The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Jim Mottern
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Session [1] of [2]
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Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Jim Mottern. Today is August 10, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech and Mr. Mottern is joining me by phone from California. Okay, why don't we begin with a little bit of biographical information if you don't mind? First of all, when and where were you born?

Jim Mottern: I was born in Twin Falls, Idaho, which is south-central Idaho on May 26, 1948. I was raised in that town until I graduated from high school.

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

JM: Sure, my father, Ben Mottern, was an owner and operator of a major business in town with his brother-in-law and good friend, Ted Smith. They ran a restaurant. They employed about 130 people at this scratch restaurant. My father had grown up in Northern Idaho on an Indian reservation at Worley and had a break to go to the University of Idaho. He majored in business and graduated in I believe in 1940 and was married to a high school friend of Ted Smith, his future business partner and brother-in-law. He served in the Navy. He told me a story that when Pearl Harbor happened, he and thousands of other people where in Lewiston, Idaho to enlist. The line was long and—do you want me to keep on going or should I stop?

JS: No, sure absolutely.

JM: The line was four or five blocks long and a man came down the line asking if people had a college degree. Dad was one of the few that raised his hand. The man asked, "What was your degree in?" My dad said, "Business." And the man said, "You are a Navy supply officer go to table 14."

JS: Wow.

JM: He went and signed up and fretted for about three weeks, because no one in the Worley-Spokane area really knew what a Navy supply officer's uniform really looked like. They found one, he went back to Harvard for an accelerated supply school and graduated and served on a flag ship in the Med. And he told me many wonderful stories of his time in the Navy. My mother, Thelma, was a real rambunctious lady who grew up in Boise. She liked history and unfortunately, she died a day after my sister was born three years after I was born. So initially I had a family that was my grandmother who took my mother's place, and my father. My father remarried when I was in fifth grade. We had a family that was focused on sports. I liked shooting. I was a class officer in my high school, and I always liked the Navy. Twin Falls was a very stable community then. I have a picture of about fifteen children in my kindergarten class and all but two of them graduated with me from high school.

JS: Well, you mentioned your dad's service in the Navy. Did that have an impact on your desire to serve in the Navy?

JM: It did, but not intentionally. The first thing I remember ever about the Navy is, of course, seeing my father's uniform items. He stayed in the reserves because I think he had to, during the Korean War. He told me once he even considered going back in the service when the Korean War started up. Probably my first memory of the Navy was going with my grandmother to the post office and on the big stone steps of the post office was a Navy recruiting poster. It was a metal recruiting sign with a guy in a Cracker Jack uniform and I asked, "Who's that person? What's he doing?" My grandma said, "That's a Navy man. Your father was in the Navy, and he liked it." I thought, "Hmm, that sounds like maybe something for me." That led into unintentionally to ships, both sailing ships and war ships that I modeled together. I read everything I could find in the library and probably by the time I was in sixth or seventh grade I really knew I wanted to go to sea which was interesting because I had never seen the sea at that time. So I was focused on

that. My father always told good and bad stories of his time in the service. The funny times when he, a pay clerk and an a Marine Corps guard were armed and carried 120,000 dollars in small bills for payday. He was a paymaster on a cruiser. So, the stories were interesting, and yet he didn't mince words. He didn't like being seasick. He didn't like the mutton he was fed day after day. Because that's all the Navy could give them. It wasn't a glorious time, but it was something that he liked and respected. And I just came to love ships and thought I would like the sea.

JS: Alright, as a kid growing up there, did you talk to him much about—did you tell him that you wanted to join the Navy one day as well?

JM: I didn't really know initially in grade school if I preferred the Army or Navy. I just liked military things. Cowboys were real big then so I liked cavalry things, Davy Crockett and things like that. It sort of formed though, by the time I was in high school I discovered that my great uncle, my grandfather's brother had been in the Navy in World War I. He was a yeoman on a ship, the USS *West Apaum*, A-P-A-U-M, SP332 (ID-3221).

JS: Okay.

JM: And he was promoted a seaman to a yeoman 2nd class, in about less than three years and thought seriously about staying in the Navy and decided not to and went back to Worley. I think I pretty much made the decision myself and I did it partly because I wanted adventure. I knew the Navy would give that to me, "join the Navy and see the world" was the theme—one of the recruiting themes and that was effective for me. I liked guns. I guess—I may have liked the Navy tradition around ships.

JS: Alright, mentioning your great uncle then, your family then had a long history of serving in the Navy, correct?

JM: We did, although the person I'm named for actually served in the Army. He was a first and then a second lieutenant in the confederacy. I was horrified when I was a lieutenant commander to discover that I was named after a rebel. I was absolutely horrified. It took me about seven years to reconcile myself to state's rights. We did not own slaves, but it was just horrible for me to serve against my country. Eventually, we retraced his steps, he was captured at Vicksburg. He was guarded by a cousin from Iowa which is interesting.

JS: Wow, that is.

JM: The family split. The unit, the 59th Tennessee Mounted Infantry regiment, was exchanged after being captured at Vicksburg and they all bought horses because they didn't want to walk anymore. As the story goes back in East Tennessee. And they became a cavalry unit that was eventually pulled out of East Tennessee as the confederacy declined. After Appomattox, serendipitously they became Jefferson Davis's bodyguard. And so, his unit stayed with Davis for three or four weeks while he was on the run from the Federal Army that was chasing after him. Eventually, Davis released the troops, and they came back so that's the history. But he was serving—we had a relative that was in the Revolutionary War. We came over The Matter family emigrated from Alsace to William Penn's colony in 1751 and fought and were there in the middle of the French and Indian War on the Western Pennsylvania frontier. In the Revolutionary War the family moved down following Daniel Boone in the 1780s and went into the state of Franklin which congress did not recognize and settled in what eventually became Tennessee. Nicholas Junior was with Jackson's Troops, Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812 and was one of the regiments that was in Mobile instead of New Orleans. There was a question at the time whether the British would land at New Orleans or at Mobile, Alabama. He was at Mobile. So, the history up until my great uncle was all Army. But that didn't have, for some reason, much attraction to me probably because they didn't have ships.

JS: This history of your family, was this something that you discovered as a kid or later on?

JM: Well, the history came out later on. I took it into my own responsibility to find out where we came from. My father—people in genealogy are either very interested or could not care less. My father was in the latter camp. I asked him once where we came from and when I was in the 5th grade. He just said, "Well, Tennessee I think." That didn't satisfy me because obviously Europeans in North America didn't come from Tennessee. So, I pretty much did this on my own fifteen/twenty years ago. We did have the history from Uncle Dave who was in the Navy and certainly my father's personal experience in the Navy which he shared with me whenever I asked.

JS: Well, where'd you go to high school?

JM: I went to high school at Twin Falls High School. It was a three-year high school. It had been built in, I think,'52, '53, and was in extremely good condition, still actually is in service. I played sports, had fun going to school, was senior class vice president. My high school class still gets together for reunions. I got one coming up next year. So, was a great time for me and many of my good friends are still a part of the Twin Falls experience.

JS: Were you in high school when the Kennedy Assassination happened?

JM: Well, I was in high school in Spanish class when it happened. It came over the school intercom which was not used for anything at all. I was real surprised it worked. Initially, some of the class was happy. Idaho was very conservative. And had gone for Goldwater. Actually, it was Nixon and Kennedy, excuse me. It didn't take me—it took a while for me to understand really truly what it means when a person dies and certainly after that the impact on the nation when the president dies in office and even more tragically, assassinated. So, I was in Spanish class, and I think it was in the morning sitting in the third row when the announcement came on.

JS: Well, you mentioned sports. What type of sports did you play?

JM: Oh, about anything I could. I wasn't big enough to be good at football while I played it. My best sport was baseball. My father coached our team from the first grade to the ninth grade. We got pretty good. We won 117 games and lost 17. I played second base. I played basketball through junior high, but then got into wrestling. Cause at 5'8 you're not going to be good, it's a tall man's game. I played football and then ran track. I did basically four sports around the year like most of my friends.

JS: So, I imagine that kept you pretty busy.

JM: Well, it did plus after school clubs and homework. I usually had to study about an hour and a half to two hours every night because in some subjects I wasn't the sharpest pencil in the pouch. History was extremely easy for me; English was easy, but math and science was more difficult. Actually, math was the most difficult and science was in between.

JS: Alright, well as you were going through high school, were you paying attention to what was going on in the world with U.S foreign policy and the Cold War? Did you pay much attention to that?

JM: Well, a bit, but when you're in the small southern Idaho farming community you were the center of the farming community and you're focusing in high school on sports, on food, on classes, on girls. I didn't spend a lot of time thinking about Vietnam, but clearly the Vietnam—the situation in Vietnam gathered more and more attention. Starting probably our sophomore year in high school, the Army recruiters, the Army reserve recruiters, there was a regiment in Twin Falls started making recruiting calls to the high school. So clearly it was going on in Asia. I remember this my senior year, they did not get much attendance at their booth and I felt sorry for them so I gave them my name. They kept calling on my dad and he finally came to me and said, "Jim, do you want to be in the Army?" I said, "No dad, I want to be in the Navy." So, he told them. In hindsight, looking back because it's interesting they were talking to my father instead of talking to me. So, we knew things were going on, but they were far away and other events, other activities were more present in my life.

JS: Okay, well had anyone from your high school gone to Vietnam though or been drafted at this time?

JM: We didn't start having people do that until our senior year. We had probably a half dozen people, two were killed, Herman Lowman and Larry Coats. Larry was on the wrestling team with me. Herman was—I guess Herman was a wrestler also. They both enlisted in the Marines. One during the year and one after graduation. Unfortunately, both were killed. One in '67 and I think one in '68. We had a number of other people who served. James Peterson who went into the Army and became Special Forces. He and I have remained good friends. He lives on a boat in Bermuda right now and I just exchanged e-mails with him this morning. And then we had a couple Other—One guy was in the Air Force. As I think about this, my thinking, Jason, is that there were surprisingly few of us that went to the war. Probably because the big troop buildup came several years after.

JS: Alright, well I know you mentioned at this point you had told your dad that you wanted to go into the Navy as opposed to the Army. Did you go in at this time or was it onto college upon graduation?

JM: Well, I went onto college. My dad was the alumni president at the University of Idaho Alumni. He always said that the University of Idaho was his first great big break

off the Indian reservation. My grandfather ran the general store and really loved Idaho. I told him once I was going to go down and interview with Stanford and he was so upset with me. Anyway, I went to the University of Idaho, and I tried to get into Navy ROTC and couldn't because the eyesight requirements was 20/20. And I had probably 21/50—2200 at the time. So unfortunately, I couldn't get in, so I decided to try for a two-year scholarship instead of the four-year scholarship. I took naval science classes for two years and then eventually was able to pass the eyesight test to get into the two-year program. In fact, I had to memorize the eye chart. I watched closely how the Gunners Mate Chief did the eye test. It was always left to right and there were seven letters on the line. That was pretty easy. I could memorize seven letters, which I did. So, I memorized the eye chart and got accepted—even though at that time, the eyesight had come down to 2100 hundred and I was still a little bit above that. Interesting enough, the draft was started in 1969 in my fraternity which we had about sixty-five guys living in the chapter house and another 30 thirty living off campus. Sigma Alpha Epsilon. We had about half of the people were in some ROTC unit. Idaho is a land grant institution. Just before we had arrived—I had arrived on campus, it was a requirement for everyone up through their sophomore year had to be in an ROTC unit. A requirement that was not in place. When I was a freshman, we probably had about half the people and anyway, here I am as a junior getting paid seventy-five dollars a month which I thought was really neat. My draft number comes out at 357 which was quite good since they went to 195 that year. I decided that I still wanted to be in the Navy and why not? I saw the Navy as one ticket and certainly the best option I knew to get out of Twin Falls, to get out of Idaho to see the world, have the adventure and then figure out what I wanted to do. So, I stayed in the Navy program. and it was actually—the classes were held in a Quonset hut-like building that was constructed for World War II radio operators when the nation mobilized for World War II. So, there was quite a history there. I have been back to the same building two or three times and it's just interesting to be back in a place you sat at and listened to and scratched your head when you were trying to do celestial navigation and things like that. A funny thing happened to me, a little story; I decided although I liked the Navy, and I liked the uniforms, I liked ships, I detested marching. I did not like marching. We had drill I think every Thursday. I was the junior class president, so I told my Navy

instructors that I had class officer activities during drill. They were so delighted to have a class officer in the battalion because of the growing anti-war unrest across campuses they said, “Sure Jim” and excused me. The next year I was elected to the five-man executive board which I guess the student senate. I applied for and received another dispensation from attending drill, so I barely knew how to drill. The irony upon irony about three months into my first deployment the captain calls me up to the bridge on my destroyer and says, “I want you to form up your division. I want to inspect them.” So, I was frantic. “How the hell do I do this? I should have gone to drill” And so I just remembered basically to form my division into two lines and, I said, “Okay, first line, 3 steps forward march. Division ready for your inspection, sir,” Fortunately I barely knew enough to get through that. So, I was pleased to be in ROTC with commissioned, I believe on the 30th of May 1970. We were commissioned in the gym with parents and students. The Army and Air Force cadets, as well as the midshipmen were all commissioned—and I was surprised at the time, the whole gym stood up and gave us a standing ovation. I didn’t realize why they made such a fuss over us. I just remember that happening.

JS: Well, the ROTC training, was it all done there at the campus or was there a summer camp or cruise as well?

JM: One of the programs then and, I think it still is now, the combination of classroom and summer cruises. Because I was only a two-year midshipman instead of a four year, I didn’t go to the cruise between my freshman and sophomore and the one between my sophomore and junior year. So, I missed out going to play with the Marines which they did one summer and then working one summer as an enlisted. So, I got to my senior cruise which basically you are a sub junior officer, I guess the way to say it, midshipman first class. I had the opportunity to take serve on the destroyer USS *Isabell* (DD-869). Picked it up in Long Beach on a cruise called PACMIDTRARON (Pacific Midshipmen Training Squadron) with probably eight hundred or so mid-shipmen, about five destroyers and the battleship *New Jersey*. We steamed up to San Francisco, then up to Seattle, and over to Hawaii, then crossed to San Diego and returned back to Long Beach. That was a lot of fun. I got seasick for the first time which was not fun, but I certainly liked the different ports. Coming into Hawaii, I still remember that was the first landing on the moon. We got into Pearl Harbor and the celebration of—it just happened

about four hours or, five hours prior to our arrival, and the whole town was just celebrating for America and the scientific achievements. It's really, really exciting time.

JS: Well, how long do those cruises last?

JM: Those cruises lasted I believe five or six weeks. I could be wrong, but I think between five and seven weeks. Basically, it was most of the summer. We got paid okay. Better pay than the summer road construction job I had. It was a chance to face Navy life, stand watches, operate machinery and fire guns. The Navy set up social events with local port girls. Some were ugly, some were really cute. That was about five to six weeks, five to seven weeks. It was not a full summer.

JS: Okay, alright.

JM: One of the unanticipated side effects of that cruise, I came back with a really bad vocabulary. I came back here twenty maybe twenty/twenty-one at the time and I came back, and I was probably pretty foul mouthed. My parents, unbeknownst to me; had a Japanese exchange student living in our house. I came back after being at sea just boisterous and just having a lot of fun. I came and pushed open my door and yelled, "I'm home." And there was this little Japanese girl saw me and she retreated into a corner and didn't know what to make of me. I said, "Who are you and what are you doing here?" And I was pretty boisterous at that time. Glad to be at home, really proud of what I had done, and I was feeling pretty good about myself.

JS: Alright, well did you feel that the ROTC training overall was pretty good? Prepared you for Navy life?

JM: No way.

JS: Okay.

JM: You'll hear this maybe in a few minutes why I say that, but it was academically it was sound. Naval history which I liked a lot, piloting, but navigation since I'm not a math whiz, it was a bit of a challenge, but I passed that. I liked the gunnery section, but it didn't really give you the skills that I needed on ship as a junior officer. First, it would have been maneuvering the ship. The midshipmen in the Naval Academy get that because they go on YP's which are coastal patrol craft. They do maneuvering, they do signals, they do all these things. When you're landlocked in northern Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. You don't maneuver, you don't take radio commands,

you don't break signals and form screens, that type of thing. That was the first thing that was tragically missing. Second was, you don't have the good experience of leading men in a real deep and encompassing way. Fortunately, with being active on sports teams and being a student politician in my fraternity, I was a fairly good leader—but I was really tried and tested the first year I was on my ship. So, I knew the Navy, I knew the basics, but I really had to scramble the first six months to be on the bridge. I really needed to—I was really stretched when I had to be a disciplinarian for people my own age. Some of them didn't want to be in the service—many of them didn't want to be in the service, or others were—just had chronic performance problems. Fortunately, I had two guys in my division who were old enough to be my father, my two chiefs. So, it was a real mixed bag, and I grew remarkably in the first six months.

JS: Well, before we get any further into your first assignment there, if we could talk a little bit more about college. What was the atmosphere like on the campus there at that time? Was there much in the way of war protests and things like that going on, on campus?

JM: War protests, the first several years, there were none. It wasn't until my senior year that there were open protests and it started off with a half a dozen people. And it may have increased to fifty or sixty. The University of Idaho then was conservative reflecting the state which is very conservative still. Yet, it was hard not to notice on the nightly news. The body count on the network news certainly, in retrospect, took upon themselves of taking the war to people's front rooms. There was an increasing gloom in people's view of the war and how that has come out into society and how they thought the government and everything. It was a growing concern, a deepening problem, obviously. There did not seem to be a good way out. Especially in putting more troops went in, more died. It did not seem to be a—there's too many leaks in the bucket if you will. And probably one major leak is that Haiphong was open for munition importation and that's probably the most classic mistake that the LBJ administration and others made. But I would say that in the first three years there was nothing, the last year was considerable, and yet, remarked in terms of the student body. Again, it'd reflect back on the standing ovation that the new commissioned officers received. I think that's an

indication of what the people at that graduation ceremony thought of the people being commissioned.

JS: Well, had you been following developments fairly closely yourself? And if so, I know you talked about this. Had you formed much of an opinion at this point?

JM: Well, it was hard not to follow developments as the troop numbers came with a draft no instituted hard enough to be affected on that. My draft number—extremely high draft number gave me piece of mind, so I could do what I wanted. I thought, "I still want to be in the Navy and the Navy's going to be over there." So, I certainly did think about it. It certainly did affect some of my friends. There were student permits, so that my world revolved around the University of Idaho and people stayed in school because if they got out or dropped out, they'd be drafted. That happened to one of my friends who was in another fraternity. He was in our ROTC unit, and he decided one semester that he was just going to drink instead of going to class and he flunked out. The next summer, someone came back from my fraternity and said, "Oh, by the way, Petty Officer McKinney said to say hello to you." I said, "What" He said, "Yeah, He was a signal man on the destroyer I was on, and he said to say hello." This was a guy who was not one of my close friends, but I knew him well. He flunked out and he got drafted two weeks later and was sent to his destroyer. So, there were certainly ramifications of not doing well in school. You could sense that the government was increasingly looking for bodies. Needing troops and there were—McNamara at that time—either at that time or when I was in the service, already in the service lowered the recruiting standards to category three and four which would be aptitude and intelligence on standard tests. It was clear that the military needed more people and was starting to vacuum men from the street to put into uniform.

JS: So, you graduated from college in May of 1970?

JM: Yes, I did.

JS: Okay and was commissioned at that point. Did you go directly in at that point, or did you have a little time off before reporting for your first assignment?

JM: I had three weeks off and I sort of fiddled around. I don't remember what I did, but nothing of merit, I'm sure. I reported on my destroyer USS *Agerholm* (DD-826) in San Diego in June. It may have been the 20th or the 21st. I know the report date is

somewhere in my papers. It was interesting because the ship had just come from refresher training. It had been in the shipyard and then been through refresher training, which is a very, very intensive period of training of teams, training as individual skills and testing. Everyone was on leave as much as they could because we were getting ready to be deployed in July. So, I showed up to this destroyer. I get my state room which we called the forward broom closet. I basically stood watch. There wasn't much going on because everybody was getting ready to deploy. I didn't really appreciate that, and I thought, "Okay, I can do this." So that's what I did. That's sort of my transition from Idaho into the Navy.

JS: You mentioned these exercises. What had your *Agerholm* been doing prior to that? Where had it been operating? Do you know?

JM: Well, the *Agerholm*, like other Pacific destroyers was on a rotation between the western pacific (WESTPAC) which was then primarily Vietnam and the west coast. So, the ships would be six months over, six months back or six months over and then back for nine months or so. The rotation period had stepped up probably two years prior to my joining the ship. So, the ships were old. My ship was commissioned in 1945. It was older than most of the people on the ship. It had been modernized in the mid-60s and it was called FRAM, F-R-A-M, it was the FRAM-I. It was modernized from the main deck up to support a drone. We now call them UAVs. It was a drone called DASH, D-A-S-H (Drone Anti-Submarine Helicopter). It was an abysmal failure. The technology just wasn't ready for the Navy at sea. All these destroyers where World War II vintage destroyers were slowly being just worn down. You can tell on the ship it was all rusty. Chipping rust, paint over rust was the major activity of the deck division; about forty guys. We were between Midway Island and Guam. Probably over one of the deepest parts of the ocean in the world and somebody chipping paint in the boiler room, chipped through hole and we had to put coals. It was a proxy basically. Kind of sort of like clay, but The Snipes, which was the name for engineers, called it "monkey shit." So, they basically slapped it on. We could tell the ship was old. We were in a situation where we—I really loved to fire four-gun salvos. But when you do that urinals would spring off the bulkhead, the air conditioners in the captain's in-port cabin would crash on the floor.

The damage control assistant, the DCAA, would just really get pissed at me but, I really liked it. Everyone else liked it too, but it just really tore the ship apart.

JS: Well, could you talk about things like your quarters? Could you describe that?

JM: Yeah, the officers on this tin can and the ship was commissioned in '45, like I said. It was part of a war design and later remodeled weapons wise, but not creature comfort wise. It was three hundred and ninety feet long. We had a complement which was really what you needed to run the ship according to the operating manual 350, we had about 335 all the time. 18/20 officers and the rest enlisted, which we probably had twenty, twenty-five chiefs. The chiefs really were the key element in the Navy on the ship. But my forward officer area was right next to—it was a bulkhead and the bulkhead is like an eighth inch of aluminum between the chief's quarters and the forward officers. We had three state rooms that we called the forward broom closet. I shared mine with a former tackle from the Naval Academy, and two of us couldn't stand up in the state room at the same time. We would dress and leave, come and go at different times. I had the top deck and—no, I guess I had the bottom deck, and he had the top deck. So, we had six guys in a space probably of about sixty square feet. It'd be about a half or a third—Let me look at my desk here, or it'd be the width of a desk of about three feet and then a chest of drawers and another three feet. So, it was probably six feet by three feet. So, it was eighteen feet of floor space and maybe twenty. There'd be six of us and three state rooms each about that size and then outside in a passageway there was a urinal—actually a commode, and a shower. That was our "state room". The palatial thing we had. So, the crew—that was actually better than the crew because they slept in crew compartments that are about thirty men in a compartment and they were organized by division which meant by work assignments. The gunner's mate and the fire control technicians, my guys, slept in the same compartment. Snipes, slept in a different one, the radiomen in another one, and so on. So my first state room was really this itty-bitty thing and then later when I got more seniority for my second deployment I had enough seniority to get into after officer's quarters and shared it with a guy and that was about three times the size. We could probably put—if we could get together, we could probably put these guys in there and put a dart board. Which is sort of fun because depending on how the ship was moving at the time, the dart board would go back and forth. So, you would have to,

depending on the motion of the ship, you would have to throw the dart at the board where it was going to be. Not where it was. The quarters were fairly Spartan. and crucial to enjoyment was air conditioning and fresh water. The ship was old, it produced fresh water from evaporators that generally worked. But when you were at sea for quite a while, they would tend to break down or they would reduce efficiency. So, it was not a surprise we'd usually be out 30 to 45. Usually about your twentieth day you would start talking about going on water hours. Which meant that you would—that the fountains, the bubblers in the passageways would be turned off. They only turned on for several two-hour segments during the day. The water on the ship was prioritized for boilers first, food and food preparation second, drinking third, and personal hygiene fourth. It turned out to be—so water was real important. When we got over to Asia it would be easily be 110 degrees. Especially off the gun line off of II Corps. Air conditioning was just—you acclimated to a certain state, but the only place that truly was air conditioned was the captain's state room and no one ever wanted to be in there because it was not good news if you have to go there. Or the electronic spaces. A lot of the real smart enlisted electronic technicians probably slept where the radios were and everything else just because it was air conditioned. It's hard to sleep when it's 104 degrees, 105 degrees in your compartment and you're sweating. So, what turned out to be really good for myself and the other five officers in the forward officer's quarters is that we were right next to the Chief's Quarters. I think I mentioned that a few minutes ago. The chiefs are the technicians that really run a ship. When we'd go in water hours, for some strange reason the chief's quarters never went on water hours. So, we always had showers and we decided among us we were not going to squawk because we were on the same valve system as the chiefs. So, we said, "This is okay, we'll just be bum about it." When you're at sea, you get salt grime on you as the ship turns—if you're doing watches outside, that would be outside on the deck or the bridge wings, you often get cinders or let's say stat gas on you, so you get soot in your body or grease all around you. If you don't wash yourself, it gets in your sheets. And pretty soon you have this film and it's hard to keep if you like to keep yourself really clean, which I did and still do, this was hard. So, I'm really glad it turned out to be a good deal in that we're next to the chiefs. So, the ship was—we had about335 guys. My part of the ship we had four 5 inch/38 guns mounted in

two twin forward mounts. And so, you'd have a mount with two twin guns, and it was two side by side guns. You have right below that you'd have a readily handling room where you'd have the powder and the projectiles into rotating concentric circles that would go up at a hoist into the gun. And then down below the readily handling room would be the magazine shells and the powder were kept for storage.

JS: Well, before getting further into your assignment and your job, I'm going to ask you a little bit about your, I don't know, I guess your impressions of the crew itself. You don't have to go into specific names if you don't want to, but if you could talk a little bit about the crew and some of the personalities you ran into if you don't mind.

JM: Before I do that, I just thought of something I neglected to tell you. It's your question a few minutes ago about reporting on board. That three weeks I had basically by myself was quite interesting. I had always been—my first experience, my first day to report on board I was assigned watch. I had an officer who was an LTJG commissioned a year ahead of me and unbeknownst to me that he had put me on mid-watch also. So, I had Officer deck, basically the import-quarter deck and then I'd work until ten o'clock, so I didn't know—no one told me I had the midnight watch. The guy turned out to be oily, but he always liked to play little tricks on me. So, I'm sort of getting your question. What really struck me at those three weeks is that San Diego in summer of 1970 in my four or five guys from the University of Idaho, who were commissioned and assigned to San Diego was really sort of like the "endless summer." The weather was really, really nice. We had money. I had my car, a '67 Mustang. It was really cool. Every night if you wanted to go—I didn't—but every night there would be a major party at a place. So, everyone knew that Friday night was the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) was the place to be. Sunday night was the Down Winds Bar on the North Island, Thursday night was the Miramar Officer's Club. These events were very much like *Officer and a Gentleman* or *Top Gun*, at those bar scenes. The guys were not necessarily in uniform but women it was just young, it was fun. I'm still struck by those three weeks. It was really dreamy; it was a lot of fun. It was nothing like my life was going to be. So that was something I did not tell you, but I it's still a memory I will always have with me and how much fun I had and how dreamy it was simply because of the weather, the events and

how easy things were at the time. Going from that question though, or any questions before I go to your question about the people?

JS: I don't suppose so.

JM: The ship was interesting. This was my first experience, in retrospect, in a blue-collar environment. When I worked in my dad's restaurant although I worked as a bus boy and washed dishes, I was the co-owner's son, and I knew I didn't have to bus dishes for all my life to make a living. When I got into the Navy, this is my first experience with people from all different strata of society. As a footnote, I think one of the things we have lost now as a nation with the ending of the draft, I understand why it's important. One of the things that the service did with the draft is all different people from many walks of life was to put them together working and depending on each other in small spaces. and associated through, generally, by working, living, laughing, arguing or more with people of different types. I had thirty some guys working for me split between gunner's mates and fire control technicians. The gunner's mates were good mechanically. They were smarter than the boatswain mates who generally were the people that gave ship dates where everyone started out. But they were mechanical, they were probably guys who enjoy working on cars today. The fire control technicians were a blend of people who knew radar as well as computers. We had a big electromechanical computer, probably the size of a desk that you used to calculate the firing solutions for either anti-air or anti-surface. I had two chiefs when I came on board. One was a guy named Fry. He was promoted to E-8 when I was second crew—he was as sly as a fox. He was quiet, but he was probably in his own way brilliant. I didn't really appreciate him until the second cruise. But he was, for example, the radio chief, and one time lost the combination to his safe. So, he asked Senior Chief Fry to pick the safe for him and Chief Fry did. Fry, one time, did an overhaul of this mechanical computer, this big hummer, at sea when this was something that was done only in the shipyard. So, he was just quite a guy. The funny thing about it, one time between the first and the second cruise we'd go out for—we went out for one day—just a fast run test on some engineering equipment. Chief Fry's family was on the pier crying and hugging him and everything else. We were formed up on the fantail and I said, "Chief, why are they crying?" He looked at me and he said, "They think we're deploying." So, he basically told them a month before we left that we had left

so that he could go ashore every night when he didn't have duty and for the next month have fun in town. So just a sly fox. I had another guy named Chief Conboy who was also an interesting character. He was married to a Japanese who lived in Japan. He was a recovered alcoholic and he really liked to be at sea. He was nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. Just a real nervous guy. He's confident, but just really high strong. He always preferred to be at sea, and he would always swap to be on ships that were going to be in WESTPAC. So, I got him as we were going the first time. My chief wanted to stay in San Diego. My Conboy found out that we were going to WESTPAC, swapped, and then when we were coming back, swapped again. I really didn't get to use him for much, but he's an interesting character. I still remember when we were off of Korea one night and he was listening to the Army/Navy game. So, it really struck me how he and the other chiefs really adopted the Naval Academy as their university, their football school, that type of thing. You know here was a guy who—we were nine thousand miles away. Who had found through Armed Forces Radio or short wave, a way to listen to the Army/ Navy game. The other chief I had was McPherson who took Conboy's job, and he was just a real really guy. Probably a young John Wayne, if you will. Part Cherokee and just really an effective guy. Going generally to the crew we had the captain who was, Taylor, Frank Taylor and he was relieved by Walt Toehlke. A very experienced—Taylor was an extremely experienced ship handler. Maybe one of the best, I think, in the fleet. A real quiet guy. Ran a pretty good ship, but he had, had bad luck. We had an executive officer who was lieutenant commander. The CO was a commander, an XO was lieutenant commander, and the department heads were four lieutenants and the and then we had JGs and Ensigns as junior officers. About twenty chiefs, as I said, would be between thirty-five and forty-eightish and then we had the mass of people. Most of the crew were under 20 years old. I think you had to be seventeen with your parents' permission to enlist. I wouldn't be surprised if we had one or two 16-year-olds. The crew was really a mix of people. One of the guys in my division was a person, FTG3, a third-class petty officer class Weed who had the same degree I did or wanted political science and didn't like the war. He would challenge me on why we're here, is the war winnable and things like that. I was not interested in debating the merits of the war because clearly it didn't matter what I thought it was what we were going to do. We

had people—I had another petty officer third class who was my age, twenty-two, and he was on his third wife. He was from east Tennessee, which I later found out where my family was from. He was a good guy, but he would do silly things sometimes or he lost one of the digits on one of his fingers one time because he didn't put the magazine where the hoist as he was doing preventative maintenance. He didn't put it in safety, and it cycled, and it cut off a part of one of his fingers. Just stuff like that. But Hoover—the first cruise I went on, I started getting all these letters from the XO. They're dunning letters on Hoover. The captain is always a good guy, the XO is the guy that cracks the whip on a ship, the executive officer. I finally went to Hoover and said, "Hoover, what are all these letters? Dunning you—basically, they want to—you're not paying your bills. What's wrong?" He said, "My wife, that bitch." Evidently Hoover and his wife had a disagreement, and she was sixteen or seventeen. They had a fight, so she went and took his credit card or whatever it was and bought major appliances for all of her family and friends. And he said, "I'm not going to pay for those." And I said, "Okay, did you give her your credit card?" "Yes." "Do you remember signing a power of attorney?" And he said, "What's that?" I said, "Do you remember signing a letter giving her the power to sign a contract?" Hoover replied, "Yes." Okay, well I said, "Hoover, I don't think you can have any—you've got to pay the bills because you gave her the right to do what she did." He said, "That bitch." So, we fast forward, we come back from the first deployment and Hoover takes leave right away and goes back to east Tennessee. He comes back three weeks later with a smile on his face. I said, "How'd it go?" He replied with a smile, said, "We had a good time. My in-laws picked me up and they had their pickup with a shell on the back and a mattress there, so they just put my wife and I back in there and we screwed as they took us home." I thought, "You did what with your in-laws in the front seat?" Anyway, what I found in the crew was this wide variety of people. There's one guy who, as a seaman from Wyoming, was—I guess you would call him a mean drunk. I kept getting these shore patrol reports, I'd get them about three weeks out from every port. It turned out that he would get drunk at every port and pick a fight with the shore patrol, which is not the thing to do. I kept trying—I had learned by then to use the enlisted structure so I found one of my good second class, his name was FTG3 Bush." and said, "Bush, why don't you take this guy under your wing and fix him?" And so,

Bush was from Alaska, a great guy, FTG3 came back in three weeks and said, “Mr. Mottern, I’ve got a problem, I can’t fix him.” And I said, “Why?” He says, “What do you do with a guy that just wants to be a cowboy?” So, he was right, if all he wanted to do was raise cattle and livestock. He didn’t care. So, I learned quickly that people have different aspirations, different backgrounds and different plans for their future. Going back to the crew in general, there were certainly distinct groups of aptitudes and affinities. People in the damage control technicians, be it welders, and pipefitters, those guys were excellent in terms of fixing things. They’d be people repairing all the urinals, and overhead lights and captain’s air conditioner when I shot four-gun salvos. The Deck Division men would always be young, or I’d say men who had an attitude problem. Basically, an aptitude problem or didn’t give a rat’s ass. One guy who was a big strapping guy probably eighteen/nineteen he was from New York. We were in San Francisco. He came back from quarters one day and this whole side of his face was just all puffed up. I asked, “What happened, what happened?” He said, “Well, I found this lady in a bar, and we went out and I went back to her place and three guys jumped me.” Basically, it was a set up, they were going to roll the sailor. “They were going to take my wallet and I started to get the best of them and then she hit me with her purse.” I said, “Well, how’d that do that?” He answered, “She had a brick in her purse.”

JS: Ouch.

JM: So, you had the deck division with people who were new seaman that didn’t go to a specialty school and would try to get up to a would be called strike or basically apprenticed into technician or yeoman or something like that. And then you had the Gunner’s mates, and the FPGs who were in the same division. The people who were snipes, which would be the damage control people, the people lived in the boiler room and the engine rooms. Probably the most thankless jobs it’d be 110/125 down in the boiler room when we’re off the gun line. It’d be 110, 105, and 108 or so. There’s not much difference in 105 and 110 with humidity, but you go down to the boiler room, and you get to 120 degrees. You basically—they all were skinny, and they always had oily bodies because we burned fuel oil. They were a very crucial part of the ship. As you went up in the super structure of the ship, you got into the electronic technicians, the people who repaired the radio gear, the tube gear—there was nothing chip based it was all tubes.

The intelligence and the aptitude went up and you get into the operational people like the navigation and people who maneuvered more and the signalmen. These people were not only smart, but they were quick. They were quick to analyze, quick to make decisions. You had people that had different mechanical or work aptitudes and then you had certain cognitive abilities that were different. The ship was, when you are deployed for six months and you were at sea for four to six weeks at a time, the ship becomes a community—it is a living community where people know each other, and I do not know of any fights between crew members from either deployment on the ship. Now, sometimes you'd have fights with that "dumbass ship over there" or "those blickity blank Marines." When I was in Cuba, the Marines always picked fights with coast guard crew. For some reason they didn't like white ships and they would—I'm meandering here—but they would get the smallest guy in their battalion to try to pick a fight with the biggest coasty. As soon as the coasty would rise to the occasion the whole bar would stand up and they'd just break it down. It was like a scene out of a wild west. Overall, you had older guys who would be the department heads, the CO, XO, and chiefs. Then you had the JOs, (Junior Officers) who had limited experience, but they had college educations. Which of the eighteen or twenty officers six or seven from the Academy and then you had the petty officers (E-5 and E-4) and the non-rated people, the E-3s and E-2s, E-2/E-3s. Did that give you the information you wanted?

JS: Oh, absolutely yeah. Well, overall, how was morale on the ship would you say?

JM: I thought morale was pretty good. We usually would have a reenlistment when the bonuses went up and people could reenlist in the war zone which meant they didn't have to pay taxes. People didn't like getting seasick. The ship was old and battered and beat up. It was not a nice place to live, but what struck me is how people acclimate. Eventually, you acclimate to your surroundings, most people. I think morale was probably on the scale of 1 to 10, probably a 6 or a 7. It depends on if you were Hoover, and his wife was out buying refrigerators for her friends or if you were the seaman who was probably happy when he was drunk, I don't know. Guys were all generally okay. Those who had wives, and close family members such as parents or a fiancé for example, really were torn by the separation. We would be underway away from our home port for

six months a year and when we were in port for six months we would really be at sea for two or three months of those six months. So, one of the things that struck me, and I was single at the time, was how hard it was for people who—would be for people to have a marriage that was based on seeing each other as husband and wife, infrequently. I mean, the saying goes "The wives raised the children. The husband sent the check direct deposit." I think that was probably the biggest detraction for morale. In terms of the war, whether it was right or wrong, I think other than a few people who had voiced opinions, we all were there. I mean, there was no option of going anywhere else. And so whatever people thought, Weed was a guy that thought the war was dumb. He did go AWOL (Absent without leave). I think separation from dear—from loved family and your friends and maybe personal circumstances were the most negative factor on morale. My opinion thinking back.

JS: Well, once you joined the ship, was it too long after that, did you guys go directly to Vietnam at that point, or?

JM: Yeah, we left three or four weeks after I joined so I'm basically three weeks from college to joining a warship. Which is like the 21st of June. Mid-July, we deploy. You had asked me a question earlier about how my ROTC training helped me, prepared me, it didn't. I went six weeks probably two months after graduation I was at sea heading for Vietnam. I missed refresher training which is the whole ship team training for damage control, gunnery, everything else. So, I really fell in a crack of no training. I was immersed in a do or die or do or get screamed at situation. My department head was a Naval Academy graduate three years ahead of me. He was in the class of I think '67. He was a brilliant guy. Abysmal people skills. So, I was basically in the boiling water to learn how to operate the guns, learn how to do maneuvering to get up to the expertise of the Naval Academy graduates. So, I was immersed in training myself and I was in an extremely steep learning curve. Plus, I had some of the silly things going on with people and, one of the things I mentioned to you is when you're at sea—at least when we were at sea, everyone operates with minimum sleep deprivation. As a sense that you are standing watches four on, eight off. There's a dog watch which is the afternoon watch between—your watches rotate so you can never ever adjust when you're going to get deep sleep and you do your normal job during the other wait time. I'd stand watches probably ten to

twelve hours a day and work six to eight depending on the day, Monday through Sunday. We sometimes took—we didn't do work center activities; we'd do maintenance on Sundays. We'd all be fatigued and really deprived of sleep. It would be like a low-grade flu. You medicated yourself with caffeine. There'd be guys who'd drink eight to ten cups of coffee a day. Every work center—I had one in the gunner's space, had a coffee maker. So, people sometimes—everyone had a special brew. Some would put a little salt in their coffee and others put some sugar in it. Some people who were—really drank a lot of coffee supposedly could tell where the coffee came from. I ended up finding—Coca-Cola was really good. I would drink—we had on the second cruise our captain put in a coke machine. When you'd get up for the midnight watch—the mid-watch, instead of having a hot cup of coffee I thought a cold coke gave me more refreshment and I got the same caffeine kick. The attribute—or this caused me to really know learn how to sleep efficiently. When you think about sleep, deep sleep is real important for clearing your brain and mental health. So, if you think about pictures of World War II, you will often see pictures of sailors, especially in the pacific of sleeping in improbable positions. I learned to sleep quickly. My wife complains that I can go to sleep between the time she turns out the light on the wall switch and gets in bed, I'll be asleep. I learned to sleep like that in my stateroom in the forward broom closet was below and between the two twin gun mounts. I would be able to sleep during gunfire.

JS: Wow.

JM: So, one of the things that I learned about was how to be efficient in sleep and how to be efficient in time and everyone else probably had that same need.

JS: Well, once the *Agerholm* set sail, how long did it take to get from San Diego to off the coast of Vietnam?

JM: About a month.

JS: About a month, okay.

JM: Basically, went—the first time it took four weeks. The second time, it took about two and a half weeks because we were replacing a ship that had a mechanical problem. The first time we went from San Diego to Pearl (Pearl Harbor). We spent three days at Pearl, which was nice. And then went from Pearl to Midway. And Midway Island's really cool. It's real isolated atoll and it's at the end of the Hawaiian Island chain

and it's very historic. We could still see some World War II wreckage around, there's some murals from the Midway Battle. There were a lot of Gooney Birds. These are protected albatrosses' birds, and we were all informed, especially during nesting season, that if you touched any one of them and it's a federal offence, because they protect the species. We'd usually pull in there to get refueled and go onto Guam. And then Guam to—Midway to Guam was about an eleven-day trip. From Apra Harbor in Guam to Subic Bay in the Philippines where we'd get our .50 caliber's and load up any other special munitions. Then it'd take about six days to go from Subic Bay to wherever we were ordered to go in Vietnam. Total time the first time, was close to a month, we did it in about two and a half weeks the second time. We didn't go through Midway the second time. We went from Pearl to Apra Harbor and refueled. Apra Harbor was always just a pit stop. Always basically six hours to get to fuel and water. We always had to get water and whatever foodstuffs we needed. Navy destroyers at that time, basically depending on the speed they were operating at, if they were operating at 18 knots or below probably could go seven, eight days without refueling. If they operated at 22/24 knots or above, as we did when went on Yankee station and would probably need to be refueled every three days. It wouldn't be that we'd run out, there was a critical point, where you'd need to have a wartime reserve. I don't know if that was 40 percent of capacity or whatever, but we always managed to have the 60 percent and kept the 40 percent as the wartime reserve for contingencies. To answer your question, it took us the first time about four weeks to get to Vietnam.

JS: Alright, and once you guys arrived there, how much did the atmosphere change aboard ship?

JM: Well, it changed in several ways, fairly some subtle and some not. The weather increasingly became hotter and more humid. If you're over there in monsoon season, in the Philippines, some of these rains you'd get three or four inches an hour. You wouldn't be able to see barely 100 yards and sometimes just 50 yards. In Vietnam it would be this really oppressive heat. If you touched certain metals, it might burn your hand it was so hot. So, the weather was something that changed. Also, when you entered the combat zone income taxes went away. That was a happy thing. You'd get free postage by just signing your name. But what happened when we went from—when you

went to Hawaii—retracing the trip, that was a little festive because we got to spend a day at Waikiki or a night at one of the bars or whatever. As we got closer to Subic—Subic was the wartime port—the largest naval base in the world outside of the United States. So, it was the third largest outside of Norfolk and San Diego. That was where people were refueling and doing R&R. As you got as inland to Vietnam, depending on your assignments, the focus on what you were going to do, the briefings that you either gave or attended became more serious, more focused on what's going on, what's the operations, what's the operation's order, what's the comm plan, that type of things. The communication plan. So, you would go from a military organization that is training for combat operations to one that is entering combat operations and things became more serious.

JS: One question I meant to ask you about the trip over to Vietnam about the journey over. Did you guys have a crossing the International Date Line ceremony of sorts?

JM: No, we didn't. We would go over with our squadron, and it would be—I mean, these were working destroyers, so we'd pass it and it'd be in the plan of the day, the POD. We pass it and people say, "Okay, change the clocks." It was really mechanically chipped. You'd change the clocks, and you'd change the day, and it was really not an event. Not like going across the equator. One of the times though, we had two memories of crossing WESTPAC going west. My first time we had a destroyer escort with us, a Knox class (DE). It was one of McNamara's programs that basically took a—evidently, initially designed as a very effective destroyer to take money out they made it from a two-screw ship to a single screw ship. Those ships always broke down or frequently broke down. One of our five ships was this DE, and someone had to tow it into Guam which is sort of not good for either ship. The DE's call sign was "Hockey Puck" and sometimes at night when the officers or the CO was not around, some of the enlisted guys would call it "Hushpuppy." They would come back on the net in a miffed voice and say, "This is Hockey Puck, not Hushpuppy." We had one guy one time—I still remember we were in a column abreast about a mile apart. Someone on one of the other ships had turned himself into the XO saying that he was gay. That meant at the time that you would be mustered out of the service. We muttered, and it wasn't just the officers, it was

enlisted crew that I knew about. It was the guy probably just trying to get out of the war. Three nights later, or three mornings later, he was missing at sea. Apparently, somebody had given him a "Blanket Party" which is the colloquial term for putting a blanket over his head, hit him alongside the head, and throwing him overboard during the night. The formation had traveled eight hours. We didn't turn back. We determined that by that time he was dead. We had assignments to be where we had to be for some operations and didn't have time to spare. So that's one memory I have of crossing over. Another memory is from the second time I went over, we were with another squadron and this squadron commander evidently was a bit of a—well, he liked pomp and circumstances, I guess. So, he said on Sundays during the daytime, we were to wear dress uniforms. So here we are, the closest ship is a mile away; one on the port, one on the starboard you go up the bridge and people are wearing whites. Is that stupid or what? That was my first experience with a stupid command. Which you're going to do it and it was just like, "Why?" Because you go out and when you get saltwater spray and you've got grease all around, it just did not make sense. Khakis were really good for the officers. I don't know—I may have gone off your question.

JS: No, not at all. Not at all.

JM: Is that the thing you were interested in?

JS: Oh, absolutely, yeah. Well, I guess the next question I have for you then is if you could talk a little more in detail about your own specific assignment and how your assignment was in the warzone.

JM: At this time, it had probably been from '67 certainly through '72/73 when Vietnam ended. The destroyers really had several assignments. They were either on gunfire support, called NGFS, naval gunfire support, or it would be screen duties for carriers or around carrier flight operations.

JS: Okay.

JM: So, my duties varied based on what the ship was assigned. If we were on Yankee Station, we would be around a carrier and we called them bird farms. We'd either be screening Port or Starboard. The carriers would be always faster. The carriers would always be chasing the wind because they wanted to have 30 to 40 miles an hour—knots of wind across the deck to launch. If there's no wind they were going to have to go 30

knots. And so, they would have these carriers spreading back and forth and destroyers trying to keep up with them. We could, but going back to the previous comment, if we were at 20 plus knots, our fuel usage really went up. So, if you're going twenty/twenty-four knots, we could go up to about 30. Old things really started shaking, but we'd have to refuel every three days which became inefficient. So, on Yankee Station we'd be assigned to a carrier, we'd be screening, or we'd be on plane guard. On plane guard there were two plane guard stations. One was 1,200 to 1,700 yards, astern of the carrier at 185 degrees relative. Basically, lining up to where the angle deck is, where the landing deck was on the carrier. We were there in case somebody fell overboard, or a plane ditched and to pick up the crew as well as a reference point for the landing, the pilots that were landing.

JS: Okay.

JM: There was another plane guard station that was three to five miles aft of the carrier. This is where the corkscrew down, where the squadron's coming back would go through their descending altitudes or around the destroyer that would be three to five miles back. So, when I was at—when we were on Yankee Station, my job on watches was changing stations, maintaining—cause the carrier would change direction or change speed based on what they needed to launch. Sometimes they'd tell you, sometimes they didn't. If you were right behind the carrier 1,200 to 1,700 yards, you would have to be watchful about what the carrier did. One night we were in the Sea of Japan behind the USS *Midway* (CV-41) and they lost load which means they lost electrical and they just went black. We were going about eighteen knots, and we were probably about fifteen hundred yards and we got to 600 yards pretty quickly. That's when you really get puckered. A destroyer hitting the carrier would probably take the paint off the carrier and sink the destroyer. So, my watch as an officer, you really have two sets of duties that are interwoven because they conflict for time. One of them was what you do in the watches and then what you do for your specialty. My specialty was gunnery and when we were at Yankee Station we'd just do maintenance and checks that I was really focused on either bridge watches or combat information center, breaking down signals, changing course of what they wanted to do. We always had to be alert for the Russian—there was usually a Russian spy ship or a missile cruiser in the vicinity of the Yankee Station. They were

there to report any raids and any launches, and they were probably there, in case of a hot war, to shoot a missile at the carrier. There'd usually be two to four carriers on Yankee Station. There was Yankee Station and Dixie Station. Dixie Station, when I was there in '70 was not being used. They decided to put everyone together on Yankee Station for reasons I've never thought of. So, related to Yankee Station were two other destroyers' assignments. One was SAR, it would be North SAR, search and rescue, and then PIRAZ, Positive Identification Radar Advisory Zone was what we did. So, SAR could be up close to North Vietnam, and you'd be where the pilots that were damaged over on raids in North Vietnam would try to get to you so they could be safe. We would be 60 to 90 miles away from Yankee Station. And that was our assignment then. Can you call me back in a second?

JS: Sure, absolutely.

JM: Thanks for your patience.

JS: Sure, not a problem.

JM: So, you'd asked me what my duties were, and I was talking about I divided them into Yankee Station which is really working around the carriers and then I'll do gunfire support in a few minutes.

JS: Okay.

JM: So, Yankee Station would either be screening or pointing guard which would be protecting or in some way being involved with the carrier. There was SAR, which you'd be up away from the carrier group close to a bingo which is a punch out area for pilots or you'd be at PIRAZ. So PIRAZ was important. You would be with a missile ship and sometimes you'd get "double ender" which means missiles forward and aft. We'd be there as protection of the missile ship in case NVA gunboats would come out and attack. because the missile ships did not have any surface guns. And PIRAZ was a positive identification radiant area where planes returning from raids had to be positively identified before they were allowed to land. So that was important. PIRAZ was usually ninety to one hundred twenty miles away. We had CAP (Combat Air Patrol) over us at both North SAR and PIRAZ stations. Two memories I have working with the carriers of clearly playing guard when you were behind the carrier you had to be very alert about what the carrier was doing. When we were in the distant playing guard, oh, the three to

seven miles, the first tour we had, I think it was the first tour, we had a fighter, a Corsair, I think, lose power and it came through three or four levels of the spiral, and hit an E-2A and knocked five feet off one wing and the E-2A crashed just instantly. I was on watch, but it happened so fast I was looking off the starboard wing, and this happened off the port bow, I think there were six guys in the (E-2A) crew were dead. It was their last mission before going home. We were the small bulge in the water before the first two or three hours picking up remnants of bodies. I learned then that brains and intestines don't have any color. It was a sad, sad thing to put remains, fragments of helmets with brains in plastic bags and try to honor the people that had just died so tragically, but suddenly. To one of our SAR events, this is probably in hindsight—we were given a mission one day to go real close to North Vietnam. I don't know why, but I remember we all were general quarters and—we went up and we probably—it was real flat. We probably could basically—well, we'd see fishing pots. When you see fishing pot markers you know you're in shallow water. The screws were churning up mud from the bottom. So, we knew we were nuts. We drew twenty-six feet, so we probably were in fairly shallow water, and we did what we needed to do. We turned around as fast as we could go to get out of the area. One of the PIRAZ experiences, we were on Yankee Station and the *Stars and Stripes*—I remember reading the *Stars and Stripes* and they said there were two carriers on Yankee Station. I looked out and there were five. So, I said, "The reporter obviously got it wrong." Three or four days later we were put up in the North—we were put up as on PIRAZ and a helo came over the horizon. They usually fly further close to the surface, and they dropped on the cruiser. About an hour later, we were given orders to come alongside, and a message was passed to the bridge. And it turned out two days later—or actually it was that night. We went to general quarters surprise at 2 AM and it was the Son Tay prisoner of war raid. We were actually on the outside of Hai Phong Harbor at the time. To pick up any pilots that were shot that may be shot down. There were none shot down, but the guys in combat said there were so many planes in the air, the air search radar screen was just all white from all the contacts. At least my FTG3 in combat said there were—it looked like there were about a thousand planes in the air. Apparently—according to him, they went over into China based on where we had the Chinese, North Vietnam border. So that was quite a—anytime you go to general quarters,

especially at night when it's unplanned, you really pucker up. That was one of my memories from that experience. So that was, when you were with the carrier, which is what destroyers were designed to do, you really operate to the carrier, frequently going back to Yankee Station operations, whenever the carrier was refueling or rearming from a supply ship, the Russians always tried to put themselves in a position where the carrier would be going. If you put a supply ship alongside a ship getting replenished, either oil, or ammunitions, or food or whatever, they will take a course that is favorable to seas and wind and stay on that course at probably nine to twelve knots until the replenishment was finished. What the Russians would do is race around to put themselves on a course to have a collision and try to break up the replenishment. They were doing this harassment all the time and it was really annoying because you basically—what would take normally two hours, you'd have to do it twice. That just meant you got less sleep. So that's experience on the carrier operations. Any questions before I go to gunnery fire?

JS: Yeah, a few about the Son Tay raid if you don't mind. At what point did you guys realize what was going on? Did you know about the raid itself?

JM: We didn't know anything about the raid itself.

JS: Okay.

JM: Evidently the orders were carried over by courier. There was no—apparently there was no electronic communication of the orders. It was all personal courier from DC on an airplane to Yankee Station. Although clearly the carriers were directed, apparently people weren't told you're going there because we wanted to do a big raid on the POW camps. On the *Agerholm* we didn't really understand what was going on, what had happened until the day after or several days after when we received a report that they did not find the POWs. We were just—my FTG3 and I still talk to him periodically to see him. He lives in San Francisco. We didn't know what was going on, but anytime you have a thousand planes and all of a sudden you realize you're up at the northern part of the gulf, this was again, you're in a World War II destroyer with four- or five-inch guns that are mounted forward, nothing aft in case you have to run. In a ship that someone can punch through with a ball-pin hammer all of a sudden, you're thinking, "This is serious." So, we did not know, and it was clear though what's going on, it was pucker time. I think the people and certainly the operations officer and a few other department heads on the

ship were briefed. As a JO (Junior Officer) I wasn't. They followed directives—Directives were to hold all information extremely close, and they did. Even for us and I mean, we had no way to communicate to anyone. Then you didn't have cell phones, you didn't have—when you were at sea then, you would really be isolated from anything except mail that came periodically by helo, or sometimes if you were close to Saigon, you'd get armed forces network.

JS: One other question about these types of missions, when you would come—when the Agerholm would come close to the North Vietnamese shore, did you guys ever receive any opposition?

JM: No, we didn't, Although, I didn't know. My hunch is we had CAP (Combat Air Patrol) over us, and I think that one time—my hunch is one time we went up north we were used as bait. The North Vietnamese did not rise to the occasion. That's the only reason why we'd go north. That far north, that shallow water. We didn't have electronic gear that would be sophisticated enough, in my opinion, to listen in on something. Although, moving thirty hours north to get to better radio reception just did not make sense. So, my sense was we were probably bait at the time or they wanted us to visually look at something. It also could have been testing what Vietnam or when the North Vietnamese would identify us. When we left, we left quickly. We left as quickly as we could go. So, that's just my opinion and I can't answer—I don't have any more information.

JS: Alright.

JM: So, anything else with carriers before I go to gun line?

JS: No, I don't think so.

JM: Okay, so reflecting again, when you're around a carrier you were really focused on—everything centers around the flight operations for the strike missions and then the return of the strikes and the carriers running from wind. You're basically involved with that whole activity. You'd be anywhere from twelve hundred yards to ninety miles from the carrier as I mentioned. The other role, which changed my activity was when we were on gunfire support off of Vietnam. They call it NGFS, Naval Gunfire Support. That's where I had all the fun. Basically, we carried four, 5 inch/.38 guns. The Army—The Army and Marines would call them 127-millimeter guns. And there were

two twin mounts forwards. So, we could fire fifteen rounds continuous over long times. You'd take twenty-two rounds—This is per barrel—rapid fire for maybe five to ten minutes.

JS: Okay.

JM: So, fifteen rounds per mount, that's thirty rounds a minute. That's pretty impressive. We would typically fire twelve to thirteen hundred rounds per deployment. We would be anywhere from a half mile to one mile offshore. The range of the five-inch gun was about 17,500 yards, standard projectile. We had a rocket assisted projectile called RAP which was really cool. We'd get around 23,000 to 24,000 yards. Although the RAP projectile had less explosive, and it was not as accurate as you get farther out. The five-inch shell weighed fifty-eight pounds, and it had about seventeen/eighteen pounds of explosives. There were several ammunition types that we used depending on what the assignment was. Most of the assignments were troops in the open and so we'd use AAC which is anti-aircraft common which is a time fuse. Basically, the Mark 1A computer, the gunfire computer that I mentioned earlier that you thought Fry repaired once, we would set a AAC, which was also used as an anti-aircraft round to go off about thirty yards height before it would just basically shoot fragments like a big hand grenade in the air. We also used VT frag that had a little proximity fuse that would go off when it detected a body. There was something developed in World War II to counter kamikaze so it wouldn't go off until it got close to a target in case we'd use it and it'd go off about thirty feet instead of thirty yards over the ground. They were more expensive, so we preferred AAC, a semi-armor piercing called HICAP against bunkers. We'd use —we had Willy Peter which was White Phosphorous which we'd use that for special targets. White Phosphorous is really, really, really nasty. It's a mineral that when exposed to oxygen burns until it's consumed. So, it's used for spotting or used if you want to do something really nasty about people. Star-shells and I had mentioned about RAP. So we would go typically to either in II Corps, and Jason you might know, I think you probably know that Vietnam was organized by corps area?

JS: Mhmm, right.

JM: So, we were typically at II Corps or run through that special zone. The run for that special zone is down by the delta. I think our first mission when I went over was, I

guess we went over to Phan Thiet off of II Corps and we would basically be in two watch sections which means you'd be four on, four off. You'd be going three to five knots offshore and wait for spotters to come up and then it'd be the air spotters from the Army or ground spotters that give you targets. Sometimes at night we'd call H&I fire, harassment and interdiction fire, which you'd randomly shoot a shell in a certain area. We always thought we were being harassed more than the people we were shooting at. Because, you know it'd wake the crew up. Depending on the activity, we'd fire usually—you'd get a target, you fire one shot, adjust, fire your second shot, and then ask for "fire for effect" which would usually be five or ten rounds. and you'd pump out five rounds a barrel or something like that and be done with it. So that'd go on and on. One of the things I remember is that the first deployment there was a problem with projectiles exploding in barrels, which is not a good thing. There were a couple gun crews that were lost and other destroyers. It turns out after analysis some of the ammunition was old Korean War or reworked World War II shells. I may be wrong about World War II shells but at the base of a shell there was a seal that when the powder was ignited in the gun chamber, protected the mechanism of the base of the shell. The fuse of the shell is in the base, this is a gas seal. They thought there was a defective gas seal causing the detonation of the powder to ignite the shell which is not a good thing. We had to go through and inventory and look at every single shell. We used to carry about fourteen hundred rounds. That was something I always had to do. We did that once or twice and then they had to try to work through what the problem was. And then I remembered that—still doing it today, I had to sign—I had to do a tag for every single empty powder canister. Now, the Navy uses the Navy Destroyer 5 inch/38 caliber guns, it's semi-fixed. You have a projectile and then you have a 34-pound powder charge that's ignited in the shell is ejected from the chamber powder is three types; Flashness, non-flashless; depends on night or day. And then there's a short round which is used to lob a shell over a hill. Well, I had to, because some dufus on some other ship had mixed live powder with empty canisters and there was an explosion somewhere, I had—there was a directive that came out that all gunnery officers had to personally inventory all the empty powder casings and sign a tag. So, I used to write my, in high school, Jim Mottern, in ROTC, James W. Mottern. I started doing that the first fifty or eighty shell casings. Then I got to JW

Mottern, and I finally got to J.W.M. After you're doing a thousand of these you start to abbreviate and still had to meet the letter of the law. So, there'd be piles of these canisters waste deep and you would be shooting five hundred a day or something like that, you sort of go through them pretty fast. So, these missions would either be fire, you know, you'd get the target, and you'd have your bridge watch would be conning the ship, combat would be taking the communications from the spotter and then you have the gun plot which would be setting the speed of the ship. You put the barometric pressure, the temperature of the magazines. All of this went into the computer and the gun crews would be operated—because naval gunfire is extremely accurate. Another characteristic is the trajectory is very flat because it has a very high muzzle velocity. The bullet goes very straight. So, we'd be very good for targets we could see or reach, but it'd be more difficult if you had to shoot to the backside of the mountain which is why we had short charges. So, we used targets, we used spotters. My second tour we had something interesting, the Army became involved with sensors and basically, we reported on, back at Phan Thiet, second deployment. The Army briefing came aboard, and they told us about these sensors. Basically, they were sensors down a supply pass. They were nothing more than remote radios and they would be triggered when somebody was going down a path, if you will. You'd track them. Here's device 1, here's device 2. And so, we knew when we had these said, "Okay, here's where these devices are planted. When they get to this device we're going to fire three rounds here. They're going to try to escape up this ravine and we're going to put a round over there." So, we fired a couple of missions that were basically remote like that without any spotter at night. It was quite interesting. You would not have any visibility; any identification of the target was all mechanical and it was all remote and the spotters would go over the impact area next thing to see if they could find any bodies. Not my ship, but the ship before us; I think it was before us, was on a similar mission and evidently there was two VC or NVA that were having sex near one of the recorders and so the ship really had a fun time listening to the moaning and groaning of the couple having sex. So that was one of the amusing things. Another mission we had that runs that special zone, and I think this is the first deployment. We get an Army briefing onboard—and they had a battalion of Cambodians. Cambodia at this time with Prince Sihanouk was neutral. All of a sudden, I come into brief, and they said

"Listen we're training a battalion of Cambodia. This is top secret." I said "Okay." They said this is a formation that's very tenuous if they get attacked, we're concerned they're just going to scatter like geese. So, your job is—so you're here to protect them, and provide support, so we're going to call and basically tell us protocol and we need to be very alert for a call in response to a mission within two or three minutes of getting the call. That was the first time I started to suspect that everything I'd been reading in the US papers was not exactly as it was. Because here is number one, a secret training mission and secondly, this ally of—the troops would break and run at the sound of a firecracker. That was something else I remember. So, we would do these—most of my time was gun fire support and we'd fire twelve hundred to thirteen hundred rounds per deployment. Really, we'd be on gun line for about a month at a time. Depending on your rate of fire, you would have to go out and replenish. Coming from Subic Bay a day apart would be a supply ship so in a clockwise fashion starting from the south going north up the coast towards I Corps and going around were supply ships. So, if you were running out of shells or fuel—we're going slow. We only really needed to refuel every seven to ten days, but we'd have to rearm every three days. You would basically determine where the next refueling, rearming ship was. It'd be about one hundred miles offshore. You would race out and rendezvous with them, go alongside, replenish and then break off and race back to our gunfire support station. And when we rearmed like that, it would be an all-hands evolution. Every guy would—the shell would come over in pallets of forty-eight. Every person would have a round and carry them up to the magazine hoist which were up forward and then they recycled down mechanically to your magazine. Each one of these shells were identified with their serial number. Again, we had an exploding shells because of old projectiles and things like that. So, it was very routine. When we'd go out, sometimes you'd get ice cream, you'd certainly get movies. Movies—you'd always barter for movies. One of the favorite ones, I remember, inadvertently somehow through the censors there was a movie called Vampire Lovers or something like that. This turned out to have nude scenes. All of a sudden that was an instant hit. They were showing that one Sunday in the ward room and all of a sudden these nude scenes come up which was completely unheard of. We were three weeks out from any port or anything and all of a sudden there were guys in the gangway, enlisted, trying to peer and everything else.

"Hey, hurry and get that done so we can watch it too." But it was quite surprising. I think it was Vampire Lovers, but it was really a stupid movie, but they had tits. Now, I'll go back and forth here. One of the good entertainment memories I have is a somewhat equivalent experience. Bob Hope was one of the carriers when we were on Yankee Station, so we were able—we were given permission by the carrier to steam within a half mile of it. And so, the guys that were lucky got to go up on the signal bridge, which is the topmost—it was above the Coney—above the bridge. We had "big eyes" which were basically a hundred pecks power binoculars used to read signal flags. We got to go up and look at four or five thousand guys on a carrier deck. The stage that looked like Bob Hope and go-go dancers. I remember go-go dancers. That was so cool seeing Bob Hope maybe two thousand yards away, maybe a thousand. But to have a man like that, to have people like that come out and see us in the middle of the ocean, seven thousand miles away is something that I have told my daughters how much I appreciate that man and how special that was. We were all excited to see him—just to see the ship with the people on it. That's how starved we were for entertainment. So, summarizing that I had on the ship, two sets of duties. If we were around the carriers, we did bird-farm stuff. If we were on gun line, we were basically shooting.

JS: Alright, why don't we go ahead and take a break for today if you don't mind?

Interview with Jim Mottern
Session [2] of [2]
Date: 11 August 2010

Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Jim Mottern. Today is August 11, 2010, and this is interview session number two. Okay, if we could begin today. I had a couple of questions about some of the fire support missions. Could you talk a little bit I guess about how a fire mission would work in a way a gun crew worked? I guess what I'm getting at is, what were the different jobs and if you could talk about a fire support mission, say from the moment you received a target to the actual firing of the gun?

Jim Mottern: Sure, let me first go with the different crews and what they did and how they worked together. The ship when we were on in NGFS, naval gun fire support missions, or we called it colloquially the gun line. We were in a port and starboard watch bill in the sense that you had four hours on, four hours off. That's how the whole ship would be set up. You had the bridge manned normally as you would underway which, you know, the officer of the deck, and the junior officer of the deck, two lookouts. You have lee helm. The helm is the steering wheel, and the lee helm is the engine order of commands. Then you'd have stern lookouts, and you'd have the petty officer for the watch which would be running the enlisted portion of the watch reporting to the officer on deck. We'd also have a navigation detail with probably two maybe three people in navigation doing precision sightings and charting where the ship was. It was very important to understand relative to landmarks where the ship was so that the gunfire computer would be able to give accurate instructions to the gun mount and set the fuse at the right time. So, one part of the crew was the bridge. You'd also have, right behind the bridge on the same level, was the combat information center, which would we called CIC. That crew would be duplicating what the bridge was doing in terms of positioning and taking bearings and ranges from landmarks they could get on radar and making sure that they're positive of where the ship was—the position where the ship was, agreed with what the bridge did. The bridge's position was done visually, and the combat information center was done by computer—excuse me by radar and they really had to match. Everything was focused on safety for the troops and accuracy for the target. The combat

information center also was the radio telephone network when it came out over the speaker about twice the size of a grapefruit. The communications with the spotter and again, as I said; The spotter would either be in the air, in a Bronco, OV-10A Bronco, a small observation plane, or on the ground with the troops. Most of the spotters were in the air. The radio telephone network also was on the bridge so that people would be able to ascertain that there was a confusion of what the spotter had said. You would check with the bridge, or you'd probably have about six or seven people or more listening to the spotter's directions. In the center of the bow of the ship you'd have the gunfire plot and that was the mark 1-A—Mark 1-Able—electrical mechanical computer about the size of a large desk and it would be the computers that would be used to determine or point the guns in the right place. We'd be going probably three to five knots. The speed of advance was not important, but the other portions of the gun commands were. You would put in an aerometric pressure, you'd put in wind, and we had reports from 7th fleet or the off area that would have wind at different elevations which was important if you were shooting long distances. Especially RAP, a rocket assistant projectile. You would have temperature of the magazines. I think it was a five-day average and you would also do calculations of the wear of the gun bores, the guns you would be shooting. That was important also. The guns had thirty, maybe fifty thousand rounds of life and it was relatively common for someone—for a ship would have to pull the sleeves of a barrel when they got worn out. They put a spin on the shell for accuracy and they're worn out through repeated firing. That was the three areas I just mentioned were the crews on a ship that basically determined where the ship was, what the spotter's directions were, and set the commands into the computer and setting the computer. In the actual gun—and this was common to all 5 inch/.38 mounts. We had two mounts, two guns each. They shot a projectile of fifty-eight pounds, and I believe the powder casing was thirty-four pounds. The powder casing was brass and the round itself varied based on the mission you chose. We had in the magazine a variety of charges. Anti-Aircraft, which was AAC, which was a time fuse. I liked to use that for troops in the open. We had VT frag, (Variable Time Fragmentation), which was also a fragmentation warhead that had a little radar in its—actually in the base and it would go off when it approached ground. That did not have a big of charge, but it was very effective. Then you had the HICAP (semi-armor piercing)

which was used for the bunkers or anything that appeared to be fortified. We didn't use much of that because of just our terrain and where we were in II Corps. The mounts were set up so that you had a crew on three levels. The first top side level was where the gun mount itself and then below that was the upper handing room. You can call that a ready magazine if you wanted. Below that was the magazine itself where powder and shells were stored. The crews for a 5 inch/38 gun included the following a mount-captain who was a very experienced third class petty officer or perhaps a second class petty officer. You'd have a trainer and pointer, and that person would be somebody who would be manually, if necessary, moving the gun to left and right or change in the elevation. You had two men; one would take the powder out of the hoist, and the other would take the projectile out of the projectile hoist. So, you had two hoists that were coming up from the upper handing room which was a round room and the deck immediately below the mount. They would take the projectile and put that in a tray that when the breach was open of the gun and the powder handler would take the powder charge and put that behind it, then a hydraulic ram would push the projectile and powder casing into the breach of lock. The mount captain would say, "Ready for fire." Or he would signal he was ready for fire. A good crew could fire 15 rounds minute per barrel in a steady state. Sometimes they could do 22 rounds for three to five minutes. The shells were fairly big and so you'd have your big, strapping Bosin mates or gunners' mates doing the loading. Below, as I said before, that's the mount. The mount would be set up usually an automatic. So, it would be under the command of the people in plot who were running where the gunner was going to be trained left or right and the elevation. When we used time-fused rounds, a-double-common (AAC) was an example. The gun plot computer would set the time of flight into the shell, and as the shells were coming up the powder hoist, there was a device that was like a screwdriver, if you will, that set the time of flight in the base of the fuse. The projectiles would come up from the hoist, nose first, and they'd sit on their base and this device would be receiving commands from plot changing time of flight. Right up until the projectile was taken out of the hoist and put in the tray and then ran into the breach of the gun. The time of flight was important because the computer would calculate where the ship was and the distant time of flight. If we wanted to have a burst 60 feet instead of 30 feet, the time of flight would be a split second less to

get the proper height. So, the mount crew was the crew that physically operated the gun itself. When we were doing normal gunfire support you would have both—you'd probably do one mount and you'd tradeoff between the two mounts which you would most likely have both guns manned in case we had to use both guns. Underneath the gun mount was the ready handling room and this was a room probably the same dimensions of the mount, but it had two concentric rings in a round space. A top ring held the projectiles, and the bottom ring held the powder charges. The projectiles were loaded in advance based on what the gunnery officer had requested from gun plot. We'd always have maybe a half dozen HICAP and if we were going to shoot a-double-common or VT frag we'd have that loaded into the ready magazine. The powder was on the lower ring, as I said. The powder would be—if it was night, I think we'd use flashless and in daytime we'd use non-flashless. The reason being is that if you were out and had night vision and you were on the bridge and you used the wrong powder, the powder that's used for the daytime, you are pretty much blinded. You'd give all this light that's created by the muzzle blast. The Navy had developed a powder charge that did not have a light. It was basically the same power, same projectile, but it was more smoke than light. When it got to be dusk you would have to change over from non-flashless to flashless powder so that was important. Bridge didn't like losing their eyesight at night. You'd tend to get growls from the captain. (Laughter)

JS: Right.

JM: Sometimes if we were in hilly country, we'd also have short charges, which I mentioned before, were charges that had less propulsion power in them and allowed you to lob a shell into the reverse side of a hill. Naval gunfire has extremely high muzzle velocity very flat. It was therefore very accurate and very good for line-of-sight targets or targets that are straight from the ship to where the target was, but not effective on the reverse side or of a mountain or a hill. That's why you have to use short charges. So, the three levels again were the mount, we talked about the mount crew. The upper handling room. The Upper handling room would be manned probably by four to six people depending on the activity we'd expect to happen. And then down below the upper handling room on the third level, the bottom most level was the magazine. This is where the projectiles and the powder was securely stored for sea. It was armored to the extent

the ship was armored, and you had a watertight hatch to get in. By the way, there was no direct access from one compartment to the gun mount, to the upper handling room, to the magazine other than the projectile and powder hoist. They were closed off so if you had an explosion in the upper handling room, it wouldn't light off anything that was in the gun mount or go to the magazine and light that up which would be catastrophic for the ship. In the magazine, it would be the same number of people that would be in the upper ready handling room. It would probably be five or six and it would have your second class there or experienced person because those are the people that would be picking out the rounds and try to manage the inventory. You rotate your inventory. Basically, the oldest out first. If you—depending on your shells, your shell stock, how long you had the magazine load. When you're out on the gun line though, you'd go through everything fairly quickly with the exception of perhaps your star shells and your Willy Peter, your white phosphorous which tended to be special missions. So, you had six people in the magazines and another six people in the upper handling room. That's twelve. Then you had four, seven, another seven people at thirteen and then you had five people in the gun plot: that's eighteen. You probably had five in combat, that's twenty-three. Then you had three people, especially in navigation, twenty-six would be the navigator's addition to the normal bridge watch. That'd be the number you'd have for a gunfire support mission. Does this answer your question?

JS: Yeah, absolutely.

JM: Now, we would have two crews. You would have a Port and a Starboard or a blue and gold. So, you'd be on and if you're firing a lot, it'd be a lot to do and sometimes there wouldn't be anything to do. Everyone was always taking measurements. Before we'd fire each day, I had responsibility of checking the gunfire recoil seals. These hydraulic seals that when the gun fired, there was a hydraulic recoil mechanism that absorbed the blast and made sure that the gun breach did not careen out of the mountains. It was very, very important for me to have hydraulic fuel or hydraulic fluid to keep these fit. I think it was between twenty-two hundred and twenty-four hundred PSI. When I first came on board ship, my department brought me to his office and I was really green and he said, "Mottern, I want you to get the recoil fluid and get it here by tomorrow." I didn't know that he had tried to do that himself before I got there. There were two squadrons

that had left in the last three weeks from San Diego. They had taken all the hydraulic fluid so there was none to be found. He made me feel that my existence on earth was depended on hydraulic fluid and I looked all over the place. So gave in to my chief, and finally, the chief came back, and his name was Butler, Chief Butler, and he told me the situation and I said, "Well, no wonder he told me to get it because he couldn't." So, one of the things you learned quickly—or hopefully you learned quickly when you're a division officer, you learn who is your best scrounger. Scrounger was a term that was the person who would come out and do com-shop, basically do exchange. A scrounger is somebody who'd go find something and depending on his com-shop skills, he would get it for a certain price. So, I had gunners mate third class named Coffin. I pretty much determined that he had the slick personality and the inquisitive nature of an art-shark (??) and probably a conniver. I said, "I want to see Coffin." I said, "I need 60 gallons of hydraulic fluid here by tomorrow at noon. I don't care how you get it; I just want it here and I don't want to know how you got it." I got a call from the porter deck, oh, about ten in the morning the next day and there's Coffin. With—he actually got 100 gallons. He was pleased as punch. I never knew how he got it. I—typically though, especially overseas, a lot of exchange, especially in the Subic Bay Naval Station was with coffee. I think the coffee came in about five-pound tins about two and a half feet high in about eighteen inches square. So that was—you get a lot of things done with crane operators and everything like that by giving them five pounds of coffee. Gloves, work gloves were another thing. So that is the crew and generally how we operated in the naval gunfire mission.

JS: Alright, one other question along those lines, I suppose. Any particularly memorable fire missions that stick out in your mind? I know you mentioned the one with the VC on the trail having their fun, (chortle) but any others that stick out in your mind that you can possibly talk about?

JM: We had one that typically, the spotters would be up in the air and sometimes you would see, they would see men in the open and they would pretty much determine that they had guns, they'd site them visually with binoculars. We had a couple, ones where we had a—I don't know what the vehicle was. It was a jeep-like vehicle, it may have been a stolen U.S jeep that was going down a road. The fire team got all excited. So

instead of a target that's moving, oh, at three miles an hour as someone would when they walk, we had something moving about twenty miles an hour down a road. And so, we got on that right away. We chased—we had about three shells. One—the first spot came in after or behind the guy on the road, whatever road this was. The road wasn't straight and the next shell—next spot was to the right and the third shell was in front, and the fourth shell was right on him. But here's this guy driving down the road as fast as he could. The road was no straight and so we are getting these spots. You'd normally get fire coordinates on a map, and you'd shoot, and they'd say, "Up 100, right 50." Up 100 yards and then right. Our—then he'd hone right in. But our spots were "Up 200, left 75, Up 100, right 25". It was really big spots so that was sort of fun. We'd always—so that was one. The second one we had a mission where there was a firefight going on and the spotter came on. He was pretty excited. These spotters would be different. The spotters would be the same person for a mission, but they may have rotated, taken turns. Or they certainly may have been rotated out of the area completely. So, you certainly got to know a spotter. If they stayed up you knew his southern drawl or you knew his Yankee twang, but different ones have different cadence. We had one that came up and he was all excited. Evidently there was a firefight going on and basically, we had to put down three or four rounds a spot and then we had something like 30 rounds fire for effect. Which means you basically take both guns and shoot fifteen shells a minute. So, for thirty rounds that would be pretty much shooting pretty fast, both guns for—until you get your thirty rounds out. I remember that and apparently—well, it was successful because we'd always get a body count afterwards. KIA (Killed-in-Action) and we kept sort of a hash mark in the gun plot. You don't have much to do there when you're out to sea like that. We kept score, if you will. So that was one mission that I remember. Most of them were probably three spots and then five rounds or ten rounds and that would pretty much do what the spotter wanted to have done. When you have a fifty-eight-pound shell exploding over your head, at a range of about probably, oh, stream range maybe 100 yards for the shrapnel. So, you put five rounds, ten rounds in a tight cluster and it's all a-double-common (AAC). You're going to pretty much shred anything that is organic matter, soft or even medium hard organic matter around. So, nothing much was left of the target when we fired into it. There's a story of the *New Jersey* (BB-62). There's an island that I

don't have the name, it was immediately north of the DMZ. (Editor's Note: Speaker is most likely referring to the island of *Cồn Cỏ*) the *New Jersey*—the tour when we came back the first time this happened, I believe, timing wise when the *New Jersey* was doing gunfire support at the DMZ, and they could shoot twenty/ twenty-four miles. We shot nine miles. And some North Vietnamese battery opened fired on it that was from an island in North Vietnamese waters. The story goes, the *New Jersey* changed its target from what it was shooting at to the island and spent all day shooting at the island. The Navy map people, the chart people had to re-chart the island because it was all blown away. The mountains were not there, it was so dramatic that the island, which had been used for Navigation purposes was altered in that chart people had to basically relook at it and change the charts. You didn't want to mess with a battleship and certainly, in a smaller sense (his destroyer) we were pretty effective as a gun platform also. We always got a kick. Every once in a while, the Army would come out to see us. They were curious. We had one Huey land on our deck, our flight deck. Now these guys, we thought we were in really calm water. It was nothing going on. These guys got out and had bandoleers of ammo, they've got hand grenades hanging off, they got their rifle and in about three minutes, they're all seasick. It was just sort of—it was amusing to us because it was just sort of hardly any perceptible movement of the ship. It was really quite severe for them. Which is interesting because if you go to sea, you'll probably get your sea legs in about three days. If you got seasick you would probably be over that in a day and a half. Everyone, by the way, had a motion they would get sick in. It's just whatever your inner—how your inner ear works. But I had a situation that's very common. When you've been at sea for a month/month-and-a-half especially if it was fairly rocky, you would come on land and you'd start staging around because your inner ear, your body's telling you to adjust for a moving deck and the deck's not moving because the pier doesn't move. So, it was relatively common and happened to me once or twice to have a reverse. If you get off the ship and you're staggering around because the ground's not moving like the ship's deck normally would. For the reverse, it was fairly easy to adjust to land maybe after a half hour or so. So, back to your questions.

JS: Okay, well that's pretty much the questions I had. Did you want to move on onto Typhoon Joan now?

JM: Sure, I wanted to do a couple things to note that I didn't—by the way, is this going to be—is this interview going to be written up in some more coherent form than I'm giving you?

JS: Oh, well it will be transcribed basically verbatim as—we edit it to take out mistakes and things, but as far as speaking it's what is said.

JM: Okay, well let me go over a couple of things and I'll go into Typhoon Joan which is one of the highlights. And something that we who were on the ship won't forget. One of the things that you answer for morale of the crew, and I thought about that last night. I thought about—I think we all had pretty good morale. We were there to do a job. We weren't pleased to be away, especially married people or people that had sweethearts were not pleased to be away from them. Everyone pretty much was in this little community, 340ish men on this 390-foot ship. You get used to it, develop your own routine. Different personalities come out. Most of the guys were extremely sociable, and malleable and melded together. We had—really guys of all races and I guess creeds. We didn't wear religion on our sleeves. We really worked together and being effective together. We had notable personalities and certainly the chiefs had personalities. Some of the Bosin mates were colorful and my department was interesting. I still remember the guy named, Duck, D-U-C-K, Bosin mate Duck second class—It might have been first class. We had a real smart mouth seaman who had been a perpetual problem evidently. He was sent to the mess decks, that's where the crew ate, and he was in the cleaning detail. Duck was the really ramrod straight, built like a brick; had a great physique. Evidently the seaman mouthed off to Duck when, Duck said to swab that deck and that over there. The seaman mouthed off, so Duck picked him up and put his hand under the guy's jaw and picked him up off the floor and banged his head against the bulkhead, "You will swab the deck as I tell you to." And then let him down with one hand. We learned on the ship as officers that sometimes you would let the senior enlisted take care of bad-news-guys that way and it worked out just well. Duck was quite effective that way. We also had a guy who was—really my first experience, was a Captain Queeg like man. He was a department head, my department head from the academy, a brilliant man. Extremely smart, but he had just abysmal people skills, he was a screamer. In the Navy, there's a term called "screamer" and those are people who basically liked to get into

someone's face and yell at them at the top of their lungs. Either makes them feel good or they get results from it. My department head was a guy like that, and he was not liked by—people admired him for his abilities, but the crew especially did not like him for his personality. I found out seven years after leaving the ship when I was at the Great Lakes (Naval Training Station), met one of my officer buddies had reserves and evidently that on the first tour, when we were going to go to Hong Kong, the deck division had collected money to give him a one-way sampan ride. I suspect that that would have happened had we not gotten into a storm, the typhoon (Joan) and not gone to Hong Kong. That was just interesting, this guy had mid-watches which would be between midnight and four in the morning. He would get mad at something and call you at three in the morning and want to know an answer to something. You may have just gotten off watch and in deep sleep and it was annoying to have that type of experience. I talked also yesterday about water, water hours and how that was real important, especially if you were at sea in hot weather. One of the things I didn't mention was "bug juice". Bug juice was the term for the mess-decks and in the wardroom for Kool-Aid. Basically, the water we made was usually marginal in the sense that it tasted like oil. So, what the cooks would do is they would put Kool-Aid like flavoring in the water so it would disguise that. So, you had green bug juice—we mostly had red bug juice. I don't know how the term came up, but it was quite—you just drink it for the water, you didn't drink it for the flavor. Also, we talked about the different duties assigned to the destroyers when they were in the operating area, the AOA. (Editor's Note: Referred to as the Area of Amphibious Operations, AOA) One was Yankee Station, and the other one was gunfire lines which we just talked about a few minutes ago. In Yankee Station, one of the things officers of the deck, especially junior officers, we had a signal-book. A signal-book would be a combination of—you had a standing signal-book, and you'd have a special code wheel. We'd call them "whiz wheels" that were changed daily. A whiz wheel was a round plastic ring and on a daily basis at a certain time, put a paper on the bottom of the whiz wheel so that you'd have a different array of outside letters and inside letters in two concentric circles. You would—especially—when you were talking to spotters, people on the ground, you would get a call for fire, and you'd ask for authentication. You would say, "I set the authentication, I sent Alpha—numera—Alpha Romeo." The other side put

their whiz wheel, their opening on Alpha November or whatever I just said and then call out whatever the wheel said in the other opening. We had a couple times where the VC or NVA would try to get us to call fire on our own troops. So, they'd come up on the circuit and they'd find the circuit, the radio circuit and say, "Call for fire." They'd say "Battering Ram" was our call sign. "Battering Ram this is Red Fox (an Army spotter's call sign). I request fire mission." And then the ship would come back, "Red Fox, this is Battering Ram, request authentication. I set Alpha November." And you'd expect them to come back, and they'd be silent. One of the things that officers learned, though, we always were afraid of on the Yankee Station is we were hanging around the bird farms, the carriers which were high priority targets. We knew that—we knew our little world which was pretty much what we could see. We would read *Armed Forces Network News* as it came out, which would be a week older. Something like that or something would come off over the radio. We never knew what was going on with the Soviets. The Soviets would sometimes have a missile cruiser nearby especially in the Sea of Japan and we always thought, "Well, this is not good." There was a command, I can't remember what it was, in the standard code book which was a NATO code book that was basically to destroyer's—to escorts. Sent to your electronic gear. We had electronic countermeasure gear to blip-enhance and proceed at this speed at this course. Which means, you pretend you're the carrier and go away from me while I shut down all my electronic gear and tried to hide. That meant there was an incoming raid on the carrier. We always were alert for that blip-enhance command. We always had that memorized. We never heard it, fortunately. One of the things going to—I want to talk about Typhoon Joan, which was quite extraordinary and, unless you have questions, talk about really some of the liberty ports we went to, and what they were like and what people did.

JS: Okay, sure.

JM: Typhoon Joan was a 1970 typhoon that surprised the 7th fleet and certainly us. The ship, the *Agerholm*, been on plane guard duty in Tonkin Gulf. And we were released to go to Hong Kong for, I think, five days R&R. These ships would rotate out of Hong Kong. That was really the favorite—one of the favorite R&R places. There was a station ship assignment that was two weeks. Ships would normally get three days to five days and I came up very quickly with my experience with Hong Kong over my years in

the Navy that you run out of money in Hong Kong in three days no matter how much you begin with, in three days. So, it was one of those three-day ports. Most of the ports were five days. Hong-Kong was a three-day port. We proceeded north going around Hainan Island and the weather barometer went down, and the waves came up. As a side note, one of my reserve buddies told me oh, must have been 15 years later he was at Fleet Weather Center in Guam at the time, but they had miss plotted by five hundred miles, where the typhoon was.

JS: Oh wow. How'd that happen?

JM: We thought this typhoon was ways-away and there was no problem. Basically, as we were going—if you have a mind's eye view, we were going from the Gulf of Tonkin, up around Hainan Island to Hong Kong. This typhoon was heading towards the mainland, and it got between us—it put us between the land and the ocean. We couldn't maneuver away from—couldn't turn east to get away so we had to go south and go through the waves. Anyway, the first day transit was fine, the second day the waves and wind started coming up by night of the third day. We were into seas that would probably—we had water going over the bridge. Green-Water over the bridge. We eventually had to turn and while we were trying to do this, the water basically we had waves over the first stack. Bring water down the stack. So, the ship was going down and burying itself to where the top of the mount was visible, and it would come up to where really, I imagine quite a bit of the red lead below the water line was visible. We were all by ourselves, of course. You couldn't sleep. You had to tie—I was in the four-broom closet, as I mentioned that was a really small officer's quarters and you had to tie yourself to the bed because you would be—when you went up you'd be thrown up so you'd really lose about a third of your weight and then you'd go down and have about half of a G as you come back up. One of the waves came and hit the ship and I was just getting ready to go on watch. I was—I had just put on my shoes and all of a sudden, I was hurled. I was sitting on my bottom bunk and was hurled. The ship took a port heel and we went up to get up to about fifty-eight degrees I was told later. And the capsize point was forty-five or forty-eight degrees.

JS: Oh wow.

JM: So, I was basically thrown through the entrance to our state room, and I was standing on the bulkhead on the opposite of this door. It was actually a curtain. I looked up and there was my bunk, probably oh, at forty-five/fifty-five/fifty-eight degrees above me. All of a sudden, I had a Big Ben clock I had purchased in San Diego to help me set alarm to get awake for watches and things like that. I had it taped to the bulkhead. All of a sudden, the thing, it's about a one-pound clock, it's a big metal clock, comes spinning by my head and it hits the bulkhead I'm standing on and it missed me by about two or three inches and just breaks into all these little pieces. Fortunately for the ship, instead of capsizing (sound of a clap, or smack) another wave came on the other side and pushed us back. Oh, it was quite something. When the morning came first, we had these huge monstrous waves. It was like one of the Scandinavian maelstrom's myths. If you remember about Vikings and the maelstrom which is somewhere; a whirlpool that sucks ships and things into the sea. There were waves, at least to the height of our radar, 100-foot waves. Again, we had this three-hundred-and-ninety-foot ship. We were surfing down these waves. The waves would come underneath us. We'd turn around and the stern would lift up and we would start going down these waves and we'd start to gain speed faster than the rudder would hold. So, all of a sudden, we'd lose control of the ship. The challenge was you come down at the base of the wave and then the next wave comes. The challenge that the wind would take in and try to put the ship sideways. If we turned sideways, the next wave would roll over the ship, broach it and turn us over. So, we eventually had to turn—we had to turn the ship and Captain Taylor, who I had mentioned yesterday, a phenomenal ship handler. Basically, found the right time and turned the ship. So basically, instead of stern to the waves, we were bound to the waves. So that was the harder ride, but it was safer. So, the wind was howling, and it was just screaming. You could barely hear yourself and you're standing on the bridge, and you'd look out one wing and you'd see water. We'd do a rock, and then you'd look out the other wing and see, when you come on the other side, see the water. It was just quite something. We lost all communications. We lost a life raft; we lost all the radio antennae. We lost contact and they started setting out planes for us. We did not—they told everyone to stay off the main decks because we would have lost people. We had a couple waves come, and we had a big reel that the mooring lines were on that were welded to the deck. A couple waves

took the mooring line reels and ripped them off and left three-inch square holes in the deck and it started to flood out after steering. So right when we're trying to do these maneuvering, all of a sudden, we'd lose power steering. We'd have electrical fires in after steering and the damage control people had to go down and put out the fire and re-fix the electricity and plug the hole. So, here's these people after steering, steering the ship with big cranks that are going up and down as I mentioned. Rocking back and forth excessively and it was quite hairy.

JS: Sounds like it.

JM: So, then we're all ahead two thirds on one engine, one third on the other trying to stay into the wind. All of a sudden, the water starts showing which means the water becomes shallower. Pretty soon we started getting some—well the radar, the surface radar started getting some blips that did not look like waves. You had blips all over because these waves were one hundred feet up, you'd have them all over. They'd be reflecting radar transmissions. It turns out we were going through the Paracel Island chain. We were driven by the storm. We couldn't really maneuver because we were actually driven between two islands that the charts had twenty-three, twenty-five feet of water. We displaced on our sonar dome, twenty-eight feet of water. So, we went through these two islands probably a mile apart. It was just luck; it was just God's grace. We went through and because the storm had raised the water level, we didn't hit any rocks. So, we finally get—this is about a day-and-a-half and everyone's—first of all, you're bruised. You go down the passageway and the ship wouldn't rock; it would throw you violently. So, what you would do is you would have a handhold, and you'd look for your next one and in the middle of a roll you would walk quickly to the next one and hold yourself. Because we had power problems, again we had an old destroyer, we had battle lanterns on at night and the daytime was just low light. It was not clear at all. We had picked up—when we were on the gun line prior to Yankee Station, two South Vietnamese naval cadets, they were Bang and Chow. So, they've been on board about two months and I guess were looking forward to going to Hong Kong with us. I get them mixed up. I think Bang was the CIC officer and Chow was an engineering officer. Bang thought he didn't like to go into combat because he thought the radio circuits, he thought there were spirits in the CIC. Chow didn't like to go down where the boilers were because it was hot, and

said officers don't go down where it's hot. And so, we were beginning to wonder if these are our allies. What was going to happen out of Vietnamization. Anyway, Bang and Chow were in after officers. After a day they got hungry and the ship didn't serve in the storm, hot meals because the cooks would be scolded by any water thrown off of the stove, or any hot skillets or pans or whatever. So, we had cold cuts, basically bologna, cheese, stuff like that, frozen bread. One of my favorite memories of the storm—we thought we were always going to live forever. I'll tell you that I always thought—and the guys around me, that we were going to live forever. We were at the height of our youth. We were with a bunch of guys we liked; we had all this fun stuff we could do. We did what we were told, but we thought we were going to live forever. Anyway, I'm getting ready to go on mid-watch and I think it may have been ten o'clock watch. It's either nine o'clock at night or eleven o' clock at night and they're —I think it was probably eleven o'clock/11:15 at night. In the state room, the state room was probably about thirty feet wide and had a linoleum floor. And in the general quarters where we had sort of a sick bay or basic ward that did rudimentary operations. The Stuarts had set up on a buffet, up on the cabinets going crossways to the ship's length, bread they had unfrozen. They had a five gallon can of mayonnaise because they didn't have anything smaller. We had cheese and cold cuts. There's no lights other than these low-light battle-lanterns, because we had trouble with the electricity and the ongoing watch wanted to keep its night vision and were fixing our sandwiches. All of a sudden, a wave comes and knocks the five gallon can of mayonnaise on the deck. Makes it as slick as ice. And we can't hold onto anything until the ship goes Port. We slide by the sandwiches and then we go Starboard, and we fly another way. So, there were about five of us, so we were all sliding in unison. About this time Bang or Chow, I don't know which one, came in and he sees this, and he's sort of against the corner. We had a good time because we were screaming and laughing because we didn't have any sleep for a day and a half. "Pass the bologna or put mustard on your bread." And then about the same time, a huge mahogany cabinet that had been used and put together from a former or previous wardroom that had our TV and stereo system, that comes unbolted from the bulkhead. And so, water starts coming in with the wave and mixes with the mayonnaise, but this big thing that probably weighed at least three or four hundred pounds that was made in the Philippines starts chasing us.

Basically, slides on the floor like we were, but we realized quickly it went at the same speed we did. So basically, when it was going away from us, we'd get our bread and fixings, but when it was coming towards us, we had to jump up on one of these couches that had a built-in metal base that was used as an operating table and the big thing would crash against us. We were whooping and hollering and sort of crazy fun. It evidently scared the bejesus out of these Vietnamese guys. When they did the debrief to the US, when they left the ship they thought—they enjoyed the time there with us, but they thought American officers were crazy. They used the example of the wardroom and this "sliding dinner" and thinking it was funny and fun was a "spirit in the big cabinet was trying to kill them." You had to be there to really appreciate it, but it was just nuts and extreme. We finally cleared the storm, and we pulled into Subic Bay, probably in the storm one and a half, two days. One of the guys, as soon as we put the gang way over and people going back for it, one of the guys comes out and kisses the ground. It was really quite something. It turns out there were major cracks in the hole that we thought were going to be in the base for three to four days. It turns out that we were in for about a month and a half. The ship was old, as I said. We had major cracks in the hull that had to be re-welded. We had one of the stacks that was weakened and that had to be reinforced— it just really wrecked ship. So, Typhoon Joan is something that I will always remember, and it was really a fun time as I look back. So that's Typhoon Joan. Any questions?

JS: Just one. Was anyone injured as a result of it?

JM: No one had major injuries. Everyone had bruises. Any piece of equipment that was not secured—initially, when we got into the storm, if your things bang around like a pump would break loose or a portable generator would break loose and you heard banging around and the guys are rushing out and tying it down, but after a while, the things banging around broke up and then all the little pieces broke up into further smaller pieces. It was just that violent a storm.

JS: Right, right. Alright, well I guess that's the only question I have.

JM: Okay, I wanted to go over just probably just what one of the things if you're in the Navy, unlike the Army and Air Force, you go to different ports when you're going with your ship from gun line or from Yankee Station. We really enjoyed—the primary

one we went to was Subic Bay in the Philippines which was the largest naval base outside the continental US It was almost as large as San Diego. There were sometimes seven to ten thousand men that would come through that base, that naval station on a three-day carrier in a Marine amphibious ready group and you'd have seven to ten thousand men. which was the base outside Olongapo, which was the town outside the base was probably as wild as Dodge City was at the height of the cattle drive. You had armed guards, people with rifles at the entrance of all these bars. Everyone had a favorite bar. It was either the Zanzibar Club, the Jolo Club, the New Jolo Club, Texas Bar, and East End Supper Club. It was interesting what different guys like to go to different places. Some were pleasant, many of them were low—I'll call them low class, if you will. What was interesting is, some of them—they always had fairly good bands. One of the things that happened probably because of the American involvement with the Philippines is the Filipinos, up until recently—and I don't have experience with the last three years, are really the best rock and roll. They played rock and roll real well where the Chinese and Japanese did not. So, there was one bar, it was the Zanzibar Club that always had Janis Joplin imitators, and they were actually pretty good. So, Subic Bay was quite a place, and you would have just wild times. One of my yeomen, his name was Myose, M-Y-O-S-E. He was a Japanese-American. He refused to go ashore. I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I'm Japanese-American." He was afraid for his life because of what happened in World War II. So, Subic is legendary. Go on the internet and find out about the revelries. Anything off limits was dangerous. Two of my guys came back once and they were as white as a sheet. They were off in Subic City which was off limits. They were at a bar and the guard came in with a pistol and blew the back of the head of the man next to them, a Filipino that blew it out with a pistol right next to him. They basically said they were never going to go to Subic City again and I don't blame them. Um, one of the experiences too, getting into the monsoons. When it rained you couldn't see fifty feet or maybe you could see a hundred feet. All your clothes were wet, moist. It wasn't as bad as the Army or the Marines in Vietnam, certainly, but when you put on wet underwear in the morning, using your body heat to dry it out was really a treat. You had your shoes, and your shoes would rot out. Basically, you'd get mildew and you shoes would just fall apart. So, shoes would last probably six months or so and then you would have to replace

them. We've had a pair of dress shoes for uniforms, dress shoes. My work shoes would only last six months or so before they would literally just fall apart. That's pretty much what I wanted to say to you other than the following—I guess following the next tour after we got the storm, the ship was assigned station ship at Hong Kong to sort of compensate for not making it the first part of the year and without getting sunk. That was quite an experience. We were in the harbor and stationed there two weeks and we all ran out of money. We spent time in the Wan Chai District which is "Susie Wong town" if you remember the movie. And just quite experiences there. Everyone had a favorite bar my group had the Pussy Cat Bar. I almost got married there once to Julie Chow—she was really a cute girl. We were drinking one night and getting ready to go back to the ship and you'd have these bar girls asking you to buy them drinks. Of course, they got commissions off the drinks. This one girl said, "Buy me a drink." I said, "No, I can't because my girlfriend's here" She said, "What's your girlfriend's name?" I turned to my buddy, Dean Whitehead. I said, "What's my girl's name?" He turned to the lady badgering him and told me, "Julie Chow." So, I said my girlfriend was Julie Chow. About three minutes later I get a tap on my shoulder and there's this really cute little Chinese girl with a beaming smile said, "Hi, I'm Julie Chow." And so, these guys, we would come back, and Mamma-San and Julie Chow would be there so one night we were really blotto, and it was toward the end of the two weeks and Dean Kanoof and Whitehead. All of a sudden, they start bartering with Mamma-San, who ran the operating manager of the bar. Mamma-Sans always ran the place. (??) to get married, for her to be my bride. These guys were—we weren't serious, but they were, and fortunately I found a way to make sure we had didn't have enough ducks in the dowry. I went back fifteen years later. One of my cruises, and saw Momma-Son, and Julie married a lawyer, lives in Kowloon, very happy. It's just really interesting to have that type of thing happen. After the second tour I requested in-country Vietnam, I liked shooting. It was winding down, so they needed a Fleet Training Group in Guantanamo. A Fleet Training Group basically was the Atlantic Fleet's training ground for all the new construction ships as well as ships that were coming out of the yard. So, I was able to live in Guantanamo for a year and I got to do even more shooting in Guantanamo, but I didn't have to do any of the paperwork. I would take ships out in the morning at seven and we'd go shoot two

hundred, three hundred rounds and then come back and I'd go ashore, I'd grade them and go ashore. It was really great. So, I spent a year in GTMO had a lot of fun there. Met people who still are my friends, both schoolteachers, civilians, as well as two Marines who lived by me in Sothern California. So, Jason, that is about it.

JS: Okay, well I still have a few questions for you.

JM: Oh, please ask.

JS: Okay one, I meant to ask you a little earlier when you were talking about the typhoon about the Vietnamese that were on board. What were they doing there? Why were they on board?

JM: Let's call it an on-the-job training program for the naval officers. They've been through classroom school. I don't know if they'd been on any ships yet. The Navy was in the process of turning over small ships, patrol craft and things like that to them and so this was an on-the-job training program on a US destroyer. The theory was they would be assigned to an officer in their specialty; an operations officer in terms of combat or engineering officer in terms of the boilers in the engine room and learn how things were done, but my sense is they—well they had a different culture, they had different priorities. We were there very Anglo-wise, factual black and white get things done. They were probably looking over their shoulders and thinking how long their government would last and what to do if it didn't. Which was probably smarter than we were. But they were there for training.

JS: Next question I had for you, how long did you end up staying in the Navy?

JM: Well, I stayed in almost three years. I got an early out. It's interesting, when Vietnam—well, when I was in Cuba and Vietnam was shutting down rapidly, this was in '72 and I get a message saying I was going to get a six month early-out, beginning in two weeks. This was like December 1st or 2nd. I had a reserve commission, and a reserve commission serves at the pleasure of congress and the regular commission serves at the pleasure of the president. That means there is more job security. So, I got an early out and I had a three-year active, three-year reserve commitment from my ROTC scholarship and commission. So, I went into the reserves and stayed in the reserves up until, oh what was it, for another twenty-two years. I stayed in the reserves for two major reasons. One is I enjoyed the guys—When I came out, I went into the University of Wisconsin which was

a liberal place at the time. I had a hard time adjusting to being called a baby-killer and some of the crazy liberal things going on, so I naturally had fun talking sea-stories with my Navy buddies. They fell into a group in San Diego and moved out West back to San Diego who were just a lot of fun to be with and it was sort of like my Rotary or my Kiwanis Club. That was the first reason. The second is, in the late '70s, the Soviets were aggressively expanding in the world when they had detected correctly that Jimmy Carter didn't know what the hell he was doing. Jimmy was surprised, he admitted they had invaded Afghanistan, for example. I thought there was a 30 percent chance of a war with the Soviets. There was a lot of theoretical discussion, actually white papers written by the naval war college. About if you have a nuclear war at sea, nuclear exchange at sea and not have it extend to the mainland of the two countries. There was time that I thought that the Soviets—we'd get in a shooting war with the Soviets because of our weakness. And then when Regan came in and started building up (the military). There was a period of time that the Soviets were looking at a gap that would soon close, and America would rearm and there was another period that we could have gone to war. I stayed in for a total of 25 years in the active and reserve. 27 if you count my ROTC time because I was under government orders. I retired as a captain an O-6, and I look back at it was one of the best things that's ever happened in my life, not all good things. The typhoon was bad, some of my work conditions were not always good, some of my supervisors—superiors were not good, but I just had a glorious time and am proud to been able to serve my country.

JS: Right after you left active duty and went on reserve, did you continue to follow developments in Vietnam?

JM: I did, and I was concerned about it. Clearly Congress was being Congress, and the Watergate Crisis and Nixon's resignation really ended any commitment we had made to the South Vietnamese. The north figured that out and they attacked—when they invaded with regular troops and overran the South Vietnamese Army, and the state collapsed. I was just sick, and I was in a funk for about a year for the people who had fought for their country, for the people who had assumed we would honor our word as America. I was just stunned with just the hutzpah of the North Vietnamese to do the invasion. My cousin, two-and-a-half years older than I am, married a Vietnamese woman and they now live in Twin Falls, Idaho, where we grew up. She detests the communists.

When she goes back, she goes back like every couple of years, and they have secret police following her and trying to get her to give them money for a bribe. I always, from my colleagues at Ernst & Young where I was partner would say, "Oh, we're going to go to Vietnam and travel there." I would just say, "You can go there. Don't send me a postcard." So, I did follow, and I am disappointed with what we did as a country and distressed with people who made their sacrifice for their nation. It was not our finest moment.

JS: Alright, well to wrap up the interview, if I don't mind, could I ask you some of those questions that touch on some of the broader issues surrounding the war?

JM: Yes.

JS: Okay first, looking back on your experiences and the way things turned out in Vietnam, how do you feel about American involvement in Vietnam? Do you think we should have been involved? And also, how do you feel about your own involvement?

JM: Let me take the last question first because it's easiest. I wanted to be in the Navy from my grade school, from the fifth grade on. I really wanted to be in the Navy, I liked ships I thought I'd like the sea. That turned out to be the case. It was different than I expected it to be, but by-and-large it was better. I was glad I was in the Navy and I'm glad I went to Vietnam because it gave me the experience that I've been able to use in my life. I grew up. I came back—after my first deployment I went back to the University of Idaho in my fraternity and I'd only been gone for eight months, let's say, like everyone else were small children. Even guys just a year younger than me. So, I grew a lot and having to deal with all the things I've mentioned to you in these hours we talked. So, for me it was good. I am proud to have answered the call for Vietnam service. I could have equally been happy to be in the Atlantic, but frankly I'm glad I went to the Pacific because I saw more places and I got more action. I'm sort of an action guy. That's my answer for the Vietnam portion. The country, I believe that Americans need to understand that countries play on a chess board, they play a game as fortunes rise and fall, economies move in and out of cycles. I believe that at the time, it probably made sense for us to be involved. Clearly, the North Vietnamese had an intention of forcibly taking the country, which they did. What I did not like what the timidity of the US Government, of our president to close Hai Phong. It made no sense to me when I was

there in Vietnam and later to allow the Soviets to resupply North Vietnams Army through Hai Phong. Clearly the peace settlement did not happen until we mined Hai Phong. I just think we prosecuted the war in a foolish manner, and I think that McNamara is one of the biggest criminals of our time, of my time. He will have to—the Lord will forgive him because that is, if he asks for it. But I think he is one of the biggest tragedies of this war. In his book when he said he knew two years-ish before the war ended that it was unwinnable the way it was prosecuted, but he stayed in doing it for political reasons. I think that is a tragedy, I think that is a horrific disservice to the men and women who came after he made that conclusion and served and died or were harmed. That's my opinion. I hope that helped it clear.

JS: Yes, sir. Next question you mentioned coming into some of the people on the left and their take on it. They're referring to Vietnam veterans as "baby killers" and such. Did you have much interaction yourself? Also, what was your take on the war protest movement?

JM: Well, the first encounter I had was in Seattle and we were up on a visit in-between deployment. Somebody spat at me and called me a baby killer and I said, "What do you mean I'm a baby killer?" We didn't have any conversation because they ran away, but that was the first time that I had—I had read about it (the protests) because we had Time Magazine on the ship. We'd get it about a month or a month and a half after they published it. It just struck me that they were against the war for a couple reasons. One was certainly policy reasons which everyone can have a disagreement in policy. Also, there were people who were afraid of being drafted and I could appreciate that. There were also people who were using the war as a lightning rod for their political beliefs that went beyond the Vietnam War that went into maybe civil rights, went into "economic justice". The Vietnam War was just a convenient way or a very effective way to protest against what they didn't like, the structure they didn't like. We didn't talk about it much on the ship. In the wardroom you don't talk by policy. You don't talk about sex, religion, and you don't talk about politics. I would have to believe that the chiefs and the officers were certainly patriotic, certainly believed what they were doing was right and they did it. I had people in my division—FTG-3 Weed, he was the one who argued with me that Vietnam was wrong, and I would finally say to him, "I don't care what you think. You

just have to do your duty here while you're in the Navy and if you're done and want to leave, go ahead." But clearly, it was a controversy, and I would tell you after I saw Bang and Chow, maybe wonder if South Vietnam was going to be able to stand on its own. These two guys, the future naval officers, their Navy was going to be awfully weak. So that was that. I mean, does that cover what you wanted?

JS: Yeah, absolutely. One other question, I know you mentioned having no desire to go back to Vietnam, to go back over there. What do you think about this developing American policy towards Vietnam and establishing a relationship with them and trade and a lot of Vietnam veterans going back in tourism? What's your opinion of all of that?

JM: I think if individuals want to go back to see the important places in their life, emotional places in their life, that's their individual decision, I'm all for it if that's what they want to do. Like I said, my cousin's married a woman named Phong, they have a number of children. One of them is a major in Army Special Forces, another one is a Navy lieutenant flying helicopter of a DDG (Guided Missile Destroyer) in the Atlantic. She is a great person. They are a wonderful addition to our family so individually as people that's fine. I just have no desire to go back there, but I do see the rise of China as a challenge to America and I believe the people who think that this will be a peaceful rise of China. I believe they are naïve and don't read history. In that context, I believe the US has a strategic interest in developing relationships with the Vietnamese who, by-and-large, have suspicions and concerns with China themselves. Strategically I would support an improved relationship with Vietnam.

JS: Well, is there anything else we should cover? Anything else you'd like to say before wrapping the interview up?

JM: I'd like to thank you for your patience with me today and yesterday. I hope that my information will be of use to someone, sometime, somewhere in a project they have. I would again say that serving in Vietnam was not my intent, it just happened, but my time there, what I did, the experiences, the memories, I still see them clearly in my mind's eye. Formed me and helped make me who I am today. And so, I'm just glad I had this opportunity and that you were patient enough to keep me on your list.

JS: Oh, it's been my pleasure talking with you, sir, and I certainly appreciate you taking the time to do this and that you were still interested after all that time.