John Walker Bligh, Jr.
Narrator

Michael Russert
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Interviewers
NYS Military Museum and Veterans Research Center
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John Bligh	**JB**
Michael Russert	**MR**
Wayne Clark	**WC**

MR: This is an interview at the Embassy Suites Hotel, Syracuse, New York. It is the 3rd of May 2007 at approximately 10:15 a.m. The interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clark. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

JB: John Walker Bligh, Jr., August 22, 1936, [unclear], New York.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering military service?

JB: High school.

MR: Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

JB: A little bit of both. I originally volunteered in order to get the GI Bill, but after some conversations with the recruiter, or sweet talking with the recruiter if you will, I decided to enlist.

MR: Did you have a choice of service at the time?

JB: Yes.

MR: Why did you select the Army?

JB: Because it was a three-year as opposed to four-year option.

MR: Where did you enlist?

JB: At Syracuse.

MR: And where did you go for basic?

JB: Fort Dix.

MR: How long was your training, and what was it like?

JB: Ten weeks. It seemed to be difficult. The cadre were all veterans of the Korean war; some admitted a little bit of a bias that those of us who were recruits were getting the benefits of the cave mill? from which they actually fought, but it wasn't serious. It was good training.

MR: Did you get any special training after that?

JB: Oh yes. After that I was sent to ASA headquarters at Fort Devens, Massachusetts for further testing, and again, the OCS test which I passed but declined. And then on to the city of Monterey in California for 54 weeks of Korean language.

MR: Did you find that difficult?

JB: Oh yes. It was difficult because it was different. It was also a setting whereby, the Army at the time, we were not grouped according to language aptitude. The aptitude tests were basically what we did at Fort Devens. In Army fashion, you had NCOs and enlisted people, and the NCOs were allowed to opt for the language school when they reenlisted, without aptitude tests. So you could never go faster than the slowest member of the group. If you were in the right group, some people moved faster than others, but we all got out with the translator--

MR: Who were the instructors?

JB: The instructors were all Korean. Still are. Koreans had a reunion there two years ago. Korean is still the second largest language group taught at Monterey.

WC: Did you learn to read and write the language too, or just speak it?

JB: Yes. Concentration was on speaking because we were going to do voice intercept; that was the basic MOS. But Korean has a simpler form of the written language. The traditional language was Chinese characters; we got some exposure to that, but most of us were never very good at that—I wasn't. The King in the 14th century in Korea decided that the populace was unable to write the language because it was so complicated with the characters, and had developed a simpler form. It looks complicated to the Western eye, but unlike the ideographs which Chinese uses, it has consistent sounds. The Virginia Tech shooter, Cho Seung-Hui, I could easily write. The characters in Chinese, I doubt that I could.

MR: Did you go right from the Presidio to Korea?

JB: Via Fort Lewis, Washington, then shipped to Yokohama, and from there by plane. There was some additional training, OJT really, with the tapes that had been picked up from the North Koreans by our colleagues, and we listened to those in a theater underground. It

was called Camp Oji for the name of the part of Tokyo in which it was located. The ship over was, for most people, the first seagoing expedition they had. I was lucky—I had fantail duty and the man overboard watch, so I got a lot of fresh air. Of course, we got ahead of schedule, so they had to have a man overboard drill, circling around Yokohama Harbor for a while doing that. Some of the people, of course, got pretty seasick.

Also, I have a little anecdote. The Army, in those days, would have a pile like this (gestures a large stack) of all the papers and orders. They misspelled my name when we left Monterey, so when I got to Fort Lewis, they started calling off names to get on ship. When they got all done, out of about two thousand guys, I was the only one standing on this big tarmac. So somebody came over from the line and asked what the hell I was doing there. I said, "Well, nobody's called my name." But they had put--instead of Bligh—Sligh; of course, the serial number and everything was correct, so they changed the top copy. When we got to Yokohama it was the same thing over again, and also on the ship because they did it alphabetically and I wound up with people whose names started with R and S instead of B's. And also in Tokyo I didn't get paid, and didn't get any mail for weeks because of that same slip-up. Everyone just corrected the top copy and forgot to look below so they passed on the copies with the misspelling. They finally straightened that out, and it was quite nice to get a lump sum of pay, although I would have enjoyed Tokyo more if I'd had money at the beginning. Anyway, I was there over the summer in 1956, and we moved on to Korea by plane.

MR: When did you arrive in Korea?

JB: August 1956.

MR: And how long did you stay there?

JB: Until October 30th or 31st—I can't remember-- of 1957.

MR: Now where were you assigned?

JB: On the DMZ.

MR: And what was life like where you were?

JB: Once you got used to the idea of where you were, it was fun. Certainly in my view, and substantiated in reunions we've had, over the assignments people got for themselves. The irony was that if you weren't very good at Korean in Japan when they tested you or you did the OJT, you got to stay in Japan, so the incentive was wrong. If you were a certain level—and there were a couple of the guys who were very good—they stayed in Yong Dong Po, near Seoul, but that was a much more military setting. We were up on the DMZ, there was a second lieutenant platoon leader who did not speak Korean, he really didn't know what we were doing as long as we did it well. Life got pretty casual by military standards. I don't mean we didn't do the job, it's just that there wasn't a whole lot of rank to run around saluting anyway. Life was good. We had a standing mess hall, which… there were some even smaller units. We fluctuated in size from about 13 people doing voice intercept up to 22, operating three sites. When we got down to 13, you were on duty quite a lot. Anyway the smaller units would come in, so that we were able to support a mess hall with one enlisted cook title, although he didn't really do much cooking—Korean help did that—and with a motor pool, and from there we went to three different sites up closer on the DMZ to do the voice intercept. There were also a couple of Chinese linguists assigned to us.

MR: Were you in bunkers when you were assigned there?

JB: We were in bunkers. They had K1, K2 and K3 were the numbers because of the language, although K3 actually did both Korean and Chinese intercept. And we rotated around, although you kind of adopted one as home. One of them was on the 24th Division Compound, and the 24th Regiment, and that was really just a hut

truck built into the side of a hill because you had all this US military around. The other two were camouflaged bunkers.

MR: Did you carry weapons at all?

JB: Oh yeah. We were issued either carbines or M1s. Most of us traded, or somehow acquired grease guns, considering where we were, which was a lot better. Frankly, we all realized that we might be the first to see anybody coming. We'd be the first to get run over by them, too.

MR: You were in an ASA unit; what does that mean?

JB: Army Security Agency. It no longer exists since the 1970s. It had been called Communications Reconnaissance; just before we got there they changed the designation to ASA.

WC: Did you operate radios at all?

JB: Yes.

MR: What was your standing mission, basically?

JB: Voice intercept. There were Koreans called CMS's, Critical Military Specialists, and as native speakers they were better at the language than we were. We had a series of radios with different capabilities, all battery powered: so we would sort of hop… one radio would work, and then another. There was always a GI in the bunker, and almost always a native speaker of either the Chinese or the Korean language. The radios weren't very good, to be honest. It was World War II stuff—almost everything we had was World War II stuff. As I understood it, the terms of the Korean truce meant that we could maintain the equipment we had but not bring in new, because the other side broke down all the time. So I think we eventually scrapped that and did bring in some new trucks. After years of use there was a lot of breakdown; the same was true of the radios, although we were able to get new batteries for them. And we did

have one radio repairman assigned to the unit, also an ASA man. We had a mechanic who was a linguist but somehow knew about vehicles so he opted to do that, which was necessary because none of the sites were within walking distance, they were all five or six miles at least and quite steep.

WC: Did you ever receive any messages that caused the unit to be put on alert?

JB: (Nods yes) Put on alert a couple of times. It wasn't so much the messages received as the ones you didn't. If the mess went silent, then everybody got worried. Mostly we were doing low level voice intercept, so we could pick up unit activity and artillery drills, and so forth. Many of those, I don't think they had the ammunition, they just drilled without, the North Koreans. The Chinese were a little better equipped. But the alerts came when… we wrote down everything we got. Because we were close to the DMZ, it could only be called confidential classification. We then took it down by courier further south, and as it got further down south it picked up classification, so eventually it became top secret stuff. But whenever we didn't, our papers were blank or near blank, then people higher up the chain of command seemed to get worried, and there were a couple of alerts, presumably based on that—that was our guess on those.

MR: Was there ever any fire across the DMZ?

JB: Yes, there was. Not while I was in it, but one of the hut trucks. We also did—I should mention—occasionally we'd take a hut truck out and go to sites that weren't permanent, just to see if we should move the site or perhaps even establish a new one.

WC: What did hut trucks stand for?

JB: Hut trucks were like a box that sat on the back of a deuce-and-a-half truck, and they had radio capability.

MR: Like a portable trailer, but on the truck?

JB: Yeah. One of our bunkers was one of those; it was just set into the ground, the one that was in the 24th Division area. People would listen, and one of those took a few rounds, presumably from the other side of the DMZ. Nobody got hurt, it just splintered some of the wood. There was no secret, because these things had such long antennas, that if you hid below the crown of a hill, if the other guys were watching, they could see the antenna. So one colleague said when he crept up to the top of the hill to look over, somebody waved at him. I don't know—he seemed to be telling the truth.

MR: You mentioned about your winter conditions, they weren't very good?

JB: Well, winter was pretty darn cold. There's only about 30 miles difference between where we were and Seoul, but the 30 miles made a big difference in terms of the Siberian effect on the climate. Seoul had what I'd call a Washington, DC-type climate, hot and muggy, and then chilly but not so bad. It was cold, and I've always wondered how guys fought in that war the way they did. We had Quonset huts fueled by diesel camp stoves, but the diesel was so diluted by theft along the way that by the time it got to us, it had a lot of water in it and it would freeze. So one of the duties of the man on guard was to go around and bend the hose that ran from this 55 gallon drum of diesel into the tent stove. Even then it didn't always work. I woke up one morning and opened the tent stove and there was ice in the bottom of it. It might have gone out during the night. As the diesel was stolen off, they would add water to keep the levels up, so by the time we got it—

MR: Who was doing that, the Koreans?

JB: We assumed. There was quite a black market going on. You didn't want to park a truck and leave it further south because you'd came back and it would be sitting there, but there wouldn't be any wheels. It was quite hectic. And the same was true of supplies. We

were on a replacement regime; and we were supposed to be able, if something wore out, to turn them in. If you were the right size, that sort of worked, but one of our friends who was, as he described himself, vertically challenged, a small man, he could never get anything because everything he wore was the size Koreans wanted. The only way he could get it was to go to the off-limits black market store and buy it. It was particularly true of shoes and boots. Combat boots were beloved by everybody who didn't have them, and getting those replaced…. My feet were big enough that it wasn't really a problem, but for some it really was.

Anyway, the winter could be miserable, and also because we had to climb rather steep hills to get to the bunkers. In winter in the rainy season you couldn't always make it, so you had to hike up. Of course, you carried food and everything, so the packs could be quite heavy. It wasn't all that burdensome, but it was cold. The bunkers, because they were covered with sandbags, and as long as the tent stoves worked, they were too hot. The local employees, the Chinese and Koreans, loved to cook, so they would always keep the stoves going even in the summertime. The GIs were happy to eat something that was cold, a sandwich from the mess hall, but they wanted to get everything fried up in chopstick size.

MR: Did you eat local food?

JB: Yes. I actually learned to like kimchi quite a bit, and a lot of people don't. I still buy it. One of my sons, he's never been assigned to Korea, but he, strangely, was born there and the Marines send him back once in a while. He loved it. And of course, rice. There was one village that was closest to us but was much nearer the DMZ—walking distance but closer than we were. You could go there with families and some people went to play cards and gamble, because the Koreans seemed to be inveterate gamblers. And you would eat the local food. Rice, particularly. They didn't have a lot. They would eat what they had, which was kimchi, rice, and occasionally, I guess, they had some egg. Further south there was a village with more substance, with a tea room.

MR: So you had some close relationships with the local people?

JB: Yes and no. The close relationships were basically with people who worked for us. Right across the road from us we were—I don't know how familiar you are with the Korean geography, but we were on what was called the Choksong Peninsula, which really was where the Imjin River took a bend, and across the road from us was Gloucester Hill, where the British Gloucester regiment, during one of the Chinese spring offensives got chewed up pretty badly. Anyway, it's written up in a lot of histories, and the Gloucester regiment I believe, had a number of US decorations because of that action. So we had a Korean military unit across the road from us, but it was an area where civilians were banned by then-president Syng-man Rhee. The one village that I mentioned where most of our local employees lived was an exception. Most of the villages, the civilian population was further south of us. We adopted an orphan and he lived there and we took care of him. Some people are still in contact with him.

MR: Is he still in Korea?

JB: He came to the US but went back. I think he came here to study.

MR: You said there was a British unit near you?

JB: Sussex regiment. In one of the pictures you'll see they had a beer hall, and we could get whiskey, and they couldn't. We had a little club which, to be honest, was unauthorized because we weren't big enough to have one. But they'd always find someone who took sympathy with us… Anyhow, we had a club with various kinds of whiskey. Some of them would come over, and we would go over there. They had beer, mostly Japanese or Hong Kong. They had a very nice sign that said "Tavern," and we decided one night that we wanted it. So we went over and toasted the queen, and they would toast Eisenhower, while others of us were outside doing this—I was in the inside with the beer—were outside digging the sign up. Which turned out to have a cement base and was quite heavy, it loaded

down the ¾ ton. But we installed it in front of our club and when some of them came over—there were also Australians and Kiwis (New Zealanders) there—they said, "Aha, it was you guys. We knew who it was." (Laughs) They never tried to take it back. Yeah, the guys were with the Sussex regiment.

MR: Were they a listening station also, or were they security…..?

JB: No, that was an infantry unit; they were geographically between us and the first unit of the 24th Division. Facing north to our right would have been the 28th ROK Division. And there was also a Turkish regiment sort of sandwiched just below that. We all got our water at the same point, and the road wasn't big enough for the American deuce-and-a-half pulling a water trailer and the British Bedford to pass, so we'd have a little game of chicken there out on the road, for the vehicle who was going to force who to get over. Usually they did. Once one didn't and we lost the side mirror of the deuce-and-a half… But after basically the first year in Korea, I became what you'd call not exactly platoon sergeant, because we didn't have any, but I took care of the motor pool and assigned other things. So basically I came out of the bunkers, and still I went in on spot duty, but I oversaw the compound. We had a little orderly, and we kind of had an office, the two of us, while he was assembling the traffic to be taken south by courier, and I had a desk, not really an office. Toward the end I thought that I'd wanted to get back, so I went back into the bunker and started doing more of the voice intercept. It was a little boring.

The advantage of being a dispatcher was whenever a vehicle was needed to go hunting, I'd dispatch myself a vehicle. That was my big pastime there, pheasant hunting, and I taught it to a number of boys from the south who had never even seen a pheasant. So I got them to learn to appreciate the sport. And we all had dogs. We had more dogs than we had GIs. There was no way of keeping them from reproducing, basically. The only thing that kept down the number was that the Koreans traditionally eat dog at certain times of the year,

so dogs would go missing and we assumed it was the Korean soldiers across the road that, you know….

MR: What other things did you do for entertainment besides pheasant hunting?

JB: Well, we read a lot because it was one of the things to do. Power, at first, was only on eight hours a day. Eventually we got it up so that we had three generators which nominally ran for eight hours each. They didn't usually work all that well at once, but it got to the point where we always had two going. That was one of the jobs of the mechanic, to keep the generators going. So we read a lot. Actually, we heard a lot of records because we could get these relatively inexpensive record players. *My Fair Lady* was out on record—

MR: How did you get the records and the books?

JB: There were PX's. There were two, one in Uijeongbu, which was 25 miles further south and one in Moon Son Nee [? phonetic], which was where the 24th division main compound was. I only got to the one in Uijeongbu once, and the one in Moon Son Nee, I think twice. If you took a courier run down to Uijeongbu with our traffic you usually got to do a lot of shopping for other people. So that was where we got those, and you had to rely on other people's taste. Or people sent them by APO from home.

Wintertime was the time to do that because we couldn't do much outside except, well, I could go hunting, and then it was actually safer because if there were still mines around, the ground was frozen. But there were a whole lot of areas that were marked with the Mines signs. Doesn't mean there were mines there, it just meant that they just hadn't been checked out. Occasionally we'd see them. I don't want to say I stumbled across because fortunately I didn't—but it was an antitank mine, I was told later. Some people found, I think the Chinese word for it was a toe mine, it was a small Chinese mine, why they dug it up I have no idea. They brought it into the orderly

room and we told them to get it the hell out of there. Fortunately it didn't explode. I could never understand how they could have done that. Anyway, they did.

WC: Did you get to see any USO shows at all while you were there?

JB: No. We had a couple visits from the Donut Dollies, they came up. They liked to come to our place because nobody was hustling them and they could get a drink in our club. It wasn't an easy trip for them, they came from Seoul, so it was a day trip with the roads being like they were, the [unclear] ride very rough.

WC: Now, by Donut Dolly, were they Red Cross girls?

JB: Yes.

MR: I guess I didn't ask you how much time did you work, and how much time did you have off, what was your schedule like?

JB: The rule was that you were supposed to always have 16 hours off between shifts. It didn't always work. We got down to just 13 people doing intercept at three sites, and they just didn't work. And sometimes you would stay up in the bunker because they just couldn't get up to you to relieve you, because it was either too rainy or too slippery with the snow. But the nominal was eight on, at least sixteen off, and the target was to get twenty-four off. Sometimes we would double up so that you'd get a weekend. We weren't all assigned at the same time. Two or there would come in, and when it was time for those people to leave—the Chinese in particular, who were better paid than the Koreans--would have a dinner down in Seoul at the Chosun Hotel. So people would either double up or somehow accommodate so the two or three who were leaving would be able to go down to Seoul for the weekend. And then there was R&R to Japan that came up. I never went….

MR: So you stayed in Korea the whole time?

JB: I stayed in Korea. I had the R&R option; I didn't take it because--I can't remember why--didn't feel like it, I guess, or I was doing something else. We also had a basket on the compound, and we played a lot of pickup basketball. Otherwise people amused themselves in one way or another. Reading was probably the basic way. We would build little things, like a new latrine, just for something to do. And we had movies every night. Predictable movies. Sam Katzman was the producer of these terrible black and white things that were in the mid-1950s, in terms of plot and sophistication awful. But the Koreans loved them; I think that was how they learned most of their English. We'd show them in the mess hall, and there was a signal unit that was even smaller, and they would come up. They were the same ones that came there for their meals. And we would get KMAG officers coming in. The place got a reputation because unlike most of the GI mess halls, it was sort of individual, and so people would find excuses to stop by for lunch. And as long as they signed the book, we could draw the rations to make up for what they'd take. The movies were… we were either laughing about them or complaining about them. In that situation, you complained about things because they're there. Like the food, everybody got so tired of chicken they swore they'd never eat another one. The Army cornered the market before Frank Perdue came along. We had an awful lot of chicken, but it was well prepared. And then a couple of times a year, those of us who did some hunting, we would provide pheasant. We'd do that for Thanksgiving, and we had enough pheasants so people who wanted to could have one. Most of them had never tried it. It worked out all right.

MR: You had some interesting observations about the greatest impressions on you, when you sent this in to us.

JB: Remind me. What were they?

MR: Well, they were about never meeting anyone from other parts of the country, and [unclear] diverse backgrounds.

JB: Oh, yes. When I went to high school in Manlius, there was one black athlete in the Onondaga League at that time. I got to Fort Dix and there were a number of Puerto Ricans and a number of blacks, and I wound up in an area of the barracks with a Boston Irish. And that was quite an experience, broadening for me. At Fort Devens, we got mixed in with a lot from the south, primarily from the Tennessee and Georgia areas, and one from Arkansas. And in Monterey again, a further blending in with people from other various areas. Yes. I'd never met them and it turned out to be very good. I remember I was in total disbelief in Monterey; one man from Louisiana, his favorite phrase was "Who whupped the Civil War?" I think he thought they had. It's sort of incredulous, and it's almost a cartoon condition, but that was his line. But it's good, we still maintain contact, a lot of us.

There weren't that many of us, ever, but we had a couple of reunions. We went back to Monterey in 2005, which was the 50th anniversary at the time. They did it up big for us. They, embarrassingly, ran us through a couple of Korean classes and showed how much we had forgotten. And we came away with the belief that those people there now are a whole lot better than we were. Whether they are otherwise motivated or not, I don't know. Some of them are, because they got a bonus for signing up to go there. It's a career course, maybe that makes a difference. Or maybe they've just learned how, over the years, how to better instruct. We, I mean nobody ever fought going to Korea. Some of the people whom we met at Monterey were studying what they called Animese at the time, which turned out to be Vietnamese later, and they went off to duty wearing civilian clothes. Of course, along came Vietnam and they were back in the Army wearing uniforms. In Monterey itself because of the language situation, it was really broadening. People were studying various languages. I was in a barracks where most of the people were either studying Korean or Magyar, Hungarian, which actually turned out to have a linguistic relationship, [unclear] languages; I don't think it was intentional when they assigned us. It was a fascinating place. Much changed now; where our barracks used to be is now the drill field, although I wonder if they ever drill. There's only one building, the old tin barn,

that is still standing. But now the school fights for its bureaucratic life.

MR: Have you been back to Korea at all since?

JB: Well, when I was with the State Department, I was assigned to the Embassy.

MR: Did you ever go up to the DMZ?

JB: Yes I did. I'm the only one to have ever been back to the site of where our compound was.

MR: Is it changed that much?

JB: There's a village there now. It was terraced, and the terraces are still there, but now with Korean buildings on them. I think the Quonsets and the Jamesways [buildings] are long since gone somewhere. It was when I was with the Embassy, I drew a couple of times escort duty up there with visiting Congressmen. They all wanted to get their picture taken at the DMZ.

MR: When were you in Korea with the State Department?

JB: 1966 to 1968. Two and a half years.

MR: What progress did you see in the time you were there?

JB: Oh, immense. Everything was a ruin in the mid-1950s, and the bridge was back over the Han River. The airport itself, it was just a bombed out building when we landed from Japan. When we went back, it was a going airport. I'm sure that's ten times that now. But there was actually an economy; it was pretty much subsistence in the 1950s, the Korean economy. But there was a lot of activity, and a lot of dollars being pumped in. There were two ROK Divisions in Vietnam, and I think we paid pretty heavily for that. Plus they sent home, maybe even paid them in dollars in Vietnam, I don't know. A

much different place. In Seoul, there was only one hotel when I was there in the Army, and then [in the 1960s] there were a number of them getting increasingly fancy. Things were fairly quiet aside from the large military [unclear].

When I was there in the Embassy, the Pueblo was seized, and we had the North Korean raid, the assassination attempt on President Park. Our residence compound was from here to across the street, to the Presidential Palace. I happened to be out that night, coming back in my car, and saw these lights. The Koreans were forever firing off fireworks, but I noticed one staying up in the air an awful long time, and I thought, that's a flare. So I darted in to our compound and our guards were pretty nervous, and we could hear machine gun fire. And this was a 30-plus element of super physically conditioned North Koreans that came down with the intent of assassinating President Park. And because they were in such physical shape, and it was wintertime, they found the tracks in the snow, and they would close, shut the trapdoor, but they were never fast enough. They couldn't believe… I guess they couldn't believe these guys could come up and down the hills as quickly as they did. Anyway, had it not been for one curious Korean police officer, they might have pulled it off, but he noticed a group of men moving through the street after midnight, and when he questioned them, of course they shot him right away, but that alerted people in the President's [Palace]. And they all died, except one. Whether he was the last one and thus chose to surrender or not, I really don't know. Nor did I interrogate him. But the reports were that his thighs were immense (gestures)--a physical specimen that ended any speculation about how humans could get up and down the hills that quickly. Yeah, there was actually more going on then, and, as I said, the Pueblo was seized. It was an interesting time.

MR: After you were discharged, did you use the GI Bill?

JB: Yes, I did. Which was one of the reasons I joined the Army.

MR: Yes, you said that—

JB: I first went to, because I got out from the Army in mid-November, and I started at LeMoyne College here in Syracuse in the spring semester. After three semesters there I transferred to Syracuse, and I graduated there in 1961, and a masters degree in 1964. Not only was the GI bill a great help, I was able to live at home, and therefore the GI Bill pretty much covered the tuition. Had I not had it, I'm not sure what I would have done. I probably would have gone to school, but under different circumstances. Syracuse worked out pretty well because of the Korean language; I had satisfied their requirement for a foreign language, and I also picked up a few credits for area studies, so I saved tuition by not having to spend a full four years.

MR: You said you have stayed in contact with some of the servicemen?

JB: Yes. We had a couple of reunions and they sort of varied, because the language school group did not all wind up in the same place. So the first platoon, Company A where I was, there were people who came both before and after with whom we're in contact, and we sort of had reunions. Then there's the language school group, which is a different group, and that's the group that went to Monterey in 2005. Otherwise, we've met in Denver on one occasion, and Washington on another. There's some talk of doing it again, but we've lost a few: age creeping up. Mostly illness. It was never all that large of a group. By contrast, my friend did similar work in the Navy, but that was a much larger—not voice intercept but electronic message intercept—they have thousands of people, and we never did. So his reunions are big deals, and ours are quite small.

MR: How long were you in the Foreign Service?

JB: Thirty years.

MR: How do you think your time in the service—besides the GI Bill, I know that was a great asset to you—how do you think it changed or affected your life?

JB: Oh, I was insular as hell before I went into military service. I never dreamed of going abroad. The reason I wound up in Korea is a little prosaic. I was offered Animese, which I didn't know what it was, 6 months of Russian, 6 months of German, 12 months of Russian. Well, we knew Monterey was a nice place so how can we guarantee that we spend a year in Monterey? That's how I picked Korean over the other language options. Ironic since my best language was German, my wife is [unclear] German, and I spent fourteen years of my Foreign Service years in Germany. I learned a lot… well, I don't think I learned so much but learned to see other people's views on a number of things, on issues that I would not have otherwise, had I stayed in Central New York. Well, maybe. And it was… great… I wouldn't trade the experience at all. Both of my sons are career Marines, doesn't hurt them at all.

MR: What were some of your duty stations; Korea, and I know you said Germany?

JB: In the Foreign Service?

MR: Yes.

JB: My first station was Korea, and then Costa Rica. Then Liberia. In Costa Rica, I was assigned to Vietnam via training in Washington, but it was about the point that Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger decided we had won, and anyway we weren't going to send any more people there to do… I was assigned accords, you know what that was, pacification, rural development group. So I never got there. I was sort of without an assignment, and I was offered two, one in Monrovia, Liberia and one in Recife, Brazil. And that was time when the race issue in the US was really taking off, and I thought it might be interesting to pick Liberia. And besides, if I went to Recife, I'd have to go learn Portuguese, and I'd just come off a Spanish-speaking

tour and I knew I'd get mixed up and I wouldn't wind up speaking either very well. So I went to Monrovia, and in Monrovia I was assigned to Dusseldorf, and from Dusseldorf back to Washington, and then off to Barcelona. I was in Barcelona for about a year, then I went to Madrid. From Madrid to Ottawa, Ottawa back to Bonn where I stayed 8-plus years, which is very unusual but it was time that spanned the fall of the Berlin Wall. The first four years I was there, and then the Wall came down, and the ambassador at the time wanted people with experience--and my language was pretty good--to stay on, so he supported another tour, which is unusual in the Foreign Service. So I stayed there until 1992 or 1993, then I went to Brussels, which was nice, but I found the work kind of boring. So I asked for reassignment, and I was offered Saudi Arabia or Sydney, Australia. My wife had always wanted to go to Australia, so that's how that decision got made. And that was the final post.

MR: Which was your favorite?

JB: In terms of work, the most interesting was Madrid. Spain at that time, it was in NATO, and was getting ready to join the European Union. My job was business promotion. We had a lot of interest on behalf of American companies in Spain, because they could see something was going to happen. So it was very busy, the combination of the hours that Spain keeps with the late dinners, everything seemed to get done over a meal, and going to receptions. It was busy, but there was no time to worry about it. I did get to play some tennis with a Wimbledon winner, so that was kind of unique.

In terms of being able to see what got done, it was probably Germany. US companies were finally starting to pay attention to the life and business opportunities abroad. They'd always invested in Germany after the war, but they hadn't really commenced smaller companies to try to sell anything, a service or goods. So I did a lot of trade promotion there. So that's what I'd say were the highlights.

MR: If you could just--you sent us this photo (hands it to JB)--hold this in front and tell us where and when that was taken. Wayne can just focus on it and make it part of the video.

JB: This is a picture taken at recruitment into the US Army at Fort Dix, January 20th or 21st, 1955.

WC: Ok, got it.

MR: Ok, thank you very much for your interview.

JB: You're welcome.