

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Thomas Jones

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VRV-A-L-2011-043

Thomas (Tom) Jones, a Navy Corpsman who served in Vietnam with a Marine reconnaissance unit, and following the war struggled with PTSD, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Sep 15, 2011 Location: Jones residence in Springfield, Illinois

Date: Oct 6, 2011 Location: Jones residence in Springfield, Illinois

Date: Nov 10, 2011 Location: Jones residence in Springfield, Illinois

Date: Nov 22, 2011 Location: Jones residence in Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Jan Culp & Rozanne Robertson, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 202 pgs Total Time: 2:14 + 2:23 + 2:33 + 2:51 / 2.23 + 2.38 + 2.55 +
2.85 = 10.01 hrs

Session 1: Jones's childhood and initial training as a U.S. Navy Corpsman

Session 2: Combat experiences in Vietnam with a Marine Long Range Recon team

Session 3: Reflections on year in Vietnam with Marine Long Range Recon team

Session 4: Reflections on adjusting to life after Vietnam, & writing on experiences

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on February 3, 2012.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Thomas Jones, *Veterans Remember*, VRV-A-L-2011-043

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Thomas R. (Tom) Jones was born on November 17, 1944 in Quincy, Illinois, and grew up in Peoria, where he was raised by his grandparents, and then the south side of Chicago, where he lived with his mother and step-father. He attended Tilden High School in Chicago, where he took advanced science and math classes and graduated in 1962. In October, 1965 he enlisted in the Navy, and elected to become a corpsman (a navy medic). He attended Basic Training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center, one of only three African-Americans in his class. He received corpsman training in San Diego. In the spring of 1966 he was sent to Camp Lejeune, NC, where he was trained in preparation for working with the Marines. He then attended the Jungle Warfare School in Panama.

He shipped to South Vietnam in June of 1967, and was assigned to the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, part of the 3rd Marine Division, then working in Quang Tri Province. For the bulk of his tour, Jones served as the corpsman on a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, a six to ten man team that would be inserted into enemy territory to conduct reconnaissance for several days at a time. The patrols were extremely dangerous and stressful – essentially a deadly game of cat and mouse with both the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regulars, requiring an individual's senses to be working at a heightened level. Jones's most memorable patrol was during the North Vietnamese siege of the Marine fire base at Khe Sanh. Jones discusses his experiences in detail, and reflected on the changes that he went through because of them.

Jones returned to the states in mid 1967, and attended a nuclear medicine and radioisotope school at the National Naval Medical School in Bethesda, Maryland. He was then assigned to Great Lakes, all the while, struggling to adjust back to a normal life. While there, due to the nature of his duties, Jones often found himself counseling returning Vietnam veterans who often struggled with post-traumatic stress issues. Jones also assisted Admiral Drapper Kaufman with various race relations groups. In 1971 he was discharged from the service, and eventually made his way to Peoria.

After a long career in government and politics, including establishing the Regional Trauma Center at St. Francis Hospital in Peoria, service on the Peoria County Board of Supervisors, plus stints with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Illinois Secretary of State's office, Jones turned his attentions to writing a novel based on his Vietnam experiences. *Lost Survivor* was finally published in 2005, and a few years later was followed by a play adapted from the book entitled *A Long Way Home*, focusing on the character's struggles after returning to the states. Tom passed away on October 7, 2017 after a long battle with cancer.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Navy corpsman with Marine Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) in Vietnam; 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division; *Lost Survivor-The Novel of a Black Soldier's Journey to Vietnam and Back*; Siege of Khe Sanh; Basic Training experiences at Great Lakes Naval Training Center; Peoria, Illinois as an African-American; *A Long Way Home*; south-side Chicago, Illinois in the early 1960s; Tilden High School, Chicago; Jungle Warfare School, Panama; Congressman Bob Michel; Dr. Michael DeBakey; Gov. Jim Thompson;

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