Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with Jaak Sepp. We are in Las Vegas, Nevada on May 5th, the year 2000. It is approximately 6:15 in the evening. Mr. Sepp, why don’t you begin by giving us a brief biographical sketch of yourself.

Jaak Sepp: I was born in Rotweil, Germany in July of 1946. It was a displaced persons camp. My parents were Estonian refugees escaping from the Russian Army during World War II. In the early 1950s refugees were being sent back to their countries of origin and my parents worked their way and tried to get to the United States. We ended up in southern California in June of 1950. At that time I was just turning 4 years old. I went to elementary school, that’s where I learned my English. I went to… I grew up in Ontario, California. As a teenager we moved to Upland which was a neighboring town and I graduated from Upland High School. I took pre or college prep courses there and went to Chafey Junior College in Alta Loma. I had received an athletic scholarship in water polo to San Jose State. On graduation day I had an automobile accident and I suffered a concussion and small skull fracture, so that athletic scholarship went down the tubes. At that point it was too late to enroll in a 4-year college, so I went to the junior community college, the junior college Chafey. I was there for a year and a few months and was drafted.

SM: What were you going to major in at college?

JS: Actually it was forestry engineering.

SM: Okay. What did you know about the Vietnam War and what was going on in Vietnam when you entered college?
JS: We knew about the Vietnam War in 19...I graduated in 1964 so there were already protests, there were sit INS. I came from a politically anti communist family and it’s because of their history that they were stridently anti communist. Without reservation, they would have gotten involved in any anti communist cause which was the way Vietnam was portrayed to the public and I felt no qualms about being involved in the war. I sympathized somewhat with the protestors but that really in the end turned to contempt. I don’t know how and why that transition came, perhaps the time I was in Vietnam realizing the effect this was having on morale and on the troops, but I removed and I still am considered communism equal and evil to fascism and Nazism. The results are the same, the means are different; that’s all.

SM: So when you were drafted, you didn’t feel any negativity towards them?
JS: No, inconvenienced. Party life was over! College life came to an end, but it did not effect the way that this happened, it did not effect my, I guess for search of better words, anti communism.

SM: What did your parents think about you being drafted?
JS: They were afraid for me, having gone through the Second World War and the violence of that but at that time also we thought of Vietnam as an advisor’s war or a guerilla warfare and that somewhat mitigated their concerns.

SM: How much was the fact that this was part of the cold war where we were again establishing a bulwark of containing communism; did that have an effect on their opinion as well?
JS: Oh yes, oh yeah. They felt this was a just thing. They just didn’t think I ought to be going because I was their son. But, in the end, they realized there’s a price for freedom and they felt that Vietnam was a price worth paying. They both went to their graves feeling that way.

SM: So their opinion never changed?
JS: Their opinion never changed. You can under...I guess I can understand it because they looked at it through a very narrow vision which they were entitled to from their background, the fact that they were declared enemies of the state for being successful, for being educated and having done nothing against the state. They feared that form of government and that form of political structure ever raising its head again because they knew what the result was. They were shocked. I went in for a physical, it was a pre induction physical, and when I called them from
Los Angeles International Airport and told them I was on my way to Fort Bliss, Texas, that did cause a shock.

SM: So you didn’t really have a chance to go back?
JS: No, I didn’t go back until I went home after basic training for a week.
SM: Wow, I’m sure that was a shock.
JS: That was a shock.
SM: So Fort Bliss, Texas for basic training? What was that like?
JS: Fort Bliss, Texas was, it wasn’t a difficult place to train. We didn’t have a lot of hills, we didn’t have a lot of trees and bushes to have to run around, it was about half physical conditioning and half teaching us certain military skills in the classroom and in training areas.
At this time, I believe it was at Fort Ord, they had a spinal meningitis epidemic so training regimen was restricted to the essentials and a lot of the harassment, the physical harassment, was cut out. We were given enough food, enough rest, and enough time to recover from each physical experience in order not to contact the meningitis. So in that respect, it was good. Also I was in really good physical condition so physical training, which is the way the military harasses you, is by extending your physical training in push ups, sit ups, or whatever it is, chin ups, they didn’t mean much to me. I could do it, and so it didn’t bother me. I believe the basic training score was 1000, 500 for the written exam, 500 for the physical, and the combined I scored about somewhere between 950 and 975 and because of that score I was promoted to private E2, bumped up to E2 out of basic training. Also because of the grades that I received in the basic training class, I was given an assignment to a school that was normally reserved for 3 year or 4 year enlistees which was at Aberdeen Proving Ground Aircraft Armament Training School.
SM: So when you went into the Army, when you were inducted, you didn’t know you were going to become an armorer?
JS: No, in fact we were told draftees, at that point, were going to become infantrymen one way or another. We were going to end up infantrymen because they didn’t want to waste the time and money on draftees. They did give you the opportunity to take an extra year or two years and become regular Army instead of draftee and be guaranteed a particular school. I took a gamble, and I didn’t end up in the infantry.
SM: So then after Fort Bliss basic training, well actually before your AIT training at Aberdeen, did you think that basic training was effective?
JS: I thought it was effective. The basic training, the conditioning and teaching people military lore and the military way of doing things came across and it came across effectively. Whether you agreed with their method was a different story, but what they taught was well taught. I mean, I really can’t complain about that. Physical conditioning was tough if you’ve never done it before. Having to grasp new concepts and new ideas was tough if you’ve never done that before but if you had done that, then you just adapted to their way of doing things and you found out you did less push ups and got more bed time and rest time and more privileges if you just went along and did the job and you did it to your best ability. If you resisted and rebelled against the system, you paid a dear price for it. You still pay it. But it was a system you couldn’t beat so you did what you could to do it right.

SM: Was there ever any incidents of physical contact or altercations between the students or the basic trainees?

JS: None in my unit, and I didn’t hear of any others. There was never any physical or corporal discipline of the trainees and no physical retaliation against NCOs and officers. None of that happened. Now from my understanding you hear in the gossip and the rumor mill that it did happen, it happened somewhere else, but it never happened in the circle that I actually had knowledge of.

SM: And what kind of weapons training did you receive?

JS: We trained with M-14s, both in semi automatic and full automatic, we trained with hand grenades, and with the M-60 machine gun on a fixed mount. You could swivel it maybe a total of 45 degrees from center so that’s 22 and ½ each direction and no elevation change, just to get used to the idea of pulling a trigger and having a gun bounce on you. We did fire the M-14 with bipods but only in a rather small training session with selector switches that we had to turn back in. The rest of the time we trained with the M-14s in the semi automatic mode. No side arm pistol training at all.

SM: So when you…when was your first introduction to the M-16?

JS: In Vietnam.

SM: In Vietnam?

JS: I was never assigned an M-16; I never was given an M-16. As an armorer I learned to shoot it and how to repair it from the manual, but I was never given an M-16.

SM: What did you think about the M-16 compared to the M-14?
JS: The M-16 was lighter, easier to handle, but was prone to jamming. The slightest amount of dirt or rust would cause a round to stay in the breech. The round was so thin that normally you would jab something sharp against the rim of the round and force it back out. With the M-16 you’d pull the back of the round out, so you had to use either a cleaning rod with a swab on the end or you junked the gun. One of two things happened. The later models had chrome breeches which weren’t prone to rust. I believe the earlier ones, the first models, had polished aluminum breech. The chrome ones worked better. They also had a manual device that allowed you to jam the round into the chamber but if you jammed it in there was a good chance it would stay jammed. It was sensitive to dirt; that’s why you had that dust flap over the extractor part or the ejector part.

SM: Did that change at all while you were in Vietnam?
JS: I believe it did, it changed there because we had a second generation of M-16s. The original ones, the best way to identify it was it had a flash suppressor that had 4 prongs on it. The second generation came out with 4 prongs that were enclosed with a round device on the end. We used those prongs to open the wires on C-ration cans and they frowned on that because it damaged the flash suppressor and you could literally twist it off if you went the wrong direction.

SM: You could twist the flash suppressor off?
JS: Yes. The flash suppressor screwed on and was held in with a pin. You could eventually break that pin loose, so the GI’s, they did do some damage to the weapons themselves. You could break the flash suppressor off and having that pin in there you would also strip the threads at the same time making it not usable so they went and they closed off the end and that was our second generation of M-14s.

SM: Okay, let’s take a step back…
JS: Or, okay, M-16s; not M-14s.
SM: Let’s take a step back then to your Aberdeen proving ground AIT to become a 45 Juliet 20, an aircraft armorer, is that correct?
JS: And aircraft armament maintenance specialist.
SM: What did that involve?
JS: That involved 16 weeks of school. You were introduced to the basics of a helicopter and what it was used for. That took about 2 or 3 days. You went around and you actually went
from the classes to look at display helicopters at the proving ground. You got to sit in them, you
got to play with the controls which were hooked to nothing, but you got a feel of what you were
going to be working with. You saw the armament systems on the sides, mounted on the sides of
these aircraft. Then you went into classrooms and you took each one of the separate systems and
you studied it and you studied the application and again you went back to static mounts and
worked the systems. Each time or at the end of every week you had a test. How you scored on
the test determined the shift. Each class was 4 days, pardon me, 5 days per week, 8 hours a day.
The prime shift was 8 to 12, I’m sorry, 8 to 4; 8 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon with an hour
and a half for lunch. That was the prime shift. The next level of student went to…from 4 until
midnight. The worst students went from midnight until 8 in the morning and this went on. The
ones in the last class, the midnight to 8, went 7 days a week. The demand at that time was
anticipated to be so great. I luckily stayed always in the 8 to 4 class. We worked together as a
team to make sure everyone in the class passed. We would quiz each other. Most of us had at
least 1 or 2 years of college. Everyone was a high school graduate, so we had some form of
study habits and we formed a comradery there that said, “We’re not going to get split up.” We
lived in the same barracks, we slept on the same floor of the barracks; in fact, we slept all on the
same row of barracks in the bunks in the barracks. So, there was an incentive not to let yourself
be the one that dropped out. You didn’t want to look bad in front of your friends and that’s kind
of the story of the Army, you don’t want to look bad in front of your friends and that’s why you
sometimes do things that aren’t too bright. We went through training on the M-40 grenade, I
believe it was the M-40, grenade launcher used on the frog helicopter.

SM: Just a 40 millimeter?

JS: 40 millimeter, yeah. We trained on the flex guns which were two hydraulically
operated M-60 machine guns mounted outboard on the helicopter. We trained on a single 50
caliber mounted on an observation helicopter in a fixed mount and we trained on the rocket
systems including the hog which was the 48 rockets, 24 to a side. We got to fire at the range, the
flex guns and the hog, from a mock up aircraft. Again, you couldn’t traverse it, you couldn’t do
anything with it other than actually sit in the seat, see if your bore sighting was actually
functioning, and then you got to fire it at the range. The rockets, of course, being explosive or
highly explosive, you didn’t get to play with. You had a light that went on that told you, “Yes,
this rocket would have fired.” Mainly it was a light bulb, a continuity checker on the system.
Then we spent, once we got through all of the systems, then we spent probably 2 weeks in
trouble shooting classes where they would give you problems and they would have a stop watch
on you and you would have to, in groups of 2 or 3, solve the problem. Sometimes it was an
actual repair that you made, sometimes it was only an exercise in writing as to what you would
do and the steps you would follow because you couldn’t use live fire, you couldn’t test the
weapon. Training was fairly complete and again it wasn’t difficult. There was very little
harassment. If you did your work and you did it well, you were left alone. If you rebelled
against the system, they paid you back. They paid you back more than you could handle
sometimes. You just have to understand it; they make the rules and they’re going to enforce
their rules and it made training easy, or not easy, but less difficult if you accepted that. There
were people that didn’t like to be called names, they didn’t like to be belittled and they would
rebel and they paid for that. If someone called you a name or called you stupid or something like
that, if you ignored it or accepted it, everything was fine. Life went on, and it went on well. It
was a college campus almost. If you been to Chesapeake Bay in Maryland its beautiful; it was
just gorgeous. When we finished the school we had probably a week time there waiting for
orders because there was a glut. There weren’t enough slots available to move us into field units
and I was sent to a holding unit in Fort Benning, Georgia, which was waiting for a compliment
of helicopters and troops to come back from Vietnam. We were going to rotate out and replace
them but be assigned to other units. I was there from, I’m going to guess, the end of September,
beginning of October until I departed in March. I received the orders to Vietnam sometime
between Thanksgiving and Christmas of 1967.

SM: A couple of questions about the armorer school; first of all, the instructors. Were
they all Army NCOs or were there also civilians that taught you?
JS: In the rocket training systems, for the rocket launchers, they were civilians. For all
the grenade launchers and machine guns, those were all Army specialists 5 and above. They
were all specialists 5 and above.

SM: Were these civilians from the manufacturer?
JS: They were from the manufacturer.

SM: And who was that, do you remember?
JS: You know what? I don’t remember who manufactured the rocket pods or the
SM: Was it Honeywell?

JS: Actually what they were there was to teach us how to repair and troubleshoot the control systems for which were basically at that time computer cards or circuit boards. There were 4 in every helicopter and they governed different things within the armament systems and they were interchangeable and they told us how to recognize problems and those were civilians that taught us that. We also had a system there which was probably...what it did was it let you fire a dummy rocket and then you had a joy stick and a scope that you followed and you had a blip of light that got fainter, fainter, and fainter and you had to hold it on a moving target; usually cars on the highway, trains, or airplanes, and then at the very end of it it would blow up. You’d get a big flash of light and if you were still on the target you knew you had made a hit. I need to go back a bit. There was one other system that we trained on and that was the wire guided missile and I believe that was the French system of wire guided missiles that were hung below; they were hung on an outboard from the Hueys and that’s what we trained on the joystick with. We played with the wire guide. That was fun. We’d sit there and zap cars coming into the base, but they didn’t know we were doing it. If they did they could see the light from the end of the telescope, the flash, if they knew where to look.

SM: So this was kind of like a tow missile?

JS: Tow missile, yes. French SS2 maybe? Again, it kind of escapes me. We never used them, so it never meant anything to me. In the field I never saw one, never saw one.

SM: Just a 2.75 rocket?

JS: 2.75 rockets. I never in the field worked on flex guns. I learned in the field on how to work on mini guns. I never saw one in training.

SM: The mini guns were the 6 barrel gatling guns?


SM: And then the 40-millimeter cannon?

JS: And the 40-millimeter cannon.

SM: Now did they train you on, as an armorer, the different types of ammunition that would be used on those?

JS: Yes, yes.

SM: What were the different types of grenades, for instance, for the 40 millimeter?
JS: You had high explosive, you had a tear gas grenade. That was phased out because there was some form of problem with it. And you had a shotgun round that you could fire out of. A shotgun round I never saw even demonstrated live at Aberdeen. It was in the book and you read about it. Again, let me go back. There was one other armament system that we studied, and it was a pod dispensed land mine. It looked like a beanie bag. It was forced by air pressure compressed gas out of the back of the tube. It was in a jelly-like suspension. It was camouflaged. When it hit the ground and when the jelly evaporated, it was alcohol based, it armed itself. Motion would set it off, and you would disperse this over known or suspected trails. Again, I never saw it used on a helicopter but I know it was dispersed out of fixed wing aircraft because I had seen samples, practice samples, of that mine over in Vietnam. We never used it in any unit I was with.

SM: How long would it take that gel to evaporate usually?
JS: A few hours; it was that rapid.
SM: And what was that...you said it was motion, it detected motion. Did it have some kind of a sensor?
JS: Something, once it settled, if you changed its attitude, would cause it to trigger and fire. What was inside of it was classified. We never opened one up. We only knew how the dispenser worked. We maintained the dispensers and the firing mechanism on the dispensers. The mine itself, we knew what it looked like because we had samples of it. What actually caused it to go off, we never saw that.
SM: And what was the nature of the mine itself; anti personnel?
JS: It’s an anti personnel.
SM: Is it like shrapnel?
JS: Shrapnel coming out.
SM: It wasn’t loaded with...
JS: They looked like little star devices; little star shaped devices if I remember right and that was it.
SM: You mention that the retribution if you buck the system that it can be rather harsh.
Do you remember any particular incidents?
JS: We had some, a group of soldiers that decided that they weren’t going to stay in that last late class, they didn’t care what their grades were and tried somewhat of a rebellion in class
and they ended up doing all of the KP, they ended up cleaning the barracks, they ended up hand
mowing the lawns, they ended up doing a lot of push ups and a lot of running. That was the limit
to the punishment. It was mostly physical and mental. You didn’t want to clean someone else’s
toilet. You cleaned your own willingly when you were there, but you had…those guys had to
clean other people’s toilets so they had their nose rubbed in their rebellion so to speak. But that
was the limit of it. I never saw anyone go to jail for rebelling against the system. To my
recollection, I never saw anyone in rank demoted but these were all E1s in that last class anyway
so there was no where to dump them. You couldn't demote them.

SM: How about Article 15?

JS: Until I got to Fort Benning I never knew of anyone that got one; never an Article 15.
They usually got that rebellion out of your system in other ways. Army did not want to have, in
their records, a lot of discipline problems. They would rather deal with it individually, locally,
and get it over with. There was always the alternative; if you don’t make it here, you’re going to
infantry school.

SM: Would they openly threaten that?

JS: That they would lay out. That worked, that worked because what were they going to
do, especially with an enlistee? He’s in for 3 years. If he doesn’t want to learn his job, then you
have to put him somewhere. The idea that, “Okay, you’re going to go to the lowest form of job
in the Army and the most difficult is the infantry and you’re going to go to infantry school.” If
you physically could, you could go. I think one or two actually volunteered to get out of
armament school and go to the infantry. They didn’t want to do the homework, they didn’t want
the discipline, but I’m sure they also failed in infantry school. They may have been the article
15s once they got to Fort Benning.

SM: Anything else that you want to add about your training before you go to Fort

Benning?

JS: Not really; it was easy. Easy may not be the right word; it was not difficult.

SM: Okay, so you went into Fort Benning into the holding company until you got your
orders to go to Vietnam and your orders stipulated March of ’67?

JS: Right.

SM: So what did you do between November-December of ’66?
JS: We cleaned barracks, we painted motor vehicles, we upgraded motor vehicles to be shipped to Vietnam, we unpacked and inventoried material coming back from the gunships in Vietnam, placed it into supplies. A lot of barracks repair, a lot of maintenance because of the big build up that was going on at Benning at the time with the airborne school and the infantry school. So, they kept us busy. There was a lot of landscaping going on, a lot of lawn mowing, a lot of tree planting. I did spend 3 weeks as a stockade guard and what I did there was I trained for a day or two on the 45 automatic pistol and the 8 shot Winchester hammer-op pump shot gun, 12 gauge, and my job was taking prisoners on sick call to the hospital and bringing them back. That was limit to stockade duty. During that time I never pulled KP and I never did guard duty. There were just too many of us and the rosters were so long that by the time they got to me I was off the base.

SM: Did they offer you any kind of training options, you know…

JS: No, we got to Fort Benning…

SM: …go to airborne school or something?

JS: …you would stay in your MOS but you could go to airborne school. But you could not, at that point, you were not changing your MOS and…

SM: Could you have gone to airborne school if you wanted?

JS: It was a voluntary thing. Some guys did. Maybe out of the 20 of us that came down at the same time from Aberdeen, maybe 2 or 3 did. Most of us didn’t.

SM: You didn’t?

JS: I did not volunteer to go to airborne school. I was not thrilled with heights; in fact I was afraid of heights.

SM: But you became an aviation armorer?

JS: Well, that I was assigned to out of basic training. That’s the school they were sent to. Again, it has no option on the draftee and you take the luck of the draw.

SM: But you were afraid of heights?

JS: I was afraid of heights. Still am.

SM: Were you afraid of heights when you were a door gunner in Vietnam?

JS: At the very beginning, yes I was. I had a lock on that seat, and I had a lock on the pillar with my leg. You couldn’t have got me out with…you couldn’t have beat me out with a 2
by 4. But then as time went on, you learned to relax. You learned the aircraft had the tendency
to hold you in place as long as it’s flying with the right attitude.

SM: Alright, well when you got to Vietnam did you know what unit you were going to
be assigned to?

JS: No, had no idea. Got to Vietnam, we spent a couple of days at Cam Ranh Bay and
there they sorted out who was going where and I was sent to the 17th aviation group in Nha
Trang. There I met with, I think he was a sergeant major, and his staff and they literally
interviewed the people coming to the group and they divided us up. I was assigned to a Mohawk
or a OV-1 company in Phu Bai which is the civilian airport south of Danang, pardon me, south
of Hue along the coast. There I worked on 50 caliber fixed mount systems, on OV-1 and the
mount, the systems themselves, they operated in the same manner as they would have on rotary
wing. The rocket pods, the sights for the rockets, and the triggering mechanisms for the rockets
were the same in the OV-1 as they were on helicopters. So, you only had a transition as to find
out where the circuit breakers were on the panel; really simple. The only thing that was really
new to the whole thing was arming the rocket pods and pulling the safety pins out of the machine
guns while they are revving the engines because the static lining was attached, at that time, still,
to the rockets until they fired, until they fired up the engines. Once they were able to go from
ground power to aircraft power, then you disconnected the ground straps. So moving around
those propellers was dangerous. A man had fallen in or stepped into a propeller just before I
arrived there and he was an armorer and he was the one I ended up replacing. He wasn’t paying
attention as to which way he was turning when he was under the aircraft and he stepped into the
propeller and it just…

SM: Did it kill him?

JS: Well, it tore his top off. There was nothing left from his top. The pilot was sent
home with a mental…he had psychological problems after that and he couldn’t fly anymore so
they sent him home. He felt that bad by what had happened. It wasn’t his fault. The man made
a mistake and he paid for it. There, when we weren’t working on armament systems, we were on
7 days a week. Most of the work was done during the day. Even the aircraft that flew at night
with the side looking radar, the observation aircraft, or the infrared cameras, left at dusk so our
nights were pretty much free. We spent a lot of time filling sand bags, filling bunkers, and
reinforcing our base there. We were next to a Marine artillery unit that had the 175 self
propelled guns. While we were there we were mortared twice. No one ever got hurt. We were in our bunkers quick enough.

SM: What about small arms fire?

JS: No small arms fire. The nearest village was far enough away across open beach or sand or rice paddy that they didn’t have a shot at us with a sniper and all they got was they would get into the little villages around the airport, pop a few mortars, and run and that was it. We were, of course, prepared for the worst but at that time in early 1967 they weren’t planning the worst just yet. We were in the compound in Phu Bai also with a unit called 8th R&R which we called 8th rock and roll and that was a listening post and monitoring radio traffic between the north and the south, between units in the north and the south, and as armormers we went there to work on some of their guards gun systems such as we rebuilt and helped them repair their pistols, we helped them repair their machine guns, we helped them repair some of their M-14s, things like this. That was a nice place to go to work because it was air-conditioned shops and the food was excellent. They had ice cream for dessert and they had a swimming pool. There was a swimming pool. So, it was kind of nice.

SM: A swimming pool in Vietnam?

JS: They had a swimming pool up there.

SM: Above ground or below?

JS: Above ground.

SM: Okay, must have been nice.

JS: It was nice. 8th R&R was a good place to visit.

SM: What units did yours support in terms of the Mohawks, the fire support, and everything else?

JS: We supported and provided intelligence for Mac V and the Marines. The cons of film all went to Danang and then came back to 8th rock and roll. The analysis was done at both places.

SM: So the Mohawks weren’t primarily for gunships?

JS: No.

SM: They were intelligence gathering?

JS: They were intelligence gathering and they used their weapons to defend themselves from ground fire and also to mark targets for fixed wing, for other fixed wing aircraft. If I
remember right, they carried either 4 or 6 rockets on a wing. If they carried 4, that means they
had 8. 6 out of the 8 would have been smoke or white phosphorous, 2 would have been high
explosive. 50 calibers were rarely used because they didn’t like to make strafing runs. The
plane had no glide factor and at that point was flying slow and was an easy target. It was very
loud. You can hear it coming and it came from altitude, it came up from high because of the fact
that the radar, to work, had to be looking down and the higher it was the more it could see and
they didn’t like to ground. But, they used a lot of rockets because they were marking targets. A
50 caliber, it’s rare that they used those. They’d come back with ammo, we’d remove the ammo.
When they’d go back out we’d put it back in and rearm them.

SM: Same for the rockets?
JS: Rockets never came back. Those guys shot those off one way or another.
SM: Really?
JS: Even if at nothing.
SM: Was that standard operating procedure?
JS: Yes. They usually either fired them off to sea because they didn’t want to land with
the rockets on board. It was a hazard with the static. They were sensitive to small current leaks
and could fire them very easily and with the propellers spinning in front of the pod, the air
moving across was enough to create static. So they would fire these things off.
SM: And that was an Army wide policy, right?
JS: It was a policy in our unit, and I’m going to guess that it pretty much must have been
policy with the OV-1s. The little Bird Dogs that came in and out of there that we would rearm or
do some small repairs on, they would not necessarily fire them all off. They would come back
with rockets on board and we would replace the ones that had been fired.
SM: Yeah, because they had single engines at the front of the aircraft.
JS: Single engine at the front.
SM: The pods were out on the wings.
JS: They didn’t care.
SM: Yeah, there’s not as much of a danger as far as static electricity.
JS: That’s right.
SM: What did you think of the Bird Dogs?
The Bird Dogs were a great airplane made out of cloth, wood, and aluminum and I had an opportunity to fly them in a couple of times as an observer and I enjoyed flying in them. It’s funny because in the Bird Dog as an observer, we flew front seat so we had a great view. They gave us the front seat. Once I flew on it as being transported from one place to another, the ride I hitched was on a Bird Dog. I flew once in a Mohawk. A pilot took me up just to show me what it was like and it was an interesting aircraft; very, very noisy inside because of the high pitched turbines that drove those propellers. Very agile; turned corners, dive and climb, almost an aerobatic aircraft. The one thing we did in Phu Bai that could have gotten us into trouble that we enjoyed playing with is they had, the Mohawks had an ejector seat that threw you clear if you were in the process of being shot down or crashing and they had a trainer for this seat from England and our job was to maintain this seat. We had 2 cannon shells or shot gun shells, over sized shot gun shells that fired that seat into the air and we would sit on there and practice which meant shooting up in the air and then slowly dropping back down. We tested that seat usually with more than one beer under our belt. It never got tested during working hours, I’ll tell you that. It was something that they would let us get away with.

SM: How high would it throw you?
JS: The track was maybe 10 feet tall.
SM: Oh, okay. So it was…
JS: So from a sitting position, it shot you up a track and then you came back down. The object was to pull the panel just as you would in the aircraft, the seatbelts would pull you back, your legs in, and your elbows in just as if you were going through the canopy. The Mohawks canopy did not release. You shot through the Plexiglas. It was made to be a break away. So the triggering device on the ejector seat was a thick canvas cover with T-handles, one on each side, that pulled it down. When you pulled it down it also pulled in your elbows and the straps on your legs so you would clear the hole in the canopy on top. But you blasted through with your helmet and this canvas piece kept your face back up against the seat so your neck wouldn’t be broken because when it pulled down, it wedged you in. I think the seats were made in Spain; NATO seats, so I think the seats came from Spain.
SM: Any interesting operations in that Mohawk unit?
JS: None that we knew of. It was an intelligence-gathering unit and as armormers we weren’t privy to what they were doing. You would hear talk when the officers would talk or the
pilots would talk and they would tell you they were flying over the Ben Hai river and the
demilitarized zone. They would be flying into Laos and making observations there and you
knew where they’d been because they told you what they were photographing. What they were
listening in on, we had no clue. They did make one run on a daily basis from Phu Bai to I
believe it was UBON airbase in Thailand and then the next day they would come back, same
route. In talking to the pilots, what they were looking for was differences in whatever the
intelligence they were gathering so if they were photographing or listening, then they were
looking for changes in what was there from the day before and the difference in what they
sensed, saw, or photographed gave the intelligence people something to interpret. Basically, in
hindsight, they were looking at the trail, the Ho Chi Minh trail was what they were scouting
going through Laos. Fuel wise, they flew into Thailand instead of coming back to Phu Bai.
SM: But you were never privy the actual intelligence?
JS: No, no, we never saw it.
SM: You saw their flight plans, probably?
JS: No, we never saw their flight plan unless they left a map laying around and then you
could see where they flew. Often just a plastic map with grease pencil on it and we would see it
in the ready room. But, it wasn’t an item of gossip. No one said, “Oh, I see where they’re
going.” It was none of that and you couldn’t care less. We had one specific job and we tried to
do it as best we could and really weren't concerned much with anything else.
SM: Was morale in that unit good?
JS: Morale was really, it was quite good. It was very professional. You had
commissioned officers as pilots. The lowest rank there that stayed there for any length of time
was E4. The food was good. We had plenty of rest, we had plenty of recreation, time away, and
time off.
SM: Good rapport between the enlisted and officers?
JS: Yes. They depended on you to have the armament system ready to go and
functioning. So they treated you well. They expected you to do your job and if you did your job
they thanked you for it. They actually did. They’d come back from a mission and say,
“Everything worked fine.” If it didn’t work fine they would explain to you what had gone wrong
if you repaired it. If you didn’t repair it, then they would come back from a mission and they
would really let you have it if the same thing cropped up more than once. But at that time, they
had a legitimate gripe.

SM: Did that ever happen?

JS: Once in a while. But, it was a rare occasion, it really was. The armorers there, they
wanted to stay armorers. They wanted to stay in that type of unit. They didn’t want to go to a
line unit, so they did their jobs. We did end up with too many armorers. Again, they got them in
country, they didn’t have places to put them so in the Mohawks we ended up with too many.

There was the first time I really ran into the war. I believe it was April, the North Vietnamese
made their push on Quang Tri, Dong Ha and the casualties were flown into Phu Bai and then
either taken to emergency surgery at 8th rock and roll, the hospital there, or, pardon me, and then
stabilized there and then flown to Danang. Being on the airfield and it being a commercial field
also, we would volunteer to help carry the stretchers on the transport planes. These guys, they’d
already been dressed up where their wounds had been dressed, but these were men that were
badly hurt and putting them on the aircraft and the moaning and the groaning and the fear in
these people’s eyes, especially those that had amputations. I saw my first GI death there. A man
armorine had lost his arm and his head was taped on to the stretcher, or actually taped to his
shoulder so he couldn’t see what happened to him. It was hot, it was humid, the tape came
undone and he turned his head and he looked at his missing arm or the stump and he said, “Oh
my God,” and that was it and he was taken back off that flight line and taken to the morgue.

This went on for a couple of days that they brought them to Phu Bai and then as the battle
continued they went directly from Dong Ha to Danang and we didn’t see them again. The first
batch of casualties all went to 8th rock and roll. They had a medical unit there and they stabilized
these guys at that point but I think the medical units, the Navy corpsmen at Dong Ha got their act
together and got their field equipment up there and they were stabilizing the troops before they
got to Danang. There was no intermediate stop anymore for them to go through. Not long after
that at the beginning of May they realized that they had too many armorers and the unit was over
in compliment as far as the number of enlisted men they had and they sent armorers out to other
units and you went by seniority and I came in March and I was one of the ones to go and I was
sent to a unit with the 14th aviation battalion, still with the 17th group, and I was sent to Lane
Field which was just outside of Qui Nhon and the unit there, I do not remember its name, I do
not remember its nose art, and I cannot remember the unit number. We did support the Korean
capital division. We provided support for Koreans. The aircraft were all Hueys, B and C models
and mostly B models and D model troop transports, Slicks. There I worked as an armorer
and also repaired American weapons in the possession of the Koreans, mostly M-60s. They
would bring them back to our shop and we would work on them. I pulled a lot of guard duty
there. No KP, lots of guard duty. We stood perimeter guard there. The flight crews did not pull
any extra duty. All they did was fly. Morale in that unit was horrible.

SM: Why?

JS: The NCOs were abusive and there was something going on there that had to do with
enlisted men’s club and the black market. They were skimming from the slot machines there. It
was one of the few places I actually saw slot machines. Later on, I guess it was in the 70s, they
did convict a sergeant major of the Army and some of his cadre for the black market activity;
skimming from the slot machines and the selling of favors. I don’t know exactly what charges
he was convicted of, but evidence of that was already at Lane Field. The slot machines, we hit,
collectively, a group of us were playing a nickel slot machine and I believe our jackpot was 500
nickels, 50 dollars. No, what is it? 20 in to 500, 25 dollars, and NCO in charge of the club had to
get the 1st sergeant to key it off of the machine and to pay the jackpot. He came and put the key
in the machine and he said, “You had no jackpot.” And at that point, we knew something was
wrong and we never went to the club again. The rest of the time, this happened early on when I
got there, and we never went to that enlisted men’s club again. But there was some problem
there. They ended up being, that unit, as I was leaving, was being removed from Lane Field and
being sent somewhere else and I believe it was replaced by the 129th. At that time I was sent to
the Firebirds and the 71st. Actually I went back to group in Na Trang; they asked me what I
wanted to do. At this point, again, at group they treated us fairly well. They asked us what we
wanted to do, I told, they showed us what was available and I said, “I’d like to go back up north
and I’d like to go to a helicopter company,” and they said, “Fine.” It took them a couple of days
to cut orders. During that time I worked as a carpenter and we were building…or taking tents
and converting them into buildings. In other words, plywood floors, galvanized iron roofs,
screen walls. 8-hour shift, you had breaks, you had meals. Again, no harassment, no one
bothered you, weekends, if you were there during the weekend you got to go to town, you got to
go to the PX. You were taken care of. Went to battalion from there and from battalion, the 14th
battalion, they assigned me to the 71st. I got to the 71st early in the morning from battalion
headquarters. It was marched, you know, went in the orderly room and reported for duty and ran into a conflict with the 1st sergeant on the first day and the first interview and it lasted the whole tour that I was there.

SM: This is 1st sergeant Hillhouse, is that right?

JS: Yes. He had other names.

SM: Some colorful names?

JS: Colorful names, and hoping not to offend anyone, Shithouse was the other name that we had for him and if he overheard you using that name, you were really up the creek. There was all sorts of extra work for you at that point. My mistake was my name being Jaak, he mispronounced it, I corrected him, he told me in his Army no one corrected him and his name of looking at things and when he disciplined us was he would say something to the effect that in his Army, this didn’t go on. In his Army he didn’t have to tolerate this. He was a short man, rather pudgy, with a pencil moustache, a big belly, polished fingernails. This was something that stood out to me when I first saw him. Here was a man, a 1st sergeant, and he got manicures! I believe he was an acting 1st sergeant and we saw to it he never became a full 1st sergeant. Whenever he came up for review we would do something to the battalion or at battalion that would get him bumped off. We got even with him. He harassed us, we got him back. Usually it was tossing brass out of the helicopter on approach. On the battalion. This was absolutely, as you would know, forbidden because we would nail the outlying hooches putting small pin pricks in the roof, little holes, that always leaked in the rain. And for a long time, at battalion, they wore hard hats, they wore helmets, outside. No soft caps were allowed. They made the mistake of being at the tail end of the final approach to our strip and the Chinooks did it and we did it.

SM: Do you think that made 1st sergeant Hillhouse that much harder on you?

JS: Oh yes. It made it hard. It made him react toward us in a very, very aggressive manner. He knew he couldn’t physically do anything to us. He had to catch us in an act before he could give us an Article 15 or send us to the disciplinary barracks in Danang. He never caught us. No one ever got a…well pardon me, one guy was drunk and he fired an M-16 when he…he was a crew chief, crew chief’s got M-16s when they were issued, and he fired his M-16 in the barracks and I think he went from E3 or E4 to E1. He was a private when I left and I think he got busted in October, something like that, of ’67. It was stupid. But, we never dropped in rank. We were never busted down.
SM: Let’s take a step back real quick, I want to ask you one question about the effects of the wounded coming into Phu Bai from the Dong Ha battle. How did that effect you and the morale of your soldiers to see guys coming in like that?

JS: The morale was not affected. The determination to do your job and do it right was brought home because these casualties were a result of something not being done right by somebody. The attack on Dong Ha was a surprise attack, so somewhere there was a slip up in gathering intelligence in patrolling or something like that. And not being an infantrymen and not being in intelligence, we knew that a surprise attack was not supposed to happen. You just knew this. You could watch a John Wayne movie and figure that out, and then it did make you more determined at that point to make sure that you crossed your T’s and dotted your I’s as far as your work went and we did volunteer to go out and carry the stretchers, give the guys water, stand there and hold our half of the pup tents because they were put on an open runway to wait for aircraft on stretchers and we would shade them with either a poncho liner or the pup tent held open between two guys just to give them shade. No one forced you to go down there, but somewhere along the line something got into you that said, “These guys need help more than I need to sit down,” and you went and did it. There was not a negative effect from seeing the wounded, but it did bring it home that this was for real, this was serious.

SM: During your short break between being with the 131st aviation company, the Mohawks, and the 71st at Qui Nhon your support for the Koreans, what did you think about the Korean forces, the rocks?

JS: The rocks were very disciplined soldiers. The ones we dealt with spoke English, broken English but they understood what we were saying to them. When they brought us a problem they explained it to us in English. Their discipline was corporal discipline. In other words, if a soldier had dirty boots, if his pants weren’t creased properly, if he failed to have a proper salute, he normally got a slap in the face. He was brought to attention and slapped and that to them to be manhandled like that was a very humiliating thing and I don’t think those troops ever got slapped twice. As soldiers, they were very tenacious. Once they had a target or an objective in mind, they went and got it. They did that. They did have a lot of contempt for the Vietnamese and there was hostility between them. They would have fistfights and there was nothing ever where weapons were drawn. They were disciplined enough not to do that, but they
would get to where they would fight each other with clubs, they would beat each other with clubs, they would go at each other.

SM: So did you work much with ARVN in those 2 first units?
JS: We saw ARVN, we didn’t deal with ARVN. Once in a while an ARVN officer would come down and when the lift unit company of that aircraft unit I was with at Qui Nhon or at Lane Field, he would come and count the number of noses and the number of guys that they were going to get on the aircraft, stuff like that. Then we would see these officers, but that’s it. Oh, in Phu Bai we did once see and talk to Key, ended up the president or the dictator?
SM: Win Cao Key?
JS: He flew up in a Skyraider, fixed wing, propeller driven Skyraider. Black uniform, purple scarf, and he came and talked to us. A small man, but nice. He really was nice. You didn’t, I think at that time he was still a colonel.
SM: Do you remember what he said to you?
JS: Again, I think all he said was he thanked us for the job we were doing out there and that was it. He came in and wondered through and he looked at the shops. We had our tools in there and our boxes and everything was put away and pretty much to see if everything was…it was like an inspection but it wasn’t an inspection because he surprised everybody by walking up the ramp at the airport and showing up. No one was expecting him. He flew in and no one was expecting him there and there he was. By the time he was done with us, the guys at 8th rock and roll were there with the jeeps trying to get him to go to 8th rock and roll where he really belonged. I guess they didn’t want him to wander over, but he did. He was a personable man. The one time I saw him I thought he was kind of neat. Should have been in World War II flying a spad is what he should have been doing.
SM: With the scarf?
JS: That’s right.
SM: What about Vietnamese civilians; much interaction in the first 2 units?
JS: Yes, and only as vendors selling souvenirs, selling food, fresh fruit, selling soda pops, things like this and really no animosity; none visible. You had the local police, what did we call them? White mice? Big 44 on their hip like a cowboy, white shirts, black hats, black pants, they would give us the finger at their little…they were traffic control, a lot of them, and as you drove by they would give you the finger, or walk by. There was a…I don’t know what the
problem there was, I didn’t involve myself in it, couldn’t care less, but these little white mice did
give us the finger often. The civilians themselves around those two bases pretty much came as
vendors. They wanted to sell us something whether it was souvenir dresses, the slit dresses and
the pants on the side to send home to girlfriends and mothers and what have you, and a lot of
fresh fruit. We bought fresh fruit from them because it normally wasn’t available in quantity in
the mess halls and we never got poisoned fruit, we never got anything with razor blades or glass
or anything like that in it. They did provide us with laundry services and they would alter
fatigues, they would sew on patches, they would sew on nametags, things like this. The thing
that we missed or did come up missing a lot were socks and we found out after Tet because we
found the remains of these; socks were used to haul things in. A sock filled up with rice
provided a soldier with some form of ration that they could measure out so they liked to steal our
socks. They never stole all of them. Usually you came back with an odd pair and at least one
pair plus one missing. So, we constantly were buying socks. At that time, we had no clue what
the problem was but after Tet we found out where these socks were going. I’m sure to be able to
sell on the compounds, these people had to provide intelligence to the Viet Cong or the North
Vietnamese. There were people that would come on the base and the Vietnamese would scurry
to get out of the way and knew that there was something there but again there was nothing that
you could do about it. See, they were afraid.

SM: So you did suspect that some of the Vietnamese coming on the base were VC?
JS: Whether they were sympathizers or actually VC or just people coerced in order for
them to keep working on the base, oh yeah.

SM: Were there ever any oport acts of terror that you witnessed?
JS: There were probes of defense outside of Qui Nhon at Lane Field.
SM: But that was it?
JS: They were building a, and I have some of the souvenirs on display there, they were at
night about 5, 600 yards out from Lane Field they started up a mountain and at the first set of
rises in the mountain, in the brush, or in the it was like chaparral which is about 7 or 8 feet high,
not jungle, but thick underbrush, they were digging an observation post. We could hear them but
could never pinpoint it. Then they made the mistake of one night smoking out there and what we
did was we took pencils and put them into sand bags and formed a sight line and then the
Koreans came out and inspected that and then a couple of nights later they came out and actually
observed what we were observing and then during the day they made a sweep in there and as an
armorer I got to go along. That was actually an infantry mission that I went on illegally, but they
took me along as an armorer and I carried a machine gun and that was the first time I had face-
to-face contact with the enemy. We walked in on them as they were walking out. We surprised
each other. There was a real Hollywood type dust up and it was basically people slugging each
other, hitting each other with weapons. I don’t, I know I didn’t discharge mine and if their 100
rounds shot between all of us, between probably 20 people scrambling, that may be
exaggerating. It was mostly all physical. I got cut with a rice knife which I took and kept as a
souvenir. I got cut in the arm with that. I took it away from whoever it was that was hitting me
with it and bashed him back with it. I probably knocked him unconscious and then helped tackle
an officer and I stripped him of his American compass. It was shaped like a pocket watch. I got
the souvenir before the souvenir hunters did. We walked out of there. We had a number of
prisoners. What happened to them, I don’t know. The Koreans took them with them and that
was it. We never saw them again. The Koreans had a POW compound and they had Vietnamese
and Korean interpreters. We knew the compound was there, we couldn’t see it, we didn’t hear it.
There were, later on when I got out of the military or out of the Army and got out of Vietnam,
you hear these stories about prisoners being tortured. While I was there I never witnessed it. I
heard it as gossip. Being gossip, I can’t attest to it happening. But, you did hear about it. I can’t
prove it and I can’t disprove it. The one thing that was odd with the Koreans and it was really
disheartening was in some ways they had a crematorium. They did not send, the capitol division
anyway, did not send their casualties, their dead, home in body bags. They sent them home in
little boxes like big match boxes of ashes and that’s all that went home, and the crematorium was
by the dump and the wind blowing in the wrong direction, the odor was not pleasant and at that
time again you knew what was going on in there. It was kind of sad. They had a religious
ceremony there and they had them all wrapped up and you could see them with the white cloth
over them and a big tray of these little boxes and you knew what had happened then. It does
effect you. We weren’t insensitive to people dying. We felt bad for the Vietnamese that we saw
dead, same way. They buried their dead and you know, if you walked by a grave yard or a
mausoleum and there were people around, almost all the GI’s I saw would shut up, be quiet, and
walk by quietly and if they were Catholics most of them crossed themselves. So, there was, in
that time, there was still some respect between you and civilians.
SM: When you went to the 71st attack helicopter company, assault helicopter company, what was the morale like in that unit?

JS: The morale was not good. There were groups of people or enlisted men that performed like or similar jobs that got together and did it and then there were other groups that did other jobs and they didn’t really interact very much. There was a lack of leadership there and actually like a leadership vacuum. You were only disciplined, you weren’t led, so you always tested the limits. “At what point can I do something and not be disciplined,” vs. being disciplined. It caused a lot of problems in the company; a lot of animosity between the NCOs and the enlisted men because of it. The NCOs were not equipped to handle so many young, inexperienced people. They used intimidation instead of persuasion and intellect to get you to do things. Probably it wasn’t their fault, it was the Army’s fault for not training them on what to expect when they were loaded up with people that were brand new, fresh out of the wrapper.

20/20 hindsight tells me that, at the time, I was going to dig in my heels and get away with what I could and not get caught. If they did something to us, then we would do something like back. If they harassed us, we would, in the darkness, harass them back. Usually it was tear gas underneath their hooches, things like that. Never a fragging, never anything like that. There’s rumors of that, I never saw it, never heard it. Tear gas was a well used item or a smoke grenade.

SM: Well the issue of training and being prepared for what you encounter in Vietnam; do you feel that the training you receive prepared you?

JS: It prepared me to become an armorer and do the armorer’s job. It did not prepare me to become a door gunner.

SM: Which is what you became.

JS: Which I ended up a door gunner. There was no preparation for that, other than on a static mount and the few times to practice fire at Lane Field, I never fired a machine gun. I never flown in a Huey other than being transported and they put us in the gun platoon. Within a month we were all…the armorers that came up, we ended up door gunners.

SM: So what was your first experience like up in the Hueys as a door gunner? Who were you with?

JS: I was with a specialist 5th class whose gunner was rotating out and he was about a month or two from rotating out. His last name was Harrington and I believe his first name was Lindsey. He was pretty much the bottom of the heap. He was an alcoholic, so he flew whether
he was drunk or not, you couldn't tell, but he always reeked of alcohol. So, you had no respect for him and he had no respect for anybody. He would just point out and say, “Do this, do that,” without actually teaching you what to do. So the first flying experience, the first thing was shocking because I was afraid of heights. I was more or less struggling not to fall out and not to wet my pants! Yeah, and we flew a moderately active mission. We used the door guns. It didn’t take me too long to get the hang of it. It doesn’t shoot straight, the rounds come out, they make a curve, you’re not pointing a gun at the target, you’re pointing the bullets at the target and you have to know which way the ark goes. Once I got the hang of that and I got over my fear of being in the air and not being secured, we did not have seat belts. What held us in the aircraft was our own weight and the fact that we would wedge ourselves in with our legs against the pillar or the aircraft strut on a pylon or something like this and then we had a 6 foot long belt that attached to the floor, or a strap that attached to a cargo hook on the floor, and that attached to us with a seat belt. It allowed us to move within the aircraft or to the front of the aircraft and still be strapped on.

SM: In the unlikely event that you did fall out, that would catch you?
JS: That would catch you and that was it.
SM: In theory.
JS: In theory. I never knew of anyone falling completely out. I know people who’ve saved themselves by grabbing it, but I don’t ever recall anyone hanging from it. That would have been humiliating. That really would have been embarrassing, “I’m hanging by a monkey belt!” But I stayed with Harrington until he quit flying and he quit flying about 3 weeks before he went home. He went to maintenance.
SM: Who did you fly with after that?
JS: Just as he was going home, probably our last mission, the tips of the rotor blades got shot out and at the time they were making all left banks which made it almost impossible for me to do it. It was more likely that the crew chief had done the shooting. I got blamed for...he blamed me for shooting out the rotor blades and I was grounded and sent to a special forces camp to run a refueling and rearming point out of that special forces camp Tin Phuc just west of Chu Lai and we ran a rearming and refueling point out there and I was out there for about 3 or 4 weeks. That was a miserable experience. The special forces troops there didn’t want us on the base and they didn’t let you forget that you were intruding. They had a mess hall, they had...
waiters and waitresses and cooks and we were not allowed to eat with the other Americans. We were not fed. We ate C-rations. They had covered barracks. We slept in fox holes. We were not given tents so when it rained we sat in a ¾ ton truck, the 3 of us, and tried to stay dry. It was really miserable. Twice we ran out of food and twice they wouldn’t feed us. During this time they wouldn’t feed us at all. Even when we asked, we’d say, “Listen, we’re out of food.” They would not feed us. They said, “Get on the radio, call battalion, call your own company. They’re responsible for you, not us,” and shut the door. Now these are Americans. Not a good taste in your mouth. There was an Australian pilot that flew their equivalent of a Bird Dog that flew in once and dropped off some C-rations for us, but it was only what meals he had on board his aircraft, so it wasn’t a whole lot. Maybe 2 or 3 boxes of food, and he relayed a message which had already gotten through to battalion and then they ignored it at battalion and one of our company officers, and I believe he is deceased now, by the name of A.J. Sutton, came and he brought us C-rations and our paychecks. We couldn’t even buy food because we didn’t have any money with us. So, we were stuck out there. We ran out of food again and we had to wait for…we radioed battalion, they ignored our request. They delivered more ammunition and more rockets to us, but no food. We’d run out of food again for a couple of days and then another one of our aircraft showed up with food. After that, they pulled us out of there. The night before we were pulled out was the night of the typhoon that they had, the first one that we went through, and again…here, the dates really escape me. If you go to Carlock’s book you can pull out the date, and we were out there and the wind was horizontal and salt water, it was salty. The distance, I’m going to guess, maybe 90 miles inland. That’s how hard it was blowing. We had no tents, no cover, it ripped the top off of the ¾ ton truck. We sat in our fighting holes. We got so mad we banged on the door. They had a huge bunker there shaped like a conical Vietnamese hat made out of concrete left there by the French and they were all snug and dry in there. We ended up, it had a thick steel door like a bank safe, we wedged that thing shut so they couldn’t get out and we defecated and urinated in that water so when they finally did blast their way out of it. But they banged on that door wanting to be let out and we said, “No, we’re going home, thank you.” We left them in that thing. Eventually the Vietnamese, the local militia, got them out. During this time, too, the first time I saw cruelty and neglect by Americans of Vietnamese. The special forces there had a compliment of local militia that they supervised and trained and there was a group of them, they traveled, the local militia, whenever they went out in the field
their families apparently went with them. They were standing at the end of the runway and one of them had strung hand grenades with the spoon loose and the pin being attached, the ring of the pin being attached. It came off and snagged on his coat and the way that the grenade blasted, it blasted up and took off his face. He was just a mess. We wrapped him up. We were down at the flight line or at the runway at the time. We wrapped him up in a poncho. Well his wife and children were there and she was just trying to get him out of that poncho and you had to restrain her that he’s dead, there’s nothing you could do, and she had an infant and a toddler with her and at that time had a couple of cans of C-ration desserts in the truck. We went and got those C-ration desserts and stopped to feed the kids. Something had to be done, at least to let the mother do what she was going to do with the priest that had come out there and the rest of the Vietnamese were trying to get her to console her, to get her to where she could at least tend to the children. Well we grabbed the kids and started feeding them and I forget his rank, and he was an American in the special forces camp, came and with his boot kicked the C-ration cans out of our hands and said, “We don’t do that for the locals here.” That’s the first time, and it’s actually the only time I saw that type of cruelty towards civilians by an American. That was the oddest special forces camp I ever ran into. There’s another thing that was strange out there. Every morning there’s a river and they guarded a river crossing. That’s what the camp was there for. The river, in the morning and for the first couple of hours is always bright red. By mid day the river was back to the brownish green color. Next morning it would be bright red again, and it didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that they were dumping dirt into the river from either tunneling or digging positions and we would joke about this and talk to them, you know, “Why aren’t you doing something?” They’d say, “That’s none of your business.” The whole time, the couple of weeks that I was there, I never saw a special forces person lead a patrol out of there. They were always on the camp. What their mission was and why they never left, I don't know. The locals would go out and come back, but that river was always red in the morning, except the day of the typhoon. The following day they came and got us. They slung load out the ¾ ton truck and all the remaining rocket and ammunition and dumped us off in Tam Ky. We drove along the Highway 1 from Tam Ky back to Chu Lai and came back to the base. The next day I was flying again. Ray Foley had arrived at that point from the 129th and he being a rookie, although he had all the experience of a year plus already under his belt, they put me with him and he and I formed a bond and a relationship on the aircraft and around the aircraft that we pretty
much, except when he went on special leave and I went on R&R, we maintained from probably
from October until I went home. He was a good teacher and he was a patient teacher as far as
teaching you to become a door gunner, not just an armorer, and at some point I became very
comfortable and skilled at what I was doing. I flew with almost all the time with him. The other
one that I flew with when Ray was on special leave, I flew with John Daly and I flew once in a
while with a sergeant that we had, we had a platoon sergeant by the name of Hamilton. I don’t
remember his first name, and he was a man who was really afraid to fly. But, he was a platoon
sergeant and once in a while I would fly with him. He normally flew in the center of the aircraft
and didn’t ever fire a weapon.

SM: How long did he last?
JS: He lasted quite a while. He didn’t fly for long. When they grounded him and took
him off of flight we would end up…and one of the fellow gunners, a guy by the name of Roger
Hall would give him his hours or part of his hours to keep the guy on flight staovs, make sure he
wasn’t staying on an aircraft. Toward the end of his time of flying we got a device that someone
had rigged to drop mortar rounds as bombs. They built 2 chubes, they each held 20 mortar
rounds; one stacked parallel to each other and they took out the percussion fuse and replaced it
with a propeller driven fuse and you had enough altitude if the thing worked that that propeller
would turn enough rotation as that mortar round was dropping that it would go off when it hit the
ground. Well this system was made out of sheet metal, friction, and the fact that the tolerances
weren’t too close. They would normally jam. You might drop 2 or 3 out of that chute and then
it would fall or it would jam up and the chute was hinged and you would take it and you would
load it while it was horizontal in the aircraft and it would hang out past the aircraft. Then in
order to drop the mortar rounds, you had to lift this thing up on its hinge and let gravity pull them
out. Well, in the air at 90 knots or 100 knots the wind grabs it, pulls it away from you, you’ve
got to manhandle it, and if you’re afraid of flying or afraid of altitude to begin with, well this
thing’s jerking you around. Well he was really afraid. He made me seem like a hero at that
point, although I was just as scared. I just had better control and he accidentally fiddled with it
and fiddled with it and when he finally dropped it he dropped it on a friendly village. Luckily
they were irritated but not hurt. At that point I was so mad at him. First thing, during a mission
he had stopped firing and it caused us to have to end the mission because he blamed the gun
being jammed but what he did was twist the ammo belt, break the link, and say his gun was
jammed and then he stopped shooting and of course his side, he crawled back in the middle of the aircraft and hid. I disconnected, this incident with the bombing, I disconnected his monkey belt from the floor, held it in my hand, pushed my leg up against his hip, called him on the intercom and said, “This is the last time you’re flying with anybody in this unit, sarge!” I wasn’t going to push him out by no means, but I put pressure against his hip to let him know that, “That’s it, pal. If it’s not me, it’s going to be somebody else,” and the following morning he was handing out tools and parts in maintenance. They pulled him off. But, he was a real disaster for the unit and he was a disaster for morale in the gun unit. After that, we got an NCO that was really strict. He was an infantryman. He never wore any jungle fatigues. He still wore stateside fatigues with the yellow and black or the gold and black markings, the white nametag with the black lettering. Sergeant stripes were always the gold ones, and he wore normal boots. He didn’t wear jungle boots. But he was a combat infantrymen. He had a CIB. I don’t remember whose combat patch he wore on his right sleeve but he didn’t like flying. He flew a few missions and he made a point of taking care of us. But, he didn’t want to schedule people to fly. He didn’t want to send guys out in what he considered was a very risky proposition and at this point we really settled into teams or groups of gunners and crew chiefs that stuck together, basically enlisted fire teams, and we scheduled ourselves or the pilots would ask for a crew and they would ask for us in particular. The harassment at the base camp in Chu Lai being what it was, Ray and I opted to go up to the fire bases either Hill 35 or LZ Baldy and we would stay up there for weeks on end, flying day and night 7 days a week, just flying. We would come back because the duty roster would come down from the orderly room and said you had to pull guard duty or something of this nature. In that unit everybody pulled guard duty except for some of the NCOs and some of the officers and we would pull guard duty and we would guard the fence between the Marines and we would sit on the beach below a hawk missile battery at the south end of the base at Chu Lai. We’d be outside the fence on the beach. Behind us was row after row of wire and concertina, claymore mines and landmines to protect this hawk missile battery. But, they had us down there guarding it. Normally after the last run by the sergeant of the guard and the office of the guard which was around 1 am we would crawl up on the fence, holler up at the Marines, “We’re going to sleep, wake us if somebody comes,” and they would honk their horns and let their sirens go to wake us up if a jeep came down the beach or up the beach. But my sidearm was, at that time, I didn’t have a sidearm issued and I had a snub nosed detective .38;
the little .38 special and that was the weapon I would go on guard duty with and a pocket full of iron rounds. Mostly we shot at what we thought were sharks which were probably sunfish or something out there in the bay. Usually down there it was the last call about 1:00 and they would bring us coffee and dry chicken noodle soup, Lipton, something like that. They’d bring that down, and when they were gone we’d toss the coffee and go to sleep. On guard duty, I’ve got to admit, though, when guard duty was serious guard duty, usually nobody slept. You’d stay awake talking to each other to make sure you stayed awake. In fact, Hillhouse, Sgt. Hillhouse used to like to come down and try to catch you sleeping and if Ray was sergeant of the guard he wouldn’t let him get close enough until Ray made enough noise to make sure everybody was awake. He was good about that. But if you were in a position that was in some responsibility as far as a guard post, if you did catch…were caught sleeping, you’d either get an Article 15 which was lucky or you would be sent for a period of time to the disciplining barracks at Danang and if you were on flight crew you never flew again. You’d immediately taken off. During my time that I was there no one was caught and prosecuted for sleeping or disciplined for sleeping.

SM: Because of Foty?

JS: When we pulled guard duty, yeah, and like I said, if we were in a position of some problem then we all stayed awake. There was no going to sleep. Again, I think it was the comradery that bound us together to make sure that the other guy wasn’t going to get hammered for something stupid like sleeping. In flying, when I first got there, we flew very few missions. It wasn’t a whole lot. Now after the middle of October, beginning of Thanksgiving, there was an escalation in the number of flights we were doing and the intensity of resistance. It wasn’t just a few rounds being popped off at you. Someone was very adamant on the ground in trying to bring you down and we were getting shot at more and more on a regular basis and for a long period of time over a target and luckily this was a gradual buildup so those of us that were new at this time, anyway, didn’t face that sudden shock of being hammered by anti aircraft fire of some sort. So, you built up your confidence and your ability to shoot back. This was not something that was planned, it just happened and we were lucky to be in this part of the cycle. But, from about the middle of October on and including the Thanksgiving and Christmas cease fires it was gaining in intensity and in December we really felt it. We’d go out to the Hill 35 or out to LZ Baldy flying into that Qui Son Valley area and back behind there and every mission was a hot mission. You come back, you’d have to reload and you’d have to reload usually from scratch
because you’d expended everything. And it got hot and it stayed hot. Of course as we rolled in
past the Christmas cease fire and into New Years, then it really got going just before Tet and
after Tet there was no mercy. Every mission was horrible as far as the enemy ground fire went,
for the gunships anyway. It didn’t matter which part you were supporting, whether you were
supporting down toward the south end of Chu Lai or north by Tam Ky. I rarely flew south.
Almost always with Ray we were up north in Qui Son Valley or the areas west of Tam Ky and
west of Baldy. I think that it was Hill 35 but I think its name was charger. There we were, we
didn’t know it at the time, we were fighting North Vietnamese regulars. We didn’t know until
after…actually after Frank Anton got shot down which was the 5th of January, then we got to
know that we were fighting hard core NVA.

SM: Could you tell the difference between going up against the VC or the PAVN?
JS: Yes, you could by the intensity and accuracy of fire and the way that the fire was
placed. Viet Cong normally or the VC would fire at you from straight lines and they usually
were firing at you out of opportunity and not out of design. They did not set aircraft traps. The
North Vietnamese actually set anti aircraft traps where they would be firing at you from below
and from above and from the side. They worked to get that happening because then they had the
advantage. VC would fire at you only in self-defense or at opportunity. If they thought they
could get in a good lick, they would do it, but otherwise, no.

SM: In the operations that you conducted with the 71st, these were primarily in support
of the 101st?
JS: Correct.

SM: The special forces?
JS: Yes.

SM: ARVN?
JS: ARVN and the 196th light infantry brigade. That’s where the name charger comes
from because the Americal division, the 196th, their nickname was charger. That’s where…they
were our primary support, then also came the 101st and in some cases even cavalry units, air
cavalry units, 1st cav. They came out for a short period of time and they were pretending to be
cowboys and then Bivounced outside the compound I think the 1st or 2nd night they were there,
you were mortared and lost most of their aircraft and they pulled out their aviation unit because
of that. They didn’t have the common sense to come inside. They were going to hang out
outside and set up a perimeter and all they did was just lob it in over the top of the perimeter and
down on their flight line. It was stupid. I don’t know if they had any killed. I know there were a
number of people wounded. They may have had some actual fatalities among their casualties,
but they pulled them right on out of there, their aviation. There were cavalry units up there but
mostly they were, I’m trying to think of the term, scouts. A and B teams where you had a
chopper, a gunship, and a LOH and then a slick that dropped off troops, LOH drawing fire, you
know what that is.

SM: Cobra gunship?

JS: No, at that time we didn’t have Cobras. It was still a Huey gunship, yeah. During
the whole time I was there I only saw Cobras in pictures. Never saw an actual Cobra. Actually,
I saw one on the ramp at Danang one time, but I never saw one in Chu Lai; always the Huey
gunship. But, from December, actually from October on, there was this gradual intensity from
Thanksgiving until after Christmas, it really built up, mission after mission, day in, day out, night
missions. We were one of the few units that would scramble and fly at night and that’s why they
liked us out at the Hill supporting the infantry units and not some of the other units because
lights went out, they wouldn’t go out. It was that simple. What in battalion operations or in
operations caused that, I don’t know. But as we were flying, you still had all this time in the air
and you got nothing but harassment back at the camp. We wanted to stay gone. If you got
caught there, you ended up hauling garbage. If you really got demeaned, luckily it only
happened to me maybe once, you burn shit. Actually, burning shit was one of the easier jobs
because if you got away from it with the wind in the right direction and lit the thing on fire and
went and sat around somewhere and smoked a cigarette you kept looking to see if they were still
smoking because if they were smoking they were burning it and everything was fine. The worst
job you had was hauling garbage. Usually you had a 2-½ ton truck, load it up with 55-gallon
drums with things that they wouldn’t feed hogs because the garbage-garbage, slop garbage, went
to the hog farms. Whatever they didn’t take, you took to the dump like twice a week. So in that
heat, it was pretty rancid. I did that a lot for disciplinary reasons.

SM: What would you do to receive that punishment?

JS: Well every once in a while we’d come back, actually not every once in a while, when
we had the chance, we would come back and the 1st sergeant had a communications system or a
PA system and we would cut the wires on it. We carried side cutters just like we carried a side
arm to cut his com wire, and then they could splice it together. Well, we just cut sections out.  
finally, you couldn’t stand on the hood of a 5 ton truck we had that thing up so high cut and for  
some reason he never rewired, he’d always splice so we finally had it cut where you couldn’t  
even reach that sucker. Then they had to rewire. We wouldn’t show up for company musters.  
We would go to sleep. If you’ve been flying for 3 or 4 days or a week straight with cat naps, not  
sleep time, cat naps, and we got really good at that, and you come back and you take a shower  
and they call you in for some kind of stupid duty like picking up cigarette butts on the beach,  
things like that. They wouldn’t let you sleep. Then you’d rebel in whatever stupid way you  
could or whatever simple way you could and the communications wire, the little tear gas and  
smoke grenades, stuff like that, putting a burning or still smoldering shit can back in the NCOs  
latrine. He couldn’t use that thing! One of the worst things, you’d be standing in the shower and  
the 1st sergeant would come in there and grab you. He knew who you were and he’d grab you  
and say, “You’re going to work.” Well if you hadn’t eaten anything other than C-rations for a  
couple of days you were hoping at least to get coffee and something for breakfast and if it was  
after 8:30 the mess hall’s closed so you didn’t get fed until noon. That’s the kind of discipline he  
believed in, or an attempt to maintain discipline and it was futile. It didn’t work. We had other  
plans for him which was to ignore him and then do the little stupid things in order to irritate him  
because irritating him was a way to get even. He had a temper and he’d lose control and you’d  
see him ranting and raving out there and you know you’d ruined his day and that was enough.  
We didn’t have to hurt him physically, we just had to ruin his day. When we flew, we were as  
professional as you could ever expect and dedicated to doing our job. But, when we had free  
time, we were not flying. We were really independent souls and being pretty much leaderless  
and without aims and goals to keep us busy and pointed in some constructive direction, well, we  
were like little kids. We’d wander off. Usually it wasn’t to a good place. No one was vicious,  
no one was physical, but it happened. It did happen. We tear gassed those guys once in a while.  
We smoked them a lot. We tear gassed them once in a while. We’d drop sand bags in their  
hooches flying over on approach, things like that. They were at work, toss a handful of brass on  
there so it would rain on them. That was a way of getting even, and at that time you didn’t think  
of the consequences of somebody looking up and getting a piece of brass in their eye and being  
blinded. When you grow up, you realize that was stupid, right?
SM: Right. What about the special forces group that you supported? Did the negative experience from that first special forces camp, did that ever effect you?

JS: No, because the special forces that we supported out of Chu Lai and out of the various hills and firebases were not garrison type troops like they were at Tin Phuc, these were fighting troops. When they went out to be inserted, then they needed our help and to deny that help would be...you weren’t being a soldier at that time, that was wrong, and it went against the grain of all of us, our pilots and our flight crews, our enlisted flight crews, and taking them out usually was because they were cornered and under fire and these were fellow soldiers that had to be helped. That’s why we were there. Otherwise, Greyhound bus would have gone and picked them up. They could have caught the train. We went in there to protect the aircraft, the Slicks that went down to pick them up, and the troops on the ground and sometimes it was very close where you were literally they were surrounded, they had maybe a few yards between them and the enemy and the enemy’s closing and you had to get in there with the door guns and literally on the radio they tell you to move left, move right, to stop firing, to increase firing in order to bring the NVA to bay long enough for them to either scramble up on the harnesses, and I can’t remember the name of the harness, or the slick to come into an LZ, land, and pick them up. But that business with the garrison type special forces, that didn’t carry over at all and inserting Marine reconnaissance teams and Americal division long range LRRPs, again, these guys were there and they were asking for help and that’s how we looked at ourselves. We were there to assist these guys and that’s what we did. I don’t remember of the group that normally flew in the same group of aircraft that I did that anyone ever chickened out or refused to fly. It did happen. There were pilots that would take, and this was a rare occasion, and the circuit breakers and the warning lights are all pressed to test so if you push it down it lights up, and in the armament end they would push down a circuit breaker light and it would come on and that would mean, “Okay, there’s something wrong with the armament system,” and the mission would be cut short or altered and you’d go to work on it and take the corner of a toothpick out and that’s holding the light down. Every once in a while you would find a gunner or a crew chief that was so frightened of flying that they would twist an ammo belt or push a link in and their guns jammed in order to not fly. But that was such a rare occasion and usually these guys didn’t last. They were the ones that were there for a trial and they were gone. We had gunners who, a couple of them, that were so frightened after their first mission that they would cry, they couldn’t stand up,
they’d just sit on the side of the aircraft and we’d quietly just get rid of them and push them aside. They’d get other jobs in the company or be transferred out but there was no harassment, “Hey, you were chicken, you were yellow,” because we knew that this was not a normal thing for people to do. We flew without parachutes, we flew without body armor, and you sat on an opened door. It’s like sitting in a football field and having someone open up a machine gun, on a machine gun with you while you’re walking across the end zone and they’re in the other end zone. Not many people would do it. Not many people would do it, and not do it on a regular basis and what motivated us inside to keep doing it, I don’t know. But we kept doing it. We had a lot of empathy and feeling for the guys on the ground. Some of that came from our pilots because they would tell us, “These guys are dying, we need to go get them,” and they’d let you know that you’ve got to be on the top of your game tonight or today and we would do it, especially flying with someone like Ray or John Daly or Mike…I never flew with Mike Rogers, but I knew of his reputation and Bill Reynolds, his reputation, I never flew with him, that as a gunner you couldn’t let these guys down and you couldn’t let your pilots down. You couldn’t do it.

SM: There was a good rapport between the crew chiefs, door gunners, and the pilots?

JS: Between crew chiefs and door gunners there was a good rapport. There was a very good rapport usually with the aircraft commander and the crew chief. The gunner was shunted aside a little bit because his role was marginal as far as the functioning of the aircraft went. Most of the work went in to maintaining the flight systems on that aircraft so the relationship and the interaction between the crew chief and the aircraft commander were more obvious. Actually as gunners we dealt more with, and armorers, with new pilots, peter pilots, coming in to show them how the systems worked and train them on it. So we got, the gunners, got a rapport more with the co pilots than they would with the pilots. The pilots looked at you and asked you, “Are you ready to go? Are the systems ready to go?” and either you said yes or no and if you said no, chances are you wouldn’t be flying for a while. You’d be redoing armament systems for a bit, but luckily I never let that happen and I worked at it not to have it happen. I got grounded once. I felt it was unjust. It may not have been, but I felt it was and I was never going to be grounded again. As discipline once in a while, Sgt. Hillhouse would threaten to ground you but you also knew he didn’t have anybody to replace you and that’s a little thing we had on him. A couple of missions, you know, if you want to get into that I can get into some of them that come to mind.
The first one that we ran into problems with, and this was when I flew with Ray, one of the
crewmembers had an aircraft. He was not the best crew chief; he cleaned things up but didn’t
look under the skirts, so he didn’t know exactly what problems were and his wife had just had
twins so he celebrated the night before. Ray was going to go on special leave that day and Ray
called me up and said, “Jaak, we got to go fly for this crew,” and he didn’t want to take that door
gunner with him. He wanted to take me, and I said, “Okay, Ray, let’s go. You’re supposed to go
on leave!” but he said, “Nah, I can put that off,” so we ferried the single gunship down. We were
going to Duc Pho and some distance outside of Duc Pho out on the beach we lost our hydraulics
and we found out that we had 2 lines chafing and leaking and they finally leaked out completely.
What this crew chief had done was he always topped off his reservoir of hydraulic fluid without
seeking out the underlying problem and because of this he also left a case of hydraulic fluid in
the cargo hold. Well we hard landed and we crashed and we sent out an SOS and landed on the
beach. Ray went to the left of the aircraft and I came around to the right and we set up a
perimeter and this was still pre dawn and there were Vietnamese moving in the tree line above
where we were on the beach area and one of them looked like he was in charge but he appeared
to be running toward a village or some other area to get instructions. We surprised them, and
they didn’t know whether this was a trap for them that we set down and we had either high
performance aircraft which were jets or other helicopters waiting to pounce on them and they’re
indecision gave us a time where the co-pilot came out and took the guard position or perimeter
position away from Ray and sent him back to the aircraft. They topped off the hydraulics and
said were gonna have to fly out. No one answered our may day. No one responded; battalion,
no other company. We got no response on the radio so it was either swim out or face the
consequences and we came back with the…someone came around to me, I don’t remember who
it was, and said, “When you hear that rotor, that starter kick in, you need to be on that aircraft
now.” We heard it start up, bounced back in the aircraft, and flew off the beach and on the way
back the pilot had to nurse that aircraft with as little hydraulic motion as possible to keep that up
and we flew the accumulator back and by the time we got to Duc Pho, we’d lost everything and
they set it down hard on a grass runway there, spread the skids so that the rocket pods which
normally are 18 to 24 inches off the ground were about an inch off the ground. That’s how far
they spread the skids. We finished our mission by borrowing a gunship from the unit that we
were going to go support or assist. Their problem was they had ships but they didn’t have
enough crews. Well, we ended up flying one of their mini gunships. When we got back, none of our rescue equipment or maintenance equipment had come down and we went ahead and said, “You know, I can make it fly,” and he went to one of their downed aircraft, got the hydraulic lines from that one, replaced them on ours, didn’t have a chance to bleed the system like you normally would a hydraulic system but did get the hydraulics in there enough where we could straight line fly it along the coast back to Chu Lai and we flew it back to Chu Lai. We got that single aircraft back and shortly after that Ray went on special. That was the first really hairy thing and then you flew and the missions got one after another, one after another, you really didn’t separate one from another. Then I guess it was things were really going rough. We were taking a lot of hits and a lot of fire after Christmas and then on the 9th, the day of the 5th of January Ray and I’d been in Chu Lai and he and I actually were going to ferry an aircraft up to one of the hills, I guess it was 35 and there was some question as to which pilots were going to stay up there. The pilots that ended up staying asked for Ray and I to be part of his crew and this was a pilot by the name of Gary McCall, an aircraft commander named Gary McCall and we’d flown a few small missions during the day and he, I guess it was at dusk or somewhere about there, we got called out to support an infantry unit that was in the valley floor out there in the Qui Son Valley and they were out there by mistake. All the other infantry units had moved up to higher ground in defensible positions and they left this Charlie company and I don’t remember what other parts they were of the Americal division, the 196th, on the valley floor. Of course they were in the middle of either a regiment or a battalion of NVA, right smack dab. So, they set up an aircraft trap for the rescue aircraft and then assaulted the position. We were called out to give them fire support and to give a unit fire support you have to get in radio contact with them, you have to find out where they are and get their permission to roll in on them and we couldn’t get them to respond, couldn’t get them to respond. They were under such intense attack that they couldn’t and then finally you get these little whispered comments and you go, “Oh, this one’s not good,” and every once in a while we would see the green, the commies used green tracers, a single tracer coming our direction and that’s it. We were off and up, but this single tracer would come up. A little while would go by and another tracer. During this circling and waiting to get in contact with the grunts on the ground, this Charlie company, we were using up fuel; precious fuel. We’ve not popped off a round. All we did was clear the guns to make sure they fire and that’s it and somewhere along the line the infantry responded and we were making our run. I
can’t remember our first or second pass. First pass Anton took a hit; the wing ship took a hit and
this was a full blown anti aircraft trap and he took the hit not knowing…I guess they didn’t know
how badly they were hit. We went around for a second time and he went into the ground. He
had no hydraulics and all of the anti aircraft weapons were on the door gunner’s side so I was
engaging probably somewhere between 9 and 14 anti aircraft guns and these are the 12.75 or
12.7 millimeter anti aircraft weapons and it was horrendous. We took more hits that day than I’d
ever seen before. We had taken hits into the fuel tanks that caused them to leak. The aircraft
commander’s rotor pedal was shot out from under him, under his feet, and we were running out
of fuel. We did make an attempt to rescue them but they had to pull out. We had our search
light on. I think if we’d have gone lower we’d have been below the angle of attack for their anti
aircraft weapons but it didn’t work out anyway. We had to leave the area. We radioed back,
“We’re going.” We went back to the hill, I guess to hill 35 and set down. Our aircraft was
unflyable at that time. We counted 48 hits in the tail boom and this is not counting exit hits. A
total of 64 hits in the aircraft. When you shined a flashlight in the tail boom at night it was like a
sieve, it was like a colander. The bulk of the hits were all in the tail boom which means they
were off on their sighting which was lucky for us or they would have gotten all of us that night.
Ray, they brought up a gunship for a rescue attempt. Ray tried to hide himself on board to go
back out and they caught him and they made him stay because now he and I had no aircraft but
the gunner on a slick that was flying flares was going to go back out and for some reason their
gunner couldn’t or wouldn’t go back out. I didn’t have an aircraft. I asked Ray, “Can I go?” and
he said, “One of us has to go.” I said, “I’m gone.” They needed him to wait for a new aircraft or
try to figure out how to fly the existing one so as a gunner I went back up. First time I’d flown in
a Slick in a combat mission; first time on a flare ship. So on the way out the crew chief is giving
me on the intercom all the instructions of what to do on a slave ship. We [?] we’re starting to
drop flares. We had one explode out the side, not completely but a flare burning through the
side. We let the pilot up front know, the AC know and he panicked, screaming, “Get it out of
here, get it out of here, get it out of here,” and we were scrambling to get them out. In fact, I got
burned from the blast from that in the arm; burnt about a quarter inch deep hole in my arm from
that flare burning outward. We were able to get the flares out and dump them, pull that curtain
back, and the pilot was just sobbing. He had failed in his attempt earlier to make the rescue.
Now, he’d also failed in the second attempt and he was coming unglued, plus that incident with
the flare in the back had pretty much turned him into a rather nervous state. We did come back.

We went to our base camp again up there on the hill. There, everything becomes somewhat of a void. I don’t remember what we did the rest of the night. I know we didn’t...we must not have slept. Somewhere during that time Ray and I got another functioning aircraft. Someone brought us an airplane, a helicopter. The following morning we went out and we were up there as quick as daylight permitted. We flew out to...there was a fire base Goblin above there that was directing us toward the infantry on the ground and we landed up on their bunkers, one of their bunkers. We sat down on that away from their antenna arrly and then another gunship came and hovered and then the company commander showed up. Now this was his second trip out. I don’t know this because I wasn’t a witness to it but they told me he tried twice during the night to attempt a rescue with a slick and it didn’t work either and he came and he took our landing spot and we took turns sitting on top of the hill off to the side somewhere. Finally late in the morning clouds had lifted and you could see down in the valley, you could see that aircraft and there’s no one around and then we got the radio call from this fire support base we were on and they said, “You know, the grunts are on the ground, there’s no blood, there’s no bodies, these guys have vanished.” Three of them had been taken prisoner. I think it was PFC Jim Pfister, SP4 Lewis, and one officer aircraft commander, Frank Anton. Frank Carson, the pete pilot, had effected some kind of escape during the night and he actually walked out. He’s someone you need to ask about that. That, I guess, is pretty interesting about how he’s a man who blended in with Vietnamese and he’s over 6 feet tall and white as white could be. He claims he’s dark complexioned but he’s not that dark. Plus, he’s over 6 feet tall with a GI haircut, but he got out.

That afternoon when we left that firebase was probably the quietest on the radio that I’ve ever flown because we knew we lost a crew and we couldn’t do anything to help them. We got back to Chu Lai, we took this loner aircraft back to Chu Lai, went to take showers, and I didn’t know it at the time but I’d also been hit in the back of the leg and this was probably on the first mission in the gunship and I had this burn on the arm and burns, you know how they hurt. They’re not maybe...they don’t have to be really bad to be painful so I went to the 1st sergeant after I took a shower and I said, “I need to go down to the medics. I need to get this looked at.” He looked at me and he told me that he’d had enough casualties for night and that I was going to drive the garbage truck, get ready. So, I drove the garbage truck. But, in my way of getting even with him, I took the garbage truck to the dump, put it in either second or third gear, jammed a sandbag
up against the accelerator with my foot and bailed out and the truck went out over the edge into
the dump and I walked back to battalion and asked for a ride, said the brakes failed. Luckily
they never checked the brakes. That’s the last time I drove a garbage truck. I never drove again.
But, that’s the kind of things we did to get even for the mistreatment.

SM: What did you think about the pilots you flew with?

JS: The pilots we flew with? The rookie pilots were not well prepared at all. They knew
how to fly a helicopter but not under adverse conditions. It was always dicey when they had
controls. The aircraft commanders that were warrant officers and not commissioned officers
were there because of their experience so they were good and we liked flying with them. The
commissioned officers were aircraft commanders because of their rank and not because of their
ability and sometimes they were worse than the rookie warrant officers coming up. They didn’t
have time and they didn’t have the experience but they were put in positions because of their
commissioned rank. The Army, you know how its structured, things are whether they need to be
or not or they should be. That’s the way it is. But, the aircraft commanders, the ones that I flew
with, if they flew us into trouble they flew us out of trouble. They were like that. They played
around, they played cowboy. One time we were flying and we were not allowed to low level
coming from Tam Ky which is near a forward base camp to Chu Lai. Well we were in and to of
the trees just having a good old time. We hit a tree, or a limb, and broke the Chin Bubble. Well
that was grounding for the whole crew and the aircraft commander, he’d either became a peter
pilot or a maintenance officer somewhere. We had a pillow onboard. I tossed the feathers from
the pillow into the aircraft and said we hit a bird. That’s all it took, we hit a bird! So the damage
to the aircraft was not a tree, it was a bird because we had the feathers to prove it.

SM: You got away with that?

JS: Got away with it. They needed to see feathers for a bird, that was it. But they were
all the same sized and they were our pillow fillers! The pilots, again, the aircraft commanders,
onece they had the experience, and especially after Anton went down, their attitude toward
enlisted crew…often we weren’t briefed on missions except in the air and told, “Hey, we’re
going to go do this, now get ready to do it.” It got to the point where they’re showing us on
maps where we’re coming from, where we’re going, why we’re there, how long we’re going to
be there, where to look for problems, where to place our fire ahead of time and that made us even
better as crews. That also caused us to stay out in the field and want to stay because the
treatment again we could be professionals and we could be respected out there and, pardon me
again, to eat shit in Chu Lai and we didn’t want to do that so we just stayed out weeks at a time.
We were flying probably…we normally, I think the aircraft goes in for a maintenance check
every 25 hours and we were going through 2 and ½ to 3 aircraft per week, sometimes 4 aircraft
per week. All I’d do was shuttle up a new one, shuttle up a new one, and the shuttle crew would
take ours back for maintenance. We would not leave the hill. We just wanted to stay. The
infantry, some of the rear echelon officers did treat us poorly. We didn’t have hats, we didn’t
wear hats, and they would nail us for that. “Hey, I got a flight helmet and I’m not going to wear
it. It needs to be connected to the aircraft,” so that was our excuse for no hats and hats would
blow away. You could have put them in your pocket but that wasn’t for us to even explain. We
had a problem one time getting fed by the 196th and this went on with a little nit picking for a
while and finally it came to a head where they were going to close the mess hall, we’d been up
all day and part of the night and we needed to get fed and the mess sergeant said, “Get out of my
mess hall,” and one of the crew chiefs, Joe Bruce, pulled a gun on him, pointed it at him, and
said, “We’re getting fed.” We got fed that night. That got back to the commander of the
Americal division, or the area commander whoever that was, some colonel up on the hill, and he
made a mock sort of temper tantrum and a wink he said, “You guys are going to get fed from
now on,” and from then on, when we went to the guys with the Americal or the 196th to get fed
or to get anything, we were taken care of just like that. If you had a problem with the medics,
you needed aspirin, you needed a Band-Aid, you needed to replenish a first aid kit, those guys
were right there with the stuff. If you needed C-rations to put on the aircraft because you were
going to go sit somewhere at a forward base, those C-rations were made available by the 196th to
us without questions asked so it was really…that was good, and they didn’t just give us the
canned eggs, the scrambled eggs. They gave us food to take with us. That part was nice, and
when they could they would save hot food for us. They would hold it over. Now that never
happened to us at the base camp in Chu Lai. They never held food for us, even when they knew
we were coming in. A little aside again, I know this is dragging, but in Chu Lai at Thanksgiving,
this happened to us Thanksgiving and Christmas, Ray and I were both in Chu Lai at that time
flying patrol missions during these cease fires to the south of us; one of the few times we flew
south of Chu Lai instead of north. Well they were going to hold Thanksgiving and Christmas
dinner for us and they were going to bring it out to the flight line. They came out with a box of
nut cups and hot C-rations and no turkey, no gravy, no dressing. So you can imagine that getting
even time was getting close again, and we did. I can’t remember what we did, but we did
something. Ray was so mad that he grabbed that nut cup and a bunch of them threw them away.
I know I ate a few of mine and then that was it. But, that’s the kind of treatment we got and
that’s’ why we stayed out in the field. Could not take it back there because they made you feel
so unwanted and so incompetent that you…the pilots would ask us as a crew to go out as, Ray
and I especially, as pairs to fly every opportunity and we would just be there so we were the first
ones in line and they didn’t have to look anywhere. They can get on the radio or the phone and
we flew. We flew, we flew, we flew. I flew…I turned in my equipment, I think I left on the 10th
of March was my date to leave Vietnam and then on the couple of days before I left I turned in
my equipment and I borrowed it back to keep flying, to stay out of the company area. I flew
until the night before and during the night and the morning that I was actually supposed to depart
Chu Lai so I missed the morning flight. The Army’s got orders for certain times you get on the
plane. You have these orders and service tickets and you’re supposed to go on and I was
supposed to go to Cam Ranh Bay. Well the shuttle brought me back around noon because I’d
flown a morning mission and they brought a gunner out to replace me and I flew back on that
same aircraft back to Chu Lai. Well, to leave I had to go to the orderly room to get new orders.
Sgt. Hillhouse is there just screaming, “You’re AWOL! If you weren’t getting out, you’d be
going to jail.” I said, “I flew!” He said, “I don’t care what you did,” and we’re talking here
some really vile language. He says, “Now I got to cut you new orders, I got to explain to
battalion why you weren’t on that plane,” I said, “Just show them the flight records. That’s why
I wasn’t on that plane.” I had friends out there that were still flying and I had earned, for the
night that Anton went down, an Army commendation and had been awarded with a V device.
He took that out of his drawer with the medal and with the orders and the certificate and he
ripped the two pieces of paper up and he told me to my face, “You’re never going to see these in
your lifetime,” threw the medal back in the drawer, and threw the orders and the certificate that
you get and tossed them in the trash and told me to get out of his Army. I caught the afternoon
flight to Cam Ranh Bay. They got 4 lines or 5 lines of people. You go in there and you’re
processing out, basically it goes by rank, and they got the real screw ups; the guys that have been
busted, the convicts, the ex-convicts, the guys that’s being sent home for disciplinary reasons,
and these are the ones that are going to be doing crummy detail, guard duty, burning shit, doing
KP at the transit barracks during the night. I’m in the line with normal people, I’m a Spec 4 and
I get to the front of the line and they were calling out the name and checking it off on a
chalkboard type of thing. All of a sudden an NCO jumps up and says, “Give them to me,” and I
end up with these drags so they put me burning shit at night at the women’s barracks. The view
was great, them walking around in their underwear. You know, I haven’t seen this for a year so
this is pretty nice, but I’m still burning shit. Now I flew all night, day before, not eating and not
sleeping, burning shit all night, not sleeping. I was filthy, I smelled, and I was tired and
sometime around mid morning or early 10 o’clock or whatever, 9:30 they came and got me and
said, “You’re on the next plane out,” and I said, “I’ve got to clean up,” and they handed me a
khaki shirt, short sleeved, and said, “This is what you’ve got.” So I’ve got these nasty fatigue
pants on, boots, and a clean khaki shirt and again, I’m in this “I am in an ugly mood” mode so I
put diesel fuel in one of the refuse buckets in the women’s latrine, loaded it up with diesel fuel,
loaded it up with all the copies of Stars and Stripes I could find, lit that thing on fire, and when
we taxied out and flew out that thing was still burning on the ground. So, I left Vietnam burning
shit but I burnt that thing down. Getting out was good. It was easy. The process went rapidly.
They were really efficient. The medics treated us real well. The doctor that came through was
very crude and very nasty. This was, the reason he was there was probably because he’d made a
medical mistake somewhere and he was really in a sour mood and what he did was he treated us
terribly in there, you know, stand up cold and it’s Seattle. We came to Seattle. We’re freezing
to death, standing there in or underwear in this long hallway and they’re doing the check and
checking shot records, things like this, but the rest of getting out was pretty easy. One thing
happened on the way over; leaving Cam Rahn Bay we stopped in Okinawa and I believe that
airbase there is Kadena. From there we flew to Tachi Kawa in Japan and then to Anchorage.
We flew back on Saturn airways which was the charter arm of Eastern I believe. Well, this is
civilian aircraft. There’re 90% or 70, 80% are all military but there are civilians on board; flight
attendants, the whole thing, little hot towels and lemon juice, whatever it is. We get to
Anchorage and the enlisted…no one has customs forms so this, I believe, was the 11th of March.
Alaska’s cold at this time. We were all in, the most anybody had was a long sleeved jungle shirt.
Most of us were all in short sleeves and they lined E4 and below on the ramp at parade rest while
they fueled the plane. E5 and above went to the reception area or waiting area and stayed warm
and they got on the plane before we did and we were out there just…there were guys that were
so cold they wet their pants. To keep us in place, they had Air Force guards and all of them
dressed for winter, I will say that. There were guys that had malaria or the last stages of malaria
and they’re getting over it, they were sick, they were tired, some had visible wounds that were
bandaged up and here they are, E4 and below, standing on the runway at Anchorage; not a good
feeling.

SM: Welcome home!

JS: Welcome home; not a good one. You know what? We got to Fort Lewis and other
than the doctor being there they fed us and they explained what was going to happen. They took
us by bus to the front gate but we wanted to go to the airport. Everyone’s going somewhere, no
one’s staying. They said we couldn’t stay and sleep, we had to go home. We get to the gate and
there’s this bus stop and all these benches like there are in front of military bases. The bus
stopped, opened the door, and said, “You guys are out.” Didn’t’ take us, like, normally a bus,
you would think, a military bus would take us to the airport and then let us go there and pick up
our airplanes and keep on going. No, they dumped us at the gate at Fort Lewis and we had to
arrange our own transportation. So those of us who had money would pool up and taxis, of
course, were pulling up and I think maybe someone was getting a cut of the taxi fare up there and
we took it to Seattle Tacoma Airport, whatever that is, and flew back. Treatment at San
Francisco International, one of my stops, I think I was on Northwest Orient, and there was the
first place that I ran into the anti war sentiment and it was a real eye opener. Went to, like I say,
it was Host International, one of those little coffee lounges there and wait to be seated and
nobody would. They go around you to seat people. “I don’t know, I’m by myself, maybe they
really mean that I should go to the counter.” I went to the counter and they wouldn’t serve me.
Wouldn’t! The little girl that wouldn’t serve me, I asked her, “I’d like a cup of coffee, I need
something to eat, I’m on my way home and I’ve got a plane to catch,” and she just looked at me
and she dumped a water on me. “What was that for? What was that all about?” and I don’t
remember exactly what she said but there’s something about this blather about killing babies and
women and children and what have you and I’m in shock and I’m not paying any attention and I
threw the cup of coffee from the guy next to me at her and nailed her with it and a police
escorted me to the airplane or to the lounge area and said, “You need to stay here, pal,” you
know. “You’re not in any condition to go back out front because they’re really mad at you now
for throwing this thing at this little girl,” this waitress. Well. I feel bad about it now at the time,
but why do I have to listen to this crap? I got to LA and it got to be pushing and shoving. People were outwardly rude to you, muttering under their breath, giving you the finger, giving you the peace sign with the finger in the other hand, and this is at LAX. Not good. Then came that transition as you’re going from soldier to civilian in 12 hours. It’s not working because you’re really not a civilian and you’re really not a soldier. It was a strange, strange feeling. It was hard to take.

SM: How long did it take you to adapt?

JS: To hide any anxiety and fear and frustration and anger, probably 3 or 4 weeks. This is to hide it, just to put that façade out. To really come to grips with it, 4 or 5 years maybe; 4 or 5 years. I got out and there was another incident in there with Hillhouse. I didn’t want to leave because Frank was still on the ground and now at this point we actually knew he was still on the ground and they had a program; I didn’t want to reenlist for 4 years or what have you. I’d already been told…I wanted to go into Army intelligence or become a commissioned officer pilot. They told me there was no way I could get commissioned because I didn’t have a 4-year degree. I didn’t want to be a warrant. I said, “I want to go to Army intelligence school and I want to go to Europe,” and they said, “No,” that, “You’re a security risk,” and I couldn’t understand that because there were other Estonians that had been stationed as intelligence coordinators and I knew them because that’s how I knew about the job and they bumped you up to E6 or equivalent, whatever E6 was warrant to depending on which job you got. Then you could go to college, finish your college in Germany and get a commission. I wanted to do that and they said, “No, you’re a security risk. We cannot let you go into intelligence.” The only option was left was stay in Vietnam and I really…that was where my heart was to stay and the only way I could effect that was to join the National Guard, a local unit, and be activated immediately and then not leave there but stay in Vietnam and do this 6 months at a time. Hillhouse told me, “No way. You’re out of my Army, you’re out of my unit. You’re gone.” He wouldn’t let me stay, even 6 months at a time. That’s how much, how deep that animosity between he and I were, or was. It was…looking back, its humorous but at the time it was difficult to cope with because there were limits that you could do to him and not get into serious trouble when you really wanted to do something to him and there was no help from the officers in the units. The pilots were powerless to intercede. There’s nothing they could do. But, we didn’t have a platoon sergeant that would get in for us. In fact, for the last couple of months
there I don’t’ think we had one. The one that we had quit went back to infantry because he
didn’t want to fly. This is Boucher, the one before that. But he understood; he didn’t’ feel like
ordering men to do something that he was afraid of doing and he admitted it and he wouldn’t do
it and he didn’t do it and I got a lot of respect for somebody like that. He went back to the
infantry. He did not go to a desk job. He went back to ground pounding. Wherever he came
from, he went back and he was an infantry platoon leader and that’s what he went back to, or
someone else sent him out and decided what to do. He didn’t want to make that decision. The
other officers, operations officers and what have you, they were no one you could go to to get
any kind of help and because of my attitude and because of Ray’s attitude and you’ve already
talked to him so you know where he’s coming from on this, is every 25 hours you’re allegedly
supposed to receive an air medal. We received none. We cannot find any that were even issued.
It took me until 1999 to relocate and find the orders from our Army commendation medal and I
finally got the orders. What it was is Chuck gave me a book, Stolen Valor by Burkette and I
don’t remember the lady author’s name and in there, in his acknowledgements, he lists all the
people that helped him in research so I called all of them until I found a gentleman, and I don’t’
remember his name, Bruce something I think at the Archives, military section, and he helped me.
In the mean time Foley had located me through seabolt and

SM: This is CD 2 of the interview with Jaak Sepp. Okay, so you contacted this
individual at the national archives through Burkette’s book?

JS: Right, and gave him Foley’s order numbers. He said, “You know, I cannot find this
for you. This is like the last scene in Raiders of the Lost Ark where you’re looking at the
government warehouse and they say, ‘Go ahead and find the ark’?” He said, “Well, that’s where
your orders are. They’re next to the ark.”

SM: That’s funny.

JS: But he said, “If you give me something to look for, then we can do it,” and using
Foley’s date and number he located it. But in 1996 I had written, for some reason, to the
Department of the Army in St. Louis and I think what it was I was saying, “I’ve got this where I
actually know about the Army commendation medal and I know that I had some air medals I was
due, would you please look into it?” Well in ’97 or so they had had a hearing, I’ve got the copies
of the letters that they sent around and what they said is they actually located those orders and
they added on to it the good conduct ribbon and some other stuff that belonged to the unit that I
was entitled to and they sent the letter to me with that and a copy of the orders. Well, during this
time that it took to get all of this stuff I’d also contacted my congressman and his aid took it and
I gave him the forms and filled out this, what is it, freedom of information act release and all, and
a year goes by and nothing happens other than a letter saying, “We’re going to look into it,” and
then at this time I’m doing the research myself and I finally called him the same time I had called
the archives and I got a hold of this Bruce…I think his first name was Bruce.

SM: It wasn’t’ Snyder, was it?

JS: No, I will write you a note and I’ll tell you who it is. I’ll tell you who this guy is
because he’s a jewel. He did something he didn’t have to do, but he did it. I’d contacted the
congressman’s office and I said, “Listen, I’ve got Foley’s numbers. Why don’t’ you guys see
what you can do to get these guys to look?” A couple of days later he calls me back. He’s
talked to the same Bruce and I give him Bruce’s name and phone number, I gave him everything
he needed. Bruce’s called me back before he called this aide back and he said, “I’m sending it to
you.” I guess he wanted to fax it to me and I said, “I don’t have a fax machine yet to send it to,”
so he puts it in the mail. A day later this congressman’s aide calls. He says, “We found your
orders and when we get them I’ll give you a call back.” Well, I know where the orders are. I
said, “Thank you.” He calls me back in about a week and he says, “We’re sending you a letter
that we’ve located all this stuff,” and he’s sending me copies of what I’ve already received from
the national archives and I get that and then he said when I get that paperwork to give him a call.
I called him and I said, “I really appreciate,” and I’m trying to brown nose there and I said, “I
appreciate what you’ve done.” I ask him, “Now how do I get the certificate along with the
medal?” and he told me that if I contact the congressman in writing, tell him what a good job;
now this is the aid saying what a good job he had done and all the services he had rendered to me
as a veteran, he would see to it that I got the orders, or got the medal and the certificate and its
been 30 years and my attitude towards this kind of treatment really hasn’t gotten better and I told
him in no uncertain terms where he could shove those medals. I said, “I earned those, I’m not
going to get them back by buying them from you.” Then I call the congressman’s office in
Washington, D.C. and this was a year ago and I haven’t heard a word since so I think I lost them
again! Bad attitude; but I do have a copy of the orders now.

SM: Why not go through Secretary of the Army? You’ve got the copy of the orders, that
should be able…
JS: That I think is the next step is to send a copy of the orders and a copy of all those letters that I received. But now I’ve moved and now I have a new congressman and this congressman’s military aide, she’s not even interested in talking to me. This is really something else. She sounds a little bit young and the concern isn’t there and I know to them, to most people, these awards and decorations are just that. I guess it’s like winning a ribbon at the school science fair that disappears when you move the next time or is in the box that grandma keeps and gives you a shadow box 10 years or 50 years later that you can give your kids and show you what you did. But to veterans, we have nothing to show for what we did. There’s nothing there that says you did a good job, you did a bad job, you did an indifferent job, you were a criminal, or you were a good American soldier. The only thing we have are these medals and these awards and certificates and citations and when you don’t get them, you really feel deprived. But, you’re against a bureaucracy that has a date that they stop on or they’re non responsive. They tell you, “You need to give me the orders.” Well, if I had the orders I don’t need you. I need you to look. A big excuse used to be, “Well we had a fire in St. Louis,” but they don’t tell you it’s the Korean war archives that are missing, not Vietnam era, and its late Korean war so the World War II guys are still safe; but this fire covers a lot of ground. It may even be covering guys in the Gulf War for all we know, but that’s what you get when you call and it makes that…it brings back the ugly part of what you were involved in. I don’t have any regrets about going to Vietnam. I still think communism is the wrong thing. I, too, and even as I’ve aged now 30 years later see no difference between it other than its political color and its banners and slogans from fascism. Whether you’re an economic slave or a political slave, you’re still a slave. Communism makes economic slaves out of you and by doing that makes you a political slave. You’re still a slave. I know Americans did things wrong over there. It was more out of stupidity and frustration than out of evil design. They did not plan to do evil things to Vietnamese, but they did them. We all know that. It’s obvious, you can read the paper and magazines. A lot of guys come to you and they talk about, “I threw babies out of planes and I did that.” Those guys probably didn’t exist. They probably weren’t in Vietnam. I never saw that. I heard wannabes talking about killing babies and being forced to do all sorts of stuff and when you talk to them, they can’t give you dates, times, places, their ages don’t match with the time that they should have been in Vietnam. They talk about having beer parties in college or working or being married and then they go back and they were in Vietnam at the same time and how can you be in
college and over there doing all sorts of atrocious things, but they’re looking to, I guess, to make
a political point that they’ve gotten to believe and also to look for sympathy and someone to,
“Oh, poor boy, you were stuck over there?” Well, those of us, the vast majority of us sent over
there aren’t looking for the poor boy because we never felt ourselves to be poor. We were not
deprived of 2 years or 4 years or 1 year, whatever you were there. Most of us feel we actually
did something worthwhile. The end was horrendous for the Vietnamese people, and also for the
psyche of the American people. I don’t’ know that we’re going to get over it as long as there’s
this group of veterans and this group of political protestors that are still around because we’re
always going to be at each other’s throats one way or another. Each one of us has the truth, and
its not always the truth. Hopefully I’ve just embellished and I’ve never lied. On this tape, I’ll be
honest with you, I didn’t’ embellish. I tried to keep it short although this is dragging on but I
don’t have any qualms about it because I think the cause was just. It was just such a
mismanagement of the war and not having a plan to…the war evolved out of control of the
Americans, I think. We tried to use modern management principles on something that’s been
around since the first man tossed a rock or a stick at somebody else or choked them. That didn’t’
work. We need to go back and rethink that with our military that they need to be a fighting force
and not some kind of, I guess right now, we’re just traffic cop all sorts of parts of the world
where we may have a clear goal and a mission that is in our interest, but in some ways we’re
leaderless in accomplishing that because we don’t’ know what we’re supposed to be doing.
Vietnam, it happened and there was no one there to cope with the happening.
SM: Well when you got back in ’68, shortly thereafter Johnson decided not to run for
reelection. What did you think of that?
JS: Well I thought it was a good deal because he’d mismanaged the war up to then and I
think to some degree it took some political courage for him to say, “I screwed up and this is
beyond me.” He had mismanaged the war, whether it was in picking poor advisors or listening
for advice. Like Harry Truman says, “The buck stops here,” well it stopped for Johnson. He
didn’t have an answer to his own problems. We didn’t’ read the tealeaves. We didn’t’ even
know there was a cup of tea on the table most of the time I think. You would report out that
there’s tanks on the ground, there’s tank tracks or truck tracks in the jungle and no one would
want to listen to you; not here. Well at Tet they found out they were there. Water buffalo do not
leave treaded trails about 6 or 7 feet away from each other, or 8 feet away, 12 feet away. That’s
not…and we found out the hard way and we didn’t even learn when we found out the hard way.

We made a serious mistake. One was we kept taking experienced troops and sending them home instead of giving them a complete mission and goal and say, “Until you achieve that goal and that mission, you’re not coming home,” and we kept putting people that were inexperienced and we sent them into a grinder against people that were experienced. What did they expect? It was, the outcome was…we determined the outcome by our ineffective leaders. It all boils down to that; who makes the right or wrong decision based on what?

SM: So you don’t think the 365 day rotation system was a good one?

JS: No, I really don’t think so. It would have meant the same people being exposed to fire longer, but they were more equipped to handle that exposure to fire. They were surviving. I’m willing to bet, although I don’t have the statistics, there were more people that died on the line, in line companies and fighting companies, the first two months than died in their last two months; all things being the same as far as the amount of combat they’re exposed to because you learn. We learned to become door gunners and not to be scaredy cats sitting in the door wondering if that wind was going to blow us out with the machine guns. I was replaced by a guy that, God rest his soul, was just incompetent, afraid. He shouldn’t’ have been up there, and if it had been a really deadly mission it could have cost an aircraft plus 4 people’s lives plus everybody on the ground. Luckily, they survived that mission and I think Roger Hall on his way home jumped in and took his place. Roger also flew the last day of the last hour. We did not get a week off, a month off or what have you. You didn’t fly 1000 missions or 100 missions and then get to stop. No, we flew until we came home or we went home, carried home. In some ways we didn’t want to quit. It was hard leaving, knowing that your friends were still there doing the same thing and for me I was being kicked out. I never lost a day’s pay or an hour’s pay and never was busted, never had an article 15, but it was this battle of wills that the Army lost out on and I know I lost out on. We both did.

SM: Well what did you think about the Paris Peace of ’73 and the refusal to provide aid in ’75?

JS: Well the Paris peace accords, if you read up to the point where they reached the accords, it was arguing about the shape of the table, who was going to sit where, and what. You knew this was a ploy and in some ways you knew what the end was going to be. We were looking for a way out without having our nose bloodied when we turned around and ran out of
there and they were looking to get us out and get the last kick in to the seat of our pants on the
way out, so the game was being played. Anything that came out of there was suspect. As far as
I was concerned, it was a way of getting out. The only thing that I liked about these accords was
the fact that the boys were going to come home, and they did. I guess before the accords were
even signed they came home and at that time I stayed on that television. Of course, there were
no VCRs yet that I could afford anywhere I knew about, not even beta mas at that time, and I
stayed watching as they’re showing those guys landing in the Philippines and I waited 2 days,
almost 3 days until I finally saw Lewis, Pfister, and Anton and then I went back to bed. It was
okay, the boys came home. That was the first time that I had cried I think over all of this or had
any real sense of emotion. But seeing those boys, or men now, get off that plane. They read
their names on TV and I just [releases a deep breath]; it was okay. Boy, I cried and I cried and I
cried.

SM: What about ’75?
JS: I felt bad for the people. I felt bad for those that threw their lot in with us and
believed in us. Knowing everything I knew about communism and what these people were going
to go through, this was not going to end good. Reeducation camps are not a place to go. Those
that were outright sympathizers and collaborators and we don’t’ know how many were killed;
hopefully it was only in the tens of thousands and not in the hundreds of thousands but I know it
was a lot. These people have grudges and they have lists and they knew who to look for. The
handwriting was on the wall. What was the total number of refugees, half a million over that
period of time? There are so many we don’t know who drowned, who the pirates killed, who the
Vietnamese killed themselves, who got out to sea and just were swallowed up. It’s pathetic, the
fact that we wouldn’t give them aid, we wouldn’t go back once we reached this accord and
settled in. I’m of the opinion we should have tried to get some kind political rapprochement of
rapport with these people as soon as possible because maybe at that time we could have found
more of the missing in action that were alive. I’m a firm believer in that more were taken than
were returned because you see these lists of people that suddenly they just go into a vacuum and
no one knows where they are anymore. If they did, and there’s no reason for me to doubt that
they did the same thing that they didn’t do in Korea where electronics warfare officers, senior
pilots, and those that they captured didn’t go to interrogation, didn’t disappear in the Russian
Gulay and didn’t disappear in China. There’s a good chance that some of those guys that were
taken ended up there being squeezed for information. The cold war was a hot war there and those that were pulling the strings were also wanting the information and I’m sure that those that were of value of them did go and they left Vietnam and they’ll never be heard from. If I was...put the shoe on our foot; if we had the opportunity, damn right we would have taken somebody that could feed us intelligence information that we were hungry for. Why not? Hopefully, we would have turned them loose as POWs and not buried them. The thing with the...whether it was a fascist dictatorship or communist dictatorship, they bury the fact that they did instead of saying, “We did it, ha ha, and here’s your guy back.” They like to bury it. Look at those archives in Russia; slowly they’re coming out, slowly they’re coming out.

SM: In what ways did the war most profoundly affect you?

JS: One thing it led me to measure friendships in more than I could get out of them. It wasn’t...friendships aren’t just fun; they’re the ability to rely and trust people and I learned that there, that to be a friend you need to be more substance, the show. You’ve got to be there. When you start to do something you need to put everything you can into it and not, “Ho hum, I will slack off here and not do this, no one’s going to see me, no one will catch me.” You’ve made a...it kept me as a conservative politically but also with the desire to read between the lines of anybody’s rhetoric and demand as much honesty from the side that I root for as from those that I oppose. I don’t know if you know the author David Horwitz, Radical Son? He and I had some very crosswords at San Francisco State. I had gone there to visit a friend. I was going to Cal State Long Beach and this was in the early ‘70s if I remember right and he was up there leading a protest and somewhere I ran across him and he was out there saying all sorts of blather about the war and I called him all sorts of names and he called me back and then 2 years ago, 3 years ago, C-SPAN book notes or something, “David Horwitz, Radical Son, the book.” It had been out for a while but it was the first time I’d spotted it. So I go then and I read it and I said, “My God, this is the same guy. It is him!” So I called this Center for the Study of Popular Culture in Los Angeles. I live in San Diego so I called and said, “You know what? I’d like to get David to sign this book,” and they said, “Well sure he would. We’re having a luncheon up here,” a breakfast, whatever it was, “Would you like to come up?” and the speaker was John Stossel from 20/20. I said, “Sure, I’ll come up,” so he made me a guest and I go up there and there’s all these Hollywood types up there and I get him to sign the book and we stand and we’re talking and talking about what courage it takes for him to make that transition from the far, far
left to just past the center right. Whoa, that’s a step, plus the people he had to take on in order to
get to that point and I ended up joining his Wednesday morning club. I go up there twice a
month for lunches now in Hollywood. Interesting people; I mean, we heard everything from
John Irving up there of Cider House Rules to George W. Bush spoke there, Wayne le Pievre
spoke there, Adriana Huffington, John Casey. People like that will come out and they give an
hour, an hour and a half speech; Bill O’Reily of the Reily Factor…Tony Snow was the last one I
saw 3 weeks ago, 4 weeks ago? So it’s interesting to go up and you can listen to them and you
get there and you get to talk to them and ask them questions. We were throwing rocks at each
other in ’72 or ’71.

SM: Did he remember that?

JS: Oh yeah. He doesn’t remember me directly but he remembers the time in San
Francisco. I mean, he offended everyone but that was his job at Ramparts Magazine. If he
couldn’t pick a fight he had someone else do it for him. He had a cause, “Set the people free!” I
met Lionel Chitwood, the man that directed, I guess, produced *Hanoi Hilton*. He really has a lot
of empathy for the prisoners of war. I’m not sure what his views are on the war itself but he’s
got a lot of empathy for the POWs. That’s why he did *Hanoi Hilton*. He said, “That story needs
to be told and it needs to be told in an honest manner,” and he did a good job.

SM: Have you talked to guys like Frank Anton about that?

JS: Oh yeah. I felt bad. I didn’t know how to talk to Frank at the very beginning when I
first got in contact with everybody. I tried to write him a letter. Actually, I wrote him a letter
when he was at Camp Lejeune, the trial for Garwood, Robert Garwood. I wrote the base
commander a letter saying who I was, that I had served with him, and please give him this letter
with my address and phone number and I explained to Frank or I wrote in that letter what I had
tried to do and how it had been unsuccessful. I have never forgotten how good if felt when I saw
him get off that plane in the Philippines, he and Pfister and Lewis and I told him at the time that I
didn’t know who was where anymore, I’d lost contact with Ray Foley, I didn’t know who was
alive. I knew Frank Carson had made it out but I hadn’t been able to contact even him and I
never got a response back and this was what, ’73? Then I gave up. Ray didn’t give up. He
joined the association. I don’t’ know how they found him but they found him first and he’d been
a member for a while and he kept bugging and bugging and they went by Jack Sepp, J-A-C-K.
About 4 years into the search and Ron Scebold was really getting mad. He told Ray, “I’m not
going to do this anymore,” and Ray had told them that, “Okay, we’ve got to change the name
spelling to Jaak, J-A-A-K,” so they come up with all sorts of names and he’s calling. There’s a
bunch of Sepps in New York, some way related, I have no idea who they are but they’re like 18th
cousins removed or something like that and he’s called all of them. He’s called every Sepp in the
US I think that he could find and no answer. Finally, they get the service number and the correct
spelling of the name and they find a general grade officer of some sort who’s willing to look up
social security numbers. Well this takes some time. Ray is bugging Sceboldl constantly about it,
every month or so he’s calling, he’s calling. Scebold finally tells him, “Leave me alone! He’s
dead, we can’t find him.” I guess the next day or even that day this general calls and says,
“We’ve got hits, we’ve got him.” I buy houses and rehab them so I apply for loans. Well I
applied for a loan and I show up on some credit report and they pulled it out by social security
number. We got together and the same day I got a letter from Ron Scebold and one from Ray
Foley. I go to the mailbox and I know Ray Foley’s handwriting and I know the return address
and Scebold’s got this thing that says 71st AHC Association, whatever it is, Rattlers/Firebirds
Association. So I open the letters and I read them and my heart’s beating at probably 160-200,
somewhere in there. It’s coming out of my chest. Maybe I’ll call Ray. I dialed the phone; I
can’t dial the phone. Again, now we’re hitting the emotional wall. I have to get another hurdle,
emotional hurdle. Couldn’t do it that day. I go to work the next day and I tried it again. I
couldn’t do it. So the 3rd day I call Ron Scebold. I couldn’t do him but I said, “You know, I
don’t know this guy. Let me see what he’s got to say.” So I talked to Ron for well over an
hour. He told me, “You got to do it, buckle up. It’s no big deal. You’ll get past all of this fear
of being back in touch because Ray has been looking for you. You need to call him. He wants
to hear from you. That’s why he sent you a letter.” Finally that evening after a number of tries I
dialed through and I said, “Ray?” “This is Ray Foley,” “This is Jack Sepp, do you remember
who I am?” and then there’s this silence and I mean we had to not talk, I mean, heavy breathing
for 10 minutes and finally I can’t remember who starts talking and then we’re just blabbering
about our life for the last 25 or 30 years. But again, I guess there’s something in there that you
push into the back and it takes something to trigger it and its contact. Seeing Frank visibly for
the first time, knowing that he may think that we left him behind; I know he didn’t know that we
went back to look for him that night on our flare ship and Ray tried to stow away on an aircraft
to go look for him. I’m sure he didn’t know that. But, then we had to talk to him and face him. I
felt really bad. The year after Ray and I…within 6 months, I flew down to Florida to visit him.
That was a good visit, we had a good time. Ray owns some airplanes. We went flying and went
to an air show and traveled around and met his family and we had a good time. Then time rolls
around and its our reunion and I’m having problems thinking, “Well maybe…it’s far away, its in
Florida, I can ignore it.” Ray says, “You got to come out, you got to come out, you got to go!”
So I said, “Alright, I’m going.” I get to the reunion and I’m finding it very, very difficult to go
in the room with the displays. I can see all this stuff from the distance; it’s in 2 different rooms.
I couldn’t right off the bat make myself do it. So I found an excuse to get away from Ray. I
got to the bathroom and wept. [?] and I went around that first room and I thought, “Okay, this
is okay,” so I’ll go in the other room and then its like this drapes were open and I felt good so,
“Okay, I can deal with anything,” and that night Bill Reynolds came in and he couldn’t
remember anything and, “Bill, you probably don’t remember me, but go walk around and look at
some photographs and then come back.” The same thing with Mike Rogers; Mike Rogers shook
my hand, “You know, your name’s familiar but I don’t’ know who you are!” and I think Rogers
told me, “I don’t even know why I’m here. I think my wife made me come,” and by, this had to
be 8 or 9 o’clock the first night of the reunion; by midnight we’re sitting around sharing stories
and bringing back…turning the lights on in rooms that had not been opened for 30 years – good
feeling. Then Frank shows up a day later or so, something like that, and that had to be for me
one of the most awkward moments in my life to look at a guy who I know we left on the ground,
not because we could do anything about it, but to have to face up to that. Listen, we did
something bad. It was out of our control, but it still was bad. He talked, and we talked, and we
talked and we talked and we talked to the other pilots and guys there and finally came to the
conclusion that it’s okay as long as you tried. He and I talk on the phone a lot. I make
photographs for him, I send him books, I try to get his book to everybody so that…and I like to
send people autographed books so they’re not likely to give it away or toss it on the shelf and
hide it and I’m one of his better customers. Same with Chuck. In fact, I trade books. I see
authors up there in Los Angeles and he wants a book and, “I need a Firebird book to so and so,”
and I’ve got this guy’s book. The latest one that did that affirmative action for UC
San…University of California system, got that thing through as a regent, his book, Chuck [?].
I’ll get his autograph, but I need 3 of these, you know? Wheelin’ and dealin’, feeling good.
These reunions, and I can see it where today Mike Acre came for the first time. John Daly I had
called for 4 years, 3 years and I caught him by accident one time. He never would return a call, he never would return a Christmas card, never, and finally Roger Hall went to his house, banged on the door. Roger’s this 600-pound guy. I don’t know if you saw him in the room or not. Roger shows up. I mean, you can’t ignore him! He’s big, very, very big. John’s here at the reunion. John feels bad that he didn’t come to the last one. But that first one, Mike Acre, he’s one I flew with and he was up there in Phu Bai and its odd for these guys and I know what they’re going through that first time to go back and start going through old rooms in the back of your mind that you haven’t been to, that you’ve tried to ignore. You probably have a good understanding because you listen to us. You see us today and by our stories and by what other research you’ve done, you know what we’ve experienced but you can’t tell this to someone who hasn’t studied it. I mean, we’re no worse or no better than the boys that landed on D-Day. We were on the losing end of the campaign. But, the courage and the dedication of these infantry units who were misled, and I don’t mean they’re lied to, but went out in the field without the right intelligence, without the right leadership, and us flying. Again, go out to the end of a football field and have somebody take a 50 caliber and you go to the other end zone and you walk across that. You’ll only do it once. We did it everyday for hours and hours on end. In October, November, December, January, February, March; in 5 months and 2 weeks, conservatively, I flew probably 750-800 missions. That’s conservatively. You figure every one is an hour and 15, 2 hours. That’s a lot of time. I didn’t fly all the time; there were other guys that flew more than I did. It does hurt, it does hurt when you don’t get even a piece of paper saying, “Thank you.” Nothing. I got wounded over there 3 times and never saw a purple heart, and once I actually had to report it. Hillhouse said, “If you get wounded and you’re not in the hospital and you show up in the orderly room, you’re going on detail and you’re grounded. You’ll never fly again.” That’s the way they kept casualties down. You know how the Army is; if they give a purple heart that means they got a wound they’ve got to report and then the casualty figures in the newspapers look bad and all of this. These guys with small wounds; there’s a picture in there of a hog with part of the tube shot away at the front. Well that part of the tube’s in my arm where the bullet went through. The bullet pushed the shrapnel into me, but it went right by me. Ray got wounded more than once. He got that one purple heart I think for his knee, but there were times he had shrapnel wounds just like I did, all over. Well you don’t go in for the little stuff. I went in for what I thought was pretty big. I mean, I got a big scar on the
back of my leg. I’ve got the burn mark here. I get told, “You’re going to haul garbage.” Well, I hauled garbage one last time. Bad boy, you know, if you were 21 at that time acting 12 Tantrum, right?.

SM: Now what lessons do you think we should take away from the Vietnam war?

JS: What lessons should we take? Without proper preparation of the military and of the nation as a whole, not that they agree with you, but prepare them for what the task at hand is, and then lay out what you’re going to do to accomplish that task and then do it. I don’t mean, “On Wednesday we’re going to attack here, we’re going to do this, we’re going to do this,” you set the parameters. You get visible goals towards this, whatever the campaign or action is, and then you accomplish it. But, you don’t’ go into something that’s open ended. Case in point, look at the contrast now; now I’m not talking about the leaders themselves and the size of the operation…the way we prosecuted the war in the Gulf versus the way we prosecuted the way we prosecuted the peace in Haiti. We stabilized Kuwait, we didn’t destabilize Iraq, and in Haiti we’ve done nothing but pour money down the toilet with no end in sight because we still don’t’ know, after all these years, who really is charge or who’s going to be in charge tomorrow. We may know who’s in charge today, but we don’t’ know who’s in charge tomorrow or what they might do. Democracy is not returned, but it never was in Haiti. Democracy has not come to Haiti yet. We have no goal other than to make sure no one gets in a boat and that’s it; to keep the people out of the boat. It’s pathetic. But whether you agree with the way the Gulf War ended or not, the way it was planned and executed was excellent. We knew what we were going to do and we did it. Bam! We go to Haiti and we think we know what we’re going to do and we’ve accomplished nothing, nothing.

SM: Do you think the same when you look at other operations like what’s going on in Kosovo and Bosnia and Serbia?

JS: The same thing. The most I read about is Kosovo and in Bosnia things seem to be swept under the carpet and are somewhat stable. But Kosovo, that’s such a can of worms right now. We have the French taking the sides with the Serbians, we have us siding or thinking we need to side with the Kosovars, and we don’t know what we want to do there. We do know one thing; partition’s not going to work. It didn’t work in Vietnam, it didn’t work in Korea, it didn’t work in South Africa with the little Apartheid zones of black townships or whatever they called them, territories. That doesn’t’ work. Either create a homogenized or homologue society or you
separate the warring sides by a big fence. Somebody’s going to lose. Either the Albanians get to keep their little temples and minarets, but that means the Serbians are going to lose their Orthodox religious sites and churches and cathedrals; churches I guess is what they call them, or its going to be like the other way around and either way its going to be war again, just not today. It’s coming back. I don’t see those people loving each other and I don’t see some kind of device that we’re going to have a clear pathway to your church or your temple; no, that’s not going to happen. There are going to be rocks throwing on both sides at each other and finally it’ll be bottles and molotou cocktails and finally someone’s going to shoot somebody and then it’s all over again. You can’t take two dogs, feed them, and put them in a pen back together when they’ve been fighting before. At some point they’re going to get hungry again and start fighting and that’s what we’re doing. You can’t erase this animosity. In a perfect world we can, but we can’t. I don’t know that its really right for us to spend so much of our treasure trying for an ideal world when there isn’t’ one. We need to be pragmatic on whom we help and we have to have results from that help or we cut it off. Your dollars are finite, my dollars are finite, and there are other things to spend it on - I don’t consider government spending an investment, I don’t care what they do it - to spend my money and your money on, than try to resolve 700 or 1000-year problem. It’s not going to happen. I don’t’ have an answer for there because I don’t know who the players are. But someone does know who the players are and what they’re end game is and when you know that end game and that’s why we pay all these billions of dollars for intelligence every year, we need to get that. We need to know who these people are and what they want and then craft some kind of plan of action. But, just to go in there and say, “We’re going to have a diverse society and we’re going to have love and peace forever and everybody’s going to get along,” yeah. There’s some stuff growing down there in Ocean Beach right next to where I live in Point Loma that you need to borrow, because you’re going to love it. Let me get out of your hair.

SM: Anything else?

JS: I don’t’ have anything else unless you have some questions.

SM: Well just one last question; do you think that it was worth the treasure and the lives spent in the Vietnam war?

JS: In the short term, no. I think it emboldened the European communists into doing stupid things that ended up costing them the cold war; the big thing, Afghanistan, where they lost
everything they had because they had nothing economically. They should have won there but they didn’t have the money to pay their troops and their people and feed them at the same time. The economics brought down…in fact the ruble bought nothing, helped destroy. I think it caused their dominoes to tumble more than our deficit spending to get us there. That’s a whole different story on the economics and the politics for them. But, I think Vietnam emboldened them, so in that respect yes, the losses were worth it; for the goal in Vietnam, no. But if you’ll look at the rest of Southeast Asia, look at Thailand, Singapore, it was Indonesia for a while, and some of that other pacific rim that were given the opportunity whether they squandered it or not, excuse me, they were given an opportunity to make decisions that outright win, and us rolling over in 1963 or ’62 in Vietnam, I think the outcome of the cold war would have been way different and I look at it from the point that the cold war, this was a hot spot in the cold war. It was not the Vietnam war in isolation. It did give them the courage to do stupid things and they went ahead and did them which was beautiful, because it cost them. No one thought the Pope would back solidarity, that he’d have the nerve and the fact that we backed the Pope. That little Catholic Army started that downhill tumble in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan drove the nail in their coffin, they were losing so badly. What little arms we provided was enough to bring them in the quicksand worse than what we were in in Vietnam. Short term, that’s 58,000 almost 59,000 names on that Wall and I can’t go to that Wall without being very emotionally effected by it. Now I’ve not been to the Wall but I’ve been to the mobile display and I have to go there almost by myself for a long time before I can talk to someone. If you just look at that, even when you know where the names are, okay, names are names, but if you look at that expanse and it still rings a pretty sad bell in the heart somewhere. Hopefully this kind of situation and in these circumstances we won’t face again. At some point in time we go back to having an international police force that takes care of situations; the feeding of the hungry and the starving and separating warring parties. The military goes back to being a trained and ready military that does military things and not international social workers; not that that social work doesn’t need to be done. I’m not that kind of a conservative. But, you need to husband…that’s a wrong term, you need to manage your resources and extend them in different ways than just lay the biggest card out on the table on day one and find out they’re playing a different card game than you are. You’re not even in the game but you’ve already laid your cards down. We’re not going to bomb this, we’re not going to attack this, we’re not going to do this, no. You can’t do that. That’s
social work and that’s a different agency and a different way of doing that. Like I said, those
starving people need to be fed, but they don’t need to have a trained and armed military to do it.
That’s not there. Just from the economic standpoint it shouldn’t be. Not that the military can’t
fly in and provide the air support as far as logistics or the Navy logistics ship wise, but the fact is
troop one involved? No. Sermon over?
       SM: If that’s what you?
       JS: You know, I realize it’s about 9:30.
       SM: Its time to go eat.
       JS: You need to go take a nap.
       SM: Well this ends the interview with Jaak Sepp. Thank you very much.