

Interview with Ken Jobe
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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday the 5th of October, 2005. My name is Mark DePue. I am the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And I'm here with Ken Jobe, who is a veteran of the Vietnam War and has also spent lots of time with the engineers in South Korea; several tours in South Korea. Ken, what I always start with is when and where you were born.

Jobe: I was born in Murphysboro, Illinois in 1937.

DePue: Well, this is great because I was thinking you weren't an Illinois boy, and you actually are.

Jobe: I am. Spent a lot of time at Bloody Williamson County. Then, we moved to Union County, and I graduated from high school in 1955.

DePue: Union County, Illinois?

Jobe: Illinois.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: As in Anna / Jonesboro. As in Jonesboro the site of the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

DePue: One of several.

Jobe: One of them.

DePue: When did you move to the Jonesboro area?

Jobe: When I was in the fifth grade.

DePue: What was your father's occupation then?

Jobe: He was a superintendent of the grade schools.

DePue: And, again, the year you were born?

Jobe: Thirty-seven.

DePue: Thirty-seven. So the tail end of the depression. And your dad had a good job, sounds like.

Jobe: He did.

DePue: So...

Jobe: Well, he was a school teacher. So what happened was, there were times when the school board couldn't pay him in money, they paid him in chits, or they paid him in potatoes, or corn, or something like that. Chits being a piece of paper with you can take this to the following merchant and you can redeem it for food or clothing.

DePue: But by the time you started to remember things, those days were over, weren't they?

Jobe: They were over.

DePue: Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Jobe: Vaguely, vaguely.

DePue: You would have been four at that time?

Jobe: I better remember VJ day, VE day, than I do that. Both my uncles were in World War II.

DePue: Do you remember paying much attention to what was going on during World War II, or was that kind of background noise for you?

Jobe: Oh no, because both uncles were in World War II, we were paying a lot of attention to them. One was a Chief Petty Officer on the USS North Carolina and a plank holder. The other...

DePue: A plank holder?

Jobe: That means when the ship was christened, he was there, and his name is on the plank, you know, and he had a plank of the board for the deck that was given to him signifying that he was there.

DePue: I'm guessing that's a really big thing if you're from the Navy.

Jobe: It is. The other was an MP [military police] in the—what's now the Air Force. And he was at Tinian, and he was one of the folks who were guarding the nuclear bomb that was dropped on Japan.

DePue: Wow. Did he know what he was guarding?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: He did. He also was from southern Illinois. There were a number of folks in that unit—I don't remember the unit that was from southern Illinois. I think they all wound up in the same MP Company. And they were all over six foot two. They were hand selected, and they knew what they were guarding.

DePue: I'm sure they took that very seriously. My guess is that when your two uncles came back, and they would come over to the house, or you would go to their house, and they would start talking to your dad, their brother, they would start talking war stories, and that you were listening in, perhaps?

Jobe: They did. Now, with the MP that's not true. He didn't talk. He only started talking about ten years before he died. The Chief Petty Officer is a different story. I had information on him, and in my aunt's house, I built a number of model destroyers, and ships, and things like that. And we charted his way across the Pacific.

DePue: During the war?

Jobe: During the war. And one of my vivid memories at the end of the war was, when they all came back to Johnston City. And Johnston City had all of the guys' names who were in World War II up on a—like a board in the city in the center of the town. And they had the people that were alive, and they had the people who had been killed. And they had whether they were in the Navy, the Air Force, the Army, the Marine Corps, whatever. Then, when they all got back, they had one big parade, and that was it. That was the celebration. Yeah, I do remember a number of stories from them.

DePue: So, you were exposed to a lot of things military growing up?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: That's basically what I'm driving at here. You were in high school, then, when the Korean War started?

Jobe: Yes, yes.

DePue: Do you remember when the North Koreans invaded the South?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: You were thirteen, maybe fourteen?

Jobe: Probably.

DePue: It was 1950.

Jobe: In nineteen fifty-one my dad died from Lou Gehrig's disease. I was a freshman in high school. My mom's biggest fear was that the war would last so long that I would wind up in Korea as an infantryman. And that was something that she didn't want. My dad never quite made it to World War II because of the number of kids, the job he had, and his physical condition. But, yeah, the Forty-fourth Infantry Division was a National Guard outfit, was here in Illinois. And that unit was called to active duty. The guy had the best, biggest grocery store had a son who was of that age. He had joined the National Guard to avoid being drafted. And, of course, he—

DePue: This was '48, or '49?

Jobe: Yeah, something like that. And so when the call-up occurred, he did everything he could to keep that boy from going to Korea, but it didn't work. He pulled all the strings he could think of, it didn't make any difference. He went to Korea just with everybody else. So, you know, we followed what was going on there in high school. And we were also following a little thing that was going on -- *Time* magazine was reporting Korea big time, but they also were reporting a little thing that was going on with the French in Vietnam. And one of the things I vividly remember from *Time* magazine is that when the French lost Vietnam, that the Vietminh reserved a portion of a cemetery in Hanoi because they were sure we Americans would be coming sooner or later. And they were right.

DePue: That would have been 1954. You would have been seventeen. Close to your senior year in high school, and that caught your attention?

Jobe: That caught my attention.

DePue: And was your mom even thinking about that? Was there any discussion with her?

Jobe: No, no, no.

DePue: What were you thinking? Were you already interested in the military?

Jobe: Ken Gray was the representative for southern Illinois. We knew Ken Gray. Ken Gray offered me the opportunity to go to the third class of the Air Force Academy. I flunked the physical at Scott Air Force Base because my shoulders are too round, and they thought I wouldn't be able to stand at attention for long periods of time. And the thinking was that that was enough to disqualify me for the Air Force Academy. He then offered me the chance to go to West Point. I declined that because I knew my mom didn't want me in the Army. So, I didn't go. Instead I

graduated from the University of Missouri at Rolla –played football, played a little basketball.

DePue: What position in football?

Jobe: Those days we were playing both ways. Defense and offense. I was a tight end.

DePue: So you were healthy enough to be playing football?

Jobe: Right. The other thing is, the two guys that were ahead of me for the Air Force Academy lasted less than ninety days. And one of them was so overweight that he had not eaten for three days when we took the physical at Scott Air Force Base. You know, he didn't make it through the summer. But, that's all right. That's fine. So, how I kind of wound up in the military was I needed money. We needed money bad when we were going through college. And if you joined the ROTC, and you stayed in ROTC, you got twenty-five bucks a month. And that was a lot of money. That paid for my room.

DePue: Was that as a freshman, even?

Jobe: No, that was junior and senior.

DePue: Yeah, that's probably when they contract.

Jobe: Right. Then everybody that was a non-vet and male had to take two years of ROTC. It was mandatory.

DePue: The first two years of ROTC that don't actually commit you to becoming an officer at the end?

Jobe: Right, correct.

DePue: When did you start at Rolla?

Jobe: Well, that would have been the fall of '55.

DePue: Okay, so at that time, the Korean War is over?

Jobe: It's over.

DePue: So, you're thinking?

Jobe: I wasn't even thinking. I was thinking about twenty-five bucks. That's what I was thinking about.

DePue: And your mom's probably hoping that there's not going to be another war?

Jobe: She was overjoyed that I had gone to school at Rolla. Well, actually, she wanted me to go to SIU, but SIU didn't offer Engineering. Both she and my dad were SIU graduates.

DePue: You're paying out of state tuition, then, at Rolla?

Jobe: Yeah, it was two hundred bucks a semester.

DePue: And it was twenty-five dollars a month you were getting for ROTC?

Jobe: Yeah.

DePue: That's not tuition, it's just...

Jobe: That's twenty-five bucks; you can use it however you want to. In our case, it was enough to pay for a room.

DePue: And when you signed your contract, you were basically committing to six—

Jobe: Seven years.

Jobe: At the time it was six months active duty, and the rest of it was inactive reserves. Or active reserves.

DePue: So, you could go six months, which is basically get me through basic and advanced officer training.

Jobe: Right.

DePue: And then come back and either be in the inactive, or in the national guard, or in the active reserve?

Jobe: Correct.

DePue: What was your thought when you graduated and got the commission?

Jobe: My thought was, I'm going to go be the world's greatest mining engineer-geologist in Oklahoma. I intended to go in for six months, stay in for six months, return back to Lone Star Steel Company in Oklahoma, and have the world's greatest career you ever saw.

DePue: What was your major in college?

Jobe: My major was geological engineering with minors in civil and mining engineering.

DePue: And for anybody who knows about Rolla, that's an outstanding engineering school, is it not?

Jobe: It absolutely is.

DePue: I thought that was a five-year program?

Jobe: Some of us made it a five-year program.

DePue: Did you make it five years?

Jobe: Yeah, I made it five years.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: In part because I switched majors a number of times. I thought I was going to be a petroleum engineer, but at the end of the first semester the petroleum market as you know goes up and down. We were in a decline. The people that graduated that year from petroleum engineering were pumping gas at gas stations, if they could get a job. And, you know, five years later, those guys were making entry salaries that were more than any other discipline except electrical engineering. But, then again, two years after that, petroleum engineering thing was in a decline. Anyhow, I switched, decided I would be a geologist. Learned that if I really wanted to be the world's greatest geologist, I needed a PhD. Also knew that I couldn't afford to stay in school for that. Switched over to mining. Got enough of a mining degree to be able to work as a mining engineer.

DePue: Okay. Now you said that when you graduated—or when you got your commission—Lone Star Steel?

Jobe: Lone Star Steel was a Texas outfit, and they were making oil field pipe and selling it. And they were very good at it. They were also very politically active. They had three captive coal mines in southeast Oklahoma. And I went to work in those three as a junior mining engineer.

DePue: Were you still in college? Or was this after college?

Jobe: After I graduated. I graduated in sixty. Worked there for six months, went on active duty. The advantage that southeast Oklahoma coal had was, it was low sulfur coal. And pretty good BTUs. So, you could feed it into the oil pipe and not have a bunch of emissions and problems with stuff coming out the stack. So it was a good job, it was a good company to work for. The products were great. Offered every benefit you could ever think of at the time. Nice small town, good area, wonderful hunting, and fishing. But, I wound up on active duty in the Army.

DePue: So, I'm puzzled about the chronology here.

Jobe: Okay.

DePue: The beginning of your third year at Rolla you sign up for ROTC. You then have a commitment, which is typically a two-year program.

Jobe: You had the option. You could either go into the two-year program, or the six month program. The six-month program didn't last for a long time. I'm going to say it probably ended—well I'm sure it ended by the time Vietnam had come along. I think it ended by 1964.

DePue: Which program did you take?

Jobe: I took the six-month program.

DePue: And the six-month program, that was intensive officer training?

Jobe: We went to the basic officer course. Then, we went to a little bit of an advanced course. Then, there was some time left in that six month period. I went to Fort Benning and went to jump school.

DePue: Okay, I think I'm getting even more confused.

Jobe: Okay. Let's go ahead—we're between sophomore and junior year at college, right? There's a decision point. The decision point is, do you go for the junior and senior years in ROTC and get a commission? And the answer is yes and the reason is I want twenty-five dollars a month. I need the money. I'm working three, four jobs in the summer time in order to come up with enough money to pay tuition. Okay, at the end, when I graduate in May of 1960, then I go to work for Lone Star Steel. I'm there six months. In January of sixty-one I go on active duty for six months. Okay? And I've got this seven-year commitment hanging over my head. I go to Fort Belvoir, and we go through the basic engineer course. Then I go to Fort Benning to jump school and that was a fun experience. And then, I stayed on active duty. I was supposed to complete the remainder of the six months on active duty down there. I got down there and I was in a construction battalion.

DePue: When did you get your commission then?

Jobe: May of 1960.

DePue: So you were still in school a year after you got your commission?

Jobe: No.

DePue: You got your commission after your fifth year in college.

Jobe: When you graduate from college, then you get your commission. Okay, so I got it, I think, on the 30th of May, 1960.

DePue: But you could have received it with two years of ROTC?

Jobe: No, at that time, in order to get the commission, you had to have four years in the ROTC Department, and you had to graduate before you could get your commission.

DePue: Well, I don't want to belabor that too much. They've obviously changed ROTC programs and commissioning programs all the time.

Jobe: Right. It was a different world. The draft was what was driving it.

DePue: What happens then when you get done with Fort Benning? With your basic and your advanced training?

Jobe: I'm at Fort Benning, and I'm in this construction battalion, and there's short equipment, and short people, and as a result of it, I got put in charge of the major construction project on post: building training fire ranges. Before, the way the range thing worked was you had known distant ranges.

Jobe: You would reel up a bull's eye and somebody would fire at it. And you would qualify that way.

DePue: This is the one where you had a couple hundred yards out and there would be people in the pits pulling the targets up and down?

Jobe: Right. And you rotated back and forth. Okay, so the infantry school has some folks who do concepts and analysis. And they concluded, based on what they came up with in the study of the Korean War, that we weren't terribly accurate when we were firing our rifles. And we didn't really do a good job. We might broadcast out rather than trying to hit an individual. We might try to broadcast ten rounds out at a group of people. Or we might fire ten rounds at one person, when we would be better with a kill rate if we fired directly at one person. So, their analysis indicated that what you needed was a pop-up silhouette to fire at. And it's only up for a few seconds, and then it goes back down. That might be at the fifty yard line. Then, we've got another one at the seventy-five yard line that's off to the side. And another one down there at two hundred yards that does the same thing. So we wound up building that, the first prototype range.

DePue: Well, this is an important step. Those are the ranges I spent all my time on in the Army until they became computerized ranges. The very same concept.

Jobe: Right.

DePue: Fort Benning being the infantry school, you're building the first one of these for the entire United States Army. And did you have a lot to say about how it was constructed then?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: You had a lot of input?

Jobe: Well, we had a set of plans, and we followed those plans, and we put it together, and it worked. You know, I was short people, I drove the water truck - lieutenants aren't supposed to do that. My platoon sergeant drove a grader - they aren't

supposed to do that. One of my squad leaders drove a bulldozer - they aren't supposed to do that. That level of person is supposed to be managing and directing. But, we were so short of people that the only way we could get the job done on time was by us doing that. And, you know, we had half the number of people we were supposed to have. That was such a learning experience. I enjoyed that so much, I decided, I'm going to stay on active duty. This seems like a lot of fun. And I called my wife and said, "I'm thinking about doing this, what do you think?" And she was for it.

DePue: So, we missed that part of the story. When did you get married?

Jobe: Fifty-seven. Saint Patrick's Day.

DePue: You were still in college?

Jobe: Still in college. She had graduated from SIU.

DePue: What was her name?

Jobe: Doris. D-o-r-i-s. Maiden name was Rogers, R-o-g-e-r-s.

DePue: Okay, hang on.

Jobe: Married in the year 1957.

DePue: You met her in college, then?

Jobe: Actually I met her when I was a junior in high school.

DePue: High school sweet heart?

Jobe: Not really. We knew each other. But it wouldn't qualify as being high school sweethearts because she dated other guys, I dated other girls. It wasn't that.

DePue: But you went to the same high school?

Jobe: Oh yeah. For two years. We're still married. We have three grandkids, and we celebrated our fiftieth in April. In fact, we went on a cruise with the grandkids.

DePue: Well, congratulations. What, you left the kids out of the cruise?

Jobe: No, the kids and the grandkids, all of us went on a cruise.

DePue: Wow, that's great. She was okay with you staying in the Army then?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: And how about your mother?

Jobe: She was not okay with it. She really didn't think it was a good idea. She was afraid I was going to get killed.

DePue: And this is in 1961?

Jobe: Yes, in 1961. We, you know, we had a thing going with the Russians then, and this particular battalion I was in at Fort Benning got ready to go to Germany for one of the Berlin crises. And we got ready to go take over Cuba during the Cuban crisis. I was in a unit that was a STRAC outfit. Well, the troops call it the Stupid Troopers Running Around in Circles, but it was a strategic reserve outfit that had a mission in Germany and Western Europe and we were supposed to help over there. So, you know, my mom wasn't really enthused about all this. But my wife was fine with it. She thought it was great.

DePue: Okay. Take me over the next few years then, after you made that decision.

Jobe: At Fort Benning we did the Cuban crisis, we did the Berlin crisis. We did a lot of construction at Fort Benning. We were deeply involved in the University of Mississippi integration crisis.

DePue: That would have been '63?

Jobe: 1962, '63, something like that. We were involved in the incident in Selma, Alabama.

DePue: When you say you were involved, exactly how were you involved in these incidents?

Jobe: We deployed troops from Fort Benning to both Selma and—maybe we didn't do Selma—I think we did do Selma. I think we sent some MP units over to Selma. For the University of Mississippi, the problem there was that the federal forces had a perimeter around the University of Mississippi for that integration. James Meredith was the guy's name. And for the engineer troops, we were not there providing security. We were there to provide logistical support in the form of electrical generators and flood lights so that we could put the flood lights out around this perimeter and see at night, see if anyone was coming.

DePue: Coming towards the perimeter that the Military Police had established? Basically protecting the campus so that people aren't going to do something crazy?

Jobe: Right, that was it. And, in my case, what happened was, because I was airborne qualified, the group commander asked me to go down and make sure everything got loaded on the aircraft correctly, which we did. I didn't actually go to the University of Mississippi, but some of my troops did. And some of them were black, some were white, some were from the southeastern United States, some sympathies were not with the federal forces, but they went anyhow, and they did a good job.

DePue: Were you stationed, at this time, at Fort Benning still?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: What was the general mood? What was the mood of the black soldiers then?

Jobe: Divided. I had three lieutenants working for me. Two were from Alabama, one was from Wisconsin. The two from Alabama reflected the attitudes from that area. And it was a very segregated society then. The one from Wisconsin was very, very, very liberal and did not understand the attitude of the folks from that part of the country.

DePue: Now, the two soldiers you're talking about from Alabama are blacks?

Jobe: No. They're second lieutenants.

DePue: Oh, I'm sorry.

Jobe: They're both white. And the youngster from Wisconsin was also white and a lieutenant. And the attitude in that particular engineer group, since the group commander knew the Kennedys, the attitude was, We are going to do whatever we are told to do, to the best of our ability. On post, we were pretty integrated. I mean, it didn't make any difference. As long as you could do the job you were assigned, you were fine. Off post was a completely different matter. And, you know, there were restaurants down there where, if you were a black lieutenant, you didn't go into that restaurant. You were served separately. And there were folks who didn't like that.

DePue: Folks, as in, soldiers in your unit that were under your command?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: You were in command of a company at this time?

Jobe: I had Company C of the 577th [EN BN], which was a...

DePue: As a lieutenant?

Jobe: As a lieutenant.

DePue: Well, that's pretty good.

Jobe: I think they were hard up for somebody. So we had four companies, five companies. We had a 0-3 as the captain. He had one company. The rest of us were all either first or second lieutenants. Yeah. And, you know, some of the troops, the soldiers, had been detailed to other positions that were assigned to us. But they were detailed to other positions on post. And as a result, when you got ready to turn out the troops to go to work to build something, say a road, you were short at least one third of what you were supposed to have. And that was fairly standard. It

changed during the Cuban crisis because the one third of the folks that we didn't have came back from details and filled out the unit.

DePue: These are momentous times when you were down at Benning.

Jobe: Oh, they were.

DePue: Do you recall any specific incidents, whether it was racial incidents in your unit, or in the battalion?

Jobe: I had one kid who was from Puerto Rico, but he was psychotic. And he was a problem because he thought I and the first sergeant—according to the psychiatrist, he was seeing us and he was seeing ghosts. And we were the people who were—the first sergeant and I—were the people who were persecuting him. But, he was psychotic, and we managed to get him out of the Army.

DePue: Did you have any black officers or black NCOs [non-commissioned officers] in your unit?

Jobe: I had plenty of black NCOs. I had plenty of Hispanics. And, again, as long as they could do the job, they were treated by both the enlisted and other officers just like anybody else. The engineer troops, we're very busy. As long as you keep engineer troops busy doing the jobs that they're trained to do - building, doing construction, acting as infantry when that happens, you don't have a problem with an engineer troop. The problem with an engineer troop is when you run out of things for that troop to do, and you don't keep him tired, he doesn't work eight to ten hours a day, then we have problems. But it wasn't a black-white thing in our unit.

DePue: Okay. This was a construction, not a combat engineer unit?

Jobe: We're going to get off in semantics in a minute. But, at this time, that unit was a construction battalion.

DePue: Okay, so it was construction.

Jobe: At that time it was a construction battalion with a secondary mission to fight as infantry when so required. So, we trained to do primarily construction, but we also played—didn't play, that's the wrong word—trained as infantry. We went to the rifle ranges, we went to the machine gun ranges, we went to the bazooka/rocket-launcher ranges. We trained to use all of the small unit arms that we had.

DePue: Well, from what I remember, an engineer always has a secondary skill of being infantry.

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: And I guess combat means that you're assigned to a combat organization and division someplace. You were assigned to the post?

Jobe: We were assigned to the eighteenth—no, let me back up a little bit. We were assigned to the 151st Engineer Group, which was a separate group. It was a core level group, in terms of the Army organization. But the second infantry division was also at Fort Benning, and at that time, and we could go help them whenever somebody said, "Go do that." But we were not assigned to the second division.

DePue: Okay. You were still at Fort Benning the night when the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: Talk a little bit about that.

Jobe: Okay. We were on a field training exercise. I have as a judge and evaluator a Korean War veteran, a World War II veteran, who is an O-3, a captain engineer, OCS [Officer Candidate School], fine individual. He was my evaluator. And, again, we were short one third of our folks. So on this field training exercise, we didn't have enough people to establish a 360-degree perimeter. So we put ourselves in the thicket, and we let the thicket cover one third of where we were. And while I was doing that, he kept saying to me, "Don't put your people out here so deep." He was sick that day, and he said, "I've been listening," and he's spent the day on the cot in headquarters. He said, "I've been listening to the radio, and there's something going on in Cuba, and I can't quite figure out what it is, but we've just pulled the dependents out of Cuba, and we've never ever, in my experience, pulled dependents out of a country and then not gone in. We're going to Cuba." I said, "Okay, that's interesting." So, you know, what do you want me to do? Well, about dark, we got the word. "Stop what you're doing, don't send any more coded messages. Transmit everything in the clear. Come back to the post. You're all restricted to the post, nobody goes home. "And you"—me, commander—"you leave right now. You bring the evaluator with you, and you come back to the group headquarters, okay?" So, we go back to the group headquarters, and we were told, "All right, what we want you to do, is, we want you to take your company, and you take one half of it, and you put it at Eglin Air Force Base. You take another half and you put it at Homestead Air Force Base—Tindel Air Force Base," they're next to each other.

DePue: Both in Florida?

Jobe: Both in Florida.

DePue: What was the second one?

Jobe: Homestead and Tindel.

DePue: Okay, not Eglin?

Jobe: Not Eglin. I said, "Okay, what happens?" "You go down there, and you're to build tent cities, and the Eighty-second's going into one, and the 101st is going into the

other. Okay? And they will, you know, you take your orders from the post engineer at both places. Right?" "When do we start?" "You start right now."

DePue: You haven't even been home yet?

Jobe: No. We're not going home for a while. "We want you to line your folks up, you get them to ready. They take everything they own. You load your ammunition, you load every piece of repair equipment that you've got, and you get ready to go before six o'clock in the morning. One of your platoons will be leaving before six o'clock. The other one will be leaving at ten. There will be a state police escort. You will not stop." And I said to my platoon leader, "Clear? Clear." That's what we want done, and that's what we did. And so, I've kind of been left, along with my first sergeant and a supply sergeant, and that was it. And what we were to do was, we were then going to convert that little group of cadre into another construction unit. And we were going to follow the infantry into Cuba. And, of course, it never happened. We never got to Cuba.

DePue: I misspoke at the beginning of this whole discussion. This would have been October of sixty-two.

Jobe: Yes, that's about right.

DePue: At what point in time do you even pick up the phone and talk to your wife about this?

Jobe: You don't.

DePue: Well, she must have told you about what she was thinking after you finally got back with her again.

Jobe: Well, you know, everybody knew what was going on. She was working on base. She was working at the Officer's Club. She was a secretary for the club officer. And we all knew what was going on. And we were all following this information on television. We saw what was going on at the presidential level. We pretty well figured out what was going to happen.

You know, and I had this happen. I had a number of the kids, the troops' parents call down and want to find out, "Where's my son?" And the answer is, the company clerk—I had a company clerk that stayed back too—would say to them, "I'm sorry, I can't answer that." And most of these people were World War II veterans. And they'd say, "Well, okay, can I talk to his platoon or the first sergeant?" "Well, okay, you can't talk to the platoon sergeant, you can't talk to the platoon leader; I'll let you talk to the first sergeant." The first sergeant would say, "I'm sorry, Sir, but I can't give you that information." "Well, could I talk to the Company Commander?" And my answer was, "All I can tell you is that your son is not here, and your son is safe. And beyond that, I can't tell you anything else." And, you know, we were very serious. We knew what we were getting into.

DePue: And as far as you're concerned, when all of this was going on, what did you think was going to be happening?

Jobe: I was afraid we were going to have a nuclear exchange. I was sure we were going to Cuba.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: I was positive and so were the rest of us. I mean, we knew. It was what we'd been training for. We were headed to Florida, and that was going to be the invasion route to Cuba. At that time we paid troops in cash. Me to you, as a troop, twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, one hundred dollars. All right, so we get to the end of the month, and somebody's got to pay the troops. So I wind up flying in a grasshopper – observation fixed wing aircraft –down to Tindel. Then I go down to Homestead, and I pay my troops in cash, and I come back. When I got to Tindel, at Tindel there were so many aircraft, they were parked wing tip to wing tip. It looked like the airfield was sinking due to the weight of the aircraft that was down there.

DePue: Every description aircraft?

Jobe: Every description aircraft you can imagine. Some of them blackbirds—no, there weren't any blackbirds there. We fly on down to Homestead. I get to Homestead, there's so much aircraft there that were taking off and landing, they won't let the Army observation aircraft that I'm in land on the main runway. We have to land on a taxi way because there's so much going on. And we did. And I paid the troops, checked with the post engineer, and did a couple other things, and everybody was satisfied with what was going on. Troops loved it. They were eating Air Force food, which was better than the Army food.

DePue: The 577th, from what you've told me before, I'm guessing it was part of the Eighteenth Airborne Corps. So who's the first to go if you're going to Cuba? It would be the Eighty-second and the 101st, and you guys would be the engineer support of that corps.

Jobe: That's correct. That's exactly what we were.

DePue: Did you find the motivation and a level of cooperation in your soldiers was different from before this happened?

Jobe: Oh, yes. This was not the daily routine. There was excitement, there was dedication, the guys were ready to do it. Nobody tried to get off the trucks on the way to Florida. One of my trucks ran over one of us old guys because he had his private car, he pulled out in front of him, the truck ran into it and there was a fender bender. The lights were turned on. We had a state police escort. The police basically pushed the car out of the way and kept the dump trucks going. The kids told me that as they were going through Florida, people were standing on the side of the road with flags waving and cheering.

DePue: Wow.

Jobe: They were ready.

DePue: What happened then, at the end, when you guys finally found out that it wasn't going to happen, and you stood down? Was it a gradual decompression?

Jobe: No. When it was all over, I think, the one platoon at Tindel stayed there for a while. No, it was the one at Homestead that stayed there for a while because we were helping support some missile battalions, batteries that were down there. And there was some concern that the Cubans might try to do something then with some aircraft coming over. The one from Tindel came on back, but the other one stayed down there for probably forty-five, sixty days. The return was anticlimactic. You know, we went back to doing our normal routine stuff, and it was not the same. And shortly thereafter I got orders for Korea.

DePue: Okay, I'm interested in once you finally do get together with your wife again, and she talks about it, was she going through what so many others did —hitting the grocery stores and loading up on supplies, or?

Jobe: Not too much, no. Again, we're on base at Benning. I don't think there was any great concern about it. You know, we had had practice drills. We knew where the bomb shelters were. We knew what buildings on post we had to go to, and I didn't see any panic on their part. It was, "This is part of it. We know this is part of it. I'm going to work every day in a, basically, in an Army office. And I understand what's going on, and I understand what the risks are."

DePue: How about when you finally had a chance to talk to your mother?

Jobe: My mom might have been dead by then. I forgot what year she died. She died before—no, no she was still alive. It's a couple of years later when she dies.

DePue: You don't recall?

Jobe: I don't recall any adverse reaction on her part. She had remarried then, too. And that was part of it. Probably some letters went back and forth. But she was glad that nobody got hurt, she was glad the way it ended. My mom was a pacifist of the first magnitude. She did not like violence of any type, anywhere.

DePue: Is that part because of her religious convictions?

Jobe: I don't, well that had something to do with it.

DePue: What were her.....

Jobe: She just really did not think war was necessary. That's the long and short of it. And she thought that we should be able to sit down and work out whatever the details

were. She did everything she could do to support the activities in World War II, she just really didn't understand why we had to have it.

DePue: Well, let's talk about going to Korea, then.

Jobe: Okay. I got orders for Korea, right? Wife's pregnant with the second daughter. I go to Korea in May of sixty-three. Second daughter is born in September of sixty-three. I go to Korea, and it is a shock.

DePue: This is an unaccompanied tour?

Jobe: This is an unaccompanied tour. All my tours in Korea are unaccompanied. Vietnam is, of course, unaccompanied. You know, I'd never been out of the United States. I'm basically a kid that grew up in southern Illinois - in a small town in southern Illinois. I'd been to college in a small town in Missouri. I've worked in small towns, southeastern Oklahoma. Fort Benning was Fort Benning, and I love Fort Benning. But none of that prepared me for the cultural shock in Korea sixty-three, sixty-four where we've got rice paddies and thatched roofs.

At the time, I was in ASCOM City, which is by Kimpo between Inchon and Seoul. We were still using Caribou in the rice paddies. We were burying our people sitting straight up. There are no trees. The country is denuded. You can see damage left over from the Korean War. I saw where the Forty-fourth Engineer Battalion landed on Kimpo—not Kimpo, at Inchon. I became the Commander of the Fifty-fourth Engineer Company. One of the things that happened was, we were required to recon our escape route to the south because if and when the North Koreans came across the DMZ [De-militarized zone], we were to go to Taejon.

DePue: Taejon's over here. We're looking at the map right now.

Jobe: Okay, here's Pusan, okay we were to go to Taegu. That's where we were to go. So, the headquarters company commander and I—I had the Fifty-fourth Engineer Company heavy maintenance—went from...

DePue: See here's Taejon.

Jobe: Here's Kimpo. We went from there to Seoul to Inchon. Which is I-n-c-h-o-n, as opposed to Uijongbu, to Chungju to Taejon, to Yong Dung to Kimchon, and Taegu. And that was our escape route. And then we came back a little different route. But, the purpose in doing that was to see what we would have to do to get over the then existing roads, what there was of them, from up there to down here. And that was very interesting because, again, I could see the impact of the Korean War.

DePue: So you're out and about in the Korean society more than the typical soldier would be?

Jobe: Yes, yes. We also had a Korean-American Friendship Council. And the purpose of that was to improve relations between the local Koreans and our unit, you know.

And we helped out by building orphanages, part time after the guys had worked. We helped out some schools, we met the mayor, you know, we did things like that. It was kind of like having a friendship council to the mayor of the city of Springfield. We also had to go up here. There was a missile battery up here at...

DePue: Kimpo?

Jobe: It's west of Kimpo. It's on this peninsula right there.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: And we did go to Munson, we did go to Uijongbu, and up to Camp Casey. And it was very educational, but at the end of the tour I was more than happy to go home. And I did not like Korea.

DePue: One year tour?

Jobe: It was a one-year tour.

DePue: Your impression of the Korean people?

Jobe: Hardworking. Very hard, hardest working people I've ever seen. Have a temper twice that of the Irish. They worked day and night. I mean, at that point in time, everything was pretty much manual. You know what an A-frame is?

DePue: Yeah, that's what they would—

Jobe: Put on their back. And it's like a shoulder harness made out of wood, but with the prongs sticking out here. And you could see furniture, like a cabinet, that's maybe six, eight, ten feet tall on the back of one of those. And you could see the guy's belongings up on top of that, and he's taking something he's made to market to try to sell it. Thatch roofs, tin shacks, vehicles. Well, the vehicles they had were vehicles that had been pulled out of our can points [cannibalization] and they had made them run.

I had a bunch of Korean nationals working for me. I had a Korean national secretary. I had on my desk a picture of my wife and my oldest daughter standing in front of our Chevy Two four-door sedan and the mechanics—the Korean national mechanics—would come by and say, after they got to know me, "Oh you're a very rich man because you have that car." I would say, "That car? That's a \$2,000 car, barely. It's the cheapest car I can buy." Well, yeah I do have a car, but that's not very rich.

We had huge problems with pilferage. At the time we didn't have vehicles that had turn signals on them. So we had to send a team down here someplace, to the south, and those guys would go to Seoul, and they got on a train, and they rode the train down here. And the guy that took them up there was driving. He put his hand out to signal a left turn in downtown Seoul at the train station. Came back in, he didn't

have his wedding ring, and he didn't have his watch because one of the slickyboys had gotten it away from him.

But while I was there, we did our job, which was to repair construction equipment. We broke it down to the frames, we rebuilt engines, we rebuilt transmissions, we rebuilt transits, we rebuilt generators. But President Kennedy was killed while I was there and we didn't know what was going on. No one gave us any guidance. No one said, "Okay we're going to mobilize, we're going to do whatever." But in my unit, what we did when we heard about it—7:30 in the morning, I'm taking a shower—we took our machine guns and we put them on the highest hill around us, and we put a squad of people up there, and a couple NCOs. Why? Well, we didn't know what else to do. And we all felt that that was the appropriate thing to do.

DePue: That there might be implications to him being assassinated and the North Koreans?

Jobe: Right, right. And, you know, by noon it was all over and everything was back to normal.

DePue: What were you being told, and what were the troops being told about the likelihood of war, and what the North Korean Army was like?

Jobe: We were told some very bad things about the brutality of the North Korean Army. We were prepared for an invasion. We thought it would happen. Or it was likely to happen. There were incidents in the DMZ at the time. Not often, but every once in a while. And, this recon to the south was taken very seriously because we had some heavy equipment that we needed to get down there, and some of those roads were one lane wide over a mountain. So we knew we were going to have problems getting down there.

DePue: (laughs) This isn't small equipment. It's not designed for Korean roads.

Jobe: No.

DePue: What unit were you assigned to then?

Jobe: I was the commanding officer of the Fifty-fourth Engineer Company.

DePue: Was that part of...

Jobe: It was part of the Engineer Depot.

DePue: So does that mean you were assigned to Eighth Army? Not one of the divisions?

Jobe: We were assigned Eighth Army.

DePue: Okay, which also implies that you're not that far forward.

Jobe: Well, we're thirty miles. We're just south of the Han River. The maintenance teams went up to the DMZ at that point in time. They went to Camp Casey; the Seventh Infantry Division was still there, the Cav Division was still there, and the Second was still there. So we had people that went up there to help repair their equipment.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: We, you know, we did go on the firing range. We did fire all of our weapons. We were not as prepared as I think most of us would have liked. But we were prepared.

DePue: Did you have any opportunity to see your work with the Korean Army?

Jobe: At that time, the Korean Army, no. Sixty percent of the unit was Korean of one type or another. Either Korean nationals or KATUSAs.

DePue: Okay. Korean nationals? So civilians?

Jobe: Civilians. Just like we're dressed now, in some cases. In other cases dressed like a mechanic would dress.

DePue: KATUSAs are Korean Augmentees To the United States Army.

Jobe: That's it.

DePue: And they are Korean soldiers but they're paid American pay scale? American Army pay scale?

Jobe: They're all university graduates, okay? They all speak English, some better than others. They saw this program as a way to get ahead in their society. Their pay is Korean, but it's higher than what the same person would get in the Korean Army.

DePue: And your experience working with these KATUSAs and the Korean civilians that were directly assigned to these units?

Jobe: Wonderful. You know, we might have lost some parts out the front door in somebody's pantaloons, or whatever you like to call it. But they knew where they were. They understood thoroughly what they were doing and why they were where they were, and they knew they were ready to defend their country. And the KATUSAs are super Koreans.

DePue: And from what you described before, Korea in early sixties is still in desperate economic shape.

Jobe: Terrible, terrible. One ball bearing that size—

DePue: About the size of a large marble, maybe?

Jobe: Yeah. Sold on the Korean black market will exceed the best pay that my Korean national mechanic will get for a year - the annual salary. And some folks, you

know, we had stories of other folks, of other units, losing two and half ton trucks. A complete truck, gone. It was parked on the side of the road, I went over to get something to drink, I came back, and it's gone. And it would become a bus. A Korean bus. It never happened to us, but we lost pilferage. I mean, it happened.

DePue: Made supply sergeants nervous I bet.

Jobe: Extremely nervous. Well, we never lost gas masks. But it was always the parts that could be used to make something in the Korean society. That was what was of interest.

DePue: And they could use practically anything to make something.

Jobe: Anything.

DePue: Okay let's move on here because I do want to spend quite a bit of time talking about Vietnam as well. You left Korea in what month?

Jobe: Okay, I leave Korea a year later. Sixty-four I go back to Rolla, I go back to school. I get a degree in civil engineering.

DePue: A master's degrees?

Jobe: Well, I was working on a master's degree, but Vietnam crops up.

DePue: So you were a civilian when you were doing this?

Jobe: No, I was on active duty. This was an Army program, you know, we have assignments officers that tell us what to do.

DePue: Sure.

Jobe: And they're our peers. But they're guided by people in deputy_chief of staff - operational personnel. I get a letter. It says, "We have selected some folks to go back to school at Army expense, full time, and you're one of them. Would you like to go back to school and get a master's degree?" I said, "Yes, please. I'd like to go to Purdue. Please don't send me back to Rolla."

DePue: (laughs) That was a mistake.

Jobe: I get orders for Rolla and it says, "We want you to get a degree in civil engineering, we want you to get it at Rolla. You've been accepted. Please report" such and such time, such and such date. So I did. And I get a second bachelor's in civil engineering construction management. That gets us to roughly December of sixty-five. I get a phone call that says, in December of sixty-five, "When will you graduate?" At Fort Benning there was an experimental unit when I was there. And that experimental unit became the first air cav [cavalry]. Helicopters and all that good stuff. Hamilton H. Howze was the guy behind that, three star. [general]

DePue: Now, you've mentioned before that the cav unit, the First Cav was still in Korea. So they came back to work on this?

Jobe: Well, this was the Eleventh Air Assault Unit. And when we move them from Fort Benning over to Vietnam, they become an air cav outfit.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: And they put that big horse shoulder patch on. Back to the December thing—I get a phone call from the assignments officer, and he says, "We've got to take you out of school early." I said, "Okay." "What degree can you get soonest?" So the answer is, "I can get a degree, a bachelor's degree in civil construction management and I can get it at the end of the month." He said, "Good." I said, "Okay, you're sending me to Vietnam." He said, "No, we're not doing that yet, but there's a buildup going on and we need you to come back to Belvoir." I said, "Okay, fine. When?" "January." I said, "Okay, I'll be there." So I got back to Fort Belvoir.

DePue: Fort Belvoir...

Jobe: Virginia.

DePue: And that is the head of the engineer school?

Jobe: That's the engineer school. At that time the engineer school split between Fort Leonard Wood and Belvoir. I go to Belvoir, I become the XO [executive officer] of the Second Battalion Engineer OCS, and I had a battalion there for six weeks between lieutenant colonels. After that I go to Vietnam. So for the year sixty-six I'm at Belvoir OCS, running the OCS battalion. Good deal. Working night and day.

DePue: And, again, this is the time when each one of the branches has their own separate officer candidate school.

Jobe: Yeah, correct. Correct.

DePue: I would imagine running that you have people's attention because they know where they're going.

Jobe: Yes, they did. They did.

DePue: The first four classes were all NCOs. Ex-NCOs, or somebody with a college degree, preferably an engineering degree, although we did have a lawyer or two. We were training them to become second lieutenants, and they knew they were going to Vietnam. And I knew I was going to take some of them to Vietnam, and I did. Those four classes, we knew so much about those four classes. We knew when the guy got up in the morning. We knew when he went to bed at night. We knew what his girlfriend's name was because we weren't taking any chances on those four guys not being able to—what's the right word here—starting to say work here, but not just work, but be terribly efficient in their job when they got to Vietnam

because we knew what was going to happen. And we put our reputations on the line for each one of those graduates from the first four classes. Unfortunately that meant we washed a bunch of people out, or washed them back to subsequent classes. That also meant that we attracted the attention of training that puts now training and doctrine command. And we had a visit from some folks down there that explained the rules of the game to us.

See, this was an OCS that was established from the ground up. We hadn't had an Engineer OCS since the Korean War. The rules were, "We are giving you a candidate who meets the requirements to become a second lieutenant, and your wash-out rate is higher than any other OCS in the entire Army. Would you please explain that to us?" And we did. And about two weeks later we were told that our goal was not to wash-out, I think it was something like twenty percent. If we washed out more than twenty percent than we would have another review, by name, of each one that was washed out as to why he was washed out. So the standards were relaxed a little bit. And by the same token, most of the guys who became second lieutenants and went to Vietnam did a super job. And some of them were outstanding.

DePue: What was your wife's attitude during all of this?

Jobe: Great. At this point in time she's fine with it. She's fine with the Army, she understands what's going on, she understands why we're doing what we're doing. We had a graduation every two weeks. At that graduation, she's got to be there with a gown on. It's formal, it's dress blues, and all that good stuff. She got tired of that. But other than that, she's fine. I wasn't the only person that went to Korea, I wasn't the only person that was going to Vietnam. She thoroughly understood what was going on because everybody around us was doing the same thing.

DePue: When did you ship over to Vietnam, then, Ken?

Jobe: January of sixty-seven. Right after Christmas.

DePue: And you flew then?

Jobe: Yes. I got on an airplane that from Cape Girardeau to St. Louis. I believe I wound up at—oh, I was in Sacramento. Whatever that Air Force base is there in Davis, [Travis AFB] and flew from there on over to Guam. Went to Clark Air Force Base, I think. That was in the Philippines. Then flew into Cam Ron Bay, no, I flew into Seoul.

DePue: Seoul?

Jobe: Seoul. The airport at Seoul. Ton Son Nhut.

DePue: Oh, you mean, Saigon.

Jobe: Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah. Saigon, yeah. Seoul is Korea.

DePue: And probably when you landed at Ton Son Nhut you realized, Boy, this is a lot different than Korea.

Jobe: It was, but it wasn't. The shock wasn't there. Vietnam and Korea sixty-three, sixty-four weren't all that different. They're two different societies, they're two different value systems, but the Koreans are a completely different folk from the South Koreans—the South Vietnamese, I mean, I'm sorry. The South Koreans are completely different from the Vietnamese.

DePue: What was it that struck you as being so different about the two?

Jobe: The Vietnamese, though they're passionate about things—you know, I subsequently became a company commander. I subsequently have a hundred local nationals in Vietnam working for me on a road, QL1, and doing manual labor on construction projects. I had the impression that the South Vietnamese were very passive, as opposed to the South Koreans who were not passive about anything. You know, I had the impression that what the South Vietnamese in the country—not Saigon. I don't know anything about Saigon. The South Vietnamese really wanted to be able to do, was they want to be able to get up in the morning, do their job, grow rice, feed their family, observe the sun go down at the end of the day, do the same thing the next day. And they don't care about the political system. The South Koreans are completely different. They care passionately about their government and about their system that they have working for them. And they're doing everything they can do to improve their country. That wasn't my experience with the South Vietnamese.

DePue: What was the unit you were assigned to then?

Jobe: Well, okay. I got into Ton Son Nhut, right? I spend a week, more or less, at the replacement battalion there and I get offered a job in Saigon working a MACV [Military Assistance Command - Vietnam] as a water supply expert. I declined. My reasoning is, I know that the 577th is over there, and I want C Company 577th again. Because, I figured, I know most of the NCOs there. I had it before, and I'd love to have it again.

DePue: By this time, you're fairly senior captain?

Jobe: I am a senior captain. I'm not a major yet, but I'm a senior captain. That argument goes on and on for two days, various levels of folks. They finally decided I was nuts: it was a plush job, you'll have an office, you'll live in Saigon, you'll be in a hotel, you don't have to go out in the boondocks. All you have to do is study geology and tell us where to do this, that, and the other. I said, "No thanks. I want C Company 577th." I kept saying that until finally somebody said, "Okay well, you go to Cam Rhan Bay. Get on a plane and go to Cam Rhan. You go down there, and you'll find the Eighteenth Engineer Brigade. They'll assign you to something. You can't have C Company 577th because they're down in the delta, and you can't get to that. Somebody else is down there." "Okay, that's fine." That gets repeated at the

brigade level. A day later, I get told, Okay get on a caribou, fly up to Qui Nhon, go see the Forty-fifth, I think it was, Group.

DePue: Fly to where?

Jobe: Qui Nhon. Qui Nhon is up the coast.

DePue: This map might be better, I don't know.

Jobe: Okay, here's Tuy Hoa, Qui Nhon is off this map. [page turns] Qui Nhon is right there. This road goes from An Khe over to Pleiku. Bad road, terrible road. A lot of people got killed on that road.

DePue: So, you're on the coast here?

Jobe: So, I'm on the coast here, and I go in to talk to the Forty-fifth Group Commander, and I tell him same thing. He says, "Okay, well, I can't give you C Company, but B Company is due to rotate out, we can give you B Company." I get on a helicopter and go to Tuy Hoa. I go to Tuy Hoa, I get B Company. (pause)

DePue: Again, we're looking at the map.

Jobe: We're looking at the map. Okay, the place where I am doesn't show up on this map. It's called Vung Ro Bay. V-u-n-g R-o.

DePue: How do you pronounce that again?

Jobe: Vung Ro.

DePue: Vung Ro. Just like it's spelled.

Jobe: We build a port there.

DePue: Now you're assigned to what unit?

Jobe: I'm a Commander of B Company of the 577th Engineer Battalion.

DePue: Which means that the 577th Engineers spread all over the country?

Jobe: Yes. Well, at that time, C Company was down here at Vung Tao, which is way south of Saigon.

DePue: In the delta area.

Jobe: In the delta area. There's a road, 7B, that runs from Tuy Hoa over here to Cheo Reo which leads to the Ia Drang Valley. We had one company there. We have a company up here, north of Tuy Hoa. Most of the battalion is at Tuy Hoa, right here. The Song Ba Thatch River shows on here, that's good. And I'm down here at Vung Ro. And I'm building a port. And the only thing else that's down there is - we've got

a civilian contractor. The DeLong Corporation is building the DeLong Pier. That, if you think back to Normandy, there were those spud barge piers that went out into.... Okay that's what went into—

DePue: Part of the Mulberry Harbor system.

Jobe: Right. And Colonel DeLong came back to the States and formed his own company, and he sold a bunch of the DeLong piers to us to install in Vietnam. He's got a crew over there installing those. What my company is doing is we're building a wharf made out of rock out to that particular DeLong pier. We're building some roads. We're putting in some pipelines. We installed some generators. And we're also providing our own security. We're located at the dividing line between the ROK [Republic of Korea] Army, Capital Division, and the Tiger Division.

DePue: Okay, now this takes some explanation. The ROK Army, these are South Korean soldiers—

Jobe: These are two divisions that were sent to Korea to help us in the effort against the Vietminh or VC [Viet Cong], or North Vietnamese. They, in this case, were providing security along route one, which parallels the sea up through here. Along the sea. So, I'm roughly right here, where that indentation is.

DePue: __Nha Trang

Jobe: Well, that's south of me, but I'm right there. And above me I have some Korean infantry from one of the divisions—forgot which one. And the other division was down the mountainside into the valley. They have an artillery battery down there. So, I'm back with the Koreans again, and it comes in handy, which we'll get to in a minute.

Anyhow, we build this port, we are doing it in the rain, we are short supplies, we don't have the dynamite we need, we don't have all the equipment we need, but we get it done. We have a monsoon season that's going on. We have 114 inches of rain in a ninety-day period. We are living in tents. We eventually get to the place where we build some south seas hut type things. Wood barracks. And we have some folks that don't like us being there. And occasionally we would get sniped at by the local VC force.

DePue: Small arms fire.

Jobe: Small arms fire. Nothing, you know, it's a rifle. We owned QL1 during the day, and at night QL1 is closed.

DePue: QL1?

Jobe: QL1. That's the main highway that goes up and down the coast of South Korea. Street without joy. [See *The Street Without Joy*, by Bernard Fall] So we closed these roads off at night, and if I have to go get supplies, if I have to send a unit up

to battalion headquarters at Tuy Hoa, we don't do it at night. When it gets dark, road's closed. The transportation unit that was there—I think they had three companies, it was part of the transportation battalion—were running deuce-and-a-half [two and a half ton trucks] and five ton trucks up to the air force base, and they were carrying bombs up there. And we had the occasion when a bomb fell off. A 250-pound bomb fell off one of the trucks. There was a Vietnamese railroad repair battalion in the area, and it was a political thing. And when it came time for the national elections, the railroad was being used to ferry people from this area south up to the province capitol, Tuy Hoa, to have a vote. And security was provided by South Vietnamese soldiers. Now, the VC didn't want those people going up there and voting. So that 250-pound bomb became what we're now calling IEDs.[improvised explosive devices]

DePue: Well, I'm sorry, but 250-pound bombs aren't supposed to be just casually dropping off of trucks in the first place.

Jobe: It happened. It happened. It shouldn't have happened, but it happened.

DePue: This was Americans who were transporting these?

Jobe: Yeah, this is Transportation Company U.S. Army. So, anyhow, the trains headed up there. The train is a GE locomotive, just like we use here. In front of it are two flat cars, and they're loaded with a 57 millimeter rifle on it, 50 caliber MG on it. There's some voters on it, and let's say, a company of infantry providing security. And they've got something similar at the rear. In between are passenger cars, and those passenger cars are filled with voters. When it gets through the pass and comes down into the valley, and turns to go this way at a destroyed train station, the VC blow up the locomotive. Everybody who was going to vote got off the train, got on busses, and headed back south, and never voted. And the problem was that those of us that run up and down QL1 everyday didn't catch that there was something that happened on the side of the road. We didn't catch that the IED was there. We were focused on other things. That's one of the things that happened.

DePue: Roughly what month would it have been?

Jobe: I'm saying this is the fall of sixty-seven.

DePue: Okay, and monsoon season was when?

Jobe: No, it couldn't have been the fall, it couldn't. No, this is the summer of sixty-seven, probably June of sixty-seven.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: The monsoon season, in that area, went from January to March. Something like that. Ask me another question.

DePue: You'd mentioned before, you were talking about the South Koreans being in the same area and pulling security on Highway 1.

Jobe: Highway 1. Okay, from Tuy Hoa over to Cheo Reo is Route Seven Bravo. There is a Special Forces camp about halfway between the two. Special Forces camp has an airfield there. We have been repairing the airfield off and on because it's got a spring in the middle of it. It's an old French airfield, and it has a crown longitudinally, as opposed to cross ways. So the Air Force guys, who at this time were flying caribous, didn't like landing in there. And their rules of engagement wouldn't let them do it. So, we had a company that went out there and repaired it, and fixed it all up. I get a radio call at two o'clock in the morning when I'm down here at Tuy Hoa. "We need your crane up here now." I said, "Man, it's two o'clock in the morning. I'm not bringing that crane up there, across the road at two o'clock in the morning. It's dark. Bad guys control that road, you know; I've got a problem. I've got to get through those two Korean roadblocks. I'm not bringing it up there. I'll bring it up there at sun-up at six o'clock in the morning." "Well, the convoy's leaving at six o'clock in the morning, and you've got to bring it up here." "I'm not doing it." "Okay. So, well, what's it going to take to get you to do it?" "Well, first off, I've got to talk to the S3." This was an NCO, and a good guy, and I really liked him. So, the S3, a major, gets on the line and he says the same thing. "I'm not doing it." He said, "Okay, what's it going to take?" Said, "I want to talk to the battalion commander. I'm not bringing it up there." He said, "Okay, why are you not bringing it up here?" "Number one, we've got a security problem. Number two, I need it down here. Number three, I don't have any way of replacing this, and you're wanting me to put up flood lights that I've absolutely got to have this crane for. I mean, you've been on my back to do this. I'm not bringing it up there." "Okay, well this is a direct order: you will bring it up there now. We'll get you another crane tomorrow. We'll bring you another crane down in two or three days. Okay, so send it up here." "Well, I'm not sending it up there. I'm going to bring it up myself." "Okay."

So, we drive back, we take it up there. We drive twenty kilometers blacked out, with those little cat eyes. This story is going to Korea now. I get to the road with the Korean roadblock, and it's two-thirty, three o'clock in the morning. Totally dark. I mean, we've been doing fifteen miles an hour. I've got a minimal force with me, because I don't want to attract a lot of attention.

DePue: You've got a couple jeeps and this huge 20 ton crane?

Jobe: I've got small arms, a couple jeeps with machine guns and radios, a twenty ton crane and a trailer behind it, and a three quarter ton behind me, maybe a deuce-and-a-half after that. I get to this road block, and I tell them, "annyeong haseyo" that's hello, how are you? You know, universal greeting.

DePue: Right.

Jobe: “Annyong haseyo”. I said, “Me American daiwae (captain). I must go through. Open up, move the gate, move the roadblock out of the way.” “No.” Then I wind up talking to, through the darkness now—and it’s a really dark night—to a Korean NCO. Same thing, he says, “No”. I say, “Okay, you find the battery commander, whose name I knew. Bring him down here. I must go through. Now, open it up.” And the answer back in English, broken, was kind of, “Well I can’t go wake up that battery commander. That captain won’t—no, I can’t do that.” I said, “Okay, then move the roadblock. If you don’t move the roadblock I am going to push it out of the way.” They moved it. There is some moral to why in 1964 I needed to learn to speak Korean. I didn’t really realize it at the time, but anyhow, we go through.

Everything works out fine, there’s no problem. I get my crane in a couple of days. We finish the construction, the DeLong pier works fine; there aren’t any problems with it. The DeLong Corporations pier works wonderful. We go through a hurricane. The hurricane blew part of what my work was, but it didn’t bother the pier at all. Then I’m told I’ve been a company commander as long as I can be allowed to be a company commander, and I’m now going to have to be a staff officer. And my answer is, I don’t want to be a staff officer. Well, they want you back in Saigon again. No, I don’t want to go to Saigon.

DePue: But you’re probably up for promotion?

Jobe: I’m getting close. I said, “I don’t want to do that. I really don’t want to do that.” “Well, they want you at Brigade.” “I do not want to go to Cam Rhan Bay. That is not my cup of tea. I’ll go start draping bananas down in Cam Rhan. They don’t do anything except push paper. I’m not ready for that. I don’t want to do that.” Okay, well, we’ll make you the S2, assistant S3 of this battalion. How’s that?” “That’d be wonderful.”

DePue: An engineer battalion?

Jobe: The engineer battalion, the same 5-7-7. So, I become the assistant to the S3, and in reality, I’m running the battalion on the day-to-day operations of what we’re doing. And that works out pretty good, we’re having a grand time, we’re doing our construction. We’re building them an airfield—a couple of them. We’re working on the QL1. We’re building the cantonment area. We’re helping one of the infantry divisions out from time to time. We’re building a hospital. Then, we get to the fall of sixty-seven, and I’m out on the airfield that we’re building, making sure that things are going right.

DePue: Where is this?

Jobe: This is at Phu Hiep. Phu Hiep Army Airfield. P-h-u H-i-e-p. And a C-130 [large cargo plane] lands. That’s an Air Force aircraft. And out of the back of it comes a captain with a jeep, and an NCO, and a trailer. And all the markings are obliterated. And he says to me, “We’re here.” “Well, that’s nice.” “Okay.” “No wait, we’re here.” I said, “Wonderful, I’m here too. I don’t know any—why are you here?” He said,

"You didn't know we were coming?" I said, "No. Didn't have the foggiest idea. Who are you?" "Well, I can't tell you. You're supposed to meet us here." "No, man. I'm building this airfield. I don't really know about what you're doing. I mean, you want to get on the airplane and fly back out that's fine with me, but who are you trying to find?" He says, "Well, aren't you with the area command? Don't you know we're coming? And aren't you supposed to meet us?" I said, "Look, why don't you get out of my airfield so I can continue construction. I really would appreciate it if you'd move that piece of trash out of here."

It turns out it's the 173rd Airborne Infantry. And they're going up this Seven Bravo, and they're going to sweep up in here, like they'd done a couple years before, and they're looking for the bad guys. And they do so. The rest of the brigade comes in. And I become the Eighteenth Engineer Brigade liaison officer to the 173rd. And they're out there, and they find a hospital area. They find NVA. They have a little...

DePue: I was going to say, my guess was this was an area that was more controlled by the NVA than by Viet Cong.

Jobe: Yes. At this point in time, yes. Two years before the reverse was true. So, then I spend thirty, forty-five days in the pre-Tet period assigned to the 577th, but I was physically working with the 173rd. And I go out on patrols with them. What happened is, the previous time they were up here, well, they looking for the bad guys, for one thing. But they left behind a reserve unit that had some other things to do, such as to secure the rice harvest for that area. And when they had been there two years before, there had been a short round that had destroyed some dikes. And the dikes were instrumental in getting water from the Song Ba Thatch River over to the rice paddies. And I coordinated with the local Civil Affairs Unit.

DePue: Song...

Jobe: Song Ba Thatch, so that river right there. Well, it's called Song Ba here, but it was really the Song Ba Thatch River.

DePue: Okay.

Jobe: So, we go out and we do a recon, and we find the area that's all messed up. And, of course, the locals want the 577 to go out there and repair the dikes. The problem is we can't get through the rice paddies with our equipment to do it because the French had built that using manual labor eons before. So we can't do that. We did some other things with them to help them out.

Then, that Special Forces camp had another engineer company out there working at the time, and they needed to come out. And their company commander was leaving, rotating back to the states, and I was asked to go out there and bring that company out with the 173rd acting as an escort. And so I did. Flew in, landed at the airfield, got out, talked to everybody, told them what's going on. Don't become the company, just bring them out. We did. Nobody got killed, nobody got hurt.

When that company went in two weeks before, month before, the 173rd didn't take the precautions that we took when we were going in, and well, we had a group of engineers up front on the road from our battalion, and they called back to the 173rd cav squadron, and said, "Hey man, there's some guys in black pajamas up here in a bunch of holes. And, you know, we're clearing the road, we're repairing the pot holes so we 173rd can come behind. But do you want us to engage them? Or what do you want us to do?" Cav squadron commander said something like, "We want you to get out of the way. You ash and trash guys get out of the way, we'll bring the cav squadron up there. We'll take care of them." That major was killed. The jeep he was in was blown up. We lost three people that day out of the 173rd. The jeep was burned beyond relief. The whole thing came to a screeching halt. It turned into a three, four-day exercise. And, it was not pleasant. But, coming out, coming out, we camped one night halfway out, and no problems. Nobody shot at us, nobody tried to stop us.

DePue: So, who was it that the Vietcong engaged? Was it the support troops?

Jobe: The cav squadron of the 173rd.

DePue: So, the major, what was his position?

Jobe: He was the commander of the cav squadron.

Pue: So, a young major in charge of the battalion, basically. Okay.

Jobe: And when we came back to Tuy Hoa, the locals were out at the edge of that city with young ladies, well dressed in the native garb, with flowers. They had thrown flowers out on the roadway. It was a political thing for us to drive over and go back to Tuy Hoa.

DePue: What was that all about?

Jobe: That was because this valley had been cleared again. And it was safe to go in and out of that area.

DePue: So, you think they were sincere in their—

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: Well, that leads to all kinds of questions. You've got the Vietcong in your area that are active. You've got these people who are, from all that you can tell, very supportive of what you're doing, and what the South Vietnamese government was doing. How did you try to sort all that out? Trying to understand what the war was about from their perspective, I guess?

Jobe: You know, I got asked that question. One of my troops asked me that question when I was in Vietnam—when I was company commander. That question and the second question, "What's going on in the big war? Are we winning? Are we losing?"

Are we advancing? Are we retreating? What's going on?" And the answer was, you know, "I know what the 577th are doing, and I know why we're doing and when we're doing it. But at this point in time, I'm concerned about big picture, and I don't have the foggiest idea what's going on in the big picture, because I'm living just like you, from day-to-day. I'm trying to get the job done that we were assigned."

As far as the locals were concerned, like I said earlier, I had about a hundred folks that were working for me, all males. They worked very hard because of some problems in Saigon, I think I owed them, at one point in time, 100,000 piastres, the whole group. Because there's some bureaucratic problems in Saigon, that payday, we didn't get paid. We didn't get their pay, so we couldn't pay them. It was another two, three weeks before we paid them. But, we were able to get the money to pay them. But that group continued to work without hesitation, for us, knowing that they'd missed a payday. And, you know, they need to feed their families and all that. And one of the guys was the translator, and I said, "Tell them I'm sorry, but, you know, something's happened in Saigon. I don't know what it is. We will get you paid eventually. If anybody's really hurting for money let me know, and we'll take care of them." But, the answer back was, "Well, you're good men, we trust you. We'll continue to work." And we employed them for another six months. And we paid them on time after that.

The translator eventually got to the place where he trusted me quite a bit. And he said, one day, "You know, half these guys are VC." And I said, "Oh, that's interesting. Tell me which half, and I will take care of them." And he said, "Oh no. I can't do that. If I do that, they will cockadoo me." I said, "What does cockadoo mean?" "It means make me smile from ear to ear. And my family." So we said, "Okay, that's fine. We won't press you any further on that one. We'll continue to work."

Now, here's the rest of that story. At some point they knew where all of our facilities were at Vung Ro at the port. I was told that during Tet—no, pre-Tet, so this would be fall of sixty-seven—that VC and some North Vietnamese went back and attacked the transportation units that we left at the port. And they, the transportation unit didn't do like we engineers did. They didn't put out a perimeter, they didn't put out guards, and they didn't "waste" some of their manpower on other than their main mission. So, they lost some folks killed in action because of that. Because the VC came back in there in the morning and attacked them. December of sixty-seven is relatively quiet.

DePue: Oops. Okay, sorry about that.

Jobe: Okay, we're now to December of sixty-seven. December of sixty-seven is relatively quiet. The holidays are coming up. Both sides kind of think that we're going to have a truce. We're moving towards January and Tet. And Tet was always a big thing in Vietnam. Bigger for the Vietnamese than in the US. And, I'm going home in January. That's my rotation date. I'm there a couple of weeks longer than what I should have been. I leave before Tet starts. But in the last

briefing to the battalion command group—they were held every Friday afternoon—I'm asked by a relatively new battalion commander when I'm briefing the intelligence report about all the camp fires that are up in the hills south of the Song Ba Thatch river, "What's going on with all those campfires?" I said, "We're getting this from infrared aerial reconnaissance Well, I've been here for a year. I've never seen this before. I don't know what's going on up there. But if we've got twelve people scattered around sixty, sixty-five, seventy, fifty—whatever the number is—of those campfires, there's something going on because that hasn't happened before." "What do you make of it?" I said, "What I make of it is, we're about to get hit. I think what I would do, if it were me, is I would go out to our fortifications that we've got around our perimeter, and I would intensify those fortifications. And, you know, we've had one-twenty-two millimeter rockets that have been fired north and south of us. It may be our turn. We need to increase the fortifications around our tents and our buildings. That's what I would do." Seventy-two hours later, I'm at home in Cape Girardeau. When I get to Cape Girardeau, I'm listening to the reports of Tet, and I'm seeing what's happening and I'm seeing what's going on up and down this coast. And I don't want to be at the Cape. I want to be back here.

But, the other thing that was of significance I, we fast forward to the year 1972. Well, Seven Bravo was used by the North Vietnamese to come down to split this area in half. And it's very emotional for me because that's my road and I'm watching it on TV and I can't stop it.

DePue: And 1972, of course, is the first major offensive, the United States Army is downsizing at that time, it's much more of a South Vietnamese show and the United States Air Force, and they attempted to take over at that time. Thought they could pull it off, and they almost did it, didn't they?

Jobe: Well, actually, '72 might be a—

DePue: Was it '75?

Jobe: '75. It's '75. And they did take over. I mean, I sat and watched reports from aircraft that were flying over there and it showed the North Vietnamese coming down from Pleiku, right down seven Bravo. Right down the Song Ba Thatch river to Tuy Hoa. It was very emotional. It still is.

DePue: Well, this is a good place to stop for now, and I do definitely want to be able to pick it up and some reflections, and go through the rest of your career quickly. But it's been excellent so far, so, more reason for continuing, I think.

(end of interview)

(second interview continues)

Interview with Ken Jobe
Interview # VRK-A-L-2007-024.02
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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Saturday, October 6, 2007. This is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I am here with Ken Jobe for part two of an interview. And Ken, I apologize, we're going to have to be a little bit brief tonight, since you and I both have to go to a dinner here pretty soon. But, I definitely wanted to have more opportunity to talk to you about your experiences.

Jobe: Sure.

DePue: I'm going to ask about your reflections on your service, especially in Vietnam. And maybe some comparisons with what you learned in Korea as well. After I got done with this yesterday, I was thinking about a comment that you'd made early on, where you said, you got out of college and your plan was—what was it you said?

Jobe: Well, I was going to be a mining engineer.

DePue: The best mining engineer that there was.

Jobe: Yes, that's true.

DePue: And, fast-forwarding a few years later to 1968, just seventy-two hours before Tet, and then getting back to Florida, I think it was, and hearing the news about the Tet offense had begun, beginning. You had no doubts about where you were supposed to be at that time.

Jobe: Correct.

DePue: And that was?

Jobe: Well, actually it was Cape Girardeau, Missouri, but I was supposed to be back in Tuy Hoa. I was supposed to be with the unit, the 577th and the 173rd. I wasn't supposed to be at home. I was supposed to be there for Tet.

DePue: So there was a big transformation between when you graduated and a few years later.

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: How did that happen?

Jobe: Well, good question. I think, in 1960, that attitude that you heard, reflected the attitude that was prevalent on the campus in Rolla. You know, we weren't raised on the campus at Rolla to be Army officers. We were raised to be civilian engineers. Our contribution to society was supposed to be engineering. Not military engineering, but civilian engineering. Very few of my graduating class stayed on active duty for twenty years. Mostly what happened was we went in for six months, and then we had the reserve at the time. Or we went in for two years, and then we had reserve time. And some of the folks did stay on for twenty years in the reserves. But mainly, it was we did our duty, and then we were going to make civilian life our career. We weren't guided towards being military officers.

DePue: But what happened to change that attitude?

Jobe: Oh, well I got to Fort Benning. And I absolutely enjoyed Fort Benning. To further explain the change, as a mining engineer, I'm making 350 bucks a month, which was a reasonably good salary for me. As an Army officer, my base salary as a second lieutenant was \$222.30. Forty-eight dollars also for subsistence, and there was a little bit of a housing allowance. But, you know, there was a drastic change there. I think what changed my attitude was, what I found at Fort Benning, what I saw, not only with the officers at Fort Benning, but a lot with the NCOs, and the dedication of the folks there to something that was bigger than just something that had a monetary orientation. And I wanted to be part of that. And at one point, there were eight of us that, while we were at Belvoir, we went to Kennedy's inauguration, and we heard what John Fitzgerald Kennedy had to say during his inaugural speech. And that was playing in the back of my mind. And that had a big impact on what I decided to do, ultimately with my life.

DePue: For some citizens, that idealism that was invited in Kennedy's speech later turned to cynicism by the time of the Vietnam War and following Kennedy's death,. How did you deal with all of that? With the way the American public was dealing with it?

Jobe: It was not pleasant. It was not pleasant at all. You know, when I came back from Vietnam, the contrast was, I remembered what happened when my uncles came back from World War II to a small town in southern Illinois. It was a very warm, proud reception. We had defeated the bad guys, everything was wonderful, there wasn't going to be any more war ever. Now, we come back from Vietnam, and I've been away for a year, and I had no idea what was going on when I landed in San

Francisco. And, you know, I witnessed some young folks say some things that weren't very nice to some troops who had come back. And the troops were spit upon—they were enlisted troops.

DePue: Do you remember the specific things that were said?

Jobe: Those troops were called baby killers. The folks there were very anti the Vietnam War. They were very much into the peace, love episode. That group of about ten or fifteen youngsters started to me, and I kind of stared them down, and they ran off and left me alone. But, even in southern Illinois, there was somewhat the same attitude. You know, southern Illinois has been a very patriotic area. It's contributed a lot of folks to the military. We had a draft and all of us my age saw that as part of our responsibility and part of our growing up. Contrast that when I came back from Vietnam, the attitude had changed. Folks were doing everything they could to avoid the draft. And lot of questions about—even from my brothers-in-law—what's going on in Vietnam. "Why are we there? It's the wrong place. What you're doing is wrong."

DePue: What did you tell them?

Jobe: Well, first off, you don't understand what's going on. Secondly, this is not World War I, where we had armies sort of lined up, you know, like this, moving back and forth across the country in a trench warfare type thing. They had envisioned that we would start from, say, Saigon, and move north to, say, Pleiku and we would capture territory, and we would keep that, and we would pacify the countryside, and we would keep going north. And that wasn't the way this was. This was really a war for the hearts and minds of the locals. Some of my brothers-in-law felt—and they were not veterans—felt that this was a waste of resources that could be spent better here in the United States. And we discussed it. We argued about it.

One of the questions I was asked was one of same ones you asked earlier, about "What did the average South Vietnamese want?" The average South Vietnamese I saw wanted the same thing you want. You want to go out and raise your crops, make some money on it. At the end of the day you want to contemplate the sunset, you want to enjoy life, you want to continue doing that. But, the overall political thing was not well understood.

DePue: And did that bother you a lot?

Jobe: It bothered me and several other people., I was home for maybe three weeks, and then we went back to Belvoir. Both of us that came back went through the advanced course at Belvoir. The first thing we saw was an armor outfit from Fort Meade sitting on the steps of the senate building with a machine gun emplacement during the riots that were going on in Washington D.C. That was not something we had expected. It was a period of turmoil and adjustment that was very difficult for the Army and those of us in it.

DePue: Did it cause you to doubt what you were doing? Or the mission?

Jobe: No, no. Not me. And not the folks that I was with in the advanced course. But we did have some Army officers and quite a few enlisted and some NCOs that left the Army. I can think of five who were very talented officers. Who would probably have, all five, made general officer. One left because he had different ambitions. He wanted to be involved in politics and wanted to be the governor in a state in the northeast. He never achieved that. Another one didn't want to go to Vietnam. He disagreed with the whole setup in Vietnam, disagreed with the philosophy behind it and didn't think it was something that we should be involved in. And, you know, from a theoretical standpoint he couldn't accept it. And when his seven years obligation was up, he immediately resigned, and he didn't go to Vietnam.

Another guy had been in Vietnam early as an advisor, and had been wounded, and didn't want to go back for that. The third person basically wanted to be a university prof. What we were doing in Vietnam was not in line with his desires, so he resigned too.

DePue: What did you think about the overall strategy the United States was pursuing? As I recall, Westmoreland was still there when you were doing—

Jobe: Westmoreland was there. On the ground, what I didn't understand and I think a lot of us didn't understand is, we assisted the full-time fighting troops. And they would go in and they would clear out an area, and they would be pulled out and we'd go someplace else. And then they'd pull out and go someplace else. Then eventually we could well come back to the first location and re-clear the area. It just seems to me, that the so called ink blot theory on how to control the South Vietnamese and how to win the territory really didn't work well. I thought we were short troops. I thought we needed more troops, more equipment. And certainly we had a lot of good technical things going on. We had, you know, the technology to do it, but I don't think we had enough troops. And I didn't particularly appreciate the ARVN as contrasted with the Korean soldiers that I'd had in South Korea.

DePue: Thank you.

Jobe: Okay, so what I kind of said was, my experience with the South Vietnamese soldiers was no where near as good at with the KATUSAs in South Korea.

DePue: The dedication wasn't there?

Jobe: There wasn't any dedication.

DePue: Which, I would think, would cause you to wonder if they're not dedicated, then they're not committed to victory, then they're—when you'd already said that many of them were actually Vietcong, or sympathizers.

Jobe: Right. Well, for example, we lost on the Song Ba Thatch River, we had a float bridge. And that float bridge was ours. And we, you know, we ran traffic over it, it was on QL1 again. We lost an NCO and I think three soldiers because they were out there guarding it at night. The real security was supposed to be from the local

forces that were in the village around it. And they were supposed to be preventing either the Vietcong, or the North Vietnamese from attacking that particular bridge. They didn't. And, in fact, they may have even aided the opposition in coming, guiding an advance to that. And we had those folks killed before we could get out to provide some additional security.

DePue: How do you explain the difference then, between the Koreans and the Vietnamese? And between how that played out tactically on the ground?

Jobe: Well, I think it was the commitment of the central government in both cases. I think in South Korea, there was a commitment to a democracy, and that went down to the province and local level. I didn't see that in South Vietnam.

DePue: How about the fellow soldiers and the NCOs you worked with, the Americans?

Jobe: In our case, we worked for the first six months; we were working twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We had one main shift, and then we had a maintenance shift, and our troops were well trained. They were doing the job they were trained for, and they were very good. And we were out in the boondocks. There was the drug scene reportedly, but we really didn't have that because of our location and because of the mission that we had going on. There wasn't the time in the barracks for the troops to basically have idle time. Engineer troops just don't have idle time. So, you know, I had an NCO that I thought a lot of. He was in a sister battalion at Fort Benning, but when he got to Vietnam he had some mental problems and we had to let him go from the Army. That was the only NCO that we had problems with in South Vietnam. And I think part of it, a good bit of it, was because that unit, the 577th, by and large, went to Vietnam as a unit. And it was the same unit that was at Fort Benning. Now, once we got to Vietnam, in order to set up the rotation cycle, we had some new folks that were filtered into it, and we started getting individual replacements, like me. That's a lesson learned. That's something we shouldn't do. We need to rotate complete units in and out. And there's some disadvantages to it, but for unit integrity and I think mission accomplishment it's better to do that.

DePue: So, reflecting back, you didn't have the discipline problems, the problems with racial tensions, the problems with drugs that so many other units seemed to be plagued with?

Jobe: No. Not in sixty-seven. The unit may have had some of that in sixty-eight when the construction missions slacked a little bit.

DePue: You stayed in contact pretty well with your wife while you were over there?

Jobe: Well, (laughs)— the contact was letters.

DePue: No phone calls?

Jobe: No, we couldn't. We weren't in position to do that.

DePue: How did she cope back in the states? Because she was seeing this on TV, or in the newspaper, and up front.

Jobe: Well, in her case, what we decided we would do is rather than having her stay at Belvoir, or Benning, she went to Cape Girardeau. She lived in Cape Girardeau. Her family was there. She had six sisters and two brothers, most of whom were someplace between there and St. Louis. So there was a support group for her. And, you know, she had some young kids who were going to school. She was focused on that. Mainly it was a stable environment, supported by family. There wasn't a problem like some of the families had, that we saw, that stayed at the post camps and stations without the support of an extended family.

DePue: Okay, now I'm going to ask you a really tough question. And in about one minute talk about the rest of your career. Just hit the highlights.

Jobe: All right. After Vietnam I came back, went to the advance course. That's not the way it's supposed to happen. You're supposed to go to the advanced course and then go be a company commander. Went through the advanced course, continued working on a master's degree. Became the majors' assignments officer for the engineer majors. Went to command staff college. Got finished with that. Went back to Fort Belvoir. Was on the engineer school staff in a liaison role between conceptual design and the school. Then, went bootstrap for a master's degree at GW. Finished that up and was headed to Cambodia. Had to go through a French language course, never quite got to Cambodia because they wanted—the Cambodes MAG [Military Advisory Group] wanted artillery rounds more than they wanted an engineer major.

DePue: This would have been about when?

Jobe: Seventy-four. Seventy-two to seventy-four. Command and Staff College was 1970, seventy-one. Belvoir would have been two years, so that would be seventy-three. Yeah, we're talking seventy-four. So, then I wind up in the basement of the pentagon in an outfit called DOMS, the Director of Military Support. It's a joint military unit involved in civil affairs, meaning quiet control and providing military support in the event of a natural disaster. Moved upstairs to the third floor and the assistant exec to the deputy chief of staff for operations and plans. I'm there three and half years. Go back to Korea as a commander of the Forty-fourth Engineer Battalion. I am there for a year. That's year seventy-eight. Then become the deputy team chief and occasionally the team chief for the chief of engineers, Inspector General. Duty station was in San Francisco, but it was assigned to the office in Washington D.C. Then I retire after that.

DePue: So, you spent a lot of time in Korea, that one year in Vietnam, a lot of time in Virginia.

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: Okay. We're going to finish with some, kind of, reflective questions for you. And I'm asking this question specific to Vietnam.

Jobe: Okay.

DePue: Do you think that your service there, the service of lots of Americans over there, has been justified, in retrospect.

Jobe: My answer to that is yes. Now, I know there's a lot of disagreement with that, but I think so. We learned a lot for the future of the Army and the modern volunteer Army, and how things should be, rather than how they were, as a result of Vietnam. And for society as a whole, we did what John Fitzgerald Kennedy said we should do. Maybe the results aren't quite what we wanted. And, you know, those of us who have been on active duty are the first to blame congress for not funding the effort in Vietnam that subsequently caused the thing to fail. But we might have been wrong in our strategy to start with.

DePue: You spent your career in the military, but how especially did your experiences in combat and in posts overseas, change your outlook? Change the way you think about things? Change you?

Jobe: I no longer have the violent temper that I once had. I have learned to be a lot more cautious and a lot more, I think, try to think things through and weigh the possible outcomes before I decide on a course of action.

DePue: Okay. What do you think Americans today should remember about the Vietnam War, in particular, that you'd want to tell them?

Jobe: Well, the group that we took over there in sixty-five and sixty-six was up until the time of the current Army, was the best-trained Army we've ever had. We were probably as dedicated as anyone ever had been, perhaps more. And unfortunately, when the support from society failed, or changed, we had problems in the Army. Serious problems with discipline, serious problems with mission accomplishment and serious problems with the organization.

DePue: Well, that might lead to the next question. Do you think the media played a role in that? What's your opinion about how the media covered that?

Jobe: Oh, well, you know, I never saw a reporter or media the entire time I was in Vietnam. Whatever our effort was, it was not reported. No one knows where Vung Ro is. Few people know where Tuy Hoa is. No one cares about Seven Bravo. Plei Mei they don't know about. Dak To, though it was a significant battle for the 173rd and the North Vietnamese, is known only by the folks who were there and those of us who supported it. So, I think that's my answer.

DePue: That there were stories that should have been told that weren't?

Jobe: Yes.

DePue: Okay. What advice would you give to future generations? This is kind of a broad, over reaching kind of a question.

Jobe: Right, understood. I think what happened was, when we got to—

DePue: There's a mission statement.

Jobe: All right. Ask me the question again.

DePue: What advice would you want to give to future generations?

Jobe: The advice is, look how we changed the Army, and from seventy-four to seventy-eight. We basically took the lessons that we learned in Vietnam and applied them to the new mission that we saw in the future. And that was done primarily at the headquarters DA level by folks who had on-the-ground experience in Vietnam. It was a very practical approach to how to fight wars.

DePue: Any final comments you'd like to make?

Jobe: Okay, yeah. This thing right here.

DePue: He's pointing at his unit crest.

Jobe: Okay, here's the story of the broken heart. How did we come up with this as a symbol for the Forty-fourth Engineer Battalion? This battalion was in World War II and deactivated at the end of World War II in forty-six. In forty-eight it's reactivated at Anniston, Alabama, Fort McClellan. No, at Bragg. It goes from Bragg to McClellan. Okay, they rebuild Fort McClellan. They know that something's going on. The Korean War breaks out. It goes from Fort McClellan over to Japan. It's getting ready to land at Inchon with MacArthur.

All of the unit markings are obliterated. The guys say, you know, we've heard about amphibious landings and the total chaos that takes place on the beach. We need to be able to quickly land, find our equipment and go do our job. How are going to do that? The S3, the assistant S3 says, You remember the headlines at Anniston, Alabama? How when we left, we broke all the hearts of those southern belles? What we're going to do is, we're going to put a broken heart on all of our equipment and all of our tool chests, so we'll be able to find everything very quickly. And it worked. And they did. And everyplace they went thereafter, every bridge that was built, every rock quarry that was established, every highway that we were involved in, every piece of vertical construction that happened had a broken heart on it. And there are bridges, to this day, that were built with the broken heart on it by the guys who were sitting in that room.

DePue: Well, I think that's an appropriate place to stop.

Jobe: Amen.

Ken Jobe

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DePue: Thank you very much, Ken.

Jobe: Thank you.

(end of interview)