

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.

**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Dick Jonas  
Conducted by Ken Baake  
Date 15 October 2015  
Transcribed by Sheon Montgomery**

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

1 Ken Baake: Okay. So he's turned it on. So just for the sake of the oral history so  
2 people know who this is, this is Ken Baake. I'm in the English Department at Texas Tech  
3 and I'm here at Texas Tech University. Today is October [15], 2015. Yes? I'm  
4 interviewing Dick Jonas. Dick, where are you now?

5 Dick Jonas: I'm at home in the downstairs music studio.

6 KB: Is it Arizona or California?

7 DJ: I'm in Chino Valley, Arizona.

8 KB: OK, Chino Valley, Arizona. And we're doing this interview for the Vietnam  
9 Center.

10 DJ: We're having a problem again, Ken. (Technical difficulties)

11 KB: Problem again? Okay. He's got about thirteen different things here. Okay.  
12 How about if I just use the regular phone?

13 DJ: Why don't you try that?

14 KB: Yeah, I'm asking Kelly, the head of the center here, if that will work. Any  
15 better now?

16 DJ: Well—

17 KB: You kind of see what we're doing here, and I really appreciate you  
18 responding with your written response on this, and you've given us your background.  
19 You were born and raised in the Deep South, you said.

1 DJ: Right.

2 KB: When did you serve in Vietnam? What was your tour there?

3 DJ: That was 1967-68, from about September to May. Kind of like the school  
4 year.

5 KB: Okay. '67-68, September to May. Right. Did you volunteer or were you  
6 drafted?

7 DJ: Oh, I volunteered.

8 KB: Uh-huh. Okay.

9 DJ: I had wanted to be an aviator forever, since I was a little boy. So as I  
10 approached graduation from college, the Air Force was hiring pilots like gangbusters and  
11 I said, "Pick me. Pick me," and I got lucky.

12 KB: Right, right. Wow. Right. Okay. And where did you go to training for  
13 aviator's training?

14 DJ: I went to undergraduate pilot training, known as UPT, at Moody Air Force  
15 Base, Georgia, near Valdosta.

16 KB: Okay. So then, '67-68, let's see if I can remember my history. Tet was in—

17 DJ: It was in February '68.

18 KG: Right, so you would have been there for that.

19 DJ: Well, see, I did my combat tour in Thailand. I was stationed at Ubon Royal  
20 Thai Air Force Base in the 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing. I was in the 433<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, Fighter  
21 Squadron, called Satan's Angels.

22 KB: Right. Now Ubon is not the same as NKB, right?

23 DJ: No, NKP (Nakhon Phanom) is north of Ubon, I don't know how many miles,  
24 but a good long way.

25 KB: Right, right. Cause that's what shows up in your "Boom from the Gas Hole"  
26 song. So you flew out of there and—can you hear me okay?

27 DJ: Yeah, you're doing good.

28 KB: Yeah, I don't know how we can have a—this is a several hundred thousand  
29 dollar building and room and—well—Saigon, oh, Saigon is a wonderful place, right?

30 DJ: Saul Broudy did that one.

1 KB: Yeah, that's funny. So, all right, so you were flying—what was the aircraft  
2 you were primarily piloting?

3 DJ: I was in the F-4, the Phantom. When I first got into fighters I was a back seat  
4 pilot in the F-4. So the guy in the front was called the aircraft commander and the guy in  
5 the back was called the GIB, the gib, guy in back, and I flew my combat tour as a back  
6 seater. But I got lucky, I only spent a couple years in the back seat and I came home from  
7 the combat tour to an upgrade slot and moved up to the front seat as an aircraft  
8 commander. I had some friends who spent like four years back there.

9 KB: Right.

10 DJ: I was lucky.

11 KB: Yeah. Yeah. So, the back seater's job is what, primarily?

12 DJ: Operate the weapons systems. Called the wiso, WSO, Weapons Systems  
13 Officer, Weapons System Operator.

14 KB: Right. So were you flying in these—I think that's on the cover of the *Red-*  
15 *Blooded All-American Boy*. Is that one of your planes, the F-4s?

16 DJ: Yeah.

17 KB: Cause it's got the 0-70 on the tail. So the way that ordnance works there is  
18 that it fires off as a—

19 DJ: You mean on the front cover of *RBAAB (Red-Blooded All-American Boy)*?

20 KB: Yes, sir.

21 DJ: That's an F-16. I flew that later on in my career.

22 KB: Okay, but the F-4 is similar in that the weapons fire, the ordnance fire—

23 DJ: Well, no. The F-4 had two engines, the F-16 has only got one. If you'll google  
24 F-4 Phantom and then google F-16, you'll see the difference. There's a ton of pictures on  
25 the internet of both airplanes.

26 KB: Yeah, okay. So, and then what prompted me to do this is I—a little  
27 background on me. I was from Maryland and I was born in 1955, so by the time I was  
28 registering for Selective Service the draft was over in 1974 or 1973. But, of course, it was  
29 the backdrop to our whole experience regardless of where you were in the situation, it  
30 was the backdrop. And, you know, for me it became, it was current affairs, and you  
31 know, we discussed it in school and so forth. And then, of course, there, you knew big

1 brother, friends of big brothers who were in the service. But then it moved from that into  
2 sort of history, and it wasn't until I heard this *In Country* album, which was probably ten  
3 or eight years ago, 'cause I play a lot of music, and this just sort of blew me away that it  
4 was just that rich, and all of a sudden it became this entirely new reality in the sense of—  
5 I mean I know that that's sanitized but it was just like, "Oh, look at these experiences,"  
6 and so—

7 DJ: I'm glad to hear you say that, Ken. My purpose and my music project is to  
8 give the world a snapshot of what it's like, what it was like, to be a fighter pilot when I  
9 was a fighter pilot. And it sounds like that I and the other guys have expressed ourselves  
10 well enough, we have communicated effectively to the younger generation, you and your  
11 peers, our message. So I'm glad to hear you say this, that *In Country* had an impact on  
12 you.

13 KB: It did, and I've taken to playing a few of the songs, and what's interesting,  
14 and maybe you can comment on this. I've played them at different folklore conferences  
15 and things and you will get a few people, I don't make a big deal about it because again, I  
16 wasn't there, but I just say these are songs of soldiers in Vietnam, and some, oftentimes  
17 for people it won't register, for really younger people, or if they don't have any  
18 connection. But occasionally you'll get somebody who's just really, really touched that  
19 that's being presented. Either they've been there or they know somebody.

20 DJ: Have you communicated with Dr. Lydia Fish at Buffalo State College?

21 KB: I've called up there, and she is on a medical leave now.

22 DJ: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

23 KB: Yeah, and I don't know what. I didn't inquire, but she's on a medical leave  
24 and they gave me her email and I emailed her and didn't get a response back and I don't  
25 know what—I didn't press it. I don't know.

26 DJ: She's the glue that held the *In Country* group together. She found us all.

27 KB: Yeah, sounds like it was, and she's written all these articles. When's the last  
28 time, have you talked to her at all recently?

29 DJ: I've exchanged emails with her. I haven't communicated with her in quite  
30 some time now. I didn't know she was sick even.

1 KB: Yeah. I don't know what the status was, they just told me that, and I guess  
2 the center up there at Buffalo, I asked the woman at the anthropology department, and I  
3 don't know whether, it sounds like it has either gone dormant or doesn't exist. Do you  
4 know anything about that?

5 DJ: No, I don't. I knew that she was in the anthropology department.

6 KB: Yeah, well, I'm going to call them and try to trace that again and find out  
7 more about what it was, because that was all seminal, and again, how did that come to  
8 be? This was 1991, so it is about twenty-five years ago. How did that come to be that  
9 they decided to do this and you all got involved?

10 DJ: Well, as I say, Lydia did it. She got interested in the Vietnam-era military folk  
11 music. Not just fighter pilot songs, but one of our group was a 1<sup>st</sup> Cav grunt rifle toter.  
12 Another guy was a Green Beret. He was not an aviator, either. One of the guys was a  
13 bomber pilot. He had flown B-29s and B-36s and B-52s. Then in Vietnam he flew DC-  
14 47s, which is electronic warfare thing. I think he also flew some of the attack, the AC-47,  
15 as well. "Bull" Durham is who I'm talking about.

16 KB: Right, right.

17 DJ: And then the rest of us, there were, I think, four or so that were all fighter  
18 pilots, me, Toby Hughes, Chip Dockery, all flew the F-4. Toby did a tour at Cam Ranh  
19 Bay down in South Vietnam. My tour was over in Thailand, and my missions went up  
20 over North Vietnam mostly. And Chip Dockery did two tours out of Thailand in the F-4  
21 and wound up flying 399 total missions.

22 KB: Wow.

23 DJ: He holds the record for the group.

24 KB: Wow. Yeah. That's amazing. And I think it was one of his songs where he  
25 said, "I'm a good old-fashioned run-of-the-mill hero." Was that his song? I think it was, it  
26 said—

27 DJ: I don't recognize the line.

28 KB: And it says something like that and it said, "My main claim to fame is that I  
29 had an equal number of landings as takeoffs." [It was actually Bull Durham who said  
30 this.]

31 DJ: You know who that sounds like? It sounds like Toby Hughes.

1 KB: That might be him, yeah. I forget, it was one of the songs on there, right.

2 DJ: Just for the record, I have one more takeoff than landings. I punched out of an  
3 F-16 long after my combat tour.

4 KB: Yeah, really? Where was that?

5 DJ: The engine, it, the engine kind of ate itself. It swallowed a compressor blade  
6 and I couldn't make it to an emergency field to land, and the airplane wasn't going to  
7 compress any more air, so I wound up punching out.

8 KB: Oh, boy. Where was that?

9 DJ: Excuse me?

10 KB: Where was that?

11 DJ: I was working the Goldwater Gunnery Range down at Gila Bend, Arizona,  
12 when it happened.

13 KB: Wow. That must have been—

14 DJ: I've got a plaque up on the wall. Let me see if I can just find the date. 1982.  
15 16 June 1982, Gila Bend, Arizona.

16 KB: Wow. Yeah, so that was a new experience, I'm sure.

17 DJ: Yeah. The story is in the *RBAAB* book, by the way, if you have that book.

18 KB: I do, yeah. I'll go back and re-read that.

19 DJ: Let me see, I'll try to give you a page number and make it easy. I think it's  
20 probably in Chapter 4, maybe about, probably about 4-22. Let me look real quick. Yeah,  
21 on page 4-24 down near the bottom is where the story begins, "At my own," and it goes  
22 on from there to tell the story.

23 KB: Yeah, Okay. "I was a student where", 4-24. Okay. That's the "Red-Blooded  
24 All-American Boy" title of that actual section.

25 DJ: Yeah, it is. In fact, I wrote a song about the F-16 when I was going through  
26 training, and the name of the song is RBAAB.

27 KB: Right. Yeah, that's right. And here, in fact, here's the F-16 picture, right  
28 before. So, with Lydia then, did she contact, were you aware of this organization?

29 DJ: No, not until—I think Lydia contacted me first. And then I already knew  
30 some of the guys. I knew Chip and Toby. But then I think those were the only two guys I

1 knew who were doing this kind of music. But then I got acquainted with all the others  
2 when the group began to come together, you know.

3 KB: Right. And so then she brought you all—so are all these recordings, I guess,  
4 they're pretty much all done in the same studio? Tell me the recording—

5 DJ: We had a recording session in Chicago with, it used to be Flying Fish, then  
6 they got bought out by somebody. But it was Flying Fish and they had rented, or  
7 contracted for a recording studio, so we all assembled at the studio. I think it took, I don't  
8 know, two to three days maybe to get the whole project done.

9 KB: Right. So would you, it's obviously, some of the songs. Here's my question,  
10 I sort of wrote some of these in my notes to you, would you say most of these songs that  
11 are on that record, because I'm going to use the record, and of course there are all those  
12 other albums that you've done and that Toby's done and other folks have done. But I  
13 want to use this *In Country* because it's the anniversary for this article. Would you say  
14 that most, or many of those, had been massaged up through the experience, you know,  
15 you'd be singing on break or something like that, or coming up with words and writing  
16 them, or were they more sort of done after the fact? For you and for the others who are on  
17 the record?

18 DJ: I know that Toby, and I'm pretty sure that Chip and I, we wrote the lyrics and  
19 the tunes while we were on our combat tour. Toby's got a real good one called  
20 "Tchepone." Tchepone was a really hot target up in southern Laos.

21 KB: Yeah, that's the "Strawberry Roan" song, that's great.

22 DJ: Yeah, that's right. And then Chip wrote a bunch of his stuff while he was up  
23 at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base. And then I wrote I don't know how many, a bunch,  
24 while I was at Ubon.

25 KB: And did you perform them over there?

26 DJ: Yeah, we'd have parties, you know, and formal what we call a "dining in,"  
27 it's like a formal banquet, and I performed at a number of those. And then even after I  
28 came home I performed at several functions of a similar nature. Many times I've been  
29 invited. I'd be stationed in Arizona or over on the East Coast or some place and  
30 somebody'd have a function over on the other side of the country and they'd say, "Hey,

1 could you come entertain for us?" I'd jump in my airplane, put my guitar in a travel pod,  
2 and launch myself to go. It's a class way to travel, I'll tell you that. Company air, boy.

3 KB: That's right, right. If the engine goes out, you can strap your guitar and  
4 parachute out of there, I guess.

5 DJ: I'll tell you what. I went TDY (temporary duty) to Germany one time, late in  
6 my career. Not to Germany, to Norway. And a group down at one of the bases in  
7 Germany was having a function and they said, "Look, you're going to be in Norway.  
8 Why don't you come down? We'll send an airplane up to get you. You can come down  
9 and entertain us." So I took my guitar along. The bad news is, the airline lost my guitar.

10 KB: Oh, no.

11 DJ: So when I got down to Germany I managed to borrow a guitar. They also lost  
12 my formal mess dress uniform, so I had to borrow a uniform. That was an interesting  
13 experience. But the show went on.

14 KB: Wow, yeah. And you're still doing these shows, I guess?

15 DJ: I'm sorry.

16 KB: Are you still doing these shows?

17 DJ: Yeah, in fact, I did a couple of months ago I did a show up at Hill Air Force  
18 Base, Utah. One of the squadrons up there was being reactivated to get the new F-35 and  
19 they were having a big party, so they invited me up. And a couple of weeks after that I  
20 went up to Klamath Falls, Oregon, to entertain the Oregon Air National Guard. And I'm  
21 about to go on a humongous trip here back to Florida to visit my family, and then on the  
22 way back I've got a gig at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio for the San Antonio  
23 River Rats.

24 KB: Yeah, I saw that. That would be—I'd love to see you in concert some time. Is  
25 it just you and the guitar, singing, or do you have a backup band?

26 DJ: It's just me and the guitar. I sing songs and tell the war stories. Try to be  
27 clever and make people laugh and enjoy the music.

28 KB: Wow. Yeah. So, you guys did some of this—the lyrics, I get the sense that  
29 they're, in any of these, either World War I songs that I've listened to, that they're—

30 DJ: Yeah, you know, on one of my albums there's a song called "Futures." It's a  
31 World War I thing. I got the lyrics out of a songbook that was produced by a fella named

1 Bill Getz, a World War II combat aviator. And then I dreamed up the tune myself. But  
2 that's World War I, and then other standards like "Itazuke Tower" and "Nickel on the  
3 Grass" and those, they've been around forever. They were around when I first came into  
4 the Air Force.

5 KB: Right, I think one of them was all the way back to "The Lousy Lance  
6 Colonel" from the ANZACs (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps) in World War I.

7 DJ: That could very well be.

8 KB: I think that may have been the "Saigon Warrior" song.

9 DJ: Okay. I'm not sure about the background on that song. Saul Broudy could tell  
10 you.

11 KB: Are you still in touch with them, or are they still active doing the same thing,  
12 some of the folks that were on the *In Country*?

13 DJ: Oh, I swap an email with Saul about once every two or three years.

14 KB: Oh. Okay. Huh. Now maybe I'll try to track him down, too.

15 DJ: I probably have contact info on him. What I should do, I guess, is send him an  
16 email and ask him to contact you.

17 KB: Yeah, Okay.

18 DJ: I have your email, so I will do that. I'll make a note for myself so I won't  
19 forget.

20 KB: Okay. So, the *In Country* CD, it came out. What kind of reception, and how  
21 did that change in terms of what you were doing? Did it open you up to a non-veteran  
22 audience, or was it still primarily going to the different bases?

23 DJ: You know, probably the biggest audience we ever played to was, we did  
24 *Austin City Limits* with the *In Country* group.

25 KB: Right.

26 DJ: Are you familiar with *Austin City Limits*?

27 KB: Oh, yeah.

28 DJ: It's produced by NPR (National Public Radio) down in Fort Worth, or—

29 KB: I think it's in Austin, isn't it? Yeah, it's in Austin.

1 DJ: Toby Hughes had a friend who was on that staff and he kept pestering the guy  
2 to, “Hey, you should run *In Country*, on an *Austin City Limits* episode. And they did.  
3 They got Kris Kristofferson to be the host.

4 KB: Right.

5 DJ: We did a one-hour show. Each guy got to sing, I don’t know, a couple, three  
6 songs. But, you know, that went out to the whole country, anybody who watched *Austin*  
7 *City Limits* saw it. While we were, let’s see, I think it was, probably at that we went out  
8 to some place and did a live show for a group but they were pretty well all veterans or  
9 real fans of this kind of music. I don’t remember how many people were there, probably,  
10 I don’t know, a couple hundred or more.

11 KB: Right. And when was the *Austin City Limits* show? Do you remember that?

12 DJ: Veterans Day 1991, I believe.

13 KB: Okay, so the same year as the *In Country*. And, is there still an audience for  
14 this? Again, what I’m asking, as I said in my notes, it seems like these songs should take  
15 their place among the American folklore. I mean, everybody knows, probably gonna  
16 know a little bit of “Get Along Little Doggies” or “Red River Valley” or something.

17 DJ: Yeah, I think I wrote a comment or two on that.

18 KB: You did. Yeah. And whether that would—whether they would—

19 DJ: I’d like to think so. The fact that my stuff still sells indicates that there will be  
20 some longevity. But “Fighter Pilot’s Spirit,” [same as] cowboys a century and a half ago.  
21 Those cowboys if they were here today would likely be fighter pilots.

22 KB: Right, exactly.

23 DJ: I would have thought that.

24 KB: There’s actually some images, I don’t know if you’ve seen them, I could  
25 send you some, from World War I of the pilots, it’s like a horse in the sky, and the plane  
26 is kind of mixed in with the horse in the sky.

27 DJ: Yeah, I think I’ve seen that. It’s, they’ve done it with several airplanes, but  
28 the first one I ever saw was the F-4. The F-4 is so big and bulky and fast and mean. We  
29 used to call it the Big Ugly. Some really good cartoonist turned it into a rhino.

30 KB: Oh, okay.

31 DJ: In fact, at one point they called the Phantom, the Rhino.

1 KB: Oh, really?

2 DJ: That's when I was out of the business.

3 KB: So tell me about the "Pull That Boom from the Gas Hole." Was that a real  
4 experience, I mean, an actual experience, or was that just a composite?

5 DJ: That's a fiction.

6 KB: Pardon me?

7 DJ: One of my lines in shows is that fighter pilots are born with the right to lie.  
8 That's a lie.

9 KB: That's a lie.

10 DJ: But you know, it could have happened again and again. And I'm sure it did,  
11 where you send a couple of airplanes up to strike a target and it's pretty well defended  
12 and somebody gets shot down. And the other guy, he sticks around until he's about to run  
13 out of gas, and then he hustles over to the tanker track, gets more gas, and comes back  
14 and flies CAP [combat air patrol] over his buddy while the rescue people come in and  
15 pick him up.

16 KB: And in the rescue they had the two Jolly Greens, one up and one down. Is  
17 that right?

18 DJ: You know what? I can put you in touch with a guy that flew a bunch of those  
19 things, and you'd get better information from him.

20 KB: Okay.

21 DJ: In fact, he lives here in [Arizona]. Jim Bender, he flew the Sandy mission on  
22 a number of rescues, and he could tell you. It was an A-1 that he flew, but they were in  
23 coordination with the Jolly Greens, so he could tell you how they did it. I will send him  
24 an email and ask him to contact you.

25 KB: Okay. If there are videos on Youtube, and I've done this in my class, I've  
26 taken that song, in one of the classes I teach in folklore, I've taken that song and it's  
27 almost like a direct transcription of what's happening in the video. I don't know if you've  
28 seen any of these. The Air Force has a few of them that they've put out. But there's one  
29 up there and I can't tell the source, and it's been around for a long time, and it's like a  
30 History Channel type of thing. But it actually goes from the very, he's in the treetops, and  
31 the same kind of thing, the Sandies come in, and the Jolly Greens come in, and it exactly

1 follows the track of your song. So that's why I thought maybe there'd been one  
2 particular event that you had—

3 DJ: There were many, many events that followed pretty much that same scenario.  
4 In some cases there were humorous hooks in it, some places there was really bad hooks  
5 where, you know, they didn't get the guy. You've probably seen the movie *Bat\*21* and  
6 they lost a bunch of people in the airplanes trying to get that guy out.

7 KB: Wow. That's right. Yeah. But you keep trying, I guess, is the moral. And  
8 what about the others, "Will There Be a Tomorrow?" is one of the other songs of yours  
9 on there.

10 DJ: I wrote that one while I was over there. I remember writing the song. And it,  
11 again not necessarily one specific event because there's a line in it "from the sea comes  
12 the sun, dawn is breakin'." We used to, I went on several missions up in the Hanoi area  
13 where we started out in Thailand and flew eastbound over South Vietnam out to the  
14 tanker tracks over the Gulf of Tonkin, and refueled and drove up the waterside until we  
15 got down about to the mouth of the Red River, or up in the Hai Phong area, and then  
16 we'd go westbound and we'd go strike a target. That happened many, many times and,  
17 you know, after a while that scenario kind of sinks in on you, and if you've got any  
18 poetry in your soul at all it's not too much trouble to sit down and write a poem about it.

19 KB: Yeah, that's just a beautiful song. Is the music—I couldn't tell if that had  
20 been borrowed from another tune.

21 DJ: No. No, that's original lyrics and original tune.

22 KB: Right.

23 DJ: When I first started writing and producing songs, I got to thinking, you know,  
24 it doesn't make sense for me to write a good lyric to somebody else's tune, because I'm  
25 going to have to be involved with them, pay them royalties, something like that. Why not  
26 just write my own tunes? I been kind of a musical fella since my youth, and it wasn't all  
27 that much trouble to come up with an original sequence of notes to fit the lyrics. So most  
28 of my songs are like that. There's a few out there, maybe probably less than half a dozen,  
29 where I borrowed somebody's tune to tell a story, but not too many.

30 KB: Right. And, of course, I write songs and I tend, if I'm going to borrow a tune  
31 it's going to be folk tune that's in the public domain.

1 DJ: That's good. Use public domain. There's a lot of songs out there that are to  
2 the tune of "Sweet Betsy from Pike" and I'm pretty sure that's in the public domain.

3 KB: Right. Yeah, it is, and some of these, like I said, cowboys—"Utah Carroll"  
4 that's the "Cobra Seven" song.

5 DJ: Yeah, it is. And I'm pretty sure that tune is public domain. I checked with  
6 Toby, he's on a lot of my albums, and he wrote a bunch of songs to the Marty Robbins  
7 gunfighter ballad.

8 KB: Yeah, that was a big CD, right.

9 DJ: Yeah. And if you're gonna use someone else's tune and they still have rights  
10 over it, you gotta pay them.

11 KB: Right. Yeah. There's a lot to that gunfighter ballads and it seemed like—I  
12 don't know if it was in El Paso. And then there's the one—

13 DJ: Hey, Ken, the sound is starting to—

14 KB: Yeah, you know what it is, this is one of those old AT&T phones, and  
15 anyway, it cuts in and out when I move. So maybe I should just be strapped in here. So,  
16 it's a solid phone, or you can use the cell phones and then lose your power, so there are  
17 alternate ways to be frustrated.

18 DJ: Oh, yeah.

19 KB: But, yeah, right, some of those are the Marty Robbins songs. But like I said,  
20 a lot of them seem to be of the folk tradition, and some of those have been reused several  
21 times, things like "Why Sing a Song." I don't know if you're familiar about the Buffalo  
22 Hunters. It was in the town of Jacksboro in the year of '73, and they go out and they're  
23 hunting for buffalo, and that song had previously been loggers in Maine, right around the  
24 time of the Revolutionary War, and the hardships of being a forester in that time. And  
25 then prior to that it had been a seafarer from England. Exact same tune, and really the  
26 same story line, about these young men who seek adventure and end up, you know, kind  
27 of like a "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," they wish they hadn't chosen that path because  
28 it becomes harder than they realized.

29 DJ: A couple of my songs that other people, Chip Dockery wrote a really good  
30 song, but he used my tune "Yankee Air Pirate" and that was fine, he and I work together  
31 anyway, so it's not a problem. And there's another one of my songs about the F-16 that

1 some guys over in Korea wrote about their adventures over there flying out of the Kunsan  
2 Air Base, where the 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing is now stationed and has been for several years. But  
3 they used my tune, and it's actually on one of my disks, I don't remember which one, but  
4 my tunes are being copied now.

5 KB: Right, right, right, right. And you've got like twenty-some albums out, right?

6 DJ: Twenty-nine, yeah.

7 KB: Wow. And they have a couple of them here at the Center, and I'll try to get  
8 some—

9 DJ: Have you been to my website?

10 KB: Yes, I have.

11 DJ: Okay, they're all there.

12 KB: Right. Erosonic is the—

13 DJ: That's correct. Erosonic.com.

14 KB: Right. I'll try to get a copy of that.

15 DJ: I'll tell you what, if you're looking for sound bites, a good place to get sound  
16 bites from my stuff is a site called cdbaby.com. Have you been to that one?

17 KB: No. I'm familiar with cdbaby, but I don't know—

18 DJ: Well, go to their page and in the search box just type in my name, Dick Jonas,  
19 and you'll eventually find more than half of my songs have sound bites.

20 KB: Right. Some of them, of course, the funny ones like "The Friendly FAC"  
21 (forward air controller) and the, I forget who wrote that one.

22 DJ: Let's see, "Friendly FAC," I think that's a Chuck Rosenberg song.

23 KB: Yeah.

24 DJ: I don't know if he wrote it or somebody else.

25 KB: Yeah, in communications with the Green Beret on the ground. I guess the  
26 FACs, they could either be in a plane or on the ground themselves.

27 DJ: That's correct. You had ground FACs and air FACs.

28 KB: Right. But again, the whole experience opens up in front of you when you  
29 listen to these songs. Obviously not the emotional and the fear and everything else, just  
30 the reality of it.

31 DJ: Your phone's cutting out again.

1 KB: Okay. How about that?

2 DJ: Okay, that's better.

3 KB: I asked at the end of my notes here if you thought there'd be any value in any  
4 kind of a, maybe I could try to talk to some folks here and see about some kind of a  
5 reunion thing, or something like that. Would that, or something, because we're all getting  
6 older.

7 DJ: That's true.

8 KB: I don't know if you think there'd be any—

9 DJ: I would love to see that happen, and I would be happy to participate. I'd be  
10 willing to travel some to be a part of it. I guess you saw my comments that I sent back to  
11 you last night. I wish we could do something, a concert on HBO (Home Box Office) or  
12 something similar. Late at night so we can use the warrior's vernacular. There's a lot of  
13 sexual innuendo, toilet humor, profanity, you name it, in a lot of these songs, and you just  
14 have to be judicious about where you sing the real words. This gig I've got coming up the  
15 6<sup>th</sup> of November in San Antonio, I've been in deep coordination with their program  
16 manager there about which words I should probably not use. I've got a really nifty song  
17 called "Nipple on the Grass" and it is quite salacious, but it's clever, and the lyrics are  
18 good, and every time I do it at a show people are just rolling in the aisles. But I can't do  
19 that song for these old farts down in San Antonio. It would, you know, it would be  
20 insulting to them. They don't want to hear those words.

21 KB: Where is that? Is that a Vietnam setting?

22 DJ: Yeah, the River Rats are all combat experienced. When we first started out  
23 several decades ago, you had to have flown a combat mission north of the Red River in  
24 North Vietnam to qualify for membership. Well, we all begin to die off, and they said,  
25 "Hey, we gotta change this." So now anybody who's been in combat as a, you know,  
26 Army helicopter pilot, a F-22 pilot over in Iraq or someplace, they're eligible for  
27 membership. But the group down in San Antonio, they're a little older, they're probably  
28 as old as me, I'm seventy-six, and they're a little bit more circumspect, especially when  
29 the ladies are around. Equal sexual or gender treatment notwithstanding, there's some  
30 things girls don't want to hear.

31 KB: Right, right, right.

1 DJ: I don't want to make anybody uncomfortable, you know. If they want the real  
2 stuff, that song's recorded on one of my discs, they can get to it.

3 KB: Okay, well I'm gonna have to, now you've enticed me, I'll have to go—

4 DJ: It's on the number twelve CD, *Passing the Flame*. The song is actually done  
5 by five female combat flyers, couple of F-16 pilots, couple of A-10 pilots, one gal flew  
6 twenty-one missions in a B-52 over there in the Sandbox. She's a good singer, too, by the  
7 way. But I still do it. I say, now if you can get the most out of this song, you've gotta  
8 pretend I'm a girl.

9 KB: (Chuckles)

10 DJ: I say, I know that is a huge stretch, and you can't even, you can do, "Don't  
11 Ask, Don't Tell" anymore, you can't do "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" anymore, but that don't  
12 make no difference. And then I go into the song, and I tell them about each one of the  
13 girls, each girl gets her own verse, you know. I say, "The first one is by Violet, by an A-  
14 10 jock that flew ninety-nine missions. She's about that high, about that big around, little  
15 girl." And so on. It's really entertaining, and I enjoy doing it. I like making people laugh  
16 and pay attention and, you know, appreciate the story.

17 KB: Now, do you think that even on the *In Country*, most, the largest majority of  
18 songs are the Air Force fighter planes.

19 DJ: Yeah, well we, as I said before, there's I think four or five of us that were  
20 aviators, so we had the others outnumbered.

21 KB: Right. Although I wonder if their tradition was the same in the other services,  
22 you know, as much of a tradition of—or do you think it is more the cowboy connection  
23 with the aviators?

24 DJ: There are some common threads among the warriors, regardless of whether  
25 you're pulling a rifle trigger or dropping a bomb from a supersonic airplane, and we did  
26 two tours with the *In Country* group. We went up the East Coast performing at colleges  
27 and what not, and we did the same thing on the West Coast, and so we got to know each  
28 other pretty well. There's a story in the *RBAAB* book, if I could remember where it is,  
29 that would give you a good taste of that.

30 KB: Okay.

31 DJ: It'll take me a while to find it.

1 KB: I can find it if you just would give me a—  
2 DJ: Well, let me see. I'm going to start out at page 6-16. You got the book there  
3 with you?  
4 KB: Yes, I do.  
5 DJ: Page 6-16. "Crack Went the Rifle" was a song done by Bull Durham, but  
6 there's one place where I talk about me and Bull and Bill Ellis and a couple of the other  
7 guys went out to eat one night, and we got to talking about, you know, the grunts say,  
8 "Well, your war was tougher than mine." Bull Durham, he flew the AC-47 and he looked  
9 at me and all the combat missions I'd flown over North Vietnam, and he said, "Your war  
10 was tougher than mine." And we got in a long discussion about that. I wish I could find it  
11 real quick.  
12 KB: Well, yeah, "Crack Went the Rifle" is here on 6-16.  
13 DJ: Yeah, but there's no story with it.  
14 KB: No story with it, no.  
15 DJ: Unfortunately. This book is—the story is in the book. If I could just—I'll tell  
16 you how I can find it. I will whistle the book up on my computer and I will do a search. It  
17 will take me probably two or three minutes. Are you game for that?  
18 KB: Sure.  
19 DJ: All right. Hold on a minute. (Pause) It's gonna take a while because the way I  
20 have the book laid out on my computer, the *RBAAB* book, is by chapter, so I'd have to  
21 search in each chapter.  
22 KB: Well, here's one, here's a discussion, "The Forgotten War" this on 6-9.  
23 Discussing going to Nebraska and playing a reunion in 1995.  
24 DJ: Oh, yeah. "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda."  
25 KB: Right, right.  
26 DJ: That's a little bit different story, but there are some similar threads in it.  
27 KB: Right. Well, at any rate.  
28 DJ: I'll tell you what. I will see if I can find it, and then I'll email you so you can  
29 find it in the book.  
30 KB: Yeah, that's good. So, again, talking about how the different services had  
31 their different traditions in the songbook. Like you said, there's still the same, you said

1 there's a common thread across the sort of, anyone who's a warrior. What would you say  
2 that is? Or did you say that, maybe I missed it.

3 DJ: Well, the discussion came about because Bull looked at me and he said "Your  
4 war was tougher than mine."

5 KB: Right, right.

6 DJ: And I looked him right back and answered, "No, it wasn't. You were just  
7 likely to get shot down as me." And then Bill Ellis, he had an input. He was a grunt. He  
8 was a rifle toter. First Cavalry Division. In country, South Vietnam. And I would not  
9 have wanted to live the way those guys had to live and fight that war. Number one, they  
10 were over there for a year. I flew my one hundred missions over North Vietnam in nine  
11 months, and that included a two-week leave at Christmas and a beautiful R&R (rest and  
12 relaxation leave) to Sydney, Australia. So I finished up in a lot less time than those guys  
13 did. And, when I'd go on a mission it'd be, say like four to six hours long, and when the  
14 mission was over we got back to Thailand and Thailand's fairly secure. And all I had to  
15 do was, you know, lay out in the sun, peek up my tan until the next day. But those guys,  
16 they lived in the mud and the booby traps and stuff 24/7.

17 KB: Right. And the mosquitoes and the malaria and the snakes and the whole  
18 thing. Yeah. Are you familiar with Karl Marlantes's book *Matterhorn*?

19 DJ: I'm sorry, say again, you're breaking up.

20 KB: Karl Marlantes is a novelist who was in the Marines, and his book came out,  
21 *Matterhorn*, oh, a couple of years ago, which was his experience of being on the ground.

22 DJ: It doesn't ring a bell.

23 KB: It's a really good story, and it starts out with problems with leeches and the  
24 different things they had to deal with. But it's also some of the frustration of you take one  
25 hill and then you have to turn it over for, leave it for the Vietnamese, the North  
26 Vietnamese, I mean the South Vietnamese.

27 DJ: You're cutting completely out, Ken.

28 KB: Am I out now?

29 DJ: Yeah, you were there for a bit.

30 KB: How about now?

31 DJ: Okay, that's better.

1 KB: The story of them being in, having to take over these hills and then they  
2 would get some new word in and they'd leave that hill after they'd just fought to get it.  
3 So it was a lot of the frustration of—

4 DJ: Sounds like Khe Sanh.

5 KB: Yeah—it probably was Khe Sanh. Yeah.

6 DJ: They paid a big price for Khe Sanh. And then I think within a week or two  
7 after that battle was over, they just vacated.

8 KB: Right.

9 DJ: Didn't make any sense to me.

10 KB: No, no. And that's just some of the frustration. But it's quite a good book of  
11 that experience. Even tigers on the ground. I don't know how much he sort of took the  
12 most impressionable things. And also some of the relations between the troops. It really  
13 does give you an experience. So, yeah, it would be different. You'd fly back and like they  
14 say, in the rescue mission the pilot could be back at the air force base at the end of the  
15 day if all went well. Well, you've got an appointment here in a few minutes. I'm not even  
16 sure what time it is—

17 DJ: Oh, no, I've got plenty of time. It's not ten o'clock yet and my meeting's not  
18 until 1:30pm.

19 KB: Oh, okay. What other reflections, and I might ask Sheon if she has any  
20 questions? She works here at the Vietnam Center, and has worked a lot with these  
21 archives. Are you familiar with the Vietnam Center here over at Texas Tech at all?

22 DJ: No. I'm familiar with the one out by Fort Worth.

23 KB: Fort Worth, huh?

24 DJ: Yeah, there's another Vietnam museum. In fact, me and a couple other guys  
25 went and did a concert with them when they were first getting started about, I don't  
26 know, for or five years ago.

27 KB: Right, right. This is like, an archives here. Sheon, do you have any  
28 questions? What's the Center, the Archives here are mostly what? Letters and things?  
29 [Sheon answers from across the room.] So a lot of letters from veterans and things, and  
30 it's a center here, so it's, and also some of these oral histories and we've gone through  
31 and listened to some of the oral histories. A lot of the recollections of music, of course,

1 are the rock-and-roll soundtrack that was going on, and that was a different world then.  
2 Cause you all came out of the country music tradition primarily?

3 DJ: Country and folk. Yeah.

4 KB: Right, right. And although there are a few songs on *In Country*, like there's  
5 the one Otis Redding song, "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay" that's been redone. But  
6 mostly, and I saw a couple of them in some of the archives where they rewrote a few  
7 songs. One was like "Yesterday," the Beatles song, was rewritten for something related to  
8 the war. But most of the time it would have been the folk and country that was the  
9 tradition. Would you say?

10 DJ: You know what, you talk about the oral history thing. You know, the  
11 Veterans Administration is collecting oral histories from veterans. They sent a guy  
12 around and interviewed the veterans for an hour and a half and they videotape it. I did  
13 mine, I don't know, six or eight years ago at the VA hospital down here in Prescott. And  
14 they let my wife come in with her video camera and tape it as well. And she's pretty good  
15 with her Macintosh and audio and video, so she made a DVD of it. I may have an extra  
16 copy or two. Would you like to have a copy?

17 KB: I'd love to, yes, please. We could keep it here and I could also use it for this  
18 article.

19 DJ: Okay. I will get a copy and I'll mail it to you. Give me your postal address.

20 KB: Okay. Well, you are getting ready, you're gonna be leaving for a vacation  
21 here in a couple of weeks, right?

22 DJ: Yeah, next Monday we head for Florida. Gonna visit my family, and we're  
23 involved in the Military Officers Association of America, they're having their national  
24 meeting this year in Orlando. So we're going to visit the family, then we're going to  
25 Orlando for that meeting, and then on the way back out west is when we do the gig for  
26 the San Antonio River Rats.

27 KB: The River Rats. That ought to be fun. And I'll be working on this over the  
28 next couple of weeks, so maybe when you get back I can send you what I've got and also,  
29 if we have any follow-up questions I can—

30 DJ: Yeah, that would be great. The flight plan calls for us to be back here on the  
31 8<sup>th</sup> of November.

1 KB: That would be perfect. By that time it will give me an incentive, I should  
2 have this written up, and if any of the other folks that you get a hold of. And, of course,  
3 there can be subsequent articles beyond this. This is a publication that Ron Milam, who's  
4 in the History Department here, and is also a veteran, is putting together, and I'm not sure  
5 who the publisher is, but the title of the anthology is *The Vietnam War in Popular*  
6 *Culture* or something like that. So that's the focus for this particular piece, but there  
7 certainly could be subsequent ones. And maybe we can get some, maybe I can see if I can  
8 get any kind of support for some kind of a reunion event, or something like that.

9 DJ: You're cutting out again, Ken.

10 KB: I said, maybe I can get some kind of support for a reunion event of some  
11 kind.

12 DJ: Keep me posted on that. I'd really like to do that.

13 KB: We can cut it off here. Next time I'll try to get a phone that works. And we'll  
14 talk again, and I hope you have a good trip and I'll just be back in touch with you—

15 DJ: Okay, I'll have my laptop with me on the road so we can swap emails if you  
16 need to.

17 KB: Great. Well, I really appreciate it. I really enjoyed your time, and like I said it  
18 was inspirational for me to hear that album, so it's nice to be able to talk with one of the  
19 originators of it.

20 DJ: Good.

21 KB: All right, Dick, good trip. Safe trip. Are you driving, did you say?

22 DJ: Yeah. I've got to haul my sound equipment and my CDs and books. They're  
23 gonna let me put those out for sale at the show.

24 KB: Yeah, you're heading east so you'll be—going back west into the, right into  
25 the sun at this time of year is tough. Unless you are driving real early but then it's tough  
26 that way. Good luck on the trip. Be safe and we'll be in touch.

27 DJ: Okay. Sounds good.

28 KB: Thank you, sir.

29 DJ: Bye-bye.

30 KB: Bye-bye.