

# Title Page & Abstract

A Panel Discussion with Tom Bowman, Tom Jones, Patrick Lam and  
Pham Thien Khac

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Veterans Remember – Vietnam War Oral History project*

Interview # VRV-V-L-2015-038

Tom Bowman, Tom Jones, Patrick Lam and Pham Thien Khac, four Vietnam era veterans, discussed their wartime experiences with moderator Mark DePue on the date listed below as part of a collaboration between WILL Illinois Public Media and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember – Vietnam War Oral History project*.

Interview dates & location:

Date: May 19, 2015 Location: Union Theater of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History

Technical Support (cameraman, etc.): Sam Cooper & ALPM Systems Technician staff

Transcription by: Bonnie Bruns, ALPL volunteer

Edited by: Betty Workman and Jan Culp, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 20 pgs Total Time: 1:14 / 1.23 hrs.

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on February 10, 2016.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield,  
Illinois.

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# Abstract

Bowman, Jones, Lam & Pham, *Veterans Remember*, VRV-V-L-2015-038

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Tom Bowman, Tom Jones, Patrick Lam and Pham Thien Khac, four Vietnam era veterans, participated in a panel discussion that was co-sponsored by WILL Illinois Public Media and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Oral History program. The name of this event was *Vietnam – First Encounters*. Tom Bowman arrived in South Vietnam in December, 1968 and was assigned to the 44th Medical Brigade, which was headquartered at Nha Trang. He performed a variety of tasks including assisting in triage, ambulance driver, accompanying teams going to the field on MEDCAPs (Medical Civil Action Program), and escorting psychiatric patients. Tom Jones arrived in June, 1967 and was assigned to a Marine Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol. He spent his tour on extended patrols deep behind enemy lines in central South Vietnam. Following his return to the U.S., he struggled to adjust back to normal life, and eventually became a counsellor, helping other returning G.I.s. He wrote a book based on his experiences entitled *Lost Survivor*.

Patrick Lam was born in Saigon, South Vietnam in 1972. In 1979, his family made the decision to send him with a group of relatives who were attempting to escape the country. Patrick said goodbye to his mother and siblings, and escaped on a fishing boat crammed with 200 refugees. After a harrowing week at sea, they encountered an oil rig and jumped into the ocean in order to be rescued. From there, the family was sent to tiny Kuku Island for several months, then to Galang, Indonesia, and finally to San Francisco in 1980. Pham Thien Khac was drafted into the Army in 1967, and was trained as an engineer officer, being commissioned in December, 1967. In 1975, when South Vietnam fell to the Communists, he fled to a remote area of the countryside and hid out until he was captured by government officials. He spent the next year in a brutal reeducation camp. He fled Vietnam in 1989 and found refuge in Thailand until 1996 when he returned to Vietnam while waiting to emigrate to the U.S. He arrived in America in 1998. The four gentlemen shared their experiences of the war, and for Bowman and Jones, their memories of returning to the United States. Mr. Pham and Dr. Lam shared their stories of escaping from Vietnam, and their impressions of their new lives in the United States.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Vietnam War; difficulties readjusting to civilian life after combat; Vietnamese boat people; combat experiences in Vietnam; Vietnamese reeducation camps; refugee camps in Thailand; Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRP teams)

**Note to the Reader:** Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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