Interview with Thomas Jones

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, September 15, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm in the basement of Thomas Jones. Good afternoon Tom.

Jones: Good afternoon.

DePue: Now let's get this established right from the beginning. How would you like to have me refer to you? Thomas, Tom, TJ?

Jones: Tom, TJ, either one.

DePue: Okay. I think I'll use Tom, although I think a lot of your friends refer to you as TJ?

Jones: A lot of them say TJ, most say Tom though.

DePue: Okay. When and where were you born?

Jones: I was born in Quincy, Illinois, November 17, 1944.

DePue: So, you were born in the midst of the Second World War?

Jones: About the end of it, right?

DePue: Yeah, one year out.

Jones: One year out.

DePue: Was your father in the military?

Jones: No, but I really don't know about my real father because, back then—I don't know if you want to get into this.

DePue: Sure.

Jones: Well back then, my mother got pregnant. The guy that got her pregnant, he was one of the first of his family that had the ability to go to college, and they did not want him to have a wife and a kid going to college. It was a small town. So, I was born there. I was there for six months and then my mother brought me up to Peoria, to my grandmother's.

DePue: Did you even know your father's name?

Jones: Oh, I know him. The fact is, I have a stepbrother. We used to spend time together. We've reached out to each other and—

DePue: Would you be willing to tell us his name?

Jones: Oh, Ralph Douglas, that's my stepbrother's name. My father was Ralph Douglas. He was a junior.

DePue: Okay. Obviously then, you took your mother's name.

Jones: Yeah, that was my mother's name. It was actually my grandmother's name too. That was my mother's maiden name.

DePue: And her name again?

Jones: Katheryn. K-a-t-h-e-r-y-n.

DePue: A different kind of spelling.

Jones: Yes.

DePue: She probably fought that her entire life.

Jones: When she got old enough to realize it was different. (chuckles)

DePue: You mentioned that, at a pretty young age, the family moved over to Peoria. What led to that?

Jones: Well, my grandmother was in Peoria first. Then, when my mother decided that Quincy was not going to be the place for her future, that's when she

brought me up to Peoria. I was six months old then. So, from six months until I was in the sixth grade, I was in Peoria.

DePue: And your mother was living in Peoria at the same time?

Jones: No, because what happened is, she—I grew up—my grandmother raised me. My mother went to Chicago to find a job and all, and then she brought me to Chicago.

DePue: And that's going to be quite a few years down the road, right?

Jones: Yeah. Let's see, from six months up until I was in the sixth grade, I lived in Peoria with my grandmother.

DePue: Well, I want to spend a little bit of time on that because those are the formative years. You mentioned your grandmother. Is your grandfather not living at the time?

Jones: He was living, yes. They owned a boarding house. I guess you'd call it a boarding house. That was during the time when blacks couldn't stay in hotels. So, what happened is, she had—it was a double house, a big house. I forget how many rooms. So, what happened is, she almost operated like… Back in those days, when blacks traveled from city to city, they stayed in either private homes or a boarding house like that.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about your grandparents. Apparently, your grandmother, did she have a stronger influence over your upbringing?

Jones: Yeah, she was a very strong woman. She had came from the south. The fact is, she was there. She was picking, and she grew up on a plantation for a while, picking cotton.

My grandfather, he worked on a plantation too. But they decided they had to leave the south and come north. Wasn't sure exactly why, in terms of it. There was always rumors, but it wasn't sure.

DePue: Do you know about the timeframe they moved north?

Jones: Let's see, I was born in '44. They had been there a few years before that, so I would think it was in the '40s, in 1940, I think. It was around that time.

DePue: Both the First World War, but both of those wars, there was a huge migration of African Americans north…

Jones: Right.

DePue: …because of the job opportunities, to these industrial cities especially.

Jones: Actually, they liked Peoria. (chuckles) They didn't want to go to Chicago, but they liked Peoria. My mother, of course, being young, wanted to go to Chicago. (laughing)

DePue: More opportunities for her then.

Jones: Right.

DePue: This would have been right about the end of the war.

Jones: That's the end of the war, when she went out.

DePue: What was it like, then, growing up in Peoria for you?

Jones: (chuckles) Peoria was interesting. At that time, Afro Americans and whites, it was separate facilities. I remember a couple of times where, like, I went to a movie, and, you know, they had a big fight break out between the Afro Americans and the whites because the African Americans had to sit up in the balcony, and some sat downstairs. It started a fight in the movie, out in the lobby and all.

Because I was younger, I didn't have any overt feeling about a sense of a lot of racial tension. I mean, I've seen a fight there. I've had people call—you know, walking down and kids call you names, stuff like that.

Growing up with your grandmother is a different world. Number one, very protective, overly. But she…really got down to it. She just knew basics. She told me once, because I was off into a lot of stuff when I was a kid. And I had a dark lab, and I was doing photos and doing my own development and all.

DePue: At a really young age.

Jones: Oh yeah, I was off into it, just…And she told me once… You know, we would talk, and she told me once, "No matter how smart you are, always remember to use your hands because that's how you get your food to your mouth." Those are grandma things. (both laugh) You know, there's wisdom.

When we first came to Peoria, she owned a farm. Yeah, there was a farm out on the Farmingdale Road or something like that, if I remember right. It was a little small farm. It had a little stream through it, you know. It was more just growing stuff for us. And, I remember, across the bridge at East Peoria, they had a big lot where they actually grew vegetables, farming actually.

DePue: They being your grandparents?

Jones: Yeah, the grandparents. When I first got there, they had a farm, and it was good. So, I grew up almost in a farm attitude and all. Then, she moved to the city and bought the boarding house. My grandfather worked at Caterpillar and retired from that.

When I was younger, living with Grandmother, the first thing you do is you go to church every Sunday. (chuckles) And I got into it because I used to run all the support stuff for the Bible school.

DePue: What was the church?

Jones: Morning Star. It's a big church up there. The Morning Star, in fact, pastor… It's one of the biggest Afro American churches there, is Morning Star Baptist Church. It's been there, and it's been several different places. So, I ended up getting very involved in church, since Grandma was a mother of the church too.

DePue: What does that mean?

Jones: That means she was—well, like you have deacons and all. She was a mother of the church, you know, older women that the preacher know he could depend on for anything. (chuckles)

DePue: Let's talk a little bit about the schools. Were these integrated schools that you started?

Jones: It was integrated schools. I don't remember the name of the school. I can get it. But yeah, it was integrated. I really don't remember having a lot of problems in school, because I didn't do anything. I went to school and at that time, we was living in Peoria proper, and school was like three blocks away from where we lived. So, you know, I did school and walked home those three blocks. I didn't have a lot of adventures in terms of going back and forth to school, that I can remember. But I don't remember problems in school, you know, of any racial kinds of things.

DePue: Can you think of any particular incident where you became aware that you were different from a lot of the other kids?

Jones: Well, that happened early on, because you just looked around. There wasn't that many Afro American kids in that school at that time, I can remember; the fact is, two of the best friends I had, I vaguely remember, was two white kids who lived a couple of blocks down. It was really, you know, that we played out, pulled each other in wagons and stuff like that. But they were white kids. There was two white kids who were really friends.

I think I really experienced more of a difference when I got older. I became more aware of it. When I was younger, I realized I was not like them.

I didn't look like them. I never really felt different; I just looked different, was the way that I felt.

DePue: I would imagine, though, going to church was a very segregated experience.

Jones: Well, Sundays are the most segregated time in America (laughing) because everybody goes to church, is the most segregated. Yeah, it was all black, and, I mean, it was fun. It was fun in terms of it. I didn't know it was work; I didn't know. Like, I did summer school. I was doing the summer school stuff…set up the projectors and all that, and keep the class attendance, when I got older in the church and all. But it was, at that time, the largest Afro American church.

DePue: This is something I've been wanting to ask you. You refer to—you say Afro Americans.

Jones: I say that because that is the term today.

DePue: Not African Americans?

Jones: It's African American. That's actually what it is. I said Afro?

DePue: Mm-hmm.

Jones: Yeah, I'm trying to elongate from black to African Americans, and I ended up in the middle. (chuckles)

DePue: Well, I know there was a time, especially in the late '60s, early '70s, where it was black.

Jones: Black.

DePue: Black and then Afro.

Jones: And then Afro Americans, right. And a lot of that was when they first started looking at this Pan-Americanism and all those kind of things, and reaching out to Africa as the motherland. That spawned a lot of groups that started doing different definitions. I mean, it was black at that time, it was. I mean, it was the Black Panthers, they didn't say African American Panthers. (chuckles) Don't even sound right now that…(both laughing) Maybe it's because I'm so used to black.

That's the interesting thing is because I've been there and have seen these changes of words, you know, in terms of, as it rose up the ladder of acceptability in terms of what. One time, it's, you're black, and you're proud. But then, all of a sudden, now, you know. But it doesn't sound as catchy as—Black and proud just sounds much more catchier than African American and

proud, even though it's a correct term. I'm using it still because I came up during those '50s and the '60s, you know, in terms of it.

DePue: That was an aside, but I did want to ask you about that.

Jones: I don't even think; I just say Afro American. I'm getting lazy with it.

DePue: That's okay. I mean, we're all creatures of the time we grew up in, to a certain extent. And speaking of that, you did grow up in a town like Peoria in the 1950s. Many people look back on those days in the 1950s, those were the great days to be a young kid growing up. Was that kind of part of your experience as well?

Jones: Yeah, because I wasn't aware of anything else, except going to school, Grandma, family. I have a lot of siblings that are not brothers and sisters, but, because my grandmother had the big house, you know, this boarding house, other families would drop their kids off as they went to another city to find a job. So, a lot of my cousins grew up with me as, like, brothers and sisters, because, for a period of maybe three to five years, they actually lived there. So, it was really extended family things that went on.

I'm going to go back to your question, because I started going over here. (laughs)

DePue: That's okay.

Jones: Okay, good.

DePue: Did you have a bicycle? Did you have a way to get around town?

Jones: I had a bicycle, oh yeah. The fact is, when she came from the farm and moved in and got the boarding house, and this plot they had was on the East Peoria. You had to go across the bridge. So, I used to ride my bike over there. We lived on 7th Street, really, 7th Street, where the medical district is now. So, I used to ride my bike from there and then ride down—they didn't have the new bridges, you know—and then go across the bridge, and then had to ride another five miles to get to the plot over in East Peoria. But, you know, you just didn't think about it.

DePue: Thinking about my Peoria geography, that's no small river you're riding across.

Jones: No, a big bridge, yeah. I'm just lucky I didn't find—

DePue: (interrupting) It's the Illinois River?

Jones: Yeah. But again, I think about things now, where before then, you'd just go do it. I'd be like, well, okay, I'm supposed to be going over to help Grandma. So,

I get on the bike and I start riding. (both laughing) It wasn't a "should I, shouldn't I" think about it, accidents can happen. Overall, I felt that I was in sort of a cocoon, with Grandmother's very definable rules and all. I thought my grandmother, it was God and Grandmother, and sometimes those positions switched when she was whooping me, but…You know, because Grandma's God. She's the one that can talk to God, and, back then, they had a different attitude with kids, you know. Back then, the police would say, oh, that's your mother or your father. You belong to them. So, I grew up convinced that my parents owned me, and, if I did something they didn't like, they could kill me, and they wouldn't go to jail because I was theirs to do with what they wanted to. (both laughing)

DePue: I notice you always refer to your grandmother. Was she that much more dominant a personality in your life?

Jones: At that period in my life, yeah. She was total there. My mother was in Chicago, and I was, like I say, from six months until I was in the sixth grade, I was in Peoria.

DePue: And Grandfather was the guy who was paying the bills, but otherwise it's Grandmother?

Jones: Grandmother really was in charge of everything. (both laughing) He went to work and brought money in. And it was a very physical contrast. Grandma was a big woman, and Grandfather was a small, short guy; so, it was a real dramatic contrast.

But, the rumor was that they had to leave from down south because Granddaddy had got in a fight. I don't know if he killed a guy or something, or he just got in a fight with a white guy, and that's why they had to leave and come up north, because, even if he just got into a fight, out there; he struck a white person down south.

DePue: What state did they come from?

Jones: Missouri. The family came from Hannibal to Quincy and then from Quincy to Peoria.

DePue: But when you are talking about the south, you're talking about Hannibal, Missouri?

Jones: Oh no, they came to Hannibal coming north. (chuckles) That's where they came. They had to leave from the Deep South. I think they were in…I'm not sure if it was Louisiana or Mississippi. I'll have to go to some of my aunties, or something that are still around, to get the specifics. But the part I understand is, they came from down south, Hannibal, Quincy and then Peoria.

DePue: Well, let's get you to Chicago then. My math would say that that would have been roughly 1955, if you were in the sixth grade at that time.

Jones: Right.

DePue: Remember anything about that move?

Jones: When we first moved to Chicago, we stayed with—and by then my mother had married—so, we stayed with my stepfather's sister on 5222 Wabash, right down from DuSable [High School]. Actually, my first semester, I went to the grammar school right next to DuSable in Chicago.

DePue: Well, for those of us, like me, who aren't from Chicago, where roughly in the city is that?

Jones: The south side. It was the address, 5222 Wabash, stuff's coming back. So, it was south and 51st Street is where they were at, DuSable. That's where the DuSable Museum, that's what that is today. I remember, around when I used—it's a museum now.

DePue: Chicago's known for being a city of neighborhoods. Did it have a name for the neighborhood?

Jones: No, that was just far south. Then, from there, we moved into the projects at 3939 Lake Park, which is around where Wrigley Field is; that's 35th.

DePue: So, farther north then?

Jones: Yeah.

DePue: When you first moved there in the '50s, would that be a neighborhood that was recently becoming integrated or populated by Afro Americans?

Jones: Yeah, it was. There was a combination. It wasn't all black; it wasn't all white; it was a mixture. If you were on this block, it would be a different kind of mixture over here, but it was all moving towards more blacks moving in at that time.

DePue: Now, maybe you were too young to comprehend at the time, but I would imagine that that was part of the white flight, the beginning of the white flight, to the suburbs of Chicago.

Jones: They were moving away from the areas because DuSable was getting to be all black in terms of the school, which is why it's now the black museum. (laughs)

DePue: How was being in Chicago different? What did you find once you got there?

Jones: The pace, first of all, because you could feel the up-tempo; it was different. People didn't say hello when you walked down the street and said hi to them. In Peoria, everybody said hi, hi, hi. It's like in Springfield, you know, people say hi; hello; how are you doing; they say hi. They don't have to know you, hi, hello. Chicago folks were more contained; they weren't very open.

I remember that's where I got into my real first fight. A schoolyard bully decided it was my turn to be picked on. See, I didn't know what it meant to be schoolyard bullies, and you're supposed to be scared of them. See, because where I came from, I didn't experience that. I didn't know you were supposed to not fight him when he was bullying you. So, he came up and tried to bully me, and everybody stood around. I had never had that experience in Peoria, when someone came at you, just bullied you, trying to…he was trying to take my lunch money, and I said, "No, it's not yours." Simple. (chuckles) And he said, "I'm taking your lunch money," and he came over. I flipped him over, and I jumped on him and told him, "I told you, I'm not giving it to you." Then I got up and walked away. Well, he was so damned surprised, he just laid there. After that, no one bothered me. (laughing)

DePue: Was he bigger than you?

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Was this a segregated or an integrated school you were going to?

Jones: It was integrated at that time. Yeah, it was integrated at that time.

DePue: Well, the next obvious question, was this a white kid or a black kid?

Jones: He was a white kid. That's probably why I did that. I didn't understand. Growing up in Peoria, like I said, I remember two friends on the block I had were two white kids. They didn't act that way. He didn't give me the money; so, it wasn't like I had to give it back. It was my mother's money, you know. So, I didn't even think about you were supposed to be scared. I was just, "No."

DePue: Did you feel like you got a good education in Peoria?

Jones: What a difference. When I got to Chicago, I went a half a semester, and then my parents moved to the projects. And then, I went to Oakland Wall School.

DePue: Oakland?

Jones: Oakland Wall. That's where I got my graduation picture. When I got there, for a week I got chased home because, you know, the teacher asked a question, I raised my hand. And then, all of a sudden, I had folks, "Oh, you're trying to make us look bad in front of the teacher." I'm raising my hand, answering her

question. So, you know, they said, "We'll get you when you get outside." So, the first week I was there, I was chased home.

Now, I lived in the projects on the seventh floor. So, I would run—the school was two blocks away—run. I would run up the steps and then zip in, because they couldn't… My philosophy was, if you're behind me, you won't catch me. But then, one day my mother asked me, "Why are you breathing and panting so hard?" I said, "I ran up the steps." "Why did you run up the steps?" "Oh, I just, you know, I just decided to run up the steps." You can't make up good excuses when you're a kid. (laughing)

Well, the next day, we went through the ritual, and this is when it stopped because what happened is: I had this thing, I'd run up the stairs, and I'd slide down. At the end, on the right side of the hallway, there was a janitor's closet. So, I would bounce off and go in. Well, I bounced off the janitor's thing to open the door, and it was locked. I knew my mother was in there, and I said, "Uh-oh." And these three guys start coming down, because they said, "Now we've got you. You ain't got no place to go." So, I said, "You're right." I didn't know what to do, so I attacked them. It surprised them so much that one guy come running—attacking them—that they ran. No one chased me home any more.

DePue: Was this new school an integrated school?

Jones: It was majority black. I'll show you the graduation picture. There's like two whites, and everybody else is black.

DePue: So, these kids who had been chasing you home every day are…

Jones: All black.

DePue: Your mother found out about what was going on then. What was her reaction to it?

Jones: It was good. As far as she was concerned, that's what should have happened.

DePue: That you should have taken them on?

Jones: Oh yeah.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Took a very brief break. We were talking about the new experience of being a kid in the Chicago schools.

Katheryn Maybery, Tom Jones' mother, relaxes in a tavern in a southside Chicago neighborhood sometime in the early 1960s. Katheryn managed a tavern at the time.

Jones: It was a cultural shock when I first got there. Peoria was slow paced. Everybody who knew you seemed to be nice. All of a sudden, you go to Chicago, and the pace is a swirl almost. There was so much going on. Since my mother ran or owned taverns and lounges, all the street folks got to know them because, what happened is, she was out among them. She knew them all, which was kind of funny, in some cases, because what happened is: I knew all the street folks, but I couldn't do nothing wrong because… I heard a couple of them tell me, "We can't do nothing wrong with you, you Kathery's son." And I didn't know about the reputation.

DePue: When you say you couldn't do anything wrong, do you mean that you got a pass from these folks, or, if you did something wrong, they'd be telling your mother?

Jones: Oh, no. Yeah, if I did something wrong, they'd tell my mother, but that's not what scared them. What scared them is they told me, "No, you're Katheryn's son, and if I do that with you or for you, she will shoot me," because she was out there. (both laughing) I saw her when she got into some riles because she's running a tavern. That was the reputation that she had, that she would shoot you. So, what happened is, no one wanted my momma to come and shoot them. (laughing)

DePue: Does that mean that your mother got a little bit of your grandmother's personality?

Jones: Oh yeah, she was a very strong woman. But, you know, she came out pregnant, out of Quincy, and then went to Chicago on her own, got into this whole thing of running taverns and lounges and all, which ain't for the weak at heart, in terms of it. Oh yeah, she was very, very strong.

DePue: How about her husband, your stepfather? His name, first of all.

Jones: He was William Crawford.

DePue: Okay.

Jones: He was not strong in terms of that. I mean, Mom was much more stronger than him. He was a masseur, gave massages at this place called Covenant Club in Chicago, downtown. It was like a downtown, Jewish spa. The fact is, I worked my way through high school there, started off as a bath boy and then giving massages and all. That's where he worked at. I did meet the Lone Ranger and some of those folks.

DePue: The Lone Ranger?

Jones: Mm-hmm. Silver, whatever it was, Jay… Somewhere I've got a thing where he signed a thing for me. He was coming through there.

DePue: I sure can't remember what his…

Jones: Jay.

DePue: Well, Jay Silverheels was Tonto, wasn't he?

Jones: Was it Tonto?

DePue: The Indian.

Jones: Yeah. But he came through, you know. All kind of folks, like football players, they would be the guest and come through. But this was downtown, and they had an Olympic size swimming pool and everything. I believe it was on the twentieth floor and all that.

So, he was not strong. Mom was the strongest one. The fact is, as I think about it, now that you're saying that, most of the women in my life have been strong, Grandmother, Mom, the wife I have. (both laugh) Maybe that's why.

DePue: You talked a little bit about her running taverns. Were those taverns in the neighborhood, or did she have to travel to get to those?

Jones: We lived at 3939 Lake Park. She ran, at one time, a tavern on 39th, and she ran it on 43rd, 51st and 63rd Streets. So, those were further.

DePue: She wasn't working at these at the same time, was she?

Jones: No, no, these were different times.

DePue: Was she managing these places?

Jones: Oh yeah. She ran them; she managed them. She owned one at one time, but that didn't last too long because she was better at managing it than owning it.

DePue: Than keeping the books?

Jones: Yeah. But she could run it and do everything else, but she didn't like the bookkeeping thing.

DePue: Was it an okay thing for you to go to the tavern and visit her?

Jones: I could come in, but it's not saying that I could go in and just sit around. If I went in, it was because I had to see her about something or, you know, in terms of that. The fact is, she didn't want me drinking out in the street. She told me when I got a little older, she said, "We've got two bars in the house, so I don't need to hear about you drinking no wine in no alley." (chuckles) That was her approach. So, once you can drink when you want to, it's fascinating; I didn't really care about drinking that much anymore.

DePue: That was, perhaps, part of her psychology.

Jones: It worked. (laughs)

DePue: Let's talk a little bit about living in the projects because that term conjures up all kinds of images today too.

Jones: Oh, yeah. We lived on the seventh floor in a fifteen story building. It was very interesting; back then it was totally different than now. Back then, people went into the project as a temporary thing, until they got themselves together, and then left. Today it's more… it's multigenerational, in terms of folks, families now living in the projects. The projects was where all the, you know—but then, they had two or three major gangs. There was a lot of gang activity.

DePue: And this would have been the late '50s, early '60s. Now we're talking about—

Jones: Yeah. This was, you know, the Egyptian Cobras.

DePue: The what Cobras?

Jones: Egyptian Cobras, yeah. Then there was the—let's see the Cobras, the Black Stone Nation, as well as Jeff Ford folks and all, came from…There was a lot of gangs around. I never belonged to a gang. There was six of us were friends, and we used to call ourselves the KLAN, was the Kinsmen of the League of Affable Nobility, high sounding words. We just wanted to dance and party with the girls. We wasn't really into gang activity.

We got in a couple of fights with gangs. Also, what happened, where I lived at, it was the projects; it was the ICC tracks, Outer Drive, Lake Michigan. The fact is, today that building I grew up in is a private building and condominiums because you've got the same views they do on the north shore.

DePue: Were these well maintained projects when you were living there?

Jones: When I was living there, they used to win city beautification awards. And then, they built two other projects. This is after I left. They built two other projects, and it turned into the projects again, with gangs taking this building and all. So, they blew up the other two new ones they built. But, where I grew up, is still there. But now it went private, and they made it into condominiums.

DePue: Did the project you were in, did it have a name? I know many of the projects in Chicago.

Jones: Yeah, you've got a lot of them. I think we had a name but we never—it was just 3939 Lake Park because you always talked with folks who were there. I'll have to look that up.

DePue: It doesn't sound like it was as massive as some of these other projects that came later.

Jones: Like I said, the attitude, too, was different of the folks going into the projects. It was to be temporary thing. If it doesn't take a year or two before you get on your feet or whatever, and then you wanted to get out. We stayed there for a while though.

When we left there, I went back down to Peoria for a while, because I finished high school and everything there. But the projects back then was different. I mean where I was at, like I said, it won the city beautification award. The guy that was the caretaker, he really was really good at keeping things clean, keeping things working. He had a pride in making sure that it did. So, it was really, it was different. It wasn't like Stateway or Ida B. Wells or those others; it wasn't like that. It was just one fifteen story building was there. Maybe that's what it is, because they found, when they built these other two, you created a whole other environment in terms of the number of people all of a sudden in a small space. But, when I was living there, it was just one.

DePue: You mentioned when you were down in Peoria and your grandmother called the shots. She made sure you got to church every Sunday. Did that happen in Chicago?

Jones: No. (chuckles) That was a different environment too. That was another culture shock because I never belonged to a church after I got to Chicago, never belonged to one.

DePue: Did you miss that?

Jones: Yeah. I would go to church with somebody, most times a girl, say "Oh yeah, I'll go to church with you," you know in terms of it. But it wasn't a consistent thing. I did miss it because I had did so much in the church when I was in Peoria. I got to Chicago, Mom wasn't a big churchgoer, [she] went to church for special occasions. It's like. "Okay it's Easter. We go to church," you know, you do those things. But it wasn't like really being involved and getting that sense that you get when you go to church in terms of belief.

DePue: During those years, did you have a chance to head down to Peoria to see Grandma once in a while, maybe go down there for summers or something?

Jones: When I first went to Chicago for the—it must have been most all the way through high school—every summer they would send me to Peoria to get me out of the city in the summer. So, every summer I would spend down with Grandmother, and then I'd go back to the habit…going to church, da-da-da-

da, in terms…because Grandmother said, if you don't go to church on Sunday, you ain't going nowhere no other day. (chuckling) And, you know, it's going to be something fun for you. So, you had to go to church, you know. But every summer they would ship me off.

The fact is, I used to ride the Rock Island from Chicago to Peoria, and they put me on the train, because I did it. So, the people knew. And then, my grandmother would pick me up at the train station in Peoria. So, I traveled by myself, just back and forth on the train. It seemed like it was a more trusting environment back then.

DePue: It sounds like you enjoyed your summers in Peoria.

Jones: Oh, yeah. Chicago was always the swirl. It was always the fast pace. And even if you were talking to folks, they seemed like they're talking, and they'd just be moving. Everything was a faster pace, and the intensity was different. Going back to Peoria was a nice easy pace. I'm going to Grandmother's house.

In Chicago, I lived on the seventh floor in the projects with all these people. There were more people in the daggone projects, probably, than the big swaddle of Peoria that I lived in, you know, in terms of it. So, I enjoyed the Peoria. It was almost like it was a stabilizing thing, or else it would make me paranoid because I've got two different things going.

DePue: Did you eat better when you were at Grandma's?

Jones: Oh yeah, oh yeah, because grandma had that home cooking and cooked for everybody. So, yeah, that was where the great meals were, was at Grandma's house. Mom was not really a big cooker. She could cook, but, you know, like at dinnertime, she was most of the time out working because it would be in the evening time.

DePue: I imagine she's tired by the time she gets home.

Jones: Yeah. My stepfather could cook, but after a month, you'd done went through his repertoire, you know. (laughing) You'd have went through it.

DePue: Did you have any siblings up there in Chicago with you? Did your mom and your step-dad have any kids?

Jones: No. Well, he had some kids beforehand, but they didn't live with him. But even when I was in Chicago, I had one or two cousins that came to live with us a while because their parents were having a rough time.

But, back then, everything was extended family. I mean, you used to have family reunions. Today they go to hotels, and they get a family reunion planner. But, back then, when folks say, we're going to have a family reunion,

folks come. They sleep on the floor; it wasn't at hotels. They did all the cooking, and everybody just participated, in terms of it. It was really that old family connection, that everybody felt involved. But, you know, you go; everybody sleeps on the floor because it's family, you know. So, we'd plan a family reunion. The food was unbelievable, you know, in terms of it.

DePue: What are the highlights of the food?

Jones: Well, to me it was always sweet potato pie. I used to enjoy the cobblers. You don't even see that no more, I don't think, in terms of stuff, the cobblers. I always liked fried food, you know, fried food, but had a lot of vegetables and all because Grandma grew them, and she did canning. Oh God, I got some other flashbacks of Peoria.

One of the things I had to do in the house is keep the fire going. It was a big house, so it had two coal burning furnaces. So, my job was to keep the fire going, putting the coal in and all. But the most important part of that job is banking it, so that overnight the fire don't go out because when the coal furnace fire go out, you've got a little work to do to get it going and a time thing, and people will be cold, and they'd be calling you all kinds of names. We used to have this coal delivered. The truck pulled up, and we had a coal chute, you know, and the coal thing come down. So, that was my job. When I got a little older, my job was…I had to go down, put the coal in and make sure I bank it for the night, so that in the morning, you just go put fresh coal in and get the fire going and all. That was one of the jobs I remember. That was my responsibility that everybody knew.

DePue: Did the family have any Thanksgiving or Christmas traditions?

Jones: We usually went to Grandma's house on holidays. You know, even from Chicago, we'd come down because she always had the space. She had the kitchen, a big kitchen and all. So, actually, grandma was sort of the stabilizer. I mean, you could drop your kid off there and go to another city to get a job and all that, and then come back. But, you could drop them there, and it was okay because Grandma said, anything about the family that needed to be done, she was going to do it. So, Christmas and Thanksgiving was grandmother's house, which was wonderful because that's where all the good food was.

DePue: What was usually the main menu for those meals?

Jones: Well, you know, Thanksgiving was always turkey or something. But then, on Christmas, we'd get a ham, maybe turkey, cobblers—because I always liked cobblers because they're sweet and everything—sweet potato pie. Those were basics. There was just lots of good food, lots of good food.

DePue: It didn't hurt you too badly; you're still a pretty thin guy.

Jones: But, I was so active. I was always…I was active. When you're young, you're active; you could eat. When you were younger, you could eat this much and still look like you did. Today, you know, if I started eating this much, I know where it's at. (both chuckle)

DePue: I wanted to take you back to Chicago and ask you just a question or two about the relationship you had with your stepfather.

Jones: It was off and on; it was off and on. I'm not sure, because what happened is, when my mother wasn't there, he tried to be strong, when she wasn't there. If she was there, he was not. So, we had those conflicts, in terms of, well, I could always say, "Mom said it was okay to do it." And he would say, "But I'm telling you to do this." "But mom said…" (chuckles)

So, we got along, but it was thin getting along. You know, anytime, something could break through the ice, and the next thing you know, we'd be in an argument, in terms of stuff. He was from Chicago and all, and he had this fast pace. And see, I grew in Peoria, with no drinking. I mean, on holidays we got together, family reunions or something like that. But other than that, you know, didn't drink. Then I go to Chicago, and we've got two bars in the house.

He was a drinker, which is one of the other things that caused friction between us, because he was a drinker. I'd been around, and I'd been around all the folks with mothers, you know, being in taverns and saw folks with alcohol and drinking and all that, being drunk, acting stupid, hurting people. So, that was one of the things that I had to adjust to is, people drink all the time, day and night. (chuckles)

DePue: You mentioned that there were two bars in the house.

Jones: Mm-hmm. There were two bars in the house.

DePue: I'm trying to visualize this in the first place. To me, a bar is the same thing as a tavern.

Jones: Oh, no. This was the liquor bar at the house, when I say that, two bars in the house. These were bars, you know. They had these little things back then. One was a cabinet on a little table, where you had the chairs, stools. We had two of those kind of little bars, kind of thing. That's interesting, yeah. There is this difference of words back then, and some of them are not here today.

DePue: Well, language evolves, just like everything in this fast-paced society, like the United States. That's one of the reasons we talk to people like you.

You were growing up at a time, again, this is the late '50s, early '60s. There was a lot going on in the civil rights movement in the United States. Were you paying much attention to that?

Jones: I had a lot of friends who were into it. I never really got off into all the black or the Afrocentric kinds of things. But I knew them all, because of the neighborhood. Like, I knew all the gang members because I knew the neighborhood. But, because my mother would… You know, everybody knew my mother because she ran the taverns and all in the neighborhood. So, no one bothered me, usually. In fact, I remember someone stole… My mother, when I got old enough to drive, she bought me this car, a Chevrolet convertible. I lived in the projects, and someone stole it. And she said, "You all better return my son's car."

DePue: She just kind of put the word out in general?

Jones: The car showed up two days later. The only thing is, there was a slit where they cut to get into it. That's when I said, "Wow. I know I'm scared of my mom, and now, everybody seems to be scared of her."

DePue: She was the disciplinarian in the family too, then?

Jones: Oh yeah, oh yeah. My grandmother—see this is how I got to Grandmother and God. Grandmother would give me a whopping, and she would always say, "Don't run from me." And I'd say, "How can I not run? You're beating me," in terms of it. Well, I used to try to run up curtains, grab.

Back in those days, in the bed, they would have like two box springs and two mattresses or a box spring and two mattresses to make it thicker and all. So, I was running from her because she was going to give me a whopping. I ran under the bed, and I said, I'm safe here in the dark because it's got all that stuff up top, so she can't get to me. The next thing I know, light came from above, and she had lifted up that thing and told me, "I told you not to run from me." All I could do was go…(both laughing) That's when I figured, oh, she's like God because she made light come into my darkness down there. I mean, I couldn't believe it. I'm in the dark, and all of a sudden, you know. I mean, this was two box springs and these two mattresses, and she just lifted that up. And all I could say, "I ain't going to run no more. I ain't going to run no more." Yeah, she was a very strong woman.

DePue: When you say whopping, was this the—

Jones: Belt or switches.

DePue: On the butt?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Well, whatever was close. She could aim for the butt, but, if you move, you know. But see, what she would do is, she would have you get your own torture. She would say, "Okay, go out there and get me a switch." I'm getting a switch to get whipped, and she would say, "Bring me a handful back." Of course, obviously, I'm going to, "Oh no…oh, this one, yeah." I would bring them back, and I would get the smallest ones, trying to—and she

would calmly sit there and weave three or four of them together. And when she got through whopping me, that looked like little paisley prints all over my ass because she would braid them. So, we couldn't get away with it by bringing some little weak little thin thing because she had me bring her a handful of them. And I did all that thinking to get away, and she'd sit there and braided them. [You] Can't beat them old folks when they want to get you.

DePue: It sounds like she kept her calm during this process.

Jones: Oh yeah. I think, growing up down south on the plantation and all that for a period of her life, she really had a whole other attitude in terms of being up for it. Nothing seemed to be a big problem. You've just got to go through it, and you could do it. You know, she ended up coming from down there. They have nothing. They had a farm, had the boarding house, you know, could never have done that, I'm sure, where she came from, down there, have that kind of opportunity to do those kinds of things.

So, Grandma was probably the most dominating figure, in terms of internally and all, and Mom. There's been strong women, actually, I guess.

DePue: Again, taking it up to Chicago, growing up in that part of the neighborhood, I'm thinking, you have to be a White Sox fan.

Jones: Well, yeah, because we could go sneak in the White Sox. You know, they was on 35th Street there, and we were on 39th.

DePue: So, you can sneak into Comiskey Park?

Jones: Mm-hmm, oh yeah. There was always ways. And, you know, because we were up there all the time, and we knew other kids that knew ways. You could always get one or two in with no problem. It's when you start bringing a group, then, all of a sudden, you didn't.

DePue: Well, let's get you into high school and talk a little bit about that experience. Where did you attend?

Jones: In the grammar school, I was in the last graduating class from Oakland Wall because, after that, they went to eighth grade. And after that, they started this middle school, and they split that up. So, that graduation picture is when I was the last graduating class.

DePue: Did they make a bigger deal about graduating from middle school, grammar school, at the time?

Jones: Well yeah. You know, we had—well, you graduated from grammar school, you had a little dance, actually, and you had a little ceremony. That's why we could get the picture together and all that. But it was a ceremony, like a graduation of some type. I don't know what they do today. I mean, I know

teachers and all that, but I never really talked to them about the graduation part.

DePue: Were there a lot of kids who didn't go on to more schooling after that?

Jones: Oh yeah, because getting a job was, you know. A lot of folks, that's the first thing they wanted to do. That's what—I went out, trying to get a job. I had my grandmother and my mother and all that. They were supportive, but I figured, well, I can't, until I get a job. I've got to listen to everything they say. I had no choices in the matter. (chuckling) But a lot of them did not go. I ended up going to—we're we going to high school, not going to grammar school?

DePue: Yeah.

Jones: Okay. Anyway, I went to Tilden, Tilden Technical School, 4747 South Union. It was all boys, and they held the wrestling championship at that time, like twenty-eight years of wrestling, one of the top football teams that went downstate a couple of times. I played basketball.

DePue: Were there other options, or was this the neighborhood school to go to?

Jones: My stepfather went there, and it was Tilden Technical. It was a technical school.

Now the interesting thing is, I lived on 39th and Lake Park, so I had to take the bus, not the yellow school bus, the CTA [Chicago Transit Authority]. I lived on 39th and Lake Park. It was on 47th, all the way across town on the west side. So, on my bus, I would go past Phillips High School and DuSable to go to that school all the way on the west side.

DePue: Did you have to compete to get into the school?

Jones: I don't remember that. I just know that, when they had… I may have had to because that's what it was; it was a technical school. It was all boys, which is the other thing that was interesting. You don't have that today. It's not all boys today.

DePue: From what you told me before, though, you kind of liked the girls. So, was this kind of a different experience?

Jones: Well, see, everybody used to say that. You're going to an all boys school, whoa, God. All the girls would get out of school earlier and would be there, because you had to walk a half a block to get off the bus. It would be lined with all the girls from all the other schools. (both laugh) Well, that attracts them. It's a girl magnet because it's got all these guys and big in sports and all, but it was a technical school.

DePue: What does that mean, technical? It means skills or—

Jones: It was orientated towards math and chemistry and the sciences. The fact is, I took airplane mechanics. It was a course they had there. But, then, there were three teachers they called the weeders. You had to pass their course. And that's when you knew it was a technical, because it was algebra, geometry and chemistry. You got it in your last year, and if you didn't pass them, you couldn't graduate. So, we called them the weeders.

The guy I remember more was the chemistry guy, Dr. Smoller is his name. Dr. Smoller had worked on the Manhattan Project. He was the chemistry teacher.

DePue: Just kind of as a marker here, the University of Chicago was not far from this neighborhood where you grew up.

Jones: It's on the west side more, the University of Chicago. But, of course, then you had Hyde Park and all south, but yeah, the University of Chicago there. But, if you didn't pass these classes, you couldn't graduate, and I graduated. Dr. Smoller, he had a blue spot on his head where they had put a metal thing or something. He must have had an accident to do with the chemistry. It blew up or something. He was a hard taskmaster, and I passed his class because he got me interested in chemistry. So, when I went to junior college, I took chemistry. It was an evening class because you had lab and all. And, when I walked in, Dr. Smoller was the teacher. He said to the whole class—it was a class of thirty—"I don't know what most of you know about chemistry, but I do know what these three do because I taught them in high school." I was, like uh-oh, well, I know one thing, I'm going to pass this class because if I start failing…You know, because I had that thing where he was the weeder. I made it through. Out of thirty, I think there was only, like, fifteen or eighteen that went all the way through because he was a hard taskmaster.

DePue: It sounds like the Tilden Technical School experience was quite different from your earlier experience in the Chicago schools.

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: You felt like you got a good education there?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Yeah, and I think it was because it was a technical school. Now I understand that was probably a higher level thing than just going to school, you know, just basic. This is what you do in basic because it was technical, and it was the emphasis on the math and the sciences and those kind of—there was more emphasis on that. That's what got my interest in all this stuff I do now, that I have done, is because of my interest in science. Tilden was a good experience. I was on the basketball team.

Here's the thing about living in Chicago. If I missed the bus, then I had to take another. Well, like, when I had basketball practice, I would miss my usual bus. So, then, I had to go another way and take another bus another way,

and catch the El [Chicago's elevated train system], go to a certain point and then get a bus. Okay? But, then, going between those, I had to walk through, maybe it's a block or two. Every time I had to do that, I'd always get challenged by a gang because you were on their turf. I knew it was going to be a fight and run every time I missed it. And, of course, during basketball season, I'm missing it all the time.

After a while, though, they got to know me because, what they found out is—I remember three or four of them—they could come up to me and, "What are you doing here in our neighborhood? Where are you from," and all that. And they want to fight. So, I would tell them, "I don't think none of you can beat me, and I'll prove it if you get in line, and I'll take you all on, one by one." Most of the time, they did it, and, of course, I'd hit the first one and run like hell. But they would get in line. (both laughing)

DePue: So, a combination of talking yourself out of it and fighting yourself out of it.

Jones: That's right. My philosophy, if you're behind me, you're not going to catch me. That was, you know, you'd get into a situation like that on a daily basis. I've been on the buses where, you know, I had one time, guys were throwing me off the bus, and I didn't even know why it started because I was with another friend talking. Oh, that's what it was, the friend I was with knew him. They had some problems, and the guy came over and was telling him he's going to kick him off the bus. And I said, "How can you kick somebody off the bus, man? You ain't the bus company." I opened my mouth, then he decided both of us had to go off the bus, like it was his bus. I told him, "You ain't taking me off the bus. I'm going home." My friend was a little timid. He didn't know what to do because the guy buffaloed him. He ended up coming after me and throwing me off. We wrestled and fought, and all that. He tried to push me out the back door. You know, you can pull the thing, and the doors open. He tried to push me. It was real exciting, as I look back now. (laughing) He tried to push me out while the bus was moving. The bus driver was hollering and stuff, and I'm saying, "Why don't you stop the bus and come back here?" I ended up throwing him off the bus. (chuckles) It was crazy, but that was Chicago.

DePue: You mentioned that, about the time you got out of grammar school, you were looking for a job. Did you have jobs in high school?

Jones: I worked as a masseur where my stepfather was at, the Covenant Club. I started off as a bath boy and then ended up giving massages.

DePue: I'm guessing that was a different kind of experience for you, as well, because you mentioned this is a Jewish club in downtown Chicago.

Jones: It was Jewish, yeah. It was like a country club, downtown. It was interesting. I mean, I met, like I told you, a lot of folks, like the Lone Ranger and all that.

But now, in Chicago, you're so immersed by people all the time, and when you're doing something… That was different. I mean, massaging, dealing with people's bodies and stuff. I never thought I would ever do nothing like that.

DePue: Did they give you some training to do this?

Jones: Oh, when I was doing the massage thing, yeah. That's where we got training. For the bath boy, you give them a towel when they come out of the shower, and you're just basically the bathroom flunky. If somebody needed something, you know, oh, we've got toothpaste. I'll run down here and get it for you. You're just a gopher. But then, when I went into doing massages, yeah, there I got training. And, since my stepfather was one of the head masseurs there, I got all the training I needed to be there and bring more money in the house.

DePue: Did you get tips?

Jones: Yeah, you would get tips once in a while. Most of the time, you would get tips. They were very generous sometimes. It was different, though, you know, most of the time you don't think about it. You know, people do things with it, buying massages and all. But it was another cultural thing. Like, I'm sitting here massaging a person's body, you know. I never—there was nothing in my past that said—I never had a massage until I ever went there. (both laughing)

DePue: Well, you talked about your grandmother's massages.

Jones: We would call it a massage today, but back then, I had another name for it, damn sure.

DePue: I would expect, though, that experience—Here you are, a young black kid, going up to this Chicago. You're dealing with rich, assuming they're rich…

Jones: Oh yeah. You've got to be rich to be a member.

DePue: …white Jewish people. You can't help but notice; here's a racial difference.

Jones: And, because they were rich, to me it was like, they're pampered, spoiled people.

DePue: That was their opinion of…?

Jones: My opinion of them because it seemed like they couldn't do nothing. But they were rich, so they didn't have to do nothing. They paid other folks to do things all the time. That was what they did in terms of it. That was my first exposure to that.

The other thing that was my first exposure, to knowing where Chicago had a downtown. You know, a lot of kids grew up in neighborhoods. When I

was growing up, a lot of kids thought Chicago was just their neighborhood. They would say downtown, but that wasn't Chicago. Chicago was what they know, which was their neighborhood. They didn't know more than that. So, a lot of folks don't understand, didn't understand, Chicago being downtown because they never went downtown at that time. Now, they know it.

So, by working downtown, I ended up really getting a whole other view in terms of Chicago, downtown, you know, working in this place for all these rich folks, being downtown, walking around. As an educational thing, I learned so much, just by going to the different environment of the differences because I never knew. Rich folks was somebody you always heard people talk about. They didn't have TV then; they had all these radios, you know, that had twenty-eight buttons and three or four worked. (chuckles)

DePue: You mentioned the difference you noticed right away, moving from a slower paced Peoria to a fast-paced Chicago. Then how was downtown different from Chicago?

Jones: A faster pace, faster pace, people were always moving.

DePue: Even more unsettling in that respect?

Jones: Oh yeah, just because there was so many people. Neighborhoods – there would be people up and down, but they're going in and out. But here you had people, just volumes of people, just moving around all the time. Even after I got used to Chicago, you know, got comfortable with it, I remember the first time I went to New York, and I went to Harlem. It almost scared me. I couldn't believe all the activity going on. People running down the street with clothes hangers and stuff, all kinds of products. I mean, it was just like, wow. And the other feeling I had is, I never seen this many black folks in one place.

Harlem was a whole other experience. It was different than the experience I was going through, living in Chicago. You know, the way it's set up. I mean, we had streets, 63rd, 1st and all that, but Harlem was an area in terms of things, and there's so many people moving so fast. Everybody seemed to be running. And that's what I got in downtown Chicago. People almost seem on the verge of running, you know, they would be walking so fast to get to where they're going, they'd be on the verge of running. And, you know, my Peoria was always my base of me understanding, and, all of sudden, this was way beyond that, and I'm living in it.

DePue: What were your thoughts about the future when you got towards the end of your high school years?

Jones: I wanted to do something in the medical field. That was my interest, was in the medical field. I worked for a while at the state psychiatric institution, which was interesting, because a lot of crazy people go to places like that just to take—you know, I'm not sure how crazy they are, but they were brilliant. I

met the guy that was the number three chess player in Chicago. He taught me to play chess. There was a couple of other folks that were in Chicago. They were famous, and they were in this psychiatric institution. It was almost like they were taking a break from stuff. The chess guy, they said he comes in every couple of years. He'll come in for a while, end up there. It was all research. Every floor was tied to a school and a mode of therapy. The one I was on was—we did a lot of drug therapy and discussion groups. I think it was University of Chicago, there was the college that was for that. So, they did a lot of experimental things.

I understand it more now than I did then because, when I first got there, one of the experimental things they did was that the staff didn't wear things to identify them as staff because they did group therapy and they wanted everybody to feel comfortable, to be able to speak. And someone don't say, well, look at me; I've got a white coat; I'm a doctor, or look at me; I'm a nurse, you know, which then translates to, I'm well and you're not because, see, I'm staff and you're not. That was one of the things they were experimenting with. So, what happened is nobody could wear anything that would identify them like that, as staff. So, when we got in these group therapies, it was open game on anybody to raise up something about anybody. When I first got there, I didn't know who—I thought the staff folks were the folks that were the crazy folks, and the crazy folks acted more subtle like the staff folks because you couldn't identify them. (both laughing)

DePue: Was this after you graduated from high school or before?

Jones: After. I mean, it was a fascinating experience. The guy who was a top ping-pong player of Chicago, he was there. The guy who was the number three chess player was there. And then, where I really became aware of how whites do not like to come into black neighborhoods at dark—this young teenage girl, I came home and she was—she had found out my address. This is the projects, in the black—3939 Lake Park. I came home, and she was curled up in front of the door, and I'm saying, oh no. She was a patient, and she had finally came there. So, I let her in. She was lucky because she curled up there. But, you know, where we lived at, unless somebody came down the hallway, they didn't see. So, then I called the psychiatric institution and said, hey she's here and da-da-da, what do you want me to do? Somebody should come and get her? So, they said, well, let me get a hold of her father.

Well, her father was a big judge. He called me, and I talked to him. I said, "Well, you'll come and get her." He said "Well, I'll be there in the morning." And I said, this young white girl, oh God is she crazy? I don't know what she'll say tomorrow, you know? But, he wouldn't come down and get his own daughter. I could just take her out of the building. He didn't even have to get out of the car. But, he wouldn't even come at night down there to the projects. And she was so out of it, whacked out half the time. So, I just

kept on talking to her until she just got tired and went to sleep. Then, he called the next morning, and he came and got her, when it was daylight.

DePue: Well, that's quite an experience. All of these are eye-opening experiences for you then.

Jones: Oh yeah, yeah.

DePue: What did your mother and your grandmother have in mind for you to be doing with your life after you got done with high school?

Jones: They wanted me to be into something that I would be happy doing.

DePue: Was there any expectation that, we want you to go to school; you need to go to college?

Jones: Had to go to school, had to go to college. And I went to Southeast Junior College, which was, at that time, with CVS [Chicago Vocational School] in Chicago. Now, I think, it's a Chicago Teachers' College. You know, they broke off. It was a junior college, Southeast Junior College, when I started.

DePue: They didn't have any community college?

Jones: Yes, Southeast Community College, and it was in with CVS, which was a big high school there. It physically was there for a while, and then it broke away and became Chicago Teachers.

They didn't have any expectations, but they had a lot of faith in me, that I would find something that I would be happy with, that I was going to be okay with. Joining the service was not okay. (laughing)

DePue: Well, that's one of the questions I've got, obviously. This is the timeframe, you graduated in '62, right?

Jones: Yeah, in '62.

DePue: The draft is going on at that time. So, most kids, about the time you finished high school, that's at least in the back of your mind. What were you thinking about service in the military in 1962?

Jones: At first, I didn't think about it. Then, of course, they had the draft going, and they said, well, you can get drafted, especially coming out of high school, and you're going to college. I'm not sure what it was, because I was in Chicago, and I'm not sure where the draft board had me. I'm not sure if they had me in Peoria or Chicago, but I decided to go into the service because I wanted to learn more and see more.

When I was growing up in the projects, one of the things I loved to do was read. In fact, at Oakland Wall School, I went there the sixth grade, and I skipped seventh. You know, I got a double they call it, from sixth grade and went to eighth grade because they gave me a battery of tests, you know, they give these tests. My reading comprehension was 12.2; my math was 10.4 in terms of tenth grade and twelfth grade and all that. I had a high compensation. So, they looked at all these tests and said, oh well, he can skip because he can do all this stuff. So, I got a double and went to eighth grade. It was a Chinese teacher that noticed my grades and really went and said, something should be done with him because he has such a high reading score and math score and all that.

DePue: Were you okay with that? Because you kind of lose track of some of your buddies that way, too, I would think.

Jones: No, it was great. It was great for me because, like I said, I had about six friends. We called ourselves the Kinsmen of the League of Affable Nobility. We used to have little cards, "KLAN," give to the girls, huh, see? (both laughing) Very impressive. It was six of us, you know. And we did have some problems with gangs. I'm maybe flipping back and forth on you here.

DePue: That's fine.

Jones: Living in the projects, like I said, gangs were all around. The fact is, they used to go have gang fights on the lake. So, they would come by the building where I lived, and they would recruit folks on their way. So, they would throw you up the front in a fight, and then, they'd come and fight after people got tired of beating on you, then they come in to fight. I mean, I've had guns put on me; I've had a knife put into my throat. They'd say, you're coming with us to go fight over in the gang fight they were going. My philosophy was, well, if I'm going to get into a fight, it's going to be now because, when I go over there, I don't know who is a good guy, bad guy or nothing. I know now; you the bad guy in my life right now. So, no, we fight here. So, I ended up having to fight not to go fight, in terms of it. That was one of the things.

We knew all the gang members. Everybody in the neighborhood knew everybody. So, that was one of the things, that they was always trying to recruit folks, you know. And then, they tried to recruit you to come in the gang. They'd say, well, you know, it'll be easier for you around here if you came and joined our gang. Nobody will bother you. And I'd say, nobody's going to bother me anyway, but you right now. But then, somebody would whisper to him, "You know that's Katheryn's son," (both laughing) because everybody on the streets knew her, because she ran the taverns and she knew all the folks, the in and out and all. She knew everybody in terms of the street folk. When I was growing up, I knew all the policy wheel [a form of racketeering] folks and the prostitutes, the drug dealers, the hustlers, knew all of them.

DePue: Well, you haven't mentioned the police.

Jones: Well, once my mother divorced my stepfather, her boyfriend was a guy named Gene, and Gene was one of them folks on the paddy wagon. He was a Chicago policeman, a huge man. You see, the paddy wagon folks back then were the roughest because they had to put the people in the paddy wagon. Nobody wanted to fight Gene because he didn't feel pain. Everybody in the police department knew him because he would go pick them up, you know, and everything. So, her boyfriend then was Gene, and nobody bothered Mom. Again, nobody bothered her because of him, and nobody bothered me because of her. If it got real bad, then he would get involved. But I never had to get him involved because, most of the time, I handled things. But the gang things were very prevailing. You could not live there and not know gang members. You could not live there and the gang don't try to recruit you. You either get in the gang, or they take you over to a fight, so they get tired of beating you before they start fighting, either way.

DePue: You mentioned you were on the basketball team. How tall were you at that time?

Jones: I was about six-foot-one, because I ended up being six-foot-two, is where I ended up.

DePue: So, a good size.

Jones: Oh, yeah. I was thin. But back then, youth and strength, it's—

DePue: Well, let's go back to being in community college. You already mentioned you had a couple jobs during that time. It sounds like it, at least.

Jones: Right.

DePue: One of them was at this mental hospital.

Jones: Oh, I went to a laboratory school downtown. I only did it for two or three months because, after that, I decided to join the Navy.

DePue: You mentioned chemistry that you were taking at the community college. Was that essentially your major, was the sciences?

Jones: Well, technical school, yeah, that was it. I was interested in chemistry and physics. I was really more interested in physics because I was just starting to learn about quantum physics, and I really got off into that.

A lot of it, I think, is from Dr. Smoller because he had me stay still long enough to really get interested in understanding it. As far as I was concerned, he was a great teacher, even though there were times…I mean, if you went to sleep in his class, he would move the rest of the class away and

pour ammonia around you, you know? (both laugh) Or he would have the class get back, and he would make water—you know, hydrogen and oxygen and a flame—pow! He was unusual, but nobody went to sleep in his class after the first week.

DePue: How about girls? Were you dating at this time…any serious relationships?

Jones: Not serious, no, not serious. I'll tell you, I did have an interesting experience I remember, one time with a girl, because I was off on a study on hypnosis and all. And she said, "Why don't you hypnotize me?" I said, "Well, I don't know. I've just been studying it, but okay." I had her sit there and just relax and all that. What do you ask a girl? "Well, are you with anybody else besides me?" "Well, there's so and so, and there's so and so…" I said, "What? Damn it, she really is hypnotized; she's telling me the truth." (both laughing) That's when I decided that was nothing to play with.

DePue: Well, I'm getting up to the point in time where you're going to be in the military here, but I wanted to ask you this. And this is the larger, you know, what's going on in the world, if you will. November of 1963, you've got the JFK [John F. Kennedy] assassination. Do you remember that?

Jones: Mm-hmm. Yeah, yeah. Well, see, in my family, they had his picture up in almost every room. The black community was a big supporter, you know. They loved him. You walk in the house, and they have Jesus and Kennedy, in terms of it, in the black community, in the households I was in, I grew up in. He gave hope that there was going to be something different.

DePue: So, when he's assassinated, what's the response; what's your response?

Jones: I couldn't believe that people would kill the president. You know, and then, I had simple thoughts. The president's a leader, and he's doing everything for us. Why would someone kill him? I didn't really understand politics and all of that, at that time, you know. I was down to simplicity—good guy, bad guy. You didn't get into politics, where you've got nothing but shades of stuff. (chuckles)

Kennedy, it really was a depressing thing, and, I mean, the pain. A lot of my family took it like a family member died. I mean, he was important in the households that I was at. Like I said, you had Jesus and Kennedy, pictures on the walls.

DePue: Well, let's get to the point then, where you do get in the military. What led to the decision? What got you interested in possibly joining?

Jones: I wanted to do something different. I have to relate this back to when I was living in the projects, when I made an amazing discovery…and amazing discovery. The amazing discovery was, white folks write down everything. (chuckles) If you know how to read, you can learn it. That's what got me into

reading. I read *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, *The [Rise and Fall of the] Third Reich*, I read *War and Peace*. People would say, why are you reading such thick books? Oh, you're not supposed—what size are you supposed to read? (chuckles) But I got into reading because I couldn't believe it. If you could read, I mean, you could just read, you could learn everything. And the reason I say "white folks" there, because there wasn't too many blacks writing. What the blacks were writing were revolution and evolution and, you know, that kind of stuff, see, but that's probably what happened.

By me going to a technical school, where I had to focus on technical things, and then, when I started looking around the world, see, I never thought about dealing with all the black issues at that time, before I went into the military because it was so fascinating to me all the stuff you could learn and find out about. So, you could find out about the whole world, just by reading. That was the big, amazing discovery. Well, like I said, the big, amazing discovery is, somebody writes all of it. That was amazing to me, when I learned that, and that was in the projects. That's why I probably didn't get into a lot of trouble because I loved to read. I just loved to read.

So, I wanted to do something different. Peoria. I was comfortable in Chicago; I could go play; I had friends, you know. But, every day was going to be the same as the other day, basically, in either place. I wanted to just see more and understand more.

When I first went in the service, and they say what's your classification? What do you want to be? A bosun's mate because they give you this battery of tests. And they say, well—and I wanted to say bosun's mate because I had some family members in the Navy who were bosun's mates, and I thought that's what the Navy was.

DePue: So you went to the Navy because of them?

Jones: I went to the Navy because—well, it was kind of interesting, too. The Navy seemed to have more opportunities in terms of schooling to me than the Army or Marines. (laughs)

DePue: This is towards the summer/fall of 1965. So, things in Vietnam are just starting to cook up. Was any of that any part of this equation?

Jones: No and no. I wanted to go and learn more stuff, and I figured I could get it in the Navy. I said a bosun's mate just because I had some family members that were bosun's mates, and I thought that was the Navy. Of course, when they took the test, they said, "You should be a corpsman or dental tech." and I said—young mind—"Why would I want to be a dental tech and mess around with people's mouths?" You know, that's kid's stuff, ugh. "I'll do a corps."

Now, of course, just being a corpsman, I've held every human organ in my hand on the battle…on the combat. So, if I'd did a dental tech, I'd have been in an office.

DePue: But at the time they gave you these two options, what did you know about being a corpsman?

Jones: Nothing.

DePue: It didn't mean anything to you?

Jones: I didn't know what it meant; it meant medic. Okay, I'm interested in medicine, anyway. I said, "Okay, that sounds good, but I ain't going to be no dental tech and mess with people's mouths." (both laugh) And, of course, I look back, I say, if I was a dental tech, I'd be working in an office; close the office up; go home. Go home to a place called home. But no, I didn't really think about it. I was more interested in learning and seeing different things.

Then, when I got out of corpsman school, and I should have known—actually, I think I did—when they sent me to go FMF, with the Marines. Field medical, that's what they called it when a corpsman goes with the Marines, is FMF.

DePue: Field Medical Service?

Jones: No, FMF, field medical…what's the F for? [Force]

DePue: We can figure that out later.

Jones: But, when I first went in, of course, then I went to corpsman school in Great Lakes. I think I told you about that, with my guy, Riley.

DePue: Yeah, but let's back up. Did they call it corpsman school or are you going through basic naval training at the time?

Jones: I was going through basic. Well, what happens is, you go through basic naval training; that's what I did at Great Lakes. Then I went to corpsman school in San Diego. Then I went to the Marines. I went to North Carolina for their boot camp.

DePue: Camp Lejeune.

Jones: Camp Lejeune, swamp Lejeune we affectionately called it. (chuckles) The Great Lakes, I said, well, you know, it was close and all, and I could come home on leave. So, I was glad I went to Great Lakes.

DePue: That's just on the north side of Chicago.

Jones: Yeah, it's up in North Chicago there, and I could come home for leave in terms of it. I thought that would be great. Of course, you go through, and the thing about being in boot camp with the Navy, see, you do some things. A lot of other things that they don't do. It's like, you may be on a ship, and they have a fire. So, they take you in this little room in boot camp, and they have this real thick oil-filled trench, about that deep, a whole wall. and they light it. Well, before they do that, though, they do little things to your mind, like, all right, smoking lamp is lit, if you want to smoke. And you're in a room. Okay, folks pull out the cigarettes, start smoking. And then they light the oil, and it burns. It's got thick stuff all burning, an RP says, "You can't put your cigarette out until you finish it." (chuckles) And this oil, it's all getting all over you. The smoke is so thick, you can't see. And then, they give you hoses because you're supposed to be fighting a fire, you know, because it's flames all up and all. But, if you had a cigarette, you could not put it out until you finished that cigarette.

DePue: Was this all just a way to train people how to deal with the crisis of a fire on a ship?

Jones: That's what the training was for.

DePue: And cope with it, instead of trying to run away from it?

Jones: Right. We ended up, you had water hoses, and you had to put it out. And there was a way you had to spray it right, and all that, because, if you sprayed down in it, it will flare up and come up. It was exciting.

DePue: Was your experience, then, in Great Lakes…I think it would be different from growing up. Now, you're in this overwhelmingly white world again?

Jones: When I show you the pictures, you'll see. When I was at Oakland Wall, there was only two whites, and it was all black. And, within a few years, if you look at the photo of Great Lakes boot camp, it's all white, except for, I think, two of us. And in corpsman school, it's all white, except for two or three of us.

DePue: Okay, we're talking again, '65, '66, '67. The civil rights movement has been going on, but there are definitely still a lot of tensions in the United States at the time. So, how did that translate into your experience? And let's just start at the Great Lakes, first of all.

Jones: I told you my thing with the drill instructor.

DePue: Yeah, but we need to get that on the record, for sure.

Jones: I became master at arms because I got in a fight with the drill instructor. Being from Chicago, I had a little attitude, (chuckles) and I was confronting him about something. I'm holding myself back, and he said to me, he said, "Well, if you think you're so bad, you come across the desk." And I stared at him,

thinking, I ain't going to jump across and hit him. I'll be in the brig, you know? And then he said, "Don't worry about this." You know, they have braids and all. "Forget this. If you want to come across the desk, you come across." And I did. (laughs)

So, once they broke us up, he said, "Oh, you think you're tough. Well, I'll tell you what, you're the new master at arms." Now, there's only two of us there. Now, he done made the black guy the master at arms. And then, there were a few of these kids that wanted to get in with the drill instructor. So, he saw we had a fight. They knew that was not good for me. And I'm Master at Arms, but they didn't understand that. They figured they're going to teach me a lesson for the instructor. So, they was going to give me a blanket party. And I heard they was going to give me a blanket party in the shower—go in the shower, and then they throw a blanket over you and beat you, you know?

So, I went to the drill instructor and said, "Hey, I'm learning I've got all these folks to be dealing with. Can I have an assistant master at arms?" And he said, "Yeah, why not?" So I went to Riley, is the guy's name, the biggest guy in the company, didn't feel no pain, from Arkansas. Riley and I had talked because he was from the same town as my great aunt. So, I told Riley, I said "Well, I want you to be my assistant master at arms." And Riley said, "Okay, what do I do?" And I said, "You make sure no one hurts me," because Riley didn't feel pain, so they wouldn't hurt him. "Now, you make sure they don't hurt me." And he said, "Oh, okay," and once folks found out Riley was the assistant master at arms, nobody wanted to mess with me after that.

DePue: What did it mean to be the master at arms?

Jones: It meant you were supposed to keep everybody in discipline and in shape. You're the one that's supposed to be…,you know, when the drill sergeant says, this one do something wrong, you have to go grab him, and you're like the police. Now that's a setup, obviously. (both laughing) Two black guys, you make one black guy, you know, so. And, of course, I hadn't been around running things and being in charge of whites. Man! I was like, what's this mean? But it was like a police officer: the Master at Arms is supposed to enforce the rules and all that. Of course, that's the person that everybody gets pissed at because that's what you do.

DePue: How about this drill instructor? Do you think he had some strong prejudices, or this is just a technique that he was using?

Jones: See, it was very difficult back then. There was only two blacks in there, so he didn't have that much contact. I think, if he had more, you would see it, or [if] he had only one, you would see it. I think he had some prejudice. That's one of the things I was on him about, was about, why are the white boys doing this

and the black boys…you know, they can't do that. It was little things, the privileges, those kind of things. And that's what we were arguing about. At that time, I was saying, "Well, you know, it just sounds like this is one of them things that your folks do." That's when he got pissed.

DePue: "Your folks."

Jones: (chuckles) That's when he got pissed. And then, he started berating me, and then, of course, I was standing there huffing and puffing, stamping like a horse, wanting to get out. I don't think he thought that I would come across the desk at him. I don't think he would have said it because, even though I ended up getting put in the situations I did, it didn't look good for him either, in terms of edging, by him saying, "Don't ignore this. Go ahead and come and jump on me."

DePue: Was there anybody else watching this?

Jones: Well, I assume, after it started happening, they did because they pulled me off him. (laughs)

DePue: In other words, you might have been having the upper hand on this?

Jones: Ah-huh. When I came across the desk, he was so shocked. I mean, I flew across the desk, and he was so shocked, he didn't know what to do. They had to come and pull me off because everybody heard all this stuff.

And Riley, because he was from the same town as my great aunt. So, when I went on leave, my first leave, I took Riley to my great aunt's house, and they sat up half the night drinking Old Crow, reminiscing about that little town they was from in Arkansas. (laughing)

DePue: Where was your great aunt living?

Jones: That was the house that—she was the sister of my stepfather. That's why I call her great aunt. That's where he went to live first there, before he moved to the projects.

Oh, they had a great time. I mean, she was older, you know. And Riley had a great time just going over and reminiscing. I loved it because it keep Riley happy because he was really watching my back.

So, at boot camp, I think that was the most intense incident that occurred at boot camp. Then I got orders to go to corpsman school, and it was in San Diego. Now, I'd never been to San Diego before.

DePue: Is this your first time out of Illinois?

Jones: Basically. The only thing we used to do is go down to St. Louis because we had relatives there that came up, you know.

DePue: Did you take the train or fly to San Diego or bus?

Jones: I remember, I took the train, yeah. The train is what black folks use for long trips, most of them. They didn't fly then. Most of them couldn't fly, unless you had a position, or you had something you were doing. But just, hey, we're going to go on vacation out here and fly; that was not the way they thought. Car, bus, train, that was long distance because none of us were going to go, you know, outside of America. None of us have been outside, except my uncle, my mother's brother, and her. He loved to just drive around the country. Every year he would take a new place and go there, you know.

I took the train. Now, the interesting thing they do at corpsman school is, you get your orders to come out three months early, before your class starts, and you do kitchen [police], KP. (both laugh) So, I ended up, for a little over two months, waiting for the class to start. So, what they do is put you working in the kitchen. It really does make it appreciate when the class starts. You ain't got to get up at, like, 4:00, 4:30 in the morning. You've got to wash dishes, and work in the kitchen. You don't know anything about how to clean up. You know, you're peeling potatoes, doing all KP stuff for that period of time before you go to school. So, when the classes start, it is almost like a relief. Oh God, we can now just sit here and just rack our brains. Ain't got to hurt—our bodies are wracking now, you know.

So, I went to corpsman school, and that was interesting. It was at the Balboa Hospital, which is the Navy Hospital in San Diego. The fact is, when I got out of corpsman school, that's where I was at, was at Balboa Hospital. I used to run the emergency room and the clinic, walk-in, the clinic they had for servicemen and their families. That was a very interesting thing. Corpsman school, I don't remember a lot of incidences, you know. It was more going to school…well, you're so dammed tired.

DePue: Well, I imagine it's got to be a rigorous course. Tell us what it is—what it means to be a corpsman in the Navy in the first place. What are you to do, and what are the limits, what you can't go beyond, in terms of medical service.

Jones: Well, corpsmen, compared to like the Army Medic, has more training. It's a longer training period. Corpsmen, basically, are all the medical support. Corpsmen were always like physician assistants, more than just a medic, you know, that's on the grunts because you can go to a hospital and be pulmonary, have a certain specialty. So a corpsman was really like a physician assistant. They could go so far, but it was narcotics or something like that, that a doctor had to order it and all.

And they had nurses there also. The nurses were at the hospital. So, the corpsmen, they were more like a physician's assistant because they reported to the doctor too, except in some cases where the nurse there was an officer. They didn't like that, and they didn't—I can tell you a story about that later on, in coming back here with the trauma program and nurses. Like, what do corpsmen do, and are they trying to get between us and the doctors because now they want them to be the physician assistants? The nurses did it because most of the nurses today are physician assistants. But, at first, they were taking all the return military, specifically corpsmen, to go into these civilian physician assistant positions.

DePue: But to be a corpsman, I would assume you've got a couple options. You can be a corpsman onboard a ship or on shore duty, serving the Navy personnel.

Jones: Right.

DePue: Or you can be a corpsman working with the Marines out in combat, where you're the only medical expert.

Jones: Well, see, what you've got is, you've got sea and shore duty. Shore duty is working in the hospital, you know, a Navy facility here in the United States. But then, you have sea duty, and most of the time in sea duty, you'll be on a ship. So, you have a rotation between those two. A certain period of time, you'd be on sea duty, and then you're supposed to go on shore duty. You go shore duty, then you go on sea duty, and then you come back. It depends on what specialty, but for corpsmen, it's that way.

Well, one of the options, you think sea duty means on a ship. Well, sea duty also means going with the Marines. So, that's considered your sea duty, just like if you were on the ship. In fact, I actually spent more time on the ship with the Marines than I did in the Navy.

DePue: I guess my curiosity is, though, when you're doing service with the Marines, there's no doctor out there; there's no nurse out there; there's just you and somebody who might be very seriously injured. So, how much can you perform there?

Jones: Well, when I was in Nam, I could do anything, everything, medical procedures. I did all the sewing up, the suturing. I would do the pills and all. It had to be something I just didn't think I could handle, then I would be the one that would say, you need to go to the doctor. A lot of it is what you felt you could do. You were trained to do it all.

DePue: Okay, that was the nature of my question, then. How much training did you get into those much more involved procedures that you'd have to do in a field environment?

Jones: A lot of that was with the Marines because you played Marine boot camp for a time, and then you went to combat, wounds and all.

DePue: So, that's going to happen a little bit later in your training.

Jones: Right. In terms of, you could do anything that you were trained for and felt comfortable doing. But, once you were with the Marines and once you were in combat, there was no limit to do because I was the only one there to do it. There was nobody else.

DePue: About what time then, what month would it have been that you completed your corpsman training at Balboa? This would have been 1966?

Jones: Sixty-six, yeah, because that's when I went across to North Carolina, I think is the progression of it. I'd say it was '66; I went away in '67. We did do a Caribbean cruise, where we went from North Carolina, and we would sail around the islands, Puerto Rico, Jamaica and all those places. And then we would go to a little place called Vegas. It was an island that they practiced World War II landing, where you actually had the ships that the drop the things. And you, being an armored personnel carrier, and go in the water and bob down underneath the water. And then you come up, and go to the beach, and they have stuff blowing up on the beach. Then you did patrols and stuff like that. It was part of the Marines, you know, part of their class when you graduate was go through that experience. So, you had the Navy stuff you do with the healthcare, and then you had all the Marines stuff you had to learn about in terms of combat.

DePue: I kind of skipped over, and I apologize for that. I skipped over the learning how to be a Marine part of it, at Camp Lejeune. Tell us about that.

Jones: Well, that was the fun part…as I got older. (laughs) Well, first of all, here they try to make corpsmen into some watered down version of a Marine, and corpsmen, we knew we weren't Marines. But the Marines love us because we'd be with them wherever they are in the world. That's what the love is between the Marines and corpsmen. And there is a love between Marines and corpsmen because the corpsmen go anyplace. The Marine is there, and that man's corpsman, he's going to go anywhere that man goes. So, Marines respect that because you're there on the battlefield doing that.

But from the inside, talking about being a Marine—and then, you know, you're young and you've got this "I'm fertile; I can do anything. I'm physically able." I can look back now at stuff I can't do now [that] I did then. It was so easy because I was physically in shape; I was mentally tough. And, of course, going through there, the things you experience, you won't experience in any other kind of situation. Like, you had to crawl under the barbed wire while they're shooting live rounds above your head. You had to go on these patrols where, every time we did, we always… Down in North

Carolina, they've got some big poisonous snakes. And you'd be doing these little things. You'd be in a little rubber raft, going down the bank, doing a maneuver, and you look up, and there'd be big snakes hanging off of the limb. And, you know, you just sort of slide down and close your eyes in terms of it.

We went on these patrols, and folks would dig foxholes. Well, one time, I remember the guy who built a foxhole, and he ran into a little snake pit. Of course, he had dug down because he was going to dig down deep. That was the problem. He dug deep, and he ended up with all these little snakes, all the little cottonmouth snakes running around. But he came straight up. He jumped up just like that. He didn't touch the sides or nothing once he saw the snakes. (both laughing) He saw the snakes, you know. The smaller snakes are more potent than the larger ones because, as they grow, it dilutes out a little bit, you know. So, I ended up doing a lot of stuff with snakebites, you know.

And then, being in North Carolina was an interesting experience to itself during that time, too. North Carolina was a dry state, except if you were on the base. Well, we used to go out. I remember going out back in the woods where some folks had told us to go, in one of them back of the woods kind of places.

DePue: This is off duty, now, we're talking about?

Jones: Yeah, off duty. And they sold moonshine because it was a dry state. They didn't have regular; they had the moonshine. I was with this guy from Detroit, and people in Detroit, I think, if they don't carry a gun, they don't feel like they were dressed. He had this pistol. It was a pop-out holster thing, you know, the spring pop-out holster. And we're back in the woods, and we're the only two black guys in there. It was one of those places where every table had a red and white checkered table cloth, and no four chairs matched at the table. (chuckles) So, the guy said, "Here, take some of this." He says, "You don't need all that commercial stuff. This here is moonshine, white lightning." It was in a little brown jug, you know. I took a hit, and it felt like fire going down. And I said, "Geez." So, my friend from Detroit, he grabbed it, and he does it. When he does, he goes, (gasps), and the holster pops open, and the pistol falls on the ground. I have never seen so many shotguns, long shotguns, come out of nowhere. "You boys revenue boys?" "No, no, no, no. He's just dumb." (both laughing) I couldn't believe all them guns, and we're in the middle of—there's two of us out in the back of the woods, you know. "You idiot, you could have gotten us killed because they're thinking we—and they'd be serious about that." "Are you revenue folks or something?" Because they had wars down there about that stuff. That was one of the…kind of being in the south.

I didn't really do a lot going in town. So, I really didn't have a lot of interactions with the locals in terms of it, you know. And I'm not sure if it was—I just didn't think about it. It wasn't anything that I thought was

negative, even though I did have a few experiences. I remember, I was coming back from Chicago. I had a tire that got shredded, and the spare, it was not full of air; it wouldn't hold air. So, I go to the guy. I've got my wife. I've got two kids. I go to the guy and say, "Give me a tire, and I'll come back or something," and he said, "No, you've got to pay me." "Well, I don't have any money to pay you." "Well, let me see what you got." Bartering, what do you know? So, he ended up—what did he take? It was all right. It didn't mean that much to me, whatever it was. But they were hardball about, "No, you have to pay me. You have to give me something. I'll trade you." I wasn't too far away from the camp. If I'd got the tire, I could have went, took a cab, and came back that same night. He went, "Oh, no, you've got to give me something." We finally came to a conclusion, so I can get this tire on, because there was no place else. That happened to me out in California. It was a little different.

DePue: You lost me in one part of this, though. You mentioned you had a wife and two kids?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Well, I don't remember that happening. When in the story did that happen?

Jones: I got married. Well, here's the thing. This is, as I told Carol, "You help me for my post-traumatic stress." See, I was married three times before we got married. My first wife was from Chicago. We had two kids together.

DePue: What year did you get married?

Jones: I think it was just before I went in the service.

DePue: So '65?

Jones: Yeah, '65 I went in the service. I just went in the service because I went to Great Lakes, and then we were out in San Diego. The fact is my oldest daughter was born in San Diego.

DePue: What was your wife's name?

Jones: Doris.

DePue: Doris...

Jones: Hmmm, I don't remember her maiden name. I've erased that, but I can get it. I'll get it.

DePue: And your daughter's name?

Jones: Antonette and Thomas R. Jones, Jr.

DePue: Wow, that's quite a name.

Jones: That's why I started using senior, because he would not use junior. So, I got married before I went… now wait a minute; let me think that through. I was not married when I was in boot camp. It was after boot camp that I got married, because she went to San Diego with me. And that's where my daughter was born, my oldest daughter was born. Then, when I went to corpsman school, they came down to North Carolina. I'm remembering now. We lived in one of these little trailer things because it was temporary, you know, just for the training and all.

DePue: While you're in corpsman school, I would assume that you can spend evenings with your wife.

Jones: Right.

DePue: While you're in this mini Marine boot camp experience, my guess is that you couldn't spend evenings with the family.

Jones: After a period, I can. Once you get past the initial, you could. So, yeah, that's why we lived at the trailer because it was temporary, because I knew I was going to go someplace. I wasn't going to be there.

DePue: Okay, now, you've got yourself married. You've got a daughter. You've got a mother and a grandmother. This is about the time, just looking at your own records here, April, May, 1966, that's when you're at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Vietnam is just beginning to heat up in 1966. '65 is when the first major ground units were in there. So, this is becoming a bigger concern for the country.

Jones: Yes.

DePue: And, I would assume, for wise mothers and grandmothers as well.

Jones: Oh yeah. And, if they had been forty-five, sixty days later, I couldn't go to Vietnam, because I wouldn't have been finished with my sea duty. You know, I would not have enough time to do it. So, they got me just in time because, if I had went another month or two, I would not have had enough time to do that year.

DePue: And I'm assuming that they knew they needed you in Vietnam.

Jones: Oh, yeah. I mean, corpsmen were getting shipped out. The fact is, I have that in my book, in terms of, we all thought it was this master sergeant that was doing this, because he used to get so upset at corpsmen for washing their cars on the grinder. He would say, "That's the parade ground. You're not supposed to be washing your car there." After we got through the initial boot camp, well then, we're back at first—we're not boot camp people no more. So, we're

corpsmen. Then we had to serve there in the medical capacity for a while. So, we were corpsmen now.

DePue: At Camp Lejeune.

Jones: At Camp Lejeune, yeah, because then we went, you know—had done the Caribbean cruise. There, I was a corpsman with a unit, you know, in terms of it. That's where all that training of going around the islands were about.

DePue: Well, I know you got jungle warfare school in Panama.

Jones: In Panama, right.

DePue: Did that happen after Camp Lejeune?

Jones: During Camp Lejeune.

DePue: That was part of it.

Jones: Yeah. After we went on the Caribbean cruise—that's what they called it, Caribbean cruise—but that's where I went to jungle warfare school, and that was interesting. Going to jungle warfare in Panama, I was there. That was a time when Panama was beating up Americans, and they blew up the Shell building and all. I don't know if you remember that or not. What happened was, we were on leave there, and the folks on leave were told to stay put because they were attacking Americans. There was a whole big thing about the Panama Canal, what should happen and whatever. And they blew up…I think it was a couple of American companies' businesses. I think one of them was Shell.

I happened to be with a guy that was married to a Panamanian. So, we were there to see—we went to her family's house. Then this thing came on, "All American personnel…all American folks," you know, "People, stay off the streets because they are attacking Americans." So, we just stayed in the house there, in terms of comfortably, until they said it was okay to come back out. But that was the first time I had seen riot crowds running down the street, and, you know, just… One thing I do know about crowds, if you get hung up in a crowd, get to the outside as soon as you can because, if you're in the middle, you cannot stop from going wherever, which way they go.

The jungle warfare school was an interesting thing, too, because here you are, and they're teaching you stuff, you know. You had to handle snakes and hold them, so you won't be scared of them, supposedly. And then, you would go on these little night things, and they would wet the trail up, and then be snatching people at the end and stuff, trying to give you a sense of being in the jungle in Vietnam. Well, they did change the program because they don't be coming up behind you trying to snatch the last man, you know. In Nam they shoot you. They don't care about snatching you.

Then they had this one thing you did where you had to—they gave you a black sock full of rice. You had two live chickens for four men…two live chickens, and a knife, machete and a compass with it. They give you an azimuth[1] to shoot to get back. They blindfold you, and they fly you around. Then they put you down, and they give you the azimuth for you to make it back. Just follow your compass and all. Then you have an emergency beeper thing, you know. That was exciting. That was the first time we really moved through the jungle, being in a team.

But, the most vivid memory I have is a night we had been out doing maneuvers; it had been raining. We come back to our little hooch. So, we had to make a little hooch, which you just had a poncho, and then you put palm leaves down. We were tired; we're just doing all this. So, we come back. Everybody lay down, and everybody started complaining, "Will you stop moving," until all four of us realized, we're all four complaining. Something else was in the hooch with us. And this big anaconda then crawled up in there, out of the rain or whatever. (both laugh) He had the best night because, just like that, we was outside. All we did all night, we just keep our eye on him. We were out in the rain. (both laughing) The next day, we had snake handling class. But that night, we didn't have snake handling class, so he owned the hooch, the lean to, we had put together. That's one of the more vivid ones.

Then, at snake handling class, you put the snake around you and all that. But that was the night before. That snake had a real good sleep that night.

DePue: Again, let's go back to Vietnam because, kind of looming in the background during all of this, was your wife or your mother…?

Jones: They were all concerned, all concerned. I was concerned. Well, I was concerned at first. But then, I said, if they don't get me in sixty days, then I can't go. So, I kept thinking, because I knew folks, everybody was jolly. I know the master sergeant, officers and everybody jolly, you know, da-da-da-da. So, I said, there's probably a good chance I won't go. That's what I kept telling them, "Oh, there's probably a good chance I won't go. I've got two months. They've got to get me, you know, and they don't move that fast, and da-da-da-da." Well they do move fast when they want you. So, forty-five days before it, I get my orders to Vietnam. Like I said, forty-five days, I would not have been able to go.

DePue: Did you have any views about whether us being in Vietnam was a good or a bad idea at the time?

Jones: I never really thought about good or bad. My thoughts were, if I had to go, it was bad. But I didn't have the philosophical, conceptual stuff in my head then.

[1] The **azimuth** is the angle between the north vector and the perpendicular projection of the star down onto the horizon. (*en.wikipedia.org/wiki/**Azimuth***

DePue: Were you aware, though, that there was the beginning of protests in the colleges and universities and an antiwar movement?

Jones: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I was aware of it. A lot of the guys I served were off into it or came from that. So, they would preach in the barracks, and they would play, and everybody—you know, there's always some guitar player in every group. So, they would sing all the protest songs and folks. We knew it and all, but we were in such a cocoon environment in training that I never really ventured out. I didn't go to Raleigh, North Carolina. I didn't really go out there. I would save up and then come back to Chicago. So, I was doing more family than really…I mean, I knew it was going on, but I wasn't really into it at that time. And, because I was just on training and going to the family, then I'd come back to training. So, I never really got that concept to be passionate about it at that time. Now, when I went over, that was different. Then I had a bird's-eye view.

DePue: Well, that's going to be part two of our conversation. I think we'll have at least three sessions here. I think this is a place to make a clean break, and we can pick up the next session with you going to Vietnam and that whole year's experience in Vietnam.

Jones: I'll work on some of the specific dates and times for the schools and all that.

DePue: This has been a very interesting look into your early life, and it's important, for me especially, to get a sense of where you came from and what the motivations were and what your foundations were. So, I appreciate you spending the time with us.

Jones: You'll find a lot of this in the book. (chuckles)

DePue: Well, I haven't gotten far into the book yet, but I'm going to have to—I'm going to be reading it for our next session, absolutely. We'll go ahead and stop here.

(end of interview #1 #2 continues)

Interview with Thomas Jones

VRV-A-L-2011-043.02

Interview # 2: October 6, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Thursday, October 6, 2011. This is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. Today I'm in the home of Thomas Jones. Good afternoon, Tom.

Jones: Good afternoon.

DePue: Tom, this is our second session. We had the first session, dealing with your experiences, everything leading up to the point of actually getting to Vietnam. But it was all important history, especially growing up as a black in Peoria, and then going to Chicago.

Jones: It was very diverse.

DePue: Those were great stories.

Jones: I tell people, when I speak, that I was a state brat. Born in Quincy, grew up part of my life in Peoria, grew up in the projects in Chicago.

DePue: And I'd like to spend that much time, so that I and anybody who is listening to this down the road, gets a real understanding of who you were, at least, before you went to Vietnam.

Jones: I understand.

DePue: And I know that very much a part of your story is, once you get to Vietnam, you kind of become a different person to a certain respect.

Jones: Totally different.

DePue: So, let's ask just one or two questions about before you go to Vietnam. I think we talked about this briefly, but did you have a chance to get leave right before you left?

Jones: I did, before I left, because I got back from doing the Caribbean cruise. I had my orders. I went home, and I think I was there for like a couple of weeks, and then I went to Vietnam.

DePue: And you had one child at the time?

Jones: I had one.

DePue: How old?

Jones: Let's see, at that time she was about four, four or five, something like that… just starting in school.

DePue: Old enough to understand that daddy was going away for a while?

Jones: I think she knew I was going, but the conversation I had beforehand, of course, I said, yes, yes, yes. It's one thing, going away for a while. But going away for a while has always been, at the most, was weeks, you know, when I was on the Caribbean cruise and all that kind of stuff. So, really, I don't really think she understood. It was just, daddy's going away, be going away for, you know, this short period of time. A week, two weeks was long to her. So, I don't think her expectations of gone was long as I was really gone.

DePue: Your wife's name again?

Jones: At that time, my wife was Doris.

DePue: What was Doris' feelings about you going to Vietnam? It couldn't have been a surprise to her what this could mean.

Jones: Well, you know, actually, as I said, forty-five more days, I wouldn't have had enough time to go. But, of course, Uncle Sam's timing was impeccable, and he got me. (chuckles) If I had waited forty-five days, I wouldn't have had the rotation time, but they got me. She was scared because everything, at that time, it was '67, it was starting to get hot over there in the early part of '67. So, we were starting to put more troops over there. So, she was scared, but, you know, a lot of that came out at the end of '67, when you had Khe Sanh, when you had Tet, you know, those things is when it really hit the news media.

DePue: Was she not expressing her anxieties with you before you left?

Jones: I don't think she expressed them to the intensity she had them inside. There was so much unknown. As I went through these different training sessions,

you know, corpsman school was one thing, going through down in North Carolina to Camp Lejeune, you know. And then I went on the Caribbean cruise. It was still military. It wasn't the mindset of combat military. Even though I was doing all this training, it was training.

DePue: That gets me to the next question. What's going on in your mind, knowing that you're now going to the real show.

Jones: You know, I didn't really… It wasn't fear. It was anxiety, going to some place where there's shooting. But again, I didn't really have a total understanding. I still had this thing about, well, being in medical, I'll probably be behind the lines, you know. A medical situation is something behind the lines. I had went through jungle warfare training in Panama, but it was training, again. So, I didn't really have an understanding. Once I got there, I understood there is no frontlines. The combat zone is where everybody is shooting at you.

Seaman Recruit Jones in fire training while at Basic Training. The training provided one of the many opportunities for the drill instructors to harass the recruits.

DePue: I've got to believe, though, that the Navy and the Marines had something in mind for you when they sent you down to jungle warfare school, that they weren't necessarily going to waste that training.

Jones: It should have been a big hint. (both laughing) Well, the thing is, I really wasn't focusing on that, because what happened is, I will still be with the group I was with. So, we went as a group, and it was just another training thing. My mind didn't do the connections, and I didn't really have a sense of Vietnam. I mean, the Panama war school— after that, they really put together jungle warfare things that reflected Vietnam. But there, it was survival in the jungle, how to shoot azimuths, read compasses; it's how to survive in the jungle, with you out there by yourself. You know, it was those kind of things. So, it was still like a training thing. They do things like have you go on patrols at night, and then the instructors would try to snatch you. But I didn't really get the sense of the feel of what it meant, of combat in a jungle. I mean, it was training, but I'd been trained in a lot of stuff.

DePue: It wasn't life and death yet?

Jones: Yeah, it wasn't the finality. The instructor would say, you messed that up; now do it again. After that, it's been that kind of stuff. Or you say, yeah, you know, you could have been dead if you did this and that. Well, okay, it's still a conceptual thing, in the head. So, I don't really—as I'm thinking back—remember any great fear of going. I was just, okay, I'm going over here for a

year, and I'll do it. But I'm thinking, well, I'll be in a medical battalion and behind the lines.

DePue: Let's get you to Vietnam. But, before we do that, so much of what we're going to be talking about is based on what I've read in the book, *Lost Survivor*. Now, that's your book that you've written here. And, as we get towards the end of this whole conversation, probably the next session or after that, we'll talk about why you wrote the book.

Jones: Okay.

DePue: *The Lost Survivor: The Novel of a Black Soldier's Journey to Vietnam and Back*. And so, for the record here, Tom, what I'd like to ask you is, how autobiographical is this book?

Jones: All the emotions are mine. The things where it's much more closely is when I was in Vietnam, because I was a corpsman, I was in a team, a long-range reconnaissance team, until I got wounded,—even though they gave me one Purple Heart for wounds—until I got wounded a few times. Then I went to third shore party for… I think it was about thirty days or something, before I left Vietnam.

The emotions of coming home, in terms of that, I created the character to go through certain emotions because he went back, because that's one of the choices that happened to so many Vietnam veterans. When they came, they couldn't do the adjustment or couldn't get traction back in their lives. To show you the effects, you actually went back to Vietnam and thought that was a choice. That's when you realize how screwed up your head is, that you think that that's a choice of coming home, you know.

So, the emotions are there. Yeah, I went through. I've been married three times, in terms of why I finally ended up being married one time for a long period of time. A lot of that is because of where my head was still fragmented and fractured, in terms of the experiences I had in Vietnam, which, at that time, I didn't realize it, of course; it's everybody's fault. I'll take some blame, but, you know, it couldn't be me in my own mind. So, a lot of the experiences, all the emotional experiences, I did go through. A lot of the specific kinds of things were going through the patrols in Vietnam. And some of the situational things, when I came back and dealing with people, that's what I really tried to capture. Those were mine.

DePue: Well, I know you're working on an audio version of the book right now. And I've listened to the introduction and portions of that. Here's one of the things that really struck me, and I think it really crystallizes what you were just talking about and what the book is really all about. This is your statement, that this is a book that, "Follows the metamorphosis of a man to a soldier and of a soldier back to a man again."

Jones: You really become a different person, because all the things that defined you before means nothing when you get in a firefight. Once that happens, the only thing that then means anything to you is, what do I need to do to survive? And none of the things before—you don't see any bearing on that. So, the combat redefines you to that you now become, I'm going to be a survivor at all costs. Well, that's not our normal way of growing up. But that's what you have to do to have the mindset to survive in continuous combat. It's not like every once in a while, but continuous because, in a recon team, you're out there for ten days; you come back for a week and go back out for ten days. So, you know you're going back in—no matter if you come back—when you come in from the jungle, from the patrol, you know you're going back out. So, you don't want to let that survival skill get dull. You're always on edge; you're always ready to react, ready to act and do.

So, it was a transformation. Who I was when I went to Vietnam, I was a totally different person when I came back. The things that were fearful to me before Vietnam seemed childish, almost, just because this was so—everything was such a possible final act. If you do something, make a mistake, it could be a final act. There are no do-overs or you're going to keep doing it until you do it right. If you don't do it right the first time, the possibility is high you will not get another chance to say, next time I'll do it right.

And, once you lose who you are, you become just a reactive animal in the situations you're in. And when you come back, now, all of a sudden, everybody remembers you as when you left, and it's very difficult for them to understand that, how can you be gone only a year and you have such a dramatic change. You remember people, and you sort of remember situations and events, but they're not vivid in your mind because you still have the survival. What you measure things against has changed. Before you left, you may have measured, oh, I live a block away. I need some friends and da-da-da-da. But afterwards, it doesn't matter if he's a friend or not. You know, you have to get back to those things that defined you. You've been dealing with such intensity of staying alive, not living, but the intensity of staying alive. What makes a lost survivor in my mind is that your choice is you survive or you die. You don't see no other choices in between those two parts of that spectrum. You don't see any difference. It's either here or here. And, when you come home, all of a sudden you have all these things where people look at in shades of different grays.

That's one of the things that always got me, folks would come back, and you say, let's go do this. And they'd say, oh maybe, could be, let me think about it. Your mind has, well I'm going to do this; you go do it. But you come back, all of a sudden, folks seem all gray and fuzzy to you because you've been doing things that are very precise in terms of what you're doing. But, you come back, it's like an amoeba or something that's enveloped your [that you're given. You don't really see the structures that defined who you were before you went; you don't see them. I mean, you have to find them again. It's

like coming out of a fog, and you find something that's solid. And all of a sudden, you realize, okay, this is different. It's all emotional and mental. So, even though—and I came back and I had all my arms; I had my body; I had…everything that looked like me, looked like me. (chuckling) But, I was a totally different person in my head, in who I was.

DePue: Let's get started with the specifics of the story. When did you arrive? When did you ship out to Vietnam? June of '67 I believe.

Jones: June of '67.

DePue: Do you remember arriving in Vietnam and your first impressions of the place? Did you fly over or ship over?

Jones: Flew over.

DePue: And a civilian aircraft, I'd bet.

Jones: Civilian aircraft, Braniff, that's true. That's in the story. That's how we flew in. I think what hit me was when the pilot said, "Hopefully, you'll fly with us going home one year from now." That sort of puts—all of a sudden—one year from now? I mean, that said it. I'm going to be here for one year. And I hadn't even got off the plane yet, and I'm going to be there one year. I had no idea when I was going. I write in the book about getting on the C-130, flying up from Da Nang and putting a flak jacket underneath, because for snipers and all. But, there was these fuel tanks in the middle, and, if somebody hit them, the whole plane blew up. That's when it was like, this is not making no sense. But you sit on the flak jacket.(laughing) You know, and that's sort of when it starts.

And then when you get there, you're a new guy, and nobody wants to really have a personal relationship. You know, does your momma cook good foods? Is your girlfriend pretty? They don't care about that. That's all the stuff that defined who you were before you came. They don't want to create that personal relationship.

DePue: The guys who were there already?

Jones: The guys who were there already.

DePue: Did you understand at that time why they didn't?

Jones: No. I just thought they were hard dudes. I didn't have no idea. After I got there and got a few patrols, I understood then, because, even though you may say, okay, I'll make a buddy and friends, you go on the next patrol, and you get in a firefight, and your friend gets killed, it's a friend killed. But, if you just go out with some guy that's there on the team, because now you have a team focus, it's not individual any more. You learn about people once you're

part of a team. See, recon was unusual because you are a team, and the team is all important. So, what that does is, your relationship is to the team and your team members. So, it's really a tight focus because those are the ones who are out there with you. So, if somebody walks into your hooch or something like that and starts talking to you, they will never mean as much or be friends as the team that you're with. You really give up who you are to become part of the team.

DePue: Because?

Jones: Survival. They're there with you, when it's only six or seven of you.

DePue: Let's go back to the question, though, the very first impressions you had of Vietnam, getting off that C-130.

Jones: The C-130 was the second. When I got there on Braniff, I mean it was just total confusion. When you go through training, you don't go through training to come into a combat base. You go to training, and you're at a base, where you come out of your barracks, and you go do what you're doing, and you come back to your barracks. It's got an order to it.

I mean, the first thing, the first impression I had, was when the door opened and the smell. The smell was the thing that really hit and then the noise. Because, even if you're on a base in training, you don't hear it all the time. Now here you heard all these guns firing, and you heard explosions in the distance and all. And that's before you've even taken the first step down off the plane. But it was the smell. It was that heat that just gets you, and you start sweating just like that, (snaps his fingers) and your whole body just gets wet. But I think the smell, the sights and the sounds, those were the things that said that just your mind is confused. That's when you start getting scared. (chuckles)

DePue: What was your unit of assignment? When did you find out where you were going to end up?

Jones: Actually, I think like the second day. Actually I volunteered for recon. I said, oh well. And it's kind of interesting—

(pause in recording – voice yells something in the background)

DePue: Thank you.

Jones: I volunteered to go. You know, you had to volunteer. The thing I think that got me is they said, well if you're in recon, you can run. But, if you're in a grunt unit or infantry, you've got to hold the hill until they come and rescue you. (chuckling) So, I said, well, if I can run, you know. Now, I've got partial mentality; it's just the second day there. If I can run, it's got to be better than

you've got to stay there, with people shooting at you, until somebody else comes.

DePue: They didn't bother to tell you, you're going to have a lot more reasons to be running.

Jones: Well, no. They didn't tell me that part. I had been in jungle warfare school, you know, and I was using that as my basis for… So, it was like jungle games, you know, in terms of what we did there. Until you get into the firefight, you don't have no idea what it means. Yeah, you train for it, and you sort of know, well, I can get shot and get killed and all that. But, when you first have the firefight is when you understand that whatever you think, whatever you feel don't mean nothing. The only thing that matters is what you're doing at that moment not to get shot.

DePue: The specific unit you're assigned to?

Jones: Third Recon Battalion, yeah.

DePue: Part of which division?

Jones: It was part of the 3rd Marine Division, but it was Recon 3rd, and it was long-range reconnaissance.

DePue: Now, I don't want to get you too far off base, but I thought I saw in your records, it was the 2nd Marine Division. It did say, 3rd Recon Battalion, and I know that, the way the Marine Corps is structured, if you're in the 3rd Division, the Recon Battalion in the 3rd Division is the 3rd Battalion.

Jones: Right. That's what I always knew it was. I've got to go back and check that. Of course, the papers filled out to Vietnam are back here.

DePue: I don't know. (both laugh) You mean somebody made a mistake perhaps?

Jones: A lot of things happened, and they're not mistakes until other people see it. (chuckles)

DePue: What line company, do you recall that?

Jones: It was Charlie Company. Well, it's kind of interesting because I went to the 3rd Marine Reconnaissance Battalion Association, which you have to be there. They said the records burnt up in Kansas, so you've got to go through this long thing. Well, I happened to have my records, and I sent them to them. Of course, as soon as they got them, they said, oh, you're a lifetime member because I had all the records. You couldn't even become part of that organization unless you were a part, and they checked it. Before we leave here, I have to double check that. I don't think I left it out.

DePue: I've got a copy of that. We can talk about that later. You said you were assigned to a six-man team. Was Charlie Company organized in platoons then?

Jones: Well, they called them teams. I mean, it may be like a platoon.

DePue: A platoon in the Army, at least, was generally about thirty to forty people, and that would have squads that would be the sub-organization under that.

Jones: It would be like squads more than anything else because each team stayed together.

DePue: Flesh out who's in the team. What are the team members?

Jones: Well, you had a team leader, an assistant team leader, a radio man, corpsman, and then you had two others. For us, we had an M-79, and we had, thank God, a guy that liked to carry the M-60. An M-60 is probably the heaviest firepower any team can have when you've got six folks.

DePue: M-79 being the grenade launcher.

Jones: The grenade launcher, yeah.

DePue: And the M-60 being…?

Jones: It's just a machine gun, 60 millimeters.

DePue: It's the same caliber as the M-16 rifle, isn't it? No, it's larger.

Jones: Yeah, it's larger. The M-16 is about 7.62 millimeters.

DePue: That's right; you're right.

Jones: I'm just starting to remember this because I'm going through this audio thing, and this guy is creating these sounds he's looking for, like how does the .45 sound? How does the M-16 sound? How does the AK-47 sound?

DePue: What's the senior rank in the unit then?

Jones: You usually have a corporal. You have a sergeant. It wasn't officers.

DePue: This was a Marine unit, correct?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

DePue: What's a Navy corpsman doing in a Marine unit then?

Jones: I asked myself that many times, but the corpsmen were the medical support for the Marines. That's what it basically is. In the Army, they have their

medics, which is a little different. In the Navy, you become a hospital corpsman, and you get more training than you do if you are a medic. But the medical support for Marines has been from the Navy in terms of, from the medical side it's been corpsmen.

DePue: So, here's the question for you, having lived through this experience. Were you more Marine or more Navy, once you were in that unit?

Jones: Marine, easy answer. If you're going to stay there, Marine. That's why Marines respect the corpsmen. I can go to Marine Corps things and all, you know. They have a lot of respect for corpsmen because corpsmen is with them, which means you start thinking like a Marine. You don't think like a Navy guy.

DePue: Here's something else that might surprise people who are reading the book and reading about J.D., that's your protagonist in the book. He sounds like he's just as much a warrior and just as much armed for combat as the Marines were.

Jones: Oh, yeah, six men, six or seven men. It's not like a medic or something. You carried a .45. I have used in combat, every weapon you can use by a Marine. There's only six of you. You can't say, he's a corpsman; you don't have to shoot, even though these fifty folks are trying to get you.

DePue: When you went through training, did you understand that you were being trained to be an infantryman, as well as a corpsman?

Jones: Oh, yeah. When I started crawling under the wire, and they were shooting real machinegun bullets over, I figured this is not the Navy. (chuckles) And that's what it is; it's a mental adjustment.

DePue: So, the expectations were that you'd have to fight just like the rest of the guys would.

Jones: I didn't understand that part because, see, we really didn't get to… At that point, it was still early on, I figured, you know, they always say, the corpsman had a .45. That was usually the standard issue to a corpsman. It was just basically usually for a defense if you were doing something. But to be this aggressor and actually be a member of the team and just being just like any other Marine, no, I had no idea that that's really what was going to be happening.

DePue: Okay. I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit because I'm so fascinated to hear your reflections on this. But, I want you to explain, first of all, where did you end up? Where was your base of operation?

Jones: Actually, when I first got there, it was at Dong Ha, and then we moved to Quang Tri. They put a new camp and started in Quang Tri. All my time was at basically Dong Ha and Quang Tri.

DePue: And where is that in the country here?

Jones: It's right up next to the DMZ [demilitarized zone].

DePue: The map I'm looking at for the 1st Corps Tactical Area has both of them. So, next to the DMZ, it's in what we would call the I Corps area.

Jones: I was in the I Corps area, number one. That's the big military designation. There, it was in Dong Ha. Quang Tri is the province; the whole province is called Quang Tri.

DePue: But I see Dong Ha, and I see Quang Tri in the city, as well.

Jones: Right. When I first went, we was at Dong Ha. They moved and opened a new base at Quang Tri because it was like five or so miles further south of the DMZ, because Dong Ha was an artillery range from across the DMZ.

DePue: Well, just another thing that wouldn't make sense to you, I would guess…if the bad guys are shooting artillery, why can't we go get the bad guys' artillery?

Jones: Well, you didn't have that thought while they were doing it. (both laugh) The things we used for our basis of rational thought didn't count; you learned that. The only thing we appreciated is, going to Quang Tri, down the road, took us out of artillery range. I was at Dong Ha when they hit the ammo dump blew, and the fuel dump, you know. That's real fireworks.

Being in recon, the one thing we hated was being in for incoming. We always preferred to be in the bush, where we could move, move around. The big difference was, if you notice, Dong Ha is closer; Quang Tri is farther.

DePue: You doubled the distance from the DMZ.

Jones: Right. So, they took it out of artillery range, and that's what the key thing was.

DePue: What was on that compound?

Jones: Oh, you had Marines. Really it was a Marine base above everything, where I was at. Recon kept to themselves. It wasn't that you went over and just make friends with a lot of other units. Recon was really pretty self-contained.

DePue: Was there a reason for that? It was just kind of the psychology or the mindset?

Jones: It's the psychology of the teams, again. The whole thing was team, you know. You was part of a team. Now, you go into hell and back for the team, remember.

DePue: You got there—it sounds like—either June or early July. Tell us about the weather and the terrain where you're going to be operating.

Jones: When I started, it was all hot, muggy, and then the monsoon. Because you're right off of the hearing the monsoons come across; that's when it was wet and cold, raining all the time, and I mean raining. It's not like—

DePue: When does the monsoon season hit?

Jones: Probably, I think, probably like we call our fall, if I'm doing the time. And you would just be wet all the time. Then, you know, during the other times, the sun's there, be so hot. Then you go into the jungle, which holds humidity and everything close to the ground, so you would just be sweating. But after I was there a while, I didn't sweat as much, Now that I'm thinking about it; I never thought about that before. When I first got there, I couldn't do nothing without sweating. If you took three steps, you started sweating. But, after a while, your body does adjust.

DePue: What was the terrain?

Jones: Mountainous, valleys.

DePue: Rugged mountains?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Jungle covered.

DePue: You always hear about triple tier canopy jungle. Was that what you experienced?

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Can you describe what that's like?

Jones: The vegetation is so thick, and it's so high. It could be seventy-five, fifty feet or more, and you see little sunlight shafts come through because it's so thick and so high. When you get in that stuff, that high triple canopy things—I mean, they call it triple canopy because it has its different levels—you cannot see the sky. You see sunlight that breaks through leaves and things like that, patches, and it's so tall that…Coming from here, I never knew that was what a jungle was. The only reference I had was Tarzan movies.

DePue: There was plenty of those in the '50s.

Jones: Yeah, and they had them open most of the time, except when he was swinging on the vine, which you didn't do either, by the way. (chuckles) I think that was one of the big shocks. In Panama, you know, you had that, but it wasn't the mountainous. I mean, we were going up and down, or else these valleys between the mountains, with real thick canopy. There was places it would be light, but it's just this like ambiance lighting, you know, just light reflecting off of leaves, getting down. And, you go to some other areas, it would be almost like it was dusk. It would be so dark, and it would be the middle of the day.

DePue: What were your initial impressions of the Vietnamese people?

Jones: You know, one of the things that was a cultural shock. In America we have poor people, and they have phones and cars and things. They just don't have quality or beat or battered up or whatever. But to understand, we had no understanding of a peasant society with villages, you know, what that all meant. That was probably the thing that was one of the adjustments, the villages. They say, I'm going to the city. You go there, and there's a little village, you know. Where's the city? Our concept of cities is houses and buildings. But to go to a peasant society, where you have a village, and there, this whole ancestral thing, you know, and terms that you deal with. That was probably the culture shock.

You know, like, these people must be lower than poor because our sense is that like they don't have nothing. But, to them, they were rich because they had two water buffalos, and they had a plot for rice, growing rice and all. I think that was the cultural shock because it's really all set in a different culture there. There's no way in the world we ever had no training to understand the culture or the view or the sense of it.

DePue: So much about what Americans today understand about the nature of combat in Vietnam is the Vietnamese, and were they friend or foe or something in between? What was…

Jones: In recon, we didn't trust anybody because, so many times, we've seen folks…it could be the barber. You go get your haircut, and then, all of a sudden, something happens, and you can see they're in the wire.

DePue: What does it mean, that they're on the wire?

Jones: On the perimeter, you know, they've attacked that night, and they got killed. They'd be in the wire, dead. But, see, recon really kept to itself. You really didn't mix with a lot of other units and all. You stayed with yourself. When you weren't there, you did things. You wasn't out in the bush; your team was together. You may have had individual ones you met in other units or something, but there was really no crossbreed for Marines to Army, for

example. Folks may have a friend relationship, but it's individual, you know, somehow or another. It was some kind of individual thing.

DePue: When you're not out on patrol, and you're at base, I would assume you occasionally do get to a town or a village someplace, and you're seeing Vietnamese people in their own environment. Did you view them as potential enemies or as people who wanted you there?

Jones: Well, our thought was, as soon as you [away from microphone – unintelligible] because, if you lost that mentality something could happen at any time. So, you always had your radar screen up. You always was ready to react to something, which meant you always was scanning. You wanted to make sure, if somebody walked somewhere, whether they're coming towards you. You was always assessing your environment.

DePue: Would it make any difference if they're a sixty year-old man or an old woman or a young kid, to you? No?

Jones: No, because they all—you know, we've been in situations where all those three categories have shot and tried to kill you. So, you just…you're weary of anyone who wasn't in a recon. If you weren't part of a recon, you worry who [scratch on recording – unintelligible] was the Vietnamese. I mean, you would make relationships, and some made relationships with Vietnamese [more scratches on recording] but very seldom, when you go out, like to a building or village that was outside the base. Most of my time was spent on the base.]

DePue: Two different kinds of enemy that you might be facing, one being the Viet Cong and the other being North Vietnamese, especially that far north of South Vietnam. Were you going to face both?

Jones: We faced both. Most of the folks we were faced with was North Vietnamese, was the actual army.

DePue: Which one were you more respectful or fearful of?

Jones: The NVA [North Vietnamese Army].

DePue: Because?

Jones: Well, we'd see these booby traps, and they're coming to shoot at you, but they'd run away. The NVA will stay there until someone tell them to leave. (chuckles) That's a big difference. In fact, we used to see the VC (Viet Cong) would just, you know. But the NVA, we used call them, you know, "Mister Charlie." We had respect for them because they were trained, and until someone told them to break off, they wouldn't break. The VC, they just wanted, you know… The VC, we didn't really—we wasn't that worried about the VC, most of the time, because, most of the time, we didn't do trails. A lot of time, if you do trails or you do something like that, you run into the VC.

DePue: When you say we didn't do trails, what precisely do you mean by that?

Jones: Oh, we'd go out in the bush, and there was a trail where you can see where folks' pathway—you know foot trail or something—we would never walk on them. We would go up and go parallel to them, so we could see the trail and follow it, because as long as you stayed off the trails and all, you could stumble upon the VC. For the most time, we were always dealing with booby traps, which means you're looking at where you think people are going to walk, where the people all started walking. They don't go through the jungle. They try to find a trail to go through because it's easier to walk through the jungle if you're on a trail. So, the trail is the most dangerous place you can be, because everybody knows that's where people walk. So, it meant in recon, you don't want to do trails. When we came across a trail, and we wanted to follow that trail to see where it went or who was on it, we would cross it and go parallel to it through the brush.

DePue: Which sounds nice, until you start trying to break through the brush.

Jones: Walking through the brush, it takes time, and it's an interesting urgent patience. Everything's urgent patience because you had to be moving, because you want to keep moving. But, if you try to, you couldn't fight it because you never would win. You can't beat the jungle when moving through it, unless you're hacking through it. And you couldn't hack through it because no one is supposed to know you're there. If you start hacking, people know you're out there. You learn how to be very precise the way you move, where you step, how you step, because you had to walk a certain way. You would step and move things out. We spent most of our time walking through the bush. We did not use trails. Trails always were bad. Something bad will happen to you using the trails.

DePue: One of the things that really stuck with me in the book is the "wait a minute vines." Tell us about the "wait a minute vines."

Jones: Little green-yellow vines, and these little thin things with little stickers, but, once they wrapped around you, and you start pushing and pulling and all that. The next thing you know you had more on you. I mean, they can just engulf you, and you'd be out there just struggling like you're chained or something. They're little thin vines, but they're all filled with little stickers. Anything that was man-made, it seemed to be, it would grab. Obviously, animals could walk through it. They have fur and all that, and so it didn't—you know, they can walk through it easily. But you start having clothes on or stuff like that and you start walking through a thing of bushes of "wait a minute vines," and all… (audio interference) It came off. [referring to the microphone]

DePue: That's not good is it? We're going to take a quick pause here.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, after a very quick break, hopefully we didn't lose too much. Having kind of experienced some of that stuff, with "wait a minute vines," nothing to the scale that you had, I had some appreciation for it. I wanted to ask you more about the expectations of you as a corpsman. What were you expected to do, beyond being another infantryman there in the team?

Jones: Being a corpsman meant being there, not just for medical. It meant for emotional and mental. You were Doc. You were—no matter what. Sometimes you're Chaplain, you know, when someone is going through something. You were the person that was different, but you were there with them being the same. So, being a corpsman really was more than medical, even though that's the reason, officially, why you were there, because you were the different person, by being medically trained and all. You were the only one. Now they cross-train a lot, in terms of stuff, you know. But, back then, they didn't cross-train. But until someone got wounded, you were just another Marine.

DePue: Was it somewhat intimidating? You had far less training than a physician would have or a surgeon. Yet, you're going to see some stuff that a lot of surgeons don't see on a day-to-day basis.

Jones: That was true.

DePue: Was that intimidating to you a certain extent?

Jones: I never thought about it in terms of that. You know, as I go back, I start thinking about the things I didn't think about. (chuckles) Now, I would have a whole lot of different questions, you know, just being older and thinking about it. You know, you say, I'm going here. I said, Okay. Then what am I supposed to do? You do this and this. Okay. I didn't remember having all that…

It wasn't until I was on a plane that it really hit me that, you know, it's going to war. You can get killed. I mean, I was there. Then, of course, you're on the plane. You can't say, I don't want to go; turn it around. So, being a corpsman there, it was, what was I supposed to do? You'd be so focused on it because nothing else counted, nothing else counted. Nothing else counted.

The other team members, they wanted to make sure that you knew as much as they did about operating and moving in the bush because you're out there with them. You can't have six guys, seven guys, you know, and five of them know what they're doing, and one don't. And he's bringing up the rear, making a lot of noise and bringing attention. In recon, it was so folks do not know you're there. That's the number one thing you always wanted to do.

DePue: You mentioned that, as the new guy in the unit, you weren't necessarily embraced or treated well. But, did somebody then kind of take you under their wing to teach you the ropes?

Jones: Once you got part of a team, because now you're part of them. So, they wanted to make sure you knew. Then you had folks to show you stuff and, you know, because, when you first get there, you haven't been out. You don't know what's going to happen. That's one thing I put in the book, that you get into your first firefight, you can cry "Momma." You can pee on yourself, crap on yourself, do all kinds of things. What are you doing next? Did you cover your team member? Did you do this; did you do that? That's what was important.

DePue: You were, shall we say, just a little bit older than the average kid in Vietnam at the time.

Jones: Which I found out when I got there. (laughing)

DePue: Do you think that worked to your advantage?

Jones: In some ways, I think it may have been helpful. A lot of them, they were kids, you know, there. They hadn't really been through anything other than school or maybe been out of school a couple of years, from being in high school. And all of a sudden, they're over there. To me, I had a sense they were kids because I was older. But the only thing that meant is, I would question doing something super stupid before they did. They would go ahead and do it and then find out. But, being older, a lot of times I would, umm, no, I don't think I'm going to do that, when I had the choice.

But that was all not being in the bush, because, once you go out and you out in the bush, everybody is mature who's out there. (chuckles) It's amazing how these nineteen, eighteen, these twenty year-old kids, how mature they got because they would have other men's lives in their hands.

DePue: Getting to Vietnam, you're also a black man coming from a society where there's a considerable amount of racial turmoil going on, as well as the antiwar protests and student protests and everything else.

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: How did that play out once you got to Vietnam?

Jones: In recon, didn't focus on it at all. You was going to be in a week, and you're going back out. That's what you focus on. You hear about what's going on at home, and you know, before you left, how things were. Really, recon in Nam was such a focused thing to be a part of. So, you didn't have all that racial conflict, like you did in the rear units, you know, sort of, where they had time to do that. I mean, you go out. Sometimes you didn't have a weekend. You may be in three days, and then, all of a sudden, go out. You were so focused all the time about making sure you did everything that you had to do to go on patrol and stay alive. So, you didn't really have that time.

Now, there's always a few incidences where someone—because folks can mess with you by sending you out and doing stuff. You know, you piss somebody off, they can put you in all kinds of situations. You come in on this team, and then you going out two days later with this team. That make for everybody gets uncomfortable because I'm used to being on this team. I know what they can do. I know who I can trust. But, I've got to now be on another team, and I don't know, and I've got to learn who they are and how they are because you get to know each other, in terms of who you are. So, I don't know, recon was different when it came to that.

DePue: Was there one specific team you worked with most of the time, then?

Jones: Yeah, I was really with two teams when I was there. One, you know, when I first got there, and then folks started leaving and people dying.

DePue: Can you flesh out some of the names and personalities of the team when you first got there?

Jones: Personalities yes, names…That's what I found that's fascinating. I've had people say, have you ever tried to keep contact with folks, you know, or something like that? I never did.

DePue: Well, paint us a picture, as much as you can, of the people that were there when you first got there, on that recon team.

Jones: Well, some of them, I put in the book, like Mex, you know. He was a point guy; he really was. And then, the guy that liked to carry the 60 [M60 machine gun], called Sweeney, but he was big, a country fed boy and all. The sergeant we had was a big black guy. The physical descriptions that I put in the book were of the folks I served with, the teams, the physical descriptions.

DePue: And this is the people that you went out—in the book, it was talking about that mission at Khe Sanh, which we'll get to a little bit later.

Jones: So, those were their personalities and all. You know, I find this fascinating; I have blanked out stuff about Nam. That's why I started writing because I was having all these crazy nightmares. It started off as a therapeutical thing, just to write and get it out. But I found things I…I just blocked and didn't want to bring them up. You know, names, they're not there. I have vague memories of one or two names from Vietnam, when I was there. When I was there, it was important, and you just knew the person by his name, most of the time by a nickname. (chuckles) You know, it wasn't a formal thing, like, oh yeah, first and last name.

DePue: Who were you known as?

Jones: Basically, just Doc, because he's a corpsman. That's what everybody would call you, is Doc. So everybody just, just Doc, because there's only—there may

be five teams that's part of the company, or four or five teams—there's only four or five Docs, and, most times, you was with your team.

DePue: Is the name, *Doc*, then, something of respect?

Jones: Oh yeah, for Marines? Oh yeah, because you're out there with them. That's what the Marines always respected by the corpsmen.

DePue: What I'd like to have you do now is flesh out your first patrol, if you can remember that one.

Jones: If you live through your first patrol, you can live through others. I mean, not just whether you're killed or not, but mentally, because when you come off, you know you're going back. The first patrol: The first thing I remember on the first patrol is when we did get into a firefight and when the pilot dropped the bomb on us. (chuckles)

DePue: He dropped the bomb on you, the—

Jones: Oh, yeah. The part in the book where it talks about that, that really was my first patrol. We got out. We had contact. They were surrounding around us. They were just—

DePue: They being the VC?

Jones: This is the NVA. We were on this little knoll, and it had this ridgeline that went around like three ways behind, you know, and there were some planes behind us. We walked out. We were on this little knoll waiting to move, and all of a sudden, we start receiving fire. Then we looked up, and all of a sudden, all these brown uniforms were everywhere. There was a phantom (a kind of jet plane). He came in to drop some bombs.

Well, what I remember is, when I looked, the team leader says, "Keep your heads down. The jet's coming in. He's going to drop some bombs." And I looked back, and it looked like that jet was way off. You saw this little silver pods, you know, from the distance, come out. The jet pulled up, and they came. Well, the first bomb went over us and hit the ridgeline. The second one fell short and hit the knoll we were on, and that was the first wounded that I had to deal with. Both of them were killed.

Then, after that, we—and I almost shot my gun, because, you know, when you first go out on a patrol, you don't have your jungle sense. You've still got all this sense of base and people and noise. You've got all this stuff in your head. That's why, when you first go out, you have to stop and wait a while for your head to get uncluttered from all the sounds that you have and the anticipation of those kind of sounds. That's the other thing, because the sounds are totally different when you're in the jungle. And everything just looks green, and it takes a while before you really can start seeing shapes.

Like here are the leaves and, you know, real shapes, in terms of things, because everything just seems blurred. Partially, it's because you're scared, you know, in terms of it. You can't really focus on anything, and it's your first time. You expect that you could get shot at, and you look around and see anybody could be shooting at you from anywhere because it all looks the same. You don't have a focus. You can't distinguish things. You can't distinguish shapes and all. It just seems green until, after a while, you start seeing all these leaves, and now you see stalks that you're aware. Now you can see them in terms.

The first patrol, you know, the person I had to treat was from our own bomb because they dropped it, and it clipped the hill we was on. So, we was in a bomb blast, and that's the strangest sound to hear. These little metal shards would be going through, whipping, you know. In training, you hear big noises and explosions. I mean I went to Vegas down there or whatever. We had land, and they had things blowing up like World War II. But, when you're in a bomb, right in where the blast is, besides the shock, which will pick you up, throw you around, and you can hear the stuff whipping through the air, and you see little trees in front of you being cut. You don't even know how you didn't get killed. I didn't understand how I did not get killed, and then after that, I had a lot of incidents. I figured out, that's a normal thing. You do not know how you did not get killed sometime, when you get into a firefight. And that was the first firefight, a real one, where you had real folks that were trying to kill you.

DePue: You mentioned you could see the enemy coming up. So many times you read other stories about combat, and it's rare that you actually are close enough to the enemy to see him.

Jones: But, see, in recon we actually got a chance to see them because it's only six of you. So, once you get your jungle senses on, then you can identify them.

DePue: Doesn't that make killing the enemy much more personal for you?

Jones: Oh, the first time it was.

DePue: Was this first patrol the first time that you did?

Jones: That was the first time because it was one-on-one. And in your mind, the first time—at least, in my mind—I'm looking at him, and I'm saying, well he's just like me; he don't want to be here either, you know? I'm still using that back home rationalizing, until he points his weapon at you. Then you realize he's going to shoot you. Then you shoot. That's when the transformation occurs, that it's okay to kill the enemy, because now it becomes, it's not, I'm killing that man. It's okay to kill the enemy. That's when that kicks in, because they all trying to kill you. And then, from that point on, anyone that tries to kill you is the enemy, and you can kill them.

DePue: Did that actually happen on that first patrol?

Jones: Yeah, that's the first time I ever killed anyone. I mean, that just makes… It'd been different probably, if that act had occurred, and then I was out of it. I would have been, probably, the whole turn of, because I killed a guy and did this. But, since we were still there, and everybody was still shooting, you don't have time to feel bad for yourself. You do something or you don't.

DePue: How close was he when you killed him?

Jones: Oh, he was real close. I mean, he was…hmm, about the length of this room, because he had…

DePue: Twenty feet or so?

Jones: Yeah, twenty feet, something like that. I mean, he was close, because I could see him, his face and all. That's why you hesitated, because I could see his face. That's what, you know, just, I could see his face.

DePue: Can you see it still?

Jones: There are times, because it don't go away. Once in a while, things come back. Going through, doing this book, writing the book was one thing. Going through, doing this audio book has been another thing, because now I'm dealing with sounds, and then I'm recording. It brings back a whole other way that memories come back in your head. I can read the words, is one thing, but sound becomes more personal because…

DePue: I'm sure we're going to get much more of this, but so much of what you've been talking about, the first impressions of getting there, your impressions of going on the first patrol, it all goes back to how heightened all of your senses are. Your sense of smell; your sense of sight, hearing. Is that because it's all tied to survival?

Jones: It's all tied to survival because, in recon, that's all you've got. To have a split second more than the enemy is that you know you can identify him, or he can identify you in that split second. That's the only time you've got to make—not make a decision. See, you don't have time to make a decision. That's the hardest thing; you don't have time to think about. You do something or you don't, period. That's why, when you go to recon, you couldn't take no baths and have soap or something, because that gave a different smell.

It's amazing how sound… You don't usually hear, you can't hear, sound because, a lot of times, people say, it's muffled by the jungle. But, if there is a sound, you know something's wrong. You don't have to hear it clearly. If there is a sound, there's something wrong. If you see something, if all the wind is blowing this way, and over here, it's not, that stops you and makes you wonder, well, what's there?

It's little things like that because, when you out in the jungle and you going through it, it's whoever sees, or is aware of the other, the enemy, first, is going to be the one that comes out of that. You don't have time to think about the philosophical rightness of an act. You don't have time; you just don't. You do it, or you don't. And if you shoot this guy, you've got a lot of people shooting at you. There's going to be more people coming.

DePue: There's another decision that you had that first patrol that I think you talked about in the book. I know you talk about in the book. I think this is a personal experience of almost killing a friendly.

Jones: Oh yeah, and that's because of fear, not knowing. That's why it was on that first patrol, because really… you just… you'd be so scared that anything that moves, you think you should shoot it. Now, that's before you really shot a person. You can see the eyes, the face of the man, you see, before he becomes the enemy. You see a body; you see someone; you start shooting because that's what it's like being in training. I'd see him; I'd go shoot him because it wasn't clear, because your senses aren't clear. You see a body, a man, and you start to react.

That's the difference between when you're new, and you go out in the bush, and after you've been there for a while…because after you've been there for a while, you pretty well know where everybody is, in terms of if you get into a confrontation or a firefight. You have a sense of where your folks are because you've been out there, you know? You know they're going to go right; he's going left. You have a sense of it. But the first patrol, you had no sense of any of that. The only thing you have a sense of is, I'm here, and every bullet in the air is aimed at you; everybody's shooting at you. That's the feeling. You know, after you get past it, then you find out, a lot of bullets are shooting, but they're not all aiming at you, even though you can get shot by one.

That's what the first patrol really did is, even though there's all these bullets out there, they're not all shooting at you, because the first thing you do is freeze. You're scared to move because, if I move, I'm going to get shot, which is the complete wrong thing to do because, if you keep staying still, you stay long enough, then they really can see you're not moving. You get shot. It reverses your way of thinking of what you do in situations, totally.

DePue: That first patrol, then, is also the first time you actually had to use your medical skills?

Jones: And failed, because there was nothing I could do. I mean, a bomb just rips you apart. There's not too much you can do.

DePue: And this was an American bomb.

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: What was…

Jones The only thing we did, when he said he was coming back to drop—because the pilot was really eager, because, when we said, "Hey, stop dropping. You're killing us." He cussed, and he says, "Damn it; I'm coming back in." That's when he came, and he turned. And I have never seen it. I mean, we were actually almost higher than the jet because we were sort of looking at an angle like that, when he came sideways and dropped that napalm.

I was out at the National Guard, and I was talking to pilots with the new 160, whatever they were flying when I was there.

DePue: The F-16s?

Jones: And I said, "I bet you I've seen pilots do stuff you can't do today." And, of course, the pilot's ego says, (makes growling, grumbling noises). I told them the story about him flying. They said, "Oh, he's flying by wire." It was interesting. They all expressed some sense of frustration, saying, everything is so computerized. The technology now takes over, and you fit within the parameters of technology, and all these things. And they said, they don't fly like that no more.

DePue: Did his actions that day save you?

Jones: Oh, yeah. They were coming down on the ridge and that. They was coming by another plane.

DePue: It sounds like that would be somebody else that the team would respect.

Jones: You're there with them. See, that's what is built in. All the stuff that happens, you're there with them. That's what makes the difference.

DePue: So, that helicopter jockey who drops you off and hovers there long enough so you can get off and is there while you get on.

Jones: I've seen helicopters get shot up, blow up, trying to come in to save recon teams. I've seen when our choppers couldn't get to us, and choppers were flying through the area, and they said, "Well, we'll come in.," And they pick you up.

DePue: This first patrol, then, you've got a lot to process, once you can get back to the base and kind of decompress or, at least, try to decompress. What's on your mind? Was it the first time you had to kill somebody, the first time you couldn't save somebody, your own reactions when you're out in combat?

Jones: Oh, it was all of it. I mean, it was all of it. It was so jumbled. It was so confusing because the thing that hits your head is, is this how it's going to be? And you don't know; every time I go out. That first patrol…and the team

leader actually helped by just really putting it in the perspective. He said, "You know you can live through it. Everybody makes mistakes. The key thing is you get to the other side, and live through it. That's the key, you survive." That, at least, gave me a perspective. Now, that perspective was, you don't give a damn about anything but your team members, (chuckles) because they're the ones out there with you, going to live or die with you. That's why recon was at. You're behind enemy lines. There ain't nobody out there you can depend on. The only ones is the guys that come and get you.

DePue: We've been talking a lot about the recon team, but I don't think we've fleshed out enough the specific mission, the purpose that there is a recon team.

Jones: Well, there were several we went on. One was, obviously, just see where the enemy was, intelligence gathering. I think the intelligence folks, they had real eyeballs on the ground, rather than just sensors and all. We'd been out. We planted sensors on trails and stuff like that, but you still want to know where they are. You can drop them from the plan, and you say, "We think we've got them where they are." I mean, we've watched the NVA. When they know that sensors or something is in the area, they get some guys and just have them go around in circles, you know, make a lot of noise. And they determine where you will drop your bombs. (laughs) Amazing in terms of stuff, on how they did these little things to fight the technology. It was unbelievable. Most of it was intelligence gathering, where we'd go and see, is there troops here; is there movement here? Is there, you know?

Then sometimes, we would go out and snatch folks, suspected VC or the paymaster, or it was really a VC organizer or something like that. You know, we would go out and snatch them. Sometimes it seems like we'd go out and snatch them, but really, everybody ends up dead. So, I wasn't sure if we were snatching or what, because I wasn't privy to all of that. They ended up dead. So, I'm not sure what that meant. The majority of our patrols that I was in was intelligence driven, intelligence gathering.

DePue: Does that mean, if you do encounter the enemy, but the enemy doesn't know you're there, you don't make contact?

Jones: We tried not to make contact. If we initiated contact, it was something we had to do to get out, to save ourselves. But, we didn't go in to be doing combat, I mean, you know, attack. We would go in, maybe before; sometimes they was going to do operations in that area and all, and we would be there. I'm sure a couple of times, I think we were sent in as bait, to create activity, so that they then can swoop in—was it the Sparrow Hawks? whatever they used to call it—where they bring the other men in, you know, once you make contact.

I remember, we got into a big battalion battle there, where we kicked it off because we had ran into an NVA battalion, and they didn't know they were there. They didn't know it was a battalion at first. So, at first, what they

did is, they got us out. Then they dropped other units in, and then it got bigger. And then it became a battalion size battle, in terms of it. But they took us out. Well, good, because we had been running for, like, two days, and we kept telling them, there's a lot of folks out here. Well, they didn't know they were there. We had found them.

DePue: I was going to say, that's the reason you're sent out in the first place, I would think.

Jones: Well, we wanted to find out they're there, but we don't prefer you find out they're there because they're chasing us. We say, "Shoot all the guys behind us." (laughs) That happened a few times. It was intelligence gathering. We really were just sneaking, poking, peeking, as we called it. See what's going on; report back, "We've got movement here. We've got folks over here," things like that. We didn't go out to make contact. However, most of our missions we were on, we ended up having contact. And, whenever a recon team gets in contact, they're always outgunned, outnumbered and can be surrounded easily. That's why you didn't go into somebody else's neighborhood and just start kicking in doors. There's only six of you. You get a twenty man platoon, just the smallest unit; you're already outgunned, in terms of numbers of people.

DePue: I want to go through what a typical patrol was like. But, before I get there, one specific question, what's in your aid kit when you're going on these patrols?

Jones: Mostly bandages. You have some stuff like aspirins or something like that. But it was mostly bandages, surgery kits…Like I said, I didn't carry the unit one in the bush, you know. It was like waving a vine and saying, "Oh God, look what he brought to us." So, I didn't carry it. I carried all my bandages, all the surgery—had a little surgery thing, with scalpels and stuff like that.

DePue: And morphine or anything like that?

Jones: Yeah, we had morphine. You've got to be careful about morphine, because if you've got somebody who's got some chest wounds, morphine is not going to help him. But we had morphine. Most of the time, unless it really was bad, most of the team did not want morphine because, once you took that, you're out of it. It's better to fight in pain than to be out of it and just laying around waiting to see what happens.

DePue: With a triple canopy jungle, how do they get the casualties out? How did they get…

Jones: You had to get to a place that is a landing zone. See, if you're with a unit, like a regular Army unit or your Marine unit, they can blast an LZ [landing zone] for you. But recon you only got six. You can't blast an LZ, so you have to find the place to be picked up. So, even if the chopper's there, if you in some of this deep jungle, you still have to get out to where a chopper can land. I've

had some choppers pick up, you know… Once came out holding onto the skids. When I first got there, they had 34s [Sikorsky H-34s] and 46s [Boeing Vertol CH-46s], then they went to Hueys. So, I was there before they started using Hueys. When you're going in a 46, you know, that's a big double rotary thing. Everybody knows you there.

DePue: CH-46?

Jones: Yeah, a Chinook. Everybody know you're there because it has to take a landing pattern for it to come down, and you can see it, you know? I remember getting picked up once on a patrol. What happened is, it was so dense, he couldn't really land. So, he said, okay, he's going to hover, and he dropped the back ramp down for us to get in. But the problem is, it was an incline, and the rotor blades started cutting in. The damn thing started so, he was scared of losing it because the rotor blade was hitting the hill; there's a little hill there. We were supposed to be coming in on the back side, but the daggone thing was going down, and the back that has the door, you know, the…

DePue: The ramp.

Jones: The ramp. The ramp was getting pushed up, while it was getting hit. So, we ended up having to go around. Actually, the damn door gunner held us, and he took off. It was the two door gunners, holding two of us, as we took off. That was that 46. So, when Hueys came, we thought this was wonderful because they just zipped in and zipped out. That was great. But when I first got there, it was them 34s, you know, big, clunky things. Yeah, that was terrible. The Hueys was big. We loved Hueys, loved Hueys. But when I first got there, it was the 34, and then it went to the 46 and then went to Huey.

DePue: Let's get back to the medical procedures. What's the borderline between what you could do out in the field and what you had to just make do until you can get back to some kind of medical facility?

Jones: Everything was make do. It was all basic…Stop the bleeding. We've got a chest wound. Do something to make sure you stop the… You would take the plastic off the bandages, and then put it on, and put it over, so you can stop the gurgling, because most of it was gunshot wounds or shrapnel. And then, what you dealt with was secondary, was what the damage was. Was it to an organ or was it to where the wound was at, more than anything else. [I] ended up doing a lot of tracheotomies, cutting their throat so they could breathe. And see, you didn't have armor.

DePue: You had the flak jacket when you took the C-130 ride. Didn't wear it on patrols?

Jones: No. It made too much noise, and you had all those other hundred pounds on you. Never wore flak jackets in the bush.

DePue: A helmet?

Jones: Nope. Bush hat, just a soft cover. This is back before the days, before they had all this stuff, even. (laughs) You know, when I talk about it, all of a sudden I realize, God, I see guys going today, and they've got all these helmets and all, recon, whoever, rangers, whatever. You didn't do that back then.

DePue: But they're not walking through a triple canopy jungle either.

Jones: No, no, and that's the difference. You couldn't move in all that stuff. And the other thing is, it made noises. If you hear a waving vine or something scratch across a helmet or scratch across a flak jacket, you know, soon as you hear the sound, it's a man in the jungle. Really, your senses had a lot to do with, you know. Your radar screen was really your senses. What you did is, you got to know the difference of hearing a manmade sound and a natural animal sound. You don't hear an animal move through the jungle and hear leaves scrape or anything. Where, if a man move through the jungle, and he's got clothing on, you do. It gets down to be that sensitive. And you don't realize it, though, because you're just doing it. It's only when you get out of it, and you come back, that you realize, because you can hear things. You know, you hear things, and you smell things that nobody else do.

DePue: What I'd like to have you do, and I think it will take a little bit of time to do this, but walk us through a typical patrol, from the very beginning, when you first found out about it, to preparing it. This is going to take a little while, hopefully.

Jones: Yeah. Well, first of all, they say this is the day we're going out. Then, what happens is the team leader comes, and we get a briefing of the area because everybody on the team has to know where we're going, you know: here's our landing zone, where we're going in; here's our recon zone. They could be different. Sometimes you could land outside the recon zone, and you had to walk into it. You know, it would be a thousand, two thousand yards to walk into it. It depends on if there was a lot of canopy and a lot of stuff, they couldn't land you there. Then you have to land outside of your recon zone, and then go in. We had a zone which we would move around in, basically.

So, then there would be flyovers. Flyovers would be usually the patrol leader or assistant patrol leader. What they would do is do a flyover to try to identify landmarks. You know, here's a stream; here's a landing zone possibility; here's a landing. They'd look at the landing zone possibilities.

Then, after we go through that briefing, then we sort of have an idea of where we're going, an idea of where, if we get separated, points you should go to meet at. That's all the intellectual side; that's all the mental side.

Then preparing. It does make a difference. I mean, sometimes you go to an area that you know that you're going to have to walk a distance to get to

a landing zone, for a chopper to get in. Other places, you don't because it may be flatter, more open, and you know that helicopters can get in. You take different chances, depending on the terrain you're in and how you can get out.

Preparing personally then, there's personal preparing. You used to tape everything, number one, so that you don't make no noise. You tape your pants and your boots and all because, mostly, you walk around, you get leeches and other kind of little things; even when you tape your daggon pants and your boots, damn leeches still seem to find a way to get in there. So, you taped everything. You've got to make sure nothing made any noises, and you taped it or you set it up so that nothing made any noises. So, that's the personal; that was just preparing.

Then you get ready, and then you go to the strip. Recon, we had our own little landing area with helicopters coming in and out. So, you go, and then the helicopters would pick you up. Sometimes we would fly straight to the recon zone. Other times they would fly some other place, go down and then take us over to the recon zone because everybody can see the helicopter in the air, and everybody knows where it's going. You know, when it goes down, everybody can see where it goes down. Whenever a helicopter went down, it was like a magnet. It pulled all the enemy to that area. So, either you had to get someplace where you could get out of the helicopters and get away from it as soon as possible, or they would hit two…

Now, what's amazing is, the daggon NVA, like in the elephant grass, they put sticks and put grenades on them and have them strung together, because they knew that was the place the helicopter was going to land. They knew that's the place it had to land. We went down a lot of times where we had to abort the mission because we'd go down, and, all of a sudden, you started seeing those stakes. You'd know there were grenades on them, and they had to abort the mission. I mean abort the landing. They didn't abort the mission; they just took us to another place and dumped us. (chuckles)

Most of our preparation, I mean, it wasn't a big intelligent briefing by somebody, you know, an officer or something like that. The team leader and the assistant team leader would be involved at that level. What we were involved in was just preparing for us to go out. Where we're going, our secondary targets, what is our recon zone, secondary places, if something happened, to get picked up, you know, in terms of it, of emergencies. That was not a long process because, once you knew you were going out, nobody checked to make sure you had all the right stuff or anything like that. There was no checking. You had it, or you didn't. If you didn't have it and stuff started, it was your ass.

DePue: It sounds like there was a lot of unspoken expectations that you had with each other about how to get ready, what was necessary.

Jones: Oh yeah. After you've been on patrols for a few times, you understood. It wasn't like in the infantry company. You know, you have all this stuff you carry around because you go and set up camp at night. Recon don't set up camp. You don't sleep where you eat, because you stayed in a spot too long, and they can get a bead on you. So, wherever you ate, you always moved, and you never slept where you ate. Little things like that, but those are basically things we actually learned from them.

DePue: Were most of the insertions daytime or night?

Jones: Most of them were daytime.

DePue: So the pilots could see where they were going?

Jones: Yeah, most of them were daytime.

DePue: But it still puts a little bit more of a bulls-eye on you going in.

Jones: Oh yeah, that was the problem. A lot of times, they would take and send, you know—because what happened when the recon team goes—when we went out, you had two Hueys. You had two Huey gunships, and you had two Phantoms in the area because the most dangerous time is when you're being inserted or extracted.

DePue: But, if that's the signature, then the enemy knows when a recon team is going in the area.

Jones: A lot of times, exactly. That's always a problem because, once a helicopter comes down…A lot of times, they would have this go here, and they would have another Huey go over here.

DePue: For decoys.

Jones: Yeah, for decoys. All the insertions were was to get you on the ground because the helicopters would attract it. That's the big red thing; there they are. So, the insertions and extractions were very fast. They came down, woomp-woomp-woomp; they gone. Then you move fast as you can out of that area. It ain't no thing about, surround the landing zones, no. You hit it. Once you hit the ground, you move.

DePue: Now that you're on the move, tell us what a typical patrol is like, if there is such a thing.

Jones: Every one's different, but the basics, in terms of movement, is when you come off the helicopter, first thing is, you move until you feel you are safe away from where that helicopter inserted you because that's where everybody's going. The only problem you've got to do is if you run into somebody going there. Then you get far. Then what happens is, you stop. You stop, and you

get what's called your jungle senses on, which means you get the clutter out because you've been on a helicopter, "rrrrr-rrrrrr." You know, all that stuff is all in your head. It's all clutter. So then, what you do is you stop, and you sort of de-clutter your ears, your head, you know. You get grounded. You're now on the ground. You need to get grounded. You're on the ground, and you just be still as you start hearing and feeling your environment. You get all the sound out. Get all these other sounds out of your head, the helicopter blades and people talking and all kind of thoughts. Whatever thoughts you have, you just want to clear your head. Basically, what it is, is you're de-cluttering your mind, and you are setting yourself where you at. I'm here now; I'm here in the jungle. I'm in the middle of—and your thought is always, I'm in the middle of the bad guys. That's when you just get your jungle sense.

Then, if you're outside the recon zone, then you've got to start moving to your recon zone. If you're in your recon zone, then you start looking for the points where you're going to go for observation. You never stay in one place long enough for someone to get a bead on you. You'd be going, and you see a village. Well, you don't care what's in the village, except we look at a map and we say, well, you know what, they say there's nobody supposed to be here; yet we're looking and seeing all these people moving around. So, that means they're also moving around outside the village too. That initial period is just getting your mind tuned in to where you are. You're in the jungle with the bad guys. It's a whole different thought than you're someplace else, and you hear voices because you may go two or three days and may or may not hear a conversation between somebody.

DePue: This isn't just a one-day patrol then, in most cases.

Jones: Oh, no. You'd be out there anywhere from five to seven days.

DePue: And everything you're eating and everything you're drinking, you've got to take in with you?

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: And all the ammunition and all the medical supplies and spare batteries for the radio?

Jones: Everything, you take everything with you. You can't depend on nothing. If you have something, you find something, great. You cannot depend on finding anything outside of what is with you. If you didn't bring it, you cannot depend you have it.

DePue: If you were encountering villages, would it be practice to go into the village?

Jones: No.

DePue: You'd skirt away from the villages?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. What we's going to report, there's villages here; do you know it? There's people there; do you know it? We would just do intelligence, in terms of observation.

DePue: A lot of the other combat units would set up ambushes or would go on raids.

Jones: The only time we would do that is if somebody sent us out, if we were out there to capture some suspected VC leader or the VCs who were there. And, if it was VC leaders, it wasn't just, get VC. (chuckles) There's a target that you're looking at. But no, we did not want nobody to know we were there. That was the whole purpose of it because, if they know you're there, then what happens is they come looking for you. And, once they start looking for you, they usually would find you, most of the time, because it's their terrain. So, we did mostly observation. We would set up if we see a lot of activity somewhere on a trail or a road. We've seen roads where—it was unbelievable, you couldn't see it from the air—but roads, truck traffic, the whole thing. Then we would try to give them an idea of where this road was at. Then we would follow the road to see, you know, did it lead to a camp? Did it lead to a village? Where did it lead to, if we found a road that wasn't on the map?

So, a lot of it was observation and reporting. But, the key thing is, we never wanted anybody to know we were there. I mean, that was the number one thing that was your protection, was that they didn't know you were there because, once they know you're there, they always could get more men after you than you have, always. There's only six or seven of you. They always get more men.

DePue: Were you eating three meals a day?

Jones: No. One, two, two on good days. You're always moving.

DePue: Did you take all of your trash with you?

Jones: We buried it. You buried trash. You never left anything out. The whole thing is, if somebody was following us, they should not see any signs that we were there.

DePue: Even burying it, you'd be disturbing the soil.

Jones: That was the only thing. That's why you never—wherever you eat, you do not sleep because, when you eat, you do stuff, you bury it. And, you know, and, if you stay close to it or if you stay long enough, I mean, someone would get a bead on you.

DePue: Where would you find to bed down?

Jones: You'd get a big sticker bush or something like that, and you dig down a little bit. Then, come up and cut it out, and make a little hole inside the sticker

bush. And then, you put stuff back up, where you dug to go in. We slept in some interesting places. (laughs)

DePue: Got used to sleeping on the ground?

Jones: Or you would sleep on the ground or whatever. But all you had, you may have a poncho.

DePue: What did you do with a guy who was snoring loud?

Jones: Make him stay up all night. (chuckles) If you snored, you would not be sleeping very much because you'd be woken. We're listening. The other side is listening too, and they know the sounds that are manmade and the sounds that are jungle made, and they know their sounds. If you see a VC go through, you're not going to hear him. When he goes through vegetation, he may have little shorts on or a little something. There's not much to make that human sound. The VC, when they go through, they're a damn army. They don't care if you hear them because they got supplies and routes, and they've got support units. So, when they come through, you can hear them. But the thing is, you ain't going to run into just three or four of them. And they can always get support. That's why the VC were not the threat. We never felt the threat of the VC. The VC, you only got hurt if you didn't pay attention to stuff. I mean, it there was a booby trap. You could pay attention and get a sense. But we never walked trails, see; so, we didn't really encounter VC a lot.

DePue: Where you were, it sounds like pretty deep in the jungle, as much as you possibly could. If you saw a Vietnamese villager out there, did you just automatically assume that it's a VC?

Jones: Unh-uh. We'd just watch him to see what they do.

DePue: What would a villager be doing in the jungle?

Jones: Oh, he could be walking to another village. We didn't look for the rationale. The only thing that would be of interest to us is, hmm, why is he out here? He could be walking to another village. So, we may then follow him, you know, to see where he's going because, if it's an area—like we've been in areas, there wasn't supposed to be no humans there because they had moved the villagers out, you know, and all that kind of stuff—then you go there, and you see damn villages, with all kind of folks and everything.

DePue: Were you doing most of the movement in the daytime or at night?

Jones: Most of the time, in the daytime.

DePue: My guess is that, with the triple canopied jungle, you wouldn't be able to see a thing at night, anyway.

Jones: Not in certain areas. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. I mean, it would be that dark. Most of our movement was during the daytime. The most movement we did at night is, if we stopped to eat. Then we would wait until it gets darker to move some other place to sleep.

DePue: I've done enough of this to know that map reading, and knowing where you're at is a challenge, especially when you get into that kind of terrain. How did you guys manage that because this is what being a recon was all about.

Jones: A lot of it, when you get on the ground, you create landmarks of what you see.

DePue: But, if you can't see beyond the jungle canopy—

Jones: You climb a tree. Well, if you can't see it above that, then you just try to keep a path until you can go where you can see. Those maps, I don't know who provided the maps. We never found a map that was a hundred percent accurate, and the reason is because they were always…

DePue: These were military topographic maps?

Jones: Right. And the reason is because, even if they had a map of what happened last week, they done put a new road in or they done cut a new trail in. So, that map, as soon as you take it, is out of date because they're going to create new things. Those folks were always building, always building. Always building trails, always doing roads, and some of them were very creative. I mean, you'd go up, and there would be a stream, and they build bamboo stuff under. From the air, you don't see it. But then, you see trucks drive across the water, you know, because they'd be under the surface of the water.

One of the things you always watch is, when you came upon a village, you see, like a village there was not supposed to be nobody there. One thing is, are there women and kids or not? You had little things you'd look for. It's the little things that you notice that really gave you a sense of what you will do or not do. If you get further, go find out more or not. You come upon a village, and you see no women and children, and you see all men running around, and it's supposed to be an area that they cleared out, then you figure something's not right. A lot of it is not that you know it's wrong, but it's the quick identification of, something's not right, and I need to know something more about it, is more important, you know, because, then you may look at it and say, maybe it is all right. Now, we don't go down to the village, and go through it, and stop and pull them up, and ask who are you? What are you doing here? We just report back, hey, there was a lot of movement in this village, and no one is supposed to be there, hmm. They didn't get the memo. There's a lot of movement in the village.

And then, the next thing is, are there women and children? If there's women and children, okay, maybe it is a village with families and all that. If

there's no women and children, then you've got to wonder, why are all these men here?

DePue: Were the NVA always in uniform?

Jones: Most of the ones we encountered. Saw a couple of Chinese. It was kind of a trip, seeing the Chinese, because they were so big, compared to the Vietnamese.

DePue: How did you know they were Chinese? Different uniform?

Jones: Mm-hmm. Oh, yeah. The different uniform. They were big too, totally different physically, stature, than the VC.

DePue: Part of what you had to do, the sense of hearing, did you or other members of the team know any Vietnamese?

Jones: Some of the members did. Our team leader on the sys team, they could speak some. We knew gutter Vietnamese, you know.

DePue: Do you get close enough to be able to hear conversations sometimes?

Jones: Oh, yeah. I wasn't one of the ones that was really open to the Vietnamese language, but our team leader and the sys team leader, they understood some level of Vietnamese. Oh, yeah. We used to get close. We used to sit there, and we could reach out and touch folks, and they wouldn't know we were there. I mean, the whole thing about it was them not knowing you there. That was your number one protection.

DePue: But getting so close that you could smell them and hear them?

Jones: Oh, yeah. But that's the way you really understand, get a sense of what was going on, why they were there. Like I said, if you go in, there's no women and children, and, all of a sudden, you get down, and you find that, are they moving through? Or is that where they really are staying?

DePue: All of this makes me wonder what kind of a human being makes for a perfect recon guy.

Jones: It's impossible to say, because it's something inside.

DePue: People who like to live on the edge?

Jones: That probably helps, but you can't be too far on the edge because he gets foolish and crazy. We had guys that went to recon school and everything. They come there, you know, and they've been trained. They want folks to run around with rocks in their packs and all that. I remember, one guy came over, and he was going to toughen up because [when] he came in, everybody was

laying around. A guy's over there smoking dope, a guy's over here drinking, and he wants to whoop them into shape. Now, these guys have been here ten, eleven months, operating in the bush. He come over, though, and he decided, when they're out of the bush, they're supposed to have military bearing. You know, it was like, what? And so, he's going to whoop them into shape. I medical quarantined them so that they couldn't go. (laughs)

DePue: The radio operator and that radio had to be incredibly important, but how often were you allowed or could you use the radio?

Jones: We had time; we had signals. Most of the time, you go in, and the base would say something, and you'd click once or click twice. The only time we really talked on the radio is if we had something we had to report. And once we reported it, we moved.

DePue: So, something that was really timely information.

Jones: Right, yeah. There was no, you know, are you okay, bla-bla-bla, click, click, that's all, because, once you start talking on the radio—because they were monitoring. I'd been on one patrol where the gook came over on the radio because they got our frequency, you know, talking crap. That shakes you up though, when they get on your radio.

DePue: Talking English to you?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

DePue: In the book, it comes across very clearly that these recon teams, or this recon team that J.D. was on, is like the ultimate target out there for the NVA and the VC.

Jones: They'd be sitting around eating their rice, and all of a sudden, artillery falls in on them. They know damn well that it ain't a plane because the only ones that could identify them being there to have artillery fall on them is recon. And the thing is, recon operated in the bush, like they did.

We were comfortable in the jungle. Half the time, half of the guys probably were more comfortable being in the jungle than they were when they were out of it.

When you say, what would make the perfect recon? It's internalized because most of this stuff is mindset. When you go to boot camp and all that, they tell you it's in your mind. You can do this, da-da-da-da. It is. When you can get past a fear of stepping off of a helicopter into enemy country, and it takes off, I mean, that in itself is the first thing, in terms of your fortitude, in terms of where your head is, because that's when the realization hits you that everything you know, everything you did, don't mean nothing. The only thing that's going to mean something is what you do now. It's the mind. I've seen

skinny guys; they can put their 100 and some pack on and hang. I've seen big muscular guys; they couldn't handle it for a day out there because they just got tired out and all. They was carrying too much bulk and they never really… Your body is not a point of… I mean, you have to be in physical shape. You get into that just by doing it over and over. But more than that, your body gets acclimated, through your mind. This is what you're going to do; this is what you've got to do. It's more mental than anything else because, once you get past the thing that you're stepping off a helicopter and you're by yourself out there—see, that's the first thing. That's where most folks, all of a sudden, crush, right there. Then, all of a sudden, you move; then, all of a sudden, you get into a firefight, and it's green jungle every place. You can't say, I'm going to go down to 5th Street and run away. It ain't no street signs; it's mental. That's the most important part. The rest of it is, yeah, you can always build your body up to carry heavy weights. You can always be very skillful at shooting. But, if you don't have the ability, the senses to be able to know how to feel your surroundings and sense your surroundings, you can be the best crack shot in the whole daggone Army, but, if you don't know who to shoot at, it don't mean nothing. (chuckles)

DePue: We're still wanting to talk about a typical patrol.

Jones: Yeah, I'm veering off.

DePue: I'm not saying you got off track at all; you haven't. My questions, maybe, have drawn you off track. But I wanted to ask you about extraction, the end of the patrol.

Jones: That's when Jesus comes into your life because he comes out of the sky and he gets you. (both laugh) The best part of the patrol, you know, the most dangerous also—just like the insertions. When you're doing insertions, they land; they hit, and they run. When you do extractions, first, you've got to get coordinated, where you at and where they at, to come to get you. And then, you've got to pop a smoke grenade, so they can see where to land. And at that moment, everybody can see the yellow smoke.

DePue: Yellow smoke?

Jones: Mm-hmm. At that moment, everybody can see it. Once you pop that grenade, the smoke grenade for the helicopter, to say, here we are, anybody around that got eyes can see where you are too. That's when it gets really hot. That's the point where you really… I mean we've been involved in several extractions that had to be called off, and we had to go to another area because what happened is, once you pop the grenade, all of a sudden, you start getting shot at, because they know where you're at. They know, once you pop the grenade, then the helicopter is going to come because they don't carry smoke grenades and be popping for helicopters. They know who it is, you know? (chuckling) So, you always make sure you try to tell them, okay, I see you. You know,

you want to see them first. You want to make sure you have eyeball contact when you say, okay, I see you over here, you're north of me; you're south, or whatever, because you can see them. Obviously, whether they can see you or not, you can see the helicopter. And then you say, okay, now I'm popping smoke. When you say, now I'm popping smoke, that's when they dive in because they know that's the most dangerous point because I done popped a smoke grenade. There's a point of time when they see it and when they come to get you. Everybody knows that, and so that can be kind of hairy, sometimes.

DePue: You've suggested, on some of these patrols, if it doesn't go well, maybe the enemy has been chasing you for a while, and maybe you've got casualties. Does that complicate things exponentially?

Jones: Oh, yes. The casualties, you've got to carry them. And then, you go into emergency. Now there, they may send the jets in, the Hueys, and blow and blast the area to try to create a support thing around you, wherever they can get the chopper down. If it's a hot LZ, which means, you know, when they're coming down, it's going to be under fire, that's when it's the most dangerous, obviously, when you've got somebody wounded or anything.

DePue: What happened if you had somebody who died on a patrol?

Jones: It depends on how many chasing you. If there's a lot chasing, what you do is, they'll tell you to keep moving. And then, they come back to come try to get the body. You try to hide it, so that the gooks don't chop it up.

DePue: They'd chop it up if they found it?

Jones: Oh, they used to do things like that. You know, you get into a war with another culture, and we always fight the war according to the way we think the rules are. They don't read our books, what the rules are. Sometimes it's just manhood warrior stuff, in terms of cutting things off. Sometimes it's a head game, where you go up, and they cut up an American soldier and stuck a penis in his mouth and all that, just to shake you. It's part of the head game of war, is to shake your enemy, make them think that you are twenty feet tall and you eat; you eat.

I guess one of the jokes I always tell is, if you live in snake land, you know the best way to get rid of snakes around your house? Develop an appetite for snakes. No one wants to live next to somebody who eats them. That's what that was, that kind of head game thing they do, you know.

DePue: Did you guys find yourselves playing the head games as well?

Jones: We had guys who would cut off some ears and fingers because they think it's part of the warrior stuff, you know, and I'm a killer; I'm bad and all that. The mindset of survival is not tuned in to the niceness of living. I mean, I've seen

very quiet, religious kids go just totally off because, number one, they're not in the structure that they know what the boundaries are, and then, they find there are no boundaries because there are none. It's wrong to kill, but you kill folks before they get you to say it's wrong. Then they realize, all of a sudden, there's no boundaries. And they never been there, so they just go totally berserko.

DePue: Okay, let's get you back then. Once you're extracted, taken back to the base of operations?

Jones: Taken back to the base, then you debrief.

DePue: Everybody involved in that?

Jones: Everybody's involved with the first level. The second level, no, because the second level's going directly with the intelligence agents, unless it's something that they sent us out specifically to see about something, then you find a higher level officer come in and be part of the debriefing. Other than that, it was the patrol leader and the assistant patrol leader.

DePue: But my guess is—you're out there doing recon—that this is all about intelligence, so the debriefings could be rather intense.

Jones: Oh, yeah. They'd be asking all kinds of questions. There's two things you're looking at. One is, when they send you out to look for something, because they think something may be there. And, one, they're reconning because they don't know what's there. So, if you go in and they know something is there, then that's validating our thoughts and theories, or however they got other information or whether they got it from their spies, whatever, it's validating it.

When they don't know something is there, and, all of a sudden, you run up and find something, then that gets intense. If it's a recon, where we just had recons, they just wanted to see if there's movement or something like that, it wouldn't be everybody, in terms of it. It would be the patrol leader and assistant patrol leader usually, that would participate.

In recon, it was different. I know guys in the National Guard. I know guys in the service, in the Rangers, in the Marines. It seems like recon stuff now is very much more intelligent. (laughs)

DePue: You mean rational in what it's all about?

Jones: That was at the beginning of the recon. In World War II, they had what you called Merrill's Raiders and all that, whatever. But that was still, you know, it wasn't—I mean there was stuff going on in the jungle in certain areas and all that. But, Vietnam is when you really started getting into these little small units in all. The terrain demanded that you had to do it a certain way, or you couldn't do it. That's adaptation to the terrain that you've got to deal with.

DePue: Did you go through these debriefings before or after you had a chance to sleep and clean up?

Jones: Usually before because they wanted it while it supposed to be still hot and all.

DePue: My guess, though, is you guys are totally exhausted after this.

Jones: Mm-hmm. It all depends. Like I said, was it something we were going to verify? Was it something we were going, and then we found something? It all depends what happened on the patrol, in terms of what we saw. The majority of times, the debriefings for the patrol officer and the assistant leader, they would be the ones that would go most of the time. The rest of us would go and just crash and all, you know, clean up and try to come down because, when you come back, now you've got to reverse your senses.

Going out you've got to get your jungle sense on, as you call it. When you come back, now, you've got to change that because, otherwise, every moment you'd be jumping and everything. It's almost like you had to deaden down your senses to come back and live among other noises and stuff and people, you know, people moving around you because, when you're out there, any movement, then, you're very sensitive to movement of any type. So, when you come back, then you have to sort of bring it down now.

DePue: This might be a peculiar question, but having that kind of an existence, where you're out in the bush, and then you're back for a while, and you're out in the bush again. What's the real world?

Jones: When's the next time you're going on patrol? The real world is going on patrol, coming off patrol, going on patrol.

DePue: So, that was the part that made sense.

Jones: That's the part that made sense to you in that situation because that's what you had to do.

DePue: Is that what kept you alive?

Jones: That's what everything was about. If somebody came in, and they had some things about beating their chest like, you know, I'm important, or I'm this or that, that scared people because see, those folks will get you killed. And we also found a lot of times that, when the bullets started zipping through the air, they'd be the ones holding their heads, crying, with their ass up in the air.

DePue: What did you do when you did get back? What was the normal procedure when you were decompressing?

Jones: Well, after you did that, shower and everything, probably – usually – you'd get high. Or the drinkers would drink and just sort of blah; you try to be blah.

You operated at such a high level of sensitivity, and I mean, this is being in the jungle and all, because every noise, every movement, you get such a high level of sensitivity in your mind, you have to deaden it down somewhat. That's where people smoked marijuana or else they got drunk. And depending if it was a hot patrol, where folks got shot or killed, you really had to deaden down. The ongoing reality is, you were going back on patrol.

You go on R&R [rest and relaxation]; I went to Bangkok. They had Hong Kong then, but I went to Bangkok when I went to R&R. But I had been in in-country R&R down at China Beach. You know, you go there for a week, and then you come, and you're still there. Well, you go on R&R for seven days, ten days. I didn't go to Hawaii and meet my family or something, so there wasn't that reintegration or reconnection of any type. I went to Hong Kong. I looked around and I said, oh, there's folks and all that, but no incoming. So, it was more of just you being on the streets; you seeing buildings, you know. You're not feeling that there's going to be incoming. But, you know, you cannot deaden down your senses too much because you have to go back after R&R, and go back to the bush.

DePue: In the book, the character of J.D.: I mean, it's very matter of fact that he uses marijuana more than he drank.

Jones: There were two types, those who smoked marijuana; those who drink. The big difference, the ones that smoked marijuana would lay on a bunker and look for falling stars, and the ones that drink would be coming back and start fights.

DePue: Which one was your experience?

Jones: It wasn't marijuana. I didn't like the high, and I didn't like getting drunk. I grew up; my mother owned taverns and all that, so alcohol was not—I've seen a lot of folks, what alcohol did to them. Over there, folks get drunk, and then they want to fight some more when they were in. So, that didn't make sense.

DePue: Apparently, marijuana was not hard to get.

Jones: Oh, no. No. It's like anything else in a war zone; there's all the stuff you're supposed to do on the base, and then there's what's outside the gate. (chuckles)

DePue: The other thing that comes across very clearly in the book—getting back to the issue of race—that oftentimes the blacks would use that opportunity to get together…

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: …that they would maybe re-segregate themselves to a certain extent.

Jones: That was mostly in the other areas of the base because, in recon, you was with your team.

DePue: So, that wasn't your personal experience.

Jones: Yeah, blacks would get together, but it wasn't a racial thing. It was more of a commonality thing.

DePue: Socializing.

Jones: Right. But it would be with your own, within the context of there. Or, if you went someplace else and you knew folks, you know, you could go anywhere. If you was black, and there was another one, they would welcome you as a blood brother and all of that. But it wasn't the hardcore racists, where they get together and be calling white folks names, or the country boys get together and start calling blacks names, because you're going to have to go patrol with them in another few days. So, it wasn't as much of the kind of racial tension, in terms of when I was there, if you got in some of the line units and all, where they had time to actually have those kind of emotions and express them.

In recon, you were so focused on survival because, like I said, no matter what you did at the base, you had to go out on patrol within a few days with these folks. When I was there, I didn't focus on all the other stuff. I mean, there was no reason to focus on it, to me, because my head was always, I've got to go out, and I just did not want to make sure I lost anything that I needed when I went out, to survive.

DePue: You grew up a pretty religious kid. Your grandmother made sure you'd go to church all the time. Did that stay with you, once you got to the jungle?

Jones: Parts of it. You know, you always got to believe in something bigger than yourself, because there's no way in the world that you can say your mind can understand all the interconnections of what things work around you. So, you always had to believe in something. When I was at home, it was Grandma, church, Mom; you know that. But God could be anywhere, and God is everywhere. No matter what, this is the one thing you did keep because you understood there is nothing you can do about anything. If incoming comes in, and it killed the guy next. You can have five guys, a damn shell can hit; three will die; one be really badly screwed up, and the other one won't even get a scratch. How do you explain that? (laughs)

DePue: Well, for some people, they would say that proves there isn't a God. That wasn't your experience?

Jones: No. But you did wonder, why did God let all this stuff happen? What is it? That's probably where I started to develop where my mind is now. I tell folks, you know, when it's raining, and you get wet, it's not raining to make you

wet, and it don't rain because you're there. If you weren't there, it's going to rain. Your presence is just an awareness of you being there at that moment. And, I guess what recon did was made me so focused on, always, at this moment, is what it is. God was there because, when incoming comes in, there are no atheists in them foxholes, when the incoming is tearing the ground up around you. Everybody's pleading to God. You may have had a conversation an hour ago. A guy said, "I don't believe in God." All of a sudden, that incoming come in. You'll hear him yell as loud as everybody else, "Oh God, don't let me get blown up. Don't let it fall on me." So, there are no atheists in a foxhole when it's incoming.

Now, is there intellectual conversations? Yeah, we'll say this and that and the concepts of all that. But, when the shit is coming down on your head, everybody prays to God that it don't come on their head.

DePue: We talked beforehand. The central story that's in the book—I keep referring to the book—is the story of the patrol during the siege of Khe Sanh. But excluding that, I wonder if you can tell us about a couple of other memorable patrols and experiences that you had.

Jones: Going into A Shau Valley, where everybody made wills out. (chuckles)

DePue: A Shau Valley: that's one of those names that rings with veterans of the Vietnam War, certainly.

Jones: Yeah. It was a hot place, a lot of bad guys in there. They put us in on this stream bed. Well, it was a sandbar on the stream bed. They didn't think there was any bad guys there. In the A Shau Valley, there's always bad guys. But they didn't think there was any here. Well, what happened is, there was an NVA battalion that apparently was there, like taking an R&R thing, you know. (chuckles) We ended up getting inserted right in the middle of their base camp because the stream went through their base camp. Nobody knew they were there.

They put us on the sandbar. As soon as the choppers left, we came under fire. For about an hour, we at the sandbar; they had all these old trees, you know, rotting and all. But the water got low, and that's where this big sandbar was at. We had little tree trunks and debris and all, and, for hours, we were there, and they were shooting from both sides of the stream. Finally we figured out, wait a minute, there wasn't supposed to be no bad guys, but they were there. So, finally, what happened is, they sent in the choppers and got us. So, we had to go down the stream and get out of the stream because we was down in like a little valley. Then we got out to flat land, and they came in to take us out. Of course, I think it was two choppers that almost got shot down; they left in flames.

It was really hot. Everybody, when they say we was going to A Shau Valley, folks, they would start making their wills out because, this don't sound right, because they said, well, we're just going in. We don't think nobody's there. But this whole battalion of NVA was there. And we landed right in the middle of the damn camp. So, that was one of the more memorable ones.

The other one was—I had so many of these things—well of course, the first patrol, when all that happened. Oh, I remember, there was one patrol where we were being chased, and that happened a lot. There's only six of you; you get chased a lot. They don't necessarily know where you're at, but they sort of know where you're at, and they chase you. We had run out of water. So, we're running through some little rice paddy and buffalo crap and everything, knocking it out of the way to get the pills, you know. They say, you throw your little pills in for your water. Well, that's good if you want to be staying healthy, but, if you're trying to stay alive, you really don't care about if it's unhealthy water. It's water, and it's wet. We was out of water, out of food, because they kept chasing us. They couldn't get the choppers in, and they couldn't find an LZ to us because of the area we were in. So, they chased us about two or three days, until we finally got someplace where they could get us out.

Well, it's one thing, you're sneaking and peeking around. It's another thing, when they're chasing you, because, when they're chasing you, now you can't stop because, once you stop, there's always going to be more than them. That was the one thing in recon: whenever you stopped to fight, there's always going to be more of them than you. So, them not knowing where you are and movement was the thing that was the most key thing, always, because you could not stand in a fight. When you got into a fight, if you stayed long enough you will be surrounded. So, you had to fight, break, run, fight, break, run. You had to keep moving. I think that was the thing that… That's something that most units, though, they could stay and fight and get reinforcements.

Now, what happened is, you get into a big firefight. If you got into a big firefight—and this one time it became a battalion size battle—that was a two-nine or something like that, the Marines. But, we ended up kicking it off, and it was almost like it was a battalion size ambush by the NVA, because they got the recon team. They take us out; they call a Sparrow Hawk, and they bring in a platoon, you know, more men to probe and all that. Then they ended up in the middle of being outgunned. Then, the next thing, you've got a company coming in. The next thing you know, you've got the battalion coming in. That's when they said, wow, there's a whole lot of these folks; it must have been a trap. So, I think that was the one time we may have sprung one, and that was a very hot one too.

DePue: Again, besides the Khe Sanh mission, which we'll probably get to next time we meet, what do you think was the worst mission that you went on?

Jones: The first one.

DePue: Just because…

Jones: Because it changed who I was. It had the most impact.

DePue: And what was the most serious medical challenge, as a medic, that you faced?

Jones: Let's see, which one. It was probably when I had to deal with wounds that were in the chest area, because there, it's internal, and you can only do so much. Yeah, you can put plastic over it to stop them from drowning, and, therefore, you have to do a trache,[2] you know, in terms of doing those kind of things. I mean, you got shot in your arm or something, you bandage it up, put around; you can still be moving. But, once you get hit in the chest area or stomach area, now you've got all these organs involved that are messed up, and there's nothing you can do in the bush when you have those kind of wounds.

DePue: What happens when you have wounds like that, and you're being chased?

Jones: You do fight a little longer because you have to give folks a chance. As long as the man is alive, you do not leave him. The whole team will go down in a fight. As long as a man's alive, you do not leave him.

DePue: How did you personally, then, deal with those kinds of situations and the fear involved and the tensions involved?

Jones: You know, you do what you… You don't know if it's the training, whether you're crazy, or you're stupid. It could be any of those choices, but you'd just be so focused on doing what you had to do. That's the one thing I'd learned about fear. Fear is a personal thing with each person because, whatever one person is fearful of, another person may laugh at because it don't mean nothing. I mean, it's very personal, fear. Fear is your thing. It's not something from outside you. But, once you're in these death defying situations, you don't even be thinking. You do what you have to do. You don't be thinking about it. A man's hurt, he's shot, you patch him. You throw him over your shoulder; you start running with him. The crazy thing about it is, I mean, he's got his hundred-pound pack, his body and all, and you're throwing him on yours. You've got the same thing. Now you've got double or triple your weight. But somehow you make the next step; you make the next step; you make the next step.

[2] tracheotomy

I don't know how… And the fear, I mean, there's bullets zipping and things are happening, and all you be focused on doing what you think you're supposed to be doing. It's like you've zoned to another place. Part of its training, I think. A lot of it is because it's a team. And the way the team thought things is, you know, one go down; all can go down. You don't think of it happening, but, once you get in a firefight and all that, if he's alive, we ain't leaving him; we're dragging him.

DePue: It sounds like your identity was much more being part of that team than being Tom Jones.

Jones: Oh, yeah. The team was what was important. That's who you went out with. That's who you stayed alive with.

DePue: I want to finish today, then, talking about January, maybe leading into the next couple months of 1968. Sixty-eight is an important year, historically, for the United States, and it kind of gets kicked off in Vietnam with the Tet Offensive and all of these prognostications that people like [General William] Westmoreland were making about, we're starting to turn the corner; it looks like we're going to be successful; things are going our way now…and then Tet hits. Do you remember that time?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Well, what happened is, they changed the strategy.

DePue: They?

Jones: The North Vietnamese. We were responding to them in all these hit and run little things, except for Khe Sanh, where they were doing constant. It was in the countryside, and they changed it and made it urban. That's what got us off guard, I think, in terms of Tet. Tet was an urban attack. It was not like all the rest of the war, up to that point, which was out in the boonies, in the jungle and all of that. Tet became urban warfare, and we'd been trained well for the jungle. (chuckles) So, all of a sudden, it caught us totally off.

DePue: But your war is still in the jungle when that occurs, right?

Jones: Mine was still in the jungle. We didn't go into the urban areas.

DePue: Well, Hue and Saigon, I know, were two areas where they hit hard.

Jones: Hue was one. Now, Hue is where we were; that's up north. Where we were is at Hue. There's Hue; I see. (consults a map)

DePue: It's right on the ocean here.

Jones: Yeah. In fact, Hue was a beautiful place. I used to go to Hue because it had all these girls' finishing schools. You go there, and you see nothing but all these girls and everybody on bicycles. It was amazing. I mean, a very sophisticated

kind of city, beautiful. Then Tet hit, and they just destroyed it in terms of any beauty.

We were outside of Hue because they threw us out there, number one, once it all happened. Like, where are these people coming from? Well, they're coming down here, and, by the way, they're not hiding. That was one of the things we noticed, that they were moving fast. What the NVA would do, they would move a whole battalion in the area in small groups to really fool you. So, you never could see the whole group. You saw these little… And that's why recon… They were using recon a lot because we had small groups out there. We could see them because they never moved en masse. They always moved in little small groups. And then, all of a sudden, they end up in one place at the same time. Now they're a big group. Well, then they're attacking you.

Yeah, during Hue, we were still in the jungle. We were looking at them, where they would run after Hue, when they were trying to disperse, get out of the cities. That's why I've got that thing about Hue was this whole turned urban. We saw a lot of movement of troops and all, but it wasn't the numbers. You couldn't see the numbers in one place like that because of the way they were doing small units. Then, all of a sudden, they coalesced in the cities and attacked. Then, what happened is they broke into small units again, when they were running to get out of there.

Hue was… I mean, during the Tet, it was hot everywhere. It wasn't from a strategic or people tactical thing; it was just so many people, either going to go fight, where they were going, or else running away. So, you had all kinds of groups in the jungle. I mean, it was unbelievable. I'd never seen that many folks running, but they weren't one big mass column, like a hundred men marching or anything. There was a hundred men running. (laughs)

DePue: Before Tet, did it feel to you like we were winning?

Jones: Oh, yeah, or even with Tet. If you talk to most Vietnam veterans, they're going to tell you we were winning; we were winning. And truthfully, we did. We didn't lose a battle. I heard a story about them doing the peace negotiations. An American colonel said "Why, we never lost a battle," And the Vietnamese general said, "Yeah, but we're both here at the peace table." So, winning or losing the battle didn't mean too much did it?

DePue: Did it feel like you were winning after Tet?

Jones: Well, see, in recon, we were so focused. It wasn't like an Army thing or a command thing, where you're saying you're winning or losing. We were so focused on what we did, which was go out in the jungle and not be seen, and observe; we didn't get in those kind of battles where this one army beat that

army. To us, in our world, that wasn't what we were dealing with. You didn't have a lot of philosophical concepts or these intellectual things about was the war, right? Was it this? You had to go out the next day. That's where your focus was; I've got to go out the next day. Once you got out of that, and you came home, then, all of a sudden, you had all these things about we did this and should we do this. But you were so focused in recon that you knew that, no matter what you did or didn't do, you had to go out, back to the jungle. And that was your whole focus because, once you lost that, then you started making mistakes; and, once you start making mistakes, then you increase your possibility of getting killed. So, you didn't hear a lot of philosophical discussions about military tactics and strategy. (chuckles) All you wanted to know is, when am I going out? Where am I going? What am I taking? When do I get back?

DePue: Let's finish with this question for today, then. Were you guys on your recon team good at what you did?

Jones: Oh, we thought we was the best, as long as we stayed alive, because it's when you didn't stay alive is when you said you were not good. That's not even a true statement. One of the things you found out, no matter how skillful you are, if the bad guys had luck, you'd be just as dead as if they were more skillful. So, it was a combination of luck and skill. We thought we were good because of the number of patrols we went on and the less number of us that got killed.

DePue: Reflecting on it, back from this perspective, forty years later, maybe, were you good?

Jones: Oh, yeah. We were good. And most of the teams were good. There were some that you did not want to go out with because you knew it was luck, because they weren't good at all. I mean, skill will take you so far, and luck will take over. But you've got to have enough skill to be unlucky. And they were going to be… You know, you could tell the folks… It was about the leadership. It really was about the leadership. If you had a team leader that really was trying to cultivate you, to make sure you had the skills to do your job and survive. Then you had team members who thought, by doing that, you would confront team members and be a sergeant, like you in boot camp; there's going to be trouble there.

DePue: This is my guess and, correct me if I'm wrong, these team leaders, what, twenty-one, twenty-two?

Jones: Oh, nineteen, they can be as young as nineteen. It was amazing.

DePue: That's an awful lot of responsibility.

Jones: Oh, yeah, a lot of responsibility. That was the amazing thing about it. People say how young they were. But what's really amazing is the job they were

doing and being responsible, you know, for other men's lives, when they got into the leadership role. I mean, yeah, there was always… I mean, young is going to be young. They going to be doing dumb, stupid stuff. But, in recon, you got old real quick because, if you didn't, little things killed you. Little lapses of judgment killed you. So, you could not afford not… They picked that up. Most of them that were good, they picked that up. And, even though they were young, they knew what they had to do. They knew who they had to do it with, and they knew that it wasn't none of this stuff of just going off wilding, being a wild child or something, because that's what got people killed. In recon, the whole thing was, don't do things that got people killed. If someone's going to kill you, that's because they got you. But, you don't make mistakes for you to get killed. (chuckles)

DePue: This has been a riveting discussion today, Tom. We'll pick it up again. There's still quite a bit more before we get to the trauma of even returning home, and then trying to make sense of that. That's probably another session away. I want to thank you very much for putting up with my questions and being so open and reflective in talking about these things.

Jones: I'm glad I'm old enough now to share. (laughs)

DePue: Yeah, there you go.

(end of interview #2 #3 continues)

Interview with Thomas Jones

VRV-A_L-2011-043.03

Interview # 3: November 10, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Thursday, November 10, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I am here again today with Tom Jones. Good afternoon, Tom.

Jones: Good afternoon.

DePue: We are in Tom's basement.

Jones: Well, it's got a lot of names. I call it a writing studio. My wife calls it a man cave. It's really a basement. (both laugh)

DePue: It serves many roles. November 10th, I guess it's appropriate that we're out here one day before Veteran's Day and talking about this.

Jones: This whole month, the Marine Corps' birthday. Once I served with them, I have to remember that.

DePue: The Marine Corps' birthday, today, 236, isn't it?

Jones: Right, yeah. After living with them, you can't talk about Marines on their birthday, without saying it.

DePue: I know this much about the Marines, that they keep track of their birthday much better than the other services. I have no idea what the birth date of the Army is.

Jones: Right, that's a good point. (chuckles)

DePue: I bet you that was beat into you right from the beginning.

Jones: Oh, yeah. Yeah, their tradition, their history. What makes a Marine is, you've got to love misery. Everybody else says, I want hot meals and all. A Marine says, No, make the weather bad. Make the food cold. Get me pissed off, so I really go do my job. (chuckling)

DePue: And they did that well.

Jones: That's right; they do it well.

DePue: This is our third session, Tom. The first two sessions, we talked about—the first session, about growing up in Illinois and getting into the initial phases of your military service, joining the Navy, ending up being a corpsman.

Jones: Going to the Marines.

DePue: Almost getting to the point where you were in Vietnam. Session two, we dealt with the Vietnam experience as the medic, as the corpsman…

Jones: The corpsman, right.

DePue: …on a long-range reconnaissance patrol with the Marines. That was some pretty searing experiences. I'm holding in my hand, your book that you wrote several years ago, *Lost Survivor*. We talked about that a little bit last time, and we're going to get into more of that today, as well. Here's where I wanted to start. The character of J.D., you've already told us, is loosely patterned after many of your own experiences?

Jones: Yes.

DePue: In terms of his personality, J.D.'s personality versus yours, where would there be similarities, and where are there differences?

Jones: I think there are more similarities than differences. Going through that period of time, there was no differences. Those are the emotional kinds of things that I was going through when I was going through those experiences. After I got older, I started to understand that, even though those are the emotions at that point in time, the hardest thing was how to redefine yourself to have other emotions to replace those.

DePue: Once you come back.

Jones: Once you come back.

DePue: I don't know that we'll get there too much today, but we definitely want to examine that quite a bit because that's very important. Let's get down to the specifics here. Your unit of assignment, once you were there, what was that?

Jones: I was a corpsman with the 3rd Marine Recon Battalion, and what we did was, most of our time was spent up in Quang Tri. When I first got there, I was in Dong Ha, which was an artillery range from across the DMZ [demilitarized zone]. So, we used to get artillery rounds all the time. So, then they moved the camp five miles from the DMZ, and they just called it Quang Tri, but it was Quang Tri Province that that was in. So, all the time I spent there was up around the DMZ. And what we did was, six or seven of us would go on long-range patrols, which means we'd go out, and we'd be out in the bush from, I don't know, seven to ten days. It depends on what the objective was, in terms of the mission. You'd come back. You'd be back for four or five days, and then you'd go back out for seven to ten days.

DePue: I've got written down here, MAC, which stands for Military Advisory Command, Vietnam Studies and Observation Group.

Jones: Right.

DePue: What was that?

Jones: Well, that was a group. It was a multi-service group that was put together to coordinate all the different services, as far as I understand it, in terms of the Vietnam theater. Basically, they did the intelligence gathering and analysis of it and then passing it on. The 3rd Marine Division Long-Range Reconnaissance Battalion was the only Marine unit attached to it. That was because of the intelligence gathering. So, we actually, though we were this Marine battalion for long-range, we really did not report to the usual Marine Corps staff structure. We reported to that group because of the intelligence gathering.

DePue: Many of those who worked in MACV, they were working directly with the South Vietnamese soldiers, with ARVN. Were you in that role as well?

Jones: Well, I wasn't in that role any way, formally, as part of our mission. But what we did, because I was a corpsman, is that the corpsmen and some doctors, we would get together, and we would go into the village of Quang Tri and treat kids and medical things in the villages. But that wasn't really—[I] didn't look at it as part of the official part of policy—even though it probably was somewhere on somebody's desk. But we were in the area, and it was something that we were responding to, in terms of just the medical needs that were going on. So, we didn't really have the relationship, like the Rangers or the Green Berets and all those folks did, with villages, being part of the villages, actually putting together groups in villages, you know. Ours was basically intelligence gathering. So, we wasn't trying to make friends with anybody. (both laugh)

DePue: That wasn't part of the equation. I wanted to ask you some specific questions about incidents that you have conveyed here. The book starts, basically, with a

mortar attack on the compound, where you were, basically, buried alive in the bunker or almost buried.

Jones: Exactly.

DePue: That happened?

Jones: That happened. Things like that happened. I was a corpsman. I did sleep in the corpsmen's hooch. I was with the long-range reconnaissance team…went out on patrols with them, which is also in the book. Those are from patrols that I have been on and my own experiences. The fact is, you talk about incoming—I say it in the book, being in artillery range, whenever the mood hit the enemy, they decided to shell you. They could just do it once in a while and mess with you, so that, you know, in the morning, you're going to get a couple of shells in. Or they get pissed off, and they shell you all day and all night. (laughs) So, all of those things happened. All the combat kind of things, in terms of the setting, the environments, happened.

DePue: One of the things you talked about, in conjunction with the bunker and being trapped in the bunker and having a flashlight, and finding out you had some company in the bunker.

Jones: Rats, yes. Rats got awful big over there. There was so much to eat. I think they got bigger when the United States got in the war because we sent so many supplies over there. So, they obviously liked to live wherever there was folks in a green uniform that had a patch on because they always had food they could go and pilfer.

DePue: Did you have a phobia against rats, like J.D. did?

Jones: Yeah. When I was a kid, the incident happened in terms of the rats creeping in the bedroom, which is why they've stuck with me. I've had several experiences that rats are not just big mouses; they are really a different breed. Since it was the sewer rats, they were a little bigger than the usual rats. I had experiences with the rats, experiences over in Nam. The first time I saw a rat, it was early morning. I came out; it had rained, and this rat was drinking out of a rain puddle. I thought it was a possum or something. I couldn't believe it was a rat; it was that big. (laughs)

DePue: Well, that might spook anybody.

Jones: Oh, yes. I did not like the rats. But, if you got in the bunker, you'd be on one side, they'd be squeaking over there, and everybody figured out where everybody else was. And they didn't cross the line.

DePue: So, they weren't all that aggressive?

Jones: The other problem is, the rats lived in bunkers a lot of places, see. So, that was their home. Now and then, in something like that, then, it was different. The rats would attack to protect it.

DePue: They're protecting their home turf then.

Jones: Right. You know, you got caught in there. The rats want to stay out of your way, and you want to stay out of their way. So, everybody wants to know where the other ones are, so they can go on the other side of the bunker. (chuckles)

DePue: A couple of the characters, and there's a lot of colorful characters in the book. Dancing Dan and Bobby…Booby Trap Bobby.

Jones: Booby Trap Bobby, yes, yes. Men do strange things when they're constantly under pressure, in terms of combat, when they're not in combat. I mean, that was just an example of some of the kinds of personalities that I saw there that really went to the extreme. Especially in recon because everything is being a man. You're a man and do this. You're supposed to be always at the top of your game, whatever it is. But FNGs, fucking new guys, were bona fide, approved targets. (chuckles) They haven't been anyplace to show who they are yet. So, that's who got picked on a lot with these kind of pranks and all.

DePue: Why? Why did the FNGs get picked on?

Jones: Well, it was sort of a ritual. You're now going to be part of us. We want to see if you got a sense of humor. Are you fast? It's sort of like a passage of rites of getting in to become part of something. You start off as an outsider. They don't know you, don't know what you can do, don't know what they can expect of you. So, what happens is, they do crazy things, just to see how you react to it. And, if you overreact, they name you for the incident. (both laughing)

DePue: Well, it sounds like you were at the other end of the process, being the guy who named people for incidents.

Jones: Oh, yeah. When this period of time went on, yeah. They had a lot of respect for the corpsmen because we went out with them and all. So, they didn't mess with the corpsmen too much. Two folks that they didn't really mess with, actually, probably three, was CBs [Construction Battalion members], because CBs came and built the real building and all, you know; cooks, because nobody wanted to have their food messed up by some cook getting pissed off at them; and corpsmen. Those three, basically, weren't part of the Marines, but they were more accepting of them than other entities.

DePue: Since you talked about the FNGs, I wonder if you can reflect on that whole process of people coming in as individuals and going out as individuals, rather than as units, which is how we're fighting the war now.

Jones: Oh, yeah. Going over, it was a plane full of corpsmen and a few nurses. So, it wasn't really [that] you were attached to any unit or anything. You were going over as a replacement, which was part of the strategy in the war at Vietnam, is because they thought, if you had all these individuals go, then you would worry about this buddy thing, where some buddy gets stopped, and you lose your combat effectiveness, you know, if you're in combat. So, everybody was an individual, coming in. So, everybody was FNG when they came in. It wasn't that you came in with a group of folks that you trained with and were there. You came in; it was all replacement, after those first units went in, and replacements were one by one. Then, the difference, when you come home, you come the same way. You do your rotation time, and then you're on a plane, and you're coming home.

Well, the previous war, like World War II, folks trained together; they fought together; they came back, and they were on ships, which gave a chance for folks to decompress and say, you know, you acted like an animal over there, and that was good, but that was war and combat. Now, you're going home; you can't act like that. But you've got the reinforcement of people who had been through the experience with you.

When you come back as a singular individual, like you did coming back from Vietnam, there is no support about that. You're going back into "the world" and the life you had before. But you've been so redefined, in terms of surviving that, and you have nobody to really talk it out with. So, it really—that's where the problem is, everything is so internalized then.

DePue: Reflecting back, then, you don't think that was the best way of doing things back in the Vietnam era?

Jones: No. I think it was an experiment, and they figured out it didn't work, because they don't do it no more. (laughs) Obviously, you have replacements coming in, individuals, but if it's a policy, it's a different animal than if it's something that just happens. We've got five guys. We've got five slots open. We get five guys that come in as replacements.

DePue: Part of that whole process of coming in as an individual, going out as an individual, also got connected with counting the days.

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Did you do some of that?

Jones: Oh, heck yeah. That was one of the things that the book tried to do. That's one of the things that put the "at attention" was, he was going home in a short period of time. He was counting down. When folks get thirty days out or so, nobody wants to really be the one to go on patrol because now you can see an end to it. It's not like, okay, next week I'm going back out in the bush. It's not like that, you know, in X number of weeks, I'll be leaving this place. Nobody

wanted to get killed leaving and going out on patrol. And that's the tension, obviously, that he was leaving. But, because of this strong bonding of team, that he really was going to make that last patrol because that's what he did there.

DePue: What were some of the rituals that you guys had for counting the days?

Jones: People would mark on the calendar. Basically, it was marking. I didn't really—as I look personally, I started counting the days, but I kept losing track because I was doing so many things. (chuckles)

DePue: You weren't one of the guys who woke up every morning and says, there's X number of days left?

Jones: No, because I always had so much demand on doing something, being a corpsman, because it's not like, okay, I'm not going to go on patrol. I'll just sit in the hooch, you know, and wait my time out. Still, I had to treat folks. I was still so involved. Even if I didn't go to the bush, I'm still on call twenty-four hours a day, and something always goes on when you got all those folks and explosives and guns and heavy metal. You're always doing something as a corpsman. Or, what happens is, you get a lot of the folks coming in for the emotional and mental, because a corpsman is also like a chaplain, because that's another wound, from their viewpoint. They'd come and talk to you because they trust you to take care of them, save their lives. So, what happens is, a lot of times you also ended up being put in this role of being the chaplain and listening to all the things. There was always something going on that filled your mind. (laughs)

DePue: Which was probably a good thing.

Jones: Oh, yeah, because what happened is, if you start focusing on your fears and all, then what happens is, you make it a reality because you'll do something stupid to put you in the exact situation that you're fearing.

DePue: Well, going back to the book, one of the things you talked about in the book was an assassination attempt that happened at one of the chopper [helicopter] pads. Do you recall that incident?

Jones: Yep, yeah.

DePue: And was that based on something that really happened?

Jones: Well, it was based on something that happened. I obviously did the fiction part, in terms of adding, but several teams had assassination attempts put on them. How many were coordinated from the outside or how many thought they were just doing it for their country, at the time, I don't know. But they really did not like recon.

DePue: They being?

Jones: The enemy—the NVA, the VC—the gooks did not like recon because you were out in their backyard moving around like they do.

DePue: There were incidents, then, where you would land someplace, and the enemy was there waiting for you?

Jones: Oh, yeah. The fact is, when you go down, especially in elephant grass, everybody's looking because they used to put bamboo stakes up and put grenades on them where they thought would be a landing spot. Or else, what they would do—because they were excellent at tactics and all—they would create some reason for you to come see what was going on, and then they would booby trap all the possible landing strips with the bamboo sticks and grenades. So, they were always looking for ways to get to recon.

DePue: It sounds to me, then, like the helicopter would come in; it would deliberately hover high enough so they're not going to trigger that stuff.

Jones: Yeah, it comes down very slowly. Now, most of the time, you go in wide open; they zoom in. But, when they started going down in elephant grass, then they sort of—they make it slowly, so the elephant grass starts parting, so you can—well, once they start coming down, see, the elephant grass parts, and then you can see it. That's why everybody'd be looking. If you see a bamboo stake with a little brown things on them, that's not normal. So, you don't land there. (laughs)

DePue: Well, the pilot is busy trying to fly the thing.

Jones: Everybody's looking.

DePue: Everybody's looking.

Jones: Oh, yeah. The gunners, everybody's leaned over looking because—I mean, those are things that have happened. So, then it becomes part of your repertoire of remembrance.

DePue: How high off the ground would they hover when you actually jumped off the aircraft? Would they land?

Jones: Coming into brush or something, they usually didn't. If they hit flat ground, they would land, people jump, almost like they kept moving, you just jumped off and rolled, and they kept really slowly moving. Then they had a pattern to go up. But, when you had to come straight down because there was no—you couldn't make a run to gain altitude, and you had to go straight up, well, that was different.

DePue: Okay. The one incident that is most important—at least in my mind when I read it—was the whole patrol that occurred at Khe Sanh during the Khe Sanh siege, which started in late January and went on for the next couple of months. This is towards the tail end of your tour there, and that's what you were just talking about. So, you personally were put in the position of, do I want to go on this? I've got just a few days left.

Jones: Oh, yeah. That's why I say, that's why I know the feeling, because I did it. Somebody else could read it and say, well, that don't make no sense. Well, I read it and say, it don't make no sense. I read that too, now. (both laugh) Then, the team was going out, and I was the doc for the team.

DePue: What I want you to do, then, is to take a few minutes here and, as elaborate as you can get, tell us that story of that particular raid, from what actually happened in your experience.

Jones: Well, they had this idea that they could put a recon team out.

DePue: They, being senior command?

Jones: Senior command. It wasn't that they wanted a recon team. The problem is, they didn't know what was going on. They heard noises. They know there's a lot of movement. They get hit with artillery all the time, but they had no idea of how many, where, any of that, because the usual patrols couldn't get out.

DePue: Let me just give a little bit of background here, and you can correct me when I get some of this wrong. Khe Sanh is in the northwest corner of South Vietnam. So, it's pretty darn close to the DMZ. It's pretty close to the border with Laos, as well.

Jones: Right.

DePue: Here you've got a regiment and some other units of Marines who were based at Khe Sanh, and then surrounding hilltops and perimeter areas. As I understand, reading the history books about it, the North Vietnamese saw this as a duplication of Dien Bien Phu.

Jones: Exactly.

DePue: That this is going to be this big set path, set the course of battle.

Jones: It worked before.

DePue: They were going to have this Marine unit that was stuck there, and they were going to crush this unit.

Jones: Right. And, of course, the Marines say, no, you're not. So, I mean, it was under constant artillery bombardment. It was under constant fire. We used to

say the airstrip belonged to the enemy because, as soon as anything got near the airstrip, that's when all the mortars and all would come in. And they did it so often that they had it pretty well bracketed, in terms of hitting the strip, and not just trying to find where the strip is by exploding shells. They did it enough, they knew their settings to be on the airstrip.

DePue: The other thing I should clarify here, this isn't Viet Cong units. These are—

Jones: This is NVA. This is real army. There's a big difference.

DePue: With real artillery.

Jones: With real artillery, oh yeah, a big difference. Here, now, you're facing their real army. They have the resources. They have the armament. So, this wasn't the VC, you know, little guerilla actions going on. This was actually a major military battle they was having. And when we flew in, the helicopter got hit. I put a little bit more, obviously, in there in terms of the description of it in the book. [We] Got in. We did get out of the wire. We did go for a while, and it was easy to see that there were a lot of gooks because they were moving around in trucks. (laughs)

DePue: How do you go through the enemy line in the first place, if they basically have the whole compound surrounded?

Jones: Well, what happens, what Spooky did, was create a pathway.

DePue: Spooky.

Jones: Spooky—or Puff the Magic Dragon, as the Army called it—a C-47 that has many guns and all. When it shoots, it could put down a bullet like every two inches on a football field. So, what we did was, Spooky went through and would also detonate a lot of mines and all. So, it really created a path for us to get out of the wire and into the bush because, once we got in the bush, now it's a game of hide and seek, which is why they wanted a recon team. It's not like a regular patrol, which they're going to go out and try to see where the enemy is and all that. But they don't move the way recon does, where we go into the deep bush.

DePue: How many people on this patrol?

Jones: Seven. We did see ammo dumps and all. I added something about the cave because I wanted to add a little tension, because General Giap was there, who really was the architect of Dien Bien Phu, which is why this was such a symbolic thing was going on at that time. Because here, he was trying to create that same situation because, obviously, what happened with Dien Bien Phu is that they ran the French out. So, that added more tension to the story. But the patrol of recon going into Khe Sanh, walking out and getting patrol, we weren't out there more than a day because, actually, that's when they

discovered we was out there. There was too many of them; you could only hide for so long because there was so many. Every time you turned around, especially when we was getting around to where the roads were, that they were using openly.

DePue: Going through the line initially and knowing you're going into an area that's that infested with the enemy, and you just have a few weeks left. Aren't you thinking, this is going to be a long shot if we survive this thing?

Jones: I did not at the time. The only thing, at the time, I was thinking about is what I was going to do. There was no philosophical, conceptual thoughts. It's, I've got to raise this foot and put it down where there's no mines. You're so focused on that moment of what you're doing because, when you don't, that's when you make mistakes that get you killed. So, what happens is, you didn't have those kind of thoughts, at that time. The only thought I had was doing what I was supposed to be doing the best way I could, to make sure my ass got back. It was too late to say, I can't go. (laughs)

DePue: Again, going out when basically the Khe Sanh area is totally infested with the enemy; they're all over the place. If you did get in trouble, was the thought that somebody would chopper in to rescue you?

Jones: Interestingly, I don't remember thoughts of getting in trouble, to have that plan B. (laughs)

DePue: Well, in the book they definitely got in trouble. What happened on your patrol?

Jones: Oh, we got in trouble because there was no way not to get in trouble because, I mean, it was a full invading force of the enemy all around there. So, even though we got out, and we got moving around, and we did see things and reported things, it wasn't that long because they just had so many troops that were roaming around. So, all of a sudden, you didn't have your usual hiding… you couldn't hide in places. The fact is, they were hiding in those places. (laughs) So, you ran into them all of a sudden. These places you would go in the deep bush, where you wouldn't see a lot of enemy move through it, they were there, because now they're an invading force. So, it was really a strange thing in terms of it. They were hiding to ambush.

So, we went out. We did see. We was out there for about a day or so, and they had to get us out.

DePue: Can you talk about some of the actions that you got yourself into?

Jones: In terms of being on the patrol?

DePue: Yes.

Jones: Well, the thing about the snake, with the guy from Detroit, that had happened where the snake came across the pack. I don't even know why the snake didn't—all I know is, I was trying to be part of the tree because the snake, obviously, had not bitten the tree. So, I was just trying to be part of the tree, when it came down. And he did aim, and I thought he was going to shoot me. That incident happened. Of course, I made it a little longer, in terms of the length of the snake and all that. It was a poisonous snake, and he was going to shoot me.

The thing of finding the road and seeing tanks, because they did have the tanks there. The fight: we really didn't start the fight. We were trying to get out of the area and ended up getting into the fight.

DePue: Okay, let's pretend, in this case, that I haven't read the book, that the listeners haven't read the book. So, if you could walk us through the details there.

Jones: Starting on the patrol, or going out, or starting when it gets into the firefight?

DePue: When you get into the firefights.

Jones: Well, in the book, I would just say, because the members of the team understood Vietnamese, a certain amount of it, they had heard that the Vietnamese were going to come out the next day and search the area for the recon team, which, then, the recon team decided, well, we cannot… I mean, one thing you know in recon, like I said, if you're in enemy country, as soon as the first shot, as soon as you get in a firefight, you are surrounded, automatically. And now, you've got all these folks with all these guns and all these tanks and all. It was not a good thing to be surrounded by them. But, if they're coming and looking for you, and you're a small team, you got to create a way to get out of the area.

The best way to create a way to get out of the area is make them worry about their behinds. So, you attack them. And that's what happened; they attacked. And, of course, that caused so much confusion because a recon team would not attack as a normal course. They were trying not to be found, and then it used it as a defensive thing, when they do get found, in terms of fighting.

DePue: When you say you attacked, your team attacked, what were you attacking?

Jones: It was a base camp that we attacked.

DePue: And there were armored vehicles there, tanks?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Well, there was two things that were very surprising that we seen. There was a lot of things that were very surprising, but two things stand out. One, seeing a tank in the jungle, which in my lexicon of my brain, didn't put tanks in jungles…tanks in deserts, tanks in Europe, tanks…but not in the

jungle. And the other thing is, because we went in the areas, there probably hadn't been any humans in those areas for long periods of time. The first time I saw a couple of wild elephants. They seem bigger when they're wild than when you see them in a zoo. (chuckles) Besides that, being from Illinois and farm country and in Chicago, so, to see an elephant that don't have nobody on their back with a stick, that was one of the things I have a lasting memory of. I couldn't believe it. They were just rolling around, you know, and they were big. I think wild elephants are bigger than… But anyway, go ahead.

DePue: Let's go back to the attack.

Jones: So, anyway, that was the strategy, to attack, because, by doing an attack, you're creating a diversion because they get on the defense; then you have a chance to move out of there because they're worried about another attack. So, they're ready to either try to counterattack or else… And that was the only edge that was possible, is to create a confusion so that they would get focused on one place, where you can start moving to get out. In real life, the only reason we really got out is because we did attack their base camp.

DePue: When you say attack, you're off at a set distance, firing at them, or did you actually try to close and engage in close combat, as well?

Jones: Actually, what we tried to do was, we just wanted to run through their camp shooting at everything. It's not trying to be accurate, and count how many folks you shot. You just wanted to break up, so that they'd be concerned. So, it was a base camp, and we just ran through shooting. As long as you kept running and shooting and throwing grenades, you're okay. It's when you stop that it becomes a problem, because now they know where you're at, and they come get you. But if you keep moving… So, actually, it was a diversion. It wasn't that we were trying to get into a firefight. We wasn't trying to accomplish no mission. The only mission we had was how to save our asses by keep moving. The only way we can move at all was with them not to be focused on us. So, we attacked them.

DePue: Was the radio still working before you launched that attack?

Jones: Um-hmm.

DePue: Did you call in and tell them that you going to be attacking and then be looking for us; we're going to need some help?

Jones: No, because we didn't trust the radio because the folks—we had the sense, they knew we were there, and as soon as the radio—I mean, they monitored all of this stuff. They had to figure out where it was at, where you were, you know. But they tried triangulations and all that. They had all that ability. They had teams that hunted recon teams too, which was another story in itself.

DePue: Did all seven of the members survive running through that compound?

Jones: All seven survived.

DePue: What happened after that?

Jones: Well, after that, we got back, and, of course, I left.

DePue: Well, how did you get rescued though?

Jones: Oh, we got to a point where they could pick us up on the helicopters. We got to a flat plain. By then, of course, we had support because then the Hueys, the gun ships, were there, and then the Phantom jets were there. So, the enemy now, their heads were down because it was a surprise to them, first of all, to be attacked because they were the invading force. They did not expect an attack. I mean, this is, obviously, afterwards you think of these connections and these links. At the time, it was just you had to do what you had to do. I'm going to run through. I'm going to shoot everything that moves, you know, that's alive, and keep running.

DePue: So, it sounds like you attacked the compound. You got as far away as you could to feel a little bit safe, into an open area where you can get picked up.

Jones: Where the helicopters could…

DePue: Did you then call on the radio to have them pick you up?

Jones: The radio was okay when we started, but it did get shot. So, it wasn't any good. Right after we went through and we were trying to get to the helicopters, then obviously there was enemy folks around, and the radio got hit as we were trying to leave. But, these weren't from the compound where we went through and attacked. These were folks coming to the compound we ran into. That's where the radio got knocked out. But we had already made where we were moving, in terms of it. Then, once we got to the flight area, they came in.

DePue: So, the link-up coordination had already occurred before this.

Jones: It occurred before the other radio.

DePue: Okay.

Jones: Oh yeah, that was a… It was the most intense, in terms of firefights and like that. Been in a lot of the firefights; they're all intense, but that was a little bit more because everybody was specifically looking for you…sort of like it personalized it. (chuckles)

DePue: Do you have some other incidents that you haven't told us, that are really prominent in your mind?

Jones: Oh, there was a few… I remember one time, we was going to A Shau Valley, and they landed us in the middle of the stream. It had a sandbar, and so, we were put on this sandbar because it was open for the helicopters. But what they didn't say—and what they didn't know—is that a battalion had moved in the area for R&R. (laughs) We landed in the middle of their camp. So, we're down in these valleys, and we're in the middle of a stream, and we're on a sandbar, and old tree limbs and all, had been washed up when the tide was high. As soon as they dropped us and left, we started getting gunfire from everywhere—all the banks from both sides, because we were in the middle of the damn camp. We didn't know. They kept us pinned down for a long time because they couldn't get to us. You know, we was hiding under these old beached big limbs and stuff and all kinds of stuff. We was hiding. So, they couldn't get to us. They were just shooting at us. But, of course, we couldn't move because, if you moved, you get shot right in the middle of the stream. And they were shooting down at us.

So, finally, what happened is they had a gunship came in. They came in and sprayed both sides at the same time, basically, so we could get out of the middle of the stream and get on a higher ground and get out of there. That was one that was pretty—The fact is, we were going to A Shau Valley, and folks actually made wills out because they didn't expect to come back because A Shau Valley was a hot area.

DePue: Where was that in relation to Khe Sanh?

Jones: A little south of it, I think; just south of it.

DePue: It's certainly a name I recognize, but I'm not placing it on the map here. We're looking at a map right now, of the I Corps area, which is the northern part of South Vietnam.

Jones: Khe Sanh. A Shau Valley was—I have to look at it. It was in Quang Tri's Province, and it was between Quang Tri and Khe Sanh, but, I think, a little south.

DePue: Now, on either side, then, the mountains are fairly rugged in that area?

Jones: Oh, yeah. What happened is, you had mountains, then, that came down. And then, what happened—because this is a river that cut through. So, you had these sharp banks, which meant—That's why I say, the firing angle they had was so good because they were actually firing down at us. When we walked into it, we had started moving, which was good; we did move. We had started moving, and our point guy took a shot at this tree. Across the stream, on the tree, was a sniper he had taken out with his Willie Peter grenade. That's when we realized we're in the middle of something, that they had snipers out already. Then, after that, of course, the whole world turned into lead shooting through the air. And, like I said, they couldn't get to us.

Finally, the Huey came in, made a path for us. We were able to get out of the stream, the sandbar in the stream. We were able to get out and get to higher ground, and then move where they could come to pick us up. But that was death-defying a few times because, I mean, they were everywhere because we were in the middle of their base camp. (laughing)

DePue: What made the A Shau Valley such a dangerous place? Is that kind of a route of transport?

Jones: It was a route that they went through. They considered it their territory.

DePue: How about an action or some actions where you guys took some casualties?

Jones: Well, I put in the book, the first time I had to deal with someone who actually got killed, and that was from our own bomb. That was the first time I actually saw folks killed, the first time anyone got killed. I mean, that first patrol, that happened. It probably is the one that sticks the most, the further I get away from Vietnam. It stays there. A lot of the other stuff, some of it merges a little bit, and I have to think about it to bring it back up. But that first patrol was probably the one that had the most impact that sticks with me today, going through…and all, the first kind of things that occurred.

Then, the whole thing I put in there about going to a pile of gooks and kicking dead bodies and all that. That was for real. And what it was, was to show you what death is. It's a numbered piece of meat, a piece of dead meat, you know? The first time you start doing it, what happens is you're squeamish. You're like, why am I kicking a dead body? And then, all of a sudden—this is the insidiousness of what happens to your mind, in terms of being subjected to that kind of total traumatic inputs in your head—all of a sudden, you go over this point where you say, well, if he's dead it don't make a difference if I kick him or not. That's when you lose the whole respect for the things that you learned at home, which were the ceremonial grieving for dead and all that. That was a transitional point, mentally, of understanding that, to be alive, I can't be that.

DePue: There's a line in the book where J.D. is thinking. He thinks to himself, or he says to somebody, that he killed more men than he would ever save or help.

Jones: True. Being involved in recon, besides the gun battles and all that, and the call- in artillery and to targets, I'll never know as many people that I've probably been involved in their deaths, knowing or unknowing.

DePue: Well, in your experience too. I mean, pilots oftentimes know that they've killed people, but it's at a distance.

Jones: It's at a distance. I remember, I was taking a flight to Washington. I was going to one of the committees out there, and a young pilot got on in St. Louis, where they had four teams they were testing and all, down there at the time.

We ended up next to each other, and we was talking. He found out I had been to Vietnam and all, and he was a pilot. So, he started asking about, how did it feel to kill? It was really a first; it really took me back. I said, that's a strange question. But then, as I talked to him, he learned how to fly. To him it's just like playing a videogame. And he goes, and he pushes a button. There's explosions, and he gets a report. There's been secondary explosions, or you think you may have killed this many enemy or whatever. But there's no human connection to it. Whereas, when you're in something like recon, or you're in combat on the ground, you can look your enemy in the eye. So, you know you are killing another human being, but they probably didn't feel that. You can have remorse, if not then, at some other time, that it ever happened. But, if it's just a videogame, and you push a button, there's no sense.

There is a humanity in war. Otherwise, everybody would be killed. (chuckles) No matter how many gets killed, there are more that could be killed. All the prisoners don't have to be alive, you know? So, there is some kind of strange places and times that this humanity comes up. But that's the thing that you have to lose, is this humanity, to be able to survive in combat. The humanity is not in combat, even though it can arise there, when you decide not to take a shot or to kill somebody. You can make that decision not to do it.

DePue: And you did?

Jones: Oh, I did it many times, because they're running away with their backs to me, and they wasn't coming at me. See then, I was more in my corpsman mentality, waiting to see if something happens for me to do something, is when they're running at you. When you focus on being a Marine, the time to be a Marine, is when they're running at you. If they're running away from me, I can be a corpsman again. Then, I had to go fix them sometimes. That's probably one of the other big emotional things.

Being a corpsman, you're in this very unbelievable position that I have actually had to work on men who were trying to kill me, that I shot. It's a real… It's a dichotomy going on. That's where I really had to face that dilemma of this dichotomy, of being a corpsman and yet acting like a Marine because, even though this man was trying to kill me and I shot him, but now, I had to take care of his wound. That happened more than one time. We used to take them back for prisoners or something. That was probably one of the more difficult things to deal with, being in recon, as my base training was healthcare, medical, in terms of it.

DePue: To the enemy.

Jones: Right. Especially if he tried to kill you, and now, all of a sudden, you're fixing him up. (chuckles)

DePue: Do you recall any reactions that you would have gotten from them? Maybe they're unconscious; maybe they're not.

Jones: The enemy?

DePue: Yeah.

Jones: It was a surprised look on their face when I came to him. But, when I start putting bandages on him, you know, then it was different. Then, I didn't sense anything else because there was still other stuff going on. But, I mean, when I first went over, they would look at me like I was coming over to finish the job. But, when I, all of a sudden, get down and I start putting a bandage to them, then they realized I'm there to help, and I'm not there to try to kill him, even though I shot him. It's crazy.

DePue: What was the emotions on their face when they figured out that you were there to help them?

Jones: Confused, confused. Just shot him, now I'm coming over and putting a bandage on where I shot him. (chuckles)

DePue: Would you have left them in the jungle, or would they have been…?

Jones: Oh, these would be taken as prisoners. We took them as prisoners, called choppers in. We was in an area where they could call the choppers in and put them in. Well, the one thing about recon is, there's only seven of you, so you don't really try to take prisoners, unless there's a specific reason for it because you can't afford to feed them, water them and take care of them. So, you don't take too many prisoners. If you're taking a prisoner, it's for intelligence gathering reasons. Otherwise than that, is trying not to make sure people know you're there.

DePue: You were talking about how you had to kind of separate your humanity that you came over to Vietnam with, with this brutal experience of combat, once you got over there and become, basically, a killing machine.

Jones: Yes.

DePue: There's a comment from a gunnery sergeant. I think he says to J.D. in your book, and here's what the gunnery sergeant said, "When you kill a man, there are two graves; one in the ground and the other one in your soul."

Jones: And that's when you kill a man, and you know he's a man. It's different than shooting at little uniforms moving around. And usually, it's the first time because that's when the graveyard starts within your soul. Those are the things that stick with you because they stay; they don't go away. The first man you kill, that you knowingly know you killed another human being, that's what sticks. After that, they're the enemy.

DePue: But, that first one happened on that first patrol that we've talked about?

Jones: Was really a man being killed. It wasn't the enemy, at that point in time, even though he was in enemy dress and all. But he wasn't the enemy the same way it was after that moment.

DePue: Okay. Some of this we've talked about already, but I found there was a lot of very compelling quotes that I'd been pulling out of the book here, that I'm going to be reading. Here's another one, talking about this kind of an experience, what keeps you going. And, again, I think you've addressed it to a certain point, but here's a quote, "Even if McMasters hadn't ordered him to go, he would have wanted to."

Jones: Yes.

DePue: The Valley Dogs were so much a part of J.D. that he still wanted to be with them, even if it meant death.

Jones: Because every time they went out, it could have meant death. So, that was the bond from day one. The first time you got on the team, you get in a firefight, and you really become a team because you all come back alive.

DePue: Did you really have a choice for that Khe Sanh mission, of whether or not you could go?

Jones: I didn't have to go because I was short (in terms of remaining service), and I was a senior corpsman. I didn't have to go on as many patrols as I did, by being a senior corpsman. We were understaffed, but there was other corpsman there they could have sent. But, once you get with a team, you were part of that team. Do or die, you know; that's the thing.

I've had people talk to me about how scary it is, about this warrior spirit that they felt coming out of the book, in terms of surviving. And I said, yeah, it's something that's very hard to really have folks understand. When people become part of something, and it becomes a whole, you're always going to want to be there because you're trained to be there; you've been there; they've been there for you. It's always happened; you become—and some of it is something we don't talk about. I've said it before, and this is an interesting example of love between men, that is not talked about. Most of the time, men do not… You know, they're scared; they're very uncomfortable talking about love between men because it comes out with some sexual kind of thing. But, in something like this, you really see love between men. Most men don't say they love another man, until they're in a casket, and they come by and say, man, you know, I really loved you. He's dead (chuckles), then we express their emotion. But when you're with a team, you have this love, and it's there. You feel it because, if somebody throw a grenade down, any one of you will jump on it to save the team. That's a whole other concept, in terms of what it means, in terms of the tightness, the bond that goes on.

DePue: A little bit more, another… This is twenty-some pages later. You're reflecting on the nature of combat, "Combat is beyond understanding. There is no right or wrong. You live through it and in it. Clarity demands you know you are there to kill and live to kill. Everything else is irrelevant."

Jones: When people are trying to kill you—it's not like somebody just goes off, and he pulls a gun on you and shoots at you—you've got people trying to kill you, multiple people trying to kill you. What is right or wrong? You do a right and get killed doing it. Is that wrong? You don't want to deal with those kind of philosophical questions in your mind when you're getting shot at. (chuckles) The only thing you want to know is, what does it take for me to stay alive? And the major answer from everybody on the team was, if all the folks who can kill us is dead, a simple equation.

You know, we have rules of war, but rules of war depend on the man, what situation they're in. If I've got three people shooting at me, and I charge them, and I kill the three of them, my next thought is, are there any more? Now, as I sit, now or afterwards, and I think it through, I can say, well, this is what was going on. At the time, the only thing going on was, what do I need to do to stay alive? If it means that everybody here dies, they're dead. So, it's crazy; it's insanity. It does not fit any of our well thought-out constructs of what humanity means.

DePue: This is quite separated from our discussion about Vietnam, but, no doubt, you were paying close attention to all the discussions about the "war on terror" we're in. Capturing people in places like Afghanistan, and then incarcerating them in places like Cuba and Guantanamo, and then getting in debates about, now that we've captured these people on the battleground and we bring them back to Guantanamo, now we have to give them a trial. What's your reaction to that?

Jones: Well, I remember I was on a radio program being interviewed, and the radio guy was an advocate in terms of stop torturing Americans—Americans should stop torturing and all, the very thing you're saying—my response was, number one, you realize it's not a one-way thing. You torture, and then, when yours get captured, they're going to get tortured, number one. Number two is, being a person who has been in combat and on the battlefield, I'm not a big believer in torture. I understand how folks can rationalize it, to use it in national security to get information, and they may do things. And they pay a price for it, usually. But torture was not one of the things, from my viewpoint of being involved in combat, in firefights. I mean, that was just straight up; it was totally different than when you put that torture thing into it. But, for national security, people will do things, and they would give up—but they sacrifice themselves to do it.

DePue: You were bringing back prisoners.

Jones: We brought back prisoners for intelligence. There was a reason.

DePue: But you were turning your prisoners over to who, Americans or to South Vietnamese?

Jones: It could be a combination, sometimes. There was always an American there, even if it was with the Vietnamese. We've turned prisoners over, but they never made it past the helicopter ride. (chuckles) I'm not sure if that was torture or not, but they didn't make it. Somehow they fell out of the helicopter or…something. I'm not sure exactly what the stories would have been. But, see, in the world of my experience in Vietnam, torture was never one of the things that ever entered our minds. Killing, capturing, but never torture. So, that wasn't really part of my experience of war.

DePue: You grew up, and your grandmother made sure you got hauled to church.

Jones: Oh, yeah.

DePue: I'm sure you were raised to be a believer.

Jones: Oh, yes.

DePue: So, how did you make sense of combat and God, as well?

Jones: Combat made more sense once I understood it didn't make sense. It did not make sense. At first you have these preliminary thoughts, when you get into those situations, of, how could God let all of this happen? But then, you get an artillery barrage come in on you, and shells land around you, and you come out unscathed. And all you say is, thank God. (laughs) You try not to have conflicts in your mind in recon, when you went out, and to think about that. I mean, once you're there, get over the initial patrols, and you realize that the number one thing you're supposed to be doing is staying alive, to help your team members stay alive. I mean, that becomes your focus because God is there, no matter what you think. You figure that out. And why does God need a reason with you about whatever the actions are to go around you? (laughs)

It always fascinates me because, you know, I tell people, I tell kids, they'd be going about some event or situation, I said, well, take a raincoat or get an umbrella. They say, what are you talking about? Look, it's going to rain where it rains when it rains. If you're there, you get wet. If you don't have an umbrella and a raincoat, you get wet. If you're not there, it don't stop the rain. It happens. (chuckles) So, whatever you want to call it, we can call it anything we want to, but the bottom line is, just your presence there does not create it or make it not happen. It's an event or a circumstance, and, you know, you start thinking that way because, you start getting so deep into how can God let this happen? What are you going to do if you come to a clear answer? God does this because of this. So, what do you do the next second, now that you

know? The question is, does it change what you think should be the action? Nope.

DePue: I want you to reflect—and you might consider this a bit of an unfair question—but, what was it, of all the things that you experienced in Vietnam, that most scared you… that you were most afraid of?

Jones: The most things, I think, after I was there for a while, the thing you're more scared of is getting killed with the first shot.

DePue: The first shot of the first patrol or the first shot of any patrol?

Jones: The first shot of anytime, anytime. It goes back to survival. If you can survive the opening burst of an ambush, you've got a good chance. Your chances really go high in terms of possible survival because you can always run or something, but your chances get higher. But, the first shot, you never know.

DePue: Did you ever have any fears or doubts about letting your buddies down, the other guys on the team?

Jones: Oh, the first patrol was the worst, the first couple maybe even, when folks got wounded and folks who died, you know, when I was working on them. That's when you start really… At first, you doubt. Was it my lack of skills? I didn't know what I was doing; is there something I could have done? You have those kind of doubts and all. But, after you start going on patrols, you realize you can only do what you can do, and you're not responsible if you can't do more. But it takes… You had to get there because, yeah, at the beginning you wonder, if I knew a little bit more, could I have done something, or did I do something wrong? But, the truth of the matter is, nobody knows really but you.

DePue: What you're describing, it sounds like, in order to survive, you have to develop this very hard crust of a fatalistic attitude. Would that be right?

Jones: Yeah. Otherwise, how can you get off a chopper and go into a place where people are going to shoot at you? That's a mindset. (laughs)

DePue: Okay, a little bit different line of questions here. What did you think about—or maybe you didn't reflect on it—the tactics of the war at the time, the way the United States was fighting this thing.

Jones: All from hearing from other things because, in recon, we were in this sort of cocoon because we didn't talk to a lot of other folks, not an exchange and all, because we just stayed to ourselves a lot. We operated like they did, in terms like VC folks did, you know, in terms of guerilla actions. But, in terms of tactics from a higher level than actually doing the eyeball to eyeball stuff, we didn't really think too much about that, except when we expected something to happen. Like, we'd get in a big firefight, and, all of a sudden, the good guys

come, and they don't come. Then we think it was fucked up. It was very personal. Everything was so personalized, in terms of that. I mean, the focus in the team and what the mission was and what we did, was so focused. You didn't have too many conceptual things about the tactics or something. You wanted to make sure you're going on the next patrol in a few days, and you want to come back. It was just that much focus because anything that came from someplace else and made you start thinking about something at the wrong time, where all of a sudden, you lose your focus or your concentration. I mean it was… So, you didn't really… you didn't have discussions about that.

Now, being older, had distance and did a lot of, now, looking at stuff, found out we didn't understand the culture we were going into, of how to fight them. I think America has a problem every time they get into a war with countries that have very different cultural, means it takes us time to adjust to fight the war, to win in terms they understand. I think Vietnam was that. You know, if you look at the history, we had no understanding of what a Vietnam environment is.

In our society, poor people have cars and telephones. Now, you go into a peasant society, and you look at them and say, this is below poor. But, in their culture, they were very important. They had two water buffalo, and they were the rich people in the village. We had no concept of that, culturally, of who they were. They've been next to China for all these years, but it is not part of China. I wonder why? Because China couldn't beat them. The French went in. You go back in history, the Mongolians came to invade them. They didn't make it. It's still called Vietnam. We didn't look at that. How did that happen? There's something that they are very resourceful at, obviously, of living next to China and having all these other folks from other countries come in. What Vietnam does, to me, is, all these countries come in, overrun them, and they think it's wonderful because they then take out of their culture what they want that makes sense to them. Then they kick them out of the country. And, if you go back, that's the whole thing they've done. They've gotten Mandarin from the Chinese for their governmental service and all. They got agriculture and all that from the French. It's, you know, even a country like Vietnam, yeah, I need to do more agricultural export. What do I need? We'll have France come take us over. (both laugh)

DePue: One of the things that bedeviled the United States military, going in there, and, I think, you understand from the framework that you were growing up, and even at my age, growing up, you watch the World War II movies; you saw the lines moving back and forth on the map.

Jones: Right, right.

DePue: Success was lines moving on the map. Then you get to Vietnam, and success became—

Jones: No front lines.

DePue: No front lines.

Jones: The combat zone is where the fight is taking place.

DePue: So, let's count bodies.

Jones: Yes. And once you got into that…because, when you had a line, you say, well we got a mile; we got five miles of the enemy's territory. You know, that's something you can stand and judge, like that meant something, in terms of winning the war, in terms of tactics or strategy or something like that. Not in Vietnam. In Vietnam, the fight was wherever the fight took place. There was no rear areas.

It's very similar to what's going on today. You don't have lines drawn, the good guys on that side and the bad guys on this side. You have actions that take place in different parts, and you have to react to it. Vietnam is where it started. It's the same thing you see in the conflicts going on right now. They're having the same kind of problem because people strap explosives on themselves and all. Are you going to tell them to stay across the line? You don't even know who they are until they blow up.

DePue: Did all the emphasis on body counts make sense to you?

Jones: Well, no, because the only thing the body count meant is the body count we had to do for us to be alive. Our body count was the only one that counted because, when you look at body count, it never made any sense, in terms of what does it mean? I killed a hundred more folks than you? What does it mean, in terms of something, other than you got twenty less people to come shoot at me or what? I mean, what does it mean? That was one of the things that was a problem. There was never—and it's the same thing I feel today too—there here is no one can tell you, what is a win? In Vietnam, what would have been a win? It wasn't, we were going to take North Vietnam; we make one Vietnam, you know. It wasn't… It didn't make sense because we didn't really have… We couldn't tell folks, well, if we do this, we win the war. There was no clarity like that, you know. In World War II and all that, they said, okay, we take back France, and we take back this, and we win the war. There was nothing like that in Vietnam.

DePue: The last few years of the war, the measure went from body counts to hearts and minds.

Jones: Another thing that's really hard to count on a sheet of paper. (both laugh) How do you put a one down? I got one heart and mind. How do you do that? What does that mean? So, all of a sudden, now, we have this military action going, but we have no military objectives because we're counting things that don't make a difference in terms of a war. The only time body counts count in

a war is if I have destroyed enough bodies that you give up. But what number is that? Is it a thousand, ten thousand? Who knows what number it is?

DePue: And from what you've told me before, my guess is that, when you were there, surviving day by day, going out on yet another patrol, what you weren't thinking about were questions like this. Is that right?

Jones: Mm-hmm. There was no reason. If you know you're going to go, continually be exposed to combat, focus is very key. You don't want to put a lot of stuff in your mind that has no relevance to you staying alive at that moment. I mean, that was the bottom line. It wasn't that there were times someone may have had a conversation about it, but, if it was something that would invoke a deep thought, deep thought didn't help you. (chuckle) You know, it was all about survival. And all the other questions, oh, you know, there may have been a passing reference or a question, or somebody said, I don't know what the hell, the general don't know what the fuck he doing. It would be a passing comment. But it was based on the general had them doing something that didn't make sense, what they were doing. (laughs)

DePue: Isn't that the right of any American soldier, to grumble anyway?

Jones: If you don't grumble, you're not really in the military. And then you wonder, well, if it's so bad, how do we get twenty, thirty-year folks who retire from that? (laughs)

DePue: In a lot of these actions, you were dealing with North Vietnamese regulars. I know you dealt with Viet Cong, as well; you encountered Viet Cong. The differences between the two?

Jones: The Viet Cong were more guerilla actions. You know, they would be in villages. They would do all these little terrorist acts in villages to try to sway the village in a certain area. The NVA was regular army. We had respect for them. We called them Mr. Charles sometimes, or Mr. Charlie, because the VC, if you run at them shooting, they'd run. But the NVA, they're an army. They'll stay until someone tells them to retreat. That's a big difference. (chuckles) And the VC: you had to worry about, if you dealt a lot in trails or a thing of where people would go normally, because they were more guerilla terrorist kinds of—like guerillas and terrorists. Where the NVA, being a regular army, had artillery support; they had strategies; they had tactics; and they had a whole lot of men that could be in one place at one time. The VC: you never would see a whole lot of them at one place in one time, except when they got to Tet and all that, when they put them in battalions to do their urban warfare. But other than that, they were guerilla tactics. The NVA, yep, they were regular army. You had a lot of respect for them. They broke off contact when someone to break off. (chuckles)

DePue: You mentioned earlier that sometimes, when you were not on patrols and had some slack time, you'd go into the local villages with the local Vietnamese people. Did you have a sense of how they felt about the war and about Americans being there?

Jones: It's kind of an interesting question because it took time for me to even think about, that they had thoughts about anything because I was going there. I was doing this as something for being a corpsman, you know, when it started. I'm going to do medical stuff: you know, here's a wound. It wasn't to go and understand; it wasn't to go and know. It was, okay, I've got some skills; we're going over here. The doc will say we want to put something together for these kids, in terms of healthcare stuff. Okay, we'd go over. That's where it started. And then, all of a sudden, you start seeing them as people. They become human beings. Then, all of a sudden, it becomes—to me it did—it became interesting then, trying to talk to them because now it was, they had a whole different view of everything going on.

It depended what area you was on, about how they felt about North Vietnam. If you was in an area where there was a lot of VC, then they had a much more hardcore thing against the United States, even if the United States were all around, because they know, as soon as the troops left, the VC would be back. That's one thing. American troops can go in, and they can do all the stuff they did, but then, they leave. The VC is still there, and then they come back, in terms of it.

A lot of the up north—and you had the Montagnards and all those folks—they did not really care for the South Vietnamese government. And the South Vietnamese government didn't really care about them either. So, you had this urban farm, agriculture thing that was going on there. They didn't trust the South Vietnamese government. The Americans: Sometimes it just seemed like they really liked the Americans because we really brought good supplies. (chuckles) It was good stuff we brought over. We put so much resources in the country that everybody could get some, and nobody missed it. (laughs)

DePue: Do you remember the things that they especially cherished that the Americans had?

Jones: It's kind of interesting: It wasn't electronics because most of them didn't have electricity for something. Most of the time, they just wanted what they needed to survive. They were into survival mode—all the ones I saw—because it was all up north, around the DMZ, you know. Americans could bring things.

DePue: In World War II, it was cigarettes.

Jones: The American would bring things. Kids liked chocolate and stuff like that… and cigarettes, yeah. But their cigarettes they had was, you know, here's a

cigarette; here's a joint of dope; tell the difference because their cigarette was so strong. Most of them would be eating beetle nuts all the time and had very interesting smiles. But, after I started doing the health and medical call thing we did in the village, then I got more interested in seeing that they were people and that these folks were just trying to stay alive. They weren't really… But, see, the thing is, what throws it all off, is that you might be dealing with this family here and everything. That's really nice, and you really see them as a human being. And, all of a sudden, one night their bodies is found in the wires, and they had an attack on the base. And so, you just learned not to trust anything because, you know, they had all these… Even if you go into a village, you got something to drink. They'd cut the bottom out and put ground glass in it. I mean, they had all these other ways, insidious ways, that they were trying to kill you, you know.

One of the things is, culturally, when I first got there…to me these were the poorest poor people I'd ever seen in my life. I wasn't used to seeing a village peasant society, and I didn't understand what that meant. What happened is, the United States didn't understand it, in terms of what it meant. We relocated a lot of the villages, said we're going to take them here and take them over here. We put them in this environment, you know, to be able to work with them.

DePue: And protect them better.

Jones: And protect them better. And then, the village where they were at, we'd bomb it and all, so that it can't be of any use to the VC. However, they have a strong connection with their ancients, their folks that have went before. So, all of a sudden, we blow up their villages, bomb them, including the graveyards. That's like you just took four hundred years of their lives away because ancients, they're alive today. Little cultural things like that, we didn't really understand.

We didn't understand, either, about the North Vietnamese and all, in terms of tactics – more strategy than tactics; they were so orientated. I found out an interesting little fact, as I've been writing this second book. And that is, there's this plant—I forget the name of it now—but it's poisonous, unless you put it in a stream and let water run over it for a certain period of time. Well, apparently, the North Vietnamese, for years, came and planted those things all up and down South Vietnam. That's how their troops survived when they came in for Tet and all, to feed them, because we didn't know you could put this thing that was supposed to be poisonous…if you put it in the stream with a rope, and let the water run through it for a certain amount of time, it's not poisonous no more. We didn't know those things because we didn't take time to understand the culture. (laughs)

DePue: Were you injured?

Jones: Oh, I got wounded a couple of times, actually more than that. They only counted a couple though.

DePue: How about the couple that they counted? You got two Purple Hearts; is that what you're saying?

Jones: I got one Purple Heart, and they got wounds in there I thought was fascinating. (chuckles)

DePue: What was that for?

Jones: We was on a patrol, and we came under fire. I got hit in the leg, and then I got shrapnel that was in my back.

DePue: Rifle fire?

Jones: Shrapnel. I got a bullet. It didn't go through my leg, but just hit the side of it, took me down. Then we got into a firefight. We got three guys that got killed. I got nicked. I didn't have any bullet go through and through. I had shrapnel, but I had a couple bullets that just sort of just nicked me. So, I got the one Purple Heart for multiple wounds because it was on the same patrol.

DePue: They medevaced you out right after that?

Jones: No, no. When I got hit and I fell down, I remember a team guy came in, and he lifted me up and said, "You okay, Doc?" I said, "No, they shot me." And he said, "Well, can you run?" "Hell yeah, I can run." Only four of us came back. That's when three other guys got killed. That's where I got wounded, going to them. So, anyway, I got shot a couple of times, and then I had shrapnel in various places.

DePue: Can you tell me any more about that patrol? Do you remember much about that one? Were you ambushed?

Jones: Yeah, we walked into an ambush. We didn't realize that they knew we were there. So, when they caught us, we were sort of caught in the open, which was a problem. We tried to get back to the bush. To do that we had to go… Well, we came through some rice paddy things. And to do that, we had to go across the rice paddies. That's where they had us pinned. We had to run across this open area, a rice paddy, like open area, to get to the tree line, to get to cover because they hit us on this side. So, we had to run in this open, and that's where two of them got killed. Then, when I went through is when I got hit. I was on the ground, and I could hear all this, "t-t-t-ph-ph-ping!" around me, and I just stayed still, didn't move.

Then, when I got up and started running to get into the brush, I got hit again. When I fell in, they turned the gun to me because they thought I was dead because, when I was laying out there, they said bullets were all around

my body. But I didn't get any real direct hits. I got these bullets that went through, you know, just hit me and were flesh wounds. When they looked, they said they saw all these puffs of smoke all around me, and so they thought I was dead. And then, all of a sudden, I come flipping into the bush where they were, and, of course, they were ready to shoot me then. Wasn't nobody supposed to be coming. I was dead, you know. (chuckles)

It was sort of crazy because, what happened is, we tried to radio back [that] we had an ambush. And they said, "Well, attack them; attack them." There's seven of us, and there's more of them because they've got us on three sides. They didn't get behind us yet because that's why we was trying to get to this tree line.

But it was interesting. When I got hit, I really… at first I thought… when I got hit and I fell, and I could hear all these bullets zipping around me, I thought I was dead. I mean, it just was going to be a matter of time. But then, they started concentrating the fire over back on the other folks because they thought I was dead too. The gooks thought I was dead. And then, I got up and ran and got into the bush. That's when I got wounded. When I got wounded, the only thing I was thinking about was how to get up out of this, how to get out of the opening. You always just focused on what you needed to do. Then, of course, when I finally had a chance to get up and ran into the opening, and then, from there, they told us to attack them. Oh, no. We had two dead; one guy was wounded bad.

DePue: How long after that were they finally able to get you out?

Jones: Oh, they came in pretty… Because we was in this area that had a lot of flat ground; we had the old rice fields and stuff. So, the choppers coming in and getting us wasn't a problem for them on that patrol. It's just that we walked into it because we had to go through so much open ground to go from one tree line to another, is what got us exposed so long.

DePue: Was being captured part of the equation for people on long-range patrols?

Jones: Nobody wanted to be captured because they knew… See, that's maybe, probably why I'm not that big on torture either because it's what they wanted to do. When they captured men—I've seen them—where they slice them up and all, you know. That was the torture thing. That's what I'm saying, being in combat, okay, we shoot it out. I kill you. You kill me. But to sit around and torture somebody… We knew all the torture techniques, but that was nothing we ever thought about doing.

DePue: Would you have preferred to be killed than captured?

Jones: Oh, yeah. That was our motto, "Do or die; don't let no one take you alive." That's part of the warrior spirit. People see this part of the warrior spirit, you know, they're going to do things and train and all then skill and all of that. But

really, what the warrior spirit is about, is that the warrior is going to be there. It's do or die to him. And, if they're with you, they're going to go down with you. That's part of being that mindset.

The other thing a warrior do that most people can't do is look the man or person in the eye who's going to kill him. People can't do that. But a real warrior, who's been through it and all, knew it's the time and can look another man in the eye, who is going to kill him, and look at him in the eye. It's a different sense that's inside you.

DePue: Once you survived the first few patrols, what was the attitude that you had about whether or not you were going to survive, or whether or not you could or would be killed?

Jones: Well, you always knew you could be killed. That was the reality that was up front. It wasn't behind in the head. It wasn't something that came up. It was up front. The fact is, my feeling was, I could be killed at any time, anywhere in Vietnam because it was all enemy country. My hooch, where I go with my, it was all enemy country, as far as I was concerned, because I could be attacked at any time. We'd be in the hooch, like we're sitting here talking. And, all of a sudden, boom, you know, someone could attack and run in and shoot everybody. So, you were always, constantly under that kind of pressure.

After a while, you begin to understand what it took to go on patrol and come back. You didn't really… Remorse was not something you could have. You had it because, after… My thing was always, after the patrol was always the worst part because I relived it. All the things that could have happened, that did happen, you know; I relived it. Even though, while I'm there, I'm doing what I have to do at that moment, because I'm so focused on doing stuff right then. But, after a patrol is when I walk through it, that I see all the things that could have happened that didn't happen, you know, including, I could have got killed. Oh man, I could have gotten killed here. And I thought that was probably one of the things that was helpful because it affected me more after the patrol, because I was so focused on what I was doing right then, that I didn't think about, you know; I didn't have…thoughts. The only thought I had was, what's happening? What do I need to do? It was total survival mode.

DePue: Were you expecting to die when you were there?

Jones: Oh, there's been times when I figured I was going to die. Oh, yeah. We went to A Shau Valley. That was one where, you know, a lot of us we figured, most of us figured, well, we ain't going to get out of this alive. I mean, that's when folks wrote the wills and all kinds of stuff, giving their stuff up. You always knew you could die. I mean, that's the whole reason that you made sure you were sharp. That's the reason you did the things you did, to make sure you're always aware of things, make sure you've got the right techniques and all this stuff because, if you didn't do some of those things right, you know, you

could get killed. But didn't really carrying dying in my mind as this thought about…with the things I'm could do not to die, in a conceptual thought, because you had to do things not to die. (chuckles)

DePue: Well, you talked about before, as the medic, you were kind of the father confessor, the chaplain in the unit. Were other people coming and expressing these fears and doubts?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I heard it all. I heard it from the ones that had a dream last night they was going to die that day, heard that they had premonitions that they were going to die. I heard about their fears. Sometimes, when you talk about their fears, you find out they were expressing a fear about this, but this is really what they were fearful about. It just was being expressed there. You ended up being in people's heads all the time, you know.

And what you learned in dealing with those is, you had to sit quietly and listen to people. So, even though, a lot of this, they'd be going through experiences, you know, I get in there a lot. I hear, and I'll be talking to folks, and they'd be going through their experiences. While their experiences, compared, were not as intense. And I see their reaction, where it has, in some cases, disabled them a little bit, in terms of being able to function because of their experience. I look at it, and then I realize, well, that's like one bad patrol, but what happens if you're there for a whole year and you have a year of bad patrols? You know, that's that kind of situation I'd been in.

So, I'm not sure why, but I could reach out and help other folks because their experiences haven't been as intense. I've had more extensive, intense experiences. So, again, there comes that corpsman thing, in terms of being helpful. You can put a bandage on a wound, but then, those unseen wounds that people have, emotionally and mentally, you still got to put bandages on them.

DePue: Well, it just suddenly occurred to me—this is jumping way ahead in your own personal life—of what you ended up doing once you came back, isn't it?

Jones: Yeah.

DePue: Without getting too far into that… Did you win any medals, get any awards? Winning is the wrong word for this, isn't it?

Jones: Yeah, receive and recipient of. I got the Purple Heart, Presidential Unit Citation, Vietnam Combat Ribbon. I can't remember all of them. It was kind of interesting, I had all the medals, and I've still got my original medal. I've got my Purple Heart here, because I got it in Vietnam, getting it from one of the generals there.

I was being interviewed by a local TV station, and my secretary had said, "Well, you've got medals, don't you?" And I said, "Yeah." "Where are

they?" "Down in a box in the basement, I think." She said, "The TV program, these folks are coming. You should get your medals out." And I said. "Oh, okay." I had to go find them. I never really put them out on display before. You know, they were things I did during that period of time, and I didn't really just throw them on the wall. I was so involved in veteran affairs, you know, I was more reaching out to be helpful to them rather than… They didn't know I had all them, you know, Purple Hearts and all these kind of combat medals.

DePue: How about a Bronze Star or a Silver Star?

Jones: No, never got one of those.

DePue: But you're doing things that most people would think is totally crazy, like running through the enemy compound and blasting away.

Jones: It was totally crazy, but it happened a lot on recon. (laughing)

DePue: I'm going to pause for just a second.

(pause in recording)

DePue: I'll start us up again here. Okay, we were just talking about winning medals, being awarded here. It strikes me that, because you were in recon, what was accepted for recon would have been exceptional for a lot of other units.

Jones: Exactly, that was just another day.

DePue: So, you weren't written up for awards…

Jones: No.

DePue: …where other guys in a regular line unit might have been?

Jones: Oh, yeah, because in recon, that's what we did. We didn't think about it in terms of recipient of some award or something, you know, or an action. Even those who get that award, I'm willing to bet you, they didn't think, I'm going to do this to get a Bronze Star or a Silver Star. What they did was, they did what they had to do at that moment. So, in recon, we were always in situations where folks would call it hero stuff. But to us it was, that's what you should have done because, at that time, that's what needed to be done. (laughs)

DePue: People now refer to what you did as heroic. Do they call you a hero?

Jones: Oh, there's one or two here and there, you know, when they learn about what it is or they've read the book, and they get a sense of it. Most people, it's very fascinating because I wear my Purple Heart. That's the one I do wear on my lapel, my lapel pin Purple Heart. It's amazing the number of people I've had

come up, number one, ask what it is, and I say, a Purple Heart. And they say, I don't think I ever saw one before. I had that happen to me.

I was in Chicago the last few weeks, doing this recording, and the number of people that had never seen a Purple Heart—they never met anybody that had a Purple Heart, because all the Purple Hearts they had heard about was watching TV. The people were dead, and they were getting it, (laughs) which I thought was a kind of fascinating kind of a viewpoint.

Yeah, I think if we was in other units, the recon folks would have been able to get all kind of medals. But, in recon, you came back alive; that's the best medal you could have.

DePue: Did you see yourself… do you see yourself as a hero?

Jones: No, I was doing my duty. I was serving with the men I was serving with.

DePue: What's the most heroic thing you think you saw while you were there?

Jones: When other men gave their lives up for other members of the team. You know, a guy jumping on a grenade.

DePue: You saw that?

Jones: Oh, yeah. I saw that because it happened more than once. But I've seen where they've jumped on—or else where I've seen guys jumping in front of other folks and took the bullet. They wasn't saying, here, shoot me. They jumped in because they were shooting and knocked the other person out because they didn't see that the enemy was aiming at them, you know. The heroic things are the things I've seen men do to save others, and what they gave up to do it. And what made it heroic, is because it wasn't a thought of being heroic. It was a thing that had to be done at that time.

DePue: What do you think the toughest part of being in service in Vietnam was for you?

Jones: Well, the easy answer is combat, but the real answer is finding out that I could survive in Vietnam by doing what I had to do, no matter, at any and all costs. We had these things in our head. We have limits. We have a line we don't want to cross.

DePue: But that was the toughest part of your experience?

Jones: Oh, yeah, all the shooting and the combat. The toughest part was being scared all the time. The toughest part was the pressure that, at any moment, at any time, from any place, you can be killed. That is the biggest fear when you're in a combat zone, is you can be killed because, if there's no combat, then it's just an argument. And, what the hell, I walk away, and you walk away or

whatever, or we fisticuffs, and somebody wins, but nobody's dead. So, the biggest fear was, you could get killed at any moment, any time.

Now, after that, is when you get down to when you look at yourself—because, when you spend time by yourself, and you think about the things you have done and the things you would never have—you couldn't even imagine that those kind of things could be done, let alone that you would ever be doing them.

DePue: Let's talk about morale. Another part of what we hear and read about the Vietnam War, now, was what happened to the military's morale while they were there. You were in a time period, then, that equation of unit morale was kind of in a flux or changing.

Jones: In recon, though, our morale was based on what we did with each other. Yeah, you know, the upper command, they made some calls that to us seemed like, this is dumb shit. Well, it was something bigger than us, maybe. We hope, maybe, that's what it is. You know, maybe we don't understand this because we're looking at the small part, and they got a big part. No, it wasn't really that big. (both laughing) It wasn't that at all. I was thinking…my mind wandered on that one.

DePue: How about the next question, then? Obviously, as an African American yourself, the impressions that you had about how well the military was integrated and dealt with that.

Jones: I got my first understanding of that when I was in boot camp because, up until that time—especially when I got assigned to corpsman school. That surprised a lot of folks because, at that time, blacks were either stewards, or they worked in the kitchen, or they were bosun's mate.

So, when I came though, is when the other billets were opening up, that you could be an Afro American and go to another—You didn't have to go to just those selected ones, which is how I ended up going to the medical side of it, you know, because of the decision they had made. But, up to that time, the Navy was one of the last ones to really desegregate, in terms of services. A lot of it was because, you've got a self-contained ship, and you want everybody to say they're underneath, and they're all together because you're out there, just you all on that ship, out in the middle of the water, the big water. They wanted all this monotonous, continuous, which meant whites would be doing it and all. So, when I came along, it was opening up to more blacks to be able to get involved in different types of parts of the service in the Navy.

I mean, it's very interesting, if you look at my school pictures, I went from grammar school, which was all black, except for two whites, to high school, where it was all white, except for two or three blacks. Then I went to boot camp when there was only about three blacks going through it. And then, I went to corpsman school, and there was only two or three of us blacks going through it. And then I went to Marine boot camp, down in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and there it was more blacks.

It was interesting that we stayed at Moffett Point[?], which used to be for the black Marines. That was their separate training thing at one time, Camp Moffett[?]. It's been in the news quite a bit here lately because they also found the water was bad, among other stuff. (chuckles) But after that, then there was more Afro Americans or blacks then. But, going through the specialties, there wasn't that many blacks, and they had just started opening it up.

DePue: Once you got to Vietnam, was race relations an issue or a problem?

Jones: Not in recon. You just couldn't afford to burn the energy up. If you had a problem with somebody, number one, you don't want to make it one of your team members because, see, when you're out in the bush, he's the only firepower you've got to watch your back. So, you just don't do stupid things with folks. And you try not to get off into things that can cause problems.

Now, when you went to some of the other bases—even though we'd say rear, but they're not rear, but the bases, actually—there you did because what happened is, they were still living in some kind of structured society, still mentally constructed over there, you know, from what was over here.

DePue: They being?

Jones: Being mostly the whites. They wanted to be the same as it is right here in the States. You know, we get the good jobs; we get the best places, you know, because they were in charge, was how the blacks felt. But the big difference, of course, when you're in a combat zone and you have racial tension and racial problems, everybody's got a gun. It makes a difference. (chuckles) It's

one thing, I have the authority and law on my side, the badges and the guns. Then, when you walk around, and everybody has a gun. (laughing)

DePue: You mentioned about going to some of these other base camps, and I wanted to know if there was some tension or some resentment towards those guys who weren't combat troops, who were in the rear echelons and doing those kind of jobs.

Jones: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. If you were in combat or something, you were in a war. And everybody understood that all these supplies and re-supplies and all were very important, but what happened is, they were living still like you could be—you know, you'd go to some areas, you couldn't tell if they was in Vietnam or not. It was just be at any base, you know, that they had all the trappings of an office at any base, even if it was in Vietnam.

DePue: You mean things like an Officers Club, an NCO Club, a PX.

Jones: Ah, right. And they had clubs, like the Da Nang, you know, and China Beach, which were recreational areas where they had clubs. So, there, they were still doing the American society thing. So, there you had the same: if you had the American society things, you had the same problems imported to that area too. If you was in an area of deep combat and all, in recon, I mean, you did it by teams. So, your team, you're all one. And nobody outside messes with the team. You mess with one, you got them all. And everybody knew that. So, it was different. The focus was not on trying to… You weren't even trying to acclimate yourself to live like you did if you was on a base back in the United States. I mean, we didn't wear a flak jacket; we weren't like regulations; we were doing intelligence work, you know. It wasn't no spit and polish boot, of base, kind of thing, where you could be in a base over there and be in that, you know, where they would shine their boots and all that. You could always tell. (laughs)

DePue: The next subject is something that is discussed quite a bit in a book, but it's always in a very matter of fact form, and that's the use of drugs over in Vietnam.

Jones: Um-hmm.

DePue: What was it like in your own experience?

Jones: We used to say, "Well, the guys that got high on dope, they'd lay on the bunker and watch falling stars. The guys that got drunk wanted to fight, they never wanted to stop fighting. They get drunk, they want to fight. It was more part of a theme for the war in your mind: how do you come down from being always ready? It's how do you come down? A lot of folks found that alcohol… Well number one, the drugs was so easy to get. You step off the base and go ten feet, somebody would be there: We can talk to somebody who can get you drugs. That was prevailing. Number two is, it kept folks from

killing each other when they weren't on patrol because these people had the same skills and acting crazy on the base as they did in the bush. (chuckles)

DePue: From your perspective, from being a member of the recon team, using marijuana was not a problem?

Jones: It didn't bother us at all, as long as it wasn't in the bush. Our point guy, he smoked in the bush. But, other than that, didn't allow that. We didn't allow smoking, actually. No one smoked.

DePue: How about some of the harder drugs, was that prevalent?

Jones: It was in the bases. I mean, where people actually were still living part of this American society construct of an American base. I think they had more problems there. You're always going to have individuals who get on it and it takes over them. We were operating in an environment where you couldn't let nothing take over you. You could use anything you want, but it couldn't take over you because we were going out on patrol.

DePue: Does that mean that the team would police itself on that respect?

Jones: Oh, yeah. You can get high as you want to and all that, but you go on patrol and you did your job. It didn't bother nobody. The drugs were more acceptable because you didn't want all these highly skilled, very contentiously under pressure folks, going off on the base. So, it was tolerated more. In recon the team did its own, because you're not going to take somebody out who's going to help get you killed, you know. That's just not the philosophy. So, if you get high and, all of a sudden, you can't function in the bush… You can get high all you want to, but, if you can't function in the bush when you're on patrol, what's happening is, nobody's going on patrol with you, or you're not coming back from a patrol. There's been times when things have happened to folks, and they got in a firefight, and the person ended up getting killed.

DePue: Friendly fire, is that what you're saying?

Jones: No, it was fire. No one puts a thing on whether it's friendly or enemy. It was just, died under fire. That's why they didn't have a lot of assholes in recon.

DePue: Let's talk a little bit about what's going on in the United States at the time. I want to do this from the perspective of what you're hearing—and what you and your other buddies are feeling about—what's going on in the United States at that time.

Jones: Well, you know, it was a time when everybody was challenging authority. We had the evolution, revolution, the Black Panthers. All these things were happening, and, in the middle of all this stuff, was the Vietnam War, which was feeding into it. Everything was feeding into everything else. You had all this energy, all this useful energy, and folks talking about putting flowers in

soldiers' guns and all that. Obviously, they had no understanding. The reason of a gun was not to be a flower thing, but to shoot bullets out. But then, over there, we had folks, like surfers, and, you know, they came from those hippie crowd and all.

In terms of, probably, the most expressive stuff with blacks, in terms of what was going on because of the riots and all this stuff, because it took so long to get information there, so, you only got snippets of it. Everybody sort of felt a lot of times it was sanitized, you know. It wasn't really telling the whole truth, in terms of what was going on, especially what's going on between the government and the Black Panthers.

But, interestingly enough, a lot of folks came back. They had all these skills, did not want to join any revolutionary group. But, over in Nam, you sort of knew about them. But there was not an intensity of how you participate in anything it meant, anything, for you to do about it. The one thing is, was not, you know, folks did not like Jane Fonda, and the folks did not like…

DePue: Folks like you?

Jones: No, no, didn't like her. She's sitting on barrels of guns and trying to kill me. Yeah, no, I had no reason to care about that. (both laugh) It wasn't a big philosophical thing. It's just, well, why does she have to be nice and sitting on this gun? That don't make no… That's a gun, you know. That gun may be shooting at me. So, it was more of that. It wasn't an ideological thing about it. It was just, ah, I can't go for this. Why would she do that? I could see her going and talking about helping prisoners and all that, but then, all these other pictures came out. That was not…

DePue: Was this one of those other subjects that you just didn't want to be thinking about too much because it would be a distraction to you?

Jones: Oh, yeah. It pissed off a lot of the guys, though, in terms of that she did it because she was such a pin-up thing in their heads and all.

DePue: She was Barbarella.

Jones: Oh, yeah. Barbarella, that's right. Then, I think the thing about it mostly was, everybody had their own sense of what a hippie was. Nobody really understood what it meant, except it was long hair, and they were the ones that were out in the streets. They're the ones talking about being baby killers and all. So, that was a direct link, in terms of it. That was probably: What are these hippies talking about? you know, because of what they were talking about: being against the war. Most of the folks over there were saying, well we're against the war too. Shit, they're shooting at us. (both laughing) We're not for the war. What are you talking about? It was that kind of thing. They didn't understand. No, we're not for the war. We're serving, you know.

And then, coming back and the confrontations, now that was the thing that really got most of us who were coming back, the confrontations, or where they would come and call you all kind of names and spit on you. I mean, it was just, here you're coming back; you made it alive, under circumstances which, there was no reason for you to be alive, The majority of folks coming by hadn't been in combat or nothing. And these folks are up here, demonstrating about some ideal, about something, spitting on you, and calling you names, like you said, this is what I want to go do. Ain't nobody wanted to go do that. It was, I'm in the service, the military; the orders said I'm going to do that. I'm going to fight for the country. All right, that's what I signed on to. If I don't go, by the way, they put me in jail, see? (chuckles) So, why are you having this attitude towards us? Shit, we're part of your families and all, you know? So that was one of the things that really didn't make sense.

And then, the things people started running into when they coming back. All of a sudden, you come back in your uniform. You have a group of folks around you because of the uniform. That stuff didn't make no sense to none of us.

DePue: I wanted to still keep, primarily, with your experiences in Nam. You were in Vietnam when Martin Luther King was assassinated. Do you remember hearing that news?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Like I said, it wasn't when it exactly first happened. It started out as a rumor, first. Then, you know, the folks came out and started talking about, officially, what's going on.

DePue: And it wasn't just the assassination. It was the riots that happened throughout the country.

Jones: Right. That's what really caught attention. Now what happened is, it scared the white officers more than it encouraged the black folks to do anything. They got scared, and some of them had armed guards around their hooches. And they were always trying to talk to the blacks to see how they were thinking, and asking, all the time, what do you think about this, trying to assess if this was going to be something that spilled over to the war zone.

Well, no. It didn't because, no matter what happened back home—this is recon mentality now—no matter what happened back home, I've still got to go on patrol in another few days. And, even though I may think it's terrible, the rioting and all that they killed, but, I've got to go out on patrol in a few days, and I want to come back alive. So, I'm want to go home and be pissed off; I don't want to be pissed off in Vietnam, when people are still shooting at me. (laughs)

DePue: Okay.

Jones: It was painful, though, from the viewpoint of a lot of them, because the families got caught up in it, white and black. That created some tension. I think a lot of the tension there, though, was generated on the side from the whites because they had more of the paranoia, fear thing going, and really sort of… To me, they're the ones that really had more fear about what possibly can happen. Their actions, in trying to prepare for anything to happen, was probably much more prominent, in terms of cause and concern, than looking for all these black folks to, all of a sudden, want to revenge Martin Luther King over in Vietnam.

DePue: One of the things you hear about—and this is an example of human nature, as much as anything, I think—in off-duty time, the Army would re-segregate itself; it would just kind of happen. But, from listening to you talk about recon, that didn't happen so much in recon. Is that right?

Jones: Respect for your team.

DePue: Stay with the team.

Jones: With the team. I would go around other folks, other country boys, go around when they got country music and listen, you know, folks you knew. If you was black, you go anywhere in Vietnam, and there was another black brother. He was a brother, blood brother. So, you can have that. But the team really was the core, and that's where folks really got together. That's where folks really were who they were.

DePue: I want you to reflect then, about your fellow Marines, your fellow soldiers that you served with. What was your feeling about them, in terms of whether or not they were good at what they did, whether or not you could trust them.

Jones: They were very damn good because, anybody that did multiple patrols and came back alive, you're automatically—that was like you really got old. You went to retirement after three or four patrols, and, especially if you had some hot ones, well, then you were like a senior. It didn't take long to be a senior person. (chuckles)

DePue: Now, you're talking specifically about the recon teams.

Jones: Right.

DePue: Let's expand that circle just a little bit, about the fellow soldiers and the Marines who you also served with, but who weren't on the same team as you.

Jones: Oh. Well, in terms of how they interacted?

DePue: Were they good soldiers? Were they good Marines?

Jones: Oh, I think that—Oh, yes. The Marines—and I know more about them—but they fought the war, I think, the way you had to fight it because they had these small units; they supported the platoons, battalions and all that. The Marines were the right folks to fight that kind of a war. I found that, overall, because a lot of times our lives depended on them responding and they weren't recon. But they were good soldiers. What's amazing to me is, they were **young**, good soldiers. A lot of them, they weren't there with all this military history and tradition, but they were good soldiers. They didn't have all that in their head, you know. It was, I'm doing a job, and this is what I need to do the job, and I get it done. They didn't have a conceptual thing about, this is part of a great military tradition. That happens afterwards. (both laugh)

DePue: How about those guys who were flying the helicopters, that were crewing those helicopters?

Jones: Ah, we love them. I mean, they put us in. But, most importantly, they came and got us out. It was amazing that they did that because, I mean, a lot of times, we'd be in a hot LZ, a hot landing zone, and we'd be taking fire, and they'd come in. I seen a lot of men die in helicopters, coming in to get us and getting all shot up and helicopters crashing and all. But, I mean, it was amazing. That's the one thing, I think, in Nam, even if you weren't part of a unit, the helicopter folks coming to get us is something; they would put themselves in danger, their lives in danger, to come in and try to do that. If they couldn't do it, that means that it really was a suicidal. But, they're trying to figure another way to do it, to get to you. So, we loved them, you know, our cowboys in the sky.

And it wouldn't be just the folks assigned to you. If you got into some hot shit, a helicopter can be going by, a gunship be going by, and say hey, I'm in the area, and they'd pop over and come down. It wasn't, well, I wish I could come, but I'm on mission, you know, to take the general over to his base. There they tell the general, hold on, we're going to get this team.

No matter what was going on, they came to get you out, and they would take the hits. And now, you've got a big target for everybody when they come in. That's the only thing, you know. Me, I'm an individual, you can hide behind trees and all. But, when the helicopter comes, everybody knows they're going to go towards the big thing. So those guys would stay there, and they'd be taking gunfire. They would hang there until you got on. It was amazing. I have respect for them and all the supportive folks, in terms of the recon.

Then we had what they called *Sparrow Hawks*. If you got in trouble, you found the enemy for them, then they'll send in a platoon and take you out, you know, and then keep increasing the manpower because you've created contact. So, they now really know where the enemy is, and then they can

mount the resources in it. I had a chance to work with a lot of different groups, and folks really did their job.

DePue: How about this group? Your experiences that you've been discussing so far, it's very much an enlisted world.

Jones: Right.

DePue: Even the sergeants who were leading these teams are really young. What's your view about the officers you served with over there?

Jones: There was good ones, and there was some I wondered why they didn't die their first day. Officers have been known to die sooner or later if they're assholes. (chuckles)

DePue: You mean fragging?[3]

Jones: Fragging or you know—

DePue: But that's an example of what happened with the discipline in the military over there.

Jones: Exactly. The majority of the officers in recon were okay, if they'd been out on patrol and they really understood what was going on. Where you had a problem is officers who came, like from the United States, and they'd been used to theory and concepts. But it didn't work because these people [Vietnamese] weren't reading the same book, so they didn't know how to be the enemy in the book. They were the enemy on the ground. There was a lot of mis-read.

The majority of officers in recon, I thought, were good because they dealt with men dying, with problems of combat on an ongoing basis. So, they were always into it. When you go back to the bases, there you get officers that, they use the processes to protect them from not knowing, or they added something to it because that was the only place they could be important because they were officers and because, after a hard day, they'd go to the officers club, and then they could drink. Well, the officers in recon didn't really have an officers club, see, so there's a whole other different thing. (chuckles)

DePue: Did you see or make any distinctions between officers who were military academy grads versus ROTC grads versus OCS?

[3] In U. S, military parlance, fragging (from fragmentation grenade) is murdering members of the military, particularly commanders of a fighting unit, or manipulating the chain of command, in order to have an individual or unit deliberately killed by placing the personnel in harm's way. Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fragging

Jones: Well, not really. Some of the officers, like warrant officers, that came up through the line, they obviously had a lot of experience. The officers who actually went through a formal program, they, at least, understood tactics. But, the problem is, a lot of their tactics were what they learned, and we were in a situation, every day, you learned about a new tactic. The officers who couldn't adapt are the ones who were not good because they would still hold onto, this is the classic this. Well, when they said, this is the classic, you knew right away, here's going to be some crap because ain't nothing classic. Like I said before, the enemy hasn't read your book to know how he, the enemy, is supposed to be the enemy. (both laugh) So, tactics are great, but just because they're doing this, don't mean that their next move is going to be here, which you learned, in terms of tactics and all.

Really, I think, where the officers who probably were trained in a formal program, the one thing they did bring was a sense of continuity about organization, about keeping control of troops. Because you're in a combat zone, troops can go crazy because they get bloodlust or, you know, when they go and get two shots from a village, and they want to go wipe the whole village out. So, one thing that the trained folks did have was, they had a military bearing that brought some kind of framework for folks, everybody, to act the same way, and that's what they brought, truthfully.

When it came to combat and all that, that was who's the most agile in mind. They can see different ways—can see and understand why the enemy was moving the way they was. Now, I'm not sure that was being taught at that time because, usually, when you go into an academic program, it's something that happens afterwards. It's not while you're in the middle of it. It's the lessons learned afterwards that we talk about in terms of case studies. (chuckles)

DePue: Where do you learn tactics like, oh my God, we're surrounded, the best thing to do is to run through the compound, and then we can escape?

Jones: (laughing) That's called pure survival. What in the hell can we do? See, but that's the kind of thinking you have to do when you're in recon because, like I said, a small number of folks. You could only carry so much weaponry and bullets and all as a recon team. The weapon you had the most was your mind. When you understood that, you had a whole different experience of being a recon member than if you just thought, because you had a high skill level about how to shoot and throw a knife, and all that stuff.

DePue: Well, the officer reading the manual would say, that's initiative, and as long as we have the initiative, the enemy is flatfooted; they're the ones who are waiting to see what's going to happen next.

Jones: Not when you're in their backyard. They know the only places you can go.

DePue: Yeah.

Jones: They ain't going north. Why? There's a big river there, and there's a big mountain, so, the only way they can go is over here. They know stuff like that. (chuckles)

DePue: Okay, we're going to turn to some more mundane things here for you.

Jones: Okay.

DePue: This one is a universal. Whatever the combat experience is, you want to keep in touch with the family back home. How did you guys manage to do that?

Jones: You start off wanting to communicate. You write every day; you write often. Then you appreciate getting home packages, you know, stuff from home and all of that. But what happens is—at least this is what happened to a lot of us in recon—if you start saying the things you're going through, then the letters change because they don't understand. How could someone do that? And then you stop writing about it. Well, now, all of a sudden, what do you write about? You write about, oh, our baby's growing up; you're doing okay, you know. You may write, oh well, you know, how are the bills going, but not often; it doesn't matter. You can be killed the next moment, who gives a damn; let the bill guy worry about me staying alive. That's the attitude.

It was a time period. Even if you wrote a letter today, it will be weeks before it gets there. And then, for the response, it would be weeks before it would come back. And so many things can happen in between. So, the things you was going to write about, after you write for the next letter, it had been replaced by so many things that's happened to you. But they're things you can't write and tell nobody at home. So, you try to talk about, well, I bet our son is getting taller, you know; you can send a picture. Those are just things you try to keep linked. But the communications was terrible. Today, they be on Skype looking at each other, talking to each other, you know. It's a whole different world. Back then, getting mail was, you know… Then, of course, there was times the enemy would blow up the barges, and they got the beer and the mail, which always pissed people off. So, you used to say, well, why do we have to put the beer and the mail together, you know, because then, they would probably go after the mail, and we can get the beer. (both laughing) That's the way the grunt thinks, see. No, letter do, but save the beer.

DePue: How important was mail call to you, though?

Jones: It was important getting a letter because it did say home still existed, and there is somebody that knows where you are, and they care about it. So, that was very important, was to receive things from home, more than writing things to home about what was going on. Receiving was the best part of that whole thing. When there's a letter or there's a care package, that was important.

DePue: This next one you've talked about a little bit. I think your experiences would be quite different from most GIs in the Vietnam War, but I want to ask you about the food, what kind of food you ate.

Jones: Well, being in recon, we didn't want to smell like Americans and have heavy beef droppings because, when you eat something—When you eat, whatever you eat comes out in your sweat, comes out in your urine, comes out when you take a crap. And you can smell it, in terms of the difference. So, we ate light, ate a lot of stuff that—no beef, no fried food, unless you're on R&R or something, where you can be wild—and light. Number one is because, most of the time, you couldn't make a fire, so you didn't eat a lot of hot meals. I mean, there were times we did have, where we could make a fire and, you know.

DePue: But you're talking about even when you came back to the compound, that you're eating this kind of fare.

Jones: Um-hmm. Oh, yeah. You've gone out five days. On the first day back, the morning of, you might have a breakfast of eggs, bacon or something, if you can have it. But, after a day or two, you stop eating that because you don't want to shit in the jungle unless it smells like the jungle. They don't raise cattle in the jungle, so the beef smell, you can tell it.

I used to sit up and listen to platoons and folks move through the bush, and we could identify, you know, there's one over here, because they'd be making noises, and then they'd be talking about, have you got this; I lost this. You just sit there and listen to them as they walk through. A lot of times, we'd be right in the middle of folks going on patrol, and they'd go around us, not even know we there, and they're not supposed to.

DePue: You're talking about NVA units or American units?

Jones: American units too, both of them. But the American units were more funny because you could understand what they were saying. We'd be sitting there just listening to them, identifying, oh, there's one; oh, there's another one over there, They'd be talking, bitching and complaining…noisy. A group like that's noisy. But, yeah, we tried not to eat to smell different. That was one of the things.

DePue: Did you have the opportunity to see any entertainers, any USO shows or anything like that?

Jones: I went to China Beach. I've been to Dong Ha. I didn't really see a USO show, to tell you the truth. I went to those in-country R&R things, but I never went to…

DePue: You didn't have an off-country R&R?

Jones: Oh, yeah, I did. I went to Bangkok. In the book I said Hong Kong, but I went to Bangkok. That was a surviving thing too, being young, stupid and crazy. I'm surprised I didn't kill myself.

DePue: Are you suggesting you over indulged in a few things?

Jones: Everything. (laughs) It didn't make a difference, you know. Shit, I'd die here in this or else I go back, and they shoot me. Ah, what the hell. I mean, that was the attitude at that time. Actually, what happened is, you were there; you got drunk; you got high; you engaged in all kind of sex, and you did all of that. R&R was five days, you know. It was a week. It's like being out in the bush for a week, you know, in terms of the recon team perspective. So, it was a good time while I was there, but I'm going back to the bush. And it was only a week. So, it was like, this week out of the bush, but I was doing this entertaining thing while I was out of the bush. But, the week's over; get ready to go back out on patrol.

DePue: Were you ever, while you were on R&R, able to put out of your mind that you had to go right back into it again?

Jones: Oh, yeah. You get drunk or else something. What I did in Bangkok, what fascinated me, was all the boat people and all of the carvings; you know, the Buddha carvings and all that kind of stuff. That's when I really started really paying attention to culture, the cultural aspects of what was in the Asiatic countries, instead of just gooks. And, you know, and those terminologies. So, that sort of started giving me an inkling of, you know, these are people. They just have different ways. It became, they were people. It just fascinated me. They had all these folks. They were on the boats, and they'd walk across the planks to this boat, to that boat. You don't see nothing like that in the United States. So, it was just like, wow, this is—what's—wow! (laughs) You know, it was really the exposure to cultural differences, and that was fascinating to me. R&R was fascinating to me in those terms, because I had a chance and I met folks. I went to where they lived at, which was on the outskirts of Bangkok, on stilts and all of that. I mean, it was really a whole different experience, to see behind this, you know.

And it was different because the folks I'd met, they were actual Thailands, and we would go buy stuff. It would be cheaper than when all the other Americans went there because, as soon as they walked in, the price doubled and tripled, in terms of stuff. But they'd get the same thing, two thirds the price of it. That's when I really started saying, well, this R&R is an economic driver, isn't it?

DePue: For them.

Jones: Yeah, oh, yeah. Going on R&R, because, after the first couple of days of being in drunken stupors and all that kind of stuff, then I started looking

around and started seeing all these things, you know, like all these carvings and this Buddha stuff and the boat people. And, all of a sudden, they became in view. I could see them. The first two days, I didn't see that. It was like, okay, I'm on R&R and, what the hell, we'll see if I live through it, you know, kind of thing. But that sort of opened me up to start seeing, oh, wait a minute, I've never seen nothing like this before.

DePue: What did the military do to control VD problems?

Jones: Gave a lot of damn shots, penicillin shots. (chuckles) That's the one thing, being a corpsman, I knew what everybody did when they went on R&R. (both laugh) They'd come in or else, you can go by the latrine, and you hear people hollering and screaming in there, and you say, well, I'll be having somebody coming around. (laughing)

DePue: You knew what that was about, huh?

Jones: Oh, yeah. You go in and see the plumbing has been twisted because… What happened is, you always warned them: if you're going in, you're going to get VD. And they're, yeah, well, okay. I'm going, and that's the key thing, you know, and I don't know how to check if they got it. And, if I do have it when I come back, Doc, you've just got to take care of me. Okay, what else am I going to say? So, folks coming back, there was a lot of that. But most of the stuff got cleared up with shots of penicillin or something like that. There was a few that got what we called, "the cock rot" stuff, which, ain't nothing you can do. Your cock going to look funny, and it's going to disappear. It's going to fall off. That's what we'd tell them, Oh, you got that cock fall off stuff man. We don't know what to do.

DePue: Was there an official name for it that we'd recognize, or this was just a virulent strain?

Jones: I forget the name of it. It was a virulent strain of this—

DePue: That penicillin wasn't going to fix?

Jones: Well, you had to give larger, massive doses of—I forget what it was. I mean, it was penicillin, but the usual penicillin shots did not do nothing for it. That's why we called it "the Vietnam cock rot." I knew our name for it, but what is the medical name for it? I'm not sure.

DePue: But, you're the medic, the corpsman.

Jones: You know, it took me a while. At first I figured out I was trying to forget all that. My wife teaches me all the time, hey, you was a corpsman; you know what this is. Oh, I know all kinds of stuff, but I don't want to know it now. (laughs)

DePue: We've been at this for over two hours now. I think what I want to do is to finish off with getting you home and not getting too much into once you got home, but just the experience of coming home. Tell us about that.

Jones: Well, getting on the plane and the plane taking off…

DePue: Where was the flight from?

Jones: Phu Bai.

DePue: Phu Bai.

Jones: No, Da Nang, Da Nang. I've got to stop and think. It was Da Nang, where we flew out of, coming home.

DePue: And this is a commercial airliner again?

Jones: Yeah, it's commercial, like a 707, you know. It has a four jet engines.

DePue: And stewardesses.

Jones: And stewardess. That was kind of—you know, first going in and seeing a stewardess. It sort of gave you a first inkling of something different because, all the time we're in Vietnam, you'd be flying. You didn't see no female stewardess. You didn't see that many females, actually. So, that's the first thing. Like, oh, this is different; you've got a female that's greeting you coming into the plane.

DePue: It's not some helicopter crew chief that's pulling your butt out of a rice paddy.

Jones: Exactly, or spitting and telling you to go do something stupid because you don't know nothing else to do. And then, getting in the plane. And then, of course, the anticipation is, are we going to take off without anything happening because, in Nam, something always happens. You know that. There's always something, and it ain't usually good.

So, yeah. We'll be taking off, and you're thinking: The flight is going to get a round and probably blow up. You'd be thinking all the things of what—And you're in the plane, and I'm thinking all the things of why we ain't going to be able to take off, anticipating. My mind was just anticipating something's going to go wrong on this flight, taking off. And then, when it does take off and you get in the air, it's such a relief that just flows through you. It's like you haven't had a chance to take a real breath in a year. And you've got feelings because, now, you've got the uprising, and it's pushing you down in your seat. Your body's feeling different forces going on, and your mind is saying, I'm actually leaving. I'm actually leaving. And you're still waiting for something to go wrong.

And then, I mean, you're so happy, but you don't express it. Some screamed and hollered when the plane took off. I think all of us actually screamed and hollered when the thing took off. And, of course, then everybody settles and goes to sleep because you're really sleeping without, in your mind, when you go to sleep, I'm going to sleep without listening for a siren or incoming. But, what happens is, you don't hear it. So then, you keep waking up, and then you realize, oh, I'm not where I'm supposed to be—anyplace to hear it. I'm in a plane. But, when you go to sleep, you'd be wondering, wait a minute, I don't hear anything, because you get used to hearing the usual noises, you know. So then, you wake up because you don't hear the noise. And then, you realize you're in a plane. You say, this is wonderful; I'm great. Then you go back to sleep. And then, it's a cycle.

Then you start thinking about, well, I'm going home. And then, what does that mean? Now, you start thinking about home is a place that you can go to. It's not just a place I've got in my head. It's not just a thing that I'm… I'm going home. And then, you start thinking about, oh yeah, my wife, like this, and my baby...Now, all of a sudden, these things become more solid in your mind now because you're going home.

Landing, that's the other thing. Okay, the plane is going to crash. It's probably going to be something terrible. It's probably… On the plane, I mean, folks are just… They've still got this Vietnam mentality, so they're talking crazy crap. A lot of them—after you get past the initial--hooray, we're leaving, most everybody just crashed and went to sleep because it was like, okay, I can sleep now.

When the plane landed, guys got off, kissing the ground. I think I placed a kiss on the ground. I didn't even know why because everybody was doing it, and I was back in America. That was just like, okay, I made it.

DePue: Where did you land?

Jones: San Francisco.

DePue: At a military base or a civilian airport?

Jones: A military base, yeah, I think it was an Air Force base. It was kind of strange because I remember staying the night and getting up the next morning to make the bed. And they said, oh, you don't do that. The maids do that. You say, what do what? (chuckles) You all got maids? Wow, okay. That ain't the way the Marine Corps or none of the other service… Yeah, we kissed the ground. Then, they're going to feed you this steak and fries and all this heavy meat. You're back in America; now you get beef, big hunks of meat… and got sick as a dog the first night because my stomach was not used to all that heavy fried food, you know. Whatever they think, that's what you want when you

come back. But it depends what you're doing again. My system didn't like it. I was throwing up and everything.

So then, you go to the regular airport to fly out to go home. That's when it hits you how different everything is. You're still military when you fly into the military base. But, when you go to the regular airport, you've got colors flying in the air because everybody is brightly colored. You have all these people having the perfume. They walk—because your senses are still heightened—they walk with clunkiness, you know, because you've been walking through jungles, where you have the technique of walking, be very precise and all that. And these folks would be clop-clop-clop. I mean, you can hear all this. And you see all these colors; you see all these different people, and you see males and females walking through. You don't really know what it means, other than, I'm at home. There was those who were sitting around drinking. They had a bottle to go pass around. I'm home, and the hell with everybody, you know, in the terminal. There was others that just be quiet. They had their backs to the walls because they didn't want people to be behind them, because they really wasn't sure. You couldn't tell what was dangerous. Your mind and survival skills is, always try to identify what sounds, smells or what could be dangerous. Now you're back here, and all these people around. You don't have no idea if what smells or what you hear is danger, but you're looking for it. So, you get confused because your senses are still super sensitive in terms of it.

That's when I started thinking about… Actually, thinking about going home is when you really… About halfway on the flight, when I was going to sleep, I started thinking about coming home, started remembering home. When I landed, the only thing was just that I made it! I made it! I made it! Then, you start noticing the differences. At first, you think the differences are just because you've been gone for a year, everything's… But it's more than just like you've been gone for a year. Yeah, there's buildings in places where there used to be vacant lots and vacant lots where there used to be buildings. When you were young, growing up, we'd see a big stone building, we think it's there forever; it's permanent. In a year's time, I come back, you know, and they had some of those permanent looking buildings I left, which, in my mind was always permanent, were vacant lots. It was like, wow, I never thought that building could ever be torn down. (chuckles)

Then you start thinking about what you've done. And when you get home, what do you have to say about it? It may not be a long thought. It may be a short thought, or it can be a long one, but, the bottom line is, you really started sorting out in your mind, how you tell people what you've been through.

DePue: I want to read a quote from the book again, and this is Ham's advice to J.D. about coming home. "It's not just going crazy here. You have to think about doing things at home. It's different, and you have to be ready for it. You can't

go home cussing everyone out or just blowing someone away because they piss you off. It's not that way back home. Being an animal is okay here; shit, everyone is a damn animal here. At home, those are your folks, your people. Doc, the habits of war die hard. You have to think about what you're going to do at home. You can't take this crazy shit with you."

Jones: Right.

DePue: "You have to start thinking differently."

Jones: And that's the key thing, that, if you don't have folks that understand that around you, you don't think of a difference, you just be home. And you don't know how much you've changed because everything who is you now has been normal for a year. So, you don't know how much you've changed, and you don't have anybody to tell you. What I tried to do there, with Ham, was to say, you know, the things that really kept you alive here will not keep you alive at home. It's a whole different way. You've got to care about people. You don't just identify enemy, and then figure out how to kill them or not be killed by them. It's, now you're among your own family and your folks. You've got to get back to… I think what it really, in my own mind, came to a thing, was about survival. Where you're in combat, survival is being alive or being dead, and those are the only choices. There's a very clear choice. You're alive or you're dead. But when you come home, now you have to make choices that are not just being alive or dead. The choices are expanded, and you're not used to that. And people irritate you that, all of a sudden, take a lot of time making choices, you know—oh let's go over here at 8:00. Okay, I think I can do it. I may have to call so and so beforehand, because you've been living in a world of black and white, yes or no, alive or dead. And, all of a sudden, you get back home, and everything is gray; everything is mushy; people don't seem to talk straight. They linger, and they talk about stuff. And you say, are we going to do something or what? You're used to doing. But here, that's an adjustment. How do you slow down so that you'll be at the pace of the folks you have to live with, rather than the pace that you were staying alive with? That's a transitional thing that happens, and that's what he tried to get across is, you know, the habits of war die hard because they are survival skills. You don't give up your survival skills just because it is an intellectual thought. (chuckles)

DePue: We're going to spend a lot more time in the next session, talking about this process of adjusting back to being a civilian again. I'm going to finish with what I would imagine was a pretty positive story for you, and that moment of meeting your wife and the kids. Tell us about that.

Jones: Oh, yeah. Well, when I came back, one of the things is—and I came home and surprised them because I did get home a little early—probably I felt the most, at that moment, coming in, seeing my wife, seeing kids, my mother, I felt what it meant to be alive. I could feel it. It was just, everything was open. I

was open because I'm so damn happy that I made it back alive to the folks who I left. That initial moment is almost like a freedom thing; I made it home. It was even more than getting off the plane, and you know you're back on American—and you ain't got to go back over. It was just a pure feeling of, this is what I stayed alive for; I wanted to come back to. That's the initial feeling. Then, as time goes on, you figure out how screwed up you are. That moment is a moment you always try to get back to. But it's a moment; it is not an ongoing, living routine, you know, so...

DePue: This has been an important session for me because you've done a good job of articulating what a lot of veterans go through. And, obviously, because you've written the book, you've kind of struggled through all of this yourself and thought about it…

Jones: Yes I have.

DePue: …and been able to explain these things in ways that, I'm sure, a lot of people are going to find meaningful. So, I thank you for that. And we've got more to talk about.

Jones: Looking forward to it.

DePue: Okay. Thank you.

(End of interview #3 #4 continues)

Interview with Thomas Jones

VRV-A-L-2011-043.04

Interview # 4: November 22, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Tuesday, November 22, 2011. We're just a couple days away from Thanksgiving, and I'm here in the basement, the office or recording studio, whatever.

Jones: Or cave—it depends on what my wife feels that day.

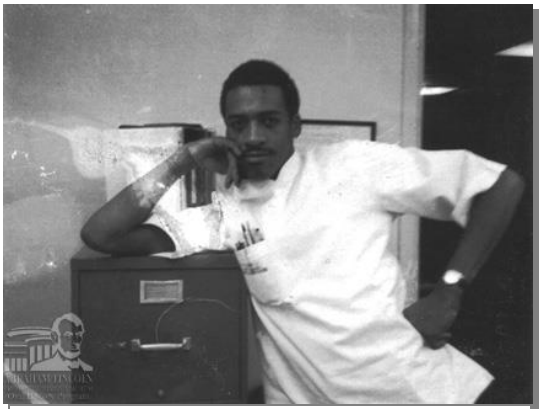
DePue: Exactly. I'm with Tom Jones. I think this is our fourth session.

Jones: Fourth session.

DePue: And it might be our last. If not, it's only that you have more to say. But last time, we pretty much finished off with your experiences in Vietnam and just were talking about getting home. So, where I wanted to pick up today is, you still had some time in the military, so what you did when you returned home.

Jones: Well, when I came home, I went to the Radioisotope Nuclear Medicine School at Bethesda, Maryland at the National Naval Medical Center. As I said, I didn't know you were supposed to be smart to get in that school, but I had the option of going to duty station or a school. So, I decided, what was the most difficult school to get into. My number one criteria is that they didn't send them to Vietnam. Radioisotope technicians I'd never even heard of, and I never saw one in Vietnam, so I thought that was the place to go. When I got there, I found out you were supposed to be smart to go to the school. So, my philosophy was, if I had to be smart, not to go back to Vietnam and get shot, I'll try smart this time.

So, I went to Radioisotope Nuclear Medicine School. It was one of your longer military schools. It took from multiple services. The classes were very small. After that, I went to the Great Lakes Naval Hospital and ran the radioisotope nuclear medicine lab there. That was an interesting adventure because we were one of the first hospitals to get a gamma camera. You used to have scanners where the thing goes back and forth; it took a long time to take a picture, once you've injected the radioisotope. The gamma camera: you could take the whole picture of an area of the body. So you could start doing flow studies. So, I did a lot of research work with Dr. Gotshal from the University of Chicago. I was the only technician there. They called me the head technician, but I was the head technician, the end technician. (chuckles) There wasn't that many folks around that could do that.



Petty Officer 1st Class Jones while he ran the radioisotope laboratory at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital in 1969.

DePue: The go-fer and everything else.

Jones: Oh, I did it all. I was the only one. I was the only technician. I was the only person there.

DePue: Tell us a little bit more about what exactly a radioisotope nuclear medicine technician does.

Jones: What we did is, we injected radioisotopes into folks and tracked it as it went through the body, look at the body functions and all. We also did therapy in terms of, like thyroid, where we would do radiation dosages higher, to be able to burn out part of the thyroid. So, it's basically injecting radioisotopes into the body, and then taking pictures of it as either it flowed through the system or if it went to a specific organ or area.

DePue: What exactly where they looking for?

Jones: Well, thyroid diseases, or we did flow studies. That was at the beginning, where you start trying to see if there was something, like the heart, that had blocked veins; the liver, where certain radioisotopes would go to the liver, and you would take pictures of that, and then you'd be able to see spots where the liver was not functioning. That was my assignment there, but what I did there, I was one of the first minority advisor to an admiral, Admiral Draper Kauffman, an admiral at the Ninth Naval District. That's when Elmo Zumwalt was the Chief of Naval Operations. So, I was one of the first advisors to an admiral, in terms of minority issues.

Great Lakes was one of the few places—during that period of turmoil—that did not have race riots on the base. We had some racial tensions, but I would do things to make sure folks had to get together. You know, we'd have dances, and the white kids had to invite the blacks, and the blacks had to invite the whites. Otherwise, we couldn't have a dance. (chuckles) One of the more controversial things was telling folks they had to take all the weapons…no knives or guns or nothing in the party. We'd do it in the rathskeller that was there. I almost got busted once for that because the officer of the day came by and saw weapons on the table and decided he should confiscate them. I said, "Well, this is the only reason we're not having problems because no one has any weapons, and everybody knows this is supposed to be to have a good time." But he said he had to confiscate them. So, I told him, well, then he had to take me with him because I'm the one that had them take it out of their pockets and put them on the table. And, if they take the weapons and leave me, I didn't figure it would bode well for me. (both laugh)

So, we went to the office and I told him, I think we should call the admiral. And, of course, he said, "Yeah, right. You call him." It was at night, like after 11:00. So, I called the admiral at home, and when the admiral got on the phone with me, he apologized, but he says he had to do something about the weapons. And I said, "Well, anybody you catch coming out with a weapon, they're yours. But, if they're in here…" You know, it was sensitive times, and it was also a sensitive kind of…But, he was very surprised when I woke the admiral up, and he had to talk to him.

DePue: He was thinking he called your bluff, and it wasn't a bluff at all.

Jones: I find it's easier not to bluff than to bluff. (laughs)

DePue: How did you come to the attention of Admiral Kauffman in the first place?

Jones: Well, I was involved with… I've got to remember; I've got some newspaper clippings about it. It was for a program about minorities, and that was, of course, during the time when a lot of things were going on with the Black Panthers and a lot of the racial upheaval. This was one of the programs to try to have the admiral have access to minorities, to talk about minority issues. We did some good things. We had radio personalities and artists come from Chicago up to Great Lakes and put shows on. We had Dr. Benjamin Mays, who was from Morehouse College. We had him there, in terms of bringing in successful blacks in different areas. What happens is, obviously, then, you become friends with an admiral, and that wasn't too bad in terms of trying to get things done.

Petty Officer 1st Class Jones meeting with several dignitaries at a reception for Dr. Benjamin Mays, President Emeritus for Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia. From left to right are UTCM Jesse Sherrod, Rear Admiral Draper Kauffman, Dr. Mays, PN1 Joe Spalding, Jones and Rear Admiral Alban Weber. From April 9, 1971 *Great Lakes Bulletin*

DePue: What was your rank at the time?

Jones: First Class.

DePue: Which is E-7?

Jones: E-6. I had passed it to be a Chief, but that meant I had to re-up again. (chuckles)

DePue: And didn't plan to do that, huh?

Jones: No. Well, one of the things is—because a lot of the stuff I did there was in that capacity as a minority advisor to an admiral—is that we did have some problems with the shore patrol because you had a lot of southern boys there. And there was problems in terms of how they enforced things in terms of whites and blacks. It was a time when, if they saw four blacks walking down on the base, they would stop them and check them because they was in a group. The whole environment at that time was an uproar of challenging authority, redefining.

DePue: Well, let's put a timeframe to this. You returned back to the States in July of '68?

Jones: Sixty-eight. I went to radioisotope school in Bethesda, Maryland, and so it was late ’68, I think, when I went to Great Lakes.

DePue: Let’s talk a little bit about 1968 and what went on. I don’t recall if we mentioned anything about—I think we did—the Martin Luther King assassination, while you were still in Vietnam. Did we talk about that?

Jones: Briefly, we did.

DePue: But, by the time you got back, that’s about the time that Bobby Kennedy was assassinated.

Jones: Right.

DePue: I think he was assassinated in June.

Jones: When I got back it was such a time of upheaval. You had two sides, you know, those who were challenging and trying to redefine authority, and the authorities who thought that everything was just fine the way things were, which created the clash. It seemed like nothing was settled. I mean, everything was so buzz of activity… so many things going on between evolution, revolution. It was just a time of total upheaval, since everybody was challenging everybody, or else folks were trying to put down challenges.

DePue: Having been in the war and having grown up in the United States in a variety of different environments and then gone to war, where were you with the whole debate within the black community at the time, about whether or not you want to make the change in the way that Martin Luther King had advocated, or you want to embrace the side that the Black Panthers…

Jones: Malcolm X or the Black Panthers, like that. I didn’t really get involved in a lot of groups. One is because the stuff I was in, I had to keep my head going all the time. Calculating all this radioactive stuff was a challenge. (laughs)

Never really joined any groups, the Black Panthers, all of them, because it was a time when everybody was Pan Africanism and Afro this and that. I never really joined any groups because one of the things I had in my head was, I’d been to war, and folks here were used to police actions. It’s totally different. In my mind, there were Vietnam veterans that joined a lot of the groups, but there were more that did not because, when you’re at war, everything is fair game. They’ll destroy the whole block, destroy the houses; families get killed. I’ve seen it. That’s what war is. It’s not a police action. A police action, you’ve got rights and all that. In war, you win or you lost. I just had in my mind, with all of the training that the war veterans had, when they got together, it just seemed that the powers that be could not let that happen. They trained us. They knew exactly how much we knew, and they knew exactly what we could or couldn’t do. I know, when you get a group of them together, a group of Vietnam veterans, bent on some kind of action, they’re

not going to come at you like a police action, they're going to come at you like a military action.

DePue: They, being the authorities?

Jones: Authorities, to me, that meant total destruction. The folks that had been living here had not experienced war. They experienced the civil side of it, where you still have rights, even if they violate them. But you had to have rights to be violated.

DePue: Well, the classic example in this timeframe we're talking about happened, probably, when you were in radioisotope school, but happened just down the road, in Chicago, at the Democratic Convention.

Jones: Right.

DePue: How closely did you follow that?

Jones: Oh, I followed it because it was just amazing, but, again, knowing Chicago… you know, I really came from Chicago.

DePue: Your mother was still in Chicago at the time?

Jones: My mother was still in Chicago at the time, you know, family. So, I was aware of all of it. I was more on the edge of it. I didn't really get in the middle of it. The only time is, I was in Compton when they rioted there, in California. But again, it was civil disobedience. It was losing control. It wasn't really like war.

DePue: I believe that after the Martin Luther King assassination, the riots in Chicago were more on the west side of town than they were on the south side?

Jones: Right.

DePue: So, did the neighborhood where you'd grown up, was that untouched, relatively?

Jones: Relatively. I grew up on the south side of Chicago, but a lot of it was on the west side. That's where they had the activity—what attracted everybody—was going on, was on that side. But the south side, there wasn't the on-the-street kind of riots going on that was happening on the west side of Chicago.

DePue: Did you hear from your mother at that time?

Jones: Oh, yeah. It's kind of funny. She was concerned with me being back and not being where she knew where I was at, with all these rioting. I'm laughing to myself because, I thought, I went through Vietnam and all that. This was more of an observational thing to me than really something that was like

terrible. I mean, I understood about riots. I was in Panama when they had riots, and Americans couldn't walk the streets. They blew up, I think, the Shell Building down there. One of the things we found out, in terms of when you get caught up in that, is number one, you get to the edge of the movement of the riot, the crowd, as soon as you can because, if you get in the middle, you'll get carried along. The mass of folks would take you. Number two, you try to get as high as you can because folks in the crowd in rioting, they usually are moving from one point to another.

DePue: While this isn't totally unusual, but, it is interesting that—as we sit here and talk—the authorities have tried to break up "Occupy Wall Street", and it's gotten a little bit ugly and much more serious over in Egypt right now.

Jones: Oh, yes.

DePue: The Arab Spring has turned into the Arab Autumn, when they're trying to fight again for their personal liberties.

Jones: Well, it's really fascinating. My wife and I was talking about that earlier. It really was fascinating to me, especially in the Egypt situation, where any time you have the military run a country, you're going to have problems because, obviously, the power is based on authority because I got the weapons. So, any time you have a military running the country, they're going to run it the way military runs any other operation. I think folks thought they'd be getting rid of this guy, and now they've got the military. Now they find out they've really got problems. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, sorry for that digression here. Let's get back to your life here, if we can, Tom. I wanted to ask you: You've spent a big chunk of your life, up to this point now, dealing with medicine, medical issues. Were you starting to think this was your future?

Jones: Oh, yeah, when I was coming out. The fact is, when I came out of the service, I had an opportunity to go to Presbyterian/St. Luke's and take over the radioisotope lab there or get involved in this new program called "the trauma program," which was basically a military model of accidents and all: stabilizing folks at the scene and making sure they go to a hospital that has that level of care, and make sure you have life support things going on while you're transporting them and all. So, I was one of the original architects of that. That program came out of Cook County Hospital, where, of course, they had a lot of experience with trauma in Chicago. So, I was one of the architects of that.

They had a program, when you came out of the service, where you could go work in a civilian job in the area you were going to go into. The military paid for, I think, like, three months. That's when we was putting the program together. Then, when I came out of the service, I went to Peoria, and

I was the regional trauma coordinator for the sixteen county areas around Peoria, for all emergency medical services.

DePue: Did trauma include counseling people?

Jones: It ended up doing that, but, at the beginning, it was basically just setting up the system, you know, coordinating the police, the hospitals, fire department, ambulance services, to be part of a system of response, with very definable elements, such as stabilizing before you move the patient, you know.

DePue: Your time at Great Lakes: Did you have any experience in counseling, as well, based on some of the other things that you were doing?

Jones: You know, actually, counseling was a natural part of being a corpsman, for example, in the service. I mean, yeah, you did, from the physical aspect. But you was also the ear, and everybody would bring their problems, officers, everybody, would bring them to the corpsman and just talk to him.

DePue: It's either you or the chaplain, huh?

Jones: Yeah, and since I went out with them, was crazy as them. But I was supposed to be the sane one to be able to help them. So, I ended up doing a lot of counseling, of course, in the service. That's where I got involved in a lot of areas, like being the minority advisor to the admiral and stuff like that. I also did a lot of counseling at the Great Lakes because Great Lakes was the orthopedic hospital during the Vietnam War. So, you had all these kids that had been in combat that were in casts and body casts and all, and you just can imagine the energy. So, I ended up in the hospital, doing a lot of counseling because of all these kids coming back in various stages of having a cast and couldn't move around.

DePue: Is this strictly an informal thing, though?

Jones: It was informal. It wasn't really formalized, like, here's your title as a counselor. But I would get the calls whenever there were problems with a kid— I call them a kid now. You know, with a guy that just came from Vietnam, he's been in combat; he's in a body cast, and he starts going through his remembrances of Vietnam. Then he's in a cast; he can't move, and there was a high level of frustration, sometimes anger. So, I ended up being put in that role by necessity, more than by any kind of, this is your job, and here's your title.

DePue: Does that mean that you'd dealt with all of the issues of your own, returning back from Vietnam and having those searing wartime experiences?

Jones: I really feel as though that's what helped me a lot is, I had to help other people. I was put in a lot of situations where I would listen to someone and their reactions to events that they had in Vietnam. None of them were as

intense as the ones I went through, but their reactions were so intense. I think, at the beginning, that's what helped me do that, because, you know, they had been through things. Any time somebody tries to kill you, and they almost do, it is a thing that sticks with you. But reaching out and trying to help others go through that, is probably the biggest thing that helped me because I was so involved in trying to listen, talk to them. It was realistic talking. You can't say no pie in the sky, blue sky stuff. The guy just came from combat, and he got his leg shot off, or he's got a full body cast or something, or else, he's lucky to be alive. So, you know, it's not really a Mother Goose tale kind of thing that you have a conversation with him. It's really a true. It was all from inside, internally.

DePue: At this time, how much training had you had in terms of how to actually do counseling, or is this all OJT (on-the-job training)?

Jones: All OJT…didn't have no classes, nothing.

DePue: How about the issue of confidentiality?

Jones: Well, it wasn't that. I wasn't official.

DePue: Were you going around and talking to other people about the things you were hearing?

Jones: Only if it was something that helped the person.

DePue: You mean, go to a doctor.

Jones: Yeah, it was something like that, to help the person, but never… Since it wasn't formalized, I didn't have to report it. I didn't have to put it down, you know. What happened is, folks knew me throughout the whole hospital complex, so they would call me: There's a problem; can you come over and talk to this guy because he's losing it? Then I would respond to it. So, it wasn't any formal training. It wasn't any assignment. It was more because, as a corpsman, that's what I did. (chuckles)

DePue: This part of the book, *Lost Survivor,* is pretty powerful stuff, in terms of J.D. struggling to try to readjust to back home. I'm going to read a couple quotes here and get your response. Here's one from Chapter 21, "Living on the edge in Nam and coming home so suddenly was like driving a car off a cliff, then slamming on the brakes."

Jones: No matter what, it didn't work. Coming home, you know, you had been redefined. I mean, the combat had redefined who you are because you were in such a survival mode. You had all these survival skills, which, of course, meant nothing, once you came home. So, even though you could be driving a car, like you have control of the car, in terms of the steering and all, you really didn't, because it's like when you go off a cliff. It don't matter how much you

push the brakes. They work; but there's no road. There was nothing there, underneath you. That's the way it felt inside my stomach; you run off of a cliff, and you automatically be pushing on the brakes, but you're in midair; it don't matter. (chuckles) And that was the sense, that it was… All the stuff I understood how to do, all the skills I had acquired, of survival, didn't mean nothing, at all.

DePue: In American culture, home is such an evocative term. What does it mean for a veteran to come home? How does he figure that out? What is home?

Jones: That's the question because, when you leave, you are one person who fits into whatever home means. Then, when I went to war and went through combat, home was a mental construct in my head, of memories that I remembered because they started fading. So, home was just a mental construct, and it was almost like going home was more the reality than when you got home. Well, you carry things in your head. You leave, and your wife had long hair. You come back, and she has short hair. Well, that doesn't mean too much to her, could be because she got tired of it. She takes care of it and all that. I mean, that's all the proper way to think about it. But, the truth of the matter for you, you carried it in your head for thirteen months, and that was one of the pillars of being home, was seeing your wife with her long hair. And you get home, the hair is short. You don't expect to have to adjust, coming home. In your mind, it's always, home is a place where I'm leaving here to go; that's going back to. But, when you come back, you're not the same person that left.

DePue: The last time we talked, and now this time again, you talked about things that were changed when you came home. But, underneath that, we're hearing that you're the one who has really changed.

Jones: Right. My whole who I was had been redefined because I've seen things; I did things I couldn't even conceive—if I had stayed home—that they existed. But then, they got to be normal. All of a sudden, you come home, and your normalcy is totally different than what you considered as normal before you left. You've been redefined to adjust and survive in this environment. And, when you come home, it's a mental construct.

DePue: When you came home, did you want to adjust back to who you were before you left?

Jones: Well, it took me a time to realize I was different, even, because I was who I was. And, as I started interacting with more people at home, is when, all of a sudden, the differences became more clear.

DePue: There's a couple of people whose interaction is most important, that's your wife and your kid. How did that go for you, coming home?

Jones: First of all, when my son was born, I was over there. So, that was a thing, you know. I had a son, and there was a great sense and feeling about the kids and

all. In terms of the wife, what happened is—and I think this is where the mental construct stuff comes in, because you carry what you think is your relationships when you go over. And, when you come back, you've broken all the links, except for your mind. You haven't had any emotions. Your emotions about home, after you get through a few things of combat, and people talk about, oh, I was in a firefight, and I was thinking about home. No, they weren't. They're thinking about who shot at him, and where's the next bullet? You don't think about home.

So, you come home, and folks are doing like they usually do. But some of it don't make sense to you no more. And you don't realize it until you stumble over it. It's not like you can anticipate it. There was no anticipation because of the way it came, you know, just get on a plane and came back. I tried to do that in the book, where Sergeant Ham saying, "You can't act at home the way you do here." But, what's that mean, when you're still there? And when you get back here, people seemed so clumsy and soft. It seemed like they lived in a world of gray, instead of black and white, instead of, yeah, we going? Yeah, or not? People will say, well, maybe, could be, I'm thinking about it. Well, you've been living this life of, you do it or you don't. Now, you come back, and they're in this middle place between the do's and the don'ts. You'd be saying, well, where the hell; what's this? You know, because your actions had meaning, and you were very precise in the things you did, especially if you was in recon. You know, you'd walk through the jungle; you're very precise on how you move through the jungle. Then, you come back here, and everybody's sloppy. They have all these gray areas, and no one seems to be able to make a decision. Everybody has to think about everything. That's not what you've been living for a year, that your life depended on.

DePue: I want to read another quote here and, again, from the book, obviously. This is a promise J.D. and Jan had made to each other. "Made a promise to each other that they would always share how they felt, no matter how bad things got. But he stopped writing when his brutal experiences became familiar and no longer unbelievable. The cruel and crude became so common, they weren't even worth writing about any more. Besides, he knew she wouldn't understand. How could she?"

Jones: There was no reason. I'm there and didn't understand it. But I did understand, from the times of writing, that, when I wrote about stuff that I was going through, when I first got there, because it was amazing to me. It was, oh, my God, you know, there's a… But then, what happened is, the letters came back, and they couldn't believe that that kind of stuff could happen. I just wrote them and said it happened. So, all of a sudden, it wasn't a big deal to write about any more. It was just… didn't even think about it no more.

DePue: But you're now back in the States. You're with your wife. Do you find those experiences where you can talk to her about what had happened?

Jones: No, because, you know, what happened is you have a conversation with folks. You tell them, and they look at you like, well, that couldn't have happened because they can't conceive of that. In their world, in their minds, they can't conceive of the situation occurring that you lived through, because they can't see how that could happen. That really screws up a conversation, when you lived through something, and folks can't believe it happened.

DePue: Is that why it was different for you, hearing the stories of some of these guys you were administering to?

Jones: Yeah. I could connect with them.

DePue: And they knew you could?

Jones: Yes, because, once I said I was a corpsman, I was in recon, that opened the door. They talked. It's very interesting, folks who have been in combat can talk to other men about combat, about weaknesses, which they would not talk to other folks about. I had my first firefight. I crapped on myself. I peed on myself. I cried out for my mama. I called for God. Two folks that have been through the experience will talk about it. But, if they haven't been through the experience, then it's… different. And how do you talk to a woman who can't even understand you're going to boot camp, let alone what you did to survive in combat.

DePue: Did your wife try to understand? Did she want you to talk to her?

Jones: Well, what happened is, you know, the sense I remember, at that time, was, it wasn't a point of talking because of all the stuff on TV about Vietnam veterans going crazy, folks going in bell towers and shooting people, you know, all this stuff was going on. So, it was always, how messed up are you, rather than, let me talk about the experiences that you went through to be messed up. So, there wasn't a base there to have a conversation because they were trying—always, it seemed like—trying to see, I know you're different. Obviously, they can see you're different because your patterns are different.

A lot of things that used to be important didn't mean nothing no more, didn't have the same meaning when you came back. When you was a kid, it was very important - I went out with Joe, and we went over to this place. Well, that didn't mean that much any more, but Joe was still doing it. So, you come back, and Joe says, we're going to go do what we always did. Well, back then, it meant something to you. It just didn't mean that much. But it seemed like, when people talked to you, they were assessing: are you one of them crazy Vietnam veteran guys I seen on TV? They say they're explosive. They go off, da-da-da-da. It seemed like that was—whether it was or not—but the sense, the feeling was—because the way they would be in conversations, the questions that would be asked. Seemed like questions like, "Are you okay? You're not messed up like all those others?"

And, of course, you change your patterns because those patterns you had before, that everybody was familiar with, they didn't mean nothing to you. But that's what people held onto, while you were gone. So, when you come back, and, all of a sudden, they say, well, you always liked to do that. Well, that's when I thought that that was the epitome of something. Now, that is such a low level in my life, in terms of experiences, it just didn't mean that much to me any more. I didn't care about going out to place A with Joe.

DePue: What, then, did give meaning to your life when you came back?

Jones: I think it really was doing things. I got involved in a lot of stuff, and I still am. I think a lot of that was my way of, well, I can't deal with all this stuff, but I'll sit here, and I can do this.

DePue: What do you mean doing things? What kind of things?

Jones: I enjoy reading; I enjoy learning; I enjoy writing. I just really focused on those. Those were singular things that I did, that I didn't have to do with nobody. And I think what I did is, I started really getting into those kind of things, where I can just do them, and I didn't need to have folks around to do it.

DePue: In J.D.'s case, I guess he never did really reconcile with how he had changed. So, he went back to Vietnam. Let me see if I can find the quote here. When he returns to Vietnam, he feels, "A powerful kinship of family filled J.D. to overflowing. Was this the feeling called home? It didn't matter; he was back in a place where someone would always have his back."

Jones: Right. When you survive through combat with other men, it's a bond. When you come home and everybody's trying to assess—you feel like they're trying to assess who are you now? Their assessments are based on, how do I get you back to how I knew you before you go. And you will never go back there. You can't be that no more because you can't undo all the things in your mind of which you have done, which you have seen. You can't undo that. And that's what forced you to be somebody different when you came. It redefined you. That's what forced you to be different when you came home.

Going back, all of a sudden here you are with folks that, in your mind—it's all mental—in your mind, that really care for you. You had a wife. You had family. You had everybody else. They care for you. They love you. But going back and being again with men that are willing to put their lives down for you, and you was willing to put your life… that was such an intense kind of thing. It's really not fair to compare it, like coming home and being back with the family and all, because it is a whole… But you don't know that. In the case where J.D. went back, it's because he couldn't find his place in the life that he left. But he knew his place in Vietnam.

DePue: Things made sense to him in Vietnam and not at home?

Jones: Well, he understood the things that did make sense. Didn't shit make sense in Vietnam, half the time. (laughs) You lived through it. But you was with other people living through it. It wasn't you… You come home, and you feel strange. You're different. It's you, by yourself. When you go back there, crazy stuff goes on. But you have other folks, so you don't feel like I'm singularly different here. We all in this together.

DePue: Well, let's go back to what we had talked about a little bit, in terms of relationships. You're married at the time.

Jones: Um-hmm.

DePue: Maybe just as kind of an abstract concept here: Soldiers go away. They're in love with their wife; the wife's in love with this man. He goes away. A different guy comes back, and now she's expected to fall in love with a different guy.

Jones: In your mind it ain't falling in love with a different guy. It's, I'm back. It's only after you're back, you start seeing the differences because you don't think about it before you come back. It's only when you're back. And to you, you're not a different guy. You have more experiences that you've been through, but you don't feel different. It's only until you come home, do you feel different.

DePue: Were people telling you that, Tom, you've changed?

Jones: Oh, yeah, because, what happens is, you don't want to participate in all the stuff that you used to do…was fun with people. It didn't matter if you was around them or not, see, let alone whether you enjoyed going out and having fun at some place with them. You don't realize the difference until you get around folks who are the same. But you're not because you've had experiences now that they can't even conceive that could happen in the first place, let alone for you to be through it. So, this whole thing of when folks say, did you feel… No, I didn't feel different, I felt like I was who I was, until I got home and, all of a sudden, folks, they had a mental construct of who I was before I left, and that I had changed.

DePue: Do you have any anecdotes that illustrate that?

Jones: Well, I used to love to dance. I used to go out dancing. Of course, in Nam, I didn't do no dancing. (laughs) I can still dance, but it used to be that was the big thing, getting ready to go to a dance: take time, get ready, you know, clean up and go out and dance. I enjoy the dancing still, but I didn't really care for the routine of going out, like that was an exciting thing. When you've been through adrenaline rushes, where it really made a difference of what you did or didn't do, like your life or not, and then, you come home, everything seems to be at a slow, different pace. So, all of a sudden, I enjoyed dancing, but I didn't really care about how I looked when I went to the dance. I might have

been wearing combat boots. (both laugh) I was going to dance, but, you know, before it was always, you're getting ready, the anticipation… Well, you know, I'm going to the dance, okay. I've got pants. I've got stuff on, shoes. I've got a shirt on. But, before, it was I had to have a certain shirt, and I had some kind of look I was trying to project. When I came back, it didn't make a difference. I was going to the dance to dance. (chuckles)

DePue: Did you have any issues with nightmares? So many veterans, you hear they have problems reconciling what had happened, so they turn to drugs or they turn to alcohol.

Jones: Oh, yeah. I didn't realize it at the time. I went through some periods there, where it was very… things didn't… you wasn't tuned in to things around you. So, you found places to go in your own head and the drugs and the alcohol. Alcohol was never that big a thing to me because, when I was growing up, my mother owned taverns and all. We had two bars at home, and she used to say, "If you want a drink, there's two bars at home where you can drink. I don't want to hear about you being in an alley drinking some wine with some winos in the alley."

I never did care for alcohol because I've seen what it did to people and all. So, I got off and would smoke marijuana. But it was more because it was relaxing than it was something that was trying to be a drug to solve anything. Even in Nam, it was stepping away, because you never used it when you were in the bush because sometimes you didn't want your senses heightened, because you start hearing and seeing things that make you react to them. And the next thing you know, you'll be in a world of shit. (both chuckle)

I had nightmares because I did all these things, you know, with the human body, in terms of people blown away, and you trying to find their parts and bring it together, so, at least, when you send them back, they've got their parts. So, I've seen so much, in terms of that. So, I had the nightmares and not sleeping and then sleeping and then waking up totally drenched in sweat, you know, going through a nightmare. It was interesting. A nightmare we look at as something really different, but the things I was having was remembrances, but they would be considered nightmares.

In the book I do put some of the nightmares I had, in terms of shooting people, and eyes. For some reason, the eyes, because I've seen so many men die, and I've seen life leave, and then that dullness that comes in the eyes when they die. So, I used to have a lot of nightmares about that. We call them nightmares here. (chuckles)

DePue: Were there any particular memories that really stuck with you, maybe the ones you wish wouldn't?

Jones: Most of them. (laughs) Most of them. There was a couple of situations where we went in, where we seen where folks had been tortured. That was probably one of the things that had the most impact. It was interesting, I was asked that in an interview about torture. I said, "You know, I was part of this warrior class thing. A warrior will stand by your side to die with you. A warrior will look in the eye of the man who is going to kill him. A warrior is not into torture. I kill you or not, or I wound you or whatever, but torture wasn't part of the culture. So, the couple times I did see men who had been tortured where their skin had been peeled and everything and cut up; that's probably the thing, that was the thing, that really was the recurring kind of nightmare. That was one of the worst ones. And, going to a thing that there's been explosions, and people are still alive, and you've got part of their body parts here. You put it all on top of their chest and all, so that their body part would go with them, to see if they can sew it back on and do something. Those were probably the two kind of nightmares that bothered me the most.

DePue: Do you still have them?

Jones: Periodically. I don't have them in the intensity. I never know when they come up. I can go years and nothing happening, and who knows what triggers them? I know men that can't go in a restaurant if they smell rice because that's the trigger in their minds. So, I periodically go through periods—I think it's where the pressure of doing something or getting something done—then all of a sudden, they pop up. It wasn't until I got older, when I started trying to look at what was the trigger for it. I really haven't—it happens. I'm not sure. Anything can trigger something like that. It can be a smell. It can be a sound. It could be a thought, and, bing, you're there. You don't really know until you come out of it.

DePue: Is there anything particular that seems to trigger it for you?

Jones: The only thing is, I know that—it's interesting—the more pressure I have, the least I have them, which is probably why I stay so busy, because my mind is always focusing on something. It doesn't just slip around and flop around.

DePue: Some people thought that, maybe, one of the things that's different about Vietnam, certainly the nature of the combat, was because it was harder to identify the enemy in many cases. But another thing that was different for the Vietnam generation is they came back to a nation that wasn't accepting and embracing them, but were condemning them.

Jones: Right.

DePue: Did you personally experience any of that?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Coming through the airport, in terms of the little hippie thing I did in the book, I actually was in that; that was a real situation. I've been in places where folks wanted to start these conversations: Why are you over there

killing babies? Now, that's a hell of a way to start a conversation. I used to look at them and say, because they were trying to kill me. And then, of course, at that time, I was around folks, everybody was off into intellectualizing everything. I think that was one of the big things too.

You come back here. You've been in, like I said, in this world of black and white, do or don't do. And then, all-of-a-sudden, you come back, and folks have long intellectual conversations about different issues. I enjoyed them because, see, at the end, I would say, it don't mean anything.

DePue: That it's a luxury? (Tom laughs) It's a luxury to be examining it in that way?

Jones: Yeah. So, we get through with the conversation and what? Because that's what they had said then, see. So, I was like, okay. But, I've had incidences where I've been places, and people—because I was doing a lot of stuff in the public—and when they found out I was a Vietnam veteran and all, then they wanted to have this conversation about, well, how does it feel to… They start off with how you're killing people; how does it feel to kill folks? Huh? Back then, my answer was short, curt, because I wasn't into… Now, they weren't asking an intellectual question; it was a very personalized question.

DePue: It was a very judgmental question.

Jones: That's what happened most of the times, when it was off into those. There was always a judgment thing in the way the question was asked. My answer I just gave: You want to be un-intellectual. I can do that very well too. I'd be saying, well, if your choice is you kill them or they kill you, which one are you going to take?

DePue: Did it make it worse then to have—in your case, in particular, or Vietnam veterans, in general—to adjust back to whatever is a normal life?

Jones: I think what happens, you figure out you have to do some adjustments because you are there. I mean, the first emotion is, you get home. And then, when you get home, you find out, well, home ain't what I've been carrying in my head, but I'm here now. What does that mean? You start, then, doing adjustments, but you can only do the adjustments once you accept that this is where you're going to be. It's very hard to make all your experiences, like being in Vietnam, meaningless, so that you can be involved back in your life, because being involved back in your life, a lot of time, is what people perceive you should be doing because of what they know you did before you left. But you come back, you've got a whole new thing. Your adjustment is different because, it's not that you're trying to go back to whatever a normal life meant, it's the normal expectations of what people think is normal. What's normal now, all of a sudden, to you, is totally different than the people around you. But then, what happens is you realize, okay, well, this is better than being in the jungle and getting shot at. You have your issues because, like I said, you

never know when you'll have an episode, where you do a flashback. You do more of them when you first get home, but, when you have them later on, when you get older, they seemed to be more intense because you're older now, and it's a surprise to you. When I had those episodes, they happen, it's a surprise, because I'm saying where in the hell did that come from? Because I wouldn't have had it for a long time.

DePue: Is there sometimes it occurs, and it spooks those folks that are with you?

Jones: Oh yeah. Well, you know, one of the things you find is, your expression of anger; when you come home, it scares people because it's an intensity. You're used to shooting folks when you get mad. (chuckles) So, you'd be mad, and all-of-a-sudden, you throw an ashtray across the room. And everybody goes, Oh my God, he's crazy, you know, and run out the room. You'd be doing, well, fuck it; it's an expression. I threw the ashtray. Different levels of where folks—the base where they come from. So, you would do things. If you expressed it openly like that, it would be so much more intense than folks who haven't been through those experiences. But, if you're around other guys, other Vietnam veterans, someone does something like that, and you said, ah, he's going off. It's something, but it's not… It don't mean anything, other than, at that moment in time, poof, that's where he was, okay? But folks here, they may have never seen you angry, and all-of-a-sudden, you do get angry over something, and you're expressing it. They're taking it as… To them it's so intense, but to you, you're just expressing what you feel at that time.

DePue: Well, and I'm sure they would personalize it as well.

Jones: Oh, yeah, because it's you and them in the room. (laughs)

DePue: I keep taking you back here. I don't know that you want to spend too much time here. But, again, your wife, maybe she was experiencing some of that as well?

Jones: It took me a while to find out that what happens, everybody's involved in things that go right or wrong. I was going through things and, of course, a lot of times, you don't know you're going through things until you're in it. It wasn't like I saw it coming and said, well, next week this is going to be like this. It's always after, when you look back, you say, well, I think I probably overdid that or I… whatever, you know. That's when you have the thoughts about it. While you're in it and doing it, you're just doing it. You're not thinking about how it's going to look, how it's going to seem. You're not thinking about that. After a while, you realize, there's no way in the world I can talk to my wife about anything because she has no basis to understand it, because you start talking about stepping on a stick, you know, a punji stick, and, all-of-a- sudden, they want to go to the bathroom because they feel sick. You'd be looking at them, well, I ain't got to the real part of the story yet. So, how do you have a conversation?

At first, you think, well, they just don't understand. Then you learn, well, maybe you don't understand because they're normal back here. You're the one who's not. (chuckles) It takes a little time for you to understand that concept. At first, you need to change back to something, is what you sense. Change back to what? I can't go back and do that. But it seems like, when they say you need help or something, it's to get back to what they recognize and are comfortable with. Sometimes you care, and sometimes you don't, about them being comfortable with it, because that's where you are; you're reacting. And you don't know until you're into it.

DePue: But if they want you go to back to be who you were before, from what you've talked about here, that's just not going to happen.

Jones: Can't. You can't undo it. Once you make a marble cake, you can't undo it and separate the pieces any more. (chuckles)

DePue: Is that a Tom Jones original?

Jones: Oh, I've heard that somewhere, about you can't undo a marble cake, and I just like that statement. It's so true. Once you bake it, you can't just separate the light and the dark parts any more.

DePue: Let's go back to, maybe, a little bit more pleasant discussion here. Bring us up-to-date. When did you get out of the service? And then, what did you do after that? You've hinted at it a couple times, anyway.

Jones: I got out of the service in '70, '71. When I came out, I ended up going through the trauma program. So, I went to be a regional director of the trauma program in Peoria, Illinois, and was responsible for all the emergency medical response for the sixteen-county area around Peoria County, which meant, basically, from Route 80 to a little bit north of Springfield and from 66[4], at that time, over to the Iowa border. That was the swap that I was responsible for.

It was very interesting. I mean, the first week I was there, I was the new regional Trauma Coordinator, which meant I was supposed to be working with hospitals, police, the fire, the ambulance companies, the doctors, all those, to try and create a system with these folks for emergency medical response. Well, they never had nobody try to systematize them, and I had no power or authority over anybody either.

But what really made it happen is, the first week I was there, they had an airplane crash at the Peoria Airport. So, all of a sudden, I get these calls from everybody because they heard about this new person, the Trauma Coordinator, supposed to be for these emergency medicals. I had been there a week. The only thing about the trauma program were papers in my briefcase. I didn't even have an office. I was in a file room with a little desk and a chair. I

[4] The famous Route 66, now Interstate 55

didn't even have an office, wasn't there a week. But everybody was calling me about, where do we get body bags from? I was getting calls from Europe and newspapers all over the damn country because it was an airplane crash. And everybody said, Oh, We got the Trauma Coordinator should do that, should answer that question, or Go to the Trauma Coordinator. I got folks coming to me talking about needing body bags, and I didn't even know what I was doing yet.

So, it was sort of a baptism by fire. But, again, because I wasn't too far from being under a lot of pressure, somehow I got through it. But that was my maiden journey of being there, was an airplane crash at the airport. And then I had to coordinate, which I had no idea what coordinate meant. I had no idea who to coordinate with.

DePue: Did you come out of that experience with an enhanced reputation or a damaged reputation?

Jones: I actually came out enhanced, basically, because I was there. I think a lot of it was that they had somebody to talk to, even if I didn't know how to go do all those things. They had somebody to talk to about it, where they didn't have before, who could talk to somebody else that they didn't talk to that was needed. I stumbled through it, you know. Then there was a lot of politics because, what happened is, a hospital in the city was designated as a trauma center, regional, area-wide and local. Well, you went to a city that had more than one hospital, everybody wanted to be the top one. But St. Francis was a regional one, in Peoria. Then, what happens is, Methodist says, well, the other hospital is a big hospital. They say, well, we're bigger than St. Francis. We do this, and we can't get no… So then, they became an area-wide, and they was across the street from each other. (both laugh) I saw a lot of that stuff because, even though I was Regional Director there in Peoria, I was running around the state because I had been the architect of it, you know, working in other areas, in other cities.

I think it probably helped me [that] I went into a situation like that because I still had to be very responsive in the medical sense and dealing with people, which I had a natural inclination, just from all my experiences. Anyway, I had no authority over anybody. So, I had to figure out how to get them to work together because they needed to do it, which is not usually a criteria, most of the time. I ended up getting the police, the fire, the hospitals, putting them in the system.

The fact is, we got a big Robert Wood Johnson[5] Foundation grant. We was one of the fifteen sites they picked in the country for developing that, and we actually ended up being one of the top three in their whole grant program for that.

[5] Johnson was founder of Johnson & Johnson, Inc., the pharmaceutical and medical devices company.

They used to fly me around the country and have me speak to other folks about putting together these systems and how you work with folks.

While Trauma Coordinator in Peoria, Jones met in Kewanee to discuss the organization of a Kewanee area Health Planning Council. Pictured, from left to right, Dr. William Stearns, Dan Baily, Jerry Wolff and Jones.

DePue: Tom, you had a way then, when you were at Great Lakes, of kind of rising above the rest and being identified by the admiral to run a particular program, and now doing the same thing in the trauma center.

Jones: I don't know; it seems like I just—I always say—I feel the flow. My sense of life is like a flow, a stream. You have rocks and stuff, and they'd be like events and circumstances, but the water goes over them, around them, under, you know. I found that I always trying to feel the flow because then you flow around the rocks; you can flow over them. But then, as I got older, I began to look at the flow. When you look down at a higher level, then you realize that that's a whole characteristic of you, the stream, the rocks, the events, the circumstances. But, most of the time, we don't take that view of looking at ourselves, a higher view of ourselves. To me, these things happened by just the flow of stuff. It wasn't stuff that I was trying to do. It wasn't stuff that I knew that doing this would end up doing that.

I've spoke to kids in college and high school, and they said, well, what classes do I need to take to do what you have done? (laughing) You don't want to know. There're no teachers, but there's lessons you learn. Yeah, I came out, and that happened in the trauma center. Then, of course, I was in the newspaper a lot because it was very sexy, with all these sirens and red lights, and so I was in the newspaper a lot, you know.

DePue: Well, now you're helping to save lives too.

Jones: Yeah, you know, in terms of what I was doing. Then, that's when the politics stuff. So, folks say, you're in the newspaper all the time. You should run for office. That's when the Vietnam mentality was still there, and I said, "They don't shoot bullets at you do they?" (Mark laughs) They said, "No." I said, "Okay." I had no idea what it meant. I didn't understand about issues. I had to go find where they were meeting to go be there.

DePue: Who's the "they" we're talking about now?

Jones: This was the political parties.

DePue: Both of them?

Jones: Yeah, because I didn't belong to anybody. So, I said, I'll run. I ran for city council.

DePue: Under what ticket?

Jones: City council was low. You didn't have to declare at all. So, I ran for that. I had no idea what any of it. But I only lost by a few votes.

DePue: When was this?

Jones: Seventy-two, seventy-three.

DePue: This is pretty early, after you had just gotten there then.

Jones: Um-hmm. I still had that energy, that drive, you know. I'm still…

DePue: You're not even thirty yet, at the time, are you?

Jones: No. So, I ran for city council, lost. Then both parties started talking to me because this unknown person—he actually got more votes than a lot of other people, but he didn't win. But he got more votes than a lot of other people. I had no idea what it meant.

DePue: Had you gone out and actively campaigned?

Jones: I went door to door, knocking on doors. I was very honest with folks. You know, I'm doing this, and, not that I've been around a long time or anything… But that caught the attention of the parties, that I could get votes, not knowing what I was doing, not having no organization, no money. (chuckles)

DePue: Tom, by that time in American politics, to be African American almost guaranteed that you're going to be a Democrat. Is that how it worked out for you?

Jones: No. Republican. The fact is, I ended up going with the Republicans. It was kind of interesting because I didn't really understand what Republican-Democrat meant. (laughs)

DePue: You had to know though that, hey, all the other blacks that I know are Democrats.

Jones: Well, you know, it was very fascinating. I knew the folks in the black community. I knew the head of the Urban League, and I knew them. But I was so focused on what I was doing that I was not really involved in a lot of community kind of things, even though I did know them. I was more focused on all this healthcare stuff, you know, this trauma program. I'm dealing with

multiple people and trying to keep it in one system. And these are the police, the fire. I was in this whole other world. So, I wasn't really into the community social activities. So, I didn't really have that look to say, this is where you be, over here, Democrats, because you're black. I had no idea of the parties. The fact is, the first time I voted in my life, I voted for me because they told me you had to register to vote. I do what? (both laughing) So, I had to go register to vote, so I could vote for me. I never voted before. How do you tell a kid this is what you do in a classroom, vote for yourself the first time?

So, the first time I voted for myself was when I ran for city council and lost. But it caught the attention of the parties. The Democrat guys, they brought me down to a restaurant with everybody, wherever, you know, and talked to me about being a Democrat. I still had the concepts in my head. Then the Republicans talked to me. The bank president was up in his private dining room, overlooking the city of Peoria and all, and I said, I like this. (both laughing) I didn't know what the philosophy or any political positions were, I like this. That's why I got involved with the Republican Party, and I had some interesting events.

I remember when Mary Alice Erickson was running to be chairman of the Republican Central Committee.

DePue: Mary Alice?

Jones: Erickson. She was Bob Michel's person. She was his campaign manager.

DePue: You're talking about Congressman Michel?

Jones: Right, and the minority leader in Congress. He's from Peoria. So, what happened is, I ended up actually getting to be friends with Bob Michel. But Mary Alice was running to be Chairman of the Peoria Central Committee, and, of course, she was a woman and bla-bla-bla. So, I said, okay, I'll help. One of the things that helped is, of course, back then, precinct committeemen were very important. So, I said, okay. Of course, in the black community, from the Republican viewpoint, there was all these open precincts. So, Mary Alice said, we need to have folks in there. So, I went to people and got them to be… I still hadn't really caught the whole concept of all this political stuff. I'm doing it because I'm dealing with somebody.

So, I go, and I get folks to be precinct committeemen, blacks in these communities. What happened is, the guy that was chairman understood what I was doing. He understood probably more than I did. So, he calls me in. And now I'm up—my precinct I lived in was open. Now, where I lived at was in the Bradley area and…

DePue: That's on the north side of town, Bradley University?

Jones: Yeah, in Peoria. I lived on the bluff where Bradley University was, a few blocks from Bradley. So, my precinct opened, and then I go and Mary Alice puts me in. So, the chairman calls me in because now he's seen I'm getting active. And he says, "Well, if you're going to be a Republican, you need to understand the philosophy." Now we're going to get to the political philosophy of things. So, he gave me all this stuff to look at. And I said, hmm, okay.

So, I'm at a Republican event with Mary Alice and all these precinct committeemen, and I said, Man, this precinct committeeman stuff must be tough." They say, "Why?" I said, "Well, the chairman had me sit down and told me I had to agree to all these Republican principle things he had, before I could be a precinct committeeman." And they all went off, "What? That ain't the way it's supposed to work." So, they all got pissed at him because here's a black guy being visibly active, and he's doing this putting the Republican, you know, that philosophy in my head.

Well, I ended up getting it. We had the election. Mary Alice won. Now, she's Chairman of the Central Committee and I was Vice Chairman of the Peoria Republican Central Committee for Peoria County. That's when it really became interesting politically. I didn't know I had a position of power. (both laughing)

DePue: But others knew.

Jones: I found out, later on. I was just doing what I thought I should be doing. I mean, I had no agendas, no identifiable banners I was waving in the air or nothing. I was doing stuff with Mary Alice. Then, of course, that was when Bob Michel and I became friends. Well, I didn't understand what it meant to be a friend of the minority leader of Congress because he was just a friend. (laughs)

DePue: You didn't realize, at the time, that he's, I think, number three?

Jones: He was the third most powerful person in the world, actually.

DePue: Yeah, if the President and Vice President die, he's the President of the United States.

Jones: No, he was Bob, and I was always Tom. Then a thing opened up on the county board, and I got appointed to the county board seat. And then I started getting more involved because I was on

the county board. I was Vice Chairman of the Finance Committee. I was Chairman of the Republican Caucus, which was the forum for elected republicans and the party to get together to discuss issues and all of that. And, all these things, I had gotten these positions, well, because of Mary Alice and Bob Michel. I was just doing okay. I'm supposed to what? Okay, and that's what I'd go do. I didn't have all this banner stuff in my head, waving, you know?

DePue: It's driving me crazy. I won't be able to concentrate until I correct myself. He was Minority Leader, so the Speaker would have been President.

Jones: No, he was the Minority. Oh, he was still…

DePue: A pretty powerful guy.

Jones: Yes. And I never realized it because Bob was always Bob Michel. He was just such a genuine person, and, I think, one of the greatest legislators that were there because he was back when it did matter to be a legislator. I mean, I met Tip O'Neill and his staff. I met all these people in Washington, and that's how I got these appointments. I had all these presidential appointments, and I didn't realize what that meant. I was on the National Heart, Lung and Blood Advisory Council for the National Institutes of Health, right? That's a presidential appointment, confirmed by the Senate. I didn't know what was going on. People were sending me stuff from all over the world, congratulations. When I realized, sooner or later, when I got there, we gave $600 million a quarter away to people around the world. That's why they were doing that. (laughs)

I had all these presidential appointments, and it's because I knew Bob Michel. I mean, it's been under Republican and Democrat. That's the other thing I found out. I had appointments under Republican and Democrat presidents. I got appointed by Jimmy Carter; I got a presidential appointment from him. I'm going to Washington, and everybody is just really having a great time. I'm with all these people and on the committee. I was on the council, the NIH [National Institutes of Health]. It was people like Dr. Mike DeBakey,[6] who's the open heart surgeon; Gene Braunwald, who was the Dean of the Medical School for Harvard; Thomas James, who was from University of North Carolina. This is the committee. And then here's me. (both laugh)

DePue: And they're all saying, who's that guy? What did he do?

Jones: Well, they found out, because what happened is, Ralph Vinovich, who used to be [Everett] Dirksen's AA and ended up being Bob Michel's AA. And, you know, he was the dean of the AAs in Washington.

DePue: Administrative Assistant?

[6] Dr. Michael DeBakey was the first person to perform a human heart transplant.

Jones: Um-hmm. I was out in Washington for a meeting, and he told me what happened is, that the folks at the NIH had written this letter to the congressman saying, we've got this guy, Tom Jones. We don't know where he came from. We don't know if you know, but he's from your area, that he's on this. Like I came through some affirmative action program or something, you know, to get on that. And they wanted the slot to put a real doctor, scientist in. So, they wrote this letter to Bob Michel. They thought it was one of those things that someone did and slipped by.

Well, Bob responded, Tom Jones is a friend of mine. That's how I know what you all are doing because every time he comes to meet with you, I stop in, and we talk. (both laughing) Ralph showed me the letter. He said, "You should have seen the letter they sent in about how great you were."

DePue: Were you spending time, out in D.C., or were you living out in D.C.?

Jones: Spending time. I would go out for these meetings. We had a meeting every quarter with this group. Like I said, I didn't realize how… You know, I'd be in a situation, I'll do what I think should be done, and people from the outside look at it and say, my God, man, you've got the President, or, you know, you call Bob Michel at home. I didn't have that same thought. It was, oh, I need to talk to Bob. I pick up the phone and call him.

All this other stuff was swirling around me and I remember, I did something that no one was supposed to do. I got into a disagreement with Dr. DeBakey, the big old heart surgeon. I mean, he's the guy the Shah of Iran sends a private jet for, and all this stuff. But I knew him as Mike DeBakey. This is when we became friends, after this, because we got into a difference. We had something going on—it was about containment—because we had to give this report to the president of Congress, and there was sort of a format they wanted you to use. But these were medical insiders. They're going to do it the way they want to do it because that's the way they express themselves. I'm looking at the report, and we're in this big meeting.

Now understand, this meeting we had; it had like a big table, a long table that twenty to thirty folks could sit around. Everything was on the record. They had mikes from the ceiling. They had closed circuit TV, and they had a stenographer talking into a thing, you know, because everything you did, you cough, you fart, it's on the record, which I didn't have the whole concept of either, at the time when I did this. But I challenged Mike, you know. I said, "Wait a minute." I said, "The way this report is written"—because I understood administrative and reports— "The way this report is written, we're not responding to how we're supposed to do it." And DeBakey said, "Well, if you were a doctor or a scientist, you would understand it." I said, "Oh really? Well, you're right. So, from now on, whenever you vote for something, I'm voting against it. And if you're against it, I'm for it. So, from

this point on, your vote don't count no more." I just did it, and everybody got quiet because I challenged god, which I didn't you know.

DePue: But that was a nice, condescending attitude he had towards…

Jones: Well, you know, I just reacted. I responded, and it wasn't no conscious thought. To me, it just, you know? So, I just said, "Well, your vote don't count no more." Everybody got quiet because I challenged god. And he looked at me and laughed, and he said, "Well, they give us a structure, a framework, we should try to stay in it, even though we say it our way." And everybody, "whew". But, I didn't realize, you know. I just responded.

After that, we became friends. Hell, I was out in Texas, and he took me around to the university there, and I kept telling him, "This don't make no sense." He said, "What?" "They've got statues of you, man. You ain't dead. They have statues of you while you're alive. Do they know something you don't know?" But we became friends in terms of it, and he was great.

The fact is, after I seen my doctor. I told her about all these folks I'd served with in Washington, like Dr. DeBakey and all of these folks. And I said, "I got books—because he used to send me books, you know—where he signed them." So, I took them so she could see it, and she said a couple of the books were books she had when she went through medical school. Well, I never… It's not that I didn't understand. When I think about it, when I thought about it, I understand all this stuff, but most of the time, I was in it, doing, you know, with these folks. It's always because I was doing things is how…

And then, of course, I went through problems of being black in politics in downstate Illinois, especially as a Republican, and usually problems more with the Republicans. (chuckles)

DePue: Now you lost me there for a second. Problems you had with the Republicans?

Jones: Well some Republicans. What happened is they wanted to put me in this box. Okay, you're a black guy and you're Republican, but you're in this box. I remember when I went and got elected—I was appointed the first time and got elected—but when I was running…

DePue: For what position, now?

Jones: For my county board seat. I was really running like a reelection because I was there for about two or three years before that, being appointed. What happened is, my district, the second district, encompassed the whole city of Peoria. There was a guy running, and he decided that we should put pictures on all of our material, campaign stuff, right? So, he went to everybody else first, and they all said, well, it all depends what Tom wants to do, because, see, they understood what he was doing. Then he comes to me. Now, I didn't

understand all the stuff he was doing at first, but I did understand he went to everybody else before he came to me. And I said, that don't make sense, if it's about me. So, what he wanted to do was say, well, Tom, I don't care if you're red, white, brown, green, you know, we need to put pictures in.

DePue: (chuckles) But he obviously knew that there weren't many black Republicans who were voting for you.

Jones: So, he wanted a picture. But my instincts, which have saved my ass more times than I can name… So, he said, "Well, just put pictures in there. You know, Tom, I served with you, man." I said, "Nah, I don't think we need pictures," because I had a choice, and I took it. My choice was, if he wants to change it, I'd keep it the way it is. I don't know what's going on, but I know it's not to my advantage if he wants to change it. He wouldn't have talked to everybody else before he talked to me. That just didn't feel right, so we didn't put pictures in.

Well, soon I understood. On his little poof about him, you know, he was a lawyer; he was part of the reenactment thing; he was a lifelong Peorian. Mine was presidential appointment here, gubernatorial appointment… So, that's why… He knew, and everybody else knew, if he put my picture on that— because, if everybody just looked at well, damn, look all these things that Tom Jones did. With the picture up there, they wouldn't even read it.

DePue: But you could put on there that you were a Vietnam veteran and a Navy corpsman, those kind of things, which, I would think, would play to your—

Jones: That was part of it, in terms of…

DePue: That plays to your advantage.

Jones: …right, but the picture would not have helped me in terms of it. So, we won, and I was one of the top three vote getters for the whole thing. So, now, he's running to be Chairman of the county board.

DePue: But you won the election, or you got on the board?

Jones: Um-hmm. Well, I was on the board, and I was running really for reelection. I was appointed a couple years earlier.

DePue: But you stayed on the board.

Jones: But, I got reelected, all right? So, I won an election. Now he wants to be Chairman of the county board. So, they come to me to say, will you help him get votes, because, see, I had a rapport with all the other folks on the county board. It was tough some days, having rapport with them, but I had a rapport with them. Everybody wanted to talk to me. I was Chairman of the

Republican Caucus; I was Vice Chairman of the Central Committee and also, yeah, everybody talked to me.

But, he was going for Chairman of the board. So, I said, okay. Well, he had to come to me because, see, I'm the one that dealt with all the party and everybody else, to say, okay, put the votes. How many votes you need? You know, to put it all together. Well, I did that. He got the votes to be Chairman. Now, where was he going to put me—because had to—because I put the votes together. So, he made me Chairman of one of the major committees, the Tax Committee. And I was Vice Chairman of the Finance. Well, the Tax Committee made me the tax collector for the daggone county, (both laugh) which was like, is this a favor that I really got out of this?

So, I was Chairman of the Tax Committee. That was interesting because I was the tax collector for the daggone county, and I had a lot of interesting adventures there. First of all, I had all of the supervisor assessments, and all that was under my committee. What he didn't understand is that Tax Committee—everybody looked at it as a tax thing—but you had a whole lot of other things that you were responsible for. One of the things was that, for culverts and all, I can go and say, hey, they need a culvert here; they need a drainage pipe. Let's tax the folks and build it. Well, that meant I had an assessor and a lawyer because I was also head of the subcommittee for the local improvement.

Well, I get there, and, you know, these are good old boys. County government used to be where they—when I was on there, there was three of us that were in this twenty-something, thirty- age group.

DePue: You're a paid employee now with the county. Is that right?

Jones: Unh-uh.

DePue: No?

Jones: I was on the County Board. I was working for the Department of Public Health; that was my job.

DePue: But you've got people who are paid employees of the county who are answering to you.

Jones: Um-hmm, because I was chairman of the committee. So, I determined the budgets, determined all of that. I also was Chairman of the Local Improvement, I had my own assessor and lawyer. Well, he didn't understand that. So, what happened is, I said, oh. So, I brought a black guy in to be—because it's assessing real estate, you know—what the assessment is for the houses if you put in a culvert or a sidewalk. And so, I'm at a County Board meeting, and I had his name up, him and this other guy who was the lawyer. I was getting ready to get rid of him next because they were good old boys. The

County Board was a good old boy thing, you know. If you serve the community well, we'll put you on the County Board. It was that kind of a thing.

Well, I'm in an open meeting, and the chairman says, "Oh, wait a minute. What are these appointments? I make the appointments." This is at the County Board meeting. I looked at him and started smiling because he was trying to berate me, you know. And I said, "Oh." I said, "You should talk to your lawyer right there, you know, the State's Attorney Office. You should talk to him." So, they whispered; and he said, "Oh, well, can we talk about this later because, according to the statutes, I have the sole right to make those calls." (both chuckle) He didn't read them. He embarrassed himself, but I didn't pounce on it, you know. I thought it was kind of interesting that he didn't understand. So, then he says, "We'll sit down and compromise." That's when I really understood; the art of compromise is, people always want to compromise when you don't have to. So, he wanted to compromise, but I didn't have to compromise. But I said, "Yeah, you know, we're all in this together."

I got very involved in a lot of stuff. Passed the first no smoking…and I smoked. The news media said, "Well, why'd you do that?" I guess this came from being in the service and all. That was a duty, in terms of serving people of the county. My smoking was my personal habit. The other thing was, as I told them, "We had just paid for the walls and the ceilings to be cleaned. I know how much it costs to get that…"

DePue: So, your no smoking ban was for the buildings where you were working?

Jones: Um-hmm.

DePue: It wasn't for restaurants or anything?

Jones: No. I figured this is a thing that was open for the people, and, after the amount of money we paid to clean the walls and all that. That smoke had crusted in for a long time, and the smell and all. To me, it just made sense that there should be no smoking.

DePue: I wanted to go back and…

Jones: I'm rambling off everyplace.

DePue: …return to your personal life just for a bit. I'll let you decide how much or how little you want to talk about this, but I know that you did get divorced. When did that happen? And what role did your service in Vietnam play in that, if any?

Jones: Well, I think it played much more of a role than I realized at the time because it was easy to live with me. But, at the same time, I would act like I wasn't

living, with other people, because I would go do whatever I thought I wanted to go do.

DePue: Are we talking about the same time period, in the seventies, here?

Jones: Yeah, the seventies. My wife was from Chicago. She grew up across the street from me, and she was still in Chicago. What happened is, not just with all the problems of me being a Vietnam veteran, but also because I had been around the world and seen so many different things. These are things that I would talk to her about, but she had no concept of what to do about the conversation because she hadn't been anyplace. She'd been in Chicago. She went to a relative's house in this town or something like that, and here I had been to all these exotic places, I'd been on Caribbean cruises, been to the islands, went to Vietnam, Bangkok. I mean, I've seen all these things: of differences, of different ways to live, different ways to think. So, it didn't work with us because, what happened is, I kept trying to expand, and she just wanted to be comfortable and stay. That was my rationale at the time. As I got farther away from the event of the divorce, I realized, well, you know, I must have been an asshole, too, in terms of that. (both laugh) It wasn't just her not having… I mean, she was a good person, you know, and all.

I was married three times, and, in my head, when I was going through the divorces, it was, folks, my spouses, the wife. I have such a thing of learning, and they just didn't seem to want to expand any more than what they knew. They were very comfortable where they were at. And I was uncomfortable because, every time I learned something, it was like, oh, wow, here's a whole other new thing. So, I was really running and searching for that all the time. That, probably, in many ways, just totally destroyed their world because they were trying to find a stable environment and something that they had in their mind as normal. And I'm into, you know, there's this world out here, just amazing.

When I was a kid and I was growing up in the projects—when I first went to Chicago—I got a double from sixth grade to eighth grade, to skip seventh, because they did some tests and all. Well, it's because I used to love to read. My math score was 10.8. That was in eighth grade. My reading score was 12.2, and I had a high comprehension. I enjoyed reading. I was reading *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire, the Third Reich* and all this. And folks would say, "Why are you reading such big books?" I'd say, "Well, because you've got more information in it." (both laugh)

So, all of a sudden, I'm coming back now, and I've got family and all. I love my kids. I love my wife, but I wanted to… Like I got involved in all this political stuff. It wasn't a thing that I was thinking of getting involved in. Circumstances and the flow of stuff, that, at the same time, was making such a demand on having a family of folks because now, besides me, in my head, and doing all kinds of stuff, I'm involved in all these Republican affairs, and I'm

doing this, running around. Then, when I got divorced the second time in Peoria, I came to Springfield because then I was with the public health in Springfield. I was lobbying Congress for healthcare issues.

DePue: When was the first divorce, what year?

Jones: I can't remember the year, but it was in Chicago, and it was when I was still in the service.

DePue: Okay. So, when did you come to Springfield?

Jones: When I got out of the service, I went to Peoria and married a local Peoria girl. In my mind [we] had the same problem. She couldn't see this world I saw, and I couldn't explain it to her in terms that she could understand to see it. So, I decided it was time to leave Peoria. That was the reason I went back there, and I was on the county board and all that. But, you know, how can you be out in the public life and all that, and I've got all this turmoil going, in terms of personal? So, I knew where it was going to lead; it was leading up to a divorce. So, I left Peoria and came to Springfield. When I came to Springfield, because of my knowing all the Bob Michels and Tip O'Neill and all… I know all those staff folks. So, I came. I was still with public health, but my job was lobbying Congress for healthcare issues. So, I was in Washington more than I was here in Springfield.

DePue: So, you're in the Illinois Department of Health at that time?

Jones: Right.

DePue: Obviously, you're walking away from being an office holder.

Jones: Yep. Resigned from the board, left it all. People say, how can you do that? See, that's another one of those things. I keep saying, I think it's all that Vietnam stuff in there because, you know, you learn to walk away from things because you feel you have to.

DePue: Was this in the late seventies you came to Springfield?

Jones: Yep, it was late seventies. I spent more time in Washington, in terms of lobbying for healthcare issues. I actually did some stuff that had some dramatic impact, which I didn't realize until later. People don't realize, stuff in Washington, no matter what you see today, it's five to ten years before you really see the impact.

DePue: What was it that you did that you felt there was a big impact?

Jones: Well, they had things about these grant programs, block grants. It was based on populations and a lot of statistics. Well, most of the money went to the east coast. The other money went to the west coast, and folks in between got

dribbles, as it was going across country to other places, the way that it was structured. So, [I] inserted a little thing in a bill—this is one good thing about knowing the minority leader—that said they had to do a study. Well, you know, they're always doing studies. That's the way they take you off into dark corners and stuff. But the other part of that is, do a study, and they had to have a study done by a certain time and implementation of the results within a certain time. What that did is, it changed how the grants were structured. So, all of a sudden, it opened the door. Illinois got more money through the block grant process. It was healthcare.

DePue: As well as lots of other states in the middle of the country?

Jones: No, just Illinois. (both laugh)

DePue: How about that.

Jones: I mean, they could have taken advantage. It didn't say Illinois. They could have took advantage. But, since I'd sort of wrote the thing, I understood the process, and everybody in the process sort of understood that it was done. One of the things, I remember, when I first went out there, the Governor had a Washington office and the legislature had the same.

DePue: Is this Governor Thompson, now?

Jones: Yeah and Rock was the Senate, Phil Rock.

DePue: Phil Rock, okay. So, he was in the Illinois State Senate?

Jones: Yeah. The legislature, they had a Washington office too. When I started doing this thing for healthcare, I went over there and said, "Hey, aren't we supposed to be working with each other?" (chuckles) And they didn't know what to say because ain't nobody ever did that. (both laugh) What do you mean coming out here talking about work? My philosophy was, let's get together, get stuff to Illinois, then fight about it, because we got it. And so, that's where I worked with… Who's the current auditor general now?

DePue: Of the state or of the…?

Jones: Um-hmm. I'm blocking on his name, but he used to be chief of staff for Rock.

DePue: I know exactly who you're thinking of. I can't…

Jones: I'm blocking his name. But, anyway, he was head of the Washington office for the legislature. So, I had the access through Bob Michel and all the folks that I knew. So, I would go and bring him to the meetings, and that opened up the door quite a bit because he knew more about what we was trying to do in terms of stuff. We had a Washington office, but I was there from the

Department of Public Health doing this. So, I used to coordinate with them because I had the access directly to the members.

DePue: When did you make the move over to the Department of Veterans Affairs?

Jones: (chuckles) That was funny. I was sitting in my office at Public Health. A state trooper came up and said, "Are you Thomas R. Jones?" I said, "It depends on what you want." (both laugh) He said, "The governor wants to see you." The governor? Now, I had did stuff at times, you know, because I was very active in doing stuff.

DePue: Were you still active in the Republican Party issues?

Jones: I wasn't really on the political side any more. I was just doing the state government side. But I was running to Washington all the time, and he understood that because he knew that. This is during the [Illinois State] Fair time. So, the state trooper takes me out to the Fair, and he's in this little mobile home behind the stage. I walk in, and he [Governor Thompson] says, "Want a drink of Jack Daniels?" I said, "Well, not right now because I don't know what's going on. The governor's got me in a little thing here." He says, "I want to do something for Vietnam veterans, and you're a Vietnam veteran, so, I want to make you part of my cabinet, the Assistant Director of Veterans Affairs." I said, "Okay, can I have a drink now?" (both laugh) And that's how I ended up over there.

They knew I was a Vietnam veteran. I had high visibility of the political folks, obviously, with Republican politics and politicians, and also the Democrats. What's interesting, I've had like three presidential appointments, three gubernatorial appointments, and they've been by both Republican and Democrat.

DePue: What year would you have moved over to the Department of Veterans' Affairs?

Jones: Seventy-nine, eighty, somewhere along that time.

DePue: Was that how you ended up being involved with the creation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.?

Jones: Well, I did all the coordination for the Illinois contingency of that because I was a Vietnam veteran, and I was Assistant Director of Veterans Affairs. I also was with the Illinois [Vietnam Veterans Memorial]—I was one of the eight folks, nine folks, that got that started, and I'm the one that got Governor Thompson to be involved in it, of course, which then made it happen. I did a lot of stuff like that. As I look back now, I haven't really—until you started doing this here—I haven't really dug back to these memories before, of how and why things happened.

DePue: Well, that's my job.

Jones: You're doing a good one because this stuff, I haven't really regurgitated out of my head, in, I don't know when.

DePue: I know the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. first opened in 1982. That was—I usually don't want to throw my own opinion out here—but that was a pretty powerful moment in America.

Jones: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And, you know, I was responsible for the Illinois contingency there, because we were involved in some of the planning; we had folks on the committees that were going on.

DePue: What did it mean to the Vietnam veterans themselves to have that memorial there?

Jones: All you had to do is just walk down there and see the number of folks who were on their knees crying, because they could see the names of folks. I think that was the thing that really made it. You actually had the names. That was the first memorial where you have all the names. That's what made it more powerful because that, all of a sudden, gave it a sense of, these are people. You could see men and family members just on their knees and crying, reading their names on the wall. That almost made the wall almost like a live, living thing, you know, when people were there. I think it was also something that started some kind of healing process in this country because, I think, the majority of folks realized, you know, they were serving the country, doing their duty, even if it's something I may not personally believe in. That's the thing I used to say, if you're pissed at the war, why are you pissed at the warriors, because they were fighting for a war you thought should be happening. They would do the same thing. It's not their call. You can't be in the service and say, well, I'll go fight this kind of war, but I am not going over there and fight that kind of war. It don't work that way.

DePue: Like everything else in the Vietnam War, the design of the memorial became very controversial.

Jones: Especially, you know, the lady [Maya Yen Lin][7] who was Korean or Chinese or something like that.

DePue: Chinese, I think.

Jones: Yeah, Chinese. Well, it was, and there was a lot of battles about that because it was underground. You know, it had the sense of being underground, and who was doing it. I think it ended up being where it should have been because

[7] The Vietnam Memorial was designed by an undergraduate at Yale University, Maya Ying Lin, born in Athens, Ohio in 1959. Her parents fled from China in 1949 when Mao-Tse-tung took control of China. A native-born American citizen, Lin acted as a consultant with the architectural firm of Cooper - Lecky Partnership on the construction of the Memorial. (The Vietnam Veterans Memorial - http://thewall-usa.com/information.asp)

all of the folks wanted it to look like a World War II statue, which everybody understood. You know, they didn't go back to the Revolutionary War, when everybody was on the horse. But that was the sense of, it seemed like a lot of Americans, then, that would make it okay. But, when it was such a radical different design…and what made it was the names. That was the first time we had a memorial with all the names on the memorial. I mean, that made it really different.

There were some Vietnam veterans, they had an opinion of it wasn't good; it shouldn't be this. But, again, how should it have been? Who knows? But that was dramatic; it was different. You walk down there, and then you walk up out of it. I mean, just the sense of it was just…I'd say it's such an expression in America. I think now, they finally got over it, like everything else. (laughs) I think the reason there was so much controversy [was] because people had some preconceived notions of how they thought it should be. You know, a nice statue going up and some Latin words. But the war wasn't that kind of a war. Coming back home wasn't that type of coming back home, like everything before. So, it should have been different, I think, and it should have been unique, in terms of it. I think the only people who were disappointed are folks that had something in their head of how it should be because, when they say, "I didn't like it", you say, well, what do you like? And they can't describe anything, other than a statute that they've seen before.

DePue: I take it you were very happy with the design of the monument once it was done.

Jones: Oh, once it was done. All the monuments reach to the sky, and in the Vietnam Memorial, it wasn't a reaching to the sky kind of a thing.

DePue: A lot of people have made the analogy that the design was an allegory of what the war was all about in the first place. It started small.

Jones: It got big, and then it…yeah. Who knows how you design a memorial to reflect the war. All I know is, the farther back you go, they're on horses, and then they got them on tanks. Well, that's all—you know, that's all war. I think the uniqueness of it. It took a little time to acclimate my own mind to it, because I kept saying, "What the heck is that?"

DePue: So, you weren't onboard to begin with?

Jones: Oh, no. I wasn't. What the heck was that? And then, I started thinking about it, and I said. "Well, what do I think it should look like?" I couldn't come up with anything. (laughs) So, then, after that, I was one of the supporters, and said, "Yeah, it's different, but all the experiences we went through was so damn different." All the folks I talk to, in terms of war, there's a commonality of war, in terms of what happens to people personally. But, when you look at the expression of how to do that, Vietnam was not like the other wars. No one

felt like it was like the other wars. It wasn't called a war, first of all. It was a long time before they said, "Vietnam War."

DePue: For a long time after Vietnam, the United States managed to stay out of wars. Then 1990 comes and the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein, and we go over. In the spring of 1991, now a victorious military comes back, and they're treated a lot different from the Vietnam generation. What were your thoughts about that experience?

Jones: First, it was great. I think it was great that they were being treated the way they were, not in a comparison sense, at first; it was just good. They were serving their country, and they came back, and folks appreciated it. I didn't really compare it, at first. It was just, you know. And then, you know, we had elections going on. I had folks coming to me, support this guy, John McCain, because he's a Vietnam veteran guy and da-da-da-da.

DePue: Well, I'm talking about the '91.

Jones: Oh, the first time we went over. I thought it was great that they was coming back, and they were being the way I thought and wished we did Vietnam, that people appreciated it—whether you were for the war or against it—appreciated that you went, served your country, and you came back to still be of service to your country. When I thought about it in comparison, if you compare Vietnam to any military action, it comes out blah. Looking at it, why are people treating them different? Well, I thought there was a lot of different reasons. One is, a lot of them were kids of Vietnam veterans, number one. It seemed to me that America had said, we have to respect those who go put it all on the line for us.

DePue: That this is something we as Americans learned collectively about Vietnam?

Jones: I think, to me, it was. It was like the American public was saying, we don't want our folks to come back like in Vietnam, where they were attacked and spit on and called all kind of names, like they were responsible for the war. To me, there seemed to be something here in the American people that says, we don't want that to happen again. I think that gave them the first chance to express a different emotion about it, in terms of, this will not be like the Vietnam veterans when they came back.

DePue: Some decades after you came back from Vietnam, you decided to write a book that was pretty closely based on your experiences. Tell us when that happened and why that happened.

Jones: It took me twenty years to get to the point to even want to write it, and it was really my wife, Carol. She says, "Why don't you write some of the stuff down?" I think what happened, why we have been both married for a long—because she had been married before and had seen the other side of the Vietnam War, where she was at a base in Germany and how they emptied it

out. So, she had a sense of it from a whole other viewpoint—which was interesting—than mine, who was participating in the war.

DePue: She had been married before, to a Vietnam veteran?

Jones: Yeah, yeah, and he was in Vietnam, and he came back. He was a courier, one of those who ran around the country carrying stuff that he had to kill you for, if you knew what was in it, and all that kind of stuff. So, she's the one that encouraged me, you know, you should write. Of course, it took me twenty years to write it, and, interestingly enough, when I wrote it, it was, like, okay. We had quit our jobs. I was a member of the governor's cabinet. That's when I was at Veterans Affairs.

DePue: Quit our jobs, as in retired?

Jones: Quit our jobs, as in quitting. She was a member of the Secretary of State's cabinet, and so we quit our jobs. We had a Peugeot, which we didn't realize until later, that there was about four of them in the whole country. And everything that didn't fit in the car, we sold and gave away. We just took a direction and started going. Everybody thought we was totally insane.

DePue: What year would this be?

Jones: Eighty-six.

DePue: Oh, this is a long time ago.

Jones: Eighty-six. And we just did that. What didn't fit in the car, we sold and gave away. We went out East, first and went to Connecticut and went to Westport. Stanford first, because we knew people that knew folks out there that owned a radio station, but it was just another big city. We were searching for something.— It's interesting, the things that you can believe in, in America, that you probably can't in other countries; it doesn't mean it's true, but you can believe in them. We had this here belief that we had enough talent and skills that we can go anywhere and make a living.

So, we went out East first, and Westport was real nice. But you don't go there looking for a job. You have money, and then you go there. We went to Hartford, Connecticut because I knew the fire chief up there. And it was another just big, clanging city kind of a thing. We had some friends who lived in Scottsdale, and they called. We was talking to them, and they said, "Well, why don't you come on out here?" I was writing; that's when I really started writing. I said, "Great." You know, that's what writers do; they sit by the pool, have profound thoughts, and they put them on paper. Okay, so what if we're in Hartford, Connecticut? And they said, "On the way, why don't you stop by some friends who live around Denver, Colorado?"

So, we trekked across the country. They lived in Evergreen, Colorado, which is up in the mountains. We liked that. We stayed there almost a year, until the snow started coming. My wife figured out that we're getting the snow depth in feet instead of inches, and she said, "Get me off this mountain." When we left, we left in a blizzard that was all the way down to Albuquerque, New Mexico because it was snowing in the desert. It was one of those seventy-five, hundred year events, you know?

So, we leaving Evergreen, Colorado, drive all the way, get down to Albuquerque, New Mexico. It has six inches of snow, in the middle of the desert. All these little animals were walking around saying, I know the sky is falling. Look, I've got a handful of it. (both chuckle)

So, when we got to Evergreen, we liked it there, worked for Australian Outback Collection from Australia. They made…

DePue: Oh, Australian.

Jones: Australian. They made these oilskin jackets that a lot of the writers liked. You know, they brush them and scratch them. They did amazing things with wool and all. It was owned by a Canadian and an Australian. Carol got there first because they had a computer stuff issue. She was the head of IT [information technology]; so, they brought her in to deal with setting up worldwide purchasing systems and all that. And I was writing. Then, they had a desktop that they had brought from Hong Kong or somewhere and did some different… So, they asked her, "Why don't you take a look at this, and put this together." And Carol said, "I don't do electricity. I don't do…So, you have to talk to Tom."

DePue: You call it a desktop. Do you mean an early kind of computer?

Jones: Early desktop computer, right. The problem was that it was operating on European power supply 220 or it was 120. But, back then, you had to figure out where to go inside to get to it. Not that I knew, but I had enough confidence, I'll tear anything apart, and I figure I can put it back together. So, they asked me to come in. I said, "Okay." I remember I had all this computer broken out because I had finally found the supply thing, you know, and I was flipping… You just flip a switch, once you get to it. One of the owners walked in, and he looked; he saw the computer all in pieces. He said, "Do you know what you're doing?" I said, "We'll see when I put it back together." He said, "Alright" and walked back out. (both laughing)

I put it back together, and it worked. Then, what happened is, I ended up going to work for them. I was running the office. They had four companies—Australia, Hong Kong, Canada and here. So, she was doing IT things, and I was actually running the company. I didn't realize I was running the company. I just thought I was there doing office stuff. It was a whole

different world. I mean, people could bring their animals to work. You live in the mountains, and we got to be mountain folks. We used to go out with a group of folks. You'd cut your firewood because everybody had fire burning stoves.

DePue: How big a company was this?

Jones: It was not a big company, like employees, but it used to be on Saks Fifth Avenue, and they moved it out to Colorado because it was more like the Outback. They were doing a lot of the horse industry. I used to run around to the Quarter Horse Congress Show, the Arabian Horse Show.

DePue: The name of the company again?

Jones: Australian Outback Collection. One of the big investors was the company that won the American Cup that year. In fact, we met him; he came in. That was a whole other conversation, another discovery of what people do in a world I have no concept of. His wife raised miniature ponies, and they had three farms: Australia, England and some other place. I'm like, "What do you raise miniature horses for again?"

DePue: There are people who buy these?

Jones: It's their little hobby. We spent Thanksgiving because I like to cook. So, we spent Thanksgiving, and we had a great time. He was here from Australia to check on his investments. But I couldn't get over that. I can't understand one miniature horse farm… three? I don't know what you do with one, let alone what do you with three? Anyhow, that was a whole other world, obviously, because she had the Queen or somebody that had came to Australia and stayed in their house, you know. I mean, it was one of those kind of things.

DePue: Is all of this a way to say that the writing kind of got put on hiatus for a while?

Jones: For a while it did, until the snow came, and she figured out the snow depth in inches. We then went on down to Scottsdale. So, she was going to work, and I was going to write.

Well, she went to a hundred and something places, and everybody wanted to do interviews, but nobody hired her. We found out because one of the guys who was from Illinois—and they were talking and figured out they knew some of the same people and all—told her, said, "Well, you know, it's just fascinating to a lot of people here that this black woman was an IT executive, but nobody knows what to do with them in terms of hiring her. So, you're probably going to never get a job. But they think it's fascinating. That's why you got so many interviews. (chuckles) I said, "Okay, so that means I have to go out and get a job."

We had met the mayor of Chandler because we have the contacts back here to Washington out there. So, I get a job. They hired me, put me in this position, and then they were supposed to upgrade it. You know, the usual political things. But they hired me to automate systems in Maricopa County. About 57 percent of the population of Arizona lives in Maricopa County, probably more, 60 percent. That's where you've got Peoria, Chandler, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Carefree. They're all in that area. However, the first project, you know, they had a recall election for Governor Mecham, who was the governor there. Up until that time, nobody knew who I was. They were very interesting. Who's this black guy walking through I can see every day in the county building that had a tie on? But nobody really knew who this guy was, me. But, when it came out that what they were going to do was to automate the signature verification for the recall petition, that was the project. Then everybody knew me. They would say, "Oh, you mean him?"

DePue: Well that explains why you got stuck in the job in the first place, doesn't it?

Jones: No, because what happened is, two days later they deleted the position because he had brought me in this position he was going to upgrade. So, they deleted that position, So, there was no reason to go ahead with the upgrade. So, what happened is, two days from payday, no job. So, we said, all right, we'll go back to Illinois. Our enemies are friends, compared to the way you folks are out here. And I told them, "You know, you all talk about meeting folks at the O.K. Corral for a shootout, but then, you all sit around and put a snake in people's bedrolls the night before, so they died, and you win by default. That's not the way I'm used to fighting." (chuckles) So we tucked our tails between our legs. We sent our stuff back on the train, and we were getting ready to take the train the next day and come back to Springfield. And I get calls, all of a sudden, from the governor's office.

DePue: Which governor?

Jones: From Mecham's office, out there. Now, they want me to stay. Well, what happened is, friends started calling them, like the Governor of Illinois, the minority leader of Congress and all. They start calling and saying, "What's going on? What you doing to our friends?" because they heard we was coming back. So, they called the night before we're supposed to leave saying, "Tom, don't go. We'll figure something out." I said, "Hey, we've got tickets; our furniture is already gone." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what, we'll figure out how to get you a job, get the house. Why don't you just let your wife go ahead and go, and you stay and set this up. And she can come back." And I said. "Let me see if I understand this right. The people I don't trust want me to trust them. That's what you're saying? No, we're going back to Illinois. I've been through a trust thing with you already. It's gone." The only reason they were reacting was because they realized we had all these friends around the country in high power places that all of a sudden started getting concerned, "What are you doing to our friends?"

So, the night before we leave is when I get the call that they want to do all this. I'm like, "No, no, no, we're leaving. You all can have it; it's yours; I understand." (laughs) "I'm not here to create a revolution. I'm not here to do anything." I was going to get a job just because it was nice, enjoyed living here. No, that's when we came back to Illinois. And, of course, we came back, we had nothing, you know, was living in a small house on the east side. It's really fascinating how people are. We had folks come up to us and said, "Now you left, you know, you were the top. Now you're at the bottom. You've got to work your way up, which meant now we were looking up at their butts. Well, Carol and I started laughing, like, "We was on a ladder?" We were doing what we were doing. Our concept had nothing to do with what they were talking about in terms of, now, you're back, you're at the bottom, you got to work your way up.

DePue: Now, who are you hearing this from? From all your acquaintances, from the black community you had now—?

Jones: The black community. Basically, we had a lot in the black community, the East side.

DePue: Well, how much of that dealt with you having been a Republican? You'd been in Republican politics, and that wasn't their politics.

Jones: It was. I don't care if they're Democrat or not. In this town, if you don't get along with Republicans, you don't get nothing, at that time, specifically.

DePue: But were you getting some resistance or some…

Jones: From the political system or anything?

DePue: …because you were a black Republican…from other blacks? No?

Jones: No, this was just pecking orders. It wasn't any of that. It was just pecking orders.

DePue: So, you're coming back to Springfield, having no job or no job prospect?

Jones: Um-hmm, nothing. Carol got a contract to do some consulting with a company, and I was at home, still writing. But we had people that had really interesting attitudes about that. Now you're back; you used to be important; now you're not, da-da-da, you know. It was interesting, because what happened is, when they found out that their boss's bosses would come to our little house… I mean, we didn't even have a table. We had a card table for our kitchen table. Yet, folks from Jim Edgar's office and all their boss's bosses would come over. People like Senator Emil Jones would come over and have dinner.

DePue: Are we talking about the 1990s now, when Edgar's governor?

Jones: Um-hmm. So, when they found that out, then, all of a sudden, one Christmas, everybody showed up and was like, Merry Christmas. It scared us to death because a year or two, they had just…Well, you're now at the bottom of the pole. You don't have anything, da-da-da-da. Only, they never realized we never thought like that, see. So, the way that they were rationalizing didn't mean nothing to us because we didn't think that way. All the folks we had that were good friends and all were folks that were over their boss's boss' bosses. When they realized that folks like… Like I said, Senator Emil Jones is coming and having dinner. All Edgar's people are coming and stopping by to see how we doing. Then, all of a sudden, everybody decided, well, maybe we should be friends with them again. (chuckles)

So, we've had a lot: we been all the way down to nothing and been at the top, where you're the most important thing—supposed to be—around.

DePue: I believe you also did find a job, or the job found you, perhaps?

Jones: Well, the job found me. Carol had got started working for Governor Edgar because she knew Edgar because she was part of his cabinet when he was Secretary of State. So, she had got a job. Well, what happened is, the Department of Insurance, the Public Pension Division, was part of that. And a guy, this new guy, took over that. Steve Selke was his name. He used to be the…

DePue: He's one of Edgar's people?

Jones: …yeah. He was a legislative guy. So, he was now the Director of the Department of Insurance. A lot of legislative folks would go over there. It's like putting you out on the farm or something, after all that heightened stuff you do as a legislative director, you know? So, the problem he was having was that the Department of Insurance, which was the big brother, kept saying, don't pay attention to the pension stuff. It's public, and it's not that much. But Steve, understanding the political nature of things, said, "Wait a minute. Every little town has a pension fund because of fire and police. I don't know if that means there's a problem or not."

So, I was brought in to look and evaluate problems or impacts on, obviously, the Director and the Governor in this area about public pensions. So, I came in and spent a couple of weeks looking around, doing my things, talking to people, came back to him and said, "Yeah, you've got a hell of a problem." Every town has got a newspaper. The department's in the newspaper, but nobody here has relationships with a lot of these groups and da-da-da-da. So, yeah, things could blow up, and these are people's pensions. And it's the public safety folks, you know, in terms of police and fire. You've got a problem, okay? Here you go, Steve. I'm going back to writing.

DePue: Did this include State employees?

Jones: Um-hmm. The division had the authority to regulate all the public pension funds in the State. Now, what that means in terms of the authority and the power to do it, is a different thing. But, I mean, they had the authority.

DePue: Well, I know that, during the years that Edgar was governor, they recognized that, at the State level especially, they had a huge problem and retooled the public pension system so they could figure out how to get it back into a healthy status. But it was, as I recall, a very long-term project that Governor Ryan and Governor Blagojevich blew off, basically.

Jones: At the time, see, what their concern was, was police and fire because they was in all these little towns.

DePue: So, they were not concerned about the State level, but more so the municipality?

Jones: At that time, in the department because, what happened is, when I got there, when I was going to walk away—because I told Steve I did my report to him, and told him I was going back to writing—he said, "No, you can't go." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You're the only one I know that knows." (laughs) I said, "Say what?" "You're the only one I know that knows this. I don't know it. I ain't got time." The insurance folks, they didn't care. They didn't want him to be involved in that because they dealt with the big money, the insurance companies and da-da-da-da, the big brother. We don't deal with that little pension division stuff. They had to deal with fire and police, and that's messy stuff, you know, but, politically, much more dangerous, which Steve recognized because it can be blowing up in any little city has a newspaper, and you can be in it. They had no idea. Then, all of a sudden, they would catch the blow back from it. So, I said, "Okay." And that's why I got there. For fourteen years I was in that position.

DePue: I know that Selke, as you mentioned, started off as the Legislative Liaison. I think he was there for at least a couple years. So, we're talking about the mid-1990s when you got involved in it?

Jones: Right. For fourteen years, that's what I did. I regulated it, wrote all the stuff. I got to know the unions, Municipal League, Mayors Conference, worked with them all, and actually ended up, when I… No one wanted me to leave. However, that's when Blagojevich became Governor, and I didn't like the way, the feelings that I was getting and sensing, of what was going on. It wasn't nothing specifically, but just movements that people were making, did not make sense to me. So, that's when I left and came to the Secretary of State's office.

DePue: What year was that?

Jones: I was at the Secretary of State for six years, so.

DePue: Two-thousand and two?

Jones: Two-thousand…1999.

DePue: Two-thousand and three is when Blagojevich became governor.

Jones: So, it was 2003 because, I think, I left that year.

DePue: You didn't wait long, then.

Jones: Oh, no. I'd be up in the middle of all this stuff now.

DePue: Well, and now…

Jones: (interrupts) Because, see, when I was there, I was very active. I did all the fire and police. That's what, most of the time, they always wanted the division to deal with, the fire and police pension funds. You have to realize, those are big funds. You look at Springfield, Peoria, Champaign, Rockford, they've got over $100 million in each fund. People don't realize they that big. And just the five folks selected on the board determines what happens to the money. So, that's where they really had to focus. No one really focused on Chicago, Cook County, or the State. Well, because I knew Bill Holland, who I was talking about earlier. Bill and I used to—

DePue: (interrupting) Auditor general.

Jones: Right. Bill and I used to be in this program, Society of CPAs. They would do a thing down here, and then, the next day, they'd do it up north, you know. We were both on the agenda, speaking. Bill and I, because I knew him from the Washington days, we would have breakfast together. I said, "Well, you know, I'm supposed to be doing the Chicago, Cook County funds, but nothing's ever been done." He said, "No, Tom. You understand; you're not dealing with government money. You're dealing with real money. Those folks have the ability with just two signature, to write a check, do whatever they want. They don't see the reason the State should get involved with that. These are Chicago, Cook County, funds. So, he said, "If it's not for their benefit, they have no reason to want to open it up for the State to get involved."

DePue: I guess I'm confused about one thing here. If you're dealing with a lot of the municipal funds, pension funds, isn't there something that's happening at the municipal level that's auditing and controlling their own particular pension funds?

Jones: It don't belong to the local government. It's a stand alone entity in local government. That's what people don't realize.

DePue: But how does the State get involved in this, then?

Jones: Because the law says they had to do an annual statement, and we did audits on them. I had an audit staff, and we actually audited them.

DePue: Okay. So, that's what you're doing. You're monitoring the auditing of all of these local pension funds. Beyond that, do you have any control over it, or are you just the whistle blower?

Jones: Oh, we could take them through a hearing and the whole thing. Oh, yeah. Actually, the way the law was written, over statewide and Cook County.

DePue: Over statewide as well?

Jones: Um-hmm. What happened is, Bill Holland, because he did the regular audit, because they were considered State agencies. So, I worked with Bill and said, "Okay, you're doing the audits. I get your audit. I take that as an audit because, every two years, you did a management audit or a compliance audit. So, that's how I helped him because he did an audit, you know, just by being Auditor General.

DePue: I'll put you on the spot here, and you can correct me, what I get wrong in this. But, I believe, now, obviously, with the housing market crash and the serious recession and everything else, almost every state has serious problems with their state pension funds. I'm not talking about municipal, but at the state level. And Illinois, I believe, is at the bottom of the heap, as having the worst pension fund situation.

Jones: Right.

DePue: Any sense, feeling of, oh God, that was what I was supposed to be watching?

Jones: No, because the State Auditor was auditing them and doing the reports, in terms of what was supposed to be going on. And the legislature did not want us over there.

DePue: Yeah, this was hardly your problem. It was something the state legislature knew all the time and never fixed it.

Jones: Well, they created it. So, what my focus was, was the police and fire downstate. Then I started dealing with Cook County and Chicago funds.

DePue: Did that include the teachers fund, or is that separate?

Jones: In Chicago, um-hmm. So, I had a meeting with them, and I said. "You know, the law says I'm supposed to be auditing you all." But, you know, I couldn't even afford to do an audit on one of the big funds. I mean, it would take more staff than I had to do it. That's what they basically said, "Well why do we need you to audit? Everything is going right. We ain't got no problems." (both laugh) And I looked at them, you know, I was in a meeting with them,

all the Chicago funds: labor, the Chicago fire and police, all of them. I said, "Well here, answer this simple question then." At that time they were very concerned the feds were coming over to put ERISA [Employee Retirement Income Security Act] stuff on it, which is a higher…

DePue: A what?

Jones: ERISA, that's what all the private folks have to do. "Right now, all the governmental funds and all are exempted from ERISA. So, they don't have all the reporting requirements that you have to do."

DePue: Is that an acronym for something?

Jones: Yeah.

DePue: R-I-S-A?

Jones: E-R-I-S-A. You have to look it up. Basically, it's the thing that the feds do to look at pension funds. It's the rules. Government plans are exempt because those rules say, you've got to have a certain X amount of dollars in, and you've got this many. You know, it's very specific in terms. But all the government entities were exempted from it, as long as they had a state regulatory entity.

So, I'm sitting there talking to all these guys. And I said, "You all are concerned about the feds coming in because you're all big enough to be on the fed's radar screen." And they were. I said, "So, what keeps you out of them is that you are regulated by the state." And they said, "Yes." And I said, "So what name do you give them?" They said, "What?" "What name do you give them? Because, if you don't give my name, you're not being regulated by the state. And I know no one's ever asked me for my phone number or my address to send to the feds." So, that started them thinking a little bit. And I didn't push. I just was having a conversation. Then the Chicago Fire decided okay, we'll try this. What my thing was, "Look you've got to have an annual audit. We'll get with your audit folks, and we put together where they do a compliance audit every two years, with them doing it, and we sign off. Here's what you have to look at upfront, then we look at the results, and you send it to us, and we'll take that, then."

What happened is, the Chicago Fire was the first one to go through the process and found there was things that they had been doing wrong. They were so happy they discovered it, and then, after that, then it became a process.

DePue: Well, I didn't know this aspect of your life. You're stuck doing a job with no power, watching this train wreck come barreling down the track here.

Jones: Yeah.

DePue: Is that about it?

Jones: Yeah. But the thing is, on the pension side, with the downstate and Chicago, see, there I dealt with it, no problem. The State, well the legislature, didn't want the regulators going in there, anyway, so, didn't really get off into the State funds.

DePue: The legislature knew the problem that they had.

Jones: But, Bill Holland…They had to send their audits to me because according to, we had to have the file. We had to have the records of the audits, in terms of the pension funds. When I left, I got a fire helmet up there from the Firefighters Union. I've got stuff from the FOP (Fraternal Order of Police) and all and the Municipal League because, really, I did put them in a cohesive process that everybody was involved in.

DePue: In other words, you helped them identify problems that they, at least, started to address.

Jones: And they addressed them, and would work with them to address them. People still come to me and say, "Why don't you go back to pensions?" And I said, "You don't think I learned anything the first time?" (both chuckle)

DePue: Okay, Tom. Half an hour ago, we started with this thing about how you ended up writing the book. (Tom laughs) What we've been hearing about is all the major distractions from writing the book, and they're important distractions.

Jones: The most difficult thing in writing, I find, it's so easy to do other things; that was what I found the most difficult. I'm off into all these things, and I'm writing. What happened is, I got into a routine where I would get up at 4:00, 4:30 in the morning, write in the morning, go to the office, and then, when I came home at night, I would edit what I wrote that morning. Then, the next morning, start it over. That's how the book ended up being written while I was back doing all these things. I just started getting up between 4:00 and 5:00 in the morning and write before I went to the office and then edit it in the evening.

DePue: It sounds like you got out of this position in 2003. That's when Blagojevich came to office. Then were you officially retired for the next couple of years and worked on the book?

Jones: No. I figured I was leaving, but I still had to eat. (chuckles) It's interesting, see, I retired, like I said, last year, twenty years. But that's my second twenty years. I actually did forty-one years in government because, when we were on a trip around the country, pulled the retirement money out. So, what I retired on was my second twenty years I did in government because I took out what we had. That was the only money we had running around the country, was that.

DePue: So, you have expended all that first retirement money. Is that what you're saying?

Jones: Oh, yeah. If I stayed there for the whole thing, forty-one, my name would probably be in the newspaper. But I would have earned it. (both laugh)

DePue: You're referring to all these people who are getting these very high pensions?

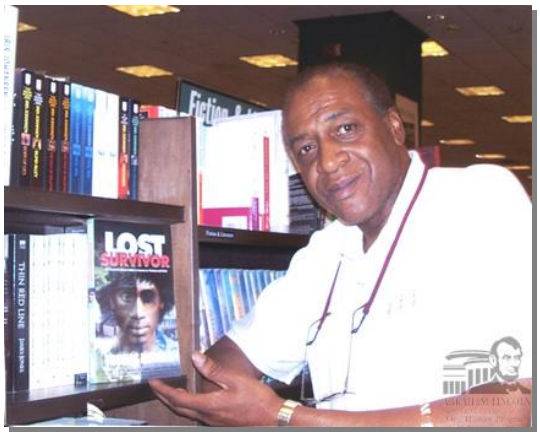
Jones: Those who understand the system and how to play it. But I could have been straight up, forty-one years, yeah, you know, at the levels that I was at, because I was at the top executive levels and all that.

But the writing continued through all of that. The fact is, I think, it probably helped me in some other ways because I always had something to do when I came home, and I didn't bring a lot of stuff in from the office because I was more getting in so I can start writing.

As I got into the writing of it, then I really started looking at all the things that I did in my life that's like, hmm, because I'm putting it in there, and I can see it now.

DePue: Were you open with people that you were in the process of writing a book, as well, or is that something you kept to yourself?

Jones: At first I kept it to myself, but, after a while, I told folks I was doing it. I never thought about not saying anything. But, at the beginning, I just didn't talk to folks because I was doing it. Then, I guess, as I got to more of the point that it started getting published, that's when I started letting folks know, yeah, I'm writing a book about Vietnam. They had no idea what that meant because they had seen a lot of other Vietnam books. Then it came out.



I remember, for a while there was a whole lot of them out, Vietnam books. Tim O'Brien and all his stuff; I've got him up there too. I read all those folks, you know, either military, historical or… But most of them didn't deal with what is that transformation, and why did it occur in your head, in your whole being? Why did it change who you were? Really, that became obvious when I wrote the stage adaptation that was put on at Hoogland Center because I had to do such a different format. A book is, write words, and they bring their imaginations. But now, all of a sudden, I had to really create real physical characters and their interactions and the emotional interaction between them on stage.

DePue: Let's lay down a couple markers here. The book came out in 2005?

Jones: Right. Really 2006, officially. But 2005, we had prereleases out.

DePue: And now you're talking about a different kind of an exercise, the creative exercise of writing a stage play?

Jones: Based on the book.

DePue: How closely?

Jones: Very closely.

DePue: But it's a different name, correct?

Jones: The name of the play was, *A Long Way Home*. The reason is because —how I got to write that is an English teacher—they always get into trouble.

DePue: How you wrote the book?

Jones: No, wrote the play. Because the English teacher said, "Tom"—you know, he read it—and he said, "This would be a good play if it started when he got home." I said, "Well, but, if you don't know what happened before he got home, you don't understand why the conflict and their actions at home, which makes it a good play, from your viewpoint." So, I thought about it for a while and I said, "Well, I'll write it. I'll write a play. He said, "You ever wrote a play?" "No." I said, "I've written plays, but I wrote them when I was trying to understand dialogue and narrative and stuff, you know, just to get a feel for it. But I never wrote a play so somebody to see." And he said, "Okay." He was very helpful because he understood it, as I went through it. But then, I had to figure out, how do I do the first part of that book on Vietnam, which would be so much, where it would change your whole character for the rest of your life. If you don't get that part, you don't understand what all the conflict is when you get home."

So, I did a multimedia approach where— I didn't know that since I wasn't in formal staging and performance—I just thought of ways to get things done. I didn't know of all of the little things you're supposed to follow to get things done. (chuckles) So, I created a multimedia play. I didn't know that was a big thing, and people hadn't did that, because I did a multimedia. So, I had a seventeen-foot by twenty-four-foot scrim and had videos and photos flashing on it—while there was monologue going in—talking about the transformation from Johnny to J.D. I did that by a monologue and all this background. And sounds, you know, because I brought a speaker system in, so we can get sounds. And I had camouflage all around the seats and everything. So, people had to smell the mustiness and all that kind of thing, because I really thought the play began when they came through the doors of the building, not when they sit in their seats. Well, I didn't know these were

supposed to be cutting edge things; people didn't do that, because I didn't have enough training to know what not to do. (laughs)

So, I wrote the play, produced it, and it evoked so much emotion from everybody. It was unbelievable. People were coming out actually crying, from old men… I had three girls come up. They said their Dad had came back; he was acting so funny; they never understood what happened to their Dad. And, I think, just because I put it on stage in terms of all of this happening and accumulating—when he comes home to the family, you know—what the book deals with. So, now everybody's like, "Oh, you're a playwright" and all that. But I did that because, what I'm very interested in, is taking the platform, and then expressing it different ways, you know; here's the book. So, I did the book, doing a stage play, doing the audio book, and folks want to talk about a movie. But it's the same book, the underlying theme of it all. But, the different ways it's expressed, it has people giving very interesting, different emotions to it, I find. You read the book; you're a reader; you bring your imagination; you have your own sense of the characters. I've had men take me to lunch and argue with me that they knew these characters. When I did the play, I'm defining what a character looks like in relationships in the play, and the emotional swells at that moment, you know.

DePue: Have there been moments in writing the book or in writing the play where it surprised you when emotions and memories came flooding back?

Jones: Oh, yeah. The fact is, it's interesting. They were interviewing for *Springfield's Own Magazine*, for this next issue, and one of the questions is, which of these things did you have a reaction to personally? I said, "You know, when I started writing the book, at first there was. But I'm not sure if it was the difficulties of just writing a book or the difficulties of what I was writing about."

DePue: When you say, "which of these things," in the process of events or in the process of writing the book, versus the play, versus seeing the play?

Jones: Right. The process of actually writing the book. Writing the book: at the beginning it was more difficult because I have to dredge up all these things. The play did not really have that dramatic effect on me, until I sit in as an audience member. While I was doing it—because I was producing it—I was running around with all these different folks and directors, getting things done and all that. That was doing things. But when I sit down and was just another member of that audience on opening night, that's when it really hit me. That caused me a problem. I had to walk out.

What I'm finding as I'm doing the audio book, I've had moments of the same thing, where I've had to step away because, when you do audio, it can create images in your head too. And, like the other people, there would be images of this. But, to me, it's like it touches a memory. But those are the

times, actually being a member of the audience opening night, that bothered me with the play because, up until that time, I was so busy doing things, I didn't really tune in to it. And then, doing the audio, there's been times I've had to step away from it because…it's the intensity of it. Something there, in terms of the audio, made me just say, "Oh, wait a minute. I've got to take a break and step away from it for a while."

DePue: Are you done with the audio book?

Jones: Oh, yeah. Right now, what I'm doing is developing websites and all for release next week.

DePue: I see that you've got a big sketch pad over here on an easel, and it's the design of your web page that we're looking at.

Jones: Right.

DePue: Has this whole process been one of healing for you, or is this like picking at a scab and pulling it off all the time, over and over?

Jones: I think it's been more… Sometimes it's a combination. I mean, I start picking the scab and, all of a sudden, then, I started healing. It uncovered the wound of the scab, you know. I think most of it has been more of a healing thing because it's forced me to really look at myself in many different ways, which I never would have done if I just went to work and had a good job and retire and go somewhere warm or something like that. I told my wife, "You know, I sense sometimes that all this stuff I get into—because my head being in things, I'm involved, I do things—it's still sort of a residue of Nam, of the doing thing, because that's what was so big to me." You do. You did. You know, you didn't debate it. You didn't discuss it. I enjoy all that, the intellectual. do a lot of reading. I've read most of the philosophies and all. But I think that's all part of that doing thing that really, I think, stems from Nam, and the sense that, if I think about it, I can go do it.

DePue: When you were in Nam, as the corpsman, you said that you'd become a counselor to everybody who's got personal issues and problems. You did that when you were at Great Lakes. I'm sure you did that, somewhat, when you were at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Is this another way of counseling your fellow veterans?

Jones: I look at it is as, once I, in my own head, said that, what has kept me from going off has been helping others. And I started getting into, not just the veterans but the families, because those are the ones who are confused. It took me a while to understand. You know, there's two parts to this, the guy comes home and he's got problems and all that. Family is the one that really lives with him too.

I was on a radio station being interviewed, and a lady called in. She says, "You know, I've got that book. I read it every week," she said, "because I didn't understand why my husband acted the way he did. I couldn't understand what could make him change to be such a different person." And she said, "I read that book every week because I understand now. He did things that I can't understand." I said —Sam Madonia [radio] show, in fact—I said, "You didn't record that, did you, because that is the best testimony, that it really helped somebody, because they're reading, and they're understanding something." You still have to go through the process, what do you do once you understand? You can end up in the same frustrating place, but at least I know I'm here because da-da-da-da.

But a lot of this has been, how do you help people understand the transformation of young people. You can't say, these young men now, because I think it's the same thing with the National Guard today too, that what they go through and what they give up, there's a cost. When we talk about the cost of war, I'm not sure we really do that fairly. There's a cost of war in terms of dollars; there's a cost of war in terms of dollars for bullets and all. There's cost of war in terms of the aftermath and the after fix, which we don't really put in this cost of war. One of the costs that you do in war is, when your young folks go and serve the country, they pay a price, a personal price. They come back to us safe, hopefully okay, as much as you can. But no matter how much you look… When I came back, nobody thought nothing was wrong with me because they didn't see no… I had my arms. I had my legs. I could talk intelligently, and I was okay. I was screwed up more than any of them, in terms of my experiences I went through. So, you can't look at a person and say, well, he looks okay, you know. So many actions happen.

I think part of this has been a quest of helping people to understand, or sharing with people, considerations of what happens when a loved one goes away in situations like this, and come back, and they are changed. Yes, they are changed. They have good reason to be changed. But the families, they don't get a chance to sense that. They don't get a chance to understand that side because they're just seeing the after-effects, the aftermath of when their loved one comes home, that's got all these problems.

So, I found that it's been a lot of times, what I've found is the veterans read it, and then they start talking about it. It's like, they read the words. Now they can talk more about it. But I find, when the families read it, they're the ones who are amazed that, how did he come back, and he wasn't more screwed up, once they understand what it did and what he had to do to survive, to come back.

DePue: When you published this, I assume it was self-published, essentially?

Jones: Well, you added the word essentially. If you didn't say that I would have said, no. (both laugh) What it was, was a small press.

DePue: Okay.

Jones: I went to them and said, I'm going to do this book and da-da-da-da, and as co-publisher, because I want to understand the book publishing process. So, I co-published it. But he already had contract agreements with the distributor, see, and I knew that was the most important thing. If I put it as a self-published book, the distributor may or may not really…

DePue: Did you have any notion in your mind, at the time that it came out, that you were going to make some money off of this?

Jones: I just wanted to break even.

DePue: So, that wasn't the reason for writing the book?

Jones: No. It wasn't about money. I mean, the book has made money. What happened is, the other guy went out of business, and then the distributor says, "Well we've got these books we're going to throw away." And I said, "You can't throw my property away," because, by me co-publishing, I kept all rights. I never gave them up. I understood that much.

I ended up with all the books that weren't sold, which I wanted. But I didn't think I would make a lot of money. I wanted to make enough money to cover it, and, if I got some more, good. But that wasn't the driving force behind it.

DePue: It's enough to hear the comments from people who have read it, and it's helped them?

Jones: Oh, yeah. I mean, it's been unbelievable, the response and the reactions you got from people, and people who didn't want to sit down and really talk about it, which they had never done. What I also find interesting is the young folks who are just being so responsive, and this is in high school and all, which really blew my mind.

DePue: Does that mean there are teachers out there assigning this as required reading for them?

Jones: There are teachers talking about it. I've had some talk to me about it. I don't know, I've got some other folks, a professor and all, that they want to write an instructional thing from it. In fact, they want me to do a retreat with their counselors, I think it is, to look at this as instructive things for families, veterans, professionals who work with them and all, and trying to see if we can develop something, to use this as a basis for that kind of interaction. So, I mean, the swirl of stuff has just been… secondary swirls, things I could never have thought of.

DePue: I want you to look back at your own personal experiences and kind of set the book aside for a little bit here. Are you proud of your service in Vietnam?

Jones: Yes, very…and the people I served with. I try to tell folks, whatever you think about the war, the warriors are the warriors of the country, no matter what. We went; we did a job. Now, when the decisions were made to do other things, we had nothing to do with that.

DePue: This many years removed from the war, which you'd have to say we lost, do you think you were there fighting for the right things?

Jones: Yeah, because I wasn't fighting for all the stuff they were saying we're going there. I was fighting for the folks who I was there with. I mean, I was so focused on that. It wasn't a thing of a philosophical debate to me about, well, should we be in Vietnam or not? I am in Vietnam. What am I doing here? I'm with the team. Something happens to them, I've been trained to do what I'm supposed to do. You couldn't afford those kind of thoughts where you get that if you were in constant combat. You know, they say, World War II, ten days or something like that, was the average time that most of them were in combat. In Vietnam it was 250 days out of the year that you were in combat. Big difference. There was no frontline to go back to.

DePue: I hear some knocking on the door. Should we take a quick break here?

Jones: Okay.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Well, that was a very brief break, and we're very close to the end of this, as well. Some of the questions that I ask everybody else, we've talked about so much. One of the questions is, what would you want people to know and understand about your experiences, but it's pretty much all in the book, isn't it?

Jones: It's there; it's all in the book, yes.

DePue: So, Tom, what would you like to say in terms of summing up? I've thrown a lot of questions at you. What do you want to address that we haven't discussed yet?

Jones: I think one of the things is that, as I look at what's going on now in the future, and I've obviously become very sensitive to this whole issue about how combat changes you, redefines your life, how it impacts your whole… everybody around you. Now, I'm looking at what's going on in terms of the National Guard. I did a couple of five point lecture series about war wounds, women in war, the changing role of the National Guard, and what really sort of got me tuned into it is when I really understood that almost 50 percent of the National Guards are combat veterans. That just blew my mind because the

National Guard's always been one of these things, you say, I'll go there. I get an education. I make a little extra money. I can wear a uniform, and I don't go to services where it goes to places where you can get shot. It ain't that way no more. In fact, if you want to go someplace, maybe you should join the National Guard. (both laugh) You will get an all paid trip to some country. I'm looking at that now. The fact is, the next book in the trilogy, the *Lost Survivor* trilogy, so the next book, right now the working title is *Making Tomorrows,* is about when his son or his sister —I'm looking at both of them —ends up joining the National Guard and ends up going to Desert Storm. What I'm really expanding this to be is to be a multigenerational story of a family and its involvement in multiple military conflicts. That's what I'm going to end up doing.

I finally understand what's going on with all this stuff I've been doing, and that's really what it is. That's, the second book is looking at what's going on. In that, he understands what they're going through, being in a combat zone. But he's also the one at home, now, that has the same emotions as the person who has been left.

DePue: How do you think Iraq and Afghanistan, and the experiences of your average soldier and Marine there, are similar and are different from your experiences in Nam?

Jones: I think they're very similar in terms of no frontlines. Combat is wherever people are shooting at you. It's a total different culture. One of the things about Vietnam is, you're sending all these young folks over there, and they have no idea of what a peasant culture is. I think it's the same thing. We're learning of what their culture is because they do things that we just don't, in our culture, think is appropriate for you to do. Well, they're not part of our culture. They are part of theirs. And then, we have to learn how to deal with that.

I think the biggest difference is how America is reacting to their young men and women coming back. I think a lot of it has to do with the National Guard because they've got 3200-something armories throughout the country. That means they're in every town. So now, it's not a thing of, someone goes into the service, and they have this base, and they go to some war, some combat zone. Now these are people leaving from those little towns, going to combat and coming back from combat to those little towns. I think that's created a greater sensitivity to what's going on, compared to Vietnam, where there were so many other things going on in that environment, in terms of challenges and revolution and evolution and all of that, that there's more of a focus of dealing with that in a positive sense, in terms of the person.

Folks talk about the war. I've been interviewed a couple of times, when they started, and they said, "Well, what do you think about the war?" And I said, "No, I don't think anything about the war I care to talk about. But,

as long as we have our young men and women in harm's way, then we're supposed to be supportive of it because we want them to come back." That's sort of been the attitude. I can talk about all these different environments for war—where it started, really started, and how it's there and what's the reasons—but my focus, my concern, is those who serve.

DePue: Another one of the differences between Vietnam and what's going on now is that, in your war, you went over as an individual; you came back as an individual. Now, we're doing unit rotations. Which one do you think is better from the soldier's standpoint and from the military standpoint?

Jones: I think it's probably the unit rotation because, what we found out—and I understand it—I met the guy that was part of the team that came up with that thing in Vietnam when I was the Assistant Director of Veteran Affairs. I was at something in St. Louis. He was telling me the rationale behind it; well, if your buddy gets killed, they keep on fighting and da-da-da-da-da. No, I think really, by doing a rotation, I think, by unit, is probably the thing because of cohesiveness, and folks are all glad everybody comes back. But that's the front part. What people don't see, because it's the National Guard, is that, when they come back, they disburse to their small little cities surrounding, and they're back alone. It's not like they come back to a Marine Corps base or a Navy base or an Army base. They come back, and then they're disbanded, and everybody goes back to their home in smaller towns and all, and it's not on a base. I think that's something there should be more sensitivity to because that's where I think you'll find problems that they're facing, in terms of coming back from combat because, when they need help, now they're coming from a little town, especially like around here. But I think, if you go anywhere, you see that that's what happens. They come back as a unit to the armory. But, right after that, they're disbanded, and they're individuals, in their individual cities, in their individual places. I think that's an area that, when, you know, look at how do they get the services and the support and the help.

But, to answer your original question, I think it is better to come back as a cohesive unit, but, because it's the National Guard, they don't stay that, like if they're on a regular base. I think there's an impact there we're still going to find out more about as we go down in the future.

DePue: Well, you've obviously written a book about your experiences, roughly based on your experiences. There's a play that's based on the book. There's an audio book out there. And I'm very thankful that you agreed to do this interview, but why did you agree to do the interview?

Jones: To me, it's just part of the expression of people understanding there's a reason that loved ones go. They do their duty, and they come back, and they're crazy. They've got good reason to be. (chuckles) It takes a lot from the family to bring them back because the same thing that got them in Nam was the

situation in terms of being with other folks who they felt a cohesion of being with. Coming back from Nam, everybody expected you to be different, right off the bat, when you came home and normal…what they thought was normal. I think it's just important that we have to have families and the person coming back understand that, if you don't have each other, you'll never get past that point. That's basically it. You need both. The family needs to have an understanding for the tolerance, and the person coming back needs to understand they have been redefined. And they have to find out, who are they going to be from that point on? They know they cannot go back, but there's things you can still do to bring that here and do other things.

DePue: We've been at this for quite a while, not just today, but this is our fourth session. So, what would you like to say in closing here, Tom?

Jones: I appreciate the opportunity to share these things because, what I have found is that when things are addressed very openly and all, people can hear what you're saying. There are things, I think, that should be part of this whole historical, in terms of the young men and women that serve our country and come back. As far as I'm concerned, every day is a Veterans Day for a veteran. (laughs) I think I'll just end it on that note. (laughing)

DePue: Thank you very much, Tom. This has been quite an experience for me, and I'm sure it will be for anybody who has the opportunity to listen to it.

Jones: Thank you.

(end of interview #4)