RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH POPIELOWSKI

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Joseph Popielowski. Is that close enough?

Joseph Popielowski: Popielowski, yes, with a "P."

SI: We are in Manalapan, New Jersey, at the Monmouth County Library. We thank the library for allowing us to have this space. Today's date is December 16, 2013. This is Shaun Illingworth conducting the interview. Thank you very much for coming in today.

JP: Well, thank you.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

JP: I was born in West Germany. [Editor's Note: West Germany was created following World War II in 1949, when the United States, Great Britain and France consolidated their occupation zones into one West Germany. East Germany and West Germany were united again in 1990.] I like to say I'm a World War II kid, because what happened was, my father was in the Polish Army. He got captured by the Germans. He escaped, [from] what I understand, five times from the Germans. He had to swim a couple of rivers to get to the other side, but, anyway, he got caught and the Germans rounded up my mother and brother at that time and took them to Germany to work on their farms, because they were short on workers, because their young men were going to the front. … I was born in a small town called Neumarkt in July 11, 1944, and I spent my time in the German small towns, because my parents were working on the farm, in different areas, because … my father was a farmer at one time, and I used to play around with the young kids in bombed out buildings and playing around with Molotov cocktails, if people understand what they are. It's like a bomb … in a bottle with gasoline and you would light it up and you would throw it against the wall and there you go. They would use that in the wartime against the tanks and, one day, when playing around with kids, … we were Polish and I remember one girl, she was in charge and whatnot, … we found some bottles of gas and we were throwing them against the wall. … I picked up one--this I remember, doesn't go from memory--and I lit it and I threw it, but thing is, when I lit it, it was on fire and it exploded as soon as I threw it, in my hand. … I was lucky that I didn't lose a hand at that point, because I'm a lefty, and the glass exploded and it went into my face. I was bleeding. I was young at that point, I don't know, a young kid, maybe five or something like that, and a German saw me laying there on the ground and [he] picked me up and rushed me to the hospital. … There, I was treated and that's all I remember at that point of that.

SI: Was this during the Allied occupation?

JP: Yes, the Americans were there. I was born in '44. The war ended in '45, when the Americans came in, and we were in a camp at that point, where Americans set it up. … What happened was, it was somewhat [after] a couple years and a priest sponsored us, from Michigan, and that's how we came to the United States. … I guess we landed in New York and, since my father was a farmer, then, we moved out to New Jersey and … my mother and father worked on a few farms in New Jersey. … Then, later on, my father found a job in a factory and my mother took care of the house.

SI: How old were you when you came to the United States?

JP: Oh, gee, I don't remember, maybe, I'd be guessing, maybe seven, maybe somewhere there.

SI: Was it the early 1950s?

JP: Somewhere. I think in 1953, we came, somewhere there.

SI: Do you know if your parents always wanted to come to America or if they ever tried to go back to Poland?

JP: Well, Poland was not [in] the question, but I found some pictures when I was a kid, made, I guess, earlier in my age, and the picture was stamped, "Australia," because the friend, the girl that I was talking to you about, that was in charge of our group, she went to Australia, but, since we were sponsored by the priest from Michigan, we came to the United States.

SI: It seems like you know a little bit about your parents' lives before you were born. Did your father ever say anything more about his time in the Polish Army?

JP: No, he didn't talk about it. … When he met somebody else that he was able to talk to, then, he would talk to that person of his experience, … [of] how the Germans attacked them and what he did in the service, … but he would not talk about it at home. I don't understand it and I never thought about asking about it.

SI: How much older was your brother than you?

JP: I don't know, maybe four years, something like that. … We had our differences, at one time, because he left home early, and, if you understand some of the old traditions … from the old country, the parents used to wait for somebody in the family that would grow up and help out. So, he went, I guess you can say, the American way and he went out of the house at eighteen and got married. So, that was a misunderstanding in family life, but things were patched up. … I understood what he did and my parents were looking towards me at that point.

SI: Did you have any other siblings or was it just you and your brother?

JP: No, I hate to say this--I had a sister. She was a baby [at] that time and the end came to her when my mother spoke up to a German officer and they took her and tied her to the post, whipped her. The baby died, because the baby, (Maureen?), she had the baby in her arms and she died.

SI: Would you like to take a break?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You grew up in the American Occupation Zone.

JP: Yes, West Germany, yes; go ahead.

SI: Growing up in that kind of environment, did you speak many different languages or only Polish?

JP: [laughter] I never learned Germany, only a few words. One, there was a slogan one time, it wasn't kind to the Germans, but what I remember, "*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles, zwei Kartoffeln und das ist alles*," which meant, "Germany, Germany above all--two potatoes and that is all." So, it was, like, a derogatory statement against the Germans of … how they acted and how the soldiers were.

SI: Was your father in a prisoner of war camp until the end of World War II or did they put him on the farm before the end?

JP: No, he never was in a concentration camp, but, as soon they found the family and took the family to Germany, that was it. We were just working. My parents were just working on the farms, with my brother, because my brother was born in Poland and I was born in West Germany, at that time.

SI: As a child, would you have to do things on the farm, like chores?

JP: Well, I didn't. Probably, my brother did, because he was a few years older.

SI: Did you go to school while you were in Germany?

JP: No, no. They didn't accept Poles, to teach them in school.

SI: Was your group all Polish or was it a mixture of other peoples?

JP: From what I remember, Polish.

SI: All Polish, okay.

JP: Yes. It was a group, like, maybe ten kids, ten, fifteen, somewhere there, whoever was around at that point, whoever didn't have a place to go, you know, like the United States, Australia or somewhere else.

SI: Did you all live on the same farm?

JP: No, they moved my parents around. It wasn't just one farm. It was different areas, [from] what my parents were telling me.

SI: Do you remember anything about the voyage to the United States?

JP: Very little. I remember, we came here on a ship called the USS *Hershey* [USS *General M. L. Hersey* (AP-148)] and I think it was named after a general, General Hershey, at that time. My

friends kid me around with it, because [they] say, "You came on a ship called *Hershey*?" [laughter] because they think of the candy bar, but it's funny at this point.

SI: What are your earliest memories of being in New Jersey? Where did you go?

JP: … I remember going to school in Clarksburg, Perrineville, and then, after that, to Freehold High School, and my parents worked in a few farms in the area, where they grew corn and vegetables and chicken farms and such.

SI: They worked on many different farms.

JP: Yes, it wasn't, like, just one. … My father was working … just to have food on the table and whatnot and, whatever was available, he took it.

SI: Did your mother also work on the farms?

JP: Yes, as much as she could, but there was a limit on her work because, … somewhere, on one of the farms, she was hit by the wind or whatever and it made her ill and, from that point, it was like a downhill struggle for her, health wise.

SI: What do you remember about coming to a new country and getting acclimated to life in America?

JP: I don't know. I was a kid. … I was going to Clarksburg school and the bus picked me up one time, that I remember, and took us to school and I just didn't know anything about school. So, I decided to walk home. I didn't know which direction. [laughter] So, I took the first road that I saw and I was walking away. … I was a kid at that point--maybe, I'm not sure of the age bracket, [I] must have been somewhere over seven--and two teachers saw me walking away from Clarksburg school. … They ran after me, grabbed me and took me back to school [laughter] and they were teaching me English and whatever else I had to know and I remember their names at this point, Mrs. (Lewis?) and Mrs. (Wolf?), because her family had the (Wolf?) General Store in Perrineville.

SI: Okay.

JP: So, that portion, I do remember them, because I'm grateful to them, because I didn't know any English at that point. Here I was, a young kid, but no English experience. I had nothing and I just studied and learned English and I can say I'm all American at this point. [laughter]

SI: Was that a very big school or a smaller one?

JP: No, it's country towns, Clarksburg and Perrineville. I mean, it's rural. I liked it. I mean, it was great going to those schools.

SI: What were your favorite subjects in school?

JP: I don't remember at this point. [laughter] I never thought about favorite subjects and whatnot. … Since teachers were teaching me English and whatever else I had to know, it just never dawned on me, but I liked to play basketball at that point and whatnot. … Since I was a short kid and whatnot, playing basketball, I was able to steal the balls from a lot of the young guys and … they would say, "Pop, Pop," and I would just pass it on.

SI: Did you live in Clarksburg?

JP: Yes, … not Clarksburg, but Perrineville, because they're both close by. So, we lived in the Perrineville area.

SI: What was your neighborhood like? Were there many people nearby? You said it was very rural.

JP: No, it was rural, and the thing is, I was a foreigner. I mean, I was limited in my English and whatnot, and so, it was not easy. I picked up a lot and I had a few friends at that point, but, when you move around, you lose touch.

SI: When you were growing up in Perrineville, what would you do typically for fun or enjoyment?

JP: There was Perrineville Lake. I remember going, later on in life, to parties out there and whatnot and being by the lake. There was a lot of fishing and whatnot, but that was about it. Teenagers would gather around at that point, when I was in my growing up, but, mostly, I stayed … on the farms with my parents. In other words, they kept an eye on me.

SI: What kind of traditions from …

JP: Poland.

SI: … Poland were kept up in your household?

JP: Well, … mainly, [there] was Easter and Christmas and I remember those, but thing is, yes, Christmas was the best way possible, because, being poor and whatnot, it was like pants or shirt or something like that, that I would need and whatnot then, but, then, when I saw some of the other kids and, "Boy, oh, boy," I thought, "oh, what a Christmas."

SI: Were there foods or anything that you would have from the old country?

JP: My parents would set the Easter table the old tradition way. There had to be butter on the table, salt. My mother had some holy water from the church. She had the priest come down, bless the house, from room to room, and it was traditional ham and kielbasa and a few other things, vegetables and cookies and whatnot. … She made her own pierogies. I'm sure some Americans'll know what they are, but she made the giant size, and I mean giant, compared to the American ones. I mean, if you had to sell them, they would probably be a dollar a piece at this point, [laughter] but they were good. It was either filled with meat or potatoes, I liked the

potatoes one, and *golumpki* [stuffed cabbage rolls], *paczki*, which was like a donut that you would fry, and they were good. You had a few of them with milk and whatnot and you were full.

SI: Was there any significance to having the butter and the salt on the table?

JP: Yes. It represented God, Jesus and the family and whatnot. I'm lost on the tradition of it, but that's basically what it was.

SI: In your house, did you continue to speak Polish or did your family speak English?

JP: I hate to say it, even though we were Polish, my father picked up, I don't know how he did it, picked up Ukrainian, of all things, because, if you know history, Poles are Slavs, S-L-A-V; if you put an "E" at the end, you have a "slave." That's how I think, in the old way in history, because, before the slaves, they were serfs, which is the same thing. You were asking?

SI: You were telling me that he picked up Ukrainian.

JP: Oh, yes, Ukrainian, and so, in turn, I picked it up. … Also, he had a few German words that he understood and, every time he would speak to somebody that's Polish, I would remind him, on the side, "Speak Polish. [laughter] You're Polish," but he spoke Ukrainian. So, at this point, I picked it up in the family. … I'm a cat person, so, I speak to my cat in Ukrainian, [laughter] but he understands me. So, you might say my cat was a Ukrainian cat.

SI: When you were growing up in Perrineville, was there a large Polish-American or Ukrainian-American population?

JP: No, there was only a couple that my father talked to. … The problem was, my father didn't understand the United States, what it meant to be here and what it took, because, at one time, he was a cook in Germany, but he never mentioned it to anybody to get that kind of job. All he wanted to stay is a farmer, because that's what they had in Poland. So, he wanted just to stay a farmer, but … I found farming as a hard life, in the late '50s and '60s, and so on.

SI: You mentioned he eventually got a job in a factory.

JP: Yes. He was working with some friends of his in a factory, wire or something, and then, later on, he found a job at Washington Forge, which was in Englishtown, and we found homes near there, where we were renting at that point. So, he could just walk there or somebody would give him a ride. So, it was easy for him to get there. So, what he was, it was like a grinder. It's a specialty. You would use the wheel and you clean the cutlery, the knives, the forks, spoons and whatnot, give them a shine, put them in boxes and they would sell them, or ship them out to different stores, but they went out of business, because they moved out, one time, to Puerto Rico, at the end of their stay in Englishtown. … I don't know, they just disappeared, I think went bankrupt.

SI: When did you enter Freehold Regional High School?

JP: That's my teen years, I think it was then--what, think?--somewhere there, but I don't remember the years, somewhere maybe '57, somewhere there, and I spend my four years in Freehold High when I graduated. … The thing is, … I was in a business course and I had a good teacher, Mr. (Frederocco?), and he let me know what stores were in the area and I got a part-time job, in my business course, working at, I think it was W. T. Grant and, later on, they became (Discke?). … There was Newberry's, next door, down the street, but I never worked there, but Newberry's had another store in the mall in Freehold called Britt's. It's not there anymore, and the one day, I walked into Britt's and some customer saw me. … They knew I was working in stores and they thought I was working in Britt's. So, the customer came down to me and it was the Christmas season and I used to carry a felt pen and whatnot. So, he's telling me he found a toy and a wheel was off in the box and he came down to me and he's pointing out, "Well, the wheel fell off and I can fix it, but can you give it to me at a cheaper price?" and I said, "Okay." I pulled out my felt pen and I gave him a discount [laughter] and I said, "Go to the register and tell them and you'll get a discount. It's Christmastime." So, that's what he did. I just felt, "Hey, Christmas." [laughter]

SI: What was your job in the store?

JP: I was, like, the stock person. I would clean up the areas in the store and take care [of things]. … I used to work with the assistant manager at that point.

SI: Did you ever get any other part-time jobs or do any other work while you were growing up in the area?

JP: I worked, … a couple weeks, I should say, in the wire factory, making some kind of wire that was rolled up, and that lasted for a few weeks, because it was bad for the hands and whatnot. I would be having cuts and whatnot and I said, "No way," and whatnot. So, at that point, I left and I took a couple courses in business and computers and such, because it was just the beginning of computers. … Then, later on, I decided to try my luck in New York City and I got a job in a major company called Allied Chemical--it's now [Allied]Signal Chemical--and in their computer department and I worked my way in their computers. … Later on, they decided to move to Morristown and I asked the manager, and I sat down with him in his office, and I asked him, "Look, you're moving to Morristown. Give me a chance. Let me go with the company and start at the beginning in the computer department." So, the manager thought about it and he said, "All right, you can go to Morristown," and, since I was living in Englishtown, I used to drive to Morristown and it took me, like, an hour to get there, but I liked the company. I liked the computer department they had and I tried to stay with them as long as possible, and even though I broke down one night, because it was the third shift, because, there, I would stay away from management and whatnot. … I thought it was easier to work in a department [at that time], even though I had the basic experience, I could have worked second shift and whatnot, because, sometimes, things overlapped and, sometimes, I would try to work on second and, sometimes, go on training, on first, but I just liked working with Allied Chemical at that point.

SI: Was this after you graduated from high school?

JP: Yes, of high school, and I was living in Englishtown with my parents, because, like I said, they didn't understand English. They didn't understand what the United States was about. So, my father was … looking at me to help out. So, that's what I was doing, but, later on, 1965 came around, and … then, my notice came in for the draft and I figured, "What the heck? I'll join up and see what the Army's going to offer me and whatnot." So, I joined up. My basic training was, of all things, in Fort Dix. So, here it is, I'm in basic training. I think it was supposed to be for eight weeks, learning the basics, because, now, you've got to get in line and follow orders. So, I figured, "Well, I'm getting off Saturday and Sunday." … I took the bus home and I figured, "What's the easiest way of coming to … Englishtown?" at that point. So, I figured I had, I think, a Ford Falcon at that time, so, I decided, "Hey, why not? I'll take my car down there." … The thing is, I found out, in basic training, you're not supposed to have a car, … but I figured my parents need the help and whatever little change I had as per my military pay, I was giving to my parents, and I figured, "The car is better." So, sure enough, I brought the car down and, since we couldn't have a car, I parked it in different areas, like the church parking lot. … I got away with it to a certain point, because we had to have KP [kitchen patrol] from time to time, and would you just know it, my turn came up and it was, I think, Saturday and Sunday. … The thing is, I wasn't there. So, it was, like, "Holy smoke, what did I do?" I came to the base and I'm checking in and, all of a sudden, the guy that took my place is now ripping me apart, because he came to me and he says, "You know, you're supposed to have been on KP Saturday and Sunday and I had to take your place." … He wasn't happy about it. … On top of that, I heard from everybody, right to the Sergeant, the Captain wants to see me, "Whoa," and that's the worst thing. So, in the morning, I had to report to the Captain and I remember that conversation. I came in, I saluted him and I said my name and I said, "You wanted to see me?" and he said, "Yes." … He said, "You were supposed to be on duty Saturday and Sunday for KP and you were not." So, at that point, I just told him the truth. I said, "I was home, because my parents don't understand. They don't know what's going on. I give them a certain amount of money," and I was upfront with him. I didn't try to give him anything other than that and he said to me, "You know, I can understand that. I was going to throw the book at you," but he changed his mind and he let me go, but, thinking about it, he could have cut my pay or, how should I say it? take it away for a certain amount of time.

SI: Cut you down in rank.

JP: Right, and maybe took a stripe away, and maybe even the stockade. I don't know at this point, but he could have, but he said he understood my situation and whatnot and he just let me go, because … he said he understood.

SI: That is pretty understanding.

JP: Yes.

SI: You were going back home. You were supporting your family financially. What else would you have to do as a result of them not fitting in?

JP: Oh, I used to take care of the bills, any bills that came in, anything that my father needed. Like, he had to go to unemployment and somebody had to speak for him, and then, I was there.

… It reminds me of, there was a Russian gentleman, Mr. (Zimko?), and he was Russian. It was hard for me to understand him, but I knew the basics, because of my father, and he went to the unemployment office and I spoke for him, since I understood the Ukrainian language and some words are similar, because Ukrainian and Polish are similar. There's a twist to the language, but I picked it up and I answered the question and he was happy, I was happy and the girl was happy about it, because the questions were answered at that point, but I helped an old gentleman out.

SI: Did you do these things when you were younger as well?

JP: Yes, that was somewhere in my late teens, at that point, I think. That was before my Army days. So, I helped out with the bills, with the mortgage. I made sure that everything was paid, like, my mother always said that she would not own a house. So, my father found this house that I'm living in now, at 73 Main Street in Englishtown. There was a woman that was living there and she wanted to sell the house, but she needed two thousand dollars down payment and I happened to have that much money. … This was just before going to the Army and what I did, to make it easier on my father, I gave him the two thousand dollars for the down payment, I filled out the mortgage on a monthly basis that we had to pay and … I made twelve envelopes up and gave them to my father. … I told him, "Mail it every month on the 1st of the month and make sure the mortgage gets paid," and that's when I left to Vietnam and he made sure he did it. … Then, later, when I came home, I looked at the checks and the bank circled the date, because he was sending them too early. [laughter] I had to laugh, … because, when I came home, I figured, "Maybe there's … going to be something in an account," because I was sending them two hundred dollars for them, and I said, to myself, "What the heck? They needed the money. So, if they used it, they used it, good for them." My feelings were, "I was helping them." That's the basics of it. So, [if] they needed something, they had it, so [that] they could have the change and whatnot.

SI: Did your parents ever learn to drive or were you the only driver?

JP: No, my father never learned to drive. My mother didn't, either. He was just afraid. I mean, he didn't have the knack for it. I mean, that's one of the things. I had a young woman that showed me how to drive a car. I mean, it was unbelievable. She was very nice about it and I think I saw her one time later on in life. She didn't recognize me. It was in Englishtown. I was walking in the borough … where the stores are and I ran into her and it was like she was losing … [her] mind. I mean, it was, like, dementia and whatnot and, now, to think of it, what my neurologist doctor told me, and I said, "Whoa," to myself, "that's dementia. Boy, I just don't want to face it." I mean, it's hard to lose the memory like that, but I saw it and that's life. It's hard reality.

SI: It must have been very difficult on your parents when you went into the service. Did they understand why and what was going to happen?

JP: Somewhat, yes. I tried to give them the basics of it and I had to go in and they understood it, at that point. … I arranged different things for them, to make it easier. So, they managed and my brother was around at that time and he was coming over to the house. … It's like they patched things up and it was okay.

SI: When you went into the service, you said it was a big change from civilian life to the discipline of military life. Were there any other examples of that, besides going home on the weekends?

JP: I didn't mind the Army life. I mean, I was getting into it and it wasn't bad for me, that since my run-in with the Captain, … the sergeants got to know me, the lieutenants. … As you can see, my hair is a bit long and I used to keep it, in the Army, a bit long--and you know the Army, they wanted short haircuts. So, when a sergeant would see me, or a lieutenant, they learned to say my name, of all things. [laughter] At the beginning, I was like "Mr. Alphabet," and then, once they understood how to say my name, they did it the best way to pronounce it, "Pop-el-ow-ski," as they say. The Sarge would yell at me, out loud, and I was walking by and he would yell, "Pop-el-ow-ski, the barber's looking for you," [laughter] and I managed to get away with it about two times. … I would turn around and yell, "Sarge, I've got an appointment," and I managed to get away with it a couple times and that was it. … Then, after that, when one of them would point it out to me, I had to go to the barber right away. [laughter] It was funny at that point, but that's … the humorous side of it all, in Army life.

SI: Were you at Fort Dix for eight weeks or longer?

JP: The training was for eight weeks at the beginning of '65. So, after that, there was a Sergeant (Morin?), and the thing of it is, he liked Slavic names and, since I am Slavic, which is Poland, Ukraine, yes, Russians, Czechs, Slovaks, all the way down south, he picked my name. … He was a nice guy, Sergeant (Morin?), and I asked him one time, "Why'd you pick me?" "Well, you have a Slavic name. I like names like you have." So, I was grateful for that and I was working, at that point, in the computer department in Fort Dix, running the computers and doing odd jobs with tapes and whatnot, because we had the 360, the card reader, with the old card decks that were punched out and whatnot [IBM System/360 (S/360)]. … I used to work on the third shift and whatnot, and that was okay with me. … I got used to it, and then, I would come down to the barracks and I would go to sleep. That was the best part of it, because, all of a sudden, when inspection came around and guys used to line up by their bunks for inspection, the Lieutenant and the Sarge would walk by and I would try to rest, try to fall asleep. … I'm thinking, "Wow," and I'm listening to what the Sergeant is saying and the Lieutenant or whoever else was there was asking, "What is this man sleeping?" and somebody would tell him, "Well, he worked on the third shift." So, I got away without having inspection, hey, which was great to me, [laughter] and I managed to get my sleep at that point, … but, when inspection came around, then, you had to be spit-and-polish at that point. … If you were good, you got off certain duties and I would try for that. … Then, it just got to me and I said, "Oh, the heck with it," because I would get tired and whatnot and I would just do the best I could at that point, but that's the Army life and I just got adjusted to it. I didn't mind it, but I had responsibility at home. That was my basic concern, that my parents had what they needed and I would make sure to see to that. Like I said, I gave them the two thousand dollars, I made the two hundred dollars out for them when I was in Vietnam, and they managed at that point.

SI: At that point, did you think you might go to Vietnam?

JP: No, I didn't know anything. My captain, that I had created the problem for him, called me in one day and he talked to me, on a one-to-one basis, and he said, "I can't send you to Germany." … Then, I understood why, because I was born there. I guess they were afraid, if I don't like Army life, then, I might skip and say I'm a German. [laughter] … I understood that and he said, "Orders came down and you're going to Vietnam." That's how he broke the news to me.

SI: Were you a United States citizen at this point?

JP: No, I became a US citizen after my Army days.

SI: Okay.

JP: I was living in Englishtown. I knew a couple of my friends. They were farmers. They're not around anymore. One is deceased. … I was great friends with him and his brother is living now in Windsor, New Jersey, as a farmer, because the land was taken over by the township. It was outside of English[town]. It was like (Gene?) was the main drawing point on the farm to me. That's the way I looked at it. I got along with him. He understood me and everybody liked to stop in at the farm and just talk about anything and that's what we'd do. … I would just stop over there. His parents were--their parents, I should say--were alive at that time. They would invite me over to dinner many a day, stay over there, and we would just talk. … His mother was Polish. So, she would talk to me and she had a knack of asking me, in Polish, "How are my boys doing?" [laughter] She wanted to know what they were doing, because she had a knack, if I would stop over and her sons were going out, this was in our late teens, she would say to me, "Joe's here. Take Joe along." [laughter] I had to laugh, later on, about that, because she would ask me, later on, "What did you do?" but this was all in Polish and her boys didn't understand Polish. That's one thing I didn't understand, that they didn't pick up anything, because … their father was Italian, their mother was Polish, but they didn't understand Polish. So, they would ask me, "What is our mother asking you? Can you tell us?" and I would just smooth it over, make it as good as possible, you know, so [that] they would have no recourse or bitterness about it and whatnot and their mother would be looking kindly on them. … I'd just smooth it over and I just thought to myself, "What's the point? I mean, we're going to have fun and whatnot, and that's what it was and everything was all right. We're home."

SI: You started telling me about how you became a citizen.

JP: Oh, yes, because I took them as my witnesses.

SI: Okay.

JP: To, I think it was Freehold, and I got sworn in in the courthouse as an American citizen.

SI: I was just curious. I know a lot of people who came to this country got their citizenship through the service.

JP: Yes, I never thought about it. I just never thought about it. I should've, but it wasn't just on my mind at that point. …

SI: It was not required for anything.

JP: I think, today, looking at it, my rank would have been limited as far as going through … advancement, because, like I said, I was an E-5 Sergeant, but I don't know if I could have gone ahead of that. Maybe, but … I heard from other people from the service, there was a limit that somebody that's not American can go in rank. That's the way it is.

SI: Your captain told you that you were going to Vietnam. How did you go from Fort Dix to Vietnam?

JP: Oh, there, my orders were given to me and a certain amount of men were assigned to go to Vietnam and we were taken by plane, I think it was Northwest … and we were taken to Fort Lewis in Washington and, from that point, … by plane to Japan, for a layover, and then, to Vietnam. … From Vietnam, I think it was Cam Ranh Bay, by a troop carrier to the camp base, and the thing is about the camp base, I didn't know, for the longest time, what was the base camp called? My memory was not there at that point. I just didn't understand it. The area was Pleiku. I think it was a small town. It's, I think, a regional capital now, but I didn't understand and I kept asking myself all the time, "What base camp was it?" I didn't know. I came off the plane and I was there, going for supplies. They give you an M-16 and your basics and I didn't even know what base camp it was, and I came home, I still didn't know. [Editor's Note: The M-16, a lightweight assault rifle, was invented in the late 1950s and issued to units in Vietnam beginning in 1965.] Then, a friend of mine gave me a CD of Vietnam and I looked at the CD and, whoa, I said to myself, "Wow, Camp Enari." That was the base camp name, Camp Enari, and I was there. … It was outside of Pleiku and that's where my military [tour] was at, the whole one year there. I went on a lot of patrols, … but I stayed in that base camp. … We were attacked every so often. Usually, it was at night, after midnight. I mean, sometimes, the siren went out and … there were bunkers around the perimeter and we were assigned bunkers and we would just go into bunkers. There was, like, four men to a bunker, with our M-16, and, like I was saying before, getting off the plane, we were given our supplies, assigned to a tent at that point, because, when I came to that base camp, it was just tents. … The Sergeant gives you what I call a riot act, the basics of the M-16, and he made, I'll say a speech, saying, like, "This is your M-16. You will give a name to your M-16 and you will go to eat with that M-16. You will sleep with that M-16. Why? because that M-16 will save your life one day." … He said other basic things, which I can't say at this point, [laughter] but that was his speech at that point and that's when we had the M-16, and GI parties at the tent, just about every night, of taking the M-16 apart, oiling it, putting it together and having it ready.

SI: Had you used an M-16 before that?

JP: No, never, but we learned in Vietnam. [laughter]

SI: You had been in computers and records maintenance.

JP: Yes. I thought, you can say, probably, I was part of the group support army at that point.

SI: You were then placed in the infantry when you got to Pleiku.

JP: … No, no, we were infantry, yes, Fourth Infantry Division.

SI: You were not doing any computer work there.

JP: No, and I was lucky, at that point, because my computer work was in--the computers were the 360, with the cards, the IBM--and it was in trailers. It was a couple trailers on the side and, boy, did they get dusty. The dust was like a rust color and I would create, on the computer, morning reports. It dealt with people coming in, leaving, who was around, who was reassigned and who left Vietnam--every which way--and I'm saying who died and all the other basics and that would be distributed to the different units in the Fourth Infantry Division. That was my basic [duty], besides going on the patrols and whatnot. Sometimes, I would even volunteer, which is--some guys in the service today ask me about it, [laughter] and are saying, "Joe, do you know what you do on a patrol?" I said, "Yes, I volunteered. I even volunteered to be the lead man." What do you call them?

SI: Point?

JP: Point man. He said, "Joe, you're crazy. Do you know what a point man is?" I said, "I had to do a job. So, I did it. The Sarge asked for a point man, I said, 'Yes, I'm here,'" [laughter] and they thought I was nuts, but that was part of life. I mean, … I liked to go on patrols. If possible, if there was a native or a scout and/or a dog, I felt safer at that point and/or I would try to talk to the old-timers that went on patrols, to see what it was like, … to see what they would tell me. … At the beginning, I would watch the guys come back from patrol and I would look at them and [I] said, "What the hell is going on? They look miserable," because they were going, at that point, to take their showers and whatnot, and I saw some of the guys, they were bitten up and some had swollen heads and whatnot, and that's what I was saying to myself, "Wow, what the hell was going on out there?" Well, I found out when I used to go out there. I didn't mind going in the daytime. … To me, it was okay, but the night was the problem. I like to use some other terminology, but I can't do it. [laughter]

SI: You can say whatever you want, it is okay.

JP: No. … I'm trying to be nice about it. [laughter] That's what got me into trouble, going on a night patrol, because, if you go on a night patrol, and it all depends how far you go, if you stay overnight, and what happened with me is, since I'm short, I'm like five-three--if I wear boots, five-four--we were crossing a stream and, since I'm short, I put my M-16 up, not to get it wet, … it's not going to work that good, and I just sank. It must have been a low [point] in the lake area and I got wet and we were staying overnight, and the thing is, I was carrying two [M18] Claymore mines in my backpack. I was setting [up] a perimeter. Once we got to a certain place, … at that point, there was a lieutenant with us, a radioman, a scout and a dog, and we stayed overnight. … I set the perimeter in one area, another guy would set on the other side. It was, like, close to a circle and I had a clicker and I would put it … by my helmet and, if somebody snapped the wire, I would click it and, "Boom," and the action would start. … Thank goodness, I didn't have to do it, but, anyway, if you know Vietnam and you know the bugs there, mosquitos

were giants. It was like horses, to me. [laughter] I mean, they were big. I mean, in New Jersey, they're the little, tiny ones. I hate them, can't stand them, but, in Vietnam, they were giants and I got bitten by mosquitoes, and the thing is, they give you lotions to put on yourself and I think, to this day, those lotions attracted the mosquitoes to the soldier, [laughter] and I got bitten. … On top of that, I was wet, and the thing is, … the temperature drops at night. So, I was wet and stayed like that until morning came around and the sun came out, but thing is, I got back to base and I liked my breakfast, you know, scrambled eggs, coffee, black coffee. I really liked Army coffee. … There's nothing like Army coffee, for some reason. [laughter] I don't know why, but I liked my black, hot cup of coffee, and thing is, I couldn't eat. So, I explained it to the Sarge, and thing is, he said, "Go and get yourself checked out." … I got myself checked out and, at first, they said, "You have a high fever, unknown origin." Second, "You have malaria." "Whoa, malaria." So, at that point, he told me, "Well, you have to go to the hospital," and the hospital was in Cam Ranh Bay, which was the Air Force hospital. It was down on the shore area and they sent me over there and I had to recover over there for a few weeks, I'm not sure, two or three weeks, something like that, maybe more. I'm not sure at this point. So, there, I met a couple guys that I got to know and one was from Brooklyn and his name, last name, escapes me, but he was Dan. … I was in the Fourth Infantry. He was on the First Cav and we got along because he was from Brooklyn, I was from New Jersey, and I said to him, "Hey, how about let's get together, since we're close by?" and I said, "When I get home, I'm;" at that point, … I had a few more months to go and I said to Dan, "I'll write you a letter and, when I get home, I'll give you the basics. Maybe we can meet later on," and he was trying to persuade me to join the First Cav and he said, "I'll show you the basics of it. It should be no problem," but I said to him, "Dan, I've got only a couple more months to go and I'll be out of here." … The guys used to rib me, because that's what they did, they were telling me, "You're a long-timer. You'll never get out of here. You're going to stay in this Army." They used to kid me about it all, but I said, "Look guys," even when I was going on patrol, I used to say, "you know, after all this kind of stuff, I'm going home. I'm going back to New Jersey." That's when the guys used to tear me apart, saying, "You're not leaving this area. You're not leaving Vietnam or the Army. You're going to be a lifer," [laughter] and I kept saying, "Look, I'm going home. I'm going back to New Jersey," that kind of stuff, but thing is, with Dan, he was a helicopter gunner in the First Cav. … Then, when I got home and I sent him the letter, at that time, it was somewhere like June, that letter came back to me and it was stamped, "Person Unknown." I mean, the whole letter had both sides stamped, "Person Unknown," and I'm thinking to myself, "Wow, did I make the wrong address on the envelope?" and I checked it out, "No." So, I said, "What the hell is going on?" I just didn't understand it and I guess one of the letters I sent him, I sent some information, where I lived and I guess my phone number, and, out of the blue, his sister called up and she broke the news to me. He was shot down over Vietnam. He got killed. I didn't know what to tell her. I just cried with her on the phone, you know. She was crying with me. I felt bad.

SI: Would you like to take a break?

[TAPE PAUSED]

JP: Go ahead.

SI: You were just talking a little bit about how often you would go on patrols and what the purpose of the patrols was.

JP: Patrol duty was every three weeks or so. So, they would set up a patrol and, if possible, I would go for it. If I was scheduled, I would go for it and, sometimes, I even volunteered to go out there, even as point man, but, basically, we went out there, out into the areas, to check what was going on. It was not to engage the enemy, but [to] see what was going on. So, in some ways, I guess I was lucky at that point, but, to give you an idea, at one time, we noticed rifle fire in the distance. So, we got close as possible and the radio person reported that and I guess it was handled by another patrol, to see what was going on, but our mission was, basically, to see what was out there and come back and make reports on it. … I guess I was lucky at that point, because, every three weeks or so, duty to go out there, I had so many of them, I just don't know what to count, how many patrols I went to. … We would check, like, the natives that were walking by and … they would walk in a line. The women would have the baskets on their head, then, the strap around their forehead to carry them and we would look in the baskets, to see what they were carrying, and, most of the time, it was some kind of gourds or vegetables and we would just let them go. … One time, we took a path and we walked into, like, four or five buildings, I mean, in a row, on this path and, whoa, all the colors you can think of, yellow, red, purple colors and whatnot. It was like, I think, to attract the Army troopers, … for them to stay, I mean, some attractive women and whatnot. [laughter] It was like an invitation. … Since it was duty, we just stayed for five or so minutes and we kept going at that point.

SI: Would you have to go into villages on these patrols?

JP: … To break the Army life, I had a project going on. It was clothes or toiletries for the natives, the Montagnards [people indigenous to the Central Highlands of Vietnam], who were helping the Americans, and my friend, who was Michael (McCafferty?), had his plan with Oregon, since he was from Oregon. I was from New Jersey, so, I had to write up--I don't know how I did it. I had to write up, with the newspapers, the local ones, I think three of them, *Star-Ledger*, *Asbury Park Press* and the *Transcript*, that's the local paper, and they had stories about me and my situation and my project and would people contribute to me in Vietnam. … Boy, did they--I had the Girl Scouts, the Explorer clubs, people from the New Jersey Monmouth-Middlesex-Ocean area send packages to Vietnam, and he had--I think he was from Portland--and Michael would have his packages come in and what it was, when they came in, the unit would assign us to take them over to the village, or villages. He would do it, I would do it and I would … ride shotgun in a jeep with the boxes, you know, a few boxes that we could take, and my driver said, "Make sure you look out for snipers, because I'm going to floor this jeep and go all the way." … He would not stop and, boy, was he right, and I had my M-16 with me and I was just holding on and we came to the village. … The natives would give us a couple things to eat; I just don't remember them. Basically, it was rice, some kind of meat, I'm not sure if it was snake or buffalo or something else, and we would distribute the clothing and whatnot for the young kids and whatnot. … To this day, I'm just thinking about it, because we had so much at the end of our term, when we were leaving, that we had to turn it over to one of the major shipping companies. I think it was Sealand, because, between us, we had so much clothes, we couldn't handle it, from Oregon and New Jersey, and that's when I went to New Jersey, back home, but, anyway, back in the duty, when I had my malaria, … soldiers used to pass on

different things and one guy that left passed me a monkey in a cage, [laughter] and the thing is, I was trying to take care of it. Boy, was she noisy, whoa, I couldn't stand it, my buddy couldn't stand it, [laughter] and the thing is, since I was out to the hospital, and then, I came back, the monkey was gone. My buddy said he couldn't stand the monkey, so, he gave it to one of the natives. [laughter] She was making too much noise. So, that was the end of the monkey, but it was funny having the monkey around, unbelievable.

SI: When you would go out to the Montagnard village, could you communicate with the villagers?

JP: No. We had … a guide that understood and spoke. … They had some broken English that they would try to use, because, being around Americans and whatnot, some [language transferred]. I can't even think of the words they would use. The only one, "You *dinky-dao*," [laughter] meaning, "You're number ten." "Number one" was the best. I think "number ten" was the worst, so, it was meaning the same thing, "You *dinky-dao*." [laughter] It's like, "You're nuts or crazy," I'm not sure at this point.

SI: When you were on the patrols with the scouts, were the scouts Montagnards or ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam]?

JP: ARVN, yes, yes. They were in the Vietnamese Army.

SI: On a typical patrol, how long would you be out and how many guys would go with you?

JP: Oh, it varied, I mean, a platoon, I'm not sure, sometimes eight or so men, or maybe a couple more if you add the scout and whatnot, or the dog handler, because the basic camp was Camp Enari, where I was. Way in the background, I noticed two mountains, and I mean big. I don't know if the Army built them or if they were natural, because the troops called them "Big Titty" Mountain and "Little Titty" Mountain, because they were high. … Below them were the canine units, because I belong to the Vietnam (K-9) Dog Handler Association, because I had a lot respect for the guys that came with us with their dogs. I mean, it was a shame, at the end, when the war was over with, some of the guys saved their dogs, but the Army figured there was just too many dogs and they had to let them go, I mean, euthanize them. … That's the tragic of it all, because you can't save everybody, and the thing is, … sometimes, you pay the price. Sometimes, I feel I've paid the price, because, look, I have Agent Orange--Agent Orange caused cancer, Agent Orange caused heart problems, where my heart stopped and I had to have heart surgery. [Editor's Note: Agent Orange, an equal mix of the chemicals 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D, was used extensively in Vietnam as a defoliant between 1962 and 1971. Under Operation RANCH HAND, US Air Force C-123s dispersed the majority of Agent Orange deployed in-country. It has been linked to a number of health problems among those exposed, including heart defects, cancers and blood disorders.] Whoa, that was wicked, because I went through, let's see, Freehold Hospital--it started in New Brunswick, that's one, Freehold was two, Jersey Shore, where the operation was, was three and Temple University to recover--four hospitals I went through. … They woke me up at Jersey Shore after the operation. I guess they worked on me overtime, because, when my heart was beating again, they shipped me by helicopter to Temple University and I was joking around with the nurses, later on, I said, "Boy, I wish I could have

been awake, so [that] I could enjoy the helicopter ride," [laughter] but no chance. … Right away, they shipped me out, as soon as they had my heart beating, and, boy, that was wicked trying to recover. At the beginning, it was wintertime, too, my heart was pounding, I mean pounding, in my chest. I couldn't stand it and I was thinking, "What the hell is going on with me? My heart is pounding. It's like one of those stories from--what's that author?--Edgar Allen Poe." I thought like the heart and whatnot, it's pounding. I couldn't sleep, the heart was pounding so loud, just couldn't stand it, and the thing is, I don't know if I should say this, I would listen to the wind and, to me, it was like Indian drums beating on the wind. … It was like [Mr. Popielowski makes a thumping noise]. It was like my heart beating and I would listen to the wind and the wind, with the drums beating, to me, it was like telling me, "You're going to live. You're going to live," and, every night, I used to listen to the wind, to see if I could hear the drums beating, and, sure enough, all those days I spent at night, in the wintertime, I just listened to the drums and I kept saying, "Boy, I'm going to live," … because the doctors didn't think I was going to make. I mean, one intern and a couple other people, nurses, were saying, "Boy, you know, they've got so much on you, health-wise, you could probably write a book about it," you know, they were telling me. I was just wondering, "Wow, didn't know that," [laughter] but thing is, they never told me if the doctor stopped my heart or the heart stopped. … Nobody told me that. I know a lot of people tell me, "Doctor stopped the heart," but, to me, it didn't happen that way and they told me, oh, quite a few minutes, something like fifteen, whatnot, and I was joking with the nurses, telling them they could have put a tag on my toe and shipped me out and all my troubles would be over with. I know where I'm going, and my friends are telling me, "Yes, six feet under." [laughter] It's like a joke and whatnot, but I take it in stride. It's just funny at this point.

SI: That was 1998.

JP: Yes, when … the heart stopped and I had the major surgery, but thinking about it, it all goes back to Agent Orange and cancer, Agent Orange.

SI: When did you start having Agent Orange-related problems?

JP: … When I came home in the Summer of '68, when I was discharged, that I came home, … right off, I started to get headaches. Headaches turned to major problems, like sweating a bit. My body would get nervous. My body was hot and, on top, the worst thing was, my head was burning up. I mean, my head felt like it was on fire. I didn't understand it. … To get some relief, I was taking a lot of over-the-counter medications, like aspirin and whatever else there was, what I could think of grabbing and using, didn't matter what it was at this point, allergy pills or whatever else, something to give me some relief. … If I spaced them up, it gave me some, but it didn't completely go. I had to let it go and it would just drag on for a couple days. Then, I would have some relief, but thing is, it would start up again and the doctors didn't know how to treat me, the couple that I went to, doctors. They didn't know how to treat me. They didn't understand what Agent Orange was. So, until now, a few years ago, I think--now, it might be three years ago--when I wasn't feeling good and I think they diagnosed I had cancer, what it was, my doctor told me to go and get myself checked out and I went to Robert Wood [Johnson Hospital] for three weeks. They kept me in the hospital for three weeks. At the beginning, they were calling me the "Mystery Man," because they couldn't find anything wrong. They were

stumped. Nothing was showing up. They threw every test on me and, at the end, I think the last two days, they gave me a bone marrow test, for biopsy of the bone marrow and a biopsy of the kidney, and the thing was, the kidney was twice, because, first time, they couldn't get a good reading. So, they had to do it a second time. Boy, and I'll tell you, it's brutal, because the needles are long and they stick it into your back area, to the bone, and they've got to break the bone through then with the needle and get samples of the fluid and maybe a little bone. So, it's like two needles there, and then, the needle for the biopsy of the; I've lost my train of thought.

SI: Your kidney?

JP: Yes, … to get a sample, and then, … that gave them a clue that I had cancer. So, as soon as the doctors found out I had cancer, right away, they assigned me to the Cancer Institute in New Brunswick. There, I have my present doctor, the cancer doctor and Dr. (Gereepo?). She's, like, in charge of everything. If something happens, like, now, because the doctors are telling me I don't have a good immune system, so, I try to stay away with people with a cold or anything that … is going on, especially wintertime, and I have brittle bones now, because of the chemo treatments. That's another problem. Sometimes, I get cold feet, and then, I wonder what the heck is going on, and then, I wait for something else to hit me that I don't expect. It comes, like, in stages, as the older I get, but that's chemo and the one doctor told me they're finding out that chemo causes a lot of different issues that they don't even realize. So, who knows? I even met a person that had a cancer, I was talking to when I ran into him in the Institute, [he said he had] a cancer [that] they don't have a name for yet, of all things. Here he is, a person has cancer and they don't have a name for it, unbelievable, but that's what happens with all these issues that come up, whoa, and the thing is, I keep wondering myself, you know, "What's keeping me going?" Maybe it's my attitude, because I take things in stride. I mean, don't get me wrong, like, doctors ask me, "Are you feeling depression?" "Depression? I mean, who doesn't get it if you're going through all these situations?" but thing is, I don't want to take drugs for it, because a couple doctors wanted to give me drugs for depression. I don't want that. I want to be myself, my good-natured self, instead of being depressed, have some medication, try to bring you up. I mean, that's not my idea of being good, good feelings and whatnot. I don't need that. I want to feel good by myself, my own self, … being good-natured, you know, the good attitude, happy-go-lucky, and so on, the way I see things. Sometimes, I like to smile a lot. Sometimes, I like to joke around and whatnot. As serious as things can be and I know they're serious, but, still, I've got to keep myself going and see what happens. I believe that we're supposed to live to every second we get. So, that's my object in life. As much time as I have, and I'll tell you, the quality of life for me is not there. I mean, there are moments, but that's moments. I mean, most of the time, it's [that] I feel like I'm going to be miserable. Something comes up and I don't feel good. … From the chemo, I get tired, worn out. I'm short on breath. I can't do much at home. If I do something, I've got to take a breath. If I get tired, I've got to lay down and relax and calm down, that kind of stuff, and, boy, that's no life and whatnot. … Sometimes, I ask God, "When is this going to go get over? When is it going to end?" and that I mean both ways, my situation, as what pains I'm going through and whatnot, and when is life going over with? I'm trying to say that because [of] how serious it is. It's no picnic. It's no fun. It's just, basically, just being miserable, you know, but I can't do that. You know, then, … a lot times, I would say to myself, "Joe, snap out of it, you know, snap out of it. You can't do that." So, it passes. So, I snap out, try to be myself, do something enjoyable and what I like and whatnot. So, at this point, I have a

computer. I have a few people on my computer that I keep in touch with, like a woman in Florida, which is part of the Tea Party [a conservative, grassroots movement] and she sends me articles of what's going on and whatnot. In turn, I would send them to her, and another woman, I think from Michigan, who's in her nineties, and she sends me articles of what's going on and [President Barack] Obama and whatnot. … You know, Obama is the news that's going to be for the next few years, so, all his stories and whatnot. … Then, I think about myself and Obama and whatnot, oh, man, … and I read these stories and what a background he has and I think to myself, "Holy mackerel, how in the heck did people vote for him?" You know, they just voted for him because he's a black person, be honest with it, but he's not. He's half and half. His mother was white and he either had a smart mother and/or people around him that gave him the Socialist education, because Poland is Socialist and whatnot. … I still have a relative in Poland and, I mean, they paint a rosy picture, but it isn't, and I have relatives that I didn't even know about in the Ukraine. … What the Germans didn't do to Poland, the Russians did it, because they split the country in half and where my parents were, on the Eastern side of Poland, they took the land away and made it part of the Ukraine. So, the little town they were, now, it's a major city. It's called (Schmizzle?). They took away part of that. So, now, (Schmizzle?) is part of the Ukraine and part of Poland. So, at this point, I don't know if it's split or what, but each country has a town like that, or a city. So, to me, I think they split it up, but that's where my parents came from and they had some acreage or ground and had a little farm and grew their vegetables, had a few cows and milked the cows, and so on. That was their living, that the Germans did away with all that.

SI: Let me go back to when you were in Vietnam. You were going out on these patrols. You were not supposed to engage the enemy, but were there any times where you took enemy fire or had to fire your weapon?

JP: No. I was lucky. We heard rifle fire in the distance, but we never engaged, but we were attacked at the base camp every so often, at night, in the midnight hours. To give you an example of my experience of war, what it meant, I was in the bunker at one time and we were attacked at night. … One of the guys were asking me, "Well, what are we going to do now?" I said, "Open up and shoot low and do as much [as you can]," because the Sergeant came in before and told us--there was a heliport on the right-hand side--and he said, "There are no Americans on the right side, by the heliport. So, make sure, on the right side, nothing goes through," shadows or anything. So, at the beginning, I peeked out on the bunker and all hell broke loose and I saw what the Army was throwing out and, to me, I was thinking Fourth of July, because, if you know the Army, … they have tracer bullets that go out and they looked like they were in color and I'm thinking, "Wow," with all the stuff going out. … To me, it was like Fourth of July. Here I am, in the war, I'm using my M-16 at that point and my M-16 jammed on a bullet and I touched it and I burned myself on the two fingers. So, I had to put the M-16 down and I used another M-16, somebody else's, while one guy would put the bullets into the clip for the M-16, and that was my … first experience of war, in other words, the reality of it, because everything else at the beginning was just at the normal Army life, but, all of a sudden, it was like all hell broke loose. … In the morning, we waited for the relief of the next four troops, guys, to come down. … I'm looking out at the opening and I'm seeing some Americans carrying out bodies and I was just looking and I was, like, counting. … I'm saying to myself, "One-two-three--I better stop," and that's the reality of it. So, whoever tried to get to the heliport didn't. So, whoever was assigned

to the duty, they carried the bodies out. Another time that was reality to me was, I came off a patrol, I went to get my shower, came back and in one tent was, like, it was showing movies and I remember the movie, to this day. It was *Gung-Ho,* with Randolph Scott. I like Randolph Scott. He was the American cowboy. Even to this day, I like to watch one of his movies on the computer, and I went to the tent and I sat down to watch the movie and this was like in the evening, I think somewhere like eight-thirty. … All of a sudden, the siren comes on and it's blasting away and I'm saying to myself, "I'm dead tired. I'm off of patrol. I'm here watching a movie. I wanted to watch the movie," … but thing is, when the siren went off, there's two exits. Everybody jumps for the exit and I'm watching the guys run out of the exit and, here, I'm trying to watch the movie, of all things. [laughter] … There was a water cooler on the left side and the water cooler was made out of glass. Somebody hit the water cooler and it flies and comes crashing to the ground into a million pieces. Guys are still getting out on the exits. I'm sitting down, … trying to watch the movie. Then, the projector goes and I guess the projector was knocked over and, by that time, everybody was just about out and I said, "Aw, nuts, I can't see the movie. … It's time to go." [laughter] So, I ran out of the tent and right into a ditch and I stayed in the ditch until the all-clear, which, oh, I'm not sure if it was minutes, but it seemed to be longer, maybe ten, fifteen or so, and it was over with and just went back, … get back to my tent and whatnot, and do what I had to do. That was the reality of war with me, but I did use my M-16, I mean, every time I was in the bunker and they attacked, and I used that M-16 until it got hot and whatnot. … If you know weapons, I think there's a difference between a Russian AK-47 and an M-16. An M-16 is more reliable, but the Russian one, for some reason, it can get dirty and you still can use it. An M-16 can't do that. You have to clean it every time. You've got to; otherwise, you might get problems with it. That's why we had GI parties just about every night. … The thing is, with the tents that I was in, at that time, in a short while, barracks were set up. The Army didn't waste time and, from the tent, I was assigned to a barracks and I had a cot in there with every other guy, and the thing is, I've got to say, I was in a unit of guys, to me, it was like we were all foreigners. You know, I was born in, like I said, West Germany, at that time, but there was a Mexican, Argentinean, Irish. I mean, we were split, like, because some of the guys were going to college and they didn't finish and the Army grabbed them. There was one (ER?) and, boy, I admired him, Roger (Schlot?), because he was, like, a spick-and-span person. Like, his uniform had to be creased, boots shined, because we used to shine our boots at night, with taking the M-16 apart and oiling it, and trying to keep our uniforms, at least have one uniform that would have the crease in our … fatigues, so [that] when inspection came around, we would be there, and we would take time [to do that]. … Roger and--I can't think of the Mexican's name now--they were practicing their drills, you know, with the M-16 and, you know, shoulder and whatnot, and I was trying to rest at that time on the bed. So, what I did was, maybe I shouldn't tell you, [laughter] I took a bowl that I used to shave in, like we had, and I went to a barrel, because we had rain barrels at that point by the barracks, and I picked up some water in the bowl and I threw it over them. … Then, I threw the bowl and I ran for my life out the exit of the barracks, [laughter] but it was just … trying to break the monotony of the everyday life of what was going on. … They understood it. It was in jest, fun, and I gave them some time to cool down, and then, I came back, and I went back and took my M-16 apart and whatnot, to oil it, but that's fairly, generally, what we did. On top of that, certain guys used to listen to different types of music. I used to listen to the rock, like The Grateful Dead [an American rock band founded in 1965]. Like, there was a certain amount of guys that used to like The Grateful Dead, so, it was, like, The Grateful Dead group. So, even to this day, The Grateful Dead played in

Englishtown, in the Raceway Park, one day. … I don't know when that was. That was a long time ago. So, I got their whole albums and CDs, but that's what it was. … I don't know how the heck it happened--I think I was going home--one of the guys gave me some eight-track tapes to hold for him and I didn't know what to do with them. … I was going home and I wound up with them and I didn't know what happened to him, … because I have an eight-track tape deck that I bought, from Japan, but I haven't used it, of all things, and some other stuff that I had in the cellar, like the turntable and whatnot, but we had a flood in Englishtown, so, I had to clear the cellar out. … When I got pneumonia, it was, I think, last year, a major storm came around, flooded Englishtown, and I went down the cellar and I fell into the water. … Thing is, my friends in New Brunswick, the (Hubbards?), Stan's wife said she had a feeling about me. So, she came over the next morning to find out why I wasn't answering the phone. … What happened was, I fell into the water. Somehow, I don't know how, I came up. I tried to change my clothes in the dark, in the front room. I have a small house. … The front room is like a living room, very small, and I couldn't do it and I had some boxes on there and I couldn't put my blue jeans on and I fell on my rear-end. I couldn't get up. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know where I was. There was a door and I hit my head into the door and, somehow, I didn't know nothing. … Her name is Dorothy. She came on the next morning and she's calling me on the phone and she says, "Joe, open the door. I'm here," and the thing is, I had a hard time. So, finally, I got up, because it was daytime. I couldn't do it. I was just sitting there on my rear-end, couldn't get up, and I forced myself to get to the door. I opened the door and her husband came in. I shouldn't say it that way. They had a key that I gave them, just in case, in the future sometime, and her husband used the key and he came in. He saw me and I [was] sitting down there and I think he helped me, picked me up and he tried to get me dressed. Then, he took me out in the porch and I have steps going down. I think it's about three steps or so and I collapsed backwards on the porch. So, Dorothy, right away, called the ambulance and the ambulance came with the cops. The cops didn't understand me. They didn't know the situation, what I was going through. … So, the ambulance took me to CentraState Hospital in Freehold. There, the hospital tells me, … since I fell in the water, the water was polluted, I had pneumonia and Legionnaire's Disease. [Editor's Note: Legionnaire's Disease is a type of pneumonia caused by breathing in bacteria from water mist. The name originated from an outbreak at a 1976 American Legion convention at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia in which 182 guests contracted the disease and twenty-nine died.] … I remembered Legionnaire's Disease. Way back, they had a write-up on it in a newspaper, that some Legionnaires died from it in Philadelphia. So, I'm saying, "Whoa." I'm lucky at this point, because the doctor said one more day and I wouldn't be here. So, I'm thinking, "Wow, I'm still going strong," you know, because, then, I'm thinking, "How many times was it now?" With the heart stopping, with Vietnam, but, now, with pneumonia, I counted like four times, I shouldn't be here, but, yet, I'm here talking to you. [laughter] I mean, how can you beat that? I don't know. … Right to this day, I'm thinking, "Living, I'm beating the odds, right now," but, to myself, I'm thinking, "How long can this go [on]?" with the Agent Orange, the cancer, the chemo treatments and the heart stopping and whatnot, and I'll tell you this story. I don't know if you want [it]. …

SI: Was this during Hurricane Sandy when you had the flooding?

JP: No, no, I think [it was] Ilene, Irene or something. [Editor's Note: From August 21 to August 30, 2011, Hurricane Irene claimed the lives of fifty-six people internationally and caused over fifteen billion dollars in damage in the United States.]

SI: Irene, two or three years ago.

JP: Yes, something like that. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing it, Irene or Ilene or whatever they called it, but that's when it happened. I'm lucky that Dorothy decided to call. I don't know, she had some kind of feeling that she was telling me, that something was going on. So, in reality, she saved my life and, like, I kid around with the nurses, I keep saying, "Well, they could have put a tag on my toe and that would be the end. I wouldn't have to worry about any bills, the house or anything else or going to the doctors, nothing," because I'll tell you, when my heart stopped, because I was telling Dorothy and Stan that, the (Hubbards?), they live in New Brunswick, Rutgers Village, I told them some of the stories that I experienced when the heart stopped, because I was somewhere else. I don't know where I was. I was in a calm, peaceful, good place and I was laying down, no problems, nothing, everything was good, and then, I guess that's when I woke up and I was in that fourth hospital in Philly. I wouldn't recommend that hospital. I shouldn't say that. They're supposed to be good for hearts. That's why they rushed me over there, but I found Robert Wood the better [of the] hospitals of the surrounding area that I was in. … They seemed to have the doctors and the nurses that seemed to work with the patients. The other hospitals, it was, like, iffy. They tried to, but, somewhere, like the Philly one, … you know, when your heart stops, you lose your senses, your taste and your mind goes. You don't see things the right way and I wasn't [in good shape]. I didn't have the taste buds. I can only remember how some things tasted in food and they don't anymore. I wish it was, but those days are gone. Well, anyway, my eyesight wasn't the best, because I was looking at something and I would see black all around everywhere, like on the edges. If I was looking at you, … around you, everything was black.

SI: Like tunnel vision.

JP: I don't know what it was, and, even TV, I would see the TV, but everything else in the background was black. So, I had to go to one of the doctors in the Philly hospital and he's telling me, "Open your eyes. Wider, wider." … He was raising his voice and whatnot and, here, I'm not in condition to do anything but do what he's telling me and I'm trying to. … He's raising his voice and whatnot and I'm [saying], "Gee whiz, take me back to the room," I was thinking to myself, and, once he was done, that was it and I went back and that's what I mean in treatments of doctors and nurses. Like, one, there was like a butterfly machine that takes pictures of you. I'm not sure if it's your head and whatnot and the nurses would lock the butterfly up and I feel like I'm fading, I'm fainting. My mind is not there. I feel like I'm going to collapse and, in the background, … listening, I hear some nurses saying, "You're keeping him in there too long. You're keeping him in there too long," and, all of a sudden, they open up the butterfly and I seemed to be collapsed. I mean, that's my experience. That's what I mean in treatment. Now, I was [in] no condition to say no to anything. I mean, the hospital gives you patient rights and whatnot, but, to me, going through all these hospitals, sometimes, I feel like they don't mean anything, because, sometimes, I don't want to take certain medications. If I know what they're going to do, if I know that's going to be harmful, "I don't want it; give it to me two days from

now," but nurses insist, "You've got to have it. You've got to have it." So, there go your patient rights. So, what can I say? I had two … spells, shaking, what do you call them?

SI: Seizures.

JP: Seizures, thank you, seizures, … but the nurses told me that was induced by medication. So, I don't know. If the nurses say [it], I'll go with that, that the medications created those seizures, but that's my experience with the seizures, because the original neurologist told me that I had to take the one basic medication, which is Lamictal, that's what it's called. … What it is, it's to prevent seizures. He says, "You've got to take this," and what happened was, he was assigned to me. He was one of my better doctors. I could have told him anything and I did, and I experienced a lot of different situations. … I explained it to him and I'm afraid to say it to any other doctor at this point, because they will not understand it, you know, because they might say, "You're nuts. You're crazy." I still can manage myself. I still can think, but I don't want a doctor to start saying I'm not capable. So, … at this point, I'm careful at this point. … If I have a good doctor that understands, then, that is what I'm looking for, but thing is, I had this doctor for a few years and I found out, the hospital, Robert Wood, sent me a letter saying, "Your doctor died from a major heart attack and don't get upset. We will be assigning you another neurologist." Boy, that sunk me, whoa. I mean, that was a blow to me, I mean, having him, and I'm thinking to myself, "Why? … Look what I'm going through, with the heat stopping, the heart surgery, all the three pneumonias, the Legionnaire's disease and all the other stuff, and Vietnam, the malaria, the malaria twice, some kind of high fever--and I'm still here. So, what's keeping me going? Is it my attitude or something?" [laughter] I don't understand it. I just don't and a lot of people, when I discuss it, say, "Well, it's not your time." Well, so be it; it's not my time.

SI: Did you have a similar attitude when you were in Vietnam? Did you feel that you were going to get through your tour?

JP: Yes, yes. I kidded with the guys. Like I said, I would be going back to New Jersey and, sometimes, when I'd go on patrol, I would say that, oh, what is that? "As I walk through the Valley of Death, I will fear no evil." You know what I mean.

SI: Psalms.

JP: Yes, yes.

SI: Psalms 29 or something. [Editor's Note: In the King James Bible, Psalms 23:4 reads, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."]

JP: I would say that to myself, that I'm going to go back home, no matter what. So, that kept me going.

SI: You were in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive. [Editor's Note: The Tet Offensive, a series of offensives conducted from January 30, 1968, to September 30, 1968, by the Viet Cong against

every major city in South Vietnam, is seen as the point when American public opinion began turning against the war.]

JP: Yes, yes.

SI: What was that like, in your experience?

JP: Well, my understanding, what it was, we were, the Fourth Division was, in the Central Highlands, near Pleiku. My understanding was, the First Cav was above us and by the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] were the Marines. Boy, they were tough, I mean, and, when all hell broke loose and what was reported was, in the papers, when I read them; … what I heard from the guys, we stood off everything. The North Vietnamese came down from the North, the [North Vietnamese] Army, the Viet Cong was there, every place, all hell broke loose and we held our own, everywhere, and what happened, which helped us to lose the war, was when Walter Cronkite showed up. … He showed pictures of Americans fighting back and the public here didn't understand that. They looked at it, we were losing. What lost the war was, Ted Kennedy passed a bill through Congress to cut off aid to South Vietnam. [Editor's Note: CBS News anchor and reporter Walter Cronkite reported on location during the Vietnam War. While reporting on the aftermath of the Tet Offensive, he voiced his strong opinion that the war would end in a stalemate. Senator Ted Kennedy supported the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-559), which cut spending on aid to South Vietnam.] Once the aid was cut off, then, South Vietnam was breaking apart and it's not the American soldier that lost the war, it's the politicians and Congress, because they didn't have the stomach and they were looking at the people protesting in the United States, like Jane Fonda, because she, to Vietnam Veterans, is the traitor, because even though she apologized, that apology is not an apology. [Editor's Note: Actress and antiwar activist Jane Fonda visited North Vietnam in July 1972. There, she was photographed at the sights of a North Vietnamese antiaircraft weapon and she made a number of broadcasts denouncing the American war effort.] It's an apology because she got caught being that, because … what she did was go up North and she had pictures taken of herself with the North Vietnamese soldiers. How the heck can an American do that? She makes a living here. I look at it, she's an actress, makes money up the kazoo and whatnot, has a good lifestyle that this country gives a person like that and, yet, she goes and becomes a traitor. Why? and then, she wonders why, at a book signing, some Vietnam veterans spit at her, but that's why. I mean, you have people like that that just turn on this country. I can't understand why people turn on this country. I never could understand that, because, like I myself, I was born in Germany, West Germany at that time. Even though I served in Vietnam … and getting Agent Orange and whatnot, this is the greatest country there is. There is no country like this and, yet, there are people that want to turn this country down. Why? Why tear it down? You have the best living.

SI: Were you aware of the protest movement in the United States while you were serving in Vietnam?

JP: Somewhat. … Sometimes, I would get the papers from here, like the *Star-Ledger*, *Asbury Park Press*, friends would send it, and I would read the Army paper.

SI: *Stars and Stripes*? [Editor's Note: *Stars and Stripes* is an independent news source whose goal is to provide news access to all active service members.]

JP: Yes. I wonder if I still have a couple issues. I don't know. I might, but that's how I kept an eye. … On top of that, today, I read the history of Vietnam and, to me, anybody that reads history or knows history or is a history buff, knows Vietnam should not have happened, if we had the right politicians. If you look at Ho Chi Minh, I think he's what they call the grandfather of Vietnam today, maybe the father status. He used to be here in the United States, getting his education, and my understanding is, he wanted a constitution like we have here in the United States. The politicians turned him down. Why? I mean, if a person comes to you with some stature and has some leadership, this country should help him, but, instead, the reasoning wasn't there and they turned him down and he turned Communist and Vietnam happened slowly. [Editor's Note: Ho Chi Minh was born in French Indochina in 1890 and became dedicated to establishing a free Vietnam in his youth. In the 1910s, he lived in Western Europe and the United States. In 1919, while living in France, he attempted to appeal to American President Woodrow Wilson during the peace conference at Versailles following World War I, but was spurned. He soon joined the Communist Party as a means of achieving his goal. He returned to Vietnam during World War II and founded the Viet Minh to fight both the Japanese and French. He was President of North Vietnam from 1954 to 1969.] When Kennedy was arrived [elected] President, he sent the Green Berets [United States Army Special Forces] there as advisors and, from that point on, it just escalated and the Americans never learned anything from the French. When the French got beaten, I'm not sure the name, how do you pronounce it?

SI: Dien Bien Phu. [Editor's Note: In 1954, Vietnamese forces defeated French military forces at Dien Bien Phu, signifying the end of French colonial rule of Indochina. The Geneva Accords sought a temporary partition of Vietnam along the 17th Parallel and elections to unify the country under a single government, but the post-colonial era witnessed two nations forming, Communist North Vietnam and anti-communist, US-backed South Vietnam.]

JP: Yes, that's the city. When they got beat over there, they should have learned that you can't beat natives in their own country, especially you have the enemy up North and the country is split. …

SI: When you were in Vietnam, what did you think about the war itself? Did you think it was a winnable war? Did you question what was going on?

JP: No, we never questioned it. I had very little understanding of the war, what was going on. I knew there was a lot of protests going on and I was reading about those protests and that's as far as my understanding goes and we never talked about different situations, what was going on in the barracks or in the tents. It didn't come up. It was just … we had to do a job and we were there to do it.

SI: You said, during the Tet Offensive, the North Vietnamese Army came down into the Marine area and into the Central Highlands, where you and the First Cav were. Do you remember what those days were like?

JP: No, no.

SI: Did they attack the base?

JP: Well, no, somewhat, like I said, after midnight, but we didn't realize that. We heard rumors, talk going on, but nothing, or, like I was saying about the bodies being collected, they were in black pajamas. That was the Viet Cong, but nothing else. So, even though they were coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail that they called it, we didn't notice any North Vietnamese or anything like that. [Editor's Note: The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a route used by the North Vietnamese to get supplies and men into South Vietnam that ran through Cambodia and Laos.] It was like the war was going on, but there was a certain amount [of] basic Army life going on within the war. So, I really didn't see it as far as the Marines saw it, the First Cav saw it. Like I said, a friend of mine died being a helicopter gunner, but, otherwise, other people didn't see it. It was just like we were there just in case if we were hit, like a midnight barrage that we were getting, but that's about it.

SI: How long after the Tet Offensive did you leave Vietnam? Do you remember what month you left Vietnam?

JP: The Tet Offensive was in February and I think I left in May. When the Tet Offensive broke out, I was there at Christmastime, just before the Tet Offensive, and I met some Australians there. I had duty, and because everybody was off, so, I had what they called CQ [charge of quarters] duty. I can't remember what the official title is. Well, anyway, I was sitting back and I think it was the barracks at that time and, all of a sudden, I think it was two or three Australians walked in on me. … You know, they say, "What are you doing, mate?" and I'm saying, "I've got duty," and, oh, he said, "Okay, wait, we'll be back." So, they left and brought a case of beer for me, of all things, [laughter] and put it on the table for me and they said, "Merry Christmas," and they left and I had a whole case of beer. … The thing is, I think beer, at that time, was ten cents a can and a pack of cigarettes was ten cents … a pack, but I didn't smoke, but I carried a pack of cigarettes in my T-shirt, in case somebody says, "Joe, you got a cigarette?" and I would unwrap my T-shirt, "I have one," but just didn't like it, which is okay. Can you imagine putting that smoke in your lungs and whatnot? which I'm thinking today, "Eh, what the heck?" I gave up drinking and smoking, because I can't do it now. I mean, I tried it one time and it sort of put me in a nice mood and whatnot, but I can't drink much, can't afford it. … Oh, on top of that, when the Australians left, one Australian started to draw a kangaroo on the doors of the barracks and the Sergeant came in and he's asking me questions. … He's saying, "Who drew those kangaroos on the doors?" [laughter] I said, "What kangaroos? Sarge, I don't know anything about it," and he left. I guess he got some guys to try to wash it off and whatnot, but the one guy knew how to draw a large kangaroo on the door and, boy, that was fun. To me, that was funny, for Christmastime and whatnot, here, being on duty, getting a case of beer and having kangaroos drawn on the doors. [laughter] Oh, that was Christmastime to me, wow.

SI: Did you get to go on R&R [rest-and-recuperation] during your tour of duty?

JP: Yes, I went to Hong Kong. I spent two weeks over there, getting a tour of the islands, and it was nice. It's built up, probably, now.

SI: Before we leave your Vietnam experience, do you remember anything else about your patrols or the base that we did not cover?

JP: Yes, I was once in the barracks and it was nice weather. It was calm and whatnot and I'm looking out the door and the weather changed. It was, to me, like, it was in a snap. Here, I'm looking and I'm seeing--the floor was hard. When it rained, it was slick, like shiny, because it was, like, a rusty color, pounded down because a lot of guys walk on it. Well, anyway, I'm looking at the ground and I see this whirlwind swirling around, all over the place, and I'm looking and, all of a sudden, the weather changes, into the rainy season, where it's getting chilly and whatnot. "Whoa," I said to myself, "Well, I've seen nature change." That was an experience, never seen that happen again.

SI: While you were in Vietnam, were you able to communicate with your parents, through the mail or by other means?

JP: … What happened was, I wrote letters to them and, since they didn't understand English, they would took it--bad English now, teachers would be mad at me [laughter]--they took the letter to a Polish family down the road, which they were stopping in [to visit], and their young daughter would read it, the letter, to them and, in other words, translate. … Her name was Donna, Donna (Nezza?), and she would translate the letter to my parents of what was going, because I couldn't say much, because they wouldn't understand, because I felt like I was tied up inside, and I would just explain the basics. So, Donna would read it to them and tell them in Polish of what was going on. That's how I communicated with them.

SI: Could they write back?

JP: No, no, they couldn't write. They didn't understand English.

SI: They did not have the family write back.

JP: No, no, somebody else would have to write a message and I would get it that way, and then, in turn, they would send, like, a care package of, you know, candy, cookies, there was one time, salami and whatnot, and I would give it to the guys. [laughter] It was still good and useable at that point. That was the care package. "Yes, what do you got, Joe?" [laughter]

SI: What did you think of your officers and NCOs [non-commissioned officers] in the unit?

JP: I don't know. … They were efficient. They were doing what they had to do and, basically, you had to follow orders and everything was all right. … On top of that, if you got the rank, then, the duty became easier and I looked forward to it and, when I made E-5, here's a story for it, a friend of mine, there used to be country-and-Western bands come around and there used to be, now and then, a woman singer. … I'm not sure if they were from Australia, Korean, South Korea, and I'm not sure where else they came from, and the young woman used to pick … a GI and she would point to the GI once she finished singing, you know, pointing the finger at you, and the GI would get up …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Go ahead.

JP: So, she used to point to the GI and the GI would step up and she kissed the GI. So, my friend, his name was (Hugh Gallagher?), he was Irish, from Cicero, Illinois. That, I remember about him. We got along good, but thing is, he was a lot taller than me and I used to have, like, two shirts, sergeant shirts, with the stripes. … I said, "Hugh," because he found out that the girl kissed a GI, so, he also found out that they were in another tent area in another unit. So, he said, "Let's go to that unit. I want to sit in the front row. Make sure we sit in the front row," and I said, "Okay, Hugh, you know, this is what we'll do," but thing is, that was [that] the sergeants were allowed to go there, not the regular guys. So, I said, "I have another shirt. This is what we'll do. You put my shirt on and we'll go in there. So, if anybody says [something], you're my guest and whatnot. I'm from here and you're over there, whatever, but, if you want to, then, we can sit in the front row. You can watch the girl." So, that's what we did. He put one of my shirts on. I had one shirt had my name on it, the other one didn't. So, we went down there. So, of course, we got our stripes, they let us in. So, we sat in the front row. He's there, right in the front. The girl is singing some country music and whatnot, and then, once she's finished, and I'm sitting in the front row, so, he knows she's going to pick somebody. So, he figures he's in the front row, he's going to get picked. So, I'm sitting next to him. So, she's done, she points to me, of all things. So, I get up and I kiss her. [laughter] He never got over it. I mean, he razzed me, pulled my leg, told me off, "How could you do that? I was supposed to do it," [laughter] but it was the funniest thing that happened. Oh, gee whiz, here it is, I'm trying to do him a favor and it just backfires on him. Oh, that was funny.

SI: Were there any other forms of entertainment? You mentioned movies and concerts like this.

JP: Oh, there was some if anybody had a baseball or football or something like that. They would throw it up. Basically, that was just it, at that point. … There was one time even, what happened was, somebody barricaded one of the barracks--in other words, put sandbags in front of the door, the back door and the front door--and, all of a sudden, all hell broke loose. By that I mean, the sergeants, the captains, I'm not sure, there was a general that came out, he called everybody out and he had everybody in formation. … He's telling us all this and everybody doesn't know what's going on. I mean, okay, they did it, but thing is, he took our privileges away. We couldn't have any entertainment. We couldn't play with anything, no movies, nothing, no clubs, no nothing, and what it was, later on, they found out it was the brass that did it, the lieutenants. Some lieutenants went in and took some sandbags and thought they would pull a joke up on some of the other guys and seal the doors up with sandbags, as high as you can, so [that] you can't open the door, but they took everybody's privileges away. … I don't understand it. Here, the lieutenants did it. Instead of blaming the people that did it, the General blamed everybody. So, there goes that. There's another thing. That's Army life.

SI: Were there any issues with drug abuse in the military while you were there? Did that come later?

JP: I guess that came later. I didn't notice anything, nothing at all. I mean, it was like we were solid. I mean, nobody was using anything, … nothing that I noticed, because it was, like, in the barracks, it was Army life within the war, but there was other stories. If you went out into the field, because there was bunkers out in the field, maybe by a village, maybe one or two or three, that somebody had to go on duty and, there, there might have [been some usage]. I'll say it that way, but, officially, I didn't see anything go on with drugs. So, that was that, nothing, not in my experience, and not even, like John Kerry was saying, that speech he gave in Congress. was ridiculous, against the Vietnam veterans, about looting, shooting, putting villages on fire, and so on--nothing, didn't see nothing like that, no abuse of natives or nothing, nothing--but, yet, you have, maybe somewhere, you had that massacre that happened, but that was one of so many. [Editor's Note: On March 16, 1968, hundreds of unarmed civilians were murdered by US Army soldiers in the Americal Division, an event that, when made public over one year later, turned public opinion against the war. Vietnam veteran John Kerry, later a US Senator and Secretary of State, testified before Congress on April 22, 1971, on the Vietnam War.] Maybe, maybe, it might have happened, but I didn't see it. As many times as I went out, out in the field, watching what's going on, nothing, no abuse, no nothing. So, I don't know where that came from.

SI: How did you come back to the United States? What were you assigned to do when you came back?

JP: Wow, my memory's slipping there. What happened? I think I must have come home from Vietnam, because I don't remember going to any base in United States afterwards. It was like coming home, straight home, getting on a plane and, oh, maybe I came to McGuire [Air Force Base in New Jersey, adjacent to Fort Dix] and disembarked over there, and then, was given my discharge papers and spent, I guess, a couple days there, but my memory's not good on that. I just don't remember. That's a good question.

SI: Towards the end of your tour, did you plan to go back to Allied Chemical or did you have any other plans?

JP: What did I do? I know I spent a lot of time home. I wasn't feeling good about anything. What happened was, afterwards--some years passed, I did some odd jobs--but, afterwards, I found a job at Robert Wood Johnson [Hospital] and I didn't mind it, because it was close to home. So, I took the job and I started in the day time, that, eventually, they created the second shift, and then, the third shift. So, I took it. So, I didn't mind working the third shift, but, when I was working the daytime, when new people came around getting the job, I would teach them what had to be done as the work situation was--so, running the computers, creating the reports, back up, and so on. So, a lot of people would come down and just tell me, "I can't do this. I don't understand it." … Then, I would just give a pep talk. I mean, "I just don't want to hear that kind of stuff," because I told them, "Look, you can do this. Give yourself some time and I'm here if you have any questions," because I was pretty good, "Ask me and I'll let you know." … When people gave themselves the time, two or three weeks or so, and I was there and I managed to get things going. … Sometimes, I ran into a problem. To give you an example, … I was working with a woman and we had these big disc drives where … they twist on in the computer, on the drive, and one of the women was running, I think some payroll reports, and she did it the wrong way. … I was doing something else, because the hospital had the computers split. One

section did one series, where we had back-ups, another one did another. It was like Huey and Dewey, the ducks. [laughter] So, I noticed it. So, we were supposed to get this stuff done by morning and this was the third shift and I said, "This is wrong." So, she realized it. So, that's when hustle time came around. So, I managed to swing things around, do it as fast as possible, get the drives right, get the back-up done, get the reports done in the morning and that would be it, and I was sweating. … By the time morning came around, whatever was running, which was good at that point, I turned it over to the first shift. The woman was thanking me left and right, at that point. [laughter] I said, "That's okay, that's okay, as long as we caught it. We caught it, we fixed it. It's us working," and that was it for that and I managed to get away from that scrape. "Boy," I was thinking, "can you imagine when the boss comes in and hears everything is wrong, nothing more was running right, and we have to turn it over to them?" Oh, man, I just didn't want to see that happen and that was one of the few times. There was a couple other times like that. Boy, … it's like if you … pick up the right routine and you notice it, how it goes from step to step, then, you can figure out what you can do, and if you have the time. So, I managed to try to get it, but I did it. Now, I couldn't even do it, I mean, because of all the issues about the mini-strokes and whatnot, just couldn't do it. I'm lucky to do anything around the house. [laughter]

SI: How long did you work at the hospital?

JP: Too long. I mean, they told me, I didn't realize this, they told me thirty-two years.

SI: Wow.

JP: Yes, just about my lifetime. I didn't mind working in the computer department. I liked it, but thing is, I don't know how I did it, because, like I was pointing out to you, I had that Agent Orange cancer, and the thing is, I didn't know about it. I knew something was wrong, but thing is, I couldn't talk to anybody. I couldn't prove it to anybody. Nobody would believe me. So, what am I supposed to do? So, at that point, I kept my mouth shut. I did what I had to do because I had to make a living and go on with life, because, aw, gee, I wish there was somebody to talk to and try to get some understanding. The doctors didn't understand me. I had some good coworkers. I mean, at the end, they saved me a few times. I'm grateful for that, … because, when I came back to work after my heart surgery, I wasn't fit. I thought I was. I was not and I started to work, go back to work, and I'm working and my coworkers are saying, "Joe, it's eleven-thirty. You've got to start this job up." "Right," because I was getting lost and I started the job up and finished it. Sometimes, I ran into problems with the management a couple times. They didn't understand what was going on. There was some ridiculous problems with their situations and whatnot. I didn't understand it and they didn't understand it, what was going [on] with me, until I realized that I couldn't do this anymore. I didn't know what was going on with my heart. Sometimes, I'd have heart irritations and I don't know what it's coming from. My heart doctor says, oh, my heart is good. That's what I want to hear. So, if my heart is good, hey, that's the best news at this point. So, I take it in stride, but thing is, at that point, I was breaking down. I couldn't handle the work and, in the morning, and I took the third shift because I wouldn't be around too many people. … In the morning, when four o'clock came around and a certain amount of work had to be done, fatigue was setting in and I was getting nervous, on the shaky side, and I'm thinking about it, over all of it, and it's now beginning nightly. It's like continuing as the nights went on, the next night, the next night and the next night, and I'm

thinking to my[self], "I can't take this anymore. I'm talking to myself now." … At that point, when morning came around, I went to my neurologist doctor and I explained it to her, of what's going on, of how I feel, that I'm going to collapse. It was going to that point. So, she gave me the paperwork to go on disability and said to fill out that I couldn't work anymore, because something might happen, because either I was driving myself, or … I don't know how to say it anymore, maybe it was beyond me, I'm putting stress on myself, on the heart, and something would happen. So, I filled out the paperwork and the worst part of it, I had to compose a letter and hand it to my management that I'm resigning because of these issues that are coming up with the heart, because there's no management that understood what was going on. It was just impossible. So, at that point, I went to friends of mine, the (Hubbards?) again, and I explain it to them. … We composed the letter and I hand it to my management. … From that point, I went on disability and I stopped working.

SI: What year was that?

JP: 2005, I think it was. See, I didn't realize how bad [of] shape I was [in]. I had the attitude that I still could manage, I still can deal with people, like talking to you and explaining things. Oh, yes, there's times when my memory fails. I forget and situations happen and I have heart irritations, but I'm not thinking anything else can happen, … but other things can happen. The heart can overwork itself and palpitations, or whatever they call that, something worse can happen and I think, "I'm myself, but I'm not myself." So, I … didn't realize it, but, at the end, I just had to say I couldn't do it. That was the end of working. Wow, what a situation, but I have my attitude and I can laugh and I can joke around with it and I can talk to other people and even explain different things. Maybe they can use some of the situation I went through health wise, that they can point it out to somebody else as a Vietnam veteran, because everybody runs into somebody that's a Vietnam veteran, you know. So, maybe they can use that, say, "I talked to a Vietnam veteran and this is what he's going through. It's something like you're going through," you know, that kind of situation.

SI: While you were in Vietnam, were you aware that they were using Agent Orange in your area? Did you ever see it being sprayed or distributed?

JP: No.

SI: Okay.

JP: No, it's just that it was used … all in the foliage, the trees and whatever.

SI: It was sprayed around the perimeter of the base.

JP: Yes, somewhere there, and I don't know how far they went out in spraying it, but, like I said, when I came into the base camp, it was tents. So, the ground was cleared. All they had to do was put down tents. So, that's where Agent Orange was sprayed … and the base camp was a good-sized one. So, you can image how much [was cleared]. Well, thing is, I learned that … Agent Orange was the worst one, but they created Agent Orange II. Prior to these two Agent Orange, there was Agent Pink, Agent White, Agent Purple, and I don't know, I'm thinking maybe

the Army ran out of colors to call them, [laughter] but it was depending on how strong they were. Agent Orange was the worst one. That's my understanding and that's why, if I got it, I'm thinking, "What about the guys around me? They must be going through the same thing." Like, I'm in touch with a guy from the First Cav. He lives in Idaho. I'm in touch … in the computer with him and, one day, he sent me a message and he's asking me, "Joe, how is your eyesight?" "It's still pretty good. I mean, I see pretty good. I still can drive," and then, he says, "Well, I got Agent Orange." So, I figure, "Well, if that's Agent Orange, can cause an eyesight problem, whoa. Well, what's going to happen to me? I mean, is that what's going to be next on the line?" [Mr. Popielowski whistles] I don't know how long I can take this. That's why I ask God, "When is this going to end?" It's unbelievable how bad it is. I don't know, people just don't want to understand how much damage Agent Orange has caused, and there's no cure for it. I mean, the country made Agent Orange and all these other poisons and there's no cure, unbelievable. … I think two major companies made it.

SI: Dow, and I forget the other one.

JP: Dow and DuPont, maybe. [Editor's Note: Dow and Monsanto were the primary manufacturers of Agent Orange.]

SI: Maybe.

JP: I'm not sure. I know Dow probably did.

SI: You came back in 1968.

JP: Right.

SI: You said it was in the early 1970s when you started working at the hospital.

JP: I think I started in '74.

SI: Okay.

JP: Working at Robert Wood. See, I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't prove it to anybody. Nobody understood about Agent Orange. Nobody understood about what Vietnam veterans were going through and something was breaking me down and I didn't understand it, because, like I said, … my head, most of the time, when something started, my head felt like it was on fire. I have symptoms of it, but I'm thinking now that maybe the heart surgery had something to do with it, because it's not that severe. Maybe it's all the medications I'm taking. I'm taking, like, ten medications at this point. You know, … the major one is for seizures and I've got to find now a neurologist doctor, because, somewhere, I fell through the cracks and I don't have a neurologist and the hospital in Temple told me I need three doctors, but, since I have cancer, it's about, like, five doctors. So, I have to find a new neurologist, because I'm taking Lamictal and I'm thinking, "Should I be taking [this]?" I've been taking that Lamictal for quite a few years. I don't even remember when it was, when I started, and thing is, one doctor asked me one time, "Are you supposed to take all these drugs?" Well, I said to him, "All the doctors told

me I should. What am I going to do?" There was only one drug that I said I couldn't take anymore and it was called Cymbalta. It was upsetting my stomach. It was bloating me up and it felt like I couldn't eat anymore. So, I said, "That's hurting me in the long run. I can't do that." So, eventually, my doctors were changed, the neurologist, as time went by, since my first doctor died, and then, I just said, "No, I can't take this anymore," and I got it down and had to stop it. …

SI: When you came back from Vietnam, did you have any other issues in readjusting to civilian life? Did you have any post-traumatic stress?

JP: I'll tell you, at night, I couldn't stand it. What happened was, it doesn't happen today that much and I just don't like Fourth of July, because of the fireworks and whatnot. They remind me of the attacks. The fire trucks and the ambulance, the cops, when the sirens go off and whatnot, at the beginning, I used to run to the door when I heard them and I would try to open the door, but the door was locked. That's … what saved me at night, is I couldn't open the door, because I wanted to run outside to the ditch. That's how bad it was, and that burning head and whatnot. … The worst thing, that hurt, [was] that there was nobody to talk to about it, nobody, and nobody to explain it and find doctors even that would understand about it. I didn't want to have anybody tell me that I need to see a shrink. What do you call those doctors?

SI: Psychiatrists?

JP: There you go, thank you, psychiatrist, because I don't know if a psychiatrist would help me or not. I'm not loony. So, I'm thinking, if I start to open up with anything, they might think I am loony, you know, with all these things. I mean, I couldn't stand it. Like I told my first neurologist, I was looking at my cat, I was laying down on my bed and he's on a bench close to me. I'm seeing the cat and he's changing color on me. I couldn't understand it. … At that point, I think I was hallucinating, and then, another time, I thought I was seeing giant spiders come out of the ceiling, I mean, giant spiders. Can you imagine that? and I'm saying to myself, "No, they're not there." [laughter] … All these stores, I'm telling you, I can't believe it now myself, that these things were happening to me, but it was all in my mind and I'm telling myself, "No, they're not there. That's all in my mind." So, then, I just turned around and tried to go back to sleep, that kind of situation, because I couldn't do anything. I don't know what was happening to me.

SI: Did you try to get in touch with any other veterans or join any veterans' groups? Did you stay in touch with anyone you knew from the Fourth Infantry Division?

JP: I can't find anybody at this point. I wish I could, especially (Hugh Gallagher?), or there was (Ed Glover?). I think he's the one that gave away my monkey. [laughter] … I think he's from York, Pennsylvania, I'm not sure. One time, I thought I found the (Glovers?) in a directory, I think on the computer. I'm not sure. I was going to write it down, but I never did and time just slips by. … I joined up with the Catholic War Veterans because one of my friends joined it. So, he said, "You can join, too." So, I signed up then, but they're all guys in different wars, World War II and whatnot. Some of them I talk to, wow, and what they went through, too. … War is war.

SI: When did you join the Catholic War Veterans? Was that right after you got back from Vietnam or more recently?

JP: No, no. This is just recently, maybe a couple years ago. It just happened. … Oh, I'm also a member of, what do you call it? Berlin Airlift [Historical] Foundation. [Editor's Note: The Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation, founded in 1988, is dedicated to educating the public about the 1948-1949 Berlin Airlift and preserving aircraft used during the operation.] The office is in Farmingdale. What happened was, a long time ago, when I was young, I don't know how I did it, I met up with Tim Chopp. I think he started it. What happened was, I don't know how I met him, but we got together on Route 33, The Cabin [a restaurant], and we discussed it. He discussed it with me. So, he had a few members at that point and I became the sixteenth member. I'm, like, a crew member. He took me out on their cargo planes. What the Foundation does, they restore old airplanes, the cargo planes that were used in the Berlin Airlift in the '50s, when the Russians closed Berlin down, and they rebuild them into working order. … Even now, they try to find the planes. They found another one in Canada that I think they purchased and they fly them back to Berlin, in [remembrance of] … those days that they flew out there to save Berlin. … I managed to join at the early stage and meet with them, … but I lost track of them, on whatever happened with me, and I've got to get in touch with them again, because they wanted to know what was going on with me, but just everything was falling apart for me, with the Agent Orange part. … Like I said, most of my days are so miserable and whatnot, the way I feel, because I'm talking to you, but I'm not all right, because I feel pressure in my head. … With this chemo treatments makes it worse, because it makes me tired out, and then, it caused the short on breath, which makes a problem, and then, when I get tired, I've got to lay down and whatnot. So, it's almost like on a daily basis. If I have a good day, it's my lucky day, that I call it, that I managed to have good feelings about everything. That's like, I hate to say it, you might not believe me, but, after my heart surgery and I went outside, when it snowed or when the weather was changing, I felt like I was touching with God. Like, I would raise my hand and I would be touching him, because I had that calm feeling, like there is no feeling like it, and I didn't understand it. … The same thing, one day, I went out when it was snowing and this was at night, like eleven, twelve o'clock or something. My neighbor was out there in the snow, shoveling. … That's when I was managing myself pretty good and I would put my shovel down in the snow and I felt the most peaceful feeling I could have in myself. I couldn't understand it, but I felt so good, so calm and whatnot, and I'm looking around and I'm looking up at the stars and whatnot, but I feel so good. Everything was good. I didn't understand it, but that's the couple incidents, and then, even after the surgery, when I would lay down on the bed, I would feel, like, a current running through me, straight line, and, when it would break, I would feel bad, like I felt the current break. I didn't want that to happen and I would try to relax and calm down and I'd talk to my neurologist and he would explain it to me that we have currents. You don't notice it, but we have currents running, electrolytes or whatever they call it, and they make you feel good and that's what I was experiencing. I didn't know anything about that. So, who knows? but I felt good. I had no problems.

SI: Is there anything you would like to add to the record?

JP: No, no. I'm just looking at your face.

SI: What?

JP: On your reaction. [laughter]

SI: No, I am just trying to understand.

JP: No, it's hard. Some things are hard to understand. … I'm thinking you have to have your heart stop, and then, you will find out if they bring your heart back beating, because you lose everything, I mean, your taste buds, your sense of directions, whatever's going on, and then, when it causes the four mini-strokes, forget it. Then, everything is shot. So, if you come back and you can manage, then, how can you say it? It's the grace of God, or if you believe in it or whatnot. I don't know what to tell you. … All I told you is my experience and what goes on. I mean, you go to war and, here I am, I was a World War II kid, come to the United States, I wind up in Vietnam and, now, I'm here and I have all these health issues. I can't get rid of them. There's no medications that can help me and I have to go through all this until the end and that's why I ask God, "When is this going to end?" Well, at this point, I don't get an answer, but I keep going. So, that's my life.

SI: I appreciate your sharing all of it with me. Thank you very much for your time and your service.

JP: Thank you. I just wanted to leave something of what my experiences were about Vietnam. I'm just grateful to you for giving me this time.

SI: We would not have our program if it was not for you and other veterans sharing their stories.

JP: Well, if there's a chance of me reading some of the stories of other veterans, maybe you can let me know.

SI: Sure. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: This concludes the interview.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Juli McDonald 2/21/14
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/20/14
Reviewed by Joseph Popielowski 2/10/15