STEPHEN MAXNER: This is Steve Maxner, conducting oral history interview with Mr. John Haseman. I am in Lubbock, Texas at Texas Tech University. He is in Grand Junction, Colorado, and the time is 11:00 Central Standard time, the date the 21st of June, year 2000, and Mr. Haseman, would you please begin by giving a brief biographical sketch of yourself; when you were born?

JOHN HASEMAN: Well, I am an Army brat and moved around a lot all my young life, 3 different high schools, and I ended up at the University of Missouri which was my father’s home town and first alma mater before he went off to West Point. There were family people living in Colombia, so that was a logical place for me to go. It started out that I was studying engineering but switched to political science with an emphasis in international affairs, and at the time, of course, both with my family background and with the realities of the draft plus the requirement to go through ROTC for at least 2 years, I made the decision to go the full ROTC program and to go into the Army for 2 years as a 2nd lieutenant rather than being drafted.

SM: What year was that when you started college?

JH: I started college in 1959, graduated in 1963. I went into the Army right away in military intelligence, and also shortly after entering the Army, took the written exam for the Foreign Service which was at that time my career objective. I passed that exam the first time and while I was at Fort Benning for officer’s basic training at the
infantry school I went up to Washington for the oral examination and passed that also on
the first time which I gather is somewhat unusual, and went on the roster as a potential
foreign service officers. Then I went back to my military career thinking I was going to
do 2 years and then transfer into the state department. I went from Fort Benning to Fort
Meade, Maryland or to Fort Holabird, excuse me, for my intelligence training as an
intelligence staff officer and then to Fort Meade, Maryland, and I got attracted to the field
and in order to expand my training I extended my 2 year obligation by 1 year and then
went to additional training at Fort Holabird, and then was assigned to Korea to the 502nd
military intelligence battalion and while I was in Korea was notified by the state
department that I had come up on the list and it was now my choice to enter the foreign
service and I had 60 days to respond. This is, by now, 1964 I think and I was having
such a good time in the Army that I wrote them and thanked them and told them that I
was going to stay in the Army and I completed my tour in Korea, did a very good 1 year
tour in Fort Ritchie, Maryland as a counter intelligence field officer commander, and then
it was of course the Vietnam war was heating up. I volunteered to be assigned to
Vietnam and asked to go to an infantry or tactical unit. I was assigned to the 9th infantry
division, more specifically the 9th military intelligence detachment where I was initially
the admin officer of the detachment and then after about a month became the chief of the
interrogation prisoners of war section and by that time it was early January as I recall of
1968. Everybody knows what happened in January, the Tet offensive came. I was either
prescient or lucky because I had interpreters for both religions who were both Christian
and Buddhist. I had given my Christian interpreters off for Christmas and the Buddhist
interpreters had to work, and the understanding was that when Tet came the Christians
would work and the Buddhists would go home, so I had a couple, I don’t remember
exactly how many, but I had 2 or 3 interpreters working when the Tet offensive hit. Most
others were not working because everybody in Vietnam was on vacation, and so the Tet
offensive hit and I spent, gosh, a couple of weeks flying all over the Mekong Delta with
my few interpreters trying to find out what was going on and so from that point the 9th
division made the decision to set up a forward command post at Dong Tam in the Delta
rather than at Bearcat which is where the division headquarters was, and I was selected to
be the commanding officer of the forward, if you will, of the 9th MI detachment down
there and spent the rest of my 1 year assignment in Dong Tin. It was not a happy assignment for me. I was disillusioned with what I saw and the way the war was fought from the top down, politically, the personalities that I worked with, probably some immaturity on my part, but in any case I was disillusioned and I requested to be released from active duty. So, when my assignment ended in...that was in November of ’68, I got out of the Army and went back to school, got a master’s degree in public administration at the University of Kansas specializing in city management and of course thought I was going to be a city manager for the rest of my life. Then, I was bored. The war was still going on. There were some bad things going on in the Army, the Army’s sergeant major was convicted of some misdeeds and there were several other things and I just said, “I can do better than that,” and so I requested to come back on active duty after being out about a total of 19 months, and the Army took me back. They sent me to the MI advanced course again at Fort Holabird. It was my 4th, I think 3rd or 4th, training there; it was 4th I think, and I requested assignment to Vietnam from there and I specifically requested duty as an advisor. I did not want to go back to a tactical American unit, and by that time most of them were coming out anyway and so I applied for duty as an advisor and went to Fort Bragg for 3 months to learn how to do that, and was assigned to advisory team 88 in the Mekong Delta, Kien Hoa province, and I’ll stop there and let you put some things together.

SM: Okay, excellent. Let’s take a step back real quick to going into the Army on active duty, going to IOBC in particular at Fort Benning. What did you think of the IOBC training, the infantry training, you received?

JH: I enjoyed it. I was full of piss and vinegar and enjoyed the whole thing. I thought it was a bit pedantic and some of it was pretty elementary like how to fold a tent and that sort of thing, but the leadership training in particular was good and I think I learned from it. I certainly got a feel for what it was like to be an infantryman as a combat arms guy, and it was very valuable later to me in my career.

SM: Now, when you went to the military staff officer course, how did that work in terms of your branch? Were you branched infantry and that’s why you went infantry first, or were you branched MI?
JH: I was branched MI because of my eyes. I have bad eyes, and I was not eligible. I should back up and perhaps say that my ROTC program at the time was an all field artillery unit and normally I would have expected to be commissioned in the field artillery branch. But, because of my bad eyes, I was not eligible.

SM: Interesting, okay.

JH: In those days, and actually for quite some time afterwards, all military intelligence officers went to the infantry basic officers course because they did not have an MI basic officers course which trained in the basics of leadership and tactics, and so all MI officers went to that first and then they went to their intelligence training later on at Fort Holabird.

SM: Okay, and the staff officer course at Fort Holabird, what did that encompass and how effective was that training?

JH: Well, it taught you the basics of being an MI staff officer; all of the things that you would be expected to do as a very young officer going either to an MI unit or to an intelligence staff at some higher headquarters. It was not particularly detailed, it was very staff procedure oriented in the intelligence field. It was not a particularly long course; I think 3 months or 4 months is all, and from there I was sent to an MI battalion in the US which basically did not have a mission except for training reservists and that was one reason I chaffed under that, not having a real job, and that’s why I volunteered to go to Korea.

SM: Okay, now the training that you did receive, you mentioned that when you got to Vietnam of course that the IOBC training and I would assume that in even the MI staff officer course training, there wasn’t really all that much of a counter insurgency component to that, is that correct?

JH: Well, by the time I got to Vietnam my first time, I had been through two other MI courses. I had been to the area studies course which was basically human intelligence, and I had been to the counter intelligence cross training course which led to my assignment at Fort Ritchie so I had two long courses if you will and one short staff officer course by the time I even had my first Vietnam tour. But was there much counter insurgency training? No. I didn’t get any of that really except what you would normally read in the course of your professional reading and that sort of thing.
SM: Did you go to Korea first and then the area studies course, or vice versa?

JH: Vice versa.

SM: Okay, the area studies course. What did that emphasize? You mentioned that it focused on [?].

JH: Well, there are obviously some classification issues here.

SM: Well, whatever you can discuss.

JH: Well, basically it was involved in the Army’s strategic level, in the units, and the gathering of intelligence from human sources; that is people that you would recruit, and you would have intelligence requirements and you would train them and hopefully be able to get a response. Actually, I didn’t do a whole lot of that. I ended up being the admin officer of a detachment for most of my time which was basically a support role, but of course people I worked with were involved with both counter intelligence and human intelligence.

SM: Now, when you did arrive in Korea after engaging in the area studies course, was there an expectation on your part that perhaps you might engage in those types of activities in Korea?

JH: Yes, in fact I was kind of disappointed to be made the admin puke, but somebody had to do it as they say and it was a question of timing and I showed up and they needed a guy to do that. In retrospect, it was actually quite interesting because I served, you know, I talked to the people in the other jobs and I got an idea for what they were doing and supporting their activities, supporting the field station, and that sort of thing. I got a pretty broad exposure without any of the details; of course I had no need to know as to what kind of operations they were doing, but I enjoyed it. I enjoyed Korea. I had started my life long love of Asia.

SM: Now, again, if you can discuss this, from the standpoint of being basically a kind of case officer is what the agents, the CIA would call it; running intelligence sources, human intelligence sources, in a foreign country. For the MI, as an MI officer in the Army, in the Korean context, can you discuss what you would be looking for and what kinds of people you would try to recruit?
JH: No I can’t, because I didn’t do any of it. That’s what I say; I didn’t do any of it at all, and I didn’t know what the collection requirements were and that’s the other thing. I was very [?] and so I simply wasn’t involved in it.

SM: Okay, I didn’t know if perhaps before you got there if you had something…

JH: It whetted my appetite because I’d been trained and I knew the sort of thing that I would be doing, but in Korea I didn’t get to use any of that training.

SM: When you got to Korea, what were your primary duties in the admin position?

JH: I was the acting officer for the detachment which was not very big. I think we were actually a company, company C, so I did personnel, I had the motor pool, I had ash and trash as they say, I did administrative and logistics support for 3 field stations scattered across Korea. I was, if you will, on the staff of the headquarters of the battalion and have those kind of responsibilities as well, and it was basic to think in terms of battalion adjutant or that sort of…we had a company commander who was a lieutenant colonel and an exec who was major and they basically concerned themselves with the intelligence operations side of things and I was the guy that took care of the admin.

SM: Okay, were there any KATUSAs assigned to your unit?

JH: No.

SM: Okay. Well…

JH: They were assigned to the battalion, but not to our company.

SM: Not to your company? Were there military intelligence KATUSAs?

JH: No, basically laborers.

SM: Okay, did you have a lot of interaction with Koreans?

JH: Yes, it was a bilateral operation so all of our operational guys had counterparts that they worked with and I met several of them, but since I didn’t work with them we weren’t very close and I left there with no Korean friends.

SM: While you were in Korea, were there a lot of hostilities in the DMZ area?

JH: No, no. There was a period of relative peace and quiet. I think there may have been some tunnels, but it was so long ago I just don’t remember.

SM: Anything of consequence or importance that you took away from your Korean experience?
JH: Well, as I say, I started my love affair with Asia. I ended up spending all of
my time in Southeast Asia after that. It just had got me started. It also was my first
exposure to anything overseas. I’d never been out of the country before, so I was excited
about it and I knew that I would really rather be overseas than in the US as far as working
is concerned because we were doing real missions, real things rather than training. I
guess I was just bored by training. That was, like I say, when I made the decision to stay
in the Army I enjoyed the comradery and the team play of it and I didn’t turn down my
Foreign Service opportunity. I would come back to that much later in my career. But
anyway, that was sort of my start into the real Army.

SM: Okay. When you returned to the United States after your tour in Korea,
what units were you assigned to again? You mentioned you had a command.

JH: I came back and did the short cross training course for counter intelligence
and then I was the commander of the Fort Ritchie field office which was the counter
intelligence background investigations, physical security for what was then called Site R
of the underground Pentagon. Then there was also a geographical area in southern south
central Pennsylvania, central Maryland, and northeastern West Virginia that we were
responsible for background investigations for the entire Army.

SM: Now I would imagine that from a counter intelligence context, your primary
concern was the potential of Soviet infiltration, is that correct?

JH: In the strategic…yes. That was correct. At my level, we were little guys
out in the field and we were doing paper work. We were doing background
investigations for people that we never met. So, where I was, I had knowledge of that
and there liaison officials from other agencies that I worked with who were more
concerned with that than I was. I was not involved in that.

SM: Now at the time you were doing these background investigations, were these
considered the TSSBI, special background?

JH: It would depend on who the individual’s case we got. We would get the
leads because they had either…were either from that part of the world or had worked
there, what have you. So, we were going door to door interviewing family friends and
employers, that sort of thing.
SM: I see. Did you coordinate any of that with other organizations, other
government offices, state departments or CIA or anything else, FBI?

JH: Not really. The only coordination I had to do was with...occasionally we
would have a case where somebody who was going to be assigned to Camp David which
was in my geographical area so I would get to go up to the outer gate and coordinate with
those folks, but no; we were not at that level. We were far below that.

SM: Alright, and let's see...what else did you do while you were back in the
United States before going to Vietnam?

JH: That was it.

SM: That was it?

JH: I had one year at Fort Ritchie, 4 months, I guess, at school, a year at Fort
Ritchie, and while I was in that year I applied to go back to Vietnam.

SM: To go to Vietnam? Okay. Now, with regard to your first tour and the 9th MI
detachment, now you said that when you learned that you were going to Vietnam that you
were excited. Any other emotions? Any kind of concern or fear?

JH: I don't think that came along. It was the thing to do. I thought it was the
right place to be. It was obviously, “There’s only one war and you should be there,” and
so I went off with a great deal of anticipation. I thought it was going to be very
challenging, that it was going to be dangerous and all that, I guess, but I certainly wasn’t
sitting around worrying about whether I was going to get killed.

SM: Now how old were you at this point, when you went over in ’68?

JH: In 1967 I was what, 25?

SM: What did your parents and your family think about this?

JH: My father cried.

SM: Wow.

JH: He’d been in World War II and he said it wasn’t fair for his son to have to
go off to war. He said he should do it because he knew all about war and I said, “No, it’s
my turn. You did yours, now it’s my turn.”

SM: Did he talk much about his war experience with you?

JH: No, he never did, never. He spent most of his time with General MacArthur
in New Guinea and he never talked about it. He’s got, since he’s passed away we’ve got
his notebooks and his pictures and stuff and we’re still…its been a couple of years, so
we’re still going through that, but no; he didn’t talk about it. My parents were the typical
brave parents; they put on their best face and sent their oldest son off to war. Of course
all of my letters back were very innocuous, “I’m having a good time, I’m very busy, it’s
hot, it’s raining, its cold, it’s dusty.” But, that was about it.

SM: Okay, now you mentioned that you have…there were 6 other children in
your family; 3 brothers and 3 sisters. Did any of your other brothers serve in Vietnam as
well?

JH: My brother, my next brother, who is 3 years younger than me but is 4 years
behind because I went ahead a year in school, came over about 6 months into my tour,
and of course as you may know there were regulations that said you don’t have to have
two siblings in the war zone at the same time, but you had to apply and neither one of us
would apply. I wouldn’t apply to have my assignment cut short and he would not apply
to be delayed. So we were there, but not in the same place.

SM: What was his position in the war?

JH: He was an engineer platoon leader in the central highlands.

SM: In the Army as well?

JH: Uh-huh.

SM: Okay. Do you think he’d be interested in participating in this project?

JH: Oh, he was never an advisor.

SM: But I mean in terms of conducting an oral history for his Vietnam
experience?

JH: I don’t think so. He did not have a pleasant experience. He never enjoyed
it and he never wanted to go back again. It has [?] I don’t think.

SM: So you arrived in country in late 1967, 25 years old, excited, this is going to
be a great challenge. Describe first entering the country; you’re off the plane, you’re in
Vietnam. What are your first impressions?

JH: Well, I guess the first thing that hit you was the heat and the smell like
everybody else talked about. It was different, it was unusual, but it was sort of, “Hey,
what are we going to do now?” and you went through the usual replacement center out at
Long Binh and waited to get your assignment, and it was boring.
SM: Any concerns, or any…

JH: No, no.

SM: No? Actually, you know what question I should I have asked before asking that is did you go through any special briefings before leaving the United States to go to Vietnam based on what you would be doing in Vietnam as a military intelligence officer?

JH: No.

SM: No special briefing or anything?

JH: No, no. I got on the plane and went.

SM: Okay. When you arrived in country did you get any special briefings?

JH: Nothing more than the standard orientation that everybody got.

SM: What did you think of that?

JH: I don’t really remember it. It didn’t make much of an impression on me, obviously. It was the unusual thing about “Watch your ass, watch out for booby traps, and watch what you’re doing and do what you’re told.”

SM: What about officers that you had interacted with either before leaving or once arriving in Vietnam; other military intelligence officers or just officers you met in the course of your routines? Did they discuss Vietnam? Did you meet many veterans?

JH: No, not really. Going over on the plane, it was mostly all young fellows, whether they were lieutenants or privates and corporals, young NCOs. Not too many veterans by that time, ’67 there weren’t that many veterans. No, there was no real comradery. We slept on the plane. I don’t even remember that I had any friends I went over with.

SM: Okay, so when did you arrive? You arrived at the 9th MI detachment for the 9th infantry division in November of ’67?

JH: Uh-huh.

SM: Your first assignment was basically chief interrogation section?

JH: No, admin office of the detachment at Bearcat.

SM: That’s right.

JH: I was very disappointed.

SM: How long did that last, that position as an admin officer?

JH: About a month.
SM: I’m sorry?

JH: About a month until the next lieutenant came in and I told my detachment commander and he sort of promised me, “As soon as somebody else comes in, you can have another job.”

SM: And it was at that point that you went into interrogation?

JH: Yes.

SM: Okay.

JH: I don’t remember exactly what month it was. I got there the very end of November and I was already in the job at Tet, so somewhere in December, I want to say December, or early January.

SM: So what were your primary responsibilities once you moved over to the interrogation section?

JH: Well, I was the chief. I, at that time, did not do any interrogations myself. I had detachments from each of the 3 brigades, so there was an attachment at Dong Tam which supported a brigade, there was a detachment at Tan An, and we had a few interrogators back at headquarters and basically we reviewed the interrogation reports and prepared briefings for the G2, the division TOC, and we collected all the captured weapons the GI’s brought in that were not…the equipment and stuff and weapons that were war trophy eligible we certified and gave them a very much coveted certificate so that said they could take it home. But basically it was reviewing the reports of others and admin for all the personnel that worked for me.

SM: Now the detachments that worked outside of the headquarters where you were, these were the combat level intelligence gatherers?

JH: Right. I had a lieutenant in charge of each of those teams and they had several Americans and several ARVN interpreters and I should mention we had a small ARVN intelligence detachment that was sort of a counterpart to our detachment, so I had several ARVN interrogators that were not interpreters, they were actually interrogators out in the field as well and they had their own commander and their own unit.

SM: And so these were kind of like your ARVN counterparts?

JH: Yeah, that was my first opportunity to really work with a counterpart.
SM: What did you think about the Vietnamese soldiers, the ARVN's that you worked with?

JH: The ones that I worked with were very capable. They were far better trained than we were because they'd obviously been fighting for a long time, they spoke the language, they didn't need an interpreter at work. They used their own methodology in the interrogations that we didn't and they usually could get more information from a guy that we'd already talked to.

SM: Now you mentioned they had their own techniques?

JH: I'm not going to go any further.

SM: Well, I mean, it's of course been documented and discussed that there were times when even Americans used I guess you could say techniques that were beyond the scope of what was...

JH: Not in our detachment. We pretty much followed the book. I firmly believe that if you mistreat somebody that they're going to tell you whatever you want to hear, and that wasn't my objective. We didn't have a single incidence that I can recall of a mistreated prisoner once we got them. They were knocked around sometimes in the field by some obviously very emotional GI's who had had buddies killed or wounded, but if we couldn't get information out of them, we just simply passed them up. They went from our camps to the Vietnamese side and they disappeared and whenever information may have come out of them, we wanted to know right away what unit they were from, what kind of weapons, where they were, and if we didn't get that from one person, we went to the next and that was basically what we were looking for. We weren't doing any kind of high level strategic stuff about what the objectives of the job were. We wanted the basic, "Where's the enemy, how many of them are there, and how can we find them?"

SM: Okay, just troop disposition stuff?

JH: Exactly.

SM: Not strategy, not commander's intent or anything like that?

JH: No.

SM: Interesting. But, what about for officers that you captured?

JH: Well, I don't remember very many. We occasionally, I can remember a couple anecdotally but it was just basically the same thing. We were at the tactical level
and so we wanted tactical information that can be immediately exploited, and if there’s
things…one of the things we learned, for example, was how long, when we fired artillery
at a base camp, how long did they stay in their holes? Did they come out as soon as we
finished shooting, or did they stay another 30 minutes, or that sort of thing because that
told the artillery guys what to do. That was as strategic as we got.

SM: So there were instances where you were able to utilize that information to
affect more enemy casualties?

JH: Oh yes, I think so. Our primary question was, “Where were you supposed
to go after this fight?” and we wanted to know it right now.

SM: The people that your unit, your detachments captured in the 9th infantry
division components, the people that captured, were these primarily ARVN? I mean,
excuse me, NLF or Viet Cong or PAVN or a combination?

JH: Well, the people that were brought [?] because I can answer that better once
I moved to the forward CP because then I got involved directly in what was going on, and
I would say there were 3 categories: there were prisoners of war, there were civil
defendants which were mostly draft dodgers, and there were innocent civilians, and any
general daily take, let’s say we were lucky to get more than one or two real prisoners of
war because a lot of the people that were captured were taken in sweeps or they went into
a village and anybody that looked suspicious and that sort of thing. Well, if you couldn’t
prove that they were a soldier, you could not classify them as a prisoner of war. If they
were male and under the age of whatever it was, I can’t remember, they were at least a
civil defendant because they should have been in the Army so they were probably a draft
dodger. All of our people went from us to the Vietnamese. We did not release anybody.
Everybody went to the Vietnamese, and so we didn’t get…the percentage was not very
high of actually captured soldiers. But, during the time I was in the 9th division, I would
say that those who we did clearly identify as prisoners of war were guerrillas, local
guerrillas. When we captured the first North Vietnamese in the Delta, Saigon didn’t
believe it. You know what their response was? “There are no NVA in the Delt” and we
said, “Wait a minute, I have one sitting right here.” He’s a captain or a major, I think I
remember, and he most definitely is, and it took a while. This is, like I say, part of the
mentality that finally caused me to leave the Army that first time.
SM: What about the weapons that were captured by the detachment or through the detachment? What were the most prevalent weapons in ’68 while you were the chief of the interrogation section?

JH: Well we didn’t capture the weapons. We just processed what the troops captured; lots of AK-47s, lots of…there was one that you could keep; I can’t remember the name of it because it was not an automatic or a semi automatic weapon, SKS, SKS. Very, very occasionally, like I say, if there is other officers that were killed in fighting, there would be pistols come in and of course those could also be kept. That was about it. When there was a base camp captured or something, occasionally we’d have mortars, RPGs. We did captured a lot of RPG weapons and that sort of thing. Nothing really was [?].

SM: What would happen to the bigger weapons like the RPGs?

JH: It was all evacuated to Saigon.

SM: Okay, and AK-47s, those were as well?

JH: Also.

SM: They could not be kept?

JH: No. You couldn’t keep an AK-47.

SM: But there were incidents where soldiers did keep them?

JH: Well, I’m sure there were. There were instances when people captured weapons and they didn’t turn them in to us, but there were supposed to be procedures set up that when you went home, of course obviously if you tried to put it in your luggage it would be X-rayed and they’d find it, and if you didn’t have the certificate from your unit, you couldn’t keep it. They took it from you in Saigon before you got on the airplane. But still, people did manage to take them home and they’d take them all apart into the tiniest little pieces and mail 3 home at a time. Basically, you had to turn it in and get that certificate, and the GI’s that did turn them in were very anxious and bugged us, “Where’s my certificate?” and they’d come down to our unit when I was assigned down in the Delta, and we tried to process them as quickly as we could. All we had to do was look at the weapon, write down the serial number, certify that it was what they said it was, and give it back to them.
SM: Now in terms of the actual processing of prisoners and how things work, if a
unit in the 9th infantry division captured say a Viet Cong soldier with a weapon, with an
AK-47, they would then send them to the attachment at the brigade level; is that correct?
JH: They wouldn't even have to have a weapon.
SM: Okay.
JH: Anybody who was detained, whether you say captured or detained, went
from the unit to our POW if you will, our prisoner of war cage at the base camps where I
had come and there they were screened and interrogated for that tactical information and
then they were turned over to the local Vietnamese government, usually in our case at the
province, and that was it.
SM: So they never actually came through your office for an additional
interrogation.
JH: We did all our work at our POW cage. We didn’t have an office. [Once we
interrogated them they went to the Vietnamese.]
SM: Oh, I see; I’m sorry.
JH: We didn’t have an office. We lived down in the POW cage.
SM: Oh, okay.
JH: And we did all of our work. We had little booths that we took, latrines, and
turned them into interrogation booths so we could do it one on one, but once we did our
interrogation and wrote our interrogation assessment report, they went back into the cage,
literally, and everyday the MPs took them into the province and turned them over to the
Vietnamese with our tag that said, “Our assessment is they are POWs, not pleading, or
innocent.” [Not civil defendants or innocent civilians.]
SM: And then after that you had no idea where they went?
JH: That’s right.
SM: Did you ever have any returnees, any other recaptures?
JH: Oh yeah, we had Hoi Chanhs come in, and they went through the same
processing system. I should say there that if we had somebody who was really interesting
like that one Vietnamese, north Vietnamese officer that we identified, there was a system
where the division commander would get involved and off he would go through
American channels living with very close monitoring by the Vietnamese. Like I say, we
had our counterpart detachment. It’s been 30 years, so I don’t remember the details of
that. If there was somebody that we thought was particularly important to the US, for
whatever purpose, we could figure out a way to keep him a little longer. But eventually,
they did go to the Vietnamese.

SM: And what about capturing people who had previously been captured and
interrogated; like somehow had made it back out and were now reengaging as a
combatant?

JH: You mean like recidivists?

SM: Yeah, recidivism, yeah. Any POW recidivism?

JH: Let me make one more clarification; if we, in the field, if the field brigade
CPs categorized somebody as a prisoner of war, then they were evacuated to the division
POW center and so if you will, the people at division, the interrogators that worked for
me at division, would have a second chance to talk to them. Maybe they’d have more
input, they’d have better information from what was going on, etcetera, but at that point
they were turned over to the Vietnamese.

SM: Okay.

JH: The civil defendants and the people we thought were innocent civilians
went directly to the Vietnamese at the province level, and [makes sound] so there was a
slight difference. That’s how we were able to hang onto interesting POWs.

SM: Any of that stick out? Any others besides that NVA officer?

JH: Well, he was the one that stuck out. You always…wounded prisoners that
came in were kind of tough because on the one hand you’d take them right to the medical
center and they’re being treated by the doctors and you want to talk to them because
they’re more vulnerable, and that was sometimes hard because it’s just tough to talk to
anybody who’s in pain. The one single one that stands out in my mind was the north
Vietnamese officer that we actually, our deputy CG, actually took him to the general’s
mess for lunch and treated him like an officer in an effort, you know, psychological. He
was quite willing to tell us anything that we wanted to ask him about things that had
happened in the past, but he would not give us anything that would get his buddies in
trouble. He would not tell us where they were going, or what his plans for the unit were,
or anything like that. He was very professional. I respected him.
SM: That brings up an interesting point. In the questionnaire, you mentioned that your evaluation of the fighting ability of the NLF and the PAVN soldiers that the 9th infantry division encountered, that they were excellent, very well motivated, and the fighting ability is, as you stated, better than you were led to expect. What kind of a briefing had you received about that or what kind of information had you received and…

JH: Not really any.

SM: Okay.

JH: The briefings that we got about Vietnam in the States and once we got there were, “These are tough soldiers in tough conditions,” but they were very general and sort of more on how to keep yourself alive and that sort of thing. Very rarely did we get anything that was specific on capabilities and [?] the weapons, we knew what the weapons would do, that sort of thing. That’s about it.

SM: What was the biggest surprise about the abilities of the enemy soldiers from your perspective?

JH: Well, there are 2 ends of it; some of the people that we captured that were POWs were impressed local villagers, you know, kidnapped, and they were delighted to be captured and to tell everything they knew and hopefully go home. We had a lot of those. That would probably be the single biggest category; local guerilla either volunteered or impressed into the guerilla system, and then at the other end were some very hard core guys like this captain and there were some others who were equally closed mouthed and like I say, if we couldn’t get an answer out of them in an hour or two, we didn’t bother and we went on to the next.

SM: And was that in part because of the time sensitive nature of the intelligence?

JH: Exactly; the commanders wanted to know what was going on right now and, “What can I do with my troops out there, what should we do, where should we not go, where are the booby traps,” and that sort of thing.

SM: Were there…are there any particular instances that stand out in your mind where the information or intelligence you were able to glean from an enemy, a captured enemy, that it was immediately sent out to the field and was very helpful in reengaging the enemy or capturing more enemy?
JH: There were many instances. I can’t quote you any specific ones. That’s long vanished from my memory bank, but that was what we always were trying to do and when we were able to do it we felt real good about it, and that would be things like the enemy’s going to withdraw to this village or this point and then we’d send the helicopters up and they’d find people and they’d do air strikes and they’d reengage them or something. I mean, that was what we were trying to do and we would get applause from the CG and he would pat us on the back for getting the information and that was our main motivation.

SM: And what about the use of the intelligence that you guys got for psychological operations; whether they be leaflet drops, or some of the loud speaker operations or things like that?

JH: There was some exploitation. Other people were doing it, not us.

SM: Would they use intelligence that you got?

JH: Yeah, we would have psy ops guys would come around and say, “Well, do you have anybody that would volunteer to go up in a helicopter?” and by that time you’re looking for, for example, the local guerilla that was happy to be caught and we’d say, “Hey, how would you like to go up and fly up over your village and tell everybody who you are and your parents that you’re okay and tell all your friends to Chu Hoi?” and so that was done, so there was some coordination from things like that.

SM: Were those operations successful to your knowledge?

JH: Oh, I don’t really know.

SM: Okay.

JH: There’s really no way to know.

SM: I didn’t know if after an operation like that if you would have an increase in the number of Chieu Hoi coming into the brigade?

JH: Well, there probably would have been but it was not something I would have followed. Again, it was very low level here.

SM: And…oh, quick question as far as down at the brigade level where your lieutenants were running the interrogations and the operations down there for the MI detachment; they were not language trained, either? They also had Vietnamese interpreters that they had to depend on?
JH: Absolutely. I think, oh, I’m trying to remember when I…I didn’t have any Vietnamese language for my tactical tour, and I don’t think anybody did, and we all had, we all used interpreters and they were all ARVN sergeants who spoke English without exception.

SM: And they all spoke English really well?

JH: Not really well.

SM: No? But well enough?

JH: Well enough.

SM: Okay. And, now also one of the…I was curious about the responsibilities that you had as chief of the interrogation section; would you then take some of the information that was gleaned by these prisoners and compile a report that would then be sent up to higher headquarters? Was that part of your responsibility as well?

JH: Basically what we did, we tried to keep the report paperwork to a minimum, and so the interrogator who actually questioned someone would be…you know, there was a standard format that we used, and if there was something hot I would take, you know, the basic stuff and I would hop in my jeep and go up to the…again, I’m talking when I’m down as the CO forward. I have someone at the door. Hang on just a second.

SM: Oh, certainly.

JH: So anyway, where were we?

SM: Well, you were talking about the way that the information, I guess, was…

JH: Okay. So if there’s something hot I would do what was called a verbal spot report. I’d tear off the important information, hop in the jeep, and go up to TOC, tell the G2 forward that we had this, this, this, and this. It would usually be a relocation or where a unit was hiding or where a guerilla cell was or that sort of thing. Let me change phones here. I hope I don’t lose you. Okay. That was one form. The other one was once the final interrogation was done we’d mimeograph all these things off and they went in the paper mill and they went to the detachment headquarters and then into the, I guess, the Saigon paper mill. I don’t know whatever happened to them. But, the main methodology was to get the spot report information to the TOC. I was the interface with the division staff of the forward CP. If we had a particularly lucrative interrogation, I would normally take the sergeant that did it or the lieutenant that did it with me in case there was a
specific question and he’d stand up and he’d give his thing. I also had, when I was the
CO forward, I also had CI people; the CI section had people there, and so if they had
agent reports we would do it the same way.

SM: Okay, how aware were you of the specifics of the counter intelligence
operations that those individuals conducted?

JH: Not very aware. I just knew that they had sources that they talked to here
and there and everywhere; all the hooch maids, the massage parlor girls, and we were at
least as interested in keeping our own information, counter intelligence, as well as
anything we could pick up.

SM: Absolutely.

JH: I also had...the province was real and the province advisors were real
interested in our capabilities and at one point I actually assigned a young CI NCO, put
him in a fatigues with no rank insignia to fool everybody, right, [actually to give him
more status so he wouldn’t be looked down on because he was an NCO] and sent him out
to one of the districts in western My Tho province [Dinh Tuong province] and he worked
for 4 or 5 months before his DEROS. He worked the spot of the district advisory team
out there. So, it was very helpful for them. Even the CI guys were basically interested in
tactical information, so we had good, I mean, they were good people; they were young.
We had a couple of warrant officers who knew what they were doing, had a lot of
experience, and it worked. But, it was strictly local level. We were not looking at any
big pictures down at our place.

SM: Were there any incidences of capturing, or not necessarily capturing, but
catching, through the CI program, infiltrators in the base camp?

JH: Yes, we did have a couple of those. I don’t remember much of the details
of it. They were, you know, low level intelligence agents for the VCs and where, you
know, the old thing about the hooch maid pacing off how many steps it was to the, you
know, that sort of thing? And we had several of those, but again, it was very low level.

SM: And anything else stand out as far as the operations that were conducted and
the interrogations that were conducted and how they were useful or helpful to the overall
mission?
JH: I think we were helpful because, again, given the fact that we didn’t get very many, when we did capture a source that had information we were able to get that information to the TOC and disseminate it very quickly. Basically they used to tell us, “If you can’t tell us where a unit is within about 2 hours of the time of the information, it’s not going to be any good because they will have moved,” but even at that point, they could figure okay, they know this guy’s been captured and they know we just hit him and they’re going to go someplace. How far could they go in 2 hours, and they’d draw a circle and say, “Where would they go? Obviously they wouldn’t go here,” and so they would even be able to use that. So, I thought we did a pretty good job of providing them and we certainly got a lot of kudos, plus we had the ASA people with us and they were getting a lot of very detailed information themselves. So, I think we did pretty good. The frustration of it, we actually had a division commander, once the division headquarters moved down to Dong Tin whose philosophy was, “We’re going to have an operation at this point tomorrow. Tell us who’s there.” And we would say, “Well, there’s nobody there, but why don’t you let us tell you where people are and then you go there?” and he says, “No, that’s not the way we plan things in this division.”

SM: What?

JH: Oh yeah.

SM: Completely ignored the intelligence on hand?

JH: Well, yeah.

SM: And conducted your operations on…

JH: Well, that was my impression at the time.

SM: Wow.

JH: You know, and there could have been all kinds of things that I didn’t know, but that was my impression and that was part of what contributed to me wanting to leave.

SM: Now, did you discuss this with other staff officers, other officers in your unit?

JH: Yeah, what can the G2 forward, the major, the lieutenant colonel; what can you say? The two star general says, “This is the way we’re going to do it,” and so…

SM: Yeah, but at least some kind of a discussion of, “Why are we doing it this way, and is there any…”
JH: Of course it was discussed, and it was very frustrating, but we’d say, “Maybe he had intelligence on other sources,” and give him the benefit of the doubt, but at that point all I knew was that we were telling him there were VC over here but he was wanting to do an operation over there where we didn’t have any information.

SM: So would the soldiers be inserted at that point where he wanted?

JH: Oh yeah.

SM: And what would happen?

JH: Nothing.

SM: They would come up against nobody?

JH: Yeah. Anyway, that was another thing. Another thing was the body count business which was anybody that was at the field level knew that it was fabricated.

SM: Could you elaborate on that some?

JH: No, not really.

SM: Well, you say that as far as the fabrication, are you talking about the enemy counts that were submitted up the chain of command?

JH: Yeah, the body count. The common joke was you’d start with 5 and the company would report 5 and the battalion would report 11 and the brigade would report 20 and everybody would laugh.

SM: I take it you witnessed this first hand?

JH: Well, I witnessed some of the statistics. I didn’t actually witness it because I didn’t very often see bodies. I was a base camp weenie except when we were looking for caches and things like that. But it was talked about all over the place. It was very common as a topic of discussion, and of course we also read newspapers, we had friends in Saigon that were talking about things, it was just…there were a lot of reasons behind it, but that was another one of them.

SM: Well what, from your understanding in 1968 when you were there, what was causing that body count inflation?

JH: The desire to have your unit look good and knowing nobody would check. Every once in a while some body would go out and check, you know, a conscientious company commander, a battalion commander would go out and say, “Where are the 20 bodies?” and, “Well here’s one and there’s one and the others were dragged away,” and
the guy would say, “You don’t have 20, you have 3.” “Well, no, we saw them before they dragged them away.” “But where did the...” you know, and but I can’t bear no specifics. These are all kind of beer talk around the club or something.

SM: Right. What about a...was there ever any talk or discussion about instead of emphasizing body count, weapons count; how many weapons were actually captured?

JH: Again, you’re talking...I’m on a very low level. Not that I can remember.

There was a very strong emphasis on turning in captured weapons. In fact, I would send people out to the units when they’d had a fire fight and say, “Take your pad of certificates with you and go out there and if they’ve got AK-47s, say, ‘We’re sorry, we need those, but if you’ve got an SKS you can keep it. Here’s your certificate right here.’” So the idea was a lot of GI’s, they’d sort of put their heads together and say, “Joe, Sam, and Harry each got an SKS so let’s not report it,” because there was a very strong threat amongst the GI’s that if they reported it, they’d never see it back again and I’m sure that happened in other units. So, they wouldn't report weapons captured when in fact they had 4. So, the idea was to encourage them to report it and to give them their war trophy on the spot.

SM: Well, based on what you just said, it seems like there was an inflated body count and a purposely deflated weapons count?

JH: Well, I would say much more inflated body count and not so much a deflated weapons count.

SM: Well, deflate in the context that soldiers would not turn in weapons that they did capture because they wanted to take them home as trophies.

JH: In very small numbers; percentage wise, I’d say less than 10. And again, there were people in the division that knew that well enough to encourage them to support me during the 9 months or 10 months that I could do this, to go out and encourage things. Of course, by the opposite side I’d say, “Sorry guys, you can’t keep that AK,” and then sometimes they’d get permission, they’d count it, and they’d say, “Well, we’d like to have them because they’re good to fight with.” That’s okay. They were allowed to keep them to fight with because they liked it better than an M-16. I don’t blame them, but at least we would get to see it and count it. It was more done by the units than it was by us.
SM: Now when you were there in Vietnam, had the incidences of exploding AK-47 ammunition occurred yet?

JH: I don’t remember it, no.

SM: Alright, well let me ask you a question real quick about the specifics of Tet of ’68.

JH: Okay, I’m going to walk around again because I’ve had too much coffee.

SM: Well, you know what; we can take a quick break.

JH: This is one of the hazards.

SM: Let me go ahead and pause this and we’ll take a quick break for a few minutes.

JH: No, now go ahead and ask.

SM: Well, I was just curious about if you would go ahead and just discuss how the events unfolded in your area of operations, when Tet ’68…

JH: Let me just stop here for a minute.

SM: Yeah, I’ll pause it.

JH: Tet of ’68, I was still at Bearcat and it started when the ammo dump at Long Binh blew up and we were, I don’t know, 10 miles away; definitely felt it, saw it, heard it, and by then the TOC was starting to get reports of all the provinces in the Delta being under attack and so off we went to the war. I will say that the 9th division, at least the people in the Delta down at Dong Tam, knew something was up. They’d been getting reports for weeks about build ups and mysterious things going on out in the wilderness, if you will, of the Delta, and it was reported, and despite the, “Oh, ho, ho, tush, tush,” stuff coming back out of Saigon, the division itself was ready. They wasn’t really surprised because they knew something was going to happen. But I think everybody was surprised by the scope of it, and of course the division spent a good part of the next 3 weeks going all over the Delta trying to rescue various province capitals; major towns, district towns, and what have you. Because I had those 3 or 4 interpreters, either they or I spent a lot of time in helicopters, saw a lot of the Delta trying to find out and identify the VC and NVA units that were involved in that sort of thing. The, I guess, the impression that I had was, “These guys pulled one off, here.” I don’t think anybody really believed that they had a
SM: What about in terms of the effects of Tet, what was important in your area of operations. When the dust settled and you were able to assess the effects of Tet, what did you guys come away with?

JH: Well we came away with a lot of violence and a lot of destruction, even in Saigon, because they 9th division had part of the responsibility for Saigon. The Y Bridge was in the 9th division AO. But anyway, I guess we realized, by the end of it, that most of the VC guerillas had been killed. There were the usual stories that people claim that they found their base camp barber body and that sort of thing, maids that never came back, all kinds of anecdotal stories like that, but basically it was that the VC had been, if not eliminated, had been badly hurt in the Delta. That was our impression, and of course the press did a job in the States of...we won’t even go into that, but we thought that there’d been a very strong victory. We’d gotten rid of a lot of guerillas, and they hadn’t captured any of the towns in the Delta, so it was a very hard battle, but the good guys won.

SM: Well, you mentioned the press but you said you didn’t want to get into that, but how much how aware in 1968 were you while you were in Vietnam of the way the press was handling it back in the United States?

JH: We were very aware because everybody, at least in my case, my parents and my brothers and sisters were sending me clippings. We had, of course, the Stars and Stripes. That was about it as far as actually reading it. But, we had...I have to be very careful as to what I knew then and what I knew later, but we knew that there was some very sensational reporting. I distinctly remember the coverage of the embassy, for one thing, so I don’t remember where I saw all that or whether it was in our own reports, but we knew about that. So, I think most of my knowledge of the press reporting came after the fact, after I got home, rather than when it was actually going on because we didn’t have access; we didn’t have reporters with us and that sort of thing.

SM: Now you’ve left the United States in November of ’67. Had General Westmoreland...

JH: He was still there.
SM: He was still in the United States giving…
JH: No, he was in Vietnam.
SM: Okay, but in 1967, he had made some briefings to congress, and these were made public, and the infamous statement, “The light is at the end of the tunnel,” that kind of stuff; were you in the United States at that point when he was…
JH: I don’t remember.
SM: You don’t remember? Okay, because I was going to ask if you did recall, how that effected perhaps some of the perceptions of the officers.
JH: No, not really much of anything. The thing that everybody knew and said about General Westmoreland concerned his starched fatigues and his spit polished boots when he came down to pay his visits to the troops, and how that pissed everybody off. General Abrams was much more popular and respected [?] than Westmoreland was.
SM: Well would you discuss a little bit about, you know, you mentioned that you…let’s see here, that you left the Army rather disillusioned, especially with the senior officers, and you mentioned of course the 9th infantry division commander changed and his different philosophy of the role of military intelligence and planning and everything else. What about the larger picture in terms of the strategy as you understood it when you went to Vietnam and how the United States Army and the MACV strategy was unfolding in Vietnam. What did you think of it while you were there?
JH: It’s really hard to say. When I left, I should have dug out the letter because I wrote my congressman who I’d known sort of personally, and it wasn’t just at the high level. I thought my detachment commander, who was a major, was a career ticket puncher who was a protégé of the G2 and that he didn’t care very much for his people. He would have much rather been the G2 or the deputy G2. I mean, that was eternal. That was, I would say, 7 or my 12 months was with this guy who tried to screw me with my OER and fortunately I got it thrown out later on when I came back in, but in any case, it was a personality clash and everybody has their own personal experiences; who they worked for, who they respected and didn’t respect, and I just had a whole handful of people that I didn’t respect, and it started with my detachment commander and went all the way up to the president. I was a very unhappy young fellow and I had thoughts that I would just go into something where I would feel a little better.
SM: Well, how did the [careeर's] mentality of some of the officers that you worked with, how did that affect their decision making and can you provide any particulars?

JH: No, I can’t, and I wouldn’t even say it. It was the decision making. It was the care, the relationship with subordinates, the way they treated people, the way they reacted towards directives, and that sort of thing. It was lots and lots of atmospherics, I guess. I didn’t…I didn’t think that my CO was a particularly sharp officer, but there were lots of mediocre officers in the Army by then. We both made it to O6, so obviously we had some things in common I guess. But anyway, that’s neither here nor there.

SM: Okay, and what about the…you made some interesting comments about the body count and the inflation and everything else; what about the larger strategy on how this war was being prosecuted? When you arrived and even by the time you left, it was still…the emphasis was on attrition, the emphasis was on the body count.

JH: Well, we’re still talking first tour and at that point I don’t think that was a factor, for me anyway.

SM: But what did you think about that strategy?

JH: Well, it was different in the Delta because we didn’t have the high level of intense unit to unit combat. Until late in my tour, we were still fighting lots and lots of low level guerillas, lots of them, whereas in the north you had the major unit clashes with NVA regulars, so no, it wasn’t a factor for me; not something I thought about.

SM: Well, you did say that you thought that the strategy was lousy, it was inappropriate, and it seemed like it was uninformed.

JH: Well, I think that applies to my overall assessment of the entire period I was there.

SM: How do you think we could have done it better?

JH: Oh, we should have attacked North Vietnam.

SM: Okay.

JH: We should have totally closed down the Ho Chi Minh trail. We could have done it. We had the capability to do it. We didn’t take the war to the enemy, we fought it defensively.
SM: And also, you mentioned in terms of motivations of why we were involved, you mentioned political objectives. Could you explain that a little bit more, what you mean by that?

JH: Well, I don’t remember where I put it.

SM: The question is, “Why do you think the US was involved in Vietnam?”

JH: Oh, I think the initial reason was valid; politically, it was the support of an ally and we were still doing the containment theory with communism. We were in a bit of trouble as far as that was concerned when President Diem refused to do the referendum that the 1954 agreement required, [?]. But basically, at that part, I think we were on the right side as far as politics of it. Where we went astray was Johnson’s strategy of guns and bullets and his refusal to fully mobilize the American population. From a military standpoint, the one year tour was not very good. You had lots and lots of people with one year of experience rather than people with 4 or 5 years of experience.

SM: So you think people should have been in for the duration?

JH: Well, not necessarily for the duration, but certainly the idea of 6 month tours for officers and then off to the rear was extraordinarily demoralizing for the enlisted men. There had to have been a better way to do that, and we didn’t figure it out. There’s lots of things like that that I can’t think of right off the top of my head right this minute, but there was a couple of them anyway.

SM: Of course that raises the issue of the potential of diminishing morale and other problems. How was the morale in your detachment and also in the 9th infantry division?

JH: The detachment’s morale was excellent. I’m trying to think back…I had one guy I can think have who would definitely be considered a leftist in his ideas, but he was a good soldier and he worked very well. So, I would say in 1967-1968, morale was still pretty good; at least among the people I was with. Later on, of course, it went downhill but by then I was an advisor and it was a different situation.

SM: What about in the 9th infantry division generally?

JH: I think it was pretty good. I don’t remember very many reports of drugs or racial problems or that sort of thing. There may have been in some of the brigade based camps, but I just don’t remember it at that period. That was, certainly it was during the
time of I think Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy’s assassinations which caused
heartache, but there were no rumbles that I can remember.

SM: Were there ever any incidents of American soldiers being involved in
activities that they should not have been, from an intelligence standpoint? You
mentioned the counter intelligence projects that you worked on, that were able to reveal
Vietnamese.

JH: No, I don’t. I don’t think I had a single one of those.

SM: Okay. Or Americans being compromised in some fashion?

JH: No, I don’t know. Not where we were.

SM: Now did you, after things kind of died down with Tet after most of the
villages in the Delta were recaptured, those that had been temporarily captured by Viet
Cong units, after that, the military activities kind of slowed down. Did you notice any
kind of significant difference in the contest of the operations and the units that the 9th
infantry division came up against? Were they still primarily Viet Cong, or were they a
lot more PAVN?

JH: Well, there was a big dip in the bell curve there that I think everybody
experienced. We in the Delta particularly experienced it because with few exceptions,
there weren’t any NVA down there at the time, and it was only after the Tet offensive
that you come up to mini Tet in what, April, May, whatever it was, and there were
definitely units back. Our order of battle, we were always fighting the same battalions
and they were all VC battalions that had been re-manned and that sort of thing, but I
don’t have any information on the specifics of that. It’s not something I was interested
in.

SM: Yeah. Do you remember which VC battalions?

JH: No, I don’t. 514, 516, that sort of rings a bell.

SM: And I was wondering if…one of the things I’ve read about with regard to
the post Tet period was sometimes, when the Viet Cong units would be re-outfitted, they
were actually re-manned by North Vietnamese soldiers that were dressed up as Viet
Cong. Did you guys run across that?

JH: Oh yes, yes. In fact, that was, like I say, when we captured this guy that
was the first North Vietnamese, the people didn’t believe it. The people in Saigon didn’t
believe it because they had no intelligence that the units had moved that far down. That
was, I suppose, was one of the big instances at which the re-manning of units began to
take place because there had been so many guerillas in the Delta as opposed to NVA
units until mid ’68.

SM: Now would your unit coordinate much with other branches of the services
like the Navy? They had a lot of, of course, [?] operations going on?

JH: Oh yeah, well it was very close because we had one of the mobile force, the
mobile riverine force. I did not do much coordination; that was all done by the tactical
units.

SM: Okay.

JH: The only thing the Navy did for me that was really unique and I wrote
about, actually, was we put…they gave us a small landing craft and we turned it into a
prisoner of war cage. It was our mobile POW cage and so when the [riverine] force took
9th division troops and went off up the river so to speak, I’d send an interrogation team on
that boat that was fixed up with barbed wire and what have you, and so if they caught
prisoners up there they could bring them onto the boat for interrogation rather than
waiting for a helicopter to bring them all the way back to Dong Tam. So, that was a
unique thing that we worked on.

SM: And the area in which you worked, did they use a lot of defoliants to help
clear out areas around the rivers and things like that?

JH: No, I don’t remember much of that at all. When I got to my advisory
location later on, you know, 2 years later, I found out that it had had some defoliation
strips done, but when I was actually there, no. I didn’t really know about it.

SM: Is there anything else that…oh, you know what? There’s another question
that I do have because you gave a rather interesting response to my question in regard to
recreation, and you said something about me jesting.

JH: About what?

SM: I asked about recreation on the questionnaire and you said something about
jesting about it and I was wondering, you guys didn’t get any R&R or anything like that
or USO shows?

JH: Oh, we got R&R, yeah.
SM: Yeah, okay. So were those out of country or in country R&Rs?

JH: I didn’t have any in country R&Rs. I think I had 2 out of country.

SM: Thailand?

JH: Malaysia, and I went to Panang, and I think Bangkok was my second one.

SM: What about USO shows and things like that?

JH: I saw Bob Hope at Bearcat.

SM: What did you think of that?

JH: It was right after I got there. That was Christmas of ’67.

SM: What did you think of that show?

JH: It was great. I mean, I thought it was great. I had met Bob Hope when I was a high school kid in Alaska. He did a show up there for the troops. But, there wasn’t much more than that. I wasn’t all that interested in it. I hardly ever went to Saigon, then or later.

SM: What about some of the other service related stuff they had like libraries? Did they have anything like that near you where you and other soldiers could go to relax?

JH: Oh yeah.

SM: Donut dollies?

JH: At Bearcat, there was quite an…actually quite a good infrastructure. They had the donuts, the USO, there was a library. Down at Bearcat, Dong Tin, there wasn’t a whole lot.

SM: Did you find that those…

JH: We had a place where we could go and get paperback books and things like that.

SM: There was?

JH: Yeah.

SM: Okay. Did you find that those facilities were helpful in coping with the strains of being in a combat situation?

JH: It was helpful to me personally, but I don’t know that all my guys read the paperback books but I’m a reader. It was not something that you thought about. We had a shower point where we could get hot showers, but you had to drive down to the turning basin and there was a sandy base. I think the biggest thing that people complained about,
it was built up sand dredged up from the river, so it was very sandy and dusty. So, you’d
drive down to take your shower and you’d be covered with sand by the time you got
back, but anyway, we wanted the hot shower. We had the typical aluminum rocket pod
cold water showers at our hooch.

SM: What about the food?
JH: We…our detachment messed with a medical detachment.
SM: Okay.
JH: And it was an informal system that I arranged with them. They basically
sent the detachment down there with no support, so we would have either…I don’t
remember where there was a division mess hall or not. I guess there was someplace.
But, we messed with the medical company.

SM: And that was decent chow?
JH: Oh yeah, it was decent chow.
SM: What about base life?
JH: There was none.
SM: Well, what was your average day like?
JH: Oh, my average day? Oh, probably 6, went to the morning briefing, had my
statistical report and any highlights that I hadn't mentioned the night before. We didn’t
usually get…in the morning we were usually cleaning up; writing the reports that we’d
done spot reports on the day before and that sort of thing, and the detainees would usually
start to come in in the afternoon, and they would come on through the evening and then
so we would often be up until midnight doing the interrogations. In fact, one of the things
I remember about General Knowlton who was the division forward commander and was
one of the ADCs is we were sitting out finishing up paperwork in our latrine hooches that
we turned into interrogation booths, and GI’s being GI’s, even our guys, we had our
shirts off and it was hot and we were tired and we’d been working for 18 hours and
General Knowlton walks in, you know, at 12:30-midnight, and of course we were all
flustered and leaping to attention and he was saying, “Take it easy, guys. I just came
around to see how things were going. I know you worked real hard today with all these
interrogations that we had and I just wanted to come by and tell you I appreciate it.” He
was quite a guy [A wonderful officer]; its too bad he didn’t stay longer [so maybe things
wouldn’t have become so frustrating for me]; but of course he made it to 4 stars and I’m still in touch with him with a Christmas card every year to this day.

SM: Wow.

JH: He sort of adopted us. He thought we were very professional, we worked hard, we knew what we were doing, we made a contribution even though we weren’t out killing VC. Too bad there weren’t more of him.

SM: Okay, and…

JH: But anyway, that was basically…it was basically an 18 hour day, and I let the guys sleep in in the morning if we didn’t have anything going on, obviously. I’d go over and do the division stuff and do any coordination and what have you, and then I’d come back and brief people on what was going on and where we might be getting people problems, who was in contact and that sort of thing.

SM: Were there a lot of civilian Vietnamese in your base area?

JH: Yeah. We had the typical arrangement that everybody else had with the…we did not have a hooch maid, but other units did, and there was a barber shop and there was a massage parlor. We didn’t have as many as they did at Bearcat, which was a regular base camp. Ours was a smaller operation; barbers.

SM: What did you think of the Vietnamese people?

JH: I liked them. I liked them very much. I got to be friends with my interpreters and in a couple of cases went to their homes when they had a house because I lived in My Tho [the last two months]. So, I liked them. For me, Korea was the start of my love affair with Asia but with my Vietnam assignment, bad as it was or personally unhappy, it cemented my love of southeast Asia and that’s where I got my start as a southeast Asia foreign area officer because of that.

SM: Do you have any contact with any Vietnamese people you served with?

JH: Two, one was an interpreter from my advisory years and one was an interpreter from my division years.

SM: Wow.

JH: I’ve lost the second one. I saw him in Saigon about 3 years ago, and when I went back a couple of months ago he wasn’t there. So, he’s moved. I’ll just wait. One of these years I might get a letter from him.
SM: The other interpreter that you still have contact with, is he also in Vietnam?

JH: Yes, he is. I see him every time I’ve been to Saigon now; 4 or 5 times, and I see him every time I go.

SM: How was he treated after the war?

JH: Well, he had an unusual situation, but basically he cannot get a job with the government so he teaches English, but his son works for a Malaysian bank so there’s apparently no great prejudice, or maybe he couldn’t get a government job if he wanted one. I don’t know if he’s applied, and I hear that from Vietnamese across the board, guides that worked for us that were in the ARVN or something like that or parents were, still have trouble.

SM: Was that the case with the other interpreter?

JH: Yes. He spent; I think he told me, 6 years in a reeducation camp. He was an ARVN sergeant.

SM: Wow. Well, okay. Anything else you want to talk about with regard to your first tour, like for instance there was anything interesting or humorous that occurred in [?]? You said something about talking about that.

JH: Oh, there were all kinds of anecdotes that I’ve written down here and there. We made the best of things. We had our own barbecue that we made. We made lots of barbecued shrimp; we had all the fancy little things that young bachelors do in the local community. I suppose because we had liaison requirements in My Tho. I could go and the GI guys went all the time to My Tho and one of the perks that I sort of handed out was that I’d take one of my interrogators with me, and I’d go do my liaison with the CIA house and the 125th MI group guys and what have you and they would go do bachelor type things, and love it; taking care of your men. But, we made the best of what we could.

SM: You said something about a CIA house?

JH: Oh yeah. They had a house in every province. I spent the last two months of my assignment as the liaison to the brand new Phoenix Program, and I moved into the embassy house in My Tho and worked there and worked with the province advisory team, even though I was still assigned to the 9th MI detachment.

SM: Okay, what…
JH: Basically the requirement came down and I told you I had that personality conflict so it was a win-win situation; the CO who didn’t like me and me not liking the CO, sent me off to My Tho and it worked well.

SM: And for the last 2 months you worked as a liaison with the CIA working on the Phoenix Program.

JH: The CIA and the province advisory team because it was a joint…they still called it Phoenix, but it was a joint program.

SM: Well yeah, the Phuong Huong; it was supposed to be primarily a Vietnamese program, wasn’t it?

JH: Well, it was, but they had both the province S2 advisor and the CIA guys, of course we never called them CIA, it was the embassy house.

SM: Embassy house?

JH: [?] advised the program, and I physically lived in the embassy house.

SM: Now, what was that like?

JH: It was neat. It was a big 2 story or 3 story old French villa and it was much more comfortable and we had air conditioned bed rooms and a cook with great Vietnamese food for us and it was very, very pleasant and I was delighted to be there.

SM: What was your primary duty, responsibility?

JH: My responsibility was to take potential targets to the division for reaction. They would, you know, I had nothing to do with how the center was run or anything like that. I did have a desk and they would bring me cases and say, “We’ve got all this great information. Do you think you could talk them into doing an operation?” and occasionally the division would, but the basic philosophy was we will integrate Phuong Huong operations into our larger mission which was the right way to do it, and the division commander couldn’t tell you, “I’m going to do just the Phuong Huong operation with the division.” It was kind of, at that point, it was brand new and it wasn’t…it sometimes didn’t get as much support because the US units are still saying the best way to win a war is to kill lots and lots of VC and NVA, and why should we go look for one or two village VC chiefs?
SM: Well, from your perspective, though, what did you think about this; the emphasis on neutralizing the infrastructure versus just going in and wiping out large numbers of people.

JH: Oh, it was definitely individually targeting people and trying to build up case folders against them and that sort of thing. It was totally destroyed by the press accounts of it. I lived with them and I didn’t see any killer teams going off, kidnapping wealthy officials for ransom and all those other things. I’m not saying that abuse didn’t take place, but I didn’t see them and I was right with them for 2 months.

SM: But what did you think about it in terms of a…

JH: Program? I thought it was an excellent idea, an excellent idea because the shadow government was the controller of even the VC and the NVA main force units, so you cripple the [VC shadow] government, if you will, you will therefore cripple the military effort.

SM: Now during your time with the military intelligence detachment and when you were working in My Tho, did you have occasion to learn or hear about the use of terror on the part of the Viet Cong?

JH: No. Oh, on the part of the Viet Cong?

SM: Yeah, that they would utilize…

JH: All the time.

SM: Yeah.

JH: All the time. We constantly were getting reports about village chiefs or teachers; they seemed to be the two biggest targets and their families. We’d go to a village, I used to go. We’d send intelligence people out with med caps so we could have a chance to talk to people and there’d always be stories about assassinations and public spectacles of executions and what have you. It was going on constantly, at least in the Delta, because it was almost entirely a guerilla war there.

SM: Now, you would accompany med caps?

JH: Uh-huh.

SM: Would they be accompanied by support personnel in terms of protection?

JH: Oh yeah. They’d have a security unit would go and the docs would go out into a village, usually two or three, and medics, or I’d go myself sometimes with one of
them and we’d just talk to people; “What’s going on? What's’ really going on?” and they could talk to Americans under the guise of the med cap whereas they couldn't otherwise if we just rolled up in a jeep and started talking.

SM: So actually, the med caps facilitated the collection of intelligence on the ground?

JH: Yes, they did, but we didn’t get very much intelligence. It was more of, “What’s the atmosphere in this village?” Is it a happy or is it a scared village? Where would the VC come in? It was not a question of, “Do they?” its how do they travel when they come in to put up their mortar locations to fire mortars at Dong Tin? You know, where do they go? [?]. It was very low level.

SM: But important.

JH: Yeah, it worked. You tried to do everything you could.

SM: Were there ever any reprisals against people that talked with you that you’re aware of?

JH: Not that I’m aware of.

SM: We’ve been going now, let’s see here…

JH: I’ll talk about more; the primary, the person that I sort of worked with, not necessarily for, was the province S2 advisor was a major on the province advisory team, and most of the people I worked with were the intelligence advisors. There was the NILO, Navy Intelligence Liaison Officer, Navy lieutenant O3 in town that belonged, I guess, to the mobile riverine force Navy component but he actually had his office in My Tho, and the advisory team staff. So, I went to the province advisory briefings everyday and sort of coordinated with the province senior advisor and that sort of thing. But, I lived in the CIA house because there were no villas for me in the province advisory house, and the guy, the embassy guy, said, “Oh sure you can stay with us. We’ve got an extra bed,” so it wasn’t because I was detailed to them that I lived there, it was I was detailed to the province. But, I lived with the CIA people because they had space.

SM: Okay, and you interacted regularly with the CIA people?

JH: Oh, I lived with them, yeah. But I didn’t, for example, as whatever you wanted to call the head guy, had his own office and it was… I couldn’t go in there. If I wanted to talk to him, I had to knock on his door and he’d come out to the door because
of need to know and all that stuff, so I was definitely not liaison to the CIA. I was liaison to the province but I lived with them and ate with them.

SM: What about Vietnamese people there and Vietnamese counterparts working for or working in conjunction with Phoenix?

JH: Well, the counterparts in the Phuong Huong center, they were set up where from the province staff, and I honestly can’t remember who all I worked with. My whole point of contact were the two intelligence guys from province; a major and a captain.

SM: Okay, and the people that you saw were targeted by Phoenix while you were there for those two months, you mentioned that you guys were basically collecting data, collecting information on these individuals. From your knowledge and your understanding of the program, what was the primary purpose of collecting that information? Was it to capture them and present a case against them, or was it to actually, if necessary, kill them?

JH: Both.

SM: Both?

JH: But it was primarily to capture them and get information on other VC, and it depends…it tended to be that the division would get real interested if they were talking about the province VC chief or somebody fairly senior. They weren’t too terribly interested about village VC. But, conversely, the province, the Vietnamese province apparatus was very interested in VC village chiefs because they were down at the individual terror level if you will so there was a combination of both. But, it was mostly to go out and try to capture these people and get intelligence from them and roll up the rest of the VC government. Rather than kill them one by one, it was to find out who all they were and uncover clandestine people that they didn’t know about, so we didn’t do any assassination mission planning; we did sweep planning. The 9th division would put a cordon on this particular village and we’ll have our source with a hood on his head in a building someplace and he’ll look at all of the people that you bring in for questioning and point out who the bad guy is, that sort of thing.

SM: I see.
JH: We did two or three of those. Remember, I was only there for 2 months. I saw enough of the program that when I went back, I specifically volunteered to go to a province advisory team, figuring that that’s what I’d be involved in.

SM: And what about strategic hamlets?

JH: We didn’t have any. By then, I think it was gone.

SM: Okay, I didn’t know if any were still around.

JH: We didn’t have any in My Tho Province [Dinh Tuong Province].

SM: Okay, anything else you want to add about your first tour?

JH: No, I think we covered it.

SM: So you went ahead and resigned, went to school?

JH: I didn’t resign; I went into the active reserves.

SM: Oh, you were in the active reserves?

JH: Yes.

SM: I’m sorry. Okay, so you were in the active?

JH: I requested relief from active duty.

SM: Okay, so you went to the active reserves, you went to school, got your master’s in public administration, and…

JH: And I was bored, and I can do better than these guys, you know, a sergeant major and that sort of thing, so I asked to go back in and went to the advanced course and volunteered to go back, and you could volunteer to go to specific things and I asked specifically…in fact, there was a program; if you volunteered for the [?] program, you were guaranteed to go to the corps area that you chose. That was a guarantee. Are you there?

SM: Yes sir.

JH: Okay.

SM: I’m sorry.

JH: So I volunteered for it and I asked to go back to IV corps and I guess it was not until we actually got in country when you put down, I think we got a form that said, “What three provinces,” you know, “Put down three provinces,” and I put down one province and said, “I was here before and I’d like to go back because I know the area very well,” and they said, “You have to put down three,” so I put down Dinh Tuong
which was where My Tho and Dong Tam were and I put down Ben Tre, Kien Hoa across
the river, and I forgot which one the third one was, and I got Kien Hoa.

SM: So you’re, at that point…let’s see, what year is this?
JH: This is June of ’71.
SM: June of 1971. What did you think about…?
JH: June or July.
SM: Huh?
JH: I can’t remember exactly what day I actually got in.
SM: Oh, that…I’m just looking for a round figure. What…well, I guess a couple
of things, actually, before getting into what you thought in 1971 about the Vietnamese
program, the Vietnamization program. What did you think about LBJs decision not to
run for reelection in ’68 when that happened?
JH: I thought it was wonderful. I had family reasons to not like LBJ as well as
later in the war. I did not like him at all.
SM: And what did you think about Nixon’s election bid and his secret project
initially and then his secret plan, and then his plan of Vietnamization, when it was
unfolding?
JH: By the time when I was going over, we didn’t know what it was, but…no; I
guess we did know because he came in in ’68. I was all in favor of Vietnamization and I
was all in favor of the [?] program because I thought if you went after the local structure,
the enemy structure, you’d end the war. In fact, I was sort of reacting back to my 9th
division thing when they were trying to block off 25 square miles and assume everybody
in it was a bad guy and I said, “Oh, if we’ve gotten in there and gotten 20 bad guys, we
probably would have done a lot more,” but anyway, that’s neither here nor there. So, I
was a strong supporter of the program, and that’s why I volunteered for it. As it turned
out, of course, by the time I got there it was virtually Vietnamized and I really didn’t
work in it at all.
SM: Now your primary mission was to help advise your Vietnamese counterparts
on how to train and conduct operations?
JH: Here’s where it gets very complex; now remember, this is June ’71 and you
have a Vietnamized DIOCC program and you have a…this is the period when we were
reorganizing the advisory teams to the smaller advisory teams because of withdraws and
so I can’t remember where I got the briefing but I’m sure it was before we actually got to
Vietnam and they were already telling us about the reduced sized advisory teams and that
you might have to have an expanded area of responsibility and what have you, so when I
got there I knew I was probably going to be doing more than just advising a DIOCC and
that’s exactly what the case was because when I got there, when I got to the team, the
DSA was a major, then there was me, and then we had an intel NCO who advised the
DIOCC and then we had an ops NCO who helped operations, so there were 4 of us on a
team that at one point had 8 I think. I’m sure that’s right because there were 8 bunks in
our bunker where we slept.

SM: I’m sorry, would you spell for me DIOCC?

JH: D-I-O-C-C, Defense Intelligence and Operations Court…District
Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Center.

SM: Okay.

JH: That was supposed to be the apparatus within the TOC at each district,
combined intelligence and operations. I mean, you’d think that that would be normal, but
they figured they needed a special facility. But in any case, the [?] advisor in the
classroom training was it was all about how to be a DIOCC advisor, and so that’s what
our practical exercises were on and that sort of thing. By the time we got there, it was
basically, “You are going to be the deputy district senior advisor. We don’t have the
personnel to be a separate…for you to be solely a DIOCC advisor guy,” and so I was the
deputy district senior advisor and went on, you know, the district senior advisor would go
on an operation one day and I would go on the operation the next day and then we
switched off, and it was sort of, “Oh, go and see how sergeant so and so’s doing.” I’m
trying to think; I want to say that within 3 months of my arrival, the Intel NCO left our
advisory team and was not replaced and within 6 months, the operations NCO left and
was not replaced so there was just 2 of us plus our interpreters. We had two interpreters.

SM: These are Vietnamese?

JH: Vietnamese. One was a civilian and he was the Intel interpreter for the
DIOCC. He was physically handicapped; one leg was shorter than the other, so he
couldn't be drafted and couldn't walk long distances. He tried. He would go on short
operations. But anyway, the DIOCC itself, by that time, just kind of went away and the Vietnamese had come to realize that it was a good program and they integrated capturing or eliminating infrastructure just like they went after guerilla units. So, for all intensive purposes, within 6 months of my arrival, we didn’t have a DIOCC.

SM: Okay.
JH: I was no longer a Phung Hoang advisory.
SM: How much had changed in the Phung Hoang program in your first 2 months to the second tour?
JH: Well, in the year and a half I’d been away, it had gone from barely, barely starting up in the province to having a full time advisor and establishing all these...basically what it did was cause the US Army to have to assign dozens and dozens of lieutenants to Vietnam as DIOCC advisors. So, in the year between let’s say I left in November of ’68, I don’t remember when MACV actually really said, “This is top priority.” But between ’68 and ’71, they’d gone through a whole iteration of maybe 2, maybe 3 iterations of lieutenants going over and being district DIOCC advisors, to the point that when I got there, there was a sergeant doing it, and then the DIOCC went away.

SM: What about the actual way the Phung Hoang program or project executed its mission?
JH: Well I can only talk about district level and we did not do separate...we didn’t differentiate Phung Hoang operations from regular operations. They were completely integrated, so that when you went out on an operation you were looking for both guerillas and...I mean, the district has two, had to target on infrastructure. In fact, our district chief did an innovative thing; he gave every single officer an infrastructure counterpart and they were supposed to find out everything they could about him and if you were able to eliminate your counterpart, you got extra brownie points or whatever. I don’t remember how many actually did that. But anyway, it was to build up support for cognizance of the program, reports of capturing and the infrastructure [?]. But in effect, they didn’t seem to change operational styles. They integrated both tactical and Intel operations into one.

SM: That’s an interesting concept, using the counterpart concept in that regard.
JH: In fact, it was briefed at the national level. I don’t know if it ever became national policy, but our PSA thought it was important enough that it was briefed at Saigon.

SM: And you, as a person working on that project, part of the job or part of the project was to actually potentially eliminate the counterpart?

JH: Well, yeah.

SM: Kill them?

JH: Yeah.

SM: Okay.

JH: To capture them or kill them, yeah.

SM: Okay. Now, while you were there, did you hear of or witness yourself or hear through rumor I guess the use of that type of an operation by say a province chief or a district chief, eliminate a political competitor who was not necessarily Viet Cong?

JH: I can say, categorically, it did not happen in my district. In fact, I worked in 2 districts. I don’t know about any other levels. I certainly heard the rumors and the reports that it was used as a vengeance, revenge, and income generating program and my personal thought is that it probably did in fact happen, but I have no personal knowledge of it.

SM: And I guess the conditions under which you lived, how different were they in 1971 and on into 1972 versus your first tour in ’68?

JH: Well, its apples and oranges because the 9th division and all of the divisions usually went pretty first class. They built these huge base camps. We lived in 2 story barracks, wooden barracks buildings. We had fans and electricity and all that kind of stuff. My province, my first district team, we had a team house that was a stucco building and we had built, before I got there, the team had built a bunker, a sleeping bunker out of sandbags and PSP on the back where we slept, and the big room was…it even had 2 different tile patterns, so ½ of it was where the kitchen and the dining room table was, if you will, and the other half was where the sofa and chairs were and our radio and desk that we kind of used as our operations center. We had electricity during the day and at night we had a generator which we ran until we ran out of gas and wanted to go to bed and then we turned it off. We didn’t leave it running all night. We had a cook, and
she cooked very good food for us. We had a cold water shower. We had a latrine with a flush toilet, and I thought we were in pretty good shape. But, I had other friends who were district Phung Hoang advisors who lived in air conditioned trailers and that sort of thing, so conditions varied widely, depending on where you were in Vietnam. The second team house I lived in was a bit bigger because it had a larger advisory team, but was basically the same idea.

SM: Now…

JH: We had electricity all night [?], but anyway.

SM: The operations that you would support out of this area, were these large unit deployments, small unit deployments?

JH: We had, Kien Hoa had no ARVN divisions assigned there or regiments. It was all RF and PF.

SM: How well were they trained?

JH: Some were very good and some were very rudimentary. We spent, when we had the ops NCO, part of the time that he was there he spent training PFs how to handle rifles and shoot, things like that. The district chief and I, I mean, the district senior advisor and I, did not pretend to really advise our counterpart. We coordinated with him, and occasionally we’d offer some advice. We provided funds; we provided air strikes and that sort of thing.

SM: So you guys would act as the forward observers of sorts.

JH: Oh yeah, yeah, except we were ground based. We’d have coveys come in, FAQs come in, and first thing in the morning we’d coordinate with the district chief as to where he had operations going. Coveys would come on the air and we’d request that everyday, it was automatic, we’d get one come in and then if anybody needed one we’d have troops in contact or if we had suspicions that enemy companies [?] biggest unit we had to worry about.

SM: I’m sorry, what size?

JH: Company size.

SM: Company size.

JH: VC or NVA.

SM: But mostly, at this point, NVA?
JH: By that time, yes.
SM: Okay, and what was the intelligence product like that you were receiving in the advisory capacity in terms of before you’re the MI guy and you’re doing the briefing?
JH: By that time I was wearing MI brass but I was not doing intelligence duties whatsoever.
SM: Right, and all intelligence gathering?
JH: The only intelligence we got was from our Vietnamese counterparts.
SM: Yes. How was it?
JH: It was, oh, in retrospect I can say I know why it wasn’t very good, but it was good enough for them to go out to the field everyday, or almost everyday, conduct operations, build outposts, provide security. There were 9 districts in Kien Hoa and we were the second best. This was my first district. So, it wasn’t a huge threat initially, so as it turns out, it was more a question of keeping track of the local guerillas and chasing them around and occasionally…it was mostly defensive. They’d attack an outpost, we’d have outposts overrun, and then we would react to it and that sort of thing. When I went back as the acting district senior advisor, it was called the Easter Tide Offensive but it didn’t actually hit our province until I want to say August or September. It was an entirely different situation. We had an NVA regimen cross the river into our district, into our district, and we had some major, major firefights. But, I lost my train of thought.
SM: Can we go ahead and discuss…
JH: You were asking what was the intelligence like. It was…there are some VC here, the VC village chief isn’t going to be here, there might be a tax collector coming through, there’s 10 guerillas hiding in the coconut trees over here, that sort of thing.
SM: Well, would you go ahead and tell me why, in retrospect, you think intelligence wasn’t very good?
JH: Because I asked that interpreter we talked about a while ago, and I said, he admitted to me, I’m not going to mention his name or anything, he admitted to me that his sister had been a fairly high level VC cadre in the same province, but he could not tell anybody because he would never have been able to go into the ARVN or be an interpreter for the Americans. So, when the war was over and he was put into re-education, she was able to get him out in fairly short order. I took that with a grain of salt; a very large grain
of salt, as to what he might have been reporting on, but I’ll give him the benefit of the
doubt. But, in any case, I said, “Well who was the VC in our district?” We always
assumed that about 1/3 of the people in the district compound were VC or VC supporters,
and he said – and I have no way to verify this yet – he said that the senior VC was the
district S1, Lieutenant Thu, and all 3 of the intel NCOs were VC but not the S2, and the
interesting thing about this, and if you want another anecdote, when I went back out there
as the acting DSA…let’s just fast backward a minute; I got to Kin Hua in let’s say June
of ’71, June or July, and we closed that advisory team in May when the DSA DEROsed,
and because the district was doing so well and we were phasing out personnel, they
closed the advisory team and I moved to Mo Cay which was one of the very worst
districts in all of Vietnam, same province. But anyway, when I went back in let’s say
September as the acting advisor, for a while I had an American NCO with me, with 2 of
us, but for a number of reasons we sent him back to province and I was there for 3
months by myself during this major offensive, and the district chief come up to me the
second day. The reason I was sent was the advisor, the senior district chief, or province
senior advisor, had sent the province S2 advisor out there to be the acting senior advisor
and within an hour of him getting off the helicopter he was killed and he was killed
because he had never been in the field and he didn’t know how to react in an ambush and
he stood there. He literally had his head blown off by an RPG. So, the district chief said,
“It would have never have happened if they’d sent you.” He said, “I asked for you, but
they said you couldn’t come because Mo Cay was also in trouble and you were too busy,
and so they sent me so and so, and if you had come, it never would have happened, but I
never want to lose another advisor so these two NCOs from the intel section are your
body guards.” And so in addition to being Intel NCOs, whenever we went on operations,
I went every time the district chief went, I went. “These are your body guards and they’ll
be very close to you and they’ll carry your radio and they’ll do all this other stuff, and not
to worry because these are your body guards and they will take care of you,” and I said,
“Well, I’ll carry my own radio, but I’m glad to have the body guards,” and so when I saw
my interpreter friend in Saigon and he told me this, I said, “You know, I always
wondered who they were and that doesn’t surprise me because that’s who I’d want to
have as my recruits if I was the VC district chief.” But, why am I still alive? They had
all these opportunities to kill me, and he said, “Well, actually, there’s 2 reasons.” He
said, “First of all, it’s too much trouble for the VC when an American gets killed or
wounded because there’s investigations and they may lose their sources just through
somebody saying the wrong thing or something and so rather than have an investigation,
why shoot yourself in the foot by killing your advisor?” And he said, “The second reason
was, everybody liked you. You were a nice person. You worked well with everyone, you
weren’t arrogant, you went to the field, you didn’t ask special favors, you carried your
own radio. People liked you,” and so I’m still alive. But anyway, where were we?

SM: That was part of the question as far as the intelligence and the Viet Cong
and how far they had infiltrated even the ARVN.

JH: Oh yeah, yeah. But we, I was going to say, we thought 1/3 and we had no
way of knowing who they were. We were not equipped to fathom out who the VC were
at times and the district chief’s staff.

SM: Well thinking back or looking back on that experience, especially when they
assigned the 2 body guards, do you recall or in retrospect do you see where perhaps they
were actually even controlling agents of sorts, where they weren’t just protecting you but
they were also preventing you from doing certain things?

JH: No. They did not do that at all.

SM: Restrict you?

JH: They were just there to, you know, if a fire fight broke out, their job was to
knock me to the ground and make sure I didn’t get shot.

SM: Not necessarily because they were actually trying to save your life, but they
just didn’t want the hassle that would be involved if you were killed?

JH: Exactly, and so they didn’t in any way hamper who I talked to, what I did,
who I saw. I mean, they obviously knew everything I did.

SM: But they certainly monitored everything you did?

JH: Oh sure, they went everywhere.

SM: So they reported back?

JH: If I went to take a piss, they went with me.

SM: Yeah.

JH: If I went to take a bath, they went with me. I mean, they know everything.
SM: But they also know everybody you talk to and everything that was said?

JH: But I never did anything privately. See, I was an advisor; I wasn’t seeking out people and having private conversations about intelligence or anything like that. I was just along with the radio in case we needed air strikes and to provide moral support and that sort of thing.

SM: Right. Wow, okay. The Easter Offensive, and in particular when they finally did hit in your area of operations, could you discuss what happened and the specifics; what your role was?

JH: Well, several things happened. I’m trying to remember the sequence of events. I went on my extension leave in July for a month, and when I got back I found out that by that time, May, the advisory team was closed in my first district and I moved to my second district to meet my new boss and what have you, take my interpreter with me - the two of us moved together as a team-and then I went on my one month leave and when I got back I discovered that my district chief had been killed and my boss wounded in an ambush, major operation, but this is not yet the Easter Offensive; that didn’t happen until September. But anyway, so I was acting district senior advisor [Mo Cay] after a month, basically, on the ground until he came back from the hospital and then we worked together for a couple of months and then the invasion happened and it was very interesting because we had…I’m trying to remember how this worked. We had…I’m trying to remember what we called the Chieu Hoi’s that we made into the…kid carson scouts, kid carson scouts, and their American advisor went into an operation in our district, actually on the border of the next district, and one of them was badly wounded and the only way that we could get them into an American hospital in Saigon was if an advisor went with him and so I went on the Medevac. It picked me up, we got the wounded man, and of course the advisor had to stay with his team, and so I flew up in the helicopter from Ben Tre to Saigon and on the way I could see smoke from what was obviously what was big fires out in what had been my former district [in Ham Long] and I was concerned about it but I flew on to Saigon, dropped the man off at the hospital, and flying back the pilot says, “I'm supposed to take you to Ben Tre instead of back to Mo Cay. I said, “Oh, okay,” so they dropped me off and the province senior advisor said, “There’s a major invasion. There’s a whole regimen or maybe two of them up in your
old district, in Ham Long, and I’d like you to go up there and be the acting DSA…we’re going to reconstitute the team. I’ll send you and the sergeant.” I said, “Of course, when do I…” you know, and he said, “Right now!” So, they flew me out there and that’s when I…he then also told me about the other guy getting killed and so that’s how I got into the Easter Offensive which didn’t happen until September.

SM: What happened once the fight broke out in your area?

JH: Well, there was at least one or two regiments. We never were really sure, and part of the ARVN 7th division came into the district and basically the district chief surrendered all operations to them for the first couple of weeks I was there and…

SM: This is August of ’72, is that right?

JH: Later than that. I want to say September.

SM: September of ’72?

JH: Yeah.

SM: Okay.

JH: September or October; I will say September, and so I was in there and we reconstituted, officially reconstituted, the team. I was appointed district senior advisor, and I want to say I was there September, October, and part of November and between the ARVN division and then the rest of our troops, we kicked them out. They went back across the river and back into the Plain of Reeds and I went back then to Mo Cay, my official job. So, it was very intense for a while. In fact, I wrote an article for a now defunct magazine called Gung Ho about one battle in one of the little towns, village towns, whatever you want to call it, and it was very hot and heavy. I was there by myself with the radio. We’d put in a lot of air strikes. We had some pretty vivid descriptions from RF and PF platoon leaders about, “Keep dropping the bombs, the VC are running around bumping into trees from the concussions!” You know, “You’re killing lots of them!” and that sort of thing, so that was my Easter Offensive. It was me with a sergeant for about a month, oh, 3 weeks, and by myself for about another month and ½ with the district chief.

SM: Well, how many battles, like the one that you just talked about that you had written in Gung Ho magazine, how many of those occurred in that time period?
JH: Oh lots. That was one of the biggest ones. In fact, I think that was the one that actually ended when the ARVN division came in. It was basically over, and then the ARVNs swept through. Basically they did a district sweep and that lasted a couple of weeks and then they went back to wherever they had to go, and the rest of it was cleaning up, so I would say probably major battles like that, 5 or 6.

SM: Okay.

JH: And, lots and lots of small contacts afterwards.

SM: And what kind of casualties would you estimate were inflicted against the North Vietnamese and—

JH: I have no idea.

SM: —and VC?

JH: I have no idea.

SM: Were the ARVN units and were the district units that you were working with, did they engage in the body count like the Americans did when we were there?

JH: No, they weren’t, and they did report how many were killed but I don’t think they were fighting the body count war like we did. They were just trying to kill as many as they could. In fact, it was often a problem. You sort of wondered if there really was a fight because there weren’t any bodies. “Well, we had a 2 hour fire fight; how many were killed?” “Well, we don’t know.” So, there was no conservative effort to patrol around an outpost afterwards, for example, to leave and look for bodies and blood trails or anything like that. The fighting was over and they were still alive and that was good.

SM: Well, how effective do you think that was, though?

JH: There were varying degrees of effectiveness depending on what part of the district or the province you were in. That was the way they fought the war, and again I had another friend who was killed in an outpost. The outpost was attacked, mortar and ground attacked, and he was running around setting up the defenses and rallying and everything like that and he was killed by a mortar round.

SM: This was an American?
JH: No, no, it was a Vietnamese. But, it would be very, very intense for a day or two and then there would be nothing happen for a week and then you’d do something. You’d go some place and you’d be back into very heavy attacks again.

SM: What did you think of the strategy as it was being employed while you were there in this capacity? Did you think that they were going to win? Did you think that they’d be able to hold off?

JH: Sometimes my cup was half full, and sometimes it was half empty. There was no question in my mind that we were going to defeat that offensive just because of the way that the battles were going and the fact that we did still have US air power. But, I always, always, the whole time I was in Vietnam, questioned whether the South Vietnamese would win the war. In fact, sometimes when the advisors would have their monthly meetings and we’d have 5 or 6 beers and depending on the degree of frustration someone would start a conversation about what it would be like to be advisors to the VC side because they seemed to have their shit together better than the south Vietnamese.

SM: Well, you know, something just popped in my mind thinking about the district chief and the infiltration of the Viet Cong into the political and military hierarchy of this area in which you worked; how do you think that affected the Phuong Huong program?

JH: Well, by then the Phuong Huong program was basically dead.

SM: Right, but those people…

JH: It was no longer a separate program. So, when you have 2 or 3 Intel NCOs who are supposed to be keeping all of these diaries, they were the same kids, I mean they were kids; they were under the age of 30, same age as I was or younger, yeah, obviously they’re protecting people. The question is how many did they themselves know about? Their own level of knowledge may be rather limited, or they may have been solely assigned the mission of keeping the VC advised of what the government forces were doing rather than knowing who they were actually reporting to. You just…we didn’t know.

SM: It’s just amazing.

JH: Yeah.
SM: And of course, they had to have been in positions of influence and authority prior to getting that high up, and I’m sure they were…their ties to the VC were not new.

JH: Well see, you just don’t know. I do know that this lieutenant is reportedly, and I’d love to go visit him and I might be able to do it on my next trip, he’s reportedly a mid level government cadre in the province now. Where the guys who were the Intel NCOs are, I have no idea. Some of them were local RF soldiers and some of them were regular ARVN, so where they went at the end of the war, I have no idea, and my interpreter said he didn’t know, either.

SM: But I mean as far as during the war, they had moved up the chain and was, prior to becoming either mid level or high level VC working in those ARVN or South Vietnamese positions of authority…

JH: Well I would say the guys in our district team were not high level at all.

SM: Yeah.

JH: They were, they were either VC from VC families and sort of…I mean, they were obviously clean enough to have gotten into the RF or PF, and then surfaced as part time agents. I just don’t know.

SM: It just raises the level of complexity.

JH: If those guys were like that in my district, they must have been that way elsewhere.

SM: Oh yeah, it just shows once more how complex the situation was on the ground.

JH: How complex and ultimately how futile.

SM: Yes, yes. Wow. Well, what happened after the Easter Offensive? How much longer were you in country? When did you leave?

JH: I’ll end up with one last neat story; I went back to my district with Major Reed and the cease fire came and I have this knack for being in the wrong place when major events happen. I mean, I’ve been in country when my DSA was wounded. I was on R&R in Japan when the cease fire was signed the last week in January, the 3rd week in January and we were all supposed to all be out by the end of January, was it?

SM: Uh-huh.
JH: And so I flew back having no idea what was going on, got back to my
district, and as you know once it looked like there was going to be a cease fire they had
this flag business where the VC or the NVA would attack and raise their flag and say,
“We control this territory,” and then there’d be a reaction and they’d put Vietnamese,
south Vietnamese flags up. This was going on all over the place. Well, the district I was
advisor in, in Mo Cay happened to be the home district of Madam Binh who was the VC
foreign minister and was actively involved in the peace negotiations in Paris, and so they
decided, they being somebody in Hanoi, that they would give Madam Binh her home
district back as a present and so the flag raised and it turned into a major offensive just in
Mo Cay not elsewhere in the province in which they attempted very determinedly to
overrun Mo Cay and claim the whole district as a VC district and so by that time my
DSA had been assigned to one of the 2 power 4 power teams, and had left, and so I was
there all by myself and my interpreter and I got word down that said, “You’re not leaving
on the 31st of January,” and the explanation was, “Well, 2 weeks ago you could have
driven up to the ferry and into Ben Tre without any security,” because the road was clear
and pacified and all that good stuff, “But now its closed,” which was true; they’d taken
over several of the bridges and the VC had it, or the NVA, and the district town was
isolated and they made the decision that the remaining advisor would stay in Mo Cay
until I could drive to the province capital because that was a security situation before the
cease fire. But, I was not allowed to advise. I could just stay there. There wasn’t
anything I could advise about anyway because there were no American air strikes left so I
couldn’t help the district chief with almost anything. He thought it was amusing that I
would stay, but I said, “No, they told me to stay. You and I are going to be here
together.” Then it was all done. So, I stayed 2 weeks, a little over 2 weeks, past the
cease fire and when I showed up in Can Tho I had to out process the 4 corps. “Holy shit,
what are you doing here? You were supposed to be gone 2 weeks ago?” I said, “I know.
Get me on an airplane!” So, I was, to my knowledge, the last district level advisor to
leave his district advisory duties in the entire war. There may have been other guys in
other parts of the country.

SM: But you were 2 weeks late?

JH: Huh?
SM: You were 2 weeks late?
JH: I was 2 weeks late.
SM: Well, general question about your second tour; how much influence…
JH: Pardon?
SM: How much influence do you think you had as an advisor during your last, well; it was almost a year and a half?
JH: Well, in some thing a lot of influence and in some things none at all. We had no influence on local politics, for example. We had very little influence on tactical operations. By that time, I was at least…I knew how to do an infantry operation, but my counterparts didn’t need any advice on tactical operations. I was occasionally a twinge of conscious as far as spending money goes. I did have funds to disperse for things like school and clinic instruction and that sort of thing, so I was a resource, a source of funding and so I had some influence there. I suppose I was more an influence in that aspect than anything else because it was kind of neat to build a dispensary or a clinic or a 10 room addition to the high school and that sort of thing. So, but as far as actually advising, I think that was a myth from early in the…well, not early in the war, certainly mid point onwards because the Vietnamese officers were perfectly proficient in tactics. You tried real hard to get them to be more aggressive, to do more operations. “If you, you know, why don’t we try in this village that’s still a D or an E village, why don’t we do some operations in there next month and see if we can improve security,” you know, that sort of thing. “If you do an operation there, I think I can get air support.” But, we weren’t as much of advisors. I think that was a convenient term that was created for the infrastructure for Americans in the province at district levels. Certainly by the end of the war we were not tactical advisors. We were asset providers; funds, air strikes.
SM: And what about, you know, one of the myths about the war, one of the comments that’s frequently made, is the Americans or I guess in the context of your second tour, the ARVN and the South Vietnamese forces controlled the day and the Viet Cong and eventually the PAVN controlled the night. Did you find that to be the case with your two tours, or the first one?
JH: Well, I can’t really comment on the first tour because I wasn’t out in the field that much. In the second tour, it definitely, in my little area of the world, it
depended on the situation as a convenient answer. There were definitely parts of my
district where I could not go in daytime as well as nighttime; in both of my districts.
There were some districts up to the very end that some areas, Mo Cay up to the very end
that I would never have thought about going in and would not have gone without a fairly
substantial ARVN force because of booby traps and VC presence in numbers, in large
numbers. So, in some cases, they controlled part of the daytime, and in some cases the
ARVN controlled the area day and night. But, you could take a map and spotchy color it
with who owns what, who controls what. You know, this color is day and night owned
by ARVN, this color is day and night owned by the VC, this color is a mixture. That
obtained up until the very end.

SM: Okay, anything else from your second tour that stands out that we haven’t
touched on?

JH: No. Advisory duty, you don’t win a lot of medals, and in many ways it’s
much more routine than being in a tactical American unit was. It definitely turned me
into a regional specialist because as soon as I got out of Vietnam I applied for the
program as a Southeast Asia Foreign Area Officer and was admitted and I spent the last
20 years of my career only in FAO jobs. Even the ones that I was on in the US were
either school or they were FAO billets so being an advisor had such an impact on me that
I basically spent the rest of my career doing it, either as an attaché or a security assistance
guy or whatever and I really enjoyed it, I really enjoyed it. I felt it was a constructive
contribution. I mean it was, yes, you were going on tactical operations lots and doing lots
of fighting and things were not always pleasant, but you were doing constructive things.
You were building schools, you were hopefully building infrastructure and that sort of
thing, and I had a great deal of pleasure when I went back to my two districts in 1996. I
haven’t been back since then, but I went in 1996 and my feeling was one of satisfaction
that things were okay. Now granted, the wrong guys won the war, if you will, but things
were okay. There were fish in the streams and rice was growing and the fruit trees had
regenerated and there was no barbed wire and there was no incoming and there was no
areas where people couldn't go out and make the land productive and so I felt good about
that even though, in the end, the wrong guys won the war.
SM: Well, what did you think about...when you left after your second tour, that was in I guess early...

JH: February of ’73.

SM: Yeah, February or ’73, came back to the United States, and continued on with your career as a Foreign Area officer. What did you think about the decision in 1975 not to continue providing assistance to the South Vietnamese forces?

JH: Well, by that time I was in Thailand and I was irate, but what good was there? I mean, I think the handwriting was on the wall in 1973 when the government was willing to sign an agreement that basically papered over the fact that there were North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. When we did not require all of those troops to go back to North Vietnam, the handwriting was on the wall that we were strictly providing a fig leaf for us to get out of there, and eventually it was going to be overrun. There was no question in my mind in 1973 that’s what was going to happen. It’s just going to be a matter of time. That was made shorter when we stopped providing arms and what have you.

SM: So in your estimate, as early as ’73 this was not peace with honor?

JH: Oh no, there was no question in my mind in 1973 that it was a lost cause. It was very hard to leave my counterparts because they knew.

SM: Did you...did they talk about it at all?

JH: Oh yeah, yeah. They said, “Well, you know,” tears in our eyes wishing each other good luck and they’d say, “Well you’re lucky. You’re going home to your family. We have to stay here and we know what’s going to happen.” They were...they knew then, and in fact I guess at one point in 1975 there was a considerable amount of talk that the provinces in the Delta might very well have been able to hold off indefinitely because they could mass forces to prevent armor from crossing the Mekong, so all of the Delta south of the Mekong the northern most branch of the Mekong, they might have been able to hold out for quite some time, but somebody made a decision not to...the south Vietnamese people made the decision, “No, we’re not going to do that,” so things were pretty well off by then in the Delta.
SM: Well what were the most important lessons that you took away from your
two tours that you were able to use later as a Foreign Area officer?

JH: Well, one, whether it’s a lesson or an ability, it’s how to work with people
of another country, another race, another civilization. I think I do that pretty good.
Certainly as far as, you know, the military side of it is if you’re not going to go fight to
win, don’t go at all which is much better enunciated by General Powell or Casper
Wineberger, depending on who you want to give the credit to, and I think that would
have been my single biggest national level strategic lesson. Another lesson is one man
can make a difference sometimes and lots of people can make no difference at other
times, and that would basically be the lesson of our war. I think most of us individually
felt we made a difference when we were where we were, but all of us together could not
alter the outcome.

SM: What did you think about your service when you came back and what do
you think about it today?

JH: Oh, I’m very proud of it. It was the high point of my life. The Vietnam
War is a hobby of mine now. I’ve got a personal library of hundreds and hundreds of
books about it. Although oddly enough, I'm not an expert on Vietnamese political affairs.
I’ve concentrated so much on Burma and Indonesia in my later career that I’m not really
an expert on Vietnam anymore, although I certainly thought I was when I left. I belong
to several veterans groups and I belong to the Counterparts association and it was a major
part of my life.

SM: Do you attend the reunions?

JH: No, I haven’t, but I’m hoping to be able to go this time.

SM: Okay, I’m going to be there this year so I hope to meet you there.

JH: Well, it depends on a lot of other commitments but I’ve kept the literature
and its going to be in Kentucky [L.A.] I think but it’s a question of whether I’m off on
another consulting gig or something.

SM: And let’s see here, in terms of your post war perspectives, how did the war
most effect you as just a human being, as a person?

JH: Oh, I think it took away any illusions I ever had about man’s inhumanity to
man or however I want to rephrase that correctly. If anything it may have made me very
cynical about American politics to this day. As a person, I think I grew up in Vietnam. I came out of college a year younger than all of my friends and sort of ran around as a lieutenant for a couple of years and then I grew up in Vietnam and hopefully while I was there learned how to treat people and how to work with them and I’ve used that every since.

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

JH: No, I think that covers it.

SM: Okay. Alright, well this ends interview number one with Mr. Haseman.