

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROY JACOBSON
Combat Engineer, US Army, Vietnam War
2003

OH
474

OH
474

Jacobson, Roy, (1943-). Oral History Interview, 2003.

Master Copy: 2 audio cassettes; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Roy Jacobson, a native of Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin, discusses his service in Vietnam in the 1960s as a member of the 346th Company of the Army's 5th Special Forces. He details the training he received as a combat engineer at Fort Bragg (North Carolina) and his subsequent experiences traveling through Vietnam and learning Vietnamese on the way to his posting in the village of Ben Cat (Vietnam). He explains how he assisted American and South Vietnamese Special Forces in protecting North Vietnamese Catholic refugees from Viet Cong attacks and tells the story of a particularly harrowing North Vietnamese assault on the village. He then goes on to describe his next posting, which was training a Vietnamese Airborne Rangers MIKE assault/relief team in the villages of Tu Duc and Bien Hoa (Vietnam), and details a night raid he led them on to rescue American POWs. He mentions the work he did after that in Saigon (Vietnam) directing American air drops and his subsequent decision to seek a discharge and work for Air America, as well as his postwar work for the Bureau of Law Enforcement of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources training Vietnamese game wardens . Finally, he reflects on the positive treatment he received when he returned home as well as the natures of the Vietnamese people he met during his service and his thoughts on the country itself.

Biographical Sketch:

Roy Jacobson (1943-) was born in Staten Island (New York) and grew up in his family's ancestral home in Manitowish Waters (Wisconsin). He served with the 346th Company of the US Army's 5th Special Forces during the Vietnam War, assisting and training US and South Vietnamese Special Forces. After his discharge in 1966, he worked for Air America and the Bureau of Law Enforcement of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and, at the time of this interview, was working on publishing a book, *Hai Si*, that details his experiences in the war.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2003.

Transcribed by Dana Peterson, 2013.

Abstract written by Jacob Seidman, 2014.

Interview Transcript:

Kurtz: [laughs] What this is, is a release for, uh, the tape.

Jacobson: Effing lawyers.

Kurtz: Yeah, yeah, yeah [Roy laughs]. No, this is for the -- so that the tape can-- public can listen to what--[momentary pause in recording]

Kurtz: Tuesday, September 16th. This is an interview with Roy Jacobson, and Jim Kurtz is the interviewer. Roy--

Jacobson: It's 10:17 Rolex time.

Kurtz: 10:17 Rolex time. Roy is showing off as he often does. Roy could you tell us where and when you were born?

Jacobson: I was born in the U.S. Navy Hospital in Staten Island, New York in 1943.

Kurtz: What was the date?

Jacobson: September 14, 1943.

Kurtz: So very close to a birthday right now.

Jacobson: Yup.

Kurtz: Uh, where did you grow up then, Roy?

Jacobson: After World War II, Dad moved back to Wisconsin where we've been since 1849 [1949?] and moved back to a family place in Manitowish Waters.

Kurtz: Okay. And then did you go through school in the Manitowish Waters system?

Jacobson: Manitowish Waters grade school and then four years at Lakeland High School [Minoeque, Wisconsin].

Kurtz: Lakeland High School and then after high school, what year did you graduate from high school?

Jacobson: '61.

Kurtz: And after you graduated from Lakeland High School, what did you do?

Jacobson: Went to University of Wisconsin for one year.

Kurtz: Okay, and which University of Wisconsin? Madison?

Jacobson: Madison.

Kurtz: Madison.

Jacobson: Yeah, I went there to wrestle. I ended up beer drinking, getting very poor grades and asked to take a little time off.

Kurtz: Okay, and what did you do after that?

Jacobson: I worked for my dad's construction company until the fall of 1962.

Kurtz: The fall of 1962, and what happened in the fall of 1962?

Jacobson: Well, you can read about this in my book, but I'll tell you for free.

Kurtz: Okay.

Jacobson: I was laying on the floor reading the Sunday paper, and I saw the Sunday magazine article about a Green Beret team with the Montagnards in South Vietnam, and I figured that's where I wanted to be, and that's what I wanted to do.

Kurtz: So you enlisted in the Army, is that correct?

Jacobson: I enlisted in the Army.

Kurtz: And how long was your enlistment for?

Jacobson: Three years.

Kurtz: Three years. So, where did you go for your training in the Army?

Jacobson: I went to Fort Leonard Wood.

Kurtz: Fort Leonard Wood in--

Jacobson: Missouri.

Kurtz: When did you report for duty?

Jacobson: December-- November or December, I forget.

Kurtz: Okay. Of '62?

Jacobson: Yup.

Kurtz: And at that point, other than the article you read, did the Vietnam-- or was the draft a concern of yours or anything?

Jacobson: No, no.

Kurtz: So you just wanted to do--

Jacobson: Right. Every member of my family has always voluntarily gone in the service to include even my mother's cousins were the guys that blew up the heavy water plant in Norway, commandos as whatever they were. So yeah, it's on both sides of my family. That was what we did.

Kurtz: Well that's another story we might have to talk to you about, the heavy water plant, but today we're talking about Vietnam. Where did you take your AIT [Advanced Individual Training]?

Jacobson: Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Kurtz: That's an artillery school. Is there a reason why you went to?

Jacobson: No, at the time I was part of the Army, not part of Special Forces [Known as the Green Berets], and I was sent where whatever levy I was on.

Kurtz: Okay, then after AIT what was your next assignment?

Jacobson: At that point, from AIT I was in the Special Forces system, and I went to Fort Benning [Columbus Georgia] for jump school.

Kurtz: So you went to jump school at Benning and that was like in the spring of '63?

Jacobson: Yes.

Kurtz: And what after jump school?

Jacobson: Fort Bragg [Fayetteville, North Carolina].

Kurtz: Fort Bragg, and what did you do at Fort Bragg?

Jacobson: Well, when I got off the bus at Fort Bragg I was part of B Company, Special Forces Training Group.

Kurtz: Okay. And how long is Special Forces training for?

Jacobson: Uh, now it's a little over a year. Then it also was, but it was – but actually it might have been longer then because there were times--Special Forces started in '52, and Special Forces was an offshoot of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services, predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency] and the guys in France and Yugoslavia and Burma, and all of the people that were involved in our training and our commanders were all from the OSS, Merrill's Marauders and so forth, and so it was very much a -- it was a start-up--'62 was still a start-up. In '52 when they started the 10th Group and split it off to make the 77th, which later became the 7th group, uh, that was mostly made up of guys from the Lodge Act.

Kurtz: What's a lawjack?

Jacobson: Senator Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge, Republican from Massachusetts] sponsored—we were workin' --

Kurtz: Oh, the Lodge Act!

Jacobson: The Lodge Act.

Kurtz: Okay.

Jacobson: Where there were many Europeans who had been in resistance groups. And those guys were, they were the Special Forces for the most part with the exception of a bunch of OSS guys. So in '62 there was an expansion of SF, and it was--Kennedy did this in preparation for what his vision was for Special Forces. In fact, I remember when he said he has two Peace Corps, one carries rifles. So there was a lot of time between the corps groups. I first went to demolition training, or what really was combat engineer, and I was the engineer on a team. If you understand how a team works, you have two guys who are on operations, the captain and the team sergeant. Two guys are in intel [intelligence] and this is the same today, the executive officer who's now a warrant officer, and the number two enlisted guy on a team. Then you have two weapons men, two medics, two commo [communications] men, and two demo [demolition] men. And I simply was assigned to demo school, or engineer school. It was called demo school then because we were still in this World War II, blow up things. Our son, having gone through it, it's very much a building school now. And after demo school I went to what was then called branch. It has a different name now, but it's still living in the Uwharrie Mountains.

Kurtz: What mountains?

Jacobson: Uwharrie Mountains of western [North] Carolina.

Jim; Do you know how to spell that?

Jacobson: U-W-H-A-R-[R]-I-E. Near Ashville [North Carolina].

Kurtz: Okay.

Jacobson: Anyway, you'd parachute in there, and you would simply spend several months learning things. Everything from how to teach using an interpreter to working with guerrillas, leading patrols, ambushes, and so forth. And then I went, I had [inaudible] PFC, I went to NCO [noncommissioned officer] school, and now NCO school is internal. And there were no promotions then when you were in school status as there are now. Now you come out of training group as a sergeant. Then you sucked it up and continued along and rolled your sleeve up so you'd fit in the club. And I went to NCO School for four months at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and then I was assigned to a team.

Kurtz: Okay, so roughly, did this whole training thing take you like from the spring of '63 through the spring of '64 or thereabouts?

Jacobson: Probably the summer of '64. Like I say, now there's really no lags. Then you might have a month or more between training sessions.

Kurtz: Okay, what team were you assigned to?

Jacobson: I was assigned to a team in the 5th Special Forces. Well, that's not true. First, I was assigned to the 3rd Group.

Kurtz: Where is the 3rd group?

Jacobson: The 3rd Group is also at Fort Bragg and each of the groups then had different assigned areas. The 3rd Group was Africa, the 3rd Group is now Africa and the Caribbean. The 5th Group then I don't think had an assignment per se, but the whole group was assigned to Vietnam in '64 and the 7th Group, I'm not sure they had an assignment either, but the 1st Group was at Okinawa [Japan], the 7th was also at Bragg. The 8th Group at the time which doesn't exist now was in South America, and now the 7th Group does that. The 10th Group was in Europe, which they still keep a third of the unit there, and the other third in Colorado, but they're European, Soviet Union thing. The 1st Group out of Okie [Okinawa] still remains -- I think a third of their unit is still in Korea, and the others are assigned as they were. So I was assigned to the 3rd Group and started to learn Swahili. "Jambo Bwana." ["Hello Mister"].

Kurtz: How long were you with the 3rd?

Jacobson: Shut your recorder off for a minute [momentary pause in recording]. Okay. So I was in the 3rd Special Forces Group when a levy came down, and I'd only been there for say a month or two, uh, learning Swahili, uh, not even on a team per se, it was just a whole class learning languages, some French, some Swahili, some Portuguese, and a levy came down, everyone sergeant and above could volunteer for the 5th Group who was going to Vietnam. So I walked down the barracks, and I borrowed a shirt from a sergeant, whose name was Vern. He was a black guy, and I put on that shirt and I stood in line and gave my name, rank, and serial number, and the sergeant major looked up, looked at my name tag, looked at me, I was a PFC, he knew it. I just (??) -- was in the 5th. So, through subterfuge I got to work, and I was then assigned to a team, and it was a team in the 5th, and I really don't recall the team number because it wasn't germane, but I was assigned to a team that had a new captain, and the XO [executive officer] was new, too. He has a second lieutenant, but he had been a radio operator on a team in Laos in [Operation] White Star, and the team sergeant was a really good team sergeant. He was an old combat vet from two wars. And the rest of the team was made up, half of older guys who had probably been in a dozen or more years and half of us new guys.

Kurtz: That's interesting. So where did you train then with the 5th?

Jacobson: Fort Bragg.

Kurtz: Fort Bragg and how long was that training? Was that Vietnam specific?

Jacobson: Specific Vietnam, specific to go to the Plain of Reeds [site of a major battle; a large grassy plain in the northern part of the Mekong Delta] to replace a team from the 1st Group.

Kurtz: Where in Vietnam was the Plain of Reeds?

Jacobson: IV Corps [One of four corps in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. It oversaw the Mekong Delta].

Kurtz: IV Corps is south of Saigon?

Jacobson: Yeah, the Plain of Reeds is now where there is a crane sanctuary, and when I was in the bureau I trained those four Vietnamese who were the first four game wardens for that place.

Kurtz: Say bureau, that was the bureau of--

Jacobson: Bureau of Law Enforcement.

Kurtz: Bureau of Law Enforcement at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Jacobson: Yes. I trained the first Vietnamese game warden force, and they were all former Viet Cong. They were all, would have been my enemies, but we didn't go there [laughs]. We learned Vietnamese, total immersion, and learned it very well. Some of the guys took French, most all of us young guys learned Vietnamese, and when I say total immersion it was six weeks living in a Vietnamese village with Vietnamese around us.

Kurtz: So they had actual Vietnamese brought over to Fort Bragg?

Jacobson: North Vietnamese refugees. Yeah, they were Catholic refugees. In '54, 600,000 Roman Catholic Vietnamese fled south ahead of Ho Chi Minh's rifles, and some of them ended up at Fort Bragg as instructors. Our son's instructors turned out to be Egyptian officers. He speaks Arabic.

Kurtz: Did you receive any particular weapons training with the type of weapons the VC used or anything like that?

Jacobson: Uh, we shot all the time, but we shot with -- I fired expert with the M1 rifle when I was in basic training, and I--which was good because I got an overnight pass and tied up with a damn pretty young woman, too, I might add, which all the bullets, all the money I spent on 22-bullets paid off. Then at -- we were shown an M14 but in fact never fired it. We had M16's around but in fact fired M1's all the time and kept M1's with us. And the first M16 I ever saw -- I shoot one once, one day, shot a magazine through it at Bragg, but really the first ones I ever saw were the ones that started showing up at our A-Team camps.

Kurtz: Okay, so you got your Vietnamese training at Fort Bragg, then what happened in your training?

Jacobson: We trained as a team with other teams in a wet area on the Cape Fear River [east central North Carolina] Lived and trained as wet as we could get going, because we were going in IV Corps. And we had anthropologists that came in and gave us area training. We knew the composition of the people, the culture, we knew who the Viet Cong units were in that part of the world.

Kurtz: How ethnically diverse was the population in IV Corps?

Jacobson: I never went to IV Corps.

Kurtz: Okay, but I mean with the training.

Jacobson: Oh, uh, there are many Cambodians, there are many Chinese, actually Nung, not ethnic – their Chinese Nungs. Lots of --

Kurtz: The Chinese Nungs, tell us what a Nung is.

Jacobson: That's a Vietnamese ethnic group of Chinese origin. The French had a division of Nungs, that's what they did for a living. They were the fighters. Ah, but the Khmers and --

Kurtz: Khmers are from Cambodia.

Jacobson: Cambodians. The border shifted from years to years. And there were other groups that were there before the Vietnamese moved in. People from southern islands, there, you know, had been a number of people who moved in and out of that area.

Kurtz: How long was your wet training?

Jacobson: We were probably a month in the, what passed for, a jungle, and we were six weeks language training and probably another three to four weeks of cultural training. And during that same time we got to know each other. We crossed trained as a team. My boss, Reino Peanula, was the other demo man. He and I went to NCO school together so we knew each other well. We would put on training, the weapons men would put on training, the medics and then the commo men.

Kurtz: So we're sitting the summer and fall of '65.

Jacobson: Yes, yeah.

Kurtz: Okay, what happened after you did all this training?

Jacobson: We went on an airplane. We had a 707, but those were KC-135s. They were cargo planes or whatever. A B-team and an A-team and we flew to Hawaii, and the pilot said the plane was broken down so we just figured he had a girlfriend there. So we went broke. And then we flew to Guam, and the plane broke down again so we figured the plane [laughs] was no good. So we got a pay advance and went broke again, and then we --

Kurtz: How did you go broke, in case people are interested?

Jacobson: Oh, drinking and playing and visiting in the taverns and with gals. And then we went to Bangkok, but fortunately we didn't stay because we had no money. We went Nha Trang, got another pay advance, got issued M1 --

Kurtz: And Nha Trang is in Vietnam?

Jacobson: Nha Trang is in II Corps, Vietnam, and it is the headquarters for the 5th Group.

Kurtz: So that's where you first entered Vietnam was in Nha Trang.

Jacobson: In Nha Trang.

Kurtz: And do you remember when that was?

Jacobson: About, I would say, 9th or 10th of December.

Kurtz: December '65.

Jacobson: Yeah. Early December.

Kurtz: Okay.

Jacobson: Where we got pay advance again, then we went to Saigon.

Kurtz: Okay, how did you get to Saigon from Nha Trang?

Jacobson: Flew, probably in a 123.

Kurtz: Okay. Where did you land in Saigon?

Jacobson: Tan Son Nhat.

Kurtz: Tan Son Nhat.

Jacobson: And then we caught a few cabs downtown, and we checked into the Caravelle Hotel. Those were early days, you know, and couple of the older guys didn't want to go down to Tu Do Street--

Kurtz: The Caravelle is quite close to Tu Do Street?

Jacobson: Yeah, it's right next to it.

Kurtz: And what was Tu Do Street?

Jacobson: Uh, many taverns that were frequented by soldiers of many armies over the years. So we went down, fortunately Top, who knew what he was doing, made us all give him money to pay for the couple rooms we had ahead of time. He'd seen this act before, and he also kept out some money for breakfast and a cab ride back to the airport. And so we went down,

and we didn't stay late, we just had beer and bought "Saigon tea" for the girls.

Kurtz: What was "Saigon tea"?

Jacobson: Never drank it.

Kurtz: Neither did I, so [laughs].

Jacobson: I assume it was nothing more than tea, but sold as whisky, yeah. And had a great time, it was exactly what I was looking for. The next day was one of the best days of my life. Uh, and I've had some very good best days. We got out to the airport, and we got on some helicopters, and we went to Ben Cat, which is in III Corps. We didn't go to IV Corps at all, we replaced the team from the 1st Group. We had no idea what the hell--

Kurtz: Let me stop you here now. So in other words you were deployed from Tan Son Nhat to where were you?

Jacobson: We were deployed from Nha Trang. We went – happened to go to Saigon to get air transport out to a camp called Ben Cat. It's on Highway 13. Well, you know where it is.

Kurtz: Yes.

Jacobson: On Highway 13 and as we got off the helicopters half a team from the 1st said, "Man, we've been waiting for weeks." Which is probably why we went there instead of where we were trained to go. And they said, "You're going to get hit tonight." And they got on [laughs] the helicopters and left.

Kurtz: Before we go on from there, what were your impressions when you got into Vietnam about the weather, the smell?

Jacobson: That was the next morning because we hit Saigon at night. Saigon, downtown Fayetteville in the '60s, they all were the same you know, Tu Do Street was the same as downtown Fayetteville, uh, GI town. When I got to Ben Cat I realized that was exactly where I wanted to be and why I wanted to be there. It was green, and the people were friendly, and you could buy two handfuls of food for a tenth of a cent. And everybody was cheery, this was during the day, now, at night [laughs] was a different story. And people were happy, course I spoke the language, we had a half dozen interpreters that all wanted to be Americans. They were good guys, and the troops were—troops we had --

Kurtz: What was the topography like around Ben Cat?

Jacobson: Oh, it was rubber trees all around, rubber trees and rice paddies. And our camp was adjacent to the Vietnamese 5th Division, 7th Regiment which was kind of kitty-corner around the street. It was a French plantation building with some wire strung around it and some sandbag positions around. It was horribly indefensible. And the first night we hunkered down, waited. I issued myself a little bit better weapons.

Kurtz: Now what weapons did you issue yourself?

Jacobson: Two AR15s, 'cause I already knew that they malfunctioned so I had two, plus I had a 57mm recoilless rifle, uh, I'm redundant, so.

Kurtz: Did you have a handgun or anything like that either?

Jacobson: No, I didn't get one of those till later when another team sergeant taught me how to shoot. They were around. Unlike, probably a line division, the weapons room was open to get what you wanted.

Kurtz: Go get what you want.

Jacobson: Yeah.

Kurtz: Now, did they have any French weapons or Russian weapons at that time at that Special Forces camp?

Jacobson: No, the troops were equipped with M1 rifles and then later went to M1 carbine simply because of the size of the weapon and stock. There were M3, actually there were seven different types of weapons. It was awful because it was a nightmare for—

Kurtz: Ammunition supply.

Jacobson: Ammunition, sure. And they, uh, there were a few AR15s around and later some M16s and different kinds would show up. Obviously the crew-served weapons [any weapon that requires more than one person to operate] were M2 and M4 30 caliber machine guns. We had BAR's, we had M1 rifles.

Kurtz: So basically you had World War II weapons –

Jacobson: Yeah.

Kurtz: With the exception of the AR --

Jacobson: Yeah, we had some Thompson submachine guns and some M3 submachine guns.

Kurtz: And that's what you trained on back in the States, too, is that?

Jacobson: Yeah, yeah. Well, really just the M1, but that was no problem. I mean we were comfortable with the weapons. And our troops were, one of the companies was Vietnamese, we had some Cambodians, we had some Moi Sedang Degar which is Montagnards.

Kurtz: So was this organized as a strike force?

Jacobson: Yeah, it was a strike force.

Kurtz: And so you had, what, three companies? Or how many companies did --

Jacobson: It said on paper we had five, but we had about 450 troops, which really would be three at full strength, three light infantry companies.

Kurtz: Okay, did you have any language problems within these companies or between these companies?

Jacobson: Everybody spoke Vietnamese as that was the lingua franca. One of the companies was Nung, and we all spoke Vietnamese, although two of my sisters and I have a facility for languages, we all have a half dozen or more of varying degrees under our belt, and so I would stand on the front porch at night with whoever happened to be the guard there, and if it was a Nung I'd practice words. They all wanted to learn English, or American. Uh, they were thrilled with anything American, so Nung Son San Se Ha (??), that's in whatever Nung dialect they spoke, I think it might be Cantonese, and the funny thing was, on one of the first nights the guy said, why do I speak the language of the enemy? And it put me back. Then it dawned on me. I was in Mississippi, but I was speaking like I was from Maine. I learned North Vietnamese, this happened to be a southern, South Vietnamese. And so one of the interpreters always said I spoke "Vietlish." And it was probably close to true, but I spoke a combination of the languages, of the dialects. Whatever word I learned, I simply used.

Kurtz: And that was fairly common, that there were several different dialects of Vietnamese.

Jacobson: There certainly are north and south. When those Vietnamese came for training and George was with me, when we introduced ourselves I asked them in Vietnamese, "Were you Viet Cong or Republic or Viet Lao?" Viet Cong in all (??) [inaudible]. But George went purple. He wondered if I was going across the table. Then they asked me after they conferred, had I ever been [laughs] their prisoner? And of course at this point, George wished he wasn't there. Well, I knew why, because I was speaking with a

North Vietnamese dialect, and I just didn't want to say, well, that's cause' Ho tried to kill all the Catholics, and they left, they were our instructors. I just said that our teachers had been from the north, they're Catholic from the north, and they knew. So we spoke all the time, some of the guys didn't pick up the language as fast as me, and some never were going to. You start throwing 'y'all" in a few times into a normal Vietnamese phrase, and you've lost the --

Kurtz: Did you live with the Vietnamese troops?

Jacobson: Yeah. We lived and ate and drank with them. We were ostensibly ordered to live with the MAG unit with the --

Kurtz: MAG is Military Assistance Group.

Jacobson: Advisory Group, yeah, and some did, but I always stayed over with the troops.

Kurtz: Were you assigned to one of the companies?

Jacobson: Yeah, initially I was assigned to be a commander, as a U4 I was commander of 346 Vietnamese Company. I was assigned, and I knew why. I was a wise guy, and the commander was a wise guy, and these were all Saigon cowboys. We got along fine. He was a good guy.

Kurtz: At this point [**End of Tape 1, Side A**] --

Kurtz: When we turned the tape over, that you lived with your Vietnamese company. What kind of, was the typical duty day with these folks?

Jacobson: Normally, we would -- my job was to bolster the camp defenses the first few weeks. So we'd be filling sandbags, we'd be stringing barbed wire. We had -- our captain left after a week. He went AWOL [absent without leave]. We were attacked every night and every day.

Kurtz: The Vietnamese captain or the American?

Jacobson: No, the American. The American captain went to Saigon, and there are various stories, and I've never even bothered to ask. I think he might have jumped out a window in an attempt to break his legs so that he would not have to come back to camp. So the command of the camp went to a second lieutenant who had about two months of experience, and he had a very hard time. We are still cordial, and we visit, but he had a very hard time.

Kurtz: How long was the second lieutenant in command of the team?

Jacobson: About a month and then we got the two best team sergeant team leader combinations that ever existed in Special Forces, except I see our son has had some very good ones, too.

Kurtz: So you say a team leader and team sergeant?

Jacobson: They came, but the significant events that happened at Ben Cat were on Christmas Eve. We got a top, our team sergeant had Willy the weapons man and Reino and I, the engineers, walk around and we said, "take notes," and so we took notes, and we ordered stuff. We ordered stuff for a battalion and stuff to make the camp secure.

Kurtz: By stuff you're talking about barbed wire?

Jacobson: Barbed wire, concertina wire, and sandbags. And so on Christmas Eve we had a drop of twenty tons of that.

Kurtz: How did it come, by road?

Jacobson: Most of it, no, there was about a 300 foot ceiling, and so the planes would come and all of the sudden realize they were low, and they would drop, and so we did 20,000,000 piasters worth of damage to the village we were protecting. There were people running in every direction with animals squished and houses burnt on fire, and it was, it was awful.

Kurtz: So we paid for the damages?

Jacobson: We paid for the damages, yeah. And then the last plane that came over came from -- the colonel sent around a care package for Christmas for everybody, the fucking chute streamered, and it went through our team house roof. That kind of ended the day. So I went to Christmas Eve services, oh, and also, a Vietnamese convoy of rangers was coming north, and I told them, "Stop this is bad," and he said, "I won't take orders from an American, much less an American sergeant," or whatever. And so, one of the last bundles, these were all free dropped, one of the last bundles hit his jeep and of course killed him and severely injured the driver, and the rest of them backed up and waited like they should have. So I went to mass with, who at the time was our team leader, was the XO, who was sitting face in his hands, we'll just leave it at that, on the side of the ditch after this debacle, and he said, "I gotta go to church," you know, at Christmas Eve.

Kurtz: So you went to a Vietnamese Catholic church?

Jacobson: Yeah, Ben Cat was a Vietnamese Catholic refugee place.

Kurtz: There were a lot of North Vietnamese there then?

Jacobson: There were Vietnamese Catholic Christians, there were local people from Ben Cat who were communist, and there were the troops who were moved in. There was a kind of eclectic mix. And so, yeah, so I went to church, my only armed mass, and I stood in the back, armed, while he went up and did what he thought he could. He tried hard, Kenn tried hard, he just, was way over his head, lacking in experience. And then on New Year's Eve I was on a patrol with Top and Reino at Dong So.

Kurtz: Okay. And when you were on this patrol who was on this patrol? More than three Americans on it, weren't --

Jacobson: No.

Kurtz: Just three Americans?

Jacobson: I was with 346 Company, Willy was with 349 Company--Willy and Eddie, who was the other weapons man, he was young. And then Top and Reino were with the Vietnamese Special Forces.

Kurtz: So there were two Vietnamese companies on this patrol along with the Vietnamese Special Forces team?

Jacobson: Nah, there were just three or four Vietnamese Special Forces. And the rest were in camp, and Willy took the Nungs north to Bau Bang, you know where that is?

Kurtz: Yes.

Jacobson: And we stayed in Dong So and layed in -- I later measured, we had 150 guys for seventeen hundred meters of perimeter, and when--

Kurtz: Did you dig in?

Jacobson: No, we were behind. Dong So had plenty of natural trees and cement ornamental fences and so there was plenty of cover. And we were just to be there that overnight. I don't think you could dig in to that laterite soil. We never --

Kurtz: It was in the dry season anyway.

Jacobson: It was very dry. Anyway, Top and Reino and I decided among ourselves whatever rotation we were going to have to somebody stay awake, and I had gone around and seen that the company was spread out but in groups

of two or three. And Reino had set up whatever mortars we had; we would have had three mortars with that company.

Kurtz: 60s or 81s?

Jacobson: 60s. 60s with small base plates. And he set that up on kind of the street corner. It was the only place you could fire up without hitting a tree. And about midnight one of our interpreters came in and said there are very many Viet Cong around the town. We didn't have radios internally. It was runners, and--

Kurtz: Speaking of radios, did you have radio contact back to Ben Cat camp?

Jacobson: We did, only because Top knew what he was doing, and Denzo(??) had been his radio operator in the 10th Group. So he set up a rhombic, he set up a tricky antenna and finally did get voice comms with him. It took quite a number of hours. Ben Cat was a dead spot for us, I don't know about you guys, not Ben Cat, but north of Ben Cat. I think there's a hell of a lot of minerals underground. Whatever reason, we did have radio comms toward, you know, toward the afternoon.

Kurtz: Did you have PRC-25's?

Jacobson: 10.

Kurtz: 10.

Jacobson: Yeah, PR-10. And, anyway, he said, it was so funny because he said, the runner said that the Viet Cong all have Thompson submachine guns with red stocks, and they're led by a white man on a white horse. In hindsight, if it was that fucking Frenchman at Lai Khe I hope he hit his fucking head 'cause [laughs] --

Kurtz: Was there some background on this Frenchman from Lai Khe that you could share?

Jacobson: There is later on. We had a history with him throughout our time. He was making a living, and to do that you had to be on both sides, or, you know, you had to accommodate both sides. I say that after all these years, I'd probably still shoot him. Anyway, all of a sudden we were attacked violently. If I recall it was the Q270 Regiment.

Kurtz: There's 271, 273, 272 were their 9th VC Division.

Jacobson: Okay, well, it was in the 2-7s anyway, and those guys hit us and were among us. I immediately went to the south wall. We were hit, we were

overrun in about five minutes or less with -- the Dinh(??) was apparently the regiment, you know, clearly there's a thousand rifles firing at once. And there were rifle grenades and mortars. We called in artillery on ourselves, and one salvo came, but then it was coordinated enough that they simply put VT fused ones over Ben Cat, and the division had artillery, had three tubes. Uh, so that ended. So at this point they were-- no one knew who anyone was, you understand, you haven't been there, you're night-blind, and you can't hear anything. And so all you do is shoot at whoever's in front of you. And I later counted, I shot 142 bullets. I didn't know that till the next day when I saw what was left in the last of my magazines because my other ammo was in a rucksack in a house. So I grabbed two guys by their shirt collars and dragged them back because the Vietnamese Special Forces medic had set up a little aid station not realizing that things were going south real fast, and I went in, and I said, "Top, they're all around us." And in fact, they were around us so much that two organized units ran up Highway 13 through the town gates north. They were going up to hit Willy if he was coming south. They didn't even bother shooting at us; they just run up virtually in formation. Meanwhile, everyone was shooting at whoever was in front of them, but at this point there were as many behind us as there were in front of us because nobody knew who was where. Them guys were as night-blind as us. And Top said he called in artillery on us. I later found out that the lieutenant would not do that. Well, it wouldn't matter because I don't think he had enough rounds to do any impact, how many rounds do you keep handy, or keep primed up. But in any case, Top said throw a grenade under the radio, and so did he, and we went out. And I went back with, at this point I was with Andy, my interpreter, and we just kept shooting. I mean, the cover was very good. We were behind the damn big trees and the concrete fences, but as many would come, you know, would run past [laughs]. Then Top and Reino and the Vietnamese lieutenant named Toi who was the XO of the Special Forces team, the SFV, Vietnamese team, they ran past and Top said, "Toi said there's no VC to the west." Okay. So that's where we were leaving. And there were a group of us, I would say twenty or less and just going single file. Reino gave me six magazines which I put in my pockets. I presume he gave his others to Top. And the only reason he gave me magazines is he was cleaning his M16 in the jungle on the march north. For whatever reason he took it apart, that was him, and he dropped the cotter pin that holds the firing pin in so that he had a useless weapon. He had a pistol with him though. Incidentally, I sent two of those pins to Eric in Iraq in my first two letters.

Kurtz: Eric is your son who was in Iraq in 2003, now?

Jacobson: Yeah, yeah, and in fact if I still had a foreskin, and I were in combat I'd keep one of those pins tucked in there just because, I'm telling you, this is an important pin because the rifle doesn't fire without it. So then these

were AR15s we had anyway, and as we were exfiltrating west we were in a pigpen. An automatic weapon opened up in front, and that's the last I saw of Top or Reino that night, or ever. And five of us ended up simply veering off to the side, and Andy promptly fell [laughs] head first in a well, and he hollered, "Help me, Jake!" So I had to pick two guys, who I had no idea, one had a rifle, one didn't. One had thrown away his rifle already. And they held my legs, and I reached down and grabbed him, and we pulled him out. He thought his arms were broken. They weren't, I don't think. But anyway, we made a plan, and we exfiltrated west till we hit jungle. We evaded quietly, calmly, there were bullets still--you know what a bullet sounds like, [sharp, short noise], I mean [sharp, short noise], very loud when it comes past your ear, and there were a lot of them. We just moved into the jungle to the west until we hit jungle, and we crawled in, and we laid in a star shape with our heads touching. And we had a soldier who had an M1 rifle with one extra magazine, or a clip, but also whatever was in there. Andy had whatever was left in his carbine. I had whatever was left in my magazine, plus I had those from Reino. The armed Vietnamese striker had one grenade; the other guy didn't have one. And then it was a Vietnamese civilian with us who was paid by the Vietnamese Special Forces team to crank their generator for their radio. So he still carried his seat for that [laughs]. And the unarmed striker started to cry, and he took his bayonet out and put it on his throat. He said, "Be quiet, or we'll all be killed." At that point there was a hell of a flurry of Vietnamese because we were very near their rally point. And at one point a Vietnamese who had been barking orders, of course it was all dark, and besides everybody was night-blind anyway, he came over, and he pissed on Andy and my boots. You know, in the prudish step into the jungle, unlike Americans, and then, it got all quiet till morning, and we exfiltrated south, came out on Highway 13. A bus was coming so I took our spare grenade and gave it to the unarmed striker, pulled the pin. I said, "If there are VC on the bus, throw it and we'll cover you, and we'll find out what's going on." "Don't," he said, "There's only dead people in Dong So and some imperialist soldiers." And as we walked up we saw Toi and the Vietnamese Special Forces team. Top and Reino had been captured. A few months later I talked to one of the guys who had taken French leave at the time, or had run away, and he said that a VC political officer had executed both of them. And I suspected they had gone back to find me, but I don't know. But anyway, they were dead, and it was just--the streets were mud with blood, blood and mud, and so at this point my boots weren't in very good shape, jungle boots, because they had piss and mud and blood. So we went to the little café there, and I bought Biere Larue for breakfast and French baguette for everybody, and we sat there. I took off my boots--

Kurtz: That's Biere "33", right?

Jacobson: No, that is Tiger beer.

Kurtz: Tiger beer.

Jacobson: Ba Muoi Ba is the other one. I actually like Tiger beer better. But they took off shirt, took off my effing boots and leaned the rifle against the wall and life was good, because at that point Willy had his Nung company in, and it was daylight, and the people were going about their business. It was obvious nothing was going to happen.

Kurtz: Did any higher-ups from the Special Forces come out to check out what happened?

Jacobson: Only our defacto team leader came at the time, and he was completely beside himself. He was supposed to have taken that patrol, and so to this day he is, uh, greatly bothered by the fact that--not only that, every other patrol where we had deaths on he was supposed to have been on and had some reason not to go. That's -- he gotta live with that himself. But it wouldn't have made any difference if he was there. Top was a more experienced soldier. And things happen--you hope for luck and try not to make bad luck for yourself, that's combat.

Kurtz: So what happened after you had your beer and baguette?

Jacobson: Uh, I got in a violent argument with Kenn saying the wounded should go out before a couple dead Americans. The dead Americans left first, and I ended up going and debriefing at Thua Dat Mot which was a Vietnamese headquarters, and then Bien Hoa, and then at Special Forces had a technical operations center so I went to TOC [Technical Operations Center], and I spent the evening with a pretty girl to help me heal. And when I brought it up to our bureau, we had a violent shooting incident where somebody, game warden at Superior, shot a guy, and there were a bunch of people who, if you know the game warden, most of them are non-combat people, they were trying to figure out what can we do to help in the future. I said, "Well this worked for me, every time." Well, that fell on deaf ears, you know. So -- but it did! And if you were married, it would help. Eric got into a violent confrontation in Iraq, lost guys in his platoon, and the good luck was his wife flew over from the Blackhawk unit, and they spent the night together, and I figured that would be some healing. I mean, not that every guy should have a wife issued in reserve. It just happened to be good luck.

Kurtz: The bureau you're talking about again is the Bureau of Law Enforcement in the [Wisconsin] Department of Natural Resources, which you were employed in later. Okay, what happened then after that? Did you get your unit reconstituted, or did you get a different assignment?

Jacobson: Uh, 346 Company ceased to exist. I have access to all of the patrol reports from the national archives. I simply got them all. And we went from 450 people to fifty in thirty days. Regarding our Special Forces team, the CO left. The chief radio operator – well, Top and Reino were killed then within two weeks. The chief radio operator who had been Top's best friend for their whole careers, who had been a member of the 5th Ranger Regiment in Korea, Airborne Rangers, he went so shell-shocked that he had to leave. The junior weapons man, Eddie, had to be transferred out, so essentially we went to half a team, and we lost 400 guys in one month out of Ben Cat. We were patrolling every day. That was the main incident, there was a later incident when an entire company was--another entire company was killed. That happened about three months later. But meanwhile we were taking attrition, obviously on a daily basis. But we were still functioning. I see that we were pulling almost 1,000 townspeople in a month, for those months, for sick call. We were establishing a school, we were patrolling constantly.

Kurtz: So you patrolled rubber and paddies?

Jacobson: Well, you try to avoid the paddies, but everything was rubber there. And then there was jungle too, yeah, east of Lai Khe. That was – there was a lot of jungle between there and the railroad tracks. And west of there too, there was before you get to the next rubber plantation there was a lot of rubber. It was at the junction -- Ben Cat was between War Zone C and D and The Iron Triangle. It was the center of the action.

Kurtz: And how far south of Lai Khe was it?

Jacobson: Ben Cat is, I know it's ten Ks to Dong So, so maybe eight, seven-eight clicks south of Lai Khe.

Kurtz: So it's very close.

Jacobson: We'd go to Bau Bang, would be about the northern limits and then around. We weren't allowed to patrol to the south, and as you'll read in the book, and I'll give a copy of the book to the [Wisconsin Veterans] Museum. We had a lot of restrictions on us. I talked to our C-team colonel a few months ago. He's eighty-five and sharp, and that was his third war. We were very lucky to have him as a C-team leader. He knew what he was doing.

Kurtz: A C-team would be?

Jacobson: A C-team commands three B-teams and each B-team commands nine A-teams. We were never under a B-team at Ben Cat. We were A301, the

zero meaning we worked directly for the C-team, and then later A302, which was the 3rd Corps MIKE [Mobile Strike Force Command] force. But time ended in Ben Cat simple through attrition for me, and three of us were sent to Tu Duc, and we started gearing up to start the MIKE force.

Kurtz: Where is Tu Duc?

Jacobson: Tu Duc is between Bien Hoa and Saigon, a pretty peaceful place to be in town every night if you wanted to. And at that time we listened on the radio when Tony, who was our second team leader and Tom who was the second senior demo man were killed, and 348 Company were decimated. Incidentally, there were nineteen of us to live out of that Dong So attack. And I don't think that many lived out of the other one. Tom was killed, Tony escaped but only after running out of ammo and being wounded, being captured, and it was the second time, his second war that he was wounded, captured, and escaped 'cause when the guy in blue again, the political officer, held the carbine up to shoot him in the head, Tony knew that it was empty. So he put one upside the guy's head and took off running, got shot again, and he showed up later. He'd crawled out and flagged down a bus. The bus tooted the horn till somebody came and got him in front of Ben Cat. So, I mean he was a survivor, and he was a very good team sergeant. He and I remain friends; we didn't get to be friends until after he was wounded 'cause it was a command thing. He was the boss. And then the guy I work for now in the homeland security contract, Joe, I was lucky I had two very good team leaders, and he was one. He was a West Pointer but, not but, he was a West Pointer, and he was very good. But anyway, then Joe came, they closed the camp at Ben Cat, and brought the remaining--

Kurtz: When was that about?

Jacobson: April.

Kurtz: April '66?

Jacobson: Yeah, April '65.

Kurtz: '66.

Jacobson: '65, I went there in '64.

Kurtz: Oh, okay. I got the dates wrong. Okay, April '65, I'm sorry.

Jacobson: And Willy, the weapons man, and John, the medic and I were starting to train up the forerunners of the 3rd Corps MIKE force, which was an

Airborne Ranger, it was an assault force. And Rocky and Jones were transferred to Minh Thanh. I'd later run into them.

Kurtz: That was another rubber plantation area.

Jacobson: It was, yeah. I'd run into them later. Jones was later, Jones is MIA, he was, I think on a delta operation. I lost track of Rocky, last heard of him in Singapore. He was a medic on oil rigs. But anyway, Joe came south with the remainder, also with the replacements that we had, they were all Lodge Act guys. The replacements were, Roth, he was a big Lodge Act guy from Poland, Kokoszka, from Poland. We had some good guys, and we spent a couple of glorious months training up 450 guys for the MIKE force battalion.

Kurtz: Okay, and then where did you get assigned with that MIKE force battalion?

Jacobson: We did our first operations right out of Tu Duc, and then we moved to a new camp north of Dred(??) near Bien Hoa.

Kurtz: North of where?

Jacobson: Right near Ben Hoa. Just north of Bien Hoa, between the airport and the town.

Kurtz: Okay, we got a little more of this tape yet. When were you at Bien Hoa? That would be roughly July of '65?

Jacobson: Yeah, I think our first operation might have been June or July with the MIKE force. And the operations were, if a camp was going to be hit or we had been hit we would go in as an attacking relief force and we had an operation west of Suio Da which is north of Nui Ba Den, and then we had an operation at Minh Thanh. I led a bayonet charge. The team sergeant from Minh Thanh was missing on a patrol so we went in, and there's always -- that's why it's so easy to write because you can pitch back to things. I had never met an American Negro, in my life, except the porter on the train one time, until I was in training group and I became friends with an older sergeant. He was a staff sergeant, and we partnered up. That's one of the keys, I told our son going through Special Forces training group, partner up with somebody good, 'cause it's all in your head. And King and I partnered up on the first of these cross country go from point A to B to C to D and if you don't get to one of the points you don't where the next direction is or distance. Well, you don't know distance anyway. And he said, "Do you know how to do this?" Geez, I dittos ???. I can see a map in three dimension. And King was a good soldier. And I found out that the difference between growing up black in Mississippi and growing

up white in northern Wisconsin was virtually none. You still ate fried chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy and biscuits for Sunday. And you were poor. Those were the two constants.

Kurtz: We gotta stop here. **[End of Tape 1, Side B]**

Kurtz: Your MIKE force experience which basically was a reaction force, so how long were you assigned with this MIKE force unit?

Jacobson: I probably stayed with them seven, eight months. But I was talking about why I led a bayonet charge on purpose.

Kurtz: Okay, please tell us.

Jacobson: And it had to do with one of my best friends in training group, who was an old guy, older than I, but we partnered up for the whole time, and his name was King, and like I say, he was really the first Negro I ever knew. Probably the only one I ever knew until the guy that worked for you. And uh, the team sergeant, I knew King was north of us on a team, I didn't know which one, and then I heard the team sergeant was a Negro and he was missing, and we were on an operation. We had the entire MIKE force, and Joe wasn't our team leader anymore, he got assigned to a B-team. It was simply a matter of how assignments went. So we had a guy who had been the S2 [intelligence]. Turned out he was as good a team leader as Joe. He had been a corporal in Korea, he was a combat vet, and he was old and white haired as a captain, and I talk to him too; he's still a friend. Anyway he left Oscar who was a new--the Suoi Da operation was just a fuck up. It was no big thing. We got lit up, but it was nothing important. I lost my first rucksack at Dong So. I lost the second one at Suoi Da. I lost one more since then, but it just wasn't --

Kurtz: What's the significance of losing a rucksack?

Jacobson: It means you're moving fast. And you're moving very fast. Anyway, I thought it was King. I thought King was the guy that was wounded and he was really as good a friend as I ever had, and Oscar, the new XO [executive officer] was to keep one company to secure the airstrip at all costs. Willy had two new guys with him north of the strip with a Nung company. A new guy, Brewer, was with a Nung company south of the strip, and I was the recon platoon leader at that point. And I had recon platoon in the woods to make sure we weren't going to get lit up from there, and we took rifle grenades, and Brewer got hit. And at the same time we got strafed twice by Hueys [Bell utility helicopters], and that's when I realized Joe was back in the picture because somehow the B-team came, some guys, and I was cursing into the radio 'cause a third strike my guys would have lit 'em up, and the lord knows what would have

happened to us then. The Skyraiders [Douglas A-1 attack aircraft] would have got us. I mean, this was not good to shoot at helicopters, and Joe said, "Would you please stop swearing on the radio, Jake." I said, "Well, would you please tell them not to shoot at us anymore." So we went up to Brewer, hauled him off, the Nung company that was with Brewer broke and ran. I sent my interpreter, Ving, back to get them and tell them to come to me, I'm the new company commander, and they did. And we moved up, we got lit up by fixed positions at the far west end of the strip, but luckily there was a drainage ditch there so we just hopped in that, and I swear to Christ I could see my friend King moving. It was a trick of light, he was dead. But I saw him moving. Well, to backtrack, one of the things that I did at Tu Duc was I trained the entire battalion in use of the bayonet. And the reason was, I used to take my recon team for a run in the morning. We'd go into town, to Tu Duc, go to the cathouse, get some breakfast, and then run back. It was a nice start of the day. And we got caught, so my punishment [laughs] was to teach these guys bayonet drill which was its own fire drill. So these guys, when I screamed "La Lay (??), they all grinned, and I had 150 Genghis Khan look-a-likes click on the bayonets. And I hollered "Sat Cong" ["kill communists" slogan], we charged 'cause I'm looking at my friend alive. You know, he wasn't, but eyes play tricks. And they broke and ran. A Corsican Legionaire had told me if you ever get in a bind, the Viets are afraid of the steal, he said. And it was a calculated move, and it worked. They abandoned their positions, went straight out into the open area to the west, the new team leader, Joe, called in the Skyraiders, and they lit them up. It was a wonderful thing. But I bayonet probed my way up to the guy, it wasn't King, it was Ernie Haywood, it was a different guy when we didn't have --

Kurtz: Bayonet [inaudible] because of mines and booby traps?

Jacobson: Yeah, and then I tied on my parachute chord and a homemade hammock, tied it on his feet, went back in the trench and pulled back in case they had left a --

Kurtz: Grenade on your --

Jacobson: Right, that's what I'd a done, but they didn't, and I saw a violent confrontation taking place to my right. Joe stripped the camera away from a civilian cameraman. Turned out it was Sean Flynn, Errol Flynn's kid, who took a great picture of me the next day. I didn't know it existed. And Joe sent it to me, right after we were lit up on a different operation. The bugger was in front of me. As I'm -- I've got a pretty fixed stare and I'm loading from the top and anyway, he didn't want the world to see a picture of how we treated negros. It doesn't matter, you know, it's how I treated me. I didn't wanna get blown up! Anyway, this whole business of why the Nungs came to me had to do with living with the troops at Ben Cat.

Morely Safer, in his first assignment came to Ben Cat with a guy named Alex Brower who had been a French combat photographer who'd been around a lot. He'd been in Algeria, he'd been in Indochina. And they were there when our Nungs lit up our Vietnamese Special Forces team, and it's all on film. And apparently at the same time the – to tell you, well you know what it's like when a lot of bullets are calling. If you can't hear a helicopter flaring in there's a lot of bullets. And we didn't hear the helicopter that was coming to pick up Morely, and all of a sudden I saw it, and I threw a red smoke, and Tom flew a red smoke, and he said, "Request permission to land," and I said, "Fuck no, you can't land here. We're having a fucking shoot out!" So they took off dropping purple smoke. Well, apparently that was not only on nightly news, but the secretary of the Army had heard it, and so he sent Joe a missive saying, "Tell your sergeants, your noncoms not to swear." So when I heard Joe on the radio, of course Joe didn't tell me that for almost thirty years, but when I heard him on the radio, I knew he was somewhat concerned about swearing on the radio. So that's how we got the bayonet shot off of one of my guys which is getting' close. As the helicopter would strafe in, I didn't mind the strafing because you could do this around the trees, from the door gunners, the rockets were potential danger. So the next day was another patrol, not much happened. We – I think we lit them up -- we initiated the ambush before they were ready and so helped ourselves out, and then the only other significant operation that I almost went on, they asked for volunteers. Previously at Ben Cat we had been asked if we would volunteer for a helicopter assault. There were apparently two American prisoners just west of us. Well, after we all said yeah and got ready, we didn't go. So the word came down from the C-team, the team at Tu Duc, and us at the MIKE force to volunteer for a night prisoner rescue, a night jump. So fine, so we trained up in one day, and I had a lot of bullets by that time, a lot of weapons. Frank was the only guy I knew on that one, and I read about this later in another book, and I'm thinking, god, were there two of these? This is so different than I read, and since I was writing myself, I called the guy that had been the leader of that operation, who had been the S3 [operations], and I talked to Frank, and no, this other guy, they must have caught him drunk, because he had embellished this quite a bit. So the bottom line is we were to make a night drop out of a Caribou.

Kurtz: Which is a two engine transport.

Jacobson: Yeah, hauls about 5,000 pounds. And a de Havilland DHC-4 [caribou], the Air Force later called them CV2 I think. Anyway, Frank was in the door, I was behind him, we were to jump in, blast right through, get them. It was a cockeyed scheme because they were drop partially inflated life rafts to us in a river that was raging at that time of year. So Frank and I figured we're going to walk to Song Be. We're not even going to go to the nearest town because this is all going to turn to shit. We had planned to

evade before we jumped. Well, just as we were going, and we're really – we we gliding. We were making any noise, we were just gliding to make the jump, the jump was called off, and I heard various reasons why, why not. The guy never was recovered. I thought it was a pilot, but it turned out it was some other guy, according to this book, and he would have had access to those. So that was my last major operation. Oh, there was one [laughs] that was before Minh Thanh. And that was at Dong Xoai, and that would have been in August.

Kurtz: Of '65?

Jacobson: '65.

Kurtz: And when was Minh Thanh?

Jacobson: Minh Thanh would be October. I think Ernie was killed on the 16th of October. And we went in because the camp had been overrun, and we only went in with a company. It was Willy, and Hughes who was later killed, and Joe, and I. And Joe and I went on a patrol in the west with two Nungs and two Cambodians. And we were to find -- somebody told me it was 60C. I thought it was 325, but anyway it was some--they think the VC changed the designations and numbers of their units all the time anyway. But we were to go see if they were there, and they were and we got ambushed all to shit. The first two guys went down. Joe and I were down. Joe kept his rucksack, there were seventy-five holes in his rucksack, so one must have just been a knick because it should be one in, one out. I dropped mine right there. I said that's, you know, this thing leaks, I didn't need it, and the two Cambodians were killed, the two Nungs went back and got lit up by own -- by not our own guys, but the guys from the camp Dong Xoai, but Joe and I were there, and it's kind of funny because he bursted out laughing. I said, "Jesus, Dai-Uy, we gotta get the fuck out of here." You know, and it was rather--

Kurtz: And dai-uy, what does that mean?

Jacobson: Captain.

Kurtz: Vietnamese for captain?

Jacobson: Yeah, but in fact, we mostly called each other by first name, unless somebody else was around, you didn't want to insult, you know, didn't want to hurt feelings or something. Even now, when West Pointers come and do summertime on a A-team they're shocked at the informality, except when you're around somebody that outranks your team leader, then it's no longer a first name. And Joe busted out laughing. he said, "Sure, Jake, got any [laughs] ideas?" You know, kinda calm. So we blasted straight north,

right throw them. And it was the most wonderful thing. That entire goddamn VC regiment lit each other up, everybody was shooting at everybody else, they knew something was going on, anybody that moved. And so, we didn't run. We stopped running, we walked, and we blended in. And we walked and we walked back toward camp, and we went past right through the whole regiment. They were hunkered down, and anytime that any one of them stood up they were shooting at each other! The din was terrific, and it had nothing to do with us! It was wonderful!

Kurtz: It is, that's kind of remarkable because their tracers are green, and they saw no red tracers. So that's kind of remarkable that --

Jacobson: I never thought of that. Uh, I don't recall even seeing the tracers in the daylight. At that point, I don't recall seeing their tracers. I don't --

Kurtz: Maybe they didn't have them.

Jacobson: Yeah, I never thought of that. I never thought of that till you just mentioned it. I don't recall seeing tracers in that ambush or afterwards. And it may simply be that in the bright daylight, we didn't see it, or -- I mean, they were shooting all around us. But there were some funny things. I got a vine hooked around me, and Joe came back. I mean, we were in a very tricky situation. He says calm as can be, "Jake, would you please hurry up?" What do you think I'm doing? He had an M16, I had a carbine, and he kept hooking up that high sight in the vegetation. I said, "If you can't walk with the thing, why don't you throw the fucking thing down!" I mean, it was quiet discourse going on. But then when we got back I realized probably why we were ambushed. Because who would show up, and he was ugly anyway, was Te Wei Toi, the second lieutenant on the Special Forces team. He'd been transferred there. He was the same guy that happened to be at Dong So.

Kurtz: Might have been VC?

Jacobson: He was working for somebody. He was working hard for somebody, and I don't know who, but when I saw that I figured out, well, that's okay, there's leakers here all right. Plus, what was left of our Vietnamese troops were transferred there, and among other things, I didn't mind when they were trading hand grenades at the cathouse downtown for goods, but somebody wired up the ammo dump, the ammo bunker one night, and it was an in your face thing. It was not hard but, somebody wasn't working for us that was there. But the rest of it in the book is--

Kurtz: What's the name of the book?

Jacobson: *Hai Si*, H-A-I and then the second word is S-I. hai Si, it means corporal in Vietnamese.

Kurtz: Okay, and then that is going to be published by who?

Jacobson: Ballantine.

Kurtz: And is that 2003?

Jacobson: 2004, September 2004 is the date. I originally was asked in 1986 if I would write up my memoirs from Special Forces and the CIA contract work with Air America, and I wasn't ready.

Kurtz: To make clear of this record here, we're not going to be talking about the contract work –

Jacobson: No.

Kurtz: On this tape with Air America. How did you leave Vietnam?

Jacobson: It was normal—I extended because Joe was asked to and accepted command of Delta Force. And then his career advisor told him – see, now Special Forces is its own career path, and there are many generals who have stayed in the 18 series or 180 series. Then if you didn't have a command in a conventional infantry unit you are not going to make general or colonel. And so, Willy and I extended for six months to go to Delta with Joe. And Joe was told, "If you do that you might as well figure on retiring as a major." So he took off and had to come back and do another year with some line infantry unit.

Kurtz: Okay. Delta, could you explain what that was, please?

Jacobson: There were three forces that were created to give us our in-house reinforcing capability. We had Apache Force, and I was first on that, and that was -- the Apache Force -- I was on that when we first went to Tu Duc, and Apache Force was split, and I took the other half of that, and that was the recon team, recon platoon, for the MIKE force. Apache Force was supposed to go into three separate landing zones ahead of a U.S. unit, and the landing zone that had the least resistance was the one where the U.S. troops would go. Now, think about the failure potential here. Who's going to say, "Screw me and us, I don't care how loud the din of bullets were," you're gonna say, "There's nothing here, come here." This was doomed for failure, so stupid, and we said so. And nothing came of it. It rolled into the MIKE force. The MIKE force being a, everybody was airborne qualified, and we did combat assaults. The third was a recon force with Delta, all three were started about the same time, and Delta

would do long range team insertions, patrols, and never having worked on them I'm not sure exactly what, but they were clearly looking for VC units, or north Vietnamese units or whatever. It was strictly supposed to be a no contact recon unit, but they probably had the worst casualties of any of us. So, you know --

Kurtz: Did you come back to the States after this tour?

Jacobson: Yeah, after I left the MIKE force I went to Saigon, and I worked in the S-3 air operations. I made two to three airdrops a day for some months. Lived in Saigon with a girlfriend who had been my friend for eighteen months, and I shouldn't say lived with her. We went out a lot, but she lived with her mom (??). And generally had a pretty laid-back life, and one day my buddy Bill, who I had been in NCO school with came walking down the street, and he was wearing an Air America uniform. And he said, "The pay is really a lot better." And so I then came back to the United States, took a discharge. I had three choices: go to OCS, be a staff sergeant in the 10th Group 'cause I could ski well, or get out and go to Air America. So I went to Air America. It was me at the time, I was looking for adventure, and I found some, but --

Kurtz: This was in like the summer of '66?

Jacobson: Summer of '66. I came back to the United States, went to the used car lot in Ironwood, Michigan. They had a Corvette and a Volkswagen for sale. I bought the Corvette, which I totaled about Labor Day. Met my wife. I went trout fishing that fall. When I got discharged I went straight to DC, to Air America offices and essentially got hired, but I said I gotta take some time off here. And so, I went to, I had a big parade, you know, came home Fourth of July, I was sitting in my own Corvette, you know, I got a free membership in the VFW.

Kurtz: So in other words you got a good reception coming back as a Vietnam veteran in '66.

Jacobson: Yes, the summer of '66. It was fine, everybody happy to see me. I played hard, I then went trout fishing, went grouse hunting, and then I was a ski instructor at Powderhorn [Bessemer, Michigan] that winter, and then finally, you know, I'd make periodic calls saying, "Jeez, give me another month Air America." They finally said, "Fine, you come in now, or you ain't coming." So I said, "Okay I'm going." It was March. The skiing is just right, the snow was melting, I was ready to go.

Kurtz: At some point would you be willing to share the Air America experiences?

Jacobson: I wrote chapter one last week. The title of that will be "Kicker."

Kurtz: So in other words, when the book is done then you might be willing to talk to us?

Jacobson: I'll be very organized at that point. Uh, I'm organized now when I write I write -- everything is in chapter by file by—I write by a very strict outline.

Kurtz: So in other words, this is for my employer at the [Wisconsin] Veterans Museum, Mr. Jacobson will talk to us at some point about this.

Jacobson: Yeah, because I've come to grips with what I will and will not discuss about the CIA, and what I won't discuss about it is going to be in a novel, actually in two novels [laughs].

Kurtz: Okay, well, let me ask you this as we finish up today, do you have any thoughts about the Vietnam War?

Jacobson: Um, no. I know exactly why I was there. Every one of us in the 5th Group that went through mission training understood about the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization [SEATO], no different than the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], a member state needed help, and consequently we went.

Kurtz: Do you have any thoughts about the Vietnamese people, whether North, South, Viet Cong, or whatever?

Jacobson: No, the, uh, North Vietnamese that I met were in fact refugees. They were nice. I knew that I would never starve. We had a total immersion course. And we were told to pay attention for your first day because after that you'll have to ask for the food. You won't be told, but they'll tell you. So this really cute Vietnamese girl handed me a piece of bread for breakfast, and she said, "Thit," the 'h' is silent, T-H-I-T. Huh, I got it. Then she handed me a piece of meat, and she said, "Banh mi," and I said, it might be monotonous, but I'm gonna to eat [Jim Laughs]. So those were the only North Vietnamese guys I knew were instructors, and they were very formal instructors. I can't say I knew them. The South Vietnamese guys that I knew ran the gamut no different than Americans, some really nice, some really assholes, most cordial, or in between. When I went to Saigon, I'd stop at the "Butterfly Bar", Le Papillon. I'd stop at the Morning Star, just to see who was around. I couldn't stand the sporting bar, that was where SF went, but you went there to posture. I didn't go to posture, I walked downtown. I walked, immersed myself in the culture. I spent my afternoons reading a Vietnamese paper at the Continental Hotel Terrace. And after a year and half I barely got decent service from them haughty waiters, uh, but I lived local. I traveled local, and I've done that every place I've been.

Kurtz: Did you think the country was pretty?

Jacobson: The country was beautiful! The people were nice. The Viet Cong guys that I met that went for training at Baraboo, at the crane center, they're nice guys. The one guy I put in touch with the guy who I knew had been the colonel for Special Forces, around the Plain of Reeds. Those guys talked every night, long distance, nobody was mad at each other. They were working for their president, and we were working for ours. To quote a Vietnamese guy I just read in a book, "Fuck all presidents."

Kurtz: That's a good place to stop [both laugh]. **[End of Tape 2, Side A]**

[End of Interview]