RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES PRESSMAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Patrick Lee: This begins an interview with James Pressman on April 22, 2009, at Rutgers University with Patrick Lee and Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Thank you very much, Mr. Pressman, for coming in today and talking with us. I appreciate your coming in so soon after turning in your pre-interview survey. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

James Pressman: I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, Elizabeth General Hospital. I was born December the 3rd, 1945.

SH: Let me start by asking about your family history, beginning with your father.

JP: Okay.

SH: Please tell me his name, where he was from and a bit about his family background.

JP: His name was Harry Pressman. He was born in this country in 1911. He was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He was an owner of Rahway Lumber Company in Rahway, New Jersey. It was our family's business. His father, my grandfather, Joseph Pressman, started it in 1924. …

SH: What a time to start a business.

JP: Yes. … My grandfather was from Russia, immigrated to the United States in the late 1800s, … very early 1900s.

SH: What was your father's background as far as education is concerned?

JP: He just was a high school graduate. Very few people went to college back in those days. He graduated from Batten High School in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Back then, it was boys and girls. … Then, it went to all-girls and, now, it's Thomas Jefferson High School.

SH: Could you tell me about your father's military service?

JP: Oh, okay, yes, … it's interesting. He went into the Army. He was drafted prior to Pearl Harbor and he was twenty-eight years old and he went to Fort Lee, Virginia. It was called Camp Lee, Virginia, then, and he was in the Quartermaster Corps. … Before Pearl Harbor, a directive came down from Washington that anybody that was older than a certain age, and I believe it was twenty-eight or older, could leave the service. So, he actually entered the service … and left it prior to Pearl Harbor. Once Pearl Harbor occurred, he was already out of the military, but was soon called back in.

SH: Really?

JP: Yes. He went back in and he … was in the antiaircraft artillery type of thing, early radar, and he was stationed in Miami Beach for a time, which our family always thought was quite funny.

PL: That is nice.

JP: … Then, he finished the war in Panama. He was stationed near the Panama Canal on air defense, so that he didn't see combat in either Europe or the Pacific, but he was at [the] Panama Canal. That was his service.

SH: Did he talk about it at all?

JP: Yes. He eventually got himself into what they called Special Services. [Editor's Note: Special Service officers in World War II were tasked with providing recreation and entertainment to their units.] … He was sort of a gambler back then and … he ran a business--he was always a business guy--so, he rented out uniforms. … He made a bunch of money when he was in the service [laughter] and did pretty well, and then, when the war was over, he came back and went back to work in our business, in the family business. He also played a lot of poker in Panama--like many in the service did--to pass the time.

SH: That is a great story.

JP: True story. I like to say he sold toasters to natives down in Panama that didn't have electricity. I'm not quite sure if that's apocryphal or not. [laughter]

SH: That was the kind of businessman that he was, right? [laughter]

JP: Yes, yes, he could do it.

PL: Do you think your father's service in the Army influenced your decision to join the service?

JP: I don't know. I don't think so. I mean, … my uncles were also in World War II, but … one of my uncles was killed at the Battle of the Bulge in World War II.

SH: Was he your father's brother?

JP: No, no, this was my mother's side of the family. My father only had sisters. … I was always interested in the military. When my brother and I were children, we would play Army games. So, I was always interested in it. … In fact, when I went to ninth grade, I didn't go to Rahway High School [for] my ninth grade, I went to Admiral Farragut Academy in Pine Beach, New Jersey, which was a naval school, and spent one year there and didn't particularly care for that kind of discipline. So, I came back and finished Rahway High School, … but I was always interested in the military and military things. I always … used to watch *Victory At Sea* [a popular documentary series on the US Navy broadcast during the 1950s on NBC] if you remember that program. The theme music was great.

SH: Yes.

JP: Yes, so, yes, I liked war movies. So, yes, I was always interested in it.

SH: Was the decision to go to Farragut because of your interest in the military?

JP: No, I think it was more my parents trying to give me some discipline. [laughter] … What I remember about it, when I got my acceptance letter, … I remember being happy about it. So, it didn't bother me. It offered me a great education in my 9th grade year, and I did become more disciplined. It was a good decision to send me there.

SH: Let us talk a bit then about your mother and her family background.

JP: Okay, my mother was born in New York. … Both my mother and my father's families settled in Elizabeth first, Elizabeth, New Jersey, and then, my mother came to Rahway later on. Her father and mother … emigrated from Russia, … again, in the late 1800s, early 1900s. They came to Elizabeth, and then, they opened up a business, their own business, on Third Street in Elizabeth. It was like a haberdashery store, a dry goods store, that's what they called [it] back in those days. … It was called Krevskys Department Store. She and her sisters didn't go to college. They all got married, but my uncles all went to college. One was a dentist, one was a lawyer, one was an electrical engineer and … the youngest one perished in World War II. …

SH: Did your mother talk about that?

JP: No, it was a painful subject with my grandmother. … The only thing I knew about it was, he died in the Battle of the Bulge and he's buried in France somewhere.

SH: Really?

JP: Yes. I remember her saying that Hitler killed her son. She was a Gold-Star Mother--the honor that was given to mothers who lost their sons in the war.

SH: What was your mother's maiden name?

JP: Krevsky, K-R-E-V-S-K-Y. That was her maiden name.

SH: Can you tell me how your parents met?

JP: I'm trying to think. … My mother said … my father … went to the YMCA there, in Elizabeth, and, somehow, somebody … he knew there … was going out with a girl and my mother was this girl's friend. … [She] tells the story of my father coming to the house for the first time to talk to my mother. My grandmother answered the door and because he had just come from the gym and was wearing a sweatshirt, my grandmother said, "There's a bum at the door looking for you," [laughter] … but, yes, they went out for any number of years. They got married, on January 1, '42, right, you know, after Pearl Harbor.

SH: Oh, my.

JP: Yes. My father was thirty-one and my mother was twenty-eight. They were both a little bit older than the average when they got married. … I don't think a lot of people got married young back during the [Great] Depression days and due to economics.

SH: It is interesting that they got married right after Pearl Harbor, four weeks later.

JP: Yes, yes. I think that was not unusual. Young men realized that they would be at war on two fronts for a long time--they saw the writing on the wall.

SH: Did they talk about that at all? Did that influence their decision to get married then?

JP: I imagine it did, but they never really mentioned it. They never discussed it much, but I am sure there was a "now or never" attitude at that time. Also, they had been dating for several years already.

SH: Was it already something that was planned?

JP: Well, they had been going together for, like, three or four years. I believe they'd been going together for a while, and so, that was the time, because … he had gone in the service, and then, come back out and, now, he was back in, just like everybody else was, for the duration. So, they got married.

SH: Was your mother able to travel with him at all?

JP: Yes. I think she remembers going down to Fort Lee, Virginia, with him and into North Carolina. I don't know whether that was the first time [he was in the service] or after they were married. I tend to think it was after they were married [that] she did, while he was in the United States. … When he was shipped out to the Panama Canal, she went home to live with her parents until he came back.

PL: Speaking more about your childhood, can you tell us about your experiences in elementary school?

JP: Well, I went to Madison School. I started off in Roosevelt School in Rahway--nothing particularly remarkable about my student career there. [laughter] Then, I went up to Madison School in Rahway from middle school, and then, like I said, I went to ninth grade at Admiral Farragut Academy, and then, I spent the last three years at Rahway High School. My grades were, I would say, average, maybe a little above average. My SAT score, I remember, was over 1000. This is when, you know, it was [out of a possible] 1600. Now, again, this is 1963 and a score over 1000 was okay back then. Today, I don't know if I could get into Rutgers, [laughter] but the other thing I had going for me was, I was captain of the Rahway High School swimming team in my senior year. So, between that--and I think I got a 1060 or something on my SATs--and my average grades, to this day, I don't understand how I got … by the admissions at Rutgers, but I did get admitted to Rutgers College, and Rutgers College, back then, was a very highly rated school. Everybody that didn't live in New Jersey thought it was an Ivy League school,

which, of course, it's not, but it had that kind of reputation out of the state back then, in the '60s. It had a very high [reputation], and it was five thousand men at Rutgers, then.

SH: That many?

JP: Yes, okay, all men.

SH: How many siblings do you have?

JP: I have a brother and two sisters. My two sisters actually went to Douglass [College, part of Rutgers University].

SH: Did they?

JP: Yes. My brother went to Temple University and he's a podiatrist, went to Philadelphia College of Podiatric Medicine. … The next sister … went to Douglass and got a master's degree in, I think, Hebrew University in Israel and she's now a librarian at Princeton. … She speaks Hebrew and Arabic, and my younger sister went to Douglass. She was an art major, and so, she works in that field. She also has an MFA degree.

SH: Where do you fit in the order?

JP: I'm the oldest. So, it's me, my brother the podiatrist, my sister who works at Princeton, and then, my sister the artist--that's the span.

SH: Did you have to work in the family business?

JP: It was my choice. I worked there when I was in high school. I started sweeping floors as a young boy. … We owned a lumberyard/hardware store then. I rode on trucks and was a help. Then, when I got my license, I was a truck driver. I worked several other jobs, but, most of the time, I did work in the family business in the summers as a teenager.

SH: What about after school?

JP: After high school?

SH: After school in high school, when you finished your classes, did you have to work at your father's business?

JP: No. Well, okay, Rahway High School--we'll talk about high school--back then, was on split sessions. Half of us went seven [AM] to twelve [PM]. The other half went, like, one [PM] to five [PM]. There were so many [students], yes, they split the sessions. So, I was in the morning session. So, I went to swimming practice at five o'clock in the morning at the Rahway Y [YMCA], for the swimming team. Then, we went to school and I was home at about twelve-thirty, and I really didn't go right to work. I came home and it was a tough day already. I'd been up from down, you know, first, you had … swimming practice for an hour, hour-and-a-half, and

then, five, six hours of school. So, most of the time, I worked only in the summers. I don't really remember working after school.

SH: Did your mother work outside of the home?

JP: Yes, my mother worked in her parents' store for a time. Then, … I guess when they moved to Rahway, when she started having the children, she was home, and then, she had various jobs. She worked. She was a volunteer for several things. She did Braille. … She worked in several stores for a while, and then, after we were all out of the house and she got into her sixties, she started her own business, an antique business, and carried that on for almost thirty years. She's ninety-six now. … She lives alone. She still drives, but she's not doing her business anymore, but, yes, she had quite a career.

SH: Were there community service groups that your family was involved in?

JP: My mother was involved with the Temple Sisterhood for a time, and, like I said, the Braille, she transcribed books into Braille. … I don't know how she got interested in it, but … that's what she did for a time. My father was totally committed to the business. … Besides the lumber/hardware business, the retail end, we were also builders, built homes. We developed property, land, down the Shore, Jersey Shore, the Seaside Heights area, and so, he was totally committed to the business.

SH: It was a "twenty-four/seven" type job.

JP: Pretty much, yes. He loved it. [laughter]

PL: Did you have a television at home?

JP: Yes. Oh, well, … I remember getting the TV. The first TV was almost like a piece of furniture. It had doors that folded in the front and it was black and white. Yes, I remember that, sure. That was in the early '50s, when it first started, sure.

PL: Did you like watching TV shows?

JP: I remember *Howdy Doody* [a children's television show broadcast between 1947-1960], okay, all right. [laughter] I remember, boy, *The Roy Rogers Show*. You know, Nellybelle was the Jeep, right. … The jeep had a name, I think it was Nellybelle. I watched all the early programs that were broadcast. [Editor's Note: *The Roy Rogers Show*, a Western television series broadcast from 1951 to 1957, featured a World War II jeep, Nellybelle.]

SH: Was television still a novelty?

JP: Yes, I mean, yes, and, … again, it was black and white. … I can remember, we moved … from one house to … the next house. We had a den, but, then, we'd all sit--the family would sit--in there and we'd watch Sid Caesar [a popular sketch comedy performer featured on *Your Show*

of Shows and *Caesar's Hour* in the 1950s] and some of these other shows, you know, as a family. Jackie Gleason, *I Love Lucy*--all those shows.

SH: Did your family eat dinner and watch television as well?

JP: No, no. … We didn't have a TV in the kitchen. We did much later on, but, in the early days, we had the den and we all would sit in there. We did not eat dinner in the den.

SH: Was there a family tradition of having to be home for dinner? What were some of your family's traditions?

JP: Well, with my father, you know, working a lot and my mother in and out, I don't know that we had any particular tradition. I mean, we had some religious holidays that we would always [observe]. Either at my grandparents' house, and then, at our house, we would have Passovers and things like that, but, on a day-to-day basis, it was, you know, … you do the best you can. [laughter] But my mother usually did have the table set and we ate most dinners together until we were older and sometimes had outside activities. My dad was home by 6:50, this is when we ate.

SH: Growing up in Elizabeth and Rahway, did you have a large extended family?

JP: Yes. … I had seventeen cousins on my mother's side. There were twenty-one of us. I had seventeen cousins and the four of us in my family. So, yes, we would all get together, and then, all the kids would be running around, and we did it at my grandparents' house in Elizabeth and, almost every [day], go over to an uncle's house, whatever. … Actually, there's a Rahway County Park in Rahway. We used to go there for a family picnic once a year. My grandparents would reserve a grove. I don't know if you've ever been there, but they have these picnic groves in that park and we would go there as a family and have a family picnic. … I remember that as a young child. On my father's side I had eight cousins. We did not get together as often as on my mother's side, but we were all very friendly, and did see each other on certain occasions.

SH: Did your family go on vacations?

JP: I really don't [remember]. They tell me that we went on certain day-trip vacations, but I was so young, I don't remember. … Then, I really don't remember going on family vacations when I became old enough to remember things. I'm going to have to think about that one for a while. [laughter] … When I was younger, … as opposed to an actual vacation, we would go to the mountains. We would go up in the Watchung [Mountains]. They had the swimming clubs up there and cabins and, every summer, we would rent a cabin, you know. So, I guess that would be considered a vacation, although it was only twenty or twenty-five [minutes]. As a young child, it seemed like it was forever to drive [in] a car, [laughter] but it was up on top of the Watchung Mountains. So, yes, okay, that would, I guess, … count as a family vacation.

SH: Is that when you got interested in swimming?

JP: Yes, I was on the [team]. We had the swim club up there and I was on the swimming team, you know, for the club. … We had a pool, a couple of pools, in the area where I lived--the Oakcrest Swim Club and Ash Brook Swim Club, which was in the Edison area--and I was on their swim teams. … When I went to Admiral Farragut Academy, they didn't have a swim team and I was really disappointed, and then, when I came back, I swam sophomore, junior, senior year for Rahway High School.

PL: That is really surprising, that they did not have a swim team at Farragut.

JP: Yes, you would think so. They had a football team and gymnastics. They had a bunch of stuff, but they didn't have a swimming team. They probably had a pool, I'm trying to remember, but I know they did not have a team and I know that was really upsetting, one of the reasons why I left, because I wanted to swim in competition.

PL: When you were in school, do you recall practicing duck-and-cover drills?

JP: Yes, I remember that. In elementary school, we would have to get under our desks. I was trying to think--I think I remember--I remember stamps. We would buy war, not war bonds, but stamps, or something like that, and put them in a book. It was a way of saving, you know, for whatever, for … financing the government. Somehow, I remember those stamps, sort of like [Sperry and Hutchinson] Green [Trading] Stamps, you know, but not. It was sold in the schools and I remember that we had closets in the back of the room. … Sometimes, we'd go in the closets and hide, yes, absolutely.

SH: You remember the drills.

JP: Yes.

SH: Was your family observant of your faith? Did you keep a *kosher* home?

JP: My mother tried to keep a kosher home as much as she could, *kosher* food, separate dishes, *et cetera*. We also observed Passover, Yom Kippur, *et cetera*. My mother's family was more into that part of their lives. My father's family was not. … In other words, my father worked on Saturday. We weren't Orthodox Jews, we were actually Conservative Jews, … which is in the middle--Reformed, Conservative, Orthodox. We were in [the middle]. Our temple in Rahway was Conservative. …

SH: Growing up, did you ever suffer from any anti-Semitism?

JP: Not that I remember. We had a big community in the town, which no longer exists, in Rahway. The temple's been sold. Most of the people have moved away, but, back in those days, we actually had a church basketball league, but it was [part of] the synagogue. … We would go to other churches and play. … You know, it was pretty easygoing in that regard, yes.

SH: Do you remember anything about the Civil Rights Movement?

JP: Well, I remember, you know, seeing it on TV. Being from up here, … you know, the North was already ahead of that power curve. We didn't have those kind of problems here, … like they had down in the South with segregation. So, you know, we followed it. I don't remember it being a big, big deal. It became a big deal, but, in the beginning, it was nothing that … caught my attention. I witnessed more of it when I moved to the South in the military--such things as separate Greyhound bus station waiting rooms, water fountains, *et cetera*.

SH: Did your family follow politics at all?

JP: My grandparents on my mother's side were lovers of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, because of the Depression and because they felt that he saved them from going under. So, they became Democrats. My mother's only living brother, though he's an attorney, he's still a rabid Democrat. … He came out of that side of the family. The other side--my father's side--were not that political, but my dad did vote Republican the last few elections in his life.

SH: Did you follow politics while you attended school?

JP: Well, you know, I graduated high school in 1963. That's kind of before Vietnam came on the scene and all the protesting, and the Civil Rights Movement. I actually [did], yes, in high school, right.

SH: Did you follow the 1960 Presidential Election?

JP: Yes. … I remember, we all liked Kennedy. … Those of us that … became Republicans and all that, still, back then, … if we could vote, we would have voted for Kennedy. We really liked him. He was young, and the *PT-109* thing and all that, so, yes. [Editor's Note: John F. Kennedy commanded *PT-109* in the Pacific during World War II, which was destroyed in combat against the Japanese. Kennedy's heroic actions led to his crew's survival and later contributed to his image as a war hero during his political career.] Of course, I was young and more idealistic then, but I would not vote for him today. Nixon would have made a better president for that time.

SH: Do you remember the day he was assassinated?

JP: I was in Rutgers University, at the language lab, listening to an Italian tape, when he, whoever was running that lab, stopped the tape and said the President had been shot. We all went back to our dorms and we were gathered in the--behind Demarest, there's a quad, right? … The history building was there at that time--forget the name of it--and there was a quad.

SH: Bishop House.

JP: Bishop House, was that it? yes, okay, just like this one, [18 Bishop Place]. Anyway, yes, we were there and I actually have a picture somewhere home. *Targum* took a picture of all the kids gathering there and … there's a picture of me standing in the background with my hands on my hips--no doubt deep in thought. It was a terrible day. I was [there]. The only reason I could definitely identify myself [is], I was wearing my high school letter jacket. … So, yes, it was a really, really bad day here at Rutgers, I'm sure everywhere. I remember, … it was the only time

they did away with [classes], stopped classes. They didn't have classes. Talking about the technology, we watched the funeral, and I think I watched Jack Ruby kill Oswald on TV. It was a black-and-white TV with "rabbit ears" [antennae] and we watched it. I don't know if it was at "The Ledge" or somewhere in somebody's room, because we didn't have TVs in the rooms. … By today's standards, it was pretty Spartan. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas. Lee Harvey Oswald, the primary suspect in the assassination, was himself killed by Jack Ruby on live television days later.]

PL: Demarest is still pretty Spartan.

JP: Yes.

PL: You rarely get cellphone service in there.

JP: Yes. Well, we had a payphone, one payphone for twenty-five guys, or something like that, and we couldn't have girls in the room. … We had a radio and we had no TVs, I know that. I mean, like I said, when Kennedy was assassinated, we had to find a TV somewhere.

SH: You were a freshman.

JP: Yes.

SH: How did you make the decision to come to Rutgers?

JP: How I did it? Well, okay, I applied only to four schools.

SH: You had always expected to go to college.

JP: Yes. In my family, it was [the case that] nobody ever said you had to go to college, because it was just assumed. I mean, I don't ever remember wanting to do anything else after graduation from high school. So, my grades and SATs weren't stellar, obviously, but I applied to Union. We used to call it Union County--it was called a junior college then, now, it's community, four-year community college--but … we called it "UC Juicy." [laughter] So, that's what we called it and … I got in there. I got into Monmouth College, I got into Temple University and I got in at Rutgers College. I actually wanted to go to Temple University, because Temple had a Naval ROTC program and I just liked Philadelphia. … When I went down there, they didn't have a room, a dorm room, for me. So, I thought about it and I decided to come to Rutgers, and [it was] the right decision. [laughter]

SH: Were you planning to swim in college?

JP: No, no, I wasn't recruited. I wasn't--I was good in high school, but not good enough to compete on that level here, okay. However, I will say this. Back then, at Rutgers, I don't know if you still do, you had to take two years of gym or physical education and pass it. … It was a "pass/fail," not a graded course, and my first year at the gym, … the pool was in the Student Center now on College Avenue, … I took a lifesaving course and, the second year I was here,

my sophomore year, I taught gym. I taught swimming to other [students], to freshmen. So, that was interesting.

SH: You must have been pretty good.

JP: Yes, I was pretty good at lifesaving.

SH: Did you ever think of becoming a lifeguard?

JP: No, no, but I did do that here. It was just [that] rather than having to take physical education, I got to teach it.

PL: Can you tell me about living in Demarest Hall?

JP: Yes. It was, you know, a really nice building. I remember I liked it because it was colonial in architecture.

PL: It was a relatively new building at the time. [Editor's Note: Built in 1950-1951, Demarest Hall served originally as a dormitory for Rutgers freshman and, later, football players and special-interest students.]

JP: Yes, it was in '63. It was really, really nice. … Like I said, we had a floor. Our floor had twenty-five or twenty-seven guys, with something called a preceptor. I don't know if you still have that here.

PL: Yes, we still do.

JP: Okay. My preceptor was a guy named Bob Norton, who was captain of the Rutgers Football Team back then, and … one of the freshmen on my floor was a guy named Jack Emmer. Jack Emmer … played football for Rutgers, went on to become the Army lacrosse coach for about twenty years and, in fact, just as a back story, Jack came to my home to recruit my son … to go to West Point, but my son chose the Air Force Academy. … It's funny how things come back, you know, things that happened early on in your life. You run into these people again. … Yes, Demarest, I liked it. It was nicely located at that time, [near] what was called Records Hall.

PL: Yes.

JP: That was where we ate. That was our dining facility.

PL: That was the dining hall.

JP: Yes, and it was Spartan. It was, like, World War II-ish, yes, and the food wasn't all that great.

PL: It is still not that great.

JP: And the Student Center was called "The Ledge." I don't know if you still call that building "The Ledge."

SH: They call it the Student Activities Center [SAC] now.

JP: Okay, yes, and they actually had dances and entertainment up on the roof.

SH: Really?

JP: Yes.

SH: Did they actually use the roof?

JP: Yes, yes, they did.

PL: There is still a staircase going up to the roof.

JP: Yes, and they had a cafeteria in there. It was interesting the way they did it. You would get in line and you would place your order on a piece of paper and they'd write your name on it and they'd hang it up, and then, they'd keep moving it down this wire until [it reached] the other end. When your food was cooked, they'd call you by name. [laughter] That's how it worked back then.

SH: Was there an initiation for freshmen?

JP: Yes, every freshman had to wear a dink and a tie.

SH: Any color tie or a specific type of tie?

JP: No, it was special. I think it was a Rutgers tie and a red dink--which was a hat, sort of a Robin Hood-ish type hat, without the feather--and we'd have to wear them. I forget how long it was, but, yes; I don't think you could get the kids to do that today. [laughter]

SH: Was there a competition between the sophomores and the freshmen?

JP: … I'm trying to think. … They used to bus us up for flag football up at the University [Heights], what's called, you know, the University Heights up there. I don't know if that was required or we just did it, … yes.

SH: Were there any other activities?

JP: I don't remember that. … Yes, I remember the flag football up there.

SH: Were there mixers with the students who attended Douglass College?

JP: Yes, I remember going over there and they had dances at the student center over there, and hanging out. [laughter]

SH: When you came to Rutgers in 1963, was ROTC still mandatory?

JP: No. ROTC, up until probably, I don't know, the year, I want to say '60-'61, everybody who was, I guess, physically qualified had to do the first two years of ROTC, and then, you could make a decision either to continue on or not continue on with no penalty, you know, not like a service academy, … but, when I got there, it was not mandatory. … In fact, I did not join ROTC because Vietnam was not an issue at that time. I was more interested in the Navy, still, at that time, than I was in the Army or the [Air Force]. We had Air Force ROTC here and, in 1964, the middle of my sophomore year, now, Vietnam was on the horizon, and I had no plans to go to graduate school. So, I looked into joining ROTC and they had something called the "Compression Student," which meant I took the four years in two-and-a-half. They compressed it for me. … I didn't go to summer camp until after I graduated. So, I graduated Rutgers, went to summer camp after I graduated and got commissioned at summer camp, as opposed …

SH: Really?

JP: Yes, to doing it here on campus, yes.

SH: How many students took the compressed curriculum?

JP: I don't know, but there was a bunch. A lot of guys made the decision later on, especially. I imagine that was common during that time, because, like I say, when I got there, Vietnam was not a factor. A year later, it was very big.

SH: I had never heard of the compressed ROTC curriculum before this interview.

JP: Yes, it's called a "Compression Student." I remember going in and talking to a couple of majors who were here, and they were both Southerners--a lot of Southerners in the Army back then. The professor of military science was a guy named Colonel [John J.] Pidgeon, and I thought--I didn't know whether I was joining the Army or the Confederacy there for a while, [laughter]--but yes, they really helped me. … Later on, I think [in] my junior year, a friend of mine had gotten his pilot [license], an older friend of mine had gotten his pilot's license, and took me flying in a single-engine plane and I liked it. … They had an Army ROTC flight program here at Rutgers. Both Air Force and Army had this program.

SH: Really?

JP: And so, … what you would do is, … you had to take a test and a physical, and, if you qualified, you'd get your [license]. They sent us out to Somerset Airport and we'd get forty hours of flight instruction, enough to get your private pilot, single-engine land [rating], and they'd provide you with enough information to get your written test passed. So, before I graduated college, I actually had my pilot's license, and it was done [for] free and you had a certain amount of Army guys do it and a certain amount of Air Force guys do it. … What that did for you was,

it guaranteed you a slot in flight school, so that I knew, when I graduated, I'd go to officer training school, branch training, because you had to go to Infantry, Armor, whatever branch you were commissioned in, for three months, and then, you would go directly from there to flight school. So, I spent a year in the United States prior to going to Vietnam.

PL: Was there any competition between Air Force and Army cadets?

JP: Friendly. No, there were twenty-six [hundred cadets]. There were five thousand guys at Rutgers. Twenty-six hundred, more than half, were in ROTC. When we formed up for a parade … or whatever, we would cover the street from the Alexander Library to the other side of the gym. There were a lot of guys in ROTC--more Army than Air Force, but Air Force was substantial, too. Well, yes, we all got [along]. There was no kind of inter-service rivalry, I don't think. I don't remember anything like that between the guys.

SH: You had an interest in flying even before you went into ROTC.

JP: Right, right, … just one of those things you get interested in when you're young and I saw an opportunity to do it for free.

SH: Did the space program increase your interest in aviation?

JP: Yes, that [may have been a factor]. I mean, I remember following, you know, the *Apollos* and the *Mercurys* and all, and … all those chutes and all the rockets. I remember watching all the rockets that failed. People don't remember that we failed more often than not in the beginning. You see the rockets go up, and then, come down and explode on the pad, and I remember that, but that was a separate issue. It never occurred to me to connect those two things.

SH: You were not interested in participating in the space program at any point.

JP: No, no. I was lucky to be able to fly a little plane, never mind in space. [laughter]

PL: Did you notice any antiwar activities on campus as the Vietnam War escalated? Did you know anyone who participated?

JP: Oh, yes. My faculty advisor was a Professor Eugene Genovese, I think his name was, who went from here, I think, … taught at McGill in Canada, later on, but he was my faculty advisor in the History Department. He was a history professor and he was the guy that led the sit-ins. We used to have sit-ins in the gym, you know, the anti-war types. … On the very few occasions when I had to see him for an issue, it turns out it was always on drill day, which means I had to go in my uniform to see the guy, [laughter] but he was very good and we never had a problem. … As I remember, whatever issues I had were resolved by him or he told me what to do. So, no, … I didn't have any problem that way. [Editor's Note: Historian Eugene Genovese took a pro-Vietcong stance during a teach-in at Rutgers University in 1965, which led to criticism from New Jersey politicians. The Rutgers administration defended Genovese for exercising his

academic freedom. Genovese later taught at Sir George Williams University in Montreal between 1967 and 1969 before moving on to other universities.]

SH: He never made any comments about you being in a military uniform.

JP: No, no, it wasn't [confrontational]. At Rutgers University, the anti-war movement was not violent. I mean, I remember, at Columbia, they had taken over buildings and things like that, but there were protests and they had these sit-ins, but it wasn't of a violent [nature]. At least when I left, in '67, it was not of a violent nature here on this campus.

SH: Were there teach-ins?

JP: Teach-ins, sit-ins, yes. … That was the expression of the anti-war types. They had--the kids, you know, you had the term, back then in the early '60s, was beatniks--the kids that … went around with [protest signs]. They'd put signs in their windows. They were pre-hippies. … When we were in drill, some of them would come around and put flowers in our rifle, things like that, but … there was nothing of a violent nature here at this campus.

SH: How integrated was the student body?

JP: Not very. This guy I know, and I remember his name for some reason, Elijah Miller, was a high jumper and he was African-American and some, a lot, of the athletes, … you know, were African-American, but it wasn't, back in those days, … that much of mix, I would say, [to] put it that way. It was not reflective of the society in general and, when you talk about … whatever the society mix was here in New Jersey, because you're talking about a state college, … I would say it was mostly white back then.

SH: Was there a rivalry between Rutgers College and the other colleges in the University system?

JP: Not particularly. I mean, we were of the opinion that Rutgers College was the best school of Rutgers University, "Rutgers-Camden, no-no. Rutgers-Newark, eh. Rutgers College!" … That's what I remember thinking, that, you know, if you … went to Rutgers College, that would differentiate you, okay, from other Rutgers schools. … Douglass had a good reputation, I mean, but that was different. That was girls, this was boys, okay. So, we're talking [about different systems]. … The "Aggies," [students at the College of Agriculture], I don't remember, you know, any particular problem or anything like that.

SH: Had Livingston College been formed yet?

JP: No. The only thing that was over on the University Heights back then, as I remember it, was [that] the football stadium was over there. They had something there called the Van de Graaff accelerator. I don't know if it's still there or not. Van de Graaff, it was some kind of thing that was here, science thing, that split atoms, I don't know, was called the Van de Graaff [particle] accelerator [used in science experiments].

PL: It is interesting to imagine that we actually had a particle accelerator on campus.

JP: Right, yes, and the Physics Department, I remember taking physics up there. There was a physics building up there and I don't think there was much more than that up there. I remember a lot of athletic fields there, but not many buildings.

SH: What was your major?

JP: History.

SH: History was your major.

JP: [Yes].

SH: Did you have a minor?

JP: Art history.

SH: How did you get interested in art history as your minor?

JP: Well, I took Art 101, 102, as, you know, part of the required, you know, liberal arts [curriculum at] Rutgers. You had to take a foreign language. I don't know if it's still the same, but we had to take phys. ed.--you had it for two years--a foreign language for two years, a math or science, one each or both, whatever, for two years. So, I took geology and "Physics For Idiots," what we called it. [laughter] … No, it was three kinds of physics courses here at Rutgers--two-credit physics, three-credit physics and four-credit physics. Four-credit physics was for … people who maybe wanted to be physics majors, had a lab. Two-credit physics was for physics majors. That was purely, I think, theoretical physics. Three-credit physics was for people who wanted to take it to meet the requirement, the science requirement. Therefore, we called it "Physics For Idiots." [laughter] Okay, so, I took physics and I took geology. I didn't like math, … and I'm off on a tangent here. What was the question? I'm sorry.

SH: I was asking about your major and your minor.

JP: Oh, how I got hooked up now? So, you had to take sociology. I took sociology and the other thing was that I took Art 101, 102, and I really liked it. … From there, … I just started taking art courses that interested me--"Italian Renaissance Sculpture," "Rococo Art," "Renaissance Painting"--a flurry of art courses that I enjoyed.

SH: Do you think a liberal arts education is important?

JP: Yes, yes, I mean, … unless somebody says, "I want to be a scientist or a doctor." Then, you have to go a different route, okay. You have to load up your college [schedule] with those kinds of courses. However, if you go into college and you don't know what you want to be, or even if you know, like, for instance, if you want to be a lawyer, because both my sons are lawyers, still,

liberal arts is the foundation for that. Okay, so, yes, I believe that it's a good way to go, … especially for those that don't have a direction yet.

SH: What was the interaction like between the faculty and administration and the students?

JP: Well, I was a friend of Mason Gross. Mason Gross was not a building then--he was a human being. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mason Gross was the Sixteenth President of Rutgers University, serving from 1959 to 1971.]

SH: Well put.

JP: And he would wander the campus, and, for some reason, he and I would interact, bump into one another, and we'd start [talking]. He would stop me. He was very [nice], you know, nice guy, friendly, interested in students. He would stop and he would talk to you, and, I remember, he showed up at a few football games … and we bumped into [each other] again. … He recognized me. We weren't friends by any stretch, but he was very friendly and, yes, you know, it was good. … I liked all my professors. … A lot of them were really good people. I don't remember, you know, any particular problem with the faculty. It was a very good experience, I thought.

SH: Who was your favorite professor?

JP: Professor, Doctor, Peter Charanis in the History Department.

SH: Why was he your favorite?

JP: Well, let's put it this way: when he gave a lecture--he was in Byzantine history--when he gave a lecture, certain lectures, there might be a hundred people in the class, there'd be three hundred people in the lecture hall. … He would do the "Dance of Theodora" and other things, that were popular lectures, that were well-known lectures. He was great. Yes, he was.

SH: He lectured in Bishop House.

JP: Scott Hall. He might have done some classes there, too. … One of my professors was a guy named Dr. McCormick, whose son has done pretty well here at Rutgers, [laughter] … yes, but I only had him for one course. [Editor's Note: Richard P. McCormick and his son, Richard L. McCormick, were professors in the History Department. Richard L. McCormick went on to become President of Rutgers University in 2002.]

PL: Which history courses did you take at Rutgers?

JP: Well, I could start with Dr. McCormick, "The Intellectual History of Modern Europe." That was an interesting course. Let's see, "Byzantine History;" boy, you've really got me on the spot. "American Economic History," Sidney Ratner was the professor, you know, like that. I took "The History of England" at Douglass, for obvious reasons. [laughter] It was the only course …

offered at Douglass that a history major could take. So, I went over there, … yes, and there's other ones, … if I had my transcripts, and I should have brought my transcripts, but I didn't.

SH: Were there convocations when prominent speakers would come to campus?

JP: Nothing that I remember. There might have been, but I certainly don't remember. I remember they had certain musical groups here. Kingston Trio was here, I remember that.

SH: Were they?

JP: [Yes]. [laughter] That's about all I remember.

SH: Did they still have the Military Ball?

JP: They might have, but I don't remember going to it.

SH: Were there any other organized dances that you recall?

JP: There might well have been, but I don't remember.

PL: Were you involved in any student organizations?

JP: No, just ROTC.

SH: Let us move on to your later career at Rutgers, which coincides with the escalating Vietnam War. By your senior year, you were a "Compression Student."

JP: Yes, I was a "Compression Student," for ROTC.

SH: How was the Vietnam War discussed on campus? Was it discussed in your classes?

JP: I don't remember any of our classes taking a political bent, or whatever you want to call it. I mean, now, you know, people complain that college professors are all leftists or whatever and try to indoctrinate students. I don't know if that's what you're getting at, but I don't remember … that kind of indoctrination, either pro-war or anti-war. … You know, Rutgers, I come back to the idea that Rutgers was an "Ivy League-ish," college and it was a different atmosphere. … I don't remember any kind of that [activity], that kind, although I'm sure these people, you know, the professors, had their political [views], whatever, but they didn't try to pass it on to us, that I remember.

SH: Did you ever consider joining a fraternity?

JP: No. I was what was known as a "GDI." I don't know if you've heard that expression, okay.

PL: Can you explain what a GDI is?

JP: Yes, it means a "God Damn Independent." [laughter] … That's what we called it back then, although I've been known to attend a few fraternity parties and I had friends from my high school that were here before me that were in various fraternities, and I had friends of mine from … my Demarest days who went on into fraternities. … So, I would go over, but I never tried to join one. I was never--what's the term they use, recruited?

SH: Rushed.

JP: Rushed, right, or whatever, yes, for whatever reason. That's fine. It was fine with me.

SH: Were you involved in any fundraising during your time at Rutgers?

JP: No, no. … The one tradition that continues to endure is spring break. We did go to Florida. [laughter]

SH: You went to Florida.

JP: Yes, six of us in the car, yes.

SH: Did you have a car on campus?

JP: No, freshmen couldn't have cars because of the parking problem, and I think my last year, [the] one year I lived in an apartment in Piscataway, I had a car. … Then, my last year, I commuted from home, … but I didn't actually ever have a car here on campus. …

SH: You became a commuter.

JP: Well, in my senior year, because of [my schedule]. I had taken a full load of courses, five courses, every semester. When I got to my senior year, I took--it was part of this ROTC thing--"ROTC MS3," "MS4," were three-credit courses, just was like any other three-credit course. It was a full course, [similar to a course in] history, whatever else, okay. So, I only had, in my two senior semesters, … three regular courses and ROTC. I took four courses. As a result, I didn't go to school on Friday. You know, … kids schedule themselves, when they can, so that they don't have to go to class on Friday or Monday, whatever they do. … Then, some days, you'd come down here and I'd only have two periods in a day. I'd be done at twelve or one. … I didn't want to live in an apartment anymore. I didn't want to live in a dorm. The dorm thing kind of got old in a hurry, and so, … I decided to commute from home. It was no big deal. I got snowed in a couple times. I was able to stay with my buddies, on the "river dorms," who lived here. [Editor's Note: The "river dorms," Campbell, Hardenbergh and Frelinghuysen Halls, are dormitories on the College Avenue Campus along the banks of the Raritan River.] So, yes, it was really no problem.

PL: I know that, in the spring and early fall, it gets really warm here. In Demarest, it is quite an experience. Did you have any problems with the heat or the cold?

JP: Yes, you opened the windows. [laughter] It's about all you could do, yes. … I don't remember being uncomfortable like that, but … we didn't have, certainly didn't have, air-conditioning or anything like that--you know, just open the windows. We didn't spend a lot of time in the dorm. I remember being at the library a lot or hanging out in, you know, other places, and being at "The Ledge," or whatever.

SH: Do you recall any political events affecting the campus during your time at Rutgers?

JP: … Kennedy's assassination, I would say.

SH: I just wondered if there was another big event.

JP: Nothing of that magnitude.

SH: Yes, it would be hard to top.

JP: You know, [that would] be like Pearl Harbor, you know. Everybody remembers where they were [for] Pearl Harbor, [the December 7, 1941 attack], and everybody remembers where they were when Kennedy was assassinated.

SH: What did you think of President Johnson?

JP: It's hard. You know, what I think of him now is a whole [different story].

SH: That is what I mean--can you step back and remember what you thought then?

JP: Yes. I remember seeing him, on TV, taking the oath on the plane. [Editor's Note: Lyndon B. Johnson, after President Kennedy's assassination, took the oath of office on *Air Force One*, which became one of the iconic images of the day's events.] I remember him being from Texas. I didn't really know much about liberal politics or conservative politics back then. It's not like it is today. So, I didn't really give it … a whole heck of a lot of thought at this point. As the years went by you take the oath of a soldier and so, you do what you're supposed to do. You know, back then, there was no [reaction]--because Johnson became President, I didn't quit ROTC or anything like that. …

SH: There was no sense of animosity.

JP: Not with me. I'm not saying other people [felt that way], but, well, with me, I didn't. … When you are that young you usually have a sense of trust.

SH: Very few people know much about the Vice-President.

JP: Yes. I know I remember Spiro Agnew, but that [was much later]. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Spiro Agnew served as Vice-President under President Richard Nixon between 1969 and 1973, when he resigned from office amid a bribery and tax evasion scandal.] Do you? no, okay--pointing at the student interviewer, okay.

PL: I think I am a bit young. [laughter]

SH: What were your plans for after college? Did joining the service figure into your plans?

JP: Yes. I had no plans to go to graduate school, none whatsoever, at this time. So, I had configured it so that I would go into the military. … Between my flight training program and what I knew I had to do in officer's school, that was a year. … I was hoping, you know, [in] '67, by the time I'd finished all my training, the war'd be over--wrong. [laughter] That didn't work out well, but I had a four-year commitment. So, I knew that when you took flight--normally, ROTC, if you didn't do anything extra special, you had a two-year commitment. You graduate, you enter active duty, you'd have two years active, and then, four years in the Reserve. It was the standard way to go, but, if you were in flight school, flight training, you had to give four years.

SH: You knew of the commitment before going into the service.

JP: Right. So, I had my next four years, … you know, laid on for me. I knew what I might do. I was happy with it.

SH: You knew you would go into the service right away.

JP: Actually, as I told you, I graduated in June of '67, but I didn't go to my "summer camp," was what we called it then, until July of that year. … I was commissioned at the end of July in '67. So, I didn't get my orders [right away]. Once I was commissioned, I got my orders. I went on active duty, actually, in January of '68, I started. So, I had almost a six-month period before I got my orders.

SH: What did you do during that time? Was it hard to get a job?

JP: No, it wasn't. [laughter]

SH: I wondered if there would be any reluctance to hire someone who was going into the service.

JP: I went to--interesting, I haven't thought about this in a long time--I went to an agency and I got a job with a company called Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, as a claims adjuster. … I spent two weeks in Boston and six weeks in Philadelphia for training, and I worked out of their East Orange office … until I entered the service. … Somehow, they hired me and I did that for about four, five months, and then, went into active duty.

PL: What was working for Liberty Mutual like at the time?

JP: It was interesting. It was a lot of fun. I mean, you know, don't forget, I was young. Two weeks in Boston, all expenses paid, [laughter] wasn't too terrible. Six weeks in Pennsylvania, in Philly, they put us up and [we would] get an expense account. … It was interesting training. It

was a job, claims adjuster, in auto--a liability adjuster is what I was. … It was an interesting experience while I did it. I learned a lot.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Please, continue.

JP: Okay, [I was] just talking some more about Rutgers. It was a tradition, football games, now that football's really big at Rutgers now, but, back then, we played Princeton every year at Princeton. … The tradition was, we would get all dressed up, jackets, ties, pretending to be "Ivy League-ish," … when we went to the game, the Rutgers-Princeton football game. We'd go down to Princeton, trying to look like them. It was sort of [a prank]. [laughter] So, I remember, one of the guys on our floor wore to the Princeton game plaid Bermuda shorts, some kind of a flaky shirt with a bowtie, and do you know what saddle shoes are, the brown [shoes]?

SH: Yes.

JP: Yes, he wore saddle shoes, [laughter] Bermuda shorts, and it was very interesting. … Yes, that was our wild streak back in those days, going to the Princeton football game. [laughter] Okay, I'm sorry, go ahead.

SH: What about the *Targum*?

JP: *Targum* was, you know, very well done, I thought, back then, even today, and they had the *Mugrat.* I don't know if they still do the *Mugrat*. [Editor's Note: *The Targum*, Rutgers' student newspaper, produces a satirical fake issue each semester entitled the *Mugrat.*]

PL: They still do the *Mugrat*.

JP: Okay. I remember my first *Mugrat*, first semester freshman year, big article--I didn't see the word *Mugrat*--"Women To Be Allowed In Dorms." Everybody was going with this. [laughter] …

PL: There was an article in the *Mugrat*, just last year, on introducing co-ed rooms. [laughter]

JP: Well, it would've had the same net effect if they said we were going to separate them out. This was where they were going to allow women in your room, you know. … So, that was my first [experience with the *Mugrat*]. You know, it was well done, really was. I think some of them, and I'm not a hundred percent sure, but some of the people that worked on the *Targum* went on to be professional people in that field. It was well done.

SH: Did the *Targum* report in a manner that was anti-fraternity or pro-fraternity?

JP: Oh, I remember some articles like that. Honestly, the only *Targum* I ever kept was the one that [was published] the day that Kennedy died. I should have brought it. I didn't really think [to do so]. I have it home somewhere, yes.

SH: Before we leave Rutgers, are there any other questions?

PL: Let us continue on.

JP: Okay.

SH: You talked about the six months where you were working for Liberty Mutual.

JP: Right.

SH: When did you first find out when and where you were going to report?

JP: Well, I didn't get my orders until--I think I got them on my birthday. That would be December of '67, right. I remember, I had a …

SH: Some birthday present. [laughter]

JP: Yes. Well, I knew they were coming. I just didn't have the official orders until I went to the post office. They came and I had to sign for them. It was certified mail. I mean, I'm eighteen years old, or, no, … I guess I was twenty-one at this time, but I never got a certified letter [before]. … So, I went to the post office and opened them up and it was, "Report to Fort Benning for infantry officer basic. Report to Fort Wolters, Texas, for flight school. Report to Fort Rucker for flight school. Re-assigned to what was called USARV," which was the generic [term], was United States Army Republic of Vietnam, which we called USARV, which was just a generic assignment. … Once you got to Vietnam, they put you in your particular unit. So, I got my orders in December.

SH: You knew from that first set of orders where you would be going eventually.

JP: I knew I would be going to school, my schooling, and I knew I'd be assigned to Vietnam. I just didn't know exactly where I'd wind up once I got to Vietnam.

SH: I did not realize that. I thought you just went from school to school.

JP: No.

SH: You knew right away.

JP: Yes, well, because I was [in] the flight program and … that was the deal. You'd go right from your officer basic to your [flight training]. Flight school was split then--four months at Fort Wolters, four months at Fort Rucker.

SH: How difficult was the transition from flying as a civilian to flying in the military?

JP: Well, actually, ninety-five percent of the people who went to flight school did not have prior flight instruction. So, it gave me a little edge, I think. I mean, the ground school was [easy]. I had already … learned about navigation, certain things that you learned that I already had, having a leg up on it. … I was actually an honor graduate from flight school. I think I was second or third in my class, … you know, not because I was anything great, but because I had the advantage over a lot of them.

PL: Did flight school prepare you well for your transition to rotary-wing aircraft?

JP: Well, flight school was all rotary-wing back then. I don't know if that's what you mean.

PL: Because you were a pilot on fixed-wing aircraft.

JP: I was, right. I was fixed-wing … in college, right, … but Army training, at that point, all initial entry students went to rotary-wing--didn't always, wasn't always that way. Before Vietnam, they went to fixed-wing training, fixed-wing school, or helicopter school, but, now, with the Vietnam War really going strong, everybody went to helicopter school.

SH: They did?

JP: Yes. Fixed-wing became a secondary transition course, we called it. Later on, if you were very lucky, you could get fixed-wing transition, but you had to go through helicopter school first.

PL: That is interesting.

SH: There are so many different types of aircraft.

JP: Right.

SH: All of the pilots went for rotary-wing training before they flew fixed-wing aircraft.

JP: Starting with the Vietnam types. … Before, in the, maybe, … [late] '50s and '60s, it might have been all, I'm not sure, fixed-wing school first and helicopter second, … but, once Vietnam was really cooking, everybody went. Initial entry … at flight school was all helicopter.

SH: What types of helicopters were you training on? I know the technology for helicopters really changes in the 1960s.

JP: The primary instructor school, [which] was at Fort Wolters, Texas, was one of two aircraft, TH-55 [Osage], which was a Hughes aircraft, or the other one was the OH-23 [Raven], I think it was. So, there, those were the primary trainers. Most of us were in the TH-55s, which was a really small [helicopter], almost like a mosquito, would be the best way to [put it].

SH: It looked like the helicopter you would see on *M*A*S*H*, [a 1970 film and, later, television series (1972-1983), set in the Korean War].

JP: Yes, right, right, okay, yes. The TH-55 was upgraded, was a newer version, back then, of what was used in Korea, the 23 or the OH-13 [Sioux]. In fact, the OH-13s, which was what *M*A*S*H* was [using], were used in instrument training. They still flew those back then, but only for instrument [training], the four weeks we took in instrument training. So, flight school was divided into two parts, primary at Fort Wolters, and then, the secondary one at Fort Rucker, where we transitioned into the Hueys, which you think about [most often] in the Vietnam War, except for those four weeks of instrument training, which were OH-13s.

SH: How new were the Cobra gunships in comparison?

JP: Cobras, I didn't see one until we got to Vietnam. … I think they were introduced around '68. I think, I'm not a hundred percent sure, because I wasn't a Cobra pilot, but we had them in our unit. Up until then, it was B model and C model gunships, Hueys, gunships. [Editor's Note: The HU-1 Iroquois, later designated the UH-1 Iroquois, was nicknamed the "Huey." As a utility helicopter, they were used for various tasks, including as gunships, by the US Army. Introduced in 1967, the AH-1 Cobra, nicknamed the "Hueycobra," was used solely as a gunship.]

SH: While you were training, did you see other new technologies being introduced?

JP: Well, you wouldn't see anything at Fort Wolters. That was all the little ones, but, at Fort Rucker, in those years, they were still flying some of the old and some of the new. The Mohaves, CH-37s, I think they were, were there. The Chinooks were there, which were a newer version of heavy lift. They had the sky cranes [that] were there, the CH-54s, but most of the work was being done, when I got there, … in Hueys, H model or D model Hueys, which was what we all trained in. The other helicopters in Vietnam, the Cobras, the OH-6s, those were all transitions, after you graduated flight school. Everybody, when I was there, went from the TH-55 into the Huey, okay. … After graduation from flight school, you could be [sent for additional training]. Most of us went to Vietnam. A few guys got Chinook transitions here in the United States, but most everybody went to Vietnam, and then, if you were going to fly a Cobra or a Loach, which is what we called an OH-6, you would be transitioned or learn that in-country. They called it a "transition."

SH: You actually would learn in Vietnam.

JP: Right, there's a school. There was a Cobra school in Vung Tau, where we'd send the guys that wanted to be gun pilots who were maybe assigned to lift, or there's scouts who wanted to try Cobras. We'd send a few of them to Vung Tau, where they would learn how to fly it in what we called an "in-country transition."

PL: During flight school at Fort Rucker, did you notice any differences between the Army manual and what the instructors taught you?

JP: No. It was pretty much done by, … I'm trying to think of the word, … like a lesson plan, and it was all pretty much done to script. You went from the various phases--first, you transition into the actual aircraft, then, … you do this instrument training for four weeks, and then, you do what we call a "tac X," or a tactical exercise, where you'd actually go out in the woods with the

helicopters and do the stuff you would do in Vietnam. … They had certain side courses they taught us, like sling, how to do a sling load--how to pick something up with a helicopter and drop it--and all that kind of thing. Night flying, we did.

SH: Did you believe your training was adequate?

JP: It was good in the sense that I knew how to physically operate the aircraft, yes. I could get right into a helicopter and fly it. That part was not a problem. The problem was the tactics. Totally, it is hard to [train for]. You can't duplicate people shooting at you on a course. You practice for various mechanical failures--engine failures, tail rotor failures. There are all kinds of things that can happen, but you never really know how you'll react to it until it actually happens to you. … Then, there were low-level flying [missions], … all the various things, tactics you use to avoid being shot, things like that, that … you would learn, you'd pick up, from the older pilots. The procedure was, you'd get over there, when you started to fly, you were a copilot. The guy in the right seat--talking about a Huey now--the guy in the right seat was the copilot, the guy in the left seat was called an aircraft commander. The aircraft commander … was there, had more experience, obviously, than the copilot, and you would learn.

SH: Was it difficult to transition from Rutgers to Army life?

JP: … I liked it. It was different, but I really liked it. I liked going to Fort Benning. I liked the training. So, I didn't have a particular problem with it. I mean, I knew what I was getting into pretty much.

SH: Were there any African-Americans training to become pilots?

JP: You know, it's funny, I don't [recall], never really paid attention. … There were, you know, some. Again, I don't think it was in proportion to the society as a whole. I mean, if the society was twenty percent, … I don't know that that was necessarily reflected in the military. Don't forget, the military then was different than today. Today, you have men and women serving [together on] almost every level, and, of course, it's much more integrated, I'd say. I don't know if that's the right word. Back then, during the Civil Rights Movement, one of the things I remember the politicians complaining about was that the draft affected minorities … not as equal. You know, if you were a college kid, you could get a deferment. … There were various [reasons]. So, they were always complaining that the draft was unfair because, at that time, I believe the Army was--there were more African-Americans, maybe, on the frontlines or in Vietnam than in the general population, so, they were bearing maybe a higher brunt of casualties. Now, don't forget now, I was in aviation. Aviation was a separate group, okay. We didn't have that kind of racial makeup that they did maybe in the line units, in the ground units. It was different. I'm [not] saying this is right or wrong--it's just the way it was. It was not done on purpose. There was nobody trying to keep African-Americans out of flying. I don't mean to imply that. I'm just saying that's just the way it worked out at that time.

PL: You were commissioned as a second lieutenant and went to the officers' club.

JP: Right.

PL: When you were in the officers' club, did you notice any racial tension between blacks and whites?

JP: There were no racial tensions in the Officer's Club stateside that I witnessed. The only racial things that I noticed in Vietnam was that … when we were off duty, okay, the African-American soldiers, if we went downtown, they had their own [places]. They would go to their own clubs and … the bars, whatever I'm talking about. I assume this was maybe similar throughout the country, but I can only talk about Phuoc Vinh, where I was stationed. The rest of us went to other places. That was not something that was forced. In other words, they didn't say, "Whites Only," or, "Blacks [Only]," you know, no, no.

PL: It was just a normal thing.

JP: … They wanted to be with their [friends], you know, hang with their buddies, I guess, and we [did, too], you know. So, it was not [forced]. There was … nothing forced about it or deliberate or anything like that, that I could tell. I mean, it was simply a matter of choice. That's the way it [was].

SH: Had you been dating anyone before you left for Vietnam?

JP: I had some girlfriends in college, but … I wasn't [with] … anybody, a steady girl or anything like that. … When I went to Fort Benning, I met a young lady who I married prior to going to Vietnam, and I'm still married to her forty-three years later--so, make out of that what you will. [laughter]

SH: Was she from North Carolina?

JP: No, she was originally from Nebraska. She was actually a "military brat," "Army brat." … Her father was an Army officer and he had retired at Fort Benning, Georgia, in the early '60s, and I got there in '68, I guess. … I met her at the officers' club and, then I … left Fort Benning to go to Fort Wolters. She came out later on and we got married in Texas while I was in flight school.

SH: I saw the date on your pre-interview survey and was curious as to how you met your wife.

JP: Yes, she [was there], yes.

SH: In what ways did you prepare for your time in Vietnam? At the time you are getting ready to go over, the war is escalating.

JP: Yes. I mean, I don't remember any [preparations]. I mean, again, when I went to Vietnam, a couple things had occurred in my life. I had graduated college, I was an officer in the Army, I had a pilot's license and I had completed a year's training. It wasn't like kids who were drafted when they were eighteen and, six months later, they were in Vietnam. I was already--I won't say a man--I was on my way, you know. I don't know that I'm grown up yet, [laughter] but I had

started the process on my way to Vietnam. So, I guess I'd want to say I was a little bit more stable than maybe the other, you know, younger soldiers, okay, who went over there. … I didn't do anything necessarily out of [the ordinary], extraordinary, to prepare myself, just the training, you know. It was sort of … a process, a training process.

SH: Where did your wife wait for you?

JP: She stayed with my parents the year I was over there and, when I came back, we left and went to Texas. … I spent another year in the Army after I got back.

SH: I was going to say …

JP: Yes, she was unhappy staying with my parents, [laughter] It was not her choice, but she survived, and so did I.

SH: How were you transported to Vietnam?

JP: Okay, I took a commercial flight from Newark Airport to California--San Francisco, I want to say. Where's the Golden Gate Bridge? Is that San Francisco?

SH: Yes.

JP: Yes, okay, then, went to Travis Air Force Base. … We didn't fly military. They had contract carriers, airlines that probably don't exist anymore, but they contracted with the government to do this, and so, it was, … you know, like a cattle car type of thing, wasn't a military plane, was a civilian jet. … We flew from Travis Air Force Base to Hawaii, and then, from Hawaii, I think I went to--I'm not sure if it was Guam. On the way over, I think it maybe was Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa, and then, to Vietnam. On the way back, it was Guam, maybe we flew to Guam, Andersen Air Force Base, and then, to Hawaii, and then, to San Francisco, back to Travis, and a commercial flight back to Newark.

PL: How were the accommodations on the plane?

JP: Nothing special, I mean, nothing bad, nothing special. I remember, I mean, you're twenty-one, twenty-three years old--you know, it's fine.

SH: When you left Rutgers, did anyone in your class follow the same path as yourself?

JP: Well, I'm sure [others did]. Because I was commissioned after graduation and most of them were commissioned … just prior to graduation, I was probably a little bit behind my classmates, but I did run into [a few]. … One of the guys that was in the flight training program, he happened to be the quarterback of the Rutgers Football Team. His name was Fred Eckert, back then--his name is still Fred Eckert, I'm sure. [laughter] … I was at a place in Saigon called Camp Alpha. Camp Alpha was where you go when you were leaving the country to go on R&R, something like that. … You'd go there and you would get clean uniforms, you would get a shower, warm shower, and you would get your money, your military payment certificates,

exchanged for "greenback" dollars, so [that] you could spend them out of the country. … While I was in the shower--it was me and another guy standing there naked--and I looked at him and he looked at me and we knew we knew each other. … Turns out he was Fred Eckert from Rutgers University, the captain of the football team. Freddie, he … actually joined the National Guard in New Jersey … with me and I flew with him for a little while here in New Jersey. Then, he worked for Xerox, and then, he got transferred up to New York and I haven't seen him in a while, but, so, yes, … every once in a while, I'd run into some Rutgers guy in Vietnam. I ran into a couple of them, you know. I gave a couple of them rides in my helicopter. It was purely by chance, but you would run into people.

PL: On your résumé, it says that you went to jungle survival school.

JP: Yes. When I went to Vietnam, … I was an infantry officer. The guys in the Air Cavalry troops, most of the officers were armor officers, okay. So, … my unit in Vietnam--the Air Cavalry troops--had a ground platoon. We had what's called the Blue Platoon, or ground platoon, and they had entertained an idea of making me the Blue Platoon leader. So, they sent me to this school in the Philippines called Jungle Survival School, run by an organization with the acronym FAETUPAC. FAETUPAC means Fleet Airborne Electronic Training Unit, Pacific. It was a naval thing--no idea why they would run, FAETUPAC would run, the jungle survival school, but they did--and it was run by the Negrito Indians. I don't know if you know anything about the Filipinos, but Negritos … would be tantamount to Native Americans here. They are a native people that live in the jungle and … they ran the school. It was only a three-day school. You fly in …

SH: Really?

JP: Yes. I flew from Tan Son Nhat into Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. … It's interesting, they took us by bus from Clark Air Force Base to Cubi Point Naval Air Station, which is on the other side of the Philippines, overlooks Subic Bay. … It was the bus ride like you see in a movie--narrow roads down a mountain. You know, you could look outside the bus and you're looking [down]. Okay, it was …

SH: Straight down.

JP: Yes. It was a very interesting bus ride. So, yes, I went there and I completed jungle survival school, wasn't that rigorous. … It sounds worse than it is. It was just three days out in the woods, and they taught us how to survive in the jungle. There's a lot of interesting things in the jungle you can live off of, and then, I went back to Vietnam.

SH: Was there anything you saw that frightened you?

JP: The one thing I remember is the bats in the morning. The bats would return to their caves in the morning and they would cover the sky. It would look black and you'd see the sky moving, you know, black, but it was the bats--scared the heck out of me.

SH: You saw something else that was flying, besides you.

JP: Yes. [laughter]

PL: Now, back to Vietnam.

JP: Okay.

PL: You said that you were a copilot before you became a pilot.

JP: Aircraft commander, yes.

PL: The older guys, what did they teach you?

JP: Well, you've got a couple of things. You've got tactics. In other words, for instance, above fifteen hundred feet AGL [above ground level], they couldn't hit you with small arms fire, thirty-caliber or below, okay. So, you'd learn. One of the things you wanted to learn, when you're dealing with terrain that is mountainous or has hills, you might be fifteen hundred feet above the ground, but, if you're flying next to a mountain, you may be only seven hundred feet from the ground to that mountainside. … You know, you really have to know where you are, and they taught you … the lay of the land and how to navigate, because there were no [aids], the typical, traditional type of navigational aids that the pilots used, VORTACs [a radio navigation aid] and all kinds of radio equipment. They didn't have those in the jungle. You just simply … flew what they called "dead reckoning." In other words, you'd have to know where you started, where you were going and you would plan your course, … but, over time, if you worked in the same area, you would know every creek, every river. You'd know where you were, where they had the fire support bases out there. You could ID them by their location and what they looked like. So, it was just a learning experience on how to do things to stay alive.

SH: Describe the base you were on and its function. Where was your base located?

JP: Phuoc Vinh was the headquarters of the First Air Cavalry Division back then. First Air Cav had moved. [It] was traditionally, you'd know from the movie *We Were Soldiers*, … up in the Second, II Corps/I Corps area, in the northern part of South Vietnam, and then, … just before I got there, in about February of '68, I believe, or '69, sorry, they moved them south into III Corps, which contained Saigon. Anyway, we were about maybe thirty miles north of Saigon and Bien Hoa, Long Bin, and … the town of Phuoc Vinh was division headquarters, okay, and we were there. Our Air Cav troop was there, my squadron headquarters were there, and we had other troops. One was at Quan Loi and one was at Tay Ninh. So, that area of Vietnam that the First Cav operated in, we had our First [Squadron] of the Ninth [Cavalry] in all around it. The base had an airstrip and it had--most of the division units were there--besides our Air Cav troop, an aerial rocket artillery [unit]; Blue Max was there; the division headquarters' aircraft were there; 11th Girl Scouts, 11th GS [General Support Aviation Company], was there. Basically, it was division headquarters.

SH: Where did you first land when you arrived in Vietnam?

JP: … When I came in, the plane landed at Long Binh, which was there, was a complex--Saigon, Long Binh and Bien Hoa--and they were all pretty close together. Long Binh is where the replacement company went. The plane landed, as I remember, in Long Binh. … Yes, I'm trying to remember, but I'm pretty sure it was Long Binh.

SH: What was your first reaction to being in Vietnam?

JP: It was like a furnace. Walking off an air-conditioned plane into the [air], it was like walking into a furnace. It was a hundred-and-some-odd degrees. Just what I remember, it was awful hot. [laughter]

PL: You would think that jungle survival school would have prepared you for the climate.

JP: Well, that was after I got there. She's talking about [when I first arrived], yes. …

SH: What was your first assignment? Were you there as a replacement?

JP: Okay. When I landed, we went to … what they called a "repo-depot," the replacement [depot], okay, and we were there for a few days, a day, not long. … A few of us who got off that plane were assigned to the First Cavalry Division. … Then, we were assigned further down to the unit we would be in the First Cav. That's when I found out I'd be in the First of the Ninth.

SH: Was everyone there a replacement for helicopter units?

JP: No, no. It was just a mix of people, yes, officers, enlisted. … Well, there was three of us from that group … that I know were helicopter pilots, that went to the First Cavalry Division. We all went together. So, once I was assigned to the First Cavalry Division, because, like I told you before, the First Cav had just moved recently from their base in An Khe, which is up in the northern part of South Vietnam, to Phuoc Vinh, they had something called "charm school." "Charm school" was sort of like a three-day indoctrination course that the division gave to its newly assigned members. So, we went from Long Binh, we flew up to An Khe [and] spent three days up at An Khe, at "charm school."

SH: Tell me about "charm school." [laughter]

JP: Oh, I remember getting familiar with the weapons, familiarization [with them]. There wasn't much because I don't remember that much.

SH: This was all officers.

JP: Yes. I don't know if the enlisted guys went up there, too. They probably did, but I don't remember. … So, it was only a couple of days. … Then, we went back down to the airfield at An Khe and they flew me back to Phuoc Vinh, which is where I landed, at Phuoc Vinh, and then, they sent a jeep down to pick me up and that's when I first reported to my actual unit. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Go ahead.

PL: The Army has strict protocols for officers in terms of their dress. When you went to Vietnam, were these rules relaxed?

JP: Well, the answer is, you'd wear a flight suit. It was a Nomex flight suit and you wore it for safety reasons, because it was flame-retardant. So, when we flew, you know, we wore the two-piece. … In the old days, when I was in flight school, they had the old gray flight suits, like you might think about, with the zipper on the bottom, zipper on the top. It was a one-piece flight suit, okay, wasn't very fire-retardant. … By that time, the Army had--we were using what they called Nomex, which was a type of material that was … flame-retardant. It was a two-piece thing that was Army green and you wore your name tags and your patch, or whatever. … Then, you had gloves you wore, when you flew. You wore flight gloves to keep your hands [safe]. In case you were on fire, your hands wouldn't burn, and then, you'd also wear [a helmet]. … We had regular, the old-style helmets for a time, and then, we got these new, better, soundproof and bulletproof, bullet-resistant, helmets in. So, off-duty, … most of the pilots, all of us, you know, … were walking around in our flight suits or, you know, some form of civilian thing, you know--shorts, t-shirts, maybe no t-shirt. … I've got pictures of it here, but, anyway, go ahead. I was trying to describe it.

PL: I am sure the flight suits were very warm.

JP: Yes, but, when you flew, for every thousand feet above ground level, you'd lose two degrees centigrade. So, as you gained altitude, you got cooler, plus, the fact … you had the doors open and the windows open, you could fly the helicopter out of trim and it would create a nice breeze through the helicopter. There are ways to defeat the heat. [laughter]

SH: Talk about a typical day in your unit.

JP: Typical day, … it was the day [that] would start at night. We'd go down to the tactical operations center and they'd give us a briefing of the next day's mission. Then, we would carry that information, the leaders, the platoon leaders, whatever, the commanders, the people … who are leading the whatever mission, would get the briefing from the CO or the intelligence type, whatever, whoever was doing the briefing at night. Then, we'd go back to where we lived and we would give that information to the guys that were going to fly the mission and we'd get up in the morning and, whatever the mission was, we'd go and execute the mission.

SH: Were the quarters where you lived called a hooch?

JP: … Yes, it was a hooch.

SH: Was it already built?

JP: Yes, it was a wooden frame building with a screen, sort of like a screen, a summer porch house, it would have been, you know, here. You know, it's a wood frame with screens around it.

SH: How often was there incoming fire?

JP: Yes, we got rocketed and mortared pretty regular, I would say. We had, in my room, when I finally got my own room--I didn't have my own room for the first couple months, until we had some casualties and some guys left, so that I … was able to get my own room--and then, … I built a bunker in my room. In other words, [I] sandbagged this thing up and I put a piece of wood there. I had a roommate. … He slept on the bottom, I slept on this piece of wood. Then, we built the sandbags up higher. Then, we put a piece of steel [on top], plate steel we got somewhere, so that if something came right through the roof, we'd have a chance of surviving. …

SH: What did you do for fresh air? It is hot and you have all these sandbags around you.

JP: You know, you get used to the heat. You get what they called--the word, actually, is "acclimatized," [laughter] was the word they used. So, yes, … you know, it wasn't that bad, I mean. At night, actually, it could get cold, a little cooler. It's not the desert.

SH: Where would you go for recreation? Was there an officers' club?

JP: There's an officers' club. … Of course, we had our helicopters. If we weren't [on duty], if we could get a helicopter and we weren't having a mission, we could fly [on our own]. We used to fly to a place called Lai Khe, because they had something that looked like a Dairy Queen right off the airfield. We could stop and get an ice cream. We could fly down to Bien Hoa, … to the officers' club. They had nice officers' clubs, and [the] Air Force had better facilities. So, yes, we had ways of [relaxing]. … In Saigon, they had something called--the helicopter pad there was called "Hotel Three." It was off the Tan Son Nhat Airbase, was a separate part, and you could land there. They had a big PX there. They had the Air Force officers' club there. I mean, we didn't get to do that a lot, but you could, from time to time. We used to fly down to Vung Tau, when we could get away. Vung Tau, … you know, it was like the Jersey Shore, would be the best way to put it.

SH: Really?

JP: Yes, it was "The Jersey Shore of Vietnam," and all the various embassies of the countries there, … it was right on the ocean and they had beachfront homes there, and so, it was sort of like a "Down the Shore" type place we could go. [laughter] Not very often, but, once in a while, you could get down there.

PL: In your Air Cav unit, I understand you worked with the 75th Rangers.

JP: Yes. Every division in Vietnam had a Ranger company assigned to it. It's not like today, where you have actual Ranger units, okay. … This unit was commanded by a captain and they had three or four, we called them LRRP lieutenants. LRRP means long-range reconnaissance patrol, okay, and what they were, they were configured, they would go out on a team, maybe four, maybe five, depending [on the mission], okay, and they'd have an area to recon, and then,

… our unit was responsible [for them]. What I would do is, I would take the team leader and one of these LRRP lieutenants out and we'd go over the area that they were going to be working in and we'd look over the area from the air. … Then, we'd pick out a landing zone. Sometimes, we'd pick out two or three, and I'll tell you why in a minute. Then, we'd go back, and then, they would do whatever they did, and then, we'd execute the mission, maybe in the next day or two. We wouldn't do it right away. You wouldn't want to recon something, and then, [attack], because, if there were bad guys out there, they'd know you were coming. … Whatever the … timing was, two or three days later, we'd go out and insert the team. … One of the things we would do is, we'd pick out maybe two or three landing sites and we would land in all three of them, but, … obviously, the Ranger team would only get off in one, so that they couldn't really tell, you know. It was a little confusing to the bad guys. … Yes, that was our responsibility, was putting these guys [in], reconning for them, to find out where we could put them in, in whatever area they were going to work. If they got into contact, we'd have to go out and rescue them, because four, five guys, they didn't have a lot. You know, they couldn't sustain a combat operation night and day. We pulled them out at night. We pulled them out during the day if they got into contact with the enemy, or [at] the end of the tour. … The mission was usually three or four days of reconnaissance. They'd go out there and they'd monitor trails. They'd sneak around--maybe they'd find documents, maybe they'd shoot a guy and they'd take stuff, or whatever it was. One time they had a prisoner. We went out and got them. They had a POW. That was rare, but I did fly a mission where they had an enemy soldier they had taken, and that's how they operated.

SH: Was this a typical mission? What was a typical mission like for you?

JP: Well, we had responsibility for the Rangers. Our primary responsibility was moving our own infantry platoon. I was the lift platoon leader after a while.

SH: What is a lift platoon leader?

JP: … All Air Cavalry troops were configured, in Vietnam, pretty much the same. You had the gun platoon, which was either your Charlie or Mike model gunships, or, later on, the Cobras, you had the scout platoon, which was the OH-6--we called them Loaches, was a scout aircraft--and you had the Huey section, which was six Hueys we had, and then, you had this ground platoon, okay. … What would happen is, the scout birds and the gunship would go out on a team called a "Pink Team," and they would go out, and then, if they found something, like if they discovered a bunker complex or they shot some guys up, then, we would decide whether or not to put the infantry guys in to develop the situation. So, if we were going to put in these [men], our own infantry--it was only a platoon of guys--then, that would be our responsibility, to fly them into the LZ, put them in, and they, generally, typically, would not stay overnight. … We put them in, they'd [do] whatever they did, you know, do whatever the mission was, and we'd pull them out.

SH: You would have to go back and get them.

JP: Right. … Well, the way it was worked is, we were based at Phuoc Vinh, but our Charlie Troop, my unit's area of operation, was up in the Song [Nga] Bay area, which was maybe fifteen, twenty miles north of Phuoc Vinh. So, what we would do is, we would take the Blue Platoon

and the lift section and we'd fly up to the other base, … early in the morning, and we'd just sit there and wait. … What we would be doing is waiting in case the scout [element], the teams that were … doing the reconnaissance, would find something or more. A lot of times, too, they were shot down. A scout ship would be shot down and we were the rescue, you know, the ready reaction force. [At] that point, we would simply get on the helicopter, take them out there and go right into the crash site and try to save the crews and get the aircraft out of whatever we were doing. So, that was our primary mission, was our own guys. Secondary mission was the Rangers. Tertiary mission, I would say, would be the sniffer missions we talked about, and I also had a lot of special missions. I ran gas missions a few times. A gas mission is [when] we'd take a fifty-five-gallon drum of CN [phenacyl chloride]--CN is a tear gas, but there's two kinds of tear gas, CS [2-chlorobenzalmalononitrile], CN. CS is the kind of stuff the police use, where … it doesn't hurt you. You cry and it hurts your eyes, but it doesn't [incapacitate you]. CN is real nasty stuff. It's a persistent agent. It's really, really, really bad tear gas. It's not lethal, but it's awful stuff, and we would take it and put it in a fifty-five-gallon drum with an explosive inside it, and then, I would sling load it beneath my helicopter. … We'd have a gunship with us. We'd find a tree line that looked promising, where we might think the bad guys are, and … I'd punch it off and drop this thing like a bomb into the trees, tree line. … Then, the Cobra, after a few minutes, would go in and shoot up the area, just in case any guy was running around or anything like that. I didn't do that very much. … I think it was more experimental than a common mission. I also had a mission [where] we put the dogs in. The tracking dogs, we had [them]--they were at Phuoc Vinh with us--and, once [in a while], not a lot, but we'd take the black labs [Labrador retrievers] in, and they had a special [designation], like the Rangers. It was their own unit, the reconnaissance dogs. … We would insert them every now and then, and would do special missions. I did a recovery of an Air Force jet that had crashed and we put an Air Force team in there to see [the crash], to recover the remains, whatever. It was right in the middle of the jungle. They couldn't get in any other way, so, we had to put them in [with] ropes, you know.

SH: Really?

JP: Yes, we called it McGuire rigging, rappelling in, where they rappel in, and then, … when we pulled them out, that rope's called a McGuire rig. I don't know where that name [comes from]. Anyway, we'd McGuire rig them out, pull them out of the jungle, and leave them underneath that helicopter and flying them back to where we could land them. Yes, I've done that any number of times. I did a mission where the Cambodians were complaining to the American Government that Agent Orange was drifting over Vietnam and into Cambodia and destroying their crops. So, they sent these guys from Washington out and I had to take them in my helicopter with a pair of special binoculars, gyroscopically-controlled binoculars. … I flew them up along the Cambodian-Vietnam border and they were just looking to see if that … in fact had happened. We got a lot of special missions.

PL: What was it like to fly at night in Vietnam?

JP: Flying at night; … we didn't have NVG, which means night vision goggles. … You had to … pay attention all the time. It was difficult at best. We did it a lot. It was dangerous.

SH: Do you remember the first time you came under enemy fire?

JP: Well, the first, my first mission, one of my first missions, we were putting in the "Blues," [Blue Platoon], I guess. I'm trying to remember--I was in the right seat, okay. … Most helicopters you see in the pictures, the crew chief and the door gunner are sitting in the back of the helicopter with their machine-guns in the back. This particular helicopter, the crew chief and the door gunner had moved the machine-guns to right behind the copilot and the pilot. They were sitting right behind us. Okay, I was on the right, [the] aircraft commander on the left, the crew chief and the door gunners were right behind us. … They had their M60s [machine guns] on a bungee cord, which is like a stretchy cord. … For some reason, they had rigged it that way this day, and we were going into this LZ and I was the new guy--I wasn't flying, I was just sitting there, didn't know what was going on. … The gunships were firing rockets into the LZ, to prep the LZ, and next thing I know [is] that they said, "We're going in hot," which meant that the machine-gunners would open up. … These guys were firing … their machine-guns, but they were right behind us and the hot brass--the ejected rounds coming out of the machine-[gun]--were banging on my helmet, going down my flight suit. I was scared. [laughter] I didn't know what [was happening]. I don't know how scared I was. I didn't know what the hell was going on at that point. I mean, it was nerve-wracking, but, yes, that was the first time. I was pretty lucky. I mean, I didn't really [get hurt]. I crashed a couple times, due to the combat situation, not necessarily being shot down. I got caught in weather a lot at night. …

SH: Please, elaborate.

JP: They had a LRRP team in contact. It was at night. It was a rainy night and … nobody was flying, because the weather was so bad. … We couldn't fly instruments over there, because … our helicopters didn't have the proper instrumentation. Anyway, I remember, for some reason, the LRRP lieutenant came into the club, and I was not inebriated at the time, for whatever reason. Most everybody else was, because they knew we weren't going to be flying, and he peeked [in] and he got me and we went down to the commanding officer of my unit. He never frequented the club, so, he wasn't drinking. So, he and I and a crew went out to find these Rangers. … We got out there--and it was monsoon season and the monsoons are like rainstorms, intermittent rainstorms--and they were in and out and we were having problems. We couldn't fly in it. We'd get caught in weather. … The Commander was flying and we had a flare ship out there to light the area up and the flare went off and we were [going down]. He had vertigo. He was going right into the ground when I pulled it out, just before we went into the ground. Finally, we pulled these guys up out of the jungle, on those McGuire rigs, okay, but we couldn't land anywhere. We were out in the middle of nowhere. So, they were hanging beneath my helicopter and we were flying them back to Phuoc Vinh and we got caught in another rainstorm and the flare ship dropped a flare. … They didn't see us, we didn't see them, and it went off almost right in front of us. We were blinded for a while, for a few seconds, but we managed to get them back in one piece. … So, yes, it was exciting. [laughter]

SH: Are there any other missions that stand out?

JP: That one, I think, was one of my most [memorable], was the most dangerous, had the most potential, I think, for catastrophe written all over it, yes. Can you imagine … if we'd have run

into that flare ship? We would have lost our aircraft, the flare ship aircraft and those six guys that were hanging underneath me. … I had the four guys in my helicopter, I had the LRRP lieutenant, who was talking to the guys on the ground with his radio--he was the guy controlling the guys on the ground. He was in my aircraft. I mean, it would have been pretty bad. This LRRP lieutenant that was onboard went on to medical school when he returned home. He served as a doctor in the Army--stayed in and retired.

SH: There was a heated, ongoing political debate regarding our participation in the war while you were in Vietnam. Was it possible for you to stay neutral?

JP: Well, I mean, you don't lose your opinion just because you're in the Army. I can remember sitting, talking to some of the other guys and saying, you know, "Jesus, if we were to wall this country off, bulldoze everything, … you know, what would we accomplish?" I mean, in Vietnam there were no significant resources. The only thing there was the Michelin rubber plantation. [Editor's Note: Michelin, a French company best known for their rubber products, operated rubber plantations in Indochina when the region was still a French colony.] I don't think we had a shortage of tires. There was no silver. I mean there was nothing that you'd normally [fight over]. It was a war over an idea, … of stopping Communism. … It's not like you were fighting [for resources]. We didn't need the bases, we didn't need … any of the things that was produced in that country. It wasn't, you know, like that. So, it was, you know, a war--we look at it as a war against Communism. … I mean, I can't speak for everybody over there. I believed in what we were doing, most pilots did. I had no problem with it. Korea is a good example. Contrast the communist North to the free South.

SH: I wanted to ask about that.

JP: Yes.

SH: Do you think other people felt as you did towards the war?

JP: The overwhelming majority. … The people who liked it the least were the draftees. I mean, kids today don't understand what it means to be forced into military service. They don't have that frame of reference anymore. … To my mind, the best thing that happened out of Vietnam was the advent of the all-volunteer Army, okay, because that's why there's no large anti-war movement in this country today. You always had anti-war people in this country. … Starting with the Tories [during the American Revolution] and working your way forward, there was always people who didn't like war, okay, but, back in the Vietnam days, when you added in … the draft, now, … you could go to any college campus, you send an activist, and you could get yourself an army of students going, like Kent State, for instance. [Editor's Note: Mr. Pressman is alluding to the May 4, 1970 Kent State shootings, in which members of the Ohio National Guard killed four students and wounded nine others.] … Then, you had your parents, the parents of all the [potential draftees]. I mean, you had an enormous reservoir to work with for anti-war activities out of the Vietnam War because of the draft. Take away the draft and, now, you have parents whose kids don't have to serve if they don't want to, and the kids in college, their primary concern is their next beer, not the next life. [laughter] I mean, so, the anti-war movement, I think, has been toned down significantly, although, I mean, you still have the people. There's no

question about it, but … you don't see revolutions on college campuses anymore or people in the streets or taking over a building, all that business that happened … during the Vietnam War, because there's no draft. I think that's a good thing.

SH: While you were in Vietnam, did you hear about anti-war activities occurring in the United States?

JP: Oh, you know, you would hear about it. [You would] be so busy, you know. You're so busy doing your job and trying to stay alive that …

SH: Do you recall media coverage of the war?

JP: Yes. … I don't remember anybody ever [visiting us], you know, any kind of press coming to [our base], when I was there, anyway, doing any kind of thing like that. I mean, … Bob Hope was there. I didn't get to see him, but some of our guys got to see him. He was close by. Tarzan came to our unit and rappelled out of one [of] our [helicopters]. Ron Ely, I think, was Tarzan at the time, and he came to our unit and we let him rappel out of one of our helicopters. [laughter]

SH: Were you involved with any PR in your unit?

JP: … The First Cavalry Division had their own [press]. We had our own newspaper, you know, called *The Cavalier*. … It was always, you know, positive press, obviously because it was coming out of the military. … Again, I mean, … our unit, a helicopter unit, like ours, was mostly officers--there are enlisted--and most everybody in our unit were volunteers. Even if you were drafted as an enlisted man, if you wanted to come to our unit, you had to volunteer to be a crew chief or a door gunner, okay. … Some were assigned, you know, out of the pool, but most, a lot of guys, came over from other units, so that they even [chose that].

SH: Really?

JP: Yes. So, we didn't have a lot of problems--you know, anti-war--within our own units, problems like that. Most of the guys were [good], and you really had to be up on it. If you're [in] aviation, between maintenance and everything that was going on you had to really do your job, if you wanted to stay alive.

PL: How was the mail service while you were in Vietnam?

JP: … We got mail pretty regular. It was no problem. … It was free. You could mail [for free]. … I don't know if you knew that--anybody ever tell you that? You could mail [for free]. … Instead of a stamp, you would write your APO number on where the stamp would go and you'd put it in the mailbox. We had … a mailroom and we could mail stuff home for free.

PL: Was there any censorship of the mail?

JP: No, not that I know of. I have all my [letters]. My wife saved all her letters from me--nothing was censored. A lot of what we did was--I mean, I know it sounds arcane to people, you

know, kids today, with their e-mails and cell phones [laughter]--we used to do reel-to-reel tapes. You would tape …

SH: Right.

JP: And then, you would mail the tape home and they would [play it], you know, and so, … I've saved all of those, too. So, yes, … it's sort of a historical record, but, yes, that's how we communicated. I think I phoned home maybe two or three times. You had to go to Saigon. … It was a USO office and was like a radio phone. … Maybe two or three times, I was able to get there to call home, but it was all done with letters and those tape recorders, reel-to-reel tape recorders.

SH: I do remember them well.

JP: Yes. [laughter]

PL: I remember the cassette tapes.

SH: Were there soldiers who could not make the adjustment from civilian to Army life?

JP: Well, I mean, … always, in any situation, you'd have some problems with some enlisted men. You had drugs, not a lot, but you'd [have some].

SH: Were drugs a problem?

JP: Not as bad as probably in some of the other units, because, when you're in a flight unit, drugs are--[laughter] you know, you didn't want to be flying or doing maintenance and doing the things that would kill you while you were under the influence of something, … but they were there. They were.

SH: Because your life depends on the maintenance crew.

JP: Yes, yes, making sure that the aircraft is [in top condition]. I mean, it's bad enough people are trying to shoot you down--you didn't want something to fall off, you know, because of poor maintenance. … We had a guy; … the enlisted guys were [playing a game]. We had an incident where they were playing quick draw, and the guy drew his pistol, a forty-five-caliber pistol, and cocked it. … They were playing and he put it back in the holster, forgot he had it cocked, and, the next time he drew it, it went off, shot one of our guys. … I remember, when we went down to the hospital to see him--he had to be medivaced--he was shot in the abdomen. … The bullet went around inside him and tore up his diaphragm and hit his spine, and so, … he was really messed up. So, we went down to see this kid. So, you have incidents like that. We didn't really have--I mean, they talked about things like "fragging" [the killing of officers by their own men] in Vietnam, you know. We never had incidents like that. … We worked well. We were close-knit. We flew together. When we weren't flying, we hung around the airplane together. We ate together; … when we were in the field, not back at the base. So, we were sort of, like, a little mini-fraternity, would be the best way to put it, and officer, enlisted--once you were out there

flying, it didn't really [matter]. We didn't have any kind of serious, serious problems with draftees and people trying to hurt officers or stuff like that, not in that unit.

SH: Did you have a call sign or nickname?

JP: I had my call [sign]. My official call sign was "Cavalier 3-9," was my call sign. I had two other, nicknames, call signs, I'd guess you'd call it. One was "Cavalier Jungle," because, when I first got to Vietnam, I was in the [ground platoon], on the ground for about four or five weeks, learning to be the platoon leader. I went to jungle survival school, so, they called me "Cavalier Jungle," and the other one was "Cavalier Jew," because there was very few Jewish guys over there. I was, like, the only one. [laughter] So, they would use that, not a lot, but, yes, that was … my two nicknames, "Cavalier Jungle" and "Cavalier Jew," and my call sign actually was "Cavalier 3-9."

SH: Why did you switch roles in your unit?

JP: Well, yes, well, what happened was, we had taken some casualties and they needed pilots. So, they put me back in the cockpit and they assigned somebody else to do that job. So, they needed me more as a pilot. Actually, when I went over there, … I had a medical grounding. I couldn't fly for, like, four or five weeks, and when I got off the medical grounding, they needed pilots, because they had lost some pilots--either some went home, some were killed, whatever. … They put me into a cockpit.

SH: How long did it take you to become an aircraft commander?

JP: Oh, not exactly sure, but I want to say three months, maybe. I can remember exactly how it happened. We were sitting in our hooch and we had a downed [aircraft]. Somebody crashed and we were running. Somebody crashed, one of our guys. We were the ready reaction force to rescue them, like I said. So, they ring a bell. Each hooch had a bell in it, and the guy in the headquarters, in the tactical operations center, would ring the bell and we'd all just … run to our airplanes, get in it, take off, and then, … they'd tell us where to go and where to pick up [survivors], where the crash was, or whatever. … I remember running down to the helicopter and … I wasn't the section leader then, I was just a copilot. The guy says to me, my platoon leader said to me, "We're out of aircraft commanders. You're now an aircraft commander." So, I was promoted on the run and, from that day forward, I flew in the left seat. [laughter] That's true.

SH: How often did you have to rescue downed aircraft?

JP: It was frequent, I would say. I mean, we lost [many aircraft], because of the nature of the work--the scout pilots. It wasn't always somebody being shot down, or, sometimes, people crashed, you know, made a mistake, crashed, could be any number of things, but it was [on a] fairly regular basis, yes--not every day, but we took some significant loses over time.

SH: As you became more experienced, did you try to pass what you learned on to the new members of your unit?

JP: Well, yes, when I became an aircraft commander, I would fly with a copilot and I would teach him. … In August of '69, a new guy came in, and I had acquired my own room, like I talked about. This guy came in and he lived with me as my roommate … until I left, the following March. It was August, I left in March the next year. … He and I became really good friends, and stayed friends for the rest of our lives. He recently died. [As a] matter-of-fact, … two weeks ago, he was buried in Arlington--full military honors--he and another guy from my unit. They were buried on the same day. So, that's why I couldn't come in before, because I was down at Arlington.

SH: You had said you were down in Arlington.

JP: Yes, … that was my roommate, and he had gotten pancreatic cancer, fought it for a year, but didn't survive.

PL: How close was the relationship between the flight crew and the mechanics?

JP: Well, it was close, because our mission, a lot of our missions, required that. For instance, on a single-ship mission, if you were going into a very small LZ, landing zone, okay, what would happen is, once we'd get close to the ground, the crew chief and the door gunner might either get on their bellies and lean out the aircraft, or at least hang out the window, and … talk to you about, you know, "Move your tail to the left," … because you'd almost, similarly, like, screw yourself into this LZ, because … we were working, always, in tight spaces. … The Rangers would always be in a little clearing, or whatever. It was always tight, and so, yes, we really worked well together, and we had very little, you know, problems with these guys. We'd all get along. It was not as formal, maybe, as maybe some other kind of unit.

SH: While you were in Vietnam, was it safe to visit Saigon?

JP: It was safe. This was after Tet of '68. [Editor's Note: The Tet Offensive of 1968, in which every major city in South Vietnam was attacked by the Vietcong, is seen as the point when American public opinion began turning against the war.] I remember taking a jeep ride from Bien Hoa to Saigon, going over the Newport Bridge. Newport Bridge was--anybody who was over there in that area knows what the Newport Bridge was. Later on, at the end of the war, … on TV, you could see the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] tanks coming over the Newport Bridge, okay, but, anyway, I remember driving down there to Saigon in a jeep. I … forget what I was doing, … or we'd fly in, and you could carry your weapon, but you didn't really need it. It was like any big town. It was pretty, you know, hustle-bustle. … They called Saigon "The Paris of the Orient." It was hustle-bustle, but it was all Vietnamese style--no incidents that I [recall], when I was in town, about any kind of fragging or booby-traps, anything like that. It was fairly safe. I remember that.

SH: Were you always armed?

JP: Yes. Well, "armed," if you want to call a thirty-eight-caliber pistol being armed. [laughter]

SH: That is true.

JP: I don't know if that qualifies, but, yes.

SH: Were there any inspections of your unit?

JP: Well, you had typical military inspections. CMMI [Command Maintenance Management Inspection] was one of them, called a command maintenance inspection, something, where somebody from the division would come in and look at you, you know--yes, nothing. They made us clean up our rooms every now and then, [laughter] … but nothing significant in that area.

SH: Did your father-in-law give you any advice?

JP: My father-in-law? no, not really.

SH: Because of his military service.

JP: No, except he did tell me not to try to be a hero.

SH: He was in World War II and Korea.

JP: … Yes, he was in World War II and Korea. He was an engineer officer. … It's funny--he had built the airfields at Fort Wolters and Fort Rucker. … So, when I married my wife, we … sort of went back in her childhood, because she had lived at Fort Wolters when she was a child. We went there. She'd lived at Fort Rucker when she was a child and we went there. … So, yes, it was interesting, but he, interesting, … was on Eniwetok Island. I don't know if you know what Eniwetok was or not. … I think that's where they did nuclear tests, A-bomb tests. … He had contracted cancer very young, at fifty-seven, I think it was, … and passed away, and so, we don't know if that was the cause, but we've always suspected. He was all over the Pacific in WWII--Philippines, Okinawa, and other places. He spend a year in Korea, also. He was a great guy and a self-made man--LTC Kenneth N. Holmberg.

SH: They did not know about the effects of radiation.

JP: Yes, yes. …

SH: Were you aware of the dangers of Agent Orange? You had mentioned previously that the Cambodians had lodged complaints about it.

JP: We didn't know that it was dangerous, that [it] caused the health problems that they discovered years later. We knew it was nasty stuff because … it was a chemical that killed. [laughter] I mean, you didn't have to extrapolate too far to know if it would kill living things, you know, if you want to count yourself as a living thing, but … we didn't realize the consequences of it, I don't think. I've seen it employed. I saw the Air Force, you know, put it in. They used to drop it from C-123s [Provider], I think, and you would see the stuff coming out the back. When

it came out, though, I don't know whether they called it Agent Orange or it looked orangey when it came out of the airplane. … I remember seeing it employed and I've seen the effects of it.

SH: Really?

JP: Yes, but, I mean, the effects on the vegetation, not on human beings, but we didn't really know it was a carcinogen until, you know, later on.

SH: As a pilot, were there some tactics that you employed that you feel may have been ineffective at the time?

JP: No. Everything we did was tried and true, you know. We knew exactly what to do to decrease the possibility of being shot out of the air, you know.

SH: Did you have to report body counts?

JP: I'll tell you an interesting story. When I first reported to the First of the Ninth, we--myself and the two other guys that were assigned--went to the squadron commander's office, not my troop commander, the guy that--the squadron commander--that was the next higher headquarters. … His name was Colonel Peterson. He was a strange individual, as I remember, but he said to us, the three of us, that, "Here in the First of the Ninth, we don't give a body count unless we can land our helicopters, get out and step on their heads," which caught my interest, as a new guy. Body counts were obviously exaggerated over there, but it wasn't necessarily. We were never told to exaggerate that kind of thing. We pretty much reported the truth. Because we were a reconnaissance unit, it was critical that we reported what we saw and not what we'd like. … Now, once it … went from squadron up to the division, whether or not somebody was padding their résumé, I couldn't answer that. I'd hope not, but you don't know, but we didn't pad our résumés by body counts--at least, you know, it didn't [seem to be the case], not that I ever knew of.

SH: Did your feelings change towards President Johnson now that he was your Commander-in-Chief?

JP: I'll tell you, one of the things that changed [the war in] Vietnam, as far as I was concerned, was the My Lai Massacre, okay. [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.]

SH: You heard about what happened right away.

JP: Yes. We--let's see, how can I put this? I had an incident after the My Lai Massacre. The word got out and all that, because it happened before I was there, but it took awhile before it broke in the news. … We had an incident where a Ranger team had come in off a patrol and … they were talking about mutilating a body. The guy was already dead, a dead soldier. They had mutilated it, cut off a body part--maybe an ear--you know, as sending a message. The word went up the chain of command and I was randomly pulled out of the line with another guy, and we had

to fly back to that area. This was a hot area, and they wanted to find the body, to see if it was [mutilated, that it] actually happened, and then, they were going to prosecute these guys for mutilation of a body. … What happened was, I had MPs on the airplane with me, I had CID, which was--CID is a military version of the FBI, I guess would be the best way of [putting it], Criminal Investigation Division. These were the detectives and we had some of them on the airplane. We went back in. … I remember it because, that particular mission, … my aircraft crashed on that mission. We were going back into this same LZ that we pulled them out of, and it really wasn't a two-ship LZ, but, when I came over the LZ, there was a guy right behind, another helicopter right behind me. … I knew if I didn't do something, he was going to fly right into me. So, I moved up to the front and I ran out of power before … I landed and hit the ground. … It broke the skid, it punched its chin bubbles out, whatever, but the other guy got in okay. So, I was able to fly it out, and then, later on, land it. … The body had [been removed]. The NVA didn't leave bodies laying around. They pulled them out. They pulled him away and buried him. So, they could never find that body. So, nothing was made of it, but I just thought it was interesting that they would take me out of the line--away from my regular missions--to go back there to see if [the body was mutilated, because] somebody said something. I mean, it was a total waste if time and effort. Before, nobody would have done anything, nobody would have cared. Now, everybody was sensitized to atrocities, if you want to call it that. To me, doing something to a dead body is not necessarily an atrocity. If he was alive, yes, … you'd have a problem. … So, yes, the My Lai event changed things.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: This is interesting.

JP: [laughter] That's what my wife would say, anyway; go ahead.

SH: Did you have any personal interactions with the South Vietnamese population?

JP: Okay, … on our base, we did not have what were called "hooch maids," okay. Some of the people, a lot of them, maybe, had women that worked on their base that would do the laundry, that would live--actually, sometimes, would live right in there--and they'd shine your shoes, they'd do a lot of things, but we had a civilian workforce there that did things like fill sandbags. We had laundry service. We sent it out and it came back. … I don't know exactly where it went, … and they would do that. … For a time, we were allowed to go downtown after [duty], if we weren't working. Downtown, they had bars, restaurants of sorts, and they had a market down there where you could buy food, French bread, different things. It was dirt roads. It was, you know, not what you'd think of as a town today, but it was Vietnamese. It was a relatively substantial town in comparison, … but, after a time, for some reason, they wouldn't let us go downtown anymore. So, after that happened, we really didn't have a lot of interface with the Vietnamese population.

SH: Do you know why they stopped letting you go?

JP: I don't know, maybe there were some incidents. … The Vietnamese soldiers would always have, like, shootouts down there. They'd shoot, like duels and stuff. I mean, it was like [laughter] the Wild West sometime, yes.

SH: What were your impressions of the South Vietnamese Army?

JP: We had some missions with them, not a lot. … Ninety-five percent, ninety-seven percent, … of our missions were in-house, what I would call "in-house." … Some of the assault battalions and other helicopter units would take the Vietnamese Army units here and there. They were around. It was like--I remember seeing them up at Song Bay. … [laughter] It was more like a Boy Scout jamboree than a military operation. There were some good Vietnamese military units. The South Vietnamese Rangers, South Vietnamese Airborne were very good units. The regular, what you'd call regular Army units, "straight-leg," [a pejorative term for ground soldiers used by airborne soldiers], whatever you want to call them, were not very well disciplined. … I remember, we did a couple--I personally--with, well, some of our other guys, put in some Vietnamese troops. I forget why. I mean, it was a highly [rare occurrence]. It was once or twice, maybe. They came out with a program called--it was in Vietnamese, two Vietnamese words which escape me, but it meant, "Working together," "(*tan tian*?)." I forget what the Vietnamese words were, and we were supposed to be working [with them], giving [them training], like today, with the United States Army training the Iraqi Army to take over. We were, theoretically, trying to get the Vietnamese to, … you know, take over. … Now, you're in 1970 and they're trying to … wind it down--never really worked out very well. The regular soldiers weren't really very good. The Airborne and the Rangers were more professional.

SH: What about other programs to win the "hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese?

JP: Well …

SH: Were you involved in any of those?

JP: No, no. … My unit, we were strictly in combat operations. We really didn't get involved with that kind of thing.

SH: Did you have any contact with soldiers from countries allied with the United States while serving in Vietnam?

JP: Well, not in our area, but … there were Philippine units there. Up north, there was the [South] Korean Tiger Division and White Horse Division. … The North Vietnamese didn't mess with the Koreans. Koreans [were] pretty brutal people. I mean, they didn't operate under the same rules that we did.

SH: Really?

JP: So, I mean, you had Australians there. We ran into some Australian guys. They had the British, the Canberra, bombers I saw operating out there. I mean, there was a smattering of a lot of different things there.

SH: Did you receive R&R [rest and relaxation] after a certain period of service in Vietnam?

JP: … You were entitled to one R&R, which was, I believe, a week, eight days, something. … Of course, the married guys, like myself, we went to Hawaii. I went to Hawaii to meet my wife. However, that was in--see, I got there in March, April, probably in October--after about six months, but here's something you probably won't hear. We had "turn back R&Rs" in the First Cavalry Division. "Turn back R&R" was, they had so many slots for R&Rs, … if they weren't used, you could get one, another R&R. I, in fact, had three R&Rs, one in Hawaii, to see my wife, and then, … I went twice to Taipei.

SH: Really?

JP: In Taiwan, yes, "turn back R&R."

PL: How was Taipei?

JP: I liked it. … Back then, it was a big city, you know, was … probably the same as many big cities. … People were very friendly, the Chinese, you know, Taiwanese. They were American allies; … wasn't the Red Chinese, that's for sure. [laughter] No, they were [nice], you know, and it was really interesting. I really enjoyed it. … I remember, they had a Chinese circus there. It was in a building, like a ten-story building, and every floor had a different act, acrobats, you know. … Then, of course, there was a lot of drinking and partying going on. … One time, I went with my roommate. He and I … got to go together. So, we had a good time on R&R in Taipei.

SH: Was it hard to return to Vietnam after your R&R?

JP: To go back? I wasn't real thrilled leaving Hawaii. [laughter] It was a long flight and I can remember being, you know, not real happy about it, going [back], after being with my [wife], you know.

SH: Was it hard to readjust once you got back to your unit?

JP: Not really, no. You go right back to work. It's … no big deal. … When I went on the next one, and when you get close to the end of your tour, any time out of country is good. [laughter] …

SH: Did you become superstitious about certain things?

JP: You try to stay away from any [hazards], you know. … You get assigned your missions, but there are things you could do to really stay away from some of the more dangerous things. I mean, as I got closer to the end, I tried to be more careful, more selective about my missions, but there were guys that were killed that were what we called "short," you know, within a week or two of going home. So, you really couldn't get away, couldn't get out of doing [your duty]. You

had to do your job. You really did. I mean, there were certain things you might be able to do, but … you had to take your missions right up to the end.

SH: How did your unit recover wounded or killed soldiers?

JP: Well, no, … if we're pulling out people that are still alive, we would simply fly them to the nearest hospital, … could have been, depending where we are, at Phuoc Vinh, had [the] 15th Med there. We'd fly them there. You had the 93rd Evac in Long Binh. You had a hospital in Lai Khe, which was fairly close by, or you could take them to the nearest aid [station]. Every fire support base had an aid station. So, if they were dead--we really, I never really, pulled out any, you know, what they called (line ones?) or people that were KIA--they would send somebody else out there to bag them and take them.

SH: Are there any other parts of your Vietnam service that we have not covered?

JP: Well, I mean, you kept trying to get at me at the political [aspect], you know, what we thought of the war and all that. Now that I look back on it, I mean, we lost the war politically, not … because we didn't have enough men, materiel. We had five hundred thousand guys in Vietnam. … We've got Afghanistan and Iraq today--you've got less than two hundred thousand. In Vietnam, which is probably a smaller geographic area, we had five hundred thousand guys. … We had the Navy. We had the Battleship [USS] *New Jersey* hanging around. We had strategic air. We had B-52 strikes. We had tactical air. We had airfields in U-Tapao. … I mean, we had everything going on there, okay, and the reason we lost was because [of] the politicians, [and] the persistence of the North Vietnamese. I mean, obviously, … they waited us out, but, … I mean, once we were gone, they walked over the [South Vietnamese]. You know, they just took over the country. … What people don't realize is the real killing over in that part of the world didn't really start until after we left--the death, you know, whatever they called it, in Cambodia. [Editor's Note: The "Killing Fields" are the mass graves in Cambodia where millions of people were killed and buried by the Khmer Rouge regime that came to power in 1975.] Fifty-eight thousand Americans were killed, God knows how many Vietnamese and, you know, civilians and whatnot were killed, and then, you had the enemy soldiers in North Vietnam. That was probably nothing compared to … the murdering that went on after we left. People, the anti-war types, they kind of overlook that part of what happened.

SH: The Khmer Rouge.

JP: Yes, right, [the] killing fields, is that what [it] is? Yes. So, you know, you have to look at [that]. You look at things in a historical context. You look at, in Korea, okay, same thing, we had a North and a South. The South was on our side, North was against us. We didn't finish that--look what we've got today. We've still got the same situation, only they're going to be nuclear. They're nuclear armed now in the North. So, you've got a horrendous problem there. First Iraq War, we stopped short of Baghdad, and was that good or bad? I don't know, but we had to go back and finish the job. So, now, Vietnam, you know, we pulled out, they took over. There was all those massacres and everything. The press never covered that. Now, all these years later, you're getting a little bit--it's more normal. I mean, it's sort of like they're becoming almost--even though the North Vietnamese government or the Communist government is in the

whole country, we're allies again, sort of like Japan and Germany. So, you know, it's interesting, you know, when you look at it historically.

SH: Have you ever thought of going back to Vietnam?

JP: Yes. A guy that I served with runs a company that takes you back to Vietnam. That's his business now, and you go back to where you were stationed. You can also go [elsewhere]--like, I never was in Hue, you know, or some of the other famous areas. I never was up at Khe Sanh. … I was strictly [there], stayed in my area, and, you know, I'd be interested in going back, seeing what's there in Phuoc Vinh, where I was stationed, and some of the other places I was--haven't done it yet, but I'm thinking about it.

SH: You talked about staying in contact with fellow soldiers and having to attend the funeral services for two of your comrades.

JP: Yes, they buried both guys on the same day in Arlington.

SH: Have you gone to reunions?

JP: All the time. Yes, I belong to any number of veterans' organizations--too many to be effective, I think. … Locally, I belong to the Vietnam Veterans of America in Union County. So, I work there. I belong to the VHPA, which is the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, which is an organization just of pilots, no crew chiefs, no door gunners. They have their own organization. They have the reunions I go to. I belong to the First Cavalry Division. They have their alumni association and I go to their reunions periodically. … Then, my unit in Vietnam, the First of the Ninth, has their own reunions every other year. It's called the Bullwhip Squadron, and the reason they call it that is because that was their call sign when they first went over. … I go to those every other year. … Most of the time, they're held at Fort Rucker. This time, they're having it at Fort Benning, because they were … originally formed up at Fort Benning, years ago, in '65. So, yes, I participate. I belong to the VFW, although I don't participate. I belong to the American Legion, although I don't go to their meetings. It's just too much. There are too many organizations, but, … in the local one, I'm on the board of directors, and so, in the other ones, I go to their reunions and all that and I enjoy it. …

SH: When you returned to the United States from Vietnam, you were still in the service.

JP: Here's what happened to me. I served three years, two months, nineteen days, okay, but who's counting, right? [laughter] Okay, at the end there, in '71, when I … still had time left on my commitment, however, they were having a draw down, okay, … they had too many pilots, too many. … So, I was released early. So, when that happened; … after I left Vietnam, I went back to Fort Wolters, Texas, to be an instructor pilot, okay, went there for a year, was released from active duty, went back to New Jersey and joined the National Guard. I went back to--I lived in Rahway then, now, I live in Clark--but I … went back home, went to work for my family's business, Rahway Lumber Company, and I did that … until we closed. About thirty years, I worked there, until the business was sold.

SH: Really?

JP: Yes, and when I returned to New Jersey, I joined the National Guard in Westfield. Strangely enough, they had an Air Cavalry unit in Westfield. Helicopters were at Linden Airport. So, I flew there for another six years. Then, I left the service, left the National Guard, and went back to school, back to college, strange place called Rutgers University, to get my MBA, which I did on the GI Bill. So, I went four years to Newark at night, while I was working. Then, after I finished, got my MBA, I went back into the service, but I wasn't flying anymore, … no longer on flight status. … I served in a unit at Fort Dix for a number of years. … Then, I developed a case of cancer and couldn't keep up, so, I had to drop out. … I served in the active Army, I served in the National Guard, went to school on the GI Bill for my master's program, and then, continued on [in] the Army Reserve. It was actually at Fort Dix. I was there for a number of years, and then, finally, had to leave. So, that's … what happened after I went back.

SH: How many years did you have in the Reserve?

JP: I had about ten or twelve years in, but I couldn't [stay in]. I wanted to stay, if I could, but, medically, I couldn't do it.

SH: You were given a military medical discharge.

JP: No, I just had to leave, but I enjoyed it. I mean, I loved it. I would have stayed. If I had to do it all over again, I probably would have stayed in the Army, as a pilot, if I could.

SH: Could you tell us about your current affiliation with Rutgers?

JP: Well, like I said, I got my bachelor's, and then, I have my master's, MBA, at Rutgers, and then, I went to a meeting down here at the Rutgers Club in New Brunswick. I forget how I was [invited]. … I don't remember. I got a letter. It looked like a free dinner, okay. [laughter] So, anything you get free from Rutgers, you want to take it. So, anyway, I went over here to the Rutgers Club. … It was the Rutgers School of Business Alumni Association and they were looking for trustees. So, I signed up. So, I served on their Board of Trustees for the School of Business Alumni Association, up until the time that our friend Dr. McCormick decided to change the alumni situation here at Rutgers and we had no more affinity groups. It was all one big, happy family, the RU--something or other--AA, whatever they changed it to. … They changed the nature of the organizations, and so, I decided not to be a trustee anymore, but I did it for about fifteen years, I would say. I enjoyed every minute of it. [Editor's Note: In 2007, Rutgers University reorganized its alumni system by creating the Rutgers University Alumni Association, a new association to represent all Rutgers University graduates.]

SH: You are also involved in the mentoring program.

JP: Well, yes, … I do that. That has yet to come to fruition. They're having some problems there. They haven't figured out a way, I think, to meld the mentors and the mentees together. I don't hear positive things about it--not to say it's a bad thing. … They sent us a letter, about giving us some names of students, and you call them and they don't know what you're talking

[about] or they don't want you, they don't need you, whatever. I mean, … so, yes, I think they still have some work to do with that, but I do that, yes.

SH: Did any of your children attend Rutgers?

JP: No, no, [laughter] but my two sons, are crazy, nutty Rutgers football fans, but neither of them went to Rutgers. They have season tickets, spend thousands. I mean, they have six seats. It costs them, I don't know, three, four thousand dollars a year, whatever they overcharge you for football tickets here. …

SH: [laughter] That is true.

JP: But, no, my older son … started off at the Air Force Academy, and then, transferred to Johns Hopkins, and then, went on to get a MBA at Loyola and a law degree at Fordham. My younger son went to Gettysburg College, and then, graduated from there, and then, went to Georgetown Law. …

SH: You have two lawyers.

JP: Two lawyers, yes. My wife … got a teaching degree from Kean University. … After I sold our business, I got a teacher's degree. I got a certificate … to be a social studies teacher. I took the Praxis test. I don't know if you know what that [is], yes, and so, I have a little piece of paper somewhere at home in my desk drawer that says I'm a teacher of social studies. So, I don't teach full-time, I substitute teach. Then, I decided I had nothing else to do, so, I went out and got a real estate license. So, I do dabble in real estate. So, I remember standing in front of a class of high school students, and I was sixty-two or three, and they're complaining about high school. … I held up the book, I said, "I'm taking a test. I'm sixty-three years old. I'm still going to school. Stop complaining." [laughter]

PL: They always complain.

JP: You know, I mean, one of the things, also, … after I got out of the active Army, along with getting my MBA, while I was in these Reserve units, I … took the armor officer advanced course, Command and General Staff College, aviation accident safety course--I took a bunch, you know. I did a lot of schooling over my time.

SH: Was there ever a possibility of you being called to active service?

JP: No, because, during that time; … it's only since the Iraq War where they started to take National Guard and Reserve units and move them wholesale, you know, as units, into the combat theater. In Vietnam, there were no National Guard or Reserve units called up. Individuals could volunteer. In fact, we had one--one of our gun pilots was from the California National Guard--but that was rare. It just didn't work like that back then. They didn't call up whole units. In fact, joining the National Guard, like, you remember with President [George W.] Bush, they were complaining that he joined the National Guard so [that] he didn't have to go to Vietnam. [Editor's Note: President George W. Bush served in the Texas Air National Guard from 1968 to

1974.] They simply … forgot that he was a jet pilot and that he had to go to flight school, had to do a lot of things, you know, but, anyway, … that was one of the things that the Vietnam War was [known for], that … if you could get into a Reserve or National Guard unit, you probably weren't going to go to Vietnam. … I consider it [that] you still served your country. Not everybody, … you know, is destined to go into combat. I mean, it's still an honorable thing to do, even if you thought it might keep you from going to Vietnam, you know what I'm saying? If you sign up, you sign up--that's all. You serve, you serve.

SH: How were you treated when you returned from Vietnam?

JP: You know what? We came back, at least I came back, and a lot of us came [back this way], we didn't come back en masse or in units, like they did at the end of World War II, where they came off the ship and they marched down Fifth Avenue. No, I flew in, you know. I got off the plane in Travis Air Force Base. I quick ran to the airport at San Francisco and took the first plane home. I didn't run into any kind of, you know, virulent anti-war sentiment directed against me personally, okay. I mean, in fact, … the first thing I looked for was a unit to join. I wanted to stay in. So, I went right into the National Guard. … I remember, we didn't have any problems. I remember, we flew our helicopters and landed at Westfield High School, and we landed right in their athletic field, let the kids look at the helicopters. I obviously knew what was going on and, obviously, I was a guy--I was a Vietnam veteran for the war. I mean, I believed in what we were doing one hundred percent and I had no use for, you know, draft dodgers or, you know, civil disobedient types, I guess.

SH: What commendations did you receive?

JP: A bunch. [laughter]

PL: I have the résumé.

JP: You want me to read off my résumé? I know what I got. [laughter]

SH: I saw pictures of you being given medals.

JP: Yes, well, I received three Distinguished Flying Crosses, Air Medal with "V," Army Commendation Medal with "V," Bronze Star, like that--a couple of awards from New Jersey for service, New Jersey Merit Award, New Jersey Distinguished Service Award … with Silver Oak Leaf Cluster. So, you have to figure that one out. [laughter] … Yes, you do these things and that's what happens.

PL: How was it to transition from flying in Vietnam to becoming an instructor for other helicopter pilots?

JP: … It was a challenge. I really enjoyed it. … We flew in these little TH-55 [Osage], Alphas they were called then. It was good work. … One of the funny things is that Fort Wolters was … right outside of Fort Worth. You had Dallas, Fort Worth, Weatherford, Texas, and then, Mineral Wells is out there, okay. … Our heliports were on the military base, but the staging fields--

where we actually did the training--was on public or private, I'm sorry, private land. The Army contracted farmers' pastures and they would fence them off and put a tower in there and we would do our [training]. … We'd pave it for them and we'd have our own airstrips and helipads, and we'd go out to these different--we called them stage fields. … Every morning, one of my jobs was to go out there and herd the cattle, [laughter] because they would open the gates and let the cattle, their cattle, go through in there. I'd have to fly out there with my helicopter and … I'd use the helicopter like a horse, you know, and herd, actually herd, the cattle that were on the stage field off the stage field, land the helicopter, close the gate, then, call the rest of them out to come in and start working. [laughter]

SH: Please, describe the pilots.

JP: … My students were a mix. We had Vietnamese students, but I never had foreign students. … We trained the Air Force helicopter pilots, a little known fact. The Air Force did not have its own helicopter school.

SH: Is this true?

JP: Navy did, Air Force did not. They came to us. Later on, I'm sure that changed, but I had a couple of Air Force guys that I trained. I had a couple of guys from the National Guard. National Guard had flight units and they … had the ability to send some of their guys through flight school. So, I had a couple of National Guard guys, and then, a couple warrant officer candidates--a various mix. They were, you know, pretty good. I mean, you had to have something on the ball to go to flight school. They weren't all college graduates, … like I was ROTC and all that, but a lot of them--you still had to pass the mental test, the physical, you know, [be] physically fit, you know. You had to have the desire to do it and you had to have, you know, the wherewithal. So, most of the guys that went through flight school had something on the ball, I would say.

SH: Thank you for coming. If there is something that we have not asked that you would like to share, please do.

JP: Well, … I mean, I want to say that, you know, when you're in the military, okay, you take the oath to protect and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign or domestic--and, if you're a history major, then, you write me a three-page paper on what constitutes a domestic enemy--but that's the oath, okay. … When you take the oath, … my opinion is, what you're really saying is, "It's my country right or wrong." You really don't take the oath of office and say, "Unless the President is a Republican or a Democrat. Then, I'm not going to do it." You don't get that option, okay, or, "Unless I believe in what's going on or I don't [object]." No, once you take … the oath, then, you've got to go where they send you. … I don't have any sympathy for somebody who joins the service, and then, decides that, "Oh, I think that's an illegal war," you know. You really don't get that option. You hope that [it works out]. You know, our country's set up [where] the politicians say where to fight, and then, the Army or the military go and do the dirty work, but you really don't … get the [choice]. If you want to be in politics, go into politics; [if] you want to be in the service, then, it's your country right or wrong. … You have to, you know, … take the orders. … That's just my opinion. There are many reasons why

the military is deployed, and the deployments are well-planned by military experts. A soldier follows orders.

SH: Thank you for sharing that with us. I hope that when you get the transcript back, if you see omissions, you will fill them in.

JP: Yes. If you want me to come back and do more, I will. I mean, I enjoyed it. …

SH: Was your unit well-supplied in Vietnam?

JP: Okay, we had an incident where they were being very protective about rotor blades. They said there was a shortage of rotor blades, for some reason, and, one night, we were mortared and the mortars fell in our flight line and shredded all the blades on our Hueys. … Within a few hours, they had changed them all and we were back on. So, somehow, they were able [to do that]. We got first priority because our unit--as any cavalry unit [would], but I'm only talking about the First of the Ninth, and as it related to the First Air Cavalry Division--we were the eyes and ears of the division. … We were out there all the time, hunting the bad guys, shooting them up, starting things. So, we were high-priority. … If we lost a lot of aircraft, we got replacements. I really can't remember a time when we had to stop operations because we didn't have what we needed.

SH: You described crawling away from your helicopter in the book *The Headhunters*. [Editor's Note: Author and Vietnam veteran Matthew Brennan documented the stories of his fellow pilots and crewmen, including James Pressman, in his book, *The Headhunters* (1988).]

JP: Oh, yes. … I told you, the first few weeks, I was on the ground because I was temporarily medically grounded. … We had an aircraft that … crashed out up close to the Cambodian border, and it was in--I didn't know it at the time--but I finally realized it was in a bomb crater, ARC LIGHT. ARC LIGHT is a B-52 strike, and, when they're dropping all those bombs, they blow open the jungle and you can see, you know, all [of] the hole, this thing in here. [Editor's Note: B-52 strategic bombers deployed in support of ground operations throughout Vietnam operated under the codename ARC LIGHT.] Whoever this guy was, he had crashed his helicopter in the middle of one of these bomb craters. In one of these open areas there, there was a bomb crater. So, we went in to secure the aircraft that was on the ground. I went in with … what they called the rigging team. We were going to sling load this thing out, and it was a Cobra. … Normal procedure for … slinging a Cobra gunship out is, you'd take the ammo off it, you'd drain the fuel tanks, you know, but it was later on. It was getting dark and it was really in "bad guy country" and we didn't want to hang around. So, they just rigged the thing to be slung out. When the Chinook picked this thing up, the strap broke and the Cobra fell down, crashed right in front of me and it caught on fire. So, you know, ammunition and rockets were going [off]. I mean, it really [laughter]--it was exciting, and so, I turned, stayed [low]. You know, you have to crawl. I didn't want to stand up, because I would be cut in half. So, I stayed on the ground like a spider, used my fingers and my toes and crawl along until I came to the bomb crater and jumped into the bomb crater.

SH: You were actually out of your helicopter.

JP: I wasn't in the helicopter. I was on the ground. I wasn't flying at this particular time. I was flown to this area, with the ground platoon and the rigging team. That was standard procedure when we have an aircraft that wasn't totally destroyed. If it was still intact, we wouldn't leave it out there. So, we'd rig it. If it was a little bird, a small helicopter, we could sling it out with our own H model. We could sling out a Loach, because it was not that much weight, but a Cobra is much bigger. We had to use a Chinook, call in a Chinook to sling it out. So, we were waiting there and, when this thing picked it up, it was rigged wrong. Something happened and the strap broke and the thing crashed and it burned up in the LZ with us there.

SH: That must have gotten your attention.

JP: Yes. I was happy to go back to flying. [laughter]

SH: There was another story where you were laying on the ground.

JP: Oh, yes. Well, that, I was in that hole, that thing was burning and the machine-gun ammunition in the Cobra was cooking off and you could hear--it sounded like popcorn. … The rockets, the aerial rockets, were igniting and shooting out, you know, going out. They didn't have any particular direction. They were snaking on the ground, going up in the air. … I guess the helicopter must have exploded, the fuel, whatever, and I was in this bomb crater and I saw all this white phosphorous. I don't know, it was coming over my head, so, I jumped out of the bunker and ran into the jungle, into the tree line. … A few feet into the tree line, I tripped over something and … I laid down, … just in case any of these things were flying around. … Later on, a flare ship came in and, when they were going to pull us out and dropped the flare, … I was in a graveyard. I could see it was fresh dug graves there, because the NVA would take [their dead], wouldn't leave the bodies there. They would pull them out … if they were killed by the bomb strike, whatever. They'd pull him into the jungle and bury him, and so, I was hiding behind one of those mounds. You could see the mounds. You know, it's obvious what it is, yes.

SH: You must have been happy when the helicopter pulled you out.

JP: Oh, yes, I was very happy to leave that place. [laughter]

SH: Did you keep your logbook?

JP: No, you don't keep them. They stay with the airplane.

SH: Do they?

JP: Yes, the maintenance log was in my [helicopter]. … Our personal flight records were kept by a guy in the tactical operations center. [There] was a guy who was in charge of that, and then, they'd be incorporated into your permanent records.

SH: Your best diaries are the letters that you sent home.

JP: Yes. … A lot of it is there. Actually, the best thing is the tapes, some of them. As I listen to them, … it's hard to imagine some of the things I said, you know. I know--it's funny--the one thing I kept saying over and over again, that I don't remember, I was always telling my wife, "I'm tired." Every tape, every letter I wrote, at the end, I would say, "I'm really tired. I have to go to bed." … I don't remember that, but, obviously, that must have been what happened.

SH: That is pretty interesting.

JP: Yes.

SH: You mentioned previously, and I wanted to follow up--what was a "sniffer mission?"

JP: … Oh, yes, a "sniffer mission," it was called. Sniffer mission--we would fly to division headquarters and we'd pick up a piece of equipment, I guess is the best way to call it. … It would sit in the middle of the airplane, the helicopter, and they'd put this hose out the front, okay, and we'd take on a chemical officer and an enlisted guy, his assistant, who ran this machine, and then, we would fly a prescribed course, okay. … We would have with us a Cobra, and this is a gunship. … The guy in the front seat of the Cobra--the pilot--would have a map with the course and he'd be there to protect us in case we crashed or something. … We would fly low-level, right on the tree line, and this machine would pick up the smell of--I guess the best way to put [it] is, when a lot of people urinate, there's a smell of ammonia in the air, whatever it is, that chemical that this machine is sensitive to--and it would [find that]. You'd get a reading. When it got a reading above a certain level, they'd know that a bunch of men had stayed the night there, whatever it was, and then, the guy--my crew chief--would throw a smoke grenade out. … When the guy in the high bird or Cobra would see the smoke, he'd mark it on the map. … If you did enough of these sniffer missions, and I wasn't the only one doing them, you could begin to see the infiltration routes, where they were coming into the country from Cambodia, or wherever they were moving around. You could sense or pick up large movements that way. I don't know that it was a precise science, but, … when you combine that with other intelligence, with the sound listening devices we would put in and other things, you could get a picture of where they were moving. … You could find out, like, for instance, if they were massing to attack a particular base. You could see it in that kind of intelligence.

SH: Did your unit have good intelligence?

JP: Yes. … We had something--there's all kinds of interesting things going on. We had something called the "double check six," which is a helicopter with all kinds of radio gear on it, and what it would do [was], it'd monitor enemy radio transmissions. … Their call sign was "double check six" and they could actually follow, direction find, an enemy radio signal right up to an NVA soldier with a radio on his back. They could actually track him down, if that's what they were doing. So, we had that. … You know, when you put it all [together]--it was never one thing. Intelligence is never one thing. I mean, you might be able to capture a map or a guy and he'd tell you something, but you have to build the whole picture. So, the sniffer missions, the sound listening devices, the Ranger teams doing reconnaissance, … capturing a map--you'd put it all together and you could get a picture of what was going on.

SH: Did your unit have any interactions with the CIA?

JP: The boys with no name tags? [laughter]

SH: The CIA, yes.

JP: Those guys, no. Air America was there. I saw their planes in Saigon. We had--there were mercenaries in Vietnam, not Americans. They were called … Hmongs or something like that. They were ethnic Chinese that lived in Vietnam. … CIA would arm them and send them out to hunt. I didn't [get involved with that], but … we never really interfaced with those kinds of guys. We were strictly, mostly, straight up military operations, you know, First Cavalry Division. I think the First Cav, when they brought them down into where they were in III Corps, around the Saigon area, [it] was to block infiltration of the NVA to try and take over Saigon. … We were positioned between Cambodia [and Saigon], the Parrot's Beak, the Elephant's Ear, which were areas where … that's where they invaded. When they invaded Cambodia, that's where they went in, part of where [they went in], you know, right there. … So, that's what we were doing there, and we were like a blocking force.

SH: Were you in Vietnam during any of the "bombing pauses?"

JP: I was in Vietnam when they had a three-day [truce]. … The North Vietnamese declared a three-day truce for Ho Chi Minh's death. It was September of 1969, early September. [Editor's Note: Ho Chi Minh died on September 2, 1969, at age seventy-nine.] … I was flying a mission, a Ranger mission. … A couple of days before, we had found this place where we wanted to put them. … I was taking the actual Ranger team in--it was during the ceasefire. When I landed in the LZ, apparently, these guys were on break. The bad guys were right in the LZ and they were sitting up against the trees, smoking and joking, okay, and I put this Ranger team right on top of them. … By the time I landed on the ground--the minute you land, they jump out, the Rangers--I couldn't get them back in and they started shooting them up, shooting up the place. So, I had to take off. … We called in the contact and the Cobra rolled in and killed a bunch of them. Anyway, so, I came back in a little while later and pulled them out, because it was too hot to leave them there. They were compromised already.

SH: Really?

JP: Yes, but that was on, supposedly, a ceasefire for Ho Chi Minh's [death]. [laughter]

SH: There was no ceasefire for your unit.

JP: No, no.

SH: The war was also televised.

JP: Yes, yes. … My mother told me that my father would sit every night and watch the news, you know, [to try to] see me, but, of course, you know, I mean, all you would hear is how many guys were killed, Americans. … The problem with that war was, one of the problems was, you

couldn't kill enough of them. That's why this body count thing was useless, because, even if it was true, over a ten-year period, I mean, the kids that were four, North Vietnamese, that were four or five years old, … in ten years, we're fighting, you know. They had replaced [the casualties]. They continually replaced those that they had lost. So, it didn't make any [difference]. … In the end, it really didn't make any difference how many [were killed]. I mean, they were constantly being replaced and … the North Vietnamese were more interested in--they would sacrifice two, three hundred guys to attack a fire support base, or more, to kill one or two Americans, or ten or whatever. They were fighting a war for the anti-war movement back here, you know. It didn't matter that we killed three or four [hundred], whatever it was, didn't matter, because they had killed five or six Americans. That's what got reported and that's what was driving, you know, the politics of all this. …

SH: The body count backfired.

JP: Yes, in a way, in a sense.

SH: There are pictures of American servicemen helping small children in Vietnam.

JP: Yes. … I mean, this business of "baby killer" and all that stuff the liberal press tried to pin on us--American soldiers would rather feed a kid than hurt him, okay. American soldiers, if we found a child that was hurt, we'd fly him to a hospital. We'd take care of him, you know. We didn't, nobody--unless there was something really [wrong with someone]. You know, I mean, you get bad apples in every bunch, but 99.9 percent of us would never go out of our way to hurt a child or to kill innocent people. Now, you had the My Lai Massacre. You know, those things happen in war, but, I mean, we had five hundred thousand guys there, you know, and it was a ten-year war, probably five, six million people, American servicemen, because we rotated in and out in Vietnam. I mean, there would be no children left if we were all baby killing, you know what I'm saying? That was just a political thing. It's like today, when they try to say, you know, "blood for oil" in Iraq. Well, you know, I didn't see President Bush and Vice-President [Richard] Cheney getting rich on oil revenues because they took over Iraq. … You know, it's just slogans and politics, is all that was. The liberal press is to blame, also.

SH: Did your military service influence your career afterwards?

JP: Well, I mean, you know, it made civilian things seem less menacing. I don't know how else to put it to you. Things that happened in my business were, "No big deal, at least you're not trying to kill me," you know. [laughter] … When you're under tension like that, and the threat of [death], threat of [harm], for a whole year, I mean, it makes other things pale in comparison, … I guess is another way of putting it. I don't know how else to put it for you.

SH: Thank you for coming in and sharing your story with us.

JP: Oh, sure.

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

Reviewed by Jovelle Tamayo 7/1/11
Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 7/25/11
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/3/11
Reviewed by James Pressman 10/27/11