RV: This is Richard Verrone. I’m continuing my oral history with General John Arick. Today is March 19, 2003. It’s 9:55 am Central Standard Time and we are in Lubbock, Texas in the Special Collections Library interview room. John Arick, it’s been a month since we last talked. We’re still in your first tour, let’s talk a little bit about, I’d like to ask some questions, some basic questions, and then we can talk about some specific incidents. Could you describe the difference between daytime flying and nighttime flying and what you preferred and why?

JA: Well, let’s see. During the daytime it’s a little lighter than it is during the nighttime. I had to say that. I felt compelled. The difference, well, first of all, it would seem that more exciting things took place at night than during the daytime and I use the term exciting as a euphemism for more enemy action. We were able to scare up more enemy action at night than we were able to in the daytime then. The bad guys seemed to know we were coming most of the time.

RV: Day or night? Which?

JA: Daytime. If we had an operation, we on many occasions, the A Shau Valley and the Ia Drang not withstanding, the bad guys would know we were coming and disappear into the night and day. But at night they seemed to come out and play and give our recon teams in particular some problems. And that was when our particular unit, VMO6 with the armed Hueys probably made most of our money during my first tour in ’66 and ’67. We would be called on repeatedly to go in and bail out recon teams.
RV: That were ambushed?

JA: That had encountered the bad guys. Yes, ambushed or been surrounded or whatever.

RV: How effective were your nighttime bailouts?

JA: 100%. Although, and I believe I’ve already talked about this, within in about two weeks of my appearance in Vietnam, our commanding officer was killed during a night extract. But the teams were always taken out and not without some wounds and not without some damage to the helicopters. But we never got beaten back and left a team in during my time there.

RV: I’ve talked to other pilots, interviewed them and they said that they sought out the enemy. They didn’t want to avoid conflict. They actually wanted to go out and as you said, play. They wanted to find them and kill them.

JA: Sure.

RV: Or find them and deal with them however they had been ordered to do so. Was that the attitude of your unit as well?

JA: Yeah, pretty much except that our mission wasn’t, the Marine Corps attack helicopter mission wasn’t quite so much hunt out with the helicopters themselves. We would be helo escort, we would be observation, but we would not necessarily go out with our helicopters looking for a fight. We would encounter them all the time, not all the time, but frequently. And when it happened it was exciting and that’s what we were getting paid to do and everybody loved it. The risks notwithstanding. It was a chance to do what we had been trained to do so we did it. I’m not sure I answered your question quite the way…

RV: No, you did. You absolutely did. When you said observation, how would you observe? What were you looking for?

JA: well, VMO-6 was Marine Observation Squadron 6. That’s the title. So that was one of the main missions we had. We’d go out and we’d look for signs of the enemy. We’d look for the enemy themselves. We would be asked by the ground units to be their eyes. If they were moving through a rice paddy area or a jungle area, they’d ask us to fly out ahead and take a look and see if we saw any bad guys and occasionally we’d draw fire and they’d get their wish. They knew then where the bad guys were and we’d shoot
back and go on our way. In fact, I’m not sure whether I talked about this already, my
shoot down was on a mission, when I got shot down, I was on a mission like that. We had
just landed a battalion, I believe of infantry, on the beach or just beyond the beach and
they were moving inland and my wingman and I were out flying around in front of them
and we encountered some North Vietnamese in trenches with pith helmets and weapons
and everything. I actually lost that battle. They shot us up pretty bad and nobody in the
helicopter was injured.

RV: What type of fire were you taking?
JA: Small arms fire. AK-47. Our guns jammed and we weren't able to shoot back
or get their heads down so they got more rounds into us than we did into them. Did I tell
this story?
RV: No, you did not. Not that I remember.
JA: At any rate, redundancy is a good thing.
RV: Sure.
Ja: One of their rounds hit our oil tank, oil cooler and we lost all the oil in our
transmission and were forced to land. Fortunately we landed, not fortunately but
fortunately but there was friendly position, artillery position available for us. We sat
down immediately. I autorotated for a while and landed with power and then shut down.
Our helicopter was subsequently externaled by a 46 back to the aircraft carrier that we
were operating from.
RV: When you said your guns jammed, how often did this happen?
JA: Not very often, and certainly that’s the only time that I can recall that all of
our side guns and my forward firing guns jammed at one time.
RV: All of them.
JA: All of them. That’s the excuse I give for getting shot down, but I’m not sure.
We were caught at low altitude without the ability to shoot as much as we should have
been able to shoot and we lost that one.
RV: Did you make one pass, okay, guns are jammed, let’s get out of here or did
you try to come back around or did you stay in the area?
JA: Stayed in the area.
RV: You stayed in the area? Why did you do that?
JA: Because there were so many bad guys down there. It was kind of a crazy thing and guns don’t stay jammed. We had a crew chief and a gunner who were trying to clear their door gun jams and at the same trying to clear the jams in our forward firing machine guns. So I had every expectation that one gun would be cleared in time but it didn’t happen that way.

RV: What were your rules of engagement?
JA: If you see bad guys, shoot them. And we made the decision, this was on the first tour, we made the decision whether they were bad guys or not.

RV: You did?
JA: Yes. And the decision usually was, well it was always in my case and probably always in everyone else’s case, if they had a weapon, shoot them. And you didn’t have word that they were friendly Vietnamese in the area. But nobody in black pajamas with a weapon and nobody with a pith helmet on and a weapon was a good guy, so we shot at them. Generally speaking, we would not shoot at somebody if we didn’t see a weapon.

RV: So if they heard you coming, they could literally throw down their AK and just stand there.
JA: Absolutely. And that happened very, very frequently. And it took some real self-control not to shoot. But the chances of shooting an unarmed person was not a particularly attractive…or, the event of shooting an unarmed person was not particularly attractive, so we didn’t.

RV: So you made the call. This person was the enemy, you could fire. You did not have to be fired upon?
JA: No. We could preempt.
RV: What was the attitude of the ground forces to you guys? How much did you talk with them and how much did you interact with them?
JA: Lots with radios but very seldom on the ground. Near the end of that first tour, we had interactive briefings for the larger operations. But we talked to them on the radios all the time during the operations. They loved us because we were able to look out where they couldn’t see and we were able to cover them when they were moving and were able to shoot from the sky and we were a lot closer than the jets were. Although the
jets had napalm and snake eye and all those great things, we were more capable of getting
down and dirty and closer to them and doing things on the spot that they needed done.

RV: I don’t think you answered this. Did you prefer daytime or nighttime flying?
JA: I don’t know the answer to that question. I’m not sure I preferred either one.

There was more action at night. You couldn’t see as well. Of course we didn’t have night
vision equipment at that point in time. But they were two different worlds, two different
types of battle. You could see the bullets coming at you better at night mostly because of
the tracers. That wasn’t necessarily a good thing but it was a fact of life. I don’t know.
They were two different types of fighting. That’s not a good answer but I’m going to
stick with it.

RV: That sounds fine. I’ve heard this before where it just depended on the
situation and the weather. That’s crucial. What did you think in 1967, ’66, ’67, ’68 of the
American strategy that was being used, in particular, I want to ask you about how the
United States government and military leaders could tell if the United States was actually
winning the war. How could they measure that they were winning. But first overall
strategy, what did you think early on in the first few years of the engagement?

JA: I didn’t think a whole lot of it because I was out there to do what I was being
told to do. I didn’t think beyond the fact that the search and destroy missions, that’s
basically what was being done during my first tour. We wouldn’t get intelligence but we
would get told that there was intelligence that there was a unit somewhere, an enemy unit
somewhere and we’d take a company out to the proximity of that unit and put them into a
landing zone and they’d operate for a day or two and then we’d pull them out and go
home. You want to talk about body count, I didn’t even think about body count and I’m
not sure that many of the people I flew with thought a whole lot about body count. If
there were bad guys, it was always a good thing to kill them if they were trying to kill
you, not a pleasant thing, but a good thing. But if we were able to get in contact with the
enemy, if we ever made contact with them, if the ground troops made contact with them
or if we made contact with them, as far as I was concerned at that point in time, it was a
successful mission. If we went out to do something and didn’t see any bad guys
anywhere, that was an unsuccessful mission because our mission was to go out and
search and destroy with the units on the ground.
RV: Did you think in ’66, ’67 and then you returned stateside after this first tour, did you think that the United States had a winning policy from what you could tell from your experience there?

JA: Yes. Very simply yes. There was never any doubt in my mind at that stage of the game nor was there any doubt in my mind as I left my second tour that we would prevail. It was only after, particularly after the TET Offensive and I wasn’t there for the TET Offensive, but the fact that we actually won the TET Offensive with a significant victory despite the media or others, that was a significant blow, I thought to the bad guys. I felt we were going to capitalize on that and when I went back for a second tour, I was expecting that we would be doing an awful lot of damage to the enemy as a follow-up in ’70. It didn’t turn out to be the case, obviously.

RV: Did you think that McNamara’s and other’s policy of body count, just looking at it in general, not from your personal experience, but just looking at the war of that’s how we can tell we’re winning the war is the ratio of killing. That’s one big way we can tell. What’s your opinion on that?

JA: My opinion on that today is it was absolute insanity. We have learned since how to fight and win a war, not that we didn’t know it before, we just know now that we really need to do it the right way. You win a war by taking territory. Now, denying territory, I guess you can also do that too with air, but when you get down to the grass roots, you’ve got to take and hold territory whether you actually have bodies, your own bodies, live bodies on that territory remains to be seen. It all depends, but you take and hold territory. You don’t just count dead bodies. That was lunacy. That’s from my perspective today. I’m not sure I would have taken that strong a stance back when I was in my mid 20s.

RV: Let’s talk about some specific incidents in your first tour, specifically the ones that you were awarded medals for. Why don’t you tell me about those?

JA: Let’s see, the first…

RV: And don’t be modest.

JA: Okay. I will tell you what I can remember of them. The very first one involved a recon team who was up on a mountain up to the west of Ky Ha, the helicopter base in Chu Lai, not very far away, probably a 10 minute flight if that. They were up on a
mountain peak and they were surrounded, during the daytime, too, which was an unusual
situation and by the way, I was delighted that it was daylight because you could see
everything, but there was a recon team surrounded by bad guys and taking fire. So I was
a wingman at this stage of the game. This was very early in my tour. And we went out
and flew around and shot up the area and the guys on the ground said they were running
out of 7.62 ammo and I suggested to my flight leader that since we had a couple of extra
boxes, that we go in and make a low pass real fast and drop off some ammo. He said,
‘Fine. Go ahead and do it.’ I did it. We took some heavy fire on the way in and on the
way out the first time. We went back in and dropped our ammo.

RV: Now how could you tell you were taking the fire? This may be a very bad
question.

JA: Heard it. No that’s a good question.

RV: It was hitting the aircraft.

JA: No. It was not hitting the aircraft.

RV: You just heard it coming.

JA: We heard it coming but we also had the guys on the ground telling us,
‘You’re taking fire.’ By the way, that was most often, in my case, the best way, and it’s
coming to mind right now for the very first time, that was the best way we could tell, the
most legitimate way we could tell we were taking fire other than taking the round in the
helicopter and fortunately in my case, I won’t have to knock on wood because I doubt
that I’ll ever do it again.

RV: Let’s hope not.

JA: We’d be in dire straights if I did it again. That’s why God has young people
do wars. Old people think too much. At any rate, the guys on the ground say, ‘Klondike,
you’re taking fire.’ And that’s always words you don’t want to hear but it’s always good
to know. And the guys on the ground told us and so we went in anyway and dropped off a
couple of boxes of ammo and then went away. I used to be an artillery officer. At that
point I had been an artillery officer and the guys on the ground had contact with a, I
believe it was an 8-inch battery that could deliver some supporting fire. I actually called
in artillery on the bad guys I guess, or registered the battery so the guys on the ground,
the recon team could then use the 8-inch battery.
RV: How did you do that exactly?

JA: Oh, geez. Well there were certain procedures. You’d establish contact with the battery. You tell them – God, I can't even remember now. Well, first of all, you’ve got to get them to shoot a round from where they are and get it to hit the ground so you can see what’s happening and then you adjust from that. And I don’t even remember the terminology, Richard. But I knew how to talk and I knew what needed to be done and we did it and we actually called in some artillery.

RV: And you walked it around to where you knew the enemy to be.

JA: Where the guys on the ground told us the enemy was. We never saw the enemy in this particular case and in many of the situations I found myself, we never actually saw the enemy. Sometimes we saw bullets coming at us. Sometimes we were told we were taking fire from them, but we never actually saw.

RV: How frustrating was that?

JA: Probably not very in my case because ignorance is bliss. I believed the enemy was there and it kept my involvement somewhat impersonal. I never saw anybody that I shot and killed. I do know that I did shoot and kill people and I called in fixed wing air strikes from time to time that killed people but I never saw them, which again, kept it impersonal for me and that is probably why I don’t have flashbacks like a lot of guys do. I don’t have much of a problem with bad memories. I do have one very vivid, really bad memory. That’s about all on that particular incident.

RV: Which medal did you get for this?

JA: I got a Distinguished Flying Cross. One very bad incident, a very telling incident that I can recall, was when I was flying a Slick Huey. I was on an observation mission. It was me, a single pilot, in a Huey with my crew chief in the back. I don’t think I had a copilot and the Huey was a single piloted helicopter so it was not a problem but we generally flew with a copilot, almost always flew with a copilot for any number of reasons. But I was up in the DMZ operating off of an aircraft carrier. I don’t remember the particular name of it at the time. But I got a call from the guys on the ground. They said, ‘We have a routine Medevac down here that we need to get out.’ Routine generally meant a dead person, routine, there’s no rush getting them out. But they were moving in the DMZ and they needed to get this person out. I said, ‘Certainly, I’ll come down and
get them and we’ll take him out to the ship.’ I don’t believe those were my exact words
but I ended up down in a landing zone with our guys coming out with a body – no, there
was no body bag. That was the point. The guy had been dead, sadly for several days.
They put him in the back with my crew chief who immediately vomited and I think very
appropriately so because the stench was just unbelievable. At any rate, we took off and
flew quickly back to the ship and completed that mission. But I will remember that just as
long as I live, the sadness of it and the distastefulness of it and that was without guns.
That was with a Slick.

RV: How often did you do that?
JA: Once.
RV: That was the only time?
JA: Well, no. Actually I picked up other…
RV: With the Slick, I guess is the one time.
JA: That was the only time up there in the DMZ that I did anything like that. I did
have a refugee pickup one time in a Slick with a copilot at this point in time. This is a
kind of humorous event. We were out and there were refugees that had gathered at a
certain point and the guys on the ground, Marines on the ground, they had gotten them all
together, and we, the Hueys, and I guess either 46s or 34s at the time, I don’t recall, were
picking up groups of refugees and moving them to a place that was a refugee camp. At
any rate, we landed. I landed. It’s interesting. My copilot was a major at the time who had
just gotten into country and this was, I believe, his first flight. If it wasn’t his first, it was
very close to his first flight. At any rate, refugee lift. Very seldom did I do that. This, I
believe, is the only time I did a refugee lift. Ladies and kids and old men, little old men,
got onto the helicopter and I don’t know, we must have had eight or nine in the back with
our crew chief. At any rate, one little old guy with a scraggly beard, a pig, a little pot
bellied pig or whatever you call the things, in a basket, had one in basket. I guess that
keeps them from getting loose and doing bad things. At any rate, probably his only
possession in the world, bless his heart, got on to the helicopter and we took off and
headed for places that I don’t recall right now, the refugee camp. At any rate, at some
point in time at about 1,500 feet in the air, my crew chief advises me, and keep in mind,
in the Huey, the pilots and the cabin are on the same level, slightly different from a 34
and you can turn around and look and see what’s happening and there’s interaction.  
There can be interaction between the pilots and the crew chief. At any rate, I’m driving or  
my copilot’s driving or whatever and the crew chief says, ‘Sir, the pig’s loose.’  
RV: This is over the radio?  
JA: Yes. The doors were closed. We don’t fly normally, particularly with  
passengers back there with the doors open. So the doors were closed. The crew chief  
says, ‘The pig’s loose. He’s running around. What should I do?’ Of course the little old  
man has to have his pig, needed his pig, but this was not part of the equation at the time.  
The fact of the matter was the pig could very easily gotten up forward where we were and  
in the controls and that would have been a bad thing. So I just told him, ‘Open the door  
and throw the pig out.’ And he did and of course, the little old man was devastated but we  
all made it to the refugee camp and the pig did not get to the front seat with the controls  
and that was a command decision that had to be made. Everybody didn’t live happily  
ever after, certainly not the pig.  
RV: I can imagine. What did the man do?  
JA: I have no idea because, again, we landed, everybody got out and they went to  
wherever they were supposed to go.  
RV: He didn’t like, talk to the crew chief or try to argue?  
JA: Not that I was aware of, no. And the length of time between me saying, ‘If  
you can’t catch the pig, get rid of it,’ and the time that the pig was actually out the door  
was probably five minutes or so which was a lifetime as far as I was concerned. All I  
know is that I guess I took the controls and I’m not sure about the particulars here but my  
copilot’s job was to keep pigs out of the front of the helicopter for the next five minutes  
and he did an excellent job of that.  
RV: Your call sign was Klondike?  
JA: Klondike.  
RV: Was that consistent the whole first tour?  
JA: Yes.  
RV: Second tour…  
JA: Scarface.  
RV: Scarface. Okay. Did you pick that?
JA: No. Those were squadron call signs. We did not have individual tactical call
signs during my two tours in Vietnam although actually we did. The second tour, each
member of the squadron, the squadron call sign had a number attached. I was Scarface 4.
But during the first tour, Klondike was the call sign and whatever our mission number
was our call sign for a particular mission. Klondike 4-1 for example.
RV: Which weapon did you fear most that the enemy had?
JA: Fear?
RV: Yes.
JA: On my first tour, it would have been the quad 50s, 50 calibers that they had, anti-aircraft weapons. We were pretty much able to stay, as we were transiting, we were pretty much able to stay out of the range of small arms fire by flying at 1,500, 2,000 feet. Of course when you got into the area that you were working in, you had to come down lower in order to do your job. But it was the quad 50s. RPGs, when we were up in the demilitarized zone when we were confronted with North Vietnamese or the possibility of being confronted with North Vietnamese. RPGs were another weapon that we were concerned about. I believe I told this story previously, but also command detonated mines in landing zones, pre-positioned command detonated mines. The surface-to-air missile threat as far as I was personally concerned was not an issue until I got back on my second tour.
RV: What other medals were you awarded the first tour, what incidents?
JA: I got three other Distinguished Flying Crosses and a couple of single mission air medals.
RV: Okay, you want to talk about those missions?
JA: Okay. One of the missions was the one that the Archive has on audiotape and that was where we were required to go out at night on a rainy night into the mountains and take a recon team out of a tight situation. Again, it was us, I was controlling a flare ship that dropped flares during the extract, I was controlling, actually at the beginning, a section of A-4s, but I released them early on in the event because the weather was too bad for them to be able to see any targets or for me to mark any targets for them. And I was talking to the guys on the ground, and I was controlling a section of H-46s that would be ultimately the pick up aircraft. We went out, we talked to the ground, my section put in
some rockets and machine gun fire in the vicinity of the recon team, and I’ll make this a very short story. Ultimately, the 46s came, each of the two 46s came in and picked up the recon team and we went away and everybody lived happily ever after and when the recon team was out, I dumped all the rest of my ordnance and my wingman’s ordnance on the area around the landing zone. I never had a clue whether we hurt anybody or killed anybody, then we went home. I got a DFC for that. But there were some more events that took place. It was a little more tricky than that, but it’s on tape and in the archive.

Another event that took place, and this happened on May 10, 1967. I won’t forget this one. We were working off of a carrier again with a battalion of Marines. In the morning, we landed the Marines, at this point, 46s landed the Marines with us as helo escorts, a section of two Hueys, landed the Marines on the east end of a valley and then we flew cover throughout the morning for these Marines as they swept up the valley, no contact. We had to go back a couple of times to refuel, didn’t expend any ordnance. Generally speaking, as the Marines, the ground Marines would get down on the ground and then sweep across an area and then at the far end of that area, whether it be five miles, ten miles or five feet, whatever it was, they’d be helicopter extracted and out of there and back to wherever they started, in this case it would have been the ship. In this particular case, the ground commander decided, instead of being heli-lifted out of the far end of the valley back to the ship, they would march back and retrace their steps. Well, it just so happens that there was a North Vietnamese unit that was in that valley. They saw the Marines coming, they chose not to engage the Marines so they were down in their spider holes hidden, and maybe it was Viet Cong, but I’m reasonably sure it was North Vietnamese, but whatever the situation was, they hid on the way through, did not engage. So, as the Marines turned around and started back, these guys were coming out of their holes and the Marines caught them by surprise and there was a pitched battle. And the Marines, and of course we were called in to shoot our rockets and machine guns at them which we did and it was kind of a good show. It was good, heavy contact and the bad guys were losing and they were being pushed back out the valley. And I called in several sections of attack aircraft jets to drop bombs and napalm on these guys as they were retreating.

RV: You could see them.
JA: Yes. Certainly we could see them in this particular case. And we knew we were taking fire and the ground guys, of course, were in heavy contact. So we continued. I got my helicopter shot up pretty bad on one or two passes and so I had to go back to the ship and get a new helicopter and then come back, which I did. At any rate, the battle was progressing. The Marines were pushing the bad guys back down the valley. Unbeknownst to the Marines in the valley, me or anyone else in the area, there was another Marine unit that was coming around the end of a nose and into the valley as the North Vietnamese were retreating. They came head on to the North Vietnamese and got into heavy contact too. If we’d known what was going on it would have been a great thing, but we didn’t, the fog or war. At any rate, I was calling in air strikes but the Marine unit that I was not in contact with nor did I or anyone else running the show know that was in the area, this was another battalion of Marines, by the way.

RV: How could they….

JA: I don’t know. To this day I do not know. How did that happen? I have no idea.

RV: How do you not know a battalion is hanging out around the corner?

JA: I don’t know. I really honest to God don’t know and at that point in time, being a 26-year-old captain or 27-year-old captain, I didn’t really care at that point. The big thing was, here they are. The first time I knew there was anybody in the area was when I was getting green star clusters being fired up in the air to let us know that there were friendlies there. The friendlies had come into the valley, actually star clusters were coming out of the mountain area. I called off the air strikes and we stopped shooting. And at that point in time, actually, I was virtually out of gas so I had to go land in a rice paddy and have somebody bring me some gas to get me refueled to get back to the ship because I had stayed there longer than I normally would because it was such an intense situation. At any rate, friendly fire incident, obviously. I was grounded immediately and I actually had to ride as a passenger back to my base at Ky Ha from the ship. I was replaced on the ship. An investigating officer came out who, by the way, the investigating officer, we’ve talked about him already, was Don Babbitz. He was my instructor at Sofley. He happened to be the investigating officer in this particular case. At any rate, the question was, ‘Why were friendly bombs dropped on or near friendly positions?’ My old commanding officer,
when I got back to Ky Ha, called me on the phone. He was working in the Wing headquarters operations and of course he wanted to know what happened. He said, ‘Who were the fixed wing?’ or he asked me, ‘Who were the fixed wing? What was their call sign?’ And I told him at that point in time it made no difference what their call sign was. They hit every target I told them to hit. I was the controller there and I was calling in the bombs. We were on a North Vietnamese target that was heavily engaged with a Marine unit that had asked for the support. So don’t worry about them. Obviously, that was a little melodramatic on my part, but I wasn’t a happy camper, obviously at the time, very concerned, very angry, pissed off because some idiot had wandered, and I know who it ended up being, name will go unmentioned on my oral history, but the battalion commander, I knew who it was. At any rate, how that happened, I never knew. But I was very angry at the time, obviously, I think.

RV: What do you mean he had wandered?

JA: He had allowed his battalion to come into an operating area that wasn’t his operating area and as a result, his battalion became engaged in the same unit that was retreating in the face of the Marines that we were supporting from the ship. So, at any rate, I was investigated and grounded for probably a week and ultimately exonerated because in investigating, they found that there were dead Marines from the battalion that had wandered into the path of the retreating North Vietnamese but those guys were all killed by enemy fire, not by bombs. The fact of the matter was, the unit that had come into our area wasn’t supposed to have been there and I’m not sure exactly what happened with the commander of that organization but all I know is I was exonerated and I got a medal for it.

RV: You did end up getting a medal for it?

JA: Distinguished Flying Cross for it. That was probably the most intense encounter I had when I was in Vietnam. Obviously it was because we got into a situation where there was the fog of war.

RV: Right. I’m not sure people who have ever been in a battle or conflict know exactly, they know the definition of that, but they don’t know what that is really like.

JA: Well, is it Sun Su that said that?

RV: Sun Su was one of the ones who mentioned that, yes absolutely.
JA: Well, the fog of war, that particular term has been modernized, with ‘shit happens,’ stuff happens. No matter how you train and how hard you work, it’s not going to go the way you planned and you just have to be prepared to deal with whatever comes along because it’s going to be different from what you expect. So, if you have a platoon of infantry advancing on an axis and you have it all planned to take the hill, you’re probably going to get surrounded by enemy or the platoon’s going to wander off in the wrong direction or something is going to happen to make it tremendously more challenging than you had hoped for. And the fog of war is just you cannot see what the future holds when you’re doing something as insane as shooting at somebody and having them shoot at you.

RV: How often in Vietnam did the fog of war enter into your personal picture?

JA: Every day, I was in combat, nothing ever turned out exactly the way we had planned to have it turn out. So, when we, give you an example, the story I told before about the one that we have on tape, when the first helicopter was first coming into the landing zone, and this is one of the things that made the coordination of this a little more tricky and probably made me worthy of note at the end of the operation, was that the first helicopter, when it first came into the zone, was guiding on a strobe light. Apparently no one had told the crew chief that there was a strobe light in the zone and the crew chief thought it was enemy fire and he fired into the landing zone and injured one or two of the recon guys. The guy had to wave off, we had to go back regroup, figure out what had happened and then do it again. Well, the second time in, they were using, I guess flares on the ground to illuminate the zone a little better. I’m sorry. Let me go back. The first bird into the zone, coming into the zone, fired into the zone as a result, the crew chief fired into the zone, the door gunner fired into the zone as a result of seeing the strobe light on and not knowing that it was friendly strobe. About the time that the, and this is pure fog of war, about the time the aircraft waved off, the flare went off in the zone which looked very much to me like an explosion in the zone. Then over the FM radio comes the ground guys saying, ‘Mrfgeres, whtzatoingon!!’ To me it looked like there had been a crash in the zone. In fact, the guy on the ground was saying, ‘Don’t shoot anymore. We’re friendlies here. Klondike, tell them we’re friendly down here.’ So I called back to base at that point in time and said, ‘I think we’ve had a crash in the zone.
Check it out.’ Well, what happened was the pilot had waved off and gone around and he was fine and we got contact. And then I asked him, ‘You want to try again, third time’s a charm?’ And he said, ‘Okay.’ And we went about the extraction after that. But that’s again, the fog of war.

RV: That’s a great example. So why don’t we continue with your medal incidents.

JA: There was another one that I got a DFC and I can't remember what it was right now. I honestly can't. I can't remember what the two single mission air medals were. They weren't very much of anything. My mind is blank.

RV: How common was it for your unit to be awarded the DFCs and the air medals?

JA: Pretty common. We flew a lot. Our particular mission was one of, we went where the action was. That’s what made the mission so interesting. So many of our pilots got multiple awards for heroism.

RV: When you look back at your first tour, what do you see in your mind’s eye?

JA: I see Vietnam, I see jungles, I see mountains, I see a bunch of guys that are very close, close knit, doing something that to me as a 63-year-old is scary stuff, flying into mountains over the tops of clouds and letting down into the clouds. I see a beautiful countryside that is pockmarked with bomb craters and other scars. Did that answer your question?

RV: Absolutely. Sure. Do you see a helicopter?

JA: Yes, absolutely.

RV: Do you see any people, any faces, any of your comrades?

JA: Yes. I see lots of faces of my comrades.

RV: You want to take a break?

JA: Sure.

RV: Okay, sir. Why don’t we continue? You ended your first tour in 1967. Did you know the exact date you were leaving?

JA: No. I did not know the exact date I was leaving. I know the exact date I got back to the States because that was June 7, 1967 was the first day of the seven-day war in the Middle East. If I have my history right.

RV: That’s a very good way to remember.
JA: Something that I didn’t think very much about at the time because I had just
come out of a rather intense tour in Vietnam. Let me talk a little bit about R&Rs on my
first tour.

RV: Sure.

JA: I’ll go back to that because I’m now thinking of times I was out of country. I
was kind of unique. I flew a lot because I wanted to fly and because of the times and
because of my experience and probably my rank. I was a captain. So, I got actually three
R&Rs. One was Hawaii, one was in Hong Kong, and one was in Taipei. The first R&R
was in October of ’66 about five months after I’d come into country, four or five months
after I’d come into country, I went to Hong Kong, visited all of the places that you're
supposed to visit. I bought a whole bunch of clothes because that’s where you can get
really cheap clothing. I got two suits and a sport jacket and stuff. I partied hard and came
back.

RV: Were you by yourself?

JA: Actually, I went with one other guy from the squadron, Steve Wilson. We
stay in touch to this day. At any rate, it was an unbelievable experience going on R&R
because of course, it was a stark contrast. First of all, it was a stark contrast coming to
Hong Kong from Vietnam. But at Hong Kong, of course, at that point in time and today
I’m sure also, is a stark contrast to the civilization that I’m aware of. So it was interesting,
fun and educational. And I actually survived five days in Hong Kong. Then in January,
about mid- January, because I had been flying so intensely, my commanding officer said,
‘You’ve got to go on an R&R and get out of the country.’ I said, ‘I don’t want to go on
R&R. I just want to stay here and fly.’ He said, ‘No, you’re going to go.’ So he sent me
to Taipei. Where can we send him? I wasn’t going to bump anybody, but there were
places that didn’t fill up. So I went to Taipei. The very first night I was there I was so
tired, I just took a bottle of rum into the room and laid down on the bed and I don’t know
whether it was a television or a magazine or whatever and I just drank probably half of
the bottle and slept for about a day and a half. I went sightseeing and I was alone at that
point in time. I went sightseeing, ate at some good restaurants, drank at some good bars
and then came back. Then going back, in December, everybody was fighting to get an
R&R, not fighting but pressing to get an R&R in Hawaii because that’s where you could
meet your wife. So I had taken, before January obviously, had taken an R&R, I guess it was December, taken an R&R in Hawaii and met my wife who had given birth to our second born, our first son, back in July after I had left her eight months pregnant, eight and a half months pregnant. So we had a very good time, stayed at the Hilton Hawaiian Village on Waikiki.

RV: Did she bring the kids?

JA: No, no, no. Good question, fair question, but no. No. It was her R&R too.

RV: I could have guessed at the answer.

JA: No. That was a fair question. I’m glad you did. But no. I didn’t bring kids from my end, she didn’t bring kids from her end, so it was her R&R as much as it was for me. But we had a ball and enjoyed it and it was kind of rejuvenating to be able to get back together, obviously with your wife particularly in this particular case after I had allowed her to have a baby without me being around. At any rate, three R&Rs on that first tour, one of which was, I’ll say, under duress because my commanding officer had said, ‘You need a rest and get out of Dodge.’ To this day, I don’t believe and I am absolutely confident that I hadn’t done any one thing wrong. It may have just been that I was so eager to get back out and fly, he saw a gleam in my eye that was probably unnatural and he wanted to get me out of the country. So in January, I took my last R&R.

RV: Did your wife ask questions about what you were doing or did you talk about the combat that you had been in almost daily?

JA: Good question. You know what, no. And that’s what, that among many, many other things, has endeared her to me. She didn’t ask questions about it. And I didn’t talk about it very much at all. No. That was not the topic. The topic was the kids, the topic was, ‘Where do you want to go to eat tonight? How are you?’ Things like that. But no, we did not talk about Vietnam. And I suspect on both of our parts, because it wasn’t a particularly pleasant thought that I was going to have to go back to where I had come from. Neither one of us wanted to think about that at the time. Probably, today’s culture and today’s 20-year-olds, 25, 30-year-olds, probably would think deeper into it than we did but we avoided it.

RV: How hard was it for you to exit that daily theater of conflict and then go to Hawaii?
JA: Absolutely a piece of cake. Easy. No problem because everyone else had
done it, everyone else was doing it. When their time came, they went and did it. It calls to
mind something that we may or may not want to keep on here.

RV: You have to go ahead now.

JA: Oh, geez.

RV: I’m kidding. You don’t have to.

JA: I know you are. Hawaii was such an important event for each of us that was
married and those of us that weren't, I’m sure. But they usually went somewhere else
besides Hawaii because it didn’t involve meeting somebody that was coming from the
other way. But one of the pilots in the squadron decided within six weeks of his R&R to
Hawaii, to have our flight surgeon circumcise him. [laughter] I don’t know whether that’s
funny or not but it became hilarious, because, you’ll heal. Everything will be fine and as
it came closer and closer, of course, it was obvious, everybody was cheering and there
was a pool whether everything would work out alright. But at any rate, it did so I
apologize for digressing on that.

RV: No, that’s a great story. So you guys had a unit pool about…

JA: Whether he would heal in time to make his trip worthwhile.

RV: Who won the pool?

JA: I don’t even remember, Richard. But we all had a good laugh and actually at
the end of it, he did but he was on pins and needles there for a while figuratively speaking
and perhaps a bit actual, too. But anyway, Hawaii was a very important event for all of
the married pilots. So it was just something that came and went. Nobody begrudged
anybody leaving. As a matter of fact, they were happy for them because they knew they
had already done it or they would be doing it eventually.

RV: How far ahead of time did you know that you were going to Hawaii?

JA: Probably on that first tour, we knew a month or two in advance. The second
tour, there were many, many, many more people there and it had become an art or a
science to determine what the R&R schedules were. And Hawaii was very much in
demand, so you pretty much had to, it was kind of the luck of the draw to be able to get
an R&R in Hawaii. You had to be there a certain amount of time or more. You had to be
in the right place at the right time and I have no idea what that means today, but it was
kind of a crapshoot on whether you got to Hawaii the second tour. So you pretty much
know about the time frame you were looking at so you’d tell you wife, this is what we’re
looking at but I can't guarantee anything. And within two weeks of leaving, and in my
particular case, it may have been only one week of leaving on the second tour, did we
know for sure that I had gotten that particular billet.

RV: One of the reasons I asked that question was that, did you change your
behavior as that date approached?

JA: No.

RV: Did you think about it because you described yourself…. 

JA: Excuse me for interrupting. I’ll tell you what we did. As you were getting
closer to R&R, you didn’t fly the day or two days before you went on R&R. I believe that
was the case in both of my tours. I know I didn’t fly combat missions on my first tour. I
did maintenance test flights on helicopters but I did fly combat missions for the last week
I was in country before I went home on my first tour and I believe it was the same on my
second tour. So they removed us from the action.

RV: How was your transition back to the United States? Was it difficult?

JA: Not at all. I flew into, I guess, Travis and then got a commercial flight into
Dulles and my wife and kids met me there and it was great. I was in uniform.

RV: Any incidents?

JA: None at all. This was ’67. I don’t think it was en vogue to have incidents at
that point in time. Maybe it was but I was not aware of any.

RV: It picked up later, definitely.

JA: It was great.

RV: How was it coming home?

JA: It was absolutely fantastic. It was unbelievable. I do remember vividly, our
two young kids who were at the time four and one, in the back seat, of course rattling
around. They weren't strapped in at all, playing, with, on the way home, I believe it was
on the way home from the airport, playing with the ashtrays in the back, the metal covers
on the ashtrays. It was probably my daughter because our son wasn’t big enough to do it
at the time. She let go of it and went bang. I told my wife, ‘Tell her not to do that
anymore.’ It scared the crap out of me. I’ve gotten over that, but it was great. It was fantastic.

RV: You saw your son for the first time too.

JA: Yes. Actually I had lots and lots and lots and lots of pictures but saw him for the first time.

RV: That’s great. So where did you go to? Where was your next station?

JA: Monterey, California, the Naval Post-Graduate School. I was in the operations research graduate course. It was about a two and a half year course. We stayed in the apartment that my wife and kids were in while I was overseas for about two weeks and then I drove myself and my daughter across country in our new ’67 Chevy and my wife and our one year old son followed us, but by air after we’d gotten to Monterey and gotten a place to live. So my daughter and I went across country together. That was kind of a neat experience. She was four at the time.

RV: Does she have memories of this?

JA: Vaguely, vaguely. I have one stark memory of it, coming to California at 80 miles an hour on one of the interstates. I got pulled over by a state trooper. I had my uniform hanging the back seat and my daughter was asleep on the back seat at the time so it looked kind of like an All-American guy and so the trooper said, ‘Okay, I’m just going to chew you out here and let you go on your way, but you certainly wouldn’t want me to tell your new commanding officer that you’d been speeding.’ I said, ‘No, sir, I sure wouldn’t.’ He said, ‘Okay, you can go.’ But anyway, it got me out of a traffic ticket in California. At any rate, we drove in, got a set of quarters at Monterey in the quarters area. I was real nice I believe as I recall, three bedrooms. It was a duplex. At any rate, Debbie and I moved in. We borrowed a mattress, couple of mattresses and bought a brand-new, first color T.V. we’d ever had and that kept us going until our furniture and my wife and our son got out there to California.

RV: Okay. How much discussion was there between yourself and either guys that you were serving with and around in Monterey and then the civilian population about your tour in Vietnam and about the war in general?

JA: Very little. Everybody knew that if you hadn’t been you were going, if you’d been, you probably were going again, which was my case, particularly helicopter pilots at
that point in time. But we were in civilian clothes. Actually, we had very little time to talk
about anything but academics. The first term, six-week term I guess it was that we were
there, we got some refresher courses in math and science and things like that. And that
was like a cold shower because we were being taught the new math and I don’t even
remember what that was but it was the most horrible experience of my life trying to
change from Vietnam to a period of down time with my family to now I’ve got to start
thinking on my feet and on my rear end at every moment of the day. But I just did it and
it worked out. I will tell you Monterey was a wonderful place to be. There are places to
go and things to do and we went places and did things. But I was studying a whole lot
and that was not a particularly good thing to do between two tours in Vietnam for the
family.

RV: Why?

JA: It meant I couldn’t be with the family as much as I should have been. I needed
to concentrate. I’m not the smartest cookie in the jar so any of my degrees that I’ve
gotten, I had to work very, very hard for and bring my studies with me and work on them
periodically. But I would study 12 hours a day after taking, we would either have 12 or
15 semester hours each semester and these were theoretical courses, very, very deep.
Mathematics, statistics, economics, all kinds of stuff. I was one of McNamara’s Whiz
Kids, using that term in the broadest sense. McNamara, as you will recall having studied
Vietnam was very much up on numbers and analysis and the use of numbers to make
decisions and I may have digressed on this before. But there was a huge influx, about the
mid ‘60s to late ‘60s into schools, operations analysis, operations research courses
because that was where we were going. We were going to win the war with numbers.

RV: Kind of quantitative thinking.

JA: Exactly. Very misplaced as far as I was concerned.

RV: Now or then.

JA: Both. You need seat of the pants decision-making. You can use numbers, look
at them and decide how they fit in to the overall picture, but you need an operations guy
to advise you. You need an intelligence guy, logistics guy, so forth. Something that was
in danger of being lost as a result of your operations analysis and I’ll talk more about that
when we talk about my second tour. But it was a very intense course, very difficult
course, very demanding course, particularly given my immediate past having been in Vietnam. So I had to spend an awful lot of time in that and time away from the family. So it was very tough on Terry and the two kids. They fared well thanks to my wife who was very forgiving of me. But we both knew there was an end to the means that I was going through and I didn’t want to miss the opportunity to get my Master’s Degree.

RV: What was the degree in?
JA: Operations Research. I ultimately ended up getting a government Master’s and an education Master’s. I can't get the Ph.D. I’ve got a wall there, mostly family now and probably a bit of personal capability too. It was a tough pull. Monterey’s a beautiful town. We had a wonderful set of quarters and a wonderful time there given the fact that I had to spend 12 hours a day studying.

RV: How long did this course study last?
JA: I got there in June of ’67, July of ’67 and graduated in October ’69.
RV: So a two-year program.
JA: Yes. No real reason to talk about the Monterey experience other than my transition back to the Marine Corps. As it became apparent or was solidified that I was going to go back to Vietnam.

RV: How did that happen? How did that become solidified?
JA: Just a fact of life. My monitor in Washington said from day one, ‘You're going to go to postgraduate school, but you're going to go back to Vietnam because you’ve got experience, success to some degree mostly because you're still alive, and we need helicopter pilots.’

RV: How did you feel about that?
JA: No problem. I absolutely wanted to go back.
RV: You wanted to go back.
JA: Still a war going on. And I’ll tell you quite frankly, I’m not so sure that anybody that went to Vietnam, particularly officers, should have gone without wanting to some extent to go back, without being anxious to rejoin the fray or join the fray. If you go kicking and screaming, you can get hurt pretty bad I think, I thought that then and I think that now. At any rate, it was a forgone conclusion. Most of the time and really all the time I was at postgraduate school which made it tougher on Terry and the kids too.
because they knew I was going back overseas. I needed to get them back in to the D.C. area from Monterey which is where we were from, where family was. We weren't going as groups or as units and units didn't stay together. Wives didn’t congregate together as a unit like they do now that I think is absolutely essential and good that the wives were kind of hung out by themselves and had to go back to family and depend on family which was fine, but I think its better now with the units being more cohesive, the wives and families are able to gather and have an understanding shoulder to lean on. At any rate, I started checking with my monitor and my old commanding officer from Vietnam. I wanted to go back and fly Cobras because Cobras had become the Marine Corps in thing very recently and word out of the monitor shop was, ‘No, you’re going to go to 46s.’ I said, ‘No, no, no. You can't have the world’s greatest attack helicopter pilot go to 46s.’ So I called my old commanding officer who was then a colonel who was the Chief of Staff for the Commandant, and I said, ‘Hey, Colonel Maloney,’ – he ultimately made three stars- ‘what can you do to help me out?’ He hustled around and said, ‘Okay, if you can get yourself requalified in Hueys before your orders come due, then they can write your orders to Cobra school, to Army Cobra school and you can go to Cobras.’ I said, ‘Hot diggity dog.’ So I had a lot of friends down in Camp Pendleton in the San Diego area, of course, from Vietnam and from my past in Hueys at the Huey squadron there at Pendleton. I said, ‘Hey, I need to get requalified. I need ten hours in Hueys. I am the world’s greatest Huey pilot. It won’t take me long.’ And the guy said, ‘Sure. Come on down.’ So I took off a week. I don’t even remember the sequence of events. Anyway, ultimately I went down to whatever it was, VMO-7 or one the VMOs or the VMO down at Camp Pendleton and got checked out again in the Hueys. I called my boss, my former boss, said, ‘I got all the paperwork.’ He said, ‘Done deal.’ And so I got orders out of Monterey to the Army Cobra School at Savannah, Georgia, Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah. While I was writing my thesis, I sent my wife and two kids back to the Washington, D.C. area before I had finished up simply because our old apartment complex had an opening and it was a good thing to put them back where they were. It worked out the first time so I tried the second time. So I sent Terry and the two kids back, I believe it was in August and I stuck around, finished my thesis and whatever course work I needed to and ultimately left then in October. I went back, had some down time,
got home and then went down to Cobra school for four weeks, finished that up in a blaze of glory and went home for some more down time over the Christmas ’69 time frame and then in January went back into Vietnam.

RV: How did your wife feel about you going back to Vietnam?
JA: She didn’t like it at all but she was also very supportive and didn’t talk about it.

RV: Did not talk about it.
JA: I led a very protected life when it came to my Vietnam experience. The people around me and particularly my wife were very understanding and patient and there was no particular personal trauma involved in it. I hated leaving. It took me, it’s taken a lifetime to get over it and I’m still not over it. I hated leaving my family to go overseas on an unaccompanied tour. The fact I was going to Vietnam was not an issue really. Just leaving was the issue. And I really did hate it but beyond that, not much tooth gnashing and wringing of hands outwardly.

RV: Right. So which unit were you assigned to?
JA: That’s a story. I had orders to go overseas to the 1st Marine Air Wing, which would ultimately get me to the Cobra squadron, HML 367. En route, my orders were changed unbeknownst to me to go to III MAF headquarters and be in the operations analysis section at III MAF headquarters. Well, actually I didn’t find that out until I got to Okinawa, in the holding area, the tank. They’d call out names. ‘Everybody going to 1st Wing, blank, blank, blank, blank, blank, go over here. Not so fast, Arick, you go over here in this corner.’ ‘Oh, what is happening to me?’ It’s totally unmanly to be on the III MAF staff. I need to get back in Cobras. I say that with some frivolity but really I was locked and loaded to go back to Cobras. I had just finished Army Cobra School and I’m good at what I was going to do.

RV: The training you received in the Cobras; how was that for you?
JA: It was wonderful. The Army has as good a training program for its pilots as the Navy and Marine Corps does.

RV: Really?
JA: Absolutely. And sometimes and in some aspects, the Army’s training is better. One example and I won’t digress too much on this, the Army actually requires its
student pilots to do full touch down autorotations without turning the power back on. I think I bored the world with that story previously so I won’t go back there again which is wonderful for your confidence as well as just pure training being able to take your autorotative landing down to a full touchdown rather than turning the engine back on at the bottom and using power to land. It’s good. And it also separates the wheat from the chaff, too. There’s some people that can do it, some people that can't. In my particular case, fortunately and virtually everybody’s case, it worked out. So the Army’s training for helicopter pilots, as far as I was concerned, was more in depth than the Navy’s had been. But I digress. Where did I digress from?

RV: Your orders being changed when you were in Okinawa.

JA: Okay, I got to Okinawa, turned out that my very closest friend, our family’s very closest friend at Monterey who was at my course who had left a little bit ahead of me had gotten to Vietnam a little bit ahead of me, had gone to the III MAF staff, was in the III MAF operations analysis section and needed somebody to be his assistant. He was a major; I was a captain at the time. So unbeknownst to him, he totally screwed me but thought he was saving my life. ‘Don’t go to Cobras. I’m going to take you up here to this plush staff job.’ Well, as I already would have it, the III MAF at that point in time, this was January ’70 was shrinking the size of the staff and lo and behold, shortly after I got there, we began a series of activities that would do away with the operations analysis section on the III MAF staff. Hot diggity dog! So six weeks into my stay, actually about four weeks into my stay, I knew I would be leaving so I started looking forward to the squadron, right. Well, I had to go through the Wing. It turned out there was an operations analysis section at the Wing and there was a pilot in that position and he had not been in a squadron yet and he was looking for somebody who could take his place and as my orders came into the Wing admin section with operations analysis all over it, I got sidetracked onto the 1st Marine Air Wing staff operations analysis section and that’s what I was and it turned out then that there for the next four months, I was a one-man operations analysis section for the 1st Marine Air Wing, which in fact meant that I took statistics coming to me from the field and didn’t analyze them. All I did was turn them into overhead slides and make them ready for the G-3, the colonel who I worked for, Skinny Lamar. One of the neatest guys in the world. At any rate, the colonel that I
worked for so he could brief the generals. At any rate, the next four months I was there, however at the end of the four months, Colonel Lamar was great because he understood I was going crazy. So the entire time I was at the III MAF staff, the entire time I was at the Wing, I was going down to 367 and flying missions with them at least once a week and most of the time, two or three times a week I would fly missions, Cobra missions.

RV: Cobra missions.

JA: Yes. Cobra missions with them. So that whole six months I was flying but I was not doing it the way I wanted to. At any rate, at the end of six months after I first got into country, I found myself another operations analysis guy to come to the Wing. He had been in a squadron. He had also been in my operations analysis class at Monterey. He had been in a squadron for six months, F-4s and he was all ready to go out and be a Forward Air Controller with an infantry unit. And I got a hold of him and asked him, ‘Do you really want to go out there? Why don’t you come and spend the rest of your time here and help me out?’ So Larry Bacus came to the Wing, relieved me as the operations analysis guy in the Wing and finally, I got into 367 as a regular squadron pilot and as it turned out, their logistics officer and it must have been June or July of ’70 and I spent the remainder of my time in the squadron being their logistics officer and flying Cobra missions.

RV: Let’s go back and talk about your first three months. What exactly were your duties there at III MAF?

JA: At III MAF, I don’t recall. It wasn’t a pleasant time because I was mumbling the whole time. Not really, but I didn’t belong there, I didn’t want to be there. First of all, I thought operations analysis in Vietnam was an oxymoron. This is combat. Sure, let’s figure out who did what to whom, but why is the section here? You don’t need anybody trained in statistics to do this and you didn’t either at III MAF or over at the Wing. Quite frankly, I don’t recall. Mostly I guess it was just compiling all of the information that was in the memory banks, mostly file cabinets at that time. I don’t even think there was such a thing as a computer at that point in time. I don’t remember it at any rate. Just getting everything together in a neat place so that it would be there for posterity.

RV: Who looked at it, your work?

JA: I have no idea.

RV: It went up the chain somehow.
JA: It got to the III MAF G-3 and I’m sure that ultimately, some of it got to the commanding general, who at the time I believe, well, now I don’t even remember who it was. I can't remember I never had any interaction with him as a captain, which was just as good. I honestly don’t remember what was done because I really don’t want to. I did a good job. I did a great job. Obviously I wouldn’t haven’t have gotten where I did if I even had a blip of the nature that I had probably depicted there. No, I worked very hard at what I was doing and I did a good job at it. But as far as utility, that was the frustrating thing. I just didn’t believe there was any real utility in having one, in this case, two guys with Master’s degrees in operations research in a combat zone putting together stuff. But we did. Then, to a lesser extent, we did the same thing at the Wing. There was an operations analysis section at the Wing. You won’t find that today. You won’t find anybody using the term ‘operations analysis’ as a staff section, which is good. I guess we were doing it in response to bureaucratic pressures that said, operations analysis is good. We’ve got to get body counts. We’ve got to know how many sorties were flying, what types of sorties, what the results of these sorties are, and indeed that’s what I was doing at the Wing. I was compiling information on numbers of sorties, the effectiveness based on bombs dropped, body counts if there were any and I don’t remember that explicitly.

RV: Statistical analysis.

JA: But there wasn’t that much analysis when you got right down to it because we were not modeling events. We were not using an analysis of variants or whatever it is that we did at that point in time and to this day I still swear that the best thing that I learned in operations analysis both in the field and in school was not to allow somebody to blow smoke at you using statistics. And by understanding some of the terminology, I learned how to ask some questions that would keep me from having smoke blown at me.

RV: Such as?

JA: Oh, somebody gets up and says, ‘I just modeled this particular situation and the outcome is going to be this.’ And they used some technical terms about what the model was. And I’d say, ‘No. Wait a minute. What did you put into the model to get this result out and how does the model handle this internally to cough up the result?’ Now, that a generic answer to your question but I can't remember all the technical terms. But that’s basically what it is. I could go back to some extent and ask questions about how the
model handled the data and what the data were that were being put into it. Where did it come from? Is it a reasonable sample size, things like that. I’m sure you, even in your discipline, you’ve had to deal somewhat with statistics and do perhaps some of it. I’m not sure about that but at any rate, the best things that I learned in the operations analysis were, the most useful thing, was not to allow smoke to be blown at you when somebody says, I just modeled this and this is what’s going to happen.

RV: Do you think it had any place at all in country in Vietnam or should that happen back in the United States perhaps?

JA: I don’t think it had a place to the extent that it was being talented and staffed. I don’t know. Maybe somebody saw the light when they saw John Arick come in as an operations analyst. They said, ‘We’ve got to close this place down. This is ridiculous.’ (laughter). But no. I don’t think we needed graduate degreed personnel doing that in Vietnam. I think visits to Vietnam to get data and go away, I think things like that, but I don’t think wasting a staff position on something like that was worthwhile, particularly when one of those staff members was ultimately to become the world’s greatest Cobra pilot. (laughter).

RV: Okay. On the flip side, tell me what you think it did. What was good about what you did the seven months as a…?

JA: Six months.

RV: Six months. I gave you one month too much.

JA: What did it do for me?

RV: What place did it have? Tell me the positives about that position and tell me the positives about the work you did.

JA: My message is, there wasn’t much positive that I could come up with because I was a captain trained to fly Cobras although I was probably pretty good at operations research, I didn’t think there was a place for that. The good part about it was the facilities were wonderful.

RV: Where were you?

JA: III MAF headquarters was just north of Marble Mountain in Vietnam and Wing headquarters was across the Da Nang runway. So, in Da Nang, the Da Nang area.

RV: Same area.
JA: Yes. Da Nang area. When I went to the Wing, while I was at the Wing, it was much more difficult for me to get back to the squadron because the MAF headquarters was just north of Marble Mountain which was the helicopter base, so I could just drive down the road, jump out and I was right there. When I came over from the Wing, I had to go all the way around probably through bad guy country but I wasn’t thinking that at the time. But anyway, all the way around the runway and so it was about an hour’s drive from the Wing headquarters, while it was a 15 minute drive from the MAF headquarters, so out of the frying pan into the fire I guess is as good a way to describe it. Although I was closer to the possibility of getting to the squadron and I had a lot more sympathetic ears listening to me. And I didn’t complain a lot. I complained in a joking manner and a lot of this is joking. Every job I’ve ever had I believe is the most important job in the world and I have handled it like that and I did these too. But it was probably the most grudging of jobs that I’ve ever completed.

RV: Did you feel like your talent was being wasted?

JA: Yes. Most assuredly.

RV: Was this a hangover from the McNamara years, this kind of analysis?

JA: It wasn’t a hangover. It was right in the middle of it and it was a direct result of it, I believe. You know better than I do and maybe I’ve got my times shifted.

RV: No. You’re right.

JA: But, no. This was absolutely directed, ‘Marine Corp’s going to do operations analysis just like our Secretary of Defense says we’re going to do.’ So see, we have an operations analysis section at every level. There weren’t operations analysts sections at the group and the squadron level fortunately for me, it turns out.

RV: Tell me about Vietnam itself. Had it changed any since you’d been gone those two years?

JA: The countryside, no. The country, probably, but I wasn’t involved enough in the country itself to be able to pass judgment on that. So as far as I was concerned, it hadn’t changed much at all. The one thing that had changed that was profound, absolutely profound and I discovered this very soon after I got to country and started flying missions with the Cobra squadron, was that the way the attack helicopters were being handled was far, far different from the way they were handled on my first tour. On my first tour, the
attack helicopters were king. We, and I must say probably not totally objectively, I thought that was appropriate. We had the wherewithal and the talent to be able to control a mission, all aspects of the mission, ground, the air, various aspects of the air, and bring them all together and shoot back at the same time. When I came back, the helicopters, the second time around was Cobras. There were still attack Hueys, but the Cobras were being handled more like the fixed wing had been handled on my first tour. In other words, the Cobras would come into the area and be controlled by somebody else and they would not be the masters of their fate. They would not tell the transport helicopters, ‘Hold back here while I go check out the zone.’ There would be a third party. And the third party was in a Slick Huey and he was called the Helicopter Coordinator Airborne, the HCA, who was most usually, probably all the time, a major or higher who was the person who was going to control the Cobras. We’d provide close in fire support and helicopter escort and the transport helicopters. And more often than not, that HCA would coordinate with a fourth party who would be the tactical air coordinator airborne who would control the fixed wing and coordinate. And this guy would be and not a gal at that time, this guy would be in an OV-10 and he would control the fixed wing support for an operation whereas back in the good old days, I’m not totally objective on this but I doubt seriously that you’ll find too many people that argue with me, back in the good old days you’d have one person controlling everything. Now, that took some hand/eye coordination but it was there. And if you allowed the people who were experienced to do that job, it could get done and in my estimate, much more efficiently. But with an HCA and I said major or higher, very frequently these guys had not been in the theater very much or very often, were relatively new and were inept sometimes. I actually saw an HCA one time tell a transport helicopter who was going to extract a recon team that wasn’t in contact with a standard extraction, this guy said, ‘No. I can't pick you up there. You’re going to have to move two miles through dense jungle to get to another zone,’ which in my estimate was cruel and unusual punishment and should never have happened.

RV: Why?

JA: Because the zone was too tight for his helicopter. I disagreed with him. At any rate, this guy that was doing it was brand new in country. He didn’t understand what was going on. He didn’t understand what the ramifications of making a recon team that
had been in field three days, four days, maybe longer, going through an extra two miles
of dense jungle to get to a bigger landing zone. There were any number of ways they
could have gotten them out. That’s again, a memory I hadn’t realized I had. That was
something that happened far too frequently as far as I was concerned the second time
around, there were too many folks getting their tickets punched, so to speak. You may
have heard that story before and to this day I am grateful I was a captain, a lowly captain
on both of my tours because it gave me an opportunity to fly the missions, not have to
worry too much about politics. But the second time around, I didn’t have the freedom to
engage the enemy. The rules of engagement were much more stringent. And in my
particular case, the HCA had to clear you onto a target. You could not clear yourself onto
a target. If you were being shot at and I don’t remember exactly what the rules were, but
it has to be and I don’t think it’s any different, if we were being shot at and we could
confirm the fact we were being shot at, we could shoot back. But as I told you before, or
mentioned before, frequently we didn’t know we were being shot at. It was the ground
folks that were telling us we were being shot at or the helicopter or somebody had to be
hit to know we were being shot at. So most of the time, I think we missed some chances
to shoot some bad guys simply because of the broader constraints, more stringent
constraints we were under. Where there was one person controlling everything on the
first tour, there was a transport flight leader, an attack helicopter flight leader, an HCA, a
tactical air coordinator airborne and there was a fixed wing flight leader. Now, we had
the flight leaders from the different units on the first tour, but there was one person in
charge of controlling it all.

RV: Whoa.

JA: There were three.

RV: Couple of questions. First of all, could you argue with the HCAs call and say,
‘Look, they can make it in there,’ or ‘Why are you making them march?’ Could you say
that kind of thing?

JA: Yes, yes.

RV: Did you?

JA: Yes. It didn’t do any good.

RV: And his answer’s, ‘Thank you Captain Arick, but…’
JA: Yes. ‘Thank you Scarface 4. I appreciate the input. Let’s move on.’ I don’t think that’s exactly what he said but there might have been a profanity in there too, I don’t know, mostly from my side.

RV: Okay. This begs the question why? Why the changes, do you think? This is just two years later.

JA: Because we were going to a much more controlled environment. The 7th Air Force took over all control of missions and doling out of missions, which meant they were slower to come down. Reaction time to tight situations was longer. That’s an effect or that’s a result. I’m not answering your question. Why? Because the bureaucracy had oozed in to the war probably because at that point in time we were at the height of the number of people that were there. They were beginning to think, I believe about going south but there were probably the most people, the most units were in country. So there were a lot of people that wanted control. 7th Air Force won that one. Instead of the Marine Corps controlling its missions and deciding on its missions in I Corps, the 7th Air Force from Saigon had a blanket control over the whole country. And if you know something I don’t know when it comes to that air control, speak right up because this was my impression when I came back. I was never interested enough or in a position to act or to learn exactly what was going on other than the fact that 7th Air Force was in charge and we had to clear all of our missions through them one way or another.

RV: Obviously, by what you're saying, you found this much more ineffective than you first tour.

JA: Yes.

RV: Do you think that the United States lost the tempo of the conflict that really we were losing initiative doing this or what was the effect on the ground would you say?

JA: I don’t know about the ground.

RV: The overall war effort?

JA: I don’t know. I can tell you that the bureaucracy had, like I say, oozed into the operation much more so than on my first tour. And that can't be good. Too many people trying to make a decision at the grass roots level on spur of the moment is dangerous in combat. I said that already. It can't happen that way. There have to be local decisions being made so that had to have a detrimental effect on the effectiveness of the operations.
And I believe it did. I mean, we didn’t shoot as much. We weren't cleared to shoot as much. Our missions were not nearly as, the year that I was there the second time, we had much less contact, much less contact than we did on my first tour. And remember I bracketed, my tours bracketed TET. And I came in after Ia Drang and I left before Lam Son 709, which I’m sure you’re an expert on. That was where of course, the fear was for the surface-to-air missiles I think the most. At least it was for the Marines that operated there. Is it Lam Son 709?

RV: 719. Right.

JA: So my tours were kind of during the down time if you will. They weren't these huge operations other than operations Hastings when I was in on my first tour. That was huge. Khe Sanh had not, we were operating out of Khe Sanh and I operated out of Khe Sanh a lot on my first tour, but the siege didn’t start until while I was in Monterey. So my opinion was that during those down periods that I was in country, we were doing great things, I thought. We were keeping the bad guys on their toes. We were defeating them. We were going to their places and doing what needed to be done. The second time around, everybody was punching their tickets and nothing useful was happening or much less useful was happening. Let’s put it like that.

RV: It seems like it was crowded air space too.

JA: Funny you should say that because the next thing I was thinking about saying was we had a bazillion lieutenants in our squadron and we had a half a bazillion majors in our squadron. Everybody was there to get their ticket punched. Now lieutenants were there to do battle with the bad guys, which was fine. But we must have had thirty-five lieutenants in the squadron. So obviously the good missions, actually most of them fell on the shoulders of the captains, which was still good for me. But again, it was much more restrictive, much more bureaucratic.

RV: Did you see rotations in and out of the field, the six-month officer rotations in and out of these positions that you were associated with?

JA: Just like me. Are you talking about…..?

RV: Well, six months in and then six months in the rear.

JA: Yeah, pretty much. And that happened to me and I was a captain. That’s what made it even worse. I mean, if I was a major something like that, I’d expect it. But you
know, six months in a staff job because majors are made for staffs. That’s what the rank
is and then perhaps six months in a squadron to get your ticket punched or whatever. But,
yeah. Because of my position on the second time around, I don’t know, I wasn’t in the
squadron the entire time so I don’t know who came and went. I do know commanding
officers, even on my first tour, rotated pretty regularly. It was six months in command,
six months in a staff position. And it was that way for the commanding officer, probably
the executive officer in my squadron the second time around. As far as the rest of the
majors are concerned, I don’t remember. I do know that four of the majors one night were
out drinking and rolled a jeep and came back with cuts and bruises and broken arms and
legs. But anyway. They were good at doing that. Actually, they were all good guys but
not as experienced.

RV: Was that a problem?

JA: Yes. That was a big problem. The HCA missions would fall on the shoulders
of the majors. The flight lead missions would fall on the shoulders of the senior people
there primarily and some of us that had been there a couple of times and were loud and
obnoxious. That was very frustrating to me. It wasn’t frustrating because they were
majors and didn’t have time, it was frustrating because of what I saw them do from time
to time. Now, that’s just my opinion.

RV: That’s what this is about.

JA: But I thought it was much less effective the second time around just because
of the nature of the animal.

RV: Let’s take a break. I need to change the disk out here.

JA: Absolutely.

RV: Okay. Let’s continue the interview, sir. We’ve been talking about the
bureaucracy that you ran into in the air, on the ground perhaps with the operations and
the way that your role in these operations went down. Let me ask you about the
difference between the actual platforms you were flying. The first tour you were flying
the Huey gunship, second tour, the Cobra gunship. Tell me the differences between the
two and compare and contrast if you will.

JA: The Huey wasn’t originally built to hang weapons from, so it was more of a
makeshift gun platform, which meant that it didn’t have the speed and the handling
qualities that a weapons delivery platform should have to make it an optimal weapons
delivery platform. However, the Huey had a second mission each time it went out as an
attack helicopter. It went out as a Medevac, it went out as a resupply helicopter and I did
all of those things with an attack helicopter my first tour. And the Huey had in it the
tactical air coordinator airborne who could and did control all aspects of a particular
operation; the transport helicopter flight, the attack helicopter flight, the fixed wing attack
flights and the ground too. The air commander, the tactical air commander didn’t control
the ground, but he more or less controlled all the activities and coordinated them with the
ground. The second time around, the platform, attack helicopter platform, the Cobra, was
built specifically for weapons delivery. It was skinny. It was faster. Its stub wings were
built to hold more ordnance than the Huey could hold. It went faster which meant it gave
a bigger boost to all the weapons that were launched from its platform. It had a turret on
it that had a 40-millimeter grenade launcher and 7.62 minigun, which was a devastating
weapon. So it was much more versatile when it came to the attack helicopter business. So
when I went back over there the second time, I was expecting to have a much more
effective weapons delivery platform capable of doing everything we did initially except
the resupply and Medevac pick up of course because the Cobra held only two pilots in
tandem. But I was disappointed. I was disappointed. First of all, the Cobra did what it
was supposed to do. It carried more ordnance, not a lot more but some more and it
delivered it more accurately. It was capable of delivering it more accurately, particularly
the turret. We tried the turret on a Huey periodically on my first tour and it usually
jammed or it didn’t work or we didn’t know how to use it properly but it never really
worked on a Huey properly. It worked on the Cobra. But the Cobras were considerably
more restricted in the conduct of their mission simply because there were more echelons
of control and the Cobras were treated primarily just like the fixed wing attack aircraft
were. They’re just out there as another source of firepower, not another source of
maneuver, not another source of eyes, not another source of control, but simply ‘Go here,
shoot there,’ was the order. And for that reason, I was personally disappointed in the
mission on the second time around. And as I may have mentioned on this recording or
not, my impression of the activity, successful contacts that we had, not my impression,
but the amount of activities, successful contacts that we had with bad guys on my second
tour were considerably less than they were on my first tour. And I blame that on the
layers of control and the inability of the Cobra during 1970 and the small part of ’71, one
day, the inability of the Cobra to go out there and do what it needed to do by itself. Now,
we still went on emergency recon extracts. We didn’t have nearly so many that I can
recall. We still did all of the things that we had done the first time around. It was just not
the same thing. And I apologize for being obtuse, oblique or whatever it was in that but it
was just too much control over the Cobras and not enough freedom to conduct the attack
helicopter mission the way I believed it should be conducted. And that is kind of
freelancing, out there talking to the guys on the ground, being their eyes, being able to
respond immediately and lethally to the contacts that they pick up.

RV: Was that opinion shared by the men in you unit?

JA: The folks that had been there the first time in the Hueys, yes. Absolutely. My
impression was that yes it was. Everybody had an opinion so I don’t want to overstep my
bounds and speak for them but I think that’s a fairly universally shared opinion,
particularly the people that had been there the first time or one time before in the Hueys.

RV: Where did the change come from?

JA: I think it was evolutionary. This is purely speculative on my part but the war
had been going on and on and on and more and more people were becoming involved and
more and more people had opinions and more and more people were concerned about
controls and getting their fingers in the pie. Here’s a very cynical excuse for the HCA,
but I do suspect, or I do know that others share this opinion, others of my era, not the
more senior officers. The HCA was generated just to have something for the majors to
do. I said it was cynical and it is. I’m sure that wasn’t the ultimate but it actually put
another helicopter out there with somebody in control so that they could be out there in
control and as far as I was concerned, it wasn’t necessary. And I fought that. As a matter
of fact, when I got back to the States ultimately and ended up, about two years after I got
back to the States on my second tour, I ended up as the operations officer of the Cobra
squadron down at New River, I ended up writing the first tactical manual for Cobras in
conjunction with my commanding officer who was there in Vietnam with me as a major
in 367, Huey P. Long Miller. HPL Miller. Quite a character, quite a good guy, but he was
the one that generated the requirement for the squadron to develop their own tactical
manual, not unlike the Army’s tactical manuals that they had had for sometime that
developed formations for helicopter escort procedures for low altitude flight and target
engagement. So between the two of us, me primarily doing the authoring and him doing
the editorial work, we developed a tactical manual that at the time I left wrote out the
HCA’s role and put back in the TACA role. Now, Colonel Miller, Lieutenant Colonel
Miller was an HCA advocate because he was a major who had come into Vietnam on the
second tour. Actually I don’t know that it was his second tour. His first tour may well
have been in A-4s or something like that. But anyway, his first helicopter tour as I recall.
And please forgive me, world, if I’m mischaracterizing this. So he was one of the people
who benefited from the HCA role. And I have to say this, of all the HCAs I worked with,
he was the most effective and the least likely to make a stupid mistake. We were all likely
or not likely but capable of making stupid mistakes.

RV: What’s an example of a stupid mistake?
JA: A stupid mistake would simply be not being able to find a landing zone for
the helicopters, going to the wrong area for a landing for an operation and also telling a
ground unit to move two miles through dense jungle to go to another landing zone that
wasn’t necessary in my opinion. So there were plentiful opportunities as there are always
in a combat situation to make dangerous mistakes. At any rate, I’m not sure where I was
going there but we did end up writing a tactical manual. I wrote out the HCA. I don’t
think that the HCA, because I got back into flying again, Cobra flying again as a
commanding officer of a squadron and a group, there was always a version of the HCA in
the tactical manuals that evolved after I wrote the one for HMA 269 in 1974.

RV: Okay. Would it be possible or would it have been possible to change any of
this while you were there in Vietnam or was it just too set?
JA: No. It certainly would have been possible but the source of the change could
not have been me or a captain. It had to have come from the top or it have had to come
from somebody that was convinced by somebody like me and I didn’t have the time or
probably the wherewithal to convince anybody. Let me change that. I probably didn’t
have the stones to go to these majors who had a place to go and conduct their mission and
say, ‘You don’t belong in this mission.’ I never said that. Probably I ultimately made
major because I didn’t say that. I don’t know, but no. I did not choose. I like to choose
my battles and I did not choose that as a battle, at least one that I fought openly and
vigorously. So I’m not being particularly, I guess I’m not being disingenuous but that’s a
complaint I had then. I did not go to the mats to voice my opinions where my opinions
might have been listened to because I believed I wouldn’t have any effect.
RV: It sounds like you said what you could in the circumstances in which you
were.
JA: In my opinion I did.
RV: As far as you could.
JA: I took it as far as I thought I could. I probably wasn’t as brave and as gutsy as
I should have been, but there were others that believed what I believed and when we
talked we commiserated.
RV: Tell me about the standard operating procedures in these combat situations.
You went over the structure of who was on scene and what was happening but you
described this with the Huey and how you would approach a combat situation, how you
would go into a hot zone, a cold zone. What was different in the situation in 1970-71?
JA: Very little was different as long as the HCA would allow you to do what you
needed to do. The Cobras would go in, sweep low over the zone, draw fire as necessary.
Seldom on my tour did we draw fire, second tour. Then the transports would be called in
by the HCA when the Cobras told the HCA everything was okay and then we set up a
pattern that covered, a flying pattern that covered the transport helicopters while they
were in the zone. Then we set up to cover them as they came out of the zone then they’d
go about their business and we’d fly back with them in formation as helo escorts. We
were close in fire support in the landing zone during the actual landing of the troops and
we were helo escort coming out. That was it. We were not controllers and we weren't
talking to anybody but the HCA.
RV: Whereabouts in South Vietnam were you operating mostly during this time
period?
JA: During the second tour I was out of Marble Mountain.
RV: Just around the Da Nang area?
JA: No. I’m sorry. Actually we operated north of Phu Bai at least all the way up
to the DMZ.
RV: Really?

JA: Yeah. I don’t recall. No. All the way up to the DMZ occasion, regularly all the way out west. As a matter of fact, this was a tour when we did work with Special Operations Group and we did go into Laos and work with the guys out west.

RV: This is part of where I was leading to. This is the tour where you actually went into Laos.

JA: Well, we actually went into Laos on my first tour too.

RV: Right. We talked a little bit about that.

JA: But more secretive. Actually this time it was secretive too, obviously, but it was much more routine, if you will, although still, not always. We would have four Cobras, two transport helicopters, maybe as many as four and an HCA that would brief with the Special Operations Forces and I don’t recall where we had these briefings. They may actually have been at Marble Mountain in our facilities and we would meet up out in the field, pick up the Special Operations folks. They may have been Hmong. They may have been with our guys. They may have been South Vietnamese with our guys or just our guys, but we would meet up with them and then insert them into landing zones across the border and then leave and then we’d go back and pick them up usually under fire after they had encountered resistance.

RV: Were the rules of engagement any different in Laos than they were in South Vietnam?

JA: You know, I ought to remember that but I don’t. My instincts tell me that yes they were only because there was much less likelihood in the areas we were going into to have anybody that were friendlies or even had friendly intentions or peaceful intentions in the areas that we went into than there were in the places that we worked in Vietnam. So, yes, primarily because there was very, very little likelihood of seeing any friendlies where were planning on going into. So, yes, you may shoot. And indeed, on each flight as I recall, there were free fire zones if we needed to dump our ammo to get back over the mountains or if there was any reason to dump ammo. Plus fixed wing very frequently had to expend their ammo before they went back in because I don’t believe they were able to land with hot ordnance. So there were free fire zones for them when they came out there with us too.
RV: Can you tell me some about those missions, what they were like?

JA: Yes, but very little because I have very little recall with those missions. I probably in the entire year I was there remembering there was only six months I was active. The first six months I was a visiting pilot although I was experienced and I was flying as pilot in command, I did not get the missions that went across the border. So it was only the last six months that I got missions that went across the border. And I probably only flew 10 of those the entire time I was there. And I don’t actually recall a situation where I was involved in a mission across the border where we actually had a shoot-em-up of any significance certainly because it’s slipped my mind.

RV: Tell me about the SOG personnel. What were they like?

JA: Cool. They were snake eaters. As a Cobra pilot, I really didn’t get to know them because I never saw them. If I was the flight leader for the Cobras, then I would be in the briefing, but if I wasn’t the flight leader for the Cobras, I wouldn’t. The guys would be there. I had very little contact directly with them. More contact on my first tour because we actually went out to the Special Forces camps out to the west and did go face to face, all the air crews went face to face with the guys that were going across the border, the Hmongs, Montagnards, and I guess our Special Forces guys. But yeah, it was just kind of, I stood in awe of that. They were the John Waynes, the guys that were doing really, really scary stuff.

RV: Did they ever talk to you?

JA: Sure.

RV: What did they tell you about their missions, what they were doing?

JA: No. We didn’t talk directly about their missions.

RV: Not that. What did they talk to you about?

JA: Women, booze, the mission itself, what’s going to happen, where we’re going to go, what we’re going to do, what we expect from you, what you expect from us. And I guess that’s it. That’s a horrible answer to your question but I just have no real recall of that.

RV: Okay. Any missions during this last few months you’re in country flying the Cobras that stand out in your mind? Any medals awarded?
JA: I got one single mission air medal the second tour and I can't recall what it was for. I don't even think I earned it.

RV: Why do you say that?

JA: Well, the flight strike system, the method for determining how many air medals you get, flight air medals you get, was extremely, I'll say liberal, but it was ludicrous more than liberal. I think I explained this the first time around but recall that the first time around, a mission was you take off from base, you go out, you fly around, you land, whatever you do for a day, come back, you have one mission. That was on the first tour. By the time I got back, a flight would be, an example of a flight might be escorting a resupply helicopter who picked up some stuff, dropped it here, that’s one flight; dropped it here, that’s a second flight; dropped it here, that’s a third flight and then you come back. Now, to make matters slightly more ludicrous, if on any of those flights, somebody called, ‘You’re taking fire,’ including the helicopter pilots themselves, you got two flight credited to your system. 20 flights equaled one air medal. Now, there’s a lot of math involved there but certainly nothing you can't handle, but theoretically, you could earn an air medal in one day by flying to ten separate locations with a resupply helicopter taking fire at all of those places and that’s stupid. I always professed that and there were others with me that professed that too. This the way the Marine Corps worked it. I don’t know how the Army worked it.

RV: Were there any particular missions that do stand out?

JA: I didn’t answer your question. No. Honestly, quite frankly, no. There was one event that I wasn’t a part of. First of all, I was on a Medevac mission, a night Medevac, not mission but standby and actually we flew some missions but the night that Apollo 13 got hung up. So I got to listen to that periodically from the Medevac bunker between Medevac missions one evening and over a period of time.

RV: This was when their problem first was known.

JA: Yes, ‘Houston, we have a problem,’ and then beyond that. The second event, actually I was on the Wing staff. I wasn’t flying that day but we had two Cobras come back from a mission with two very young lieutenants of the 35 that we had in the squadron that had a midair over Marble Mountain, all crashed right in the middle of Marble Mountain and died tragically. Those are events that I recall happening the second
time around. As far as my missions were concerned, nothing spectacular at all or nothing notable at all. That’s unusual but that was a relatively inactive period. As far as I was concerned it was. I was probably the most experienced attack helicopter pilot in the squadron, certainly one of them flying many if not most of the demanding missions, most demanding missions. Nothing particularly noteworthy, which may be noteworthy in and of itself for that period of time. Like I say, Lam Son 719 came just after I left as I recall in the early part of 1971 and I remember hearing stories from my old compatriots, horror stories about flying that operation. Before, of course was Khe Sanh, before I got back was Khe Sanh and TET. So I very conveniently came in between the more exciting periods of time.

RV: How was unit morale your second time around?

JA: Not as good as it was the first time around because the younger guys weren't being allowed to fly, didn’t have a reason to fly that much. There weren't that many missions. We had too many lieutenants, probably too many captains, certainly too many majors, so there was inactivity. That was a period of time when the fragging was taking place with the drug problems and with the fragging of the more senior officers by anybody who wanted to roll a grenade into a building. I don’t recall it happening.

RV: Did you hear talk of it?

JA: I did hear talk of it. Sure did. As a matter of fact, one of the most talented pilots in the squadron at the time who had been an infantry officer on a first tour in Vietnam was pulled away from the squadron to take over Zulu Company, which was the security company for Marble Mountain that was theoretically supposed to take care of drug problems, frag problems and things like that. That’s how serious the problem was but I never encountered it. Although I may be in denial, I just didn’t.

RV: Let’s talk about your base life your second time around. Tell me about the quarters in which you lived. I know you were in a couple of different locations, or were you in the same quarters?

JA: Actually the same base location. Periodically I had to spend the night in the field or out away from home and we’d spend it at a Special Forces camp or another base where we’d sleep on a cot. But Marble Mountain. There were hooches, Southeast Asian huts that were barracks for officers, maybe as many as six to eight lived in one set of
quarters. I think the field grade, major and above, had two or four in a SEA hut. I, on the other hand, lived in a barracks area by choice that didn’t have six to eight screaming, drunk, out of sequence [control] people coming in, bunk mates coming in at all hours. I lived in house, or not a house, but a room all by myself. It was kind of a row of rooms that were not unlike BOQ rooms, much smaller, cots – well, actually they were beds, skimpy beds – and that’s it. But it was more or less an area that was free and clear of random blanket parties and things like that. Now obviously, not obviously, but I wasn’t going to be involved in any of those because of my background and experience and demeanor. But each of the choices of huts for me to live in had people in it that would be up all hours of the night screaming and yelling, partying, doing stupid things and I never really developed a knack for that. My first tour wasn’t like that. All of us lived together, all of us went to sleep roughly between 9:00 and 10:00 at night, and if we were going to be drunk and obnoxious, we’d do it between the hours of 5:00 and 8:00 in the evening. These guys partied all night long. It was much wilder the second time around and I attribute that to the reputation for drinking that developed out of the earlier days in Vietnam. And the new guys, newer guys misinterpreting how to handle that. Now I didn’t not drink. I drank and I drank with the guys. But when I was finished drinking with the guys, I went to a place that was quiet and went to sleep pretty much. I woke up with a hangover frequently but at least I got five, six, seven hours of sleep at night rather than having these guys screaming and yelling and running all over the place, which is in fact would have been the situation I would have been confronted with if I lived in the barracks. The places weren't that far apart and I didn’t lose anything from living in that room rather than living in the barracks.

RV: Okay. Let’s talk about the alcohol use, both first tour and second tour. Can you tell me about it and how prevalent was it?

JA: This is probably not doing justice to certain people, but there’d be no way of telling who I’m talking about, but I don’t know of anybody that didn’t drink in my circle–my circle being pilots and actually ground officers that were living with us too; the flight surgeon, the logistics supply officers. So everybody drank that I’m aware of and most of us drank in what today’s terms would be excessively. That would be more than three or four or five drinks a night. Today, more than one or two drinks would be excessive for
me but that’s a good thing. At any rate, the second tour there was a much more elaborate
officer’s club, larger, more plush, still made out of wood and everything, but the building
was built to be an officer’s club with furniture and bars and a stage for the dancing girls
that came periodically. So it was a much more sophisticated drinking environment that
you had the second time around. The first time around, if the infantry folks would have
called our drinking environment sophisticated also because it was a room with a
makeshift bar and a thatched roof but nevertheless, there was booze at one end of it and it
was being served. That’s sophisticated. The second time around, it was a bar and the
younger kids came into that and just got wasted, literally and were wild. Some of these
pictures that I’ll show you at some point in time, maybe not even today, but would depict
some wild times on my first tour and we did have some wild times but they were more
controlled and when eight or nine o’clock rolled around, that was it. We knocked it off.
The second time around, the partying went on way beyond what I considered to be
reasonable. And as the bull captain in the squadron, senior captain, it was my
responsibility to control the lieutenants and I tried but I didn’t succeed very well in that
regard. Anything else?

RV: What about drug use? Did you see any drug use?

JA: No. I did not. Never while I was over there did I see it. I was aware there were
drugs being used, but I always was led to believe, and believed, it was more in the
enlisted ranks in the aviation units than it was in the officer ranks. I suspect it was that
way pretty much all throughout Vietnam whether it was ground or air. But on our air
bases, our air base, I was not confronted with that. Even our enlisted folks that I worked
with quite regularly, obviously because they took care of us and our helicopters as result,
I never detected any adverse effects of drug use or drug use for that matter.

RV: Did the alcohol use get in the way of performance the next day?

JA: No. Thankfully, the younger guys, and at this stage of the game I was 30. So I
was older I guess. God. The younger guys blew it off in time to get out and fly. However,
I will tell you the men I talked about, as I recall now, those guys had been partying hard
the night before and they had been out on a mission all day flying support out of an
outlying area. And they were just coming back. So I’ve got to answer your question
because my recall is not as good as it probably should be, I would say yeah. I would say
it got in the way. If in fact what I recall is accurate, then it got smack dab in the way. It
lost us two helicopters and four good men, four good children almost. But in my
particular case no. In others, no.

RV: Did you sense any tension between officers and those who were enlisted?
JA: Not in my units. No. As a matter of fact, there was great camaraderie on the
first tour. This was one drawback of the Cobra and I’ll phase into that. On the first tour,
every enlisted person in the squadron, whether they were an administrator or a logistician
or a maintenance person for the helicopters was capable of becoming a door gunner and
flying on missions. Now, of course the crew chief was a maintenance man for the
helicopter and he was on one door, but we had to put someone else on the other door. So
virtually the entire squadron flew together and as a result, there was very, very close-knit
camaraderie. The second time around, the pilots were more removed. Let me put it this
way. The enlisted folks were more removed from the action than they were the first time
around because we couldn’t take them flying with us. We used two pilots for a good
reason. I don’t question the fact that we had two pilots rather than one enlisted person as
the other crewmember. So the second time around, the administrators, the logisticians,
enlisted were not flyers so they were virtually totally removed from the missions. And
even the maintenance folks said goodbye to the helicopter when it left and greeted it
when it came back. So they were also removed. Actually, that was one of the issues that I
was very vocal in. And one of the issues as I recall now that I have been known to stand
up and take a position on and blame, if that’s a good choice of words, that’s one of the
reasons that the morale the second time around was lower than the first time around. The
tightness of the aircrews, the pilots, and the enlisted was not the same.

RV: How about tension between those in the rear who never saw combat, never
went out and those who actually were going out?
JA: I never saw that. The closest I came to that, those of us in the squadron the
second time around, once I got into the squadron, no. We were just our squadron so we
were all in the front and we were all doing everything. If you’re talking about the pilots
who went out and flew and the enlisted who were back in the rear, no. There was no
tension as a result of bad feelings from the guys that were doing the flying thinking that
the guys in the rear weren’t pulling their part. No. Absolutely not. The only place that
that may have arisen was when the group staff, some majors became HCAs. They weren't in the squadron but they were going out and flying on missions and controlling the entire squadron activity, transport and attack missions.

RV: Was the intelligence better the second time around or about the same?

JA: No. Not as far as I was concerned. Again, understand that I did not have the impression that there was as much activity the second time around as there was the first time around, enemy encounters. We thought it was better because we were being told in very minute detail what the enemy that we are to encounter in this operation would be. Then there was a very detailed briefing that took place with all of the leaders of the elements of the operation in one room. That’s something we had the second time around that was a good thing we didn’t have the first time around. However, once we got to the areas, it turned out that there wasn’t as much contact as we had had the first time around and so the intelligence we were getting was much more extensive. The intelligence we were getting was much more extensive in my estimate the second time around, sophisticated, if you will, but no more accurate.

RV: Do you think that was a problem? It was decreased activity but…

JA: Absolutely. There was always that problem. We weren't able to tell where the bad guys were. That doesn’t help the situation.

RV: It’s always a problem.

JA: Yeah, it is. It’s going to be a problem later today probably or tomorrow or certainly the next day. Yeah. That definitely was a problem. I mean, we’d expend gasoline and time to put people on the ground and nothing would happen. Disappointing.

RV: This must have been frustrating.

JA: Yes. Absolutely. Although if you looked at it as if, ‘Well, there was no enemy there so I didn’t get shot at. I’m not dead. Everything’s good,’ okay. ‘Or maybe we scared them away when we were coming in and we achieved our goal,’ which is horse hockey because the only way to win a war is to take and hold ground. And we were not taking and holding ground. We were inserting, confronting as appropriate and then extracting. So the bad guys would go away and then they’d come back. Go away and come back.

RV: It’s like a game almost.
JA: Absolutely. That’s why we lost the war. I’m absolutely convinced of that.

They had places to go and hide and we didn’t. They knew when we were coming or they could certainly hear us when we were coming. There was no radio discipline whatsoever, absolutely none.

RV: Why not?

JA: Because it wasn’t necessary, theoretically and nor was it thought about at least on the first tour. I was still a captain so if somebody said, ‘Stay off the radio,’ I stayed of the radio. But listen to me on that tape sometime. I’m talking us through every step of the way and you don’t do that nowadays. In my squadron command and in my group command when I was flying tactical missions again, not in combat of course this time, but we exercised radio discipline, radio silence a whole bunch and that was one thing in Vietnam that we did not exercise at all. As a matter of fact, the first time around I was pretty proud of myself. I could be short, succinct, get the mission done with a minimum of words if you can believe that after listening to that tape. However, the second time around, folks were coming up with terms like, ‘Roger that.’ Well, that’s one too many words. ‘What do you mean, Roger that?’ Just Roger is good or Rog. That’s the only one I can think of right off hand but if you gave me a little bit more time I could think of some other really, really stupid common terms that were used the second time around that were unnecessary and unwarranted and excessive.

RV: Why did that happen do you think?

JA: Because the rumor was, I’m convinced of this, that everybody, the war stories I’ve heard about Vietnam were cool and helicopter pilots could say the really coolest things in the world. So when I get out there I’m going to say some really cool things and oh, by the way, I’m going to make them up as I go along. And that’s a lot like the drinking was the second time around, the partying was the second time around, an overstatement of reality I guess. That’s probably not a good way to say it.

RV: It’s like a self-perpetuating myth.

JA: Yeah. Self-perpetuating, not only self-indulging, self-growing, yes.

RV: So when you would come back to your quarters, you were able to come back alone if you wanted to be alone.

JA: Yeah.
RV: How much contact did you have with home?

JA: Letters weekly, daily. Tapes. That’s the contact. Nothing direct.

RV: Same first tour and second tour.

JA: Yes.

RV: How was the mail service? How would you judge it?

JA: Excellent.

RV: Okay. What was the turnaround time?

JA: Probably a week. You had to count on something getting home in a week, something getting to you was kind of a crapshoot but probably a week coming toward Vietnam.

RV: Did you ever get to make any of the MARS calls?

JA: I made one MARS call when my son was born on my first tour and the second time around, I made a MARS call when I found out for sure I was going to get to go to Hawaii for R&R. Yeah. Those two times.

RV: What about news from home? Were you able to keep up with what was happening on the home front, a lot of the…

JA: Protests.

RV: Protest, political incidents, a lot of stuff going on.

JA: No. Not really. I wasn’t concerned about it. I was more concerned about my family and of course executing the mission. That probably sounds a little melodramatic and I think it is a little melodramatic, but as long as there’s no smoking hole back there in the United States when I go home, as long as my family’s healthy and happy, the rest of the nuances aren’t my concern right now. I’m more concerned about surviving this tour. When I say that, it’s not dodging bullets or being afraid of dying, it’s more of just not thinking about anything. Shallow, but the truth.

RV: Maybe sensible.

JA: Well, I like to think that. In my mind’s eye it was certainly and still is. I lived to fight another day.

RV: Any R&Rs second tour?

JA: Yes. Two. I went to Australia and to Hawaii, those two. Australia was an awesome experience.
RV: By yourself?
JA: By myself. Well, a plane full of other R&R folks going to Australia. I didn’t go with anybody I knew. A week in Sidney. I went on a tour of the Outback. I went on a tour of a zoo there. I had my picture taken boxing a kangaroo. Unfortunately it never got developed. So I don’t have it. Sidney was an awesome place and I say this freely and frequently. Even the ugly girls were beautiful. That may have been a function of my origin and my destination ultimately, but I don’t believe that for a minute. I liked the people, men and women, in Sidney and in Australia, other parts, other nearby areas. And I said at one point and time, about the time after I’d been back that Teddy Kennedy was thinking of running for President. I swore that if in fact he was nominated, I was taking my family to live in Australia. It probably would have never happened, but then again, Teddy Kennedy was never nominated. And that was too close on the heels of Chapaquttic to make it realistic. Although, in most recent past in our presidential personalities, I don’t know about the American people’s capability, I don’t know if we know how to elect a president. Of course you could carry that over to our most recent election too because of what happened. But anyway, I digress.

RV: I wanted to ask, how about USO shows either tour?
JA: The only USO show that I recall from my first – no I’m sorry. No USO shows that I recall on my first tour. Ky Ha was a little bit out of the mainstream. We did have, I believe some dancers come by and Filipino rock bands come by and do an act every now and then but we just didn’t have the facilities for a USO show at Ky Ha. The second time around, absolutely. There was a USO show probably once every other week there with dancing girls and the whole nine yards. Bob Hope actually came to Da Nang around Christmas time on my last tour right when I was ready to go home. I’m sorry. He was there on December 31st at Da Nang, 1970. To be able to go to the show, you had to draw. I drew a winning ticket. It was the last day that I was going to be in country so I gave it to somebody because I was going home. And I didn’t see that. I wish I had now.

RV: Who’d you give it to?
JA: I don’t know. I don’t have any idea. I gave it to somebody who was deserving, I’m sure.

RV: It probably wasn’t a major.
JA: For sure it wasn’t anybody above the rank of captain and probably was a
lieutenant because I was still in charge of the lieutenants’ morale.
RV: What else would you guys do for entertainment besides drink?
JA: That’s pretty much it. I looked forward to R&R, looked forward to a letter
from home. Read sometimes.
RV: What did you read in country?
JA: Larry Boyd. Pretty much. Actually, I read the Book of Mormon. One of the
squadron pilots, another captain, was Mormon and his faith fascinated me and I’m not a
real religious guy. I go to church but I don’t wear it on my sleeve like some I have met.
There’s nothing wrong with that. My brother is an ordained minister, even my best
friends are. But at any rate, it fascinated me and I read it and the Book of Mormon
fascinated me and encouraged me about life in general. I did not become a Mormon as a
result but it was an experience and that took some time. It certainly beat drinking. It was
better for me and probably morally and spiritually better for me. I do remember that. By
the way, the guy I’m referring to was the biggest prick I’ve ever met in my life, self-
professed and card carrying. He was my nemesis. He treated lieutenants like they were
dirt and he required them to call him by his rank and his last name, use sir every time.
Now, I was not on a first name basis with the lieutenants but I didn’t care what they
called me as long as it was something respectful. But at any rate, he was a Mormon and
he allowed me to read the Book of Mormon, an extra copy he had and it was quite an
experience and a good experience. What else. That’s pretty much it. Our lives were flying
and we pretty much did that most of our waking hours so there was very little time to do
much of anything else.
RV: Okay. You mentioned Book of Mormon; tell me, did your religious beliefs
change at all because of your time in Vietnam?
JA: No. They didn’t. I got real religious a whole bunch of times. My religion is
Protestant, Episcopal. I was baptized and confirmed as a youth in the Episcopal faith. My
wife is, our kids are. So the Episcopal faith is my persuasion and it remains that and it
remained that throughout the Vietnam experiences. The Book of Mormon was, I use the
term interesting. Probably it’s an overused term. But it was. It gave me something to sink
my teeth into another perspective that I had not been familiar with and in that regard it
was an uplifting experience.

RV: Do you think the saying is true that there are no Atheists in foxholes?

JA: I absolutely believe that.

RV: Is that from personal experience or from what you heard over there?

JA: Not from what I heard. It’s a personal experience. Well, I suppose being
open-minded like I profess to be, yeah, I can see Atheists over there and indeed I
probably ran into some and probably could recall them if I had somebody to bring them
back to mind. I don’t see how there could be. There has to be a greater power, I believe.
I’ve always believed that. And getting through certain situations as many of us did, you
cannot, I cannot attribute that all to me individually. Of course I had friends and
colleagues that were fighting beside me and with me. There has to be a greater power.

RV: Did you have access to chaplain services or religious places?

JA: Oh, absolutely. Everywhere we went there was a chapel. There was a
makeshift chapel every place. Actually we had a chapel built there at Ky Ha and there
was quite an elaborate one at Marble Mountain. Elaborate in relative terms.

RV: Were these well attended?

JA: Pretty much. Sure. As a matter of fact, I think probably everybody went every
Sunday when they weren't flying.

RV: Really. Your second tour when you were flying the Cobras, was this seven
days a week or same basic schedule you had the first time. You went out when needed
and did your missions. Was there a limit to how many hours you could fly in a row?

JA: There was and I cannot recall what it was. It was much more sophisticated
than it was the first time around. I mean, that one fateful November 10th, I ended up
flying ten, twelve, probably close to fourteen hours. Ten hours was the limit back then
but it wasn’t a hard limit obviously. The second time around, I don’t know. Maybe it was
four hours; maybe it was six hours total time. Maybe it was six. I’m sorry. I can't
remember but there was a much more stringent and hard limit the second time around.

Again, I think a result of the bureaucracy seeping in but probably not illogical,
particularly in light of the fact that we had so many pilots in the squadron and if some
person hogged all the flight time, that meant that some lieutenant down the road was not
going to get the training experience that he needed to progress up the chain and become experienced and capable of conducting missions himself.

RV: Were you all rotated? Was it a set system?

JA: It was but there were different categories of rotation. There were copilots that were rotated and then there were pilots that were rotated, then there were section leaders that were rotated to airplanes, division leaders that were rotated for airplanes and then there were flight leaders that were rotated that were capable of leading any number of missions. So, yes, there was rotation and there was equity theoretically, at least it was attempted. And if somebody didn’t get the flight time they thought they would get, the operations guys would hear about it very quickly because nobody was bashful about complaining about not flying.

RV: Did you fly with the same copilot each time?

JA: No. Very seldom did we fly with the same copilot.

RV: Was that a problem?

JA: No. It was a good thing because the copilots needed to learn how the missions are accomplished and who did it good, who did it well and who did it not so well. And saying that, it’s not coming out exactly the way I wanted it to because obviously there were instructor pilots and there were non-instructor pilots. Now, the copilots as they were becoming qualified would fly with an instructor pilot and it became a routine for somebody who was becoming qualified as a, let’s say, section leader, to fly with an experienced flight or section leader, division leader a number of times in succession and be evaluated so as to get his qualification from that flight instructor. And there was the title flight instructor.

RV: Why don’t we go ahead and stop for today?

JA: Sure.

RV: We’ve reached a good stopping point. Thank you very much.

JA: Thank you.