

**John W Corcoran, Jr.  
Veteran**

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Interviewers**

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Rome Free Academy  
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**Q:** Hello my name is Matthew Thompson I'm doing the interview of John Corcoran a Vietnam veteran with the assistance of my camera woman Mandy Prosser. Its 12/19/02.

**Q:** Hello. I'm going to ask you a few questions. What year did you enlist?

**JC:** In 1965 early 1965.

**Q:** Did you enlist right here?

**JC:** No. I enlisted on Long Island Bay Shore New York

**Q:** Do you have any specific reason or...?

**JC:** I quit high school and wasn't going anywhere

**Q:** After you were enlisted, where were you stationed for boot camp.

**JC:** I went to Great Lakes, Illinois to boot camp basic training and I think it a tie in all stay was nine weeks but I kept us later me because they're looking for the volunteers for the drum corps and what they had to do was wait until they had enough men to form a cord so I think I was there 16 weeks.

**Q:** What was the name of the field, the camper?

**JC:** Well it's a Great Lakes Naval Training Center.

**Q:** The journey, the specific training for a special job or...

**JC:** When I was in an Navy? I was an aircraft mechanic, an A4 Skyhawks

**Q:** What was it like working [unclear]?

**JC:** It was a fairly simple plane. My work mostly concerned the maintenance and upkeep of the aircraft, refueling get ready for flight, recovered after flight and get everything ready for the next flight, on the aircraft counters and when they weren't on a carrier we did a squadron, it was a station at a home-based Naval Air Station first-rate at Norfolk Virginia then we went to Lemoore California and the purpose of that was more or less the training new pilots as they came in. It was the enlisted men stayed 2 squadron anywhere from two to three years, but the pilots rotated all the time we have I sure do one for, maybe a year and then they go on to either another squadron or another duty station, but the enlisted men was [unclear]. So that's what we did when we were ashore, we were training of pilots in that carrier landings. While we were ashore they flew out they usually had what they called carrier alteration, when the pilots go out, leave the base where we are at, they go out there landings and that we were usually ashore, it'd be three months and then back on the ship.

**Q:** When were you shipped off to Vietnam?

**JC:** 1966, January 66 I think.

**Q:** What was your arrival in Vietnam like?

**JC:** I was shipboard. We were ashore. The crew, we board the carrier which is [unclear], and San Diego then we steamed out and then the pilots will be aircraft at work, so we board the ship at San Diego and first stop was a Honolulu, we got weapons, bombs, a lot of the bombs on and all the look and he gave us a couple of days off in Japan, Yokosuka Japan and then to west Pacific, Gulf of Tonkin

**Q:** What kind of long engagements did you encounter in the Gulf of Tonkin?

**JC:** well what that because particular squadron I was with, was the a4 Skyhawk, which is an attack aircraft and it was a more or less of [unclear] small plane carried bombs it had two 20-millimeter cannons and it wasn't a fire like the larger planes that he had although one of our planes shot down and make, which was unusual because the make is the size of probably three times the size of the aircraft that we had at machine and we were mostly concerned with the bomb they had the guns and all self-defense for fights and things when we got into trouble. On that piece of paper I gave you, it has valid of the victories on the cruise I was on, and the combat losses my particular squadron has two of our planes were shot down and end up in that TOW camp never released in 70 or 72, 72 I think it was. The matter of fact, many commanding officer was shot down in my plane, the plane I was in charge of, it had a pretty rough time.

**Q:** What was it like serving on the USS Bonhomme Richard.

**JC:** It was like I say I was there on the flight deck and when we were in flight operation it was usually 12 to 14 hours a day depending night or day depending on the mission for that particular day, and my particular job was to get the aircraft ready for the launch, first launch of the day or evening. Strap [unclear] go over the pre-flight with him, strap means get him started and he taxied up to the catapults and he was rushed off the carrier on his mission, and depending on the mission, anywhere from a half an hour to 40 minutes later, they come back changed pilots refuel, reoil, chapter playing over, put another pilot in and another mission, and that was a constant cycle, take off, finishing mission and recovery, land, refuel, rearm and off you go. Then, does any repairs need to be done they would dig beyond a hangar deck which is one deck below the flight deck. So, it was [unclear] like I said I was on the flight desk, that's very dangerous and be on your toes, that's the hairy place you could get messed up seriously. I think I told the class when I was here earlier and we had a light night launch, I felt something hit me in the back of the head and ain't no attention to it, because you could be contemplations, that's you could be killed or get killed and what had happened is fella had walked into a tiny propeller and I think in the back of my head was a piece of the jaw and the only thing left of them that I could see as they went on with the launch was... I think it was his leg, and we also had fellows fall overboard just a depth of 90 feet off the water wanting to be covered the other fellow, that poor son of a gun and a bag of tie-down changed on his back which is about 90 pounds, so I think he went right to the bottom. So, you know you had to be on your toes and eyes and back your head because you can't hear anything plus we have the ear protectors on. Now look, now what they have just 30 or 35 years later they have what you talked as you can speak to the pilot, to the other crew, put earphones on. Then were just big ear muffs so in any of them were wearing [unclear] if you wanted to talk to somebody you had to scream it was more or less all hand signals between the air the ground with what's called a plane captain and the pilot, it was all hand signals, which was more or less standard like thumbs up, open flap, head to tail, see you later.

**Q:** Was the carrier that you run or even both of them me a USS BONHOMME RICHARD and the USS and others

**JC:** Yeah

**Q:** For the large carriers?

**JC:** The independence was a Forrestal clutch(?) carrier like I said it had four catapult [unclear], was built during World War two, and then only had two

catapults on the bow, the independence had four to here, to an angle, so they could launch twice as many aircraft in what they would do on the earlier ship I was on when they were doing the whole time launching, me cover at the same time you'd have in [unclear], the decks were like this, this was the bow, and this is what they call the angle and you could launch their craft off the bow on these two catapults here, and recover the others on this one here, and the idea was to the [unclear] and the aircraft had a hawk a tale of catch a wire under a wall. If they missed the wire, they just keep going then come around again, so that was unique, just before World War II, it came out with that design and I don't know what took them so long. Before that they just had a straight deck at that plane, Mr. Wire [unclear] and he goes can hit anything in its way and it happened quite often and another ideal thing I said earlier was they could launch and recovery at the same time.

**Q:** Let's say that they had a buddy system with a marine side of that but did you know any friends that came from Fisher or no?

**JC:** No, I think they had that system but it was only good for basic training, boot camp and that was it. I didn't know anybody that was, you know [unclear], as a matter of fact. And then and it was just individual as they might had that drawn, I though they did but I enlisted singly, you know, not by the group and no one else.

**Q:** Did you have any friends while you're there for your term sir?

**JC:** oh yeah sure, as matter of fact, I'm still in touch with one of these in state of Washington the last time I heard of them from and even trying to get a reunion together so they after 35 years matter of fact I was going to school in 1969 in New Jersey in the aircraft mechanic school and behold here's a couple hyper station, same squadron. Nick, we got together quite often, [unclear], but that wasn't planned he was from New Jersey so that's probably how I met him. That was interesting. I have a few lose touch.

**Q:** That was a pleasant

**JC:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Q:** How many terms did you serve?

**JC:** One because that what they had and that was the one I was 17. Back then what they had it's called a minority enlisting. If you were under 18 you would be return, the enlist will be expired when you turn 21, so when I was just 17 when I enlisted, I was released from active duty and we'll get this charge until total six years, but I was release from active duty on my 21st birthday, then I used the GI

Bill I finished high school in an 80 and went to school in New Jersey, and then finished 928 from MV here, so that was the GI Bill and you know, that time you didn't have to put into it, which is guaranteed, of course important as much, but I suppose the budgets the way they are the veterans administration, but I think these days it's even better, because they match what you put into it.

**Q:** What was it like when you found out that your terms are up, your tours are up and you go home?

**JC:** I thought it was dating. I was just can't wait, can't wait to get out in hindsight, just they have been retired. Would I retire I was 37, 20 years? Then go to work like a lot of [unclear] being wrong here at the air force base, you see a lot of that fellas retire, then like I said, then go to work.

**Q:** So, you're released not discharged?

**JC:** Yeah, [unclear] after the total of six years and all tour would be four years active and two years inactive, it's a matter in within those two years you could be recalled so that's determining what was a total of six years.

**Q:** Did you have any surly?

**JC:** Oh yeah sure. Not in Vietnam, not the country. We were going to Japan, in the Philippines, the Philippines, Subic Bay was a naval station there and looked about if it was a Clark Air Force Base, was in the Philippines. And like I said Subic Bay was a bustling little the city and we stay out maybe 45, 50 days come in and replenish, and we're going to ship weapons reload and we be in port maybe, three or four days, and then go out again. We also visited Hong Kong [unclear], with Australia but something, something came up changing orders, only know what it was. It was the [unclear] caught fire while we were there. It was supposed to be all relief, and so we had to stay over. Still comes up disaster, source and things he can have fire on a ship, especially on an aircraft carrier when the bombs and missiles as matter of fact, missiles set the fire off so that's why we were delay, that's probably why we didn't get to go to Australia. We went to Hong Kong, Philippines, Hawaii, Japan [unclear] on the way over and then on our back, we went from Japan on the way back, back to Hawaii and then back to San Diego and then they sent us this [unclear], back to the east coast back to Norfolk where we came from and we were on independence as soon as we wanted to sign the independence. We were once on a Mediterranean cruise. I was on that cruise for four months and then we'll be back to the state to be separated. On the Mediterranean, we visited Spain, Italy, Greece. That was about it, and then I was flew off the carrier, that was the interesting to Spain, then from Spain he flew

across the Atlantic to New Finland, in Oakland, they flew us to Philadelphia, which is ironic. That was my first duty station and my last, and that's why, you know, they mustered out he's from active duty Philadelphia.

**Q:** How'd your family reacted when you got home?

**JC:** How I should. Great, it was great I'd see family. While I was on active duty, my folks moved to Rome my dad went to work with the [unclear], and so he and mom and my two brothers came to wrong while I was in the Navy I [unclear] online now so it was a joyous, joyous occasion plus the conflict was still going on and on 'till 1972 or 1973 I think it was. So, I used to watch it every night on TV. Like I said in the questionnaire there. I saw my commanding officer being released from the field of which you can watch it on TV. He retired as a [unclear], he was a commander when he was shot then retired as an [unclear]. Hey great to be back.

**Q:** What it all mean for you? I mean the experience.

**JC:** Not the time when I enlisted. Who heard of Vietnam? I never heard it. From boot camp to Philadelphia, it's the lender, in Philadelphia to Mississippi, and they had ordered this squadron attack squadron 76. Where is that? It is Vietnam. Oh, I'm going to Vietnam. At last I did the squadron at that time, like I said was in California, I met the squadron then from there we went out their ships but who know. I certainly didn't have heard of the place, because it hasn't really started to build up you know, didn't have that many shoes in country at that time, and it started to get, you know, heavy more, but then I learned, you know, coming to the Pacific. And was funny that I put in, when you finish your basic training, they asked you where you'd like to go, you know, east coast, west coast. It was like to be stationed, so I put in east coast [unclear] New Jersey or maybe Virginia. They got the Far East coast, yeah. It is Pacific, that's what they call them Westpac cruise, that Pacific cruises, so it was an enlightening. I grew up a little quick from a 17 year old kid. I was as I was 19 when I was over there, not unlike a lot of fellows in my generation. 19 was the average age. Lessons can be learned.

**Q:** Would you do it again or no? Just do the whole training and going through all the different countries and...

**JC:** Sure. Like I said, in hindsight, I would have stayed in, and they would have given me thousand dollars reenlisted bonus. Hey I got three of that in my pocket I would just [unclear]. But in hindsight, I'm sure you've heard everyone in the state. It would be knowledge it it's a [unclear], especially these days the opportunities that they have and the different fields, and like I said 20 years,

maybe 30 that would have been 37, retired had been half about my basic pay depending on how far up, the higher I went. Yeah was an experience that I don't regret not one bit.