

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JEROME FRANKLIN
Engineer, Vietnam War
2003

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Franklin, Jerome (b. 1924). Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Franklin, born in Newark (New Jersey), discusses his service as a traffic engineer with the Michigan State University U.S. A.I.D. (Agency for International Development) program in Vietnam from 1957 to 1959. He explains he graduated from the New Jersey School of Engineering and Yale University and that prior to 1956 he was employed as the Grand Rapids Traffic Engineer in Michigan. Franklin recalls that he, his wife and three children flew into Saigon in 1957 just before the Tet Holiday. He tells a story of being greeted by representatives of the local YMCA who stated they were from “Yimka,” meaning YMCA. Franklin relates that the streets in Saigon had very heavy traffic with thousands of motor-scooters and many pedi-cabs, but not many automobiles. He explains the intersections were controlled by officers and his job was to initiate signing, striping, install traffic signs and lights, and reroute traffic for times when President Diem left his palace. Franklin expresses disdain that so much money was being spent on sending equipment to Vietnam while the cities and states in the U.S. were having budget problems. He reports that he worked closely with the Chief of Police, Mr. Thieu and sometimes ran into problems with translators who had their own agenda and explains that English, rather than French, became the dominant second language. Franklin tells that there was a military presence of about 800 troops, he met soldiers on transportation missions in the Mekong Delta area, and remembers a couple incidents in Saigon where busses were blown up. He touches on the presence of the French Gendarmeire. The housing Franklin was provided was near the Presidential Palace and the U.S. Ambassador’s residence. He recalls that his family was able to utilize military facilities such as the commissary, the Bachelor Officer’s Quarters, the Bachelor’s Enlisted Quarters, and join the French club, Circle Sportiv, because of his affiliation with U.S. A.I.D. He relates a story of Americans enjoying the local food and one incident of being told the food they were enjoying was dog meat. Franklin talks about his travels through Vietnam and Cambodia including a visit to the temple of the Cao Dai in Tay Ninh, and Angkor Wat in Sam Riyet. He discusses the terrain, the various indigenous people he saw, and the fact that the Vietnamese welcomed Americans. Franklin refers to Canadian and Polish friends he made through the International Joint Commission and visiting with them once he returned to the states. He relates that, while in Vietnam, his wife gave birth to their daughter at a missionary hospital in Zhadim, a suburb of Saigon, and believes this was the first American birth in Indochina. Franklin tells of having amoebic dysentery before leaving Vietnam and his family having to take paragoric. He left in 1959 before there was a large American military presence.

Biographical Sketch

Jerome Franklin (b. 1924) was born in Newark, New Jersey and attended the New Jersey School of Engineering and Yale University. He worked for the Michigan State University's traffic engineering program in Vietnam from 1957 to 1959.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2003.
Transcribed by Michael Chusid, 2006.
Transcription edited by Christina M. Ballard, 2008.

Interview

Jim: -- doesn't work because of inept operation. [Laugh.] It is windy and cold today.

PAUSE

Jim: Today is Thursday, December 16, 2003. My name is Jim Kurtz, the interviewer, and the person we are talking to today is Jerome D. Franklin, who lives here in Madison, Wisconsin. Jerry, could you tell us where you were born and when?

Jerry: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, on February 15th, 1924.

Jim: 1924. And where did you grow up?

Jerry: In Newark, environs of Newark. And I went to high school in Newark and the Newark College of Engineering. And I received my bachelor's degree in civil engineering, and then, further, I went to Yale University for their equivalent master's course in transportation – traffic engineering.

Jim: Okay. You had some experiences in the Vietnam before the American war. Could you tell us, you know, how you got involved with that? I understand you were working in Michigan at that time.

Jerry: I was the traffic engineer for the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. And I was approached by Michigan State University to go to Vietnam to be their transportation advisor under their contract with U.S.A.I.D [Agency for International Development]. That was in the latter part of 1956. At the time we settled our affairs and arrived in Saigon in February of 1957.

Jim: How did you get to Vietnam? Did you go by boat, plane?

Jerry: No, no, no. We flew: Grand Rapids – Chicago – San Francisco – Hawaii, and then Japan. I think it was Midway Island, and then Japan.

Jim: Were you on a military transport or commercial?

Jerry: Commercial. PanAm.

Jim: And did you have your family with you?

Jerry: Yes, at that time we had three boys: 6, 4 and 2. And it's interesting, the PanAm airplane had cots or bunks right about the seats, so one could sleep.

Jim: So, I mean, the boys could sleep, or adults could sleep too?

Jerry: Yes, Jeanette and the boys had bunks.

Jim: Oh, that's nice. And was this obviously a propeller-driven airplane or a jet?

Jerry: No, propeller.

Jim: Propeller.

Jerry: And fortunately, we were involved with the YMCA in Grand Rapids. And at each place in Japan, Hong Kong, etc., we were met by representative of YMCA, and one of them said, "I'm pleased to be here as a representative of Yimka." And we didn't know what the Yimka was: Y-M-C-A. [Laugh.]

Jim: Oh, okay. So when you landed in Saigon at the Tan Son Nhut Airport, what was your first impression, getting off the airplane?

Jerry: Well, it was prior to Tet – it was more or less the day before Tet, okay? And so –

Jim: What time of the day was it?

Jerry: I would assume, during the day – daylight.

Jim: Okay – arrived in daylight. Did you have any impression about smell, heat?

Jerry: No, no. But quarters were furnished for us, so we were able to move right in?

Jim: Okay. Were you greeted at the airport by somebody from the A.I.D. [U.S. Agency for International Development] mission?

Jerry: Well, M.S.U. – the Michigan State University –

Jim: Okay, 'cause you were affiliated with M.S. – 'cause if they were a contractor –

Jerry: Yeah.

Jim: -- and so they greeted you and –

Jerry: Yeah. -- and then provided, the housing was already – an apartment.

Jim: Okay.

Jerry: It was – We stayed in the apartment several months, prior to moving into our own home.

Jim: Okay, now you didn't buy a home – you were renting a home. Did Michigan State provide this home for you?

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. Either through them or A.I.D.

Jim: Okay. And was your housing towards downtown Saigon, where the commercial center is, and all that?

Jerry: It was about a mile up from the palace.

Jim: Okay, the presidential palace.

Jerry: And it was on the same street as the ambassador.

Jim: And who was the American ambassador at that time?

Jerry: Mr. [Elbridge] Dubrow. Yeah, he was about two blocks towards the center of town.

Jim: Was the American military mission located anywhere near?

Jerry: No, they were in, either in Cho Lan – I think, I just don't remember anymore.

Jim: Wherever they were. Okay.

Jerry: But they weren't too numerous.

Jim: Okay. Do you have any recollection as to how many there might have been?

Jerry: I think the total American military throughout the country was about 800.

Jim: Okay.

Jerry: And we had the opportunity to visit with them on our transportation missions to Hue and, you know, Trong and to Southern Vietnam –

Jim: Mekong delta area?

Jerry: And we would actually bunk in with them. And usually it was six or seven people – three officers and three enlisted people.

Jim: Okay. What was your job in Vietnam, working as a representative of Michigan State University?

Jerry: Mine was primarily to assist in traffic engineering, but that didn't preclude, for example, visiting these various stations, larger cities, to determine where they – what they needed in terms of vehicles, equipment, etc.

Jim: So operating a traffic system, is that right?

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. Street lighting, signs, markings, vehicles.

Jim: The Saigon street pattern was pretty distinctive of a French colonial street pattern. I assume your job was to work with that street pattern, not to tell them to put in, you know, new streets differently?

Jerry: No, no. I found out that, on that assignment and others, the wish list can be millions of dollars: a subway system, an expressway system, but realistically, it's what you can do with the people, knowing the economics and the training and the wherewithal.

Jim: Okay. How would you characterize the traffic in Saigon in 1957 when you got there – was it heavy or – Kind of like Madison in 2003 or –

Jerry: Oh, it was – I'm trying to remember – There weren't that many motor vehicles, such as cars, but there were a lot of scooters, motorized scooters. And were they pedicabs? Pedicabs and motor scooters. And thousands of motor scooters, because at that time they were able to purchase under the economics system very inexpensively. Even for the Vietnamese, which – the economy was much different than the U.S.

Jim: Was there much military traffic in the Saigon that you lived in 1957.

Jerry: No.

Jim: So it wasn't like what it was during the war, when it was dominated heavily –

Jerry: No, no. It was – The American military presence was really not in the forefront at all. And –

Jim: So how was the traffic then controlled -- by the officers directing it at major intersections, did they have streetlights? Or what –

Jerry: [Laughs.] Well, they more or less – If there was any control, there would be intersection control by officers. But very little training, and no signing, no striping, and we initiated that. I had marking machines brought over, and we could initiate that. And then also we translated, we prepared traffic booklets for the first time, because everything prior to that was in French.

Jim: Okay.

Jerry: And not Vietnamese, but in French. And so we prepared under the assistance of translators Vietnamese booklets – the first one.

Jim: Did they have the same understanding of the rules of the road that we have? Or did they have any rules of the road?

Jerry: No. If you could afford gasoline, that was the criteria. [Laughs.] Maintenance was reasonably unknown.

Jim: Okay. Now did you live on the local economy, i.e. shop in local stores and stalls, or where'd you get your food from?

Jerry: We both had the local economy, but also at that time Michigan State had a contract with U.S.A.I.D., so that we could use the commissary.

Jim: Okay. So that you were using the same commissary that people from the embassy and others –

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.. We also – for recreation purposes the BOQ --

Jim: Bachelor Officers' Quarters. I'm just telling that for the --

Jerry: Yeah, and the Bachelors Enlisted Quarters. They had a restaurant and the movies, and so we were welcome there.

Jim: They have a golf course for you to play on?

Jerry: I don't remember a golf course. Tennis, tennis was --

Jim: Okay. Tell us about the circle – you know, the club that you belonged to?

Jerry: Circle Sportiv. Ah, they had a swimming pool. I found out later that the water wasn't too clean, but who cared? [Laughs.] And –

Jim: They have tennis there?

Jerry: They had tennis there, and they participated in plays. Of course, it was all French.

Jim: So it was a French club, not a Vietnamese club?

Jerry: It was a French club. I'm sure that when the French were there, there was little participation by the Vietnamese. But afterwards –

Jim: 'Cause this is roughly three years after the French left control.

Jerry: So I'm sure that there were Vietnamese members of this club.

Jim: Were there other American members of this club?

Jerry: Oh, sure.

Jim: Were they, like, military officers and embassy personnel?

Jerry: I don't – The embassy – I don't think they – I don't remember the military, but –

Jim: Do you have any recollection of the CIA presence?

Jerry: No. We found out later that there was the CIA there, but basically, no.

Jim: So there was no talk about them operating or anything like that. You were there after General Landsdale was there?

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. So –

Jim: Did anybody talk about him, because he was –

Jerry: No. I knew the name, but you know, there is a – I found out later, you know, twenty years later, that there was a CIA connection, but at the time we didn't know.

Jim: How did the French treat you as an American working there?

Jerry: Well, the French people -- I immediately looked up the French man who ran the utility.

Jim: Now "utility" – what do you mean by utility? The electric?

Jerry: Yeah, the CEE or something, whatever it was. And he spoke a little English, and in the course of time, I had a problem with the translators. For example, the president, when he left the palace, every street was blocked, or major streets were blocked. And there was one street going to the airport, and you couldn't go to the airport. And we received complaints about that. And I was in the position, rather than the chief of police, Mr. Thieu, to approach the government, because he was part of the government and, you know, protocol, etc. So I approached Mr. Thieu, and I said, if we block the street, one street to the west of the street which is normally blocked, people could get to the airport, and security, etc., etc., can be maintained. So we agreed to try it, you know, on the next time the president –

Jim: We're talking about President Diem now?

Jerry: Yeah, President Diem. And it was successful, and it worked out fine. And I approached Mr. Thieu, the police chief, next time, and I said to the translator: tell him that he did a good job. And it was excellent. And one can tell the conversation, and the translator said to me: why did he fail?

Jim: Why did he fail? The chief of police thought you said he failed?

Jerry: Yeah. Well, through the translator, see? And so another gentleman and I said, on a one-on-one basis, they would like to talk to us. And first thing, they didn't trust the translators, because the translators maybe went back to the, whatever their respective government positions would be, and reported. And so this other gentleman and I, we hired a translator, a French woman, and maybe two hours a day – just nothing but French. And eventually I could talk to the chief of police on a one-on-one basis, and the translator sat in the hall. Now we didn't discuss philosophy or anything, but on a basic man-to-man –

Jim: This is the management of the traffic of Saigon?

Jerry: Right.

Jim: So when you were there, French was really the second language of the governing elite, is that right?

Jerry: Oh, yeah, sure. Everybody spoke. Anyone who was educated over 25 spoke French. And – but the interesting thing that you should mention that now -- is that the younger generation, they didn't want to have anything to do with French, and English was the – And many, many schools sprung up teaching English – Vietnamese teaching English, because they could speak a few words.

Jim: So in '57 English was becoming the driving language?

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: You mentioned that there was a concern with these translators going back to report to the various government agencies they worked for. Was this like the South Vietnamese had a secret police that –

Jerry: Well, we didn't know it, but one time we tested a translator, and you and I had a conversation about visiting a particular police station, or whatever it would be, without any intent to do so. But the translator heard it. And whatever day was chosen, they called and said: we're ready for you – how come you didn't show? [Laugh.]

Jim: So that's pretty good evidence that they were reporting back. Now did you do any driving around the country in the immediate Saigon area? Like up to the rubber plantations?

Jerry: We drove up to Hue.

Jim: You drove all the way up to Hue? And that was on National Highway 1, which kind of goes along -- ?

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: What was your impression of that road?

Jerry: Well the road was a windy, at best two-lane road. There was very little traffic, but what impressed us was the tremendous beauty of this country, and particularly along the coast. Virgin, never-been-stepped-on beaches – beautiful! And we were saying: maybe in the future, when things settle down, what a wonderful tourist area this might be.

Jim: Was there any evidence at that time of, like, the Viet Minh? The Viet Cong weren't operating then yet.

Jerry: Well, we were told never to drive at night. Even to Dalat. It's a resort area in the mountains. We were told –

Jim: Was that because of bandits or guerillas?

Jerry: Well, whatever. The Viet Minh were present on occasion, and they just said even to Tay Ninh, if possible, always go during the day.

Jim: So how did they make their presence known? Were there vehicles that were getting ambushed or robbed or –

Jerry: We had one or two incidents in Saigon where busses were blown. Particularly military, American military were wounded. No one was killed, but they were wounded.

Jim: So they were using car bombs or grenades?

Jerry: Yeah, car bombs.

Jim: What was your impression of Hue?

Jerry: Tourist area. The old fort –

Jim: So did you get to the citadel where they had the big battles?

Jerry: We were there at the citadel and all the temples all along the way. There was -- I would think about twenty military in Hue. That was a big, big station.

Jim: What was your impression of what the military was doing?

Jerry: I don't think that they felt that they were very successful, because nepotism and inexperience formed the, at least the -- the impression I have, the elite of the South Vietnamese army. And they were there because they were there. But they

were sincere – our military was sincere and dedicated and trying to do a job but they were frustrated.

Jim: And you said you went to Natriang, and did you go to Danang also?

Jerry: Oh, yeah.

Jim: Any special impressions of those towns that many Americans went to later?

Jerry: No, again at that time it was more or less peaceful. We would interview the mayor and the chief of police to find out –

Jim: What was your view of these municipal officials? Were they kind of nepotistic – was nepotism rampant there too?

Jerry: Yeah. Politics. I don't think there were any elections.

Jim: How would you characterize them as compared to, like, the way the Madison area government is?

Jerry: Well, [laughs] I was with the Madison government, and sincere – yes. Honest – yes. Hard-working – yes. But lousy government. Ha, ha, ha!

Jim: You're just talking about Madison?

Jerry: Of course of the multitude of –

Jim: Now, would you say that the civil government in Vietnam was kind of lousy too? That's a leading question.

Jerry: Well, I can't answer that, because it was a new country, similar to Iraq today. They had three years of not being a French colony, and how they were chosen, I'm sure that it would be friends of the mayor, I mean the president. It was small enough that if he didn't like you, you weren't chosen. But it's interesting that I remember particularly meeting with the mayor of Saigon who said: I can't understand it. I occasionally read the American newspapers, and even at that time the cities and states were having budget problems, and I can't understand it. You're furnishing us with millions of dollars of equipment, and yet your own cities have budget problems.

Jim: Jesus, it almost sounds like 2003, doesn't it, Jerry? Did you have any contact with just plain ordinary citizens on these trips out in the country?

Jerry: Oh, yeah.

Jim: What was your impression of what they thought of Americans?

Jerry: They had at that time seen very few Americans. In many cases, no Americans had ever been in these, particularly in these smaller towns. And so they only through movies or these contacts – we were always welcomed.

Jim: Did they know the difference between you and the French?

Jerry: Oh, yeah.

Jim: How do you think they knew that difference?

Jerry: The language, the language. [Laughs.]

Jim: And add to it, maybe the approach – being a little more friendly?

Jerry: I think so. We made an effort – that was why we were there – to really make an effort to make friends and to possibly teach them something. And I would assume under the French that it wasn't so –

Jim: On the trip up the coast, did you see any Vietnamese military installations?

Jerry: We would see forts, um, roadside forts, built every few miles. And they were manned, but we never – just look at them. They weren't in any way controlling us. We just –

Jim: They were there to provide security for the roads, maybe, or something like that.

Jerry: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jim: We going to turn the tape over now.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1

Jim: We working on the first tape. Jerry, did you see anything else on your trip to Hue that we missed that we talked about that would be of interest to –

Jerry: Well, we ran across for the first time – we'd seen mountain people: Hmong.

Jim: Okay. And these are different than Vietnamese?

Jerry: Oh, yes. Different language, different culture, and they didn't like each other. The Vietnamese would refer to them as mountain people, as savages, or whatever. And we had no contact with them – we just saw them, because we couldn't converse with them in any way. They were poor and not as advanced as the Vietnamese. We saw them on the way to Hue, and we went west from Hue

towards the Cambodia border and they were present there, and then we saw them in Dalat. I don't remember seeing any mountain people in Saigon.

Jim: Okay. You mentioned Dalat. Tell us about how you go to Dalat from Saigon.

Jerry: By car. And the embassy had a house up there, and as long as the pecking order - the ambassador wasn't there and, you know, if it was free -- we could use it. And so we spent a week up there. And it was entirely different --

Jim: Could you describe what the topography was like up there?

Jerry: Mountainous, fir trees, pine trees growing, and one would never know you're in tropical Saigon.

Jim: Or in the Asian area. And were there lakes there?

Jerry: Oh, sure. And there was a school there. Very nice school for the elite. I don't know if any American kids.

Jim: Was this where the Vietnamese elite went to play? Was that what it was for?

Jerry: Yeah. The Vietnamese -- Let me put it this way: it would be like Colorado.

Jim: Okay. Like a ski area.

Jerry: I don't think there was any snow. But hunting, fishing -- there was no gambling.

Jim: Was there a French presence there too?

Jerry: The French would be there -- they would be there. We had very little to do with the French as such, but in the course of, as I'm saying, the head of the utility was French, and through the circle club we would pick up some French friends. Tennis -- French friends. And -- But the number was greatly reduced from when [Vietnam] was a colony.

Jim: Okay. Did you get to know any of the plantation managers or anything like that?

Jerry: No. We had -- We passed through them and we could always eat, as presents. But they would like to see us.

Jim: So you could stop at a plantation house and get a meal?

Jerry: Yeah, if you -- just a courtesy.

Jim: So they were sort of running like old taverns in the United States, where people could stop and --

Jerry: Well, for a very few people. I mean, I think in a year's time you could count them on both hands. There's no way that – there's no interchange.

Jim: Was there any military presence in Dalat? There was a military academy up there later, but was it there then?

Jerry: No, no. Well, there may have been a military academy, but we didn't see it.

Jim: Okay. Then you took a trip to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Could you describe how you got there and what kind of vehicle you went in?

Jerry: Well, we drove in – I had brought over a vehicle, a Chevrolet station wagon.

Jim: Remember what kind of model it was or anything like that?

Jerry: It was a four-door station wagon.

Jim: I guess they didn't have as many models then either. [Laugh.] But did they have standard transmission at that time?

Jerry: Oh, yes, yes. I found out then on later assignments that standard was preferable.

Jim: And what kind of condition were the roads in?

Jerry: Passable.

Jim: And were they gravel?

Jerry: No, paved roads. It would be the only road, you know, interchanged between – And with customs we had no problem. "Welcome to Cambodia – Kambodzha."

Jim: Okay, and before you got to Cambodia, you went through Tay Ninh – did you visit the Cao Dai temple there?

Jerry: Yes. The Cao Dai temple, and we took many pictures, and Victor Hugo was the patron saint, and I don't remember who else –

Jim: Mohammed, Jesus, Victor Hugo. Did you get a chance to see one of their masses that they have?

Jerry: No. No. We again – during daylight – we went up and went back. We just kept going during daylight.

Jim: Were you able to get to Phnom Penh in daylight from Saigon?

Jerry: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: About how far apart are they?

Jerry: I would assume a full day, but we were able to – yeah.

Jim: Did you drive your own vehicle when you went to –

Jerry: Yeah, I drove. And we had another couple with us, and then we fly to Sien Yurep.

Jim: Okay. And what's at Sien Yurep?

Jerry: To the Angkor Wat.

Jim: And what's that, if you can just describe that?

Jerry: Angkor Wat was monuments and temples and I've got a picture of it I can show you. And built about 800 A.D. And evidently the civilization that was there disappeared, and it was rediscovered by the French, I think, in the 1800s.

Jim: There's no people living there now, are there?

Jerry: Well, the people in Sam Riyet. The town. But I don't think there's any religious people who have maintained –

Jim: -- the temple area.

Jerry: The temple area.

Jim: Was there any military or French presence in Cambodia when you –

Jerry: Yeah. We took a tour of Phnom Penh and there were still French soldiers, and then now in Saigon there were five gendarmerie officers. Now the gendarmerie is a national police. We call it, in American English, gendarm is a cop. But it's not a cop – it's more or less –

Jim: Like the FBI?

Jerry: No, they're police, but their national police is, I assume, like Scotland Yard.

Jim: Okay, okay, okay.

Jerry: They're national police.

Jim: Now, were these French?

Jerry: Yeah, they were French and we were acquainted with them and very, very good friends of the five gendarmerie officers, and then what happened is that the General DeGaul, who was involved in Algeria, and he said to the Vietnamese, I would like to have these gendarmerie officers back in France or the colonies, other than Vietnam. Unless you want to pay for them. And the Vietnamese said, well, we have no money. And so they left. Now the other thing is that we haven't talked about the international control commission.

Jim: Let's talk about that.

Jerry: They were to insure that the peace as such between North Vietnam and South Vietnam was maintained.

Jim: That was the Geneva Convention of '54.

Jerry: Yeah. And so they would travel both from Vietnam and South Vietnam which, of course, we couldn't do. And the Indian officer was the chairman, and the Canadian was theoretically the Western representative, and a Pole was the Eastern representative. And again, particularly on this particular team, we ended up very, very friendly with them –

Jim: Did they actually live in Saigon?

Jerry: Yeah, they had their own barracks, and –

Jim: So was this a social contact with the members of the joint commission?

Jerry: Oh, yeah.

Jim: Where was this? At the social club, or did they have a club of their own or something like that?

Jerry: I had met them on one of their trips, and I'm just trying to think: they had their own barracks. They were welcome at any military thing, because, first thing, they were all officers. The Pole was a captain, four stars. But he was a captain. The Indian was a major, and the Canadian was a lieutenant commander of the navy.

Jim: Okay.

Jerry: And they were one of several teams, but this particular team we took a liking to.

Jim: Do you know what their job was?

Jerry: Just to make sure [laughs] –

Jim: Nobody fought?

Jerry: I think it was a study in time. They just rode around in Jeeps, you know. What was the name, the new name, the city on the coast?

Jim: Mosianuk?

Jerry: No. But --

Jim: In Vietnam? Vung Tau?

Jerry: Yeah, Vung Tau. But that was Kup San Juk. So they would get in the Jeep and check, theoretically, and see that the South Vietnamese weren't importing anything that they shouldn't.

Jim: Okay. Did you see any of these International Joint Commission people in Hue or Da Nang or some other place?

Jerry: No, no. We saw them in Kup San Juk and Saigon. And it's funny, the gendarmerie officers, we -- On our way home, we visited one in Marseille and one in Paris. But I'm surprised at myself, because we've never looked up this Canadian.

Jim: Do you know what part of Canada he was from?

Jerry: Toronto. And my five-year-old said, "You're a Canadian? Say something in Canada." [Laugh.] But -- Because the kids, they actually went to a French school initially. My oldest boy went to the French school initially and then went to an American school.

Jim: So you had to pay a tuition for him to go to a French school?

Jerry: Oh, yeah. It was a nominal amount.

Jim: And was it pretty close to the neighborhood you lived in?

Jerry: Yeah, yeah. We would drive them there, and of course we always had drivers, so they would pick them up and take them. The old -- the younger, the second boy went to the French school. The third boy was too young, and then my wife gave birth to a daughter in Saigon in August of 1957, and I think that was the first American birth in what was Indochina.

Jim: Did she give birth in a Saigon hospital? Or were --

Jerry: No, it was the Seventh Day Adventists, a missionary hospital.

Jim: Where was this hospital?

Jerry: In Cho Lan, Cho Lan.

Jim: That was the Chinese area?

Jerry: No, Zhadim.

Jim: Zhadim, which is a suburb of Saigon.

Jerry: Yeah, northern suburb. They had acquired a two-story house and had really converted it into a small hospital. And we met them when I had returned from Saigon – I was in Grand Rapids again, and I noticed in the paper that they were going to appear at the Seventh Day Adventist Church to give a lecture, and so we went and invited them home and revisited them.

Jim: Oh, it makes the world very small, doesn't it, when something like that happens. Well, is there anything about your Vietnam experience that we haven't covered that we should?

Jerry: I don't know – I'm just trying to think.

Jim: Well, we can always have another day if that –

Jerry: We had a – It was a good experience. We found out on the way home, on the pre-leaving physical, that four of the six of us had amoebic dysentery, which we didn't know. [Laughs.] So we were loaded with pills on the way home. My daughter –

Jim: Was that because of the water there?

Jerry: Who knows? Why four of us, and two of us didn't have it. I don't know. We were reasonably healthy, with the exception of loose motions.

Jim: Sure.

Jerry: As I say, and paragoric was – When we first came, they just gave it to you, and then they discovered that paragoric was not so good, and then we had to have a physician dole it out.

Jim: What kind of shots did you have coming in, do you remember?

Jerry: Everything. Everything.

Jim: So that's part of the reason why you were relatively healthy then?

Jerry: Everything, including we would take malaria pills.

Jim: Did you find the heat a problem?

Jerry: Well, it was hot, you know, but one gets used to it. You can always go to the swimming pool. The rain, though, was sometimes heavy. But we didn't have any discomfort. Interesting thing: we had an American marching and chowder society, and every two weeks we would go to a restaurant, and although they catered to the evening crowd, 30 or 40 Americans spending money would always be welcome – plus the beer and wine, etc. And the reputation of the society became such that restaurants would solicit us, and we always on the odd week would have two people go to a restaurant. In a particular restaurant they liked the food and particularly the meat, and they talked to the proprietor and they said, "What kind of meat is this – it's really delicious." And the proprietor said, "Duck." And they just couldn't believe it. And he just said, "Duck, duck," with his accent. And they could believe it, and he said, "I'll show you the menu. D-o-g – duck." [Laughs.]

Jim: That's a great story.

Jerry: And so – sometimes things get lost in translation.

Jim: What kind of people – Was this a diverse group of Americans in the marching and chowder society?

Jerry: Yeah, some military too. Those posted permanently in Saigon. And that would be business people, U.S.A.I.D., embassy people, you know. But translation also – When we arrived in Cambodia, they put little pamphlets. And the impression was, in French it says: when you arrive in Cambodia, meet the people, and you'll find that they're nice people. And I assume that in Vietnamese it said the same. But the translation into English was: when you cross the border, make sure you have intercourse with the natives. [Laugh.] And the French said, it's in the dictionary! We found out that words – for example, "cowboy" was a derogatory term with regard to teenage boys or something. He was a cowboy. That wasn't very nice. And you found out that there were certain words, even in French, that you didn't use, because – And then they found out that there are certain words in English you don't use.

Jim: Well, do you have – You know, you left before the big American presence in Vietnam. Do you have any impressions either during the American-Vietnam war or after that you'd like to share with us?

Jerry: Well, because we were overseas. Again, and I was back in the United States from 1959 to 1964. And then I went over for nine years.

Jim: Okay, so you were gone –

Jerry: So in Pakistan you read the – BBC, and you read the Time Asian booklet, and in Pakistan you also read the Red Chinese. I say Red Chinese, because all the time we were over there it was the Red Chinese. And the little red book – I had it, and so you were subject to propaganda always from the other side. And it was really difficult to –

Jim: Did you maintain any contact with any of the Vietnamese that you knew, or have you talked to any of them since you left Vietnam?

Jerry: No, no. I knew Vietnamese here in Madison. But in the course of time, you just – it's been twenty-five year, and you lose and, um --. Many of the people I was working with, I was much younger, and frankly they're all probably dead.

Jim: Sure, sure. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us, Jerry?

Jerry: No, I don't know.

Jim: Well, thank you very much, and we'll wind her up here.

END OF INTERVIEW.