

*Conversation*  
*With*  
*James B. "J.B." Renninger*

at  
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Recorded and Transcribed  
by  
Lyn Corley



TAPE 1 SIDE A

LYN-Today is August 2, 2017 and we are at Harbor Oaks Road at my home and I have a guest today, J.B. Renninger and he goes by Jim. His whole name is James. He is going to share his career, his life and his career and his days at Cecil with us today. Thank you, Jim.

J.B.-Thank you for inviting me over here today. I grew up in Pennsylvania, very I will say, poor monetarily family but rich in love and that type of thing. We had ten kids in our family so the one thing that we didn't do is come home late for dinner because if we did there might not be enough left for you. (Laugh)

LYN-Was it a farming life?

J.B.-My dad did have a small farm at one time but then smartly he got into the grocery store business and it worked out pretty well. But we, primarily he was a business man, self-employed. He owned his own grocery store. He also had a gas station and at one time a farm, like I said. But it was a farming, very rural in Pennsylvania, very rural community so his family was also large so his uncles and his brothers were my uncles were farmers and that type stuff. I got a lot farm experience. Got a lot of grocery store experience as well.

That always taught me that, you know, unless you want to work with your hands for the rest of your life you need to get an education so they were very smart in that regard and kept pushing me toward an academic career, academic profession.

Like I said, I was the oldest son. I had two older sisters and then seven others fell below that. So, I did like to read and I guess was fairly successful. I got through high school and applied to Penn State University, got in and at the time they had some branch campuses as all major universities today have. But, only the highest scoring students got into the main campus. The others had to go to a branch campus. But, I got into the main campus.

Once again, we had limited exposure in the country like that to professions so my family, my father I think an eighth education. My mother had a twelfth-grade education but once again it was very rural so my exposure to professions wasn't that great so I don't think I even knew what an engineer was at the time. When I got to pick a career field I picked something I knew which was teaching.

LYN-Had your dad had any military experience?

J.B.-None what so ever.

LYN-No one in your family?

J.B.-Nobody in his family had ever served in the military. Now my mother's family, she had a couple of brothers that served in the Army during World War II. I know one was a truck driver, actually the other was in the Navy but I don't even know what he did in the Navy. I never really spoke to them about serving in the military so my experience with the military was almost zero.

Like I said, I went to Penn State thinking I was going to be a math major. At the time, in the late '60's, computing was brand new. Bill Gates was just working out of his garage yet but we did have computers, a computer at Penn State. It was an IBM 360. It took up the space of this house. We worked punch cards and all banging out holes in punch cards that the reader would read and put a program into the computer. You submitted your punch cards and maybe ten hours later you would get your program back with all the bugs you had to fix and all that kind of stuff.

So, I was intrigued with computing but it was one of those things, "It will never catch on" type thing. I had a dual, a major in math education and a minor in computer science which was...

LYN-What year was that? When did you graduate?

J.B.-1972.

LYN-That was early.

J.B.-Yeah, it was early. The PC's weren't out at the time. But, I was interested in PC's and later years in life I did have some of the early Timex 99's that worked off TV's and stuff like that.

But, anyway, I graduated. I got married when I was in college to my high school sweetheart. She was in the same high school. Her father served in the Army. He was a tank mechanic I think but he got to pick up the remnants of blown-up tanks and try to restore them. He worked out of Africa a little bit. I knew more about his military service than...but he never wanted to talk about it, like most military people that had seen action and it was something they wanted to forget and not remember.

I was fairly motivated, back then they had something called military draft which they don't have now. They had deferments for students so I was deferred my military service was deferred while I was in college.

Then they had another program called lottery, a lottery system. They, to give those on deferment more time to plan, you know they didn't take everybody so they had a lottery system and they drew numbers by birthdays. If your birthday was drawn early, a low number in the lottery, you I guess won the lottery which I did. I was number thirty-three out of three hundred and sixty numbers, three hundred and sixty-five numbers, three hundred and sixty-four numbers so I was pretty certain in college that I might be going in the military although it wasn't real to me.

I graduated a little bit early and I kind of did it so that I could get my mind straight about this military thing. So, I graduated a little bit early and I thought I had about three or four months to figure this out. Well, the army at the time, they had figured this out really well. When they saw my diploma come across their desk they immediately, I mean within weeks, I had my pre-induction physical and that's when I realized that this military thing was serious and it was going to happen. So, the Army gave me a pre-induction physical and of course I was in good health so they said, "You passed" and they gave me a date to report.

I had about two months to report. That's when I knew they were really serious about the military and me and my future. So, I always had wanted to fly, never had really flown before so I went to the Air Force and said, "Hey, "I want to fly for the Air Force." They said, "Basically you meet

all the criteria we'll take you but we'll take you in six months." I go, "OK, well, the Army is going to take me in two months." They said, "Well, we can't take you for six months." I said, "Well, that's not going to work." (Laugh) They said, "Well, too bad."

So, I had to look for an alternative so I went to the Navy. The Navy was in the heat of the Vietnam War so they were losing a lot of pilots and they said they could take me before the Army did. So, I committed to the Navy, signed a contract with the Navy. It was kind of comical because I said, "Well, what about this Army thing? They gave me a report date." They said, "Oh, don't worry about it. The Army will figure it out."

So, I'll fast forward a little bit here. I did go in the Navy and the Army didn't recognize and report for duty and did call me AWOL and went to my mother and father and reported me AWOL. "Where's your son?" She says, "He's in the Navy." They said, "No, he's supposed to be in the Army." They said, "We're gonna come and get him." So, she, I had many frantic phone calls from her saying, "You've got a problem." I went to the Navy at the time, I was kind of a boot in the Navy and they said, "Oh, don't worry about it. The Army will figure it out."

Believe it or not, they figured it somehow because I didn't get thrown in jail and all that kind of stuff. So, anyway, I was actually in the Army, they wanted me to be in the Army and the Navy at the same time.

I was accepted at the Navy flight program. Back then, I think, it was a four-and-a-half-year commitment after wings. It was four and a half years after wings. The training took about eighteen months so at the time we had a six-year commitment. We had to serve either, we had to serve some form of active and reserve duty for six years. I said, "Oh, eighteen months training, four and a half years as a pilot, that's six years and then I'll be done." So, my thoughts were, I'd do my six years all active then I would be done with the military.

As all Naval aviators do, well first of all before you get commissioned we went through, I went through aviation officer candidate school, OACS, down in Pensacola. Our drill instructors were Marine drill instructors who most of them were combat veterans out of Vietnam. You can imagine their focus at the time was very real in trying to turn out quality individuals because the threat of the enemy was real, the threat was real.

So, they weren't kidding around about "Somebody is gonna capture you if you can't run fast enough, jump high enough and all of that." I remember our drill instructor who was a staff sergeant in Vietnam, he had taken a round through his jaw. His name was Staff Sergeant Tackley. He was, when he spoke it was real. He spoke from real experience.

OACS was lunacy, it seemed lunacy at the time but I remember, probably the most memorable thing was a march, a mattress march where we marched, maybe it was a run, with our mattress on our back at five o'clock in the morning. We always mustered outside the battalion to do PT in the morning and when they said, "OK, sweethearts, get up there and get your mattresses." We were going, "Oh". Pennsylvania was warm was Pensacola was hot.

LYN-Were you there in the summer?

J.B.-August. I reported in July so July and August I went through OACS with Marine DI's drilling us every day or several times a day. So, hot and humid. Like I said, Pennsylvania was warm but Pensacola was hot. It was an adjustment to get used to that.

We, my wife, like I said we got married in college so she stayed in Pennsylvania for about half the training in Pensacola, indoctrination in Pensacola, so we were paid and treated as enlisted for six months, E-5's, we were paid and treated as an E-5 for six months. So, she came down there and kind of had to find her own place to live while I still had to live on the base and couldn't get off the base, barely could even see her.

So, we went through the indoctrination, I went through the indoctrination then made it through all the physical and mental, all the training we had to do and was commissioned in August of, I guess it was November of '72.

LYN-Do you remember the failure rate?

J.B.-The failure rate was phenomenal. They had no qualms about washing people out. For some real things and some kind of picky things, to us it seemed picky at time. I'll give you one incident. I had a, I reported to duty with a watch and I guess I didn't read the fine print. We weren't allowed to have watches. It had one of those twist-a-flex bands on it. I was standing in formation and the DI flipped it off my wrist and he said, he didn't say anything to me at the time and they reported over the loud speaker that the candidate who lost his watch would report to the duty drill instructor to pick up the watch.

I'd seen what a report to the, I actually had experienced what a report to the duty drill instructor was all about the day before. "I don't need the watch that bad, you can keep the watch. I'm not getting that watch." They kept announcing would the candidate please pick up his watch and I just wouldn't do it. Then finally they said, "The candidate who lost his watch will report." I went, "OK, now I've got to go down there." Of course, I paid the price for the watch. I don't know that I ever got the watch back.

Yeah, if you didn't comply with some of their crazy rules or some of the real rules they would wash you up. Academically some people washed out. I remember one incident where it was a fraternal-type selection where we had to select one person to leave the unit, to leave the military. So, it was a peer-rating type thing.

It just so happened that day we picked up our rifles at the armory, pick them up is a kind word. We ran a couple of miles through the sand to the armory in July or August to pick up the rifles then we had to run back double-time back. It took maybe an hour and a half in the hot afternoon sun and the sand to get there and an hour and a half to get back.

On the way back one of the guys fell out of formation and so the DI just kept "Turn to your left, turn to your left." We just double-timed around this guy until he got up. A couple of us tried to go over to this individual and help him up because if he didn't get up soon I remember I was going to die because it was to the limit of your physical ability in the heat and in the humidity with uniform and boots and running through the sand. It was one of those things that it was approaching your physical limitation of the whole group.

We did that fifteen minutes of running around him and all we wanted to do was get back and get done with this thing. Because of him we marched, double-time marched, was fifteen or maybe twenty percent longer.

So, that night they, we had a peer evaluation of who was the most likely to succeed and who was the most likely to fail. Well, he was, his inability to run on that march or stay with us on that march I'm sure he was, he was the most likely to fail. He wasn't there the next day. They took him out of the system that day and sent him home.

So, those, and throughout the academic training, the physical training and the professional training there was no qualms about letting people out or booting people out.

Flight training was fair but it got down to "We can't train you." In training, they would help you. They would have what we called "student studies". They would help you with your exams, not your exams but your academic training but if it came down to the point where they couldn't expend more than reasonable resources to keep you in the program they didn't have, they didn't bat an eye to cut the apron strings and send you home.

LYN-It was during the draft time so if they sent you home what was going to happen to your obligation?

J.B.-There was a, I think there was a minimum time-period that if you served so many days you would have met your military obligation. I want to say it was a hundred and eighty days. So, six months. If you served your hundred and eighty days they could not come back and get you.

The reason I know it is I had a friend who, actually a pretty close friend, and a hundred and eighty days is six months so we were well into our flight training and one day he just, back then you could it was called "drop on request", DOR from the flight program. At the hundred and eighty-first day level he DOR'd. I'm, "What do you mean?" I didn't see him on the flight schedule anymore and I said, "What's going on?" He didn't want to talk about it but I learned he the DOR'd and it was a hundred and eighty-one days so he knew that if he served a hundred and eighty-one days, no harm, no foul.

LYN-He had fulfilled that obligation and he could go home.

J.B.-He had gamed the system and I never realized there were people doing that.

LYN-I've never heard of that. Thank you for sharing that.

J.B.-Drop on Request, a hundred and eighty days. Quite honestly, I think not only relieve you of your military obligation but also VA benefits as well. I think he got VA benefits as well. So, it was kind, kind of slapped me in the face because we were pretty good friends and we shared a lot of stuff but not that.

LYN-So he may have had it planned all along.

J.B.-I think he may have. The last I heard he was a PA up in Minnesota. He came from Minnesota.

Anyway, we went through Pensacola OACS and then we became officers and went through flight training, VT-1. I'll never forget going to VT-1 looking out over the flight line. It was the first, what I would relate now to is the visual of World War II. The amount of equipment in World War II and when I got to Softly Field VT-1, Training Squadron One, the number of T-34B's there, T-34's there was phenomenal. There were hundreds of them.

LYN-My husband was in VT-6.

J.B.-VT-6, I went through VT-3 up there. So, after VT-1 I remember seeing, like I said, all of the airplanes there and I had never really flown in an airplane so that was my first experience with flight. So, I was one of the students, I can categorize my training as being an average student. I was not very good. I screwed things up but I probably was an average student. There were students there that already had their private licenses so they all, when you talk about the physics of flight they knew about it, they understood it. It was all brand new to me.

In some respects, even the instructors said, "That can work against you because the way we fly, Navy airplane isn't the same way of flying a regular civilian airplane." But, it's soft physics so it all works the same.

So, I went to VT-1, graduated. It was T-34's, the old "B" model. Then I went to VT-3 up at Whiting Field which is near Pensacola. Then we had to go back to Softly again to VT-5 because after, we flew the T-28 up at VT-3. But the we had to go to a boat in the T-28's so we had to go to VT-5.



Navy T-28 Trojan



Navy T-34 Mentor



We were pretty good pilots by that time. We were pretty comfortable with the T-28 and VT-5 was like the Blue Angels of training command. I remember we all closed our canopies on cue. We did our speed break checks on cue so we kind of acted like Blue Angels practicing going out to the boat.

Going out to the boat was, that was the first real experience of stark terror. You can talk about the ship all you want but until you see the ship the first time.

LYN-So we're talking about the Lexington.

J.B.-The Lexington, wooden deck. It's open canopy so with a big radial engine in front of you that is loud. So, I remember, sound continuation wasn't great with the helmets we had and then with the canopy open it was even louder so trying to hear your LSO and follow his directions and still flying was, when it was done I put it into the miracle category. I got through that.



LYN-By that time were you were scared or exhilarated and you knew this was what you wanted or were you just, "I signed on for this and this is what it's going to be"?

J.B.-No, I was scared when I was there, exhilarated when I was done and very proud of myself after it was done. It was something that very few people have done in their lives and I made it through. You have all of those experiences when you're flying the airplane. You know, scared to death that this is gonna bite you and then we'll get to another incident later on but you go through all of those. Even today, you get a little scared when you're flying.

I vowed I would never fly at night with a single engine airplane because if the engine quits you go for the light or you go for the dark, you know. When you're up there the light is where the street lights are and the cars and people are or you go for the dark where there's woods...

LYN-Trees.

J.B.-I don't fly nights very much but I did just recently come back from Pensacola at night. I had a little scare. Flight training in VT-5 and then it was off to, I wanted to fly jets but once again my skills weren't good enough to get jets so I got props. The hierarchy then whether it was right, wrong, or indifferent was that the best guys went to jets, the second-best guys went to props, and the guys who couldn't get jets or props went to helicopters. So, I got props. I was right in the middle of the pack.

Got props and went to Corpus Christi at the time. Flew the TS-2A, the training variant of the S-2 which was a submarine hunter in the fleet at the time. So, I went there and went through all that training. I never got, I guess I got a "down" which was an unsatisfactory flight in T-28's in formation and I think I only got one "down" then I got a "down" in instruments in TS-2's. Most people got a "down" or two. It was rigorous. It was challenging. Some days you were on your game and some days you weren't. If you weren't up to the task that day they didn't care. You got a "re-do". So, we did a "re-do".



Navy TS-2

Anyway, I got my wings. I went out to the boat in the S-2, never liked flying the S-2. That airplane was, it had two engines, two big radial engines, torqued every which way. Controlling that airplane was tough. It was slow. It was cumbersome. I found out later in life that long and slow is hard to fly. Fast and high is easy to fly. So, S-2's I got my wings there and I remember being up for orders and they, the props the premier prop airplane was B-3's but they said, "You know if you fly S-2's which they still had S-2's in the fleet, they said, "They're transitioning S-3's and you'll fly jets which was always my goal anyway.

So, I figured maybe they won't be lying to me. So, I got S-2's and I flew S-2's and eventually, and that's where, S-2's were out at Cecil Field, I actually got there in December of '73 so it took

me right at eighteen months to get through all the training from July of '72 until December of '73. I either got there in December of '73 or January of '74.

LYN-So, when you got orders to Cecil did you know where Cecil Field was? You knew nothing about it. OK, did you drive up?

J.B.-Drove up and...

LYN-First impression. I ask everybody.

J.B.-The first impression was, "Man, we are out in the boonies."

LYN-My first impression.

J.B.-But it was a jet base and it was loud airplanes so I said, "It makes sense. The trees really don't care about noise." So, we had some A-4's there but mostly A-7's by the time I got, A-7's and S-2's and soon to be S-3's were there. I flew the S-2 for about eight months, nine months and I started the S-3 transition. So, yes, Cecil Field, the Vietnam War was still going in '73 and '74 so it was still going pretty hot and heavy. It was pretty hot and heavy until '75 when I think the peace accords were signed, somewhere in there.



Navy S-3

Cecil Field, great facility to fly airplanes but not much else. I remember the commissary was a wooden building. Great people.

LYN-Little dispensary.

J.B.-Little dispensary. It had all of the trimmings of a World War II base. It reminded me of a World War II base.

LYN-And it was a World War II base.

J.B.-It just, met that standard for sure.

LYN-So your wife came along.

J.B.-She came along. We bought a house right off 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, well we lived in apartments for the first two or three years, two years maybe.

LYN-Do you remember where?

J.B.-Yeah, off Jammes Road an apartment building, I forget what the name of it. It's still there. Then we bought a little, I'll never forget we bought a house right off of 103<sup>rd</sup> Street. A lot of people were buying in Orange Park and I thought, "Who in the world would want to live way out there.?" I mean that was, Orange Park Mall wasn't there. Blanding was a two-lane road. I remember one of my skippers bought a house out there and it was a trek just to get out there.

LYN-We went out just to look about buying and I was, "I don't think so." It was a different Orange Park then.

J.B.-Yeah. I bought a house, like I said, off 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and I think I paid twenty-four, two for it, twenty-four thousand dollars for the house. It was kind of my first experience with realtors. I don't really know how this all transpired but we kind of were looking at homes with a realtor and then I think it was my wife found this house in the supermarket, in Winn Dixie or whatever it was, on the bulletin board. It looked like one of the houses we had looked at.

LYN-That was happening. Was it a military person selling it?

J.B.-I don't think it was.

LYN-That was happening, military people buying military people's houses.

J.B.-We saw this house on the bulletin board and it looked like the same house but it was like, it was cheaper, a thousand dollars cheaper. I said, "What the heck is this all about?" We called the person on the bulletin board and they said, "Yea, you can come out to the address and we'll show you the house." Low and behold it was the same house we had seen with a realtor. So, I was new to this whole game so I said, "I can pay twenty-five thousand with a realtor or twenty-four thousand without.

LYN-Do you remember the street?

J.B.-Wilkins Drive. It is still there. It's like a block, a square-type development with one entrance and one exit. VyStar Credit Union is now on one of the corners on 103<sup>rd</sup> out there. Wilkins Drive is still back there. We bought the house and after we bought it we were moving in and we had somebody drive up and say, "Do you realize you may have to pay the realtor fee?" They said, "Are you renting or buying?" We said, "We bought." I guess it was the realtor that had listed it and I guess this person had cut the realtor out of his commission. Anyway, they kind of were threatening in the driveway. I said, "Whatever happened I don't know how you can get to me." He said, "You could be liable for the realty fee if they don't pay it." But anyway, we bought a small house. We avoided Orange Park at the time and bought a small house and lived at that home until we left.

I was assigned to S-2's with the promise they would get me transitioned to S-3's which they did. Transitioned to S-3's and we went out to San Diego to transition which was a real treat. We lived

on North Island. We lived right across the street from the Hotel del Coronado for three or four months. A beautiful place but you know we lived right on the island for five months while going through transition. We brought ten new S-3's home to Cecil and we started working up for a cruise on Nimitz which, the strangest thing, we had a, I don't know how much I should say about this.

We had an incident, an issue with our XO where our XO eventually ended up in him being relieved of his duties. But the more emotional thing to me, I was asked to, we were asked as junior officers to testify against the XO. There was an incident that the XO was part of and according to stories now it was kind of innocent. They were making a big deal; the CO was making a big deal out of it and we were asked to testify against the XO. To make a long story short, he was relieved and that was kind of at my first experience with the politics of being in the military and the ugliness that can come of that. He was relieved. We got through but it created, that incident created turmoil within the squadron. Some department heads sided with the XO and some did not and the CO you know, never cross the CO or do so at your own peril. But we all got through that.

LYN-Did you testify?

J.B.-I did not. I didn't write any letters either. They asked us to write letters but some may have, I don't know but the end-result is he was relieved and we got a new XO.

Let's see, S-3's transitioned from props to jets was the manner in which the skill and which you fly props and jets is totally different. Once again, there were some prop pilots that made the transition, there were some that did

It was a different time and flying jets and props is a different, it requires a different model pilot. It was very customary back then to drink a lot. It was customary to smoke a lot but those habit patterns were more accepted in the prop community I think than in the jet community, maybe not. I know we had one alcoholic pilot, a lieutenant commander that, we tried to get him through to the jet transition and I mean I guess he was just an alcoholic, it may not have had anything to do with props or jets. But we had several guys that just didn't, you have to think faster in a jet because everything happens faster. If you don't think faster you're six miles behind the airplane. That's not good. So, there were some that just couldn't think fast enough. There were some that had personal habits that just weren't conducive to further Navy service or transition so we lost quite a few actually in the transition.

LYN-Say that again. You lost...

J.B.-Well, not physically lost but they didn't make the transition.

LYN-What happened if they didn't make the transition? They were just reassigned?

J.B.-Reassigned to some other set of orders. It was career-ending type orders. We had, and I'll give you an incident that occurred later on in my career. In props, it was just more acceptable to fly, I would say, in a prop, slow-flying airplane you could, you could noddle your way through a

situation. You had more time to think about the situation. In jets, you're going faster and you don't have as much time. If you don't have time to react things can occur.

A good example is I lost a good friend in an aircraft mishap simply because of position lights. For some reason in the S-3 position the wing-tip lights would burn out frequently. So, it was common practice to "Oh, don't worry about it if the light doesn't work, don't worry about it. You know we'll fix it tomorrow or the next week or whatever." It just wasn't a critical thing.

When you fly night formation that's how you see the airplanes with those position lights because the airplane is black. It's masked by the dark skies so the only thing that gives you visual cues are these position lights. What happened is he flew into the side of an airplane and one of the things, contributing factors, both airplanes crashed but I don't know what happened to the other pilots but I know he died. It was, one of the contributing factors was the position lights were burned out.

LYN-Was that at Cecil?

J.B.-It was at North Island but, after that they brought us strip lights that are called "formation lights". They put formation lights on the side of the airplane which are specifically designed to assist us in flight formation. I always said that he bought us formation lights. He was one of the prop transition guys and whether he had anything to do with, "If the light doesn't work, let's go anyway" I don't know.

But anyway, back to the transition.

LYN-You knew before you took off that your lights weren't working. So, if you say, "We're not taking off, these lights aren't working." Did that happen?

J.B.-Well, sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't. So, anyway it is one of those things, sometimes you take an airplane that doesn't have everything working properly. It's just the way it is. There are so many systems on airplanes. There are somethings that are, you know, the engine has got to work naturally but if the, say there are systems on the brake system. You can have normal brakes and or you can have anti-lock brakes. You can select one or the other. If the anti-lock brakes don't work no big deal although in the S-3 it was a big deal. You could actually take off and be safe to do so.

But anyway, transition in '76 we went on cruise.

LYN-You were on the Nimitz.

J.B.-On the Nimitz on cruise. I went to a squadron, VS-24, that's the S-2 squadron and the S-3 squadron that we transitioned. VS-24, and I won't get there yet. But anyway, went to VS-24 and I had a good cruise in the VS-24. Very good cruise.

LYN-So living on the ship.

J.B.-So living on the ship, Nimitz carrier, nuclear, very fast. I always had creature comforts. With the S-2's we cruised and I did work-ups in the S-2's and then I had an appendectomy and

they had to leave some people behind because they didn't want to take all the S-2's along so I didn't go on the cruise.

A conventional ship, Saratoga out of Mayport, creature comforts not there. Not so much. I did a couple of weeks on Coral Sea and that thing was, well it's a machine. An air craft carrier is a big machine. It's, and machines need lubricants and they generate heat so if you don't have good air conditioning, man you sweat a lot. It's hot sleeping, it's hot...So, I did get a cruise on the Nimitz. It was a good cruise.



USS Nimitz CVN-68

We had F-4's and Vigilantes which are some of the prettiest looking airplanes you would ever but old airplanes so we had some issues with the Vigilantes breaking. The physical structure would break just because of their age. There was one pilot, I mean it looked like a normal landing and it broke the airplane in half. I mean, the keelson which is the main structural member of the airplane broke so he landed. I can't remember what happened to the airplane. I want to say we just threw it into the ocean.

LYN-That happens. They get pushed over. So, the F-4's were out of Cecil?

J.B.-No. They were out of probably Oceana. The F-4's Vigilantes...good cruise. After that and that's where I met a guy named Charlie Hoover who went on to be a detailer. I'd worked out that I would get a following tour after this sea tour, a shore tour in the training command which was career-wise that was the norm. It was normal to go to a training command.

So, I worked it out that I would go to Pensacola and be a training-command instructor there. Like we alluded to earlier, communications were not what they are today. We did snail-mail letters and if a bad thing happened we would get telegrams. For instance, my last son, I forget it was '85, but anyway my wife, I was notified by telegram that he was OK.

Charlie Hoover went on to be a detailer before we went on cruise and I had worked out that I was going to Pensacola. I get my orders message traffic through the formal Navy message system and "Your orders are to VT-26 in Beeville, Texas." I go, "Huh? We worked this out." I couldn't contact him until we pulled into port.



Training Squadron  
26



Navy Jet Trainer  
T-2 Buckeye

I called him, normally you call your wife the first call. This time the first call went to my detailer. "What the heck happened to my orders?" He said, "Oh, have you talked to your wife?" I go, "No, I'm talking to you. What happened to my orders?" He said, "Call your wife first." I go, "OK." So, I call her and said, "What's going on here?" She said, "Well, he called me and said..."

LYN-The detailer called your wife?

J.B.-Called my wife and said that the orders to Pensacola were not feasible anymore. Do you want to go to Kingsville or Chase Field in Beeville, Texas? She said, "Well, where's Kingsville?" He said, "It's near Corpus." We had gone through training in Corpus, it was nice but not great. She said, "Where's Beeville?" He said, "It's half-way between Corpus and San Antonio." So, she said she had never been to San Antonio so let's go to Beeville. So, she picked my orders to Beeville, Texas and so I called Charlie back and I said, "Charlie, what?" He said, "Did you talk to your wife?" I said, "Yes, but my orders?" He said, "Well, you're going to Beeville." So, that's how I got to Beeville. So, I got orders to Beeville, Texas and you talk about remote. Cecil Field was remote. Beeville was in the middle of cow pastures and ranches, ranch country in Texas. King's Ranch is down in Kingsville but this is up north. The closest McDonald's was fifty-three miles away.



LYN-So how far are those bases apart?

J.B.-Two hundred miles. The closest McDonald's was fifty-three miles. We had one blinking light, no stop lights in the town.

LYN-So Cecil looked like a metropolis.

J.B.-It looked like a city. Beeville, Texas there was nothing to do in Beeville, Texas so we were busy in Beeville, Texas being flight instructors. We worked six days a week for two and a half years. We were pumping out aviators.

So, there was nothing to do there so the wives' club, the O club., we had to create our own fun. Who knows better what's fun than we do. So, we had a good time there. The community treated us well. There was a rancher who had died who left money in his will to throw a barbecue every year for the pilots, which is really nice because the first year I went there it was called "Brimcater Ranch". It must have been a Brimcater that bequeathed the money for the barbecue. They said, "Go out Route 59 for 8.7 miles and at the cattle guard turn left then go 2.3 miles."

So, you get to the cattle gate guard at 8.7 miles and it's a big pasture. Cattle guard just keeps cattle in the pasture. You look and there's nothing there except a pasture and a rutted road. So, we go and we had to drive up 2.3 miles into this pasture and then you come over this little knoll and there's a group of trees and lights and they had a big barbecue out in the middle. It was a real nice little barbecue but I'll never forget the cattle guard at 8.7 miles.

You met multi-millionaires. They loved the community. They loved the Navy. My daughter, I have another good story. My daughters were in 4-H there and they made, one of them made a cake and another one made aprons or some sewing project, some baking project.

LYN-The sewing project was an apron in 4-H. I did the same.

J.B.-I was new to 4-H and I was busy so I remember my wife was at the auction where they auctioned off the animals and stuff for the kids of her age. I'll never forget, I got to this auction and there's a, they are auctioning three chickens and they're talking about "twenty-three, twenty-three, anybody give me twenty-three fifty, anybody give me twenty-three hundred fifty dollars. Twenty-five, twenty-five?" I kept saying, "Twenty-three hundred dollars for three chickens?" That what I'm seeing. I said, "This can't be right."

They went up to like twenty-nine hundred dollars for three chickens. I asked the guy, I said, "Did I hear right? That's twenty-nine hundred dollars for three chickens." He goes, "Yeah." I said, "Are they prized chickens, special chickens?" He goes, "No, they're gonna be barbecued chickens." So, these farmers would just give money to these kids for you know college educations. My daughters got fifty or eighty bucks for a cake you know. It was kind of crazy.

Chase Field, Beeville, Texas was, we lost quite a few, it was like the old west. Pilots did crazy stuff. Like I was the duty officer one time and I got a call from a resident saying, "Hey, one of your airplanes flew over the lake at water-level and blew up a rooster tail on the lake." I go, "What?" Yeah, he did. It was a Marine captain that did it.

We lost some students that did stupid things. We had, I remember having safety stand-down because an A-4 flew into a tower and killed the two people onboard. It was, the loss of life was not a big deal. It was a big deal, but it was common. So, the admirals would get angry when we lose airplanes and come and yell at us. We were doing a lot of flying. Like I said, it was, every day we had three events and then the PO would close, on week-ends we would go up to Randolph Air Force.

LYN-Say that again. Every day you had three events.

J.B.-Three events. We would fly to simulator one or have two simulators in one flight but you had to have three events every day. That's a twelve-hour day basically. When you do that for two and a half years you get real good. You get real good. I was a, I flew T-2's there and I was, one of the things you have to do with the students is spin the airplane and a lot of people, that's uncontrolled flight. The airplane was a good spinning airplane and I got so good at spinning the airplane it was just like getting up in the morning. It wasn't a big deal.

The students would be scared senseless about spinning the airplane because the airplane would flap around and do, turn off on its back, and do all kinds of crazy stuff but it was, I had seen it all. It was no big deal to me to spin an airplane. So, I was one of the spin pilots. We had gun, they put a gun pod on the T-2 and the students would shoot at a banner that I used to tow. I used to be a tow-pilot and the students would shoot at the banner and of course I would watch them to make sure they weren't going to shoot me.

We would go out to the boat with the students, a lot of students, they did away with the T-28 CQ so the first time the students would go out to the boat was in T-2's. So, we, I was a chase pilot so I'd chase four solos out to the boat.

LYN-What boat was this?

J.B.-We did, we went to the west coast, we went to the east coast. We worked off every, I think I had traps on every carrier the Navy had. They'd give the instructor pilots a trap or two. It was kind of fun to get a trap on some of the west coast carriers.

J.B.-So, we made it through Beeville. We were ship's company, I did Carl Vinson. After that tour I was plank owner which is the initial crew of the USS Carl Vinson, nuclear air craft carrier. Because we were a new ship I got to be the OOD which is, I was in charge of the ship when the captain wasn't on the bridge. I had a lot of OOD duties.

USS CARL VINSON  
CVN-70



LYN-Where was that stationed?

J.B.-In Norfolk. We did an around-the-world cruise on the first cruise. We went to the west coast. It was a nine-month cruise.

LYN-So, your family had moved to Norfolk by then.

J.B.-Had moved to Virginia Beach.

LYN-Virginia Beach. We lived in Virginia Beach.

J.B.-We did a nine-month cruise and I'm gonna, during that cruise was back when I think the admirals were playing a game to see who could keep a carrier out at sea the longest. We did a hundred and fifty-five days at sea divided by thirty, that's five and a half months without seeing land. That's a long...

LYN-Without seeing land.

J.B.-I mean, we were at sea for a hundred and fifty-five days. I think back then, I think it was ninety days you get a beer day. They would give you two beers and then another sixty days, then the next beer day came at sixty days. So, we got two beers days, like two beers.

LYN-That does remind me about Zumwalt, beer-in-the-barracks man. Do you remember that?

J.B.-Z-grams with Zumwalt. Actually, I still have a Z-gram book that he listed all of his Z-grams. Anyway, the Carl Vinson we did around the world and I remember the last port call was in Perth, Australia which I made and then it was a thirty-day transit to get home and I had a set of orders to North Island. They wanted me to stay on board because I was OOD and all that kind of stuff and I said, "Eight months at sea, a hundred and fifty-five days at sea without seeing land." So, I left the ship before the end of the cruise. So, I never did finish the world cruise but that's fine with me. Shell back and crossing the equator and all of that...

LYN-So there was opportunity for your wife to meet you in any of those ports.

J.B.-None. A hundred and fifty days at sea we didn't have any ports. She did come over, the Nimitz cruise she went, she was one of the organizers of the wives' club and all that kind of stuff so she organized some trips over there. So, she got over to Europe a couple of times. We met a couple of times but she never got to Perth, Australia.

Went to North Island. I was a fleet readiness, RAG instructor there. Then I got recruited to VS-32 at Cecil Field to do my department head tour. The world-famous Maulers. I was recruited because, my pedigree in the military in the squadrons was in maintenance. I liked maintenance, maintaining the airplanes. Not that I did the work but when they had problems I would love to read the books and see how it worked and help them noodle through the problems.

So, when we went to VS-32 they had just failed at corrosion inspection so they wanted somebody good in maintenance to come to the squadron. It was one of those revelations that or realizations that I noddle through or thought through, "Do you want to go a good squadron and

make it better or do you want to go to a bad squadron and make it good?” Well, they sent me to the bad squadron and I’ll tell you right now, “You want to go to the good squadron and make it better.” The bad squadron and make it good. It was bad. It was really bad. The turn-around, the acceptability of poor maintenance. They had some poor maintenance practices and to turn that around when you had two hundred and fifty maintainers who were, “That’s good enough.” I said, “No, that’s not good enough.” That’s hard to do. We did turn that squadron around.



LYN-So you all moved to Orange Park I assume when you came back.

J.B.-We did move to Orange Park. By that time Orange Park wasn't that far out in the boonies anymore. So, we came back to Cecil Field. Somewhere in there, I'm gonna tell you a story, I met John McCain. I think it was my first squadron. It wasn't in a good way but he had been a POW. He was attached to a A-4 squadron out at Cecil and was a POW for five or six years and came back and they gave him a squadron. He had missed the majority of his career being a POW.

I'll never forget he was CO of the squadron. Back then, especially light attack guys, they used to do crazy stuff to each other. One little trick they used to play on each other is they used to steal one another's airplane and take it in the hanger and paint it up like one of theirs. So, the next morning, the CO of the losing squadron would go out there and instead of twelve airplanes he would have eleven. So, that's not a good if you're a maintenance officer or a supply officer and you just lost an airplane, I mean lost it. You don't know where it is. It's pretty hard to call your boss and say, "We lost an airplane."

Of course, the other CO of the gaining squadron would be laughing their butt off saying, "This is gonna be funny." Anyway, we were in the Rocket 17, I don't know if that term has come up, in the COQ bar, Rocket 17 was an institution back then and I was a junior officer and I'll never forget. McCain came in and grabbed, there was a CO on a bar stool drinking a beer or something and McCain came in and grabbed him by the throat and drug him off the back of the, off the back of the bar stool right on the floor and just started duking it out and fighting. I remember distinctly wondering as a junior officer, "This is not the proper etiquette and behavior you should have even in a bar." Here it is, a senior military, he was a commander at the time and he was beating the crap...

LYN-With his daddy who is an admiral.

J.B.-Yeah, right. But anyway. I didn't know why they were fighting but that's what happened. Somebody had stolen John's airplane and I guess he had just found out about it. They, you know you did not want to tell your boss you had lost and airplane. You don't want to do that.

Anyway, fast forward to VS-32. I was the maintenance officer, a very hard tour. They were terrible in maintenance.

LYN-What was the plane?

J.B.-Same airplane, S-3 at Cecil Field. But, that's where you're making medal once again, if you take a bad squadron and make it good. For that I was selected for command of the squadron. I went to VS-24 as the PXO in the interim...



LYN-Explain what that is, PXO.

J.B.-Perspective executive officer. So, now this is S-3's. I had done a tour in VS-24 as a junior officer and while I was gone at the training command in my ship's company tour, the RAG, VS-24 had, as my XO tour in VS-24, I always greeted the new junior officers by telling them that VS-24 had killed more pilots than any, maybe all the other squadrons combined in the time I wasn't in the squadron. I did that as an inspiration to, to follow the rules. In every accident, there is a change of events that culminate in a mishap. Usually if it's, the longer the chain of violations probably the worse the mishap. All the way through to the loss of life.

So, I mean, VS-24 out of Cecil Field while I wasn't there had taken an airplane to an air show in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. They hadn't safed the seats and they had people inside the cockpit and a little kid ejected himself out of an airplane and killed him. VS-24 had an airplane get hit in the middle of the runway. An A-7 hit it, hit the S-3 as it was crossing the runway and killed those two guys.

LYN-That was at Cecil?

J.B.-At Cecil a A-7 hit a S-3 and killed at least two guys in the S-3 and maybe the A-7 pilot. I think he might have ejected. But this is the worst one, the CO of VS-24 on cruise in celebration of mishap-free flying

TAPE 1 SIDE B

J.B.-During a celebration for mishap-free flying the CO was going to fly by the ship and he did an Aileron roll except when you do the Aileron roll, now we're jets but we, there are blunt-nose jets and there's point-nose jets, blunt-nose jets you've got to be a little more careful you know. They're a little bit slower and they're a little bit less agile. Anyway, he did an Aileron roll and you lose altitude when you do an Aileron roll.

LYN-Say that word. Do we know how to spell that?

J.B.-You roll around...A-I-L-E-R-O-N. It's the flight controls on the wings. The Ailerons cause the airplane to roll but he lost so much altitude he impacted the water and it killed him. This is the CO of the squadron. They have cake on the flight deck and I'm going to say it was...

LYN-Celebrating.

J.B.-Celebrating mishap-free fight. The CO killed himself on the ship. Anyway, I used to brief, when I was XO of the squadron I used to brief the JO's and even the JO's to this day will tell me about their first experience meeting me. They go, "What the 'H'?" My purpose was to make them cautious and aware of you know, "If you don't know history you're gonna repeat it."

LYN-You were saving their lives or giving them opportunity to save their lives.

J.B.-We went through that whole XO, my whole XO-CO tour without killing anybody in the air although we did lose a sailor on the flight deck. I'll tell you about that incident.

When I was XO, to work on the flight deck you have to have physical capabilities that are different than being just a normal sailor. They have to have better hearing. You have to pass, they screen you to make sure your hearing, your sight is good. As with anybody as you age your sight goes, gets worse. So, every year everybody that works the flight deck has to have, even enlisted has to get a flight physical. It was brought to my attention as XO, after one of our work-ups that some of our sailors weren't screened with a flight physical.

So, we have a corpsman and I, "That's a bad 'no-no' to have people work on the flight deck who aren't qualified." So, I brought a corpsman into my office and I said, "What's going on here." He said, "Well, I didn't have time to screen them all." I go, "Read my lips, you will have time to screen all the future guys." I said, "Do you understand me? This is a serious thing." "Oh, yes sir, Yes sir."

So, anyway we go out to sea at a later date, not too much later.

LYN-What ship is this?

J.B.-Theodore Roosevelt. We got to sea.

LYN-Based at Mayport?

J.B.-Norfolk. So, we go out to sea, and to make a long story short, I had a sailor that was carrying tie-down chains and he walked behind an A-6 at high power, had the engines at full power. He got blown over carrying the steel chains, a lot of steel chains. We never found him.

LYN-Which would be common that you don't find people that go over aboard.

J.B.-A lot of times. It's very rare that they find somebody that gets blown overboard. Then to make matters even worse, I'm informed as the XO that he didn't have a current flight physical. I just went, "You gotta be kidding and now he's gone." You talk about court martial type of stuff, that's court martial material.

So, I brought our corpsman back in and I said, "What part of this don't you understand?" He said, "Well, you sent him down to get..." This was back when HIPPA prohibits me from knowing what your medical conditions are. This is back when it was just starting. But he was sent down.

LYN-I can't image that applied to the Navy.

J.B.-It did. It did. He was sent down for a flight physical and he didn't pass. I said, "Why didn't you notify me?" He said, "Well, I can't because it's..." What do you mean you can't?" So, to make a long story short he went down, we sent him down, he didn't pass and we didn't know it. I still think I could have court martialed the corpsman but anyway we lost him.

That's the, then I will get into probably one of the most infamous mishaps in the S-3 which I know a lot about because I was the mishap aircraft.

As CO, we go on, we are a normal squadron. We have issues and we are on cruise and I have a launch, a pinky launch, it's normal for a CO to get a pinky recovery. That way you get a night trap and it's really night. But they gave me a pinky launch.

LYN-Pinky?

J.B.-Pinky, that's when the sun is going down. So, the sun is going down and I'm launching. I launch and I raise the landing gear and the nose wheel doesn't come up. That's not a big deal because if the wheels don't come up that's not a big deal. It's a big deal if they don't come down.

So, the first thing you do when your wheels don't come up you try to get them down. I put them down and the nose wheel doesn't come down. Now we've got a problem.

So, we go through all the procedures of the, in our manual it's called NATOPS, Naval Aviation Training Operation Procedures or whatever, NATOPS. We go through all the authorized procedures and I still can't get the nose down. The problem with that at the ship, we were on cruise, eastern Med, blue water ops which means there's no divert. If you're gonna land you're gonna land on the carrier or in the water one of the other.

The problem with not having wheels and having to land on the carrier are it's very, very, very dangerous. In fact, with this airplane it says, "You will barricade" so you fly into the big barricade. This airplane had never done a barricade landing before. So, that's one thing you never want to be first at.

So, I know all this and I'm, "I don't want to be first barricade." So, we do everything we can. We go through all the NATOPS procedures. I started going slow because the nose wheel folded into the fuselage like this so if I go slow maybe it can push, I did things that tried to push the gear

down. That's the emergency way but they weren't pushing the gear down. I thought if I go slower it will be less wind friction and it will push it down. It wouldn't push it down.

I thought, "Well, the nose kind of swings down so if I pull "G's" it will put more "G" force on the airplane and it will get a little momentum to get the wheel down. The problem with that is you can pull three and a half "G's" legally. That's all you are supposed to pull. That didn't do it and so I had to, everybody knows airplanes are built for more than what they are authorized, what the book says. So, I pulled four and nothing at five and nothing. I pulled five and a half "G's" and I got "clunk". I got every indication in the cockpit that everything was good.

I said I took off pinky and so now it's night. My maintenance officer tells me, "It looks like it's down but it may not be down." So, I'll skip some of the nuances of how we got there but we got to a situation where it looks like it's down and I have every indication that it's down but my wingman says it might not be down.

So, I said, I'm the CO, so they only more senior guy on the ship is my boss the CAG so I convince him that we have to come down just to do a touch-and-go because it's down, I know it's down. I've got all the indications. I do a touch-and-go and get airborne again. Well, my maintenance officer was right. It wasn't down.

So, we touched down and the gear collapsed and all the gear part of the airplane and the engines are sitting right here so they are eating up parts. So, we did a touch-down. The nose hits the deck. The gear collapses as the nose hits the deck. There's sparks and fire coming off the nose of the airplane.

The LSO starts screaming at me to eject. Well, in the S-3 the right seater, the guy in the right seat ejects everybody. So, I remember thinking, "I'm not sure it's the, I'm not sure it's the right decision but I know it's not the wrong decision because that's what we're supposed to." You don't want to eject alongside a carrier at night. If you get in the water alongside the carrier there's huge amounts of swirl and turmoil behind the ship. You've got four forty-foot propellers back there churning the water. It's been known the drag people down eighty feet and then you've got to swim to the surface at night.

A lot of times you think how long can you hold your breath. So, not ideal but anyway we, the LSO is screaming to eject so he ejects but only he goes out of the airplane. Only the right-seater goes out. The three of us, I didn't know it at the time, in fact it's night time and this rocket goes off. Well, if somebody at night time takes a big light and flashes it in your eyes you're blind. You can't see anything.

Here I am blink going off the flight deck with this type attitude and I can't see anything. I didn't know what happened. I remember thinking, "Did I eject?" I go, "I don't think so because still I still have the stick and I still feel like I'm flying." I thought, "Am I gonna die? I've never done that either before. Maybe I've died. I don't think I've died either."

But it was just how things happened so quickly when you are in an accident situation. Your brain just goes into over-drive. Then I get my eyesight back and of course I have the stick in my lap so as soon as I broke the flight deck, of course my vector is down and you have fifty-five feet



to recover the airplane before you hit the water. So, somehow, I recovered eight feet off the water. I didn't know it at the time because I was blind. The airplane went way below the flight deck and they couldn't even see it. In fact, the air boss thought it hit the water. Anyway, we climbed out and that's when I did an assessment. "OK, he's gone. I'm in a..."

LYN-There are three people in the plane.

J.B.-Three people in the airplane. I look back and I see four eyeballs looking at me. To make a long story short, we came back then we did do a barricade. The first barricade ever. It tears the living crap out of the airplane. It tears the airplane up. Every probe was ripped out of the airplane, it's not just broken off, it's ripped out of the airplane.

We landed OK. I'll get to the epilogue here. So, there was a little bearing that broke in the nose wheel and it prevented the nose wheel from coming down. The ejection system failed. What caused that is the, it was miss-manufactured from day one so had flown ten or twelve years with the wrong ejection valve in the co-pilot seat.

LYN-So the man who ejected.

J.B.-He, that was the other thing. I was CO, I was responsible for him and I knew going in the water at night is not good. So, they immediately, I'll tell you one of the little stories. When I was climbing out the air boss told the SAR helicopters, something and rescue helicopters, "There's four chutes in the water." I went, "Boss." He said, "Shut up, we've got an emergency in progress." They thought the airplane hit the water.

I said, "No, I am the emergency. Don't be looking for four people because I've got three here. You find one and you're doing good." Then they said within about three minutes they said, "Well, we got him." I go, "How do you have him already?" I didn't know it until after I landed he had ejected about right here, got a chute, well then the carrier came underneath him. He never even got wet. He just landed on the flight deck which isn't as good but it's not great because you land on a steel flight deck and that steel flight deck does not feel good."

LYN-How was he?

J.B.-He's OK. He's living in St. Augustine. He's doing fine. So, we get everybody back. The airplane, we identified two problems. One was the landing gear bearing and the other was the miss-manufacture of the ejection system. There were like twelve other airplanes that were miss-manufactured and people were flying around with unsafe ejection systems and had been for years.

So, Cecil Field, came back. I remember coming back after that cruise. Well, let me talk about the airplane. We off-loaded the airplane and went into Spain to get, it was during the beginning of the cruise so we off-loaded the airplane onto a MPS ship. It went into Spain and there was an aircraft manufacturing there, I forget who it was now, but, redid the airplane because it had significant rework to be done on it.

As we were leaving the Med they said, "The airplane is ready to go home." We assigned our maintenance officer to get it and bring it out to the ship. I remember him saying, a lot of the parts

that we call “beauty panels” weren’t there. They got it safe to fly. He said, “Oh, this airplane is really squared away.” Anyway, none of the JO’s when we got near Cecil Field, none of the JO’s wanted to fly it.

LYN-I can understand that.

J.B.-Of course you’re CO so, “Shoot, it’s in better condition than last time I flew it.” (Laugh)  
Guess who flew it off the ship? (Laugh)

I remember at Cecil Field I used to be a jogger, I still am a jogger, but I used to jog the perimeter road and anytime I saw an airplane circling overhead it used to send chills down my spine because I remember circling trying to figure out this landing-gear problem. On one occasion, the duty truck came out and found me and I said, “Oh, God, it’s one of mine.” It had an unsafe nose gear but that was the kind of problem that we used to give us unsafe gear indications. It used to just be an indicator problem and that’s kind of what I thought I had but I had the real thing.

I will never forget a time, once again it was summer time, sweltering hot and the duty truck coming out and I’m going, “Oh, no.” Because if it’s just an indicator problem you don’t have to do anything. You just land. But if it’s a problem you should foam the runway and all that. You have an aircraft mishap and have all kind of damage to the airplane and all of that. In this case it was just an indicator problem.

LYN-So, coming home. Talk to me about those homecomings. Are they more special to the wives or is it a big deal?

J.B.-It’s a big deal.



HOMECOMING sculpture

Norfolk-North Charleston-San Diego

Expressing the joy of reunion between  
a family when the sailor returns from a  
long period at sea

Homecomings are, you know, you're at sea, you're focused like a laser beam on military stuff. Quite honestly, wife problems, kid problems, family problems are secondary for the most part. So, in their absence basically your wife is absent, your kids are absent, and you know a lot of times with my vintage we found out about problems at home Snell mail, you know. We always, they weren't consecutive. You know, you'd get a letter saying, "Johnny's arm is healing well." "What happened to Johnny's arm?"

LYN-Primm Wright told me the secret. You're supposed to put numbers on those letters. No one had ever told me that either.

J.B.-Well, we didn't either. I got all kind of letters and you say "What?" I could get a set of orders without knowing. So, homecomings were the time that you know, Navy sailors would look forward to because there was twelve on, twelve off, seven days a week. I can't tell you the number of Christmases I spent on the ship. So, they were very, they were looked forward to by the sailors.

As pilots now, we usually had more crews than we had airplanes so not everybody got to fly off. Usually the fly-off took place a day or two before so those were extra special to get off a day or two early but not all pilots got to do it. Not all our air crew got to do that. They were some that had to walk off and walk on. It's special to see the families congregated on a flight line and I guess for the wife, I remember my wife pointing out, "Daddy, he's the one in the flight suit." We all had flight suits. In fact, she was hood winked a couple of times thinking that that person was me and it wasn't me.

LYN-I'll tell you a funny thing, I learned who my husband was by the way he walked. I could identify him by the way he walked. There are a lot of sailors out there. I finally figured that out.

J.B.-Homecoming was a big deal back then for the wives' club. It was, they, even cruises were a big deal. They used to send us, I remember this, they sent us some items to auction off. Some were little risqué things you know trying to prep us for the homecoming. But, the money generated would fund the homecoming party. We always had some kind of homecoming party. Maybe not that day but there used to be a party afterwards. Yeah, homecoming was a big deal.

LYN-So your adjustment. Can you talk to me about the adjustment being home after being a seven to nine-month cruise?

J.B.-Yeah. For the most part the spouse, the wife, well, I grew up, I was in the Navy when it was primarily male. Toward the end of my career there were females. When we talk about spouses they were normally female. The wife, in the normal family mode I mean the guy goes and does the lawn work. On cruise, the wife has to pick up all of that. I'm a car guy so I used to have a couple, two things about me. I like older cars because I like working on them. Now, the problem with older cars and working on them is you have to work on them. That only works if you're there.

So, I always had one or two extra cars. I don't know why I do that. But that's why I did it I guess, so, I remember coming home one time. My wife, I said, "Why are you driving that car

for?” She goes, “Well, the other two stopped running so I just”, she would go to the next one and start driving it. She had to pick up, she had to become much more independent as a spouse.

With the house, she got very skilled at... I remember one time she alluded to how proud she was that she had changed a timer in something. I don't know if it was the dish washer or whatever. She got a technician out and he said, “Well, we're gonna have to order one of these timers and put it in here, you put it right here.” She said, “Well, what do you have to do?” He said, “Well, you take the wire off that one and put it on this one.” She said, “Well, I can do that.” So, I remember she was so proud she had changed the timer in something and saved ten dollars or something, I forget what it was.

But, other decisions that would have normally been made with the father and the mother, the husband and the wife, had to be made by one spouse. I can tell you that one time I came home and my daughter was in 4-H, now this was I had two daughters and we waited ten years and I wanted a little boy and I had a third daughter. Then I had a boy. But anyway, the third daughter got into 4-H and horses and I came home and I heard them talking about horses and “OK, that's normal.”

I was not too interested in horses but then I heard them talking about horses and leasing horses and horses and leasing. I come from a family that for an economic model, I was taught an economic model that if you can't afford to buy it, “If you can't afford it you don't get it. You don't lease stuff.” I never leased a car in my life. I probably never will lease a car in my life.

They were talking about horses and leasing. I said, “What are you talking about?” They said, “Well, we're leasing a horse.” I go, “Who in the world would do that? Lease a horse?” She goes, “Yeah, we've been leasing a horse for three years.” I go, “Didn't know that. Didn't know that we were leasing a horse.” Of course, like I said.... She and I talked about this leasing of a horse. I said, “If you want a horse we need to buy a horse.” Of course, it was always in my mind too, it's expensive to own a horse. I found out, well, horses aren't that expensive to buy but they are expensive to maintain.

So, my daughter was into this 4-H and into 4-H big time and it was a good decision to stay with horses because she had three goals in life. One was to become a lawyer so academics were important. A horse was second priority and as a teen-ager, senior teen-ager, dating teen-agers she always told the boys, “My school comes first, my horse comes second, and if you don't mind being third then we can go out on a date.”

So, anyway we talked about leasing horses and I didn't like leasing horses. I go, “We ought to buy a horse.” So, we tricked our daughter into thinking, “Well, we can never afford a horse” but she went out looking for a horse to lease. We worked it out with the owner who wanted to sell the horse, “We're gonna talk lease but we're really we're gonna buy.” So, we bought her a horse one Christmas and I'll never forget, she didn't know it until we put an envelope under the tree saying, “Congratulations, I'm yours” or “I'm your horse” or something like that.

So, this is a big deal to me, you know, buying a horse. Not only is the capital expensive but maintaining. I'll never forget, she, we were waiting with anticipation about the card with the

horse. She opened it and she goes, “Oh, a horse.” We go, “Are you kidding me? Oh, a horse’?” She started crying like a baby because she said, “I never, I knew I was never going to get a horse.”

So, those things take place, cars, appliance repair, lawns, I mean so, transitioning back there has to be like, we were leasing a horse and I said, “No, we’re not gonna lease a horse. We’re gonna buy a horse.” So, there were some...

LYN-Decision making in transition...

J.B.-The other big transition or decision making was, my mid-career, my wife had a career, she was a teacher and wanted to get in administration.

LYN-Where did she teach?

J.B.-She taught in Clay County for the most part but she also taught in Duval County. In Duval County, she taught during my first tour. But every time she moved she had to start all over again.

When we got to Beeville, well, when we were going to Beeville they wanted her to travel for the interview. Well, back then the Navy we were earning nothing and school teachers were earning less than nothing and airlines was expensive. So, I said, “No, you’re not going to fly there for an interview.” But, we got there and so they said, we said, “We’ll get there next Tuesday.” They said, “OK, come in Tuesday for an interview.”

So, she came in for an interview and I had the kids and we had planned she would go in to for the interview in the morning and we take the kids to lunch because we were living in BOQ. She never came home. I go, “What the heck is going on here?” So, to make a long story short, they knew she was a Navy wife. She was coming in Tuesday and they needed somebody so the interview consisted of, “Go down and look at second-grade class room and if you like it that’s your classroom. And by the way, you start now.” (Laugh) So she started that day.

But anyway, somewhere in the middle, every time we moved she had to start all over again. Somewhere in the middle of my career she said, it was 1985 I guess, she said, she looked at my orders and said, “You know what, those orders are your orders. You’re going to...” I went to National War College in D.C. and then I did a Pentagon tour. After my squadron tour I came back I was a RAG CO of VS-27 at Cecil Field which was another, I could talk two or three hours on that tour. Then I went away and the I came back and was the Commodore at Cecil Field.

All that time I was either at Cecil Field or theoretically a bachelor up in D.C. or up in Norfolk.

LYN-So, she stayed in her career.

J.B.-She stayed in her career and became an assistant principal and then got into grant writing and she’s still, in fact she’s home writing grants right now.

LYN-So she’s in grant writing.

J.B.-She started the grant writing position in Clay County and she was a grant writer in Clay County. She ran the grant department in Clay County.

LYN-In the school system?

J.B.-In the school system. Then she was hired by Duval County, General Friar, when he was the Commandant at the National War College so I knew him from a previous time.

LYN-So, she worked right down the street from here.

J.B.-Right down the street from here. Then she went to FSCJ and she was in the grant department there. Then she retired a year or two years ago and now she is a consultant writing grants. She writes for Jacksonville Children's Commission. She writes for Work Source, Career Source, whatever it's called now. I should know what it is, in fact, she just got hired by the chamber for, what's the business end of the Chamber with Jerry Millot? Anyway, she just got a call the other night. She will be writing grants for them.

We write, we are on the University of Iowa, we're University of Iowa grant writers. We write primarily, she started, I don't want to talk about her too much.

LYN-Please do.

J.B.-She started it, back then, just with any profession in the beginning if you claimed you were a doctor you were a doctor. There were no certification standards for being a doctor and eventually the AMA took it over and whatever and created standards to be a doctor and now you're a "card-carrying doctor". The same with lawyers, the same with grant writers.

She found that a lot of people said, "I'm a grant writer" and they had questionable skills and things like that. She started a grant-writing organization. I'll never forget, she and about four or five others started a grant-writing organization. Her conference, national conference I think we had seven attendees. Now it is twenty-something years old and I just went to the conference last year and we had seven hundred and fifty people. International, now it's international.

LYN-And she is still involved in that?

J.B.-Not so much now. She got the organization running then she worked with, I forget what, the University of South Florida to create a credential, a credible credential criteria test to create a credential. She started a foundation for grant-writing so she was in the beginning of the grant. Now there's, just as some professions have multiple, I think there's two or maybe three grant-writing credentialing agencies. I can't tell you one is better than the other.

As a pilot, there is only one credentialing and it's called the FAA. I think doctors there's only one. I'm not sure about dentists and chiropractic and all of that stuff. But, she's one of the major, GPA is one of the major grant-writing organizations in the world now. She was on the leading edge of all that. She got her PhD in grant writing.

LYN-Where do you get a PhD in grant writing?

J.B.-Well, it's actually in higher education. Her PhD was to create the credential for certification and she is still working, eventually she will succeed, but to get a college curriculum that teaches the skills of grant writing because there are all kinds of foundation grants and all different flavors

of grants. There's all kinds of accepted practices and skills that are required and you know, "Where do you look for grants?" It's a skill.

LYN-So, you are talking about her. Her name is?

J.B.-Phyllis Renninger. She has been married since, a long time, forty-seven years.

Phyllis  
Renninger



LYN-Where is she from? Oh, your town.

J.B.-Yeah, home town in south eastern Pennsylvania. Yeah, she stuck through this Navy... which is another thing. A lot of marriages don't, whether the military life-style and the separation. I'll never forget when my CO tour, I had a JO who had, it was competitive to go to post-graduate school in Monterrey, California, and I got him a set of orders to go to PG school and his wife, he had married her in Pensacola when he went through as a naval flight officer. She, in Pensacola, her home town and her family, she said, "I'm not going to Monterrey, California. That's on the other side of the world."

So, he called me and said, "You need to cancel my orders." I go, "Are you kidding me?" "I fought like crazy to get you a set of orders." Anyway, I said, "You know, if she won't follow you there there's a problem. Don't screw up your career too. Your marriage is not very strong and you're gonna screw up the career if you turn down these orders.? So, he did go to PG school and his marriage did dissolve. You know, it's hard on marriages. Military life is hard on marriages.

Throughout my CO tour, my commanding tour at the RAG, my Commodore tour, there's a lot of pit-falls in life that do military officers in. I can tell you stories. I had one that posed for Play Boy, a female of course. Her timing was off. She thought she was getting out of the Navy in May and the June issue wouldn't come out until June. Well, the June issue comes out in May and it was in the public domain and she is in the military. The Navy did not look kindly about it.

LYN-I think I remember that. That was in the news, wasn't it?

Tell us about Commodore.

J.B.-I was the Wing Commodore. I had six squadrons of S-3's at Cecil Field. I followed Phil Voss which is another name. You need to interview him. [Conversation with Phillip Dane Voss is included in this project.] We always call him the "future mayor of Jacksonville" although, he is not going to run.

LYN-His paperwork is right there. I called him and he was in Los Angeles actually when I talked to him Saturday

J.B.-He's a good friend of mine. How did we get to Phil Voss? Oh, Commodore. You know, once you get in the military when you get up to higher echelons of command it's very political and Phil did a lot for me, he believed in me, and maybe rightfully so. But, he had a big hand in me becoming Commodore.

I followed him into the wing position at Cecil. You are challenged by people. You have a lot of people and you have a lot of airplane problems, a lot of wife problems.

Well, let's see, I had a guy jump off the Buchman Bridge at night and claimed to be a SEAL swimmer so the police were trying, he said he could swim to the shore and he couldn't so he was hanging on a pylon and he wouldn't get off the pylon so the police called me and said, "One of your guys just jumped off the Buchman Bridge." I had a sailor that...

LYN-Most people don't survive the Buchman Bridge.

J.B.-No, this guy was lucky. He, I told the police, "You have a boat out there?" They said, "Yeah, but he won't come off the pylon." I said, "Can you get to the shore? I'll get him off the pylon." They were coming to pick me up when the guy finally gave up and turned himself over to police. Then they turned him over to me and I had to adjudicate his misgivings.

One of the more unfortunate things I had, he was in the wing, a sailor who had a marital problem. He and his wife were divorcing and he couldn't take it and he had taken, actually it's tragic, he took his son and actually said, "You're never gonna see your son alive again." He was right, she didn't. He killed his son. Killed him and put him in a truck and burned him up.

But, I remember talking to some of his buddies and saying, "He's got problems." When he abducted the child and we didn't know where he was taking him or what he was going to with him. He had threatened the life of this boy, six-year old boy. I said, "If you know where he is or where could be we need to get ahold of him." We didn't get to him in time.

So, we had incidents like that. That kind of stuff happens more often than you would like to happen but it happens in the military. We had a sailor who was caught on drug charges. He was being taken to the brig but the CO wanted to talk to him before. He was a good guy but he just got caught up in the drug trade. He was seeing the CO and before the master at arms could take him out of the CO's office and take him to the brig he said, "I need to go to the men's room first." He did and he went to the men's room and blew his brains out.

I had a senior chief, a senior chief petty officer who was in charge of what was called DAPA, Drug Abuse Program Advisor, he was the drug abuse program advisor for my command and he



was selling drugs. So, he, we caught him and he's, I think he went to Leavenworth. He got reduced to a E-1 from E-8 to E-1 and was dishonorably discharged. But he served time.

But, we had some tragedies but when you are dealing with two thousand people and a RAG that has in a year you probably have a thousand people going through it. I met a lot of people. I met a lot of people in that RAG, that wing, that RAG.

Out of the wing at Cecil Field I decided I would retire. The year before, I was a Navy captain at the time, I realized that I wasn't going to be an admiral. I selected, I was what is the proper word? I had been looked at for nuclear powered training but one of my, this is another revelation and one that I try to teach the youngsters that I mentor is in life, that things have consequences. I was being looked at for nuclear power in 1996 and in 1971 I had gotten an "F" in one of my math courses. This is twenty-six years, twenty-five years ago.

LYN-Same thing in our record.

J.B.-They said, "Why did you get an "F" in this class?" I went, "Are you kidding me? I mean, I took it again and I got a "B". "They didn't care about the "B". They cared about the "F".

LYN-Same thing at 174, a class, my husband got married and he retook it and it stayed in his record and it kept him out of, what was it called NECEP. Somebody found that in the record and it kept him out. So, he went to college and got picked up for OCS Coast Guard but...

J.B.-They brought that up and I just couldn't believe they went back that far. Of course, that tells you something. They couldn't find anything else.

LYN-Except that one thing.

J.B.-When you get to that top of the pyramid, man, it gets real tiny up there and so I didn't select. There were three of us being looked at for nuclear power and I was one of the two that didn't get selected or two of them were selected, I was either one of two or two of two that didn't get selected. Anyway, I realized I wasn't going to make admiral so, "I can live with that. So, I'm gonna retire." I put in to retire but the year before they had had a RIF, a reduction in force of captains. They had too many captains. So, they said, "Anybody that wants to get out can get out." So, unbeknownst to me, too many captains got out.

So, the next year they didn't have enough captains. So, I want to retire and they say, "We don't think so." I go, "What do you mean, you don't think so?" "Well, we want you to go to sea and work for an admiral." I go, "Well, I don't want to go to sea and I don't want to work for an admiral." "Yeah, but we really want you to go work for this admiral."

Twenty-five years and this was the all-volunteer force and I'm here, "OK, all volunteer force and notice my hand isn't up. What does it mean?" They said, "Well, you are a commissioned officer and you work at the pleasure of the President and he is very pleased with your performance right now. We want to keep you." So, I said, "I don't know how I'm gonna get out of this." So, next thing I know I get a call from an admiral, a guy named Admiral Mullen. So, do you know the name?

Admiral Mullen was a one-star, just made admiral. So, he calls me up and I say, “Admiral, before you go any further, I’m trying to retire.” He goes, “Yeah, I know but they still gave me your name.” I said, “OK, just as long as you know where we sit here.”

So, he talks for fifteen minutes on the phone and he said, “I want to come down and meet you.” He’s up in Washington, D.C. and I was at Cecil Field. I said, “OK, when do you want to come down.” He says, “Well, tomorrow morning.” “It just so happens my calendar is clear tomorrow, Admiral. You can come down.”

LYN-You told an admiral he could come down. (Laugh)

J.B.-Yeah. So, he comes down next morning, he shows up in my office and we talk for like three hours and we talked about this, that and the other and at the end of the conversation I remember him saying, “Well, I’m not going to push this thing but if they keep you, you’re the guy I want.”

I said, “Admiral, I am going to push my retirement but if they keep me I would be glad to come work for you.” So, anyway, long story short, they did keep me and I did go work for Admiral Mullen but it was probably one of the best tours I’ve ever had because he is a great guy to work for. [Admiral Mike Mullen became the seventeen Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2007-Admiral Mullen served in both the Vietnam War and Persian Gulf War]



Admiral Michael Mullen

“J.B., we have a problem. We don’t have any Cherry Coke on the mess deck.”



He was a great war fighter. He was great officer. He was great with the troops. Troops loved him. He used to go down and eat on the mess deck almost every night with the troops. He is an admiral, has his own cook but he would go down and eat with the troops. I can tell you a lot of stories about him. Probably one of the more famous one, he came up, well any time he had a problem he would tell me. That meant I had a problem. I had to fix it.

So, one of the problems was he said, “J.B., we don’t have any”, we’re in the middle of the North Arabian Gulf on cruise on George Washington battle group, well, I’ll tell you one story before that. He went on leave and so he goes on leave and it’s me, I’m a captain, CAG’s a captain, and the captain is a captain. So, I said, “Just for organizational issues here, who’s in charge here? We are all three captains and we’re all three on the same ship.” He says, “You are.” I thought

was true I just wanted to make sure they understood that. Now I was in charge of the carrier, eighty-some airplanes, the two nuclear subs we had, the cruisers, you know twenty-five thousand people, a lot of crap. When you have a lot of stuff a lot of stuff can go wrong.

But anyway, back to the ship and the troops. He came up to me one day and said, "We have a problem." "OK, Admiral, what problem do I have?" "We don't have any." We're in the North Arabian Gulf. This is half-way around the world. "We don't have any Cherry Coke on the mess deck." I go, "Oh, boy, we do have a problem sir." I go, "How am I gonna get Cherry Coke half-way around the world?"

So, every night we had a call to Norfolk our immediate in charge and if we had parts problem we'd satellite phone to them to say "We need this part or we need that part." So, every night we had a status report. I'll never forget we went the prop fell off the submarine, that's normal. The radar doesn't work, that's normal, and oh, by the way, we don't have any Cherry Coke. They stopped and fall silent. "Say that last one again." I said, "We don't have Cherry Coke on the mess decks." They said, "That's what we thought you said." Three days later we had Cherry Coke. (Laugh) I mean they ship it all the way around.

I told them, "When that Cherry Coke comes in I want the first glass because I want to give it to the admiral." So, I'll never forget, he was sitting at his desk and I put this glass of Cherry Coke on his desk and he's, "What's that?" "Cherry Coke, Admiral. We now have Cherry Coke." He just smiled at me.

But I went to work for Admiral Mullen which was a great tour, hard to work for. He was a workaholic. Pushed.

LYN-During that time you were stationed in...

J.B.-Norfolk.

LYN-But your wife, your family stayed here in Jacksonville, in Orange Park.

J.B.-Yeah, they stayed in Orange Park. She got, I think she came over on cruise, met us over on cruise one time but then I served him. He left and the new admiral was interviewing captains for, I was his chief of staff, Admiral Mullen's chief of staff. That's the second highest guy in the admiral's food chain.

The new admiral was interviewing captains and he was turning them down left and right and I'm like, "Look, I want to retire. I wanted to retire two years ago." He said, "Well, can't you just stay here?" "No, you're gonna go on a cruise again. I don't mind going on a cruise but I do mind going on a cruise." Finally, I told him, I said, "You know July of next year I'm gonna leave. I'm gonna walk off the ship so you better have someone." He still didn't anybody when I walked off the ship.

Anyway, hard tour but I came down to Cecil.

LYN-Now where was that tour? Was that a Med cruise?

J.B.-That was a Med cruise. Came down to Cecil, retired there. Admiral Mullen was the guest speaker. So, we retired down there.

Then I went back, Cecil Field goes on. I got a job with FSCJ running their aviation center out there. So, it was kind of funny because they would always, the college would always ask, “Wonder what this is all about at Cecil Field.” I can tell you. Well, the hangars, we talked about hurricanes and we owned a hangar at the college. They said, “I wonder what the hangar is stressed for during hurricanes, wind speeds?” I said, “I can tell you.” So, they would ask questions about Cecil Field.



Florida State College at Jacksonville-Cecil Field Campus

LYN-What is it?

J.B.-Probably a hundred and twenty-five knots. So, they asked questions about Cecil Field and I’d say, “I can tell you all about that. I can tell you more than you want to know about Cecil Field.” So, we set up the aviation center at Cecil.

You probably don’t know this but I was the architect in a public-private partnership which engaged the college, the Jacksonville Airport Authority, it was a thirty-million-dollar project. We got ten million from the college, ten million from the Aviation Authority, and ten million from the City of Jacksonville to build a paint hangar that can paint a 757, actually a 767 which is a big airliner. It, the importance of that project is this, it allowed a commercial concern which is called Flightstar which was up at International Airport and they had eighty employees. They now have eight hundred employees at Cecil.



LYN-Thank you very much.

J.B.-So, that was, it's still owned by the Airport Authority, the college, and the city. So, but it was a job creator for the city. That's literally the guy who was running it, Jerry Hernandez, the owner of Flightstar, I convinced to come to Cecil and bring his business there. He went from eighty employees, he has eight hundred or maybe a thousand now.

LYN-That is a major concern for the city is bringing commerce into Cecil, and jobs. It is slowly happening. They come in big chunks though.

J.B.-Yeah, you've got Amazon out there now. So, Cecil Field still lives on. I've lived through the thought about bringing the Navy back. I lived through the demise of Master Jet Base Cecil Field which...

LYN-You were there?

J.B.-I was not there. I was around. I was in the Navy when the decision was made and we couldn't believe it. We go, "What the heck are they thinking about?" Allegedly, we will give them something that we know they will turn down.

What happened, what I heard is, I wish I could remember, they had BRAC decisions like every two years, '89-'90, it might have started in '87, '89,'91, '93 but I think it was in '91 I think, in '87 or '89 the Department of Defense says, "Navy, you're not playing this game. Army and Air Force are giving us things to shut down." The Navy said, "We'll, the Navy was slow rolling, the Department of Defense, if you get enough out of the Air Force then we don't have to shut anything down." But in '89 I think or '91 I forget which one it was, Navy said, "Well, we'll play the game. We'll give you something we know you won't take." They put Cecil Field on and they took it.

LYN-They didn't know John Warner was going to be in the middle of that.

J.B.-So, they took it. Probably the worst decision and they moved people up to Oceana which I had experienced Oceana before and it was a mess up there without the Hornets. All of a sudden people in Virginia Beach don't know what they're getting here. That airplane is loud.

Anyway, they moved it and then I lived through the re-vitalization when they tried to bring the Navy back. I mean, Oceana was balking at the Hornets up there big time so they said, "Well, we'll look at bringing the Navy back. Maybe we'll offer the Navy some more money to come back." It was a bad decision to go to begin with.

LYN-And Peyton didn't want it back.

J.B.-No, he didn't. There's, when you lose something it's almost impossible to get it back and they had, we had encroachment problems not even close to what Oceana has.

LYN-Nothing.

J.B.-But when Cecil left then everybody started developing.

LYN-Including his father.

J.B.-So, to be honest with you if I bought a house in Oak Leaf and it's nice and quiet for five years and the Navy is not here and then you want to bring the Navy back...

LYN- That's the place I stood as a non-Navy person. I've lived in Virginia Beach. I knew what it was at night when those they were working on those engines. [Oceana NAS noise]

J.B.-We lived in Brigadoon. Do you remember that?

LYN-We lived off of Holland Swamp Road on Arthur Avenue. We bought a townhouse so the second floor was those bedrooms and that noise from Oceana was maddening.

J.B.-Even back then.

LYN-That is a place where the encroachment is enormous in Oceana. That's where I stood as a civilian here. Now that I have heard in interviews many of the things that happened, we were so much better suited than anywhere else. I'm so sorry for the politics that happened in that and what it has done particularly to parts of the westside.

J.B.-Sam Houston, that's another name you need to interview.

LYN-He sat right here and I had known Sam. [Conversation with Sam Houston is included in this project] Patty Houston was my favorite teacher up at Spring Park School. I didn't know Sam was Sam until he walked to our door.

J.B.-Sam lived close to where I live now at one time. I forget why I was talking to him. He must have been Commodore and I was CO of RAG or CO of something and we were talking and all of a sudden, I heard this screaming in the background and all of a sudden, the phone went limp. I could hear people screaming in the background. I said, to my wife, "something happened down there" because he wouldn't answer the phone anymore. I said, "I'll have to go down there and find out. It sounded like somebody had intruded and was killing them or something.

What had happened is he was out on like a Florida room, patio, and the hose from the gas grill had disconnected and it was just spraying flames. Of course, he dropped the phone to go conduct the emergency actions and get the hose out and start trying to secure the gas line. I go down there and all the screens were burned out.

LYN-I've never heard that story.

J.B.-So Sam Houston, "Shoebags" is his call sign.

LYN-So, when they were considering moving back, did you take sides? Did you get involved in that effort?

J.B.-Do you know what year that was?

LYN-Let's see, Peyton.

J.B.-Was Peyton the mayor?

LYN-Ten years ago.

J.B.-See, you get a different perspective when you're representing your constituents in Orange Park. Although Cecil Field didn't really affect us the model is you have to represent your constituents. The fear was that any encroachment that had taken place already would prohibit it. There's something called ACOUZ, it's a sound decibel levels. In order to develop an airport, you have to be, the FAA, the DOD won't let you develop an airport unless you can't hurt the frogs and the environment, the people, and so by this time the encroachment had taken place and there was a lot of vocal voices about "not in my backyard, don't bring it back to my backyard."

You know Peyton, you don't live here. I was a little sensitive. I could see both sides. It would have been best for the Navy but it would have probably been worse for some of the residents, the past residents and as well as really bad for the current residents who had just bought a brand-new house.

LYN-I'll say that right after that debate the development slowed down because I assume people were still leery. It is starting to boom again.

J.B.-Well the expressway, the new by-pass, the toll road, I always get a kick out of that because since day one at Cecil Field they were talking about a road to the back gate, "It's gonna be built any year." In 1973, we were talking about the road to the back gate. Now it's almost there. It is there

I'll never forget all the chatter about the road to the back gate because all we had was 103<sup>rd</sup> Street to the main gate. The back gate, at Cecil Field the other thing I can relate to is the change in uniform policy that has taken place back at Cecil Field back in the '70's, '80's maybe even '90's, I mean you couldn't wear a flight suit except on the flight line. The flight jacket was part of the flight clothing so you couldn't wear a flight jacket outside the flight line, allegedly. Of course, in the cold days of winter in Jacksonville you needed a jacket and a flight jacket worked just fine except you couldn't drive through the gate with a flight jacket. So, you would do all kinds of contortions trying to take that flight jacket off before...

LYN-Before you got to the gate. (Laugh)

J.B.-Admiral Moriarty used to be a real pit with that. He used to station people at the gate to note and log those who came in the front gate and back gate with flight jackets. So, if you had a flight jacket I don't know how many times you had to strip a flight jacket off before you went in.

Today, it's amazing how there is no, there is no policy about uniforms any more. They wear any uniform. They wear flight suits in the restaurants. I was looking at, "Oh my god, they would have killed me..."

I mean I went to change-of-command at VP-30 just two weeks ago. I walked in and I almost didn't get a seat because all the troops were sitting in the chairs. I'll tell you VP-30 is a big squadron so not all the troops were even there. The troops that were there were seated in the chairs. It used to be that the out-going CO and the in-coming CO would review the troops. They don't stand, they are seated with the rest of the guests. It's really changed, it's changed a lot and I'm gonna say, "Not for the better." There are sailors that don't salute the flag or don't want to honor reveille.

LYN-During your time that would have been what consequence if you didn't salute the flag?

J.B.-Oh, they would have..

LYN-Court martial.

J.B.-They, certainly Article 32. There would have been legal issues whether it be at the commanding officer level or a court martial. I can't tell you the number of times I've gone to Captain's Mass with sailors or held Captain's Mass with sailors and I've court martialed lieutenants at Cecil Field too. He was a P-3, mission commander or plane commander in a P-3, so

TAPE 2 SIDE A

J.B.-He was a lieutenant but he was court martialed for stealing money from our ge-dunk and harassing females. By that time, we had females in squadrons so he was harassing them. We went to the west coast. We went to the east coast.

LYN-Let me ask, were you there during Jensen's time, the chaplain?

J.B.-Jensen? No.

LYN-That would be an interesting story, I will write it up. There is in the Navy now a Jensen window in the chapels to protect...he was preying on wives. It happened at our own chapel. [Chaplain Commander Andrew F. Jensen was the first chaplain to be court martialed in the United States Navy history for conduct unbecoming an officer. The trial marked two firsts for the Navy-the first officer to stand trial on adultery charges and the first chaplain to have ever been court martialed. He was acquitted at NAS Jacksonville. The story was portrayed in a movie.]

J.B.-At Cecil?

LYN-At Cecil.

J.B.-What year was that?

LYN-I don't know [1975] I was hoping that you knew. I will research that. So, you developed this program at the community college and then you went on to other things.

J.B.-Well, the college is very political and I ran into problems. They are very protective of their turf and I ran into problems with my supervisor who resented the fact that I'm well known in the aviation community, I mean, more well-known in the Cecil aviation community, Jacksonville aviation community and I was working in the aviation community so I would go to functions or meetings and it was like old home week sometimes. People knew me. I mean I could get things done that some people couldn't even fathom getting done. I mean a thirty-million-dollar public-private partnership, nobody can do that. But I was able to do it.

I had one boss, this is the difference in leadership styles. This boss at the college, I asked him one time, I forget what it was but I asked him, "What should I do about something?" He looked at me and he goes, "Don't ask me" he said, "You're the expert at this. You tell me how I can help you do this. You tell me what you want to do and tell me how I can help you." It caught



me off-guard a little bit because it was atypical for the college. Then he unfortunately had brain cancer and died.

LYN-Now was this during the Spence era? Was Spence the president of the college during that time?

J.B.-No, it was after Spence with Dr. Wallace.

LYN-It did leave some financial problems. That did not affect you?

J.B.-The Spence? Well, I got there right after Spence and there were more than financial problems. There was a lot more than financial problems and Dr. Wallace took over. Dr. Wallace was a leader. He was a true leader too. A lot of people don't like him. He wasn't a perfect guy. You know, he made some mistakes. He was probably a lot better leader certainly than Spence and I'm gonna say certainly better than the current leader of FSCJ now. I could talk volumes on that too but...

When I was there I had different supervisors, one who said, "You know, we hired you to be the expert in aviation, do your job. Tell me how I can help you." Then there were others who resented the fact that I was a leader in aviation and they wanted to minimize what I could do so that they could take the credit for a lesser performance. You know, and after a while I just said, "You know, this is too hard, you know." I did some nearly impossible things. I'm gonna say, "I did some impossible things." One of them was we started an air traffic-control.

Dr. Wallace, when I got there said, "I want to be air-traffic control training school." There were thirteen in the nation. I said, "No problem, we've got a facility, we can do that." I'm a believer that if you work hard enough you can do just about anything.

In this case I went to local FAA, they didn't know anything about it. I looked at the regulations and there was no regulation of how to start an FAA air traffic control school. That was the first problem. I said, "If there's no regulation what does that mean? Maybe I'm not looking at the right place." So anyway, I went to the local FAA and they said, "We don't know anything about it." So, then the higher like the military they have a state FAA called a "flight standards district office-FISDO" down in Orlando.

I went to Orlando. They didn't know what I was talking about because there was no regulation. So, then I went to the regional FAA office in Atlanta and talked to these guys and they said, "We know what you're talking about but we don't think there's any way, there's no regulation on it." I said, "How can there not be a regulation? There are thirteen schools that are training air traffic controllers. How can it be?" They said, "We don't know but we don't think we want any, we don't think we're gonna make any more air traffic control schools."

I had told Dr. Wallace, "Oh, yeah, we'll do this." So, they said, "The only way, we recommend you go up and talk to the FAA in D.C." So, I went up to the FAA in D.C. We had a lobbyist, although colleges can't have lobbyists, we had a lobbyist that got me in to see the number two guy in the FAA at the time. He flat told me, "You're not going to be an air traffic control school." This is after months of me researching and me lying awake and I'm saying, "How in

the hell am I going to do this? I told Dr. Wallace I was going to do it and I'm gonna do it. It's the right thing to do." It was the right thing to do because you are of the vintage of 1981 Ragan fired all the air.

LYN-Air traffic controllers.

J.B.-He fired all the air traffic controllers and that was 1981. You know they threatened a strike and he said, "You have a no-strike clause. You can't strike." "Well, we're gonna strike." "If you do I'm gonna fire you." They said, "You can't fire us, we're air traffic controllers." And they did strike and he fired all of them.

Well, anyway, 1981 and you had twenty-five years then, it's 2006 or so. They're all retiring so they are gonna have to hire. They didn't hire an air traffic controller in twenty years.

LYN-Let me go back. Did any of those get rehired?

J.B.-Very few. I'm gonna say, "Maybe one or two." If they were fired they were persona non-grata and in fact I was on Carl Vinson, I ran an air traffic control center on Carl Vinson and I had to send my controllers to Philadelphia to run the air traffic control system because they didn't have air traffic controllers.

So anyway, Dr. Wallace wanted to have one and the FAA said, "There's no way you're gonna do it." That's a pretty tall challenge when the FAA tells you in person, "You're not going to do it." But I learned a long time ago that everybody works for somebody. So, I said, "Who does the FAA work for?" Well, they are the Department of Transportation but "who do they work for." Well, they work for Congress. "Who signs their pay check?" Well, Congress gives them money.

So, I went to Representative Mica, John Mica, down south. He was on the Air Transportation sub-committee. I went down and talked to him. I said, I used this ploy, I said, "I've got this young kid and he wants to be an air traffic controller and we could train him and he could be an air traffic controller or he could go to Embry Riddle. Embry Riddle was an air traffic control school but they charged fifty-six thousand dollars or eighty thousand dollars a year." I said, "He can't afford that." But I said, "We could train him for ten thousand dollars a year if we could get authority from the FAA to train him. We're not asking for any money from the FAA. We'd like authority to train them with the FAA system, their training criteria." I said, "This kid can't get this training, he can't live his dream because of the FAA."

Mica, I'll never forget, he said, "That doesn't sound right." I said, "I agree with you. What are we going to do about it?" He said, "Let me think about it." He called me back about a week later and he said, "Do you want testify to Congress?" I've never done that before but I'm not afraid to testify to Congress, you know, after going through that barricade and just about dying, people ask me, "Are you afraid of this?" "No, I'm not afraid."

I'll tell you what I was afraid of, I was afraid of dying that night. I fought my way through that so Congress is going to be a cake walk. So, I went to Congress and I testified March 30<sup>th</sup> of 2007. I remember the date because that was my decommissioning of VS-24. They did it over at Jacksonville and I couldn't make it. I was one of the prominent people in VS-24.

LYN-But you had to be at Congress.

J.B.-But Congress called. So, I testified at Congress and I'll never forget, it was about five weeks later, after I don't know if you're familiar with testifying at Congress is like you are testifying to that wall. You know, they just record everything and they go, "Bah, bah, bah, bah." It goes in the record but then there are people that are paid to read the record and take action on it.

Anyway, five weeks later the FAA calls me and says, they called me personally, he said, "Have you ever thought about being an air traffic control school?" "Not this morning but it has crossed my mind a few times." Well, guess what? They reinstated instructions and criteria and guess what, we are now an air traffic control school.

LYN-What an impetus for that for our nation.

J.B.-We are an air traffic control school and about twenty other schools are now air traffic control schools.

LYN-Embry Riddle probably doesn't like that.

J.B.-Well, they didn't like that at all because...

LYN-You are taking away their big bucks.

J.B.-We modeled our training after Oklahoma, the FAA training model. FAA didn't like it because our students coming out of our system were equally as good as the students, maybe even better than the students coming out of Oklahoma City, the FAA training school. We bought the same soft-ware, the same simulators, everything the same as the FAA bought in Oklahoma City. So, our students were getting the same training.

LYN-How did you fund that program?

J.B.-Through a grant. I know a grant-writer. [his wife Phyllis Renninger]

LYN-You do know a grant-writer.

J.B.-It all fell into place. You know, I said, it was a Department of Labor grant. We had a labor problem. We had all these controllers, the federal government, the air traffic control system is gonna fall, it's gonna disintegrate.

LYN-Look at you. What a wonderful story.

J.B.-It was a great story and the Department of Labor funded it so we paid for all of it with Department of Labor money. It's still there. It's still operating. That's a true sign of a grant if a grant was made to be, I tell my wife I'm gonna write a book someday if I ever get time to do research. I'm going to research all the grants the Department of Labor gives out that are just grab and go.

LYN-This is a really interesting turn of conversation. So, you got involved in politics. Tell us, this is exciting for me to hear about your public service.

J.B.-Well, you know, that's a good segue, I've always believed that if you're not giving back or you're not making things better then you're not doing your job. So, actually, my stint with public service after the military came because of my wife.

While I was on cruise I can tell you she at one point somehow communicated with me. She said, "I'm think about running for town council." I went, "You know, I never thought about serving in the public because I couldn't."

LYN-Had she gotten involved with some issue?

J.B.-Well, she got involved with, she ran for superintendent of Clay County Schools as an elected official. She got a taste for politics so she had a lot of support to run but not enough support to win because she is a female, David Owens was a guy, a good old boy, you know. A lot of people were in his back pocket or he was in their back pocket or whatever. So, she ran against him and that was probably the wrong thing to do simply because he was an incumbent.

But, anyway, she got involved there and then she was unsuccessful and still had the political bug so she emailed, she emailed or communicated with me and said, "I'm thinking about running for town council." I said, "Knock yourself out, I can't do it." I was on cruise at the time. I said, "Whatever, knock yourself out." So, the next communication letter or whatever it was, "Oh, by the way, I won the election." Orange Park Town Council is very small, eight thousand, eighty-five hundred residents. Not many people get involved with politics. Not many people vote so if you get four hundred votes you will probably win.

LYN-How many councilmen are there?

J.B.-There's five. Then it's a weak mayor so they elect, they nominate somebody to be mayor every year.

LYN-From those five?

J.B.-So, she was on the town council and you can do three, three-year terms so you can run, you can serve nine years. So, during that nine she stayed on council nine years and she became mayor twice. Then at the end of her tenure I was out of the Navy and the town manager was a pretty good friend of mine and he said, "You need to run." I said, "No, I don't". You know because you have people all the time sitting in the audience creating problems or solutions. Yeah. So, I said, "I don't need that." Well, to make a long story short, what happened was I lost my father at a fairly young, well, I shouldn't say I was in the military. He was fifty-four. So, one of the guys that was on town council we hit it off and he was kind of like a father figure to me. He said, "You know, J.B., you need to run." His name was Earl Harrington. He was the godfather of Orange Park. I said, "Oh, Earl, don't do this to me. I can't say 'no' to you." So, I said, "You're gonna have to help me." So, he helped me and I ran and I won.

Now what's the subject here? How did I get involved, it was my wife. She was term-limited.

LYN-Now can she go back if she wanted to?

J.B.-She could.

LYN-She didn't want to?

J.B.-Just like I turned down sixteen, I served nine years too, two stints as mayor and you know you don't get the smartest people running for office. You don't get the smartest people. To run an organization, like we have fire department, a sewer department, a water department. You need to be kind of on your game a little bit.

LYN-But they do have a city manager.

J.B.-You have a city manager but you know he works for you so the council makes the decision. He's the CEO, he's the executive officer. He executes but the board decides. We pass the budget, we ultimately hire and fire all the department heads as well as the town manager.

LYN-So, you're not going back to be mayor again. So, what are you doing?

J.B.-I tried to run for county commissioner and once again I miss-judged the opposition and she was a good-looking female who had had, Clay County had by charter had approved an increase in Clay County's commissioners to seven, from five to seven. Then, I don't why but somebody brought it to their attention, "We don't need seven." They had another charter or another resolution."

LYN-Reduction of force right there in the county.

J.B.-She had already won the election to county commissioner but before she was seated she was kicked off the county commission because they didn't approve, they changed the number back to five again.

LYN-So tell us what you are doing?

J.B.-Oh, I am still, I'm still serving Orange Park by being on the Orange Park Fire Pension Board which is, I understand the Duval County Pension Fund, it's a very complex subject and it's being handled by amateurs with a bunch of contractors doing the work. If you let the contractors do the work they will do it the way they want to do it. Unfortunately for them, I had a little background in finance as well. I was a financial planner for three years so I know a little bit about it. They don't really appreciate my input sometimes because they are very pointed. Anyway, Fire Pension Board. I'm on Penney Farms Retirement.

LYN-Can you briefly talk to us about Penney Farms? It was begun by J.C. Penney.

J.B.-As a Christian retirement community. It was designed, it was developed for retired clergy, YMCA, YWCA directors, retired dignitaries in state and in government. So, you have ambassadors and that type stuff. You have very highly professional people going there to retire now.

LYN-Has that changed? My husband's former secretary is living at Penney Farms. Now she was a church secretary.

J.B.-Yes. Well, that's close to the vision of J.C. Penney. What we've, I just did, they wanted to hire somebody to do mission planning, strategic planning. I said, "I've done that for Orange

Park.” I said, “Why don’t I give it a shot and you can save yourself some money.” But, oh my goodness. “Christian retirement community.” Well, they are very averse to non-Christians living in a Christian retirement community. However, you have a 501 C 3 sanctioned by the Internal Revenue Service which is a branch of the government, Department of Treasury. Then you have another branch of the government called the Fair Housing with HUD, the Fair Housing Act which emanates from the Department of Housing and Urban Development which states, “you can’t discriminate for race, color, creed, and all that kind of stuff.” So, you have these opposing desires of “I want to be in a Christian retirement community” but the federal government says you can’t limit it just to Christians. Then it even gets into further difficulties with the LGBT, the, what word am I looking for? The non-standard people that are out there. You can’t discriminate. The City of Jacksonville just went through that.

LYN-Sexual orientation.

J.B.-Sexual orientation. Well, so I’m doing this mission planning and in the old mission statement there was this term called “inclusive”. It’s an inclusive retirement community which is in the old mission statement. But back in the ‘70’s “inclusive” meant, and I think the Fair Housing Act really goes back to the ‘60’s, so they were saying by saying “inclusive” they were saying, “We’ve got to include all religions. We can’t exclude. It’s got to be inclusive.” But, today “inclusive” is a buzz word for more than just religious desires. So, but actually the discussion and the problem that I ran into was religious. They still are clinging onto, “If you’re non-Christian you can’t be here.” Yet, by law we can’t prohibit non-Christians from being there.

Anyway, it’s like a two-hundred and forty acres, he bought thousands of acres. Some of it has been sold off. But there are thousands of acres down there. I think now they have two hundred and forty-eight developed. It’s a retirement community that goes to end of life. It goes from today to the end of life. We’re gonna care for you for the rest of your life.

So, not only do we have the entrance requirements being debated but we also have the exit requirements being debated. “How nice of a facility do you want for the end of life? How nice of a facility do you want to provide for the end of life?” So, any organization has conflict so I’m going to, I have a meeting this afternoon with Penney Farms where we decided to build a skilled-nursing center.

They have a skilled-nursing center, nursing home so to speak, but it’s old-school, old-criteria. Some of it, a lot of the criteria has been grandfathered so it doesn’t meet today’s standards but it did back at the time the grandfather acceptance or approval, so, we’re building a ten million dollar skilled-nursing center for the end of life. The model they are using is, “Come here as a retiree and then as you age out”, and the other model they use and it’s evident in their mission statement is “volunteerism” is very important. They want you to volunteer.

In what studies I, I did a little research on volunteerism and longevity, and it really proves that, the data proves “that the more you volunteer the longer you are going to live.” It makes sense. There’s a reason to get up in the morning if I can help somebody. “I can’t check out today, I have to go help Eleanor or Jim or whatever.”

LYN-A need to feel needed is very important.

J.B.-They have some unique people down there. There is guy down there that worked for Patton, George Patton. His name is George West. He's an Army guy. Now he got in late in the war but he said, he worked on George Patton's staff. I mean, "Holy mackerel."

LYN-Is there funding through Penney Corporation?

J.B.-I don't think there's any money through J.C. Penney Corporation.

LYN-So he gave the land.

J.B.-It was his dream back then and they did fund a lot of it back then but not anymore.

LYN-Are there other similar facilities or is Penney Farms unique.

J.B.-No, there's other retirements that specialize, there are other Christian retirements...

LYN-That he funded?

J.B.-Oh, no.

LYN-He did the one only. Why there? Do you have any idea why he chose that property, that location? It's not Duval County. What county is it in?

J.B.-It's Clay County. I don't recall reading but you know back then the railroad was just, came to Green Cove Springs, actually it stopped at Orange Park for a while then it went down to Green Cove Springs and then went south to St. Augustine.

LYN-Where there was tourism.

J.B.-These railroad moguls would build railroads so far then they would build a resort. That would be the draw to bring people in their train cars down to the resort. Then they had to expand because, "I've already been to Orange Park, I'm gonna go to Green Cove Springs. Now I'm gonna go to St. Augustine." They just kept going south. Flagler, I guess it was Flagler, Henry Flagler built the railroad.

LYN-It cost Jacksonville its tourism and then it went to St. Augustine and finally Palm Beach. That's an interesting thing to be doing.

J.B.-Penney Farms, I'm involved with a non-profit, well, several non-profits. I'm involved with a very ultra-low-income apartment complex in Jacksonville near Edward Waters College.

LYN-What's it called?

J.B.-King's Ridge Apartments. I'm on the non-profit boards that run that.

LYN-Are you aware of Holly Brook?

J.B.-But it is...

LYN-It's over by the old James Waldon Johnson. I didn't know it's story. I just knew it was there.

J.B.-I got involved with this apartment complex through a business associate. We actually purchased it, or took custody of it. It's a whole different culture. I mean things that are so obvious to you and I, they are oblivious to it.

LYN-I worked after-school tutoring program through No Child Left Behind and I managed nineteen schools so it is a mind-set in some of those communities.

J.B.-We collect three thousand dollars a month on late fees, late rent payments. These people can afford the rent and they still pay late fees. We do a quarterly audit and every quarter it's ten thousand dollars in late fees. I just go, 'Oh my god.'" They can't even afford to live and yet they are paying. We don't want to charge them late fees but...

LYN-That's the only way to get the rent.

J.B.-If you don't they don't pay the rent.

LYN-How many units are there.

J.B.-A hundred and eighty-seven. It's a big complex. There are seventeen, thirteen buildings.

LYN-I didn't realize it was that large.

J.B.-Yeah, it's a big complex.

LYN-The occupancy is pretty high.

J.B.-We took it over and it was thirty-something percent. It was in bankruptcy, I can't call it "bankruptcy" because they told me a non-profit can't go bankrupt. But it's receivership, it's bankruptcy. So, it was in receivership and they couldn't pay their bills so it went to the court.

The court assigned a lawyer to manage it until they could figure out what to do with it. They were accepting proposals to take custody of this property and we came up with a proposal that they bought. So, we have custody of it but in that matrix of how we are going to run it there is, there's two non-profit boards, one non-profit that owns it and then another non-profit that owns the non-profit that owns it.

So, to make a long story short, one of the non-profits' mission is to improve the quality of life for the residents. We are trying to improve the quality of life for the residents and it's hard. They just don't accept it. I mean, we try to do financial planning and this is the concept, we said, "Do you have a bank account?" "No, we don't." "Why not?" "Well, we don't trust the banks." "Well, where do you keep your money?" We're talking about females, she pointed to her bra as to where she kept her money.

LYN-Then they have to pay to get checks cashed.

J.B.-Everything. If somebody wants to rob you they put a gun and the next thing is the money is right there. They take it. So, it's a whole culture thing. I try to understand.



LYN-It is an enormous culture of Jacksonville, Florida. It's not just that complex. It's enormous.

J.B.-In that complex we have people who have lived there for fifty-something years. One of our workers in the office, she grew up there, she lives there, and her daughters live there, and her grandkids are there.

LYN-That happens in all of these...

J.B.-Ultra-low, we charge four hundred and something dollars a month for a two-bedroom apartment, four twenty-five or something. It's so low income, so low rent that HUD vouchers are higher and they will take their HUD voucher somewhere else that has a swimming pool. We don't have a swimming pool. They will go to some place with a swimming pool because they will get seven fifty a month.

LYN-You don't have a swimming pool. Do you have a community center?"

J.B.-We do have a community center. In fact, we're working, we're trying to work with, we're trying to figure out, we have a pre-school there which...

LYN-You do have a pre-school.

J.B.-Yeah, but it sucks. It's so bad our residents won't even take their kids there. It's being monitored by DCF so we brought in a consultant to look at it.

LYN-So that is a state sponsored pre-k?

J.B.-They get VPK, it's state sponsored but it's run by private individuals and they don't do a very good, it's so big. I'll be honest with you; the physical facility is in bad shape and that's what I'm trying to get the board to understand that we as a board kind of need to improve the physical.

It's debatable whether we are responsible for that or the operator is. Where does their responsibility start and stop and where does our responsibility start and stop. It's one of those....So, what we're doing right now is trying to improve that whole community center.

LYN-Do they take up the whole community center with the pre-k?

J.B.-We have a pre-k in, it's a fairly large building. We have pre-k in there, we have a COP shop there where the cops. A cop stop. We have a laundry mat in there. We have a community center in there so it's probably ten thousand square feet, fifteen thousand square feet. So, it's a fairly good size.

LYN-So what are you doing in your spare time? You've named Penney Farms and the complex.

J.B.-Well, a condo board in Pensacola. I own a condo in Pensacola so I'm on that board which is kind of interesting because I got on it, it's a twenty-two-story building and there are five of them, there are five twenty-two story buildings. So, I've never managed a, it's different with a high-rise. For instance, maybe throughout the whole building, I don't know but most of the floors

have cables that run underneath and they tighten them up to keep the building straight because it leans.

So, every ten years, every so often we gotta get somebody in there to check the tension on the cables and normal stuff you don't worry about that. It's a high-end, luxury condo so you have all kind of different problems.

LYN-So you enjoy being over there in Pensacola?

J.B.-We, it's right on the beach so it's like one of our dreams to live on the beach but we just live there for a week or so. Everybody says, "You gonna move there?" I couldn't live in a condo.

LYN-So you're enjoying life and you're serving the community.

J.B.-Yeah, we started this grant-writing business so we write grants. I get to do some work, well it's all work, but some of it for pay. A lot of it is not for pay.

LYN-And the Children's Commission, she's doing grants for the Children's Commission.

J.B.-I'm president of Navy League.

LYN-What is the Navy League?

J.B.-The Navy League's mission is to educate the public on the importance of maritime superiority. You know, the importance of the Mayport base to not only the Navy but the importance of sea power you know when you look at how many products come and come via the oceans it's way up there, seventy or eighty percent. Every product you use comes here somehow on the water.



(Conversation turns to debate on local political matters and then there is a loss at the end of the tape)

LYN-Where do you think the first port of trade of all of the land that is now America occurred?

J.B.-Virginia somewhere.

LYN-Jacksonville. The River May, between Rene de Laudonniere who was governor of La Caroline and John Hawkins of England. They traded cannons and a ship and water and biscuits right there.

J.B.-So, the trade at Mayport at the May River has been going on for centuries.

LYN-Since 1565.

(Conversation continues concerning local issue concerning deepening of St. Johns River)

J.B.-So what's your position on deepening?

LYN-My position would be against. That's just where I stand.

J.B.-Even though this is something we've been doing for hundreds of years when the river was eleven feet deep.

LYN-Well, they couldn't even get the ships in because of the sand bars but that entrance used to be like two miles wide, different channels. Of course, the jetties came in the late 1800's. The position is the money compared to what is the real market because we are not the top port. I only did that through research for the cruise ship. So, salinity, you know you can debate it back and forth. I'm not an expert on it and everybody has the real deal but the Corps of Engineers, I have two friends that were with the Corps who both have taken this position about how it will affect land-owners along the river and the need for that deeper for JAXPORT. So that's, my just very weak position.

J.B.-We as the Navy League we did a lot of research and we were debating whether to weigh in on one side or the other. We were about ready to do it when we called our lawyer up in D.C. and he said, "Don't get involved because Navy Leagues are national and international. How could you as Navy League Jacksonville be supportive when the Navy League in Charleston is not supportive? There are too many mixed signals." So, you won't see anything from the Navy League supporting or not supporting it.

LYN-It has been very interesting who has supported and who has not supported it. The Riverkeeper has flip-flopped and I do know Lisa. I have no closer expertise than the Corps of Engineers, men who did things around the world. One of them even did the Rodman Dam. I just formed that opinion based on those two men and the expertise they have and my experience with JAXPORT which has been very challenging to have confidence over the years. JAXPORT, going through the cruise ship and the lives, that was just enormously stupid, to be honest. [JAXPORT proposed building a cruise terminal in the small village of Mayport-it was never approved by their board of the City of Jacksonville but brought contentious debate throughout the city]

J.B.-Nobody is an expert because you're looking at a crystal ball. Nobody knows so you have to give it your best guess and nobody has all the facts either. How much is it really gonna cost.

LYN-That goes up every time we talk.

J.B.-It goes up or it went down recently.

LYN-Well, they went from thirteen to eleven miles so that's the cost thing.

J.B.-The cost went down but so did the product. The product went down from thirteen to eleven miles. You know, what is fact and what is fiction? I don't think anybody is really lying to the public I just think they are presenting it from the point of view that is advantageous, because like I said, "Nobody knows the facts."

LYN-Nobody knows the facts. Thank you for saying that. They do present it as if they do. So, these estimates on money just scare me. Of course, the money is not there now.

J.B.-And that may be the deciding factor is "Who is gonna pay for this?"