Robert Tidwell: Okay, this is Robert Tidwell interviewing J.C. Campbell on the
first of February, 2005 at nearly three o’clock in the afternoon in the Vietnam Archive
interview room. How are you doing this morning Mr. Campbell?

John Calvin Campbell: I’m doing fine.

RT: Well this afternoon actually.

JC: Yeah, I’m doing fine.

RT: Okay. Where do you currently live?

JC: I live in Granbury, Texas. It’s 2222 Acton Road, Granbury, Texas, 76049.

We live on—we have some land out here and one of our sons lives close to us. We
raised, my wife and my son, raised Boar goats. We’ve been living here since 1960.

RT: Okay.

JC: Not in this location, but in the Granbury area.

RT: Okay. Now were you originally born in Granbury?

JC: No, I was born on the twenty-ninth of July, 1932 in the old Parkland Hospital
in Dallas, Texas. My mom and dad lived in what was called West Dallas at 1106 West
Commerce. He worked for Mackenzie Construction Company, whose home office was
in San Antone, Texas. He did—in the ’30s and the ’40s, basically the ’30s; he was a
foreman of the construction company. As a matter of fact, in 1939 they put in the conduit
in the ground for the first cable in Dallas for the first TV cable in Dallas, Texas in 1939.
RT: In 1939?
JC: Yes.
RT: Wow.
JC: So it was around then.
RT: Gosh. Well that’s amazing.
JC: Yup, it really is.
RT: What were your parent’s names?
JC: Okay, my mom—my dad’s name was Johnny Campbell. My mom was Mildred Pearl Mackey Campbell. We lived in Dallas until 1942, which was the time right after the war, well we moved to Irving, Texas at 1305 Perry Road.
RT: Okay, okay. What about your mother’s grandparents, where were they born?
JC: Oh my goodness, I don’t know. I’ve been trying to do some research on them and I’ve got some things, I just haven’t gotten it down on paper. I mean I haven’t gotten it all together. But Mom was born down in Port Arthur.
RT: Okay.
JC: She’s been gone for quite a while. But my dad was born in Paradise, Texas in Wise County in 1904. Mom was born in 1906, I mean, excuse me, [1907] I believe it was.
RT: Well not much difference between their ages.
JC: No, unh-hm.
RT: Now do you know much about your dad’s grandparents?
JC: Well I knew my granddad. I called him papa. A matter of fact, in the late ’30s, well he stayed with us in Dallas for a while, the ’30s, in the late ’30s and the early ’40s before we moved. But he lived with us for a while. Then we used to go up and visit with him in Paradise. As a kid, I used to go up and spend a week or so with him during summertime some. I did not know my grandmother, she died I think when my dad was younger.
RT: Okay. That must’ve been interesting to have your grandfather so close at hand.
JC: Yeah. I don’t remember a whole lot about him because I was, you know, six, seven, eight years old. Where we lived, it was a small house. It was a two room house.
We lived on the ground where all of the equipment was, they used to call them yards or the construction yard. Dad was the—he was a night watchman, he was also the foreman. We got the—during the—of course times were pretty hard back in the ’30s. Dad I think I made ten dollars a week whenever things was pretty bad and we got our rent free. We had electric light, you know in each room and we had the running water with—I mean, no hot water, you know. We did have water into the house. We had an icebox in which we had to take a chunk of ice to put in to keep warm. We had outdoor houses, you know, we didn’t have a bathroom inside. I used to take, when I was a kid—I was telling them at lunch today, I did a talk at the Lion’s Club today about me, you know, my history of my life. I told them, I said, “I used to take a bath in the washtub, a number three washtub sitting right beside the woodstove whenever it was cold to keep from freezing to death, you know.” So times were—we used to think that it was just fine, you know, because there’s nothing to it because that’s what we grew up with. So little did we know that there was something different. (Laughs)

RT: (Laughs) Golly, so for that time, would you say that your childhood or your formative years were about the same as everybody else’s, or a little bit better, a little worse off?

RT: Yeah. No, I think ours was kind of typical. Most of the people that we knew in that era, in that time, in the ’30s and the ’40s—of course I remember, you know, I remember 1936 and I was only four years old I know. But for some reason I remember that we went to the State Fair of Texas and that was the centennial, 1936 was the State Fair Centennial. I couldn’t believe that I turned around and I saw mother take a puff off a cigarette and I couldn’t wait to get home to tell my dad. Of course, it was no big deal then, but I do remember that you know. But things then were, you know—there were people that had lots of money. But there were also people that didn’t have a whole lot of money. We were in that category of we were just a working class of people. We had a cow. Even though we lived in Dallas, we had a cow and Daddy milked her and we exchanged butter down at the grocery store and get a loaf of bread. They finally, they brought a slicing machine in there that they could slice bread and so that was a real big advancement. But it was more like a small community. But it was—you know we just,
got a pair of shoes a year, and one or two pair of overalls or trousers or whatever, you
know. But we didn’t know any different. We was just like most other people.

RT: Well you got a new pair of shoes every year?
JC: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah we were uptown when we got a new pair of shoes.
RT: (Laughs)
JC: For Christmas, you know, we’d get that hard rock candy, that ribbon candy.
RT: Oh yes.
JC: Then we’d get apples and oranges. I remember one year, we were at my
granddads in Paradise on the farm up there and Santa Claus brought me a Red Ryder BB
Gun. So that was one of the big highlights of my early years.

RT: Now the day that you got it, did you immediately run outside and—?
JC: I did. I went out to the woods because we were in the country and I went out
in the woods and I hunted birds.
RT: Oh okay, so did you just kind of shoot at them or did you potentially get
some to eat or—?
JC: Oh yeah. Oh well I don’t remember whether I hit anything or not. But it was
just the idea that I had a brand new BB gun and so you know, I was ready to go out and
tackle the world.
RT: (Laughs) So what’s your parents—how far did they go in their education?
JC: Well I think Dad, I don’t think he went to college. He got out of high school
and Mom got out of high school too, I believe. I don’t think either one of them had
college. I was the first one I guess to get any college education. I didn’t finish my
degree. I was a senior when I quit at North Texas in 1958.
RT: Okay.
JC: But I didn’t go ahead and pursue it because my degree was in advertising art
and I would’ve had to taken off a whole year to go back to get, you know, the theory of
art and the theory of this and I just didn’t think it was worth it.
RT: Okay. But your parents actually went pretty far for their generation, yeah.
JC: Oh yeah. Yeah, Daddy made fun of it. He used to say that they had to burn
the schoolhouse down to get him out. I think the schoolhouse burnt down, but not
because of him though. Mom, I don’t know that much, I think that she did graduate from high school.

RT: Okay. So when you were growing up, were you the only child or did you have any siblings?

JC: No, I had a brother and he was born in March 8, 1937. So I was a little bit older than he was. I mean, excuse me, 1935.

RT: Oh okay.

JC: So I was not quite three years older than he was. He’s passed away, he’s been dead about four or five years now I think. He’s buried here in Granbury at the cemetery out here. He had cancer. He had no children. He and his wife didn’t have any children. He said he wanted to be buried down in Granbury because he felt close to Granbury and he knew that we’d be here.

RT: So he lived in Granbury as well?

JC: Huh? No, he lived in Irving.

RT: Okay.

JC: But he said, “I don’t know anybody in Irving anymore,” because that’s where we grew up later on after we moved from Dallas. He said, “I just want to be down there in Granbury.” So we got four cemetery plots down here, one for me and one for my wife and then one for he and one for his wife. She’s still alive in Irving now.

RT: His wife is?

JC: Yeah and we keep in contact with each other and she’s still my sister-in-law even though he’s not here.

RT: So when you were younger did you do any kind of work when you were a kid?

JC: Yeah, I used to—well you can’t be around a construction company because they had heavy machinery there and Daddy would—whenever we’d go out on a job somewhere, well he had this guy that was a black guy and they called him Big Bill. He was about three hundred pounds and that’s the reason they called him Big Bill.

RT: I would think so.

JC: Yeah. Dad told my brother and I that Big Bill was just like—he was doing just like he was. We’re supposed to mind Big Bill and if we didn’t, well he would spank
us and just like Daddy would. You know he’d get the same kind of treatment. So we would go out on construction jobs with him and we got to do things like that, which most kids wouldn’t get to do. But you know, when that in ’41, 1941, whenever the war came, well that closed all of the construction material down. So the construction company just closed down and all of the guys that was working for Dad, they all just moved away, you know. They just had to find other jobs or went to the service or whatever. But then in 1942, well we moved to Irving.

RT: Okay. I was about to ask you, you know, what did your Dad do when the construction company closed down?

JC: Well we stayed there on the yard for—he was the night watchman. I mean he was the one that took care of the place because they had a lot of equipment and stuff there. They couldn’t just walk off and leave it. The company was in San Antone, the headquarters was and so he stayed there until they got rid of everything and then that’s when we moved, we moved to Irving.

RT: Okay.

JC: But I went to grade school in Sydney Lanier Grade School over in West Dallas. It was right off of what they called—it was old Highway 80, they called it the Ft. Worth Pike. But it’s almost into Chalk Hill, but it’s right off of Edgefield and the old [road] they called Ft. Worth Pike.

RT: Okay. So when ya’ll moved to Irving, then what did you and your dad do?

JC: Well, he went to work for Gifford Hill Pipe Company. Of course the war was in full swing then and Dad—I was telling them at lunch today—Dad bought an acre of land and a two room house for a thousand dollars there on Perry Road, 1305 Perry Road. That’s where we lived and then finally he built a lean-to on the house. You know, we put windows around it and that’s where my brother and I, we had our bedroom back there. For a while, we slept in the same room with Mom and Dad and there was a kitchen that was it. So after we got the back room back there, well Dad started doing construction work and stuff. He worked for Gifford Hill Pipe Company and what they would do is these great big old eight foot storm drains, pipes. Well he would—they would load on them a truck and bring them over to Ft. Worth to Carswell Air Force Base. That’s when they were building—was consolidated then. It was consolidated and then
consolidated Vaultee which turned into General Dynamics and then Lockheed, Lockheed Martin now. But they were building Carswell Air Force Base there and they used these big old pipes underground for water, you know drainage and stuff for flood control. They were putting those pipes out so fast there at Gifford Hill, it’s right north, excuse me, right south of Irving proper itself and it’s as big—it’s still there, it’s a different name now, but they make concrete, all kinds of concrete pipe and stuff. But that’s where he worked and he drove a truck and they would load five or six of those things on a truck. They were building them so fast they pulled them green they said, they weren’t dried yet. So during the summertime it was so hot that what they would do is that they would water these things down before they put them, you know, on the way to Ft. Worth so they wouldn’t crack. You were supposed to wear steel toed boots. But my dad took his off and put on rubber toed boots and one of those things shifted and it cut his big toe and his next two toes off. He really lost the use of that right foot I believe it was. I believe it was his right foot. Anyway and he was laid up then for quite a while. Then after that he just worked at a service station and did the service—he did servicing on electrical appliances. You know iceboxes and stuff like that. So he just did kind of some small things. While he was laid up, well Mom went to work. She worked at a washerteria and managed that. Then I went to work at a five and ten cent store called Duke&Ayres. There was a home office out of Arkansas and there in Irving. I did that I guess when I was about, oh, I was thirteen, twelve or thirteen or fourteen when we did that.

RT: So what did you do at the five and ten store?

JC: Restocked and swept and whatever the manager told me to do. You know, I would work after school and afternoons. During summertime’s I worked most of the time during the day. It was good for me because I got a little responsibility, you know, and it was my money. So I would give Daddy half a month my check, you know, or my pay. It was not checks then. It was a pay envelope and that’s the way I bought my first Schwinn bicycle.

RT: Wow.

JC: I think it cost me forty dollars then. It took me quite a while to buy my bicycle, but it was one of those real neat ones. It was colored gray and maroon, I believe it was. It had a horn on it and had a light on it and it had [pneumatic] shocks, I mean,
what do you call those? The shock absorbers on the front wheel, it had white sidewall
tires. Oh it was slick and I treated it like it was, you know, a living thing. I took care of
it. But anyway, and my brother, he was working and we together bought our furniture in
our bedroom. I bought a radio, we had a brand new Zenith, a radio with a record player
in it, you know. It was, you know, our life was not as in turmoil as a lot of people’s was.
But we had a good mom and a good dad and they took care of us and never did go
hungry.

RT: So did you work anywhere else when you were younger?

JC: Not—yeah, well after I got through there, which I think I was in the eighth
grade whenever I was working there. Then I went into high school and I worked for a
place and it was called Sam Hills. What he did, he made ice there in Irving. They had a
store that went with it and we kind of gave curbside service to the—you know to anyone
who would come in there. They’d want—we made ice cream or they had vegetables or
canned goods and stuff like that. You know if you wanted ketchup or mayonnaise or
whatever you’d come in and we’d fill your order. You didn’t have to get out and go in.
Then we would make ice and score ice and sold lots of ice. During the summertime, we
have watermelons there that we put in and kept cool. So we sold lots of that stuff and
cold drinks. I worked there I guess for about four years while I was in high school.

RT: So what sort of things did you do in the icehouse?

JC: Well we pulled ice. You know they’d come out and I think it was six
hundred pounds. The full ice block weighed about six hundred pounds. You run it
through the scoring machine and that’s where it saws. You’d run it through standing up
and it would go from a hundred pounds to the fifty pounds to the twenty-five pounds. It
would score on this ice thing. Then you’d turn it and run it the other way and it would
make it complete to where you could get a hundred pound chunk of ice, or you could get
a fifty pound chunk of ice, or a twenty-five pound chunk of ice. But you had to take an
ice pick and you’d go along where it was scored and that would make the ice break that
way. So we would do that and then we would actually make the ice cream and we’d
make the—you know service at the front desk or the front. The people would pull in
there. So it was like being a waiter is what it was. We’d just wait for people to come in
and when we wasn’t doing that, we was always cleaning up, sweeping up, you know
whatever they wanted us to do.

RT: Well I bet hauling that ice around made you pretty fit though.

JC: Oh well yeah, I wasn’t that big. I think I weighed about 110 pounds or
somewhere along in there, I wasn’t very big. I didn’t play football in school because I
wasn’t very big.

RT: Okay.

JC: Then I did that while I was in high school and also I played in the band. We
started a band there in Irving and it was the first at Irving High School, was the first band
in 1946. Our uniform was blue jeans and a black shirt and we had a gold tie. You know
like a Boy Scout tie?

RT: Okay.

JC: That was our uniform. Daddy bought me a used clarinet and that’s what I
started practicing on and I played the clarinet for two years I guess. I played drums for
one year and the cymbals for one year, so I got out of high school.

RT: Do you play any of those instruments today?

JC: No, I’ve still got my clarinet though.

RT: Okay.

JC: Yeah, still got that. It’s a real old one. It’s all medal. It’s kind of an antique
I think because it was old in the forties.

RT: Okay. (Laughs) So when you graduated from high school, 1950, that’s when
the Korean War began.

JC: Correct. I graduated in 1950 too.

RT: Oh, you graduated in 1952.

JC: Yeah, in 1950 also. I said 1950 also, I should have said.

RT: Okay. So did you just decide to go enlist or were you called in, in the draft
or anything?

JC: No. I think I was—I’m not sure whether it was my senior year or what, but
the reserves was a big thing then. A lot of the high school kids was joining the reserves.
So my friend and I, Sonny Barlow, he and I were real good friends, I was over at his
home or he was at our house, you know we were real close. We joined the Naval
Reserve there at Baughman Lake in Dallas at the reserve base out there because they paid you money, you know. Just for coming to meetings, well they would give you a check. I don’t remember how much, but it was a good way to make some spending bucks. They would send you to boot camp, you know during the summertime for a couple of weeks, and so you got a vacation there. Anyway, we joined when we were in high school.

RT: Okay.

JC: Then after I got out of high school, I went to work for—it was called Robert’s Lumber Company then. It was on Irving Boulevard by Irving Heights Drive. I worked there—my job then was to, I operated the switchboard, the telephone switchboard and I did some bookkeeping and stuff for them there. Then I got a chance to go to work for Southwestern States Telephone Company there in Irving in the office. We’d clean the switches and doing bookkeeping and the records keeping of the troubleshooting and this kind of stuff. I was just learning the telephone business then. It was a lot of fun, didn’t make a whole lot of money but I guess I was paid what I deserved, you know. But that was right downtown, it was right off on Main Street. Then we were at a meeting, I think it was Monday nights that we always met and they told us that there was something happening around the world, that they weren’t sure what was happening but they were having a big conflict in someplace called Korea. They weren’t sure exactly where it was, but that some of the reservists would probably get called up and just letting us know. So Sonny and I made this agreement that if I got called up, well he would join and if he got called up, I would join. So I think it was the very next week or it wasn’t very long after that he got called up and so I went in and signed up. Well mother didn’t take too kindly to that, but it didn’t make any difference because I already signed up. So we left to go to Great Lakes Naval Training Center, I think it was on the fifteenth of December 1951. So I went there for nine weeks, or twelve weeks, or whatever it was that we were there.

RT: Hello?

JC: Hello? Are you with me?

RT: Yes.

JC: Okay. Did you get the last about we were in Great Lakes?

RT: I could barely hear it.
JC: Oh okay. Well we were in Great Lakes Naval Training Center. We got there sometimes after the fifteenth; it took us a couple of days on the train. We left out of Dallas on the train and went to Great Lakes and it was about three foot of snow on the ground when we got off. For a Texas guy, well that was just too much snow, you know. But I think it was nine weeks or fourteen weeks or something that we went through. So that’s how I came to get in the Navy.

RT: Well you mentioned that you joined the reserves when you were in high school and that you’d gone to a boot camp in the summer.

JC: Yeah, we went to San Diego one summer.

RT: Okay. Well that must’ve been something, here you were in high school and you got to go San Diego.

JC: Oh yeah. No, well we went out there during the— I guess the first summer. I guess it was right after I graduated from high school in the ’50s. So it was probably in ’50 that we went to San Diego, or ’51, I’m not sure. But then I went to Great Lakes shortly after that.

RT: Boy, that’s a shift, to go from sunny San Diego to Great Lakes.

JC: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

RT: What time of the year did they send you to Great Lakes?

JC: It was in December, December the fifteenth.

RT: Oh, cold.

JC: Yeah, when we left Dallas and then we got up there a day or so later. We had to go through St. Louis on the train, you know. I think it took us two days to get there.

RT: Okay.

JC: When we got there, well they told us that we were just a day late and that everybody that had gotten there earlier than that could go home for Christmas vacation. So we didn’t get to, we had to stay there during the Christmas vacation. I don’t know if you remember Johnny Ray, the singer. He came out with a song that year. What made it so hard for me was “The Little White Cloud that Cried,” you know. It was a ’50s song. But it was a sad Christmas for me. It was the first time I’d ever had Christmas away from the family.

RT: Yeah, I mean, you were going to be there for quite a bit more time too.
JC: I was. (Laughs) It was cold and you couldn’t do anything, and so it was not a real happy time.

RT: So how was your boot camp experience overall?

JC: Well, I won’t say it was fun, but it was, you know we got through it. Our chief, the chief that was in charge of our company told everybody, he says, “If you want to go over the hill,” he said, “I’ll take my car down and let you jump over the fence.” He said, “I’ll help you get away, but it’s not going to be good when you come back.”

RT: (Laughs)

JC: So we didn’t have any takers. But it was fine. I caught double pneumonia when I was there.

RT: Ooo!

JC: I was in the hospital and if you stay more than three days, well you lose your company. The guys that I were with was from—all from Texas and from Louisiana and I didn’t want to lose it. So in order for me to get out, well every four hours they’d come by and give you shot, you know, in the rear. Then no matter what time it was they’d wake you up, “Time to shot. Where do you want it?” Finally it got to the point you said, “It don’t make any difference just pick something and hit it.” Because it hurts anyway. But I started doctoring my thermometer and you had to keep it to where you had no temperature, you know? So I finally did that and if you did it three times, I think, in a row well you could get out. So I did, I got out, went back to the company and I got graduated with them. So it was interesting. It was, you know, I was nineteen years old I guess. Yeah, I guess I was nineteen, maybe I was—yeah, I think I was. But anyway, it was nice. It was a good thing for me to get away from home because it gave me a little bit more responsibility so that was a good thing.

RT: Not only that, you had a decent pay packet as well.

JC: Yeah, we didn’t make a whole lot of money.

RT: Well where you going to spend it?

JC: Yeah, that’s true. (Laughs) You couldn’t spend it. Yeah, I think once we got aboard ship it was about eighty dollars a week, I mean a month that we made or something like that. It wasn’t a great a lot amount of money. But then nobody made a whole lot of money you know.
RT: Okay. So how were your instructors? Were they pretty gruff or—?
JC: Well if you tried to do what they’d tell you to do, then everything was fine. But we had some on there that just didn’t want to do things like that. We had one kid on there that didn’t want to take a bath. So there was a bunch of them—I wasn’t involved in it, but there was a bunch of them that got him in the shower and gave him a kyi brush bath. You know, they took one of these big old wire, not wire bristles, but it was a hard bristled brush and gave him a bath. They said, “We don’t want to have to do this every time.” He made sure they didn’t because he took a bath from then on.
RT: (Laughs)
JC: But he would shower in his skivvies and soap down and then he’d rinse his skivvies out and they wouldn’t have to wash. He’d just use two pair the whole time. So you know, you had people that wanted to do things different. But as long as you did what they told you to, everything was fine.
RT: So what was your daily routine at boot camp?
JC: Well you had to be in bed—I think it was by about 9:30 at night they had lights out. You had to do your studying, you had to do your washing, and then if you had extra duties, like if you had KP (kitchen police)—I had KP one time. I went to the big chow hall and you work in there, you know whether pealing potatoes or cooking potatoes or doing something and you do that. Of course, you’re exempt from your classes but you still have to do that, you know. But that’s getting up early in the morning and going for breakfast and you have to clean up in the big chow hall, get ready for dinner and you have to serve that, you had to clean up again. Then the same with the evening meal. You didn’t get anything special except that that’s, you know, that’s what you had to do for the day that you were assigned to that. That and then we had our classes, we had swimming classes you had to go to and if you couldn’t swim, you couldn’t pass the swimming test, well they’d put you back into another company until you learned how to swim. Some of the guys would get out there and they couldn’t swim worth a flip. I could swim, but I wasn’t a good swimmer, but I did enough to get by. But some of the guys out there—they had long poles and they’d crack them on the head, gore them down you know, and these guys would be spitting water and grabbing for the pole. So they had a hard time getting through it, you know. But you had to jump off of a high tower and take your
pants off and make a flotation device out of it, these kind of things, you know. Then
gunnery classes. We didn’t shoot anything, but they showed us guns and told us about
what you had to do you know, and what was done, and about rope tying. Just about what
we were going to be able to expect when we got in the Navy. So we had lots of classes.

RT: So did it prepare you pretty well for service aboard ship?

JC: I think if I could remember it all, it probably would have, yeah. But I don’t
remember that much of it. I remember we did this, we had classes where we went down
and we didn’t get on the water because it was too cold. But for the summer, the rookies
that were going through that thing during the summertime, they probably did have some
classes in the rowboats. But we didn’t as far as I could remember.

RT: Yeah because you’d probably have to end up rowing on ice.

JC: Yeah, that’s right, because it was real cold. We had firefighting, some
firefighting training, marched a whole lot. They had what they called them grinders.
They were big gymnasiums and that’s where a lot of the calisthenics and exercising and
marching was.

RT: Okay. So what was your rating, what did you eventually end up doing?

JC: Well I went in as a seaman apprentice and whenever I came out they
assigned—I was working for the telephone company, you know. So I had some kind of
an idea about what makes a telephone work. I asked to be in communications and they
put me in the fire room. So they matched me up real well, you know.

RT: (laughs)

JC: So as they normally do, if you’re a doctor well they may make you a plumber
you see—

RT: So what did you do in the fire room?

JC: Well when I first got on board ship, I think it was in March or April. I guess
it was March that I went aboard ship in San Diego. After I got out of boot camp, I got
fourteen days leave and I went home and saw Mom and Dad, you know, and stayed there.
Then I flew to San Diego and the ship was tied up at San Diego and so that’s where I
went aboard. Shortly after that, I think in June, we went overseas. So whenever I went
aboard ship, well they said, “You’re in the fire room,” you know. So my station was the
after fire room.
RT: Okay.
JC: I had no idea what it was like, you know. (Coughs) Excuse me. So what I would start doing was I did all the log work. In other words, I was a grunt.
RT: Okay.
JC: You would go, at night, if you were on the late watch, well you would go up to the potato locker and you’d get potatoes. Then you’d go to the onion locker and you’d get onions. Then you’d go steal some butter. Then you’d go try to go beg some bread from the bakery and you’d get canned milk. We made potato soup if you were on the late night shift, you know, from twelve to four. But you did go around, took all the soundings, the water soundings to make sure how much water, how much oil you had, any of the temperature readings that you had to take care of. Well that’s what I did when I first got on there.
RT: Okay.
JC: Then after that, well I was standing watch on the fireside. In each boiler room, I mean in each fire room, you had two boilers or two firesides and you could stand watch on both of them, but not if you got busy. If they wanted to change speeds and you know do things that were different. But they had each side I think of the fire, of the boiler there was five I think it was of these burners. Then you had the super heater burner and when you went to flank speed, you get the super heater, you’d put that on line and so you made this steam hotter so you could get more speed out of the turbine. You had the gages that you had to watch in there to make sure that you didn’t get too much heat. If you did, well you would blow the safety, pop the safeties on the boiler. In other words, you’d waste a lot of steam and the captain looked down on that, he didn’t like that very well. So it was really, you know, something you had to keep your eye on quite a bit. But that’s what I started doing and that’s what I was doing whenever I left.
RT: Now was Evans your only ship to which you were assigned?
JC: Yup, only ship I was ever on. See I was only on active duty a little less than two years.
RT: Okay. Now when you were first told that you were going to serve on a destroyer, what was your first reaction?
JC: You know, I’d only seen the ocean one time and that was the Gulf of Mexico. So you know I knew it was going to be a boat. I made that mistake one time and called it a boat and they corrected me real quick that that was a ship and that a boat is what you carry on a ship. So you know it was—I had some growing up to do. You know, I was ready to go do something, you know, to get away from boot camp. Didn’t have any idea what to really expect I don’t think. I was kind of apprehensive about it but I wasn’t afraid of it, you know.

RT: So how was life aboard ship?

JC: Oh, it was fun. We did a lot of things, it got to be like one big family and you know how families are. Sometimes you fight among yourselves, but you don’t let nobody else get in your fight, you know. You just take care of your family and that’s what it was. You got some of the guys on there that I got real close to and some of them you don’t get real close to. But they’re still, you know, your shipmate if they’re on that ship. You may not always agree but you’re always a shipmate.

RT: So how long were you aboard ship before you were sent to Korea?

JC: I think we left, I think I got on in March I believe, and I think we left in June to go, to start our way over there and of course it takes you a couple of weeks to get to Pearl. Then we stayed there for three or four days and went on to Midway and then from Midway to refuel and then on into Japan. So probably no more than a month. I can’t remember when we got to Japan. I’m sure we can go get the ship’s log and it will tell us when we got there. But it was very interesting for me and it was kind of frightening also when I got to Japan because I knew the Japanese were not very good people, you know. The soldiers weren’t for what they had done in the war, and this was some five or seven years later. There was a lot of people that hadn’t forgotten it then, you know, the war, the Japanese. So they warned us about that. But I found that the Japanese people by and large were very nice, very warm people and I enjoyed my time over there.

RT: So on your way over, did you get to take any kind of liberty in Hawaii or were ya’ll stuck onboard?

JC: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah I got an anchor tattoo.

RT: (Laughs)
JC: There were three of us that decided that we were going to do that while we were sober, you know. We didn’t want to—of course you know how kids are. You had to go do this you know, that was the thing to do. So we did that. But we went on and got our tattoo before we started drinking anything, you know, because we didn’t want anybody to say, “Well you did it because you were drunk, you know, and didn’t know it.” But we didn’t do that, we got it done so we knew what we were doing. So I’m glad I got it done, you know. It was fun, we had a good time. The thing about Pearl Harbor or Honolulu is that when we were there, there were two hotels, two main hotels, Royal Hawaiian and the Waikiki. Now you can hardly see them, it’s just nothing but—or from pictures I’ve seen, I haven’t been back since. But it’s just crowded with hotels. So you know, I don’t really know that I would like to go back to Honolulu. I wouldn’t mind going back to Pearl to see the Arizona museum there that they’re built for the war memorial.

RT: So do you still have that tattoo?

JC: Oh yeah.

RT: (Laughs)

JC: Yeah. Got it on my arm.

RT: (Laughs) So once you arrived in Japan, how long were you in Japan before you made the final leg of the trip to Korea?

JC: Probably no more than a week or so. We would go out on exercises—we went out on—I’m sure we went on some kind of exercise training to make sure, you know, to make sure that everybody knew which way the cannon was pointed, this kind of stuff, you know the guns. But we did a lot of training and getting ready for this. We were probably no more than two weeks in Japan there. I don’t recall exactly, but we didn’t stay very long anywhere we went because they were always sending us somewhere else. You know when we got over to Korea, well of course they would give you a station to go to and give you a certain thing that you had to do and whether it was patrolling or whether it was escorting a ship. A lot of times we would escort the Missouri.

RT: Oh okay.

JC: I’ve got some of the pictures that I’ve turned into you guys out there and some of the books and materials that I’ve got—I’ve got a picture of us escorting the
Missouri and she’s doing her semaphore on the lights and you could see the ship silhouette. You can also see the light that they’re doing signaling on their lights, you know. I forget what they call that. But they’ve got the blinker lights, you know.

RT: Oh yes.

JC: But we used to do that. Then we would be in Task Force 77 and we would do plane guard detail and we’d get behind the aircraft carrier, we’re doing launch and retrieval of aircraft. If there was a plane go down, well we would go after the pilot or what was remaining of the pilot. We did that more than once.

RT: Okay. So at that point, Evans would steam behind the aircraft carrier?

JC: Yeah, right. They would be off to the port or the starboard. You’d have a destroyer on either side of the aircraft carrier and you know they were running thirty miles an hour or thirty-two knots, which is about thirty-five miles an hour, somewhere along in there. You know, that’s all you can do. You have to really know what you’re doing in order to do that because you’re going pretty fast and trying to keep up while they’re doing their launches and retrievals. So it was kind of like a general quarters type thing, you know. It was an exercise that you had to pay attention to.

RT: Well when the ship was at general quarters where did you go?

JC: In the fire room.

RT: Okay, so you got to stay in the fire room?

JC: Yeah. That wasn’t a real good place I didn’t think. But that’s where I was assigned because they locked all the hatches down you know. The purpose of a destroyer is to make sure that the enemy doesn’t hit the big ships and that’s with a torpedo or whatever. The wall, the hull on that destroyer is a quarter-inch steel and that’s not too very thick.

RT: No.

JC: You know, if a torpedo comes through that thing, well you know it’s coming in. It’s not going to stay outside because there’s not that much to it. But I really wasn’t that concerned about it because you know, if it happens well it’s going to happen. But we were real fortunate and we got I think one time we were over there that we got some flak and three or four of the guys got scratches on them and they got Purple Hearts out of them.
RT: Oh wow.

JC: Yeah, kind of a John Kerry type thing.

RT: (Laughs) Well the fire room for you, I would imagine it was kind of hectic or at least a little harrowing during general quarters because isn’t that below the waterline?

JC: Oh yeah, yeah. See and you can’t see anything. That’s the first time we went into Wonsan Harbor, first time I went into Wonsan Harbor, not the ship, but first time I went in on that trip, first trip over. My first trip over was the second trip for the *Frank E. Evans* because they had been there earlier for one trip before. Of course, I didn’t start smoking till I went to military and so you know, you know how that is. It was just nerve-racking, it really was. You can smoke up a couple of packages of cigarettes in a couple of hours, you know.

RT: (Laughs)

JC: That’s what happened, you know. You were concerned about it. One time we were at general quarters and I stuck my head out of the hatch and saw two MiGs fly over. But they were, you know thirty thousand or something feet and they were not looking for us. Nothing happened. They secured from GQ and everything went back to normal. But life aboard the ship was very interesting. You had lots of good shipmates and then you had shipmates.

RT: You’d mentioned earlier that some of your shipmates had received Purple Hearts.

JC: Yeah. They were above. They were on the O-1 deck.

RT: Okay. Did you receive any decorations or awards while you were serving aboard *Evans*?

JC: No, I think I’m just qualified just for four ribbons. That’s what this thing, it tells me in here ribbons I’m qualified for.

RT: Okay.

JC: I’ll get those out in just a second—because that’s one of the reasons I sent off for it because I didn’t have any idea what ribbons I was qualified for. But they told me and so I’ll try to—here it is. It’s the China Service Ribbon, the Korean Service Ribbon, the United Nations Service Ribbon, and the National Defense Service Ribbon.

RT: Okay.
JC: Now the ship itself I think had some battle scars, but I’m not sure. We’ll have to go through Admiral Tidd because he can tell us exactly what those are and I think we’ve got a message on the back of our t-shirts too now that I think about it.

RT: Okay. So while you were serving aboard Evans, did you witness any kind of enemy or even friendly actions, especially any that were particularly outstanding or brave in your opinion?

JC: Yeah. One time we took—we had to go up north of the 38th parallel. I don’t know where, but I know it was north of it, but we didn’t know what we were doing. They just told us to go up there and to rendezvous and to send in motor whaleboats. The motor whaleboats, you know, is the boat that’s on the ship, you know. It’s probably thirty, thirty-five feet long, I don’t recall exactly. It’s got what they call a coxswain. He’s the one that steers, got a motorman, and then they had two or three sailors in there with guns, BARs (Browning Automatic Rifle). So they told us to go and to go to a certain point and to pick up some people. We got there and it was so foggy, you couldn’t see nothing. So they rigged us a mast, a pole with some chicken wire on it I guess if you would, best I can remember. They stood it up in the center of that boat and they used radar to guide them into the shore. They went in and they picked up, I don’t know if it was six or eight or a dozen, I can’t recall. But they picked up a bunch of Marines that had been behind the enemy line for a long time. Now a long time is, you know, four or five weeks or something, I don’t know.

RT: That is a long time.

JC: But they had been on recon behind the lines, you know. When they got back, I’ve never seen anybody so skuzzy looking in my life. So they ordered them to take all of their gear off, not their guns and stuff. But they took all of their clothes and their shoes and everything off and they just destroyed them. You know, I don’t know how they did it. They didn’t throw them overboard but they got rid of them. Everybody, all of the guys in our department back there in our group, we got clothes and shirts and skivvies and stuff and gave to these guys so they could shower and clean up. But those to me were the real heroes, was these guys here. You know, we got a hot meal in the morning and one in the afternoon. We may not like what they fed us but it was warm and we had a good place to sleep at night. These guys here that we picked up, you don’t
know what they’d been through. So they were to me the true heroes. We had some guys on our boat that were kind of like that too, real quiet and you just didn’t think nothing about them but they did their job.

RT: Wow. That is pretty fantastic.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

RT: So, well you just mentioned the comparison between your—or some of the things that you recall from your daily routine. For example, you know having a nice hot meal everyday.

JC: That’s right.

RT: What other things did you do on a daily basis aboard ship? What was kind of an average day?

JC: Well it depended on what shifts you had. Say, if you had the eight to twelve shift, that’s eight to twelve in the morning and eight to twelve at night. Well what that meant was that you stood watch those times, those hours, and that was down in the fire room. If you didn’t, well you worked down in the fire room on the twelve to four watch. On the twelve to four, twelve to five, whatever. You know you’d clean up and chip and paint and whatever the daily work schedule said that we were going to be doing that day is what we did. Then you’re going to have some part of that schedule. If you didn’t have the twelve to four, you were going to have the four to eight or the eight to twelve. You know so you were not going to be idle long. So at night, you know, you got to sleep about four hours anyway. But it was just, you know there was not a whole lot of idle time aboard that ship. I was on mess cooking one time and so you don’t stand watch then. But you just, you get up and you go to mess cooking aboard ship. I was in the scullery and that’s all I did. I would go there and I would take care of that and make sure all the dishes and all the trays and the cups and the spoons and things were clean. That was my job and so that’s what I did. I got liberty at night whenever we were in port and otherwise I didn’t have any duties. You know, so it wasn’t really all that bad. But you really didn’t—you know I’d really rather been down in the fire room though but you couldn’t always do that because you always had this other stuff to do.

RT: So you’d mentioned that whenever you went to port, you’d get liberty. Just how often did you go to port?
JC: Well, it just depends really. We were out something like sixty-some odd
days I think it was at one time before we made port again. Then you got every third night
when you were in—most of the time if you went in, you had one watch to stand, one
watch for that night, you know. Then the other two/thirds of the ship’s company could
go ashore if all things were being right, you know. You didn’t have anybody that was in
trouble, they couldn’t go to shore. Somebody that would be restricted to the ship, you
know, they couldn’t go ashore.

RT: Now you didn’t get in trouble did you?

JC: I tried not to. (Laughs)

RT: (Laughs)

JC: We were in what was called Formosa, it’s Taiwan now. But we went into
Formosa and this is not a real good place that we went in because the Communists were
still—they were still unhappy that the people were trying to break away from China. We
were tied up out in the harbor and you could hear the gunfire at night. These
Communists would shoot at these cargo ships that would come in. It was civilian
freighters and stuff that would come in, they would shoot at them. But I was in mess
cooking at that particular time and somebody was helping me carry the garbage out, you
know, after the meal. There was an orange laying on the top and whoever it was that was
helping me said, “Campbell,” he said, “You ain’t got a hair on your,” you know, “If you
don’t throw that orange off the side, over the side.” Because people, they’d just rush to
get something to eat, you know. Because they’d already told us, “Don’t do that, you
know. You’re not supposed to do that.” So I just picked it up and threw it out into the
water and there was an officer standing there watching me.

RT: Uh-oh.

JC: So I didn’t get a court marshal, I got a captain’s mast and got four hours duty
out of it. So I had to clean the torpedoes. So that’s I guess about the only time that I ever
got anything, any kind of problems.

RT: They just had you clean a torpedo?

JC: Yeah, well you just take them and you had to wipe them down, make sure all
the dust and stuff is off of them. I wasn’t a torpedo man, but this was light duty stuff,
you know.
RT: Oh okay.
JC: But I still had to do it.
RT: So it wasn’t anything, you know that you couldn’t handle anyway?
JC: Yeah, they didn’t give me anything I couldn’t handle. (Laughs)
RT: (Laughs)
JC: They were kind to me.
RT: So what were your living conditions like aboard Evans?
JC: It was pretty nice, except whenever it was real cold outside, that place was cold. We didn’t have air conditioning per se. We had blowers that were blowing air and during the summertime, it would get hot. In the wintertime, if it was real cold, and we’ve had times when the salt water would freeze on the lifelines on the ship, you know. So that’s pretty cold whenever salt water freezes.
RT: Oh yes.
JC: It gets real cold in your live-in quarters then and you know, you sleep in your socks and your coats and everything else to stay warm. At times, I’ve gotten my foul weather gear on and gone and slept behind a boiler down in the fire room at night on the steel deck plates with a lifejacket for a pillow to stay warm. But it was, you know, nobody died. We were in the aft living quarters back there where the engineers stayed. There was I think three racks to a row stacked up and you would raise them up, you know, chain them up at night, in the daytime whenever when you weren’t using them. When you were using them, you’d let them down and you could stack three people in one little area there. I guess we had fifty or sixty people back in that little room and it was a family deal type thing.
RT: Well I would think so. How big was this room with all the racks?
JC: Oh, it was, I don’t know how you describe that. We had a hatch right in the middle of it with the ladder coming down and right next to that, right forward of that hatch was a five-inch .38 cannon, well there was two of them that are five-inch .38 mounts, had two big guns there. When they were firing, well you didn’t sleep a whole lot. We were back there where the propellers, whenever we were going flank speed, well you couldn’t hardly sleep then because of the noise that it made. You know the
cavitations of the propeller going around and around in the water that the thing made.

But it was not a bad area.

RT: It was a pretty—I guess today people would call it cozy. (Laughs)

JC: Yeah, it was. (Laughs) You could call it that I guess. Nowadays they’ve got mattresses and all this stuff. We had a mattress that was probably an inch-and-a-half or so thick and you put a sheet—you put it inside of like a pillow case and that’s what you call your sheet. I forget what they call that now. But anyway, that was your sheet, you know, your bed, your bottom sheet. Then you had a sheet that you could put on top if you wanted to with a blanket and a pillow with a pillowcase. They gave us straps. If it got too rough, well you could tie yourself in your bunk and strap yourself in your bunk. Then your storage was about—it was probably fifteen inches deep, and probably about twenty-four inches wide, and probably about twenty-four inches deep, maybe thirty inches deep and that’s where you used to store your stuff.

RT: Oh, so that was your locker pretty much?

JC: Yeah, that was the locker.

RT: Okay.

JC: But it was underneath all of the beds, all the bunks. The three bunks were stacked there and you had to raise them all up to get into your locker. So if somebody was sleeping in a lower bunk, you couldn’t hardly get in your locker.

RT: Boy, with a space that small you didn’t have too many worldly possessions with you.

JC: No you didn’t. You couldn’t keep a whole lot. If you kept anything in your locker beside your gear it was something to eat because you always stayed hungry, you know.

RT: So did you get to write home while you were serving?

JC: Yes, got to write, and my letters were probably not very interesting to Mom and Dad but—because it’s not, you know, it doesn’t really a whole lot—the same thing happens over there day after day after day. But I was real glad whenever we had mail call and you got something from them. At one time I was going with a girl over there in Dallas and it was nice to get a letter from them, from the girl. I don’t know what
happened, you know something happened. But whenever I came back home she had
started going with somebody else or something, I can’t remember now.

RT: But it was nice to get at least letters from home as well?

JC: Oh yeah, oh yeah, and you get them from some kin folks and stuff. But it
was just knowing that it was the touch between home and where you were, you know.

RT: So did they give ya’ll the local news or gossip or what have you? What was
going on?

JC: Well they told us that there’s only certain things that we could say if we were
getting ready to do something. One time we were massing over for a big invasion deal
and there was something like three or four battleships and a bunch of carriers and there
were a bunch of communication ships and landing ships, troop transport ships and all of
that. They had been telling us that, “We can’t let any mail go off because this is very
secret.” So what the deal was that they started about three o’clock in the morning
pounding the shore, you know. They had this big invasion coming, all these boats in the
water, going to take these troops and stuff and they got almost into the shore and turned
around and came back. It was a fake, they were trying to draw the enemy fire so they
could do something. So anyway, that was a big, big thing, you know. The first letter I
got I opened it, mother told me all about it. So it was in the newspaper over here before
we knew what the heck was happening and we were sitting there doing it. So, so much
for the secrecy of the news, you know.

RT: Well did your friends or relatives give you any news from home, you know,
such as any kind of local events or was it mostly more personal stuff?

JC: Oh yeah, yeah, they’d keep you up to date on what was happening around
town and who did what and you know, this kind of thing, just kind of keep you up to, you
know, to make you feel like you were still part of the family. So that was a good thing.
The letters from home means a whole lot and I can imagine what a cell phone today
would mean or a computer to sit down and to talk to the people, you know, as
instantaneous as you can get it, you know.

RT: Oh yes.

JC: But cell phones now you can—from overseas, you can get on the cell phone
and call, you know, and you can speak directly to them. Well you couldn’t do it then.
RT: Oh no.

JC: So letters and any kind of newsprint was interesting to read. But the family did a good job.

RT: Now you’d mentioned that at times, Evans was serving fairly close to shore. Were there any memorable experiences tied with that kind of duty?

JC: Yeah. We were serving off the coast over there and you know I have no respect for the United Nations. I think that’s the biggest bunch of goops that we’ve ever had. They were running the show in Korea and my understanding of it was all that we could fire on these trains. In Korea you had the railroad track run along the beach, run along the mountain, you know, you had the mountain and the water. They would come in and cut out a place for the railroad track and you’d see these trains coming down there and we would patrol a section of that land over there and if anything came by, well we could shoot at it. But the United Nations said it’s fixed where we could only shoot star shells.

RT: Okay.

JC: A star shell is a flare and that doesn’t explode very much, you know. So what we finally started doing was we would run them into one of these tunnels and try to close the tunnel. But United Nations I think—I don’t like them, you know, because of what they did to our people over there, because to me they were Communists is what they were. But our government won’t say that, but I will. But we were patrolling this coast over there. They also had at certain times we could not fire on the enemy unless they fired at us. One Sunday morning we were patrolling the coast over there and I guess it was nine o’clock, something like that, and we were just taking a down day, you know, and there was a bunch of us on the fantail of the ship. There was two of them that were playing chess and they were playing cards and just sunbathing and this stuff. All of a sudden over on the portside of the ship big explosion. So the chess went high in the air and people started heading for the hatch and I had a t-shirt and I had footprints on the back of my t-shirt as I was going down the hatch, you know. So people were trying to get in, trying to get away from it. Then right after that first shell, there was one over on the starbird side that was a little closer. But it missed us, but the one, the portside, it burnt the paint on the side of the ship. So it had lots of—it was close and that was all that
that gun fired over there. Come to find out, well our people in the gunnery department or
wherever it was that, you know that watches this stuff, they had been watching these
people set up this gun over there but we couldn’t shoot, we couldn’t fire on them. They
dug the hole and the bunker for them to sit in and set the gun up and everything. We had
to wait till they shot first before we could return fire. Our five-inch .38 guns, they fired
and so did our forty millimeters, they fired. They got two shells off and that was it. But
it’s that kind of stuff that, you know, that’s kind of like some of the liberal people now,
they want us to pull out of Iraq and do the same thing. You know, we don’t want to hurt
them, they can hurt us, but we don’t want to hurt them. I just have a problem with that.
They’re going put these guys over there, put us over there, to do this fighting and then
they tie your hands behind your back, you know it doesn’t seem right. But that was an
exciting morning. It didn’t last very long, probably ten minutes, but it was still exciting.

RT: Well you mentioned that some of the guys were playing chess onboard.

What sort of other recreational activities did you do?

JC: Well a lot of them shot dice and they would get together and play poker.

RT: That’s a way to lose your pay packet.

JC: Real quick, real quick. I lost about twenty-five dollars one night and that was
almost my monthly deal, you know, because I sent most of mine home to Mom and Dad.
But I quit gambling after that. But there was a lot of guys on there that loved to gamble
and they did and some of them got real good at it. We also made some wine on the ship.
We got the cherry juice that the cooks made cherry cobbler and stuff out of and they
would ferment this stuff up in the blower room and it tasted pretty good. We would make
real good potato soup too at night. I mentioned that earlier, that was one of my duties,
you know. But most of the time we had something good to eat. Our ship didn’t have a
whole lot of capacity for ice cream making. But we did have ice cream every now and
then.

RT: Okay. You mentioned or you just discussed the making of wine onboard the
ship. Did they set up some kind of like a still or something?

JC: Yeah, I’m not really sure how they did it. But they just mixed this stuff up
and they put it in a big container up there in this blower room. It had lots of air coming
in. It’s where you got air for the boilers, you know, for the fires and it stayed warm
which is what it needed. But they would use their yeast and stuff like that. I don’t know how they did it, but they made some wine back up in there.

RT: Oh, I imagine it was pretty potent stuff.

JC: Yeah, it was. (Laughs)

RT: (Laughs)

JC: It tasted pretty good. I didn’t get a whole lot of it, but I got some of it. They would share, you know. If you got a package from home—there was one kid that was from New York and he was an Italian and when he would get a package from home, well he’d go separate it, he’d keep everything that he really liked out and he’d share the rest of the stuff with us. So it was kind of a sharing type thing, took care of everybody, especially when you went on the beach, you know, you tried to take care of your shipmates.

RT: Okay. Did you ever get to spend any time in a USO (United Service Organizations) club or anything like that?

JC: Yeah, in San Diego, it wasn’t the USO, yeah it was the USO. It’s the same one that’s still there and we went back out in the late ’90s for one of our ship’s reunion and I got to visit the same place that I was there in ’52.

RT: It was still there?

JC: Yes.

RT: Oh wow.

JC: Yeah, it’s still there now. It’s a place where you can go and you know, you can stay and if you wanted to live there, I guess you could for a while. But it was a pretty nice place.

RT: Now did you, you’d mentioned that when you’d go on liberties, sometimes you’d go to restaurants to eat and what have you.

JC: Yeah.

RT: Now did you go to any of the, like enlisted clubs or anything?

JC: Yeah, they have EM (enlisted man) clubs. You can buy stuff cheaper there, you could go get beer cheaper, you could get wine or whiskey cheaper or whatever, you know. When we were in Japan, in Yokosuka, Japan, you’d go to the EM Club, enlisted
man’s club, and you’d get a bottle of Canadian Club for a dollar and eighty cents and you
could have a good time on that.

RT: (Laughs)

JC: So we’d go get a bottle of that, because some of that Japanese stuff that they
had over there was just not very good. It was kind of rot-gut stuff. You knew what the
Canadian Club was.

RT: You could’ve always made some money selling the Evans label wine.

JC: (Laughs) No, there was none of that left.

RT: (Laughs)

JC: They made that while they were at sea. We had guys on that ship that would
drink, I don’t know, before they changed—they called it torpedo juice. I don’t know
what it was because I wasn’t involved in it that much. But they would strain it through
bread, you know, and drink it and get high. To me you can get killed real quick doing
that. So there was a lot of squirrely things that they did. But by and large, you know, we
had a good group.

RT: Well what did you think about your experiences aboard Evans after you left?

JC: Well you know, I guess whenever I left, well I got discharged in Treasure
Island. I had an aunt that lived out there in Oakland and we went to Vallejo to dry dock
one time. Well I would go visit with her and when we’d come tie in, tie up anywhere
near there, well I’d go by and visit with her. After I got out, got discharged, well she
wanted me to stay out at California and go to school because she was by herself, my
dad’s, it was my dad’s kinfolks. She said, “Well you can just live with me and you can
go to school at the University of California at Berkley.” So I said, “Well, let’s go look at
it and see,” because I really wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. I was twenty-two I guess it
was, twenty-two, yeah. So we drove up there and if you’ll recall in ’52, ’53, in ’53, that
was the beginning of the hippie movement. Berkley, California I think is known as the
birthplace of that and that’s all that was up there was a bunch of damn hippies; the long
hair and the sandals and the guitars and the flowers and stuff. I told Aunt Doris, I said,
“No, I just don’t think I want to come back here, you know. Not to school. You know, if
I go to school it won’t be here. I think I’m going back to Texas.” So I did, I came on
back to Texas. I was just not that type of person, not for that kind of stuff, you know.
But it was very liberal out there and I think that’s in fact where the movement started was in Berkley. But I came back to Texas and went back to the telephone company. I started working outside as a lineman and worked in ’54 and ’55. During the time, I would go to art school in Dallas at Dallas Art Institute.

RT: Okay.

JC: I did that for a couple of years like I said and then I decided that if I’m going to do anything, I better get a little college. So I used the rest of my GI Bill and started at North Texas, it was North Texas State University then at Denton. So I was going to school up there and a friend of mine introduced me to a friend of his who introduced me to a friend of hers who is Sylvia.

RT: (Laughs)

JC: So that’s the way I met Sylvia in Denton.

RT: It was a friend of a friend of a friend. (Laughs)

JC: In the Student Union Building. We were drinking a coke and Elvis Presley had just come out with “Don’t Be Cruel” and that was the song that I played for Sylvia whenever I met her the first time. So that’s kind of our song now I guess. But from then on, well I went ahead and she graduated and we got married in 1958 and we moved to Ft. Worth, to Haltom City really and then into the north side of Ft. Worth and we lived there until 1960. When we moved to Granbury, our son, we had our first son who was six weeks old when we moved. The doctor wouldn’t let her move until he was six weeks old. So we moved down here and have been here ever since.

RT: So what prompted the move to Granbury?

JC: There was too many—you couldn’t sleep at night over there because of the ambulances that was driving by. It was over in a not so good of town, part of town. So I just told her, I said, “I don’t want to raise my kids in a place like this where you can’t sleep at night and you never know when somebody’s going to shoot through your windows or stuff.” This was a Hispanic area.

RT: Okay.

JC: So we just moved out of there and it’s still that way today. So we’ve been down here, you know, ever since.
RT: Okay. So you mentioned that you went to the Art Institute of Dallas and that you also studied advertising art. Had you been interested in art when you were in high school or—?

JC: Oh yeah, I used to—well Irving didn’t have, Irving High School did not have an art department. It was not very advanced, because when we moved to Irving in 1942 there was eighteen hundred people in town. That was kids and everybody. So the high school, I think my graduating class had about a 160 or a 180 in it. So the whole high school was probably five hundred, six hundred, somewhere along in there. It wasn’t a very big one and they didn’t have a lot of classes and one of them was art. They just didn’t have them, you know, you just didn’t have it. You had math and you had English and history and all the basics, chemistry, stuff like that. But you didn’t have advanced courses in anything. So we didn’t have art classes there for whatever reason. So I just, you know, I was interested in it then and so I wanted to see what I could do with it. I enjoyed it but it didn’t do me any good except when I went to school, well I majored in advertising art which was I guess a waste of time because I didn’t get my degree and I would have had to quit school and taken a year off and I didn’t want to do that. But when we moved to Ft. Worth, well I started looking for a better job because I was working at Southwest Airmotives out at Amon Carter Field between Dallas and Ft. Worth, which is now where DFW is.

RT: Okay.

JC: I worked for a company called Southwest Airmotives and they tested jet engines. They would bring the jet engines into Dallas and refurbish them and then would send them out to us and we’d test them and then can them and put them in these containers with air tight containers, you know, to preserve them for the Air Force or for the Navy. So that was a pretty good job, but it was working at night. I didn’t like working at night because my wife was working during the daytime. Home life just wasn’t so good so I started looking for another job and got one at, it was called Convair then and turned into General Dynamics and then the Lockheed Martin now. But that’s where I went to work out there. So I worked there for a number of years and I worked eleven-and-a-half years at LTV (Ling-Temco-Vought Corporation) in Grand Prairie,
Dallas. I went back to General Dynamics in the art group and did isometric work. I did IPB (illustrated parts breakdown) as a parts breakdown, how to put an airplane together.

RT: Oh like those exploded view diagrams and that sort of thing.

JC: That’s right, that’s what it was. It would show you how to take them apart and put them back together. So it was very interesting and I really liked it. So that’s what I did most of my life as far as in the art business, working for the aircraft companies. Then in 2001 it was, well I retired from that for my last time. But I got away from the art work really and started going into more of—

RT: More technical drawing—

JC: Well, it wasn’t technical. But what we would do is I went to work, I started doing preventive, I guess you would, work for the aircraft because they have what they call a FOD program. That’s foreign object damage, you know, it’s caused by foreign object debris, which is a pencil or a pair of pliers or a screw driver or flashlight or whatever. But foreign objects are anything that’s in an airplane that’s not designed into it. So from a hairpin to shaving, drill shaving, you know. So I did that for five or six years, so I really enjoyed that.

RT: Okay.

JC: But it was preventive type things. Then after I left Lockheed, well I just retired. Just doing what my wife tells me to. (Laughs)

RT: (Laughs) Oh, so you work for her now?

JC: Yeah. No, if it wasn’t for her on the Frank E. Evans, well we wouldn’t get a whole lot done because she does most of the book work on that.

RT: Were you involved in the association from the beginning or—?

JC: Yes, in 1991 Nick Nichols called me and I had not heard—I had been looking for him for a long time. But the last I knew of him, he was from Brownsboro, Texas. But he called me and he’s living in Frankston now. But he called me and he said, “Is this John Campbell that was in the Navy aboard the Frank E. Evans?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well this is H.G. Nichols.” I said, “My goodness, where have you been?” You know. But he moved when he got back from out of the Navy, he didn’t even go back to where he was born and raised, he just moved to a different place and so I lost track of him. But he said, “I’ve been trying to get a bunch of guys together so we can have a
meeting and will you want to work with me?” I said, “Yes.” So he and I, Nick and I and our wives planned the first meeting. It was in ’92 and it was in Dallas at the DFW Airport at one of the hotels over there. I think that first time, we had twenty-six sailors, plus some wives and stuff. My wife went, but she wasn’t too interested in it until she got there and she’s just been going head over heels since then. But that was the first meeting. Then the second meeting, they elected me president at the end of that first meeting and so I said, “Well I’ll do it if we’ll have it in Granbury, because you know, this is kind of short notice.” So they did, we had the second one in Granbury. So then the third one was in Las Vegas and that’s when Ken Adams got involved in it. We’ve been to a number of different places but I’ve been involved in it since it started.

RT: Okay.

JC: But Nick, he’s the founder of it.

RT: So when did you or when was the first time that you heard about the collision between Evans and Melbourne?

JC: It was sometime, and I don’t know exactly when, but it was a long time after it happened. It was just kind of a happenstance that I found out about it.

RT: Was it before you started the association or—?

JC: Oh yes.

RT: Okay.

JC: Yeah, yeah, it was before that. But I didn’t know anything about it, you know, I just knew that something, that it had been sunk. But I had no idea any of the peculiarities about it or any of the specifics about it, I didn’t know. I just knew that, you know, it had been sunk. An interesting thing about that is that in 1952, the Hornet, USS Hornet aircraft carrier in the [Atlantic] ran across the Hobson, which was a destroyer and sunk it. [Editors note: The collision referred to above was between the USS Wasp and the USS Hobson.] I was in boot camp with a couple of the sailors that was on there. So then whenever I found about ours going, I said, “Well that’s weird, you know, because that’s happened twice. You know, that I’ve known people that are known of a particular ship that this has happened to.” So that was interesting.

RT: Well what was your first reaction when you heard or you discovered that Evans had been sunk in that way?
JC: Well I don’t really know that I had a big reaction because I don’t really recall that time. I just remember that I found out about it and I don’t know when or where. But I don’t know that I had, you know, other than, you know, “Good gracious,” you know. Because I had really forgotten the Navy when I got out of the service. Since we had gotten married and raising the kids and I was not really thinking about Navy right then. The Vietnam War that was along than, it was not a popular war. Of course, I supported everybody that was doing it, but there was so many people that didn’t sometimes you hated to even say anything about it. But it was not, you know, it was not a happy time when you found out that your ship was gone.

RT: Then especially now that you’ve been able to meet people who were not only survivors, but also the family of the people who were lost.

JC: That’s right. That’s correct, that’s correct. You know, you feel closer to them now that you know who they are, you know. That’s the way it’s going to be because before I didn’t know any of those people and so I was sad that it happened but there’s nothing you could do about it. What can you say about it that’s going to make a difference? You know, I couldn’t do that, so there was just nothing there to do. But now we can work towards an end on getting something done on this. So we don’t know if anything will ever be done on it but at least we can work towards it.

RT: The association I imagine allows them or gives them an opportunity to be able to not necessarily come to terms with it, but at least to share with other people—

JC: That’s correct. It gives them—well there’s someone else there that’s sitting right across the table from them that has a part of this ship and has suffered from apart of this ship. So you’ve got a bonding that takes place there. We had a lady that came to us and this is many years ago, right after we started doing this that she told us, she said, “I want to thank you for giving me my husband back.” We said, “Well what do you mean giving your husband back?” She said, “Well until he came to the reunion,” she said, “When he came to the reunion he completely changed. He started talking to the kids and he started being a father to them.” Said “He’s just a complete person, completely different person,” and says, “It was because of the camaraderie and the things that ya’ll are doing, you know, for the guys who were involved in this.” We said, “Well we didn’t have anything to do with it, it’s these other people. It’s the whole group that’s what does
that, you know.” It’s not us because I don’t have any idea what happened to that ship, you know, except what Pete tells me or what some of these other guys tell me about what happened. But if we can get together and we can talk about it that makes it easier for them and it makes it easier for everybody.

RT: Oh yes, absolutely. I have one last question.

JC: Okay.

RT: From all your time aboard Evans, do you have any souvenirs or any kind of mementos from your service?

JC: Every souvenir that I’ve gotten, I’ve given to you guys or everyone that I can find I have.

RT: Well what sorts of things did you keep before giving them over to the Vietnam Archive?

JC: Well my mom kept this, now I don’t know, I used to have a bunch of letters that she had and what happened to them, I have no idea. You know that we would write back and forth. But I think she had every letter that I wrote back. But I cannot find any of that stuff and she’s gone and so—but I would send stuff home. I sent my brother a boat that I bought in Japan, it was a little electronic model boat, you know.

RT: Okay.

JC: We still have that, I have it put up. I didn’t give that to you. But I’ve given you, in the place in the archives out there, I had a jacket made, like an Eisenhower jacket made out of a couple of work blues that I had. It made a nice jacket but I get one arm in it—then I had the logo, our ship’s logo, the one that shows the destroyer with the torpedo and the shell and stuff, I had that embroidered on the back. I gave that to ya’ll. I don’t know, I’ve got some, I don’t know what all I’ve put out there. But you know, I don’t have any of my uniforms or any of that stuff left and I have no idea what happened to it. I did have a blanket that I had onboard the ship, the last time we were out there I brought out to you. But it’s just like a gray blanket, you know, a military blanket, wool blanket.

RT: But you did, it sounds like you did collect quite a few souvenirs though.

JC: Oh yeah, yeah we did. I’ve still got some stuff that I sent to mom, it’s a sake set, you know Japanese sake.

RT: Oh yes.
JC: I’ve got a set of those that I gave to mom that we’ve still got down here, now I haven’t given that to you. I didn’t know whether you would want anything like that or not. But we’ve got that and I’ve got my photographs. As a matter of fact, I’m sitting here looking at them right now, the thirty-five millimeter slides that I took when we came out of Pearl Harbor in 1952 on our way back to the States. That’s whenever I got the picture of the Arizona memorial before it’s got the big edifice over it now. It was just a flag pole sticking up then above the ship, but I got a bunch of pictures of Hawaii there. So I’ve still got those, but I gave copies to ya’ll.

RT: Wow, fantastic. Well thank you very much.

JC: Well you’re quite welcome sir and I’m sorry that—

RT: Thank you for the time.

JC: Well I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you anymore, I don’t know what else I can tell you though. But I appreciate what you’re doing on this because of the Frank E. Evans but we’re working on some other stuff. Are you going to be able to come to the reunion in Milwaukee?

RT: I’m looking into the funding for it. (Laughs)

JC: Okay.

RT: That’s the only real issue there.

JC: Okay. Well what I’ll do is I’ll get on a computer and I’ll send you the information. As far as making reservations and stuff, we’re going on a Friday. We’re going to be taking our trip down to Great Lakes Training Center, Naval Training Center. They call it the Naval Training Center now, but I call it the Great Lakes, but that’s where I went to school. But we’re going to be going down there for a Friday and they’re going to give us a tour and we’re going to have lunch and then come back. So see what you can find out and I’ll send this information to you. Do you think it would help if I talked to Dr. Reckner? Can he help fund that for you?

RT: Well, we’ll have to see.

JC: Would you do that?

RT: I can certainly talk to him.

JC: Okay, well I didn’t know whether it would be that you wanted me to talk to him or not to see because it would be good, it might—