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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with John Holland
Conducted by Jason Stewart
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Transcribed by Blair Barnhill

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

Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University conducting an Oral History interview with Mr. John Holland. Today is July 28th, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech, and Mr. Holland is joining me by phone from Missouri. Why don't we begin with a little bit of biographical information? If you could, tell me a little bit about when and where you were born.

John Holland: I was born in Poplar Bluff, Missouri. September, 1st of September 1937.

JS: All right. Could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were their names and what did they do for a living?

JH: My father was Ernest Holland, and my mother, Alphia. They both were natives from Poplar Bluff. My dad attended Harvard for a brief time, and the University of Michigan, and a couple other schools, and sold food products on the East Coast 'till he moved back the Poplar Bluff, sometime in the '30's. They married in the early '30's.

JS: Did you grow up there in Poplar Bluff?

JH: Yes, I did.

JS: Could you talk a little bit about—I guess, about growing up and what that was like for you as a kid there in Poplar Bluff?

JH: Those were the good times. Just take the telephone, for example. We had an exchange of four numbers, and you would pick up the telephone and tell the operator who you wanted to talk to, four digits. Then she would connect you to whomever you wanted to talk to. If you wanted to make a long-distance call—if you called the operator and told her who and in what city, maybe sometime in fifteen to thirty minutes, they would call you back and say, "We have that party on the line." Of course, you watched the radio then. There really wasn't much television. You could drive around town all night on gas that cost you probably twenty-five or thirty cents. Much calmer, easier, life. Not as organized, no particularly organized little league baseball or anything like that, we were just kind of on our own in pick-up games. You look back on it now, and you say, "That was pretty easy times." You didn't have to worry about thumb drives and things of this nature.

JS: Right. You mentioned baseball. Is that what you primarily did for fun as a kid?

JH: As a kid—big Cardinals fan.

JS: Okay. Right.

JH: Summertime, when I was in elementary school and junior high, if I wasn't out playing softball or something, I was home listening to the Cardinals. In high school, I played football predominately.

JS: Where did you go to high school?

JH: I went to Poplar Bluff.

JS: Poplar Bluff Highschool, all right. Of course, the big thing going on at the time when you were a kid was World War II, of course. Do you have many memories of the war?

JH: Yeah, I do. Actually, my dad joined in—I guess he joined early '42. He was an interesting guy because when World War I broke out, he was about two years too young to join on his own, and my grandmother wouldn't sign the papers. So he never went, he was a very frustrated person. As soon as the war broke out, he was almost too old. He actually couldn't pass the eye examination, he told me, and he knew the doctor that was the optometrist and obtained the eye chart in advance, memorized it, and got in the Navy at thirty-eight years old. Then, I was still pretty young, but we moved to Great

Lakes, which was in ’42, I guess. Lived on the base for a while. It was the largest Navy training installation in the world at its time. He was in charge—he was a supply officer in charge of a galley, and then we subsequently moved to Berkeley, California. He was at Treasure Island. I remember quite a bit about it. I do remember—you think recycling is recently new, but I can remember as a six and seven year old with a wagon, pulling around the neighborhood, getting tin cans and glass for the war efforts to be recycled. There were some ships in there and going down and looking at them. He was subsequently transferred—he volunteered for sea duty and wound up going to Norfolk on the other side of the country on a refrigerator ship, and my mother and I were basically stuck in Berkeley, California, for the duration.

JS: Your fathers service and growing up in this time period of World War II, did that have an impact on you as far as an interest in the Navy and in the military in general?

JH: Yeah, it really did Jason. It had the whole impact on me because when World War II ended there was literally millions of people in service, and the budget didn’t accommodate that. My dad only had three years, and he was forty-some years old, forty-one, forty-two, so he was going to leave. They were going to let him go, as they did millions of them. They were just too old to get into the pipeline for a career. He was a lieutenant, they gave him an honorary release and promoted him to lieutenant commander. He had a love for the Navy his entire life, and you know, as far as I can remember back, he just kind of drilled in me, “Well, you are going to go to the Navy. You are going to go into the Navy.” It’s one of these things that you’d never really give it a second thought. You just have it in your mind, and when I was a senior in college, another friend of mine—I went to the University of Missouri, in Columbia, and we went down the road to St. Louis to the recruiting station. Signed up and took our physicals, and we were already on the dotted line before graduating.

JS: All right. Before we actually get into your decision to join the Navy, we could talk a little bit more about this early time period in growing up. You said you went to Poplar Bluff High School?

JH: That’s right.

JS: What year did you graduate?

JH: 1955.

JS: 1955. All right.

JH: I think if you remember the TV series, *Happy Days*?

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: That was ’55.

JS: Did you pay attention to developments after World War II with the oncoming of the Cold War?

JH: Oh yeah. The Cold War started, and of course, Korea. I knew several people—I was about two years too young for Korea or I probably would’ve—as soon as I got old enough, I would have probably joined. I was that well indoctrinated into the military, and back then I think everybody was much more patriotic than they are now. That’s just the way of life, and maybe it’s my ancient thinking or something, but I had a lot of friends that joined as soon as they, got out of—could, and went to Korea. Then I had a number of them join right out of high school, but that was post-Korea. They had already signed the armistice. It’s interesting going back to reunions and seeing the number of people in my high school class that were in the military, and the number that actually retired from the military.

JS: Oh wow. Your time there at the University of Missouri at Columbia, what did you major in there?

JH: I was in business administration.

JS: And you went there—was it from ’55 to ’59?

JH: I actually went to Washington University in St. Louis for one semester. I tried my hand at playing collegiate football and played for Carl Snavely, who was a well-known coach at Wash U for a semester. Wash U is sort of the Harvard of the Midwest academically. Between pledging a fraternity and playing football and some rather difficult academic courses, I didn’t do really well in the grades. I elected to transfer before I was asked to transfer at midterm. That would have been January of ’56 I went to Mizzou and graduated from there in August of ’59.

JS: Did you play football there at Missouri?

JH: You know, I walked on. Yeah, I did. I played—I don’t know how you are familiar with the various coaches, but I was lucky enough to play for three of the most well-known coaches in the US at the time. Don Faurot was the—it was his last season. I

walked on in the fall of ’56, and I was on the scout team. In other words, we ran the plays that Oklahoma and Nebraska did against the first and second team. Then in spring ball, Faurot retired that fall, and then they brought in Frank Broyles, who later became very well known at the University of Arkansas. I played spring ball for Frank Broyles, and then started to fall two a days, and I was a walk on non-scholarship guy, and I went out there for the first two a days, and I was so beat up after that. I said, “I’m not coming back.” My fall football that year was limited to two practices, and then I said, “That’s it. I’m hanging it up.”

JS: What position did you play?

JH: I was 185 pound guard and linebacker.

JS: All right. Yes, sir.

JH: Even in those days it was undersized. But our biggest guy that I remember on the whole squad was 230.

JS: Wow, times have changed, haven’t they? (Chuckles)

JH: Yeah, they have. It’s remarkable. I would no more think of going out there now for a one, five-minute session at 185.

JS: Well, you still a big football fan?

JH: Oh, I like it. I like the Big 12, or whatever they are called now since Nebraska and Colorado departed.

JS: I assume a Missouri fan?

JH: Oh yeah. A big Mizzou fan.

JS: You graduated from college then in, what year was it?

JH: In August of ’59. It took me an extra summer school to get out, Jason.

JS: Okay. Then at that point, directly into the Navy?

JH: That’s right.

JS: Where did you go through your basic training?

JH: I went to Newport, Rhode Island for the Officer Candidate School.

JS: Okay.

JH: That’s where they have all the OC’s going through. I went there in September of ’59, and got commissioned in February, ’60.

JS: Could you talk a little about what Navy OCS (Officer Candidate School) was like at that time? If you could talk a little bit about the daily routine. Just what it was like for you.

JH: Of course, we got there in the fall, and went through the dead of winter. You've got to know, Newport, Rhode Island, in the dead of winter is a miserable place to be.

JS: I bet it is. (Chuckles)

JH: That's number one. Number two, the Navy, as opposed to the Marine Corps or the Army, was basically academic. There was very little—there was some drilling, and not much physical endeavors were involved in it. It was mostly class work. You would wake up, and you drilled. We were in companies, and there were nine hundred and some officer candidates in our class, and it was a four-month program. We would wake up, and drill to breakfast, and then go back to the barracks, and get your books and stuff, and drilled from one class to the next. At that time, they were all World War II, wood framed buildings. Drafty, and everything that goes with that kind of construction. That was—you'd go through your morning classes, I think if I remember right, there were three morning classes, and then you drilled to lunch, and back to afternoon classes. Then in the evening you had a study time that you had to devote to it. Of course, there was always the cleaning aspects. On Saturday there would be a review. There were two classes at OCS at any one time, and they were separated by eight weeks. You might have fifteen, sixteen hundred officer candidates—there were no women there, by the way.

JS: Right.

JH: You would have a big parade review, and then if you hadn't received too many demerits and everything was ship shape, at noon or one o'clock you had liberty. I was not married, so you'd grab a bus, and go into Newport. They had a locker club there where you changed into civilian clothes and go out and see Newport and party for the one night. Then, more than likely, you didn't have any money anyway, so you'd spend it all at someplace, consume some of the local beverages. Then you would stumble back to the base at some ungodly hour on Saturday night, and Sunday was pretty slack until about six o'clock and then they started into study routines again. Liberty had expired and that sort of thing. We started out with nine hundred and some officer candidates and we ended up

with six hundred and some. It was predominately academic. They washed out because they couldn't pass the course. There were a few that dropped voluntarily. At that time, we had a—our term went over Christmas, and they gave us two weeks of what you call, basket leave, where it didn't count against your record. You could just go wherever you wanted to for those two weeks. There were four of us sharing a room, and I remember coming back, and there was this one guy that was with us had gone home and said he had a girlfriend and she talked him into quitting. To this day I never did understand that rationality. I wonder if he married her or not. What the consequences were—if you got commissioned, it was a three-year obligation. If you didn't, then you went in as an enlisted man for two years. His decision was to go in as an enlisted for two years. There was another guy that was in our room that—he washed out, and last time I saw him was, we were going home on Christmas leave, and it was in Chicago train terminal, and when his leave was over, he had to go to Great Lakes to go through enlisted boot camp. I never heard anything from him again. There was a company just made up of enlisted that were in there. They were almost all E7, 6 and 7. They did really well. Those guys were pretty well hand-picked, and they knew a lot about the Navy anyway. I don't remember any of those guys failing out. We had one guy, I know that had one year of law school that washed out. It was a tough time, and I'll be honest with you, I struggle academically. It was a sigh of relief when it finally got over. It was a lot tougher than college.

JS: All right. You mention the focus on academics. If you could, for just a moment talk about what type of classes and what type of academic things you were learning.

JH: I think the one that gave me the toughest was engineering. Just talking about the engineering plant on the ships, the steam cycles, and different aspects in machinery. I'm not really very mechanically inclined. That gave me a fit. There was also an operations section, which dealt with a maneuvering board, and maneuvering board has to deal with relative motion. I don't know whether you are familiar with what a maneuvering board is, but it's a circular device and you use it to plot other ships course and speed. Navigation was another one that gave a lot of people fits. Obviously, it had a lot of math involved in it, and particularly when you got into the celestial aspects of it. Obviously, we didn't do the actual taking of the sun or the stars, but we were given

readings and then we had to go into various publications to figure out our position. All those subjects were the ones that really were the big failures of our people. They also, of course, had stuff like seamanship, and military justice.

JS: Okay.

JH: I'm trying to think of some of the others. Those are the ones that pop to mind right off hand. I'm sure there were some others that just—those were the ones that were the toughest. Of course, you did have to pass swimming courses, and by and large, most people didn't have any trouble with that.

JS: Yes, sir. Well, anytime during the training, was there any time where you guys actually went out on a ship, or was it all done there?

JH: That's a good question. Yeah, we did go out on a ship. We went out on a destroyer, in December, out of Newport. I mean, it's the worst possible time you can go out of Narragansett Bay, in dead of winter, into the North Atlantic. They put us on—I've been seasick two times in my life, and that was one of them, Jason.

JS: Right.

JH: We got the whole tour of the ship, and—are you familiar with sonar?

JS: Vaguely.

JH: Well, sonar is how you detect underwater threats, and the sonar sits at the bottom of the ship as far forward as you can go. We got down there, and this is a hot, enclosed space, as far down as you can go, and all you are hearing is this "pinging" of the sonar. I'm telling you, I was fine until I went into that compartment, and from there on I couldn't get out of there fast enough or to the rail where I could lose it. The rest of my day out in training was involved in eating crackers trying to get my stomach. But yeah, we did get the indoctrination. One day out, and that was it. I think later they got some small craft up there that they could take them out on and get some more maneuvering experience, but all of our—one other place we had, we had a simulator. You went into that simulator, and you could give commands to. It was called a link trainer, and you could go in there and give—we worked problems with ships in there. If I remember correctly, it was designed—you could have about four or five different ships, and each ship was in its own compartment, and it had three or four of us in there giving commands, and what have you. You might have to form up in formation, and you'd use

the maneuvering board and all that. That was on on-hands kind of training that didn't require you to go any place, and if you had a collision it wasn't very important except in your grade.

JS: Right. Overall from this training, how did you feel that you were adjusting to the military lifestyle, the Navy lifestyle?

JH: Oh, I didn't have any problem with it. I thought it was just fine. You're apprehensive of course, after you leave there, and where you are going for your first duty station, but I think mine was just a sigh of relief that I made it through successfully.

JS: One more question about this.

JH: Sure.

JS: Could you talk a little bit about the instructors and your impressions of some of those guys?

JH: They ran the gauntlet.

JS: (Chuckles) Okay.

JH: There were some that were—the more technical guys, the more technical courses were senior enlisted just because those were the hands-on guys. When you got to things like operations, and things like that that you'd probably have a junior officer doing that kind of instruction. I'll be honest with you, the enlisted were a lot tougher on you just because they knew what really they'd been working in this arena for years, and they knew what was supposed to happen, and how it was supposed to be done. They were teaching it to you, and you better darn well learn it. I can remember, particularly, the engineering people. I don't remember an officer on the staff, on the curriculum side at all. There was probably one that was in charge of the department. As far an instructor, with me, I don't remember anybody but a chief in there. Our company commander was a—we had a chief and an officer, but it was predominantly run by the chief.

JS: Okay. Any other particularly memorable moments or funny moments? Anything like that from OCS?

JH: Yeah, I had one more thing that probably saved me up there.

JS: Okay.

JH: When you first went up there, they had us in an open bay barracks, the company I was with. It was just a long row, what you see in every movie, a long row of

bunks. Then, at the end of that room, there was a set of picnic tables. Everybody was down there studying at the picnic tables in mass. When you get thirty something people in there, you're always going to have somebody that's saying something. You are supposed to be studying, but there is always somebody that's got a remark to make. I really think that if I had stayed down—if we had stayed in that barracks, that I would never have made it. That's where I was having my trouble. Fortunately for me, the heating system broke.

JS: Okay. Right.

JH: I told you it was World War II finish barracks, system was antiquated, and they heating system broke and they moved us to another barracks which allowed four men to a room. When they went down to the four men, then the distractions decreased proportionately, so you could start studying and not have all these distractions. The four guys that I hooked up with were conscientious, although two of them never made it out. The other guy that was in the room, he and I graduated from high school together. He was quite an academic guy, so there wasn't going to be any distraction from him. In the long run, that breaking of the heating system was instrumental in my career choice.

JS: Right. (Chuckles)

JH: You never know what little thing is going to happen.

JS: That's for sure. Once you were commissioned, did you receive your first assignment at that point, or was it further training?

JH: No, I had probably—was about, four weeks left at OCS, I got orders.

JS: What were those orders?

JH: I went to the heavy cruiser Los Angeles. It was a World War II built heavy cruiser, built in, I think, 1945. It was commissioned just before the end of World War II. It was a Baltimore class heavy cruiser, eight-inch guns, and wood decks. You can equate it to a small battleship. The battleships have the eight to twelve-inch guns, and the cruisers start at eight-inch and went down to six. This was one of the big ones. In the end of World War II, went over to China and Japan. I think they transferred some—picked up some POWs (Prisoner of War) took them back to Japan from China and did a couple other things. Then, somewhere around, I'm going to guess '47,'48, they decommissioned it. Korea broke out, and they re-commissioned it, and the ship went over and served two

or three tours off Korea. They did shore bombardment and that sort of thing. I know they got hit at least a couple of times, with what they call counter battery fire, from the North Koreans. It stayed in commission through—I left it in ’62, and in ’63 they decided to decommission it for good. I think it was about another ten years later that they actually reduced it and cut it up for scrap.

JS: What was your assignment aboard the ship?

JH: I had a unique assignment, actually. I went aboard as a deck division officer, seamanship, and my battle station was in the eight-inch turret. You won’t find many of us around that fired the big guns, but I was in the number two turret—was the number 2 turret officer. I had three eight-inch guns to fire and had about forty-five to fifty men going down from the lower powder deck, to the upper powder deck to the shell deck, and then each gun had a separate compartment inside the turret. By the time you rated everybody in there, you were supposed to have about fifty men. I could fire the gun from inside the turret, or I could put the controls on remote and then they had a fire control director that could fire it from ahead of station way, way up, almost to the top part of the ship. The guns, the weapons projectiles weighed about 250 pounds and they could fire fifteen miles.

JS: Okay. Yes, sir. What other types of duties did you have as deck division officer?

JH: I was a watch stander, and I did get qualified as officer of the deck underway, which to me was a big achievement in a ship that size. I did some watches in the combat information center. That pretty well—I don’t remember too many other—of course, I did military justice. At that time, the Navy did their own court marshals on board the ship. That was later changed to where you couldn’t do a summary. Are you familiar with the court martial system?

JS: Just a little bit. Could you talk about that?

JH: Quick summary for you. There are three types of court martials. There is a general court, which is the one that can have you executed. There is a special, which has less power, but it is still a group of officers and enlisted I should say, that make judgment, and they have a prosecutor and a defense council, just like you would in civilian court. Then there is a summary court, which is a one-person court, one officer. The JAG (Judge

Advocate General) people got the rules changed somewhere in the ’70’s to where you had to have a legal officer, qualified legal officer to be the prosecuting and the defense. Before that, it was the ships officers did it. I have been both the prosecutor and the defense council, and I have sat on special courts.

JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

JH: They changed the whole thing. I have some bad feelings about this. I’m not sure if you want me to go into it.

JS: Well, you’re welcome to if you would like to.

JH: Yeah, I would. I think the legal people screwed up the military justice as bad as they have screwed up the civilian courts.

JS: Right.

JH: Before, you could do it, you’d get it done, and either the fellow was guilty or he wasn’t guilty. Now, you’ve got to wait for—they had such a back log, finally in the ’70s I sent a guy—I was the executive officer on a ship, and I sent a guy over to the brig in Norfolk, and he was in there a month and they still hadn’t done anything with him because they had such a back log. The lawyers screwed up the military as bad as they screwed up the civilian courts. That’s my take on that.

JS: Right. Yes, sir. Any memorable cases or issues regarding this from your time aboard the *Los Angeles*?

JH: Time aboard the *Los Angeles* was a great time. I had one, kind of amusing incident on the eight-inch turret. We were firing just the number two turret if I recall. It may have been all of them, I don’t know. But number two was firing. What eight-inch guns predominantly do are short bombardment. We were on—there is a range out of San Clemente islands, off the coast of California. We were out there, firing at some targets that were on the hillside, mountainside there. It’s a mountainous island there and had the solutions in all for the target. I think, if I remember, it was being fired remotely. The solutions were coming in from the fire control center. The right and the center gun was pointed just fine, and just before they fired my left gun went crazy. It elevated to the maximum elevation and fired. There were spotters, and they saw where they first two landed. They never saw the third round hit, and all these years later, I’m convinced that we fired completely over the island. I can only speculate that there may have been a

fishing boat or two on the other side of the island, got some surprise when some shell landed in their fishing ground. Never had report of a sinking, so I don't think we hit any boat. Anyway, it was an amusing time. We also had on that ship, a Regulas missile. It was one of the firsts missiles on a Navy ship, was the Regulas 1. It had to be guided. It was a surface to surface missile, where you fire from the surface and it had to go to another surface. An island or what have you. We didn't fire it a whole bunch. We fired it off the end of the fantail, the end of the ship, but when you fired—you fired and about fifteen seconds later, you would have two jets come racing past the ship, and they would guide it. Literally take command of the missile and guide it to its destination.

JS: Oh, wow. Okay.

JH: That was one of the first missiles that the Navy had. It was interesting to watch it work. The ship was so big, and it was—we carried an admiral. It was what you really think of as the Navy. We were spit and polish, going to port, you took the assigned port, and you would have all kinds of visitors. Dignitaries would come aboard. At times it got very tedious because you had to make sure that the cleanliness had to be above reproach. There was always somebody running around dinging on you. I had one of the deck divisions, so we had a prominent part in playing all of that. The silhouette of the ship was what you think of when you think of a Navy ship, to me, anyway.

JS: Right. Yes, sir.

JH: It was a good time, for me. We had one incident where they took us—we were sent to Pearl Harbor strictly for a change of command. They sent us from—we were out of Long Beach, California and they sent us to Pearl Harbor just to be a platform for a four-star admiral change of command.

JS: Okay.

JH: That was an interesting time because they just—the only people that got to bring their wives to this—it was down on the fantail and the only people who could bring their wives were admirals and generals. Here I was, I think I was a JG (Junior Grade) by that time, but they brought these captains over in a Navy bus. There must have been thirty of them. I couldn't imagine all these captains. They were like gods to me. Here they were, they were all in this Navy bus. (Chuckles) There is something wrong going on here.

Those were some of the—it was just a good ship. We made one WESTPAC (Western Pacific) cruise on it. That was kind of the highlight of the whole thing.

JS: During the WESTPAC cruise, where all did you guys go? Did you make any port of calls?

JH: Oh, yeah. Hong Kong. We spent a long time in Sasebo, Japan. That was our, really our home port away from Long Beach. Kobe, Beppu, Yokohama, there were a couple others that were up the rivers in Japan. We went to Subic Bay in the Philippines. Those were the ones we were—we were supposed to go to Australia for the Coral Sea festival, but it got cancelled for some unknown reason. We spent a lot of time in Sasebo.

JS: What was your impression of Asia? I guess that would be your first time in Asia. What was your impression of Asia?

JH: I really liked it. I enjoyed it. It was the end of—World War II had been over about fifteen years, and you could, quite frankly, you could buy an awful lot of stuff in Japan for very little money. I wasn't making a whole lot of money, but I had more than enough that I needed, and I bought all kinds of dishes, and electronics stuff. You go over and party all night for very little. I came close to staying. I came close to extending to get shore duty in Japan. I put two years on the *Los Angeles*, and then I had a three-year obligation, as I told you earlier. I was very seriously thinking of extending just for shore duty in Japan, however I lucked out for shore duty in Europe. That was before I knew I was going to stay in. My impressions of—I love the Orient. I've been back a number of times on my own since I have retired.

JS: Okay. Right.

JH: I think it's a great place. I have no reservations about going over there at all. I don't know whether I would really like to go back to Japan. The prices have skyrocketed so much, I'm not terribly sure I could afford it, but there are places that you certainly could afford.

JS: Not to jump way too far ahead of this interview, but have you been back to Vietnam?

JH: No, and I don't intend to.

JS: Okay. All right. Again, another question, not to jump too far ahead, but when did you make the decision to stay in the Navy, to extend?

JH: I extended after I left Los Angeles for shore duty in Europe, and I was assigned to Naples, Italy. I was still, what you would call a reserve officer, Jason. After I had been there about a year or so, I decided I wanted to stay in the Navy. Then I had to put a letter into augment, in other words, go regular Navy. That's when I decided to stay.

JS: Okay. Yes, sir. That was at the end of your time with the Los Angeles, and then you received shore duty at that point?

JH: Yes. The only reason I got shore duty is I gave them another year.

JS: Oh, okay.

JH: I had the three-year obligation. I had completed two, and I said, "Okay, I'll give you another year, which would make four, if you will give me shore duty in Europe." And they did.

JS: Yes, sir. One more question about your time aboard the Los Angeles. During your free time, if you had any aboard ship, how would you spend it?

JH: You mean when you are at sea?

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: Usually doing paperwork, reading, listening to music, movies in the wardroom, Acey Deucy in the wardroom. That sort of thing. You know, you can't drink on a Navy ship.

JS: Right. (Chuckles)

JH: So those are pretty much it. A lot of times you just wind up catching up on your paperwork and reports and things like that that you've got to do. Of course, it seems like you are always inspecting. Just making sure things are going okay. There would be times when they would—like on Sunday it would be like a big holiday, and everybody would maybe grab a mattress or something and go lay on an open area and try to get some sun. That ship was built before all the air conditioning became prevalent, so you had a windsock that was rigged on the ladders going down below so you could get some air down there. Particularly a lot of the sailors just had to get up and get on deck just to get some air. It was so hot in some of those places.

JS: After this first assignment, did you come to enjoy life in the Navy?

JH: I did, but I really didn't think about staying in.

JS: Okay.

JH: Not seriously. I thought, “Well, I’ll give them four years, then I’ll get out.” Two years in Naples was very nice, I’ve got to tell you.

JS: Yes, sir. You began that in ’62?

JH: Yeah. I think April maybe, April, May? I went over there in ’62.

JS: How did you get over to Naples?

JH: I flew.

JS: Okay.

JH: I flew over out of McGuire Air Force base. I caught a—I actually took my car over, and I drove it to Bayonne, New Jersey, and they loaded it in the hold of the cargo ship there in some fashion. It arrived about a month after I did. I’m not sure it was a good decision, but I had just bought this car before this WESTPAC deployment, and it was a ’62 Ford Fairlane metallic blue convertible, white top. Of course, Italians drive Fiats. They drive these really small cars. Mine looked like a tank inside that thing. It’s really funny because you can bluff a lot of them because they are crazy drivers. I don’t know whether you have ever been to Italy.

JS: No, sir.

JH: Or Naples in particular, but the Neapolitans have a death wish I’m convinced, until their final minutes, or seconds. You could go into an intersection with a big car, and just look straight ahead and see them out of your peripheral vision, and they will stop because they don’t think you see them. You have a much bigger vision there.

JS: Right.

JH: I might add that on my way between duty stations, I got engaged. I subsequently came back, jesus, a year later almost, ten months. Came back four or five days before the wedding, got married, and brought her back to Italy for the last fifteen months. Not your typical marriage.

JS: What was your assignment there in Naples?

JH: When I first went over there—there is a NATO base there, Jason. It’s Allied Forces south. I was there as a—I wasn’t attached to NATO, but I was on their base, and I was on communications. It was a Navy communications unit that was there. I was a watch stander for them. I stood eight-hour watches. You’d stand three—I forgot the—go in at eight in the morning, and get off at four, then somebody else came in at four and

worked till midnight, somebody else came in at midnight and worked till eight. That was the kind of rotation, then after you rotated through three watches each, nine watches, then you got a couple days off, and just did it again, and again. That was what I did first, then after I got married, they changed my assignment and put me in charge of a message center in a different location in Naples. I worked basically for the commander of the fleet air Mediterranean. It was more of an eight to five job. Much more suited to what I wanted to do, and just the niceties of the location were much better. You had a little social life with this job, plus I had just gotten married, so that made it even better.

JS: Yes, sir. How long did you remain here in Naples?

JH: Naples—I came back in, I think it was July of '64. A little over two years, and I came back on the best deal I ever had, I'm convinced. I came back on a—the Navy at the time was charter—would supplement US flag ships, civilian ships. What I mean by supplement, they would buy certain passages, a number of passages for people rotating. They did it by seniority at the same time. In the summer, I was a lieutenant at the time, which is a captain in the Air Force. It wasn't very much rank. Most of the people rotating back were O6 and O5, but I knew the guys who made the assignment. I partied with him, he and his wife. So he got me on this ship. He and, of course, my wife. It was the SS *Atlantic.* They put my car in the hole of that ship, so my car was with me, and the trip back took like, twelve days. We stopped in Genoa, Nice, Palma, Barcelona, Gibraltar, Madeira Islands, and then came into New York City. They paid for my whole fare, it was dead time, so it didn't count against my leave till I hit New York City. The car was in the hold, so all I had to do was clear customs, go down to the pier, get in my car, and start for Missouri, and they gave me five dollars a day to tip. That was one of the best deals I have ever had in my entire life.

JS: It certainly sounds like a pretty good deal. If we could back up for just a moment. In Italy, I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about your impressions of Italy and of the Italians.

JH: Well, first of all you've got to divide Italy into two separate sections. There's the Neapolitans in the South, and they come from a different breed. We went to Rome frequently. You would tell them—they'd say, "Where do you live?" I said, "Naples." And they'd just kind of shake their head and tell us they felt sorry for us. It's a whole

other breed. That's kind of like going from Appalachia to New York City, you know. We got to travel quite a bit. I made an intent to do that, and we got into—while we were there we got into Germany, up to Garmish, Berchtesgaden, and Munich, Heidelberg. Did of course Venice, took one trip to Barcelona in Spain, and Lisbon. We saw and did quite a bit of stuff over there. But my impressions of Italy, I loved it, up to a point. The rule of thumb then was that it took you three months to adjust to the Neapolitans. They are actually very dirty, they're rude, and every other adjective that you can think of that might fall in those categories. People that come over there, they just despise it. It takes you about three months to adjust to them, and once you do, you just kind of fall into that mode. That's all I can say. I've been back to Italy, but I have never been to Naples since then. I've been north.

JS: Right. Were they pro American?

JH: Yeah, there was no problem. While we were there, I remember Catherine's mother, that's my wife, wrote one day, she said she had seen some sort of a communist rallying in Naples and we never even heard of it. The news media picked it up, but it wasn't anything significant in a city of that size, but I never had any problems.

JS: Any other memorable moments, funny moments, anything like that from your time there in Naples?

JH: No, it was a good experience. The first apartment that I had, when I first got married, and I shared it with a guy who was a supply officer there, and he agreed to move out after I got married. It had a balcony and it overlooked the whole bay of Naples, and Vesuvius was in the background. It was something you see in a postcard. It was unreal. I guess about six or seven months after we were in there, the guy that owned the apartment decided he wanted the apartment back, or sold the apartment, and the guy he sold it to wanted to live there, so we had to move to another spot. That was kind of a downer, but it worked alright. The other thing I just flippantly kind of remember, is you could take your liter wine bottle down around the corner to the local wine shop, and they would fill it for you from a big barrel for fifty cents. You'd go down there and these little old guys would be around there playing checkers or some other game sitting—it was typical of what you would envision of this kind of environment, and you would come back with two liters of wine for a dollar, and it was good wine. (Laughs)

JS: (Laughs) Anything else from Italy before moving on?

JH: No. I think that pretty well covers it.

JS: Once you returned to the US, what was next for you?

JH: I got assigned to the *Guam*, which was an LPH (Landing Platform Helicopter). That's a helicopter carrier. You're fading away, Jason.

JS: So a helicopter carrier?

JH: It was a new construction. What I'm saying is it was built new. I was what they call a plank owner on it. We put it in commission, it was being built in Philadelphia. I came back there in, like I say, the summer of '64. It was going to be home ported in Norfolk, so it went to Norfolk, and I was part of a pre-commissioning detail. I went through various schools in Norfolk along with a lot of the other people that were assigned to ship from September through December. Then we went to Philadelphia, and there was, of course, a lot of the ships, some of the ships company was already there. Sometime in early January, I don't remember the date, we put the ship in commission. From there she had a little bit more—they ran trials out of Philadelphia down to Chesapeake. Then finally, the ship was accepted by the Navy, fully. I think it was sometime around March or April we wound up going to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for a shakedown training. That was a six-month ordeal down in Cuba to get it all shipshape. Then we came back for an availability in Philadelphia, for what they call post shakedown availability. We spent another two months up there in Philadelphia, and then we took it back to Norfolk for good.

JS: What was your assignment here in *Guam*?

JH: I went aboard as the Assistant CIC Officer, combat information center officer. After, I don't know, a year or so I became the gunnery officer, which was more of my liking. That's basically what I did. I stood watches in combat information center initially, then I finally got up to the bridge and stood watches on the bridge.

JS: At this point had you extended again?

JH: No, no. I was a regular officer.

JS: Yeah. Okay, right.

JH: I got augmented when I was in Naples, so from that point on there is no extensions. If you wanted to get out, you would have to write a letter and request revert back to reserve and be released from active duty.

JS: As gunnery officer, could you talk a little bit about that and what you would do?

JH: It was not a huge job. We had two, five-inch-fifty, three-inch-fifty mounts, and that was my responsibility as gunnery officer. That and helping the—I worked for the 1st Lieutenant on a Navy ship in charge of the deck, all the deck fittings and things like that. That's who I reported to, but I enjoyed that because I could get out more in the open air. CICs enclosed, and there were a number of other officers in the CIC, and the gunnery, to me, was a bit better job. You know, you fired a few rounds—we did one of the more interesting things was down in the Netherlands Antilles. We made two deployments, Jason, on that ship while I was on it. Both of them were to the Caribbean. We visited some of the islands down there, obviously, and one of them was Curacao, which is in the Netherlands Antilles. This was before Aruba became the big spot to go. It's Dutch, so we exchanged saluting battery fire with them. We steamed off the coast of the city down there, I can't remember what the name of the major city was. Anyway, we fired the twenty-one gun, I think it was salute, and they fired back. The shell is a really small shell. We had a saluting battery that fired it. After it was all over, I took two of those shells. I didn't know what the heck I was going to do with them. I've made lamps out of them. I still use them. I still have them in my bedroom. Curacao was one of the most interesting ports I've ever been in because they have a break water that goes through—it's a big oil refinery place, and they had this breakwater, like a bridge that actually opens up. It's to keep the sea water out in mass, but they open it for ships. Once they open this bridge—think of a bridge as being in the water and swinging out and opening up this channel. We steamed right down their main street, and with a carrier, you are looking over the side, you are looking right down on the street. As soon as we were in, then they closed the gate, and they'd bring in big tankers for their oil. The refinery was there. It was an interesting place. I've never been back, but I would like to someday. We carried—when we deployed, when we got fully manned, there was six hundred people in the crew that was full time. When we deployed, we brought the Marines on

board, and they carried a battalion landing team, which is eighteen hundred marines, and they brought an air squadron on board, which they carried twenty-six helicopters. The mission of the ship is what they call, vertical envelopment. If you remember during World War II and earlier, they had landing craft that would hit the beaches and land. So, the concept in vertical envelopment was while they were hitting the beach and landing there, there would be another contingency of Marines flying over the beach going behind the bad guys, and then pinching them between the water and themselves. They would go down there and run various exercises, and they would off load. When they weren't on board, it was almost like a ghost ship. Then, when they were on it, it was just like mayhem. You take your pick, whichever one you wanted. When we were in port in the States, it was just the ships company.

JS: How many deployments did you make?

JH: We made two. Two four-month deployments. I spent two back to back Christmases in San Juan. First two super bowls.

JS: (Laughs) Right. Was this just an exercise or was something actually going on?

JH: Well, it was—ships normally deploy, whether there is a—but the second time that we went down there, we got involved in a little bit more of an exercise, and they were having a war over there in the Dominican Republic. We were actually about twenty miles off the coast ready to land the troops. It was put down, but it was listed as a contingency and we got an armed forces expeditionary medal out of it for being down there.

JS: Did you guys go anywhere else, any cruises, or anything like that?

JH: No, just those two. Like I said, we hit various islands like, St. Thomas, St. Croix, Barbados, but we never went any place else, but we were gone a lot, at sea and that sort of thing. I think because the ship was in Philadelphia for so long, and then we were gone down there, then of course, when you are in port, you stand duty, so every third day, you've got to watch. I figured out one year I was home twenty-five days. Actually, off the ship home.

JS: As I was researching for your interview, I was reading a little bit about the ships history, and I noticed that it said that they were involved in some of the Astronaut recoveries from Gemini missions. Were you—

JH: God, how did I miss that? Yep, we picked up, I think it was Gemini 11.

JS: Okay.

JH: I was working on the deck force at the time, with the gunnery, I mean. We were out in the Caribbean and there was two ships involved. I think the other one was the *Lexington*, and they were in the Pacific, and we were in the Atlantic. As the mission developed, they could abort it at any time. In other words, they would abort in the Atlantic or the Pacific. So when they flew over us and kept on going, we would be given a new set of coordinates to go to.

JS: Okay.

JH: We didn't know whether they were going to abort when they go over the Pacific. We really wanted to pick them up, and of course, I'm sure the *Lexington* wanted to pick them up in the Pacific. Every time they'd fly over the *Lexington*, you could hear a cheer go up because we might be the ones to get them, and sure enough, we got them. They came down—I was down on the hangar deck and I was supposedly in charge of trying to make sure the capsule got picked up and right and everything, although I had minimal to do with it. They were talking to the guys on the bridge. Our coordinates were so close that where the capsule went down the ship had to back down, or it would've landed on the flight deck. It was that close. I mean, when it went down, I could see it. it was right off the hangar deck, off the elevator, and it probably wasn't three or four hundred yards. As soon as it hit—I think before it hit, the helicopter was airborne and we had two or three Navy SEALS (Sea Air and Land), and they jumped in and put a flotation collar around it, got the two astronauts out, and brought them back to the ship. Then, we got the capsule over to the side, hoisted it aboard. It was Conrad and Cooper, were the two astronauts. That afternoon they had a big all hands muster down on the flight deck, on the hangar deck, and they spoke, and I think they enlisted a couple guys, and then, interestingly enough, I got to meet them on the bridge that night. I had the—I think the twenty to twenty-four watch, and they came up there. Both of them were really small men. Obviously, I guess, trying to fit in that capsule, you had to be of short stature. One other interesting thing was, they took some samples from them, whatever blood and other things, and they wanted to get those back to Cape Canaveral as quickly as they could. I guess they used one of our weather balloons, and they tied this long string on the balloon.

We were far enough out that the helicopter couldn't make it, so they put the samples in some sort of a container that was resting on the flight deck, and I have no idea how high that balloon line went, but it had to go up a considerable way, and an Air Force fixed wing came over and picked that thing up. It flew right over the top of our flight deck and snatched it, and reeled it in, and flew back to Cape Canaveral that afternoon. I remember watching the thing. I was amazed. This big 'ol lumbering Air Force, thinking, "What the heck they doing?" The next thing I know, they snatched this thing off. Then the next morning the two astronauts flew over off the ship, then we went on back to Norfolk. The capsule stayed on board the ship and it was off loaded in Norfolk, and then probably taken to Cape Canaveral.

JS: Any other memorable moments aboard the *Guam*?

JH: I can't think of any right off the top. Jason, I'm losing you.

JS: Yes, sir. Can you hear me now?

JH: No.

JS: Let me pause real quick. (Audio cuts) How long were you aboard the *Guam*?

JH: Almost two and half years.

JS: Okay, so that would have been from—

JH: From basically—when you got right down to it, I was there from September of '64 to '67, I guess. Probably April or May in '67.

JS: Of course, during this time, things were beginning to heat up in Vietnam. Were you paying attention? Were you guys getting much news about what was going on in Vietnam?

JH: By that time, my best friend had been killed in Vietnam. He was in the river boats and he got killed in '64, I guess. So yeah, I knew what was going on.

JS: Yes, sir. Had you formed much of an opinion on the war at that point?

JH: Not really. It was kind of a remote thing, what you read about in the paper, what you saw happening on television, but it was like it was another world away. I guess what I'm saying is I had my own stuff to worry about with what I was doing there. I had a family by that time or hoped to have a family very soon. I really wasn't that intent on it, except for Dale getting killed, and there was nothing I could do about it at that stage.

JS: Yes, sir. Did you think that you would eventually be going? Did you think that was a possibility?

JH: I had no idea.

JS: Right.

JH: To be honest with you, I had no idea. I did not volunteer, if that's your question.

JS: Once you—getting back to the timeline. Once you finished up your time on the *Guam*, what was your next assignment at that point?

JH: I went to the *Nitro*, which is an ammunition ship. The *Nitro* was going through a long overhaul. They decommissioned the ship and were putting on some new transfer equipment. They had been decommissioned for about a year and a half. Most of the original crew at that time was gone. There was about forty people left. They were going through the conversion in Baltimore, and I was put in charge of what they call a pre-commissioning group in Norfolk. I had a hundred, or so sailors and officers down there that I was in charge of making sure they got through their training, they got to the right schools, there probably was some manuals that I was working on trying to update them. I had an administrative staff and a small office there at the fleet training center in Norfolk. We stayed there for about, it seemed like about three or four months in this training mode. It was in '67 and I want to say it was late summer, maybe it was midsummer. I finally joined the ship and just took the whole crew and went up to Baltimore. We put the ship back in commission. We kind of did a modified thing that we had done on the *Guam*, except this obviously wasn't new construction, and went down to Guantanamo for training just like we had done with the *Guam*, and then came back. Our home port was Davisville, Rhode Island, which was up the river if you will, from Newport, Rhode Island. When you say ammunition ship, Jason, everybody gets terrified and they park you as far away from everything that they possibly can. We were on a Seabee base up there. At the time there was a Seabee base at Davisville, and there was also a Quonset Naval Air station over on that side. There was a merchant pier that they were shipping a lot of stuff out from Vietnam that would come through that Davisville terminal. I think we were the only Navy ship that was up there, but you go past Newport

and go around a couple of those islands there at Narragansett Bay and go on up the Davisville.

JS: Okay.

JH: South of Providence. I was on there for about two years. I went aboard as the operations officer and the navigator. I had two jobs. There's about sixteen to seventeen officers and two hundred fifty enlisted. It was a nice ship. It was a good experience.

JS: Where did you guys go?

JH: Our deployment was to the Mediterranean, and I made one full deployment to the Med. Then I was on a second deployment when I got detached to go to Vietnam.

JS: Okay.

JH: I think we left on the second deployment in like July, and I had to be in Coronado, California in September. I was there for about a month, I guess.

JS: Okay. That was July of '69?

JH: Yeah.

JS: Before moving on to getting that assignment to Vietnam, any memorable moments, anything we should mention from the *Nitro*?

JH: I'm not sure of anything good. We had some bad experiences down in GTMO (Guantanamo) which is kind of funny, in retrospect. We crashed into a pier and dropped the anchor on the pier on one occasion. A couple days later we actually went aground and you could see the perimeter fence of Cuba, and we had to get a couple tugs out to pull us off. It was all part of our training, and people got instructions, crossed ways. We had a little bit of a bad reputation there. I was in there, gosh, three or four years later on another ship and they'd never repaired the pier. It's cut a big pie shape out of it. They said, "You should've seen the ship that went in there." I said, "I know. I was on it." I'm trying to think if there was anything really significant that deployments—we left in July, I think it was, and we came back in January '68 to January of '69. You hit the normal ports in Europe. We spent a lot of time in Malta. There was a little town south of Valletta called Marsaxlokk and we spent quite a bit of time there. We were in Naples, and Athens, and Villafrance were some of the ones that come to mind. I guess that was the last time I was in Naples. That's pretty much it, I guess.

JS: But you were actually on a deployment when you received your orders for Vietnam?

JH: Yep. I was on deployment. I had to catch a flight back to—we must have been in Malta on that second trip and I caught a flight to Rota, Spain. Then another military flight back to the States. I don't even remember where we came in in the States. Whether it was Norfolk or Maguire. Then from there I made my way back to Rhode Island. By that time, I had one son who was six months old, I guess. No, he wasn't six months old. Yeah, he might have been six. He was a year old. What am I thinking about? He was a year old and my wife was pregnant. We left there and drove, essentially across country. We drove to Missouri and spent a short time here with our families, and I was going to counter insurgency school in Coronado. I said, "They said in the instructions don't bring your families." And she says, "I'm going to go. I don't care. You are going to Vietnam for a year, and I'm not going to make it a sixteen-month deployment." She wound up going with me to California.

JS: If you could, what was your initial reaction to receiving the assignment to Vietnam? What was your reaction to that?

JH: I guess, it was kind of shock. I actually can remember getting the orders. The ship was in Earle, New Jersey. There is a big ammunition depot there. I received my orders, and I am thinking, "Holy smokes, this is going to be—this is not going to be much fun." I wasn't so worked up about the orders as I was the separation period. That was the whole thing.

JS: What was your wife's reaction to—

JH: I think it was kind of the same thing. What's it going to entail? And how much danger is there where you are going? And that sort of thing.

JS: How much time did you actually have off before you had to report to Coronado?

JH: You know, I think it was maybe two weeks. I think I cranked it in there when I built the itinerary to get out there that I was going to take two weeks. That's why I wound up flying and going right on out. That's just—I think I had my own options on it. That's what I did.

JS: Yes, sir. All right. You said it was to counter insurgency school?

JH: Yes.

JS: Could you talk a little bit about that training, and the purpose of it, and what the training was like?

JH: Sure. It was really an interesting time in my life. It was thirteen weeks, and there were, as I recall, about sixty men that were in the school, about half officers and half enlisted. The enlisted were all senior petty officers of some sort. I was the 3rd senior officer. I was lieutenant commander by then, and our senior officer was a Naval Academy graduate. He was also lieutenant commander. Then there was two other lieutenant commanders. One was a Mustang who came up from the ranks, and he was Senior to me, and then there was one other one that was junior to me. The training took place in Coronado, which is the Amphib base there in San Diego. They had—we went through several classrooms. Like I said, thirteen weeks. There was four weeks, it seems like, that were devoted to language. We were working on the Vietnamese language. I may have some of this timing—it may have been more than four weeks.

JS: Okay.

JH: But we devoted at least four weeks, it may have been six, to the Vietnamese language. I knew enough to get by. To jump ahead a minute, I never really used it because everybody that I associated with basically spoke English from years of dealing with other people, but it was good to know and I'm sure a lot of them did use it. Then we spent about four weeks on general indoctrination, on tactics, on the culture of the Vietnamese, what you can expect, what you should do, don't get embarrassed if somebody comes up and hold your hand because that's an acceptable practice there. There were just a lot of little things that amounted to whether you were going to offend the people or not. Obviously, if you are an advisor you don't want to offend anybody if you are going to have to work with them.

JS: Right.

JH: We did quite a bit of PT (Physical Training). We ran in boots formed up into two companies. I was in charge of one of the companies and the other lieutenant commander was junior to me had the other one, and the two senior ones became the CO (Commanding Officer) and the XO (Executive Officer) of the organization. We did, like I say, a lot of PT, a lot of running. We had an obstacle course that we ran a few times that

was sort of a junior one. They let us on the—interesting side note, they let us on the big one, one time. The one that the SEALS train on. I tell you, I did some of it, but there was some of it I wasn't having any part of. They went through these high wires and balance beams that were way off the ground. I said, "There's no way. I'll fall off that thing and break my neck." I have a very good appreciation for SEALS. I think they are a great bunch of guys I tell you, but some of the things they had to go through are just nuts to get there. You got an interesting perspective on just touring part of their training course, and of course their training base is there, so every now and then you would see those guys running with telephone poles on their shoulders. We spent three weeks gone. We spent one week at Pendleton in a weapons familiarization course. We went up there and basically fired all the weapons that you could, .50 calibers, and LAWs (Light Anti-Armor Weapons) and M-16s, and that sort of thing. We did another week up there where we took part in war games, and we were just out there and they would ambush us, and we would set up tactics trying to avoid ambushes. We would go in the perimeter for the night, and they had loudspeakers and broadcasting to us, "Here you are in Vietnam, and your wives and girlfriends are back home with the draft dodgers." Anything they could to get to you. The culmination of the trip was on a Friday or Thursday night, was an all-night hike, and this goes on with every training group that goes through it. You've got some coordinates where the bad guy's camp was, which were the trainers. Basically, you marched all night, and the guy that was in charge of it and myself, crawled up and found the camp. I remember he said, "You want to go with me?" and I said, "Sure." We outlined where the attack was going to be, and the timing, and then we deployed all the troops around the thing at first light. We had a time set for it, and we jumped in there and killed them all, so to speak.

JS: Right.

JH: It was a good battle problem for us because you were marching in the dark and using compass coordinates and that sort of thing to get to where you were going. I shifted gears here. You go from the Navy to an entirely different environment and that is where you just change your whole mindset on everything. The last week was the survival week, which was probably the most interesting of the whole group. The first part of it they started in San Diego and you slept on the beach. I remember you are supposed to

catch fish, and I never fished and never caught anything, and I wound up eating raw snails off the seawall, which were not too bad in retrospect. I didn't die, or anything. Then they took us up into the mountains where the course is, and it was a really dry, hot fall. There wasn't anything up there to eat. You wound up eating acorns and things like that. You are supposed to go out there and catch rabbits and things like that, and the rabbit population was all diminished by then. I don't know if anybody caught anything. On the last—on a Thursday night they gave us—they brought this big piece of meat in and cooked it in a pot. I didn't have anything to eat, basically for the week. Of course, the first thing I did was get diarrhea. You may not even want to hear this story. One of the things we learned in training, Jason, was that if you eat charcoal it will stop the diarrhea. We had had a fire that night and the things had died down, and I just went over and just ate some of that charcoal, and it works. If you ever get in that situation, it does work. The next morning there's supposed to be the start of the final part of it, and that's the capture, and that sort of thing, and the imprisonment. They decided that they—they said, "Well, we are going to put you in three trucks, and each one is going to leave separately, and we are going to dump you out, then you've got to invade the captures." I guess they decided because of the fire hazard they weren't going to let us evade and they weren't going to tell us about it. Anyway, the truck I was in was the second one to leave. There was a bit of an interval and we'd been gone, I don't know, five minutes maybe. All of the sudden shots went around us, and the trucks stopped, and it was guys dressed up in North Vietnamese uniforms, and told us to get out, line up. They said, "Who's the senior guy here?" And I looked around, you know who was the senior guy? Me. First they did, they hit me, and then they wanted to know where I'd come from, what ship, and I told them nothing. So to make a long story a little shorter, I got water boarded. It's an incredibly terrifying experience, I've got to tell you. The put me on a board, inverted board, and they poured water—they had a towel, t-shirt like thing, put that over my face, and poured water. You can't breathe. The first time they did it, I just broke out. I just broke this board, and then they put me back down, because you aren't supposed to resist them. That's all part of the training. After they did that about four or five times, I told them where I came from. These guys are going to drown me. I can't breathe.

JS: Right.

JH: Anyway, they put us back in the truck, took us into the camp. First thing they did, of course, was take my glasses away, and they take your watch so you can't see and you don't have any idea what time it is.

JS: Right.

JH: And they put a mask over your head—sack, march you into the camp, make you crawl into the camp actually. Basically, I spent most of that day getting beat up, spent some time in a tiger cage, then I got interrogated. You are supposed to try to escape, but I knew there was not going to be any escaping for me because I couldn't see where I was going. We had one Black guy who was an E5 and that guy escaped three times, I think.

JS: Oh, wow. Right.

JH: He just had them going nuts. In the middle of the afternoon, we were moving rocks from one side of the compound to the other, and they said, "Okay, who's the senior?" They wanted to see the senior officer. Well, I knew I was the 3rd senior. I hadn't seen the other two guys, but I knew I was the 3rd senior and everybody seemed to be there, so I didn't pay any attention to him. After about the third or fourth time they told me that. I said, "Maybe I better go over there." So, I walked over, and I said, "I think I'm the senior guy here." He hit me, of course. That was their first—it's an open palm hit. I don't know what he told me. They probably took me in for interrogation or something, but I didn't know what had happened to the other two guys. Then they assembled us about—it was dark. The guy that was our senior officer in this group was—the only way I can describe him is he had stars written on his shoulder. I mean, he was an outstanding officer, lieutenant commander, very good looking, personable, big guy, definitely going to be an admiral, and they brought him out there. He started (unintelligible) with me and he said, "I told you I quit. I told you I quit." He had quit the program. He told them he wasn't going to go through anymore of that getting beaten up and put in a cage, or anything else. He had apparently quit that morning, and since they knew the 2nd senior guy was a good friend of his, they pulled him in to try to talk him into changing his mind. So in essence, I had been in charge and hadn't even known it, and the guy walked off the stage. He said, "I quit. I'm not doing this anymore." To jump that problem ahead just a

skosh, he said—they sent him home on leave. He didn't go with us to Vietnam. I heard later that they tried to get him through two more courses, and he never did make it.

JS: Oh, wow.

JH: I often wondered what happened to him, whether that ended his career essentially, or whether it had any impact at all. As far as I know, he never made it to Vietnam. Anyway, we finished. Then we wound up going home and I left right away. We had to catch a flight out of Travis Air Force base in California in four or five days. My wife had delivered out there.

JS: Oh, wow.

JH: So we had a one month old and a—he would've been a year and a half, to take back. We drove from San Diego—I got as far as Springfield, Missouri, which is about two hundred miles west of here. My family met us, and I couldn't go any further. I didn't have any more time. I got on a plane in Springfield and flew to Travis. My family drove my wife and family back to Missouri. I caught a flight and went to Travis, joined up with the rest of the people and flew from there to Saigon.

JS: Before we actually get into the beginning of your tour in Vietnam, if we could back up for just a moment, I have a few more questions about the counter insurgency program if you don't mind.

JH: Not at all.

JS: Okay. All right. Was there any sort of riverine type training? Anything like that, or was it—

JH: No. The riverine training went on at Vallejo.

JS: Ah, okay.

JH: Ours was not riverine. In fact, initially, I don't think there was anybody in our group who was destined to go into riverine. They were different kinds of advisors. A lot of them were coastal group advisors, which were the Junk Force.

JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

JH: I don't recall anybody that was destined for riverine in their orders.

JS: How about the instructors there at the counter insurgency? Were these guys who had already been to Vietnam?

JH: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JS: Overall, did you feel that the training prepared you, I guess as good as it could for Vietnam?

JH: Yeah, I think it did. It was the most interesting Navy school I ever went to, I know that. I think it got us started as much as we could. We were going to a variety of jobs, so it had to encompass—there were guys going to staff jobs and things of this nature, but they were going to interface with the Vietnamese, so they had to be aware of what the customs were and that sort of thing. Most of the guys I never saw again after I got in country. I only remember one or two that I ever saw again.

JS: Okay.

JH: One was a guy that worked in Saigon. I think he had a desk job, but another fellow was up at Coastal Group 11, which was just south of the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone).

JS: Was there anything that the training did not cover, but looking back in retrospect you wish it would have?

JH: That is an interesting question. I never even thought of that.

JS: Okay.

JH: I really can't think of an example of what they could've missed.

JS: Okay.

JH: From my own standpoint, in retrospect, I wish they would have had some more stuff on riverine, but that wouldn't have been appropriate for the people that were going through it. They already had that going at another location.

JS: Yes, sir. All right. Again, before actually getting into Vietnam, this is probably, if you don't mind, probably a good place to go ahead and stop for today. We are getting close to the two-hour time limit.

JH: Okay.

JS: So if you don't mind, we will go ahead and take a break for today.

JH: Okay.

JS: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University continuing an Oral History interview with Mr. John Holland. Today is July 30th, 2010, and this is interview session number two. Okay, last time when we left off you were just about to begin your tour duty in Vietnam.

JH: Right, you are starting to fade already.

JS: Oh, no.

JH: That's better.

JS: Hopefully, that won't be too much of a problem today.

JH: We will deal with it if it is.

JS: All right. Yes, sir. Why don't we begin then if you could tell me about the trip over? First of all, how did you get to Vietnam?

JH: You mean transportation?

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: The group that I went through counterinsurgency with all took the same flight out of Travis Air Force base, outside of San Francisco. We met there and flew from there—a couple stops, I think we had one in Pearl and one in Guam. I was thinking later there was an amusing antidote. There was three of is in the seat, and one of the guys had a fifth of whiskey. I said, "Harvey, we can get in trouble smuggling that whiskey on board." He said, "What are they going to do to us? Send us to Vietnam?" (Chuckles)

JS: (Chuckles) Right.

JH: On the trip over we polished that thing off. It was a Braniff charter. They had—it was a civilian manned flight, and it was very nice. Of course, the flight across the Pacific is always long.

JS: Right. Yes, sir. What was your rank at this time?

JH: I was lieutenant commander.

JS: Lieutenant commander, okay. Where did you come into country?

JH: Saigon.

JS: Okay, at Tan Son Nhut?

JH: Yes.

JS: Upon stepping off the plane, what was your first impression of Vietnam?

JH: (Chuckles) You know, first impression is, you think you're going to get machine gunned as soon as you step down off the plane. I didn't really know what to expect. They put us on a bus, and the bus had, I remember wire screens across the window, I guess to keep people from throwing grenades in the bus. I remember the bus driver crawling underneath it to inspect it. I'm not sure, in retrospect that he wasn't doing that for a bit of show. It was all so new that all of a sudden you are flying into a combat environment. It is a cultural shock, there is no question about it.

JS: Right. Yes, sir. Do you remember the exact date? Do you remember that?

JH: Oh, no. It was late November. One other thing on the flight over that was noteworthy. I missed Thanksgiving Day that year. We left the day before, and if you know when you cross the International Date Line you advance a date, and when we landed, it was the day after Thanksgiving. I was in a group a few years ago and the question was, "What was the most noteworthy Thanksgiving you've ever experienced?" and mine was the one that I didn't have.

JS: (Laughs)What sort of in-processing did you have?

JH: You know, what I remember, they took us to a barracks and they had a section for officers and the rest of it was for enlisted. I spent, I think one night there. It seems like, and I don't remember too much about it. There was an officer's club close by and we went over there. It seemed like the next day I got relocated to BOQ (Bachelor Officers Quarters) in Saigon and I checked in with the Naval Advisory Group Headquarters in Saigon. They processed the orders and everything, and then made arrangements for my further transfer.

JS: So is it that point when you found out exactly what unit you would be going to?

JH: No, I had orders, all the time. I knew where I was supposed to go.

JS: Right. All right. Oh, one other question about arriving. Was it at night when you came in?

JH: Daytime.

JS: It was in the daytime? Okay. All right. Once you checked in with the Naval Advisory Group, you said they organized further transportation. Where were you going to?

JH: Da Nang.

JS: To Da Nang, okay. All right. How did you get there?

JH: I flew. It was a military aircraft. I do remember though that the flight—I went to Tan Son Nhut again, and the flight was postponed, and postponed for mechanical reasons, and finally that day they cancelled it. I didn't have any place to go and I wound up sleeping on the loading platform outside the air terminal there at Tan Son Nhut. I had a valve pack and a duffle, and I just slept on that, then whatever mechanical problems they encountered, they fixed it and I flew up the next day.

JS: So, is that where you were going to be based out of? Da Nang?

JH: Right. My orders were to the Coastal Surveillance center as the officer in charge.

JS: Before getting into your actual duties there, could you talk a little bit about, I guess about Da Nang, and your impressions of it and your quarters there?

JH: Da Nang was a big, sprawling, metropolis, and there was a lot of military. There was a Navy support activities, where I was quartered, and got a room at the BOQ. It was a really nice facility. Of course, the Air Force was there, and they had their base and it was the Marine Corps headquarters for I Corps, so there was a lot of stuff going on. The base where I was, I guess it was a Vietnamese Navy installation, which was—it seemed like it was about a ten-minute jeep ride from the support activity.

JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Upon arrival there, what was your first impression of the Coastal Surveillance Group and of the guys that you were working with? You don't have to go into specific names if you would prefer not to, but if you could talk a little bit about the unit itself.

JH: Well—what the mission was?

JS: Yes, sir. That and also, if you could, some of the personalities. Again, you don't have to get into names, but something like that.

JH: The interesting part was that when I got there, the Naval Surveillance Center's responsibility was to prevent interdiction of I Corps by the North Vietnamese

with supplies. What they would do is bring ships down the coast and then land them at night in a clandestine manner, and supply the NVA (North Vietnamese Army), and the Viet Cong with ammunition, supplies, that sort of thing. Our job was to monitor—we had ships that were off the coast that was Navy ships and Coast Guard ships. We were coordinating the tracking of any suspicious ships that would be out there and could vector any of our ships, the friendlies, or aircraft to investigate and board if necessary. The people there were confident. My thing is, I didn't work there very long. When I checked in, the senior Navy Advisor for I Corps was a full Commander, and he was stationed, as I recall, in the same compound. I don't remember whether he was in the same building or not, but he was in the same compound, and I really reported to him. But as soon as I checked in, I was informed that the officer that I had orders to replace was in the river boats, and they had created this riverine operation. He took over the operation, and apparently, I don't know whether Washington didn't know this or not, but when they cut the orders, it was for the officer in charge of the Coastal Surveillance Center, but it turned out I got an entirely different assignment.

JS: Yes, sir. So did you spend any time then, in the Coastal Surveillance Group, before going out on the boats there?

JH: I spent a month.

JS: A month, okay.

JH: I went to the boats on Christmas day of '69.

JS: Okay. During that month time period, could you talk a little bit about what you were doing during that first month there?

JH: You know, I'll be honest with you, I don't remember much about that month. It was actually, a very boring job.

JS: Okay.

JH: I guess the other guy—we had a month turnover there of some sort, and I don't really remember ever having much of a turnover at all with him. I took over the Coastal Surveillance Center and ran it, then when I left, the second in command, I don't even remember who that was, took it over. It was—I know at the time, I was apprehensive about going into the river boats, because you read so much about the action that they were doing. At the same time, what I was doing was pretty boring and I hated to

think that I was going to spend a year doing this kind of work. I had mixed emotions about this whole thing.

JS: Now these river boats, were they American boats, or South Vietnamese boats?

JH: They were American when I got there, and then we will jump ahead, and we turned them over halfway through my tour.

JS: Okay. All right. Once you went out there, was it still based out of Da Nang, or somewhere else?

JH: No, we were based on the Cua Dai River, which is now the Hoi An River. They have renamed it, I've noticed.

JS: Okay.

JH: My main place was Hoi An, which is about twenty-five, thirty kilometers south of Da Nang. What we had was an array along the river there, Jason. We had two Swift boats. Are you familiar with Swift boats?

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: The Swift boats were used predominately for the offshore patrols, but two of the boats would come into the river and they would rotate in, in pairs. Right at the mouth of the river, there was a coastal group, which was the old junk base. It was Vietnamese junk base with American advisors there, and the Swift boats would tie up there, and when I first came down the river, I stayed at the coastal group for several days 'till I moved on down to Hoi An. Then, further on down past Hoi An City there was the PBRs, patrol boat river. There were ten of those down there at the squadron base, and they were based out of a Marine camp.

JS: Okay.

JH: When they had any problems with the boats or whatever, if they couldn't fix them, they would have to go back to Da Nang, to the shipyard.

JS: Okay. At this point, what was your specific assignment?

JH: I was in charge of the operation. It was Operation Sea Tiger.

JS: Okay. Yes, sir. All right.

JH: What I did—there was a lieutenant that was in charge of the PBRs (Patrol Boat River). He was the commanding officer of that group, and the two Swift boat officers that were in charge of their individual boats would come in, usually it would be

an ensign or a JG that was in charge of those boats. I ran the operation from a MACV headquarters, the Army Advisory Headquarters in Hoi An. We had a TOC (Tactical Operations Center) there where we operated out of. I had, in addition to—two Swift boats, PBRs, and when I came in there, I had two Navy snipers. I had what they called a duffle bag team, which were sensor planners. These guys did double duties as radio operators in the TOC. Then, on call I had a UDT (Underwater Demolition Team) team that was based out of Da Nang.

JS: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about Operation Sea Tiger itself, and the purpose of the operation? Was this part of the larger interdiction thing, or what?

JH: Yeah, their basic mission was to prevent the interdiction of supplies and weapons and people going basically north to Da Nang. They would funnel down the Ho Chi Minh trail and come east across the plain and then try to cross rivers and that sort of thing and infiltrate up toward Da Nang. Our job was as much as we could to prevent that infiltration.

JS: Okay.

JH: Of course, most of that work went on at night. So our mode of operation was that we would set night ambushes. That's where we had most of our contacts. The way that worked, the boats would usually go out—we'd have to clear an area for free fire, and the boats, whether they were PBRs or Swift boats, they operated in pairs. They would go out so that they could set into the riverbank just about twilight, where there's just enough light so that they could set in. Then the boats would moor into the side of the riverbank, tie up usually on a tree or something, and put one guy on the bank, with the safety rope of course, to prevent us being ambushed. Then use our night observation devices to scan the river, and the bank on the other side for movement. When I—I had the two snipers and they had night observation devices, so you could put those guys on the boat too, to give you—if you just had a one single target you had a better chance with those guys.

JS: Being the commander, did you generally go out with them at night?

JH: I went with them quite a while.

JS: Okay.

JH: I didn't go every night, but I—it's hard to say how many times I went out, actually. (Chuckles)

JS: Sure.

JH: But I went out enough to know that it got rather tight out there. We would sit there—let's say we set in at seven o'clock, and we'd stay 'till eleven or so. We found out that if there was going to be movement by the bad guys, it was going to be pretty much about eight or nine o'clock, when it got dark and they could get out and do stuff. When it got later in the morning, there just wasn't anything going on.

JS: Was there a curfew for the Vietnamese? Were they not supposed to be out on the river at night?

JH: Yeah. They had to be in their villages. So if there happened to be another friendly unit operating, then we had to clear the area before we could use it every night. So, you had to put in the request to make sure that there was no friendlies out there. I don't really remember ever getting turned down.

JS: Okay. Since the only, I guess Vietnamese traffic on the river would be, at that time, would probably be the enemy because of the curfew, what would be—I guess if you could talk a little bit about what would be the sequence of events if, say you guys saw movement on the river. What would take place at that point?

JH: What you would do—basically, like I said, you operated in two pairs. Two PBRs would be together, and two Swift boats, but they wouldn't be in the same area. The PBRs, they only drew a couple inches, so they could go into water that the Swift boats could never get into. One operated on one end of the river and one operated on the other, but basically what you would do, if you saw a single guy, then you would wait till the right opportunity, the closest, and take him under fire. If it was a lot of soldiers in a line, you would wait till they got just about, across from you, and you would open up on them. In that particular scenario, you would get the hell out of there. Fighting from the water with a fiberglass boat, you're not going to kill them all. They've got a big target to shoot at, so our element was the element surprise.

JS: Okay.

JH: That was always the trick, and we got surprised a couple times ourselves, but we did more surprising than they did.

JS: Speaking of the Swift boats and the PBRs, could you talk, I guess, a little bit about how many crew members held? How the boats would be armed? That type of thing.

JH: Sure. The Swift boats were a fifty-foot aluminum hull that were originally designed for work in the oil rigs, down the gulf. As I recall there was a .50 caliber machine gun right over the top of the cab. Then a 50 and a 60 mm mortar over and under, on the stern. I can't remember. I think there was another .50 caliber forward, I just don't remember. The crew was permanently on board. They had bunks and eating facilities, and everything. They were a self-contained unit. An ensign or a JG would be in charge, and as I recall there was about five enlisted that were on there. The boats, a lot of them—at that time they were starting to integrate the Vietnamese into taking over the boats, so they would deploy out of Da Nang, and they would usually have one, maybe two of the crew would be Vietnamese.

JS: Okay.

JH: Sometimes you had a—there would be two officers on board, one US and one Vietnamese. The PBRs were a thirty-five foot fiberglass that had a water injection engine, whereas the Swifts only had twin screws. The PBRs could get up on step. When they got on step, they drew like an inch or something like that. They could go a lot of different places that the Swift boats couldn't. The only obvious problem with the PBRs was it was a fiberglass hull, so if they got shot at, it's pretty much going to go right through the hull. There was a steel plate on both sides where the captain of the boat was. They did not stay out at night. I mean, they didn't live on the boats. There was—seemed to me like there was four crew members. It would be a senior enlisted in charge, and it seems like a .50 caliber on the front. I know one of them had a Honeywell grenade launcher. They had a .30 caliber on the sides. I can't remember what they had on the fantail. I think it may be another .30 caliber machine gun. It was a pretty heavily armored boat for its size. When they would go out, they would go out in pairs and there would be a junior officer normally in charge of the patrol. You had a senior enlisted that was in charge of the boats, but then you had an ensign, JG, or something like that that would be in charge of the two-boat patrol. Occasionally, I would ride one of them, or the commanding officer of the group would ride them. They patrolled during the day, too. It

wasn't just a night thing, but the chances of finding anything in the day were pretty remote. My understanding of the history of this area was that when they first tried to come into the river about two years before, they had actually been thrown out. I mean, they had actually been shot out of it, there was so many bad guys along the riverbanks. Then in the interim, it got pacified to the extent they could get the boats in there. We were the only riverine operation, Jason, that was north of the Delta. Everything else was down in the South. Sometimes we almost felt like stepchildren.

JS: (Laughs) Right.

JH: Because everything you read or heard about was down in that area, in the Mekong Delta. Like I say, we were the northern most entity.

JS: Well, along those lines, because the focus was in the Delta, was there—you said it almost felt like being stepchildren, but did any problems arise because of that, say for supplies and things like that?

JH: No.

JS: All right.

JH: We got everything we needed.

JS: These night ambushes, from your perspective, how successful were they? Did they work as far as stopping the enemy's plans?

JH: Oh yeah. They definitely worked. I became a big advocate, if you're going to fight a clandestine war like it had developed, the only think you could do was go out at night and play their game with them. That's when they were making their attack, so you had put this fear into them that they never knew where we were going to be. If you sat back and went into your compound at night, they knew exactly where you were. All they got to do is set up some mortars, lob them in there, but if they are carrying those mortar tubes down the riverbank, and all the sudden they get shot up, they are going to have second thoughts about doing it the next time.

JS: I know it's impossible to know exactly, but could you give me an estimate about how often you guys would actually find something in the river at night, and would make contact?

JH: I've never really thought that question out, and this is a wild guess, but I would say maybe ever fifth or sixth patrol. Most of the time you'd come back empty.

There is no question about that, but you never knew, and you never knew when they were going to see you. If you made a big silhouette and they were walking, and they saw you—I remember the first night I went on an ambush with a Swift boat, and we were set in. We'd been there a couple hours, and then all of a sudden, (makes whooshing sound) right over the top of the cab was a RPG (Rocket-Propelled Grenade). We said, "Well, we better get out of here." They got us bore sighted.

JS: Was that your first encounter with the enemy then?

JH: No, my first encounter was the next day I think, or the day after that. I got in the Coastal Group 14, and I was living with the advisors down there. There were two officers and two enlisted. Their comment to me was, "You know, you might as well get your combat action ribbon, and get it out of the way." So we boarded a Boston Whaler, fourteen foot with a machine gun on the bow, and you could go down this one branch of the river headed toward the province that was just south of us. There was a village down there that was 100 percent VC (Viet Cong). Of course, in a Boston Whaler, you don't have a whole lot of protection. We got down there, sure enough, we got about a hundred meters, maybe not that close to them. It opened up on us, so these guys did some racetrack patters with the Whaler back and forth, and we were firing at them. That was my first encounter with the VC. Then we went on back to the Coastal Group. They said, "Well, that's taken care of now."

JS: Right. Yes, sir.

JH: It was a funny thing. That village stayed there. It was set—everybody knew that that village was VC. Never anything happened to it. It sat on the other—across the province line. We were in Quang Nam Province. That was one of the restrictions of the war that was almost unreal. That you couldn't chase the bad guys across the province line without prior approval from both province headquarters. So if you were in hot contact with somebody, it would be like—well, we're here in Missouri, and Arkansas is just south of us. It would be like fighting a war here, and you couldn't chase the bad guys into Arkansas, but you knew Arkansas was theoretically a friendly province. They are all part of the South. That really bound our hands in some of those cases.

JS: Being relatively new to Vietnam at that point, did that cause any impact on you? Did it make you question the wisdom in it and what was going on with that?

JH: Oh sure, yeah. It just got more so as I was there. You just could not cross that line. If they got across that border, then they were safe, basically. It was a whole other—that went out of our area of operation too. It fell into somebody else's. I think the Americal Division had that. You remember the infamous, Mr. Calley and that sort of thing. They were just south of us. In fact, one of the first things—I hadn't been in the river probably—god, two weeks and we got a visit from a reporter and a Navy captain as I remember, and they wanted to ride out into that area. They didn't see anything. They just rode the river. We took them down there toward the South because we couldn't—we didn't want to take them down there where they were gonna get shot, that's number one, but they wanted to see what that area looked like. I guess, where that village was, was not too far south of where I was operating out of, but I never saw it obviously.

JS: Would this have been in Quang Nam Province?

JH: Yes.

JS: All right. One question I meant to ask you a little bit earlier, given the fact that it was fairly late in the war, how was morale among the Americans at that point?

JH: The guys I had, I thought that they had good morale. I never had any problem with anybody. The only time I ever had any problems with anybody is after we turned the boats over.

JS: Okay.

JH: Of course, the Vietnamese took the Swift boats over entirely. I don't think there was ever any advisors, and the PBR guys rotated out, but there were still some that were there, particularly a couple senior guys and they did not want to ride the boats with the Vietnamese. I didn't press the issue. I stayed on as the senior advisor and I rode the boats. In fact, many times I was still running the operation. I don't remember anybody else, off hand, riding the boats after the turnover. There may have been one or two Swift boat guys, but the PBR guys refused to do it, and I wasn't going to push them. They'd been through enough and they had just a month or so to go till they rotated home, and it really wasn't worth it to anybody's time to do.

JS: That brings up another question I wanted to ask you, which is about the South Vietnamese Navy sailors, your impressions of them?

JH: Boy you can run the gauntlet on that one.

JS: Okay.

JH: I think it's probably a reflection on any military organization, but the guys that were the toughest, the guys that really wanted to get the combat, were the ones that had come down from the North when they divided the country, and the people had a chance to go south. These guys were really fierce warriors, and they wanted to kill the VC and the NVA. There were some that were from the city that got drafted in some fashion, and they weren't always the most energetic that were working. You never really knew—a boat would go down and you never knew whether it was really somebody doing some mischief to it, or whether they really had problems, but that was their issue. Of course, they had been fighting the war for years. In some respects, you had to weigh that. You know, I'm going home in a few months, and they are still going to be here fighting.

JS: Right.

JH: My enthusiasm level may have been at ninety-nine percent, but theirs might have been at forty because they knew there's no end to this thing. They're going to have to keep fighting forever maybe. I tempered my evaluations of what they were doing and went along kind of with what they had in mind. They would run hot and cold. They had some great officers. Some of them I would go any place with, and some of them were lukewarm. I really think that's a reflection any place you go. I remember the guys from the north, Jason. They were the ones that really wanted to kill, and the coastal group guys, the junk sailors, they were another hardcore group. Now, I wasn't advisor to them, they didn't really come under my jurisdiction, but I spent a lot of time with them and rode junks and spent a lot of nights in the coastal group. They were tough guys, and you could tell the old ones had tattooed across their chest, "Sat Cong," which means, "Kill Communists." I was told that if they were ever captured, that that part of their body would be skinned off alive.

JS: Right. Yes, sir. Would you guys ever coordinate operations with them? Or—

JH: Oh yeah. We ran a lot of coordinated operations. The area of operation I was in was run by the Korean Marine Corps. They had a huge Korean base down there. I ran operations with the Korean Marines, the South Vietnamese Army, the RFs (Regional Forces) and PFs (Popular Forces), which are their militia, National Guard kind of guys. Also, occasionally with the Marine Corps once or twice because they had a group down

there, plus they had a—where they PBRs were, was actually a Cap base. We worked with them a bit. A lot of times we would do—be at the blocking force. We would insert and then try to block the escape of the bad guys. Depends on who you worked with. The RFs and PFs were marginal, and Koreans—Koreans were good when you could get them. I was convinced later that the Koreans had a quote of how many they could lose, themselves. I mean, how many friendly casualties they could take, because at the first of the quarter you could see their operation tempo pick up and as some of them got killed toward the end of the quarter, you'd almost not see them out at all. The Vietnamese were scared of the Koreans, I can tell you that. They put the fear of god into them. I'd driven by the compound and see guys hung out there, the VC they caught, and they just hung them up and left them.

JS: All right. Was there any difference in the way they operated as well? Or was it just things like that? Fear tactics, displaying the enemy that they had killed?

JH: Yeah, I think—Americans are sensitive to a certain extent, you know. They—how am I going to describe this? They have more feelings, and you get the Koreans, and you think they don't really care. I think that terrified the Vietnamese. Perhaps it's an Oriental mindset, I don't know. I do know that they did get—they put the fear of god into the South Koreans.

JS: You mentioned a moment ago, the advisory role. Was that something you had all along from the point that you took over Sea Tiger, or was that something that came a little later?

JH: It came a little later. We didn't have any definitive plans as I remember, and then of course, President Nixon was in office and they decided at the high level to get us out of Vietnam, and the way was to turn over the operation to the various units. Once I got there, they started drawing down a lot of the manpower all across the border. You know, Army, Marines, the whole bit. Somewhere, I think early—some planner probably had it all mapped out, but it was, I'm going to guess about February or March when I found out that the boats were going to be turned over. We knew they were going to be turned over eventually, it was just when. As I recall, it was like May of '70 that we turned the boats over to them.

JS: Did that change your role very much? Did that have much of an impact on your role?

JH: Yeah, sure it did because now all of the sudden instead of calling the shots, now it's advising the shots. I was working, and I had a counterpart that was a lieutenant commander, and he was a great guy. I couldn't have wanted a better counterpart. We worked together on it. We'd go out on operations and that sort of stuff. As we got further into it, there would be times when I would be back to my old role of running it. Here again, he had been fighting this war for—I don't know, twenty years, and I was there for a year. He had a family in Da Nang, so he would want to go up there and see them. When he would go up there and see them, I wound up calling the shots again. I was essentially running the operation as an advisor. The thing about it though, I could get air power if we needed gunships or something like that, where they might have a tough time getting it.

JS: Right. Okay. That was one of your roles as advisor, to be a connection to the American fire power?

JH: Yeah.

JS: Not to get too far ahead with everything, but do you know what happened to your counterpart?

JH: No. I have no idea. I do belong to the counterpart organization. No, unfortunately I have no idea what happened to any of the guys that I knew over there. I'm fearful that they've probably all perished or wound up in one of those reeducation camps.

JS: Right. Yes, sir. I guess if we could switch gears for a moment and talk a little bit about the enemy, your impressions of them and how they operated.

JH: Of course, your VC, which were your local guys that worked during the day and became VC at night, they were a mixed bag. Some of them were probably really good. I never knew any of them personally that I am aware of. Their tactics were pretty much hit and run. The NVA—I only really had one encounter, personal encounter with the NVA, and we caught them in an ambush, probably about thirty of them going north to Da Nang one night. You know, from everything I've read and seen since then, they were all good soldiers. I never had any Naval encounters with them.

JS: Did the enemy—I know you guys would have contact with them on the river, but did they ever mortar or rocket the base camp there as well? Did that ever happen?

JH: Yeah. They would periodically mortar the compound there in Hoi An where we were living. It usually wasn't—three or four rounds is about all. Enough to get everybody awake and heading for the bunkers. The compound actually set pretty much in the city itself. So you could hear the shrapnel raining down on the rooftops. It didn't happen all that frequently. I kept my room in Da Nang. That would be my R&R (Rest and Recuperation) site in country, and I remember going up there and they seemed like they had that siren going every night with a mortar attack some place. Like I told you previously, that was such a huge city and so much military installations, it was hard to say where in the world they were mortaring. I don't remember any direct mortaring in Da Nang. They did it a few times in Hoi An.

JS: Since you mention that, could you talk a little bit about—I don't know, Hoi An itself and your quarters there?

JH: Oh. Well, it was an Army advisor compound, MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam). It was actually kind of interesting because we had the small Navy detachment there from this duffle bag team, the sensor team. So there was myself and a Navy lieutenant. I think he was lieutenant, lieutenant or JG who ran the team, but most of the people in there were Army. There was one Marine, and when I got there—of course, the commanding officer had his own quarters, and I slept in a bunk room with three other guys. I think they were all Army captains. It was just an open air, not open air, but there were screens and mosquito netting and stuff. I remember, Jason, somebody, one of the officers left, got transferred. I was like the, outside the commanding officer, I was like the fourth senior guy. One guy got transferred. Well, there was one bunk room that had air conditioning, and it was for three people, three senior people below the commanding officer. I squeezed into that third slot somewhere about three months into my tour there. I had rather nice quarters. It was a small compound. It wasn't anything sprawling. It was like an inner-city compound, if you can envision this thing. It was about, as I remember, three blocks from the waterfront, so it wasn't a big walk to catch a—when I would want to ride on the river, I'd just get ahold of one of the boats, and they'd come down and pick me up off the pier and away we'd go. Then, when it was over, they would drop me back there.

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: If it was a night op and I was on a Swift boat, I would go back to the coastal group and bunk there. It wasn't a lot of people there. There was a galley, and they had decent food. They had two clubs and had a little outdoor area where they showed the movie at night. But like I said, it's in the middle of the city. I got the impression Hoi An has changed 180 since I left, because now if you read any tour group itinerary that goes to Vietnam, they always stop at Hoi An. It's become a major shopping—and they talk about these huge hotels. I have trouble envisioning what all took place, but apparently the whole thing changed. I used to get some exercise. I would actually run outside the compound. They had an old soccer stadium there. I would get on the soccer stadium and run around the track. It was really beat up, and a lot of potholes and things like that. I guess they have cleaned all that up and made it a real tourist area. There was a bridge that was well known there, a famous one. I can't remember, but I remember going down there with—one of the Army captains said, "You need to come see this one day." And I think that is one of the main sites now on civilian tours.

JS: Is it the Japanese built bridge?

JH: I think it is, yeah.

JS: Yes, sir. Okay. Being based there inside the city of Hoi An, do you have much contact with the local civilian population?

JH: Only the ones that worked there inside the compound that would maybe work in the galley, kitchen. There was a woman that did the wash, and she'd take your uniform down there to the river and beat it on a rock. There was a little PX (Post Exchange) there, there was another woman that worked there, but those were pretty much it. We didn't go out at night and go to any—I don't even know if they had any clubs or anything there. But no, I didn't—I had very little contact with the civilian population.

JS: What little contact you did have with them, what was your impression of just the Vietnamese civilians?

JH: I thought they were very nice people. They were polite. There was, how am I going to say this? I always like the dresses that they young ladies wore. I can't remember what the name of them were.

JS: The ao dais?

JH: Yeah, ao dai. That's it. I had absolutely no problem with the Vietnamese. In fact, as I—I enjoyed my job, and I liked the role of advisor. If I hadn't had a family, if I had been a bachelor, I would've extended. I felt that strong about what we were doing and how we were doing it, but I would've probably faced a divorce if I had extended.

JS: Right. Getting back to the operations themselves, and Operation Sea Tiger, we've talked about—I guess, how things worked. But are there any memorable moments, any memorable fire fights, anything like that that stick out in your mind that you could possibly mention?

JH: Yeah. There's a couple, of course. I will say that I lost the duffle bag team before the turnover. Their mode of operation, I will talk about that for just a minute. McNamara came up with a concept of planting electronic devices, sensing devices across the DMZ to cut down infiltration. I don't know how that ever materialized, but what I had was a sensor team that did that on a local level. What we would do is go out and have a trail, find a trail on the riverbank, get it cleared, and they planted these sensors. They dug holes and planted them, and they had little antennas sticking up. Some of them would pick up acoustics, some metal. There was about three or four different kinds.

JS: Okay.

JH: You'd plant them, I'm going to say about twenty yards apart in a series of normally four, as I recall. They would plot the coordinates of where that trail was. We would then go back, and usually we had about three or four trails that were active. We had two batteries, artillery batteries. One was a 105 ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) battery that was right outside our compound. Then there was a 155 battery that the Korean marines had. We'd clear those coordinates every night, and then they would sit in the TOC, and monitor the coordinates. If they had any activity, somebody walking down the trail, then they would call in a fire mission. You never knew how successful it was. First of all, if you ever had a successful one, somebody would come and pull the body away anyway, but it certainly would cut down traffic on the trail. They had one other interesting—they did it one time, and I thought it was a terrific operation. We had one island that was in the middle of the river that was nothing but trouble. Bad guys and booby traps, and everything else every time you went into the place. The lieutenant that was in charge in charge of it came up to concept, and they planted claymores. One at

each end of this trail, probably about three hundred yards apart, maybe not that far, maybe it was a couple hundred yards. They actually sat in one of the Swift boats off the river and the guy in the TOC monitored the traffic on the trail. They got movement on this trail, and they could tell which end it was coming from and when they got to a certain point they set off the first claymore and the reaction from the people that were getting the claymore was to turn and run the other direction, so they counted down about twenty seconds and set off the second one. They killed, I think about four or five guys and got some weapons. We only did that one time. And then, just before we turned over the boats, these guys were out operating in the same island, and one of the guys hit a booby trap, and it blew his leg off, and we started to—I went with them a lot of times, but I wasn't with them that day. It blew his leg off, and we got a medevac (Medical Evacuation) chopper to come in and two or three of them were wounded. They took the small arms fire and the chopper couldn't get in. Then, they had to scramble some gunships, and when they finally got him in and medevac'd him out, he was dead. The lieutenant was banged up. He had a lot of wounds, and there was one other one that was hurt, so the team dissolved. That was just before the turnover. Then, I had another interesting experience with the SEALS. I have all the greatest respect for SEALS, okay?

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: They are truly the epitome of the warrior, but I had one experience and they sent a team of SEALS to try to distract some of the body snatch like they were doing in the Delta.

JS: Right.

JH: SEALS, my limited experience with them, you really can't talk to them very much because they know everything. They had to go down river. It was the same island, same little place I have just described in the last two incidences. They were going to set in like we normally do in ambush, they were going to set in the evening, and they had these rubber rafts. I said, "No. The best thing to do is just hook on to the side of a Swift boat, and just let it take you down the river, then when you get close, you can cut loose and drift in." They said, "No problem, we don't need this Swift boat. We are just going to go down the river." I was—that particular evening, I was out watching a movie, and all of a sudden, it was still light, and the river—I just heard all this machine gun fire. You

probably guessed it, the friendlies, the Vietnamese on the banks saw these two rubber rafts going down there, or one—I think it was two, and took them under fire, thought they were VC. The only thing—I guess poor shooting was the only thing that saved them. They got onto another little island. I finally got the firing stopped. Told them they were friendly, and by that time, of course the word was out that they were out there going down the river. I asked our intelligence officer about it later. He said as far as he knows, we didn't get anything.

JS: Right. Yes, sir.

JH: Then I was on one interesting thing, too. Later on, was a prisoner release. It was sometime in the summer as I recall, of '70, and the South Vietnamese decided that they would try to initiate a prisoner release exchange, and they needed a lieutenant commander from I Corps to be the liaison officer. I was the only lieutenant commander in I Corps apparently because they called me out of the river and said, "You are going to have to go to Saigon to meet with these people." I flew down to Saigon and met—there was the planters there in the naval headquarters, the Vietnamese. I think it was the Des Moines. It was a heavy cruiser, 8-inch guns. I think it was the XO (Executive Officer) that was there, and what the plan was is to put—they had about seventy, maybe eighty prisoners, and some of them were fisherman from the North headed straight across, others were true prisoners, but most of them, I think the real soldiers, were missing limbs, i.e. legs and things like that. They put them on the *Vung Tau*, which was an old US Navy LST (Landing Ship Tank). The *Vung Tau* was the main flagship of the Vietnamese Navy. The loaded them in the south, some place down there, maybe off that prison down there—they had an island. Brought them north and they pulled into Da Nang harbor, and that's where I boarded it. There must've been as many news media on there as they had prisoners. I mean, there was news people from every country you could imagine. I thought I was going to get a berth someplace, but it wound up there were no bunks available. I remember I had a small detachment of communication guys and my job was to be a liaison with the Navy ships, the *Des Moines* and the FAC (Forward Air Controller) and anybody else that had to do with the Navy, or US Forces, I should say. The plan was, they had three Yabuta junks, and we went north off the DMZ and—oh, and International Red Cross was on board. So the next morning I went up to the bridge and

would stand there behind the captain. The seas were pretty rough, and the guy from the International Red Cross was there, and I said, "Captain, I think it's too rough to land to get these people off." I never will forget this Jason, he says, "We are going to get them off of here." And he turned to me, and he said, "Sometimes, you just got to make a decision." I don't know what it was, but that thing has hung with me for forty years or whatever it's been.

JS: (Chuckles) Right.

JH: The Red Cross guy just kind of walked off in frustration, I think. It dropped like an LST, so you dropped the bow, and bring the junk in. We had three, but they only needed two to put the prisoners in there, so they loaded one, and it went off the—out of the bow and they brought the second one in. They gave each one of them a little bag, like you used to get in airlines, and it had some toiletry stuff in them. Somewhere I have some pictures of all this stuff. The second one got clear. You could see the north DMZ area. As soon as the second boat got clear in the side, every one of them tossed their bag over the side of the junk, then they headed north. I was talking to the observation aircraft, and he said he saw two North Vietnamese patrol boats come out to meet them and escort them back. That's the last I ever heard. We turned around and went back to Da Nang. They let me off at Da Nang, and probably all the news people got off at Da Nang, but it was an interesting few days.

JS: Were there—was this an exchange for some South Vietnamese as well?

JH: No. I think the intent was to try and get something started. They were just doing this as a goodwill gesture to try to get something started, but to the best of my knowledge, nothing ever materialized out of it.

JS: Okay. Yes, sir. Looking at your questionnaire here that you filled out. You mentioned, I know you mentioned Operation Sea Tiger, but you also mentioned about Operation Chi Lang.

JH: That was the Vietnamese. Once they took over the boats, it became Chi Lang-1.

JS: Okay. All right. I guess if you could talk a little bit more about that Vietnamization program and handing, turning the boats over to the Vietnamese. How did

you feel about that, and how did you feel about the program of Vietnamization in general?

JH: I'm not sure I even had a feeling. It's just something that when you get in the military you are told to do something. I guess I was probably apprehensive whether the Vietnamese could do it at the time. It's one of those things you know it's going to happen, so you make the best of what's happening. I knew that they had some really good sailors, but I didn't know about the vast majority of them because I hadn't worked with them. I just worked with a handful of them. It's one of those things you're apprehensive, but it's going to happen, so you might as well just make the best of it. Again, in retrospect, it was the only way for us to exit the country. If we had not done that, no telling how many years—if we kept fighting the war like we were. The war was fought entirely wrong from a military standpoint. I have equated it to trying to win a football game and not being able to cross the fifty-yard line. You couldn't go north through the DMZ.

JS: That's an interesting comparison there, pretty accurate.

JH: There was no way. I did have a couple other—between the time we turned the boat over until I became advisor, there was a lapse time of about two or three weeks, and I really wasn't—as I recall, they really weren't sure whether I was going to be the senior advisor or whether they were going to have an advisor. Then they elected, so they thought I might wind up going back to that coastal surveillance center. I took a driving tour north. I had a jeep and drove up highway 1 to the DMZ, and I stopped at each of the coastal—I think there were three coastal groups north of Da Nang, so I wound up going through Hue, and on up into that area. I did get to see—from coastal group 11, which was just south of the DMZ, I got to see a B-52 strike going in. You could just see it way off. I guess it was in Laos along the Ho Chi Minh trail that they were doing it. The guy who was senior advisor at coastal group eleven had actually gone through the counterinsurgency training with me, so we were friends. We got mortared one night I was there. I think I spent two nights with him. We got mortared one night and then saw the strike going in. Both of those were little interesting events. There was one other one that was before—hopping back a bit, Jason, was before I went into the river. It was not long after I checked into Da Nang when I first got there, and they wanted to give me an

orientation trip into what the coastal surveillance ships were doing. So I rode an eighty-two foot coast guard ship out of Da Nang in December. I'm telling you, I have a lot of admiration for those guys because we hit the South China Sea and went everyway but forward. I told you about getting seasick out at Newport, well this was the other time. I swear to god, I thought I was going to die that first night. They would check in. They went to one of the coastal groups south of Da Nang and visited radar stations that were on islands out there in the South China Sea. Inspected sand pans and did some night firing missions. We were out five days. It came back, and they were going to be in for, I think it was a day and a half, and then going back out for five days. That was their rotation. I have a lot of admiration for those guys.

JS: Yes, sir. When you weren't—first, if you did have any free time at all, how would you spend it?

JH: You mean in Hoi An?

JS: Yes sir.

JH: Oh, reading mostly. They had movies. There was a lot of boring times. You can only do so much of this stuff. Somebody said, "War is ninety-nine percent boring, and one percent sheer terror." That's pretty close to it.

JS: Yes, sir. All right. How about R&R? Did you get a chance to go on R&R?

JH: Went to Hawaii for five nights. Met the wife there.

JS: One other question about your counterpart. How were you able to communicate with him and the other Vietnamese? Could you speak enough Vietnamese, or could they speak enough English?

JH: They spoke perfect English. (Chuckles)

JS: Okay. (Laughs)

JH: They had worked with so many counterparts and people over the years that they spoke great English. Now, my Vietnamese by that time, was pretty much down to three or four words. I had no trouble communicating with them. The interesting thing, I told you, my best friend was killed over there, and this guy had worked with him. I'm not sure if he was his counterpart, but they had worked together in this RAG (Replacement Air Group) group. In fact, a couple of the officers that I was working with had known my friend.

JS: How did you discover that?

JH: I don't know. We just got to talking one day about it, and I said that Dale Meyerkord was a good friend of mine and he had been killed over there. They said, "Jeez, we worked with him in the RAG group."

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: I thought, at the time I—kind of saying, "Whoa, they worked with him and he got killed. Is this going to be something in my future here in a short order?" It did give me some thoughts as to what it might lead to, but nothing obviously happened.

JS: Right. Is there anything else we should cover before we talk about the end of your tour?

JH: I don't guess so. I didn't do anything with telling you about the UDT guys.

JS: Okay. Yes, sir.

JH: What I predominantly used them for was to blow bunkers along the riverbanks. There were numerous bunkers, and I guess that's where the fighting was the fiercest when they came in the first time, but we'd go on ground sweeps along the river and slightly inland. They used C4 and would just plant it and break the back of the bunkers, collapse them in. That was pretty much—there was an old bridge, I remember, they were trying to get out of the water. It had been blown up and was preventing us from going any further to the west. They dove down on it and put some C4 and did some damage. One of the guys got really badly cut on the iron, and I think that was—I can't even remember if we got the whole bridge dropped or not, but I know he was a Vietnamese frog man. We had to get him out of there, and I don't remember if we ever got back to the area or not.

JS: You mentioned the enemy—the bunkers there on the river. Could you talk a little bit more about that and about how the enemy would try to use the environment like that to his advantage?

JH: The bunkers would have been—along the riverbank, the bunkers were so thick, the walls were so thick that unless you had a direct hit on one of them through the mouth, they're almost impregnable. Fortunately, by the time I got there, most of the bunkers were abandoned or not used. I don't recall ever getting shot at from a bunker, but we'd still destroy them just to prevent their use. They would conceal themselves and the

island that I was telling you about, they had that thing heavily booby trapped. You would go in there and try to weed them out, and you never knew when you were going to turn the corner and find—the booby traps were the biggest nightmare in there. I stepped over one, one day, and that was another thing the UDT guys were doing because when we would go in and find booby traps, they would explode them. He said, "You know, you just stepped over a booby trap." I said, "That ground looked like it had been turned up, and that's why I didn't step on it." It was like a—I think it was a 105 round. The worst round that I ever heard was a 16-inch round that was booby trapped. You went in this field and there was one square that was brown. The rest of it was green, so you knew that there was a booby trap under there, and when they cleared it away it was a 16-inch gun, probably from the New Jersey projectile. We got behind a little berm there and we exploded it. I had never heard so much shrapnel in my life. It was like the whole air was alive over your head just whistling.

JS: Oh, wow.

JH: I thought, "Man, if you'd been there when that thing went off, there wouldn't be anybody alive around you."

JS: Yes, sir. Was that primarily the kind of booby traps they used? Unexploded ordinates, that type of thing?

JH: Uh huh.

JS: And you mentioned, of course, getting off of the boat and going onto the island. Was that something you guys did quite a bit of, actually getting off of the boats, and walking around the land?

JH: Yeah, we did. Now, the boat crew wouldn't. They didn't go off, but I went off several times on operations. I'm not sure I was supposed to really, but I did.

JS: Who would you be working with then, if the boat crew itself did not get off the boat?

JH: You mean on the shore? I would go—for the bunkers we had the UDT guys. Then after we turned the boats over, I don't remember having—I think the UDT guys went away, too. What I would do then is go on ops with the RFs and PFs a bit. More or less to make sure they were going to do what they were supposed to be doing. That's not like it happened every day or anything like that.

JS: Right. Any other memorable moments or even funny moments? Anything like that that sticks out that you could talk about?

JH: The only other thing—I have made some notes here. The only other thing I think I hadn't covered is—I spent one evening on a tour of a nasty boat.

JS: Okay.

JH: Again, it's a SEALS kind of thing. The boats are, as I recall, it's like a Swift boat that was trimmed down and seemed like it could get about seventy miles an hour out of it and it was used for insertion. We just went on an offshore patrol off the coast one night and that was interesting just to do it. I'm trying to think—its semi amusing. It wasn't then, but I had my jeep stolen.

JS: Oh, really?

JH: About a month before I was leaving country, they stole it right out of the compound. I never did figure out what happened, and I don't guess they ever recovered it. Somebody got into the MACV compound and stole my jeep.

JS: Anything else then before talking about the end of your tour?

JH: I think not.

JS: What was the end of your tour like? And, was there any sort of out processing?

JH: Yeah, you know you had to go back—I think I went back to Da Nang. You had to turn in your weapons, we had to return your boots, too. I think I turned in everything—fatigues and everything that they had. In one of the bunker escapades, we'd always send in—we had a UDT guy. He was an E6, and he was sort of our tunnel rat. I got to be good friends with him, and he went in this one, came back out and said, "I found a rifle in here. You want it?" I said, "Sure." It was a Chinese communist SKS, all rusty and what have you. They took it back to the PBR base and cleaned it up for me, put it in their vat of oil. Anyway, I registered that and brought that back on the plane. I can't imagine doing that today, huh?

JS: (Chuckles) Right.

JH: I got this rifle I want to check in. You'd probably get arrested right there on the scene. I was walking through the airport carrying this thing in a bag, but they took everything that was there. I guess they recycle it to the Vietnamese. Then I boarded the

aircraft, everybody gave a big cheer when they took off and flew into LA. To be honest with you, I never knew what to expect because you heard all the stories about the anti-war protestors at the airports, and what have you. I never saw any, fortunately. None of them were there to meet me. Of course, we were all in uniform, and then everybody divided up where they were going. My flight was to Memphis. The wife and parents met us in Memphis, and never saw any signs of protest. Of course, Memphis—you aren't going to find any protests there, I don't think. That's pretty much the out-processing as I recall.

JS: All right. This maybe a silly question, but how did you feel about leaving?

JH: I was glad to leave and come home because I had a family.

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: But at the same time, I felt that I would have liked to have stayed to continue on doing what I was doing. One thing about it, when you come out of a combat zone, at least for me, your mind is totally changed. Mine was focused on killing Vietnamese, North Vietnamese and VC. I've had people tell me—that talked to me after I came back, that they didn't even know me. My focus in life was just that, what I just told you, and to adapt to another way of life all of a sudden was a bit taxing. I found out nobody wanted to talk about the war. I tried to engage—I was so enthusiastic that I wanted to talk about what was going on over there. Nobody wanted to talk to me about it. I remember going to a party after I came back, and friends that I had been in high school with, and I thought, "Well, these guys surely will." You know, they just kind of—nothing. I felt a great deal of frustration, and I did a lot of things I think, that I didn't have to do just because I got so enthusiastic about—you know, I didn't have to get off the boats to go onshore. Nobody expected me to do that, but I was gung-ho. That's the word to describe it. I would have probably gone anywhere and done anything at that time. They had an aborted rescue mission in the north. I don't know whether you have talked to anybody about that or not, but they had this prison camp pinpointed, and they made an insertion by helicopter, two helicopters trying to rescue the prisoners and it was deserted. That was in the news, and I remember telling my dad, I said, "I would have really liked to have gone on something like that." And he said, "What?" He couldn't envision trying to do something like that, but that's just the mindset that changed me. Things that had been important before were

no longer important. When it's a life and death situation, you just change your whole set of values.

JS: How long did it take you to adjust back to life outside of the war zone?

JH: I have no idea. I can't answer that. It was probably—it's not like you can put a timeline on it. It just happened. Probably a couple years at least, maybe longer. Sometimes I don't think I ever adjusted.

JS: Were you surprised by the fact that people in the United States, at that point, just didn't want to talk about it? And how much had the United States changed from your perspective since you had started your tour?

JH: It hadn't changed. The war was a long way away. It's probably like what's going on right now in Afghanistan and nobody really realizes what it's all about, and nothing's changed, so there is a feeling of frustration that nobody really cares. They do when it initially starts and then after it goes on for some prescribed period, then the mindset just says, "Oh, it's just another day in a combat zone. It's not impacting me, so I don't care." It was a feeling of frustration, but it was kind of interesting because for a year basically, except for R&R, I had never gone out at night except for operations. I was always in the compound, and all of a sudden you could drive down to the corner and do this and do that. That was an amazing change of environment.

JS: Once you got home, did you follow the developments on TV and through the newspapers?

JH: Oh yeah. I stayed very interested in it, particularly to see if there was anything going on where I had been, areas I'd been. I still read books and things like that and can identify with different places and things that take place.

JS: At the time you left, did you have any idea about the way the war was going to conclude? Did you have any inkling of that?

JH: No. None. As far as I was concerned, it might go on for another twenty years.

JS: Yes, sir. Did you remain in the Navy after coming home from Vietnam?

JH: Oh yeah. I had twelve years in, ten years, I don't know. I had another two ships and another two shore assignments.

JS: Okay.

JH: Eventually retired after twenty-one years.

JS: Okay. So what year would that have been?

JH: I retired in ’81.

JS: Okay. All right. Talking about—again, about the war, again I asked you about if you had any idea about the way things would conclude, but finally the way things did come to an end with the fall of Saigon in April of ’75, what was your reaction to that?

JH: Huge disappointment. I thought about those fifty-eight thousand guys that had gotten killed, and all the manpower and resources. Then, from what I’ve read and understand since, we failed to keep them supplied with ammunition and the supplies they needed to fight the war. That was—I was in extreme disappointment. We fought the war wrong, and then we didn’t keep them supplied with the war materials that they needed just to maintain the status quo. It was such an easy way to—the thing could have ended, to my way of thinking in a couple years, and finally we mined Haiphong Harbor and cut off the supplies there. They were so afraid of offending Russia and China that we just played patsy and that’s not the way to fight a war.

JS: Yes, sir. That brings up some of the larger questions, some of the broader questions that I usually like to close out the interview with, so if we could talk about some of those.

JH: Sure.

JS: First off, looking back on your experiences and your service in Vietnam, how do you feel about American involvement in Vietnam and about your own service?

JH: You mean do I think it was justified going over there?

JS: Yes, sir. I suppose so, and also about how you feel about your service as well.

JH: I thought we were justified in there, to go over there, and the concept was good. Again, it was just the way we executed it—it was not right. There was no way to win the war, the situation, and we allowed the thing to continue to exist through a couple administrations of doing it wrong. The people there, the ones I knew and associated with, wanted freedom. The farmer out there in the field just wanted to do his job. He just wanted to be left alone to tend his rice crop, and ride his water buffalo, and not bother anybody. It could have ended, I really believe, in a couple of years. What we did, we just strung it out, and failed to support them, but I thought to go over there was the right

thing. It was just the way we did it was wrong. My career—I had a grand career. Maybe a few other duty choices that I should've made, and I didn't, but I have no regrets on it.

JS: Getting back to the way the war was handled for a moment, you feeling is then that we should've taken the war to the enemy?

JH: Yeah. I think, you know, we had proved that later in the war when they walked away from the negotiating tables and we had that—rolling thunder, I think was the name of the campaign that just bombed the dickens out of Hanoi and a couple other ones. That got them back to the conference table. That's the only way that you can do it. Let me just say, Americans have too much scruples sometimes. They are afraid to—war is not a game. It's a life and death situation, and we want to play it by the rules that are our making. The enemy doesn't have any rules. That's where we have our biggest failing. I just read something yesterday in the *American Legion* magazine. It said that in Afghanistan, the US and the other allies are thinking about forming some sort of a war called restrain—I don't have that exact terminology but it's restrain violence war, where you hold fire in situations where you could, and I think that's wrong. I mean, if a guy is under fire, you don't wait to get shot before you pull the trigger, and Americans don't seem to understand all that stuff. That's one of my big bugaboos. Until you get into an environment like that, it's hard to understand it. Yeah, they could've done a lot over there. I am firmly convinced, and I've talked to pilots and they—in fact, I work with one, a Navy pilot, and of course they had to have every target pre-cleared, and if they saw a target of opportunity on their way back to the ship, they had to get clearance, and the clearance had to come from Washington. In other words, if they saw a truck convoy down there, they couldn't arbitrarily take it under fire in the north. They had to get clearance from our boy McNamara and his wonder kids. There was a real jerk.

JS: All right. Could I get your feelings on some of the other issues surrounding the war, such as the media coverage of the war? How do you feel about the way it was covered?

JH: Oh my god. (Chuckles) You sure you want this?

JS: (Chuckles) Sure.

JH: You know, when the war started, it was sort of like the general population. Everybody was supportive by the most part, and by the time it ended, the news media

was just hammering the military. It was literally years before the military built up again any type of credibility. We just—between the peace movement and the media, the left-wing media, it just skewed all kinds of information. They were looking, I guess, for things that would sell stuff. CBS, I think was the worst, and ABC was probably the best as far as from a military standpoint on reporting unbiased. You still have people—and you had people like Jane Fonda.

JS: Right.

JH: Was over there and riding around on anti-aircraft guns with a helmet on, with a red star on the front. My way of thinking, she should have been brought back here and tried as a traitor. Here we are at war with a country, and she is over there doing her thing. I won't let any of her movies or anything else in my house. I have the utmost hate for that lady. Not lady, that is the wrong term, but I'm not going to dignify this.

JS: Yes, sir. How do you feel about US policy towards Vietnam today? The growing trade that we have with Vietnam, tourism to Vietnam, veterans going back, all of that.

JH: When that first started, Jason, I had a lot of trouble with it, from a personal aspect, but I think I have grown out of that. It's something that is going to happen, and you asked me, I think the other day, if I would ever go back and my answer is no.

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: I know, and I have read about a lot of guys that go back, a lot of these people that are in counterpart organizations go back and they've got people they adopt and stuff. I don't have any problem with it anymore. It's too long gone to worry about it. There is other issues. It's going to happen and there is no need for me to even get concerned.

JS: All right. Just a few more questions.

JH: Sure.

JS: Have you ever visited the Vietnam wall?

JH: Yes.

JS: What did you think of it?

JH: Very emotional. I was stationed in D.C. from '74 till I retired in '81, and the wall was not constructed until I think, '82, so it was after I left. I went back there in, I think '95 or '96, and that was the first time I had seen it, the only time I had seen it. It's a

very emotional place. I didn't think it would affect me that way, but it did. Before that, I went to the moving wall up a little north of here, eighty or ninety miles. Then later they brought the thing to my hometown. It was in what we call our coliseum. I live right across the street from it, so I was there. But your question was about the one in Washington, and it's a terrific memorial. I give them a donation, monetary every year. I remember a guy came up to me. He was there and he was talking to me. He wanted to know if I had been over there, and I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, welcome home." I thought it was kind of funny because I came home in '70 and this was in twenty-five, twenty-six years later, but it still had a meaning.

JS: Yes, sir.

JH: It sure did.

JS: All right. Well, is there anything else you would like to say, or anything we haven't covered at this point?

JH: We've covered just about everything.

JS: Okay.

JH: I don't have anything else that I am aware of.

JS: All right. Yes, sir. This will bring the interview to a close then.

(Interview audio ends)