Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview the Mr. Eddie Jones on the 13th of January 2003 at approximately 1:40 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. Jones is in Merkel, Texas. Sir, thank you again for consenting to conduct this interview with us. And if you would why don’t we begin with a discussion of your early life. Just tell me when and where you were born and where you grew up.

Eddie Jones: I was born in 1932 in Thalia, Texas, T-H-A-L-I-A, and grew up there until I was about in the 4th grade, and in the 4th grade we moved to Childress, Texas, and that’s where I finished high school, in Childress, Texas right there.

SM: What was the population of Childress when you were growing up there? Do you know?

EJ: It seems like to me it was about 10,000 or something like that.

SM: What was it like growing up there?

EJ: It was great. It was a great little town. I knew everybody and it was a fine place to grow up. I had lots of friends. It was just a good small town.

SM: What did your folks do?

EJ: My father worked for the highway department, and my mother was at that time, was a manager of a section of Montgomery Ward and then later on she owned her own business in the restaurant business. My father passed away when he was only 53. After that she was a widow the rest of her life.
SM: While you were living there in Childress, what would you do as a young person, besides school of course? What did you do to either work or play? What were the things you would do in Childress?

EJ: Oh, good gosh. Most of the time like all small towns, we drove the drag every night and piddled around there, played ball. Some of us in our early age, we used to sack groceries on a Saturday afternoon. That was back during the days when everybody went to town on Saturday, and a bunch of us would get together and do that. Just the typical things that small town boys do I guess is what you’d say.

SM: Did you hunt very much growing up there?

EJ: Yes we did. I’ve always been a hunter. My dad was a big hunter and a big fisherman, and we did a lot of hunting and did a lot of fishing. Particularly, a bunch of us boys used to go out nearly every weekend or so out to Childress Lake and fish all night.

SM: What would you hunt in that part of Texas?

EJ: Usually quail or ducks or something like that was about what we were hunting all the time. Then sometime at night we’d go out coyote hunting or something.

SM: While you were in school, were there any particular subjects you enjoyed?

EJ: History. I always enjoyed history. I guess that was probably my favorite subject. I don’t know. They were all just about the same growing up. Let me think here. That’s about it. History, I guess.

SM: How about sports. Were there any particular sports you enjoyed?

EJ: Sports, yes, I played sports. Football, Basketball. That was back during the days when we didn’t have too many coaches. We had just two coaches for the whole school. The football players, we had to play basketball and run track, whether we wanted to or not, to stay in shape. So we’d do that all year round.

SM: What do you remember about major historical events that occurred during your early life, especially things like World War II, things like that.

EJ: Gosh, I can remember World War II. What I remember about that is we had an airfield out at Childress then, Childress Airfield and I can remember all the airmen in town and I can still remember the day the war ended, because Childress was a dry town. I remember, that and everybody went to town. We all got in the car. I was just a kid and
drove downtown and the airmen and everybody else was celebrating and sitting on the
street corner drinking whiskey, and it was just a big celebration, I guess is what you
would call it. But the airbase was there all during the War. I can remember all that and
remember the airplanes flying and the bomber runs and all that kind of stuff. It was a
bomber base. I can remember that. Of course, then when the Korean War came along, I
was about to graduate from high school then. That’s when I first entered the service was
in 1950 when I graduated.

SM: Now, living there near the airbase, did that have any kind of influence on you
in terms of what you thought you might want to do in the military?

EJ: Well, I guess it did in a way. I don’t remember really. My brother was in the
military. I guess it probably did. I was always fascinated with airplanes even though I
wasn’t in the Air Force in the military, so I guess it probably did have some kind of
influence over me.

SM: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

EJ: I’ve got one brother and two sisters.

SM: And this was an older brother obviously.

EJ: Yeah. He was an older brother. He retired from the Air Force.

SM: When you were graduating from high school, I assume you felt you were
going to be drafted, so you just went ahead and enlisted voluntarily or were you drafted?

EJ: I don’t know whether we thought we were going to be drafted or not. There
were three or four of us that went in at the same time. I think it was just the fact that we
got out of school, we didn’t have nothing else to do. And my dad and my mother, my
folks, packed me a bag and sent me off to Austin to the University of Texas. I still
remember the first class I went to was an English class. It was in an auditorium. I think
there must have been 300 people in that auditorium. I think that scared me to death.
You’re coming from a small town. I came back home and then in December, and like I
say, there were three or four us that were kicking around, really didn’t know what we
wanted to do, so we just all volunteered. The war was going on in Korea. We wanted to
get in that, so we all volunteered.

SM: When you volunteered, did you think you were going to be going to Korea?

EJ: Yes.
SM: And you went directly to the Army? Any reason you chose the Army?

EJ: I guess not, other than the fact we all joined the paratroopers, and that’s the reason we wanted to into the Army. Even though I never went to the paratroopers. The other three did.

SM: Did you go in for a particular MOS?

EJ: No. When I volunteered I asked to go into the armor or the tank outfit. At that time, they told me, they said you didn’t really have a choice. They’d put down what you’d really like, but you didn’t have a choice. So that’s when we all joined it the paratroopers. When we got in, I don’t know how it happened, but somehow somebody pulled a record and I wound up in a tank outfit. So I got what I wanted anyway, but I don’t know why I did.

SM: What attracted you about being in a tank outfit?

EJ: I guess I’d seen movies about them during World War II or something. Nothing in particular. I just thought that was something I wanted to do. While I was in them I really enjoyed them. I really did. It was something I really fit into it seemed like.

SM: So you were active duty Army 1950 to when? How long was that enlistment?

EJ: 1950 to 1953. I went in December of 1950, I think it was, and went to Fort Hood, Texas.

SM: For your basic?

EJ: Yeah. At that time, even during basic they were forming the 2nd Armored Division or reactivating the 2nd Armored Division. So I stayed with the 2nd Armored Division. We trained at Fort Hood and starting in December and then in July of that summer, we deployed to Germany. So I stayed with the division the whole three years I was in the service.

SM: Where did you go after basic training for your armored training?

EJ: We did it all at Fort Hood because we were reorganizing the 2nd Armored Division right there at Fort Hood at that time. So we did it all right there.

SM: What was that training like?

EJ: Great. It was rough but it was great. It was in the wintertime, and it got awful cold in Fort Hood. But it was some of the best training we’d ever had. And the people that was training us of course, our platoon sergeants and platoon leaders and all that were
people who were going to stay with us anyway. So they did. They stayed with us the whole three years, most of them did. So it was a good organization.

SM: What was the morale of the unit like while you were going through training?

EJ: It was great. Nearly all of them by the way were draftees, and the platoon I was in, the way we came out, it was kind of funny, because the platoon I was in, most of the people came from around Lubbock, Slaton and that area up in there, was all drafted in that area. Of course I volunteered, but I came from Childress and we all wound up in the same platoon. I’d say half the platoon I was with was from the Lubbock, Childress, Amarillo, just in the Texas area. I’ll put it that way. The training was just great. We had some of the best training I’ve ever witnessed in the Army.

SM: Basic training and I guess you had armored training immediately after that was through?

EJ: Well, we had, I guess you could call it basic training and then advanced training. Then like I say, it wasn’t like the typical person that goes in the service and gets basic training and advanced training, because it was a unit training at the same time, I guess is the way to put it.

SM: What were you selected to do in your armored unit?

EJ: I was a tank driver. I started out as a tank driver. Then I went from that to a tank commander. Then I was later a platoon sergeant of five tanks.

SM: On what tanks were you trained?

EJ: We trained on the old M-1 tank they used in World War II, the old Sherman tank. Then when we went to Germany, we got the M-26, which was, I forget what we called that. I can't remember the name for it. It seemed like it might have been the Persian. Then we stayed with it for about a year or two and then the last year I was in Germany I guess it was, we got the M-46, which was a modern tank at that time. Our training was good, and even in Germany we did lots of training. Training was really good. I guess it was the best trained unit I was ever in really. I went in as a recruit, and three years later I got out as Sergeant 1st Class.

SM: Wow. How in the world did you manage that? You went to E-7 in three years?
EJ: Well, really more than that. That’s an E-6, Sergeant 1st Class was. I think I made Sergeant 1st Class in less than that. I think it was a little over two years. I can’t remember exactly how long it was. But I can remember when I decided to be in, and I thought maybe I’d stay in the service. I had a battalion commander at the time was Colonel Clay, and his father was General Clay who was head of the Berlin area right after the war. He was a four star general. But anyway, I applied for OCS, Officer training school, and I went in and Colonel Clay asked me, he said, “Well, what are you going to do if I disapprove of this?” I said, “Well, I guess I’ll go back to college.” So at the time he said, “Well, its disapproved. You go back to college and get your commission and then come back in the service.” And that’s what I did.

SM: Do you know why he did that to you?

EJ: I think he knew that being an OCS officer was all right, but if you took the years out to get your college degree that you’d progress a lot faster when you went in the service, and sure enough that’s what happened. I caught up with people who had gone to OCS but never get their college degree. They just kind of run into a blank wall after a while in the service, in the officer’s corps anyway. Because education is something that they put a lot of emphasis on or did at that time.

SM: When you were finished with your training there at Fort Hood, your primary job at that point was to drive tanks, and that’s when the unit went over to Germany?

EJ: Right.

SM: Where were you in Germany and how long did you stay there?

EJ: I went to Manheim, Germany. I was there from July. We left in July of ’51, and I came back home in October of ’53.

SM: So you stayed in Germany the whole time.

EJ: Yeah. I was in Germany the whole time.

SM: Were you guys standing in for a unit that had been previously in Germany and was sent to Korea?

EJ: No. That’s when Germany started or, when we had the big build up in Germany. That’s when the Russian threat of the Cold War really started heating up. That’s when they started deploying units at that time to Germany. Well just to give you an idea, I know the 2nd Armored went and the 4th Infantry Division went and the 28th
Division went. There might have been one or two other divisions. I don’t know but they really built up in a hurry back in ’50 and ’51.

SM: What were things like in Germany in terms of the living conditions? Where did you live? How was the food, things like that?

EJ: The first six months we were there we lived in tents. That’s when they were building Coleman barracks which was at Manheim and still there. It was just a post they were building. Well, we lived in tents while they finished the barracks. So we lived there, and then after we lived in the barracks there, the Coleman barracks. The living conditions were really good. The food was good and things were good. There was a lot of fun in Germany at that time. We had lots of fun, and our money went a long way, so we got along fine as a bunch of young, single guys.

SM: How much free time did you have?

EJ: We had quite a bit of free time. On the weekends we’d normally have some free time. We spent lots of time in the field. I’d say we spent, well, we used to say we spent nine months out of the year in the field, and that’s probably about what it was. But when we were back in garrison, we got passes, three day passes. We did a lot of traveling. We used to travel to Amsterdam a lot. That was close by. Train travel over there was pretty good, and we’d get on the train and go places. We could go from Manheim to Amsterdam and spend the weekend and get back on Monday in time to go back to work. We had a lot of places to go, and a lot of things to do.

SM: What was Amsterdam like then?

EJ: It was a great city. We usually stayed around the same places in Amsterdam, and it was just a fun city to go to.

SM: Of course Amsterdam has quite a reputation today. Was it just a shadow of its current self? Would you describe what you mean by fun?

EJ: Well, if you were a single guy, it was really fun. It was a lot of bars and a lot of girls and you know.

SM: Got you.

EJ: I’ve always wanted to go back and never went back. We used to stay on a place called Rembrandt Square, and they had a statue of Rembrandt out there. We used to praise him every time we got there and every time we left.
SM: What was the relationship like between the soldiers in your unit and the
civilian population that you witnessed?
EJ: Pretty good. Really good. Surprisingly it was really, and that wasn’t long after
the war ended of course, but we had a good relationship with the Germans. We didn’t
have any hard feelings I don’t think, or I never ran onto any. The only thing we ran onto
is some communist elements every once in a while where people were communists and
were in the communist thing, and that kind of got a little touchy. But other than that, we
never had any trouble with the Germans.
SM: What about clashes between young American men and young German men,
as far as things like that?
EJ: I never saw that happen in the three years I was over there. It never happened.
SM: Let’s see. Were there very many communist, you said communist elements. I
guess you're talking about civilian communists that were active in the area?
EJ: If you spend enough time overseas, you run into what we call “voting
communists.” I don’t know how we ever explained it. They’d make their beliefs known
to you sometimes. I’ll put it that way. We were just always alert to that.
SM: What about military units? Did you ever run into any communist forces
anywhere while you were out on maneuvers or patrolling or thing like that?
EJ: No. No.
SM: Well, was there anything else about your experiences in Germany that you
wanted to discuss?
EJ: I can't think of anything. It was just a nice three-year. We worked hard and
trained hard, but it was a good three years. It was a good experience for a young person.
SM: Did you have very many people leave the unit and go to Korea?
EJ: No. We didn’t. We didn't have anybody leaving the unit to go to Korea, but
after, I was a volunteer so I stayed three years in the service, and the ones that were
drafted and went into the 2nd Armored Division and went over there of course, were two
year draftees. And after they went home in two years, then we started getting people from
Korea who were draftees that had spent a year in Korea and then they were coming to
Germany and spend another year, because of the shortage of personnel and everything.
So they’d come from Korea, go home for 30 days and then come on over to Germany.
But we didn’t have anyone from our units getting picked or required to go to Korea out of
Germany, no.

SM: In what kind of condition were the veterans that came from Korea into your
unit?

EJ: They were good. They weren’t as well trained as we were even though they’d
seen combat. I’m talking about tank units, now. The tank units in Korea were used in a
different way than what tanks are meant to be used. They were used because of the road
and terrain and stuff. There wasn’t much maneuverability for tanks over there. So they
were kind of restricted. So really the ones that came from Korea wasn’t as well trained in
tank warfare as we were in Germany.

SM: What about practical lessons that they passed on to you from their combat
experience? Anything that you remember?

EJ: Yeah, a few. They had to pass some on to us, but like I say, we felt kind a
little--Well, I don’t know how you say it. We felt a little bit better trained than they were,
or more knowledge of what we were doing than they were doing because of our training.
I think our training was much better than what they had.

SM: What kind of stories were you hearing about the war in Korea, especially
after the introduction of Chinese forces? Do you remember any of the Korean War
veterans describing?

EJ: I try to remember. I was thinking about that the other day and I thought,
“Gosh, I can't even remember.” Now, we had one or two people that I can remember one
sergeant in particular who came to us that was a silver star winner and quite a hero, but at
the same time was pretty well screwed up, personally with his drinking and so forth. But
he used to tell stories about Korea. I really don’t remember many of them to tell you the
truth. I think we were so dad gum busy. At that time things were pretty hot in Germany
too, on the Cold War thing. I think we were so dad gum busy with our training and
everything, we didn’t have time to give it much thought to tell you the truth. I don’t
remember us doing it.

SM: Do you remember being on any kind of special alerts while you were there?

EJ: In Germany?

SM: Yes.
EJ: Well, yeah. We were always on some kind of alert standby. I was trying to
think of some incident that might have put us on alert. We used to go on standby a lot. I
can't remember. I think it was just the normal thing of a build up of tensions that we
probably as soldiers down there, we didn’t really know what the tensions were, other than
the fact that you’d start being alerted to be more on alert or something like that or training
for something.

SM: Anything else about Germany that you want to discuss?
EJ: No. I don’t guess. I guess that’s about it I can think of in Germany.

SM: When you were getting ready to leave Germany, was that your discharge?
EJ: That’s right. When I left Germany, we came into Fort Dix I guess, and then
went to Fort Chaffee and that was where I got discharged was at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas.

SM: Did you have specific plans, where you might go to school, things like that?
EJ: Yeah. I had specific plans. I was going to go back to college when I got back,
when I got out. So I came home. I guess I got home in December, and then in January I
started college at Hardin Simmons University.

SM: Now, you said go back to college. Is that where you had started?
EJ: No. I started at the University of Texas, but I only was there for a month.

SM: So Hardin Simmons. Did you know what you wanted to major in?
EJ: Yeah. I think I did. I majored in Business Administration, and that’s pretty
well what I had on my mind all the time when I went in, when I went to college.

SM: You started in ’54 actually, right.
EJ: January ’54.

SM: You graduated four years later.
EJ: No. Let’s see. I graduated in three or three and a half years because I
graduated in May of ’57.

SM: And you had gone through ROTC as well.
EJ: I went through one year of ROTC because I didn’t make up my mind I wanted
to come back in until my last year. So I went to the military, and asked them and they
said, “Just take one year and we’ll commission you after one year.” So I just had to take
one year of ROTC.

SM: Oh, okay. So you got your commission in ’58?
EJ: ’57.

SM: Oh, you did get your commission in ’57.

EJ: Yes. I got it in—yeah. Because in June of ’57 I went to a basic course or what
do they call it, officer basic training I guess. No. What did we call it? I forget what we
called it now. Anyway, it was summer camp I guess is what you called it. Then I was
commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in June at Fort Hood. I took my summer camp at Fort
Hood. I was commissioned in June, but I didn’t go on active duty until October ’57.

SM: And this was, your branch was field artillery. Is that correct?

EJ: Air defense artillery.

SM: Air defense artillery.

EJ: Now, I’ll give you a story about that. I’d spent three year in tanks so I figured
I’d just go into the tanks. And that’s what I applied for was armor, and I think infantry
was my second choice, and field artillery was my third choice, and I didn’t even know
what air defense was. That was a time that air defense became a
big thing. Let’s see, Eisenhower was in at that time I think, and everybody was getting
selected, well, they could hand pick anybody they wanted to, to go to air defense, and a
bunch of us wound up there. And I can't say I really liked it. But I took my officer’s basic
there at Fort Bliss in air defense, and I stayed in the air defense until, lets see I went to
Italy, so I came back to air defense in ’61. I guess until 1962, and then they split the
branches between air defense and field artillery. And I got field artillery then.

SM: What were the biggest challenges that you faced transitioning from being an
enlisted man in the early ‘50s to your officer basic course and things like that in late ’57,
early ’58?

EJ: I didn’t think there was that much of a transition. I had the advantage of
course on all the other 2nd lieutenants around because I’d been a senior NCO. I knew the
ins and outs of the military by then, and I also knew how to work with NCOs because
they’re the ones that get the work done. I fit in real good. It wasn’t any problem fitting in.
I didn’t have that much trouble transitioning I don’t think. It was much better being an
officer than it is being an enlisted man. I’ll say that. But other than that, I don’t think I
had that much trouble transitioning to it.
SM: When you finished your training, your first assignment was a training platoon leader at Fort Bliss?

EJ: I went to basic course at Fort Bliss, and after that I was a training officer for air defense, at that time was Nike Ajax. Later it was Nike Hercules missiles. Then while I was training officer, the Italians came in and were taking training. They came in by battalion. So I was assigned as a training officer for one of the battalions of Italian officers, or Italians. And I worked with them then, let’s see. That was in ’58, ’59. I think a year. Then I went to Italy with them, and stayed three years in Italy with the Italian air defense bunch.

SM: The Nike Ajax training there at Fort Bliss, how would you guys simulate that? I would imagine you didn’t get to fire off many active missiles.

EJ: Oh, yeah, fired lots of missiles. We had McGregor range, which is right outside of Fort Bliss. Then we had Red Canyon. But we fired the Nikes in the training phase, when I was a training officer of course every unit you trained would fire out missiles when their training was complete, or during their training. And at the same time, when I was a training officer, we’d have National Guard units and units from overseas would come into Bliss to fire. We’d act as safety officers while they were firing, so we got to see lots of Nike Ajax fired and a lot of Nike Hercules fired.

SM: Which system did you prefer?

EJ: Well the Nike Ajax was the front-runner of the Nike Hercules. It was just a shorter range missile. They were all air defense missiles. And then the Hercules was the biggest missile, and of course it was probably the best missile, too. A lot bigger than the Ajax.

SM: When you went to Italy, was it the Hercules that you were using at that point?

EJ: Yeah. Hercules. And the Hercules could deliver a nuclear warheads. That’s the difference in it and an Ajax.

SM: Nuclear capability.

EJ: That’s the reason, when I went to Italy, I took what we called a warhead support detachment, and our job was to maintain control of the nuclear weapons that
went with them, and to do the assembly or anything like that in case they were ever
placed on the missiles to fire. That’s what we did then for three years.

SM: This was with an American unit stationed in Italy?

EJ: The detachment was an American unit. I went over there as a team leader and
then later I commanded the detachment as a captain, and if I remember correctly, I think
we had 36 men in the detachment.

SM: I don’t know if you can tell me, but were you nuclear capable at that time in
Vicenza, Italy?

EJ: No. I don’t think we were at that time, no.

SM: You were there from ’59 to ’62. When in ’62 did you come back?

EJ: Let’s see. We came back in--While I was over there the Berlin crisis came up,
and everybody got extended. But I had school orders, so I didn’t get extended. So I guess
I came back because I got back in time for the kids to go to school. So, it must have been
probably around, I guess it must have been in September of ’62 when I came back
because I had school orders.

SM: You said it was in time for the kids to go to school. You’d gotten married
and had some kids in between.

EJ: Well, yeah. I got married when I was in college in ’56, yeah. Our first child
was born in ’58, and he was born in Fort Bliss. And I had another son that was born in
Italy in ’61.

SM: When you came back, it was to go to Fort Sill, Oklahoma field artillery
advanced course. What did you find challenging about that class, that course?

EJ: Oh, my gosh. It was a pretty challenging course, really. Because it was the
advanced course and they put it on you pretty heavy so you’ve got to do some studying. It
was a good course, and good training. It was busy. Then that was still during the time
when we’d go to, we went to Fort Sill. We’d stay nine months there, and then we’d go to
Fort Bliss for three months of air defense training. And then later on during that same
period was when, or right after that I guess, was when they did away with having the two
units, so you were either air defense or you were field artillery. So that’s when I became
field artillery all together.
SM: When you were going through the advanced course and also throughout, I guess your first five years as an officer, how helpful was your bachelor of, I don’t know if it was arts of science, but your bachelor’s degree in business administration?

EJ: It wasn’t too helpful.

SM: Okay. When you got to the advanced course, did any of that help at all, if you took business management classes, that kind of stuff?

EJ: We had management classes and of course there was a lot of writing. We had classes in staff studies and things that we had to write. That it probably helped me quite a bit in that area there.

SM: When you were there at Fort Sill, I guess shortly after you started, of course, in October of 1962 in the Cuban missile crisis, do you remember that and what do you remember most about the Cuban Missile Crisis?

EJ: When the Cuban Missile Crisis, I was already out of advanced course. I was trying to think. And I was commanding a battery at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was commanding B Battery of the 3rd of the 30th I think. We sat on the railhead I guess for a week or two waiting to move out. We never did have to move out, but we were loaded and ready to go during that period.

SM: How long was the advanced course?

EJ: I’ve got to get my time. I think we were nine months all together in advanced courses. That included Fort Sill and Fort Bliss I believe.

SM: Then you must have come back much earlier in ’62 then.

EJ: No. ’62. I came back in ’62. When was the Cuban Missile Crisis?

SM: October of ’62.

EJ: Was it? Well, let me think here a minute. I know I was in a unit when we had it.

SM: Yeah. You have down that you were the commander of a service battery from ’62 to ’64.

EJ: Okay. I must have had the service battery during the Cuban Crisis I guess.

SM: So you guys sat on the railhead. You were ready to go, and then it just dissipated and you brought yourself back.

EJ: Yes.
SM: How aware were you of how close we were of actually going to war? Did you have that feeling?

EJ: In Cuba?

SM: About the Cuban Missile Crisis.

EJ: I don’t think we really--it was close. I understand that, but I don’t think we ever felt it was really that close, on the type of invasion. I was with a self-propelled field artillery 155-unit, battalion. We just always had that feeling that, we couldn’t visualize a big invasion. I guess that’s the way I want to put it. But I don’t think we ever got too excited about it, to tell you the truth.

SM: Self propelled artillery at that time, this was not fire and maneuver simultaneously. You had to set the artillery piece and fire it even though it was self-propelled.

EJ: Yeah. You still have to set the artillery piece. But it was on the track vehicles, you know.

SM: You did that until 1964 when you were commander of the battery.

EJ: Yeah. In ’64 I was commanding Bravo Battery of the 3rd of the 30th, which was what we called a firing battery, 155 self-propelled when I got orders for Vietnam.

SM: All that was at Fort Sill.

EJ: All that was at Fort Sill.

SM: With the firing battery, how much of that was field time?

EJ: Well, quite a bit of field time, because we supported the school and we were also a reforger unit for Germany, reforger business. Then at that same time, the battery I had, we ran the confirmatory tests on the new, at that time it was new, the M-109, the 155 self-propelled which took us in the field nearly every day for some kind of. We had a test we had to do nearly every day on them.

SM: What did you think about this new self-propelled unit?

EJ: Great weapon. In fact it’s still around. They still have it. Of course the gun has been modified some on it, but its still the same weapon basically. It’s got new electronic stuff and modern like that, but its still the same basic hull that we had then.

SM: Let’s see, ’62 to ’64, as you were completing your time as a commander of a firing battery, how much up to that point had you heard about Vietnam and had there
been any discussion about tactics for the kind of war that was going on in Vietnam, that
kind of stuff?

EJ: The first time ever heard about Vietnam was in 1961 when I was in Italy. They asked for volunteers at that time, and I think every officer I knew volunteered to go to Vietnam. None of us got orders, but we did. But in ’64, you knew things were beginning to heat up over there. At the time I got orders, I have to say, I wasn’t really expecting them. Because when I finished the advanced course and was assigned at Fort Sill, the branch told me, they said, “You’ll be here three years or maybe longer.” We always were trying to figure out how long we were going to be someplace so you’d know what arrangements to make. And we built a house. I think I mowed the grass one time before I got orders for Vietnam. That was the last house I built while I was in the military, by the way.

SM: I’d imagine.

EJ: But anyway, we knew it was heating up over there.

SM: What did you think was going on in Vietnam when you got your orders in ’64?

EJ: We’d heard, the advisory thing is all we’d heard. Of course, that’s the only thing that was going on in ’64 was advisors. We had to hear it from some people who’d come, there wasn’t very many people who at that time really had been to Vietnam or were coming back from Vietnam. Even the ones that’d you run onto sometimes had not spent anytime in the field in Vietnam, and even when we got over there in ’64, in comparison to how many people were in country, there was very few of us that were in the field with the Vietnamese right down to the district level.

SM: What was going on between the Vietnamese people themselves, the actual fighting in South Vietnam?

EJ: Well, they was fighting everyday somewhere all the time in ’64 when we got there. They had been for a long time. It had just intensified some, because I guess along about that time is when the North, they were just getting more equipment and just more push I guess to do something.

SM: What did you think when you got your orders? Did you think this was a good thing for you?
EJ: Well, yeah. I guess all military officers would think that. Here I’m going to
get to go do what I was trained to do, so I wasn’t disappointed, really. There was
something going on, and I wanted to be part of it. I think most officers were that way.
SM: What did your wife think?
EJ: Well, wives, they get used to that stuff, military wives do. She wasn’t happy
about it. But that’s something they have to learn to live with. That’s just a given thing in
the military. Some of them learn to do a good job with it. Some of them don’t.
Fortunately I was with somebody who did understand.
SM: What kind of preparations were you able to undertake for your tour in
Vietnam, that first tour. In terms of I guess, training, briefings, things like that?
EJ: I went to Fort Bragg to the, they called it, to the Special Warfare school. I was
trying to think today how long that lasted. I think it lasted six or eight weeks. I can't
remember exactly how long it lasted. That was in, I guess I went about June or
somewhere in that summer. And then I graduated from there in August, the end of
August. And then of course I went to Vietnam in September. The training at Fort Bragg
was good. We had good training. If I had a gripe about it or any other kind of training
that the military gives is particularly in an advisory effort, it was the language. We had
some language training but not enough that you could carry on a conversation with
anybody. That was always I think, the weakest element of the military, then and maybe
still is now. But I understand now that people get more language training than they used
to, because we have more ways to give it with new computers and training aids and
things like that. You can get some foreign language into a person a lot quicker than you
used to could. My opinion is that everybody in the military ought to have a second
language. And of course now, particularly the Special Forces, nearly every one of them
will speak a second language now. So that helps. But language was the biggest stumbling
block. I may be getting ahead of you. But to give you an example, when I was a district
advisor, the furthest district out, and when I got there I was supposed to have a team of
five men. Well, I only had one, at that time, one sergeant with me. And we landed in a
little district in Vinh Long province, and I couldn’t speak Vietnamese and no one there
could speak English. So here you are in a place, and the first couple of months, the only
thing we did was all with hand signals until we got an interpreter. But even working through interpreters is still difficult. That was the weakest point I think.

SM: What about cultural training, training about what was going on between the different Vietnamese groups in South Vietnam, that kind of stuff?

EJ: Yeah. We got a lot of that. And of course we had a lot of recommended reading that we all did on that. We were pretty well up on that when we got there.

SM: Do you recall any particular readings that you did?

EJ: Oh, gosh. I can't think of the guy's name now.

SM: Anything by Bernard Fall maybe?

EJ: Yeah. His books, they were good. Other than that, I can't just put my finger on any of them but I read his books, I know. He was kind of a reference book to everybody about that time. In fact I think he was about the only one that knew what was going on about that time. Bernard Fall, yeah.

SM: So you left in September of 1964 to go, and did you know what your job was going to be when you left?

EJ: Yeah. I pretty well knew what I was going to do. I didn’t know what part of the country I’d be in or anything like that, but we knew we were going in as district advisors, which were just really getting started to build up was a district advisor. And that was something that had been tried but hadn’t been just really pushed like it was going to be pushed then. So most of us that were going over there then knew we were going over to work with the districts or to work with regional force, popular force people. Not regular Army people. So we knew that on the way over, really, most of us.

SM: How did you go over?

EJ: We flew over by civilian aircraft I think. We had to go over in civilian clothes back in those days, and come back in civilian clothes.

SM: How many people, if you would just go ahead and describe the flight over, how many people were over that actually went into Vietnam with you, your first impressions upon landing?

EJ: Well, let’s see. The flight was full. I don’t remember what type of airplane it was, but it was full. I guess probably 100 people or better on it. We landed in the Philippines, and then we landed in Saigon. I don’t know. It didn’t seem, other than the
fact it was awful hot when we landed. You just get out and the temperature is just muggy and hot and all that. Back in those days, like I say, there wasn’t that many Americans in Vietnam. So we went from the airport to hotels. I stayed at the Majestic Hotel, which is on the Saigon River. We must have been there about two weeks while we were processing out. So my first impression of Vietnam was good. The people, you just fall in love with them. The Vietnamese people you can't find any better anywhere in the world I don’t guess. I can remember, of course we ruined them now, after we left after the years. The military had a tendency to take some bad things in with them I guess to any country we go to. When we first got over there, I can remember standing in the hotel and we were all issued rifles and pistols as soon as we got there. And we’d go somewhere, like we’d leave a rifle or money or billfold or anything like that. You could just lay it down anywhere, and it would be there when you came back. I don’t think there was a dishonest person in Vietnam when we first got there. Later on, things changed. But at that time, that’s what impressed me I guess more than anything else. We stayed there about two weeks in processing before we moved out.

SM: What kind of briefings did you receive during that two-week period?

EJ: Let me think. I think we had already had a pretty good idea of the briefings and so forth at Fort Bragg before we got there. But when we got there, the main we got was the briefings of the areas in the country where we were going in I guess. At that time, I Corps- you're familiar with I Corps and II Corps and II Corps and all that I guess. I Corps’ up North. IV Corps at that time was the hot spot, the delta area was. Some of us, that’s where they were trying to fill up the district first and that’s where most of us went. Really we just got a map orientation of all those areas, and how the hot areas, they used to have all painted in where they were VC controlled and government controlled and contested and things like that. We just got that. Then after we got on our own, we was pretty much on our own. It was like every district advisor kind of had their own little private Army, and little private war going on after that. Because you didn’t have much contact with anybody outside your district, you was pretty well isolated.

SM: Okay. You mentioned that the briefings involved showing you where, what side had control over what area, that kind of stuff. What about the North Vietnamese? Was there very much suspicion about NVA units in the area where you were going?
EJ: No. The NVA units at that time hadn’t really come into the country. And when they did come in, they came in, in the III Corps area. A good friend of mine was a Ranger advisor at the Ranger battalion at the same time I was over there. His Ranger battalion was the first one to make contact with a hard-core unit. That was in ’65, sometime in ’65, probably August, or June, July, or August, somewhere along in there. I think that’s the first time that anybody had really come face to face. We had North Vietnamese people and North Vietnamese soldiers in the country at that time as advisors to the Popular Force and some political, well we called them political cadre. They were in there working with the people, of course. But units, that’s the first time I’d ever heard of the units coming in. I never did buck up against the hard-core North Vietnamese unit while I was there.

SM: When you finished your in processing, how did you make your way out to your district?

EJ: We flew from Saigon to Vinh Long. And Vinh Long was the province headquarters. Then that’s kind of where we started splitting up because the province advisor was stationed at Vinh Long. He’s the guy that we worked for, and was our next boss I guess you’d say. Sa Dec was where 9th Division Headquarters was, ARVN 9th Division Headquarters. I went from, from Vinh Long, we started splitting out to our districts. And my district was the furthest district out on the west end of Vinh Long province, and from Vinh Long I went to Sa Dec by convoy, which was division headquarters, and then from there, I was supposed to get my team to go in. The district teams consisted of five-man teams, which was the captain was a district advisor, and then you had a lieutenant who was the intell officer. And then you had a sergeant that was the operations sergeant. You had a medic, which was a well-trained medic. And then you had a radio operator. But at the time I left, when Sa Dec, I only had one of my team members was there was a sergeant and we were the only two to go out at that time. Later on I got filled in with the rest of my team members. But from there we went out by helicopter to the district.

SM: Your district was Lap Vo district, is that correct?

EJ: Lap Vo, yeah.
SM: Did you already know the name of your counterpart when you were going out there, who you’d be making contact with in the Vietnamese Army?

EJ: No. I guess they’d given me the name, but I’d never met him. That was my first meeting with him when I landed in the helicopter. He didn’t speak English, and I didn’t speak Vietnamese. That’s the reason I’m telling you about the language problem.

SM: Yeah. Right. How did that initial meeting go?

EJ: It’s awkward. It had to be awkward. Neither one of you could speak the language. But he knew to take care of me, and then I’ll tell you how good of friends we became. He came and spent four days with me the year before last. Let’s see. It will be two years in June, and I’ll tell you about this later on if you want to get into it. But he spent 13 years in a concentration camp afterwards. But anyway, I met him and at that time he had some, most all district headquarters had a pretty nice, well a big building. I’ll put it that way. If you can visualize the old French Colonial type things that they used to build in Vietnam. It was a headquarters, is what it was. Where district headquarters was there was one little room that would be about half the size of a normal bedroom, and that’s where he set us up to live. Of course we didn’t know. Sergeant Wagner and I didn’t have any idea where we were going to eat or where we were going to go to the bathroom or where we were going to take a bath or what we were going to do. But anyway, somehow we struggled through all of that. And he hired Minh. Captain Minh was my district chief. He hired some lady that he claimed used to cook for the French. Well, she’d cook us meals, and it wasn’t very good, but it was enough to keep us alive. I guess we were at the district for a month and we had no radio contact with anybody, and finally, I never will forget it, Rex Masters, which was a guy I knew at Fort Sill, he ran the headquarters at Sa Dec for the division headquarters, came out with a convoy and brought us some fresh water, five gallons, some five gallon cans. That’s the first American we’d seen in a month after we got there. It was a good sight. We finally got settled in though.

SM: How many people were there as members of your team for the district?

EJ: It was supposed to be five, and it started out two, myself and Wagner. Then I got a lieutenant and a radio operator and then later on I got a medic so there was five of us there.
SM: And what was the ARVN unit size?
EJ: We didn’t have any ARVN units.
SM: There wasn’t any ARVN?
EJ: No. We worked strictly with Popular Force and regional force, and mostly just Popular Force. They were just district troops.
SM: And what size was that contingent of Popular Forces?
EJ: We drew a payroll for about 700. But I’d say we didn’t have that many. I’d say we probably had about 500 or 600. You really couldn’t ever tell. The Popular Force were dressed in everything [like the VC]. You couldn’t tell the difference in him and a VC if they were standing side by side, because they all wore the same kind of clothes. We didn’t have uniforms. Most of them wore black pajamas. And that’s what we wore a lot too when we were on operations.
SM: How were the Popular Forces armed? What were the typical weapons?
EJ: Carbines, M-1 rifles, Thompson sub-machine guns, not well armed. We didn’t have anything like a mortar or machine guns like M-60s or grenade launchers or anything like that. The only grenade launcher we would have is the old M-1. We used to put a grenade on the end of it and that’s your grenade launcher. We didn’t have any of the M-60 grenade launchers or anything, no modern equipment whatsoever, carbines and M-1s mostly, and Thompson sub-machine guns. And somebody during the years way back, the Vietnamese were so small, that they took the stocks off of the Thompson sub-machine guns because they claimed they couldn’t put them on their shoulder and reach the trigger and stuff like that which wasn’t right. But you couldn’t hit anything with a Thompson sub-machine gun with the stalk on it. Sure enough you can't hit nothing with it off.
Things like that were all going on when we got there.
SM: Okay. When you first arrived and you went through the process of trying to establish a rapport with your Vietnamese counterpart, how did you assess what your role would be and how you could fit in to what was going on there in that district?
EJ: I tell you, it took a while. But really what you finally come down to is, Captain Minh knew more about fighting a guerilla war than I knew because he had been doing it most of his life. But what you finally assess for yourself is the contacts that you have through fire support. We could get through [to] the helicopters or any type of
support like that. We had to coordinate all the helicopter gun ships, and we could get air
strikes in, and then we could work with people like USOM and AID, and so we were
kind of a go-between between him and support activities I guess is what you’d say. We
could get special projects like money for building a school or just items like that. But
mainly the more important things is that we were able to call in air strikes and call in gun
ships and things like that. So we were kind of his fire support, put it that way. But as far
as experience and what operations we went on and how they were conducted and what
they were doing was pretty much up to him. I would just tag along. And I think I
probably learned more from him than he learned from me.

SM: How frequently would they go out on operations?
EJ: Nearly every day there was some kind of operation or an ambush or
something was going on. I’d say that one of my team members, or two of them, I
wouldn’t let them go by themselves. I’d make at least two go or out nearly everyday. So
we were out on some kind of operation on a daily basis. There’s something going on.
Now, we didn’t have Americans with every operation that was going on or every ambush
or anything like that because the district is a pretty good size. I always equated the district
as say, a county, like Taylor County or something like that was the size of it or
something. So it covered a pretty good-sized area.

SM: Why don’t you go ahead if you would and describe the first time you went
out on patrol with the Ruff Puffs, when you went out on the field with them?
EJ: I’m trying to think. I went on so many of them. I’m trying to think which one
the first one was.

SM: Yeah. Which one was the first one?
EJ: I went on so many of them. I’m trying to think which one the first one was. I
guess the first one we went on to was, we had what he called sweeps or we went on raids
too sometimes, early morning raids. But mainly if you just take a sweep through some
villages and hamlets. I guess that’s the ones I remember going on. The first one I guess
would be--I very seldom went unless Minh went to. In other words, if he went, I always
went with him, but if some of his lieutenants or someone else went, I usually sent the
lieutenants. So when I went with Minh. I guess the first one I was on was, we took, and
maybe he just did it to familiarize me, but we went through a sweep of some villages and
hamlets to just see. He’d check for people or see if there’s any young men or where
everybody was or what were going on. He knew what he was looking for. I really, for a
long time didn’t know exactly what we were looking for. You go into a hamlet or a
village, and you never saw any young people. It was all old people and kids. All the
young men were either with the VC or with us. If you caught one then you had to
determine what he was. But we’d take those sweeps and see if you could catch
somebody. But I guess that’s the first ones we ever went on. I guess we went on, I guess
I’d been on two or three before we ever got into a real firefight of some kind that we had
to call in support and get out or something. But I guess it was probably, I guess I’d been
there at least three weeks before we got into what it felt like to be shot at.

SM: How would you describe VC activity in the area, and VC patrol of the area?
Was there a lot of activity and did they patrol a lot of area, or was it sporadic and not very
much control?

EJ: Yeah. They were pretty active, and we had some areas, of course, like all
areas that were just all VC controlled. Then we had areas that we called contested areas
that we operated in and they operated in too. But the ones that were VC controlled, we
were very cautious about going into those. In fact, Minh wouldn’t go into those unless we
really had a pretty good-sized force to go into them. But the VC would hit our outposts.
We had a lot of outposts. We had some big outposts and then we had a lot of little
outposts. But they’d hit some kind of outpost or some little village, or either they’d come
in and collect taxes or something every day. It was just an every night affair. I say every
day. I should say every night because the VC operated mainly at night. So it was pretty
active all the time.

SM: If you would describe the first time that you guys made significant contact
after that first couple of patrols you went on.

EJ: In the delta area, if you’re familiar with the terrain in the delta areas, there’s
just rice paddies and tree lines and canal banks. That’s about what it is, and the VC
fought you when they wanted to fight you. If they didn’t want to fight you, you wouldn’t
find him. If he wanted to fight you, in other words, he would always seem to be at the
advantage unless you could just go in and catch him by surprise. And they’d usually hit
you from a tree line while you was in a rice paddy or something like that. And the first
couple of times that happens, you feel awful naked because there’s nothing to hide
behind. When I first got over there, it was the rainy season I guess. And all the paddies
were anywhere from knee-deep to waist-deep to chest-deep when you were in them. If
they caught you in the rice paddies, that’s usually when you got caught when you got in a
firefight or something. Then a lot of times, rather than just going in to the tree line, we’d
try to sit down and get fire power in or some kind, or get helicopters or call in some kind
of support to move in. That’s about it. Nearly every time you got it in the delta, that’s the
way you’d get it was when you was in the paddies. We stayed wet most of the time.

SM: Was jungle rot a big problem?
EJ: Yeah. We had a problem with out feet because we stayed in the water so
much, particularly in the wet season. Its amazing, but during the dry season, if somebody
would have told me that the rice paddies would be dry, I’d thought they were crazy, but
in the dry season, all the water leaves the paddies, and then you’ve just got old hard red
dirt like stuff. And they’ll try to plow it up with an old ox and it just comes up in big
cloths and they're real hard. They're just like cement or something. And trying to walk on
those is just about as bad as trying to walk in the water, rice paddies. So either way. In the
dry season you were more open. Things seemed to just open up or something. You felt
more exposed I guess, is what I want to say. In the wet season we used sand pans a lot.
We traveled a lot by san pans. That of course you couldn’t do in the dry season because
the only place you could travel would be on the canals, and you didn’t want to get on
those because that’s where the VC would be looking for you at.

SM: So you felt more exposed during the dry season than during the wet season.
EJ: I did. I think its because it seems like, its kind of like in this country when all
the mesquite trees drop their leaves, and everything and everything just looks more open.
I guess that’s the feeling I got during the dry season over there. Like I say, in the wet
season we traveled by boat a lot, sand pan a lot, in the rice paddies. That’s an experience
is learning how to, a sand pan is about like a canoe. You can equate it to a canoe--is
getting where you’re comfortable fishing and riding sand pans without falling off and
crossing monkey bridges. When you learn those two tricks, you're a native. You really,
you’re there.

SM: Now, the monkey bridges, you're talking about bamboo bridges.
EJ: Yeah. Just one little bamboo pole and you learn to walk those. You're a veteran then.

SM: I guess when you went out with them, with the Vietnamese Ruff Puffs and when they were out on patrol, how did they take care of themselves in terms of those problems you mentioned that you guys had as far always being wet, having problems with your feet, things like that? How did they deal with those?

EJ: Most of them were bare-footed for one thing. They had just flip-flops on. And I guess they were just so used to it, it didn’t seem to bother them. I’ve never seen them with foot rot or anything along that line. I guess they were just used to being wet all the time, that it just didn’t bother them. I don’t know, like we were. Of course we had jungle boots on all the time. So we’d have to make sure that we took them off and tried to keep our feet dry when we got out of places like that or you would get jungle rot. They're just amazing people. They were just raised in that. They just fit it. It didn’t bother them.

SM: At that time, when you could call in support, what could you bring in, especially in ’64?

EJ: Mostly gun ships, helicopter gun ships were the biggest help, and air strikes sometimes. In ’65 I guess it was, early part of ’65, the first jets I ever called in was a carrier was right of the coast I guess, down in the south. And we got some Navy jets out for an air strike I called in one time, and the only thing about them is when they come in, the FAC would tell you that we only got about 15 minutes to put them in because they just had enough fuel to get to you and get back. And so really they were good, don’t get me wrong, but they wasn’t as effective. Now there was Sky Raider that the Americans flew and the Vietnamese flew. That thing could carry all kinds of ordinates and it could stay up over you for an hour or so, and just hover around and you could work with them some, but the jets you had to get in and get out. And in our type of warfare and the small units like we were, what worked for us best was the helicopter gun ships and the Sky Raiders. And we didn’t have any artillery support. We did on one part of the district. We had two guns in another district that could reach us, but very, very little.

SM: Was that an ARVN unit?

EJ: Yeah.

SM: ARVN artillery?
EJ: Yeah, out of another district. And I could call the district advisor there and ask
for support and he could get it to me, if we were in an area that he could reach me, but
most of the areas we couldn’t reach in my district.

SM: How about Naval gunfire support?

EJ: No. We was too far inland.

SM: That’s what I thought. Now, what size units are you talking about in terms of
the Viet Cong? When you would have to call in support, how heavy an engagement,
what size enemy unit would you guess you were going against?

EJ: Well, it would vary. Sometimes it would run anywhere from a squad to maybe
company-size, and we very seldom got into anything bigger than a company-size, what
you’d call a company-size unit. And we made contact with them a few times, and a
couple of times that the district chief thought that we were, due to the firepower and
everything, that we got into a battalion-size unit. But I kind of had my doubts about it. I
always thought there were probably maybe two companies or one company at a time. We
didn’t get into them very often. Most of our action was with real small units, a platoon or
squad units I’d say. Now, when they’d hit an outpost or something, they’d gather their
forces and hit an outpost. When they hit that outpost, they might have been at battalion
level, but by the time we’d get to them, to the outpost to help support, they’d be gone, so
we’d never know, I don’t think.

SM: What were the heaviest weapons you’d come up against?

EJ: The heaviest weapon I ever came up against was a .50 caliber. And that was
heavy for them. At that time, that would be the heaviest one you’d come up with. At that
time, that was what was so frightening to the helicopter pilots, was the .50 caliber,
because they could put it on a helicopter pretty quick. And there wasn’t very many of
those. We used to protect the .50 caliber. Gosh, if you lost one, you’d just nearly turn out
the whole country trying to get it back in those days. But the VC did come up with some
.50 caliber machine guns. And I remember one time we captured a weapon that was a .50
caliber rifle that fascinated me that. We’d run on to VC, and some of our troops too, that
still had the old French weapons that they had during the French War, that were carrying
those kind of weapons, and you’d pick those every once in a while. But that’s basically
.50 caliber was the biggest thing you’d come up on.
SM: No RPGs or anything like that yet.
EJ: No. Not then.
SM: Who was flying the assault helicopters?
EJ: American pilots. The Vietnamese, the only thing we could get out, I ever got, couldn’t get that out of them either, was the Vietnamese had some med-evac choppers, and of course we had Med-evac too. But nearly every time we’d get a med-evac helicopter in, it would be Americans. The Vietnamese just wasn’t very prone on flying in hot zones or anything. Usually, when you needed a helicopter or like a med-evac, it was in a hot, hot area. But the way that worked, the district chief, Minh would have to call and request a Vietnamese helicopter, and when they couldn’t come, I’d call at the same time because we knew they were going to turn us down, and then the Americans were dustoffs and they’d usually come in for us. They were good people.
SM: Did any of the members of your team ever require med-evac?
EJ: No, never did.
SM: How long were you there in that particular district? Was that six months?
EJ: I was there in that district for, I got there in September, and I think I was selected for that other job in June of that year. So probably about eight months I guess.
SM: Did you notice any significant changes over that eight-month period from the time you arrived to the time you left?
EJ: Our support got better. I’ll put it that way. The activity picked up I think. That was probably due to, you know, it’s hard to measure the dang thing. We’d gone over there for a year. And you know how Americans are. They want to fix everything right now. And we go over there for a year, and want to just go balls out for a year, and then you got your counterpart like Minh. He’s been over there all of his life, and he’s not going home after a year. He’s going to still be there. So they’re not in as big a hurry, I’ll put it that way, as we are. So even though we pushed them, I would say the activity picked up, but I don’t think it picked up that much really. Well, it picked up in that we could give him support, and he felt more comfortable that I could get in some gun support and air strikes and things like that. He was more bold to go out and hunt something big than he would have been otherwise. We saw some changes, but it’s hard to
measure the changes you saw in that time. That’s weird. That might not sound right, but I
don’t know how else to put it.

SM: Well, how about enemy activity. Did you see any changes in how they were
conducting their business in the area while you were over there that term?

EJ: Well, they got a hell of a lot more cautious because they knew that with me
there, we could put something on them pretty quick. So I think we saw that really.

SM: By cautious do you mean that they would--

EJ: Well, not as active. They were active, but they weren't as bold. Let’s put it
that way. They had to be a little bit better. Before when there was no air strikes or no
helicopters to hunt them down or firepower, they could pretty well do whatever they
wanted to do. Of course, let’s face it. We had outposts that were probably manned by VC
that we thought belonged to them. In fact, a lot of the soldiers in the Popular Force set up
like I say, they all look alike, whether they’re VC or Popular Force. We had VC right in
our own ranks. That activity was just, I think it picked up because we were probably
more active ourselves, in other words. I guess that’s what I wanted to say.

SM: From your understanding, who controlled the tempo of operations in your
area?

EJ: The VC. Like I say, they fought when they wanted to. If they didn’t want you
to find them, you wouldn’t find them most of the time.

SM: You mentioned that there were VC in your Popular force ranks. Did you
know if any of them got caught while you were there?

EJ: Yeah. They’d screen out some every once in a while, one or two or
something.

SM: How did they do that, do you know?

EJ: I don’t know. When you think back on this thing, I guess you could equate it
to our Civil War. You never knew that this guy sitting next to you with a rifle, that his
brother may be across the canal over there and be a VC, or his daddy or his uncle. In
other words, there was kin fighting kin, you know. It was a civil war is what it was.
We’ve just got be honest about it and call it that. This guy, he may be in your ranks today
and be a good soldier, but he may go the weekend if he gets off or a day he gets off, he
may go back to his village and visit with his brother who’s a VC lieutenant or something.
This kind of thing went on all the time. You had to finally, your mind had to get to this point where these people were fighting one another, and there was more involved in it than just black and white. It just didn’t work that way. So we always had something. We always knew we had VC with us, and the district chief, we always had bodyguards. I always had two bodyguards that stayed with me and I knew they were clean because they were hand picked by somebody. But the others, you didn’t really know whether they were VC. They might be in your camp today and go out and fight with the VC tonight. You didn’t know.

SM: How did these observations that you’re making, how did they fit in with the larger American, or I guess you can call it the grander American idea and strategy, that this was the Cold War. This was communism versus democracy, the black and white as it were, as you said? Was it just communism against democracy?

EJ: No. I don’t know. I don’t know whether a guy that we called VC that had on the black pajamas and carrying the rifle, I don’t know whether he even knew what communism was or not. He knew what Vietnam was, and he knew somebody had told him that he needed to join his country together or they recruited them. The VC would pick them up when they were 14, 15 years old. They just took them into their [ranks], they’d just go through the villages and pick them up. And they had no choice. They’d either be a VC or they were dead. But they indoctrinated them, and like I say, the indoctrinated them with communist propaganda of course, but I’m not sure the average little black pajamaed guy really knew what communism was. He was just fighting for his country or what some people said was his country. And I’ll put it this way, they were very dedicated. In fact, in many cases they were more dedicate than the government forces that we worked with. You catch one of them or wound one of them or capture one of them, the look on his face and the hate that he had when he looked at you, you realized you were dealing with some pretty tough characters. But I don’t know how to call it anything but a civil war. I don’t see how the Cold War even fit into it. You’ve got to understand that these people have been fighting for years. I guess the most peaceful Vietnam’s ever been is when the French had it. Of course the French did every thing. They were the policemen, the traffic cop and the whole works. But they were real dedicated people now on both sides. Gosh, I wish I could explain it better.
SM: No. You’re doing a very good job.
EJ: I don’t know, Steve. I wish I could explain it better.
SM: You are.
EJ: But you know, when you ask me a big picture like that, its hard for me to visualize because like I say, its like I was in a county, and this guy ran this district and he was the god of that district, and we just kind of had our own little personal war. For instance, we never knew what the guy in the district next to us was doing or what the ARVN were doing or what the big picture was hardly. Every once in a while, we’d get a call and they’d want to bring in an ARVN battalion and run a combined operation and we did that with the ARVN units on occasion. I’ll have to say, we did a better job than they did. But that’s the only time we’d come in contact with the “grand scale” of what was going on. We were just kind of surviving in our own little world down there, and trying to do something. To be real honest about it, after you’ve been there for a while, you could see the handwriting on the wall. I don’t think any of us, after we spent a year there, thought it was ever going to work. Eventually the two countries were going to have to come to an accommodation. It’s a shame that it came to an accommodation like it did. Because you had people, and there wasn’t anything bad about being that way, you had people in South Vietnam that you worked with that Ho Chi Minh was their hero, and you could understand why because he fought the French. He ran them off. He fought the Japanese. He was a country hero whether he was in the North or the South to a lot of people. A lot of people that you had with you in your ranks, now most Americans never run into this because if you go as an American unit you’d never see this, but most of the people who worked with you at one time probably fought with the Viet Minh, when they were fighting the French. It was a weird thing. It was quite an experience, I’ll put it that way. But that’s what the advisory effort was back in those days. It was new. Of course the district thing was a new thing, and people learned a lot.
SM: Well, you said that you go the feeling, you yourself thought and perhaps you discussed with other gentlemen you served with, Americans you served with there, you didn’t come out with a very optimistic outlook on how things were going. Did you feel that way at the end of your first eight months when you went from being a district advisor to being an MIT advisor?
EJ: Yeah. I’ll put it this way, Steve, and a lot of us think this way. Now, I’m talking about advisors. I’m not talking about military units. I figure the day that the 173rd was committed to Bien Hoa, that’s Airborne, and then the 1st Infantry Division was committed, that the war was lost right there. There was no way that American soldiers, there was no way you could fight a conventional war in that country, the kind that the Americans wanted to fight. They took it over, and they just took it over from the Vietnamese. I wasn’t there during that period, but I could understand. I had that feeling that we had made a big mistake, because we had seen the quagmire that you’d get into. I’m not sure, to be honest with you, I’m not sure that if we had never committed American troops, that you would have ever seen a North Vietnamese troop committed. I wouldn’t know for sure about that, but I wouldn’t know. There is a possibility that the advisory effort could still be going on. By this time, I would have thought that the North and the South would have come to some kind of accommodation. That’s just my gut feeling on the thing. I think we’re making more progress in Vietnam right now than we’ve ever made, just like we are in China. Capitalism is going to finally win over what we wanted to do all the time, is my feeling on the thing anyway.

SM: Well, that’s an interesting observation based on what you said in you’re interview so far. There weren’t any main force NVA units in the area where you were, and I guess what you’re saying is the introduction of American conventional forces brought about the same response from the North Vietnamese.

EJ: I think it had something. I’m not saying that they wouldn’t have come anyway. I’m not going to say that. But I think that either caused it or it sped it up. I don’t know. We committed the Marines at Da Nang. Their mission was to guard the airfield at Da Nang. Of course you know you’re not going to tell a Marine that he’s going to get in a foxhole and guard an airfield. He’s going to saddle up and go hunt for something to do. He’s going to go fight somebody. And they did. Of course, their excuse for engaging in combat was that you had to spread out and go out and patrol to protect the airfield. That’s the start of it right there. When the 173rd was committed at Bien Hoa, to give you an example, their first operations that they went on was disasters. They just chopped them all to pieces. I think it just showed them that, “Hey. We may be little and we may be in black pajamas, but we can just pick at you as long as we want to. You’re going to fight
when we want to fight.” That’s the way they fought their war and it’s hard to whip
somebody like that, I’ll tell you. Maybe we could have stayed with the advisory effort a
little longer and just used what we had over there like helicopter gun ships and some air
support, we’d have done alright. I don’t know. That’s all afterthought I guess. That’s my
feelings about it anyway.

SM: When you left the district advisory position and went to become a team
leader of the MIT team, why don’t you, if you would, describe how that transition
occurred?

EJ: This MIT team, are you familiar with it?

SM: That’s Motivation Indoctrination and Training team.

EJ: Yeah. It was a concept developed by the Special Forces, and they’re the ones
that started it. What it is, is a team of people made up of Vietnamese Special Force,
Vietnamese Rangers, Chu Hois and people who are trained as propagandists. In other
words, they just took the same tactics that the VC taught, and we were going to use them
the same way we used them, except we were going to use them. What we’d do is go into
a district, and the district chief would pick out a hand picked platoon to be trained and
indoctrinated. And so then we’d go in or they’d come in with complete new uniforms,
new weapons, new equipment, and we’d spend, I can’t remember how long we spent with
them. It seemed like it was eight weeks or something, six weeks. And you’d indoctrinate
them. In other words, the training was the same thing as the VC would do. You have
propaganda people who’d come in and use propaganda on them to teach them. Plus we’d
teach them all kinds of tactics and things like that, which were highly trained units when
we got through with them. They came to Lap Vo to train one of our platoons. They saw
it, and went back to Saigon and requested that I be assigned to the team. I didn’t
volunteer for it at first. But it was a volunteer assignment. So they got a hold of me and
wanted to know if I would volunteer for the team because they didn’t know anyone that
knew the delta as well as I knew the delta area. So that’s what I did then. I guess I started
in June. I guess I was with them the last four months I was there. What it consisted of
was, like I say, Vietnamese Special Forces and we’d get the Chu Hois out of the Chu Hoi
center. You know what a Chu Hoi is? I had two of them on my team, and I learned to
trust them more than I did anybody else to tell you the truth. They were good people. But
anyway, I had two officers. It would be myself and I had a lieutenant, and then we had, I
think our team consisted of, it’s been so many years ago. I think our team consisted of
about 12 people. We’d go out and live, we’d go out in a VC contested area, that’s where
we did our training, and we’d set up in some old pagoda or some little hamlet or some
place, and we’d stay with that platoon out there for six weeks training them, and then
hoping that they’d be well trained, which they would be when we left. Then we’d go back
later on and go on operations with them, see how good they were. We’d spend a lot of
time teaching them intelligence and, the first ones, assassinations and the whole works on
the thing. So that’s what I did those four months after I left the district. I think the first
place I went was down in the My Tho area, and then I spent six weeks there, and then I
spent six weeks over in Go Kong district and then the last 45 days in country I was in
Kien Phong province, which is set up right next to the Plain of Reeds, and that’s where I
spent my last 45 days with the team.

SM: When you would go into an area, how many members on a team again?
EJ: We had 12 people in the team.
SM: 12 people in the team.
EJ: Then we had the platoon of course. 25 man platoon. I guess it was 25.
SM: And you’d go into an area and you would train the people in that area. And
these were the Popular Force people.
EJ: Yeah. We’d train that platoon. The district chief would hand pick the platoon,
and we’d take that platoon into a contested area. And we got them in a contested area to
train them because we wanted them to be, at the same time we were doing the training we
would do some operations in the area too.
SM: What kind of intelligence training would you provide them?
EJ: That was done by the Vietnamese. We had, with mine, I had a Vietnamese
lieutenant, and I had one Chu Hoi, which was a lieutenant, was a political cadre with the
VC. Then I had one other lieutenant, VC lieutenant that was Chu Hoi that was a platoon
leader. Between the both of them, they knew the propaganda techniques because they’d
been indoctrinated so well themselves. I used them a whole lot on that indoctrination. But
it was the same thing that the communists used or the VC used. We just used their tactics,
the same thing.
SM: Would the platoon be trained to identify and capture or if necessary, kill Viet Cong cadre in the area?

EJ: Yes, that was our primary--

SM: That was the primary concern.

EJ: Yes.

SM: How effective were they?

EJ: Very effective. They basically, some cases even knew ahead of time or suspected certain people, you know. I guess you can put it that way. And to tell you the truth, after we trained them, we knew it was happening, but we didn’t get personally involved in the assassination end of it or capturing of cadre because it might be village people who had been living there for a long time before somebody might have known they were VC. That was another thing that was kind of funny, that you’d have to learn, which always fascinated me is when I first got over there. I kept getting this thing from the district chief about this guy, we’d capture somebody and they’d say, “Oh, he’s political cadre, VC political cadre.” And I’d think, well, to me a political cadre would be the worst kind of guy you could run up against, rather than say just a regular VC. But somehow, them being a political cadre had a certain amount of respect or something. In other words, they weren’t as hard on them as they would be on a guy they caught that wasn’t a political cadre, whereas I’d be right the opposite. I’d think he’s the guy that started it all to start with. But that’s the way they looked at things. That was an interesting little side note. But the political indoctrination thing, in those countries I guess, has been around so long that I guess, what are you going to call it, a respected profession. I don’t know. You might call it that.

SM: The platoons that you were training, did they have a special name, do you know?

EJ: A special name?

SM: Right. Did they have a particular name after they received your training?

EJ: No. Not that I know of. We never gave them a name that I know of unless they gave them a name. We never gave them a name. I don’t know where the equipment came. I shouldn’t say that. I started to say, I don’t know where their uniforms and things came from, but we got all new uniforms and good equipment for them and everything.
we’d equip them with. At that time, when I wasn’t in the field, which wasn’t very often, we had a villa in Saigon that we stayed in, the team stayed in. So it’d work out. We’d come back to Saigon every time and replenish our team or whatever we’d need to do if we lost any people, and then we’d go back out to the next district and pick up a team or pick up another platoon. It was a good program. I don’t know whether it still, I don’t know how long it ran after I left or anything like that, but the other team leaders were, like I say, were Special Forces and I wasn’t Special Forces. I just had the delta team because of the knowledge I had of the area.

SM: The Chu Hois that you had working with you, were these South Vietnamese that had been Viet Cong and turned back to the side of the government, or were they North Vietnamese that had been captured and turned?

EJ: They were South Vietnamese, both of them were. They were sharp. They were pretty sharp people. In fact I trusted them more than--I really learned to trust them. In fact, the lieutenant and I, this might have been a dumb thing to do, but we picked them up one time in Saigon and gave each one a rifle and put them in a jeep and we drove to My Tho with them in a jeep. After we got about half way there, I told him, I said, “Listen, we might have made a mistake. These old boys might take us out,” but they didn’t, so by the time we got there I had a lot of trust in them. But they knew, they were really knowledgeable of course of the way the VC operated, and they also knew that we probably had people, even in those platoons where they were hand picked, there was a possibility, in fact a good possibility, that we had some VC in there, one or two or one or something like that. When I really started having a lot of faith in them was when you go to bed at night and you bed down in some little old pagoda or some little old outpost somewhere, about 12:00 o’clock, after it’d get dark, one of them would come and wake me up and move me somewhere else, you know, while nobody else was watching because they knew that something could happen. So I had a lot of faith in them.

SM: In the Americans, did you work with the same Americans over time in this particular area or did you transition through quite a few people?

EJ: Are you talking about in the MIT area?

SM: Yes, sir.
EJ: I had a lieutenant, an engineer lieutenant named Thompson, and he stayed with me, he stayed with me the whole time while I was with. No, he left. Let’s see. Wait a minute. Let me think. It doesn’t seem like he was with me when. Yeah, I guess he did stay with me the whole time on the thing. Because I used to take him out and he’d go back. We’d kind of split sometimes and he’d go back to say another district we just trained and work with them some more to see how their operation was going. So we weren't together all the time. Let me put it that way. Sometimes we were by ourselves.

SM: Of course in 1965, step back, 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, what did you hear about them and what did you think when that happened, and of course the resolutions that followed that Johnson could use all necessary means?

EJ: Like I say, as far back in the boonies as we were, I can remember the district chief knew it before I did, and he came to me and was all excited because they were bombing the North, and he thought that was a good thing, that we’re finally going to bomb the North and the Americans are bombing the North. As far as all that other stuff, why, when, and where and how it happened, we were kind of lost for information where we were.

SM: And you’ve already described to some degree what you thought of the American conventional military build up as conventional forces started entering various areas. What did you think overall of the approach of the MIT teams?

EJ: I thought it was one of the greatest things. It was probably the kind of thing that, had it been started earlier, it seemed like to me, Steve, that we were playing catch up all the time. Does that make sense to you?

SM: Yes, sir.

EJ: In other words we were playing catch up all the time, and the Americans were always in hurry. We wanted to do things. It’s kind of like our kids are now. If they want something, they want it now. They don’t want it tomorrow type thing. But it seemed like we were always playing catch up. If we would have had more time, well, go back a little bit. If we would have had more time for instance, to send every advisor or at least the senior advisor or district advisor to language school before he went to Vietnam, it’s amazing how much more effective he would have been. So what I’m saying is we would “make shift” catch up. This was a program that, had it been started years ahead of that,
say in ’62, when things started happening, in ’63. It’s a good program. Now, I don’t
know whether, to be honest about it, I don’t know whether the program survived or not. I
don’t know how much longer it run after I left over there. I really don’t know. It was a
good program. It was the kind of program we should have been. It turned out at least one
platoon of well trained, well equipped indoctrinated soldiers, you know. We’ll put it that
way. So it was good in that sense. And we had a team in each Corps area. We only had
one team in each Corps area.

SM: How many platoons did you train over the course of the four months you
were there?

EJ: Well, I was trying to think. I was in My Tho and I trained a team in My Tho,
one in Go Kong, and two in Kien Phong province I think. I guess I trained four teams in
that length of time. I must have got in on the middle of one team because that only gave
me four months and I think we spent six weeks with them. I’m pretty sure I got two in
Kien Phong. But I didn’t finish the team now. That’s where it was, in Kien Phong in the
Plain of Reeds. The team was still there when I left.

SM: They were still training the platoon.

EJ: Yeah they were still training the platoon when I left to come home.

SM: While you were going through the training with these platoons, did you guys
make a lot of contact with the enemy?

EJ: Very little. We never could understand why, but the VC pretty well left us
alone. They didn’t bother us that much. Now, when you went back with a platoon you’d
already trained and he’s in his operational phase, then they’d make contact. They did
some things where their intelligence was good, and they may only capture one or two or
kill one or two, but they knew some pretty good operations or they were doing what they
were trained to do, put it that way. When we went to the Plain of Reeds or right on the
edge of the Plain of Reeds, with a district down there, was I guess, hearing all these
things about the Plain of Reeds and everything, I guess was the spookiest, and it might
have been because I was close to coming home. I don’t know. But that was probably the
most spooky one, but we didn’t get hit while I was there.

SM: Did you ever train them to use additional assets like close air support, things
like that?
EJ: Yeah. They could use that. But see, this is hard to do, when I say we trained them
to do that, that’s hard to do because all your close air support nearly, your FACs, your
Forward Air Controllers, they’re all Americans. So you nearly had to be an American at
that time to get support. You see what I mean. They couldn’t call. Particularly some little
black pajama guy down on the ground, you know, he didn’t have much. In fact he was
lucky if he had a radio to call anybody.

SM: You had the language barrier, you’ve got the technology barrier, and then
you have training, the technical expertise.

EJ: Yeah.

SM: In terms of comparing your MIT team experience with your advisory team
experience, did you have better access to interpreters and English speakers with MIT
teams?

EJ: We didn’t have interpreters with the MIT teams but we had enough people.
These cadre that we had were hand picked people too, and most of them spoke English.
So I didn’t have an assigned interpreter per se like I did when I was a district advisor.
When I was district advisor, I had a Chinese. What they did, when we needed
interpreters, the Saigon government went to the Chinese community there in Saigon
really is what it bases down to, because the Chinese community were better educated and
many of them spoke English, and recruited them or inducted them to be interpreters. I got
a Chinese, well he was a Chinese-Vietnamese, but he was Chinese descent. Lyn was my
interpreter. I called him Lightning. He was a little bitty guy. So he was my interpreter in
the district. I never had one on the teams.

SM: How did you feel when you left the MIT teams to come home? In terms of
when you left the district area as district advisor, you indicated that you really didn’t feel
very optimistic. When you left as an MIT team advisor, did you feel any more optimistic
or did you feel the same way?

EJ: I felt about the same way. We were way behind the eight ball about that time.
There were some good things coming out, but when the American troops were
committed, a lot of that kind of stuff stopped. A whole lot of it stopped. I think we still
had advisors in districts and provinces, but I think what we did is caused the Vietnamese
to back up and say, “If y’all want to fight this war, you can have it.” I really think that’s
what happened. And I think the districts and provinces probably just hunkered down and
tried to stay out of it, to tell you the truth. And I don’t imagine the Americans, you’ve got
to look at it this way. An American unit, if you were in an American unit for instance,
you take this GI or this officer and he goes out to Travis Air Force Base, and he gets on a
jet and 24 hours later he’s landing at some base camp in Vietnam. And he stays there and
the only thing he sees is Americans other than the Vietnamese who work on the base
camp, which half are probably VC anyway or even the whores right outside the gate.
That’s the only thing he’s going see of Vietnam, other than his little operations that he
goes out and tromps through the jungles all the time. But he comes back and he comes
back to base camp and he drinks American beer, eats American food. He’s never left
America yet. Then you put him on a plane after 12 months, and he lands back out here at
Travis Air Force base in 24 hours, he never really knew the Vietnamese. We tried to
figure out what happened to some of these guys. They never knew why they were there.
They never met anybody over there, so they don’t know what they were. I’m not talking
just about the inductees or the GIs. I’m talking about officers and other people. They
were just so, like we did, we lived and ate and fought with them on the ground. That’s the
way the advisor did. So you were with them 24/7.

SM: What were the more interesting things you ate?
SM: What comes to mind? Anything in particular?
EJ: Nuoc-Man I guess is the first thing that comes to everybody’s mind, and you
learn to like that, because if you can get past the smell, you can put it on your rice or
anything else and get your protein out of it. That’s what we looked for. Out in the little
hamlets where they were making the nuc mam, have you been there to see the vats?
SM: I know what Nuoc-man is. I’ve eaten it.
EJ: But you know they have those big old vats. And it stinks out in those villages.
But in Saigon they’ll refine it. And nuc mam there is pretty nice. But anyway, out where
we lived, it was just old regular rotten fish nuc mam. And then rice, ate lots of rice, ate
lots of chicken, if they could catch a chicken and fish. I’ll tell you another story then if
you’ve got time to listen to it. When we’d go through a hamlet or village sometime, if
there was a dog, particularly a young pup, these Popular Force guys would always steal it
or pick it up and bring it home. We’d put it in the base camp. We were at the district
headquarters there what we called the base camp. And that dog stayed around there for a
while eating rice and get real fat and then all of the sudden, somebody’d come over and
they’d always come over and get our wash basins. We had some old porcelain
washbasins that we’d shave in and wash our face in. We had us a little stand built up
behind our hooch there. They’d come over and say, “Well, we’re going to fix something
to eat.” Well, they’d always mix these vegetables and meat into these wash basins and
they’d come bring it over there and they’d bring some beer, and we’d get the chopsticks
and we’d sit there and eat this stuff. Well, then somebody would say, “What happened to
that dog that was here the other day?” They said, “Oh, it hit a hand grenade and got hurt
or a grenade trap got it or something.” We were pretty dumb, but after that happened two
or three times, we realized what we were eating. Dog to them was good. That’s just
something you had to get by. And one other time, for instance, they’d take; the district
chief was the one that got me one time on this. They sell rats three different ways; live,
dead, and stunned. And you can buy them. Of course the live cost more than the dead
ones. But my lieutenant, lieutenant Halbert one time got caught in an outpost, and they
couldn’t get out. Well, they got in a firefight so they wound up in an outpost, and we
couldn’t get them out so we had to leave them in there all night and I was talking to him
on the radio and he said, “Boy, you ought to see these things they cooked up.” He said,
“It was really good. They just basted like they’d been barbecue and baked.” And I said,
“What are they?” He said, “I don’t know, but it’s pretty good.” He come to find out they
were rats that they’d basted and they were real red. Bob had a weak stomach anyway so
he like to never got over that one. But you know, that’s the kind of things they ate, which
there was nothing wrong with it, but they ate it all the time. My district chief used to tell
me, he said, “That rat never ate anything but rice.” I said, “How do you know it never ate
anything but rice.” He said, “Well, it’s a rice rat.” I said, “Yeah, uh huh. There’s too
many villages around there to know he’s just a rice rat.” And balut, the eggs, fermented
eggs. That’s another thing. We were on an operation one time. I never will forget it and
we’d about starved to death. We came up on this little old hamlet and I saw this rack, it
looked like eggs and why it dawned in my mind, the only thing that entered my mind was
boiled egg. I thought, “My gosh!” And I got to talking, didn’t have my interpreter with
me, and I was talking to Minh about those eggs. He said, “We’ll get us some.” And we
sat down and they gave it to you, and they set them in little old, kind of like a wine glass
or something, set them up in there and give you a little bitty spoon. I thought, “Now,
what in the world is going on here?” Then he’d take that thing and cracks the top of that
and there’s a chicken inside that thing, and he just reaches in with the spoon and eats it. I
thought, “Good Lord. That’s too much for me.” But that’s the kind of thing we ran onto.
But we survived. We’d nibble around on stuff. We’d get by. If you take rice and put nuc
mam on it, you’d get some protein and then sugar cane. If we could find sugar cane, that
was always good to carry with you. Then sometimes we could get into Vinh Long. We’d
get dried shrimp, little popcorn type shrimp that were dried, and we’d carry that with us.
That was good protein. So we got by.

SM: How would you carry the sugar cane and how would you eat it?
EJ: The sugar cane, you just peel it and eat it. Just like we did when we was kids.
We used to have sugar cane at home. You’d just take the hull I guess off of it, and chew it
and chew the sugar and juice out of it and spit out the bulk or the pulp. You could always
find sugar cane. Coconuts. If you could get into some areas you could find coconuts.
Now, coconut was, the coconut oil took a while to get used to because our stomachs were
not used to it and it used to upset our stomachs. We’d get diarrhea all the time when we
drank it. But you find that your stomach adjusts to all that stuff after you get over there a
while. But that’s about the way we ate.

SM: What about living conditions, especially when you were on the move so
much with the MIT teams?
EJ: We just lived wherever we could find to set up, like an old pagoda or even an
old outpost we would stay in. Just wherever you want to drop your sleeping bag or your
hammock. In October I think of ’64. I have to give you a little background on this. My
district chief, Captain Minh is a Hoa Hao. Are you familiar with the Hoa Hao sect?
SM: Yes, sir.
EJ: Okay. His father was pretty high up in the Hoa Hao operation, lived in a Hoa
Hao village in the delta. And Minh was pretty high up, and still is influential in it now.
He lives in Switzerland right now, but he still has a lot of contact with the Hoa Hao here
in the States. You know about the Hoa Hao being very anti-communists, and are still
being persecuted in Vietnam. The VC are down on them or the communists, control them pretty heavy. But anyway, what I was going to tell you, in October I guess it was, there was a Hoa Hao guerrilla leader by the name of Hieu, H-I-E-U, that fought both the government troops and the VC. In other words, he protected the Hoa Hao territory around the Hoa Hao village in there. He came out and put out the word that he had an interest in joining the government forces or regional force, you know, coming over on the government’s side. So Minh and I went to Hoa Hao village, and I lived with Hieu for about two months I guess. And that was the main reason I was with him, was we were of course negotiating him coming out on the government’s side, but the main reason I stayed with him was to keep the government troops off of him, thinking that they probably wouldn’t attack him while I was with him. But anyway I lived with him for a good while, and then I lived in the temple at Hoa Hao village for about a month. But we finally came out. I think we came out and I’ve got to get my times right here. We finally came out in December, sometime in December, before Christmas I think. And he brought 500 troops out with him and they joined the government forces, the regional forces, and they made him a major in the regional forces and they made some of his lieutenants. In other words, they had the organization. So we had the whole battalion came out with their weapons, and then we took them and sent them through training and so forth and everything. We’re good friends. I’m still in contact with Hieu in Vietnam. Of course I’m still in contact with Minh. Hieu spent 13 years in a concentration camp. Well, they call them re-education camps, but they’re really concentration camps. He spent 13 years in a concentration camp and seven years of house arrest. I communicate with him now but, about half of our letters that he sends or I send get ripped off somewhere along the line. But he still, I’ve got some pictures from him and so forth. But anyway, we’re still in contact. We became real good friends. So we got that battalion out of there, and got him to join, like I say, the regular forces. They made him a major in the regional forces and he was really a guerilla leader now with long hair, black pajamas, and at the time I was living with him, they lived just like the VC did. In other words, we moved every night. I learned a whole lot with him. Then I got decorated for that from General Kahn, who at that time was the top dog in Vietnam. I just wanted to bring that up. I’d forgotten we’d already passed that up.
SM: That’s amazing. Did you work with any of the major sects, the Cao Dai or the Vien Xuyen or anything like that?

EJ: There was a mixture, but the majority of them that we worked with were Hoa Hao because, at Lap Vo I was right next to An Yang province, which is nearly all Hoa Hao, and Long Xuyen province or the town of Long Xuyen is in An Yang province. But most of those people in there still are Hoa Hao now. I did work with some of the others. They were a mixture of them, but most predominately Hoa Hao. When Pete Peterson was still the ambassador of Vietnam, I was in contact with him, and he used to, they couldn’t make personal contact now with Hieu, but he would send out some of the agents out of the consulate in Saigon or Ho Chi Minh City, and they’d check on him or would check up on him, I’ll put it that way and kept me informed about him. Like I say, I get a letter from him, I guess once every month or two, two to three months, we still communicate. But he’s alive. And like I say, he spent 13 years in the concentration camps.

SM: Unbelievable.

EJ: While I’m on that, let me tell you, we got a lot to be ashamed of in Vietnam, the way we left it. I don’t really know. They can call it anything they want to, but we just walked off from some responsibilities there. But what gets me, and I blame myself as much as I blame anybody else. We never worried about what happened to these people that we worked with and lived with and supported all this time like Minh and Hieu. And like Minh, now, they took Minh to the Chinese border, is where they had their prison camps. I just got through reading a book about them by the way, where he spent his ten years up there first. The Americans just forgot. Even me. The easy thing for me to do was to think, “Well, he was a lieutenant colonel, and Hieu was a guerilla leader so they killed both of them.” I figured they were both dead. And that was the easy way to do it, and that’s what I did. But people knew. Our government had to know that these people were imprisoned up in there, and that they were killing them and they were starving them to death and everything else. God, he can tell you some horror stories. Minh, like I was going to tell you now, after I got in contact with him. He lives in Switzerland now, and he came June before last, it’d be two years this June, and spent some time with me. So I got to talk to him and find out. And I got to apologize to him for the United States. I’ll put it that way. You know what really gets me, he’s not bitter. He’s not bitter at the
Americans or anything else, but we left them there. Just like he said, he said the first
three years they were there in the prison camp, they said, “If we can just last three years
we’ll be all right because the Americans won’t let us stay over three years.” He said after
about five years they kind of gave up on the Americans. I can understand why. We never
went in to check on them. We never went in to complain about it. We never filed any, in
other words, the Congress didn’t have an uproar and people who were advisors like I
was, we should have been pushing something to really find out what happened to all
these people. So finally, the only ones that would have an interest in it I guess were the
Swiss, and the Swiss came in and they're the ones that got him out. He spent 10 years on
the Chinese border, and they got him out of there and he spent three years in prison in
Saigon. And while he was in Saigon, his family, his wife could of course bring him food
and medicine, so he got in pretty good shape, and then they finally got him out and he
went to Switzerland in 1988 and that’s where he lives now. Now, Hieu never did get out.
He’s still lives in Hoa Hao village and still is monitored, everything he does. Now, him
and Minh’s wife and the kids, he’s got four girls and one boy. Three of the girls, the
oldest three girls, she put them on a boat in Saigon back in, I don’t know. I forget what
year it was she put them on. I think it was ’78. And the first time she put them on a boat,
they got caught and brought back. And she put them on a boat again and they finally got
out. Well, there’s one of the girls who I communicate with all the time, Minh Chao, her
and her sister, she’s got a sister too, live in San Jose, California, and another one lives in
Australia. One of them wound up in Australia and two of them wound up in California.
The other two kids, the other girl and the younger boy are in Switzerland with their daddy
and mother. She’s there too now. But all three of those girls got a college education now
and all doing real good. It’s amazing what people like that did for themselves. It’s also
amazing that the Vietnamese, how fast they integrated themselves into our society and
started becoming productive citizens. We don’t have them on welfare. They’re not on
welfare and they’re not hunting handouts or anything like that. They came in and did
what they needed to do, which was educate themselves, and that’s what they're doing.
And you know and I know that every time you get one in a class, they're usually at the
top of the class education wise. But it’s amazing. I just wanted to get that across that I
think the worst thing we did was how we abandoned them after we left them. It’s just
pathetic. And as far as I know, the United States never has apologized to these people,
but there’s a lot of them live here in the United States now that got out of there, even after
the prison camps got out. So I just wanted to say that. I wanted to get that on record,
because these two people are really fine people, are still fine people I imagine. They’ve
tried to get me to go back to Vietnam to visit with Hieu, and I’ve thought about it a
couple of times, but to go back and give you a little idea of how we operated in the
district and when I was with Hieu. Our war was a personal war. It wasn’t like going over
there with a unit and everything that was done, you could blame on the unit or something
like this. It was a personal war. In other words, it was a face-to-face type war, and I’m
sure I made some enemies over there and I’m sure I did something to some people that
still might not be exactly happy about it. So going over there wouldn’t be that safe for
me, I don’t think right now. But anyway, I wanted to get that on record about those two
people and how I think we left them holding the bag on the thing. But that’s just my
feeling. All right, ready to go. [laughter]

SM: When you left Vietnam in 1965, you already indicated that you were
pessimistic about whether or not we would succeed. How close did you watch what was
happening in Vietnam? What was the trip like back for you, and how closely did you
watch what was happening in Vietnam as you continued with your military career?

EJ: I watched it real close, and when I came out of there, I went to Saint Mary’s
University as an ROTC instructor. And again, I was supposed to be there for three years,
but I think I only stayed two or something. Anyway, I’d volunteered to go back to
Vietnam and about that time the Navy Ship Pueblo got captured. So I wound up going to
Korea after that, so I didn’t go back to Vietnam during that period, and never did go back.
But I kept up with everything that was going on and it was quite obvious that I think
anybody could have seen the fact we were fighting a losing battle. Even if we’d have won
the war, we wouldn’t have won the country. We won battles, Steve. I don’t guess we
could ever say we were defeated in a battle. But when you go into Ia Drang Valley or
some place and fight and then you pack up and leave, what have you gained. That’s what
I say. I think it was just a matter of time. It was kind of like the French history being
retold. Does that sound right?
SM: Right. You say that you put in papers to go back to Vietnam, what did you hope to do if you went back?

EJ: I wanted to go back into the district. I’d rather go back as an advisor, not with American units. I wanted to go back to where I felt like I could do something that would be satisfying. I think if you go as an American unit, like I say, I don’t think they ever, they never got close to the people.

SM: What did you think of Johnson’s decision not to run for re-election in ’68?

EJ: I think he probably did the right thing. Not only that, I think that the war had just worn him down. I don’t he could have held together for another term. And I was glad that he left because I don’t think he would have ever put the pressure on the communists to get our. The main thing then, let’s face it, was try to get those prisoners out of prison. That was, as far as I’m concerned, was the objective, in the latter part of the war, was to get the prisoners home. I don’t think it would have ever happened if Nixon hadn’t have put the B-52s on them, and really convinced them maybe they ought to let them go. I don’t think Johnson would have ever done that. I think he would have still been hem-hawing.

SM: Where were you? I know where you were. You were a field artillery advisor in Iran in 1975. When did you leave Fort Sill to go do that in ’75? Do you recall?

EJ: I left in January.

SM: In January ’75. So you were in Iran when Saigon fell.

EJ: That’s right.

SM: Did you get word there that that happened?

EJ: Yeah. We could get the word and we could see it on television. It was on Farsi television but we could see what was happening. That’s one of the reasons I cut it short and came home and retired. I just couldn’t get over it, which was all right. I had enough time to retire. I had a good career going. But there was a bunch of us that did that. I wasn’t the only one. Most of us that were advisors. It ended the wrong way. I’ll put it that way.

SM: Yes, sir. What do you think about the way the United States is approaching Vietnam now, in terms of normalizing relations, trying to build economic relationships with Vietnam?
EJ: Well, like I say, I’ve got some Vietnamese friends that I talk to all the time now. And Minh’s wife, Ti, just got back from Vietnam. She goes every year. She says that things are better, but there’s still the corruption. The place is pretty corrupt. But, I hear them talk about things like that, and I don’t pay much attention to it because it was corrupt even under their, under the Saigon government too. Corruption is kind of a way of life for the Oriental. I’m just convinced of that whether you’re in Vietnam or Korea or China or wherever you are. But she says they still, in fact she had a pharmacy in Saigon. She don’t have it now. But even she stayed there after Minh went to Switzerland for a while, but she said they’d come around and take all of her profits so she couldn’t make any living. But I think with more influence and more capital investment. They went at it pretty strong here a few years ago, and then there was so much corruption that the American companies backed off of it and pulled back out of it. If you go there, if a company goes over there, they’re just going to have to learn that there’s a certain amount, I don’t care, they’ve got to factor in the corruption. I’ll put it that way. You’ve got to learn how to deal with it, because that’s the oriental way. I think as we get more things in there. I’m not satisfied with the way the VC or the communists still control the country, like the Hoa Hao for instance. The Hoa Hao, they won’t let them assemble or anything. Back in 1995, they allowed the Hoa Hao to have their founder’s day celebration that they should have every year. But there was a million people that showed up at Hoa Hao village, and it scared the hell out of them I guess. So they clamped down on them again. In other words, they don’t have freedom of religion or anything like that. And them being so anti-communists, they’re down on them pretty good. I haven’t been there. I would imagine the communists control the country pretty good. Anyway, people who have been there, and I guess there’s a lot of Americans over there. More than we think now, that get along pretty well in the country. I don’t know. I think our investment and capitalism, I think that will turn around quicker than anything. I’m convinced of that. I think that’s what happening in China. I don’t know. It just does something. It causes democracy I guess.

SM: What major lessons did you take away from your Vietnam War experience on a personal level for yourself?

EJ: You mean as far as the war itself overall?
SM: The war or just what you experienced in Southeast Asia. What was the most
important thing you took away from your experience there?

EJ: I took away some satisfaction, and I thought I did something to help out, and I
made a lot of good friends. And I fell in love with the country. The people of Vietnam,
you can't meet any better people than the Vietnamese I don’t think. I think they’re still
that way. That’s the reason I think that they’ll survive, in spite of the communists or
whatever government they got. I was really impressed with that. But just, well, just so
many experiences and close calls and things over there and friends you make. I guess
that’s what I brought back with me more than anything else, and my team members. I’ll
always remember them.

SM: What do you think we should learn from that experience as a nation?

EJ: Make dang sure we know what we’re getting into. You know, you’ve got to
really look at something close and make sure you’re not getting yourself into the middle
of a civil war or something. Let’s face it. We didn’t want to call it that. That’s what that
was, Steve. It was a civil war, because they had brother fighting brother and daddy
fighting daddy. You’ve got to make sure you know what. And if you’re going in to help
someone, you’ve got to make sure they want to be helped. I think that by that time the
government of South Vietnam was so corrupt it was hard to do anything with, and so the
people down in the districts and the provinces, they were trying hard but if you didn’t
have it at the top, you never were going to get there I don’t think. We just need to look
closer next time before we jump. And like I say, I think if we would have left it at the
advisory level, I’m not sure that things wouldn’t have worked out. I don’t know. We
might still be sending advisors over there, but we wouldn’t have been sending units. I
don’t know. The people in the field, I think if every one of them would be honest with
you, the people who were in the field during the middle ‘60s and the early ‘60s will tell
you that if they really look at it hard, they can see that you couldn’t have won the war. It
didn’t make any difference how much strength you put in there. It wasn’t going to be
won that way, not by armies.

SM: Based on what you saw and what you experienced after you got back, how
important or how significant do you think the casualties were on the American will to
continue, year after year after year and the emphasis on body count?
EJ: Well, it had just gone on and on, Steve. But if you’d have never committed
the American unit, you could have lived with an advisor getting killed every once in a
while, or two or three getting killed. This is something in our type of thing now, you’re
going to see that going on all the time is these Special Forces guys, they’re so trained in
different countries that there’s things like that happening that we don’t even know about
anymore. And it’s happening in a good way probably. But I don’t think people would
have gotten near as upset. I’ll put it this way. Your advisors mostly were officers or
senior NCOs or career people. It wasn’t a draftee thing. I had one draftee on my team was
my radio operator, Sullivan was from Chicago and just a great kid and left Vietnam with
a good attitude. If you hadn’t had draftees dying, and you had career people dying and
career people of captain rank or colonel rank, they wouldn’t have paid that much
attention to it I don’t think. It wouldn’t have happened that often. But when you started
having casualties and particularly the American units were so, and I hate to say anything
harsh about guys that went over there but, I don’t know how to put it. But the morale, and
the caliber of soldier, and the caliber of draftee that was going in the latter part of the war
was a disaster waiting to happen. That’s just the way it was. The only ones going, let’s
face it, along the last was the hand few that had volunteered and the others were draftees
that couldn’t get into college or get to Canada. That was about what it amounted to. Most
of them came out of the poor section of New Orleans and New York and Dallas/Fort
Worth, places like that I think. They didn’t particularly want to be over there. And you
can’t hardly blame them. I don’t know.

SM: Is there anything else that you’d like to discuss today?

EJ: No. Let’s see. I wanted to be sure and get that in about the Hoa Hao and then
the other one. Let me just make sure. I made a couple of notes here. Let me see if I got
any. I’ve got my 214 if you need any data off of that. Decorations or anything, you want
those, Steve.

SM: If you want, you can send a copy of that when you send the transcript back.

EJ: Okay. I’ll send you a copy of the 214 then when you send that whole thing. I
guess that’s all I’ve got unless you’ve got something.

SM: No. I’m through with my questions. Let me go ahead and put an official end
to this. Thank you very much sir. This will end the interview with Mr. Eddie Jones.