Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University beginning an oral history interview with Col. Jim Hall and his wife Minnie Mae Hall, who is also here with us. We are all sitting in the interview room in the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech. Today is the twenty-fourth of March 2005. I want to first of all thank you, of course, for visiting with us here and for agreeing to participate in the program and be such wonderful supporters of the Oral History Project and the Vietnam Archive. Jim, if I can, let me begin by just getting some biographical data onto the record. Could you tell us where you were born and when?

Jim Hall: I was born on a farm just north of Greenville, Texas, which is about fifty miles northeast of Dallas, Texas, on April 8, 1919. My mother—my mother’s parents lived there, and that’s why I was born there, although my mother and dad lived in Greenville.

LC: Now how long had you had family members on your mom’s side here in Texas? Does this go back a long way?

JH: My grandparents moved here before the turn of the century. They moved to a little town called Cego, Texas, down just southeast of Waco, where my mother was born. Then they moved to Kingston. This is the farm community that I mentioned just north of Greenville. I don’t know what year, but she went to school in Kingston and finished high school there.

LC: Is that right? Now where did your grandparents move from?
JH: My grandmother was from Mississippi and my grandfather was from Alabama. Their name was Horton.

LC: Okay, spelled like you would think? H-O-R-T-O-N?

JH: Correct.

LC: Any military background for any of those folks that you know of?

JH: Not that I’m aware of. I don’t think they were involved.

LC: Now did you have brothers and sisters, Jim?

JH: I had one sister. She died in 1969.

Minnie Mae Hall: ‘79.


LC: What was her name?

JH: Gwendolyn.

LC: Okay. What did she do? Did she stay in Texas?

JH: She stayed in Texas. She married a Navy man from World War II. His parents lived in Lytle, Texas, just out of San Antonio. She moved to San Antonio when they married. He became a president of a bank down there and she passed away down in that area.

MMH: She had an interesting career, too.

LC: What did she do?

JH: She was a teacher.

MMH: A postmistress.

JH: And a postmistress.

LC: Is that right?

MMH: Yeah.

LC: Good for her.

JH: Yeah, she did that in Lytle.

LC: Now where did she qualify to become a teacher?

JH: At Howard Payne in Brownwood.

LC: Okay. How did she come to go to college, then? Did she pay for that?

JH: No. It’s a long story. If I’m getting off base here, you can stop me.

LC: No, it’s fine.
JH: My mother and father were divorced when I was eight. My sister was three years younger than I. When my mother and father divorced, my father moved to Dallas from Greenville and left us stranded. My grandmother and grandfather had sold their farm in Kingston and moved to Commerce, Texas, just again, east of Greenville and established a boarding house for young ladies attending East Texas State University. It wasn’t a university at the time. My mother moved us there with them. She moved to Dallas to try to find work. She had no experience in anything. She was a seamstress. She got a good job—not a good job—she got a job as a seamstress at a dress factory in Dallas, a so-called sweatshop.

LC: You mentioned that, yeah. Do you know what the name of that company was?

JH: It was Marcy Lee. I don’t know, company, corporation, whatever. It’s gone now. She worked six days a week, at least ten hours a day. Some weeks during the Depression she made as few as six dollars a week. So we lived on that until I got old enough to begin to earn a little money mowing lawns, working in a grocery store, filling station, carrying a paper route when I was fourteen. My sister and I went onto high school and got out of high school, but I didn’t go to college because there was no money. I didn’t know anything about earning big money enough to go. My mother didn’t have any education to try to get me along that line. I had a good friend who was a tile-setter and got me a job as a decorative tile-setter’s helper, and eventually an apprentice. Now to go back to my sister, she came along three years after I did. She established contact with my father, who then gave her the funds to go to Howard Payne, but I never did contact him and he never did contact me until I actually was drafted into the service and he realized he had a namesake.

LC: Okay.

JH: Then kind of took an interest in me and then continued on after World War II. During World War II and after World War II, we became close.

LC: That’s a very—that’s an incredible story, actually.

JH: So that’s how my sister got her education, because she got back and contacted him. Long story.
LC: Well, no, it’s a very interesting story. Now I’m going to ask Minnie Mae now some of the same kinds of things. Where were you born?

MMH: I was born in Dallas, Texas. Love Field now has been built over our home place. It expanded and they took our—we lived on Lemon Avenue and Love Field had to grow. So we moved to Irving.

LC: What about your family?

MMH: Well, I was born coincidentally on April the eighth, 1922.

LC: No kidding.

MMH: He tells everyone I’m older than he is. It’s not true. Anyway, I went to North Dallas High School. Two years I was in Irving High School because we moved there to—my mother inherited her people’s farm out there.

LC: So you would’ve graduated from Irving, then?

MMH: No, I went my freshman and sophomore year in Irving and then I went back to Dallas and I graduated from North Dallas.

LC: What year was that?

MMH: I graduated in June of 1939.

LC: Okay. Now—

MMH: I did not go to college. I had two older brothers. One became a lawyer in Dallas and the other one went to A&M and then he joined the Air Force. I lost two brothers in World War II. One was a pilot in a B-25, the younger one, and the older one was a bombardier on a B-24, both in the European section of the war.

LC: Now, Minnie Mae, do you feel like you could tell me anything about those—about where they were serving?

MMH: Well, I think my husband probably knows more about—we know a lot about them now. We didn’t know anything at first. They were just missing in action.

LC: Okay.

MMH: It took about fifty years to find out about one of them.

LC: What was his name?

MMH: You want to tell her all this? He’s better about words than I am.

JH: Harry, Jr., Harry Clay, Jr., was the older.

MMH: C-R-U-M-P was the last name. Crump. C-R-U-M-P.
JH: Following him was Walter Pershing Crump.

MMH: Named for the general.

LC: Sure. Now tell me first about Harry.

JH: Okay. Harry—let me first tell you about Walter.


JH: His nickname was “Bitsy.” He joined the Air Corps in late 1940 and became a pilot in ’41. They sent him to Brazil for some kind of action, we don’t know what. He came back to the United States in 1942, mid-1942 and was reassigned to Columbia, South Carolina, B-25 training organization, and from there went through Europe and through England and down into North Africa into Algeria while Rommel was still in charge of North Africa.

LC: Okay, so ’43?

JH: Early ’43. February?

MMH: Yeah. He was lost in February.

JH: He was lost on a bombing mission over either Algeria or Libya. We’re not sure exactly where he was shot down, but several years—and we never did know any details about that. Several years later—am I getting too—?

LC: No, this is wonderful. This is very important.

JH: Several years later, I read an article in a magazine, an Air Force magazine, said something about B-25s in the Mediterranean. So I contacted the publisher of that book and asked who I could talk to about the author, if they could tell me. They gave me the author’s name. He was actually the secretary of the association of the bomb group that Bitsy was in. He said he published either a monthly or a quarterly newsletter. He would put in a note in that if we were interested in finding out something about Walter “Bitsy” Crump who flew out of Algeria in 1943 and was lost. As a result of that, we got about three letters from people who knew him. We’ve had phone calls from a couple people, one who was actually his wingman when he was shot down. So that told us what happened. He got hit directly by an anti-aircraft fire. The airplane exploded and he went down. Later, after the ground forces had moved Rommel out of that area, the wing commander sent a team out to see if they could find any evidence of what might have
happened. In that Arabic country, everything had already been picked over and they don’t
know what happened to the bodies or anything.

LC: So they never got any evidence?

MMH: No.

JH: None whatsoever.

LC: You heard the wingman tell you, the eyewitness?

MMH: Mm-hmm. It was so nice to talk about it.

LC: I believe that probably was. That probably was very—

MMH: After about fifty years, wasn’t it? It was a long time afterwards.

JH: Yeah, a long time.

MMH: Then later, I received a telephone call one Sunday afternoon from a
history teacher from Grand Prairie, Texas. He had been to an estate sale and found—well,
he bought things pertaining to the war. We had both of our names listed in the Dallas
telephone book because we lived there for years. There is a set of books called The
Fighting Men of Texas. On one page are my two brothers, Jim, and my other brother.

LC: All in a photograph together?

MMH: All in a photograph together, and a little bio there. It said Jim Hall was
married to Minnie Mae Crump, who was sister of these three men. Well, he bought these
books or had these books. This teacher looked in the Dallas phone book, found my name,
called us up, and he had bought all kinds of pictures and awards, certificates, and medals,
and everything that had belonged to my brother. He had married right before he went
overseas. She had died not too long after that. Her family had all this and why they didn’t
return it to our family, I’ll never know. Anyway, he bought all this. We met him and he
wanted to give all this to us. I said, “No, that’s yours.” He had copies made so we have
that.

LC: Okay, well, that’s very nice. That’s wonderful.

MMH: That kind of tied it all together for us.

LC: Yeah, that was a wonderful phone call and a very good thing he did, a very
good thing he did. Good for him. Now do you know much about Harry, then, that you
can tell me?

JH: Again, we knew very little about him.
MMH: Well, go back and tell her what he did before he went in the service.
JH: I will. He graduated at the University of Texas Law School and established a practice in Dallas with a young partner friend of his. When Bitsy was lost, Sonny is Harry, Jr. Sonny—
MMH: Before that. When Bitsy went into the Air Force, he—
JH: I’m going to tell them. Sonny closed his law office and went in the Air Corps.
LC: Now, he enlisted. He wasn’t drafted I take it?
JH: That’s correct. He wanted to become a pilot, but he couldn’t pass that exam so he became a bombardier.
LC: Now was there a physical issue with him?
JH: Usually eyesight or something like that. It could so much as colorblindness will disqualify you as a pilot.
LC: Right.
JH: So he became a bombardier in a B-24. His wing was stationed in—I can’t think of the first name, but it’s in eastern Libya. It might be Benghazi, I think, but I’m not certain right off. They were on the Ploesti bombing raid and were quite damaged by anti-aircraft fire over the target, but came back from Romania through Italy to come back to their base. Leaving the boot of Italy over the Mediterranean, some Luftwaffe fighters got them and shot them down. They ditched into the ocean. For years, for a long time, their parents knew he was dead or knew he was missing in action, knew nothing of the details. When the war was over, his pilot and co-pilot and engineer on the B-24 had survived the ditching. They did not know what happened to Harry, Jr. because with all the damage that had occurred to the airplane before bailout or ditching, they have a bell that they would ring. It was certain signals to say, “We’re going to bail out,” or, “We’re going to ditch,” or whatever. They don’t know whether he ever heard any of this or not because the wiring might have been damaged. Anyway, they didn’t know exactly what happened to him, but they were in a life raft together. The engineer subsequently died, but the two, pilot and co-pilot, were POWs (prisoner of war). The pilot came to Irving, her mother’s parents’ home, and— I mean, her parents’ home, and briefed them on as much as he knew about it. Later, many years later, when we were living—I had already retired and we were
living in Granbury, a good friend of ours, our postman became a good friend of ours. He was a B-24 crew chief, and they had a big reunion in Fort Worth. I said to him, “Will you check around and see if anybody knew anything, if anyone knew Harry Crump?” He came back to me one day or, he called me from Fort Worth, in Granbury, and said, “Hey, I’ve got his co-pilot up here.” So we set up an interview with the co-pilot at that reunion. Her sister came down from St. Louis. We all three sat in and got these details that I’ve told you up to know. He never did know what happened to Harry, Jr., either. So.

LC: Now they were in a raft and they were picked up?

MMH: The pilot and co-pilot.

JH: The pilot and co-pilot. The engineer had died in the raft.

LC: He died?

JH: The other two were picked up as POWs.

LC: Now they were picked up by a German or Axis surface ship?

MMH: The guys, for some reason after the war, they were not friends anymore.

LC: Something must have happened.

JH: Something caused that.

MMH: There was something. I wonder if the co-pilot tried to do something differently than the pilot did. I don’t know what happened.

LC: Sure, something happened. They were under extreme, extreme circumstances. I can’t even imagine. Do you know where they were held as POWs?

JH: No.

MMH: I really don’t.

LC: Okay.

MMH: It was nice that we finally found something.

LC: That’s incredible, actually.

JH: Many years after.

LC: These reunions are pretty useful for families who need resolution.

JH: You know the unfortunate thing is about things like that, so many parents never were able to find out. We were just fortunate in incidents, incidents.

MMH: My parents didn’t know all this.

JH: No, they didn’t.
MMH: They were already gone.
LC: Now, you have a sister as well?
MMH: Yes.
LC: So do you only have the two brothers?
MMH: I had three brothers. The other’s younger than I, and he died about, I guess, about six years ago. He was a county judge in Glen Rose, Texas, in Somervell County, but he joined the Army. He could not go overseas because of the loss of the other two brothers and that grieved him.
LC: Yes, I can imagine.
MMH: I had Bitsy. We married on July the twenty-fifth, and Bitsy and Annalee, his girlfriend from Irving, married the week after. She went with him to South Carolina and then he went overseas. They were just together about, what, three months?
JH: Mm-hmm.
MMH: Before he left. Then he was lost in February of ’43 and six months later Harry, Jr., was lost. So that was a double whammy for the parents.
LC: Well, and for you.
MMH: Yeah, sure. Then, of course, he was over there fighting all these wars and I didn’t know whether I’d ever see him again.
LC: Well, that must have been extremely—
MMH: I didn’t really worry because I felt what’s to be is to be.
LC: Was that what you thought at that time?
MMH: Yeah.
LC: Do you think most young people your age thought that, what, during the war, what will happen will happen?
MMH: Well, I don’t know about everybody.
JH: More so than today.
MMH: Yeah, oh, yeah. We were much—I wouldn’t say stronger, but I mean, I expected him to do what he had to do.
JH: Well, the situation with war, too, is much different than what we’re experiencing today. It was, “We’ve got to be involved to stop this expansion of Nazism.
We’ve got to be involved to stop the imperialism of Japan or we’re not going to be a free nation.”

MMH: That’s right.

JH: That was the focus that we had right here. You know, we honor Veterans’ Days and veterans and all of that, but in anything I’m ever involved in along that line, I always say I was an active war veteran, but you were an active war veteran, also, because without teachers, without doctors, without farmers, all those, and production line people—she was Rosie the Riveter. Without all those kind of people, we wouldn’t have had any support to have won the war. It was remarkable the way our country came together in those days, whereas today if we need a new weapons system it takes ten years to get it on the ground, that type of thing. So it was a much different situation in those days. Everybody contributed toward gaining the possibility of freedom.

LC: To what do you attribute that, the fact that everyone came together? Was it that the mission was so clear?

JH: It was clear.

MMH: I think so.

LC: No doubts, no anti-war.

JH: We had to. If the Nazis had taken England and the Japanese were already taking all of the Pacific—we were an isolation nation at that time, anyway. Eventually, they would’ve been trying to override us over here in our own country, unless—and our Congress at that time was very opposed to any kind of outside war.

LC: That’s right.

JH: Fortunately, Roosevelt and Churchill got together under the table, so to speak, and had some agreements that Congress wasn’t even aware of and were able to save us.

LC: Now—go ahead, Minnie Mae.

MMH: I was just going to say, the scrap drive, scrap metal. Mother and Daddy gathered up everything they could find around. They didn’t farm. It was a small thing she’d inherited over the years. They went down around the barn and they gathered up anything that looked like metal, gave it to the collection. Everybody had victory gardens.
They grew vegetables and everything. Of course, there was rationing and everybody had
to be very conservative with gasoline, tires, sugar, coffee, everything was rationed.

LC: It applied to everybody. There wasn’t—

MMH: Oh, yeah. That’s right. The women—while he was gone, I stayed with my
parents. They had the Women’s Corps—I’ve forgotten what we were called, but we went
to meetings to find out what we could do and all that. It was just a different world then.

LC: The atmosphere was very different. Now I want to ask how you two met.

MMH: Can you make a short version? You know men don’t like details.

JH: There’s no short version.

MMH: Women like me go into too many details, so I’ll let him give you a short
version.

LC: All right, we’ll see if that will suffice, and then if not, we’ll come back—

MMH: If he doesn’t tell it right, I’ll tell you.

LC: There we go.

JH: In February of 1940—before February of 1940, she and her best girl friend
named Corky went to a religious camp, a Christian camp up in Sherman, Texas. From my
church two good buddies of mine went to the same camp. Among about six different
couples of them they all met and kind of shined to each other up there. Well, her best girl
friend Corky and my best girl friend Emory—

MMH: Boy friend.

JH: Boy friend, Emory, continued to date when they came back from that camp
to Dallas. Corky invited me and my girlfriend at the time, named Betty, who I was almost
engaged to, to come to her house and play Monopoly. So the four of us gathered and
opened the Monopoly game and behold the dice weren’t there. So Corky said, “Emory,
you’ve got to go up to Minnie Mae’s house about a quarter mile away from Love Field
and get the dice. This game is Minnie Mae’s.” So, here we go, Emory and I knock on this
front door. Here comes this lovely vision, a vision of loveliness. A hundred little pin
curls, bobby pins all over her head—

MMH: I didn’t know they were coming.

LC: You weren’t ready for visitors.

JH: That’s another story.
MMH: He thinks it was set up.

JH: A housedress on and fluffy house shoes. We got the dice and walked back to the car. I said to Emory, “You’ve got to get me a date with that.” Not her, with that. So we went back and played Monopoly. Later, Corky invited Emory and me back to her house to play Monopoly and invited Minnie Mae.

LC: Yeah, no Betty this time.

MMH: No Betty. We left her out of it.

JH: So during this game, Minnie Mae said, “My mother’s giving me my eighteenth birthday party”—at a nice park in Dallas, Lee Park, which was very nice. It has a nice kind of ballroom-type hall that you can rent.

MMH: Arlington, just like the Arlington.

JH: “Would you like to come to my birthday party?” I said, “Sure, when is it?” She said, “April the eighth.” I said, “Oops, sorry, my mother’s giving me a birthday party the same night with my Sunday school class guys to play Forty-Two and have homemade ice cream.” Well, a little silence there, and she said, “Well, when you all finish playing Forty-Two and have your ice cream, why don’t you bring your guys over to my party?”

MMH: See, I was a fast thinker.

LC: I guess. You caught that very quickly.

JH: There was about six or eight of us, these South Oak Cliff boys, about twelve miles away from there, came barging into this party and those north Dallas guys didn’t like this at all.

LC: I’ll bet they didn’t.

JH: Anyway, we had a good time. So that kind of broke the ice and we started dating. By mid-1940 we were beginning to talk about marriage.

MMH: It was the summertime.

JH: Well, first of all, she was going steady with a guy named Homer Whitley. So she dropped Homer and I dropped Betty.

LC: Had to get rid of them.

MMH: Get rid of them, yeah.

JH: So by mid-1940, we were talking about marriage, but we were also hearing and reading that there was a possibility of a draft in late-1940. So we said, “I’m twenty-
one. I might be drafted so let’s wait and see what happens because if there is a draft I
don’t want to be married and leave you here alone.” So we decided to wait. Well, in
September they had the big fishbowl drawing up in Washington pulling our numbers out.
My number was pulled out to be January or February of ’41 with the first draft out of
Dallas being November of ’40. So we talked about it and I said, “Why don’t I volunteer
for this first draft, get that year out of the way, and then I’ll come back and we’ll save
three or four months before we get married?” So we did that. I was in the first draft out of
Dallas. November 26, 1940. Before that year was up Congress passed another law that
said, “You’re in for the duration.” So that’s how we met.

LC: That kind of scotched the plans about you would come back after a year
and—

MMH: Yeah.

JH: It did.

LC: So when did you actually get married, then?

JH: Okay. I was stationed in San Antonio at Fort Sam Houston in the field
artillery.

LC: Now had you gone to basic there?

JH: I went to basic, yes.

LC: At Fort Sam?

JH: 1940 and got out of there in January of ’41.

MMH: Field artillery.

JH: I went into the 15th Field Artillery and made corporal while there.

Immediately after Pearl Harbor in December ’41, I heard about the aviation cadet
program. So in January of ’41, I went down and applied for it. Wait, ’42. I went down
and applied for aviation cadet, passed the exam, and was accepted, but had to wait for an
opening, which became available in June of ’42. In the meantime, Minnie Mae had
moved up to Austin to be closer to me. I’d get off on maybe one weekend a month and go
to Dallas to see her from 1940 on. In early ’42, her friend Annalee that we mentioned a
minute ago, Bitsy’s wife, had an apartment there in Austin, and she worked in the
Department of Education and getting her law degree at UT (University of Texas).

LC: She was going to law school?
JH: Yes.

LC: Wow, that was brave.

JH: Yeah. She invited Minnie Mae to come down and share the apartment, live in the apartment with her, got her a job in the Department of Education there in the capital of Texas, small, small government at that time. So that made it easier for me, to get to Austin. So in May of ’42, I was home on leave already planning to think about getting married. I went out and bought a ring without her knowledge. I went to her mother, who we were just like this (gesture). I said, “Minnie Mae and I are talking of marrying. Do you concur?” She said, “Oh, yes, that’s fine.” So I said, “Well, I think I should ask Mr. Crump.” She said, “That would be real nice.” So one day I was there while I was on this leave. Mr. Crump put his hat on and said, “I’m going to go down to the barn and look at my cows.” So I said, “May I go with you?” So we went down—is this getting too detailed?

LC: This is wonderful.

JH: We went down to the barn—I have to digress a minute. Several years before that, he had been cranking a—

MMH: Oh, years before, he had been cranking an old water pump in our home in Dallas. Some way it broke his finger. People didn’t run to the doctor all the time as they do now and blood poisoning set in.

LC: Oh, dear.

MMH: All of a sudden he had streaks and everything on his arm and he went to the doctor. They removed his finger about to here (gesture).

LC: At the knuckle, the second knuckle?

JH: Now back to the barn. I said, “Mr. Crump, Minnie Mae and I have been talking about getting married, and I wonder if you would give me your permission to marry your daughter.” That was on his right hand. He took that little finger like that (gesture), pointed back at the house and said, “You go ask her mother.” I already had.

LC: You cleared that one already.

JH: So Minnie Mae and I were dating one of the nights there while I was on leave. We were talking about engagement. She said, “Let’s—I don’t accept it. Let’s get engaged. We’ll talk about marriage later.” Well, I already had the ring in my pocket. I
said, “Well, I have to know the size of your finger, so take your class ring off and let me try it on my finger so I’ll know what size to get.” So she gave me her class ring and I put it on. Then I took the other ring out and put it back on her finger. She said, “That’s not my class ring.” Then she yelled and she said, “Turn on the headlights.”

MMH: She doesn’t know where we were.

JH: Oh, we were parked on the shore of Bachman Lake just north of Love Field. That’s another long story. I’ll get to that. She ran around the front of the car so she could see that ring. She hadn’t seen it. She started yelling, “I’m engaged! I’m engaged!” Well, there’s security in numbers. She had about six friends parked over there, too, you know.

MMH: That was my plan.

JH: All these girls jumped up with their boyfriends to come over to see that ring.

MMH: We were all listening to Kay Kyser and his musical college on the radio.

JH: So, that started our engagement. Then by July, we decided July was time to get married.

LC: Now you had just gone into the training—

JH: I was still in the field artillery when we were engaged, but before we got married, I was an aviation cadet. I was an aviation cadet in June of ’42. We were married in July of ’42.

MMH: They frowned on wives.

JH: Yeah. They did not want wives following the husbands as cadets because it interrupts the continuity of study and training and learning and all of that.

LC: Sure. So you stayed in your job in Austin?

MMH: No, I went home to Mama.

LC: Would you have been allowed to keep your job when you were married?

MMH: I don’t know. I don’t know.

JH: Oh, probably, yeah.

MMH: Well, I’d imagine because they were short of help with all the men gone. Annalee, of course, stopped school. Well, it was summertime. She didn’t go back to school then. She did later. I went back to Irving and stayed with Mother and Daddy. So that was when—

JH: Then she went to work at North American Aviation.
MMH: Yeah.

LC: Now tell me a little bit about that. How did that come about?

MMH: Well, Irving, where Mother and Daddy lived, had—

JH: Let me set the stage for that.

LC: Sure.

JH: Irving is a suburb community of Dallas.

MMH: About ten miles from Dallas.

JH: Grand Prairie is another suburb of Dallas. Grand Prairie had a huge bomber plant. North American Aviation had a branch plant from their California operation there. They were building B-24 airplanes in that plant at Grand Prairie. So now you can take it.

MMH: Well, there was a man who worked at North American in Irving. He was probably in the personnel some way. I don’t remember his name or anything, but people were contacting him if they wanted to work. There was a bus that came all around in Irving to pick up people to go to Grand Prairie, which isn’t very far from Irving. I someway got a job. I wasn’t trained to do anything, but I was in the machine shop. I guess I was a gopher, really, because when this person was running out of parts I had a little clipboard and I would write down what they wanted. Then I’d go over to the machine shop and where they were making the screws and the nuts and the bolts and everything and get the product and take it back where it was needed.

LC: Okay.

MMH: I worked at night. I figured I couldn’t go anywhere anyway, so I worked at night. The bus would pick me up in front of my mother’s gate, front gate, and I would get on the bus and they would bring me back to the gate.

LC: So that was pretty convenient.

MMH: It was. It really was.

LC: Did you mind working at night?

MMH: No, I liked it because Mother and I had all day to play.

LC: Okay. Did you sleep?

MMH: Well, a little bit.

LC: A little bit, okay. Did you make any money at all?
MMH: Well, I don’t remember. I’m sure it wasn’t a lot because I didn’t have a very important job, but I thought I was doing my part of the war, you know. I felt like I was doing something.

LC: You were doing something.

MMH: Yeah, not much, but it was something.

LC: Now how many women were working in the plant?

MMH: A lot. A whole lot. Some of them were really Rosie the Riveter. I didn’t do anything quite that good, but it was interesting and it was nice to be watching them build the airplanes.

LC: Involved. You must have felt involved. Especially since he was now going to be a flyer. So that kind of probably felt good.

MMH: Yeah, it did. So it just gave me something to do while I was at home.

Mother and I were good friends and we’d go shopping and everything in the daytime, so.

LC: Now what about your sister?

MMH: My sister is the youngest of the family. She’s seven years younger than I am. She was a little princess. Well, all just, you know—

LC: I bet.

MMH: Did for Nancy. Right now, she and I are the best of friends.

LC: Does she still live in the Dallas area?

MMH: She’s in Irving now, by the way. They live in Las Colinas, which is a lovely part.

LC: I know exactly where that is. Yes, it’s very nice.

MMH: She, of course, was in high school. When the war was over and he got out we went back to Irving and rented an apartment. She was a cheerleader. We were really wanting an apartment and they were hard to come by. She came home one day and she said, “Our advisor’s leaving and our pep squad needs somebody. Would you take it?” I didn’t know one thing about being a pep squad advisor, but to get that lady’s apartment, I said I would do it.

LC: Sure enough.
MMH: So we were involved. He would bring home the convertibles where he was working with his daddy, bring them home and they’d ride around in the convertibles at the game.

LC: That sounds all right.

MMH: So it was a fun time.

LC: I bet it was.

MMH: She’s in Irving now so we see each other.

LC: Well, that’s very nice, isn’t it?

MMH: It is.

LC: Jim, let me ask you about the transition that you made from the artillery to wanting to be an aviation cadet. Now, had the fact that you’d known her brothers, they were fliers, did that influence you at all or why did you decide to make that jump?

JH: Since I was about that high (gesture) living in Commerce, every once in a while, maybe once every two or couple weeks an airplane would fly over. I’d watch that thing ‘til it disappeared. I always wanted to fly. In fact, in 1937 when I graduated from high school I went out to a little airport in the southern part of Oak Cliff and took flying lessons in a little Piper Cub. I soloed it after five hours at forty horsepower, forty miles an hour. If you got a forty-mile an hour headwind, you just stood still.

LC: That can happen in Texas, too.

JH: Yeah. So I wanted to graduate to a little higher level of flying and I got into a Spartan C-3, which was an open cockpit biplane, 225-horsepower engine. It flew about sixty or eighty maybe ninety miles an hour. So that was my interest in aviation. Then while I went in the field artillery, well, it wasn’t a possibility because I didn’t have a college education. That’s all they were taking initially until the war got to where they had to back down and get people who didn’t have a college education. So the transition from field artillery to aviation cadets was very simple. After I passed the cadet examinations, both physical and mental, and was accepted. My battery commander in field artillery supported me a hundred percent, except he said, “I don’t know why”—I put in for OCS (officer candidate school) in the Army at the same time. He said, “I don’t know why you’re accepting this. All those guys do is drink.” He was the biggest drunkard in the world, but that’s another story. I got my orders to go into the cadets. I went to Brooks
Field in San Antonio. The first—I was a corporal and that was considered non-
commissioned officer in those days. The first thing I saw was an Air Force staff sergeant,
an Air Corps staff sergeant, mowing the lawn, not his lawn. I said, “Staff sergeant
mowing?” I said, “Man, I can’t go over this. I’m glad I’m a cadet.” Anyway, I went
through cadet training and had no problems at all. I had to go to what was called the San
Antonio Aviation Cadet Center at Kelly Field, which is now Lackland Air Force Base.
That was our preflight training. I think we were there about three months and then we
moved to Ballinger, Texas, to a little civilian-operated, Army-controlled airfield named
after Ballinger, Texas, for basic flying. We had civilian instructors, but we had military
check pilots to check the efficiency of what the civilians were teaching us. Then on to
San Angelo, Texas, to basic flying. We had military instructors there. Then on to
Ellington Air Force Base in Houston for advanced flying where we flew feeder-type
airplanes. I flew a twin-engine Beech, a twin-engine Curtis, AT-10s, AT-9s, and a single
AT-6 for gunnery, single-engine, and graduated from there. Going back to basic training,
when we were to leave basic training they would either send you to single-engine
advanced or twin-engine advanced. If you were in the upper ten percent of your class
academically and flying-wise you had to choose which one you wanted. Otherwise, it
was just the drop of a hat. So I got to choose. Well, I dearly, dearly wanted to fly a P-38
twin-engine. So I chose twin engine. When I graduate, I get orders to go to Midland,
Texas, to fly bombardier cadets and AT-11s.

LC: Which are the—

JH: Trainers for the bombardiers. They carry five bombs on each side in the
bomb bay, two cadets, and a bombardier instructor. One cadet would drop his five
bombs. The other cadet would then drop his five bombs. Then if we had a spare time
maybe and I’d give them a good ride around. That was very disconcerting to go back into
a trainer airplane after graduation and not get my P-38. So I kept volunteering and
volunteering.

MMH: I had decided he didn’t like me.

LC: Yeah, I bet you wondered.
JH: I kept volunteering to get out of that environment and get into a combat outfit. She always asked me, “Why do you want to go fight?” “Well, somebody’s got to fight the wars.” Anyway, but I was always declared essential, couldn’t be released.

LC: Now that was based on the fact that you were training people and they needed trainers.

MMH: Yeah.

LC: Jim, of course, I’m sure that wasn’t, as you’ve said, what you wanted to do, but did you see how important that was? Upstairs, you could see how important it was?

JH: I did and later in my career, in B-29s, I realized how very important it was to me as a pilot and I’ll tell you why in a little bit.

LC: Okay.

JH: Then here came one day on the bulletin board, an offer for people with, for pilots with over a thousand hours to volunteer to go into the 20th Air Force to fly B-29s. Well, nobody out where we lived ever heard of a B-29. They were so new. So I thought, “Well, this is an opportunity.” I knew it was a four-engine airplane, so opportunity. I volunteered. I had 1,019 hours and I was accepted. Before I could go to B-29s I had to have four-engine experience. They sent me back to Tarrant Army Airfield, which is in Fort Worth. I had to go through B-29 transition there for two and a half months and then go to my B-29 outfit. Well, they sent me to Lincoln, Nebraska, to be assigned to a B-29 outfit, but it wasn’t ready. They weren’t—the base wasn’t ready to accept the bomber yet. They sent me to Tucson to be on standardization board for B-24s.

LC: Now, I’ll stop you there for just a second. Can you tell me about that standardization board? What was the work of that group?

JH: Okay. When a crew—when a B-24 pilot and co-pilot had graduated from B-24 transition had to wait to get a combat crew they would send them to a place like Tucson, what we called a repo depot.

LC: A repo depot?

JH: I don’t know what all that stands for, but R-E-P-O, something like that. Gosh, what did it stand for? Doesn’t matter. Anyway, that’s where they would go for their training as a crew to get ready to go overseas.

LC: They would train them together as a unit.
JH: Yeah. We, as a standardization board, would ride with the crew after they passed certain phases of recruit training to assure that they were compliant with the book.

LC: That they were working together?

JH: Working together. So that they would meld as a crew in combat.

LC: Absolutely.

JH: That was our job. I was only there a couple months before the B-29 base opened and I was pulled out and sent to Great Bend, Kansas, for 19th Bombardment Group.

LC: Now did you know that you would only be in that standardization group for just a short time or did you—it wasn’t certain?

JH: No.

LC: No, you did know?

JH: My orders said I was going to the 20th Bomber, 20th Air Force.

LC: So this was just you were in kind of a holding pattern and they found this for you to do. Okay.

JH: In fact, when I got to Lincoln, Nebraska, they hadn’t even heard of the 20th Air Force. So I showed them my set of orders that said, “You’re assigned to 20th Air Force.”

LC: That’s new.

JH: Well, we got to Great Bend. They didn’t have the B-29s for all of us to really learn right there. So they had B-17s as companion trainers. So we had to check out in the B-17 before we could get to the B-29. After checking out the B-29 we flew both, depending on the availability for whatever we wanted.

LC: So there simply weren’t enough B-29s available?

JH: That’s correct.

LC: Jim, since you’ve flown the 17, the 24, and the 29, you’ve flown them all, can you just put them side-by-side in your mind and evaluate them from a pilot’s perspective? I think that’d be very interesting.

JH: Okay. The B-24 was a beautiful flying airplane. It had what was called a Davis Wing high-lift aerofoil. It flew beautifully. It could outperform, in normal flight, a B-17, almost—
LC: Meaning responsiveness to the controls?

JH: Yeah. They had—plus, it was faster. It could carry more bombs, longer range, that type of thing. The B-17 was more prominent than the B-24 because the B-17 could get shot up real badly and come back home. The B-24, if it was shot up badly, it was going in.

LC: Now why was that? What was the characteristic?

JH: I think it was just the design of the airplane and the sturdiness of the manufacture.

LC: So that was an engineering distinction between the two, that the B-17 could take more structural problems, more structural damage?

JH: Yep.

LC: Wow.

JH: Yeah, you’ve seen pictures of B-17s, I’m sure, come in with a tail almost shot off?

LC: Yeah.

JH: If that happened to a B-24, it’s in. That old B-17 would come on back, but it was slow. Well, I shouldn’t say slow. One hundred and fifty miles an hour, and it didn’t carry near the bomb load the B-24 did. It didn’t have the range a B-24 did, but I loved the B-24 more than the B-17, but I would not have wanted to take a B-24 into combat.

LC: Just because of it’s relative fragility? I mean it’s more fragile.

JH: Yeah. Now, the B-17 compared to the B-29. The B-29 was so far advanced in technology in those days, it was unbelievable what we were flying with in those days compared to what the guys in Europe were with their B-17. They were in the Pacific, too, the B-17s and B-24s. So that’s the comparison.

LC: What made that B-29 the aircraft that it was? What were the changes? What were the upgrades that made it just beyond the others?

JH: Well, it was a much larger airplane.

LC: It’s huge.

JH: It would fly, cruise, at 210 miles an hour. Over the target we’d go 260 miles an hour. It had—it was pressurized, which we could fly at high altitudes without the oxygen mask on. It was always hanging on our helmet right beside, in case we
depressurized. It had remote controlled gun turrets, so the guys weren’t standing there doing this (gesture). Instead, they had optical-type gun sights, both for the bombardier who was the forward gunner, and the right and left gunners and what we called central fire control gunner who was in the center of these two and up on a pedestal looking out a dome. The tail gunner, but he was all enclosed anyway, but these gun sights—not the tail gunner. Well, yeah, the tail gunner had the same type of gun sight. These gun sights, instead of looking through this and this (gesture), they had an optical lens with a little reticle, circle. That was adjustable by size, by a knob over here. In our study of the enemy airplanes, just the silhouettes of them, we had to learn what that airplane was just by looking at a black silhouette, and then learn what the wingspan was of it. Once you’ve identified as this probable type—when we’re in combat, now. Once identified out in the distance as that type airplane, the gunner would set in. As an example, a fighter had a 108-foot wingspan. Set in at 108, that made the reticle 108. Well, when he then got that fighter with its wings crossways in this reticle at 108, pushed a little trigger over here and that turret would swing around and zero right in on them.

MMH: Just like that.

JH: Just like that.

MMH: Automatically.

JH: The turret was some, oh, fifteen feet, thirty feet, twenty feet from where this happened and that could be the bombardier with the upper turret, lower turret, and the nose. Not in the nose, but right behind the pilot and co-pilot. Or it could be the upper or lower turret aft of the gunner side, the gunner, the CFC (central fire control) was in. The central fire control gunner, he could see all around and above him for 360 degrees whereas the side gunners could only see 180 their way. So he, the CFC gunner, could control who had the access to whichever turret depending on what he could see. His right gunner says, “I have one at ten o’clock.” Well, the CFC gunner would say, “You got him,” and flip a switch. He had two turrets to go on him like that. Or if the CFC gunner saw one coming at ten o’clock high he’d say, “I’ve got it.” He’d take something like that. Well, then in addition to that we had radar-bombing capability. Never heard of it. It was a retractable turret. I know on the B-17s, you’ve probably seen the ball turret that they’ve got. Well, similar to that, except it’s just a solid mass of cover. It can be retractable up in
between the bomb bays up into the enclosure here and there to preclude drag, except when we were nearing the target, we’d put it down then. The bombardier had to be radar operator.

LC: They’d put it down?

JH: They put it down and have the antennae then to pick up the target and bomb by radar if the bombardier can’t see the target because of clouds or whatever.

LC: Now during training, how much did they explain to you about how that radar worked? Did they just give you a general overview or they put you through the paces?

JH: No, our radar operators went through school, a separate school.

LC: Okay, they had a whole separate training. Where was that school? Do you remember? Do you know?

JH: No. Wait a minute—no. It might have been at what is now Edwards Air Force Base, then Muroc Air Force Base, out in California. It might’ve been there. I’m not certain.

LC: That had to be all introduced—that whole training program had to be designed and introduced as the technology itself was coming in, which is really quite something. Then you put it together all in the B-29 package. Do you remember your first time that you flew a B-29?

JH: Yes. No, the first time, I can’t say exactly the first time. I can tell you this, though. The first—it didn’t matter whether it was the first, second, third, or fourth—I got to Great Bend, Kansas, in late August 1944. It was H-O-T.

LC: I’ll bet it was.

JH: The B-29s had a history of—up to that time, a short history, but a history of real engine problems, overheating. Before you could take off in a reciprocating-engine airplane, you have to check the magnetos. To do that you set the propeller RPM (revolutions per minute) and the inches of mercury by the throttle to so much. Then you check the magneto, turn it to the left, right, off, and see if you get it as much as, oh, I’ve forgotten now. I think a seventy-five RPM drop in the engine. You’ve got to go back in. There’s something wrong with the engine. So in doing those checks the cylinder head temperature sitting on the edge of the runway, 212 is the maximum, as I recall. Sometimes you get up to 230, just checking the engines in hot weather. So what we’d
have to do after we checked the engines, if we didn’t get the drops, we would open the
cowl flaps on the engines, wide, taxi the full length of the runway to let the air cool the
engines, hot air cooling the engines. Come back and if the engines were down below 212
then you could take off, but they also had terrible oil leak problems with the first engines
we had. When we got to combat, we didn’t have nearly that problem, but in training we
did.

LC: Was that a problem with seals or do you know what the problem was with
those oil leaks?
JH: I think it was seals. They were—I hate to say this. They were Dodge engines,
but Dodge is a good corporation.

LC: Okay. I’m from Michigan, so you’ve got to be careful with that stuff.

(laughs)
JH: That was basically it, were the seals. I don’t know—

LC: Now did they change—go ahead. Go ahead.
JH: I don’t know why it was just the seals from that particular company, but
they’re the ones that always got their fingers pointed at them. You know, I was young in
those days, and I don’t know the reality of whether it was just Dodge or not.

LC: That’s what you guys heard. That was the scuttlebutt.
JH: That’s who we accused. (laughs)

LC: That’s right.

MMH: Had to blame someone.

LC: That’s right. Did they switch out those engines?
JH: Oh, yeah.

LC: Who made the later ones? Do you know who made the later ones? Were they
still Dodge?

JH: Yeah, they were all under the Wright patent. Wright patent? That’s not right,
just a Wright engine.

LC: A Wright engine?

JH: Yeah. There’s another word there. It’s terrible to get old.

LC: I think you’re doing pretty well.

MMH: I think he did.
LC: I do too. Well, how long then were you at Great Bend?

JH: We got to Great Bend in late August of ’44. Our group was ready to go to combat in late January of ’45. At Christmas, I took her—she was with me there. She came with me after I got my wings.

MMH: I was with him after.

JH: After I got my wings, she went wherever I went.

LC: Okay. So could you live on base?

MMH: No.

JH: No. There was no space for civilians. I mean—

LC: There was no such thing?

MMH: We lived everywhere in anything.

LC: So you would just find somewhere?

MMH: Yeah, we stayed at a motel in Tucson.

LC: Catch as catch can.

JH: If you want to interrupt right here, before I get into—she can tell you about housing.

LC: Sure.

MMH: When it was time for him to get his wings at Ellington Field, the whole family, his mother, daddy, friends, after all the past years—we all went to Houston to the graduation. He had no idea where he was going. People had been giving me going away—I had been home all that year, just visiting him about once a month wherever he was. People gave me going away parties because they didn’t know if they’d ever see me again. I was going to be gone. When he pinned his lieutenant bars and wings on him and when he opened his orders, Fort Worth, Texas, thirty miles from my home. What a letdown.

LC: Right, all those parties for nothing.

MMH: Yeah. I think everybody wanted their presents back, but anyway.

JH: We were only there for ten days.

LC: Oh, okay.

MMH: There, we lived in a gloomy, dark, old, old house that rented out a room to us in Fort Worth. I could—
JH: A boarding house without meals.

MMH: I don’t know where it was. I’d like to know now, but I didn’t remember where it was. We were there just a short time. I’ll have to tell you something funny, though. He was sleeping. He was flying and everything at different hours. One morning I was supposed to wake him up and he was so tired that night—

JH: Let me interrupt. I need to set the timing here. When I graduated, we went to Tarrant Army Airfield in Fort Worth. I was there about ten days, then got orders to go to Midland, just without ever getting in a B-24 there. Then from Midland we came back there to get my four-engine training.

MMH: Oh, is that the time?

JH: That’s what she’s going to talk about now.

MMH: I was mixed up on which time it was. Anyway, I hated to wake him up. He was so tired when we went to bed. He told me to wake him up at a certain time, but I was going to let him sleep a little while longer. Finally when I woke him up, he was scared to death he was going to be late. I never let him sleep any more. That was a no-no, but I just hated to wake him up. I found out later you don’t worry about that.

LC: You found out later you don’t worry about—?

MMH: Letting him sleep. You just get him up no matter how tired he was, but I was able to follow him around. We lived in Tucson and Lincoln. In Lincoln we rented a room. A dentist and his mother rented that. They were patriotic and they rented out a room. I had no kitchen privileges. I could keep a little carton of milk and a sweet roll or something because he flew different hours at night and all. The Y (YMCA, Young Men’s Christian Association) wasn’t very far from there at all.

JH: I didn’t fly at night then.

MMH: No, you were in Lincoln.

JH: Administrative, waiting for an assignment.

MMH: Well, anyway, we ate our meals at the Y and—

LC: Now did they have a cafeteria there at the Y that you could go and—?

MMH: Yeah.

LC: Did you just pay for what you selected? Is that how it worked?
MMH: Yeah. We had friends that were in the same outfit or the same boat. They lived across the street in someone else’s home. So we’d jump around with them.

LC: How did you get back and forth to the Y?

MMH: Well, he had a car.

JH: I had a car.

MMH: His dad gave him a car when he graduated. I probably mixed everything up.

JH: Let me interject here and go way back now that we’ve kind of skipped over. Just before I got my wings, my dad realized that I’d probably be going into combat and that’s when he made the first overture to us.

LC: Now he had kind of—he had not been in the picture. How was he keeping track of what you were doing? Do you know?

MMH: Through his sister, I imagine.

LC: Okay.

MMH: Because they were—

LC: Closer.

JH: So my dad then—

LC: He’s going to put in an appearance now?

JH: Yeah, he put in an appearance. He had an automotive salvage business in Dallas, very, very lucrative. I shouldn’t say very lucrative.

MMH: Well, it was the largest one in the Southwest.

LC: So he did all right?

JH: He did all right. So when I was in advanced flying at Ellington Field he gave her a little Studebaker Champion to bring to me for my graduation present.

MMH: Bright red.

JH: 1941.

LC: Oh, boy, I bet you wish you had that now.

JH: So that’s aside of how we got back together. Then after that, then we became pretty close.

LC: Okay. Later on you worked with him for a little bit. Is that right?

JH: After a while. We’ll get to that later.
LC: I thought you mentioned that. Okay, sure.

MMH: Anyway, we lived in very funny situations.

LC: I’ll bet you had to.

JH: We had that little Studebaker to get around in.

MMH: Yeah. In Midland, when we went there, it was my job to go find a place
to live when he reported in. It was hard. There was one apartment house in Midland, if
you can imagine. I found—I guess we found this room, The Grapevine or something.

Anyway, we moved in there. All military people were there.

JH: Twelve apartments.

MMH: Twelve apartments in this one. It’s still there.

LC: Is that right?

MMH: It has a new name and it’s been improved, but it’s still there. We visited
the area not long ago.

LC: How interesting. That must have been a funny feeling, too.

MMH: All the wives would chum around together.

LC: Sure.

MMH: All young, no children, and all that. Then let’s see—in Tucson, we lived
in a motel room. In Lincoln, in the dentist’s office—oh, the dentist’s mother, his mother’s
home. Where else? Oh, in Great Bend, we lived in what had been a little grocery store
connected to a house. They figured they could make more money renting it out than a
grocery store. While—a lot of details.

JH: Actually, it wasn’t in Great Bend. It was in a little community a few miles
from Great Bend. It had two or three grain silos—

MMH: And the railroad tracks.

JH: The railroad tracks by the grocery store, and about half a dozen houses—

MMH: A one-room schoolhouse, back then.

JH: It had a little schoolhouse.

LC: Tiny. Tiny.

MMH: We were happy to have it.

LC: I bet you were.
MMH: When I went into the newspaper office to see if there was any ads in the paper, and a young airman was being transferred and he had an apartment in this place. I overheard him trying to put an ad in the paper. I followed him outside and he told me what it was. I said, “Could I look at it?” So I took him in our car and took him out there. It was a—what was the name of that little town?

JH: Dundee.

MMH: Dundee, Kansas. It was like one room had been the store. They had one little partition for the bedroom. Two walls. Our bed was in there. I was so glad to find somewhere I didn’t even look around, really. Come to find out we had no sink. We had a dishpan with a faucet. It had a little bathroom to take a shower. We went down to the basement and shared with someone else who lived down there. It was a place to live.

LC: You were in charge of finding—

MMH: Finding a place.

LC: That was your department?

MMH: That’s right.

LC: Once you would find a place—and you didn’t really know how long you were going to be at any of these places, what did you do? You were probably very busy managing the food and trying to get all that arranged.

MMH: Yeah. Everything we owned we could put in that little Studebaker.

LC: Yeah.

MMH: You should see us now. (laughs)

LC: You’ve accumulated since then.

MMH: Anyway, we managed just fine. They had big lights like a little grocery store would have in the ceiling. When you came in, you’d turn one switch and the whole place, you know.

LC: It would light up.

MMH: They had a lot of coal oil lamps, kerosene lamps sitting up there. I said to the lady that was showing me the place, “Why do you have those up there?” She said, “Our power goes off real often.” You know, it was a nice place to live. We made do.

LC: You made do.

MMH: It got cold while we were there.
LC: Well, just as it gets hot up there, it gets cold.
MMH: Yeah. We took our milk from a local farmer. They brought it to us in the
glass milk bottles with a little cork, little cardboard stopper. It was so cold, the cream
would freeze and raise up about that high over.

JH: Just sitting on the steps outside.

LC: That’s right.

JH: Let me tell you about housing. When we rolled into Great Bend from Tucson
with the B-24s, we went to a hotel hoping to get a room. No room at the inn. So they
were very accommodating. They called the little town of Hoisington, which is just north
of Great Bend. They said, “Yeah, we have one room. You can have it for three nights.” I
said, “We’ll be there.” So we got there and checked in and we were on the second floor.
Tied to the bedstead is a coiled rope with little knots in it. Minnie Mae looked at me and
she said, “What’s that?” I said, “That’s your fire escape.” And it was.

LC: They were not kidding.

JH: That was the way to get out if you had to get out.

MMH: We were on the second floor of this old wooden building.

JH: We only had three nights there because of a housing shortage. They wouldn’t
let anybody long term in the hotel. They just rotated them.

LC: Wow.

JH: Fortunately, she was able to get us into this place in Dundee.

LC: It’s almost just unimaginable now.

MMH: It built character.

LC: Yes ma’am, I think you’re right. Well, you had to solve a lot of problems
and once you had them solved you weren’t done because you had the next time it was
going to be a whole new set of circumstances. You probably had to become very self-
sufficient and confident I would think, too. I mean, she had to on her own.

MMH: Yeah. Well, we did more worry then. They had more serious things to
worry about.

LC: Well, yeah, that’s right. You were fully engaged in the training process, I’m
sure. I’m sure. Well, let me ask you a couple of timeline questions. This will kind of help
set your own personal experiences against the broader background. At the end of 1944
when you were up in Kansas, I’m sure you were paying as much attention as you could, given all of your engagements, to what was happening in the war. Of course, you had two brothers who had gone missing and you had no information. So that’s very worrying, but at that time, did you know whether you were going to be deployed to the European theater where Battle of the Bulge, for example, was taking place or out to the Pacific?

JH: Didn’t know.

LC: Had no idea?

JH: No. When we finished our B-29 training at Great Bend and we’re getting ready to deploy overseas, they told us, “Pack summer and pack winter.” They gave us winter clothes and summer clothes. “You don’t know where you’re going and don’t even speculate.” They let us ship a footlocker, what—

MMH: About like that (gesture).

JH: About like that of anything we wanted to an overseas base. That’s one advantage of being in the Air Corps, rather than on the ground, where you carried everything in your duffel bag. So my crew, we packed everything we wanted, thought we’d want overseas. That was shipped. We didn’t know where, but they put us on a train and sent us to—well, I’ll regress. Several of the crews flew their own airplanes out of Great Bend. I was a junior. I was still a second lieutenant. No, I was a first lieutenant, but I had just made first lieutenant in December of ’44. So I was a junior aircraft commander and my crew didn’t get an airplane to fly overseas. We were put on a train and headed west to Hamilton Field, just north of San Francisco. When we were there a couple, three days, I don’t remember exactly, and they put us on a C-54 transport. I didn’t know whether we were going to Alaska or we were going to Panama or we whether were going to the Pacific somewhere.

LC: Just had no clue?

JH: Had no idea, but we did have—when we got on the airplane, they gave me a set of orders for my whole crew. “Don’t open this for two hours after you’re off this base.” So we opened it in Guam. We landed in Honolulu and Johnston Island, and maybe (unintelligible), I don’t know where. Anyway, but we got to Guam first.

LC: Let me ask, before I ask you about Guam, what did you do?
MMH: Well, he took me home at Christmastime and I stayed with Mother and Daddy again.

LC: Okay. That was the plan that you had devised, that she would stay?

MMH: They always seemed glad to have me. I don’t know whether they were or not.

JH: They were.

LC: I’m going to guess they probably were. I’m going to guess they were. Let’s take a break for just a second. Now Jim, you mentioned the route that you were taking out to the Pacific. Did you fly any of that or were you cargo?

JH: Cargo on a C-54.

LC: Your crew was with you?

JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: Were you all understanding that you would fly together as a crew? There was that integration had already occurred? Okay. Can you tell me about the guys that were in your crew at that time, and their names, if you can remember?

JH: Sure. My co-pilot was from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He was still a second lieutenant. He had come from B-17s into the B-29 program. Let’s see. I was about probably—this is ’44. I was twenty-five.

LC: All of twenty-five.

JH: ’45, yeah, just before and he was still twenty-one.

MMH: He was old.

LC: He was—you were the old man, and he was just a nipper, huh?

JH: Yeah, an old man. Then we had—

MMH: Tell her his name.

JH: Oh, his name was Francis Thompson.

LC: Thompson, okay.

JH: From Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I’ll tell you, I’ll just go back through the airplane rather than sides. I will tell you we had five officers and six enlisted men. The engineer was a tech sergeant. His name was Donald Leber. I think he was originally from California. Then the next one would be my navigator who was 1st Lt. Eugene Victor from New York City. My radio operator was Ernest Vick, who was probably nineteen. He was
from Ellijay, Georgia. Now that’s all of the people in the front cockpit. Then we had, in
the pressurized compartment, we had a long tube over the bomb bays that went back to
the gunner compartment. That was pressurized, too. Then in the gunner compartment, the
CFC gunner originally was John Keough. He was a staff sergeant from Wallingford,
Connecticut. The right gunner was Donald Komor from Birmingham, Alabama, probably
nineteen at that time. My left gunner was Marvin Beatty, who was from Rochester, New
York, and he was probably twenty-three. He was next to me as being the old man on the
crew. Our radar operator, initial radar operator, was a first lieutenant named John Segal.
He was from Chicago. He sat just in the compartment just aft of the gunner’s
compartment. That was a radar station and also had a storage place in that same
compartment. Then that’s the end of the pressurized area, except it had a tube that went
on back to the tail gunner’s compartment, a small tube about so big (gesture) to
pressurize it. He would have to crawl through an open area.

LC: I’ve seen that, yeah.

JH: Okay. His name was John Turrell and he was nineteen. He was from New
York City. When we got to Guam, we were met by a six-by-six truck and all loaded on it.
It took us up to what we called a bivouac area. Just huge berms of jungle had been
bulldozed out and nothing but red, red, red, red dirt all around. We had about three
wooden-type buildings with screens on them that were the headquarters, operations, and a
dining hall. They pulled us up in front of a big pile of canvas and says, “That’s your tent.
When you pitch it, you’ll have a place to sleep tonight,” all eleven of us. I said, “Where
are the cots?” He said, “You have your sleeping bag on the ground.”

LC: Wow. That’s it.

JH: So we got busy, pitched our tent, and I don’t know how long it was, but after
a couple, three weeks, or something like that, they came to us and said, “Okay, you
officers, we have some Quonset huts back down here that need to be built. If you want to
move out of here and go build your Quonset hut then in between missions you can go
down there and build your Quonset hut.” The enlisted men—we got cots before we left
the tent.

LC: Okay. So you’re off the ground at least.
JH: Off the ground. So the enlisted men still stayed in those tents, but we officers joined with another crew—they put two crews to one Quonset—and built our Quonset hut. It was nice. It was nice. Believe me. (laughs)

LC: It was better than the ground. How many crews were there? Were guys coming in as you were at the same time?

JH: Well, some of them had gotten there before us and some of them—we'll, we were the last ones there.

LC: You were about the last ones.

JH: Initial crews, yeah. We'd get replacement crews later. I don't remember exactly how many crews to a group now. We had three squadrons to the group. We had the 30th Bomb Squadron, 28th Bomb Squadron, 93rd Bomb Squadron. If I remember correctly, we each had eleven airplanes, each squadron. We had a flight leader, who in our case was a major, an aircraft commander. We would always fly on daylight missions. We would fly in a nine-ship formation in elements of three in a, “V,” type. I was, after about the second mission, I became an element leader of the right hand element, flying on the right wing of the three echelon.

LC: How soon after you got to Guam did you start to fly missions?

JH: I got to Guam on, I think it was, the twenty-fifth of February or something like that. I flew my first mission I believe it was the sixth or the ninth of March.

LC: So about a month?

JH: About ten days, maybe, eleven or something like that.

LC: Okay, sorry. What did they tell you about your missions?

JH: We always had a mission briefing, a very detailed mission briefing about the target, what we could expect in the way of anti-aircraft, what we might expect in fighters, the forecast weather, which was very unreliable because there were no reporting stations west of Japan. It was just kind of a guess on weatherman’s part. We would be briefed on the type of bombs we would carry, the target we were going to hit, and the purpose of the type bomb for the target. That was just about it for the briefing. Usually it took about thirty to forty minutes for this total briefing. Then we would be put on trucks and taken to our airplane and do our preflight. Then our engine start time, about ten minutes before our start time, we would all be in our seats ready to fire up. Then we fired up, taxi out and
just have a long stream of airplanes down the taxiway taking off at thirty-second
intervals. At the end of the runway, there would be an operations officer with a green
light gun. When it was our turn to release our brakes—first, he would put a yellow light
on. That means we would come up to full power. Then he’d turn the green light on and
we’d release our brakes and go.

LC: He’s standing there with this device like a gun almost that had some kind of
light on the end of it? About how far away is he standing from the—?
JH: He’s standing off the edge of the runway, probably just a hundred feet from
where we were.

LC: Is he getting radio signals? Does he have headphones on and so on?
JH: From the tower, mm-hmm.
LC: Okay. Jim, this is a very important thing that you’re telling us about so of
course any details you want to pitch in, very interesting.

MMH: The crew chief. Tell her about your crew chief, Cecil. You didn’t mention
him.

LC: Now this is the ground crew?
MMH: Very important man in my life.
LC: Oh, yes ma’am.
JH: Well, before our first mission, I was given my airplane, our crew airplane.
We flew the same airplane every mission as long as it was in commission to fly.
LC: The crew would stay together. They would stay with an aircraft. Did you
stay with a ground crew and a crew chief?
JH: We didn’t stay with them. They were separate from our air crew in the
bivouac area, but our air crew worked closely with them in the aircraft preparation. If, for
example, the ground crew consisted of five people it had a crew chief and four helpers. If
it got beyond their capability, they had what they called crew maintenance that would
come in, but our air crew would come down after they got their rest, come down and
assist in doing various things. The armaments section—I’m sorry, the bomb section
would come down and load the bombs for us for whatever the type mission was. The
ground crew, they would assist, but they were not responsible for loading them. That’s a
technique in itself to make sure that they’re properly engaged there so that when the
bombardier flicks a switch it will open.

   JH: So that was the coordination she was talking about. Just as she said, I give
Cecil Corley, my ground crew chief, a great deal of responsibility for me being here
today because he took such good care of the airplane.

   MMH: We still are friends with him.
   JH: We still have dinner or lunch with him once every three or four months.
   LC: Does he live down in the Dallas area? Fort Worth?
   JH: In Greenville.
   MMH: They lived there first. They lived in Dallas.
   JH: About seventy-five miles from where we are now.
   LC: So you still see him?
   MMH: Call him, talk on the phone.
   LC: How wonderful. That’s really, really special.
   MMH: I thank him every time I see him.
   JH: I still have two crewmembers that are still alive that I keep in touch with, two
air crew members. My last bombardier—we changed a few people—my last bombardier
and my original co-pilot, but he is so ill. He’s hardly hanging on.
   LC: Where does he live?
   JH: Right now they’re in Spokane, Washington.
   LC: Okay.
   JH: My bombardier lives in the winters in Las Vegas and in the summers in
Smithfield, Michigan.
   MMH: I was going to say I think I took better care of him. He was the old man
on the crew and most of them are gone.
   LC: I guess you did a pretty good job, Minnie Mae. I’d say he’s in fine shape.
   MMH: I’m bragging on myself. (laughs)
   LC: So you had a very close working relationship, which I’m sure you cultivated,
with those guys on the ground crew. You’ve described the flight, the pattern that you
were in. How many missions did you fly? Let’s start there.
JH: Thirty-five.

LC: That was what you had to fly in order to rotate out? Is that right?

JH: That’s correct.

LC: Okay. Did you ever encounter fighter aircraft, Japanese fighter aircraft?

JH: Hm-mmh. Let me go back a little bit. We got the green light for takeoff. I don’t remember now the length of the runway. Off the top of my head, I think maybe eighty-five hundred feet. Not extremely long like we have today. A B-29 was originally designed for max gross load of a hundred and twenty thousand pounds. We were flying a hundred and thirty-five thousand, a hundred and thirty-eight thousand.

LC: Because of how much—

JH: How much fuel, how many bombs. The stalling speed of the airplane was just about the same number of miles per hour as the gross weight, 135,000 pounds 135 miles an hour. So you want to be above 135 miles an hour before you broke ground. A lot of the pilots thought that meant that if you break ground at 135, well, taking off at Guam, at North Field, Guam—there were three airports, three Air Force airports on Guam. One was Harmon Field in the middle of the island where the transport airplanes came in. No combat there. Then the other was, Northwest Field where the 315th Bomb Wing was. They had a special mission we weren’t involved in. The 314th Wing that the 19th Bomb Group was in was at North Field. So our runway started out with a little bit of a slope down. Then it had a little sway on it, just a little bit of an up rise on the far end for takeoff. Beyond that, they had several hundred yards, four or five hundred yards, of the jungle cleared away in case you had to skid through that, but there was still a problem. The end of the runway to the edge of a cliff of Guam was roughly a little over a quarter of a mile, maybe as much as a half mile, anyway, something close to that. It was jungle beyond that cleared part on over to the edge of a six-hundred-foot cliff. So what we were always worried about was losing an engine on takeoff. If we did that, there was hardly any way you were going to survive getting over that jungle and be able to dive down. We had many crashes into that jungle.

LC: You did.

JH: Loss of an engine crash.

LC: Why were the engines coming away on takeoff?
JH: A lot of times an engine just goes out for no given reason. It just quits.

LC: So it would just quit, it wouldn’t actually come away from the airplane?

JH: No, it wouldn’t fall off.

LC: It would just die.

JH: It might internally come off. I mean, come apart internally.

LC: Just not functioning.

JH: Yeah, but anyway, I told my crew, I said, “The end of that runway is hard top and beyond that is a little bit of coral. Then it’s just nothing but dirt, but the end of that runway is where the nose wheels are going to come off the ground. I’m going to use as much speed as I can,” which was usually around 150 miles an hour. So in case I lost an engine I have 150 miles an hour to hopefully sustain. A lot of my contemporary aircraft commanders said, “Why are you doing that?” I said, “Here is the reason.” I just explained. “Well, that seems to make sense, maybe we won’t pull it off, won’t pull that nose wheel up so soon.” After we got to the edge of the cliff and dove down that six hundred feet, almost six hundred feet, we had good airspeed then and could go.

LC: You could get going?

JH: We had two different type missions. We had daylight formation missions. We had nighttime single-aircraft missions. Before we got there, the 93rd Bomb Wing over on Saipan, which is 125 miles closer to Japan than we were, had a lot of trouble at altitude hitting their targets because they bombed from west to east, had a bombing run from west to east. A bombing run consists of a point called an initial point. You fly that point and then you start your run to the target and that run is where you’ve got to hold that airplane straight and level at a certain altitude and airspeed for that bombardier to get his bomb site working correctly, the Norden bombsight. That’s where my training bombardier cadets came in. I had to do that for them to get their accuracy on their training bombs. So I was pretty adept at that.

LC: So it came back and paid off for you.

JH: It paid off, yeah. That’s why I made the comment that I did way back earlier.

LC: Absolutely.

JH: The 93rd had found that going from west to east the airplane had a ground speed—do you understand ground speed?
LC: Why don’t you explain it, just in case someone listening doesn’t?

JH: Okay. Ground speed is the speed the airplane actually moves across the ground, although it’s in the air, across the ground. That consists of the speed the airplane says it’s going on its airspeed indicator plus the wind it may have from the tail or the wind it may have from the nose or side wind. If it’s going nose-wise that wind will slow it down. The ground speed, it may read two hundred miles an hour on the airspeed indicator. If you have a thirty-mile an hour headwind, you’re going a hundred and seventy miles across the ground, same with the rear. If you have a tailwind 30 miles an hour, you’re going 230. They found they were going at their bombing speed—which is between 210 and 260 air speed—they were finding they were going almost 350 miles an hour ground speed. The bombardier just couldn’t synchronize.

MMH: I’d imagine.

LC: Going too fast.

JH: Nobody knew anything about the quote, “jet stream,” in those days. That was the first indication aviation had of jet streams.

LC: Is that right?

JH: That’s right. So General LeMay came over from England.

LC: Curtis LeMay, right?

JH: Curtis LeMay, yeah. He says, “Guys, we ain’t hacking it. We’re going to change things. If we get good forecasts on weather and they can tell me that the wind probably aren’t going too strong, we may fly daylight formation at the high altitude bombing,” which we did on several, many missions, “Or we’re going to go in where we can really put the bombs on the target, between five thousand and twelve thousand feet at night, single ship.” Boy, we air crew says, “Wait.” This is in our minds and in our private conversations, never question LeMay. In our minds, we said, “Man, they could throw a sink up and get us there!” Well, fortunately, their anti-aircraft, they didn’t have very many automated aircraft. Radar aircraft, those things are all automated for twenty-five, thirty thousand feet, twenty to twenty-five thousand feet calibrated for that type of thing. So fortunately, we’re moving fast enough they couldn’t find us. The anti-aircraft fire wasn’t as hectic at those low altitudes as we had anticipated, but the thermal clouds that were generated by preceding bomb drops, those clouds were the most horrendous thing
I’ve ever been in my life. The fire—first of all, these night missions were primarily incendiary bomb missions. We burned out huge parts of various cities around the factories. The primary reason around the factories was because the Japanese would contract out or make a contract specify, “You have this sort of machine, you’re going to do this kind of job. You have an electric saw, you’re going to do this in homes.” So there was no feeling, compassionate feeling on our part, young guys, about letting those homes burn outside of the factory complex itself.

LC: So you were thinking that these, although the description might be civilian, that in fact they were part of the war effort?

JH: Yes. That was our briefing. That was the LeMay’s concept.

LC: You guys all pretty much accepted that and felt that was probably correct?

JH: Correct.

LC: So emotionally, you were okay?

JH: Had no emotion about it.

LC: Okay. So there wasn’t any emotion with it.

JH: No, because what we had heard of the atrocities on the islands and all the POWs were getting, we could hear about it. We had no—

LC: No compunction about doing this. Okay. So the incendiary missions, you were talking about the clouds.

JH: The big incendiaries would cause huge clouds. If we were going—if there was not a huge wind to move that cloud away from the target complex and it just came up, we had to go through that cloud, put our bombs close to the target, at least. Once you got in that thing you were hoping you’d come out right side up.

LC: Because you had no way to check your—

JH: Only way was our instruments.

LC: So you’re flying only instruments?

JH: Only instruments, but up or down and sideways—

MMH: It was rough.

JH: The bombardier or the radar operator, bombardier couldn’t see anything, so the radar operator was the one who was zeroing in on the target area where the bombardier would drop the bombs. That was the worst environment I’ve ever been in,
including severe thunderstorms. In fact, on one mission, my CFC gunner’s pedestal, he
sat in this rotating seat, that came loose from the floor of the airplane. It didn’t hurt him,
fortunately, but it came loose. We used to lose a lot of rivets in airplanes bouncing around
like that with the wings.

LC: Now the bouncing, was that because of the different pressures inside and
outside the clouds? So you’re just getting banged all around?

JH: See, when these clouds come up, they swirl like this. So on this side you may
go up. This side you’re going down. Just swirling like that.

LC: So it would really toss you around.

JH: Oh, really.

LC: You’re in formation.

JH: No, single ship.

LC: No, this is single ship? Okay. Okay.

JH: Another sweat on that was, we had an exact time, exact altitude to be over
that target. If this guy up here is early, he drops his bombs and here I come, the
possibility of him—we never did have this occur, but it was always a big sweat and no
one—I shouldn’t say no one. If there were many, many that never did make it exactly on
time and either before or early or late over the target, but we, to my knowledge, we never
did lose an airplane by friendly fire.

LC: Now I have seen photographs taken from inside a B-29, flying in formation
with the bombs raining from all of the aircraft at the same time. I think that’s what you’re
describing.

JH: No, that’s daylight formation.

LC: Oh, that’s with the formation bombings?

JH: Yeah, that’s daylight formation.

LC: Okay. So with the single-mission bombs, single-plane missions, you might
be on one, someone else might be simultaneously also on a single-plane mission, flying
to a point and dropping.

JH: Lots of them.

LC: Like how many?

JH: Oh, like—
LC: I mean, say with one major city area.

JH: One major city? Probably be over 150 airplanes, but it would start at maybe midnight. Then every three minutes or every two minutes or something another airplane was there and so forth. It would take a long time for the whole mission to be over the target.

LC: Right because they’re coming in this kind of graduated way, incrementally.

Where was a mission like that planned? Was there a headquarters on Guam itself that was making all of those design decisions?

JH: Right. General LeMay’s headquarters was on Guam, 21st Bomber Command under the 20th Air Force. His staff would plan the whole mission. Each group, each wing, would get their requirement and then it’d be passed down to the group for our participation in it. Everything was outlined, our takeoff time, time over target, altitude, flight, everything was already prepared for us.

LC: Now over your thirty-five missions, how many of those were nighttime missions? Can you guess?

JH: You know, I could count in my diary. I kept a diary. I don’t know whether I sent you one or not. Oh, no, I didn’t because it didn’t involve Vietnam. I kept a diary of that so I could count that. I would say probably sixty-forty, sixty night and forty day.

That’s just off the top of my head.

LC: Now from a pilot’s perspective, which would you rather fly? Which did you feel better flying, the nighttime single missions?

JH: Daylight formations.

LC: I guess I’d have to say, knowing nothing about it, I would, too. Can you go ahead and just take us through why that would be the case? It’s sort of evident, but go ahead and just tell us.

JH: Well, being the case here, it’s daylight. You can see all around you. One problem was in daylight you get the fighters, but not in the dark. You just had the feeling of camaraderie with nine airplanes that you’re a part of. You know this guy’s leading this one, I’m leading this one. You know this guy’s leading this one. You know they’re wingmen, and—

LC: You’re together.
JH: You’re together. What you can expect of each one. On that type mission the lead ship is the lead bombardier. The rest of the ones are just toggle—what we call toggle—on the first bombs we saw come out of the lead airplane. Toggle means you flip a switch and our bombs go at the same time. If it was set up on interim the bomb would drop here, here, here, here, here. Then we’d have the same intervalometer setting back here on the bombardier’s panel. If it was just a mass drop the lead plane would just go with all the others. That’s what you’ve been seeing mostly, I think. The pictures I’ve seen just looks like just mass instead of intervalometer. Another point was—oh, about the fighters. When we first started flying in March, when I first started flying in March, we didn’t have any fighter support for ourselves. I’ve forgotten now at what month. It was some time probably in late April or early May, Iwo Jima became secure enough that they moved in a fighter wing there, P-51s. It had, I think it was three B-29 mother ships for them they called it. Based on what the mission was, the daylight mission was, these B-29s would take off, the fighters would take off. This mother ship would lead them to the target area that each group of 51s were assigned to protect. Then so the mother ship would head back to the Iwo and the fighters would do their thing with Japanese fighters. If there weren’t too many of them they’d go down and do their work on the ground and then they’d come back up. After we finished our bomb run they’d hook onto one of our airplanes, which went right over Iwo anyway, and just fly in formation until we got to Iwo and they’d land.

LC: They’d drop out?

JH: Mm-hmm. We had a procedure—the P-51 silhouette looks much like a Japanese “Tony.” It was hard for the gunner to determine which was which. So we had a procedure that the 51 never did come toward you to hook onto you like this. They came like this and kind of slid over, with the nose still pointing away (gesture).

LC: So the silhouette would look different?

JH: That’s right. So we knew it was friendly rather than coming at us, but there were some P-51s who got friendly fire on them. Not shot down, but got friendly fire. “Hey, guys!” (laughs)

LC: I bet there was some radio traffic over that. I can only imagine. Let’s talk about the night missions a little bit more. Did you, or did you hear of—did you
experience or did you know of ground-based anti-aircraft fire on during those night
missions by March of 1945?

JH: Never did have, to my knowledge. I don’t remember anyone ever reporting
damage from ground fire.

LC: That’s really extraordinary. It tells you—

JH: There was probably some, but I didn’t here about it. I never did. I think it
was because they couldn’t aim at us directly. They couldn’t see us.

LC: So there still were—did your briefings provide information that there was
active anti-aircraft defenses in Japan, but they just couldn’t reach you?

JH: They could always say what intelligence would tell them, that there was
this—you could expect this many anti-aircraft batteries around a given target. Let’s see,
another point I was going to make right there. I’m trying to think.

LC: It’ll come back to you, sure. At nighttime, did you ever, any of your missions
or ones that you heard about, get that enemy fire interference?

JH: No. Not that I know of.

LC: Man, that’s just incredible.

JH: We would get searchlights until we got in the cloud, and searchlights had a
big psychological effect on us.

LC: Can you describe that?

JH: Well, my very first mission, it was a nighttime mission, but it was a high
altitude formation. We left IP (initial point), headed toward the target in Nagoya. I don’t
remember the name of the aircraft factory. About halfway to the target, about three
searchlights got us, and man, you talk about bright in the cockpit. It was scary, but we
kept going straight. My bombardier got real upset. He was just excited. In fact, he didn’t
even release the bombs over the target.

LC: Because he was rattled by—

JH: Yeah. So I said, “We’re going to make a 360, we’ll come back, second time
over the target.” Vern Davis was his name. Wait a minute, I didn’t mention him.

MMH: No, he was your first one.

JH: I didn’t even mention the bombardier earlier. Vern Davis from, somewhere
in New York, northern New York, was my first bombardier. So I said, “Vern.” I said to
the whole crew, “Hey guys, we’re going to make another run. We didn’t drop our bombs.” So we did, but the second time the lights got us again and they stayed with us all the way over the target. Man, once those bombs were out of the bomb bay I made a diving turn and got out of the lights in a hurry. Then everything settled down. They were a real psychological menace.

LC: Absolutely.

JH: Once they got you because you knew if they got you that the anti-aircraft guns could see you.

LC: Could train on you, they could train on you. That didn’t—I mean, for you that did not follow?

JH: Well, on the lower altitude missions, it did. This was high altitude.

LC: How high were you?

JH: Oh, we were probably at twenty-two thousand, somewhere in that twenty-two to twenty-five thousand.

LC: It’s still extraordinary that the lights were powerful enough.

JH: Oh, yeah.

LC: I could see how that would rattle your cage a little bit, actually, more than a little bit.

JH: I might say, in that respect, mentioning altitude, I mentioned earlier about being pressurized?

LC: Yes.

JH: We never did go over the target pressurized. We always went over the target with our oxygen masks on.

LC: Can you explain why that was?

JH: Yes, because if we got a hit in a pressurized compartment we might have explosive decompression and we’re gone. So being unpressurized over the target with our escape hatches open so we could bail out if we had a problem, but then once we left the homeland of Japan and got out over the ocean we went back to pressurization.

LC: How long did the pressurization and depressurization process take when you would—?

JH: Once you turn it off, it goes down almost immediately.
LC: Right away? Okay. So there wasn’t any gradualization there, just—
JH: It might take three or four, five minutes, something like that.
LC: At most. Okay. Who was responsible for making that transition?
JH: The flight engineer on my command.
LC: Did you get to decide who on the aircraft? Was that something that you as a
pilot had discretion over? Which member of the crew would take care of that, the
pressurization issue or was that standard operating?
JH: No, he, the pilot, co-pilot and he had a switch that would turn off the
compressor, but it was the aircraft commander’s responsibility to determine when that
would be done, unless there was an emergency. In emergencies, the flight engineer
automatically turned it off. He didn’t have anything to do except monitor the whole
airplane, all the radio instruments and switches and all. Plus the pilot and co-pilot had to
worry about staying in the air.
LC: A few other things. So that was essentially his duty as a basic item. Okay. Is
there any mission that you remember particularly that you can share or more than one?
JH: My navigator was quite a writer.
LC: A writer?
JH: A writer. He wrote up an overview of this particular mission that, well, a
wonderful overview. He started with the time we’d wake up, the briefing, go down to the
airplane, get the airplane ready, pull our propellers through, get in, start number one,
number two, and so forth. Detail, right on up through the whole mission, come back,
landing and all. Remind me and I’ll send her a copy.
MMH: Oh, that’s wonderful. It’s a wonderful story.
JH: It’s about how a mission goes. Anyway, this particular mission was a
formation over Osaka, Japan. I think it was the sixth of June, but anyways it was in June
of ’45. We were in our nine-ship formation, the 19th Bomb Group—I mean the 30th
Squadron of the 19th Bomb Group. I was a number two element leader. After we left the
IP en route to the target over Osaka my right wingman called and said, “Jim, I’ve just lost
an engine.” I think the number four—that’s immaterial. “I’ve just lost an engine. I can’t
keep up.” We had fighters. So I said to the flight leader, number one element, I forgot
what his name was—Tobin I think his name was. I said, “Number one,” or whatever I
said, “I’ve got to drop back,” and give Lorent the extra firepower that we can afford to
give him a two-ship formation rather than a three-ship. Rather than a single-ship
formation, with the fighters, they would knock him down.

LC: Now these are Japanese?
JH: Japanese fighters.
LC: Enemy fighters. Okay.
JH: We didn’t have P-51s in the area, for some reason.
LC: Okay. On this mission, you had no cover?
JH: No.
LC: Okay. No fighter cover.
JH: I told him my number, my left wingman to join up under the lead element. I
asked Lorent what airspeed he could hold and he told me. I pulled back and we flew
formation, just a two-ship formation. The fighters just came after us like wasps. We got a
little anti-aircraft fire also. We both dropped our bombs on target. We continued on
target. Then after target we peeled away. That’s when the fighters really began to get us.
My airplane, I had over sixty holes in it. One of them was through the top part from the
center fuselage going down and out the far side of the bomb bay, about this big around
(gesture), and through the tube that we crawl through from the front compartment to the
aft compartment. The other sixty holes were just all over the airplane. Lorent got quite a
few too, but we got him back to Iwo Jima. He landed there to get repairs and then we
went on home, but that was the mission that I was the most satisfied. I got the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) for that.

LC: Jim, can you tell me about the tactics that you used and the tactics that the
enemy used? How did you—why did you not get shot down? Truly. Good flying? Good
equipment?
JH: No.
MMH: The Lord.
JH: Good airplane. We stayed basically, no evasive action.
LC: None?
JH: No, not on the IP especially because you have to give the bombardier that
stable platform for the bomb. Regardless of what happens outside that airplane he has got
to be able to synchronize that bomb site so that the bombs will hit the target. You don’t
do anything except fly straight and level.

LC: You as the pilot prioritize the dropping of the bombs over evasive action,
regardless of the—

JH: That’s right. It’s just the gunners and our support airplanes on the other
wings, it all helps. Once you’re in a nine-ship formation you’ve got terrific firepower
against fighters, but they’ll sneak in on you. The first fighter I ever remember seeing was
coming in from ten o’clock and I saw these little pink specs. I thought, “That looks just
like a movie.” Then I thought, “Hey, it’s real!” I got my armored vest out on me and all
that. I called in the fighter at ten o’clock and the bombardier shot him down, thank
goodness.

LC: Did shoot him down?

JH: Yeah.

LC: Did you see that happen? Were you watching that all?

JH: I was watching that, yeah.

LC: Can you describe what you saw?

JH: Well, oh, man. The bombardier saw him about the same time I did, I guess,
because all of a sudden there was nothing but a ball of fire out there. After I first saw
those little pink things, I mean he just peeled down. He was a good way from us when he
was shooting at us.

LC: How close?

JH: Oh, he was probably—he never probably didn’t get within maybe seventy-
five or a hundred yards of us when he exploded.

LC: A hundred yards?

JH: A hundred yards. Well—

LC: That feels close.

MMH: Pretty close.

JH: Well, we’ve had them come through the formation, either already shot out or
already shot up coming through the formation. In some cases hitting an airplane or
luckily missing the whole thing.

LC: That close?
JH: Yeah, but after we leave the bombing target, then we kind of loosen up a little bit in our formation. Formation flying is very precise. I don’t know if—what you do is you get a point on my airplane and a point on the airplane you’re flying a wing on. You line those two points up. If one point starts moving a little forward you’re gaining. You pull back on the throttle just a little bit. You stabilize so those two points stay right together.

LC: You were doing this all visually. Of course, this isn’t how it’s done anymore, but—

JH: That’s right.

LC: You were just doing this by reckoning, by just visual reckoning?

JH: Visual reckoning, yep.

LC: Tell me about landing from that mission. Your compatriot in the other plane landed at Iwo Jima. You flew on back to Guam?

JH: Yeah, after we left, after the group left the homeland of Japan, we each on our own to get back home. The engineering section of the group gives us a proposed altitude to fly and a proposed power setting, depending on fuel level. If your fuel is running low, you run a little slower so they don’t burn quite as fast, but you’re still—in other words, you don’t use as much fuel. So it’s up to the pilot then to make that decision. So we would be on our own.

LC: Now when you brought the aircraft in, of course you didn’t know it had sixty holes, but you probably could guess you had a few.

JH: Had a bunch.

LC: Any hydraulics problems while you were landing or anything like that?

JH: No.

LC: So all of your flaps and everything were functional?

JH: Fortunately.

LC: Your landing gear? No problems. So you just put it down to a beautiful landing?

JH: Yeah. We knew we had holes because the gunners would tell us, “Your right wing has, I can see such-and-such. I can see such-and-such.” Then we knew that big hole was through the center there because it was open.
LC: Open draft, right. How big was that hole?
JH: It was probably—what? Fourteen, sixteen inches, something like that.
Through the skin of the fuselage and then it decreased in the tube because it had maybe
ten feet to go after it exploded and then tore into the tube and tore into the far side of the
tube.

LC: Now did you guys all go and have a beer after that, or what?
JH: I wasn’t a drinker. In fact—
LC: That was a good thing, probably.

JH: Speaking of that, after every combat mission and after we landed and we’d get off and be taken back up to the intelligence briefing hut, but outside that, there’d be a table with Red Cross girls behind it and serve you a little shot of whiskey, kind of calm you down when you went into intelligence for debriefing. All my guys would fight to see who got behind me, to see who got seconds.

LC: Because you were going to go right past that? I’ll bet they did.
JH: That’s right. The same way we officers—this is way off the subject—we officers would get, or were allowed, one bottle of liquor every week. I didn’t drink so I’d always give that to my enlisted crew because they didn’t get it. One of my other officers also didn’t drink and he—so, the enlisted crew, if they had a drink, they’d share it with the ground crew. So they had good camaraderie there.

LC: Yeah, that was a very good thing to do as a commander.
JH: Coming back from a mission like that, after we landed, everything’s fine.

We’re happy.

LC: I bet you were.
MMH: Did you mention your flag?
JH: Oh, Cecil Corley, my grandmother knew Cecil’s mother, sent him a Texas flag. He put it on a broomstick. He came to me and he said, “Lieutenant, would you fly this flag out the window of your airplane on taxi, and then after you land, slow down, open your window, and do it again?” I said, “Well, the co-pilot can do that. I’ll be busy flying, I mean, landing and taking off.” I mean, taxiing. So, every mission, my copilot would hoist that Texas flag out the copilot’s window from the time we left the hard stand, down the taxiway, until he had to close his window for takeoff. Then he had to give it
back to the engineer. He’d fold it up and roll it up and hide it somewhere. When we got
down and landed and slowed down enough at the end of the runway he could open his
window again, here came the Texas flag. That flag is now in the Frontiers of Flight
Museum in Love Field in Dallas.

LC: Is it really?

JH: It’s not on display.

LC: Now did Mr. Corley give that to them?

JH: No, he gave it to—originally, after World War II, this is way, way off story, after World War II—no, no, no, not after World War II. Going way back for the 19\textsuperscript{th}
history. Now, they were at Clark Field on December the seventh, 1941.

LC: The 19\textsuperscript{th} Bomb Group was?

JH: The 19\textsuperscript{th} Bomb Group and B-17s. Early B-17s, not the ones like what was all over Europe. On December the eighth, 1941, which was December the seventh at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese bombed Clark Field two hours after they bombed Pearl Harbor. They tore up a lot of the 19\textsuperscript{th} airplanes there. Eventually, the 19\textsuperscript{th} was evacuated from there with whatever they could and took MacArthur to Australia. Then they flew out of Australia, moved up to Java a while, got run out of there, and then bummed around. Then they came back in late ’42, I think it was, to Pyote Army Airfield, which is about roughly a hundred miles west of Midland, Texas. They did combat crew training there for a while.

Then they were deactivated and became the 19\textsuperscript{th} Bomb Group, Very Heavy, for B-29s in mid-1944. Then when it got to be Great Bend then in early August, maybe late July, they began to accumulate all the air crews. The B-17 crews at Pyote did not go to Great Bend.

LC: Okay. So the flag that got put at Love Field—

JH: Oh. It started out that, later, after World War II now, because there had been a 19\textsuperscript{th} at Pyote, the Ward County commissioner decided to make—one of his commissioners for that particular precinct decided to make a museum of the history of Ward County. In addition to the building that she had for that, there was a lot of extra room. She had a good friend in Monahans, which is sixteen miles away that had a big military collection. She asked him to put the military collection in there. A lot of it was from the 19\textsuperscript{th} days when they were at Pyote. So our 19\textsuperscript{th} Bombardment Association, back in the day we have annual reunions, decided to make that a repository for anything any of
our people want to send to it. So the flag went to Pyote first, but this little museum was
only open on the weekends. Pyote now is a little town of about three hundred people. No
signage on Interstate 20. It comes right through the middle of Pyote without saying
there’s a museum there. So everything that’s in that museum is just kind of stagnant. I
went to the county commissioner who we became pretty good friends and I said, “You
know, I want to take that flag out of here.” She said, “I don’t blame you. Take it. Go.” So
I kept it in my garage until a couple, three months ago when Frontiers of Flight built a big
brand new museum on Love Field.

LC: I haven’t been there yet, but I hear it’s something else.

MMH: It’s wonderful.

JH: It’s pretty good. They’ve got a lot of things to do on it yet, but I took that
plus several other artifacts over there.

MMH: You asked Cecil if he wanted to fly it.

JH: Oh, yeah. I asked Cecil a long time ago. He says, “No, Jim.” He says, “My
kids don’t want it and I don’t have any means for it.” I said, “Well, I don’t either, Cecil,
it’s hanging on my garage wall all framed, glass and all.” They did that Pyote. So I
donated that along with some other memorabilia.

MMH: Did you ever—Fowler writing up about your flag in the paper, in the
Dallas News? I mean the Times Herald.

JH: Well, during World War II when we were on Guam, the Dallas Morning
News had a war reporter over there named Wick Fowler famous for his chili cook offs
down in Terlingua.

LC: Oh, I think I’ve heard—okay. Uh-huh. He was on Guam.

JH: Yeah, as a war correspondent—

MMH: He came over there.

JH: He got wind of this Texas flag. So he came up and talked to Cecil Corley,
who was at the airplane all the time when it was on the ground. He talked to him and they
got me down there and holding the flag out the window, picture.

LC: Taking the picture. Oh, yeah.

MMH: It was in the paper, a big write up.

JH: “Texan does this.” We’ll crank Cecil into it ‘cause he was a Texan, too.
LC: Well, sure and he’s the one who had the flag, right?
MMH: Yeah.
LC: Now, let me ask you this. I like the flag story very much. Did you have a
name for your aircraft?
JH: City of Flatbush.
LC: The City of Flatbush? How’d that come about?
JH: Well, here’s the story on that. Most all wartime airplanes had girly nose art
on them.
LC: They sure did.
JH: Our wing commander, General Powers at the time, Tommy Powers, said, on
Guam said, “Any of your airplanes in this wing that have girly—they have nose art on
them eradicate it. We’re going to do something positive for the war effort. We’re going to
name every airplane in this wing after some city in the United States. You aircraft
commanders put in your request for a city.” So being from Dallas and my crew agreed,
Dallas. We put in a request from Dallas and it had already been assigned. Then they said,
“Well, take Minnie Mae’s home Irving.” Well, Irving had already been assigned.
LC: Really?
JH: Yeah. So we said, “Where we go from here?” My navigator, Brooklyn, New
York.
LC: I remember you saying that.
JH: Says, “Well, let’s name it Flatbush.” “What is Flatbush?”
LC: Now was this Eugene—what was his name?
JH: Eugene.
MMH: He got Jim married. (laughs)
LC: Eugene Vic—
MMH: Victor.
JH: Victor. V-I-C-T-O-R. He said, “Let’s name it Flatbush.” Well, all of us little
young dummies didn’t know what Flatbush was. He said, “That’s a nickname for
Brooklyn.” So he said, “Oh, well, I need to regress the object of this whole program was
name your airplane. We’ll write a nice letter to the mayor,” in this case it’d be a borough
president or whatever you call them, or mayor of New York, whichever. In that case, it
was the mayor of New York and, “We’ll send this letter to him and say ‘Here’s what
we’ve done to advertise your city. What we want you to do is get some publicity on this
and say, ‘Hey folks. Here’s B-29 named after our city. Go out and buy some war bonds to
help support this war, build another B-29.’”

LC: Smart, very smart.

JH: So *The City of Flatbush*, that’s how *The City of Flatbush* came about. We got
a nice letter back from whoever was the mayor then. I’ve looked and looked for the copy
of that and I can’t find it.

MMH: Can’t find it.

LC: Now, did the plane get decorated at all?

JH: No.

LC: I mean, did it have *City of Flatbush* written on it or—?

JH: Well, yes. I’m sorry. In a big circle it had the North American continent on it.
Canada, Alaska, United States, Mexico, Central America. None of those were named.
The U.S. wasn’t named, but it was a different color. Wherever that city was in the United
States a pennant pole came out of that little, streamer with a pennant came out with *City
of Flatbush*.

LC: Now who did the art, do you know?

JH: We had several artists that could do that.

LC: This was all sort of centrally organized by the squadron then?

JH: By the wing.

LC: By the wing, oh, okay.

JH: Wing commander said, “I want all of you girly artists to come and see me
and here’s what we’re gonna do.”

MMH: It wasn’t near as much fun.

JH: It’s easy to find girly artists. (laughs)

LC: Well, I’m glad to have that story.

JH: That sure is far away from Vietnam.

LC: That’s all right. We’re getting there. We’re making good progress. You
mentioned in the notes that you provided that your last mission was at the end of July
1945. Now, let me ask how did you feel at that point? What were you thinking about how 

long the war might go on, just given what you were seeing as a pilot?

JH: On my thirty-fifth mission it was my crew’s thirty-fourth mission because I had to fly an orientation mission with another crew on my very first mission without any of my crew onboard.

LC: So you were one up on them?

JH: I was one up on them. I was planning to fly my thirty-sixth mission with my crew, but the wing had a policy. Thirty-five missions and that’s it. I went to my squadron commander and he said, “Oh, we can arrange that.” Then he went to the group commander and says, “Here’s the situation.” The group commander said, “Okay. We’ll do that,” but the wing flight surgeon came in and said, “Oops, sorry. He might psychologically be unable to continue to complete that mission because it’s an extra mission. I can’t let him fly that extra mission.”

LC: That doesn’t sound like it had anything to do with you or an evaluation of you. It was just a statement.

JH: No, not on me. It just might be. So, very sadly I didn’t get to fly my crew on their thirty-fifth mission, which was about four days later than mine, July the twenty-ninth. I sweated it out. They had a brand new aircraft commander from the other ten crew members. I really worried about them.

LC: You worried about them. What kind of—?

JH: Cecil Corley and I—well, after they took off we went back to get some bunk time because it’s a sixteen, seventeen, eighteen hour mission. We rested then, but we got—from when there’s about time to get back down there, back down there and it was a happy occasion because there was a company called in a “milk run.” We had heard, been told, in fact, that—I had been told before when I completed my thirty-fifth mission I was told, “You’re not gonna rotate back to the States, because all eastbound transportation has been frozen anticipating the invasion of Japan in November. Therefore we’re not allowing any eastbound releases at this time.” So I had to sit there. Then the two bombs were dropped and they opened it up.

LC: When did you find out about the atomic weapon having been dropped? Was it the day of Hiroshima?
JH: I think it was probably either the day or the next day and so much speculation around “What in the world is an atomic bomb?” It went all the way from being a capsule that the co-pilot’d throw out his window to being a huge thing like it really was. One navigator that was in our—I don’t know whether he was in our group or wing, group I think—had a buddy on Tinian. It was in the 509th. He went over there one day on some kind of transport just to visit his buddy. They wouldn’t let him even close to the airplanes, but the navigator in that group, 509th, told them. He says, “It’s a completely different configurated airplane.” So when he came back, he says, “I don’t know what they’re doing over there, but it’s something very unusual.” So once they dropped it and he had told us about—we just kind of assumed it was a big thing. We didn’t know what the power meant at that time, never heard of megatons.

LC: Never heard of megatons?

JH: I never heard of a megaton.

LC: What was your reaction? The fact that you didn’t know, you probably couldn’t visualize it.

JH: When we heard about it officially and heard what it had done, “Wow, one bomb does all that?” Then we heard about Nagasaki and “Wow!” But you know what? We, we being our nation, not all of the nation, being the ones who protest the use of the two atomic weapons over there and criticizing the killing of the number of people that those two bombs did, we killed a lot more people than that with our just regular bombing and fire raids. Fifteen percent of Tokyo was taken out on one raid. Think how many—I don’t remember how many people advertised taking them out, but it was equivalent to what Hiroshima was.

LC: Or more.

JH: Nobody screamed about that.

LC: What do you make of that, Jim?

JH: I don’t know. I don’t understand why people would not—would try to take apples versus oranges when they’re both apples, killing people. I had no compunction about the people I killed. Doesn’t bother me in the least today because we were doing it for a good cause that kept our nation and possibly a lot of the world free from that authoritarian dictatorship that was over there.
LC: Now let me just shift for a second and ask Minnie May. What did you—were you getting letters from him?

MMH: Every day.

LC: Every day?

MMH: Every day I wrote to him. Every day he wrote to me.

JH: Almost every day.

MMH: When he was able.

LC: Do you still have those letters?

MMH: Part of them, I saved nearly all of them. I don’t know how many we have, but a lot. You know, they didn’t come every day cause sometimes they would be two or three in a day and maybe not.

LC: They’d bunch up because of the service.

MMH: Now people call each other. You know, I have a friend whose son is in Korea. He calls his wife all the time.

LC: Yeah, can you even imagine?

MMH: No. ‘Cause we were so excited when we got a letter.

LC: I’m sure you must’ve been. You must’ve been.

JH: You know, I’d take the time flying back from a target, back to Guam, seven, eight hours. I’d take the time to write her a letter.

LC: You would let the co-pilot just kind of manage things while you would—

JH: Sure. Well, we had it on autopilot and the co-pilot and I would take naps all the way home. So.

LC: So you would write her a letter?

JH: Write her a letter.

LC: That was time well spent, I think.

MMH: I think I would tell her about your lunches. This is funny.

JH: Oh, this is off.

MMH: Well, she wants to know these little—

LC: That’s all right. That’s right.

JH: When we started flying our missions we’d get a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in a little sack. They’d give us maybe a big can of some kind of juice, which
had to split among—maybe it was two of those or three I don’t remember—to split
among the crew. Each person just got one peanut butter and jelly sandwich for a sixteen,
seventeen, eighteen hour mission. We complained to the group commander in our
preflight briefings. He went to the, we called it the mess officer, the dining officer, one
day the food service officer. He said, “Either they’re gonna get that adequate flight
lunches”—no, he didn’t say that. He said, “I’ve cautioned you about getting them some
adequate flight lunches. You’re scheduled for a combat mission with crew such and such
tomorrow.”

LC: That got him motivated.
JH: Yeah. So when he got back from that mission we began to get bologna
sandwiches, Spam sandwiches.

LC: So did you get enough so that you could have maybe a little snack as well?
JH: Yeah.
LC: You got a little bit more extra.
JH: Yeah. I’ve forgotten now what else, something else that was canned. There
was far removed from the flight lunches you get today when you make a flight in the
military airplane.

LC: I can imagine, you poor guys. Well, let’s take a break there.
MMH: Okay.
Laura Calkins: This is Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech continuing the oral history interview with Col. Jim Hall and with his wife Minnie Mae. Again, we’re all three of us sitting here in the interview room on the campus of Texas Tech and the date is the twenty-fourth of March 2005. Let’s continue, Jim, with your permission talking about your return to the U.S. after your service in the Far East.

Jim Hall: As I mentioned after completing my thirty-five missions I could not come home right away. I got home about the middle of September of 1945 and landed on a troop ship, landed in Oakland and took a troop train home. Troop commander of about two hundred troops as a captain back to Ft. Sam Houston where I originally entered the Army. After arriving there and resting for a night they put us in a theater one morning and said, “You have two choices. You can either get out of the Army right now or you can stay in Reserves and it’ll take you about three days to process all the paperwork and get you into the Reserves.” Well, I wanted to see this sweet young thing so I said, “I’m outta here. I’ll be home tonight,” which I did. So I went home. My father, as I mentioned earlier, had an automobile salvage business and he wanted me to come in business with him rather than to continue my apprenticeship as a tile setter, made my tile setter friends very unhappy and especially the president of the company. That’s another story. So I went to work for my father. Then the Reserve program opened up out of Hensley Field in Dallas, western Dallas. I guess it’s a combination of Grand Prairie, but Dallas actually owned it. It was in conjunction with a bomber plant I mentioned earlier, North American Bomber Plant where Minnie Mae worked. Initially we had AT-6s, single-engine trainer. Then we got some AT-11s and they formed a troop carrier wing then, a Reserve troop carrier wing, with the AT-11s just phasing out and C-46s coming in. So we would fly all kind of missions in Reserve, transporting people and/or material and going to the various airborne bases, Army Airborne bases to drop the troops on their training missions, parachuting training missions. Along comes the prospect of Vietnam, I mean of Korea. So we were all—the wing was recalled in to active duty in, I think it is late 1950 early ’51. In the meantime I had already been recalled on active duty as the former maintenance officer at Hensley Field on a program called Category R. That was a
commitment for three years that could be finalized either by commitment of the three
years or by war or by the wing being moved and my inability to move with it, but then
the Reserve all these recall for active duty and I stayed with the wing to Donaldson Air
Force Base, South Carolina. We were programmed get C-119s to replace the old World
War II C-46s, but I wasn’t happy being, the prospect of being a troop carrier pilot in
Korea. So I volunteered for A-26s.

MMH: Here he goes again.

JH: It was a little fighter-bomber, a real hot little airplane, World War II-type that
had their training school in Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. I was accepted, except that
I had to go to the Strategic Air Command Survival School at Fort Carson, Colorado, in
February of 1951, ’52.

MMH: Two.

JH: 1952. That was a two-week course. In February in the Rocky Mountains isn’t
a very good time to—

MMH: Survive.

JH: Be outside and survive, but it was really good training. They gave us six days
of classroom study. I mean, no, they didn’t. About four days, I guess. Then they took us
into the field to put this training into practice under supervision. Then with about a week
left, I’ll regress just a minute. In those days the B-36s and all were programmed for one-
way missions if we got in a fiasco with Russia, with the Soviet Union. They would fly
and drop their weapons and then fly as far as they could toward the Eastern Europe and
then bail out in the Soviet Union and hoped to be rescued. So this was the premise that
we worked on at the school, didn’t have anything to do with my A-26 except the survival
aspect.

LC: Right. This is SAC training.

JH: Yep, SAC training. So this particular morning about six or seven days before
the end of our course, they assembled us on a mountaintop and gave us a guide for each
crew, eleven-man crew and said, “Thirty-five miles over there is where we’re gonna
supposedly pick you up, land a troop carrier airplane and pick you up behind enemy
lines. So you have a plus or minus two hour leeway there to get there or you’re out of
luck.” Snow’s almost knee deep. During the outdoor activities they had given us regular
in-flight lunches which were really good lunches. In there they had a can of Hershey chocolate, little round can. I think it had three rounds of Hershey in it. So I saved those back because—I saved them back because they were going to, after we left this briefing on top of this mountain we were on our own to survive with food except that they gave us a Pemmican bar which is dehydrated compressed beef. We’d shave it, put it in our mess kit with some water and you’d build a fire and boil it or stir it up and eat it cold. That didn’t sound very appetizing to me so I saved these Hershey rounds and because we were supposed to either catch rabbits or shoot, no, not shoot birds, trap birds or whatever. I said, “Six days. Thirty-five miles. Man, we will be moving. We’re not gonna have any time to set up traps.” So we departed. They had aggressor forces throughout this whole area, the six miles, simulating Soviet military. If we got caught, then they would take us to an interrogation camp and interrogate us as though they were really Soviets. It really got nasty when they started talking about what was happening to our wives and our families back home and all that. They really made it realistic.

LC: They did make it realistic?

JH: Made it realistic and walking a couple of miles with your hands like this, you can’t believe how tiring your arm can get.

LC: Your hands folded over on top of your head.

JH: Folded over the top of my head. We got—I was a senior officer. I was a major and I’m a senior officer with eleven people therefore suggesting as the aircraft commander. We had Navy mixed in with us. So I said, “Guys, we don’t want to go as an eleven-man crew. It’s too easy to track. We split up in twos and we’ll try to stay pretty well abreast moving toward that point thirty-five miles over there. Not really in yelling contact. We’re not gonna yell because if these aggressors hear us—” Anyway, we got to a pretty lively road and I can see some of them getting into ditches. Me and my buddy were down in a ditch down over here. One of the couples way up the way made a run to cross the road. The aggressors run over there and caught them.

LC: Saw them.

JH: So then they came along the side and caught us, too. So we all marched in to the interrogation tent. We were kept there probably a couple of hours and being interrogated. Then they released us saying that if you get caught two more times you fail
the course. So you won’t have this training that you need. That was the only time we got caught. We got to our destination okay, within about an hour of the time for pickup. In fact, we just kind of sat back on the outskirts when we knew where we were for, I don’t know, three or four hours, waiting until time to get up real close.

LC: So you had to hang back, you hadn’t gotten there so good.

JH: Right. So then they had six-by-six trucks there to simulate these and took us back to Ft. Carson. Fed us a huge steak, as many steaks as we wanted.

MMH: Go back to your chocolate, what you’d do with that on your trip?

JH: Oh, well. Oh, yeah. Okay. I rationed myself. In the morning I would have one bite. Lunch I’d have one bite. Dinner I’d have one bite. That took three chocolates. So during up until about the third day I did pretty good, but after that I just could not wait for that minute when I could take a bite of chocolate. I mean I became a chocoholic. So after they released us, after we had these good steak dinners. I went down to Broadmoor Hotel, got a room, went to their gift shop and I bought a dozen bars of Hershey. I laid in my bed and ate chocolate. The next day on the commercial airplane going back to Greenville, South Carolina, we stopped in several little places, and I was running into the gift shop and grabbing chocolate. It took me about three months to get over that. I mean I really became addicted. Got back there and learned that my orders had been changed, no more A-26s. I was going to go to Kirtland Air Force Base to be in a nuclear test group, task force, I guess you’d call it, to support the atomic energy commission and their tests out in the Pacific. The sole purpose of the base at Kirtland was to support the atomic, you know, they called it the Special Weapons Center. The Air Force base wasn’t the center and they had one airplane of each type that the Air Force was going to marry a nuclear weapon to. So they would test on these various tests. So I was the operations officer to this task force, not a part of base compliment ready to go overseas. I got there in, I think it was March of ’52.

MMH: ’52, yeah.

JH: We left there in July of ’52 for—I think it was July, mid not the end of July, ’52 for Kwajalein Island where the Atomic Energy Commission was going to detonate a weapon on Eniwetok, actually Eniwetok Atoll because there’s several islands in the atoll and this was Elugelab, E-U-G-E-L-A-B, I think. We were stationed at Kwajalein. I was
operations officer of this task group and our mission was basically just to support whatever the AEC (Atomic Energy Commission) asks for and we’d transport it to the accommodations there at the Navy base at Kwajalein. On the day that—this was called Operation Ivy. On the day that the first thermonuclear bomb, Ivy Mike, was detonated I was flying an old C-47 thirty miles south Eniwetok and had about four or five AEC scientists and an equal number of AEC photographers. They wanted to—the scientists had just old-fashioned navigator sextants to check the ascension on the nuclear cloud as it went up. The photographers were to photograph it so they’d have a firm documentary. We had to actually have on the extra dark glasses to keep the flash from bothering us, but there were two other effects, thermal and blast. We didn’t feel a thermal effect, but we felt the blast effect thirty miles away after, I don’t know, a minute, maybe forty—I don’t know how many seconds maybe. That elevated us just five hundred feet just real quick like.

LC: Just like—
JH: Boom, inside of a thunderstorm or something.
LC: Instantly? It just bumped you right up?
JH: Mm-hmm.
LC: What did that feel like at the controls?
JH: Well, all you do there is hold the stick forward, keep her from turning like that, turning straight up. So we did that and survived easily, but it just doesn’t—kind of like a sonic boom if you’ve ever encountered one.
LC: Jim, can I ask you some questions about that?
JH: Sure.
LC: Were there other aircraft besides your own that were flying similar missions for photography and measurements?
JH: They had one C-54 that was configured very similar to ours, more sophisticated equipment and higher level scientists, I’m sure, on it. But the other airplanes that we had at Kwajalein were all our Air Force airplanes that we didn’t—we didn’t have a B-52 or B-36 or B-47. We had a B-47 there. Then a squadron of F-84 samplers and the B-47—that was the only one that practiced being in position as though it had actually dropped this device and then made it’s escape as though the bomb was still
near it to see what effect that would have on that airplane in that particular position. The F-84s were there to take samples of the cloud on filter sheets and bring them back and send them back to the laboratory at Los Alamos to be analyzed. Now the B-47 did his mission okay, but when he got back to Kwajalein the base was socked in with a thunderstorm, terrible thunderstorm, and he didn’t have very much fuel. There was a small Japanese island, I think it was Roi, R-O-I, in the Kwajalein Atoll. We told him, “Try that buddy. You can’t get in here because there’s no radar here. There’s no way you can see it. We can’t even see across the room hardly.” So he made it this time. The next day you see where he tore up all the old, old, old asphalt on those brakes. The next day we loaded a lot of fifty gallon drums of fuel with a hand crank pump, JP-4 and an old C-47, here I go up out of Roi and we crank all of this into that B-47, enough to get him home. He had JATO. That’s Jet Assisted Takeoff rockets on the side of the airplane to help him. It was a very high-density wing, high-loaded wing airplane. It took a long runway—

LC: To get it up?

JH: To get it off and this little runway, I think, was only maybe thirty five hundred feet, four thousand possibly, old, old, old asphalt. But he made that just fine with his JATO. Then we had a couple of other shots up there that we monitored. Not to the degree that we did this thermonuclear, the others were just normal nuclear shots.

LC: Not hydrogen bombs?

JH: Not thermonuclear. So I was only there about six or seven months. Came back to Kirtland. Was then assigned to the base group there as a flying safety officer and there I flew the T-33, the B-25, and then just administrative-type flying. Then along came task group, Task Force Castle in 1954. I was pulled into that task group, but before that in preparation I knew I was going to be pulled back in and it was part of the original assignment there was task group rather than just base people. So I was going to be the flying safety officer for the task group. I’ve got the number now. 132.40 over 7, I think, anyway for the Castle Air Force task group. We were going to have a bigger array of airplanes on this one than we did on the Ivy shot. So everyone would be Eniwetok because the shot was going to be at Bikini. So we had a B-36, a B-52—no, didn’t have a B-52 there. Had a B-36, B-47, and many fighter types that were going to drop nukes. So
back before the task group formed, the task group commander was going to be a SAC
general, Strategic Air Command general, General Howell Estes. He came down and took
the people that were going to be in the task group for a briefing. He says, “I want all of
you to be knowledgeable of the aircraft we’re going to be flying out there. After this we
can all just”—he just briefed us on things he expected. After this briefing he said, “Jim,”
he says, “I see you’ve been flying the B-20, T-33, and B-25. I want you to be conversant
in the B-36 and the B-52. So go down there and get checked out as a co-pilot in those.” I
did. Our B-36 was what we called a “featherweight” B-36. It was stripped all its
armament to make it real light to fly those class five, in those days, around sixty plus
thousand feet, up almost in the U-2 range. So I did that, but in doing that we had the
flight surgeon for this task group was the flight surgeon for the base at the time. He took
me and we went to Gunter Air Force Base to the super high altitude chamber there with,
and were fitted for partial pressure suits. This was the forerunner on what the astronauts
are wearing now.

LC: Now where is Gunter?
JH: Gunter is at Maxwell—
MMH: Montgomery.
JH: Montgomery, Alabama. It’s in conjunction with Maxwell Air Force Base, but
it’s a much smaller. Not an airstrip.

LC: Now can I ask you how you got—well, do you know why they pulled you
out for this?
JH: No.

LC: Was it because of the—?
JH: No, I don’t know except maybe my experience in operations, possibly,
because I had been an operations officer back in the troop carrier. Then I was squadron
commander in the troop carrier. Then I was the operations officer on the Mike, on Ivy
rather, and flying safety officer back at Kirtland. Oh, and they sent me to flying safety,
First Flight Safety School at University of California for a semester. The Air Force
contracted with USC (University of Southern California) just strictly for an engineering
course, well several subjects, but engineering with aeronautical engineering basically
hidden.
LC: Apparently you were doing well at these different tasks because they pulled you out for this special duty, yeah?

JH: Yeah. I was quote, “kind of making a name for myself.” So we, Colonel Howland, I believe his name was, the flight surgeon and I got fitted for partial pressure suits. Now this is, as I mentioned, similar to the astronauts, but not near as all-encompassing and as safe as they are. Instead of having the full pressure suit on over us we had on our lower extremities what we call capstans. They’re rubber tubes interlaced with crosses of fabric all the way up the cap, the tube on both sides of our legs and then up our body and down our arms. Then we had a tight-fitting helmet, very similar to the astronauts. We had forced oxygen into this helmet. We had caused reverse breathing. Instead of sitting here and inhaling and then exhaling normally, you inhale by the pressure and you had to push out to exhale.

LC: You had to work to exhale?

JH: To exhale and to talk. (Makes sound) (Laughter).

LC: Did you have a—did they let you get acclimated to that?

JH: In the pressure chamber.

LC: Okay.

JH: At sixty-three thousand feet without any kind of constraint, your body explodes. So the capstans on these things, on our suits, were basically if we were to be in a non-pressurized altitude of above fifty thousand feet these things would pop and expand and tighten everything on our legs tight so they wouldn’t come loose, our body wouldn’t come apart.

LC: So it holds you together?

JH: Very simple. It holds together. Then we went into the pressure chamber with all this and they took us to sixty three thousand feet and decompressurized. It popped and we lived. They wanted to take us to sixty-five. Colonel Howland says, “Nope. Sixty-three is a maximum altitude. We go to thirty-six and I won’t go above that.”

LC: Now how many guys that you know of were in this program?

JH: There were at Kirtland, I think—no, wait a minute. I apologize. I know of two other airplanes other than ours at Kirtland and these two were at Carswell Air Force Base at Fort Worth. They were configured for nuclear testing in addition to us. They had
gone through the same program that Colonel Howland and I went through. One of them, instead of our B-36 going to Eniwetok on Operation Castle, one of the Carswell B-36s went out there. Oh, and Castle, what we had to do—we had an aircraft carrier out there with all good radar on it. Before we went out there we went down to North Island Naval Air Station, San Diego, with this carrier out just off the shore there. Took our—the only airplanes we were gonna fly out to Eniwetok to North Island and had them practice with the aircraft carrier radar spacing them at certain spaces that were predetermined as though they would be the ones who dropped the weapon out on Bikini. This is well before we ever went over for that shot.

LC: So you would practice the entire shot, essentially?
JH: But no shot.
LC: Without the weapon?
JH: Yeah.
LC: What they’re trying to do is organize the aircraft in the air, their spatial distribution?
JH: Right. See, each aircraft, each airplane would be in a different space, in a different position in space depending on what the ballistic drop was from the weapon. For instance, a B-36 at fifty thousand feet would be much longer than F-100 at thirty-five, forty thousand feet.
LC: The downward trajectory of the bomb would be very different?
JH: Yeah.
LC: Okay.
JH: So this is what the practice was about was to get the crew on an aircraft carrier along with some Air Force people we’d put in with them, radar experts to simulate putting these aircraft in their various positions on a map and then in the air based on a point on that map. Just to practice so that they would be sure to get them in that spot. So the pilots up here would also know what they’re gonna have to do out at Eniwetok. So then we’d go back home and I don’t know a couple months, maybe a month and a half, we go over there to Eniwetok. General Estes, as I mentioned, was the commander here. I’ve forgotten the commander’s name on Operation Ivy. I don’t remember. So we flew some practice missions there with the aircraft carrier. Then on the day of the shot 180
miles east of Eniwetok-Bikini, a hundred eighty miles east. The airplanes were all put in
their exact position at the exact time the AEC says we’re going to detonate this shot.
Then when it came off they all made their escape maneuvers from the point that they
supposedly were to release that weapon.

LC: The purpose of all of that was so they could measure the impact on each
aircraft as it gets away at a certain path?
JH: Right. Right. I should’ve mentioned all these aircraft were instrumented to
assure what both the thermal and the blast effect was on them in their getaway position.

LC: Did they have radiation sensors as well so that they were—?
JH: Did they what?
LC: Have radiation sensors so you would get how much—?
JH: Oh, yeah. We all wore those sensors.
LC: You all had those sensors on.
JH: Yeah and they were checked daily.

LC: The purpose of all of that was so they could measure the impact on each
aircraft as it gets away at a certain path?
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assure what both the thermal and the blast effect was on them in their getaway position.

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LC: Have radiation sensors so you would get how much—?
JH: Oh, yeah. We all wore those sensors.
LC: You all had those sensors on.
JH: Yeah and they were checked daily.

JH: Right after a shot. So this occurred and I didn’t—I wasn’t involved in the
flying activity there, but that morning that they detonated the first weapon on Bikini I was
standing on the runaway on the ramp at Eniwetok at the detonation time. It looked like a
second sunrise a hundred and eighty miles away. Then after, I don’t know, three or four
minutes or so here came the shock wave, no heat. Well, no thermal blast, but the shock
wave I could feel it 180 miles away, very lightly.

LC: Very lightly? So you’re standing there. You were okay to stand there
through it?
JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: Wow. Do you know, Jim, whether there was equipment even where you
were that was going to be assessed for the impact, equipment on the ground or maybe in
the water, ships or anything that were just kinda sitting out there?
JH: Yeah. They had radiation instruments, test instruments all around, yeah. They
were all monitored regularly. They had been there essentially before Ivy Mike because
Elugelab, I don’t know, this in Eniwetok Atoll and they think contaminated that area
pretty seriously. So that’s why they monitored us everyday because this is two years later
after the Mike blast there at Eniwetok. So they still had to monitor equipment there for
everything on the island, yes. So then the airplanes came back and my good buddy from
the 19th Bomb Group in World War II on Guam was flying that B-36. So I went up to
him and his name was Savage, George Savage, but you know those old time gun shooter
name Doc Savage. So his nickname was “Doc.” I said, “Doc, how’s the blast?” He said,
“It was a blast.” He says, “Come back here. I want to show you something.” You know, a
B-36 has the aft-facing engines. They were pusher-type engines, instead of—

LC: Pulling.

JH: They have, on the propeller hub, they have a cone about an inch, I mean about
a foot in diameter coming down to a sharp cone. They’re painted. All that paint was
burned off.

MMH: Woo.

LC: Really? How far had he been from the blast?

JH: Well, I don’t know exactly, but he was in his position as though he had
dropped that weapon and then did his escape.

LC: The heat just—

JH: When the heat came up he was going away and it got him.

MMH: Still got him.

JH: It’s also—it had USAF (United States Air Force) markings on it also, kind of
what you call—singed them, I guess.

LC: Wow.

JH: That was a good test, though, for us to know that we had escape maneuvers
planned for all these airplanes in case we did ever have to go to war and they would have
to do that—that the guys were safe. If a test had failed, as an example, on any airplane,
that airplane would be subject to question whether or not it would ever drop a nuclear
weapon on the Soviet Union.

LC: Was there any aircraft that was actually eliminated from—?

JH: No.

LC: Never?

JH: No.

LC: Really?
JH: Uh-huh.
LC: Wow.
JH: Well, see fighters would be the ones who would be the closest and boy, they (makes swoosh sound).
LC: Their speed.
JH: Zoom away, yeah. Full of speed, so the B-36, for example, maybe 250 miles an hour in a turn, but it all worked out well.
LC: Now what were you wearing when you saw that second sunrise? Did you have protective—?
JH: Normal khakis.
LC: Nothing else?
JH: Mnh-mm.
LC: Your eyes? Nothing else?
JH: Mnh-mm. Too far away.
LC: Too far away, but you felt the shock.
JH: I felt the shock.
LC: Of course, radiation effects probably—
JH: No, it didn’t come over that far at all.
LC: Yeah, too far.
JH: The weather forecast—it’s always west to east. The weather forecast was not accurate. It changed at, I don’t know, before or at shot time and it just totally irradiated—what was the island’s name, little island. I want to say Rodem. No. No.
LC: Rongelap?
JH: What? Rongelap. Totally, yeah. Rongelap and we had an Air Force, small Air Force detachment there plus the natives and boy they were evacuated immediately back to safe ground. They had to relocate completely, the natives, in a new environment for many years. They’re back there now, but for many years it was so hot.
LC: That was an accident.
JH: It was really an accident.
LC: That was really based on the poor weather forecasting?
JH: The change, well, I wouldn’t say the fore—but the change in the weather forecast.

LC: That couldn’t be foretold or wasn’t picked up in advance.

JH: Yeah.

LC: Yeah.

JH: Right up to shot time it was still going to go northeast where Rongelap was.

LC: Now just thinking about the experience of seeing a couple of shots. I mean you saw at least two that you’ve described. You’re watching something that’s absolutely, in the case of Ivy Mike, unprecedented.

JH: That’s right.

LC: What impact did it make on you? Did you think about how powerful the United States was, or the science, or did you think about God or I mean, what did you think about when you saw that?

JH: I didn’t think about the United States particularly, but I thought about—I was awestruck really to see such a thing. This thing building up, building up and what I wanted to do was turn and go away, ninety degrees away, but I couldn’t because the scientists want to do their little thing. So we kept flying.

LC: So you had to hold steady in.

JH: Perpendicular to it, yeah. Until they got what they wanted and then we went away. This thing just looked like it was blossoming so fast coming right at us that I wanted to go, but my impression. I didn’t think about God. No. In later, well, in World War II I did quite a bit, missions always said a little prayer. “Get me out of this one, God, and I’ll promise.” But then the next, I’d go say it again, the next mission. “Get me out of this one God and I promise.” This one I wasn’t really that close. I thought—yes, I did think, “Wow! What an impact that will have on the world attitude toward warfare.” The United States is the only one that has a thermal nuke. The Soviet Union already had the just plain nuclear weapon.

LC: They had the straight up Hiroshima style, I guess, bomb from 1945.

JH: That was my big concern was, what is the world coming to? What do they think based on this and what can it do? Thermal nuke based on that twenty thousand milli-ton that Paul Tibbets dropped on Hiroshima.
LC: Which was a squeak compared to—

JH: Compared to this, yeah. I’ve forgotten the megatons now that were dropped.

LC: Yeah, I don’t remember either, but the film of that that I’ve seen, which may have been shot from your plane, I don’t know.

JH: It could’ve been.

LC: It is—I mean words fail you. It’s frightening, but I cannot imagine having actually been there. You had to hold the plane, as you said, until the scientists got what they needed. How did you know? What was the signal that their tests were complete, they had everything they needed, you guys could get out of there? Was there—?

JH: I think basically the cloud, the fireball of the cloud had ascended so far that it was out of their range, within a confined cabin, to get for any higher. They says, “We’ve got what we want. Let’s go.” That were strictly up to, I’ve forgotten the chief scientists’ name we had aboard.

LC: Were these AEC employees?


LC: So civilian scientists?

JH: Yeah, mm-hmm. The photographers were civilian, also.

LC: They would just let you know “We’ve got what we need”?

JH: Yeah. Then after we finished Bikini test, went back to Kirtland again and I became the Air Force Special Weapons Center flight safety officer then.

LC: What did that entail, Jim?

JH: Trying to reduce the number of aircraft accidents we would have throughout a year. We were based on a year. Had a percentage figure in an accident with so many hundred thousand flying hours, X number of accidents equals so much percentage. Just trying to actually protect ourselves from losing airplanes and people, basically people. That’s what it was all about, but establishing programs where the units that flew airplanes would instill in their pilots, “Here’s what we’ve got to do to be real careful.”

LC: So setting up, say SOPs (standard operating procedures) for certain types of missions?

JH: Yep.

LC: Did you get involved with logistics and supply as well?
JH: No. No. That was strictly up to them.

LC: Okay.

JH: One good example of that, not getting involved in logistics, I came up with a great idea that I saw on some airbase. I think it was a SAC airbase and I don’t remember where, but they had what they called a rolling command post. Back in those days most command posts were on the base with all kind of radio equipment and electronics and that type of thing. This one had all kind of radios and telephones. You know, we didn’t have satellites then so telephone was restricted somewhat, but all kind of equipment like that to help near at or near the site of a crash. So I came back from that and I kind of designed a vehicle with all this equipment on it that could help the commander at a crash site keep in communication with whomever it was necessary through radio, if by telephone, by telephone. Then the onsite he was the on site commander of the investigation on the crash. This solved a lot of problems. When I designed this and general, commanding officer of the Special Weapons Center, General Canterbury approved it. He said, “Send that right on down to the base and tell them to get going with it.” So all I had to do was send this drawing down, not drawing but specification. So the base flying safety officer came to me and says, “Where we gonna get all this stuff? Have fun.”

LC: “I just had the great idea. I’m not here to implement it.” Right? So implementation became somebody else’s—

JH: It’s terrible to be a bureaucrat like that.

MMH: Not my job.

JH: Well, that wasn’t—well, they had the resources. At our center had a higher Air Force priority on personnel and equipment and the supplies than they did. So I told them they could use our priority to get whatever they needed for it, which helped.

LC: They could pull in what they needed. Now that actually raises another question. Was there any time in this period that you had an opportunity, but declined to go to SAC?

JH: I never asked.

LC: Oh, you never asked? Okay.

JH: I was never asked and I would’ve declined anyway. I was happy.
LC: Why is that? What was going on—?

JH: I was just real happy in my job where I was, had a good job. The environment in Albuquerque, we loved it. It had good family. General Canterbury and I became real close friends. You can’t beat having a general being your best friend.

LC: Tell me about that relationship. What can you tell me about his background, first of all?

JH: I don’t know. Well, wait a minute. I do know his background.

LC: If you can fill in some blanks.

JH: I’ll tell you what. He came there as a commander of a unit I’m gonna tell you about in the future called AFOAT-1 (Air Force Office, Atomic Testing).

LC: Called?


LC: Okay.

JH: AFOAT, Air Force, T. I’ve forgotten what the other two letters stood for, but I’ll get to that in the future. He was commander of that and then came out as commander of Kirtland, special weapons on Kirtland, the Special Weapons Center there.


JH: Then when I became his flying safety officer he had reviewed my performance on Castle and the flying safety base, center flying safety officer leaving. So he called me in and he says, “You were base flying safety officer, base flight safety officer over there. You’re wanna be my flight safety officer.” I said, “Boss, if anybody up here wants me, that’s where I’m at.” So that’s how it came. His background, let me get to that in another section ‘cause I go into this outfit he came out of. So I was the center flying safety officer. I had one little anecdote I was gonna tell you about that, but maybe I’ll remember it. In the mean time I still had about—this was 1954. So I had three more years to be in Kirtland. I didn’t know how long I’d be there, but that’s how long I was actually there. I stayed as the center flying safety officer. He and I became real good friends. In fact, I don’t know how much you know about Albuquerque, but in those days, 1950s Albuquerque, there’s a series of mountains called the San de Cristo.

MMH: Sandia.

JH: Sandia.
LC: The Sandia Mountains?

JH: Sandia Mountains, just east of Albuquerque. Well, there was a long space of miles between the eastern edge of Albuquerque and the base of Sandia Mountains. General Canterbury came to me one day and says, “Jim, several of us are getting an investment group together to buy some of this land out here on the foothills of the Sandia Mountains, northwest of downtown Albuquerque. Would you like to join us?” I said, “Northwest of downtown Albuquerque? General, nothing out there but sand dunes.” He says, “But wait, it’s going to develop.” I said, “Let me think about this.” So I took the family out. We rode over these sand dunes out there.

MMH: The kids loved it.

LC: Oh, I’ll bet they did.

JH: The sand, oh man. I came back and told General Canterbury, “You know, I’m a realist and I don’t ever see any building out there.” (laughs) He said, “Well, Jim I respect your decision, but you’re making a mistake.” I did make a big mistake. We were going to invest five thousand dollars. Five thousand dollars was a lot of money.

MMH: That was a lot of money then.

LC: Goodness.

JH: I wish I could think of other things, but anyway. I finished my time there. I was a Reserve officer. I applied for—the Air Force opened up an opportunity for long-term Reserve officers to apply for regular officer status. I replied. I applied to become a regular officer. At the same time I applied for assignment to an Air Command and Staff College at the Air University. I was accepted for both.

LC: Now, what rank would you have been? This is 1957, if I’m right.

JH: I was a major.

LC: A major? Okay.

JH: I went to—I went to Maxwell Air Force Base to the Air University there, the Command and Staff College. I heard Minnie Mae mention long ago that a problem in the world is difference in languages, but our first block of instruction is the world’s greatest religions. I said to myself, “Religion?” So I went up to my professor and I said, “Why are we studying religions, especially as a first block, and we’re military.” He says, “You’re
gonna get into this and you’re gonna see what I’m telling you right now, but the very
basis of war is the fighting among various religions escalating into a war.”

LC: That’s really interesting. I bet that popped your eyes open.

JH: Today.

LC: Yeah, right now.

JH: Iraq, look at that.

LC: That was very—did you buy in? Did you accept, kinda get on and go with it?

JH: Oh, yeah, after I got in there I—oh, yeah I could see it right away after
several other courses combined with that.

LC: Sure. I want to ask you a little more about the curriculum in a minute, but
Minnie Mae, did you move then to and you had two kids by now, is that right?

MMH: They’re four years difference in our children’s ages.

LC: In what years were they born?

MMH: Well, our son came after World War II. We waited to start our family
after he was working for his dad. We thought we were civilians. So we had our son in
October of ’47.

LC: His name is Jim, right? Is he Jim, Jr.?

MMH: Third.

JH: The Third.

LC: Jim III.

MMH: Third. Off the record, we have five now. It’s ridiculous, but anyway.

Then we built our dream home and all that and we started another baby. I was expecting
her in September, but he got recalled for the Korean War.

JH: September of ’51.

MMH: ’51. So I moved back with my mother.

LC: Your mom and dad had a lot to put up with. Did they—?

MMH: They loved me to death. Mother was a good sport. Daddy put up with us.

LC: That’s right.

MMH: So we stayed there until Christmas. She was born in September, the last
part of September ’51. Then he was already in Greenville, South Carolina. So he came
for us at Christmastime. We went back with him and that was before he went to that
survival school and all that.

LC: Right. Right. When he left, you had been at Kirtland or in the Albuquerque
area, and then when he moved to Maxwell you also went to Alabama?

MMH: Oh, yeah. Our son was going into the fifth grade and our daughter hadn’t
started elementary school yet. I went to our son’s teacher and I said, “This worries me
because moving around, I don’t see how he’s gonna do well in school.” She looked at me
and she said, “Travel is very educational. Your son is a bright student and he makes
friends easily. You don’t worry about him.” So I took that attitude.

LC: That was probably good advice.

MMH: She was right. We just did fine everywhere. We were there a year. We
decorated our home. We started the little Cub Scout troop. I was den mother.

LC: You pitched in as den mother? Uh-huh.

MMH: Yeah, and for the year. Then they weren’t gonna let our boy join the Cub
Scouts because we’re only gonna be here a year. I said, “Are you gonna waste a year of
your life? Don’t do that. Just live it.”

LC: That’s interesting and it makes me think about the atmosphere, the social
atmosphere, in Alabama around this time.

JH: Terrible.

LC: This is a lot of change going on. What can you tell me? Of course, I’m
referring to race relations.

MMH: That’s what we’re talking about.

LC: I know that you know that. Are there vignettes or what did you observe?

MMH: Well, one, I’ll tell her one story about the city park.

LC: Please.

JH: Okay.

MMH: They had a big city park. Downtown was on one side of it and quite a few
of the black people lived on the other side. One day I was really upset about this. A
young black man worked in town. He cut across the park to go to work. They arrested
him because he was in the park. This really bothered me.

LC: How did you find out about it?
MMH: Oh, it was all in the paper and everything. I grew up in Dallas. My daddy had a grocery store and there were black people. He owned quite a bit of property there and there were black people on both sides of our property. We were not allowed to play with them, but they respected Daddy and he respected them. He helped them when they were without groceries. He called the doctor when—I had no ill feeling toward black people. It just bothered me that they were treated the way they were.

LC: In Alabama?

MMH: Well, everywhere.

JH: Especially in that part.

MMH: Yeah.

LC: Very, very apparent there. You couldn’t escape it.

MMH: Even in Dallas they had white water fountains and black water fountains. They couldn’t go to our movies. They might sit up in the very top balcony at the big Majestic Theater, but they couldn’t go through our box office.

LC: In Dallas?

MMH: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

LC: Now, Jim, what do you remember about that year that has to do with the social situation?

JH: Let me digress just a minute from that and go back to her.

LC: Please. That’s fine.

JH: Mentioning Dallas, I don’t know how it was for you. We eventually lived in those days, but on our public transportation all we had were electric streetcars. On each window it had a little receptacle, metal receptacle.

MMH: Up high.

JH: Up high, yeah. They had a little motorman on the streetcar, had two little signs, one for each side of the streetcar. A little wooden sign about so long, a little metal prong on it over on one side. On one side it said “white,” on the other side it said “colored.” He’d put that prong in, leaving about maybe two rows in the back of the car. If a colored person, a black person, as they liked to be called today then was colored.

MMH: No, it was nigger.
JH: The colored person could not sit in the forward of that. If they did then they wouldn’t move, the motorman will stop the car and someway get a policeman. Then they’d be arrested. If he was overloaded with white people and the colored people seats were all taken, he would go back and move the sign back and make these colored people get up and stand up and white people take those seats. Now that’s for Dallas. Now let’s go back to Montgomery, Alabama.

LC: Now that was Dallas in say the—

MMH: That was when we grew up.

JH: Oh, yeah, ’40s, uh ’30s.

LC: Then ’30s.

MMH: ’30s.

JH: Alabama in late 1950s. In addition to what she told you about the black man in the park, one of my professors’ wives had a tea party at her home one day and invited certain of our class.

MMH: And their wives.

JH: All of a sudden—Minnie Mae was one of them. All of a sudden a knock came on the door and here stands a policeman. He says, “I have been told that you have a black lady in your home.” She just says, “I do. She’s my friend. She’s attending a tea party of this group from the air base.” He says, “You’re under arrest for entertaining a black person in your home. She’s under arrest for being here. Come with me.” So they did, but the wife when they got to the police station called her husband on the staff at the university who called a base commander and says, “Hey, you’ve got a problem down here.” Base commander got deeply involved in a hurry and that was all hush-hush-hush. Wiped out, never happened again.

MMH: You didn’t read that in the paper.

JH: That was the way it was in Alabama in those days from a personal point of view. Terrible.

LC: Wow, that’s really scary. Certainly, I’m sure, the presence of the base not only provoked some incidents like the ones you’re talking about, but probably also helped push change, too.

MMH: Yeah.
JH: It did. Yeah, because we were already being integrated.

LC: Absolutely. Were you finding, Jim, by this point in your career, black pilots coming in?

JH: Coming in? Yeah. Not in great numbers, not like they are today, but yeah.

LC: Yeah. You were starting to see that change, too.

JH: Yeah. Yeah. It wasn’t Tuskegee Airmen type. It was right in with us.


JH: I never had any problem with that. Just like Minnie Mae tells about her dad’s store. In addition to having blacks near, some of the main streets in the near North Dallas, just Love Field and all. I don’t know how familiar you are with Dallas.

LC: Pretty familiar. Yeah.

JH: Northwest Highway runs east and west just north of Love Field. Some of the main streets in there, big, big homes, now named after some of her father’s grocery store—

MMH: Customers.

JH: Customers.

LC: Those streets now named after those families.

JH: Streets.

MMH: Yeah.

JH: Yeah. Some of those families still owed him lots of dollars, but he closed his store.

LC: I could see that happening. Well, he gave credit, though, to them.

MMH: Yeah, credit. Oh yeah.

JH: What I’m trying to say there based on that, the inter-mixture there, the blacks were not as looked down on in that particular area as they were elsewhere in Dallas.

When I first moved to Dallas from Greenville at the age of eight, I was probably nine when we actually moved into South Dallas, which had a section of blacks in it. We lived a half a block from a railroad track. On the other side of the railroad track was nothing but blacks. Those little boys would come over and we’d play together. Have fun together.

MMH: Talking about this son.
Never did, seldom ever saw their parents, but I grew up just like she did. I grew up among blacks.

MMH: Didn’t bother us.

JH: Right. It never did bother us.

MMH: Tell her about the sign in Greenville.

JH: Oh. In Greenville?

MMH: Yeah.

JH: Up until the Civil Rights Act passed, before I was born Greenville had one main street, had a square. Had a couple of main streets in it, but one main street came down across the railroad tracks and a depot right on the edge of downtown. Right across this street, it was a two-lane street with parking on either side and across this street, great big sign all the way across the street about that thick in width.

LC: So maybe a foot and a half.

JH: Yeah, width, maybe four or five feet high. It was all lighted up inside.

MMH: Across that street.

JH: Had a cross both sides of it “The blackest land and the whitest people.” That stayed there until the Civil Acts of 1964. Then the City Council agreed to take it down and they set it over on the edge of the depot properties. The depot was out of business and the train didn’t stop there anymore, that train didn’t. It sat there for I don’t know how many year, several years, but it’s not there now. My dad ran a garage on the opposite corner from the depot right under that sign. I have a picture of that with—

LC: Do you really, with your dad’s business there?

JH: Never had a business. I got a fireplug in front of his business.

LC: Fireplug, well, that’s good. That was important for the business to have that there, too.

MMH: You know a lot of the towns—

JH: You know that’s way off of what we were talking about, but it’s important for the world to know.

LC: It’s very interesting

MMH: Let me tell you one other thing about little towns. I don’t know. In Irving where we finally lived, they had a rule. “Don’t let the sun go down if you in town.”
LC: For African Americans? For blacks?

JH: With you still in town.

MMH: Yeah they had another section, Bear Creek, they called it. Now it’s a very affluent name there. After it got a little late in the day, they vacated Irving. You never saw one in there.

LC: I think similarly—there’s similar stories about what went on in Lubbock, too.

MMH: Oh, yeah. I’m sure.

LC: There were certain roads you couldn’t if you were black you need to not be west of this certain road at night.

JH: It was pretty prevalent throughout the South.

MMH: Yeah. Well, anyway that’s all.

LC: It’s very interesting. I mean, I lived in Atlanta. I’ve seen some of the changes there and I think it’s interesting for us, for the other observations that you make along the way as you move to different parts of the country what was happening. I mean, 1957, ’58 Dr. King was just becoming a public figure and he did a lot of his work in northern Alabama.

MMH: That’s right.

JH: That’s right, his march movement.

LC: That’s right. Did you pay attention to him as that was starting to—?

MMH: He wasn’t around.

JH: Well, he wasn’t marching then.

LC: Not yet.

MMH: Yeah. It was before.

JH: He was preaching and advocating civil rights. I don’t remember what the year of the march, was about a year after we left.

MMH: Yeah.

LC: Probably ’59

JH: Maybe ’58, ’59

LC: No, ’58. Somewhere in there. You know it’s interesting these things that you observe along the way because they’re kind of touchstones for placing all the rest of what
we’re talking about into the society from which it came and some of the problems that we
had internally as a country, not to mention, of course, our international issues with which
you were involved, but turning to the curriculum at the university. Now you’ve
mentioned that the first thing out of the shoot was this survey of all the religions. This
was kind of a new thing for you. Although you’d been to all kinds of different training
schools and had acquired all these skills to kind of sit back and soak up all of this
information must’ve been kind of—was it a thrill? Was it hard work?

JH: It was very interesting. We had a lot of good outside speakers that came in
and they verified what this professor had said that “Here’s why. Here’s how it happens.”
One professor in fact, boy, he really set me off. Now, he wasn’t a professor. I’m sorry.
He was a—I think he was a lay speaker from some church in Washington, D.C. I don’t
remember the exact details. He came down and he says, “Look.” He says, “You’re a
mixed group here.” He says, “You have foreign students here,” in our religion class, “you
have foreign students here. Most Americans are Christians, but you have Muslim in here,
who believe the Islamic faith. You have Hindus in here from other countries studying the
same thing we were studying.” He said, “What do you as a Christian think is gonna
happen to your friend right here who is a Muslim, leads us along, Hindu, Buddhist, I
mean Hindu?” Then we also studied Buddhism and Taoism. “What’s going to happen to
those people who don’t believe in the divinity of Christ and therefore can’t get to
heaven?” Boy, you talk about a pop out of the box. Oh, twenty-six or -seven year old Jim
Hall sitting here. What is gonna happen? I hadn’t even thought about such things.

LC: Had you not?
JH: No.

LC: You had not thought about that.
JH: I didn’t know anything different.

LC: You were busy. You had a few other things going on.
JH: I didn’t know anything except Christianity.

LC: Sure.
JH: I didn’t know about those other religions.

LC: That was eye opening.
JH: It really was. That set me to thinking a whole lot about that. I’ll get into another part of that way on down, another assignment.

LC: Okay.

JH: With a good Islam person. You asked about curriculum, the world’s greatest religions, the constitution, military regulations, command procedures, how to be a commander without alienating your troops but still getting them at best you can onto them without agonizing or what not. Then setting up a staff to help you be a commander, saying you must have proper—all of that was encompassing in the curriculum.

LC: Were they trying to teach you how to both command and to delegate?

JH: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Delegation’s a big deal.

LC: Yeah. Can you talk about that a little bit?

JH: Well, yeah. In the military you run across two types, the centralists and the non-delegators, I mean the delegators. The non-delegators, they’re micromanagers. “My way or no way; outta here.” The delegators are, “This is your responsibility. I expect you to do it and if you don’t do it the right way, the way I’m counseling you, then you and I are gonna have a little talk and we’ll give you an opportunity to change your perspective. If that doesn’t occur then we’ll have another little talk.” We’re talking about basically chain of command and how it figures on down to the very basic airman.

LC: So that you can be a more efficient operator presumably at—you’re at this higher level and the emphasis on efficiency as well as cooperation, I suppose.

JH: That’s right. Yeah. General Estes, as I mentioned, SAC commander, I mean a SAC staff officer who became commander of the Castle Task Group. He was a tyrant. He was a non-delegator. “My way. This is the only way. This is the SAC way.” Well, we weren’t SAC so we didn’t know about all of this.

LC: Did he communicate to you what it was that needed to be done his way?

JH: Oh, yeah.

LC: Was he good at that part?

JH: Oh, yeah. He’d say, “You gonna”—example, if he wanted that little sign on that thing turned around backwards he meant now. He didn’t mean “Why do we need to turn it around”—now. That’s the way it—boy, I was just flying safety officer and, oh, my
gosh, but I was able to satisfy him, but I didn’t so call “brown nose,” but I worked my
way with his way.

LC: That’s a skill, too.

JH: That’s my description of him. He is a good description of a non-delegator.

LC: Was the year well spent?

JH: Yes, exactly. Well spent. That year I made lieutenant colonel while I was at
school based on my previous work.

LC: I should think so.

JH: It really shook my—one of the staff officers up on the staff, he was a major.
He and I had gotten in a couple entanglements about curriculum at one time. When I
made lieutenant colonel he was a major. It just tore him up badly, but in conjunction with
that—well, before I made lieutenant colonel, I got a letter from the boss between me and
General Estes out at Castle that I knew at Kirtland, Col. Paul Fackler.

LC: How do you spell his last name?

JH: F-A-C-K-L-E-R.

LC: Okay. Mm-hmm.

JH: He was in the Pentagon, an offshoot of AFOAT-1 and I’ll get to that in a
minute. Very highly classified mission and a very, very high priority in the Air Force.
The Air Force probably had ten or twenty thousand priorities depending on what
missions were at various stages, places, and whatnot. We had number four out of—

LC: Out of all of those.

JH: Out of all of those. The first one was a presidential decree, the second one
was war, the third was on Chief of Staffs operation. We were even with SAC, be tied
with SAC at four. I’ll get to that in a minute.

LC: Jim, can you hold for just one second?

JH: Okay. Sure.

LC: Okay. Go ahead.

JH: Okay. Well, I guess maybe February or March. January, February, or March
of ’58 winding down toward June graduation, I got a letter from Colonel Fackler in the
Pentagon. He said, “Jim, I’ve been following your career and I’m in an organization. I
can’t tell you anything about it, but if you’d like to come up here and work for me, I’d
like to have you. I’ve already got arrangements made for you to come if you want it.” So
I wrote him back. Again, like I told General Canterbury, “Boss, if you want me that’s
where I’m gonna be.” So here I graduate. The family, we took the family to Irving until I
could get up there, ‘til you and I could get up there and find a place to live.

MMH: We left the kids with our parents.
JH: Up in the area surrounding Washington. We lived in Alexandria, Virginia. I
went in and reported to Colonel Fackler and he said, “I want you to schedule tomorrow
for a mission briefing and don’t expect anything except lunch because it’s quite
comprehensive. I must tell you now you have a top-secret clearance, but that’s not good
enough. You also have a ‘Q’ clearance, which is atomic clearance. That’s not good
enough.” He says, “There are only a few hundred people in the world that even know this
exists other than maybe intelligence of foreign countries where it might have
inadvertently leaked.” He says, “You’re all cleared for this. I’ve already arranged your
clearance for this.”

LC: Did that clearance have a name? I know about “Q” clearance.
JH: No, it didn’t. Unh-uh.
LC: Okay. So this was something that was kind of on it’s own, didn’t have a—
JH: Well, let’s see. What did they call it? They called it “a need to know.” Need
to know. That meant that it had to be deeply involved in what we were doing. For all of
the time, for the rest of my career in the Air Force, she never did know what I did during
those ten years except what she could see on service, on the base and all. She didn’t know
what was happening.

MMH: I really didn’t want to know.
LC: Had you come to that point where you just—
MMH: Yeah. I thought I might say something that I don’t need to say.
LC: So you didn’t talk much about work when you saw each other.
JH: No. (Minnie laughs).
LC: I’m sure you had other things though, kids and all.
JH: I want to regress from that period and go on fast-forward. One day after I
retired in Granbury I was sitting here reading the *Air Force Magazine* and all of a sudden
I turned the page it says, “Air Force Special Weapons Center.” This was an offshoot of
AFOAT-1. I started to read that. Here’s our mission.

LC: Here it is.

JH: I handed that to Minnie Mae and I say, “You want to see something
interesting.” She said, “Is that what you were doing all this?” “Yeah.”

MMH: You know, I would watch him pack. He packed his own bag when he’d
tavel. I kind of looked what kind of—was he taking winter clothes or summer clothes?

JH: Or civilian clothes.

MMH: Or civilian or both or all of them? You know, I didn’t know where he was
going. The children would say, “Where’s Daddy?”

LC: Yeah. Where’s Daddy?

JH: I’m going to compress ten years into a pretty short time here, but—

LC: Is this by necessity or because you feel—?

JH: Oh, well, it’s just kind of—it’s all encompassing the same. The same thing
I’ll tell you here you can ask any question you want. It’s completely declassified. What
we did—we operated the U.S. Atomic Energy Detection System, AEDS, USAEDS,
which is now wide open. That comprised of a build up, not today, in 1958 when I
reported in, but it was the beginning—it started in 1949, I think, with General
Eisenhower—oh, wait a minute General Truman, or President Truman saying we better
do something to monitor the nukes from the Soviet Union, but it was very minor and that
was AFOAT-1. For the life of me I can’t think of what—(both talking at the same time).

MMH: Well, you’ll find it out when you wake up—

LC: We can add it to this later.

JH: Okay. That’s what it was initially and then they changed names several times
becoming eventually the Air Force Technical Application Center, which it is today. It had
a Washington office when I got in it. It had the Washington office and it had three field
offices, one in Wiesbaden, Germany, one in Sacramento, California, and one in Yokota,
Japan, which subsequently moved back to Hawaii. They had their own areas of
responsibility. Germany had all of Europe, Africa, Mid-East as far down as India and
Ceylon. The United States had the whole North America, South America and the one in
Japan and then Hawaii had the Pacific Rim, Australia, New Zealand and that as
monitoring. Now what we did on our mission was, was to detect the advancement in nuclear technology of Russia and China and in some cases France, good old France. They didn’t share all of their information with us. They wanted to be a member of the nuclear group, but they wouldn’t share all their information with us. So we had to suspect them, monitor them closely. We do with the British every time they wanted to pop one we knew in advance.

LC: Right. There was a lot of collaboration, a lot of Anglo-American collaboration, but of course the French not.

JH: So to accomplish this mission we eventually had around 330 attacks just scattered throughout the world. When I first walked in and Colonel Fackler says, “Go to that briefing,” and they started telling me where we had some detachments, I didn’t even know the country existed, let alone an Air Force detachment in it. The detachments consisted of about eleven people, one officer and ten airmen. They worked a twenty-four hour shift except it was cut down drastically in the evenings, had to monitor the equipment in the evening, in the nighttime, for any indication of an adverse affect on the atmosphere or the surface of the Earth through seismic, acoustic, electromagnetic. There’s so many included in electromagnetic. I can’t—don’t remember them all, but those three were the main three that we monitored the activities throughout the world from these detachments scattered all over. When something unusual would happen, like even an earthquake, it would trigger seismic. The seismic guy would say, “Well, it triangulated right here.” This detachment saying, “There’s direction. Here’s the direction. There’s the direction, triangulate.” The acoustic guy would say, “Well, we got that air change, atmospheric change, sub-atmospheric change, through our system. Here, there, and so forth correlates with what you’ve got.” The electromagnetic was the same way. So once we got the triangulation of where this occurred, we knew pretty well whether it was an event of nature or whether it was an actual nuclear event because of the difference in the handwriting in the instrument, if you will, the wiggle of the needle in the instrument—

LC: There was a signature for different types.

JH: You’d get a little bit different signatures, a little bit different, but it got to where we knew exactly where the Russians were going to, the Soviet Union, was going
to test or where China was going to test because we knew where we tested. We knew
they knew where we tested, Nevada and the Pacific. They had the same thing I guess, but
then when we would triangulate on a specific point, we had a special weather forecast
section in this outfit I was in and, God bless them. There were no reporting stations
throughout Asia.

LC: There were no stations when you came in?
JH: No. None that would reported openly. They might report it locally, but not
where we got the weather reports. So this weather detachment, oh, boy, they were—let
me regress just a minute. That 1.4 priority, this organization was just filled with the elite
of the elite. I’m not bragging on me, but they were highly selected for individual
positions. Even the air, the same way that our personnel people could go down to San
Antonio to the personnel center and look over record after record after record. “We want
that guy. We want this guy. We want that guy,” based on what they read in there. Then
they would send them to our school up in Lowry and train them in these techniques.

LC: So there was a training facility?
JH: At Lowry.
LC: At Lowry Field?
JH: At Denver. It was run by us in conjunction with the training command, Air
Force Training Command. I think it was maybe 2nd Air Force. I don’t remember. Once
we triangulated this then the special weather people would put their best thinking to try to
determine where that air mass was going to move and when it would emanate out into
legal air space for us to get an airplane in and get a sample on it. That was usually the
Pacific rim, anywhere along from Japan all the way down to the Philippines.

LC: That’s because an event on the Asian landmass anywhere would be moving
out toward—
JH: West to east.
LC: Yeah, west to east.
JH: Usually.
LC: So you would wait ‘til—
JH: We’d wait, well, the weather people would say, “Based on what we can
determine, it’ll be about this date.” In conjunction with these 330-something
detachments, we had sampling equipment on various major air commands and airplanes.
We only own two airplanes, AFTAC (Air Force Technical Applications Center). We
owned initially a C-47 and a C-54. We got rid of the C-54 and the C-47 and got a C-118.
We had sampling equipment on it. It was also used as one of the general’s airplanes to
scoot around various places in the country. We had agreement with SAC to put sampling
equipment into their bomb bay on the B-52, the B-36. I believe that was all SAC. No, and
the U-2. We had an agreement with the Air Weather Service to put it on their B-50s
initially and then the B-47 and the KC-135.

LC: This second agreement was with who again?
JH: The second one?
LC: Mm-hmm.
JH: Was with—
MMH: The weather—
JH: The weather—what did I say? SAC?
LC: Yeah, the first one was with SAC.
JH: SAC and then Air Weather Service.
LC: Air Weather Service.
JH: Air Weather Service.
LC: Okay. Sure.
JH: Let me think just a minute now. It seemed like another weather service,
another service in there that we used their airplanes had samplers on them. I don’t recall.
It seems like we had three different commands and we put these samplers on them. In
addition to the sampler in the airplanes we would have accommodated. Oh wait a minute,
I know. It was TAC (Tactical Air Command) on some of them.

LC: Oh, TAC.
JH: Tactical Air Command on some of their F-84s.
LC: Okay.
JH: ‘Cause we had that sampling squadron at Kirtland and it wasn’t involved
with AFTAC. It was strictly ARDC (Air Research and Development Command), Air
Research and Development, at that time. We designed the equipment to fit the airplane
and whoever built the airplane had to agree that it had no affect on the aerodynamics of
the airplane.

LC: Okay.

JH: In some cases, it would be, as an example it would B-52 and B-36 would be
the pod we would put up in a bomb bay. It was probably the width of four of those
cabinet doors.

LC: So about six feet maybe? Maybe more?

JH: It could be seven, about seven or eight feet long. In that we had several
different circular-type pad type samplers, like rice paper, circular rice papers that work
kind of like the old nickelodeons. It worked where you put one in and you take it out and
then push another one in, take it out, push another one in.

LC: Right and they’re all lined up.

JH: Lined up, yeah, with one air group blowing through. Once the operator inside
read the radiation that was collected on the first one, he’ll take it out, put a clean one in
and see if the direction they were flying would increase this. If so they’d keep flying that
direction because they’re—well, first let me back up again. They would go to, as an
example, the Pacific rim. They go to the Pacific rim and start flying square patterns,
expanding square patterns hoping that they would find a piece of the debris that was
coming in this air mass. Once they get any kind of radiative index on these sampling
papers, then they go to work right in the whole area there and keep reading. If the second
or third paper decreases, it’ll turn around. It’s max collection.

LC: Right they’re trying to—each time they hit something they’re trying to make
sure that they follow direction-wise such that they get increased hits.

JH: That’s right.

LC: Each time so they can get the volume of the air that’s contaminated
effectively and try to measure that.

JH: Yeah. Yeah. Now these big things on a B-36 and B-52 had three of those air
ducts. So the operator, our operator sitting in the B-52 punches buttons and moves all of
them at his discretion based on what he’s seeing on his instruments up there. In addition
to that, when we begin to get to the hot spot, we had huge wire-enforced balls, steel balls,
hollow, to pump air into it. We would pump this air into that ball and then he would close the valve on it.

LC: Seal it.

JH: Yeah. Seal it and then when the airplane would get back to a base, wherever it was, we had to set up special couriers to get those samples back to one of three laboratories, one in Yokota, Japan, one in Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska, and one in McClellan Air Force Base in our biggest laboratory in Sacramento. Our Air Force scientists, not AEC, but our Air Force scientists there both being civilian and military would analyze this data and could reconstruct the weapon in its entirety, tell exactly what the nuclear activity was, exactly what the case consisted of, exactly what the detonator was, and they could almost reconstruct the shape on the weapon based on these little bitty parts. I’m talking about pinhead or smaller of particles that we would get. Then we would send this to the AEC for their evaluation on what which showed the increase in technology in the Soviet Union, China, or France.

LC: So you’re measuring by making these physical measurements of the samples.

JH: Last year, this year, that year.

LC: You can watch the technology change in the enemy.

JH: That’s right. Now the way the AEC knew whether or not we were accurate going back now to the nuclear tests with ARDC testing for the—when I was in ARDC. This outfit was testing them unbeknown to me, testing the same tests that we were helping the AEC with. This organization, AFTAC, Air Force Technical Application Center, would take their samples from a known AEC test. AEC would only say “On a certain date we’re shooting on this shot at this location. You do whatever you want to to get samples.” So they would get samples, send them back to these laboratories—

LC: The Air Force would?

JH: Air Force, AFTAC.

LC: AFTAC. Okay.

JH: They’d take these samples, analyze them, send them to AEC and say, “Grade us on what you knew was going to happen at that site, and what your analysis was of that site.” Ninety-nine point nine percent so they knew we were accurate in getting the—
LC: So that refined the techniques for the—
JH: Very much so. The other samplers that we had, example, on a KC-135 it had
a big sampler on the outside of the fuselage where we had an operator sitting inside with
a nickelodeon-type thing. Then on the U-2 we had another pod, much smaller than a B-
36/B-52. It only had one nickelodeon type sampler that the pilot himself had to operate.
LC: The pilot had to?
JH: The pilot had to and then the fighters also.
LC: Well, in a U-2 there’s only one guy, right? So he’s got to do everything.
JH: The U-2s were extremely important to us because of the extreme altitude
they could get to so we’d know what was happening up there, so to speak. We didn’t
have too much monitoring, aerial monitoring, too much aerial monitoring in the Southern
Hemisphere because of the magnetic flow of the Earth’s properties, whatever. The
scientists just didn’t think that too much would cross over in the Southern Hemisphere.
We found they were wrong by another system that we had in AFTAC where we would
work with the embassies throughout the world through the air attaché office in the
embassy throughout the world to buy wine and also to take air samples with these balls I
mentioned earlier. Then they’d ship that back to us in Washington in a diplomatic pouch
that no one knew anything about. Now why wine? Well, the grapes absorb what’s in the
would show this much radioactivity in it. We had the biggest wine seller in the world
probably. (laughs)
LC: No kidding.
JH: Nobody ever touched it.
LC: Was this at Sacramento? Was this all kept at—
JH: No. This was in Washington, D.C., there.
LC: Okay because the air attaché’s things would all go to D.C. to—
JH: To the State Department.
LC: To the State Department.
JH: Then we’d pick them up at the State Department. Take them to our scientists
there in headquarters at Washington. Wait a minute. No. They contracted this out to a
civilian contractor there in the Washington, D.C., area somewhere, Maryland or Virginia.
LC: Do you know which contractor it was?

JH: I don’t know. I don’t remember. I knew at the time. They would then take this wine and run it through—get the radioactivity, tell whether or not this particular area had increased in the amount of radioactivity this year versus this year.

LC: Over the past year.

JH: If so, what caused that? So eventually AFTAC commander went to Chief of Staff of the Air Force and said, “We think we need to go to the Southern Hemisphere with U-2s.” To make a long story very short, we set up a detachment in Australia and a detachment in Argentina and sampled the air with the U-2s and those papers were sent back to McClellan. Then after we found very minimal down there, so those detachments were vacated after about two maybe three years.

LC: Would this have been in the early 1960s, do you think, or even earlier?

JH: Yeah. Oh yeah. Early ’60s. Maybe late ’59, early ’60, ’61. Throughout that period because I went down to Australia to help set up the detachment there. I visited a detachment in Argentina. That was in ’60. I went in ’61 to Australia.

LC: Now the detachments in setting them up, these two that you’re speaking of in the Southern Hemisphere, did they follow the same pattern of eleven people?

JH: No. These detachments were SAC people and only one AFTAC person.

LC: Okay.

JH: AFTAC just to say “Here’s what we need to do and here’s what we’re gonna do with the papers when you bring them back. You run the mission.”

LC: So it was much more simplified from the AFTAC.

JH: Yeah. SAC had their people on site in Australia and Argentina with only one AFTAC person.

LC: Your role in general during all of this?

JH: My role—when I first started out I was the director of air operations in the headquarters of Washington, D.C., for three—

MMH: Almost four years, I think.

JH: Let’s see, we left there—

MMH: After command (unintelligible).
JH: We got there in ’58 and left there in April of ’62. Four years. I went then to
Wiesbaden to the field office there as director of operations, not just air operations, but
director of operations, which included any air operations that came into our area and all
of the ground detachments.

LC: So director of all operations for that regional office?

JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: How many of the three-hundred-and-some detachments were assigned to
Wiesbaden?

JH: Off the top of my head, probably seventy-five or eighty, stretching all the
way from Kirkenes, Norway. You never heard of that town.

LC: No, sir.

JH: The very northern tip of Norway. It has a little very short, maybe, I don’t
know, guessing now, twenty-five mile border with Russia and that’s an interesting story.
While I’m there I’ll just tell that story.

MMH: Tell that story.

LC: Okay.

JH: I had to go up there a couple of times, but I had to go through the Norwegian
CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) system. I would report to Oslo and I would go in and
they would make me Jorgen Johannes or somebody like that and give me a passport like
that.

LC: A Norwegian passport? Just to clarify.

JH: Norwegian passport, diplomatic passport.

LC: Even better.

JH: The CIA guy who was actually a Norwegian Air Force guy working for CIA
would accompany me. I couldn’t speak Norwegian.

MMH: He couldn’t say a word.

JH: He said, “Unless we’re separated from the group don’t you say a word,”
because Norway had an agreement with Russia. They would rely on no NATO (North
Atlantic Treaty Organization) forces above the Arctic Circle, but we had a detachment up
in Kirkenes near the Russian border. So when this Norwegian escort took me there twice.
The first time he said—he had a car waiting for us at the airport and he said, “Jim, first
thing we’ve got to do is drive out to the checkpoint between the borders.” He says, “They
know you’re here. We’ve got to keep good face with them. We’ve got to let them know
that we know you know you’re here.” So he says, “We’ll drive out there in about seventy
five feet or a hundred feet or so. We’ll turn the car sideways. You’ll be in the passenger’s
seat. They’ll take a picture of you and we’ll go and they’ll be happy.” They hope’d we
didn’t know what we were doing up there, but they knew I was up there.

LC: Right.

JH: So I would make a staff visit to the detachment to see if things were going in
accord with what we required. We could tell basically by the reports, but it’s always good
to drop in and say, “Hi. How you doing?”

LC: This was a morale thing, in part?

JH: Yeah, morale thing.

MMH: You had to get stationed there.

JH: We had three Air Force type there and the rest of them were Norwegians.

LC: The Air Force personnel, how long would a tour up there be?

JH: One year.

LC: One year?

JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: Yeah. So kind of showing the flag and being interested was a very good idea
because, of course, they’re very close to the Soviet border, too.

JH: Yeah, very close. They were right there, just to the south.

LC: The dissatisfaction among those people’s not a good idea.

JH: The eastern—the city limits of Kirkenes is almost on the border. That’s how
close.

LC: When you were up there and you’re of course very close to the border and
that would probably be a very electronically-defended border if nothing else by the
Soviet Union. Could you see anything on their side?

JH: I could see their checkpoint, but beyond that is just snow.

LC: Ice. Snow. Okay. So all the way from that point in northernmost Norway
your operations went—

JH: Yeah, all the way down to South Africa, Johannesburg.
LC: Did you ever go down there?

JH: Yeah. I’ve been all over the world. I’ve been all around the world to speak, but that’s another story. We basically—we had two whole detachments in Norway in and around Oslo. We didn’t have any in Sweden. None in Finland, but we had three in Germany. We had none in France, none in Switzerland, none in Austria, none in the Eastern Bloc, naturally. Beginning in Africa—well, let’s see. In Greece we had two. In Turkey we had three plus an air operation out of Incirlik, Turkey, just monitoring the air activity down there with our pods. Let’s see, the—

LC: Was that a continuous thing that you would be continuously have someone—

JH: Yeah. That was under USAFE, USAF Europe, their airplane with our pod.

LC: Got it.

JH: Then coming back across North Africa we had one unit in Tripoli, Libya. That’s the only one up in that general area. Then the most of them down in a big part of Africa, Southern Africa, were mostly in the embassies and all that I’ve described earlier. They didn’t do any paper sampling down there. They just did the ball sampling and their attaché was doing that for us out in a little cabinet in his office exhausting to the outside—well, I should’ve said inhusting.

LC: Sucking in the air.

JH: Whatever that word is.

LC: Right. Sort of inhaling into those steel balls.


LC: How often would they send—I mean the air attachés, there must’ve been some protocol for this. How often would they do this sampling?

JH: It would take the air attaché, those little compressors we used, I mean intake pullers we had on those, it would take about three days to fill a bottle and then you would wait and send probably three or four at a time. I mentioned a diplomatic pouch. The diplomatic pouch could be as big as this room. That’s how those were handled. Then we’d ship him some by return pouch, empty. Clean ones.

LC: Would he then send them in every three months or what was the frequency?

JH: About every three months we would resupply. Yeah. So I visited those, briefed the ambassadors, and all that about how we were doing and what the progress
was. He might’ve known through the State Department, I don’t know. Always a courtesy call.

LC: Sure. Always a courtesy call to the ambassador or the DCM (deputy chief of mission) or whoever’s running the mission.

JH: There’s many, many other countries in Africa we had these. I don’t recall all of them, but I know Rhodesia, which is now Zimbabwe. Anyway, Rhodesia, South Africa, Kenya, Ivory—Ivory Coast, Ghana, Brazzaville, Congo, and some others, but I don’t remember any interior ones.

LC: Speaking of Europe specifically, did we do this kind of sampling, a program like this or a detachment in France itself?

JH: Didn’t have any detachments in France. Detachments were in Germany. In fact, in Western Europe we only had three detachments there and they were all in Germany. Then we skipped down to Greece and then over to Turkey and then back around the northern rim of Africa, Tripoli. Well, Tripoli—

LC: Now in the Middle East, what regional office?

JH: Okay. Middle East.

LC: Was this again reporting to Wiesbaden or did it report somewhere else?

JH: Mm-hmm Wiesbaden, all the way over to Ceylon and India. We had two detachments in Iran. We had two detachments in Saudi Arabia. We had three detachments in Pakistan. We had one in India. Had one air attaché type in Ceylon. I visited all those on a pretty regular basis.

LC: You did?

JH: One interesting incident. We had two detachments in Iran and we needed a third one right up on the Caspian Sea to monitor closer to one of the Soviet Union test sites. Our headquarters had briefed the general. They gave permission for the other two. This one was in the Shah’s game preserve, private game preserve, right on the Caspian Sea. So the general says, “I ain’t got no authority through our sources.” He said, “I ain’t got no authority. See your State Department.” So they had made arrangements for a briefing to be given to the Shah to get permission to establish this detachment. So I was designated to go brief the Shah of Iran. This guy was astute. I mean he was sharp.

Technologically sharp.
LC: Where did you meet him, Jim? Tell them everything you can about that.

JH: I walked into his office, not a palace. I was escorted into his office and I saluted him, naturally.

LC: This is in Tehran?

JH: In Tehran. He was very cordial. He said, “I know exactly why you’re here.” Introduced me to General so-and-so up here. “I know exactly why you’re here. Just tell me all the details, what this will encompass up there and what you expect of us.” Very simple. I did that. He says, “You’ve got”—just these exact words, “You got it. Just tell General so-and-so exactly what you need. He heard you say it so go to work.” So that was our third detachment in Iran.

LC: So he dispatched that very quickly?

JH: Oh, yeah.

LC: No friction, no upset?

JH: He was so pro-western. A genteel—he was a dictator, but he was a genteel man. He brought the Iranians out of hell when he made it pro-western, westernized that is. They came out of chadors and all this kind of stuff and it was kind of closed.

LC: That’s right.

JH: Then the ayatollah came on and took over and they’re back where they were.

LC: That was a hard—

JH: (unintelligible)

LC: Yes. You’re right. You’re exactly right, Jim. That was a hard, very hard time when he was overthrown.

JH: It was.

LC: Of course, he came here to Lubbock. Do you know anything about that or his son training here and so on?

JH: All I know is he had cancer. His son was training. I knew he had cancer and he went to MD Anderson and also went to, what, (unintelligible), I think.

LC: I’m afraid I don’t know actually where he—

JH: I think he went—I don’t remember.

MMH: I don’t remember.
LC: It was so politically dicey. His son trained here at Reese and there are lots of people here in town who remember him. Had him here and spoke so very well of him, still do speak very well of the whole family. So it’s amazing that you had that meeting with him. Did you ever see him again?

JH: No.

LC: He left an impression on you, it seems.

JH: Yeah. So let’s see. We got through—

LC: That was Iran.

JH: That was encompassing our detachments throughout that part. Maybe we didn’t have seventy-five. I don’t know.

LC: Well, you’re tidying them up pretty well here. The number’s getting—

JH: Counting the embassies and all it got pretty close.

LC: Now you mentioned Ceylon, or Sri Lanka now, and India I suppose and Pakistan, both of which, of course, are now established nuclear powers, but at this time we’re not. Can you tell me any instance you recall with regard to visits, say, in Pakistan?

JH: Very cordial up until—let’s see. I was in Wiesbaden from ’62 to ’65. The Pakistanis were very cordial, gave us everything we wanted in Pakistan up until probably late ’64. All of a sudden one of our detachments up at Lahore, Pakistan, a knock on the detachment door in one day—it was a secure compound, had guards at the gate and all. The Pakistani guard came in and told the detachment commander, “Captain so-and-so from Pakistani army needs to see you.” So he went out there and here Pakistani guys with his AK-47, “You’ve got twenty-four hours to vacate.” Our detachment commander says, “Wait a minute. We’re”—he pleaded his case. He immediately called Wiesbaden to talk to my boss, the commander of the field office there and said, “Here’s what’s happened.” He had an open telephone. We could’ve sent a TWX (teletypewriter exchange service), TWX telegram, but that would’ve taken awhile.

LC: So he just picked up on an open line

JH: Open line and says, “Here’s the situation I’ve got.” The boss says, “Close it down.” We always had some kind of explosive there to take care of the equipment. So they closed it down, pulled the string, and left.

LC: Blew it up, essentially.
JH: Before that, to show you cordiality, in Karachi we had a big detachment there, three different techniques. We had a big compound there and a big dormitory for the guys and all. The Chinese came to the Pakistani people, whoever’s the head, I don’t remember and said, “We want to build an embassy on that spot right next door.” They didn’t even talk about us. “We want to build an embassy right on that spot.” It was right next door to where we were.

LC: Just picked that out of the blue.

JH: Yeah, out of the blue. So whoever the contact was came to our detachment commander there and said, “Here’s what’s happening. They want this. We don’t want them to have it, but it’s hard to say no in a diplomatic way. So you know what they’re gonna do is put monitoring glasses there to monitor you. Tell your boss in Wiesbaden that we want to work with you all very closely in the construction of their embassy.”

LC: Very closely.

JH: Very closely. So to make a long story short, we had all kind of sensors imbedded in the walls and whatnot of their embassy there. The CIA then moved into our detachment, the compound, to monitor all that. We didn’t, but they moved into our complex.

LC: Did you continue, I mean did the Wiesbaden office continue to have operations in that compound, as well as having the CIA guys in there?

JH: Yeah, until this 1965 incident, or late ’64. They did the same thing in Karachi. They moved us out of there, too, and also up in Islamabad, the capital. They moved us out of there where we had a detachment.

LC: Did they move you out permanently or did you just relocate?

JH: Permanently.

LC: Yeah, because this is the time when Pakistan and People’s Republic are getting more friendly and turning against India.

JH: In fact, up at Peshawar—

LC: Peshawar Pass, uh-huh.

JH: One of the other kinds of secret services had a detachment up there and they had to vacate that also.

LC: Is that right? Okay.
JH: Yeah. I’ve forgotten which one it was now. It was in—

LC: Not CIA, somebody else.

JH: Yeah. They weren’t monitoring nuclear like we were. They were monitoring other types of things.

LC: Sure. Right. Well, let me ask you a couple of questions and see if it sparks anything you’d like to say about during this period. For example, let’s just try this one. The Cuban Missile Crisis. Did it have any impact on the operations of what you were doing?

JH: Not us.

LC: You guys continued doing what you had been doing anyway? Okay.

JH: All they did, all that did was the missiles that came down to Cuba they weren’t in our bailiwick. The nuclear warheads came with them, I guess, but we weren’t responsible for that.

LC: Right. So it didn’t hurry up your operations or accelerate the pace you guys—

JH: The only bad thing about that crisis, one of my good buddies that flew the U-2s out of Australia that I made a real close acquaintance with down there. His name was Anderson. He was the U-2 that got shot down by a Cuban missile.

LC: He was the one?

JH: Yeah. That was the only connection I had with the Cuban Missile Crisis. That’s not in AFTAC, that was just personal.

LC: Right, but that’s still upsetting that you knew him. The U-2, this was earlier of course, but the shoot down in 1960 of the U-2s, you would’ve been already with AFTAC at that point. Did it have any impact? Did, for example, I don’t know whether you can say this, did Gary Powers have a pod on that plane?

JH: No.

LC: He did not?

JH: So help me.

LC: Okay. I believe you. I believe you. I don’t know.
JH: He was on strictly other missions and we—I don’t even know whether there
had ever been any discussion about putting one on it. That was before, in the early time
when I got there.

LC: Sure absolutely.

JH: We did not have anything to do with that U-2.

LC: The U-2 aircraft were being flown on numerous different missions and
presumably were, I think you mentioned, did in some cases carry pods for you, for
AFTAC?

JH: Yes, in Australia.

LC: Was that the only place or—?

JH: No. I’m sorry. Out of Del Rio when they were stationed at whatever the
airbase is there, still there.

LC: California?

JH: No. Del Rio, Texas.

MMH: On the border.

LC: Oh, I’m sorry. Oh. Okay.

JH: Just up the Rio from Laredo. What’s the airbase there? I don’t have—

MMH: It’s where Mac lived.

JH: That’s the ’60s. Mac’s eighty-six years old.

LC: That’s okay. Someone will look it up. We’ll have them look it up.

JH: We would fly—now let me think a minute. We had pods down at, we had
operators down there. Why did we—I can’t answer that. I don’t remember.

LC: Okay. Okay.

JH: I had to make (unintelligible) down there out in Sacramento occasionally, but
why can’t I remember? Why?

LC: You’ll think of it later.

MMH: You can call her later.

JH: Oh, we dispatched them from there to Alaska to get high-altitude samples in
the Pacific Rim and/or at that time we were still at Clark Air Base in Manila and off of
Guam.

LC: U-2s were flying out of there, as well?
JH: Yeah.
LC: Okay.
JH: We’d have SAC dispatch one or two just to get high-altitude samples after we’d made—not after, but in hopes we’d get contact. When we got contact then say, “Here it is now. We can track it. We’ve got weather stations at these various sites and islands.
LC: Another, again, timeline point and this surely did not, I think, report probably to the Wiesbaden office, but you know in 1964 the Chinese demonstrated their nuclear capability with that explosion at Lop Nur. Can you tell me anything about that, remember? I mean them establishing nuclear capability in terms of international relations was very important.
JH: The only thing there with us, we got involved in saying things we did on the Pacific Rim once it triangulated Lop Nur. We just tried to get a forecast and we had better options of forecast there because we were friends with Thailand and the Philippines and all had, something.
LC: You had a lot of options around the Rim, the Pacific Rim.
JH: A little bit more than way down there South China than we did the others in Novaya Zemlya and Semipalatinsk in Russia, the Soviet Union. So all we did was take samples and give it to the AEC from there. It didn’t have any impact on us, well, our detachments were activated, but that was our mission.
LC: Did you ever go to India? Did we have detachments in India?
JH: Mm-hmm. We had a detachment in New Delhi. From Lahore I could go over to New Delhi very easily, got up the Taj Mahal.
LC: Did you?
JH: Mm-hmm.
LC: What was that like?
MMH: You couldn’t fly.
JH: You talk about that prince building something for his princess or the king, whatever it was.
LC: It was a love thing.
JH: It was lovely. I’d like to have taken her.
LC: Oh, I bet you would have.
JH: We’ve been around the world together, but not that high. She didn’t get to hit India.

LC: Now, Minnie Mae, had you moved to Wiesbaden? I take it that you had.
MMH: Yes. We lived there.
JH: I was overseas six times and that was the only time they could go, a three-year tour in Wiesbaden.

MMH: That was an overseas assignment we had. But, you know, you have to look at the whole picture. We had a great—he had a great career and I enjoyed it, too.
LC: Oh, you must have. You must have. Now, how did the kids do with growing up in Germany a little?
MMH: They did fine. They both remember so much about Germany and Europe. I was thankful they were the ages they were because they could remember.
JH: Our daughter in junior high and our son was high school, American schools there.

LC: They did go to the American schools?
MMH: Yeah. We were in the best place. Wiesbaden was a beautiful, cultural city. Right across the river Mainz was just—
JH: It was not bombed during the war. Mainz across the—
MMH: It was industrious.
JH: The Rhine River when it was industrious—boy it was torn down, but Wiesbaden—
MMH: It was just beautiful.
LC: I haven’t been there.
MMH: Beautiful city and we had government quarters there.
JH: Not on a base, in town
MMH: No. They were in little sections around the city, but we enjoyed it. Made some good German friends. They visited us.
JH: Our son particularly enjoyed it because he is a racecar nut.
LC: Oh, really? Oh, boy.
JH: He was a—
MMH: Explorer Scout.

JH: Boy Scout, Explorer Scout. Explorer Scout troops’ goal was to see every race track in Europe and they did.

MMH: They had an American leader. He was married to a German woman.

JH: He was an insurance salesman over there and he would just take off whenever he wanted to.

LC: He could take them with him?

MMH: He’d take a van. He’d rent a van.

JH: Take a couple vans.

LC: Oh, what a riot.

JH: These kids, they didn’t pay no attention to fences or anything. They got right down in the pits with the drivers, the crews. They’d steal flags off of the fences.

MMH: Climb up and free them.

LC: Kids will do—

JH: I tried to counsel my son, but he says, “Dad. Everybody does it.” I said, “You ain’t everybody, son. If you get caught, what you gonna do?”

LC: Did he ever get caught or in trouble for any of that?

MMH: No. They were lucky.

JH: No.

LC: They were lucky.

MMH: He still loves races.

JH: Coincidentally, in Dallas they have a racing school at the Texas Motor Speedway.

LC: Oh, they do?

JH: On April the second, he’s coming up and gonna take a one day course there driving one of the NASCAR (National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) cars.

LC: So this is not something that ever went away?

MMH: No. He loves races. He watches all the races on TV.

LC: He’s got the bug.

JH: He can tell you every racecar driver’s name, what his winning percentage is.

He’s a brain, you know, in races.
MMH: He’s a brain, but that’s his love is racing.
LC: Wow. Did that get started in Germany or was it already kind of—?
JH: He started taking *Car & Driver* when he was in college.
LC: Oh, boy.
MMH: Boy, if that postman wrinkled up a cover of that magazine he was furious.
JH: That’s so far off the subject, though.
MMH: He probably still has all his *Car & Drivers*.
LC: Jim, let me ask a little bit about the observations. We’ve talked about the Soviet Union and China a little bit, but can you tell me anything about the observations that were made on France. Of course, I’m thinking that most of their testing was in the South Pacific. Is that correct?
JH: Yes, except for Algeria.
LC: Oh, Algeria. You’re right. I’m sorry.
JH: They popped a couple in Algeria.
LC: That’s right.
JH: We were not prepared for that. All of a sudden we had to schedule some airplanes over there in a real big hurry. We got what we needed from them down over Libya and over in Kenya in that area and returned them back.
LC: But it was a surprise?
JH: It was a surprise.
LC: The shots in Algeria.
JH: Yeah, they would tell us. I’ll tell you a little incident about their Polynesian shots. We got word through the CIA—we worked very close with the CIA. In fact, the CIA had their U-2 detachment at 1717 8th Street in Washington, D.C., that’s immaterial. I used to go talk to them about their U-2 operation versus SAC’s U-2 operation, but we didn’t have anything to do with their U-2s, just friendly ‘cause we were put in another areas.
LC: You worked with SAC U-2s only for pods, not CIA’s.
JH: That’s right. Yeah.
LC: Okay. I’m clear.
JH: So, where was I?
LC: So you’re going to talk about the Polynesian shots and you went to—
JH: Oh, okay. The CIA told us about the French were going to pop one down there. So we deployed our good old C-118, an AFTAC’s airplane. Where did we deploy?
LC: I’ve forgotten, New Zealand, I think. I think it was at Christchurch. It had a good long range. We had an internal tank in it also. Our technicians were out of this world. You can’t believe the quality of these guys. They ran all these shows. One of my guys said, “You know what? I’ll bet they have an operation center down there. I bet they have televisions in it and watching what they’re doing down there. I’ll bet I can fix up something in that bird of ours and tune in, maybe find a frequency that they’re on.” Sure enough, he took a television with him. He turned in and we were looking at their operation. He was looking at their operation center.
LC: Looking at the French operation center.
JH: French operation center in that C-118 before they shot. That sounds impossible to me, but it happened.
LC: That’s some impressive electronics right there. I can’t even imagine. Do you know what year that would’ve been?
JH: They were close in. That was—oh, let’s see. It was when I was at McClellan. I was at McClellan ’65 to ’68. So it had’ve been that era. I don’t remember when.
LC: When you knew that they were going to—when you had this foreknowledge that they were going to do a shot, did the tempo of your operations change then?
JH: Mm-hmm. We put airplanes in Panama and, let me think. Also the Philippines because Polynesia is pretty close to the Southern Hemisphere. We didn’t know where what was going to go, but Panama was one paid off. It went east. (unintelligible) So that’s as close as we ever got except just out over the open oceans.
LC: How did you come to the—well, let me first ask. You were at Wiesbaden ’62 to ’65 and then from ’65 to, I’m gonna guess, ’68 when you left AFTAC. Where were you based?
MMH: Sacramento.
JH: In Sacramento.
LC: You were in Sacramento that whole time? Okay. You moved back to Sacramento with the kids.
MMH: Yeah.

LC: Okay. The Sacramento office was the largest?

JH: Yes. Well, it was other than Washington headquarters.

LC: Other than D.C. Uh-huh.

JH: Yeah. Uh-huh.

LC: This was the largest regional?

JH: Yeah because we had in addition to the ground techniques and my air

techniques we had the big laboratory there, the biggest of the three. The one that at

Eielson probably had—well, I don’t know. I’m guessing now, maybe fourteen people

there. The one at Yokota maybe two or three more, but the one in Sacramento, it must’ve

had seventy or eighty.

LC: Okay. I wonder whether the different labs involved checked each other. Did

you do more than one test on each?

JH: Yeah. They would. Yeah. For an example, if the Alaska lab got a paper and

analyzed it they would also send the copy of it to McClellan. Of course, some of the

isotopes would have died, not many but enough. And then you would coordinate

activities, you coded the same.

LC: To make sure they were getting accurate readings and it would—

JH: Mm-hmm. McClellan would always send some of their people to these other

two labs if we got real hot samples, be there with them while they did the analysis. I had

a set of orders that allowed me to travel anywhere in the world. No, wait a minute. I’m

sorry. Anywhere from the longitude that’s west of Alaska all the way through the

longitude that goes through Ceylon in India and the latitude through the very southern tip

of South America and all the way up above Kirkenes in Norway. I can go anywhere

anytime by any mode of transportation regardless of cost to get to a point if it was an

emergency and we needed to. Maybe there’s another dozen people that had that same

type of order. I only had to exercise that once. The Russians popped one at, which was it?

Novaya Zemlya—was that the Banana Island or—the northern most point that they

detonate. It’s an island way up north in the Arctic Ocean. It’s easy—

LC: It’s probably on this map right here.

JH: Okay. Here right here. Novaya Zemlya, right there.
JH: Semipalatinsk is way back down in here somewhere and then Lop Nur is down here somewhere. They popped one up at Novaya Zemlya. Instead of coming east it turned around and went west. Boy, you talk about having to get it in a hurry. We didn’t have anything.

LC: You weren’t set up for that.

JH: We weren’t set up for that. Immediately I had to deploy to one of the English airbases and go to the base commander and say, “Hey. Here’s what’s going to be coming in right here and we’ve got to have this, this, this, this, and this. We’ve got to have it in a hurry.” “I ain’t got no money.” One dash four. When the airplanes got there we were ready to operate.

LC: What’s one dash four, the reference to the priority?

JH: The priority.

LC: So that means carte blanche.

JH: Yeah. That’s right, whatever money it takes.

LC: Did you have any—were there any tensions with the British about this?

JH: No. Well, oh, yeah there was. Initially the tension was until we got the airplanes in and we gonna get sampling because we weren’t sure whether we’d get there in time before it’s gonna—well, we knew we’d gonna get it eventually, but it went out in the Arctic Ocean somewhere.

LC: Right, but you wanted it sooner obviously. You always wanted it sooner.

JH: As soon as we could.

LC: Yeah and that would be a priority, too, for D.C., right? For the people in Washington?

JH: That’s right.

LC: What was your title when you were at Sacramento?

JH: Lieutenant colonel.

LC: But within AFTAC, before, you had been director of operations?

JH: I was a lieutenant colonel the full time I was in AFTAC, the full ten years.

MMH: She asked what was your title, what was your job—

JH: Oh, at Sacramento?
LC: Yeah.

JH: I was director of operations.

LC: So you were director again?

JH: I had air and ground operations.

LC: Who did you report to?

JH: I reported to my, the detachment—I mean to my—I’m sorry.

MMH: You’re getting tired.

LC: That’s okay. Yeah. It does get tiring.

JH: To my field office commander. He was a colonel.

LC: Let’s take a break for a second.

JH: No. I don’t need—

LC: We’re continuing now and, Jim, I want to ask at what point did you separate, then, from AFTAC. You had been with them since 1958. How did it come about that you went somewhere else?

JH: Selfishness.

LC: Oh, I can’t believe it. True? Is it true?

JH: True.

LC: Okay.

JH: In my questionnaire I mentioned to you that my son was graduating from college. I’ll rephrase, he was in his senior year. My daughter was in her senior year in high school. I didn’t want to move. I was subject to moving because I’d been there over three years. That was one reason. I didn’t want to move then. The second reason was I had been a lieutenant colonel for ten years, promoted way ahead of schedule. The primary zone for colonel came, for me, in 1967 and I didn’t make it. I was very, very shook up and disappointed. So when—no, wait a minute, 1968 not ’67.

LC: ’68, okay.

JH: That’s when I first came into primary zone. So my boss came to me and says, “Jim, I’ve got some bad news. You weren’t on the colonel’s list.” He got a list before it was let out. He says, “I have gone over all of your ERs (evaluation report). I’ve examined every word to see if just one word might’ve tainted the promotion board’s decision.” He said, “I don’t know why you didn’t make it.” I said, “Well, I think I do.” I said, “On the
chart at the personnel center there’s a little blank up there that says ‘Vietnam’.” I said, “I could do something about that. I could volunteer to go to Vietnam and maybe, just maybe, I might make colonel.” So I went home, talked to Minnie Mae. I said, “Here’s the situation. I can volunteer for some positions that I know in Vietnam through a friend of mine in the lieutenant colonel branch.” Not a lieutenant colonel branch, but the promotion. Not the promotion branch, the personnel branch in San Antonio at Randolph.

LC: So you had some information about what might be possible for you in Vietnam?

MMH: Yeah. Yeah. So I talked to her and we talked about my future career and all if I didn’t make it and the impact it would have on us, retirement and everything and being back for her, being there and the mama and the papa of the kids and getting them through college and finish high school. So that was agreed and I volunteered. I was accepted into Task Force Alpha. I didn’t know what Task Force Alpha was. I accepted an assignment to Vietnam and then I was assigned to it. So I left in November 1968 and she became mama and papa. Did a great job. I’ll get to the assignment in a minute, but during that tour in June of ’59, ’69 I was fortunate enough to have my R&R, rest and recuperation, and come back to the States and pin my son’s gold bars on him and see him graduate. See my daughter graduate and go back. I’m sorry that was not R&R. That was leave.

LC: That was leave? Okay.

MMH: Yeah.

JH: Then, let’s see, I guess it was before that in July I went back. Then to a base and I had a great commander there.

LC: There being NKP (Nakhon Phanom), right?

JH: No, wait a minute. Wait a minute. This didn’t happen at NKP. I’m sorry.

MMH: Yeah. That was your first tour there.

JH: My first tour. I came back from NKP on R&R. I was getting this mixed up.

LC: That’s okay.

JH: I came back from R&R and then went back NKP and did my job with Task Force Alpha there.
LC: Jim, let me ask how much you had been paying attention to what was happening in Vietnam during the time you were in Sacramento, during the big build up and, of course, you had a completely different mission supporting the radiological and intelligence effort of the Air Force, but what were you thinking as you were observing the huge buildup in Vietnam aside from how it might impact your own career, which you’ve discussed a little bit?

JH: I didn’t know whether I’d be sent over there or not. Honestly, I didn’t know what—I really didn’t suspect I would be. The reason being I can go into more detail after we get to NKP, if you’d rather, or I can do it right now.

LC: Why don’t we do it now while you’re thinking about it?

JH: When I left NKP, or I’ll rephrase. Before I left NKP I made colonel in late 1959. When you make colonel you have a separate branch for assignments from the normal personnel system. It’s in the Pentagon. I got a TWX, getting closer to rotation now for my rotation date preparing for the next assignment out of NKP. I got a TWX that says, “Would you agree to be the Chief of Air Mission at Managua, Nicaragua?” I TWXed back and says, “Hey, guys. I’m just finishing an overseas tour in Vietnam. I don’t want to go overseas again right away.” So I didn’t go, but when it came time for me to rotate and before that time to rotate I had orders to report to England Air Force Base as a deputy base commander and then the commander left and I became commander. I hadn’t been there six months when the colonel’s assignments branch calls and says, “Hey. How would you like to be the air attaché in Israel?” Now this is why I don’t think I’m going to Vietnam from AFTAC because someway I was tagged in the so-called, quote “diplomatic corps.”

LC: You had all this experience.

JH: Yeah. “How would you like to be air attaché in Israel?” I said, “Hey, guys. I just told you, I didn’t want to go over to Managua.” Okay. So about three or four months, weeks, a month later, “How would you like to be the assistant air attaché in Moscow?” “Hey, guys.” “How would you like to be air attaché in”—

MMH: Ethiopia. (laughs)

JH: “Ethiopia?”

LC: That Minnie Mae is like, “I don’t think so.”
JH: Oh, yeah. So I came home and told Minnie Mae. I said, “Yeah.” I said, “You know, they’ve asked me ‘How would you like?’ They’re gonna come in here one of these days after I’ve been here about a year or maybe a little over and say ‘Here you go or retire.’” After you get to be over twenty, what, twenty-something years they keep saying oh if you don’t accept you’re just a colonel. They say retire. So I said, “How about if I volunteer for two real safe Vietnam jobs that I know of?” She said, “What’ll I do?” Well, our son was in the Army, going to Germany. Our daughter was in the university in Louisiana and was getting ready to move to the University of Texas at Austin. So I said—

MMH: I lived on the base.

JH: Yeah. We lived on the base.

LC: Oh, okay. You were living there. Okay.

MMH: It was basically that you had to live on the base.

LC: At England?


MMH: Louisiana.

JH: So I said, “You know, your mother is getting ready to move from Irving to Glen Rose, Texas, which is down southwest of Fort Worth. She might need a little bit of help and it’d give you a year of just being with your mother, just the two of you.” They both idolized each other.

LC: What a great opportunity.

JH: She said, “You know, I’ll think about this.” So she okay’ed it. So I called the colonel’s branch and I says, “Okay, guys.”

LC: I got Minnie Mae’s okay. I’m ready to go.

JH: Yeah. “I want to either be the commander of a FAC (forward air controller) group out of Saigon.” I forgot the number of it right now. “Or I want to go to AB-triple-C (airborne battlefield command and control center) as either the operations officer or as an orbit commander. “Hey. We don’t get many of these requests. Stand by. We’ll be back.”

A week later I’m on a list to go to Udorn.

LC: To Thailand.

JH: AB-triple-C.
LC: So it’s all—it’s really—
MMH: I took the dog. I took the little dog and went home to my Mama.
JH: That’s the answer to your question of why didn’t they have them go to Vietnam because I was apparently tagged to be in the diplomatic corps somewhere with my experience.
LC: Absolutely, with how much work you had done internationally. It completely makes sense. Well, describe, Jim, if you can, Task Force Alpha. This was your first tour and your base at NKP.
JH: To get to Task Force Alpha, to get to any assignment in Vietnam, you had to go through what they call “snake school” in the Philippines. I determined it was not a snake school. It was a rat school. In two weeks, so I had to report to Clark Air Base en route to NKP and survive and being taught how to escape and evade and survive if I get shot down or whatever.
LC: Now how many other colonels, or lieutenant colonels at this point, were there in the snake school?
JH: Gosh, I don’t know.
LC: A few?
JH: Well, there were probably half a dozen there.
LC: Not many.
JH: Not many because—I wasn’t going to a flying job except, well—
LC: You did fly a little, as I understand. Yes, sir.
JH: I flew, but I wasn’t supposed to. It was illegal because I wasn’t supposed to fly over enemy territory or be in any enemy territory for one year after I left AFTAC.
LC: Ah, because of the—can you go ahead and say why?
JH: Yeah.
LC: Just to clarify why would that be.
JH: I’ll have to regress backwards now.
LC: That’s okay.
JH: The sample station—because any airplane that flies over a communist country is subject to engine trouble, having to land inadvertently. Here I am, my name on the roster up at Moscow. “Don’t let him go. We want to interview him,” that type of
thing. In a perfect example of how inconvenient this was when we were stationed in
Wiesbaden. If I wanted to go to Ankara, Turkey, as an example, Pan Am One flew direct
from Wiesbaden to Istanbul over Bulgaria.

LC: But.
JH: I couldn’t fly Pan Am One because it might have to abort and land in
Bulgaria, a communist country. So I had to fly to Switzerland. Get on Swiss Air to
Athens. Get on Greek Air, whatever its called, fly around to Istanbul. Get on Turkish
Airways, Istanbul to Ankara.

LC: This restriction survived your appointment at AFTAC for one year only?
JH: No.
LC: How long?
JH: I couldn’t do that for a full year after I left AFTAC.
LC: For a year after.
JH: The whole time I was in AFTAC—
LC: Yes, that was standard operating. You could not fly over a communist
country.
JH: It got kind of touchy down occasionally in some areas of Africa.
LC: Right, ‘cause—
JH: They weren’t communists. They—
LC: Right, but they weren’t exactly friendly.
JH: So we had to be real careful, but of course we didn’t have detachments, but
we just couldn’t fly over them. Had to pick an airline that might go way around, but now
back to—
LC: That’s interesting.
JH: That was illegal for me to go to, for me to fly the missions I did out of NKP,
but we’re gonna finish snake school. At snake school, they put you in—they give you
academics first, teach you how to escape and evade, survive off the land for temporary
time. Then if you get caught here’s what you do. Don’t tell them anything. Be nice to
them, but take whatever they give you, whatever torture or whatever.
LC: Just take it.
JH: Yeah. Take it. Yeah.
LC: What was the limit of what you were supposed to give back? Literally was it name rank and serial number?

JH: Name, rank that’s it.

LC: That’s it?

JH: That’s it.

LC: That’s not just like a movie thing. That’s for real.

JH: That’s the real thing. Then they put you out in the field. I’ve forgotten the name of the tribe, the Philippine tribe that they contracted with to try to catch us. It was all at night. We’d go out three different nights. We had to go out and try to camouflage ourself all night long so that one of these guys couldn’t catch us. They roamed throughout. They got paid if they caught us. We had three little chips, like a poker chip. If one of them caught us we’d give it to him. We could stay there or we could move and hide again, but he’d go to his buddy and say, “Hey, I got my chip. You go. He’s over here somewhere. Go close.” Again, if you gave your three chips away you failed the course.

LC: Your chip was worth something to them? What could they do with it?

JH: It was worth a certain amount of money and I don’t know what it was.

LC: Cash or food or something?

JH: Yeah. Cash.

LC: Cash. Okay.

JH: Cash. At least that’s what we were told. So I got caught once and that was all, but I gave a guy a chip and he patted me on the shoulder, “No problem, sir. No problem, sir.”

LC: At least he was gracious about it.

JH: Anyway, I finished snake school, rat school, and went on to NKP and reported in. General John Dyas was the commander of Task Force Alpha. Had a big compound on the airbase there and only the military assigned there—we had some Navy, mostly Air Force. We had a few Army, and some IBM (International Business Machines) contractors, civilian contractors, all lived on the base. In the compound, we had the largest IBM computer complex in Southeast Asia, including 7th Air Force down in Saigon. We were to monitor what was happening along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and implant sensors wherever we could to try to determine their movement. The FACs on
basically from NKP—we had a big Special Operations squadron there and had several
different FACs in the group there, the FAC group flew several different types of
airplanes. The FACs would tell us various movements, but basically their mission, as you
know from Richard, their mission was to spot and then call in the strike forces to strike. If
they saw something that the strike forces couldn’t get to or didn’t get to then they would
notify us and we’d get a sensor. If we didn’t have sensors in the general area, we’d put
sensors there. If we found that there might be a truck park—let me regress. The North
Vietnamese would come out north of the DMZ (demilitarized zone) through the mountain
ranges that separated Laos from North, from Vietnam. Mu Gia Pass was a big one.
There’s one just north of Mu Gia Pass. Oh, gosh, this map is so complicated. Mu Gia
Pass is somewhere about—is that the DMZ?

LC: Yes, it is.

JH: About right there is the Mu Gia Pass and that other one right up in here
somewhere. So the Ho Chi Minh trail actually started here in a minor scale, not near the
majors coming through Mu Gia Pass on down here. Did I send you a copy of some maps?
Well, they’re documented on there.

LC: Yes, you did. Absolutely and these will be included in the collection, also.

JH: The passes are documented there on there. I doctored the maps to show
generally what we were doing.

LC: Did you make the markings on these maps yourself?

JH: I made the markings on them.

LC: Let’s see, I’m just—

JH: Gosh. You’ve got the black ones. I have some colored ones.

LC: I made a copy of these. This is a copy for me.

JH: Now this is the second tour.

LC: That’s second tour. Let’s see. Where’s my map of the first—

JH: That’s first tour.

LC: There we go. Now this is the map that’s been deposited in the Jim Hall
Collection entitled “Sensor Patterns.”

JH: Then I know up here.

LC: A little further north of Vinh.
JH: Yeah. It wasn’t noted on this map. This was—
LC: Here are the passes.
JH: When I stole—borrowed a copy right here. Burned a copy. This was all—all this was on here. This type printing I put on there myself.
LC: You did this.
JH: They would come through this pass up here in a minor scale and then come through—oh, wait a minute. There’s—Mu Gia and Ban Karai have got—oh, I’m sorry there they are. That’s the two. Ban Karai here and Mu Gia here. This was the minor of the two. This was the major of the two. What we would do, after we got word from the FACs if they needed some implementation of sensors to help them we would implant the sensors, have either the C-130 group out of Da Nang, I think it was, implant the sensors or the F-4 group at Ubon.
LC: Ubon.
JH: Down south—Ubon right there. Go plant them. Then we got the idea that in addition to truck parks and all that had been being used, we got the idea to plant them along what we thought was the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We would hear then—I’ll regress. These sensors were both acoustic and seismic and we had C-121. We didn’t, but C-121 certainly stationed in Khorat from another organization stationed to twenty-four hour circling over somewhere about the northern part, northeastern part of Thailand. They would—these sensors would communicate their data back to them.
LC: So they’re transmitting.
JH: Transmitting.
LC: They’re both sensing and transmitting.
JH: Sensing and transmitting. Coming back into our computer center and the sensors were approximately two feet long. You may have one in your—
LC: I don’t know that we do, actually. I don’t think so.
JH: Okay. Well, I drew you a little picture.
LC: Yes, I saw the picture here.
JH: The picture of how one looks, but I don’t remember exactly.
LC: So about two feet.
JH: Two feet, something like that, and then this plate right here to keep it from
sinking into the ground. It would sink right up to this.

LC: About how big around would that plate be?

JH: About eight-, oh, sixteen, eighteen inches. Then a foliage—

LC: Fake—

JH: Fake foliage with antennas in it. The antennas were much different than this
illustration, whatever, on my drawing there. I just drew that that way. These sensors
both—these were better for seismic. We also had some that we’d hang in trees that would
pick up the acoustic, but this also had an acoustic capability, a minor, less capable than
the tree hangers, but it could, acoustic. So when we then decided to start putting them
along what we thought was the trail we would have these implanted there, and there and
there and there so forth. It’s just not near to scale.

LC: Sure.

JH: Then when these would start transmitting, the trucks were coming through
this section and we got to this section. We knew how many hours or minutes or whatever
that took. Then we knew the distance from here to the next one.

LC: So you’d be tracking the duration.

JH: That’s right. So shortly after the first one, and we knew their speed, we
would contact the fire bombers, the F-4s, out of Ubon and say, “Here’s where they’re
going to be at such and such a time. Go get them.” When we heard them coming through
that particular group of sensors we could hear the bombs going off and then everything
got silent. So we knew that we did a good job on whatever number of trucks were there.
This was mostly at—not all the time at night. In the daytime, the foliage there, the trees,
the jungles there. The trees had three different areas of vegetation, the tall, tall, tall spout
trunk, then a lower vegetation area, a middle vegetation area, an upper vegetation area.
That’s why they went in there with Agent Orange. Everyone’s involved, associated with
that. That’s what they’re trying to do is defoliate that so that we can see—

LC: What was happening on the ground.

JH: Uh-huh under the jungle. So that was our mission was to try to kill as many
trucks, as many any kind of vehicle, even guys on bicycles.
LC: These sensors, then, were acute enough, sensitive enough, to pick up the
movements of bicycles? Foot traffic?


MMH: Animals.

LC: Wow.

JH: Animals, oh, yeah. The elephants.

LC: Do you know where these—were these U.S. Air Force design or were they
contractor or do you know anything about that?

JH: I don’t know.

LC: End of it?

JH: I don’t know.

LC: Okay. Manufacturer, who built these puppies?

JH: I don’t know.

LC: No idea.

JH: I’m sorry.

LC: No, it’s fine. It’s fine. I’m just wondering. I mean the sensors are really
interesting. They were seeded along particular routes. How did you know where they
needed to be placed?

JH: Basically by the FACs telling us. Oh, I forgot. There’s another group. We
had a Special Operations unit that would be let down into Vietnam by helicopter like we
talked about at Herb out in Afghanistan. They would tromp all through this area down
here and report back by radio.

LC: Where the routes were.

JH: Here’s where they are. Mm-hmm. Then the FACs would tell us that it looks
like trails here, trails there, no movement today, but trails.

LC: Okay. The sensors and transmitters were clearly powerful enough to get that
signal all the way to aircraft, then, circling over Thai territory, not over Laotian territory.

JH: It could be over Laotian.

LC: It could be?

JH: Might have spread over out over Laos.

LC: How long would the sensor be active? Was it run on a battery?
JH: Yeah, well, yeah. It was battery powered, so I don’t really remember. All I ever saw of a sensor is the display there at our compound. The sensors were all down at Ubon or whatever the drop, the C-130s were. I think they were out of Da Nang. I might be mistaken.

LC: Now, Jim, your title. I know your rank, but your title when you were at NKP was what?

JH: When I first got there I was deputy director of operations. Then the operations officer was transferred, rotated back to the States and I became the director of operations as a lieutenant colonel.

LC: Your work was to get the aircraft?

JH: The work was to, yes, to coordinate with the units that we would employ to do both jobs, to do the implanting and to do the destruction. Also, we relied on the FACs so much that I flew with the FACs as a co-pilot just to understand what their mission was and how they accomplished it. Then I take that back and massaged that a little bit. Say, “How can we employ this for our mission in addition to what they’re doing of just spotting something and calling in the firepower on their own?”

LC: The aircraft that the FACs were flying were what? What type of aircraft?

JH: Oh, it varied. They were small. I think the largest one was a Cessna—no. I don’t remember the numbers. Had both a pusher and a puller propeller, one in front and one in back. Twin tails and two passengers.

LC: Pilot and co-pilot?

JH: Well, no co-pilot. He was by himself unless someone rode with him.

LC: Like you?

JH: Like me.

LC: Okay.

JH: The others were smaller than that and I don’t remember the numbers of them, O-1, O-2.

LC: That sounds right, yeah, O-2.

JH: I could look it up in my records, but I don’t. In addition, the Special Operations group there flew the A-1s that I mentioned earlier, and they flew the A-20s. I think they called them B-26s then, but they were maybe modified B—earlier B-20s,
World War II airplanes, anyway. Anyway there were B-26s in Vietnam. I flew co-pilot on both of those. I didn’t fly co-pilot in A-1. I flew backseat on it with a wing commander of that outfit just to see how they operated in helping the FACs.

LC: How to coordinate—coordinating all that. Now how big—?

JH: Yeah.

LC: Go ahead, Jim.

JH: In the B-26, this was a nighttime operation only because they had night vision. I don’t know why the others didn’t. The small airplanes didn’t fly at night, but the A-26s did, B-26s did. I flew co-pilot with one of my good buddies, AFTAC, who happened to be there.

LC: Oh, is that right?

JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: So another AFTAC veteran out there in Thailand.

JH: There’s still another one later. This IBM computer set up would take all this information and process it and put it out to the desk of our operations people. Then we had to report, in addition to planning for what we’re going to do, report to 7th Air Force at Saigon at Tan Son Nhut. “Here’s what’s happening. Here’s our plan. We request permission to strike.” If there wasn’t time to strike we had okay to go on our own if it was a real hot one that might disappear.

LC: So you did have a priority clearance to go ahead and launch an operation?

JH: Under certain conditions.

LC: Wow. Those conditions were?

JH: Just if it was an emergency and the attack might disappear, the attack capability might disappear.

LC: You were the one giving that order, making that decision?

JH: Yeah. Well, with the general approving it.

LC: Sure. You have staff below you who are also helping you get all the data together?


LC: How big a staff did you have?
JH: Oh, I had—let’s see. We had two sections. We had the operation staff and a technical staff, sixteen technical—about twenty-three, twenty-five. About eight or ten operational staff and—oh, wait a minute. In the IBM room we had thirty people.

MMH: Tell her how big the computer was.

LC: Yeah.

JH: Well, oh.

LC: You mentioned that it was the biggest IBM station, but—

JH: Well, it was. I can’t give you a size. Take a room roughly forty-by-forty and like your cabinets upstairs that’s the way the computers were in those days. This room just solid with cabinets like that, that you can get on a laptop today.

MMH: I didn’t know you’d already told her.

LC: Were they using at any point in their system those famous punch cards?

Where they—was there any punch card technology there?

JH: Unh-uh.

LC: We’re beyond that now?

JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: Did tapes—?

JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: Tapes. Wow. IBM contractors?

JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: So civilian contractors operating this whole thing. Did they report to you?

JH: No. They reported directly to the general.

LC: Okay. Was this General Dyas that you mentioned?


LC: Oh, D-Y-A-S. Okay. What was his background? Was he—?

JH: You know, I don’t really know. Well, wait a minute. He was a TAC man. He was a fighter pilot before he came there.

LC: Fighter pilot even as far back, maybe, as World War II? Is that—?

JH: Was he that old? Could’ve been. At least Korea, but maybe World War II. I really don’t know. He and I became close friends.

LC: You got along with him, too?
JH: He told me one day. He said, “Jim, I’ve been in the Air Force a long time and I’ve been in TAC practically all my career. You know more than any colonel I’ve ever seen knew.”

MMH: That was a good compliment.

LC: That was pretty nice.

JH: He’s the one that pinned my eagles on me when the orders finally came through.

LC: Okay. Well, he sounds like a good guy.

JH: Oh, he was a good guy.

MMH: I knew he was a colonel before he did.

JH: Then we got home.

LC: Oh, you did? How did you find out Minnie Mae?

MMH: His boss there in Sacramento and his wife are our good friends. One evening—the kids and I were staying in Sacramento that year. He came over. I just thought it was a visit. He brought me a big long-stemmed red rose and I didn’t know why. I took it and on one of the little leaves was an eagle, a rank thing.

JH: Insignia, eagle insignia attached.

LC: He had put it onto the leaf?

MMH: Yeah.

LC: That’s pretty good.

JH: I didn’t even know he had.

LC: Now did you two, were you able to communicate very much?

MMH: Letters.

JH: Letters only.

LC: Did you ever call?

JH: No.

LC: Did you ever get on a MARS (Military Affiliate Radio Service) line?

JH: No. No way to get a call from there.

LC: No way, huh?

JH: No. There was no long distance capability for NKP. There might’ve been in-country down to Bangkok. That town was away from us.
LC: NKP sits right up on the border.
JH: Yeah. It is. It’s just right on the Mekong River right there. The little town is a
nothing town.
LC: I’ll bet.
JH: However, I did get a wonderful pair of shoes made there for $7.50.
LC: Did you? How’d you manage that?
JH: Well, that’s like—
LC: There’s a local—
JH: That’s what they do.
MMH: They just draw around your foot.
JH: Take a big ledger and spread it out and you put your feet on there. He draws
around your foot. First of all, he gives you a catalogue and says, “What type do you
want?” He draws around your foot and then he puts tape around your instep and that’s all.
You go back three or four days later you’ve got a pair shoes that just fit better than any
you buy.
LC: Custom. How long did you wear those?
JH: I still have a pair. I haven’t worn them in several years.
LC: You’ve still got them?
MMH: They’re still gonna fit him.
JH: Well, let’s see. I lived in Granbury fifty—I retired in 1975 and I was still
wearing them when I retired. That’s from ’68, ’69.
LC: Wow. Now did you get across the border into Laos much?
JH: Not from that tour. The other tour.
LC: Not on this tour? Okay.
JH: I flew with the FACs over into there, but never crossed personally.
LC: You weren’t on the ground? Okay. Is this the time when Minnie Mae came
over and you guys had some time?
JH: No. That was second tour.
LC: That was second tour, as well? Okay.
JH: In addition to all of that, I might’ve mentioned earlier. I don’t know. I went
down to base operations one day and told the guys, “Hey, guys. I’m in a non-flying job
over here in Task Force Alpha. I have a pair of wings. What do you have out here I can
fly?” They said, “Two old Gooney Birds.” C-47s if you don’t know what a Gooney Bird
is.

LC: C-47, wow.

JH: They said, “Do you have any time with Gooney Bird?” “Well, yeah from
Kirtland Air Force Base and then we talk about three hundred hours.” “Well, let’s go out
there and run around in a pattern one time and you’ll be checked out and you can fly
Gooney Birds when you have time.” So they’d have missions down into South Vietnam
as far as Saigon, frequently into Da Nang and Chu Lai here. I’d come from NKP across
Laos down in there and get small ground fire both on take offs and landings over here,
just locals. Then take people down to Saigon to 7th Air Force Headquarters and that type
of thing. Then we also had—the base had a program where once every week they would
send a C-47 to Chiang Mai, which is way over in the—

LC: Northeast.


LC: Northwest. I’m sorry. You’re right.

JH: Way up near the Burma border somewhere right in there somewhere. It was a
beautiful cultural city and former old, old capitol of Thailand and stayed that way, but
they were beginning to modernize when I was going there. Some weekends I would have
a weekend off and I would fly them up there. I became acquainted—wait. You did come.

MMH: I came there.

JH: Yeah.

LC: You were up in Chiang Mai at some point?

JH: Yeah.

LC: Uh-huh.

MMH: Just visiting.

JH: I made a good friend of a teak furniture manufacturer there who had a friend
who was a taxi driver. I would always call my teak friend and say, “Tony,” American
name, “Tony, can you get a hold of John and see if he’s available for the weekend,” if I
was going to go up there. I’d just hire him for the full weekend. Take me out in the
boondocks little communities and all. Explain to me what they were doing.
LC: What’s going on.
JH: This is way off.
LC: Did you get a good feeling for the Thai people up in that area?
MMH: Oh, they were wonderful people.
JH: Yeah. I love the Thai people. They are the most humble people I’ve ever known. You’ve probably realized that.
LC: Yeah. I’ve had some Thai friends, too. That sounds very much right.
JH: Yeah.
LC: Yes, exactly. It sounds very much right to me. Did you while you were at NKP and in your position as director of operations have any interface with Thai officials or Royal Thai Air Force people?
JH: Not at NKP. The general did and the wing commander did with the Thai base commander. We were on a Royal Thai base and they ruled the base, but it was wide open for us, anything we needed to do. No complications whatever. I wasn’t involved in any other activity other than kind of Saigon was Air Force types and the Navy guy I told you about with the elephants.
LC: Okay. Now let me ask about your flights where you were actually taking some ground fire. You hadn’t flown under fire since really, am I right, World War II?
JH: That’s correct.
LC: Was that a little scary?
JH: Well, yeah.
LC: I mean it had to have been.
JH: When you hear something ping on your wing or somewhere. It wasn’t heavy fire, just rifle. Maybe a twenty-two I don’t know what size. Some of it got up to as high as .30 caliber, but no .50-caliber type. It was just locals. It wasn’t so called insurgents down there. If we got fired—if we could verify we got fired on you have to call it a combat mission.
LC: So am I right? I think your notes told us that you had about thirty-five of those?
JH: I had fifty-five total, including the ones that I flew with the FACs.
LC: Fifty-five, you’re right, combat missions.
JH: I had one mistake in that. I did say in my next tour, I said I had a hundred missions, but I go with this ninety-six.

MMH: Oh, that’s bad.

LC: Oh, ninety-six. Well—

MMH: That’s really bad.

LC: Okay. This is in the notes that he’s provided to us. So I’ll just make a little note there that you exaggerated by four missions. Were you able to keep your hours up such that all your flying certifications—?

JH: Mm-hmm.

LC: No problems there?

JH: No problem.

LC: Jim, just while I’m thinking about it. I just want to enter into the record, what was your, at the time of retirement, your total number of flying hours with the U.S. Air Force?

JH: 11,034.

LC: That’s amazing. That to me is amazing.

JH: That’s why I have a unique career. I had all these staff jobs. Did all this other stuff and normally a colonel with thirty years, twenty-eight years or thirty years, five thousand, seven thousand maybe, something like that.

LC: It’s absolutely amazing.

JH: I was a hog.

LC: It’s astounding. Yeah. There’s a lot of jet fuel down the drain.

MMH: He loves to fly.

LC: He loves to fly. Do you still fly at all? When was the last time you flew?

JH: Myself?

LC: Yes.

JH: Oh, probably 1976 or ’77.

LC: So you haven’t flown since then? You miss it?

JH: I did for a while.

LC: Not so much anymore?

JH: Mm-mnh.
LC: You’re too busy. You’ve got too many other things going on.

JH: Shortly after I retired about a month or two, I guess, moved to Granbury. We went out to the air base at Carswell. She looked around and she says, “Do you miss all this?” I said, “No. Not really. I loved every day I was in it, even combat, but I don’t miss it a bit.”

MMH: He forgot the colonel part. He was just—


LC: I noticed that.

MMH: Some of our friends are still Colonel and Mrs. Colonel.

JH: Oh, boy. Mrs. Major. Oh, that’s one of the contradictions I always felt was terrible in the Air Force, wives trying to wear their husband’s grading or rank.

MMH: He told me I don’t have any rank. I’m a PFC (private first class).

JH: When I was base commander, people would come to her, “Minnie Mae, how about getting Jim to do such and such?” “I’m sorry. I don’t work for Jim.” (laughs)

MMH: I said, “I don’t have any rank. I don’t have any rank.”


Well, let’s take a break for a sec.
Interview with Jim & Minnie Mae Hall
Date: May 16, 2005

Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University continuing the oral history interview with Col. Jim Hall of the U.S. Air Force and his wife, Minnie Mae Hall, is also on the line with us. Today’s date is the sixteenth of May 2005. I am in the interview room in the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech. Jim and Minnie Mae are joining me by telephone from their home in Fort Worth. Good afternoon to both of you gain.

Minnie Mae Hall: Hello.

Jim Hall: Good afternoon, Laura.

LC: Thank you for finding time to continue the interview. I’m sorry we’re not doing it in person, but we’ll have just as much fun, I think, and make good progress today. Jim, you had worked on some notes that you thought might include in the record here and I invite you to go ahead and include those if you will.

JH: Surely. Before we officially start our interview on my Vietnam experience, may I express my feelings about the military in Vietnam conflict?

LC: Yes, sir.

JH: I have over thirty years of active duty military service including enlisted and officer assignments. I have never regretted a single day of that service including three combat tours and being away from my family for about six years on various assignments on which they were not allowed to accompany me. As to my feelings about Vietnam, I fully supported our attempt to quell the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia. The conflict in Vietnam was too politically controlled to allow us a total victory in Vietnam and our withdrawal put a stamp on national indecisions on our actions. Nevertheless, with the actions we did take communism has not spread into other countries in that area and I attribute our Vietnam action to that success. I should also note that I did not have to fight in the trenches as so many of our valiant servicemen did. So I may not have the same perspective that many do have. On my first tour after the fifty-five combat missions and on my second tour I flew ninety-six combat missions, but I had a good bed to come back to each night, good meals and no fear if the enemy might attack our base. So perspectives do vary depending on certain conditions. I’ll begin by my
assignment to Task Force Alpha and Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base. I reported
there in September 19—correction, in November 1968. I reported to General John Dyas
who was the commander of TFA (Task Force Alpha). I entered as a lieutenant colonel,
initially as deputy director of operations and eventually the director of operations when
that spot became open. TFA had the largest computer system in Southeast Asia taking
info from many varied sources, both air and ground, pertaining to North Vietnam
movements both in the north and Laos. Intelligence reports were collected from Special
Ops ground forces, forward air controllers, 7th Airborne and Control Center, orbits, and
EC-121 airplanes. All of this data had to be processed for the largest computer complex
under IBM contract in Southeast Asia and forwarded to 7th Air Force headquarters in Tan
Son Nhut airbase in Saigon each morning at about 5:00AM. After collation of all this
data, I had to prepare the report for General Dyas’s approval and transmission. Seventh
Air Force reviewed this data for the master operations order for their air units in Vietnam
and Thailand. We also had a division of high technical personnel who continuously
researched new ideas for possible implementation in assessing the build ups, movements,
and preparation of the North Vietnamese. One section’s involvement was assigning in the
advancement, assisting in the advancement of using laser-guided bombs and other highly
classified functions. We had a C-47 assigned for our movement of personnel about
Thailand in South Vietnam for coordination of operations and understanding mission
complexities of the air operation’s units. I also frequently flew General Dyas to Bangkok
for meetings at the U.S. embassy and to Tan Son Nhut to the 7th Air Force headquarters
meeting with 7th Air Force Commander Gen. Davy Jones, who, if I remember correctly,
became Chief of Staff of the Air Force at a later date. Back to intelligence and
information gathering. Through these sources we would get information about the
location of North Vietnamese missile sites. There was a wing of F-105s that are based in
Thailand nicknamed “the Missile Busters” with call signs of “Wild Weasel.” These
specially-equipped planes with their radar and missiles would be alerted to the
approximate location enemy missile sites, and were airborne when the B-52 and other air
strikes were scheduled. When the missile sites came up on their radar to launch a missile
these Wild Weasels would home in on the site and try to destroy it. The North
Vietnamese would move these sites frequently so it was somewhat of a cat-and-mouse
game. As these sites would move we would try to keep abreast of the new locations. One of our requirements was to lay strings of acoustic and seismic sensors in predetermined locations along the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail and other identified locations to determine the movement of vehicles, movements we have determined vehicles, personnel, and other supply methods. After our analysis of such movements we would determine the best location to lay these sensors. We had designated F-4 and C-130 units equipped for this mission. Wing numbers and locations of C-130s is forgotten, but the Air Force were stationed at Ubon Royal Thai Air Base in Thailand south of Nakhon Phanom along the Mekong River. When our sensors would detect movements we would call in strike aircraft with exact movement location for their bombing efforts. We could monitor the success of these bombing missions by the sensory information. It was almost instantaneous. These missions were quite successful. We would replant sensors if they were damaged or lost their battery power. I might blow my whistle here a bit. General Dyas called me in one day and told me I had just been promoted to full colonel. He also told me that I was the most well-versed, knowledgeable, and personnel-oriented lieutenant colonel he had ever encountered in his career including several colonel-level wing commanders who served under him. Perhaps his endorsement on my annual evaluation report reflected that and led to my promotion to colonel. After General Dyas left, we got a big air general named Butcher. Chester, I believe was his first name, who was an I-and-me man making decisions contrary to established policies and getting into trouble with 7th Air Force headquarters. No one can please him. I think he had probably been one of the colonel wing commanders that General Dyas mentioned. I have no idea how he ever made general. Thank goodness I left after about two months under his command. Later when I was stationed at England Air Force Base, Louisiana, an OSI (Office of Special Investigations) agent came to me and questioned me about a lot of General Butcher’s actions while at Nakhon Phanom. I didn’t give the general a very good report and that was the last I ever heard of him. Other than this last comment, I believe that our operation in Task Force Alpha helped reduce the resupply efforts of the North Vietnamese, their efforts in the South, but again I feel that politics precluded the eventual defeat of the North’s efforts to overrun the South. Without that intrusion I believe the conflict would’ve ended in our favor. I must note that we had two exceptionally highly-
classified missions that required a special security clearance above top secret. They were nicknamed Alfredo and the Slinging Dart. Very few of our people even knew about them.

LC: What was the name of the second one again, Jim?
JH: Slinging Dart.
LC: Slinging Dart.
JH: D-A-R-T.
LC: Mm-hmm. Thank you.
JH: Very few of our people ever knew about them. I don’t know whether they have been declassified even today so I can’t go into detail. I flew fifty-five combat missions this tour including the old C-47, several different forward air controllers, and EC-121 and an F-4. I was to be assigned to England Air Force Base upon completion of the tour there. After leaving Task Force Alpha I was assigned as the deputy base commander at England Air Force Base, moving to base commander when the current commander was transferred. This was a Tactical Air Command base with an F-100 wing.

The wing commander was another of these colonels General Dyas mentioned, an I-me-type without much experience except flying airplanes. We got along except in some of his decisions, which were against Air Force policy. When I’d advise him of such he would say, “We can do it this way,” and we got in trouble a couple of times with the Air Force inspector general’s visits. I really didn’t enjoy being around fighter pilots with their wild parties and drinking, but continued to operate the base in a progressive manner. One occasion, which really turned me off, was an order issued to me by the wing commander in the officer’s club one day. He had a nice club and he said to me, “Jim, there is one thing lacking. We need a fireplace in that corner over there,” pointing to a corner in the bar. I said, “Colonel, we have a nice fireplace in the dining room and this area is well heated in the winter.” His reply was, “Yes, but these pilots don’t have a place to throw and break their drink classes after giving the toast.” I said, “Well, I’d have it built only with a definitive written order.” The order never came, but that was the level of his thinking. Just do it without any real necessity. After having been there about six months the colonel’s assignment branch in the Pentagon called me one day and asked if I would like an assignment as chief of the air mission in Managua, Nicaragua. I told him I’d only been back from Vietnam a short time and did not relish another overseas assignment so
soon. About a month later another call, “How would you like to be the air attaché in
Israel?” Then later, “How about the assistant air attaché in Moscow?” And still later,
“How about the air attaché in Nigeria?” I think it was Nigeria. It was an African nation.
My answer was the same. I talked to Minnie Mae, my wife, about this saying they’re
asking me if, with emphasis on, “if,” I would like so and so, but about the end of a year at
England they would probably come to me and say, “Your next assignment is such-and-
such.” Minnie Mae said what I told her I knew—Minnie Mae said—

MMH: What’d I say?
JH: Minnie Mae said, “What would I do during that year?”
MMH: Yeah.
JH: I told her I knew of two assignments for colonels in Vietnam and might
volunteer for one of those and would never have to go overseas again. She said again,
“What would I do?” I said, “Both of our children are out on their own and our widowed
mother is—your widowed mother is contemplating a move to a new city. You can enjoy
a year with her and help her move.” After some serious discussions we agreed on my
volunteer suggestion. I called the colonel’s branch and I volunteered for one of the two
jobs. Their response was, “We don’t get many volunteers. We’ll get back to you,” and
they did in about a week later with an assignment as an orbit commander in the 7th
Airborne Command and Control Center at Udorn, Thailand. We left England Air Force
Base in September 1971. I’ve always suspected the reason I was getting called about the
air mission and attaché assignments was because of my assignment in the Air Force
Technical Application Center where I dealt with embassies, consulates, high-level U.S.
and foreign civilian and military officials and having been a member of our air staff. So
much for the England Air Force Base assignment, now to the 7th Airborne Command and
Control Center in Thailand. So it’s off to Thailand I go in September 1971, but first there
must be a stop at Clark Air Force Base near Manila, Philippine Islands, to attend an
escape, evasion, and survival course before I can fly a combat mission. This is commonly
called “snake school” with a week of classroom instruction and then three days in the
field with implementation of supervised activities we have learned in class. Then we
return loose and adjoined to try to evade capture by hired indigenous natives who had
been paid to capture us. If we were caught three times we failed the course and had to
start over. I got caught once, which was less than most. However I never did see a snake, just saw plenty of rats. Ugh. We all arrived at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand on the northern Mekong River. I was given a classified organization briefing instructed in operation procedures 7th Air Force headquarters in Saigon to become familiar with the interconnection of our operations with their plans and requirements. Then back to the AB-triple-C and assigned as orbit commander of Cricket Orbit. Seventh AB-triple-C mission was to control and coordinate all strike missions against the North Vietnamese with two orbits manned twenty-four hours a day. One orbit over northern Laos above the Plain of Jars and the other in southern Laos near the Cambodian and South Vietnamese borders. These orbits were flown in specially-equipped C-130 airplanes. The control function was handled by six specially-trained air controllers and an intelligence officer. The northern orbit was operated by a daytime orbit designated “Cricket,” which would stay on station till they leave after twelve hours by another C-130 night orbit called “Alley Cat.” In the southern orbit the daytime orbit was designated “Hillsborough” with the nighttime orbit being “Moonbeam.” There was another C-130 mission named “Trump,” which was very highly classified and I doubt that that mission has been declassified. The air controllers would receive calls from all strike aircraft originating from Thailand bases and would advise them of any other aerial activities in their area of operation. The Navy also operated from their carriers and controlled their own missions. One of our air controllers was in constant communication with the Navy equivalent to 7th AB-triple-C to preclude conflict in air strike areas. Two other of our controllers were in constant communication with forward air controllers accepting their need for air strikes and forwarding information to the strike aircraft. The intelligence officer was in contact with strike aircraft. I’m sorry, was in contact with Special Operations groups on the ground in Laos accepting any information they might have for immediate strikes, or further transmission to 7th Air Force in Saigon for other necessary action. In the northern orbit, Cricket and Alley Cat, the intelligence officer would also be in contact with Laotian Gen. Vang Pao’s operations to people to coordinate their ground call is artillery and aerial activities to ensure there was no conflict between our activities and there’s. I visited Gen. Vang Pao twice at Long Tieng to coordinate our joint operations. I was also sent to Plain of Jars to coordinate artillery activities. Very
interesting and effective operation in northern Laos in an attempt to preclude the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces from overriding north Laos from the northeast. In April of 1971, our operation was moved on to Khorat in central Thailand. I might add here that I was able to take two weeks leave at this time and Minnie Mae came to visit me for three weeks. The main purpose was to celebrate her fiftieth birthday. I gave her a grand tour of a portion of Thailand that I knew except Nakhon Phanom, which was strictly no unauthorized visitors. After a few days in Bangkok, showing her that wonderful city and celebrating our joint birthdays on April the eighth, her fiftieth and my fifty-third, we then flew to Udorn visiting Thai friends there with a grand tour of that area and then to Chiang Mai in northwestern Thailand where the Chinese and Burma, now Myanmar, borders. On a few previous ends in—on a few previous weekends fly into Chiang Mai, I had become friends with a manufacturer of teak furniture and artifacts. He knew a great taxi driver that I could hire for the full weekend and he would show me the countryside. I hired John, the taxi driver, to show Minnie Mae all of the area around Chiang Mai. Tony, the teak man, and his wife were gracious hosts with an elegant dinner and our gifts for another. Then we caught an overnight train back to Bangkok for another couple of days before I had to return to Khorat. Minnie Mae shared my trailer home for a week while I flew a couple of combat missions. Then back to Bangkok and the U.S. she went, a great opportunity for both of us. During this tour, I flew ninety-six combat missions and logged just over a thousand combat flying hours. This assignment was a great pleasure, but again I must reiterate that we could’ve done a better job of winning the overall conflict if we’d been allowed to make more air strikes on very important targets in North Vietnam especially in Hanoi and Hai Phong areas. I left Thailand in early September 1972 for an assignment to Hill Air Force Base, Utah, as a deputy base commander. Then to Hill Air Force Base which is near Ogden, Utah, about fifty miles north of Salt Lake City. It was one of five huge Air Force depots, which was the supply sources for all Air Force needs. These depots were called air logistic centers under the Air Force Logistics Command. Maj. Gen. Bryce Pole was the logistics center commander when I arrived. He was the very best boss I ever had in the Air Force. I arrived at Hill as deputy air base commander and was elevated to base commander upon retirement of the then-base commander. Hill Air Force Base covered approximately six thousand acres of
ground with a multitude of large warehouses, several large airplane hangers, a Titan II
inverted missile silo deep in the ground, the air logistics center, a base hospital, helicopter
rescue wing, Air Force Reserve fighter group, and several other tenets. In addition, we
had over five hundred base housing units for military personnel and many on-base
dormitories for unmarried personnel. The missile silo was researching for the
development of the Titan II missile. The warehouses were cramped with several thousand
items needed throughout the Air Force and were specifically designated through our
logistics center. The center was also the designated supplier of all Air Force aircraft
landing gear needs. Also, being the repair depot over such. It was the prime depot for all
F-16 needs and depot repairs. During my tenure we automated all the warehouses so that
a computerized operation selected the appropriate request and delivered it over
designated moving tracks to the appropriate shipping department. We also had a museum
commemorating the contributions the base had made to the area along with many
artifacts from its beginning in World War II along with many restored U.S. Air Force
airplanes. This has now become a reality as Hill Aerospace Museum. The base is
outstanding and supported by all local cities, chains of commerce, the state legislature,
the Mormon Church headquarters, and an innumerable named organizations and support
groups. I was elected as a member of several organization boards, such as chambers of
commerce, advertising agencies, and one local bank. I suppose the bank was appreciative
of the approximate five hundred million dollar annual payroll we had. This was generated
by the twenty-one thousand civilian employees and six thousand military personnel on
the base for which me and my staff were responsible to assure proper working conditions,
dining facilities, healthcare, housing for military, and recreation. All of this constituted a
four billion inventory of physical properties, flies and invested assessments from earned
non-governmental sources. In addition to Hill Air Force Base, we also had the Wendover
Bombing Range up about one million acres and an auxiliary airfield there on for which I
was responsible. One interesting incident came as a result of the annual prayer breakfast
the president had encouraged for all military bases. At the February of 1974 breakfast, I
invited President Kimble of the Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons, to
be our guest speaker. He graciously accepted and brought his military liaison Apostle
Boyd Packer along. It was a memorable occasion to hear such a highly respected
religious leader speak. Later I received a letter from Boyd Packer’s assistant, David Hate, signing an invitation from President Kimble to a visit to their headquarters complex in Salt Lake City. This invitation also included my entire base, chaplain staff, and chaplains. We were really treated royally with very depth of understanding of the LDS (Latter Day Saints) religion royally and the very depth of understanding. I’m repeating myself. We were really treated royally with a very depth of understanding of the LDS religion without any attempt to convert us. A wonderful tour through the headquarters including a session with their missionaries, their training program, and a special conducted tour through the attic and normally unseen fortunes of their tabernacle, excellent rapport. Just prior to my departure from Hill, we broke ground for over two hundred more base housing units, a major accomplishment with the Congress cutting military spending for 1974. My departure was sad for me for my assignment there was the best duty I served in my career. AFTAC was wonderful, but Hill was better as I had so much responsibility and was able to accomplish a lot for the future of the base. Not withstanding, I asked General Pole if he might find me an assignment there at the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex. My stepmother had recently passed away and my eighty-five year old father couldn’t take care of himself. No home health in those days. Minnie Mae would fly there every other week to look in on him and prepare him for another two weeks before she would return. General Pole was very sympathetic cause he said he had a similar situation with his father a few years ago. So after a couple of weeks General Pole told me he could get me an assignment as inspector general at the air logistics center in Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma City. I accepted as that was just over two hundred miles from Dallas-Fort Worth and easier to look in on Dad. Thus we were transferred to Tinker Air Force Base in September of 1974. I reported to Tinker in late September as the inspector general for the air logistics center. However, Gen. Jim Randolph told me that it’d be temporary as the then-air base commander would retire in a few months and I would become the base commander. The inspector general is somewhat blah. Yep, blah. Besides inspections of several operations on base, it was flooded with individual complaints that took a lot of time to resolve and about eighty percent were not substantiated. The civil service union was very strong leaving the production rate quite a bit below our goals. Not like Hill where seventy-four percent of the base population was Mormon with outstanding work
ethics and no problems at all. I made a few civilian employees angry with me because of
the pressure to improve their performance. The base commander retired and I took over
as base commander. With my previous working as inspector general, I assumed my
assignment wasn’t exactly popular with a lot of people and disconcerting to me and my
attempt to improve working conditions and productions among my staff, which was
about fifty percent civilians. As at Hill, I worked hard to fulfill my responsibility to
please General Randolph so it went pretty well. However in mid-July of 1975, Minnie
Mae and I took a two-week vacation without our grown children or one of our mothers as
we usually do. Driving back to Oklahoma, I said, “You know, I could take a whole lot
of—this is my kind of life,” and retirement was off with. We talked about it and decided
that that would be our plan. Upon return to duty the following Monday morning I saw
General Randolph and told him I was putting in my request for retirement. He said, “Jim,
please don’t do that. I like the way you operate.” I told him I was sorry, but the decision
had been made. I initiated the necessary action that day. Consequently on September the
1st, 1975, I retired from the Air Force for thirty years and seven months of active duty and
four years in the Air Force Reserves between the end of World War II and my recall of
duty for the Korean conflict of 1950. My actual retirement started in Granbury, Texas.
Granbury is a quaint little town. Do you want to hear all this?


MMH: She hasn’t gone to sleep yet.

LC: No. No. No. Actually I am very busy taking notes.

JH: Granbury is a quaint little town about thirty-five miles from Fort Worth, west
of Fort Worth. It was established in the mid-1980s while Indian tribes were still a
problem in the area, but it survived and became the county seat of Hood County. It was
surrounded by cotton, grain and peanut crops. This made their economic base. Also,
some cattle resources. It survived the depression, but after many years to regress, began
to regress economically. By 1970 about one third of the buildings on the square were
empty. Many boarded up and some with roofs caved in, but it was surrounded by the
Brazos River. The U.S. Civil Engineers had just completed a dam south of Granbury and
Lake Granbury was born. At that time, Hood County had about six thousand people in
the city and twenty-seven hundred residents. The original land for the county seat was
donated by two brothers named Nut who were quite popular in the area and had
established the general store on one corner off the proposed square before the courthouse
was built. Subsequently many other merchants and professionals built around the square.
Two of the Nut grandchildren left the little town in their early adulthood, made their
millions in the Dallas area and saw the potential future of the quaint little town as a
tourist attraction with a new lake. They returned, bought up several of the empty stores
on the square, renovated them, and started business there in. The town did become a
tourist attraction and began to prosper again. While I was on my second assignment to
Vietnam and Minnie Mae was in Minerals, Texas, where her mother had moved, the two
of them would frequently go to Granbury to shop, eat, and enjoy the plain atmosphere.
Minnie Mae fell in love with Granbury so we decided to test it and see if it was where we
would really be happy in retirement. We put all of our household goods in storage, rented
an apartment half a block off the square. Bought a limited amount of goodwill and garage
sale furnishings and set up house keeping. After a couple of months, having joined the
Methodist Church on one corner of the square and meeting a lot of the merchants that are
nice and other nice people, we decided this was the place we could be happy. So we
bought two residential lots with direct access to the lake only six blocks from the square
on which we would build our three thousand square foot four bedroom, three bath, living
room, dining room, den, kitchen, breakfast room, large tool garage and workshop, and
visual landscaping which we did our selves. In the meantime a local newspaper noted the
city manager had retired in the city council and was advertising for a new one. Minnie
Mae said, “You ran large air bases. You could do this job. Why don’t you apply?” I
stated I was retired and didn’t relish going back to work. She kept pushing me. So I
submitted my resume, was interviewed. Then the mayor in council was hired and started
to work. The city financial situation was pretty poor. So I began to search out the
problems and correcting deficiencies getting us back to a sustainable office situation. I
was really enjoying the job when I detected two flagrant violations of Texas state laws.
One involved personal property law, not land or buildings. The other involved annexation
of land for a residential development. As to the latter, Texas laws are quite strict on how
land annexation can be approved by city councils. The mayor was a land developer and
had convinced the council to allow him to annex one ________(??) at a time contiguous
to a section of the city limits, a direct violation of state law. I went to the mayor and told him what I had found. He told me to sit on it till the forthcoming election. We discussed it back and forth with no resolution. So I left. The next morning I went to his office with a resignation letter justifying my position as having hired to uphold the federal and state laws and the ordinances of the city. He saw my letter and said, “I hope this is not what I think it is.” I said, “I will stay on till they can find someone else.” So I left that job after only five months. The council, the city council was upset and tried to get me to remain, but I was out of there. However, they then asked me to campaign for forthcoming open city council seat. I was elected and served three terms with the new mayor. I really enjoyed that state of elected public service and without being tied down with the morning 7:00AM until question mark question mark job. I was free to come back to admin a civic charity club and church activities. Likewise Minnie Mae also became quite involved in like activities, becoming president of the prestigious Woman’s Wednesday club, which has been organized for about a turn of a century. President of the only local garden club, many boards and guilds of various organizations. We made our home and wanted to use some of the leadership qualities we had developed over our many years of experiences elsewhere. After living there for about three years, Minnie Mae’s mother became ill and spent her last four years as a complete invalid in our home. My mother was at a Granbury nursing home and my dad was in a Dallas nursing home. So many hours were devoted to their care until their deaths between 1982 and 1986. These were great loses to us, but we overcame our grieving and went on with our active life. During our unencumbered periods of retired life we did considerable traveling by far. We visited every one of the 254 counties of Texas taking a photo of the courthouses. All fifty of the United States and extended driving tours through all the southern provinces of Canada, from the Eastern Maritimes to Vancouver out in the west. Then we became addicted to ocean and paddleboat steamer cruises on the Mississippi River complex and the Western Columbia River. As I approached seventy years old, I could see that I would not be able to maintain our wonderful home in Granbury and potential health problem might need more specialized treatment that was not available there. Plus, if Minnie Mae or I should get down health wise it would be a strain on our daughter to commute down there from home in Colleyville, a Fort Worth suburb. So we began to think about moving to a retirement
community in a Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex. We did a lot of research of such facilities. In November 1989 we first purchased a condominium in the Lakewood Village retirement community in east Fort Worth. It has three levels of care, independent living where we bought into, assisted living complex, and a scale nursing home, nurse care facility. So we feel we would be ready for the future. Plus we only live about fifteen minutes from our daughter. As we were leaving Granbury, there were many festive events wishing us farewell and good luck in our new lifestyle, many accolades that we never expected. To toot our whistle, here is the wording of one plaque presented to us by the Hood County News, the local newspaper distributes three times a week. The one inch printed heading reads, “Good for Hood,” Hood being Hood County. Followed by, “For dedicated service in their community they should be in the Hall of Fame,” in three quarter inch letters. Then these words, “Some people live in the world to serve others. Jim and Minnie Mae Hall, Granbury’s ambassadors of goodwill, are two such people. During their fourteen years here, their volunteered efforts have helped a countless number of individuals and about as many community projects. One would be hard pressed to name another couple who has done more for Granbury. Unfortunately, the Halls will be moving away in a couple of weeks to a Fort Worth retirement community. First thing about son and daughter, the Halls want to be prepared if a serious health problem strikes. They explained, ‘We want to prepare ourselves for older age before infirmary possible sets in.’ The Halls are deeply involved in this community and the town’s people enveloped them. They were named citizens of the year by the prestigious Woman’s Wednesday Club in 1987. They’ll be sorely missed in our community as they leave.” Ending with half-inch letters, “Thanks Jim and Minnie Mae.” So we left Granbury and moved into our new condominium apartment in Fort Worth in November 1989. I’m getting close to the end.

LC: You keep going, Jim.

MMH: How’s your tape?

LC: It’s in good shape.

JH: It’s rolling. So what do we do now that we have no homeowner responsibilities? We have a cafeteria where we receive one meal daily included in our monthly maintenance fee. We have no meetings to attend other than commitments. Well, we just began all over again with homeowner leadership roles, civic activity, local clubs,
and our new church. I became president of our resident’s council, a board member of the Lakewood Village Condominium Homeowner’s Association, and deeply involved in getting a Fort Worth regional library built in our immediate area. Minnie Mae became president of the Village Book Review Club, chairman of the Food Service Committee and established a Woman’s Red Hat Group. She is Mrs. Sunshine with her outgoing and wonderful personality and greeting new residents and encouraging our old residents about their aches and pains. This is a good life and as we previously stated, we just lock our door and go, either on a planned trip, on a spur of a moment opportunity. As of this date in May of 2005 we’ve been on twenty ocean cruises to most parts of the world having completed a full around the world vacation and have sailed on paddle steam boats on the Mississippi complex four times and one time on the Columbian River in the Oregon, Washington and Idaho area for a total of twenty five cruises. We began to feel our old age at ages of 86 and 83 with various aches and pains and a few other minor problems, but medication takes care of that. So we continue an active life. Our next planned trip will be to the 19th Bomb group reunion later this year in San Antonio. I look forward to seeing some of my old World War II buddies as well as old newer guys from Vietnam era, a couple newer ones from Desert Storm and the Iraq efforts. I am enjoying working with Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archives at Texas Tech University and presenting some of my memories about my life in general and about my military career. This endeavor has taxed my memory in many areas and I have rambled along as various incidents feel themselves. I hope this will be worthwhile to the archives and anyone who might stumble across it. It is to preserve the future reference if any. I am Jim Hall. Thank you.

LC: Jim, thank you very much for all the effort that you put into developing that statement and, of course, all the time that you both have spent with us. Just for listener’s information, Jim and Minnie Mae have agreed to answer a few questions or to at least consider them and think about what they might reply. If you’re all right, Jim, we’ll go ahead and I’ll ask you a couple of questions.

JH: Okay.

LC: Okay. Jim, thinking back over your career what was your favorite plane to fly? What was the best aircraft you ever flew?
JH: Well, I would have to say two, but two totally different mission capable airplanes. My favorite one, I guess, was the B-29 in World War II, a combat-type airplane, because it was so highly technically advanced for those days. I had a cohesive crew that I flew with on each of the thirty-five missions I flew over Japan. So that made it real special to me. Coming on up into the more modern era, I flew the B-52 which was a great airplane. Easy to fly and could accomplish a great mission. Then there was a little T-39, which was an offspring of a North American civilian version Saberliner, and it could carry about seven passengers. I loved to fly it. That’s basically what I flew during my assignment in Germany for three years. I flew it throughout, quite a bit, all over Europe and Northern Africa and into the Mid-East countries, not too far into Mid-East. I guess Turkey would probably be the farthest in Mid-East, but that was a wonderful little airplane.

LC: What was the best thing about it?

JH: Oh, it’s pleasantry in flying, just so easy to fly. It was very well appointed. Had a little passenger airplane, not cargo. I called it the “Cadillac of the Air Force.”

LC: Jim, if you don’t mind, I want to ask you a couple of questions about the service that you gave to the country during your tours in Southeast Asia.

JH: Okay.

LC: First of all, with Task Force Alpha, in the first tour, can you tell me a little bit about this first generation of laser-guided bombs that you used—how did you get familiar with them? Did you go to briefings and how effective were they?

JH: Here is my only involvement, very minor. As I mentioned, we had this highly technical division under the director of operations, which I was. At an AC-130 base, and I don’t know where it was now, they were trying to drop bombs with a laser beam. They were having a lot of trouble. They somehow contacted us and asked if we had a specialist who might know something about such a process and could be of assistance to them. And, fortunately, we did. I don’t remember his name. He was lieutenant colonel and he volunteered to go and work with them. It didn’t get to the degree near of where we are today, but they got to where they could come pretty close to the target by just dropping the bomb out of a C-130 and following a laser path.

LC: Am I right in describing those as basically the first generation?
JH: Well, I’m not certain, but it was an early generation. I don’t know whether it was the first, but there might’ve been—well, there must’ve been other activities on it because they were trying to do it before we got involved.

LC: Okay. So it actually predated your first tour in some ways?

JH: Yes. It was improved a bit by the assistance of this lieutenant colonel, but not near the precision that it has today.

LC: What was the title of that technical division that was under you, that was—?

JH: You know, I’ve tried to remember that and I should’ve asked Lee Bird when I was talking to him a while back.

LC: Well, I’ll ask him when I interview him. How’s that?

JH: Okay.

LC: Okay. Let me ask a little bit about other details from your second tour. In the paperwork that you provided us, you mentioned that you had been on two backseat missions over North Vietnam in an F-4.

JH: Yes.

LC: Can you tell me anything about those missions or what it’s like to be in an F-4?

JH: Well, we were on our AB-triple-C organization. I was on the base with an F-4 wing and I became real familiar with the commander who eventually became chief of staff of the Air Force, Charles—I might think of him before we hang up.

LC: You had mentioned him earlier.

JH: Yeah. Anyway, and I said, “You know, I’ve never been in an F-4 and do you ever have an occasion where an airplane might go up and really didn’t need a back-seater?” He said, “Sure. I can arrange that, Jim.” So I flew two reconnaissance missions, they were so-called reconnaissance missions, over the southern part of Vietnam. We didn’t go up into the skillet part where the Hanoi and Hai Phong and all were.

LC: Over the southern part of North Vietnam.

JH: North Vietnam, yeah. Just probably, I don’t know, maybe a hundred miles north of the DMZ, in that general area. Anyway, they were just on a recce’ mission both times.
LC: Were there any events during the mission that you remember, either of those missions?

JH: No. No. He just had automatic photo capability. He activated that. I just sat there and rode and looked. I handled the stick a little bit, but not a whole lot.

LC: A little bit, huh? How did that feel? How did that plane feel?

JH: It was a great, great combat airplane. I mean, we didn’t do very many maneuvers in it. We just—he did most of the flying. I did very little, but it was just mostly straight and level flying, climbing up and get to the desired altitude, and doing a little recce’ work and then heading back towards Udorn.

LC: Well, Jim, you also mentioned that you had in the course of that second tour occasions on which you met a Gen. Vang Pao. Can you tell me the circumstances of those meetings if you remember at all?

JH: Yes. As I mentioned, in this and I can expand on it a bit. General Vang Pao had a little Air Force of his own. If I’m remembering correctly, our Air Force trainers, T-28s I believe he had. They flew on their own. I guess it’s legal to mention it now. We had some civilianized Air Force instructors up there to help them out. General Vang Pao also controlled the ground forces and the artillery, which was basically out in the Plain of Jars firing towards the East towards the approaching—what vehicle—I mean Laotian—Pathet Lao.

LC: Pathet Lao. Mm-hmm.

JH: In conjunction with this, we would have our FAC airplanes, the U.S. FAC airplanes, sometimes necessary to get up into that area to spot a specified target that had been reported to us by our U.S. Special Operations people. It was necessary for all of the Laotian people to understand exactly what was going on and to coordinate with us and us with them on what was happening both in their air strikes and in their artillery firings so that we would not be hurting them any and them not hurting us any if we had a joint involvement in that general area. General Vang Pao was very gracious, very understanding. He says, “You’re helping us more than we’re helping you. We will do anything that will help you.” Especially with his little fighter pilots, he said, “We can control them easily.” The artillery batteries, the ones I visited at least, were run by the Royal Thai Army people, not the Vietnamese, not the Laotian people. I went up a second
time where we had a minor violation by one of the fighter pilots interfering with one of
our forward air controllers. I went up a second time just to say hello to Gen. Vang Pao,
that I would go talk to his operations people about this, work something out.
LC: What was your impression of him? You met him under two different kinds
of circumstances. The second one sounds a little more pressed, a little more pressure
there. Did he receive you graciously?
JH: Oh, yes. Very muchly so. That ethnic culture that the Thai people have is
very prominent in Laos also. They’re very humble, very understanding, and very
accommodating. It was real easy to brief him, talk to him. He concurred wholly with the
proposal that we made, real easy to work with.
LC: Did he have U.S. Air Force personnel around him generally at all, as
advisors?
JH: Yes, but to what level I can’t really—I didn’t really determine, but I know
that they were so-called “civilians,” but they were Air Force people on special
assignment with civilians.
LC: Yes, sir. Yes. Most of that is now pretty well known.
JH: Yeah. In fact, I think if I remember correctly they were called Raven FACs.
LC: I think that’s right. Yes, sir. I think they’ve even made a movie about them
now.
JH: I think so, yeah. As far as high-level advisor on his staff, American high level
advisor, I don’t know that he had that.
LC: Minnie Mae, are you still listening in?
MMH: Yes, I am.
LC: I wonder if I can ask a question of you. You were spending a great deal of
time in the U.S. during these two tours I know although you did visit Jim in Thailand as
he said and went on that wonderful tour. What were you thinking about and what was
your reaction to the growing anti-Vietnam War climate in the U.S. during those years?
MMH: Well, I guess I really defended our position as much as I could. If people
were negative, I tried to say something positive. In Glen Rose when I stayed with my
mother the year, it’s a small, small town and the people there were not as probably vocal
or as involved with it. They had people who were over there, of course, but I never did
run into anyone that was not for what we were doing. They were probably there, but they
never bothered me about it.

LC: When you were watching, for example, the evening news and so forth and
you would see the commentaries and reports on protests—

MMH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I did all of that and cut out clippings of the paper and
saved those for him and all that, but—

LC: Did it bother you?

MMH: Well, you know, somebody asked me the other day didn’t I worry all the
time. I really didn’t. I think I watched my mother when she lost her two sons and I
thought, “You know, there’s not one thing we can do about it.” I’m trusting that
whatever’s gonna be will be and Jim is doing what he wants to do. I just kind of didn’t
lose sleep over it. People might’ve thought I wasn’t really caring, but I was.

LC: Well, yes. That’s a completely different thing, isn’t it? I mean, how much
you care isn’t necessarily denoted by how much you worry.

JH: I’m might interject right here.

LC: Yes, please.

JH: Laura, her grandparents were named Nickels and Steels and combine those
two and that’s quite a strong alloy.

LC: Absolutely. She has given full demonstration of that in these interviews.

JH: Her mother and she are made of the same alloy and they withstood such
things greatly.

MMH: Yeah, I tell ya. Of course, inside I was worried, but I realized worry
doesn’t really help much. I tried to keep a cheerful outlook and look on the bright side of
everything, kinda like Pollyanna.

LC: Well, but the two of you often discussed, it sounds like, what the next move
would be. You were on board with his decision to volunteer for a second—

MMH: Oh, yeah. We’ve always discussed everything.

LC: I think that’s just wonderful and a great lesson to people now. Some of that
seems to be missing.

MMH: Well, thank you.
LC: Let me ask, Jim, a little bit about the period when you were at Hill Air Force Base. You’ve described in detail the work of the base and your roles there, but of course there were very, very important developments during that time period that affected Southeast Asia and in particular I’m thinking about the Paris Peace Agreements and the release of the POWs. Do you remember that in early 1973?

JH: The only thing—you’re talking about the release of the prisoners from Iran?

LC: No, the U.S. prisoners being held in Hanoi.


LC: That’s okay.

JH: The only thing I really—I wasn’t involved in anything concerning it. The only thing I saw was what came through the television, newspapers, and our daily report that generated in Air Force headquarters. It was teletyped out, so it was just very minor, summary of everything. Where we were we didn’t have any problem with it.

LC: How did you feel though as someone who had served over there and all kinds of Air Force guys getting released? Did you think the agreement was a good one to conclude the war? Do you think that the timing was right and the agreement was a solid one or not so much?

JH: No. It was long overdue and to go back before the agreement, as I kind of emphasized, I think if the politics would’ve stayed out of it and given the goal to the military Department of Defense as to what we were to accomplish over there and basically turn it over to them about all of the decisions being made in, as I understand, basically Lyndon Johnson’s office and McNamara’s office that things would’ve turned out a lot better. We wouldn’t have had our guys pinned up so long there as prisoners. I think that the agreement would’ve been much stronger in our favor if we’d had more pressure on the Hanoi and Hai Phong area to really show the Vietnamese they didn’t have a chance to win if they continued the war. We hoped that they would get rid of their communist leanings. I think that as it turned out I’m happy that the agreement came along as it did, when it did with all the other factors I’ve said and not being factored.

LC: Right, lots of other things kind of coming together. Did you feel the same way about President Nixon’s management of the war that you’ve come to feel about President Johnson’s?
JH: Yes, I did. He was a little too power—he felt he had to be too involved.

LC: Yes, uh-huh, and should’ve left it to the Defense Department.

JH: More or less set a goal. Naturally he has the final say, but I think the way that we’re working today is a good example of what way we should, with Iraq, the way we should’ve worked in Vietnam. President Bush is very strong and very involved in operations, but he’s turned it basically over to his military, to the Department of Defense, his military commanders, and Rumsfeld. I think that’s what should’ve been done in Vietnam.

LC: I see. Do you remember any strong reaction when you heard in 1975 that all of South Vietnam was falling to communist control?

JH: Yes, I did, especially in the military. Very upset that we could be there as long as they did, lose as many lives as we lost, and then give it away like we did.

LC: Did you have a sense that or do you have a sense now that we lost that conflict or is there more to it than a simple pronouncement like that?

JH: We lost the conflict but we won, in my mind, the effort to preclude the spread of communism beyond the Vietnamese borders. Cambodia, as you well know, still has a communist factor there. I feel that if there had not been an action against the North Vietnamese that Thailand would probably have been overrun as Laos has been. Laos is, well, I guess, was partially communist. Right now they’re not fully free yet.

LC: Have you been back to Southeast Asia? You mentioned that you had gone on an around the world trip in addition to all of the miles that you have logged here in North America. Have you been back to Asia at all?

JH: Just the one trip that we mentioned where we flew into Singapore and were taking the trip of what’s called the Spice Islands which is Indonesia. Our first stop—then we got on, after four days of Singapore, we got on a cruise ship and the first stop was Phuket, Thailand, which is way down south in the panhandle of Thailand, just a little bit east of the northern tip of the big island of Sumatra in the Indonesian complex where the tsunami occurred. It was so far removed from, Phuket is so far removed from the area that I served in that it was just really a resort area.

LC: Was it recognizable to you as Thailand, though?

JH: Was what?
LC: Was it recognizable as Thailand?

JH: Oh, yes, yes. Humble people and the friendly monks and their temples just like a miniature Bangkok, really.

LC: Let me ask you a question that this kind of overlays some of the comments that you provided earlier about your retirement and how much fun you two have had together and how many good plans you’ve made and lived into. How do you feel in general about America’s treatment of it’s veterans including yourself, but more broadly? Should the government do more than it has done or are you fairly satisfied that the government is paying proper attention to the needs of veterans?

JH: I have two feelings on that, Laura. One is the government has established good programs for veterans in general. The Iraq thing has caused a big influx of more needs for more help for those guys who are coming back with long term, lifelong term injuries, missing limbs and that type of thing which the government works with them on. My other feeling is that veterans before this conflict, the Iraqi conflict, a lot of them are expecting the government to do everything in the world for them. I’ve talked to guys who are veterans who are living almost as good as I am saying, “Why doesn’t the government take care of us better? We spent all our time doing this and that and the other. Why doesn’t the government do more for us?” I tell him, “We are the government. How long can we continue to give, give, give where the giving might not be essential. Would be happy to have it, but not really essential to sustain your livelihood.” That’s my general feeling, if that was clear enough for you.

LC: So you have some concerns about the fiscal intelligence of broadening basically, probably, any government program, not just a veterans program. Is that the direction you were going in?

JH: That’s what I’m going. I think we the people expect—I’ll rephrase. There are certain factions of we the people who think the government owes them everything. I can go back to the early days of Medicare. Medicare was developed to help people with medical problems and it has expanded to cover so many others that in some cases are absolutely not necessary, but they’re convenient for people. At my age and stage, seeing older people, a lot of their desires and in some cases needs, the government’s just overspending and overspending and overspending. In some—I won’t identify them. I
won’t attempt to identify the classes, but in some classes of our nation or our people the
healthcare providers are easy to be influenced—started to use the word bribed but I won’t
use it—influenced to prescribe not medications necessarily, but other things that people
that don’t really need to get them and that’s a big cost to our economy.

LC: Right. That all has to be borne by someone.

JH: That’s us. We the people.

LC: Absolutely. We the people. Well, I wonder whether either of you have any
additional observations or things that I haven’t asked you about that you feel you’d like
to include in this interview.

MMH: I really can’t think of anything. Laura, you’ve been so efficient in the way
you’ve handled the questions.

LC: Well, thank you, Minnie Mae.

MMH: I think you’ve covered quite a bit. If you think of something else after we
are finished today you can call us back.

LC: I will. I will do that.

MMH: We’d be glad to help any way we can.

LC: Okay. I appreciate that so much. What about you, Jim? Same thing?

JH: I feel the same thing. You’ve been so gracious. One thing about my
presentation to you, in getting prepared for this I’ve tried and tried to think of so many
things that I couldn’t remember about. I’m sorry that I couldn’t go into more depth in a
lot of them because I just don’t remember the real details at this age. I’m sorry.

MMH: I thought he did pretty good.

LC: I thought he did pretty good, too. I was about to say that anybody who wants
to have a sense of the kinds of missions that you were assigned to and that you just
discharged so honorably in service to this country will find in this interview a terrific
resource. That’s absolutely because of the two of you and certainly nothing that, really,
that I’ve done except call you up and spend some time with you, which I’ve been more
than happy to do. Of course, you also very graciously visited us here, too.

MMH: We sure enjoyed our visit with you. We were quite impressed with the
whole set up.

LC: Well, it is an impressive operation.
MMH: It is. I had no idea it was out there. One thing about his memory, I could not remember all the names of those people if that had happened to me, or the names of the towns.

LC: I tell ya.

MMH: I couldn’t have done that.

LC: He’s really done a terrific job. Well, on that note I’ll go ahead and conclude our interview for today.