

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES MCGINNIS

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Nicholas Molnar: This begins an interview with Mr. James McGinnis on July 23, 2012, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Nicholas Molnar. Thank you, Mr. McGinnis, for coming in today.

James McGinnis: Thank you.

NM: Just to begin, could you tell us for the record when and where you were born?

JM: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, February 5, 1945, at--it was called the Margaret Hague Hospital. It was Frank Hague mother's name; that was the maternity [hospital] in Jersey City. [Editor's Note: Frank Hague was the Democratic Party boss of Jersey City, and mayor from 1917 to 1947].

NM: To begin the interview, we would like to learn a little bit about your family background. Can you tell us about your father?

JM: My father was brought up in Hoboken, New Jersey. My mother was brought up, I believe, in Lyndhurst, New Jersey. They got married, had a few kids. I was the third out of four. We lived in Union City most of my life at home.

NM: Do you know anything about your father's family history?

JM: We're third-generation McGinnis's. So, my grandfather was born in this country. He was born in Jersey City, too. He worked on the Erie Lackawanna train railway. He actually had an office that was an RRCAR right before he retired. I can go to my father now, if you wish. He was in trucking most of his life. Toward the latter part, he became a member of the International Longshoremen's Association, ILA. He worked down in Harborside, Jersey City.

NM: Could you tell me a little bit about your mother and her family background?

JM: Her maiden name was Justus. She had three or four sisters, and they grew up in the Lyndhurst area, Lyndhurst, New Jersey. That's about it with her.

NM: You grew up in Union City. Could you tell me about your earliest memories there growing up?

JM: My earliest memory, we lived in a lot of different apartments. For some reason they liked to move around, I don't know why. But I remember, when I was about four or five years old, we still had trolleys in Union City on the tracks, and we used to sit on the running boards of the cars back then. There were still running boards. That's something I do remember, because, when the running boards went away, we said, "Now we can't sit down in the cars." I remember that far back, with the trolleys we had there. It was mostly on, I think, New York Avenue.

NM: What was the makeup of Union City at this time?

JM: It was a melting pot. Union City, because of its proximity to New York, it was a melting pot of all different Italian neighborhoods, Irish neighborhoods. We gelled together pretty well.

Most of my friends were Italian, yes, but it was quite an interesting time growing up, because we didn't have all the sophisticated toys you guys have today. We played stickball in the street, hopscotch and stuff of that nature. They had very limited fields, so if we wanted to play baseball, we had to find places to play. We didn't have all the sophisticated stuff that you have like where I live now in Bergen County, but we made do with the best we had.

NM: Tell me more about your siblings. You mentioned you were born third. How much older are your older siblings?

JM: I had a half-brother. He's still in Florida, I believe. Then, my older sister, Pat, she's a little older than me. I was number three, and a younger sister, Alice. I'm sixty-seven. They're old. The older ones are all in their seventies now. My younger sister is in her fifties now.

NM: You mentioned your father was a longshoreman. Did he work in civilian life during World War II?

JM: He never got drafted. He had three children at the time. He was, I think, 4-A at the time; that was a classification. He worked mostly in trucking, but then he became part of the ILA. He was actually doing plans for these huge ships that came into Newark Bay. He would plan to put all the Conex containers and stuff like that onboard. It was pretty interesting.

NM: You mentioned some of the things that you did for recreation in Jersey City. Could you expand upon that?

JM: If we had a Spalding ball, that was it, a rubber ball. We didn't have the sophisticated stuff everybody has today. Tennis wasn't a sport for us back then. We'd play basketball down at the North Street Park. That was one of our things. But if you had a bat and ball, we could find a field somewhere and get together. As we get older, obviously, we found nice fields. The thing is, if you were a pretty good basketball player you got to play a lot.

NM: Did you do anything such as Boy Scouts or things like that?

JM: I started in the Boy Scouts when I was an early teenager, but I just never enjoyed it. So, I didn't stay too long with that. But that was in my younger years, obviously.

NM: For some families, religion was very important growing up. I was wondering, does that hold true for your family?

JM: We were Roman Catholic. When we were younger, we went to church. We had to go to church. The one thing I do recall, as I get older, when we used to go to church, the hour used to go so slowly. At this stage of my life, the hour goes quickly. It's something I really remember about church, because you really don't want to be there. But yes, we went to local churches. St. Anthony's Church was the one we went to in Union City.

NM: What did you do for entertainment? Did you go to the movies often?

JM: Yes, we had--Central Theatre was Jersey City, Roosevelt was in Union City. On a typical Saturday, you'd have probably two movies and some cartoons, for like a quarter. That's how we spent our time. I believe, back then, that the only air conditioning that was available was in movies. So, if we got to Jersey City, which had several theaters, we'd go to cool off. But you'd have a full, like I said, two movies and some cartoons and stuff. So, that's what we did for entertainment as far as inside.

NM: Could you tell me about your elementary school, your time there?

JM: I went to Edison Grammar School in Union City. Then I went to Emerson High School in Union City, which is now a junior high school. But it was the same class--as a matter of fact, this coming year, the Class of '63 January, which was my graduating class from Emerson, we're having our fiftieth anniversary. So, we're getting together, most of us, to remember the old times. But you still have your friends. We were the last class of the half year. Back then, if you went into eighth grade, it was 8A and 8B. The next group after me became one year. So, the eighth grade was one year, but we had the half year. So, if you failed anything, you only had a half year to make up. That's one difference. But we were the last half year. So, that's why we graduated in January.

NM: In high school, did you have any interest in sports?

JM: I was about a hundred and ten pounds. I was a skinny kid. I tried out for football. I wasn't heavy enough to even play football, but I did other things. I didn't play any real sports in high school, only because, like I said, I wasn't big enough, to be honest with you. But there weren't too many things other than that, except basketball. I used to play sandlot basketball, stuff like that, a couple of leagues I played in. So, we fit in where we could.

NM: What were your interests in high school?

JM: As far as the learning curve? I took accounting courses. I took a typing course, which I still am very happy I took, because it helps you today. I actually went into accounting when I got out of school, when I was going to night school at Rutgers.

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

JM: Yes, I delivered newspapers, the *Hudson Dispatch*, which was early in the morning, when I was going to high school. Then when I was in my, I think, eleventh year, I worked for the Clinton Pizza. I was a pizza delivery guy. I'd just gotten my license. I was actually still in school when I did that. I would do my homework in the back room in-between, and that's what I did as far as working, from the newspapers to a pizza guy.

NM: Did you have any plans for after high school?

JM: Going to night school, which I did. I wanted to be an accountant because right after high school I got a job in New York, in a company called Columbia Gas Systems. It was a utility

that's no longer around. It was an entry-level job. I was delivering mail and stuff like that. I eventually got into an accounting department, and then I was drafted.

NM: You mentioned that you were in night school. Can you talk about the program and what led you to it?

JM: It was accounting. I had an accounting job in New York and I wanted to do that. I believed that's what I liked to do. We didn't have the sophisticated computers you have today. Everything was manual, but I enjoyed it. It was interesting.

NM: The program was an extension program out of Jersey City.

JM: Extension university in Jersey City. That's where I went. I don't know how many nights a week I went down there, but I ended up with sixteen credits. That's what I'd gotten before I was drafted.

NM: What year did you graduate high school?

JM: '63.

NM: Could you talk about your job in New York before you were drafted?

JM: Yes, it was an entry-level job in the mail department. I didn't know anything about New York. I took the bus in, we walked across to the building, and that was it. Our department, we delivered things, which came from our company to different places in New York. So, I got to know the subway system real well, because I really didn't know. Actually, my first delivery, I had no idea where I was going, where the subway was going. It was downtown or something, and I was petrified, but I got to know New York so well that I could probably be a tour guide in New York. [laughter] That's the way it was.

NM: Around this time period, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It is a vivid memory for a lot of people. Does that hold true for you?

JM: Yes, it does. We had one of these temporary delivery guys, from a service, and he wasn't that bright. I remember going to lunch that day, in November '63, and we came back to the building. We didn't have HDTVs and stuff of that nature. This guy happened to say, "Hey, did you guys hear that the President got shot?" We said, "Yeah, okay." We didn't believe the guy. But that was my vivid memory, that I really understood after the fact what happened. This guy told us the real [inaudible], but we didn't believe him. Then, of course, the company's in mourning for three or four days.

NM: Your family is Roman Catholic. Were there any particular feelings towards Kennedy?

JM: First Catholic President. It was *Camelot*. I think if he would've lived, a lot of things would've been different. I know, specifically, Vietnam probably would not have happened. We all cherished him because he was such a well-liked President. I remember, he gave the speech

when he was first inaugurated: "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." I never forgot that.

NM: In school, did you participate in defense drills and hiding under desks?

JM: We did in grammar school. We did something [like] that, in case of a nuclear attack or something. I remember doing that. It was back then. It was prepare for what could happen, because the Cold War was certainly in full bloom by then and nuclear missiles were just shy of having a button pushed. They had different movies that came out at that time depicting that stuff, but the country was ready. It was very close. The schools, we certainly behaved in school. In fact, in high school, we had to wear ties and that's just the way it was. If you didn't have a tie, you'd see Mr. (Satz?). Mr. (Satz?) was a haberdasher and he had the craziest looking ties, but he was our homeroom teacher, too.

NM: [laughter] While you were in high school and working in New York, did you follow what was going on in world events? You were subject to being drafted?

JM: Certainly. Back in the '60s, as soon as you turned nineteen or twenty, it was mandated and you knew you were going to go. I didn't know anything about Vietnam at the time. Once we get into my military history, I'll tell you what happened there. We were just young kids growing up, trying to have some fun. I still lived at home, but we were attuned to world events. Being in New York, it's the most exciting city in the country, you just can't help it. It was a different city back then. It was not as safe as it is now. Like in the Hell's Kitchen area, you really didn't want to go into that area. It's just the way it was.

NM: I think for generations afterwards there is really no concern with being drafted at all.

JM: True.

NM: As a normal American teenager, is that something that is on your mind, that if you are not in college, you might be subject to being drafted?

JM: Well, I bring this up when I'm doing tours a lot, and I ask a simple question. Even though we've been in different countries, Iraq and Afghanistan, and I say, how come there's no demonstration? I go, "Where are the demonstrators?" They look at me, and I say, "It's pretty simple. There's no draft. It's a full volunteer military force." My son is twenty-six now and I'm just thrilled there's no draft. I mean, if I was called to go back into war, into action, into harm's way, I would certainly redeploy. It's something that I feel, to me, but only because I'm experienced. That's pretty simple. I'm just thrilled there is no draft and we're able to do what we do with the wonderful people that we have.

NM: In your time in New York City, did you eventually get into the accounting department?

JM: No, I was in the mailroom. Then, they said, "We have an opening in accounting." I was going to night school. I said, "Yes, I'd certainly like to do that." I learned a lot from those people, who were much older than me, most of them. It was an experience to me, really. Pretty

interesting. Back then, if you had a job in New York for a company, you'd never leave the job. You'd get promoted or whatever. You would maybe meet somebody in the workplace that you'd marry. I mean, that's just the way it was. We had several couples that met in the job and you retire from that company. This was a utility company, like Public Service. So, it wasn't that it was competitive, but that's what people did back then.

NM: Before we move on to your time in the military, is there anything that we missed that you want to discuss that you remember from this period?

JM: Well, yes, a good friend of mine, Dennis Buttacavoli, is a very dear friend of mine. His uncle, when he was here, was Joey Faye. [Editor's Note: Joey Faye was an actor and comedian who appeared in vaudeville, theater, film and television before his death in 1997.] Joey Faye was in vaudeville, a little before your time and a little before my time. Uncle Joey would be in Broadway plays, because he was pretty interesting. He would know that we didn't make much money, Dennis and I, but he knew everybody in Broadway. So, he would call Dennis up when a show was closing. I can remember the first show I went to see is *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. He'd say, "Dennis, why don't you and Jim go to the eight o'clock show tonight? Just go to the box office, say, 'Uncle Joey sent me,'" and we'd get in for free. So, that was pretty neat. `

NM: [laughter] While you are working in the city you mentioned you became adept at navigating.

JM: Extremely so, because we had to deliver mail and stuff like that. I got to figure out the subway systems and all that goes with it. It was a very thrilling experience, because it was a short commute from Union City. You could probably get a bus from 32nd Street, which is right across, but it was quite an interesting experience. Like I said, later in life, I had other different positions in sales where I actually handled Manhattan. So, having that first-line knowledge of the city itself, you just get used to what you're doing over there. You can navigate. I can be, like I said, a professional tour guide with one of those double-decker buses, probably.

NM: Let's talk about going into the military.

JM: I was drafted in October '65. Traditionally, you go to Fort Dix, which we did, and you go to basic training. Then you go to another specialty. They call it MOS, Military Occupational Specialty, but we were in the reception station for like a week and we just never got sent anywhere. Scuttlebutt in the Army is pretty decent because when there's a rumor out there, it really starts getting talked [up] and listened to. I have this shirt here. This is what I use down at the memorial. This is the unit I was put into, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. It was the first light infantry brigade in the United States Army, and the concept was much different than the Army did before. They would train your unit together and you'd deploy together, wherever you went. It was like how the British Army does. You could have buddies in the British Army for life, if you stayed in the same unit. It was an experiment that proved extremely good. They actually developed two other units after us, 198th and 199th Light Infantry Brigade. Light infantry is anything you carry, that's it, but that's the unit I served with. We were sent up to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, where we were told what the unit was. We trained in Fort Devens. We

trained at Camp Drum in Watertown, New York, which is now Fort Drum, the home of the 10th Mountain Division when they're home, and Cape Cod, Camp Edwards. Now, of course, we had all the training put in. When I was in basic training, I was in Bravo Company. Then they developed what they called Delta Company. Delta Company was a support company for the battalion, three line companies, support company, and then you have your battalion. I was put into a recon platoon. Recon was the elite of the battalion. We were the spearhead. In a conventional operation, we would be the first platoon, which we did only one time. Other than that, when we deployed to--we actually had orders to Santo Domingo. They had a brigade down there from the 82nd Airborne, due to some unrest down there, and we were going to replace that brigade, but the OAS, Organization of American States, they ordered that we didn't need any more American troops there. So, the M-14 rifles we were training with became M-16 rifles and we knew the rest of the story. That's when we deployed to Vietnam, from Boston Harbor, on ships, through the Panama Canal, Long Beach, California, and next stop was Vung Tau, which was the South China Sea.

NM: What was your initial reaction and your family's reaction when you got drafted?

JM: It was kind of expected. I guess, I was kind of in a lull in life there, in-between stuff. Maybe I just wanted to see what it'd be like to be in the Army. I'll never forget, I got my first uniform on and they had our names and I looked down, I said, "I can't believe it. That's a US Army uniform." But I made some very dear friends in my time in the Army. They're as close as anybody would ever be to you, because the experiences we had together, especially the combat end of it, is something we'll never forget. It was a very tight bond and I got to meet people from all over the country, because it is a melting pot, the military. There's no question about it. They may sound a little different, but most of my dear friends came from Indiana and Ohio. I call them every holiday today, some of them.

NM: Were there any challenges from going from civilian life to military life, either mentally or physically?

JM: No question about it. They make you be reborn. Like the Marines say, "We tear you down, we build you back up." You have to react to the training is the whole thing. It's a very disciplined life. You've got to do what they say and that's just the way it is. It made me a more organized person. I was pretty organized before, but I became more organized. There were some things that we learned in the entire process that I'll never forget. I've been asked, on occasion, if I would think that in our country that each young person should get drafted or be put into some community service. In Israel, if you're a male, you're going to be serving three years. If you're female, you're going to serve two years, and that's mandated. I certainly think like a work program or something--it doesn't have to be military. It could be something that would stabilize a lot of the young people today.

NM: Talk about basic training in your experience and some of the people from Indiana and Ohio. Was this your first time that you interacted with people from other parts of the country?

JM: Yes, because we had never really traveled anywhere. Summertime came and went and we didn't go down the shore. We weren't a rich family, we weren't a poor family, we were kind of in

the middle. There's four children involved, too. But it was quite an experience to have that, because I didn't have that before. I knew people in New York, but I didn't know people from other parts of the country. Basic training was pretty interesting. Like I said, the three specific areas we did--

NM: You can continue, I'm just going to close the door.

JM: Being the fact that we stayed together the entire time was very good, because in Vietnam, a lot of the people that went over there were replacements. The mindset being--I don't know if you've seen the movie *Platoon*, it's pretty interesting--but, if you're a new guy, you're up front. You might be on a point in patrol because your life wasn't worth that much. Because we were so tight with each other, we trusted each other and we took care of each other. I tell the groups down at the Memorial that I kept a diary in Vietnam. I added up all the things I did because it was fresh in my mind, anything I wrote down. I told the kids, I said, "My recon platoon, we participated in sixty-two night ambush patrols," which is hazard duty. I said, "As luck would have it or profession, what we did, we didn't lose anybody the entire year," which is somewhat miraculous, I think. I have a challenge coin that I show them, which is kind of a lucky coin for me. I believe we had a lot of luck to do that and you need a lot of luck in a situation like that. But it was professionalism and luck also, that got us through that time.

NM: You mentioned your unit initially was going to support operations in Santo Domingo. Prior to that, were you following the events in Vietnam and was that a possibility that your unit might go there?

JM: Yes, there's always a possibility, because it was in 1965, October. There were several units over there already. The advisors had been there earlier, from 1959. One of the brigades that was in-country was the 173rd Airborne Brigade. They were in '65, early, before us. And it was after the Ia Drang campaign, which the 1st Air Cav was, actually, the first Army unit of that nature and size that was in Vietnam. So, we knew things were happening over there. We had some sergeants and people that came back who already had been there, because one of the distinctions in the Army, if you see--I don't know if you're aware of this--a dress uniform, most of the patches are on the left shoulder here. If you see a patch on the right shoulder, it denotes that the individual had been in combat with that unit. So, that's the distinction. So, as soon as we saw one of our sergeants or something with that patch there, we knew that they'd been in combat and they would be maybe training us. We had a few guys that had been over there.

NM: During your training, was there any specialized training? I know you wrote on your survey of your role in-country, but was there any specialized training for you prior to going to Vietnam?

JM: Yes, because, in the platoon I was with, we were the eyes and ears of the battalion. That's what recon does. We did extensive map training, extensive compass training, because we didn't have GPS back then and the terrain in Vietnam was completely different than what's going on in Afghanistan or Iraq. The thing is, we trained very heavily in that area, in patrolling. One thing I do mention, I play golf on occasion, I did yesterday. If I'm playing the West Point golf course, there are chances that you'll have a cadet come out with you and they'll usually carry the bag. They won't be riding in the golf cart like we are. I'll come to a par four hole in the terrain area

and if this aspiring second lieutenant is going to go into the infantry, I always question them. I said, "How would you negotiate a patrol in this specific area to not expose them to danger as much as you could?" Sometimes they're right, sometimes they're not right. I said, "I nailed it every time, because failure was not an option for a reconnaissance scout survivor."

NM: You had training in accounting and typing. Oftentimes, in my experience talking to people, sometimes these people are pulled out and given administrative type of duties.

JM: It's funny you bring that up. I was doing sixty words a minute with the typewriter. I was very good. They asked for volunteers to type. We're going from winter clothing to summertime clothing, and they needed all these forms pumped up. So, I volunteered. I said, "I'll type for you." So, I get into the ready room or something, and I'm knocking these forms out. Well, the clerk's looking at me. He goes to my sergeant, he says, "This guy's terrific." He says, "Can we make him a company clerk?" So, Sergeant Hollingsed, who was our platoon sergeant, he said, "No, we have plans for Mac." He said, "He's going to be my squad leader." So, I did have a shot, but he wouldn't let me go. [laughter]

NM: I want to talk about what you remember about the initial trip over. Did you fly over?

JM: No, we took ships out of Boston Harbor. We had two ships, the *Patch* and *Darby*. We went down the Atlantic, went through the Panama Canal, Long Beach, and then we deployed. Once we got over to Southeast Asia, we deployed in landing craft infantries, LCIs, with our duffel bags and stuff. That's how we got there. The trip was different, because I've always had good sea legs, because I've gone fishing a lot in my life. A lot of our people from the Midwest, they've never been on boat before. So, coming down the Atlantic was pretty smooth and going through the canal. I was actually working in the bakery on the ship. I did volunteer for the bakery. It was good duty. Actually, I was looking through the portholes as we went through the canal. We get to the Pacific and now we're crossing the Pacific and we hit a typhoon on the way over, which is a hurricane at sea. That's when I started to see my Midwestern buddies turn really green. The ship was just tossing in the waves. That's what I remember. Actually, we used to look over the side of the ship and these little sailfishes or something, they used to swim alongside the ship. It's amazing, because we see a lot of different things. Of course, the sky looks a lot different when you're in the Pacific. You can trace the clouds. It's just incredible. Other than the typhoon--our sleeping quarters were not the greatest. We were down in the hold, which had like seven or eight bunks with ropes and there was just about this much room. It was terribly hot down there, you just sweat constantly, but you had no choice. You couldn't go on the deck. I did work in the bakery; eight hour shift a day. So, I remember that.

NM: Approximately how long was this trip to Vietnam?

JM: It was twenty-seven days.

NM: You mentioned you were working eight hour shifts in a bakery. Could you talk about that duty?

JM: It was good duty because a lot of the cooks were a bit older than me, obviously. They could have come from Britain or something. It was Merchant Marine. If you did what they told you, everything was fine. In the Army, rank goes from Private to General, right, and the food gets better as you go up the chain, obviously. The typical meal on board ship if you're just a private or something, you'd get this basic G.I. cake we call it, but because we were working in the bakery these guys would get us pies and everything. So, we ate pretty good because they took care of us--fresh milk, which was unusual. So, that was the good part about it. I behaved myself, so I didn't get in trouble, because if you didn't behave yourself, they put you into the tray room. The tray room is like a hundred and fifty degrees where they wash these metal trays. We had one guy that volunteered for that. He was kind of a pain to these cooks, and they sent him to the tray room. So, I'll never forget that.

NM: Prior to being in-country, were you in contact with your family and friends at all?

JM: We wrote letters. Letters took two weeks to get back and forth, and that's how we communicated back then. We didn't have sophisticated iPhones and stuff of that nature, but that's how we communicated. I guess we wrote letters on the ship, too, because it was difficult unless you had a specific area, like in-country where they have a mail area you could work with. We didn't have any phones or anything, unless you got in a port. Maybe Long Beach I may have called home one time. The one interesting thing about taking these ships from Boston Harbor, our tour of duty, which is twelve months in Vietnam, it started in Boston Harbor. So, there were twenty-seven days I didn't have to spend in country, which could have been a lot different for my life.

NM: Talk about your initial experience in Vietnam. What were your first reactions in terms of the weather, where you are, sights and sounds?

JM: Well, we were put into an area called Tay Ninh province, which was ten miles from Cambodia. It was west of Saigon and Cu Chi, which was the base camp of the 25th Division. We built the base camp from scratch, which meant building bunkers, sandbag bunkers and stuff. And the heat--I remember the heat being so intense that I had a stinging sensation when we first landed, like something was biting me, but not really. It was going from whatever temperature we had at sea to a hundred and ten, hundred and twenty degrees every day, even in the monsoon season or in the dry season. That's my first reaction to that. The people, they were kind of different. They had the conical hats and stuff of that nature. Most of them spoke some English, but the thing is, we were told to be very careful in-country. Our captain, who was our company commander, Captain Gregg, very dear friend of mine today, I remember him telling us he that had a good buddy of his that became a quadriplegic because he got careless and he was hit by some sort of explosive device. He became a quadriplegic; he had four limbs gone. He says, "The moment you step foot in this country, you keep your guard up." We didn't use the term 24/7 back then. He says, "Twenty-four hours a day. The only time you drop that guard is when you're in that plane going back to the world." I'll never forget what he told me because that was real world. You had to keep your guard up all the time. You just didn't know who was good or bad because at daytime, you'd never see a soldier in daytime. Most of our activities were at night. We always say, "It's pretty simple. We own the day, they own the night." That's how they got around and they did their stuff, because what we had as far as armament was incredible

compared to what they had. They had nothing near what we had as far as all the aircraft and artillery and stuff of that nature. So, basically, we found this later on, they used the tunnel system. There's a great book that I recommend to anybody. It's called *The Tunnels of Cu Chi*. Twenty-five, thirty miles of tunnels underneath. That's where they used to go down. We didn't know that initially. So, that's how they defended themselves.

NM: A lot of people talk about going to a holding area and they send you to a unit while your unit stays together.

JM: We deployed together. We built a base camp in Tay Ninh from scratch. Then we started doing our patrols during the day. Because recon is a small unit, we did do a squad patrol, which is about twelve. We had twelve by three, thirty-six. The biggest thing we can send out is a platoon. We had three squads. A normal infantry platoon has four squads. So, we did our own work together, but we were very disciplined and that's how we survived.

NM: How long did that process take to construct the base camp?

JM: It took several weeks because if you're in the base camp, you were put to work. You don't just lounge around. At nighttime, we had a bunker system. We had to build these huge bunkers for protection. They'd ring the outside of the perimeter and you'd have the triple concertina wire in front of you to keep the enemy from getting through. These bunkers took weeks to build because thousands of sandbags have to be filled. The only guys who are going to fill the sandbags are you. So, you'd have one person holding the sandbag, one person fill the sandbag, and one person tie the sandbag and put it in place. You built it like not all in one. You built it so it wouldn't fall down. So, it took a long time to do that. Like I said, if we weren't doing that, we were doing something, probably out on patrol doing something. The people that stayed in the base camps, if they were cooks, they were doing pretty good, because all they had to do was be a cook, but we were used for a lot of different [things]. As a matter of fact, I had a diary I kept over in Vietnam. I shared this diary with Sarah Taggart a couple of weeks ago and she goes, "I didn't realize they had you guys doing so much stuff." I said, "Yes. You just don't relax in the Army. You got things to do." But if we were in the camp, like I say, we would build this place because there's no one else there to build it. The engineers would help with some heavy stuff, but by the time we had our base camp really built and comfortable, and it was comfortable as you can get anyway, then we were moved to I Corps, which was up north. We were replacing Marine positions in Chu Lai. Contrary to what we had down South, which is almost a city, there was nothing up there. The Marines were never in the camp and they never built anything. So, we had to start over again. So, we left a pretty, not cushy, but it was better than what we got up there. That was the distinction.

NM: While the camp was being constructed is your unit is going on patrols?

JM: If we're not in camp building stuff or on the bunker line at night, we're out patrolling.

NM: Were civilians enlisted and the local population to help construct the camp?

JM: Once the camp was being built--and I have several slides of this I took over there--they enlisted the peasants to come. They paid them a pittance or whatever it was. But you had to be careful with these people, because the biggest armament the Vietcong had were mortar tubes. They would launch a projectile like a rocket and it would come in an ark and hit them. If they really wanted to get accurate to the base camp--most of your base camps, if they're down South, is one big base camp because it's flat. Up North, completely different, because you had hills, you had to have high ground. So, you have what they call firebases, which artillery would be there. What they would do is when they would attack at night with the mortar rounds, they would try to hit the middle of the camp, because in the middle of the camp is the general, all the hospitals, all the important people in the middle of the camp. So, the infantry is in the outside perimeter and that's how this thing worked, but you have to be careful with the Vietnamese civilian because you'd see them pacing towards maybe the wire by steps, counting. They'd be counting to see how many feet was between this and that. We caught several doing that and, of course, they were turned over to the Vietnamese police and because they wanted to be accurate with their weapons. Like I said, the biggest weapon they had was a mortar tube and that's how they did it.

NM: When you were going out on these patrols, what was your role?

JM: When we were out on patrol, squad or platoon size, I was normally the pace man, because you have your point man. Pace man is the guy behind him. What does the pace man do? Pretty simple. You try and find a specific area in the jungle. We're not talking trails and streets. So, the pace man, we would have the map coordinates, we'd have a typographical map with squares on them and they would have numbers. What we do is we'd plot where we wanted to go, either by daytime or by night ambush. I was the guy that would determine how far we're going by steps. I used to carry a compass. So, I have the right azimuth, the right reading that I can aim for. So, that was one of the most important things I did. We had the flank security, too. We had flank security, which was on the sides, because if you were patrolling--I can relate this to you. Because we were so good at what we did, if we went out as a platoon on a rice paddy, because you had to go spread, we looked like a company, much bigger than we were. We kept big distances. If we went out as a squad, we looked like a platoon. So, we went out to this one area of operations one time. We didn't have any contact. We came back in, here comes Bravo Company. One guy behind, the rifle is over the shoulder. As we're leaving, they're getting attacked, because they compromised themselves. That was what you had to do if you wanted to survive. The line companies, they just didn't do that. Six months into our tour, as we were getting sent up to Chu Lai, they lined up every trooper in front of the tent and they said--if you were next to me Nick, they'd ask you to step forward. What does that mean? It means that you're going to be transferred to another unit, because the entire brigade could not rotate at the same time. So, we started to get replacements in. I fortunately stayed with the unit up in Chu Lai. As we got the new people in, they weren't as good as we were, you couldn't trust them. You'd have a night ambush patrol and this guy would be going to sleep on me. He's supposed to be awake. They just didn't have the same degree of professionalism that we had. The last letter I got from Vietnam, when I was back in the world, was from Sam Williams out of California. He was explaining how (Eddie Bryant?) from Chicago had probably fallen asleep in the foxhole and a hand grenade came in and injured him severely. That just didn't happen with us. You had to keep your guard up, but that's what I recall the most. I never forgot what Captain Gregg told us, "Keep your guard up." That would be your patrol. You'd have your flank security out here, and

they would guard in case something was coming this way, but we never took the trails first of all. It might have been easier to take the trails, but that's where you can get ambushed on the trail. We would be through the thick bush. The guy in the front, the point man, he probably has a machete and he'll be cutting through the brush. It was very tedious stuff, but you had to know what you were doing. Traditionally, if we went on a night ambush patrol, you always have a forward observer, an FO, from the artillery battery we call it. They would have their own radio, backpack radio. When we got where we thought where we were supposed to be, he'd call the artillery piece to project a two-hundred meter hydra-burst, which would be an artillery shell bursting in the air. He also had compass. So, he'd hope that this round would probably go over here or over here, not directly above you. Once it hit there, we knew where we were supposed to be. I remember a hundred meters by foot was a hundred and thirty steps. How do you keep track of that? We had like a little thin rope. We used to tie knots in it and untie them, just to make sure we had the right number of steps. If the round would go over there, you knew it was in front of you and if you did need artillery support, the next command would be dropped two hundred, which would mean the artillery rounds would hit the ground and fire for effect. We can walk rounds up to fifty meters in (frontal?) positions, pretty close, but that's what a typical patrol was doing. But you just didn't want to compromise yourself. That's why a lot of these guys took casualties. They just compromised themselves.

NM: I want to go back to when you are initially in Vietnam. Are you given in-country any advice on what you should expect? Were you told about the types of ordinance the enemy is going to use or booby traps, things like that? Is there a tutorial that is given?

JM: Not really with us. I think when replacements started to come in, they had some sort of--they had called it "charger academy," because we were chargers, 196 is the chargers. They put together some sort of training mission to the new guys, because we had--don't forget, we were the initial unit in there. So, we had to learn by ourselves what they had. They worked with what they had. They had Chinese claymores. They had kind of IEDs, Improvised Explosive Devices. They didn't have the sophisticated ones that they have over in Iraq, but you had to be careful with these guys because they use whatever they had. You just got used to it. I mean, the creatures themselves--the centipedes, the snakes and everything--I had my own issues with those on occasion. I'll tell you something that I recall, and I have this in my diary. We were on night ambush patrol. I had Hoopengartner next to me, he was my partner. It was my turn to have a little shuteye, if you can really sleep. I have my M16 on a bipod, which kept it off the ground. I was on my side, had my helmet on and I'm just trying to sleep a little bit, and something hits me. I'll never forget this. Something hits me and moves me over. I immediately went for the weapon. I thought we were being under attack. (Hoop?) grabs me. He says, "Mac, cool it. Everything is under control." This guy was a farmer from Ohio. We liked to hang with the farmers, because they knew more of what was going on out there. He said, "No, no. I'll tell you what happened." He was looking in front of our position and he saw movement, but it was like a hopping type of movement. All of a sudden, this person or creature started coming toward us. It was a huge rabbit. I was hit by a big rabbit. Never saw it. It moved me over. He grabbed it because he knew what it was. It was incredible, but that was one of my [experiences]. I share that with the kids sometimes. We had other parallel stories about snakes and stuff. This was a kind of a jovial thing, but it scared the heck out of me because I didn't know what it was, but he was right there.

NM: Were insects, rodents and snakes things that you had to deal with?

JM: Yes, especially the black ants and the red ants. I don't know which were worst, but they were real terrible. You might be going through a triple canopy jungle, which is pretty thick stuff, and those ants would be in your ears and everything. It's terrible. But you're in their country. I had some snake issues. One time, we were coming back from an ambush patrol at night through a rubber plantation, and it was all rubber. So, I'm walking, I'm tired and (Hoop?) grabs me-- same guy. He says, "You might want to stop for a second." Well, right in front of me, maybe two feet, was an anaconda, big huge snake. I almost stepped on it.

NM: Wow.

JM: [laughter] The other incident that happened to me, we would traditionally burn the letters we got from home, in a little wire basket, because we didn't want the Vietcong to read what [was written]. I was burning letters outside the camp tent one day--we had this sandbag wall and we had rain ditches when the rain came. I heard a squeaking or some sort of squealing in the ditch. So, I'm getting ready to jump over the ditch and I looked down, it's a king cobra. It's a snake. It's got the hood up. It wasn't a big one, but it was definitely a king cobra. I told the guys, "We got to get rid of this guy." We killed him with a shovel. We took it to the first aid just to let them know what we had. I almost jumped into that pit without even thinking, but I didn't. I took that last look, and that was a couple of my animal stories.

NM: How do you get ready for these types of missions? What is the sequence of events? Is there a briefing? Tell me about the gear required and preparation.

JM: It all according to how long you're going out for. If we're going out for a couple of days, multiple ambushes, you're probably going to take some C-rations, that's canned food. We'd put it in these long green socks we had. We just stuffed them in there and put them around, so they wouldn't make any noise. The philosophy being if you ate one it got lighter, because you weren't carrying it anymore. That's what we prepared. We would probably have a machine gunner come out with us, an M60 machine gunner. I'd probably have some bandoliers across my chest, all of the machinegun ammo to help, if they needed it. I would carry a triple basic load. A basic load is like a hundred and twenty rounds of bullets. I had like three hundred sixty. I carried a lot more just in case. And you'd prepare. Sometimes we'd use the camouflage paint on our faces and stuff of that nature. We'd have steel pots, that's what took out. But at night time, if we were in an ambush spot, I had--I called it--a Booney hat. It was a tiger stripe floppy hat, because I was a real blonde kid back then. I didn't need the Vietnamese (moon shining on?) me. So, I used the hat the entire year I was over there. I do have that. I show it at the museum sometimes.

NM: Talk about this initial recon patrol that you go on and your first time out.

JM: You're scared. It's something different. You're not quite sure what to make of it, but then, you start to get used to the thing. You become very good at it. The story being the jungle is your friend, work with it. One question I'm asked sometimes is, "Can you relate to me the first time you were under fire?" I say, "I certainly can. I know exactly what happened." We were

attached to Special Forces group, an B team, and these guys were very professional. You didn't know they're ranked, but they knew our ranks. So, you never knew what they were, but they all had tiger stripes and stuff of that nature. We were patrolling a road by the Black Virgin Mountain in III Corps. It's called Nui Ba Den. It's the only mountain down there, so it kind of stands out. They had a radio relay station on top. On the bottom, they had a rock quarry. They had the engineers, which used to mine rock. The entire middle of the mountain was owned by Vietcong and we were taking fire from the mountain. It's the first time I was under fire. I didn't realize that when bullets go over your head or near you, they snap, like this, just like that. That was my initial under fire. Well, the B team, they didn't even flinch, because they knew Charlie was a lousy shot or something, but that was my first experience with that, with many to be had later. [laughter]

NM: You mentioned you were in sixty-two night ambush patrols. Was this in one of them?

JM: This was a day patrol. Once again, they own this mountain. That was their mountain. They had tunnels and all kinds of stuff up there. Most of the stuff that you encounter was at night with these Vietcong.

NM: How often would you go on day patrols?

JM: We could be out maybe for a week. Obviously, if you're out, you're going to do a night ambush patrol a night. That's just the way it was. We could be going out on ambush patrol at night one time. We could be doing a patrol, maybe three thousand meters. It's all according to what your mission was. There was one area that we used to provide security for. It was an artillery base camp, small, it was only six guns. By the way, artillery pieces can be called a gun, but military guys never call a rifle a gun. I bring that up sometimes. It was an area and it was called Area of Operations Blue, AO Blue. It was right by Highway 13, which, when you think of highways. You think of our highways; this is all dirt roads. The convoys used to come from Saigon, Chu Chi to Tay Ninh, and they'd take this road. So, traditionally, if we were out on squad size, we'd have two squads guarding the base camp at night and we'd have one squad on an ambush. We'd bring with us these metal detectors like you have for the people at the beach, they find these metal things. Well, they sweep the road in case the Vietcong buried a mine or something. Once again, we kept our discipline extremely well. We'd be at AO Blue maybe for a month at a time, and then we were replaced by Alpha Company. What happened is the Vietcong--there's only one area in this road which was a rubber plantation. Rubber plantation, they can't hide, because it's all trees straight. It was a little double canopy jungle. When we did the mine sweeping, we always kept our distance. Like I said, we looked a lot bigger than we were. If Vietcong ever had you together, then they knew they had you. What happened is they buried a metal (projectile?) into the road, Alpha was coming down the road in the morning, and they all gather around. Well, they didn't come back in that day because they were ambushed. The entire squad was decimated. I think to myself, three weeks before we were in the same area, exact area, but we kept our discipline. You know what I'm saying? We kept our discipline and we weren't compromised. This is just one of those things where they made a mistake and that's it, the last mistake they'll ever make. So, that was one specific area that I recall. Probably there's a lot of luck too, but, like I said, we didn't compromise ourselves. That meant a lot, because if you look like you knew what you're doing out there, chances are they won't attack.

NM: What would be the best way to go into your operations? You have gone on sixty-two night ambush patrols and day patrols and operations. Would it be best to go chronologically?

JM: I can recall some of them.

NM: What are the most vivid ones?

JM: Well, the vivid one I recall is, there was an operation called Attleboro, November '66. Up to that point of time, we would do our individual patrols, night ambushes. What happened, the 25th Infantry Division was on an operation by the Michelin Rubber Plantation, and they uncovered caches of rice and stuff of that nature. It was like a stronghold of the Vietcong, and they didn't want to give that area up. What they did was they had it defended extremely strong. The ants used to build ant hills, looked like a mound. I don't know how long it took to do it. The Vietcong used these as bunkers. They'd cut view slits into them if they had these machineguns and they'd stay behind, because it could take a lot of firepower if it was coming your way. One of the units, the 2nd and 27th Wolfhounds, they had ventured into this area, and they probably lost almost a whole company. We were the first group in to get them out of there, what was the survivors. Captain Gregg at that time, he said, "It's pretty simple. I need some ropes here. We're not going to just lift these bodies. We're going to pull them out because there might be hand grenades underneath as booby traps." That was my initial exposure to the death and reality of war. It had to be thirty something GIs that were just taken apart and some Vietcong were killed too. They would be up in the trees, the snipers with ropes in case they fell. That was my initial thing. We were the next group in and we had some activities when we were there, but once again I think they took the brunt of it. That was Attleboro. That was the biggest operation of the war to that date.

NM: I was doing a little research on your unit. There was Cedar Falls and Junction City.

JM: Cedar Falls was the next operation. It was around the west of Saigon, they called the Iron Triangle. Junction City was out by the Cambodian border, and the 178th Airborne Brigade made the only combat jump in Vietnam at that time. That was the two other operations that came after the fact. After that time, we were, like I said, we had to be moved up north so the Marines could go inward and do what they had to do.

NM: These operations are large search and destroy type operations. What is the relationship between what you are doing in your squad or platoon to these larger operations?

JM: Like I said, most of the time, our small unit was up by itself. So, we did some maybe S&Ds, search and destroys, but we weren't part of the company group, which was fine, because most of the stuff we do was for intelligence. If we did encounter some activity, then we just took care of it. But we weren't part of those large operations because we were kind of separated. When we were up North, we might be guarding a bridge at night on Highway 1, and we might be guarding another bridge in the South. We had OP North, OP South. In fact, up North--this is right off the South China Sea--this one bridge they had there, at one side the Vietnamese Marines were guarding it and on the other side we were guarding it. We had, at that time, probably eight

guys per bunker and that was great because you only got one person awake. So now, I'm on guard duty. I'm just walking on the bridge and the radio is in the bunker. Well, I'm looking south and I hear fire and I see this firefight, these tracers, the lit up rounds. They had green, we had red. So, I knew who was bad and good. So, I'm watching these tracers go up and down, but you know what, in Vietnam, this is happening two thousand meters away. It's not affecting us. These guys wouldn't wake up if you dropped a bomb in their bunker. That's just the way it is. So, I get back to the bunker and the radio is blaring. The battalion thought we were getting hit. I said, "No, everything is cool." When we got back in the morning, they wanted to know who was on watch and we wouldn't admit that I was on watch. I was probably up for an Article 15 or something, because I didn't react to them quickly enough, but it wasn't happening here. [Editor's Note: Article 15 of the Uniform Code of the Military Justice refers to nonjudicial punishment, allowing company commanders to administer punishment without a court-marshal.] It was probably a Marines team that got in trouble, and it happened away from us. So, it didn't affect us directly. I didn't know that the battalion thought that we were getting hit.

NM: You mentioned that one of the things you are trying to do is gather intelligence. Tell me more about the different types of missions that you are going out on.

JM: Well, you had free-fire zones. If it was a Vietcong area, then you could fire upon that area. Most of the time we didn't attack, we waited for them to attack because a lot of the Americans in Vietnam were kind of bait. You'd be bait because how would you know where they were unless they start firing at you? But Chu Lai was a completely different area than III Corps because we had the fire bases. Every little hill was different. We had our missions up there, but, once again, we stayed out of trouble when we could. So, we weren't on mostly S&Ds like the major companies would be on. When I think of incidents like the My Lai Massacre, I think to myself, "How could that have ever happened." [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.] Now, I delineate because we had a spokesperson down at the memorial talk about it--how many years later--forty years later. We had interaction with the kids or the Vietnamese people in the South; they were a lot nicer to us. Most of them were Catholic. Up North it was a little different because they were closer to the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone], I suppose. I don't know how you could take an order to kill, randomly, civilians. I don't know how you could do it, because I certainly would never be part of that. I don't know it. But I know why it happened, because if you go through the story, like Lieutenant [William] Calley probably shouldn't have been there. He wasn't the right person at the right place. They actually murdered three hundred and fifty civilians. There's a big memorial in Vietnam to that massacre. Why did that happen? I know why it happened, because when the Americal division came over there, they were doing these S&Ds, or search and destroys, and they were losing guys to booby traps because they were taking the trails. You don't take the trails. We, on occasion, would come upon a booby trap or trip wire, but we were very astute with that stuff. We took our time. But if you got careless, once again. So, this whole unit snaps and they're ordered to murder three hundred and fifty civilians? What's that all about? I just can't figure that one out.

NM: While you are doing these patrols, these night ambush missions and these various other types of patrols, how often did you encounter improvised devices or anything such as that?

JM: If you took the trails, first of all, you're open to ambush. A simple rule I learned a long time ago, by some very smart sergeants: If for some reason you're ambushed, just like this incident that happened out in this theater, your initial reaction is flight, is to get away, get out of there. If you're a trained military person, you attack the ambush, because if you don't attack the ambush, you will not survive. That's pretty simple, but you wouldn't know that as a civilian. It just wouldn't work that way. We were never ambushed because we did it the right way. We were never compromised. If we had some activity at night, say the Vietcong would come by, they might lob a few rifle grenades or something like that, because they didn't know where we were. We were that good at what we did. One thing that I recall, and I mention this in the tours--have you ever seen a claymore mine?

NM: I know what one looks like.

JM: A claymore mine is an anti-personnel device. It's got a curve to it and it's got four little legs that you can put into the ground. We use that in front of our defensive positions at night ambush. Everybody had a claymore. I got very good at putting mine out and what I would do is--you had a blasting cap in a wire you had to put in, making sure you didn't touch the blasting cap or the heat of your fingers may detonate that thing. So, you'd put it in. I ran the wire back and I had a little plunger that would be the detonator. Now, stories at the times said that the Vietcong, if they saw a soldier putting a claymore out, maybe he'd put it out too early, they may want to turn it around, because the front of the claymore, in bold letters, it says, "Front towards enemy." Pretty interesting statement, but it's true. They may turn these around. They didn't make noise or commotion, and if you hit the plunger, you were on the receiving end of that claymore. I never had one turned around. Some of the guys thought they would put a piece of white tape in the back, they can see it maybe at night, and if they did turn it around, you know that they did, but I just never had one turned around. But the story had it that they would do that. I put my claymores out when it was dark. I was very quiet and very stealthy.

NM: Your unit is obviously disciplined. How often did your unit make contact with the enemy?

JM: It could be weeks, mostly weeks. Then they may be in a specific area. I remember one time we had a patrol out and we were just taking a break in the woods. We had a whole platoon with us at this time. Most of the patrol is behind in the jungle and we had two guys on what we call and LP, listening post. It was a rice paddy that went across. So, it was the middle of the day, we didn't sense any problems, and some of the guys were going out to the rice paddy and filling their canteens with water because that's what you did. I always had my weapon with me. Remember, I had a floppy hat, I had no shirt on, I have my M16, and I'm talking to these two guys. One guy's name was (Sharp?). I say, "(Sharp?), how are you guys doing," because they had these walkie-talkie radios that they were supposed to communicate with us if they saw anything. He said, "You know, these radios aren't worth a thing; they're not working." I say, "Well, everything okay here?" He says, "Not really." He says, "A couple of guys come out of the jungle on the other side by the paddy with black pajamas." I said, "Did you try to radio it in?" He said, "Well, these radios aren't working. At that time, the entire tree line opens up on me. I'm sideways looking here and I hear it. I knew what it was. The rounds were hitting the dirt, right here. Well, my defensive mechanism kicked in. I hit the ground and faced this way. I

remember (Sharp?) telling me, he says, "Fire back. Fire back." I said, "Screw you." I said, "You fire back." [laughter] Then, once the firing stopped, because they knew they'd have the brunt of what we had to bring, nobody got hit. It was across the rice paddies, maybe two hundred meters. It was probably one of the closest times I personally had, which I dropped my guard maybe for an [instant] and that's what happened. My guard wasn't sharp. Even though I had my weapon, I only had one magazine. I didn't suffer any injuries, but it scared the heck out of me. That was one of the instances that I was close to being hit, but we didn't lose anybody at that time either.

NM: You are going out on operations in the day, night ambushes at night. Did you ever come across evidence that the enemy was in the area and had fled?

JM: I had a little black and white camera I kept with me on occasion if it was safe and I have pictures I took of a Vietcong bunker complex that we found. They weren't there, so they had left the area. But you wouldn't know it was there. Just in the jungle, all of a sudden, you see these foxholes and spider holes and stuff. So, I took some pictures for later viewing. They were definitely there, but they weren't there when we stumbled upon it. We were just very fortunate. Don't forget, when I came back to the world in '67, July, the activity up North was a lot less than it was in the South, and we were wondering why. It's pretty simple. If you look six months down the road, they were gearing up for the Tet Offensive which was January '68. 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.] So, they were gathering their stuff and they took the time to prepare. That's what they did.

NM: When you are going out on these missions and patrols, did you ever have any interactions with local civilian populations?

JM: You'd come to the villages and the kids would always come out. If the kids were around, you figured stuff was okay, because if you didn't see the kids out, then there was something happening there. I don't think we ever burned any huts down, these "Zippo raids" they called them. We never did that. Very little interaction. Down South it was a little bit stronger because if we were guarding a position, like you called, laterite. Laterite was the road base that they made the roads [with]. It was like a clay-ore type thing, and it was so hard they couldn't dig into them to put metal objects or mines. Some of the kids from the village would come over and they would sell us cokes and stuff like that. Some of them spoke some pretty good English. Actually, I have a picture of two of the Vietnamese girls, young teenagers, Lein and Mai. I became pretty friendly with Lein. I think I gave her a medal or something, just platonic. She actually wrote me a letter and I keep it with me in this set up to show that she says she's going to another village and she's going to miss me. It was pretty neat. That was the interaction we had with them, the only time I can recall, because we happen to be in this specific area where they can come over and sell us stuff. Other than that, we didn't interact with them. You try to keep them away, especially up North, because it was different mindset up North.

NM: Eventually I want to get to your time in the North, but I wanted to ask in the South, did you have any interactions with Vietnamese military? Do you have to work in conjunction with them? Do you come across them?

JM: We called them ARVNs, Army of the Republic of Vietnam, and they had the green uniforms and stuff, but it was a job to them. I mean, we did all the brunt of the patrols. I never personally--we did have, on occasion, a Kit Carson scout go out with you. Kit Carson scout would be an expatriated probably NVA [North Vietnam Army] or Vietcong, and they'd be interpreters. I know one incident I recall. Charlie Company, which is another company of ours, they had a tremendous high incidence of being ambushed when they went out. Their interpreter, whatever his name was, he used to have a feather on the back of his helmet, and we didn't know why. Well, obviously, this guy was Vietcong still and he'd be sitting on the patrol orders. They were the patrol and they'd have, actually, orders typed up where the whole ambush is supposed to be. He'd sit in on those talks. He probably went into the village prior to them going out and he told them where they were going to be. The way Charlie Company handled it, they knew something was wrong and they figured out it was him. They went out on one patrol and he didn't come back in. So, they took care of things that way.

NM: Before we go to your time in the northern part of South Vietnam, is there anything that we missed or we didn't talk about?

JM: No, I think everything is in perspective. I do say one thing--talking about ambush patrols. One of the questions--it's actually a two part question--that they ask sometimes. If they don't ask, I bring it up. They'd say what was your best and your worst time in Vietnam? I say my best time, there's no number two, on the freedom bird we're going home, going back to the world. I said my almost worst time, I recall it like it happened maybe five minutes ago. We were outside the base camp in Tay Ninh and we had a squad size ambush. There were little trailers, wide open stuff, these are wide open, no jungle or anything. We had twelve in the kill zone behind me. I was on rear security with this other guy and we were facing the base camp. We knew where we were facing. About two in the morning, we heard mortar tubes going out from behind us. So, I'm thinking to myself, "Wait a minute, the base camp is this way, mortar tubes. Well, the camp is getting mortared." You can actually see the flashes because it was so--and I started to shake and I started to stutter. I'm thinking, "You got to keep your act together guy because this thing can get terminal in a real hurry." I don't know, maybe twenty-twenty-five seconds--it hadn't happened before and it hasn't happened since, but it did happen to me and the fear just took over. I composed myself. I don't know what I would've done if I didn't, but I knew things could happen there. So, what happened is, they're mortaring from behind us; they're hitting the base camp. Now, when they mortared the camps, they always did it twice before dawn, one in the middle of the night, one before dawn. So, we knew they were going to come probably this way to get to another position. Now, if they come into our kill zone we have to spring the ambush. Well, they didn't come past our kill zone. So, just before dawn we heard mortar tubes from over here going off. That was the traditional for them. In the morning, Alpha Company came out and we went to the spot where we thought they were the first time. We determined by the impressions on the ground from the mortar tubes, they figured it was six mortar tubes and maybe seventy-two NVA regulars. We had fourteen. Years later, I'm at a reunion and with the sergeant who was in charge of the patrol. He says, "Hey Mac, remember that ambush that we

almost got you know?" I said, "Yes, vividly." He says, "You know, I asked battalion at that time on the radio if I could get you guys and see if we can get these guys in the middle of the night." Well, battalion says, "Stay right where you are. We know where you are," because they are putting out artillery over our heads, so we're right in the middle. I always said if he would have gotten permission for us to go after these guys, knowing the numbers after the fact, I probably wouldn't be here. But that was something very vivid that I recall. I do bring that up. Once again, luck took over. [laughter]

NM: Did it come as a surprise when your unit, after building this base camp, is transferred to another area?

JM: Yes, very surprised, because we had no idea. It just broke us apart because we were so tight together. Actually, in my diary, I wrote down the five or six names [of the] guys that were transferred to the other units. Five of them were killed with other units. It's a sin because we were so survivable together. Like I said, the replacements started to come in and these guys didn't have the discipline we had. So, you had to be careful. I had a couple of new guys come out with me on an OP [Observation Post] and they sacked out. It just didn't work. Once we got back to the world, then, then they started getting major casualties. They just didn't take it as seriously as we did.

NM: Could you just explain a little bit breaking the unit up? What exactly do you mean by that? Do you mean that your platoon is broken up?

JM: You had, say, twelve guys in a squad. Six step forward, they go to different units. We get six replacements in, because the rotation in Vietnam was like this, except if you went over as a group like we did. Then, realizing that's why they did it because they couldn't rotate [inaudible], whoever was left at the same time. It broke down the discipline that we had together and that's just what it was. You had to be really careful.

NM: This happened after you were sent to a different location?

JM: No, prior. Because like I said, I stayed with the brigade and I ended up in Chu Lai because we transferred guys to 25th Division, 5th Mechanized, could be the 4th Division. Like I said, five of the six guys that were in my unit didn't come home.

NM: Can you talk about relocating to this different area? I want to know if the types of missions you are going on change in any way.

JM: Different terrain, completely different terrain. You're going from flat area in III Corps with a lot of jungle to the Central Highlands, which is all mountains and stuff of that nature. Like I said, the base camps were not the same in the North because you had to have the high ground. So, every hill had its own little base area or a firebase. So, the terrain was completely different, completely different. You just did the same type of missions. As of matter-of-fact, we used to-- if Bravo would go out on an S&D, we may go over there to provide security and stay in their base camp and provide the outside stuff. We did it once with Charlie Company. Charlie Company was on [what you] call beach bunkers. They were on the sand. They're out in the

sand. That was tough getting through. So, we'd fill in if we had to because the size of our unit was compromised. It wasn't a big unit. It changed a little bit up North, but the terrain was a whole big difference up there. It was completely different terrain.

NM: You mentioned that you are getting all these replacements. Was there a certain period where they acclimate to a point where it is okay?

JM: Well, some of them got better. As a matter-of-fact, I'll share a story with you. This fellow Jules-Leitz from Ohio, he was a replacement. I had about thirty days left in country before, fortunately, we'd get to go home, not realizing that it's going to happen. Because early in your tour, you figure, "Hey I don't know if I can survive three hundred and something days," and then you get to six months and, all of a sudden, "Wow, we're going downhill now." Toward the end you got really careful because--I started up toward the front of the platoon in the patrols. At the end of my tour, I was in the back. I was rear security. We were in an ambush patrol. We had done a major patrol that day, how many thousands of meters up in the hills and mountains and stuff, and we were setting up for an ambush on a rice paddy. So, he was my partner and usually it's an hour on, an hour off. You try to cover each other. I remember him telling me, he says, "Mac, I can't stay awake." He says, "I'm just beat up. Today was just too much." So, I looked at Leitz and I said, "Don't worry. I got your back." I remember looking out into the rice paddy staring the entire night. I thought to myself, eight months before I'd be looking at the same darkness and there would be all kinds of ghost, goblins, and creatures coming to get me, but I said the night passed slowly without incident through the eyes of a seasoned reconnaissance scout, because I was really good at that time. When dawn broke he apologized. "I'm sorry I couldn't pull my shift." He's a good guy. I said, "Leitz, how much time you have left in country?" He said, "About sixty days." I said, "Well, I got thirty days. Thirty days from now when I'm on the freedom bird going back home, you are going to be out on an ambush when you have thirty days left in country and you're going to have a partner that's going to confront you with the same initial thing." I said, "At that point, you'll know what to do." I'll sleep when I get home. That stands out in my mind because that really happened.

NM: Talk about the challenges of this different terrain. Does this result in you packing different gear? Does this result in you traveling lighter?

JM: Well, interestingly enough, our traditional web gear was called the Alice Pack. At that time, that was the Army's up to date. It had a knapsack that hung off the back of your belt. To really get it off you had to take everything off. We got to the Marine area, we looked at the web gear that they left behind; a lot of them left some stuff behind. This is World War II era gear. It fit better than ours. So, I actually outfitted myself in the Marine gear, which was the web gear. You could actually have the pack on your back and if you had ammunition or stuff in it you can drop this. Another thing with the grenade pouches, the traditional Alice Pack had these canvas box type things for the magazines of your rifle and on the sides you would have the hand grenades on the outside. Well, as un-luck would have it, the grenade has a little pin and if that pin is open because it's got to be pulled--you cannot take that pin out when it's folded properly. We heard stories where guys would be walking in the bush [and] because these grenades were outside, something might grab hold and all of a sudden you are sitting with a live grenade, and how do you get it off. Well, the Marines, they had World War II web gear and they had grenade

pouches that were like this, which means you could put the grenade in and close it. So, that fit us much better, because I knew it was safer to have it, but that's the type of web gear we used. We used the Marine gear up North.

NM: You mentioned previously the difference between the demeanors of the South and North Vietnamese. Could you expand up on that?

JM: Well, if I had a camera with me it was the daytime and I see a couple of kids, I'd probably try to take a picture with them. When you did it up North--I got a favorite slide and the kids are all--their backs turned to us. I call that in the bottom of the slide "Bashful Baby-sans," because they weren't as friendly to us up North because the NVA controlled a lot more up there. As a matter-of-fact, the NVA they'd come into the villages at night and the people were dealing with us, selling us stuff. In the North, we didn't have the same closeness with the kids, like I said. But if they were dealing with the Americans, the Vietcong might come into the village at night and they go to each hut and they'd leave a bullet in each hut. They'd say, "If you continue dealing with Americans this is what is going to happen to you." They would target teachers and leaders, stuff of that nature. That's how they would get their point across, because these people are caught between a rock and a hard place, especially the further north you got. But we didn't have the same, like I said, relationship up North that we had in the South. The only time I ever had that, where we talked to the kids was that one specific area, because we happened to be there providing security. We'd be there all day and night and they'd come over and talk to us. So, it was okay. I wrote home for candy from my mom because they didn't have that stuff over there, but it was a completely different mindset.

NM: Was the type of ordinance that the enemy had in the South versus North different? Were you facing more NVA regulars versus Vietcong or is that something that you couldn't discern?

JM: What happened in the North--we were the first Army unit to go that far north. The Marines were sent and I think the Vietcong followed them, because the activity was a lot less in the North, obviously so. Like I said, the only other thing I can think about it is the Tet Offensive was coming up in six months and they were rearming and stuff of that nature. But the Marines would go out, they'd have operations in these different areas. As a matter-of-fact, the Marines lost more Marines in Vietnam than they did in World War II. They, more or less, brought the bad guys with them, which is fine with me. I mean, on occasion, we had some explosions on the road, stuff like that, but we really weren't compromised as much as we were in the South. It was a lot more open, the whole terrain. Like I said, it was a different environment. The NVA were not that close to us. They would never be that close to the South China Sea at that time, because they were mostly inland and they had their own hills they dealt with in there. As far as the equipment and everything goes, it was fairly the same. I mean their main battle weapon was the AK-47 Kalashnikov 7.62 and stuff of that nature. I think when the Marines moved inland they may have taken a lot of the NVA with them, which is fine with us.

NM: During your time in Vietnam, it is really a time of the expansion for the United States military in Vietnam. Is that something that is apparent to someone who is going on patrols, that there are really more troops?

JM: Well, when we were in country, I think the troop strength was about 260,000. The height of the war in the late '60s, early '70s, was five-hundred thousand. So, they doubled it in size. As a matter-of-fact, when we were in country, we were asked to train some of the new units. The 4th Division was going on patrol with us, and I think the 9th too. One thing we did work with a lot over there, I didn't bring it up, the war dogs they call them. Have you seen them? We have a memorial for the war dogs in Vietnam. Well, I call them scout tracker dogs. We'd take them out on night ambush a lot with us. You'd have a shepherd in the front, a shepherd in the back, and hopefully, they wouldn't make noise. They were an integral part of what we did too, because if that dog stopped, you'd know something was up there. The TO&E, the Table of Organization and Equipment was about the same up North to my knowledge, but we did get to share some security with, like I said, the South Vietnamese Marines who were using World War II weapons. I have a picture of me with a M2 carbine. We did it differently because of the terrain, but it was virtually more open up North. It wasn't as much jungle that we dealt with as we did in the South.

NM: You did not make as much contact as you did in the South. Are there any vivid experiences that stand out in your time?

JM: Mostly in the South, because we were attacked more--I say attacked--we were under fire a lot more in the South. In the North it was intermittent. I think it's because the Marines moved inland, I guess. And the Tet Offensive, that had a lot to do with it. When we got down to our last weeks in country, we may have refused to go out on patrol. I'm thinking if we did or not. I think maybe we rebelled. [laughter] I remember walking down to this road to a village called Nuocmaou and I had maybe one week left in country. I was a shabby guy. We never shined our boots or anything. I'm coming down this trail. Here comes this jeep with an officer and this guy has got starched fatigues, a hundred and twenty degrees. Well, he stops the jeep, because we're not about to salute him over there. We wouldn't salute an officer; we just didn't do it. He jumps out, he's ripping into us like, [inaudible]. "Take a break." He'll learn fast though--starch fatigues in a hundred and twenty degrees. But our officers never wore rank. I'll tell you an incident that happened, and I do bring this up on my tours. The traditional helmet that we had back then, the steel pot, it's got the camouflaged cover. With the Army, you have this elastic band on the bottom. Guys put cigarettes in there and mosquito repellent. One distinction Marines had and they still have it today, if you see a helmet on a soldier and you don't know whether it's a Marine or a soldier, you'll never see that elastic band on a Marine. It's a distinction that they've always kept that band off. I'll tell you how I know about this as confirmation. We were coming back from Operation Attleboro. We had Lieutenant Novotny, and he was right next to me. We were being looked over by the general, who really screwed up the operation. He was relieved of his command. Of course, he's going to talk to an officer, not going to talk to me. Anyway, Lieutenant Novotny lost his camouflage, the little elastic band, probably from what we call a "wait-a-minute bush." You're in the jungle and it just snatches it off. The brambles will just snatch it right off. He looks Novotny straight in the eyes, he says, "What do you think you are a Marine?" He had lost his thing. That's the distinction. Any movies you see or any footage, if you don't that elastic band, chances are it's a Marine.

NM: You mentioned that the officers in your unit would not really display their ranks. Could you tell me about the relationship in your unit with your officer?

JM: Initially, we had Lieutenant Brede. We were his first command. He was actually on R&R [Rest and Recreation] when Attleboro because that's how we got Novotny. He was a really good officer. We interacted mostly with the sergeants because they are the next in line. I also mentioned the fact [that] you pick up some Vietnamese language when you're over there and we talk about one of the only women killed from the State of New Jersey. Her name is Eleanor Grace Alexander. She was a captain. I really never met her, but if I had the opportunity to meet her, I would have called her a *dai uy*. *Dai uy* was the equivalent of captain in Vietnamese. Second lieutenant, first lieutenant, captain, that's how rank works. *Thieu uy*, [*trung uy?*], *dai uy*, that's how we used to address these guys. I said I didn't know anybody above the rank of captain, so, I didn't know what the major name would be. But I call her *dai uy*, and that's pretty interesting.

NM: You mentioned mosquitoes and very often what accompanies mosquitoes are diseases and things like that. Was that something that incapacitated men in your unit or anyone?

JM: Well, you took malaria pills every week and we never cut the arms of the fatigue shirts off. Some guys did it. [inaudible] you have to roll it down at night. You'd be at night time, you have the mosquito repellent on because they come real close to you. They would be able to bite, however they did it, through the cloth. They were that bad. Of course, the smell of the mosquito repellent was pretty strong too, so maybe it kept the Vietcong a little further away, who knows. But, yes, mosquitoes were a hazard. You could get dysentery and stuff like that, very simple, because the water we drank--we didn't have the luxury of having access to water. I had three canteens I always had with me. Any body of water I came to, I'd fill them up. Could be a stream, could be rice paddy, and you'd have purification tablets, which kind of taste like iodine. You put it in and it could get mighty thirsty out there, but you had to take care of yourself. We didn't have faucets. No electricity, no running water for a year is about what it was, but you learn. Today, they have these bladders they put on their backs and stuff with the water and that's pretty neat, but that's how we did it back then. I remember working with one of the scout tracker dogs one time and the handler--we had a handler and a dog--his lips were very parched and I felt sorry for this guy. I said, "Do you have any water left?" He says, "No, I gave it to the dog." I look at the handler, and he's got one canteen. I said, "Are you out of your mind?" I said, "Look at my canteens here." I was thinking I had three canteens, which was my protocol. So, I gave him some of mine to help him out.

NM: How often would you have these tracker dogs with you?

JM: In the South, we had the scout tracker dogs and not every patrol, but on several and I mention them in my diary. It was nice to have them out with us, because we knew we had that extra degree of security. One time, we were on patrol North, and I bring this up on occasion, and I guess we were ambushing outside of a village. For some reason, these two Vietnamese mutt dogs, they followed us. I'll never forget it. Now, we set up for the ambush at night. One dog went to one side; one dog went to the other side. Now, why did they come out with us? They didn't make a noise the entire night. Usually, a dog would come because they think you will give them something. Anyway, when dawn broke, they went away. It was just incredible. To this day, I don't know why they did it, but they certainly followed us out on patrol.

NM: Did you ever consider doing another tour or making a military career?

JM: Not really. I'd had enough, seen enough. It interrupted my life. It was an experience I'll never regret. If, for some reason, our freedom was in jeopardy and I was asked to go, I'd redeploy at that moment, but back then, it was the fact that they knew the war is going to keep going and going because it was not winnable. It could have been won, but it was not the mindset to win that war when you have politicians ruling the thing. One book that I highly recommend, it's called *After the Storm* written by Paul Drew. Paul I served with. He's a PhD in writing. He's talking in the book about being on patrol by Nui Ba Den, the Black Virgin Mountain, and what happened is a helicopter crashed and he was sent out to recover the bodies of the guys. They got to Nui with the body bags and whatever and they got stuck there in the middle of the night. It was a squad, which is very tough place to be. He's relating back to Secretary [Robert] McNamara's confrontation with the citizens, because he's running the war, basically, and he's making mistakes. He goes out to Mt. Rainier in the state of Washington to escape the controversy. As Paul puts it, he says, "The demons I faced on Nui Ba Den that night would have devoured those that you sought refuge from in Mt. Rainier." So, that's one of Paul's quotes. I remember that. Pretty interesting.

NM: Can we talk about the process of actually leaving Vietnam? Were other men in your squad or platoon in the same situation as you since you had deployed together? Were they leaving at the exact same time?

JM: One thing I didn't have to confront was the controversy in California. If you came back to the world and you came through that area, you might have protesters spitting at you, screaming at you. What's that all about? I didn't have to deal with that because we left from Tan Son Nhut Airport, you go to Japan and Anchorage, Alaska. In Anchorage, we got off the plane, it was nice. It was a hundred and twenty [degrees] in Tan Son Nhut. It was sixty degrees in Anchorage. I recall that. We actually flew into McGuire Air Force Base. So, I flew into a military base. So, I didn't have to confront that. I confronted them one time in New York later, but I didn't have to confront it at that time. So, there was no incident as far as that goes right away, even though it did occur to me maybe a week later.

NM: You mentioned that the rest of your time in Vietnam was flying out. What was the mood on the airplane? Did people talk?

JM: It was elation. There was no alcohol or beer or anything. I remember that. Maybe a guy would sneak on a bottle, who knows, but it was just not really understanding that we're going back to the world. I didn't have my M16. I had my summer greens on--no, I had tans on at the time. It just wasn't real yet. You just didn't believe that you're getting out of that place. It was different. I certainly felt for the people we left behind very, very deeply. You're back in the world in twenty something hours and you're in Fort Dix. Coincidentally, I actually went back to the place where I went into the Army, at the reception station. That's where you get brought in. We were there for maybe one day and they gave us our summer greens and uniforms. The next day I had somebody pick me up and that was it.

NM: Was your job available to you when you came back?

JM: What happened is, back then, if you were drafted--I don't know if you enlisted--but your job was guaranteed or an equivalent job. When I left, I was in accounting, I told you that. When I came back, accounting had moved out to Ohio, to the main office. I'll tell you an incident that happened to me in New York as I went back to my people. I was living at home, and my mom said, "You're going back to work?" I said, "In about a week. I just want to chill out." She goes, "Are you are going to visit those people, right?" I said, "Certainly." You know, I'm back home. She goes, "You put that uniform on." I says, "I don't know. I'm not too popular when I put that uniform on." She goes, "You put that uniform on." She said it twice to me. I thought to myself, "You can't say no to mom, can you?" So, I put my summer greens on. I had my ribbons and stuff and patches over here. I took the bus into Port Authority. As I was walking across town, which I always did when I was working, there was kind of a mob coming my way, maybe a couple of blocks away. So, I talked to a person on the street. I said, "What's this all about?" He said, "That's a peace demonstration. Have you ever seen one?" I say, "No, I never have." I'm thinking to myself, "I'm kind of confused here." I said, "Didn't we just come back from a war. We put our time into keep the freedom we have here, to allow these people to do this?" I'm thinking that way, but I was more concerned with the people that were still in country like Jules-Lietz, another thirty days to go, and it was confusing. I didn't confront them, but I got into the elevator, 120 East 41st Street, and there were two guys in the elevator, older than me, and they're looking me over. So, the one guy turns to his buddy and says, "See this guy here?" He says, "Yes." He says, "Here's one guy who didn't burn his draft card." That acknowledged the fact that I did something right. That was my incident.

NM: Did you go back to where you used to work?

JM: Yes. What happened is the accounting department moved out to Ohio and I went to the--they didn't call it HR [human resources] back then. It was a different department. They said, "How would you like to move out to Ohio? That's where your department went." I said, "Hey, I just got back from Vietnam. I'm not looking to go anywhere." They said, "Okay, we're going to offer you another position," and they actually offered me a position in what they called the traffic department. It was kind of like a travel agent within departments. We would schedule airlines and trips for all the executives and we had company aircraft too that flew over the pipelines. So, that's where I came back. So, I became kind of a travel agent when I came back. I enjoyed it. It was just something different.

NM: What was your family's reaction when you returned home?

JM: Well, it was--they were glad to see me, obviously. I probably became closer to my dad when I was [in the service]. He wrote me a lot. You know how it is with young boys and stuff, but I just was thrilled to be home. I didn't have to pull any reserve duty because we had a six-year commitment, but so many guys were trying to get into the Reserves and the National Guard because they weren't going to get deployed to Vietnam. They would stay here. So, I had a six-year commitment. I actually got my discharge in '72. I didn't have to pull any extra duty. I melded back to society and I thought I was okay until I decided--not decided, but I found out years later that I had accrued post-traumatic stress, which I'm currently being taken care of with now. I'm being reevaluated and I do see a counselor probably once a month, talk things over. I

think I'm pretty much where I'm going to be. That's why one of my ambitions in life when I retired was to be a tour guide, and we're all the same down there. Either you talk about this, you can or you can't. There's no middle ground to Vietnam. There's a lot of people that can't talk about it. Fortunately, I've always confronted it. I've become better, but being taken care of medically for the PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], which is mostly therapy, it's something that a lot of soldiers need. A lot of these new soldiers are not asking for this. There's actually four suicides in the United States Army every day. It's amazing, but it's because they're not asking for help. Once you identify the issue, which I did, I seek treatment and it's done very well.

NM: Were there challenges in re-acclimating to civilian life?

JM: It was pretty easy getting back to the fold, I think, except when I did go through the early stages of PTSD I didn't know what it was. It's a very anxiety type thing. Like I said, thirty years ago, we probably couldn't talk, you and I, maybe. I don't know. But I feel that I've confronted the issues that post-traumatic stress brought to me and that's how I compete with that issue. We were young people. I would've gone to Woodstock, stuff of that nature. We were regular guys. We weren't anything different. We had gone through an experience not like other people have to go through, but that's the nature of the beast. We have reunions every two years, my unit, in different areas. I'm very tight with a lot of the officers. We had very good leadership, extremely good leadership. Their main reason was to get us home alive. We didn't know it at the time, but later on, you start realizing that that was their purpose.

NM: Coming back in '67, did you follow the course of war while you were in the States?

JM: I did, not strongly, because the thing is, coming home to an ungrateful nation is really a slap in the face. I talk about movies on occasion at the memorial. The one movie I recall was *Rambo II* when Sylvester Stallone is just expatriated a bunch of POWs [inaudible]. He's talking with Colonel Trautman, and the Colonel says, "What is it you want, John?" He says, "What I want is what every guy that spills his guts in Vietnam wants. We want our country to love us as much as we love it. That's what I want." That's about what it was. We were treated as second class citizens, which I think is criminal. To this day, I will go out of my way on Memorial Day or something, when I'm up in New York, when the Iwo Jima comes in, to shake hands with everybody I can and thank them for their service. I tell the groups that come down, it's mostly the students, that if you see a service person, regardless of what branch they are in, go up and thank them for their service. I say, "They'll feel good, you'll feel better," and that's just the way it is. We vowed that from that day on, we would never, ever see anybody treated like we were treated.

NM: You've gone into a little bit about the travel scheduling department. Can you tell me more about your career?

JM: I worked for them when I came back and it was in New York. There no jobs in Jersey at that time. My brother-in-law at that time was working for Boston Wove Hose, it was a company out of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and they had a small warehouse in Jersey. He says, "How would you like to work in Jersey?" I said, "Sounds good to me. I don't have to commute. I can

drive to work." I worked for Boston Woven Hose. I was a warehouse manager for several years. Then they decided they wanted to put somebody else in that spot and it was somebody's big brother and they said, "Goodbye." That's what they did back then. So, I realized at the time--I felt devastated; I was fired, but I didn't do anything wrong. It was probably the best thing that happened to me in my work life, because it told me that tomorrow could be a different thing. This is not going to go on for forever. When I first worked in New York, I said when you work for a company back then, you probably work your entire life for that company, but that wasn't the case. Then, I went into other careers in sales. I did that for about forty something years before I just retired.

NM: Congratulations on retiring. Would you like to share for the record going into sales and some of the things that you did?

JM: I did send this down, I don't know if you saw it.

NM: Your resume?

JM: Yes.

NM: Yes. I have your resume.

JM: And I have the DD-214, I put in there too. To be a tour guide at the memorial, you've got to be a combat veteran. It's a very nice distinction, I think. The one thing I bring up on occasion, I think this really--I told Pat this the other day [when] we were having coffee. I said 1982 when the Vietnam War Memorial was dedicated, I met Jan Scruggs many times, who was the founder. At the end of his talk about the memorial and this and that, he says, "You know the National Park police?" He says, "They're all Vietnam veterans." That really solidified the fact that we're protecting our own.

NM: What led you to become involved in the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial?

JM: Back in '82, I was down in Washington for the dedication and in '89, the first shovel went into the ground in Holmdel; I was there. It was developed a few years later. Like I said, I donated certain items down there. I always felt a part of it, because I have some personal items that are in there and no one else has that of all the tour guides. One of the fellows, Dan O'Leary--there's a picture in the back wall, it's of a ship and he's on that ship, but he just happened to be in the group. I have two identifiable items in there. I always vowed that I wanted to do this for the right reasons. Number one, to keep the memories alive of the heroes on the memorial, to share stories or any information I can with the groups and we're very--there's no sugar coating with us down there. Three, the most important, is to keep the memories alive of those people. That's why I do it and it's something I always wanted to do. I tell Sarah [Taggart, Deputy Director of the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial], "You got my heart and soul down here. I don't know what else I can give you." I thoroughly enjoy doing it. It's unique because we are the only learning center and museum in the country right now. They are developing one down by the Wall. It's going to be for all wars though. It's not going to be just Vietnam. It's just something that I always wanted to do and being I have sales experience forty something

years, I can converse pretty well with people and make them understand. That's something I've always wanted to do. It's a passion. It's a passion that's very well--it's thanked. You're working with very nice people and there's no pressure really, but I just love to do it. I'm going to get as good as I get.

NM: Before we close, is there anything that you would like to add for the record, about your early life, your Vietnam experience, your time afterward, or as a tour guide?

JM: Well, as a tour guide--Memorial Day, we had two scholarships we give out to the students. There are two young girls, probably in their twenties. Her dad is a Vietnam veteran. He's also lost a leg in Vietnam. He was in a wheelchair and we welcomed him home, which we always do. It's on our website too, her talk about learning about the Memorial and her dad. At one point, when she was talking about him coming home and being treated the way he was, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. I just happened to be sitting next to, we call him "The Doc." He was with the 1st Cav. I put my hand on his shoulder. I said, "Doc, I need your support." He says, "I know exactly what you mean." It's a very moving place because it's solemn, it's pretty solemn, and it's something to keep alive the memories. That's so important, it really is.

NM: When did you become involved in some veterans' organizations?

JM: I've been with the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] since probably 1982. I was a commander in the Nutley post back in the '80s. I am currently a member of the VFW in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey. I'm holding some officer's chair, but I don't have any reason to be at the top anymore. We do other things. We go to the Paramus Veterans Home. They have bingo every once in a while. We have a dinner coming up. We bring them into our post, the ones that can get around, and we feed them and stuff of that nature. Memorial Day, I would normally be involved with the VFW in Franklin Lakes because we have like two parades we do, but now that I'm part of the foundation, I have to be down there, which I want to be down there. I participate in anything I can be used down there in any shape or form. It's very rewarding, like I said. To share the knowledge and stories with the young people who know virtually nothing about the war, they're going to get first hand from us. That's what they usually come away with, because there's questionnaires that we ask them to fill out after the fact and most of them remember mostly talking to the veterans and the stories, because, like I said, we're very open with what we talk about.

NM: Is there anything else?

JM: I appreciate your time down here. [laughter]

NM: Well, thank you Mr. McGinnis for coming in. We can conclude the interview.

-----End of Interview-----

Reviewed by Mohammad Athar 7/14/15

Reviewed by Molly Graham 12/22/2017

