RV: This is Richard Verrone. I’m continuing my oral history interview with General John Arick. Today is April 16, 2003. It’s about 9:50 am Central Standard Time and we are once again in the Special Collections Library interview room. Sir, let’s pick up where we left off. We’ve been talking about your second tour and some general issues. I want to ask you about a couple of other general issues. How would you describe the leadership in Vietnam as a far as what you saw just above you, your superiors and then overall leadership, military and then political?

JA: Okay. Let’s talk about the folks right over me first because obviously I have opinions on that. I thought it was all excellent. I was blessed by having folks that were my immediate supervisors and then my commanding officer, squadron and group who were very competent in what they did but most of all they had at the time on both of my tours the common sense to allow the youngsters that knew what was going on to go ahead and do what they did best. There were other organizations that I observed while I was there and other people that I observed outside of my chain of command that had a tendency to want to do more than they were capable of. I think we talked a little bit about this in our last session or already and that is the Helicopter Coordinator Airborne, HCA. That was a position that I felt on my second tour was made to give field grade officers, majors, colonels, a job because many of them had staff jobs and not much to do. That’s cynical. That’s probably too cynical but I did see folks put into the position of Helicopter Coordinator Airborne that weren't capable of doing it when there should have been in my
estimate, a perhaps younger, perhaps more experienced, certainly more experienced individual whatever his rank was in the position. But my immediate leadership was excellent.

RV: How would you rate overall leadership in the theater?

JA: I think it was also excellent. People were out there making mistakes. There’s the fog of war but it was a lose-lose situation in retrospect. Obviously we didn’t believe that and they didn’t believe that at the time but the tactics were – I believe the tactics, seek and destroy, win the hearts and minds and all of the clichés that we have grown to know and love, it wasn’t doing the trick. It was doable certainly by all standards of the military and we did it, but we needed more people, more bombs, more bullets to beat the folks there. That obviously is history.

RV: Let’s wait and talk about the political leadership and kind of overall strategy of the war a little bit later and when we’re talking. Was discipline a problem that you saw on either tour?

JA: No. Actually, it wasn’t. I don’t even remember whether I brought those pictures with me. It got rowdy in the evenings in the clubs but it was fairly well contained and during the day, as far as I was concerned in my areas of responsibility and observation, discipline wasn’t a problem. On the second tour, we of course had fraggings, something that has happened most recently. That’s a horrible testimonial to discipline, allowing things like that to happen or having things like that happen is a sign that discipline has broken down obviously. There was, we’ve talked about this previously also but there was, and I knew it existed but never saw it, drug use primarily as far as I knew, marijuana. But the people that I came in contact with, the pilots in my squadrons, alcohol was the only sin that we indulged ourselves in.

RV: So overall, discipline was not much of a problem in your immediate unit.

JA: No. Not in my immediate sphere of observation. None, no court-martials, no office hours that I recall right now. So if there were some non-judicial punishments that were meted out by our squadron commander, they were relatively minor in nature that I can recall.

RV: Do you remember what the attitude was of the military leadership to these fraggings?
JA: The short answer is no, I don’t, mainly because they were remote to me in my sphere of observation. I do know that at Marble Mountain, the commanding officer of the air group there developed a Zulu platoon or a Zulu company that was responsible for – it was kind of an ad hoc MP, military police unit that would beef up the security in the area. That was in response to the fraggings.

RV: Tell me about the relationship you formed with your men. We’ve touched on this kind of in general especially with your copilots and relying on others in the air. But maybe on the ground, what kind of relationships did you develop, you as an individual with other men in your unit.

JA: Lasting friendships, lasting bonds. I would say I have a lasting friendship and bond with everyone I flew with, everyone in my squadron. And those are witnessed by the organizations that have formed up, the Vietnam organizations, post Vietnam organizations that have formed up since the war. The Marine Corps Helicopter Air Crew Association is one that I remember and is very active. It has thousands and thousands of members in it. I maintain contact with people. Not directly face-to-face, one-on-one, but I know what people are doing through that organization. And it’s kind of a band of brothers. We developed a bond that nobody can break and nobody that has been confronted with the situations that we were confronted with and this whole idea is almost cliché, but it is the truth as far as I’m concerned. You develop bonds that you can’t develop with anybody else unless you have been in the same set of circumstances, types of circumstances and we have a whole new group of kids that will be doing that now, have done it.

RV: The bonds forged in warfare are unique to that experience.

JA: Absolutely. Yes.

RV: Tell me about any relationships or contact you had with the Vietnamese civilians.

JA: The only relationships I had with the Vietnamese civilians were the ones we called mamasons who cleaned our hooches and that was very, very remote. The gals that gave haircuts over there. I still had a little bit of hair when I left my first tour in 1967. As a matter of fact, the last haircut I ever had from anybody other than me was in June of 1967 just before I left Vietnam and I’ve cut my own hair ever since.
RV: What was your impression of the Vietnamese civilians? You didn’t have a lot of contact with them, but just in general.

JA: My impression was they had to have a lot of stamina and guts. They were living in a primitive sort of way by Western terms and certainly my terms. They were under pressure because there was a foreign army occupying their space, they had to deal with also…they had to be tough. They had to deal with obviously the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese elements that had infiltrated the civilian populace. My primary focus on the civilian population when I was over there was on the kids and I hated seeing the kids hurt or put into a refugee situation. Everybody hates that but it was particularly appalling to me that these kids had to be suffering. And you know, I related it back to my own children back in the States. Geez, if my kids had to go through this, I’d go crazy.

RV: Did you think the Vietnamese were in a position to learn ‘democracy’?

JA: Yes. I still do. I think anybody is in a position to learn democracy if they’re given the opportunity. The Vietnamese didn’t have an opportunity to because as far as I was concerned, they were under too much pressure. I always thought we’d win the war while I was over there (recalling that I left there in very early 1971 for the last time). I always thought that we’d win the war, that they’d have an opportunity to enjoy democracy. I don’t know enough about the politics of South Vietnam at the time but I always thought they were kind of a democracy.

RV: So despite not having any traditions of democracy in their history, you thought that perhaps that this was possible.

JA: Yes I did. Obviously naively. I’m older and wiser now, much older and a skosh more wise. I’m sitting here talking to a scholar, quite well known scholar on the subject and obviously that was naïve and I’m smiling because I’m having fun with the subject because that’s…I had a problem as a captain over there and I’m going to ease into strategy and politics and indeed its been proven I believe. I’ll yield to you on that one; that my opinion as naïve as it was a captain was the same opinion that my leadership had back in Washington. To go into a combat situation, you have to believe in what you’re doing, otherwise you won’t come out of it in one piece or you risk not coming out of it, much higher risk of not coming out of it in one piece. So, yes, I believe that these people could learn democracy.
RV: Switching countries, look at today’s situation in Iraq. Here we are going to try to teach or install or help install some sort of democratic form of government. Can you draw comparisons?

JA: Well, we won this war. We’re winning this war. (knocks on table) I’m very superstitious.

RV: For the record, you just knocked on the wooden table.

JA: Yes. Absolutely. Thank you. We’re doing it the right way this time. We went in with overwhelming force. We moved the dictatorship regime out and I think we have a wonderful opportunity to teach these folks democracy. I’m scared to death, however that something will keep us from being able to do that. Popular sentiment may be much more violent and much more anti-democracy than we perceived. Look at Vietnam. We learned a lot of lessons after we got out of there and took a look back, scratched or heads and said, ‘Holy crap! What have we done?’ Now, I’m hoping and I believe at this point in time that’s not going to happen. We’re doing it right. The bad stuff isn’t going to happen in Iraq. I think we’re doing right. The military part was taken care of in an efficient, appropriate manner in my estimate. Now that diplomacy has to start, the political aspect has to be handled appropriately and promptly.

RV: We’ll talk about lessons learned from Vietnam in a little while. I wanted to go ahead and touch that subject a little bit. What do you see in your mind’s eye when you look back at Vietnam, physically, the country? What do you see? You spent a lot of time in the air, so you saw a lot.

JA: Yes.

RV: From above.

JA: I Corps, some II Corps but mostly I Corps. I see a beautiful country. I think I’ve said this previously so I’ll try not to be redundant. But I see a beautiful country with a lot of potential. I remember pock-marked rice paddies and burned out portions of jungle, but I see all kinds of potential. While I was there and flying in the Western parts of Vietnam and Laos, I saw at one point a summer palace on a hill in, I believe it was, either Easter Laos or far western Vietnam that used to be, it was in the middle of the jungle on a mountain in nowhere and it was beautiful. I don’t know whether I’m fantasizing or what but I believe that Vietnam is a beautiful country and I have hesitated...
going back because of a couple of things. Financially, I don’t have the disposable cash to
do it right now, but I don’t know what my reaction would be.

RV: Would you want to go back?

JA: Yes, out of morbid curiosity, not morbid curiosity, but pure curiosity. I would
like to go back at some point in time, but I’m not sure when.

RV: What would you do if you went back?

JA: Be a sightseer. I’d try to go to as many of the places that I had been there and
I’d like to go to some of the places that I hadn’t been just to see what’s going on. I had a
kind of a mini-encounter with returning to areas that I had been in when I was in Vietnam
the second tour flying Cobras. I had an occasion to go south to Chu Lai. Very seldom did
I go down there but I had a chance to fly over Ky Ha which was the helicopter base there
just northeast of Chu Lai and it was occupied by the Vietnamese at the time and I could
remember when it was a booming base where there were a bunch of very egotistical,
proud, loud and obnoxious Marine pilots and air crew and others milling about there. It
wasn’t that way when I flew over it, so it was kind of sad, but…

RV: What kind of emotional experience do you think you would have if you went
back? I mean, how attached are you to that emotionally today?

JA: Not very. Not very. I’m sure I could get as wordy and as reflective as I have I
the last 15 and a half hours of discussion that you and I’ve had (exaggeration) and I’m
sure I could conjure up some emotions and would conjure them up. I lost very good
friends, all close, very good friends. But not very.

RV: Could you describe a really humorous event that happened to you over there?

JA: Well, I told you the story about the Marine Corps birthday in November of
1966. It wasn’t humorous. It was kind of ironical. Ironic. Well, I think I also told you
about the pig in the refugee lift. I think that’s probably the extent of humor. People, we’d
laugh all the time. We’d sit around on occasion and watch special movies that we would
take funny shots at like…I don’t know whether you’ve ever seen Mystery Science
Theater 3000. It gives you an idea what my mentality is, but that show, when I happen to
stumble across it, intrigues me and it’s a riot most of the time. We’d laugh, we’d joke,
we’d tell jokes but I cannot think of a particularly funny, funny story.
RV: Is there a particularly brave incident that you remember?

JA: Lots of them. Almost everyday. Anybody that I saw in a Medevac pickup helicopter that went into a zone to pick up a sick, wounded, or dead Marine or other, that was brave. I thought one day when I was out I had to land in a rice paddy or to the side of a rice paddy and wait for something to go on. While I was there, I saw a column of soldiers – not soldiers, oops. Marines, actually. The terms being used interchangeably here in this war and that’s fine. I have gotten over it. You can call a Marine a soldier any day of the week and I’ll accept it because everybody’s brave. But anyway, I saw a column of Marines walking by and those that could shave at that point in time had beards and they looked like a Willy and Joe cartoon to me. They looked tough. They looked mean, they looked brave. The thing that stuck out was they were young. I mean, just kids. And I was 27 at the time, 27, 28, 29. These were just kids and that had to be brave and it was because what did they know about anything? They were there and they were doing what they were being asked to do and they were doing it well as far as I was concerned and I think as far as anybody who looks back was concerned. But, yes, I saw bravery every day and as far as I was concerned, everything that was being done was brave. Some of it was stupid, but all of it brave.

RV: Do you look upon what you did as brave?

JA: Sure. And stupid.

RV: I guess that’s a loaded question.

JA: It is. That’s why I answered it in two words, brave or stupid.

RV: Good. Right. What do you think about when you see these young helicopter pilots on T.V. today that are fighting another war?

JA: Envy. They have better equipment than we had. The thing that amazes me, watching the war, there are all kinds of shots of Cobras everywhere. And those Cobras are all Marine Corps Cobras to the best of my knowledge because I don’t believe the Army has the Whiskey model Cobra today. But these are all kids. I’d like to say that I trained them but it’s been such a long time now. But I trained their commanding officers and they’re out there doing what they do best and what they’ve been trained to do and this is the epitome of their lives, not just shooting at empty dumpsters on the ground in an impact area. It’s shooting at guys that are trying to hurt our guys on the ground and doing
a wonderful job of it. And they're doing what I used to do for a living for a couple of
years, anyway. What do I think when I see them? Envy.

RV: Envy. Okay. A couple of off the wall questions, any strange encounters with
wild animals?

JA: Not strange. The only encounter I had with a wild animal being an aviator
was elephants. I don’t believe I’ve told this story. We were out on what we used to call
snooping and pooping in western Vietnam flying around on a reconnaissance mission. Of
course we were armed. This was in Hueys on my first tour and probably ’66, early ’67 in
the mountainous jungle area and we came upon a herd, flock, group of elephants and we
looked at each other in my cockpit and we decided that we’d kind of shoot them up a
little. So we shot some rockets at them. At that point in time, this was probably ’66, our
rockets wouldn’t hit anything so all we were doing was making them extremely angry.
Then we decided we’d shoot some of our 7.62 machine guns at them. We rolled in and
we shot them. Now, the reason was, these were pack animals being used by the Viet
Cong so we wanted them to get angry with the Viet Cong so they couldn’t use them. But
at any rate, we stirred up the elephant herd in western Vietnam on a bright, sunny
afternoon probably in November, December of 1966. And lo and behold, on the cover, on
the first page of *Stars and Stripes* at some point later in time – there was no reporter with
us, there was no one taking pictures that I knew of – there was a picture of the back ends
or elephants making it down, running down a jungle pathway with little puffs of dust
coming out of their rear ends being bullets hitting them. The bullets that we shot did not
injure them more than probably, they didn’t penetrate, at any rate.

RV: So you didn’t kill any?

JA: No. We didn’t kill any. Absolutely not. We made them awfully angry and
probably they were a little sore of a couple of days.

RV: So you could pick targets of opportunity and that was a target of opportunity.

JA: In certain areas.

RV: Did anybody in your unit or yourself have any pets?

JA: Not on the first tour. I think probably there were pets on the second tour at
Marble Mountain but none that I came in contact with that I can recall.

RV: Were you ever exposed to Agent Orange, any of the chemical defoliants?
JA: Not that I’m aware of. The VA is still after me to get tested on it and I’ve
gone a couple of times to the office over at Amarillo VA and waited for an hour or so and
nobody’s come around so I left. The short answer is no.

RV: Any race issues amongst your men or that you heard about?

JA: Not at all. As a matter of fact, the first tour we had several black crew chiefs
and door gunners that flew with us and they were just one of the gang, always. Second
tour, we had a black captain who became a very close friend of mine and who then in
later years ultimately made colonel and I’m not sure, I don’t think he made general but he
became a colonel. I remember him vividly. An excellent, excellent person, absolutely no
racial issues that I was involved in at all.

RV: Okay. Are there any songs that you hear on the radio that take you back to
Vietnam?

JA: *Green, Green Grass of Home* and yes I can't remember the names of them
now but I can conjure up a flashback listening to some of them.

RV: So that does happen.

JA: Oh, yes. Not really a flashback, but yes it does bring back memories.

RV: Let’s talk about the media coverage of the war. How much contact did you
have with reporters there?

JA: None. None. Remember, I was a lowly captain just climbing into my airplane
or into my helicopter in this case and going off to do battle and coming home. I knew
there was a PR program. We had a public affairs officer in the air group I believe but
none at all.

RV: What do you think of the overall media coverage of the war in general? And
you can comment then and now.

JA: Well, then it was spotty and primarily sensationalism as far as I was
concerned. It didn’t make the headlines unless there was this little girl that’s been
bombed with napalm running down the street or a guy getting his head blown off. Now
that I’ve seen what can be done in this current war and compare it to what was done with
Walter Cronkite coming on at dinnertime when people were still sitting around their
tables eating dinner but had the TV on and showing some pretty bad stuff, cigarette
lighter to the hooch and things like that, that’s why people didn’t like the war. Now, war
is insanity. That fed the people who disagreed with the war. It was perfect for them because war is hell. People are going to die. People are going to do stupid things. It’s going to be confusing and things are going to happen that we didn’t ever dream would happen. But that’s the nature of war, naturally. But unfortunately, in Vietnam, the absolute worst as far as I was concerned was being fed back to the American people. There is an absolute worst in the war that is going on right now and we’ve seen it as recently this morning with the 12-year-old that went to Kuwait without any arms. That’s the absolute worst. But people today are given the privilege of comparing that to other aspects of the war that aren’t as violent, but perhaps successful, comical, patriotic, things like that with the embedded reporters. I think some of the embedded reporters are expletive deleted but most of them are doing a very good job of giving another perspective on the war, one that allows us back here to see the good and the bad.

RV: How did you feel when Cronkite said what he said?

JA: When did he say that? I’m not sure I was home.

RV: Post-TET.

JA: Then I was home but I was studying probably. What I think now, I think he was inflammatory often. I think it was, well it was one sided. It was a personal opinion, one person’s perspective on the war. I didn’t like it.

RV: Why don’t you talk about the anti-war movement? You were there early, came home, went back toward the winding down of the war and then you come back. What was your perspective?

JA: I was totally, not totally, that’s crazy. I was not in a position for any number of reasons to spend much time reflecting on the antiwar movement as it was going on. When I was in Vietnam, I was in Vietnam. When I was back between my two tours, I was engrossed in postgraduate school, struggling to get the heck out of Vietnam and into an academic study so I could pass and do well in the graduate courses that I was taking and spending time with the family as much as I could. So I wasn’t focused. That 1968, A Crack in Time Do you remember the news special that was done by one of the networks, well after the fact but all of that took place while I was at Monterey going to graduate school and it never registered the gravity of it, all of the events that took place, never really registered with me. And again, there’s no excuse for that other than I was focused.
in other places, family because I was going back to Vietnam and in graduate school. Antiwar movement opinion at the time, that didn’t affect me. I’m not interested in it.

RV: What about now? What do you think about it?

JA: The antiwar movement that went on then?

RV: Yes, sir.

JA: I think it was a hell of a lot more on the money than I thought about it at the time. I think it was an extremely useful movement because I think it finally made our politicians sit up and take notice. Today I give a lot of credit to the kids back then that were demonstrating. Back then, after Kent State took place, my thoughts on the demonstrators were solidified. That was, these kids don’t really know what they’re doing. They're high on dope or those that aren’t just want to go out and have a great time and scream and shout. They don’t know what the consequences of screaming and shouting could possibly be. So they really don’t understand what they’re doing. Those kids that were killed at Kent State, I’d like to think didn’t understand the big picture or the fact that they could get hurt, seriously hurt. But right now I think that the antiwar movement during Vietnam was probably one of the more profound events that helped us focus on reality, I guess.

RV: Did it affect you personally, directly in your coming home either time?

JA: Not at all.

RV: How hard was it for you to transition back into the United States from Southeast Asia?

JA: Not particularly hard. I was damn glad to be back obviously, glad to be with my family. But...no, when I came back, everything was as it was. I had a place to go. I had a duty assignment. I had a plan and I focused on that plan and the plan involved me and my family and our futures and I just didn’t have much problem.

RV: When you came back in ’71, you pretty much knew this was the last time you would be going to Vietnam. Did you know this?

JA: Yes. I assumed that.

RV: How did you feel on that flight back?

JA: Again, damn glad to be on the flight going back. But the last-time-in-Vietnam syndrome, first of all, I wasn’t going to allow myself to necessarily believe that because I
could have gotten called up at any point in time to go back there for any number of reasons. Whether I went back on a normal rotation or not, it could have happened. So I had a sense that I had done my time in purgatory and now it’s time to move on, but at the same time I didn’t dwell on that idea.

RV: Let me ask you about a policy question. What did you think of the one-year tour thing? Should we have had people in for the duration like we had in previous wars or should we have changed this slightly or was it adequate?

JA: I thought the one year idea was great. Next question. (laughing) It allowed folks to have an idea of what the end point looked like. You get to Vietnam, you have a short-timers’ calendar with 365 little squares or little shapes to color in as each day goes by. So you knew what the end was going to be. Now, having said that, that can affect people one of two ways obviously. I’m only going to be here for a year. No matter what I do I get out and everything’s going to be fine. I don’t believe that 95% of the people involved in or fighting in Vietnam, or in Vietnam for that matter, focused on the end point other than they knew that they were going to be going home at a certain point in time. Most of them had to work hard at what they were doing to survive and to do what they were doing well. Do I think the one year idea was good? Yes, except I look at ‘the greatest generation’ and I say, ‘God, they were really successful and how in the heck did they do it?’ These guys over there right now will probably be home in six months. We had nothing, me included, had nothing on ‘the greatest generation.’ And they did a wonderful job at what they were doing. People got over there, they got to know what they were doing, they were resolved in what they were doing. They knew they had a mission in Europe. They had to beat Germany before they could go home and they went about their business. I think probably if we had had that type of deployment policy in Vietnam, based on the strategies and the tactics that we were required to use, it would have exploded in our faces. I think we should have gone in there with overwhelming force. I think we should have bombed them into the stone ages. I think we should have done any number of things if we wanted to beat the enemy, to beat the enemy. We didn’t understand that and it wasn’t going to happen. For Vietnam, the one-year tour was fine.

Let me say one thing about that, also, though. The idea of sending cohesive units into combat as units is an absolute must. It should happen. I think we probably touched on this
a little earlier. Sending people in one by one by one by one to replace people did two
things bad I think. Number one, you had to develop the cohesiveness after you got there
which could be deadly, and number two, it left families sticking out there on their own
back home. If a unit picks up from a base and goes overseas, generally speaking, the
families will stay together and we’ve seen this most recently in the news media before; its
worked quite well obviously with our POWs. The folks stick together. You have a
support structure. So I think the one-year deployment policy for Vietnam, for that type of
war, was fine. That type of war doesn’t work but if you're going to have a war that isn’t
working, then let the kids know that there is an end point that they can lock into. That’s
kind of a convoluted thought process there so I may want to go back and rethink that, but
one year for Vietnam was fine and appropriate as far as I’m concerned. It was the fact
that we did not do unit deployments for the bulk of the war was not a good thing.
RV: Based on what we’re seeing today, we’ve learned that lesson?
JA: Yes. Absolutely. Train together, go into war together, leave your families
together as much as you can.
RV: How much did you talk about Vietnam when you came back the last time?
JA: The last time. The first time, not all. Hardly any at all. Of course when we
went to the bar, we’d reminisce a little bit. The second time, relatively little. I always joke
about it now, but one of the things that caused me to want to go to Vietnam, get over
there, get an air medal and come home was because I was sick and tired of listening to
people telling war stories all the time at home during ’65 and ’66 before I went over to
Vietnam. So I was not going to be one of those folks and I’m not today.
RV: You wanted the war stories.
JA: No. I wanted to be able to say, ‘I’ve been to Vietnam. I don’t want to listen to
your war story. Excuse me. I’m going somewhere else to talk to this girl over here.’
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your war story. Excuse me. I’m going somewhere else to talk to this girl over here.’
something like that. We went over there. We did our thing. That’s enough. That’s one of
the things that has kept me from participating really actively in these post-Vietnam
groups. I’m a member so I can stay in touch but getting together over a keg of beer and
reminiscing about rolling in hot on a dark and stormy night; some people love to do that.
I’m kind of ambivalent on it. So I’d rather talk about something else.
RV: When you looked back at the war after you’d gotten home, how much did you follow the war progress?

JA: Quite close.

RV: You’re still in the military.

JA: Absolutely. As much as I could through the media and of course I was in uniform and on a base and as much as the information was available, I took it. Of course I was glued to the television when the prisoners came home and cried quite frankly.

RV: Right. What did you think of the Vietnamization…

JA: Joy.

RV: I’m sorry.

JA: Tears of joy.

RV: Okay. What did you think of the Vietnamization policy, turning the war over to the South Vietnamese and letting them fight it on their own?

JA: It was at the time, I absolutely thought it was just a step. It was a means for us to extract ourselves from a very untenable position. And it was inevitable that the minute we left the place would fall and indeed it did.

RV: Did you feel that when you…

JA: Oh, yeah. Sure. We were holding up the South Vietnamese. They were brave. They were tough. They were good people. They mostly believed in what they were doing, but they were being motivated a lot by our presence. I guess not unlike the Kurds in northern Iraq with our Special Forces.

RV: What did you think in 1973 when it was over for the United States, completely out for the most part?

JA: Mostly I thought about my close friends that I had been flying with in the Cobra squadron that I was in at the time. Some of them were over there doing the flying and extracting the folks from the Embassy. As a matter of fact, as I recall, I lost a good friend who crashed in the water and wasn’t recovered on that airlift. But I just watched it with great interest hoping that we wouldn’t lose anymore.

RV: When you heard the phrase, ‘Peace with honor,’ from Kissinger and Nixon, what did you think about that?
JA: I thought it was a great, catchy phrase. I had no idea what that meant other than the fact that we will establish peace over here but we will do it in an honorable fashion. Okay, you guys figure out how you’re going to do that. Again, at the time I was a naïve ambitious young Marine thinking mostly in a much smaller sphere. ‘Peace with honor’ sounded absolutely fantastic so, ‘Guys, make it happen or let me know how I can help make it happen.’

RV: What did you think of Kissinger? Do you remember seeing him on televisions, Paris Peace talks?

JA: I was rooting for him and that’s about the only recollection I have.

RV: How did you feel in April 1975 when South Vietnam fell completely?

JA: I actually talked to you about the extraction. I focused on not ’73 but ’75. Closure. Gosh, I hope not too many people get hurt. I hope we get all of our friends out, friends, Vietnamese friends and Americans certainly. I wished I was over there being able to help out. That’s about the extent of it.

RV: Where were you when you came back? What was your station?

JA: I went to Quantico to do a payback tour for my graduate school. I was in the Marine Corps Development Center. I was tasked with developing an analytical model. I was tasked with describing to the Secretary of Defense the Harrier’s capability. We had just gotten the Harrier. We had our first operational squadron and whether or not we went ahead and got more Harriers depended on whether or not the Secretary of Defense was convinced that the Harrier could accomplish the sortie rate that the Marine Corps said it could. I, using my analytical skills, some of which I had learned in graduate school, developed an analytical model and preached it and then oversaw a field test of the Harrier, ten aircraft from the operating squadron that the model predicted and the field test validated. I went up and talked to a bunch of three and four stars, convinced them that I had indeed shown that the, not I, the Marine Corps had indeed proven that they could fly the sortie rate that they said they could.

RV: Did they buy it?

JA: Oh, yes. Look at us.

RV: So you were the impetus of the Harrier.
JA: I was a captain/major at the time, so ‘impetus’ is not the right word. But it’s captains and majors and lieutenants that do the work, do the muscle work and I was the guy who was in charge of making sure that the muscle work got done.

RV: How long were you at Quantico?

JA: 2 ½ years.

RV: Until ’74.

JA: Until ’73, middle of ’73. I was there from January ’71 till June of ’73.

RV: Okay. So this is where initially you witnessed the withdrawal of the United States and then subsequently the fall of the country later. Where did you go from Quantico?

JA: I was at test pilot school when the country fell. In June of ’73 I went back to the Marine Corps air station New River and I became the operations officer of the Cobra squadron at New River. I was there from June of ’73 till December of ’74. I cut that tour short to go to the Navy Test Pilot School in 1975.

RV: Let’s talk about the war and we’ll continue with your military career if that’s okay.

JA: Sure.

RV: We’ve talked a little bit about overall policy and strategy and you’ve talked about using more weaponry, more men, more everything. Is that what you would recommend to have done it differently? What could the United States do better and do differently to have won that war?

JA: I’m going to inject the Arick philosophy of oversimplification. What we should have done – and everybody said this back then. Give us more guns, bullets and people. Let’s go in and take and hold territory. You’ve got to put boots on the ground. At least in the Vietnam era, we had to put boots on the ground in order to win. We couldn’t, we took great pride I guess and indeed appropriately in beating back Viet Cong or a North Vietnamese unit that was on top of a hill and saying, ‘We’ve got the hill,’ and then picking up and moving somewhere else and of course they came back the next day or the next week. Continuously they did that. That was why we lost the war, as far as I’m concerned. We did not have enough people over there to put enough boots on the ground to take and hold territory or to take and stake claim to territory with some meaning.
Today, literally, today, we can actually do better at not having boots on the ground because of our air power and technology. Back then and as in the Second World War, we needed to push the enemy off and hold the enemy off. Without many, many more troops, that was not going to happen and obviously it didn’t. (inaudible)

RV: What could the people in Washington have done differently?

JA: We as the voters could have gotten somebody in the White House that was a little bit more sensitive to the demographics of the area and the military requirement. I think the best thing Lyndon Johnson ever did for the Vietnam War was to not run again. What was the question again?

RV: What could the folks in Washington have done differently besides leaving office?

JA: (Chuckling) I’m not sure they could have done anything else just by virtue of their nature. McNamara was a numbers guy, an analytical guy. War is not analytical. There’s an analytical part to it but there’s also a seat of the pants part to it that the commanders at every level including the Commander in Chief have to be sensitive to that people on the ground have to be able to run the show. What could the people in Washington—they could have butted out. Let the commanders do what needed to be done. Now I’ve said that, General Westmoreland’s body count focus I think was…the emphasis on it was misplaced. Territory is what we needed. How many of these people have we killed? We can't kill them all. We’ll never kill all of the Asians if we want to defeat a country. We have to move them out and then bring them back in our image, if you will, to defeat them if that’s the ultimate strategic goal. Yeah. I think they could have butted out.

RV: We touched on this earlier but what lessons do you think the United States learned? And speaking from a military standpoint, you stayed in for a while after this, 20 more years. So, what did you see change if anything?

JA: What I saw change was Colin Powell in 1990 demand that we develop – and of course General Schwarzkopf – demand that we have overwhelming force before we venture forward in the next real war. Now of course, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, all took place in the interim. And we pretty much much used overwhelming force except in Somalia. That is a totally different story, sad, reflective of Vietnam as far I was concerned with the
mentality, and I guess General Powell was responsible for not sending tanks over there. Isn’t he the one that said we’re not going to use armor? At any rate, for whatever reason, maybe he learned his lesson in there and certainly he’s a great American and he did the job the right way for the first Gulf War. It would appear, he, as Secretary of State this time but the Defense Department is doing it the right way the second time. Overwhelming power. If we’re capable of it, let’s use it. If we’re going to fight a war, fight a war. Don’t pussyfoot around. That was the lesson.

RV: And you saw the changes implemented over the years?

JA: Oh, absolutely. I sure did. The training was good. We didn’t have enough money for training. There’s always been this ops tempo issue, do you have enough money for flying hours to train adequately? And I fought that as a commanding officer of a squadron and an air group or I dealt with that. I dealt with that during the interim. But when the time came, our kids were trained properly. We had the right technology. We had adequate technology. Of course, it’s better today than it was 12 years ago, much, much better and we used overwhelming force. Probably an overkill, it would appear, for the first Gulf War, but that’s just fine.

RV: Right. Better safe than sorry?

JA: Absolutely. It’s a tragedy to lose one life in a situation like that but to have had as few casualties as we did considering the scope, the first Gulf War and certainly this phase of the Gulf War is remarkable as far as I’m concerned and a testimony to using force and technology and common sense. And common sense in Washington would be to sit back, let your field commanders do the work.

RV: How much inter-service rivalry was there in Vietnam? There’s a group of historians who believe that was one of the major problems. There was a lot of rivalry between the two and it simply didn’t get squared away.

JA: Okay. That was at a much higher grade than I was. There was no inter-service rivalry as far as I was concerned at my level. When we were working with the Special Forces, when we were working with Naval Gunfire, when we were working with – very seldom did we work with the Air Force other than on the second tour when the 7th Air Force was in charge of clearing us to shoot, which was a travesty. That’s another story unto itself. I think the people that claim inter service rivalry during Vietnam have an
extremely strong point. There was inter-service rivalry but it was not at the lower levels.

It affected the lower levels by the virtue of coordination or lack of coordination sometimes but at my level I did not see any kind of inter service rivalry. I do know that the Air Force wanted to be in charge of all air in Vietnam. I do know that the Army wanted to be in charge of all land operations but when it came down to the nitty-gritty, I think it wasn’t an issue. I know it wasn’t an issue. We still didn’t in 1981, we still weren't very, we weren't good at all. We were a disaster trying to make a joint operation out of

Desert I, ’81.

RV: ’91.

JA: No. Desert I, the extract attempt in Iran.

RV: Oh, the hostages.

JA: The hostages, yeah. That is a perfect example of our inability to develop a joint operation. It was a disaster because we had to have the Marines, the Navy, the Army, and the Air Force all working the same thing and we didn’t do it right. It was just a little itty-bitty operation and cramming those four services, the four services together was tough. This time around, I marvel watching the Army and the Marine Corps doing what they are doing in concert with each other.

RV: Okay. Why don’t we take a break.

JA: Sure.

RV: Looking back at your tour, first of all, do you experience any kind of disabilities from your tour mental or otherwise? (laughter) That’s a bad way to ask that.

JA: No, that’s a wonderful way to ask it. Why no. Next question. Well, yes, as a matter of fact and I’m not exactly sure. Those disabilities are service connected and those, some of the disabilities are a result of the flying that I did and the time that I spent in Vietnam but in other places also. I do have a Purple Heart but the disabilities are not involved with the Purple Heart. I got dinged in the arm. I told the story. But as far as official – well, they’re directly related to Vietnam but no one event, if you know what I mean. If you don’t, tough because I’m not sure I can explain.

RV: So what are the disabilities?

JA: To the best of my knowledge, most of them are associated with my joints, my back, my hips, and I am having maybe some kind of a Freudian moment here, it’s not
arthritis. Anyway, most of my body as a result I guess of vibrating for 30 years in paying me back right now. My joints and my back are affected. I am having a Freudian moment because I cannot remember what it is. Tinnitus in my ears from the early dates of flying helicopters without appropriate sound suppression equipment. I like to refer to it as borderline high blood pressure and actually that’s what it is. That’s the best I can tell you.

RV: No PTSD incidents?
JA: No.

RV: When you first came back did you have anything like that?
JA: None whatsoever. I was pretty well insulated although not totally but insulated from the blood and guts of the war. I did describe the one event where my relief aircrew on Medevac got blown away and I was asked to identify the body, half of the body and I declined that. And there were other situations, too. No posttraumatic stress disorder.

RV: Looking back on your service in Vietnam, what do you think about it today? What’s your impression?
JA: I’m proud of it. I’m grateful for it. I’m even more grateful to have come back in one piece, mentally and…presumably mentally, and physically. It was a great learning experience. I’d say I’m grateful for the opportunity to have served and to have experienced it.

RV: Is there anything that you would change about your service?
JA: Not really, no. No regrets.

RV: No regrets. What do you think was the most significant thing that you learned either personally or professionally while you were there?
JA: The most significant thing I learned is don’t take anything for granted, live day to day and enjoy life and appreciate the United States of America.

RV: Okay. How do you think the war most affected your life after you left Southeast Asia?
JA: Well, psychologically, it gave me a basis to compare things to. If I was say at graduate school in the late ‘60s, I was sitting in class totally confused by what my statistics professor was trying to get through to me and saying this is the worst feeling I’ve ever had in my life, hey, wait a minute, this is not the worst place in the world. The
same thing applies. The war allows me today to put things in perspective a little more
realistically and perhaps a little more optimistically than I would be able to do if I had not
experienced Vietnam.

RV: Can you expand on that?

JA: I gave you the example of sitting in a classroom thinking the world is going to
come to an end because I have no clue what this professor is telling me and no, it’s not
going to come to an end. We’re going to get through this just like we got through
something else. We have kids get sick and I know that there is a light at the end of the
tunnel. There are peaks and valleys and I’ll throw clichés at you all day on that. I’m
better able to look beyond the stresses of the current time frame to what lies beyond and
that’s what we did a lot when we were in combat.

RV: For the younger generation today, Vietnam is ancient history. They literally
can't find Vietnam on the map let alone know kind of why and where and who and all
that. What would you tell the younger generation today about the Vietnam War?

JA: I would tell them that it was a period of time in United States history when we
learned a lot about ourselves. I would say that the military, again, I would stress this
probably isn’t totally objective, was a strong military, a talented and dedicated military
that did what they were asked to do in exceptional fashion for the most part. However,
America, the United States, overall had a humility check; we discovered what we could
do. We discovered what we couldn’t do. We discovered what we should do and what we
shouldn’t do. And for that we came out a stronger and more powerful country.

RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in the United States?

JA: Only through the Board here and then not personally.

RV: What do you think about Vietnam today, or do you?

JA: I don’t. I do because and I will give you proof of it. I’m interested in the
Vietnam Archive. I’m interested in the Vietnam Center. One reason that I am grateful for
being associated with both is that its helping me learn a little bit about the background of
a time that was very, very instrumental in my life. But as far as, I don’t think about
Vietnam today.

RV: What about the modern Vietnam?
JA: I’m grateful that we made the decision to start trading with Vietnam. I’d like to see more industry go into Vietnam for their sake and perhaps ours. I’m grateful for the relationship that Dr. Reckner, and this is not PR, but I am very grateful for the relationship that Dr. Reckner and his staff and others have developed with the Vietnamese. I think in the long run it will be a very fruitful relationship that we have between ourselves and Vietnam. I’ve got to tell you one little side story. I wish I could remember, I believe Dr. Reckner was instrumental in it, but there was a former Marine that was on the staff at the Embassy in North Vietnam or in Vietnam. During the Marine Corps birthday, a staff member Marine, perhaps former, I can't remember. I wish I could. Anyway, this Marine/former Marine sent me a letter and some mementoes from the Marine Corps Birthday celebration in Hanoi in 1989 or 1990 and I have that at home in a place of honor. It was amazing to me that we had a Marine Corps birthday celebration in Hanoi ever. It’s not a very interesting little story but it was very…it was poignant at the time to me. Golly, who would have ever thought at any point in time there would be a Marine Corps birthday party in Hanoi ever under any circumstances? But it’s there and we’ve moved well beyond that level and you and Dr. Reckner and the entire staff deal with the folks over there on a regular basis and I think it’s great. I love it.

RV: So expanded relations is a plus.

JA: Absolutely. If I didn’t believe in that, I wouldn’t be a member of this, of course, a very minor member of this organization.

RV: Tell me about books you’ve read on Vietnam.

JA: None. Very few.

RV: Why?

JA: I don’t read a lot if you believe that.

RV: I don’t believe that.

JA: I know. When I read I like to throw my mind totally out of gear. I’m reading Clive Cussler right now. Are you familiar with his work? Tom Clancy, John Grisham, political fiction, Flynn. I just have never found it particularly relaxing to read about Vietnam.

RV: Is it because of your service there or just in general?
JA: It’s more of an academic drill as far as I’m concerned and when I read I like to read for non-academic reasons unless of course I’m taking a course or I’m going for a degree or something and it’s gloves off. What you have just done is uncover probably my primary one of my principle flaws and that is I don’t read enough at all. And we tried to teach our kids to the contrary and did a reasonably good job of that. But I was never taught to read, I just have never enjoyed reading other than under totally mind numbing circumstances, Clive Cussler.

RV: Well, you read what you want to read and that works for you so that’s what’s important.

JA: Shallow but true.

RV: I don’t know if I’d call it shallow. How about movies on Vietnam?

JA: I’ve probably seen most of them if not all of them.

RV: Tell me about what your impressions are, your feelings are about them.

JA: The first one I saw was, I believe if I’ve got the time frame right, was *Green Berets*, and I saw that between Vietnam tours. I saw that in the late ’60s. I don’t recall whether it was out then. I was fascinated just simply by the, just to see how Hollywood depicted Vietnam. I can remember vividly my wife, I had a bruise on my arm at the end of the movie, not really. I should have had a bruise on my arm at the end of the movie, my wife complaining to me about, ‘Stop talking.’ The scenes were not jungle scenes. They were North Carolina foliage scenes that were supposed to be Vietnam. I thought it was done rather well, considering. Moving on to *Full Metal Jacket* I thought that was an excellent movie if you get past the profanity in the beginning, although I thought the beginning – maybe we talked about this – I thought the beginning with the DI was absolutely one of the most gripping scenes I had ever seen in my life if you get past the profanity.

RV: As a Marine that hit home with you.

JA: Oh, absolutely. I thought that was wonderful in quotes, ‘wonderful’. But the acting, the talent that the guy who played the DI….

RV: Lee Army.

JA: Yes, yes, yes, yes. I should remember his name forever. At any rate, he did a magnificent job. ‘I love the smell of napalm in the morning.’
RV: *Apocalypse Now.*

JA: *Apocalypse Now* I thought was the single movie that depicted the mood of the war and the various moods of the war as well as any movie I saw. It was depressing, dark, stupid, everything from the dancers being extracted from the stage, which I didn’t see any extractions like that but I saw crazy people around stages with the USO performers and other types of performers acting crazy. I saw people like, ‘I love the smell of napalm in the morning,’ that were totally engrossed in themselves and were nuts and of course I saw others that were brave and honorable. How did the movie start? It started with the guy in the hotel room. I saw that. It showed as many as the moods of Vietnam as well as I saw in any other Hollywood depictions. *Platoon* was good.

RV: What do you think about that?

JA: I can’t remember very many things about that other than the fact that it took them through boot camp all the way through the war there.

RV: They opened the movie with getting out of the back of a C-130. Charlie Sheen’s character the Cherry getting out and then processing, seeing the coffins, seeing the veterans leaving and coming in and joining a platoon and going out that day on a patrol.

JA: I don’t recall.

RV: Army infantry basically.

JA: I saw the movie. I enjoyed it. I guess I have no real opinion of it other than it was a good movie. I mean, it was reasonably well done.

RV: Did you see *We Were Soldiers*?

JA: Yes. Just recently, as a matter of fact. That movie was exceptional from the point of view of the ties between the guys in uniform and the families back home and the notifications being given and things like that. The helicopter scenes were bogus. They drove me crazy.

RV: Tell me why. I’ve heard this before, but tell me why.

JA: You have heard it before? Oh.

RV: I have heard this before. Yes, sir.

JA: Okay. Good. Then I’m not totally nuts for that reason. Flying in very, very close formation, low to the ground, coming through over the explosion. I don’t know
whether they were their explosions that they had caused, but just coming in like that and
swooping in and swooping out, that didn’t happen that way. I mean, one helicopter might
do that on a regular basis in a hot zone. We used to do that all the time, but not two
together. That’s crazy. First of all, you run into each other because one guy takes fire
from one side, the other guy takes fire from the other side and you break into each other
or you’re trapped. You have to continue going in the direction you were headed initially.
You can't zigzag. I thought the rest of the movie was well done. And of course I was not
involved in the war at that stage of the game.

RV: So you don’t have any kind of aversion to seeing depictions of the Vietnam
War on the big screen.

JA: No. Absolutely not. The only aversion I have is to the possibility to me being
clobbered by my wife if I talk too much and complain about the movie. No. None at all.

RV: Have you ever been to the Wall in Washington?

JA: Yes, as a matter of fact I saw the Wall every day I went running while I was
stationed at the Pentagon and I have visited the Wall. This is going to be somewhat
irreverent I’m afraid. I have friends whose names are on the Wall obviously and I miss
them and I wish they hadn’t died in the war. I wish there was something that could have
been done. Emotions that people display at the Wall are, I don’t understand it. Why don’t
you just go there and stand and reflect. Why do you have to break down and cry? And
I’m talking not of moms and dads and sisters and brothers. I’m talking of friends and
others. I mean, I guess the Wall is doing what it was intended to do and that is generate
thought, reflection, memories, but when I see a guy dressed in fatigues, long beard,
medals all over his fatigues, long hair, go up to the Wall, cry, I don’t understand that. I’ll
leave it at that. This guy may be suffering from posttraumatic stress syndrome and I may
be totally irreverent and out of line by saying that, but the degree of emotion that is
generated by the Wall in certain people is just overdone, I believe.

RV: Have you talked to others in the military about that, other veterans?

JA: Sure.

RV: What do they say about that?

JA: Nothing other than the fact that the Wall is the Wall and it brings back
memories and people that I talk to don’t emote that much about the Wall. I think the
Wall, the traveling Wall and all the things associated with it and its remembrances of the
war, the remembrances that are associated with it are all good. I mean appropriate. When
it first was built, I thought it was absolutely horrible. Somebody’s making a joke.
(coughing, sniffling) This is not emotion. I’m getting over a cold. Really, honest to God.
If I cry I’ll let you know. Okay, the Wall, when it was initially erected I thought was a
cruel act because it was dark. It was black. It was somber. It didn’t show anything about
the war. It just showed the deaths associated with the war. And it wasn’t until later that
they put the statues up and did a little bit more landscaping around the area that I thought
it was a lot better. I was absolutely amazed at the response. I was relieved but mostly
amazed at the response of people to the Wall. I thought it would be shunned, which was
very naïve. I’ve done some really naïve things in my past as we’ve heard earlier, but the
emotions involved with going to the Wall, I think, except for a few, are overstated. That’s
presumptuous of me to say but that’s my honest feeling. I mean going up to a wall with
my best friend’s name on it, personally, tears are not called for as far as I’m concerned.
Memories, thoughts, regrets, happy memories, all fine. But the outward display of
emotion, it continues to amaze me.

RV: What kind of memorial would you prefer to see there?
JA: Today, I think the memorial that is there is appropriate and is well received
and the vast majority of Americans if not all Americans view it as an appropriate tribute
to those who served, those who lived and those who died.

RV: So you’re over the blackness of it.
JA: Yes, I am over it. The only thing that lingers is the public display of emotion
that is elicited. That amazes me and I suspect one day if I live to be 100, I will be over
that too. But when I go to the Wall, I feel emotion. But I don’t break down and cry.
That’s me.

RV: Before we move on to the rest of your military career, is there anything else
you want to talk about regarding Vietnam? We can come back to this obviously.
JA: I’ve thought about this since we were winding down. Absolutely not. You’ve
asked me questions about final opinions or impressions and lessons learned and I can't
thing of anything else to add to a wind down on that particular subject.
RV: Well, good. We left off in your career and we’ll go at your discretion here and
as in as much detail as you’d like to go, but you were going to Navy Test Pilot School.
JA: Yes.
RV: And where was this again?
JA: At the Naval Air Station, Patuxant River, Maryland. Southern Maryland.
RV: How long were you there?
JA: I was in the test pilot school for a year. I graduated in January of 1995.
RV: ’75.
JA: Thank you. I graduated December of 1975. I entered there in January. It’s a
yearlong course.
RV: What were you doing there? What kind of test pilot school was it?
JA: Well the Navy Test Pilot School is one of three primary test pilot schools in
the world. The Empire Test Pilot School is in Great Britain. The Air Force Test Pilot
School is in the middle of the Mojave Desert in California and then Navy Test Pilot
School. That’s where, the Air Force and the Navy Test Pilot schools, is where all
astronauts are initially trained. The test pilot school exists to train experienced pilots in
evaluating new aircraft and new aircraft systems. So I finished that course. I stayed there
and I was then transferred at Patuxant River over to the Rotary Wing Aircraft Test
Directorate. Don’t try to say that three times in a row, or I can’t. I was there for an
additional two and half years. While I was there, I tested some systems in helicopters and
my primary tasks were to participate on the Army test pilot teams at Edward Air Force
Base in California, where the Air Force Test Pilot School is I must add, on the initial test
of the two prototypes that ultimately developed into the Apache. This was the advanced
attack helicopter program. So I was fortunate, very fortunate to be involved in that
particular test program because it involved testing, in my case, the Bell version of the
advanced attack helicopter prototype. There was a then at the time, it was Hughes and
then ultimately Hughes was taken over by McDonnell Douglas, but the Hughes version
of the prototype advanced attack helicopter ultimately won that particular competition
and went on to evolve into the Apache helicopter. The reason it was good was because it
was a true new technology flying airframe and there aren’t that many opportunities for
test pilots, particularly rotary wing test pilots to test brand new airframes. From there I
went into testing the AH-1T, the new Cobra and that was also a major opportunity to test it as the new airframe. When I finished my test piloting days, in the summer of 1979 I was transferred to…sorry, summer of 1978, I was transferred to Okinawa where I served on the staff of the 3rd Marine Division ground staff for a year overseas tour. I came back from that particular tour and was stationed at Camp Pendleton California. For a year I was the MAG 39 group operations officer. Following the group job I took over HMA 169, Marine Attack Helicopter squadron 169, 25 T model Cobras. I stayed in that position for a year and a half until May of 1981, June of 1981 when I was transferred to the National War College in Washington. I served a year at the National War College.

RV: How was that?

JA: That was great. That was one of the best-kept secrets in the military, an academic opportunity to deal with national security issues on a super top-level scale.

RV: What rank were you at the time?

JA: I was a lieutenant colonel. There were colonels and Navy captains there. I’ll tell you the Chief of Staff of the Air Force right now, John Jumper was a classmate. Chuck Krulack, the past commandant of the Marine Corps was a classmate. I can’t remember his first name, but Peck is his last name, a civilian guy you see on the talking head shows from time to time, Ambassador was in my class. Also, a fellow by the name of Golinsky or something like that who had been a hostage in Iran was in the class. So there were a lot of very, very interesting people with interesting backgrounds and interesting futures, too.

RV: Now, you’re on the career path obviously to general officer at that point.

JA: That’s pretty much it. Not everybody, but the folks that go to the National War College had a shot at it if they don’t step over themselves after that.

RV: Was the curriculum really challenging?

JA: No, because it was fascinating. Yes, it was challenging because it was a whole new aspect that I was being confronted with and attempting to learn, but it was enjoyable and educational and the people that we associated with there were just fascinating people.

RV: So you were there for a year.
JA: A year, yes. 1982 I graduated from there and I went to the Pentagon for three years. During that three years I served on the staff of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Program Analysis and Evaluation, PA&E. My primary job was to oversee certain programs. One of the programs was the HumV that was just coming up. Another program was the AHIP. I can't remember what AHIP stands for but if you look at television nowadays, you'll see a little helicopter flying around with the big ball on top of it. It’s the eyes of the Apache, if you will. My boss, my immediate boss was dead set against the AHIP at the time. Obviously it lived happily ever after. Another job was to be the Marine Corps on the scene in the Secretary of Defense office to cover the JVX, which was the program that has evolved now into the Osprey. The JVX was the very, very first element, it was the gleam in the eye of the Marine Corps at the very beginning. And the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Program Analysis and Evaluation at the time, David Chu, brilliant individual, was dead set against the concept of the JVX.

RV: Why?

JA: He said we don’t have the technology to develop an airframe that can fly safely with tilt rotors. He was right. He was absolutely right at the time because the stresses that the wing undergoes when you rotate the nacells for the rotors/propellers, could not, the wing could not withstand the stresses. It would collapse unless it was a very, very heavy wing. In the mid-80s, we developed an epoxy wing. I think I’m using the right terms. Don’t quote me on any of these, please. At any rate, a lightweight wing that could withstand the stresses better and that’s what we’re flying today. So despite Secretary Chaney at the time, Secretary Chaney, he was against it because my boss was against it, Assistant Secretary. Despite their misgivings the program evolved obviously and now we’re trying to get the thing back in the air.

RV: Its quite controversial.

JA: Extremely controversial and appropriately so. I think the Marine Corps, by virtue of the fact that we, I use the term loosely, but the Marine Corps saw fit to fabricate maintenance records openly, puts us in a position to be closely scrutinized. At any rate, that was primarily what I worked on during those three years.

RV: Let me go ahead and this. We’re going to change out disks. Okay. Why don’t you go ahead?
JA: In 1985 I ended my tour, summer of ’85 I ended my tour at the Pentagon and was transferred to Marine Corps Air Station New River again where I took over as the executive officer of Marine Aircraft Group 29. I was in that job for a year. At the end of that year in 1986, summer, I took over as Group Commander and served in that capacity for two years.

RV: How did you enjoy that, the leadership really at the top of the group?

JA: That was wonderful and the main reason was I had a squadron of Hueys and Cobras. I had three squadrons of H-46s. I had a squadron of 53’s. I had a squadron of OV-10s, fixed wing, all under me as well as the support squadrons which meant I got to fly anything I wanted to and be with kids that were just learning to fly and be with kids that really, really knew how to fly the machines quite well. That was a great experience.

RV: What rank were you?

JA: I was a colonel at the time. At the end of the tour I was selected a Brigadier General as my tour was winding down. At any rate, I left New River in the summer of 1988 and went to Cherry Point where I took over as the Assistant Wing Commander for the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing which was self gratifying because whereas I had 1,600 people and five or six types of aircraft in the group, I now had probably 15 or 16 types of aircraft including C-130s, Harriers, A-6s, F-18s. I guess that’s it. But at any rate, lots of different airplanes and helicopters to fly in that capacity.

RV: Did you do any deployment planning for any of the activities the Marine Corps was involved in during the ‘80s?

JA: No. I did not. I did predeployment training for the kids that were involved, the squadrons that were involved. When I had the air group every year, every six months, one of the 46 squadrons would become a composite squadron that would have Hueys, Cobras, and Harriers. They were starting to deploy Harriers at the time with the composite squadron with the Marine Expeditionary Units. So we would prepare that squadron, those folks for deployment to wherever they were going to go. So predeployment planning, not the strategies and tactics, well not strategies, but the tactics involved, aviation tactics involved.

RV: How did you enjoy North Carolina?
JA: I loved it because the jobs that I had in North Carolina were the best you could get. Eastern North Carolina is a different world, a different place to live than certainly Western North Carolina in the research triangle but it was great. We lived on the base both times both at Cherry Point and at New River. Actually, when we were at New River, we lived at quarters at Camp Lejune, which was nice. The base is a wonderful base.

RV: So how long were you there at Cherry Point?
JA: Two years. I was there until 1990.
RV: You had made Brigadier General by this point.
JA: Yes, I was promoted to Brigadier General in I believe July of 1988 after I had left New River. I stayed Assistant Wing Commander at Cherry Point until 1990 during which time I flew very actively in lots of different airplanes and helicopters. But in the summer of 1990, my number was up. I had been in an FMF, Fleet Marine Force, position flying capacity for five straight years, unusual for a guy of my rank. So they said, ‘You’ve got to come to Washington’. So, the day I checked into headquarters Marine Corps in Washington, D.C., summer of 1990, Saddam Hussein moved into Kuwait. I underwent some of the most difficult withdraws in my life. I was the most well trained aviation Brigadier General most prepared to go to the Persian Gulf and fight a war of anybody anywhere in the whole world. Obviously I’m not totally objective in that regard, but by certainly five years of operational flying I was. I was in charge of facilities and services for the Marine Corps. That was my job, payback. As I watched Desert Storm, Desert Shield, Desert Storm from my plush office in Washington, D.C. I was in charge of commissaries. I was in charge of facilities, building construction. I was testifying in front of Congress about families for the Marine Corps but I wasn’t the world’s greatest Cobra pilot anymore.

RV: How’d you handle that.
JA: Well. I did my job well. I enjoyed being in Washington. That’s my hometown so we enjoyed being back closer to friends and family. But I was a trained killer and being the facilities and services guy for the Marine Corps was just not my cup of tea at the time. But again, I would honestly level at this stage of the game, I did the job extremely well I thought and others did too. But at the end of my two years there having
missed the war, I did not get selected for two stars and I opted to retire after 30 years. So

RV: You were passed over just one time
JA: No. Passed over twice.
RV: Twice. And that was the signal.
JA: Yes. Absolutely.
RV: Why do you think you were passed over.
JA: Well, I just think that…..(chuckles).
RV: You don’t have to answer that if you don’t want to.
JA: No. I’d be happy to. The first answer is I have no idea because I’m such a
great Marine. But one of the things that I did not enjoy about being a general officer was
sitting in the front row and at the head table. I’m not that kind of guy. When I give a
speech, I work very hard at it. I script it. I don’t read it but I prepare for it and there are
others that you see everyday that can walk up in front of a crowd and give a moving
speech on something that is meaningful, humorous and useful in a moment’s notice. I had
to work too hard at that. I did not particularly enjoy the limelight. I suspect that that
probably showed. And I don’t have great hair and killer abs. Even in uniform I didn’t.
Obviously I have regressed somewhat after the fact. The fact that I did not enjoy the
limelight, I avoided public speaking when I could, probably showed and is probably the
primary reason why it was time for me to get out of the Marine Corps. I enjoyed being a
general officer but the hardest rank of my career was general officer.

RV: Really? Why? Because of what you just said?
JA: Yeah. Probably pretty much because of what I just said – the limelight, being
up front, doing all that stuff. Now, I enjoyed being president and chief operating officer
of Boys Ranch, but I avoided being the chief executive office who is in the limelight. I
like to work with people, do the job, and get on with it, not characteristic of a general
officer.

RV: Looking back at your Marine Corps career, what’s the Marine Corps meant
to you?
JA: Everything. Beyond God, country, and family, the Marine Corps is my life. It
was my life obviously for 30 years and it taught me everything I know virtually. I
enjoyed it. I’m grateful for the time I served and I’m proud of the time I served and I look
upon it as a wonderful opportunity.

RV: Is there anything else that would like to add to the interview?

JA: I don’t believe so. I appreciate the opportunity to talk as long as I have in as
much detail as you have asked. I probably ought to apologize to whoever is listening to
this right now for the length or the extent of detail that I’ve provided. I’ve enjoyed the
discussion and the opportunity to record.

RV: Great. Thank you, sir, very much and this will end the interview with
General John Arick.