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## Maj. Gen. John W. "Bill" Libby (Ret.), interviewed by Laura Tucker, Part 3

John W. Libby

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**Transcript of an Interview  
with John Libby  
by Laura Tucker  
May 27, 1999  
, Maine**

The following interview was conducted for the MAINE VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. Tapes and transcripts of project interviews have been deposited at the Maine Folklife Center at the University of Maine at Orono, where they are available to the public in accordance with the Center's policies. Some restrictions may apply to the use of these interviews by researchers. The Maine Folklife Center should be consulted concerning fair-use guidelines.

Reference copies of the tapes and transcripts are also available in the library of the University of Maine at Farmington and in Special Collections in Ladd Library at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

Monique Leamon of Casco, Maine, transcribed the recordings.

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Listener discretion is advised.

**JL:John Libby**

**LT:Laura Tucker**

**Tape One, Side A:**

**INT:**Interview with John W. Libby, May 27th, 1999. How are you today?

**JL:**Good.

**INT:**If I could just get a few basic questions, your full name, your date of birth and where you were born, to start with?

**JL:**OK, my name, full name is John William Libby and my date of birth is December 25th, 1943 and I was born in Lewiston.

**INT:**Lewiston, Maine?

**JL:**Oh yes, is there another one?

**INT:**Where did you go to school, and where did you graduate and when?

**JL:**I attended high school in Lewiston and I spent a year at West Point, didn't like it, transferred to the University of Maine and graduated from, when I say the University of Maine, there is only one University of Maine when I went to school and that's Orono. I graduated in 1966 with a bachelors degree and stayed on and finished grad school in 1977 and then went into the service.

**INT:**OK, how did you get into the military, were you a volunteer?

**JL:**I was a graduate of the ROTC program in Orono so I was commissioned into the Army.

**INT:**And what branch did you go into?

**JL:**Field artillery.

**INT:**Which is the Army, Marines...?

**JL:**Oh, no, I was in the Army. I was in the artillery in the Army.

**INT:**OK, did you have specific, what was your MOS then?

**JL:**Numerically it was, I was a 13-Alpha, which just means field artillery, I mean

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that's all of the time I spent on active duty which was ten years I spent in field artillery.

**INT:**I noticed on the paper it mentions something about Fishhook?

**JL:**Fishhook, yeah.

**INT:**Yes, what's that?

**JL:**Fishhook is just an area in Vietnam, it describes an area along the Vietnam-Cambodian border which was shaped on the map like a fishhook and that's what that refers to.

**INT:**Where did you first go in the military once you graduated college?

**JL:**When I graduated from the university, I went off to the field artillery basic course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. It was about a thirteen week course where they taught you all the basic skills that you needed to be a field artillery officer. From there I went to Fort Hood, Texas. It was my first assignment after school, I was in the division headquarters of the 2nd Armored Division and was there about, oh, nine months before I left to go to Vietnam.

**INT:**What year was that?

**JL:**Nineteen sixty eight. Where were you in 1968?

**INT:**Not even thought of. So where was your home base in the States?

**JL:**I was kind of transient, I was at Fort Sill for thirteen weeks going through the basic course, and then at Ford Hood for nine months which was my first assignment in a unit, and it was from Fort Hood that I left to go to Vietnam, so I hadn't been in the Army very long really before I ended up in Vietnam.

**INT:**What were your perceptions of the war at that time, because that was 1968, it was after the Tet offensive, what were you conscious of?

**JL:**Well first of all I felt we belonged there, I believed that we were giving the South Vietnamese people an opportunity to be a free and democratic country. I wanted to go, I volunteered to go, I picked up the phone and called my branch at the Department of the Army and volunteered to go to Vietnam because I

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wanted to make a career out of the military and frankly I thought a part of getting the ticket punched, if you will, was I needed to go and fight in Vietnam like everyone else or I wouldn't be able to stack up to my contemporaries, so I volunteered to go. But I believed very much in what we were doing over there at the time.

**INT:**What about the perceptions you had of what was going on in the United States at the time, because you were ROTC and you graduated and went right in the military, how, what [*unintelligible phrase*], what did you think of that when you went into the military?

**JL:**My feelings have changed significantly, but at the time, for example I can think back to my senior year at the University of Maine when the Students for a Democratic Society first started the chapter on campus and, and we were quite late, I mean organizations like that existed on other campuses years before they existed in Orono. They came out and protested, we had a review at the football field up there in the spring every year, they came out and protested that and the fraternity guys beat them up and it was all a big joke in our eyes, but I held those people who opposed the war in very poor esteem. You know, I knew the right answers and I was making the right decisions and they had made all of the wrong decisions in my mind, very unpatriotic in their opposition to the war, that's exactly where I was, I mean there was no question in my mind about that in those days.

**INT:**How have those changed since then?

**JL:**Well, since then I've come to realize that, it sounds trite in a lot of ways, but part of the reason we went to Vietnam and got involved in our minds was to preserve the rights of the people to say and do what they want in a democratic society, and that's all these people were doing. The fact that they disagreed with my point of view was lost on me as a young guy and just coming out of college, but the older you get the more reality creeps into your life and you begin to realize that they made choices that were different from mine and there are people today who make choices that are different from mine, it doesn't make them any less patriotic than I am. So I've come a hundred and eighty degree, I mean I've come full circle on where I, how I felt about those people then and, if you will, those people now.

**INT:**OK, you said you did call and ask to be sent to Vietnam, but how did you feel when you actually got the papers to go?

**JL:**I was kind of excited, I mean in a, in a way perhaps that you couldn't appreciate. I mean, you volunteered to serve, I spent four years in ROTC learning some basic leadership skills and preparing myself to go on active duty, become a commissioned officer, I went off to thirteen weeks of the basic course and learned all the technical parts of the job, went down to Fort Hood, Texas and got to practice those and I, if you will, in a stateside environment and I was, I was really kind of anxious even when I got the paper to go and to put all these skills that I'd learned to work, even though they were skills that were designed to hurt and kill other people. Now there's another side of you that when you get the paper in particular makes you, it suddenly brings to some realization the fact that you're going to pick up and leave for twelve months and there's the side of you that says at that point in time, boy, this is not, this is not a good thing, this is not what I really want to do. My wife and I were just very recently married, less than a year at that point in time, and I obviously wasn't anxious to leave her or leave my extended family, so it's kind of a bittersweet moment professionally. I was looking forward to the opportunity to do what I'd been trained to do, but at the personal level I don't enjoy going away for two weeks in annual training with Guard any more now than I enjoyed leaving for a year then.

**INT:**Well, I guess you had a very good relationship with your family at the time and ...?

**JL:**Oh yeah, my dad served in WWII, I listened to him talk about his experiences in the Pacific and that's really what kind of prompted me to sign up for ROTC. Actually even before that to think about going to West Point, then to sign up for ROTC and serve because that's what he did, he served his country, he came back, served his community on a lot of boards and committees which I now do, and I tended to follow in my father's footsteps and he spoke in glowing terms about his experiences. I remember his twenty fifth, Mum and Dad's twenty fifth wedding anniversary, all of his WWII buddies that he hadn't seen for decades that we were able to track down, showed up and it's a vivid memory in my mind, the kind of camaraderie that existed between those guys. So it was something that I wanted to experience because my dad had done it *[unintelligible word]*.

**INT:**What kind of preparation did they give you before going to Vietnam, the Army?

**JL:**Not much. They put us through what we euphemistically referred to as charm

school, getting ready to go. It was about a week of intensive training where they tried to introduce you to, they worked on certain individual skills like taking you to the range to fire your weapon, then they worked on some collective skills, if you will, they set up a perimeter, in Vietnam everything was a base camp with a perimeter, it was training that we were really not schooled for, it was kind of a guerrilla environment where we were training for a traditional Germany *[unintelligible word]* kind of environment. So in the charm school they put us through developing perimeters and manning perimeters and sitting out there all night long and aggressors probing the perimeters in these fake attacks to acclimate us to the tactical kind of environment we were going to see in Vietnam. But it was five days long, that was the only detailed training we got, we had a lot of in country briefings about customs and traditions and those sort of things, but nothing extensive at all. That same type of training, by the way, was essentially repeated once we got to Vietnam and before we got thrown out with our units. So nothing terribly extensive at all.

**INT:** Now did they give you any sort of POW training or...?

**JL:** Yeah, all of that, all of that's fairly standard training even today for the soldiers that we have in the Guard and on active duty, there it's pretty standard annual kind of events that you go through where you learn the code of conduct, they teach you some basic skills with regard to how to prepare yourself for becoming a POW or those eventualities, things that you kind of blow off because it'll never happen to you, and in my case it didn't and I'm fortunate, but some of the POWs that were taken during Vietnam will tell you that they wished that they'd focussed a bit more. And that was one of the lessons learned that came out of Vietnam is we needed to prepare our soldiers through more extensive training for becoming POWs, and they've certainly done that.

**INT:** How old were you at the time you were sent to Vietnam?

**JL:** Oh gosh, in 1968 I was twenty four.

**INT:** Twenty four. Now, take me to where you were, *[unintelligible word]* you board a plane, where did it take you first, did you go to Okinawa or did you go straight to Vietnam?

**JL:** Oh no, they, well, I remember vividly, we flew out of Boston, and my wife drove me down, difficult trip obviously, I got on a commercial aircraft in clothes like



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I'm dressed in today and flew out to California, Travis Air Force Base, where we were issued some basic uniforms and then put on military charters. They were still commercial aircraft but they were chartered specifically at that point in time for all soldiers to be taken from the west coast. There were a number of reception centers where we reported to and were put in uniforms to Vietnam. I remember we refueled in Alaska, we refueled in Japan, and then we flew in to *[unintelligible word]* Vietnam. So we got on a commercial airliner and except to get off when they refueled it, took off from California and landed in Vietnam.

**INT:**What was in like when you stepped off the plane in Vietnam?

**JL:**I remember two things vividly, I remember the heat and humidity because I left Maine in September and it's a great time of year here, and I remember the smell. And I couldn't describe the smell to you, but I remember the smell. If you got off the airport in Portland, unless it was low tide and you smelled the clam flats, you wouldn't notice the smell. But I noticed the smell over there and it was a rancid kind of smell and, as I learned later, it came from burning latrines, it came from all of the jet fuel, there was just a, an awful lot of, kind of an industrial type environment smell that was, wasn't clean, it wasn't terribly oppressive, but it was definitely there. I remember the smell, the minute I got off the airplane.

**INT:**Where did you go after you stepped off the plane, *[unintelligible phrase]* base?

**JL:**No, we went to a reception center where we were in processed, our, they processed our records, reviewed our medical files, they issued us the rest of our equipment at that particular point in time, and we awaited assignment to the individual units that we would be sent to. Now, since I had volunteered, I volunteered for a specific unit I wanted to be in, I wanted to be in the 1st Cav, it was, it was the first unit deployed to Vietnam that depended exclusively on helicopters for transportation, it's a, it was an air mobile division was its characterization. It was a new and emerging tactical technology and that's why I volunteered to be in that unit, I thought this is the unit of the future and I wanted to experience it firsthand, so while others waited for their assignments based on vacancies in other units, I simply waited for the first aircraft after, it took a couple of days to process us in, I waited for the first aircraft to take me to the 1st Cavalry Division.

**INT:**Did you do anything in country, in Vietnam, those couple of days or did you just

stay...?

**JL:**No, other than standing in line waiting to be processed and waiting for your physicals to be reviewed and other things to be done, equipment to be issues, no, you, they gave you a bunk in a building with everyone else and you were told to go here at this time, go there at that time and other than that you just kind of hung around and waited for the processing to be completed and then for you to be sent to your unit.

**INT:**And then what happened when you were sent to your unit?

**JL:**They posted something on a bulletin board that said I had to be at the airport at such and such a time to get on such and such an aircraft and I showed up down there with a bunch of other new guys like myself, and we got on a C-130 which is just an Air Force prop aircraft and we were flown to the division base camp where you went through in processing again and were sent very quickly, and that only took a matter of hours, we were sent very quickly from the division base camp, which is in the rear area, out to the actual unit you were going to be assigned to. In my case I got sent to an artillery battalion.

**INT:**OK, do you know where that was in Vietnam?

**JL:**Yes, it was, the division base camp was in An Khe which was in the central highlands, and the unit that I was sent to was at a place called Camp Evans, it was in the northern part of Vietnam about thirty miles south of the Demilitarized Zone which is just a, the separation of North and South Vietnam.

**INT:**What was your first mission when you were there, like I'm trying to get a feel of what your daily life was like, what you did for your actual job and where they sent you.

**JL:**Of course, yeah, the new guys, they'd get the lousy jobs so when I arrived I got assigned into the battalion FDC, which is the fire direction center. That is the place where all of the fire missions, you know, artillery fires shells in support of the infantry, that's where all the fire missions are calculated, that's where you come up with the settings that are put on the guns and so it's a technical kind of place where we used at the time very state of the art but by today's standards very primitive computers to do the calculations, which used to be done by hand, by calculator and by slide rule. They were just beginning to introduce these computers which were called FADAX (*sounds like*). So I got

assigned to the battalion fire direction center and obviously got assigned to the night shift, so I worked from six o'clock at night until six o'clock in the morning when, you know, frankly there wasn't a great deal going on and so it was kind of a boring existence. I would work from six at night until six in the morning, and I had nothing to do but wait until six the next night to go back to work. We lived in bunkers which were nothing more than open bay buildings that were, instead of being, having siding on the side and metal roofs, they had sandbags on the side and sandbags on the roof to protect you from any incoming enemy fire. There were opportunities obviously during the day for recreation in the form of, there were some basketball courts and some horseshoe pits, but my routine generally was I went to work at six at night, I got up, got off at six in the morning, went to bed, slept for as long as you could, and then got up and did whatever you wanted to do, entertain yourself until you went back on shift at six o'clock at night. It provided time, a lot of time for, you know, writing people. I discovered letter writing during that time frame, extensively, I mean that was your contact with the outside world, that was your ability to stay in touch with reality, so I wrote copious quantities of letters during that time frame, something I don't do any more. But that's how you, that's how I spent most of my time.

**INT:** You mentioned incoming enemy fire, did you ever experience anything like that when you were on or off duty?

**JL:** Oh you always do, I mean throughout the entire twelve months that was a constant in your life then. It could happen any time of day and night and sometimes you didn't know it was about to happen and sometimes you did, depending on the type of incoming fire from the enemy. Some you could hear coming. We had radar, some they could detect coming. And some just all of a sudden the ground started going off around you. But you were very careful during certain periods of time to make sure that you didn't spend a great deal of time hanging around outside, or if you were outside that you were fairly close to a bunker that you could get back into, because that was the, for a field artillery man who wasn't out in the jungle like the infantry were, the greatest fear that you had was the other guy's artillery, so you just learned to deal with that.

**INT:** So you stayed most of your time though on your base and not in the jungle?

**JL:** Yeah, I didn't, I did not. And this first assignment that I had which was in the fire direction center, I was there for about a month and then I spent the next eleven months about in equal shares of five and a half months each in two different

kinds of jobs. I went from that job to a job as a liaison officer to an infantry battalion. Every infantry battalion, that's an organization of about seven hundred men, was commanded by a lieutenant colonel, and they had a field artillery liaison officer and he was the commander's artillery advisor, if you will. It was a great job because the battalion commanders did most of their work flying around in helicopters and you got to fly around with them and you got to adjust a lot of artillery fire, but you did it from helicopters. The battalion commanders lived in fixed facilities, so it was a pretty good life in terms of the quality of life, and you know, wherever he went you went and you provided him advice and counsel on the use of artillery to support his troops which were actually out there living and fighting in the jungle on a daily basis. So I spent five and a half months doing that, and very enjoyed that because, again, it was a high profile kind of job, the amenities in terms of the living conditions, they lived in fixed facilities, were pretty good.

**INT:**What kind of perks did you get that maybe some other soldiers didn't get?

**JL:**Hot showers, for example. I mean they lived, you know, in fixed base camps. Most of the infantry was out living in tents, under ponchos, moving on a daily basis, picking up showers where they could find streams, I mean just living in the jungle. And we were living back on fixed facilities where, you know, we had hot showers, we had cold beer and sodas at night, where we had limited movies available to us. Primitive settings, but by comparison to what the guys in the jungle were going through, I mean this was, this was pretty, pretty cush. So that was the kind of environment that I found myself in for the next five and a half months, and the final five and a half months I was an artillery battery commander, which meant that I was out there on a more forward base. Again, a fixed installation but placed farther forward so that we could deliver the artillery support to the infantry guys who were now living out in the field around you and with you. But being artillery, I mean, you know, I didn't put my sack on every day and head into the jungle, I stayed right on the fire base with my Howitzers and my guns. So I went from the, a fairly large base camp where you had some amenities of life, to a much smaller base camp, something maybe, to put it into perspective, roughly the size of a football field, out in the middle of nowhere. All of your logistical supplies, food, water, ammunition was brought in by helicopters and, again, we didn't have hot showers, we didn't have movies, and we occasionally got cold sodas and beer but, so it was a step down. But frankly, it was a step up professionally because that was the very job that you were trained to do was to be out there in command of six artillery Howitzers and a hundred and fifty people, that's what, that's what you

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were trained for and frankly it was the most rewarding job I had in Vietnam. I got a chance to lead troops, and in our case to provide life saving support to the infantry that was up front.

**INT:**And that was the action? Because I know sometimes there is an inconsistency in soldiers in what they're trained for and what they actually ended up doing. So you were actually doing what you wanted to do?

**JL:**Actually doing what I wanted to do. I mean, the two best jobs that a field artillery captain could have in Vietnam were to be a liaison officer to an infantry battalion and be a battery commander. I had them both. It was, you know, it was just ideal from a professional standpoint.

**INT:**And where was that second home base located?

**JL:**We moved about, about the time I took field artillery battery, we moved from Camp Evans which was up in the northern part of Vietnam, northern part of South Vietnam, to what we called Free Corps (*sounds like*) which was not the southern part which was the delta, but just north of Saigon into the Fishhook area.

**INT:**OK, and you said [*unintelligible phrase*] your job as battery commander was ideal from a professional standpoint, but what about from a personal standpoint?

**JL:**Well, if I could have structured the assignments personally, I mean, I would have liked to have been a liaison officer my last five and a half months. That was a, there was less risk involved in that job. I mean, as an artillery battery commander, you're out there on this small fire base the size of a football field, you've got barbed wire around you and, during my last five and a half months we were subjected to maybe a half dozen ground attacks, which meant the North Vietnamese actually attacked the base camp, got in to the wire, some of the them got through the wire and, so, if I could have structured it, you know, you're greatest fear I think in, when you went to Vietnam, my greatest fear was dying late in my tour when you start thinking about coming home. So if I could have done it, I'd take the safer job later, but you know, I didn't have any control over that. But again, if I could have asked for two jobs going to Vietnam, they would have been the two jobs that I had.

**INT:**How did you deal with those [*unintelligible word*], like, for a professional

standpoint, but from a personal standpoint, how did you deal with what happened when the North Vietnamese infiltrated your home base?

**JL:** Well, the interesting problem was, I'm sure other veterans will say this to other interviewers, I mean your life was a series of boring days interspersed with some periods, some fairly short and limited periods of absolute terror during which you're under a ground attack for example. And you react instinctively in those situations, I mean that's what the training had been all about. It was, I knew exactly what needed to be done, and you went about doing it. You didn't have time, you really didn't have time to think about it. You thought about it before and you thought about it especially after, but when things like that were occurring you didn't have any time to think about it, you only had time to react and do the things that you were trained to do. So those were not periods, when I say periods of terror, they were especially after the fact when you looked back on it, but during the actual event there were just so many things that had to be done that you did them. Not unlike, you know, a fire fighter shows up at a fire, he knows what needs to be done and probably doesn't spend a great deal of time thinking or worrying about his own safety because he trusts in his training, and it's probably after the event when you look back on it and you say, boy, that was stupid or that was close or whatever, so. The most difficult times I had were the times immediately after the, a ground attack when you had some time to reflect on just how close you might have come, and then you settle back into the same dull old routine and don't spend a great deal of time thinking about the next moment of terror either. There just, there's a lot of things that needed to be done.

**INT:** Well what about those times after, you said it was the time after and thinking, did you ever talk about those things with other soldiers that were there *[unintelligible word]*?

**JL:** Oh you talked a lot about those things with other soldiers that were there. I mean, misery loves company to some degree and you spent a lot of time talking about your personal experiences during a ground attack, and out of that of course war stories emerge that get exaggerated over the years to the point where we're all medal of honor winners. But the, the thing that I had great difficulty was, with was sharing any of that stuff with people who weren't there, especially after I came back to the United States. I mean, I would, I didn't talk about Vietnam, I shut out Vietnam. I didn't experience any problems with post Vietnam stress syndrome, although we all were affected to some level, I'm sure, but I don't react to loud noises, I don't hit the ground when firecrackers go off or any of

those things, and I haven't done anything irrational in my life. But you do carry some baggage with you, and it was a long time, I guess it was before, it was in, it took my kids being in about high school age and studying Vietnam in high school and asking about Vietnam before I began to volunteer information [*unintelligible word*]. It was a subject that I just avoided. It was something I did and I moved on from there and something that I didn't choose to revisit, and it's only something frankly I've become comfortable talking about since my kids were in high school and I first began to open up to them. Never talked to my dad about that, interestingly, and he talked all the time about WWII. But I never talked about Vietnam with him and I never thought much about that but to some extent we all came back, well unlike WWII when you went over as units and you fought as units and came back as units, and there were big parades. There was no closure for many of us. I left alone and I came home alone. Other than my family who met me at the airport, there were no parades, there was no ticker tape, there was, and I left from a society that didn't support the war, I came back to a society that supported it even less. So there was, sometimes I think feelings of guilt about the fact that we had been and we had participated in something that it appeared the country didn't support. So we didn't talk about it. We just got on with the rest of our lives, many of us.

**INT:**How did you deal with that in your job. You said you left from a country that didn't support it and you came home to that, you didn't get your ticker tape parade, in fact you probably came home to anti, you know, there were anti war protests heating up when you left and heating up even more when you came home.

**JL:**Yeah, and I went from there to an ROTC assignment at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst where, I mean the ROTC building got taken over by the SDS guys, and you know, we couldn't even teach ROTC classes. I mean, they told us to stop wearing uniforms and start wearing civilian clothes because we were the object of everybody's ire and, you know, some of that bothered me, I mean it bothered me significantly but, you know, I was still in the Army and that was my choice at that point in time, I could have got out, but you're still in the Army and you're still committed to all of those principles. I mean, the Army didn't volunteer to go to Vietnam, the Army was sent to Vietnam, they were an instrument of public policy. I still believed in it. I had doubts about whether the decision to commit the Army to Vietnam at that point in time, by the time I came home I had real doubts about whether that was a wise decision and whether it was even an honest decision. As you look back on the Gulf of Tonkin incident and all of these little things that can lead you to

believe that the decisions might not have been on our own national interest, they might not have, I don't know why the decisions were made, but I had some, I had some problems with the decision to commit the Army, but I was still, it's kind of like today. I'm not sure that what we're doing in Bosnia and what we're doing in Kosovo are the right things to be doing, but I still wear the uniform on a part time basis with the National Guard and fully accept the premise that if somebody tells me tomorrow I've got to go, I'll go because that's, I've chosen to be in, I believe we need an Army and I hope we're always committed wisely, but I know that we're committed by people who are civilians, not military. So I think I dealt with some of that when I came back, a bit of a feeling of guilt about having gone. A bigger feeling of guilt, frankly, about having survived. I lost a lot of friends over there. Not friends that I went with but friends that I made when I was over there, and I think we all came back with a little bit of guilt about the fact that, you know, we came back, we survived and they didn't. And there's a part of that that still exists in me and every Memorial Day, every time I go to Washington to visit the wall and I look at the names of the guys that I knew over there that didn't make it back and to some extent feel guilty about the fact that I did and they didn't. Again, you go through those periods and get on with it.

**INT:** When did the doubts start, took form in your mind, [*unintelligible word*] might have been later on when you were in Vietnam or, you know, how did they get there? Was it after you'd been there for a while?

**JL:** Well, remember what I said earlier on, you know, I told you that I believed in what we were doing in Vietnam and I believed that we were giving the South Vietnamese people an opportunity to live a democratic life. It didn't take too long after you got there to realize that South Vietnam was not New England, I mean, we have a communication system and other things that support a democratic form of government that they don't, and in fact the democratic form of government might have been absolutely the worse form of government for them because there was no way for the Vietnamese farmer in a small village to even know who the hell was running for office, much less who was in office. So all of our perceptions about democracy and how great that it tend to break down when you got in that environment and realized that democracy probably wouldn't work over there. What they needed was they needed somebody almost to be a dictator in my opinion, but that became pretty clear to me. And then I began to develop, as soon as, almost as soon as I got in country, some real doubts about what we were doing there, and some real doubts about how we were prosecuting the war. As soon as you got on the



ground you'd begin to realize that the only way you can fight and win a war is to force the other guy to fight with you, and we didn't do that. I mean, they didn't allow us to cross the border into Cambodia and Laos, they didn't allow us across the border into North Vietnam, and as a result I began to realize very quickly that our enemy fought when and where they wanted to, not when and where we wanted to. And it felt for a long period of time, and still do, that I'm sitting there on this little fire base which is almost a bulls eye drawn on the ground and I'm waiting for him to pick the time and place to attack, and we're not prosecuting the war, we're not forcing them to defend anything, therefore we couldn't force them to defeat anything. So I began to realize that we might have made a mistake politically in getting involved, and then I certainly realized from a professional standpoint that we were fighting a war that we could never win because we could never him to fight, therefore we could never defeat him. And all of those things kind of added up to the point where many of us at that point in time decided that, well, our three hundred and sixty five days in Vietnam is an exercise in personal survival, and you began to think in those terms. And that's why I said, God, I wish I had that cushy job at the tail end of my tour as opposed to the more risky job at the tail end of my tour because, again, the biggest fear we all had was, was, dying was a part of it, but dying late in the tour as you were getting ready to head home. I mean, the people we always talked about were the guys that were leaving in the next seven days and died and how tragic that really was. Because again, our window was three hundred and sixty five days long, and we all had ladies, little short time calendars, mine took the form of a picture of Raquel Welch, and we had them divided up into three hundred and sixty five parts and every day you'd ink out one of those parts, and you could watch your tour get smaller and smaller, and that's where we developed this mind set, this short timer mind set, and boy, once you became a what we called a two digit midget, when you got under a hundred days, that's when you really started thinking about going home and really started worrying about the real possibility of not going home. That was a, two digit midget's a classic phrase from Vietnam and people don't understand it, they weren't there.

**INT:** You sound like you developed a real camaraderie with your peers, what was that like? Because you said you were all *[unintelligible phrase]*?

**JL:** You know, it's impossible to define for people? It really is, I don't mean to appear like I'm talking down to you, but it's really impossible to define relationships with other people when your lives literally depend on them and what they do and what they don't do. I mean, it's a bond in a day to day

relationship that just defies explanation. You must trust implicitly everyone else, and whether they liked you or not, whether they liked me because I was an officer and they're an enlisted guy or not, or whether they liked me because I was a Yankee from the north and they were a rebel from the south didn't make any difference. What made a difference was that we all depended on one another to get to day three hundred and sixty five and be able to go home, and boy, that creates a very interesting working environment where every-, nothing de-, nothing matters except protecting one another. So you create these incredible bonds. Unlike my father's experience, however, where a bunch of guys from Webster Street in Lewiston volunteered to go in the Army in WWII and they end up in the same unit, they trudge through the Pacific for years and years and all come back together and all, I didn't know any of these guys when I showed up, and I haven't seen any of these guys since I left. And that's the difference between my father's experience to some extent, and my experience is I didn't know my buddies before I got there and I don't know my buddies after I come home. Now that's, there are a couple of people obviously that you stay in touch with, but most people, you know, we all were arriving as individuals so you get in a unit and in three hundred and sixty five days, the entire unit would change. So you knew some people for a week, and you knew some people for twelve months because they came in the same you were, so it was a different experience from my dad's.

**INT:** Now you mentioned kind of, you were talking about officers, because you were an officer, and enlisted men. Did you notice any kind of hierarchies there, any tensions between maybe enlisted men and officers?

**JL:** Oh clearly, clearly. I mean the, most of the enlisted kids you've got to remember were draftees and they weren't volunteers, and they had no use for the officers who, this is a generalization, but they had little use for the officers that they considered the lifers. I mean, we were there because we all volunteered, we didn't have to be officers. So there was a, there was definitely a hierarchy that existed between the officers and the enlisted people. There was a term that came out of Vietnam that didn't exist before Vietnam and probably exists after but it doesn't happen very much after, a term called fragging where enlisted soldiers would kill their officers by throwing hand grenades into their tents. That was a very serious problem during Vietnam was officers being, fragged is the term that we used, by enlisted people. I don't mean it was something that you worried about every day, but it was not an uncommon event. And it stemmed, again, out of the fact that a lot of the enlisted people were, all of the enlisted people were draftees, most of them came from the lower segments of

our society. Remember people could get college deferments? So, it wasn't the guys who went to college who got drafted, it was the kids who couldn't get into college, it was the kids who couldn't afford to do, to take the right jobs and get deferments, so it was really the lower strata of our society who served in the enlisted corps at that particular point in time, and they saw the officers as the lifers, the guys who are making the decisions, the guys who got them there, the guys who were keeping them there, so there was a tension that existed perhaps during that period of the military's existence far more than other periods between the officer corps and the enlisted corps. Now you could overcome that if, you know, if you were an effective leader and the troops realized that your interests were their interests, and most of us did. But that rift manifested itself in the verb that we coined during Vietnam, fragging.

**INT:**Did you ever have any personal experience with any hostilities?

**JL:**No, at the personal level I did not, no, I observed some of that. I mean, some of that occurred at one of the fire bases that I was on, the infantry company commander got fragged one night. But again, he was in the unenviable situation of having to take his soldiers out on a daily basis and conduct these what we called search and destroy missions that we happened, they happened to be operating during that time in an area that was heavily booby trapped and, I mean, well documented during that time frame, there were instances where the enlisted guys said no, we're not going. And the officers were under orders to make them go and that's where the real rift [*unintelligible word*]. That was less of a problem for us in the field artillery because, again, we were on a base camp, we all had a job to do, we knew that if we all did our jobs and protected one another that we probably all had the greatest chance of surviving that way, so we weren't forced into some of these external situations that the infantry people particularly were forced into. So, I didn't have, you know, I had enlisted soldiers who didn't care for me simply because I was an officer, but I don't recall every experiencing any confrontational situations or being aware that I was in any danger from my own troops.

**INT:**What was your contact with the South Vietnamese people, did you have much?

**JL:**None.

**INT:**None at all?

**JL:**Zero.

**INT:** Did you have, what were your perceptions [*unintelligible phrase*] with the ARVN, the South Vietnamese military, what was your perception of that and the South Vietnamese government.

**JL:** We had no regard, I said we, I had no regard for the South Vietnamese military. They, and I've got to admit, I had very little contact with them, but obviously in the period leading up to, I was there when there was about five hundred thousand American soldiers in the country, I was there about at the peak of the Vietnam war in terms of the number of soldiers the United States had there. We got there in large part in a lot of our minds because the South Vietnamese wouldn't fight their own battle. It wasn't a question of couldn't, they wouldn't. I mean, it was early in the '60s when we, probably even in the late '50s when we first sent, started sending advisors over to work directly with the ARVNs, and we certainly provided them with the, all of the implements of war, helicopters, artillery, rifles and ammunition. I was personally convinced that the reason I was there fighting is because they wouldn't fight their own battle, so I had no regard for the South Vietnamese army at all. I had less regard for the South Vietnamese political structure, but again, I had no contact with those people. My perceptions were based on my observation of the war. You know, I knew when I was at the University of Maine going through ROTC that I was going to end up in Vietnam in no short order. Kids now graduate and get commissioned and probably wonder where their first assignment was; we all wondered how long was it going to take us to get to Vietnam because we knew that's where we were going. So we all followed the situation, and the South Vietnamese government was in disarray, so I had no regard for the military and less regard for the government. But I had no contact with either, very minimal contact with either, and no contact with the South Vietnamese people at all. We didn't have the opportunity to go town on a weekend pass, and where we were operating, we were fighting and the South Vietnamese weren't around, I mean the South Vietnamese civilian population weren't around obviously.

**INT:** I know that you said that the South Vietnamese [*unintelligible word*] in disarray, did that somehow affect your job, and also do you mean eventually that you were in a war you can't win, you weren't going to win? How did that [*unintelligible phrase*]?

**JL:** No, I don't think, I never felt like the South Vietnamese government had an impact on what we were doing. I mean, we were under the command and

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control of the American military, they were making the tactical decisions on where we were and how we were going to operate, so the fact that the South Vietnamese government was in disarray, I didn't feel that had any bearing on me personally during the time that I was there. I did believe that because the government couldn't govern and the soldiers couldn't fight, that we had to go over there and fight their battle for them, I did believe that. But once I got in country, I mean the fact that the South Vietnamese existed and the South Vietnamese government was in disarray didn't have any impact on my daily life or any impact on my three hundred and sixty five day tour over there.

**INT:**I guess I have a few kind of more, smaller questions. What did you do for R&R, did you ever get any sort of recreation time or some time to relax?

**JL:**Yeah, I got out of there twice. There was a program of rest and relaxation, R&R  
...

**End of Tape One, Side A**

**Tape One, Side B:**

**INT:** You said you were on R&R and you got to meet your wife in Hawaii.

**JL:** Yup, I spent seven days in Hawaii and that was a surreal experience, I mean it really was. You get on this airplane and you leave the heat, humidity, smell and killing behind, and you fly off to Hawaii for seven days and you lay on the beach and you eat good food and you make up for lost time and you have hot showers. First thing I did when I got to the hotel room was get in the hot shower, I really wanted a hot shower. And then you get back in the airplane after seven days and go back to all the killing. It was kind of surreal as I look back on it, and I mean the whole week was a blur. We tried to do all the tourist things and it was extremely enjoyable, but it was, as I look back on it, a surreal experience in many ways. I did get an opportunity for a second R&R and one of the ultimate ironies of Vietnam, and a lot of strange things happened over there, was that one of the lieutenants in our battery was killed just prior to his going on R&R, and all R&R meant was there was a seat on an airplane for somebody to leave the country for seven days, and you got to pick one of several destinations. I picked Hawaii obviously to meet my wife. This kid had picked Singapore. He was a bachelor and he just wanted to go to Singapore for whatever reason, so his R&R week became available and we drew lots and I won, so I got to take his seven days in Singapore, so I got a second opportunity to leave Vietnam. We all, anybody would take a second opportunity, a third or a fourth if they could, and by the luck of the draw I got to take some other kid's R&R to Singapore for seven days. And I don't remember much about Singapore, I mean, I went and I was pretty much a hermit in my room and I did it more to get the hell out of Vietnam than to see Singapore. I'd have gone anywhere, but Singapore just happened to be the place.

**INT:** You said there were some strange things that happened there, some ironic things like?

**JL:** Well my, the R&R situation is just one of those things and the fact that you could get a second R&R, if somebody in the unit was unfortunate enough to die, you could get a second chance at somebody else's expense to go off to another seven hiatus out of country, I mean, just kind of strange things like that that we built into the situation over there.

**INT:** Now, did you experience any sort of like culture shock when you went to Hawaii, because you said all of a sudden you went from Vietnam to your wife

in Hawaii? And it's kind of a blur but...

**JL:**It really wasn't a culture shock as much as it was, I mean it was just, it was, you know one day you're in the middle of the killing fields, if you will, and the next day you're on the beach Waikiki, and it wasn't a culture shock in terms of going from Vietnam to Hawaii as much as it was just, I mean, a complete change in environments. It didn't take any time at all, by the way, to adjust, leaving Vietnam and going to Hawaii. I can tell you the longest day of my life was the day that I went back to Vietnam, that was more difficult than going the first time and it was just, I have never, there's a recollection of depression that will never leave me about getting on that airplane in Honolulu and heading back to Vietnam, knowing where you were going and knowing exactly how much time you had left. That was the most difficult flight of my life. The most depressed feeling in my life was when they opened the damn door and the heat and humidity and smell rushed back in to that damn airplane, and you could hear a pin drop all the way back on that flight, no one said anything, they just...

**INT:**You were all with men going back?

**JL:**Yeah, we were all soldiers headed back. This was not a commercial flight, this was a chartered flight so we weren't, no civilians in the airplane, we were all soldiers, we all still had on our print shirts from Hawaii and our shorts and we were heading right back, and it was just, you could hear a pin drop on that whole flight, the whole way, nobody had anything to say.

**INT:**What was it like on those plane rides, on your second R&R too, on the way there, you said you didn't talk on the way back, but...?

**JL:**On the way, on the way over, I mean, everybody's getting out. I mean, we talked about the world, that was a term that everybody used over there, you know, I wonder what's going on in the world, I want to get back to the world, the world was anyplace other than Vietnam so when we were headed back to the world, even though the world happened to be Singapore, there was nobody shooting in Singapore. A lot of guys, the two most popular destinations clearly were Hawaii for the guys who were married, and even the guys who weren't married but somebody who wanted to meet a girlfriend or whatever, and Australia, and everybody wanted to go to Australia who couldn't go to Hawaii. And Hawaii was pretty much restricted to married people because there were so many of us and we got priority obviously in going back to Hawaii. People wanted to go to

Australia because they wanted to see what we referred to as round eyes, girls with round eyes instead of slanted eyes. But any time you went, the flight to Hawaii and the flight to Singapore were parties. I mean, God, we're out of here and we're headed somewhere else. I mean, not parties in the fact that we were all drunk, because they didn't serve anything on the airplanes except sodas, but the trips back, including the flight over to Vietnam, and the flight from Hawaii back to Vietnam, the flight from Singapore back to Vietnam were very quiet, very depressing airplane rides.

**INT:** Now when were the, just to get a specific, when were the dates that you went on your R&Rs?

**JL:** I was about nine months into my tour. I remember we deliberately talked about that after I got in country and I began to realize how the system worked. We deliberately talked through the mail about picking some point well into my tour so that when I left I wasn't leaving for an equal or longer period of time, so we were very deliberate about the nine month time frame, not nine months, necessarily nine months, it could have been ten, it could have been eight, but certainly something better than six. We wanted to be fairly close to the end of this thing when I left, I wanted to be able to go back and wrap it up reasonably quickly by comparison to twelve months.

**INT:** Now what was your contact with your wife? You said you wrote a lot of letters, but I've also heard that sometimes like on telephone wires if you ever, there might have been some censorship, and in letters and stuff, did you ever get to call home, or?

**JL:** Yeah, there was a MARS system, Military Affiliated Radio System is what it's called, we called it MARS. You actually got on a radio and got hooked up by a ham radio operator somewhere in the world who could telephone back from wherever he was to whatever number you wanted to call in the States. So if you were lucky you could pick up a ham radio operator in the United States and the phone call wouldn't be terribly expensive. I, you pick up a ham radio operator in Seattle, Washington, and he picks up the phone and calls Lewiston, Maine and gets my wife on the phone and he's got a patch system that allows me to talk to her, but he needs to key the radio set at its end when she wants to talk, and I need to key the radio set at my end when I want to talk, because this is not a two way conversation, it's over a radio, so it's a one way. So you end up talking on the telephone, hi sweetheart, hi, I love you, I miss you, over, and that's her signal to, he keys the radio and she can now talk to me. So it's kind



of awkward, but just the ability to hear someone's voice was wonderful. We probably talked over the MARS system a dozen times while I was there, and the MARS operators were located right on the base and you could go to them any time you want, but they were usually pretty long lines and to some extent, since the conversation was awkward and it wasn't two way, it was only one way, you almost felt empty when it was over, that you couldn't really say what you wanted to say and how you wanted to say it. I mean, you've got two radio operators listening in on you, it wasn't very intimate, but from our perspective it was the, just the ability to hear someone's voice back home was very important to us, so, we probably talked once a month. But I wrote every day, faithfully every day, sometimes two or three times a day. Same thing to my mother and my father, and then to a lesser extent obviously to my sister who was, you know, married and back here in the States. Letters were the primary form of communication.

**INT:**How much of a part did religion play for you while you were over there?

**JL:**A significant part. I grew up as a Catholic and my wife was a Protestant, and we got married in a Congregational church, and in that short time that we were married before I left to go to Vietnam we did the routine where, on a military installation we'd go to the Catholic service one Sunday and the Protestant service the next Sunday, trying to find what we were both comfortable with. When I got to Vietnam it turned out that we had a series of outstanding chaplains, and these guys, you know, they were denominational people, Catholic or Protestants, they pretty much conducted a nonsectarian, that's not the right word, they didn't conduct a Catholic mass or a Congregational service, they just conducted a worship service. And I attended on a regular basis, I mean, growing up in the Catholic church, religion was important to me, you know, you went every week, you played by the Catholic rules. I rebelled a bit from that when I got to college but I found some comfort in getting into those worship settings at the personal level, and the chaplains were just outstanding people. I mean, these were ordained people from their own religion who had chosen on a volunteer basis to be over there with us and they were the kind of people that you could have a dialogue with. And one of the problems that we had over there is, as an artillery officer on a fire base, I might be one of two or three officers there and most of the enlisted kids were, again, kids who were drafted because they were dropouts from school, or a lot of kids were there because the judge told them enlist in the Army or go to jail. They weren't the kind of people that it was easy to have a conversation with, so the chaplains represented another intellectual, emotional outlet for you. So

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religion became very important to me over there. You know, I didn't pray to survive, but there was comfort in getting together in those kind of settings that I enjoyed.

**INT:**What was, I guess I'm also wondering what was discipline and morale like when you were, because you talk about how most, you were one of a few officers with a lot of enlisted men, drafted men, how was the discipline and morale on your base?

**JL:**It was probably non-existent by standards in the United States, I mean, you know, we, people didn't shave and they didn't cut their hair and that's unacceptable today. They didn't, you know, they weren't properly dressed in their uniforms, I mean guys ran around with shorts on to soak up the rays and get good tans, and so we were, we look, I mean if you look at the pictures of the soldiers during that time, we're kind of a slovenly bunch by normal grooming and appearance standards in the military. Discipline was non-existent in that there weren't a lot of salutes and yes sir, no sir kind of stuff exchanged, but there was, there was discipline in their professional, in their professional part of their jobs. Again, I need to take you back to the, there was an unspoken realization that we all had to do the things that we were trained to do and do them well in order for all of us to get through this thing, so there was a discipline in the way you approached your job from a survival standpoint, but we were a pretty slovenly looking, slovenly acting bunch by conventional military standards.

**INT:**Do you have any theories as to why those [*unintelligible word*] were let go?

**JL:**It was, you know, it was all part of the rebellion, I mean it was all part of the thing that went on between the enlisted guys who were drafted and were there because somebody sent them there, and the realization on the part of those of us who were leaders that, I mean this wasn't a big enough issue to make a deal, we're all over there, you know, how do you look an eighteen year old kid in the eye who can't drink back in the United States and can't vote in the United States but is old enough to die in Vietnam and tell him it's important to cut his hair? I mean, those things were kind of inconsistent, and we recognized that. So what we really asked from the soldiers were, you know, do your job and we'll all survive and we'll all go home, and that was the context within which we operated, at least the environment I was in. And it was pretty effective, I want to tell you, as field artillery men, these guys did their job and did it extremely well. And most of us survived and most of us came home because we depended on one another, and we fought and operated for one another.

**INT:** Did you have any experience with any drugs or counter culture when you were over there?

**JL:** Oh yeah, that was all over the place. It wasn't so bad when I was there, and it wasn't so bad in the unit that I was in because the artillery folks required a certain security clearance, and in order to get a certain security clearance your record had to be reasonably clean. So as unfortunate as this sounds, the reality of it was that the worst soldiers in terms of their background and criminal record, their social habits, were in the infantry and the better soldiers, or a better cut of soldier were in the artillery. So while I know there was drug abuse, hell, there was alcohol abuse among the senior NCOs and the officers who wouldn't stoop to using drugs, they'd stoop to use alcohol. So there was plenty of abuse. And again, generally speaking, all of that was conducted in an environment where people knew when and where it was appropriate, and obviously somebody who's under the influence of either alcohol or drugs cannot effectively do his job and therefore can't effectively protect you, and you can make the argument that you're at risk twenty four hours a day. There is no good time. But there are times when you know what's going on and you know what's going to happen, and times when it's less likely that things are going to happen. So I didn't see it as a real problem. It's no different in my mind than a bunch of college kids at Farmington headed off to the local pub on a Friday night and one of them being smart enough to be identified as the designated driver. The rest of you drink and there's one person whose responsibility is to get you home, or to be a, not that some of the rest of you couldn't, but you've got one who you can count on to be able to get you home, and that's the way it was over there and you knew it was going on and it really wasn't something you wanted to see but you could understand in that environment how a touch of alcohol or a drag on the pipe might be appropriate. You dealt with it, I mean you, that was, you dealt with the reality of the situation. It's outside any model that's acceptable in the military, but you dealt with the reality.

**INT:** When were those less risky times and when were the more risky times?

**JL:** The, about early morning and early evening were the more risky times in the areas that we were in. And that was generally because that was the time when you were switching people, you know, one infantry unit would be out during the day and they'd be replaced either early at night or early in the morning, and it's that time when people are crossing and, or giving up a perimeter and somebody

else is taking over the perimeter that you're most vulnerable, and the enemy knew that. We did a pretty good job with all of the technology that we had available to us in protecting ourselves at night from people advancing unseen on our perimeters: mines, radar, night vision devices, all of those things kind of took the night away from the enemy. So that was the time when alcohol or drug abuse probably was most predominant, that's the time when we were generally safest. The thing that we faced, the risk that we faced at night was the indirect fire, the enemy artillery, and that was stuff that you just hunkered down in your bunker and waited it out.

**INT:** Did you ever have particularly sticky situations in any of those instances under enemy artillery?

**JL:** No, it was the, no, it was the ground attacks that were the most difficult situations because in each one of them, some enemy breached our perimeter and got inside the wire and those were the people that obviously pose the greatest risk to the guys that are running around, especially if it's in periods of limited visibility, early in the evening or early in the morning, difficult to pick them out and identify them and you're trying to do your job anyway and we have, they had what they called sappers, they were soldiers who came in with ammunition, dynamite, explosives strapped to their body. They would attempt to run into places like the fire direction center and blow themselves up and all the people who were in there. So it were the sappers that, usually the guys who tried to get through the wire and they were the ones that scared the death out of you, not the individuals, those guys. And during any ground attack there's so much confusion, you're not really sure what's going on and you're not really sure who's running around. I mean, they're a little smaller than we are and they certainly look different than we did, but you know, there were short Americans and, again, in periods of limited visibility it became kind of dicey knowing who the good guys were and the bad guys were. Those were the time, the indirect fire was, people got hurt or killed as a result of that, it was almost just bad luck, you just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Again, we generally had some knowledge, the enemy had very limited capability in terms of the stuff that they fired at us. Most of what they fired were mortars which are small, essentially small artillery pieces that you backpacked, and they have to be fairly close to you, so you can actually hear the rounds going off in the tubes, and then we had warning devices, so we always had thirty, forty five seconds notice. When you heard the alarm go off that meant you had thirty or forty five seconds essentially to get to someplace where there was shelter. So while that was, wasn't, those weren't fun times,

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you had some advance notice and there were some things you'd do to protect yourself, but during a ground attack you weren't really sure what was going on.

**INT:**What was the extent of your contact with the Vietnamese, because you mentioned you could see who were the good and who were the bad. How did you tell the difference?

**JL:**Well, you, it was difficult. I mean I can, I can tell you that I only know that I killed one guy in Vietnam, I mean I actually aimed my weapon and pulled the trigger and watched one guy fall over. I mean, that's the, and the rest of it was all conducted at such a distance and in such confusion and I'm not sure what happened and what didn't happen, so, and again, remember, we're the artillery, we're sitting on a fire base, we're not out there in the jungle being ambushed or stepping on land mines. We're sitting there behind the barbed wire and occasionally these ground attacks when they would commit hundreds of people at you and hundreds of them would die in the attempt, occasionally two or three of these guys would get through the wire and be running around and, again, I only made personal contact with one of those individuals in my twelve months over there.

**INT:**What happened with that contact with that Vietcong [*unintelligible phrase*]?

**JL:**I killed him, I mean this guy, he was a sap, I mean you could clearly recognize him, he was just covered with stuff. I was coming out of the fire direction center and he was coming toward the fire direction center. There was no question in my mind, had I not come out the door when I did and killed him that fifteen seconds later he'd have been in the FDC and killed all of us. I mean it was just, again, one of those things where another fifteen seconds and your life is entirely different. I, to this day, I carry a picture of the guy in my wallet. It was interesting because you fall victim to what you would regard I'm sure as morbid thinking and morbid kind of activities, but when this particular fire fight was over I felt the need to empty this guy's pockets. Now, you did that for a couple of reasons, number one they might be carrying maps or information or other intelligence stuff that would be helpful to you, but there was a sense that, just a fate that it was him that was dead instead of me, and it's another human being, and I didn't know the guy and so I felt the need to empty his pockets. And I took his wallet out and I opened his wallet and it was eerie, it was almost as if it could have been my wallet. I mean, he had a picture of him in his uniform, and I had a picture of me in my uniform, he had a picture

of what I assumed to be his wife, and he had a couple of old crumpled up letters stuffed in there, and I had a couple of my wife's favorite letters always stuffed in my wallet. And I suddenly realized that the difference between he and I, you know, other than the obvious difference he's dead and I'm alive, is that had I died my remains would have been sent home and I would have received a proper burial in honors and my family could have made some closure to this and then got on with their lives. But this guy was going to be buried in a trench out in front of the fire base and his family would never know what happened to him. So I took the picture of this guy and stuck it in my wallet, and I can't offer any explanation for why I did that other than every now and then when I think things are not going well and I'm being persecuted and, you know, why me, I open my wallet and look at that picture and it kind of puts some perspective on how bad my day was or how bad any event was. So that's, you know, one of the things that you said in your letter was, you know, you dig out any of your mementos, I didn't keep anything, I have nothing. I brought back a rifle which I donated to the museum, military museum down in Augusta, but I have nothing. I burnt my uniforms, actually threw them away [*unintelligible phrase*], and I regret that, you know, I wish I'd kept some of that stuff. I have a bunch of old slides, 35mm slides that I took and sent home. But beyond that I have nothing other than the picture of this guy I carry in my wallet.

**INT:** Why did you want to get rid of the uniform, do you know why?

**JL:** Well, yeah, when you got home there was just that sense of, I went, I survived, and those were exactly the terms you put it in, I survived, and I don't want to ever look back. I mean, we, I'd been there for twelve months and I'd realized for twelve months that I was engaged in a war that this country could not win based on the way we were fighting it at the time. I had began to seriously question whether we even should be there or not, and it was just something, it's like any bad, almost sounds trivial to say this, it's like any bad decision you make in your life, you just want to kind of put it behind you and move on, and part of putting it behind me was to just get rid of everything. And, you know, other than the pictures I've got in here and the picture I've got in my wallet and the rifle that's down in the museum, I've got nothing that I brought back from Vietnam, nothing. Which is exactly the way I, I wish I'd kept my uniform, that's the one thing I regret for some strange reason.

**INT:** When did, I mean you said you were there until September of '69, you served your full year, how did you feel when they said you were, you know, you knew

you were going home at a certain time, but how did you get home? Did you fly, what was the process?

**JL:**We, about forty eight hours before you're due to leave country, you go back to the same place you started. And I don't know if you ever saw the movie Platoon, the very beginning of the movie and at the very end of the movie, they show a scene that, they don't identify it, but it was the 91st, 93rd Replacement Battalion I think was the name of the place where all the new guys come in and get issued their stuff and all the old guys come out and turn in their stuff. And there's a, in the movie, it struck me how accurate that was, in the movie you, it's easy to tell the new guys from the old guys. The new guys have got all the short hair cuts and they're all white and they got new stuff on, and the old guys are grubby, scruffy, half dead looking people, I mean they've got the sunken eyes and, it was just striking, it was, I remember how, thinking how accurate a portrayal that was of us passing in the night. Because you literally stood there at the air field when the airplane arrived and watched the new guys coming off while you waited to get on. And I remember when I got off looking at the guys getting on and *[unintelligible phrase]*, and I remember getting on and looking at the eyes of the new guys getting off and I remember thinking that I knew exactly what they were feeling and thinking at that point in time. But it, they brought us back about forty eight hours prior to, and got your records put all back together for you, turn in your old stuff, issue you a clean set of fatigues to fly home with, and then you kind of hung around, stood in lines and hung around, you know, that's all you seem to do in the Army, kind of just wait in lines. And then your airplane arrives and you get on it and, the, on the airplane it was, you can't, you can hear a pin drop *[unintelligible phrase]* because you're all convinced in your subconscious that this thing isn't going to leave, it's going to get hit by enemy rocket, something's going to go wrong. You can't be, we're this close, but we can't leave this place, somehow you're convinced of that. And boy, the minute that airplane lifts off from the ground, I mean it erupts, just goes nuts. And then it's one big party until you absolutely collapse, emotionally and physically, from exhaustion. But there's a period of time after you take off for, I don't know, probably lasted an hour, where you're just high fiving everybody and, Jesus, you know, screw that place, and you break into song. I remember two big songs then were Green, Green Grass of Home and We Gotta Get Out of This Place, the Animals, you probably never heard that one. But those were the, I mean those were the anthems of Vietnam. You sing those things, you go nuts and then you all kind of settle back into your seats, go to sleep and you wake up in San Francisco, California. And again, it's one of the most surreal things, I mean you leave

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Vietnam and hours later you're standing in San Francisco, California. And we, we got in and, eight, nine o'clock at night, there was no flight to the east coast so we had to wait until the next morning. And we all went down to the local strip joints in San Francisco and drank until they threw us out, staggered back to the airport, got on the airplane the day and flew home. You know, so literally forty eight hours after you leave Vietnam, you're standing at the airport at Logan being met by your wife and it's like nothing ever happened. It was just strange. But...

**INT:**Did you encounter any hostility at the airport?

**JL:**Well one of the first things most of us did was we, well first of all they bring you in to Travis Air Force Base which is right there in San Francisco, and what most of us do at that point in time is, we all had taken one set of civilian clothes over with us, and we find someplace to change and get out of your uniform and into your civilian clothes. But you've got to project yourself back into the sixties, I mean, so now I put on a sport shirt and a pair of jeans and a pair of sneakers and I head off for the airport only to find out that I can't get out that night, and I then I head down to, with a bunch of guys, to the local pubs to drink a few beers and watch the strippers, and there's no mistaking who you are. I mean, this is the sixties and there we all are with short haircuts, tans from here down, I mean, and, you know, these people, thousands of guys like this are passing through San Francisco so there's no question that you're a guy coming back from Vietnam, anybody can recognize you. And you know, we took some shit, I mean, that's one of the things they caution you about and counsel you about when you're in that forty eight hours out processing, you know, expect some of that stuff. Especially in a place like San Francisco, California which is kind of a liberal place. So you expect some of it, and some guys don't react to it well, and most of the rest of us you just, it rolls like water off your back. I went, I survived, I'm home, I'm not going to listen to, this guy can't upset me, he can say anything he wants, he can't upset. But occasionally they'll hit with some of these guys a trigger point, you know, make some comment that will impugn the guys who didn't come back with us and people lose it. There were some unfortunate situations like that, and I heard some personal comments, but, well I was focussed not on the previous three hundred and sixty five days, I was focussed at that point on the rest of my life and I think a l-, most of us were. Even the young enlisted kids with no high school education or the option to go to jail or go in the Army, I mean, we had been and we had survived, we were home and we wanted to get on with whatever was next and some clown in a bar in San Francisco didn't have effect on



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*[unintelligible word]*.

**INT:** So you were *[unintelligible phrase]*, you go back to Logan, you met your wife, how was that homecoming with your family?

**JL:** I think they're always anticlimactic to some extent. I think you, I think in your mind you just fantasize about things that never happen, emotions that are there but never to the extent that you expect them. I mean, it really is anticlimactic, and despite the fact that your family comes down to meets you and your wife comes down to meets you and you drive back, then the next day they get up and go to work. And the next day you get up and get on with your life, too, so that's all a part of our experience versus the experience of, like they had in WWII, and even the guys and gals who went to Desert Storm, they went together and came back together and had some closure in their lives. We, we never really had that closure and, even the dedication of the memorial, the big parade in Washington, the Vietnam veteran parade, none of that represented closure, I'll never have closure. And that's not a complaint, it's an observation. It's the difference between my dad's experience and Desert Storm experience and my experience. I mean, I went as an individual, I came home as an individual and people went to work the day after I left and they went to work the day after I got back. Life went on.

**INT:** What was the next step in your life going on? I mean, you went to ROTC you said in Amherst, Mass.

**JL:** Well, actually I went to school. As soon as I got back I went off to the advanced course, which is just an extension of training for, when you go to the basic course they teach you to be a field artillery captain, to be a battery commander. When you go to the advanced course they're now training you to take on the next level of command, the battalion level of command, so it's more of the same at a higher level with a broader outlook, so, that was a nine month long course. We used to joke about the fact that they took a four month course and they crammed it into nine months, but all of us who went to that course, ninety five percent of us who were in the advanced course were all just back from Vietnam, most of us were married with young wives and no kids and that nine month experience became, you know, a party from day one to day two hundred and seven where you went for a couple, three hours a day and then played golf or drank beer or did whatever we wanted. It was a, it was a, I think it was almost designed to allow us to unwind and get our feet back on the ground. It was a great experience. I learned to play golf then, had all kinds of fun. It was

a good, good time.

**INT:** Now you said ninety five, probably ninety five percent of you were vets just back. Did you share...?

**JL:** Oh yeah, I mean in that setting we all did, you couldn't help it. It's when you get away from those, those kind of people, I mean people who had been there. The difficult thing is sharing some of this with people who, I mean, you can note and think about fragments, but you can't really appreciate all the things that lead up to that. So it's difficult. It's less difficult now for me, but it's very difficult to sit down with my brother-in-law or my sister and talk about my experience over there. I'm still troubled to this day by the fact that I didn't talk about it with my father, because he had shared so much of what he did in WWII, and I never really talked with him about my experiences in Vietnam. That troubles me, it troubles me only in that I don't understand why it happened. But it was difficult unless you were talking with somebody who'd been there to kind of share it because it was kind of a surreal experience in a lot of ways, it really was.

**INT:** So you had your nine month training, where did you go after that?

**JL:** I tried to get out, or we thought about getting out. Actually, I wanted to go to flight school, I wanted to be a helicopter pilot and I got my wish. They were sending me to flight school [*unintelligible phrase*] back to Vietnam for a second tour, and my wife said we need to talk. And we talked it over and decided this wasn't what we wanted. It wasn't what I, I wanted to be a helicopter pilot but I didn't want to go back to Vietnam. Those guys were, the fatality rate for helicopter pilots was incredible, it's a very risky profession over there. So while I wanted to fly, I didn't want to fly that much. So at the very last minute I decided, we collectively decided this wasn't what we wanted as a family, so I picked up the phone and called my assignment officer and told him I didn't want to go back to Vietnam, therefore I didn't want to go to flight school, and I said I want to get out so send me back to the east coast somewhere and we got an ROTC job in Massachusetts which is as close as we could get to Maine, but, back in New England was back home. And so we came back, two of our three sons were born when we were there and just as I was ready to get out, they came back and said, well how would you like to go to Europe. [*unintelligible phrase*], we may never get to Europe otherwise, so I took one more tour to go to Europe, that's where the third kid was born, in Europe, and that was such a horrible experience. I mean, the Army was

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demoralized, it was under strengthed, there were horrible race problems in Vietnam, I mean in Germany, and just atrocious drug problems over there. I mean it was a horrible experience, worse than Vietnam, even though I had my family and my three kids with me. And after we'd been in Germany for a couple of years we said, this is not what we want to do. And I resigned and got out and came back to the world.

**INT:**It was horrible for the American officers in Germany you said, and like race relations, was it because of Vietnam?

**JL:**Oh it, the Army was in turmoil because of Vietnam. The, a lot of the senior NCOs got out so we promoted a lot of junior NCOs to leadership positions very quickly and they weren't prepared for it. The race problems spoke for themselves, I mean these were the days of the afros and the daps (*sounds like*), I don't know if you've ever seen a dap, these long convoluted rituals that the Black soldiers went through when they greeted one another. You know, we shake hands, well they had these thirty, forty five second routines that they went through. It was done for a couple of reasons, not the least of which was to irritate those who were not Black, and they did it very effectively and a lot of the soldiers brought back from Vietnam the drug problems which they took to Germany with them, you know, when they went to Germany. So you throw all of that, the fact that we lost a lot of senior leadership and promoted a lot of people into leadership positions that weren't ready for it, the fact that we had some real race problems, the Black and White thing was just a cultural thing which manifested itself in the military also, and the fact that we sent a lot of kids over there with drug problems, and that we were under strength, horribly under strength. We were going from the draft based Army to an all volunteer Army at that point in time so a unit might have fifty percent of the people that they needed and, which meant you did twice as much work. All of those things combined to make Europe at that particular point in time a horrible experience. And I had three kids and a family I was trying to attend to. We just decided that wasn't what we wanted for the rest of our lives, so I resigned and got out.

**INT:**I want to go back for a moment to Amherst when you said that the MCS came in and took over [*unintelligible phrase*], that sounds like an interesting experience.

**JL:**Well it was, I mean we were back there and that was particularly difficult because that was about the time the United States Army invaded Cambodia and that

created an increased level of protest back here in the States. And we became targets, I mean we were the, we were the Army on campus, if you will, so we became targets for all of people's frustration. I don't mean, there was no, I never felt any personal threats or any personal danger, but the program became a symbol of everything that was wrong with our policies in Vietnam. So, I mean they came in and literally took over our building. And we'd go to work and people would be sleeping in my office. They put us in civilian clothes because they didn't want us in uniforms because that just further incited people, and we did all of the seminar kind of things where we'd try to bring the people who were opposed to the war together and we'd try to explain to them what the military's policies were, and none of that worked of course. But it was a very interesting time to be in Amherst, Massachusetts. And I thoroughly loved the ROTC assignment because the only kids in the program were kids who were truly committed to going in the Army and really wanted to because the environment was so tough for them, so it was a joy to work with those young men and women, but it was just a difficult environment to work in. But, I had a great big German shepherd that I had bought and I used to take him to work with me, and he was a big dog and he was growing up in a house with three kids in diapers so he was a real wuss of a dog. But German shepherds are pretty impressive looking animals. I'd put him on a short leash and take him in to work with me. Boy, the corridors would clear, the protestors would just get the hell out of the way and pret...

**INT:** Did they just stay there, and they...?

**JL:** They lived there, they moved into our offices and lived there. And the administration decided that it wasn't worth the confrontations that it would take to get rid of them, and there were some ugly confrontations nation wide. Kent State occurred during that time frame, and that was the yardstick that everybody worried about was that the protest would escalate out of control into an environment like that, so college administrators, you know, took a hands off approach to this thing. Frankly, the only thing they were disrupting was, you know, the little ROTC building over on the other end of campus and the programs that they were in, so that was no big God damn deal to anybody, and so, yeah we tried to operate in that environment to the extent that we could and we did. And, you know, that only lasted for six months or so, but it was interesting. I mean, the first year and the last year were normal, it was the middle year that was that crazy year, so. But, from my perspective, I was home, two of my three kids were born then during that time frame, so I had all kinds of other things that were keeping me busy and focussed and it was, you

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know, after going through Vietnam, I mean we used to, the phrase used to be, well what are you going to do, send me back to Vietnam? And that's the way I felt about the protestors in my office, you know, what are they going to do, send me back to Vietnam. I mean, I've been through that, none of this stuff really mattered to me, it just made life a little more interesting.

**INT:** So how did you get, you said you resigned from your, how did you end up back in Maine?

**JL:** Well, Cindy and I were both born and brought up here, so this was home. So when I got off active duty we came home. I'd been trained, I had a masters degree in education from Orono and I wanted to teach, so I ended up at Fryeburg Academy teaching and it wasn't too long into my teaching career, with three sons, that it started to become relatively obvious to me that a school teacher's salary, especially in a private school, it was going to be a struggle financially, especially when I had three kids who were going to go to college sometime. And after three or four years, I mean, you look at the pay scale for the future and it maxes out pretty early and it doesn't go too high anyway, and I said I need to do something else. Well, that something else was I joined the National Guard on a part time basis, and that led to a full time opportunity in the Guards so, oh God, five or six years later I found myself back in the, in a sense back in the Army, except I'm in the Army in Maine.

**INT:** And what was your job, your full time job, the opportunity?

**JL:** It was right here in Waterville, which is why we ended up in Waterville at the Engineer Group near Waterville, which is one of the National Guard organizations, I was just a training officer, and that led to a number of opportunities for promotion and other jobs that have essentially been in the Waterville-Augusta area, and so I stayed in the National Guard on a full time basis because the ten years I had on active duty counted toward retirement in the National Guard, so I stayed in the National Guard until about five years ago when I got out of the Guard on a full time basis and took a retirement, and started working for the state and got back into the Guard on a part time basis. So, I guess the military's kind of in my blood I guess.

**INT:** Can't quite leave it?

**JL:** No, getting close though.

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**INT:** You've already talked a little bit about your perception of the war now, how did you, I want to know more about how you adjusted when you came home, you said you just kind of left it.

**JL:** Yeah I did, I just kind of left it. I mean, when I got there, I think that's why I ditched my uniform. I mean that was the final act in my mind now. You couldn't put it behind you. I mean you could refuse to talk about it and I did for years, and you simply got on with your life, but my life was still the military at that point in time. You know, I guess the thing that's still with me today is, I alluded to the relationships that developed with other, in this case men, because *[unintelligible phrase]* at least in Vietnam in this time frame, I alluded to the relationships that develop between men when their lives depend on one another. One of the things that occurs in that dynamic is when one of them dies and inevitably somebody does die in an environment like that...

**End of Tape One, Side B**

**Tape Two, Side A:**

**INT:**OK, you were talking about the relationships and learning to manage how when someone dies.

**JL:**You learned, you learned to manage your emotions because it happened so often that you sudden-, all of a sudden you become kind of dulled to the death, you become, your emotions become kind of dulled because otherwise, I mean, you know, there, it would eat you up emotionally, so you see it so often you just kind of accept it, it becomes very routine. I'm sure people, paramedics for example, will tell you that there's probably a shock the first time they go to their first real accident but after a while it just becomes kind of routine. Well that's the way death unfortunately became. So you learned to control your emotions very well. You learned not to get terribly emotionally tied to people. You can be very friendly with *[unintelligible word]*, you can have great relationships with them, but you, emotionally you kind of remain distant from people, otherwise when you lose those people it's difficult to recover. And the one thing that I can tell you I brought back with me is a real inability for a long time, I'm talking up until maybe the past eight or ten years, to verbalize an emotion, to express an emotion, even with my wife and my sons. I had real difficulty in getting close emotionally and I recognize that, you know that's, that's what I brought back with me from Vietnam was an inability to express emotions and to some extent an inability to feel emotions. My wife today will complain that, you know, we have a son who played hockey at Maine, I'd go up to the games, I never would get emotionally involved in the games. I'd sit there and I'm watching and I love the game, I like to analyze the game, but, movies, athletic events, family reunions, I'm the stone face in the *[unintelligible word]* crowd. I'm feeling a lot of emotions inside, but I don't get close to people, I don't show my emotions very often, and I had a very difficult time expressing emotions. And that's the baggage that I brought back, and I think it's a piece of baggage that we all brought home, those people at least that were in an environment where they, they saw friends dying *[unintelligible phrase]*, but all things, all things considered, I mean that ain't bad. There were people in much worse shape than I was that came back.

**INT:**How many friends did you have that died in Vietnam?

**JL:**Well, when you say, when you say friends, there were probably a half dozen names on the Wall that when I go down there I look up and all of these were officers who were in units that either served with me or in my commands that

died while we were there. But, I mean there were dozens of other people who died, you know, that I knew that were part of the unit. But again, it almost goes back to the us and them thing. Your relationship with the enlisted people was much different than your relationship with the officers because of the way they regarded you and to some extent the way we regarded them. That's unfortunate but it's a statement of fact. So, there are six names that I look up when go down to the Wall, any time I get the opportunity to go down there, and these are six people that I lived and fought with over there who were also officers, but there are dozens of others, some whose names I remember and many whose names I don't remember who I remember zipping in a bag some morning and sending them back in the aircrafts.

**INT:**How often have you been back to the Wall?

**JL:**Every time I go to Washington I make it a point to get down there. I mean, I might get to Washington a half dozen times a year. But one thing I've never done and I've always wanted to do and I thought about doing it this year was I've never been back on Memorial Day. I find, I find more comfort being there individually. I mean, you can't go to that place and be alone but, I think I might have some difficulty in feeling the same way about the presence down there if I was one of a couple hundred thousand on Memorial Day. It's something I've always wanted to do, however. I'll get around to it some time.

**INT:**You mentioned that you really didn't start talking about it until your sons got in high school. What were their first questions and how did you deal with that?

**JL:**Well actually it wasn't them. I got invited with three other Vietnam veterans one night to go speak to the church group that my sons were in, and I just felt ready to talk. And so we went, and the youth minister, the junior minister who was running the youth groups, had a series of questions, much like you do, that we all agreed that we would answer. I was in the, all three of us happened to be in the Army, one guy was an enlisted medic and he had some very interesting experiences, and the other guy was a helicopter pilot and he had some very interesting experiences. We all answered some basic questions and then the kids had an opportunity to ask us personal questions and, you know, after that point in time my sons got a bit curious about it and we started talking more in this setting, but it was, that was kind of what drew me out, if you will.

**INT:**So you talked about it more when you went home?



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**JL:**Yeah.

**INT:**Conversations that you [*unintelligible phrase*] with your father?

**JL:**Not to the extent, because they didn't have, you know, Vietnam was a chapter in their textbook. I mean, the fact that I was there made the chapter maybe a little bit more interesting, but you know, it wasn't the war to end all wars, it wasn't a war to defeat the Nazis, it was just a footnote in the God damn history book. I mean, you're a history major, right, I mean...

**INT:**Psychology major actually.

**JL:**Oh, that's even worse.

**INT:**History is just something, my dad's a big history buff so...

**JL:**Yeah, but I didn't have the kind of conversations with them that my dad had with me. They didn't have the kind of interest in my experience that I had in my dad's experience, and I think that in part goes back to, well I mean most recently it's been manifested in Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest Generation*. I think there were a lot of people who felt that, you know, these were guys who preserved democracy for the world, and put Vietnam into some perspective, what the hell was that? Except the longest war we ever fought? So I think it was different in that regard, and while I had some interest in the military from a very early age, none of my kids had any interest in the military at all.

**INT:**How do you feel about it now, especially with the war with Kosovo going on and you mentioned the Bosnia crisis over there, did it stir up any new feelings or old ones?

**JL:**It's almost like the emotion doesn't kick in again. I mean, I have some feelings about it but I don't get emotionally wound up, I don't sit in front of the TV sobbing, watching what's going on over there. I'm more analytical now as I think about it. I mean, I am, I think I'm changed by virtue of Vietnam experience, I mean I think it's part of who I am and part of what I've done as an adult, and ninety nine point nine percent of that is positive. So I don't regret my decision, I see the war in a different light, I see the people who opposed the war in an entirely different light, I mean they were doing what was important

to them and frankly it was their voice who brought some reason maybe to our policy and ultimately got us out of a situation we maybe should have never got involved in. I mean, I don't have all of the information, but based on what I can read and conclude, we were in the wrong place at the wrong time. And as I look at Kosovo and Bosnia, I tell you what I see over there, I see two countries involved in a civil war like Vietnam was, and my fear is, in Bosnia, and we've got Maine Guardsmen and women who have been there and they would tell you if you talk with any of them, their belief is that it will be weeks after we leave when these people go back to doing what they've done for hundreds of years which is to fight with one another. I feel the same way about Kosovo. Look at the Irish for crying out loud, they're not even in a war. George Mitchell went over, declared victory, and everybody thought everything was good, and they're killing each other as we're speaking right now. So, you know, my fear about those two situations is once again our civilian leaders, this is not intended to be derogatory, but our civilian leadership has committed us to situations that we can't win, and we haven't even tried to define what win is anyway, but that's my fear is the parallels in terms of our experience in Vietnam in getting involved in a civil war and taking ten years and fifty eight thousand lives to come to the realization that we couldn't win it, however we define that, and the same thing is going to happen to us in Kosovo and Bosnia in my opinion.

**INT:** You, that's the second time you mention that civilian leaders and the military. Is that ever a *[unintelligible word]* for you?

**JL:** No, that's not an issue. I mean, if it was an issue I wouldn't be in. I understand clearly that civilian leadership will make the decision where they want to use that arm of foreign policy they have that they call the military. I have no problem with that. I can disagree, but God, if my father and his generation had disagreed or chose not to serve, where the hell would we be now? I mean, I'm like you, I sit in front of the TV at night and I watch what's happening to the people in Kosovo and I conclude that we can't allow that to happen. Now, I'll stop right there. I don't know how we stop it, but I know how they've chosen to stop it, and while I feel in my heart I can't allow something like that to go on, I'm convinced that we've got ourselves into one of those quagmires, I mean, you, you're young enough or old enough to remember that when we got into Bosnia we were only going there for a year. And I'm here to tell you that I was in Atlanta, Georgia on military duty on Monday, and we've already programmed our rotations in Bosnia out three more years. And that's beginning to look strangely like Vietnam, except no people are getting ki-

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we're not losing thousands of people a week. But I think we've got ourselves into a situation where maybe we shouldn't be.

**INT:**How do you think Vietnam has shaped our country, especially Maine, *[unintelligible phrase]*?

**JL:**Boy, that's a tough question. I'm not sure, but let me answer a different question that you didn't ask. Let me tell you that Vietnam has completely altered the military, and I think that any success that we experienced in Desert Storm, for example, where we were extremely successful in a very short period of time both in terms of identifying military objectives and executing those objectives, is a direct result of the lousy lessons that we learned in Vietnam. The military has been completely reshaped. But I'm not, I'm not sure what that means to Maine. I mean, I'm still convinced at the personal level that people went to work the day I left and people went to work the day I got back and, and that's probably the greatest impact that we've had on Maine is, I think it's negligible. I think it shaped the generation of guys my age, I mean, I'm troubled constantly when I pick up the paper and I read that a Vietnam veteran goes nuts and shoots somebody, and they attribute it to post Vietnam stress syndrome. And I keep wanting them to write the article that says Vietnam veteran elected chairman of the Waterville Parks and Recreation Board. We're Vietnam veterans when something goes bad, but we're not veterans when something goes right, and as I look at my peers, the people that I served with, the guys and gals that I know that are being interviewed by you people, I look at what they're doing for, what they did for their country, what they're doing for their state and what they're doing in their communities, I'm very proud of what the hell I've done in terms of service to both, to my state and my community in the things that I've done. And I think I represent the average Vietnam veteran. So to some extent, maybe that's the impact that the Vietnam war has had is the generation of us who have come back, made our sacrifices and got along with our lives and it made a contribution because when it gets tough on the daily basis of the job, you know, I think we all subconsciously think back to those three hundred and sixty five days. The one thing I threw away and I wish I never had is my short timer calendar. I meant to bring that home. I wish I had that framed on the wall as a constant reminder of, you know, what I'd been through. Hey, if I survived that, my attitude is well the rest of the stuff is gravy, it's easy. But I don't think, I just feel that as a society, you know, we went to work the day Bill Libby left and we went to work the day he got back and that's, and Vietnam's a footnote in somebody's history book. But there are a bunch of us who have been personally impacted,

and I can tell you the military has been significantly impacted.

**INT:**For the better?

**JL:**Absolutely, absolutely for the better.

**INT:**What are some of those community activities you mentioned [*unintelligible phrase*] that you were involved in?

**JL:**Oh I did all the things that parents do. I mean, I was president of the soccer boosters and president of the hockey boosters, and my wife and I officiated soccer and I officiated hockey, and I've been on the Parks and Recreation board, I've been on the Y, and we all, both, participate in varying committees at church, and you do all those things that parents do when their kids are involved in activities. She ran project graduation for four years at Waterville when our kids were at Waterville High School. So those are the things that we did and we got involved in. I'm not suggesting that we wouldn't have done it if I hadn't gone to Vietnam, but those are the things that we did. And I know at the personal level, I tell people when I talk about my dad, the greatest pride I take in what he did is, I can look at his, I can read it in his obituary, and it's put in these words in his obituary, I mean, he served his country, he served his state, and he served his community. And that's exactly what I decided I want to do and that's exactly what I hope my kids do at some point in their lives. They haven't chosen to serve their country, but you can do that in other ways.

**INT:**Kind of a recurring theme I've noticed and I've heard from other vets is that they hide. You seem to be, you know, pretty active in the community, but did you ever have any, to hide your vet status or your Vietnam status, could you talk about how, you know, the only time they mention a vet in the papers is when he goes crazy and they attribute it to Vietnam.

**JL:**I mean the answer to the question is yes, but not hide actively like you're suggesting. I mean, I hid it in that I didn't talk about it. When there were opportunities to, you know, people were talking about being Vietnam veterans, you know, I didn't offer, or very often offer that I was there. So to some extent I hid that veteran status. There are circumstances and situations early after I returned from Vietnam where I was embarrassed by the fact that I'd been there and didn't want people to know about that, but I think over the years I've gained some comfort. So to some extent I had hidden that, but I'm sure not nearly as active as, a lot of other veterans not only have hidden their

veteran status but they, they've kind of retreated from society in general. I mean those are the people that we tend to focus on unfortunately. But I think all of us to some extent have hidden at some stage in our lives since we got back the fact that we were veterans and participated in Vietnam. I think all of us also, many of us or most of us, also have gained greater comfort over the years in recognizing that we did what our country asked us to do at that point in time and a lot of us like myself would do it again. And, my country asked me to go to Vietnam, it was the thing to do at the time and I did it, and while I questioned why we were there, and even shortly after I got to Vietnam, I continued to believe in our country and what it stands for and I con-, am willing to continue to serve and whatever that entails.

**INT:** So you would go back again, if they asked you to do it over?

**JL:** Oh absolutely, I mean when I, when the day comes that I wouldn't, I'd get out. I mean, I've said to you, I have some question about Kosovo and Bosnia, but given the opportunity to go to either place tomorrow, I'd do it.

**INT:** Have you ever gone back to Vietnam?

**JL:** No.

**INT:** Would you want to?

**JL:** No. I just had no interest. I mean I, I didn't say that out of anger and, I have no interest in revisiting that. I've put that behind me. I've watched a couple of, oh you know, the news shows, the *60 Minute* kind of programs where they'll track some veteran who's gone back and, you know, wanted to see the battle field or whatever. I read a book and saw the, *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* is the book. It talks about the 1st Cavalry Division when it first got there and the horrible beating that they took, and the commanders actually went back and met with the North Vietnamese commanders who defeated them on the battle field that day, and while I took great interest in that and even got kind of misty watching it on TV and reading the book, I got no interest in doing that, you know. It has nothing to do with anger or fear or, I just have no interest in going back.

**INT:** I guess, in closing, what is it that you want to leave because it is, the whole purpose of this project is to gain a more accurate history because I know I personally didn't get anything for Vietnam war history in my high school, and,

which is why, you know, I got interested in it in college, but what is it that you want to leave to be remembered about the war and about your experience?

**JL:** Well, I guess I'd characterize it the following way: what, what I learned was an appreciation for the basic freedoms that we have in this country which during the Vietnam period manifested itself in a grudging recognition of the fact that we don't all have to agree, and the fact that a brigadier general of the National Guard can sit here today and tell you that I have some question about what we're doing in Kosovo and Bosnia is what, what makes this country great. I also have no reservation about going over there because I'm still committed to supporting our civilian leadership. We elect them, we trust them, and I'm prepared to support them. And the day I'm not prepared to support them, I'll get the hell out. I grudgingly gave ground over years and came to realize that the people who protested the war maybe served us in a far greater fashion than I will ever really truly appreciate in that they raised the consciousness level about what we're doing and I think if we learn something out of Vietnam, it's that we need to listen to our people, and we need to respect the fact that we can disagree on things, and the fact that I chose to serve shouldn't be held against me, and the fact that someone chose to protest and not serve I will not hold against them, and to some strange extent that's exactly what I went to Vietnam to fight for was your ability to say, I protest, I disagree, I will not go. I think that's what we should take away from Vietnam. And I have a grudging respect for those people who had the moral courage to oppose what we were doing there in that time frame. I took it personally for a long period of time, but I don't take it personally any more. And it's kind of interesting that the leader for Students for a Democratic Society at the University of Maine, when I was a senior in the ROTC program [*unintelligible word*] was a guy by the name of Ken Kantro. Ken Kantro is now a jeweler in the state of Maine, he makes this lovely jewelry which I buy on a regular basis for my wife. It's interesting how our past have crossed at several junctions in our life time and, I've never had the opportunity to talk to Ken Kantro about how he felt about, and he doesn't know me at the personal level, how he felt about me as the ROTC [*unintelligible word*] colonel and how I felt about him and what we might think about one another. So it's a conversation I've always wanted to have, but I don't know the guy and probably will never have the conversation. But that's what I, that's what I take away from Vietnam, and that's what I hope people would take away from Vietnam is the fact that we're, we are a free society, that's what many of us were prepared to fight to continue to preserve, and I think that people who disagreed about our policies in Vietnam at that point in time have over the years gained a tremendous respect for the other person's

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position, and that's what I remember.

**INT:** Well, I don't have any more questions, unless you have any for me? Do you?

**JL:** No.

**INT:** Well thank you very much for doing this interview, I appreciate it.

**JL:** Thank you, yeah.

**End of Interview**