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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with James Chamberlain
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Aaron Kellerhals**

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

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1 KC: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History interview with Mr. James
2 Chamberlain. Today is 15 February 2011. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of
3 Texas Tech University, and Mr. Chamberlain is joining me by telephone from his home
4 in South Bend, Indiana. Mr. Chamberlain, to begin this interview, I'd like to get some
5 biographical information if I could. Can you tell me when you were born and where?

6 JC: I was born February 27th, 1951, in South Bend, Indiana.

7 KC: February 27th, so you have a birthday coming up before long—

8 JC: Right, I'll be sixty years old.

9 KC: Very good, very good. What were your parents' names?

10 JC: My dad was Orville Chamberlain, and Margaret Chamberlain is my mom.

11 KC: What did they do for a living?

12 JC: My mom was a stay-at-home mom, and my dad was air-conditioning and
13 refrigeration man. He worked for Kroger's. It's a grocery store. I'm not sure if Texas has
14 them or not but he was a maintenance man for that and he also did work on the side and
15 people—fixing their air-conditioning and refrigeration.

16 KC: By the way we do have Kroger's here in Texas.

17 JC: Okay. I didn't know.

1 KC: But not out in West Texas, but in other parts of the state. Did you have any
2 brothers or sisters?

3 JC: Yeah, I had an older brother, and I had younger brother. My older brother's
4 name was Ron, and my younger brother's name is Dennis.

5 KC: Now, what was life like for you growing up there in Indiana? What sort of
6 things did you like to do as a child? What sort of memories come back when you think of
7 your childhood there?

8 JC: Well, I grew up—which they call the baby boomer generation—and my dad
9 served in World War II. He landed on Anzio Beach, and I would listen to him and his
10 friends talk about the War, and I mean he had friends that served in Korea. He had
11 friends that served in World War II. My uncle—he was with the Marines—he landed
12 with the Marines in Guadalcanal during World War II, and it was his one and only
13 landing because he got hurt severely and spent the next three-and-a-half years in the
14 hospital. My other uncle was in the Navy. He landed—he was with the Navy, and he had
15 LST [Landing Ship, Tank] that landed the tanks for the Marines on Iwo Jima and got to
16 see the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima. So, it was one of those things that it was sort of
17 burnt into you that you're a male, you serve your country, and after I graduated high
18 school, I did.

19 KC: So, that sounds like it was a pretty strong influence on your decision to join
20 the Marine Corps when you did. This military family influence. What about school?
21 Where did you go to school? And how did you do?

22 JC: I went to school in South Bend Indiana called LaSalle High School, graduated
23 in 1969. How I did? I could have done better, but it was one of those things that I worked
24 part-time at a—well, Kroger, and I just was more concerned of getting out of school
25 because I never really cared too much for school because if you were a jock, you had it
26 made or, believe it or not, if you were a big drinker, you had it made and I did neither
27 one. I just worked and went to school, and that's about it.

28 KC: Interesting. Growing up when you did, with the types of military influence in
29 your life, were you aware—would you consider yourself very aware of larger global
30 issues, the Cold War and the particular events in the Cold War?

1 JC: Not so much the Cold War but the Vietnam War was on the news every night
2 of every day of the week and stuff. So, yes, I was watching, and I would see pictures in
3 the paper where the Buddhists were burning themselves and things like that, but never
4 really thought much about it. Because heck I was a teenager and all you're concerned
5 about it just having a good time.

6 KC: Right, right sure. Did your parent's ever talk about the War? Say over
7 dinner? Like you mentioned, I mean this was a war that was literally in your living room
8 on television like never before. Was there any sort of family discussion or understanding
9 of the War?

10 JC: When it came—my dad was drafted into the Army okay? He graduated and he
11 says a month later he was in boot camp, and my dad just served and after he served his
12 time he got out and he'd never—he's one of the kind of people that never liked the
13 military, okay? So, he just was hoping that we didn't have to serve in the War itself,
14 that's all he saying, he says "I just hope you guys just don't have to go."

15 KC: Now did he ever talk to you about his personal experiences in the War?

16 JC: No, not until I came—when I came home on leave from boot camp, then my
17 dad started talking a little bit and then when I came home from Vietnam, he talked a lot
18 more. He explained things, like what he did, and in fact my mom and dad are still living,
19 and I can get more out of my dad about the War now than we did growing up. I learned a
20 lot, my dad was a combat engineer, and he says they would build bridges at nighttime, he
21 says that during the nighttime the Germans would blow them back up and he says it just
22 made him mad, and he just—never really talked a whole lot about it until like I say to
23 when I went because my older brother, he tried for the military and couldn't get in
24 because he was overweight, and he had high blood pressure. So, in my immediate family,
25 I was the first one to go in. So, I joined the Marines, actually April Fools of 1969 because
26 I went to Chicago for my physical and that's where we had to go. Then when I came
27 home and I just finished school and I graduated June 6th and July 1st of 1969, I was in
28 Marine Corps boot camping—err not "boot camping" but boot camp.

29 KC: Now you mention that your father was, I don't know about reluctant, but you
30 didn't hear much about your father's wartime experiences until you joined the Marine
31 Corps and especially after you got back from Vietnam. I've heard other Vietnam veterans

1 say this similar thing before as well, do you think that had something to do with the fact
2 that this understanding of war and of combat, it's not something that you can understand
3 or really grasp until you've seen it. Do you think that maybe why he was able to open up
4 to you and discuss these things because you now had a frame of reference?

5 JC: Yeah, I believe so. The only thing he ever told us when we were growing up,
6 was at the end of World War II he was driving a truck and he said he saw Mussolini, his
7 girlfriend, and I think his general, they were hanging. And the Italians were still throwing
8 stones at them. That's the only thing he ever talked about. He just said he got—and all he
9 would say is he got drafted into the Indiana National Guard. That's all he would say.

10 KC: Interesting. Now you made the decision to join the Marine Corps, being
11 aware of what was going on in Vietnam, and I would assume being somewhat aware of
12 the history and traditions of the Marine Corps, maybe you perhaps what they—what kind
13 of war they were fighting in Vietnam. Why did you choose the Marines?

14 JC: When I joined the Marines back then they had two, three, and four year
15 programs, so I enlisted for two years but there was—then my dad, he wanted me to go
16 into the Army, and he says, “You go talk to your uncle about the Marines and then we’ll
17 go for airshow.” I drove to my uncle’s house, and my uncle says, “Look I’m not going to
18 encourage you, you know or discourage you,” he says, “The Marines are tough, and it’s
19 going to be very hard.” And I just was—it just stuck in my mind thinking “Well, I want
20 to see if I can take the Marine Corps training.” That was one of the reasons, and then
21 there for a while my dad wouldn’t talk to me because I joined the Marines, he wanted me
22 to go into the Army.

23 KC: Was it a matter of just unit pride, or branch pride? Or was he upset that
24 knowing that the Marine Corps would likely be in—if you joined the Marine Corps,
25 you’d likely be in some, perhaps some uglier situations?

26 JC: That’s what I think it was. I think he knew if I joined the Marines that I would
27 be in Vietnam, and he thought that maybe I’d have a more likelier chance of being in
28 Vietnam. But by that time my cousin, he was already in Vietnam, and he was with the 1st
29 Infantry division, so he was in the thick of things too. My dad just wanted me to go in the
30 Army and get some kind of a trade, and he knew that I couldn’t get any kind of a trade in
31 the Marine Corps, except for being a rifleman and that’s what I was.

1 KC: All right now, describe for me what boot camp was like for you. I assume
2 this was Parris Island.

3 JC: No, actually back then I took the physical and everything in Chicago so—
4 which made me West of the Mississippi. So, they sent me off to San Diego while they
5 called us “Hollywood Marines.”

6 KC: “Hollywood Marines” notwithstanding, that title, tell me about boot camp
7 there at Camp Pendleton.

8 JC: Oh, man.

9 KC: Tell me—I mean from the second you get off the bus, tell me about that
10 experience.

11 JC: The second? We didn’t even get off the bus. We’re at the airport and there’s
12 this staff sergeant in dress blues yelling at us at the airport and all these people are
13 staring, looking at us and everything like that and they put us—they cram a bunch of us
14 on this tiny little bus and then we pull into boot camp, San Diego boot camp, and this
15 drill instructor jumps on the bus and he says, “You’ve got thirty seconds to get off my—”
16 well, I won’t go exactly what he say, “this f-ing bus, and ten seconds are gone already.”
17 And he kicked the first guy in the butt, and I was the last guy off and he kicked me in the
18 butt. They made us stand at attention with the footprints and read the UCMJ [United
19 States Code of Military Justice]. They’re standing there yelling at us and everything like
20 that, and I’m thinking, “Holy shit, what did I get myself into?” The first night was just
21 pure hell, that’s the only way I can put it. I mean they shaved our head; they gave us four
22 and a half minutes to shower and shave and get rid of our civilian stuff, we had to pack
23 up our civilian clothes, send that home, and then because there was in my—when we got
24 there, there wasn’t enough of us to form a platoon, so we had to wait until the next night
25 to get the rest of the guys to form the platoon. So, they kept us up all night, you know like
26 I said they’re trying to teach us how to march and everybody’s yelling at us because they
27 knew we’re raw recruits, and that first meal was the nastiest thing I ever ate. You know, a
28 cold, raw, greasy potatoes and eggs that were cold, it was just terrible. And I’m thinking
29 “Oh, man, how am I going to survive on this food?” In the meantime, they’re telling us,
30 “Oh, you’re not supposed to run when we’re marching,” and they got us running and they
31 literally beat us, they would hit us from the neck below, you know so if we bruised it

1 wouldn't show. But they would grab us by the throat and choke us and grab our eyeballs
2 and having to just totally PTSD'ed [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder] us everything, just
3 damn it was pure hell. But one thing about it is, once I graduated—man, that was one
4 thing I was very proud of because all the stuff that all of us went through. I made it.
5 That's what it was. I made it. So, I was proud.

6 KC: Did you, at the time, have an appreciation for what they were trying to do?
7 This effort to break down an individual and build him back up in the Marine Corps'
8 image if you will. Did you have an appreciation for that, or was it just a matter of
9 scrambling to survive these few weeks?

10 JC: It was a matter of scrambling to survive because back then, you know like
11 now they tell you to drink water and keep drinking and drinking and drinking then still
12 keep on drinking, well, back then it was they told you when to drink and they told you
13 when to go to the bathroom and all this stuff. You don't—I never realized it until I was in
14 Vietnam, and the thing is, is we were out of water, and we were setting up an ambush,
15 and I heard this water running in front of me and I'm thinking—man, I was dying of
16 thirst, and it was hot and humid at nighttime, and I was thinking, "Man, I just drink that
17 water," but I knew I was going to get sick and due to all the discipline in boot camp I
18 knew not to drink it and I didn't. Like I said, you realize later, "Oh, that's the reason why
19 they do that," and everything. I can remember the first words out of their—your mouth is,
20 "We'll make you or break you." And I saw a lot of guys break too.

21 KC: Well, tell me about that a little bit, what sort of things tended to end
22 someone's career in the Marine Corps if you will at that early stage? What drove them
23 out or washed them out?

24 JC: Some of them—you've heard of Hoppy's right? Some of them would drink
25 hoppys, some of them would slit their wrists, and some of them said they were gay just to
26 get out, saying they were homosexuals to get out. I mean, there's no way you can go over
27 the hill in San Diego, because you hop one fence, you're going to get hit by an airplane
28 coming in because you're right next to the San Diego Airport. You hop the fence another
29 way, you're in Navy boot camp, and then you hop the fence the other way then I think
30 it's Highway 5 that runs by it? So, there's no need of hopping the fence because you're

1 not going to go anywhere but a lot of guys would drink that hoppys and just do anything
2 they can to get out.

3 KC: Did any of this have to do with what may lay in store following the Marine
4 Corps? I'm sorry. Following boot camp, that Vietnam was looming, do you think that had
5 anything to do with it?

6 JC: No, I just think they couldn't take all the hollering and screaming, and PTing
7 [Physical Training]. Actually, the physical—the only way to put it is the physical and
8 mental abuse that they give you in boot camp back then, back in the '60s. One thing
9 about it too, I didn't realize it, but they shortened—when I went to boot camp—they
10 shortened it two weeks because they needed us quicker, to get trained and sent over to
11 Vietnam and we knew that we were eventually going to go. So, it was one of those things
12 that they hurried up, trained us, and sent us over.

13 KC: What was your daily routine there? Do you remember how it went from the
14 time you woke up to the time you went back to sleep?

15 JC: Yeah, they woke you up and you did a little physical fitness, then you ran like
16 two to three miles, you come back and then they call it “raking the grass” but there was
17 no grass, it was dirt, and they made us rake straight lines in front of our barracks, and
18 clean up our barracks, make our bunks and everything then we'd go to chow, and after
19 chow we would go to some classes, and at ten o'clock we're back on the drill deck doing
20 more PT and running and everything, we'd run another two or three miles then, and then
21 we'd eat lunch, and then in the afternoon would have some classes and then about two
22 o'clock we're back on the PT field, doing more PT and we'd run about three miles or so,
23 and then after that we'd eat supper and then in the evening we'd do some more PT and
24 there we'd run anywhere from three to five miles at nighttime, then we'd polish our
25 boots, get everything ready and shower, and pass out because your just tired from the
26 whole day of PTing.

27 KC: What sort of classes were you taking?

28 JC: Well, some of it was like first aid, some of it was like hand-to-hand combat
29 with bayonet training, of course, the history of the Marine Corps, let's see—that's the
30 ones that come to mind because towards the end of boot camp you're going to take a

1 written and practical exam and all that stuff, and then also you're drilling—you ever see
2 the movie *Full Metal Jacket*?

3 KC: Yes, many times.

4 JC: That is—when I was in that was pretty close to what it was really like except
5 for we never had access to the bullets and stuff like that. I mean they didn't do that. Then
6 they just would take us to classes and PTs and drill, that's another thing that we did, did a
7 lot of marching and drilling and everything like that. Of course, they had ropes and
8 obstacle courses that we had to go through because we had initial physical fitness test and
9 then they had what they called "Coming out of the Marine Corps" test which includes
10 squat thrusts, three mile run, running the obstacle course, and sit ups and pushups, that's
11 all I can think of right off hand, then you had—like I said the normal physical fitness test
12 that was pull ups, and sit ups, and the run. So, I mean it was preparing for drill and us—
13 physical fitness, that's all it was, it was lot of physical fitness. Most of the classes I
14 remember, in fact here's a strange thing too: when I was in the Marines, we was going
15 through hand-to-hand combat training and everything like that, and judo and everything,
16 the guy that was teaching us that, you wouldn't believe it, but I'd just retired recently in
17 2008 after 35 years of being on the sheriff's department up here, the guy who taught us
18 our hand-to-hand combat was an instructor down at the police academy where I went.

19 KC: Oh, is that right?

20 JC: Yeah, and I'm looking and I'm looking and I thought, "That guy looks
21 familiar," and then, because when we were first got there we were in long sleeves then
22 we went to short sleeves, and then he saw my Marine Corps tattoo and he asks when I
23 was in, I say, "'69 through '71," and I say, "You know you look familiar, but I can't
24 picture where I saw you," he says, "I ought to look familiar, I'm the one who taught you
25 you're hand-to-hand combat and karate and all that stuff," and I'm thinking "Dang, who
26 would ever think," because I went to the Academy in '70—'74 yeah '74 I went to the
27 Academy, so and I went boot camp in '69 now who would think those years later that I
28 would see him again.

29 KC: Now did he remember you personally? Or—

30 JC: No.

1 KC: He just knew that you were—you were there the same time he was there, so
2 he did.

3 JC: Yeah, I mean he was a black belt in karate, and he was a pretty tough rookie.
4 In fact, the police department that he was on, he went into a bar fight it was during—he
5 was on speedway which is Indianapolis Motor Speedway Police Department, and there
6 was a bar fight with a bunch of bikers, and he walked in himself, and he hurt several
7 bikers, and nothing happened to him. So, they says, “Nope, we’re putting you into the
8 academy and teach those guys.”

9 KC: As you’re working your way through boot camp, do you feel that there is a
10 growing sense of confidence within you? Do you feel better as your physical
11 conditioning becomes a little more acute, that you’re doing better or again, is this just a
12 matter of, “My gosh, let me get to the end of this thing,”?

13 JC: No, actually yeah you do get a little more confident because the first initial
14 physical fitness test you know nobody does that good on, and then all of a sudden you
15 notice when you start doing PT, “Hey that three milestone run don’t bother you that
16 much,” and then your body becomes conditioned. Yeah, it gives you the confidence that
17 knowing that “Hey, I’m getting better.” And another thing, because I went in boot camp a
18 hundred pounds—a hundred-fifty pounds I’m sorry, and I graduated a 185 pounds. But
19 the thing is, I was not used to eating—I’m not going to say meals but eating three times a
20 day. Because it was—that food was terrible in Marine Corps, but it was something to eat,
21 you know.

22 KC: What about the relationship among the boots there at Camp Pendleton?
23 Within your boot camp platoon, was there a growing sense of cohesion there or was it
24 individuals from beginning to end, how did that work?

25 JC: No, it’s where you learn to work together as a unit, I mean there was no
26 individuality in the Marine Corps. You learn to work as a unit and you just build that
27 confidence, once you get to know the guys and “Oh, this guy can do it, so I can do it. We
28 both can do it,” so we have—you just build confidence in each other.

29 KC: Was there mention of Vietnam during boot camp?

30 JC: Yeah they said stuff like, they would throw a dummy grenade and have us
31 jump on it and to save them, saying that, if we would screw up they says, “You’re going

1 to get yourself and other Marines killed because of your stupidity,” and all this stuff, and
2 they’d say, “I’d ought to kill you now, so we can save Marines,” and things like that, they
3 said, “You’re going to die in Vietnam” and everything like that, so you try not to do that
4 same mistake twice, but it never fails you, you always—they catch you screwing up and
5 yelling at you.

6 KC: All right now, you’ve worked your way through the training, and what was—
7 how long was the training at this time?

8 JC: Boot camp was ten weeks, that was eight weeks training and two weeks
9 processing, and then from there I had to go to ITR [Infantry Training Regiment] which is
10 Infantry Training Regiment, and that’s three weeks’ training, but before we started it, we
11 had to pull guard duty, then we started our three weeks’—in other words we had to wait a
12 week for our cycle to begin. Then after that I went to Infantry Training and that was a
13 month long, and then we graduated, so actually it was like five-and-a-half months, my
14 training from boot camp to I came home on leave.

15 KC: Now we know, every Marine is a rifleman first we understand that, was there
16 something else that you wanted to do in the Marine Corps? Was there another MOS
17 [Military Occupational Specialty code] that you would’ve liked to have pursued?

18 JC: You know I wanted to be a diesel mechanic or in motor transport and stuff,
19 but—I’m trying to think, I think everybody in my platoon in boot camp, maybe less than
20 ten, went into the Infantry. So, we were all together. I can’t think of, there could’ve been
21 other guys because everybody goes through ITR which is Infantry Training Regiment, so
22 then after you graduate from there, that’s when they did it back then, if you’re—since I
23 was infantry I went down the road to Camp Horno where I took my Infantry Training, if
24 you were going to be a truck driver they would send you to truck driving school, or if you
25 was a cook or whatever, but everybody has to go through that Infantry Training
26 Regiment, so everybody knows how to protect themselves.

27 KC: Sure. Well, tell me about ITR, what was the routine like there? How were
28 you doing in ITR? What was the progress there?

29 JC: From there we would wake up about five in the morning, and then we’d eat
30 breakfast and then we just went through—all we would do, we never did any PT, but all
31 we did was march. I mean we just marched up and down the mountains at Camp

1 Pendleton, and we went to different Infantry Schools, they show us how to set up
2 ambush, how to set up booty-traps, how to clear a mine field, they show us the M60
3 machine gun and different types of weapons that are in the Marine Corps. The only
4 weapon they didn't let us shoot was the 105 recoilless rifle, and that was artillery you
5 know. But they would have us shoot all the weapons and stuff like that, and that was
6 about it. We'd usually stop maybe about five o'clock in the evening and we were on our
7 own. We'd eat our supper and stuff, but we didn't train on the weekends, not like in boot
8 camp. In boot camp we trained every day of the week. And that's about it, I mean they
9 just took us around showing us and we'd set up ambushes, and walk through ambushes,
10 and learn how to get out of an ambush, and that's about all I can remember what we did.

11 KC: Were any of your trainers there at ITR, had any of them had experience in
12 Vietnam?

13 JC: Everyone. Every one of my drill instructors, and every one of my—what did
14 we call those guys? Mother Instructors, we had a name for them, but I can't think of what
15 it was, but yeah even Infantry training every one of them had at least one or two tours in
16 Vietnam.

17 KC: Now at this point in ITR, was there—did any of these instructors take you
18 aside and say, "Look here's how things are going to work in Vietnam, here's why you
19 need to set this ambush up in this way," or, "You need to haul your pack in this way," or
20 "This is the kind of ammunition you need with you." Were there any sort of real life
21 pointers or advice that they were able to give you?

22 JC: Not that I can remember, because they were still teaching a lot of World War
23 II tactics, where we had to climb down the netted rope like they did in World War II, that
24 was another thing we had to is just climb down that rope and hitting the shores just like
25 the Marines did in World War II. You know I honestly can't remember if any of them
26 told us about their Vietnam experience and stuff.

27 KC: Well, all right, you've graduated ITR. You say it was about five months or
28 so, from the time you went into this. When did you go home? Do you remember, what
29 month are we looking at here, is this towards the end of 1969?

30 JC: Yeah, early November exact date I can't remember, but I came home on a
31 twenty-five day leave. Normally they gave everybody twenty days, but I got a five day

1 extension because my grandma was dying, and she came in to see me. And so, they let
2 me stay home five extra days. But then I went back to Camp Pendleton after I came home
3 leave, it was like twenty-five days and stuff.

4 KC: What was this twenty-five day of leave like for you? You know that or
5 assume that you know you have Vietnam in the future for you, you've been away for this
6 time, there've been some I would assume some pretty significant changes in your life and
7 who you were. What was it like to come back home, to see your family, to see your
8 friends?

9 JC: It was nice because I knew I was going to Vietnam because my orders were
10 stamped "WESPAC" which means West Pacific. Being a rifleman the guys in the
11 Infantry Training told us, our instructors in Infantry Training says, "Once your orders are
12 stamped "WESPAC" you could go to Okinawa or Japan," but they said, "Most likely
13 you'll go to Vietnam." It was just nice coming home. I just—just nice. I mean I met a girl
14 and everything like that, we hit it off pretty good, then it just seemed like boom I got
15 home, and boom I'm heading back. When I had to go back, that was even—my dad, he
16 knew what was going to happen so never showed up to the airport to see me off. So, my
17 grandma took my mom, my brother, and my best friend and my girlfriend to the airport
18 and when I was on that plane heading back, I saw them all standing there waving and
19 crying and that's when it hit me, that I'm going—I can get killed and stuff. So, I started
20 crying, and I had this elderly lady next to me and she gave me, she says, "What's the
21 matter?" and I told her, and she just gave me a hug and just I don't know. It just hit me
22 hard that, "Hey, I'm going for a long time, not just training, but I'm going for the real
23 thing."

24 KC: Well, that brings up a good question here, what did you know at this point in
25 your life about what was taking place in Vietnam? We're looking at, again, very late
26 1969 into 1970. You have been aware, or at least the country had been aware, of the way
27 the War's progress had unfolded since 1964 and 1965. The Tet Offensive, of course, was
28 a major event in the War, it changed a lot of people's minds, a lot of people's thinking on
29 the War. You've got the anti-war protests taking place in the United States, people calling
30 into serious question America's role there. And again, you're training and having been

1 trained by people who had been to Vietnam, Marines who had been to Vietnam, what did
2 you know about the War as it had shaped up to that point in late '69, early 1970?

3 JC: The thing that we thought about is, "What are we going to do?" They never
4 told us and stuff, they said, "The War is winding down," and everything like that, the
5 only thing we thought, "Well, maybe we might not have to go." Yeah, we paid attention
6 to it, but not as much as you'd think that we would be paying attention to it knowing that
7 we're going to be heading—or going over there and stuff you know. Because boom I hit
8 Camp Pendleton and I'm in another place they call "Staging battalion", that's getting us
9 ready to go. And it was like a company of us, and it was like a 155 of us and out of 155,
10 153 or 150 something like that were headed to Vietnam, and that's when they gave us a
11 bunch of shots and they told us what units that we were going to, that's when they
12 assigned me to the 3rd—or the CAG [Civil Affairs Group] units over there.

13 KC: So, you knew before you went over, you didn't get your orders in Da Nang
14 you knew before you left Camp Pendleton that that was—

15 JC: Right, I was going to the CAG units, and then they flew us to Okinawa and
16 gave us a bunch more shots. We spent three days there, we packed up all our uniforms
17 put them in boxes, and that's when they issued us our jungle boots, and our jungle
18 fatigues, our camouflage fatigues, and stuff like that. Then they, from there, they—
19 because there we're four CAGs over there, and I knew—then that's when I knew I was
20 going to 3rd CAG which is up in Phu Bai area. So, then they flew us to Da Nang, and then
21 from Da Nang we caught a TC-135 to Phu Bai.

22 KC: Now when you were there at staging battalion, did you know anyone else
23 who was there with you?

24 JC: Yes, some of the guys I went training with and everything too. Because we all
25 came back home on leave about the same time, and you get to—well, I mean them
26 barracks back them days were open squad base, so you get to know the guys. A lot of the
27 guys were going for their first tour like me, and there were some guys there going back
28 for the third and fourth tour over there.

29 KC: What was the trip to Okinawa like? This is a long plane ride, what was the
30 atmosphere like on the plane?

1 JC: Like that we just had a good ol' time, because we stopped in Hawaii, they'd
2 let us off the airport—not the airport but the airplane, but we couldn't leave this restricted
3 area and the thing is, there were—I mean there were police officers protecting us from
4 the civilians, then they refueled the plane. Now here's something, we originally—they
5 bussed us up from Camp Pendleton to El Toro, which is the Marine Corps Air Wing Base
6 in California. They bussed us up there, and we was waiting for the—we didn't leave until
7 like, I'm going to say like one—two o'clock in the morning, and we were waiting for the
8 plane to come in to pick us up and then they would fly us out, but there was something
9 wrong with the plane or they had to change planes, so they bussed us up from El Toro to
10 L.A. International. There's like four busses full of us heading up there, and the California
11 Highway Patrol were giving us a police escort until we hit the city of Los Angeles then
12 they took over, and they let us board the plane and they had police officers around the
13 plane protecting us to get on the plane to make it to the plane. That's one thing I'm
14 thinking, "Wait a minute, I'm fighting for my country, and we need these police
15 protections and stuff?" And that's when we started to realize that people didn't like us.
16 When we flew, we got a military discount flight, but a student would pay the same
17 amount that we would pay but that student can bump us. In other words, if there's one
18 seat left and two of us, the student will get it before I will even though I have orders to be
19 back at a certain time. But they didn't care, they bumped us, and we got whatever we
20 could get. But one—the flight to Okinawa, we went halfway, refueled in Hawaii then we
21 refueled in Wake Island, and then we hit, and man, I can't remember I think it was—I
22 can't remember how long of a flight it was, but man, I didn't think it was ever going to
23 end. And then we hit Okinawa, and they bussed us down to Camp Smedley Butler and
24 that's where they gave us more shots and stuff.

25 KC: Now you've mentioned on a couple occasions here, both at L.A. and in
26 Hawaii, that you had to be protected. I assume that you're talking about the anti-war
27 protestors who would've been around the airports at this time.

28 JC: Mm-hmm.

29 KC: What was your opinion of that, overall? You were aware, you're obviously
30 an intelligent individual, you've seen the news, you know what's going on, you realize

1 that there are those who are opposed to the War and there are a lot of activity and
2 growing radicalism in the Anti-War Movement. What was your opinion of that overall?

3 JC: Them themselves—I don't know. But the things is, is what I felt—thing was
4 is that wait a minute, here I am fighting for the country and I gotta be protected and yet—
5 that's what it was. But mainly we thought about it but for a split second, and just, "Leave
6 me alone and I'll leave you alone," that's what it was. You do what you want to do, I'm
7 doing what I want to do and everything, that's my main thing is just leave me alone and
8 I'll leave you alone.

9 KC: So, you're leaving Okinawa, after another round of shots as you've
10 mentioned, I assume you're coming into—I shouldn't assume do you come into Da
11 Nang? Do you fly into Da Nang?

12 JC: Yeah, we flew into Da Nang.

13 KC: Okay into Da Nang. Describe your initial impressions of Vietnam. You fly
14 into Da Nang, you get off the plane there, what was your impression?

15 JC: Well, when they open that door for us to get off the plane, was the—that was
16 the heat, the heat and humidity and the smell. I'm thinking, "Oh, man," you know. Then
17 they boarded us on, took us to this place called Freedom Hill which is around the Da
18 Nang Airport, and we spent the night there and they bussed us and we're driving past
19 these villages and stuff and the poverty that I was thinking of, I mean just looking at
20 everything and I remember this lady that's smiling at you, and they had this stuff called
21 betel nut, it was like a tobacco that turned their teeth black and women are smiling at us
22 and they got black teeth, and then this one lady urinates in front of us and I'm thinking,
23 "Man, what kind of a country am I getting into?" We spent the night. We arrived there
24 and they says, "Boy we need you guys, because we just lost a bunch of Marines in an
25 ambush." So, they separated us from there and flew us up and everything. We just spent
26 the night in Freedom Hill, but it was just the smell, the heat, and the way people lived.
27 I'm not used to it; I mean you know. The roughest I had to live in was the Marine Corps
28 and that was on the ground but at least I had something better than what these people had.

29 KC: So, you've been assigned to the 3rd Combat Action Group, and you say based
30 out of Phu Bai. All right, did you know at this time anything about the Combined Action

1 Platoon, the way the Marine Corps was using the CAPs, the CAP program, how it came
2 about or what they were trying to do?

3 JC: The only thing they told us is that we're going to be living in the village with
4 the people, and we're going to be about twelve—thirteen and a corpsman. That we'll do
5 day patrols, set up night ambushes, and just protect the village. That's all they told us
6 what we would be doing.

7 KC: Did they tell you this back at Camp Pendleton, or when you arrived at Phu
8 Bai?

9 JC: Well, when we arrived in Phu Bai. Because after we arrived in Phu Bai, they
10 picked us up and they drove us to the Marine headquarters. When we left Da Nang, it was
11 like a 120-some degrees and we hit Phu Bai it was the monsoon season up there. So, it's
12 just pouring down rain. They just told us that we're going to be building bunkers and
13 reinforcing because before we could go out into the village, we had to go to a two-weeks
14 school to learn the Vietnamese customs, language, and small unit tactics like that, so we
15 had to wait for the next opening for the school, and that as in Da Nang.

16 KC: Okay, well, tell me about the school then. I would think that this would be an
17 important part of your training and of your experience, since you're going to be part of a
18 CAP platoon and living among the villagers. What was that training like, that school like?

19 JC: It was a lot of small unit tactics, I mean when we went through training when
20 we set up an ambush it was like company size, and platoon size and everything like this,
21 and we're only talking squad size, so we had to learn to fight as a small unit. Thing is, is
22 that we learn that and then the language, I mean I picked up some words, but I picked it
23 up more when I was in the village because we were in the village with the Popular Forces
24 and we could talk back and forth, and sort of pick up what they're saying, and they were
25 teaching us, so we learned more in the village. It's just mainly small unit tactics and they
26 had us go out and fire these LAWs [Light Anti-tank Weapon] and then the M60, and the
27 M79 grenade launcher even though we fired them before we had to re-fire them again so
28 we can get more familiar with it. That was about it, just get really familiar with the stuff.

29 KC: Now during your training here, and again this is back at Da Nang you said,
30 during your training are you with the same CAP platoon that you would be going out to
31 the village with, or are you with different individuals that you may or may not see again?

1 JC: Different—some of the guys were—mostly it was different. One guy that was
2 with me, but most of them were like—because some of them we're from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd
3 and 4th CAG so they all went to school at once, whenever that opening was because once
4 we landed in Vietnam some guys went to 1st CAG, 2nd CAG, and I think 1st CAG was
5 south of Da Nang. 2nd CAG was Da Nang, 3rd CAG was Phu Bai, and 4th CAG was north
6 of me, I'm going to say Quan Tre? Or someplace up there north of where I was okay. So,
7 it was all of us together, but this one guy him and I went together because they sent a
8 bunch of us to 3rd CAG but there was a lot of us that they sent to different CAPs. So, one
9 guy that I went to training, we went to CAP together and actually he was from
10 Evansville, Indiana.

11 KC: Oh, is that right?

12 JC: Yeah.

13 KC: How would you rate the training you received for the Combat Action
14 Platoon? What was—you were looking at the language facility, looking at the cultural
15 aspect of it as well, as small unit tactics, how would you rate your experience there in the
16 school?

17 JC: You know what struck me the most, is when I went to that school—I mean
18 the training was good, but really struck me the most and cold heartedly, they had—you
19 heard of the Chieu Hoi Program right? Okay, well, they had—this was a lady, come in
20 and talk to us and she was a Chieu Hoi, and she just sat there and bragged about how
21 many Marines she killed, herself, personally herself and everything like that. They would
22 come in and talk to us and I'm thinking, "I don't know if I can—" well, I said, "You
23 cold-hearted bitch." That's what I said. I don't know if I can say that.

24 KC: That's fine.

25 JC: Okay. I'm thinking, "How can a person be so cold?" Well, then after a while
26 we become cold and disenchanted and everything you know. Just like they did.
27 Somebody dies and you think, "Well, thank goodness it's not me," and you just, that's
28 what struck me. I mean how can this person be so cold about killing a person.

29 KC: What kind of effect does that have on you? You're new in-country and you
30 hear this woman who is Chieu Hoi, you hear her talk about this in a rather casually or like
31 you say in a very cold manner, what kind of an effect does that have on you?

1 JC: It just made me think, “What kind of people are we fighting?” You know we
2 grow up in the United States, women don’t—women were in the military, but they
3 weren’t in combat roles and this girl just does it nonchalantly that it doesn’t faze her.
4 That she killed all these Marines, and then she said some Army but it’s just that her cold
5 heartedness, that’s what’s the only way I can say.

6 KC: How long did training last here in Da Nang?

7 JC: Two weeks.

8 KC: Two weeks all right, so you leave Da Nang and you’re headed back up to
9 Phu Bai. Are you, I would assume at that point you are introduced to other’s who will be
10 going out to the village to the CAP, or is the CAP being put together there, how did that
11 work?

12 JC: Well, the CAP was already there, they just—after we finished our schooling,
13 they just drove us out to our unit where we were, where our CAP unit was.

14 KC: And what was the name of the village that you were assigned to?

15 JC: Oh, man, I’m going to say Quan Si An because the first CAP unit I was with
16 we had two villages, okay. The one village liked us, and the other village hated us.

17 KC: Is that right?

18 JC: Yeah. They were—we considered them or less like oh, seventy percent Viet
19 Cong suspects, I mean that’s the way it was. So, I can’t remember the name of that
20 village, but I mean it shows you how cold heartedly—one day I was down at the well, or
21 the stream taking a shower and they stole my glasses. I wore glasses and they stole them,
22 I’m thinking “What are they going to do with them?” That’s the village that hated us.
23 And it took the Marine Corps over two-weeks to get me a new pair of glasses.

24 KC: To what Combined Action Platoon did you belong?

25 JC: The first one was CAP 333, then the other one was—because after a while
26 they needed some Marines to go to another CAP, and it was still CAP 336 I believe it
27 was, which was a different village that we went to. Closer to our headquarters.

28 KC: What was it like to enter for you to enter this Combined Action Platoon?
29 You’re dealing with—or you’re entering a unit, not only is it embedded so to speak in the
30 village, but you’re also got some individuals as Marines who have been there for a while.
31 What was it like entering this new unit, in this new set of circumstances?

1 JC: Well, I can't remember who said it, but this one guy told me, that "No matter
2 what rank they are, they've been in-country longer than you are and you listen to them."
3 So, that's what I did, I listened to them and if I had questions I would ask them, I just
4 more or less watched them to see what they were doing and stuff. That's about the only
5 thing about being new in a unit.

6 KC: How were you received by the guys who had been there longer?

7 JC: They just, they call, or they asked you where you was from, what's things like
8 in the United States, what's going on in the United States, and that was about it. They
9 welcomed us because we had—my first sergeant, see the highest ranking person in our
10 unit was a sergeant and my first sergeant was great, he was great. But he was short, and
11 he was getting ready to leave and the rest of them treated us pretty good. Well, they all
12 treated us pretty good, because were Marines and were new in-country, and they just—it
13 was like a close-knit group.

14 KC: Even upon arriving as a new guy, and often times we hear the new guys
15 don't always have such a warm welcome as it were, but you felt comfortable with these
16 guys, they welcomed you they helped you out, is that an accurate way to describe that?

17 JC: If I asked them a question, yes. If I didn't ask them a question or anything like
18 that, I mean it's just that it wasn't—some of the guys gave us the cold shoulders, but
19 some guys didn't. And it's not cold shoulders, it's just that—oh, we had a word for it I'm
20 trying to think of what it was called. FNG [Fucking New Guy] I know that's what we
21 were called. But most of the time, when we went on ambushes and stuff like that, in fact
22 one guy he says, "What's your MOS?" and I said, "O311," he says, "No it's not," he
23 says, "I got thirty days to do," and he carried the M60, he says, "I'm not carrying it
24 anymore, so you're carrying it." So, he took my rifle, and he gave me his .45, and then he
25 gave me the M60, and he took me out, fired a hundred rounds, and he says, "You're
26 good, so you're machine gunner."

27 KC: How long were you there when this took place?

28 JC: The next day.

29 KC: The next day? Is that right? Welcome to CAP platoon 333, you're now the
30 machine gunner (both laugh). No, no, please go ahead.

1 JC: And then he just took me out, showed me how to fire out because that's what
2 his MOS was, and because the machine gunner and your radio operator weren't the most
3 well-liked people by the Viet Cong, and they tried to get you.

4 KC: Did that—did you realize that when you took over as machine gunner?

5 JC: Yeah, I did, yeah, I did. But I figured, well, you know, I've got the machine
6 gun I can put out a lot more rounds than what they can. Learn to fire it, and it's more like
7 what we call OJT [On the Job Training].

8 KC: Were there any difficulties? Were there any particular personalities who you
9 clashed with? You made mention that most welcomed you very, I wouldn't say warmly,
10 but there were others who weren't quite as welcoming. Do you remember any—was there
11 any personality clashes? Were there any issues there between you guys?

12 JC: Well, not so much with me, but I did see a couple incidences. But there was
13 one guy, he was new in-country. I think I'd been in-country for six—seven months, and
14 he was new guy and he just thought he could come over and run the place. We had to put
15 him in his place, and he was from Kansas, and I don't know what he thought he was, he
16 thought he was some big tough guy, but you know what happened was one night we go
17 set an ambush, instead of going on an ambush we stayed in the village. He—but we all
18 had to take our turns standing radio watch listening to it, he didn't let me know that there
19 was a guy sleeping on the bunker a little ways down from me sleeping on top of the
20 sandbags. So, I'm standing there half-awake and half-asleep, and I see to my right in my
21 peripheral vision something move. Then I looked at it and it moved again, so I grabbed
22 my rifle, and I was about ready to shoot it and it was a fellow Marine, the guy from
23 Evansville. The guy never told me about it, we confronted him about it, and he says, "It
24 wasn't my job to tell." That's what he said. But I'm trying to think—first part of that
25 question. No, I think they would talk to you, but the guys that had been there for a while,
26 but it's—we haven't proven ourselves to him yet. That's the main thing and once you
27 prove yourself to them then things change.

28 KC: What does it take for one to prove oneself to the rest of the unit?

29 JC: What your like under in combat, that's how you prove yourself. Because I had
30 an A gunner that would always freeze up and hide.

31 KC: Had he been in-country longer than you?

1 JC: Nope, no, he was new. First time you let the guy go—you think about it while
2 it's new, but after the second and third time you don't freeze up. I mean I had to have
3 other guys carry my ammo up to me because he was too afraid.

4 KC: And what became of him afterwards?

5 JC: They transferred him to some other place, and what happened to him after that
6 I don't know. Because we had to get him out because he was going to get us hurt or one
7 of us killed.

8 KC: Well, then, your time there in-country, was there one particular engagement
9 or event that you recall as being the most important for you earning your stripes as it were,
10 that proving yourself or was it a gradual thing? Are there anything that stand out in your
11 mind where you said, "This may have been the one where they said okay finally, this guy
12 gets it?"

13 JC: Not, not really. Like I said your first engagement they see how you did and
14 stuff. Then as long as you can prove yourself to them, they'll—your buddies for life and
15 stuff you know. So, I can't think of any one particular—

16 KC: Describe for the layout of this village. Let's talk about the village you said
17 they liked you first. Describe the layout of that village there.

18 JC: It was a small little village, it was right along the river, and, of course, it had
19 our bunkers were there in front, and then the people had their hooches behind us. Barbed
20 wire, and it was like flatland and then like a little incline, and in that little incline was
21 white sand. We were all by white sand. It certainly looked pretty, it looked like the first
22 snowfall where it's enough to cover the ground but yet you got some grass coming
23 through. That was that village, it was a small village. And then between the bunkers and
24 the concertina wire we had claymore mines facing out, so if the village ever came under
25 attack, they could blow the claymore mines and protect them.

26 KC: What about the political, or social structure of the village? How did that
27 work?

28 JC: Jeez I can't think of what they called them, but—the chief. The chief, he's the
29 one who ran the village, I mean they all listened to him. That's about all I can remember,
30 the chief was in charge and the Popular Forces and everything, some of them were good
31 and some of them weren't that good. I mean there was one time when we were into

1 engagement and they took off running on us, and I'm thinking, "Wait a minute this is
2 your war, why you running?"

3 KC: What was the structure like of the Popular Forces who were there in that
4 village? How many of them were there? What was the pecking order if you will? How
5 were they armed? Describe the PFs [Popular Forces] you dealt with there in that village.

6 JC: Well, the first village in CAP 333 there was twenty-two of them. They were
7 armed with M16 rifles just like us, and they had normal rank structure but the guy in
8 charge I think was a captain of all of them. And then your sergeants and privates and stuff
9 like that, they would go out on ambushes and patrols with us and everything like that.

10 KC: Did you ever find any sort of reluctance on their part? Were they enthusiastic
11 instead? What was their overall attitude towards this mission they had?

12 JC: No, I never saw any reluctance. But except for I mean—the CAP forces
13 also—not CAP forces but the Popular Forces in the other village I mean they, the one that
14 hated us, we didn't even trust them at all. When we went on ambush, we didn't go with
15 them, we didn't trust them at all.

16 KC: All right now the attitude of the villagers in general, and we'll stay with this
17 more positive village and contrast it with the more negative village later, what was the
18 overall attitude of the villagers towards the Marines who were there? I mean what was
19 the interaction like. How did they express their satisfaction with your being there? Those
20 sorts of things.

21 JC: They liked us. The ol' mama-sans would cook us these noodles and they
22 would cook food for us, and the chief liked us, chief would tell us if something was going
23 wrong or if something was suspicious, they would tell us and then we would go out and
24 check it out and everything. We worked with them building buildings and school rooms,
25 so no we got along real good.

26 KC: Was there any sort of medical component to this as well?

27 JC: The corpsman, the corpsman that was with us usually took care of them too
28 unless it was something serious and they would get medevac [medical evacuation] too.
29 Because I think what happened, was one time the chief was out there hoeing the rice
30 paddy and he must've—he hit something and a grenade went off and it, well, he got some
31 shrapnel metal in his arm and we medevac'ed him out. But I can't remember what

1 happened after the chief, but I do—now you're going to laugh about this. But I do
2 remember one night they had this villager who died, and they're very superstitious people
3 I don't if you've heard that, and this villager died, and he threatened to come back and
4 haunt the village. So, the village chief and all of them wanted us to not go out on ambush
5 and stay there in the village, because they's afraid this guy's going to come back and
6 haunt them and do whatever, I don't know. So, we stayed there, and we had these house
7 boys who would cook our food or clean our weapons and whatever, he was with us and
8 then all of a sudden, he wanted us to walk him back to his house. I say, "It's just right
9 around over there," and he brought up that ol' villager might come and get him, so I had
10 to walk him back to his house. That was a little funny highlight, this old man—well, they
11 made him mad, and he threatened to come back and haunt them and they took it for real.

12 KC: I'll be darned. What about this about village that wasn't as crazy about the
13 Marines being there? Where was it? What was its location in relation to the other village?

14 JC: It was maybe three—four clicks down from where the first village was, and it
15 was by the—see we had the big river by us and I can't remember the name of the river,
16 but down the way from us was this Navy riverboat base called Tan My. We were down
17 from there, but this village you know we never spent much time there because one time
18 we did, and they told us to go back to the other village because those people were afraid
19 since we weren't there. We would march pass them, but the thing is, is you just had to be
20 careful. When you slept you slept with one eye open, one eye closed. That's how bad it
21 was.

22 KC: What sort of things would they do to give you this impression that they did
23 not want you there?

24 JC: They would help the Viet Cong. They would help the Viet Cong, give them
25 food, feed them and stuff like that.

26 KC: Was there evidence of this? I mean you saw them or knew that they were in
27 some way?

28 JC: Well, they would ask for like tin to build hooches and stuff, and we go on
29 patrols, and we would find bunkers made out of the tin and stuff that we gave them.

30 KC: What, you talked about some of these—of kind of their general attitude here,
31 but what about the villagers? Not necessarily the political leaders or the Popular Forces

1 who were there, but what about the villagers themselves? What sort of vibe, if you will,
2 did you get from them?

3 JC: It was okay, because there was a curfew, they had to be in the village at eight
4 and couldn't leave until six. Come six o'clock in the morning they would go out and
5 work the fields and come back in and cook their food. Never—you talked to them but not
6 much because I couldn't talk that good of Vietnamese even though I was supposed to
7 learn it I couldn't talk that much Vietnamese to them. They just was happy we were
8 there, so they can go out and get their plants and everything like that. Not plants, their
9 food.

10 KC: Did you detect any sort of resentment in either village about the American
11 presence? I mean we're talking a curfew, that's not something that they were obviously
12 used to throughout the generations. This is the American Marines, they come in they dig
13 these bunkers, they built these barbed wire fences, they set up claymore mines, they tell
14 us when we can leave our own village and when we have to be back; did you detect any
15 sort of resentment or bitterness about any of that?

16 JC: No, but—not in the first village, but in the second village one night we saw
17 three of them leave this one hut and walk right out into the tree line and we tried to
18 follow them, and we lost them. Because once in a while we would go, what we call, on
19 killer teams it'd be like one—about three of us. And we wouldn't have our helmets or
20 flak jackets or anything like that, we just have on our regular cover and go out and see
21 what we can find, and we tried to follow them. They went somewhere, and then we got
22 back—they got back the next day, but I don't remember whatever happened to them. But
23 I do remember three of them, and one was a lady that just took off after curfew.

24 KC: How would you divide your time between the two villages? Would it be a
25 day here, a day there, two days here, how would that work?

26 JC: It mostly a day here, a day there. What we would do is we would set up an
27 ambush pretty close to the village, so come morning time we would march into the
28 village. Then at nighttime we would set up another ambush and then we would make it
29 close to the other village. I can't remember how big of an area of operation we had, that's
30 how we would do it. But most of the time, excuse me, we would spend like maybe three
31 or four days at one village and maybe one day at the other village because they just didn't

1 like us. But I mean I was with that unit for a couple of months then they sent me to
2 another unit that 336 I think it is, I can't remember exactly, but now that village. That
3 was so bad that we had to wear flak trousers. If you saw the villagers walk down this
4 trail, it was safe for us to walk down this trail. If they never walked down this trail, we
5 didn't walk down that trail because it was booby trapped. They were—we caught them
6 trying to steal our food, the same thing. They'd want concrete to build their school and
7 we'd find bunkers made out of concrete. It was just a heavily, heavily booby trapped
8 area. They knew that when we went on patrols because one of us would usually trip a
9 booby trap and we'd lose a Marine. That's what happened, that's how I got sent to that—
10 me and this guy, Shorty, that's his name from Evansville, got sent to the unit because it
11 was so heavily booby trapped that they were losing Marines left and right.

12 KC: Now when you would move from one village to the next, would the entire
13 platoon go? Or half of them would stay and half of them would go, how would that
14 work?

15 JC: Just that one time was just me and Short, and we went to that because they
16 were down like four Marines, so they sent just two of us down there. The other—the first
17 CAP 333 was over strength so that's—they moved us down there and being new in-
18 country you do what they tell you to do.

19 KC: All right now when it comes to setting up an ambush, you know I mean the
20 platoon knows, the platoon leader knows, what the mission, what the purpose there is.
21 You're working with the villagers during the day, if you can help them with digging a
22 well or building a building or doing whatever it might be, and at night you setup these
23 ambushes. Take me on a typical, if there was such a thing, take me on a typical ambush at
24 one of these villagers. From the planning of the ambush all the way through coming back
25 when it's over, how would that work?

26 JC: Well, actually, the sergeant would pick the location okay, and me being the
27 machine gunner we would wait until it turned dark so they can't see us, and then we
28 would just grab our packs, march—not march but go to the ambush site and me being a
29 60 man, I'd set up my 60 but I also carried claymore mines on my back. My pack, when I
30 was a machine gunner, weighed over a hundred pounds. So, I'd take the six claymore
31 mines and set them up in like a 180 in front of us. Then I'd come back and sit, and it'd

1 just be like a straight line, and me being the 60 I'd be in the middle. We just sit there and
2 wait until they walk into our ambush or if nothing ever happened, we would get up just
3 before sunrise and go back to the village. And that was about it, but if contact occurred,
4 what we would have to do is as long as there was no Marines wounded or killed, we
5 would take the dead, and we had to lay them out in front of the village. That's what we
6 had to do. We had to get sticks and the Vietnamese would get these big ol' poles and
7 we'd tied their hands and legs together and carry them, lay them out in front of the village
8 because they were really high on body counts. They wanted that body count and
9 everything like that. They would count the number of dead, and then they would stay
10 there anywhere from two days to two-weeks until somebody come and buried them.
11 That's for the Viet Cong, the NVA I think some guy from Hue city would come down
12 and bury them.

13 KC: So, you were doing with both NVA and Viet Cong there in those villages.

14 JC: Right.

15 KC: Describe for me the strength and weaknesses of the enemies you faced, both
16 NVA and Viet Cong.

17 JC: Well, the Viet Cong, nine times out of ten, they would just spray the area and
18 run. Because they weren't that big of a unit. Now the NVA, they would stick it out and
19 fight. They would give you a fight, because how the Viet Cong got their training I don't
20 know, and I never really found out, but the NVA they were trained and trained regular
21 troops just like us, and they would stick it out and fight it with us. Of course, they carried
22 their AK-47s, SKS which is a Chinese rifle, and, of course, they had the B-40s. Oh, man,
23 those things were terrible.

24 KC: I've heard other people say that, describe the B-40 and what it was capable
25 of.

26 JC: Well, it's a shoulder-launched weapon but it's—ah, man, the launcher is—I
27 can't remember how long it is because I never saw the launcher all we saw was the tail
28 end of the stuff coming at us. It looks like a missile that they stick in front of it, and they
29 fired it at us. The only thing that we had to counteract it was the LAW, so they'd start
30 shooting them at us, and, of course, at nighttime you'd see the flash and we would—
31 boom, shoot our LAWs right at the flash, and hopefully, it would discourage them. And

1 nine times out of ten it did. It would—I'm trying to think of the explosive power that it
2 had. I'm not sure now, but back then it could knock a tank out. I think. But there's no
3 tanks around us and stuff but like a truck or a Jeep, well, you can forget about it. Most of
4 the time our biggest thing was the booby traps. A lot of the times you'd see the punji
5 stakes because you'd see they have punji stakes and punji pits and everything like that.
6 Well, when I was over there, they got tired of doing that, and they would use our dud
7 rounds that never went off. They would take our grenades, or artillery rounds, and stuff
8 and make booby traps out of them.

9 KC: Now, in addition to setting up these ambushes at night, would you also go
10 out and patrol around the village during the day?

11 JC: Yeah, yeah, we'd go on a day patrol, not much but maybe two or three clicks
12 or something like that to see what's out and about. That's about it. I can't explain it, but
13 we would just—the sergeant would give us the directions and which way to go, and we'd
14 go out and see what we would see out there and come back, usually we'd be gone maybe
15 a couple hours.

16 KC: Would these be full on platoon sweeps or patrols or just small units small
17 squads? How would that work?

18 JC: It would be about three or four of us. One machine gunner, radio operator, and
19 two rifles and that would be it. Or sometimes the whole CAP would go out too, but that
20 was very rare normally it was just like three or four of us something like that, mainly
21 about four.

22 KC: Small squads or something like that then.

23 JC: Mm-hmm. Actually, that's a fire team, so make it more like a fire team yeah.

24 KC: Sure, sure. All right, now, when you're setting up these ambushes and going
25 out on these patrols, I would assume that you've got some sort of intelligence coming in
26 from somewhere. Where did the intelligence come from? Do you know?

27 JC: Sometimes I'm not sure because one time we had the company gunny come
28 out and he says, "Hey, we got word that this is an NVA supply route, and we're going to
29 go setup," and he says, "I can guarantee a kill for you tonight," and everything like that.
30 So, what happened was the Navy picked us up on these river boats, we marched out there
31 and got on the river boats, and they took us down and dropped us off. And he knew

1 where to set us up, and we all setup an ambush along the right side waiting for the NVA
2 to come, and they never showed. The only thing that happened that night is we just sat in
3 a ring and got rained on all the time. Then after in the morning we marched back, but
4 man, that was—all I remember it was quite a long march at nighttime because it's hard to
5 see but we didn't have the equipment like they have now. I mean we would have starlight
6 scopes that was supposed to be able to see things at nighttime. The thing is, is that those
7 starlight scopes were only good is if there was some light out there. It was cloudy night;
8 we couldn't see them, and we couldn't do anything. When we sat up and ambush, like if
9 it's pouring down rain or it's cloudy and you can't use the starlight scopes, you just
10 listened to the bugs. That's the thing I picked up from the old guys that been in-country
11 for a while. As long as those bugs and crickets and everything out there chirping and
12 making noise there's nothing out there. But if they stop there's something out there, and
13 you can't see it until they come upon you real close or they start up again. But it's
14 something that could've walked by you. We could never see it because we didn't have
15 the good equipment like they got nowadays.

16 KC: Take me on the, either patrol or ambush, where you first encountered the
17 enemy in combat, the first contact. Do you remember that one?

18 JC: Yeah, it wasn't much of a contact. It was three Viet Cong that walked into our
19 ambush site, and we got one of them, but the other just took off and we waited to see—
20 when you set up an ambush, you got one man at each end and he's responsible for—let's
21 say if you got a whole patrol walking through you, you got one man on each end and
22 they're just a little ways separate from the main body of the ambush. So, you wait until
23 everybody in the ambush gets into where your main people are, okay, and the guys on
24 each end will take the stragglers. Well, they just walked into our kill zone, and they
25 sprayed the area and we got one and one took off running, and that was it. He got
26 wounded but we saw blood droppings, but we don't know where he went. But that wasn't
27 the—I mean the worst one, I mean you even have it documented in your—you back on it
28 in 1970, you go back to August of 1970 CAP 325 that was my last unit because they were
29 phasing out the CAPS that I was originally with, and my last night out in the field we got
30 word that the next day we're being disbanded. Heading back to the headquarters in Da
31 Nang, we set up an ambush and a whole company—not company a whole platoon of

1 NVA walked into our ambush and that was the longest and the most fierce firefight that I
2 was in. And the next morning when we got one kill, it's—you know how you get the
3 letters in the back of your site, okay, they're actual letters explaining out what happened
4 and everything like that, you know what I'm talking about?

5 KC: Yes.

6 JC: Okay, well, that very last firefight I'm thinking, "Dang, I remember that. That
7 was the longest and the most fierce firefight we had," because those guys—that was
8 another thing that come with the B-40. At that time, I was a radio operator, so we were
9 chasing them after they walked into our ambush and we killed one, we were chasing them
10 I stopped and talked on the radio and started running again, and it couldn't have been a
11 few seconds after I started running again they can tell because where I was at, when you
12 carry the radio there's two types of antennae you had like a three foot one and a ten foot
13 one. Well, we had to have the ten foot one, and I stopped and talked and a few seconds
14 later they blew up this hooch where I was standing next to, I just stopped and talked to.
15 That was quite a firefight too, but at that time they were pulling out the CAPS and
16 making them bigger. So, we were twenty some Marines and a corpsman, and then I can't
17 remember the Popular Forces, and they—it was weird because I had radio watch and we
18 advised—or they advised us that they have intel that there is a platoon of NVA in the area
19 so keep alert. I woke up the sergeant who was from Gary, Indiana and told him and he
20 says, "Okay," and it couldn't have been twenty minutes later they walked right into our
21 ambush. And then all I can put it is all hell broke loose.

22 KC: Well, tell me about that, what sort of things do you see? What sort of things
23 do you feel, and smell, and hear? Take me through this big engagement.

24 JC: Okay. Well, at the time I was, when they tripped into our ambush because we
25 were taking turns listening to radio and we had like fifty percent watch, it was my turn to
26 sleep so when they walked into our ambush I was sleeping. A B-40 hit on the other side
27 of the rice paddy from where me and this guy was, and then our sixty men and all of us
28 and what happens is that we saw the flashes coming at us and we just opened up on them.
29 We just started chasing them, they'd open up and then it was just more like back and
30 forth, but that's all we got was just the one. I mean I can't explain but rounds going,
31 noise—grenades and LAWs because when they fired the B-40s you can see that big,

1 bright flash of the B-40 rocket and we just aim within that general direction because nine
2 times out of ten we might not hit him, but we can be close enough like their aiming at us,
3 to keep our heads down.

4 KC: Very interesting, very interesting. Well, why don't we stop there today Mr.
5 Chamberlain?

Interview with James Chamberlain

Session [2] of [2]

Date 17 February 2011

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History interview—continuing an
2 oral history interview I should say with Mr. James Chamberlain, today is 17 February
3 2011. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University. Mr. Chamberlain
4 is joining from his home via telephone South Bend, Indiana. Mr. Chamberlain, we had
5 you earlier this week. You were discussing your time there with the CAP platoon moving
6 back and forth between these two villages, and you were describing some of the initial
7 engagements in which you were involved, in which you encountered the enemy. And
8 you've talked about these firefights and the ambushes and things like that. What I'd like
9 for you to do today, is to kind of pick up on the narrative of your time there in Vietnam in
10 these villages. What was your daily life like? For example, your daily routine, things like
11 that.

12 JC: Most of the time if we weren't going on patrols, tell you the truth we just
13 stayed in the village and just messed around, screwing off. That's about the only way I
14 can explain it. But when we would go on patrol, depending on which CAP I was with—
15 now CAP 333 we would find bunkers. We would find actually I found one rice paddy
16 dike which I thought was just a typical rice paddy dike, and it was an entrance to a
17 bunker. And how I find that was I was walking along it and then all of a sudden—I can't
18 remember what leg it was—but it fell right through the ceiling. I had to hurry up and get
19 my leg pulled out because what the Viet Cong would do, they would hang snakes from
20 the ceiling, so when we would find a bunker, thank goodness I was a tall guy but our
21 shortest guy we would throw a grenade in, and he would go in with a flashlight and a .45
22 and search it. Well, the first thing I thought of when my leg fell in was, I'm waiting for
23 these snake bites to get me. Luckily it wasn't anything and it was—what it turned out to
24 be it was just a very old bunker that they never used before. But like I say when my leg
25 fell through it was scaring the heck out of me because I was just waiting for that snake to
26 bite me. Other times we would go on patrol, and we would find ammo just laying around,
27 live ammo and everything and we'd have to blow that in place. In another area that I was
28 in, I think that was CAP 336, it was so heavily boob-trapped that we would find—it got
29 to a point where they finally gave us a German shepherd that smelled booby traps. I don't

1 know how they trained that dog, but that dog was just excellent. Like I told you before,
2 they only way we found them is one of us would trip them and that happened quite a bit.
3 But the dogs would find the booby traps. We would blow them in place. Sometimes we
4 would find artillery rounds, like 155 rounds, 105 rounds, grenades, things like that that
5 they booby trapped. Luckily these dogs sniffed them out, and we blew them in place. The
6 one village, 333, the people were great for us. They would cook food for us. They had
7 these noodles that they would cook, and oh, man, it was delicious. Also, when I was with
8 333, we had a guy from—his last name was Cook. I can't remember his first name, but
9 actually that was his profession was a cook. He would cook up some—to us it was
10 delicious meals—it would be C-rations or whatever we could put together and stuff. Like
11 I said at nighttime just after dark, so we wouldn't be seen and stuff, we'd load up and
12 when I was carrying the 60, I would have my pack standing up and it would actually take
13 two guys to pull me up because I couldn't get up by myself when I had to carry that pack
14 for however far the sergeant setup our ambush that night. We would stay in ambush all
15 night, and hopefully we hoped it wouldn't rain and stuff like that. Most of the time when
16 it would rain it just soaked you, then the mosquitos would come out, and man, those
17 mosquitos just were just terrible. They'd eat you alive and it seemed like they'd pick you
18 up, throw you around, and kick you around. That's how bad they were. When I went to
19 my very last one, before I got pulled out, we didn't go on patrol that much because we
20 had Popular Forces and the guy in charge of the Popular Force, or he was a Chieu Hoi,
21 and we would set up our ambush and he would go out, and if he came back and went to
22 sleep, we had nothing to worry about. But if he would go out, come back and just sit
23 there with his rifle between his legs don't go to sleep because we were going to get into
24 contact in which it happened. I don't know how he did it, but every time he would come
25 back and not fall asleep, they would—we would always get into a firefight with the
26 enemy. Whether it be just a group of Viet Cong or NVA but in that area we were
27 engaging a lot of NVA troops. Now the other areas, maybe an NVA soldier here and
28 there but most of the time it was all Viet Cong. But in that area, it was—we're like in the
29 valley and the mountains, and we engaged them a lot with the NVA I mean. We see this
30 train go by in front of it they have a bunch of flat cars in front it, so just in case they mine
31 the railroad tracks it wouldn't hit the engine. Day time, it would get up to a 120, 130.

1 Nighttime about eighty degrees, humid. I don't know. Anything else you want to ask
2 about?

3 KC: You bring up this issue of the Chieu Hoi leading the Popular Forces there. I
4 guess I would assume that if anybody is going to be able to pick up the signs of VC or
5 NVA, a Chieu Hoi would be able to do that having travelled with them, worked with
6 them, been part of them, would kind of pick up on the tell-tale signs that they might leave
7 out there in the jungle or what have you. Now getting back to the booby traps, you
8 mentioned some of the kinds that you would find here. Can you go into some of
9 descriptive detail of some of these booby traps that you saw? What did they look like?
10 Whether they're the punji pits, or whether they're the Bouncing Bettys or the rigged
11 mortar rounds, describe some of those for me in as much detail as you can remember.

12 JC: We would see punji stakes but they, where we were at, they didn't use them,
13 they used unexploded rounds. One of their tricks was, they would take one of our
14 grenades and pack it with mud and pull the pin and we'd be walking along, and it would
15 explode, and of course, we'd lose some toes and get shrapnel in the legs and stuff like
16 that. Other times we—it was artillery rounds, a lot of artillery rounds that didn't explode
17 and they would put a blasting cap in them and string the trip wire which you can't see and
18 tie it between a tree and walk right down the trail, and then we would pull it out and it
19 would set off the blasting cap which in turn would explode the round. We were lucky.
20 We would always find them before they would explode, but we always carried extra C4
21 with us and just put C4 around it and blow it in place. Let's see, that was mainly the ones
22 that we would run across was a lot of artillery rounds. I never seen any bomb rounds that
23 didn't explode, but a lot of artillery rounds that didn't explode we would run across. And
24 like I said thanks to that dog finding them it saved a lot of Marines life; it would save a
25 lot of Marines lives. One of those things would go off and—I've seen a guy lose every
26 toe except for his big toe on his foot. I've seen a guy who tripped it, and he got shrapnel
27 all over his face and luckily it never hit any of his vital arteries like the carotid artery.
28 There was shrapnel around it but not where it nicked it, or the temple, and just all over his
29 face. He was never the same after that because he was—actually he didn't trip it was the
30 guy in front of him that tripped it, but he got it in the face, but he was never the same. He
31 was a great guy, and then after a while he just was—he just lost it. I think they finally

1 transferred him back to the States for help. They—our main source of what we would call
2 backup was the—we would have the Navy PBR boats, river boats, and then a lot of our
3 air support, of course, was the Air Force but if we needed helicopters for medevac and
4 everything like that, the detachment of Marines that was up in Phu Bai was just the CAG,
5 CAG units. By that time the 3rd Marine division I think pulled out, and we just took over
6 just a little part of the base and mainly it was an Army base but the 101st Air Borne, the
7 Army was our—in other words if we needed a medevac or helicopter support, it all came
8 from the Army.

9 KC: You talked about the booby traps, and just obviously I'm sure how
10 frightening they would've been. What kind of effect did the existence of these booby
11 traps have on the men of the CAP platoon that you were with? What kind of an effect did
12 they have on you emotionally, knowing they could be there at any time?

13 JC: Actually, I may not pronounce it right, but it demoralized us knowing that we
14 are just a fellow Marine. It's just that—it came to a point where, of course, we all hated
15 being there, but it just—we wished that we could fight that war the way we should fight a
16 war. We have a lot of restrictions on us back in 1970, and we were supposed to heed by
17 them but we never, well, we sort of did but not totally, okay. At first, when we were out
18 on ambush anything that moved at nighttime which is that curfew, I told you about at
19 eight at night to six in the morning, they walked into our ambush, we opened up on them.
20 Towards the end, it came down to—like we were walking a guard post in the United
21 States, we were supposed to challenge them. Unless for sure we saw them carrying a rifle
22 or something like that. So, it was getting sort of—actually, to tell you the truth it was
23 getting sort of stupid there because we had the firepower and the willpower to—that war
24 could've ended, I think, way before I got in. They just tied our hands, and it just—that's
25 what actually demoralized us was knowing that these congressmen are telling us what to
26 do and what not to do, and they're sitting in their nice, air-conditioned office in
27 Washington D.C. telling us what we can do and were halfway across the world being shot
28 at. Sometimes, you know, we can't take a shower for a week, and we stopped, and it was
29 just nice to be back home. That's all we thought about was just making it back home
30 because it's not what you would think. I mean growing up World War II and Korea,
31 you'd see all these guys fighting and all this stuff. Everybody was behind them, and

1 nobody was behind us. In fact, what was it we made a joke about—this is when the
2 women were burning their bras—we was always wishing they would come over and burn
3 their bras in front of us, you know, because we hadn't seen a good looking woman in a
4 long time. Also, at that time the Army invaded Cambodia, so it stops some of the supply
5 routes, so they were coming out of the mountains towards us and everything. That's when
6 a lot of people were demonstrating and I believe Kent State happened when I was over
7 there, in fact it did happen when I was over there. Me, I wasn't the most educated guy,
8 but I had a high school education and these kids they have the opportunity to go to school
9 and what do they do? They protest the War and I mean they; I've never had it but—err
10 wasn't spit on or anything like that, but a lot of the guys would come home and get spit
11 on and treated bad. When I came home, I was—nobody would talk to me, I even got
12 people I went to school with, they says, "Hey we ain't seen you in a while," and "Where
13 you been?" I say, "I just got back from Vietnam," then they'd turn their back and not talk
14 to me. The only people that talked to me and gave me respect was the people my dad
15 knew that fought in World War II or the Korean War.

16 KC: Let me take you back to the days of your time in the CAP platoon there in
17 Vietnam, and you talked about small things like not being able to shower, and not having
18 air-conditioning and things like that. What was daily life like for you as a Marine in the
19 CAP unit in terms of sanitation, in terms of did you have books to read? Were you able to
20 send letters home? Did you receive letters back? What about those kinds of things? Can
21 you discuss those with me?

22 JC: Yeah, the best thing that we could get was a letter from home. There were
23 times that, it was just the mail system, and we wouldn't get a mail, and everybody just
24 loved to hear letters from home. Most of the time early in the morning after we would
25 come back from our ambush, we would clean our rifles and weapons and just make sure
26 they were in operating order because the M16 rifle had to be cleaned daily. It was just
27 one of them rifles that would jam up on you. We cleaned our rifles, if we got mail—most
28 of the time in the morning we would get supply, that's when they would bring out fresh
29 water because all we had was two, two quart canteens of water to last us for a whole day
30 and we would hand out the supplies and sometimes they would give us extra food where
31 we could cook. We just—if we didn't go out on patrol we would just sit in the village and

1 just read, yeah, we got books, but I really can't remember how we got books because I do
2 remember just laying on top of bunkers reading books and stuff. If we could take a
3 shower, it would usually be in the stream or creek that was by us, we just dipped our
4 helmets in there and poured it over us and hoped no leeches would come on us. Because
5 sometimes we would take a shower and then we'd find leeches all over from being in the
6 water. Bathroom wise? Jeez all that was, was an ammo box with the two middle boards
7 missing. The thing is, is that usually out and away from the village because we would dig
8 one every day. Then the main thing, going to them, was those water buffalos. They hated
9 us, and these little kids, little Vietnamese kids with sticks, would be able to whack them
10 water buffalo and they would listen to them but boy they got a whiff of us they started
11 charging us. We had one guy that had to shoot a water buffalo, and he shot that thing four
12 or five times in the head with a .45 and that thing still kept coming at him. If it rained like
13 during the monsoon, oh, man, keeping dry was the biggest thing which was you could
14 never keep dry. I mean we just totally wet, it just poured down rain, and poured down
15 rain and I can remember sitting in ambushes where it's raining so hard, I can put the hand
16 in front of my face, and I can't see it. It was that bad, your constantly wet and you can't
17 take your—you can take them off, but it won't do any good to take your boot off to let
18 your feet air out, but it's pouring down rain all the time. That's all it does, I mean you've
19 seen that movie with Forrest Gump where he says it rained down, sideways, up and that's
20 the way it was. I mean it just poured down rain up there, and up there was red clay plus
21 the white sand.

22 KC: Speaking of the climate conditions there, what was—what kind of effect did
23 that have on you? This is not rural Indiana that you're dealing with here, you're up in I
24 Corps. It's mountainous terrain. It's heavy jungle. You've got—of course, like you're
25 talking about you've got the monsoon rains. All of these things will obviously take an
26 effect physically. It will have an effect on your M16. It will have an effect on your
27 clothes and your boots and your socks, and but also, I would think have an effect on your
28 mind. What kind of effect does the weather have on you both physically and
29 emotionally?

30 JC: It takes its toll on you. I landed in Vietnam weighing a hundred eighty five
31 pounds, I told you what I weighed after I graduated, I came home, and I was a hundred

1 thirty five pounds. Carrying that pack around in the mud and slipping in the mud. You
2 know like one night we went on an ambush, and this captain took us way out in the
3 middle of nowhere in a free-fire zone. They put me in the back. So, we were walking in
4 the water up to our waist and I was sinking into mud up to my knees, and I had all that
5 weight on my back and carrying the M60. The guy behind me was, we called him “Be-
6 deep Be-deep” and the reason we called him that was because whenever they would
7 shoot artillery rounds with flares and stuff like that, you’d hear the sound, it would go
8 (makes whooshing sound), he says it went “Be-deep, be-deep, be-deep” all the way
9 down, so that’s what we called him. The South Vietnamese were firing on us, of course,
10 we couldn’t fire back because they were friendly, and the sergeant come up to me and
11 says, he asked me, “Where’s Be-deep Be-deep?” and I say, “He should be back a few
12 yards. I don’t know,” I had my hard time just carrying that 60 and all that pack myself.
13 And then he comes back, about fifteen minutes later, he found him. This guy had real—
14 he has glasses on, and he couldn’t see a thing, so he’s sitting on a rice paddy dike holding
15 his M79 in the middle of nowhere, not knowing where he was, and the sergeant was
16 actually leading him by hand because he couldn’t see. The heat, I mean yeah it gets hot
17 here and humid but once in a while we’ll get a rain and we’ll lose the humidity but there
18 it was constant, I think you sweat it out. It was just one of those things that—I can’t say
19 you get, you just get accustomed to it. That’s about it. I mean most of the time we always
20 had our pants on, if it wasn’t raining, we’d let our feet air out but most of the time we
21 didn’t have a shirt on. They also made us where those flak jackets too, they were heavy
22 but the only thing they helped on is when you’re carrying a pack the straps don’t dig into
23 your shoulders and rub them raw and everything. You get to your ambush site most of the
24 time, well, not so much day patrol but at nighttime we’d get to our ambush site, and we
25 were exhausted, totally exhausted in carrying all that stuff. When you’re in the Infantry,
26 no matter what part of the Infantry you are, everything you own is in that pack.

27 KC: Well, that begs this question, what sort of things did you carry with you?

28 JC: Okay, in my pack I had one pair of socks that I kept in a plastic bag to keep
29 dry, because that was a rarity having dry socks, clean dry socks. An extra change of
30 clothes if I was lucky, most of the time they were rotten away, and there would also be
31 like letter-writing gear, my shaving gear, any other little personal things that I would have

1 because my parents would send me a package a month, my aunt would send me a
2 package a month, so I'd carry cans of Progresso soup and warm them up. Also attached
3 to that was my two, two quart canteens of water. And then I had a couple LAWs like
4 everybody that carried, and then I had—I carried six claymore mines on the back of my
5 pack, and then I carried seven hundred rounds. Each machine gunner had a thousand
6 rounds, but I had eleven hundred because I had a hundred rounds assault pouch, and I
7 carried six hundred rounds and my A gunner carried four hundred rounds. So, I carried
8 the claymore mines, and what I'd do is once we get to ambush, I would go out there and
9 set up the claymore mines. I would set one up at and then like a one hundred and eighty
10 and I'd put it out in and daisy-chain it with det. cord. Then I'd just—I'd always carry the
11 clicker with me, which is what sets it off, I'd carry that in my pant leg because they got
12 the big pocket there. And then I'd set that up and then we'd put it in middle of the
13 ambush and so if we heard anything that's the first that you blow is the claymore mines.

14 KC: Now in the midst of all this—the thirteen months that you had, at least
15 theoretically, spent in Vietnam—did you ever receive the opportunity to go on leave?

16 JC: Yeah.

17 KC: When was that and where did you go?

18 JC: We had what they called two, three day in-country R&R [Rest and
19 Recuperation], and actually all that is, is you come in Friday and then you go back
20 Monday morning, and you get to go to the rear, which is—well, to the rear that's what we
21 called it. Then you get an R&R, and I went to Sydney Australia. When you went to the
22 rear, I mean to tell you the truth, beer was a nickel a can, so it was just a three day drunk.
23 When I went to Sydney Australia that's where I got my tattoo done in Australia.

24 KC: Well, tell me about this trip to Sydney, why did you choose Australia for
25 your R&R?

26 JC: Well, it's going to sound sort of racist but I got tired of seeing—I just wanted
27 to see some round-eyed girls you know. That sounds funny but I just wanted to see some
28 round-eyed girls and it was very strict going into Sydney too because I smoked, so all
29 you could take was a pack of cigarettes and then once you got there to Sydney, you'd
30 have to throw your cigarettes away and as soon as you walk across the other side you can
31 buy another pack of cigarettes. But there was two Marines on this whole flight from Da

1 Nang to Sydney, and the rest were Army. So, me and this other guy that was a Marine,
2 we got motel rooms across from each other. I mean it was just nice. The first thing I did I
3 took a shower for about a half-hour, forty-five minutes. It could've been longer, but it
4 was just nice to be clean. Just the green slime that was rolling off my body and I took a
5 shower before I went. And I just took a nice hot shower, went to sleep, and then me and
6 this other Marine we would go to bars, but we wouldn't hang out at the bars where the
7 other G.I.'s were, we went to little side bars and the Australian people—that's all we had
8 to do is buy the one drink and they said, "What do you want?" And then we would tell
9 them, and the Australian people, well, they could tell by the way we talked we were
10 Americans, and once they found that we were Marines, that was it. We didn't have to buy
11 a drink after that, I mean the Australian people treated us nice, and man, I hated. It was
12 just nice to be able to eat some good food. I mean cooked food and sleep in a bed. Just
13 simple things, and having a flush toilet, little simple things that we just take for granted
14 every day like a hot shower, using a flush toilet, sleeping in a bed, actually after you get
15 used to it then you got to get used to sleeping in a bed again. Not that bed in Australia,
16 that felt so soft that, man, I slept for about three or four hours. We both woke up, got
17 something to eat, and we would just walked around Sydney and it was just nice seeing
18 things normal. Seeing things normal. No jets flying over, no helicopters flying over, no
19 carrying a pack and sleeping on the ground. Being normal again, that's the way we put it,
20 just being normal.

21 KC: Now how far into your tour was this trip to Australia?

22 JC: Actually, my last two months in Vietnam was spent in the rear. So, it was like
23 two weeks before I got pulled out, then they sent me to Okinawa, so it was like two or
24 three weeks before I got pulled out, I went there and came back. Then when I come back,
25 they says, "Hey, we're getting pulled out. They're setting down the school." Actually,
26 when I got pulled out of the rear I went to where the school I went, because you had to go
27 to a two-week school, we went to the compound where the school was. When I got back,
28 they says, "They're closing down the school, they're pulling out the CAP units," and the
29 guys that hadn't been there long enough are going to be sent to other units, and me and
30 most of the other guys we had our time in. We had like nine, ten months in. They let us
31 get pulled out.

1 KC: Now where was, you said you went to the rear for your in-country R&R,
2 where was that? Back to Phu Bai?

3 JC: Yeah, Phu Bai.

4 KC: Okay, well, describe that one for me, you mentioned that beer was a nickel a
5 can and that it was a three-day drunk but describe what it was like to go back to Phu Bai,
6 out of the jungles or away from the village, and to be with other Marines and to have this
7 kind of time off. What was that experience like for you?

8 JC: Well, we got to sleep in a cot, and there again be able to take a shower. Take a
9 shower, and shave, and we shaved out in the field but just to be able to sleep not on the
10 floor, we'd get to watch movies and eat some food again, some normal food. We'd watch
11 the movies and sit at the club watching movies, it's sort of an outside one, and the guy
12 behind the bar was like a dual role he would run the projector plus give us the beer—or
13 sell us the beer, and we just sit there and watch the movie. You'd still hear the
14 helicopters, and you'd have the heat and everything like that, but most of the time it was
15 just be able to sleep. That's what we do, we just slept and relaxed.

16 KC: And obviously, it was well-earned relaxation, of course. What was your
17 relationship like, or the other grunts who were in the field, what was their relationship
18 like with those that served permanently in the rear there in Phu Bai? Was there any sort
19 of problems, or discrepancy or discrimination towards them?

20 JC: When they would—when we'd have to go to the rear to do paperwork and
21 stuff like that, that Phu Bai I should say, and they would complain about, "Oh, man, look
22 at this, they're in a screened tent," I never said anything, but I just thought it and I'm
23 thinking, "I'd be happy to trade places with you. You got a bed you can sleep in at
24 nighttime, so if you start receiving rounds you can go run into your bunker." And the
25 only thing that used to, well, piss me off was I had a NVA pack that I took off a dead
26 NVA and when I got medevac'ed to the rear, to Phu Bai hospital, when I went to go get
27 my stuff it was gone. They would steal—the guys in supply, I wouldn't say "all" of them
28 but there's some people in supply, would steal our stuff because I knew the guys out on
29 the field would not steal my stuff. If the guy—anybody, he says, "Hey do you have a
30 cigarette?" and I, "Yeah," or "Hey can I have that can of soup that you got?" I would give
31 it to them, or vice verses. But the guys in supply would sometimes take our stuff and

1 we'd never see it again. The people in the office, we never had many doings, but we'd
2 hear them complain because of the heat, and they have a fan blowing on them and
3 everything. Go out in the heat where you don't have no fan blowing on you and you're
4 laying out there all the time. So, we'd hear them complain, but myself personally I never
5 said anything, but I thought, "You know you guys got it made back here. Yes, you can
6 receive incoming rounds, but you can hide. Or go in a bunker and hide." Out there you
7 receive incoming rounds, you just pray that it don't hit you, that's all.

8 KC: Was it difficult to go back out, back out to the village after your three days in
9 Phu Bai?

10 JC: Yeah, yeah it was. It was, but it was nice to see the guys again because when I
11 was come back and the guys saying, "I'm next, man. What was it like?" and I say, "Man,
12 it was great," and I say, "You can take a shower, and stuff like that." Of course, once you
13 come back, when you go back in there our head would be long and then the company
14 gunners would make us go get a haircut. That's the first thing we had to do is get a
15 haircut and be presentable and look like a Marine instead of a—well, the only way I
16 could put it because they called us "slime-balls." We don't have barbers out there, how
17 are we supposed to get a haircut? But going back out, yeah and then thinking, "Oh, man,
18 got to go out there and do this again."

19 KC: You bring up a good point there, you say when you come back to the rear
20 you have to get a haircut as one thing, were you able to or did you need to? And if so,
21 were you able to resupply yourself with boots, or fatigues, or whatever may have been?

22 JC: If we needed boots yeah. If we needed boots and stuff like that, we could get
23 that stuff, or if we needed the jungle fatigues and stuff, "utilities" we called them, utilities
24 are the fatigues of the Army, but utilities if we needed them and everything but most of
25 the time, they would just make us go take a shower and get a haircut, take a shower in
26 other words be presentable and don't stink. When we shaved out there, we couldn't use
27 deodorant, yeah, we never used deodorant, and we never used aftershave because they
28 could smell you. So, we had to be presentable, so that's the first thing they did is when
29 we got off the truck. We'd carry our packs with us and the gunneys usually standing
30 there, "You need a haircut, go get your haircut, go shower and shave," and then you had
31 to report back in to the gunney about an hour later. They made us want to be presentable

1 which I guess I can understand, but sometimes it's just all your thinking about, "Man, I
2 just want to get something to eat and go to bed."

3 KC: I was going to ask you if there was any sort of resentment on your part. Here
4 you are coming in from out in the bush, and here's a gunnery sergeant who's telling you,
5 "Go get a haircut. Go take a shower. Make sure you're following these rules, etc." I was
6 wondering if it would make you bitter in any way. Like you'd want to say, "You know
7 what, I just got in, give me a break here I want go to do this or this," was there any of
8 that, that you saw?

9 JC: Yeah, but we more or less, at least me, I kept to myself and I'm thinking,
10 "Hey give me a break," but I would do it because we were told and taught to respect that
11 person's rank. You may not like the guy, but you've got to respect his rank. So, we would
12 just do it and get the gunnery off us, then he would—like me. After I got it all done and
13 shower and shaved, in fact he told me, "Go shave," and I say, "I don't have any shaving
14 gear, I left out in the field." And so, he gave me shaving gear, so I mean—after I got
15 showered and shaved and was presentable, he would give us a nickel and say, "Hey go
16 buy yourself a beer." A cold beer was great. I mean towards the end when I was out in
17 the field, we had a captain who wanted to look real good. For every kill that we could get
18 we would have a cold case of beer. He would come out, inspect it, make sure it was a
19 righteous—not a righteous kill, but a kill, we'd have cold beer out there that afternoon.

20 KC: Wow that must've been something else for you.

21 JC: Oh, that was a delicacy.

22 KC: I imagine so.

23 JC: But then there again, a couple of beers and we were drunk because we weren't
24 used to—I mean all we had was just water. And then my parents would send me Kool-
25 Aid because we would run out of water, then we'd have to go to the streams and creeks,
26 fill our canteen and then we'd have to put iodine tabs in it, and then that made the water
27 taste terrible. And my mom and dad would send me pre-sweetened Kool-Aid so I'd mix
28 in there and it would just make it taste more presentable than iodine water.

29 KC: Well, that was obviously very kind of your parents to think of you and be
30 able to provide that for you.

1 JC: In fact, I'll tell you one time, you've heard of O-Ke-Doke popcorn, haven't
2 you?

3 KC: I have yes.

4 JC: Okay, well, my dad sent me a three pound box of O-Ke-Doke popcorn and
5 I'm thinking, "Man, it's been a while since I've ate cheese popcorn." So, me and the guys
6 we opened it up, and started—it was hot, we were low on water, but we didn't care—we
7 we're munching on that popcorn and the Vietnamese didn't know what it was. Told them
8 to come and eat it, and they were afraid to eat it because they had never seen popcorn
9 before. Once they tasted it, you can't explain to them what popcorn is, they had corn, but
10 they ate it like corn on the cob, not popcorn. I was telling my dad, I said, "That was very
11 appreciated." A hundred-twenty some degrees and salty, cheese popcorn and stuff.

12 KC: Probably the last thing in the world you should've been eating, but it would
13 be difficult not to eat it, I'm sure.

14 JC: And then see my aunt would send me a carton of cigarette and then she would
15 send me soup and candy. And then my dad would send me some cigars, those little
16 Tiparillo cigars, and then they would send me soups, and other canned stuff. Once a week
17 we would get these ST packs, and in that was ten cartons of cigarettes and then it had
18 letter writing gear, shave cream, razor, razor blades, ink pens, yeah anything to write
19 letters with. And how it went was, because when I went over there, I smoked Marlboro
20 cigarettes, and when I landed in Vietnam and went out to the field, well, I was low on the
21 totem pole in seniority, and the Marlboro was snatched up right away, so I had to take
22 what was left over. I don't know if you ever smoked in your life, if you haven't don't, but
23 I had to smoke Lucky Strike cigarettes, and oh, man. Then I progressed up to Pall Mall,
24 and then finally got my Marlboro after a while.

25 KC: You have to do your time in order to rise up in the hierarchy of cigarette
26 smoking.

27 JC: Right. We'd also get the cigarettes in the C-rations too. Little things like that,
28 I mean it took me about three months because me and this other guy would smoke
29 Marlboro and we would switch, one week he'd take the Marlboro and I'd take the
30 Winston and vice verses. But man, I was never so happy to get rid of them nasty Lucky
31 Strikes though. Yeah, we could've went to the rear and paid a dollar fifty a carton, they

1 were only fifteen cents a pack. We'd also make some money off the Vietnamese too.
2 They would ask us who was in the rear, and their favorite cigarettes was Salem and—
3 what was it, there was another. And then we would go—we'd buy ourselves a couple
4 cartons and then we'd buy those cigarettes for them. We charged them like ten bucks a
5 carton and it only cost us a dollar fifty. But then when we ran out cigarettes and we
6 needed some, I had to pay that dollar fifty like got them and stuff.

7 KC: You talk about the indigenous personnel, the Vietnamese that you dealt with,
8 and you talked about for example the issue of popcorn and they weren't sure what to
9 make of it. I would assume that there were other cultural barriers and cultural issues with
10 which you had to deal while you were living with them. What sort of things come to
11 mind when you're dealing with the Vietnamese?

12 JC: Well, I remember one night after a firefight, I didn't know what it I'm new in-
13 country, to me it looked like just concrete slabs. So, I tore my M60 apart and start
14 cleaning it, and they were hollering and screaming, and you know everything like that, I
15 didn't understand what they were saying. Well, come to find out, it was some Buddha
16 festival thing, okay? Or not festival but Buddha thing, that they pray to Buddha, and here
17 I'm cleaning my M60 machine gun, I got gun powder and all that stuff all over. I didn't
18 know it, like another thing simple thing like if you got to get a glass of water from them
19 or tea, oh, I loved their banana wine. Oh, man, that was some stuff. But you don't drink
20 the whole glass, you leave a little bit on the bottom, swish it around and throw it out. That
21 for some reason that's one of their customs that you don't drink the whole glass of thing,
22 you leave that little in the bottom and throw it out. What was some of the other stuff—oh,
23 this is a little anecdote that was funny. We had this big festival that we were invited to
24 because we were with them, and I'm eating the rice and everything like that and I see this
25 little meat cut in squares. To me it looked cube steak, so I'm eating it and eating it and I
26 thought, "Man, this is good, I ain't tasted meat like this in a while." So, I asked the
27 Vietnamese next to me, "What is it?" And he goes, he tells me, "*Cho*." And I go, "*Khong*
28 *biet cho?*" Which means "I don't understand Cho," and he goes, "Woof, woof." Oh, man,
29 you know I'm thinking of my Irish setter back home, and I'm eating dog. And they eat
30 cat too.

31 KC: What kind of an effect did that have on you?

1 JC: I got sick.

2 KC: Did you really?

3 JC: Yeah, I mean I didn't vomit or anything like that but it just you know when
4 you eat it and you go, "Oh, man," my stomach just felt upset. Just sitting there thinking, I
5 mean I didn't—it was tasting good until I found out what it was, and then I'm eating dog.
6 I'm eating dog. I mean I love dogs; I mean I can remember one time I was sitting at
7 our—if we didn't go out, we always had to stay on watch just in case they would attempt
8 to attack us during the daytime, and I'll tell you right now they never attacked us during
9 the daytime, and if they did, they outnumbered ten to one anyway. So, I'm sitting there,
10 and I see this cat (makes racing-by sound) run by and I see this mama-san (makes racing-
11 by sound) run by too and then a few minutes later I see this cat tied to the stick and all the
12 fur burned off and she's taking it down to the well, chopping it up and their eating it. And
13 then the rats were bigger than the cats, I can tell you that. Those rats, those are huge.

14 KC: Was it difficult for you to make these kinds of adjustments living in the
15 village with these people?

16 JC: Yeah, well, not so much adjustments but you—one of the big no-no's is you
17 couldn't touch the women, which is part of being in a CAP program and everything, and
18 you can talk to them and socialize with them, like I said the one village was pretty cool,
19 and the other villages we didn't socialize with them because the one hated us, and the
20 other one was setting up booby traps for us. Just little things like, I think the language
21 barrier too. It'd be probably like what the troops are facing now, I mean you don't
22 understand what they're saying and stuff. But customs, we learned that in school and so
23 you knew not to do it.

24 KC: Did you keep a short-timers calendar?

25 JC: No, no, no I didn't. Just for number one I didn't have a place to put it in,
26 because usually guys who kept it was someplace to put it. Both my pack was tied up with
27 military equipment, so I didn't have a place to put it, but I knew the days. I knew the days
28 and stuff.

29 KC: What was it like for you when people would rotate in and out of the platoon
30 that you were in? Did you find yourself making attachments with people, and then them

1 leaving and being replaced by someone else, was that part of your routine and if so, was
2 it difficult?

3 JC: You become—you become very good friends and I'll tell you what both
4 friends I had over there will never, ever compound to the friends I got now because we
5 experienced things. You're happy for the person, you hate to see them go, but you're just
6 thinking, all I kept thinking, "Man, I wish that was me," just like everybody, "Man, I
7 wish that was me," and stuff. But when we'd see them go, it was sad for all of us, but we
8 knew the man's going back to the—we call to "the world", that's what we called the
9 United States was "the world."

10 KC: What about when new guys would come in? What kind of reception did you
11 give to them?

12 JC: I talked to them. I mean it's hard because sometimes when you're new in a
13 place, guys won't talk to you. Guys talk to me, but they don't talk to you that much
14 because you get to know a person, but then if that person gets wounded and gets shipped
15 back or gets killed, you don't want to become too attached and then the thing is, is it's the
16 same thing with the new guys. You talk to them, and you give them advice, if they ask
17 me for advice, I will tell them what I knew and everything. I treated them pretty good
18 because I knew what it was like to be the new guy in the country.

19 KC: When you had time to think about home, what sort of things would come to
20 your mind? What did you want to do when you got home, as you were sitting in a village
21 in Vietnam?

22 JC: Probably like every place that we grew up in, we had a certain part of South
23 Bend that we called "the circle" where all of us teenagers would just drive around, try to
24 chit-chat with the women, and eat at Bonnie Doon's or Azar's or something like that.
25 That's what I was thinking about, I just can't wait to get in a car and cruise the strip. Just
26 drive the circle, eat one of them big ol'—they have Bonnie Doon's in Texas?

27 KC: I'm not familiar with them, no.

28 JC: Okay, well, the big ol' Bonnie Burger that was my favorite sandwich. It was a
29 double hamburger, with lettuce, tomatoes, and stuff and that's what I wanted, was one of
30 the Bonnie Burgers and a Cherry Coke. That was my favorite. That's what I would think
31 about, eating one of them ol' greasy Bonnie Burgers and having a Cherry Coke.

1 KC: Well, were there any other particular episodes about your time there, and in
2 the CAP program, that you wanted to discuss before we move you out of these villages
3 and move you back to the rear?

4 JC: There was good times, there was bad times. You know you asked me a
5 question the other day, “What was it like in a firefight,” and to me it’s really hard to
6 explain but the only way I can explain it, it’s hell. You’ve got rounds going, explosions,
7 people hollering and screaming, mass chaos, confusion, and everything. I just wish I
8 could explain that better. When I was pulled out—and actually I had it made in the rear,
9 when I got pulled out and went to the rear it was just nice knowing that I’m sleeping on a
10 bed now, and I got three meals a day. Believe it or not when I was in the rear, I had it
11 really made.

12 KC: And when you went back to the rear, this is Phu Bai I assume?

13 JC: No this is Da Nang, after they—

14 KC: You went back to Da Nang? Okay.

15 JC: They—can’t call it “dismantle” but they pulled us out, okay.

16 KC: The entire platoon.

17 JC: Yeah. And they sent us to Da Nang where the school was. Some of the guys
18 pulled security, and by that time I was a radio operator and since they knew I was a radio
19 operator, I got to know the second lieutenant real good and all I did was listen to the radio
20 from twelve at night to six in the morning, go get a breakfast and I had senior life-saving
21 from the years before I went in, and I would call China Beach which was down the road
22 from us, and if they were open I’d open up the beach and I’d take the surf board out, so
23 the guys can go out into the South China Sea and going swimming. Then in the evening
24 I’d watch the movies, so I had it pretty well-made in my last two months there.

25 KC: Was it difficult for you guys to leave the villages that you were living with?

26 JC: Leaving some of the kids and stuff, I mean knowing what would happen to
27 them. I can remember one time, whenever we would come back to the village that day,
28 we would just pick a house and just stay there around the house. Then we would leave for
29 ambush and then we’d come back, well, that day that we spent at this—young ladies
30 house, that’s the only way I can say it—her house, we come back the next day and the
31 NVA killed her. For being associated with us.

1 KC: It was the NVA that came in and killed her.

2 JC: That's what the villagers said.

3 KC: What goes through your mind? What kind of an effect does that have on
4 you?

5 JC: I'm just thinking, it's just a waste. She was a very pretty young lady, she gave
6 us water, she cooked for us, I mean we would give her money back and everything like
7 that because they would pay us in this MPC [Military Payment Certificate], and we
8 would give it to them and they could buy things with that too, okay. What got me was, is
9 that yeah, they showed what Calley did, but they didn't go into the village and see what
10 the NVA did to the people themselves. There's gotta be numbers and numerous—where
11 the villagers were killed too. But that never hit that because the news people just showed
12 what we were doing wrong. The thing is yeah, you don't want to have civilians killed but
13 it happens. They should've showed what—that's what got to me. They should've showed
14 what the Viet Cong and the NVA did to the people themselves, that they were supposed
15 to be trying to free from the Southern Government.

16 KC: Well, you get the orders that your platoon is going to be disbanded for all
17 intents and purposes, at least it's not going to be in these villages anymore, and you come
18 back to Da Nang. What kind of feeling did you have about that? Yes, it's obviously like
19 you mentioned it's difficult to leave the people, especially the kids, but you're also going
20 to go to the rear and the big rear, this is Da Nang this is a large city unto itself. What was
21 that like for you?

22 JC: We were happy. We were happy that we ain't going to have to go out and
23 ambush anymore. When we first got there, they put us in guard towers, I'd rather stay on
24 guard for a couple hours, that was a whole lot better than just laying in ambush all night.
25 You're just up in that guard tower and you get three cooked meals of course, the beer and
26 the movies and things that we hadn't had for a long time. It was just knowing that we're
27 not out in the field anymore, that was it, we're just not out in the field we're in the rear.
28 We're still subjected to incoming rounds but we're not out in that field anymore, we're
29 not sleeping on that ground.

30 KC: Were there any difficulties associated with this? And I guess what I'm going
31 to ask here, is in the field there was, I would assume, a level of informality. You're not

1 going to shave, you're not going to get a haircut, you don't have to be spit and polish but
2 often times I've heard people say that when they came back to the rear, that there was
3 what a lot of people called "Chickenshit." Making sure that your buttons were right, and
4 that everything was in its place, did you have any of that kind of experience?

5 JC: Yeah, they made us polish our boots and we told them, "We don't have
6 polish," so they gave us polish, yeah, we had to shower and shave everyday but—do a lot
7 of that. I mean field day the barracks—well, not barracks. Well, they were barracks you
8 know but clean the barracks and stuff like that where we never had to worry about that
9 kind of stuff before. They messed with us but not totally messed with us because
10 sometimes they were a little afraid of us too because you knew what happened and
11 everything like that, the fragging of officers and stuff like that, so they knew not to mess
12 with us too bad. We dealt with it. It just was nice—you're going to think it's silly, the
13 thing I had a hard time getting used to was I was sleeping on the ground so long, it took
14 me a while to get used to sleeping on a bed with sheets and stuff. The whole thing and
15 stuff like that. We didn't have inspections, but they expected us to be—our haircut, clean
16 shaven, we just figured it was the price to pay just to get out of the field.

17 KC: Sure, sure. You mentioned the issue of fragging, and again we're looking at
18 what 1970? Sometime in 1970 here, so the War's being going on for quite a while, it's
19 taken on various different characteristics depending on where you were, and when you
20 were there of course. What was the moral of the Marine Corps like as you saw it in Da
21 Nang from the rear in 1970?

22 JC: Wow. Man, mine was good because I wasn't out in that field anymore. I think
23 that's what most of the guys was, we're just happy we're not out setting up an ambush
24 every night. Yeah, it's hot but we'll take it, but we can go somewhere where the suns not
25 cooking us. What helped us was when I was able to open up the beach, the guys were
26 happy just to get out there and go swimming and just go swimming and having a good
27 time.

28 KC: We often times hear, and it's gotten to where we often times associate
29 Vietnam especially in the later years, with drug problems and racial problems in the
30 United States Military. Did you encounter either of these while you were there?

1 JC: Out in the field, no. In the rear, racial problems, no. I would walk past some
2 buildings and smell guys smoking marijuana, but I'll be honest with you I never seen any
3 hardcore drugs I just smelled marijuana. I never tried it myself, but that was about it. I
4 didn't hit racial problems until after they pulled me out of Vietnam and sent me to
5 Okinawa, that's when I saw the big racial issues there.

6 KC: That's interesting, let's jump ahead a little bit and tell me about that. What
7 did you see? What was this about?

8 JC: There was about three of us that they pulled out that day. And they sent us to
9 Okinawa, 3rd Marine Division—2nd Battalion 4th Marines that's where they sent us to.
10 When we got there the company gunney or I can't remember who says, "We don't want
11 you guys. You guys are too salty, you're going to ruin the troops that we've trained," so
12 they needed MPs [Military Police] for this Camp Hansen. So, they stuck all of us and
13 turned us into MPs. We—racial problems we had a big riot, two hundred Marines against
14 thirteen of us and I got a meritorious mast for being in that riot.

15 KC: What were the circumstances that led to this riot?

16 JC: They said there was not enough black stuff in the PX, so they congregated,
17 and our lieutenant gave them ten minutes to breakup and then thirty minutes they broke
18 up, so they sent us back to our barracks and all of a sudden, they congregated again.
19 Lieutenant gave them the order to disperse or he's going to throw tear gas, and they
20 didn't disperse so we threw the teargas, and the fight was on. I mean the fight was on.
21 They were throwing—we were chasing them. They were throwing rocks at us and I'm
22 talking huge rocks not these little stones, and we were chasing them across the parking lot
23 and guys were getting hit with the rocks. All I remember, this guy—and this is all I can
24 remember of it—this guy was coming at me he had a big lead pipe in his hand, and I took
25 the nightstick and I hit him in the mouth with the nightstick, next minute I know I felt
26 something hit me in the back of the head and I'm on my knees and I see this guy's going
27 to kick me, and I cracked him in the shin with the nightstick and that's it. Next minute I
28 know I'm in the dispensary with the smelling salts underneath my nose. Guys were
29 telling me that some guy knocked me out which I could tell, and that they were trying to
30 steal my stuff and then a bunch of guys came and saved me. I remember another time this
31 one black guy, he was a corporal, and he was with the MPs with us, and his head was

1 split open from a rock he got hit with, because all we had for protection was the helmet
2 liner which is just plastic. They painted it white to make it look nice, but it wasn't a
3 protective helmet thing and it split his head open, and I remember this guy says, this
4 black guy says, "So, man, don't hit me bro," then he goes, "Bro helm," wham. Breaks
5 nightstick over his head. I mean it's just that they were—it was one heck of a fight. Let's
6 see thirteen of us I think, twelve or thirteen of us I can't remember exactly I have to go
7 look it up, and maybe only three or four didn't get hurt.

8 KC: What do you think led to these racial problems in the Marine Corps then?

9 JC: You know the Army was having its problems, and sometimes I—I just think it
10 just bled over into the Marine Corps, but the Marine Corps didn't put up with it. They
11 called in riot companies, company of Marines that were on riot duty, and dispersed them.
12 I didn't see it in boot camp, training, and I mean heck growing up in the '60s hearing
13 even in Indiana we had our racial riots and everything like this. There was riots at my
14 school—high school I went with, and I didn't see it again until went to Okinawa where
15 these guys had nothing better to do because when I was in Vietnam black, white, or
16 whatever we were all one. And over there they just—I don't know what their problem
17 was, but it was one heck of a fight. That's all I can tell you.

18 KC: I'm sorry to have jumped ahead there, but it was interesting, and it was
19 somewhat on topic, so I wanted to follow up with that. All right so you've come back to
20 Da Nang, you've got a couple months left in your tour, you are radio operator which you
21 say was a pretty cushy job. You open up the beach there, China Beach, you spend a lot of
22 time out there, you've got the amenities of being in the rear with cold beer and a cot and
23 these types of things. How long are you—I'm sorry you say you got two months left in
24 your tour at this time, is that correct?

25 JC: I didn't know it, but that's all I spent there before they pulled me out totally,
26 me and a bunch other guys they pulled us out totally, there was too much in the rear.
27 Maybe two, two-and-a-half months I mean I don't know exactly but I'm just saying two
28 months. No, it was in a cot, this was a mattress bed. I couldn't believe it; I tell you the
29 truth it was just nice. Just nice. It would have taken a lot for them to attack us, because
30 where we were there was too many other units to get through to get to us, so we had it
31 made.

1 KC: Now having been in the middle of the War, with the CAP platoon and now
2 being back in the rear at Da Nang, did your perspective or your view of the War change
3 at all now that you're not going out on these daily patrols or nightly ambushes, and
4 you've returned to some sense of normalcy if you will. Did your view of the War, or
5 perspective on the War, change at all?

6 JC: No. No, even to this day I feel proud of my service and the only thing I
7 wished was that the politicians wouldn't have got so involved and I didn't really realize
8 that after I got home, how much the politicians were involved with it. Because they were
9 still sending guys to the school, and we would talk to them, and you know we'd be up
10 straight with them. Yes, I felt sorry for those guys because they're just beginning and my
11 tours sort of winding down, that's the only thing I thought of, my tours—I don't want to
12 seem selfish, but my tours winding down. I don't have to go out anymore, it's just, just
13 was nice knowing I didn't have to go out anymore. Especially like I told you, my last
14 night out in the field the way that thing was written doesn't do any justice for that
15 firefight because the firefight started at twenty-to-three in the morning, and the last shot
16 ended at four o'clock in the morning. So, that's how long that thing went on, the one I
17 was telling you about the other day?

18 KC: Right, right, right the one that made quite an impression on you.

19 JC: Yeah, I mean I was in little skirmishes and everything like that, but nothing
20 like that. It was just a—I was happy that I didn't get wounded, and just happy that—you
21 know I'm going home, I'm just going home pretty soon.

22 KC: When did you get the orders that you were going to go home?

23 JC: That was in Okinawa, after I got pulled out of Vietnam totally—oh, actually
24 what happened was the battalion that I was with, originally assigned to, in Okinawa they
25 were aboard ship. They were in the Philippines practicing war games. Something broke
26 out that they took all of us that were pulled out that day and put us back to our companies
27 because they were getting ready to ship us back to Vietnam. We had to meet—what was
28 it, we had to meet our battalion in Okinawa—not Okinawa but Philippines, and we was
29 going to head back to Vietnam but when I was there packing my stuff, I saw this staff
30 sergeant walk in. I'm thinking, "Dang he looks familiar," it was the recruiter who signed
31 me up here in South Bend. He says, "What are you doing?" I say, "Well, they're getting

1 ready to send us back,” he says, “Do you want to go?” and I say, “Man, I’m short,” I say,
2 “I don’t want to go.” So, he pulled some strings, and I didn’t have to meet my company,
3 all I had to do was just be a duty NCO [Non-commissioned Officer] every other day, I
4 say, “I don’t care, let me be duty NCO every other—” by that time I was a corporal.

5 KC: So, you get the orders, you’re going to spend—how much time I should ask,
6 do you spend in Okinawa?

7 JC: October to January. Late October to January.

8 KC: Okay so you’re there for quite a while then, for a good couple of months. All
9 right now while you’re in Okinawa, I assume obviously that you’re wanting to go home
10 but know that you have the time that you want to spend there. Describe for me your time
11 in Okinawa, you mentioned that you were an MP, and you mentioned this skirmish that
12 you guys—that you’re involved with. Tell me about your time in Okinawa, tell me about
13 the Marine Corps as you saw it there.

14 JC: Well, we worked one day on, one day off, and then every other weekend we’d
15 work the weekend, we’d work Friday—err Saturday and Sunday, and then and stuff. On
16 our days off, I just visited Okinawa. I went to Koza, which is a big city and I’m trying—I
17 think this is the city by the Air Force base down there, and I went to Kim Village and
18 mostly we just got off base. But when we worked, we, sometimes I’d work the gate,
19 sometimes I’d work a roving patrol, then we’d stop cab drivers and search their trunks
20 and find them trying to steal military equipment and things like that. Then when the riot
21 broke out, that’s—they had a week off because they put a big ol’ knot in the side of my
22 head but before then we just after the riot and everything, we did the same thing, and I
23 can’t remember how much longer before they told us to—no it had to be just a little bit
24 after Christmas or something like that I think is what it was. They were cancelling
25 people’s orders to be rotated back to the United States and everything too, and that—but
26 like I said I lucked out and didn’t have to go, but mainly it’s a day on and day off. Then
27 we work eight hours on, eight hours off, and eight hours on somehow. We had to work
28 two eight hour shifts, I know that, so that’s—working the post, that was—err the main
29 gates you just let people in, and like I said roving patrols just checking for people stealing
30 military equipment and everything.

31 KC: Are you counting down the day that you’re going to go home.

1 JC: Oh, yeah.

2 KC: Do you still remember that day? Which day was it?

3 JC: January 11th I believe.

4 KC: All right January 11th comes around Mr. Chamberlain, describe your day.
5 What took place?

6 JC: Well, a couple of days before hand, they sent me up to Camp Smedley Butler
7 and they—I had my uniform all ready, with my stripes and ribbons and everything sewn
8 on, I got my orders, I left Okinawa and it was thirty degrees. I hit California because
9 we—did we reach, yeah, we had to refuel in Hawaii, but I don't remember. But anyhow
10 once I hit California, we had to go through customs again and then I think it's Ontario
11 Airport we landed—it was Norton Air Force Base we landed in, and then we had to catch
12 a ride from Norton to the airport. Well, I paid this cabdriver to take me to the airport and
13 it was foggy, he was speeding down the interstate and I could barely see it, and I'm
14 thinking, "I made it home, and I'm going to get killed in a car wreck because of this
15 stupid cabdriver." It was like thirty-some degrees there, and then from there I caught the
16 flight to O'Hare Airport in Chicago, and it was twenty-eight degrees and snowing. By
17 that time, I'm getting cold, I was really cold, and I then I caught a flight from there to
18 South Bend and I didn't let my parents know that I was coming.

19 KC: Is that right?

20 JC: I called my brother and says, "Meet me at the airport," and I said, "Don't tell
21 mom and dad." I come home, my dog wanted to attack me and bite me, which in turn
22 woke up my dad and he was happy to see me, and then my mom was down at the club,
23 conservation club, and my brother Ron took me down there and we just hugged and
24 cried. I'm home, I'm home you know.

25 KC: What's the first thing you wanted to do after this reunion? Did you go get
26 one of those burgers?

27 JC: What was it? Yes, it was, come to think of it, I went to Bonnie Doon's, and I
28 say, "Ron, I want a cherry Coke, them greasy fries and a Bonnie Burger," and at that time
29 it only cost seventy-five cents for that Bonnie Burger. I think it's—I don't think there's
30 any Bonnie Doon's around, but it's probably two fifty a burger now. I ate it, and it was
31 just nice. I went to see some friends that I hadn't seen, and I called my buddy I had this

1 one guy I knew since second grade and we were best of friends, and I said, “Hey Gary,
2 I’m home.” Lickety-split he came over. See I was engaged when I went over, my fiancée
3 left me when I was over there, and I say, “I need to go to Indianapolis and go get my stuff
4 from here.” Then my brother drove me down there and got it, come back and I just spent
5 the time relaxing. I was sleeping and they made fun because I had a mustache, because I
6 didn’t have a mustache when I first went over, and it’s just nice spending time at home
7 and sleeping in my bed. I was twenty years old but still sleeping in my bed.

8 KC: It’s a good position here to bring up some kind of post-war attitudes, and
9 adjustments, that you may or may not have made. Here for the last year, you’ve been
10 away, you’ve been away in an environment as foreign as can be, in many ways cut off
11 from Western civilization, been thrown in the midst of irregular combat but combat
12 nonetheless, and in the space of a few days you’re back in the United States, at your
13 parent’s house, sleeping in your old bed back in South Bend, Indiana. What was that
14 transition like for you?

15 JC: It’s a shock, but after a few days it wears off. The room looks smaller, it
16 looked so big before I left. It’s just that my mom would check on me quite a bit, and
17 that’s when my dad started opening up about World War II. We would talk, because I had
18 a thirty day leave. They gave me thirty days, and I had to report back to Camp Pendleton.
19 We just went and visited friends, some of them greeted me some of them shunned me.
20 But my good friends, we just went out and had pizza and what was it—this conservation
21 club its where when I was a kid growing up, we would swim and that’s where—senior
22 lifeguard and all that stuff down there, we’d go down there. Friends of my dads who
23 fought in World War II and Korea, said, “You want a beer?” and I say, “Well, I’m not
24 twenty-one,” “I don’t care, if you’re old enough to fight in a war you’re old enough to
25 have a beer,” so I’d have a beer with them. They asked me questions and I told them what
26 it was like because, well, this one guy he fought in Korea and my dad in Italy, and they
27 talked about the winter times and they says it was cold and I say, “Well, you know,” I
28 say, “During the monsoon it got seventy degrees, but we were cold too.” Cold and wet.
29 Just probably like way they were too. And we would just swap environmental things of
30 the different wars, that’s all.

1 KC: Now you're back in 1971, obviously the tenor of the country has changed
2 since you left, regarding the War and America's position in the War has changed, U.S. is
3 drawing forces back. What did you see in terms of how the country was dealing with the
4 War that was still taking place in Vietnam?

5 JC: You know the thing that got me was I never talked to a war protestor, and I
6 don't think I ever will. But the thing is, is what I felt bad for is the guys that were over
7 there. Majority of the people are supporting them, but you don't hear from them, you just
8 hear from the people protesting the War. And that's why I felt sorry for the guys over
9 there. They need the support any kind of support, just like they're doing to the troops
10 now. "Hey, you're doing a good job," that would've been nice to hear, but we never
11 heard that. All we heard was "baby killer", of course, I was called that a "baby killer" and
12 what got me was I got bumped from my flight because of a student. You know, come on
13 now wait a minute, his school he has to be there, but I got certain orders to be back in
14 time and stuff. People—I don't know—they just didn't respect the uniform anymore or
15 guys in uniform.

16 KC: Now you mention that you had been called "baby killer" in this instance.
17 Who was that? Who called you that, and where did this happen?

18 JC: Actually, a guy I used to work with on the police department before he
19 retired. When I was first on the road patrol, he called me a "baby killer." Because he
20 says, "That's all you Marines did was kill babies over there."

21 KC: What was your reaction to this?

22 JC: I wanted to kick his ass, but I didn't because I was still in training, and I'm
23 thinking, "This is going to screw me up and put me back in that jail again." Because you
24 had to work in a jail, and it just, it hurt. This other guy that was good friends with the guy
25 who called me a "baby killer", he said, "At least he had the balls to go in the military, and
26 not run and hide like you did." So, one guy stuck up for me.

27 KC: Did you continue to follow the War at all? In the news reports and things like
28 that?

29 JC: Yeah, I kept up on it and I can remember one night, this is towards the ending
30 of the War, and they were showing the Vietnamese overrunning Phu Bai airport. I told
31 my wife, I say, "I wonder where," I say, "I wonder what happened to all of them people

1 in the village where I was at.” I say, “If they’re still alive,” and I say, “all the area that I
2 fought in, I sweat in, I bled in, and everything else is taken over by Communists.” And I
3 still feel—oh, jeez I just had a name, the guy who made the peace with the North
4 Vietnamese.

5 KC: Are you talking about Henry Kissinger?

6 JC: Yeah, he sold us out. He sold us out, that’s the way I feel.

7 KC: In what way?

8 JC: He wanted peace and he’d do anything to get peace. Yeah, they got the peace
9 and all of a sudden, they took over the country when they signed papers saying they
10 weren’t supposed to come and take over the country. I just feel that he sold us out just to
11 get the peace and get our troops out. We’re still missing several thousand men over there.
12 A guy—well, not him, but his family I knew from a church that we used to go to, they
13 finally found his remains and he was shot down in ’71. I mean come on, let us bring
14 home the—let these guys come home and get a proper burial. I just think that he just
15 plain and did everything just to get the peace and the War over with. That’s my opinion.
16 And I don’t know if I’m right or wrong but that’s the way I feel. I mean how do you feel?
17 Do you think he did all right?

18 KC: Well, it’s the opinion that you have offered is one that is shared by many,
19 many veterans of the War that I’ve spoken with. Now do you remember where you were
20 when you received word that Saigon had finally fallen? This is late April of 1975.

21 JC: Yep, my wife and I were at home watching it on the news.

22 KC: And you were out of the Marine Corps by this time?

23 JC: Yeah, yeah because back then when I enlisted, I enlisted for two years. I still
24 had reserve time to do but I didn’t have to attend any meetings and stuff like that. But we
25 were there, and I felt sad. I mean all of them fifty some thousand men that lost their lives
26 for nothing. You grow up knowing that we never lost a war, and this is the first war that
27 we’ve lost, it’s over with and it was sad, just sad I just couldn’t believe it, that you’d see
28 the people and look at all the people, you’re like sometimes those people in the village
29 they wouldn’t do anything to help us, but boy when Saigon fell you see them trying to
30 scramble on the plane so they wouldn’t have to be there. Well, why weren’t you out there

1 helping us more when we were fighting the War? I don't want to get all riled up about
2 that.

3 KC: No, no, no that's perfectly fine this is why we're doing this, is to get your
4 impressions of not just what you did while you were there, but your thoughts on things
5 afterwards and why things turned out the way they did turn out.

6 JC: I know one thing, a year after I came home, they removed seven cysts from
7 me.

8 KC: Is that right? And this related to your time in Vietnam?

9 JC: Yeah, because the area that I was at, they say, was one of the most heavily
10 sprayed areas of Agent Orange and I can remember a plane flying over. I can't give you
11 the exact date and time and everything like that, but it was a clear, hot, sunny day and we
12 felt rain drops on us. In 2009, I had prostate cancer, and that's one of the cancers that
13 Agent Orange causes too.

14 KC: I gather—suspect that this was Agent Orange related to that.

15 JC: Never know. I don't know, but they removed lymph nodes and all that stuff,
16 and right now I'm cancer free but I still got a lot of—what do you call it—residue left
17 from that surgery in 2009. I don't know. All I know is my doctor told me he rates cancers
18 from one to ten, of course, one being the best and ten being the worst, all my biopsies
19 came out eight, so he removed lymph nodes and they didn't find any in the lymph nodes.
20 But my prostate, which is supposed to be the size of a walnut normal, was the size of a
21 tennis ball when they removed it.

22 KC: Well, I've only got a couple more questions for you Mr. Chamberlain before
23 we wrap up the interview, and they're pretty broad, general questions so feel free to
24 answer them however you see fit. One is, how do you think your experience in the
25 Vietnam War most effected your life?

26 JC: Well, number one it made me grow up.

27 KC: How so?

28 JC: You grow up here in a little city of South Bend—well, not little city, but city
29 of South Bend, Indiana—actually I lived in a county, I grew up out in the county, so I
30 never lived in the city itself, okay? Protected and—just I had a car, but I worked,
31 everything I got I worked for, and then I joined the Marines because to see if I can make

1 the training and to try to get my mom and dad's approval because I'm the middle son and
2 my older brother always got all the, what do you call the—the first born, he got treated
3 the way the first borns are treated. Where it's, "Ron this, Ron that, Ron this." I tried to
4 get the approval, prove to them that I can do it and stuff it just—it's one hell of a
5 difference between sleeping in your bed one time and the next minute you're sleeping on
6 the ground, and you're being shot at. Hearing people cry, seeing people wounded, just
7 makes you grow up in literally, and this is no joke, when I went to Vietnam, I didn't have
8 a hair on my chest but when I went over there and came back boy all kinds of hair came
9 on my chest, I tell you that. So, it actually put hair on my chest, would I do it again if I
10 was twenty, thirty years younger? Yeah. I'd be right over there now. I'd be over there
11 again in Afghanistan and Iraq; I wish I could but by now my health is not one of the best.
12 In 2009 I had like three major surgeries after I retired, but it just made me grow up and
13 that's the only way I can put it. After all what I said it just made me grow up.

14 KC: Well, the last question I have is one I like to ask all the interviewees that I
15 have the pleasure of speaking with. And as we move forward as a nation, we look back
16 and say, "What did we learn from Vietnam?" I want to ask you, what do you think is the
17 legacy of the Vietnam War for this country?

18 JC: I would have hoped that we learned something, but we haven't. Because the
19 way their treating the troops over in Afghanistan and Iraq, that they got their hands tied.
20 Now come on, like us you train us to fight a war but then you tie one hand behind our
21 back, they're doing the same thing to the guys over there. What kind of legacy? We're
22 just losing men because they're not letting them fight the way they fought in Desert
23 Storm. They let the military fight it, get the politicians out. I wish we would have learned
24 something, but we didn't. We didn't. That's the way I feel, because if you're going to
25 fight war, fight a war. Fight the War the way the Israelis fight it or fight the War the way
26 the Russians do. Don't go pussy-footing around like they're doing over there, let the men
27 fight. That's how we lose men over there because they don't let them fight the War the
28 way they should, that's how we lost a lot of men in that war over there because we were
29 limited unto what we could do. That's my opinion, this just upsets me because I can see a
30 lot of similarities between the Wars we're in now and Vietnam, I see a lot of similarities.

1 KC: Well, Mr. Chamberlain, is there anything else you'd like to add to this
2 interview before we bring it to a close?

3 JC: No, I thank you because—for calling me because a lot of people don't know
4 about the CAP program. All they heard was just the big infantry units and stuff like that.
5 Yes, they played a role. They played a big role okay, but so did we. We did have villagers
6 to our side, of course, we didn't have villagers to our side either but, it's nice to let people
7 know that we weren't all going out in big infantry units and everything like this, we did
8 help the village. We helped them build things. We helped them do things that—there
9 another part of the War that probably people weren't really realize. I mean were you
10 aware of the CAP programs?

11 KC: Not for quite a while, no.

12 JC: Yeah. We helped a lot of villagers. I wish I had the money and I'd love to go
13 back to every little village that I was in. I'd love to go back to Vietnam. Again thanks,
14 making people be aware of the CAP program and what we did. Did I never really told
15 you either, most CAP programs, they had two M60 machine gunner. I don't know if you
16 were aware of that. Were you?

17 KC: No.

18 JC: Okay, they had two M60 machine gunners, two radio operators, two
19 grenade—well, M79 grenade launchers, they're not like the weapons they have
20 nowadays, and the rest were rifleman. That's what our CAP program was. So, we had—
21 we might've been only like a squad of men but we, if needed to, we spit out some fire
22 power. But just thanks.

23 KC: Well, it's been my pleasure Mr. Chamberlain, I thank you for your time.