Richard Verrone: We’re continuing our oral history interview with Jack Wright. Sir, we’ve been talking about your first tour. Let’s talk about your second tour. Before that, you rotated back to the States in 1968.

Jack Wright: Correct,

RV: When was that?

JW: I mentioned that there were some personal problems at home. Maybe not on tape. I applied for a 30-day drop. I was due to come back in October of ’68. I actually got out of country in early to mid September of ’68. I got a very unique assignment then. I was assigned in Southern California, about 30 miles north of San Diego, about 90 miles south of Los Angeles. It was a junior ROTC assignment at a private military school called the Army and Navy academy. Set right on the beach, they had their own private beach. Very unique. Actually I reported in November of ’68. I left summer of ’71 on the way back to Vietnam.

RV: What city or town was this located in?

JW: Carlsbad, California.

RV: Carlsbad.

JW: Carlsbad buts right up against Ocean Side. Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base, that was the military facility that we utilized. In fact my daughter was born at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base.
RV: What were your duties there?
JW: My title was senior Army instructor. I headed up the junior ROTC unit. I did some instructing. I instructed the senior high school students, this was high school. We conducted the drill and ceremony. We had a military review once a month inviting parents to come in and visit and see what’s going on. Very expensive school. A lot of movie stars children were there. Slim Pickings, met old Slim, very nice guy. That was a relaxing, good assignment and then back to Vietnam. 1971, must have been August, I just don’t remember. August timeframe, somewhere in there of 1971 I got about a 45-day leave in order to re-locate my family back to Texas, then back to Vietnam.

RV: When you came back the first time, did you have any problems adjusting to life back in the United States?
JW: Only home.
RV: In what way or can you talk about it?
JW: Yes, I can. My wife was a young, shy teenager when I married her. All our life together up to then, I was the dominant force in the family. When I went to Vietnam in ’67 this young shy teenager, grew up. She had three children that she had to take care of by herself. She began to assert herself and became the ruler of the roost. Here comes Major Wright back from war and I’m ready to take over again. She says, “No, you ain’t babe.” Well, we had a period of adjustment to go through. Adjusting, I’m still in the military. I went to another assignment, so no I didn’t have any trouble other than that problem.

RV: Did the high schoolers whom you were teaching, instructing, advising, did they ask you about your Vietnam experience?
JW: Not really, not really. I didn’t dwell on it a lot. I can’t recall these kids really wanting to know about my Vietnam experience.
RV: How about others?
JW: At the church I found some interest. I gave a presentation at the church one Sunday evening about my Vietnam experiences, showed some slides. Had a military training film, narrated by John Wayne that I got and showed. There was quite a bit of interest there.
RV: Did you have any experience or did you seen on TV, the anti-war movement and following U.S. policy, how much did you pay attention to all that stuff?

JW: I guess I’m sorry to say that I stuck my head in the sand. It wasn’t close to me. Actually it got close. Remember the doctor that was later convicted of killing his family? He initially said it was outsiders.

RV: McDonald, was the guy’s last name?

JW: I believe so.

RV: Jeffrey McDonald.

JW: I believe it was. When that happened, he led people to believe initially that it was this anti-war movement people that had come in and slaughtered his family. I thought my goodness, is that really happening? It didn’t. He was later convicted of that. It really put me to thinking how much danger is my family in because I’m a serviceman?

RV: Did you follow U.S. policy? Did you keep up with the war in other words, what was happening?

JW: Yes, I did. I followed the paper and what was going on there. I think I could see the handwriting on the wall at least before the policy makers would admit to it that we weren’t accomplishing our mission. The South Vietnamese ARVN would never be able to hold them.

RV: You worked directly with South Vietnamese forces, PF and RF forces as you’ve mentioned and occasionally with ARVN, you saw those many times. Did you think that the Vietnamization policy would work? That the United States policy to turn that war over to the South Vietnamese to fight on their own had a chance of working?

JW: Initially, yes. I really did. Because of men like Major Tien and the second province chief that came in. I believe his name was Tu, T-U lieutenant colonel. Outstanding men. I don’t think he and Major Tien could have gotten along [because they were both strong personalities.] Of course Major Tien was wounded and gone because they were both real strong personalities. I think with leaders like that and of course at that level I couldn’t see the corruption. I have since learned that at the higher levels in the Vietnamese government the corruption was rampant. I can’t attest to that as fact.

RV: You thought what you saw; yes that Vietnamization could work.

JW: Yes.
RV: Based on what you know now and what you learned later.

JW: It didn’t work. I don’t know why. North Vietnam as much as we were bombing and doing things up there, those people were steadfast. They just kept coming back for more. Where did they get all those people? I don’t know. The South Vietnamese didn’t seem that dedicated. During my second tour, just before I left there in ’72, we had a ARVN armored column moving north. They ran up against some stiff NVA resistance. They just abandoned those armored vehicles, tanks, armor personnel, abandoned them. We had to call B-52 strikes in to try to destroy that equipment before it fell in the hands of the North Vietnamese. They just abandoned it.

RV: Did you see that as common?

JW: I didn’t see it to that extent but the one time. That happened just a few weeks before I left.

RV: So let’s get into your second tour. Now, why did you go back? Why did you leave this assignment at the Army/Navy Academy?

JW: It was time for me to move. The Department of the Army said, “Major Wright it’s time for you to go back to Vietnam.” I got orders.

RV: Really?

JW: Yes, time to go back.

RV: Did you have any reluctance about going back into a combat zone?

JW: Not at all. In fact I was satisfied knowing myself that’s what I was going to do when I finished the tour there at the Army/Navy Academy, I’d go back to Vietnam. I was totally psychologically ready for it.

RV: How about your family?

JW: No problem.

RV: Saw that as your job?

JW: Yes, that’s our way of life. We had our daughter by then.

RV: Right. So this is going to be a one year tour, your next one. Did you know your assignment before you arrived in country?

JW: No. I knew I was going to USARV. USARV is the top level. That could have been all the way down to a staff officer in the 23rd infantry division, 9th infantry division. I didn’t know what it might be. As it wound up I was assigned to the
headquarters in the logistical section. Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics. DCSLOG
USARV.

RV: This was in Long Binh or in Saigon?
JW: Long Binh post.

RV: Long Binh post. What exactly was your job?
JW: I was assigned to what they called again DCSLOG USARV, and there’s
various divisions within DCSLOG USARV. There was transportation supply,
maintenance, and they created a separate new division called retrograde because we were
beginning to pull troops and equipment out of Vietnam. We did the high level planning
for getting the troops and equipment out of Vietnam. Then our plans were sent on down
and implemented at the lower levels. So I was in retrograde division. I was made the
branch chief of the retrograde division. A division has various branches in it. There was
the retrograde branch. I was the inspection and assistance branch chief. There was
another branch I can’t remember what it was. My job was to be sure that the equipment
used to clean up the retrograde equipment, you had to go through agricultural inspection.
We called it a water blaster, high-pressure washing machine. These machines had to be in
good repair so they could clean up this equipment to get it on board the ships to get it
shipped out. Boy, that equipment was junk, a lot of it.

RV: Really?
JW: Yes. Also, I was tasked with being sure that the necessary tie-down
equipment, wire rope, chock blocks things of this nature were readily available. I didn’t
really see that as my job because we have a supply division. That’s a supply problem.

“No, you’ve got to do that.” “Yes, sir.”

RV: Were you still a major at this time?
JW: Yes.

RV: Describe to me your typical day there. Did you actually write the plans for
the movements of this material?
JW: I didn’t. The retrograde branch of the retrograde division, they actually
wrote the plans. They would write the plans and then send them up to the two-star
general who was the deputy chief of staff for logistics. He would approve, disapprove,
make changes and then these would be distributed to the various command levels that
needed to implement the plans.

RV: So you were in charge more of implementation versus planning and all that?

JW: Right. I was more of a doer in that I had warrant officers working for me.

There was a supply warrant, a couple of maintenance warrants. They would go and visit
the various support command headquarters. There was one at Cam Rahn Bay, Da Nang.
I’ll think of it in a minute. There was another place they would go. They would go about
once a month and check to see if they were properly maintaining the equipment that they
used to prepare for retrograde to check on the status of the tie down materials. We had to
furnish lumber for the Korean soldiers that were there. Each one of them was authorized
so much lumber to build what they called a ROK box, so they could ship their personal
belongings back to Korea.

RV: This is rock as in r-o-c-k, to Korea?

JW: Yes, R-O-K. Republic of Korea forces. These were called ROK boxes.

Why me? That’s what I was asked to do. We had some problems getting adequate
supplies. I really felt like I was beating my head against the wall a lot of times. About all
I could get was, “Do it. Get it done.” What can I do? I can’t go out and get the stuff
myself. As a matter of fact, just before I got there, my branch did do that. They sent a
warrant officer to the Philippines, to one of the bases there in the Philippines where the
trucks, jeeps, rolling equipment went for rebuild. Made arrangements to pick up the used
tie down equipment and that this equipment came in for, and sent it back so it could be
reused. They were just throwing it away. We actually had to go out and try that. I guess
it was a one-shot affair. We’d have to go back about twice a month to keep it going. It
worked once.

RV: Why do you think the United States military was having problems getting
supplies, getting personnel to do things? Why was your job that difficult do you think?

JW: I wish I knew. I can’t answer that. I just don’t know. I found that so
frustrating. You write a letter to a material command somewhere. You deal with high-
level policy makers; then it has to filter on down to the doers. Because you are a high-
level headquarters and you don’t write to the doers down here. You write to these
people. By the time it filters down, it’s two months later before they say, “You made a
mistake somewhere and you’ve got to do it over again.”

RV: So, too much bureaucracy, too many levels?

JW: Yes.

RV: Did you find that common? Did the other people that had similar positions
as to yours, were they having the same kind of problems as getting things done?

JW: I don’t think they had the same to the extent that I did. Yet, as much
heartache and pain as I went through toward the end of that tour, they decided they didn’t
need that branch anymore. They just shipped me off somewhere else.

RV: Where did they send you?

JW: It was just another place there in the DCSLOG organization.

RV: How many times did you actually get out into the field and oversee some of
these activities or were you mainly based?

JW: I was mainly based there at Long Binh. Qui Nhon was the other place I was
thinking about. I went to Cam Rahn Bay once, Qui Nhon once, Da Nang once. Of
course my people went nearly ever month. Actually one week, they’d go to Cam Rahn
Bay, then maybe two weeks later, they’d go to Da Nang. Then a couple weeks later
they’d go to Qui Nhon. They were out quite a bit.

RV: What were your impressions of these facilities of Qui Nhon and Cam Rahn
and Da Nang?

JW: Cam Rahn was pretty good considering the country compared to others. In
Qui Nhon you lived in bunkers. Da Nang was pretty uncertain also. It was kind of
uncomfortable not knowing really what was going on, being a visitor there. And a low-
level visitor like I was a major, didn’t anyone care. “Who is he?”

RV: When you would go to these facilities and these towns, how long would you
stay?

JW: One maybe two nights, a couple of days.

RV: Was it all business? Were you able to go out in the evenings?

JW: If we wanted to. There were some clubs available if you wanted to go. I
didn’t particularly want to go.
RV: How did you find that attitude of most American troops that you ran into when you went out of Long Binh?

JW: I began to run into, even in Long Binh some of these problems that you asked me about on that first tour, which I didn’t have that much contact with the American troops. I began to see some of this attitude that I had heard and read about. I didn’t actually see any drug use, but I heard about it. It was a lot more prevalent in contact with American units than it was down in the Delta. An attitude of the troops, “I don’t care who you are. You don’t tell me what to do.” Even the limited contact that I had with them, very uncomfortable.

RV: Why do you think this is happening at this time?

JW: Because of what was going on in the States I think. These young troops didn’t want to come over there in the first place. They were forced to go and a lot of their friends had run off to Canada and were protesting and marching and burning draft cards and burning the flag. I think this played on the minds of the soldiers. These young people are in a situation like that are a lot more conducive to falling into the dope traffic, and disobeying orders and injuring or killing their superior officers, NCOs.

RV: Did you hear any discussion of the fragging stuff?

JW: Not really, no. Just kind of scuttlebutt and reading about it. I had more access to newspapers there in USARV headquarters than I did down in the Delta. You’d read about it, hear about it.

RV: What kind of news could you get there?

JW: Well, there was daily newspaper.

RV: Stars and Stripes?

JW: Armed Forces. I believe it was the Stars and Stripes, Vietnam edition of the Stars and Stripes.

RV: What else did you have television? Could you see news from back in the United States?

JW: Didn’t have any television, I had the television down there in the Delta [laughs].

RV: Out in the middle of nowhere.
JW: There were some people that bought their own televisions. I didn’t want one. I was involved in the commanding general staff correspondence course. I did a lot of that work at night. We generally worked 12-hour days, from 6:00 in the morning to 6:00 at night. So I would do my letter writing and work on my sub-courses in the evening, had a radio. I enjoyed some of the old time radio, Jack Benny, Fibber McGee and Molly. I enjoyed listening to some of those.

RV: Tell me about your correspondence course. How did you get involved in that and what were you going for?

JW: Commander general staff school course is a step in the progression of your career. It’s highly selective; if you don’t get selected to go to the regular course then you’re apt to not go very far, be passed over for promotion. You could pick it up through correspondence. I chose not to take the chance. You could take it through correspondence and still be selected for the regular course. I think that through correspondence, I was not selected for the training course.

RV: Why not?

JW: I don’t know. They don’t tell you that. They just don’t select.

RV: Did you pass the correspondence course?

JW: Yes.

RV: Was it difficult for you?

JW: Yes. It really wasn’t all that difficult. Some of the sub-courses were more difficult than others. It was basically all in the material. All you had to do was study the material. Then when you took the exams, just remember the material that you had covered.

RV: How did they do this? They sent you material periodically, like a book or a manual?

JW: A sub-course. I believe there was 30 some sub-courses. They’d send you to sub-course number one. The study material and you’d study that and then I don’t remember whether you’d notify them or what. Then they’d send you the exam. Take that exam and then meanwhile they would have sent you sub-course number two. You could go ahead and start on that and work your way through all of the sub-courses.

RV: What were some of these sub-courses for example?
JW: Tactics, maintenance, supply, staff level work. One of the sub-courses you had to do a staff study, which is probably equivalent to a thesis. You had to do a lot of research. You could put your paper together. I don’t remember what I did for the command general staff. Had to do one at career course. My study there was in the headquarters company of a mechanized infantry battalion. That’s a real hodge-podge of organizations. You’ve got a support platoon, a maintenance platoon. I don’t remember what all of it was there. You had, the headquarters company commander had no vehicle maintenance section of his own. Here was battalion maintenance, but they worked for the whole battalion. It came time that some of the vehicles that the company commander owned needed work done on them. There was no one he could turn to say, “Maintenance sergeant, this vehicle needs this work done on it, take care of it.” He could go to the battalion maintenance sergeant or the maintenance officer or warrant officer, “Mr. Owen” or whoever, “I need--” “Sorry sir. We’ve got other things, we’ll get to you when we can.” Here sits this company commander. So the thrust of my paper at the career course was this company commander needs a maintenance section of his own.

RV: How well was that received?

JW: Probably still on file [laughs]. It was a requirement of the course. Everybody had to do one and whatever they did with them I don’t know.

RV: How long did it take you to do this correspondence course from Long Binh?

JW: I didn’t finish it there. I finished it later on. I probably finished it in about three years, total time.

RV: When you did not get selected, did you know that was a sign, well I’m only going to go so far in the Army and that’s it? When did you find this out that you weren’t going to be selected?

JW: Shortly after I arrived, second tour. Probably in 1971, late ’71. A list came out for people that had been selected. There was a copy in the headquarters building there. I went and looked at it and my name wasn’t on it.

RV: Yet you still wanted to go through that and do the correspondence?

JW: Yes, if I didn’t do it by correspondence, then you’re next promotion’s in jeopardy.

RV: When did you make lieutenant colonel by the way?
JW: ‘76 I believe.
RV: Going back to the second tour in Vietnam, could you make a comment on the leadership in Vietnam, on the American leadership. You can reflect up on this from your first and second tour. Starting from the people above you, we’ve talked about that your first tour, your supervisor there. What was it like during your second tour?
JW: Immediate supervisors were all right. I have a problem with screamers. Have you ever run into a screamer?
RV: Yes.
JW: You know what I’m talking about?
RV: Yes.
JW: The division chief was somewhat of a screamer. The two-star general who was the DCSLOG of USARV was a screamer. He would scream and raise cain. Every morning they had that they called a LIMIC, logistical information management something or other [conference]. I went to one or two of those. It was primarily for the division chiefs and their assistants. I was invited to go by my boss in retrograde division just to see what was going on. It seemed like the general would lock on to one section or one person and just scream and shout and carry on. I like to think about just before General Westmoreland assumed overall command of Vietnam, general Crayton Abrams came in. I knew General Abrams; I had met him personally one time. He would never remember me. He was three-stars when I met him in Germany. He came to what we called a “dining in.” Have you ever heard that term?
RV: Yes.
JW: We had a dining in at our little brigade headquarters there in Germany, and General Abrams came down and was the best guest speaker. I met him. He was absent from Vietnam, went back to the States for some reason. He was gone for two or three weeks. He came back and they were giving him an update briefing. There was a major briefing and he briefed for maybe 15-20-30 minutes. The General said, “Just a minute major. You’ve been talking for 30 minutes telling me how much work you’ve got to do. I’m not interested in that. I want results.” He didn’t shout or scream. He didn’t make a fool of the man. Anyway, I can’t handle these screamers. I have a real problem with it.
The last tour I had in the Army [at Ft. Sill] before I retired, he wasn’t the last commander, but during the last four years of my time in the Army he was a screamer. Oh, he was a screamer. He used a lot of foul language too. That just tears me up. I freeze up. I freeze up when that happens.

RV: So what do you think about American leadership at the highest levels in Washington D.C. and then at the joint chiefs?
JW: I did not think much of General Westmoreland.
RV: Why?
JW: I was afraid you were going to ask that.
RV: You knew I was going to [laughs].
JW: Can I stand on the fence?
RV: If you want to.
JW: I can’t really say; and I never met General Westmoreland personally. I don’t know. I just didn’t like General Westmoreland. I can’t say, “He did this, which I didn’t like.” I got the impression that he was wanting himself to look good. He did move on up to Chief of Staff for the Army, the second highest position in the military. Just the impression of this lowly major at the time [did not count for much, it appeared to me] that that was his goal was, to look good, get a high body count. It just didn’t set well with me.

RV: How about General Abrams?
JW: I thought a lot of General Abrams. General Abrams was only there a short period of time before he moved on up to Chief of Staff. I thought a lot of him and his reputation. His reputation goes back to World War II. I love to tell the story that I heard. He was a battalion commander in World War II and was totally surrounded by Germans. He called his staff together, staff and company commanders. Said, “Gentlemen for the first time in history we can attack in any direction.” This is the kind of thing that impressed me. Of course General Abrams didn’t have to impress Major Wright. He was very confident. He also had the distinction of being the only man to have died in office as Chief of Staff of the Army. He died of cancer while he was still Chief of Staff of the Army.

RV: What did you think of the body count policy? I mean you had experience with that directly in the field.
JW: I had experience at the grass roots level. It was a means of accountability, showing what you had accomplished if anything. I think it was highly inflated, I believe. I can’t tell you why. Because of the stories that I have heard, the rumors, the gossip that it as highly inflated in the American units.

RV: You heard that at the time or since Vietnam?

JW: Both. I’m trying to think of a name and it just slipped me. I wouldn’t want to use a name anyway. One of the stories that I heard was a very highly thought of general officer of World War II vintage. His son was in my career course. His son was out of that group that just came back from Vietnam. His son got in pretty deep trouble because he was a company commander and he was offering bounties for fingers, ears; that really bothered me. Like I say he got in trouble for it. That wasn’t widespread that he did that. I don’t know where the man ever wound up. His father was a four-star general.

RV: Can you reflect upon American policy makers in Washington and their conduct of the war?

JW: I can reflect to this extent. Once again this is Jack Wright’s opinion. Policy makers in Washington D.C. were out as politicians sometimes are to feather their own nest. That’s not necessarily with money. To make their own way. The war in Vietnam was a war run [controlled] by the politicians. The politicians would not say, “Ok, military we want to do this and let them do it.” They would say, “We want to do this and here’s how you’re going to do it.” You’ve never been in the military, you’ve been around the military. I would not expect you to go out and take command of that platoon and do a good job of training that platoon or taking that platoon through a platoon Army training test because you don’t now anything about it. You’ve never been there. If you want a platoon company, battalion trained and ready for combat give it to me. I’m a military man. I’ve been there. You tell me, “I want this done.” Government and Washington D.C. you say military, Department of Defense we need to clean out Vietnam. You go down there and do it. You make your plans and by such and such a time you show me your big plan. That’s what you did in World War II. General Eisenhower was selected several years before D-day to personally plan the D-day invasion. Then he got
RV: Why do you think they didn’t do that? What had changed so much in American or in the political currents of America to allow that to happen with a major war that the United States was involved in?

JW: I don’t know. I just don’t know. If I could answer that question I would probably be president, maybe! Again I think it’s a power thing. There is too many people that are not interested in doing what is best for the country. They’re interested in doing what is best for them to maintain their source of power. Even to include President Nixon’s underlings that were so deeply involved in Watergate. They had their own little circle of power, and power corrupts. Whereas in a military chain of command this is kind of controlled.

RV: In your second tour did you start seeing this?

JW: Yes.

RV: Because the first tour you were on the ground, out in the field. Now, you’re back in the rear area at a desk job basically and you’re trying to coordinate this withdraw of Americans forces basically. Did you catch wind of this kind of atmosphere?

JW: Yes. It was more scuttlebutt, rumors, talking, but there is basis for a rumor, gossip. There’s basis somewhere. Where there’s smoke there’s some fire. Maybe not a lot of fire, but there’s a little fire. There’s something to it.

RV: Did you have a lot of paperwork your second tour? Was it a ton of overwhelming kind of paperwork?

JW: Yes, especially for a guy that’s not really good at writing. I had to write thousands of papers. Not thousands, many, many papers. It was kind of funny. We were having some problems up at Da Nang about properly maintaining their equipment. Here I was up here at Army headquarters. I didn’t know, I later met and worked for this guy up in Da Nang. He was a low-level commander, he was a lieutenant colonel. I was a major. For one general officer to write another general officer they called it aback-channel. It’s kind of coming in the back door. I would write a back channel for my general officer boss to go to this general officer that commanded this maintenance unit, and he would send it down to this lieutenant colonel to answer. He would answer and
back channel, back through, back down to me, and I would answer and here we were
back channeling each other through two general officers. I later went to work for this
dude at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky.

RV: So, too much bureaucracy?
JW: Yes.

RV: How could the United States Army do it differently?
JW: I don’t know. I don’t know.

RV: Did you see while you were there, this is unnecessary we should be
maintaining the equipment this way and extracting the equipment this way, retrograding
the equipment?

JW: No, because I never did get down to the area where I could observe what
was actually going on. I was supposed to take care of those areas that I was responsible
for, the maintenance and the water blasters, the tie down equipment, the chocks the
blocks, the wire rope, the nails, the wood for the ROK boxes. Obviously I didn’t like
that.

RV: Right.

JW: There was people in place, that that was their job; there was a maintenance
division, there was a supply division. I would go over and try to talk to the division
chief. “Look, this is your job.” “Major, I’m not going to write your paper for you get out
of here?” What could I do?

RV: Did you feel in your second tour underutilized? Do you think your talents
were being wasted? You had practical field experience, you had practical experience
with the Vietnamese civilians and military. Here you were taking care of ROK boxes.

JW: I never, at least I don’t think I had that experience. I wished a lot of times
that I was somewhere else rather than where I was. I did not enjoy that kind of work. I
just wasn’t comfortable with it. I’ll admit I’m not a good writer. I wasn’t comfortable
with it. I guess the thing that I liked most about that second tour, about twice a week the
retrograde division would get as many people out as we possibly could and play touch
football. I really loved that [laughs].

RV: Tell me about your living quarters there and your entertainment. Your life
away from your job.
JW: We had huge wooden buildings that had little one-man rooms, unairconditioned, single-bed bunk, a desk, a refrigerator, no water in there. There was a centralized latrine, sink area where you had to go down each morning and stand in line to shave. It was kind of like our house down in the Delta. The walls and then the open area up here. Some of the people would, and I don’t know where they go the materials to do it. They would close all that in and buy them an air conditioner. They had air-conditioned quarters. Then when they left, they’d sell it to someone else. Well, I had a chance to buy one of those rooms for $100. I turned it down. I didn’t want to turn loose of $100; I was kind of a tight wad. I had me a fan and I could make it all right. One humorous spot in here, when I got into country for that second tour, I wasn’t even issued a weapon of any kind for about six months. Then we got some, someone got some intelligence that the VC sappers were going to get on post and bomb, detonate a load of explosives in the BOQ area. So, higher level said, “Ok, we’re going to establish a guard system.” Now this is in the BOQ area. You know what BOQ stands for?

RV: Yes.

JW: Bachelor Officer’s Quarters. Captains, majors, lieutenant colonels. Ok, lieutenant colonels you’re going to be sergeants of the guard. You will establish a walking guard around three or four buildings. You will have enough guards to walk that post from 9:00 at night to 6:00 in the morning. Each guard will only walk one tour. So they issued us weapons, .45s. Here I am with a big .45. A major, field-grade officer walking guard. Over in another area, a casual friend who I knew at the career course was Walter Garr. He was kind of an arrogant sucker. As he would come around a certain part of his post there was a dog came out barking. [rrr,rrr]. He got tired of that. So one time when he walked around here came that dog he just pulled out his gun and shot him [blam]. He called the provost marshall and said, “I just killed a dog over here. Come check him and see if he’s got rabies.” We didn’t walk guard anymore. They shut the whole thing down. At this rate we’d start shooting at each other.

RV: What other extraneous activities did you participate in?

JW: There was club shows. They had various clubs. They’d bring in some of these two-bit entertainers. They would do their thing. It was fairly good. We would go once or twice a week. There was movies, we’d go to movies. Like I say, I didn’t
participate much in that. I’m not a drinker. I did do more drinking over there than I’d ever done before. One or two a week. I’d go back to my room and write letters and do my sub-courses.

RV: How old were you during your second tour?

JW: In ‘71… I was born in ‘36.

RV: 35?

JW: Yes, thereabouts.

RV: For a major was that average?

JW: No, they were pretty well across the board. There was a lot of captains. A lot of majors a lot of lieutenant colonels. I don’t know. You couldn’t pick an average age.

RV: What I’m getting at is your maturity level. Your second tour, you have experience, you’re on your second tour. You’re a major, you’re 35 years old. I know you’re at headquarters. So there are going to be some older people there. Do you see what I’m asking? This maturity level, was it there for you the second tour or not?

JW: I’m not sure that I’m grasping the question.

RV: Did you see yourself or find yourself much more mature your second time around?

JW: I found myself more mature, excuse me. I got my tongue all tangled up. I found myself more mature, but still lacking in the staff graces. How to do a staff paper. How to get a staff paper written. You couldn’t just write a paper and take it to your boss and get it approved. I had trouble just getting my copy approved. Then you had to coordinate it with other agencies. If you sent that through distribution it might be six weeks before you got it back. Because it would have to go to this division and their action officers, majors would have to research it and decide it was good, bad or indifferent. Then he’d send it on up to the division chief. He would what we called “chop on it.” He’d do this and say, “It’s ok.” Then it’d have to go to another division and the same thing. It just took forever. So they told me, “Walk this through.” Nearly every one of my papers I had to walk through. So I had to take it down and get the action off. “Ok, that looks good.” I’ll recommend that the boss chop it.” I can’t do that, I can’t wait. We’ve got to get it to the boss right now. That’s a hassle. That is a real hassle. It worked. I had
a real problem getting copies made. They had a reproduction, a copy machine. Have you
seen those copy machines that are about half the size of this room?

RV: Yes.

JW: You know the paper starts way back here and goes and goes and goes.

RV: Really long.

JW: They’d catch on fire about right here. Numerous times, catch on fire

[woosh]. I have stood in line for 30-40 minutes trying to get a piece of paper to go in.

RV: It seems really inefficient.

JW: Yes, very inefficient.

RV: Do you think that was a symptom of Vietnam or do you think that’s a

symptom of the military bureaucracy?

JW: I think it’s more a symptom of the military bureaucracy magnified in

Vietnam. That’d be a good answer to that.

RV: A great answer [laughs]. You knew the exact day you’d be leaving right

your second tour?

JW: Close.

RV: Basically.

JW: I got a 30-day drop my first tour. I got a 30-drop my second tour also. My

mother’s father passed away. So she went to the Red Cross and requested that her son be

allowed to come home for his grandfather’s funeral. Things were at the point, I’d already

got cut lose out of retrograde division and put in another division they had made up. I

think they called it the CID division. I never did understand what we were supposed to

do. I can tell you right now what I was supposed to be doing although I did write a

couple papers. Going out to the dumps, military dumps, found a brand new, do you know

the term gamma goat?

RV: Yes.

JW: Brand-new gamma goat sitting up on this pile of junk.

RV: Why don’t you describe what that is. People that might listen to this--

JW: A gamma goat is a. What do I want to say? It’s an articulated vehicle.

There are six wheels. Four wheels on the main power and then two wheels on the trailer,

if you will. It’s articulated, but all six wheels will pull. There’s this gamma goat up on
top of this. What is that doing up there? I go back and tell my boss about it and as far as
I know nothing was ever done. It was probably left there when we finally pulled out.
Possibly. I don’t know. I just didn’t understand.

RV: So you got to go home 30 days early?

JW: Yes, because things were coming apart as you will. They were wanting to
get people out, they just went ahead and let me go. I got my duffle bag and went on.

RV: Did you fly to Saigon?

JW: Yes, I flew out of Saigon.

RV: Was it a different mood for you leaving the second time?

JW: Well, personally yes. Because I did not have fond memories of that second
tour. I did not enjoy that tour.

RV: So you were relieved basically to get out of that job.

JW: I was relieved to get out of that assignment. As luck would have it I went to
Ft. Campbell, Kentucky and received some of the equipment that we had retrograded out.

RV: Really?

JW: Actually, there was howitzers, 105 howitzers that we retrograded out and
immediately sent them to [to rebuild depots], classified them as junk when we got them at
Ft. Campbell. Never used again. The whole idea was to save money on that equipment.
Well, we saved money by spending money to ship it from Vietnam over here, and
junking it rather than junking in Vietnam.

RV: Were you pulling combat pay while you were on your second tour?

JW: Yes.

RV: Did you get that for the 30 days you were shorted?

JW: No.

RV: That wasn’t a concern of yours?

JW: No, that wasn’t a problem.

RV: When you came back the second time did people ask you about Vietnam?

Was there a different attitude from the first time you came back in 1968?

JW: No, not really. I probably got more and I can’t really remember, because ’68
is far back. We went from Vietnam, went right to Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. Right into a
military environment and military community. There wasn’t any problem.
RV: Reflecting back on your Vietnam experience, let me ask you a couple of innocuous questions. Did you guys ever have any pets with your units in ’67-’68 and then ’71-’72.

JW: Any what?

RV: Pets.

JW: No. Started to say some people did, but I can’t say that because I don’t know. I didn’t. I didn’t want to fool with them. Up at province headquarters in Go Cong there was a huge python snake that they had in a cage there. They would feed it live ducks.

RV: Did you ever encounter any wild animals, any unusual wildlife?

JW: No, not at all. Water buffalo. Water buffalo in this area they used them as work animals, they used them as pack animals, transportations pulling their wagons. Then they’d eat them.

RV: If you could Jack, comment on your spiritual growth or your spiritual life while in Vietnam. Did it evolve and change while you were in this combat zone or was it even a part of your life?

JW: Yes, religion was a very important part of my life. Just before I went to Vietnam the first time I had a rather traumatic experience with organized religion. I’m Southern Baptist. Was then, still am today. I don’t want to go into the experience but I was ready to leave organized religion completely. Because of this experience I had in Columbus, Georgia at a Southern Baptist Church. I said, “If that’s what it’s all about, I want no part of it.” I firmly believe that the Lord’s hand was in this. Because he took me out of that situation and put me in a situation where the chaplain that came to visit me on Christmas was the only religious man, and I think he was Catholic, which doesn’t make any difference. The only religious figure I came in contact with for a year. So I had time to kind of work these things out by the time I got back to civilization. I had worked it out in my mind and I can still stay with the Baptist Church. The second tour, you’ll find within those letters I went to chapel service as much as I could. There’s some bulletins in there. I would send a bulletin to Gayle. In those letters there’s some bulletins from the chapel services that I attended.

RV: So you saw your spiritual life evolve?
JW: Yes. Yes, it did.
RV: In a very individual way for yourself?
JW: Yes, for me.
RV: Were you ever exposed to any defoliants, Agent Orange or anything like that? Did you have an experience like that?
JW: None.
RV: What did you think of Vietnam itself, the country?
JW: Again my thoughts are on the poor people, the peasants of the Delta area. I had very little contact with the people, the Vietnamese people on that second tour. I feel I have a love for these people because of their simplicity. Their, grass roots. I used that term, they live, they love, they work. It’s such a poverty stricken level and yet, there’s still a lot of happiness there. These are the kind of people. Well, just before I left that second time, they had a big party for me there at district headquarters. The village chiefs came in and one of the village chiefs had on a rather ragged shirt, about my size. I just took my shirt off and put it on him, gave it to him. I thought that much of the people. These people.
RV: How did he react?
JW: Com On Ong, Com On Ong. Thank you sir. Very appreciative. I gave my set of red plastic dominoes to my Vietnamese friends that we played dominoes with three or four night a week.
RV: How about the country, geographically?
JW: The Delta area, there is no altitude down there. The only altitude you get is when you step up out of a rice paddy onto a rice paddy dyke. That’s maybe 12 or 18 inches. It’s flat. As I’ve said before the rivers run according to the tides. It’s a beautiful country when it’s green and growing. It’s a harsh country when it’s dried. You know there’s no water around. The rice paddies are all baked, cracked, mud. It’s really a contrast. Yet the people live and love and raise their families in that kind of environment. That takes a lot of fortitude in my opinion. A lot of stuff that maybe some of us high-classed Americans need to get a hold of.
RV: Does that stay with you, now today? Has it stayed with you through your life witnessing that kind of life?
JW: Yes. Yes, it has.
RV: Then coming back here?
JW: Yes.
RV: How has it affected you in that sense?
JW: I don’t know that it’s really affected me per se. It’s affected my thoughts.
I’d like to go back. I wish there was something I could do to help these people. To do for these people.
RV: You’re pointing to your district, you area.
RV: What about the rest? You feel a certain loyalty to this area.
JW: Yes, I feel a loyalty to this area knowing that in this area and all the way up the line it’s basically the same at the grass roots level. You get on up into the cities and into the slum areas of the cities. I’ve seen it in passing, driven past it. I don’t know what goes on there. I know what goes on here.
RV: You felt like you weren’t able to do enough for them?
JW: Right.
RV: Has that bother you through your life?
JW: Somewhat. I’ve never sat around and brooded about it. I’m not built that way. I did what I could, when I could. That’s the best I could do.
RV: You mentioned that you felt like you did everything you could while you were there to help these people. Did you guys engage in any civic action?
JW: Yes, to the extent that we could. Civic action, building schools, repairing roads, making supplies and materials available for the people to do the work.
RV: Right.
JW: We did that as much as we could.
RV: You actually helped build the school or you organized the supplies to build the school?
JW: Organize, made available the supplies to build the school.
RV: Is this mainly on your first tour?
JW: Yes. Again that second tour I was in that headquarters and didn’t do anything.
RV: Right. Do you think that looking at both tours, comparing both tours, your fulfilling job in both situations for the Unite States government, for the U.S. military, and this might be a very simplistic question, but which of the two tours do you think you actually got much more done for the overall American government objective in Vietnam?

JW: You believe in asking tough questions [laughs]. Probably the second tour. In my own small area things that we did, getting people out of the country and the equipment even though it was junk a lot of times that we got out, we got it out of the country. It didn’t fall into the hands of the North Vietnamese. It was very small in my own particular case, a very unrewarding experience because all you did was paper. Shuffling paper and someone else did the work, whereas the first tour was hands on. I was right there with the people. Not actually down on my hands and knees working with them. They would get down on their hands and knees. You’ve seen the Vietnamese squat. They’d squat down there for hours. I’ve got pictures of people making little rocks out of big rocks so they could mix the mortar with it to build the schools. You know I had something to do with that. I made some of the material available to them so that they could take those little rocks they were making and build a school. Something that those young children could get some education. By the way, in that area, the IV Corps type goes on down in the Delta area, and probably elsewhere. Schoolteachers were a target for the Vietcong.

RV: Yes. Do you remember what would be considered your most humorous event in Vietnam? You’ve related a few.

JW: One and I don’t know why I didn’t relate it. Again this is down in the Delta in the Hoa Dong district. Told you about the .81mm mortar. It was shooting out over the main street in town, shooting to the west. They got a faulty round. It just barely cleared the top of the building and fell in the street, right between district headquarters and the police station. Here lay a seemingly live .81mm mortar round. People were standing around looking at the round. What are we going to do with it? I don’t know what they were saying, I couldn’t understand. But I was watching. One of the soldiers, probably one of the PF soldiers, sneaked up on that round. It was right near this river that flows through Vinh Binh City about 30 yards away from it. He slipped up on that round and he
grabbed it and ran and threw it in the river. As if slipping up on it would keep it from exploding!!

RV: Right, he’s alive [laughs].

JW: And he got away with it [laughs]. We’ve laughed about that, my team. We’ve laughed about that a lot with that guy sneaking up on that round [laughs].

RV: How about the bravest action that you witnessed?

JW: I’ve never really thought about that. A quick review of my thought is probably the soldier that threw the thermite grenade over the house. Because like I say, that VC that was in that house he wasn’t shooting up through the roof. He was shooting at kill level. This guy had at least as far from one end of this room to the other. Probably a 20-30 yard run before he threw that hand grenade, or that thermite grenade. Then he had to get back. Of course, it’s a heavy volume of fire went into the house from all directions and then it stopped. He ran and threw the grenade and darted back. He made it, but that took guts. Let me tell you when those rounds are hitting that little short dyke that I was hunkered down behind, that’s scary.

RV: How about by American units?

JW: I didn’t have that much contact with the American units.

RV: How do you think the media covered the war? What’s your opinion of that?

JW: I think that’s beyond my level. I think a lot of things were blown out of proportion at the time, the My Lai incident for example. Yet, possibly as time went on, there was a lot of truth to it. The media seemed to jump on little things and blow them up and the forget them. Whether they were right, wrong or indifferent when they blew it up, they just let it go. They never did go back and say, “Hey that really wasn’t that bad or it was worse than that.”

RV: How about since the war. There’s been a lot said about how the media covered the war. Did you feel like it was done, reflecting back, impartially or partially? You can even compare it to what you know of the media today, your exposure to what’s happening to day.

JW: Once again I’ve never given a lot of though to that. A cursory thought now, I really think the media did a pretty good job. Like I say, they blew some things up. They would never go back. I guess it’s never good copy to go back and say, “Hey, if
really wasn’t that bad.” You know you don’t fake a picture of men grabbing a buddy, they’re running toward a helicopter to get out of a hot LZ, landing zone. A buddy falls, gets hit, two men stop and grab him and throw him on that helicopter and jump in. You don’t fake that. So, maybe on an A,B,C grading they probably got a C+ or a B in my mind.

RV: Do you think the media has a role in warfare for the United States?
JW: Yes. Yes, if you want me to expand on that I will.
RV: Of course [laughs].
JW: That’s the teacher coming out in us. The American people want to know what’s going on. They want to know. Of course starting with the Vietnam War and then on up through the little brush fires and the Persian Gulf. What’s the name?
RV: Persian Gulf War?
JW: Desert Storm.
RV: Desert Storm.
JW: Desert Storm. The media was there. You could watch it, see what’s happening real time. The American people want that. They want to see what’s going on. Maybe that’s my son or my husband or my brother or my daughter or aunt. I think the American people would demand it, if it wasn’t there. There was a lot of censorship during World War II. There’s things that need to be censored. You don’t want to broadcast that we’re going into Wake Island next Wednesday. The American people want to know what’s happening. I think that’s the press’s right. Tell it like it is, don’t try to embellish it.
RV: In 1972, when you came back, how much did you follow the war? America left in January of ’73.
JW: I followed the news broadcast, the paper, how things were going. When I first got back to Ft. Campbell, Kentucky I worked in the G-4 office. G-4 being the logistical office at division level for 101st Airborne Division. Then I went out of there down to another unusual assignment for an infantry officer as the executive officer of a transportation battalion.
RV: This is in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, correct?
JW: No, Ft. Campbell, Kentucky.
RV: Both the G-4 and the XO were at Ft. Campbell?

JW: Yes.

RV: I’m sorry.

JW: Yes. The battalion commander of that transportation battalion in ’73 was ordered to Vietnam. He was one of the last to get out of there. I was kind of interested not only was he my boss, but a friend. I was kind of interested in that individual and what was going on there. I never did have any contact with him after he got out. It was almost like he was hanging on to the landing gear of the helicopter. He lost everything. The only thing he got out with were the clothes on his back. He wasn’t one of the first ones to leave.

RV: Right. You’re at Ft. Campbell in April, 1975 when Saigon fell. How did you feel?

JW: What were we doing? Why? That was my thoughts. Why? What happened? Were we defeated? Then I had to step back and look and see, yes we were. Because we pulled out. We called it a retrograde operation, but we pulled out. All of the money that we spent and put into building up the Vietnamese Army so that they were self-sufficient apparently didn’t work. That still bothers me today. Why are the North Vietnamese so much more steadfast in what they’re doing than the South Vietnamese? Now, you live in Lubbock and I live in Burkburnett. But if you come down and attack my home, buddy I’m going to fight back. It appears for this one individual viewpoint we told the people, “Ok we give up. Come in and do whatever you want to.” What did we do wrong. We missed the boat somewhere. Win the hearts and minds of the people. That was a good phrase. People loved to use that phrase. You’ve got to win the hearts and minds of the people. Why? What are you winning? We didn’t win anything. We spent millions of dollars. We lost thousands of soldiers and withdrew. We have nothing to show for it except a Communist controlled Vietnam. I don’t care for it. I’m not going to say anything that I want that on record. When the moving Wall for Vietnam, you know what I’m talking about?

RV: Yes.

JW: When it came to Wichita Falls late last summer I went out and looked at it. Just kind of leafing through the books they have available with the list of all the names, I
found the name of my sponsor. The officer that sponsored me when I went to Germany in 1963, was killed in Vietnam. I don’t remember the date he was killed. Just leafing through and that name just kind of jumped off the page at me and I didn’t know.

RV: How did you feel? How did that hit you?

JW: Wow! That’s kind of emotional. That was kind of the opinion I had. I was involved in something else and walked down the wall and just looked and then went on. I was out there on honor guard business. Our honor guard on two different days we had a part of the program.

RV: Have you ever been to Washington D.C. to see the Wall?

JW: No, I have not.

RV: Do you have a desire to go?

JW: Yes, I would love to go see that, but I just haven’t had the opportunity.

We’re kind of been there, done that. We’d rather go somewhere else. I do want to get back to Washington D.C before I get too old to travel. Probably another year or so. But I do want to see that.

RV: Do you find with time passing since you came back from Vietnam and since you’ve gotten out of the military that people are more interested in talking to you about your experiences in Vietnam or the Vietnam War or has it been relatively the same?

JW: I don’t think people want to talk about it, want to hear about Vietnam. They’ve heard the news, the only war that we ever lost. The mighty Americans got our tail kicked in Vietnam. I have considered asking the honor guard if they’d like to have a little party in part of the program for me to give them a thumb nail sketch of my experiences in Vietnam. I thought well, none of them really asked for it. They’ve never really asked me about it. I don’t want to impose myself on them.

RV: Do you think that’s the attitude of the general American public that they just aren’t that interested?

JW: The younger generation, yes. This is like World War I was to me when I was a kid. That was along time ago. I don’t know anything about that, not really interested in it. I’m a lot more interested in World War I right now than I was in high school and college.
RV: Have you ever suffered any post traumatic stress disorder symptoms or anything like that over your life?

JW: No. I question it. I don’t have a right to. I won’t try to impose my thoughts on anybody else. Sometimes I get the impression some of those people are thinking, “I went over there; therefore you owe me something.” My government doesn’t owe me anything. They paid me what I had coming, what I had coming when I went over there. They paid me what they said they would pay me. When I said, “Yes. I will do all of these things,” and was sworn into the regular Army. I said then, “If you want me to go, I’ll go. You tell me to go and I’ll go. You tell me to go to Vietnam, I’ll go. You tell me to go to Korea, I’ll go. You tell me to go to Somalia, I’ll go.” That’s after my time, but I believe that. I get aggravated at some of these veteran’s organizations for saying you ought to recomputed our retired pay to bring us up to what a lieutenant colonel retiring today would get. They didn’t promise me that. They promised me that when I went in that if I served 20 years, I would get 50% of my base pay, period. Now, they have been good enough over the years about once a year, nearly every year since then, they’ve given me a cost of living increase. They didn’t tell me they’d do that. Now, they have reneged some on the medical care. But they’re attempting to straighten that out. This shoulder injury that I told you about has cost in excess of $25,000 so far and it’s not over yet. I haven’t paid one dime. Medicare, because at age 65 you go into Medicare. Medicare is a primary payer. What they don’t pay goes to Tricare. Have you heard that term?

RV: Yes.

JW: Goes to Tricare and Tricare pays the rest of it. I feel that for the most part, the Army, government has done me right. They’ve treated me right. They’ve done more than they said they would do for the most part. With the exception of the medical portion.

RV: Do you think the United States achieved peace with honor as Nixon put it, Kissinger put it?

JW: Say again?

RV: Do you think the United States achieved peace with honor as Nixon and Kissinger put it in 1973, peace with honor?
JW: Any way I answer that you’re going to ask why.
RV: But you don’t have to answer [laughs].
JW: No. They thought they did. They thought they did after they got through
fighting over the shape of the table at the Paris Peace Talks. They thought they achieved
peace with honor. There’s not any honor amongst thieves. The people apparently, the
North Vietnamese that were at those peace talks, and they talk about being honorable,
being honorable people. They weren’t very honorable. Like the Japanese in World War
II, when Pearl Harbor was bombed the diplomats didn’t get to Cordell Hull or whoever
the Secretary of State was.
RV: Cordell Hull.
JW: Yes, in time with the message that said, “We’re declaring war.” They were
highly upset. The North Vietnamese weren’t. They’re not a very honorable people. Did
we achieve peace with honor? No. We gave up, we surrendered. We quit. The gospel
according to Jack Wright.
RV: That’s what we’re after. Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in
the United States since you’ve been back?
JW: Not knowingly. I’m sure I’ve seen them in passing.
RV: Any songs take you back to Vietnam when you hear them?
JW: No.
RV: What about books on Vietnam have you read books on the war or have you
tried to avoid that?
JW: I’ve tried to avoid that.
RV: Have you?
JW: Yes. In fact, for along time I wouldn’t even watch MASH.
RV: Really?
JW: Yes. MASH was set during the Korean conflict but it was about the
Vietnam problems. Originally I felt that they were putting me down. It was a slap in my
face. Now as I watch it very chance I get. Even though it’s old re-runs I still watch it.
I’ve changed my mind on that. I still have problems with Platoon, John Wayne’s The
Green Beret, I’ve watched it several times but that’s because I like John Wayne. I don’t
I know how realistic that movie is. I’m not sure at all how realistic it is, but John Wayne. I’m watching John Wayne, I’m not watching *The Green Beret*.

RV: What other Vietnam movies? Have you had a problem with them in general or not?

JW: I’ve just had no desire to watch them. I don’t want to watch them. I have no traumatic experiences that it could dredge up. But I think it’s primarily because all of the movies, to include *The Green Berets*, dwell on the American forces. I was not with the American forces. I was not around American forces. I worked with the Vietnamese down here in the delta. I worked in the high-level headquarters over here. But never had any contact with combat troops. So I don’t know what it was. I don’t know what jungle warfare is like because I’ve never been there. I know what it feels like to get shot at out in the open, because I’ve been there. I don’t know the jungle warfare. I don’t know being in a firebase that’s about to be overrun by the NVA, as that latest movie.

RV: *We were Soldiers*.

JW: *We were Soldiers*. I did watch that.

RV: What did you think of that?

JW: I thought it was pretty good. Probably pretty well portrayed. Do you recall when that actually happened?

RV: November 1965.

JW: ’65 ok that was before I heard about it. Before my time over there. I liked, I don’t know whether you saw that last part, where the commander, the colonel is talking to General Westmoreland?

RV: Yes.

JW: General Westmoreland said, “Well, we sent them home with their tails between their legs.” The Colonel said, “General this is their home.” I thought, “Wow how true that is.” Their home and we’re the invaders. I wonder with all my high flower talk about letting the Army run the war, how much different it would have been. I said the Army, the military, how much different it would have been if the military had been allowed to run that. We were the invaders in their country. Yet again it wasn’t the North Vietnamese country, it was the South Vietnamese or are they all the same? They say they’re all the same. Hell, I don’t know.
RV: What do you think about Vietnam today?
JW: I think it’s a shame. I would venture to say that these people down here are just as bad off today as they were when I was there 30 years ago. Because the Communists from my knowledge and my reading and my hearing have never been one to build up. They want control. I saw this so clearly in Berlin when I was stationed in Germany right at the Berlin wall. We went to Berlin, Gayle and I and visited the Wall. Got up on a platform and the Wall is here and this is west and this is East. You see over here building and building, just a boom in building in West Berlin And over here, destruction. Tearing down buildings, getting them back away from the Wall. The destruction versus the construction. This is my idea of what the Communists are doing. They’re destroying. They want to control. They’d get those buildings torn down away from that wall and then they can control the people and not have so many coming over the wall, through the wall. That’s my idea of what the Communists do. They wanted control. My guess is that their iron-fisted control over all those people and those peasants are not any better off from the first time.
RV: Would you ever want to go back?
JW: Love to go back.
RV: Why?
JW: I want to see if any of my friends, if I could recognize or I would be recognized. I want to go back here. I don’t want to go to Saigon. I don’t want to go to Hanoi. I want to go here. I want to go back to the people that I knew and loved when I was there in 1967 and 1968. I want to go to Vinh Binh.
RV: What do you think is the most important or significant thing that happened to you in Vietnam personally?
JW: I guess the most important thing was seeing the level of existence that these people lived in. They had no sanitary facilities. One of the things that we did up here in this Dong Toi area up north up on our northern border, this big river that goes through here. We, the advisory team in Hoa Dong district made available funds and material available to build a public latrine. It was built out over the river. It was two sided. Men and women. They didn’t have anything like that. That was great. The fact that all of the droppings went right into the river and right down here people were getting water out of
the river for washing and cooking that made no difference. It was the fact, here was
something they had never had before. They thought that was great. We did something
great for those people. That’s the level of existence of these people.

RV: So your realization of this struck you?
JW: Yes. Like I said, I’d never seen anything like that. That was the biggest eye
opener.

RV: How do you feel about your service in Vietnam today?
JW: I’m extremely proud of my service in the delta in ’67 and ’68. I feel like in
my own small way, and it was small, that I made difference in some of the lives. Second
tour I didn’t have any contact with the people. That might as well have been Timbuktu.
It was just, we called it a hardship tour, separated from your family.

RV: Is there anything about your Vietnam tours that you would change if you
could?
JW: That’s another toughie. I can’t address that. I really can’t because I want to
raise the standard of living for these people, but that’s a high psychological goal. It’s not
something that I can do. I don’t know of anything that I could change as a small
insignificant person in the overall scheme of things to make life better for those people.
That’s the best I can answer.

RV: How has your service in the War, your experience there, most affected your
life?
JW: It’s probably given me a greater appreciation for the little things; the people
that don’t have much, the have nots. I’m trying to break away. I’m really a sucker for
“We are the lighthouse for the people that have lost their left big toe.” Wait a minute I
don’t know who you are. Before I give to them, check them out. I usually just give.

RV: This was obviously a very formative experience in your life.
JW: It was. I’d like to be able to verbalize what all that was. I just don’t have
the verbage for it.

RV: Do you think the United States learned lessons from it’s Vietnam
experience?
JW: I hope and pray they did. We’re going to have another one of those. I said off the record what I think it’s going to be. I just hope they did. We’re going to get our tail kicked again. We’ve got to do something different.

RV: Do you think the United States has learned to conduct itself differently in warfare?

JW: because of our political system and the change over of power, I doubt it. Because I learned it. I learned what you have to do. You weren’t there, did you learn it? Too many times, we have to learn it all over again. I don’t know whether we learned our lesson or not.

RV: For the younger generation today, what would you tell them about the Vietnam War and about Vietnam?

JW: I would highly praise the people. They are a beautiful, intelligent at their level, the level wherever they may be for the most part, industrious people. They have got to train themselves, their leaders to be honest with the people, to care for the people. I don’t think their high level leaders from their president at that time, way on down cared for the people. I think they cared for what they could get out of it. Believe that. I’m kind of ranting.

RV: No you’re not. If you walked into a classroom and they wanted to learn about the Vietnam War, you’d talk about the people?

JW: I would talk about the people. I would talk about how they lived, how the peasant people are not concerned about government. How we need education, good education to educate the people, educate their teachers. Don’t give them American philosophy. Well, how to teach is one thing, but don’t tell them, “this is what you teach.” Your philosophy. Make the student decide. At the lower levels you can’t really do that. Start out at these childhood levels teaching so as they grow they begin to seek other answers on their own to develop their own country, to stop the war they’ve been in like you said earlier like the gentleman told you. The North Vietnamese historian said they’d been at war for how many years? Hundred of years. They don’t know peace. Teach them from the ground up peace. They have to obtain prosperity, not give in to them, but I’ll work for it. Maybe perhaps.
RV: Well, is there anything else you’d like to add to our conversations we’ve had today?
JW: Other than the fact that everything I have said is strictly Jack Wright’s opinion.
RV: Of course.
JW: Don’t laugh at me [jokingly].
RV: I’m not laughing at you. We discussed this all through lunch, so yes.
JW: And that it is not official government propaganda, it’s all one man’s opinion. The way Jack Wright saw the life that he lived and the people that he lived with. It’s all my opinion. The Department of the Army, the Department of Defense have nothing to do with this particular presentation or comments made by me.
RV: This is about your story, so that’s ok.
JW: It’s my story. It’s my life in Vietnam. I lived there and I guess I’ve lost that part of it.
RV: This will end our interview. Thank you sir.
JW: Thank you.