

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH MASTRIANI

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Nicholas Molnar: This begins an interview with Mr. Joseph Mastriani on July 25, 2012, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Nicholas Molnar. Thank you, Mr. Mastriani, for coming into our office today for the interview.

Joseph Mastriani: It's my pleasure.

NM: To begin, we would like to learn about your family history. For the record, can you tell us when and where you were born?

JM: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, on March the 29th, 1942, in what my parents tell me was a vicious snowstorm, Palm Sunday, also.

NM: Can you tell me about your family history on your father's side?

JM: My father's parents came from a town in Southern Italy. It's now called Lamezia Terme in the Catanzaro Province of Calabria . My grandfather came here first, in 1898. He was joined two years later by my grandmother with her first two of nine children in--did I say 1900? I have the ship's manifest from my grandmother's arrival. One of my cousins has the manifest of my grandfather's arrival. The early years, I'm not too sure of and this is one of my regrets, that if people who listen to this, [can learn from], is, I never was interested, when I was a young person and my grandmother lived with us, to follow up and ask questions, like, "Where did you go when you first came here?" The ship's manifest seems to indicate New York. There is nothing in my recollection that ties the family to New York. They, I believe, originally settled in Northeastern Pennsylvania, around Scranton. The question becomes, "How the heck did they ever find Dunmore, Pennsylvania, from Italy?" Well, I'd be digressing into my grandmother's side to go any further there. So, they were united in 1900, when my grandmother arrived, and the first child born here was 1902, which was the uncle next in age over my father. He and my father were born in Newark. The family went back to--or originally to, I believe went back to--Dunmore, Pennsylvania, adjoining Scranton, shortly after my father was born in 1905. All the other kids--there were five following my father--were all born in Dunmore, Pennsylvania. They returned to New Jersey in 1920, to Kearny. Why Kearny? no clue--bought a house in 1924. I'm sorry, they moved originally to Newark, and then, in 1924, they bought a house in Kearny, where the family was raised and where, eventually, from the age of one, I was raised.

NM: What about your family history on your mother's side?

JM: My mother's side is a little more difficult. My mother's father was born in the same region, Calabria. Where in Calabria? I'm not sure--name was Bevelacqua. It's fairly common, hard to track down. Her mother is American-born, but of Italian immigrants from Provincia Avellino, which is just east of Naples. How they met, I do not know. My mother is the third of four, plus a half-brother. My mother was born in 1919, which would have made 1931 the year of her father's death. He passed away from food poisoning and he was a local merchant, ran a jewelry store. They had a bar. I remember my mother and her sisters, and my uncle, worked in the bar. My mother recalls bringing plates of spaghetti from the kitchen upstairs down. When my grandfather passed away, which would have been 1931, sometime thereafter, my grandmother remarried a man, let's say, of not stellar character. He eventually ran all the kids out of the house.

So, my mother and her siblings went to occupy an apartment. I think my mother was sixteen, which would make that 1935. They occupied an apartment in her aunt's house, her mother's sister's house, and they lived there until my mother got married. They married in October of 1940 and moved to North Arlington, New Jersey. They bought a brand-new house for three thousand dollars and, for an extra five hundred dollars, the attic was furnished as a room for my uncle. My father took in my mother's two sisters and her brother. So, the newlyweds started out in a big household. That was something my mother was always tremendously grateful to my father for. Well, my mother's older brother married in the first year and moved out and, essentially, the other two, the two sisters, one older, one younger, stayed with us through my birth and into my very young years, when my expanding family really forced them to leave this house in Kearny. One thing I left out there was, at about one year of age, my parents sold the house in North Arlington, because my father's mother was left alone in a house in Kearny, the original family homestead. So, we moved to Kearny to live with her and an aunt, one of her daughters, her youngest daughter, along with my mother's two sisters. I don't want to digress too much into the future here, because we can go to 1998, when I brought two of my uncles back to that house, but, essentially, the message is, how the hell did we all fit? [laughter] It was so small, three small bedrooms, one bathroom and there were, what? five or six adults and a couple of kids.

NM: Just for the record, what was your father's name?

JM: My father's name, another interesting thing, his name through his entire life was Joseph Eugene Mastriani, reflects an Italian custom of naming your children after their saint's day. My father's birthday is March the 19th, which is St. Joseph's Day. He didn't have a birth certificate. He was actually, according to lore, born Ugo, Ugo Giuseppe, Hugo Joseph, and, in adulthood, they always called him Joe and this is another affectation of Italian families. They might have two kids with the same name. They call one one thing and one another. I found that in doing genealogical research of the family, but, anyway, at some point, my father used his baptismal certificate to prove his birth and get a birth certificate on which is listed Joseph Eugene Mastriani--where the Eugene came from, no clue. He was fourteen years older than my mother. He was born in 1905, too young for World War I, too old for World War II, but that comes later.

NM: What was your father's trade? What did he do?

JM: Well, he had to drop out of school after eighth grade. He and his older brother dropped out of school and worked in a coal-breaker in Scranton, because the family needed the money. The early history, I'm not sure of. He got today what we would call a GED. After the coal-breaker, he must have become a machinist's apprentice, because, eventually, his trade was as a machinist and that was a result of Scranton being a huge area for railroads, because of the coal. You can only move coal by rail. So, there were all kinds of different railroads, tracks, shops and everything, and I know his oldest brother was a railroader and his next older brother was a railroader. So, I assume that he went into the railroad shops and became--whatever he did, he ended up as a machinist, which helped me quite a bit in terms of my own capabilities and aptitudes; for somebody who dropped out of school in eighth grade, very good head for arithmetic and math. He worked as a machinist in the railroads. I'm not sure at what point, it had to have been during the war, during the Second World War, he went to work as a machinist in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and he progressed from being a machinist to being a planner and

estimator. He was also active in the local machinist union, from which came an opportunity, I would say in the late '40s, to work for the union, which he did, kept him on the road a lot. My mother didn't like that. She convinced him to get his old job back at the navy yard, which he did. I don't know how long a period that was, but he was miserable there. My mother finally said, "See if you can get your union job back," which he did and a lot of things sprung from that. One was the connection with the Navy. He used to bring us--I have one younger brother, one younger sister--my brother and I he used to take over to the navy yard and we would walk on the ships and I developed this fascination with machinery and naval lore. We used to have to come into the house on Sunday afternoon at three 'o'clock, every day. We had to be home to watch a TV serial. This would have had to have been sometime after 1952, because '52 was when we got our first TV set. 1952, I was ten years old. There was a documentary, serial documentary, on TV called *Victory at Sea* and we used to have to come in and watch *Victory at Sea* and my father would say, "I worked on that ship and I worked on that ship." [Editor's Note: *Victory at Sea* was a twenty-six episode NBC TV series about naval combat during World War II that aired from 1952 to 1953.] So, we grew up watching *Victory at Sea*. I know why I took that diversion, but I don't know where I started from. Do you recall?

NM: I asked about what your father did. You said he was a machinist.

JM: Okay. So, he worked for the union until he was forced into retirement in 1970, because, in those days, you could force somebody to retire at sixty-five. I don't think he wanted to retire. I think he liked his job. He got involved in his union job on the political side of it and he was doing more in political action than he actually was doing on organizing. I remember, during his organizing years, we used to stuff envelopes with union literature, so [that] he and his colleagues could hand it out at the gate while they petitioned for representative elections in various places, like the aircraft factories on Long Island, and I remember him spending a lot of time in Western Pennsylvania with some of the manufacturing facilities out there. Piper Aircraft, I think, was out there. In those days, we didn't have the transportation network that we have today. So, when my father would go off to a job, be it on Long Island, even though that wasn't very far, or Western Pennsylvania, he would be gone for weeks at a time, because there was no inexpensive airline travel. Trains, even though they were better, were slow. So, my father spent a lot of time away from home. So, effectively, for a great part of that, we were raised by my mother.

NM: Before your father got the job at the naval yard during World War II, was he a machinist in the Newark area?

JM: I don't think [so]. I remember from stories, anecdotes, I know as a very, very young man, I would say probably during the Depression, his maybe mid-twenties, he worked at the old Lionel Train factory in Irvington. [Editor's Note: The Great Depression was the deepest and longest lasting economic depression in the industrialized Western world, lasting from 1929 to 1939.] Little anecdote that they used to joke about was, he got this job, which was a plum, to get a job in those days, at the Lionel factory in Irvington and my grandmother gave him ten cents to take the bus, which was a nickel, only he finds out that it's a dual zone. He didn't want to be late, so, he spent the whole dime getting to work and he had to walk back to Kearny from Irvington, but, other than that, no, I don't know what he did or where he developed or began. I mean, I said it

was in Pennsylvania, at the rail yards--don't know. Something I would like to know, but never will.

NM: Where are your earliest memories from? I know you moved from North Arlington to ...

JM: Kearny.

NM: Yes.

JM: My very earliest memory would be the end of the Second World War. Now, that would have made me a little over three years old, which is strange that I would remember it, but my mother gave me a saucepan and a wooden spoon. I went out onto the street, with the other little street urchins, and we marched up and down the street, banging on the saucepan with the wooden spoon, and that's my earliest, earliest memory.

NM: What about some of your earliest memories of growing up in Kearny? Could you describe what the place was like when you were growing up?

JM: Oh, yes, easily, and I just wrote about it. A couple of things--number one is the ethnicity. I live now in Marshfield, Massachusetts, which I call "the most ethnically-challenged place in the world." It is total white Irish Catholic, and Kearny, it's known as a Scottish-Irish town. We were Italian. There were a lot of Italians there. There were a lot of Eastern Europeans, a lot of Baltic States people, Lithuanians, Estonians. I don't remember Latvians, but, especially, there was a Lithuanian club. I went to school with a lot of Lithuanian kids, or children of Lithuanian immigrants, a lot of Polish, a lot of Eastern European Jews. So, Polish, Russian, German, they're the ones I remember. Everybody had a grandmother who couldn't speak English, including me, and they used to sit on the porch and just watch what was going on in the street, just a one-block street on the eastern side of--there's Harrison to the south, Kearny, North Arlington, Lyndhurst are on, like, a peninsula bounded by the Passaic River to the west and the Hackensack River to the east. We lived on the eastern side, overlooking what we called in those days the swamps and the garbage dumps over to the rise that forms Hudson County, South Hudson, and then, you could actually see Manhattan. You'd look across and Manhattan was right there. So, the ethnicity was one thing that is totally missing today, especially where I'm living now, but even in Red Bank, where I raised my kids and lived as an adult, was much more ethnic in terms of--jeez, I stayed in Red Bank last night and, usually, when I go to Red Bank, the first person I see is a Guatemalan landscaper. I don't see that where I live now, but that ethnicity would lead you, for example, to be able to say, "Hello, how are you?" and, "Good-bye," in several different languages. It was rote. It was mimic. You didn't know what you were saying, but you would ask your friend, "How do I say to your grandmother good-bye?" So, I could do it in Estonian, Polish--strangely enough, I couldn't do it in Italian [laughter]--but, as a child, you were common property. In other words, if you were on the street, some grandmother would summon you to the porch and give you a quarter and tell you to go down to the store, which is at the end of the street, and get a loaf of bread. Maybe the loaf of bread was twenty-four cents and you'd end up with the penny that she'd give you. So, you'd walk back down to the store and buy a Tootsie Roll for a penny. So, those are the early memories. Another early memory is the activity in the neighborhood, especially during good weather. There were so many people on the street. This is

a one-block street, totally divorced from any central commercial area, but a green grocer would hawk his wares on the street, a fishmonger, a junk man with a horse-drawn carriage, that if you had some pipe or some metal or rags, they would take them from you. I remember the knife sharpener. Every now and then, a guy would walk up the street with an A-frame on his back holding a grinding wheel and ringing a bell, and I don't know what it was, a nickel or a dime. My mother would go out with a kitchen knife or two or a pair [of scissors] and he would set up his A-frame and he would sharpen it. The houses were duplexes, flat-roofed duplexes. So, every now and then, somebody would have to get their roof tarred. That was a big deal for kids, because the roof tarring people would drive up with their truck and towing a tar melter in behind. They'd go erect a wooden derrick on the roof with a pulley and a rope and they'd take out these big cylinders of solid tar and they'd break them into chunks with an axe, throw it into the tar melter, fire up the tar melter and they would pour the molten tar into buckets, take it over. We would sit there and watch that as amusement. Coal trucks, most people in those days used coal as fuel, so, a coal truck coming up the street, man, another opportunity to have fun, go watch the coal guy with the chain-driven truck drive up, set up his chutes, so that the coal could get into the coal chutes. Then, when he was gone, chances are there was somebody else, the banjo player with no legs and he would come on to the street with a little dolly. He'd sit on a wheeled dolly and he would propel himself with two big rubber blocks and he would sit there and he would play. We'd run home and ask my mother if we could have a nickel, so [that] we could run down and put a nickel in his cup, but I guess the overriding thing is activity. There was always something going on on the street and, if there was nothing going on on the street, we'd make up our own games. We didn't have money to buy balls, for example. So, you'd go down to the railroad cut and pick up old bolts or a nut that would hold the rails together. You'd go home, wrap them in a rag, then, wrap the rag in electrical tape that my father might have or somebody's father would have in the basement and that would be our ball. Life was joyful and simple and, when I see our high school kids today, where I work, and all the little gizmos and toys that they have, it's incredible how happy we were for how little we had. I revel in the fact that we had that environment, because I think the environment we have today is just way too privileged, way too comfortable. Are you familiar with Adam Smith, the economist?

NM: No.

JM: Classical economist. He turned the phrase "the invisible hand," which is how economics works [when] things get out of balance. Well, I think we're starting to see the invisible hand at work, as we sit here. [Editor's Note: Adam Smith was a Scottish economic philosopher best known for the idea of a free-market economy. The invisible hand is a term coined by Smith in his book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* and refers to man's innate desire to better himself, which leads to the betterment of society, or, as other economists would argue, its detriment.]

NM: What kind of ball games would you play with your friends in the neighborhood?

JM: Well, there was always stickball. Because we were a one-block street connecting two other main thoroughfares, there wasn't a lot of traffic on the street. So, we could play in the middle of the street most of the time and there was a sewer plate. That was home and there were two other readily definable things, plus, we'd create the second base and we'd play stickball. We'd play

catch. We'd practice double plays. The most famous double play combination was, prior to our era, three guys, Tinker, Evers to Chance. I think they were Chicago Cubs. For whatever reason, they were famous. So, we would practice double plays, dragging our toes over the second base and firing them. We would go down to the local elementary school, which was three or four blocks away. They had a glorious bit of grass and, if somebody had a football, we'd go down there and we'd play both touch and tackle football. If we were lucky enough to find a baseball, because, as I aged, you get into the '50s, the glorious '50s, where people started to realize more prosperity or a touch of prosperity, we started to come into things like baseball gloves and baseballs, bats. We would leave right after breakfast, with the admonition, "Be home for lunch." We'd have lunch, we'd go back to play some other thing. Mom would say, "Be home for dinner." We'd come home for dinner. If it was summertime, we'd go after supper, said, "Come back home when the streetlights come on." "Okay." That was life for a kid in those days, very simple, very joyful.

NM: Were there any other languages besides English regularly spoken in your home?

JM: Oh, yes. Italian was spoken in my home, because my grandmother could not speak English. Now, my mother could not speak Italian when she got married, but she learned how to speak Italian by being with my grandmother. Italy is a very young country. It was really a collection of fairly independent city-states, very autonomous, and each little region and sub-region had their own dialect and my grandmother spoke a Calabrese dialect, which if you look--because I can now speak Italian. I learned it starting at age fifty-four and it's a hobby of mine. On Facebook, one of my--she's a third cousin that I made acquaintance with later on, another story--she occasionally writes in dialect, because they're trying to keep the dialect alive in Calabria, in Italy. It's unpronounceable. Because eighty percent of the Italians in this country have their roots in Southern Italy, like me, I can recognize that Southern--I'll call it an accent more than I will a dialect. So, when I hear Southern people trying to talk Italian, us second, third, fourth-generation, we'll occasionally use Italian words straight out of Sicily or Calabria, because I can recognize [it], just like you can recognize a Bostonian for saying, "HAH-vad," [Harvard] or anybody from Brooklyn, you can recognize the dialect. So, strangely enough, I couldn't speak Italian, nor could my brother or sister, but we could understand it. So, my grandmother would speak to us in Italian. We would reply in English and she understood enough English that we got by, but that's another old guy's regret, "Why the heck didn't I learn the language when I had an expert in the house?" My grandmother, although she wasn't formally educated, was very bright. She could also speak standard Italian, which was unusual for a person of her origins and geography.

NM: Was religion, or going to church, a regular part of your life growing up?

JM: It was for us kids, or we kids, whatever is proper. My mother was insistent on us going to Catechism, because we were public school kids, and she was insistent that we go to Mass on Sunday, but neither she nor my father went to Mass and the church was quite a distance away. Generally, we walked. She would dress us all up, because that's what you did in those days, and we would walk probably eight or ten blocks to the church. My father's mother was irreligious. She was left at age two in Italy by her parents. They immigrated to the US, left her with her grandmother and an uncle who was a priest. Especially the last ten years or so, when this whole

abuse thing came out, my sister and I've been talking about, "Was she so anti-clerical because her uncle, she was witness to [something], maybe her uncle had a babe on the side or a little"-- don't want to go there, but you get my drift. So, no, my parents really started to go to church sometime in my adulthood and they attended Mass regularly. They were involved, my mother especially, in some church activities. She had a very good singing voice. She was in the choir. They had since moved to Monmouth County and my grandmother was so irreligious, I know the three youngest kids, of nine, were baptized on the same day by a family friend who insisted on it, took the baby, the toddler and the older kid down to get baptized herself. So, that's how the youngest three got baptized. Obviously, my father had a baptismal certificate, so, he was baptized. Why? I don't know. It wasn't because of my grandmother, that's for sure.

NM: Did you join any organized activities, such as Boy Scouts?

JM: I was a Cub Scout for a short period of time. There was nothing productive in being a Cub Scout. It was like an organized brawl once a week. The Cubmaster had a truck and we would meet the truck and he would take us to some school and we would just rough-ass around for a while. We had a den mother and I had a shirt, but no real great memories of being a Cub Scout. It was kind of pre-Little League. I'm close to three years older than my brother. By the time he was of age, they had organized Little League; never participated in any of that. I think high school sports was really the first time that I got involved in organized activity.

NM: Before we get to high school, can we talk about your earliest memories of school and some of your academic interests?

JM: I was a good kid. I was an obnoxiously good [kid]; no parent should have the ease of raising somebody [like me]. I was the oldest. I had responsibility, especially for my younger brother. I remember losing him when he was about three years old, which would make me six, and I had to be probably well up into my forties or fifties before it suddenly dawned on me, "What the hell is a six-year-old doing being responsible, outside, alone, for a three-year-old?" Well, she mobilized the neighborhood. Somebody found him on a street behind these houses on the other side of the street. [laughter] So, yes, I went through grade school, I was pretty good in school. I was a good kid, never had any discipline problems. I was a safety patrol boy, went on to junior high school for two years, did well. They didn't track kids in those days. You were in a class with everybody else. The brightest and the least bright were in the same classes, except for, I guess, tracking-wise, there was a more academic track and a vocational track. Well, I was in the academic track, always did well in math, liked history, liked to read, but I didn't care for English. They didn't offer foreign languages in those days to junior high school. High school, [I was] looking forward to high school because I always wanted to play football. I played football. I did well in high school, certainly not the top of the class. As a matter of fact, I found my old high school graduation program--I wasn't even an honors student, although I was in the National Honor Society. Those two pieces of information don't gee up; always did well, but I was never a top-of-the-class guy, again, math, liked math, wanted to be an engineer, because my two youngest uncles were both engineers. They saw my interest and they used to feed into it whenever they would visit.

NM: In high school, you said that you participated in some organized sports. Can you talk about that a little bit more?

JM: I played football for four years. I ran track probably four years. I played basketball one year. They didn't have all the sports that high schools have today. There was no hockey, there was no lacrosse. So, four years of football, I got badly hurt my sophomore year, but I went on to play two more years. Basketball, the only reason I made the team was, one of the football coaches was the JV coach of basketball. So, I was a senior on the JVs, but I got to play basketball. Track was a natural sport--it's not one that you learn, you're blessed with. I was fast, so, I ran track, I think all four years. That actually got me admission to Brown University, track. The track coach and the track coach at Brown were tight, but it wasn't a scholarship. It was just a guarantee of admission. Well, Brown, in those days, was three thousand dollars a year--might as well have been three million for my family. So, that was just never going to be.

NM: As a teenager, did you have any jobs?

JM: I did. As a young teen, I used to work in a butcher shop, where I would go to work Friday afternoon and I would deliver by bicycle, used to get paid three dollars for Friday afternoon and all day Saturday, delivering predominantly meats. This shop was a butcher shop that also had fresh produce, because, in those days, frozen food just wasn't there. It started to come in at that time, because the management there, as I got a little older, brought in a line of frozen foods, but, generally, women didn't drive. They would come in and they would order meat. It's not like you go to the supermarket today and, if you want a chicken, you find this cellophane pack with chicken in it. The butcher would go into the walk-in. He'd drag out a chicken and it would be plucked and he would cut off the head, cut off the feet. If you wanted it cut up, which is mostly, I recall, what my mother wanted, "[Can] we have a chicken cut up, please?" butcher would go in, get a chicken, wrap the stuff up. We'd go home, or I'd take it home, my grandmother would burn the hair off the legs on the gas stove--great smell. My mother would take the giblets and the neck, throw it in the refrigerator to make chicken soup with. She'd do something with the chicken. If you wanted a sirloin steak, butcher would go in, he'd take out a huge chunk of meat, put his knife on it, "No, a little more," put his knife on it, "Good, right there," and he'd cut the piece of beef. They'd make sausage, but the women who would come in to do the ordering either didn't want to or couldn't carry the bags home. So, I would get dispatched with my bicycle and a basket to deliver the groceries that she ordered, the meat and vegetables, and, if I were really lucky, I'd get a quarter tip. I was paid three dollars for the Friday, Saturday, plus tips. It was nice. I'd make seven or eight dollars over a weekend. I'd have to give it to my mother. She'd give me a dollar and she'd put the rest in the bank for me. That's the only job I had, because my father, because of his early years, said, "You're going to work the rest of your life. You play sports. You don't need money." He was a generous and loving man, but he didn't hand out money very easily. I always wanted some more money. "No, you're not going to work. You can't work. You go play sports. You'll work the rest of your life."

NM: What were your plans for after high school?

JM: Well, I told my father that I wanted to become a machinist, like him, and it wasn't so much because of him, but I liked big toys, like trains and ships and things like that, and I wanted to

work on that stuff. He said, "No, you're going to go to college. When you graduate from college, if you want to be a machinist, you'll be the best-educated machinist in the building." So, I didn't work, I played sports and that was fun. I didn't have any money, but that's what my father wanted me to do and that sounded reasonable to me.

NM: You mentioned that you had admission to Brown. Can you talk about the process of looking at colleges?

JM: Well, the two uncles who were engineers went to what was then called NCE [Newark College of Engineering], NJIT [New Jersey Institute of Technology] today. It's been NJIT for how ever long, but NCE. Family didn't have any money. I applied to Seton Hall, Rutgers, Farleigh-Dickinson and NCE. Most likely, I was going to go to NCE and live at home, because the tuition in those days was, like, 250 dollars a semester. When I was a junior, I wrote to--who later, at least for my generation, became a very famous name--Representative Peter Rodino, who represented Newark, Kearny, West Hudson area, and told him I wanted to go to Annapolis and what did I have to do to get into Annapolis? So, he wrote back saying whatever it is I had to do and I applied to go to Annapolis. That's the Navy connection. I wanted to be a carrier pilot. So, I took the tests and I got what they called in those days a first alternate appointment. So, some time after that, the phone rings and Rodino's office asks me if I'd be interested in going to West Point, because, apparently, they had one of their appointees drop out, flunk out. Whatever the reasoning was, there was an opportunity to go to West Point. Well, I had a little bit of a connection there, because, not that I remember it, but my father said he took me to West Point when I was three years old to go see an Army-Notre Dame football game. That's part of the family lore, no memory. Who takes a three-year-old to a football game? Anyway, at that time, in the '50s, there was a half-hour serial on TV called *The West Point Story* and it was little anecdotes about cadet life. "Would I want to go to West Point, instead of being a commuter student at NCE?" "Are you kidding me? Absolutely." So, he arranged for me to take the tests and, in those days, in Kearny High School, there were two graduating classes per year, one in January and one in June. I was in the January class. I had a math teacher who had been a plebe cadet, football player, blew out his knee. They washed him out on medical. He highly recommended that I go to a small prep school in Cornwall, New York, to prep for the SATs, which I did. That was great advice and I aced the SATs. I got my appointment. Once I got my appointment, this same teacher said, "It'll help you a lot if you go to their pre-admission prep up at Braden's," Braden's was the name of the school, and I did. He was a hundred percent right, because the discipline in that place and the heaviness of their curriculum, I'd never anticipated working that hard. Well, the prep school taught you--they had a track in trigonometry, a little spherical trig and some literature, "John Brown's Body," [Stephen Vincent Benet's 1928 epic poem], which was the basis of the plebe year English course, and that allowed me, that gave me breathing room to get used to the place and not have to stress too much over academics. So, I did very well my plebe year, a lot of that based on having been sent to Braden's. So, here's the man--his name was Lou Conte and never had any contact with him again, have no idea what ever happened to him. You figure, if I was eighteen and he was a relatively new teacher, he's probably still around, somewhere. So, that's what I did between my graduation in high school and my admission to West Point.

NM: Had you ever left Kearny before, for vacations or travel?

JM: Go to Scranton. That was every now and then. I remember taking a vacation trip to Gettysburg, I remember taking a trip to Washington, DC, and, of course, we lived right across the river from Manhattan. My very earliest years, my father, I reiterate this many times, a master of cheap entertainment--when they were building the New Jersey Turnpike, we'd spend an hour or two down in the Meadowlands, watching the pile drivers drive piles. This was fun. We would drive over, take the train to Hoboken, take a ferry ride over to Chambers Street, Manhattan, stay on the ferry, so [that] you wouldn't have to pay another fare, and come back. That was entertainment. Go to Newark Airport--in those days, the old Newark had two wings, very low-rise, one-story gate wings, and there were observation platforms on top and we'd go down to the airport and stand on the roof of the old terminal buildings and watch the Super Connies [Lockheed Constellations] and the DC-6s and the DC-3s fire up their props and just thought this was tremendously glamorous. I don't know what started me on that track, but the whole idea of the simplicity and joy of life in those days, was very, very fond memories.

NM: You mentioned that you were interested in machines. Did you have any hobbies, like model building?

JM: We didn't have enough money to buy models. Occasionally, we would come across [a model kit], via a gift or whatever. I can remember building the plastic model of the USS *Missouri*, of building the old--I can't remember the designation--the [Grumman F9F] Panther fighter plane, going to the hobby shop to buy a little bottle of glue to put these things together, but it was not a hobby per se as much as it was a very infrequent joy, to be gifted something like this.

NM: Could you talk about your training and education at West Point?

JM: Yes. We're talking about 1960 through 1964. At that time, there was only one course of study. Now, I'm involved with the Academy very heavily today and they have forty-seven majors. There was just one course of study. The only divergence was, I took French and somebody else took German and I think they had five languages and that was your only choice the first three years. I adapted pretty well to it, got a good start by going to Braden's, started helping people, especially with math. I'd taken three years of French in high school. I recall the first two months of the Academy, when we were getting ready for the academic year, I got a phone call from the French department, asking me if I would consider taking advanced French. Of course, here's this kid from Kearny, I'm lacking self-confidence in this prestigious place, "Why would I take an advanced course? I'd be so happy just to pass anything." So, they arranged for me to take the qualifying test and they came back and said, "You did very well." So, I took advanced French, which gave me opportunities to tutor my classmates, because, in those days, the French department was brutal. I got a couple of my classmates through the French courses, for which you develop gratitude. So, I didn't have any trouble academically at all. I ended up graduating a little bit above the top half. I was in the top half, not by a whole lot, but I graduated in the top half of the class. I loved the engineering courses. Their curriculum at that time--you in effect were, like, if, hypothetically, in another college, you were a civil engineering major, you'd probably take, in addition to the core courses, statics, material mechanics, you would take minors in, or required courses, in electrical, fluids, things like that. This was like a

curriculum where all your courses were the minor or courses that a major in another university would take, but it would be concentrated on their major. So, every engineering course that exists, I've taken, but not as a focus. So, I did well in those. I didn't have a lot of interest in history, for example. That developed much later on in my life. Classic literature, never liked it, still don't like it. I read a lot, but the prose is very--spy novels, stuff like that. You'll never find me reading *Macbeth* or even more lighter stuff, like Charles Dickens; just doesn't interest me. So, I definitely had that focus. I chose the Corps of Engineers from when I found out that I was-- actually, you could go to another service, but it was a very complex way to determine who could and who couldn't. I intended to go Air Force, air. I wanted to be a pilot, always wanted to be a pilot. First was the Navy, and then, I was flight qualified, physically, which, strangely enough, most of my class wasn't. You figure you have this cream of American manhood--the eyes. So, I was qualified to fly for the Air Force. So, I put in for the Air Force, but, because I was flight qualified, they would not allow me to go to the Air Force in a ground slot, and the way they sliced and diced the eligibility, I didn't make it. Army Aviation wasn't originally available to West Point grads, so, my first choice of branch was the Corps of Engineers, because I liked engineering. I liked building. That went only to the top of the class. So, I ended up choosing Field Artillery; Armor Branch, too maintenance intense, Infantry Branch, too mud intense. So, I went Field Artillery, so [that] I could be in the action. I ended up in the Infantry my first year in Vietnam, because that's what second lieutenants of Field Artillery do. They're forward observers in infantry rifle companies. So, I was high enough in the class where I would be able to get into any of the airborne divisions. I was scared of heights and I figured becoming a paratrooper would cure that. Strangely enough, I talked to my father, I said, "I think I want to go into the paratroops. Would that cause you and Mom anguish, knowing I was doing this?" and he came back and said, "Yes, that would make us a little bit nervous. Why don't you try something else?" That was my first inclination that I was an independent adult, said, "I'm twenty-one years old. Why am I asking my parents this? This is what I want to do." So, my first choice of assignment was the 101st Airborne Division and I got it, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, graduated from college, had a two-month graduation leave, worked a little bit of that for my engineer uncle, who had his own machine fabricating business, and got myself in shape for Airborne School. August of 1964, my best friend from school was living--where the heck was he living?--somewhere in the New York area and he drove over to Kearny. We tandem-ed all the way down to Fort Benning, Georgia, in our two new cars and went to Airborne School in Georgia, in August, which I have to, every now and then, remind people who say it's so hot, "Try Airborne School in Georgia in August." [laughter] So, we went through Airborne School, was one of the unique guys who took six qualifying jumps, because, on my fifth jump, the qualifying jump, my parachute ripped and the cadre on the ground, with their loudspeaker, "Man with the malfunction, pull your reserve." I look up and I've got this rip in one of the panels of my parachute. I look around me and everybody else is falling at the same rate. Without a great deal of vertical velocity, a reserve chute can be a real problem and I made the decision, "I'm not pulling my reserve," because the band around the bottom of the chute is very heavy. I figured, "That's going to hold. All I have is a little bit extra velocity," which I couldn't perceive. So, I landed fine and they descended on me like ants on candy and I don't know what was in their mind, whether I was going to lose confidence or whatever--they made me go take another jump. So, it took me six jumps to get out of jump school. I have one classmate, to this day, when he sees me at our five-year reunions, "Man with the malfunction, pull your reserve." [laughter] So, anyway, I qualified, and then, went on to Ranger School, got Ranger qualified and you learn so much by doing this, in terms of

your own capabilities. Their philosophy in these two schools was, "You have a lot more inside you than you think and we're going to drive you beyond the point that you think your limit is, just to prove to you that you can do it." You'd run into these situations, especially at Ranger School, "You drop out of this formation, you'd better be dead and, if you're not dead, your classmates or your fellow Rangers will kill you when you get back to the barracks, because they're going to have to carry you." So, that endurance--that physical, that mental, that emotional endurance--was all built during that time, plus, the confidence factor, "I can do anything, anything." Discomfort, I'm never uncomfortable--cold, hot, that's what God sent, that's what we deal with. So, Airborne School in August in Georgia, the swamp phase of Ranger School in December, wading in water up to your chest, and then, getting out into thirty-five, thirty-eight degree temperatures, it's uncomfortable--deal with it.

NM: I want to ask about this four-year period at West Point. Do you remember the assassination of John F. Kennedy vividly? [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.]

JM: Oh, yes. I remember hearing about it, getting out of class. I remember marching in the memorial parade. Actually, I have more vivid memories of his Cuban Missile Crisis speech than I do of his assassination. [Editor's Note: In October 1962, the United States demanded that the Soviet Union remove its nuclear missiles from Cuba. The United States placed a naval blockade around the island nation, creating a tense standoff between the superpowers that many feared would lead to nuclear war. The crisis was averted when the Soviet Union agreed to remove their nuclear missiles from Cuba in exchange for the United States removing its nuclear missiles from Turkey.] You roll back the time [to] when he was inaugurated, in January of '61, the Corps of Cadets went to Washington to march in the inaugural parade, which turned out to be a really difficult thing, because of the snow that was there and the cold and the trip. I didn't go, because, I can't remember whether it was math or French, I had a roommate who was a football recruit, really great guy, had a lot of academic troubles, and he was what they call "turned out" in either math or French. Whatever it was, I was named his tutor, to get him through what they called the "turn out exam." In other words, "If you pass this exam, we'll reinstate you right where you are." So, I didn't go to Kennedy's inaugural parade because of this tutoring thing. Another Kennedy incident--not incident, association--would have been, I guess at the end of '61, he was the speaker at graduation for the Class of--wouldn't have been '61, it was '62. He was the speaker at the graduation. Again, some kid in my company, a year behind me, had been turned out in French and I was named his tutor. So, I recall the barracks, the room I was in, faced what they call the Plain, the parade field. That's where they brought Marine One in, landing with Kennedy, and I recall this kid and I--it was, yes, French--standing on the radiator looking out the window at the President getting out of the helicopter, and then, being driven down to the graduation ceremony. So, there were three opportunities, actually, four, linked me to Kennedy--his inauguration parade that I missed, his graduation speech that I missed, the Cuban Missile Crisis, where we were all gathered in the auditorium to watch the speech on closed-circuit TV, and then, his assassination and funeral.

NM: You saw the Cuban Missile Crisis speech on closed-circuit TV. How often did you follow world events?

JM: Hardly at all, just the academics and athletics and military activity were so all-consuming that we were very, very little involved, although we were forced to subscribe to a New York newspaper, the *Times*, the *Daily News*, whatever. So, a plebe would have to deliver the newspaper of your choosing to your room every morning, which I did as a plebe, and then, enjoyed the fruits of for three years, but, generally, no. I was aware, for example, that we were involved in Laos, counter-insurgency. I remember Kennedy's focus on counter-insurgency. As a matter of fact, there's a story, that I think it was the 1960 Army-Navy game, where the President turned to the Superintendent of West Point and asked why he only brought half the Corps of Cadets to the game and the Superintendent said, "That's it. That's what we have." We were half the size of the Naval Academy at that time. We're a very small school, 2,400, and the President was very much aware of the role of potential counter-insurgency warfare in the future. That was the impetus behind doubling the size of the Corps of Cadets over the next ten years, which is, now, they are equal to, in size, the Naval Academy. It's over four thousand cadets now, but each cadet company had what they called a tactical officer and one of the tac officers, (Lee Parmely?), was in Laos and he was kind of a folk hero. So, we were aware of counter-insurgency efforts in Southeast Asia, but Vietnam, never heard of it. I knew more about Vietnam as a kid, because I recalled Dien Bien Phu, I remember Eisenhower providing money for the French operations in Vietnam--Indochina, French Indochina, it was called at that time--but Vietnam was really a mystery. [Editor's Note: In 1954, Vietnamese forces defeated French military forces at Dien Bien Phu, signifying the end of French colonial rule of Indochina. The Geneva Accords sought a temporary partition of Vietnam along the 17th Parallel and elections to unify the country under a single government, but the post-colonial era witnessed two nations forming, Communist North Vietnam and anti-communist, US-backed South Vietnam.] Even though our involvement started in earnest in 1962, under Kennedy, knew very, very little about it. We were aware of the establishment of the concept of Special Forces, that that would be, someday, a really cool thing to do, but, yes, not that involved. Academics, athletics and military kind of dominated our lives. There was never a moment's rest--place was like a prison.

NM: You mentioned that you did track and football in high school. Did you participate in any sports at West Point?

JM: Yes. You were required to participate on either an interscholastic team or an intramural team, all year. So, I went out for and made the interscholastic track team. I was a sprinter. So, the fall track sport was cross-country, wasn't for me. So, I played intramural athletics. I remember the first year, my plebe year, got me in good stead with the upperclassmen in my company, because it was a real jock company. Since I was not on the track team then, I could be on the intramural track team and I was very good at it. So, then, winter and spring were track sports and I was a sprinter on the track team, a plebe team, and sophomore, which they call yearling or third-class year, and junior year, cow year or second-class year, I was on the varsity track team. So, that took up two of the three. So, it was track first year, intramural. Football, soccer and wrestling filled out that third of the three sports seasons for me.

NM: Could you talk about your experiences after Airborne and Ranger School. Where did you think you were going to go?

JM: Yes. Well, I knew where I was going to go. I was going to go to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to the 101st Airborne Division. So, after Ranger School, I took about two weeks' leave from Fort Benning, drove back to Kearny, took a little visit to West Point, where I found out that a good friend of mine was killed in an auto accident coming back from Ranger School. We graduated Ranger School together--fell asleep at the wheel, went in-between two bridge spans over the Toccoa River in Georgia. Ironically, that same night, I fell asleep at the wheel in North Carolina and a North Carolina state cop--I was speeding--he, siren and lights, pulled me over, saved my life, and I had a classmate fast asleep in the seat next to me, but the impetuosity of youth, just finished Ranger School, for God's sakes. We were down in Florida at the swamp camp. We're driven up to Fort Benning, had to clean everything up, turn in equipment, dress up, go to graduation. We got out of there at one or two o'clock in the afternoon. Instead of taking [time] and sleeping, get in the car, "Let's get on leave." So, I lost a classmate that night and it could've been me, too. Ironically, several years later, lost another classmate, fell asleep at the wheel, was getting out of the Army, was at the division headquarters at midnight, signed out at 0001 [hours], got in his car to drive to Philadelphia, where he's going to go to school, fell asleep, killed himself. How'd I start on that track, Nick?

NM: After Ranger School.

JM: Oh, yes. So, I drove--it was right after Christmas, I was going to report. I guess I was going to leave New Year's Day and there was a forecast of a storm, snowstorm. So, I left a little bit early, drove all the way through Pennsylvania. I guess I must've stayed overnight, and then, left the next day, signed into Fort Campbell, took a BOQ [bachelor officer's quarters]. I had made arrangements with two of my classmates at Ranger School that we would live together. So, we didn't know much about the Army, but we knew, somehow figured out, that we had to go get a certificate of non-availability of quarters, which allowed us to collect whatever the quarters allowance was, a hundred bucks, two hundred bucks. We found a three-bedroom house in the neighboring town, Clarksville, Tennessee, unfurnished. It was 110 bucks a month, yes, very, very cheap. We went out to a discount furniture store. One of the guys didn't have any money, so, two of us each advanced him his one-third and we bought furniture for the house. This is the first time in our lives that we were free people; liked to joke that I was twenty-two years old, twenty-three, yes, I was twenty-three, just short of twenty-three--first time in my life I had my own bedroom. So, we went to work. We did our job as officers. We were [in] three different organizations and started to live like human beings, until--I was on the list to go to flight school, because you had to be in an active line unit for a year in order to go to flight school at that time. So, I was in a 105-millimeter howitzer battery. I was a forward observer, which is the guy that is attached to the rifle company to call for and adjust artillery fire. They did not school us in this. It was all on-the-job training. The powers-that-be decided that West Point grads didn't have to go to basic field artillery training. So, I was learning my trade, doing all the little crappy jobs that second lieutenants are given, and my brigade, that would be one-third of the division, was alerted to be deployed to Vietnam. So, we did our preparations. I went home. They gave us a week or ten days of pre-deployment leave. I went home. I got a call when I was at home from my battalion executive officer, saying, "The Department of the Army called. They will waive the year of waiting and, if you still want to go to flight school, they will cut the orders for you to go to flight school." That's probably one of the hugest dilemmas of my life. I really wanted to do this, but I couldn't wave good-bye to my unit. They were going and I was going to abandon

them--I just couldn't do that. So, I asked them to hold the orders for a year and, on my return from Vietnam, send me to flight school. Well, I did my year in Vietnam. I got orders for the 82nd Airborne Division, not flight school, and what the heck are you going to do in Vietnam in a rifle company in the toolies [slang for jungle or woods] all the time? I didn't have any way to question this. So, when I came back from Vietnam, I went down to the 82nd and my memory fails me as to whether I followed up and said, "Why didn't I get the flight school orders?" I felt very, very fortunate to have a second airborne assignment, consecutive, because that doesn't happen often to West Point grads. So, somehow, I swallowed it. What I ended up doing was getting a private pilot's license and, later, a commercial pilot's license on my own. So, I got my dream to fly, just not with the services.

NM: Were you a forward observer in your brigade in Vietnam?

JM: I was the forward observer for B Company, Second Battalion, 502nd Airborne Infantry, very proud outfit, yes.

NM: You mentioned that you got a lot of this training on the job. Can you talk about some of the challenges in that?

JM: Well, in classic field artillery doctrine, how it's done, so-to-speak, and how you're trained is in conventional warfare. You're on an observation post. You've got your back-up non-commissioned officer, you have a private who's a radio operator and there's a certain process you go by. You're looking at your binoculars and you can see out in front of you and you spot a target and you have your map and your compass and you go through the process to call for fire. You get your first rounds out there, and then, you adjust the rounds, in order to get them onto target. So, one of the, I guess the very first operation we're on, I like to call it an intelligence failure--turns out that we were dropped--there was intelligence that said that there was a large enemy concentration somewhere and we're going to take one of the three companies in the battalion, our infantry battalion, and we were going to maneuver them into a place at the end of two valleys and they were going to drop--no, that was a different battalion. They're going to drop the three companies of us, not drop, airborne, helicopter-borne, onto this flat area near a village, because, in those days, whether they were Viet Cong guerillas or whether they were North Vietnamese regular units, they often avoided contact when they did not create the initiative. So, the idea was that they would fade up these two valleys and run into the blocking force in behind, which may be five or eight kilometers distant. So, we only had enough helicopters or enough room to land one rifle company at a time. So, Charlie Company was the first one in and I was in B Company. They were the first one in. They landed, no problem. Helicopters lifted off, came back, picked us up and I asked the door gunner--because these Huey helicopters, which your friend Carl [Burns] used to pilot, would carry eight combat troops and two door gunners, one on each side. So, chopper comes in, I pile in with the Company Commander and the First Sergeant, myself, his radio operator--well, eight of us are in the chopper. So, as I climb in, I asked the door gunner, "Is the landing zone hot?" and he said "No, it's all quiet." So, when we're making our descent to the landing zone, turns out that they had landed us directly on a Viet Cong regimental training operation and the first wave in completely surprised these people and they had no way to react except to engage. So, as we're making the descent, it erupts in fire. So, they drop us in there. We lost a chopper or two and it turns out

we're completely surrounded. So, I'm looking around for the Company Commander. I mean, I get off the chopper, I head for the nearest cover and I'm looking for the Company Commander, because he's the one from whom, even though I'm a second lieutenant, I take my direction, and I can't find him. I start crawling around. [I said], "Where's Captain Rowe?" and somebody, I don't remember who it was, might have been his first sergeant, said, "He got shot inside the chopper and he stayed on." So, it was moot because we did not have artillery support. We were too far away. The whole idea was, we were going to drive this enemy force toward the guns. Now, the range of a 105 howitzer is about seven miles. So, this was more than seven miles from the guns. So, happens that, in the first wave, the C Company Commander was killed, the C Company forward air controller, who controls the air assets overhead, was killed, plus, a number of other people including the artillery forward observers, my counterpart. So, one of our platoon leaders, a second lieutenant, takes command of the company. Now, he's as green as I am. So, he asks me to handle the air assets overhead, something I had never done, wasn't sure exactly how to do it, but I'm talking to two A-1E Skyraider pilots overhead and directing them how to approach, what to do and what we wanted. We eventually managed. We were pinned down most of the day, overnight, and we managed. They disengaged partially and we beat them off partially. In the morning, we'd taken about twenty-two dead, lost four choppers and no training to do any of that stuff. What we learned from that, though--I'm sorry, I mixed two things up. That was, as you can probably figure out, a very memorable experience. Artillery-wise, you were constantly unable to observe any distance. You're [dealing with] all heavy vegetation. So, the first scrap that we got into, new Company Commander says, "Get me some support out here," meaning artillery fire. I said, "Okay." I look at my map. I have a general idea of where I am, but I can't see anything. Well, your training has the enemy force out there in clear visibility. So, what can I do? I said, "Well, what I'm going to do is, I know where I'm *not* and that's where I'm going to call for the rounds, and then, when the rounds land, I will walk them back." So, I knew where I wasn't. I called for fire where we weren't. I adjusted my observation angle to where the rounds were by sound and I started dropping them back, which was totally--you would absolutely, completely fail any operational readiness test doing something like that. So, here's a bunch of twenty-three-year-olds rewriting standard field artillery doctrine on-the-fly in a wartime situation, in action, and that became the way we adjusted artillery fire--get the rounds out there where you're not, and then, walk them back.

NM: When you initially got to Vietnam, can you talk about getting acclimating and what you first saw?

JM: They flew us out from Fort Campbell on commercial charter jets to Oakland, California, bused us to the Oakland--I don't know what they called it, some kind of a naval, Army base or whatever it was. We boarded a troopship at Oakland--Oakland Army Terminal, that's what it was called, Oakland Army Terminal--we boarded a troopship and it was a twenty-day sail over to Vietnam. We took one stop, a day or two before the end of the cruise, at Subic Bay in the Philippines. They let us off. We all overran the Subic naval facility there, had a lot of San Miguel beer, got back on the ship, sailed again into the South China Sea, which was very rough, with a whole bunch of paratroopers that were full of beer. It was not pretty, but, I don't know, two or three days' sail from Subic Bay, we landed at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, at the very end of July. When that ship stopped in the water, it was like, "Oh, my God, how are we going to survive this?" It was so hot and so humid. Well, we got off the ship at Cam Ranh and we went

into a little encampment somewhere. Sometime shortly thereafter, we took a shake-out exercise through rice paddies. I don't think it was designed to find any enemy; it was just a shake-out. It was so difficult, after twenty days on ship, in that heat, you'd have a hard time raising your arms up to the level of your shoulders. You were just so tired. Shortly after that, I guess it was September--it predated that big engagement I just told you about--they took us by LST, by naval ship, landing ship, up the coast, I don't know how far, maybe a hundred miles up coast, to a city call Quy Nhon and they trucked us over to the base of the mountains with a mission of opening up what was called An Khe Pass. An Khe was a village in the mountains, flat area, where the First Calvary was going to establish their base. So, we cleared An Khe Pass. That engagement was part of it and the First Cav was flown and trucked in to there shortly afterwards.

NM: Just to clarify, are we in 1965?

JM: We're in September of '65.

NM: Okay, September of 1965. Your airborne training had been in parachuting.

JM: Right.

NM: Was this the first time you were personally using a helicopter?

JM: Yes, it was. We never trained with helicopters at Fort Campbell. Strangely enough, there was a month in-between the end of airborne training and the start of ranger training. So, they had all these second lieutenants down in Fort Benning, didn't know what to do with them. So, they took all the married guys who had their wives with them and they gave them make-work jobs at Fort Benning, something like handing out parking passes, whatever, just crummy, little jobs. They took all the bachelors and sent us up to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, opened up an old abandoned basic training barracks at Fort Jackson, and we were given, also, senseless, make-work jobs for the cadre that was evaluating what at that time was called the 11th Air Assault Division. They had been formed to develop the helicopter-borne air assault forces. So, I was sharpening pencils and doing whatever the heck I did for a month there at Fort Jackson while what eventually became the First Air Cavalry Division was being shaken out and tested. The doctrine of air assault helicopter-borne troops was being formulated and tested, but, prior to that time, no, absolutely no helicopter training at all.

NM: Was this transition easy or difficult?

JM: Very easy. There's nothing there. I mean, you're a passenger. You get on the helicopter, the helicopter lands, you jump off. My wife is a very nervous flier and I keep telling her, "What we do today is not flying." When I give the kids at the high school I work at a talk, the juniors, that Vietnam is like toward the end of their junior year, the last slide I use is a picture of a troop sitting with his butt on the floor of a Huey helicopter and his legs dangling out and I said, "This is what flying is." So, other than getting used to flying with your legs hanging out of a helicopter, which, already, I'd overcome my fear of heights through regular jumping out of transport aircraft, but you've got a seatbelt. It's hooked to the floor of the helicopter, so, it's not like you're not belted in, but just taking in stride riding through the air at a thousand feet, or whatever, with your

legs hanging out of this aircraft. It was easy to get used to. I never kept a record, which is one of the minor regrets of my life, not a big deal, of how many times I had made air assaults. I guess it would be up in the fifty range.

NM: In September of 1965, you were in one of the initial Army units deployed and there was a huge troop build-up, of course. Was this apparent to a young second lieutenant?

JM: No. The connection I make to that era was that the Army did not have the logistical capability, in terms of equipment and supply, that they had in 1968 when I went back. So, we went over there with paratrooper boots and regular fatigues, heavy fatigues. I don't recall when it happened that first year, but they had developed, either very quickly or it was in the mill, what they called jungle boots and jungle fatigues, jungle fatigues being an extremely lightweight fabric, that if you got it wet, you'd put it out in the sun and, three minutes later, it's dry. The jungle boots had drainage holes in the arch of the boot. They had corrugated soles and heels. What would you call that? cleated soles and heels. They had canvas uppers, or some kind of an artificial material. So, they also would not only drain out, but dry out much more quickly. So, coming into 1966, when we got jungle fatigues and we got jungle boots, we started to get regular food more often. I think the first three months, we ate nothing but C rations. For an Italian kid from New Jersey, C rations are--you can't eat this crap, but that was all you had.

NM: The operation you described previously, was this your first operation?

JM: In September, yes. Two factors here--one is, an airborne division is very, very light. All our equipment is air droppable and, number two, the build-up was starting. It wasn't all that accelerated. So, as an airborne division, we were just lifted from place to place. Normally, like, the First Air Cav, for example, they went into An Khe, that was their home. They built a base. They mounted operations from their base. The 101st Airborne were a bunch of nomads. We just went. [They said], "Okay, we need you down in the Iron Triangle to help the First Infantry Division," and we'd go down there. "We need you up in Tuy Hoa to take on this mission." "We need you there," and we'd just hop on to airplanes and be flown somewhere and operate out of some different place. It wasn't until around Christmas of 1965 that we actually started to establish a base, a coastal city called Phan Rang, where life got a little bit more comfortable, because there was a place to go back to, although we didn't spend very much time there. We were still being moved all over.

NM: Can you talk about this period from September of 1965 to Christmas, when you started to build your own base?

JM: I just recall operating in a number of different areas. We had been operating mostly in the Central Highlands, heavily jungled mountains. They flew us down to an area called the Iron Triangle to help the First Infantry Division. That, I recall. Anybody who knows anything about Vietnam would know about the Michelin rubber plantation, for example. So, I got to see different geography, flat, much more open--rubber plantations, like the Michelin, are just enormous and the rubber trees are planted very specifically, so that somebody with a machine-gun commanded a tremendous amount of distance down the line of rubber trees, for example. In flying back up to--there was a coastal city called Tuy Hoa, which was much more like the

jungled mountains and rice paddies, because all these things represent a very physical challenge to your body. Rice paddies--rice spends part of its lifecycle underwater--they flood the paddies, and then, the paddies are mucky for a long period of time after that. You can't really walk through them. You walk on the dikes. Well, when you walk on the dikes, you're silhouetted, which is very, very dangerous. You do that for a while, you want to get back in the jungle, until you're in the jungle, and then, you want to get back where you can walk at a decent pace. Those are the physical topographies and geographies that I remember contrasting.

NM: Between September and December 1965, did you make contact with the enemy?

JM: Yes, quite often. I would like to characterize that timeframe as ninety-five percent boredom and five percent terror, because we would spend days and days and days out on what are called search-and-destroy or recon-in-force. It was, "Go find them, so [that] you can get rid of them." It was so different, I would guess, from a strategic point of view, of Korea and World War II and we had a lot of Korean War vets and many World War II vets, where the lines were drawn, the enemy was readily definable, turf was identifiable, into, "Where are they? Find them and, when you find them, destroy them." You could go out for six or seven days, humping the boonies, not run into a contact, just be totally exhausted, and then, you would find the disengage philosophy that especially the local Viet Cong [practiced], "Take some shots. Take an ambush. Don't get heavily engaged. Disengage and withdraw," and they had built a lot of places specifically for that, that kind of warfare. For example, you'd go into a village and there'd be no men. Once you saw nothing but women and children and old men, you knew that there was enemy resident in the village, but, if they saw you coming, they would have tunnels hidden under haystacks and various other places that would run a kilometer and they would just escape.

NM: As a forward observer, did you ever call in artillery?

JM: Oh, all the time, yes. That's the new technique. "Where aren't they or where am I not? Call it in, adjust it back." Plus, in field artillery doctrine, field artillery is never in reserve. So, when my company or my battalion was in reserve, I would end up flying air missions, that is, be airborne, be available to help units on the ground. That was another occasion where we rewrote standard field artillery doctrine. I can remember doing it the first time, and then, bringing this technique back to my colleagues. I was flying in a single-engine aircraft called a Bird Dog, L-19 Bird Dog, later renamed the O-1, and had a unit engaged on the ground, was in contact with the unit, knew exactly where I was, called for some fire for them, to let them disengage, and we started taking antiaircraft fire. The doctrine was that when calling, when doing air observation, you used as an observation direction--it's called an azimuth--the gun target line. You knew where the guns were, you know what the target is, you adjust off that gun target line. Well, I got my pilot diving all over the sky and I can't keep track of where the guns are. So, I get this brilliant idea. I looked down and there's a canal and a road along the canal and it's very identifiable on a map and it went in a direction, I even remember, east-northeast, you're talking about maybe sixty degrees magnetic. So, I call back and I say, "Change azimuth," that is, my observation of the scene, because the people who are computing the settings for the guns can adapt to the directions the guns are firing directions that you're observing. I said, "Change azimuth to 6-0 degrees," or it was in mils, an arcane mathematical thing, and they did and, now, no matter what the pilot did, I could adjust the fire based on that canal and road without having

to keep in mind where the guns were and where the target was and adjusting from that. So, there's another twenty-three-year-old, "Let's change the whole field artillery standard doctrine for air observation."

NM: Was this something that you would teach to other observers?

JM: No, I'd just tell them. I mean, it's obvious. It isn't a big stretch, "Hey, forget the gun target line. Find a readily identifiable ground terrain feature. Use that as your observation azimuth, because it never changes." I've flown hundreds of hours of air missions and I didn't experience that much anti-aircraft fire, but it didn't matter, because it's a hell of a lot more accurate to use a terrain feature with a known azimuth than it is to try to keep in mind that the guns are there and the target's over here, yes. So, you tell somebody, "Hey," and they get it. It's not a very difficult thing to understand.

NM: You mentioned that, occasionally, on these operations, you would make contact with villages. Did you have any contact with civilians?

JM: Yes, quite a bit. Everybody who knows anything about Vietnam knows about My Lai and I can tell you, with complete certainty, that all civilians were treated with respect and gently, especially women, older women, older men. [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.] I don't recall the Vietnamese word for uncle, but it's a revered title in Vietnamese culture and we would call the old men "uncle," for example. I use in my slide presentation, which I'd be happy to provide for you--it's a 16 MG PowerPoint file; you want it, I'll send it to you--I provide pictures of us treating civilians. For example, we overran a field hospital once and we got a number of wounded prisoners and nurses and I have pictures of us feeding them, giving them medical treatment, providing cigarettes. Every instance I had of treating a civilian was extremely benign and respectful. Most of us really look at My Lai as an aberration and disgraceful, much like Abu Ghraib. That's not what professional soldiers do. [Editor's Note: Mr. Mastriani is referring to the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal during the Iraq War.]

NM: You had a French language proficiency.

JM: Yes.

NM: Was that useful?

JM: Since artillery is never in reserve, every time my rifle company would come out of the field, usually, I would be assigned air missions, which are great. It's because I love flying, etc., etc. One time, I was assigned to what's called a Ruff-Puff platoon, local Vietnamese militia, Regional Force-Popular Force. So, we have this mission of locating a small guerilla cell and, of course, the platoon leader is a Vietnamese, doesn't speak English. I don't speak Vietnamese. We find that we both speak French. So, everything's going fine for [the] better part of a day and I knew where we were headed. I knew what the intelligence said and, all of a sudden, we take an abrupt right turn. He's near the front of the platoon and I'm near the back and we're strung out a couple

hundred yards probably. So, I work my way up to the front with my radio operator, told my NCO to stay at the back, and I get this guy and I say, "Where are you going?" All of a sudden, he can't speak French any more. It's because he knew where this cell was. He didn't want to engage them, but that's the only time that I had an opportunity to use my French, which worked great until, all of a sudden, couldn't speak French anymore.

NM: How often would you have to work with other armed forces or these Ruff-Puffs? Was this regular or unusual?

JM: No, it was more unusual. I had worked--in the very early stages, we'd worked a little bit with the Koreans. The Koreans had a division over there. Later on, around Christmastime, when we were down in the Iron Triangle area, we worked with some Australians. I don't remember working with ARVN forces and only then, with the Ruff-Puffs, just that one time, thank God.

NM: It sounds like you were supporting these non-American units on some operations.

JM: Yes, yes. I remember being out with them. The Australians were adjacent to us at one point and I'd met them back in a rear area somewhere. I don't recall being out in the field with them. The Australians have a different concept of field artillery. Their senior officer's with the infantry, their junior officers are back with the guns. The philosophy being, the senior officer, that the company or battery commander is the one best equipped to control the fire and the best place to control it is out there at the action.

NM: Are there any experiences that you remember in working with the Koreans or other units?

JM: The only one I recall is, the Koreans were brutal. I can recall being on an operation with Koreans where they were abusive to villagers; other than that, no, nothing beyond that.

NM: Were they verbally abusive?

JM: No, I think smacking them around. It's the typical situation. There are only women, children and old men. "Well, where are the men?" "They're gone. They're Viet Cong. They disappeared." "Where are they?" and they would smack them around, which American troops would never do.

NM: Your unit was leading this nomadic lifestyle. Were you working out of already established bases or were you dropped in on operations?

JM: Just dropped in--well, you always established some little base, but the idea that you have a tent with a cot in it, which was luxurious for us, the idea that you could sleep up off the ground eighteen inches, with something overhead, was untold luxury, maybe there was a mess tent around, a regular mess hall, where you could get real food, maybe there was some beer. So, that's what a base camp is, which we didn't have for an awfully long time. Foreword bases, yes, you could sometimes get beer or they would ferry rations out to you or bring them out by helicopter, so [that] you weren't eating C rations.

NM: You were very aware of differences in terrain. Were there other things that affected you, such as insects or animals? A lot of people talk about mosquitoes. Was disease a concern?

JM: Let's start there, because that's the biggest story, malaria. We took a drug called Chloroquine, Primaquine, and then, sometime later, we were given another drug called Dapsone. Now, I'm not going to vouch for this explanation, but, apparently, somebody discovered that there was no malaria in leper colonies and they attributed it to this drug, this anti-leprosy drug, called Dapsone and they started giving us Dapsone. At dusk, we would roll down our sleeves, button the top button, lift our collars up, in order to keep the mosquitoes away from us. Malaria was a problem. Thank God, I never contracted it. It hit me directly toward the end of my first tour. I had been in the field for ten months and we had gotten new howitzers, new artillery pieces, and the Army, or the hierarchy there, was faced with the fact that we were all coming up for rotation at twelve months. So, they started bringing replacements in, so [that] it wasn't like closing the curtain on the old, not like today, with the unit replacement they have had in Iraq and have in Afghanistan, which was a direct result of our individual replacement policy in Vietnam. They asked me to go back to the base camp, take six of the old guns and start to train the new officers and enlisted that were coming in to take over from us as individuals--I mean, talk about joy. [laughter] I was going back to sleep on a canvas cot and live in a tent, but there was a miniature officers' club. They had cold beer. They had a mess facility there. So, you were eating regular food. You'd get these kids in from the States and I forget how long they would be with us and we'd concoct these different kinds of fire missions that they never ran into in their artillery training, like moving a gun, resetting, relaying, things like that. We'd run them through these drills and, after a week or ten days, or whatever the timeframe was, we'd ship them out to be replacements. I'm getting close to my rotation date and, all of a sudden, I'm notified, "You have to go back out to the field, because the artillery liaison officer," who's a step above me as a forward observer, he's the battalion commander's forward observer, if you will, "he's got malaria. Go up there and replace him." I'm ready to go home. So, I hop on a chopper and I go up and they're already in the field. So, I take a mess chopper or supply chopper, whatever, go out to the battalion headquarters and start operating with them out there. It so happens that there was a fairly--to pro soldiers, there was a very significant event. The guy who was the original collegiate "lonely end," a fellow named Bill Carpenter, who was company commander of one of the companies in the battalion, he ended up, on an operation, getting himself in some deep stuff--I mean, not his fault. I don't mean to cast any aspersions that way. He's in deep trouble. He's getting attacked. He's thinking he's going to be overrun and we've got some tac air support overhead. He just said, "Bring it right down on me." It was a big *Life* Magazine article, which I cannot find. I had it at one time. I regret losing it. So, I was out there for that. [Editor's Note: William Stanley Carpenter, Jr., graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1960. While at West Point, he was named an All-American football player and earned the nickname the "Lonesome (or Lonely) End" since he was often lined up near the far sideline and excluded from huddles. He earned the Distinguished Service Cross in 1966 near Dak To for the incident Mr. Mastriani describes, which was chronicled in the July 8, 1966 issue of *Life*. He retired from the US Army as a lieutenant general.] I was there, I don't know, maybe two weeks and they got a replacement, a permanent replacement. I survived. I left and went home.

NM: Do you want to take a break?

JM: I'm still good. I'm happy. Yes, let's take a break.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: I will just continue.

JM: Go ahead.

NM: When you went on your missions, we often hear about how the Viet Cong would set booby traps and things of that sort, would you encounter that as a forward observer?

JM: Yes. The two types of booby traps that I recall encountering, one are called punji stakes. That's a hole in the ground upon which they put sharpened bamboo that's been treated with human feces, and then, they cover them up and make it look like the ground around it. So, if you do happen to step on it, not see it, and my recollection is that they were fairly visible, it was rather crude, but it would take you out of action. It wouldn't kill you by any chance, but it would take you out of action and the subsequent infection, you had to be very diligent of. The other one was a whip type thing, where they would take a sapling of some sort and tie it back with a trip wire and it would go. I don't recall that ever causing any real damage. The idea of a trip wire and a mine, no, but this was 1965 and early '66 and I guess that hadn't been developed all that highly. Plus, there's just such a tremendous amount of geography to cover. We're talking about the first year. The second year, I wasn't in the infantry.

NM: Is there anything that we missed about your first year in Vietnam?

JM: Only to compare it with today's soldiers that have such a tremendous communications capability. All we could do was write a letter. Sometime during that first year, we got franking privileges, where we didn't have to put postage on the letters, but your communications with your family were extremely limited, strictly what you could write, probably much like World War II or Korea. The other thing was care packages, because I make fun of this. My Italian Earth mother would send me boxes with cylinders of provolone cheese and sticks of pepperoni. My wife is very observant of the condition of the food that we eat, like a little bit of mold, "Oh, there's some mold on this." "Cut it off." So, because the packages would come, the grease would soak through the paper that the packages were wrapped in and there'd be fuzz and mildew on the packages. You'd open it up and it'd be on the cheese. Well, you had a choice, wash it off and/or cut it off, because to have provolone cheese and pepperoni was--what's better than that? So, you just cut that stuff off. That's another great memory.

NM: How often would you write or receive letters from your family or friends?

JM: Well, my mother was not a letter writer, not very often. I know that after that big action that I told you about in September, I had written my brother, but he didn't keep the letter. I'd love to have that back.

NM: As a graduate of West Point, were you treated any differently by enlisted men or other officers? Sometimes, we encounter people who talk about West Pointers in a way that denotes there was a difference in the way that they were treated.

JM: No, not in the way we're treated and I know from reputation that it splits. When I talk to people--I mean, we're all individuals and some people who worked for/along with West Pointers are very, very effusive about their praise, and then, you run into others who will practically spit on you. So, it all depends on the individual; in terms of treatment, no, not that I can think of. I know that, in dealing with the cadets of today, one of the things that I tell them is that, "A., it's a very different Army. Vietnam changed this Army tremendously. The second thing is, it's a much smaller Army and you're graduating twice as many people. So, you have double the amount of grads going into a smaller Army. You're going to be with your classmates or others to a much, much greater degree than my cohort did." We had guys that might be the only grad in their whole battalion, whereas you go out now, I saw in our alumni magazine, for example, some aviation battalion, there were seven guys in it, guys and girls now, because girls, women, can be helicopter pilots. So, you had an aviation battalion with seven classmates in it. That's unheard of, from times previous.

NM: Can you talk about the period after your tour in Vietnam ended? Where did you go? What were your thoughts?

JM: Well, I went back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to the 82nd Airborne Division. Just a little color, from coming back, had a charter flight into McGuire Air Force Base, my brother came to pick me up and he prevailed upon my mother not to go. So, he picks me up and I get in the car and I'm terrified of doing sixty miles an hour, because I had not gone over twenty miles an hour for a year. [laughter] He's pumping up the Turnpike at sixty miles an hour and I'm having a fit, not accustomed to that, and then, I came back a couple of days before the Fourth of July. So, I had to deal with the fireworks. That is the only reactive memory that I have, negative reactive memory, is fireworks at the Fourth of July. Coincidentally, after my second tour, I also came back at the end of June, had to deal with that all over again.

NM: You returned to the 82nd Airborne Division. Were you still in the artillery?

JM: Yes, I reported in to the division headquarters and I was really happy to have another airborne assignment. Not the least reason was that Army pay was so bad in those days that hazardous duty pay, 110 bucks a month, was a big chunk. So, I was happy to be in a prestigious organization, the 82nd, well-known in history, and to be getting the jump pay and to be slightly closer to home than Fort Campbell was. I want to give you a little reaction of getting to Fort Bragg, because I tell this story many times. I-95 was not complete, so, you would jump off of 95, get on US 301 for a time. The last hundred miles before Fayetteville, North Carolina, where Fort Bragg is, was complete, from Rocky Mount to Fayetteville. So, 95 ends there in Fayetteville and the first thing I see at the traffic light, there's a huge billboard and there's a hooded rider on a bucking horse, "Welcome to Fayetteville, North Carolina, Home of the United Klans of America. Defeat Integration and Communism," which kind of staggers me a little bit. So, I always remember that incident. 95 now has been redirected, so, even that site, I can't identify. I was there about five or six years ago, can't even identify that site.

NM: How long were you in Fayetteville?

JM: Well, I got there in, I guess shortly after the Fourth of July, 1966, report into the 82nd Airborne Division. They assigned me to a field artillery battalion, Second Battalion, 321st Parachute Artillery. I report down there and the battalion commander has an opening for his staff supply officer and, combat soldier, I don't want to be a supply officer, but you do what you're told to do. So, I take over the supply shop in this artillery battalion and I don't know how long I held that position, generally, an office job with some field exercises to go on. I think I had a noncom, two enlisted soldiers and a warrant officer specialist. Warrant officer specialist, this is his life. So, he took care of all of the detail stuff, but after '66, '67, must have been about a year in that assignment, one of the battery commanders leaves and I get assigned to be the commanding officer of A Battery of that battalion, which is your classic, "This is what a real soldier does. This is what a West Point grad aspires to, company level command," great job, great job. I took over the unit and [found them] a little sloppy, not physically fit, which I thought was a sin for an airborne soldier. So, I tell my first sergeant that we're going to--"Got to whip these guys into shape. They've got to be airborne soldiers. They have to be in great physical condition. That's a hallmark of what an airborne soldier is," said, "Four weeks from today, we're going to be running five miles. So, they've got a month. Now, we're going to do a little bit more every day, but you'd better tell the noncoms to get their guys out there on the road, do some running, after work, whenever." So, I took care of all the things which I thought were not up to snuff. I started to pick up on things that, eventually, became a technique that I used in civilian management with my technicians and clerks and everything in the telephone company. That was that I told my first sergeant, when I took over, that I will honor the previous battery commander's Friday afternoon commander's hour, [in] which any soldier could come in and talk to me. Nobody ever came to talk to me--finally dawns on me that for a soldier to talk to the battery commander, he's got to ask his gun chief, who has to ask the First Sergeant, and then, he's got to march by the First Sergeant to come in, big impediment. So, I come up with this brilliant idea that I'm going to talk to the guys in [their areas]; how you break it down, like, all the gun sections, just take every NCO, give him an hour off. They can do anything they want--also, tell them that I'm not going to act on what these guys tell me about, maybe that would reflect badly on them. I just want to know what's going on. So, I did that; found out the soldiers loved it. They just loved it. So, I continued that for as long as I was a commanding officer of a company-sized unit. It developed great cohesion. You know the soldier more as a human being than just PFC Molnar. It becomes very personal, that they believe in you because you talk to them, too. You don't just listen. You tell them, "Okay, here's my vision. This is what we're going to do," turns out that you can become a hero, if you will. For example, whole idea of physical fitness, my first sergeant tells me that there's not enough time to do everything you want to do and to have the guys clean up and clean the barracks, etc. I said, "Well, let's schedule two hours for PT." So, I go to the Training Sergeant and I said, "Next week, our training schedule, you schedule two hours of PT." So, he sets up the schedule that way and the battalion training people kick it back. "You can't have two hours of PT." "Okay, put on the training schedule, 'Second Hour, Commander's Hour,'" that, in other words, I don't have to answer to anybody. They come back, "You can't have five hours of commander's time every week." So, I came up with something else, whether it was motor pool or a training class or whatever, and I told my first sergeant that, "We're going to take the whole first hour for PT. Then, you've got a whole part of

it," whatever the training blocks were, an hour-and-a-half, I say, "the second one, the troops can go shower, clean up. You can clean up the barracks and we'll start the other training things mid-morning." They loved that. Now, I'm faced with the dilemma, I'm brought up in a culture of honor and integrity and I'm reporting something that's not true, with the intent to deceive--so be it. I thought that the physical condition of my men was more important than what I was reporting as what I was doing, worked out great. Not only that, but you'd also built up these personal relationships with the troops. They saw you as a human being with a vision, and always ran with them, never sent them out to do PT. Sometimes, you would lead it, sometimes, you would take the mess section or, sometimes, you would just get right in the middle of the pack and run as a soldier, lead by example. That's something that became a doctrine for me.

NM: How long was this assignment? Was it one year in Fayetteville?

JM: No, no, I finished the first year as the supply officer of this battalion. I took over as the commanding officer of this battery, and then, in February of 1968, right after the Tet Offensive, the 82nd Airborne had a process by which one of their three brigades was on a division ready force and there were certain restrictions to your activities at that point. [Editor's Note: The Tet Offensive, a series of offensives conducted from January 30, 1968, to September 30, 1968, by the Viet Cong against every major city in South Vietnam, is seen as the point when American public opinion began turning against the war.] You got your equipment configured in a certain way. You were responsible to be available at a certain notice, and then, one of the three battalions of that brigade, along with its associated artillery battery, was on what's called immediate ready force. You had to be home. So, it just so happened, when they alerted the 82nd to go in and reinforce the Marines up in I Corps for the Tet Offensive, because the Marines were really bogged down in the City of Hue, it was my rotation on as immediate ready force. So, it was a Monday night, I recall, I get a call, "Come in," and I go in and they said, "We're going to deploy to Vietnam. In the morning, we're going to arrange for you to get the fillers you need to fill out," because we were very understrength, "and we're going to have the plan available for loading out." So, for the next five days, we took in fifty fillers, out of 110, I think. So, you're going to war with people you don't know. They don't know you. They haven't had a chance to develop confidence in your capabilities and, for a soldier, that's really important. You don't know who the screw-ups are, you don't know who the hot guys are, because this is a draftee army here. It's 1968. The war protests are starting to come up. Our whole mission in Vietnam is clouded with doubt, but we took the fillers. We integrated them. We started to load out, because we're going to fly over now. We're not going to put the stuff on trains and send it to Oakland, etc., etc.--faced with another integrity dilemma. My chief clerk, the First Sergeant's main guy, he's seventeen years old. Halfway through, we're told, "Nobody under eighteen can go." So, we just ignored the fact that he was seventeen; never lied about it, but we said, the First Sergeant and I said, "We're going to take him," he wanted to go, "we're going to take him with us. Once we're over there and established, we'll let it be known that he's seventeen," which we did, but we loaded up and we flew out. We stopped at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage, Alaska, and we flew into Chu Lai in northern South Vietnam. We went from the airfield to an old Marine firing position and we started firing in support of the Marines, like Saturday or Sunday. So, it was drinking beer at home on Monday night and in the action on Saturday or Sunday. We were there for just a couple of days and they flew us up to Hue, which is further up north, and we started to work. There was a road--I won't call it a highway--there was a road

from Hue west into the A Shau Valley and we started pushing down that road. I occupied two firebases for the push down the road, firing in support of--the 101st Airborne was there also, up there in the Hue-Phu Bai area--and we started supporting them, plus our own troops. As a firing battery, it was pretty standard, what we were doing. It wasn't like being an FO [forward observer]. So, other than now being in a fixed position, which made you a sitting target for being mortared and rocketed, it was better than being in the infantry. We were in a quarry. There was Navy CBs [Construction Battalions] there that were blasting rock and crushing rock as a rock operation, for building whatever it is they built all around there.

NM: How long were you in Vietnam once you were deployed there this time?

JM: Came back at the end of June. We were offered--we were on a status called TDY, temporary duty--we were offered the opportunity to go status PCS, permanent change of station, with the five months or so credited toward a one-year tour, or we could go back to Fort Bragg. Now, I had been in command of this battery for about a year-and-a-half, which is an extraordinarily long time in that timeframe. I knew that one of my best friends was up for a command. I talked to my battalion commander, who assured me that he would give this command to my best friend. So, I didn't feel like I was just plain abandoning my unit. I knew that I couldn't stay with it that much longer, because command slots were premium. So, I decided to leave. I had also decided then that I was going to be returning to Vietnam indefinitely over a period of time and that I loved company level command, company level operations. I didn't have any desire to progress in the Army, number one, and probably more so, which probably sounds strange, for an Italian kid from New Jersey, the Southern culture of the '60s, I could not adapt to. I just did not like Columbus, Georgia, Fayetteville, North Carolina, Clarksville, Tennessee. That's where most of the Army bases were. So, actually, while I was in Vietnam the second time, I submitted a letter of resignation, which was denied. So, when the troops were given stop-loss orders in Iraq and everybody--they were doing that in the '60s in Vietnam. They said, "You have a regular Army commission. You serve at the pleasure of the Army. No, you can't resign." So, they said, "Try again in eighteen months." That was the horns of the dilemma, "Should I get credit for the second tour and just, probably, they would let me go seven more months when I got out?" but I had no idea of what I would be doing if I lost my command. So, I decided, "Well, it's a crap shoot. Let me go back to Fort Bragg, see if they catch up with me." So, I got back to Fort Bragg, July of '68, signed into the division and they were looking to fill a slot in their division level logistics staff. They call it G-4 Plans. I definitely didn't want to do that. I wanted to get back down into the field, but you do what you're told to do. So, I take on this job as G-4 Plans officer in the division staff and it was a desk job. You go out to the field on command post exercises and division level exercises. I guess the highlights of that job were, I went to Turkey twice, to plan NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] exercises, which gave me great insight into, for example, how the Greeks hate the Turks and vice-versa. I actually saw it with my own eyes, the bickering back and forth. I got to see Turkey, Istanbul and Izmir, went to Puerto Rico to plan another exercise, a joint naval exercise on Vieques Island. So, when Vieques Island's reversion to Puerto Rico as a state made the news, I'd seen it, been there, but, essentially, I was just doing my job and waiting out my time, because I wanted to go back to New Jersey. I wanted to get back to my ethnic enclaves.

NM: Going back, can you expand a little bit more on this culture shock in the South?

JM: Well, part of it probably has nothing to do with the Southern culture, but it was [that] you're a transient. It's an Army town. I was back there six or seven years ago--it's entirely different than it was. It's a beef-and-potatoes culture in a spaghetti-and-meatballs mind [laughter] and I did not like the surroundings. I missed Polish Jews, I missed Italians, I missed Angus MacDonald and his pipe band and all those kind of things, which you take for granted when you live in a place like Northern New Jersey. You'd go to work in the morning and, on the radio, you have very agriculturally-oriented programming, like the flue-cured tobacco prices today and pork deliveries. Today, I might enjoy something like that, but, as a twenty-something single man, no. When you see movies, and I'm dating myself, like *Steel Magnolias* [1989 comedy drama], find out that they have very strong women who were very--words escape me right here. They give you the feeling of being a pretty little rose, but they're really a steel magnolia. You wouldn't remember; you're too young to remember that movie, probably.

NM: I know the movie you are talking about.

JM: Okay. It's just too different for me. I craved the ethnic diversity of the North and, also, I had aunts and uncles and cousins, some lived close by. Because we lived with my grandmother, it was like, as a good friend from civilian life from the Bronx calls it, "First Army Headquarters;" no relation to the military, it's just that everybody comes to visit you, because you've got Grandma. So, for example, even to this day, I know all my cousins. They don't know each other, because they would come to our house to visit, stay with us if they were from a distance away. So, I don't mean none of them know each other, but, generally, I've taken on the role as the family historian. I missed all my aunts and uncles and cousins, because we were just very close.

NM: You mentioned that physical fitness was something you emphasized, but were there any other common problems in commanding this unit?

JM: Engendering the sense of responsibility and accountability--you screw up, you pay. There's a standard, "You've got to meet the standard. You don't meet the standard, we're going to do something to make you meet the standard." I had a lieutenant, a second lieutenant, one of my FOs. I get a call from the Desk Sergeant, duty desk sergeant, of the Military Police. This Lieutenant X is in jail down in Fayetteville, "Go get him out." Lieutenant X has been a problem in terms of his buying into the culture, the military culture. So, I tell the Desk Sergeant, "It'll do him good to spend the night in jail. I'll get him in the morning." It's two or three o'clock AM. Desk Sergeant's talking to a captain, "Yes, sir, thank you." Phone rings again. It's the MP duty officer, major something or other, "Get your ass down there and get that lieutenant out of jail." "Yes, sir." So, I go down and get the Lieutenant out of the jail. In those times, troops got paid once a month and that was your duty as the commander, to pay the troops. So, you would go down, you'd draw a forty-five, you'd get your chief clerk, usually, get him a forty-five, go down to the finance office, get this twenty thousand dollars or whatever it was. They had some process by which Corporal Molnar got 181 dollars and, somehow, in this big stack of money, it always worked out perfectly. You could give Molnar 181 dollars and Sergeant Fuzz 231 dollars and they had enough ones and fives and tens, etc., but the troops would then go downtown and have a toot that night; said, "I'm going to beat this." I had the First Sergeant tell the NCOs that, "Starting next week, the heaviest PT would be the day after payday and, if you go get yourself

shitfaced, you're really going to pay." Well, it only took once, one payday, that everybody's off the side of the road barfing their guts out, that the payday drunkenness went away.

NM: That was a problem. Was that a common problem outside your unit as well?

JM: Yes, yes. It was common, and there are also, culturally, things that you're not accustomed to dealing with. I had a good troop go AWOL [absent without official leave] and we come to find out, when we dig into it, that the reason he went AWOL was, he was a North Georgia mountain boy, had a girlfriend that he planned to marry, screwed around and got another girl pregnant. The pregnant girl's father and brother took him and actually had a shotgun wedding. Forced to marry this girl, he joins the Army, ends up at Fort Bragg and the pregnant girl's, his wife's, father and brother get wind--oh, no, know what he did is, he goes and he gets his girlfriend, his love, to come move up to Fort Bragg, to live with him. His wife's mother, her father and brother find out about it and they come up here and they're going to kill him. So, he takes off. In my culture, that is just so totally alien that I could hardly deal with the fact that this is happening in America. [laughter] Another situation, where a troop just has to have time off during an important field exercise, because his sister's husband, down in Alabama or somewhere, is going to be executed and he's got to go down there to be with his sister, to support her--for a kid with my background, this is so alien, culturally alien, that I have a hard time believing that situations like this occur. The stability in which I was brought up, this is totally alien to me.

NM: Were the men in your unit from all over the United States?

JM: Yes. Don't forget, this is a draftee army. One of the things that I didn't have to deal with in terms of unwilling soldiers was, to be in the 82nd Airborne, you had to be a volunteer to go airborne. If you're going to volunteer to go airborne, you have a certain sense of adventure and spirit and it's a lot easier to integrate you into an organization than it would be some other infantry division where you were drafted, you went through basic training, you went through your advanced basic training and you came to your unit. By virtue of the fact that it was a draftee army, yes, from everywhere; in that timeframe, and I can't vouch for it today, your NCOs, those who stayed on, were preponderantly from the South, because the economic opportunities in the South in the '60s were much less. Black kids finally found a meritocracy in which they could excel and progress. They had a tendency to stay on. Plus, the military as a culture is much more comfortable to Southerners than it is to Northerners--big generalization. That's my personal assessment of it.

NM: Were there any problems between blacks and whites in your unit?

JM: Not that I'm aware of, no. They were fairly well integrated. It's predominately white. The statistics from Vietnam belie the fact that blacks got the worst of the deal. The percentages are fairly representative of the population; my NCOs, probably half and half, maybe a touch more black. The work I'm doing at West Point right now, with my fifty-year associated, affiliated class, the Class of 2014, when they were plebes, we had four classroom sessions in which seven or eight of my classmates are participating in this program. One of the sessions was respect and I was telling my brother and sister-in-law this last night, we get pre-prepped for the session. We had this young female major who was prepping us for this session called respect, and three of us,

of the seven, were from the New York Metropolitan area, one from Yonkers, one from Manhattan and me from Northern New Jersey, and we grew up in the '40s and the '50s. They talk about ethnic slurs and respect for humanity. We kind of chuckled and her name was Missy, Melissa. "Missy, you know who you're talking to? You're talking to at least three guys here who grew up in the New York Metropolitan area. We know and have used every ethnic slur in the book against our best friends, because that's the era, the culture, we grew up in," and this political correctness of, "Trend so lightly on ethnicity," we're all proud of being whatever we were, whether you're a WOP or a mick or whatever, that's what you were, a Jew. We've got about sixteen different pejorative terms for Jews. I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood. We used to fling these things back and forth at each other like nothing. I don't know what got me off onto that. I'm sorry, Nick, we ought to expunge that whole thing. [laughter]

NM: Going forward to your second time in Vietnam, what were some of the differences that you experienced in your new role and responsibilities?

JM: Boy, that has carried forward so many, many years. The Army has a doctrine that says that the commander is responsible for everything that the unit does or fails to do. It's your responsibility to get other people to adhere to what it is they have to do and, in the high school, when I run across a kid who's a little bit resistant and recalcitrant, I ask him to define discipline for me. "It's punishment." "No, it's not punishment. Discipline is doing what you're supposed to do when you're supposed to do it, in the manner in which it's supposed to be done, in the absence of anybody making you do it." So, that's the kind of atmosphere you want to bring as a commander, because, if you should drop a round short, or something even more general, because I tell people that I dealt in a very, very hazardous occupation, where people died as the result of mistakes, so, the only way to keep people alive is not to make mistakes. So, it's always your responsibility. I remember just being tremendously gratified by a *60 Minutes* interview of a Navy submarine captain who was told to proceed at all possible haste from Point A to Point B and he ran into an undersea mountain and one of his sailors was killed and another was badly hurt. Whoever was interviewing him, whether it was Mike Wallace or Morley Safer, said, "You were using Navy charts, weren't you?" "Yes." "You were told to proceed at all possible haste, weren't you?" "Yes." "So, why do you feel that you're responsible?" He said, "I was the commander of their ship. I'm responsible for everything that happens." I said, "Thank God, still, that that attitude exists," because responsibility, accountability, discipline and lack of entitlement are things that I learned and I carry forward to this day and I see tremendously missing today in our society as a whole. You're responsible for what happens to you, either by things you did or didn't do.

NM: In your second tour in Vietnam, you were in a ...

JM: Firebase, yes.

NM: Could you talk about your experiences in the firebase?

JM: Yes. You have these hundred and some men that you're responsible for. You're in fact responsible for their actions. When they throw a forty-pound explosive charge out six or seven miles, it'd better be where it's supposed to go and the person who called for it, who is your

responsibility, better know how to do it. So, every time you get a fire mission, you get this anxiety. You're not controlling anything at this point, but the people that you've put in place and the people that you've trained and the atmosphere that you've created, the discipline that you've tried to lay out on your gun chiefs, your assistant gunners and all, about the steps that they go through, that everything is, "A, B, C, D," because you're desperately afraid that that round doesn't go where it's supposed to go or that your lieutenant FO screwed up the coordinates and it's going to drop in the middle of a rifle company. It's overwhelming, that kind of responsibility, plus, the defense of your position, where you set your guard posts out, how you set up your soldiers in terms of making sure that, during the day, when they have other responsibilities, that they get the rest that's required, so that they can stay awake. If you've ever tried to stay awake on an overcast, moonless night, where your eyes just can't focus on anything, it's the hardest thing in the world to do. So, what do you do? "Okay, First Sergeant, you go out and make the rounds of the guard posts at two," and then, you're seven by twenty-four, so, you have your fire direction center, who's always got one or two people awake, to ring up the command post every three hours or every four hours and, I guess, what did we do? two, must have been two. Every two hours, the phone rings and either the First Sergeant or I go out to each of the guard posts to make sure everybody's awake and alert, because you're a sitting duck, and that the people know how to defend the position. That responsibility is overwhelming and it just stays with you forever and it gives you this sense of, "Hey, I'm responsible for everything."

NM: In the firebase, what was your primary concern defensively?

JM: To be able to defend the position defensively. Offensively, I've got a mission and that's to provide fire support and, I mean, there are some times when you're firing all night long, a combination of what they call harassing and interdiction fires, where you're just popping a round out there every fifteen or twenty minutes, or you're supporting a major assault by one of your infantry units, in which case you're firing continuously and that the kind of firing you're doing is depending on your FO's capability to, "Do you want all six guns fired for effect? Do you want me to keep their heads down by firing one round at a time, every ten seconds?" You're starting to do that, and then, you have to start thinking about, "How tired are your troops?" You don't need six soldiers to fire an artillery piece, so, get three of them down and, every hour, rotate, so that the crews are fresh. Then, they're given a setting, that they're not too tired and make a mistake. Defensively is, you've got your outposts. We had a type of munition called beehive, which was developed just before my second tour. You never get a chance to practice with these things, because what they are is, instead of a high explosive shrapnel type of shell, it's thousands of little flechettes, little arrows, small things, and they're meant to be fired with a level tube at short range and they have to be set for exploding or detonating very close in. I recall, one night, the phone rings in the command post and First Sergeant answers it and he says, "Sir, there's movement on the perimeter," pull on the boots, go out there and, sure enough, we've got quite a bit of movement out there. You can see it, because, in the jungle, and even down in Fort Benning, at Ranger School, there's a phosphorescence in the trees and, as people move, you can see their movement. You can't see their bodies, but you could see the phosphorescence change. He says, "We're going to get hit." So, this a war story now. I say, "Top," name for a first sergeant, Top, nickname, I said, "Top, get Sergeant Broome, chief of firing battery. I want number four piece moved by hand up to the perimeter and tell each gun sergeant to bring one of their two rounds of beehive up to the number four piece." I loved my first sergeant. He loved

me. We worked together great. He starts questioning me, "Why are you going to move the base piece, number four?" I said, "Best gun crew, and I want to create a hole in the middle of the battery. So, if they do get a penetration, they're going to have a longer distance to go before they reach one, two and three." He said, "Oh, okay." So, he follows through and gets that done. There were two separate instances, the move number four and the move one round of beehive, and it was something else in there, but that's an indication of the defensive things you do. Well, apparently, whoever was going to hit us saw what we were doing and they disengaged and moved away, but it was just that whole thing of being ready to [act]. I never thought of doing it that way, it just kind of happens. You develop a feel. Another situation, it was actually fun, get another call, "We see light and movement out in the distance." We had been rocketed before, didn't suffer any casualties, didn't even hit within the battery position, but it was definitely we were the target. So, I figure, "Uh-oh, here comes some more rockets." So, I hop up. I go out there and they just happened to be--the guns were laid in a certain direction and they were right down the gun line, maybe two or three miles away. So, the old forward observer comes out in me. I get a map, I look, I said, "It's most likely they're within this tree line that's described on the map." So, I pick the coordinates. I asked for permission to fire, because you couldn't just fire, because of friendlies, possibly, in the area, so, get permission, and the fire direction center plots the settings to hit this thing. First rounds, boom, massive secondary explosion--we got [it] and this is just pure luck, believe me. This is not great skill, but my troops were just ecstatic at what they had done, because artillerymen never see the fruits of their action, always happens somewhere else. We had clear line of sight. We set it. We fired two rounds, just hit pay dirt, either an ammunition bunker or they had moved some rockets up getting ready to fire and, boy, you want to see something to create morale, I mean, they talked about that for days.

NM: You mentioned that you had been rocketed before. Was this something that happened sporadically or was it more harassment?

JM: Sporadically. Well, I wouldn't say it's [to] harass. They're attempting to do some damage; well, probably, two or three times at the most. That was one of the differences between infantry and artillery. You're always moving in the infantry. When you're on a firebase, you're fixed. They know where you are. They had a chance to set coordinates, compute their settings. They used, predominantly, a very small field piece called the sixty-millimeter mortar, which was very mobile. An individual troop could carry, two troops, one carry the base, the other carry the tube, and they were very crude, but very effective in terms of they might not even use sighting pieces, optical pieces. They can take the sling, the canvas sling, with little, if you want, three hundred meters, hold this down on the ground with your foot and elevate it until it's tight and drop a round in it. So, they weren't the most accurate things around.

NM: You received two Bronze Stars. Did you already describe the circumstances in which you earned those Bronze Stars?

JM: I don't even admit to having them. They are what I call "awards for perfect attendance." They have nothing to do with valor. I don't wear a lapel pin with a Bronze Star. I see a lot of license plates--Massachusetts has a license plate for a Bronze Star--and I wonder how many of these guys have Bronze Stars for Valor. If you get a Bronze Star for Valor, you get a little "V"

device that you place on it. Mine are not for valor. Mine are for perfect attendance, "Meritorious service in action against hostile forces," i.e., perfect attendance.

NM: Had you considered making the military a career?

JM: Well, the first couple years, even the facts of whether you would or wouldn't are pretty distant. I really didn't think about it a lot until I got back to Bragg. I had asked for the DC area, like Fort Meade, Fort Belvoir. There was nothing around New York. I'd asked for something where a young, single guy would enjoy living. Instead, I got Fort Bragg. I was happy to get the airborne, but, on the other hand, I didn't get flight school and I was the S-4 in the battalion, a staff officer. That's probably when I started saying, "I really don't want to be here." Then, getting a battery command changed that somewhat, and then, going back to Vietnam again, plus, by that time, my classmates, a lot of them had had a second tour and I had no idea where we were going. It's 1968 when I decided, "We could be here forever, because we're not making any progress. We'll go take this hill. People will die and we'll abandon the hill. They'll come back a year later," and I looked at the peasants in the field and said, "What difference does it make to them who their government is? They want to worship their ancestors, grow their rice, eat, celebrate their extended family--what difference does it make? Why are we here?" but it wasn't an antiwar sentiment as much as it was, "Why should I be coming back to this?" Plus, that part of my career was likely that my next assignment would be Fort Sill, Oklahoma, another great, thriving metropolis of ethnic diversity that I love so much; said, "Let's go back home."

NM: Can you talk about the transition from the military back to your home life?

JM: I don't recall that it was a big problem. I started interviewing for jobs in December. I got out, I left the Army, the 3rd of December. I start interviewing for jobs. I guess a lot of it was a matter of geography. I got this interview with New York Telephone and my objective was to come back to New York, because the big city, etc., etc. So, I get this interview and New York Telephone was having tremendous service problems. They were actually looking for "young older" people or "older young" people, how ever you want to put it, not twenty-two-year-olds, with some life experience, to get them out of this particular jam. So, I went to interview and the guy who's interviewing me takes me through their 140 West Street exchange office. They call it a central office and I go in there--there's machinery everywhere. There's things clicking and banging and stuff moving around. I think, "Oh, this is great." So, they offer me a job and I take it and it was a good job, liked it. I worked on East 79th Street, their exchange office at East 79th Street, and the one at East 56th Street, but I was living in Manasquan and I was commuting up to New York. I found out that I had been ruralized, that I really didn't like going to New York every day. So, there was an opportunity to participate in a National Guard exercise down at Fort Bragg. They had a Texas National Guard engineer battalion that they were converting to field artillery. I was in the Inactive Reserves and they did their little search and they said, "Well, here's," oh, they were airborne, "here's an airborne artilleryman. Maybe he'd like to come in, work on this." So, it was a two-week summer warrior type thing and I went down there, because it was Fort Bragg, because it was airborne and I enjoyed it; didn't whet my appetite to say, "Let me get back into the Army," but I decided to resign from New York Telephone without a job, which, for my Depression era father, "You're working for the telephone company. What are you, nuts?" but I managed to get a job with New Jersey Bell, which was right across the river. In

those days, they were all subsidiaries of AT&T. You could not transfer--I mean, the capability was there to transfer from one to the other--you couldn't leave New York Telephone. They would never let you. They would never sign off on it. So, I quit and I managed to get a job with New Jersey Bell, got it specifically in an engineering type of situation, technology that I knew something about, and, eventually, evolved from the engineering into the operations, which was more like being a troop commander--loved it, loved the field assignments as what they call a district manager, director of switching operations, probably could still be working there if [I] didn't run into an organization change which most likely would have had me go to Virginia.

NM: On the pre-interview survey, it says you attended Seton Hall University.

JM: Yes, I decided to go for my MBA. So, I was still working in New York, I think, and I started to pursue an MBA at Seton Hall. I got married, I was living in Sea Girt; no, that would have been with New Jersey [Bell]. I think I started when I was working in New York, and then, I continued on after I got married and was working for New Jersey Bell in Newark, but a combination of being a newlywed, living in Sea Girt, working on a new job, plus, I didn't find it the least bit challenging. It was very common sense. I still, to this day, remember, I was taking accounting--now, I'm somebody with an engineering degree--I get an "A" in accounting. I had no idea what it was all about. You just take this number from here and you transfer it there. You take that number, you add them together. The economics piece, I had already had an economics course. I liked it. I said, "This is nothing new. I already knew all this stuff." So, I said it wasn't worth it and I ceased that. In turn, when I was working for New Jersey Bell, they gave me an opportunity to go to Stanford in a three-week executive session in the summertime, where that was like a three-week MBA.

NM: Did you follow what was going on after you left the service?

JM: Yes, mainly through reading. For example, there is a seminal work on Vietnam called *Street without Joy*, and so, I read that, I read *Hell in a Very Small Place*, which [chronicles] the siege and fall of Dien Bien Phu, [both books by Bernard B. Fall, published in 1961 and 1966 respectively]. So, while that subject, that world history, history, social sciences stuff, was never important to me as an undergrad, it became kind of a hobby and I started to get into it and especially now, without a full-time job, that is, I would say, my prime interest. I call it "geopolitical confluence of geography, religion, history, economics." I spend a tremendous amount of time doing that.

NM: You mentioned that you eventually got your commercial pilot's license.

JM: Yes.

NM: Just for the record, when did you get that?

JM: That was in the late '60s, when I was at Fort Bragg.

NM: Okay.

JM: When I moved to New Jersey, I did a little bit of flying out of Monmouth Airport, which was close by to where I was living, and, once I got married, it was way too expensive for a married person to do. I couldn't waste the family money on stuff like that. So, I didn't fly again until I was fifty. My parents gave me a gift certificate for the flight school at Monmouth. So, I went down there and I took two of my three kids on different little sessions. It's amazing. People talk about once being able to ride a bicycle, once being able to fly an airplane. There's certain things, like, I would never fly without an instructor pilot, unless you can fly at least once a month. So, when my mother passed away, my parents left me a small amount of money and it's just mine. It's not family money, it's my money. So, that was one of the things I said, "Well, if I don't have to be careful with it and I can just splurge on myself, I want to fly a couple of hours again." I haven't done it yet. There's an airport in Marshfield, Mass., and I probably will.

NM: How did your career in the military affect your management style? Have you applied that part of yourself to your career?

JM: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I think that it probably had more to do with--the military--had more to do with my management style than any single other thing. All the things I learned being a battery commander, I applied. Now, there's a difference, because you don't have the Universal Code of Military Justice. For example, you don't have the authoritarian capability that you do when you are an officer in the Army, but certain things, like respect for one's humanity, get to know your soldiers, be approachable, be consistent, I mean, these are things that I tell this Class of 2014, when we get together, about the aspects of leadership that were successful for me. Everybody's different, but my son, my youngest, is thirty-one. He's in the Navy. He's an Annapolis grad and I can recall telling he and his fellow midshipmen, who are young officers, "Make it personal. You make it personal by knowing your," sailors, not soldiers, but, if I can, let me just take the iron, "Know your soldiers. Profile them. By profiling, I mean behaviorally. How do they act? How do they react? because everybody's different. So, somebody, a particular person, has a personal style that's Chicken Little, 'The sky is falling, everything's wrong.' Another person, the sky could be falling and he wouldn't tell you, 'I'll handle it.' So, know people and how they react. Make it personal, so that you're approachable. Find a way--no, you don't have to find a way, it comes naturally, at least did to me, where your status and your authority is known, but it's not an impediment to communication." That, I think, I learned in the Army, although I'll have classmates, fellow officers, don't buy that at all. They have a different style, more authoritarian. I know I had difficulty with a woman technician out of my Trenton orbit down there once. She tells my boss, "Well, he's a West Pointer and you know how *they* are." I asked my boss, "How are they? Every one I knew is different. I run a shop that has free communications. People seem to appreciate the ability to approach without fear of retribution. So, take that for what it's worth. I want to ask, how many West Pointers does she know?"
[laughter]

NM: You were living in New Jersey when you were with New Jersey Bell.

JM: Yes.

NM: Could you talk about how New Jersey has changed since you were growing up?

JM: Well, I grew up in Kearny, which is very congested. I've lived all my adult life in Monmouth County, which is much less congested. I don't know that it's really changed all that much. It's still congested. We're still a bunch of rude, in-your-face people, which I love. When we talk about Governor [Chris] Christie, for example, we don't want him as a Vice Presidential candidate. He's too New Jersey. I love him, I love his style, because it's just very nostalgic for me. The rest of the world can't take us like this. So, that piece of it, I know I read a book that a neighbor, New Jersey neighbor, gave me a couple of years ago called *The Soprano State* [by Bob Ingle and Sandy McClure], where you open the book randomly and you read what's written about situation X or person X and the connections and the underhandedness, that's still legal, but you open randomly to another part of the book about person A and, essentially, it's the same story. This book, as I'm reading it, is just the same story over and over again. That's how the system of government is subverted to the connections and the debts owed and collected on by various personalities and how it has come to be over the years. Of course, this comes in my later years, when I'm into it, as opposed to when I was a younger person. I didn't know that this is going on, except I have my father who was very connected, politically, not that he was involved in anything, but because of his work. We had a very famous US Representative named Hugh Addonizio. [Editor's Note: Hugh Addonizio was an Italian-American politician who served in the US House of Representatives from 1949 to 1962 and as Mayor of Newark from 1962 to 1970.] You might recognize that name. I think his son, who's probably my age, was involved. Anyway, Hugh decides to resign, or not run again, for the House, so [that] he can run to be Mayor of Newark. He's asked, "Why the hell would you give up a seat in the House of Representatives to become Mayor of Newark?" His answer, "I could make millions as Mayor of Newark." That's New Jersey. There we are. Matter of fact, I have fun up in Massachusetts when people ask me the difference. I say, "Well, Massachusetts is 'New Jersey Light.' It's not quite as bad, but it's the same old stuff."

NM: What led you to become a substitute teacher? Could you talk about some of your experiences with that?

JM: After I left what was then called Bell Atlantic--this was 1996--I had to go out and find another job. I retired voluntarily, but under duress, because there was no job for me. I had just spent six months in Italy, in a Bell Atlantic International opportunity, just to keep a job. My kids were older. I could leave with some feeling that my wife was not being abandoned and there came an opportunity, while I was in Italy, to voluntarily retire and get six months' pay as a severance. Their personnel policy was that if you were offered a job and you refused the job, it was a two-month severance, or three, whatever it was. It wasn't six [months]. So, I knew, based on the way the company operated, that if there was going to be a position, it wasn't going to be in New Jersey, it was going to be in Virginia. So, the telecommunications industry was booming. I never thought that I would have trouble finding another job. So, in the time that I was looking for the job, I became a substitute at Red Bank Regional, where my kids went to school, and they were pretty happy that I was mathematically competent, for example. I did that for a very short period of time. I got a job as a grunt engineer at Bell Labs in Holmdel, which was quite a come down in pay, but it was local. I never had a local job before, really, and it was enough for us to live on. My wife was working. So, I took that. I did that for four years.

NM: You currently substitute now.

JM: Oh, okay, so, when I came back from Italy, it's October of '96. We had a really nice home overlooking the Navesink River in Red Bank, which we loved. Everything was great. There was a riverfront property, a couple of acres, and the owners had passed away and they had willed the house to their nephew, young nephew. Taxes on it--and we're talking almost twenty years ago--were eighteen thousand dollars at the time. So, I said to my wife, "They really can't afford to keep this place. I'll give it five years." Well, when I came back from Italy in '96, they had subdivided the property and put it on the market and, while we could have afforded, possibly, to buy it, we could never afford the augment in our property taxes that would have resulted, which were already high. So, whoever bought it designed and built a house that, as I told the owner, "If you had some vendetta that you wanted to visit on me, you couldn't have designed a house that better accomplished the purpose." It was sixty-two-foot long, took every inch of sightline to the river and it was built virtually as close to us as they could possibly build it. Plus, our house was very close to the property line. So, that really devastated, really hurt me. After about two or three years, I said to my wife, "Look," she's from Massachusetts, "why don't we go up and see if we can find a home up there, with river views that we just lost. The telecommunications industry's still going very, very well and I'll find a job up there." Well, we had difficulty selling the house because Red Bank's elementary school system's very suspect. It was a five-bedroom house, which appeals to families, who would have to send their kids to Red Bank schools. So, it took us two years to sell the house and, by that time, the telecom industry had hit a funk. The housing prices up there had narrowed the gap. They were much less expensive than New Jersey prices. So, we ended up paying more for our home than we had planned on paying. I was fifty-eight years old. Nobody wants a fifty-eight-year-old general manager. I'm not accountant, I'm not a physician, I'm not really an engineer. So, the substitute teaching worked out in that I could work during the day for the chump change they were offering and I would have a couple hours in the afternoon and the night to mail out resumes, interview, because you can always refuse a job. "We want you to come to work tomorrow." "Sorry, I can't." So, that worked in well with looking for a job. No job was forthcoming. Retrospectively, I should have taken anything. Like, I did have a temp job with State Street Bank, for example, in their retirement services. It was just a grunt clerical job as it started out, but I understood the mathematics of money, for example, annuities, present value, future value, stuff like that. So, I started doing more than the grunt clerk work and they asked me if I would stay, but I didn't want to be doing that work. So, I decided to leave, because, initially, I said, "Six weeks, I can work six weeks," so, I could resume looking for a job. Well, nothing ever came of it. I kept subbing. There came an opportunity when I had developed a close relationship with the head of the math department in one of the two schools I was working at. He said, "Can you commit to working two or three months, because I'm going to fire one of my teachers and I need somebody every day until we can hire a certified teacher?" I said, "Yes, that's fine." So, I was doing this. They couldn't find a certified math teacher and I ended up working the rest of the year. It didn't pay a hell of a lot of money, but it was good work. So, I thought, "I don't need a lot of money." I expressed an interest to be hired. They couldn't hire me because I wasn't certified. So, back to subbing, and that's pretty much what I've done. I've done it for twelve years and the only change is, I sub either math or history, because I want to be able to add value to my presence. Substitute teacher's the lowest form of animal life in the education business, but, by concentrating on one school and concentrating in one subject, I've been able to build relationships with colleagues in math and history, especially now, at this age, especially for history. They're all young. We're talking about people in their twenties and

thirties and I was around for the Korean War, I remember Dien Bien Phu, I remember John Kennedy, plus my interest in geopolitics. I send stuff to a number of them. Like, I have a close relationship with a young woman, maybe thirty. I just sent her a great piece on Second Amendment, which I thought, given the recent thing--so, they welcome it. They welcome, they accept me. Other than when I turn seventy, I'm no longer accepting morning calls. You want me? call me the day before or the week before, so [that] the phone's not ringing at six o'clock to come in. I'll probably continue to do that for a while. Plus, I tutor. I tutor Italian. I've taught Italian language in adult school seventeen times. I finally said, "That's it," because the repetition--I mean, I enjoy doing it. I enjoy watching people enjoying themselves growing. I just can't repeat this for the eighteenth time. [laughter]

NM: I understand that you are part of the alumni association for West Point. You mentioned being involved in a fifty-year group. Were you always involved in these things?

JM: I've been since I've been in Massachusetts. I was asked if I would consider running for a position on the Board of Governors, which means you put your name up and, when they vote at the annual business meeting, you get elected. So, I'm on the Board of Governors of the West Point Society of New England. I'm the membership chair, which means I'm a clerk. I take the dues, either online payments or paper payments, and I keep records. I established a structure which didn't exist, so [that] we can manage the membership, and I'm also the liaison to the West Point Parents Club, people whose kids are cadets or want to be cadets. That's not a lot of time. Like, middle of June, I come in and I give the candidates who are getting ready to enter a talk. I talk to their parents. They had me come in and give a talk to the club just on a general subject. So, that consumes a reasonable amount of time. This fifty-year affiliation program only lasts four years. It's while the Class of 2014 are cadets. So, we did things, like, we run a reception for the parents on Reception Day. It's when the kids are admitted in and the parents come over. They're all jumpy and nervous and you pat them on the head and tell them it's all to a purpose and you feed them. My class funds the reception, so, all day long, they come and go and we talk to them. Then, at the end of the cadet basic training, we throw another reception for, they call it A-Day, Acceptance Day, where they're accepted as plebes into the Corps of Cadets. It's kind of the same thing, and then, I'm involved with seven or eight of my classmates on a program run by an endowed chair. It's called the Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic, and the cadets' first year, there are four classroom sessions on integrity, respect, conflicting loyalties and retrospection. So, we facilitate, as old grads, those sessions. The format has changed for this past year. They have what are called leadership challenges. That involves young officers and grads sending stories back to the Center for the Professional Military Ethic on where their leadership capabilities were challenged. The Center massages the information, packages it and it's offered, not offered, there are four--well, there are more than four. As an affiliation class, we are obligated to do four sessions. There are more. I know I've done five, because I was invited to do another one, and you bring experience and maturity to this situation, this challenge that a young officer had to deal with. It's amazing how much more you see through your age, experience and maturity than the kids see. So, we just finished the second year of the four. This year coming up is another series of leadership, same format, leadership challenges. We already have the dates for the first two. We don't have the material yet, but there are 144 cadet platoons in the Corps of Cadets, but only eight platoons get an old grad as a facilitator, because they can't handle more than a handful of us--very, very gratifying, very, very rewarding, and it's costly and

time consuming and worth every minute, every dollar. I look forward to doing that. As a matter-of-fact, on the 19th of August, the Class of 2014 takes their affirmation pledge, in which they pledge to complete their education, to graduate and to serve, because, if they don't take this pledge and they decide to drop out, very, very costly, personally or financially, to them, to get out of serving. So, we will, and this is not limited to the guys who are participating in these leadership challenges, anybody from the class who wants to go is encouraged and welcomed to go watch them take their affirmation pledge, and then, we'll sweeten that up. We'll have a little gathering of our own, and then, when they graduate, we're not as involved their senior year, their first class year, because they go through a very set curriculum on officership. For the most part, we're not involved with that, but, at graduation, we will give them their first set of second lieutenant's bars, inscribed with our class and their class, and we will, as a class, also give them a book written by one of our classmates called *Fallen Warriors* [by John F. Murray], which is a biographical sketch of the twenty-four of us who died in Vietnam.

NM: Before we conclude, is there anything else you would like to add for the record, either about growing up in Kearny, your time at West Point and the military or your career afterwards?

JM: I feel constantly gratified at having lived on this Earth during this time period and having grown up when, where and how I did, having the opportunity to attend the single most prestigious leadership school in the world, having served in a war, which is not something anyone should ever aspire to. It's like the same philosophy as I tell the youngsters at West Point, "It's a great place to be from, but not at. It's great to have had that experience and survived it. I would never want to do it again, but it was a tremendously growing and building experience." I loved my civilian career. There were ups and downs in terms of how I liked a particular assignment, but, getting an opportunity to lead eight hundred to a thousand people in a common goal, most of it by remote control, successfully, was great; having raised three children and have a relationship with somebody you love for forty years. I don't want to get too macabre or maudlin, but it's like a classmate always remembers me telling him, when I got through my first year in Vietnam, "Every day is a bonus." Whether it's a ripped parachute or the war, or I was also a volunteer firefighter, we fell through, close to falling through, fell, but managed to grab something, a floor, "Every day's a bonus." When I walk, I don't care how hot it is, how cold it is - every day is worth living.

NM: Thank you, Mr. Mastriani, for coming in and sharing your story. We are going to close the interview now; thanks again.

JM: You can tell how much I hated it. [laughter]

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Reviewed by Julia McDonald 8/1/14
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/18/14
Reviewed by Joseph Mastriani 8/22/14