The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Jim Laible
Conducted by Steve Maxner
August 21, 2002
Transcribed by Shannon Geach

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.

Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. James Laible on the 21st of August 2002, at approximately 11:00. We are in his office at the Texas tech Health Sciences Center and this interview is for the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project. Thank you sir for consenting to this interview. Why don't we begin with a brief discussion of your early life? If you would tell me when and where you were born and where you grew up.

Jim Laible: Ok, I was born in Syracuse, New York in 1939, December 6th. I lived there until the start of World War II when my father who had volunteered to go into the military could no t because of his 4-F or whatever the thing because of some back problems. He was asked to go back to the family farm and run the family farm because my grandfather had had a heart attack. So, I spent World War II in a dairy farm in Lyons, New York raisin g food to support the country, which was one of the areas that did. So, after the war he moved back to Bridgeport, New York, which is a suburb of Syracuse. He was a Florida floriculturist by training, went to work for a multi-millionaire who wanted him to develop various roses and orchards and other kinds of things. He stayed on with this individual in a place called Shackelton Point, which is on Oneida Lake. It's a rather large lake and sometimes called the thumb of the Finger Lakes in upstate New York. We had approximately a mile of shoreline or actually this individual did. When the individual died he left the estate to Cornell University and my father being a Cornell University graduate was asked to stay on and develop it into a biological research center,

which he did. And I spent my early years in high school working on biological research projects. Working on fisheries driving their trollers on the lake and etcetera. I then opted not to go to Cornell University and went to St. Lawrence University in upstate New York. That was a smaller university. They thought based on my high school record, which was pretty good. I graduated 7th in my class, which was a very small class, I think there were only 47 in my class, but whatever. My interests in high school were primarily sports. I played football, basketball and baseball for my high school. I then opted to go to St. Lawrence University. It was considered one of the small Ivy League Colleges. If you didn't get into one of the Ivy League Colleges it was the place to go. I again, had a good college experience. I did play football my first two years at St. Lawrence and got hurt. Saw that I couldn't finish. I then took ROTC in college because I knew I was going to go into the military for two years, one way of another. I thought I'd like to go in as an officer. As I did well in ROTC. I liked it very much. Did well in our war games and other kinds of things. In fact during my summer training, which was done at Ft. Devons I did quite well in the tactical portion and was mad a distinguished military graduate and offered a regular Army career on my graduation. The idea being that I wanted to go infantry and actually anybody from my school who was offered a regular Army commission it was tradition to take it. That meant I was going to spend three years as opposed to two on active duty. I went to my Officer basic in Ft. Sam Houston and then was assigned to the 18th airborne corps at Ft. Bragg North Carolina for my first assignment. It was a rather hectic year. We integrated the University of Mississippi that year and I was in charge of the medical unit that sent there. We also participated in the Missiles of October Program. We went to Ft. Stewart and loaded on ship in Savannah. Actually as I think I said earlier, we were issued real live ammunition and though we were ready to go to war. In fact, John Kennedy, President Kennedy came by after we were standing down to visit us. I was walking across the field after watching the parade and ran right into this jeep. Said hello Lieutenant, how are you doing? That sort of stuff. I was awed as a matter of fact at that point in time.

SM: I would imagine. Well, let me take a few steps back and get a little bit of clarifying information. With regard to your memories of World War II and immediately thereafter, what was it like in upstate New York? What was the atmosphere

like with regard to how the war ended, the dropping of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? How much do you remember about that? You very young, you were only six years old at that point.

JL: In fact, it was interesting. I had relatives in Rochester and while I was still living in the Syracuse area I have a cousin who was a year older that I and we were celebrating our birthday in Rochester New York, I guess it was our second birthday I suppose when the Pearl Harbor took place. Immediately we rushed back, everybody went back home to get to where they needed to be. During World War II I have spotted memories of it. I can remember during the Battle of the Bulge, I can remember sitting in our kitchen at the farm and listening with my parents to reports on the battle of the Bulge and how horrified they were that it was taking place etc. I remember opening a life magazine and it showed a picture of an individual of a bullet hitting his head and the side of his head bursting out. I'm not sure why life published it, but I was absolutely as a five or six year old horrified by this picture in Life Magazine. In fact, it still haunts me a little bit. I can remember my father was out in the fields when Franklin Roosevelt died. My mother walking us out, my brother and I out to tell my father that the President had died. But I do have spotted memories of the war. I can remember when the war ended. I don't really have a lot of recollection of the bomb being dropped, but I do remember the War had ended and we were very happy about that and that we were going to go back to Bridgeport, a town outside of Syracuse, where I grew up. And I was happy about that. I had in fact just started kindergarten then. So, I started in it Lyons, New York, which is where the farm was and I finished it back in Bridgeport, New York. It was a very small town in my kindergarten class there were three girls and me in Bridgeport. Those three girls and I went all the way through school together and school districts changed and whatever, but we all went to school together and graduated from high school together.

SM: Oh, that's funny.

JL: Interesting, interesting time.

SM: When the War ended, did you have relatives, Uncles perhaps or other extended relatives that came back who had fought?

JL: I did not. My father had a sister and a brother, but the brother was substantially younger and was not the age. And as I said my father, because of a back

problem was 4-F. So, he had actually worked prior, he tried to enlist in the Marines because of his horticultural activities he went down to the Pentagon and though maybe he could get involved in maybe camouflage studies and other kinds of things. Then he worked as a guard at an ammunition plant outside of the Syracuse area until literally the government contacted him and asked him to go take over the farm because you know food products were a substantial need at that point in time. My grandfather had a rather large farm and he recently had a heart attack so he was in the process of thinking of selling it. And the government didn't want it changing hands at that point in time. So, my father went there and ran it throughout the war.

SM: Do you recall any other activities in support of the war? Whether it be participation in the various drives, the tin drives and all that kind of thing?

JL: I do remember rationing and rationing kinds of activities specifically with rubber, gasoline products and various drives. My parents were very much involved. You know al of that kind of stuff. Specifically I think my mother was involved with the Red Cross and you know other types of things. I had various I was between the ages of I guess four and seven during this time frame, so I don't remember a lot.

SM: You remember quite a bit for being so young. Well, after the war ended of course your father went to work in Shackelton, at Shackelton Point.

JL: At Shackelton Point.

SM: Right. What point was it that Cornell University took over that estate do you recall?

JL: I think I was in 7th grade because the individual that ran the organization left my brother and I an inheritance for our college education. I can remember this one young lady who was sitting next to me in class; our names were in the paper the morning of the announcement of the activity. She asked if she could sit next to me. I was a rich. I really wasn't. There wasn't enough and in fact, it didn't pay for my entire education at ST. Lawrence, which was a private organization or college and quite expensive. But it helped me. I probably couldn't have gone to Cornell if I hadn't had that inheritance. It was in about the 7th grade. How old would I have been?

SM: About 132 I guess. It was around 1951.

JL: Ah, yes. Because I graduated in ’58 from high school so, it was prior to me. SO, it probably was maybe ‘55ish. Would that be right?

SM: Ok.

JL: Well, no. I graduated from junior high in ’54. So, it was ‘53 I guess.

SM: Ok. During that time period in between the end of the war and when Cornell University took over the State there obviously was a lot of Cold War activity going on. The dropping of the Iron Curtain, a strained relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. The falloff China to Communism, were those topics discussed much in your household, by your parents?

JL: Very much. My parents were very much into history and what was going on in the World. We always watched the news on TV and listened to it on the radio prior to that. And we did discuss that. I am a history buff by nature I think if I hadn’t become on the medical side I would have like to have been a history professor. So, I’ve studied history. In fact, I consider my self an expert of the revolutionary War and studied that immensely while I was in Vietnam as a matter of fact.

SM: And when some of the more controversial events were taking place especially involving Joesph McCarthy, and the McCarthy hearings and things of that nature. Did your parents in terms of the conversations you had with them, did they view these critically? Did they think that sometimes it was going too far with the anti-Communism, the Red Scare, things like that? How was that discussed?

JL: I think they believed to some degree in the Red Scare. I don’t think they were supporters of McCarthy I remember family being somewhat disillusioned by all of that. I think they were concerned about the communist threat and I grew up that way. It’s interesting another point of view in my history, my mother was an extremely conservative Republican and my father was a Democrat.

SM: That’s wild.

JL: I remember, probably was the Eisenhower election that this Charlie Brown who was the millionaire that my father worked for and my mother obviously were close friends because he was a very conservative Republican also. So, they had my father putting up posters all over Bridgeport in support of Eisenhower. Maybe it was even Dooey; I think it was Dooey not Eisenhower, that they were supporting. But my mother

was very active. She was the chairman of the Guild of Republican Women in our county. There was a saying if you don't have Caroline Laible's support, you don't get elected. So, she was always considered a behind the scenes person, but she was a very powerful person. She founded the first mother's Club in the area, the first PTA. She established the library there. She was a schoolteacher by training. And so, in fact I think at her funeral, my daughter, her granddaughter had heard this and things and said that about her. The saying was in Bridgeport, or Madison County, which is where we lived, you don't get elected unless Caroline Laible supports you. There wee a number of people who didn't get elected as I remember growing up because she did not like them

SM: Did your mother work as a schoolteacher as well?

JL: She started teaching school I guess a couple years before I was born she had graduated and come to Bridgeport and established actually the first kindergarten in the town. She worked for a couple of years until I was born and then she stayed home well through the war and those areas. That was very interesting for her because we went to a farm and she had grown up in the city her whole life. So, that was quite an experience for her to live on a farm. But she adapted when we came back to Bridgeport she became the first music teacher for the school system. While I was growing up she was always our music teacher. She only came in and worked a couple of days a week, a couple half days a week, I think. Then when my brother and I went to college she went back to substitute teaching and eventually did teach a couple of years after that. But primarily when we were growing up she believed strongly in mothers should be home taking care of their children.

SM: I would imagine that given her strong educational background she emphasized that as you were growing up and probably did a lot of home schooling.

JL: Very much so.

SM: Not in an official capacity, but teaching at home.

JL: She did a lot. In fact, she of course taught us music and she insisted upon us doing our homework and was there to help and that kind of stuff. There was never any indication at all that we weren't going to college. We knew that form the time we started school and that we better have decent grades. Yes. And of course my father was very much into education. He was I think graduated cum laude from Cornell. So, he was as

my mother would say I'm the teacher type, he's the smart one. And he was very interested in our education and etc also.

SM: The work that your father did, did he involve you as you got older in that kind of work?

JL: Yes, he did. He probably just on his own had one of the largest gardens in the state of New York. He raised every kind of vegetable. He was famous for his sweet corn and his brands of strawberries that he had developed etc. My problem as I tell my wife now, I do not want to get involved in growing anything and whatever. Because although both my brother and I worked a lot both in keeping in keeping his garden up and going and working with him in various kinds of things. I've grown not to like farming, growing and that kind of stuff. In my earlier life I did. All my first houses I built etc. I did my own lawns. I did all my own landscaping and all of that kind of stuff. I'd obviously learned all of that growing up.

SM: In terms of the floriculture that your father did, was he actually genetically manipulating plants?

JL: He would try to develop in fact he would graft trees, apple orchards and stuff. He developed the Mrs. Brown was very interested in roses and he again had one of the finest rose gardens for her that he developed. He developed rose products. He was involved in developing Blue Spruce for Christmas tree type of use. They made their own cider and they mixed various kinds of apples too for that. He was also big in, what's the word? Bird watching. But, he did do a lot of experiments in that kind. Trapping and banding ducks and geese for the State. He developed both the green Wing Swallow. He had a project in doing that which is still ongoing, these number of years after his death by Cornell. He was cited each week in the Syracuse paper they listed the people who had cited the most number of birds and he was always one of the people who had seen the most and rare birds throughout the state. So, he was really into conservation as well as floriculture. His primary love was floriculture and actually landscape gardening. He was an outstanding artist. He would draw homes and what the landscaping should look like. Beautiful kinds of stuff.

SM: This is the work that he did when Cornell took over the state or is this before and after?

JL: Actually, when he did most of the floriculture work for this millionaire and his wife. He had a ground crew kind of thing. This was a huge estate and the lawns looked like they were absolutely meticulous. All sorts of flowers and bushes and other kinds of things. He had a rather large crew that did that. When Cornell took over they turned it into a biological field station. Even though he stayed in doing some of this kind of thing. In fact, he had his own greenhouse and would develop and grow various kinds of flowers so that the estate houses all of those had beautiful flower arrangements in the etc. He kept doing some of that, but primarily he became an administrator then. He was more involved in managing the facility and they had huge dog kennels, a beautiful facility they turned into a cafeteria. They had several barns and other kinds of things, which he turned into dorms and other types of things. The University used this field station primarily for people doing their Masters and PhDs so that they could do their fieldwork. You know they'd come in during the summers or sometimes in the winters and sty there for a period of time and develop whatever they were working on. Lichens to fish to birds to you know whatever kind of activity they were involved in. And Cornell still uses it today. It's interesting that Dr. Smith's son went to Cornell. Of course, Dr. Smith went to Cornell and his son was there. In fact, has stayed at my old house, which was also turned into a dormitory on the estate.

SM: Well, that's remarkable. You did do some work and help when it was transitioned into a biological research facility. You mentioned fisheries. What kind of work would you do?

JL: I basically did a lot of, in fact it was interesting. My brother worked with my father basically working on the land kind of thing and Cornell set up a fishery research center there doing research primarily on the wall-eyed pike. All of the game fish that existed on the lake. It had been known as one of the finest fishing lakes on the state. For some reason they were having trouble, the fish were dieing out etc. So, working in conjunction with a fish hatchery thy set up a project to study the fish and to study where they were and what they were doing, what was causing them to die. Was there over fishing? What should the limits be? So, I did a lot of thins. I did what they called Creole synthesis where I'd drive a boat around and check with the various fishermen, see what they'd caught, what bait they were using. If they would allow take sample of a

scale of the fish they had caught. We also would go around the shores of the lake and do some netting to see what kind of small fish, fry so to speak. You know small fish how they were growing and we'd take sample of the mix and match of perch and pike and whatever else, bass, whatever was there, from various sides of the lake. The lake was I think 22 miles long and 10 miles across. So, I spent a lot of time driving the Cornell vehicles with another student or someone else doing that kind of stuff. We also would do some netting around the area to find out what kinds of fish we where. And then we'd bring a sample in and we would gut them and see what they had been eating and that type of thing. So, I spent a lot of time driving their boats and taking a number of the professors around to check on this stuff. We had a tower on the estate and put a telescope on the top of the tower. So, periodically throughout the week and even into the night I would go up in the telescope and we had the lake sectioned into quadrants and I would count the number of fishermen and boats in the area. We also looked at like the water skiers and see how they were affecting how the fishermen were operating. Spent some time flying in planes over the lake looking, you know counting and doing other kinds of things. During the winter we would go out, tip up fishing is common. Again we'd do it either by air or we had a motorcycle, a three-wheel type like the police motorcycles only we had a ski on the front end so we would go around again counting fish and doing that kind of stuff. So, those were the kind of things. You know I did almost everything that was in the project other than doing writing and that kind of stuff. I was the assistor to either the graduate students or Dr. Forney was the head of the project and several of his assistants. I worked with them around the clock kind of doing stuff like that.

SM: Now, did they discover there was something in particular that was affecting the fish?

JL: I think there was some pollution, which was killing some of the food for the fish. I think they found there was some over fishing. There was also some poaching going on, netting. Because this particular fish, the wall-eyed fish is probably the best selling fish in that part if the country. Also up in Michigan and that area too. But, it's a very white meat fish and very, very tasty. There were poachers out there netting the fish and doing that kind of stuff. We'd run across that. We didn't do anything particular about it other than report them to the game warden other than we found this kind of

activity. But between some pollution in the lake and other kinds of things since then they have really turned the lake around. They have also because of some of the pollution they'd had these algae builds and the lake would almost become green with this stuff floating around which also hurt the air contents and stuff in the water. And I'm not a scientist in listening to all of these things that went on. My father died last year.

SM: I'm sorry.

JL: We had a memorial service for him. He was in New Jersey at the time, living with my brother, but we had a memorial service there. I did get Dr. Forney who has since retired obviously came to the memorial service, we did do some talking and apparently the lake has really turned around in the last few years.

SM: What was the source of the pollution do you recall?

JL: A lot of it was just the lake is just surrounded by camps.

SM: Ok.

JL: Now, actual no longer summer homes, but you know really nice homes. But as the build up was taking place there was a lot of sewage going into the water. Laws were passed that prevented that happening. Moving, and actually the county put in a sewer system up until that point in time was septic tanks etc. And the types of hoe growing there year round now as opposed to summer homes. In fact, that's how I met my wife. She was from Syracuse as I always harass her, she came from a rather well to do family and had rather nice summer home which we did go by to see. It's nicer to day as we saw last summer. But my brother and I were actually almost championship water skiers. We had our own boat and we'd come by and check out the young ladies. Of course, they all wanted to learn how to water-ski.

SM: Of course.

JL: And we could do that very well and we had the boats to do it. Actually, he didn't meet his wife there, but he dated a few girls there.

SM: And that's how you met your wife?

JL: I met my wife. In fact, I will have been married 40 years this December. I met her while I was a I guess a junior in high school. Dating her and married to her for a long, long time.

SM: That's remarkable. Did the work that you did that you conducted with the biological research facility there. Did that have an effect on your high school work? Were you drawn naturally to the sciences as a result?

JL: I wasn't. In fact, like I said in high school my love was history.

SM: You liked history. Ok.

JL: And in college I sort of bounced around with everything. I really wanted to go into human resources and so I took industrial sociology and psychology as a prelude to becoming a human resource person. But I think my biological background was what got me in the medical service corps because they were looking for people who might know something about sciences. When they looked at my history and what I had done and that kind of stuff, because sociology and psychology, well I suppose there probably are some trends in that with the medical service corps. But I think it was my biological work history. I did that. I worked on that project all through college also in my summers. I did it in high school and then all through my college years.

SM: What was your major specifically when you graduated?

JL: Industrial sociology.

SM: It was industrial sociology and psychology.

JL: My minor is in psychology actually.

SM: As you were of course taking your regular core courses you were also taking ROTC courses. What was the size of the Corps cadets there at the university? How were the course structured? How well do you think they prepared you for military service?

JL: Yes. To answer they prepared us very well. In fact, we continually in various competitions with other universities always won. We were very much infantry oriented. All of our professors of military science were infantry types. We were the top school at our summer camp several years in a row. The year I was there also as far as tactics went. They really taught us well. Camp Drum, which is now Ft. Drum, where the mountain division is was very close t there. We spent a lot of time down there. We learned how to shoot very well. We did lots of winter games there because obviously that's why it's the mountain division and what takes place. It was a National Guard Reserve Camp they called it then, now it is Ft. Drum. So, yes we did. I can't remember how big the corps was. Just about every able-bodied student at the University did take

ROTC. You know some of them would go in six months in the Reserve and then you know not stay in. But we did have a number of individuals stayed in for full career. In fact, I ran into several of them at my reunion. A number of them did go in and did go to Vietnam and then got out, which was my intent actually. When I went o Vietnam I was a pretty senior captain. My full intent was, actually an interesting story talking about my early career. After my first two years at Ft. Bragg I went to visit the medical service corps offices in Washington. You know talking about getting out and so on and so forth. They said well, you've still got another year and we're going to send you to Korea. I said wait a minute, I just got married and have a brand new child, I don't want to. I had actually gotten married; we got married in December of my first year. My wife got upset because every time I turned around I had been deployed some place. I was at Ft. Bragg assigned, but we were always in Mississippi or Savannah, Georgia or some other place all the time. She said we're going to get married before you get killed. She was still a senior in college and we got married. We'd been separated for six months until she graduated and then it looked like we were going o spend a half a year together and then be separated for another year and I didn't want to do that. They said well, if you want to go to Germany you can take your wife with you, but that will be two more years. Well, I said five years isn't bad. I'd never been to Europe and then we decided that was a good thing to do. I went to Europe; again I thought I was going to be a personnel officer because as I said earlier that's what I always wanted to be. Instead they did assign me to the personnel shop, but when I go there they made me the club officer. So, I ran the club system. The officer and enlisted club system. Little did they know that I worked my way through college working in food service. When my father started working with Cornell establishing this food service thing. I had just graduated when they decided to put dorms and food service in I was just graduating from college. He had to set up a cafeteria. He knew I had run actually my fraternity food service system in college and so he asked me. So, I set up the cafeterias, hired the staff, bough tall of the equipment and put the menus together and set up contracting ranges, which is what I had done in college. So, when I got to Europe they didn't know that I'd had this food service background, but they assigned me to the club anyway because the club was losing money and they told me I had six months to turn it around or they were going to close it. This was the medical club

in Frankfurt, Germany with the 97th General Hospital. Within that six months I had it making an absolute profit. We put in new sound systems. We repainted it and did all sorts of things. The thing I thought about was what do I have that nobody else has? I've got unmarried nurses. If I set this club up in Germany and attract the young Lieutenant from the armored divisions around it we can make things going. So, I brought in a band. We had a beautiful bar and fireplace. They'd never used it. Brought in you know sound systems and pretty soon I set up happy hours, free pizza night, put in a steak night. Very soon we were the most popular club in the area. In fact, the major club which was run by the infantry in downtown Frankfurt got all upset with me because I was drawing all of the customers out to our little club. Because of that I had gotten recognized by the commander at the hospital and he got promoted to brigadier general and so he made me his aid to camp. So, I spent my remainder of my tour in Germany as an aid to camp. Which was wonderful because he traveled all over Europe and I got to travel with him. We had a good time. He got curt tailed and sent back to Walter Reid. About this time, this was '66 the big build up was taking place in Vietnam and we were losing officers routinely, you know being curtailed from Europe to Vietnam. One day I got called by the personnel officer who was a good friend of mine. He said Jim you've been curtailed. I said Oh, rats. When do I go to Vietnam? He said no, you're going back to Washington D.C. In fact, the general who I had worked for as the aid to camp by that time, I'd been promoted to captain and he was still a brigadier so I was ineligible to be his aid. But he brought me back for a very interesting tour. I headed the Army's entertainment program and was a social aid at the White House.

SM: Oh, wow. Ethyl Mervin. Oh, my goodness.

JL: Yep. Herb Elpert.

SM: You knew Milton Burrow?

JL: Yep.

SM: These photographs are outstanding.

JL: And I spent time as Vikki Carr, Anita Bryant. I spent a lot of time as Linda Bird's escort at various things. I was married and had two kids. But when we had one of these kind of affairs they wanted a military officer in uniform as her escort. Sometime I can tell you this turned into rather an affair. This young gentleman as you see has no leg,

but he liked to dance. They in fact became an item. And the problem was he was going through a rather serious divorce at the time and the President's daughter was visiting him all the time. We didn't want her named as one of the possible problems.

SM: Oh, my.

JL: So, I was asked, I'm drawing blank on what her name is. Lady Bird's social aid. I came in to the office one day at the surgeon general was sitting there and he says to me Jim, you've got to put a stop to that romance. I am drawing a blank, the lady's famous. Was Lady Bird's social press lady. I said how am I going to get to the President's wife? It just so happened a classmate of mine, in fact, she was just running the reunion I was at. Classmate of mine had gone to UT and gotten her masters and she was Lady Bird's press agent member. You may not remember you're too young. But she was involved in Beautification of America and all that sort of stuff. And she worked for Lady Bird publicizing this. Liz Carpenter is the lady I was trying to think of. So, I go tot my classmate, she got me to Liz and Liz and I discussed a presentation. Lady Bird and Linda Bird were coming out to Walter Reid and they were baking cookies for the boys. We had ward one we called it. It was all young infantry officer like Butch, who had been hurt. Most of them orthopedic patients. They were you know taking care for them. SO, we got the press release that said that they were coming out to take care of the young boys on ward one and I got to Lady Bird and we decided that Linda Bird needed to look for somebody else. And actually by that time she was getting involved with Rob. This was in between the actor that she was dating and Rob.

SM: Do you recall the name of the actor she was dating?

JL: Yeah, he did Psycho.

SM: Oh, Bates.

JL: That's his…

SM: No, that's the name of the hotel. Anthony Perkins, is that it?

JL: I don't know. I'll have to ask my wife. He was a big, young star at that point in time. I'll have to call her. Let me call her.

SM: No, that's ok.

JL: But in any event.

SM: But she was dating the actor and then she was dating.

JL: Right and then she was without escort. That's when I was doing it. Then she stared dating Robb.

SM: Robb is the gentleman in the photograph who is missing his leg?

JL: No, no Robb is the Senator from West Virginia. He was a major in the Marines, I think at that time.

SM: Oh, ok.

JL: I can't think of his first name either. I'm horrible with names anyway.

SM: Oh, ok. Last name Robb. R-O-B-B. Got you.

JL: Yeah.

SM: The gentleman in the photograph who lost his leg.

JL: Yeah, Butch Dominguez.

SM: Did he lose that in Vietnam?

JL: Yes. He stepped on a land mine and had his foot blown off. In fact, all of the officers on this particular ward, ward one we called it were all young for the most part line officers who had been wounded in Vietnam. We had at that point in time 1,600 patients at Walter Reid and the war was not unpopular in '66. So, I set up an arrangement with the Shorum, which is the biggest nightclub in Washington D.C. As part of their contract they made all these stars say that they would do a performance, either do a tour at Walter Reid or do a performance. So, I had if you were anybody you appeared at the Shorum and if you were at the Shorum, you came out to Walter Reid.

SM: That's great.

JL: I've got a picture of me with the Supremes in here. Bill Cosby. Of course he lived in Washington. Madovark Lemon from, I guess they may have not even been put in here. Of course, Louis Armstrong, Pearl Bailey and I had become real close friends. In fact, while I was in Vietnam and actually years after that she sent me cards. Here I am with the Supremes.

SM: Wow, that's outstanding.

JL: There they did a show for me. I always put this inhere because my wife said he's out dancing with the stars and I'm at home taking care of three kids of two kids.

SM: You're right. That is hilarious.

JL: In fact, there's Louise. I stopped putting this all together. I've still got other tuff other places. And again Pearl Bailey she became a regular for me. What happened was we visited the Psych ward and I'll donate al the stuff to it too.

SM: That's excellent.

JL: In any event, she visited the Psych ward with me. And this patient who was suffering battle fatigue of whatever had not spoken in a year. And she went over and talked to him and apparently her father had had some problems along the lines. He started talking and it turned her on so that any time she was ever near an Army hospital anyplace, she'd call me and I'd arrange for her to do that. Like I said, for years sent me Christmas cards. So, we developed quite a friendship and that kind of thing.

SM: That's wonderful. I meant to ask you earlier. You mentioned that you didn't want to go to Korea as your our and you went to Germany instead. Did the Korean War affect you or your family at all?

JL: It did. Of course it was mostly my high school years. When it ended I can remember thinking damn, I'm not going to get to go to my war. Literally, I was that Gung- ho wanting to be a soldier. When the war ended I missed my chance. I was back on active duty or I came on active duty just as the Berlin Crisis was ending. So, that had quite an effect. And a lot of the folks who I worked with and whatever had been involved in the Berlin Crisis at Ft. Bragg and building out. So, I came on active duty just as that ended. I remember a lot of my senior medical service corps officers, who I don't know if I explained before the reason why they were taking us young guys and trying to build up the corps, were Korean War Veterans who had been wounded in the war. So, we did talk a lot about that war and as I was growing up in the military revisiting what happened and what took place.

SM: Well, that's interesting. I want to definitely follow up on that and how it affected your perspective of how the medical service corps should be functioning especially in Vietnam. As you were going through ROTC was there a lot of focus on the European theatre or was there also talk about some of the other smaller wars that were occurring in other countries, the guerrilla and the Communists insurgency types of wars. It was mostly on European kind of thing. Probably because we were a small detachment we did do a lot of guerrilla type training. In fact, I've got some pictures of that. I should

have brought my yearbook in with me of some of the guerrilla tactics kind of things we were doing. I've go t a picture in there that shows me receiving my distinguished whatever they call the award, which I have some place. Which I'll also probably donate that I got in college. But there is a picture of me in my yearbook of all people doing that.

SM: You mentioned that when the Korean War ended you were disappointed. At what point in your life did you realize you wanted to be active duty in the military?

JL: I probably my junior year in high school. I started thinking about you know I'm going to go on active duty. It became more and more of a kind of thing. By the time I got to college as a freshman I knew I wanted to not only be in ROTC, but I did want to serve at least my two-year obligation and I wanted to serve it as an infantry officer.

SM: When you first arrived in the military, why don't we go ahead and talk about your initial impressions as an active duty officer. Where did you go? What was your first training assignment? What kind of training did you receive there and what were your impressions? Did it surprise you at all?

JL: I graduated on June 3rd. As I said I worked for my father for about a month. I think on the 1st of July I reported to Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, which was an interesting kind of place. I had not been in the medics. It was somewhat loose as far as I was concerned. They way I had been trained in ROTC. It was hot in San Antonio at that point in time. In those days there was very little air conditioning. It was an interesting time. Again, I graduated at the tope of my class. I think I was 3rd in my class out of ROTC. I was given orders to Ft. Bragg. Actually, that's not true. That wasn't my first assignment. I reported to Ft. Bragg on the 1st of July. I had no basic training at all. Then I went from Ft. Bragg in August for my training. So, I spent 30 days on active duty, with no basic training. So, by the time I got to because of my rather stringent ROTC upbringing and because I had spent at least 30 days with the 18th airborne corps, by the time I got to Ft. Sam Houston and some of them had the loosey goosey attitude. We had nurses and you know physicians and well the nurses all wanted to be there but none of them had ROTC training and a lot of the medical service corps officers were there because they had medical training in college. Had been drafted and applied to become Reserve Officers. It was literally shocking to me to say the least. There were lots of people there that didn't know much about the military.

SM: How long did you stay at Ft. Sam Houston?

JL: Six weeks.

SM: What did that training focus on?

JL: Everything from marching to some first aid to the organization of the Army medical department. We did do some training in medical support to the line and that type of thing. That was all totally new to me. But, I did as I said very well at that because I'd already been with the line side. I just hadn't realized how the medical support was provided. So, that I did learn. I immediately came back to FT. Bragg and we immediately deployed to Mississippi.

SM: Yes, you mentioned that you got some weapon training in ROTC. What were those weapons that you trained with?

JL: It was the M-1, A-1 rifle. I had grown up my father was an outstanding rifleman and a shotgun; he was just a wonderful shot. So, I was pretty good before I ever went into the military. I always did very well in weapons training in the military because I had a background in that growing up.

SM: Did you hunt much growing up?

JL: Yes.

SM: What did you hunt?

JL: Pheasants for the most part ducks. I was never big into deer hunting. My grandfather on my mother's side was considered probably the finest sportsman. He had a summer home on the lake. Both form a fishing standpoint he knew every place on Oneida Lake where to go fish and how to fish, big deer hunter. I can remember when I was early growing up our Thanksgiving dinner never included turkey. It was always duck and pheasant because that's what we did. My father, if fact, was an avid sportsman too. In fact, when we moved back to the Syracuse Bridgeport area as I said we had a garden. We never bought any vegetable ever. We also raised our own chickens so we had our own eggs and chicken was the Sunday meal kind of thing of some sort. We were Catholics so we always had our own fish because my father always caught it both winter and summer. So, I grew up in a very hunting, sports, wildlife oriented kind of environment. So, I had done a lot of shooting as a kid.

SM: How much of an emphasis was there on religion in your upbringing?

JL: Quite a bit. My parents again, I told you were very much instrumental in starting various kinds of things. Like my father was the first Boy Scout Master for the town. First Boy Scout troop he was the Scoutmaster for. The first Catholic Church in that area, which was a very Protestant area and my mother was a Protestant, she was actually a Lutheran. But my father came from an Irish, although his name is Laible and that's German and his father was also a Lutheran. But his mother was Irish, Irish Catholic. So, that's how the family became to that mode. As I said, my parent we responsible for bringing a church into our community. They and ten other families. My father was the first trustee of that. My mother played the organ, set up the women's group, established the first choir there. My brother and I were altar boys from the time we were in I don't know, old enough to be. I don't remember what the age was, but really very young until we graduated from high school. So, he attended mass at 8:00 every Sunday morning, which I hated and I don't do that anymore. In any event, religion was a big thing in our house. My mother became a Catholic.

SM: I was going to ask you that. She converted to Catholicism?

JL: Right.

SM: Wow.

JL: As soon as she married my father. Actually, when we lived on the farm she used to go tot the Lutheran church with my grandfather who was also still living there, even though he had a heart attack and couldn't participate in the heavy stuff in the farm. He lived with us and my grandmother had died. So, on Sundays my brother and I would go to mass with my father and my mother would go to the Lutheran church with my grandfather. Even with that it was very much religion. Actually, the Lutheran religion isn't that much different that the Catholic religion. Although some of the beliefs are different. When we moved back to Bridgeport and about the same time my brother and I were getting ready to make our first communions, doing the training for that. She would go with us and the nuns would train us and the nuns would give her stuff. I think we have mad our first communions together, which is a big thing in the Catholic Church.

SM: Yes, sir. Absolutely. When you went down to ft. Sam Houston, did you receive any additional weapons training?

JL: No, actually at Ft. Sam the M-1.

SM: It was still M-1?

JL: Actually, the M-1 carbine we also did fire, because that was the officers weapon at that point in time.

SM: No M-14 training?

JL: Not there.

SM: How about at Ft. Bragg did you do much weapons training there?

JL: Yes and then we did move to the M-14.

SM: At Ft. Bragg?

JL: Yeah.

SM: Ok.

JL: Or at least the units I was with had the M-14.

SM: You mentioned one of the first thing that you did upon your return after you initial training at Ft. Sam was going down to Mississippi and helping with the integration of their university there. What did that involve? What was your participation in that Integration?

JL: I was assigned at that point in time to a field hospital. And the field hospitals were divided into three hospital groups so you can split them out and place them. So, you've got three hospitalization units. We should have had a clearing company but we didn't have one. So, we took, or I did I was the, I don't know what you call them. I was like platoon leader, but I commanded one for the hospitalization units and we took one of those and set it up in case people got hurt or whatever. Most of the troops were from the 82nd. So, we just set up a small hospitalization unit in a field someplace.

SM: In the event that some of the soldiers from Ft. Bragg were injured or hurt?

JL: Right. They expected it to be a lot rougher than it really was. In fact, that we were alerted for the second semester. We had just gotten back from the Cuban Crisis and we were alerted. We loaded again but we never left Ft. Bragg. We just stayed there and nothing happened.

SM: Do you remember the specific unit you were assigned to within the 18th airborne corps.

JL: Yes, it was the 28th field hospital. Then they reorganized. After all of these activities took place they realized that what they needed was a clearing company. They

reorganized the field hospital into a clearing company and I became the executive officer of the clearing company. In fact, it's interesting that same clearing company, during a battle that took place in Ban Me Thout was there and I took over their equipment. Yeah, their station in Vietnam. They were assigned to an aviation detachment there. That's a story we'll go into later I guess. But I had been the executive officer of that company at Ft. Bragg. I just came into this area at Ban Me Thuot. We were bringing in a brigade and I was the S-3 of the med battalion at that time. But I went down to set up the aid stations. We decided, they were putting it in the field and I got some interesting pictures of that and the mud we set it up in. But prior to that we decided we needed something g while they were setting it up because this was after Tet. You know they were trying to clear out the NVA pockets. I decided that I needed an immediate medical capability because people were going to get hurt setting up the base camp as well as some of the activities that were taking place. We didn't have any close medical support, other that what we had with us. I set it up at this underground facility. The 563rd clearing company had set up, which was my company back at Ft. Bragg.

SM: Oh, that's remarkable. Now, the integration and the setting up the hospital there at the University of Mississippi or near the university of Mississippi. Was there much violence?

JL: There was not a lot of violence. We had a major problem in that they wanted us to take all of our black soldiers and leave them at Ft. Bragg and just bring white soldiers. Insisted upon that not happening with the medics. I had a couple of people in my unit who had graduated from the University of Mississippi. They were enlisted but one of them was a pharmacist and some other kinds of people and they didn't want to go with us. That was a lot. That was my first experience with segregation and problems was involved in that. I'd come from a high school where we had one black family in the entire high school. My college had no black at all. You know I had just grown up not thinking about it. All of a sudden, I was thrust in the middle of it. I tell a story about during the Cuban Missile Crisis and there are stories to go on forever. We had been alerted to get loaded and we loaded all of our equipment on trains. And then we had to convoy our trucks from Fayetteville, North Carolina down to Savannah, Georgia. I was supposed to be the convoy commander. Well, my wife was still in college and she was

coming down to spend the weekend with me. W had not known that we were going to be alerted so she was in route, coming down to meet me and the Lieutenant Colonel who was commanding my unit at that time on the field hospital knew that my wife was coming and that there would be nobody to meet her that's I'd be gone. Because I was in the initial deployment. So, he let me stay and I took command of the bus convoy. We took all, other than the soldiers that we'd sent before in those days and still today the nurses and doctors weren't assigned to the hospitals. They only came out of the regular hospitals once you were deployed. They had an assignment and so I organized them and got them ready. Took that down, so I got to spend two days wit my wife and I was the last to go. Now, coming back they did make me the lead person. I had a convoy of 250 duce and halfs I think from all of the units. In fact, I spent my whole time in a jeep with a radio. I had a jeep up front and a jeep in the back and I spent my time passing these and watching the convoy. Came into a southern town and we decided to stop at the equivalent of a Burger King or whatever it was to let the troops buy food. The guy said well your white guys can eat here, your black guys have got to eat in the back. I said that will not happen in my tenor here. I said I've got 250 trucks coming through this down. I said I'll drown the town in dust and dirt and we'll just run through it. He paled and I said for young second lieutenant I was pretty tough. My troops always talk a bout that. A lieutenant didn't let anybody mess with anybody. In fact, the next town I came through they told me I was going to have to stop at the stoplight. I said I've got 250 trucks. I'm going to go right through this town. I stood right in the middle of the street and just waved them through. The policeman came up, you know it was a little town to this one policeman I said what are you going to do? I'll have trucks in three states if I slow them down like that. So, I just waved them through the town and he just walked away.

SM: Oh, that's outstanding. The integration issue that you face very quickly or very early on in your military career there. What was the state of the relationship like at Ft. Bragg? Was there very much racial tension?

JL: Actually there weren't in our units, I think. Some of the guys, a lot of the guys were from the south and they'd gone to segregated schools. You know, was there some? Probably. Was I aware of it? No. We trained hard and people worked as a team. You needed the guy next to you to make sure what happened, happened. A lot of guys,

who probably had never spoken to a black person, became very close friends with black people. You know now, a lot of socialization off post probably did not take place. Of course, Fayetteville at that point in time was still segregated. But the officers clubs and the NCO clubs, even the enlisted clubs they went out. I would say integration within the military was pretty well taken care of. Was there some problems? Sure, but I didn't experience a lot of problems.

SM: Thank you sir, this will end our interview for the 21st of August.

SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. James Laible on the 22nd of August 2002 at approximately 10:05. We are in his office at Texas Tech University Health Science Center. Sir, why don't we go ahead and pick up with today's interview looking at your early military experiences in particular. Would you please outline what happened when you first heard of the Cuban Missile Crisis, as that crisis evolved?

JL: Well, I guess at that time, I think I was a first lieutenant. The supply officer, I was in the 28th field hospital and I was as I sad the supply officer and the leader of one of the and I can't even remember sections. Field hospitals over there had three separate sections and normally their mission was to provide rear support for various areas or area support. The way I heard about it was during the build up, the whole unit was filled with lieutenants. The operations were done by lieutenants. In fact, the commanding officer was a first lieutenant also. And normally that kind of unit the commanding officer would be a lieutenant colonel. So, we were way understaffed. We were one of the lead medical units to be deployed in the Crisis, but we didn't know about it, because none of us had a security clearance high enough to know what was really going on. They eventually notified us that we were going to be deployed. They sent in a lieutenant colonel physician to be the commander and a lieutenant colonel MSC to be the executive officer. At that point in time, we found out that we had a rather significant mission during that. We were going to be one of the first medical units to be deployed with the troops into Cuba. We then started actions to get ready to go. They built us up in strength and etc. The interesting part was in the 55th medical group, which we were assigned to in the 18th airborne corps. We were probably the least ready organization to go anywhere. Unfortunately the war planners put us one of the primary units to go. So, we had a lot of

things to do to get ready to move. We got a lot of new equipment; we got a lot of new people. We did a lot of training to get ready as well as getting loaded. I think I said before that I was probably the senior lieutenant next to the commander in the organization. So, I was designated by the lieutenant colonel MSC to take the lead element. However, in the meantime as I said before my wife who was, and actually she wasn't my wife at the time, my fiancé was coming down to visit me. She was doing her practice teaching at school and she was between semesters or between positions so she decided to come and visit me. And was in route when I got orders to deploy and I couldn't find here, so the colonel was very nice and let me take the rear element going down, which included the doctors and the nurses. So, I did get to see her for a couple of days. It was also interesting we'd work for about 24 hours straight and she was coming in and so I went home to get cleaned up, go tin the bathtub and fell asleep. So, when she arrived I wasn't there and she finally called and woke me up. I got up and got dressed and went down to the bus station to pick her up. But, we did deploy. Initially the main body was stationed at Ft. Stewart, Georgia. The advanced elements and all the equipment was loaded on docks in Savannah, Georgia. I spent the early portion down there, because I'd come in with the rear element at Camp Stewart. Then as we got closer and closer to deployment I was sent to Savannah with the equipment and the ships and the other lieutenant who had been the commander of the organization. We were going to take the first element into Cuba. We knew it was real when they issued us real ammunition. We were ready to go. We thought we were going to deploy. Of course, the only thing we knew really about what was happening was what we saw on TV other than orders to be prepared to go. Finally, the Crisis ended and I went back to Ft. Stewart where we had the 2nd armored division and some other unit had deployed into Ft. Stewart from Ft. Hood, I think it was, who we were going to support. So, then we had a huge parade in honor of Kennedy. He came down to see u sand thank the troops and all of that sort of stuff. And again as I said before I was not in the parade. A number of units were not. And we watched it so we were walking across the field going back to our bivouac area. All of a sudden I see this jeep coming down with a machine gun on it and realize that it was the President and his party going back to the airfield. SO, he stopped and saw there were three young lieutenants walking across the field. He stopped and said hello to

us. I almost died, thinking I just met the President kind of thing. It was exciting. We eventually did go back to Ft. Bragg. I was the convoy commander for all of the medical trucks etc and vehicles that were going back. I think I had almost 200 vehicles, maybe 250 vehicle sin the convoy.

SM: And this is when you sped through all the small towns?

JL: We sped through all the small towns and trying to keep that group of vehicles together without getting lost was a major problem. I think I shared with you some of the racial problems I ran into at various places where we stopped to allow the troops to buy hamburgers and hotdogs etc. and drinks. We were told that the whit troops could enter the front door; the black groups had to go around to the back. I told them like, hell that's going to happen. Not on my watch. I said maybe I'll just roar through this town and roar right over your hamburger stand. The guy visibly paled and told me he would serve all of my troops. I said these guys have just come back from possibly defending the country and losing theirs lives and I'm not going to let you treat them differently. I don't care of this is a southern town.

SM: Well, did you loose any trucks on the way back? Or did any trucks get lost?

JL: Actually at one time, I think I had trucks in about three different towns. Of course, some of them broke down, but I had a repair vehicle and squad at the very end. So, they would patch that up. I'd have to leave some troops there. We did have some radio contact between the front. I had a group of NCOs in a jeep leading the convoy, a group of NCOs at the rear with the repair vehicles. So, they would stay with the vehicles and catch them up. We never lost any vehicles. We all got back to Ft. Bragg. So, that was an interesting part of that conflict. And as I said I got back, in fact my wife had decided we were going to get married in December and I wasn't sure I was even going to get back in time to back to Syracuse, New York where we got married. But, we did. I did get there and we did get married.

SM: Excellent. With regard to the medical hospital and equipment and other things that you had to do to prepare for the Cuban Missile Crisis was there very much in terms of radiological medicine or medical counter measures to deal with a radiological threat? Because of course the Cuban Missile Crisis focused on the possibility of an atomic war, so did that affect you preparations?

JL: I don't think it did. At least, I don't remember it being an incident. We had some training and capability with doing that as do having specific training to deal with nuclear warfare; I don't think we really did.

SM: You had mentioned in our previous interview that since you were drawn in to the medical service corps to flesh out the corps and renew the corps. Did the Korean War Veterans that you had been working with, did they pass along lessons at this point and throughout your early the first year or two or however many years you worked with them, what kind of lessons were they passing on to you?

JL: They did. It was more not a formal kind of thing, but you know talking about war and what happens during war and some of the kinds of things. They told lots of war stories, which I listened to with open ears, sort of like a sponge looking at what they'd learned and how they'd operated. It was no real formal training by these individuals. In fact, for the most part most of them were in units that didn't deploy, which was interesting. After we deployed I would say the people who probably taught me the most were the NCOs. I remember when I first got to Ft. Bragg I had an E-7. I was the motor officer. He told me, of course he was a lot older than I was and he told me Lieutenant, you're the boss, but you let me run things and I'll make you the best looking second lieutenant at Ft. Bragg and he really did. That was something I never forgot to include during my whole military career. I always looked for real good NCOs and let them do the day-to-day operation and I did the planning and things that officers have to do, but I let them run the day-to-day operation and they did outstanding. I always had some of the better; in fact my units were always rated as top units because I let the NCOs do their NCO jobs. Second lieutenant tend to think they are wearing the uniform and the bars and they need to run things and they shouldn't do that. In fact, I told both of my boys who had military commissions the same things, trust your NCOs.

SM: When you returned to Ft. Bragg how much more time did you have left there?

JL: Probably had a year left.

SM: Was there anything note worthy that occurred during that time period in terms of your military experiences?

JL: Probably not, the one thing that did happen to me and of course I was in the 18th airborne corps and I wanted to get my jump wings. So, I started jump school twice and each time I got through about half of it, I was pulled out of school, because my unit deployed. Once, as I said for the University of Mississippi and then once again for the Cuban Missile Crisis. So, I took all of the physical training for it, but I never got to jump out of the airplane. So, that was a problem. I then deployed, as I said I went up to Washington after my first two years to find out what I needed to do to get out and finish my last year. They told me, well we're going to send you over seas. We're going to send you to Korea. My wife had just joined me. Actually, had just delivered our first child and I didn't want to do that. So, they offered me the opportunity to go to Germany instead and take my wife. And I had one year left and so I had to have added on two years, which was fine with me. Give me an opportunity to see Europe and so on and so forth. I had an offer from a civilian corporation to go to work for them, Proctor and gamble as a matter of fact, as a regional sales manager. I obviously had to turn that down, but I figured if I got the opportunity that time I would get it again in a couple years when I got out. So, we packed up and with a small child headed to Europe.

SM: In terms of the Vietnam War and activities in Vietnam, what were you hearing as a military officer about American activities in Southeast Asia through the early 1960s up to the time you got to Europe?

JL: Actually it was interesting. When I was at Ft. Bragg the last part of the time, the individual headquarters right next to me was a helicopter pilot right next to me with the Special Forces. He would periodically disappear for months on end and then come back. And he couldn't tell me where he was, but I knew he was in Vietnam during that time, the end of the Kennedy time frame. Actually, I was at Ft. Bragg when Kennedy was killed. I was hearing about it, it was guerrilla warfare of course being at Ft. Bragg, was home of Special Operations. A lot of those guys would be disappearing and going, leaving for a year, coming back, doing various kinds of things. I was pretty much aware that it was a guerrilla warfare and we were providing advisors to the organization. Once I left Ft. Bragg to go to Europe I really was more intent on the Cold War and that was happening in Europe at the time and what our missions were there etc. And the possibility of having some you know role I few did go to war with Russia or our Cold

War adversaries. I started to pick up on the war again in about1966 when we started the big build up. We started moving troops in and troops actually involved because as I said my peers were getting curt tailed out of Europe and getting sent to Vietnam directly. As I think we talked in the interview my first job being the club officer and then being the general's aid and the general going back to Walter Reid. I got told one day I was curt tailed and that I was going back to Washington. I had a rather interesting assignment there as I shared with you before. I was head of the Army's medical departments entertainment program. I was social aid at the White House. However, I go there I n'66 and within one year they told me I was heading to Vietnam. The interesting part about that was because as I had shared before my career in the military was going to be personnel officer and the medical department had its own personnel officers. They don't use the AG officers for that. So, they sent me TDY in route to Ft. Benjamin Harrison to get formal schooling in personnel and I did with my family there. I was to say it was a four or six week course. Got trained, took my family back home and deployed for Vietnam. I flew out of Ft. Dix. I was supposed to leave on a specific day. However, they decided they needed an aircraft commander and I was a captain so they held me over a day. So, I took a charter jet. I was the only officer on it with 300 maybe enlisted individuals over to Vietnam. The interesting part about it after they decided that I was the commander and we're about to take off, maybe because he's a medic he can't command these troops. And that's not the case, medical service corps officers can. If I had been a physician or nurse probably not. But medical corps service officers can. So, I did something I learned as a young lieutenant and talked to you about before. I found a couple of sergeant majors and said you guys are in charge, organize the flight and they did. I had no problems whatsoever. They put together an organization of NCOs to run the flight. We stopped in Hawaii; we stopped in Guam I guess. We did let the troops off but they had them well organized and we got there with no problem. When I go tot Vietnam I reported into the area I thought I was going to be working out of. The MAC-V medical headquarters. They told me that General Wesmorlon had made a change. That given an order that made a change in my assignment. The medical service corps at the time had what they called the 90-day wonders. These were young college graduates with some sort of a medical or scientific background that they were putting in the medical

service corps without any ROTC training and or experience. They had 90 days at Ft. Sam Houston to learn how to be a medic and then we're shipping them off to Vietnam. Many of these people were going into the line units. Where there's a medical infrastructure in a division and they were going in tot these jobs and they were failing rather miserably because they hadn't had the experience. So, the word came out form Wesmorlon that all medical service officers who had field experience would go to line units and these younger people would go to the hospitals and the other kinds of things. So, by that time I was a relatively senior captain and had been with the 18th airborne corps and had a lot of file experience so I immediately was shipped to the 4th infantry divisions. Which was a shock to me. I assumed I was going to use all of my training that I'd had in personnel management for that. I went to the 4th infantry division and I was placed in charge of the headquarters at headquarters company at the base camp.

SM: Where was that? Where in Vietnam?

JL: In Pleiku.

SM: Pleiku. Before we get too much further along let me get a few other background questions out of the way real quick. You mentioned Kennedy a number of times already to day and I was curious were you a Kennedy supporter and what did you think about him as President?

JL: I guess being a typical military officer and with some of the jobs that I've had, I'm sort of apolitical. My wife was an avid Kennedy supporter. She loved him. He was my commander and chief and obviously he was appropriate whether I was a big supporter in years since then have had some concerns about some of the things he did and what he did. But that that point in time he was the commander in chief.

SM: Yes, sir. What did you think about the policy in Southeast Asia as it evolved, in particular the emphasis of the Domino Theory? The fear of Communism in general and did you think that the response following the Gulf of Than Kins was appropriate to the situation base on what you understood?

JL: At that point in time I did. To some degree even as I reflect back upon it, probably our involvement in Vietnam did stop the Domino Effect. WE literally bled the Communists in China and North Vietnam to the point they won the war, but they lost the over all war, the Cold War because they had to expend so much even to include Russia to

support the Vietnamese in that war. We may have lost the war, but we may have won in the long term.

SM: Ok. With regard to the Walter Reid Entertainment Program that you ran, how important do you think that was in terms of for the soldiers?

JL: I think morale wise, and I can tell a million stories about incidents that occurred and took place. I think they really enjoyed that. We had huge turnouts. As I said we had almost 1,600 patients at Walter Reid. So, there were a lot of soldiers there that saw a lot of people. Moral-wise I think it was very good. It also was good and had a lot of the entertainment people supported the war effort as opposed to some who didn't come to Walter Reid and see the many wounded individuals. Some of them were pretty badly wounded. You had paraplegics. You know half of their face missing. All sorts of other kinds of horrors. I know Herb Elpart showed you that he was there and the Tijuana Brass and they did a shoe for us. They also toured several of our bad units. His wife got so ill, I had to take her out because of that. Vikki Carr, no it was Anita Bryan I guess went on to one of our paraplegic wards and she met a soldier, he was a medic and she was in Vietnam the year before with the Bob Hope Show had given her his combat medics badge. She saw him there, lying paralyzed. In fact, she took him to the Shorum that night. She said you know Captain can you bring this young man to the Shorum tonight? And I said I could and we did. In fact, she crawled into bed with him. She said oh, my God my husband isn't here I don't have a date tonight. Captain, you're my date. We had a dinner party and I think I shared some of this that night at home. I called my wife and said well, you'll have to have the dinner party by yourself because I'm going to the Shorum tonight with Anita Bryan. So, look for me on the 11:00 news. She did. That was not necessarily a popular person with my wife. I think the morale and a lot of them did a lot of things. As I shared with you the black lady and I 'm drawing a blank on her name.

SM: Pearl, right?

JL: Pearl Bailey became very involved and did a lot of thing to try to help the soldiers. Anytime she was in the Washington D.C. area she always called me and came out and did kinds of things. She even in other hospitals would ask me the Letterman's

and the Fitz Simmons. Whenever she was in town dealing with entertaining she always made to a point to visit the soldiers that were hospitalized there.

SM: Did that help you late in Vietnam, were you able to bring over any USO people or do anything like that over there?

JL: No, I didn't do that, but we did one of the biggest Bob Hope Shows that was ever in Vietnam. Was right after obviously the Tet Offensive and he brought the show there. I've got pictures, which I will donate of that show at the 4th infantry division. Now I didn't spend much time in base camp, but when I knew the show was coming and I knew some of the entertainers that were going to be there I made it a point to get back into base camp for that and I've got a lot of pictures of that. I will donate those with my file.

SM: You went to Vietnam in October of 1967, correct?

JL: Correct.

SM: What did you wife and family think when you told them that you had orders to go to Vietnam? What was their response?

JL: I think they all knew that I was going to go. In fact, to go back a little bit further when I was in Germany I sent in my resignation to resign my regular Army commission at the end of my three-year tour. They sent me back a letter and said not until you come back form Vietnam. Now, eventually somebody challenged that and they couldn't hold you beyond that. Bu t at that point in time they told me I was going to go to Vietnam and then I could consider resigning. So, again this is the second time I have not gotten out. So, they knew eventually I was going to go. In Washington the place we first rented there for the first year I was there, I talked to Branch I wanted to upgrade the housing we were in. They advised me not to do that, because I would eventually be going to Vietnam. So, they were all prepared for that, I think at that point in time if you were a healthy individual you were going to go to Vietnam if you were in the Military. I think they were ready. I don't think at least my wife was real y happy a bout that. My kids were too young to really understand. I moved them to Syracuse, New York. My wife thought I was going to a really safe place and work in the MAC-V headquarters assigning medical types throughout the country. When she found out I had gone to the 4th infantry division, there was somewhat a concern. In fact, when we get there I hit

country and had sent information back that my assignment had been changed from MAC-V to the 4th infantry division. I want to say it was around my mother's birthday. They were having a get together. She went back to Syracuse and rented an apartment. That evening on the evening news it said element of the 4th infantry division were overrun and had taken heavy casualties. As the story goes, both of them heard it, but both didn't want to tell the other one they'd heard it.

SM: Oh, my. Well, speaking of the news had you and your wife and perhaps your parents been keeping close tabs on what was going on in Vietnam through the evening news? Of course, that was a daily feature.

JL: As soon, basically as I got back to Walter Reid I watched it and of course were having casualties come in hundreds a day. So, I was very up on what was going on and what was taking place etc. You know about the time we started committing troops to combat I was very much involved.

SM: What was the morale like in the hospital itself amongst the hospital staff?

JL: We were very busy and felt that I think it was very good. Felt we were doing good for the Army you know taking care of these very badly wounded soldiers.

SM: What was the flight like over?

JL: It was long. You k now I was somewhat excited and nervous because of the role I was playing and going there. Mostly it was dark. Every place we landed it was at night until we landed at Vietnam, which was in the early morning. The flight took off in late afternoon and every place we landed was totally dark. So, I was nervous, excited knew I was going to war. The first thing I remember seeing as we came into Tan Son Nhut was the shell marks and bomb marks in the ground and along the area we were going to.

SM: What was the atmosphere like as far as the soldiers and their attitudes and how they were?

JL: They were all up. All you know motivated to go to war. You know excited. It was an exhilarating kind of a flight I would say. Nobody again at that point in time the protests weren't there. They were just all new there. They were mostly young troops. Not all, as I said there were several Sergeant majors and first sergeants and senior NCOs, but the majority of them were just young privates going off to war.

SM: Now, was this a planeload of individuals in the same unit?

JL: It was totally replacement people. Once they got there they were dispersed in various areas.

SM: What were your first impressions once your aircraft landed, the door opened and you got out and there was Vietnam?

JL: It was interesting the first night I was there they had a tent city where the replacement officers slept on a cot. I did not have jungle fatigues. I was in regular, the old fashioned fatigues and it was hot. That first night there was lots of artillery going off. I didn't know for sure whether it was incoming or outgoing. Eventually I knew exactly what was going to happen. But, at this point in time it was just very noisy. I guess I was disappointed because when I got there I thought I'd be immediately assigned and do something. They told me no, your orders have been changed. We'll pick you up in the morning and tell you where you 're going and what you're going to do. So, the first day there was somewhat boring, disappointing. I wasn't doing anything. I was sitting on a cot in a tent for probably a day and a half.

SM: Did you get any kind of initial briefings when you arrived?

JL: No. The initial briefing I got was when I got to the 4th infantry division, 4th med battalion. But prior to that they just told me the story I told earlier that I was a senior captain and I was going to a field unit based on new orders form general Wesmorlon.

SM: Well, what did that briefing at the 4th ID cover?

JL: In fact the individual who briefed me was the S-3, who eventually became the executive officer, Major Korn was his name. Poe Korn. He briefed me on the AO, what was taking place, what was going on etc. Had a rather bad experience the first night I was there. They had what they call the Green Stripe Club. The idea was you know you've seen the juice glasses that have various stripes on them. At least they used to in the olden days. I got there and after my briefing and stuff we had a little officers club in a tent. They had a drinking contest and the Presidante of this organization was the one who could drink the most of these juice glasses full of juice. I made Presidente that night. The next morning I couldn't walk. I basically stayed in bed. My roommate was an orthopedics surgeon. Although he was serving as a surgeon at the organization. He

came back in and I'd slept rather late as I was rather hung over, very hung over. He said you need to go out to the mess hall, they're having steak for lunch today. Obviously we didn't have steak very often. Of course, I didn't know that at that point in time. I walked up to the mess hall opened the door, smelled the food, closed the door and went back to bed. I'm not sure that the commander and or the executive officer were totally happy that they had this new captain who had got drunk. But I do not drink bourbon to his day because that's what it was. But, in any event I took over and actually it's interesting medical units at that point in time it's no longer the case. The commander always had to be a doctor if you were engaged in combat. The medical service corps officer was the executive officer. In reality the medical service corps officer was the commander if that company or whatever. The doctor was figurehead and spent all of his time treating patients. The company was run by the medical service corps officer. They had had a very poor commander when I got there. The unit had a supply officer that was selling frames for eyeglasses for sunglasses. They had the aviator sunglasses kind of thing. Of course, we had those to issue. He had been doing that. They had lost thousands of dollars worth of equipment. Not lost, he had sold it for various asundary kinds of things or traded it. So, the previous the guy I replaced had some other problems too. He apparently had a drinking problem I think and had lost an entire payroll. He was flying in a helicopter and he had it in his briefcase and he opened it for some reason to count it and it blew out into the air. So, he was being basically relieved. So, that's why I got the headquarters in the A company. I didn't like that because I didn't like being in the base camp at Camp Anaria. I wanted to be out. Talking back to my earlier days. If I was going to be a medic I wanted to be out with the combat troops. I guess I was there through the Tet Offensive. But when I got there the S-3 Poe Korn, said you've had some experience have you not? I said I had and of course the battle of Doc To, which started the entire thing that led up to Tet had started. We were heavy fighting in the Doc To area. We had the 173rd attached to us. They asked me, they had a young lieutenant one of these 90 day wonders up there and they asked me if I would go up and we were having some major problems getting organized. We were taking mass casualties routinely. If I'd go up and sort of run the operation up there for a period of time, which I did. So, I got into heavy combat real quickly. Our clearing company, which was I guess with the first

brigade up there was taking so many hit itself, we finally just dug it under ground and put connex containers, metal containers, dug them way underground and then put timbers, sandbags ands PSP over them. We had a generator and lights. We painted the insides whit and we used those as our operating rooms, but had to have them underground because we continually took incoming fire from the hills surrounding the area. I've got some pictures showing that too, which I'll include in what I present. I stayed up there for a period of time, go things basically organized and working well. Came back to the base camp. I did periodically go up there and one of those trips up there by helicopter was the first time I got shot up in a helicopter. As I said before, it happened three times. Actually two of them were we got shot up. The third was we just crashed on take off.

SM: Any particular reason?

JL: I don't know. We took off and this was later in my tour. In fact the last time I think. No, it wasn't the last time. The helicopter took off and then auto rotated and then just crashed down on the ground and split the skids out.

SM: But you weren't injured?

JL: I wasn't injured. Actually three of us there. Interesting story about that and I'm way ahead of myself.

SM: That's ok.

JL: The next week we went back into the helicopter and I flew with this full colonel who was the disconcommander. It was our command and control ship. It was a borrowed ship. It wasn't one of the forces ships because they were all engaged in other kinds of things. So, this young warrant officer turns around and says do you remember me? To the colonel and I said I don't know if he does, but I do. He was the young warrant officer who had been flying the ship who had crashed on us. I said are you sure this one's good? He assured me it was, we took off.

SM: When you were shot up those two times, did the aircraft get damaged enough where you had to immediately land?

JL: No, the other tow times we did what we called controlled crash landings. Actually, they had control of the ship. One of them was we were flying from I want to say Dakto, it may have been Kontum, but we took some .50 mm hits from the ground at a

relatively high distance. So, it didn't damage the aircraft bad enough that it crashed. He had a rather controlled crash landing and we made the airfield.

SM: Now, with the underground operating rooms, how many of those did you guys create there?

JL: Initially we had to and I think that eventually we had four.

SM: Ok, what was the back up plan if they hit the generator if power went out for some reason?

JL: We used flashlights.

SM: Also I was curious about field-improvised sterilization. Was that an issue or was there always some mechanism on hand that was a reliable way of sterilizing operating room tools?

JL: We had sterilization capability there. In fact most of that was kept outside. It wasn't kept underground. Lots of times, you know sterilization was somewhat of a problem anyway because people would come in with mud. IN fact when we were under a mass casualty drill you know al of the physicians were working and everybody had a job except me, because my job was the administrative kind of activity. So, I'd literally help them hump litters. I remember one time this guy was laying on one of the stretchers in one of the rooms. The physician told me to clean up his wound, which I started to do very gently. Half his leg was blown away. He said captain I told you to clean the wound and he grabbed a cloth and just scrubbed the thing.

SM: Was he awake?

JL: The guy was basically in shock anyway. He just wanted it clean so we could start blood and do some bandaging. In fact, we had another thing happen to us early in when I first got there. And I told you the 4th infantry was "over run". We literally the NVA were dug in deep, you read about the Battle of Doc To and we would lay wall-to-wall napalm on the hills, which I could see. Then we'd send in the battalion and the battalion would just get crucified. We'd get the shit kicked out of us really, the 4th infantry did. We were taking mass casualty after mass casualty. At one point in time, we had a battalion that was basically wiped out. I don't know it quite that was the case. But they had heavy casualties. We couldn't get most of them out. Most of the killed. They finally took a Chinook and flew it in and they loaded all the bodies in a sling under the

thing. They brought it back and grave registration, which I never understood was right next to the aid station. The Chinook hit a bump like this and the sling dropped and these bodies just rolled out on the ground. They'd been on the hillside for at least three days and there were heads rolling around and parts of bodies all over the airfield all over my clearing station. I literally vomited, threw up. And again I saw horrible stuff after that, but I was indoctrinated and hardened into the military dead at that point in time. During the rest of the war, I saw lots and lots of bad wounds and injuries etc. From that point in time I was hardened into what took place. But I do have to admit I lost my cookies at that point in time.

SM: As you were working during the mass casualty experiences what did you witness of the triage process? Could you describe what you saw?

JL: Basically and this was hard too, during a mass casualty what they would look at is they would sort those who were going to die and they put them aside and try to do something, you know morphine or whatever to ease their pain. Those that were going to live, but didn't need immediate care were set off to the other side and they treated those that were critical. If they did something with them or could do something to them they were going to survive. I read an interesting statistic that I think 95% of those individuals who hit medical care lived. Even though they were very badly wounded in many cases. Different where I was in Dakto than other places. There was usually a surgical hospital or an evacuation hospital within wade distance. So, they'd pick them up on the battlefield and take them right to the hospital over flying the division level medical support. Where we were they couldn't do that because the blade time to the nearest hospital, we were up in the central highlands. Actually along the Cambodian border, all of that area we were just too far to do that. We had to take them into the division level medical support. So, that was one thing at least in the 4th as far as I knew was a little bit different that any other places. Then they would back haul them out of our clearing stations into the hospitals along the coast. Actually there was one in Pleiku. So, that if people were wounded around the base camp area they did take them directly to the hospital. But for the most part the out forward area's where our Charlie Company was and actually all three of our medical companies, except for the headquarters in A company did treat a lot of casualties as well as routine sick call kind of stuff.

SM: Now, prior to Tet of ’68 the end of January of ’68 how many mass casualty situations do you think the 4th ID found itself engaged in? From the time you got there in October until early January of ’68?

JL: And I can’t remember how long the Battle of Dakto took place, but there was a period of time we were taking mass casualties for at least a month I think. Then we secured the area and although the 1st brigade stayed at Dakto, they were then moving around, looking for small units. The Battle of Dakto, I don’t know it was a prelude. It was just the same way they did DMB and Phu. You know they attacked with regulars and then staged a massive uprising, which took place during Tet. Interesting how I saw Tet get started. I was getting back at the base camp with my headquarters in A company. We had two MPs come in and one of them had been shot through the ear. Just listening and talking to them. They had been in down town Pleiku, which is probably about 10 miles away from Camp Penari, which is a base camp on patrol, two of them in a jeep. They saw some Vietcong in the street. The Vietcong came up and tried to take their weapons. One of them when he saw him come up pulled a .45 out and put it behind his back. So, when they realized that there was a significant, not a significant number maybe seven or eight Vietcong, he told the driver to move out. He pulled his .45 and started shooting. They shot back and one of them hit him in the side of the head. I guess I had been talking about Tet and how I found out about it and that kind of thing. Then of course that was basically, he talks about it in some of the books. I think this was the day before Tet and it was the prelude. Some of the NVA, not NVA Vietcong forces started it about12 hours earlier than it was supposed to start. But the next day we started taking casualties and we did in fact take casualties at the headquarters in A company clearing station. Because there were casualties generated in Pleiku. There was an Army hospital in Pleiku at the Air Force Base there. But they got overwhelmed. A lot of things that took place around the Camp Penari area came into us.

SM: How many beds did you have available for patients when they came in?

JL: I want to say 40, but we could expand it to more than that. We had quansid huts in the head Neg organization. We could expand it with tents. I’ve forgotten. I have so many hospital units in my career, I have forgotten. I want to say 40 or 80. Forty with

expansion to 80. It's something I'd have to look up in the field manuals to tell you exactly how many.

SM: When you received mass casualties, I assume those beds would fill up very quickly?

JL: yeah. Basically what we'd do is we would stabilize them and then using fixed wing a backfield to the hospital areas. So, we were the first area where they had blood capabilities available. Because of that I later on invented a technique, which the military now uses. We called it a forward surgical needle. What I'd so is a battalion aid station was the smallest medical unit. Actually the companies had individual medics, then the battalion had a battalion aid station, which was the first place there was a physician. What I would do if a battalion was engaged some place in heavy combat and we needed on ground support, I would take a team with some blood refers and a physician and two helicopters and we'd drop them in on top of the battalion aid station. We'd develop a mini-clearing station in the battalion rear. In fact, later on I was involved in medical doctrine. I was director of training and doctor in development at the Academy of Health Sciences, my last assignment. I used some of the techniques that we worked on in Vietnam for use as far as supporting the current military, which moves so fast that you have to get a surgical element out. You have what they call the golden hour. If you can start blood within that time frame, you can save people. So, I would get that capability as far forward as I could. That didn't normally exist within the battalion aid station. But, I could take it out of the clearing station and drop it in on the battalion.

SM: When you said refer you're talking about a refrigerated unit?

JL: A refrigerated unit, right.

SM: That would carry the blood.

JL: You have to have something that can keep blood. So, we did have refers or refrigerators at the clearing stations and we just took them forward. I'd take a surgical tech. The other thing I always took forward was a radio and a radio operator because they didn't have that. I could then control the dust off coming into our area then. So, it was a concept that actually one of the physicians and I developed. We used it quite frequently. Actually after Tet as they started doing battalion sized operations, you know chasing small units of North Vietnamese in the jungles.

SM: Well, why don't you go ahead and describe the events of Tet as they unfolded in your area of operations?

JL: Well, really what happened was each one of our brigades actually at that point in time, we had the 173rd and the 1st Brigade were in Dakto. We had some support elements in Kontum and out on what we called the oasis out near the Cambodian border was our 2nd brigade. Our 3rd brigade was still part of the 25th division along the coast. After Tet, they, the NVA basically attacked Dakto again. And so our 1st brigade stayed there. They took the city of Kontum and parts of Pleiku and we retook those. Of course I had a lot of the medical support for those. By that time I was assigned to Charlie Company in the oasis. We then moved south to take Ban Me Thout back. I set up a medical operation down there. The second time I took fire. I took more fire as a medic then when I had a rifle company later on. I was at Charlie Company for a period of time. That's where I got my combat medics badge. We took lots of fire. I think you had to be in an infantry unit under fire for something like a 30-day period. We did. I think I told you before that the company that I was the executive officer for at Ft. Bragg, the 563rd clearing company was in Ban Me Thout. The Special Forces were there. They had an Army airfield there. They were supporting that and the local troops. Once the NVA took over that area we sent our 2nd brigade down there. I took a clearing company; I set it up initially on the airfield while they were building the base camp for the 2nd AD, so that we had immediate medical capabilities there. Interesting the first night we got there, we were in tents. There were a lot of other support troops in their arena. I made my people sandbag our tents. Again they had an underground aid station, the same as we did. I reinforced that with sandbags etc. In fact, I had the nickname of Sandbag Laible, they used to call me the troops, because I made everybody sandbag in and I made sure we had bunkers. The aviators, typical really nice setup. They had a nice officers club and so on and so forth. They, the warrant officers were harassing me about that. In fact, I think I got the name Sandbag Laible form the aviators. I said well, if we get attacked I want to make sure, we're ok. That night they did attack us. We took heavy .82 mm mortar shells. My troops all were in bunkers or behind sandbags and nobody got hurt. But the officer club got hit badly. This one guy who was really harassing me dove under a table and the shell came in and took off both legs at the knees. So, they were glad we had our

aid station up and protected and we could treat even during the attack. Then I've got some other pictures of when I actually built the aid station out at where our camp is. Show me sandbagging it in again. The interesting part of that is I also have a picture where this tank is coming right at my aid station and there are mortar shells bursting behind it. I'll make sure that is included in my.

SM: Yes, sir. Wow.

JL: I said the other day when I was looking at my pictures, why in the hell was I out taking a picture when these shells are coming in, but I did. I also had one and I can't find it during the Battle of Dakto, we were right on the airfield, our aid station. We were on one side and the 173rd clearing station was on the other side. I had two pictures. One where our physician, they just shut down. We were having mass casualties and they said they couldn't take anymore and they were sending them to us. We were having mass casualties too. Our physician got furious with their physician. He ran across the airfield to holler at them. On his way coming back there are shells bursting behind him too. So, he's running across the airfield. The airfield was under, for a period of time so much fire that the C-130s would come in and not land. They would come in touch the ground and with a parachute pull the supplies out. Then we'd rush out and get them. Of course as they came I, we'd always take mortar fire. I have a picture of one of the C-130s got hit coming in and blew the tail off and I can't find that picture. I knew I had it, but I think I gave it to somebody. I had another show that I used to do as the montagnards, where the men go topless and the men go bottomless kind of thing. I lent it to somebody one course I was in sometime and apparently they never gave it back to me. At that point in time, until now I wasn't really interested in any if that. In fact, there are slide I've looked at since that presentation at the Symposium I hadn't seen for 30 years.

SM: Now, as Tet was unfolding, how busy did your hospital stay throughout that period?

JL: Well, actually they were very busy during that entire time. I in fact, I guess it was right after Tet or whatever the 4th was sending elements into Kontum. And I went out and set up an aid station at a Special Forces camp because there wasn't any base camp at Kontum and eventually as we retook it we brought our 3rd brigade, took them back from the 25th infantry division and brought them in and they stayed in Kontum.

They actually operated out of the Kontum area. But, I was there prior to them getting there and that was one of the first mass casualties I saw on the other side. We were with an ARVN division, which was there. We were in support of them getting set up for our folks to come in. They, the NVA did one of these mass charges on our lines. They took the quad 50s that were supposedly for air support, they just put them down and just pumped them into these guys just charging in. I forgot what the body count was, but then the ARVNs loved that. So, they stacked the bodies like cord word, to look at. I wanted them to either burn them or bury them. I was the senior medic in the area and U had a major go round with the commander of the ARVN forces. He wanted everybody to see how many people they'd killed. But that was an interesting night. Prior to that night they said we might get overrun. Like I said I was in a Special Forces Camp. All these Special Forces Camp I had to set the aid station up there because they had permanent buildings. That night all of us who were there were assigned to a Special Forces operation person that if we got overrun we were supposed to go out and what did we call it?

SM: Escape and evade?

JL: Escape and evade, which I thought was nice that we had a Special Forces guy to escape and evade with. But in any event we stayed. We did get the mass attack. I mean it was literally. They just came screaming and running and the quad .50s just poured into them. We beat off the attack and we were actually toward the rear of it. These guys were advisors to the ARVN unit that was there. They took most of the casualties, the ARVNs did. But the enemy took a lot.

SM: Now in those situations did you facilities provide medical assistance to the ARVN if they were overwhelmed?

JL: And we did to the NVA.

SM: Right, the captured POWs.

JL: Well, in fact another story aside. This was back in headquartrs in A company when I was there. We ha a couple of the Chieu Hois, they actually were. This guy had been wounded and I think he had malaria besides. In any event, I was talking with him through my interpreter and he had come down and filtrated down the Ho Chi Minh trail with a whole bunch of equipment and then had joined a unit to fight. They came in across and ran in to us at Kontum and ran into the 4th infantry division. Then they ran

into us at they came across again out of Cambodia into the oasis area and they ran into our 2nd brigade there. They hit the 1st brigade and then they hit the 2nd brigade. Again, we had moved down to Ban Me Thout and he finally they were coming back he finally just gave up. He said I don't know what this 4th infantry division is, but it must be the biggest division in the world and he kept running into us. Of course, we moved by helicopter and they moved on foot and we knew where they were. We just kept moving to keep them from coming into country. So, I thought that was an interesting story. There was another guy that came in as a prisoner. He said he'd come down on a bicycle carrying, or maybe not a bicycle, I don't know. But he had been carrying heavy weapons ammunition. He got all the way down there and they told home to go back and get some more. He gave up. He wasn't going to go. He'd been under attack by the you know arch lights and all of the other kinds of things all the way down the Ho Chi Minh trail. It was interesting, I was way further north of Dakto. And again went to an area we were looking at the possibility of the 1st brigade going up in operations there and I went up to look the area over as far as providing medical support and I stayed at a Special Forces camp again. Interesting stay there, it was out in the middle of nowhere. These guys really I mean they went out in the jungle and did weird things. But, where they lived they always had fixed facilities. Usually ARVN troops as protection etc. But, during my time there one of the evening he took me up on a hill and I could see the Ho Chi Minh trail. I could see the lights coming down and as they got into the Vietnam area, there were no lights anymore. You could see them coming down the trail. There were vehicles coming down the trail. That was an interesting stay too. One day while I was there this helicopter comes in and these young Vietnamese ladies get off the helicopter and I was asking naively what's that? They said well, that's some entertainment for the Special Forces guys. They also had a guy that I had heard about and didn't believe. He would come into the Special Forces camp for a period of time and he had a beard and really a very slender looking guy. And I'd heard about this guy. Basically take a knife and some ammunition and disappear for weeks on end. He'd come back in and he'd have a bag full of ears. He just went out and killed you know North Vietnamese soldiers. He would just kill them and then he'd bring back the ears so he could show how many he'd killed

during his time frame out there. That was a weird guy and I'd hate to see him in normal society. He just liked to kill. They just sent him out.

SM: This was an American?

JL: American. I'm not sure he was a Green Beret. I think he was just an American scout of some sort. He'd come back with information on movement of troops, he'd just lay in ambush, pick a guy off and cut his throat and cut off his ears.

SM: And then go back for more.

JL: And then go back for more. He'd come back in when he needed. He'd change clothes and get more information and get something to eat. Basically he lived off the land. And he operated out of this Special Forces camp. You know I'd heard the story about this guy and I never would have believed it, but I just happened to be there when he came in one time.

SM: How much time did you spend at that camp? That Special Forces camp?

JL: Probably a couple of nights is all. I went into it several times. My job was and this is when I became the S-3 of the med battalion, just scout the area prior to a battle and stuff. You know see where we could set up medical support, that kind of stuff.

SM: Would you provide them with medical supplies, Special Forces camps?

JL: No, they had their own supply system. Actually they were attached to there was an area advisor group and usually headed by a full colonel and they had their own route for doing that. I mean if they needed it and we were there, we always brought in our own medical supplies. Usually when we left, we just left with them what was there. But they really were there to advise the ARVN forces for the most part. I did have a mission we'll get to eventually where I was sent out with one of the A teams.

SM: Ok, I'll write that one down.

JL: In fact, there's some pictures in that montagnard book and I had some rather interesting encounters during that time frame too.

SM: Yes, sir we will have to discuss that on another day because I think we're out of time aren't we?

JL: Sorry I'm taking so long here.

SM: No, no this is great. This will end the interview for the 22nd of August.

SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. James Laible on the 29th of August 2002 at approximately 10:05 Lubbock time. We are in his office at the Health Sciences Center. Sir, why don't we go ahead and continue the interview by looking at a couple of the issues concerning supplies and logistics in Vietnam? IN particular I was wondering did you ever find yourself or the hospitals and facilities where you worked, were there any problems with the logistics system? Were there any shortages of anything, things like that?

JL: To the best of my knowledge we never had any problems. There was of course, an S-4 for the medical battalion supply officer and each of the companies had supply officers. I didn't really get involved a lot on that. I was more into operations, but I know during my operations activities I never had any shortage of medical supplies or nay kind of supplies as far as that went.

SM: As your experiences continued, let's see here. We talked briefly about some of the Special Forces activity in the area. You mentioned in our last interview that you went on I guess an incident involving a team mission that you were on. I was wondering if you could describe that activity you engaged in with Special Forces.

JL: Basically, the Special Forces A team was assigned to an ARVN unit to do a relocation of montagnard troops that were up along the Cambodian border. The idea was two fold. One was to set up a free fire zone there. I think it was probably in preparation for the Cambodian Incursion, which took place later in the war, not a lot later, but after I had left. But as I look back and read as to what was happening all I was told at that point in time was these villages were in the way so that we could lay free fire zones and bombing arch lights in these areas. So, it was to protect the montagnards. Also, I truly believe too, wanted to rid the North Vietnamese of sources of supply and other kinds of havens. They would move, they would build and if you're familiar with montagnards, they'd build their houses on sticks and have a very unique style, which I have some pictures of. They actually built whole villages in this particular area. They would fly Chinooks out, take a whole village or most of a village and bring the entire village, all their supplies, everything except their huts there to this new area and set them up. Then they would torch the montagnard villages, so that there was nothing for them to go back to. Because the tendency was they wanted to go back to the area they'd come from.

Because there were disease and the possibility of a plague epidemic going, the Colonel, the area advisor asked the commanding general of the 4th infantry division, if he could send a doctor and a medical team out to support this area. And give shots and you know teach hygiene and do a lot of other things. So, the division surgeon said, well I can't afford to send, we're engaged in a lot of combat, I can't afford to send a physician out there. He said I can put together a team. So, the division commander said well send Laible, he's expendable. So, I took a team, I think of either five or seven people that surgical needle that I think I'd talk to you about before. It was the same team and my jeep and my driver so we'd have a radio. And we went out to just outside the Cambodian border and set up with the ARVNs. There had apparently been an ARVN camp there, which was, what am I trying to say? Surrounded, had bunkers and fence etc and some permanent buildings. We were actually stationed there. Then outside of that they had a rough puff organization. I'm not sure how big it was, regional forces, popular forces organization that was also supporting this operation. They were supposed to put the perimeter. So, we were in the center, the ARVNs had a perimeter around us and then the rough puffs had a perimeter around them. The ARVNs didn't trust the regional forces, the popular forces so they wouldn't let them in the compound. They had to set up outside the compound. And I got there the first day and the A team, I think they had three officers, a signal officer, an infantry officer, maybe an engineer I'm not sure and several NCOs. So, they were setting up the perimeter with fire points and all this sort of stuff. I said wait a minute guys, if we're going to be out here al one I want to know where the artillery is coming from. They aid we don't have an artillery in our rear. I said well, about 10 klicks from here there's a 4th infantry division base camp for our 3rd brigade. I said I'm going to call in to the S-3 there, who was a friend of mine and see if I can't get some fire points set up and I did. I said I don't care about these machine guns and whatever. If we get attacked, we need artillery. So, I did in fact. So, the medic here is taking over the A team and I'm bringing in artillery and I put fire points around so that if we did get attacked I could call in artillery support. We did that. These young lieutenant Special Forces guys thought this old captain was pretty smart as far as a medic went. But, I had been involved in some firefights before and the best thing was to have artillery. In fact, I tell a story I had a section of the perimeter on the base camp, Camp Penari was

my responsibility. The medics manned it. Again, interesting and I told you this before, the medics manned the bunkers and the band manned the towers, which had a machine gun in them. So, they were heavy gunners with the Army band. In any event, one night while I was an officer of the guard, we took fire on the perimeter. I ran up into the tower to see where it was coming, grabbed the phone sand started calling. And this young kid in there, he's got this M-16 on full automatic just firing and firing and firing. Finally he said Captain, captain aren't you going to shoot? Aren't you going to shoot? I said son, I'm doing more effective firing with this phone calling in artillery strikes than you're ever doing with that machine gun or I mean that M-16. I said all I have is .45 and there's no reason I'm going to pull the .45. This phone and that artillery I'm calling in, and I was adjusting the artillery fire on the forces. So, it goes back to that same thing I learned during that fire fight that artillery is important. We did. As soon as I got the artillery coming in the enemy left. I mean I don't know if we hit any of them or not, but we stopped taking fire when the heavy artillery came in. I wanted to make sure if we got in to an attack that happened. In any event, we went on with the missions and the montagnards were being brought in. We were giving them shots for plague and giving them a bar of soap and speaking to them about hygiene and so on and so forth. And I had a montagnard interpreter who was assigned to me all the time anyway. He traveled wherever I went. He spoke both Vietnamese and montagnard language. It was like a three man team. I had my driver, my jeep and this montagnard interpreter. And wherever I was he was basically with me. In any event, we were doing this and talking to the chiefs and trying to get them to understand what we were trying to do. We give them a bar of soap and most of the time they would bite it. The ARVN commander and I really didn't get along very well. He did things that I just didn't think were appropriate. Like as they came in, he would separate the men in one area, the women in another area and the children in another area. And that of course immediately made the montagnards hostile to the ARVNs when they came into the area. I argued with him about that quite a bit. And I'd often time deliberately bring families together or do other kinds of things which he didn't like. One of the other things that happened to us there was they were looking for, I don't know whether they were trying to get the montagnards to tell them stuff, but they brought them in, but they didn't supply them with any rice. I was arguing

with him about that, he needed to do that. He said well, then they'll become more cooperative I will supply the rice. To make a long story short again, because I was the S-3 and S-5 of the med battalion, I knew at the same place where I'd ask for the artillery, we had captured a cache of NVA rice cache that we'd uncovered. In knew we had it there. So, I just called the S-5 of the division and had three truckloads of rice just delivered and dumped on the ground. Of course, again I probably could have gotten shot by this ARVN. He was not very happy with me at that point in time. In fact, he reported me to the regional commander, who basically said well, he doesn't belong to me, he really belongs to the 4th infantry division. I don't control him. So, we continued to do that. I tell another story again and in fact why I did this was the montagnards were threatening to leave. And as a Chinook would come inland unload one village; another village would try to get back on it to go back out into their area. You know in talking with my interpreter, the reason was they didn't have any food and they had food back there and they really needed to do that. So the ARVNs were playing a game with them. And of course, as I'm sure you're aware of the ARVNs and the montagnards didn't get along very well. They hated each other as much as they hated the NVA, but they did like the Americans. They really did. I guess after I got finished they liked us even more. In` any event, they decided that some of the villages hadn't got the total word as to what we wanted to do. So, when I went out to talk to chiefs about you know talking their people into getting the shots. They didn't like t get the shots, but to do this. And as I came into this one village, I had a platoon of rough puffs as my escorts. As I said my driver, myself and these regional forces platoon was with me. So, as I came into this village I saw up in the elephant grass, what I thought was two or three people. In fact, was and I started taking AK-47 fire. So, I jumped behind my jeep and I grabbed my .45 and I'm going to back to my old infantry activities and I start directing these regional forces, popular forces to attack. I mean I had a platoon. I only saw two guys up there. I looked around there was nobody there. Me, my driver, and my montagnard interpreter. So, I said let's get the hell out of here. I grabbed my driver's M-16, put it on full automatic, laid in the back of the jeep and just pumped it away up there and we took off out of the area. And about oh, two hours later back at the base camp, these regional forces, start coming in ones and two at a time. You know the platoon; they'd just taken off as soon as the

fighting started. So, that was my first encounter with trying to direct an infantry activity and not having it happen. We then, I tell another story that's something that I did. At this point in time, my boss who was the executive officer of the med battalion and who had been the S-3 before I took over that job, called me. He said Jim, we're having a USO show, Filipino show coming in to the officers club in the base camp tonight, you think you can find a way to do this. Now, we're not talking like this. We had in the med battalion; we had our own code of words. Nobody could have understood what we were saying because we had our own language, which we talked through, but this is what he's telling me. I said God, how can I get in there. That's 50 klicks away maybe. He said well, try. We haven't had a "girlie" show ever here at the base camp. He said try to get in. So, low and behold as it turns out the regional advisor, commander flies in to see what we're doing. He comes in one of these bubble observation helicopters with a warrant officer pilot and he sits down. And he comes up and talks to me about what's going on. He said he's going to be there for several hours. I said well, could I borrow your helicopter to fly into the base camp. Not the division base camp that was too far away, the 3rd brigade base camp. I really need to pick up some extra supplies and so on and so forth. And so he said sure, go ahead and borrow it. As long as you're not going to be gone more than an hour. I said no, I 'm probably going to stay there. I'll send my driver and I'll stay over night and I'll send my driver to pick me up the next day. So, he said sure, so I'm borrowing this full colonel's helicopter to go fly to a girlie show. In any event, I get in and first thing I notice is the warrant officer is sort of leaning out the door. I realize I had been there now about probably two weeks and I hadn't had a bath. In fact, we ran out of water. I tell the story we used to shave with beer, because you know we had lots of beer, but no special operations guys, but no water. I hadn't showered in at least two weeks. So, I finally decided he was not real happy with me being in. But he lands and I went down and they actually had an area where when you went into the base camps they had a walk trough area where you could walk through, take a shower and they'd issue you new uniforms, which I did. So, I decided well I'm half way back to camp Penari, now I've go tot figure out another way. So, I thought I'd go in and talk to the S-3 of the aviation battalion who was there. I said have you got any slicks going back and he said well, they've all gone back for the day. He said, but I've got a couple of gun

ships going back, but he said you know they're not supposed to take packs. I said oh, come on, you and I are buddies. So, he said ok, I'll put you on one. So, the last gun ship going back into the camp, I was on the ship. I'm listening on the earphones to he pilot. He said we're going to have to take a couple of runs before we go back in because we've got to clear this area. There's been some NVA sightings. So, I said ok, so as was typical I was sitting on my .45, but I did have an M-16 with me at this point in time. I had taken my driver'sM-16. All of a sudden he goes into an area and I see it. There's a Vietcong parole in black pajamas and all of a sudden the tracer start coming up at us. Oh, shit. I'm going to get killed going to a girlie show. So, I finally said well, what the hell and I pretended to be a door gunner. I shot my M-16 with the door gunners. Actually on the guns ship, they had rocket pods, so we tore up the area pretty well, I did get back in, did see the girlie show. Then the next day went back out to the base camp and my driver had come in to pick me up. I'm realizing as we're going back you know you've just done another thing. You and your driver and this montagnard are going down a road in enemy held territory without any escort. I guess at that point in time, you know you're young you feel totally non-vulnerable I guess is the word I'm trying to say. But I really decided, you know the three of us aren't going to put up much of a fight if we get in trouble. I did have a radio, so, I knew I could call for some help. AS we were going through this, down an actually a dirt road back out to this area and we're heading toward the Cambodian border. All of a sudden I hear this rumble up ahead of me and it's a tank. So, we pulled right in behind the tank. It was out there clearing the area, making sure the road was open. Boy, I was so happy to see a 4th infantry division tank. We just followed it al the way back to our Special Forces camp that we were working in. SO, that was one of the dumber things I've ever done in my life.

SM: Now, back in the base camp with the girlie show were there American female personnel at that camp?

JL: There were probably four as they called the donut dollies, the Red Cross ladies. That was all. We had no. Of course, in the divisions we didn't have any nurses anyway. Ninety-one Charlies are the LVNs and they were all male. And at that pointing time, female physicians were not authorized. There were no women authorized in the divisions at that time. They were strictly males. Like I said I think there were four or

five Red Cross ladies there who did notifications and al of that sort of stuff. They called them the donut dollies because they were always handing out donuts at various things. So, the only time there were in fact the only two times I was there that there were other females there was this USO show, which they were Filipino entertainers. Then the Bob Hope Show did come there. He did one of his biggest performances for the 4th infantry. So, there were lots of young female entertainers with him. But those were the only time that was the case. Tell another story. We had the division surgeon had a dental detachment attached to us. There was a German Luft Waffe pilot who had become a dentist and was a lieutenant colonel at that point in time. And headed this detachment and it was actually attached to a Charlie company which I told you I had responsibility for. He had a live-in Vietnamese woman, which to this day I don't know how he got away with. But he had fixed up his hooch very elegantly and very nicely. This lady lived with him. Whether the brass knew it or not, I didn't know it, but I was a captain, he was a lieutenant colonel. He sort of ran his own show. He had a private shower built for her and it was strange to be way out where we were and to have this. The base camp was a whole lot different than it was out in the forward fire support areas. But it was strange, I never fully understood that. Of course, when I became the S-3, I wasn't around that particular unit anymore anyway or at least base camp. Out in the forward support bases I visited him, but I didn't have much to do with him anymore. So, it was only for about a maybe two-month period that I was associated with this relationship, but interesting. He had all his meals delivered to his hooch and my mess hall actually supported his detachment. So, strange, never figured it out, never. It's one of the weird things that happened in the war I guess.

SM: Now, the USO show activity, how important was that do you think?

JL: Oh, I would say in fact I've got pictures that I need to show you. Raquelle Welch was the major attraction. We must have had thousands and thousands and thousands of troops. In fact, there was a hospital in Pleiku itself. I think 91st VAC. I can't remember. And the Air Force everybody came out to Camp Penari. Of course, it would have been an unbelievable time to drop some mortar rounds on the camp. But in fact there was a screen of gun ships and fighter you know around the camp area. Of course, the bunker and the perimeter of the base camp was just unbelievable. In fact,

they sappers tried to penetrate it several time and they were always killed. We had a huge airfield there also. S, they flew them in to the airfield, did the show and but we had troops from all over the central highlands came into that show. It was an unbelievable huge show. Again, I've got some pictures that I'll include of the performers and all of the troops that were there etc. But they went to extremes to make sure that there was a perimeter sealing that up because it was such a concentration of troops. The enemy could have really cause major damages if they could have got close. We did have a period of time right after Tet and I talked to you about that where the base camp was basically rocketed nightly and mortared. So, all that was left in the base camp primarily they'd bring units in to stand down and do that kind of thing. But the engineers the SNT folks, all the division support people there in the aviation folks basically flew out of the airfield there. And I told you we had such a long area of responsibility all the way from Kontum down to Ban Me Thout and out tot the Cambodian border. So, our three brigades were basically deployed to work in those areas. So, the division commander told the G-3 one day, we need to put together another brigade and clear our AO around the base camp of all the enemy that was there. So, they said well we don't have the troops to do that. He said well, yes we do, we've got cooks, clerks, mechanics, all of these kind of people we'll put together a provisional brigade. And the med battalion was asked to staff as a headquarters a battalion. I was given a rifle company, basically made up of the cooks, clerks and mechanics from the medical battalion. I had, I must admit my first sergeant was a medic who had been in infantry NCO before. And he turned in his white card, his Geneva Convention card and said I'm reverting back to my old MOS. Then of course I had as the S-3 my signal NCO was an E-7. He could participate because all of my signal people did participate in the company. On, I had a company, but I had at least three volunteer medics for each platoon, I mean for each squad to go with me. And my medics were probably in the best shape of anybody because they'd been out humping with the infantry and were in good shape. They knew tactics better that these guys did anyway. In any event, we had a couple of days training and I took off in a helicopter and surveyed the AO where I was going to have responsibility for clearing it. We took off one morning with this company. I had actually one platoon was made up of the medics. The other two platoons were made up of discom support headquarters kind of people. My weapons

platoon was the band as usual. They had the machine guns. And so we took off. I had three platoons online. We went through this very heavily jungled area and down a ravine and up the other side and as I got to the other side I lost every one of my platoon sergeants. They were all fat cooks and were totally out of shape. They all passed out form heat exhaustion. In reality, all the E-6 and 7bv medics that had volunteered to go with me took over the platoons. So, we were operating totally outside the Geneva Convention at that point in time. All the leadership was medical. The thing we lacked really was communications. We had very few radios. My command post was my jeep, which I told you all the time with my radio there. And I crested this hill and as I did I saw two platoons who were supposedly online coming right at each other with a crest in between the two. I knew what was going to happen, they were going to see each other and there was going to be a fire fight between my platoons because they're really inexperienced people. So, I zoomed the jeep down right in between the folks and I did stop a firefight among American non-combat troops. We literally found a few positions where there had been .82 mm mortars that they'd been firing on us. But we ran into no firefights at all. I finally, again a story I tell I finally as we were ordered to return to the base camp I came into this area where one of my platoons was. The platoon leader there was a young second lieutenant, one of these 90-day wonders I talked about before and he passed out form heat exhaustion. So, the troops didn't want to go anywhere and you know whatever. They had lost their leader. So, I finally picked him up, put him over my shoulder and I told my folks I'm leaving with the radio. You guys want to stay her, that's fine but I'm leaving. So, they all followed me back into the base camp. While I'm coming back into the base camp this helicopter sits down beside me and out jumps the commanding general, two star from the division. He says captain, what is this company here? Of course, I'd had my straps on so he couldn't see my medics. He said you guys are looking pretty good. I said well, we cleared the area and we haven't found anything. He said, well who are you? I pulled back my shoulder strap to show him my Caduceus. He said oh, shit. He said good going captain, carry on.

SM: Oh, that's funny.

JL: So, we walked back around and came in the front door of the base camp.

SM: Now, how many people were in your company?

JL: It was a standard sized company.

SM: Ok. The suspected enemy in the area was this NVA, VC or a combination?

JL: Combination. Mostly around our area around the base camp was VC. I remember another time when in fact I got shot at more as a medic than I did with that rifle company. I was out again one day working on that area of the base camp we were responsible for. We were putting new claymores in and changing some of the barbed wire and doing some other kinds of things. All of a sudden we started taking some fire. Again, typical Vietcong they were in black pajamas with the straw hats and I could see them there. Again I called for a gunship. Then the gun ships came in, two of them. And they just tore up the area. They were shooting everything. There was palm trees flying. Just tore up the whole area shooting things. I didn't have direct coordination with them. I was talking through their operations people and I could see the NVA scooting out a valley and going the other way and they were just tearing up this area in front where they had originally been. But they had long since departed and I couldn't get to the gun ships to say go to your right, go to your right. They've gone off in that little valley. The other thing that was interesting and one of the problems we had was there was a French tea plantation between the area between our base camp Camp Penari and the oasis we called it, which was the area that I flew into that was our second brigade headquarters. We were not allowed to fire into the tea plantation because it was French owned and so on and so forth. But obviously the Vietcong fired out of it al the time. So, that was our major problem. I'm sure they, the French owner of the tea plantation and family bribed the Vietcong. Now they came to the Bob Hope Show and sat right in front. In fact, they periodically would come and have dinner with the commanding general etc. But the plantation was off limits for American fire. Tell another story. I was riding in a cracker box form the base camp out to the oasis and I took fire from the tea plantation. They used my Red Crosses as targets on the cracker box. Took several hits that way going out there one time. In fact, another time I went out there we had a problem with the base camp. This was when I was the C company commander or C- company executive officer. I came back into the base camp and the guy who eventually became my boss as the XO was then the S-3. He said Jim let's go back out and see what's going on and get things straightened out there. So, I said fine and we got in his jeep. Of course, we

always had the jeeps. We had sandbags in case we hit a mine and this area was the road from the base camp out to the oasis was not secure. We controlled it during the day and the enemy basically controlled the area at night. So, every morning they'd do a sweep because there would be land mines placed in the road. The armored personnel vehicles and the engineers would clear it each day. So, we came up to the roadblock and there was along line of trucks waiting to leave and they hadn't cleared the road yet. So, this guy was a major said come on Jim, we're going to just go out. So, we did. We took off down the road while they were still clearing. We passed the engineer people who had one of these road scrapers that they were scraping the road with. We passed it and went on down the road. All of a sudden I hear this boom. I look around and it had hit a land mine. We'd just driven over it. Our jeep was probably light enough that it didn't go off. So, the duce and a halfs probably would have had trouble with it. So, another stupid thing we did. Although this time it wasn't me that made the decision to do it. I just happened to be along for the ride.

SM: Now, with regard to the tea plantation taking fire from it. Even when you took fire, you weren't supposed to shoot back?

JL: Well, small arms yeah.

SM: You couldn't bring artillery in because you'd be destroying the plants.

JL: We couldn't bring in artillery, right.

SM: then the military would have to pay for that.

JL: Exactly. I'm not sure what the agreement was. All I was told was that you can't direct heavy fire into that area. The tanks couldn't fire into that area. It was just basically if you took small arms fire you could protect yourself.

SM: Is that all you ever took from it was small arms fire?

JL: That's all I took. The base camp and the area around me you know they'd use .81 mm mortars and their rockets they'd fire from those areas. We knew where they were coming from. Camp Penari had signal mountain, which was a huge mountain right outside the camp. Actually if you look at it and then I got pictures of it, we used to call it Titty Mountain because it looked like a woman's breast. It had two mounds there. It was outside the base camp, but we had signal people up there and observers up there. I'm not sure how they kept it from being over run other than the fact it was so steep that it

probably would have been difficult for anybody to attack the top of the mountain. We could tell where everything was and where it was coming from. So, we knew very well that there were enemy in the tea plantation.

SM: You mentioned that there was a period where the base camp took a heavy concentration of rockets and mortars. What was the average though? How frequently would the base camp be rocketed or mortared?

JL: For a period and I think it was right after Tet every night. You know they mainly were aiming at the airfield, which was a fair ways away from us. But we had bunkers and we spent a lot of our evenings for a while. In fact it took place so often it was becoming so disruptive. That's why the commanding general decided to clear the area. Which after we did that, and a few units did encounter some enemy resistance, not much. And I would say probably there was a limited number of NVA in that area, but there was enough to disrupt activities for at least several weeks every night.

SM: A couple of follow up questions with some of the earlier things we discussed this morning. You mentioned having to give shot to the montagnards and the resistance to that, what sots were you giving them do you recall?

JL: I think it was plague prevention kind of thing and I'm not sure what else. I obviously have forgotten. There may have been Tetanus or typhoid or something.

SM: Like a vaccine?

JL: I'm not really sure anymore. For the montagnards in particular were some of the diseases that were more easily controlled in the cities of South Vietnam with sanitation and what not, like Cholera, things like that or Diphtheria. Where they problems for the montagnards more so?

JL: They were a very tough people, but all of the infectious diseases of that particular part of the country, they were plagued by. During our med cav kind of activities we saw lots of sick children. I would say the death rate among young montagnard kids was probably pretty heavy.

SM: Would you say still Malaria was the most prevalent?

JL: Malaria was probably the most both, as far as the montagnards went, as far as the NVA troops they were very susceptible to it too. So, we had lots, not lots we had

numerous North Vietnam soldiers basically Chieu Hoi'd as the called it, gave up and came in because they were sick and wanted to be treated.

SM: They knew that if they surrendered to Americans they'd get treated for the diseases and be treated well. At the first opportunity probably when they were well they'd get out. So, in that incident where the base camp was being mortared again it was a combination of NVA and VC. You mentioned that you didn't get along with the ARVN commander and how he treated the montagnards and that you of course engaged in a number of activities to kind of circumvent some of the negative things he was doing. When you gave the montagnards rice contravening his attempt to prevent them from having access to food, did you notice a difference in how they were cooperating or responding?

JL: They actually and many of these particular montagnards hadn't seen very many Americans because they were really on the Cambodian border. Probably some of them you know crossed back and forth, had no idea where it was. This was just montagnard territory. They seemed to like us right from the start. Obviously at this point in time. You know they liked us a little bit ore I suppose. I'm not totally sure they fully understood what I had done. But again the bottom line is when this full colonel talked to my commanding general, very soon after that they decided that I probably wasn't needed there anymore. My more important role as the S-3 of the med battalion was that I'd gotten it set up and everything was running fine and the troops did stay out here for probably I lost track of time because it's only a year and it seems like forever. My troops did stay out there for a significant length of time. I had set it up and everything was operational and the division commander decided I ought to come back to the med battalion and do my S-3 stuff. I'm not sure whether that was his idea, whether that was true or he just didn't want me out there fighting with the ARVN commander.

SM: Now, the incident with the regional force, popular force unit that retreated in your midst did you ever have any other interactions with rough puffs? Perhaps more positive than that one.

JL: Actually, they had gone with me on several you know missions. But we'd never taken any fire. They didn't get along very well with the regular ARVN unit. In fact, like I said they kept them on the far perimeter of the camp. They wouldn't even let

them inside the ARVN ring that was set up on the perimeter. They weren't very well respected. I mean they carried all sort of weapons. Some of them even wore cooking pots for helmets. Training wise they had little or none.

SM: What kind of weapons, typical weapons were they carrying?

JL: They had some old French lock and load kind of stuff. Weapons I had never seen. They didn't have any M-16s obviously. I don't think they had any M-14s. They had some M-1 rifles, American type. Most of the rest were old French kind of weapons. Where they had gotten them from I had no idea. I didn't really follow up much on it. Other than hearing about them in the AO and working with the ARVNs, we really had except for that particular missions I had no real dealing with them.

SM: Ok. Now, in addition to the vaccinations and you trying to help the montagnards with the plague and things of that nature, did you participate in any other types of civic action? With regard to the montagnards or Vietnamese civilians in general?

JL: Yes. Well, a couple of things. One and I've showed you my book. I was also the S-5 of the med battalion. So, I had a regular team that went into doing med caps as we called them on a routine basis. We sent a team into the montagnard villages closer to the villages, not out where we were just on this missions. On a regular basis, weekly basis we did do civic actions. And again in my book it'll show where we damned a river to allow them to get better drinking water, to irrigate fields, to grow pineapples and other kinds of things. So, yes we did it on a regular basis. I had one NCO that was his job totally was to take this team. We'd usually take one of our physicians with us and we'd treat the children and do other kinds of things in these villages. We'd build a school. We built a school for the montagnards and what am I trying to say? The Vietnamese actually did supply a teacher. We also did preventive medicine activities. There was a village just outside the base camp that they called Sin City. We basically examined the center for preventive medicine to examine the young ladies there. For a period of time, if they were clean and appropriate and gave them shot for all of these kinds of things basically to protect the troops. Because they were going to go there whether it was off limits or not. We did that, I've got some pictures of that too here that I'll donate, doing some of that. And then we'd do some other kinds of you know hold some clinics for the folks. We had

numerous Vietnamese house girls in the base camp. You know came in and washed and shined boots and did that kind of stuff. So, we held clinics for them, all of them that work in the base camp area, not just the med battalion folks. You know lot of them would come in and sometimes they'd bring their kids. These were Vietnamese to the base camp. It was interesting again, the day before Tet none of them showed up. So, they knew about it even before we did. I guess we did know it was coming but we didn't know for sure when. So, there was a lot of civic action took place in the end. But our main civic action was with the montagnards.

SM: You've talked a lot about montagnards on the area. Were there any Vietnamese civilians ethnically Vietnamese civilians in the repo?

JL: The city of Pleiku and I don't remember how big it was now, I'd have to look it up was a pretty good-sized city. And that was totally Vietnamese. Everybody who basically worked in the base camp at whatever they were doing was Vietnamese, ethnic Vietnamese. The montagnards were basically still in the Stone Age. When we first got there, as I said before men wore loincloths and the women wore a skirt kind of thing but they were topless. It seemed though as time progressed and as we got out there more and more. More and more of the females were wearing tops, but most f those were GI uniform tops kinds of things. You know as they were apparently given away. Again ethnically bothered some of the folks. Talk about sin City, we finally got a full colonel Catholic Chaplin in the division and he got Sin City shut down totally. Which didn't mean anything. The problem was the folk just moved from the village that they had set up for this kind of thing into Pleiku itself. From a medical standpoint it was not necessarily a good thing from a hygiene standpoint and from a preventive medicine standpoint. Immediately the venereal disease went up substantially.

SM: Because it decentralized where they were located, it was harder to find them so you couldn't treat them as well.

JL: Exactly. In fact, they sought out when we'd come in to set up a clinic, they'd seek us out. But that was alleged to be supporting prostitution. So, the division Chaplin got it shut down. That was toward the end of my tour. By that time, I really was so involved in combat operations and I've showed you the picture of me. I spent probably most of my week out in the forward firebases. You know supporting the actions there.

We got a new discom commander who insisted upon whenever there was a company engagement of any sort, company level or above, he wanted discom support command helicopter there. So, it was him or his XO. I was the SNT battalion, the transportation battalion and myself and the 33s and he were in that helicopter directing the combat support out to company level. So, spent a lot of time in a helicopter my last several months there.

SM: Were there different medical issues you had to face when you go into the fort areas versus what you were dealing with back in the base area?

JL: Yeah. Basically when I was in the base camp again, when I was with a company it was primarily sick call and diseases and those kinds of things. When I moved forward it was basically dealing with combat. There was always that wherever we were, but it was more combat casualty kind of things. As I'd moved forward with the discom support, it was usually directing dust off ships and making sure they had enough medics and what they needed. And the way we supplied the company level medics, actually we were assigned to the companies, but as they got wounded or sick etc. I would bring medics up from the supporting medical company to be forward medics. Then we'd rotate them too. If somebody had been out with the division a long time and was getting a little upset we would rotate them. Tell another story when I was the S-3 of the med battalion we had a number of consciences objectors in the medical battalion. I had one who was my chief clerk and I had brought him in. There had been out with a rifle company for a period of time. During some off the heavy fighting during battle of Dakto his lieutenant had gotten wounded and he was up taking care of the lieutenant and this NVA soldier comes running at him you know shooting an M-14. He picked up the lieutenants .45 and shot the guy right through the forehead that was coming at him. Of course, it really shook him up. Like I said he was a true conscientious objector, but he was not going to let that NVA kill his lieutenant and he shot him. Of course it really shook him up emotionally. He was a college graduate. He was a very smart young guy. So, I brought him back to the med battalion headquarters and he worked as my clerk. Did a super job for me, really intelligent young man. Types of stories all the time.

SM: Did you have many other psychological casualties?

JL: Actually we didn't. We did set up and this again was when I was the S-3, S-5, we did set up a little aid station in a montagnard village. And kept it out there full time. It was overrun one night by actually it was an NVA platoon. One of my medics out there you know they were fighting for their lives. I guess these were probably regional forces, popular forces, but montagnard soldiers. But he rolled out of his bunker and an NVA was coming at him and he cut, literally cut him in half with an M-16. He had some problems with that. I had to bring him back too. He was not your typical combat soldier. You talked about racial kinds of concerns, this team I had and I think there's a picture of it. I had one guy, he was a black soldier, 91 Charlie I think or maybe a Delta operating room tech or an LVN. He came to see me one day and was somewhat upset. He had said that this team I put together he was the only black on the team and was I singling him out for some reason. I said no and he said well he felt uncomfortable being the only. You know we had lots of blacks in the unit, why was he the only one? The reason he was he stood about 6'4" and weighed about 240 and he could pick a GP tent up by himself and throw it. I just took him because he was big and he was good at his job. So, I rotated him off and on periodically so he wouldn't think I was singling him out. I thought that was strange. I'd taken him because he was so good and he was wondering if maybe he was expendable because I took him on this team that I sent in to all these dangerous situations. Of course, I went with them so I'm not sure why he thought that. Of course, I was expendable as I told you before.

SM: Now, other troop issues, was there very much alcohol or drug use?

JL: Actually during the time I was there a little alcohol, not a lot. I think of course I was there in the '67, '68 time frame. The war wasn't really totally unpopular in the States. The whole '70s movement, late '60s, '70s movement hadn't effected out troops. Many of the soldiers who were there were volunteers. I had very few problems with alcohol or drug. Yes, some probably more with some of my senior NCOs than I did with the younger troops. I don't think dugs were, we were in such an isolated area were yet that available. I don know with people who replaced me and folks later on in the early '70s they did start having problems. But at my point in time there we did not.

SM: So, you didn't have any kind of a drug testing system set up yet?

JL: I don't remember having one.

SM: The drugs that were available and were used, what were they principally?

JL: I would say marijuana and opium.

SM: Ok. The senior NCOs were these alcohol problems?

JL: yeah, and many of them probably had the problem long before they came. Most of the time they could keep it controlled. Sergeant majors and the first sergeants really knew who their problem children were and watched them closely.

SM: You mentioned that of course one of the things that positively effected your experience in the troops was it remained a popular war through ’67 and then into early ’68, but what were your sources of information and news?

JL: We literally had television.

SM: Armed Forces TV?

JL: Yep, and we got the nightly news. We sometimes knew more from the news than we got in our operations briefings to tell you the truth.

SM: Wow.

JL: Of course that was a war that was covered from the front lines. We had newspaper people out with our companies. The Stars and Stripes, we got that every single day. So, we probably had very good television, news coverage as well as newspaper coverage.

SM: now the Armed Forces television news that you saw, was this created by Armed Forces personnel or were you getting ABC, NBC, CBS filtered through?

JL: Both. They had their own Good Morning Vietnam. You know hat kind of stuff. The radio was big too, but literally we had TVs in a tent, which we called the officers club. You know we had it in my S-3 shop. I’d watch in my office, had a TV. We’d watch the news there to see what was going on throughout the country.

SM: How about correspondence from home and to home, did you write much?

JL: I did. Unless I was in combat I wrote everyday. I tried to on a weekly basis send home a tape. One of the first things I bought when I got there was a tape recorder. Of course in those days everything was big and it was literally on tape. So, my wife and I she probably did better than I did and of course I had two young kids, but I did at least once a week give a summary of what took place and probably will eventually donate those too. She’s not at this point in time not ready to have that take place yet. But as I

get closer we'll probably do that. We did try t write everyday. The problem was of course as I went forward the mail didn't follow us every day. So, it would take about a week to get mail. Sometime I'd get five or six letters at one time. Then it would be again another week before I got anything. Depending on just where I was and more away from the base camp I was the harder it was to get mail. Lots of times I just held it there or had it held there. I'd pick it up when I got back.

SM: In the correspondence she sent to you, did your wife describe much of the atmosphere, the attitudes of the American people? And if they were changing?

JL: She did. Again I don't think until Tet, after Tet things started going down hill. But in the area where she was living it was a very conservative, at that time Republican part of New York State. And there was more indifference about he war than there was hostility for it. She'd complain about the fact that her neighbors were going on with their lives as normal, you know buying new drapes and her husband's going off to work. Not realizing that she had a husband in war. She always said that if she had it to do over again, se would have stayed in a military community where there were other people who were in the same boat. There was literally nobody in the area where she lived that had anybody in Vietnam. Didn't care about the war, didn't know it was going on.

SM: If you would describe Tet as you experienced it, Tet of 1968.

JL: Ok. As I think I said the first time I knew Tet was going on was actually before Tet started with the military policemen saying they had run into a Vietnam in Pleiku and had come out to the base camp because one of them had been wounded. It's somewhat of a blur. We continued to get attacked at Dakto, but we had been fighting there anyway as a prelude to Tet. They took over Kontum and Ban Me Thout. We did get attacked at the oasis our base camp on the Cambodian border. So, there was fighting going on. At that point in time, I was the S-3 and I was basically asked to go to each of the areas as the division retook the towns or the areas to help support. I did tell you I think in went into Kontum. I went up to Dakto, but basically we were al set up and knew what were doing there, we'd been in heavy fighting anyway. I went into Kontum to prepare for our 3rd brigade which had been with the 25th n the coast to come into Kontum. The ARVNs had basically recaptured the city with the support of Special Forces. I told

you about the night we thought we were going to overrun, but we didn't. The time when they lowered the quad 50s. It just seemed to me like there was a lot of heavy fighting going on. Wherever we were trying to retake we went down to Ban Me Thout, we sent our 2nd brigade or large portions of it down to Kontum to recapture that particular city. We did get in to some rather heavy fighting. It was during the monsoons season by then. It was sort of interesting. I've got lots of pictures of all of this stuff going on. I told you about as we were setting up our base camp I got a picture of me taking a picture of a tank being shelled by artillery. And I told you the story about moving in with this aviation unit there. And the young warrant officer who was harassing me about being Sandbag Laible getting wounded that night. As I said after that he was glad I had sandbagged our place and had a place to treat people. I guess the thing about Tet is we went through a period after Dakto of light fighting and then we thought we were going to have a truce during the Tet time frame. So, we were basically standing down and not doing much. All of a sudden all hell broke loose all over the central highlands. They were bringing in their NVA regiments through the central highlands up the Ho Chi Minh trail, so lots of fighting.

SM: You were there through October of 1968, correct?

JL: Yes.

SM: So, you were there for all the different phases of Tet. How did from the time Tet really hit in late January or early February through say to mini-Tet in the spring and then to the follow on Tet in August or so.

JL: Basically we went from a defensive position, where we were being attacked to offensive positions where we were locating these various NVA units. In fact, if you've seen the movie, "We were Soldiers once"; we had a lot of that kind of fighting taking place with various battalions with the divisions. In fact, that area was in our AO actually although during that movie the 25th division was there, I think it was the 25th. But that was really some of the first action. Then the 4th came in a year after that and we took over that area of responsibility. We had similar firefights with battalion size units that we were supporting. That's one reason I told you that I developed this surgical needle. You know a battalion the company has to support the brigades and all the battalions in it. Periodically we'd have a heavy firefight and I'd need medical support up front. So, I'd

send a surgical team in on top pf a battalion aid station and we could make it into a mini-clearing company.

SM: Now throughout the year or the ten months you were there in 1968, from the time Tet hit to the time you left what were the biggest differences? What were the biggest changes you witnessed?

JL: I think primarily as I said we were the aggressors then.

SM: Ok, by October.

JL: By October we were trying to clear out the NVA units. It went from fighting when I first got there except for Dakto, we were fighting Vietcong. After Tet we were fighting NVA units and we fought more conventional type warfare. In other words, unit on unit as opposed to just strictly guerrillas. Although there were some guerrilla kind of activities taking place.

SM: Did you notice any increase in American casualties as a result of the change n who you were fighting? That is NVA versus VC?

JL: Yes, yes and the types of casualties. We were now taking a lot of weapons casualties as before we were taking a lot of booby trap and other kinds of casualties early on. At least, putting Dakto aside and the rest of the AO we had more injury type things as opposed to small weapons wounds etc. or automatic weapons wounds. And as I said we started taking more, our base camps and our fire support bases were staring to take incomings as opposed to everything being outgoing.

SM: Ok. Were there any other events or specific combat related or military related incidents that you wanted to talk about with regard to your tour in Vietnam?

JL: No. I think I've not covered them in the exact order, but I do think that's the case. I do remember and I've basically made I don't know, I wouldn't say crash landings, but they were weapons initiated landings. In each case we always made it back to an airfield before we actually sat it down. In one instance where we auto rotated we were actually taking off and it happened.

SM: So, four incidents, three or four incidents?

JL: Well, there are three that I actually remember that the helicopter was disabled. Of course I told you about taking fire form that one. Took fire another time we were again going into a valley. We were actually flying on a river, down below the tree

lines and we took fire that time too. I don't know that we got hit at all. But you could see the tracers coming and you knew that we were taking automatic fire. I tell another story we started taking fire and the guy was tree level flying. You know I could hear the tops of the trees hitting the skids and the bottom of the helicopter. That was a little bit frightening also. This was interesting ride. We had this young Catholic priest assigned to the division and he was going with me, actually going down to Kontum. Had a Playboy centerfold on the back of his seat. It was a totally nude girl there and the Catholic priest is sitting right in front of the nude girl. And some of these young warrant officer pilots, I don't know whether he knew that he had a Chaplin on board and was going to try to embarrass him or what, But I was embarrassed.

SM: Well, thank you very much this will end the interview on the 29th of August.

SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. James Laible on the 9th of September 2002 at approximately 10:20. We are in his office at the Health Sciences Center in Lubbock, Texas. Sir, we were going to continue our discussion of Tet. In particular would you describe for me what you recall about the changes after Tet? How the war changed after Tet.

JL: I think after Tet we went into more of a proactive attack mode. Spent a lot of time basically as I said earlier retaking areas that we'd lost during Tet and then going out after various NVA units in the Central Highlands. It was interesting, I was listening last night to it was on the 7th cav. They spent some time in the central highlands. The history of the 7th cav. They said in Vietnam the Central Highlands were the area most defended. If you captured Vietnam or you took Vietnam through the Central Highlands. If you controlled the central highlands you could control Vietnam as opposed to the cities. That was apparently very true because the North Vietnamese came in through the central highlands coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail into the central highlands. After Tet we did spend a lot of time attacking enemy units coming into the central highlands. My role changed. I had been with a medical company prior to that. Now I was the S-3 of the med battalion, the operations officer. So, I was planning all the medical support for anytime we had a battalion engagement or larger. I spent a lot of time planning the medical support on how we were going to provide that care. The medical battalion commander either wanted me in the air with the discom commander monitoring the medical support

for that or in the TOC. The Tactical Operations Center, which I after Tet slept there. Not primarily I didn't leave it very often. I spent my nights there so I could monitor what was going on. My responsibility making sure we had dust off if there wee wounded or you know what was taking place. My life became rather complicated after Tet. I spent a lot of time either in the TOC, listening to he various battles going on or with the discom commander in our command and control ship following what was taking place. If I wasn't doing one of those I was in the brigade firebase or battalion firebase depending on what we were doing, supporting the action. So, I spent a lot of time in the field. In fact, during that time I received the combat medical badge for spending 30 days with an infantry unit under fire. So, that was my life, don't wan to say exciting, but I suppose that's the case. I was constantly involved and constantly didn't spend any dead time or dull time after Tet. Always engaged in something or doing something.

SM: The months that you spent, I assume it was probably more than a month?

JL: It was. I spent actually, I had a picture, which I took out. I spent 30 days with Charlie Company, which I was in support of the 2nd brigade, actually prior to Tet, then through parts of Tet out in forward areas. I had a hooch they called it in base camp in a wooden building. But I spent most o f my time in a tent out forward.

SM: Now in terms of the dust off, did you have control over the aircraft or were they assigned to a different unit and you just made sure that the coordination occurred between the forward units and the dust off units.

JL: Basically they were not 4th infantry division units. They were medical units that were attached to the 4th infantry for support. In fact, I would coordinate that prior to a battle because I knew what was happening and where the battle was going to take place. Then periodically I would call them in if we had what am I trying to say? AN attack place unexpectedly or we got into a battle I would request dust off support. Most of it came through my office. Much of the time it came through my office, tactical operations center. Sometimes it was pre-arranged, sometimes it was on call. But most of the time the division wanted the request to come through me. I could also coordinate them with the aviation battalion if we needed gun ships to support the aviation people going in etc. Lots of times, the decision whether or no we would send dust offs into what was considered a hot LZ came through my office. In other words, I was asked to coordinate

and respond whether or not I thought we ought to sent the dust off I nor not. At least two bad experiences there. One time I did send them in and a dust off got shot down. I had the detachment commander, was a friend of mine and he wanted to go in and get his own people. The aviation battalion was saying no, it's too hot. The people on the ground saying no it's too hot, don't send them in, don't send them in. He and I basically got in an argument on the radio. He was going in and getting his people, which I commend him for. I told him he shouldn't he overruled me and went in and he got shot down and was paralyzed. In fact I saw him a number of years later, not a number of years a year later at Ft. Sam Houston. He was a quadriplegic in a bed. So, sometimes make bad decisions. Another time I made a decision we had a person wounded and this was in the base camp, seriously wounded with a head injury. We wanted to get him into the evacuation hospital downtown Pleiku. So, the dust offs always came in from Pleiku to Camp Penari. Again, I'm in the TOC and I get a call at this montagnard area that we had a detachment supporting had a seriously wounded individual. So, they wanted me to stop ad pick the individual up. Talking with the dust off crew they decided coming from Pleiku they were going to fly right over this village they would sit down and pick the individual up and bring him into the clearing station and then pick up the head injury there and then take him back to the hospital. Unfortunately, I finally agreed to that and the person on the ground had a minor injury, did not need to be picked up at that point in time and the kid with the head injury died before the dust off got to us. The surgeon chewed my ass about how could you divert the ship? Why would you do that? Well, you know you make judgment decisions in the heat of fire and I did. However, later one of the other surgeons came to me and said Jim, you didn't need to worry about it, the kid was never going to live anyway. He was dead when we got him in. But again brand new young doctors thought they could do something and they knew if they needed to get them into an operating room quickly, so that bothered me for a while. So, I do have some memories that I hadn't thought about probably in 30 years until we started talking about all this stuff. I just shut them out. You made some decisions and some people got killed or died and they were based on what you knew at the time and how you dealt with it.

SM: In terms of the dust off preparations for an operation, how did you determine the size of the commitment you'd need of dust off helicopters?

JL: Actually I think we had, the detachment usually had four ships available to a brigade sized unit. Two up ship and then two on call. We would basically try to determine what we were going up against, what type of casualties we thought and how far it was actually from where the attack was taking place to getting them back to the hospital. The ideal thing was to take them form the battlefield directly to a hospital as opposed to putting them in a clearing station in the Central Highlands because we were so far away. Lots of times specifically up in the Dakto area and even further north than that we would actually devote two ships to picking up casualties from the battlefield and bringing them back to the clearing station. Because the wing time was just too far to take them all the way into Pleiku to the hospital or to the coast.

SM: Did you ever find that wasn't enough?

JL: The only time and I really wasn't into the operations area then. There was this Major Pocorn was doing that as opposed to me at that point in time. The only time I saw that we didn't have enough capability was actually prior to Tet in the battle of Dakto as they the North Vietnamese were gearing up to the Tet Offense of which we didn't know and I didn't realize any of that until I've since studied the war and studied what they were doing. But we were taking mass casualties. We couldn't even get the, I think I shared that earlier. We couldn't even get the wounded off the hills because it was triple level canopies, whatever they called that. Most of them had to be extracted out. So, that was a problem. The problem I did have periodically with dust off was with the LRPs. I can't even remember what the terms. The ranger types that we would send in to ambush Vietnamese, I can't even remember what LRP stands for right now.

SM: Oh, the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols.

JL: Yes, right. There actually a book on it, the Ghost of the Central Highlands. It talks about their activities and what they did. But periodically they would get into an area, they'd be there, they'd get scared and they'd want to be extracted. There were no slick ships to do it, so they would call in that somebody was wounded. When I'd send in a dust off all the LRPs would jump on the helicopter and come out with it. I had a couple of problems there. I know these guys were brave I there, but I didn't like using my dust off ships to extract LRPs. But I had at least two occasions, this was after Tet that happened. Again, as far as the dust off ships I was never involved where we had so many

casualties that I didn‘t have enough dust off ships to pick them up as soon as it was possible. Frequently the problem as I said before was it’d be a hot LZ and I couldn’t get them in there. Or I had to wait for gun ships to escort them in.

SM: What did you do when you encountered those LRP teams that feigned a wounded soldier so they could get extraction? Was there anything you could do?

JL: I didn’t really probably do much. I reported it to the G-3 of the division and I thought it was an in appropriate call for the medevac. Most cases somebody was hurt or whatever, but not to the point that they couldn’t have waited until the next morning or some other time to get them out. I can only remember at least two occasions of that, but it irritated me.

SM: Any other major differences or changes that you remember in your post-Tet Vietnam experience?

JL: In, other than the fact that I really considered myself always in an airplane going someplace or living in the Tactical Operations Center. There was no time to read or5 do whatever. I was always going someplace. Part of that may have been that we had a new discom commander and he trusted me in providing medical support. So, wherever he went, I went. He was the type that wanted to be involved in the combat situation. So, I spent a lot of time with him or he sent me someplace because he was concerned about the medical support.

SM: Did you go on any in country R&Rs or out of country R&Rs?

JL: I did go on an out of country R&R. I met my wife in Hawaii and we had a very good time.

SM: How long did it last?

JL: I would say seven days I think there.

SM: That’s nice you were able to get your wife over there.

JL: I told everybody I played a lot of poker in my earlier time, which I never got to do after Tet, but I played a lot of poker and won enough money playing poker that I was able to pay for her airline ticket. W E would have done it anyway, but I was a pretty good poker player. I could bluff very well.

SM: What do you remember hearing from your wife? Was the R&R before or after Tet?

JL: It was after Tet.

SM: What do you remember hearing from her as far as how Tet was being covered at home? Maybe the attitude in the United States?

JL: I think she was aware that some of it was changing. I think I shared earlier with you that she lived in an area where there were no other military people. So, most of them didn't care. She was quite concerned about me. In fact, it was interesting I got an e-mail the other day from somebody else that was there. I had no basic fear at all. I got myself in some rather tight situations and got shot up as I shared with you before. I thought of myself as invulnerable that I couldn't be hurt. She had a lot of concerns and a lot of fears about that and expressed that. Was concerned that the war wasn't maybe going well because that's what the news media was saying. Maybe we weren't doing as well as we thought we were. My reaction was well, that's not true. We're attacking. We have a problem with Tet, but we took care of that. Basically won all the battles. I'm not sure she fully knew that or based on what she heard she wanted me out of there because things were getting dangerous.

SM: Now were you corresponding very much with your parents?

JL: Some. I mostly corresponded to them through her. In other words she lived near them and spent weekends with them and that kind of stuff. My mother did write and send cookies and all the kinds of things mothers do. She wrote every single day. I wrote almost every day if I was, my wife and I if that was available. And I think I shared with you we did tapes about once a week. That was a way I could stay in touch. My oldest son, you know knew me, knew of me and so on and so forth. My daughter was very young when I left. So, basically through pictures and the tapes and them talking about me, when I came home my son came running to see daddy right away and she came running too. I'm not sure she remembers totally, but she knew who I was through all the correspondence etc.

SM: Well, what was it like leaving?

JL: Leaving is interesting. As I said I was constantly flying places, going places. I got to the point where I was about oh, maybe two or three weeks away from leaving and I'd get a call from the discom commander's office. We're going to Dakto or we're going to Ban Me Thuot or we're going out on the Cambodian border. My replacement had

come in. Of course I was a senior captain in a major's job. He'd come in form commanding general staff. He was there getting oriented to the S-3 position and what we were doing in the division etc. Finally one day I got a call and they wanted me to go out on the Cambodian border with the discom commander. I thought you've gotten crashed, shot down whatever three times, in this short time do you really want to do this? So, I went into the battalion commander and I said you know sir, I've never said no on any of these trips they wanted to go, but my replacement is here. Maybe, it's time for him to go. He said I think you're right Jim. So, that was the last time that I was asked to go. In fact, what they said was your replacement is here and you've gone through some pretty heavy fighting why don't you just go to the coast a week early and take some time on the coast?

One of my roommates earlier on in the thing was an orthopedic surgeon and he had been with the 4th and then they moved him to a hospital on the coast. Why don't you just go and Deets was his name, Skytus. Why don't you just go and spend a week with him and then rotate home? I said that sounds like a good idea. So, I got myself together and went to the coast and he'd gotten me a BOQ room, weren't great rooms, but a place to stay. All of a sudden that day they locked us into quarters. I was trying to exchange some money to get the Dong or whatever the Vietnamese dollar was so I could buy a meal at the Officer's club. They said no you can't, we aren't exchanging dollars. I said what do you mean? So on and so forth. What happened was they had the conversion from the old. They'd threatened it al the time. You weren't supposed to keep too much in the way of money and they exchanged it. Because it'd be counterfeited and stolen and used by the Vietnamese had gotten it and you didn't use green backs. So, I went in and they said the conversion day is here. And everybody is locked down, shut down where they were. So, a lot of the people who were supposed to rotate home couldn't rotate home because they couldn't get into the area where we were rotating out of. So, they put me on a lane and sent me home. They took all my Vietnamese whatevers.

SM: Piasters? Was it Piasters at that point?

JL: I think it might have been. I can't remember what they called it. But they took what I had and gave me green backs and said you're going back to the United States. So, I came home probably a week, week and a half early because this conversion day

took place and the people that were supposed to be scheduled on those flights were left some place else in country. So, they just cleared everybody else that was in the rotation area. So, I got to come home I think it was about a week early. She had no idea. I called my wife from C-TAC. She said where are you? I said I'm at C-TAC, I'll be home in the morning. I got to come home a week early. So, my coming home was very pleasant as a matter of fact. Now, the problem was I had a dysentery that I had caught. So, I was very sick for a period of time. My wife in fact, all of my relatives and stuff wanted to meet me at the airplane in Syracuse. I said no, I just don't feel good enough for that. I came home and she took the kids out to my parent's home and she picked me up. We then went to meet them. I just met everybody sort of a slow mode. I had gone to Vietnam I weighed 214 pounds and when I came home I was under 170. So, I lost a lot of weight. Had a stomach virus probably for almost a year after that. That was the only bad part about it. In fact, she cooked me my favorite dinner the night I got home, I couldn't even eat it. I just was too ill.

SM: There was nothing they could give you?

JL: You know they treated it, but there was nothing really. Some sort of bug I picked up. I just out grew it I guess.

SM: It wouldn't go away for a year?

JL: No.

SM: Did you have any other physical ailments that plagued you that resulted from being in Vietnam?

JL: One thing and I still have that today. I was a baseball player and football player in both high school and college. I had hurt a toe, had basically been cut in two by a spike, the old metal spike days in high school. Then I got it torn off again in college playing football. I did in fact, it's still a very off colored toe from wearing boots in the wetness. It's never had the thing go away. Bu the dysentery or whatever it was with medication and whatever it eventually went away. I suffered through it for about a year. My toe is still a mess.

SM: Well, before we discuss the home front did you want to discuss anything in country from your Vietnam experiences? DO you remember anything else?

JL: I don't think so. I think we've covered basically all of it.

SM: When you arrived at C-TAC and made you way across the country, what was that trip like?

JL: Well, I got in and in fact an Air Force lieutenant colonel and I actually landed at McCord Air Force Base at Ft. Lewis and then he and I took a cab up to C-TAC. I was basically still in uniform and I got a flight out. I think it left at midnight and got into Syracuse, New York stopping in Chicago, you know early morning hours. Actually it was quite pleasant. I went to the bar, had a drink, I think being in uniform and wearing my Vietnam medals and etc. the bartended gave me the drink free. A lot of people talking to me about the war and so on and so forth. I guess maybe C-TAC was in an area. I heard about people weren't friendly to the military. I remember getting on the plane and I was just dead tired because I'd flown all the way from Vietnam and I was flying all night. The stewardess, flight attendant wanted to talk to me about my Vietnam experience, very friendly, but I just wanted to sleep. I didn't want tot talk to anybody. You know that was the case. Now, in my hometown, which is a conservative, upstate New York area, I was considered somewhat of a hero. My relatives and all those folk, so I didn't experience any bad coming home at all as a matter of fact. It was all very pleasant.

SM: What were your plans upon arriving home?

JL: I had been assigned to the career course, medical service corps career course in Ft. Sam Houston, Texas. But I was to start in the January course, Of course I was there, I had come home in the October, November time frame. And so I picked up my family, packed up and drove from Syracuse down to Ft. Sam Houston. They put me to work on drafting art tips, I think they called them. The training programs for getting line unit, medical units testing them for readiness. I worked actually for a gentleman who has since passed away. In fact, his wife is coming to our reunion as the guest of somebody else. I worked there. Coming right out of S-3 med battalion infantry division, I really had some experience as to what was going on. In the mean time, actually prior to doing that, my wife and I drove down to Washington D.C. to see the chief of the medical service corps because the major's list was coming out. I expected to be on it and I was early. I found that out. So, I went to the career course as a captain promoted.

SM: Excellent. Now, how much time did you take off before you left New York to go down to Texas?

JL: Probably about two, three weeks.

SM: When you got there and you started to work on the Art tip, did you apply any particular lessons that you remember from Vietnam to readiness in training?

JL: I did. Talking about the fact that you know you needed to sand bag your units periodically. You might have to dig them underground. The coordination of dust off and you know medical units and all that kind of thing. I did. So, I did in fact I felt I had taken art tips before I went to Vietnam and looking at the old ones I felt they really weren't up to where we were in combat and line units, line medical support at that point in time. So, I did use a lot of my lessons learned to go back and remember all of them I don't really remember. But I felt very comfortable in doing this and I know my boss felt very comfortable that I was making some substantial changes based on my combat experience.

SM: You only did that for a couple of months until you went into the career course?

JL: A couple of months, right. Then I started the career course.

SM: What did that course focus on for you and were there any particular challenges to it?

JL: Again I liked it. As I did with my basic course. I guess I was third. In my basic course I was I want to say similar. I graduated in the top 10%V of my career course. I dealt basically with what the medical service corps was, but there was some combat kind of things. But a lot more about hospitalization and what the Army medical service corps officer did, their roles. Everything form supply kind of thing to hospital administration.

SM: How long did the course last?

JL: Six months.

SM: Did you already have a following assignment from that course?

JL: Yes, I went back to Walter Reid.

SM: Now, in what ways in addition to helping you develop more effective readiness and training manuals, how else did your Vietnam

Effect you do you think in terms of your career?

JL: I think it made me understand what the real purpose of the medical service corps was. What we were training for was combat and I had experienced that combat. I know a lot of my peers though it was more about running hospitals back in the United States and dispensaries and other kinds of thing. And not what the real role was and what you really needed to learn. I think I carried that with me all the way until I think I shared that with you my last assignment was director of training endoctrine development. Was involved in actually repairing the war plans that were eventually used in Desert Storm. Although we thought we'd be taking on the Russians, but the techniques I learned and a number of the kinds of things that I continued to place into Army medical department activities. I had probably a reputation of being a hospital administrator, because I did spend some time in between, my time at Walter Reid as I said already. But I also spent a lot of time in the field both in my early days in the 18th airborne corps and as an S-3 in the med battalion, infantry division. I'm not sure that a lot of my peers knew that or knew how much combat time I'd spent and how much field time I had. In fact, some of them were actually shocked and a few of them not happy that I was selected to be the director of training endoctorine, which was probably one of the top full colonel jobs in the medical service corps. I was a brand new full colonel when I got the job. There were some old, stayed kind of guys who thought they ought to have gotten the opportunity to do that, the combat developers etc. But the two star who was the academy commanding general knew of my Vietnam experience, knew of some of the innovative things I'd been involved in and wanted a new blood, a new mind in doing this kind of planning. And so he and I got along very well. He didn't gat along very well with a lot of other people, but he and I got along very well.

SM: What did that position involve? What did you focus your attention on in terms of training doctors at that point?

JL: It was very interesting. I had an officer's training division. I had an enlisted training division. I had an audiovisual, can't even remember what it. In fact I had my own telemedicine, before telemedicine was even there, we did our computer training. We developed all of the Army's field manuals. We developed all of the course, all the way form the basic medical course all the way to PhD. kind of courses. I think I had about 3,000 people. I had the detmeds fielding Army Medical Hospital, the detmeds

equipment. We developed a training ground out at Camp whatever I'm drawing a blank on that too. Let's see Camp Penari, but that's in Vietnam. But we had a training area out in the desert where we set up the detmeds equipment, trained people from all over the United States on it. We had another team that went out to the reserve units. Did that sort of training. I had another organization that did training on goats. One of the things we found and something I was interested in, the new doctors coming in had no combat experience, had no experience with trauma. We had a program where we basically raised and controlled and shot goats. Then they had to bring the goat back to life and save it. Got in trouble with the animal groups over that a little bit, but we did it. We took was it called a C-4 combat casualty care course. We developed that and we took that to reserve units all around the United States. Come in with their own goats, set up the lab, you know shoot them and then have this training take place. So, that was another area. So, we had any type of training or doctrine of development. I had another organization that basically looked at potential area of combat and what kind of medical units we had, where we would place them, how we would place them based on various combat scenarios. Spent a lot of time at Ft. Hood with the second armored division, which was our test mode. Because at that point in time, this was well I got out in '87 so it was in the mid-'80s and we thought the nest war would be armor with the Russians. SO, we spent a lot of time doing that. We did do some work with nuclear and chemical and how we would react with that.

SM: I assume biological as well?

JL: Yes. And I had some expertise folks in all those area looking at scenarios. But if it had to do with training, endoctrine or the development of new equipment. Combat support people basically developed the new equipment, combat, I'm having a bad day. But the fielding of new equipment and the testing of it was my role.

SM: What about doctrine and training regarding triage?

JL: We were involved in that too. Basically each medical MOS and this is a little off that subject, but it relates to it. Each medical MOS that existed and we trained people for I had an educator, Ph, D. educator and a subject matter expert. Somebody who had that field and they worked together to either revise or update the training program for that person. Where I could have somebody that had combat experience I would prefer to use

that type of individual. So, we spent time doing that. Now, we did develop again with a commercial firm a triage video. Where you as a physician were presented scenarios and you were there with a patient and then you had to make decision on what you were going to do with that patient. Anywhere from triage to treatment. Depending on what happened the patient either died, got better, had complications or whatever. The computers were sick and it was a video type system. We were just starting to develop that type of thing. We ha three of four of them that we had developed by the time I left and actually left the military at that point in time.

SM: How did that effect doctrine with regard to in a combat situation and a mass casualty situation how would physicians or other personnel handling the classification of wounded in the triage system? Again the civilian equivalent being the person with the worst injuries is typically treated first. You don't have notion, at least my understanding, this person is probably going to die and if we work on this person now we can probably save them. So, we have to work on this person first. And if this other person dies that's sad tragedy. Did that system change at all in the military while you were there?

JL: No actually and going back to my initial that had been what I'd been taught based on my early days within the military and that's exactly what we used in starting the Battle of Dakto when we started taking mass casualties. We basically sort them into three groups. Those that could wait, those that were probably going to die and those that we could do something to save them if we did something right away. That's the doctrine we used. And that's the same thing we used in the military. The idea of being a golden hour of you could get somebody someplace where you could start fluids and provide care and I want to say and I've got the numbers here. If you got them to a medical facility, something like 97% lived.

SM: Very high percentage.

JL: That was the idea in our doctrine that we were developing was to get as much as far forward as we could. You couldn't take hospitals up there, but you could take a surgical needle as we called it and bring it right behind the tanks. Spent a lot of time out at the Nation Training Center, Ft. Erwin also observing what am I trying to say? Tactical activities and trying to coordinate the medical play with it. I'd get them as often as I could. The armored cav battalions didn't like playing the medical game very much.

They were out there to play the tactical game and that's where their promotions came and all this other kind of stuff. Was how well they could fight that battalion. I did or was able primarily because of this major general who was loved. He was a physician who was just absolutely loved by the line because he was a line type medic. They periodically let us play the medical game out there and we did. We tried to test some of these concepts that we were developing to support the highly mobile armored units that were the big items at that point in time.

SM: Now of course to keep up in a tactical situation on order for medical service person to be able to keep up with an armored line unit you have to have similarly capable vehicles?

JL: Correct.

SM: Is that part of the evolution as well?

JL: Yeah, basically we had armored carrier personnel ambulances is what we used.

SM: Was that something new or had that already been instituted?

JL: I think it was being developed by the time I came in to that. It was something. I mean the Cracker Box ambulance you couldn't take it that far forward. You had to have something that was protective. So, I think the armored units had those but not something we used very much. What we would do is outfit one of those so that we could do some surgery and other kinds of things in these kind of vehicles.

SM: As you finished your career course experience and went on to Walter Reid and other assignments of course the Vietnam War changed considerably. President Nixon came in with his secret plan to win the war, which became Vietnamization. And then of course with the signing of the Peace Accords in January of 1973 and then the Fall of Saigon in 1975, as those major events were occurring what were you thinking about Vietnam, your experiences, the U.S. experience?

JL: I think as the war became more and more unpopular I just sort of shut it out. I have to tell a story though. At Walter Reid, one of my responsibilities was the V.I.P. desk. One morning and Saturday mornings we hopped on the presidential suite we did V.I.P. physicals. This is a wild story anyway. The commanding general there was a two star general. I handled all of the V.I.P.s they always came into my office and I took them

into his office. Well, Henry Kissinger comes in one morning. I had to walk through the deputy commander's office, this suite of offices I had to walk through the deputy commander's office to get to the commanding general. He was somewhat naive. Although he had done the—on Eisenhower, so he was very well known and a great surgeon. In fact, had commanded the 4077 in Korea, the original mash commander. In any event I walked him in and I said I am Dr. Hughes, but I'd like you to meet Dr. Kissinger. I could see by the look on his face he ad no idea. This was before Kissinger was the Secretary of State. He was the whatever the young lady is today, you know advisor to the president.

SM: National Security Advisor.

JL: National Security Advisor he was at that point in time. I could see by the look on his face he had no idea who Kissinger was. So, I said Sir, I'll take him up to ward eight. Which was the V.I.P. ward. So, he obviously knew this was somebody he should know. The deputy commander comes walking in behind me because he knows there's something going on. He was totally opposite. He was totally into anything political. So, I start walking out the door and I hear him say behind me to the deputy. Who the hell is Dr. Kissinger? And if I heard it Kissinger heard it. Well, in any event so we start out. Well immediately there was a lounge. We're going down the main hall and he comes running out and he says oh, Dr. Kissinger let me go with you up to the area. So, we take the elevator up to the presidential suite area and Kissinger gives me his briefcase. And I've got his coat and his briefcase. I'm saying I'm a major, why am I carrying his stuff. I started to walk away and put it down in one of the nursing areas and Kissinger's secret service agent looked like your typical I don't know. He was big totally bald and had been walking alongside. As I started to walk away from the briefcase he went hey, you. I thought I'm going to die. So, he took the briefcase and I found out later that Kissinger was on his way to brief Nixon on the Cambodian Incursion and the paperwork was in this briefcase.

SM: And he's handing it of to you?

JL: yeah. I assumed maybe he thought the secret service again t or somebody else would pick it. He had to get undressed to have his physical so he couldn't keep it. I

didn't know it was going to be that important, but the secret service agent knew I shouldn't be walking away with that. So, that's along story.

SM: No, that's funny.

JL: It was just interesting.

SM: yes, sir.

JL: I held the Cambodian Incursion orders in my hand. Didn't know it.

SM: Right. Well, what did you think when you heard that the United States and North and South Vietnam had finally com e to terms with this agreement in January of '73 and officially the war was over for the United States? What did you think?

JL: I guess at that point in time, and I've changed my mind about it. I thought well, you had your war, which I told you about before. I wanted my own war and it's the only one we lost. Didn't feel real good about that. I just sort of went into the military and my work and at that point in time I spent my time at Walter Reid. IN fact I was there when the protestors shut down the city that day. We had a rather interesting incursion at the hospital. You know thousands of them came out to see the wounded soldiers etc. I told a story about this. Maybe I told you that I was in my office and I heard a lot of noise out in the hall. I walked out of my office I was going over to the Deputy Commander for Administrations office, which was right directly across from mine. I looked down the hall and here's this young hippie girl with a sweater vest on unbuttoned and no bra and it' flopping like this in the street. You know typical of what you saw the flower children. I looked like this and I walked right into the wall.

SM: Oh, no.

JL: We had gotten in there that day very, very early and we did have some problems at Walter Reid with the protestors etc. But shortly after that I guess in 1971, I guess the Army sent me off to graduate school. I got my master's degree at Baylor in hospital administration. So, I sort of left that part and then I became very much involved. I did my residency, which they call fellowship here with the HMO program but we called it a residency in the military at Ft. Bragg at the hospital. And I set up the Army medical department's first family practice4 residency there as the administrative support for that. The I left there and became a health services command IG inspector and spent the next three years or two of those years inspecting hospitals and trained me in joint commissions

standards and that type of thing. Then the last year there I was still the IG, but I was the commanding general in the health services command disciplinary person or operations person. If a senior physician or a commander, a hospital commander got into problems and stuff I was sent out to council the individual and do that kind of thing on behalf of the general I'd deliver a letter of reprimand and that type of stuff. I was sort of the commanding general's hit man so to speak. I did special inspections if somebody got in trouble, which we did. We had a hospital commander who purchased a yacht and then ran it aground or did something else. I had to go out and you know do that kind of stuff. So, I did special investigations and I did all of our nuclear assurity inspections. So first two years I was a hospital inspector. The last two years I was the commanding generals hitman. I did all the things nobody else wanted to do.

SM: He purchased a yacht for the government?

JL: Well, he bought it under special it was recreational vehicle. It was supposed to be for the troops and for them to use and that kind of stuff. But it was primarily being used by senior staff people. Welfare and recreation vehicle was what it was supposed to be. But it was a commander's recreation vehicle. And then they ran it aground I think is what brought all this to attention. It came out in the newspapers. There was a big part on board or something so I got to go out and investigate that and take back a letter of reprimand to the one star who was involved in doing all that.

SM: What do you remember thinking when you heard that Vietnam itself fell in 1975?

JL: I was disappointed. I was just trying to think, '75, I had just, I guess I was still on the IG team and it was a disappointment and it was like, we screwed up again kind of thing. I was at the point where I was trying to forget about my Vietnam experience and getting totally involved in hospitalization, you know that kind of stuff. In fact I was starting to think about a new career and where I'd be going and that kind of stuff.

SM: How receptive did you find people in terms of talking about Vietnam and your Vietnam experience when you came back, say for those first five years?

JL: I would say I never talked about it.

SM: Was that your choice?

JL: Yes, in fact my mother and I had a couple of real go-arounds because she was asking me questions about it and I actually one time got a little teary-eyed about it and I said I don't want to talk about it. The only things I remembered where the bad things like I was telling you earlier on about some making decisions and getting some people killed and then seeing that one guy that during the career course that was a paraplegic and at Walter Reed I saw lots of horrors form the war. In fact we had what's his name, the guy who did the massacre.

SM: O'Kelly?

JL: Yes, we had him at Walter Reed; in fact I talked to him. Totally was horrified by him, he was an arrogant little bastard besides. But I never confronted him; I just had to talk to him about some other kinds of things. He was there for psychiatric evaluation while I was there. This was my second tour.

SM: This was during the trial?

JL: Yes.

SM: Do you recall anything in particular form your conversations with him?

JL: No, they were superficial. I had to ask him some questions about some things because I was the assistant executive officer, so all administrative kind of activities that took place came through me and I had to get some information about him and I don't even remember why and I didn't even want to do it. He repulsed me. So I just got to the point where I really, until I came back here and talked to Jim Reckner, I probably didn't think anything about the war. Some of these slides and other things I was showing you the other day, I had not seen, I had to dig them out. I hadn't seen them since I came back. I gave one lecture during the career course on the Montagnards and I can't even find the slides now, I think I loaned them to somebody and I probably never got them back. That was the only time I ever I think talked about the Vietnam War. Now, once I became the director of training and doctrine, I started thinking about the lessons learned but I still didn't talk much about my own experiences. Probably until we got ready to go back to Vietnam in '99, I hadn't really thought much about it. I wasn't even sure how I would react going back to Vietnam. There were lots of hard feelings, bad feelings, some of those early battles, a lot of the death, that kind of stuff that was there. As I look back now, there was a lot of that but there was also good times there. When I left Vietnam I

was not unhappy with my experience there, I thought it had been very good. As I drifted into the, where we were in the United States, you know the popularity of the war and a lot of these other kinds of things, some of the dumb things that we had done and did getting out of it, brought back bad memories so the best thing for me was to shut it out, and I literally shut it out. In fact I told my mother that, as I was sharing with you before, I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to talk about it. Interesting, and I did think on a talk show that I did recently, prior to the symposium; we were talking about the picture of the Vietnam vet came back. It was somewhat of a druggie, hippie, loser and 90% of the people that came back didn't fall into that category. We went on, did our jobs, became successful, some of them became heads of corporations, it's just a picture that's out there portrayed by the movies that didn't exist. Most of us forgot about the experience, we're glad we did what our country asked us to do and went on with our careers.

SM: What were the most significant things that you took away from your Vietnam War experience, just as a person?

JL: I think a number of things, one, and this isn't the case either, how good and dedicated our soldiers were, both the lien types, as well as my medics for the most part. That I was able to make life and death decisions and was able to make them, sometimes not always the right ones, and as I've reflected back I probably wouldn't have done anything different but I grew, I think I went there and I was pretty old, as mainly a boy and came back a man. I had experienced everything in life, to include death etc, up close and personal and fear and all kinds of things. I probably had more guts than I ever thought I had when I came back. So I didn't really fear much in life after that. I gained a certainty that I was going to make decisions, I was going to live by them and I wasn't going to vacillate on them. I think those are the things that I brought back, I really matured during that time frame and felt that I knew how to make decisions and would be able to make them and I had been my whole life that good.

SM: What do you think we as a nation should take away form our Vietnam War experience collectively?

JL: A couple of things, one we need to be more careful. We need to make sure that what we're doing is what the country wants us to do. Secondly, I don't think we lost the war. We may have lost the war but we probably caused us to win the Cold War. We

depleted the Russians and the Chinese so badly with what it took for them to support the North that they eventually, Chinese haven't, but I think the Russians who were their primary supporters did, I think it killed them, in trying to stay with us in that kind of a war. I think we did stop the domino effect, I don't think anybody wanted it to go on. I think the other thing is that politicians need, and the country needs to know what they're going and what they're going to do and not make it a total political kind of thing. You need an objective and you need to stick with it, you can't have Generals in the Pentagon running battalions in the field. We still haven't learned that maybe you need to keep the media out of the front lines but that wasn't necessarily good either.

SM: What do you thing about the way the United States has approached Vietnam since the war and in particular more recently normalization of relations with Vietnam?

JL: Of course I've been there and I think it's good. I wasn't certain why we were doing this when I first got involved. I knew there was a necessity as Reckner said to teach the younger generations about Vietnam and the experience and so on and so forth and the lessons learned there, even like Reckner I had the same thing happen when I was going back with my own daughter who has been through college and I said I was going back to Vietnam and she said, well now are you going back to North or South Vietnam. Caroline, there is only one Vietnam now, so it was a tough experience for us and I think it's something that we need to learn. From that standpoint I support the Center and the Archives and what we are doing. From the standpoint of just like Lubbock, we can learn a lot and it's a great market for us. The Vietnamese people love Americans, that's become their second language, it's a pleasant place to go and visit. It's pleasant to see what's going on and to continue to maintain this hostility between us doesn't do any of us any good. In fact I had a North Vietnamese, who he had been a North Vietnamese General say, it's interesting. We won the war and lost peace because we put them in such a poverty situation. That doesn't help either to have a country that poor. It's a great market for us, cotton from Lubbock is probably going to be a big commodity there and we buy the products that they produce. Trade is a good thing, so my reaction is, normalization is good and I think curing disease and doing other kinds of things that in our medical projects that we've got going on is good for all of Southeast Asian and it's an area where we can work with the folks doing this kind of thing, so I think it's appropriate.

Interesting, the person who probably had the most change about it. I went in ’99 and in 2000 the Chancellor said hey, Jim lets take our wives next year and so we did, a little bit expensive to do that but we did. My wife, who had very bad feelings about Vietnam because I had gone there and left my kinds for a year and almost was killed and put her through a problem, didn’t think she was going to like Vietnam at all. When she got there, saw the country, visited with the people, really ahs enjoyed and we probably would have gone back this past year if I had my operation and couldn’t get medically clear and we probably will go back in February, spring time frame, so she changed totally by a visit back to that country.

SM: Is there anything else that you’d like to discuss?

JL: No, I said more than I need to.

SM: No, I don’t think so, this has been a great interview. Thank you very much. Before I turn it off, this will end the interview with Mr. James Laible.