

Jones, David US Army

[00:00:13.45] DAVID JONES: I was born in Davie County, North Carolina.

[00:00:16.69] MARC HENDERSON: And where do you consider your hometown?

[00:00:19.09] DAVID JONES: Mocksville, and born on August 7, 1950. I have two daughters, and three brothers, and one sister.

[00:00:36.74] MARC HENDERSON: What was your sense of the war before you entered the military?

[00:00:40.94] DAVID JONES: It was kind of a distant war going on, basically didn't have a whole lot of interest or whatever. I just knew it was going on. I didn't know if I would get drafted or not.

[00:00:58.36] MARC HENDERSON: What was your sense of the draft?

[00:01:01.06] DAVID JONES: It was OK. I had a lottery number of 154. And as time went on, my number did get called. And it was eight of us from my home town that got drafted at the same time.

[00:01:22.09] MARC HENDERSON: And what year was that?

[00:01:23.26] DAVID JONES: 1970. Drafted on 20 of July, 1970, and went through Charlotte and got sworn in there. From there I went on into Fort Jackson, South Carolina. DAVID JONES: Our bus broke down out in-- somewhere down in South Carolina. We finally arrived that night at like 12 o'clock midnight. And all of us were starving that was on the bus. And this was kind of funny about it, the mess sergeant pulled out a big pot of cold pinto beans and gave everybody a bowl of cold pintos to fill us up. It was hot.

[00:02:25.31] And while we were in the reception center, we were all asked to give blood. And I never gave blood before, so they carried us all or walked us all. They called it marching, but we walked over and gave blood. And after giving blood, they give you a Coca-Cola and a doughnut and waited about five minutes, and went outside and passed out when I hit the outside.

[00:03:06.15] So I had to go back in. They gave me another Coca-Cola and a doughnut. I waited about 15 minutes, and I made it that time. But that's when I realized that I could not give blood. I've given blood since and the same thing. After giving blood about 10 minutes later, I'll just pass out. But that was an experience then.

[00:03:34.14] As I got to our troop, I just remember the drill sergeant. We had to empty out all of her clothes that we had. We were just issued new fatigues and everything, pants and all. They scattered them all out over the sand and-- looking for anything that wasn't supposed to be there. So that was-- Marc Henderson: Memorable. David Jones: --memorable.

[00:04:09.31] MARC HENDERSON: Did they find any contraband?

[00:04:10.99] DAVID JONES: Oh yes, not in mine, but they found a candy bar in one guy's and a Playboy magazine in another guy's. So they had to-- the platoon that had the candy bar, the guy that was in there, they had to low crawl for, I don't know, it was about 50 yards across the sandpit, dragging their duffel bags with them to get to the barracks. But that was a-- remember one, welcome to the real world.

[00:04:50.53] MARC HENDERSON: After basic training you went on to advance training?

[00:04:53.53] DAVID JONES: I did.

[00:04:54.50] MARC HENDERSON: What was your MOS?

[00:04:56.08] DAVID JONES: 11-B10

[00:04:58.39] MARC HENDERSON: What is that?

[00:05:00.07] DAVID JONES: Infantry. And I also did it at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

[00:05:07.33] MARC HENDERSON: Did you choose that or did the Army choose that?

[00:05:09.28] DAVID JONES: The Army. They chose it for you. So that was-- it all went well there. I was more or less-- being from North Carolina, I was used to the heat and some of that. But I know a lot of the guys, even in basic and AIT, they were from a colder climate and they had issues with the heat there and humidity. After the last day or two of my AIT, we were all given orders, all of us went to Vietnam, so the whole thing.

[00:05:55.20] MARC HENDERSON: Did you know what unit you were going to go to before you got there?

[00:05:57.68] DAVID JONES: No.

[00:05:58.40] MARC HENDERSON: So you went over as a replacement?

[00:05:59.93] DAVID JONES: Yes. And we finished up right before Christmas, AIT. And at that point, we were given a two-week leave. And right after Christmas, we was to leave to go to Vietnam.

[00:06:22.00] MARC HENDERSON: Those eight guys that were all drafted together, did you stay together in basic training and AIT?

[00:06:28.24] DAVID JONES: Yeah, three of us stayed. We were in the same company there in basic training, and then it was only one that-- we stayed together in AIT.

[00:06:50.11] DAVID JONES: We left out-- this one person that I said I was in the AIT with, we were together. And I forget the exact date, but it was between Christmas and New Year that we flew to Fort Lewis, Washington. And there it was like snow on the ground, about a foot of snow.

[00:07:16.07] MARC HENDERSON: Had you seen snow before?

[00:07:17.48] DAVID JONES: Yes. Yes. And it was fairly cold. And they put us in a barrack and they had a roster outside the barracks as to what plane you would get on, and the time. Well, as we checked the roster or the board and my buddy's-- his name came up, the plane to be on. And my name didn't come up on the roster, so I waited. And everybody was gone out of that particular barracks.

[00:08:05.18] So we moved over to another one adjoining there, close. And same thing. All those guys started leaving. My name never came up. So we were told in AIT, take very little money, U.S. money, with you. So there again, I didn't have much money. And so they showed a movie every night, the same movie. And you get tired of seeing the same movie every night.

[00:08:42.47] MARC HENDERSON: What movie was it?

[00:08:43.25] DAVID JONES: I don't remember.

[00:08:45.79] MARC HENDERSON: Repressed it, huh?

[00:08:47.12] DAVID JONES: Yeah. And this went on for like a week I was there. And it seemed like it snowed all the time, cold and lugging my duffel bag around. I just got tired of it. So I went and said, why is my name not coming up? I'm tired of being here. And they got to looking, and my name was already-- I had been received in Vietnam.

[00:09:23.99] MARC HENDERSON: Really?

[00:09:24.74] DAVID JONES: Yeah. My name was already like I was in country in Vietnam. So they said, oh, we got to get you on a plane. So I said, oh, if I'd known that, I could have made my way back home. [LAUGHTER] But they put me on one of the first planes then leaving, so I got to Vietnam.

[00:09:49.13] MARC HENDERSON: Was it a military plane or a civilian plane?

[00:09:52.10] DAVID JONES: Civilian. It seems like it was a Braniff Airline, was the name of it. We got there. I went into Cam Ranh Bay. And I'd already got acclimated seamlessly to some of the cold weather. I got off the plane in Cam Ranh Bay, and it was like, I don't know, the temperature was 100 or whatever. And the humidity like, whew, goodness gracious. And I do remember they carried us to a big mess hall. And it was hot. It was-- just the difference in the temperatures.

[00:10:42.17] But I was there for a short period of time. And then I was put on-- I went to the airport, got on a C-130. We flew to Phu Bai. And I caught a helicopter to Camp Eagle. And all

the guys had just left out. They had flew to Khe Sanh. So they put me on a convoy going to Khe Sanh. And that was-- well, let me back up. I went to a week, I believe it was, at Camp Evans for some in-country training. It was like some of the tactics that the enemy used, just to get you familiar with a lot of the surroundings and--

[00:11:40.13] MARC HENDERSON: Rappelling?

[00:11:41.84] DAVID JONES: We didn't rappel at that time, but in a sense, we were getting acclimated to some of the--

[00:11:50.27] MARC HENDERSON: Just general in-country training, not unit specific?

[00:11:53.12] DAVID JONES: Yes, in-country or just what to expect, some of that. This was in January of 1971. And I do remember while I was at Camp Evans, it was the-- Vietnam's Lunar New Year. And it was fireworks and all that stuff going on, just like we celebrate New Year's, it was New Year's for them. And I do remember that. So at that time, then we came back to Camp Eagle and then I was put on a convoy going to Khe Sanh.

[00:12:38.61] And it was a slow, slow thing because the engineers were pushing out roads up to the Khe Sanh area. So it was an all day journey, more or less.

[00:13:03.14] MARC HENDERSON: What was Delta Troop doing in Khe Sanh?

[00:13:06.20] DAVID JONES: They had just gotten there and this was the old Marine base that was there in 1968. And at that time, we were sleeping on the ground. And from that point on, we would be assigned an area, Delta troop was assigned an area. And we were to dig in.

[00:13:36.04] And I remember they took some kind of charges, I forget the name of the charges, and blew holes as deep as they could. And then we had to use our entrenching tools and fill sandbags to-- dug deeper down in the ground-- and which I'm so thankful for because it seemed like we filled hundreds of sandbags and built an area. We dug trenches and then down the trench, we had what they called fighting positions along the perimeter.

[00:14:26.46] And this hole we dug had a roof on it. It with some PSP and sandbags on top of that. And we had to more or less crawl in. And it was big enough for eight people. It was eight in my squad. So we at night laid shoulder to shoulder there. And when you'd come off guard duty, you'd wake the next guy up. And he'd get his self up, and then you could lay down in his place. So that was the extent of it.

[00:15:05.01] And we learned to play Spades there in that hole in the ground, I reckon you'd say. I'd gotten a battery from a radio, and I went up and found a jeep and-- up there, and I had a little thing, took a bulb out of the tail light. So I wired up a light where we could have light overhead in our little bunker. And it was Lieutenant Chenault and myself, we were always partners. And we played cards at night there. That's where I learned to play Spades.

[00:15:56.20] But I really remember the first time I heard incoming because the rockets came in and I could hear them, but they went on further on the base. That was my first sound of incoming, which they hit like a couple of thousand yards down the way. But as time went on, the rockets and the mortars would come in closer. We were about 100 yards or so from the airstrip that they were using. And the enemy was trying to knock holes in the airstrip. And the mortars was landing all around us, rockets.

[00:16:55.24] They would hit around us, and we would get in our fighting positions, which was a smaller hole, and the shrapnel off of those mortars would cut the sandbags over your head. And I know sand and dirt would come down in the hole, plus the smoke off of them would come down in the hole and you'd be just like choking on the smoke. They were so close.

[00:17:28.58] But they would only last for just a minute or two and then you don't know when the next ones are coming. Whenever you hear them whistle, if you could hear them whistle, you was all right. But when they were so shrill, you knew they was right on top of you, the mortars, rockets. But that was an experience.

[00:18:02.18] We were up there until March. We were in March. We were there till after a sapper attack. The sappers came through our wire in the 3rd Platoon. I was in the 1st. And I had just gotten off guard duty and went and woke up the next guy and laid down in the ground or laid down in our bunker. And I could hear stuff starting to explode.

[00:18:44.32] And the sappers were coming through the 3rd Platoon. And we were all up then. And, of course, the next day some of the guys in the 3rd Platoon were killed and some injured. And they-- I found out later on a guy, Mike Fitzmaurice, he had done heroic stuff. He got the Congressional Medal of Honor for actions taken that night.

[00:19:32.25] MARC HENDERSON: How well did you know those guys in the other platoons? How often did you get to interact with them?

[00:19:36.81] DAVID JONES: I didn't get to learn those very well, a couple of guys maybe in the 2nd Platoon. But I was new and we filled so many sandbags that I was limited to almost getting to know the guys in my squad and working with them. I just remember I was there for right at three months before I got my first bath. And-- same clothes, everything. And I remember the helicopters taking off. They took off right over our heads. And they would bring up the dust, red dirt, and you could just rub your arms anywhere you wanted to and dirt would roll off of you, just red dirt.

[00:20:37.30] And finally somebody told us about a waterfall right outside the perimeter. I remember going down there and taking a change of clothes and stripping off, taking a waterfall bath

[00:20:59.39] MARC HENDERSON: Simple pleasures.

[00:20:59.77] DAVID JONES: And getting cleaned up and putting on some new clothes. And that was before the sapper attack, I reckon just shortly before that, and thinking the enemy was

probably watching, or all around at that time, but, of course, I wasn't by myself. It was like eight or ten of us down there getting under the water.

[00:21:25.83] And then during that whole time, we ate C-rations. And you get tired of C-rations after that length of time.

[00:21:36.69] MARC HENDERSON: Was there one meal that you preferred over the others or one that you absolutely didn't want?

[00:21:45.18] DAVID JONES: I don't know. You get so burnt out on that stuff. They had them in a big old tub, and they would hand you on or either-- if they were still in the case, they'd hand you a box and you had to take what they gave you unless you could trade with somebody. But I think it was ham slices I got for like five meals in a row. And that's not good. But you get tired of that stuff.

[00:22:16.14] MARC HENDERSON: So at Khe Sanh were you mostly just defending the base or did you go out on patrols or what?

[00:22:23.76] DAVID JONES: No. We were just basically there for-- defend the area, which later on-- I was new in country, I didn't know a whole lot-- but they were planning the LAM SON 719, which they were going to use that as a base to carry the ARVNs over into Laos, which they did. I was there.

[00:23:02.56] And it seemed like every helicopter in Vietnam was there to carry the ARVNs. I mean, it was helicopters everywhere. And then our Cobra gunships and everything was-- there was a ammunition dump right behind our area. And they would come in and load up with ammo.

[00:23:36.19] And I just know that they were so heavy, those Cobras were. They could hardly get off the ground because we had to, a lot of times if we were standing up, we would have to get down on the ground. But you didn't want to get hit by a skid. And they just couldn't get off the ground. They were loaded so heavy in the nose of the Cobras. And they were supporting the ARVNs, but this went on really for a while there.

[00:24:12.76] And I was-- refer back to the night of the sappers. They blew up-- I think it was like a 600 ton ammunition dump. And as stuff started exploding, the shell casings would go up in the air and different things. And you could hear stuff coming back to the ground. It was like whoo, whoo, whoo and hitting the ground. It was just casings or some part of the ammunition dump that was exploding and its--

[00:24:56.62] Then the planes, I forget what they called them. Anyway, they could shoot these big flares out of these-- this would be like a C-130 or C-1 something, the Caribous or something or other, that would just light up the sky. And it would be like on a parachute, and it would light up the ammo. They lit up the sky. Basically, the rest of the night after that, they would illuminate things.

[00:25:40.42] MARC HENDERSON: Did anybody fight the fire at the ammo dump or did it just let it burn out?

[00:25:44.56] DAVID JONES: No, it was no fighting that. It was stuff exploding. And there's pictures in Life magazine. As the ammo was going off, you could see streaks of fire going through the sky. There's pictures of that. I think it's in the April the 2nd issue of 1971, I believe it is. It tells about Delta Troop and some of the actions of Mike Fitzmaurice and some pictures. A friend of mine Gary Waterstradt has got a picture of him because one of his good friends had gotten killed that night. And he was more or less in mourning, I reckon you'd say. So it was sad for him.

[00:26:49.44] DAVID JONES: You get to know the guys real well. You find out a lot about their families, wives, girlfriends, children, whatever it is. And it's almost instantly. They're like a family member that you've known for a while. You get a closeness. I reckon you should say a bond with those. And I bonded with several of the guys that were in my squad, which I still today share that friendship. There's a couple here at the reunion. And I call them occasionally. Some of them were in my squad, some of them were in our troop. You create a friendship between them and kind of know a little bit about their lives going home.

[00:27:54.61] MARC HENDERSON: How much interaction did you have with Americans in other services, Marines, Airmen, Sailors?

[00:28:04.84] DAVID JONES: I didn't have any close reaction. I know one time, the only time that we had an interaction with Marines we were at Quang Tri, the post there. We were there for like an overnight stay and they had a movie theater. And little did we know that the Army and the Marines were having a little tit for tat something going on.

[00:28:43.95] Well, there was four or five of us, we went into the show to watch that movie inside of a building. The Marines then threw in a CS gas and-- their tear gas. Anyway. although I went through the tear gas back in my basic training, this was another deal with the tear gas.

[00:29:17.37] They threw the tear gas in and they cut the lights out. So all of a sudden chairs started flying and you could hear everybody jumping up and hollering. And I didn't know what was going on. Well, it was dark. I didn't know how to get out of the place. So you can't even open your eyes. The tear gas has tears running down your face and water running out your nose. It was something for a little while.

[00:29:51.84] Then I reckon the Army, they'd go back into the Marines, do something to them. But we got caught in the middle. So that was the only interaction with-- other than some ARVNs that we had up there at Khe Sanh. They were-- our unit, or where we were dug in there at Khe Sanh, the ARVNs had the next section of perimeter from us. So that was the only action or only time I got to know some of the ARVNs that much.

[00:30:35.62] MARC HENDERSON: Did you form friendships with men or women from different racial backgrounds or social backgrounds than if you hadn't joined the military?

[00:30:45.07] DAVID JONES: Yeah. Of course, there were blacks that lived close to me, and occasionally they'd help us on the farm or do something like that. But even in service, I got to know some blacks, some Hispanics, all good people. Matter of fact, there was a guy from-- a black guy from Georgia, we liked to play cards with each other. And I hadn't had any contact with him since Vietnam, but he was a good guy. And I'm sure his life is going good now.

[00:31:39.27] MARC HENDERSON: What about social tensions between Soldiers? Did you ever witness anything while you were over there?

[00:31:46.71] DAVID JONES: Not really. Probably the only thing I knew was that there was a black guy-- he didn't like whites. He just had an attitude about them. But that was basically the only one. In my part, I knew kind of how he felt. And so I never got close to him or anything.

[00:32:23.73] DAVID JONES: After the sapper attack, it was a few days later, they pulled us out of Khe Sanh. And of course, the Operation LAM SON 719 was over. And it didn't go well for the ARVNs. They had lots of injuries, death there. So basically, our mission there at Khe Sanh was over in a sense.

[00:32:57.64] MARC HENDERSON: How did your living conditions change once you got to Camp Eagle?

[00:33:01.69] DAVID JONES: Well, we got back and enjoyed some mess hall food. I think they call them A-rations. That was good. And we got plenty of food there, cold milk, tea, or whatever you wanted to drink, fresh food. It was good. We got to sleep on our cots, and so it was better.

[00:33:32.03] MARC HENDERSON: Do you have any specific memories of the pop culture, music, books, or specific movies that you watched?

[00:33:40.53] DAVID JONES: No, nothing really specific. We didn't get to hear a whole lot of music. Some of the guys, they had stuff-- equipment, I suppose I'd say--

[00:34:00.40] MARC HENDERSON: A radio or reel to reel?

[00:34:02.38] DAVID JONES: --reel to reel in their hooch, and we'd listen. I'd hear some of their music. But I didn't have anything myself. But it was, I don't know, there was a lot of different kind of music going on then. I don't know if you call it hippie type music or what. But I like country music. And I still love country music today, but the older version. I just don't care for the new versions of country music.

[00:34:47.55] But it was good. Songs had meaning to them. And I think it was-- they used to play it on, they had a radio station. I can't think of the name of it. They would say something about, it was a Vietnam radio or something--

[00:35:12.50] MARC HENDERSON: Armed Forces Radio?

[00:35:13.31] DAVID JONES: Yeah, Armed Forces Radio. And they would play some of the good stuff. I remember, I think it was Merle Haggard, "We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee." I remember they played that a lot and some of the latest music. And we had a big white board out there that occasionally somebody would-- I don't know who it was, the headquarters or what-- would bring a movie over and show a movie on the big billboard or whatever.

[00:36:01.14] MARC HENDERSON: Do any holidays stand out from your time in Vietnam, remember any specific holidays?

[00:36:06.96] DAVID JONES: Oh no, not really. You don't even hardly know it's your birthday there. But, I think it was the Bob Hope Christmas Show, I think it was before Christmas, he was there.

[00:36:29.84] MARC HENDERSON: 1971?

[00:36:30.98] DAVID JONES: Yes. And there was like only five people or something could go from the troop.

[00:36:40.94] MARC HENDERSON: Were you one of them?

[00:36:41.79] DAVID JONES: No. No. I don't know if I would have went or I would have even tried to go. I would let somebody else go that really wanted to, but I just didn't care to go.

[00:36:58.74] MARC HENDERSON: Were there any other USO shows that you had heard of while you were over there?

[00:37:03.19] DAVID JONES: No. We used to have-- a couple of times there was-- I reckon they were arranged by the USO, it was like some Filipino band or something that came in and sang some songs and some of that. And it seemed like it was one other group. I don't remember where they were from. But every now and then they had something called Donut Dollies. They would come around and more or less speak to the guys and some of that. But that's about all I know of.

[00:37:47.92] We had one trip where we went to Eagle Beach. They just flew us out for the day. If you wanted to go swimming or whatever you wanted to do, you could do. And that was nice. I got good and sun-burnt at that time. So the sun was so, I reckon, intense and hot. And I hadn't had any sun on my back in ages, so I got a lot of sun.

[00:38:21.08] MARC HENDERSON: How about other recreation? Did you take R&R?

[00:38:25.64] DAVID JONES: I did. They had-- at that time you could go to different places. And I ended up-- I flew home for, I don't know, wasn't long, about-- I got to stay after all the flight time and everything. I think I stayed home for about a week, then I had to go back.

[00:38:48.47] MARC HENDERSON: So for your R&R, you got to go home?

[00:38:50.43] DAVID JONES: Yes. Yes. They were-- it was kind of limited, I think. who could go where and how many at a time or something. But I did come home, and then flew back. I reckon they stopped it after a lot of people wouldn't go back.

[00:39:16.05] MARC HENDERSON: Did you see any drug use or anything while you were over there?

[00:39:20.70] DAVID JONES: Oh, yeah. Yeah. A lot of guys, they did smoke. And I never got into it. My daddy told me-- of course, it was on TV all the time about drug use over there. And I know specifically, I remember my daddy said, "Son, don't you go over and do them drugs." And I took that to heart, and I didn't.

[00:39:54.49] And of course, I was, like I said, the RTO. I knew I had to go out on every mission. But I do credit to the guys that did want to do-- smoked or stuff. They would always wait till late in the day, just before dark. They knew we wouldn't be going out on a mission at that time. And that's when they would do it. You could smell pot in the air.

[00:40:27.84] MARC HENDERSON: Was there ever anyone disciplined for it?

[00:40:32.10] DAVID JONES: Not as I know of. Well, now there was a guy. He-- I don't know how they got it, I don't know, but he was doing cocaine. I know he would get crazy kind of. And he got in some kind of trouble. I think he threatened an officer or something like that. But he got in some kind of trouble, I don't know what.

[00:41:02.26] MARC HENDERSON: How much free time did you have to yourself in general?

[00:41:05.74] DAVID JONES: We had-- the unit-- 2nd-- or Delta Troop, we were like a reaction group. Somebody would get in a firefight, a helicopter down, or they needed some area checked out, or something like that, we would be sent in. We had our own helicopters, our gunships there with the troop, loaches. And we could move pretty quick. But we basically was on alert like all day.

[00:41:48.29] We had our-- all of our ammo, our M16s. The only thing we'd-- sometimes we'd even have our canteens already full of water. When you got the call, we would head off down to the helicopter pad. The helicopters would already be ready to go, and we'd just hop on and take off.

[00:42:19.55] MARC HENDERSON: What were some of those missions that you would react to?

[00:42:24.59] DAVID JONES: Like enemy spotted. A lot of times we would take-- we were there with the L Rangers, the 75th Rangers, L Troop. And we would insert them into the A Shau Valley or a certain area, and they would stay out for like a week at a time. But we would go out and insert them. We would walk around just a little bit. Helicopters would come back and pick us up.

[00:43:02.06] MARC HENDERSON: And they would stay behind?

[00:43:03.26] DAVID JONES: They would stay behind. And sometimes we would just go out. There was word that there was enemy in the area or something like that. And a lot of times we would go out and didn't know why we went out, or I wouldn't. Because I was the lieutenant's RTO, and I would more or less go on every mission that the 1st Platoon would go out.

[00:43:40.51] We did different operations. One mission we went on, the jets had already more or less cleared an area for us to set the helicopters down in. More or less-- the enemy-- cleared any enemy out of the immediate area. And I know some of the grass and stuff was still smoking when we went in. But a lot of times, I think they wanted you to go out and see if you could have any contact with the enemy.

[00:44:18.98] So we never had anything like that. A couple of times as we were going in, and I didn't do it, they would see some enemy going in and the door gunners would actually shoot somebody as we went in. I know that they was talking about that, which I never saw the enemy or anything. I reckon this is--

[00:44:51.95] that's what the door gunners were more or less doing is watching anything, any kind of movement or see any kind of enemy there, they would prep the ground for any-- which they did a lot. They would put out a field of fire as the helicopter would come in to keep the enemy down or whatever.

[00:45:20.18] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have to receive any extra training to be the RTO?

[00:45:26.76] DAVID JONES: No. The RTO left the troop, and this Lieutenant Chenault, he wanted me as his RTO. And it's kind of a-- the thing is we were leaving Khe Sanh, which I became the RTO. And then we get back to Camp Eagle and there was some kind of a reason why they took Lieutenant Chenault from the 1st Platoon and moved him to the 3rd Platoon. And then we got a new lieutenant, Lieutenant Bean.

[00:46:11.04] MARC HENDERSON: So you stayed in the 1st Platoon?

[00:46:12.48] DAVID JONES: I stayed in the 1st Platoon with Lieutenant Bean.

[00:46:18.09] MARC HENDERSON: Can you describe your leadership as high up as you can remember?

[00:46:20.48] DAVID JONES: Yeah. I didn't have a problem with him. I always thought they were good.

[00:46:31.77] MARC HENDERSON: What made them good?

[00:46:35.58] DAVID JONES: I reckon, I suppose, I didn't know anything bad about them. I didn't have any problems with anything that they were doing. I know we got a lot of support from our headquarters unit and our colonel and all that.

[00:46:54.57] MARC HENDERSON: Any specific memories about your NCOs?

[00:47:00.42] DAVID JONES: Nothing--

[00:47:01.74] MARC HENDERSON: Their leadership styles?

[00:47:03.39] DAVID JONES: --nothing really. They were good. We had a good first sergeant. Of course, the lieutenant and I, we had a good relationship. I had good relationships with everyone as far as I know. And probably the biggest concerns that I had is you go out and you take a hill or secure an area and you hold it for a week or two, and then you pull everybody out.

[00:47:40.69] If you go to the expense and the cost of lives to secure an area, why pull out and just like leave? For example, Khe Sanh, which I understand the Marines didn't dig in or anything like that. They were suffering so many casualties from rockets and mortars, they had to pull out. They couldn't-- so that was my understanding of it. And of course, they left.

[00:48:23.43] But there's other areas out in the A Shau or-- they'd have fire bases out there, and they'd-- after a while, they would just pull out and abandon the area. And then maybe a year later, they'd decide they want to go back and take this area again at the expense of lives and stuff like that.

[00:48:43.95] I know we had, I think it was like-- at some point like 550,000 Americans over there in Vietnam, but either secure an area or-- along the DMZ, why it wasn't secured there to stop some of the flow of weapons and ammunition and some of that coming into South Vietnam.

[00:49:22.83] DAVID JONES: I didn't have any really. The only contact I had with was with the ARVN's. There was a group, they called them the Hac Baos, which were supposedly equivalent to our Rangers, had a little contact with them while we were at Khe Sanh, but that was all the contact. At that time, I thought they were pretty tough.

[00:49:53.68] MARC HENDERSON: Anything specific give you that impression?

[00:49:55.75] DAVID JONES: No, it's just a-- I don't know--

[00:49:58.93] MARC HENDERSON: Reputation?

[00:49:59.65] DAVID JONES: --just a reputation, or perception. They were supposed to be some of the elite, but I don't know that. I don't know how good they were.

[00:50:18.74] DAVID JONES: I reckon the most memorable thing is they had the enemy-- no, back up. A helicopter had went in to pick up a team of Rangers. And they shot the helicopter down right as it was lifting off-- or coming in, excuse me, to set down. And they shot it. And it went off kind of on the side of the hill. And we were called to get ready. Well, they made the decision or they called us in-- up-- and we got ready to leave to go out. And they canceled it at the last moment.

[00:51:22.88] We were to go in the next morning. So we got up and were-- of course, had breakfast. And we all got our stuff together, and we went down. And we were to go out and secure the area around this helicopter. Well, three platoons went out, and they found another place where we could set or get in close with the helicopters where we didn't have to rappel. And we split up. It was kind of a ridgeline.

[00:52:06.05] The 1st Platoon was on the left, the 2nd was right down the middle, and the 3rd Platoon was over on the right side of the ridge as we went down. At a certain point, as we went down towards where the helicopter or the landing strip was, the enemy-- they walked into more or less an ambush, the 3rd Platoon did. And they initially had contact. And, of course, we heard the rifle fires and everything going on.

[00:52:49.69] Then we kind of sped up trying to get more or less on line with them because it was pretty dense thicket or the vines and stuff where we were. I always stayed right behind Lieutenant Bean, stayed up with him. But as he sped up and I was crawling more or less, the wait-a-minute vines was hooking on to my radio and I had to get down and crawl more or less to get under some of this stuff because you couldn't break one of them vines. You just had to back up and unhook yourself.

[00:53:33.23] But anyway, we went on down. And as we got closer then, I reckon the enemy started seeing some of our guys, and they started shooting at us, and the-- B40s they shot. And, of course, Lieutenant Bean, he was hit with shrapnel. And some of the other guys, I think it was like five guys there that got killed. And it was more or less just fire.

[00:54:20.54] The enemy fire was coming out of a certain area right there, but you couldn't actually see the enemy. It was just a little higher grade than where we were. They was more or less shooting down on us. And the 3rd Platoon had gotten across this opening when they were shot up.

[00:54:42.37] And as time went on, we were more or less firing, and they were firing at us. Bullets hitting everywhere. And, of course, we was firing back, didn't know what-- where we were shooting. They were dug in. We weren't. And I know it come on the radio, they wanted somebody-- we had a couple-- a pair of jets coming, and they wanted me to direct fire for them. And the drone plane, it came in and popped a smoke.

[00:55:24.15] It's kind of hard to raise your head up and look where that smoke hit, but it did. And it looked like it was right on where the enemy was. And here comes the first jet, just as soon as I said, OK, bring them on. And the first jet came in and just dove right in at treetop level and bomb came out and he took off. It was just like close, so close to us. And I got on the radio. I said, it's too close, too close. And the second jet, it just veered off. It didn't drop any more because if he had been a little bit short, it had been on us, you know.

[00:56:16.41] Anyway, we had shot up all of our ammunition. I was only carrying, I think it was ten clips of ammunition. And we had shot so much. I knew my M16 was so hot-- I couldn't hardly hold up here on the grip it was so hot.

[00:56:43.92] Anyway, after the 3rd Platoon had pulled back across the opening, we was just all told to pull back, pull back. So we did pull back. And some of them hit. We knew they were hit. We helped them or dragged them or whatever. We got back and went back to-- I don't know, it would be like 1,000 yards or so back down.

[00:57:18.76] At that time, they were still lobbing B40s over at us because I know there was one lieutenant, he was sitting on the ground, or something or other, looking at a map, and he got hit right in the buttocks with shrapnel. They was hitting the trees and he got hit. But at that point, we got everybody that was injured, or were hit, whatever, and put them on a-- to be taken out. It wasn't even medevacs, it was just helicopters. And they were took out.

[00:58:06.07] Anyway, one guy, he wasn't hit. And this-- I verified this with another guy that was on the helicopter with him. He was a lieutenant, another lieutenant that had gotten hit. And it was Sergeant Allen.

[00:58:32.80] MARC HENDERSON: Was he just trying to get out of there?

[00:58:34.70] DAVID JONES: He got out of there. He wasn't hit. And this lieutenant that I'm speaking of asked him, said, where were you hit at? He said, I'm not. He said, well, what are you doing on the helicopter? He said, I thought we were all leaving.

[00:58:49.69] But anyway, it was after everybody-- well, we didn't get the dead back. They were still there. And they decided they were going to leave us there, what was left. So we were all out of ammo. One of the guys that was injured, I let him have my canteen. He just like, I think it's whenever you're hit or something, you get so thirsty or everybody was thirsty because during this time your heart goes into high gear. All the excitement or the-- whatever--

[00:59:35.72] MARC HENDERSON: Adrenaline?

[00:59:36.60] DAVID JONES: Adrenaline, yes, just takes over. And he like drained my canteen before I could get it away from him. And your lips is like so dry, your throat is dry and you can't even spit. You don't have enough water.

[01:00:04.81] But anyway, they left us there. It was two radios in the group. And I think there was 28 of us left out of the 72 there on the ground. And the only thing I had was three grenades. That's all I had left. To my knowledge, everybody was completely out of ammunition.

[01:00:31.16] Well, they was bringing another helicopter in, had it underneath the helicopter in a sling that they could just pull the lever and just dump it, water and ammo. Well, as the helicopter was coming, they started taking fire. So whoever the crew chief or whatever, he pulled the lever to dump our water.

[01:01:00.71] Well, it went right off down the side of the mountain that we were on. So we didn't get that. And at that time it was already too late to get up another water and ammo for us. So we stayed there overnight. And I just basically said, Lord, this is it, because if the enemy had came in on us, there was no way. And they knew, I suppose, that we were there or whatever.

[01:01:43.35] Anyway, we stayed there all night. We had-- way overhead our colonel and the XO, they stayed up there to give us radio contact back with Camp Eagle. And so, anyway, a long, long night.

[01:02:10.05] MARC HENDERSON: Did you sleep?

[01:02:10.98] DAVID JONES: No. Well, we sat there and like every 30 minutes, they would break squelch and we would break squelch back. We wouldn't say nothing, just tsh, tsh letting you know everything's good. We did that.

[01:02:30.87] MARC HENDERSON: Is that the incident for which you received a Bronze Star?

[01:02:35.88] DAVID JONES: I don't know. I don't know if that was the incident or what. You know that I got that. Anyway, the next morning our jets came in and they started bombing the area where the enemy was the previous day. And I mean it was-- like for an hour, it was one after the other.

[01:03:09.79] Those jets would come in right over our head at treetop level. You could actually see the bomb inside the jet coming out. That bomb would come out and a little fin would open up and that thing would-- the whole ground would shake. They tore it up all around that area right there.

[01:03:33.47] So anyway, another group came in and they more or less took us out. They got the dead up. And one pilot was still living, that was on the helicopter. He played dead that night. There were a couple of nights there. But some of the enemy got on the helicopter and was looking around at it, and he just laid there.

[01:04:12.28] But I think eventually, they had to take a leg off. And that was what I know about. I don't know of other injuries he may have had. But that was just somebody there-- word of mouth. But they did figure out that three or four of the Rangers were killed. They actually got killed.

[01:04:46.43] One was taken prisoner and one is still MIA. And the one that was taken prisoner, he was released, I think in 1975. And supposedly he don't even want to talk about it to this day, what happened out there. And to my knowledge, they've never found the remains of the one that's missing. So that would sum up my worst day and--

[01:05:28.44] MARC HENDERSON: And night

[01:05:29.37] DAVID JONES: --and night. It's amazing what goes through your mind. I don't know. You can almost feel your parents weeping for you because I just thought that was it. It was I reckon intense or-- you know, you just had a feeling that was the night you're going to die.

[01:06:03.93] MARC HENDERSON: Sure.

[01:06:10.68] DAVID JONES: Other than the time you leave out, that's--

[01:06:13.44] MARC HENDERSON: I've heard that one.

[01:06:19.38] DAVID JONES: We had some good times. Some of the guys that you meet. There was one guy in particular. He was from Washington State, I'd love to hook back up with him. I've been on the internet, can't track him down. You put in a name and you get like 50 names come up with that same particular name.

[01:06:48.81] MARC HENDERSON: Do you want to mention his name?

[01:06:50.94] DAVID JONES: Tim Fitzpatrick, good guy, good guy. We had a lot of discussion about the war that was going on at that time.

[01:07:01.00] MARC HENDERSON: What were some of the things you talked about the war?

[01:07:03.78] DAVID JONES: Just more or less how things were handled, our lives, kind of what we had been through during our lives. I don't know, in general. Things in particular but--

[01:07:30.20] DAVID JONES: From the Korean conflict, the whatever, a lot of the advances in medicine, were good for that particular time. Of course, it's improving all the time with Afghanistan. But we would-- had the medevacs. You could get people out of the jungle as long as there was a landing pad somewhere, or they would lift them out with the basket, I forget the name of the basket.

[01:08:10.15] MARC HENDERSON: The jungle penetrator?

[01:08:11.38] DAVID JONES: Yes. It's just amazing now. Some of the things that we've seen now, if we had it back there then, what a difference it would have made.

[01:08:29.97] DAVID JONES: I more or less would write to my brother. I would share a few things with him. But that particular time, I hadn't gotten married. I was planning on getting married when I come back from Vietnam. And I had taken a cassette player. And she had a cassette player. And I would make a cassette, send it to her. And she would in turn send me a cassette, so you could hear each other's voices, I reckon.

[01:09:07.24] I did go-- they had ham radios over there, and I would go over occasionally-- and you had to go late at night, so it would be daytime back at home-- and talk. And you'd say, hello, how are you? Over.

[01:09:31.83] MARC HENDERSON: The MARS radio.

[01:09:32.84] DAVID JONES: The MARS radio, yes. And that was good too. That I reckon let your family know that that moment you're OK.

[01:09:44.64] MARC HENDERSON: How much news about the war you were fighting in did you receive?

[01:09:50.49] DAVID JONES: Not a whole lot. It was-- Stars and Stripes would come out and you could read about a few things going on. But other than that, a lot of it was delayed stuff. Even the Stars and Stripes, somebody would get a copy. I don't know where they came from. But you'd maybe get two or three there in the troop. It was liable to be two months old by the time you looked at it.

[01:10:24.07] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. So how much news about what was going on back in the United States with politics or social turmoil or protests, how much news of that did you receive?

[01:10:39.22] DAVID JONES: Not a whole lot. I reckon I knew more about it before I went to Vietnam Than actually after I got there. I didn't hear that much about it.

[01:10:53.84] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever witness any sort of protest, whether it was before the war during your training, or while you were over there?

[01:11:02.92] DAVID JONES: No. And I know a lot of the guys since Vietnam have said that they were kind of booed at and some of that when they got back in the airports, but I don't recall anything negative about the war.

[01:11:28.89] DAVID JONES: I left about two weeks early. They came there in the troop and announced if you had less than 30 days, you could leave, you could head home. And I had less than 30 days, so I got to leave early, came home

[01:11:51.78] MARC HENDERSON: That's great. So tell me about the trip home.

[01:11:55.65] DAVID JONES: There again I flew on a commercial airline. Seems like it was TWA, I'm thinking. I'm not sure about that. But anyway, I flew back into Fort Lewis, Washington. And it seemed like the longest trip to get back. And I got back to Fort Lewis. And there again, it was cold. It was like right before Christmas.

[01:12:27.30] MARC HENDERSON: 1971?

[01:12:28.35] DAVID JONES: Yes. And I know we got off. And they give you a steak meal when you get back. And I went in to this nice warm room. And it was like a mess hall, I reckon. They were fixing my steak and it just seemed like I had motion sickness, I reckon. It seemed like all the walls were moving. And as I was looking straight ahead, it seemed like this wall was coming in on me. I reckon it was just flying for so long or the coldness or I don't know what it was. But I do remember that.

[01:13:14.74] But I was just tickled to death to be home. I had to go to Fort Jackson, South Carolina to finish my time. And I went there. And there again, they was reducing the size of the Army. They didn't need any more troops to go to Vietnam. So they gave me an early out, which I took advantage of.

[01:13:49.75] MARC HENDERSON: I imagine you went home for a little while.

[01:13:51.43] DAVID JONES: Yes.

[01:13:52.12] MARC HENDERSON: How was your reception?

[01:13:53.86] DAVID JONES: Good. Just amazing to sit down and enjoy good food.

[01:14:03.05] MARC HENDERSON: Did your family know you were coming?

[01:14:05.38] DAVID JONES: Yes. Yes. It was all good.

[01:14:11.67] MARC HENDERSON: So what did you do after the Army?

[01:14:14.04] DAVID JONES: Well, I got a job. I worked for a company for like a month and a half, and then I got on with the RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company. And I worked for like 32 years there and then retired.

[01:14:34.74] MARC HENDERSON: Any difficulty initially finding a job being a combat veteran?

[01:14:39.06] DAVID JONES: No, no.

[01:14:42.33] MARC HENDERSON: And did you have difficulty readjusting to life after combat?

[01:14:47.55] DAVID JONES: No, not really. I didn't have any problems. Certain smells or things occasionally you'd think about Vietnam. And of course, a lot of people wanted to know what experiences you had. And to start with, different things kind of make you a little nervous as far as speaking about it. But I think I got over that after a while. So it doesn't bother me to talk about it or any of that.

[01:15:27.15] MARC HENDERSON: How much contact have you had with your fellow veterans over the years?

[01:15:31.34] DAVID JONES: Well, we started having reunions in 2003. And I've made every reunion. We have a reunion every other year, and I've made all of them except for one. And I enjoy meeting the guys. It's like a bond that you have, especially with the ones that you served in your platoon or squad or whatever. Yeah.

[01:16:06.40] MARC HENDERSON: Does your combat experience affect the way you think about troops coming home from combat today?

[01:16:14.45] DAVID JONES: Well, yeah. It gives you a sense of pride and thankfulness for those who are doing the service, all service today. I have more appreciation for the guys that have been in combat. Anybody can be a truck driver or a pencil pusher or whatever, but I appreciate the guys that were in combat because it changes your life, I think.

[01:17:07.00] I don't know, it just gives you more appreciation for our country and all of our generations before us that heartaches from the Revolutionary War on down because they really went through a lot of heartaches and the bitterness from cold, the heat, the sacrifices that they made.

[01:17:51.20] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today?

[01:17:56.83] DAVID JONES: I think it's getting better, more-- the general population is more appreciative of all of our Soldiers now. There's some I'm sure that don't have the appreciation for our military or our country or our police or any kind of authority. But I think it's their upbringing or their way of thinking that are appreciative of all the sacrifices not only our military, but our police. They make lots of sacrifices for really our country.

[01:18:48.00] MARC HENDERSON: What do you think the Vietnam War meant to your generation?

[01:18:52.09] DAVID JONES: I don't know. I think they are appreciative more as time goes on than they did at the time. I don't know. I'm appreciative of all the guys who fought in World War II because I know they went through so much more than probably we did in Vietnam.

[01:19:20.10] They were thrown out into the bitter cold and nothing to eat. And if somebody would get injured, they didn't have the helicopter come and pick them up. They were more or less treated there on site the best they could. And maybe there was a vehicle or something that could truck them back behind the lines or whatever. But even in the Pacific, the sacrifices that were made there.

[01:19:59.31] MARC HENDERSON: Were there any lessons you learned in Vietnam that you'd like to pass on to future generations?

[01:20:06.55] DAVID JONES: Probably, what I think about is that the North Vietnamese Army were so dedicated through their-- I don't know if you call it brainwashing or their thoughts. It's hard to defeat an enemy that is so persuaded or so fighting for a cause. They didn't have near the equipment or the means to move equipment or anything, but they were persistent.

[01:21:00.63] It's hard for our military, sophisticated as it is, to defeat guerrilla warfare or the guerrillas. And a lot of times, it was just like two or three at a time. They would hit us, hit the Americans and then vanish. And if they would-- whereas were in numbers of 40 or 50, they could take out two or three and then they'd vanish. And it's a morale thing, I reckon, you'd say too. But it's hard to defeat-- like I say, as sophisticated as we are, to win in jungle warfare.

[01:22:06.88] DAVID JONES: The first time I was there, which was about two weeks after it was dedicated-- of course, it can't help but bring tears to your eyes. And it happened a few other times after that when I visited the memorial. It would be parents, grandparents, wives, and children. I can remember the first time, people crying. It gets to you.

[01:22:47.60] You look up on the Wall and you see these guys that you knew. And you think about them. And like I say, it's very touching. I remember it was-- I'm a soft hearted person, I suppose. But when I hear somebody else crying and going on it affects me. But at that-- all of that combined, the Wall and people crying and touching the Wall and all that, it's something.