated  
6 garage you have ever seen, okay? Take the front doors off, cover it with sheets of slits of  
7 beer can metal before it's been cut to can size, okay? And rust it for about ten years. That  
8 is the makings of a Vietnamese roadside café. I don't remember a meal and taking the  
9 meal on the civilian side of Bien Hoa, but we could go—you have to understand that if  
10 the helicopter pilot, himself, wanted to go somewhere, most of their helicopter crews  
11 would be willing to take them. And with all the helicopters going between Saigon and  
12 Bien Hoa, it was no problem going back and forth to them. We could hop into Saigon.  
13 I'm sure guys did it three or four times a week, if not more. Some guys might have gone  
14 to Saigon every night, I don't know. I think we'd go to Saigon once a week or three times  
15 a month. Something on that frequency. We'd go to the Caravel Hotel that had a decent—  
16 it had a rooftop buffet set up, a full bar, and a Vietnamese band and invariably, you had a  
17 decent looking Vietnamese gal which means she probably has some French blood in her,  
18 trying to sing an American rock and roll song (laughing). A thin Vietnamese gal who can  
19 barely walk in her stiletto heels with a painted black dress on her trying to sing, "Blue  
20 Suede Shoes" leaves a lot to be desired, but it was entertainment. And then there was the  
21 big PX in Saigon. That was, I don't know, I might have been in there five or six times.  
22 They had a lot of electronics. Oh, I know, we lived in two men to a room. Some of the  
23 platoon leaders and the company commanders, they didn't have roommates because we  
24 had enough room to take the single out of. Each pilot is ninety-five percent true on that.  
25 Each pilot had his own tape-to-tape, reel-to-reel tape deck plus an amp and two  
26 obscenely-sized speakers. I think the smallest speakers I can recall were probably  
27 fourteen by fourteen and maybe two and a half feet tall. They had woofers and tweeters,  
28 whatever. Volume controls on the speakers. We had that. You know, what are you going  
29 to spend your money on? You're between twenty and twenty-five years old on flight pay  
30 in Vietnam. So, everyone had these speakers. And most guys brought those back with  
31 them. Then you'd start played, "Keep Up with the Jones'." Geez, there's a new reel-to-

1 reel tape deck. Jimmy down the hallway has one and his roommate has one and we don't  
2 have one. So, we're going to have to get over there and buy one. (Inaudible) with the  
3 Sony you had, but you had to get the new speaks. Stuff like that went on. Yeah, we did a  
4 lot of drinking. Guys that could hold their liquor drank and guys who probably shouldn't  
5 be drinking that couldn't hold it, they drank. There was never any altercation. I mean,  
6 never. It was all, you know, we had weapons in every room. No one ever—there was a  
7 lot of friendly bantering going on. The bar gains of rolling dice for this or liar's poker  
8 with the dollar bills. When Martha Raye stayed with us, she got prettier on every round of  
9 drinks. You know, it was a good time. The cultural attractions, I believe it's called the  
10 Cathedral of Notre Dame. There was one Cathedral that I knew of in Saigon, and I went  
11 to that. And by chance, I met a priest at the church we go to. We were talking about  
12 things. He said, "Well, you were in Vietnam?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "What'd you do?"  
13 I said, "Flew choppers." He said, "Well, I rode around in choppers." I said, "What were  
14 you?" He said, "I was a priest." He went over on like a thirty day assignment in Vietnam.  
15 That's where I got the name that it's a Cathedral of Notre Dame or Notre Dame. It's not  
16 on the scale of an American and definitely not a European Cathedral, but it's made of  
17 brick and it's the best they could do in Saigon. Then there was a Buddhist temple outside  
18 of Tay Ninh. If you get a chance, if you haven't, see if you can find some pictures of that  
19 Buddhist Temple at Tay Ninh.

20 JS: Oh, at the Cao Dai

21 JM: Yeah.

22 JS: Yeah, I've actually seen it.

23 JM: Okay, what do you think of that?

24 JS: It was quite strange. The ceremony itself was pretty interesting as well.

25 JM: Okay. When you were there, by any chance did you go on top of the  
26 mountain?

27 JS: No, we didn't get a chance to go up there.

28 JM: You know, there's a cable car there now?

29 JS: Oh, really?

30 JM: Yeah, the cable cars are on the internet. It's probably a lot more fun than the  
31 way we just had to fly into that place. That temple is amazing. Now, if you want to do

1 some graduate student-type work, there's some pictures of Joan Collins taken in that  
2 temple, dressed. Was she Playmate of the Year?

3 JS: Good question, I don't know.

4 JM: I know she was a playmate, but I don't know if she was Playmate of the  
5 Year.

6 JS: Right.

7 JM: She came over, and it had to be early to mid- '66. And that's one of the  
8 places that they took her to see. Yeah, that would definitely be graduate study-type  
9 research.

10 JS: (Laughing) Right.

11 JM: Seeing Joan Collins in the temple that you were. I know, that reminds me of  
12 something. There was a female. She was either a DJ or a talk show host. Boy, that would  
13 have been unusual to have a female talk show host in the sixties. Or she might have been  
14 a news person out of somewhere in one of the western—I think it was a western state,  
15 Jason.

16 JS: Okay.

17 JM: Well, she came to Vietnam representing either a news agency or her  
18 hometown station, but she came lock, stock, and barrel and she brought her white  
19 Corvette over. Now, I don't know how you got between Saigon and Tay Ninh, but you  
20 know what a Vietnamese road looks like. If you want a shock, watch an American girl  
21 ride on one of those roads with the top down. I mean, what did I just see? Doggonit; her  
22 name completely escapes me. Yeah, she probably came over the spring or summer of '66,  
23 too. Let's see, once we had to destroy a Vietnamese H-34 helicopter that either ran out of  
24 fuel or was shot down. He didn't run out of fuel; he was shot down. He auto rotated onto  
25 a hill and six hundred up and flying her out was out of the question and recovering it was  
26 out of the question. So, we had—I think they told the Firebirds to go ahead and destroy it.  
27 With the lack of precision of rockets, we had on board, we couldn't hit it with rockets.  
28 Rather than coming off and hovering, they'd just shoot their rockets in so that they could  
29 continue to do their eighty mile an hour pass of that and missed it completely. Finally,  
30 one of our slicks hovered within a couple hundred yards and they let the gunner put his  
31 machine gun bullets into where his fuel tanks were. He eventually wanted the tracers to

1 set off the fuel and that was the end of that Vietnamese H-34. That's about all the off the  
2 wall stuff I can think of.

3 JS: Okay, well any funny moments? Anything like that, that sticks out in your  
4 mind?

5 JM: Well, it's funny after the fact, but at the time it was, we had a pilot that really  
6 drank. I mean, a lot more. Well, everyone really drank. He went to bed early one night  
7 and about two hours later some of us thought it was a good idea to put his hands in a  
8 bowl of water. So, he got up, ran to the bathroom right away. Our toilets, obviously our  
9 bowl was on the floor, but the tank was up on the wall in the European fashion. When he  
10 pulled it to flush, he lost his footing or something and the whole tank came crashing  
11 down. So, Dick was upset with the guy across the hall from him, so he went over there  
12 and told him he needed a place to take a shit because the toilet was broken. The guy ran  
13 him out. So now Dick's going down the hallway doing the thing that nature called upon  
14 with a roll of toilet paper throwing it up onto the wall and the ceiling fans.

15 JS: Oh no.

16 JM: Saying, "God, please help me. Somebody get God, I really need help." Now,  
17 at the time it's funnier than I'll get on, but looking back on it, it wasn't a life changing  
18 moment, but it wasn't as funny as it was at the time.

19 JS: Well, anything else we should mention before talking about the end of your  
20 tour and coming home?

21 JM: No, that's about it.

22 JS: Okay, at what point then did you receive orders to come home?

23 JM: I don't remember, okay? I know—let's say I was supposed to come out  
24 August 15<sup>th</sup> with my 365<sup>th</sup> day, okay? I know we had what was called a PCOD, a pussy  
25 cutoff date. I don't even know what it was because I wasn't touching the Vietnamese  
26 gals. I think it was ten days out. To show you how serious that was, four of our pilots in  
27 that ten days went down to Vung Tao, and they all came back with—they needed  
28 Penicillin shots and they had to redo their port call because they were within the—the  
29 Penicillin wouldn't have taken affect. They wouldn't have been cleaned up before they  
30 got on the bird to come home. So, the four of them missed their port call. Either ten or  
31 twelve days out, I was all but done flying. So, I went to Clark Air Base for a week. I

1   hopped on one of the cargo jets and went to Clark for a week and I came back, and I  
2   had—someone asked me, and I checked my logbook, and I had a couple of flights my last  
3   three days. It must have been very easy administrative flights because I sure as hell  
4   wasn't going on a combat assault with three days to go. And then I don't even recall  
5   going to company headquarters and getting my paperwork. So, they might have met me  
6   right at the snake pit. And then John Cawley—I had been flying with John from the  
7   previous six weeks on a regular basis. When I gave him his aircraft commander check  
8   ride, I'd told him that he would take over my call sign when I left. And then the night  
9   before I asked him if he could fly me to Saigon. I said, "Yeah, no problem." John took  
10   me into Saigon and coming out of Saigon he became Rattler 21. And then I went home  
11   for—I got back to the states in the middle of August, and I had a new car waiting for me.  
12   I was on orders to go to Ft. Eustis. It would have been about the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. So, I  
13   had August, September, October to kill. I spent about three or four week's tiddling  
14   around and then I went to Ft. Eustis, reported in early, and with their head test pilot I flew  
15   around the eastern part of the United States in a CH-21 which is called a "flying banana."  
16   Getting parts and doing administrative stuff for the maintenance department at Ft. Eustis.  
17   We were flying along, and they said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Man, I got a  
18   girlfriend in Indianapolis, and I put in for Ft. Knox, Kentucky, and they assigned me to  
19   the 11<sup>th</sup> Calve." He says, "Oh, you're going to Vietnam." I said, "No, you don't  
20   understand, I came from Vietnam. I'm going to Ft. Knox." He said, "You're going to  
21   Vietnam." I said, "Can't you hear me, I'm going to Ft. Knox." And he said, "You're  
22   going to the 11<sup>th</sup> Calve." I said, "Yep." He said, "You're going to Vietnam." And Gill  
23   was an old time warrant officer. He said, "The 11<sup>th</sup> is going to Vietnam." "They can't do  
24   that to me." He said, "You don't understand, little boy. You go to the 11<sup>th</sup> Calve; you're  
25   going to Vietnam." I said, "I don't want to go to Vietnam." He said, "Okay." So, the next  
26   day we flew over to Ft. Belvoir and there's a military shuttle cabs and cabs running to the  
27   Pentagon all the time. From the Pentagon we took another cab over to McNair. We  
28   walked into this—we literally walked into this Colonel's office. The Colonel goes, "Hi  
29   Gill, how are you doing?" They knew each other for the past twenty years. And Gill says,  
30   "The lieutenant here doesn't want to go to the 11<sup>th</sup> Calve." And I'm ready to shit, you  
31   know. The Colonel says, "Oh, where does he want to go?" Gill says, "What do you have



1 in Germany?" The colonel grabs his book and goes through it and says, "Here, here, here,  
2 here, and Mannheim." So that's how I ended up a test pilot in Mannheim, Germany.

3 JS: Well before discussing that for a little bit, if I could ask you a few more  
4 questions about coming home?

5 JM: Sure.

6 JS: Alright. What was your reception like upon arrival? At that point, was there  
7 much war protests going on? Did you run into anything like that?

8 JM: We took off out of Saigon and landed at Tachikawa in Japan to refuel and  
9 probably change crews. And then we landed in either—I don't know if we landed in  
10 Fairbanks or Anchorage, but I know it was in Alaska because I remember walking into  
11 the terminal and seeing a huge polar bear under glass, okay? Now, if they're in both  
12 airports, that's a bad reference. If there's one in Fairbanks or if there's one in Anchorage,  
13 that's the airport I was in. And then after I refueled there, we went to McGuire Air Force  
14 Base in Jersey. We're wearing short-sleeved khakis and I had a couple bags with me. We  
15 took a shuttle over to Philadelphia Airport and I bought a ticket to either Midway or  
16 O'Hare. I think it was O'Hare. It seemed like a good size. Once I had my ticket and flight  
17 number, I called home and told my dad I'd be at O'Hare or somewhere whenever the  
18 time was. Nine-thirty, ten-thirty at night and if it's not too much trouble, could he come  
19 pick me up. Well, you know, it's not too much trouble picking up your son you haven't  
20 seen for a year. I said, "I'll be in my short-sleeved khakis." He said, "Oh okay." He said,  
21 "You didn't have to tell me that, I can recognize you no matter what you're wearing." I  
22 might have been the only service guy standing out there. There weren't any protests or  
23 anything. That was in the middle of August in '66.

24 JS: It's a little early for that. Alright, one other question about coming home. At  
25 the time you left, how did you, from your perspective, how did you feel the war was  
26 going?

27 JM: You know, we didn't even think about that.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JM: We were so busy that, you know, we'd get the *Stars and Stripes* the Far East  
30 Edition. We'd read what different helicopter units were doing and that someone was very  
31 lucky to be alive because they took a hit in an unusual area of their body. Well, one thing

1 that made *Stars and Stripes*, a helicopter pilot took a .50 caliber round right in his—there  
2 was a chest protector that was, I don't know, three quarters of an inch thick. It wasn't  
3 titanium, it was some exotic metal.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JM: And it stopped it. Well, we didn't know that it would stop a .50. So, this was,  
6 you know, it was newsworthy. They all had pictures of a Chinook that had a 105 artillery  
7 round go right through it. The 105 is about five inches across. It showed the whole—the  
8 Chinook was right at the top of the arch of the shell. So, it went in one side and out the  
9 other side without hitting anything. It's just one of those shots you couldn't do if you  
10 tried it. There was a picture of a pilot who took a round that went in his helmet, around  
11 his head, and fell out the other side of the helmet. Now that's, you know, that's about  
12 done. The articles in the *Stars and Stripes* about that, there'd be articles about stuff you  
13 get in your local newspaper. The national stuff you get in your local newspaper and  
14 sports and that was about it. We didn't have discussions that denied if Johnson was full of  
15 shit or not, but everyone knew he was. We didn't worry about our commanders. The only  
16 thing we talked about in a derogatory sense was—I think General Wes Moreland made a  
17 jump with the Vietnamese Rangers one day. And we all knew that so he could wear his  
18 Vietnamese jump wings. Well, four star generals get a lot of latitude of what they want to  
19 do. That wasn't any problem. We didn't especially like our second company commander.  
20 We didn't like our third one less. We didn't have any use for our battalion commanders.  
21 But we worried more about our commanders doing stupid stuff getting us hurt or killed  
22 than we did about what some guy's doing back on a college campus or, you know, who  
23 senator so and so is saying about this or that. It didn't bother us. We had other things to  
24 worry about.

25 JS: Right, okay.

26 JM: And we were busy. You know, if you look at who the Rattlers supported and  
27 the type of missions we flew, you know, we didn't have a lot of time to sit around and  
28 ponder our neighbors.

29 JS: Alright, well tell me about Mannheim and the job there.

30 JM: Okay, we—and that's the guys hitting Germany after about June of '66. We  
31 were the first wave, if you will, of combat helicopter pilots to hit Germany. The career

1 army men knew that they had to get to Vietnam and get combat command time to get  
2 considered for promotion. Not only for their next promotion, but for their following  
3 promotions. There was a phrase, they had to get their ticket punched. Which if you  
4 imagine a BINGO card, step one is getting a commission, step two, and step three. You  
5 have all these steps if you want to become a general. Well, one of them is combat  
6 command time be a commander in combat. Which led to the Army setting up a program  
7 where you would stay six months as a commander and then be rotated so someone else  
8 could be a commander. Well, if you've got a good commander, why not leave them  
9 there? The idea is to command well. It is not to train to command well. The Army  
10 thought it was trained to command well. That led to a lot of animosity in the ranks. When  
11 a good commander got pulled out because the six months are up. So anyway, the unit  
12 commanders and a lot of staff people in Germany almost resented guys and especially  
13 reserve officers who were not career men, okay? Reserve officers meaning there's two  
14 types. There's regular U.S. Army and U.S. Army reserve. Even though we were on active  
15 duty for three years we were still reserve officers. We did not have a regular army  
16 commissioner. Everyone knew more than likely we were not going to be career officers.  
17 Strike one. Then you throw in the fact that your helicopter pilot on flight pay, bachelors  
18 with two door sports cars, strike two. Then you throw in that they're partying till all  
19 hours. Plus, when we'd walk in with our uniforms on with all the crap hanging on them,  
20 all the ribbons and the patch on the right sleeve denoting that he had been in combat and  
21 probably on Tuesday night a blonde on his arm and on Saturday night a redhead on his  
22 arm. It really got their attention and there was a lot of animosity with those guys. It was  
23 not unusual. It won't be unusual for you to hear someone saying, "I was sitting at the  
24 table minding my own business and this colonel or major came up to me and just asked  
25 me who the hell I thought I was." Because it just worked on them. And we weren't  
26 shoving in anyone's face. We didn't wear our ribbons until we were told to wear our  
27 ribbons, okay? Like on the greens that I wore for normal inspections which meant I'd  
28 normally wear them on Saturday mornings if I was working or if I had to go to a higher  
29 headquarters, I'd wear two ribbons. I didn't wear all of them. I had uniforms and I didn't  
30 have a patch on my right sleeve. It just didn't matter to me. You're a reserve officer. I'm

1 here for two to three years. I'll do what I can, but I'm not going to go out of my way to  
2 do whole hog like you guys do.

3 JS: Right.

4 JM: And the military needs some of that stuff. You know, it's steeped in tradition  
5 and it's one of the things that makes the military what it is. You know, I was going to be  
6 in Germany. Well, I was thinking a year at the most, but it really turned out to be a year  
7 and a half. Why should I worry about having patches on my right sleeves, you know? It  
8 wasn't way up there on the priorities. Well, these guys would take offense to that. You  
9 know, it was well known if we wanted lunch we'd go to Luxembourg for lunch. Just take  
10 one off the H-34's and go. We were flying all over the place, hanging around with the  
11 American school teachers, hanging around with the frauleins. We had to go to Augsburg.  
12 I had to go to transition into the H-34 helicopter and the H-13 helicopter so there was  
13 three or four weeks in Augsburg on TDY pay. You know, that's not a bad vacation. Plus,  
14 they give you a helicopter to fly and pay you to do this. Fifty-five minutes away from  
15 Downtown Munich. You know, its vacations that people dream of.

16 JS: Right.

17 JM: And we just did it. "You want to go to Augsburg?" "Sure, let's go this  
18 weekend." It was a fabulous opportunity. And that was in 4<sup>th</sup> Echelon Maintenance which  
19 we could do everything except straighten out an airframe or rebuild turbine engines,  
20 okay? So short of that, you know, we could take them apart and put them back together  
21 very well. And you know, we probably got a little cocky. And then the shorter we got  
22 once we got—once we knew we were getting out of the service it was KD (Kitchen Duty)  
23 by the door. You know, we'd been to Vietnam, we had a thousand hours in Huey's. I had  
24 a thousand hours flying H-34s. Our company and battalion commanders knew how to  
25 handle it, but you know, someone came up to us in the club and said something and we  
26 thought real quickly. Which didn't help the relationship they had (laughing) and then the  
27 guys behind us. Germany was fun, it was great.

28 JS: But at that point you had already made the decision that you were going to get  
29 out?

30 JM: Yeah.

31 JS: Okay, alright. So, you had a year and a half then?

1 JM: In Germany, right.

2 JS: Was that your final assignment?

3 JM: That was my final assignment on active duty.

4 JS: Okay, alright.

5 JM: I got out in June of '68.

6 JS: Okay, alright. Once you got out—and in this time—well, after Vietnam in  
7 general, did you follow the war through the media?

8 JM: Well, I did better than that. I stayed in the reserves.

9 JS: Okay.

10 JM: I worked at Sikorsky Aircraft. I stayed there for two years and while I was  
11 there my reserve assignment was a test pilot at Corpus Christi Naval Air Station. Corpus  
12 Christi had an assembly line. A four row assembly line where helicopters that were  
13 heavily damaged in Vietnam were flown to Corpus Christi by either C-133s or C-130s  
14 and deposited out on the tarmac. They were, again, fumigated and then uncocooned and  
15 given a technical inspection. Then they were scheduled to be stripped down and run  
16 through the assembly line and out the other end came basically a brand new Huey. And  
17 they obviously needed test pilots for that. So, they had civilians and a couple of military  
18 and I think there were four or five reserve officers. We spent our two week tour at Corpus  
19 Christi test flying. So that was interesting. And then when I left Sikorsky, I realized the  
20 test line helicopters two weeks of the year isn't the—you should be more current than  
21 two weeks a year if you're going to test fly a helicopter. So, I asked him what else they  
22 had, and I was assigned to New Cumberland. I went into transportation. I went into New  
23 Cumberland Army Depot working in their warehouse and transportation part for two  
24 summer tours. With that I took my wife and kids with me. After you've seen the Hotel  
25 Hershey and taken the tour of the factory and gone to Amish Country and eaten at the  
26 officer's club at Carlisle barracks Harrisburg runs other things, too. So, I asked the  
27 reserve center in Saint Louis, "What else you have?" And he said, "Well, how about  
28 headquarters tragic management command in Washington, D.C.?" And I said, "That's  
29 perfect." So, from my last year as a reserve captain through seven years as the major and  
30 one year as the lieutenant colonel, those nine years as my children were growing up, we  
31 went to Washington D.C. every summer for two weeks. I stayed in the motel that was

1 right across from the officer building in Falls Church, Virginia, and walked across the  
2 street every morning. I had a cup of coffee and a sweet roll and went up to the seventh  
3 floor and set at the desk I would occupy if I were every mobilized. I must have been  
4 pretty proficient because I got there one year and there was a note on my desk from the  
5 head of the department and he said, “Run this place for two weeks, I’ll see you next  
6 year.” Oh, I know what, Jason, you can probably find the year. It was either ‘73 or ‘74—  
7 wait, let me do that another way. It was somewhere between ‘75 and ‘78.

8 JS: Okay.

9 JM: I was told not to wear a uniform because of the anti-military sentiment in the  
10 nation’s capital. And even though I was just crossing the street, they said no one in the—  
11 oh, headquarters tragic management command is in—I think it’s a nine story building,  
12 the Nassif building, it’s on—maybe on route fifty. Whatever the main place in Falls  
13 Church is. It also had the U.S. Navy—it’s in their judge advocate. It’s in their JAG  
14 (Judge Advocate Generals) department, but I think it’s some type of review court. They  
15 were in there so there was a lot of Navy people in uniform. And then in traffic  
16 management command we had Air Force, Navy, Army, and I’m pretty sure we had a  
17 couple Marines in uniform. It wasn’t so much for me; it was so everyone else didn’t have  
18 to wear a uniform. They said, “Don’t even bring a uniform this time.” He says, “Because  
19 of the anti-military sentiment.” I thought, “What the hell? In the United States we’ve got  
20 anti-military sentiment in our nation’s capital? This is crazy.” And then after that, the  
21 position I was training for was a major slot. When I showed up as lieutenant colonel they  
22 were surprised. They said, “This shouldn’t have happened, and we don’t have a slot for  
23 you, lieutenant colonel.” And I said, “What do I do next year?” So, they got me a slot as  
24 deputy chief of staff logistics in the Pentagon.

25 JS: Okay.

26 JM: And then I think it was in ‘85. There is a—it’s a pretty high level. They call it  
27 MAC user’s conference. It’s held at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois every year. They  
28 invite 185 very highly qualified people from all over the world in the department of  
29 defense logistics. You’ll have Navy guys from, you know, someplace you’ve never heard  
30 of. They had the commanders of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Force which were the C-130s, the  
31 C-141s, the C-5s, and now the C-17s. They’re there. Navy logistics was there, Marine

1 Corps logistics was there. Army guys at the different numbered armies. The 5<sup>th</sup> Army, 4<sup>th</sup>  
2 Army, 7<sup>th</sup> Army, 10<sup>th</sup> Army; those guys were there. And they must have had a slow day  
3 because I had invited to go. What in the hell am I doing with these guys? These guys  
4 know what they're doing. I play like I know what I'm doing. That was an interesting  
5 couple of days. That's where the Navy was talking about how they get that wallet-sized  
6 part from a depot in the middle of Arkansas out to the destroyer in the middle of the  
7 pacific that needs it. You know, then the Air Force guys were talking about how quickly  
8 and the motions they go through. They can deploy a cargo-carrying airplane for a certain  
9 mission to a certain part of the world. I'm sitting there and it's better than watching a  
10 movie. This is great stuff. It was just a great meeting. It was one of those eye-openers.  
11 Things that you'd never even think of those guys were just doing. That's what they're  
12 paid to do, and they do it well.

13 JS: Right. So how much longer did you remain in the reserves?

14 JM: My last year was '92. Now, in that I completed taking my wife and kids. I  
15 think we went for three, two week tours. Now, this was in addition to Washington, okay?  
16 And New Cumberland. The only place I didn't take my wife and kids were the two week  
17 tours as a test pilot down at Corpus Christi because that's just too far to drive. I mean,  
18 you know, from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Corpus Christi's a push.

19 JS: Oh, I bet, yeah.

20 JM: Ft. Sill I took them because I knew they'd like Ft. Sill. People would say,  
21 "Jesus Christ, Ft. Sill's in the middle of swinging nowhere." Well, yeah it is, but there's a  
22 lot there. You know, there's a lot of Indian Heritage stuff. There're the reservations, the  
23 wildlife reservations and there's swimming pools all over. I think we were at Ft. Sill for  
24 two summers and I think one of them we spent four weeks there. Then we went to New  
25 Orleans for a two week tour. We went to Harrisburg for two weeks. We went to Ft. Eustis  
26 for at least four weeks if not six weeks on two separate occasions. I'm sorry, a two week  
27 tour and I think a two or a four week tour. I went to Ft. Lee, Virginia at Petersburg. I  
28 think that's about it, but my daughters grew up thinking that everyone went to  
29 Washington D.C. every summer.

30 JS: (Laughing) Right.

31 JM: You know, my oldest daughter could probably draw a map of Washington.

1 JS: Wow, right.

2 JM: I'd go to work and had to be there at eight, so I probably left around seven  
3 thirty, grabbed a cup of coffee and went upstairs. The wife and kids would hear me  
4 leaving and by the time they stirred and had a breakfast in the room, they'd wait until  
5 commuter time was over. So about eight thirty, they'd have to bus and go to Downtown  
6 Washington, go around there and either have a lunch down there or come back, take a  
7 nap, hit the pool. By that time, dad's coming home. We'd have a babysitter come in and  
8 the wife and I would go to Downtown Washington for the evening, or we'd take the kids  
9 and go to Downtown Washington for the evening. You know, yeah, my daughters  
10 couldn't understand why everyone hasn't been to Washington. Yeah, it was nice.

11 JS: It certainly sounds like it, yeah. Well, is there anything else that we should  
12 mention wrapping up this part of the interview?

13 JM: Not that I can think of.

14 JS: Okay, cause the last thing I have, I'd like to ask you some broad questions to  
15 get your opinion on some of the larger issues on the war.

16 JM: Sure.

17 JS: Okay, alright. Well, first thing, what was your reaction to the way the Vietnam  
18 War turned out? The fall of Saigon?

19 JM: I thought it was a disappointing thing that probably shouldn't have happened,  
20 okay? I don't think it was surprising. Let me expand on that a little bit. You know, when  
21 you ask, "What did you guys do besides combat in Vietnam?" One of the things I could  
22 never—I thought about it, and I'll never understand. In 1966, if they could fit it in their  
23 production, you could buy a helicopter, you could buy a Huey from Bell for a quarter of a  
24 million dollars. Okay, obviously Vietnamese could be trained to fly helicopters because  
25 the South Vietnamese were flying H-34s and an H-34 is a far more complicated aircraft  
26 to fly than the Huey, okay? Huey's, it's not easy to fly, but it's a hell of a lot easier to fly  
27 than a lot of helicopters.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JM: It was at the time the ideal helicopter flew for the mission. Why the North  
30 Vietnamese or China or Russia or Czechoslovakia or Romania or somewhere, it doesn't  
31 matter who, Afghans. Why they didn't get it and paint it like an American helicopter,



1 okay? And some evening about ten o'clock come whipping across the border, pull into  
2 Da Nang and fuel up, okay? Because an American fuel truck, all he cares about is what  
3 tail number to put on his logbook that he pumped 120 gallons, okay? And it would not be  
4 unusual for the Vietnamese to speak in broken English to be flying. You know, and if  
5 nothing else paint it like a South Vietnamese Huey. Then on their way out, cold cock that  
6 guy, shoot the fuel driver. Turn the hose on and let the other two or three thousand  
7 gallons go around. On your way out, call the tower and say, "Hey, I need to look at the  
8 underside of my aircraft. I'm going to hover within 50 feet of you and see what you can  
9 see. Go up to the control tower, kill every person in there, and drop a grenade down. Set  
10 off the fuel that's burning that's all over the ground, okay? Okay, that basically looks like  
11 a mortar attack. Then go down, hit Na Trang, Cam Ranh, Phan Thiet, Bien Hoa, Saigon,  
12 doing about the same thing. You would have demoralized the hell out of the military  
13 pilots. And you would have taken a lot of aircraft out of service right now, okay? And  
14 you know, if you want to do it with one helicopter, it would have taken five helicopters, it  
15 would have taken suicide helicopters, whatever. Just dig the concepts, okay? And then—  
16 and if you had to crash one, that would be great because now how do we trust the  
17 helicopter that's next to us? How do we know that really is John? You know, because  
18 you're flying with your visor down. How do we know that helicopter down there is  
19 American? What's the deal here? All the apprehension it would build up would have  
20 been humungous for a very cheap price. You know, buy helicopters and hell, it's only a  
21 million bucks. A million bucks to drop in the bucket. That's one thing I thought about  
22 and you know, the way we ran the war, why the hell we danced around North Vietnam  
23 like we did. We didn't want China in our war, we didn't want Russia in our war. Well,  
24 stop your shit from the high seas. You can't come here. You know, I've never been in the  
25 state department, I'd never understand the state department with my tact, but they won't  
26 even call me to ask my opinion. Yeah, we didn't understand a lot of what was going on.  
27 We had a forward air controller who saw the bad guys pulling a howitzer with a truck  
28 crossing—he caught him in the western part of Vietnam towing the howitzer that they  
29 had used to attack one of our outposts, okay? He used some helicopter gunships to kill  
30 the guys and I don't know what they did with the Howitzer. That, Jason, I think it was a  
31 weekend and I think it was a Sunday morning. That afternoon, that FAC was at our villa

1 because we had extra rooms because Monday morning, he was going for the battalion  
2 commander, and he probably would have been facing court-martial charges. On Sunday  
3 morning, it had gone from the province chief in Cambodia, to Phnom Penh their capitol,  
4 to whatever the heritage state was called to our ambassador probably in Thailand. I don't  
5 know if they would have called our ambassador in Saigon to Washington State  
6 Department in the Pentagon to Pentagon West in Saigon, down to our battalion  
7 commander, down to this pilot and said, "You get here." Mike walked into our villa  
8 somewhere around two in the afternoon. So it went that long chain in less than six hours.  
9 Now, that's goody, goody, good. So, Mike walked in and said, "You guys better hold my  
10 pistol because I think they're going to want it." I said, "What, what'd you do? He told  
11 us." "Wow, they're going to give you a Silver Star, Mike." I said, "No, I think they're  
12 going to pull my wings and court-martial me." They can't, they can't do that. Well, it  
13 turned out that the map that this FAC had, had the border in the wrong place on it. Mike  
14 did not knowingly put that strike into Cambodia because he had it marked on his map and  
15 the chopper pilot said, "Yeah, that's where we were." So, when Mike walked in the next  
16 day he had, you know, he had four helicopter pilots ready to come in right away to back  
17 up his story. He went to the battalion commander, and he said, "Here's the map I had."  
18 You know, a U.S. Army issued map that was wrong. You know, for the outcome it  
19 wasn't surprising because we knew they didn't have the capability to stop tanks. General  
20 Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, he was a hot shot, but there weren't a lot of Vietnamese of his caliber.  
21 Again, I think everyone will—you'll probably hear it from other guys, the average  
22 Vietnamese citizen didn't care. Whether they were sending their taxes to Saigon or if  
23 they were going to send their taxes to Hanoi. It wouldn't matter to them one way or other.  
24 You know, he's just out there following his little water buffalo through the rice patties in  
25 his bare feet making a dime where he can. If he has to sell orange soda pop and coca cola  
26 to the Americans when they're on an assault, he'll do that. Other than that, he'd just  
27 rather plow his field and worry where he's going to buy the next forty watt light bulb. I  
28 don't think politicians were any different no matter what country they're in.

29 JS: Alright, given all of that, how do you feel about American involvement in  
30 Vietnam? What do you think of that given what you know now?

1           JM: We probably picked the wrong side, huh. There was a lot of stuff the Viet Cong  
2 did that was never reported, okay? Sure, the Americans did some atrocities, and the South  
3 Vietnamese had some atrocities, but we landed one day alongside a—in America we’ve  
4 got Greyhound Buses running city to city. In Vietnam and I think in most of the Far East,  
5 their intercity buses are more on the shape of school buses, and they’re gaudily painted. Is  
6 that a word?

7           JS: Yeah. Right.

8           JM: It probably doesn’t look right in French. We landed next to one that was fired  
9 upon by .50 caliber machine guns opposite side of the street, road. And you know,  
10 imagine one of those Vietnamese roads and they had machine guns set up pointing down  
11 the road so that when this bus came full of people and people on top, they just opened up  
12 with .50 caliber. A .30 caliber you can survive, but when a .50 caliber hits you—a .50  
13 caliber is a half inch diameter that thing is coming at you with such force and is so big  
14 it’s going to start tearing body parts off of you. You take one in the upper leg chances are  
15 it’s going to sever the leg right there or take a lot of meat off on its way out. They opened  
16 up on a bus full of civilians and that’s an atrocity. That’s no mistaking, “Gee I thought  
17 they could have been enemies” or “I thought they were running away from me” or “I  
18 thought I saw a hand grenade or saw something that looked like a rifle.” That’s just a  
19 straight out slaughter. Well, that never made the papers. Going into a village and saying,  
20 “we want two chickens from every family in this village and to make sure you’re  
21 listening to us we’re going to chop off the leg or the arm of your oldest daughter.” Well,  
22 that’s one way to make sure the taxes get paid. You know stuff like that, if it made the  
23 paper, it was very scary. But that’s the way the Viet Cong had to ruin the war and that  
24 was their method. I don’t know whose side we were on. I didn’t think there was anything  
25 wrong with what we were doing and when I left, I didn’t see anything wrong with what  
26 we were doing and when the Peace Accords were signed, I thought, “boy I don’t know if  
27 this is going to hold water or not.” I certainly wouldn’t of—well I think a lot of that was  
28 signed and a lot of the clauses were put in there to get the POWs (Prisoners of War) out  
29 of Hanoi. That’s my opinion. It may or may not be true. Kissinger’s a pretty smart guy. I  
30 just don’t know what he knew or had to know or didn’t know.

1 JS: Alright, well you talking about the Viet Cong atrocities being covered in the  
2 media; that brings up my next question which was, just your thoughts on the media  
3 coverage on the war in general.

4 JM: Boy that's a good question. I don't know what they covered, it's easy to say  
5 there's a B-52 strike here or there, but it never covered—and even helicopter pilots didn't  
6 see it. The only guys that really saw the war were the infantry grunts and some of the  
7 artillery guys. They saw it upfront and down and dirty. Helicopter pilots depending on  
8 what kind on missions we were on, we could see some of the bad aftermath. Sometimes  
9 we were in where it was going hot and heavy and other times, we just flew over it and  
10 dropped stuff off. The medevac missions you see the absolute horrors of war, you'd see  
11 little kids that were so hungry they would loot through garbage dumps looking for any  
12 food left over the Americans threw out of their C-ration cans. You don't know why that  
13 kid, why that three-year-old's walking around by himself; is his mom dead? Is the mom  
14 turning tricks? Is his father in the military? Is his father a defect? Is his father dead? But  
15 they never, the media never covered the kids, well they probably did. But you could write  
16 books and books on the kids of Vietnam. You could probably write books and books on  
17 the kids anywhere. The adults, they can think for themselves it's the kids that don't have  
18 a chance.

19 JS: Next question. What are your thoughts on the war protests? The protest  
20 movement.

21 JM: I don't think I ever saw one. When I was at Sikorsky we'd talk about the  
22 protests, and you know when Kent State happened the signs went up for Nation Guard for  
23 Kent State student zero. That was—when our children were at home and the Tiananmen  
24 Square thing happened, I told my kids that if they are ever in a position like that where  
25 you're facing armed troops, those guys are right. It doesn't matter what you do, because  
26 that bullet will come out of that barrel so quick you can't imagine how fast it comes out. I  
27 said, "the first time you hear firing go down, get on the ground because anyone standing  
28 is fair game." But I don't recall—I wasn't on campus after that, I was taking grad courses  
29 at the University of Bridgeport, but that was at night. And since everyone worked in  
30 aerospace up there you didn't have too many protests on campus. I lived in New Haven,  
31 and I never had a reason to walk through the campus of Yale other than if there was a

1 Saturday football game I'd walk over there. But I never saw—ahh I know what. I was in  
2 Germany I was the executive officer of the 245<sup>th</sup> and one of our troops was the son of a  
3 general. And this guy was about as slovenly as you can get, he was a PFC. I was doing  
4 something in the office and is saw this thing walk in—the door was open—and  
5 something caught my eye walking into the orderly room to the sign up and here's this  
6 young buck, he's dressed in Kit Carson boots with the fringe on them and some kind of  
7 hippy pants and shirt hanging out with some kind of goofy hat on. Well, I called,  
8 “Whatever that is send him in here.” So, in he comes, and he reports to me, and I said,  
9 “Where in the fuck are you going dressed like that?” “I got a pass—” “No, no, no. Start  
10 all over. Where do you think you're going dressed like that?” “I've got a pass.” “No, you  
11 don't. You ain't going anywhere like that. You're part of our company.” There must have  
12 been some protest scheduled for downtown Frankfurt. So, a couple days later the word  
13 filters to me that he doesn't like me, he doesn't like the Army and he's going to go  
14 AWOL (Absent Without Leave) and go to Sweden. So, I put the word out that if he gets  
15 an airline ticket to Sweden for him to let me know what flight he needs to be on and he  
16 can borrow my jeep to make damn sure he gets on it. (Laughing) So, that was the end of  
17 his protesting. But that's as close as we came, I had forgotten about that. But I didn't see  
18 any in the states.

19 JS: Alright. What's your opinion of U.S. policy towards Vietnam today and the  
20 growing relationship that we have with Vietnam with trade and tourism and veterans  
21 going back and all of that?

22 JM: Well, I think—I have no desire to go back, but the guys that want to go back,  
23 if they want to go back and it's their money or someone will send them back on a thing,  
24 let them go. I don't think we have any passport restrictions on that and from what I've  
25 seen a lot of foreign countries are investing in—I've seen South Vietnam; I haven't seen  
26 much of North Vietnam. I mean I've seen pictures of it. I've also seen some film clips  
27 that I wouldn't eat any food that comes out of Vietnam. Have you seen the one about  
28 catfish?

29 JS: No, I haven't.

30 JM: Okay. Well, the metropolitan area of Saigon has gone from something like a  
31 million to fourteen, or—I don't know what the number is—four million, fourteen million,

1 doesn't matter. And all the sewage is still dumped in the river. Well, the catfish farms are  
2 not farms like we have in the United States where they're separate tanks. They are fenced  
3 off areas, cyclone fence type in the river.

4 JS: Ah, okay. I see where you're going with this. (Laughing)

5 JM: We don't eat catfish anymore. No, there's been a lot of development and if  
6 they can make a nickel on tourists going to that temple or taking the cable car to the top  
7 of Nui Ba Dinh, good for them. I think it's terrible what they did to our POWs and how  
8 John McCain can walk past Kerry without popping him in the mouth every time he sees  
9 them is beyond me. I'd hit that son of a bitch over the head with a baseball bat.

10 JS: (laughing) Right.

11 JM: And I'm not John McCain. But to hell with politics, there's opposite ends of  
12 the spectrum on military service. If they can draw tourism and there are a lot worse  
13 places in the world and a lot worse leaders than Ho Chi Minh was, and I think all Ho Chi  
14 Minh wanted to do was unify Vietnam. And if he had to use guerillas to go against—and  
15 I'll admit that South Vietnam's politics were probably as corrupt as any in the Far East.  
16 But that's how the elections were run. Dinh Diem probably should have been  
17 assassinated before he was. I can't think of the little guy that was president while we  
18 were there, he was the vice president, and he was a classic. I mean if you've heard any  
19 stories about him or the way he dressed they were all true. And his wife was at least fifty  
20 percent French, she was a knockout. Yeah, if they want to go back, fine. In fact, more  
21 power to them especially if they've got problems about it, let them go back and get them  
22 ironed out. If they want to go over there and invest in it, that's fine. I heard somewhere  
23 that there's a helicopter repair outfit out of Tucson that's been asked by the Vietnamese  
24 to come over and see what they can salvage out of all the Huey helicopters that are over  
25 there. And the guys working with the State Department there's obviously a bunch of  
26 problems about taking what are called combat aircraft and refurbishing them, even  
27 though a Huey once you take the—once you throw the weapons systems off a Huey  
28 there's no difference from an Army UH-1 and a Bell 205 model. It's just what  
29 designations on it, came out the same assembly line with the same parts. But if that guy  
30 can go over there and make a couple nickels over something that's going to go to scrap  
31 and obviously—well in my little mind there's going to be Huey's flying around this

1 world long after you and I are both in the grave. It's kind of like a DC-3 it's going to be  
2 around forever. So, if a guy can make a nickel off of it, fine.

3 JS: Well, anything else we should cover? Anything else we haven't talked about  
4 at this point?

5 JM: Not that I can think of. I had my logbook out the other night, and I was  
6 looking through it and there's nothing spectacular in that.

7 JS: Alright. In that case then. I'll go ahead and bring the interview to a close.