

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN A. WEBB
Air Controller, Air Force, Career and Vietnam War.

1999

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Webb, John (Jack) A., (1936-). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 78 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 78 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John "Jack" A. Webb, a Durand, Wisconsin native, discusses his career in the Air Force, including service in Asia during the Vietnam War and the Cold War. Webb mentions his family's military history, enlisting in 1954, and his military training, including work with radar and with electronic countermeasure systems for B-47s. He touches on volunteering for Combat Control, going through jump school, and joining a team at Hurlburt Field (Florida) in 1963. Webb outlines his career and states he served in Laos and Nakhon Phanom (Thailand) between 1964 and 1966, as well as in Korea and in Japan after the USS Pueblo Incident. He discusses taking different types of Special Forces training, including jungle survival in Panama and infiltrating a CIA base. He speaks of "Operation Water Pump/Project 404": living at Vang Pao's secret headquarters at Long Tieng (Laos), duties as an air controller working in conjunction with the Laos military, and officially being a member of the U.S. Embassy rather than an Air Force employee. Webb expresses regret that when he went to Laos, little was known about Hmong culture and everyone called the Hmong a derogatory term without knowing better. He compares working with Hmong soldiers and Royal Lao Army soldiers. At Udorn (Thailand) in 1964, Webb describes living at CIA-operated airline facilities and their quick conversion to military bases after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. He touches on going on some ambushes with Hmong guerilla soldiers, getting attacked by Russian tanks, and being held back by American policy, such as not being allowed to use napalm in Laos. Webb highlights some dysfunctional relationships with officers from other U.S. military branches and reflects on his two-person, enlisted-men team being replaced by a bigger unit composed of officers. He explains how targets were set, the fluid nature of his resources, and difficulties caused by the rules of engagement. He describes attending Vang Pao's house parties and participating in a Hmong cultural ceremony at a village. Webb talks about sponsoring Hmong immigrants in the United States. He comments on daily life and a typical duty day. Webb details doing an emergency landing after having his airplane's battery shot and getting the plane restarted afterwards. He characterizes the men in his unit, relates an uneventful homecoming, and states he wore his uniform in the early 1970s as a recruiter in Green Bay (Wisconsin) and never encountered a problem with protesters. After his retirement, Webb talks about using the GI Bill to attend college, shares his frustration about the difficulties he has witnessed Hmong immigrants face, and highlights the contribution of the Hmong people to the war effort. He touches on his membership in the VFW and the American Legion China Post 1 (exiled out of Shanghai).

Biographical Sketch:

Webb (b.1936) served in the Air Force for twenty years. He served in Korea, Vietnam, and the secret war in Laos. Webb achieved the rank of Technical Sergeant before retiring and currently lives in Fort Atkinson (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Scott Cross, 1999
Transcribed by WDVA staff & Leah Schultz, 2011
Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

Cross: [This is] Scott Cross, and I'm conducting an interview with Mr. Jack Webb, a veteran of the Vietnam War, and it is January 11th, 1999. Let's start from the beginning; can you tell us what year you were born, and where, and where you grew up?

Webb: I was born in Durand, Wisconsin in 1936, and I grew up—well, I went to grade school through the fourth grade in Durand then moved to the metropolis of Arkansas, Wisconsin through my senior year in high school and then back to Durand and graduated there.

Cross: What did you do before the Vietnam War?

Webb: I was in the service.

Cross: You were career service?

Webb: Yeah. I enlisted in '54.

Cross: Was that straight out of high school?

Webb: Yeah.

Cross: Okay. Can you describe your entry into the military service; what motivated you?

Webb: Well, my mother was the youngest in her family, and that made all my cousins of the World War II age—not all my cousins, the vast majority of my cousins. And there were so many of them—my mother's from a very large family—so everybody was very, if you will, patriotic, and the military was a very important thing to 'em. And of course everyone had their stories, and, you know, and a lot of them were involved in—like one cousin was a sole survivor in a tank on Saipan, one got his kneecap blew off at Normandy, one was a Seabee, so there were a lot of stories that they brought back. And being children at that time, of course these things sink in. And so I have three brothers, and all four of us went in 'cause it was just, you know, the thing to do in the family.

Cross: How would you characterize your military training and where did you train?

Webb: [Laughs] Where do you wanna start?

Cross: Well, kind of briefly highlight, I suppose, the beginning and then some of your specialized schooling.

Webb: When I got out of basic training, I went to Ground Radio Repair School at Scott Field, Illinois. That was uh, about a thirty-two week school, thirty-four week school, something like that. Then I got on a troop ship and went to Korea, came back from Korea in '56, went to Minnesota to a radar site, AC&W site. Left there, went to Japan to the northern tip of Hokkaido, to a Shoran detachment; there were only thirteen of us on that site. Uh, came back from there to New Hampshire, ended up in SAC [Strategic Air Command], B-47 bombers, worked on them and electronic countermeasure systems. Didn't like SAC a whole lot, heard about a thing in the Air Force called Combat Control, who were the people that go in and set up the drop zones for the Army Airborne. So I applied for that, was sent to Jump School at Fort Benning [Georgia], and then went to Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, where a troop carrier squadron was being formed and it later developed into a wing; it was A-model C-130s. And I was the only enlisted combat controller there for about six months, then people started filtering in and we ended up with a team. Then I heard about the air commandos over at Hurlburt Field, Florida, and I happened to take a trip over there to trade some communications equipment. Told 'em I wanted to be on that team; I was transferred on a TWX [Teletypewriter eXchange], on a message.

Cross: I'm familiar with that.

Webb: The air commando sent a message, said, "Move over." No orders, ship furniture and family and the whole works. That's how bad they needed people.

Cross: What year was this?

Webb: This was in '63. Then while I was with them, I went to Laos in '64, came back to Hurlburt Field, then I got a PCS, or a Permanent Change of Station, to Nakhon Phanom [Royal Thai Navy Base], Thailand, in '66 and from there I went back to Laos. Then when I rotated out of there, I went to Japan, to Misawa with the 6th Direct Air Support Squadron, which was ground forward air controllers with Jeeps and all that sort of thing. Stayed with them through the Pueblo [Incident], went to Korea for the Pueblo, and I was with a ROK [Republic of Korea] army in the DMZ. Left there, went to Wheeler Field, Hawaii, was actually quartered on Schofield Barracks, so I had a desk at Schofield at brigade headquarters and a desk at the TAS, or Tactical Air Support Squadron in Wheeler. And I was the

NCOIC [Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge] of the Tactical Air Control parties. And I stayed there a year to finish out the tour, which was a three-year tour. After the Pueblo, they decided that our flight system didn't work, so they made three squadrons. So I just continued that three-year tour of Japan. So one year in Hawaii, came back to the States, went to the Combat Control team at England [Air Force Base], Louisiana, at Alexandria. Spent about a year there, started gettin' itchy, terminated my jump status and went into recruiting in Green Bay, and then retired.

Cross: How realistic would you say your training was prior to going to Laos and Thailand?

Webb: Well, I didn't mention any of the training. Our training consisted of, of course, basic jump school at Fort Benning, sea survival, combat survival at Stead—sea survival was in Virginia at, uh—hmm, can't remember the name of the base; we did it in Chesapeake Bay, anyway. The combat survival, where you went through resistance training and all that sort of thing, was at Stead Air Force Base, Nevada. We extended that; we did our own training in Florida, which went a lot deeper than—because once the air commandos got started in—well, they came about in '60 or '61—they realized the need for—because of the mission the regular Air Force did not have training available. So we did Special Forces: the weapons training and escape and evasion, and we did jungle survival school in Panama, in conjunction with the 8th Special Forces at France Field [Panama], and the natives—we had to elude the natives in the jungle and that sort of thing. We did a lot of our own training as far as writing up ops [operations] plans and doing training in the England complex.

Cross: The England complex?

Webb: Hurlburt Field, Florida is one of the auxiliary fields of England; there are nine auxiliary fields. As a matter of fact, Hurlburt is where Doolittle did his training. At the time I was there, there was a northwest runway, then an adjacent runway, that was called Doolittle strip; that's where they actually did their training for the take-offs in that period.

Cross: Interesting.

Webb: But, uh, we did a lot of training down there. We would infiltrate—the CIA had a base at Field 3. We'd infiltrate their base at night and blow their airplanes up and—a lot of internal training, because the Air Force didn't have training available.

Cross: Do you think that adequately prepared you for your experiences?

Webb: No.

Cross: No?

Webb: Uh-uh.

Cross: Okay. Okay, can you tell me a little bit about your transportation overseas, where did you leave from and when, and where you arrived on your first trip to southeast Asia?

Webb: [Laughs] We were on what was called “Operation Water Pump”; “Project 404” it was code-named, and it was one of those “you can’t tell your wife or anybody”, you know how that goes. We had a C-54 with a Navy crew that took us out of Hurlburt Field—I’m tryin’ to remember how many of us there were; about thirty-four, something like that. I was the only combat controller. A C-54 doesn’t have a whole lot of range; it took us like, three days to get to Bangkok. We stopped everyplace. When we came back, we booked ourselves on commercial.

Cross: A lot more efficient [laughs].

Webb: Well, that was one good thing about the Air Commandos. When you completed a tour, usually what you were told is, “Here are your orders. Go to Bangkok and when you’re ready, book yourself out and go home.” So, you know, that worked out pretty good; everybody got to spend a few days in Bangkok.

Cross: Well, with our upcoming exhibit this fall on the Hmong, I’m particularly interested—I think the museum is, too—in your experiences working with them. So if you could explain as much as you can, you know, what your mission was and how you implemented that, your techniques or whatever, and just pretty much everything you experienced while you were there.

Webb: Well, one thing that I, in retrospect, that I feel sad about, is that the whole time that I was there and some years later, I don’t remember when the actual change took place, but we didn’t call them Hmong, we called ‘em “Meo”.

Cross: Meo?

Webb: And that’s from the Chinese, when they lived in China—well, some still do, a lot of ‘em still do—but the Hmong people in Laos and Burma and Thailand and Vietnam came out of China. And the Chinese called them “Miao” which also means “cat”—but it’s a derogatory term, and that carried over, and the lowland Lao called ‘em “Meo”, which is a derogatory term. And we called ‘em that, because we didn’t know any better. And what upset me—or upsets me now in retrospect; it didn’t at the

time because I was as ignorant as the people I was following—uh, there wasn't any background on these people. Even though there had been White Star Special Forces teams in there since 1959, nobody did any anthropological checks on these people, or any studies to find out even the sketchy—[Joel] Halpern is a name that comes to mind of an anthropologist who did some work; they even called 'em "Meo", didn't know what their real name was. Ah, but they accepted it; they didn't get excited about it. But it was some years later, and I think it was probably Vang Pao, who was the military leader—he was not the governmental leader of the Hmong or spiritual leader, he was the military leader; Touby Lyfoung was the actual leader of the Hmong people. Uh, I think he's the one that finally straightened the Americans out as to what they should be called.

But we, as Americans, do as Americans always do in foreign countries: "We're right, and the way things are done is the way you should do 'em, and we don't give a damn whose country we're in." I don't know if this is what you're looking for, but I found that true throughout Asia, and I spent five years and nine months, I think, total, in Asia, in many different places. But Laos wasn't, wasn't all that different as far as the way we treated 'em. Now, some of the "spooks" [spies] and some of the Continental Air people and Air America people did get into what the peoples' backgrounds were and their customs and that sort of thing. And, uh, they did show a little more respect than a lot of the military people who were rotated into Vientiane and rotated out, and once in awhile they'd stick their noses into Long Tieng [military base, Laos], but most of 'em wanted to squirrel themselves away in Vientiane down south where it was safe and they didn't have to worry about anything goin' "boom". But the ones that went up north didn't, weren't there long enough to figure out what was goin' on anyway.

Cross: What were the goals of your mission and your team while you were there?

Webb: Well, we didn't deploy as a team, see. Unlike Special Forces and [Army] SEALs and those people with whom we worked with all those people, uh, we deployed individually. It took three years to get a person trained to Phase 3—what we called "Phase 3 Qualified"—then you deployed individually to support somebody else. So when I went into Laos, my job was to direct Air. So in conjunction with—I lived at Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng, which was probably the most secret spot on earth at the time. There were a lot of people—well, when I was there the first time, I couldn't get into Long Tieng.

Cross: Why is that?

Webb: I wasn't cleared.

Cross: Oh, I see.

Webb: I could work the other places: I could work Muang Sui [Laos], I was in Vang Vieng at _____? headquarters, all these places, but I couldn't get into Long Tieng because I wasn't cleared. So it was a very, very secret place.

Cross: So with Air Control, what were your responsibilities and duties?

Webb: To blow up bad guys. We would work—we worked in conjunction with Vang Pao and his people, and the agency. The agency actually controlled everything. I would get up in the morning and if no one had said, "We're gonna make a move on an area tomorrow, have some airplanes available," I would simply get in the airplane and go up to Site 36 or some other place and see what the activities were. We were required to have a local in the airplane by the rules of engagement, which in Laos, we—I mean, hell, who's gonna check up on ya, you know?

Cross:: [Laughs]

Webb: Yeah. I didn't mention this, but we flew in civilian clothes; we couldn't have military ID. Or dog tags or—

Cross: Okay, I've heard that.

Webb: Yeah, we were—when we crossed the fence, we were what they call "sheep-dipped", and we left everything in Thailand. And uh, we had a card from the embassy that said you were an employee of the U.S. Embassy.

Cross: Now I know some men who served in similar capacities were given actual job positions in civilian corporations. Did they do that with you, also?

Webb: No.

Cross: Okay, 'cause I know some veterans, they mustered 'em out of service, and then they were hired at—

Webb: That rumor flew around while we were there, but I never saw it happen.

Cross: I just heard that with some interviews on television with some veterans.

Webb: I'm not saying it didn't happen; I'm saying I never saw it happen. And I know, I know one guy comes to mind right now who was with me in '64, and when I went back in '66 he was flying for Air America. So I think he

simply separated from the service; I don't know. But I never saw this transaction take place. Our pay was still paid by the U.S. Air Force—well, when we got it. We didn't need money up there [laughs]. No, we were never erased from the—we were told that we would be disavowed, but we were never separated.

Cross: Did you work in pretty close connection then with the Hmong people themselves?

Webb: Yep.

Cross: And how were your relationships with them?

Webb: What do you mean by that?

Cross: Um, did you get along with them, you know, working with them?

Webb: I got along with them a whole lot better than the CIA. [both laugh] A whole lot better.

Cross: [Laughs] What kind of work did they do with you in what you were doing as far as information gathering or—

Webb: Well, yeah, they had—the Hmong had people everywhere; they had road watch teams, not only—we're not talking about the trail now, we're talking about the roads up north, in Phongsali Province and Sam Neua [Xam Neua, Houaphan Province, Laos] and [Ban] Xiang Kang? In all these areas they had road watch teams in there and they would monitor the movements of the Pathet Lao and the VC [Vietcong], and there were quite a few VC in there. But, uh, they pretty much did everything. To give you an example, you never worried about being with a Hmong unit, and prior to that, in '64, I was with the Royal Lao Army, with a group called Group Mobile 16, which was a French derivative; their structure was from the French. And they were, they were touted as being the best infantry unit in the Royal Lao Army, and they would lose seventy-five percent of their small arms in a firefight.

Cross: That's a lot.

Webb: Well, you'd lay 'em down and go home, you know [laughs]. But the Hmong wouldn't do that. They were very good.

Cross: Did you go out on patrols with them occasionally, then?

Webb: Not very often, because there were two of us at Long Tieng at the time I was there, and we worked seven days a week; you'd fly one day, the next

day you worked the radio at Long Tieng, so you didn't have time to do a lot of the things that you wanted to do. But what you would do, is on your flying day, you'd get into every village you could. The whole country was covered with little dirt strips. And we were in an airplane called the Pilatus Porter, which is a Swiss-built single-engine turbo, little high-wing airplane that'll take off from just about nothin' and land on nothin'. And, uh, we would spend time with 'em and a lot of times they'd fly with me. Vang Pao flew with me. Uh, [pause]—matter of fact, that's from Vang Pao.

Cross: Oh, I noticed that up there. Now, you weren't directly involved with the training of the Hmong, though, that was all done by someone else, or—

Webb: Yeah. As far as the Air is concerned, that was done by this Project 404 Water Pump that I mentioned earlier.

Cross: Yes.

Webb: Okay, in '64, that unit was established at Udorn, Thailand. That was before Udorn was an Air Force base. And this is something that's bothered me over the years, too; the only people that were there was Air America and an outfit called Bird & Son.

Cross: Bird & Son?

Webb: —which later changed its name to Continental Air Service, because they had some trouble with the Lao government. But both of these outfits were CIA-operated airlines. The runways were all built, the taxiways, parking ramps, the tower, everything was built prior to the Gulf of Tonkin.

Cross: That's interesting.

Webb: And we were there. There were no buildings, no barracks, nothing. We lived downtown, we ate at Air America's Rendezvous Club, we drank with Air America at their Rendezvous Club, played darts with 'em. We trained and set up our training and operations in their buildings. When the Gulf of Tonkin thing came off, "Bang! Holy mackerel, look here, we got runways, taxiways; let's build a base."

Cross: Interesting.

Webb: Uh, what was your question? [Both laugh] I kind of got off of it there.

Cross: That's alright. Um, I think that covered it.

Webb: Oh, yeah, for their air training; the air training came out of Project 404, which was Water Pump. They went down—the people that flew and the

people who became pilots went down to Udorn and were trained by the people from Water Pump, in T-28s. And then the T-28s crossed the fence and were given to 'em at Vientiane, at Wattay Airport, which is their civilian/military airport. Prior to the Hmong getting involved—and the Hmong didn't get involved until after I left—the only Asian pilots that we had were Thai, who were sheep-dipped like we were, and Lao. But the Hmong got involved I think in '67 or '68, something like that, soon after I left.

Cross: You'd mentioned that you did go on a couple of patrols with the Hmong. Did you run into any problems or combat? You didn't engage the enemy?

Webb: Well, yeah. We did a couple of ambushes and uh, the main—see, the Hmong—I have to figure out how to put this—the Hmong never wanted to be or never had been trained as line infantry organizations. They were guerrilla warfare people, unconventional warfare people. Later, unfortunately, they were tasked to do line infantry work, and that's when the most of 'em were killed off, when their fatality rates went so high, because that was not what they were about. And so their main contacts would be ambushes and that sort of thing, where you didn't sustain any contact with the enemy. Probably as good an experience as any is getting shot by Russian tanks, I mean, they kept us down for awhile.

Cross: Was that your first encounter with the enemy, then?

Webb: My first under fire encounter was from Russian tanks.

Cross: From Russian tanks?

Webb: Yeah.

Cross: Can you tell me a little bit about that? What your thoughts were, your feelings, what the circumstances—

Webb: Does the word "fear" mean anything to ya?

Cross: Oh, yeah. [Both laugh] Probably not in the same context as yours.

Webb: This was really a disgusting situation. There was an American light colonel from the 101st Airborne who had in his back pocket six or eight second lieutenants that showed up at a place called Muang Sui in Thailand, and I was there, and there was an Air Force captain there with me. And someone had given us word that there were five or six Russian T-37 tanks in the area, so we said, "Well, where are they?" and they said "Well, they're here," so we crossed the hill and we took a look at 'em and sure enough, there they were. And at Muang Sui there were three F-105

batteries manned by Thai, sheep-dipped Thai, 'cause the Lao couldn't be trusted with anything like that; they'd go home and leave 'em and the Thai were getting paid enough money so they'd, you know—and they were doing the same mercenary stuff that everybody did. But this light colonel was an old guy who did not in any way, shape, or form—he was Infantry and did not appreciate Air Force and their ability to direct Air. So he berated us for a lengthy period of time and said, "I'm gonna blow those tanks up with these 105s." And I said, "Ohhhh, this is gonna get watery." So he set his Thais out there and they got about three rounds out; they backed the tanks up out of the 105 range and just turned our world to shit.

Cross: Their range was longer than the 105s?

Webb: Oh yeah, about three hundred meters. And they delivered those rounds to us for about an hour, or until they ran out of ammo or whatever reason they decided to quit, and we could never get—we never did get the, the, ah, authorization to hit 'em with Air. Another occasion was the, the ambassador—the ambassador ran the war. He was the head, which doesn't happen in a lot of countries.

Cross: The American ambassador?

Webb: The American ambassador in Laos ran the war, right down to who's gonna be targeted and all that stuff. He even controlled a lot of the agencies' operations; they reported to him. There's a mountain called Pak Ou right on the northwest corner of the Plain of Jars [Plaine des Jarres, Laos], and this had been in enemy hands for a long time, but it was decided to take that mountain. Well, a number of assaults were made on it and they were dug in so deep that you couldn't shake 'em loose. And we had some T-28s, and they'd drop hard bombs and shoot rockets at 'em and things like that. And I had been in Vientiane and I saw with my own eyes that some of the guys had brought some napalm cans in and had filled 'em—we didn't have a mixer, of course, so you hang 'em on an airplane and taxi rapidly back and forth across the rough ground and mix it, see. [Scott laughs] And they had a number of these cans sittin' along the parkin' ramp in the ammo area, so I called down to Vientiane and I said, "We can't get these guys outta here. The only way we're gonna get 'em out is take their Air, so let's drop some napalm on 'em." Got a call back: "Can't use napalm, it's inhuman." And at that time, napalm had not been used in Laos.

Cross: Oh, it hadn't been used on Laos, okay, I see.

Webb: No, even though we had some sittin' down there in Vientiane, the ambassador would not allow it, because it was inhuman. Gut-shooting people is human.

Cross: Napalm was being used in Vietnam by that time?

Webb: Yeah.

Cross: But not Laos, okay, I see.

Webb: While I'm on the ambassador—

Cross: Sure.

Webb: I was comin' back from up north—Nakong, Site 36, which was a CIA outpost, and when we came down we couldn't cross the Plain—the PDJ, Plain of Jars, was in enemy hands at that time, and they had 37 [mm], 57 [mm] guns out there, radar-controlled, so—the 57s were radar-controlled, I'm not sure whether the 37s were. But our airplanes couldn't fly over the Plain; fast jets would take pictures, but—U.S. jets—but we couldn't. So we had to hook around the Plain before headin' south, we'd go around to the east side and then come back around and we were just south, our home base was just south of the Plain. I'm comin' around there one day, comin' back, and I looked out, and there's an IL-4 sittin' out there, which is a Russian C-47, which could have been Chinese, it could have been anybody. I know damn well the Pathet Lao didn't have 'em.

Cross: [Laughs]

Webb: And he's offloading goodies, so I got on the horn real quick and I called my Airborne command post, which was call sign "dogpatch", and I said, "Dogpatch, you know, I gotta have some resources. I got a target, a hot target, right now. I need somethin' real quick." And he calls back and he says, "What's your target?" And like an idiot, I told him. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** I said, "I got an IL-4 parked, you, know; let's blow him up." "Stand by." He called down to Vientiane, calls back to me about ten minutes later—it was a long time—he said, "Don't touch him. Leave him alone. Don't you lay a finger on him." And so, meantime, this guy had unloaded all his stuff, he's takin' off; so I followed him right up to the China border. But Vientiane wouldn't allow us to touch him.

Cross: So how do you feel about America's policy?

Webb: America's policy sucked.

Cross: [Laughs] Was that pretty frustrating for you at the time?

Webb: Of course. And I understand for the guys that came later, it got even more frustrating. I don't know if you're familiar with the Ravens or not.

Cross: No, I'm not.

Webb: Okay, the Ravens, in December 1966, which is the month I left there, there was a guy named [Harry C.] "Heinie" Aderholt; have you ever heard of him?

Cross: No, I haven't.

Webb: Air Force Special Operations. His Special Operations career ran from Korea, to Tibet, to Vietnam, to Laos. I mean, he's the guru. He was a retired brigadier general, Air Force. He was assigned to the CIA for Air in 1960 and stayed that way for many, many years. He was responsible for a lot of the dirt strips that were put in Laos. The guy's just a—he's the epitome of Special Operations. [Laughs] What the hell was the question?

Cross: Uh, American policy—

Webb: Oh, yeah, okay, the Ravens.

Cross: —and the frustration, yeah.

Webb: Heinie Aderholt was sittin' with General [William W.] Momyer, who was a 713 commander in Udorn, and they were talking about the operation in Laos, and General Momyer asked Heinie about the FACs, the Forward Air Controllers. Heinie told him they were enlisted. The general went totally "spazz" and said, "That will stop. You can't have an enlisted scum tellin' a pilot where to put bombs." Well, we'd been doin' it, and we were very successful; we'd been trained to do it. So the Butterflies, which was our call sign, "butterfly four-four" for MR2, were replaced by the Ravens, call sign "raven". And they ended up bringin' in bunches of these guys; they were all qualified pilots and they flew O-1s.

Cross: So these were all officers?

Webb: Yep. And they're the ones that replaced us. And they are the ones—because it built up. At the time I was working there, there were two people that covered Military Region 2: one in the air one day, the other one in the air the other day. So you had one forward air controller up there, controlling Military Region 2; we were replaced with probably fifteen people.

Cross: Goodness.

Webb: But these guys, because it built up so big, more people were seeing what was goin' on. More people were coming up from Vientiane and from

Udon, Thailand and Nakhon Phanom, cause Nakhon Phanom was actually the “spook” base in Thailand that controlled most of the sneaky stuff: the trail, and Laos, and all that sort of thing. But as people who were non-combatants—REMFs—you know what a REMF is?

Cross: No, but why don’t you explain it for the tape.

Webb: It’s an acronym, R-E-M-F: “rear-echelon motherfuckers”.

Cross: Okay [laughs].

Webb: That’s what a REMF is. And these people would come in country long enough to get a medal and get out. They started laying the law down to these guys, which was pretty bad. We didn’t have that problem, because even the commander of 713 didn’t know we were there.

Cross: That’s highly secretive.

Webb: So, we pretty well did things—uh, I ran into one problem, and that was with an agency guy; I won’t say his name. It was at Site 36, which is the forward, up next to the North Vietnam/China border. I landed there one day and, uh, this little Hmong guy was all excited. He had troops in contact, needed some Air. So I scurried over to the hut where the CIA guy was and said, “What’s goin’ on? I understand you’ve got something hot.” “No.” He hated Air Force people. He didn’t give a damn who they were, he didn’t like Air Force people; he was an ex-Army second lieutenant. But he said, “Nothing going on.” I said, “Okay,” and I went back down to the airplane and this little Hmong major’s jumping up and down, saying “We’re getting people killed, we got hot stuff!” I said, “Get in the airplane.” He got in the airplane, we took off, we went and found it and we bombed it. I brought him back, dropped him off, didn’t go to see this guy, the CIA guy. By the time I got to Long Tieng at the end of the day, the station chief, CIA station chief was waiting at the runway. And he says, “I understand you’re goin’ around bombin’ without clearance.” The guy up at 36 had called down. [Laughs] And see, so there are little political things that take place, even though you’d think that everybody in such a small situation, in such a “Terry and the Pirates” thing would say, “Okay, you know, let’s do it.” But there are people who wanted their little kingdoms and wanted their little things, and unfortunately, that happened. But fortunately, it only happened once. So, you know—

Cross: What were some of the targets that you were specifically looking for?

Webb: We didn’t specifically look for any targets. We supported—the targets came to us. Uh, either Vang Pao—well, the targeting thing—Vang Pao had daily briefings and the CIA station chief would be there, and the FACs

would be there, and they would decide what they could expect to lay on for the next day. Our resources—and by the word “resources”, that means “available strike aircraft”—was very fluid. If there was real good weather in Hanoi and Hai Phong [Vietnam], we got few airplanes; we had to go with T-28s and that sort of thing. If North Vietnam was weathered-in, then we got everything, it was all ours, because they couldn’t go home with ordinance, so don’t dump it in the South China Sea, drop it on bad guys. In those occasions, we got a lot of stuff. But the determination would be made if there were pre-planned targets. If there was something going on, like if the night before, a road watch team had seen a bunch of trucks, then, okay, you got a truck park. And they would send the coordinates back, we would go in after that. If that didn’t happen, if you get up—you always flew, it didn’t make any difference. If you didn’t have any targets, you still flew; you went lookin’ for something. So sometimes you’d find something on your own, but then you had to have a local in the airplane, because we were not authorized to deliver any ordinance unless directed by a local.

Cross: What was the reason for that? Was that, uh, politics?

Webb: That’s U.S. rules of engagement. Have you heard that term, “rules of engagement?”

Cross: Yes, I’m familiar with the term.

Webb: It was very bad in ‘Nam. Like I said, we tended to treat it as it deserved. But if you’ve got a problem—I could have had a real problem with that one agency thing; if I had not had a local in the airplane, I’d have been cooked by the agency. So you could get cooked by anybody.

Cross: [Laughs]

Webb: You just tried to, you know, the whole CYA thing: “Cover Your Ass”. But, sometimes—well, here’s one. F-104s—I don’t know if you’re familiar with it?—jet airplane.

Cross: I’ve heard of it, yeah, and I’ve seen photographs, but—

Webb: It was developed as an air-to-air airplane, not an air-to-ground airplane. And as far as carrying ordinance, it could only carry two seven hundred and fifty pound bombs. But it had a Gatling 20 mm; they could shoot that, they couldn’t drop bombs—they were lucky to hit Asia.

Cross: [Laughs]

Webb: I had a target one day; we knew where there was a cave, and caves are always lucrative targets, because they’re high-storage. And I had these

104s, a flight of 104s, they'd come in at twenty thousand, twenty-five thousand feet; well, we're at twenty-five hundred and below, so they gotta find us. Now in these civilian airplanes, we don't have any marking capability. We don't have rockets to shoot at anything. These are unmarked airplanes and—'course, that doesn't mean you can't throw a smoke grenade or hand grenade out the window, which we did on occasion.

Cross: To mark?

Webb: Yeah. But for the most part, we could explain—when we'd got people who had been there awhile, we could talk 'em into a target. Which when they fired the enlisted scum and put the officers in, a lot of them couldn't do that. But I'm not gonna scream sour grapes here. [Scott laughs] But this one particular time, these 104s came in and what I would generally do with them is I would give 'em a rough description and let 'em just piss away their bombs, because they couldn't hit anything with 'em. And this flight came in, lead came in, dropped his bombs, and surprisingly, he was very close to where I had told him to put 'em. And number two came in, pickled his, and he's about a mile, a mile and a half away, but when they hit the woods, the woods blew up. I mean, we got secondaries all over the place. He'd hit a storage depot.

Cross: That you hadn't even seen?

Webb: Trust me, nobody knew it was there. Agency didn't know it was there. That sucker started blowin' up, and then I rained the rest of 'em on it; even they could see that. And then they shot their guns out and then I started gettin' F-105s and A-1s with lots of stuff. And when I left there, we had smoke, oh Christ, six, eight thousand feet in the air, just black smoke all over the place, and the ground was still blowin' up. But that's just an example of how you get a target. Sometimes what you're after is not what you end up with, you know, a serendipity thing.

Cross: Well, that's interesting. Was there anything else about your combat experiences and your flight observation, forward observation experiences, that you'd like to relate? Any things that really stand out in your mind that you haven't related yet? Any incident—

Webb: Well, um, I don't want to get into the war stories thing, actually. Ah, everybody's got them and, you know, that's part of the game.

Cross: Well, I'd like to spend some time talking about just your off-duty time with the Hmong, or what you did in your free time.

Webb: Okay, that's neat. Uh, Vang Pao had a big house down not too far off the runway, it was just down the hill a little bit from our hooch. And he would frequently have parties. And one thing you did not do, no matter what—I know of one guy who married a Hmong woman—but you did not in any way mess with a Hmong woman.

Cross: Not socially acceptable?

Webb: No. It was not acceptable in any way. And Vang Pao was the kind of person who meted out immediate and severe punishment, from shooting to beheadings.

Cross: Okay, that's pretty severe.

Webb: It gets that way. But he would throw parties. And in these parties, of course, would be Hmong dances and all that sort of thing. And we would engage in that, we would dance, but these were, you would dance in a circle and people didn't touch each other, everybody just danced around, you know, and drank *lao-lao*, which is a—

Cross: *Lao-lao*?

Webb: *Lao-lao* is the local white lightning, homemade brew, booze—very, very smooth. But he was a party guy, but he was so busy with what he did, he'd get the party started, then he'd go to bed. So once the meal was over, you could expect to see him for maybe thirty minutes and then he'd be gone; he'd go off to bed. I did go with him to a site up on the China border one time on, uh, Yunnan province, where Yunnan province abuts Laos, for a *baci*, which is a ceremony that they go through where the, uh—and here again, our anthropological studies really suck. What the anthropologists call a “shaman”, in the Hmong languages is a *txiv neeb* [pronounced “tsi ning”], who is the spiritual leader. And I'm sure you've run into the spiritual leaders of the Hmong in Madison, and—

Cross: I have not met any myself, but—

Webb: Oh, okay. Well, they do all the spiritual things for that particular group. And, well I detest this—I have a degree in anthropology and that's why I'm upset—

Cross: I can see why that's of special interest to you.

Webb: —some of this stuff upsets me. But uh, the *txiv neeb* would do the proper incantation, incant—is that the word? What's the word?

Cross: Incantation?

Webb: Yes, that word. [Laughs] And then it was, it came to an end with them tying strings around your wrist, and everybody would tie a string. And if the whole village did, the whole village did, so you end up with this whole big ball of string around each wrist, and this is to protect you. And you did not take it off; it had to rot off. And, you know, that was a very nice thing that they would let us become involved in. So when Vang Pao was getting his strings tied, I was getting strings tied on my wrist, too. So I thought that was an extremely open thing for them to do.

Cross: Kind of a gesture of acceptance, too.

Webb: Yes, and they had never seen me before in that village. But I was with Vang Pao, so apparently I was alright. That impressed me as being a very nice gesture on their part.

Cross: Did you have much other social interaction with the people in the villages?

Webb: Uh, at Long-Tieng was the only village that we were authorized to R-O-N in, remain overnight. We did on occasion, if there were a lot of hostilities goin' on—sometimes like 36, Site 36, which was the main one I'd mentioned before, you would sometimes have to stay overnight there, but there really wasn't any involvement, because what you're doing is dealing with what's gonna happen the next day and gettin' as much sleep as you can before, because you're gonna fly daylight to dark.

Cross: So back in your home base, it was mostly Laotians and, or I should say Thais?

Webb: Well, I didn't go back. I stayed 'til my tour was over and then I went back just to clear out, and Bob Hope missed me by two days. But I would like to tell you one thing that happened back here in the States with the Hmong. I sponsored some Hmong.

Cross: Oh, you did?

Webb: Absolutely. And I'm quite upset with that system, too, but that's not what I'm getting into. There was this one young couple that I sponsored, and they had been here probably a year or so, maybe a little longer, and they had a child. And this child was the cryin'-est, this kid was acting up; I mean, they couldn't calm the kid down. And so they decided to have a *baci*. And they got the local *txiv neeb* over and I was invited. I was the only "round-eye" there, which I was very proud of. We had the big meal, and they have some great food, very good food. But when the *txiv neeb* finished with everything, he said he figured out why the kid was doing what it did: it didn't like its name, didn't like the name they'd given it. So

they went through the ceremony to change the kid's name, and then they had the kid straightened out. I saw this happen.

Cross: That's interesting.

Webb: [Laughs] Take it for what it's worth.

Cross: You're the one with the degree in anthropology. [Both laugh]

Webb: That I thought was just wonderful.

Cross: So you didn't have a lot of free time, then? You and your comrades—

Webb: No. As I said, there were only two of us there. And it would be—well, the socialization that we did was at Vang Pao's house.

Cross: Okay. That was pretty much it.

Webb: And uh, we did get to—we ate there quite a bit, and we did socialize with a lot of the Hmong officers. They didn't have any enlisted—Hmong enlisted people didn't hang out there. Sometimes they would come in and give reports, but this was generally his battalion and divisions—er, I don't think he had any divisions, but his commanders and that sort of thing, and the CIA people.

Cross: What were your regular eating facilities and your billets there?

Webb: There was a wood house. Now the Hmong, unlike a lot of Southeast Asian people, build their houses on the ground, they don't build them on stilts, because they're high up in the mountain. We had a little house, right next door to the house that Air America used and across the street from CIA—"street" being a dirt—you know, what we call "highways" over there, you wouldn't call a "cow path" here. Matter of fact, I fell through a bridge on one of those one time in a weapons carrier. But, uh, Air America had a little dining room and recreation room, which they opened their doors—Air America opened their doors to us; they were very good. So they had kind of open hours to get a sandwich or something like that. We had the assistant air attaché would come up from Vientiane and spend the night quite a few times in our hooch. And we had electricity, we had an outhouse, but, uh, he would bring food up and we had a refrigerator, and he would bring mainly hams from the Embassy PX [post exchange], so we always had ham in there to make a sandwich, or—we didn't get any fancy meals, but you know, we didn't go hungry, either. We ate as good as we expected.

Cross: So could you describe what a typical day would have been for you, then?

Webb: Well, if I was working the radio, I'd get up in the morning—and we got up before light—and establish contact, because we shut the radio down at night, but there was somebody on the other end in Vientiane; if something happened, we could always turn it on and get on the net. But we'd shut it down because there's no lighting facilities up there, there's no flying at night. If I was working the radio, I'd stay right there in the hooch and work the radio all day. If I was flying, if there were pre-planned targets, then I would get in the air and contact "dogpatch"; that was our airborne command post, a C-47 out of Udorn. And he's the one who kept track of where airplanes were in the sky. And if I had a target, I would ask him for airplanes, then he would hand 'em off to me. And then we'd run the target, whatever that might be. If I didn't have anything when I took off, I would go to a site someplace and land, and ask 'em if they had any activity in the area, and if they did, then I'd put one of 'em in the airplane and take off and we'd go, then again I'd have to re-contact "dogpatch". Uh, variations on that: sometimes when we took off, north Vietnam was weathered in, so they'd have a lot of airplanes in the air, they'd say, "Find something to bomb." And so we'd do that; we'd go out trolling for targets. By trolling, you know what that term means?

Cross: I know in fishing, "trolling", just kind of dragging the line and seeing what—

Webb: It's the same thing: fly low and slow and hope somebody shoots at you.

Cross: Did you receive fire while you were out flying and observing?

Webb: Oh yeah.

Cross: Did you ever have any close calls, or—

Webb: Got shot down once.

Cross: Oh, you were shot down once?

Webb: Yeah.

Cross: [Pause] So you'd mentioned, uh, getting shot down?

Webb: Okay; we're in a de Havilland Beaver, which is a single-engine, re-sip [reciprocating] airplane built in Canada, by the de Havilland—

Cross: I'm familiar with the de Havillands during World War I; I didn't realize that they'd still—

Webb: Oh, yeah. The Beaver is a bush airplane. They're used in Alaska a lot, you can put skis on 'em, land 'em on lakes, and it has a huge radial engine in the front. The assistant air attaché out of Vientiane had this thing about wantin' to get involved in the war, so he commandeered—the Air Force called it a “U-6”, “U” meaning “utility”, like C-47 “cargo”, “C” for “cargo”. But he got a hold of one, he painted it white, didn't have any numbers on it, so he'd get to fly some missions. He couldn't direct the strikes; I'd have to sit in the right seat, he'd sit in the left seat, I'd direct the air strikes, he'd get a combat mission. Well, we're comin' up, we're goin' up to Site 36 in Nakong, and I looked off to the left and there's a cleared area on top of this mountain. And I saw two guys come out of the woods, and they'd gotten a little—got together there, and all at once I saw this smoke ring come up. And I hit him and I said, “They're shootin' at us.” And he, being a snide bastard, he looks at me and he said, “Well, did they hit us?” And about that time it went, “BOOM!”, and the tail of the airplane came up. And I said, “Does that answer your question?” And we get that odor that you never wanna get when you're above the ground: the smell of something burning. So we thought we were on fire. Well, I still don't know where that came from, 'cause on the back of the airplane there's a canvas, snap-on canvas cover. So I yank that off and then you can see all the way back in the fuselage to the tail. And I couldn't see any light that you shouldn't be able to see comin' in. But we got something hot, so we're close enough to 36, all we had to do was hang a left around that mountain and put it down on that dirt strip, which we did. We got on the ground, and we inspected the airplane and we can't find anything, until we open the battery compartment: the battery's blown-up. So now we're sittin' out there, about as far as you can go without hittin' China, with an airplane with no battery. And about that time, a Continental Air Service airplane landed, a Porter, Pilatus Porter. And this old guy comes out, and he'd been listening to the radio; 'cause as soon we got hit, I called my Airborne command post and said, you know, “We've taken a hit,” and before he could even answer, Crown came in.

Cross: Crown is—?

Webb: Crown is the, an Airborne—I believe it was a C-130 at the time—who controlled all the “jolly greens”, the search-and-rescue people. And he busted right into our conversation and says, “You want me to scramble the jolly greens?” And that was a good feeling, because I didn't know at the time that they were that close at hand, because we didn't even consider Air Force search-and-rescue. We figured if we went in, it was gonna be Air America who was gonna get us out with an H-34; they did most of the retrieving anyway. But this Continental guy had been listening, and he's probably, oh, in his fifties; so he's probably got more flyin' hours in, you know. So he says, “What's the problem?” We told him, battery's blown

up, didn't know how we were gonna get the airplane started. He says, "Well, get in, I'll prop it." You mentioned WWI, that's how they started.

Cross: Yeah, I was gonna say, that sounds familiar.

Webb: Now, we've got this huge radial engine sittin' there, all this junk stickin' out; he's gonna prop this airplane. "Okay." He said, "Turn her on," and he played with the prop and he got it right where he wanted it, he pulled it through one time and the airplane started. And I have told this story to many people who drive airplanes, light aircraft, and I haven't found one yet that'll believe it.

Cross: Well, I know that's how the old de Havillands started, those with rotary engines.

Webb: Yep, but we're talkin' a huge engine here.

Cross:: [Laughs]

Webb: But that, that was fantastic, and we flew the airplane out.

Cross: That's interesting. Can you describe some of the men that were in your unit, how would you characterize them, what your opinions of them were?

Webb: Our people were, for the most part, career people. A combat control team—a team in its paper form—was twelve people: two officers, ten enlisted people. The reason they did that was, as I mentioned, you didn't deploy as a team, so that if there was a large operation like the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, which we were involved in, you could take your twelve people and split 'em in half, and half could support the 82nd, half could support the 101st, or however you wanted to do it. So you could split it up. But in counter-insurgency—[End of Tape 1, Side B]—you never considered deploying as a team; that just wasn't considered. As I said, most of our people were career people, a lot of people came in as three-strippers and four-strippers, had three or four years prior service or more. We even had one guy came in had twenty years in before he went to jump school. Reliable people, ah, people who really didn't belong in garrison.

Cross: What do you mean by that?

Webb: 'Cause they're animals.

Cross: By "animals", you mean—

Webb: They, you know, did things that civilized people usually wouldn't do.

Cross: Okay [laughs].

Webb: Uh, there—even at Hurlburt there were only certain places they could go to socialize, because a lot of places didn't want 'em.

Cross: Just too rough?

Webb: Well, they're animals. You don't take Little Lord Fauntleroy and put him out in the woods; I mean, that doesn't work. So you gotta take what you get. We had a guy who was an Me-109 driver in WWII. We had all kinds of people. We had a lot of WWII vets, Korean vets, uh—it was a pretty hardcore bunch of people.

Cross: So, you'd consider 'em pretty professional? And dependable?

Webb: Absolutely. Their focus was the job. It was difficult to get on a deployment, because everybody wanted it. If there's somethin' hot goin' on, everybody wants to go, but you can only take one or two people. So, there was always a problem with that.

Cross: Now by that time, you'd been in the service for quite awhile yourself, hadn't you?

Webb: Yeah, I enlisted in '54 and got with the air commandos in '63, so it was nine years. I was twenty—I went to jump school in '61, so what does that make me, twenty-five? Twenty-five when I went to jump school?

Cross: That's math; I'm bad at math. [Laughs]

Webb: Born in '36, thirty-six from sixty-one is twenty-five.

Cross: That's twenty-five. And you stayed in the military afterwards, so—When you came back to the states, did you have any good experiences, bad experiences, as far as your homecoming, or nothing at all?

Webb: Nothing. I, uh, for the most part, I was in Asia for the '60s, for that decade. I was in and out, you know. **[Pause in tape]**

Cross: **[Tape cuts back in abruptly]**—Southeast Asia through most of the '60s, and—but you just said that your—

Webb: Well, all over Asia, you know, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Okinawa. But we had discussed this, and we were of that ilk that, you know, ours is not to question why, you know. And we're talkin' professional people. And

we hoped that we wouldn't run into any of that, because that meant we were goin' to jail, because that's what would have happened.

Cross: You felt that strongly about it, sure.

Webb: Oh absolutely, absolutely, or you wouldn't have been in that kind of outfit. What drives you to get into something like that? And that's a part of it; so you know that there's gonna be trouble. But I never ran into it, and while the Vietnam thing was still goin' on, like in 1970, early '71, early '71, I came here to Wisconsin as a recruiter in Green Bay. And I always wore my uniform, even socializing, just as a matter of my statement, and never had a bit of problem. Never had a problem in Green Bay or in Wisconsin.

Cross: And you were on recruiting duty in Green Bay for how long?

Webb: 'Til '74 when I retired.

Cross: '74, okay. Can you tell me about what you did after the service, after you got out in '74?

Webb: Well, [laughs]—

Cross: You mentioned that you had a degree in anthropology?

Webb: Well, no, I got that later.

Cross: I wasn't sure if you went back to school through the G.I. Bill, then.

Webb: Yeah, I did. See, I was a—until I retired from the military, I had a high school diploma. And I had met a lot of nice people in Green Bay, and one guy in particular who owned a piano store downtown, a guy named Don Poe[?], a World War II Navy guy. And he kept tellin' me, he said, "There are jobs," he said, "and then there are *jobs*. The best thing for you to do is take the G.I. Bill and go back to school." Well, being the person that I am, of course I didn't listen right off. And I tried a couple of things; I was a private detective and owned a bar and, you know, the normal things. And then it finally dawned on me what Don had told me, so I went to college, and I did two years at Marinette at that two-year campus. And I wanted that anthropology thing because of all the things I'd seen in Asia, and so then I had an option: either Madison or Stevens Point, because they're the only two that offer an anthro major. So I took Stevens Point, because I wanted to be able to talk to an instructor, not a T.A. And uh, college was a very fun time. I was older than a lot of the instructors, and when it came to socializing, that's who I'd socialize with. I mean, who wants to socialize with a bunch of teeny-boppers? So I went right through. I took the bill and I went right—summers, interims, the whole works, and did the forty-eight

months and ended up with four majors and a minor. And then came down here to Fort Atkinson for student teaching, and then subbed here for six years, and then got out of it.

Cross: That's interesting. So your experiences in Asia had a big influence on you and your choice of careers, then, after the service?

Webb: Oh, yeah; I wanted that anthropology thing. And after I got it, well, while I was even involved in it and saw that the people aren't really that interested in other people; they're more interested in writing papers.

Cross: Instead of the people themselves?

Webb: Yeah. There are those few who go into the field and deal with the people.

Cross: Field anthropologists?

Webb: Yeah. But the majority of anthropologists are interested in writing a paper or a book and really couldn't care less about the people themselves. And one thing that really upset me in dealing with the Hmong is the way they were treated when they came here. And that upsets me to this minute.

Cross: Yeah, I understand that a lot of people in Wisconsin have sponsored Hmong families.

Webb: Well, there's a large Hmong population here. But people did not take—example, Wausau. While I was at Steven's Point, there was a history professor there who had a broad Asian background, named Hugh Walker, and I imagine he's retired by now. But he got a call from the Wausau school district, because he was the Asian—he taught Chinese language and all that sort of thing. They were having trouble with the Hmong population. They couldn't understand why the people were there one day and gone the next, and why they did all the things they did. So Hugh handed it off to me, and I got with the Hmong and got a hold of one of the elders, and he and I went up and did a three-day in-service for the Wausau school district, and explained to 'em what a Hmong was and why they do what they do. But no one—these people were injected into all these school systems, all over the country: big in California, big in St. Paul, big in Wisconsin—nobody took any time to explain to everybody—it's supposed to be, "Get off the airplane, click your fingers, act like an American." And these people—one thing that really hurt me is a Hmong who I hope is gonna be at that thing in September, I'd like to re-establish contact with him, named Vang Yur, or we would call him "Yur Vang"—"Vang" is his family name; uh, he's a relative of Vang Pao. But he came to my house one night and he was crying. And I sat him down and finally got it out of him that someone had called him a very bad name because he was on

welfare. And they thought, and no one told them different—now this was in the '70s—no one told them any different; they thought everybody got a check.

Cross: Oh, in the country. They just thought that was normal?

Webb: Yeah. Yeah. Because they're getting a check, they thought everybody got—he thought I got one. He thought that was— “Well, the United States government got lots of money. They give everybody money.” Nobody told him any different. They went through some very traumatic experiences. And there were so many of 'em, and coming into a community—there's one still living here in Fort, which surprises me, a single family; must be an outcast from the clan. But no one prepared 'em, and once they got here, the people didn't explain to 'em our culture.

Cross: So you got misunderstandings going on both sides?

Webb: You got no understanding.

Cross: Now you'd mentioned that you'd sponsored a Hmong family.

Webb: Uh, two or three of 'em.

Cross: Two or three?

Webb: Yeah.

Cross: Was that here in Fort Atkinson, or—

Webb: No, no, this was in Marinette. [Pause] Well, uh, Marinette and Stevens Point. I think the last family was in Stevens Point. But what I did is once they got into the community, their purpose—they had to go where somebody sponsored 'em, okay, but that doesn't necessarily mean that's where they're gonna be; they're gonna get with their clan. Okay. Wherever their group is, they're gonna relocate to that.

Cross: Did they try to keep the clans in general geographic areas, or at least states?

Webb: The United States had no concept of that; they couldn't care less. They'd break 'em up in a heartbeat, because they didn't know. They couldn't be expected to know, because there was no research on this that meant anything. So what I would do is, with the families that I sponsored, is I would meet 'em, and then I would take 'em to another Hmong family. And this Hmong family could explain things to 'em, the experiences that

they had had to that point, a whole lot better than I could try in pidgin to try and explain things to ‘em.

Cross: That makes sense.

Webb: And uh, Vang Yur was very good; he was fluent in English. So he was a great helper of the other Hmong that came in. And get the people, you know—and then, of course, then they gotta start shootin’ their letters out to their clan, and re-establishing their, their, not only clan, but family contacts. And then of course, they’re gonna be in that area for a particular period of time—it may be months, it may be a year, it may be two years—but eventually, they’re gonna go where their clan is. And, uh, too many times when they were sponsored, the sponsor would try to explain everything to ‘em, and if you go into their house, they’re learning English by watching cartoons on television, and this allows ‘em to have some very colorful phrases.

Cross: I can imagine.

Webb: But eventually—it took some time—but eventually they got classes set up where—the Hmong did this: when they’d group together, then that gave it a large enough population that the local community had to do something, and Eau Claire was a good example.

Cross: So clan members would start concentrating geographically, then, by that point?

Webb: Sure. Because that’s their—

Cross: The way they live.

Webb: —their heritage.

Cross: Is that what happened, then, with the families that you sponsored, they wound up moving?

Webb: Yeah. Sure. Yeah.

Cross: I guess the last question I wanted to ask you about was uh, veterans’ organizations, whether, after your service, whether you joined any veterans’ organizations, or—

Webb: Yeah, I’m a member of the VFW and the Legion.

Cross: Okay. Are you very active in either of those?

Webb: I was very active in the Legion. I'm a life member of the VFW, just because when my wife and I travel, it's a good place to stop in to socialize. And American Legion, the same way. I was a very active member here in the post, and uh, a number of things happened, so that kind of went by the wayside. And so I got in—I dropped my membership here and went with the post where the people who I was familiar with are. China Post 1 out of Shanghai is my membership.

Cross: [Laughs] Well, there we go.

Webb: But uh, it's made up of—

Cross: It's a worldwide post?

Webb: Yeah. Vang Pao is a member, most of the CIA people, Air America, Continental, Special Forces, Air Force Commandos.

Cross: Do they have any active posts here in Wisconsin, or it's just uh—

Webb: Uh-uh. Any time two people, two members are together, it's a meeting.

Cross: Oh, that's how it works, okay.

Webb: The post was formed in Shanghai in 1928, ran out in '48, just before the Chinese took over in '49, and it's been operating in exile for fifty years. A clubhouse is being built in Texas right now. Meetings have been held in Las Vegas. One of the guys from the Ravens—

Cross: That's that organization that took over after you'd left?

Webb: Yeah. One of the guys from there is right now ramrodding the fiscal end of it and the property has been bought, and they're building the building. So China Post 1 in exile will have a clubhouse.

Cross: Are there any exiles here in Wisconsin that you get together with occasionally?

Webb: I haven't met any; I have a friend here in town who is a Vietnam vet. He was with the 18th Airborne Corps in Vietnam. He's a member; by virtue of having spent time in Vietnam, he's eligible. Uh, other than that I don't know of anybody in this area who is a member.

Cross: Okay. Well, before we wrap things up here, is there anything else that wasn't covered in the questions that you'd like to talk about, or—

Webb: Yes; I would like to see—and it’s been a long time, but I guess I should preface this with—when I got out in ’74, I didn’t have any contact with the military, whatever, or with anybody I had been in the military with, because they weren’t here. I’m in Wisconsin, you know, the end of the earth—but I love it. That’s why I’m here. Uh, I made contact with some of the Ravens up at Oshkosh three years ago, at the Experimental Aircraft Association. And then, all at once, I’m back into this. And I’ve subsequently made contact with a lot of people that I haven’t seen in over thirty years. And I think what bothers me is that the American public really doesn’t give the Hmong the credit that they deserve. These people—to see a ten-year-old carrying an M1 Garand, with the butt draggin’ on the ground—and I’ve seen this. And they’re fighting for the CIA.

Cross: And there hasn’t been a lot of publicity about it.

Webb: These, these people are treated—they make mistakes like everybody else; they’re human beings. Sure, we view people from another culture as something different and, and the way our political system is, if we wanna bomb somebody like Saddam Hussein, we demonize him, then we can bomb him because they’re bad guys. Well, the Hmong were demonized. When the first camp, refugee camp was set up at Lui, Thailand, the Hmong named it “Ban Vinai”[?]

Cross: Which means—?

Webb: Oh, boy—you had to ask me that; I knew at one time.

Cross: That’s unimportant.

Webb: “Free town”? I’m not sure. Ask one of the Hmong, they’ll tell you. But when they, when they established that area and said they were gonna put the refugees in there, the Thai came from miles around to look at ‘em, because they were told they had horns, and they had tails, and this is where you can stand two of ‘em together and to the average American they look identical. But the Hmong word—and I can’t think of the word at the time, but I can tell you what it means—the word for the Chinese is “he with black hair”. Now, you look at a Hmong and that’s about as black a hair as you’re gonna see.

Cross: I was gonna say, I thought they had black hair, too.

Webb: But to them, the Chinese are the ones with the black hair. So, of course there are differences, but the United States has a way, within its little communities and such, of not really accepting these people. Sure, there’ll be a certain percentage of the population that’s gonna extend everything

they can to ‘em, but the general population is not going to, and the general population doesn’t understand what these people have been through.

Cross: For many years.

Webb: And I find that quite disgusting. Well of course, they don’t even know what the hell went on, anyway. But, uh, we’re bringing these people in here, putting ‘em in a—I mean, the culture shock is something horrendous to ‘em.

Cross: That’s gotta be pretty traumatic.

Webb: Here again, I witnessed that, and saw what these people—and sat with ‘em when they cried. Uh, I found it quite disgusting.

Cross: Well, I’d really like to thank you for your time.

Webb: Yeah, I’m off the soapbox.

Cross: I think this has been very beneficial, and you know, I hope this will really be of value to future researchers and uh—like I said before, I want to invite you up to the symposium we have this September, and I’ll keep you posted.

Webb: I sure would like to see that. I want to try and find Vang Yur.

Cross: Would you be interested in talking as a lecturer, perhaps, or would you feel uncomfortable doing something like that?

Webb: I would not feel uncomfortable at all.

Cross: Okay, let me talk to my director about it, because I’m not sure what their schedule is or what they’ve got lined up, but I think the subject is very interesting and I think you have a lot of things to say about it.

[End of Interview]