John Schwarz Oral History

**[00:00:00] Dean Wetzel:** All right, Joe. I've got everything going now. I want to take this time to say first off, thank you for sitting down with me today and participating with this project. It's great to hear your guys stories and what it was like to be in the service during Vietnam. It's a war that's often not talked about enough, I feel, as a historian, and I feel we gloss over it and we kind of just say, it happened, but we'll leave it over there. I want to start out with some just basic information from you if we can. Where were you born, what year were you born, and then who were your parents?

**John Schwarz:** I was born in Chicago, Illinois. because my mother was in Chicago taking care of her, ailing mother. The time of my birth, but my home has always been in Battle Creek just the event of the birth took place in Chicago and two weeks later she came back to Battle Creek on the train with me so I'm a Battle Creeker. What was the next question?

**Dean Wetzel:** Just who are your parents and what were their occupations?

**John Schwarz:** My father was Frank William Schwartz born in Philadelphia. Graduate of University of Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Medical School. Served in World War I, Major in the Army Medical Corps. Served in France. When World War I was over he was one of the early doctors with the VA. He was very, very, very dedicated to his, the idea that they were there to serve the veterans of World War I. So my mother and father lived in various places as, as they started, were part of the group who started probably at least a half a dozen VA hospitals, all over the country, Maryland, Texas, Pennsylvania and finally here in Battle Creek where he was the chief of psychiatry here at the VA hospital. And my mother was a former army nurse. And in fact, my mother and father met in France in World War I. She was a Chicago Irish lady. My father was a German boy from Philadelphia. But they met as she was an Army nurse in France in World War I and they married right after the war and lived all those places to start those VA hospitals. I have an older brother, Frank W. Schwartz Jr., who passed away at age 94. About three, four years ago. He was also a physician and practiced in Roswell, New Mexico. And I have an older sister. Her name was Janet Schwartz Miller. Lived most of her adult life in California in the Los Angeles area. When she retired, she was a teacher. She came back here to Battle Creek and lived for, oh, I don't know, she was probably back here 12, 15 years before she passed away at age 93. She was a graduate of Olivet College. Right here in, in our, in our neighborhood. She had three kids. Uh, all three are still in California. But she, Jenna came back here and then I came along, uh, 10 years later and went through the Battle Creek Public Schools, Fremont, W.K. Kellogg Junior High, and Battle Creek Central High School. President of the class of 1955. Played football, swam, and was on the baseball team. And then went to the University of Michigan for undergrad. Wayne State for medical school, Harvard for my residency, and was in the Navy, served in Vietnam, and ultimately came back to Battle Creek to practice medicine and become active in the community.

**Dean Wetzel:** Wow, that's, that's awesome. You were busy.

**John Schwarz:** I was, I was busy, but that's what I wanted to be.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah. Uh, so you mentioned your, your folks were, uh, kind of as the pioneers for the VA hospitals. Were, were, did they travel a lot then? Were you traveling a lot in the 1920s?

**John Schwarz:** No, no. I, they, I, I was, yeah, I was, I was born in Chicago cause my mother was in Chicago taking care of her mother. But basically, they lived here. I've always, I'm a Battle Creeker. Yeah. You know, essentially born and bred and, uh, my, my parents were done with all the moving in the, the, uh, starting up the VA hospitals that they did through the 1920s and until 1935, when they moved to Battle Creek. So, Battle Creek has always been my home. I'm a staunch Michigander and Battle Creeker.

**Dean Wetzel:** Did you, did your dad's brothers, or did he possibly have to go back to service when World War II happened?

**John Schwarz:** Yes, my father went back on active duty in World War II. He was a Major in the medical corps, and a psychiatrist. My mother went back as a nurse here at the Percy Jones Army Hospital and out at Fort Custard Base Hospital, during World War II. And my brother Frank was in the Navy in World War II and was a corpsman.

**Dean Wetzel:** I have a lot of respect for Navy Docs. As a Marine myself, you guys are definitely heroes in my eyes. Could not imagine being a corpsman in World War II. I'm sure your brother saw a lot and I want to thank him, even though he's not here, for what he did.

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, he's no longer with us. He passed away at age 94, about three years ago. My sister passed away at age 93, uh, several years ago as well.

**Dean Wetzel:** That's good genetics though.

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, the outlook is pretty good if I behave.

**Dean Wetzel:** Now, how was it growing up with a dad who was a Major in the military and, uh, you know, a successful doctor, a mom who was also a successful nurse. Did you feel like a calling to go to the medical field? Like this is what our family is destined for. Like…

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, in some ways I felt that way. I mean, I saw my brother who was 13 years older than I go into medicine. And I think when that happened, I was old enough to understand that, in all probability, that's the ambition, ambition is the wrong word, but the goal I should have. And that's what it was all along. I mean, it just boom, boom, boom. In medical school at, Wayne State, which I think is the best medical school in the state, by the way. Because you get so much clinical experience.

**Dean Wetzel:** That's downtown Detroit, correct?

**John Schwarz:** Yeah. And it's an older medical school than U of M by four or five years. Started out as Detroit College of Medicine. But I did that, I did my internship. At Los Angeles County General, USC Medical Center.

**Dean Wetzel:** Another great place to probably be.

**John Schwarz:** And that was, at that time, was the biggest hospital in the United States at that time. And, uh, the intern group was from all over the country. Men and women, mostly men at that time, from all over the U. S. interned at L. A. County. And when I finished my internship, I joined the Navy. And did my, uh, my military time, virtually all of it overseas.

**Dean Wetzel:** Uh, what was it like growing up at the end of World War II and then right into the Cold War? Uh, I know that the World War II was seen by a lot. That was like, kind of like the war that end all wars, and then it just immediately people

**John Schwarz:** Thought that about World War I too. Look what happened.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah, exactly. And, you know, you hit this, this, this war with Russia and. I mean, in the 1950s, they were teaching you guys to go underneath desks. I mean, that wasn't common practice anywhere else.

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, I don't, I don't, I don't think war with Russia is the appropriate statement. There was never a shooting war. With Russia, but you used the, you've used the term Cold War with Russia, then you pretty well got it right. But, uh, I mean, there was, that was, that was always out there, but, uh, I don't think there was, there was no panic on the streets or anything of that nature. We understood. Where we were and who we were, who supported us and who didn't. And we understood the very same things about the, about the Soviet Union. At that time, you didn't say Russia, you said the Soviet Union.

**Dean Wetzel:** Thank you, for those corrections.

**John Schwarz:** And, uh, so that was just a, that was just part of post-World War II history.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah, it's a, it's, it's interesting for me, again, looking back on it is in some ways you can almost argue that World War II never really ended. It just grew into that that cold war.

**John Schwarz:** That's not an, that's not an unfair statement. That's a, that's a, that's a put it that way. And then this way, that's, that's one way to look at it.

**Dean Wetzel:** So, in the 1950s, you're finishing up med school?

**John Schwarz:** No, I didn't. I graduated from medical school in 1964.

**Dean Wetzel:** Oh, 1964. You started in the 1950s.

**[00:10:00]** **John Schwarz:** I started medical school in 60. Graduated from the university in 59. With a bachelor's degree in history. Graduated from high school in 55.

**Dean Wetzel:** So, you like history?

**John Schwarz:** I love history.

**Dean Wetzel:** Awesome. It's a dying art, some say, out there.

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, it may well be. There were, there was a lot of good interest in history when I was a student, and I took advantage of the, the just outstanding, history courses that were available at the University of Michigan, and the outstanding department, the outstanding faculty, and I took tons of history courses there, and my bachelor's degree was in history.

**Dean Wetzel:** They have a lot of great professors. Oh yeah. It's a university that if you can get in for that, for a history track, I'd take it in a heartbeat. The history over there. Um, so, you, you were in college. I want to talk about a couple events that happened while you were there. Okay. That you might have, might have heard about. One being, um, the tank standoff in Berlin. Right after the, the Berlin Wall went up. Did this change your feelings of the Cold War at all? Did you think this might've been a time when….

**John Schwarz:** I don't, I don't think it did. Uh, I don't remember many details about that, but, uh, I don't think it did. I mean, I was always very much in favor of backing. The American position v vs v the Soviet Union and like lots of Americans, uh, the generation before me and my generation, we did not feel that it was unheard of to think of the fact we may have someday go to war, go to war with the Soviet Union. Thank God we didn't. There were, there were accomplished diplomats on both sides, and they didn't want another war. I mean, Russia was the Soviet Union. If you take a look at their casualty numbers from World War II, they were astounding. So, nobody wanted to go into another war, uh, in the 1950s. So, there was a lot of back and forth, but there was no war.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah. You get the Iron Curtain, you, you get the divide, the Berlin wall, um, it, it very firm borders, but no, no, no firing of the gun, so to speak. Oh. You know, I, when I was over there in Berlin. Some of the ways that they tried to run the gates there at Checkpoint Charlie with the different vehicles and stuff. It was an interesting time, needless to say. Um, and a few years after that, our president gets killed, JFK. Was that possibly a moment where you were like, this could be the time we're going to war? Or what did you feel with that particular event?

**John Schwarz:** Which one are you talking about?

**Dean Wetzel:** The JFK assassination.

**John Schwarz:** The assassination? Like a lot of Americans, I remember that day like it was yesterday, November 22nd, 1963. I was a senior in medical school. I was at what is then called Woman's Hospital in Detroit, doing my, I guess, obstetrics and gynecology rotation. And word came through that Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, had been taken to the hospital, but had died at the hospital. And I can remember saying to. Some other of my, my fellow medical students at that time, I said, there are lots of things I thought I would probably see in my lifetime, but the assassination of an American president, I never thought I would see. I never thought there would be another one. I mean, the, just, that just didn't. It was an un, un, un unthinkable and unheard-of thing to me. So, uh, the Kennedy assassination was an effect. On my life, the way I thought about things, the way I thought about my country, the way I thought about certain factions in my country, for forever. It has been, but that was, you want to talk about the day that, that instantaneously changed my life forever. There may have been others, but, uh, November 22nd, 1963. Was the one that I will never forget, and it affects me to this day.

**Dean Wetzel:** I don't want to say it's the same as what I experienced, uh, but I was in fourth grade in 9/11, you know, and again, it's not the president, but it's just that impactful moment in your life where I don't remember much else from fourth grade, but I can remember sitting in that classroom, watching the Twin Towers and watching them fall on TV. And I knew at that point, I said, I'm going to serve in the United States military.

**John Schwarz:** You know, I think for your generation. Other generations. It's true. And for me it was true as well. I mean, I, I can remember 9/11 and saw what was happening and said, I can't believe this is happening. What in the world is going on? I can't believe this.

**Dean Wetzel:** Similar to, like you were saying about JFK's assassination, I didn't think anybody was gonna attack us, especially in 2000. Like, how, how, no, that's not gonna happen. I mean, we, but it did, you know, it was, it was an iconic moment. Thank you for that. Um, now, did you join the service before graduating med school? Was that like an agreed upon contract?

**John Schwarz:** No, I went down to the Naval Officer Recruiting Depot in Los Angeles, California with one of my fellow interns, a fellow named John Hill, who was a University of Iowa graduate. He was a Hawkeye. And he was one of my best friends in my internship, and we had spoken for months before that the Vietnam War was going on, and we felt because we both came from families who had served in World War II, and in my case, in World War I as well, and if you want to go back to my grandfather, the Civil War, so, but we, we knew that, that we had to go down and sign up. And we went down and signed up, and we, there was a kind of a grizzled old Navy Chief Petty Officer there who was doing all our stuff for us, and he got all our paperwork done and everything, and we said, Chief, we'd also, like, well, both of us would like to go to Vietnam. And he kind of, his glasses went down like that, and he kind of looked at us, and he said, you know doctors, I don't think I'm going to have any trouble granting you your wish. So, we both went, John and I both went to Vietnam. He was a Battalion Surgeon for a Marine Battalion. Uh, I was a battalion surgeon for the Ready Amphibious Group, which is a Marine Battalion. And I'm not sure what John did for his second, second assignment, but then I became assistant naval attaché in Indonesia, when they were having their revolution and they tossed, uh, Sukarno out and brought in Suharto, and I felt like that was almost more dangerous than being in Vietnam at that time. In fact, when I was there and, uh, it was one of the most interesting experiences of my life.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah. I, don't, I I'll be honest. I don't know much about the Indonesian revolution. I've studied Vietnam, but this is again,

**John Schwarz:** Well, Indonesia, the Indonesia was a Dutch colony, the Dutch East Indies for maybe 300 years before World War II, the Japanese invaded in World War II. Japan is defeated the end of World War II Indonesia then becomes a republic under a fellow named Sukarno. The SU indicates he's probably, he's Javanese from the island of Java, which is the most populous of the Indonesian archipelago. And, uh, so they founded the Republic of Indonesia and, uh, he turned out to be a dictator and then turned out to be cozying up to the Soviets at the time. They didn't want to take Indonesia over. They just wanted to control everything. If you look at the map, the Indonesian archipelago, especially Java and Sumatra and Bali, etc., sit right across some of the most important sea lanes in the world. So, the Soviets wanted to be basically the decision makers there. And the Western powers, led by the United States and Australia, Australia, why? Because Australia is right there, and the UK and France and Germany and others, got together and basically the responsibility was on their military attachés and assistant attachés, like myself, to just kind of elbow the Soviets out of the way, which we did. And it's one of the real stories of success where the Soviet Union wanted to come in and take over, essentially, the government of a country. And they did not succeed. The West won that one. And it's pretty important because Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world. China, India, the United States, Indonesia. **[00:20:00]** Its so strategically located. And the things that they produce are, and export, are used all over the world. So, it was important that we basically save Indonesia from becoming a Soviet Satellite, and we did and that was that's one of the great stories I mean a lot of it's been written about it in my opinion not enough.

**Dean Wetzel:** Obviously.

**John Schwarz:** Some movies have been made about it. They center of the story in Indonesia There's a movie called *A Year of Living Dangerously* That is takes place there. It's not about the revolution or anything, but it takes place in precisely that time. And the thing that I thought was good about it, not that the story was kind of, it's a love story. But what they were able to do was portray the atmosphere in Jakarta at that time, uh, quite accurately and actually how dangerous it was. I mean, you were never sure when you went out and jumped in the car in the morning and drove into the embassy in the middle of downtown Jakarta. That you were going to get shot before you got there because it was so dangerous, but anyhow, we won that one.

**Dean Wetzel:** It's the, uh, Domino Theory, correct? Is that what you guys were kind of working off of then? The whole idea that if one country falls to communism, others are going to keep falling.

**John Schwarz:** Well, that was a thought then. I mean, is a The Domino Theory was more about, you know, Eastern and Central Europe and what would happen there. And, Indonesia was, well, you know where Indonesia is, you're basically in South Asia. You just have to look at the map and the islands are so important. You know, you've got Java, Sumatra, Bali. You name it and look at the maps and the sea lanes that go through there and look at what they produce.

**Dean Wetzel:** Well, those were the islands the Japanese were after.

**John Schwarz:** The Japanese took them.

**Dean Wetzel:** Exactly. That's why they bombed Pearl Harbor, was to go and get all of those raw goods that were down there.

**John Schwarz:** The Japanese took those islands early in World War II. There was lots of fighting there, and lots of Americans fought in that area as well, with the British, French, the Americans, others, to try to just kind of cool the Japanese down, while they were defeated elsewhere. But there a lot of fighting that went on in various places in what is now Indonesia, not to mention Sumatra, Bali, and others. So it's a very, very interesting place, very interesting place. Their history is very, very interesting as well. The Dutch era and the post-World War II era, the Soviets, the Americans, and the other European Western countries, plus the Australians who were there and what, what went on to kind of ultimately win that one and Indonesia become a true republic. I would say it's an Asian style republic, which is a lot different than the United States, but nevertheless, it is a republic.

**Dean Wetzel:** Well, thank you for sharing that information, Joe, because again, I love learning new stuff and. It doesn't surprise me that we were doing operations down there. Um, it's just, I, I just

**John Schwarz:** Well, there were operations during World War II.

**John Schwarz:** I remember the Battle of the Java Sea, World War II, off the north coast of, uh, the northern coast of the east end of the Isle of Java. Uh, there were huge naval battles fought there and that was one of the ways we kind of got into, uh, into Asia and were able to make landings and go up through the Sunda Strait, which is a strait between Bali and Sumatra and up into the South China Sea and, and approach that way. So, it was just critical that we were able to do well in what we now call Indonesia, then called the Dutch East Indies, in World War II.

**Dean Wetzel:** I was blown away with Singapore when I was there on my deployment. That is a city

**John Schwarz:** I think Singapore is wonderful.

**Dean Wetzel:** That is a city you don't normally, you wouldn't expect to find it out there, it's as busy and as bustling as it is.

**John Schwarz:** Well, Singapore was a British crown colony for 200 years plus, uh, invaded by and occupied by the Japanese during World War II. End of World War II, the British, again, take it over and became a Crown Colony, and then they work with the Singaporeans. Uh, I would say starting about the mid-60s and up into the 70s, I'm not sure what year Singapore became independent, but, uh, it became the Republic of Singapore. But it's Singapore is one of them. When we were in Jakarta, we had an airplane at the embassy, and, uh, it at all. We had an old Goody Bird, an old TC 3, which was an American military plane. I mean, our, our air attachés were pilots. And so, we would, on occasion, load 10 or 15 of us into the Goody Bird and go up to Singapore and just kind of get out of the kind of tense atmosphere we were in in Indonesia. Singapore is a wonderful place.

**Dean Wetzel:** Um, I would like to go back here to your enlistment. Uh, and talk a little bit about why you selected maybe the Navy. Cause it sounded like your dad was in the Army. Uh, it sounded like your mom was in the Army. Your brother was a corpsman so that I could see maybe you were trying to follow your brother.

**John Schwarz:** My brother was in the Navy.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah.

**John Schwarz:** And, you know, I could have gone any way. I just, I don't think I threw cards on the table or anything like that. One said Army, one said Navy. One said Air Force, and one did not say Marines because the medical corps and the Marine Corps are Navy doctors.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah, I always tell people you have to be a pretty insane gun club to be a bullet sponge like we are and not have a medical wing. At all. Um, it's a very interesting. That's why we love our docs. It's why I will do whatever it takes for my corpsman. Um, okay. So, you decide to join the Navy, then what happens? You don't go to boot camp, because that's where you're enlisted.

**John Schwarz:** No, no, no. We're doctors. We become medical officers in the Navy. We joined and were assigned to our various assignments. My first assignment was as a battalion surgeon for the Ready Amphibious Group. I went, went over to Vietnam on a, on a ship, USS Montrose, APA 212, and we did, we did basically you call them raids, whatever, landings up and down the coast of Vietnam in that tour. And then we went back to the States on the Montrose. And then from there I was, I got the orders to Indonesia.

**Dean Wetzel:** Now, being with the Marines and being their battalion surgeon. Did you?

**John Schwarz:** We were. I was always Navy. Remember? The doctors are always Navy. In the Marine Corps. But yes assigned to a Marine battalion.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yes. Uh, thank you for that clarification. Um, were you properly supplied at all? Did you ever have to like, feel like you were making?

**John Schwarz:** Never had a problem with supplies. Always well supplied.

**Dean Wetzel:** Now, obviously, you had some trauma care, I'm certain, in L. A.

**John Schwarz:** If you intern at Los Angeles County General Hospital. You do, you do a heck of a lot of trauma. And, and when I was a medical student in Detroit, you see a lot of trauma as well. So, I wasn't under trained to deal with trauma when I went to the Navy.

**Dean Wetzel:** So, you would say you felt pretty prepared.

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, I felt prepared.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay. Um, did your time in Vietnam during that deployment go as you anticipated? Was it routine do you think?

**John Schwarz:** Pretty much. I didn't, I didn't think. I can't remember any huge surprises. It was, it was pretty much what I expected.

**Dean Wetzel:** So, and now, how long were, were you with the Navy in general, your entire enlistment? When did you?

**John Schwarz:** Two, two years on active duty.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yes, active duty and reserves.

**John Schwarz:** Oh, and reserve? Yes. Active duty about two and a half years. Okay. And reserve, active duty plus reserve, probably, I'd have to look it up and tell you, but maybe eight or ten years.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay.

**[00:30:00]** **John Schwarz:** I'd have stayed, but my, where I had to be and where they wanted me to be, said I couldn't do it. I have to, I have to go where my, medical training takes me now, and it took me to Boston. But the other thing that's happened is I got recruited by the CIA, after my active-duty tour in the Navy, one year of general surgery, so in, 67, I think it was 67, my friends from the agency got in touch with me, my friends. Said we have a place where we need somebody with an intelligence background and we're looking for a doctor because it just fits into the slot we have. And I said, well, that's, I finished my year of general surgery residency immediately after I left the Navy. So, I was finished with that, and I was available. And so, I said, yeah, I'll do it. And I went with the CIA, and I went, I went to Laos, way up in Northern, way up in Northern Laos to a place called Banh Houi Sai, B A N. I think it was H O U I, close to that anyhow, and then S A I. You can find it, it's on the Mekong River, up in Northern Laos. So, I was up there, and then one day a guy who was a CIA guy, kind of a well-known CIA guy, they called him Tony Poe, his name was Tony Pochepka, walked up the road from the Mekong where I was and said, they want to talk to you in Bangkok, and I said what the hell do they want to talk to me in Bangkok for? He said, well, I think they want you to go someplace. So, I said okay, so I left where I was up in northern Laos. And went down to (?) and then flew over to Bangkok. They said, we want you to go back to Indonesia. There was an operation they wanted to do there, which involved, trying to, get information from the Soviets, and about the Soviets. So I went, I went down to Bangkok and got all the information I needed to do it, what I had to do, and flew on back down to Jakarta. And, and was there for, I think I might have been there for two months or so, maybe a little more. It's kind of During this operation, but I, I met this wonderful woman also there from Kalispell, Montana, who worked for the company as well, and she became my wife. Not quite, not immediately, because from there I went back to the United States the other way, through Europe.

**Dean Wetzel:** The long way.

**John Schwarz:** I remember it was just an easier way at that particular time. And, uh, they wanted me to go back to Vietnam. And I said, okay, I'll go. I'm single. I'm good. So, then I went back to Vietnam for another 14 months or so, more than a year, uh, with the agency and, was based theoretically in Saigon, but I'm one of the only people you're ever going to meet who was in all 17 provinces. I think there were 17 of the Republic of South Vietnam from the South to the North, flew all over, various places. Over to the Cambodian border. Down to the Gulf, uh, up to the border with North Vietnam. It's all over as I was assigned to do what I was assigned to do. And I was when I flew, I always flew with Air America. And, uh, they, Air America, had this aircraft It's called a Pilatus Porter, uh, P I L, I think it was A T U S, P O R T E R, Porter, which was the most amazing aircraft you'd ever want to see in your life because it, you know, it could take off at about 500 feet and land in less than that. And then it had a good prop jet engine on it that, uh, you got up and you were at the altitude you wanted to be at. It cranked it up a little. and got some speed out of it. But a Pilatus Porter is, uh, was just an amazing aircraft. And I loved it because I thought it was a very, a very safe aircraft as well. And let's see if I can find it.

**Dean Wetzel:** Air America, was that who, was that at the time?

**John Schwarz:** CIA.

**Dean Wetzel:** The CIA?

**John Schwarz:** Air America was that's not it. Air America was, was the, the, uh, CIA, we still have it because it's a CIA airline, but. Basically, it was a CIA Air Force. They had other planes, obviously, but because the Porter could land and take off.

**Dean Wetzel:** Kind of looks almost like a crop duster, sort of.

**John Schwarz:** Well, yeah, look it up, read about it when you get home. You'll find out how amazing the plane was. You know, it could land and take off in almost no space. Uh, good jet prop engine. Again, when you get up, you could cruise along at a reasonable speed. Could carry a tremendous load. There was a notorious airplane in Vietnam.

**Dean Wetzel:** Were you surprised? I mean, you said you were well supplied with the Navy. I can only imagine the amount of toys you got to play with, with being a part of the CIA at that time. Were you just surprised at all the new technology that was out there, that was going on?

**John Schwarz:** No, I don't think technology that I had to use was basically proven technology. I wasn't doing any research. But the one thing that I always talk about when I talk about that time is the Pilatus Porter aircraft. It's just an amazing aircraft. The load it could carry. You know, you could put, as a pilot, you could put five people in there and take off. And a tremendous lift. It's just an amazing aircraft.

**Dean Wetzel:** And it's ability to take off on short, short n runways. You don't even really have to have a….

**John Schwarz:** It was really a stalled aircraft. I mean, amazing. That you would, and it was, it was as good as it was, but it was kind of the, the flower of, of stall aircraft at, at that time. It was, it was a great aircraft. No, and, and it was a Swiss airframe. The aircraft, it's a Swiss company and the, uh, the en the engine on it was a jet fry from an American company. called Garrett Air Research. So, it was an interesting airplane. I don't, I haven't seen one for years. Occasionally I used to see one, you know, tied up in an airport somewhere, but over with the Civil Aviation, so I haven't seen a Porter for years. They gotta still be out there flying because they're just as good as anything that's flying now, they were amazing.

**Dean Wetzel:** Um, do you, looking back at your time in the Navy, do you have any friends that you still maintain, or friendships that you maintain still today?

**John Schwarz:** From the Navy?

**Dean Wetzel:** From the Navy?

**John Schwarz:** Uh, there's one fellow that I keep up with, he was both Navy, because he was the other assistant naval attaché in Indonesia. And then, when I went back for that last tour in Vietnam, all of a sudden he shows up in Vietnam, uh, And, uh, on the staff of ComNav for Vietnam. And so, you know, I had a place to live, and he didn't really. That wasn't worth a damn. And so, I said, come on, you just live with me, and we'll do, we'll do fine. So, at the time, the time we were both still there, which I think was nine or ten months, I had to go. He was there after me for a while, but we, we bunked together, uh, in Saigon. It was, it was fun. He was an Ohio State grad. I was a Michigan grad.

**Dean Wetzel:** We'll try not to fault him too much though.

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, he was a great guy.

**[00:40:00] Dean Wetzel:** Um, now, one other thing that you mentioned, know I'm jumping around, and I apologize for this, but you, when you were in the CIA, you mentioned you were there in 67, and for 14 months?

**John Schwarz:** 67, that was my tour, let’s see.

**Dean Wetzel:** Look, I guess I can ask this question another way too, uh, where were you when the Tet Offensive, which is the main offensive everyone seems to know about Vietnam, happened?

**John Schwarz:** I think I was not in Vietnam during Tet.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay.

**John Schwarz:** I'm trying to think of what year TET was. 68. January. 68 what?

**Dean Wetzel:** January of 68.

**John Schwarz:** I was not in Vietnam.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay. So, were you in Indonesia then?

**John Schwarz:** No, I was in the States. And I was about to go back to Laos. But I was in the States.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay.

**John Schwarz:** During TET.

**Dean Wetzel:** So that, that, that opens up an interesting point of, how did you feel then? Because you would have had the unfiltered or the civilian access to what was happening. A lot of guys didn't have that that were there. Then did that, this was also the first time really where embedded media units were with these troops and were reporting all of this happening. How did you feel about that?

**John Schwarz:** Well, I didn't, I, you know, I can't, I can't truly remember it. I can remember Tet, which Tet is, you know, is a Vietnamese holiday. And that they, they really put the, they really put the pressure on, and there were lots of American casualties and, uh, we were ultimately able to snuff it down. But I do remember Tet, and I thought, you know, how long is this going to go on, and are we going to be able to survive it? And we did.

**Dean Wetzel:** Did it surprise you?

**John Schwarz:** That they did that?

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah.

**John Schwarz:** In a way, it surprised me. I guess I did not think that they had those abilities. But they did. I mean, basically, this was this was the Ho Chi Minh attack. It was the North Vietnamese funded and probably the personnel, many of them, had to be North Vietnamese. But I wasn't there for Tet.

**Dean Wetzel:** Um, let's get down to a little bit lighter subject I'd like to throw out there. Um, what about the moon landing, do you remember?

**John Schwarz:** About the moon landing, what I remember is that it took place.

**Dean Wetzel:** It took place. I see. Um, some, some veterans I've talked to, uh, mentioned that they've, uh, they were off the coast when the, the, uh. Shuttle returned and they were part of the teams that had to go and pick that up and stuff and another interesting part that a lot of people forget about that was going on. There's just so many things that were going on outside of just Vietnam in general. Well, you had an interesting end to your service or at least your active side of service, um, because you went straight from active duty into the the company it sounds like pretty much.

**John Schwarz:** Well yeah, not straight. How was it? There was, there was some time. In between, there was a gap. That was a general surgery resident at that time.

**Dean Wetzel:** How long does that take?

**John Schwarz:** Well, if you're going to be a general surgeon, it's four or five years. But to be a surgical sub specialist, as I am, you do one year of general surgery, to prepare yourself for the subspecialty years.

**Dean Wetzel:** Did you get to be a doctor for the CIA then, or was it just a cover story?

**John Schwarz:** No, I was, I was, my last tour, I was a medical officer, which worked very, very well, from an intelligence standpoint, and I was a doctor. I was helping people and doing that, but I was also seeing people and taking care of people. Take care of people who the agency considered assets, so it was a, it was a mixed bag.

**Dean Wetzel:** Did you ever treat, like, civilians? Did they, were they able to come up to you, or was it only Americans that could get treated by you?

**John Schwarz:** I treated civilians who were maybe assets to agency people, and as a favor, favor is not a good word as part of the fact that these people were, were assets to the US and they had a medical problem, or a member of their family had a medical problem. I would take care of them and, then treated people as well. Who, one of our people would come upon who had a medical problem and contacted somebody that was with us and maybe, again, could be looked at as an asset, what have you. I treated who I was asked to treat. And then I treated a lot of people who I discovered needed treatment for one thing or another. There was no limitation so you can't treat this. You can't treat that. Nobody ever told me that.

**Dean Wetzel:** Um, was there, I'm trying to think like, did you have to deal with like a lot of trench foot? Was it similar medical conditions, our guys fought with all the water and stuff, or was there a particular ailment that you've noticed that was…..

**John Schwarz:** Not really, uh, I mean, all of the things that the, when I was the marine battalion surgeon, a lot of those things. Yeah, I saw but then when I was with the agency, you're just you were treating all kinds of things and diagnosing things and You know, the daughter of one of our assets would, you know, if my daughter's sick, would you help my daughter, the daughter would somehow contact me and probably come to where I, my office was in Saigon or to, to the embassy in Jakarta and you'd treat them, and I remember some needed treatment. It needed, uh, very selective specialty care, and I would, if they were from a government, like from the Indonesian government, or the Vietnamese government, or something like that, say they've got to go to the United States, here's where they've got to go, I'll make the arrangements, that sort of thing, and then they would, they would get there. It was a, it was all over the place.

**Dean Wetzel:** You were busy, is what I'm, is what I can

**John Schwarz:** Yes, I was busy.

**Dean Wetzel:** Chalk this all up to. Um, now, do you remember your, the, when you left Vietnam for the last time? When was that?

**John Schwarz:** What, I left Vietnam for the last time?

**Dean Wetzel:** Between either the Navy and the CIA, the last time you left.

**John Schwarz:** Would have been, uh, June 1970.

**Dean Wetzel:**  June 1970. Have you ever gone back since?

**John Schwarz:** No.

**Dean Wetzel:** No. Have you ever thought about going back?

**John Schwarz:** Yeah.

**Dean Wetzel:** You just, just decided not to?

**John Schwarz:** No, I just, it was never, never convenient. I was always too busy.

**Dean Wetzel:** Have you ever attended then reunions? I know you didn't mention many friends that you've maintained friendships with.

**John Schwarz:** Oh, yeah. I've, I've, I attended a couple of reunions, several reunions.

**Dean Wetzel:** Has that?

**John Schwarz:** There was a, there was a, there was a reunion, you know, Saigon station. I can't remember what it was. It was probably sometime in the, around 1980. I remember going to that and I've been to parties in the DC area of with people that I served with in the embassy in Jakarta, somebody would have a party and get invited and go down because these are people who are, A. I took care of, but B. who were pretty much the cream of the crop as far as operational officers for the agency and their families. And I just enjoyed working with them. And I'm still in contact with a few of them who are, who are still alive. There aren't that many who are still alive.

**Dean Wetzel:** Unfortunately. The VA has a grim statistics. They can give you the projected year dates of groups of veterans and when they think they're going to expire or what not. It's not the best of things. So you were uh, So you leave in 1970 of June, For the, is that when you end your time with the CIA?

**John Schwarz:** Yes.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay. So, June, so Navy's done, the CIA's done, but you're not done serving America, correct? You found another way to serve your country.

**John Schwarz:** Yeah. I mean, I went into, I always, cause I was always very interested in politics.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay.

**[00:50:00] John Schwarz:** Always very interested in, in, you know, uh, the government works and that sort of stuff. It was never, it was never just something I thought, well, I want to do this. I had always wanted to run for office.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay.

**John Schwarz:** So, when I, and it's one of the reasons I came back to my hometown. Because you do better in your hometown if you're running for office. Otherwise, you go someplace else and say, where in the hell is he from? No, so I came back here. And then, you know, my family was known here. My dad was a doctor here. My mother was very active in the community. So that was, that worked out well. And my wife. My late wife, she was fine with it. I mean, she was from Kalispell, Montana. Now, when I was able to afford it, I built a little house. Well, it wasn't a little house, it was a nice house on Flathead Lake out there. Up in Northwest Montana. So, we had that for the summer, you don't go in the winter. Uh, and so that all worked out very well. Unfortunately, she died of cancer at age 45.

**Dean Wetzel:** Your wife did?

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, my wife did.

**Dean Wetzel:** Oh, I'm so sorry, Joe.

**John Schwarz:** And, uh, I have one daughter. That's who I was talking to on the phone there. And I think I want to say the word accomplished. I don't think one should talk about oneself, uh, and use the word accomplished. But yeah, I did pretty much what I wanted to do here. I wanted to run for office. I wanted to be a doctor here. I ran for office, I've been a city councilman, I've been mayor, I've been a state senator, I've been a member of Congress, uh, I've been very active in the community and active in other organizations, both in the community and statewide, never was totally taken over by a political party. I always ran as a Republican, but, I mean, that's, but you had to either be a Republican or a Democrat. I'm not in that sense, I’m not very political. I can make my own decisions I don't have to have some party headquarters telling me what to do, which unfortunately is what happens to frequently

**Dean Wetzel:** Exactly, when was your first Stint and as an elected official and what was that?

**John Schwarz:** Battle Creek City Commissioner Okay, so they call them commissioners here City Council window someplace else. But yeah, that was 19, I'm going to say 83 or 84 in there, and then was that for three or four years, and then maybe five years, and then was mayor of Battle Creek for maybe three years, and then the state senate seat here became vacant because the long-term occupant of the seat retired. So, I ran for the state Senate, and I can tell you what year that was.

**Dean Wetzel:** That oh four,

**John Schwarz:** that was probably 86. So, the city council stuff was prior to that cause I was in the Senate for six, for 16 years. Okay. So, and then I, I left in 2002, so that would go back to 86.

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay. Yep.

**John Schwarz:** And then I was in the whole office for a while and then I ran for Congress in 2004.

**Dean Wetzel:** 2004. I know you didn't serve a whole lot of time necessarily in active-duty military, but between the active and the reserve side, 10 years is a significant chunk of your life. Do you feel, when you were running for office and, and, and making decisions, you, you leaned on any of that military experience or that military training?

**John Schwarz:** Oh yeah, sure you, you do. It colors your decision making in, I think, a favorable way. And then the, and you become more rational, you learn in many ways to push your ego aside and do what's right. I mean, you're the judge of what's right. But I learned a lot of that from experience, experientially, but, I learned a lot from my father, too, because that's the way he was. He was a very practical man, and he was always to do the best for his patients, his family, his friends. I don't think I ever can remember a day when he was thinking of himself.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah, and I think it's incredible that you had someone in your life that was so influential. You know what I mean?

**John Schwarz:** Well, he was influential. He died when I was 20 years old, junior at U of M, and he passed away, but he was a tremendous influence because I was able at least to observe the kind of way he lived his life for a decade or so when you could observe those things and appreciate what you saw. And the same with my mother, you know, the little Irish nurse and her life. And she was a, she was a great friend of a lot of people. Helped a lot of people.

**Dean Wetzel:** It's awesome to hear that the war, World War I and all of its horrors didn't darken them.

**John Schwarz:** Yeah, well they were, they joined up in World War I. And then he's from Chicago, he's from Philadelphia. They met in France during the war. And my dad's father was a Civil War veteran. Yes, he was a Civil War veteran.

**Dean Wetzel:** That history.

**John Schwarz:** My dad was born in 1887. He was 50 when I was born.

**Dean Wetzel:** Wow. that's, that's not a common lineage. Like you said, that's, that's three, three generations.

**John Schwarz:** My grandfather was in the Union Army. You're in the Civil War. My dad was in World War I and World War II. My brother in World War II. I was in Vietnam. My mother was an Army nurse in World War I. She was born in 1895. I was born in 1937. Uh, so, uh, it goes back a ways.

**Dean Wetzel:** Did you ever get to meet your grandfather?

**John Schwarz:** No, my, all my grandparents, uh, had passed away when I was born. I was, I was a second thought. That's about it. And they must have gone on and had a hell of a good night one night. My brother was 13 years older than I and my sister 10 years older than

**Dean Wetzel:** Okay. So that was, okay. So that makes sense, right? The Roaring Twenties. We just ended World War I. It was kind of like that smaller version of a baby boom that kind of happened after World War II.

**John Schwarz:** Well, yeah, but I was born in 37.

**Dean Wetzel:** You're ten years past that. Past the Roaring Twenties. You're past the Roaring Twenties. You're into the new worry, which is you see Nazi Germany. You can see the fascist governments. Well, you can see

**John Schwarz:** Nazi Germany then because, you know, Nazi Germany kind of came into being about 1933.

**Dean Wetzel:** January. That's when Adolf Hitler was given chancellor. And then the rock fire and then, or the Reich fire and then Yeah. Yeah, everything else is history as we can (drum roll). Did when you ended your service in the 1970s were you oh I know as an officer you were probably given a lot more information as to what's out there as far as has helped in different things Like that than what a lot of the enlisted was but were you really aware of veteran benefits? Were you told of anything like that?

**John Schwarz:** I never asked them I don't think anybody ever really told me much about anything. It's never, never a question. I never asked.

**Dean Wetzel:** Was that did you feel that you didn't deserve veteran benefits? Or did you just feel that you didn't need them?

**John Schwarz:** I don't know, I never even thought about it. And then when I was done, everything like that, I just, there was no need for me to go after veteran's benefits. I had a perfectly good profession and was making a perfectly good, perfectly good living.

**Dean Wetzel:** Sure. I mean, yeah, the biggest veteran benefit out there is the 9 11, or for you it would have been the GI Bill, um, and you were already a Ph. D. at that point, so you weren't about to go back to school, so, um, awesome.

Now, how was it for you, in 1971, as a Ph. D., as a

**John Schwarz:** I'm not a Ph. D., I'm an M. D.

**Dean Wetzel:** M. D., sorry. M. D. Practicing and just the negativity around service in the 1970s, that had to be something new for you to experience as well.

**John Schwarz:** The negativity around service?

**Dean Wetzel:** Correct. Like the protests that were going on with Vietnam.

**[01:00:00]** **John Schwarz:** I just blew it off. I didn't have time to worry about that. You know, there's something, there's something like that always out there and if you dwell on it, you’re wasting your time. I just never I was like whatever.

**Dean Wetzel:** So, for you it was more like an afterthought, you were able to get past it and move forward.

**John Schwarz:** No, it was not, it wasn't even a matter of getting past it, I never even thought about it. I mean, you'd see these people out there protesting and all that crap and everything. Who gives a rat's ass? I don't.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah. Thank you for sharing your viewpoint of that. A lot of people think that it was so relevant that everyone was caught up in the moment, and it's not always that case.

**John Schwarz:** Well, relevance is relative, isn't it? Yeah, it just depends on your generational It's, it's economic. It's all of these things and, relevance. Again, you can say, was it relevant? Well, it was, yeah, it was relevant to the country that this crap was going on. Was it relevant to me? Did it, would, did it make me change anything I did? Would maybe be the better question?

**Dean Wetzel:** the correct way to say that?

**John Schwarz:** The answer's no.

**Dean Wetzel:** Now in the bigger picture of your service and we can even include the time with the CIA into this. Do you feel that that changed you?

**John Schwarz:** No, no, I, my outlook on life and my political outlook is not the term, but it's, it's kind of general outlook and life has never changed very much, very similar to my father's. I might add, I mean, we're, we're, I'm a moderate. I'll always be a moderate. My dad was a moderate. I always ran when I ran, I had to run as a party. I ran as a Republican, but I could have just as well as run as a Democrat. The Democrats were asking me to run all the time. And I could have done it, uh, but I'm just not very partisan. And I think the partisan stuff we see now is, is ridiculous. I don't know how you get around it because of the, the system is built in a way that, if you're going to do anything politically, if you're going to hold office, those things, you've got to have some party affiliation. I did, but I was never active in party affairs. And I just, I ran the NR after my name. I don't care. I didn't need them. Uh, they could probably say they didn't need me, and they wouldn't be wrong. It worked out fine.

**Dean Wetzel:** Now, how has your military service impacted your feelings about war and the military in general?

**John Schwarz:** You have to look long term, historically. When you deal with that issue, those questions, look, if you look back for centuries and centuries and centuries of human history, or you want to look back just on the Western hemisphere, on, on Europe, the United States, war conflict has been part of our history. It's not going to change. It's not going to change. There's never going to be the war to end all wars, unless we just entirely destroy ourselves through some sort of, atomic blast, whatever. So, you have war is inevitable, it's an inevitable part of our history, uh, an inevitable part of the history of the rest of the world, uh, you don't want it, you do everything you can to avoid it, because we know how catastrophic war can be, but we also have to be realists and understand that sometimes we're going to have to make the decision whether to go to war or not again.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah, it's modern warfare. Where we're at today with warfare is just, it's very violent. It's something that I feel that we should probably avoid, I would think.

**John Schwarz:** I would love to avoid it.

**Dean Wetzel:** Yeah, but how do you do that, and like you said.

**John Schwarz:** That's the question, how do you do that? Because you're dealing with people who are far less rational than you. Um, you know, I've been all over the damn world. I've lived in places that are so far different than we are all over the world. Was exposed to a lot of information and stuff and when I was in the intelligence community, I've studied, because that's what I do, I study, I read, I've traveled and the conflict between various and sundry groups of human beings with other various groups of human beings, historically it's inevitable. I mean, there are people out there that say, oh no, we can do this, we can do that, we can do the other thing. That'd be great if you could, I'm all for it. But the likelihood of that happening, ain't very great.

**Dean Wetzel:** And, like you said, it's, i human history. We've fought wars, I mean, I can't exactly find the evidence right now to prove it, but I would say thousands, if not tens of thousands of years of going back, you know, war has just been a part of what humans have done.

**John Schwarz:** Yep. It has, you say well it's too bad, well in a way it is too bad, but it's, again, you look back through history, it's not back this far through history and then it didn't exist, it's always existed. So, you don't want to have a war, you want to do everything you can to prevent it, you want to make sure people are treated fairly, all the things that you could do to possibly prevent it, but ultimately, there's going to be one somewhere, there's going to be one It's going to happen.

**Dean Wetzel:** Exactly. Um, well, Joe, we're getting close to the end of your oral history here. Um, I'd like to open the floor up for you here, um, to add anything from your history that we may have not have talked about that you think is interesting that you would like to be preserved for not only just historians, but maybe your family that watches this oral history.

**John Schwarz:** All I can say is this, it's, uh, you, you have to find something in your life to which you're committed. Uh, and, and situate yourself so you can fulfill at least part of that commitment. My commitment was to my community, to my state, to my country. And, uh, I think as far as what one individual can do, I've done, I've done okay. Perfection? No, there is no perfection, but I've done okay. And would I change it? Would I do something totally different? Where I to have the choice again? No. With the, you know, all the bumps, and all the groans, and all the squeaks, uh, and everything, uh, I would still do pretty much what I did.

**Dean Wetzel:** Awesome. Um, the last question I have for you, and I've been asking this, um, with a lot of my Cold War veterans, how did you feel the day the Soviet Union collapsed?

**John Schwarz:** I felt that we were witness, we were, witnessing history. I felt that the collapse of the Soviet Union as we knew it, that you know, basically it was a product in World War I, was inevitable. And indeed, it was inevitable. The history of the, of the Russian people goes back a hell of a long farther than the Soviet Union, so, I thought it was a, it was a giant step, positive step for history, but it was another step in history, and the next generation, or the generation after that, or after that, there'll be similar changes, probably similar changes, in what we'd, what, what was the Soviet Union, and it's now the Russian Federation. And that's true for every place in the world. You know, our culture changes. Our, our beliefs change. Our, our, Partnerships change, everything changes. Life is just one change after another. It's a carnival of changes. And that's where we are now. I think for the human race, it was a good thing that the Soviet Union collapsed, because I think their view of the world, and the communist view of the world, at least the Soviet communist view of the world. It was wrong. And, you say what you want now, **[01:10:00]** but, well, we used to be the Soviet Union is now kind of a Quasi capitalist country, and moving very, very slowly in that direction, depending upon what happens, but just let it, let it do what it's gonna do. the other thing we have to realize is, if you know your history, you understand that the Russians are a different ballgame. The country is a different ballgame. the size of the country. Their history. What they've gone through before. All these things. It's a different ballgame. So, to try to say, to try to put Russia, and it's people and the country within the framework of what we in Western Europe and the U. S. do and expect. That's a different ballgame.

**Dean Wetzel:** Do you think the Soviet Union's collapse, finally gave you a victory for your service? Because after Vietnam, the way it ended, a lot of service members say, we didn't win that war. But then, at least we had beat the Soviet Union.

**John Schwarz:** Well, I've seen things written about that connection. You can make that connection and it's okay. Not one that I would make a whole lot of. The Soviet Union collapsed, because it internally, it was not, it was, it simply was not able to continue from an economic standpoint, from a social standpoint. I mean, they're surrounded by all these very free republics. People who are free and economies that are free and that are booming because they're working on it doesn't make any difference whether it's their European neighbors to their West or their, their, you know, Eastern neighbors to their East, to the Middle East, you know, there's all that success and they were seeing it. And if I were a member, if I were, I'm not a member, but I were living in the Soviet Union during all this and watched how, how abysmal their economy was, you know, I'd have been right out there too, I think. Let's get rid of this nonsense. Let's get rid of these people, who are basically the offspring of a, of a revolution in 1917. And let's get, let's get our economy going and let's get out there with the rest of the world. And I think, in a Russian sort of a way, that's what they're trying to do now.

**Dean Wetzel:** Um, um, well Joe, I just, again, I would like to thank you for your service, um, your dedication to, to America, and Um, both in the Navy, the CIA, and then as a, leader, not only in the local community, but also on a national stage, you've, you've really served this nation well, I feel, um, and I just wanted to thank you for and, uh, not sure if ever heard it or ever been told, but I wanted to also say welcome home.

**John Schwarz:** Thank you. Yes, I have.

**Dean Wetzel:** So, I wanted to make sure that was So thank Joe.

**John Schwarz:** Thank you