Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I’m doing an oral history interview with Mr. John Currey. I’m in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University in the Special Collections Library Interview Room. Mr. Currey is in Madison, Alabama, and we are talking today on February 5, 2003 at about 8:40 a.m. Central Standard Time. Mr. Currey, if we could, let’s start with some biographical information.

John Currey: Yes, Richard. I was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, a town of historical significance to the Civil War Era. So I have an interest in history and things like that developed from an early age. I went to high school in Vicksburg and got an appointment to the Air Force Academy to be in the second class there in 1956. I started attending the Academy in Denver, Colorado, at the time in [the summer of] 1956 and went on through the four year program there graduating from the new site down in Colorado Springs in 1960. So I was with the Air Force Academy class of 1960. During that period, they brainwashed us, you might say, a lot to think that we ought to get to be pilots. So after the academy where I had received a navigator’s rating and of course we received our second lieutenant commissions. I went off to pilot training in Bainbridge, Georgia and became a pilot, military pilot. I spent what they used to call primary training for flight training in Bainbridge, Georgia and then went to Selma, Alabama to an old Air Force Base that used to be called Craig Air Force Base. There we did what was called
basic pilot training in the T-33 and proceeded from the T-33 [training] to Sewart Air Force Base [in Tennessee] where we learned how to fly C-130s. It was a C-130 A model at the time which was the initial type of C-130s that are still flying around a lot today.

RV: Is flying something you always wanted to do as a child? Was that part of your childhood?

JC: My brother is 10 years older than I and during the 2nd World War he always had an interest in airplanes. So I developed an interest in airplanes but I never really thought about flying. I was just interested in airplanes and I really went to the Academy because it was a free scholarship. It was something that I could do. It wasn’t that it led to flying. The Academy environment led you to want to be a flyer so I just followed that path.

RV: Was there anyone else in your family in the military?

JC: My father had been in World War II and retired as a Colonel in the Army. He had been in the quartermaster business and support is about all I knew. He was in North Africa and Italy in the 5th Army. So I knew a little bit about Army stuff. Of course Army airplanes were part of the things that my brother had been interested in, my older brother. So I knew a little bit about it but not much. Vicksburg is sort of a military town, Vicksburg, Mississippi in the sense that the Army Corps of Engineers is there. They’ve been there in river control for the Mississippi River for a long time and there’s a big research and development center for the Army there. So there’s a lot of engineers and things around mostly associated with the U.S. Army.

RV: Did you talk to your father about his military experience in World War II?

JC: I really haven’t. No, I never did. I knew a little bit about it. We used to get letters from him, I recall, when I was a child. But I really didn’t know much about it. A few things stick in my memory like him saying he hated Egypt. He was in Egypt for a while and really didn’t like Egypt. But that’s one of the few memories. And he liked his General Mark Clark who was the Commander of the 5th Army. He was very partial to General Clark. That’s about all I remember about his Army career. I’d see him in uniform, of course, occasionally.

RV: How many other siblings did you have besides your older brother?

JC: I had two sisters, one older, one younger.
RV: During your childhood, what was that like? Would you describe it as an ordinary childhood?

JC: I guess I would say that it was pretty ordinary. We had a small house in town while my father was in the Army in World War II and he was gone a lot. He had worked for the Corps of Engineers in Mississippi River control before, as a civil engineer, and after when he came back from the war he picked that job back up with the Corps as a civil engineer and worked that way until he retired. We did okay financially, not well off or anything, but we were okay as far as I recall. We had some property around that we raised cattle and grain and a little bit and things like that on. So I spent a good bit of time out in the woods and taking care of animals and gardening and things like that so I guess I think of it as a pretty normal childhood from those times.

RV: Did your mother work at all?

JC: She did not. No.

RV: What kind of jobs did you have growing up?

JC: I was helping around the house and on the farm, of course. We built houses for sharecroppers at the time on the land that we had. They raised corn and cotton and my father had about a couple of hundred acres rented out to several three or four different sharecroppers. There were houses there for them to live in. We built a couple of them and repaired them frequently and built fence around fields and had cows that stayed in the fence and I would be close enough to school to walk to school in elementary school. Later he would drop me at junior high and high school where I was reasonably involved in athletics there. We had a football team, which I played on and we did a little boxing. We had a YMCA there and the YMCA was a center for a lot of us kids and we’d swim there and play basketball and other kinds of things. I probably had a lot of friends and grew up together and hung out together and we all went to church together, a lot of us, to the churches in town. Church was a big focal point for most of our lives.

RV: What kind of student would you describe yourself as being?

JC: Well, I made good grades. I was not a role student most of the time and that led me to think that I could get by at the Air Force Academy when I was approached about going there. Actually a recruiter came to our school and he was recruiting our star All- American high school football halfback and the rest of us that were on the team that
were seniors that year went to the meeting too and I was the only one that seemed interested. I was interested because it was like a free education and I had the grades and things to go and so I ended up getting an appointment to go.

RV: That’s great. Did your parents emphasize education to you growing up?

JC: They both had at one time been teachers, high school teachers before I was born in the ‘30s. After they had gotten out of school, they had at various times taught school and been associated with teachers. But that was all before I came along. It was my brother’s era ten years before me.

RV: What year did you graduate high school?

JC: In 1956 was my graduation year.

RV: What were your favorite subjects in high school?

JC: History was real important to me. I liked English. I had some good English teachers. I did okay in math. Geometry was fun. I guess I liked all my subjects. Civics was a good course we took. I tried to take Latin one time and my father said, ‘Well, you don’t need to take Latin. You ought to take mathematics and science courses.’ So he steered me in that direction and that was probably a smart thing to do. I think that helped my Academy training later.

RV: Well, tell me about going to the Air Force Academy. That must have been exciting leaving Mississippi and going up to the Academy.

JC: Well, my teachers thought that was a bad thing to do. They weren't very encouraging.

RV: Really. Why did they say that?

JC: Well, I think they were anti-military, some of them. Actually, that may have been wrong. It may have been they just thought that my personality was not aggressive enough to do well in the military and for various reasons. I don’t know. My father didn’t really encourage me to do it. It was my idea. But he supported me when I said I wanted to do it and arranged to contact the local congressmen and senators who provided my appointment and helped me get some letters of recommendation from people around town who sent them to the nominating authorities. That’s how I ended up getting the appointment, through letters of recommendation and good grades and just general interest.
RV: How did you feel about going to the Academy? Were you really looking at your teachers who are saying maybe this is not such a good idea, John to do this? Did you feel otherwise?

JC: No. I was very interested in going. I didn’t really care what they thought about it. One of the interests was that I didn’t think I would be able to play college athletics and I wanted to do that at the Academy and they had convinced us that that would be something we could do because there was only one class ahead of us. So they were playing collegiate sports with four-year colleges and we only had two groups of two classes. And that worked out that way. All the time I was at the Academy, for three years, I played football and boxed and did the intramural program and a couple of other kinds of sports. It was a very sports-oriented four years that I spent in Colorado.

RV: What position did you play on the football team?

JC: I guess defense was my prime goal. I played linebacker and I was a center for a while and I played end and defensive mostly. I played a little guard and did a little blocking for running backs and actually I played and I banged up a knee. I had to have knee surgery the second year. After knee surgery, I went back but I wasn’t ever really successful anymore. The funny thing about those kinds of things is that other things took on more importance than football after that knee surgery.

RV: How did you adapt to the military lifestyle there at the Academy?

JC: It didn’t seem to bother me. It was strict, it was different but my parents had taught me to maintain things in an orderly manner and think in that way and so people wanting me to be orderly and direct in the things I did wasn’t a big change really. I’m sure I wrote a lot of letters home and talked about how terrible it was but so did everybody else. So it was not an unusual transition. One of the interesting things I think that did happen was because I was from Mississippi I was rooming with a guy from Chicago and our Commandant of Cadets was a brigadier general came into our room one time. There were two of us in the room and asked us- he was just inspecting- and he asked us where we were from and he really liked my roommate because he was from Chicago and he heard that I was from Mississippi and he said, ‘Well, you know, you probably won’t be around here very long.’ The education in Mississippi wasn’t something that he figured was worth enough, was good enough to get anybody through.
But I never had any trouble with grades there. They had good schools in Vicksburg because of all the engineering orientation in the town.

RV: Was that general joking or was he serious?

JC: Oh, no. I’m sure he was dead serious. He figured nobody from Mississippi would be able to make the cut grade wise at the Academy and he just generalized a little too much probably.

RV: Did you take that upon yourself as a challenge?

JC: I think so.

RV: So you adapted fairly well to the military lifestyle and you did okay academically?

JC: That seems good. I was in the top quarter of the class all the way through and there were a lot of people there who a couple of them had already graduated from college and decided they wanted to go to the Academy and they went back after they graduated. I was one of the younger cadets I guess and so I’d just gotten out of high school and there were a lot of them there who had been one, two, three and up to four years of college already.

RV: Once you had gotten out of the Academy as you look back on it, do you think that the training had been beneficial to your or was it something that really didn’t prepare you for the regular military lifestyle?

JC: I think it was excellent preparation in every way. They were strongly encouraging us throughout those years to continue our education and we did. After we got out we expected to come back to school and I probably wouldn’t have stayed in the Air Force if they hadn’t sent me back to get a Master’s degree in later years after my service in Vietnam. But it adapted well and it served me well then and all the way until now.

RV: Tell me about your decision to become a pilot.

JC: I really hadn’t ever really thought about doing that but of course being in the Air Force, they kind of took it for granted that everybody that was physically qualified would go to pilot training at that time. So I just kind of went along. It seemed like that would be fun. In the navigator training we had during the Academy days it was okay. It wasn’t anything I was particularly doing without from learning how to fly as a navigator.
But we did and we got commissioned and then it was time to go to pilot training and like most of the things the military seems to do, you just kind of follow along as they tell you and that was the way it went.

RV: Tell me about Bainbridge, Georgia and the pilot training experience.

JC: Well in Bainbridge we flew two airplanes. We started off in a little T-34 which was a two-seater, back and front. And we had civilian instructors at Bainbridge, so they were very strict and didn’t put up with any kind of foolishness and that was the way the civilian instructors were in those days. They chewed us out regularly and hollered at us and made us learn how to fly. That wasn’t hard on us because we had that four years at the Academy. So it just kind of came natural that that was a fine thing to do. We had all of our Academy friends mostly were down there along with some other people and we enjoyed being down in Southern Georgia for about a six month training period. We learned how to fly that and then we ended up flying a T-37 which was the new first jet powered trainer for a small bit of time before we left and went off to basic pilot training where we were flying old jet fighters that used to be the Lockheed F-80 shooting star that they reworked as the T-33s.

RV: Was that the first time down in Bainbridge that you had actually flown an airplane yourself, piloted an airplane?

JC: Yes. That was the first time. I hadn’t any training doing that. We didn’t do that at the Academy, actually piloting ourselves. Some people had flown before and had private licenses, but not very many of us. Most of us were just new to the business.

RV: What was that experience like your first time flying, piloting yourself?

JC: It was a lot of fun. It was a challenge. It didn’t seem like it was very hard. You kind of moved the control. It wasn’t unlike driving. It was hot in Bainbridge so we frequently opened, slid the canopy back and flew open cockpit which was a lot of fun. It was exciting. It was a lot of fun.

RV: Did flying come naturally to you or was it something that you really had to challenge yourself to learn?

JC: I really had to get down to business and learn to do that. It wasn’t a natural thing to me. I had a little trouble doing that. Flying made me sick.

RV: Really.
JC: I had a lot of airsickness during my training and all through my flight career even though I ended up with 4,000 flying hours. If I wasn’t careful I could get sick in an airplane.

RV: What did you do to counter that?

JC: At a various times as a cadet when we used fly places, we’d go back in the back of the airplanes where we were and I’d go to sleep. I got to where I could sleep on an airplane no matter how noisy or shaky or cold it was. After that I generally didn’t have much trouble. I just had to be careful about it. That let me get through pilot training and after that it wasn’t too bad. Flying in the front where you’re driving is great. Sickness comes when you’re flying in the back or standing up watching people do things. I guess your body’s attention goes somewhere else and when that happens it’s easy to get sick.

RV: What other training did you have at Bainbridge besides the pilot? Was that almost exclusively that?

JC: It was really pretty much exclusively that. We had a lot of ground school courses and things that were mostly about flying and we learned Morse code and other things, radio procedures and things that kind of dealt with flying too. So it wasn’t very different. Of course we had physical training too. We played sports and various kinds of games and stuff and ran and did a little marching. It wasn’t unlike what the typical military situation is in any camp anywhere.

RV: From there you went to Selma, Alabama.

JC: That’s right. At Selma we basically flew the T-33 and we were there for about six months again and got out as fully qualified pilots. We got our commercial licenses, most of us with instrument ratings. I kept that and used it all the way up until just recently when I decided flying wasn’t fun anymore so I didn’t do it. Besides, it cost too much now.

RV: What other training did you have there at Selma?

JC: At Selma we did basic. We learned how to fly instruments and we flew formation and learned how to fly formation and we learned how to fly cross-country and how to navigate. And of course we already knew how to navigate since I was a rated navigator but doing it as a pilot is a little bit different and learning how to file flight plans and all the paperwork associated with weight balance and keeping track of everything
you need to know to fly correctly. And that served me well when I moved on up to
Smyrna, Tennessee to Sewart Air Force base, was the name. That’s closed now, too. It’s
now a big Saturn plant I guess up there at that place. That was a very good transition up
to flying a big four-engine airplane from a small jet fighter.

RV: Before we move to your C-130 training, was there any outstanding incidents
that you remember from Bainbridge or being in Selma about the training? Anything that
comes to memory?

JC: One thing I guess, they always pay you hazardous duty pay when you fly and
all of these schools, both at Bainbridge and at Selma, there would be crashes and people
would get killed. And that happened both at Bainbridge several times and at Craig several
times. So there was always things to keep us advised that this wasn’t play. This was
serious stuff. Guys that I knew in training at both bases had crashed and been killed both
as instructors and students.

RV: Did that deter you at all in what you were trying to do?

JC: No. I always think of yourself of not in danger at all. You just press on and do
that. I never thought of it as being something that might happen to me. It never really
crossed my mind. That’s strange to say, but it didn’t.

RV: Well, tell me about transitioning to the C-130. How different was it from
flying the small fighter planes?

JC: Well, they prepared us real well for the big aircraft. I finally got into big
airplanes. We flew around a lot and found out it was easy to land and had wonderful
instruments and very stable. You control the air speed and you can do just about
anything. We found out the mission was to go drop things out the back of it. So my first
mission was out to Yuma, California, Yuma, Arizona I guess it was. It’s still even today
an air drop test facility there where you go out and practice dropping things. We were
testing parachutes and heavy equipment drops. So we did a lot of drops out of the back of
the airplane in Yuma and had a good time on the ground and went to Mexico and it was a
fun trip. I was thinking, ‘Man, this is great. The Air Force is going to be a fun life.’

RV: How did you come to be in the C-130? Why didn’t you continue with the
smaller planes?
JC: In pilot training in those days they went according to your class rank, you got to pick what you wanted to be in and since I had had some issues about flying and I wasn’t high in my class in flying skills. I did okay and I passed and everything but the grades a number of other people got were probably somewhat better. I was probably down in the lower quarter of that class. The top ranking guys got fighters and bombers, combat aircraft and became instructors and training. The lower ranked people in the classes ended up in transport airplanes. So that’s why I ended up in a transport airplane.

RV: Do you have any regrets about that looking back?
JC: Absolutely not. I got the better deal. I wouldn’t have swapped that for anything.
RV: Why do you say it’s a better deal?
JC: I think we had more fun in our flight career doing things and going places than the fighter guys. And the bomber guys as far as I was concerned were the worse off. And the training people were always envious of us because they never got out of the United States. Actually, the transport and the C-130 particularly, some of my friends went into regular reciprocating engine aircraft that were still prevalent at the time. And the C-130 was a wonderful airplane. It had a great mission. It worked out for me to be absolutely the best.
RV: That’s great. Tell me about the C-130. What made it such a good airplane?
JC: Well, it was the first transport that really could fly at decent altitudes. The others were flying in the low altitude structure and they had to fly through all the weather and they were slow. But the C-130 was pretty fast and it could fly up above most of the clouds and you could take off in the cloudy, ugly day and pop out on top at seven, eight, twelve, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty thousand feet occasionally and you’d fly around in the beautiful weather up there and fly around the tops of clouds instead of having to plow through them which made it just really fun to fly. It was a very forgiving airplane. It had wonderful control and still does today. It’s a great airplane even today.
RV: So after you finished your training there, you said this was six months?
JC: Six months at Bainbridge and then we went off to Smyrna for C-130s and we trained in the units in those days. They later established schools to train people in new aircraft but we were unit trained there and the unit did the missions and trained us as a
part of the mission. So I did air drops and we would frequently go to Fort Bragg and Fort
Benning to drop Army troops there and we learned how to do things, going and actually
doing it. I wasn’t at Smyrna very long. I was only there six months and it was 1963. They
sent our whole wing to support increasing issues in Southeast Asia. They sent our whole
wing out to Naha Airbase, Okinawa.

RV: This is in ’63.
JC: This was in ’63. Did I put that in my questionnaire? I’m not sure if I did.
RV: Yes you did.
JC: I think ’63 is right. It should have been about April of ’63.
RV: Tell me what you knew at that point about what the United States was doing
in Southeast Asia.

JC: I really didn’t know much. As I recall, it was a part of the world and there
were things going on there but I guess I didn’t really know much about it. I kept track of
geopolitical scene pretty much. I had thought that I might really enjoy being in politics or
in political science kind of things and diplomatic things. So I was really excited about
going overseas but I didn’t know much about what they were doing in Vietnam at the
time. We were being sent to Okinawa so I didn’t really connect the two.

RV: So this was with the 345th Troop Carrier Squadron in Okinawa.

JC: Yes.

RV: Tell me what your duties were there in Okinawa.

JC: Well, we got to Okinawa and everybody was there unaccompanied there [by
families] for a while until they found housing. So we spent most of our time thinking
about flying and learning how to play racquetball and playing handball and keeping in
shape and running and just paying attention to those kinds of individual concerns. We
spent a lot of time in the squadron area learning about the aircraft and all the things that
one does to support an aircraft unit, worrying about intelligence briefings and personal
equipment issues and it was a busy time.

RV: So you didn’t do much flying at the time.

JC: We were flying about 20 hours a month was what we were mostly doing. We
might get one or two trips down to Philippines or somewhere in a month. We did a lot of
local flying dropping practice loads in Okinawa and out over the water flying formation
most of the time. It was really interesting flying over the black ocean in formation at
night. It was really dark out there.

RV: How was that for you?

JC: It was a challenge. There were a number of us in the same situation. We probably had ten or twelve new pilots came in about the same time I did and so we were all learning to do that and learning to do everything else about the same time. So it was quite a group of folks. We had a lot of fun together and got to know each other well and it was good times.

RV: How long did you stay there in Okinawa?

JC: The tour in Okinawa lasted for three years. That was the tour length. We started mostly just flying local occasional missions in the Philippines. Typhoons would hit Okinawa occasionally. We’d fly up to Korea generally to get away from them and did a little flying in Japan, not a lot. Went to Hong Kong a couple of times, Taiwan. Occasionally we’d fly into Bangkok or Saigon but not very often in those days. The longer we were there the more we ended up flying into Saigon and Bangkok because things were heating up down in the Southeast Asia area and there were troops moving in there and we were carrying them in there and bringing them out and taking them supplies. We used to carry a lot of radio gears and truck radio gear in trucks that had radio equipment on them and stuff for the Army. That’s probably how they got a lot of it in there to begin with.

RV: When was the first time you actually flew into Saigon? Do you remember?

JC: No. I really don’t. That was probably in ’63, late ’63 and then regularly after that I probably was assigned into Saigon and Bangkok every month or so. It’s probably in my records where that was but I don’t remember except to know we went down there a good bit. The longer we stayed there, the more time we spent down there.

RV: Did you ever stay over night there?

JC: Yes, we did as a matter of fact. We’d stay over night and we generally would stay in those days, the early days in the Majestic Hotel, which was a little French hotel in downtown Saigon. Rooms were cheap and they came with breakfast and dinner. It seems like $15 was the per diem and that covered breakfast and dinner. So it was pretty good.

RV: Tell me what your impressions were of Vietnam itself.
JC: Well it was a smelly place. It had a lot of people and we’d fly in. The people
seemed friendly where we were. We’d occasionally fly to other places but we always
spent the night in Saigon in those days and the country was a pretty country. There were a
lot of Chinese people there, not just Vietnamese. It was interesting figuring out how to
distinguish different various kinds of Orientals, Asiatic people. I would have lumped
them all together before I was stationed there but the Japanese in Okinawa and the
Chinese and Vietnamese that we ran into and the Thais when we would fly into Bangkok
and the Filipinos that we’d see in the Philippines and the Koreans that we’d see when we
were in Korea. We really found out what all the different Asiatic peoples were like there.
It was an interesting time for that.

RV: What were your impressions of Saigon itself?
JC: Well, Saigon was busy. There was a lot of things going on down there. We’d
see a lot of Army troops drive around in Jeeps and they obviously were worried about
protection because most of the doorways were sandbagged and they were generally
manned by Vietnamese police with weapons and they were trying to protect everybody
and I guess that period, I must have been down there when they had the Tet Offensive
was a big thing in Vietnam. And we were there at the time. I just don’t remember what
year that was.

RV: That was in late January 1968.
JC: Okay. I was back over there then. That was my second tour over there then.
That wasn’t in this tour.

RV: Okay. Were you aware of some of the political things that were happening in
South Vietnam in ’63 with the overthrow of Diem and the coup d’état and then of course
Kennedy’s death?
JC: We were there. And I must have been there when Kennedy was shot. That
was ’63.

RV: Yes, sir.
JC: I was over there when that happened. I spent all this time over in Southeast
Asia during the ‘60s and didn’t really get hardly, I wasn’t in the States hardly at all until
’69. At least it seems like that. I didn’t witness much going on in the States. We had
 Armed Forces radio and television over there some in those days but not a lot. We saw a
few things on television. The papers were few and far between and we didn’t read them
very often so we were really kind of isolated from U.S. things that were going on in the
continental United States at the time and things that were going on politically in the
world.

RV: Those first initial missions into Saigon, do you remember what you were
carrying in there. You mentioned radios and trucks with radios and then the American
troops were going to start coming in en mass in ’65, but what were you initially carrying
in there?

JC: I think com gear was the principal thing. We generally would have a big
conex of some kind in the back and it would be a self-contained unit full of stuff. We
didn’t really know what was in it. Most of the time I think it must have been some kind of
generally communications gear and parts of radar systems and things like that. There
weren’t a lot of U.S. troops in Vietnam at the time, so I think they were mostly supplied
via ship. We weren’t carrying things like commissary goods and weapons and
ammunition and things like that like we did carry later on in the second tour. We spent a
lot of time carrying stuff like that, carrying howitzer shells and carrying body bags and
things because there were so many more people there and the combat was so much more
over there in the ’66-’67 time frame. But early on it seems like we’d carry helicopter
blades occasionally, I think repair parts for helicopters. They had helicopters over there at
the time early and their parts were high value items that would be transported by air.

RV: Were you doing drops in Vietnam or were you mainly landing at Tan Son
Nhut and Saigon offloading?

JC: We didn’t do any drops over there. I never did in the first tour I was there. We
did some practice drops to keep people paratrooper qualified later but I never did any
combat drops as such. We practiced a lot dropping containers and things. I know other
people probably did drops but I didn’t ever do any drops over there that were combat
drops.

RV: Tell me a little about the C-130 and your crew. How many were on board?

JC: We would have a loadmaster or two, sometimes two, a flight engineer who
would take care of the systems and fuel and electrics and panels and then we would have
a navigator and two pilots. So that would be a crew of five and occasionally there would
be an instructor with a student in training. Sometimes there might be three pilots for the
same kind of reason, but generally there were crews of five.

RV: And when you flew into Saigon and these other cities, were you flying in,
was it one plane or were you in formation with a number of planes?

JC: These support missions were generally always one plane. There might be
more than one plane headed out but they generally, they might take off like an hour apart.
Our missions from Okinawa, we generally staged through the Philippines and through
Clark Air Base. So we’d typically fly from Okinawa down to Clark and the Philippines,
spend the night and then we’d fly the next day over to Vietnam and drop off something
and bring some stuff back to Clark and then back to Okinawa. That was a typical mission.
Occasionally we’d go into Taiwan but not very often.

RV: What kind of things would you bring back out of Vietnam?

JC: A lot of times in those days there were just people mostly. There would be
people coming to survival school. They had a survival school at Clark so we’d rotate
people in and out of Vietnam that were coming back for R&R or for various kinds of
reasons. Generally not permanent change of station orders because they would fly those
on civilian airliners out of Saigon.

RV: Explain to me how you go about dropping something out of the 130. You
talk about practicing this a lot. Is there an art to this?

JC: It’s really a crew coordination event. Whatever you’re going to drop, if its
people, the Army would be Army people or combat controllers people and there would
be a person in charge in the back who would work with our load master to make sure
every body was hooked up or sat in the right spots and connected up and equipment
checked them and if it was heavy equipment then the loadmaster would be the one in
charge and he’d do the same kind of thing to make sure the heavy equipment was
properly loaded. But then we’d take off and fly an appropriate route and we might be
going fast at low level or fast at high level to get there. And when the time came, we
would find an entry point to the drop zone pattern. And we’d fly a pattern that put us at
the right altitude to drop heavy equipment and troopers were dropped from different
altitudes depending on their capabilities and other kinds of things and had to be very
sensitive of when because the wind, if it was real strong it would be too strong to drop. It
could destroy the equipment or kill the troops. So we had to worry about the wind on the
ground. We generally found that out from somebody down there that would call us and
tell us what it was and our navigator would lead us into, allot for the wind so we’d try to
hit the drop point and we’d slow down to the proper speed and turn on the red light and
slow down so everybody could see in the back that we were getting close and that the red
meant don’t jump when the doors were opened. Then we’d open the doors and fly the rest
of the way in until the time to drop came and the copilot would flip on the green light and
the green light meant its time to go. If they were troopers they would start exiting on the
green light if they were standing in the door waiting. If it was heavy equipment then
frequently the co pilot would push a button in front and it would cause a parachute to go
out the back and the parachute would extract the big parachute which would pull the load
out and then support as the load went on to the ground if it was heavy equipment drop.
There were some other kinds of drops, too, some low altitude package drops and things.
But most of what we were doing was personnel, heavy equipment.

RV: What kind of intelligence briefings did you get before you would go on these
missions?

JC: Generally they would always try to brief you on intelligence before you
would go off from Okinawa on one of these missions. The missions that I flew were
pretty standard. They’d tell you a little bit about the current threat conditions in Saigon
and that there were people around that would try to get you into places. No crew I was
ever aware of was ever involved in any incidents in Saigon in this time period. We lost a
few crews to weather and bad piloting and a few people came back with bullets in the
airplane but not very many in the ’63 to ’65 time period.

RV: Were you ever shot at during that time period?

JC: I don’t think so. No.

RV: How did you feel flying into a war zone? How did that affect you as a pilot?

JC: Well, I knew it was a war zone but it didn’t really, I didn’t feel any more
unsafe flying there than I did flying into Bangkok and the Philippines. Generally we
didn’t fly into smaller fields. Most of the time there were two or three fields that we flew
into but they were big fields. There were people who met us on the ground and we had
radio contact with everybody. It wasn’t much of a war over there from our point of view in those days.

RV: After 1965, do you leave Okinawa or what do you do?

JC: Well, in ’65 I left and went back to the States. I was stationed at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia still flying C-130s. I got back there and as it turned out I thought I would be there for quite a while. That’s the way things went those days. But they sent me to Squadron Officer School in Montgomery, Alabama in the fall and when I got back from that I already had orders to go back to the Philippines this time instead of Okinawa and as a unit they were going to send our whole unit back over there again. So I didn’t spend very long in the States. That was actually a little bit less than a year probably.

RV: What did they teach you at Squadron Officer School? What were you learning?

JC: It was a basic training program to make us aware of what was going in the world and we studied various countries a little bit and how the Air Force was organized and how it had changed in organizational structure some and how it planned on using its junior officers. I guess I was a captain at the time I went there. And we had captains and lieutenants in our class and we met and our class, I guess we must have had 10 or 12 people in the class. We had an instructor who stayed with us and taught us things. We did a lot of sports activities together. That was a big part of the program. We had a chorus that sang. It was a school-like atmosphere. We had a lot of parties with our families, our wives and everything got together and it was all part of building camaraderie was part of the goals of the school.

RV: When had you gotten married?

JC: I had gotten married on the way to Smyrna after basic pilot training in ’63, ’61 actually.

RV: Did your wife accompany you to Okinawa?

JC: She did. She was there. We got there and the families weren't allowed to come for six months until we had housing. But she joined me in Okinawa after I had been there for about six months and spent the rest of the three years and then went to Langley with me when I came back to the States.

RV: How did she feel about you flying in a war zone during your first tour?
JC: Well, she was happy to be in Okinawa after spending six months living with her parents. So I didn’t feel threatened in any way and I don’t think she did either. We didn’t just think of that as being a threatening situation at the time.

RV: So when you go back over to Southeast Asia, you go to Clark in the Philippines.

JC: Well we didn’t really go to Clark. We went to a place called Cebu down in the Central Philippines. They opened up a new base and it was a bare base kind of place. It didn’t have any buildings. It was an open field and they set up a bunch of tents so we moved into tents in 1966 and figured we’d be there for a year and we were. Our families were all back in the States. They didn’t any of them get to come over. Then we started really flying seriously when we got down there because things were heating up over in Vietnam and our mission there was to support things in Southeast Asia but we weren't stationed there for various kinds of reasons. They couldn’t send any more troops over there so we would fly over to Vietnam into Saigon most of the time for two weeks at a time. We’d fly over there for two weeks then we’d fly back to Cebu back to the Philippines. Cebu was a very interesting place. It was an old Filipino town. All the kids would run around and give you the V for victory like from Macarthur’s days. They all remembered Macarthur in the end of World War II and they were very pro American there. We really enjoyed being there. It was a true South Seas kind of place. Wonderful clear water and reefs full of fish and it was on an island, Cebu was an island where we were stationed was an island off the coast of the city of Cebu just a mile or so. But it was a really beautiful location, isolated somewhat, but beautiful.

RV: You lived in tents the entire time?

JC: Right toward the end they finally had built some concrete block barracks that we moved into just before I left. They were upgrading the place and I guess they must have kept people there. I don’t know how long they kept the base open before they gave it back to the Filipinos. But it turned out later to really be one of the top bases in the Philippine Air Force.

RV: Where else besides Saigon would you fly in Vietnam?

JC: We would fly regularly into Da Nang and Chu Lai and Cam Ranh Bay and then of course all the small places around. From there we’d fly to Bangkok and Korat and
Udorn and Ubon and the bases that were over in Thailand. Those were mostly where we flew to. Once we got over in country on one of those two-week tours then we were working 12 hours on and 12 hours off. So we’d go fly for 12 hours and come in and take 12 hours off and be scheduled to fly again. So we were really doing a lot of flying.

RV: Were your flights mainly during the daytime?

JC: No. They were around the clock. They were probably more in the day than they were at night but they were really around the clock. Actually the 12 hours off might be 15. You’d find out what it was. They couldn’t fly you earlier than 12 hours. So you kind of rotated through the schedule for the two weeks you were flying over there in country. We’d fly into all the small fields and there we were taking people around and hauling ammunition and parts for helicopters and food. We did a lot of food hauling and just all kinds. Generally it was just all kinds of loads just waiting to go somewhere.

RV: What was the most interesting thing you think you hauled?

JC: Well it was interesting hauling ammunition, hauling howitzer shells. They were pretty heavy so you didn’t fill the airplane up. They were all loaded on pallets so you’d run into Saigon and they’d zip pallets [of ammo] on your airplane and lock them in and you’d take off.

RV: So you never even got out of the airplane?

JC: Generally we would. We’d get out of the airplane. We’d take off and go somewhere and drop the stuff off and it would generally take 45 minutes or so to turn around. So we’d all generally get out of the airplane. We generally didn’t do it. We weren't in any rush about doing it.

RV: Tell me about the different bases, Da Nang, Chu Lai, Cam Ranh that you were flying into.

JC: Initially they were all small bases but they were all being developed so there was always a lot of construction going on. Where we might land at one one time it might be just a PSP airfield and [planking] kind of metal planking that they’d put down on a temporary airfield and then the next thing you know they’d cover it over with rubber. They had these rubber, quarter inch rubber sheets that they put on the prepared surface so you could land on that. The next thing you’d know it would be concrete and be 10,000 feet long. We were doing a lot of construction over there at the time and then they would
do one of the 10,000 feet runways so they could bring in fighters or F-105s or other kinds of airplanes.

RV: Were you always staying in Saigon? Was that your base or would you spend the night at Cam Ranh or at Da Nang?

JC: Very seldom did we ever stay anywhere other than Saigon or occasionally we stayed in Bangkok. But on most of the missions, they brought everything into Saigon and we loaded it in Saigon and we’d pick it up at Saigon and fly around and drop it off and terminate back in Saigon. Occasionally, I can remember once or twice I was sent out to be the person on the ground while a bunch of airplanes came in. We generally would do that. You’d fly in with the first one and stay on the ground helping them everybody get everything squared away and then you’d fly out with the last guy. So if you had some reason you didn’t catch the last guy out you might spend the night in a place you didn’t really want to be. But Saigon was basically the place where everybody stayed.

RV: Did you stay in town when you spent the night or did you have barracks on a base?

JC: No. We always stayed in hotels downtown. Initially in the early days it was the Majestic Hotel because that was one of the few that was there. Later on they opened a lot of hotels so we had several places that we would go. I used to really enjoy their hotels there, not that they were wonderful places but the food in Saigon was great. The French cuisine was wonderful. We’d eat in good places and walk around and find things downtown to do and it was a fun place to be.

RV: What would you do for entertainment?

JC: We generally would go to bars and we’d eat and go shopping. They had markets down there where they sold different kinds of things and they had a lot of bookstores and various things that were made by the primitive tribes there. Things made out of brass and things made out of wood and things made out of leather. And there were a lot of things to look at. Some stuff was pretty fancy and some of it pretty primitive but interesting.

RV: What did you think of the Vietnamese civilians?

JC: I didn’t really interact much with them. They seemed competent. Most of them spoke French and we didn’t. And they would learn to speak English but I didn’t
interact much with the Vietnamese the whole time I was there. I was there for a long time but I really didn’t do much interacting with them.

RV: Why not?

JC: We just didn’t. We were busy and we were on military installations or riding in trucks or something and we just didn’t connect with the Vietnamese very much.

RV: Are there any outstanding incidents that come to mind in the ’66, ’67 tour, things that happened to the airplane or to other crews?

JC: One thing I might mention, I ran into, for a big surprise to me, I ran into a friend I’d been to high school with. He was a civilian but he had gone to work for the Army in Vicksburg, Mississippi and the Army that he was working for was the Army that built airfields, the Corps of Engineers. And he was over there working on some airfield building and we just saw each other and were really shocked. We were in an officer’s club in Saigon eating and so we got together and had a good time there for that day. Still he and I talk about it when we see each other. I go back to Mississippi sometimes and he lives there now. He’s retired from the Corps of Engineers and I’m retired from the Air Force so we have fun getting together talking about this occasionally.

RV: That’s interesting. During this tour were you ever shot at?

JC: The second tour we picked up a few bullet holes flying up in the northern part of South Vietnam into Hue I think is where we noticed them. We were flying into Khe Sanh and some of the places up there where there was a lot of activity. We found a couple of bullet holes once or twice. We didn’t know it until we got on the ground but our flight engineer’s task was to check the airplane over thoroughly every time we landed. He said, ‘Oh, we’ve got a couple of bullet holes out there on the wing this time.’ There was a few instances of having problems like that.

RV: What do you remember most about flying in that combat zone?

JC: We were not under positive control. Nobody ever really knew where you were. There wasn’t good radars around very much so you would fly and you might fly through clouds and you didn’t know if there was anybody else in the cloud or not. You went where you were supposed to go and did the best you could to get there and once you got there you had instrument approaches to help you land but control [at altitude] in the flights was eyeballs only. A lot of times you were in clouds or around clouds and you
could see fighters making passes below you because you were generally above the low
traffic. It was nice to be in a 130 for that because we were up where there wasn’t many
other people around. And the weather was better at higher altitudes.

RV: Are there any close calls that you can remember having?

JC: I probably had a lot of them we didn’t know about.

RV: Maybe that was for the better.

JC: Yeah. The weather was always an interesting thing. I can remember landing
coming into Saigon and there was a bring front on one end of the field and we were
rapidly approaching from the other end of the field and we got on the ground just a the
front hit. It was one of these things where you can see a big line of ugly black cloud and
you know you don’t want to be flying when it gets there, particularly low to the ground.

So we were racing to get on the ground and the front was racing, just coming in from the
other end of the runway. So we landed in time and this big terrible rainstorm and rain hit
but we got on the ground just ahead of it and got to slow down before it caught us. We
had a lot of fun with the weather and I can remember seeing a small airplane about 200
yards off our wing as we were coming into an airfield there at Tan Son Nhut one time. It
was the same altitude we were flying the opposite direction. He must have been lost or he
wouldn’t have been there. But I didn’t really have any close calls with airplanes that we
knew about like that. But the weather was always more challenging than the traffic.

RV: As pilot I guess you were considered the leader of your crew.

JC: That’s right.

RV: Tell me about your leadership skills and how they developed in Vietnam.

JC: It was interesting to start. When you first fly in a multiengine airplane like
that, you’re the co-pilot so you’re chief pilot is the leader and you learn your leadership
skills that you use later on from him. So you spend two or three years flying with
somebody and you see what they do and how they do it. And when your turn comes and
you’ve been trained to be the pilot and you have a copilot and you train your copilot as
you were trained and let him do things and learn how to do things and he watches you. So
it’s kind of a growth issue. You have a good group of people that you can model after and
you do that based on and you add to it your particular orientation that you have seen and
been trained in the Academy and other places and it really comes out pretty good.
RV: So you were comfortable in that position.

JC: Very much so. My flying skills, because I was flying a lot were really very good at the time. So I was very comfortable with teaching new pilots and copilots how to fly and I was instructor pilot at this time. And I had a lot of experience and the enlisted guys were good friends and good guys. We all worked together as a good team and it all worked out very good.

RV: What about the other leadership? Maybe talk about your supervisors, the people that were above you and then the overall military leadership in Vietnam.

JC: Our majors and colonels at the time, I was a captain and I wrote a paper one time on what a good leader our squadron commander was while I was at SOS. This must have been the squadron commander. I can't remember who was who now, but overall, our lieutenant colonel leadership and wing leadership was really good. They were with us all the time. They knew what we were doing. They did it themselves occasionally. They were educated people. They could listen to you and they could give you direction. They didn’t seem to be ambivalent about the way they would do things. There was a lot of concern though about the kind of [higher] military leadership we were getting because it was clear that we were under tight constraints on how we were fighting the war.

RV: Even to you guys who were in the 130s.

JC: Yes. And we sent our operations officer off one time to a ground job there in Vietnam. And he said, ‘I was watching this, I knew this enemy convoy was supplying them up in the north part of the country and we had fighters we could have sent up there to blow them up but we couldn’t get approval to send them up. We knew they were going to get all these guns and kill all our people up there.’ You could tell that there was a lot of things that we were doing that were just pure stupidity even from the point I was in. I came back after that. I didn’t want to have anything to do with those kinds folks anymore. I figured that our President at the time was an absolute anathema. I never voted for him again and I was glad when he lost his office. This was LBJ.

RV: What about the military leadership in Vietnam?

JC: What I saw over there seemed okay. One of the colonels over there when I was at the Air Force Academy had gotten promoted to general. He was a two or three star general and I knew him real well and we’d see him over in Saigon Club all the time. I felt
like we had excellent leadership. I always really liked him. I thought he was a great
leader at the Academy and later as a general. I thought our military leadership was just
fine. I didn’t have any reason to criticize them at all. But I attributed the problems that I
saw over there to the civilian leadership.

RV: Were you questioning whether there should be civilian leadership of the
military or did you think we needed more competent people in the civilian leadership?

JC: The training suggested that always the civilians were in charge of everything
and the military was supposed to advise them and help them figure out how to do it right.
I thought our military guys are pretty good and must be doing that so then it must be the
civilian guy’s fault if it didn’t come out right. I attributed our problems over there to the
civilian leadership.

RV: Had your attitude toward the war changed? You obviously were becoming
more and more aware of the actual war, what was going on, the military movements
involved.

JC: Military people are trained to feel that you’re supposed to go win wars. And if
something interferes with what you think you need to do to win then there must be, the
civilian guys must be messing it up or not doing it right. We thought it shouldn’t have
been a big problem to go win the war over there. We were being impeded by civilian
limitations that we didn’t think were reasonable.

RV: What do you think could have been done differently?

JC: Well there seemed to us to be little reason not to attack things that we knew
that were coming in to support the fight in South Vietnam. So the idea that China was
going to drop nuclear bombs on us because of a war in Indochina or in Hanoi or
anywhere else just didn’t make sense to me. We should have probably bombed Russian
ships in the harbor then there wouldn’t have been Russian ships up there anymore. They
wouldn’t have attacked us in the United States because of that. They would have quit
supporting these guys. Those were all political limitations that we had at certain times.
Later on in the war we got to where we were more inclined to bomb people up north and
stop inputs of things into the country in the north which came down and hurt us in the
south. I guess I’ve always thought the limitations we placed on ourselves about bombing
up in the north were not very good, not very reasonable.
RV: Did you ever fly in to Laos?
JC: We flew over Laos regularly for a long time, only at altitude though. There was a regular airway that flew over Vietnam over Laos into Thailand. And we would make that generally at 20,000 feet or above. We did it regularly but we never got low until we were in Thailand.
RV: You never had any drop missions in Laos?
JC: No.
RV: You mentioned earlier that you would carry body bags occasionally.
JC: Well, that’s one of the jobs and we’d go into little fields and there was a lot of combat activity around some of these small fields and a lot of times we’d carry in food or shells and come back out with body bags and troops. Particularly it was true up in Hue and Khe Sanh in the northern part of the country. It was a lot hotter up there than it was in the southern part.
RV: Did you guys think about that very much or how did it affect you?
JC: We didn’t stay around it. Those were things that the loadmasters dealt with. When we did that, we didn’t go back in the back of the cargo compartment. We’d see those things on the pallets, on the ramps and we knew we were carrying them but we didn’t dwell in the area or think about it much. I think the idea was really we would put in out of our mind and just go fly.
RV: Where was the most dangerous place in Vietnam where you would fly into?
JC: I guess a couple of instants we flew in to a place called Song Be one time and blew a tire so we had to stay on the runway for repairs and it took us six or seven hours there. And they always claimed that was very hot activity so we were expecting to be mortared at anytime and didn’t. We got our tire changed and took off in six or seven hours later and it was one of those things you worry about your fixing to get attacked but we never did. We flew into a little airfield in the middle of a rubber plantation one time at night and we were dropping off artillery shells and we’d gotten them dropped off and a Special Forces guy in a jeep came zooming up saying they were fixing to get mortared there so you guys better get out of here. So we started taxiing immediately, went out to the runway, trying to close up the back doors and get things squared away and we took off almost simultaneously with getting all of our doors closed. So we were really eager to
get off there. Flying to Khe Sanh was interesting. We had several mission in there and
that was of course one of the hottest places in the country at the time.

RV: Was this during your ’66-’67 tour?

JC: Yes.

RV: Did you ever experience any major equipment failures besides that flat tire
you talked about?

JC: We must have had flat tires a couple of times. It seems like we had an engine
that wouldn’t start one time. So we had a procedure where another 130 could pull up next
to you and you could use his engine to put air into your engine. It would let you start. It’s
called a buddy start. We did that a couple of times. I never had to do a runway where you
go out on a runway and taxi fast and start. We never had to do one of those. They call that
a taxi windmill start I think they call that. But we were always worrying about
maintenance and how to overcome issues that you might have that might have kept you
from taking off. But in general our equipment was very reliable and we didn’t, we had
firelights in the flight a couple of times, never any fires. They were all just false
indications.

RV: You must have had a good ground crew working on these planes.

JC: I think we must have. I assumed that the airplane was going to fly and when
we’d get out there of course the engineer would check it over and we carried our engineer
with us who was an expert in systems. And the things that happened, we were generally
able to take care of them and then proceed on. It was very important for us to get back to
Saigon everyday.

RV: I can imagine.

JC: We worked very hard to do that. I guess we did do that most every day.

RV: So after your two weeks you go back to Cebu and you were there for how
long?

JC: They had a special R&R arrangement so if you spent two weeks in country in
Vietnam, you would fly back to Cebu and then they’d let you go spend three days in a
hotel in the town of Cebu as opposed to in the tents on the airfield. So they’d send us to a
hotel and we’d go down and eat and drink and walk around in Cebu and sleep late and
just in general, relax for a couple of three days. Then we’d come back into the airbase
and generally there was a training mission or two that we had to fly in order to keep drop
current, keep airdrop current, keep low level flying current, which we didn’t really do
when we were in country. So we’d do a training flight or two and then it would be time to
go back to Vietnam again.

RV: So was it like two weeks in country, two weeks out? Was that about how it
was or was it more frequent?

JC: No. That was about right. Occasionally there’d be a mission to Okinawa or
Japan or Korea or Clark Air Base. There was something- we might fly one of those two
in the interim during the times we were over in country. But most of the flying was in
country in Vietnam. There was supposed to be a hot area in the delta at those times.
There was a lot of combat activity in the Delta, but Vung Tao was such a pretty place. I
remember what a pretty place it was. It had a real nice there and we stayed close to the
beach. And you could see the soldiers and the Vietnamese and everything having a good
time on the beach. Nothing unusual happened while we were there but it was a
memorable time and an interesting place. I didn’t fly down over the delta very much.
Mostly it was up in the north or mid country to the north. Going down there was
something we only did a couple of times. So we’d fly over all the rivers and see all the
canals and rivers and everything crisscrossing down there. It was really interesting to do
that to us because it reminded us of the rivers that we saw sometimes in Mississippi and
in the south where there were a lot of rivers around pilot training bases particularly in
Georgia and South Georgia and south Alabama.

RV: Did they give you different instructions as far as safety and things like that
when you would go fly over the delta versus flying over the middle or northern part of
South Vietnam?

JC: We really didn’t see much intelligence. Our intelligence, what we had, what
little we had would come from talking to the Army guys who were generally always
flying with us and who were much more in touch with the scene and the various parts of
the country. We were always carrying Army guys around with us and they would tell us
what was going on in that particular place where we were. So we got to know a bit about
the operations in those areas by talking to the Army guys that were with us. We didn’t fly
much down south like that. We did fly a lot along the coast. We would typically make
runs to Cam Rahn Bay and stop at Nha Trang and Qui Nhon and Da Nang. It was always
fun to go into Da Nang. It was a real familiar base but the weather was generally worse
up there, the further north you got. So I can remember one time we were trying to get into
Da Nang and we were low on fuel and we were always trying to fly visual and the
weather was bad and we were flying off over the water and got pretty low but we could
see this big rock down on the coast south of Da Nang. We knew if we came in by that
rock on a certain heading perpendicular to the runway we’d be right in the right place to
land. So we came in around the rock, came in, got lined up on the runway and they
wouldn’t let us land because they said they were instrument flight rules only and we were
VFR so we weren't supposed to be able to land. So we had to go back and pick up an
instrument vector and go back out over the water again and come back in. And we were
short of fuel. We were really pressing for fuel. We were afraid we were going to flame
out our engines before we got on the ground. Fortunately we didn’t. We got on the
ground and got to taxiing before our engines quit, but always a little excitement because
you were generally trying to fly as much as you could without refueling because it took
extra time to do that.

RV: Did you refuel in the air or on the ground?
JC: Always on the ground in this 130.
RV: Now, why would they wave you off if you were making a perfectly fine
approach there?
JC: That was their rules. They said you had to be under instrument control in
order to land because the weather was bad. And we had found our way in and we could
have landed but they waved us off. I guess if I declared an emergency I could have done
that. But declaring an emergency was kind of one of those things you didn’t do unless
you were having mechanical difficulties unless you were really scared you were going to
run out of fuel. Generally they had repercussions to doing it so you didn’t do it unless you
really had to do it unless you really had to. So they wave us off and we said, ‘Well, I
guess we can get out.’ And then we flew and flew and flew it seemed like on the
instrument direction until we came back to the runway. We figured it’d be short turn but
it turned out to be a long turn. I think the people on the ground liked to practice their
instrument directions so they didn’t feel any hurry in doing that. They didn’t always get
the chance to do it otherwise.

RV: I guess they were also trying to make sure that if something had happened to
your plane landing by visual that they were kind of covering their butts.

JC: Oh, that’s absolutely right. I’m sure that’s true.

RV: Was there anything else on that tour that stands out in your mind?

JC: I remember landing the first time at a little field at night that was northwest of
Qui Nhon which was on the coast. This was a little landing strip called English and it was
at night and they didn’t have a lot of lights up there. We were flying over the water to get
up there so you saw a lot of boats out on the water and it was clear skies so the boats and
the sky all looked alike. It was totally black and there was no horizon. So you know, you
could look at the boats and think it was the sky and the sky and think it was the boats. For
flying visually it was really an interesting thing. We land on this little runway. It turned
out the little runway was dirt and it only had a couple of approach lights right on the end
of the runway, a couple of blue lights. And we touched down and the runway wasn’t flat.
We didn’t realize that at the time. It had a real steep grade so you went up this hill as you
were landing and then got to the top of the hill and the runway went down the other side
of the hill. So it was a really weird runway.

RV: How would you take off, going back down the hill on the other side?

JC: Well, that was a good question. We weren’t sure how to do that and it was too
short we thought to go that way, so we went back to take off in the same direction that we
landed after we dropped our cargo off. I don’t remember what it was that night, likely
ammo or something. And we took off and it was considered a hot area so we wanted to
do our typical climb as quickly as we can and we took off and ran up our engines and
taxied it in the runway and got all the runway we could get and we were going up this hill
which was hard to get momentum when you’re going up the hill but we were reasonably
light since we dropped our cargo off. So we got all the engines up running and released
the brakes and started going up that hill. Well, you were looking straight into the stars
because of the hill. So we took off and finally got to a takeoff speed and lifted off just as
we were getting to the crest of the hill and there we were in the middle of the black with
no horizon and we were going at a steep angle of attack in order to climb quickly, slow
speed close to stall and it was really a nightmare as far as trying to keep your attitude
indicator in your head engaged with your instruments. It’s easy to get disoriented in that
kind of condition.

RV: It sounds like a really hairy experience.

JC: It was. It was quite a challenging experience. It’s always good to have a good
copilot when something like that’s happening because you’ve got four sets of eyes
instead of just two on the instruments. That was very helpful in that evening. We took
off, climbed up and didn’t have any problems, but it was a memorable event.

RV: How would the copilot help you and how would you keep your orientation in
situations like that?

JC: Well, the attitude indicator tells you exactly whether your wings are level and
your air speed indicator tells you you’ve got flying speed so you want to make sure those
are correct. And the transition from watching the runway in the dark and taxiing with
your runway lights into the black of the sky is always a difficult point to do but your
copilot would stay on instruments very closely. You’d watch as the pilot, the visual scene
outside. As soon as I lifted off, I turned it over to the copilot because he was watching the
instruments closely. He just took right over. He had his hands on the column on the
control stick so he just took right over and flew it out perfectly just like I would have
expected him to.

RV: Did you fly with the same crew most of the time?

JC: Most of the time we were flying with the same crew. It wasn’t always true but
we had crew assignments and that’s generally how we did it. I had a young copilot from
St. Louis that was flying with me. His name was Steve Lukefar if I remember. I haven’t
ever seen him since. He said he was going to go fly for the airlines when he got a chance.
He’s probably an airline pilot somewhere now.

RV: Tell me about the relationships you formed with your crewmembers and the
people in your unit.

JC: We all were doing the same thing so we were pretty close. I don’t remember
much antagonism. When I would do something like make a hard landing, I would get a
lot of razzing from my engineer and copilot but then the engineer would get out and
check the airplane very thoroughly and make sure it was still in one piece and hadn’t
fallen apart or anything and we’d go fly the next leg. In helping the copilot learn how to fly, I’d turn things over to the copilot and let him fly around and make landings. If he didn’t do them right he’d find out because they didn’t feel right. I’d give him guidance and I was on the sticks a little bit so he couldn’t tell it but I wasn’t going to let him crash. But I’d let him go pretty far before I’d interfere in any way. He developed where he was really a good pilot I thought. I was very proud of his skills and accomplishments. And engineers and navigators were all helpful. We were going in and out of Khe Sanh on another memorable event where were landed after having trouble finding it. It was overcast and lots of clouds and the clouds came in real low over Khe Sanh after we were there and we didn’t want to stay there because we figured we’d get mortared up there. But it was in the mountains and once we took off and we were in the clouds, we didn’t know where the mountains were so our navigator was very useful in that particular thing because he could pick the mountains out on the radar. So we finally got to where we could take off and climb out as fast as we could and he guided us through the mountain passes so we could get out of there without running into them. He did it very successfully. So it was very much a crew oriented team approach to flying there.

RV: That’s interesting. So were you flying blind that one time in the clouds dodging mountains?

JC: Oh yes. We hoped we were dodging mountains. Occasionally people ran into them though. We left a few airplanes on the tops of mountains down there. It was lots worse at night but it was totally in the clouds. You don’t have much visibility if you're in total clouds.

RV: That’s right. How much did you keep up with what was going on back home in the United States? You talked about that a little bit before.

JC: I really did not. Our families in this particular tour our families were back in the States so we heard from some but we did a lot of swapping of tapes at the time. It was interesting to make tapes and send tapes back and forth, which is one of the things we did. Little small reel tapes they were at the time. They weren't cassettes. I’ve probably still got some of those. I don’t know if they play. I probably don’t have anything to play them on even if I had them out somewhere. But we’d get mail after we got back to Cebu after being over in Vietnam. There’d generally be a letter or two. That was about the
essence of it. There was Air Force newspaper we’d get once a week. Generally we’d look
through one of those and read a little bit about what was going on in the world but didn’t
know a lot about it. Things were hot back in the States in the ‘60s and we weren't very
involved in things or even know much about them at all.

RV: How would you judge the morale of the troops that were with you, your
buddies there, your crew, and your people in your unit?

JC: I think it was all excellent. I look back at that as being a highlight of my
military career, that flying. We were all very close together. We were working together as
a team. It was really, really great flying time. Everybody was highly qualified because
they were doing it all the time.

RV: Do you keep in touch with any of those people?

JC: No. Never have seen most of them since we left over there in ’66. Actually I
stayed over in the Philippines for another tour. It was not a C-130 tour but I was flying
for C-130s occasionally. I’d go over in country but it was generally just over and back
with somebody else flying. I was running aircrew coordination missions out of Clark Air
Base. I spent two years there after I left Cebu. But I didn’t really keep in touch with
hardly anybody from that time frame. I did see a few later on in my career in the military.
They were colonels by then and so was I. But, no, I didn’t keep much track of those folks.

RV: Tell me about your next tour in ’67 and ’69. Was it your choice to stay over
in Asia or did you want to come home?

JC: Well, it looked like it would be a fun thing to stay over there. I liked the
arrangements at Clark Air Base and I thought it would be fun to live there and it certainly
was. The quarters up there were older quarters but they were rambling and open to the air
and it was a tropical desert like environment and it was just, it was a fun, active place to
be at the time. So I thought it would be fun to station there and my wife agreed so she
came over and joined me and we moved into a house off base for a while and then got
quarters on Clark Air Base and stayed there. They had a lot of activities there. They had
tennis and horseback riding and swimming and there was a couple of resorts on the island
of Luzon we went to occasionally, one in the beach and one in the mountains. And there
was a lot of fun things to do there.

RV: It sounds like a pretty good tour.
JC: It was an excellent tour.

RV: What were your duties there specifically?

JC: There were a lot of aircraft flying back and forth to Vietnam going into country and some of them coming out for repairs and we were a part of what they called the aircraft delivery group at the time. And we would meet the aircraft at Clark and make sure they were fixed and make sure they were ready to proceed to their next location whether it was going east bound or west bound. There were a lot of fighters that flew through there, a lot of small airplanes particularly the Air Force had a Cessna super sky master that had twin engines they were using for forward air controller duties in Vietnam. And they flew all those airplanes from the west coast in large groups across the oceans to Vietnam. And typically there might be six or eight of them in one group and they would land at Clark in the last leg before they went over to Vietnam. And they had civilian pilots and extra fuel tanks so they could fly long distances and we had to coordinate rescue aircraft halfway across their locations to help them in case they had trouble. We had about a hundred of them come through the year or two I was there. It was an interesting assignment to learn how to operate aircraft and what aircraft needed and provided and take care of the crews. And anything that the crews needed to make sure they were briefed to go over in country. It was a very busy time. I think I worked every day I was there.

RV: You were the operations officer. Is that correct?

JC: Right.

RV: So how many times did you actually get in country to Vietnam?

JC: Because of the combat pay thing, I got over there every month. You had to do that in order to get paid. And there were flights going back and forth all the time. So I would generally fly over there and generally come back in one day. I didn’t spend many nights over there, occasionally, but not very many. I was needed back at my job in the Philippines. But [?] was part of being able to brief the people [the crews flying over]. It wasn’t just to get paid. You had to brief the people who were going over there for the first time and you needed to go over and make sure you knew how the thing was working. So I wasn’t actually piloting. I was just a passenger when I would do that.

RV: And these were the C-130s.
JC: Yes, generally. Not always but generally.

RV: Did you miss flying?

JC: Actually I was flying target missions in T-33s at the time in the Philippines. They took me out of the 130 since I wasn’t in a 130 unit and let me fly with the people on the base. And we were flying the T-33 like I had flown in basic pilot training. We would fly target missions for their F-102s that were stationed there, their air defense fighters. So I ‘d get in the airplane and fly up off of the north coast of Luzon and sometimes go to Taiwan and they would run up an make gunnery and rocket passes on me as a target like I was the enemy coming. I did that for two years. That was a fun job. I got back to flying single engine again.

RV: Did you like that?

JC: That was great flying out of my home place all the time. It was very different from flying a 130. You're up there by yourself in that airplane.

RV: Right. Tell me about your attitudes toward the war at this point. This is ’67, ’68, ’69 and the Tet Offensive happens in early ’68. Could you tell me about that experience?

JC: I was over there in ’68 when the Tet Offensive kicked off. We might have been in Saigon or somewhere and just left. It was really a hairy experience we lived by talking to the people who were more actively involved in it. I wasn’t actually in danger anywhere or in any attack. But the people we were flying around in our flights, the Army guys were definitely involved in the defense of several locations. It was a surprise that those kinds of things could have happened at that time.

RV: Do you think the United States was what General Westmoreland had said, they were on the way to see the light at the end of the tunnel but that the war was progressing and that the United States was winning and then the TET Offensive happens, did your attitudes change at all?

JC: I guess none of us ever believed that because the evidence that we were hearing that there were people pouring in from the north and from all kinds of support and everything and that we weren't doing anything really seriously about it. We were just letting it go, letting it come in and do things. I guess none of us ever really, not many of
us probably really ever believed that that war was going well in any part of it, in any time
period I was there particularly in the ’67, ’68 time period.

RV: Why do you think the United States was kind of fighting this war in this kind
of half way mode as you can describe it? Why do you think that was going on?

JC: I think they were, and at the time we thought they were unnecessarily scared
of Russian or Chinese interference. We knew that was probably why but we just, most of
us would discount that as being a possibility. Fighting war in a tentative fashion like that,
we’d always been trained in our upbringing, in our education, that you wouldn’t fight
things in a tentative way. You did them to win. That’s one of the reasons we thought all
the military guys would be oriented that way so it must have been the civilians who were
bringing this tentativeness to what we were doing. As a result, we weren't very supportive
of the civilian leaders at the time.

RV: In your contact with other military personnel in the last tour when you're
stationed at Clark, did you sense any change of morale in the American servicemen?

JC: In that time, I don’t think so. One of the things I would do at Clark frequently,
I would meet airplanes of people that were flying over to Vietnam and there were several
people that I had known at the Academy and my friends and classmates did that. They’d
fly through in things like B-25s headed over there. And several times we never heard
from them again. They went over there and then were shot down. And they were missing
in action for years and nobody ever knew what happened to them again. That happened a
number of times and they were always sad occasions. But we really felt like that was our
job. I lost a lot of classmates over there in those several years from ’66 through ’69,
people that I knew real well.

RV: Let me ask you some questions about your interactions and things you
witnessed among the servicemen. Did you ever witness any racial tension amongst the
troops?

JC: I had a loadmaster in my airplane who liked to fly the Confederate flag, which
he did. And every time we’d land, he’d open the top hatch of the airplane and stick a
Confederate flag out the top. I thought that was fine and we had black loadmasters
occasionally and others in the crew sometimes were black. Nobody ever thought that was
strange at the time. We never got any negative feedback from doing that. I guess I really
didn’t see any racial tension over there. There might have been cause. Nowadays you
wouldn’t think of doing something like that, but at the time it didn’t seem like an issue at
all. It was just something that you did and maybe people that would have objected to it
didn’t see fit to object at the time. I don’t know but it never got to be an issue.

RV: How about any tension between folks who had enlisted and were officers
versus those who were drafted and did not choose to be there but were there because the
government forced them?

JC: I guess our crew must have been almost all too close together and worked
together too long. We didn’t really see anything like that. We worked so closely with our
enlisted guys and then with us that we depended upon them and counted on them and
they did great jobs. I didn’t ever see any of that. I know it went on particularly among
Army troops and troops in combat in the field, but we didn’t see much of that.

RV: How about alcohol and drug use? How prevalent was that?

JC: I never saw any drug use whatsoever or even heard about any. Of course
everybody did a lot of drinking at the time. People were frequently inebriated when they
weren't flying but we weren't supposed to drink for 12 hours before a flight. We were on
12-hour shifts so really there wasn’t much drinking going on in between that unless we
have a beer or two right after we landed because we knew we had to go back and fly in
12 hours.

RV: Did you ever have contact with any of the indigenous forces of South
Vietnam, the Vietnamese Air Force or the ARVN?

JC: We’d carry them around some in our airplanes and land occasionally. There
were some airplanes around, particularly in Nha Trang and Qui Nhon, some of the
smaller locations. But other than that, no.

RV: I noticed on your questionnaire about the question about encountering
dangerous wildlife and you put that you only had rats and snakes occasionally in your
aircraft. Can you talk about that?

JC: Well, a lot of the times when we would go to small locations we would be
picking up cargo that had been put on pallets and left out on the ground or somewhere in
a warehouse perhaps or small unenclosed place. Since it was dry frequently, it might have
rats in it. You had to be watchful for snakes in the same thing. Snakes would crawl up
into your airplane and in your cargo, particularly in your wheel wells. I never actually saw a snake there but people told me a lot of tales about them seeing them. I did see a couple of rats. Flying back from in country it would get cold and so they would seek out where it was warm and it was always warmest up in the cockpit. So we’d take off and it’s hot and we’d fly up at 25,000 feet where its minus 60 so whatever animal was there would seek out the heat and the heat was up where we were so we’d be flying at night and there’d be a rat walking across the front of the cockpit right above the wind screen because its warmer up there.

RV: What would you do in those circumstances?

JC: We’d try to get it and if we didn’t we generally had the aircraft fumigated when we got to Clark or wherever we were going. They didn’t like to import those animals into other places. Fumigate them in country, they could do that too. They’d close the airplane up and put off a couple of bug bombs in it or a couple of gas bombs of some kind to kill whatever it was we thought might be infected.

RV: During this last tour these three years, are there any incidents that stick out in your mind that you want to talk about?

JC: Well I wasn’t over in country very much. Most of this time was spent in the Philippines. All of the airplanes that we were operating or helping to fly into Vietnam, we saw our first C-130 gunship come through. And that was really an experience to see those airplanes with all those guns sticking out the side of them that’d always been cargo airplanes. And there was the first C-47 Gooney birds that had guns sticking out the sides. They were all highly classified airplanes at the time. C-119s were flying through with guns. We had a lot of transport gunships come through and they were using a lot of those in country. That was very interesting. But that all happened after I was at Clark. I didn’t go back in country [into Vietnam] that much after that.

RV: Which airplane that you did see during those three years at Clark were you most impressed with?

JC: Well, the F-4s were new at the time. We were most impressed with the performance of the F-4. It was a new fighter in those days and had tremendous engines and power. And that was just really quite an airplane. Of course one time in Cebu we saw a B-52 land that had been over and something had happened to it. They flew out of Guam
but they couldn’t land at Clark so they had problems so they came and landed in Cebu.

This air base was called Mactan Air Base. It’s still there and active for the Philippine Air Force. But it’s interesting to see the B-52s there in the Philippines. I didn’t see very many of them.

RV: Did you hear about their ability to deliver a lot of destruction to the ground?

JC: We’d see it every time we’d fly. There would be great bomb craters frequently down below where they had been dropping bombs and just blowing the whole countryside apart. It was really interesting to fly over and we’d say it looked like the moonscape because of all the pock marks and craters there.

RV: Looking back at your entire Vietnam experience, how would you describe the enemy, the Viet Cong and the NVA? I know you didn’t have any direct contact with them but just in general, what are your impressions?

JC: They seemed like they were very dedicated to their view and not able to be turned aside by concerns or other kinds of issues. They must have been strong in their beliefs or they wouldn’t have been able to put up with all the bombing and killing that we did of them. We should have probably taken that into consideration or something.

There’s something there that and it probably is a fact that at Saigon, the North Vietnamese never had a government that was a real government. They had corrupt governments and people that you wouldn’t want to have being your government. So it’s no surprise that they needed to fall. I’m not sure in retrospect whether they weren't better off after the North Vietnamese communists took them over than they were when they were there before. We give up freedom but they had never been free and didn’t understand that much about freedom. They knew they wanted it and they weren’t going to get it from the communists, but they weren't getting it from the other people either. Its just one of those things where you figure that out.

RV: In 1969, did you transfer back to the States?

JC: I did. I had been taught while I was at the Academy that I needed to go back to graduate school. And I landed an assignment back to graduate school so it was time to go get out of flying and go back to other activities. So I went to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base after that and spent two years in graduate school and five more years there at
RV: Well we can talk a little bit around your military career. How long did it take you to get your masters?

JC: I went back and got my Master’s in Systems Analysis is what they called it. It was really operations research in the civilian fields. It was what they offered me. We spent three months after I first got back, three or four months reviewing math and stuff so we’d be able to handle the math in the program in the actual program and then 21 months of course work followed by writing a thesis. I wrote a thesis on strategic attack of large bomber forces into Russia, which was a big issue at the time and how to equip them with bombs and rockets and decoys and guns and defensive armament and things. It was fun. It’s still an applicable issue I suppose in terms of the procedures used to do it. But it landed me a job over in Air Force logistics command where I helped them develop computers for logistics support.

RV: This was at Wright-Patterson.

JC: Wright-Patterson. They called that the Advanced Logistics System in the ‘70s. They were going to do that. After I got done with that job they decided to send me back to flying. It was one of those things at the time where [as a pilot] you had to spend a certain amount of time [of your career] actually flying airplanes. So I went from there to Little Rock Air Force base and back to the training school for C-130s at the time.

RV: How much had the airplane changed since you had been in it last?

JC: It was the same airplane. They flew it a little differently. They had a different formation structure where they were flying formation in weather. It was very interesting to try to figure out how to do that. They called it SKI. I forget what all that means. It meant flying airplanes with some kind of communication link and a CRT that showed you where the other airplane was so you kind of adjusted your flight to make sure you didn’t get too close to them although you couldn’t see them. And you were flying about a mile apart and it was pretty easy to occasionally let you get too close. And the weather again, like flying in the weather in Vietnam. But that was a good mission. I ended up in the training group as the deputy commander of the training group there.

RV: What rank were you at this time?
JC: Lieutenant Colonel. And we had just established the training group. It was a part of the wing and if other squadrons were not training squadrons. They had a couple of training squadrons and they said, ‘Well, let’s have a training group.’ So they established a training group and I got to be their deputy commander of the first establishment of the 34th Tactical Training Group. I finished my tour there and went from there back into the NATO staff at Norfolk, Virginia and spent three years writing a study of how to reinforce Europe up there. So we got to use my systems analysis degree and my ability to write. So I wrote this study with a couple of other people. And we went and briefed it to the NATO Staff in Brussels a couple of times, worked with the Shape technical center in Holland and some of the people in Washington, D.C. and the Pentagon. And we wrote a big study and after it was done it was time to go do something else so I said, ‘Well, I guess I’ve had 23 years. It’s time to retire.’ So I hung up my gear and my uniforms and left the service after 23 years of commissioned service.

RV: How did you feel getting out? Did you feel like it was really ready to get on?

JC: Well they had decided, I guess the Air Force decided they didn’t need my services anymore. I could have stayed. I had four or five more years I could have stayed but things looked interesting on the outside. So I was looking around for jobs and I found this ad that said, ‘Come to sunny south Florida.’ So I sent them a resume and they invited me down and then they offered me a job, so I left the service and went to work for Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in West Palm Beach. That was the end of my tour in the military. But the education they gave me really served me well then and now. I’m still working, although I’m up in Huntsville, Alabama; I’m still working in the field and it’s kept me employed all these years and been very useful.

RV: Let’s talk a little bit about your post Vietnam experience and some of your opinions about the war. When you came back in country in 1969, back to the United States, how many people talked to you about the war, asked you about what you had done and what was going on over there?

JC: I don’t remember very much about that. I remember I was involved in school and we were talking about other things. We didn’t really talk that much about that. I don’t remember much conversation about it at all. It was still going on of course so it was in the news and we were seeing it and it was getting hotter and hotter. But the people I was
in school with didn’t have the kind of background I had and they hadn’t flown there so
we didn’t have a lot in common about that. It just wasn’t much of a subject. I don’t
remember talking about it much.

RV: How about civilians. Were they interested in talking with you about it?

JC: I didn’t really like to talk about it. Even today I don’t really do much talking
about it.

RV: Why is that?

JC: I don’t like to watch movies about it either. I guess I have emotions about the
things that happened over there and I don’t dredge those thoughts up much.

RV: If I can ask you then, why did you decide to talk to us?

JC: Well, I think what you’re doing is a useful thing. Actually, I’ve been
reviewing a lot of history of Civil War things for a family member that we recently heard
had died in the Civil War and there’s a lot of recollections of Civil War and different
collections around and I’ve been doing a lot of reading of that the last few years. I think
this is the same kind of thing. It may turn out to be real useful someday. Who knows?

RV: That’s good. What did you think of American prosecution of the war once
you got back? This was when Nixon came in and there was a lot more use of strategic air
and the bombing was intensified.

JC: Well that looked to me like the right thing to do. We should have been doing
that the whole time. I was very supportive of his efforts in taking the war to the North and
not letting them get away with things. I don’t really remember why we quit doing that
and let the North Vietnamese take over. I know it was important to get out of the war
because of the uproar about the war and people didn’t want to have it anymore and that
all seemed right. It seemed right that we should get out of it. It didn’t seem right that we
should turn it over to the other people, but then we didn’t plan to do that, that’s just what
happened.

RV: Did you have any faith in the Vietnamization process of letting the South
Vietnamese fight their own war? Did you think they were capable?

JC: I don’t remember that. I guess I never thought they would be able to do that.
As it turned out, I guess they were not.

RV: Do you remember how you felt in April of ’75 when the country fell?
JC: I remember thinking that was a terrible loss but I remember thinking also it was important for us not to be there. I guess I was supportive of the idea that it was time for us to go do something else and not do that anymore and if they couldn’t do it themselves then they needed to suffer the consequences.

RV: Right, okay.

JC: Maybe I was convinced of that by the words from the President about the need to get out of Vietnam because I agreed with that. I thought we needed to get out of Vietnam.

RV: Do you think the United States achieved peace with honor as Kissinger and Nixon did say?

JC: I guess I would support that, yes. It wasn’t peace but it was what had to be done. We gave them the opportunity to do what they could do and it just turned out they couldn’t do it. I guess I could call that peace with honor. Peace for us honor for us, not so much for the Vietnamese. It was peace for them too. It just happened to be up in the North.

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

JC: Well they were really hesitant to get involved in any guerrilla war in other countries after that. I think probably that lesson led President Bush the first time from not taking Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in the first Gulf War because then he would have been stuck with having to run the country and trying to do all these things. I think caution probably led to that. I supported that. I didn’t think he should.

RV: What about now?

JC: The situation is a little different now. I support our President and what he’s put forth and I think it would be easy for us to attack that country and make sure they're not harboring any kind of aggressive intents anymore and I think its looks like we’re going to do that.

RV: What are the lessons that the United States learned besides the caution and not get involved in some of these areas of the world?

JC: I think they learned that we need to have certain kinds of military capabilities like precisions weapons to hit things and make precise cuts. I think those things were
leaned and subsequently developed and not have come to fruition for us quite well. They
learned the importance of communication and so they worked a lot on communication
capabilities, which have greatly improved. They learned a lot about joint operations
between the Army and Air Force and the Navy, which we see in effect now. They learned
about the need for special purpose people to fight in urban terrain instead of just standing
Army kind of things. That’s come to pass. Special Ops people mostly came out of the
Vietnam experience. I think we learned a lot, have implemented those lessons.

RV: Why do you think the civilian leadership did what it did or acted like it acted
during the war?

JC: That’s a good question. I think they were overconfident. I think they felt like
they could control anything and they could go the way they wanted it to go. That might
have been true in the United States but it certainly wasn’t true over in other countries. I’m
not sure it’s true today. It’d be interesting to see the results of our efforts in Iraq might be.
We might not have any trouble at all taking over the country but what we do with it once
we get it, that’s going to be a different matter. It will be interesting to see what happens.

RV: Yes, sir. Looking back at your personal experience in Vietnam, how do you
feel or what do you think about your service today?

JC: I think I served honorably and I enjoyed my tour in the military and I value
the associations and lessons I’ve learned there. They’ve served me well. I would tell
anybody and have told others that same thing. I certainly have no regrets of doing that.
That’s I guess about all I can say about that. My son’s currently in the Air Force. He
didn’t join through me encouraging. I guess he saw it turned into a good life for me and
said, ‘Well, I guess I could do that too.’ So he’s been in for I guess about 11 years now.
He’s enlisted and he’s over in England at this current time.

RV: How has the war most affected your life?

JC: I guess it caused me to be over out of this country over in other foreign
environments and to understand the people that I was around and to know that there are
other places like that in the world had made more of an internationalist perhaps out of me
than I would have been if I’d stayed here in the country. I think I know a lot about
internationalizations and how it works and what one would be concerned about. I
wouldn’t know that perhaps first hand with this confident a feeling as I have now.
Perhaps that makes me a better citizen in some ways. I’m more capable of evaluating the things we are faced with, the decisions we are faced with in this country although you get to vote on some of those things and most of them you don’t.

RV: Today if you were to talk to a young person about Vietnam, what would you tell them?

JC: I guess I would tell them that the important thing about Vietnam was that we felt that it was a threat to our country that needed to be met and that we went over and tried to meet it in the way that seemed the most appropriate at the time. It wasn’t through any empire plans or visions that we did that. We were doing it because we thought it was over there and we thought it was best for our country. It was supporting freedom for the South in only a general way, but it was. We were fighting communism at the time, which was a terrible enemy for us. It probably wasn’t so much for the Vietnamese since they didn’t have freedom to begin with. I guess something along those lines would be appropriate to say to somebody today.

RV: What do you think about Vietnam today?

JC: I’m impressed with its advancement. I guess that’s one of the reasons I would say I think they’re probably better off that the North Vietnamese won the war because they had a government. The South was corrupt and it wasn’t, there’s no telling what would ever happen. It would have been more like what Burma has become, run by military strongmen. There’s certainly no freedom in Burma. Thailand’s a little different. There’s not as many military dictatorships around the world now as there used to be. But a lot of them were taken over by the communists because they were so bad. Most of them have improved. Vietnam today seems like it’s on the path to joining a family of nations as a regular member. It certainly is not as bad probably as some of the countries in Africa. Things kind of evened out for them.

RV: Do you agree with the United States opening up relations with them in 1995?

JC: Absolutely. I think that’s wonderful. The more they can bring them into the world community the better the sooner. I have no problems with that at all. I think anybody that thinks much otherwise is probably just being short sighted or vengeful. We certainly did that. The precedent is that we did it with Germany and Japan in World War
II and helped bring them into the world community as full participating members.
There’s no reason Vietnam should be any different.
RV: Would you ever want to go back over?
JC: I think it would be fun. I don’t have any fond memories of over there. It’s just like anywhere else. I wouldn’t mind going back to NATO staff headquarters either. But I probably will never do that.
RV: Tell me about not seeing movies about Vietnam and that type of thing. Why don’t you do that?
JC: It’s interesting that you’d pick up on that. I’ve told my wife that a number of times. I don’t watch T.V. series about these kinds of things. I guess it’s too close to home. I know too many people who were killed over there and that was an emotional scene. A lot of my friends crashed and are still there in pieces. I’d just rather not think about that.
RV: Have you actually seen any of the movies?
JC: Well, I did. I watched *Apocalypse Now* and some of the others. I didn’t really watch the one about where the guy comes back with no legs and things like that. That’s hard. *Apocalypse Now* I probably didn’t mind watching that. It was enough glorified. It didn’t seem real in some senses. The other ones, they seemed more real to me and I didn’t watch them.
RV: How about books? Do you read about the war?
JC: No.
RV: Obviously that’s by choice.
JC: I might if I found something that was interesting. I was recently found out about a series of books by a guy named W.E.B. Griffin or Griffith or something like that who has wrote a bunch of books about things and I’m sure the war in Vietnam is part of it but I haven’t read any about Vietnam itself. I read one that talks a little bit about actions in the early days, in the ‘50s up in North Vietnam with the French. I probably wouldn’t discard a book like that. I’d probably read it if I was reading something about things and would find it very exciting and probably wouldn’t get upset about reading it or not. I like to read novels about military stuff. I don’t read a lot but the things I do read are generally Clancy novels and Dave Brown, Dick Brown. This guy Brown, I forget what his first
name is, any how, he wrote a number of those kinds of novels and they’re very good. I’ve read a number of them.

RV: Did your service in Vietnam or Southeast Asia or while you were there affect your religious beliefs at all?

JC: Well, I hadn’t ever thought about that. I don’t think so. I was raised in the church, in a Protestant Methodist Church and I’m very active in that church now. I always have been since the time I came to Ohio to Wright-Patterson. I used to go to chapel when I was in Mactan [actually Cebu] and Okinawa occasionally. I guess I’ve always been connected with religion but I don’t know if the war has changed or caused any modification of those things in my mind.

RV: Have you ever been to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.?

JC: No I have not. I haven’t been on the Mall in a long time. If I was ever up there I would.

RV: So you are not opposed to going to it?

JC: No. I’d like to go. I just haven’t ever been there and had that opportunity.

RV: Was there anything else that you’d like to talk about or add to our conversation today?

JC: I can’t think of anything. I think we’ve covered a lot of territory and I’ve enjoyed the opportunity to reminisce with you about these things. I’m sure I may think of other things I wish I had said, but I think we’ve done a good job.

RV: Okay. Great. We’ll go ahead and end the interview. This will end the interview with Mr. John Currey. Thank you sir.

JC: Richard, thank you very much.