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Interview
John Hopkins
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Interview conducted by Lenore Fenn
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JH: My name is John Hopkins. I was born on Nantucket. We moved a lot, seven or eight times—California, Maine, Worcester, Mass, Illinois. My family was kind of a middle class family. My parents were educated and I've got a college education myself. They're Irish descent.

INT: What were your family's politics? Had your dad been in the service?

JH: Yes, but it wasn't any kind of issue. He was in the Navy at the end of World War II, met my mother that way. Politics? Wasn't an issue. Liberal, conservative—no sense of politics. Life went on. They divorced when I was fourteen. My family life was a bit of a mess.

INT: Did they vote for JFK [John F. Kennedy]?

JH: I'm not real sure. I remember Goldwater, too.

INT: Growing up, did you have any particular religious or political affiliation?

JH: None. My only sense of politics in the early to mid 1960's—'64, '65, '66—definitely in high school. "You're going to Saigon U." You knew you would end up there. I knew of Kennedy's death, the Cuban missile crisis, knew the sense in the world of potentially huge conflict—getting under the desk for nuclear attacks (we practiced that). There was a sense of doom etc. But as a kid I was interested in girls, in having fun as opposed to war, but there was a sense of a potentially great collision.

INT: How and when did you go in the service—your family's feelings about it?

JH: Getting into the service was a way to get out of... I was in a bit of trouble, drinking too much, being pretty wild. The police put me off Nantucket and told me I couldn't come back. I thought that by changing my geography I could change my whole life. On the spur of the moment I came home on Sunday, and Monday went to the recruiters. By the end of the day I was signed up for the physical and within a couple of weeks I was in the army.

INT: How did your family feel about that?

JH: My mother was glad. She knew I was in a lot of trouble and she couldn't keep me under control. I think she was relieved I was going someplace and couldn't continue what I was doing. I enlisted and was promised a job that would not land me in Vietnam but Europe. I wanted to be a bulldozer operator, or something. It also would give me a trade! The recruiter said those slots were all filled, and gave me a MOS (a number that gives your occupation). "Oh! You're going to Vietnam!" "I'm not going!" But aerial reconnaissance—you go nowhere but Vietnam. I was a stupid eighteen-year-old. He was directed to fill quotas. He told me a little lie.

INT: Where did you train?

JH: Fort Jackson, Fort Watchuka in Arizona, an air reconnaissance school. It was so backed up we sat around for six months without any training. It was a big mistake, sitting around. There was some anti-war sentiment from California etc.—"Country Joe and the Fish." Every morning we played the "Fixing To Die Rag." Our company motto was "Crash, burn and die." No one was eager to go to war but we all knew we would go. Once we were in advanced training there was a big void—nobody was coming back. Technological war was relatively new with infrared cameras, side looking airborne radar. Now in the Iraq war you could tell when somebody sneezed. Smart bombs. We were 1ooking at the battlefield with

sensors because the more you know about the enemy the easier it is to kill them. That's the general premise.

INT: Were there whiffs of anti-war sentiment?

JH: Cynicism was rampant but it was mostly anti-military. The bulk of us were relatively well educated. There were a couple of blacks, a couple of Hispanics, but everyone else was white-middle-class with relatively high level schooling. So there was a bit of elitism. And a big cynicism: this is not for us to be doing! The dropouts from college, a lot of not fitting into the military realm, antagonism between the officers and the enlisted men… there were lots of shake-downs for drugs and guns, general anti-military feeling, songs about coming home in a box—not a good philosophy for military life. We were scared to death coming out of Basic. Once we were over we saw it was mostly bluff. The worst they could do to you was take you to war, so what was the worst they could do to you? Take you to war! If officers on formation in the early morning (when it was pitch black) would give orders, people would say, "Fuck you!" It was pitch black. It was constant. Eventually we got into training and got involved. We had to study, about Doppler, navigation, running equipment.

INT: What did officers do to provoke anger?

JH: Mostly they were eighteen, nineteen, twenty—like we were. They'd been to Officer's Training School for six months, and they were going to give us orders? This is a joke! Probably you could kick their butt. We were afraid of the old sergeants, they were tough—not to mess with—but not young officers. They were so frustrated—they didn't have any authority with us. The worst they could do was give you extra duty or something. I don't know, there was a whole realm of rebellion at that time in society, and this was part of it. Listen to a twenty-year-old telling you what to do? [Laughter.] No way!

INT: What were you scared of in Basic Training?

JH: We had these old sergeants. They were a terror. They almost lived with you. They would physically pit one group against another, pit the strong against the weak. You didn't want to be labeled weak because then you would take a tremendous amount of abuse. There was a Puerto Rican kid in Basic who pretended not to speak English. He would drop his equipment. We had to drag him. And people would kick him because he wasn't holding up his own. At the end of Basic he was kicked out. As he walked off he said, "See you later!" And he didn't speak English! Some of the weak would antagonize the drill sergeant. We had training with pads on sticks for bayonet practice and they'd put these guys in between, and they got really bloodied so they couldn't stand up anymore. By the end of Basic we saw this was crap. Their terror and trying to get you to obey was sort of instilled in you but also was a little bit of a joke. The southern sergeants hated Yankees. They wanted to intimidate you That was their motivation. In the infantry they kept it up. In our realm they gave it up. It was a bit more of an elite situation. We waited six months with time on our hands. No one was in charge. We might have to paint a few rocks. There were no terrors. We drank a lot, and I started to smoke marijuana. Basic obedience faded. A bunch of us refused to do KP one time. In the infantry you would have been court martialed and sent to jail. But they didn't punish us like they should have.

INT: Advanced training?

JH: We ended Basic in November. Training started in January or February. We got out in May 1968, had thirty days leave, and went to Vietnam on Mother's Day

INT: Your role, responsibilities, experience there?

JH: We had been trained to use electronic equipment in a small plane, two of us, a pilot and me, with cameras and side-looking radar. We were looking for vehicles, any motion, canoes, anything moving. The heat from engines was picked up on infrared. If a truck stopped, campfires, trails—human activity generates heat. Military intelligence took the information we gathered in the air. We also did visuals, mostly hunting. Anyone we saw in the area was game. We directed artillery against them. The premise of our mission was to direct B-25 strikes against Viet Cong and MVA units. I didn't pay much attention. You might fly two or three a day or night. Basically we just hunted and tracked units flying out from a small base camp northeast of Saigon. We constantly flew the area and I got to know it pretty well. Actually the final assault in the war came down that road, Highway 1, through every village I knew, in about three days. Resistance by that time was almost nil. The biggest thing in the whole war that turned my head around—basically I was just doing my job, and I was pretty good at it. It wasn't big war; it was primarily small-scale stuff in "secured areas." Then in the Tet Offensive in 1969 where full scale units came out of nowhere in an area that was supposed to be secure including villages around our base camp—I had thought the other side was a small group of people! We flew over small village squares where army units just appeared. Tanks were popping up. Boom, boom! It changed my thoughts. It wasn't true that all the people were on our side with only a few crazies against us. Maybe I started to think a little about what I was doing.

INT: How far from your base was the enemy line?

JH: It wasn't the sense there were enemy lines. From the base of the mountains to us was fifty or sixty miles; it wasn't great distances we were dealing with. It's a teeny, tiny country. You could fly from one side to the other in ten minutes. Ten to twenty miles north of Saigon there was a little

village split between the VC [Viet Cong] and ARVN [South Vietnamese Army]. Technically, everything was controlled by the ARVN. The VC were in total control on one side and ARVN on the other. A "secure" village! There were prostitutes, drugs, everything. They let Americans in because Americans had cash. It was safer on the VC side because the MPs [Military Police] weren't going to get you. You weren't supposed to be in the village. No one would kill you on the VC side because they wanted the money.

INT: What about the role of drugs as you saw it?

JH: I'm not sure if the military had a role. From my time in Arizona drugs were present. I had never done a drug until I was in the military—except alcohol. It's just there. Marijuana was easy in Arizona, always there—rampant. The military would also give you drugs. If you wanted speed… We had someone who was overweight and he went to the medic and came back with a big jar of "black beauties" that lasted our platoon four or five days. He went back three or four times before they said, "Hey!" I got Darvon for an ear infection and they gave me a jar that big [gestures]. You could go to a Vietnamese pharmacy and get amphetamines in a bottle. Lots of speed, opium—no heroin. You either drank heavily or did drugs, or you drank heavily *and* did drugs. Nobody wasn't doing something. Officers drank a lot. My unit of a hundred twenty-four guys split evenly between "juicers" and "heads." Two or three older officers in their forties, two older sergeants in their forties or fifties...everybody else was twenty two or under, including officers—all young. War is boring, primarily. You flew a mission straight, or high—it didn't matter. You did your job. The rest of the time you were free...a lot of free time, so we did a lot of drugs, a lot of alcohol. That's what life was like in aviation units.

INT: Did you fly regularly with the same pilots?

JH: No, we just floated through what people's schedules were. Some we didn't like to fly with. Some were cowards. Personalities came into play. We didn't like some. Mostly we just rotated.

INT: Did the way pilots flew make your work harder or easier?

JH: It wasn't a major issue.

INT: You referred to "hunting," that "everything that moved was game?"

JH: They had free fire zones. Basically they forced everyone from the countryside, from tiny hamlets into camps. There were areas where they could still farm. Outside those areas anyone that moves is the enemy—unless they're wearing our uniforms. In free fire zones you'd shoot anyone you saw.

We had three, four, five base camps up through this area, each one with artillery units. They had maps and could coordinate... If they were spotted they'd disappear. You had to guess which direction they had gone. We were probably very bad at it, but you lay down fire as quickly as you could into where these people were. If they were on a river in canoes they were in trouble.

INT: Who were "they?"

JH: Who were they? I don't know. Mostly enemy, clearly armed sometimes. It wasn't anything you had to think about—an enemy, in black, in an area where they shouldn't be. So you just directed fire against them. It was your job. I did that for nine months with no qualms, no guilt. And then that whole business of armies showing up. Some people sent boxes of books to our unit. Buried—hidden in the middle, obviously—were a copy of *Evergreen*, a radical magazine from San Francisco, and a book called "The History of Vietnam." I got hold of both of those. The *Evergreen* magazine had an article on Vietnam, on torture. And about Berkeley—they had shot

some students way back in 1968, in People's Park. That was all news to me. We knew nothing about these things. I read these. The history of Indochina was a real eye-opener, about Diem and things that had gone on before. Other than that we were just dealing with gooks, and the Vietnamese were these communists coming in and taking over their country and we were trying to protect the people. After you read books like that you learn that's not the case. There's a whole long history here. So it's not that I became anti-war. I became, "Jeez, what am I doing here? Is this right? I don't know if this is right. There definitely are a lot of lies here. I don't know if this is right."

The chronology of things is often very mixed up for me over there because I was heavily into drugs and not always sure what came first in events. But at some point I just decided I wasn't going to fly anymore. I'd heard someplace that flight was voluntary, and if you didn't want to do it, you didn't have to do it. So one day I was up with a pilot and he was messing with an M-50 machine gun, and one thing you didn't want to be near was an M-50 machine gun. I'd called the guy a coward before for not doing this, and not going in, right? And then this pilot was just messing around where we knew there was an M-50, and I knew I did not want to die here, pal, now I've got no reason…this is definitely not something I want to die for—I knew that. So when we got back from the mission I said "I'm done, I'm not going to do this anymore," and I walked out the door and that was it. I never did do it again. And they threatened me and did all kinds of—you know, made my life as miserable as possible, but it did turn out it was a voluntary duty and I didn't have to do it.

INT: After that?

JH: I drove a fuel truck with two black guys. After that I went right to the bottom of the realm and they gave me the worst duties they could find,

and that was okay. Because once the initial…everybody was hostile to me: "You can't do this! How can you do this?" I'd be up in front of the commanding officer like every day, and he said, "You can't do this, you're going to be court martialed!" And I just stuck with it. I said, "I know I don't have to do this," I pray I don't have to do this, and I stuck it out and it turned out okay.

INT: How about other people who were seeing what you did? Were they beginning to wonder?

JH: I don't remember people saying, "Oh, jeez, what are we doing?" or lamenting or anything like that. It was a very personal thing. The military is restrained, plus men know not to talk about things...if you think you've got some kind of a weakness. Like I didn't feel any commitment to anything. I just knew that I personally did not want to die for this thing [that] I have all these kinds of questions about now, and that other people must have some kind of questions, but I was not going to die for this. It was a selfish, not a kind of moral position I was taking. I am not going to die for a lot of lies, something I don't believe in. I don't believe I'm fighting for my country. I don't believe I'm [in] some moral crusade against communism.

There were a lot of things I saw. We went on ammo runs down to Long Bien and we'd take three or four trucks and we'd go down and pick up ammunition and fruits and go into the big base at Long Bien. One day we had to go up to someplace and somehow we ended up driving through suburbia. We just drove up through this place that had ranch houses and pools and manicured lawns and paved streets and it was just like driving through some suburban development. We're saying, "What the hell is this?" And it turns out that it's all these generals and higher ranked officers who are just living in real nice areas.

In my unit we had what were called C and C ships—Command and Control ships. They used to go down every morning and they used to pick these guys up. They were war commuters. They just flew around, commanding from these helicopters—like in "Apocalypse Now," remember that movie? There was a guy with a German shepherd, remember?—where the helicopters came in and they're playing Wagner or something?—and this guy is a real cowboy?. Well, there was a general who was a cowboy like that, and he took down five guys with him in a helicopter because he liked to strap himself into a harness, lean out and use an M-79 to hunt people with. So he'd have the helicopter come in real low. And they took a rocket into it and all five guys who were on that plane went down with him because he was a stinking cowboy.

INT: Was there antagonism with officers?

JH: We heard rumors that five or six officers were killed in one night up in Lao Cai [?] in a base camp where a unit had been chopped up in the daytime from one of these guys buzzing around in a helicopter. They—the guys on the ground that had been chopped up—came back in. There were some lower ranked officers living in hooches and they just went down the hooches and threw grenades in the hooches and killed four or five people. Whether that's a true story or not—I don't know whether it was true—but it was what we accepted as fact and reasonably good fact. In my unit somebody took a grenade and threw it into the Officer's Club. The Club is like a little hooch, and they had their own liquor cabinets and things like that. But somebody three a grenade but they didn't pull the pin, and an officer did the John Wayne thing and jumped on the grenade to save all his buddies that were in the room, and he was just the laughing stock of all the enlisted men. In fact I think he came close to killing himself because he was so overwhelmed by the fact that he had committed his life to saving...and

then he was the laughing stock… Then the Commanding Officer's hooch was burned down with a phosphorus grenade, and so there were all these kinds of antagonisms. It seemed like they escalated over that year and it didn't seem like that's the way it was when I first got there. The military discipline just disintegrated totally from 1968 to 1969. They had no control over us anymore. They were trying to use the MPs to control us at that point, and it wasn't working anymore. I think the primary reason why they actually ended up pulling out of there was because the military was disintegrating over there.

I went AWOL at one point of time, just disappeared for five days, and went up to Saigon and was just kind of hanging around there. There was a rumor up in Saigon that there was going to be a military revolt and that there was some units that were revolting. By the time I got back to the unit it was like a big story. Everyone knew the story after four or five days. I heard this in the streets of Saigon—because that's where I was—in a kind of underworld of people just like me who'd left their posts, just moving round in a military world with our own guns and things like that and without anybody really having a check on us, a hold on us. When I left and came back here I read about units just refusing to do their duty, or assassinating their own officers. It was, I think, because this general consensus that we don't want to die for what this is. "Whatever we're doing isn't right. We don't know what it is—why it isn't right—but we know it isn't right, and I'm not going to die under these circumstances. I've got to be here 365 days, and I'm going to make it." The closer you got toward the end of that, the less you were going to do. A "short timer" was a real discipline problem. New guys would come in and the short timers would sort of indoctrinate them, like, "We're over here. The officers are over there. They have very little control over us."

INT: Could you clarify about the cowboy story?

JH: That's two different stories. The cowboy, what he was doing was commanding the unit from the air. But he liked to play cowboy. He'd get down on the runners of a helicopter, get strapped in, and he liked to lean out and use an M-79, which is a grenade launcher—it launches a single grenade at a time. So he was playing cowboy, he wants to ride in and he's having fun. He's having fun, and his fun wasn't just killing other people; it ended up killing five people from my unit. The other case is what I heard about happening up at Lao Cai. It probably did happen in some way, shape or form, but I don't know. A unit had been out and they got chewed up doing things they didn't feel they should have had to do.

INT: Poorly directed?

JH: And when they came back in they got some of the officers back—that's what they were doing. There were some real...between the blacks and whites, like in the unit I was in, it was maybe ten percent black. But if you got out into the field it might be thirty, forty, fifty percent—maybe sixty to seventy percent—and you knew most of the officers were white. There were lots of antagonisms in those realms as well.

INT: Were you exposed to Agent Orange?

JH: I don't know whether I was exposed to it or not. They used defoliants, definitely. There were defoliants being used because some of the areas would lose all their leaves and stuff like that. We a couple of times flew into clouds of chemicals being dropped from planes—we just flew under them, and they were dropping chemicals. But that only happened once or twice and I don't think it was anything that. I don't have Agent Orange difficulties, I know that. It wasn't until years later, until the controversies about dioxin and all that started, that I knew anything about it. A friend of mine worked out of that realm, out of a C-130, I think, dropping

gas, chemical agents, that kind of business. He was in a base camp that was out the farthest eastern that we went. We worked with an artillery unit that was in his base camp that he worked out of. So the defoliants were in the area but it wasn't something we were exposed to that much.

INT: Was the morale different on the line than with support troops?

JH: I'm not real sure about that. Because I lived in a small base camp that was only—maybe six or seven times came under a rocket attack, had some sapper attacks. They used to probe the perimeter once in a while—that kind of base camp. You went off and you found the war. That's basically what you did. And you came back into it. You were in a relatively safe haven. You weren't confronting your enemy out in the bushes. I know the antagonism with the officers was pretty much general, and that's mostly because I've talked to other guys over the years. I'd say the attitudes were probably fairly similar, but I don't know.

INT: Anything else you want to tell us about your experience in Vietnam?

JH: I'll tell you the one thing that was the experience that terminated all desire to participate in the war, and that was an actual battle. I did not participate in what I would call battles. We found people in the woods. We put artillery on them as much as you could. Sometimes jets, primarily artillery. One day there was just up in this village called An Lok—I'm pretty sure it's An Lok, it's not real clear—but on this hill these units started coming out of the hill—enemy units—digging into the hill. It was pretty clear that something was going to come on down here. The next day when we went back there they were dug in and American units were moving in to try to drive into the village. We were working the far side of the village, directing artillery literally against anybody and everybody. It was the first time—well, you always saw people, but they were darting and they were

going—but this was a case of people flowing throughout the woods, kind of a steady stream, kind of spread out, coming out of the village. It was all old men and old women and children and very few in between people. For three or four hours I just directed artillery into that realm of people, and after that it was just like: "Jesus!" I started to feel that I was some kind of criminal, that my activities were criminal activities and I did not want to die for this. But it took a good while before I decided. I didn't adopt a quick moral position and say, "Um...not for this." But it probably was the real life thing that made everything real to me, that you're not fighting "an enemy" here all the time, you've got real, live people. Because the war that I fought was different. I'm in a plane. I call up somebody that pulls the trigger. The bullet or bomb, the artillery shell comes, say, five miles away and lands on the ground. You see the explosion. You don't feel the explosion, you don't feel any terror. Rarely did they shoot at you, because if they shot at you you'd know where they were. So their whole principle was to keep moving. Sometimes we took some flack. But that was so rare I had no great fear of dying. So it was a war of killing from a distance, which is the real horror of what war has become. Like somebody can come in, like in the Iraq war, when they wiped out a hundred thousand people on a highway that were fleeing for their lives. That's the way war was developing—it's just technology. So it isolates you, the killer, from the people who are killed, and it makes you kind of cold to the whole fact. I mean, you don't have any blood on your hands, there's nothing that's real. You don't hear the screams, you don't see people dying. It's all distant so it's easy to get high. You could get high in the plane, you could be listening to Jimi Hendrix, like the whole realm of [the film] "Apocalypse Now." Just this crazy, crazy experience you're having but you're not personally connected to that person who's going to die over there, so I stopped. I refused to fly. And I was trying to stay in

Vietnam. I didn't want to go back to the military, to the real world, because this kind of life, once you'd been here—this is life, and the real world was something you didn't want to...

So I wanted to stay and I tried to volunteer. This is that letter you saw from my commanding officer. I wanted to stay and go into a field unit because I wanted to confront people and in a way I wanted to give them a chance to kill me so we were on an equal basis of face-to-face killing of each other. Not from above type of thing. Which was a real psychological problem for me by that time—that I wanted to get out into the field and confront the enemy straight on, and in many ways give them a chance to kill me as much as I could kill them. He knew I wanted something badly, that was his way of getting back at me for calling him a coward. Because everyone in the unit knew I'd called him a coward because I did it where a number of people heard it. And he didn't like it. That was his way to get back, and prevent me from resolving a conflict that I had with myself.

INT: How much of this were you sharing with your family?

JH: I have no idea how much I shared. I wrote letters all the time and I don't know what I shared. There's a lot of confusion about some things, even what is real and what isn't real because the whole time was so involved in drugs and a generally surreal atmosphere. The rules were entirely different from what all your life you'd had rules about, right and wrong and things like that. All of them are gone, what actually happened—it's like what's real and what's not real and what's a dream, and all those kinds of things are very mixed up. A lot of it was when you came back into this country you pushed everything back—pushed it way into the back—because you were going to come back from away. You came back on a commercial plane just like you're coming back from vacation, and they set you down in San Francisco, give you a clean uniform, put you out the door within six to

eight hours, and you're standing in an airport! And everyone else's life is just going on, right? And they're all just functioning, and…excuse me, don't know why I'm ups—but anyway…

INT: Take your time.

JH: Anyway, they put you into this airport, and all you want to do is get out of your uniform, just get out of your uniform because people are even hostile, and if they're not hostile… Actually the hostility never bothered me. What bothered me was the indifference. The indifference was probably the thing that most bothered me. Nobody had even any idea. They might watch it on the news but they had no idea and they had no immediate concern about it. You knew all this business was going on, and it was always there, for like four or five years. I came back in 1969, and it didn't end until 1975. So the whole time there was always this war going on and you felt intimately involved in it even though you're walking around in a world that has no intimate involvement with it, and in most cases just no concern at all unless they had somebody over there, and that was a real... And so you had to keep all this stuff kind of put away, and the thing about Vietnam Veterans Against the War was it gave you a place to let all this out, so you didn't take the whole burden of what you had become involved in on yourself.

Because if you murdered people, you know you have a personal and direct responsibility for that. But if you think that's something you did alone—in other words if you don't have some political outlook on this thing—it's too overwhelming. That's why a lot of guys killed themselves. A lot of guys are out on the streets, homeless; a lot of guys got so heavily into drugs, and things like that. It's because they had this overwhelming, confusing—this overwhelming burden of guilt. The Vietnamese were a powerful army, but they were a small army compared to us. We outnumbered them ten to one. We had all the planes. We had all the

technology. We still couldn't beat them, so we started to take it out on them in a personal fashion. So you get incidents like My Lai, and any case where you go in and kill women and children, or the old people in a village, or do the type of thing which is indiscriminate—which is what I was doing. It didn't register who that was, it was just a living human being that you were going to kill. That puts a big burden of guilt on you if you have any kind of conscience at all, if you're raised in a society where compassion is important. And I was.

I was raised as an Irish Catholic and the things in life that were important were to be compassionate to other people, to help them out, to always be concerned about them. You go into a situation and find out you're doing something totally horrific and against all the things that you believe, or think you believe, without compassion at all. And you come back into a society that has nothing registering on it at all and so you have to hide all this guilt in yourself and just bury it and just be quiet. I came back and spent a year with [wife] Sheila and it probably was the thing that saved my life—the fact that I had somebody to come back to who loved me. We had set a time aside and dealt with all those people who were coming back from Vietnam and we could talk.

We didn't talk much but just being among people who were all familiar with this world, so you all had a base... But then once I came out into society in 1970—I don't think I had any anti-war contact before that—but I went out into a university that had been on strike the previous semester. There was lots of antagonism towards military people and veterans and that kind of business so I was real quiet. I just came in, "I'm here. Don't bother me and I won't bother anybody else. I'm going to study and try to put my life back onto some realm of going someplace." That didn't last very long because I guess it was maybe in January or February that I saw a little article about

Vietnam. All it said was something about anti-war veterans to meet, and something about Cambridge and [John] Kerry and maybe a couple of names. I saw that thing, and I cut that thing out. Probably within hours I knew the phone number. I went over there and I talked to those people right away, and it was like I had a home. I had someplace I could go and talk to other people and hear what they had done. It wasn't a high level of political education or anything like that, it was just people who wanted to see the war stop—that enough's enough of this. I got fully involved with that from then on. It was the thing that saved myself insofar as realizing that the guilt lay with the government mostly, and the politicians and the military and all those people who took all us eighteen-year-old kids, all dumb eighteen-year-olds, and just basically used us all. It doesn't excuse anything we did as individuals, but it does put it in a little bit different light. But not much.

INT: Why were you returned one by one, with no time for psychological decompression?

JH: I'm not sure. I don't know why they did that. I think it probably was the biggest mistake they possibly could have made. If they wanted to create any kind of military discipline and any kind of military morale, they should've just put whole units over there, left them over there the whole time. But I think they were trying to soften the impact on the country, so they were trying something new. In other words, if your son is only going for a year, you're only going to worry for a year, and you're not that committed. Once you're done with that you're not at all committed at all to it—your son is back. Your family's released from the burden. They had all kinds of rules, like if you had one son over there you couldn't have a second son. "Only" sons couldn't go. All these things to try to soften the burden. I think that's what they were trying to do, to make it more palatable for everybody to take. Can you imagine families that might have had somebody

over there for five or six years, from 1960—when did they start? I met people who were there in 1956. But when the big build-up started happening you would have had people there all the time from '64 to '72. Those families would have been hysterical. They couldn't possibly have done it. They would have become a hostile force. This is all conjecture in a sense, but I think that's what they were trying to do, just kind of soften this thing. Instead what they did is create an army that knew, "I only have 365 days. I only have 364. I have 363. I have 30. I'm taking real care of myself here. Don't get me down low here. I'm not doing anything that I'm going to get shot for—unless some extreme thing." Pretty much they created an army that had a vested interest—once you'd passed about six months you were going to protect yourself, take it easy and not take any risks. "Do your job," but do it like in the formal fashion, not in any kind of enthusiastic fashion. And your commitment to the people you were with? That was a constantly changing-group. So you might have come over with a small group of people who stayed for that length of time, but anybody else was just cycling through, so you just didn't have the same level of commitment to anyone, and that was a big mistake. It was probably one of the biggest mistakes they could've made.

If you look back throughout their assessments of the war—like shortly after 1975 a couple of the generals wrote articles assessing it, and the breakdowns of military discipline, and all that kind of thing—where the fact is they labeled why they lost the war. It wasn't because the enemy was so much stronger, or of some technology the enemy had, or anything like that. It was just primarily the military discipline broke down so far [that] the military was undependable. In other words, if they gave an order, they couldn't depend on the fact that order was going to be carried out. I believe in my heart that that's probably the real reason they pulled out of there, is

that the army was no longer dependable. By the time you hit '71 and '72 we had active contact with people in Vietnam and all through the military. There was active resistance where people were connecting with anti-war veterans, people who'd been there and come back. You had actual good contacts so if something was going on in Vietnam, we would know about it through those people and through those channels, and you can't have that going on in a war! Plus all the hostility at home and the growing dissent and all that. They just couldn't keep on going. I think they would have otherwise. I do believe they would have. They would have gone another twenty years if they had to. Because to take a defeat, for the most powerful country in the world to be defeated by a little country with no technology at all—you can't do that! That set back the military in this country, their ability to commit aggression, probably for ten to fifteen years.

The Iraqi [Persian Gulf] War was their way to recover and to rewrite the history. Even [Vietnam era Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara now in his pathetic apology for committing and directing war crimes—it's just an apology for misunderstanding the strength of the Vietnamese will, and that's all. He says we shouldn't have gone there because we couldn't win quick, and that's the whole philosophy with which they went to Iraq. The only reason they went to Iraq was they knew they were going to win, quick—bang! We're going to knock the hell out of this guy easy because he has an undisciplined army, he has no technology, and we're going to beat the hell out of them. They're not in Bosnia, they're not anywhere else other than disturbing behind the scenes. But they won't send the military into any situation they can't win quick. They have a whole list of rules for engagement, and all that came out of assessments of Vietnam and rewriting that whole... So now you have it all being rewritten. I don't even know how they're rewriting it, but people who pay attention to Vietnam are few and far

between nowadays. That whole history is somewhere in the ancient past and nobody really pays attention. American power and grabbing oil and all those kinds of things that it clearly was. If you go down the street you'll see it there now, Shell—they're really trying to win the peace. As [Admiral Elmo] Zumwalt says, "We're winning the peace." That's what Zumwalt says. He's over there and he's doing some good things. But it's strange. Now we're all sitting down with our enemies. Zumwalt is over there. He's the admiral who ordered Agent Orange to be sprayed everywhere and his son died, and all that kind of business. You know he's over there helping the Vietnamese try to solve some of their problems and meeting with his old enemies. I hope it's good for him, and I hope it helps him settle out his own guilt. I'm not sure if he will. But it's good for old enemies to sit down and to end the bitterness and the dispute, because that's the only way you get peace. Otherwise everybody contains those resentments for generations and so you get situations like Bosnia, why that was the start of World War I, [why it started] in that place and in that country. All those resentments have been kept all this time and they're so hostile and active it could be maybe almost a potential other European conflict. So if enemies can't sit down and deal with each other face to face and recognize that yes, we killed each other, and we both suffered, and it was horrible, then nobody's going to get anywhere in the world.

INT: What's driving the people who cannot bear the idea of reconciliation?

JH: You know, if you lost a leg, you've got to have a damn good reason to have lost it. Once you've put your commitment into the realm of, "It was the horrible Vietnamese, and what I was doing was right," you're going to have the weight of your ego in that camp, you're going to hold on to that, so it's a hard one to give up. But I think a lot of people can give it up. I don't

find too many guys who are like that in the world, guys who've been there. They may be ambivalent and things like that, but I don't find too many who still say, "What we did was right and we should have bombed them harder."

INT: There are people who are reluctant to open diplomatic relations.

JH: Oh, yes, but that's the POW [Prisoner of War] issue. But it's been made part of the rewriting of history so you have this one thing to hang on to: "See how bad they are. They tortured and killed and they may still have in prison..." Maybe there are still some people in prison, I don't know. But I just look at it this way: If they want to resolve the POW issue they should resolve the POW issue. The Vietnamese have two million missing in action—two million. That means "unaccounted for." We have two thousand. So, all right, let's do an accounting. Let's see how many records there are of how many people got thrown out of helicopters, how many people drowned in the rivers, how many people got blown up in this village, that village. Just an accounting, that's all. And then, whenever the POW/MIA issue comes up—that's the only way I can deal with it—is to say, "Yes!" But also to say, "War is a horrifying thing." Both sides, no matter what, do horrible terrifying things to each other because that's what the whole basis of what war is. The whole basis of war is to annihilate your enemy. Your enemy is a "gook," a "dink," something that's subhuman, lower, that you could do anything to because they're not human beings. They don't value life. All those reasonings, go right down the line and you end up psychologically in a place that you can't realize that your enemy suffered, and you suffered, and you have a common experience—you have more in common experience than you do with the rest of the world. I think the whole business with World War II, over the years they've been settling things and they've actually had—what do you call it? Reunions! Battle reunions, where both sides come and—I don't want to use the word

"celebrate," but in some ways it is— to celebrate their comrades who died, and all this kind of business, but also to reconcile, and also to say, "We were enemies once, but now we're friends. We can meet in the place where we killed each other."

One of the biggest experiences I had in my life as a sort of catharsis thing was once—it must have been four or five years ago, I'm not sure. Before the embargo and all that business ended Vietnamese were not allowed to come to this country. They could come through Canada and a few people here and there would come. But this puppet theater came. It was a cultural thing and it was really the first time they were going to come. This cultural troop from Hanoi came over here, and they traveled for a month or two and put on a traditional water puppet theater. They came down here to the Cape. A friend of mine called me and said, "Come see them." I went down there. I cried. You know it was a tremendous release to see these people and be able to stay in the same room with them, to sit down and talk with them, to realize that they didn't have hostility towards us. They didn't bear grudges. I spent about a week with them. He said, all of a sudden, they needed logistical—you know, it's typical of veterans groups, of anti-war veterans groups anyway, not having everything planned out ahead of time—so we just did spur of the moment. Next thing I know I'm up in Cambridge and living in a car and traveling with this group of people and becoming pretty intimate with this group, because I had to provide the logistics of moving around and food and sleeping places and protection. They put on a performance in Cambridge at the River Festival and their security was provided by all Vietnam veterans. Many of them were NVA [North Vietnamese Army]. There was the Cultural Minister of North Vietnam who had been a long hard Communist, who had worked in the movement from the time of her youth, and she was probably in her late 50's. There were

young people who had lost their parents but didn't know the war. It was a whole realm of people in this group traveling from Hanoi. In Boston there's a huge Vietnamese community, primarily South Vietnamese, ARVN, the Republic. Soldiers who were our allies came to demonstrate against the North Vietnamese being there, and trying to get them to defect, and we're trying to... It was strange theater is what it was, because you had the allies and the enemies and the real force of the people between them was the Vietnam veterans. Trying to keep these old enemies apart. In the end though, all the groups sat down after confrontations and belligerence had been gotten rid of over a three or four day period without coming to explosions and physical violence—which at times it came close to. I just remember sitting around with all kinds of ARVNs and NVA and Vietnam veterans and just sitting and talking about the future as much as the past, and [it was] really an actual physical reconciliation where you have sat down face to face with your enemies, and have a little bit of food together, a little bit of music together, and all those kinds of things. If you have that, I think you get a true point of reconciliation where the bitterness just goes away. Everybody who was involved in that, it was a powerful experience for them, a very positive experience. It was like a true release for me. It was the true end of the guilt. Before that the guilt was put it off, and it could be somebody else's, but it was also still mine. But at this point it was just, well, all gone. All a wash. We're all in a way guilty, and let us all set that aside. It helped a tremendous amount

INT: It sounds like something you had to do together that you couldn't do alone.

JH: I don't think you could ever do it alone, and I was so lucky that I got to do it. I feel really lucky. Not very many people get that opportunity. It's just a fluke that I got it. You know, I've been trying to get enough money to

go back to Vietnam, which a lot of guys are doing. A tremendous number of Vietnam vets have headed back and a lot of the South Vietnamese in this country are trying to return to their home. Things are changing over there. It's not the war atmosphere. If the U.S. had ended the embargo sooner, probably Vietnam would be back on its feet. But the whole embargo thing was just a continuation of the war: "If you can't beat them physically, we're going to close them off." It's like surrounding some place, and trying to starve them out, and how is that anything but war? I think that's pretty much over with now. Now they see there's some big markets over there. We can make some money. If we can't win with the gun, now we'll try to win with the dollar. I think the Vietnamese are a lot more gentle and politically savvy. I hope. I'm not sure. Could turn into a little America I suppose.

INT: When you returned from Vietnam had this country changed?

JH: It changed. There was a lot more of the sort of realm of the hippies, and there was a lot more of that everywhere. It was anti-establishment, at least among the youth. That seemed like a really big, big thing. But as far as really changing, I don' t think so. I think my views of it, what I recognized in it, changed. I was kind of not looking at the world. I looked at when's the next dance, who am I going to go out with—those kind of things. When I came back, I saw the poverty—something I'd seen before but it didn't really dawn on me—and all these things started to take connection with, okay, the difficulties of getting an education; all the kinds of things that were problems in our society kind of stuck out like a sore thumb. They were glaring. Once you've kind of seen people at the level of dirt floors and grass huts and all that war business, you come back and you're not a dumb kid; you've got a little bit of a world view. I don't think it was because I was sheltered because I knew lots of poverty as a kid, like hanging out in some of the worst sections of Worcester and things like that,

but it didn't really register what it was. It was just kind of—you were moving through it.

But when you go and you see all this and you come back and you look at the inequities in this country, the wealth on the one hand and the extreme poverty on the other, you start to make all these connections, which are not too good for you to make because it makes life difficult for you. Once you realize that all this war has some connection to all these things that go on at home you have a different political outlook.

INT: Describe that change.

JH: Well, my political outlook changed to the point that when I came back I became involved in anti-war things. I was for peace and that's all I was. I wanted the war to end. Then, with people who were around who had other ideas, what I would call left-wing ideas, communist ideas, all kinds of political ideas that were floating in this realm, you start looking for an answer. What's the answer to all this stuff? You try this political option and you try that political option, or you take a little bit from here and from there. There was the Socialist Worker's Party, the Revolutionary Community Party, the Communist Party, the Weather Underground, the Attica Brigade, the Youth International. There were all these groups of people who were opposing the war, and the right-wing and everybody loved to label that all: "It's all just a Communist plot!" Right? In some ways they *were* instigators in that kind of business. But those political realms became attractive to me. "Jeez, maybe there is something to this; maybe there is something to all these inequities in this country, and the capitalists and the imperialists are the directors of war!" I became anti-government, and I floated through a number of political movements, each one more radical than the next, until I was in a political cell which was about eight people that would "direct the revolution from East Boston"—right? It was all new,

naïve, and idealistic, and a little bit absurd. After the war ended I was still politically involved for five or six years until I just burned out. You just kind of wear down, you can't do this anymore. "I'm done." So I quit and I went to—I figured if I'm going to make my way in this world, because I think we were living on welfare by that point. Things were not good for us economically; we were just borderline—so I gave up all that. I said, "I'm not going to beat my head against the wall anymore, I'm done." I literally quit. I just walked away.

The last ten to fifteen years I've been making my way in the material world here. I've gathered together quite a but of stuff. Now I'm finding those things don't matter that much and I'm looking more for ways to make some real differences in the world and I don't know what they are. I'm back to being in the stage of questions. It's sort of hard to be forty-seven years old [and] to be wondering what you're going to do with the next period in your life, but I think that's pretty much what... I mean, I'm constantly horrified by what this country does. You look around and you see the signs of the activities behind the scenes, the gun sellers, the people who push people to fight other people. The Iraqi War was just a…I went into an extreme case of post traumatic stress disorder with that business. The minute that thing started up, all my friends—everybody I knew who was a Vietnam vet on either side, even if you were pro the war, DJ, Kevin, all my friends—went into a deep psychological state of horror that this could... "It's back! It's all back." It was just like you had come back from Vietnam. I became involved down here. I was into blocking military recruiting stations and all that. I was right back. I had been an outstanding citizen for ten to twelve years and had really stayed away from all the politics, all the government, and the minute that happened I was making a speech in front of people at the Baptist—or the Brewster—church. People said, "What can we

do?" and I said, "Let's go block the military recruiting station." All of a sudden we've got forty, fifty or a hundred people blocking the military recruiting station the next morning. The level of everything just came back to right where it was, instantly, and it quickly wore me out. It was such a psychologically draining thing to be at that point again and just confrontation all the time. It was confrontation throughout this town because pretty much the whole country was just "Let's get this Evil Empire" type of business. And they were much better this time about focusing and directing the media. So it was like impossible to make headway with people to try to put together the history of the thing: "How did we get here?" So we had mass murder, again, is what you had.

Once it was over it was just sort of "Oh, thank God it's over!" But I don't know where things lead. I tend to be more spiritual and not so hard politically. I don't think we're exactly overthrowing everything in a couple of weeks anymore. But we'll see. Attitudes change. I think people are going to change—not that they're going to change, but they're going to re-adopt the things that they believed in the 1960's and the early 1970's. I see a lot of people getting to be in late middle age, forties, fifties, and saying, "What's my life about? What am I doing? What have I done?" "Well, you've accumulated a bunch of junk." Or, "You've got this success in your profession"—that kind of thing. It's all kind of losing its meaning.

INT: Going back chronologically, you said that you saw this little item and went to the VA office in Cambridge and there was tremendous relief in being with other people who shared your experience. Could you pick up the story there and tell us what happened?

JH: After I went to the office in Cambridge I got a little bit of information about what they were doing and they were going to have

something called Dewey Canyon III down in Washington and that April so immediately I wanted to organize for that.

INT: Why was it called Dewey Canyon III?

JH: Because there was an operation in Vietnam which was called Dewey Canyon I and II, that's right, and this was Dewey Canyon III. They were assaults into Cambodia, I believe. They were military operations and we always used to do things like that, just take names from military operations and Operation POW and all that kind of business—we liked to play on military jargon. I connected with those people and I wanted to fully participate in what they were doing because I knew immediately that I had a home, I wasn't alone in my craziness. There were a lot of other people who had the same feelings that I had, and so it was all I wanted to do. I was in the University of Massachusetts [and] I organized the chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against War. The first meeting we had five or six people, then within a very short period of time we had thirty or forty. I went to the Dewey Canyon III, Sheila and I drove down to Washington, and I spent like four or five days there, she spent two or three. It was just this gathering all from all around the country. There was several thousand of us, and we camped right in front of the Capitol building and it was a tremendous political event during a war to have in front of the Capitol building—thousands of veterans from that war saying "You can't keep on going here," and lobbying the government, demonstrating. We camped right in front of the Capitol and they told us we couldn't. The Supreme Court said—it went to those levels, it's odd—but the Supreme Court said we couldn't sleep, we could stand up, and under those conditions we could remain. Because the government didn't want to have police coming in and having scenes, because we were probably going to resist. They didn't want that on national TV for the nightly news, veterans being beaten, because that

creates wars. It was a lot of publicity gimmicks in this business and so one side played the other. We played it pretty well. So they came to this compromise, "They really can't sleep there; they have to stand up all night," and we just ignored it after that point. So we were totally surrounded by police all night and we had big bands going, people came from the black neighborhoods, and bonfires, and there was this tremendous partying, but a psychological cleansing for a lot of people. Everybody's there and recognizes—look how many of us there are, my God, and there were only a couple of thousand people. And there we are.

That was in April, and then we came back and all of us had tremendous enthusiasm at that point. We're going to do this and we're going to do it real fast. We're going to end the war, we thought, within months; literally we will force the government to call it quits. There's no way we can't do it, because we just got this power. We had pretty big egos about it and then the anti-war movement loved us. "Jeez, look at this, we've got this whole big movement all of a sudden out here." They loved to bring us to parades and put us up in the front and all that kind of thing and we were heroes. All of a sudden we were heroes in this strange bizarre way. We had a lot of enthusiasm and right off we planned all around the country. There were activities being planned by different groups because it was a very loose organization. It just sort of had a general trend, and each area would carry it out in its own way, shape, and fashion.

That's my sense of how the demonstration in Lexington came about. People planned for a weekend thing and we were going to march the route from Concord into Bunker Hill, working on a principle that was the reverse route of Paul Revere. We always had like these historic connections and it was theater. There was a lot of people in there. I mean, here you have young men that just returned from war that are all in motley uniforms, all

pieces of whatever they have left over from their own uniforms generally, and with toy guns, trying to demonstrate to people (because you can't really demonstrate with real guns) and doing theater and showing people what kinds of things had been going on in another part of the world, and to bring that theater into everybody's lives and not let them be unconcerned—to try to confront people not in a physical sense but with our presence and great bonds of comradeship and positiveness and optimism. We were so optimistic at that point. When we came to Lexington we were amazed at how many people we had from the New England area. It was like we were overwhelmed. There was a few people in Cambridge that January, a couple of people in an office, and there was this little blurb in the paper, and then by springtime a few months later there's several hundred willing to be arrested—that's not a light thing in our society.

We planned this thing and did all the work beforehand, passing out leaflets and making contact with people and trying to spread this web as widely as we could because each time we did something it just broadened out to different people. We had lots of people who supported us, gave us money. Money and things like that never seemed to be a problem for us. Someone would give us a xerox machine, the office space I don't think we paid for, the churches were always donating space and anything we needed. So we started that march and we ended up in Lexington on the Green. We were in a peaceful and party mood—we're on a walk for a few days and doing some political theater and nothing is really serious about this, nothing is confrontational at all. We were really non-confrontational. We had an agenda and plans but it's not mapped out by the minute or anything. And when we were there it was kind of like, "They're not going to let us stay here tonight. What are we going to do?" We had discussions back and forth among all kinds of small groups and then pretty soon there's a larger

meeting and everybody said, "We're going to stay." So then the mechanisms of who's going to get arrested if that happens [is decided], and things like that get talked about, but pretty much it was all ad-libbed and everybody just stayed. It was all very peaceful even though probably the most confrontational people were the Selectmen. The Police Chief wasn't real bad. The policemen themselves were quite pleasant. Once we were arrested we were in the DPW building and it was a big party for us; we were all just having a good time. They brought us coffee [and] I think they might have brought us doughnuts. Going through court was just a proceeding and everybody's done with court, okay, let's keep going. It wasn't a big to-do so we went off to Bunker Hill and on to the Common.

We weren't confrontational at that point; we had the optimism of moral righteouness. We felt we were right and everybody has to listen to us. There is no way that everybody isn't logically going to come to the same position that we're at and by September or so, they'll be bringing everybody home. After that point I think things started downhill. The demonstrations, for us anyway, started becoming more confrontations and we started with demonstrations in Boston where sometimes the police would be hostile, might drive a motorcycle into somebody, so somebody would push a policeman off a motorcycle, and things started escalating.

INT: Because?

JH: Because we saw that we weren't getting anywhere. I think mostly the fact that people weren't going to listen, that the government wasn't going to listen, they were going to keep on doing exactly whatever the hell they wanted to do, so we started getting angry. We're not seeing the results, our people are still dying over there everyday, so you lost the optimism and moved to more cynicism. It started to spread out into. "Look around the city, look—we're marching through the neighborhood and look at how

people have to live— and other elements and things started to come into this. It started to become a broader [thing] rather than this naive "We've just come from this horrible war and we're going to come back and tell everybody how horrible it is and it's all going to end and everything's going to get better." That wasn't in fact the case. For a while we had a grace period where the police were respectful, most of the policemen are veterans so they have a little uneasiness about what are we doing here. These people have been through war, we've been through war, and even many times in violent situations, somebody who *wasn't* a veteran could get a beating, somebody who *was* a veteran could get away with whatever it was. "I was in such-and-such a unit," and that would be a free ticket. You'd blast that ticket and that would get you out of a beating. I know I did it several times, "Here's my card carrying veteran's card," I get the free pass out of jail. I didn't get a beating out of it, unlike the guy in the elevator right next to me who is getting a beating. It was just a long-haired student. We were long-haired veterans which was hard for them to deal with, especially if you had a chance to talk to them one-on-one. Rarely did you end up in real physical things with the police, but if was the tactical police force who were trained to drive into demonstrations and get the club out and they were faceless behind their masks, there was no talking to anybody. And those demonstrations happened, and people got angrier and angrier and more willing to take on a confrontational and antagonistic role, not just with the police but with everybody else in society, too. "You don't want to listen to us? All right, we're going to put a rock through your window!"

Those kinds of attitudes came about pretty quick, I'd say, so I think that in 1972 or thereabouts we went off to a demonstration in Washington, in the middle of the winter. It was called Valley Forge or something. We went to Valley Forge and then we went down to Washington and when we went into

Washington the whole split was people, the big political discussion in the meeting the night before and the big political discussion on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. We went up and took over the Lincoln Memorial in a peaceful fashion. We all sat down and there were piles of us. I was one of them that wanted to go out with bats and go out and disrupt the traffic in Washington and go through the city and stop rush hour and do it in a physically violent fashion. Fifty-fifty was the split. We ended up settling out and just being, that's what the arrest certificates were for. That was very close to becoming five or six hundred veterans going through the city and doing some real physical damage—and they would have. I know I would have. I know I was totally game for it. I just wanted to do it. I was angry and I was sick and tired of demonstrating and having nothing happen and I wanted some release for my own rage. It didn't have anything to do with politics or anything. Let's go out there and bust it up, sick and tired of these people riding by in their cars. That's what the attitude was, and the big split in the group was whether you stayed peaceful or do you forget it, get the rage going.

INT: Would you describe some of the kinds of guerilla theater that you did and why you did it?

JH: The best guerilla theater we ever did was in City Hall Plaza one time. We had military jeeps, we had helmets and all the, and it was so real that many people thought it was the real thing because by that point I had an M16 toy that looked pretty much like the real thing. If you looked at it closely you could tell that it wasn't. What we were doing was doing guerilla theater in front of where you come up into the Government Plaza out of the [subway] and the police finally asked us to stop doing it right there. They didn't stop us from doing it, but there were people who thought this was real. What we were doing was, we had a couple of people dressed up as

Vietnamese and you would just manhandle them, throwing them on the ground, kicking them, and this was all part of an interrogation type of scene. People—not everybody, but a lot of people—thought this was something that was actually happening. They were horrified and went running off down the street or running back down the [subway], and police were actually afraid somebody was going to get hurt. Some people tried to interfere, which was good, but it was potential problems. We did a lot of that kind of thing and people played the roles they knew and it was disturbing for anybody that went by to see this right this on the streets. It confronted them with it. and that was the whole principle—to confront with the horror of it, put it right in your lap.

INT: How would you describe it to somebody who wasn't born at that time, didn't see the newspapers.

JH: I would describe it like a rape or an assault, and to try to make them as much like that—a gang of guys who were raping somebody or physically beating and robbing somebody, that's probably the closest thing to what we were trying to impress on people. You can't impress on the people shooting somebody unless you really shoot them; but you can definitely impress somebody if they really think somebody is getting beaten. That's mostly what we tried to do, give that horror and the immediate—somebody physically assaulted right in front of you—kind of idea and that's seemed to work the best, it seemed to disturb people the most. That's what we were trying to do. That's when we were starting "in your face." You're not going to listen to us—most people would try to just walk by and be blind to the whole thing—they don't want to see this, "I don't want to hear about it." You had people that were sympathetic and people that were hostile, they were fine. Either one of those groups. At least they had a reaction. The person that bugged us the most was the one that could walk by and not turn

their head. You tried to give a person like that a leaflet, they'd just turn away, or they'd put it in their hand and then they'd drop it ten feet down. We had a problem with these people. How can you be so unconcerned and just walk by? The goal of theater was aimed mostly at those people. The people that were hostile—you knew who they were, and you were definitely never aiming at them. The people who were sympathetic, you already knew how they felt, so you didn't aim at them. But this person who was indifferent, who could walk by you, this theater was made [so that] you [couldn't] walk by.

INT: Did it work?

JH: I think it did. I think it worked a lot.

INT: How would you characterize the people who were attracted to join?

JH: I think it was every kind. I knew people from every class of society that joined. You had people whose fathers were senators. You had people whose fathers were fishermen. You had black, Latino, all the realms of society and there was no coming from once place or another. It was too broad of a spectrum. It was the most diverse group of people I've ever worked with, I would say, from all different walks of life, all different religions.

INT: You had something in common, that your experience in Vietnam made you want to stop the war. Not everybody came back from the war with that conviction or commitment or concern.

JH: Right. That's one thing we had in common.

INT: So how would you talk about that?

JH: It's like you either saw it or you didn't see it over there. If I hadn't seen those two books, I doubt if I would have had a real good picture of what was going on. Some friends of mine, they had written letters home to

their hometowns, to the papers, saying, "I'm lonely, I'm over here," and that was a very common thing to do. Or a letter to the paper and or the local towns would print the addresses of soldiers from that town so people from that town would write, and most probably the people that wrote the most were anti-war people. So people developed friendships over there with people like —— and Sue, that's how their relationship started. She was in high school and started writing; she was anti-war. There's hundreds of different ways that people came to it, but I think primarily it was the recognition [that] what I'm doing and what I did there was wrong and wrong for all kinds of different reasons and different levels and [for] some just that killing is wrong, [for] some that this is imperialism, or all these different things.

I think VVAW was active from about 1966 on, and was a very small organization and then just blossomed at a point where you'd had that huge military build up. When I went over in 1968 there was people flowing into the country, it was just like this huge build up and then you had a two to three year period where there was five hundred thousand soldiers over there and then it dwindled back down as they started that withdrawal and "Vietnamization" and all that. Everybody came out of that with I think with basically some kind of guilt, and the guilt is a real thing. If you know you are doing something wrong, you have this guilt that comes on you, so you've got to get rid of this guilt somehow or otherwise it's just going to eat you away. And that has been the whole thing underlying Vietnam veterans the whole time. Even with guys like McNamara or Zumwalt, they know they're guilty—I've got to absolve myself somehow, so McNamara writes this you know book confessing his sins, which is just bullshit. In a way this has allowed us to confess our sins to each other and to be rid of the deep personal "it's only me" that was all involved in this, "I did this horrible

thing," and it gets it more out into a broader realm. I consider myself a war criminal, and I think to be able to say that is a good thing that helps me to deal with it. The VVAW was a place where all of us got rescued from wallowing in our own. There were twenty-five thousand Vietnam veterans or so who committed suicide. I know at least three, four. The only thing that I think drove them there was guilt—the personal devastation of "What have I done? "How have I acted in my life?" I think that was the main motivating factor.

INT: Especially after what you have described, it's a very isolating experience being in Vietnam and coming back from Vietnam, not the camaraderie of the old World War II movies and stuff.

JH: No units marching back together or anything like that. No glory. There wasn't much glory in this business and you're just back to society and things were supposed to go back the way they were, [but] how could they? You just constantly lived it. Every time you turned on the TV there it was. Most people could ignore it all because they didn't have a personal contact with it. But all the reminders—every time you looked in the paper, "Today the body count was three hundred and fifty, and fifteen Americans were killed in such-and-such a place," and all these places are places that you know, so it was like nagging at you constantly. It was like a daily thing. It wasn't much different from being there, to tell you the truth. You are in this body of indifferent people that are going along living their lives—it's like you look at people and you see that they went through their colleges and they got their careers and their lives went on and they've got all these successes, and you're still wallowing around with a war.

Until 1975 my whole life was anti-war and involved in that war and then for another five years it was [dealing] with politics and this was all going on in the world; it was probably a ten year period of my life that got taken

because I went to that war. Probably it would be more years ,or better ones, better ones.

INT: You encountered the VVAW and became part of it. Tell us how was it organized, what were the rules of conduct, how were decisions made?

JH: As far as being organized, I know there was some national group but I had no contact with it. It was a group in Cambridge who had an office over right behind Harvard Square. It was a very loose office but things always seemed to be going on there, things always seemed to be getting done, and it wasn't an organization like where anybody told anybody else what to do. If there was something to do, somebody just volunteered and did it. The main thing that I would say characterized it was its spontaneity. Some things would get planned, but mostly it was a matter of whoever was doing it at the time would decide how it would be done, and so large group meetings went on all the time—sometimes quite unwieldy, quite long and often frustrating meetings. The general principle was operating under "ultra-democracy," that there is no leader, everybody decides in groups, and anytime anything came up for discussion it was discussed to death, and generally in places like churches and large meeting halls that somehow somebody always made available to us. The churches were good to us all the time. They always provided whatever we needed. Once a month we had a regular meeting, and what we were going to do over the next period of time was decided at those meetings and maybe some people came out of their volunteering to do that. The meetings at first were open and a bit joyous and celebratory— we've all found each other and we're thrilled and we're optimistic. As time went on meetings might get involved in discussions over who was a police agent, and what faction was trying to destroy the organization, and what faction was trying to do this or that, so there were lots of political fights. Some were quite bitter. A friend of ours,

Bruce, and—who was it, Bob?—Paul were both members of the Progressive Labor Party and their pretty hard line communist group. But they were actually really pretty basic nice hard working people who just had real extreme political views and they got labeled as police agents. It was a huge controversy and close to physical blows in a few of these meetings. There *were* police agent because files would disappear; different things happened that were definitely sabotage [in] nature and the government was very much into knowing everything about everything at that point in time. The fact that there were police agents was a known, but it was whether you were going to let this fact that they were here become the central thing. It could destroy you real quick. Somehow we managed to waddle through all that kind of business and keep on going, but it was a hard thing and the more [our]optimism of how quickly we were going to do things disappeared the more things tended to get into fights and that kind of business.

At the time of the Lexington thing we were all just coming together. Hardly any of us knew each other. [For] a lot of the people that were together at that Lexington Common, [it] was the first time they had been to anything at all, and it wasn't a hard group of people who had been doing political things all along. These were people who were just showing up; they hadn't done anything before. This is their demonstration so that makes the arrest business even more significant. Because for somebody who has been political for a long time to get arrested for a minor misdemeanor is nothing, but for somebody to consciously step forward and never have even been to a demonstration to volunteer to get arrested and have the frame of mind, that's different. When we got together we could hold hands and all those kinds of things and be in sort of a joyous [mood] and there was a lot of celebration about it.

Coming to the [Green] we were all in a good mood, so even if they are going to arrest us, it was not confrontational. Coming into Lexington [it] was all being joined by people spontaneously from the town. I don't think there was any [advance] leafleting in the town. I don't know of anything that went on. We were coming down streets and all of a sudden we were in the [Green] and we've got hundreds and hundreds of extra people with us that weren't there before! It made it real special, because it was like being the heroes—here are people celebrating the fact that you are here. So the government comes along and says—and that was pretty much the Selectmen making the decision for the town, all right—it was the town representatives [saying] that you can't stay here for the night and such-and-such a law says you can't. Whatever it was, a ridiculous little law it was. And we had all those people on the [Green], it was a bright sunny day, if I remember right. And everybody was in a good mood and they could have probably come in and arrested all of us for marijuana, I don't know. There was [marijuana]; it was a celebratory thing. It was like here we are, we've got the good news, and we're bringing it to you. And finally people come in and accept it, and I don't remember any hostile… I remember one person, maybe, who was yelling about who the hell do you think you are, but other than that I don't remember any antagonistic harsh words really being spoken.

I remember them coming in reading the edict some time towards the evening. We knew it was coming, and as it got to be dark they started to arrest. We were all perfectly willing to be arrested here, this is just civil disobedience and we weren't all that familiar with it to tell you the truth. It was the first time I was consciously arrested for something. And it just had the more the mood of a party until they're taking people away, and people are putting their hands on their heads and they were taking us down to DPW because they've got no [other] place to put us. I think they thought we were

going to just go away, the Selectmen. They did for some reason but there was just no way we were not going to go through the thing we were doing for the weekend, and if we had to stop then that's what was going to happen, and we all ended up down in the DPW and there it was just theater. People were into it. There was a lot of talent, there was quite a few musicians and people who were into theater, and people who were now going to Emerson College, things like that, so people could put on these entertainments right through the night, and it was uncomfortable being in there but it was no big bad thing and we had fun. I don't ever remember seeing the police officer once we were inside the building. I don't even know if the doors were locked. I think they probably were. Then they packed us off the next morning to court, and we just all paraded through one at a time and then were out the front, and it was still a circus atmosphere. It was all going on and then just it was not like any of us had really done anything. I don't remember—did we plead guilty or not guilty?[1] I don't remember even what we did. But I know we were quickly out the door and back on the steps and by middle of the afternoon—by the time they got through all that number of people, it was a large number of people to have to get through—we headed off again and that was that.

INT: What do you think the Selectmen's concerns were?

JH: I'm not sure. Probably that they were Republicans and they were probably still in favor of the Vietnam War, and "You can't have this stuff going on, we're not going to have this stuff in such a reverent place. This is one of the monuments to America and you can't have such disrespect come to town." I'm just projecting what I think. I remember somebody with a bullhorn and somebody standing right beside him and they're reading this thing about the state law and we weren't going to be allowed to stay there

[1] The plea was *nolo contendere* or "no contest."

and we'd be arrested, and we had to be gone. It seemed all pretty stupid to me, that's all I can say. What are these people—are they absurd? Especially in the context of all the people from the town—if it was the townspeople over there saying, "Get these bums out of town," or something I could have seen it, but here's the Selectman coming up [and] he's got five or six hundred people from the town there, I would bet. There was a lot of people on the Green there and I think we weren't traveling with that many when we came—a couple of hundred of us. All of a sudden it's this big party, food kept appearing, things like that, and so that was the contradiction. People from town were discussing this thing as well as us. If a meeting was democratic it was [no matter] who was participating. Sometime we used to split into veterans and non-veterans if it was a real serious issue, particularly later on, but at that point we were much more into just general group democracy—whoever's here, you got equal vote, and that kind of business. I seem to remember people from town participating in those discussions about whether people were staying and then volunteering to stay themselves, so there were lots of people from the town all of a sudden arrested with us. It was all spontaneous decisions, spontaneous events, and I think that there was maybe one or two Selectmen and the Police Chief—I'm not even sure about the Police Chief—but one or two Selectmen who were just directing this thing under their own—"Not in my town, not in this sanctuary of American democracy." So he made a complete fool of himself. And we were run through the court and probably cost the court and the town a small fortune to run us all through. I don't remember paying any money, so the money came from someplace to pay for it, probably from all the people in the town of Lexington. Then several years later I think we were pardoned, he Governor gave us a pardon for this misdemeanor.[2] It was a real happy

[2] Although a petition for a pardon was circulated by Julian Soshnik, a Lexington resident and lawyer who

occasion. That whole entire weekend had the most optimism and the best mood of any kind of demonstration that I had ever been to.

INT: Is there any particular image that is strong in your mind as you think back on that time? You were mentioning people lining up to get on school buses?

JH: The strongest image I have is the bullhorn and on this pleasant Green, this really pretty pleasant place, everybody is smiling. Those pictures you were showing, you don't see anybody seriously worried or anything like that. This was like a coming-out party, because for many people this was the first time that the bulk of the veterans there had a chance to recognize [that] other people feel the same way about what's going on, and to have a little release so it had happiness to it, overall a joyous thing. Going off on the buses with your hands over the head in the night and them just going down and putting us all in one big place where we just kind of continue talking and having a good time—it didn't have any confrontation. The country roads were real pretty, and I remember as a kid I had seen this movie called "A Walk in the Sun" and it's this story about a patrol, and I think everybody dies on the patrol. All these images of going down these pleasant country roads and everybody is friendly, and going through these memorials—we started at the Concord [Old North] Bridge and there's the Lexington [Minuteman] National Park and the [Green] and all these places where all these historical events happened, and we went on to Bunker Hill and then into the Boston Common…even going through Bunker Hill we got nothing but a positive reception—where you might think, okay, here's Charlestown, and there's going to be right-wing Irish or something. It was all pleasant, all the way through the whole entire weekend and probably the only unpleasant person was the Selectman. And he actually wasn't that

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had offered to advise those arrested, the petition was never acted upon by the Governor.

unpleasant. He was kind of like the rules of logic, rules of law thing and, well, if Robert's Rules of Order says you guys are going to be out here then I'm gonna enforce it. I bet he was probably the only person upset. Because I know the police weren't upset. They were, "This will get a little bit of overtime…" that kind of business. It was pretty fun.

INT: What do you think would be a fitting memorial to that event to put on the Green?

JH: In reverence to what the place is, it is an important historical place and at the time we thought all kinds of things were important historically. In retrospect it's really a rather unimportant event that happened. Some kind of stone with a marker would be appropriate, but I think more what you're doing, right here…if some place in town there was some permanent place to put this. This was more democracy in action that did have a lot of effect. It was long and dragged out but it did have a lot of effect on other people to start seeing that okay, we've got 458 people arrested out here in Lexington and a large number of them are Vietnam veterans and [this] leads to other things, and the web of that thing [reaches] out. The collection of these interviews and things like that is tremendous. To [make those] words accessible would probably be more fitting than a stone.

INT: Do you think that the protests like this had an impact on ending the war?

JH: Oh yes, you can't believe the power of all the people in this country who resisted in all the different fashions that they resisted, from the couple of people in the mid 1960's who burned some draft cards and from those couple of little actions a couple of more people made a little action and that just kept on spreading out. Pretty soon it was all through the whole military and through the whole society and ended up with the government having to shoot the people at Kent State and different places, and I think it brought

down Nixon with his Watergate and all that kind of business. He wouldn't have had done that if he didn't have opposition and would not have quit, they would have just kept on going, kept on escalating. It was a huge drag and I think the Vietnamese recognized it, tried to encourage it as much as they could. I think a lot more people would have died. The United States would have kept on; they would have been right over into someplace else. It took them a long time, there was a ten, fifteen year period where they couldn't go charging around anymore. Now they're almost back to where they were. But still, not quite. They are still trying to re-write that whole history.

INT: How was the Vietnam War different from other wars?

JH: I don't think it's any different from any war. I think they are all just bloody, horrible attempts to impose your will on another and I don't think any of them are good. With Sheila's father, Tom, when I was in the anti-war movement, we used to have horrible arguments at dinnertime and it would make dinner unpleasant for everybody. Now I'm in Veterans for Peace, Tom is in Veterans for Peace. He came around to a whole different view, that war is this horrible thing. I don't think there's just wars, I don't think there's any kind of wars that are reasonable. There is not a reasonable way for people… It's like saying it's reasonable to decide when you have a disagreement with your neighbor, go kick his ass. And that's how you are going to resolve the discussion. I mean, you have a little bit more right when you're in your own country and somebody comes and they are aggressive to you, I think you kind of have to resist. I don't think you can, but by general principle, I would say is that war is lousy and it stinks and it's horrible and there are no good wars and there is no reason to be building all these bombs and all this kind of crap that they are doing which is still… How much of the money that we get taxed, the bulk of it is either paying for

the pensions for the people that have already been in, paying for the VA Hospitals, paying for the foreign aid, which is just foreign…they're provided more for war than anything else. You got the standing army which is this huge…you've got nuclear arsenals, you've got all this kind of crap just sucking the lifeblood out of this country and I think that's why the United States has been going downhill. And why Russia collapsed. Because the both of them had to have these huge monstrous armies, and it just sucks up all the material from the country, everything, and so you have kids that go uneducated, the hospitals are falling apart, the roads are falling apart, the [long] list of things that need some money aren't going to see any money, so we're are five hundred billion dollars in debt or three trillion or some ridiculous amount of money. That's all war. They want to blame it on Social Security and welfare but that's just crap. The big debt started from the beginning of the 1960's when they tried to run a war without increasing any taxes so they borrowed from the banks and now they're having to pay the piper. And they still continue to put all this money toward war materials and it's crazy, really crazy. Somebody wants to come over here, we need an army to [take deal with] anybody who wants to come over here, but you don't need big armies going all around the world. I think they could, if they wanted to, win the war in Vietnam. All they had to do was go buy every single person over there a ranch house and give them a pool and a car. They could have done that. They could have done it. Everybody, build them a house, and set them up with TV. Instead they got to go kill them all. [And] they spent more money doing it.

INT: My next question sounds kind of redundant given what you just said, but I'm going to ask it in case there are other things along these lines that you want to talk about. How have you been changed by these

experiences, and what did you learn? And you have obviously just been talking to that, but maybe there are some other dimensions.

JH: The first thing I learned is that everything is a lie. Everything the government has to say about anything is a out and out lie. I have zero trust for them taking care of me or taking care of anybody. If there is any kind of political situation in the world, you can't believe one thing they are going to tell you. You have to search high and low to find out the information yourself.

The other thing that I have learned is that change is not going to come easy and that it's going to come by individuals over a long period of time. It might take us another hundred or two hundred years to change, I don't know. But change does happen. Hopefully somewhere in the future there will be a little bit more peaceful world, and right now I feel that the world is more threatening than it has ever been. Even though the nuclear arsenals are supposedly on stand-down, I think that there is so much bad going on all over the place, and such a right-wing surge in this country that even starts to sound fascist in many ways, that we are going to impose our will on you—that this is what we are going to do. I'm optimistic and scared at the same time. I'd like a life for my kids. I know when I was young I had a lot of optimism about all these options and things in life out there. I think that they're kind of closed down for the kids now. Like the opportunities for the kids are service-oriented. If you go to school now you go to be trained to be be a technician or to be a this or a that. You don't go to school to be trained to think, to question. Culture is McDonald's, Mc—everything. Everything's going into this big blah blend out there in the general culture and so their ability to influence what people think is just phenomenal. When you get something like the Iraqi war and you want to know what the truth is, it's difficult to find and if you manage to find it, it's difficult to pass on

because the overwhelming media image—which is powerful, the camera can be made to say anything, you know—and once you've seen it, "I've seen it with my own eyes, how can you come over here and tell me something different? I've seen it with my own eyes. I've seen how horrible the Iraqis are." The ability to project the big lie is just there, and it's scary. It's scary.. So I'm sort of hiding out here in the woods.

INT: Do you think that your kids feel the diminished expectations when you look at them and remember yourself?

JH: I think they most assuredly do. I think my daughter recognizes and I think my son Mark recognizes it, him a little bit less than her, but you know, they're just not there for the kids—the constant restrictions of rights, and the access to education. In the 1950's there was an opening up of the universities and schools to everybody because of veterans. The end of the war they opened up everything as a benefit and then in the 1960's there was a policy of schooling for everybody. "We're going to prove how equal this country is." That's why I went to the University of Massachusetts, that's what it was, a school for working class kids. "We're going to prove the Harvard for working class." [New York Senator] Patrick Moynahan and all those people. Now you see that all just going back. Back and back—access to health care, access to all these things [is] being restricted because this government is so deeply in debt and so committed to war that I don't think it can break its addiction to it. Even if Clinton and liberals are over there supposedly in control, they're only there for a few years and the real people who are there all the time, they don't even tell the president half of the stuff. All this stuff is too secret for him. They've got all these programs going on in all the countries in the world. They are undermining people, they are pushing people up… This war against Cuba that has been going on for all these years, and this total embargo—it would seem as a neighbor, even if

you don't like what your neighbor thinks and how your neighbor acts, you could be a little bit more considerate. But they won't. They won't do that. They're still at war with this little tiny country. It's absurd. That's the truth.

INT: Would you tell us about going to visit the [Vietnam] war memorial in Washington?

JH: I would tell you about that but first I'd say when they started with that war memorial thing, I was just like horrified that they were going to do it because I didn't want any memorial to that war. I was really just like, this is another trick. This is another trick that they are going to build this, and actually the government didn't even really build it. It was private people, so the thing got built but then I think Reagan was going to come and not open it up. I was sitting having a couple of beers with my friend Kevin, who is an ex-Marine from Vietnam, and this was about eight o'clock at night and he says, "Let's go." And you know, we hopped in the car and drove from Boston to Washington. We got to Washington at four o'clock in the morning, something like that. At first light we went through the memorial and it was very dramatic and a moving experience for both of us. It put us both to tears. You can't go near that wall without that happening because it's just, I don't know, it's monolithic, it's just too much to see all those names. We went back to the car, and we were going to sleep and that's when I wrote that poem because I was thinking of all the names that weren't on the wall, all the people that had died who had died because of Vietnam but hadn't been killed there—you know, had come home and died for different reasons, medical problems later on, emotional problems later on, suicide, car accidents, drinking, all these kinds of people that died. And I was thinking that their names should be on the wall—that number [on the wall] seems like a lot but there are so many more beyond that. And I was really upset, I couldn't go back to sleep so I wrote a little poem about my

brother-in-law Tommy because he had died; he was all messed up when he came home and he died in a car accident drinking too much—he didn't want to live, so be as wild as you can, take as many chances as you can, and maybe you'll get killed. I was upset about that, and maybe about seven o'clock or so we went to go back to the memorial and by that time the Secret Service had sealed it off and so we went to go walking back in there and they wouldn't let us back in. We had old fatigues on and that kind of business and we got really confrontational with the Secret [Service]—the ones that protect the president. They were sealing this memorial and it was ironic that here we are—it's still dawn, I mean this is only an hour or two later, but it's still really dawn and we're trying to get in and just to be there— and they won't let us in and they sealed it for this president who stood for all the things that I was against, locking out Vietnam veterans. We got real confrontational but then we decided it was probably better just to let them have it—all right you want it, you've got it, we're outta here. And we got back in the car and drove away. That was it. Otherwise we were going to get in serious trouble because I guess you don't mess around with those guys, they don't take it lightly. So that was my first trip. I've been there three or four different times, and each time it's just like going the first time, it's like this well of emotions that comes up.

INT: Thank you very much, John.

END OF INTERVIEW