

John Castro  
Interviewed by Steve Estes  
Veterans History Project  
July 2, 2003

Transcribed: Loren Basham

STEVE ESTES: This is Steve Estes and today's date is July 2, 2003.

JOHN CASTRO: This is John Castro in East Palo Alto, California.

SE: Great. Alright, John, when and where were you born?

JC: I was born in Detroit, Michigan, September the 14th 1949.

SE: OK. And what did your parents do for a living?

JC: My father was a cab driver and my mother was a house wife. However, I wasn't raised by them. I raised in foster homes from age four to age fifteen.

SE: Do you mind saying why you weren't raised by them?

JC: Alcohol.

SE: You said that you're half native American ancestry, which one of your parents...?

JC: My mom.

SE: Your mom.

JC: A full blooded indian. I think she's back living on the reservation that she was born in.

SE: What reservation is that?

JC: Batchewana, Ontario, Canada.

SE: And your dad was French?

JC: Yeah.

SE: French-American or French national?

JC: I don't know 'cause he died when I was eight years old.

SE: I see.

JC: So I didn't know very much about him.

SE: Did you grow up in foster homes around the Detroit area?

JC: Well, actually about 60 miles away. And they were farms.

SE: OK. What was it like growing up on farms?

JC: Well I had a lot of chores to do. And one of the homes that I was in, the foster mother she was abusive to me. I mean I would get kicked, punched or slapped two, three times a day. I remember we didn't get very much food. I was very skinny until I was about 12 13 years old when I moved to another farm and was able to be living there. The only reason I bring this up is because one day I remember coming home from school and getting beaten because I was hungry and I wasn't really hungry, I was just so skinny. And looked like I was being starved to death. And that's why when I went to the school cafeteria they told me that if I see anything there that I would like to eat that I could go ahead and help myself. And somehow, I don't know, someone went ahead and called my stepmother and told her that I look emaciated. And so I got in trouble for that. Another memory that her two children, a daughter and a son, they would get like two tuna fish sandwiches with lettuce on it, cookies, bag of chips, plus 50 cents to go and buy things. And my lunch was one slice of bread with peanut butter on one side and then folded over. I just thought that wasn't right but there was nothing that I could do about it.

SE: Sure. You said you were in foster homes until you were fourteen. Were you adopted at that point or what happened?

JC: That was when I ran away and then I was and then I was allowed to stay with my mom.

SE: OK. Where was she living at that time?

JC: Still in Michigan.

SE: She was still in Michigan. So you finished high school in Detroit, or had you dropped out at this point?

JC: No, I dropped out of high school. I was having difficulty because I got kicked out of home when I was in the eleventh grade. I was working in a gas station at night 8 hours after school. And the school went ahead said quite a bit that it was more important for me to work. At the time it was more important for me to work than it was to go to school and so I eventually dropped out. And the reason I dropped out is one girl that I had a crush on, I found out that she was pregnant and we were actually in love. We were rehearsing the graduation ceremony when I found out and I just stood up and walked out.

SE: Did you think you might be the father?

JC: No, no. I knew I wasn't the father just somebody else. But I just didn't, I didn't know then, kids in the city did things like that because back on the farm, we didn't. We, I was born a Christian and I was going to be a virgin until I got married.

SE: OK. So how did you get into the military, you said you volunteered, right?

JC: Yeah. Well my best buddy, John Lees, he was getting drafted and he asked me if I would go ahead and join him and we could go ahead and go to basic training together. By joining in the buddy system. So I went ahead and did that. And we moved into basic training together. The first couple of weeks or so I said something to someone and then John Lees was transferred to my company. And so we did discover a little bit of basic training together.

SE: What did your mom think about your joining the Army?

JC: I didn't hear her express any opinion about it.

SE: Now this is 1968 when you joined, right?

JC: Yes.

SE: Had the antiwar movement started, or were you aware of that at all?

JC: No I wasn't. In fact I don't think I was aware about it. But this one girl that was in my study, study hall class, I forget her name. I think was Georgia. She was very interested and about the assassination of John Kennedy. And she would bring these newspapers in and say that this person knew such and such and they would know that this person didn't think that all these people had died or whatever, had no knowledge about that. That's all I remember about as far as politics.

SE: So it wasn't a very political high school experience for you?

JC: Right.

SE: Can you tell me any memorable events from your basic training?

JC: Oh, yeah. I was a squad leader. So I had to set an example. And tests that we had to see if we were learning the material and grasping some of these, guys were having difficulty with that and I would have to go give these people the test of the same material over and over again until they got it. And I would coach the guy. And this helped me even more to understanding the material that we were being taught.

SE: Had you shown promise to be a squad leader? How did that occur?

JC: I think basically there I was made a squad leader because of my GT score. Which always was like similar to an intelligence test score. Mine was 121 which is considered superior intelligence and I think maybe that's why I was made a squad leader.

SE: So even though you didn't have a high school diploma, you were kind of naturally more intelligent than some of the other folks who were in your squad..

JC: Yeah.

SE: Interesting. When you finished basic training you went to an additional training school, you were telling me.

JC: Well I \_\_(?).\_\_.

SE: Oh, tell me.

JC: OK. I graduated at the highest of the proficiency test. And I was given a trophy. It was a piece of wood with a little figurine of a man's hand with his arm up like he's carrying a torch. And I was also tied with another man as most physically fit in our company and I was asked by my platoon sergeant if I would go ahead if I would rescind my claim, my half claim, to the most physically fit so that this other guy could get the trophy so there would be two guys given a trophy instead of just one. And then an honorable mention for a tying thing for most physically fit.

SE: So, this stuff that tested your physical fitness was obstacle courses, running and that kind of stuff.

JC: Yeah, it was. But I think the reason I did so well at it 'cause I raised on a farm and I was running every year since I was a kid. \_\_(?)\_\_ And it was only a couple of years that I was in the city before I joined the Army so I was like a farm boy and as far as physical fitness. And did so well physically.

SE: So coming out of basic training with that, with those kind of high capacities for high stamina, how did you decide what you wanted to go into?

JC: I didn't decide. We just got our orders and they decided for us.

SE: OK, what were your orders?

JC: My orders were to go to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri to become a volunteer vocation specialist.

SE: Doesn't sound like the most glorious post in the Army. How did you feel about that?

JC: Well, I didn't know anything about it. I didn't even know they had a had a Fort Leonard Wood. All of a sudden it was good because I didn't do any traveling, you know. I took up with the bush leagues.

SE: That's OK, it was kind of a joke anyway. What were your impressions, you were in Fort Knox for your basic training and then Fort Leonard Wood. What were your impressions of those places having grown up on farms and then Detroit.

JC: Well, I thought they were pretty bleak. You know at least, well the bulk of the area, the barracks, was certainly like reminded me of living in a barn. They had the siding on the outside and you could see the post hole of the floor and all that in there and they had some kind of, material that wasn't plastered like in a house. You know, just rustic and it looked like the inside of a barn. One thing that really fascinated me was the machine that they had for washing dishes. One thing that really impressed me is that it was like a washing machine with the old type agitator with ringers. Something like that but it had bumps all over that was used for peeling potatoes. That was pretty neat. Then I was explaining my knowledge of horizons. I took some individual training and I was also a squad leader and when I graduated, I graduated with the second highest score ever recorded for that class. Then the post commander wanted to see me. He wanted me go to West Point. And I had to take a physical. I went and saw a doctor because my eyes weren't adjustable to 20/20 vision with glasses I was told that wasn't going to go to West Point. And did get \_\_(?)\_\_ assembled score of recognition for having such a high score. And an MOS. And then I went on leave, a 30 day leave and that was the first time my mom expressed her concern. Because she knew I was going to Vietnam after that.

SE: What did she say?

JC: She said to come home. That was it. You know but I could tell that she was really worried.

SE: Did you go home on your leave?

JC: Yeah, yeah. In fact, I had my orders before, you know, orders to go home on leave but I also had my order to go ahead and report to my next duty

station. And that was in Oakland, California. It was a point of transfer to Vietnam. So my mom knew about that and all she said was come home and that she was concerned. I guess it bothers me so much because I didn't know about to know how I was upsetting her. I was just going to join the Army, big deal, you know. So anyways.

**SE:** It's probably hard to do this, but how did you feel about going to Vietnam, separate from how your mom felt?

**JC:** I really didn't have much imagination about it. I was just going to a different country. And that was basically it. I wasn't concerned about being shot or anything like that. It was just I'm in the Army, I'm supposed to go and help fight this war. And that's basically it. However, once I got to Vietnam I thought it was such a beautiful country and I was glad that I was there. They had different kinds of plants and I fished by myself and they had mountains and things like that and it was just really neat. I thought it was really beautiful there.

**SE:** Do you remember the day that you got there, or the evening that you got there? Can you tell me a little about that?

**JC:** The day that I arrived in Vietnam was supposed to land in Saigon International Airport, but the flight was delayed because we were told to land someplace else. Because it was unsafe to land at Saigon because of artillery shelling from the enemy. So we had to land at Ben Hoa. And so we landed at Ben Hoa and then I remember getting on a bus and the bus drive through Saigon, you know it being an oriental city and seeing the women with their clothes that are certainly different from the west. And all the pointed hats and everything and I thought this is really neat. And the architecture was different and I'd never seen any \_\_(?), stuff like that. It wasn't really kept up. You know there was no sidewalks and stuff like that. Like dirt or something. So mud was getting around, splashing or something like that. That's about all I remember on the day I arrived.

**SE:** Was your first posting with the engineers?

**JC:** No my first posting was in American Division Headquarters. We were in a place outside of Saigon. And we had to report every day information to find out where we were going to be stationed. But I remember that they would read off a list of names and then read the order or whatever. And I shown where to go. And so that was a couple of days. But then I remember that I was being transferred to the central highlands and the American Division was the division I was going to be with or attached to or whatever. I was stationed in Chu Lai, South Vietnam. When I went there and we were there for some additional training and also they gave us a shot for malaria or something and some inoculations and for a whole month we didn't do anything except go to school and lay around and things like that. There are bosses in the Army and so in the afternoon we were able sit around on their bunks and that. I'd been told that it was sort of advised to get used to the timing. And I also \_\_(?), to go ahead and watch to see if anybody was having side effects from the malaria vaccine that we were given. Because I remember Larry Hubbard, a friend of mine, wanted to go do something after we got off duty. He just decided to lay around. And I mentioned to the sergeant or somebody, who seemed to be real concerned as to what it means to just lay around sleeping, you know he wanted to know the details. I was told years later that I learned about the side effects, for some of us, that some people have, based on the side effects of the vaccine.

SE: OK. I was going to ask you about your, what kind of things you were learning in the classes when you first got to Vietnam? If you remember.

JC: Well, it seemed like some of it was on hand to hand combat. That I remember seeing first run theater doing different rules and things like that. That's all I remember. Plus stuff like, it's been too long.

SE: That's OK. After you finished that first month or so of classes, where were you stationed?

JC: I was in \_\_(?). I was in company 26th Engineer Battalion and I think we were attached to 187th \_\_(?). Brigade.

SE: What was your job?

JC: My first one was sand bag filling. And building different \_\_(?). and things like that. Then I became a truck driver and I used to go off the post, off the base, to where there was some sand and I used to fill up my truck with sand and then drive it back to the post. After I was there for awhile, I was able to go, I was allowed to go on mine sweeps and did a mine sweep on \_\_(?). every day. Because of compocom (?). to get the supplies. And do remember com would be destroyed, you know, the ammo. In the beginning I brought munitions and things like that. The mine sweep plans were done quickly is that one squad, or one platoon would work from \_\_(?). and the other platoon would reach \_\_(?). and did the mine sweeping in \_\_(?). in the clear. So I did that for awhile and then somehow the mine was found and the mine detector didn't catch it. So after that, we came up with another tactic to use which was just to go ahead fill a large truck full of sand and sand bags in the front all around and to pop it over the road after the mine sweep went through to make sure that there was no mines left on the road. So this one week I don't know how many trucks we lost, I guess one every day, and so many truck drivers were getting injured because of my opinion was that they were getting injured because they were being blown out of the truck and when they landed on the ground that's when they would break their bones. I forget who I told, I think maybe it was my sergeant or platoon leader, Lieutenant Ballinger, about the reason why they were getting injured because they were not hanging on to the truck at all times. And truck drivers were afraid to go ahead and do the mine sweeping so I volunteered for it. All you got to do is hold on. So that's what I did. That was time for my platoon to be over at Ellis and Ross (?). And worked it's way towards \_\_(?). I knew I could get blown up that day. A lot of things changed just because the pressures up to now. And it was happening on a daily basis. What happened was that I was driving and found a mine with my truck. You know, there was a great big explosion and sand sort of got into my eyes. I turned my head really quick but the sound waves went ahead and broke my ear drum. I thought the bomb beautiful. All this just yellow fire like, you know. It was a jet black cloud. Then right afterward the explosion I was afraid there would be a secondary explosion of the gas tanks or the diesel tanks, so I just climbed down and ran down the street. By that time, some of the other enlisted men were around the truck and wondering where I was. I came walking up behind them. "Here I am." They asked me if I was OK, and I said, yeah. This was the first time that I was in a helicopter, a Huey. It was a red cross helicopter, it was going to take me out. I felt really important at that time because the helicopter went straight up into the air and as we were rising up into the air I'd see all of the soldiers, you know, making a circle the \_\_(?). to protect something. Me being a stupid kid, I thought they were trying to protect me, but I think it was more that they were trying to protect the helicopter.

SE: They were trying to protect those.

JC: Yeah.

SE: Were you taking fire? I mean was there...

JC: No there was no fire there. No one was shooting at us or anything. It was just that the mines would go off. So then I went to Da Nang and I was there and my ear got infected and my neck swelled up like a ball, like I had a goiter. I was given antibiotics and I would have to go every day to this doctor named Kusinata (sp?) and he would put this thing like that they use in a dentist draws the saliva out of your mouth, they put that in my ear to get the pus out. I don't know, it's painful, you know, to get all of the pus out of there. And I would have to gargle with salt water. The concussion from the air also affected my throat, like strep throat or something. Where bacteria is growing there. I don't know how long I was there. Then I went back to duty but they wouldn't let me do the concussion test anymore. And so they made me a cook. I learned how to cook. I guess I did pretty good. And then I also was... Delta Company, 25th Engineering Battalion were going through our company area for some reason and stopped there to have dinner and they just loved the way the food tasted that I cooked. I don't know exactly when it happened, but I was offered to go ahead and cook for the officers mess. Which is the post commander and everything. I was totally not, I didn't want to go ahead and cook for the officers. I think the men need good food too. And I was transferred after that. Delta Company, 25th Engineering Battalion.

SE: You got punishment for refusing to cook?

JC: Yeah.

SE: Alright, before you leave the Alpha Company, what were your relations with the other men in the company?

JC: Well I had a lot of friends. A person who the friendship was is smoking marijuana. That was, you know, I had to see whether smoking things like that... I remember one visitor, Jack, he would walk around my bed \_\_\_\_ (?). So we'd have to do that and then we'd have to drink some beer. I got a lot of mostly men.

SE: Had you smoked marijuana before you got to Vietnam?

JC: I don't think I did.

SE: Let's get you to Delta Company. What was, I mean I think you were saying that that's kind of where some of the trouble started.

JC: Yeah.

SE: What were you doing, were you starting as a cook there too?

JC: Yeah. I was a cook.

SE: OK.

JC: Well, I was a cook there. I was toward the end of my tour, which was a year being over in Vietnam. I went ahead and signed up to extend for six more months. It was like an additional six months that a person stayed in Vietnam

over a year came off of their total time in the military. So if I extended six months I think I'd get out a year, two years instead of three years. So I went ahead and did that, but then I started having difficulty. The ST boxes that we used to get filled with cigarettes and candy and \_\_\_(?)\_\_ stuff and books and I liked to go ahead and read them. These psychology books that were in the ST boxes. One day I mentioned to a friend of mine, a possible friend of mine that the reason why we used drugs was, according to the psychology book, was that we had an unhappy sex life. And he says come on, and I went and followed him and then he enticed me to have a homosexual act on him. I did that and I was real upset because I liked it. And I thought, oh my God, I am excited. I mean it was a shock to me, you know. I mean I kind of thought that vaguely but it was the truth. So anyway, shortly after that, maybe a couple of days later, I ran into my friend. Seeing that I worked in the mess hall, I didn't always see the other men that had duty someplace else. Only occasionally after 5 o'clock or whatever. You know, I would get to see him. And he said, I remember I was walking, following him into a hooch, which is a term for a permanent structure, which meant it had plywood floors, not just dirt. He said, come on Dave, let's go ahead and get it done. I was shocked. I said, don't you ever call me Dave, nobody else calls me. You shouldn't do that either. And then I tried to distance myself from him. And then I ran into him again because he was still my friend. He wanted me to sodomize him in his hooch and I said well I can't do that because I don't even have much, just rub it on me and then it will get hard. He just wouldn't leave me alone. I happened to look around at the time and it looked like they'd moved the cots down the thing as if someone was in there and the poncho \_\_\_(?)\_\_\_. So I just took off and I ran out of there. And from that time on I said I got to stay out of there. This is against the law. So I stayed away from him. And then the next time I saw him his eyes were glazed over and his behavior had changed. He was like, I don't know, I didn't like being around him. He was so different. We were trying to play cards or something like that and he took a bayonet and slammed it into the table and said this is it, nobody cheats. This is was a shock to me. He \_\_\_(?)\_\_\_. I know something was wrong with him, I said what happened to you? He said, well I took some pills. And I said well don't take those pills because I don't like the way you act. And then he came up and told me that he was getting discharged from Nam. He showed me some papers in advance and he was getting discharged. And I said, my God, he went ahead and told them we had gay sex and \_\_\_(?)\_\_ sex. And that's why they were discharging him. And so I never let on that I had this affair with him. I tried to keep it, well I kept it quiet. I didn't talk about it and nobody confronted me about it or anything. So it was like, don't talk about it, it didn't happen. And then one of my other friends, Lee, was a specialist 4 or specialist 4B, I forget. This was the last thing because then they called up everybody by the last name. I went over to visit with him and he was sitting in a chair and his eyes were glazed over also and his pupils were dilated. And he said "come and get me, can't you." And I said who's coming to get you, I don't hear anybody. And then he said yeah. And he says, "I'm messed in their shit, I've been touching their shit." I just didn't know what he was talking about. But I knew that he was extremely frightened. I could feel it. He was just filled with terror. So a couple of days later this sergeant E5, Peck, was his last name, Sergeant Peck. He didn't have any of the stripes on his shirt, it was a shirt that was stripped of all rank. So I asked him, what happened to you. He says, well, you know. Which I didn't know but I just give him "oh yeah," because I had just been smoking pot. Of course I had confronted this one guy that wasn't inhaling the marijuana but blowing it up in the air. I said well he wasn't smoking and I felt that he was a CID agent, which is the military's Criminal Investigative Department. I went ahead and declined him, and I remember that when I did I mentioned recent names (??) out and suddenly he just laid down and



put his arms and legs in the air like that. His knees were back and he said, "four." I thought it was bizarre to do something like that. So anyway,....

SE: What do you mean by men?

JC: I don't know, but other times when I had some kind of breaks, there was always somebody go ahead and say four and then I appear to have paranoid schizophrenia. So then they survived along down the line.

SE: You had met up with Sergeant Peck?

JC: Yeah. He had this loose marijuana in a bag and it had some dark stuff in there which I think was just hash and I went ahead and smoked it. And my eyes became glazed over and I was feeling terror. I remember that, several things, I didn't know that was a strong hallucinogen and it made me terrified. But I had hurt my little finger and it was a second degree burn and the blister broke open and fell off. So I had an open wound and I was cooking in the mess hall. And we were supposed to be getting ready because of a battalion surgeon they were going to do an inspection. And so I had every intention to get the KPs moving and getting the mess hall all cleaned up and the battalion surgeon came in and walked right into the kitchen, looked at my finger and said you got an open wound, you can't cook. As a matter of fact.... And I said why this is insulting. He didn't even look at the rest of the mess hall, he just hey this is it. I thought he was out to get me. My first instinct was I was getting discharged. He later told me about a homosexual act and so I went over to the kitchen a sergeant, I forget his name but he was still in \_\_\_(?)\_\_ in his capacity. And I said Mary Jane, you know for marijuana, and he said why. And he actually stood right in front of me but he did it in such a way that his genitals were touching and I said something about it was out of place here. And then I remember that before, I think we just had shorts on, we didn't have any fatigues. They were off duty. They had, some of them had been dancing around and singing "one little, two little, three little," you know the gay Indian thing. Often they would call me Little Chief, because there was another Indian that was bigger than I was and they would call him Big Chief. So anyway, they were dancing around and singing that song "One little, two little, three little Indians" and when they got to "ten little Indian boys," the emphasis was on the words "little" and "boys." The reason being was because of my male \_\_\_(?)\_\_ as a foster child that delayed my puberty until I was 23 years old. I didn't develop sexually until after I got out of the military. I say 23 because it was 1972. And that's how old I was at that time. So I said, Hob something's going on. But then I remember that was told that I couldn't go ahead and cook so the guy who used to be a cook there, was a mess hall truck driver, he wanted to go ahead and cook so anyway, he became the cook and I became the truck driver again. So I remember I had to go get water for the showers and when I went there was some kind of equipment there where the water tower was and I was afraid that it was going to come crashing down on me. And this was the morning of that marijuana relation to something so that made me fearful. But I realized that there was no problem there and I was going to be driving a truck and it was really slippery and somehow I was able to go ahead and drive the truck with the trailer full of water on this slippery hill with no problem which other men would not been able to go ahead and do it. And I did this while I was under the effects of this chemical. Oh, and just before I left, another thing I remember too is that when I was that when I was a cook or a handyman, the stove, they were filled up with gas, major gasoline and then they had to put air into it to make it pressurized and then it would come out and then it would burn. This new man he was in our company for maybe a week or so and had the largest flaccid penis and he came up there and filled the stove with air and he was completely naked. And it was

cold and I said, "aren't you cold?" And he said, "do you want this thing filled up and all that." And I said I'm being harassed.

**SE:** So you think other people and Delta Company knew you were gay, or they'd heard from this one or two incidents?

**JC:** I don't think they knew, I don't think anyone told them, but that they were told to do things and they did them without question.

**SE:** You mean told to harass you?

**JC:** Yeah, yeah.

**SE:** Who told them that?

**JC:** I think it was specialist Stringer, or Private First Class Stringer, the guy that I had accused of being a CID agent. Because I went looking for him because I was going to fuck him about smoking the pot and just doing a lot of air. And he said he had enough. And I said well why waste it, if you did have enough let other people smoke it instead of blowing it out in the air. The guy laid on his back and he's....

**SE:** Right.

**JC:** Yeah. And I remember when I went to go ahead and talk with him, I was told that he was over in his own tent, and I went into the other tent. Here's the guy, apparently he must have been masturbating because he had a big erection on and then the company translator, was this boy about nine or ten years old, said, oh, Castro wants to go to the so and so, to the ship, meaning, of course I never knew it was going on, but certain people, someone was having sex in the bathroom, you know the outhouse \_\_(?). In fact I didn't know that anyone was gay except for me and usually if I met with a guy that I had sex with must have been gay. And I didn't know. I don't know if I am supposed to be talking to you or not.

**SE:** We were just, we're not really doing a chronology right now, I think we're just talking about some of the problems that arose when you were in Delta Company.

**JC:** Oh, OK. Yeah. So anyway, I was off duty and I went to my, it was night time and I went to my hooch and I went ahead and laid down. No, no, it was in the afternoon, late afternoon, and I went to my hooch. And the colonel, the battalion commander, Lt. Colonel Sweigert, was hovering in his helicopter with a 45 caliber pistol pointing at me and ....

**SE:** For real or is this ....

**JC:** No, this is for real. It wasn't a hallucination. The hallucinations weren't visual they were all audio. And well I had some. So I went ahead and slept and I did hear a voice saying farmer you're dead. I heard it so loud it was as if the voice threw me on the bed. See what happened was that he was going to shoot me right here. I was moving out of the way, I was just the brains. I think I bled partway through the night and I remember being cold from the loss of blood and being in the dark and hearing a dog bark. I told someone about that I heard a dog bark last night and they told me, to harass me, that all people who hear dogs bark at night usually die. So anyway, I felt like I had to go to the bathroom so I started walking to where the can was. It had

walls so there was some privacy. But somebody came walking out of there. And he looked right here, this area, you know, and I said, I asked him, what's the colonel flying in his helicopter all night for. And he said, I don't see the colonel. I walked to the first man I was going toward the mess hall and somebody will stick up the mess hall. And they were making a face, like that, you know, really disgusted look, you know what I mean. And I thought, he's doing that just because I had this other man's penis in my mouth. But then I think that must have been because of the blood. I went and talked to the first sergeant. I said there's something wrong with me. There's something wrong with my mind, I need to talk to the psychiatrist. He said, well you're going to have to go to sick, go on sick call in the morning. I couldn't wait so I went ahead and seen our checked, checked off base and I went to Chu Lai Headquarters to go to the training camp because there is a Sergeant Cole, a Sergeant E5 Cole who....

[End of tape side 1]

[Tape side 2, John Castro]

SE: Hang on two seconds. OK, go ahead.

JC: So I went to see Sergeant Cole who was I understand at the Chu Lai training area when I first came in the country that he was teaching these classes to the new recruits coming into the country. He was out in the field so someone told me that he was out in the field. So I went out in the field and I saw him with a \_\_(?)\_\_ pointed right at me. Like he was going to shoot me, but he didn't. And he said, come on, let's talk. And we walked into this hooch and he told to sit down. And he sat down and he says, I knew when I saw the blood on your shirt this morning that you'd come and see me. And as soon as he said that I hallucinated, this is one of the few visual hallucinations I had but there was blood all over his shirt. And I thought this is really strange. So I told him that the First Sergeant at Delta Company, 26th Engineer Battalion, told me that I was having a personal problem and I should see the chaplain. So Sergeant Cole went ahead and took me to the, to see a chaplain. He asked me if I was hungry. I remember that, somehow we got into the mess hall. And he told me that I had been depriving myself of food. But I don't remember eating anything. But I do remember seeing all the troops sitting down eating and looking at me. You know. So anyway, he called my company commander, the executive officer came in a jeep to pick me up and sent me back to the company. I think the chaplain that I saw was a colonel, so he had some weight to pull. So when I got back to the company area, I said that I wanted the mess sergeant to stay in to watch me at night because I didn't trust people. When I got back into my hooch I looked at my bed and my poncho liner was changed. I had a camouflaged one and what was on there now was just an old drab one. So that was cleaned up and the mess sergeant, he was crying. I mean really heavily. And, you know, what's wrong with him. I told him, I said, I want you to watch me because I don't want anyone to kill me tonight.

SE: Do you want to get some water?

JC: I didn't feel free safe and ....

[Interruption in tape]

JC: So he stayed there for awhile and I guess by the time I got some sleep and I got up the next day to go out to sick call. And the sick call truck was taking me in, I think there was one other guy. And the sick call which was over

at battalion headquarters, and I was to go ahead and see the battalion surgeon. When I got there, there was a gurney and the battalion surgeon told me to hop up on the gurney. I really didn't trust this guy. I didn't know why he wanted me to get up there. Here I had just been feeling safe and I said well I'm not getting up there. And he went to his office and I guess he told me to follow him and I followed him into his office. And I told him, I says, the only thing that you want from me is a list of names of people who smoke pot in the company and I said I'm not going to give it to you. And I walked out of his office. He was very vain he was probably just fuming, you know. Intense anger, like he wanted to stab me in the back or something. This was really not going the way that they had planned. So anyways, I got over to the hospital that was in \_\_\_(?)\_\_ division headquarters, that was where one of the generals were. And I remember seeing a red cross on a tent and said well that's the field hospital, I'm going in there. I felt extremely cold, but I couldn't feel why it was cold when it was 120 degrees out. But I remember that I was up in the air and I was looking down at the tent. I was afraid, I didn't want anybody to see me. So I went ahead and I hid behind some garbage cans, this is an out of body experience. [crying] My body was down there in the hospital dying. And then the voices that I heard, someone told me, it was a woman, she's saying, about the pot, she said that's OK because they go ahead and have secret compartments. The Ford Motor Company has secret compartments, they have a factory there that has secret compartments where they ship this marijuana back to the United States and they says it's right down there on 101. And I said, really? And the next thing you know I was on highway 101 looking at this Ford Motor Company. You know, a factory there. I said, wow, you know. And I think this is a guardian, a guardian angel who's giving me this information. Then finally, I came to I was back in my body. And I asked the nurse how long was I laying around and she said well I was unconscious for two days. I thought, God, I can't be laying around like this, I got duties to do. And I remember sitting in a wheel chair looking at the water that was laying on the South China Sea. And I was watching the water and the sun was reflecting off of that for awhile. I was sitting that, I was heavily sedated for a very long time. And I remember that from that field hospital I went to another one. I was transferred to Nha Trang, South Vietnam, to another hospital there. I remember that while I was there that this black man had his eyes glazed over like my friend's were. And he was very combative. He was fighting. And they said he was on LSD. I don't think that he was on LSD. I think that he was on this stuff that they put in the marijuana. I think this marijuana was the \_\_\_(?)\_\_\_, because I saw the effects that it had on my other friends. But we never, I would never, because I remember talking to, seeing the doctor when I first got to this new hospital and he told me not to look down so I didn't look down. And then I remember, I remember there was the black man there and then another thing, I was taking a shower and they told me not to get my chest wet. And so I remember I washed my hair back like this so I wouldn't get my chest wet. And then I was unconscious and somehow I remember that I was on this airfield and they were coming in in an airplane that I was on a stretcher. And I was returned to the United States and I was going to the Valley Forge General Hospital in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. A real hospital. When I got there, my doctor, Captain Lemur (sp?) was a Swiss doctor, gave me some medication and I guess the effects of that drug was wearing off, and also the other drugs that they gave me that were making me unconscious. I seemed to be doing pretty good, but for some reason I had, I was there for occupational therapy and I forgot something and I went back to my bunk area to get it and when I went by the doctor's office his door was open about that much and I heard him on the telephone saying that, yes I have two CID men on the ward. So I said, oh, he's got two CID men in the ward, I've got to tell the people I think are pot heads that they shouldn't smoke pot because it's laced with something. And the CID is putting it in there and that they would be very

sorry if they took this marijuana. There was this one guy that befriended me. He gave me a piece of LSD, and I didn't want to take it, said I'm not going to take that. "Oh, come on you'll have a lot of fun." And he's going ahead and looking at himself in the mirror. His face is changing and all that. "It's a lot of fun. Go ahead and take it."

SE: This was in the hospital?

JC: Yeah. This was....

SE: In Pennsylvania?

JC: Yeah.

SE: OK.

JC: I started questioning him and how was he supposed to get this pea sized piece of clay, you know, looked like yellow clay balled up, how did you get that. And he says he got it from Letterman. I said well he was in Letterman but crashed and didn't see that. It's a great big thing there. So I didn't believe him and so I said he must be the CID guy. If you want to go ahead and pass this bad experience I'm having off on LSD, which in the military records states that I took LSD in Vietnam, which isn't true. I didn't take LSD until that guy gave it to me on a psyche ward. Military, at Valley Forge. And then the other guy, he would be walking around in the, and the other guy, he had a hairy chest and he always had his shirt off when he was shooting pool and he would go ahead and cuss the doctor out, saying he was man and he had to have a woman, that he'd better get his pass and all this other stuff. It was all for my benefit, that I was supposed to be, if I was a real man I would be doing this, you know. The thing of it was that my Christian upbringing, I didn't want to have a family the way my family was. I wanted to do things right, so I said well until I got married until I had sex. And I was really make sure that I got a good job so that I could raise my family and they would be with me. And they wouldn't have to be raised in foster homes. So anyway, I figured at least two guys were CID agents and one time I was walking around and I saw this one sign that said CID. \_\_\_(?)\_\_\_. In this hospital area. It was right next to shower. I went back up past the shower room afternoons. So the guy that was always horsing around with his sexual prowess and the guy that I sort of questioning as to how he got an ID, LSD, was transferred, he was released. After that, I mean, he gave me the LSD and I took it and it wore off and I started questioning the hospital, \_\_\_(?)\_\_\_ then all of a sudden he's gone. And that was that. So I went back to duty after, I went on leave, so then I went back to duty at Fort Riley, Kansas. There was not much to do, it was really boring. All we had to do was basically go ahead and wash the trucks all the time. And then after being there for about a year I got another 30 day leave and then I went to \_\_\_(?)\_\_\_, Germany. When I was in Germany, oh, I got in touch with some of the, to get me some hash. And I understand that hash is supposed to be stronger than marijuana or it's made from marijuana or something. So anyways, I had some of that. And one of the guys wondered how I hid it. So I showed him how I hid it in my locker so they wouldn't be able to find it. And this one month.... Oh, one thing I forgot to tell you, every time I got orders to go somewhere, because I had such a high CT score, that the battalion commander always transferred me to the headquarters, the headquarters company. I was never allowed to go through company duty. My orders were cut from to send me, when I got there they said, "ok, no, you're coming to headquarters." So anyways, that's just something that I remember. So anyways, this one guy that was in E Company, not headquarters company, he had this letter that was sort of sexually graphic and

all this other stuff. And I said, oh, you're CID. And I had another nervous breakdown like over in Vietnam.

**SE:** This is in Germany, though?

**JC:** Yes, this is in Germany. And what it was is that, I remember that we were at work and we were supposed to go ahead and turn our combinations in and give our key to our lockers in case something happened. And all the guys were upset, "what's going to happen to us over here in Germany?" They think of Vietnam, they had more experience, this is nothing. So we turned our combinations in and our spare keys to them. And that's how they went ahead and put one of those dark things in with my hash. So that I would think it was a piece of hash and I'd smoke it when I had a nervous breakdown. I'd become psychotic. I don't know what's happening then. For some reason I went to church on the post. Because in Vietnam I had to go see the chaplain so I said maybe I should just go see the chaplain. So, cut to the chase, so I went there and then this priest came in. He had black clothes on and he had a thing and he wasn't in military uniform, he was a civilian guy. He said is there someplace where we can go and talk. And I says yeah, to the Inn. So we walked over there, me and him were drinking beer. He told me, he says, once a year, the sergeant in charge of the motor pool, because I was working in the motor pool now. On the PLL clerk, which is a, I forget what it is. Load list or something. Which is \_\_(?)\_\_ for the battalion. And I would drive a truck in to Shifenberg (sp?) and pick up supplies and bring them back on different occasions. He told me to go to the, this chaplain that I saw, told me to go to the sergeant in charge of the motor pool and tell him to take me to Frankfurt to the hospital. And so I went ahead and did that. I did that the next day when I saw the sergeant but in the meantime, someone was asking me, somehow they asked me what rank was the, what rank was the chaplain that I saw. I said there wasn't any rank it was a civilian guy. And I said he came with me into the Inn. They said we didn't see anybody, you were by yourself. So this was another guy who was helping there. So I went to Frankfurt, Germany for awhile. And I remember around Christmas time. And it seemed like I was in the hospital there for three months but this time they wanted to give me electric shocks there at Valley Forge. So I went ahead and agreed to go ahead to take them as the doctor of the ward was Captain Bowman, no Major Bowman. I think he's a major now. He said that if I had this \_\_(?)\_\_, he figured to solve this electrical energy that surrounded the human body was something like electricity and perhaps by passing a small amount of electricity through my brain a change could be brought about. So it sounded OK to me so I agreed to go ahead and take the electric shocks. And after three of them, I decided I'm no different than I was before, it was a waste of time. I told the doctor, Major Bowman, that I wanted to see him the colonel that was in charge of electric shocks, he was supposed to be a specialist in Germany to go ahead and give me this electric shock treatment. So he came down and I told him the electric shocks wouldn't work and I wanted to go home. And he got mad. He cussed out the major, Major Bowman, and I felt sorry for him. The ward doctor because I got him in trouble with the big guy upstairs. So he said, well if you agree to go ahead and take the remaining seven, take all ten electric shocks he would personally see to it that I got discharged. So I said OK. So I went ahead and did that. That was a bizarre trip. I did get the electric shock Monday, Wednesday and Friday until I got ten, the amount of electric shocks that I was supposed to get. This one time they didn't give me a muscle relaxer and I told them. One of the technicians, I didn't get my muscle relaxer, which is a hypodermic about that big around and that long full of this sort of yellowish stuff. And that big needle went inside the vein that hurt somewhat. This is also some pills, I had the same pills that I had before. However, something came up and all the staff, mostly guys that were begin prepared to get their

electric shocks, so see that I didn't have my muscle relaxer and I could move around. I ran into the door to see what was there because there was an anteroom in front of the ward and a back stairwell and we had to get our shots and everything and go downstairs, walk through the ward and come up the back stairs and couldn't see who was in the ward so I wanted to see who was in there. And there were ten of these wall partitions, so that there was surgery in each one to make them look like \_\_(?). I wonder what they do with all this. So after having the electric shock anyways, and after I found out about this room up there, I asked one of the technicians, his name was Williamson, and he was a specialist 4. I said what are those rooms for, what do they do in there after the electric shock treatments? He said we just talk. I said, what do you talk about? After that, he stayed away from me like I had the plague. Before that, he was always around I could ask him things and stuff like that. But there was some secret going on that he didn't want me to know about. However, my records that I requested from the military was sent by \_\_(?). As soon as I received that, this Major Rebough, (sp?) who claimed to be the doctor \_\_(?), some Korean guy. So that after the electric shocks that I seemed to be doing OK but shortly after the electric shocks I reverted back to homosexuality. My behavior was totally inappropriate on the ward. And not only that but one of the technicians who works with the nurses on the ward. She had been known that a woman was her husband \_\_(?). So that I think that they gave me the electric shocks to treat my homosexuality and not the drug things given to me in the marijuana. And then after I got out I was OK for nine years. I started working at Ben-Ex Machine Tool Corporation. I started in Warren, Michigan and I was doing quite well and then I lost my job. I quit my job for the simple reason that the guy that I was working with had died. And they gave me somebody else but I couldn't get along with anybody else. I felt like I wasn't learning and they really didn't understand how to keep me busy. And I just hated that so I cracked. Then I had mental problems again, this is back in '79. So from '71 to '79, eight years, I had no problems in mental illness. And then I had this problem with mental illness after I got involved with the Church of Scientology. I remember talking with the ethics officer something about my, just like I'm talking with you, about my experience in Vietnam, but it wasn't as clear to me then as it is now. The Army was using the CIDs to go ahead and find homosexuals and then they were telling the doctor to do instead chemical, chemical weapons. Oh, lets see, there's other people that have mental problems that aren't homosexual but after the \_\_(?), Christian virgins. Those men that weren't having sex in the military like \_\_(?) that were turned in as being homosexual and they are victimized I believe, were not on my ward. So I was OK until 1979 when I got involved in the Church of Scientology. And I hired lawyer and I got my 100 percent disability back.

SE: Had you been dishonorably discharged?

JC: No, I was given a medical discharge which turned honorable after two years.

SE: OK

JC: I was living at a place, when I was discharged I was put on the temporary disability retirement list. And then two years later I had to go to Chicago, the Great Lakes Naval Station in Chicago. I had to go there for an examination. So I went there and then I finally was discharged. There was some kind of severance pay or something and I was given disability pay but somehow I couldn't receive both payments. I had to pay something back or something like that. So I was completely severed from the military. And then I was OK and I met my significant other in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He wanted to move to California. I said OK. We moved and now I'm out here. It was about a year later, we came out

and about two years later I had problems. From '79 to 1989, every other year I'd have these psychotic breaks. And one time, and they would last about three months. I would be picked up by the police and be beaten and everything. I was \_\_\_(?)\_\_ in jail and it took them a long time to figure out that I'm a mental case now. Not a conman. But I went into somebody's house once and I tried to play the piano and I was upset because I couldn't play the piano \_\_\_(?)\_\_, with the hallucinations. Because it was a delusional thing that I had. So that was my good eleven years, I was having these problems. Somehow, I sent word to the vet center in East LA and I met a guy who lived, who was a veteran and was helping \_\_\_(?)\_\_, maybe I should try lithium. But I was scared to go ahead and take that because I had heard some bad stuff about it. Some people that took it that didn't need it. So I got the prescription and it changed my diagnosis from paranoid schizophrenia to schizoid-effective disorder and they gave me the lithium but I didn't take it for about six months. I was scared to take it and I was in severe depression. I think the greatest thing that I could do was like washing dishes daily, that was it. So finally,.... In the meantime I had brought to, before the depression, I can't, I don't know when, but somehow I was working at the vet center as a patient doing occupational therapy in a garden and I had difficulty and they found out that I was using cocaine because I was missing work. They wanted to know what was going on. I'd heard other stories, but I don't know the truth. And I told them, yeah, because I've been using coke they put me in a 28 day program. And I went ahead and did that. So then I stopped going to the Brentwood VA and started going to East LA. And then I was on going to the downtown Hill Street for awhile too. I was seeing Dr. Clark Valderama (sp?) at Hill Street. He was my major provider of help, mental health. After awhile I was becoming psychotic again. What was happening was, I went to the downtown Hill Street clinic and I said I need help, something's wrong with me. They said we can't find your records, as far as we know you're not even a patient here. They refused to help. But two weeks later I was called in to the Hill Street clinic for a comp-ten evaluation and they had a whole stack of my records. And my disability was reduced from 100 percent to 70 percent. I thought, well, they can go ahead and evaluate me when I'm not having problems; when I'm having problems they won't have anything to do with me. I didn't trust the VA. Seeing that I was also receiving SSI payments and had a hotel. I stopped going to VA for treatment and I went to doctors with \_\_\_(?)\_\_. And I did that for years and I didn't have any problems during that time. In fact didn't have any problems at all since 1989. That's when I say we lived in \_\_\_(?)\_\_. I had problems, mental problems. I think they started about 1997. So for almost ten years, eight years, I no problems and I wasn't getting treatment from the VA. I remember one time when I was, we were in Hollywood or Los Angeles that I was given extra medication and I was given a shot of colixin every two weeks. And if I had symptoms I was supposed to take these pills. I was having psychosis and I took the pills and it made it worse. So I think that some of the medication that was given to me by the VA, it was changed. Some of that stuff that was in the marijuana was put in my medicine. You know paranoid schizophrenia. And then I didn't have any problems until, what did I say, 1998. And that's when I went ahead and filed a claim for post traumatic stress disorder. Simply made it a personal assault. And all of a sudden all these CIA or DIA defense intelligence agency and central intelligence agency started sending people to go ahead and this stuff that was put in my marijuana is now in aerosol. And they go ahead and spray it on people. And it causes paranoid schizophrenia. I was going to be in a nursing home, I was a certified nursing assistant. I never knew that they had a physical therapist at this nursing home. I was working through an agency and I would go to different nursing homes and would do the registry and so this guy, we both had, and I said, oh, so you were in Vietnam, I was in Vietnam too. You know, bla, bla, bla. And I said, yeah, on



the Ho Chi Min Trail and I went ahead and watched our, just went ahead bomb our artillery. And he said, well that didn't happen. I was there. And then he went ahead and left. He did something that made me feel uncomfortable. Some moves or happened to spy off or something. On the way into dinner was different, made me feel uncomfortable. And then he left. And then the patient that I was with all of a sudden sprayed something at me and I said, the guy had BM we were cleaning up, and things like that. He said it was probably just air freshener, and I said no, he just sprayed something of mine. So that's when I became aware of the paranoid something. Because I became paranoid from this last event. And I went home and had a nervous breakdown, I'm going to have to leave. And what had happened horrified, two seconds ago, if I was taking \_\_\_(?), that I'd be OK. So I went ahead and did that and I stayed there and did that, I stayed there and did do my job for that day. But, at that time I wasn't aware, I didn't believe the guy that they had this spray that causes paranoid schizophrenia. Until later. Because I didn't have any real psychosis until I got in of the VA hospital in Menlo Park. I used to live in Palo Alto. This guy there went cussing out homosexuals and doing it in a loud manner. And when I've gone past him, shortly after I've past him, I became paranoid again. And this happened, you know, at least a dozen times. Maybe more. And I said, oh \_\_\_(?), happen. Stuff that just sprayed. The patient was right. I just \_\_\_(?). Still, anyways. I was hospitalized for psychosis and, at Palo Alto VA, and I was on the long ward for a two day hold and then a two week hold then I was transferred to Menlo Park. After that I lived in, lived off, you know, away from the hospital in houses that I rented, rooms that I rented. And then I ended up over at Mrs. Miller's house and something happened there that, probably in September or October of 19... , no 2000. The end of 1999 was when I was at Palo Alto. So a year later it was just before my comp-ten evaluation, I started having this psychosis. And in the middle of the night I would wake up, I would go one side to the door to the bathroom and I would come back and then all of a sudden terror. Oh, God, I got to get to the ER. That's what I'd do when I was psychotic. I would go to the ER. And then a couple of times after going to the bathroom, and coming out of the bathroom I noticed outside the door that led to the main part of the house was closing. It had one of those spring things that if you open up the door so that it doesn't slam shut. But the door was closing. So the second time I saw that I ran over and I saw someone's sweat and I said, oh, now they're coming back over here and they're spraying that stuff in there. So when I came out of the bathroom I panicked and became paranoid and things like that. And so eventually I ended up being in a locked ward, you know, at Palo Alto VA. And then when I comp ten evaluation came up in March, because I had been hospitalized again, they said that I was paranoid schizophrenic when this happened and that it was permanent. So that I'm permanently the same and I don't think I'm really... Oh, yeah, I'm a paranoid schizophrenic but it's been caused by chemical warfare. That's their little secret.

**SE:** Well, let me say, I'm not really sure how to ask the concluding question. But I guess if you had to sum up your legacy of your military service, what would your, how would you do that? If you'd just sum it up in a fairly short way.

**JC:** Oh, OK. Well, I like the military. In fact, I wanted to become an officer as I did. I was offered to go to West Point I thought of going to OCS, which is Officers Cadet Training school or something. And then this apparent psychosis came up and then I wasn't able to do that. So I'm not very happy about the psychosis. I wish it wouldn't have happened but there is nothing I can do to change that. What happened, happened. And I don't think that I've, that I was being in the military did not effect my ability to do my duty. It was the way that I was treated for being a gay man affected my ability to do my duty. I

have a feeling that people would cause me to be unable to do my duty should be charged with treason against the United States as an enemy to the constitution. That's what I feel.

SE: Thank you.

[End of tape side 2]

[End of recording]