

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT—JOSEPH BEASLEY
(Recorded 18 April 2007)

Interviewee: JOSEPH BEASLEY

Interviewer: Jonathan Due

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Start of CD 1

Jonathan Due: This is Jonathan Due who is conducting an interview with Colonel (retired) Joseph Beasley—is that pronounced correctly?

Joseph Beasley: Correctly.

JD: On 18 April 2007. We are conducting this interview at East Chapel Hill High School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and we will be discussing COL Beasley's experience as an instructor at West Point, the United States Military Academy.

JB: That's right.

JD: And, sir, starting off with a little bit about your background, could you describe some of your childhood and your educational background?

JB: I grew up in Randleman, NC—the meanest town on Deep River—over near Asheboro. In my class of some eighty-nine students, two went to college. I went to Carolina and one fellow went to Guilford. So, everybody aspired to a career in the hosiery mills in Randleman, where I was growing up. So, I went to Carolina and I aspired not to go back to Randleman because I did not much care for Randleman. And

so, after I finished my degree at Carolina, I went to Duke to graduate school. While at Duke I got a letter from the draft board over at Asheboro North Carolina, saying that—of course the Korean War was on—and that while one could be exempt from the draft while in college, that really meant undergraduate school. It did not have anything to do with graduate school. And I hadn't bothered to notify—I didn't know I had to—the draft board that I was in graduate school at Duke. And so, they let me know that, by George, they were going to draft me, unless I volunteered. And I could volunteer and go to OCS and that sort of thing. And so I volunteered, and went to Fort Benning. While at Fort Benning, I got orders for Korea, where I went and stayed 16-months in Korea. Shortly, the Korean War was pretty much over. And I had a nice time in Korea for sixteenth months and came back to Fort Belvoir and hit a few spots in the Army. And then I went to the University of Chicago to get a PhD in history to go to West Point. And so I went to the University of Chicago and didn't finish the Ph.D. but stayed there two years and got orders one day, right out of the blue for Vietnam. I called up the Pentagon and they told me, "Yeah, we know, but you got to get over to Vietnam because that thing could end. And if you haven't been, your career would be in bad shape. So we are just thinking of you. But, we want you to go to Vietnam." And so, I went. And from Vietnam, I went to West Point. I went to West Point, I think in 1969. So, I had been at the University of Chicago for a couple of years, I think 66 and 67, and 68 I was up and in 69 I was in Vietnam. And then went to West Point and stayed at West Point until I left around 1984. And retired down here, from the Army. I was the head of Ravenscroft School in Raleigh for about ten years, and commuted from Chapel Hill. And then retired

again, and so, was perfectly retired for about two or three years and bored, and got a call from the principal here that one of his teachers—this was August—that one of his teachers had gone on maternity leave and decided to do it sort of suddenly. He wanted to know if I could come out and teach one section of AP European History for one year. That was maybe twelve years ago and I am still here. I am seventy-seven now and may be the world's oldest living, high-school teacher. But, I am having a good time and I still teach two sections of AP European history.

[Interview Continues]

JD: Now you also finished your Ph.D. at Carolina, after retiring, correct?

JB: Here. At Carolina. After I came here, I got in touch with Don Higginbotham because Don and I became good friends at West Point; he was a visiting professor one year when I was there. And I got my Ph.D. in history here at Carolina. I got my Ph.D. in 19-uh. It was while I was teaching at Raven's Croft. While I was head of the school over there, I taught AP European there too and I got my Ph.D. going to classes in the summertime and occasionally in the evening school. They gave me all the credits from the University of Chicago and so there was not a whole lot that I had to here, except write a dissertation. And through Don's help, I was fortunate and got a Ph.D. So, I've got it. I could have taught here without it, but what the heck.

JD: Yes, sir. And, again, you said that you were in Vietnam in 1969 and 70...

JB: 1969 and 1970, yeah. I think that I left there probably... June 1970 and went to West Point.

JD: And what jobs did you do as an officer there, while you were in Vietnam.

JB: Well, I have to tell you, I have to go back a bit because this is not something that I have talked about too much lately, but it might be interesting to you. When I went to Duke, I went to Duke Divinity School and I went into the Army as a Chaplain. I cannot tell you now why I went to divinity school because I doubt that I have been to church in the last ten to twelve years. But I was a Chaplain in the Army and my job in Korea and Vietnam. In Vietnam, I was in USARV Headquarters in the USARV Chaplains office but I also had a job in protocol and one of my jobs in Vietnam was seeing distinguished visitors around Vietnam. We had certain firebases in Vietnam that you took distinguished visitors too, about as safe as anything you could find. And so, I took clergymen. Mr. Nixon was not able to go out of the White House to church much because of demonstrators and so on. So he brought the church to him. And he would have services in the East Room on Sunday and after church a lot of times, he would say, "I really enjoyed that sermon" and so on, "You've got to go preach to our boys in Vietnam." I can imagine how a preacher might feel about that. But he would arrange for the people to come to Vietnam and when they came, I picked them up and took them around Vietnam. Sometimes I brought soldiers in to Saigon to meet them. I squired Cardinal Cooke around for his Christmas trip through Vietnam. And so, one of my jobs as I said was taking distinguished visitors, congressmen, distinguished clergymen, Cardinal Cooke, others, around, "touring" Vietnam seeing soldiers. In USARV I was pretty much in charge of supply, Chaplain supply. While I was there, it was during the Vietnamization program, and everything that was worth more to send back than to just leave it in Vietnam, was sent back to America. But things that would cost more to send it

back than it was worth in the first place we would leave there. While in Vietnam, no, before I went to Vietnam, I had met Colonel Thomas E. Griess, the head of the history department at West Point. And Colonel Griess told me the following story, and I do not know if you have heard of it or not, but maybe you have. But for the nineteenth century, there was a chaplain on the faculty at West Point pretty much all the time. And the Chaplain who preached in the church, in the cadet chapel, also taught in the school—there was no history department—I think he taught in the social sciences department. But in 1896, according to Colonel Griess, there was a great church-state controversy because the chaplain who was there then, I believe it was an Episcopalian, seemed to be selling his Episcopalian religion primarily against other religions in the classroom. And so there was a church-state controversy, should this be going on, in a state-supported college like West Point, and the Chaplain evidently in 1896 was told, “You get out of here and go up to your chapel, and stay up there.” And henceforth, chaplains will be assigned to the West Point military reservation along with the MPs, and the other housekeeping people at West Point. But they would not be assigned to the staff and faculty. And there had not been a chaplain on the staff and faculty at West Point since 1896. So, Colonel Griess wondered if I would like to break that mold. And so, I thought that would be fine. And so, when I came to West Point, having been in Vietnam, I was still a Chaplain, and when I came to West Point, I remember my first session with Colonel Griess, he greeted me, “Glad to have you here” and everything else, and he said something along these lines. He said, “You know Joe, I think it would be probably be all right if you went to church, but do not conduct any church services. Because we had this

problem in 1896 and we don't want to have another one." So I assured Colonel Griess that that would not be a problem. As I say, I had moved away from religion except for an academic point of view. In my own thinking, I had a lot of tragedy in Korea and Vietnam. Four of my children, four out of five had died. So I doubt that I went to the Cadet Chapel or any chapel more than once or twice the whole time I was at West Point. And, I was the OR of the West Point Golf Team and generally on Sunday morning I had a golf game at eight o'clock at the West Point Golf Course. We had a bunch of people who usually teed off first before anybody else, because we played pretty well and we did not want to be behind slow players, and we teed off Sunday mornings early. This was not a problem for me or Colonel Griess and it got to be something that no one particularly noticed. And when I became a tenured associate professor there, that is kind of a branch, and I left the chaplaincy then.

[Interview Continues]

JB: I was the first Army Chaplain to go to West Point on the faculty since 1896 when I went there in 1969. And it was kind of a thing that Colonel Griess—I don't know that Lance Betros knows that story or not—and if he doesn't you can tell it to him.

JD: Yes, sir.

JB: But, Colonel Griess, for reasons of his own, initiated that. It may have been the fine hand of Bill Stofft behind it, because I knew Bill Stofft. So, he initiated that and I stayed there and I retired from the Army at about the time that Colonel Griess did. And Bob Doughty, do you know Bob?

JD: Yes, sir.

JB: Well Bob Doughty became head of the department and Roy Flint was the Dean, and I know Roy very well too. They just didn't pursue that anymore, and I don't think that there is a Chaplain on the faculty at West Point now and I don't think that there is any interest in having one there. So, I may have been sort of a one-time shot kind of thing. I didn't really do anything at West Point the entire time that I was there that might have been regarded as clergy-type work because there was a concern that any clergyman might be in to some church-state problem. And the chaplains took care of all the services. I would have gotten in their way had I wanted to do anything like that. But it was kind of interesting when I began teaching ethics at West Point because there were plenty of people on the faculty that would have loved to have seen a chaplain or someone teach Christian ethics. And not philosophical ethics. And that would have been a path that would lead to quick destruction, and so, I most assuredly did not do that. I did teach, it might be fun to think about how I went about sort of deciding that. Ethics hadn't been taught. A lot of people would have liked to had ethics and Christian ethics taught and so how do you go about setting up an ethics course, the title of which would be "History of Ethics" and that is what the course was. How do you do that in the history department and not step on somebody's toes? That was kind of tricky. What I decided to do, well, I knew that if I started off the first day of class with cadets talking about Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and working my way on up through Jeremy Bentham and utilitarian ethics and so on, I would have those guys under the table asleep. So I thought the thing to do—and what I did do—was start off as I called it privately with Colonel Griess and a few others, "pooling our ignorance." What I started off doing was, "What do you guys think about

abortion?” And “What do you think about killing in war?” “What about euthanasia?”

Well, I mean, the cadets had their opinions on that. I didn’t really tell anyone what to think, I just sort of had about a one-hour, in-class bull session for about a week. And then I said, “Well fellows, you know, we really haven’t gotten very far. We haven’t solved too many problems here. We have talked about a lot of things. We have a lot of different views about a lot of things, but we have not solved too many problems. So, I think we probably need a little help. Don’t you think it would be a good idea, if we went back and saw what some people who have worried about this systematically thought about such problems as these. They might not have talked about just those problems, but they talked about answers to any problem. Why don’t we look at Plato’s *Republic*...”

Then I thought they had a little more of an interest and reason to go back. That worked pretty well. And so, then we went back and I just surveyed ethics, from the times of Plato and Aristotle—Aristotle of course wrote a book entitled *Ethics*—on up to modern times. And my argument—and Colonel Griess bought it; some others I’ve told you when we talked over at Carolina the other night that I had many, many conversations with General Goodpaster about this, the Superintendent—that it is hard to tell people what to do. And it is hard to tell people—and ethics is not answer-giving. I remember I told General Goodpaster one time, “Ethics is not answer-giving, but ethics is sort of an effort to give people some tools to use because when you get right in the middle of an ethical dilemma, you do not want to have to go looking for tools. It is better to have tools already there before you. And when I was dealing with the Borman Commission, I was one of the military representatives on the Borman Commission, I wound up testifying

before the Congress about teaching ethics at West Point. I remember one time, I think I was talking before the Congress, and Wayne Morris, Senator Morris said, "You have been using words like ethics and morality and so forth. What is the difference?" So I said, and this is before Congress, and it is something that I had said before in class, thank goodness, that the difference between ethics and morality is that morality involves making decisions and acting. Ethics is what or where should I look to find answers about what to do when I act. Ethics is, well, first morality is where you come to a fork in the road and you have to do something, you can't do nothing. You have to either lie or not lie. You have to make a decision. And we judge a person's morals on the kinds of decisions they make. But ethics is the place that you go to look to find out the answers as to what sort of decisions you are to make in this regard. So, I suggested that you look in all kinds of places. You may look in religion, you may look in the Code of Conduct in the military, you may look in Plato or Aristotle and philosophical ethics, it doesn't much matter. But I want to give you places to go look and that is what ethics is all about. And old Wayne Morris bought that pretty well. When I was teaching, I taught about ethical dilemmas and ethical questions. It seems to me that ethical questions were all over the place.

[Interview Continues]

JB: General Goodpaster went along with that pretty well. He came to a lot of my ethics classes. I think he would have been very disappointed if it would have been anything like Christian ethics going on in there. I had a lot of visitors to the ethics class. It was the only course at West Point with ethics in the title. And so, you know of course

about the great cheating scandal in the 1970s and so I was involved with the Borman commission because I had been teaching a course with ethics in the title. I didn't contribute too much to the Borman commission, except that I did say that that business of "goodbye forever," might not be appropriate in some cases. That people ought to have a chance to learn from their mistakes. The Borman commission, ultimately, decided for the first time that cadets could come back to West Point after a year, although very few did, as you know. There was one other thing. General Sidney Berry had been Supe at West Point prior to General Goodpaster and he was the Supe during the honor scandal. I am remembering now as we talk, that a lot of the kids who were involved in the ethics thing hadn't cheated themselves, but had evidently sort of tolerated or known about people who had cheated. I saw a difference between people who had actually cheated.

[Interview Continues]

JB: General Berry used to come to my ethics class too. I think he would have been disappointed if there would have been any Christian ethics going on. Mostly the course was just a discussion, first of philosophical ethics all the way through and then saying at the end of the one semester course, "Remember back when the first week or so during class when we were talking about euthanasia and we were talking about killing in war, and we were talking about all these ethical dilemmas? Let's talk about them now. After we have talked about all these various ideas that people have had through history, through utilitarian and absolutist ethics and so on. Let's see if we can do a better job of analyzing it." I think that a lot of cadets felt like they had. As I told you and I think you heard me mention the other day, that cadets do things. One fellow went to Fort Benning

and announced that he was a conscientious objector and then became a Catholic priest. But I thought that the course worked out pretty well and that no one got hurt too much from it. I rather hated to see it end, because it pretty much ended when I left. And I did not want to leave, but as I say, my wife did not particularly like West Point. She lost four children; a couple died of cancer, and we had one die from meningococcal which went from I think this baby has a fever at suppertime to death at midnight.

[Interview Continues]

JD: Now that was a pretty turbulent time in those couple of years at the Academy with the cheating scandal and of course with the integration of women.

JB: Yes, yeah.

JD: Did those conversations with cadets come up in the years preceding.

JB: Oh, all the time. And they came up in the years preceding. In the years preceding, when I first went to West Point, people were saying that there was a whole lot of cheating going on. And faculty members were saying that they thought in the history department that plagiarism seemed to be the main problem. That there was a lot of plagiarism going on. A lot of faculty spent a lot of time going back researching old books and things like that. Going back and trying to find this plagiarism. But a few people were tried by the Honor Court, found guilty, and dismissed from West Point. The big balloon went up of course when they had the big cheating scandal in the engineering department, about 1976 or so, 1974 maybe was when that occurred. But before that, I talked to a lot of cadets that told me that they had no interest in being at West Point; that they had no interest in going into the Army. But the fact was that they thought that they

were about to be drafted and they got to thinking that "Well, if I went to West Point, I would be there about four years, and in about four years the war would be over. I'd dodge Vietnam at West Point." And so, a lot of them told me that they in fact had gotten an appointment to West Point in order to keep from getting drafted and avoid Vietnam. A lot of them made bad bets, because they graduated about 1970, 1971, 1972, and they went to Vietnam from West Point, the war hadn't ended. There was a different crowd of cadets than you would normally find, because you never knew among the Corps of Cadets, quite what the motive had brought that cadet to West Point. To serve his country, was one that many came for, to dodge Vietnam was one that a few came for, so I expect some of them would not worry too much about the Honor Code and cheating and that sort of thing. And also, there was a lot of people on the faculty at West Point while I was there who, young scholars, many of them had Ph.D.s, many had come into the Army one way or another, had been to ROTC or whatever. West Point had brought them into teach in order to free up West Point graduates and regular army types to do the Vietnam business. Because it was true that if you did not go to Vietnam during the war in Vietnam, there was going to be a kind of question mark about your record from then on. And many people not only served in Vietnam once, but they served in Vietnam three or four times. I had wives come to me when I was at West Point, saying, "Well, my husband is going back to back over to Vietnam. He has just been home about six or eight months and he is going back for another tour of duty. I do not know how he is going back. You have never been there but once. I wonder why he is going?" And I would bite my tongue, and not say, "Well, the reason he is going is because he has been on the

phone every day since he has been back with the Pentagon trying to get himself sent back over there. He didn't want to come home. A lot of people didn't really want to be in any place, but Vietnam. And so, well, a lot of people were volunteering from the faculty at West Point to get back over to Vietnam. And so, there were a whole crowd then of Ph.D.s who had come into the Army and had no interest at all of going to Vietnam and sort of had an interest in serving out their tour at West Point, or in the Army, and then going out to college and teaching. Among that crowd was Joseph J. Ellis, who was there with me, and a pal of mine while I was at West Point. Joe Ellis was a Ph.D. from Yale and he was there at West Point and he certainly had no interest in going to Vietnam. As soon as his tour was up, he went to Mount Holyoke to teach and he is still there. There were several people like that. So the faculty at West Point was not made up of a lot of people who were West Point graduates or who were in sympathy with the military and with the war in Vietnam and so forth. There were a lot of people at West Point on the faculty who thought the war in Vietnam was a big mistake. And I was one of them, and I had been to Vietnam. And there were a lot of cadets at West Point who were there because they were hoping not to be drafted and hoping not to go. That is a little different, I think, than the West Point right now. There are not people there that are brought there to free up faculty to go to Iraq, I don't think. I do not know.

JD: I do not believe so.

JB: I do not think so. So, the faculty and the corps of cadets was a little different than it had been in the past and is now. What that contributed to the atmosphere at West Point, I do not know. But, I had a lot of good friends who were on the social sciences

faculty and who were on the history faculty who had not gone to West Point, who had Ph.D.s from civilian universities, and who frankly would tell you that as soon as they could, they were going to get out of the Army and go find a job teaching in college. Which is what they wanted to do anyway in the first place. So that was different than perhaps we see now.

JD: Yes, sir. And sir, when did you first hear that they were going to integrate women into the Academy? What was your attitude towards that and then what were some other attitudes of other faculty members and cadets?

JB: I don't remember. I know they came in 1976. I, Sidney Berry was the Supe, and I saw him a lot. He came to my ethics class some and sat in on the classes. I knew General Knowlton too, but he had gone before the women decision. This was Congress deciding and not West Point. A great majority of the cadets and a great majority of the faculty thought women had no business being at West Point. And they thought it was sort of the end of the Academy as they had known it and perhaps the end of the Academy period, if West Point admitted women. But Congress decreed and General Berry had a meeting of the faculty in Thayer Hall at one time, and I recall him saying something kind of like this, "I know that several of you out there think that women should not come to West Point, but I want to tell you that I," I believe he said that "I have certain questions in my mind too about whether we ought to have women at West Point. But Congress has said they are coming and by George, this is going, we are going to make this work. And if anybody in here that doesn't think he can help make this work, I want him to get out of here. We'll fix you up so you can leave West Point, right now. From now on," I

remember him saying, "I do not want anymore discussion, there has been enough, about women coming to West Point. From now on, the only discussion is going to be, how are we going to make this thing work." So, that was kind of get your marching orders like that and that was it. I had been arguing, I had been taking an argument that, aside from anything else, I would make an economic argument. That when we would sit over in the Officer's Club which is next door to Thayer Hall, and go to lunch and officers would be sitting around the table chatting. And women at West Point would be one of the arguments that a lot of people would be having. And it would be a minority of people at any table in the dining hall at Thayer Hall, or the Officers Club, saying, "Oh, I think it would be a good idea if women would come." There would be a great majority of people saying that "I think they have no business here. The place has been fine over the last one-hundred years or so. It would be ruined if they came. They cannot do push-ups." And all that. I said, you know, we have seen statistics—I do not know what it is now—but it costs about \$100,000 to bring a person to West Point. It costs the taxpayers about \$100,000 to get a West Point education for four years, free. I bet the money has doubled at least since then. I just do think that half the population should be excluded from this bonanza that the taxpayer is providing. So, I thought that it would be a good idea to give it a whirl. I remember in class, I had women the first time out in class, I remember some in my ethics class, and of course I taught European and I was the one who started the world history side. So I was also teaching world history a lot there. I taught some other electives. I taught Tudor and Stuart England at one time, that sort of thing for a semester. So I had women, occasionally. And I was talking about the fact that I had not seen

anybody who had ever made 1600 on the SAT—I do not know how I got off on that—since I had been at West Point, a flat out 1600. About three women came up to me after class, and said, “You say you haven’t met anybody who made a 1600, well now you have.” Those three said they all had. Most of the women who came there—I do not know how it will be when you get there—but most of the women who came there were Army brats. Their fathers had come to West Point and they came kind of maybe because their father had gone there, maybe because they wanted to go. But some of them had been admitted to Harvard, and Princeton, and all over the place and had turned down Harvard to come to West Point. They knew exactly what they were getting into, because many of them their father had been there. They knew they better be there in the best physical shape you could possibly could imagine for the Beast Barracks thing. When the first women came to West Point, people were saying, “Well, they are not going to be able to put up with the five-mile run in combat boots,” or whatever it was. And they made it fine. Those women, the first group, were in super-duper shape. Better shape than a lot of the men were. It was a real surprise to a lot of people who had been sure that they would flake out in the first couple of weeks in Beast Barracks and go home and this would be over with. They were really shocked that fewer women—I think that about 100 women came in that group of about 1000—about a tenth of the entering class was women. And of that 100, fewer people dropped out than perhaps the other 900 men. Women did fall out along the way. They were harassed a lot of times not only by the faculty but by cadets. A lot of them just got tired of it in that first group. I was walking down the hall one day and I heard somebody start off a class with, “I just think you women ought not to

be here, but since you are here, well, we will just study history.” It is kind of tough, I suppose, to start of your class with “I just think you have no business being here, but since you are here, that is the way it is.” And I heard that introduction one time, as I walked down the hall coming out of a classroom, I think that first two or three years worth of women were pretty rough. I do not know what it is like now, but I imagine that things have sort of smoothed out a bit.

JD: I think they have, sir.

JB: Yeah, I think so. It was sort of getting used to the idea that women were there. Finding a place for them in the barracks for them to live. It was kind of tough. But for better or for worse, about two years after women came we had this great honor scandal smack the Academy and everybody’s attention went towards that. Perhaps that was a fortunate thing for the women. Because people kind of got off their case and on to the problems of the honor scandal. Which I know plenty, but you do to probably. So I won’t bother to fill you in on all the ends and outs of that.

[Interview Continues]

JD: It is interesting; it seems in one of your earlier descriptions that just the pervasive effects of Vietnam had trickled down all the way through the Corps of Cadets and I was curious if you could elaborate on your own views of Vietnam. You mentioned it was a mistake, but how did that

JB: Yeah. Well I was in Hawaii before I went to the University of Chicago. But when I was at the University of Chicago of course, the University of Chicago was a real hotbed of Vietnam protests and that sort of thing. In fact, the students closed down the

university to protest the war for several days. I thought that the president of the University of Chicago at that time was a woman and she slapped her briefcase shut and said, "Well, if they want the university they can have it; I will see you later, I am going home. Turn off the lights as you go out." And she cancelled all electricity and everything. Hannah Arendt, no it wasn't Hannah Arendt. Hannah Arendt, I had up to West Point to speak. She wrote about Eichmann in Jerusalem. There was another— Hannah Gray was the name of the president of the University of Chicago. She closed the place down and we all thought that if she had called the police to take over the campus and open the place up, that there would have been all sorts of trouble. Maybe even people hurt or killed. It was a really wise decision to just say, "alright, if you want the campus you can have it." But I was involved there with teachers and others and it was a good time there for me. And I came to believe that the war in Vietnam was against the best interests of the United States. As I believe the war in Iraq is a mistake and against the best interests of the United States. I think we never should have gone into Iraq. I think in hindsight most people would agree that we should have never gone into Vietnam. So I went into Vietnam thinking the war in Vietnam was a mistake. I came to think after I had been in Vietnam for a while, that some of the things that we were doing over there might be sort of classified as immoral. The pervasive support of the corrupt Vietnamese government in Saigon being one. When I got to West Point I think that the war in Vietnam had taken its toll. My usual system would be to shake hands with the cadet at graduation and attend his funeral in November-December because the lot of the second lieutenant in Vietnam was not very good. And, you know that. I think that I

mentioned—I do not know if I did or not at that meeting at Carolina—that General Berry put out a piece of paper one day saying that “I have been trying to attend the funerals of every West Point cadet who had been killed in Vietnam. And I find that I cannot get anything done, all I can do is go to funerals. And so, this has got to stop, we going to have to have a roster.” A roster was provided and put out where members of the faculty, one day a month, that day, he would spend attending funerals and telling people at the funerals that he was there representing the Academy, attending a funeral and wanted to extend the sympathies of the Academy and so on. I was one of the members of that roster. I attended maybe eight funerals a day on a day like that. That is kind of wearying on you. And it was much more wearying on people at West Point that had known all these people, had been cadets with them and so forth. Members of the faculty and friends of theirs were being killed and so forth. It was kind of a cloud, a little cloud of gloom about the place that shouldn’t have been there and I am sure that isn’t there now. And probably had not been there at other times. Vietnam, I think I did less discussion about Vietnam at West Point than I did any where else. I think the time I was at West Point—and I certainly went along with this—was, “I don’t want to feel gloomy about this so let’s just don’t talk about it.” So whether we ought to be there or not, whether this is a good idea or not, whether Vietnam was a mistake or not, whether it was immoral or not, none of this stuff came up. I think there was probably more talking in Vietnam about it. When I went to Vietnam, some people at the University of Chicago, close friends of mine, very few knew I was in the Army, much less that I was a chaplain in the Army or anything like that. But, some very close friends of mine, came to me and said, “What the heck are you

going to do over in Vietnam. You think it is a danged big mistake. How are you going to get along in Vietnam?" And I said, "Well, you know, I am not going to go over to Vietnam to talk about Vietnam, I am going to go over to Vietnam to do Vietnam. And I am going to Vietnam not because I didn't have to—I could have said I was a conscientious objector or something, I suppose—but I am going over there because you know, a lot of friends of mine had been over there and all they say is the reason you are opposed to the war in Vietnam is because you just don't understand it because you have never been there. So, I said, "I think I am going to have to go and find out. And, you know, a lot of my friends have been killed over there. You know, I might run into them sometime and I would hate to think that I had never went. So I feel like I just ought to go." I had been in the Army then for about twelve or thirteen years. And so, I went and I said, "I am not going to talk about the war in Vietnam." Well, I got over there, and I found out that more people over there in Vietnam were talking about the war in Vietnam than anybody else. And everybody was sort of a cynic about it. I did not find anybody, hardly any soldier at USARV headquarters, that was not a cynic. And that was a topic of great discussion. I went down to a place in the delta called Can Tho, that we were giving over to the South Vietnamese Army. And in that place, in the chapel in that place, was all sorts of beautiful furniture that had been made in Taiwan. And I caused that furniture to be moved out and taken up to Cam Ranh Bay. And there was a big article in the New York Times that the Army was not going through with its promises to turn over the base and everything on it to the South Vietnamese Army because the Army had just moved a whole pile of furniture out from a place around Can Tho up to Cam Ranh Bay. And so, I

find myself standing at attention in front of General Creighton Abrams' desk—who I knew some—with Creighton Abrams reading me this article out of the New York Times. “What the hell is going on here?” And I told him what I just told you. I thought that all the Vietnamese would probably do when they got that good furniture would be to use it for firewood or something. And so, I thought it would be nice to save it and I sent it up to Cam Ranh Bay to be used up there. And he said, “Joe,” and he looked at me, he knew me, he said, “Joe, this is like moving around the chairs on the deck of the Titanic. You know of course it is all going to be theirs one of these days. Quit this moving it around.” But I remember, Creighton Abrams, now there is a four-star general, “your just shifting the chairs on the Titanic,” and so I went away thinking—and of course he did not do anything to me—kind of regrettably and resignedly, he just laid down his New York Times and said, “Joe, your are just moving the chairs around on the Titanic.”

JD: That speaks volumes.

JB: “It is all going to be theirs soon.” I do not know whose “theirs” he was thinking about, but I was thinking about the North Vietnamese because the South Vietnamese Army wouldn't fight—everybody knew that. And the North Vietnamese Army certainly would fight. And of course, we know how it turned out. But I found, I couldn't find anybody for the war in Vietnam. And I was there in 69 and 70; after Tet. I think Tet, in my opinion, Tet was the great divide. And the Tet offensive, and the destruction that it caused made just about everybody except for William C. Westmoreland, I suspect he was a true believer.

JD: I think probably to the very end, sir. And I would dare say that,

JB: To the very end. But I think that everybody else, to one degree or another, to a great degree or a small degree, all just, the effort was to stay alive and get out of there. "It is a bummer. It is too big for me to deal with, let's just stay alive and get the heck out." And that is about the views, certainly in 1969 and 1970. Must be the case, the whole thing ended in 1974, of course, it must have got even worse, it must have.

JD: I can only imagine. And again, it is interesting how that works its way back and is translated to a certain degree, but is still part of that cadet mindset amongst some.

JB: I would think that it would be hard to get rid of it. It would sort of be in the bricks and mortar of the place. And I don't know whether it has affected it for good or for ill. I do not think that Iraq has done it any good, I have my views on that and we needn't get into them. But I thought that, at West Point, we could talk about women coming to West Point, we could talk about the Honor Scandal, we could talk about various other things, but Vietnam, no. I remember a thing that once we were at a meeting of the faculty in Thayer Hall and General Knowlton was saying, talking about Vietnam and was blaming the whole thing on the press. And the war in Vietnam would have been alright if it had not been for the press and all that sort of thing. And we all after that meeting with General Knowlton repaired over to the bar on the Officer's Club. And a whole pile of us were in the bar in the Officer's Club. Among the crowd, was Amos "The Famous" Jordan, the head of the Department of Social Sciences. Amos Jordan was a highly rated—everybody called him Amos "The Famous"—Amos Jordan was a very highly regarded, perhaps the most highly regarded chair of a department. And Amos Jordan looked at all of us and said something like this: "To blame the problems in

Vietnam on the press, is like blaming the Johnstown Flood on a leaky faucet in Altoona.” That was his pronouncement on General Knowlton’s comments on the press and Vietnam. And that is one of the few things I still remember about the comments on the war. And old Amos Jordan, and everyone listened to his word, and probably respected him more than anybody there. “To blame the war in Vietnam and all its difficulties on the press, was like blaming the Johnstown Flood on a leaky faucet in Altoona.” I never forgot it. That one is worth remembering.”

JD: Well, sir, I think that we have run out of time, and that covers much of what I wanted to discuss with you. Thank you for your time.

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