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2/7/86

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(Signature of Interviewee)

(Address)

DATE

2/7/86

(Signature - Witness)



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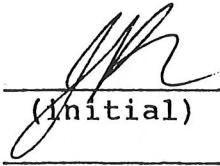
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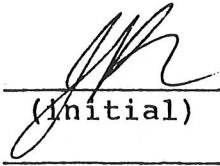
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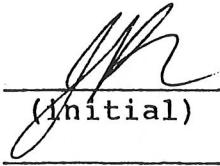
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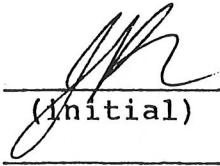
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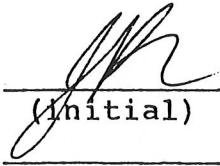
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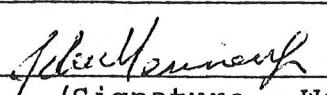
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(Signature) Interviewee


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From the desk of.....

William S. Westbrook

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WEST VIRGINIA VIETNAM VETERANS

February 7, 1986

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Jim Rogers

CONDUCTED BY: John C. Hennen, Jr.

TRANSCRIBED BY: Carla Thompson

TYPED BY: Gina Kehali Kates

John: Still in the office of Dr. Fred Donovan; we've been joined by Dr. Jim Rogers. Oh, (inaudible)...Vietnam veterans project. And we'll start out with some basic biographic background information on, on Jim. Where you were born, where you were raised...(inaudible)...

Jim: Okay. Oh, I was oh, was born in, primarily grew up in oh, Wetzel County, West Virginia uh, in the town of the reader. I graduated from high school from Valley High School in Pine Grove, WV; went to WVU for three semesters after graduated from uh, from high school. I dropped out of ah, dropped out of college and ah, ah, went in to the service; spent two years in the army ah, was in Vietnam in ah, from the middle of 1968 to the middle of 1969. Uh, came back ah, after about a year out of the service. I went back to college, finished my undergraduate degree in philosophy uh, went to medical school at the State University of New York, where I graduated in 1976. Uh, I did a residency in ah, Charleston Area Medical Center, in general surgery, which I finished in 1981. Uh, which I'm active in VVA at about the same time I finished my residency ah, late in 1981, and I had a private practice in Charleston for about oh, three and a half, four years which I closed about 5 or 6 months ago, and I've been doing oh, emergency medicine uh, since that time.

John: In Summersville?

Jim: Right, yeah, in Summersville.

John: What was your uh, your (inaudible)...in Vietnam? Is that right?

Jim: Yeah, I went to uh, uh, I went through basic training, and then I went to uh, AIT. Which I think stood for Advanced Individual Training. Uh, I went to infantry AIT. And when I got to Vietnam uh, I was put on an Advisory Team, and those made radio operator for that Advisory Team or from time to time for various components of that advisory team.

John: Okay, and so ... so you started get rolling in VVA in '78?
"77?"

Jim: '81.

John: Oh, okay, sorry.

Jim: '81.

John: Um, how did you come to, to start your involvement with that organization?

Jim: Well, I had been looking at, at some of the newspaper articles about what was going on uh, with some of the veterans in the Charleston area, being concerned about Agent Orange, and there were uh, articles in the local press at that time. Um, it was uh, an air force veterans uh, by the name of Jim Lavendar, who was

very concerned about the whole Agent Orange problem. Uh, there was a vet center satellite office function in Charleston at the time uh, being uh, uh, directed by Tom Kaslkin and Tom Raskin, and Jim Lavendar, were working together to try to get state legislature interested in doing something Agent Orange. And they held a big meeting, at the civic center in Charleston, which uh, was a 2-day meeting, and I think on the first day, when most of the major speakers were there. There were about, somewhere between 300 and 500 people there, I forget how many. And I went to that meeting and at that time they were recruiting people to sign up to form the VVA here in Charleston. And that's how I got involved.

John: Now, at one time you were President at this local, is that right?

Jim: Yeah, I was President uh, from January of 1982 through June or July of 1983. I was President of the Charleston chapter for a year and a half.

John: And your current international board of directors of the VVA are you...are you with the state counsel at all?

Jim: No, I...

John: Okay. You have been in International Director for two years now?

Jim: Oh, yeah, a little bit over two years I was uh, elected to the National Board in 1983. At the first national convention and was re-elected at this second convention in November, this past year, November of '85.

John: The first convention was in Washington, is that correct?

Jim: The first convention was in Washington, D.C. at the (inaudible)....Hotel. (laughs) This was, quite a time, quite a time.

John: Uh, you have returned to Vietnam with two delegations with the VVA, is that right?

Jim: Yeah, those were in 1984.

John: Okay. Um, what was the uh, what was the motivation behind these delegations? What were you guys attempting to achieve?

Jim: VVA's had four official delegations through Vietnam uh, they had all been hosted by the Vietnamese foreign ministry, and the topics for discussion uh, on all those delegations were the same uh, clarification uh, of the status of...of those American service men who are still missing in action uh, in Vietnam specifically in the southeast of Asia, generally, uh, clarification of the immigration, status for immigration children and information on what the uh, facts of uh, herbicides primarily agent Orange, which

was spread in Vietnam (inaudible). We talked about other things uh, when we're there, because there were other things that, that affect this, you know, basic agenda oh, but the uh, basic agenda was those 3 points.

John: Now, (clears throat)...at the latest convention uh, Bob (inaudible)...was re-elected, and correct me if I'm wrong, but there seems to be a, a sort of a shift a little bit in the focus at least on the national level of what the organization's directing it's energy to. Is that, to be a little bit less vague, if I can uh, perhaps can it be less public about far-ranging the political involvements, and...and more seeing it was a direct action (inaudible)...group for Vietnam Veterans uh, is that a fair assessment? And if so, what...what's been th dynamics for that?

Jim: Well, that's always been the emphasis uh, in VVA, the emphasis in VVA is that VVA is uh, you know, the veterans service organization and that is the primary thing that VVA has to do. At the first national convention uh, the way that was formulated was that VVA is first and foremost a Vietnam veterans service organization; other things on it's agenda that's first and foremost is the Vietnam's Service Organization, that political formulation uh, was not enough to satisfy a certain section of the membership and I think more importantly uh, a certain section of a certain (inaudible)...of opinion in the United States Congress uh, in...in the Reagan Administration uh, that uh, it's ...it would be (inaudible)...to have on, at least, not opposing VVa, um, that I think was...was the reason why at the Second National Convention that VVA adopted constitutional amendment, which prohibits it from speaking out on any foreign policy issue or any domestic issue, which cannot be related to the needs of uh, uh, the direct needs of VVA uh, direct needs of Vietnam veterans. That restriction doesn't just apply to the National Organization, doesn't just apply to National officers, or National Board of directors, it also applies to the state councils. The state councils are not free to speak out on uh, you know, these broader issues.

John: So, in other words, if we see in the paper where a member of local 38 or state council has made a recommendational policy in central America, he cannot be speaking for the organization issue. Uh, he is speaking as an individual.

Jim: Yeah, that's right, that uh, uh, is now constitutionally prohibited, and it was passed by 2/3's majority in Detroit. Was a uh, step I didn't recommend uh, I think that there is, there's a lot of distrust in the membership uh, about what VVA might do, or how far VVA might go beyond what the, what the majority of the membership wanted to do uh, and there was also uh, a lot of uh, I think there was also uh, a lot of uh, I think there were also perception in the National office in VVA among, you know, the...the National officers and the National staff, who work in D.C. all the time, there's perception there, that it was really important uh, to have this thing passed for a couple of weeks, one uh, was to increase the political credibility in Washington and the 2nd uh, was to prevent VVA uh, as a membership organization

uh, is uh, a guy named Frank McCarthy, who was, and I think still is, president uh, of an organization called, An Organization of Vietnam Veterans called Agent Orange Victims International, or at least is...was called Agent Orange Victims International at that time. Uh, now I think it has a slightly different title, uh, they dropped the international out of it. Uh, well, what happened with that kind of press conference uh, and you know two Vietnam veterans there uh, raising hell over the fact that uh, that Bob (inaudible)...and these three other guys was going back to Vietnam, uh, an especially raising hell over the fact that they placed a wreath on Hochimian's tomb was that, that then became the story of, you know, the first Vietnam veterans going back to Vietnam, that was the story, this was a major controversy among Vietnam veterans, and it got nation-wide coverage. Uh, and uh, it had a big effect on the growth and development of VVA, um...

John: In what direction?

Jim: I think it probably overall retarded the development of the VVA. Uh, I think a lot of people had a lot of respect of Bob (inaudible)...going back to Vietnam, I think the fact that he uh, led the delegations of the Vietnam veterans back to Vietnam uh, you know, for a lot of people who uh, either uh, by the time they got back from Vietnam, weren't very happy about uh, about uh, the way the war was going or the way we got in the war uh, or people who were just saying this is the end of 1981, early 1982, the war is over and it is time for us to recognize it. Which I think was probably the majority opinion of the Vietnam veterans. That and uh, a beneficial effect, but the effect that, the effect that all those negative publicity was disorganized uh, in the sense that it uh, it gave, it gave people who did not want to see any kind of organization, whatsoever, they gave those people some ammunition to use against what was developed and to uh, (inaudible)...organization for Vietnam veterans. Back then, it was that yet, but you know, today uh, 4 or 5 years later it is that, it is the National organization for Vietnam veterans.

John: Now would...would people opposing the organization of Vietnam veterans buy that, do you mean other veterans organizations?

Jim: Yeah, I mean, I mean, uh, some of the leadership of other veterans' organizations. Uh, some people who uh, just don't think that there should be a uh, an organization of Vietnam veterans uh, because the Vietnam war was very divisive. Uh, and uh, um to have an organization of Vietnam veterans is to remind the American people of the divisiveness of the Vietnam war and to carry that divisiveness on into the future. Um, Jeremiah Denton uh, has been one of the uh, foremost opponents of VVA, and the leading opponent VVA in United States Senate has been quoted to saying that, that he doesn't think that there should be a national organization for Vietnam veterans. Uh, that uh, you know, all the legitimate needs of the Vietnam veterans can be met with in contact with the uh, the veterans (inaudible)...uh, but to a lesser extent the disabled American Veterans in the uh, the American Legion...

John: Has there ever been another attempt to forming another National organization of Vietnam veterans? I know there are several national newsletters related to Vietnam vets. Is the VVA the only organization that's gotten off the ground?

Jim: It's certainly the only organization that's gotten off the ground to the extent of uh, having the operating budget the VVA national has. Which is about 800,000 dollars a year. Uh, or close to a million dollars a year, actually. Uh, having a membership base which VVA has which is about uh, a little bit over 30 thousand at this point. Uh, there have been other successful, and I think that there's only going to be one national organization for the Vietnam veterans. Uh, the closest competition was something called the United Vietnam Veterans Organization. Which was um, had it's primary strength in two places, one in Pennsylvania, one in Texas uh, it started out in Pennsylvania and merged with uh, uh, a (inaudible)...collation (inaudible)...in Texas. Uh, it never was really a national organization in the sense that everybody was operating under the same constitution that everybody was operating on the same uh, uh, same basic leadership, that they held national conventions, and uh, you know, elected their officers in the same way the VVA did. And, at the uh, Detroit convention, uh, in November of this past year, the president of the United Vietnam Veterans organization got upon the floor at the VVA national convention, said if you all pass the constitutional amendment restricting uh, your right to speak out, on foreign policy issues or broad national issues which are not directly related to (inaudible)...affairs, then I will bring my organization in under your (inaudible)... Uh, so I would say that, you know, the closest competition has effectively stepped out of the picture.

John: Uh, will this will the amendment that was passed at the, at the latest convention preclude further visits uh, to Vietnam VVA delegates?

Jim: No.

John: That wouldn't be included in that, would it?

Jim: No, that's not uh, that is definitely not precluded by that constitutional amendment. Uh, VVA will probably not again play a leading role in the uh, POW/MIA issue. Uh, for a couple of reasons uh, because uh, VVA has in the national league of families, had basically reached accommodations for the national league of families uh, is in the undisputed leadership role uh, on that issue. And the other reason is, that it may not be necessary uh, for a private organization like VVA uh, to take on that role again because there is a substantial accommodation between the Reagan Administration and Vietnam now. Uh, the Vietnamese have said that they want a result of that issue within two years. Uh, the uh, you know, we've seen the highest level delegations from the United States that have been in Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War, in the last couple of months uh, so that issue may actually be resolved. Uh, the Agent Orange Dioxin question uh,

which is also a great concern to veterans uh, however is a totally different story. That question is not resolved here. Uh, and uh, that certainly gives VVA national sufficient reason uh, to send other delegations to Vietnam it looks like that would be useful in the future.

Jim: Let's do 10 or 15 more minutes and then, and then if you want to do some more some time soon.

John: Okay. Uh, yeah, the Agent Orange issue uh, that would seem to be an obvious one that the VVA will be speaking of strongly and consistently on, and would have pretty much unanimously support among the membership. Uh, and you're on the Agent Orange Advisory committee for this state. Of course, you'll be leaving soon, but uh, what uh, what's the status of (inaudible)...of the testing program in West Virginia and just, before I forget, would you attribute any of the (inaudible)...between the Reagan Administration and the Vietnam, the government of Vietnam to the efforts of the VVA in the past, the diplomatic efforts.

Jim: I'll answer the last question first. I would say yes. Uh, what VVA did in Vietnam uh, has been a very important part of, what the Reagan Administration is now doing in Vietnam. I don't think it's the only thing. I think there are real substantial (inaudible)...political factors involved. For instance, what's going on in the Phillipines uh, where the Phillipines seems to be definitely in danger having some kind of serious uh, insur...well, they already have a serious insurrection but they're definitely in danger of having a serious insurrection which is uncontrollable um, you know, for that reasons just in geo-political terms it makes sense for the Reagan Administration to try to better its relations with Vietnam so that the Vietnamese will be less inclined to send guns uh, and other forms uh, of support and supplies to the (inaudible)...Phillipines. But I think in terms of preparing the consciousness of uh, of the Vietnam veterans segment of the American people, for some kind of improvement in relations with Vietnam and what VVA did was extremely important (phone ringing in background)...

Jim: Should I answer the phone? (laughter)

John: Uh, testing program, Agent Orange Testing Program, state...

Jim: There are somewhere between 4500 and 5000 people who have signed up for testing under the West Virginia State Agent Orange program. To this date, just slightly over 200 have been tested under that program uh, despite the fact that the program was legislated into existence over 3 years ago, and despite the fact that the program was funded 2 years ago, uh, that's a terrible record, and uh, you know, at that rate of testing, which shows absolutely no sign of uh, improving over the next uh, uh, year or at least what we're getting from the health department uh, in the committee meetings at uh, uh, that we attended. Representatives from the other veterans organizations we get no indication that

that rate of testing is going to be increased. Now, hopefully we're going to ask the legislature to look into this and ask them and see what can be done about increasing the rate of testing. There's a positive side that uh, state program and that is the um, the state of West Virginia did complete a mortality study on the deaths which have occurred among West Virginia's Vietnam veterans. And basically, I think that mortality study uh, confirms and is consistent with a lot of the other scientific evidence which has become available uh, on the effects of dioxine and dioxine contaminated herbicides and the herbicides in Agent Orange.

John: Alright, one last question (we have to go?) Uh, you...you can compiled a lecture and slide presentation based on your uh, one of your return visits to Vietnam and (inaudible)...and you've presented it to several veterans in public organizations in the last year or so. Uh, what's been the general...(inaudible)...?

Jim: When I started doing this (inaudible)...it basically consisted of...of pictures that um, that I took in Vietnam and in Cambodia. I was prepared for a lot of negative comment because I was mostly presenting it to Vietnam veterans and uh, I was uh, you know, psychologically prepared for a lot of opposition. And I got almost none. Um, a lot of people who uh, in VVA, uh, who didn't understand why it was that VVA was sending delegations to Vietnam uh, uh, came away from that convinced uh, that VVA should send delegations to Vietnam. VVA should understand what's going on in Vietnam today, what's going on in Indo-China and all of south-east Asia today. In specifically uh, you know from their own point and the uh, point of view of the Vietnam veteran VVA should understand what the effects of the ... (inaudible) ... program in Vietnam were, because it does probably have some bearing on what uh, uh, on the effects that we're seeing on Vietnam veterans today. And that was a surprise to me that uh, it got the kind of reaction uh, that it did.

John: How many groups would you say you've presented that to?

Jim: I counted it up, uh, several months ago. I have been in 15 different states and have probably done the presentation to 100 different groups over the last 2 years.

John: Really? I had no idea it was that many.

Jim: Yeah, I was, I was surprised when I counted that too, (laughs), and found out it was that many.

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WEST VIRGINIA VIETNAM VETERANS

February 7, 1986

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Jim Rogers, M.D.

CONDUCTED BY: John C. Hennen, Jr.

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Radar X

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John: Okay, and so ... so you started get rolling in VVA in '78? "77?

Jim: '81.

John: Oh, okay, sorry.

Jim: '81.

John: Um, how did you come to, to start your involvement with that organization?

Jim: Well, I had been looking at, at some of the newspaper articles about what was going on uh, with some of the veterans in the Charleston area, being concerned about Agent Orange, and there were uh, articles in the local press at that time. Um, it was uh, an air force veteran uh, by the name of Jim Lavendar, who was

Veteran X

very concerned about the whole Agent Orange problem. Uh, there was a vet center satellite office function in Charleston at the time uh, being uh, uh, directed by Tom Raskin and Tom Raskin, and Jim Lavendar, were working together to try to get state legislature interested in doing something Agent Orange. And they held a big meeting, at the civic center in Charleston, which uh, was a 2-day meeting, and I think on the first day, when most of the major speakers were there. There were about, somewhere between 300 and 500 people there, I forget how many. And I went to that meeting and at that time they were recruiting people to sign up to form the VVA here in Charleston. And that's how I got involved.

X John: Now, at one time you were President at this local, is that right?

Now X

Jim: Yeah, I was President uh, from January of 1982 through June or July of 1983. I was President of the Charleston chapter for a year and a half.

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National X

Jim: No, I...

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John: The first convention was in Washington, is that correct?

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Agent X

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X perception in the National Office in VVA among, you know, the...the National officers and the National staff, who work in D.C. all the time, there's perception there, that it was really important uh, to have this thing passed for a couple of weeks, one X uh, was to increase the political credibility in Washington and the 2nd uh, was to prevent VVA uh, as a membership organization

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X from falling in to the hands of the radical right. Now like I said, I didn't uh, I...I don't really agree with either one of those points. Uh, but the important thing was that uh, you know, the majority of the delegates in the National convention thought that there should be that kind of restriction on the National leadership of VVA.

Info X

John: In other words, there was...there was a worry that...that kind of restriction endorsed by the, the current administration of the VVA that there would be a reaction to that? Like swinging to the right? Is that?

Jim: Uh, yeah uh, it was a funny situation like um, I think what we got into was, was a deal where the membership of VVA, um, and certainly like the local leadership uh, all over the country, cause we got somewhere in the neighborhood of uh, you know, 230, 240 chapters down. Uh, a lot of that membership and a lot of that local leadership was concerned because uh, the past history of the ...the national leadership of the VVA and uh, and probably primarily Bob...(inaudible)...uh, doing things like playing a ... (inaudible) ...and other things which were not indefensible but would certainly cause you know, certain public relations problems in the veterans community. There was a concern among that membership, that the leadership of the VVA was going too far to the (inaudible)... And there was a concern among that central leadership group in VVA uh, the people who actually raised money to put the organization together, the people who talked to uh, the Congress, that the membership could cease control of the organization and go too far to the right to submit I think uh, the result was uh, the kind of compromise that we saw.

John: There was substantial opposition that, unless I'm wrong, wasn't there, after the 1st trip to Vietnam among the membership of VVA, was that directly related to the, the visit to the (inaudible)...?

Jim: Uh, what happened was, that, this first visit to Vietnam in December 1981, and uh, Bob (inaudible)...and the VVA delegates decided uh, on the basis of the suggestion of their hosts, that it would be appropriate to place a wreath at (inaudible)...tomb because that's what many visitors did, and they placed a uh, wreath at (inaudible)...tomb, they did not actually physically place the wreath themselves, but had it placed there. Uh, and it was uh, had, you know an inscription on it, like funeral wreaths do, uh, which that, with respect, Vietnam veterans of America um, that was reported in the New York Times because there was a

X reporter from the New York Times who was on the delegation. When they came back from Vietnam, because of the high profile uh, uh, being the 1st American veterans, uh, to return to Vietnam after the war. Uh, they had an open press conference. Two people uh, came to that press conference uh, with deliberate intentions of attacking Bob (inaudible)...in saying that he had sold out all the Vietnam veterans in the country because he put a wreath on (inaudible)...grave. Uh, one of those people was former employee of VVA, a guy by the name of Al (inaudible)...and the other one,

Times X

uh, is uh, a guy named Frank McCarthy, who was, and I think still is, president uh, of an organization called, An Organization of Vietnam Veterans called Agent Orange Victims International, or at least is...was called Agent Orange Victims International at that time. Uh, now I think it has a slightly different title, uh, they dropped the international out of it. Uh, well, what happened with that kind of press conference uh, and you know two Vietnam veterans there uh, raising hell over the fact that uh, that Bob (inaudible)...and these three other guys was going back to Vietnam, uh, an especially raising hell over the fact that they placed a wreath on Hochiman's tomb was that, that then became the story of, you know, the first Vietnam veterans going back to Vietnam, that was the story, this was a major controversy among Vietnam veterans, and it got nation-wide coverage. Uh, and uh, it had a big effect on the growth and development of VVA, um...

X Ho Chi Minh's X

John: In what direction?

Jim: I think it probably overall retarded the development of the VVA. Uh, I think a lot of people had a lot of respect of Bob (inaudible)...going back to Vietnam, I think the fact that he uh, led the delegations of the Vietnam veterans back to Vietnam uh, you know, for a lot of people who uh, either uh, by the time they got back from Vietnam, weren't very happy about uh, about uh, the way the war was going or the way we got in the war uh, or people who were just saying this is the end of 1981, early 1982, the war is over and it is time for us to recognize it. Which I think was probably the majority opinion of the Vietnam veterans. That and uh, a beneficial effect, but the effect that, the effect that all those negative publicity was disorganized uh, in the sense that it uh, it gave, it gave people who did not want to see any kind of organization, whatsoever, they gave those people some ammunition to use against what was developed and to uh, (inaudible)...organization for Vietnam veterans. Back then, it was that yet, but you know, today uh, 4 or 5 years later it is that, it is the National Organization for Vietnam Veterans.

X Organization Veterans X

John: Now would...would people opposing the organization of Vietnam veterans buy that, do you mean other veterans organizations?

Jim: Yeah, I mean, I mean, uh, some of the leadership of other veterans' organizations. Uh, some people who uh, just don't think that there should be a uh, an organization of Vietnam veterans uh, because the Vietnam war was very divisive. Uh, and uh, um to have an organization of Vietnam veterans is to remind the American people of the divisiveness of the Vietnam war and to carry that divisiveness on into the future. Um, Jeremiah Denton uh, has been one of the uh, foremost opponents of VVA, and the leading opponent VVA in United States Senate has been quoted to saying that, that he doesn't think that there should be a national organization for Vietnam veterans. Uh, that uh, you know, all the legitimate needs of the Vietnam veterans can be met with in contact with the uh, the veterans (inaudible)...uh, but to a lesser extent the disabled American Veterans in the uh, the American Legion...

X John: Has there ever been another attempt to forming another National organization of Vietnam veterans? I know there are several national newsletters related to Vietnam vets. Is the VVA the only organization that's gotten off the ground?

Veterans X

X Jim: It's certainly the only organization that's gotten off the ground to the extent of uh, having the operating budget the VVA national has. Which is about 800,000 dollars a year. Uh, or close to a million dollars a year, actually. Uh, having a membership base which VVA has which is about uh, a little bit over 30 thousand at this point. Uh, there have been other successful, and I think that there's only going to be one national organization for the Vietnam veterans. Uh, the closest competition was something called the United Vietnam Veterans Organization. Which was um, had it's primary strength in two places, one in Pennsylvania, one in Texas uh, it started out in Pennsylvania and merged with uh, uh, a (inaudible)...collation (inaudible)...in Texas. Uh, it never was really a national organization in the sense that everybody was operating under the same constitution that everybody was operating on the same uh, uh, same basic leadership, that they held national conventions, and uh, you know, elected their officers in the same way the VVA did. And, at the uh, Detroit convention, uh, in November of this past year, the president of the United Vietnam Veterans organization got upon the floor at the VVA national convention, said if you all pass the constitutional amendment restricting uh, your right to speak out, on foreign policy issues or broad national issues which are not directly related to (inaudible)...affairs, then I will bring my organization in under your (inaudible)... Uh, so I would say that, you know, the closest competition has effectively stepped out of the picture.

X John: Uh, will this will the amendment that was passed at the, at the latest convention preclude further visits uh, to Vietnam VVA delegates?

Vietnam VVA X

Jim: No.

John: That wouldn't be included in that, would it?

X Jim: No, that's not uh, that is definitely not precluded by that constitutional amendment. Uh, VVA will probably not again play a leading role in the uh, POW/MIA issue. Uh, for a couple of reasons uh, because uh, VVA has in the National League of families, had basically reached accommodations for the National League of families uh, is in the undisputed leadership role uh, on that issue. And the other reason is, that it may not be necessary uh, for a private organization like VVA uh, to take on that role again because there is a substantial accommodation between the Reagan Administration and Vietnam now. Uh, the Vietnamese have said that they want a result of that issue within two years. Uh, the uh, you know, we've seen the highest level delegations from the United States that have been in Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War, in the last couple of months uh, so that issue may actually be resolved. Uh, the Agent Orange Dioxin question uh,

National League of Families X

States X

Orange/Dioxin X

which is also a great concern to veterans uh, however is a totally different story. That question is not resolved here. Uh, and uh, that certainly gives VVA national sufficient reason uh, to send other delegations to Vietnam it looks like that would be useful in the future.

Jim: Let's do 10 or 15 more minutes and then, and then if you want to do some more some time soon.

John: Okay. Uh, yeah, the Agent Orange issue uh, that would seem to be an obvious one that the VVA will be speaking of strongly and consistently on, and would have pretty much unanimously support among the membership. Uh, and you're on the Agent Orange Advisory committee for this state. Of course, you'll be leaving soon, but uh, what uh, what's the status of (inaudible)...of the testing program in West Virginia and just, before I forget, would you attribute any of the (inaudible)...between the Reagan Administration and the Vietnam, the government of Vietnam to the efforts of the VVA in the past, the diplomatic efforts.

Jim: I'll answer the last question first. I would say yes. Uh, what VVA did in Vietnam uh, has been a very important part of, what the Reagan Administration is now doing in Vietnam. I don't think it's the only thing. I think there are real substantial (inaudible)...political factors involved. For instance, what's going on in the Phillipines uh, where the Phillipines seems to be definitely in danger having some kind of serious uh, insur...well, they already have a serious insurrection but they're definitely in danger of having a serious insurrection which is uncontrollable um, you know, for that reasons just in geo-political terms it makes sense for the Reagan Administration to try to better it's relations with Vietnam so that the Vietnamese will be less inclined to send guns uh, and other forms uh, of support and supplies to the (inaudible)...Phillipines. But I think in terms of preparing the consciousness of uh, of the Vietnam veterans segment of the American people, for some kind of improvement in relations with Vietnam and what VVA did was extremely important (phone ringing in background)...

Jim: Should I answer the phone? (laughter)

John: Uh, testing program, Agent Orange Testing Program, state...

Jim: There are somewhere between 4500 and 5000 people who have signed up for testing under the West Virginia State Agent Orange program. To this date, just slightly over 200 have been tested under that program uh, despite the fact that the program was legislated into existence over 3 years ago, and despite the fact that the program was funded 2 years ago, uh, that's a terrible record, and uh, you know, at that rate of testing, which shows absolutely no sign of uh, improving over the next uh, uh, year or at least what we're getting from the health department uh, in the committee meetings at uh, uh, that we attended. Representatives from the other veterans organizations we get no indication that

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that rate of testing is going to be increased. Now, hopefully we're going to ask the legislature to look into this and ask them and see what can be done about increasing the rate of testing. There's a positive side that uh, state program and that is the um, the state of West Virginia did complete a mortality study on the deaths which have occurred among West Virginia's Vietnam veterans. And basically, I think that mortality study uh, confirms and is consistant with a lot of the other scientific evidence which has become available uh, on the effects of dioxine and dioxine contaminated herbicides and the herbicides in Agent Orange.

dioxin X
dioxin-

~~John:~~ Alright, one last question (we have to go?) Uh, you...you ~~had~~ compiled a lecture and slide presentation based on your uh, one of your return visits to Vietnam and (inaudible)...and you've presented it to several veterans in public organizations in the last year or so. Uh, what's been the general...(inaudible)...?

had X

Jim: When I started doing this (inaudible)...it basically consisted of...of pictures that um, that I took in Vietnam and in Cambodia. I was prepared for a lot of negative comment because I was mostly presenting it to Vietnam veterans and uh, I was uh, you know, psychologically prepared for a lot of opposition. And I got almost none.. Um, a lot of people who uh, in VVA, uh, who didn't understand why it was that VVA was sending delegations to Vietnam uh, uh, came away from that convinced uh, that VVA should send delegations to Vietnam. VVA should understand what's going on in Vietnam today, what's going on in Indo-China and all of south-east Asia today. In specifically uh, you know from their own point and the uh, point of view of the Vietnam veteran VVA should understand what the effects of the ... (inaudible)...program in Vietnam were, because it does probably have some bearing on what uh, uh, on the effects that we're seeing on Vietnam veterans today. And that was a surprise to me that uh, it got the kind of reaction uh, that it did.

because X

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insert comment X

John: How many groups would you say you've presented that to?

Jim: I counted it up, uh, several months ago. I have been in 15 different states and have probably done the presentation to 100 different groups over the last 2 years.

John: Really? I had no idea it was that many.

Jim: Yeah, I was, I was surprised when I counted that too, (laughs), and found out it was that many.

End of Interview