Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University beginning an oral history interview with Mr. James Daniels. Today’s date is the twenty-second of September 2004. I am in the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas and I’m speaking with Mr. Daniels by telephone and Jim, you’re in Mesa, Arizona, is that correct?

James Daniels: Yes.

LC: Okay, well good afternoon.

JD: Good afternoon.

LC: I want to thank you so much for giving us some time this afternoon to talk about the places that you have been and particularly your service to the United States in the military. First, Jim, if you don’t mind, could you tell me where you were born and when?

JD: I was born in Gary, Indiana, in 1934.

LC: Tell me a little bit about your folks.

JD: Well, my dad was a—his parents died when he was very young. He only finished the third grade of school.

LC: Uh-huh.

JD: He had to go to work to help support the family he was living with. He was brought up in Indiana and worked at the steel mills in Gary, Indiana until I caught tuberculosis, then we moved to Arizona.

LC: Now how old were you when you were diagnosed with TB?
JD: I was in a TB sanitarium for two years from when I was four until I was six.

LC: Now, I’m assuming that was the reason they moved out to the far west?

JD: Yes, we moved out to Arizona for my health.

LC: Okay. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

JD: I had two sisters. I had a brother that died before I was born.

LC: Okay.

JD: He died of sleeping sickness and whooping cough, which I see that whooping cough is coming back now.

LC: I saw that in the paper as well. It’s very frightening, yeah.

JD: My brother passed away of it before I was born.

LC: Okay. And your sister’s older? Younger?

JD: I’ve—my older sister’s living now in Oklahoma City, and my youngest sister, well she’s a year and a half older than me, was killed in an automobile accident about twelve years ago.

LC: That’s very sad. That’s a hard, hard loss. Hard loss. How did your dad fare once he had moved out to Arizona? That’s—

JD: He made the move out here very well. He went into construction; he worked for Delly Web Constructions for many years.

LC: Now what kind of construction was that?

JD: He was an ironworker.

LC: So he brought his skills from the steelyard? Or—

JD: No, it’s completely different, what he’d done at the steel mill.

LC: Tell me about the difference, if you can.

JD: Well, he was an ironworker he was high altitude climate at the steel mill, he worked on the pour—pouring hot steel and stuff.

LC: Okay.

JD: Ironworker, he was—when they had riveting, I don’t know if you remember that or not.

LC: I’ve seen films of it.

JD: Well, he was foreman over a riveting gang.

LC: Okay. And he was going up in—going up, is—building up?
JD: Yeah, building go up fifteen, twenty, thirty stories.
LC: Wow. And that was all—was that in Phoenix, that he was building?
JD: Yes—well no, we traveled all over the United States.
LC: Okay. So he would be one for some periods of time?
JD: No, he—he’d take us with us, we had a trailer we lived in and we’d just go with him.
LC: Oh, so you—
JD: Wherever the job wanted him.
LC: Wow, so you got to go all over the place?
JD: I’ve been in every state in the Union.
LC: Now, how long did he keep that kind of work? How old were you—?
JD: Well he—for twenty-five years.
LC: No kidding. So you moved around a whole lot as a kid.
JD: Yes, as a younger kid, yes.
LC: Wow. How did you do with schooling? How did you arrange that?
JD: Well, I made—I passed grades; that was about it.
LC: So you were kind of in and out a little bit?
JD: Well, I’d go to one school for so long, and then he’d get a job somewhere else and we’d be leaving. I’d be way ahead of the kids and then I’d go to the next school and I’d be behind them! So it was rough.
LC: Well, it sounds like it. Now, how did your mom do with all of this moving around?
JD: She hung right in there. My mom was quite a lady.
LC: Tell me about her. Where was she from?
JD: She was from Indiana. She was born in a little town in Indiana. Keystone, Indiana.
LC: Um-hm. Was that a farming family that she was born in?
JD: Yeah, she was in farming. Her parents were still alive when she got married.
LC: And what was her name?
JD: Melda
LC: Spelled how, Jim?
JD: M-e-l-d-a.

LC: Okay. That’s a pretty name.

JD: Yeah, she went by the name of Casey.

LC: Did she? Why was that?

JD: She worked at an airbase out here—I think it was Thunderbird Field during the Second World War, they worked on airplanes and repair them, and she used to taxi them out to the runway, so they called her Casey Jones, from the train, for taxiing the planes out, and then—when she left that, they just dropped the Jones and called her Casey. That’s what she went by.

LC: And she continued to go by that?

JD: Yes, all of her life.

LC: Did she—let me just get the picture right. She’s driving some kind of vehicle that’s towing the plane, or—

JD: No, she’s driving the planes.

LC: She would actually get up in the cockpit?

JD: She was piloting the planes out to the field and parking them. She was an amazing little lady.

LC: I should think she was. When did she pass away, Jim?

JD: She passed away—1989. December of ’89.

LC: Okay. But—it’s you and your sister now?

JD: Yes, just the two of us now.

LC: Okay. And—has your sister had any kind of career or worked outside the home at all?

JD: No. No, she mostly—she helped raise three boys.

LC: Well that’s—

JD: She’d done a little bit of secretarial work, but that was it.

LC: That’s a handful though, three boys. Let me ask, Jim, how your interest in entering military service first came about.

JD: Me and a kid I ran around with, named David Sullivan always said when we got old enough to join the Navy; we were going in the Navy. Sitting at home one day, he come up and says, “Be ready to go in the morning, I signed up for the Navy today.”
says, “No you didn’t.” He says, “Yes I did.” So, we go down to the recruiting office in
Phoenix, and they says, “Yeah he signed up, he’s down here to get his physical.” I says,
“Give me the papers.” I signed up, and I really enjoyed the Navy. I really did.

LC: And Jim, how old were you when this happened?
JD: Seventeen.

LC: What did your parents have to say about this?
JD: Well, my mom was all for it. I kind of dropped out of school and my dad, he
was kind of reluctant, but he went ahead and signed the papers.

LC: Now, how much influence if any, Jim, did growing up with the World War
going on have on you as a young kid thinking about this?
JD: Well I know my dad tried to get into the service when the Second World War
started, and he had a wife and three kids, and they classified him as 4-F.

LC: Yeah, that wasn’t going to happen.
JD: I always just said, “I want to go.” When David and me, we decided all our
young life, we was going in the Navy together.

LC: And if I’m correct, would this have been in 1951?

LC: Because you had just turned seventeen? And your birthday’s on the thirty-
first of December is that right?
JD: Yes, New Year’s Eve.

LC: So you’re a New Year’s baby, okay. Well, of course, the Korean War was
going on, you, I’m sure were aware of that.

JD: Oh yes.

LC: How much attention were you paying to those events?
JD: Well, let’s see, I was a teenager, and I wasn’t paying that much attention to
it, really.

LC: Okay. Were you excited about getting started on this Navy career thing you
had?
JD: Well, yes ma’am, I was. I was surprised I even got in because I was
practically blind in my right eye.

LC: No kidding.
JD: Yeah, I was born with a paralyzed optical nerve.

LC: Oh. Okay. And how did you get past?

JD: (Laughs) Well—

LC: You can tell us, if you want to.

JD: Alright. It seems like in Phoenix, Arizona, when they give you the eye exam; they put you in a dark room and give you a card and say hold it over your left eye and read out your right, and then hold it over your right eye and read out your left. Well, I held it out a little bit and read out my left eye for both eyes. I had 20/20 in both eyes.

LC: And there you go.

JD: That’s the way I got as far as I got. And I got to California. They don’t put you in a dark room, and they told me, “You’re practically blind in that right eye. You want in the service, or out?” And I says, “I’ve come this far, let’s go the rest of the way.”

LC: Okay. So there was a doctor there that had that conversation with you?

JD: Yes.

LC: Did you think for a minute, “Maybe I shouldn’t?” Or did you just go on ahead?

JD: No, I didn’t hesitate a bit.

LC: Okay. Good man. Tell me about training. Where was your basic training?

JD: Boot camp was in San Diego, California.

LC: Okay. Do you remember much about it?

JD: Oh, quite a bit. We went to Camp Elliot for so many weeks and then came back to the training base there at San Diego and finished. We had thirteen weeks of boot camp.

LC: Right, right. And if you can, for someone who doesn’t have a sense of what that was like, can you just give us the flavor of what they made you do, and what you learned?

JD: Well, it didn’t bother me a bit, because I’d worked hard all my life, and— they made you march a lot, keep your bunk clean, keep yourself clean. Give you personnel inspections about every morning. Clean shirts and everything. Trained you. It was just general training for the United States Navy. We had to pass in swimming and everything, pass with the rifle and everything. It was just general training.
LC: Do you remember what rifle you were training on back then?
JD: M-1.
LC: Okay. And how did you do with their weapons training, Jim?
JD: (Laughs) I asked them if I could shoot out of my left eye and they told me no, so I just pulled the gun up, and I was in the Navy, I wasn’t in the artillery or nothing, so I pulled the gun up and fired away and the guy says, “Well, you qualified. You put a couple slugs in the guy’s target next to you, but you qualified. Go on.” So that was the end of my gun training.
LC: Did you have in mind what you thought you would do in the Navy after—?
JD: No idea whatsoever.
LC: Okay.
JD: Didn’t even know what they had to offer.
LC: Did they start talking about that kind of stuff in boot camp, or were they doing tests on you, or—
JD: No, not really.
LC: Did they give you any tests at all?
JD: Oh yeah, we went through tests and then showed me qualified, because of my young age and everything and background, I was just showed to be a seaman, a deck hand or—it didn’t show me to go to special training or anything.
LC: Okay. And so after the thirteen weeks was up, what happened next?
JD: I came home on two weeks leave; I went back and went aboard the USS Andromeda. A-n-d-r-o-m-e-d-a. AKA 15, I think it was three or four days later, we headed for Korea.
LC: Did you have much of any idea of what the ship’s compliment of equipment was?
JD: No ma’am, none whatsoever.
LC: Okay.
JD: We were troop transport and cargo.
LC: And what was your job? What were you given to do?
JD: Originally I was a deck hand, keep maintenance of the deck and everything, and then I got into the boat division and we took the troops into the beach head and
dropped them off and backed off and went in and picked up the troops that they were
relieving and took them back aboard the ship and took them to Kobe, Japan. I was called
an assault boat coxswain.

LC: An assault boat cox?
JD: Coxswain.

LC: Oh, coxswain, right. And, what special role, if any, did you have because
that was your title?
JD: Well, I was coxswain of the boat, I had two men under me, I had an engineer
and what they called a bow hook. The bow hook got the forward lines; the engineer took
care of the engine and got the after lines on the boat.

LC: And how many troops could get onto this craft?
JD: Oh, up to twenty, I think.

LC: Okay.
JD: It was a long time ago.

LC: Oh, I know. I know. Now the Andromeda itself could move about how
many troops all together?
JD: We had up to three hundred.

LC: Okay. And how many of these smaller crafts would make the actual runs up
to the shore?
JD: Well we had aboard the Andromeda, we had four LCMs (Landing Craft,
Mechanized), that’s the bigger boats, you could put a tank in it or the bigger trucks. And
inside them, we had LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel), which was four, then
we had what they called welin davits, davits on the side of the ship. And each side
carried three. So there were six, ten LCVPs, and four LCMs.

LC: That’s a lot of little craft coming—
JD: Yes it is.

LC: Who was in charge of making sure that everything happened in the correct
order? Was that all the way up to the captain, or was there something?
JD: No, that was usually our company commander, which was usually—it could
have been an ensign or a lieutenant.
LC: Okay. And how many times did you actually make that crossing from Kobe all the way over to Korea and back. Do you remember?
JD: Four.
LC: Four different times?
JD: Yes.
LC: About how long did it take, each time? I mean, one way?
JD: Oh, honey, I can’t remember that. I’d say a week.
LC: Okay. So it was—
JD: We were very slow; the ship I was on was very slow. Top speed was twenty knots.
LC: Yeah, that’s—that’s—
JD: Your destroyer’ll hit thirty and forty knots, we were—our ship was a big ship, but it was very slow.
LC: Just kind of chugging along.
JD: Yeah.
LC: Did you ever, under any of those circumstances of going up to the beach heads and back, take any kind of fire at all?
JD: No, I had a—
LC: These were secure areas that you were working?
JD: No they wasn’t, not in Pusan and Inchon.
LC: Okay, so you went to both Pusan and Inchon?
JD: Yes ma’am.
LC: Jim, if you can, it would really be very useful to have any kind of description, if you remember anything about those approaches.
JD: I really don’t. I don’t even care to, to tell you the truth
LC: Okay, I understand that. And it also sure was a long time ago.
JD: Yes. I got out of the Navy in ’55.
LC: Nineteen fifty-five. Okay. How were the guys as you were taking them over, do you remember? Were they anxious? Or kind of—
JD: No. I’ve never seen nobody be anxious to go into war.
LC: No, yeah, I mean kind of nervous a little bit?
JD: They were nervous, they were nervous, and they were hoping that I’d get 
them close to the beach head where they didn’t have to get soaking wet.
LC: I’m sure, yeah. Yeah.
JD: But we got as close as we could, and they had to get out up to their waist, and 
one time I hit the beach head and some of them were clear up to their shoulders, because 
I couldn’t get any farther, with the weight and everything on the boat.
LC: Sure, absolutely. Were they then carrying their equipment over their heads?
JD: Yes ma’am carried their rifles over their heads. You’ve seen it in movies.
They don’t let that weapon get wet, none whatsoever.
LC: That’s right. What about the guys that you were pulling out and they were 
going to get out of Korea?
JD: Oh, they’d come up, and we’d go down to the beach head, and they’d load on 
the boats just about the same way we dropped them off. Take them back up aboard the 
ship, they’d go up cargo nets and get aboard ship.
LC: What was their mood? Do you remember those guys getting up there?
JD: Glad. Glad to get out of there. Ready for some R&R (Rest and Relaxation).
LC: Glad to see you, probably. You made good friends there real fast, probably.
Did you feel that the part you were playing in all this was important, Jim?
JD: Oh, very important. Somebody had to do it.
LC: Yes sir, absolutely. And troop movements—
JD: I don’t care to go through it again.
LC: No, I can believe that. Did you have—and again Jim, if you don’t want to 
go into this, it’s totally fine, I just wondered if there were any men who had injuries who 
were coming off onto the boats.
JD: Oh yes, oh yes.
LC: Okay. Were they in serious condition, would you say?
JD: No, not real bad, most of them that were in bad enough condition, they took 
them aboard a different kind of craft. Got them on the medical ships.
LC: Okay, they would have already been evaced, some of them.
JD: Yeah, evaced on a different wave.
LC: Okay.
JD: All of ours were able-bodied. They had to climb cargo net to get aboard ship.

LC: Yeah. Did guys have any trouble with that? Some of them?

JD: We had one who couldn’t make it, they had to put a cargo net over the side, and he climbed in it and they took him aboard that way.

LC: What was wrong with him, do you remember?

JD: (Laughed) He weighed three hundred and some odd pounds.

LC: Oh, you’re kidding.

JD: Yeah, he was cook for them, and I guess he ate his cooking.

LC: I guess so.

JD: He was a pretty good heavy man.

LC: Big guy. Yeah. Climbing up the nets.

JD: He was always the first one in the chow line when he got aboard ship and the last one in the chow line. He ate. I mean, the man could eat.

LC: Wow, I guess so. Well, how long were you with the Andromeda all told?

JD: I was with them two years.

LC: Okay. You said that you wouldn’t care to repeat all of this, and that’s completely understandable. Looking back, though, do you feel like it was good service?

JD: Oh yes, like I told you, I loved the Navy, I really did. They treated me good.

LC: Yeah. Why did do you say you loved it, though? I mean other guys; maybe they had okay tours, but—

JD: Well, one thing, I joined the Navy, they didn’t draft me, I volunteered, and I could look at the rest of the armed services, and the Navy treated me good. I had—always had a clean bunk to sleep in, a good place to eat, and you know, I got to see part of the world, and I just thought the Navy treated me good.

LC: How about the people that you reported to? Did that go pretty well on the Andromeda?

JD: Oh yes, oh yes, no problems.

LC: Really? What did you guys do for entertainment, when you just had down time on those cruises, what did you—

JD: Well, watched movies, they had movies every night.
LC: Oh really?
JD: Yeah, they had movies aboard. They exchanged movies with other ships, so we had movies, when done painting and get the boats in condition and everything.
LC: Sure. How about playing cards, did you do that kind of stuff?
JD: Oh, we played a lot of cards. Lot of cards.
LC: What about writing home? Did that play in anywhere?
JD: Oh yes, I wrote home at least twice a week.
LC: Who were you writing to, your mom, or —?
JD: My mom.
LC: Was she able to write back?
JD: Oh yes, we got our mail; as soon as we’d get to Japan we’d get our mail aboard ship. They kept the mail up with us pretty good, I’ll say that for them.
LC: That’s really impressive; at that distance it’s pretty amazing. What kinds of things, and I know this is a long time ago, if you remember, did your mom write about?
JD: Oh, what was going on, and everything, send me clippings out of the paper of different people. Just general. How my sisters were doing and everything.
LC: Did she ever try to send you a package through the mail? Like—food?
JD: No.
LC: Goodies of any kind?
JD: No, no.
LC: That came later, maybe. It’s hard to do that stuff on a ship, I’m sure. How did you find out that you were going to be shifting off the Andromeda to another craft?
JD: The Andromeda went into dry dock at Treasure Island, they started chipping the decks and fell through to compartments.
LC: Oh really?
JD: And they said, “No longer. Decommission it.” We were going to get the ship ready to go to Alaska, and they decided to decommission it. So everybody on the Andromeda got to be reassigned to different ships. With my assault boat coxswain, my training and everything, the Calvert needed coxins and everything, so I went aboard the Calvert.
LC: And where did you actually meet the Calvert?

JD: San Diego. They sent me down from San Francisco to San Diego.

LC: How did you get down there?

JD: Train, I think. I don’t remember that. Train or bus.

LC: Oh, Okay. Did you get a break in there? Any kind of—

JD: Oh yeah, I went home on leave and then reported to—

LC: Okay. Do you remember being home for leave that time?

JD: Yes, I do. It was just a week, but I got home and went back to San Diego and got up aboard the Calvert.

LC: And—just roughly, Jim, would this have been in 19—late ’53? Or—?

JD: It was in ’53.

LC: Okay. Any idea what time of year?

JD: No ma’am, I really don’t. I’d have to look it up.

LC: Oh, that’s okay. I just wondered, just to kind of place it in time. But it was in 1953 that you joined the Calvert?

JD: Yes.

LC: And what position did you have there?

JD: I was an assault boat coxswain, a seaman.

LC: Okay. Can you describe, as you did with the Andromeda, the ship itself and its compliment that went with it?

JD: Well, it was an ATA.

LC: Yes, that’s right. So different.

JD: We had about the same—they called one of them a KA and one of them a PA, the only difference in the Calvert is, we had the commodore aboard. That’s the head man over the task force. And we had him aboard.

LC: Who was that?

JD: Can’t even think of his name, ma’am.

LC: Okay, that’s fine.

JD: We didn’t have too much to do with him. He was over our whole amphibious fleet.

LC: I was going to say, you probably didn’t see a lot of him.
JD: No, once in a while, if you were standing watch up on the bridge, you’d see him come up and sit in the chair up on the bridge out to sea, but you didn’t see too much of it.

LC: He was up where the air was thin somewhere, huh?

JD: Yeah, yeah. Well, he was the head man.

LC: That’s right. So did the Calvert then, if you remember, sail from San Diego?

JD: Yes.

LC: And where did it go?

JD: Went over to Japan. And made it to Korea—Korea was over then. Made a couple cruises on it. Then one time we went to Japan and then they sent us up to French Indochina and picked up the Vietnamese and took them down the Saigon River into Saigon.

LC: Yeah, I want to ask you a little bit about that, as you know. Did you—when did you guys find out that you were going to French Indochina? Did you know where that was?

JD: Didn’t find out until we were almost there.

LC: You were already there?

JD: Yes ma’am. You’re down in the deck division, the officers probably knew, but they don’t let the—I call them flunkies, us flunkies know that—they’d tell us when we get there what we’re going to do.

LC: Okay so, one day it just turns out that you’re—

JD: Well, we’re in French Indochina.

LC: Okay. And thinking back, did you really know where that was?

JD: No I didn’t, no idea.

LC: Okay.

JD: No idea.

LC: And they weren’t really briefing you on any of this?

JD: No, ma’am. They didn’t brief nothing. I know they had us building outside latrines up on the deck.

LC: Outside latrines?

JD: Yeah, water running through them, curtains on them, everything.
LD: Were you wondering why you were doing that?
JD: Yeah, we were all wondering, but we figured hey, you know—
LD: They know what they’re doing?
JD: They’ll tell you when they want you to know.
LD: Right and I guess after a couple of years in the Navy.
JD: Well, you just don’t ask too many questions. Don’t volunteer for nothing.
LD: Yes sir, yes sir. So you spent some time building these kind of makeshift latrines?
JD: Latrines, yes.
LD: And I know this is probably not the most pleasant subject, but can you tell me how those were organized? Can you describe them a little bit?
JD: Yeah, they’d have everything start up at the bow, and kind of a trough, like. They had stools in them, and they pump sea water through them, then they—well, went over the side.
LD: Okay, gotcha.
JD: But I hate to say this, they didn’t use them for latrines, they used them for washing up and cleaning up.
LD: Is that what happened?
JD: Yes. They used the deck and everything for latrines.
LD: Well that’s a bit unpleasant for you guys.
JD: Well, honey, you got to remember, these people in Vietnam, they wasn’t educated at all.
LD: And of course they’re also, I’m sure they’re in a pretty stressful situation.
JD: Yes, yes. There wasn’t nothing but young kids and old men and old women.
LD: There were no women?
JD: Old. Old women.
LD: Oh, I’m sorry, old women. Hmm, that’s interesting. So tell me where you first picked up some of these refugees.
JD: Well, I picked them up in French Indochina. I don’t remember the name of the port, and I think we had a hundred and some, two hundred aboard the first time, then
we—second time we had about the same amount, and we took them down the Saigon River and dropped them off into Saigon.

LC: Do you remember that sail?

JD: Yes, I do. I remember going down that river. Had to have a tugboat on each end of the ship pushing around the curves and everything because it was so big. And you couldn’t stick your head above the deck because there were snipers in the river. They had put steel plates over places where people had to, like the captain up in the wheelhouse in the bridge. But we were fortunate, never lost none going or coming, either way. But it was something else.

LC: You knew that you were in hostile territory; it sounds like, for sure.

JD: Oh yeah, they told us, to keep your head down, don’t put your head above—don’t even go topside if you can keep from it.

LC: Did you ever see anybody along the riverbank that you thought—

JD: No, I never did. They say they were there, though.

LC: Yeah, and you guys believed it, I’m sure.

JD: I wasn’t going to check it to find out.

LC: Yes sir. Well, you said that they took some precautions on the ship.

JD: Yes, they did.

LC: Where else, if you remember, did they put that plating?

JD: They put it up in the bridge where all the windows were at, where the captain was at.

LC: Anywhere else? If you remember?

JD: No, not really. But that’s about the only place you had to.

LC: Yeah. And how exposed would somebody have been if it was just on the deck? How exposed would you have been?

JD: You would have been quite exposed if you didn’t stay down.

LC: You’d have been wide open?

JD: Yes ma’am.

LC: Wow.

JD: The deck, you could—the upper part of your body was up over the metal.
LC: How did the Vietnamese that were on board, what impression did you form of them? You said they weren’t educated, and—

JD: Honey, I—the people were poor and helpless, and I really felt sorry for them.

LC: Did you?

JD: I didn’t think people lived like that in the world, to tell you the truth. It really was an education.

LC: Wow. How did they react to the Americans?

JD: Oh, they loved what we were doing, they—all smiles and everything.

LC: Sure. How did they get fed? How did—?

JD: Well, we—they brought bags of rice, and some kind of fish aboard, and they’d send them down below to feed them, they had big pots they were cooking and everything, and they’d feed them down below and then they’d—after they ate, they could come up on deck. But they ate—they were kept down too, while we were going up the Saigon River.

LC: Is that right?

JD: Made them go down below and stay.

LC: Okay. And, do you remember either of the times that you actually pulled into the port there in Saigon?

JD: Oh, I can remember it, but we just went up to the dock and dropped them off, and it was late, so they—we went out in the bay and anchored, and then the next morning we went back out in the river because we had to have tugboats and it had to be daylight. You had to see where you were going.

LC: Oh, okay. Sure.

JD: The tugboats had to push us around again, get us out. Second trip was the same way. We went into a dock, unloaded, soon as they were all unloaded, we pulled out, anchored in the bay, next morning, sunrise, we went back up the river.

LC: What kind of tug craft were they? These were Americans? American ships?

JD: Yeah—no. These were right from right there.

LC: They were local?

JD: Yeah, they were tugs from Saigon, come up the river and met us.

LC: And with Vietnamese crews?
JD: Yes. They had an interpreter aboard. So, it worked out.

LC: So he was running interference between the two? The interpreter?

JD: No, each tug had an interpreter, there was two ships and both, I can’t even remember the name of the other ship, both ships had two tugs and each tug had their own interpreter.

LC: Okay, I see. Did you have any interest—I know you didn’t have the opportunity, but did you have any interest in getting off the ship and having a better look around?

JD: No, no, not in Saigon. They wouldn’t even allow us in there.

LC: So there was just absolutely no chance of that?

JD: No, no. No liberty whatsoever. Saigon wasn’t the friendliest place, anyway.

LC: Yeah, I’m sure that’s right.

JD: I’d kind of feel sorry for taking those people out of French Indochina and taking them into Saigon. Well, it was better than French Indochina, but Saigon’s a very highly populated place.

LC: Yes, very densely populated. When you went back up to get your second group of refugees, do you remember anything?

JD: No, really, not.

LC: Not much about that?

JD: Got there, got them loaded up and got away from the dock and went down and—went down the Saigon River again, same thing, telling everybody to keep their heads below, and—

LC: Same thing again?

JD: Got to the dock and dropped them off and went out and anchored in the bay til the next morning, and they took us out and we went back to Japan.

LC: Okay, so just the two runs for the Calvert?

JD: Just the two runs.

LC: Okay. I want to ask you just a little bit more about the refugees. You mentioned that it was young people and the—

JD: Old women and men.

LC: What seemed like elderly folks.
JD: Yeah, elderly. I say old, it should be elderly. I’m getting there honey, I’m seventy.

LC: Well, I don’t think you’re there yet. What about middle aged folks? You know, in their forties?

JD: No, no, no able-bodied women or men. It was all young kids.

LC: Like really young? Like fifteen? That kind of young?

JD: No, it was younger than that.

LC: No kidding.

JD: They had to keep fifteen year olds, they’re able-bodied.

LC: So, we’re talking about—kids?

JD: I’m talking about ten, eleven years old, the highest.

LC: Did that strike you as kind of strange?

JD: Not when we were told what they were doing, what the Communists were doing, they were keeping all the able-bodied, especially the women, you understand that.

LC: Yes sir, absolutely. And when did they tell you that? Just kind of—

JD: No, we kind of asked, “Why is this, you know, all old and real young?”

They said, “Well, they’re not letting the able-bodied women or men out; they’re just keeping them.”

LC: Wow. When you were making these—the sails, did you see other American ships that were doing the same thing?

JD: It was just one, one other ship, and I can’t remember the name of it.

LC: That’s okay. I just wondered if—

JD: It was just two of us ships went in on this.

LC: Isn’t that funny? And this, did you know at the time what the mission name was? That it had a name?

JD: No, I didn’t until a professor there at the college told me.

LC: Oh, okay. Ron Franklin.

JD: Yeah, Ron Franklin told me. Passage to Freedom or something like that?

LC: Yes. But while you were doing it—

JD: We didn’t have no name for it.

LC: You didn’t have any idea.
JD: We just knew we were liberating the women and kids and men out of there.
LC: And Jim, did you have any kind of sense of your own of what the Communists were about? You know, you had already been involved in the Korean conflict, and now down here.
JD: No, I didn’t have no idea of what was going on in Vietnam.
LC: Okay, but in general.
JD: I just know that we heard the French were giving up their hold on certain parts of Vietnam.
LC: Yeah, um-hm.
JD: And that’s just where those people come from.
LC: But you didn’t really have an idea about communism generally?
JD: No ma’am. Well, I did about communism, because we’d go into Hong Kong, and I know May first, we could not have liberty, because May first is Commie Day over there. And Kowloon, across from Hong Kong was strictly a Communist town. And we just—knew, we didn’t get no liberty on May first that was known in the service as Commie Day.
LC: Was that more or less to protect you guys? Or was it to protect the ship?
JD: Yes, yes. People having parades and everything, you know.
LC: The potential was there for something to happen.
JD: Yes, the potential was there for battles and everything.
LC: Tell me what else you remember about Hong Kong during this time period.
JD: Hong Kong, I really don’t remember. I know you can buy clothing there real cheap.
LC: Sure, real nice clothes.
JD: Yes, suits. Some beautiful suits I bought there. I bought my mom a white cashmere jacket and brought it back.
LC: Yummy.
JD: Yes. Hong Kong, it didn’t really fascinate me.
LC: Is that right?
JD: No, it didn’t really.
LC: How did you feel about Asia in general? I mean, you’d spent a lot of time over there, by the mid fifties.

JD: Well, it was. I was in the service and I was sent there so I said, “Well, if this is where they want me, this is where they want me.”

LC: Uh-huh.

JD: I know that some of the Japanese, some of the older men still resented Americans. Wouldn’t have nothing to do with us. But that’s about it.

LC: When you would go in and dock in Japan, where were you, usually?

JD: Well, my home port was Sasebo.

LC: Okay.

JD: And then, we went to Yokosuka, we went to Nagoya, we went to Kobe, and that’s about it.

LC: Of those, do you have any that you particularly liked better, or were happier that you were visiting?

JD: No, it really didn’t make much difference.

LC: One was pretty much like the others, as far as you were concerned?

JD: Yeah.

LC: Did you have much time off the ship?

JD: Well, we’d have liberty three out of four nights, if you had money and you wanted to go over, well—you had duty about once out of every four days. But we had liberty and we’d go off at four o’clock or liberty call and have to be back by twelve, one o’clock.

LC: Sure.

JD: We had the freedom if you had the money.

LC: And if you wanted to spend it that way.

JD: Yeah.

LC: In general, were the guys that you were kind of hanging out with going off the ship on liberties?

JD: After payday, they might go one or two nights, and then they’d be broke and be aboard.

LC: That was all there was, huh?
JD: Well, we only made seventy-five dollars a month.
LC: Is that right?
JD: Yes ma’am.
LC: And, how did you get your pay? Was it in—?
JD: We got paid the first and the fifteenth.
LC: Okay. And in—
JD: Got it aboard ship, in cash.
LC: In American cash?
JD: Yes.
LC: Okay. Seventy-five dollars a month doesn’t seem like a whole lot of money.
JD: Well, honey, back in the fifties, you survived on it.
LC: Yes sir, absolutely. You did what you had to do, right?
JD: Well, we had a place to eat and sleep and everything; the only thing we had
to buy was replace clothing once in a while, our toothpaste, shaving cream, razors.
Laundry was done free, everything was pretty well free. Cigarettes were a dollar a
carton, if you smoked. I mean, haircuts were free, so—
LC: Not bad.
JD: No, it was good living. It was a good life. There were places you could go
spend all your money in one night and still have a place to sleep and eat.
LC: That’s true, that’s true. Tell me, if you can, Jim, any other ports you visited
before you left the service, which again—
JD: Oh, I went into Hawaii four times. And we went into Subic Bay, went into
Manila, well that Subic Bay is in the Philippines.
LC: Sure.
JD: And went into Manila—I’m trying to think. I went to San Francisco; our
home port was San Diego.
LC: You got around pretty good.
JD: Yes I did, I traveled. I made four cruises overseas when I was in the Navy.
So, we got around pretty good.
LC: Right. That’s pretty good. Tell me about Hawaii when you visited. Do you
remember it?
JD: Yes ma’am. Awfully expensive.

LC: Even then?

JD: Oh yes ma’am. We all, I think it was four of us, chipped in and went and bought a case of beer, whatever we could afford, went down, that was our liberty on the beach, drinking beer and watching the girls.

LC: Um-hm. Sounds good.

JD: Well, we couldn’t afford to do nothing else.

LC: Do you remember your buddies? Where were they from, do you remember?

JD: Well it’s like I said, I’ve just met two of them that were real good buddies of mine aboard ship that I hadn’t seen since 1955, on my ship’s reunion a couple weeks ago. And one was from outside of Denver, Colorado, and the other one was from Iowa. And there was another one that was on the ship same time as I was which was from California. And I hadn’t seen these guys since 1955.

LC: I mean that’s going to be almost hard for people in the future to really appreciate that it’s been almost fifty years.

JD: Yes, it has. Almost fifty years.

LC: Did you recognize them?

JD: They recognized me.

LC: Is that right?

JD: Well, I see, I was the assault boat coxswain, I took them on liberty on the boat, when we was moored out in the bay, I took them to the dock on liberty and pick them up and take them back to the ship.

LC: You were an important person for people—

JD: Well, that’s the way most of them got to me—I got a call coming in, but that can wait.

LC: Okay.

JD: That’s the way most of them remember me. “Oh I remember you. You used to take us on liberty!” Well, yeah, I was the guy that was in Mackleroy was my bow hook for a while.

LC: Mackleroy?

JD: Yeah, that was the name. He’s supposed get your stuff and call you.
LC: Okay, terrific, that’ll be great.
JD: He’s coming to Arizona to spend the winter, and he’s only going to be about five miles from where I live.
LC: No kidding. That’s just astounding.
JD: Willy, I can’t remember Willy’s last name; he was my engineer on the boat. Carrillo was his name. Willy Carrillo.
LC: Is that your wife in the background helping?
JD: Yup. She just went over the stuff we brought back from the reunion.
LC: Good, good.
JD: I’m trying to set up a reunion here in Phoenix.
LC: Wonderful, well that’ll be great.
JD: I’d like that. We’re trying—well, I’m waiting on a call from the commander, I might have it in 2005, if not 2006.
LC: Okay. Well, maybe somebody from the Vietnam Archive can come along and talk to, you know, tell them what they’re doing.
JD: Well, there was six of us that was aboard that ship during that Ride to Freedom. It was during Korea. That was all. The rest of them were all Second World Wars.
LC: They were even earlier than you guys?
JD: Oh, yes ma’am. Some of them were 1940, ’42, ’43.
LC: Now how long did the Calvert stay in service? Do you know?
JD: It was over—they decommissioned it—they commissioned it in ’40, ’42, ’43, and they decommissioned it in ’65.
LC: Is that right? Were there guys there from the ‘60s?
JD: Yes, oh yes. Both from Korea, yes.
LC: Wow. It’s incredible that these other men that remembered you, anyway, were there.
JD: The ones that were aboard ship when I was, on the Calvert when I was, because I took them on liberty. They were in engine departments, one was gunner’s mate, “Well I remember you, you was driving the boat to take us in so we could go on liberty.” Yeah, that was me.
LC: Yeah, you were actually a crucial guy.

JD: Well, I was a boatswain mate, us boatswain mates brag, we say we’re the backbone of the Navy.

LC: There you go. I was just waiting for you to say it, so I didn’t have to. Jim, can you tell me why you decided to actually leave the Navy, and when that happened?

JD: Well, I fell in love.

LC: Okay, so personal reasons.

JD: Yeah, personally, I didn’t think the Navy was good for a married man.

LC: Okay. Because you were moving around so much?

JD: Yeah, yeah.

LC: And when did you actually separate then from service?

JD: December of—well, I didn’t really separate, I had eight years obligation. I separated in December of fifty-five. I didn’t get discharged until fifty-nine.

LC: And were you then in the Reserves for that time?

JD: Yes.

LC: And where was your Reserve unit?

JD: I didn’t—no, I wasn’t active.

LC: Okay.

JD: I was an inactive reserve.

LC: I see. Where did you make your home?

JD: Phoenix.

LC: So you came back home?

JD: Yup.

LC: No question.

JD: No question.

LC: It is very nice there. I probably would have done the same thing.

JD: Little hot, but once you get used to heat, it doesn’t bother you.

LC: That’s right, you can live with it. It’s such a beautiful place.

JD: We got our doors open today. It’s about eighty-some odd degrees.

Beautiful.

LC: Beautiful day.
JD: No air conditioning or nothing on.
LC: And you’re still basically in that same area?
JD: Yes, I’m in Mesa, Arizona.
LC: Have you lived there the entire time, then, Jim?
JD: No, I left one time and moved to Wichita, Kansas, and worked for Cessna Aircraft. This was well, way back in the sixties.
LC: What did you do at Cessna?
JD: I was a machinist. And I left there and moved back to Phoenix and went work with Air Research as a machinist. We built airplane parts.
LC: What was the company?
JD: Air Research.
LC: Okay.
JD: Then it come to—I’m going to get it now, Garrett, then it was the Garrett Turbine Engine Company, then it was Allied Signal, and now it’s Honeywell.
LC: So it’s gone through a lot of—
JD: Name changes. Well, companies too. Mr. Garrett sold to Allied Signal. And then Allied Signal bought Honeywell here in the valley. And they changed the name at all the aerospace to Honeywell.
LC: And when did you actually retire, then, Jim?
JD: I left there in December of eighty-nine.
LC: Well, Jim, is there anything else that you can help us with by thinking back about your service and maybe how you felt about the Vietnam conflict when it developed there in the sixties, having been over there?
JD: Honey, I hate to say it, but I don’t think we should have been there.
LC: Is that right?
JD: I hate to say it.
LC: Well, it’s okay, I think—
JD: I don’t think we should have been there, we didn’t prove anything, we didn’t prove anything in Korea, and we’re sure not proving nothing in Iraq.
LC: They pretty much line up for you as mistakes?
JD: Mistakes. Loss of people that should not be—we’ve lost over a thousand people in Iraq right now.

LC: Yeah, I heard that the other day.

JD: It’s ridiculous. We don’t belong over there. They say it’s a holy war. Well let them stay in their holy war, and let’s stay out of it. We cannot change people. They’ve been like that all their lives. I’m sorry.

LC: No, it’s okay actually, to say your take on these things. I mean, you’re a veteran of the United States services, and it’s well worthwhile to record how you feel about the different conflicts that the United States has become involved in, and whether the reasons seem to be good or not.

JD: Second World War, we had no—we had to. They came to us. They bombed us first.

LC: Yes, that’s true.

JD: With Korean, and the Vietnam, and Iraq, I don’t know what we—why? Why? They didn’t bomb us. They didn’t challenge us. One country challenges another country, are we going to get in every battle that goes on?

LC: Well, that seems to be kind of—

JD: America’s way.

LC: The discussion, right, that we’re the only super power now and—but you know, it does —it also puts a particular burden on us too, to be smart about how we—

JD: It seems to me we’re losing a lot of men for nothing.

LC: Yes, that’s right. And women, now, too.

JD: Well, women too. I’m sorry, women got—just like Korea, we lost all them people and everything.

LC: Yes, that’s right.

JD: What happened? We got out of there; they went back to their old ways. Vietnam’s the same way. Got out of there, North Vietnam took over and that was it. We fight these countries, and we whip them in a battle, and then turn around and give everything back to them.

LC: It just seems kind of futile.
JD: It does. To me, I don’t know. They said there’s been a war. When we was in Springfield, Missouri, we went and visited the battle grounds the Civil War was fought on.

LC: Yes, sir.

JD: And that was kind of a senseless war too.

LC: Well, you’re—

JD: The North was fighting the South over the slavery, that’s about the only big thing.

LC: And you’re sure right, though, that a whole lot of people, a whole lot of people—what, over six hundred thousand Americans were killed in the Civil War. It almost boggles the mind.

JD: I went by the cemetery, and he says, “I’ll tell you how you tell the North from the South.” He said, “The crosses. The South are rounded on top. The North is square across the top. And that’s how you told the North from the South.”

LC: And that’s the only difference, yeah.

JD: That’s the only difference in the crosses in the cemeteries. The top. That’s how you told the North from the South.

LC: It makes me wonder if you think, Jim, that the president—President Bush’s decision to send troops into Afghanistan was a good idea. We hadn’t mentioned that one yet.

JD: No—

LC: After the 9/11 attack.

JD: Yeah. Well—and then he went after Hussein, instead of Bin Laden, they say they’re after Bin laden, but if they were after Bin Laden like they were Hussein, they would have already got him. I could guarantee you.

LC: Yeah, it’s curious, sure.

JD: My personal opinion is, he has a personal vendetta against Hussein because Hussein put a contract out on his daddy. Now, that’s my personal opinion.

LC: During the Gulf War, in 1990.

JD: Yes, that’s my personal opinion.

LC: Well, I’m actually glad you expressed it.
JD: I know you’re a Texan, but—

LC: Well, to tell you the truth, I’m really not a Texan, I’m from Michigan. But, I do live out here in West Texas, where the president is from. But you know, everybody has their own view on this, and we’re very glad to have your contribution.

JD: Nine out of ten people I talk to feel about the same way.

LC: Is that right?

JD: Oh yes.

LC: What about the guys at the reunion?

JD: What are we doing over there? Why are our people always getting killed over there? Women? Why are they getting killed over there? It’s senseless.

LC: Was that pretty much what people were saying at the reunion you went to a couple weeks ago?

JD: Yes, most of them.

LC: Really?

JD: What little conversation we—we didn’t talk politics or didn’t talk no more war in any of them.

LC: Well, that was probably a good decision.

JD: You know you make enemies that have a reunion over politics. Politics and religion don’t get along too good when you have a get together like that.

LC: Yes sir, yes sir. It’s better to remember what you guys did together.

JD: Well, we remembered a lot. I should’ve—I had some pictures laid out here, I was going to take and I forgot them. Me and the Eddie Mackleroy and William are on liberty in Japan.

LC: Really?

JD: Oh yeah. In a bar, of course. But—they said, “Just hold onto them, because we’re coming out and we want to see them.”

LC: Yeah, and that’ll be a highlight, I’m sure, at the next reunion. Well, go ahead and—

JD: Anyway, what people I’ve talked to back there, they want to know why, too. Why are we over there? What are we doing over there? They’re referring right back to Vietnam and Korea. We don’t belong there. We have no use, we shouldn’t be there.
We’re just losing a lot of troops for no—because them people are going to go right back
to doing what they did. You’re not going to change them, they’ve been doing what
they—killing each other since before Christ.

LC: And it is certainly a hard thing to try to create a democracy.
JD: It is.

LC: It’s a long project.
JD: I’ve seen Bush on TV, trying to get all the UN (United Nations) to go with
him, to help out over there. Well they didn’t go over there, and they’re not going to help
him none either. I guarantee you they’re not going to help the United States.

LC: It doesn’t look like it, does it?
JD: No, no ma’am. He should have thought about that when he went against all
of them and went. He lost all those countries’ support and help.

LC: And money, yeah.
JD: And money, money, money. That’s the main thing right there. How can we
afford to send millions over there and we got people starving here? But it’s humane, but
still, you stop and think about it

LC: Yeah it does kind of boggle the mind. Jim, is there anything else that you
can think of that we should include in this interview?
JD: No. I highly recommend anybody that’s a young age and undecided of what
they want to do with their lives, to go in the service, though.

LC: Yes, sir.
JD: I’d recommend that if they don’t see anything fit to make a career out of it.
They treat you right. I was talking to a man that started in the Navy—he was aboard the
Calvert—he started in the Navy as a seaman apprentice.

LC: Yes, sir.
JD: When he got out, he had thirty-one years in the Navy. The man come out as
a commander.
LC: Wow.
JD: That’s one rank below a captain. Worked himself right up through the ranks,
went from a chief petty officer up to an ensign, they sent him to OCS, he went right up,
he was a commander. That’s a step under a captain in the Navy. Well it was when I was
in. But he come out as a full commander with thirty-one years in the Navy. Worked himself right up the ladder.

LC: So it’s a wonderful set of opportunities, that’s for sure.
JD: Oh, if you put our mind to it, you can do anything.
LC: And Jim, you mentioned to me when we talked earlier that you almost wish you hadn’t gotten out as early as you did.
JD: Well, I wish I had stayed, made a career out of it. I could have retired very young, had a nice pension and everything, but I—wasn’t rated enough for having enough power behind me to get shore duty, and I didn’t join the Navy to stay ashore, I joined the Navy to be at sea, and being at sea is no good for a married man to be.
LC: Yes. Those separations are extremely difficult.
JD: Yes, well this commander said he’s had shore duty for the last fifteen years.
LC: It makes a difference.
JD: Well, after he’d come off the Calvert, he went on shore duty and stayed on shore duty. But that’s fine for a married man, but if you’re out at sea, it’s not good for a married man.
LC: But as you point out, too, the opportunities are there for—
JD: It’s there you can get all the education you want, get the training you want, go right on up the ladder, and you can make good money.
LC: While serving the country, too.
JD: While serving your country.
LC: Yes, sir. Well I’m glad that you mentioned that. And Jim, I want to thank you for sitting with me this afternoon, and doing this oral history interview.
JD: Well, I’m glad to help you out, and if it helps somebody in the future, I’m glad of that.
LC: Thank you.