

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

ROBERT JENSEN

An interview conducted on

June 11, 2015

Interviewer: Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs Robert Jensen are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 11, 2015.

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[Note: This interview contains a considerable amount of background noise.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Alright, we'll start with the basics, what is your name?

JENSEN: Robert Jensen.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, and where are you from?

JENSEN: South Side of Chicago.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What brings you to Pecos, Texas?

JENSEN: The job.

WONGSRICHANALAI: The job.

JENSEN: The job. I was working corrections over the last 15 years.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, and did you come straight here from Chicago?

JENSEN: Yeah, after I got out of the military in '92, I went to Marathon, Texas and I taught over there for a year. And then, in, uh . . . That was in '96, I left Marathon and then I went to, uh, I taught . . . taught all the classes over there for a year and, um, then in '98, I was up in Chicago till about 2001. Two-thousand one I came down here and been here ever since.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Ok, good. Have you enjoyed your time in West Texas?

JENSEN: Oh, yeah, yeah. I do get by with the veterans programs right here in town, I know half these guys that come in here and we get together on Veteran's Day every year.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Excellent. Thank you for coming out to join us for this.

JENSEN: No problem.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Um, when and where did you enter the armed forces?

JENSEN: Chicago, Illinois. I entered at August 20, 1973.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What branch did you serve in?

JENSEN: United States Army, Military Police Corp.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And when did you leave the service?

JENSEN: I left the service in 1976, first time. I was . . . The August 20, 1976, I got out for a year and half. I worked in the army reserves up in Chicago and was the 300 MP battalion and 322 MP company. And then I went back to active duty in February of '78 and was in the Minute Man program which meant I showed up in Fort Hood, Texas at midnight and they told me you got a 4 o' clock formation. I said, "Four o' clock formation. Is that P.M.?" "No, 4 A.M.!" [Laughs.] And being in the reserves, I had majority of my uniform except for my hat . . . My . . . I had sergeant ranks I had made in the reserves but I was a Spec-4 when I went back to active duty. So, I didn't have that and I forgot my belt. So, the next morning I told them I don't have everything. He said, "Don't worry about it. Go in civilian clothes." The next morning, I go to formation and there are 400 guys in uniform and I'm the only guy in civilian clothes. [Laughs.] But, uh, yeah, that was a fun part of joining back into the army. One day you're a civilian, the next day your back in the army. But I was in the army until 1992, May of 1992.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, and were you in the enlisted ranks, or commissioned?

JENSEN: I was enlisted. I was . . . Started off as a private. Went back in as Spec-4. I was a sergeant in the reserves. In 1980, I was promoted to sergeant in the United States Army, regular army . . . '81. I made staff sergeant and that was the rank I got out as.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And did you take part in any military conflicts? Were you deployed?

JENSEN: I was deployed to Panama in 1988. I went back home after the 6-month deployment and re-enlisted for Panama. It was my third tour in Panama. My first tour was 1979. I was stationed there from '79-'82. I got married while I was over there. Married a Panamanian. And we had one . . . first child. And she's grown now and has kids of her own. But I met and married her in Panama and the . . . Eighty-nine I went back from the conflict, 'cause I didn't like what General Noriega was doing and I wanted to part of that, uh, ousting of him. I didn't know how soon it would happen but I knew it was a conflict was about to happen.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well what did you understand about the conflict in Panama?

JENSEN: Well, I got to see a good part of it, being a military policeman and being a sergeant over there, and knowing the country a little bit. I knew the poverty had been inflicted in 10 years. Uh, General Noriega was, uh . . . He . . . Chorrillos was his predecessor. They even say to this day that Chorrillos was killed by Noriega. But, uh, Noriega did something. He took from the people but always . . . but he didn't give back. And Chorrillos always gave back to the people. He always built schools . . . He . . . He used the money that got from them, uh, to take care of the people. And Noriega was just the opposite, he took from the people and never gave back. He was . . . There was thousands of dollars that were found by us . . . that were found by the military, military police, that his cohorts had, and it was not good business.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And you knew all this because you were in Panam. How much did you think that average citizen knew about all this?

JENSEN: Well, not very much. And the bombings and everything that we did was selective targets at everything, I got to see a good part of that and, uh, a lot of people didn't see a lot of

what we saw. And the people . . . When you got people cheering you when you're doing an incursion or taking out somebody or taking out a PDF station, when you got a crowd of people applauding you . . . [Laughs.] And it's a dangerous area but they don't realize that. [Laughs.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well going back a little bit, just real quick. Why did you join the military?

JENSEN: I joined the military because I was a high school student who graduated from high school and had no real . . . no college monies, nothing to do. I wanted to be cop and I couldn't be as a civilian because you had to be 21 in those days, so I says, "I'm gonna go in the military" and I . . . First of all, I wanted to go military police. So, for the first year, when I went in, I was only 17. I just turned 18 two weeks after I joined the army so, when I was signing up in April of '73, about eight months before I went in, they wouldn't let me be a military policeman, They told me I had to go to . . . I could pick another job. Well, I took me a while and I picked an MOS of, uh, uh, it's called ditty-bopper, uh, Morse Code, Morse Code Interceptor. And that . . . What my job was gonna be. I knew a little bit about Morse Code and it would've been a neat job, something different. It was one of 300 jobs available at the time. So, anyway, I went ahead and went in as that when I went to, uh, basic training. I passed the language course and they said, "Well, you can . . . Any language you want, you can request it." And if the army doesn't want it, they'll assign you a language. Well, I asked for German, French, or Rus . . . German, French, or Spanish. I didn't know any language at that time. And they gave me Vietnamese. [Laughs] It was '73, the people going over there, they were intercepting radio transmission at that time, and I went ahead and started the Vietnamese course. I lasted two months in the Vietnamese course. I couldn't get the vowels. [Laughs.] They found out I had no aptitude for that language. Which was a good thing, I could pick any job I wanted. I wanted military police and got it. So that's how that happened.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was there a history of service in your family?

JENSEN: Yes, my uncle served in World War II. My three uncles served in World War II. I have one uncle who served in the Battle of the Bulge. I have another uncle who served in Alaska and lost his night vision because of it. I have another uncle who, um, served in, um, he was on a ship. That's the uncle I'm named after. He served in the United States Navy, and I got the information on his ship years ago. And his ship was fired upon during . . . during Vietnam . . . the Korean War.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So why the army?

JENSEN: Why the army?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Because someone was in the army, someone was in the navy . . .

JENSEN: That happened to be the recruiter I talked to.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Alright.

JENSEN: That was about it. It happened to be the army recruiter that came to our high school and he got me talking. I went to talking to him. I went to his office. He had me drive his brand new . . . He . . . He . . . He told me . . . He says, “ I got a brand-new car on the lot, a brand-new Corvette, and I need somebody to drive it over.” “Seventy-three Corvette in ’73. This recruiter, he says “ Will you do me a favor and drive it over to my office?” I says, “You want me to drive your ’73?” I’m 17-years-old. I said, “Oh, yeah. Oh yeah.” I get over to his . . . I said, “Can I buy something like . . . ?” “Oh, yeah, in the army, you can buy it down the road and then we could too.” So, anyway, I drove his ’73 Corvette over there and I parked it for him and he said, “Oh, yeah.” So, him and I talked and he got me all hooked up for the MOS of Ditty-bop, 11 something like that. It was a strange MOS. I never did figure the numbers out for it. Anyways, I went in and went to MP school in January of 1974 and completed it and my first assignment was Okinawa. Tori station in Okinawa. It was a MP . . . MP assignment of, uh . . . We had a company, a headquarters company. We were a platoon of MPs and that was all. There was 30 of us and all we did was work in a secure site. We worked the badge control system, roaming patrol, stuff like that, even patrol on the 1 mile . . . by 1 mile post. That was it. That was all the patrol duties. We used to have the NCO club, the green berets would come down and the marines would down. You had special forces, marines, and the MPs all get together at the club. [Laughs.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fun times.

JENSEN: Fun time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: They must’ve told some stories.

JENSEN: Oh, yeah, more than once we closed the club. [Laughs.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Now, the more . . . So it’s the early 70s?

JENSEN: Yes, sir.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Joining the military must have been somewhat controversial. Did you get any flak for joining?

JENSEN: No, no. In fact, I had my draft card two weeks before I went into the army. I received my draft card two weeks after I got in the army. I was real disturbed. And, uh, it was just fantastic. I said, “You gonna draft me now? [Laughs.] I’m already in.” That was it with draftees at that time. There were draftees that they came in and they were two years and out.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So was there a difference between but . . . their reaction to the service?

JENSEN: Oh, well, they still served. And uh, when I was over in Okinawa, they go and they say, “Well, if I don’t qualify does that mean they’re gonna kick me out?” That’s what the draftees attitude was. Us, we had to maintain our qualifications in order to maintain our military status. But, um, there was 14 guys went to range one time. And they familiarized with the weapon. They shot a couple times to make sure they were hitting the target. Well, there was this one female who was OJT, “On the Job Training,” and she had never fired a weapon in her life,

couldn't hit the broad side of a barn if you painted it red and put it right there in front of her. So, she gets out there and she's on the range and like, I said, "Pass the word." They pass the word down the line, "Hit her target. Make sure you fire your weapon but hit her target." So, you had 14 guys firing at her target. They were all firing 45-caliber. She was firing 38-caliber. Her target looked like Swiss cheese. She's already tried qualifying five times and she hadn't done it. She was on her last chance before they were gonna drop her MOS. [Laughs.] She qualified. They didn't count the size of the bullet. They counted how many bullets she had in it. It was somewhere around 5, uh, 500. I don't know. But, yeah, that's one of the fun things we did.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, what was your conception of the United States' role in the world, when you entered the military?

JENSEN: Well, we were about to go to the Middle East at that time back in '73. When I was in basic training, they were talking about going in the Middle East and, um, we were going in everywhere and anywhere. We were a military to be reckoned with in those days. But see, in '78, they had a drop in the military. They did a reduction in force where they cut the military for E-7, E-8, E-9, and captains, major, and lieutenant colonels. They cut 'em. Just, "You're out today. That's it." You got 90 days and have to find a home and a job. They did the same thing again in '92 with me. I got caught up in the reduction in force in '92. And it put . . . They . . . In '78 they cut the military but they didn't cut it that much. Nobody really noticed it. In '92, they cut the military in half. Now, it's still noticeable today, 20 years later. But, yeah, it was a big difference. I went from \$23,000 a year to \$5,000 a year the first year I got out. My income dropped considerably from what I was doing to what I was able to do on the outside. Because the minimum wage was \$2.50 an hour, \$4.50 an hour when I got out. So . . . That made a difference.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, OK. So, OK, so you were in Okinawa. And then to Panama?

JENSEN: No, no. I went to . . . I got out. I went back to the states. I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky and was stationed with 101st Airborne. And uh, wasn't a parachutist or anything like that. I was just a regular soldier for 6 months and got out. I didn't get what I wanted for reenlistment. I wanted sergeant rank. I wanted reenlistment bonus and there was nothing at that time. So, I went back in. I got out. I went reserves and went up to field training and stuff and, uh, the year I went to, uh, the summer for two weeks, we went to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. And I got a taste of line duty MP. Because, I had been basically a [tower rad] or a card pusher and now I was actually getting MP calls and got a chance to . . . I was training soldiers as a sergeant and I got to work with some of the fine military policemen and women at that time. So, it was really good. We had excitement from day one we got there till two weeks after. So, yeah, I showed up at uh, Camp McCoy and I got a female partner who had a reservist the week before who had locked himself in the patrol car when she was out on a traffic stop. So, there she was without any back up. He has the radio. He has the keys and she's out there. Well, the sergeant happened to hear her traffic stop in the first place and he pulled up on it. He relieves him of duty and backed her up because the six guys were about to get ready to get out of the vehicle and jump on her but when the sergeant showed up, they all quietly got back in the car. [Laughs.] So, I got to be her partner after he got done, right after she got threatened and everything else. And she says, "Well, I worked with him. I don't know if I can work with you." She was out of the car first and all that stuff. I says, "Give me a chance." And I worked with her. By the end of the second day, her and I

were partners. I'd be out of the car before she was . . . hadn't even heard the radio. I said, "Here, you handle the call. I got this here." Or she'd have me call. And we worked together great and she got comfortable and everything worked well.

I got selected as an outstanding MP, so. A lieutenant happened to come up to the gate, and I was still wearing my 101st Airborne from my previous unit. And, uh, he came up here and he says, "How is it working with the reserves?" I said, "Pretty good sir, pretty good." He said, "How many reservists have you worked with?" I said, "All of them. I'm a reservist myself,." He says, "Oh, you're looking sharp. I would've never guessed it." "Airborne, sir, Airborne." He got . . . He got that back to my staff sergeant and my platoon leader. Well, any kind of detail came up, I got to do it. I got to do a traffic detail where I was running radar and caught a helicopter at 105 miles per hour. It flew over as we were running speed, 'cause we were on a curved road at 30 miles an hour and all of a sudden I got 105, I just, there it is. So, anyway that was the fun stuff we did.

And then, just as I was about to get on a helicopter for the first time in my life, I got called to do that traffic detail so I couldn't go on the helicopter ride. I was all set to jump up on the helicopter. And then in, so after that, I got to see a lot more helicopters than I ever thought I would. I went in '78 . . . I was in Fort Hood, Texas. In '79, I went back to Panama. Went to Panama for the first time. And I was stationed with the, um, headquarters of law enforcement activity. And that fell under hospital security. So, I got to work at Gorgas Army Hospital when the brought the el [unintelligible], he came over. We were, uh, keeping him, because he wasn't authorized, wasn't liked in any other country [Laughs.] Nobody else wanted him and they wanted him dead, so we had to protect him and they put him in a hospital room. [Laughs.] Kept him there with the guards and stuff. But anyway . . . Uh, the el [unintelligible], we had him right there in Panama. So, anyway, I was working hospital duty and I got a chance to work the helipad. Every time a helicopter came in, we take these four big sandbags out of the back of our vehicle and put them up on the helipad and when the helicopter left, we'd take those four bags. Well, it was something out of *M.A.S.H.*, 'cause not only would you do that but you'd also help load and unload helicopters. Never got to fly in them but I got to see a whole lot of them. And then in . . . When Just Cause happened in '89, there was 300 helicopters on the ground and in the air. Over the next few days. And that was the first night of Just Cause. I got to see quite a few helicopters coming in and going out. And they got to see me because I got little glint tape on my helmet. So that could recognize me as U.S force and we four little pieces of glint tape on our jeep. You could always see. And my daughter thought I was wounded in combat because the picture I sent home, we had to wear white engineer tape, below our MP brassard when we were in combat. And she thought I had a bandage on my arm. "You got shot in the arm, dad." [Laughs.] But, uh, yeah, I really enjoyed that part.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, where were . . . Where was your family at this time?

JENSEN: They were at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. 'Cause when I was in . . . I left Fort Leonard Wood and they could've gone anywhere but they decided to stay there, 'cause it was a single man's tour at that time until the conflict was over. Then they would've come and joined me. So they stayed at Fort Leonard Wood. Now, my brother-in-law was in Eagle Pass, Texas and he heard about it at midnight. His aunt called him and he . . . Him and his wife and six cats went . . . jumped in their little el Honda—Little Lupe they called it. It was a Honda Civic, '82 Honda

Civic. And they had the cat cage in the back and threw a few bags in there and went to be with my wife when I was in combat. And my . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: With the cats?

JENSEN: With the six cats, yeah. My . . . One of the . . . One of them did doo-doo on the carpet and my wife had kittens over that one. [Laughs.] That was the thing I heard about. Wasn't that my brother-in-law and his wife had come while I was in combat. It was the fact the fact that the cat had done doo-doo on the carpet. [Laughs.] So, anyway, oh, I also became the star of his Eagle Pass class. He was teaching . . . No . . . He was teaching out of Eagle Pass, so he went from Eagle Pass all the way to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and he says, "Oh, my brother-in-law is over there, taking out Noriega. [Laughs.] So, I became the war hero of the class.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fair enough.

JENSEN: Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, we talked a little bit about what you saw as . . . or how you noticed the conflict in Panama. So, any other stories relating to Panama and the time you were there?

JENSEN: Well, during the time I was there, I got to Noriega's office. Noriega's office had nothing but voodoo in it. Voodoo . . . Voodoo heads and stuff like that. He was . . . He was big time into voodoo. But all the guys . . . All the, uh, sci-ops and all the investigators had already been through his office. So, what I saw was the remnants of it but he had voodoo on his desk and stuff and he was just a weird kind of guy. He was found underground, hiding at that time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What did you think of Panama when you first saw it?

JENSEN: Oh, a tropical paradise. It was beautiful. Hot and humid. Well, when we had left the . . . I got there in, uh, let's see, had to be in October. So, I left at about 50 degrees in temperature and I got off the plane and I was wearing a field jacket and, next thing I know, it was 90 degrees and sunny and it was about to go up to 100 degrees with 100 humidity. So, I got real good idea of how hot it can get real quick.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But it was pretty.

JENSEN: It was beautiful. Yeah, tropical country, tropical climate. Uh, jungles right outside. It was within 150-200 feet of the airbase was jungle, nothing but.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you interact with the . . . Obviously, you did interact with the inhabitants.

JENSEN: Oh yeah, yeah. Used to. Well, it was a strange story. In '79 I met my wife and didn't speak any Spanish. She didn't speak much English. Eighty-nine, I was there with the conflict and one of the soldiers came up to me and says, "She wants to go out with me again." I says, "How do you know." He said, "No, I don't understand what she wants" I said, "OK, I translate." I said,

“What do you need?” and then she says, “I want his name and telephone number, so he can call me. I’ll give him my phone number.” I says, “That’s . . .” I translated for them because I knew what it was like to be young and in love and not be able to communicate. [Laughs.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: That’s very sweet.

JENSEN: Yeah, yeah, that worked real well.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, so the people that you met, how did they . . . Did they like American service members?

JENSEN: Oh, yeah, we got along with them real good, the people. In fact, one day, we were in the middle of the conflict and I got called to a checkpoint, uh, because there was a group of Panamanians coming to the checkpoint. Well, being there as permanent party and being there a while, we had no trouble, you know, talking with the people. Well I became the translator even though my Spanish was not that good. And uh, my sergeant and my lieutenant and I, we had two vehicles. The lieutenant and sergeant in the first vehicle, the first sergeant and the platoon sergeant were together with his gunner. I had my gunner, my driver, and myself, and a team leader. So, I went out, and I said, “Lieutenant called it in.” And we went over and checked it from the checkpoint. Well, we went and got down to these people and I became translator. I says, “Well, what are y’all trying to do?” Well, it was right up to the first day of combat and there were still a lot of bullets and a lot of stuff flying at that time. And they wanted to go deliver food and supplies to the families. And I informed them, I said, “Nope, can’t do it at this time. As soon as it’s available, you’ll hear it on the radio and we’ll be putting information out in the towns through the mayors and we’ll let you know as soon as you can go down there. I can’t even go there and I have family down there.” I told them, I says, “I am aware of what you want to do and how you want to do it.” I said, “I can’t even get down there. So, as soon it’s possible, you’ll be able to do it.” OK, no problem. “We appreciate that,” turn around, and went about their business. Turn around. Well, there was a captain at the checkpoint who was there at the same time we were. He went in to check with his headquarters, came back out. We weren’t there but he saw two vehicles and he didn’t have PDF recognition on the vehicles. He thought we were PDF—Panamanian Defense Forces, the enemy. And he was about to fire us up with fifty calibers. In fact, he even ordered the firing of one. If it hadn’t been for a 50-caliber jamming, we’d have been shot. We had a female sergeant that says, “Stop, stop! That’s our people. Those are our vehicles.” [Laughs.] That captain got his ass chewed when the lieutenant got back and found out what had happened. He said, “Don’t ever, ever fire upon troops unless you can identify them. Get you a little bit of one of those cards so you can figure out which of their vehicles are ours and which our theirs.”

[Phone rings.]

JENSEN: You’re gonna have to excuse me for a moment.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That’s fine.

[Recording resumes.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, alright. So, we're going to start again. Where were we?

JENSEN: Oh, Panama.

WONGSRICHANALAI: We were talking about Panama.

JENSEN: And I just got done where I met with those Panamanians and the captain. And we went back to patrol and did our thing.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What, um . . . What did they understand about America's role in the conflict?

JENSEN: Well, they understood that Noriega was being . . . was, uh, was doing stuff that he shouldn't have been doing: the political uprising, the assaults on political leaders, barring . . . barring the elections, trying to maintain his dictatorship and it didn't work . . . and they didn't want him. He wasn't giving back to the people. So, that was the biggest thing there. On the, uh . . . On the humanitarian side, he had done many, many, many violations. His digna . . . "dingbats," as they were called, the Dignitary Battalion, the ones who were issued weapons and were civilians and were running through the streets, as the night . . . When the conflict was going on, all the dingbats all of a sudden disappeared. There was no one with a weapon trying to help Noriega. His troops didn't want any part of the conflict, um, our general contacted the battalion commanders. I think it was, uh, 16 of them. And all the 16 of them, all the battalions were surrendering and they'd all be processed at prisoner-of-war camps and they understood that. And once they were processed, a lot of them went back to police duties down the road. But were the police till . . . Because we took out their police force. So, for about two years, I was a civilian cop in a foreign country. Try teaching guys how to be a cop. I was training officers.

WONGSRICHANALAI: When was this?

JENSEN: This was over in Panama in '89, '90, '91. So, I really had it. And they . . . We were working . . . I worked as a desk sergeant for '91-'92. So, I got to work the joint military police desk sergeant. So, there was a desk sergeant from Panama on our desk and we worked with him. And we worked will with him. We coordinated what we're doing and stuff.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Very cool. How did your service effect your family?

JENSEN: Um . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Were the worried? Were they . . . ?

JENSEN: Well, they understood what was going on all the time. I mean we had good, good communication lines open. My daughter moved from school to school every three years. And we told her, when I got out in '92, I promised her that she could stay in the same high school from the time she started till the time she finished. That's why in '92, I got out and then she finished elementary and went into high school. She stayed at the same high school the whole time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And your wife?

JENSEN: My wife, she got . . . Well, she was able to get her U.S. citizenship down the road. She was able to find employment, have a vehicle, and do very well. She was able to pick up the English language too.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Were you ever wounded?

JENSEN: No, no. I cut myself on a machete when I was doing a car search during combat, but that was about it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Just out of curiosity did you ever encounter any strange wildlife?

JENSEN: Oh yes. A sloth.

WONGSRICHANALAI: A sloth?

JENSEN: A sloth, a two-toed sloth. There's two-toed and three-toed.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

JENSEN: Two-toed, they smell like urine because they urinate into their fur.

WONGSRICHANALAI: 'Cause they're hanging . . .

JENSEN: They're hanging, yeah. So, anyway, we came across one on the banister of the backside of a house. So, me and another guy, we got my riot baton out of my trunk, which we carried with us all the time. And we got him to go on the end of the pole and got him . . . him in the middle. We teetered it back and forth till we got into the jungle. Then he put his end up on the tree branch and I let my end up and he went on about his business. There was also a snake and we didn't do the same thing with him.

WONGSRICHANALAI: [Laughs.]

JENSEN: We captured him and, uh, he lost his head in the process.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Are sloths cute?

JENSEN: No.

WONGSRICHANALAI: No, they're not?

JENSEN: They look like a monkey with a lot of hair. That's about it. There ain't nothing cute about them. They don't smell good. They don't look good. A face only a mother could love.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Are they everywhere like squirrels?

JENSEN: No, no, no. There's only a few of them

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, fair enough.

JENSEN: And they have their razor-sharp claws, on all four claws. So, it's very, very dangerous when you encounter a sloth but you don't get many of them because they move *very* slowly. It's always fun to watch.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fair enough. Fair enough. Uh, when you left the service, had your conceptions of the military or America's role in world changed in any way?

JENSEN: Well, yeah, when they cut the military in half. I says that wasn't a good idea. We're lucky were not gonna get . . . And, of course, they had a lot of movies at that time that depicted invasions of the United States and I said, "That's possible. That's plausible especially now." Because they went from 18 divisions to 10 divisions and that was a cut in the military by half. They said, oh no, we only cut back 2,000 a year of a five-year period of time. We ended up to be cutting the military in half. They got rid of . . . They went from three marine divisions to two marine divisions. They cut the air force in half. They cut the army in half and it was just not a good plan. It's still not today. Today, this day, they're using task force, but they don't have enough personnel on the ground to take care of most of the problems, so I see it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What advice would you have for young men and women who are entering the service now?

JENSEN: Well, just to go ahead to listen to what they tell you to do because they know what they're doing by experience.

WONGSRICHANALAI: A lot of experience.

JENSEN: Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

JENSEN: Well, the first night of combat, I got to see when they came in, when the troops went down the hill. And I wrote a little poem. It's called the "Combat Squad."

The war just came down, we are moving out.
We don't know when or where abouts.
I saw the troops go into the city,
I didn't feel or see any pity.
The soldiers were armed and ready to go,
I don't know why it all looks so slow.
The men went in with guns blazing,
I wasn't sure why it looked so crazy.

Overhead a gunship flew,
It fired on buildings,
and rocks could be seen through strewn.
We moved out to join the company commander,
Three vehicles per squad and no meander.
As we went in to the dark,
We saw where an engagement had its start.
Where it had occurred, the vehicles stood,
Bullet holes throughout the side and hood.
We ended up on army cots,
We knew the thunder would not stop.
There wasn't a cloud in the sky,
but we knew why.
The Combat Squad.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Thank you. That's very nice. We can, uh, scan a copy of that.

JENSEN: That'll work. But that was the first night of combat and we got to see quite a bit that night. We were in a parking lot. And there's bullets flying everywhere, right. I got a private sitting on the corner of the building. He says, "Sarge, what do I do now?" I said, "Cover me." So, I had him . . . He covers me. I moved up. I said, "Alright, move up." Fifty feet, he hit the ground, and I says, "Alright, cover me," and we moved up and we got him into where everyone else was. [Laughs].

WONGSRICHANALAI: Just like training.

JENSEN: Just like training. You picked him up. I had one solider though that was up in the top of a humvee and there isn't much training for this one. You got bullets flying all around you and the machine gun won't come undone because of the humidity. So he has to kick the lever to release it. I said, "Kick the lever. Kick the lever. Kick the lever". Finally, third time it released. I said, "Alright toss me the weapon, and get your ass out of the turret." [Laughs.] And he rolled out and we went on to his position. That was a couple of little things that you remember when you are in a combat zone. You're in a lit parking lot and someone tries shooting out halogen lights. Halogen light is that big and you couldn't shoot it . . . about two inches big. And they were trying to shoot it out and all you do is hit . . . hit the glass lines but you wouldn't hit that light.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

JENSEN: So, eventually we found the light switch but it was a lit parking lot for a while. When you got bullets, it ain't no fun. Had one bounce off my helmet that night. That new Kevlar helmet works, I'll guarantee it. [Laughs.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Close call then?

JENSEN: Oh, yeah. Very close.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, the parking lot was lit in more ways than one.

JENSEN: Oh, yeah, very much so. I saw a whole wall of bullets. The tracers going back and forth.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

JENSEN: Just trying to stay out of the way of them. [Laughs.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was that also your first experience in combat?

JENSEN: First experience in combat, yeah. I . . . In '86, I ended up to be a . . . the Frankfurt bombing. The shopping center was blown up and, uh, 35 people were injured, 147 vehicles damaged, 147 enclosures to report, because I got to write the initial report. I was the patrol suit that day.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That was stationed in Germany?

JENSEN: Stationed in Germany for three years. So, I was there when the Red Brigade was doing their thing. So, I got to see combat and the Red Brigade, uh, when I went to college. After the army, I got to, uh, an earthquake. So, I got to see a few . . . Oh, no, no, no . . . There was a tornado warning in Alabama. So, what do they do? They have the MPs go out with their patrol cars, with the PA system to announce that there's tornado warning in effect. "If you observe a tornado, take immediate cover." And I'm looking at my partner and I say, "What the heck do we do now?" I says, "Watch for ditches. We're gonna find one and that's where we're jumping in if we see a tornado." But we were out there for 2 hours, broadcasting a tornado warning. That was the system, you know. You have to let the people know. I said, "Turn the radio on! [Laughs.] Get us out of this mess!" Typhoon in 1976, natural disaster, yeah, I saw water rolling up the hill, 90-mile an hour winds, it takes water up the hill.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And this was in Japan.

JENSEN: This was in Okinawa. Okinawa, Japan. And I got to see that. And we were, uh, were inside of the building for three weeks, during the typhoon, while the typhoon went over and passed. And then our patrol vehicle was deuce and half, two-and-half-ton truck, something about the size of a garbage truck. That was our patrol vehicle because anything else would have been lifted up and town away. But that two-and-half-ton was a great patrol vehicle, because it did have a jeep on . . . that we were using for patrol vehicles. That jeep was picked up, went through a light pole, and went downhill. So, it was totaled out.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fair enough.

JENSEN: So . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: You had a lot of experiences over the time. Saw the world!

JENSEN: Oh, yeah. I flipped a van too. Responding a car on fire. And I was clearing intersections. First one I had a green light I went through. Second one I came up to the intersection. There it was. Clear left, a strassenbahn, an electric train, going across. I waited for that to pass and then on the right lane. One lane was open and the other lane was a vehicle stopped for me 'cause I was running lights and siren. So, I get through, the first one, I went over, the strassenbahn . . . The third one I just went through and, all of a sudden, out the corner of my eye, I see this vehicle coming, twice the speed limit. It's barreling down the road and he hit me in the right rear, spun my vehicle 180 degrees, took out two regulatory signs, knocked the windows out and landed my vehicle on its side. And I calmly get on the radio and I said, "This is car such and such. I been involved in a traffic accident. I request a record of German police operation sergeant." Hung up my mic and walked out the front windshield. [Laughs.] Staff sergeant is waiting around. He says, "Well, why were you so calm?" I says, "I had already done everything I could do. There was no use in getting excited over that." [Laughs.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Seems like you were the right person for this job.

JENSEN: Oh, I enjoyed it. I was a staff sergeant. At the time a patrol supervisor, I had up to fifty patrolmen underneath me at one time. And we used to . . . I used to have all kinds of patrols. I had walking patrols. I had, uh, bicycle patrols, joint patrols, uh . . . I used to have patrol areas. I used to have a radio operator that fell under me. So, if anything was screwed up, I'd go right to my radio operator and say, "You didn't send them to the right place." Well, I had one that was . . . I'd tell her to send it to one area, and she'd send them to the other area. And then send that one to the other area and they were out of their patrol area. I says, "Either you get them right or you're gonna go back to the barracks, I'll get somebody else over here who knows what . . . who can follow my instructions." I said, "I don't want them going there. If I need a backup for them, I'll send them but don't send them out of their areas." One night, I check in the general's house and there's one of my privates with his girlfriend screwing in front of the general's house. [Laughs]. And there I am trying to explain, you know. Oh I'm just glad the general and his wife or his kids didn't happen to go out and see this, 'cause he's in a glass yard shack. [Laughs] What was he thinking? Anyway, he ended up getting relieved of duty that quick. I put another officer out there and that was the end of that one.

Another night, we had snow. We had 30-inches of snow and I told them, "Do not leave pavement. Do not go off the hardball. Do not . . . You have chains on those vehicles to get you there and back, not to drive around off road." Well, one of my sergeants decided that he was going to drive along the side of the general's house. And he did and he threw a chain. Then he called me up and he says, "I threw a chain." I said, "Great, put it back on."

"Oh, I can't do it without a jack."

I said, "No, I went to a class today. You can do it without a jack. All you have to do is attach the chain and back up over it."

"No, no, can't do that."

I said, "Alright, I'll be out there shortly." I brought five guys with me. I put him in my front seat. I pull up one of my spec-4s out on this patrol. I told him, "Do not leave hardball." After he got his vehicle, with the chain on, without jacking the vehicle up. And I had no more problems that night. But, I had that sergeant riding with me all night complaining that I relieved

him of duty and put a spec-4 in his place. I says, “Did you follow my instructions at guard mount and briefing. I told you do not go off the hardball.”

“No.”

“Well, but I . . .”

I says, “Yeah, but I nothing.”

There was another guy. We were getting ready for guardsman. Nineteen seventy-eight, were in the day room at Fort Hood, Texas. And, they decided to do a weapons inspection. Well, one guy was running a little bit late. And he goes ahead and puts the magazine in the weapon. Lets the slide go forward and shoots ping-pong ball off the ping pong table, goes off the floor and into the ceiling [laughs], missed the ping-pong ball by that much. We told . . . I says, “You can’t play ping-pong like that. If you want a paddle, we’ll give you one.” [Laughs] But that was some of the fun stuff we had over the years.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And hence your advice to do as your told, do the training. It does come in handy.

JENSEN: Yeah, follow your instructions and do what you’re supposed to do. I had one soldier one day, blow a round into the clearing barrel. The [armorers] came out and blew a second round in the clearing barrel. Not following procedures. I went over there and cleared the weapons. Then I had a female lieutenant decide that she wanted me to find the round. You shoot a round into a clearing barrel, it can go 50 feet, it can go 150 feet, and it’s all downhill. After looking for 20 minutes, I says, well I guess it’s not in this end. [Laughs.]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fair enough.

JENSEN: No, it was too much fun.

WONGSRICHANALAI: I’m glad you had . . .

JENSEN: I had an enjoyable time in the military.