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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with James Bussey
Conducted by Dr. Richard Burks Verrone
November 11, 2002
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

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

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone; I'm conducting an oral history
2 interview with Mr. James Bussey, it is Veteran's Day, November 11, 2002. We are in the
3 Special Collections Library interview room on the campus of Texas Tech University and
4 Mr. Bussey, thanks for being here.

5 James Bussey: You're very, very welcome; I'm honored to be here in fact.

6 RV: Well, good, good. Let's start with some biographical information, where
7 were you born and when were you born?

8 JB: I was born on October the 16th, 1942 in Childress, Texas and I lived there or
9 in the vicinity of there for my first seven years.

10 RV: So you grew up in Childress basically for seven years.

11 JB: For seven years then I moved on to the high plains and I really grew up in
12 Levelland, due west of here.

13 RV: Okay, in Levelland, and did you spend the rest of your years there in
14 Levelland and graduate from high school?

15 JB: I graduated from high school there in 1961 and then I attended South Plains
16 College for two years, completed my bachelor's degree at Texas Tech and then later on
17 completed my Master's in 1973 and I've done some post-Master's work at Tech and
18 some post-Master's work at Wayland Baptist University also.

1 RV: Okay, great, so tell me about, what do you remember about Childress,
2 growing up there?

3 JB: My life as a child, even early child was a very happy life. I had two very
4 loving, supportive parents in my years. I had a lot of friends in Childress; we were
5 relatively poor. My dad was a cotton ginner and did some other things too, and my
6 mother was a nurse. In the early years of my life she didn't work as a nurse because she
7 wanted to raise her three children who were born one right after the other. So we were
8 really relatively poor, but very happy. It was a good environment, we lived in the poor
9 side of town actually and I've taken my wife and family over there and they can't believe
10 that I lived in that, looks about the same as it did when I lived it. [Laughing]

11 RV: So your mother didn't work?

12 JB: Not until we moved to the high plains when I was about in the third grade and
13 then we were getting to the point where we wanted to be a little more affluent, my family
14 did, my parents did, so my mom went back to work. She was an RN and she quit work
15 when I was born and did a little bit of private duty nursing but mostly she wanted to raise
16 us as long as she could.

17 RV: Okay, what do you remember about the cotton gin industry?

18 JB: I remember a lot about it. I tell people I was raised in a cotton gin, I worked
19 in a cotton gin when I was about eleven years old and I worked in cotton gins off and on
20 until I graduated from college. I worked with my dad was always happy to work for me,
21 and some of my best memories are working with my father. I admired and loved him
22 very much, and I enjoyed working with him in a cotton gin, however I'm a little bit
23 allergic to cotton. [Laughter].

24 RV: Where you then allergic?

25 JB: I was then too, yes.

26 RV: Oh, boy so it was a little bit tough for you.

27 JB: It was a little bit tough but I endured it.

28 RV: So, tell me about Levelland, you moved there when you were seven years
29 old?

30 JB: Well, I moved, well we moved to Brownfield for a couple years, then we were
31 at Lamesa and then we moved from Lamesa right before my fourth grade to Levelland

1 and we stayed there. My dad was the sort of person who liked to move, and he would
2 become angry with a boss or something like that and he wanted to move. Well, we got
3 together when we moved to Levelland and persuaded Dad, let's stay a little while longer
4 and he died there later on, you know in the 1970s.

5 RV: So he stayed awhile there.

6 JB: He stayed there, yes. I was raised in Levelland and I love Levelland. It was
7 an ideal place for a person at the time, in the late '50s and early '60s particularly.

8 RV: Did you come to Lubbock often?

9 JB: Yes. Well at that time we'd come at least about once a month or so. Mom
10 liked to come over here and shop and we liked to go out to eat. My dad liked to eat out
11 and go to the movies, so we were over at Lubbock at least once a month. I live about
12 twenty-five to thirty miles away now and we come about once a week, sometimes twice a
13 week. So we're a little more mobile perhaps than we were then, but we were over here a
14 lot.

15 RV: Good, tell me about Levelland, what do you remember about the town that
16 you were so fond of?

17 JB: I was so fond of the people, were very friendly and open people, they were, it
18 was during the '50s and some of the stereotypical things you think of the '50s were,
19 Levelland was indicative of those things. It was a kind of a laidback era, it was a happy
20 era, things were calm; people didn't worry about a great deal. They didn't even worry
21 about nuclear war, which sometimes we hear that they did during that era, but we didn't,
22 they didn't either and it was really a nice average lower-middle class existence that I had.

23 RV: Okay, tell me about your high school years, what did you do in high school?

24 JB: Well, in high school I did a lot of things. I liked Spanish, so I was in Spanish
25 club. I was in student council; I was in tennis. I tried to be in football, kept injuring
26 myself so I got out of football pretty soon. I was in track a little bit but I liked Texas
27 history, I had advanced Texas history class, in fact I was almost a fanatical Texas history
28 person at that time. I loved Texas history, especially Sam Houston, Austin that was such
29 a big thing.

30 RV: Were you a good student?

1 JB: I was a fair student. I wasn't as good as I could have been. I was having too
2 much fun in life actually as was indicative of my first year in college. I had too much fun
3 before I settled down and became a scholar actually, well maybe a scholar.

4 RV: Now, was education emphasized in your family, was it expected?

5 JB: Very much so; it was expected. My sisters and I were raised knowing that we
6 were going to go college and so we had, we didn't think of not going to college, we
7 didn't think, in fact I didn't think of not at least having a Master's Degree and if my dad
8 had lived past, he died in '76, he probably would have eventually persuaded me to try for
9 a doctorate at least. But they all believed, everyone in the family believed in education.
10 My dad was basically; he had very little formal education. He had to quit school right
11 after this eighth grade, but he believed in education a great deal. His brother, his family
12 got together during the Depression and put his youngest brother through A & M by
13 raising money and striving to do that and that was the one in the family who went to
14 college. Dad couldn't even go to high school, and he always wanted to go to college too.
15 Dad was a very intelligent person but he was an unlettered person, but he wanted to be
16 lettered.

17 RV: Okay, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

18 JB: I have two sisters, two sisters that are a little bit younger than I, both.

19 RV: So you were the oldest in the family?

20 JB: I was the oldest, I was born in '42, I had a sister born in '44 and one in '45.

21 RV: Now, when you graduated high school in Levelland, why Texas Tech?

22 JB: A couple of reasons; first of all I preferred Texas Tech, but we were so poor, I
23 had to get there, I just lived twenty-five miles away. Seems close.

24 RV: You lived at home?

25 JB: Yes, I lived at home. I never lived in the dorm. I lived at home and
26 commuted to death. In fact I've never lived in a dorm, the closest to a dorm was an Army
27 barracks, but I wanted to live in the dorm for awhile until I found out what dorms are like
28 and I didn't want all that nonsense.

29 RV: And what year was this when you went to Tech?

30 JB: I went to Tech, '63 through '65, South Plains College, '61 through '63, the
31 school years.

1 RV: How aware were you when you were in college of the Vietnam War or, it
2 really wasn't the "War" at that time, but American policy towards Southeast Asia, how
3 much were you aware of that?

4 JB: Well, see I was the person, I liked history and I was also in what we called
5 government political science now at Tech. We were aware of it. It wasn't an overriding
6 element of our thought but it was in the background and I knew where it was, I knew
7 where Southeast Asia basically was, that whole area where Laos was, could even
8 pronounce the word Laos, which President Kennedy couldn't for awhile. [Laughter].

9 RV: That's right, he sure couldn't.

10 JB: And basically because I liked international relations, personally I was aware
11 of it and most of my fellow students were too, the ones that I associated with at least.
12 Does that make sense to you?

13 RV: It does, it does. What did you think about what the United States was doing
14 in Southeast Asia? Do you think it should have been involved at this point or not?

15 JB: I think so. I thought at the time, although I'm not sure I'd always articulate it
16 the same way but I thought at the time that that was part of the policy of containing
17 communism and I still do, in that that was a normal progression of one thing to another
18 that that was part of the whole milieu of containing communism. Therefore I think it was
19 a noble cause.

20 RV: Who was the first president you voted for?

21 JB: The first president I voted for was Johnson because I couldn't vote until I was
22 twenty-one, and I did vote for Johnson. Back in the early year I was relatively liberal. I
23 was a Kennedy Democrat for a long time and by the way today, I've gone from being a
24 liberal to a Conservative back to a moderate, and I'm a moderate right now. I'm in a
25 moderate phase of life right now, moderate to somewhat maybe left of center but I would
26 have voted for Kennedy at the time.

27 RV: What did you think; I was going to ask you what did you think of President
28 Kennedy's policies?

29 JB: President Kennedy's policies, I was one of those people who admired him so
30 much, he was so charismatic, virtually everything he did I thought was wonderful,
31 frankly, that he couldn't do wrong. I see that he could now, but at the time I didn't.

1 RV: What about Lyndon Johnson?

2 JB: Lyndon Johnson basically the same way except that he wasn't a charismatic
3 person but a lot of his, like the civil rights stance, I believed in and because at the time,
4 like to Gulf of Tonkin era, that sort of issue.

5 RV: 1964

6 JB: 1964, President Johnson, whatever he thought, I thought that he was making
7 the right decisions. In fact I didn't question it because I didn't question that thing the way
8 I probably should have, or the way I would have today.

9 RV: Do you think that's because of your youth or your following Johnson so
10 much?

11 JB: I think all those things, plus the era was an era of trust, which I suspect we
12 probably at least lost some, some of that trust.

13 RV: What was the mood on Texas Tech's campus while you were here?

14 JB: We were basic conservative campus, I was a member of the Young
15 Democrats and we were a bunch of scraggly people, and the Young Republicans they
16 were all over the place and they were a little more well-known then we were and there
17 were much more of them than we were and it was a conservative campus at the time.
18 We, trying to describe, it seems sort of superficial right now, but the big issue on the
19 campus was the name change. I was one of those who wanted it to Texas State.

20 RV: You favored Texas State?

21 JB: I was against Texas Tech; I was one of those crazy social science persons who
22 wanted it Texas State. Many people, more conservative people wanted to maintain the
23 Tech, I guess name and many people wanted to maintain the Texas Technological
24 College, or just change it, Texas Tech College. I wanted Texas State University and the
25 compromise of Texas Tech University was great. I think its wonderful now, I'm very
26 proud of it now, but at the time I didn't like it. In fact the only demonstration that I ever
27 had was when we were demonstrating in a very peaceful, calm orderly way
28 demonstrating for Texas State, us people over in sociology and government and history
29 like me I guess.

30 RV: Was that the only demonstration you saw?

31 JB: Yes, that's the only thing.

1 RV: Is a name change.

2 JB: Yes, not even--it sounds silly now.

3 RV: I remember reading about that in old University Dailies, that was.

4 JB: It was a burning issue in that era of course.

5 RV: I can imagine. Now, you graduated in 1965, did you know you were going to
6 get drafted or suspect this?

7 JB: No, the draft was not an important issue then. In fact I really didn't get a draft
8 deferment a couple years I was in college, and I believe I became a teacher after I
9 graduated, that's what I wanted to be and I wasn't one of those people who became a
10 teacher to avoid the draft, but the draft wasn't an issue until maybe a year later. I found
11 out I need to get a draft deferment because I was called up for a physical I think in
12 January of '66, and I was already a teacher, I think that's when it was, out of the
13 Brownfield Draft Board and that's the first time it became kind of important and I had
14 promised my school superintendent that I would go for a draft deferment and he
15 supported me in that. In that year they weren't drafting teachers anyway.

16 RV: Okay, so when you graduated from Tech in '65, this is spring of '65 right,
17 you went into teaching, where did you teach?

18 JB: I taught at Hale Center, I taught at Hale Center for three years until I went in
19 the Army.

20 RV: High school teacher?

21 JB: Junior high, junior high social studies. And I really wanted to teach high
22 school, but I found out later I was one of those weird people that enjoyed junior high
23 students. Very few people do but I did, and still do actually.

24 RV: So this is '66 and you went into the military when, when did you actually?

25 JB: I went in 5 August '68?

26 RV: Okay, so we've got some time here. Did you continue teaching there all the
27 way up until 1968?

28 JB: Yes, in fact basically the way it happened is I began teaching in August of
29 '65, in '67 I got married, I was married to Sharon Cobb.

30 RV: Did you guys meet at Tech?

31 JB: We met on a blind date.

1 RV: Did you really, okay?

2 JB: Yes, one of my student's parents asked me at a basketball game if I had a
3 girlfriend and I'd just broken up with someone who was a Tech student by the way and I
4 said no, ma'am and the rest is history actually. And I knew Sharon, for about a whole six
5 weeks and we became married.

6 RV: Okay, so this is 1967?

7 JB: Yes, '67 and I went through the next year and the last day of school I stopped
8 by the post office to pick up my mail, because I hadn't picked it up the day before, right
9 before I went to work I went and picked it up and I was reclassified 1A, and that was
10 beginning to be the height of the war and people were getting drafted pretty frequently
11 and by the end of the summer, by August I got my draft notice. I went down and talked
12 to the draft board and they said you probably, if you want to go in, and the secretary of
13 the draft board said I probably should go the Army or the Air Force, someone to talk to a
14 recruiter and try to get some sort of job that wouldn't require combat arms, which I
15 wasn't that concerned with at the time, though I'm kind of a naïve person most of the
16 time about things, so I went to the Army recruiter and say hey, and I shot straight with
17 him, I say, "Hey, I'm not going to go in unless I get drafted but if I get drafted I'd like to
18 take a shot at maybe going through the officer program." So I enlisted for Infantry OCS,
19 infantry was all that one could get at that time, which was fine with me.

20 RV: You enlisted?

21 JB: I enlisted, yes I was, by the let me digress in saying this, when I went to AIT,
22 Advanced Individual Training in the Army I decided I really didn't want to be an officer
23 and I already, I didn't have orders for Fort Benning, for Infantry OCS, I had orders for
24 Fort Leonardwood for Engineer OCS and decided I really didn't want to do that, so I
25 waived it and I found out I only had a two year obligation so I was a two year regular
26 Army, two year RA and so I was only in the Army two years.

27 RV: All right, so when you got your draft notice, you're classified 1A, you
28 decided to take action into your hands.

29 JB: Took action, in fact when I went to talk to the, our superintendent told us,
30 hey, go down and talk to the draft board. I went down and talked to her and I drove from

1 Brownfield back to Lubbock, and my wife and I went directly to the Army recruiter and
2 talked to him that afternoon.

3 RV: Why the Army and not some other service?

4 JB: It was a family tradition.

5 RV: Really?

6 JB: Yes.

7 RV: Tell me about that, what kind of military influence did you have?

8 JB: My uncles James T. whom I was named after was in the Army in World War
9 Two, and prior to that I had a James C. Bussey was a Corporal in the 17th Alabama
10 Infantry in the Civil War and I just felt like in the Army was, my family had always
11 talked about the Army and that's really what I wanted to do. I never thought about the
12 Air Force or Navy or anybody else in consideration. Briefly when I was about a freshman
13 in college I gave the Marine Corps a little bit of consideration for their Platoon Leaders
14 Course but I didn't do it and sometimes I wish I had.

15 RV: So, what happens after you enlist in the Army, how much time did you have
16 to go before you had to report?

17 JB: Almost immediately.

18 RV: Really.

19 JB: Yes, a couple weeks I guess or maybe less than two weeks actually. I got my
20 draft notice at home somewhere; I don't remember where it is. I don't remember, I
21 should have brought it over, I don't remember what the date was, but I enlisted and went
22 to Fort Dix on August the 5th. There were four of us in Amarillo, what we used to call
23 the AP station, and instead of being sent to, oh golly, Fort Polk Louisiana I was sent to
24 Fort Dix because I was an officer candidate at that time.

25 RV: In New Jersey?

26 JB: That's what they did. In New Jersey, yes, went to New Jersey.

27 RV: Had you ever been that far away from home?

28 JB: Yes, I really had. I went on the 1957 Boy Scout Jamboree and we were poor,
29 but my mother and I and my scraped enough money together to send me to the Jamboree.
30 We went all the way from here to Ontario and over to New York, all across New York,

1 figures Lakes area to New York City and then back down to Pennsylvania to North
2 Carolina.

3 RV: Wow, so you had done some travel?

4 JB: Yes, sir and we had gone through growing up, I had a great-grandfather who
5 lived in Wyoming, and we visited him and my dad used to take us on the, when I was
6 younger on the wheat harvest so I'd gone through the central part of the United States on
7 the wheat harvest with my dad, when I was a little guy.

8 RV: Okay, so now from '65 to '68 the tempo of the war in Southeast Asia is
9 really increasing.

10 JB: Yes, it was an incremental sort of thing from hardly anything at all to a very
11 hot war obviously at that time.

12 RV: How concerned were you of going into something like that?

13 JB: I was somewhat concerned, especially after I got married but frankly it may
14 be an old soldier talking, it never concerned me that much, I didn't worry about. In fact
15 when I got orders for Vietnam it was kind of a relief that I finally found out where I was
16 going to go and it didn't bother me at all. In fact I was kind of pleased that I could go be
17 part of history I guess, and you're the only one I've ever said that to by the way.

18 RV: Okay, well what did you think of U.S. policy? It was slow, like you said
19 slow, incremental kind of going up and up and up, how much were you aware of U.S.
20 policy

21 JB: I was constantly aware of it. I didn't--Now I believe that we should have, I
22 firmly believe that we should have increased our participation early on, initially, well its
23 called overwhelming force.

24 RV: Yes, like 1965 or after the Gulf of Tonkin [incident]?

25 JB: Exactly, go in with as much as we could and perhaps have gotten it over with
26 in a more expeditious sort of way. That we increased the two gradually in that we were
27 matched tit for tat by the enemy, and I think that was a mistake. At the time I wasn't
28 aware of it that much. I knew we were there and I watched the news every evening and I
29 was, since I was a little kid I've been a newshound anyway, and I watched it every
30 evening and followed it as much as I could. I was very aware of the Tet Offensive and I

1 just knew at the time of, at the end of Tet that we had lost. Walter Cronkite had told us
2 we had.

3 RV: Lost the War?

4 JB: Lost the War, yes. And that Tet showed us that we couldn't win, which I
5 think was a bad mistake that a media. I'm sorry, I shouldn't.

6 RV: We'll talk about that later, about the media coverage, absolutely. So, tell me
7 about Fort Dix, what was that like?

8 JB: Fort Dix was a very pretty place, it was a tough post. It was like any Army
9 post that provides basic combat training as they called it at the time.

10 RV: How long was this training?

11 JB: It was, well they always said eight weeks, but it was nine or nine and half, ten
12 weeks usually, and I was there from 5 August to oh whenever early October was,
13 whatever day that was. And I really, I hate to admit us, let me digress a little bit. When I
14 went in, I couldn't have gotten in the Army normally. I was about fifty pounds
15 overweight, I was a smoker, I was almost twenty-six years old, and I found out later if
16 you went to twenty-six you didn't have to go in, one would have gotten drafted, but I was
17 a little older, I was one of the oldest in my camp and I was overweight and a smoker and
18 that was a little tough for a person going in the Army that way.

19 RV: So the physical challenge was?

20 JB: Physical challenge was immense, yes it was but I overcame it and I started,
21 after two or three weeks I'd lost enough weight where I had started enjoying it and didn't
22 smoke quite so much. I'm one of those crazy people; I really kind of enjoyed basic
23 training after a while.

24 RV: Did you really? What did you enjoy about it?

25 JB: The arms training, combat arms, those sorts of things.

26 RV: What did you train on, what kind of weapons?

27 JB: We began with the M-14, in fact at that time we were told at Fort Dix and
28 Fort Orea, California that they were training basic trainees with the M-14 and then the M-
29 16, so we qualified with the normal qualification procedures that one would go through
30 with the M-14. I loved the M-14, and by the way I'm going to brag but I was the second

1 highest in my company in rifle marksmanship with the M-14, and I scored expert and I
2 really did a good job with that at least.

3 RV: Had you done any hunting before or were you familiar with guns?

4 JB: Yes, I had grown up with rifles, it was nothing, it was easy, it wasn't any.
5 That was not a challenge, it was just fun. I was even really good at night firing. I could
6 hit targets in the dark really easily. I'm just, I'm bragging, I'm trying to be humble but I
7 wasn't very good at the other stuff. I was just barely qualified with my grenade. I was
8 terrible with the grenade.

9 RV: I was going to say what other weapons did you train on?

10 JB: The other was M-16. We spent the normal, about a week or a week and half
11 or whatever with the M-14 qualification and that sort of thing. I don't know, we spent a
12 couple of days; it was all on the M-16. I qualified on the M-16 expert too and that was
13 fun. At the time we had heard about these M-16s and when we picked up the M-16 it was
14 so much lighter and we felt it was so flimsy that it couldn't be very good until we fired it
15 and found out it was an excellent weapon.

16 RV: What was so difficult about the grenades?

17 JB: I'm just a poor athlete I guess.

18 RV: So accuracy of throw was?

19 JB: Accuracy of throw was very bad, plus, I'm going to admit to you something I
20 never hardly, I was afraid of those, the lives ones. When I threw it, I wanted to get it
21 away and I didn't get very far or very accurately.

22 RV: So what other kind of small arms did you train on?

23 JB: Later on, you know nineteen level .45, M-39 grenade launcher, M-60 machine
24 gun and I even cranked off a few M-2 machine gun rounds, the .50 caliber rounds and
25 well I guess a little bit more than few. I'm trying to think grenades, M-79s. I guess that's
26 it maybe. Well, mines like claymore mines, went into Vietnam of course we laid
27 claymore mines.

28 RV: What would you say was the most enjoyable aspect of the training, was it the
29 weapons?

30 JB: The weapons trains, yes.

31 RV: Besides that, what else did you like?

1 JB: Oh, silly me, bayonet training. I love bayonet training. I loved unarmed
2 combat. I enjoyed that sort of thing, kind of the manly arts type things I guess. I enjoyed
3 all that sort of thing.

4 RV: What was the hardest thing for you?

5 JB: The hardest thing was the running frankly because I was an old fat boy, but I
6 did, I lost fifty pounds in basic training. I lost from a, my waist was forty and I lost down
7 to thirty-four. And when my wife saw me she really didn't recognize me immediately. I
8 was in uniform and a little guy and when I went in I was a fat boy.

9 RV: Well, tell me about the training and the people who were giving your
10 training, your instructors, how were they, were they?

11 JB: They were the normal drill sergeants. They were tough. The farther one got
12 into the training, the more they relaxed a little bit on the severe discipline, and I admired
13 them a great deal. My drill Sergeant was one of those that, if you hear a veteran say this I
14 would have gone, fought in hell for him, that sort of thing. I would have, I liked him a
15 lot. I admired him, he was a good guy.

16 RV: Were these guys veterans of Vietnam?

17 JB: Yes, virtually all of them were. I don't remember anyone, unless they were
18 like E-4 below cadre that weren't veterans; all of them are Vietnam veterans. There was
19 an 11th ACR veteran, a Cav veteran, Big Red One, and oh, there's one that, oh golly what
20 was it, 5th Division up north where the diamond I believe was, was the combat patch. All
21 of them were veterans; literally all of them were veterans.

22 RV: Did they talk about their Vietnam experience?

23 JB: Yes, they did, constantly.

24 RV: What did they tell you?

25 JB: They would, some of the in quotation "cruder ones" would tell about killing
26 people, and I'm not sure if it was true, what they were saying. The, my drill Sergeant
27 was a little more sensitive than that and he alluded to that sort of thing but he didn't, it
28 wasn't as though he was almost bragging about being a combat veteran. His main goal
29 articulated by himself was to prepare us for combat to save our lives, and most of us
30 admired him a great deal. He was a Samoan by the way and I have a special place in my
31 heart for Samoans now by the way.

1 RV: What did he tell you about the combat over there?

2 JB: He would talk about the jungle being, it was hot, intense combat, he talked the
3 punji stakes, booby traps. He had no great animosity against the [VC], I don't think he
4 ever talked about the NVA but he talked about VC a lot, and I'm not sure when he was
5 there that the NVA were there that much, but he talked about the VC. Some of the other
6 drill sergeants talked as those they hated the gooks, that sort of thing, but he never did.
7 He was a little more, maybe a little more sensitive than that. And I was in the company
8 of people who were a little bit older. Our average age was twenty-one and our average
9 education was like two years post-high school and so we were kind of an older educated
10 group. In fact in my platoon we had four guys who had just completed their bar exam,
11 and one of my real good buddies was a Harvard lawyer. He got his bar exam results
12 when he was in basic training. His name was Pete Manusek and his undergraduate
13 major, his bachelors was in physics at Harvard, and he went to law [school at Harvard].

14 RV: And then he was in infantry basic training.

15 JB: That's exactly true, yes sir.

16 RV: Wow. So what kind of apprehension did you have, if any of Vietnam at this
17 point? Here you are in the Army infantry?

18 JB: I had some but not a lot. Well, actually at the end of basic training I had a
19 stress fracture, toward the end so I didn't get sent to infantry AIT, I got sent to Signal
20 AIT.

21 RV: Just because of your injury?

22 JB: Because of my injury, yes. What happened is all my friends, most of us were
23 infantry AIT people that were in my company, and most of the guys loaded up on buses
24 the day after basic training and were driven to their AIT companies for infantry training
25 and there were several of us who had been injured including my really good buddy
26 Robert Krieger and he had, I don't remember what his injury was, it was some kind of leg
27 injury or something, he has, such as I did, got it at the end of basic training.

28 RV: What part of the injury, was it your ankle?

29 JB: It was my shin, my right shin. And so we were sent to Signal AIT at Fort
30 Gordon, Georgia.

31 RV: Now, would you have chosen that or did you want to go infantry?

1 JB: I hate to admit this, I wanted to go infantry, and I hate to admit that
2 sometimes. See later on I became infantry qualified in the National Guard, I was an
3 Eleven Charlie, I was an indirect fire infantry, mortar infantry and I enjoyed, I was about
4 twelve year old in maturity level, because I liked the soldier stuff, the infantry stuff and I
5 really enjoyed infantry. We had some light infantry training at the end of my AIT and a
6 couple of weeks of light infantry training, and I loved every minute I was in it. I had to
7 admit that to someone who's an adult. [Laughing] But I did, I enjoyed it.

8 RV: What's the most memorable thing about basic training that you remember?

9 JB: About basic training, golly, graduation I guess. Besides getting my--The drill
10 sergeant pinning the expert qualification badge on me and calling me Lone Star. I was
11 the only one from Texas and he acted like he was really proud of me because I think he
12 really thought I was a dud before that, and to some degree I was a dud.

13 RV: So your nickname was Lone Star?

14 JB: Lone Star, yes, sure was.

15 RV: Did that stick with you throughout your?

16 JB: It stuck me in most of the time through Vietnam because Kreiger, my buddy
17 that was in basic training with me, make a long story short went with me to AIT. I met
18 him at Seattle-Tacoma airport. We went to up to Fort Lewis, overseas replacement and
19 from Fort Lewis we went to Cam Ranh Bay, Cam Ranh Bay we went to Bien Hoa down
20 to 9th replacement.

21 RV: Together?

22 JB: Together at Long Island Post and then we got assigned the same, his bunk was
23 right next to mine in Vietnam. So we were together most of my Army career. And he
24 stayed in Vietnam, he reupped for Vietnam three months so he could have an early out,
25 an educational early out, and I came on home. I was ready to come home by that time.

26 RV: What did your wife think about your military training?

27 JB: The military training she, I told her all these stories and she was always
28 afraid. She was always worried about me and I reassured with sometimes lies and most
29 of the time it was the truth about my training. My mother was the same way, but I told
30 her all these things and she was, I don't think she ever really wanted me to go, and she
31 still wouldn't but and she denied reality. She thought there was some way I'd come

1 home no matter, right after that but I never did of course. My wife didn't like my being
2 in the Army at all anyway, she never did.

3 RV: Did your family or did your wife come out to see your graduation?

4 JB: No, we were so naïve we didn't realize, and we couldn't have afforded to go
5 from Hale Center to Fort Dix that way. Most of the people who came out to see their
6 sons and brothers were from that area, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania. But I wish
7 they had, I wish they could have.

8 RV: So after Fort Dix, you go to Fort Gordon in California, right?

9 JB: No sir, Fort Gordon's in Georgia. It's, come on brain; kick in. I've forgotten
10 the name of the town now all of a sudden, where the golf, the national.

11 RV: Augusta?

12 JB: Augusta, Georgia, yes, Augusta Georgia.

13 RV: Okay, tell me about your advanced training, this is Signal Corps?

14 JB: Signal Corps, yes. Well, it's basically we had PT in the morning and PT in
15 the afternoon like we did in the other parts of the Army, and we basically learned to
16 operate cryptographic signal equipment all the way from the most primitive World War
17 Two era equipment all the way up to, at the time the most advanced equipment that you
18 could use. All of us got secret level security clearances.

19 RV: How did you get that, what was entailed in that?

20 JB: It was very easy, later on I got a top secret and that was a lot more difficult to
21 get, but basically they just did a cursory sort of background investigation on you and
22 when I applied and got my top secret clearance they went back and actually talked to
23 people back home in both Hale Center, Levelland and I guess over here at Tech, some of
24 my professors at Tech told me later they had been interviewed.

25 RV: Tell me about some of the equipment you trained on.

26 JB: In signal equipment, we had basic teletype, I'm sure you're familiar with, and
27 I can say this now, I couldn't say this back then, the German equipment during World
28 War Two.

29 RV: The Enigma?

30 JB: The Enigma sort of equipment, basically that type of equipment, believe it or
31 not, and I didn't realize then that the Germans--Later on I saw, "Hey, that looks like the

1 equipment we had.” You know, when we see all the pictures of the Enigma equipment
2 later on, all the way up to equipment that was very primitive I guess computer equipment,
3 very primitive computer equipment, but basically it was teletype sort of equipment.
4 When I got to Vietnam it was World War Two era equipment, it was very primitive field
5 type equipment.

6 RV: So you did PT, you did your equipment training, what else did you do?

7 JB: Later on we’d do some weapons training with the M-16, those who didn’t
8 have M-16 qualification which was most of them qualified with the M-16 later on and
9 then right after I graduated we were sent to a two weeks course in what we would call,
10 I’ve forgotten what they called it [RUN training] then but it was basically light infantry:
11 patrolling, recon patrols, ambush patrols, securing villages.

12 RV: They taught you how to do all this?

13 JB: Yes, sir.

14 RV: Did they teach it in accordance to what was going on in the ground in
15 Vietnam or just a general?

16 JB: That’s exactly what it was. No it was not a general, it was basically related to
17 Vietnam. The attacking and clearing a village, things of that nature, it was a simulated
18 Vietnamese village, that’s what it was, with simulated booby traps and the whole thing.

19 RV: How was that training, was it useful for you once you got in country?

20 JB: It was basically useful for me but we really got re-trained when I got there
21 frankly but it was more, I think it was more valid than what most of the guys got who
22 came in country. Ours was really pretty good but we did really get retrained.

23 RV: Where was this two-week course?

24 JB: It was at Fort Gordon?

25 RV: Oh, same place.

26 JB: Yes, sir.

27 RV: How would you rate your instruction that you received there at Fort Gordon?

28 JB: The instruction, basically was extremely good. There were a few people who,
29 I was a teacher so I was a little bit critical at least of that sort of thing but most of them
30 were really pretty good teachers. I found out the equipment was as up to date as one
31 could hope for.

1 RV: Do a lot of classroom training?

2 JB: A lot was classroom training, but a lot of it was hands on sorts of training

3 also.

4 RV: All right, how long did your AIT last?

5 JB: Thirteen weeks I think.

6 RV: Thirteen.

7 JB: I think so.

8 RV: Were you able to go home at all between Fort Dix and Fort Gordon?

9 JB: No, in fact they flew me from Philadelphia International to Augusta whatever

10 airport about a week after we graduated from basic training, a bunch of us were rounded

11 up and flown down to Augusta.

12 RV: So when did you finish your advanced training at Fort Gordon?

13 JB: Let's see, it was right before Christmas.

14 RV: 1968?

15 JB: Yes, 1968. It would have been late November and then I had two weeks of

16 that light infantry training and then we got to go home for Christmas, for thirty-day leave

17 right before I came to Vietnam, went to Vietnam.

18 RV: Thirty days, did you know you were going to Vietnam before Christmas?

19 JB: Oh, yes. The story going around was if you waived Officer Candidate School,

20 this was scuttlebutt. I don't know if it was true or not that you would get orders for

21 Vietnam, if you waived OCS. Waiving OCS was an extremely difficult thing to do; one

22 went from a Staff Sergeant all the way up to a Lieutenant Colonel being told that I was no

23 good bum for doing that sort of thing. I did go through the process of waiving it, and two

24 days later I did get orders for Vietnam, I don't know if there's a correlation there or not,

25 but that's really what happened?

26 RV: How did you feel when you got your orders for Vietnam?

27 JB: I was relieved. It was difficult to tell my wife. I felt like I had to tell her as

28 quickly as I could, which I did. I was such a coward, I waited until Christmas to tell my

29 parents but they kind of suspected it anyway.

30 RV: Why did you wait?

1 JB: I wanted to make it the proper way of telling them rather than on the
2 telephone I wanted to see them, be right there with them physically.

3 RV: How did they feel?

4 JB: They were both very worried and very concerned and my dad was proud.
5 Dad was proud of me whatever I did but they were both very worried. My wife was
6 frantically worried all the time I was gone by the way.

7 RV: Okay, so you had thirty days before you shipped out. Anybody in your
8 hometown there in Levelland, did they have draft orders to go to Vietnam, were you
9 aware of anybody else?

10 JB: Not really. I'm beginning to find more and more who did now since we have
11 a person who has taken on himself to have a website for the Levelland Alumni, and I
12 asked him one day, please send me names or have those who are veterans to send me
13 their names and their story, that sort of thing, and I'm beginning to find out people who
14 did that actually I knew, none in my own class. There were a couple of them I guess in
15 my class, I graduated with about 150 and we only had a couple, maybe three of us who
16 went to Vietnam.

17 RV: Now, how did the population of Levelland or the civilians that you ran into,
18 now that you're in the military, in the Army, going to Vietnam, did you have any kind of
19 adverse reaction or what did they say to you?

20 JB: Not at that time then. My dad was proud of me and took me downtown and
21 wanted me to wear the uniform, which I was proud to do. I was proud to be a soldier and
22 he introduced me around, it was people I really already knew and told them I was going
23 to Vietnam, and they were supportive of that at that time, at least on the surface they were
24 supportive, either that or they were very supportive and they were dad's friends who
25 would naturally be supportive for that sort of thing. The same is true about Hale Center,
26 and actually my home of record was Hale Center by that time and the same is true of
27 Hale Center.

28 RV: So you shipped out to Vietnam in January '69?

29 JB: Yes, let's see it was 14 January.

30 RV: Now, tell me how you got, where you went and how you got out there?

1 JB: On a plane I flew to Seattle Tacoma and I and a couple of other guys who had
2 been in AIT met each other at the airport, accidentally bumped into each other, one was
3 Kreiger, the buddy I alluded to before, and we decided we didn't want to go out there
4 right now, it was the night and we wanted until the next morning to do the horrible deed
5 of going up to Fort Lewis, back in the Army. So we took a motel room and the place was
6 full of soldiers doing the same thing we were and we got up in the morning and the bus
7 was there to take us to overseas replacement and we got into overseas replacement, it was
8 too full, it was fill up, so we were put over on the main post next to the MP barracks.
9 They opened up the barracks there for us and we were housed there, which was fortunate
10 in that anyone who went to main post invariably got put on KP and some other odious
11 fatigue duty. So if one stayed out on the main post and took his meals, like Kreiger and I
12 did over at the MP barracks, you didn't have to do KP or whatever.

13 RV: How long did you stay there?

14 JB: I was there a couple of days and it was the most beautiful country in the
15 world, it was staggering it was so pretty. Mount Ranier was in the distance and we had
16 what they told us was a rare snowfall during the time, and this was in January and it was
17 very, very pretty, but chilly. Basically what I did, I hung around the barracks and read,
18 listened to the radio, another guy and I went and bowled the night before, I bowled the
19 best game I've ever bowled in my life, and the next night we were loaded on the plane at,
20 I forgot the Air Force base, and flown to Vietnam. It was a TWA airplane by the way. I
21 even have some stuff, I think I have a little chess piece I got there and went to Honolulu.
22 From Honolulu I think its Guam, then into Clark Air Base, which I think is under about
23 nine meters of ash now I think and into Cam Ranh Bay.

24 RV: What was the mood on the plane when you left States?

25 JB: The mood on the plane was we were glad the be on the plane and most of us
26 were relieved to be going. At that time I don't, we kept hearing stories about people who
27 refused to go and I didn't see any of that. Most of us were pretty relaxed and I guess
28 there was some element of adventure. Some people were sort of scared but most
29 everyone was accepting and fatalistic about going to the war. It was really pretty good;
30 we wanted to enjoy our last few minutes. We had a Bob Hope real good movie and the
31 chow on the plane was pretty good and it was fun to see Honolulu, the airport there and it

1 was fun to see Guam, it was fun to see Clark Air Base. Clark Air Base gave us a little bit
2 of a feeling about what the temperature was going to be like in Vietnam, but when we left
3 Fort Lewis it was cold and I remember when we got on the plane a bunch of including me
4 fell asleep. And I remember the captain of the airplane came over the intercom and told
5 the flight attendants, hold the food service right now, let's let them sleep and that's
6 almost direct quotation so we slept for a little while and then woke up and they brought
7 us the food and they was--TWA did a really good job by the way, that was the best
8 airplane flight I've ever had in my life. I've been to Vietnam twice and I flew to R & R
9 in Japan and nothing came close to that flight, about people who were very nice to us,
10 they really were.

11 RV: When you say everybody was fatalistic about going to Vietnam, what do you
12 mean?

13 JB: I'm not sure how to say it. It's, we may as well be accepting and go ahead
14 and do our job. That's the mood of the people around me at least and I say fatalistic, that
15 almost has a negative connotation but it really wasn't that negative. When we got there,
16 all of a sudden when we put down, all of a sudden we were all frightened. I remember I
17 was really scared and I was one of the safest place in Vietnam at Cam Ranh Bay. I didn't
18 know that at the time.

19 RV: Tell me about that when you landed, what were your first impressions of the
20 country when you stepped off the plane?

21 JB: My first impression was everyone came off the plane, okay when we came
22 off the plane the first thing that will always remember, I think I told you before was it
23 was very hot, very humid and it really smelled bad. Those were the first reaction that I
24 had. I couldn't believe it was that hot; that human beings lived in that kind of
25 environment. And then we were loaded on buses and the buses had the bars and the wire
26 on the window and we already knew what that was for, and we didn't realize it but we
27 were on an air base, and the air base was very, very well protected but we didn't know
28 where we were. I remember being scared and everyone was scared, we didn't talk. We
29 sat there in almost stone silent until we got to the overseas replacement station, and we
30 were all of a sudden starting hitting some of those, today we'd call it jet lag and we didn't
31 know what jet lag was back then, but I remember getting off the plane and I think I had a

1 meal but I'm not sure. I remember that night I slept on a concrete slab with my AWOL
2 bag for a pillow?

3 RV: Where, at the overseas replacement base?

4 JB: Yes, they assigned us a bed but about the time we were supposed to go to
5 sleep they fell us out to an assembly area, theoretically, I guess they were going to put us
6 on an airplane, back on the air base or something, I never did figure out what we did, but
7 we spent ours out there on that assembly area. Eventually most of just fell asleep on the
8 concrete slab we were so tired, and it wasn't until the next day that we were loaded on a
9 C-130 and sent south to Bien Hoa air base.

10 RV: So why do you go to Bien Hoa?

11 JB: Bien Hoa was close to where my duty assignment was going to be. We were
12 sent from Cam Ranh Bay to Bien Hoa. Bien Hoa, we were taken to the 90th Replacement
13 at Long Binh, Long Binh post on to the infamous Long Binh Jail, LBJ, and I spent a day
14 and a night at 90th Replacement and found out I had orders for second field force at Sui
15 Chum. Company clerk came and picked Krieger and me up, seem like there was another
16 guy there too, I don't quite remember.

17 RV: Did you know your orders, exactly what you were going to be doing?

18 JB: Well, I was too stupid to read them. I really didn't until I got to the
19 administrative clerk that checked us in and kind of explained to us. I was the dumb,
20 naïve person, I didn't know. Now I can see those same orders, I know exactly what that
21 stuff meant, but I didn't then. I was a real rookie.

22 RV: You were with Krieger, the?

23 JB: Yes, Krieger.

24 RV: Was that a good comfort for you to have this friend?

25 JB: Yes, it really was. Krieger sometimes could be very irritating but most of the
26 time he was a good guy and I really enjoyed his friendship and he and I were good
27 friends and it was good to have somebody that I knew. And I'd known him since basic
28 training.

29 RV: Where was he from?

30 JB: He was from New York, he was from, I'll tell you the New York, Genessee
31 County, it's in the Finger Lakes area.

1 RV: So, really, really far away. Yes, Levelland and New York.

2 JB: Oh, yes. He always sort of acted like I was a hick or I think he thought most
3 southerners were hicks anyway, and that was one of the bones of contention I had with
4 Kreiger and sometimes I talk negatively about Kreiger but Kreiger was really a good
5 friend. He was really more like a brother.

6 RV: What was Bien Hoa like, very busy air base?

7 JB: Yes, it was a very busy air base. There were all kinds of flights I got to see
8 things like F-4s, seems like there were F-104s there, there were all kinds of helicopters
9 around. There was some civilian aircraft. Of course you've always heard the term the
10 silver birds, the 707s, DC-9s I think, commercial aircraft but mostly military aircraft.
11 Later on I went down to Tan Son Nhut air base and it was very much the same there,
12 except it wasn't really quite as busy as Bien Hoa. It didn't have the helicopter traffic for
13 example or the small plane type of traffic.

14 RV: What was your impression of the men that you, when you first got there, of
15 the people who were already, the military, U.S. military personnel who were already
16 there in country, how were they treating you, what was your feeling?

17 JB: Well, they were a little patronizing because we were rookies, we had the
18 fresh uniforms on and we didn't really know how to wear it right and we didn't have that
19 kind of bleached out look that most veterans would after a while. We hadn't lost, Kreiger
20 was pretty skinny and I was not un-skinny but at the time, I was a little un-skinny at the
21 time and later I'd lose some more weight but we didn't have that really lean look, we
22 were very obvious new in country. They were a little patronizing at the beginning.
23 When I got to my unit, one of my first impressions, first of all we went to a mess hall and
24 a rat ran across the mess hall and I thought, whoa what kind of place is this, that big old
25 rat.

26 RV: Where was this, at Bien Hoa?

27 JB: No, this was actually in my company, A Company, 53rd Signal Battalion and
28 after we checked in, we checked in right before noon chow and they sent Kreiger and me
29 over to get chow before they finished checking us in and that was really my first
30 impression of anything and hardly in Vietnam was that rat running across the mess hall
31 floor.

1 RV: So we were you located, where was the 53rd Signal Battalion?

2 JB: 53rd Signal Battalion was on a place called Plantation Base Camp; we called it
3 Plantation Base Camp or hurricane base camp sometimes, 2nd Field Force Base Camp. 2nd
4 Field Force headquarters.

5 RV: And you arrived, you were basically within a week after arriving in country?

6 JB: Well, you know about maybe four days, maybe four days. It was very quick.
7 I was still jet lagged like crazy. In fact that night, after we got our bunks and we kind of
8 got settled in one of the guys was having a farewell party and I wasn't, I've never been
9 much of a drinker, hardly anything, and they decided that I needed to join the party so I
10 joined the party, had a couple of shots of bourbon and it was really good bourbon by the
11 way and I got probably as drunk as I ever have been in my life, because I was jet lagged
12 and had a little bit of alcohol which I wasn't really used to. I don't remember much else
13 except about mid-morning the next morning I woke up and it was so hot I couldn't stand
14 it hardly and I was a little bit hung over. Kreiger was very hung over by the way.

15 RV: Okay, so what did you guys do when you first arrived?

16 JB: We first arrived, we were checked in through the company clerk and then sent
17 to supply and we drew our bedding, drew a weapon. I already had a protective mask
18 because I had to have glasses, spectacle inserts, drew our ammunition. We already had
19 most of our field gear; I got most of my field gear in Cam Ranh Bay. By the way, we
20 were allowed seventy pounds, I didn't realize it but my personal gear was seventy pounds
21 not to mention another sixty pounds I drew in Cam Ranh Bay and I lugged all that back
22 to the company. About the only field gear we didn't have by the time I got there was a
23 weapon, ammunition, grenades, things like that, and we drew that and then we were
24 assigned to a hooch, whatever barracks and we had our bedding and basically they left us
25 alone for awhile, told us where the mess hall if they need something, go up to the orderly
26 room, that sort of thing and we were introduced to our platoon sergeant and welcomed in.
27 Like I say, most of the guys were a little bit patronizing but they were glad to see us and
28 we were welcomed into kind of a brotherhood or a fraternity of people who were there,
29 which made you feel good.

30 RV: I'm sure. How many people were you living with there, in that area?

1 JB: Golly. There would have been probably, I think our hooches usually had had
2 about maybe fifteen, maybe less, maybe twelve to fifteen people per house, maybe no
3 more than twelve, not to include some of the NCO room, we had a couple NCO rooms
4 that went into the hooch, that were built in.

5 RV: So what were your duties when you first began?

6 JB: When I first got there we theoretically were supposed to have two weeks
7 where we would become acclimated to the country and where we'd did their diesel things
8 like fill sandbags and things of that nature, which we did for about two days, Kreiger and
9 I did for about two days, they needed people so badly because they were short of
10 personnel that we were almost immediately put to work. We had two communications
11 centers, you had a, what we called a main communication center, which was high
12 volume, low priority type messages. And we had a tactical operations command for 2nd
13 Field Force comps there, which was the high priority, highly classified material that went
14 up to divisions and commander of 2nd Field Force and things of that, actually into Bien
15 Hoa Air base and over to Long Binh post, but we were both assigned to a tactical
16 operations command.

17 RV: Why, just to fill a seat or?

18 JB: I don't know. I guess I was chosen, I don't know. He and I had both done
19 well in AIT, in our school and maybe that was it, I'm really not sure. I never really did
20 know why we were two of the chosen to go over to TOC, TOC was theoretically a really
21 good assignment.

22 RV: So what did you do there?

23 JB: We handled messages between things like, the different divisions in III Corps
24 that came into the commander of 2nd Field Forces. We also handled messages that were
25 coming from places like Washington DC for example. Different kinds of field
26 commands, from the Pentagon, from, it was classified the time we even got a message
27 from President Nixon which was a particular kind of message that I'll tell you about in a
28 minute which was highly classified back then, but we even handed one from him to the
29 different division commanders.

30 RV: When you say handle messages, can you describe to me what that meant?

1 JB: We would get a message in, it was teletype and it was paper tape, sort of
2 primitive teletype equipment and we transferred those electronically from the sources that
3 came into the comm center out to the different destinations, plus we maintained messages
4 for the tactical operations that came in through 2nd Field Force, which was the
5 commander, 2nd Field Force.

6 RV: So you could read all the stuff?

7 JB: Yes. In fact for awhile we'd get Arc Light messages in and we'd read about
8 them in something like the *Stars and Stripes* or something a day or two later, and they
9 would tell about where a place was bombed and we knew that that wasn't the real place
10 they were bombed, it was Cambodia or someplace, we'd get those kind of things in.

11 RV: Now, were you still secret clearance or did you move up?

12 JB: Still secret, later I became a, I got a top secret clearance and I was one of the
13 two or three at the top comm center who handled top secret messages coming in.

14 RV: How many people were there under that roof?

15 JB: Under that roof there were probably eight or ten depending on, it was a small
16 comm. center, eight or ten. Plus once in a while you'd have an NCO-IC who was E-6 or
17 above, but hardly ever. Most of the time E-5s were the main, what we call trick chiefs,
18 they were in charge of that particular shift in that comm. center. Once in a while you'd
19 have an NCO-IC who was usually a warrant officer.

20 RV: Was it air-conditioned?

21 JB: It had to be because, thank god. It had to be because the equipment was very,
22 very sensitive equipment at the time and it had to be air-conditioned. Some of the old
23 tubes that we had right there were very delicate, and they had to be air-conditioned. I
24 don't know what they did out in the field sometimes. We had a place that we called Hill
25 837, it was part of our battalion, an element from our battalion maintained it and they had
26 a little comm. center out there, and I don't know what they did. It was the most primitive
27 conditions you could imagine short of being in a Vietnamese controlled village of some
28 kind, because they didn't have any air conditioning out there.

29 RV: So what was your daily routine like?

30 JB: Daily routine would, we had two weeks, six o'clock in the morning to six
31 o'clock at night on shift. We'd get up somewhere in neighborhood of 4:30 or 5:00, had

1 morning formation, breakfast, and then go to work at the comm. Centers. Sometimes
2 fatigue duty and work until lunch time, come back to the company area for lunch, go
3 back until 1800, then we'd be relieved and then go down and have chow at 1800.
4 Sometimes we'd have chow at 1700 if something different was going on, just a reverse
5 was true at night though, we had a night shift from 1800 to 0600 in the morning, and the
6 only time we left there was to go to the latrine or to what go to what we called Midnight
7 Chow.

8 RV: You didn't work both shifts did you?

9 JB: Off and on, yes. Well, we sometimes did, yes. Once or twice a week we'd
10 have guard duty or a recon patrol or something like that.

11 RV: Okay, so you actually went out in the field a few times.

12 JB: Yes. Guard duty was a relief, that was kind of, you got away from the,
13 believe it or not, the high stress of communications center. Guard duty was really pretty
14 good. You got to sit in a bunker and watch tracer rounds go over your head, things of
15 that nature.

16 RV: Would you say its stressful in the center?

17 JB: Let me give you an example. We would get flash messages through, flash
18 messages had to be perfect and they had to be transmitted with the greatest of alacrity.
19 There was one kind of flash message called a red rocket. That term used to be classified
20 by the way. Red rockets originated from the Pentagon or from the White House and they
21 had to reach their ultimate destination, wherever it was in the world in twenty minutes.
22 We practiced expediting red rockets.

23 RV: Twenty minutes from the time you received it or from the time it was sent?

24 JB: From the time it was sent. It had to reach its destination in twenty minutes,
25 and we practiced that constantly. That was *the* priority message, worldwide and we
26 actually had a red rocket come through one night but we were all at, we had to get things
27 right because people's lives were at stake and it was constantly working, you never
28 stopped working and you could hear, when I first started when I went back to the hooch
29 to try to go to sleep I can hear that equipment and it really drove me crazy until I really
30 got used to eventually and it was stressful.

31 RV: How many of these red rocket messages would you have, average?

1 JB: We only had when I was there and that's a little bit of a story too. I was the
2 trick chief that night; it was later on after I became a buck sergeant.

3 RV: What do you mean, trick chief?

4 JB: The leader of that shift of about four or five guys, and that night, it was a
5 Saturday night and there were only three of us available, the other guys were, I don't
6 remember, I guess they were on guard duty or something, maybe CQ I don't remember.
7 Anyway there were only three of us, and I had to go do some work on a secure telephone
8 system, which I really didn't know how to do much.

9 RV: You mean repair it or?

10 JB: Well, it was to change it over to where it would be secure, a secure card was
11 placed in the apparatus and I was the only one on the trick that could do that. The other
12 guy went to chow and we left a guy there back in comm., we only had one guy in the
13 comm. center when that red rocket came through. He was the worst dud in the whole
14 company, literally and he handled it perfectly. He saved all our lives, he really did.

15 RV: Do you remember what it said, the red rocket message?

16 JB: I really don't remember. I wish I did; I really don't. I do know that it
17 originated with the White House and it went to all of our divisions. This guy was able to.

18 RV: He got it dispersed properly.

19 JB: He got it dispersed beautifully; I mean it couldn't have been better. He rose
20 to the occasion, and I almost passed out when I found out we had a red rocket with that
21 guy coming through, but he really did a good job.

22 RV: Okay, sir could you tell me about, we discussed a little bit about A
23 Company, kind of what you guys did. How did you see yourself in relation to the other
24 companies that you were with?

25 JB: We were a little bit elitist in that we thought that seventy-two Bravo MOS,
26 was communications center specialist, and we felt as though we were a little better than
27 the other people in the Signal Corps, particularly like, our company was A Company,
28 which was a comm. center company mostly with a few radio people, but B Company
29 were line men and those sorts of people who we thought we were perhaps a little smarter
30 than the others, which is not really a good thing to feel like. I have a good friend who
31 was a linemen in B company who came home right before Tet of '68, which was a little

1 over a year before I got in country and I told him that too. He thought that comm. center
2 people were snobs I guess, he really did.

3 RV: Now was this justified, this feeling?

4 JB: Probably not, probably not, I'm kind of an egalitarian person and I don't think
5 in those terms, but most of the guys did, they really did. Later on I was a member of
6 Strategic Communications Command, when I was at Fort Detrick, Maryland after I got
7 back from Vietnam, and those people really do feel like they're the elite of the Army,
8 they really do, at least they did then. They don't even have that any more, but they sure
9 did back then and they were very snobby people, they really were as far as soldiers go.

10 RV: Tell me about some of the activities, you said you did guard duty and was
11 this during the day or night?

12 JB: It was at night time, it was usually, we had a kind of an informal guard mount
13 somewhere in the neighborhood of probably 1800 or so, and then we'd be inspected by
14 the officer of the day and then we'd be, initially we'd be inspected by the Sergeant of the
15 guard and then he would march us over to the officer of the day to inspect us and it was
16 not a very elaborate inspection as you can imagine in a combat zone. They wanted to
17 make sure we had all of our equipment there and plenty of ammunition and that sort of
18 thing.

19 RV: You carried an M-16?

20 JB: We carried M-14s in most of the time. There's a story about that too.

21 RV: Well, why weren't you carrying M-16s?

22 JB: Before we came in, now this is the story that we were given, we were told by
23 the old guys, the personnel who had been there before us, that about the time we were to
24 be issued M-16s they decided to issue them to the ARVNs, Army of the Republic of
25 Vietnam soldiers. So we never got issued M-16s, it was always M-14s. We had some
26 M-16s, we had some AK-47s, we had some M-2 carbines; we had an M-3 machine gun.
27 Did I say M-1 carbine? M-1 carbine and some of the officers decided when they would,
28 they would be part of the guard mount or go out on patrol or something, we'd carry
29 something like that, the M-1 carbine or an AK-47 or something, or M-16.

30 RV: You actually carried AKs?

1 JB: They did, the officers did. The officers actually carried, several of the officers
2 carried AK-47s.

3 RV: Any activities happen? Any memorable activities when you were pulling
4 guard duty?

5 JB: Well, there were all kinds of things.

6 RV: Like what?

7 JB: The second time I was on guard duty, what we would have, we would have a,
8 one was supposed to have two hours sleep, two hours awake in a bunker.

9 RV: How many people, you're obviously there with another person?

10 JB: Usually two, sometimes if we were low on personnel just one person. A lot of
11 times I was just by myself in a bunker, sometimes as many as three, three was ideal. And
12 you could sleep in a bunker, at one time I was in a bunker which was covered by two
13 other bunkers on each side of it, so you could sleep and the Sergeant of the guard would
14 wake me up after a couple of hours. Well, the battalion XO who had gotten drunk when,
15 he would get drunk every Saturday night and go out and inspect the perimeter guard.

16 RV: While he was drunk?

17 JB: While he was drunk and he decided that I was sleeping on duty and he kept
18 yelling at me and throwing rocks down into the bunker from outside, and I came out and
19 got chewed out and I'm sure he forgot about it later on and I liked him, he was a good
20 soldier. He was ex-British army by the way. But I got chewed out for sleeping on guard
21 duty when I was supposed to. We had, gosh all kinds of things happen. We would, right
22 after I became a sergeant, first time I was sergeant of the guard, guard duty was like from
23 1900 to 0700 and about 1900 it started getting dark. Between our perimeter, which was
24 concertina wire and claymore mines, those sorts of things protect your perimeter, there
25 was a road and there's another series of, part of the fortification for the perimeter, which
26 was more concertina wire, those sorts of things. Well, there was a captain walking
27 without any kind of weapon, without a flak vest, without a helmet, without anything,
28 walking down, after hours when he shouldn't have been there, walking between on the
29 rope between the concertina wire and when he came close to our, we had a little road that
30 was access to that road where he was walking right next to the company command
31 bunker where I was sergeant of the guard. The officer of the day came up and was

1 talking to me and I glanced over his shoulder and saw the captain coming down and I
2 yelled for him to halt, who was there, advance and be recognized, went through the whole
3 thing and he started giving me a lot of trouble. He kept trying to see what my rank was
4 and my load bearing equipment and my flak vest was over my collar rank and I could tell
5 he was a captain and I was very respectful, called him sir, but was very adamant about his
6 not walking out there. I told him, "You could get killed." In fact I had uncapped my
7 holster on my .45 when he started walking up to emphasize that I really meant business,
8 that he couldn't do that. So I got one of my troops to escort him around the back of our
9 perimeter to the next company down. The next morning on our bulletin board,
10 Congratulations Sergeant Bussey on the way you conducted yourself on guard and all
11 that kind of stuff. I never did know if he was a plant and trying to check us out, I don't
12 think he was. I think it was a dufus that was just walking through there. One night on
13 guard duty, one morning on guard duty at about 0600 we went to morning chow, half the
14 guard would go in for chow, then it would go out and the other half would go in until
15 0700. I was sitting with the first group in the mess hall and we could hear rockets, 122
16 millimeter rockets and they were impacting on Bien Hoa air base and we could hear
17 boom, boom in the distance, explosions. We went out and we could see, we couldn't see
18 Bien Hoa air base, we could see about where Bien Hoa air base was and there were
19 columns of smoke, which eventually from Bien Hoa air base covered the entire from
20 horizon to horizon, from a magnesium turned to smoke, whatever this material was, when
21 it kind of percolate down it would sting the eyes, it was unpleasant on the eyes.
22 Apparently it had hit aircraft in revetments and that was one of my experiences on guard
23 duty. Also one night from a distance, this was the summer of '69, I was in a bunker and I
24 was the awake type guy, I never did go to sleep on guard duty much, once in a while I
25 would.

26 RV: Why not?

27 JB: I'm a night person, I like the night, I love the night. Believe it or not I like to
28 stay up, so I stayed up, I'd sometimes take the other guys guard. Now if we were on red
29 alert everybody was.

30 RV: You're the perfect person to have on guard duty actually.

1 JB: I was the perfect person on guard duty, I didn't want to sleep and I liked that
2 stuff. But in the distance and I hate to admit this, its beautiful, there's an ARVN POW
3 camp, and I'm not sure, maybe seven, eight, ten clicks away from our base camp, but it
4 was hit by ground assault and you could see the flares and you could see explosions and
5 hear explosions. I hate to admit this and I've never told this to anyone, it was fascinating
6 to see when it wasn't directed at you. When one didn't have to experience it himself it
7 was fascinating to see and you could see it very vividly. That's one of my most vivid
8 memories of Vietnam is seeing that ground assault, and it didn't last very long, it didn't
9 last twenty minutes, and they had attack helicopters back over, that was about the time
10 that the Cobras were deployed to Vietnam and they were obviously, in fact one of the
11 Cobras went from our base camp, took off from our base camp about that time and went
12 over that direction.

13 RV: Did you see the actual helicopters?

14 JB: You could actually see the helicopters. You could actually see a Puff the
15 Magic Dragon attack one night, where you could see the tracer rounds; the solid line of
16 tracer rounds and that was frightening even those it was directed against someone else. It
17 frightened me to see, I'm just glad it wasn't us being attacked that way. I hate to admit
18 but that was interesting too. I hate to admit but it's fascinating actually. We had an
19 officer one night who was from A Company, my company; he was a West Point graduate
20 and a really good officer. He was an officer who was respected and liked by the troops,
21 that sort of thing. He got drunk; he went to B Company's, part of their perimeter and
22 started setting off claymore mines at monkeys. He got through doing that and he went
23 over to what we call the battalion theater, it was some [logs to sit on] in front of some
24 boards painted white for a sixteen millimeter movie screen, and it started shooting at the,
25 I forgot what he was saying, he started shooting his .45 at the "movie screen," at the
26 people on the screen. He disappeared, he was sent to Hill 837, he got reassigned there, it
27 not supposed to be a good assignment, and I hated to see him go but they reassigned him.
28 The next day he was gone.

29 RV: So what other activities besides guard duty, you said you went on some
30 patrols?

1 JB: We went on some recon patrols and basically it was just back to the jungle,
2 and everybody had to do recon patrols periodically, it was our duty. We were a tactical
3 signal unit and we were taught to do patrolling and we were expected to defend our own
4 facility and that was part of doing that.

5 RV: How often would you go on these?

6 JB: You know I'm really not sure, I think its about once every three or four
7 weeks that we did. Guard duty was much more often than that, but on patrols like that,
8 that's about right.

9 RV: It was like platoon size or company size?

10 JB: It was a lot smaller, it was like oh maybe a reinforced squad sized, that's
11 basically what it was.

12 RV: Would you go out for just a day?

13 JB: We'd go out for just, yes, and I think like it was, like 0700 to 0700. I
14 remember I had to have a picture made for a security badge and I'd just come back off a
15 recon patrol and excuse the impression, but I looked like hell and I went over and had
16 that picture made and the extra pictures I sent to my wife and she couldn't believe that I
17 looked so bad but I was dirty and scroungy looking.

18 RV: Did you ever have any contact with the enemy?

19 JB: Yes, once or twice we did.

20 RV: Can you describe that?

21 JB: Yes, we were, we would be sometimes, we weren't ambushed by maybe a
22 unit type ambush, we would be ambushed believe it or not by individuals or two or three
23 and one time there were several of us who were shot at by a guy that just popped up out
24 of the bush and started firing his AK-47 and bless his heart, he couldn't, he fired over our
25 heads. He was killed by the way, but it was that sort of thing, there was no big deal, I
26 guess I say this elaborate ill-shaped ambush or anything like that where I was.

27 RV: How did you feel out there in the bush on these?

28 JB: It was scary, it was always scary, it was very scary at nighttime especially. In
29 fact when I got back I, it was kind of tough for me even to go out and empty the garbage
30 or something like that sometimes at night. Sometimes I'd get that crawly feeling, you

1 know that you get when you did that, that was just me. Even on a night person, that
2 wasn't fun at night.

3 RV: What did they tell you to look out for the most?

4 JB: At the time that I was there, for example we were not, we didn't go on the
5 trails, we went up in the jungle beside the trails because the trails were booby- trapped
6 and theoretically the jungle wasn't. Well that changed when I was there, and we had to
7 go back on the trail because then they started booby trapping the sides of the trails and
8 the main thing we had to look out for, for us was the booby-traps with grenades with trip
9 wires. Basically what they did, they would take a cylinder that the grenade had been
10 stored in, put the grenade in there, remove the handle of the grenade, the pin was still in
11 it, a little loosed and attach that to a trip wire and then when one came through the jungle
12 and the trip on the trip wire pulled the grenade out of the cylinder and it would explode,
13 and that was what we had to look out for. Plus we had to watch out on guard duty that
14 we actually had claymore mines that were turned facing us, instead of out towards the
15 enemy, we had to watch out for that too.

16 RV: Did anybody ever hit a trip wire when you were out on patrol?

17 JB: Yes, we had a couple people. One guy flat out would not have lived if it
18 hadn't been for a Lieutenant that we had right there that was the best person I ever saw
19 with the first aid. He took over and he was the medic and he did a super job. The guy
20 had his foot blown off and some other wounds, but basically it was what they call a
21 traumatic amputation sort of thing. We didn't have many punji stakes, that was kind of a
22 passé in my area by the time I was there in '69. Most of the time it was those grenades
23 like that.

24 RV: What was your impression of the enemy?

25 JB: Basically I respected the enemy. I thought the NVA were good soldiers.
26 They had a really good reputation in our area. The 10th Division, the 10th ARVN division
27 didn't have as good a reputation. It was, one of the terms we used in Vietnam was
28 something bad was number ten, and the 10th division had that epithet of being number
29 ten, but the enemy, particularly the ARVN enemy were very highly respected, or rather
30 the NVA, yes NVA. The VC weren't very much. We didn't respect them at that time, in
31 my area. There weren't that many at that time in my area, it was mostly NVA.

1 RV: What did you think of the ARVN?

2 JB: Most of the ARVNs I thought were probably fairly good, the only thing is I'm
3 tempering that because most of the guys we bumped into were 10th Division and they
4 were obviously not very good. They had.

5 RV: They were poorly led or poorly trained or poorly motivated?

6 JB: Both, poorly motivated primarily. That was the impression we got, whether it
7 was valid or not I'm not sure but that's what we thought at the time. I think there is
8 some, much validity to it.

9 RV: Do you think there is or is not?

10 JB: There was, I think there was some validity for the 10th ARVN division. Some
11 of the others were pretty good at that time, in our area at least. I had a friend down in the
12 9th Division down at Dong Tam on the Delta and he despised and hated the NVA and VC
13 and didn't think they were very good soldiers, but I think he was pre-judging them in a
14 way which was probably not, like I say not very valid. But I had an impression that they
15 were good professional soldiers, most of us did in my unit.

16 RV: How would you rate your leadership, your immediate supervisors and
17 then the upper echelon?

18 JB: My first platoon sergeant was one of the best soldiers I've ever known. The
19 next one I got was the only other Texan I ever served with in the Army and he even had
20 an aunt who lived in Levelland, he was a Texan actually. I didn't like him very much.
21 My platoon leader and the other officers I respected and liked a great deal. My battalion
22 commander was one of the finest human beings I've ever known. For example, he would
23 know one's name, no matter whether they were PFCs or whether they were whatever
24 rank. He would say for example, "Specialist Bussey, how are you today?" "I'm fine sir,
25 how are you?" "Fine, how's your wife Sharon? Is Sharon still feeling bad about the loss
26 of your baby?" "No, sir she's feeling better now." And he would know those details like
27 that and he knew that on all the men. He had a marvelous memory. He was a helicopter
28 pilot and reputedly a good helicopter pilot. He knew everyone's MOSs in the battalion
29 fairly well. He could talk to the troops without being patronizing and that used to gripe
30 me a great deal because some of the other officers would say the lower enlisted men say

1 such and such and that was, I hate to be patronized, what it boiled down to, he'd never do
2 that sort of thing.

3 RV: Do you remember his name?

4 JB: I had it for a minute, now I've forgotten it. I've got it at home, I've got it at
5 home and I can find it. I'd love to know what happened to him, I really would. I
6 remember my company commander who I liked a lot and most of the guys didn't like
7 him too much because he was so strict, but I liked him a lot, Captain Thompson. He was
8 a very good company commander and he liked me and that helped too.

9 RV: What about the upper echelon leadership in the United States?

10 JB: I always had confidence in them. We had General Buell was our 2nd Field
11 Force commander. I had a lot of confidence and respected him a lot. I actually saw him
12 a couple of times, I actually failed to salute him and he ignored me, he ignored it. He had
13 a big entourage and he was busy with them, and I remember he glanced me and I looked
14 up and it was too late to salute, he was already turned and he thought what did I not do,
15 but he ignored it. We had heard that he did not ignore that sort of thing. He would go
16 seek one out if you didn't use the proper military courtesy. I liked him a lot, I respected
17 General Abrams a lot, that was his era, and I liked him a lot.

18 RV: Did you ever get to see him?

19 JB: I never did. I wish I had, and he did visit 2nd Field Forces once in a while. I
20 said once in a while, he was there several times and I was there, but I never did get to see
21 him. I didn't get to see Bob Hope either.

22 RV: Yes, that's what kind of USO shows did you get to see?

23 JB: Well, we had some things from, some people from, mostly from places like
24 the Philippines, had a lot of those people there and they were all, most of that that stuff
25 was really pretty good. Bob Hope came and had his Christmas show when I was there in
26 December '69, and we drew lots from the battalion to see who could go over and I don't
27 remember how many did, not too many people got to go over, but it was broadcast on
28 Armed Forces radio, we got to hear it from Long Binh. When I got back home a little
29 over a month later they showed in on television. He had the Bob Hope Show and I got to
30 see the part, his whole tour of Vietnam and part of it was the Long Binh tour, and we got

1 to see that. That was fun. That was one of the better things that I saw, better things that
2 happened actually.

3 RV: You actually went to the show, you saw the show?

4 JB: I didn't get to see it, I just heard it. Some of the other guys in the company
5 did, in the battalion did but I didn't get to see it.

6 RV: Describe life on the base for me, what was it like?

7 JB: Well, it was dirty and hot and we were always thirsty. It was a lot of work;
8 we were working all the time. I remember the first day I got off was, where I had a day
9 off was in May, it was right after Ho Chi Minh died by the way. I remember that I've got
10 a story about in a minute if you'd like. The first day I got any time off was in May. I'd
11 been there since February. Of course I'd gone home on emergency leave in February, I
12 got there in January rather, and May was the first time I got a day off. Some of those
13 guys had been there for a full tour without ever literally having a day off and therefore
14 guard duty was really a relief. Sometimes, some of the guys wanted to go on the recon,
15 just to get away from base camp sometimes. But we would get up in the morning and go
16 to work, go to chow, come back, it was, most of the time it was pretty boring. In the
17 evening, if you didn't have to work at nights there was always a movie except I think
18 either Sunday or Monday nights, we had a battalion movie. In fact our company clerk, I
19 think, from what I remember, I was thinking about the other day I think he saw every
20 movie they ever showed there. He was a real movie buff; he had been a reporter for one
21 of the St. Louis newspapers, he had just gotten the job when he got drafted, and he was a
22 graduate of University of Nebraska by the way. And he, he went to every movie that was
23 there, but that was part of the routine, just going to the movie. I bought a TV after I got
24 back off emergency leave. There were only two of us that had TVs in the hooch. I had
25 one, which was big enough for one to see. I bought the TV and we'd watch TV in the
26 evenings sometimes. I loved *Star Trek*, *Combat* was still on when I first got the TV and
27 that was by far the most popular show for an Armed Forces group with television?

28 RV: *Combat*?

29 JB: *Combat*, I don't know if you're familiar. There was a show back in the late
30 '50s, early '60s about a World War Two infantry squad in France, in World War Two

1 and that was basically what it was about and I cannot think of the actor's name, anyway
2 that was very popular in Vietnam.

3 RV: So you were able to watch TV?

4 JB: Yes, we were able to watch?

5 RV: What stations did you get?

6 JB: Just one, Armed Forces out of Saigon and what happened is, I bought the TV
7 and I was trying to figure out how to get some kind of antenna, we had a scrounger in our
8 platoon, this guy rigged up an antenna and has got some coaxial cable and wired me up.
9 We put in a place in the hooch where everybody could kind of get their lawn chairs and
10 kind of sit around and watch TV. I saw the moon landing there for example and I'm still
11 a TV-addict. I read a lot, I'll always have the TV or something going on, so I had that
12 TV, I was the only one in there that had the TV set up, and it was kind of the community
13 television. But we'd watch TV, I read a lot, I read history and science fiction and a lot of
14 things actually, biographies.

15 RV: Did they provide you books?

16 JB: Yes, we had a lot of books. Our first sergeant really believed in soldiers being
17 able to enjoy reading because he liked it. He was a Korean and World War Two veteran
18 and I don't remember how many stars he had in his CIB badge, but anyway he was a
19 combat veteran for all three wars, but he believed in people being able to read and having
20 that access. Also, we had a pretty good, comparatively pretty good library and I got a lot
21 of my history from there. I also bought some books there at some of the PXs around the
22 area. I always, when I got a chance I went to the PXs, and sought out place where I could
23 buy books and I bought a lot of books on Asian history, Vietnamese history, and I liked
24 biographies and I learned some sociology when I was there too. Basically that was it and
25 most of the time it was boring. I tried to write my wife everyday, and I tried write my
26 parents most every day, but it was usually every two or three days I wrote my parents and
27 my sisters. My dad didn't like to write and you couldn't tell what he wrote anyway, so he
28 sent me tape recordings and he sent those fairly frequently to me and I was able to listen
29 to them about once a week, I had a little tape, he bought me a tape recorder before I left
30 for that very reason.

31 RV: Did you ever do any MARS call back?

1 JB: One, not too long before I came home. I don't know, several weeks before I
2 said hey, I want to make a call, and they set me up to do it and they got the call, I just had
3 come in, I don't know where I'd been but it was a day off and I'd been doing something
4 somewhere and I came into the hooch and they said, "Hey, hurry, you got your MARS
5 call through," and I was able to talk to Sharon, my wife for a few minutes. It was very
6 disconcerting for her to have to say over. "How are you hon? Over." "I love you, hon.
7 Over" that sort of thing. I still, it's hard for me to maintain composure thinking about it,
8 that was a very important thing that happened to me, that MARS call. It boosted my
9 morale immeasurably.

10 RV: Really?

11 JB: Yes, I still even get teary-eyed just thinking about it.

12 RV: And that was two weeks before you left?

13 JB: Two or three weeks, yes.

14 RV: Why did it have such a profound affect upon you, I guess for obvious
15 reasons.

16 JB: Yes, I loved Sharon and I missed her and Sharon was always constantly
17 worried about me, and I wanted to talk to her very badly and it really had, like I say it had
18 a profound effect on me. It was bittersweet and it was kind of a precursor to my going
19 home, that was kind of a little bit of sweetening before the dessert in going home. I guess
20 maybe if I can use that kind of metaphor. But that was a good thing, that was very
21 important for other troops to have that.

22 RV: Could you do this whenever you wanted to or?

23 JB: It was very, very, sometimes the guys never could get it done. What
24 happened is the, we had a radio that was a MARS radio there on base camp, in fact one of
25 the guys in our platoon was the main radio operator for it. His nickname was Watussie
26 because he was a black guy and he was extremely tall, he probably was at the upper limit
27 of being able to be in the Army actually, and he was a really good radio operator. What
28 would happen is that he would make the call and he would find ham operators, the ham
29 operator I had was in Hawaii, maybe Guam, Guam, Hawaii and then I think somewhere
30 in California and it seems like there was another place, and they would call one ham
31 operator after another until they got down to the telephone, wherever it was, and they

1 called Sharon, this was something like two o'clock in the morning for her and about two
2 o'clock in the afternoon for me and like I say, it wasn't a very pleasing experience
3 because she just got out of bed and she couldn't really talk to me really the way she
4 wanted to and she had to say that over stuff and she still gripes about it actually.

5 RV: What did you guys do for entertainment, besides you had a TV?

6 JB: There wasn't much. Television, movies, I saw a lot of movies there. I loved
7 movies anyway; I saw a lot of movies when I was there. I read, we listened, we had
8 Armed Forces radio, which was really important, somebody in the hooch always had
9 Armed Forces radio, and heard a lot of music and news and things of that nature. We
10 heard the Good Morning, Vietnam thing. It was, after Cronauer left I guess they kept that
11 tradition alive because it seems like it was 0600 in the morning, somebody would come
12 and say the good morning, Vietnam like he did.

13 RV: Were you able to keep up with news back in the United States?

14 JB: Yes, very much so. We had the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper, I got *Newsweek*
15 magazine and we had Armed Forces radio and television, both had pretty good news
16 desks and it would be for example, it would be like, they would call themselves, "This is
17 Air Force Sergeant Smith with the six o'clock news," or whatever, and then they would
18 give a basic news broadcast as though it was back home, except the guy would be in
19 jungle fatigues. That's basically; we kept up very much so, that way. For example
20 Chappa-quiddick, that incident happened when I was there. The Sharon Tate murder was
21 there, we heard about Woodstock. Gosh there's so much, the moon landing, gosh '69
22 was a significant year. Nixon sent troops home, we all knew that we were going to go
23 home too.

24 RV: Yes, tell me about that, what did you think of U.S. policy at this point, the
25 starting of the Vietnamization policy, turning the war over to the Vietnamese?

26 JB: Exactly, which we in the unit thought that was a very good idea because we
27 thought we'd get to go home, primarily for that reason. I thought that was a good idea
28 personally at the time because I thought that was the type of policy that we should have
29 been maybe practicing all along, more of the Vietnamization rather than having us carry
30 so much of the burden anyway. And I thought that was a smart move at the time actually,
31 personally.

1 RV: Did you feel like the ARVN could, or the Vietnamese forces could actually
2 do the job?

3 JB: Frankly, I and the other people knew that within ten years that would, it
4 would be a Communist country, it was a lot less than that. That's what we thought at the
5 time. I personally and most of us didn't think anything would really work at that time, at
6 that point. I thought Nixon's attempt at what he was trying to do, starting late summer,
7 early fall of '69 was the appropriate thing to do at the time but I really wasn't very
8 optimistic frankly.

9 RV: What did you think of Richard Nixon?

10 JB: At the time I thought he was a good president. I wasn't a very strong
11 Republican, I was still fairly liberal. I was giving him the benefit of the doubt and hoping
12 that he would do a good job, and I really thought at the time he might be doing a good
13 job, does that make sense the way I'm saying it, because that's what my feelings were at
14 that time. Later on I deplored some of the things he did, but at the time I really thought he
15 was doing a good job, later on I thought Kissinger was doing a good job too, when he
16 came aboard.

17 RV: You were aware that the Paris Peace Talks had started, were going on.

18 JB: Exactly, yes sir and I was such a pessimist at that time I didn't think they
19 would go anywhere that would be advantageous to us, at least that was my opinion. We
20 were very aware, at least we were in my unit at the time that I was there, of things that
21 were going on around us, at least my friends and I were.

22 RV: What would you say the morale was of your fellow troopers?

23 JB: We were always in pretty good morale. We always wanted to go home. We
24 perhaps didn't like what we were doing so much, but we didn't mind doing it and
25 basically we were, within the context of being in a combat zone, we were basically happy
26 people, happy group, we really were. I constantly wanted to come home but I was
27 basically just, things were okay.

28 RV: Were there any racial tensions within your platoon?

29 JB: Not in my platoon, between B Company and A Company there was some. In
30 my platoon, in my section--my squad, my section, there were four guys who were
31 African-Americans, and those four guys were among the top ten friends that I had. All of

1 us liked each other in A company, the races did, there was not that, you always hear
2 about the racial tensions in the Vietnam War, I didn't see that except there was some
3 problems between some of our guys and some of the African-Americans in B Company.

4 RV: What did you see, what happened?

5 JB: Well. Let me give you an example. One of my really good friends was a guy
6 names Matson. Matson was a.

7 RV: Mad, M-A-D, Madsen?

8 JB: Mat, M-A-T-S-O-N, Matson, that's hard for me to say. Matson was a guy
9 from Minnesota and he was a tall, very amiable good-natured sort of human being until
10 he got drunk. He was an extremely obnoxious drunk.

11 RV: White guy or black guy?

12 JB: White guy. And he would go over at the B company and fraternize with those
13 people or B company, whatever those people were, it didn't matter the race and he'd
14 antagonize them and some of the black guys really too offense at some of the things he
15 did, and sometimes would go out looking for him, that sort of thing would happen every
16 once in a while. And one of my really good friends was a guy who had graduated from
17 Syracuse University. Later on he was a principal by the way because in Syracuse, got his
18 jaw broken because he was trying to break up a fight between a black guy and a white
19 guy both from B Company who were drunk and fighting each other and shouting racial
20 epithets at each other. He tried to break them up and both of them hit him and one of
21 them broke his jaw, just a little anecdotal.

22 RV: But in your company you didn't have any problems?

23 JB: Yes, we didn't have any problems at all. Tucker, a guy named Tucker and
24 Chunky, Chunky I have no idea his name, one of my most favorite human beings I've
25 ever known. I loved Chunky he was a nineteen and then twenty year old, best chess
26 player I've ever seen.

27 RV: Chunky?

28 JB: Chunky was his nickname and I had no idea what his real name was, from
29 Cincinnati, Ohio and he was kind of a very, very intelligent, but unlettered guy that, like I
30 say he's the best chess player I've ever seen. He beat everybody in the company, he'd
31 learned to play chess when he was in Vietnam, picked it up and just was good at it. We

1 had a guy, Cothran from Philadelphia who loved jazz and Bobby Troop was his hero. He
2 was a black guy. Then we had a guy from Mississippi, a guy named Tucker and Tucker
3 just about got along with everybody. He had, Tucker had a kind of, let's just say this, a
4 way of rebelling against the system, not the big rebellion, it was little rebellion, he had a
5 little goatee right under his lower lip, which was against regulations but for some reason
6 nobody ever noticed. I think he always hoped somebody would. But those are my
7 buddies; those are some of my better friends right there.

8 RV: Have you kept in touch with them at all?

9 JB: Not really. I haven't even kept in touch with Ray Will Krieger. I've lost
10 Krieger somewhere. I don't even know where he is. I keep doing Internet searches,
11 trying to find some of those guys and my problem is I don't know their names now. Soon
12 after I got back, I had an address book and I lost it, and it may still be somewhere but I
13 haven't found it. That was one of the great tragedies of my life is losing that address
14 book but I wanted to keep track of everybody but I didn't, I know.

15 RV: Did you see any alcohol abuse or drug abuse?

16 JB: In my company, in 1969, we didn't have drug abuse, very much. We had
17 about four or five, maybe maximum five or six, maybe six, that were the druggies and the
18 rest of us really avoided them, in my platoon, my company, not platoon, just company.
19 They, I was friends with them but I was never one of them. I tried to be friends with
20 everybody, frankly but they kind of stayed to themselves and they didn't have security
21 clearances and they were the ones who, because that they were known drug abusers and
22 one of them actually spent about six months hard time over at Long Binh jail for drug
23 abuse.

24 RV: They didn't get their security clearances because they were known drug
25 users?

26 JB: They lost their security clearances, so they couldn't be in the comm. center, so
27 what they were, they filled sandbags and repaired bunkers and built bunkers. In fact we
28 had a concrete bunker after awhile, they built. We had a little bit of alcoholism, we had a
29 guy from North Carolina who was, I didn't realize it at the time, later on I realized the
30 guy was rip-roaring fall down in the gutter drunk, he really was. Some of the orders I've
31 got has his name on there, otherwise I couldn't remember his name, but we had a lot of

1 drinkers, we didn't have too many that really abused it very much. I abused it twice, as I
2 discussed a while ago the first time I got there and then right before I came home. The
3 guys decided they were going to get the old teacher drunk and they did and it didn't take
4 them long to do it either. And by the way, because I had been a teacher and I was a little
5 bit older the guys didn't expect me to do the gin and sin bit with them, you know? I
6 wasn't expected to go the prostitutes, I wasn't expected to be, drink a lot, they expected
7 me to be a good guy. That first day off I alluded to awhile ago, I went with our motor
8 messengers, about three or four times a week we had motor messengers that drove into
9 MACV headquarters in Saigon, and they were always wanting somebody to ride shotgun
10 with them, they had the driver and the assistant driver who was a gunner, and they always
11 wanted one or two other guys that could get off and go as any kind of casual shotgun to
12 man the M-60 machine gun, that kind of thing. Anyway a friend of mine and I decided
13 we were going to go into Saigon, we were going to do some sightseeing, wanted to see
14 the big city and so we went into Saigon. Well, they took us on a tour, we got to go
15 MACV headquarters and they had even plush toilets and air conditioning, that was
16 fabulous stuff in there. It was sort of civilized; it was clean. People were walking around
17 with freshly pressed uniforms and all this sort of thing. It was like the country boys
18 coming in. We got to go to Chu Lon and Tu Do street and they took us to bar and the
19 guys were good guys, they didn't drink they just wanted to have a coke, it was kind of a
20 stop before they went back to base camp back there, 2nd Field Force base camp. We got
21 in there and there some prostitutes in there, in the bar. One of the prostitutes came over
22 and sat down on my lap and one of the other guys said, "Leave Bussey alone, he's a
23 married man." And she said, "Okay" and she quit talking amorously to me and started
24 discussing, Ho Chi Minh had just died recently and she started discussing in broken
25 English the concept of Ho Chi Minh going to hell. [Laughs]

26 RV: Is this your Ho Chi Minh story?

27 JB: This is the Ho Chi Minh story. [Still laughing]. And so it was, I had to always
28 tell about the Saigon prostitute and I had a discussion, a great philosophical debate on Ho
29 Chi Minh going to hell.

30 RV: Did she think he was going?

31 JB: She thought he was going to hell.

1 RV: Did you think he was going?

2 JB: I didn't have any idea. [Laughs]. I suspect at that time his mother didn't think
3 he was going to hell, if she had been alive. But I went along with her in the discussion.

4 RV: What were your impressions of Saigon?

5 JB: Saigon was a wonderful city. I was there then and I think one or two other
6 times, I went through there on R & R when I left Tan Son Nhut air base to Japan, and I
7 loved every minute I was in Saigon. I thought it was exciting city, it was, beautiful
8 architecture, the people were basically friendly, happy people. This is, how should I say
9 this, this is a superficial sort of thing, the impression I got but I really think there's some
10 validity to it. I loved it every time; I wish I could have been there a lot more. And some
11 day I'm hoping to go back frankly, I want to go back and mainly want to go to Saigon
12 and I'd like to go that whole area around there some day but I really, the main thing I
13 want to do is go back to Saigon. I want to see what it looks like now, someday I'm going
14 to I think.

15 RV: Did a lot of people partake in the prostitution?

16 JB: Yes.

17 RV: It was pretty common?

18 JB: Almost everybody did except me, to some degree or another.

19 RV: Would they come to the base or did you have to go off base?

20 JB: You had to go off base; you had to go off base. Now, once in a while
21 somebody would sneak in a prostitute. If they got caught they were in extremely bad
22 trouble, but all of us were aware that that was happening and once in a while there would
23 be, and Vietnamese were not authorized to be on there after dark, indigenous people
24 weren't.

25 RV: What did you think of the Vietnamese civilians?

26 JB: Oh, in the area where I was, frankly I liked the Vietnamese civilians, they
27 were, what I've heard about the southern Vietnamese about being laid back, relaxed,
28 happy, that's the impression I had of the civilians in the area where I was and I liked
29 them a lot. I thought they were basically honest people, and I'm saying all this and I'm
30 sure there were some Vietcong on our base camp, I'm sure there was some Vietcong in
31 those people that were being very friendly to me, but by and large I really, really do

1 believe they were being honestly friendly to us. There were some Catholics in the area
2 that had a tendency I think, at least somewhat anti-Communist if not very anti-
3 Communist in the area, at least that's the impression I got.

4 RV: Okay. Your R & R, you went to Japan you said, what was that like?

5 JB: Well, I wasn't going to go on R & R, I was sending all my money home to my
6 wife and Krieger was too, he was sending it home, he wanted to have a sports car when
7 he got back home, that was his main goal and ultimately he did get a sports car. I was
8 sending all of my money home to my wife so that we could buy stuff for when I got out
9 of the Army; we'd be able to set up a household again. So I wasn't going to go, but
10 towards the end, by December and Krieger and I both were getting real cranky and
11 everybody else had been on R & R and we hadn't and we were really getting, what you
12 might say now, jinky and people started noticing we were getting cranky and hard to get
13 along with, with everybody.

14 RV: Getting jinky?

15 JB: What I would call jinky right now. Hard to get along with and grouchy, oh
16 maybe not always as coherent as one would think we should be, so we needed a break is
17 what it was. So, Krieger went to the First Sergeant and asked First Sergeant if he had
18 could go on R & R in some thing or other. It was easy to get to go to Japan because that
19 was the least popular of the R & R sites, and that fit my purposes entirely because it was
20 cheap, you didn't have to have twelve hundred dollars or something, I took a whole
21 hundred dollars with me and brought about seventy back actually.

22 RV: Really, wow.

23 JB: Yes, believe it or not. I was an old married man and I didn't want to go for
24 the gin and sin like everybody else did when they go to Bangkok or someplace or
25 Sydney. One of my good friends Surfer Boy, by the way that's, I could digress and go
26 off on Surfer Boy for half an hour, went to Sydney. Anyway, so I decided hey, if we got
27 R & R to Camp Sama, Japan so I went and talked to the First Sergeant and he said yes,
28 and next day he had orders cut for us for R & R. He could get us in that quickly and less
29 than a week later I think, it was December the 8th, '69, I went on R & R to the 15th and we
30 was driven down to Tan Son Nhut to the air base down there, now I don't remember, we
31 spent less than a day there, bumped into a friend of mine that I had been to basic training

1 with who had been at Hamburger Hill by the way, they had been wounded at Hamburger
2 Hill and was going on a second R & R. And left Tan Son Nhut air base, went to, flew to
3 Yakuda air base, was that it, Yakuda.

4 RV: Yakuda, sounds familiar.

5 JB: I think, Yakuda air base and we landed there and were driven in the middle of
6 the night to Tokyo to the R &R center there and briefed and then went and took our
7 showers and we rid our clothes, we took our showers and signed up for tours. I wasn't
8 going to do any of that, I was going to sleep. Well, I ended up going every day I was
9 gone on some tour some place, and that tour, that first day was into Tokyo itself and it
10 was Sukiyaki and a stage production and some other things that we did around Tokyo
11 which was fun. We went to Acon National Forest, we went to Mount Fuji, did another
12 tour of Tokyo, including the outside of the emperor's palace, that area in there and I had
13 one of the best times I ever had in my life.

14 RV: Were you able to contact your wife?

15 JB: I wasn't able to then. Some of the guys said that they tried to make calls from
16 there but I never could, I couldn't get through that way.

17 RV: Were you in civilian clothes or?

18 JB: We were in civilian clothes. We weren't allowed to wear our uniforms off
19 post and we, and actually we wore civilian clothes on post too. At night time if we
20 weren't on a tour and having dinner on the economy we went to, there was a really fancy,
21 nice NCO club there and we'd go have dinner there and they always had a stage show
22 there too, in the club itself.

23 RV: You said you went home on emergency leave, tell me about that.

24 JB: Yes. I was in the comm. center one morning, this is I think a Sunday
25 morning, circa 18th of January, 16th, 17th, 18th of January, I've got orders somewhere, I'm
26 sorry February. We could find out it was the day after, I know I had guard duty the night
27 before and it was the first day of Tet of '69, whenever that would have been. Anyway, the
28 next day I went to work, I had guard duty but I still had to go to work at that time, no
29 matter what happened you had to go to work the next day, so I went to work and CO
30 called and sent for me. I went down, reported to the CO and he told me that my wife had
31 had a stillbirth. Our first child was stillborn at term and more than likely she was dead,

1 my wife was dead. This captain was a very direct person. He was old-time NCO that
2 had gotten, was a captain now and he believed in the direct approach and he said it that
3 way, and it was one of those things, it hit me like a ton of bricks frankly. The guy took
4 me over to 9th Replacement Battalion and I was among ten people who were on
5 emergency leave who was immediately assigned to a plane and we went on a plane that
6 afternoon, this was morning and that afternoon and flew from Bien Hoa air base to
7 Okinawa. I've forgotten the air base there, Okinawa to Anchorage, Alaska, across
8 Anchorage to McGuire Air Force, New Jersey, right next to Fort Dix by the way, and
9 went through overseas replacement at Fort Dix, that's where I sneaked in those boots by
10 the way, I showed you awhile ago, sort of smuggled them in actually. That was illegal; I
11 could have gotten in bad trouble for that uniform and the boots and everything. I wasn't
12 doing it to sneak it in; I just wanted to have some footgear. I just left them there after I
13 sneaked them in. At Fort Dix it was in the morning, and when we landed at McGuire Air
14 Force base it was in about two to three feet of snow. The airplane had trouble landing
15 and it scared the hell out of us, it kind of snapped me out, I was going through periods
16 of sitting in my chair worried about my wife or with a blanket over my head crying,
17 because I just knew that she had died in child birth. Well, I got to overseas replacement
18 there at Fort Dix and they checked us out, got our uniforms and didn't give us time to
19 call, they shipped us out. They tried to get those on emergency leave, there were about
20 ten of us as quickly as possible. They sent us over to the airport over at Philadelphia and
21 there, one of the guys on emergency leave was an older, Spec-6 medic, he was a black
22 guy who kind of took me, he noticed I was having trouble, I was really having a lot of
23 trouble and he kind of took me under his wing and kind of helped me get through. I was
24 having trouble calling because I wasn't sure if I could do it, and he nearly forced me to
25 call, in fact he dialed the number for me, called my dad and asked how Sharon was. Dad
26 told me, I'm having trouble right now holding back tears, dad told me she was okay and
27 hurry to come home. And I had trouble getting out, it took me a couple of days to get
28 home because of the bad weather and delayed flights, to make a long story short, they
29 routed us from Philadelphia to Atlanta I think and then New Orleans and then finally into
30 Dallas, and from Dallas into Lubbock, and I got home in time for the funeral. Initially I
31 was up for thirty-day leave just to be with Sharon and we had the funeral the day that I

1 got in, and Sharon was still in the hospital, she was still a little too ill to go the funeral
2 and I went to the funeral and my folks were there and her folks and a few relatives, by the
3 way I still go by and visit that grave site sometimes.

4 RV: Did she know you were coming in?

5 JB: She didn't until; dad had called her. I called my dad and then dad had called
6 Sharon and told her I was coming in. By the way, I hadn't had a shower since when I was
7 in Vietnam the night before, right after guard duty I went and took a shower before I went
8 to work and Sharon had some kind of cologne or something in there and she sprayed it
9 over, I got this, when she was in a hospital they rolled in a little bunk bed and I slept there
10 and she sprayed the area because I smelled bad. I've wondered over the years what I
11 must have smelled like in that hole, those airports and everything coming in. But, I was
12 home for thirty days and the doctor suggested that I might want to stay a little bit longer
13 so he contacted the Red Cross, the Red Cross contacted my unit and the CO gave me
14 permission to stay a couple more weeks, so I was home about six weeks, and there's
15 another story here. Since I came in through Fort Dix overseas replacement, which was
16 very unusual, one usually came in through Travis Air Force base in Oakland, or Fort
17 Lewis Washington or so. Well, I came in through Fort Dix overseas replacement. Well,
18 I thought you had to go back that way, so I went back to Fort Dix and we were at, Fort
19 Dix was mostly an overseas replacement station for Europe, not for Vietnam or for
20 Korea, I don't think even when Korea was there like at Fort Lewis, anyway we were
21 there at Fort Dix for five days. It was an abjectly miserable time, if I hadn't brought
22 some books and somebody had a radio, I'd have gone nuts. Anyway, we were there just
23 languishing, waiting for our plane. We got our flight out and the flight was, instead of
24 going back the way we had come through Anchorage, Alaska and back that way, went
25 across the continent of the United States to Oakland. Well, we started realizing during
26 this flight that we were having a little bit of engine trouble, landed at Oakland and we
27 stayed there an hour, hour and a half and then we took off, went to Honolulu, stayed there
28 an hour and a half, two hours. When we took off from Oakland, we circled San
29 Francisco Bay and the bridge, it was a wonderful tourist thing to do but it was kind of
30 scary because you could hear that engine gaining power and then losing power and then
31 gaining power. I don't know why they kept going with us; I've never figured that out.

1 Rather than taking about twenty-one hours, which was the normal flight time, this took
2 three, four, 35 hours, all total. We went to Honolulu, Guam and I've forgotten and then
3 back into Bien Hoa air base, but that was the longest flight I've ever heard of, from the--
4 and it was, gosh as difficult a flight as I've ever had. I got airsick one time, and I love
5 flying across the Pacific, I absolutely love that. I like to see the islands; I love to see
6 ships down below and the whole thing. Well, I didn't enjoy that flight very much.
7 Anyway.

8 RV: But you got back in country?

9 JB: I got back in and I called my unit, the clerk there at overseas replacement was
10 like most clerks at the time, he was not a people person; he was rude and hard to get
11 along with it. Anyway, he let me have the phone and I called my unit and the guy there,
12 and that clerk I was talking about, company clerk, he was a good friend of mine. He said,
13 "We'll be over there" and I thought he's coming over? So, he and the Jeep driver and
14 another guy came over just to see me. He said. "Bussey, I've got good news and bad
15 news. The good news is you've been promoted to Spec-4, the bad news is that since
16 you've been AWOL, you've got an Article 15 and you've been busted back to E-3." I
17 said, "I wasn't AWOL. Here's my orders." And he got back and he talked to the First
18 Sergeant, First Sergeant talked to the CO and got that straightened out, but they'd already
19 demoted me. They promoted me in March and then April I got demoted again. I was
20 promoted when I was gone, but that was the good news and bad news. He picked me up
21 and from then on I just kind of stayed there. I didn't really pull a whole year tour; there
22 was six weeks that I was stateside.

23 RV: I want to ask a question, did you ever see any wild animals or anything
24 unusual?

25 JB: Well, yes. Well, we had the normal like insects that people hate and we had
26 things like scorpions and that sort of thing. We always heard rumors about things like
27 tigers in the area, I don't know if there were tigers in that area or not. No tiger in his
28 right mind would be caught right in that area. There were monkeys all over the place.
29 There were snakes, and theoretically poisonous snakes in the area.

30 RV: Did you see any?

1 JB: I didn't. I saw monkeys a lot, I saw scorpions and I saw the large
2 cockroaches but I didn't see, I don't know if I saw a poisonous snake or not. I don't
3 remember seeing a poison, its something that I would, I don't know. I don't remember
4 seeing a snake personally. The other guys always said they talked about it, we were
5 supposed to empty our boots out in the morning, worried about scorpions and snakes and
6 things like that. The only thing that I knew of during the night was we always had rats in
7 the hooch, that kind of thing. Guys would leave food items on the floor and the rats
8 would come in and get it, but I don't remember seeing anything but those sorts of things.

9 RV: Looking back at your tour there, what was the most memorable thing?

10 JB: There's so much, its really hard for me. Sometimes I thought about that very
11 thing and I'm not really sure there's so much. It was a most significant point in my life.
12 I'm better for having done it. Being promoted to Sergeant, believe it or not was
13 extremely important. I haven't had that thrill even when I got a Master's Degree, or
14 something like that has happened to me.

15 RV: Why was that?

16 JB: I never expected it to happen, it was somewhat of a surprise that I made
17 Sergeant, and it was something I really wanted and most of the guys really wanted to
18 make Sergeant before they came home, and it was really significant to me. I got an Army
19 commendation though and that was really pretty neat at the time, and that was a
20 significant medal at the time for us. If, in the Signal Corps, this is another Signal Corps
21 attitude, we always thought if you got a Bronze Star if it had been anything else, if it has
22 been combat arms you'd have gotten a Silver Star. If you got Army commendation,
23 ARCOM, it was equivalent to a Bronze Star for someone else, so ARCOM was important
24 to us and I was able to get an ARCOM there and that was very significant. The other
25 guys, except for two of us, we knew we were going to be decorated the day that I got it
26 and the assistant Platoon Sergeant was supposed to have notified everybody and got
27 everybody kind of, in a pretty good, in the best uniform they could have, dressed up for
28 the ceremony, well I didn't know and he didn't know until we got a call, saying "Where's
29 Bussey, where's this other guy. Where are they, they're supposed to be down here?" So
30 I got down there and I came in the orderly room and the CO said, "Sergeant Bussey, how
31 long have you known about this?" I said, "Oh, about ten minutes, sir." He said, "That's

1 what he thought.” And he was mad. He was always mad about something. He wasn’t,
2 except for me, he loved me; he thought I was wonderful. He told me one time he was
3 finally glad to see a good soldier. [Laughs]

4 RV: That’s quite a compliment.

5 JB: That was really big for me, that old fat boy that was in basic training, that
6 really sounded good. Anyway and I got decorated and I had to awfulest looking uniform,
7 boots were ugly, you can’t, I showed you that little picture out there, that uniform was
8 really in bad shape that I was in, you can’t tell by the picture, but I didn’t really look very
9 good in that. In fact the, well those boots could have had a whole lot more work to them
10 than that, but the battalion commander presented to us, that’s his picture that has the
11 tropic lightning combat patch. He was that battalion commander I was talking to you
12 about that was such a good guy, and he was very complimentary during that. Like one of
13 the older soldiers said during the, he said that’s probably the first time he’s seen a real
14 soldier, get out of war like that, but the other guys had worked on their uniforms and I
15 hadn’t of course.

16 RV: When you made Sergeant, how long before you left?

17 JB: I made Sergeant in November and I left in January. I was up, I found I was
18 up for promotion in October but I hadn’t been in the Army long enough. I had to wait
19 another month before I got promoted enough, got promoted, that was a significant thing
20 for me. I’m still proud of it, actually.

21 RV: How did you find out you were leaving? You knew your days, exactly the
22 days?

23 JB: Yes we knew the days. Yes, everyone there knew exactly how many days
24 they had, it was always something like how much time do you have, oh thirty days and a
25 wake-up, it was always that cliché sort of thing, thirty days or fifteen days and a wake up
26 or 120 days and a wake up. Most of the guys had what they call short timer calendars,
27 which was usually a picture of a naked woman drawn with, divided into 365 parts and
28 you colored in the parts. I didn’t have a short timer calendar, by the way I don’t know if
29 you’d want this sort of thing, I have two calendars, the only calendars you could get at
30 that time and where I was in Vietnam and I always put that disclaimer on there, were

1 some Playboy calendars, I had a 1969 Playboy calendar, two of them, desk calendars, I
2 have two of those I brought home. That was the only calendar I had.

3 RV: Sure, we'll take them.

4 JB: I'd at least like to bring one or two of them to you. My daughter discovered
5 that the other day, my wife had to explain to her that's the only calendar your old man
6 could get in Vietnam. But my daughter, excuse me, was looking through some of my
7 things not too long ago and she found that and she was a little bit upset about it I think
8 until her mother explained to her what happened.

9 RV: How did you feel leaving Vietnam?

10 JB: I was happier than a human being could possibly be. I never will forget, we
11 had five days to what we call clear post and we had to be debriefed from the comm.
12 center and sign a paper that we weren't going to divulge any of the classified information,
13 that sort of thing. We had to clear finance and admin and we had to clear supply and all
14 those things, and theoretically we were given five days, which turned out to be about
15 three and half. Those are three and a half to five days of the most happy moments of my
16 life actually, and I never will forget the special feeling I had for that. I never will forget
17 being in the airplane, I got a window seat, and I remember looking out the window and
18 seeing the jungle as we were taking off from Bien Hoa air base, and we'd take off at a
19 real steep angle, I was leaning back and leaning over there and I thought, thank god I'm
20 away from here and I don't know why but we were low enough where I could see when
21 we flew over the coast of the South China Sea I could see that. I said, there, it's gone. I
22 started feeling really good and that was a happy trip home. The other trip I had when I
23 went on emergency leave was the most miserable thing nearly I've ever had in my life,
24 but that was really significant.

25 RV: Quite a contrast.

26 JB: Oh, yes, enormous contrast obviously.

27 RV: How did you adjust when you got back stateside?

28 JB: I adjusted well, some of the guys didn't, I adjusted really well. We, one of the
29 guys I came home with was a guy from Alabama, his name was Baker, he was with the
30 199th Flight Infantry Brigade and he and I knew each other in AIT, and I just bumped into
31 Baker on the way home. I talked to him on the phone and kind of kept track of him, I

1 hadn't seen him. He and his buddy, we came home together, and Baker and I actually
2 flew from Oakland, excuse from San Francisco rather down to Dallas together. He flew,
3 I flew back to Lubbock, he flew on to Mobile, Alabama. Well, Baker was an old roughed
4 up Southern boy who didn't take anything from anybody sort of guy. When we got in the
5 airport there at San Francisco and there was, it was a classic scene, four o'clock in the
6 morning, two o'clock in the morning, whatever it was, the soldiers obviously from
7 Vietnam, they had the medals and all the stuff on their uniforms and the hippies said, they
8 didn't say anything to us but they acted like they were coming close to saying something.
9 Baker was primed and ready for them. I got a little bit of that when I came home. I had a
10 few bad dreams, we had a lot of incoming the last four or five months I was in Vietnam
11 on our base camp. We had.

12 RV: Rocket attacks?

13 JB: Rocket attacks, yes mostly, mostly rocket attacks, and I used to have bad
14 dreams about those a lot. But I just noticed, it didn't take me long to get over it. I wasn't
15 one of those heavy-duty combat veterans that still carry it with them. But I adjusted well.
16 I'm not sure what to say. There's so many things that were easy for me but are still hard
17 sometimes, sometimes some of the attitudes of people still bother me.

18 RV: Such as?

19 JB: It's the common thing, I'm sure you've heard billions of times now. People
20 assuming because you're a Vietnam veteran that you were a baby-killing, drug--You
21 know? I still get that. I had a principal after I came back home after I was out of the
22 Army, I had a principal that asked me and I thought he knew me better than this, asked
23 me what was it like, I forgot what drug he mentioned, heroin or something, what it was
24 like to do it. He assumed because I was a veteran that I had been a druggie. I've never
25 been a druggie in my life. I was very angry with him and told him I was angry, but you
26 would get that sometimes. When I'd get the, when I worked on my Master's Degree
27 there was a little bit of animosity for undergraduates towards veterans when I was
28 working on my Master's. Most of the graduate students didn't feel that way, at least they
29 didn't let me know if they felt that way, sometimes one wonders. Every once in a while
30 we'd bump into another veteran and hey, welcome home brother, that kind of thing. But
31 over the years there have been some things, it's gotten to the point where I think I am,

1 like a lot of veterans, I sometimes don't trust other people in their attitudes when they
2 find out I'm a veteran. One of my favorite people, who was one of my fellow teachers, I
3 really respected whom I had known for about three or four years, found out I was a
4 Vietnam veteran and he said, "I didn't know you were, I thought you were such a nice
5 guy you couldn't be a Vietnam veteran." That was staggering, that was really
6 overwhelming. How could someone think that? Have that kind of presupposition, that
7 bigotry; that would think that. I had a superintendent that I felt like killing one time. In
8 1991 the summer, my daughter who was a sophomore in high school, she and some
9 friends, she and some classmates got relatives who had been Korean War veterans,
10 Vietnam veterans, World War II veterans and one veteran from the Gulf War who had
11 come home, to ride in a parade there during Petersburg, a time called Petersburg Day, it
12 was in August. And I rode in the parade and waved and that sort of thing. I was the only
13 Vietnam veteran there. Well, that afternoon this superintendent whom I lost all respect
14 for said something to the effect that, "How can Vietnam veterans do something like that,
15 ride in a parade and feel good about themselves when they lost the War?" And I tried to
16 explain to him, I'm trying not to use filthy expletives, which I did use in front of him, that
17 we didn't lose the War. I was a soldier in the Army and we didn't lose the War, our part
18 of the war we actually I think won. That's neither here nor there, but that sort of attitude,
19 most of all you still get that some. We had a person in Lubbock, I think in the late '80s,
20 an obviously psychotic person who killed his social worker and a policeman. One of the
21 radio announcers, my wife heard on the radio, one of the radio announcers assumed that
22 he must be a Vietnam veteran because he had gone crazy and started shooting people. I
23 used to get that stuff all the time, nothing used to make me madder than that. I'm like,
24 I'm sure you've heard these stories a billion times, the same sort of things. I've had all
25 those experienced, those things. No, just the point of that concept, people having these
26 silly presuppositions about us. I firmly believe that the people that I served with, in the
27 area that I served, were as fine an example of American youth, as there is anywhere, I
28 really do. That's just my experience. I have a good friend who's a Vietnam veteran who
29 at one time taught with me. He was in the, I've forgotten the division he was in, he was
30 an infantryman in '72. By that time apparently the discipline had broken down, the drug
31 problem was getting severe, he was the only one in his company who wasn't a druggie,

1 the only one. He'd been raised in a pretty strict, he was a Puerto Rican, raised in a very
2 strict environment back home, he didn't do anything like that, but his friends did. I don't
3 think he was lying, I think it was probably true.

4 RV: How did you feel in April of 1975 when the country fell?

5 JB: Extremely sad. Its really hard to describe, so much had been lost. In that time
6 I thought so much had been lost for nothing sometimes, and some times I still feel that
7 way. However, I'm not sure, it's really too early in history I think to determine some of
8 the questions that we have about the War. A lot if its twenty-five, thirty years down the
9 line or between twenty-five and thirty years, and that's still too early. Did we lose the
10 war, I don't know? I don't know if history's going to determine that eventually or not,
11 it's too early to know. Maybe I'm rationalizing but I still really feel really strongly that
12 it's true.

13 RV: What kind of lessons do you think the United States learned from the War?

14 JB: Well, I think of one of the lessons that we learned was exemplified by the war
15 we had in the Gulf to get the support of the people, support of the Congress, to have the
16 overwhelming course to have a concrete goal, and to expedite it as officially as possible
17 and accomplish as quickly and as expeditiously as possible, with as much force as
18 necessary.

19 RV: That was our mistake in Vietnam?

20 JB: For me, that was our mistake, among some other mistakes, that was our
21 mistake. I think, sometimes I think we had had, I still think the idea that the
22 Vietnamization concept was a good concept and I wish that we had started earlier and
23 had maybe made a more concerted effort to make it work, and I'm saying all these things
24 and I'm really not sure. I'm not enough of an expert to really know, but that's just the
25 feeling, the impression I have I guess more than anything else. I still think that all those
26 things are still a toss-up. Maybe history will bear them out, maybe it won't.

27 RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in America?

28 JB: A little bit now and again. My daughter, well when I was at Fort Detrick a
29 couple of my friends had married Vietnamese women and brought them home and had
30 some contact with them there. And then my sister at Hale Center, there was a doctor for
31 a while, a Vietnamese family who lived in Hale Center. The doctor in Hale Center was a,

1 I think three or four children and my sister taught all three or four of them, however many
2 there were, and I met them a lot and I actually talked to doctor, in fact he was my family
3 physician for a while and it was Dr. Nguyen.

4 RV: Okay, looking back at your experience in Vietnam today, what do you think
5 was the most significant thing that you learned while there?

6 JB: There were so many things that I learned, it's really hard to pin something
7 down and I've never been asked it quite that way. I think probably, I've always been a
8 person who's been accepting of other people, but I think even more so I'm accepting of
9 the Vietnamese people that I met there. I'm not talking about the enemy or other soldiers
10 or something like that, but the common indigenous people to Vietnam. I had a very good
11 feeling, very good thoughts about them, warm memories sometimes. For example, there
12 was a young girl who found out a couple of us were getting ready to go home, she fixed
13 us a meal. All it was was something like what we might call ramen noodles, that sort of
14 thing. It was basically it, and we were always apprehensive about eating there but we
15 knew that it was a very bad insult not to, and I did eat and enjoyed it, it didn't hurt me or
16 anything else. That was significant to me that she thought enough of us to do that, and it
17 was very touching. It was significant to me. I don't know, there's so many things. I
18 found out I could be brave. I found out I could form a friendship, a camaraderie with
19 people that was unlike any other kind of camaraderie that you could have, deep brotherly
20 love for those guys, and unfortunately I really don't remember many of the names, but I
21 remember their nicknames. You know, I have very, very good memories of things that
22 they said and did but for the life of me I cannot remember their names.

23 RV: So how do you feel about your service, personally?

24 JB: I'm very proud of it, which has been help, my family's always been proud
25 that I was a soldier and a veteran. Both my children are very proud. My daughter, when
26 she found out I was going to do this, she lives in Clovis, she broke down and cried. I
27 cannot express. And she's a very articulate person. My son doesn't say much, he just
28 pats me on the back. When we've gone to see the traveling wall, I've seen it about three
29 times; he's one of those that goes with me with his arm around me. My daughter,
30 verbally, gives me very positive feedback about things like this, and support. When she
31 knew I was going to do this, she broke down and cried. Expressed pride in me for doing

1 this, which may not mean a lot to most people, but it does to me. But I've got support
2 from my family, and I've very proud of my service and I'd go do it again.

3 RV: Tell me about your experiences at the Wall, you said that you, have you been
4 to Washington to see the main Wall?

5 JB: I haven't been back to Washington since 1970, since the Wall.

6 RV: How about the traveling wall?

7 JB: I've been traveling Wall twice in Lubbock and once in Plainview, and those
8 are very solemn, poignant moments for me. I'm very reluctant to leave it, I get there and I
9 just want to stay there and it's a symbol of so much. I'm, its always, and its over, I think
10 I've said this, before it's over you start in catharsis that if you have to use that cliché of
11 catharsis that's an appropriate thing to use it for, because it really is. It's something
12 physical that's symbolic of a healing, for me at least it is. I feel better about my
13 countrymen and their attitude towards me. There's some complex emotions I don't even
14 know how to articulate, I don't know how to explain. I'm not articulate enough to do it.

15 RV: If you walk into a high school or college classroom today and you had to tell
16 young people about Vietnam, the Vietnam War, what would you tell them?

17 JB: Well, I'd tell them all kinds of things. I do that quite a bit since I'm an
18 educator, I've done it at least a couple of times every year, which I thought it was kind of
19 ironic the first time I did it because I remember when I was teacher when the war first
20 started I had a person who had just come back from Vietnam come into my class and talk
21 about Vietnam. He was a Marine up in the north, up in the Da Nang area; by the way he
22 was one of my wife's former boyfriends I found out later, just before I knew her. I've
23 done that very frequently, and basically I tell them basically what was the war was about.
24 Basically what went on, I try to dispel some of the myths that you commonly see about
25 the war, try to explain that Vietnam veterans aren't the baby-killing, druggers, the
26 homeless people, the bums out on the street, that they are basically upright decent people,
27 by and large. And I try to explain to them that something that I mentioned to them a
28 while ago, that they were extremely good examples of American youth, veterans. That's
29 the approach that I take with them and most of the time they are very supportive and very
30 interested in that sort of thing. You always have someone, not so much now but in the
31 past that wanted to hear the shooting and killing, blood and guts stuff and I don't, of

1 course do that sort of thing, and I tell them that's really bad manners to ask anyone if
2 they've killed people and how many they killed and some of those sorts of things. And I
3 told them, let's don't do that, don't go that direction but basically that's the approach I
4 take. I try to dispel myths while explaining the basic concept of how we got into the war
5 and how we got out of the war and some of the things that went on in the war and try to
6 tell them a little bit about Tet of '68, basically that's it.

7 RV: Any songs take you back to Vietnam?

8 JB: Yes, that was on that, there's so many things, for example I always get all
9 teary-eyed, *Leaving on a Jet Plane*, that song's very good memories about that. I was a
10 married man and I always think of my wife. *Abraham Martin and John*, very popular
11 when I first got there, and that didn't have anything to do with the war particularly but I
12 would say very idealistic person at that time. I was twenty-six years old when that was
13 pretty popular; maybe twenty-seven and I always felt an affinity with that song. We had
14 a whole bunch of songs at that time that dealt with home. For example, there was
15 *Galveston*, can't think of the artist, oh golly, he's from Arkansas.

16 RV: Country singer?

17 JB: Country singer, yes. I can't think of his name. Anyway, and there was a song
18 that I've never even heard since then, its called *Seattle*. There was a television show that
19 I never did get to see, it was on television, called *Seattle* and there was a song and I could
20 almost sing it if I were brave enough to try to sing, but any songs dealing with home and
21 going on trains or planes or things like that. I detested at the time, the song *Cloud Nine*.
22 I don't know if you've ever heard it. It was very popular among the black guys in our
23 unit and among most of the guys in our unit except I hated it because I thought it was a
24 drug song, I think it was, I still think it's a drug song, I love that song now, I really do.
25 It's one of my favorite songs. One of my favorite songs at the time was *Soul Man*; I
26 loved *Soul Man*. I think I told you, did I tell you in the paper that I filled out about
27 Chunky? [I liked most pop music, rock, light jazz and classical. My favorite song
28 memory is/was *Leavin' on a Jet Plane* by Peter, Paul and Mary.]

29 RV: Refresh my memory.

30 JB: Okay, Chunky.

31 RV: I do remember but I want to still get it on tape.

1 JB: Chunky, we went on red alert one night, we had some incoming rounds, went
2 on red alert, somewhere we lost Chunky, didn't know where he was. I was the Sergeant
3 at that time, and one of my jobs on that red alert was, CO told me to go around and see if
4 we could find anybody, get them up on the line, I'll get them out on the reactionary
5 course. I looked for Chunky, he wasn't anywhere, we couldn't find Chunky. Chunky
6 appeared not too long after, by the way this about four o'clock in the morning, we went
7 off red alert and went back, the guys broke out soft drinks and beer and things like cheese
8 and sausage. One of the guys was from Wisconsin, used to get care packages of all that
9 stuff in it, so we broke out that stuff, started eating. Well, Chunky appears, he had his
10 helmet on backwards, he's in his underwear, both boots are on the wrong feet, somebody
11 got his feet in his boots that way, he's drunk and he did have his weapon. I don't
12 remember, I don't think he had his flak jacket, I remember he had his protective mask on,
13 oh golly, there's something else about him I forgot, anyway, he came he wasn't sure
14 where he had been, but we determined that he'd been out with B Company on their
15 perimeter line, and like I say he didn't have a T-shirt on, he had his underwear on, thank
16 goodness at least that. He didn't even have a T-shirt on. Chunky had gone out on red
17 alert out on the perimeter line drunk and that's how he appeared when he got out there.

18 RV: Probably would have scared the VC off.

19 JB: Exactly. He was the one that went on the line right after that, talking about
20 *Soul Man*, Tucker was on guard duty and Chunky and Tucker were very close, they were
21 like brothers and Chunky had gotten drunk and went up and started singing *Soul Man* out
22 on the perimeter line and Tucker told him get the hell away from here, if you don't quit
23 singing *Soul Man*, you're going to be a dead man, so Chunky got out of there. You'd had
24 have been there.

25 RV: So do you think of Chunky when you hear *Soul Man*?

26 JB: I sure do, every time. I always think of Chunky. In fact I heard it several
27 days ago and thought of Chunky. I think of Chunky a lot actually.

28 RV: What do you think of the movies that have come out on Vietnam?

29 JB: I don't watch hardly any of them at all. The, *We Were Soldiers*, I like it. I like
30 the Vietnam part of *Forrest Gump*, but that's really about it. I don't like any of the
31 others. I think they have so many stereotypical things that I think they're inaccurate or

1 that are detrimental to the image of people who have served in Vietnam. I don't know if
2 you hear that from others, but that's basically the way I feel about it. I read *We Were*
3 *Soldiers Once and Young*, before it became popular actually a long time ago, and I was
4 delighted to see it made into a movie, get the acclaim that it apparently has. But that's
5 the only one I really, really like. I detest *Platoon*, I detest *Full Metal Jacket*. I loathe
6 those two movies by the way, and most of the others I do too. I'm sorry to be so
7 vehement, but I really am.

8 RV: No, that's very helpful. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to add or
9 say?

10 JB: Well, there's so much but I can't think of anything right now. There are
11 billions of other things I guess I could say, but I guess you really as far as I know covered
12 I guess basically most of it. I really can't think of anything. I just appreciate enormously
13 this opportunity to express myself, but I mostly appreciate what you and the others are
14 doing here. I think that's a noble undertaking, and I'm not using that, I'm not using a
15 hyperbole, I really believe that. I'm not exaggerating a bit.

16 RV: Thank you very much.

17 JB: It's something which is Bible I think, just by having me, thanks a lot. I mean
18 really a great deal.

19 RV: All right, well we'll end up our interview now with Mr. Bussey. It is
20 November 11, a little after five PM, thank you sir.

21 JB: Thank you.