



Donald Brent Jones transcript  
Utah Vietnam War Stories

**Interviewer**

Give us your full name.

**Brent Jones**

Donald Brent Jones.

**Interviewer**

And you're from Provo?

**Brent Jones**

Provo, Utah.

**Interviewer**

Went to high school there?

**Brent Jones**

I did.

**Interviewer**

What year did you go into the military?

**Brent Jones**

1970.

**Interviewer**

Were you drafted?

**Brent Jones**

I was drafted.

**Interviewer**

You told us you were kind of a hippy before then?

**Brent Jones**

I was.

**Interviewer**

Tell us about that.

**Brent Jones**

Well I just got out of high school and went to a junior college and started hanging out with people who enjoyed the sixties, and I enjoyed the sixties too. So I was kind of a flower child I guess you might say. Peace, love and flowers and the whole hippy movement and I was having a great time.

**Interviewer**

You got your draft notice and how did you feel about that?

**Brent Jones**

I watched a congressman pull my number out of the barrel or the little blue capsules that had birthdays in one capsule and a number in the other, and I was number 22. I saw it come up on the screen and it rolled up on the screen and rolled down. I saw that and I kind of blinked twice and didn't believe and had to run down to the Draft Board and check it out, and sure enough, number 22.

**Interviewer**

So what did you think?

**Brent Jones**

I'd lost my school deferment. I was in a junior college but I lost my deferment so I knew I was gone. When I did get it I told my friends about it. My best friend came over with a Life magazine. Opened it up and showed me all the pictures that were current Vietnam. He said, "You can't go. Don't do it." I said, "Well I haven't made my mind up yet, but thanks for coming over. I appreciate it" and what not. And he took off and I thought heavily about it. Saw the pictures. What happened, I had a good friend that was drafted also before and he just didn't step forward and he was called in to swear in and you step forward after you're sworn in and he just didn't step forward. He was hassled by the FBI for several years. Eventually everybody was pardoned anyway, so that was all that happened to him. He didn't go. I had had some grandparents who did genealogy work for me in my family, and I traced right back to the Mayflower, 13 generations, and no one had actually been in a combat situation. I had a grandfather who was in WWI as a Supply Clerk. There wasn't anybody that had been in a combat situation and I just figured it was time to

pay the family dues. So I made my decision to go.

**Brent Jones**

So when did you find out you were going to be in the infantry?

**Interviewer**

I went to Ft. Louis, WA. Had a drill sergeant who had just gotten back from Vietnam, and he said 95% of you guys will be going to Vietnam so I'll get you ready. And he did. He was pretty gung-ho and got us in pretty good shape. Everybody kind of had the sense to be going. Once I got orders from my Advanced Infantry Training, then I pretty much knew that that was going to be it. So, I kinda knew right then.

**Interviewer**

So when did you actually get to Vietnam?

**Brent Jones**

I got to Vietnam in July of 1970.

**Interviewer**

What do you remember about that day?

**Brent Jones**

Actually, before we took off I was in San Francisco. I think it was an Army Base near Ft. Ord if I'm not mistaken. And I walked out of my last briefing to get on the plane and I was approached by a couple long-haired kids from San Francisco and they came up to me and said "You're going to Vietnam, aren't you?" And I said, "Yeah, most likely that's right where I'm headed". And they said, "Well, we represent this group, we have a place for you to live, a minimum wage job. You do not have to do this if you don't want to". And I thought that was pretty cool that they did that and I shook their hands and said I'd already made my decision and told them how much I really appreciated them approaching me to do that. I got on the plane and headed to Hawaii. And we flew into Hawaii just about dusk. Absolutely gorgeous island. Had about three hours layover and so I had enough time to walk over the grounds of Hawaii and that was my last chance to actually avoid going to Vietnam. But, got back on the plane. I think the thing I remember most was approaching Vietnam. I had a window seat. We flew to the Philippines first and then we went right straight to Vietnam. I remember looking out that window and watching a canopy come up towards us. And I had a chill that started in the top of my head and went down to my feet and went all the way back up like nothing I'd ever experienced. It was really quite a sensation. And I just realized, hey, I'm gonna be here for at least 12 months. It was quite a feeling. And then of course you get the - someone comes on and says, "OK, everybody on the left hand side of the plane go to this bunker and the right hand go to this bunker". So, there I was. Touch down.

**Interviewer**

So how soon before you were actually out with a unit?

**Brent Jones**

I went out with the sign of the Tenth Calvary. We went out and that day we went right straight out to a firebase.

**Interviewer**

That same day.

**Brent Jones**

Mm-hmm. I think it was Action, actually, the name of the firebase. Yeah.

**Interviewer**

So you're getting off a plane and you're in a firebase in one day.

**Brent Jones**

Yup.

**Interviewer**

And you said you became a Scout?

**Brent Jones**

Yeah, I was assigned to a Scout platoon, with the Tenth Calvary.

**Interviewer**

How soon before you saw your first combat?

**Brent Jones**

It was about two months. We had a unit that would go out and check out intelligence reports from the battalion. And we were to actually go out and not be seen if possible, and check out all the intelligence that came down to us. We were actually really not supposed to engage the enemy unless absolutely necessary.

**Interviewer**

Really.

**Brent Jones**

Mm-hmm. Yeah, we were just to go out and observe. Check out caches, enemy positions. Call in artillery if

necessary. That was our main duty to check out Intel, and be able to call in the main troops if needed. Course that didn't work out all the time.

**Interviewer**

Why is that?

**Brent Jones**

Well, we got hit a few times. But it was about two months before we got hit.

**Interviewer**

Do you remember that day?

**Brent Jones**

I sure do. Yeah, we were actually guarding bridges. Highway 19 was the Fourth Infantry Division's main job to guard, which went from the ocean in Quinn Yan all the way to the Cambodian border in Pleiku. It was the Fourth Infantry's job to make sure that road was secure. So we were on bridge detail that day, just one track facing down this way and kind of securing the bridge, making sure the traffic flowed. Got a call that somebody had been fired upon. Hopped up on the track and I was behind the 60, we had two 60 caliber machine guns and the 50 out the front headed down the road. Came upon the area that started getting fired upon. Took some small arms fire and at first I was behind the 60 so I opened up off the left side with my 60 caliber machine gun and after about, oh, 20 rounds I caught what was called a short round in my belt. So you have to stop, open up the belt, take the belt apart, put it back in, reload and start firing again. And I didn't know how long it took me but the other guy that was riding next to me said that it took me about 30 seconds to get that thing broken apart, broken down, reloaded, fed back in there and going again. I didn't realize that because it all happened so fast. Things were going pretty crazy. We were taking some small arms fire and almost got hit with a B40 rocket. So that was the first time and I didn't realize that we'd even been fired on before that until my partner told me that it barely missed us. I was too busy putting out rounds. That was the first time and I was hoping it would be the last but it wasn't. It wasn't the case.

**Interviewer**

How did that feel? You were drafted and things were quiet for two months, and then "wham".

**Brent Jones**

Yeah, it was pretty quiet for two months and it's pretty crazy when that happens. It's hard to explain but the adrenaline's going so bad you just kind of do your job and see what happens after that. No one got hit on the track, fortunately. It's quite an experience. One that you don't forget, that's for sure.

**Interviewer**

Did the action start intensifying at that point?

**Brent Jones**

No it was actually probably a total of two or three minutes and that was it. They scurried off and we stopped firing, and that was it.

**Interviewer**

But after that battle, did you start seeing more action?

**Brent Jones**

No, no not really. No, it was - I think I've heard it explained before where there's several weeks and months of total boredom followed by moments of hell. That's pretty much the way it was. We had an extremely good unit I believe. And we had a sergeant that kept us really tight. And we just had it together, we really did. And we did our job. We really didn't see that much action, and I have to thank the boys that went into Cambodia while I was in Advanced Infantry Training. They went in and found tons and tons and tons of ammo and munitions and rice. I think I had it fairly good just because of that fact they did go into Cambodia and stop all those weapons from coming in. So I feel fortunate. I know there are a lot of guys that had it a lot worse than I did.

**Interviewer**

You were writing home all that time?

**Brent Jones**

Yes.

**Interviewer**

And you got a Dear John?

**Brent Jones**

I did. I did get a Dear John.

**Interviewer**

Tell us what it's like to be a soldier and get a Dear John.

**Brent Jones**

It's pretty depressing.

**Interviewer**

Tell us what a Dear John is.

**Brent Jones**

A Dear John is a letter you get from your girlfriend telling you she no longer wants to be with you. And you receive that when you've been in the army. I had been dating a gal before I went in, and she had dated someone in the 60's that went to Vietnam. Ended up losing both legs in a mine accident. They were supposed to get married but they didn't. He was at the VA and she'd come and visit him all the time, and he said look, you need to go get a life. Leave me alone. Go find somebody. So two years later we started dating. She had told me about this gentleman before and in the Dear John letter she told me, she said look I can't deal with this anymore. I don't want you to come back in the same condition. I can't do it anymore. And that was it. That was the Dear John letter. It was pretty tough. It was tough to handle.

**Interviewer**

What did it do to you inside?

**Brent Jones**

Well I understood her situation so it probably wasn't as bad as most. You know there were married guys that got Dear John letters too. They'd find somebody else. It was tough. It was tough to handle that kind of thing. I was actually kind of prepared for it in a way. So that was the Dear John letter.

**Interviewer**

When a guy got a Dear John, I've heard some guys talk about this in WWII, they had to watch him because sometimes those guys might go out and find a bullet to end it all. Tell us about that. Is that true?

**Brent Jones**

Well in my particular unit I was the only one that got a Dear John when I was there so I can't relate to any of that, but it's pretty depressing. It was a depressing time, but go on. March on.

**Interviewer**

You said that you got broken like a horse. Tell us about that.

**Brent Jones**

Well since I was a peace, love and flowers I got into this combat unit and we're out on our first mission actually, and when you're on your first mission you get to carry either a radio or an M16 mission gun. Take it off your track. So I decided to take the radio. They said go ahead and take that. It was during the monsoon seasons. And I think it was a short-range patrol. It had lerps and serps and this was a short-range patrol. I think it was probably three or four days. I remember sitting in guard one night completely soaking wet. Cold. It was getting daylight. I probably had guard duty from about four in the morning until six. It was always about two hours it seemed like. I looked over, and it had rained all night, and I saw a sergeant of ours, he was actually snoring and he was in the ravine. A slight ravine to where the water was covering from his feet to his neck. And he was snoring and I was sitting there shivering. And I thought, will I ever be able to actually sleep and do what he's doing? I couldn't believe he was completely submerged and snoring. So that was part of that same mission. I got up the next day and I remember distinctly how hot it was. We were in the central highlands up in these pretty tall mountains actually. And it was really hard work. It was hard work. I just remember the point to where I was kind of bitching and moaning to myself you know, what am I doing here? What have I done? You get to the point where you just take another step forward, and it gets to the point where I just kind of felt like I broke like a horse and after that I was just counting the days. After that I just went ahead and did my job. Went out on all the missions and just kept trucking.

**Interviewer**

So what did it do to you?

**Brent Jones**

Well, it just took away the.... I don't know.... just took away your spirit, really. It took away your ability to object to what you were doing, you might say. After that you just go ahead and just keep working, keep doing your thing and just count the days.

**Interviewer**

Do you remember when that was?

**Brent Jones**

Oh, I don't. It probably would have been toward the end of August.

**Interviewer**

Of '71?

**Brent Jones**

Of '70.

**Interviewer**

So what's going on in Vietnam in the big picture? Do you have any idea what's happening? Are you listening to

other soldiers or what?

**Brent Jones**

Well, yeah we get reports. We talk to other units and stuff. We come to the firebases to get ammo and get a cold shower once in a while, you know. Once we get that, yeah we find out. To find out you read the Stars and Strips on the can in these firebases, and read about the protests. The attitude of the GI's is getting pretty rotten about that time. They're getting to be - kind of questioning what's going on.

**Interviewer**

Tell us more about that. What did you witness that said that to you?

**Brent Jones**

It's just talking on the field. What was upsetting for me was I had a lieutenant come in that was an airborne ranger took over from the E6 sergeant in our unit. And he was pretty gung-ho. He wanted to make captain pretty bad. He put us in some situations that weren't very good.

**Interviewer**

Why?

**Brent Jones**

He just wanted to engage the enemy whenever possible, when we didn't have to. It kind of upset everybody that was in the unit. He was really gung-ho and wanted another stripe. We called it "stripe fever" when we were there. I came as close to being killed by friendly fire munitions because of this lieutenant than just about as much as the Vietnamese. So that made us really upset and we'd actually refuse to go on some missions because of it.

**Interviewer**

What was this friendly fire incident?

**Brent Jones**

We wanted to stop him from taking us out in places we didn't want to go, and that we shouldn't be. We'd be out on patrol and he'd fire his weapon off for no reason, give away our position. I mean the guy was a real jerk. About that time people started realizing that we probably shouldn't be there and we certainly didn't want to get killed before we went home because of somebody's really bad attitude as far as getting a new stripe. The attitudes got pretty sour in that time.

**Interviewer**

We had a couple other guys say they just wanted to get home so bad, any time they felt the least bit there was action nearby they would call in air support. Did that happen with you guys?

**Brent Jones**

Oh absolutely.

**Interviewer**

Can you talk about that?

**Brent Jones**

We had the ability to use the Cobra gunships all the time, which saved our bacon many times. Our platoon never called in any unnecessary artillery. We just didn't do that in order to save us 'cause like I say we were out observing most of the time. And if we saw a fairly good size force we needed to call in artillery we'd do that before the regular units would come in - the regular infantry would come in. But we never did that just to avoid anything, you might say.

**Interviewer**

You'd call in Cobras.

**Brent Jones**

Oh, absolutely.

**Interviewer**

Tell us about an incident like that.

**Brent Jones**

Well it was really something to see and it was nice to have those boys above you. They'd come in and if we were on a roadway where we'd see some Vietcong activity, we'd call in a Cobra gunship and they'd come in and prep the road with - they had an automatic grenade launcher in the front that would shoot out automatic grenades. They'd prep the road with that and then they'd bring in the mini guns and cover every square inch of that for us. We'd be down below and this brass would be falling all around us like rain. So it was really amazing to watch them work and it was nice to have them up above.

**Interviewer**

You're attitude at that time was - what was your personal attitude about the war? Was it getting more intense? At one point you say you were broken like a horse and went along with the flow, but you also got in trouble for your

attitude. Can you tell us about that?

### **Brent Jones**

I spent about 6 months out in the field with the Scout Platoon and they did a Vietnamization of the war where they took all of our equipment away. The Scouts were dissolved. We went into base camp in a place called An Khe with the Fourth Infantry Division. We all got to do just different jobs. I was a radio telephone operator for a while. I handed out weapons and ammo. I drove supply vehicle. I drove around some First Sergeants in a three quarter ton pickup and we'd go out to different firebases and these guys were obviously, we call "lifers". They're in the military for their 20, 30 years. So I was driving around the First Sergeant for a while and I'd tell him what I thought about the war. We'd have arguments all the time. I didn't hold back. I'd been out in the field for six months so I was gonna express myself to this First Sergeant. So I did, and we were drivin' around every day.

### **Interviewer**

What did you say exactly? Do you remember?

### **Brent Jones**

I'd just say that I didn't think that we had any business being in somebody's civil war and how would you like during our civil war if somebody had come in and did the things they did? And of course he'd argue back at me and tell me that I didn't know what I was talking about. Of course he'd never been out in the bush, never been out in a combat situation. So we had our arguments and one day we were out and we hit a big pothole on this big 3/4 ton pickup truck and I broke the leaf springs on it. And this is, gosh, this is in 1971 probably. When I got back into base camp after they took all of our equipment away, I went ahead and extended my tour for two months so I could get out of the Army six months early. They come up with a program where you could do that so I took advantage of that. I'm in base camp, I thought I was safe you know, everything's cool. I was doing all these neat jobs and I'll just do my time and do that extra two months then I don't have to play Army when I get out for six months. So I thought that was a pretty good deal. But when I broke these leaf springs with this sergeant, you take your truck down to the Motor Pool and it was called I think Third Echelon Maintenance where you don't actually do it. I would change the oil and get the tires fixed if necessary but this was something I couldn't handle and we took it to the Motor Pool. So I went back to my hooch and had the Scout Medic come in and visit me and we were in there BS'ing one day and having a nice time. I had a radio where the first sergeant would call me and tell me if we needed to go somewhere. All of a sudden I hear a door open and slam. I'm just laying back on a cot in the middle of the day waiting for my 3/4 ton vehicle to be fixed. The First Sergeant comes down and comes in and looks at me, he says, "Jones, what in the hell are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm waiting for our jeep to be fixed". He said, "Well I don't care if you go down there and stand by it, get your butt up, get your shoes on and go down and stand by it if you have to and stop, you know, bull shittin' around". I said, "OK, fine." So I sat up, started to put my shoes on and I hear the Mullet's door close and I hear it open again. And he comes back, storms down the walkway, comes in and he says "Jones, on second thought, get your stuff together. You're goin' back out to the field". So that day I was sent back out to another line unit to spend my last 60 days in country. I guess maybe I argued with him too much, I don't know, but he was upset. Sent me back out to the field.

### **Interviewer**

He had never seen combat?

### **Brent Jones**

No. No.

### **Interviewer**

So what was going through your head? You were out in the field again and you're way short.

### **Brent Jones**

Oh yeah. Way short. Yeah, I had 60 days left. I got sent out to a unit that did not have their stuff together at all like we used to. So I was scared again. People were falling asleep on guard. It was really a bad situation. That's how I did my last 60 days. Scared all over again just like the first time right out in the field again.

### **Interviewer**

You broke like a horse, but still in your mind weren't you thinking about home and the world, and what you'd do, and mom's apple pie, and your friends?

### **Brent Jones**

Oh, all the time.

### **Interviewer**

Describe an event or place or moment where you are just absorbed with the other world.

### **Brent Jones**

We were up on a strong point once with the Scout Platoon, which is up on top of a hill observing down below. I was sitting behind the 50 looking out over the horizon. I remember the exact time I was thinking to myself, if I can make it through this I want to have a family. So I started counting the days, and that was really quite a point for me. I decided that if I make it through it I'd love to have a family. So that was one of those instances. But you think about

it all the time. You think about the food. Family would send care packages out. I remember one Halloween they sent out a little tiny pumpkin full of candy, which was really cool. And of course I stuck it on our track cause we were driving around. I ended up giving it to some little Vietnamese kids, which they just thought that was the neatest thing in the world, things like that. Anything from home, it was filled with cookies. Of course they were all broken from the packaging and stuff but they sure tasted good out in the field.

**Interviewer**

Did you have any kind of good luck charms? Some guys carried Bibles, and some guys carried eagle feathers from tribes.

**Brent Jones**

No, none of that at all. None of the people that were in the Scout Platoon with me carried anything like that.

**Interviewer**

Any superstitions?

**Brent Jones**

No, not really. One day we were up on the top of, it's called Mang Yang Pass, which is in the central highlands. Very famous French unit was completely wiped out on top of that. And we'd gone up there in our tracks one day, and we were up on a strong point, and you could look at these shallow graves. I bet there were at least a thousand of them, all facing France. And this is where the French had been wiped out. That was kind of an eery feeling up there, because it was starting to get dark before we decided to head out back to our perimeter. It was kind of an eerie feeling sitting up there and knowing that there were at least, I think it's 2,000 French buried on that hillside. You could see every one of their graves. Shallow indentation. That was kind of an eerie feeling to have that.

**Interviewer**

Did you grow close to anybody out in the field? Did you get any buddies?

**Brent Jones**

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. We were all buddies. As a matter of fact when we came back to base camp and got all our jobs I had one of my good friends that we'd play guitars together. We had little guitars out in our tracks and we'd jam once in a while together. He became a really close friend of mine. His code name was Cosmo. We got into base camp, and he ended up taking a kid's guard for him for 5 bucks. Got out on a bunker line and we got hit with sappers that night, and he was killed that night in base camp by a sapper. Yeah, we got close all right. He was a really good friend and we went through a lot together. It was a huge loss for everybody.

**Interviewer**

You write here about the smell of burning wood and the sound of helicopters.

**Brent Jones**

When you get home, every helicopter I've ever heard, especially the hueys, which you don't see a whole lot anymore, coming overhead. That would take you right back, at least it would take me right back, immediately. Sometime fireplaces, you'll be somewhere and you'll smell a certain fireplace or a certain wood smell and it takes you right back to a village somewhere in Vietnam. I guess you call it a flashback.

**Interviewer**

How about the smell of cordite burning or anything like that? Have you ever been around firearms or anything?

**Brent Jones**

Oh yeah, yeah, Fourth of July you smell the fireworks. Oh yeah, sure, that does it too. That'll take you right back.

**Interviewer**

Here you've just done another 60 days, boy that must have been insanely infuriating and alienating to do that.

**Brent Jones**

Oh it was. It was really bad. It was. That was some tough 60 days, it really was. But I got through it.

**Interviewer**

Tell us about the final few days and hours of that.

**Brent Jones**

Those last few days are pretty intense. I tell ya, you don't want to go out and do anything. Just send me back to base camp, let me sit there. Of course you can't do that. You gotta put in your time until you rotate out. It was pretty intense. I wouldn't wish that on anybody, especially after being pretty relaxed in base camp for several months.

**Interviewer**

Were you seeing combat?

**Brent Jones**

Didn't see any combat at all the last two months, thank God.

**Interviewer**

But the pressure on you of being out in the field.

## **Brent Jones**

Oh yeah, the pressure was there.

## **Interviewer**

How did you actually get out of Vietnam?

## **Brent Jones**

I've actually got a picture of that. I think it was Braniff airlines. I've got a picture of us all being in line before we get on the plane. So that's how we got home, Braniff airlines.

## **Interviewer**

When you're being out-processed in '71, tell us what it's like then. Because being out-processed in '69 was different.

## **Brent Jones**

Well, what was it called, the Golden.....

## **Interviewer**

Operation Golden Flow.

## **Brent Jones**

Yes, Operation Golden Flow. That was the name of it. I didn't realize that was the name of it, but you had to actually take a urinalysis to make sure that you were clean before you went home. Because there were a lot of GI's that were on pure China White heroin at the time. So you had to go in and take a urinalysis. It was pretty humiliating to do that. You had to go in, and there were probably eight urinals on two sides of the wall, and you'd come in, you'd file in and take a leak in these urinals. But there were two guys sitting up on the wall, in chairs, to make sure you didn't bring someone else's urine in with you. So that's what you had to do before you left country to make sure that you were clean.

## **Interviewer**

So were you urinating into a cup or something?

## **Brent Jones**

Yes. Yes, urinating into a cup. While you were being observed.

## **Interviewer**

How bad were the drugs when you were over there?

## **Brent Jones**

They were pretty bad. Pretty bad. You could get them anywhere you wanted. Any time, any place. It was pretty rampant.

## **Interviewer**

Who was doing the selling? Everybody?

## **Brent Jones**

Yeah, everybody. You know, everybody that had a chance to go outside the wire and pick it up and bring it back in the base camps. And there were all kinds of people selling all kinds of clothing and you could get just about anything you wanted in Vietnam in 1970, '71. Any type of black market things. They were there.

## **Interviewer**

You were talking about the humiliation of having to do that test. Can you talk about that? On the phone you were saying you were shy, you were modest, and that was not cool.

## **Brent Jones**

It wasn't cool. It was kind of part of being in the military is not cool anyway. When I was in Basic Training, we had I think it was six commodes, and they were facing each other. There was three here and three here. So you'd have to go in and literally, and there was no walls, you'd sit in there and do your thing. It's very humiliating but I guess its part of the process to make you one unit. Strip away your identities, all that stuff, so. It was humiliating for sure.

## **Interviewer**

That's in training, but now you've been through combat and lived through all of that and now they're treating you like a suspect criminal.

## **Brent Jones**

Well, that's true. They just didn't want to have the junkies go home. There were a lot of junkies at that time. So they'd make you clean up, and then you'd go home clean. So they could kind of put a good face on it, I guess.

## **Interviewer**

Some veterans say there were no drugs in Vietnam. And you're saying yes true, yes true. So you saw it all around you. Can you speak to experiences, or somebody around you, or you witnessed something, for these guys that think it never existed?



## **Brent Jones**

All the junkies that I knew would never do that on a mission. Ever. They wouldn't smoke pot, they wouldn't do any of that on a mission. Always, they'd wait 'til after. But it was rampant. Oh gosh, the unit I was in probably 80% were at least smokin' pot on time off. It was rampant at the time, it really was. I'm sure they wouldn't have come up with Golden Flow if it wasn't.

### **Interviewer**

Were you smoking?

## **Brent Jones**

I was.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us what marijuana did for you.

## **Brent Jones**

I was reluctant to get into this, but yes, I was a heroin addict for 8 months. You could get China White, which was 98% pure heroin; just about anywhere you wanted to. Most of the people I hung out with and knew, especially in base camp, were hooked on heroin. It was tough to get off heroin too, let me tell ya. I went in to a captain; I was an E3 at the time. I actually was in base camp and got promoted. I was an E4 out in the field, and I was gonna go up for E5 but I actually went on R&R, came home and got busted in transit with some pot, me and a buddy of mine. So they busted me to E3 while I was there. It was everywhere. You could get it any place you wanted. It was very rampant.

### **Interviewer**

So how did you come off of it? And how did you pass your urinalysis?

## **Brent Jones**

I went in to the commanding officer in the base camp, this is before I went back out to the field by the way, and told him that I need to get clean if he could help me. So he put me in the hospital and I got hit up with Thorazine, which knocked me out for probably a day and a half, two days. Then I woke up. You're all by yourself in a room. It was extremely painful to get off of heroin. I never injected it I just would smoke it and snort it. But it was an extremely painful process. It felt like I had, my thigh bones for some reason took the brunt of the pain, it felt like somebody had a pipe wrench, two pipe wrenches, on my thigh bones turning different directions trying to snap the bones, is how I explain how bad it was to get off of heroin. After about a week, started to feel a lot better and never went back.

### **Interviewer**

And stayed off it?

## **Brent Jones**

I did. Absolutely. I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy.

### **Interviewer**

But you did go back to the field?

## **Brent Jones**

I did go back to the field, yes.

### **Interviewer**

How do you get started with that? Is it just you're in the base camp, or....

## **Brent Jones**

No I got started out in the field, actually. Probably I'd been out in the field about two months. Got approached you know at nighttime, everybody's sitting around. If you're not on guard your BS'ing about the world, going back home, whatever. Guy asked me if I wanted to snort a little cocaine. I said "Yeah, sure. I'll try that." I had smoked pot before I went in the Army. Like I said I was a flower child. So he offered me what I thought was coke, but it was heroin. And that was it. After that I ended up doing it for probably eight months. So that was the first time. Out in the field, at night.

### **Interviewer**

How did you pay for it?

## **Brent Jones**

Well, when you'd go into a Base Camp or a Fire Base there were people there that were selling it. You had the funny money, the Vietnamese money with you, and you'd just buy it. Could actually get a pound of pure heroin for a hundred dollars if you had a green back hundred-dollar bill. They actually new people that had sent home, through the mail, probably close to half a pound of pure heroin to their wives. It was easy to get. You'd leave a base camp and they were selling it all over the place. You could buy it anywhere.

**Interviewer**

Were you smoking because you were bored?

**Brent Jones**

Yes. I was bored out of my mind so I was smoking. You could roll that stuff into cigarettes and smoke it during the day while you're doing your normal job in Base Camp. Out in the field, never did it on any missions at all.

**Interviewer**

Did higher rank turn a blind eye to all that?

**Brent Jones**

Yes. Yes, they did. When you get back into base camp you'd either drink yourself silly or go smoke some pot with the boys. That was it. Never did drink anything at all. They didn't mix very well at all.

**Interviewer**

So you did two months in the hospital and then two months in the field. You pass urinalysis up. Can you talk about that?

**Brent Jones**

The urinalysis I did before my 12 months was up. Because they had come up with this. You heard about it. You knew you had to get clean. I was glad I was able to get help and get clean, so that's what I did.

**Interviewer**

What happened to the guys who weren't able to do that?

**Brent Jones**

You had to. The ones that rotated out before this came out, they probably did their last heroin before they got on that plane. It would had to have been hell going home on that flight.

**Interviewer**

We had a guy, Kin Sabo, a veteran, who said, you know all this to-do about dope heads, not heroin but they referred to marijuana. He said he was out in the field - he was infantry. He said, if we had incoming and I needed help and I needed someone to respond, he said I would have chosen a pothead over a guy that was drunk and passed out, cause at least they could respond. And I will never forget that because we've had so many guys say, oh the dope heads, the potheads, the losers, shame on them, blah, blah, blah. But they could get as messed up drunk as they wanted to. Was there an "us and them" back then?

**Brent Jones**

Oh, somewhat. Not a whole lot. Yeah, I'd much rather be around a pothead than a drunk. That's for sure. Because the alcohol people could not function until about noon, it seems like. You know there was not any drinking out in the field either. If you wanted to drink out in the field you had to put that on top of a 60 or 70-pound rucksack, and a lot of people didn't want to do that.

**Interviewer**

I have another delicate question. Because I remember when I was in we had bad officers. Here you are in the field with a bad officer who's gonna get you killed. Was there any talk of doing the enemy's job? What did they call that back then?

**Brent Jones**

Fragging. Yes we discussed it and thank God we never did it, but it happened quite a bit. As a matter of fact it happened, we came in from the field one time into the base camp, which was the main base camp in An Khe, and they came up and told us we had to take all our weapons off the track. All the 50 caliber, the 60's, all our M16's. We had to check in all our equipment. We said, you know, what's going on? Apparently somebody had come back and put their 50 on a tripod and killed somebody coming out of the Mess Hall. A lieutenant or a captain. So they made us take all our equipment when we came in because of that. And you'd hear about it all the time, actually. It happened a lot. That's not pretty, but that's reality over there.

**Interviewer**

And you thought about it with this lieutenant too.

**Brent Jones**

Absolutely. Absolutely. We discussed it. But there were enough of us that said no, that's not the way to go. Yeah, it was close.

**Interviewer**

There's injuries and there's death.

**Brent Jones**

Right. Well the thing is, the first sergeant we had, he was an E6. We had it all together. He wouldn't take us anywhere unnecessarily. He knew exactly where he was going and what he had in mind to do. And when he rotated out and this lieutenant came in, there was just a whole different ball game. It just wasn't the same. It was scary. This

guy was a scary individual. Just because he wanted that next stripe, and we're almost positive he stuck himself in the leg with a bungee stick so he'd get a purple heart. We're almost positive because we're all out and didn't see any action. We were in a pretty thick area but we're pretty sure that's what happened to him, which was kind of sad. But that happened a lot too.

**Interviewer**

What was the first thing you did when you got off the plane in the United States?

**Brent Jones**

Landing was incredible to me because again I had a window seat and we landed in Seattle, and I looked out the window and looked down at all that. All the roadways and the neat lawns. Just everything was really neat and clean. It was America, you know. It was fantastic to see that outside that plane window. Got off the plane and I kissed the ground for sure. That's the first thing I did. And I wasn't the only one, that's for sure. It was a great feeling.

**Interviewer**

When did you get back to Provo, Utah?

**Brent Jones**

Let's see. I got out the last part of September. When I arrived to Provo my old house I grew up in, that was quite a transition.

**Interviewer**

Had anything changed in the United States?

**Brent Jones**

You know I'd heard in other areas it had changed a lot where you get called dirty names and spit on, things like that. When I got back to the Salt Lake airport, I had my family there to greet me and it was a great feeling.

**Interviewer**

Had you noticed any changes in the country?

**Brent Jones**

No, no not really. I know I missed the mini skirt era. I was pretty upset about that. Other than that, I think that was probably the only thing that was different.

**Interviewer**

I remember coming home and hot pants were suddenly everywhere.

**Brent Jones**

Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer**

What have you experienced since coming home, early on when you came home?

**Brent Jones**

When I came home I ended up sleeping in my clothes for three or four days. My sister thought that was kind of strange. It was a pretty tough adjustment. One day you're in the bush, the next two or three days later you're right in your hometown. It was quite an adjustment.

**Interviewer**

Are you still adjusting?

**Brent Jones**

Oh absolutely. I think everybody is always adjusting. Like I said you hear certain things, you smell certain things and you go back.

**Interviewer**

What was so profound about this war, it was 12 months for some guys 14 for others, or they extended their tour. Out of their whole 40, 45-year life span after the war, the one year really has affected their decisions and their way of life. It's just so powerful. What is that?

**Brent Jones**

I think it's just getting taken out of a free country and put into a third world country that's in untold turmoil. It's just really different. You know, it's something that I never expected to do that's for sure. It's just tough. It's always with you when you get back. I'm sure I left a part of me in the jungles in An Khe somewhere, but it's just part of what everybody does. I'm sure all the vets coming back leave a part of themselves in Iraq and Afghanistan too. WWII I don't think was any different than any world war we've had or any conflict we've been in.

**Interviewer**

You said you lost your personality and your innocence.

**Interviewer**

I think I did. Definitely your innocence. That goes away pretty quick. You know you see your first body bag, that

innocence starts to fade away pretty quick.

**Interviewer**

What do you mean by the personality?

**Brent Jones**

Oh I don't know, I think I was just a happier person. I just think I was more carefree, kickback, and that just kind of goes away I think.

**Interviewer**

So what can you say about that war today?

**Brent Jones**

Oh my gosh, I think that the domino effect was real. I think that's why we went there to begin with was to stop the communist aggression. I think 1966, if I'm not mistaken, Indonesia actually kicked out the communists and I don't think they would have been able to do that unless we had a presence in Southeast Asia. I think the Philippines benefited by it. I think most of the surrounding areas - Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, even Thailand I think were able to pretty much keep the communists from trying to infiltrate and take over.

**Interviewer**

Did you believe in that domino theory when you entered?

**Brent Jones**

I had no idea what a domino theory was when I entered.

**Interviewer**

So you just were like, I'm not into war, period.

**Brent Jones**

I wasn't into war, period. That's for sure. But I was also patriotic enough to know that I'd like to pay the dues for the family. And I'd do it again tomorrow because of that fact.

**Interviewer**

Tell me what life pictures you were looking at - your friend was trying to change you...

**Brent Jones**

Oh they were just you know gruesome, blown-up GI's. They were GI's that were in bad shape. That had been screwed up pretty good. Blown up. Arms missing. They were gruesome pictures is what they were.

**Interviewer**

Did they show the Vietnamese as well?

**Brent Jones**

Yes they did.

**Interviewer**

Media, it probably affected you at the moment but then the genealogy Mayflower story really convinced you to serve.

**Brent Jones**

It did.

**Interviewer**

How did you feel about or were you aware of the media that's in Stars & Stripes?

**Brent Jones**

You know I really didn't pay attention to the media before I went in. I'd read the Stars & Stripes when I could get a hold of it. It was pretty depressing; especially I think I just about laughed by the time Hanoi Jane came about. So I'm glad I didn't have to read that while I was there. That would be very demoralizing for somebody that's out in the field just trying to survive to read about somebody sitting on an artillery battery in North Vietnam. But that's just the way it was.

**Interviewer**

So do you now feel like you've paid your dues for your family?

**Brent Jones**

I do. I do. And I had a son that spent 20 years in the Marine Corps and did three tours of Iraq and one in Afghanistan, so yeah; I think we've paid our dues.

**Interviewer**

Does he know your Vietnam stories?

**Brent Jones**

Oh, some of it.

**Interviewer**

Does he know this part about heroin?

**Brent Jones**

Yeah, he knows about the heroin.

**Interviewer**

I'm actually surprised that you would admit that.

**Brent Jones**

Well, it was a part of the history. It's a big part of my life over there. It really was. It was definitely an escape.

**Interviewer**

Was your family informed once you went to the hospital?

**Brent Jones**

No.

**Interviewer**

They had no idea?

**Brent Jones**

No.

**Interviewer**

Does that go on your military record, that you had to clean up?

**Brent Jones**

I don't think it does. No.

**Interviewer**

Does it scare you, your son going over there? Does it bring back memories?

**Brent Jones**

Oh my gosh, yeah. Yeah, he's retired now so he made it. He was in intelligence. He was an Arab linguist. Made it all the way through. It was scary, oh, absolutely. Every time he deployed, which should have been just once.

**Interviewer**

I can't imagine. What did you think of the Vietnamese? What did you think of the Vietnamese Army? Or talk about the MVA lieutenant that came to our side and worked with us.

**Brent Jones**

Oh yeah, we had an MVA lieutenant; they call it Chu Hoi when they come over to the other side. He had been trained as a sapper, which is someone to infiltrate the wire with explosives. They told me that the training was extensive. It was like five or six years of sapper training. But he decided to come over and join our side; I guess he thought the South Vietnamese had something that they needed to stand for. So he came over to our side and he was a Scout with us. His name was Min. I don't remember his last name. He was a very educated person. He would read every book he could get his hands on and spoke English probably better than most of the people I served with. He was a great guy. We ended up pooling all our resources together to get him back, and we sent him back home when he rotated out. We kind of pooled our resources and were able to send him back to the North Vietnamese village that he came from. He saved our bacon many times. He was a great, great asset.

**Interviewer**

You mean during the war you sent him back to Vietnam?

**Brent Jones**

Yes, well we made it possible. We donated enough money for him to get back up north to his home.

**Interviewer**

How did he gain your trust?

**Brent Jones**

The first time he spotted some soldiers that were about to take us out is how he gained our trust. He was a very gifted person and he knew the Vietnamese warfare forwards and backwards. He saved our bacon many times. He was a great asset and a great kid.

**Interviewer**

Do you have a picture of him in that book?

**Brent Jones**

I do.

**Interviewer**

When you went into service, you were a peace, love hippy. But you weren't really an academic protesting kind of person. You were more of a smoking pot, hanging out hippy.

## **Brent Jones**

Yes, exactly.

### **Interviewer**

So the protestors didn't really get to you either. You kind of understood them.

## **Brent Jones**

No, they didn't.

### **Interviewer**

Overall, as you've read about the war throughout the years how do you feel about it? What would you tell a Junior High audience about that war and your experience?

## **Brent Jones**

Any kind of war is absolutely necessary. War is necessary. It's hard to imagine that it is. We're at war with radical Islam right now. If people don't realize it I think it's a sad state of affairs. I guess people have not advanced as a whole human society enough to be able to get along throughout the world. Somebody else is always gonna want a piece of land, they're gonna want to get resources somehow and they're gonna want to take it by force. That's just the way it is. I wouldn't wish it on anybody. War is not something that I would wish on any kid that's in school right now. But there are gonna be a lot. They're gonna have to deal with it anyway. It's a sad state of affairs when we can't all get along. But that's really a pipe dream at this point.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about your transition getting back into everyday life.

## **Brent Jones**

Actually I collected unemployment. Figured I deserved it. Went and got a ski pass at Sundance Ski Resort. I think it was \$35 for a weekday pass and I just skied my butt off for a whole season. So that's how I adjusted. Met a great gal and fell in love and that's how I started to get back into the world.

### **Interviewer**

We've got some guys that say the best thing that's helped them is going to the mountains or running, or being physical outside.

## **Brent Jones**

Yes.

### **Interviewer**

They really need solitude. They really need to get away from people.

## **Brent Jones**

Yeah, skiing did that for me.

### **Interviewer**

In April '75 when we left Vietnam, on TV we saw the embassy go. What were you thinking? Where were you? Do you remember that moment?

## **Brent Jones**

Oh gosh, I do remember the moment. I remember watching on TV. I remember seeing a helicopter go off the backside of an aircraft carrier. And I just thought, what a waste. That's pretty much the way I would sum it up. What a waste. I felt really bad for the South Vietnamese people that weren't able to get out of the country because I'm sure they paid for it in the years to come.

### **Interviewer**

This is very sensitive again, but can you speak to all those guys who said there were no druggies in Vietnam?

## **Brent Jones**

When I was there, there were a lot of druggies in Vietnam. Base camp was completely full of them. For sure. It was everywhere.

### **Interviewer**

It was real.

## **Brent Jones**

And it was very available. Yes. Not hard to come by.

### **Interviewer**

And cheap.

## **Brent Jones**

And cheap.

### **Interviewer**

The feeling when you left - not wanting to go, and the feeling when you returned - loving America. Talk about that.

## **Brent Jones**

I definitely loved it before I left and I loved it even more when I came back because of the situation being in a third world country, it gave me a whole new appreciation for what I'd left.

## **Interviewer**

Did you feel resentful though? I mean the leadership - that period a lot of guys feel expendable and used.

## **Brent Jones**

I definitely felt like that. I think that you know from the President on down, when Johnson decided to really send a lot of troops, and I'm sure that's why the draft was initiated because of the push that he came up with. Absolutely, I mean the military did their job and the politicians, I guess they did their job too by being the way they are. They're the ones that get us into these situations and they certainly don't have to pay the price that we did.

## **Interviewer**

I asked you if you were having flashback nightmares or anything like that and you started talking about a Vietnamese 14 year old girl.

## **Brent Jones**

Yeah, I think the trouble I've had the most is the civilian casualties. I mean the GI's were killed and the Vietnamese were killed. It's horrific to see that, but that's the job that we're there to do. But when the civilians are killed innocently that makes it really tough. In my situation we were on a road outside the village in a column of six APC's, and the lieutenant that I talked about previous was driving, or was commanding and I was driving. And we have a headset on, and he told me to turn left out into the field, which really upset me any time we did that because the farmers take months of hand labor to make these fields, and these leaders that we had that would have us turn into these fields any time they wanted and completely destroy months and months of hard labor which really used to upset me. Anyway this particular day we turned off where he told me to and I felt kind of a bump underneath my track and then somebody came on behind me and said you better stop you just ran over somebody. So I pull the levers on the track and stop and hop out and I had run over a probably a fourteen year old girl that was hiding in the grass before we turned off the road. She was there with a couple of her friends and the track went right over her body. It was like you see pictures of people - tire tracks or whatever across the - tread of that track went right across this girl and smashed her down into the elephant grass and she was in really bad shape. Had a medic come over that we'd worked with for months, hardcore medic came over and took out an amulet of morphine and could not inject this girl with morphine he was so affected by that. Somebody else had to come down and inject her with morphine. She was having a hard time breathing and she died. That has stayed with me a lot more than anything else I saw, because of that. And that was the true horror of that war were the innocent people that were killed.

## **Interviewer**

Thanks.

## **Brent Jones**

Could I just mention something else about my advanced infantry training in Ft. Knox, KY.

## **Interviewer**

Yes, tell us about this.

## **Brent Jones**

We were out in a maneuver, learning how to patrol or whatever and we had about 20 lbs. on our back and when you get to Vietnam you have about 60-80, depending on how long your mission is. I was out and we were on a big sweeping mission. We're all scattered across the hillside. I was just kind of walking along trying to get the day over with and I tripped over something with my foot. And I looked down; it was a small piece of wire sticking up out of the ground. And so I went down and got down on my knees and kind of brushed away, and it was a headstone of a 17 year old that was killed in the Civil War, and he was with the Kentucky volunteers. I don't remember his name. I wish I did. But that was a pretty profound moment for me because I stood up and I'm in my battle gear and I'm looking down at a 17 year old who was killed in the Civil war from Kentucky. That really got to me. That was quite a moment that I'll never forget. I just thought I'd share that with you because it was really something for me to see that.

## **Interviewer**

How did you feel about that?

## **Brent Jones**

I knew I was going to Vietnam and I was going to be in a situation just like this kid had had to go through, I'm sure. So it was quite an experience.

## **Interviewer**

One thing about that Vietnamese girl. Do you still think about her regularly, or does she come into your dreams, or do you see her face?

**Brent Jones**

Not so much into dreams but certain situations, movies, certain faces. Yes, it comes back on a regular basis.

**Interviewer**

What happens when a civilian is killed accidentally like that? What is the process?

**Brent Jones**

You know, I couldn't tell you what the process was. We were all just saddled back and took off on our mission. So she was just left behind.

**Interviewer**

I've heard we have to pay them in rice, or water buffalo, or....

**Brent Jones**

I'm not sure. I'm not sure how you could ever repay them. I don't know what the process was for that.

**Interviewer**

Because you know that happened all the time.

**Brent Jones**

Absolutely.