Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Joe Boyer on the 18th of April 2002 approximately 1:45 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Colonel Boyer is in Harker Heights, Texas. This is interview is being conducted as part of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project. Thank you very much sir and why don’t we begin with a brief introduction if you would tell me when and where you were and where you grew up?

Joe Boyer: Okay, I was born at the Fordyce Lumber Company camp, Ivan- a-n, right out of Fordyce, Arkansas on June 13th, 1932. Shortly there after we moved to Crossett Arkansas Lumber Camp and in about 1934 moved into Crossett Arkansas itself and I grew up in Crossett doing a lot of hunting and fishing and boy scouting and typical things that interest boys. Graduated from high school there in 1950. Went down to Ruston Louisiana to Louisiana Tech and enrolled at Louisiana Tech in 1950. Graduated there in 1954. During the time that I was at Louisiana Tech I was in ROTC--- Air Force ROTC and that is what turned me towards being in the career in the Air Force. I was a Cadet Corps Commander, Cadet Colonel at Louisiana Tech my senior year and went right into the Air Force in June of 1954.

SM: Is Louisiana or was Louisiana Tech a land grant school. Were you required to take ROTC those first two years?

JB: No it was not.

SM: What lead you to take ROTC what was the attraction for you--- did you want to go into the Air Force or?
JB: Well, I had a friend who was in there and I got in and I liked it and I just--- that was the only course in college that I made straight A’s in for four years. So I must have liked it and it must have liked me.

SM: As you were growing up, what were the more important influences on you and on your life, especially with regard to the military service?

JB: Well, I grew up of course--- I was just very slightly too young to be in World War II but I knew many guys that were from Crossett Arkansas there--- whom I knew quite well that were just a few years older than me that went into the service. I just always had a high regard and high respect for military people. But I had no direct family members in the military or anything. In fact my family members were mostly railroad people and wanted me to go railroad.

SM: Is that what your father did--- he worked on a railroad?

JB: Yes.

SM: How about your mom was she a homemaker?

JB: Homemaker.

SM: Were there any particular subjects--- in particular in high school that you enjoyed most or more than others?

JB: Well in high school--- let’s say I wasn’t the perfect student in high school. My greatest enjoyment was shop, trade and industry, shop and auto mechanics and things like that. Did a lot of woodworking and auto mechanics and I enjoyed that more than anything else and that cause me to let some of my other subjects fall behind a little bit. I passed them all but I wasn’t really prepared for college so when I got down to Louisiana Tech I had a doubly hard job making the grades there. But I did and I made it and almost a B average coming out. Distinguished Military Graduate but it was a tough road.

SM: Did you have any relatives that served in Word War II that you knew well?

JB: None that I knew well.

SM: What did your parents think when you went off to college and went to ROTC and were thinking about the military as a career as opposed to other work.

JB: Well, they didn’t have any objection, as you know they figured that I was a grown person at that time and I could make my decisions and they supported me.

SM: How about sports in either high school or college?
JB: Well, in high school I played football, baseball and in college my sports were strictly intramural type sports.

SM: In terms of extra curricular activities outside of school, did you hunt much growing up or things like that?

JB: Yes, I was an avid hunter and fisherman. I stayed on the Ouachita and Saline River every minute I could.

SM: What did you enjoy hunting?

JB: Squirrels, ducks, deer. You name it.

SM: As a pilot those skills might have come in less handy than if you were in the infantry but was there anything that you learned growing up engaging in those types of activities that did help you in the military?

JB: Well, certainly when I went through survival school, I was a big leg up on most everybody else in there. Of course, just learning common sense things and I’ve never been lost in the woods and I don’t think I have ever been lost in an airplane either. But mostly common sense stuff that you learn as you grow up and you observe things around you.

SM: Well, what made you decided on Louisiana Tech as opposed to other schools? What lead you there?

JB: Well, a friend of mine was one year older than me and he had just finished his first year there and at the time I had graduated from high school and spent the first month commercial fishing and I had my eighteenth birthday during that month. I lost thirty pounds during that month. So that was a rather tough occupation so I went to work for Crossett Lumber company--- working in the pipe shop as a laborer---- very hard work, nasty work, not much pay and I was looking for almost anything and my friend who’s father actually was about two steps up over me in the mill there, he recommended that I go to Louisiana Tech with him and give it a try and I did. Certainly glad I did.

SM: Besides ROTC, what were your favorite subjects then?

JB: Oh, economics, I guess probably economics. I can’t think of any others that was particularly favorites, I know that most all of them was tough because I did not take a curriculum in high school that would prepare me for it so I had to do a lot of digging.
JB: Well, I enjoyed history sure. I enjoyed geography but geography I don’t believe was a college course.

SM: Had you had any kind of flying experience prior to ultimately graduating and going into the Air Force--- private lessons or anything that?

JB: Nothing. No.

SM: Now, while you were in school--- of course the Korean War was in full blast---

JB: Yes, the Korean War really took off about the end of my first semester of my freshman year. Two thirds of the men in my class resigned from school and enlisted in the military. But I didn’t and I’m certainly glad I didn’t.

SM: Two thirds?

JB: About that many. I mean the freshman class of men really took off. Patriotism runs high in the South.

SM: Why did you decide against that course of action?

JB: Well, I had thought in high school about going into the Marines and had a Marine recruiter pump me full of sunshine and everything and I decided against that and decided that college was the thing to do and I was in college and I got to thinking, well if I go into the military I’ll probably never come back to college and if I stay in college at the end of college I can go in the military so I decided the best course was to stay in college and it certainly was.

SM: Now what about in ROTC in particular--- how did they handle talking about the war and did they talk very much about it all.

JB: Oh, certainly. The ROTC instructors were all experienced Air Force personnel and they talked about it and they would answer any questions. They were very forthright and they didn’t try to put out any propaganda. They told it straight like it was.

SM: Do you remember anything in particular with regard to the Korean War in discussions that you had in the ROTC classroom environment?

JB: Not really. I just remember some of the old timers there--- there was an old Senior Master Sergeant or Master Sergeant who had been in the Batan Death March. He was an old one. Several of them had been in World War II. Now the ones that I had were not Korean War Veterans because they was there at the time the Korean War
started. They were Veterans and a lot of them were World War II but not of the Korean War.

SM: Now in terms of the instruction that you received about the Air Force about the role, more importantly the role of the Air Force as one of the military branches. Of course just before you became an ROTC Cadet, the Air Force was created--- the United States Air Force was created, as it’s own institution----


SM: Right. They were really just a few years older as a separate institution. How did the Cadre discuss the issue or the role of air power in war and how it either compliments or was it more of a dominating factor in modern and future war?

JB: Well, I think probably--- I’m trying to think back because that was a long time ago--- of course they talked up air power. That is only way the Air Force ever became an independent service was you know air power and improving air power and people believing in air power and talking it up. Of course they talked it up and as you know recently in Desert Storm and over in Afghanistan our air power has proved that without it you really have a tough time.

SM: Did your perspective about the military, did it change over time as you were taking your ROTC classes or how did ROTC affect you in your perspective about military service?

JB: Well, it just strengthened my beliefs and my convictions and I felt all the way through, you know, that I was going Patriotic. I was a patriotic sort of individual and felt that I was going to serve my country and I did that---even after I got into the Air Force. For instance I was in the first squadron in the Air Force to get the KC-135, which is a Boeing 707 and I was recruited heavily by most all of the air lines that they were going into the jet air craft trying to get us guys that were young and had some jet experience to come with the airlines and my patriotism kept me with the Air Force whereas if I had gotten out and got in the airlines I probably would have made a lot more money but I wouldn’t have lived up to my own standards so to speak.

SM: Why don’t you go ahead and if you would describe your introduction into the Air Force after you graduated. When did you graduate in 1954?

SM: You went straight into the Air Force?

JB: Yes, I went straight into the Air Force, I believe the 24th of June 1954. Yes, I’m looking here at my DD214--- the 24th of June it was. I went down to Lackland Air Force Base for personnel processing for a couple of weeks and then went to Graham Air Base in Mariana, Florida for primary pilot training in PA18’s and T6’s and did well there. Graduated with--- we didn’t have honors per se but I graduated in the top part of the class. Won spot landing competitions and all that and was doing quite well. Went from there to Reese Air Force Base, Lubbock Texas. Right where you are at and went through B25’s and graduated there in July 19th, 1955. Had a great time. Competed with some of the local guys for the dates with the college girls there and went to the Hi Di Ho restaurant or drive and I don’t know if Hi Di Ho is still there or not.

SM: I don’t think it is.

JB: It was quite a spot. You ask the old timers around there if they know about the Hi Di Ho. It was just across the street from Texas Tech.

SM: Okay I will.

JB: And went from there to Randolph Air Force Base through B-29 school. At that time I applied for a regular commission in the Air Force. When I graduated from Louisiana Tech, I graduated as a distinguished military graduate and at that time instead of getting a regular commission they gave us a letter that said you will be afforded special consideration for regular commission and after one year of service. Well at that time it was a year and a month and year and two months and I applied for regular and was accepted as regular officer and retired as a regular officer. Went from B-29’s to KC-97’s at Castle Air Force Base in California but in route to there I went through heavy transport training in C-97’s at West Palm Beach Air Force Base Florida then through in flight refueling system school at March Air Force Base, California then to Castle Air Force Base where I was checked out combat ready in KC-97’s, refueling primarily B-47’s and B52’s, we were on a B52 base and the first B52’s and that was a long time ago. They just celebrated their 50th Anniversary now. We transitioned for the 97’s into the 135. At that time I thought I was to young to make it quick into the 135 so I volunteered for overseas assignment and was sent to Tripoli, Libya--- Wheelus Air Base, Libya as a SAC controller and then I stayed over there in the U.S. Air Forces Europe. I flew C-47’s and
C-54’s instructor pilot and both of those all over Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

Time to come back in April of ’59 I was notified that since I had previous tanker experience I’d be going to Tactical Air Command since they were building up their KB-50 tanker force. I fired a letter back to TAC Personnel and said if that be the case please send me to England Air Force Base in Louisiana since that was close to home. They accommodated me. I got there in May of ’59 and stayed in the 622nd Air Refueling Squadron until we closed it out in about May of 1964. Flew tanker missions as a pilot--- instructor pilot, standardization flight examiner, and mission commander and so forth literally all over the world. Then I was Base Operations Officer at England Air Force Base for a short period of time until I was notified that they needed experienced tanker people in Yokota, Japan in the 421st Air Refueling Squadron because they were tasked to take over initial refueling in Southeast Asia. Just happened that their operations officer had been a good friend of mine at England and I think he asked for me by name and that is how I got over there so quick.

SM: Before we talk about your service overseas beginning in Japan and eventually making your way to Vietnam, I would like to ask some follow up questions about your flight training and then some of your early assignments. First, in terms of flight training what were the biggest challenges you faced--- what was the most challenging part about learning to fly and things of that nature especially the aircraft?

JB: Well it was a completely new thing to me. If you could imagine if they plucked you out of the bushes and stuck you in a greyhound bus and said take off--- you never drove anything before so it was totally new experience. But, you know, I saw that other people flying them and I knew if they could I could. So I just applied myself and went after it. The PA-18 we initially started our training in was a piper cub but it was a super cub with a bigger engine, more power and then the T-6 Texan which was a very intimidating aircraft it was a big thing to get into. Then when I got out to Reese there is that B25, my goodness that is two engines and that thing was a monster. But they are all pretty intimidating but people flew them before, they could do it, I could do it.

SM: Now, in terms of navigation in the aircraft. What navigation training did you receive?
JB: Well, we received comprehensive navigation training all through out pilot training in all types of navigation. Believe me there is times during the career it certainly came in handy. I have some pretty harrowing experiences. For instance, going without any real navigation equipment in a C-123 from Langley Air Force Base, Virginia to Saudi Arabia and back. That is a long way to go in one of those little airplanes without any decent navigation equipment most of it was dead reckoning, by guess and by God and God was with us when we got there and we got back.

SM: You flew a 123 overseas--- over the Atlantic?

JB: Yes I did. That was following my service in Vietnam. I was with the Special Aerial Spray Flight at Langley Air Force Base Virginia. In January of ’69, I guess, took off and took the Special Aerial Spray Flight to Taif, Saudi Arabia and sprayed for desert locusts. That was something to behold just that mission. Tell you about the different legs of that thing. SM: I would like to talk about that when we get after your Vietnam experience that is fascinating. In terms of let’s say night time flying, what kind of navigation training did you receive for that or was that just instruments?

JB: Basically instruments.

SM: Did you receive any kind of celestial navigational training?

JB: Basic celestial yes. We carried navigators in the B-29’s and the B50’s and the 97’s and stuff so they did most of the celestial but we got a basic check out in it.

SM: You said you went through primary flight in Florida?

JB: Yes.

SM: What was the relationship like between the Air Force base personnel and the civilian population outside the base?

JB: They loved us and we loved them. It was a civilian contract school. The only military people on post were the base commander and three or four, maybe half of dozen military people--- check pilots and stuff like that but all the instructors and so forth were civilian. They lived downtown they were just part of the local population and they loved us and we loved them and we got along great.

SM: How about in Lubbock? What was it like when you were here?
JB: Lubbock was a little bit different. Lubbock was a military base and the people in Lubbock, some that I had in occasion in contact with were not to fond of the military guys going with their daughters.

SM: Or the young college men having to compete for dates?

JB: Right. The young lieutenants like I was there, we had cars and money and college guys most of them didn’t have and they resented that. I met a particularly stunning young blonde girl at Hi Di Ho one night and really enjoyed going out with her and she enjoyed going out with me and she took me to meet her family one time and her daddy didn’t take to me to good when he found out that I was in the military she had never told him. He found out I was in the Air Force and that turned him off real quick and I said, ‘Sorry about that. Goodbye.’

SM: What was it about the military the fact that you were in the military that he didn’t like?

JB: I have no idea; you know there are just some people who don’t like military. Or maybe the military is fine as long you keep away from them.

SM: As you were transitioning from these aircrafts--- the P18, the T6, to the B25 to the B-29 and the KC-97, what were the biggest challenges in attacking these new aircrafts, especially as they were getting larger, more multi engine four verses two and that kind of stuff? What were the greatest challenges as a pilot that you faced?

JB: Well, I’m really not sure. They were just bigger airplanes. We had more to handle. Of course, you go from a single to a twin engine aircraft that means you double your gages and your power gages and you go to four engine that quadruples it and like the KB50’s that is six engines of which two were jets. Just a lot more complex machine but as you gained experienced and confidence you just took it as another step in the ladder.

SM: In the Air Force at this time and you mentioned earlier you were getting advice from in being sent on specific types of assignments with Strategic Air Command as opposed to Tactical air command and stuff like that. What was the atmosphere like in the Air Force with regard to that, that is the SAC verses TAC type of atmosphere?

JB: Well, SAC was a more stringent type of atmosphere in the officers club for example, they had there pecking order in the bar. B-52 crews were on top of the bar and
down at the bottom were your non-rated in between, there is 97 drivers in the base flight
C-47 drivers and stuff like that. They thought they were a little bit better and of course
the SAC had spot promotion systems and General Lemay at the time was the SAC
commander and he run it with an iron hand and just a lot more stringent and TAC by just
the very necessity of the missions that we had to go on was a lot more loose. I was in
TAC with the KB50’s and we operated some very austere places. I operated at Midway
Island one time which is a Navy Base and we were doing all of our showering and
shaving and everything in salt water and they wouldn’t even let us in their Officer’s Club.
The Navy just didn’t like us too well so we survived and made due. Took an airplane and
went and took it to Hawaii and filled it full of all the booze that we wanted and brought it
back to Midway and the Navy guys looked at it and said they wanted some and we told
them where they could go. So you just do what you need to do to satisfy the situation as
it comes along.

SM: You were in Tripoli, Libya before you were flying tankers for the B52’s
correct?

JB: No, that was after I flew the tankers for the B52’s.

SM: Okay. Let’s talk about the B52’s first and flying those missions. As you
mentioned this is one of the first B52 units. What was the run that these B52’s were on?

JB: Well it was training missions and they flew all over. When I went into the
squadron at Castle Air Force Base, we had radio operators at the time on the KC-97’s.
My aircraft commander figured it would be good for me to have some extra duties and so
he got me assigned as Communications Officer. That experience in specialty stayed with
me throughout my career and the B52’s made their Operation Power Flight back there in
about 1955 or ’56, somewhere in that neighborhood and that was their first non stop
flight around the world--- the B52’s. They needed a communications flimsy for all their
routine and emergency radios worldwide to get them around. They were looking for a
communications officer and there was only two on base. One was a base
communications officer who run the teletype in the Comm Center and me. Here I am a
First Lieutenant at the time, a very young one but I was sat down and test or write up this
communications flimsy part of the operations order for that Operation Power Flight. It
was accepted and I got a little credit for that. The General personally commended me for
and since I was young and they called me quite frequently then from the wing to do communications tasks, which was in addition to my normal flying.

SM: So the B52 missions these were pilots in training primarily?

JB: Primarily, Castle Air Force Base was the training center for SAC B52’s at the time at the time and then later for the 135’s and the B52’s. So they were bringing in students from all over every SAC base that was scheduled to get B52’s would come out there and get their training and I was in the outfit that was doing the refueling for them.

SM: What was the greatest challenging in refueling that aircraft?

JB: Well, it was really not that great. Coming up behind a KC-97 the bow Wave of that B52 would lift the tail of the 97 up.

SM: Would it really?

JB: It would lift it right up. The very first refueling of the B52 that I observed from the back, I was standing up looking over the boom operator at the hook up of the B52, I wasn’t flying the air plane at the time I was there watching. My whole life went through the front of my eyes in a split second because the static electricity inside the 97 and all the multiple tanks in there when that boom got within a foot and a half or two foot from that B52 there was an arc or lightening bolt that went from the boom to the B52. It looked like it was as big and as long as your arm and I just I never witnessed that before and my life went in front of my eyes. I thought I was dead. Come to find that is just normal. That is static electricity grounding from one airplane to other. It was exciting the first time I had seen it let me tell you.

SM: I wonder how it look like from the pilots perspective? That is in the B52.

JB: Well he didn’t see it because the receptacle was back behind him. So the boom came in over him and he couldn’t see it behind him. The only one that really saw it routinely was your boom operator.

SM: Boy that must have been hairy. Once the aircraft came into proximity you mentioned the bow wake was pretty powerful but once the aircraft could adjust to that introduction of the bow wake then it was a pretty smooth ride?

JB: Yes, no problem. The B52 was so powerful that we could refuel it with very little trouble. Now, when we refuel B-47’s, a horse of a different color, then we had what we call toboggan or go into a dive. We’d start descending to maintain altitude because
and the same thing happen in the KB-50 refueling fighters particularly F-105’s. As they
got heavier they had to gain more airspeed or they would stall out. So we’d start in a
descent--- sometimes a pretty drastic descent--- the 97 to transfer forty thousand pounds
of fuel into a B47 you had to get into a pretty mean descent. Sometimes two or three
thousand feet per minute descent to keep up enough airspeed that the receiver didn’t stall
out.

SM: Now how long would take refuel a B52?

JB: Oh I really can’t remember but not all that long. It would pump at a pretty
rapid rate.

SM: Like a few minutes or---?

JB: Probably ten minutes.

SM: Okay. How about one the smaller aircraft? That had to maintain the higher
or had to gain speed so that it wouldn’t stall.

JB: Fighters, of course didn’t take near as long because it didn’t take near as
much fuel. But we refueled some of --- we used to have fighters in SAC F-84’s and stuff
and the F84’s would come back there and the boom operator would reach over and plug
in and sling him across to the other side but you would have him almost fueled up and
you would just sling him off and he was back and grab another one in just a matter of
minutes.

SM: That raises a good issue as far as the fact that you have a B52 that is taking
up so much fuel and then you get the smaller support aircraft, the fighters that are there
with the B52’s, was there much problem as far as the fighters running out of fuel before
the B52’s?

JB: Well at that time the fighters were not with the B52’s. It was a different
mission, it was a different aircraft.

SM: I’m sorry then how about escorts?

JB: No.

SM: They didn’t have escorts either?

JB: They didn’t have escorts. So they had their own equipment. Tail guns and
their jamming equipment and so forth.

SM: Then eventually, after that service, you made your way to Tripoli Libya?
SM: Now, what took you there and what was going on in Libya?

JB: Well I was there at a control room for SAC to bring--- deploy SAC wings out
in various places all over the world. They had a control room there to deploy SAC wings
and they only deployed one the year and a half I was there and eventually closed the
thing down and transferred me out of SAC into U.S. Air Forces Europe. I was the
Assistant Base Operations Officer there and flew C-47’s and C-54’s as instructor pilot in
both of them and flew all sorts of supports missions, VIP support missions, I flew
Embassy support missions, I flew the Queen of Libya back then, and just all over Europe,
Africa and the Middle East.

SM: What was the atmosphere in Libya towards Americans?

JB: It was not real bad but we were considered to be infidels. One time I landed
at Benghazi with the Queen of Libya, I went to Tobrook and picked her up and brought
her to Benghazi because her mother was in the hospital and she wanted to sit in the co
pilot seat, so I let her sit in the co-pilot seat. She took her little veil off and then wasn’t
all covered up like they felt they should be and landed and taxied in and some of the local
Arabs standing around on the ramp there at Benghazi airport saw her up there exposed in
the presence of an infidel and they didn’t like that too good. So when her Mercedes
Limousine took her to the hospital, with her lady in waiting, which happened to be a
young German girl, the German girl came back to go have lunch with us while we waited
on the Queen and when she got back we were locked in the airplane because they wanted
to get us off of there and we locked ourselves in and it was getting hot in there and of
course she talked to them in Arabic pretty stringently and they got away from then on I
told the Queen through the interpreter that you know she could get in the seat anytime she
wanted to but if she wanted to be during landing we would make it over at the British
airport by Tobrook where there wouldn’t be any local Arabs to see it.

SM: What was her reaction when she found out the people were angry about
that?

JB: She really didn’t have any reaction. I imagine she might have said something
or at least the German girl told her she said something. Of course I couldn’t speak to her,
I knew very little Arabic.
SM: Do you know about how old the Queen was at the time?

JB: I estimated that she was probably about fifty. She was just a pleasant looking woman and you would think what a Lebanese woman would look like with black hair and just very slightly tanned skin that is what she looked like. She was not an ugly looking thing, she wasn’t a striking beauty but she was a nice looking women. The King wouldn’t ride in the airplane. He would go all the way from Tobrook to Tripoli in a car. But he wouldn’t ride in an airplane. The Queen loved the airplanes.

SM: Any reason why in particular that you know of that the King wouldn’t ride?

JB: I don’t know, he just wouldn’t. His name was Idris, he just wouldn’t ride in the airplane.

SM: His name was Idris—-I-d-r-i-s?

JB: Yes. The Queen was Fatima. That was a just a very few years before Kaddafi.

SM: Which is why I was curious why about the atmosphere there at that time.

Now, when you would not be flying and you’d be on--- what was the base like there in Libya and how large was it?

JB: It was quite a large base. We had a full wing and we supported all of the fighter gunnery from Europe--- all of the fighters in Europe come down there for their gunnery. We had Seventeenth Air Force Headquarters on the base. A large base, large housing area but then there was a lot of housing off base and everything and we would go to town and walk around town and shop and do whatever we wanted to do and they were never a problem and we drove to various sites, you know antiquities and things all over.

SM: Never confronted, never met any confrontational Libyans or---?

JB: Never. I think Kaddafi just was a radical and got in there and stirred them up like other radicals that we know of.

SM: When did you leave Libya?

JB: April of ’59. May of ’59 is when my friend that stayed there flew and landed in the desert by the B24, you know that from World War II that was lost down there.

They discovered it in the desert. If I had stayed over one more month I would have been the one to fly down to it.
SM: When you left Libya---- did you come back to the United States?  
JB: Yes.  
SM: And what did you do at that point?  
JB: I went to England Air Force Base in the KB50’s.  
SM: Did you like the work that you were doing, the tanker work in particular?  
JB: Oh yes. You are referring to the work before I got to Libya and the tankers.  
Oh yes, I enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed all kinds of flying. I enjoyed over in Libya  
because I got to fly so much and over there I was relatively young and being an instructor  
pilot in both C-47’s and C-54’s I flew all over everywhere and just about had the freedom  
to go anywhere I wanted to anytime I wanted to. Made it real enjoyable particularly for a  
youngster.  
SM: At what point of your career did you get married?  
JB: Right after I got to England Air Force Base. I got there in May of ‘59 and I  
SM: Now was this a whirlwind courtship or did you already know your fiancé—  
future wife?  
JB: At the time she was in the Army, she was 2nd lieutenant in the Army and I  
was a 1st lieutenant in the Air Force. People are always asking, hey you were both in  
different services how did you get to know each other and her standard answer is well we  
have known each other since before we knew there was a difference between boys and  
girls. Literally that is right. I have known her all her life. I used to date her sister back  
some years before and her brother was married to a first cousin of mine and so we have  
known each other all of our life. Just finally just decided we needed to be together and so  
far we have been together over forty-two years.  
SM: That must have been a fun transition from going to being a bachelor in the  
Air Force to a husband and a family man in the Air Force?  
JB: Well, it was yeah. It kept me home a lot. When I say home, when I was  
there I was home instead out catting around the neighborhood. But my job still came first  
and that was what made our marriage so successful was that she knew that my job came  
first and so when things came up and I had to go and she knew it and she never question  
or asked all through out our career I’d come and say, ‘How would you like to go to
Japan?’ for example, and she would say, ‘When do you want me to start packing?’ That was her standard answer.

SM: You stayed--- how long did you stay there at England Air Force Base?

JB: May ’59 till July ’64.

SM: So that was very close to when you left to fly in Japan?

JB: Went from there direct to Japan. We closed out the KB50’s there in about April of ’64 and I went down as Base Operations Officer in England Air Force Base and transferred over to the 401st Air Base Group to Base Operations Officers because I had previously base operations experience in Tripoli where I was Assistant Base Operations Officer. Then I guess I was asked for by name to go to Yokota, Japan and because they had to pick up the tanker missions for the Southeast Asia war and I got out of there about as fast as you can move anywhere. Me and my wife and kids were in Japan before you can breathe twice.

SM: Why did you want to move so quickly?

JB: It wasn’t a matter of why I wanted to move so quickly it was they wanted me moved because as I understand it the fellow operations officer over there, whom I have known for a number of years back in Louisiana was told to provide tankers for the Southeast Asia conflict and he said he didn’t have the experience people to run that kind of mission. Keep a detachment in Takhli, Thailand and one in Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam. They said, ‘You know the answer to that?’ and he said, ‘What?’ ‘You just tell us who you want and you’ll have him,’ and, bingo, I was there.

SM: Now after that point all the number of important events that occurred in particular, of course, the--- when JFK became president, first we had the Bay of Pigs invasion failure and the Cuban missile crisis--- what were you doing during the Bay of Pigs invasion and then during the Cuban missile crisis?

JB: The Bay of Pigs I can’t remember, it doesn’t ring a bell with me but the Cuban Missile Crisis I was deeply involved in that.

SM: Why don’t you go ahead and explain that, please.

JB: Well on a Sunday morning there in the fall of must have been 1962. My wife and I were at the table having lunch and a phone call came in and said pack your bags for a couple of weeks and ease down here and let’s keep it low key. I was living on base and
I packed my bag for a couple of weeks and drove down there and my wife dropped me off and I went in and they said we are going to McDill Air Force Base in Tampa Florida and want you to file your flight plan VFR, no reporting, no radios, just fly in real low so that there is no way that the a radar in Cuba could pick you up. So I flew real low down to McDill. We had a pretty substantial tanker unit and at the time I was Standardization Flight Examiner and we refueled the RF-101 that was doing the low altitude photo recon work over Cuba. Did a lot of that, in fact I flew in over the land mass of Cuba to pick up one who had taken ground fire and was leaking fuel and hooked on to him and brought him out to Homestead down in South Florida and dropped him off right over the runway so he could land without flaming out or bailing out. Went through that entire situation working out of McDill flying almost everyday or every night until it was over. I think I was down there about six weeks or so.

SM: Now, while you were flying those missions--- how tense did things get in terms of the atmosphere of the base and the prospects for what might have turned out to be an actual nuclear war?

JB: Well the security--- when you say tenseness, I correlate that to security--- the security on a base was absolutely locked tight--- I mean that base was locked down like nobody’s business and as far as us thinking about World War III, we weren’t thinking that high up the totem pole--- I know that one night I received a call there---- when we went in there they had the SAC--- we called the SAC mole hole alert facility---- the B47’s--- they moved out and we moved into their facility. One night I took a phone call was from Bobby Kennedy. The Kennedy’s were running that war from the White House, which is the wrong way to do things of course, you know the military is suppose to run it—your not supposed to get a call from the what was then---- the Attorney General at the time but he wanted to know something and I took a phone call and he was on the other end of the phone. But we weren’t thinking World War III. We had enough men and equipment in Florida to sink, if we transferred it all over to Cuba it would have sunk the whole damn island of Cuba and we were ready to go down there and get them. I still think that we would have I don’t think that Khrushchev would have had the guts to stop us if we had went on in there and took it. But that wasn’t my decision to make. I followed my orders and followed them very closely and I didn’t question them.
SM: What did you do after the Cuban Missile Crisis? You were still with KB50’s right? JB: Right. Came back to England Air Force Base and continued missions and we kept detachment in McKinley Air Base in Bermuda and one in Lajes Air Base in The Azores and we were refueling continually and when--- I don’t recall at the time but sometime after that when John Kennedy made his trip down to Punta De Este I flew every night for five nights, going out of England, Louisiana down to Panama and back and refueling weather recalls aircraft and you know they were doing weather reconnaissance for that mission and when he flew in the day time all---- since I had been flying that mission--- I was mission commander to continue to fly it and refuel these escort fighters because he was going relatively close to Cuba so he had Air Force One had fighters all around him and there I was sitting out there with about three other KB50’s refueling them fighters.

SM: What were you hearing about the war in Vietnam at that time? JB: At that time nothing.

SM: Especially like any kind of information about the advisory effort and that kind of stuff? JB: Well, yes. I was asked now they came through--- and this was I suppose the CIA was running their little war over there in and teaching the Vietnamese how to do things and flying C-47’s and stuff and they came down and I know our form five clerk that kept the flight records had to go through everybody’s form five and see who had C-47 time. Well, I had a bunch of C-47 time and instrument pilot and instrument instructor time or instructor time in it from while I was stationed there in Tripoli---- it was all relatively current time and so with that time they reported it and they asked me if I would volunteer to go to Vietnam and take a discharge from the Air Force. In other words go over there and be a CIA Pilot. My first kid had just be born and here I am a fairly newly married guy with a little baby boy and they want me to resign from the Air Force and go over there and fly clandestine and I said no. I was asked several times and pressured somewhat. Some the Air Force guys were pressuring me to do it and I held out and I said if I’m ordered to go okay but I am not going to resign to go and I’m just not going to volunteer. But other than that, that was about all I knew of Vietnam until late or mid ’64 when I went to Yokota and found myself in Vietnam right in the middle of it.

SM: If you had resigned and had gone to work for the CIA did they tell you that
you would actually be working for Civil Air Transport or Air America—did they say?

JB: It didn’t go that far. I’m sure if I had questioned them and acted a little more interesting they may have told me more. But as I understood it I was going to be like Gary Powers was—the U2 Pilot that got shot down. He was Air Force resigned and went to work for CIA and if he had made it through eventually he would have come back on board on the Air Force see—with no lost time. By the way I knew Gary Powers while I was at Tripoli. Gary was flying the U2’s over there and his wife was a secretary there at 17th Air Force headquarters at Tripoli and I picked up Gary a time or two over in Athens and down in Turkey and hauled him back and forth to Tripoli—where he would visit his wife a few days and go back.

SM: That is amazing.

JB: That is just another thing that I remembered.

SM: What time period was that when you knew him down in Tripoli?

JB: Time period?

SM: Yes.

JB: ’57, ’58 or ’59. I guess I would say 1958, ’59. Not too long before he got shot down. I knew he was flying U2’s over there but I knew better than to ask him. I knew him and we spoke and everything and I knew what he had done but I didn’t ask him because I was top secret cleared and I didn’t talk about things that other people had no need to know. I would not question if I didn’t have a need to know either.

SM: Did you ever consider trying to get into that program—the U2 program?

JB: No.

SM: Did you ever get a chance to talk to Gary Powers afterwards—after he was shot down?

JB: No.

SM: How about other aspects or other information that might have been coming back with regard to Vietnam and special operations—because Ranch Hand had been flying defoliation missions going back to the early sixties and so was that kind of stuff mentioned or talked about all in the Air Force before you went to Japan?

JB: No. When the Ranch Hand was flying over there in the early sixties they took the special aerial spray flight out of Langley, which I came back to in ’69. They had
three or four--- five airplanes over there---- it was a very small operation and then it just started its growth there at around '65--- '66 that time period when it jumped up and we were up to about twenty five airplanes when I was there. We went from the B models to the K models. In other words they got the Jet airplanes--- the jet engines on them while I was there. Went from the silver airplanes to the camouflage airplanes.

SM: What was it like leaving and going to Japan--- what was it like being in Japan?

JB: My family was in Japan. I loved it there--- had a house and you know it was our house and went to Japan to go home and of course we went to all sorts of places--- we traveled all around Japan and the kids were real small but we took them to the zoos and took them downtown and we stayed at the New Otani Hotel when it was the largest hotel in the world, I guess, and just had a real great time. SM: How did the Japanese treat Americans when you were there?

JB: Good. They liked that American dollar. They treated us good, we had no problem with them. When I say we had no problem with them---- after we go the KB-50 outfit closed down at Yokota then I went to Tachikawa as a Base Operations Officer. I was flying C-54’s there for a while and then back to Yokota flying T-39s but was still Base Operations Officer at Tachikawa. We had a lot of protesters--- they would protest right off the end of the runway there and they put up bamboo poles in the flight path and were just radicals that was the age of the radicals and we had them here in the states too. We were having an Armed Forces day celebration there one day and I happen to be the base project officer for Armed Forces day and it was quite a big deal and we had over a quarter of a million visitors come on the base and visit and we had these protesters out there and I went out the gates where they were out there protesting and told them through my interpreter that they were welcome to come in and to enjoy and have some food and drink there and it would cost them nothing and they could see our exhibits and all they had to do and lay down their bamboo poles and take their little black arm band off and come and act civilized and we’d welcome them and you know everyone of them laid down their bamboo poles and arm bands and came on and just had a good time and we never had an incident one. Unbelievable. But we had I think three thousand Japanese police hid away in the hangers there ready to--- and we had some American security
police but we had three thousand Japanese black uniform Japanese police ready to take
them on if they caused trouble but they didn’t not a bit of problem. For the most part I
found that when I treated those people and when I say those people I am talking about
Arabs, Japanese, Germans or whatever, when I treated them with respect, they treated me
with respect. We got along good.

SM: Let’s go ahead and talk about your first experience flying into Southeast
Asia and if you would go ahead just describe the mission parameters and what you did
and what it was like? JB: Well, to start with it was a little bit different because when I
got there and got to Saigon at Tan Son Nhut the TET Offensive was going real good and
nobody had time to tell us anything.

SM: I’m sorry this was in ’68?

JB: Yes.

SM: Okay I’m talking about----

JB: Oh, are you talking about the first one?

SM: Right, I’m talking about the very first one that you flew in when you were
flying the missions out of Japan and eventually you made your way into Vietnam?

JB: I guess that would have been in August of ’64. Flew into Saigon and we
stayed in a hotel in downtown Saigon and flew missions primarily--- our missions were
refueling the fighters that escorted the reconnaissance aircraft flying missions up through
North Vietnam--- RF101’s. The F100’s were refueling them or was escorting them. We
refueled all of them and we start with we’d orbit way up there about the DMZ maybe
even in over in North Vietnam that was before they got so many sophisticated anti
aircraft missiles and radar and we would refuel them and wait on them. They would
make their runs low level super sonic, I guess and when they would come back we’d
refuel them where the 101 could go supersonic back to Saigon and quickly process his
pictures and we’d go back and land. That was kind of missions--- one of the missions
there when I took off going back to Japan I got ground fire and I didn’t know it till I got
to Japan one of my ground crew members found it and found a bullet hole on the back
end. But we were having real hard times there because the KB50 first place was a real
tough airplane to handle and to maintain and the R-4360 engine--- the biggest recip
engine built and and two J47 jets and we were just on the very end of the pipe line plus a mile
or two for parts. I actually made take offs out over there with an engine shut down from
the get go. Five engine take off to refuel a mission because a mission was considered
high priority and we didn’t have the parts and everything. So a little complaining and
bellyaching and grumbling over there finally got the KC135’s in. Since I had been in a
KC135 in the first squadron in the Air Force I knew a little about them and their
capabilities and so forth. But originally a SAC would not let the 135’s refuel anything
that had forward firing armament on it--- afraid if it had forward firing armament it might
shoot down the tanker. Like we would go up and refuel the fighters or orbit over say the
DMZ and RF101 would get refueled out more than fifty miles away from land when a
135 come out of Okinawa because a SAC tanker could not refuel those with forward
firing armament and could not get within fifty miles of hostile ground mass. So then the
101 would refuel on him and we’d rendezvous them over to us and we’d give him some
more fuel and top him off and then we’d wait on them and then we would refuel them all
coming back and the 135 would just refuel 101 out there to start with and then go back to
Okinawa and so they were just really fat catting it and doing nothing. We were taking the
brunt of it. Finally we got enough complaints going in there that we got a Major General
Moore there at Saigon and had heard us and he called and we got enough going that they
Air Force told SAC to get off of that stuff and get the 135’s in there and they relieved us,
which was a great thing and we took those KB50’s from there about the next thing we did
was take them to the bone yard at To Sat.

SM: Now, speaking of the forward firing armaments issue, was there ever any
concern over that static electricity arc that would form that might have a negative impact
on the forward firing systems?

JB: No, that was refueling a B52’s. Now the forward firing arment would have
mostly fighters we refuel with a probe and drop system and you didn’t have that same---
wasn’t the same system, it didn’t happen the same way--- a bit different.

SM: You didn’t have the static build up?

JB: No, as far as I know that was never a concern.

SM: Now, you got there in August of ’64, what do you remember hearing about
the Gulf of Tonkin incidents?
JB: Well, I just--- I heard I guess what you heard, same thing on the radio. I didn’t hear if there was any hanky panky going on or anything like that. We just had our orders and we flew our missions according to our orders.

SM: Was there any talk that this might--- after the incidents of the Gulf of Tonkin resolutions were passed--- the Johnson Administration bombed North Vietnam---

JB: When you are in the military like I was in the military---- you didn’t think about things like that you thought about taking care of your day-to-day missions and your quality of life. That was the stuff that was left up to the politicians to screw up. We didn’t do that. We won every battle in Vietnam and lost the war because of politicians.

SM: I was curious if people after those events and after those resolutions were passed and what not if people saw that--- that you worked with and this might be the beginnings of a major war.

JB: I don’t remember anyone every specifically talking like that. We were too busy taking care of our day-to-day activities to worry about that.

SM: Well, let’s see you flew missions out of Japan from basically August of ’64 until August of ’67--- three years?

JB: Yes.

SM: Most of those were over Southeast Asia or Vietnam or were they all over Asia?

JB: Well, the majority of them--- let’s say the KB50’s were Southeast Asia and then I flew C-54’s in from about April of ’65 until about April of ’66 somewhere in that neighborhood. I would say that more than fifty percent of them were Southeast Asia then I flew T39’s of which of maybe twenty five percent were Southeast Asia.

SM: You mentioned that the T39 is kind of like the executive aircraft?

JB: It is it’s a little twin jet Saberline.

SM: What did you fly--- what missions were those in Southeast Asia?

JB: Well---

SM: Like VIP flights?

JB: VIP flights. Senator Stewart Simington for example and several general officers and congressmen and so forth. VIP’s mostly. Occasionally we would have a
priority part some high priority airplane would be broke down and needed a part and we
were the fastest way to get it to them.

SM: During this time period, what were you hearing about the war in Vietnam
while you were in Japan? Did you hear anything did you have much contact with other
Air Force pilots maybe served a year and then went to Japan?

JB: Well, I talked to them all the time. I was in and out and talking to everybody
but I’m not sure what you are fishing for. We were and I was and all of the people that I
was associated with was in the Air Force and we obeyed orders and did what we were
told to do and we didn’t question it.

SM: I guess what I am looking for is when you were flying into Southeast Asia
and landing for instance and whenever you were interacting with pilots who had served
there, what were you hearing about the war--- the progress of the war--- whether or not --
-- how the United States was accomplishing it’s goals and things like that?

JB: I’m not sure that I heard. We got the news on the TV the same thing you got
back here. We knew that there was a lot of people over there and a lot bullets being shot
and a lot of bombs being dropped and but as far as getting intimate intelligence data we
got what we needed to do our mission and that was it.

SM: In ‘68 I would imagine that probably by late ’67 you probably received your
orders to go to Vietnam and fly with Ranch Hand?

JB: Yes when I left Tachikawa, Japan in August ’67, I had orders to Vietnam.
But I had orders to Vietnam to fly 123’s and after I got into the states back to the states I
got amended orders to UC123’s which is a Ranch Hand birds. Initially I was just
suppose fly the trash haulers--- transport. Then it was amended to the spray birds. So I
went down to Hurlburt field and went through the quick 123 transitions and spray
training. I had already been checked out in the 123 before and so it was just a quickie
check out and then spray training and on over there.

SM: How would you evaluate that training in Hurlburt before you went over
there?

JB: It was good. It was just fantastic training. Anytime you are flying a multi-
engine aircraft like that one hundred feet from the ground and doing semi-aerobatics and
when we would come off of a target and make a 180-degree turn, like forty five right and
two seventy left and back down on target again in formation it’s pretty wild and the
training was just outstanding. There is just no question about that. The instructors we had
were super, aircraft maintenance was good, the aircraft was in good shape. It was just a
good program.

SM: Were many of the pilot’s training you Ranch Handers as well?

JB: Many--- say this again.

SM: Were many of the pilots that trained you had they been to Vietnam and had
flown Ranch Hand missions as well?

JB: A couple of them yes. Two or three--- I would say about half of them had
been over there before and the other half had not.

SM: Did they tell you much about the specifics of their experiences--- specific
lessons learned and things like that?

JB: Most of them were just war stories. You know those war stories get
embellished a little bit along the way. But we talked about them but not that much but
most of it was down to business. Talking about the lesson plans for the day and the
missions we were flying and then debriefing the missions and that was that and then you
didn’t have a whole lot of time to go into to much other details.

SM: Now when you were training was that--- would you actually carry
something that you would spray water?

JB: We sprayed water down there all of the time. We watered that jungle down
around Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

SM: So that is why it is so lush?

JB: We watered it good.

SM: What did your family think about the fact that you were now going over to
Vietnam proper for an actual tour of duty?

JB: Really they didn’t think much about it. They knew that if whatever I got
orders to do--- that was my job. Like I said not being from the North, being from the
South--- the people in the south are real patriotic and they don’t really question things
like that very much. You do what you are told to do and what you are suppose to do and
you do the best job that you can do and you don’t worry about it.
SM: So why don’t we go ahead and discuss the trip over to Vietnam and what it was like when you first arrived in country. How did you travel over?

JB: I went commercial aircraft from Alexandria, Louisiana to San Francisco and then I went on a stretch DC8 commercial contract from Travis Air Force Base to Elmendorf, Japan to Tokyo and Tan Son Nhut and Saigon all on that stretch DC8 jammed packed in and got off there and of course when you unload about two hundred plus people off of an airplane in the middle of the night and shots are going off all around the place and artillery and everything else, you know it’s just sort of a spooky situation and they directed us over to building where we thought we were going into a BOQ and it was just barracks and you just go in there and there is some beds and if you want to get on one of those mattresses and sleep okay and if you don’t okay. Then the next day I don’t recall exactly how, but the next day, I guess one of our Ranch Hand airplanes came in and picked up the two or three of us that were there for going to Bien Hoa. They took us there and of course once we got there we were treated real well and giving bunks and hooch’s and welcomed to the group.

SM: When you say that shots are being fired and stuff like that--- this is the beginning of TET?

JB: Yes.

SM: Was anybody injured or any rockets or mortar rounds hit near you guys?

JB: Not in very close proximity. I could hear them but not real close proximity. Not enough that I was trying to dig a hole.

SM: But a good introduction?

JB: Yes. It got my attention. But I had been there before and it wasn’t near as much a shock to me as it was to some of the guys that was their very first time to set foot on the ground in Vietnam. Some of the first timers there were really pretty apprehensive. I wasn’t near so apprehensive because I had been there before and I had worn side arms down town--- lived in down town Saigon and everything else. So I wasn’t that shook up about it.

SM: Was there a mixed group on your aircraft--- that is Army, Navy or Marine Corps or Air Force and enlisted men and officers?
JB: Yes. Matter of fact in the plane there was families--- you know I set with two little girls that them and their mother was going to Japan. They got off in Japan. I know when Elmendorf Alaska, I took those two little girls and got off the airplane and walked around a little bit while they were refueling and it’s freezing and just mixed group of military passengers and dependents.

SM: When you got on your final leg and it was only men that were going to serve and women as I imagine that were going to serve in Vietnam, what was the atmosphere like on the aircraft?

JB: We were just tired. When you take off from Travis Air Force Base and fly to Elmendorf to Yokota and out of there and it’s long time and your but really gets tired. I can’t say that there is any no particular conversation that I can recall period. Everybody was trying to sleep and they had tired butts.

SM: So when you got there you got picked up as you said the next day taken to Ranch Hand and you were welcomed then. What kind of briefings did you receive when you first arrived there?

JB: Well, the Ranch Hand processed me into the squadron just like any other squadron would process you in and you go in and take care of all your necessary paper and first thing they give you is a bunk and where you can sleep and somebody is there every minute of the time you know to answer your questions that you might have and process you into the squadron and get you started in the check out program and get you qualified to perform the missions.

SM: Now you had to fly in country check out as well as, you had already checked out the aircraft back in Hurlburt?

JB: Yes, anytime when you go into a new outfit you have to stand and check right into the aircraft and of course we were flying combat aircraft over there--- combat missions so we had to get checked out.

SM: Was there any difference in how you were checked out at Vietnam verses back at Hurlburt?

JB: Well, I was checked out in Vietnam---- in Vietnam frequently you were taking ground fire and in Hurlburt we were not. So that is a difference certainly.
SM: How about in the evaluation system itself though--- were the check out pilots looking for anything in particular in Vietnam verses what they were doing in Hurlburt? Anything different?

JB: Not really, I’ve been a check pilot myself all the years and was a check pilot over there before I came back too and you just want to make sure that they guy is suitable to do the mission and he can do it physically, and mentally and emotionally. Some of the guys that were getting real close to their rotation home--- they got so emotionally tore up, that I was chief of scheduling--- I wouldn’t even schedule them to fly. Because I just didn’t believe that they were emotionally up to it. But the majority of us--- you know we didn’t have a problem but occasionally there would be one or two that would and that’s the stuff you are looking for. If an airplane takes a ground fire hit and the pilot clanks up well what is going to happen to the airplane and the other two or three guys in there.

SM: While you were there did that ever happen?

JB: Not that I know of, like I said I know a lot of people that got emotionally clanked up but----

SM: But that was at the end of their tour?

JB: Usually at the end of the tour. Some of them were real shaky all the way through and I was Chief of Scheduling from about within a month after I got there, I was chief scheduler and I scheduled and evidentially I was successful because I never had a problem and the commander and the operations officers all were very pleased with the scheduling and let me have free reign to schedule who I wanted to and when and where I wanted to. I would place these people that were, I figured, a little bit weak emotionally or otherwise with a strong person. We didn’t have co-pilots and pilots. Everybody was a pilot and you fly two missions a day and you fly usually one in left seat, you were pilot and the next mission you flew in the right seat you were a co-pilot. So you always matched up strong with--- weakness with strongest. I did that. The only thing that happened the whole year I was there that was a real catastrophe was an airplane got shot down one day and I was flying his wing when it got shot down and it was in the southern part of Vietnam and he went in inverted and I was just almost right directly over him when he hit and exploded and we lost those three guys, that was the only three we lost in my year over there.
SM: Do you want to take a break?

JB: No. I was just was--- I’m just an old man here. I’m fixing to celebrate my 31st Anniversary and my 39th birthday and I’m kind of got a little just Texas cedar allergy.

SM: When did you fly your first mission your first actual defoliation mission?

JB: Within three days of the time that I got there. Now, for the first three or four months, we started flying what we call trash haulers---- resupply missions. We took the spray tanks out and started hauling resupply missions. Because the TET Offensive every little base out there needed re-supply. They needed ammunition and groceries a lot worse than they needed the defoliation so we were flying in there and we were not trained in school in regulations for air lift--- the limits on the length of the air runways that were suppose to operate in and all their procedures and this and that and the other. We were just out there and if somebody said I got a load that goes to Ban Me Thuet--- load it on we’ll take it. If I got a load that goes to Son Be or I got a load that goes to Bo Dop or at some little bitty short airfield that you weren’t supposed to get into maybe only the Caribous or the helicopters are supposed to go in, and we went. We knew all those airfields and we used them as a emergency fields in case we got shot down and need the emergency field to get into, you didn’t really care if it was real short--- you could just get in there and save your life that is what you wanted so we flew in and out of them not knowing that we were breaking the rules and we set some records for airlift tonnage and so forth haul that could never be equaled because the rules wouldn’t let them be.

SM: Now was that attitude, that is, the mission comes first and if we know that we can do the job even though the airfield was short or something we are going to do the job. Is that something that came down the chain of command from the commander of Ranch Hand?

JB: That was just a Ranch Hand spirit. We just knew we could do the mission and we did it.

SM: Now who was the commander while you were there?

JB: Art McConnell had been in the class with me at Hurlburt and he went over--- I don’t remember the commander before him but anyway Art took over after a couple of months as commander and when he took over he was very low key. Art knew me from
Hurlburt and the operations officer was also with us at Hurlburt--- I can’t remember his name now but anyways they knew me from down there and consequently we had a good rapport and as Chief of Scheduling and whatever and missions flying and aircraft capability and so forth, they knew me and knew I could handle it and so we just got along real good and there wasn’t any problem with them having to test me to see if I could hack the mission or something.

SM: For the first couple of weeks that you were there while TET was still going on a little bit---

JB: It was a bunch going on.

SM: That was going on a bunch. It seems like you guys still went out on your defoliation missions but what were you hearing at your base about the city fighting and stuff like that?

JB: About what’s that?

SM: About the city fighting. All the fighting in the cities throughout South Vietnam?

JB: We saw it. I seen the fighters striking and bombing right in Bien Hoa city and right in Tan Son Nhut and I flew resupply missions into--- oh I can’t remember the place over on the coast over there---

SM: Vung Tau?

JB: It was north of Vung Tau up there--- I can’t remember.

SM: Nha Trang?

JB: No south of there but I went in that place because they had some Viet Cong prisoners they captured and they wanted us to go get them and bring them over to Bien Hoa and they were going to take them into the big Army base there and I can’t even remember the name of it--- but the fighting was so heavy on one end of the runway that we had to land on the other end and real short and turn around. When we took off, we had to do the same thing and we went out there and taxied--- we just had a very short amount of runway and overrun in front of us and when we took off to stay away from the fighting and by the way I couldn’t take the prisoners. I went in and I saw them and boy they were very arrogant SOB’s they wanted to take my pistol right off my side and shoot me. I said don’t even reach for that pistol because I wouldn’t blink an eye and blow your
head off. The Vietnamese wouldn’t let us have them. But we had planned that we were
going to take them on stretchers, hand cuffed on stretchers and put them on 463L pallets
in the aircraft and if we had any problem with the aircraft, we were just going to jet us
and the pallets out with them on it. That sounds pretty bad but that is what we said if we
had problems if the airplane won’t fly we are just going to jettison them out first and
reduce the weight. But I have been into a place up—Pleiku and another place up in the
highlands but I can’t remember but the anyway fighting was going on just right there and
we flew in and unloaded equipment and unloaded some personnel and stuff and got out
and the fighting was going on hot and heavy right there within eyesight.

SM: When you went on your missions, what kind of briefings especially during
TET, what kind of information would you get about activities and what you would expect
as far from ground fire and would you guys try to avoid it and stuff like that?

JB: We got very little briefings on ground fire because they really didn’t know
where the ground fire was going to be coming from. It just came from least expected
spots. Of course we talked to each other in the air about the ground fire. If we were on a
spray mission for example, cruising along at a hundred-thirty knots at a hundred feet if
we heard ground fire we called it and the spray operator in the back end would throw out
a smoke grenade and if you were right on airspeed and altitude that smoke grenade would
hit about a hundred meters down stream from the ground fire and the fighters then could
look at that and calculate back up about a hundred feet and they would go in and straff
and bomb the heck out of it and to let the guy know that when he fired at us he made a
mistake. But you know you never really knew and we didn’t get that much—there was
so many people over there and so much going on that they didn’t talk to each other. One
night I was coming from Son Be mountain air strip back to Saigon and I was cruising
along there and this is just east of Tay Ninh and I look to the east of me and here’s all
these explosions going on over there. Looked over to the right and you could see the
artillery fire and they were firing over us. Man, I went down quick—black night but I’m
down there flying at tree top level. That artillery was going right over us and they didn’t
tell us that they were going to fire and we didn’t tell them that we were there and they
just free fire and if one of them 155 millimeter rounds that come through that 123 it
might smart it a little bit. But you know there is a lot of confusion like that going on.
One time I was spraying a river down in the south and it was a fairly small stream really
and it was very crooked and it had three of us spraying. I was flying right over the stream
and I had one man on each wing and we were contouring that river and it was pretty wild
flying and had fighters on us and these fighters were dropping bombs right ahead of us.
Just try to keep their heads down you know while we went over and I went around one
curve and there was one of these Navy Riverine crafts like these small PT boats they used
over there and I started hollering, ‘Abort! Abort!’ And these fighters pulled off and
saved that guy and the boat and all them on its life otherwise they would have took a five
hundred pound right in the middle of them. We didn’t know that they were there and
they didn’t know that we were going to spray there and then it was just by the grace of
God --- they didn’t get blown right out of the water. So if you can imagine the confusion
that existed--- here we were Ranch Hand and there they were Navy Riverine craft and all
of the chain of command between us and them is non-existent.

SM: What precautions were made to make sure that your defoliation missions
didn’t hit other units especially Americans but also Vietnamese for instance ARVN
someone who might operating in close-by areas?

JB: Well, of course we were tasked by MACV, Military Assistance Command
Vietnam. They would give us a primary target, a secondary target and then we had
tertiary target. Wherever they tasked us to go we would head and if we could make the
primary, fine, and if we couldn’t we’d get the secondary and if we couldn’t do that we
got the tertiary. Theoretically, we never sprayed the good guys and the only time we
sprayed them [intentionally] is we had one bird over there--- Old Patches was our
mosquito bird and we sprayed all the friendly areas with Malathion for mosquitoes. A lot
of people said they got sprayed over there with Agent Orange really got sprayed with
Maline for mosquitoes. There is a lot of misunderstanding about the Agent Orange--- I
recently had a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel here told me that he was exposed to
Agent Orange on the C130. He saw that orange all on the airplane down there and I said
what? He said it was on the floor of the airplane it was all orange and I knew that is what
it was and I said no you didn’t, the only thing that distinguished Agent Orange from
Agent White and Agent Blue was the color of the stripe painted around the barrel. When
I told him that it kind of made him mad. He thought he had been in there with that Agent Orange in that airplane all that time.

SM: How did he describe what he saw in the airplane? It was something that was colored orange?

JB: Something orange in there--- it might had been residue from a smoke grenade or it might had been shark repellent that had come out of a survival vest or something like that or powder got in the airplane. He saw that and he thought it was Agent Orange. So there was all sorts of wild stuff like that. I’m part the Air Force study for Agent Orange. It started in 1982 and its twentieth year is coming up now. I’m scheduled the 23rd of June in LaJolla California Scripps Medical Center for that. That is evaluating the people who were there and who were actually exposed to it as opposed to the control group that were not exposed to see what kind of a health risk and so forth and of course by being a part of that and I get the reports on all that and the latest I’ve got is the report of the ‘97 studies. All these people that talk about all these Agent Orange experiences they had and I just shake my head--- they don’t know what they are talking about.

SM: Well at the time how were you cautioned with regard to handling the defoliants that you were spraying because you just didn’t---

JB: We were not.

SM: Oh you weren’t?

JB: We were not. We were not. We just knew better than--- its diesel carrier and you just didn’t go out there and drink it. Every time you’d fly a mission for instance if we kept the windows open in the front and the doors in the back and the air circulation would come in the back door and out the front window. So if you flew in the left seat into the mission, you would have a little slimy oil on the right side of your cheek. If you fly on the right seat you would have a little on the left cheek and that was some of that leaking back there and getting in the air and coming through there. One time I got shot up real bad and the right gear shot off and control cables and stuff and crash landed but in the mean time I took a twenty millimeter hit through a main line and had a thousand gallons of the stuff sprayed out inside the airplane and it was three or four inches deep on the floor of the airplane. When I crashed landed on the runway there at Bien Hoa and trying to get out I come down off the flight deck and slid down on my back and was
laying down in three inches of stuff. Then I rolled over and I’m wanting to get out of there in a hurry because the thing might catch on fire or something. I was crawling to the door and they are reaching in the door and got me out and had the stuff all over me. Well I was mission commander so I went right in and they rushed me right in to operations and I washed it off my hands and my face and briefed a second sortie and got out into another airplane and flew. When I got back from there it was dried up and in the process of the day I flew two or three tests flights and went over to Saigon and took a load of mail, brought a load of mail back and this happened at about eight o’clock in the morning and it’s five o’clock in the afternoon before I ever got into the shower and got to change clothes and wash. So if that is not exposed I don’t know what is. But a lot of people they tell you they got all this exposure and so forth. The exposure they got was walking across leaves that had fell off the trees. Or maybe if they took a little ground they fell down on these leaves that have fell off the trees. But they were not exposed excessively to the Agent Orange I don’t think.

SM: When you would go on these types of missions, you were all in a line correct?

JB: In what?

SM: What kind of formation were you flying when you were on these missions?

JB: We flew anywhere from one to six and I think one mission I flew ten ship formation and it’s just wing tip formation. When you say wing tip you got one airplane near and the other one is just to the right and back just slightly and that is typical formation. We flew one---- I believe it was ten ships we flew over the Plain of Jars in Laos. I don’t know how we didn’t all keep from getting shot down that day. It looked like you could get out and walk on the traces coming up at us?

SM: When was that mission?

JB: You say when?

SM: Yes sir, when was that?

JB: If you got a couple of minutes, I’ll get my logbook and I’ll tell you exactly when it was?

SM: I’ll pause the recording.
JB: I'll find it here in a second. I was flying out of Pleiku, so I'm looking for Pleiku here in this book. Pleiku to Pleiku--- Laos--- 17th of October '68.

SM: Now is the first mission over Laos you flew?

JB: That is the first mission over Laos that I flew--- the only one that I flew.

SM: What was the--- do you know the purpose behind the mission was the operation?

JB: Defoliate the Ho Chi Minh trail and Plain of Jars to make it a little bit more accessible to where they could see what was going on down there.

SM: Do you know if was in support of any projected ground operations?

JB: No we didn’t have ground operations in that area. Other than recon stuff. That was just the Ho Chi Minh Trail down through Laos and Cambodia down there we just defoliated that trail where they could see them a little bit more and be able to attack the supply trains.

SM: How about into Cambodia did you fly any missions there?

JB: Not in Cambodia per se. I flew right on the border and probably flew right over Cambodia some but in the jungle they don’t have a line marked on the border. So we didn’t think we were over Cambodia. Lets put it that way, but we were within very few feet of it.

SM: Now in the mission that you flew over Laos--- you said you took a lot of ground fire--- no one got shot down?

JB: No one got shot down?

SM: No one got injured?

JB: No one injured. Just a lot of holes in a lot of airplanes, but we were lucky. That 123 is like a big old flying barn, if you don’t hit the main post that hold it up it just keeps going. It’s not a lot of sophisticated stuff to go wrong; it takes a lot of ground fire and keeps going.

SM: Anybody loose any engines?

JB: One that I know of I think there was only one that lost an engine and he was about two places up in front of me. I saw it when it happened. They were firing what we call ZPU4’s at us. That is the Quad barrel anti-aircraft and they look like softball size balls of fire, just streaming up at us. But you know the tracers there is only one out of
every six is a tracer, so those things look like they are solid and man you know that there
is five more in between there that you are not seeing. That gets your attention let me tell
you in a hurry.

SM: Was that the operation where you got fired up most during your tour or was
there other experiences similar to that?

JB: Oh, there was many, many of them. I’d say that was the most intense ground
fire in any one particular mission there but we had lots and lots of them that we got--- a
lot of ground fire. That wasn’t the only one. Personally, let me look and see what I’ve
got recorded here back in this logbook again. This logbook is pretty thick. I got six
hundred and nine hours of combat time, thirty-six hits. That is known hits--- there is
others that I got hit that I didn’t know about.

SM: Was there much concern as far as taking ground fire that since the Agent
Orange or the defoliant was the base of it was diesel was there very much concern of that
being ignited if the tank were to get hit?

JB: No. Diesel is not highly explosive. You can take a bucket of diesel and
throw a match in it and the match will go out and that is it.

SM: You mentioned consuming it and you wouldn’t want to consume it but while
you were there was there a shot club an Agent Orange shot club?

JB: Where they drink the stuff?

SM: Yes, have you heard about that?

JB: I’ve heard people say that they had drank it--- I heard a couple of them say
that--- I can’t remember the boy’s name—Jack Spey was one, I think he was one of the
very early ones. But as far as I know no one ever did.

SM: Well, are there any other operations that you would like to discuss---
specific flying missions that you were doing?

JB: You mean in Vietnam?

SM: Yes, sir.

JB: Well I flew all over the whole country there and it was pretty wild
experiences. I was at--- this is during the days when we had the tanks out--- TET
Offensive trash hauling, I took a load of stuff into Song Be and late in the afternoon I was
on my way back to Bien Hoa to call it a day and this Army Special Forces Sergeant First
Class come over and he said he had two pallets of ammunition and rice he needed to get into Bu Dop really bad--- he needed it over there and he said this is really bad. Well like I told you while ago we didn’t know about the rules on this short airfields and having to get orders from the airlift center and all that and I said well, put it in the airplane and I’ll take it over there. Just the goodness of my heart so I took off and headed over there to Bu Dop which wasn’t very far--- just north of Tay Ninh right on the Cambodian border. I found a little air strip and I’m calling the guy on the FM radio and told him I had a couple of pallets there and I guess the young GI that was on the radio just acknowledged okay and so I said I will be in, in a minute and I landed and I had to do a steep assault approach to get in there. Got in and taxied down towards the end and turned it around and my spray operator was opening up the door in the back and he said, ‘Well, here they come.’ and they were running out here to us and I said something on the FM radio back to the guy in the compound and he said, ‘If you see somebody get the hell out of here because they are not friendly.’ He said, ‘We are not coming out.’ The young guy that initially talked to me and had got off and the old guy had got on and what he was telling me then was Viet Cong. The spray operator released the pallets and I poured the coal to that thing and we took off with the back end open--- the door open and the pallet just run out. We left them there and we got out. But we were just that close to getting shot up or killed or captured or something. Believe me I had some very unpleasant word to say over that FM radio back to those people down there about that thing. Next time somebody wanted me to do a mission like that I told him where he could take it.

SM: What were you dropping off do you know?

JB: Just two pallets, supposedly rations and ammunition. That is what he said it was and I didn’t pay any attention to it.

SM: Probably that material fell into the hands of the---

JB: The VC, you bet they got it. Now, they had the--- I’ve got one somewhere the little yellow piece of paper, Chieu Hoi pass they called it. You know the Psy war people dropped it all over the place. Turn in that thing and give yourself up and you get a free ride to Saigon and all that. Well, they had a bunch of them up there in Son Be one day with their Chieu Hoi passes and they wanted to go to Saigon and they told me we go Saigon, your airplane. No you don’t go Saigon in my airplane. They insisted and they
were going and they just coming on the airplane. Well, I pulled my pistol out and I stuck it right in his nose and I said you back up, you don’t get on this airplane. I got some Army troops and I got their attention and I said get this people away from this airplane. We took off and left them and I wasn’t about to take them. But I guess legally and theoretically we were supposed to haul these people but no one had manifested them and asked me to haul them and they just had their Chieu Hoi pass and I figured what they were Viet Cong taking them a little R&R in Saigon and after another week they would be out there and shooting at us again and then get them another pass to go back to Saigon. I didn’t want any part of it.

SM: That is an interesting perspective but they could use those passes as free transport to an R&R station.

JB: Have you heard that before?

SM: No.

JB: That is the way it looked to us.

SM: Now what did you guys think about the way the war was going? Especially as your year wore on and as you were getting close to December, what did you think of the prospects for victory, what did you think about the American efforts in Vietnam?

JB: Well, it was very obvious that the war was being run by the White House. Lyndon Johnson was running the war. We couldn’t win the war over there with Lyndon Johnson asleep at the white house. We knew that and we were getting a little bit bent out of shape for example there at Bien Hoa, I was what we call CinC-Hooch— Commander in Chief of the Hooch, I was the ranking man out of the eight that lived in our hooch. So I had hired an old Vietnamese woman, old mamason to clean our hooch, do our laundry and shine our boots for us. She would point at my watch, she would point at ten o’clock on my watch and she would point at the clock and she would say— you go bunker, you go bunker. Well ten o’clock sure enough here come the rockets and mortars. So they knew what was going on. We took a A1E sky raider that had been all junked and wrecked there and I said we I mean other people on the base there and got a couple of them flyable and took the Vietnamese pilots and set them on the high speed taxi way loaded with Napalm and cluster bomb units and as soon as they fired them rockets and mortars the C-47--- the AC-47 Spooky Bird up over head could see the rocket and mortar
fire or they could see it from the control tower and as soon as they fired it, well then they would launch those two A1’s loaded with Napalm and cluster bombs and they would just take off and they were on the high speed taxi way to start with and they just zoom right off and turn right across the river and salvo the load. Well they stopped that crap for a while but then we got severely chastised from Washington for doing unauthorized missions. So we couldn’t defend ourselves. During the time that we were trash hauling, we had an artist there in our squadron that was really good and he would take these thirty by forty poster boards and he painted a picture of a pregnant 123 on there and called that a trash hauler and we would have trash hauler of the week. The guy that hauled the most tonnage was trash hauler of the week and he put his name on this poster board. We had that thing up there and we had another one a C123 with a big horseshoe on it and that was Magnet Ass of the week. The one that got the most hits, in fact I stayed magnet ass of the week for about six weeks running. We had our spray bird Old Patches the one that is up in the Air Force museum at [?] was sitting out there and it was the only silver bird we had the rest of them were all camouflaged at that time, it was silver except everywhere that it took a ground hit and it was three hundred plus hits. They had patched it and painted the patch red. So it looked like it had speckles, measles. But we had this load of people coming in and they were always coming in--- congressional people and what not. They saw this magnet ass of the week poster and trash hauler of the week and saw patches out there with the red patches and said that must be horrible for morale. Then we got orders down thru channels to do away with that. Paint that airplane and do away from those poster boards and that was really a morale factor with us, to have them. They said that must be horrible for morale so we were told to get rid of them and we knew then that they we were fighting a loosing war. If you got some jackass congressional group coming over there that can cause you to take a poster down off your wall as a morale factor with your squadron, then we are in the wrong war. But regardless of that we did what we were told to do and we carried out our orders to the very best of our ability at all times and we didn’t let anything like that affect the way that we performed our missions. It’s just that we weren’t too happy about it sometimes but we did them all just exactly the best of our ability.
SM: You mentioned before that there were times you would have to fly missions, not in Vietnam but before you went to Vietnam sometimes you had to fly missions and short of parts--- five engines instead of six. What was the supply system like in Vietnam?

JB: While I was in the Ranch Hand there, I was not aware of any supply problems, air craft supply problems, let’s put it that way--- we kept our airplane flying the maintenance crews did, of course, the 123 is a simple machine anyway and it didn’t take a lot of complex parts to keep it going. The worst problems we had was with the uniforms. I don’t remember the exact date but a hundred twenty-two millimeter rocket came in and it almost got me trying to get out of my hooch into a bunker and it did get my hooch--- burned my hooch and lost all of my clothes and everything like that and for two or three days I was walking around there barefooted and had on a T-shirt with two stripes on it. I was a Major but I was wearing a two stiper because some of my airmen gave me this shirt to wear because all I had on was my underwear that I had trying to get to my bunker. Trying to get some boots--- I finally got some--- I was borrowing boots from somebody else to wear and I finally got--- I don’t know I was at some place up the road some where and I don’t know remember where now, it might had been Phan Ran or someplace like that, I stopped in and asked for some supplies and if they had any boots and said yes, so I got boots and picked up some uniforms that was harder to get uniforms and fatigues and boots than it was to get airplane parts.

SM: How about the food? How was the food there?

JB: Under the circumstances it wasn’t too bad. Of course we always managed to do for ourselves, being an old Louisiana guy and lived in Louisiana a while and familiar with that good Louisiana cooking. A man came in one day named Andrus Kibodeaux and he was from Bro Bridge, Louisiana. Well soon as Andrus come in--- Andy we called him, I got him in my hooch and I figured out quickly that he was the best suited to fly the bug bird--- the patches bird--- spraying the good people. He was stopping at all these various bases around and hauling stuff into them and transporting frozen steaks--- cases and cases of frozen steaks and everything else. Everyday that they would come around he would bring back a case of frozen steaks. We had our little charcoal grills going out there and around our area, man we would eat steaks like you wouldn’t believe and I
would have old mamason to bring me in some of those gigantic shrimp out of that south China sea and Andy would have his mother to send stuff over from Bro Bridge and we had Shrimp Gumbo and we cooked our own food and it was really great. But then the stuff that you got at the Officer’s Club and the mess hal’s was you know not bad. It wasn’t some steak house but it wasn’t bad. We survived and we didn’t loose weight.

SM: What did you think of the overall facilities that they had available. That is where you slept or the medical facilities and things like?

JB: Well the facilities where we slept was hooches and they were eight people in the hooch and it was opened bay in the back and it had one little room up front and we would have a refrigerator and where you would keep soda pop and beer in there. They were built with a lot of holes for air circulation and screen and we—through hook and crook got us a bunch of plywood and some air conditioners in my hooch after one of them I mentioned burned, we got another hooch that needed a lot of work so we went over to the civil engineer yard where they had tons and tons and tons of plywood and we did a little midnight requisition and got us enough plywood to seal that thing up completely— sealed the floors and the walls and everything. There was a hotel in downtown in Saigon one of my guys found where the Army was just moving out of it and giving it to the Vietnamese Army and they left these single room air conditioners in I think fifteen rooms and he got a truck and went down there and got all those air conditioners out there--- some how or another he got them. We put six of them in our hooch and give the other eight of them to the young enlisted crew that did all the air conditioner service. The deal was that we would give them the eight and if they come over ours serviced up completely and they did. Of course, we furnished them plenty of beer but they come over and drink beer and clean our air-conditioner’s and change the filters and we would sleep under one or two blankets in there and when we would get to sleep it was usually in the day time and we would get into from the missions. I was usually out but most of the guys were flying the things and they would go in there in the middle of the afternoon and sleeping under two blankets because they had that much air conditioning going.

SM: Now where did the power from this come from?

JB: The power plant on the base.
SM: So it was on base on supply. How about recreational stuff, what did you guys do for fun?

JB: Went on R&R.

SM: Where did you go?

JB: I went to Hawaii and met my wife and then I went to Hong Kong and then I went to Sydney Australia. This is of course was many years ago so I can tell it now but right after I got there I wanted to make sure that I could get to Hawaii to meet my wife you know about half way through the tour so I went to the R&R office and this young airmen first class there, three striper got to talking and everybody wanted to fly on a Ranch Hand bird and everybody wanted to fly on them. Particularly if they took a ground fire hit you know they could go back and brag to their buddies that they had flown in a combat mission that took ground fire. So we had a heck of a lot of bargaining power there. This young guy that run the Air Force section of R&R office wanted to fly on a Ranch Hand mission and I said sure I’ll fix it right up for you, I happen to be the Chief of Scheduling. And I had him come down to my hooch and gave him a little beer there and talk to him and after he got really confident and knowing who I was and I took him on a mission and everything, he said, ‘I want to talk to you confidentially. Can I come over to your hooch?’ and I said, ‘Come on,’ and he said, ‘There’s so many seats R&R seats that are empty and the Army is sending their people three and four and five times. As long as the seats have somebody in them, they’ll keep allocating the seats but if you let a seat go empty, the next round you loose that seat.’ He said, ‘We need some people to go and fill them seats or we are going to loose them.’ Technically we are only supposed to get one R&R but he said, ‘We fly them out of here out of Saigon and we fly them out of Da Nang and we fly them out Cam Ranh Bay.’ He said, ‘If you will do the scheduling and keep it quiet,’ he said, ‘You can have all the R&R seats you want.’ He said, ‘You just bring the names to me and just tell me where they want to go and we’ll ship them out and we’ll cut the orders.’ So I got the commander and the ops officer, whom I had known down in Hurlburt going through the original school and in a closed door session with them and I explained all of this to him and I said, ‘If you will just give me the power and tell all these people here that it’s got to be strictly on the QT and give me the power to do it and I’ll get us all an R&R that people can stand,’ and they said
okay and they had a commanders call the old man told them he told them that I would be briefing them after he left, he said he wasn’t going to stay for briefing but I would brief them later but they had his full backing and I briefed them. So we got everybody a week in Hong Kong, a week in Hawaii and a week in Sydney and some others to Bangkok and Tai Pai and so--- you do what you have to do. So I had the people come to me and they would come and give me a date and when they wanted to go and where they wanted to go and I would get them scheduled for it. Of course I was running the scheduling I could just schedule it, just work it into my master schedule. That kept people--- kept the morale very good, very high. Enlisted and officer’s and it would give me a real big stick around there to. Which I enjoyed being able to have people to thank me for getting them the R&R they wanted.

SM: What about in country recreational stuff, did any USO shows come through?

JB: Very occasionally. Now when we were trash hauling around there, we carried--- I got some pictures here of me and some USO Korean gals that were doing a little USO show and some of the entertainment would come in the officer’s club once in a while and this and that and the other but we didn’t have very much. Most of the class acts that came into Da Nang and to Cam Ranh Bay secure facilities that were closer to the coast to where they could get and in out safely. But we never had anything in Bien Hoa to speak of.

SM: What about facilities near where you were based, library or?

JB: We had base library and handball and racquetball courts and stuff like that---gymnasium but didn’t have much and you didn’t want to get off base to much. It wasn’t smart to get off and wonder around off base too much.

SM: Now you mentioned you had a hooch mate, did you have much interaction with the Vietnamese civilians in particular?

JB: No.

SM: Just that hooch mate?

JB: Well, she was the old mamason that took care of our cleaning and washing and so forth and making up the beds and shining our boots and of course we had during the trash hauling days, one day at Tan Son Nhut I was standing on a ramp waiting for them to load my airplane and this Vietnamese come up to me there real smart-alecky like
and I had my buck knife out strapping it on my boot--- I was sitting there strapping it and
that knife could shave. He came over to me and smart-alecked off and he said, ‘Me VC,
me VC, what you say?’ I took that knife and I got a lot of hair on my arms--- I have a
real hairy arm and I just zipped that knife down there and shaved a streak about eight
inches long and an inch wide and he saw that hair flying--- of course Vietnamese don’t
have hair anyway and he saw that hair flying and I stuck that knife over him and said,
‘Me no like VC.’ And he turned around and run. But he was being smart to me and so I
really got him. I shaved and stuck the knife at him and then said, ‘Me don’t like VC,’
and, man, he turned around and took off. But we didn’t have a lot of close contact with
them. I hauled a lot of them on the airplanes when we were trash hauling. I hauled a lot
of them on the airplanes when we were trash hauling. I hauled everything you could
think of, men, women, kids, ducks, pigs, goats. You name it.

SM: What would you be transporting those people for?
JB: Well that was part of the war effort.
SM: Was relocation of refugees?
JB: I suppose that’s what it was. I didn’t question them. They had them all
manifested and that was my mission so I just went in. They loaded them and I took them.
Now I got started in my flight bag, I got to buying a lot of the Lifesavers. I go in and get
a case or two Lifesavers and these little Vietnamese kids you know getting on this big
airplane and that is intimidating as all get out to them and they were scared to death. I
would take these life savers and go back and I would open a package and most of them
didn’t even now what it was and I would put one in my mouth and I would offer them
one. If they put one in their mouth and found out that it was pretty good then I would
give them a roll of them. SO that was my thing to make up to the kids. To get them from
being scared to death.

SM: Did you transport many ARVN soldiers?
JB: Oh yes. Lot’s of them. Lot’s of young American GIs and when we
transported people we combat loaded over there we would take tie down straps and run
them from one side of the airplane to the other and they would sit on the floor with a
strap across their lap and just row after row of them and just we really put a pile of people
in there.
SM: Were there any other events or operations you wanted to talk about with regard to Vietnam.

JB: I really can’t think of very much. There is a lot of things happen. I could go through this logbook and look at different missions and recall different things. I recall one day I think a pig saved my life.

SM: How was that?

JB: There was a rice field and this was down in the southern end. We were supposed to get rid of the rice to keep the VC from getting it. Right down the middle of that rice field would be a look like a levy and the fighter was suppose to go in there and put down a smoke screen--- phosphorous--- white phosphorous smoke screen on the left side of the levy and then we was going to go in and spray it right there on the left side. Left side was where we were supposed to spray. Well he put the stuff on the right side and there was these grass hooches every few feet down this levy where they lived and there was this great big old pig, he looked like he was five or six hundred pounds and some of the white phosphorous got on him and of course some of that stuff never goes out--- it just burns right on through. They were shooting at us out of these hooches with their AK47’s and you could just see the fire coming out of the two or three different windows on those things. As we were going along they were just hosing us down good and I was the lead airplane and right over against the levy and I can see them almost eye ball to eye ball and they were really hosing us down but this pig would run in a hooch and he was hurting so bad, he would run in a hooch and when he would run in, you would see three or four people leap out through the windows. Before I passed him up he was up in front of me before I got by him he had run through about three hooches. When he would run through the hooch they would bail out so they didn’t know that was coming in. So I laughingly said that pig saved my life--- if he hadn’t went through there they may had kept firing and got me. That was serious as all get out but it was funny.

Another time I came off of a mission in a very extreme Southern end of that Nam Cahn jungle or whatever they call it down in the very southern end and come off of the spray and then there was the ocean. I just let right down real low and you know when you start getting shot at you go low. The lower you go the less target they have and there was a little old canoe look out there with one standing up in it shooting at me, I guess with a
AK47, I could see the fire coming out of the barrel. I knew if I pulled up all I was doing
was just giving him a bigger target to shoot at. So I said well, I will just get that dude. I
was heading straight for him and letting down lower of course I wanted to hit him with
the nose of the airplane. I actually got down a little too low and skipped on the water and
when he saw me skip that water he just fell over backwards in the water and I pulled up
right then because I knew I was going to hit his canoe and he wasn’t in it. But I thought
that was kind of funny but I could have been the only 123 to get a KIA if I hadn’t hit that
water if I would have just held it long enough just to get him.

SM: Anything else come to mind.

JB: Some pretty exciting times. I was flying a mission mountain spray up out of
Da Nang and I had one of the higher ranking people in the squadron in the right seat with
me and going up the mountain and typically in the crew coordination your co-pilot
handles the throttles for you, the pilot did the flying and the co-pilot handled he throttles,
well I called for METO Power—Max Except Take Off Power and he said, ‘You don’t
need it,’ and I hit immediately hit the jettison button and salvoed all the herbicide out and
slammed the throttles myself to max power and went through the trees on top of that
mountain. When he said you don’t need that power, if I would have listened to him we
would have crashed right there that’s all it is to it. I salvoed I guess I probably had five
or six hundred gallons left--- I salvoed that out--- pulled the dump valve and hit max
power and just barely went through the top of those trees and shaking on the right in the
eedge of the stall and man I gave him a talk or two and wouldn’t quit and as long I am
scheduling I don’t give a dam if you are commander, we will never fly together again
ever, I am through with you and he never said another word that entire mission and we
flew right on back down there and landed and he never said a word to me and I never
flew with again either. That was pretty close, I come pretty close to buying a farm right
there. Through somebody’s ignorance and stupidity. But you probably shouldn’t put that
in the story. Particularly who he was.

SM: Was that much of an issue at times the aircraft itself, how much was it
considered to be underpowered or did it have enough power for the mission?

JB: The B model, which was without the jets, it was underpowered. If we were
taking off and we lost an engine on take off and the engine would not feather almost
immediately then you crashed. But with the two little jets on there you could take off and
loose a recip engine and without it feathering it would still be wind milling and you could
still climb out. So you had the power for that but when you are spraying mountains and
you are trying to contour up and down, up and down them mountains and you are going
up the side of a mountain, you got to have the power to get yourself up there. If you
don’t get the power when you need it you are liable to be buying part of the mountain.

SM: Now was there a specific way that you would defoliate mountains verses
areas near water verses regular terrain?

JB: If you were let’s say a road or a river or something like you would usually
take an aircraft and have one flying each wing formation and you just contour that river
or road or whatever it was and that would defoliate both sides of it and if you were flying
a just flat land, timber or crops or something, you usually have two or three or six ship
formation or something, just straight ahead. If you are flying mountains well, you had to
contour and we tried to work and not go straight up a mountain, go contour around where
you wouldn’t have so much climbing to do and be in the position to where if you start
having trouble you can go down. You can get away from it instead of trying to get over it
but occasionally you get hooked up like I was hooked up there where we went over one
and a valley and we had to get over to the top of the next one. That was tough and I
recall a mission I believe I got a Distinguished Flying Cross for flying out of Da Nang
one day and we were really getting hosed down good and the leader of the mission, I was
the deputy leader--- I was number two but the leader of the commission, Phil Larson got
shot up so bad that he turned off and headed in because I guess he had lost an engine and
he was really having trouble and I took over the lead of the mission and continued on
with spraying and continued the mission and took a hell of a lot of ground fire and
everything but we got the mission down and I believe that’s what I got a DFC for. But
things like that, there is so many times that things like that happen you can’t remember
them all. I know one time if you sitting in the seat and you reach right back with your
right arm to the rear just a little bit you could get a hold of the handle for the auxiliary
power unit and give you ground power to help start the engine and stuff. I leaned
forward to do something, I don’t know I was setting an attitude indicator or something
and leaned forward a bullet came into the side window, went right behind my head and
hit that handle for that ground power unit. If I hadn’t been leaning forward to do that
attitude indicator or whatever it was I was doing that bullet would have come right
through my head. So when I say the Lord looks after dumb animals partner I am not
kidding he does.

SM: What was it like as you were nearing your end of your tour of duty near
December of ’68?

JB: Nothing really, I kept flying and scheduling.

SM: Nothing changed in your routine?

JB: No.

SM: What did you feel like leaving?

JB: Oh, I felt good. Of course I wanted to get home and see my family. I had a
wife and two little boys. I knew that I couldn’t win that war by myself. So why should I
stay over there and get killed when I could go home?

SM: When you got back--- did you come to the United States when you left?

JB: Yes.

SM: What was the atmosphere like back here, when you got to the United States?

JB: Well, you know they talked about all of the protesters and spitting on the
people and this and that and the other. I never witnessed any of that. I flew into Travis
Air Force Base and got over to San Francisco and got a flight out to New Orleans and my
family was in Alexandria, Louisiana and New Orleans, I went down to the Kansas City
Southern Railroad Station, my dad was a conductor on the Kansas City Southern and I
thought that he might be there that night on it’s Southern Belle passenger but he wasn’t
but anyway I found a conductor and told him who I was and he took me and put me in his
compartment and of course I had been up for more hours that I could even think about
and he put me in his compartment and he says just go to sleep and I will wake you up
when we get to Alexandria and I will get you off there. So I got to Alexandria and got
home in the middle of the night and to my wife and kids. No one--- again where I was at
in the South people aren’t as radical as they are in the North. In the North if I’m saying
right you know like it was Kent State University and the other places where they had lots
of problems up there, I don’t recall them having problems in the South, do you?
SM: I am not real familiar with the anti-war movement in the colleges in the south. I am sure that there was some activity but I don’t think, generally I think you’re right, it wasn’t as prevalent.

JB: Well, I didn’t experience any of it. It’s a good thing because at that time I was a pretty tough character as far as physical conditioning and everything, if anybody spit on me, he would have lost some teeth or a nose or something. I just wouldn’t have stood for it. Because I knew that I was doing the right thing. I was serving my country and whether they like it or not, I was doing the right thing and I wouldn’t take any crap off them. But fortunately I didn’t have to express myself, it just didn’t happen.

SM: When did you make your way to flying to Saudi Arabia, what time period was that?

JB: It was January ’69.

SM: So it was very shortly after you got back?

JB: I came right back to Louisiana and then I moved my family to Hampton, Virginia, Langley Air Force Base. Moved them there in December and then I left there almost immediately to Saudi Arabia.

SM: How much time did you spend in Saudi?

JB: I don’t even remember now. Again I am looking in my book here. The 27th of February is when I left and I got back to Langley the 23rd of April. So it was like a little over two months.

SM: And these were locust spray missions.

JB: Yes, locust.

SM: How different was that from what you had just done in Vietnam?

JB: Well, nobody was shooting at us. We were spraying a different thing, we just sprayed and we would take off and just spray until we run out of spray. Just long straight lines because these desert locusts they call them hoppers to start with, little bitty ones, they would start hopping along and eating everything as they go and we just put down a swat of dildren and when they go through that dildren they would eat the grass with dildren and they would die. Then the next ones would come through piling up and our Entomologist went out there and took some pictures and stuff and there was some pictures of some locusts four and five feet high. Coming through and dying. The locals
Saudi’s out there in the desert areas found out that they were killing the snakes too, snakes would eat these poison locusts and die and that tickled them. The weather was so bad we were delayed getting out of Langley heading over there. The State Department had pressured us to get over there because of the Saudi’s and State Department finally told us--- you know the weather is so bad on the East Coast area that we couldn’t hardly do anything. They finally said fly anywhere you have to just so that we can tell the Saudi’s you are on the way and so we took off and flew to Plattsburg New York and it was snowing, snow deep there. Then we flew to Gander, New Foundland and we were suppose to go to St. John’s where we would be closer to Lajes to make a shorter trip but we flew to Gander and we took off the first day of March from Gander to Lajes and this two engine C123, with very little navigation equipment on board. Nine hours and thirty minutes with five hours and thirty minutes of that was in solid weather. So that was I had been over water many, many times but with three airplanes and I had more over water experience than anybody else and let me tell you there was some guys that I was talking to on the radio there that didn’t sound to solid--- coaching them along. But we went from Lajes to Terahan Spain and Terahan to Naples Italy and Naples to Chili to Turkey and then we went from Incirlick we tried to get to Tehran about three times. We didn’t have any oxygen and we couldn’t get up above the mountains and the weather was too bad and finally we got out and got to Tehran, Iran. Then we made a couple of trips trying to get to Tehran, Saudi Arabia but the weather so bad in southern Iran that the thunderstorms that we had and turned back and finally we got to Tehran and then over to Taif, Saudi Arabia, it’s the 18th of March when we got to Taif after leaving the 28th of February. We sprayed till the 8th of April. Then I left and coming back I went through Cairo, Athens, Catania, Cicely, Terhan, Spain, Milden Hall England, Keflavic, Iceland, Goose Bay Lavador, Loring Main and then to Langley.

SM: Now, when you were Saudi, what was the--- how did the Saudi Arabian people treat you?

JB: Good there was no problem. Back while I was stationed in England Air Force Base in the KB50’s I went through squadron officer’s school at the Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base and one of my--- I can’t think of the name--- the little group of mates was a Saudi Air Force officer a Royal Saudi Air Force Officer and he and I
became really good friends. I met several other Saudi Air Force officer’s through him and in ’63 I went over to Saudi as a Tanker Operations officer and had close contact with him. I spent a considerable time over there and knew the Saudi’s and got along real well with them. Never a problem.

SM: Now were the locust spraying missions deemed a success?

JB: Oh yes.

SM: Was this a temporary solution or something that had to be done every year?

JB: You know if you read back in the Bible, John the Baptist ate locusts and honey, well they still got them. That is one of those things. Now my final big flow out with the Air Force Special spray flight, was hurricane Camille. Do you remember hurricane Camille?

SM: I’ve heard about it and I think I’ve read about it but I don’t remember it personally.

JB: Gulf coast, it wiped out all the places down near and I’m looking again in my logbook here. Here I’m going to Kessler in August of ’69 and I went down to Kessler Mississippi and spent about a week spraying there. We had five spray birds and we sprayed just about everything from Mobile to New Orleans to seventy five miles in land from the coast and we went back home for a week or two weeks and then we came back and flew out of New Orleans Lake Front Airport for another week spraying. It’s just unbelievable, you just can’t imagine the devastation that was caused by that hurricane down there unless you flew over it like I did and I flew over every foot of that space down there at hundred feet looking down at it. Drove around part of it and it was just unbelievable.

SM: This was spraying for insects?

JB: Yes. See, there was lots of dead animals, lots of personal deep freezes, with no power and lots of meat markets and things and with all this meat laying around and they were afraid that there would be some disease epidemic. Normally we sprayed one ounce of Malathion per acre and we jumped it up to three ounces per acre to get rid of the flies because the one-ounce was for the mosquitoes and we did three ounces. Now we had an Entomologist who worked for me there and he had his PhD in Entomology and he was one more smart dude, I’ll tell you that and he went out and he and I together went to
the New Orleans dump and captured flies and put them in little screen boxes and took
them to our motel room and feed them with cotton balls dabbed in milk and then he
would get up in the wee hours of the morning, like at the three o’clock in the morning
and go out where we were going to spray and he would put these little screen boxes with
these flies all out there and he would put some on both sides of trees and underneath stuff
and over and everything you could think of and of course he recorded every bit of it and
as soon as we would spray he’d collect them all up and boogey back to the motel and
every hour me and him would count flies and he wrote an analysis of this program of
how many flies we killed and the ones that were killed under something and ones that
were shaded and all the different things that you could go through. It was unbelievable.
But we went out at night and put out Coleman lanterns and you know how you put out a
Coleman lantern and you see all the moths and bugs flying around it. Well nothing. I
mean after we sprayed there was nothing. So we did them a good job.

SM: While you were doing all this of course the war in Vietnam had progressed.
What did you think about the war as it ended, especially the Paris Peace of ’73 and then
the fall of Saigon of ’75, what went through your mind?
JB: Of course I retired the first of February of ’75 and what went through my
mind all this time, I hated to be on a loosing team and we lost it. We didn’t lose any
battles; the politicians lost the war for us. Now I went from the Special Aerial Spray
Flight at Langley to Little Rock Air Force Base in a C-130 outfit. I was an operations
officer in a C130 outfit and I kept so busy--- when the war was winding down they had
all these young officers going through pilot training and so forth, they couldn’t just dump
out. They had to do something with them so they shipped them down there. Now I was a
what they call a RTU Squadron replacement training unit, we did all the Tactical training
for the C130’s for world wide and for allied forces and Marines and Air Force and
everybody and you know all the troop drops and air drops and low altitude parachute
extractions and assault landings and all that. Well I was supposed to just have just
instructor pilots and all these students from all the other units come through and we check
them out and well they sent me this--- I was supposed to have sixty instructor pilots and I
had a hundred and twenty pilots total. Most of them were second lieutenants right out of
pilot training. Well, I had to stay up at night thinking up ways to entertain these guys, to
train them, to keep them busy, to keep their attention and ways to get a little bit more out
of each mission where I could get them upgraded in record time and things like that and I
was successful in all that. I went to Little Rock as a major and left there four years later
as full colonel. So I was successful in it and I was busy so I didn’t have time to worry a
hell a lot about what was going on.

SM: After you retired how in what ways---

JB: Can you hold just a second. Let me see if I can get this flash coming in.

SM: After you retired how do you think your Vietnam service affected you most?

JB: Well, I don’t think it did. I just don’t think it affected me. As far as all this
posttraumatic syndrome and this and that and the other. Now I’m having some health
problems right now could or could not be associated with it. I have Peripheral
Neuropathy in the feet and that is one of the things that this Air Force Health study has
showed has comes out of Agent Orange, the dioxin. Of course understand the Agent
Orange we sprayed is the same thing that you use to defoliate cotton before the cotton
pickers hit it and you spray on your weeds in your back yard. Highway department
sprays it around the signs and bridge abutments so Vietnam is not the only place that you
can get that. But I just didn’t have any problems and I didn’t get all doped up and
emotional problems. I am stronger than that.

SM: What do you think about the U.S. deployment to Vietnam and in the context
of the U.S. mission in Vietnam future deployments, what lessons should we take away
from Vietnam?

JB: Well, the first thing that we need to take away from there is if we decided, if
it’s a national policy that we are going to conduct a war, first you got to decide that in
Washington and if they decide that, then they lay down the orders to the military and tell
the military to go in it and beat the hell out them and win it and if they should never say,
‘Go over there and pat them on the back and push them around a little bit and wait on
them.’ Hell no! If we are going to fight a war, we are going to win. Let the military win
it and keep the damn politicians off of the front lines. They have no business trying to
run the war that is for professional military people. First thing that the military civilians
got to issue the order, they got to make the decision to issue the order and then let the
military do it. But we were too wishy washy in that. Lyndon Johnson cost the lives of
untold thousands and thousands of good young American boys because he wishy washied
around and screwed up the war and that is my personal opinion and I know that is a lot of
other peoples’ opinion to.

SM: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about today?

JB: I don’t suppose, unless there is something you think of you want to ask me.

You know I talk.

SM: I think we covered pretty much everything. So why don’t I go ahead and
end the interview here. Thank you very much. This has been a tremendous interview.