

Hotfoot/44 Side A
Interview with Jay Coburn
November 17, 1981

KF Tape 44, second interview with Jay Coburn, 17th of November. Alright you're in Tehran spending alot of time with the Colonel.

JC In Tehran was the last words you said I believe, you know there were many hours most of which were like early in the mornings, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, 4:00 o'clock when we kept ungodly hours. And there would be the three of us, or in some cases just two of us with one person sleeping. And it gave occassion to talk about alot of different and varied subjects. I couldn't, my background being what it is from a recruiting point of view and being interested in the Colonel and his activities in his lifetime. I couldn't resist doing my own little interviewing sessions on occassion. I was surprised at how open he was about some very sensitive, or at least what I considered to be sensitive issues. And I assumed that they would be sensitive to him, meaning the family and his views on those things. He talked very openly about the fact that he was literally devastated by losing his wife. It was touching to me to hear this hard crusty, knowing how he had spent his life to describe their relationship and Lucy's relationships since he had gotten out of the service. He really didn't talk that much about their relationship prior to getting out of the service. He talked an awful lot about her since then, I guess that was about a seven year period from the time he got out of the service until the time she died.

KF What did he say about her?

JC He talked alot about how they were inseparable, that for that seven year period of time they basically did everything together. Taking care of the pigs and the dogs, and going fishing, he talked alot about just he and Lucy going down to the pond. Which I have seen by the way, of course walking around the pond after listening to him talk,

JC this is after he died, walking around that pond after listening to him describe he and Lucy down there, I could almost envision he and Lucy standing out in the pond catching fish. But they liked to walk down the little path back to the pond, he said they did it a couple of times a day almost from regularity, just he and Lucy. Sit around the pond fishing. And you know I may have been reading alot between the lines. But it was fairly clear that he [not clear], in his own way, I wouldn't say he lectured but he was certainly trying to impart some advice meaning, don't lose sight of the fact that that lady of yours, in your life irregardless whoever that may have been will be very, very important to you at sometime. I got the impression that at least maybe he may have not realized that prior to getting out of the service, I think he certainly realized that after he get out of the service. Maybe he was trying to make up for lost time I don't know. Now you've got to understand the man didn't spend a whole lot of time with his family prior to getting out of the service.

KF Do you think he regretted that?

JC I kind of sensed that. I kind of sensed that. I guess, I was drawing my own conclusions as opposed to him saying it. And really alot of the conclusion has to do with knowing, listening to him talk about the period of time which was about six months from the time that she died until the time that we're sitting in Tehran. About a six month period, or we started our mission, I think it was about a six month period. And during that six month period, he basically was a nonexistent person. He didn't have anything to do with anybody, he didn't care about anything. He basically lived in room in one of his house, the way he described it, he lived in room of his house. He went out as little as possible. He turned down all visitation to include family members. I think Harry his, one of his sons was with him some, but outside of that there wasn't very much, I remembered Dick Meadows talking about him. Alot of this picture was later, became even more vividly by talking to Dick about it. Because Dick was extremely concerned about him. You know describing him as a person that had given up. And in fact, they, Dick cooked up some things for him to

JC do at Fort Bragg, coming over to Fort Bragg trying to get him involved in something. I think he had just accomplished that right before our mission came up. The Colonel had made one trip to Fort Bragg to give some kind of presentation, or consultation on something. I'm not sure what.

KF Did he tell you what Lucy was like?

JC Yes, and I can't remember all his words, but the picture he painted for me, the one I have in my mind even though I had never met, you know is one of a very giving, loving, probably dedicated her life you know to mothering his children and him. And again it wasn't so much, like I say I can't remember specific quotes, but that's the picture that I've come up with. I wish I could remember things that he said, exact things that he said to pass on to you. I just can't. You know he had a great way of describing things in detail. By the way his mind worked in detail anyway okay, but then like when he was describing for me the farm, you know I had never been to the farm and I had a mental image of that farm. And when we finally went there, when Paul, Merv and I went there after he died. Amazing, I could tell Merv and Paul what that place was going to look like before we ever drove up there. That's how descriptive he could be. And the room that he was spending this time in during the six month period of time, had been described in such detail, that it's like I had been before. But you know, I can't repeat the words, and my point is, I wish I could remember how he did that. He talked about the old rug that's worth nothing, the old rug in the house and you could almost, it's almost like he was drawing it for you. It wasn't worth anything to anybody but them. And then after I saw the rug, I knew what he was talking about, you know it was the ugliest rug that I had ever seen. But to him it was something that had alot meaning. The chair that he had sat in, the dogs that he talked about, by name. The pigs, you know, it's he had an incredible way of describing things. But you know you definitely and I think Joe was involved in some of those discussions if I remember. Even though the Colonel wasn't one for talking about that subject matter in a group. I think he was alot more open at least I felt

JC he was more open when it was one on one as opposed to the three of us. But you know, Joe might be able to share some of those things as well since we were all three there together.

KF Did you ever talk to him about politics?

JC He didn't have much use for it, yes. He talked about politicians in a very, I can't remember specifics again, but you know, he did not necessarily have a high opinion of what politicians had meant to him. And examples would be used when we would be discussing some military operation that he had been involved in. And he would described how, that people couldn't really allow, you know we weren't allowed, now I'm speaking in his words now, "we weren't allowed to operate in a fashion of expediency and getting the job done as much as were at the whim of somebody outside of the military." And what their objectives were as opposed to getting the job done, and he made many references to that. He talked about Sullivan as an example, his experience with Sullivan in Laos and Saigon. And I was sharing with him some of my experiences in Iran, that's what brought that subject up. He had no use for them, these people, talk about them as he is I am as opposed to a human being. You know then even at the same you know he seemed to have a real side of him that he said that everything has to be kept in a proper perspective. I don't think for a second that he thought that we ought to have a military dictatorship or anything like that. But even though he was critical of the impact that it had on him you know in his military career.

KF Did he say anything about Carter or Nixon, Kennedy?

JC I don't remember him saying anything about the Kennedys, I don't remember him saying too much about Nixon. Except you know he talked a little bit about Carter not having any backbone, if I remember his words. I can't remember too much.

KF Did you talk to him about history?

JC He talked alot about history. He talked about, there was a couple a day period there where he talked about revolutions alot. And so I got the impression that he must have either had an occassion because of something in him military background to become more familiar with the psychology, you know, what goes on in a revolution. Or he just had a personal interest in it, one or the other. Because he was fairly knowledgable about various revolutions, and of course he would always mention it in conjunction with what was going on. You know what we were involved in, what was going on in the streets.

KF Do you remember which revolutions he talked about?

JC Boy I wish I could, he talked about so many about them that none of them really stand out.

KF American Revolution, Russian Revolution.

JC He may even have talked about the American Revolution. You know I can't remember the specific example but he in fact, he mentioned the American Revolution. He was making a point about all revolutions including the American Revolution are basically about the same kinds of things.

KF About what kinds of things?

JC Yea that's what I can't remember the specifics on. He said they're very, I remember he was making the point about our situation, very predictable. They don't all happen in the same time frames but it's very predictable you know the outcome. They're different players involved, there's different involved, they happen in different times. But you know it's very predictable what this point will transpire, all you have to do is read the history books, that was his message. And he talked about it in a sense that really made you, at least it came that way across to me. I had a very strong feeling that he knew exactly what was going to occur, it was like he had inside information.

KF Did he ever mention the Russian Revolution, French Revolution, English Civil War?

JC I don't remember any of those specifically.

struggle
JJ
KF What terms did he talk about, in what terms did he talk about revolutions? Did he talk about subversive movements, did he talk about class [xxxxxx], did he talk about ruling classes, did he use the words Bourgeoisie and Proletarian.

JC Yea, he used all those words, he talked about ruling classes. Like I say I think he was a student at one point of revolutions, I would guess in that, especially during that two day period where he talked about that subject alot. And this was early during our trip, during our stay in Tehran. Because he seemed to be moved by the fact that we were out in the streets and all this was going on about us. And even though we were talking about the mission you know in between times he was caught with the fact that we were in the middle of one of these.

KF Did he mention any books that he read about revolutions or about history?

JC No, that's why I say, I'm not sure where he was coming from. He didn't mention any reference to him in being involved in any. In fact I'm almost positive he was never involved in one because he was, his words out on the streets the first time I heard him saying something was you know, it came across in such a manner that this was a first for him. He was in the middle of it.

KF Did he talk about religion?

JC No, I don't ever remember him talking about religion.

KF Sex?

JC I don't remember his talking about sex. He kidded, I can't remember what all the subjects were but I remember he at least on a couple of occasions made some kidding remarks about the fact that you know that wasn't much a part of his, you know, his life any longer. He'd leave that up to us young studs. Something to that effect, and again I can't even remember words but I remember he had a great sense of humor, that was one of the times, I can't remember what the specific words were.

KF You said he said jokingly that he was too old for sex in Iran. Did you believe him?

JC No, he wasn't very believable when he told me. Heck you wouldn't have to be around the guy too much to recognize that he was fairly physically fit person. And he still had that gleam in his eye.

KF Darn it would be unusual for a man on their own for a period on their own for a long period of time not to get around to talking about that sooner or later. That's what usually happens, in fact usually that's all they talk about.

JC No, we didn't surprisingly but there were occasions, and I forget what it would be, it may have been something as simple as you know, there may have been a dirty book in the house or something, is how it came up. I can't remember, there wasn't a lot of discussion about that.

KF Poche picked up a xxx of Playboys from one of the apartments. Remember that?

JC Maybe that was it, I don't remember that specifically.

KF It may not have been Playboy it may have been...

JC Been Penthouse.

KF Poche recalls reading bits out and thinking they were funny. Maybe you won't there when that happened.

JC I could have been maybe that's what I'm referring to, like I said, just right before you said that, I said maybe it was a book or something. Something was triggering it, it wasn't just because we were all sitting around talking about sex.

KF Did he talk about his parents?

JC I don't ever remember him talking about his parents. I don't remember him talking about his sister, I don't remember him talking about his brother. He talked very little about one of his sons, the only time that it ever came out in a conversation with me was almost like it had to come out. Because he was, we were talking about Turkey, we were talking about his time in Turkey, what he had done in Turkey, and he was sharing with us what he had done in Turkey. Since he had both of his sons in Turkey with him, it would have been difficult for him to at least acknowledge him. But, he said not very much more about that. Then at one point we got a phone call from in Tehran, Merv transferred his son Harry through to us on the phone. That evening in talking more about Harry, he wasn't he didn't talk alot.

KF What did he say about Harry?

JC Oh, Harry had his problems. Harry was according to the Colonel Harry was a good kid, didn't have very much direction, was trying to figure out what it is he needed to do in life. He never mentioned some things that I learned later meaning that he had a problem him drinking alot and things like that. The Colonel never mentioned that, the Colonel did say that he was having some problems.

KF He didn't say what the problems were?

JC Lack of direction, if I remember right that's what he said. He can't figure out what he wants to do, what he needs to be doing.

KF Did you have the impression that the Colonel had ever been through a phase like that in his life?

JC No.

KF Did you get any sense of how he rated his own performance as a father?

KF Did he feel that Harry's problems were greater than the usual problems that everybody has with their sons?

JC No. In fact he may have said words to the effect that well you know how kids are these day and age, they have a hard time figuring out where it is they're headed. What they're all about he had a way of saying. I can't remember his words.

KF Did they, I gather that both Bruce and Harry had done a little dope sometime or other, did he mention that?

JC No.

KF What I don't know is whether they had been, because they were I think both in college in the '60's the boys. They may have been on anti-war demonstrations, did he mention that?

JC No.

KF I'll get to ask them tomorrow. See I just wonder whether given his background, he may have been more devastated by, more devastated than the average parent of the '60's probably what the kids were doing then. I wonder whether he may have thought going to an anti-war demonstration and smoking a little dope was a much bigger deal than most parents would think it was.

JC I would guess that's the case. I would guess that he would have a very difficult time with any kids doing that, much less his own.

KF With what the anti-war demonstrations or the dope?

JC Both.

KF Did he ever talk to you about drugs? You and he took drugs a little while you were there.

JC You know he, he for, we never talked about drugs at all except for the sleeping, I mean the staying awake types of things. Which the way he talked about that I got the feeling that he was fairly knowledgeable about at least substances where they would assist him in his role, in his mission. Now whether he was knowledgeable about you look at some of the places he's been, he'd have to be fairly knowledgeable and could recognize hashish and opium and heroine and things like that, I would think he would be fairly knowledgeable, but he didn't talk about it that much.

KF Did he ever talk about the Vietnam war and it's not in it's military aspect but in a political aspect?

JC Yea, he talked about the fact that his opinion about what was wrong with that whole scene. I'll just summarize in saying that he felt, and very strongly so, that we shouldn't get involved ever in a situation where the American people as opposed to politicians, the American people are not willing to do whatever's required to win. And he had some pretty strong feelings about that.

KF Did he blame anybody, did he blame the politicians?

JC Oh, I think he did. The media.

KF Oh, the media that's interesting, go on.

JC Politicians he didn't have a very high opinion of the media, looking at his background in journalism, it's kind of interesting. He didn't have much use, never said really very much positive about the media at all. In fact, he was extremely negative about, I can't remember the specific comments but. He didn't have much use for them.

KF What did he say about his own military life?

JC He let me just tell about a conversation we had one time. He was very curious initially why that I got out of the military, and I shared with him my reasons. He had a hard time relating to what I was saying because he said that his experience in the military had not been a traditional...

KF He had a hard time relating to your reasons for leaving the military.

JC Yea. He felt, he understood what I was saying but he couldn't relate to it and these were his words because his experience in the military had been a nontraditional experience. He felt he had never had, outside of maybe one assignment that he spent as a Public Information Officer of all things with his feelings about the media. As a public information officer somewhere along the line. I don't remember where or what base or anything. That all of his assignments had been non-traditional military assignments and he hadn't had his quota of things like being a Public Information Officer which he hated. I got the feeling he did a good job, but he didn't care for it at all. And he says he understood that that couldn't be that way for everyone in the military. But at least that was the case with him and that's what counted.

KF Did he tell you about any specific operations he did?

JC Oh yea. You know off and on I guess he's probably covered you know most of the things he was involved in. He talked at some point about you know going back to World War II he would recount his motorcycle. Maybe that's how we got to talking about it in the first place, was that

JC he would be talking about motorcycles but that's where he, I got the distinct impression that he was either there was a motorcycle squadron or something because he was riding military motorcycles during World War II somewhere. I can't even remember where, but somewhere. He was talking about how terrible they were in great detail, how terrible they were. How motorcycle technology has come a long way etc. and how much fun he had enjoying them. He really enjoyed riding motorcycles, he had that look in his eye, you could just tell he really enjoyed riding motorcycles. He hadn't got to do enough of it but he really enjoyed it. He talked about laying motorcycles over on their sides the things they did in the streets of where ever they were, back in World War II. Specific operations talked alot about Son Tay not necessarily because he wanted to talk about it, but because we got him to talk about it. In fact he may not have talked about any of this if we hadn't been probing. He talked about Son Tay alot. He talked about Shining Brass.

KF What's that?

JC Shining Brass and he may have talked about Shining Brass maybe because I was involved Shining Brass too, maybe that's why we talked about it alot I'm not sure. I had been involved from an aviation point of view in carrying out some things that he had started in the special operations group in Vietnam.

KF What was Shining Brass really?

JC Shining Brass was a code name or xxxxxx for a series rather than one operation it was a long term operation of sighting targets of opportunity in Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam along the trail, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, directing some type of aircraft against that target and then assessing the damage. That's what Shining Brass was in total. It involved alot of things, it was a long period of time, we're talking three, four, five years period of time. And he conceived it, and he wasn't actually involved in it during the same period of time that I was involved in it. And he was very curious about what I

JC thought of it since I was actually carrying out some of this. So we talked and we talked about Shining Brass.

KF And what did you tell him? Did you tell him that it was a good operation?

JC I told him that I thought it was a screwball. I was honest with him, I you know when we were involved in doing all those crazy things I wondered which madman was sitting in Saigon somewhere dreaming up all these crazy things for us to go do. I mean...

KF What was crazy about it?

JC Oh we did some screwball things Ken. Shining Brass included or let's just say a typical Shining Brass mission went something like inserting, the objective was to insert a six man team, five Vietnamese and one American. Generally they were dressed as North Vietnamese, all of them. And we were flying unmarked aircraft. Inserting them to do something, it varied but inserting them into one of the countries I mentioned and then a few days later after they have done whatever it is that they need to do picking them up. And there was inordinate amount of risk and exposure associated to the mission as far as I was concerned. Not counting the four guys we were letting off on the ground. But I was just saying I was flying in and letting them off and going in and picking them up. Not counting the fact that this one American and five Vietnamese were just left off. And you know, you always wondered how all that fit in to the big picture from my perspective. That's why I said we'd get these orders and while were accounting this to the Colonel I said we'd get these orders and we briefed and we went through like a week ten days of preparation, just briefings. Looking at pictures, talking about ^{four} roots and deciding about which way to go and frequencies, it was all hush, hush and a deep secret. And then waiting on the weather to be just exactly right and you know we would then kid about it in the evening hours, we had

JC alot of time on our hands. But we would kid about the fact that there must be some lonely, little did I know at the time that I was referring to the Colonel, but you know there must just be some loon...

KF What would the targets be to it?

JC Oh they varied, all the way from trying to assassinate, you know the most interesting one I got involved in was this one team was sent in actually to assassinate an American defective that was advising the North Vietnamese. And it was purported that our intelligence had indicated that this fellow was in this particular unit, and we knew where that unit was. And that was the particular mission.

KF Did it succeed?

JC We dropped during this timeframe, these things took long periods of time, and I was involved for about three months. During that timeframe we inserted six teams and recovered one.

KF So that was what was screwball about it? I see.

JC You never and you know again I was a cog as opposed to really understanding the big picture. So you know alot of this when you're 20 years old, 21 years old and wasn't near as curious about them and I put alot of this together after the fact. You know, in between these insertions we would do to give you an exactly. The loon again in Saigon as we referred to him had booby trapped this box of ammunition, North Vietnamese ammunition. In fact it was AK47 rounds was what it was. It was an authentic box, authentic ammunition just like they would carry them on the trucks coming down the trailer. And we would take this booby trap within this ammunition that was going to blow up in this North Vietnamese soldier's face when he fired the round. That's how it was rigged.

KF I see.

JC We'd take this box and find the spot on the trail and drop it off so it looked like it fell off a truck that went by and the next truck that came along would pick it up and would xxxxx. Yea I suppose all that bits and does good, but it's hard when you're the person, it's hard when you're the person flying in to drop it off to recognize you know that we would do that just so some poor bastard gets his head blown off, you know months later, years later who knows when. I mean when you're going out to attack the enemy, that's very understandable, guy's shooting at you and you're shooting back and you know you can kind of relate to that. You know when you're sneaking off in a single aircraft you know to drop off a box of booby trapped ammunition, oh boy these guys are loons.

KF It sounds like the kind of idea, not the booby trapped bullets though, the idea of dropping in teams to achieve a specific objective sounds the kind of idea Simons would come up with. It also sounds like the kind of idea that wouldn't work unless you had a Simons running it.

JC Exactly, very unorthodoxed, very unconventional and he spent his whole military career doing unconventional things, and fighting for unconventional ideas. In a, if you stop to think about it, the military for the most part rejects unconventional approaches.

KF But given the rather limited success of this Shining Brass operation in your experience...

JC Well see I don't know, I'm just saying, I don't know if it was successful or not. I didn't have access to the results. I'm just saying, I knew whether we retrieved the guys or not, they may have E&E'd back they may have radioed, you know, I didn't have the total picture. So I don't know, like maybe some people that were, that had the bigger picture could have been more aware. At my level, all you're doing is flying the aircraft. So I'm not sure what the results were. I would have to assume that they must have been, as long as they went on, they must have been somewhat successful or they would not have continued. Because you know, you're really running a tremendous

JC risk, operating outside the confines of where you were supposed to be operating. Sometimes in North Vietnam you know there's just a lot of risk involved. So there must have been some tangible results or someone would not be willing to run that risk, in my opinion. At least I hope that's the case. I mean you have to almost think that or you couldn't rationalize a way continuing to go.

KF The government at that point must have been denying that there were any operations.

JC Oh, of course. Obviously.

KF I see.

JC But you know at the same time, and the Colonel and I, this is one of the times the media did come up. I said you know even as secretive as all those things were, you know it was strange to me that I would pick up the Southeast edition of Newsweek you know and occasionally in there there would be some mention of those type of things. He said well you know, that's just another example of how detrimental the media can be to an effort. So I mean he didn't use those words but you know.

KF Okay, he used stronger language.

JC Right.

KF Did he talk about Korea?

Correct

JC Yea, and again he didn't come out and said that he didn't want to get out of the military but my assumption was he didn't. But once he realized that it was time to get out, he sure did it, in my opinion the right way...

KF It says in here '46, this must have been in '46 after World War I, World War II.

HOTFOOT/44-17

JC No, no I'm talking about at the end of his career. I'm talking about the end of this. Because he described you know, leaving it behind...

END OF TAPE

NOTHING ON SIDE B