

Calvin C. Jones Jr. '68
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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PAUL F.

DANYOW '16: Today is Wednesday, May 13th. This is Paul Danyow interviewing Calvin Jones. We're here in the Ticknor Room at Rauner [Special Collections] Library on the campus of Dartmouth College.

Mr. Jones, thank you very much for being with us today.

JONES: My pleasure, Paul. Nice to meet you.

DANYOW: Nice to meet you. So I'd like to just start with some basic background information before we get into your Dartmouth and your Vietnam experiences. Do you mind telling me when and where you were born?

JONES: I was born in July of 1946. I think it was a hospital in Providence, Rhode Island, although I was living with my family in a little town called Pawtucket, Rhode Island at the time.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: Moved away within a few years to an even smaller town in the northeast corner of the state called Cumberland—

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: —and grew up there until I came to Hanover.

DANYOW: Great. And what were your parents' names?

JONES: Georgianna was my mother's name. Maiden name was Malloy, but I think she actually was French-Canadian descent. My father was Calvin Sr. He came from a large family in Kentucky. And he was in the military when he met my mother in the mid-'40s.

- DANYOW: Okay. Great. And what were their occupations? Was your father still in the military when you were growing up?
- JONES: He was for the first five or six years. I remember coming home from grammar school one day to find a stranger in the house. Learned that that was my father. [Both chuckle.] And he left the military after a short tour for World War II and slightly longer one for the Korean conflict [sic; Korean War]. And after that he worked at various factory jobs, as did my mother as well.
- DANYOW: Okay. Great. Do you mind elaborating a little bit more on his World War II service, in terms of, you know, where he served generally, what branch of service he was in, things like that? And his Korean War service as well.
- JONES: He enlisted in the [U.S.] Navy, and I don't have many details on it. May have been actually in the [U.S. Navy] Reserve but was called up. Spent time in the Pacific, and most of what I heard about was his time in an aircraft carrier. But he was an enlisted person, a crewman involved in signal type functions. Radio operator was his specialty.
- I think he was put into the Reserve after a couple of years during World War II and then within a year was recalled for the Korean conflict.
- DANYOW: Okay.
- JONES: But at that time, I think it was mostly in a Reserve capacity. He never left the U.S., so we would visit him from time to time at, of all things, Air Force bases around New England.
- DANYOW: Huh! Interesting. Okay. And you mentioned that you were born in Providence but actually moved from Pawtucket shortly after and you ended up in Cumberland?
- JONES: Mm-hm.
- DANYOW: That was also in Rhode Island?
- JONES: Exactly, right in the northeast corner of the state, right next to [the] Massachusetts border.

DANYOW: Okay, cool. And can you elaborate a little bit on what your childhood was like? Was it, you know, a fairly typical childhood? Do you have any particularly strong memories from, you know, kind of young years?

JONES: Well, it was not a middle-class background, upbringing. It was decidedly working-class, lower-class. My father was absent for at least the first six, seven years, and probably even longer. I don't have details on that. So I was raised largely by my mother and her parents, who lived right nearby.

But for whatever reason, perhaps because of their backgrounds, they put a very strenuous amount of persuasive effort into convincing me I should focus on school and progress and aiming toward the ability to attend college, which no one in my family had done.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: And, you know, I think my gratitude to them is that they gave me the opportunities to focus on school and all of the things that entailed: sports, extracurricular work and that sort of thing.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: So I didn't—I certainly didn't have a privileged upbringing, but nor was I denied a standard kind of development period. I was—it was not necessary for me to work early, as many of my peers had to do, even to the point of dropping out of school. So I finished high school in the usual way, made applications to pretty much all top-tier universities. But, because of my family's economic circumstances, I needed to find a way to have it paid for.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: And the choice I ended up making, because it was the best financial arrangement at the time, was a scholarship paid for by the U.S. Navy, an NROTC [Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps] scholarship to Dartmouth.

- DANYOW: Okay, great. Just thinking back, you know, a little bit more to childhood and, you know, especially high school—you know, your father obviously spent a number of years in the Navy. Do you recall that being, you know, an influence on you? I mean, were you interested in the military at those ages? Did it influence you in any capacity?
- JONES: There's nothing in my memory that appears to be a starting point, a turning point. He certainly wasn't the only one in my family who had spent time in the military. People of his age were in the Army in World War II and possibly later, so I was aware of it, but it was never something that was ever pointed to as a possible way of making a career, —
- DANYOW: Sure.
- JONES: —nor did I have more than passing interest in it, any different from any of my other age mates.
- DANYOW: And you mentioned you weren't really considering it as a career. Did you have anything in mind that you were considering as a career, say, when you were in high school, or were you very much just focused on college as the next step?
- JONES: Part of the way through high school, because of the influence of certain teachers, I had developed an interest in law, and so I thought that that was the most likely way I would pursue education at the undergraduate and professional level. Later in high school, I was told by influential teachers, again, that I had some talent for writing, so then I began to think, *I've got to consume all sorts of, you know mid-20th-century literature—*
- DANYOW: Sure.
- JONES: —*before American literature*, and began to develop a fancy that that's something I could do for a living. So when I landed in Hanover in 1964, I probably had that more in mind than the legal profession.
- DANYOW: Okay, great. Just two more things I'm curious about from that kind of, you know, young, middle school, high school period. One would be—especially thinking about high school, you

would have been a high school student, I think, during the earliest year of American involvement in Vietnam,—

JONES: Correct.

DANYOW: —in terms of sending advisers and things like that. Was Vietnam on your radar at all as a high school student, or was it just something you really didn't think about very much?

JONES: Certainly on the radar. Not a subject that was discussed outside of a school or formal sort of situation. We may have known—we and my peer group may have known some people who were enlisted or even drafted because conscription was still very much with us, especially in a small town like Cumberland, Rhode Island. So I'm sure we were aware of it, but it not developed to a point that it guided any decisions. It didn't dissuade me, for example, in any way, from accepting a Navy ROTC appointment.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: On the other hand, at that time, I don't think anyone my age could have envisioned that this was a war that would go on for nearly another ten years, or more than ten years in total, so I think we had a very limited view on what its impact was likely to be.

DANYOW: Sure. I mean, as did many other people, including the government at that point, so—

And the last thing I was curious about is, you know, bearing in mind that you were not only in the military but you were an aviator specifically, did you have any interest in aviation growing up? Was that something you ever thought about doing, you know, either—maybe not as a career but even just as a hobby, or was that something that developed later?

JONES: No. No serious consideration of that at all until I was in the military, and then I was drafted, so it was not a choice—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —into the [U.S.] Army after leaving Dartmouth, which I'll get into probably later, but the choice then I think was guided by a desire not to be doing the kinds of activities that my training, up to a certain point in the military, the first year in

the military would have meant that I would be doing, so it was—aviation was a way to change that trajectory to something a bit more interesting.

DANYOW: Sure. That makes sense. Okay. So now we've kind of worked our way up to, you know, starting at Dartmouth, so can you talk a little bit about what your experience was like in the first two years that you were here, which would have been, I believe?

JONES: Mm-hm. Well, I think the most pronounced impact would have been the revelation brought to me by the rest of the student body for how different a life some people lived in preparing for this kind of educational experience.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: Strange as it may sound, back at that point in the mid-'60s I didn't know there were boarding prep schools, and all of a sudden I was surrounded by people who had come from these elite schools and had that type of benefit and found myself in, of course, to some degree, competition with them to try to succeed here. And it was quite eye opening to learn that what had seemed to be a very good preparation—you know, very high test scores and all of the other things that you normally think represent preparation—were well short of that. And here I was, surrounded by—even in a simple dorm—by these well-trained gentlemen. And I felt very out of place, frankly.

DANYOW: And was that something that, you know, you developed an ability to deal with over time? Did you feel like you fit in better as time went by, or was that kind of a persistent feeling?

JONES: Well, I certainly had—I made an attempt to adapt. Pledged a fraternity, for example, and tried to, you know, blend in with the rest of the student body in my class. But it turned out that the lack of economic resources always meant that I was in a disadvantaged position, and it was difficult to cope with that, so I don't think I ever really made a successful transition at that time.

DANYOW: Okay. And thinking about academics, could you describe what you studied, first of all, and secondly, if you ever, you know, developed a better set of study skills perhaps or found

that you were better able to deal with academics as time went by?

JONES: In the first couple of years, since I had done well at essentially well at everything in elementary and secondary school, I thought I could take any sort of course and do very well. And it turned out I wasn't doing as well in the scientific and mathematical areas as I was in social sciences. And, of course, a little bit of success bred a little more familiarity and a little more interest, so I found that what I was doing is taking more courses in psychology and sociology and the rest of the social sciences, economics and leaving behind the math and science and physics courses that I thought would be my favorites.

DANYOW: Interesting. And what ended up being your major?

JONES: Well, eventually, when I returned—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —I chose government.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: In fact, did some sociology and actually returned to a certain kind of quantitative work in the statistical analysis of survey data, which I whetted my appetite for in some courses in the early '70s.

DANYOW: Okay, great. And now what I'm curious about is during these initial two years at Dartmouth, how much was Vietnam on your mind at this point? Obviously, American involvement was becoming much more significant.

JONES: Yes.

DANYOW: You were drafted eventually, but, you know, even before that, did you think it was likely you were going to be drafted? Did you think it was likely that you were going to end up going there after graduation, with the Navy?

JONES: Well, had my first term—first time at Dartmouth not been interrupted by a disciplinary issue, which caused a suspension, I expected to be in the Navy and to serve in some capacity while the Vietnam War was going on, but it

was way too early in the process for me to have any concrete idea what that might have looked like. I was beginning to hearing about Navy aviation [chuckles], so that might have been a sort of pathway. And, in fact, I spent my first summer cruise on an aircraft carrier and got to know that environment better than the rest of what the Navy was like, and it did seem somewhat appealing.

DANYOW: Absolutely. And was this something that, you know, people would not be talking about Vietnam outside the classroom? I mean, was the student body kind of actively aware of it, or had it not really reached that point yet?

JONES: I had a narrow—relatively narrow, I think, interaction with the rest of campus, and I think that people that I was around most probably were not mature enough to really be thinking about it in any serious way. It was something for the future for us.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: And right now, at that time, we were focused on courses and social life.

DANYOW: That makes sense. So if you don't mind, I'd like to hear a little bit more about this disciplinary issue and how that led to a suspension and then ultimately, I guess, the draft occurring. Do you mind kind of walking through how that process occurred?

JONES: Briefly.

DANYOW: Sure. Whatever you prefer.

JONES: The incident involved the economic disadvantage that I mentioned before, and I did some things that, you know, were just outside the bounds of any social environment and was discovered, and that led to a suspension. And I think the suspension was for at least two years, and at the time, of course, that led to a discharge from the Navy ROTC program, and that also included a transfer to the Naval Inactive [Ready] Reserves (sic; Individual Ready Reserves). And so I thought at that point, *Okay, I really need to do something to reorganize my behavior and my goals and my wherewithal* and felt was determined to come back and restart.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: Wasn't quite sure how I was going to do it, but I knew I had to do it, and I had at least a couple of years to do it. However, within weeks of the discharge and the assignment to the Reserves, legislation was passed that made anyone with less than a year or two of captive duty time re-eligible for conscription.

DANYOW: I see.

JONES: So I was immediately reclassified in that respect, and within, oh, no more than two months was notified by the Woonsocket, Rhode Island, draft board to come and have a little talk with them. And things happened quickly after that, so whereas the suspension occurred in the spring of 1966, by October of '66 I was inducted.

DANYOW: Just to clarify, so you had gone home to Rhode Island in that intervening—

JONES: Correct.

DANYOW: —two- or so -month period.

JONES: That's right.

DANYOW: Okay, great. So can you just kind of walk through kind of exactly what happened after you got drafted? I'm assuming for the Army it would have been basic training and then OCS [Officer Candidate School]? And can you just kind of walk through—

JONES: Almost.

DANYOW: Almost.

JONES: Basic training is certainly the first step, and almost everyone from New England was sent to a base, a training base in New Jersey called Fort Dix. So when I was put on a train in Providence, I was certain that's where I was being shipped. I was told nothing. When the train finally stopped and we were asked to get off, I was in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, which is a part of the world I hadn't seen before. Everything was completely foreign. I knew no one else who had gone through this process, so I was making it up as I went along.

And yet, having been thoroughly deflated, embarrassed by the prior six months, I was determined to handle the process in the most honorable way I could figure out, given my age at the time. So I had no associations. No one else I knew was drafted with me. I was surrounded by 120 or so complete strangers and introduced to life at a very large organization [laughs] with very odd rules and processes, and decided I was just going to try to figure it out and see what it meant and see how one would define a way of coping with that situation in a way that might have some impact on my real plan, which was to resume my life normally, go back and finish my education, at Dartmouth preferably.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: So to put those pieces together, starting there.

DANYOW: Now, when you, you know, were drafted and arrived down there, it wasn't as if you'd had no exposure to the military. You had certainly been an ROTC cadet. How was, you know, the culture of, say, Army basic training in the '60s—how was it different from the Navy cadet life and the experience before?

JONES: Well, it probably is hard to find a comparison that would be more different. You know, the participation in ROTC activities at Dartmouth was structured, adult, well-explained. You know, there were clear motivations and common-sense approaches to everything. And it was fairly demanding, but it all fit together in a rational-seeming way.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: In basic training, it took a few hours to figure it out, but, you know, it could have been minutes, really, that the whole purpose of that was to get a lot of strangers to behave in a way that was completely controlled by a chain of command, and that was a style of life in a large, complex organization I had not experienced before. It was not difficult to figure out. So I went about trying to do it in a way that seemed to be in line with what the circumstances required. So, in other words, I didn't go in as a hostile draftee; I went in trying to figure out a way to make it as reasonable as possible and to get something positive out of it, because I think I realized at some point that I needed the structure. I had not developed

the internal strength and picture of a life course at that point. Too immature. So I was going to use it to try to piece that all together.

DANYOW: Did you find any aspects of basic training difficult or particularly strenuous, or was it something you were able to deal with without too much trouble?

JONES: Well, I would not have predicted this, but it actually all was very easy. I mean, yes, there were interminably obnoxious aspects of waiting around, having nothing to do and, you know, being made fun of and harassed by, you know, NCOs [non-commissioned officers] who were responsible for the training and so on.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: But I was physically fit at that point. I could do anything that the military thought was, you know, required of soldiers at the highest performance level. I was pretty organized in ways that I probably couldn't understand but could organize the activities of a squad and a platoon and even a company when I was given those opportunities. So, to my great surprise, I ended up, at the end of the two months of basic training, being selected as the trainee of the battalion. You know, something like, I don't know, six to eight hundred troops were being trained at the same time, and somehow I was identified as [chuckles] the best of that lot.

DANYOW: Wow.

JONES: And it did, I think, change my perspective a little bit in the sense that I thought, *Well, at least now I've erased a small part of the disgrace. I've returned to something like I felt was my progress coming out of high school. And, you know, maybe if I just apply a little more and give this whole circumstance a little more benefit of the doubt, something actually good could come out of it.* But I still really didn't have much of an idea based on testing and other things like that. I was being advised to apply to Officer Candidate School at that point, but I still had another two months of the introductory training to do.

And after being in South Carolina for two months, I was sent to the middle of Missouri, the middle of the Ozarks [Ozark Mountains] to a place called Fort Leonard Wood. And that

was probably the low point of my introduction to the military. It was pretty horrible. And that's where I was allegedly trained as a combat engineer in the enlisted ranks. And the Military Occupation [sic; Occupational] Specialty [MOS] for that is actually called blaster. So, in other words, you were some one who could rig up explosions and/or defuse mines and that sort of thing. Had nothing to do with bridge building or roads or airfields or any other things that I learned later.

No, it was a horrible experience. And I think part of it was that I had been identified as someone who was on the way to engineer OCS back in Virginia, and the enlisted people who were responsible for training there had very little use for people who weren't going to stay and do what they did.

DANYOW: I see.

JONES: So they singled us out for more harassment and more misery and more KP [kitchen patrol] time. [Chuckles.] So it's funny when I think back on it, but it's—

DANYOW: Was it mostly that sort of harassment that makes it the miserable experience that you describe, or were there other factors, like, I mean, the climate there or anything like that?

JONES: Certainly it was—[Laughs.] I can remember being on the field one day when the temperature dropped from about 75 degrees to about 35 degrees in one hour.

DANYOW: Oof!

JONES: And also I was out there in I guess January and February, and I can certainly remember being out on operational training and almost getting frostbite because the conditions were so cold. But, no, I think the main circumstance is that I had had a very good experience in basic training in terms of getting along, especially with people at all ranks, and out here I couldn't find a way. I couldn't find anyone to, you know, be [chuckles] a reasonable person, so it just seemed like it was all going completely 180 degrees in the other direction.

DANYOW: Hmm.

JONES: But soon after that, I was finished and sent back to Virginia for engineer OCS.

DANYOW: And in terms of engineering, that's—you know, one thing I'm curious about is what that a particular interest of yours that led you, you know, to apply for advanced training there? I imagine as the top trainee in your battalion, as you said, you'd have perhaps *some* choice over where you ended up?

JONES: Well, probably. I think it's true that if you rank the needs of the Army at that point, engineers may have been near the top, not as high as infantry and armor and one or two others, but pretty high near the top because it was one of the—next down from the combat arm, and it was out in the field. And they were losing a lot of them, so I think there was a need there, so it was not difficult to choose it and be approved. I chose it just because it seemed the most demanding, intellectually demanding one.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: I had no interest [chuckles] in learning how to charge troops up a hill or drive a tank or run a tank battalion or—

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: —most of the other things the military did. But it seemed also that maybe there would be something in this that would be useful later, at the very least. I was told that it was the most rigorous, intellectually rigorous of the Officer Candidate School options.

DANYOW: Okay. And you mentioned a little bit how you were advised to pursue OCS towards the end of your time in basic. Did you find there was also just a personal desire to become an officer and kind of get back on the officer track after having kind of fallen off it with the Navy?

JONES: Yes. I don't think I knew anything about how it worked in the Army. I mean, I had looked at those options strictly from the standpoint of making it part of your college education,—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —and being an officer, you know, essentially from day one.

DANYOW: Right.

- JONES: And, of course, I had heard all the other stories about how the six months of OCS were pretty much four years at [the U.S. Military Academy] West Point all crammed into six months, and I thought, *Oh, can I do this, even?* But others disabused me of that, said it's—you know, it's just six months of tough activity, so—but, no, I wasn't very well informed about it. It was sort of doing it a day at a time.
- DANYOW: Sure. So can you now walk through a little bit what this engineering OCS was like—you know, what sorts of things they had you study, what the kind of typical day-to-day patterns were?
- JONES: It was basically a continued mix of the same sorts of disciplinary, organizational, structural, command-and-control kinds of things that all the rest of the military is about, with the specialty of courses in, you know, soils and construction materials and sort of the physics of building things like bridges: the properties the materials would have to have to make a road that would actually support vehicles of certain size and weight, or airfields that could support planes. We still, of course, continued the explosive-related work. But that's basically it. I think it's roads, airfields, construction and with a heavy dose of—still you were being trained also to manage units of various sizes but aimed primarily at a company, which would have been about 120 to 150 people with different specialties. So I would say it was 50 percent coursework, 40 percent physical activity and another 10 percent of sort of management training.
- DANYOW: Sure. And, I mean, you mentioned how you had thought it would be really difficult. People had told you you could—how did it end up being, in terms of difficulty? Did you feel overwhelmed when you were there? Did you feel like you could manage it pretty easily?
- JONES: It felt more like the basic training experience. It felt like I fell right in. And in this case, of course, because it was a highly self-selected group, I was now surrounded—not surrounded but at least there were maybe 15 to 20 percent of us in the training company who were Ivy League graduates and/or students and stop-outs and so on. So I felt like I was back among my own kind of people finally, again, although the rest of the company was also a very big mix. I mean, they were made of draftees.

So that part of it contributed to a new kind of competition. We were—we all thought we were pretty hot stuff and we could go to the top of the class and so on, and we did everything we could, in every respect, while still being the best of friends, to try to outdo one another, in a friendly way.

DANYOW: And so you mentioned that was six months? And can you describe what happened once you graduated from OCS?

JONES: Well, you get a commission as a second lieutenant in the Army.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And then normally the next event is after a few weeks' of leave, two to four, you would be assigned with—I guess at that time it was 90 percent probability to a Vietnam unit. And most of us had figured that out. We had figured out—we were told what was going to happen fairly early on, and by halfway through, I think a small group of us had decided the life of an engineer in Vietnam was not that attractive. So we took advantage of a visit by the recruiters for Army aviation to talk to them and see what that would be like.

Now, I had already agreed to an extension of service. A draftee was basically expected to spend two years. If you added OCS to that, you had, well, I think two years from the time you finished and got the commission. Agreeing to go to flight school meant three years from the time you finish flight school, so I knew I was sort of lining up for about a five-year interval there.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: But a small group of us, about a half dozen of us from that particular class at OCS decided to go for it, including one of my so-called upperclassmen. The way Officer Candidate School worked then, you had roughly equal numbers of people who had just arrived and people who had been in the program for three months. And so they got to help the officers and NCOs. In fact, they took the prime role in harassing and making life miserable for the new people.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: And yet they did it in such a funny way, I got to be lifelong friends with one of the guys who harassed me the most, and we got along very well, and went to flight school together, although he was three months ahead of me.

DANYOW: Sure. So let's talk about what Army flight school was like in 19- —it would be 1968 now, we're talking about?

JONES: We are. Although OCS ended in August, I was assigned to Fort Belvoir in an office capacity, as part of the adjutant general's operation, and it was strictly administrative, paper-pushing nonsense, because I couldn't be fit into a class at flight school until the following March.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: So it was March of '68. And in between that time, the time of the commission and leaving in January of 1968, I got married. This was to a person I had been close to since high school, and we had been in touch with each other all throughout. She had gone to Simmons [College]. And so we decided that was a good time. She had finished Simmons and wanted to go to graduate school. Wasn't really ready to go immediately, and so she decided that would be okay; we would get married then and go through those military activities. So she accompanied me to Fort Wolters, Texas, where we lived for three months, for the first section.

[Recording interruption after a loud tone.]

DANYOW: So we're back here with Mr. Jones after a brief technical interruption, and we're going to pick up right at the start of flight school in Texas.

JONES: I think the entering class at Fort Wolters in Mineral Wells, Texas, was probably close to a hundred trainees, and we were broken into groups and assigned to a team of pilots who almost all were contractors. They were ex-military and varied in age considerably beyond what you'd expect to see in active-duty pilots. All quite skilled. I happened to be assigned to a group that used a specific aircraft made by the Hughes Corporation [sic; Hughes Tool Company's Aircraft Division], TH-55 [Osage], a little eggshell-shaped, very lightweight aircraft. Great visibility, good flying characteristics, with the one exception that if you had the misfortune during takeoff or landing to bounce it a couple of

times on the asphalt, it had a structure that would lead to what was called ground resonance, and vibrations would then enter the frame and amplify and become so severe that the aircraft would begin to throw off rotors and various other parts—

DANYOW: Whoa!

JONES: —and literally fall apart around you. Now, whether that was—I don't think it was a story because I think they showed us some films of it, but it never happened to anyone [laughs] that I knew during the time of training or thereafter, so it was probably one of those horror stories they used to keep you on edge.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: But the first three months of flight school is strictly—there's probably as much classroom time as there is time in the air, and yet, because—these are fairly difficult machines to operate. You have to use all four limbs in a coordinated way, plus your eyes, ears and speech, on often pretty independent activities. I had been a drummer [chuckles] as a high school student, and so I was pretty used to using hands and feet separately, so I didn't find it particularly difficult to pick it up. I also had ridden motorcycles and so on.

But the other half of the time was spent, you know, just learning basic navigation, flight rules, everything about weather and, you know, how to, you know, operate safely in whatever environment you might be called on to fly in.

We pushed along fairly quickly. I think—and I may get this quite wrong—but it was well within a month, maybe three weeks that we were expected to solo. And up to that point, we flew several hours a day, you know, watching primarily and then flying a little bit under the strict guidance of the instructor. But I think all of us—there were a few people who had flown fixed-wing and other things before and were being trained on rotary, but all the rest of us I'm sure were just terrified [chuckles] of messing up on that first solo, because there was no one there to tip us off if things went badly wrong.

But essentially everyone gets through it. Some take a little longer than others. But that all went pretty much

straightforwardly. We were primarily trained to fly by eye because unless we were into different kind of aircraft than we were eventually aimed at, which is the UH-1 [Bell UH-1 Iroquois], we got very little training in flying on instruments. Very little. A small amount, where you would wear a hood and fly only on the instruments, but mostly it was visual. So we had to become experts at looking at maps and matching those up with features on the ground, which is often more difficult than it might seem during the first days, but after a while you become pretty good at it.

So that just sort of continued for three months of somewhat repetitive but slowly advancing requirements, including, by the end of it, the requirement to fly in formation, which meant that you had to be fairly close to another aircraft under, you know, windy conditions and unstable weather and come back with no parts of the aircraft missing.

DANYOW: [Chuckles.]

JONES: So that ended in I guess it was June, and we had to then begin the second phase at either Fort Rucker, Alabama, or Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Georgia, a couple of weeks later. And most everyone I knew just packed up their cars and vans and drove to the next assignment. And so I lived then in Savannah for three months, another part of the world I had not seen before. And I got introduced to humidity beyond [chuckles] what I thought I could exist. But that's when we got into UH-1s.

And it was at that second phase where I ran into an instructor pilot. He and I just could not get along or progress well together, and I was actually put on a list of potential washouts, and so when that happens, you are given what's called a check ride with a different instructor, and that happened on one day, and it went perfectly, so, you know, they quickly diagnosed the situation. It was just some sort of mismatch, and so I went back in with a different instructor, and by the end of that period, I had been selected as the top level of the aircraft commanders flying around—leading other formations of six to ten aircraft on these mock training missions to, you know, combat assaults, where you would [unintelligible] at a certain point and then fly off to another point and have to time all the maneuvers so they were exactly right.

So that all ended up working pretty well, and I thought then [chuckles] that perhaps if there's any justice, a decent performance would get me some kind of reasonably good assignment. I assumed I was going to Vietnam, but there was an enormous range of possibilities.

DANYOW: Mm-hm.

JONES: But I left the United States in the end of '68—December 27th is what sticks in my mind—with no orders, no assignment. So I arrived in Vietnam at Bien Hoa Air Base to a replacement station where I think I sat around for about five days, having no idea what I was going to be doing. And, of course, we all were required to look at the orders board every day, a very large paper panel. And my heart sank when I saw that I was being assigned to the 1st Air Cavalry Division [sic; 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, or Combat Aviation Brigade, of the 1st Cavalry Division] because the jokes throughout the six months of flight school was that, "Well, you guys are gonna be pilots. You're gonna have a really good experience, even if you go to Vietnam, except for you poor suckers who go to the Cav." And that was just sort of the standing ha-ha of the trip. And there I was, early after New Year's in 1969, on my way to the 1st Cav.

DANYOW: And was that reputation just because they had been taking heavy casualties up to that point or was it—

JONES: Pretty much, and they weren't the only ones, by any means. But they were, as far as the Army goes, probably in as much combat as marines or anyone else who was there—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —and certainly had taken some very heavy losses during the Tet Offensive of the prior year.

DANYOW: Right. Absolutely.

I'd like to back up just a little bit to touch on a couple of points back during training. One thing I'm curious about—you know, it's just kind of what it was like physically for you to learn how to fly. You mentioned that you had a little bit of, you know, relative ability from drumming in high school, but could you just talk a little bit more about what it was like, you know, mentally to try to coordinate these somewhat

unnatural control movements, and was there anything you did that helped you get better at it, or was it just time and practice?

JONES: Practice, for sure. It is a peculiar set of movements, and depending the training aircraft you get, it can be extremely peculiar because of a phenomenon called precession of the rotor systems of some of the older models, where—and I never flew them, but I understand that you had to sort of do things that were 90 degrees off what common sense would tell you to do in terms of adjusting the plane of the rotor. So since I had the TH-55s, it was pretty straightforward, and it just came with enough time and practice.

There's always a breakthrough moment where you are—in your first few days, you say to yourself, *I'm just never gonna get this*, and just like riding your bicycle when your four years old, there's one moment when it's just—everything's in perfect balance. And that happens to everyone. It happened to me. So after that it wasn't challenging.

DANYOW: Okay. And what about your first solo? You mentioned how that was a pretty significant event. Can you—I mean, do you remember, you know, any specific thoughts—

JONES: [Chuckles.]

DANYOW: —running through your mind at that point, or was it very much just following procedure?

JONES: [Chuckles.] You know, it was just, *Please don't let me screw this up*. [Laughs.] It's really a very simple sort of situation except that picture a rectangular airfield with eight runways all going in the same direction. And students at various stages in the process are using all eight, and we all fly around in these certain—not circular but almost rectangular patterns, with very clear organization about them, and you communicate with the tower when you are turning crosswind or turning downwind, turning base and turning final.

DANYOW: Uh-huh.

JONES: You know, having it in your head that these things would just happen was not a problem because you'd done it so repetitively, but doing it all together with the control and no one there to say, "Don't forget this" and "Make sure you have

that in trim”—it was just a period of a few minutes of intense perspiration and nervousness. But after the second go-around, you felt like, *Oh, you know, this is no big deal.*

DANYOW: Were crashes—I mean, obviously you didn’t crash at this stage, but were training accidents common with all these helicopters moving around, flown by your relatively inexperienced pilots?

JONES: I know that they happened because there was some publicity and discussion about that. I don’t think any happened to the group I was with or, during the time, in any other group while I was at either of those training facilities. Yet we were I think told from day one that while pilot error might be the primary cause of accidents and difficulties, right behind it was equipment failure, and so we were constantly worried about, you know, something not being checked, some cotter pin not being, you know, secured properly. And, of course, these aircraft were maintained on almost a daily basis. I mean, they were to some extent *on* a daily basis, but every 25 hours they went for a fairly major inspection. Every 100 hours they were practically taken apart and put back together. So on balance, I’d have to say that things were pretty safe, and I don’t think anyone worried about that very much, except it was always in the back of your mind.

DANYOW: Sure.

Another thing I’m curious about that you mentioned is kind of this idea of not doing very much instrument training and focusing mostly on visual flying. I guess I’m just curious, you know, if you were out on a training mission, what were you expected to do if you ran into, like, you know, very low-visibility weather or something like that, or did they just not have you fly on days that that was possible?

JONES: I think if there was a high risk, we didn’t fly. If there was an acceptable risk, we were simply given instructions about how to get low enough never to lose sight of the ground. And, you know, we were all capable of flying straight and level and, you know, keeping on bearing—you know, following a direction.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: That was pretty easy. But doing that while doing a controlled approach without any kind of instruments that—in fact, even the UH-1s didn't have anything like a glide slope. If we ever had to do that, it would have been called a ground controlled approach, where someone who could see you on radar would tell you where you were: were you too high, too low, too left, too right, and you would make changes until you got back on course. But you couldn't see anything in the aircraft that told you what you should do next.

DANYOW: Wow. That's pretty remarkable.

And so another thing I wanted to ask about is—you know, thinking about when you were assigned to UH-1s, I'm assuming that was probably the most common helicopter to be assigned to—

JONES: By far.

DANYOW: —for the Army at that point? And does that mean were you pleased with that or would you have preferred, you know, like, an OH-6 [Hughes OH-6 Cayuse] or—I don't know if they were using the AH-1 [Bell AH-1 Cobra] yet, but—

JONES: Oh, definitely, yeah. I think on balance I thought the guys in the gun company down the road that flew the Cobras probably had more interesting assignments. I mean, we can get into those details a little bit later, but—

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: But the Cobra training was only another couple of weeks past UH-1 training. If you were going into multi-engine, like the [Boeing] CH-47 Chinooks and the [Sikorsky S-64] Skycranes—I can't remember their designation now—that was probably several months more of additional training and probably would have added on to the commitment and so on, and it also would have meant flying cargo all the time, which is not necessarily what I wanted to be doing.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: So, no, I don't think I expected to be doing anything else but UH-1s. I don't think I was in an LOH [light observation helicopter] for more than three or four hours in the entire time I was there.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: And they were fun. You know, I guess I thought I was kind of progressing along a preparation cycle. I had been trying to do certain kinds of things, and I could do them pretty well.

DANYOW: Right. And in terms of, you know, flying the UH-1, did you think it was a good piece of equipment? I mean, did you enjoy flying it? Did you think it had any particular flaws that weren't being addressed?

JONES: You know, in terms of design—I mean, if you had a brand-new aircraft—I mean, they were pretty amazing. They were conservatively rated, and they could actually perform in ways that we were told never to do and go way past red lines, in many directions. Certainly didn't have the maneuverability of the smaller LOHs or even the Cobras, for that matter.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: But the problem I think with the fact that they were so numerous is just as they couldn't train enough pilots, they couldn't train enough maintenance people. And, of course, they were using contractors to some extent, but I think for those of us who developed a certain level of skill, we then knew that our lives were in the hands of the maintenance people.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And the parts and a variety of other things, and I'll have a couple of stories about that if we have time.

DANYOW: Sure.

So I guess the last two things I wanted to ask during the training phase. First, were you paying attention more actively to what was going on in Vietnam at this point? I imagine Tet, I think, would have been going on, you know, sometime while you were in flight training or shortly before and during. Is that something you were paying attention to?

JONES: You know, one of the things that I think was not possible to do under those circumstances was—I mean, we were working from four to five a.m.—we'd have to get up to get out to the flight line—until nine or ten at night. It was difficult

staying on top of even network news, television or newspapers.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: And, you know, we would do that, but we always thought, *We're getting a very thin layer of facts about what's actually happening here.*

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And we were all aware that our perceptions about these things were likely to be wrong because they were being informed mostly by our own—our small environment.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And so I did not feel at that point particularly well informed about what was going on over there.

DANYOW: Okay, great. And the last thing I'm curious about is just, you know, thinking about being a newlywed at this point, and, as you said, there's an awareness that there was roughly a 90 percent chance that you were going to end up in Vietnam. How did you deal with that as a couple? I mean, was that difficult to talk about?

JONES: I don't think so. I think we did talk about it throughout the process of the training and getting ready to go, and my wife had applied to and gotten into a graduate program at Brown [University], so she was going to go back to Rhode Island and be around her own family and my family, to some extent, while I was away. Since I had no real use for money when I was there, I just sent it all back to her to keep her life going.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: None of us could have felt like there was a high certainty that everything would come out just fine, but we also had no basis for thinking, *Good grief, this is all gonna end badly, and, you know, with a high likelihood.*

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: So I think we just—we were reasonably optimistic that this would all be behind us one day, and, you know, we were

talking more about what we would do for graduate school next and my going back to school and all that, not concentrating a lot on the one year.

DANYOW: Okay. And so now talking about, you know, going to Vietnam. You mentioned you didn't actually get your unit assignment until you'd been in country for five or so days. But did you get orders of some sort to just specifically deploy, to be in country?

JONES: Mm-hm. Yep.

DANYOW: Two separate sets.

JONES: Absolutely. Yep.

DANYOW: And did you fly over?

JONES: Well, yeah, they put us in—if you can imagine this, flying from Oakland by way of Guam to Bien Hoa in South Vietnam in, you know, a [Boeing] 707. I mean, these were the first commercial jets that Boeing made. They were the most uncomfortable, tiny—I mean, the seats are more like lawn chairs [chuckles], as I remember them. And I do remember that flight as being one in which I couldn't sleep a wink.

DANYOW: And so can you describe now—you know, once you landed in Vietnam at Bien Hoa, as you said—can you just kind of take me through what you did in those five days while you were kind of, you know, waiting for—waiting for your unit assignment?

JONES: A little bit of a fog. I don't think there was much to do. We were in what was called a repo depot or replacement station, and so we were given a room. I don't think it was a barracks or a dorm type situation. It was a small room. There was very little around to read that I could get my hands on. I'm sure there was a PX [post exchange] of some kind, where I could get something, but it was just a matter of waiting and trying to figure out whether I could speed the process up, get more information or something. They were five very boring days.

The only thing I can remember then was the shock of an AFL [American Football League] team winning the Super Bowl— [Both chuckle.]—that year. The New York Jets knocked off my favorite [Baltimore, now Indianapolis] Colts.

- DANYOW: Huh! Interesting. And so you already mentioned a little bit, but I'd like to hear a little bit more about your reaction to being assigned to the 1st Air Cav. You mentioned there was kind of a stigma attached to the division, just because it had been so heavily heavily engaged—
- JONES: Well, fear factor.
- DANYOW: Sure, sure.
- JONES: [Chuckles.] And also that living conditions were thought to be absolutely miserable. It was all rather vague. I think I said before I knew no one who had actually gone through. That might not quite be true, but I certainly wasn't very well informed. And I also knew that they were in the process of moving. They had been—South Vietnam was divided into four core areas, and they had been up I think in I Corps, which was close to the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone].
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: And they were in the process of moving down to III Corps, which is the area around Bien Hoa and Saigon.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: But they hadn't finished that yet, so I was sent up there to get Cav training for a week or so and then move south with the rest of the operation. And then they were all spread out, divided, some into towns. I ended up being in a little rubber plantation, and it was home not only to our two companies of the helicopter battalion but an engineering group and some artillery. I'm not sure I knew everything that was going on up there. It was not a big place, but it was literally a rubber plantation. The trees were everywhere.
- DANYOW: And you mentioned—I'd just like to hear a little bit more about this seven days of Cav training that you went up to the north for. Could you just walk me through a little bit more, in a little more detail of what that entailed?
- JONES: It was almost like going back to basic training because we were treated like infantry, and in order to introduce us to what the conditions were, how to keep an M-16 [rifle] working, how to slog through the bush, how not to make stupid mistakes, how to look for [M18A1] Claymore mines

and, you know, all of the other kind of sur- —it was like a survival course almost. But they knew we had just arrived, and nearly all of us, it was our first time.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: So it was an attempt to try to break you into what the various obvious risk factors were that you'd have to cope with on a daily basis. And it was grueling

DANYOW: Yeah. I'm just curious also—you know, what were your initial reactions like to the people you were meeting from the division? Let's say that you're the combat-hardened veterans, to use the slightly cliché term. Were they, you know, intimidating? Did you find them, you know, pretty effective in terms of training you?

JONES: I have a dim memory of them, and all I have left is that they were sort of all business: "We're responsible for avoiding your death in the next ten minutes, so just pay attention. We're not gonna be your buddies. We're not gonna have relationships." You know, it was just highly efficiency oriented, and I have no recollection or impression about whether it was particularly expert. It was also new to us that it must have seemed that way—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —and that we were being given all these little nuggets and gifts for survival.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: But I have very little memory of those few days because it was all a fast jumble and it was all pointed toward a quick in and then moving to our real jobs.

DANYOW: Sure. Was there any aviation component of this Cav training, or was that just expected that you were already—

JONES: Nope, nope.

DANYOW: —proficient from flight training?

JONES: We were just being introduced to the Cav as a big unit, which is 95 percent infantry

- DANYOW: I see. Right, right.
- JONES: Motorized infantry; hence the “Cav” there.
- DANYOW: Right. Of course. And this was kind of the first use of—you know, as the Air Cav division, was it not?
- JONES: Yes.
- DANYOW: Okay. So can you know walk me through when you went down and were assigned in the south to your specific unit—you know, what they were like when you met them and kind of what your initial role in the unit was?
- JONES: Well, I think there had been developed over quite a few years a similar process of working the new people into increased levels of responsibility, for especially the aviation parts. But in any little military company, there are a flock of other responsibilities and jobs that people take on, on a part-time basis, or if they’re not very good at their flying jobs, it might even be full time. And I’m referring to things like motor pool officer, which is probably the next worst imaginable role in a company like that.
- So we all had these sort of secondary functions that we had to perform while we were awaiting for assignments to go as copilots with the experienced aircraft commanders, who knew their way around, knew the—well, not many of them would have known the terrain by then, but they certainly knew everything about the operational steps,—
- DANYOW: Sure, sure.
- JONES: —which were pretty repetitive. There was not a huge amount of room for creativity. I mean, basically what the Cav did in terms of combat assaults was pick up, say, six aircraft full of fully-loaded infantry people, and that was usually no more than five or six people per aircraft—
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: —at one location, and that would have to be done in a very carefully timed way and all that because they were soon to be surrounded by unfriendlies—
- DANYOW: Right.

- JONES: —and then fly them to Point B and insert them at that point, which was usually also assumed to be hostile, so that had a two-phrase—three-phase prep process. Regular artillery would pound the area for a while, then aerial rocket artillery would come in and shoot up the place [chuckles], and then the “Slicks,” as they were called, the UH-1s would come in with two pairs of guns on either side to drop off the troops and get out as quickly as possible.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: So that was a process we all had to learn how to do, and do in different positions because each ship in the formation had a certain role to play.
- DANYOW: And when you say you were learning how to do that, was that—were you running, like, training missions in the south or were you kind of learning in actual combat?
- JONES: No, learning in real time. And, you know, we would sit in the right seat, as we said, and the aircraft commander would sit in the left seat.
- DANYOW: Sure.
- JONES: And we were training by *the* most experienced people, some of whom were commissioned officers (captains, majors and so on), and others were warrant officers, who had no command responsibility whatsoever; they were strictly pilots, and some of them were damn good. And so it was, again, just a matter of going out and repeating—showing what you could do and being given, on a judgment basis, more and more responsibility to do things.
- DANYOW: Sure. Do you remember your first—you know, one of these combat assaults that you went on, or do they kind of blur together?
- JONES: You know, well, I remember certain ones, and how early they were in the process is probably where I would get things wrong. But I can certainly remember flying around the sort of crater-filled landscape of red dirt and dust, and that was one of the biggest threats of all to flight there, was the amount of dust that would be sucked into the aircraft engine inlets—
- DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: —and coat the turbine rotor blades, turbine blades inside the engine, which would vastly decrease its efficiency, operating characteristics. So I remember being introduced to that fairly early and doing that over and over again.

The most harrowing and memorable part of the early days was my first night mission, where, again, I was taken up by a experienced person, and we were doing basically resupply of an outfit that was taking fire, and they needed much more ammunition. And so there were, like, two aircraft assigned to get in, get them as much ammunition as possible, and we'd stop at a base camp and load up with tons of stuff—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —and then have to go up and try to find them in the middle of the night. You know, it's as dark as it gets on a place like that.

DANYOW: You were flying visually, mostly.

JONES: Oh, yeah, absolutely. There was no other way to do it.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: Now, you know, you do have a capability to use some radio-based homing. Certain radio frequencies that the ground troops had and we had in the air could essentially point to each other,—

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: —so we could kind of find where they were, but needless to say, radios weren't supposed to be used very much when you're in a firefight.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: So what was most harrowing about that night is, you know, I was flying there, keeping an eye on things and doing the radio work and other things, talking to the crew in the back, and the aircraft commander was doing most of the flying, and after, like, the third run in, he said, "Okay, you got it." And that's the phrase for it. You know, "You're in control. Do what I just did."

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: And I thought, *I have no idea where I am. None at all.* And so [chuckles] I relied on as much memory as I could come up with, got back to the base, the small resupply camp, picked up another big load of small arms ammunition, and then I thought, *This is really gonna be embarrassing*, and I tried to head out back to where I thought we were going, looking for any sign of any kind of landmark and picking up the odd radio blips, so I was going more or less in the right direction. And the miracle was that I managed to find them, and it wasn't embarrassing, but I have no idea to this day how it happened, nor could I consider it anything but the most unbelievable luck that I was able to—

DANYOW: I'm trying to, you know, visualize what you're seeing out of the helicopter. Did they put out, like, flares or something to, like, mark the—

JONES: Couldn't do it at night and in a firefight.

DANYOW: Jeez, so you just kind of had to guess where the [unintelligible] was?

JONES: I mean, you know, we could see—well, starlight is pretty good,—

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: —and the moonlight is pretty good,—

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: —because it *is* so, you know, free from light pollution of any other kind.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: So we could tell where—we could see what the formations of the treetops looked like, and that's what I had to work with, to try to remember what they looked like.

DANYOW: Wow.

JONES: And I got—as you get close enough, then they will tell you, “We've got you overhead,” and so that's what I was waiting to hear.

- DANYOW: Could you see muzzle flashes from the firefight that was going on, or was that obscured by trees?
- JONES: What we could see mostly that night [chuckles]—and I'd forgotten about this until you mentioned it—what was their nickname? The Army used [Douglas] DC-3 aircraft, these very old, World War II-vintage things,—
- DANYOW: Yeah.
- JONES: —loaded up with certain kinds of ammunition, mostly [Oerilikon] 20 mm cannons and new things, which were all loaded with tracer rounds. And they would fly around an area where they knew troops were engaged, and they would just spray the area with this heavy shooting, lit up by tracer rounds.
- DANYOW: Oh.
- JONES: So I could see all of that stuff going from the air to the ground in a circle around, which was probably doing absolutely no good for the troops.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: But, you know, it was certainly a memory. And then, of course, there were the odd tracers that would fly out of the, you know,—
- DANYOW: Sure.
- JONES: —trees into the sky, but not that many. But it was a very frightening night, and I thought it was going to end pretty badly, and we just got lucky.
- DANYOW: And my last question about this particular mission was: did you take any enemy fire, or was it just hard for them to see you in the dark?
- JONES: Not that night. I'd have to say that even though at times we were flying very slowly, most of the time we were flying by so fast that in the dark it would have been next to impossible, except to just throw a spray up there—
- DANYOW: Sure.
- JONES: —and hope to hit something.

- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: So that was not the thing that was worrying me most about that evening.
- DANYOW: It was more—
- JONES: It was the embarrassing myself by not being able to do the work.
- DANYOW: Sure. I mean, kind of going off of that, I guess: Do you remember, like, a particular mission that stands out as the first time you were shot at by enemy troops on the ground or a particularly—
- JONES: Yeah.
- DANYOW: —heavy period of fire? Would you mind describing that a little bit?
- JONES: [Sighs.] I don't think I have any of the details in mind about where it was except that it was north of the base camp, and we had been spending almost all of the day waiting at this other base camp for the call to come and get a group that was supposed to move that day, but—they were supposed to attract attention and engage some of the forces that were in that area. It was mostly Viet Cong; I don't think there were any North Vietnamese.
- And we got a call when—it was late in the evening, and we were just about to call it off for the day and told to scramble and go get these people. And I think it was probably a late call, and they were in much too difficult a situation and had not been able to withdraw to a place they could control better.
- DANYOW: Yeah.
- JONES: And so I think almost all six of us got some degree of shooting up, and you could see that the fuel was leaking out of the tanks. And fortunately we had a very short distance to go after we picked them up to get back to the other base, but we could not then fly the aircraft out of there; we had to get picked up by another one because they were just full of—
- DANYOW: Wow.

JONES: But you don't—you don't really know it's happening at the time, but the aircraft behind you can tell that, you know, fuel is leaking.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: And so you get that message, and you know what you have to do.

DANYOW: Great. Let's just take another short break.

[Recording interruption.]

DANYOW: Okay, great. Now we're back here again with Mr. Jones. So we were just talking about a particular mission, where you remember taking a significant amount of enemy fire and having your fuel tanks holed. Do you mind describing, you know, any other particularly dramatic missions in this early phase of being there? And other ones that stick in your mind.

JONES: Two others do, and I think in a way they typify what absorbs people who are assigned to those circumstances and busy with those activities all the time, which is you have very little time for reflection about anything else because some of these experiences fasten the mind so tightly on what's going on for yourself and all the people you're responsible for.

The first one was—I was still a junior, in training with the company down in III Corps, and on this day, I guess I was assigned to a mission meant to increase my understanding of certain properties of the aircraft during resupply missions in certain weather conditions. It turned out a little differently than I think everyone expected.

We picked up a large amount of radio gear and four or five people from one of the local bases and flew it out to the top of a mountain. I think the name of it was Nui Ba Den, which was a conical-shaped mountain that came right out of the flatlands, with no other peaks around it, not particularly high. If I were to guess, I would say no more than 3,000 feet or so, but it was coming right out almost sea-level rice paddies.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: It was a warm day. I didn't think we had a particularly heavy load or anything, but, as I say, I was not making the decisions. A warrant officer was in charge of the aircraft. But as we were coming to approach on a tiny little helipad on the tip of that mountain, the aircraft commander lost control, and the aircraft started to spin. And when they do that, it's—there are reasons I'll explain in a moment, but the effect is that it spins around a main rotor axis, so the tail started to spin around, and the front skids caught in some wire around the top of the mountain, and we hit the ground and started spinning and rolling over.

DANYOW: Jeez.

JONES: And I think we rolled over up to three times, and I was certain during that few seconds that—that that was it and it's goodbye. And then the aircraft stopped. We were hanging upside down in our belts and our chicken plates [body armor worn by air crew] and everything else, and managed to get loose and get the crew out in the back, who were held in by even less gear than we were. And then the passengers inside were clinging to the poles and support and all that, and I guess the radio equipment was all very heavy, but it was all tied down. We all walked away from that, a twisted mess of machinery that, you know, was just junk at that point.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: And the most serious injury was a little scrape on the temple on one of the passengers.

DANYOW: Wow.

JONES: It was unbelievable.

DANYOW: That's amazing.

JONES: And it all happened because we weren't well enough informed or made bad judgments about the weight of the cargo and people with respect to a phenomenon called density altitude, which is a calculation you have to make about temperature and humidity and elevation, to see whether or not the aircraft will have reduced power at a

certain point. And, as far as I could tell, those calculations were never made.

DANYOW: I see.

JONES: Just he made assumptions, and they were wrong, and the aircraft did not have the power to haul that weight of equipment with that fuel capacity, you know, unburned and with that number of people on board. And so it could easily have ended in several deaths.

DANYOW: That's a real crash that you're talking about.

JONES: It's—oh, yeah.

DANYOW: It's not just a slight bump on landing.

JONES: Oh, no, No, no, this was—[Chuckles.]

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: And someone at the top of the mountain, an infantry guy, snapped a picture of it, and I don't know how on earth it happened. Well, I should have said this some time ago, I guess, but it doesn't really matter when. The unit that I was with was a little unusual in the respect that they refused to follow military protocol about call signs. Call signs were considered one of those things that was useful intelligence to the enemy, and so if they knew that, you know, Thunderclap was operating in a certain area and then they heard them over here, using the same call sign, they could trace their movements and all that.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: So we were required to change our call sign at least monthly, I think. Well, at one point, the helicopter company had been given the call sign Drumstick, which everybody thought was really stupid.

DANYOW: [Chuckles.]

JONES: And some wag, who was familiar with a radio program at the time called *Chickenman*—and this is not lost to history entirely; you can still find it if you really do enough searching. But it was sort of a radio cartoon. Not that funny, but funny

enough. But the logo or the audio logo of the show was “Chickenman! He’s everywhere! He’s everywhere!” So we would use Chickenman as our call sign. And the troops in the field, the Cav infantry and all, just loved it. And so they refused to give it up, and even though the battalion chiefs and the brigade commanders would come down and scream bloody murder, they’d say, “Okay, yes, we’ll change,” and they never did, and they just kept using Chickenman for the entire year I was there and probably before and after that, or after that, at least.

At any rate, because of the affection for the Chickenman routine—and they knew that we were the folks that [chuckles] rolled it on the hill—a guy took a picture and managed to figure out where we were and sent it back to me, and I’ve lost it. I don’t know where it is now. But it was on this little Polaroid—you know, with that crumpled mass of metal—

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: —still caught in the barbed wire at the top of the mountain, so—I wish I had it. It’s interesting.

DANYOW: That’s amazing.

And you mentioned second particularly notable mission from this period that you wanted to talk about?

JONES: Yeah. This is a little less dramatic, but to make it more brief, it was a similar situation of the one I mentioned earlier. We had been waiting around for a few hours for the call to pick up some troops. It came late in the day. The weather was getting really bad, so we packed up really quickly. And we made the pick up, and in this case it was a South Vietnamese unit. So the six aircraft in my flight all had about 14 of these relatively small, lightweight people [chuckles], fully packed up and all that. But we had a lot of people that we were flying around.

And we were climbing up to altitude in order to take them to their destination, and I heard—I was not the flight lead that day; I was in the third position, and there was an enormous explosion, just a boom! And I wasn’t sure where it came from, because, you know, it was sort of in the immediate

area, but it was my aircraft, and on the radio I heard from behind me, “Three, you’re on fire.” [Chuckles.]

And then, of course, I knew at that point I was dropping like a rock. So I took control of the aircraft and did a slow turn, looking for a roadway, and we were at another one of those areas with rubber plantations, and there was a dirt road running through them. So one of the things you learned during the first days of flight school was something called auto rotation. It’s a way to land the helicopter without power. So you let it fall as far as you can go [chuckles], the last couple of hundred feet, and then you pull back on the cyclic pitch stick to stand the aircraft sort of on its end, so you’re maximizing the air going through the main rotors.

DANYOW: Oh, okay.

JONES: And that loads them up with a lot of inertia, a huge amount of inertia, and they’re going as fast as they can go without power. And then you lay it back over again and let it fall the rest of the way, pulling up on the collective pitch stick, which tries to screw it back and gain altitude, —

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: —and the two together sort of soften the landing, so it’s practically like landing with power.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: So we managed to do that on the dirt road down there, and in that case, the aircraft was in perfect condition other than what I later found out was the problem. Every time we landed in Vietnam, because of the dust I mentioned earlier and its impact on performance, the door gunner and crew chief were supposed to climb to the top of the aircraft, unbutton the air intake covers and take some rags and get out and clean the dust out of every place they could see, just to get it as clean as possible.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: Apparently we buttoned up so fast to get out and get these troops that the crew chief left a rag in the inlet.

DANYOW: Oh!

JONES: And it got sucked into the engine, and that's what blew it out.

DANYOW: Wow.

JONES: So it was, I don't know, 45 seconds of [chuckles] fast-moving decision making, and—

DANYOW: Yeah. I mean, roughly how high up were you when that happened?

JONES: No more than fifteen, eighteen hundred feet.

DANYOW: That's still a long way down.

JONES: Well, enough to get hurt,—

DANYOW: When you're on fire.

JONES: —but it's a very short distance to—and we weren't really burning. There had been an explosion of the rag going through the engine that belched out a big flame.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: But we were not on fire.

DANYOW: Okay, but the engine was pretty much disabled.

JONES: It was gone, yeah. Absolutely gone. So we got on the ground, and I, you know, got all the South Vietnamese troops [chuckles] out there to surround the aircraft, and the gunships came and did their little circling motion, and, you know, we waited a little while, and then another aircraft came in and picked up at least my crew and me up. And you know, the South Vietnamese were still down there under their commander, and the aircraft was there.

A few days later, I was called into the battalion commander's office and given an air medal for having saved, you know, the lives of the people and the ship and all that,—

DANYOW: Wow.

JONES: —and congratulated. And as I was about to take my leave—and he said, "But you should have stayed with the aircraft." [Laughs.] I said to myself, *Are you kidding me? You paid how many millions to train me and get me through to this*

step and all that, and you want me to stay on the ground to get picked off by some guy in pajamas?

DANYOW: [Chuckles.]

JONES: I couldn't believe it, but I thought, *You know, there's a guy who's been sitting at a desk a little too long.*

DANYOW: Wow. So, I mean, these are—these are at least arguably even near-death experiences or very dangerous experiences that you're talking about, and it seems like—

JONES: Got my attention, yeah.

DANYOW: Yeah. In these three occasions, from what you've described, it sounds like in the moment, you almost didn't have time to react emotionally; it was all just training and solving the problem.

JONES: Exactly.

DANYOW: Did you ever kind of dwell on these situations more, like, at night or the times when you were less active? I mean, did it kind of concern you, looking back on them? I mean, some of these had been fairly close calls.

JONES: Years later, I probably sweated a little bit once or twice, but at the time, the next thing was on you too quickly, so there was no time to—to really think about things.

DANYOW: Fair enough.

JONES: Plus it was—you know, at least given the officer training and all of that, we just always had this sense that we had at least the crew on board, the people we were carrying and the rest of the folks who were going to fly with us the next day, who had to have confidence in us,—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —and trust us to know what we were doing. So it was—what's the quote about, you know, "War is"—you know—"an eon of boredom separated by, or punctuated by 15 seconds of terror"?

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: You know, that's—that's really what it was, except that the rest was not so boring, it was just on to the next thing.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: Because we were always understaffed, and we always flew a lot of hours a month and that sort of thing.

DANYOW: One thing—one more thing I'm curious about with this mission with the South Vietnamese Army: Was that common for you to cooperate with them and transport them around, or was that more an exception?

JONES: In the last six months it became increasingly common, and I think there was a period of what I think [President Richard M.] Nixon called the pacification program?

DANYOW: Mm-hm.

JONES: And so there was more time being spent, more troops being moved around, moved around by Americans in the south, or the III Corps area, which is not quite all the way south, but—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: So it was not every day, but it was at least a few times a week—

DANYOW: Sure, so it wasn't—

JONES: —when we were working with them—

DANYOW: —like that time was an exception compared to all the other missions you flew.

JONES: No. Nevertheless, I would say that the language barriers always remained pretty substantial hazards.

DANYOW: Another thing I'm curious about: You know, we're still, I think, relatively early in your time in Vietnam at this point?

JONES: No, that was more than halfway through,—

DANYOW: Oh, okay.

JONES: —that story I just told.

DANYOW: Okay. Well, either way, one thing I'm wondering about is—you know, at least in the early missions you were in the right seat; you were kind of still training on the job, effectively. Was there a set number of combat missions that you had to do before you became, like, a command pilot, if that's the right word, or was it more just—

JONES: Well, I think there was a minimum,—

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: —where, you know, you had to be—you had to ride with enough of the different aircraft commanders for them to form a judgment. And then, you know, everything else depended on your own performance and how things worked out on the missions.

DANYOW: Sure. And how far into your year in Vietnam that you became, you know, a command pilot?

JONES: [Sighs.]

DANYOW: I mean roughly.

JONES: Yeah. I don't really remember, but I would say probably by the third month.

DANYOW: Okay.

So, I mean, it sounds like you were flying, in many cases, multiple missions a day. You were doing a ton of these combat assaults, moving troops around. Did you ever have a sense of, you know, kind of what the big picture was in the area where you were operating? You know, *We're successfully containing Viet Cong*. Did you think about that? Were you briefed on that? Or was it more just: *We're bringing this group from here to there and that's what I'm focused on?*

JONES: There were a few of us who wanted to have that in the company, and we made that desire known, and we wanted to get access to whatever it was the company commander and people up the line knew, and pushed on it fairly hard. But I would say ultimately that we were unsuccessful because it was not possible to succeed in getting a big picture. The news, such as it was, came through Army filters

or at least Armed Forces filters, Armed Forces Vietnam Network.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: It wasn't as though our mail was censored. We could get sent newspapers and all that from home, and other things. But getting information that way was so thin, and I think we all got accustomed to the notion that while it was going on, we were never going to really understand what was happening and we were always going to be given a rosier picture of the circumstance than was true, but we had no way to get below that level and get more of the facts. And, you know, I think the same thing can be said [chuckles] of other American people during that period as well, —

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: —because there was just so much really concentrated, skillful deception going on.

DANYOW: Yeah. So, you know, in this kind of—let's just—I mean, let's say any given, you know, week or day when you were in Vietnam and, you know, flying. How often did you fly? Was it, you know, at least one mission a day? Was it regularly multiple per day? I mean, how long was a given mission, on average?

JONES: There was a lot of variation in each day's set of assignments. We were capped at 160 hours a month.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: Literally, since it's seven days a week, in theory we could only fly every so many days. You know, there was rarely more than one day off, but there would be days with no flying. Now, I had other duties as well. Eventually I became the operations officer for the company for about, oh, six months, and so I had to assign everybody else's missions—

DANYOW: Mm-hm.

JONES: —and follow up on everything that happened, all the maintenance and everything else.

The range of flight times during a day could be—I mean, there were some occasions, extreme occasions where it was 10, 12 hours. I mean, we were stuck out in constant refueling and going back out, because you only had about two hours maximum.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And then the short ones. Sometimes you could go off on a quick medevac [medical evacuation] run or something like that, and you'd be back in two hours. But it was almost every day. I finished the tour with just under 1,400 hours of combat assault time.

DANYOW: All in a year.

JONES: Yeah. And, you know, as I said, we were understaffed, so when necessary, you did what every team player does: You lie about your hours.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: But I think the burden wasn't necessarily shared. There was a mix of people, and some just felt more responsibility than others. And, you know, I think that was true of the commissioned officers. Warrant officers were there to do a job, which they did very well and very courageously and with incredible skill, but as a group, they were probably not inclined to go out of their way if they didn't have to.

DANYOW: I see. Talking about medevac missions, how often would you fly those, you know, relative to, say, a combat assault like you were talking about?

JONES: Personally, personally I didn't do it often because there were separate medevac units.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: But every once in a while, when you were in an area and one of the aircraft went down, you were the closest one, so you are absolutely responsible to go do something like that. I wouldn't say it was more than a dozen times.

- DANYOW: Okay. And, I mean, were any of those missions particularly difficult? I imagine it—you know, tough to, you know, see wounded people being loaded on board.
- JONES: Yeah. Well, I mean, the toughest one I can remember was when some friends went down in a gunship. We still don't know why, whether they were shot or the aircraft malfunctioned, but they just went down in some very deep cover, jungle cover, and it's no exaggeration to say that there are 100- to 200-foot treetop levels because of the vines and everything else that grow up in certain areas there, so there was a Cobra down well below the tree lines, and we couldn't tell whether the guys were alive or not. So I took the chance, with some other guns flying around to provide support, of getting right down on top of the trees. And my crew chief had the balls to—excuse me—the courage to go down on a line and try to open the cockpit windows—
- DANYOW: Wow.
- JONES: —and see if he could get anything out of them. It turns out they were both dead. But we did our best to try and pull them out, if anything could be done.
- DANYOW: So, I mean, just to clarify: So he was effectively hanging 100 feet or more down as you were hovering right on top of the trees?
- JONES: We got him closer than that. And the aircraft actually couldn't go all the way to the floor.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: It was caught in branches and so on, so he probably went down 50 feet or something like that, on a sling—you know, a motorized sling—
- DANYOW: Yeah.
- JONES: —so we could pull him back up.
- DANYOW: That's till quite a risk, though.
- JONES: Yeah.
- DANYOW: Wow.

And, you know, another thing I'm curious about in this period is, you know, how—can you talk a little bit more about what you did when you weren't flying and what some of your duties were? I know you mentioned you became operations officer eventually, but, you know, some of the responsibilities you had before that.

JONES: I actually had a stint as motor pool officer, and I couldn't get rid of that [chuckles] fast enough. And I tried to be as friendly and helpful as possible to the company commander so he would put the next-newest person who showed up into the role.

But, no, we would all have little stints, doing some of the paperwork that had to accompany—tracking every mission: who was on it, what the hours were spent—you know, what maintenance was done, and ordering parts and—

DANYOW: Just to clarify—sorry. A motor pool officer? So there were, you know, ground vehicles as part of the aviation company?

JONES: Not many. Not many. [Chuckles.] But you had to have enough to go back and forth and haul equipment:—

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: —parts and things like that that.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: And, you know, we probably had three or four Jeeps, three or four trucks, a couple of these Mules [U.S. Military M274 trucks], these little flatbeds with little wheels and so on.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: So it wasn't much at all. We might have had one large covered truck where we could haul people around. But, no, it was nothing significant except that they were always all broken. [Both chuckle.] You were stealing parts from one to make the other run.

DANYOW: And as a, say, second lieutenant early in your time there, how many men were under your command directly? Was it just the crew of your helicopter, or was it other men as well, or how did that kind of work?

- JONES: I think the—in an aircraft company, you have the company commander and the executive officer, and they're usually a major and a captain.
- DANYOW: Yeah.
- JONES: When I got to Vietnam, I was a first lieutenant, and I became a captain during the year. But we didn't really have platoons that included enlisted people and other officers and so on. It's just not how the organization worked in an aircraft company as it would have in an infantry unit.
- DANYOW: Right. That's what I'm trying to—
- JONES: So to the extent that I, quote, "had command," it would only have been the people on the aircraft at the time.
- DANYOW: Okay.
- JONES: And then I had, you know, complete authority. But other than that, you know, it was always a matter of trying to make things happen using the best human psychology you could, because let's face it, we had an awful lot of disaffected people who were there against their will and were not all that pleased to—
- DANYOW: Would you mind elaborating a little bit more on that, on, you know, potential conflicts that arose with disgruntled enlisted people and how you essentially dealt with them?
- JONES: Like all units—well, I shouldn't say "all units." Like many units who were under high stress at that point during the conflict—was roughly halfway through—you know, there was a lot of availability of various types of drugs and certainly plenty of alcohol around. And so the people who had the least control over their own fates and who felt as though they were being manipulated by the great machine—and that included everybody in the company who was giving them orders—
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: —they were not inclined to perform very well. So I think we knew from the beginning that we were not going to get where we needed to be just by yelling and screaming and trying to impose discipline and all of that. We had to try to get to these people—

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: —and make them pull their weight in some fashion or make them interested in pulling their weight, make them interested in the people around them. And maybe it worked in a third of the cases. And the others, we just—we just had to work around.

DANYOW: I know you mentioned you had studied psychology and sociology at Dartmouth. Did any of—I mean, did any of that coursework relate? Did you think about it when you were trying to deal with these people?

JONES: No, we were studying pretty much theoretical things: laboratory work and, you know, all the greats and—you know, survey courses and so on, so—

DANYOW: I was just curious.

JONES: It was kind of just stealing ideas from each other and being practical.

DANYOW: So another thing I'm kind of curious about during this—I mean, in some sense a kind of a grind of flying missions relatively continuously—is, you know (a) did it kind of, you know, wear you out mentally or physically and (b) did you ever get any chances for, you know, leave or liberty? I think you mentioned you went to Hawaii at one point, but I don't know if that was during this year or later.

JONES: No, that was a little more than halfway through. Everyone was entitled to I think two weeks, which you could take in two one-week pieces or all at once. And everyone did. And so I spent about ten days in Hawaii with my wife.

DANYOW: Mm-hm.

JONES: But other than that, believe it or not, we tried to have some kind of camaraderie and a little bit of social life. Unfortunately, like some other places I can mention, it involved too much alcohol and, you know, listening to rock 'n' roll and telling stories about the world, as everybody referred to back home in the U.S.

DANYOW: Yes.

JONES: But, no, there was definitely a certain amount of time during most days when you could try to build esprit and just friendships and comradeship. I mean, you had to do it; otherwise, there would have been no survival. You'd have all been, like, full metal jacket wackos.

DANYOW: Right. Yeah. Can you elaborate a little more on that? I mean, are there any memories of particularly funny incidents that happened, you know, socializing at the base or anything like that?

JONES: Nothing particular comes to mind. I mean, the truth of the matter is if we were going to have any kind of social entity at all, we had to make it ourselves. So I guess this sort of might pass for a sort of funny thing: The way of life for most companies over there and in spades for, you know, like, the Cav was to scrounge everything. You know, that was a technical military term for trading things.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: So we needed—we wanted to build ourselves a little officers' club. We had no materials. But there were engineers [chuckles] on base, so we would trade transportation, for them to get back and forth to the various things they wanted to do, for construction materials. [Chuckles.] So they would send over concrete and board feet of lumber, roofing material and all that, and people within the company who were clever enough, who were carpenters, who knew something about design built a structure around a living tree—[Laughter.]—with a hole in the top so the tree could continue to grow. And we ended up—I don't know how some of the people—and, of course, the invariable response is, "Don't ask." But they actually found a juke box, a Wurlitzer kind of juke box that they installed in there.

We could somehow manage to come up with any amount and type of alcohol. We all had our girlfriends back in the States sending us every 45 [rpm] record they could put their hands on, because that's what we played on the juke box—to spend those couple of nights remembering what it was like to be not a soldier.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: But I remember [chuckles]—remember one silly event, when—and I have to confess I was involved in it. We loaded Huey up with—floor to ceiling with pallets of beer, and we flew them down south to a port called Vung Tau, where the Navy was set up, and I think we landed on seaplane tender. And they offloaded all the beer because apparently the Navy couldn't get beer, or so we were led to believe.

DANYOW: Right.,

JONES: And in its place, they put case upon case of steaks. [Laughs.] So we had a day or two of barbecue back in our base—

DANYOW: Wow.

JONES: —through that kind of trading operation. How these things ever come up—who knows somebody—is just like probably would be done on campus now. You know, somebody down at Yale [University],

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —who has something that you want, and you have something he wants. But it's just old network activities that must have done it. But some of those things were quite silly.

DANYOW: It seems remarkable to me: You're talking about being able to, like, obtain that much beer, for example. Was this—I mean, presumably—Army supplied—

JONES: Yes.

DANYOW: —alcohol?

JONES: Yes.

DANYOW: That just seems odd to me, that they would be shipping that much alcohol through a combat zone.

JONES: Doesn't it?

DANYOW: It seems slightly counterproductive, but it sounds like it was pretty common, which is—

JONES: Of course, I can only speak about the Cav.

- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: But I never detected anything like a shortage of alcohol.
- DANYOW: Was there ever an issue of, you know, say, among the officers, of people not performing, being, like, too hung over to fly, or were people pretty careful of that? You know, moderating themselves.
- JONES: [Sighs.] We were all very young. I mean, I was 23 years old when I was flying there.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: So the ability to bounce back from immoderate behavior was much better than it is at my time of life now.
- DANYOW: Fair enough.
- JONES: So I think mostly people, at least the pilots—I can't remember a case of a person, you know, refusing to fly because he wasn't well enough. And at the same time, I can't imagine that someone would have flown and put others at risk.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: So I think it was controlled to that extent. I can't say the same about the enlisted people, but their lives were so much more miserable. What we asked those people to go through during that war is—is difficult to justify.
- DANYOW: Yeah. And we can certainly get to a point to talk about that more later. That's definitely one of the things I want to get your views on.
- Another thing I'm interested in hearing about: You know, at this point, there was—you know, about logistics and maintenance. I mean, did you find that it was generally easy to keep them running in good condition? Were the maintenance people good? Were parts available when you needed them? Or were there difficulties with that?
- JONES: No, there were difficulties. And we had a certain number of aircraft assigned to the company, of which I vaguely remember that 20 percent could not be flown on any one day

because they were waiting for certain materials, parts and so on, to be put back into airworthy shape.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: Aircraft commanders had the very strong responsibility to inspect almost everything and what we called red X an aircraft or a system in an aircraft if it couldn't do certain things. And no one played games with that—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —unless it was an absolute, utter, you know, life-or-death emergency.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And, of course, we had regular standards of periodic maintenance, so after every I think 25 or maybe it was 50 hours. It had a certain level of inspection after 100 hours, and it a higher level inspection after 1,000 hours, even more. But we didn't get many new aircraft, and we were always waiting for critical parts.

DANYOW: What about the—you know, the ground crews? Were they generally proficient? Did you get along well with them? I mean, did you trust their work most of the time?

JONES: Yes. But, like any reasonably large, complex organization, the range of skill was something you had to pay attention to.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: You would always want certain people looking over and/or doing the work. And if you saw that someone else was assigned to it, you looked at it more than once and were much more careful.

DANYOW: Hmm. And were you assigned—as a pilot, were you assigned a specific helicopter and, like, ground crew? Or was it just kind of a communal pool of aircraft and mechanics and you just signed up—

JONES: It was a mix. I flew a lot of different ones. Some of the people—a fellow I met who's living in California now, just

about a month ago—seems to think he flew one almost all the time. And that was not my circumstance.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: Of course, I got to assign them, too, so I probably didn't want to fly the same turkey aircraft more than two weeks. [Chuckles.] I don't think anyone else did, either. [Chuckles.]

DANYOW: So, now—I mean, if we can move now to kind of, say, the second half of your time there in country. You know, what exactly transpired for you to become operations officer of the company, and can you describe a little bit, you know, what responsibilities that entailed?

JONES: You know, much more information about that would be available from the people who were responsible for the decisions. The senior people in the company actually changed about four times while I was there, which was a little odd, because they were all on one-year tours.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: At least one of them was killed. I think an executive officer was also killed. But there were three other company commanders. One was there for quite a while. He was a black fellow. And while he was—you know, he had wings. He didn't fly much, but he flew with me a lot as copilot, and I think he also got the readouts from all of the other folks who were responsible for my training and flying with me, under me and all of that. I don't know, he somehow became convinced I was the best thing he had in the company, and the operations officer was probably the most critical job after company commander. Even the executive officer usually did a lot of humdrum nonsense.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: So I had his confidence. So he decided to try me out. You know, again, it was not unlike the situation I think I described [chuckles] at my induction, when I was still feeling as though, *This is as miserable as it gets, and the guy's now asking me to take on another six hours of work a day and all that. But if there's anything I can do to turn this into a kind of resurrection from the ashes, what else have I got to do? I mean, here I am.*

You know, and another thing that happens to you when you're in that situation for, well, some amount of time, and every individual will vary—it becomes your family. I mean, these are the people you—[He could not complete the sentence because he was overcome with emotion.] If you're asked to take care of them, you will.

DANYOW: Absolutely. That makes sense.

Would you like to take a moment, or—

JONES: Yeah, I'm good.

DANYOW: Okay.

And so I guess thinking a little bit more about—as operations officer. You mentioned earlier that one of the main things was determining who was going to fly on a given day, say? I guess I'm curious: You know, were there other specific responsibilities for that position?

JONES: Well, there's matching who to what.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: So you couldn't just—I mean, you had to rotate people so that the risk was spread and the kinds of difficult versus easy versus dangerous versus totally boring missions were rotated.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: But you also had to know who you could count on when you knew you had a bad situation or a very stressful situation or you were going to have to do a lot more with a lot less. And, you know, who could hang in there? Who could pull it off? And we were often, of course, not just operating as one company but had to coordinate with the two other Slick companies or assault helicopter companies. There was only one gunship company and one aerial rocket artillery company. We all worked with them.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: But every once in a while, we'd have to work with, oh, 12, 18 aircraft from different companies under our control, or we

would be under theirs, depending on, you know, the particular area the mission was happening. But some of them were really large.

DANYOW: Right.

One thing I noticed in your response on the Dartmouth Vietnam Project website is you mentioned you received something like 54 different air medals for various actions there.

JONES: Well [chuckles], they're not really different, and I—let me just be very clear about what that means.

DANYOW: Sure. I mean, that's all—

JONES: There was simply a system of awarding recognition for a quantity of flying of a certain type of combat assault missions, so they would give you an air medal for every 25 hours of combat assault—25, 35, whatever it was; some number of combat assault hours. And I had so many that they just kept piling on—well, you get the first air medal, you know, which is a little thing in a case, a little green thing that you put on your uniform.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: And then after that, they give you what are called oak leaf clusters, which is just a repetition of the whole thing.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: So I had 54 or 53 oak leaf clusters on the original air medals—

DANYOW: Was that impossible to wear on a uniform?

JONES: —from combat. Oh, no. You'd get—one oak leaf cluster was one color, like a silver or a bronze, I guess. And then 10 were silver,—

DANYOW: Oh, I see.

JONES: —and then 50 was gold [chuckles] or 20 was gold or something, so you just put the little tacks on your green thingie, but, you know, that was hardly a unique circumstance.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: It was just a reflection of how much time I spent—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —on certain missions.

DANYOW: But you said earlier you were also awarded one for that mission where you were able to land the helicopter after the rag had been sucked into the—

JONES: Right.

DANYOW: Were there any others that were awarded for specific incidents like that, or—

JONES: I was given a Bronze Star.

DANYOW: I was going to ask about that, too.

JONES: And I can't actually remember now whether that was for an incident or just for the totality of service, because it came late in the—in the process.

DANYOW: Okay. So you don't remember a specific mission associated with that.

JONES: I am pretty sure there was not. I think it was just for—I mean, I probably did fly more than and more dangerous missions and more complex missions than other people in my company, possibly in the battalion, but, no, there was not a day. There were no heroics or anything like that. It was just a—

DANYOW: You were certainly there long enough to justify it. I mean, the number of missions we're talking about it is extremely impressive, from my perspective.

JONES: Well, that was sort of the Cav. And I ultimately learned what they were warning me about [laughs], being assigned to the Cav.

DANYOW: Yeah. You know, we were talking a little bit earlier about, you know, receiving hostile fire. How common was it for you to be, you know, shot at or for your helicopter to be hit? Is that

something that happened frequently, or was it only once or twice?

JONES: Rarely hit.

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: Rarely hit. And most of the hits did the same thing that I mentioned before. They punctured fuel tanks, which were self-sealing, so something that didn't even matter, and you could continue the mission. But we were shot at—I think no less than weekly we would have an encounter of some of that. It did seem to happen more at night, and some of the night missions—

You know, you asked me about something funny before, and I actually just remembered another funny thing. This was in July, mid-July, around my birthday, actually. And there was a need for what we called psy ops mission, psychological operations?

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: And what this amounted to in the Cav, which is, I'm sure, very different from most parts of the Army and other services, was putting a very large bank of loudspeakers in the bay area of the helicopter, pointing out in both directions, and then some guy would get on with a good-sized, battery-operated tape recorder, and the tapes that were on—these little reel tapes that spin around—were all the sounds of wailing, unburied Vietnamese souls, who had been killed and not buried. And so the idea was to crank up the helicopter at night and fly up and down the rivers—the Mekong and all of the others that were going through the area—and play these things for hours, the belief being—and I don't know who made this stuff up, but it's just—you know, I think they even included it in certain of the movies. I don't think it was in [*The*] *Deer Hunter* or *Apocalypse Now*. It might have been. But we would play those things for hours on end, on the belief that it would make whoever the enemy forces were there more likely to surrender. If they ever got a single soul to walk in [chuckles] out of the bushes from doing that, I'd be shocked, and I wouldn't believe it. But we actually did assign those missions, at least during the non-monsoon season, when you could fly at night fairly frequently.

So anyway, I couldn't put that on anyone else, so I decided I would take it. And we were going up and down, making as much noise as we can, and flying back and forth and just getting bored. And, of course, to drown it out, we're tuning into the Armed Forces Radio [sic; Vietnam] Network, AFVN, on our—well, the equivalent of an AM radio. I forget which frequency it was that we could actually receive this stuff. But we're listening to all the '60s rock 'n' roll records and all that while the wails are being played in the background. And, of course, we can always be interrupted by the radios.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And all of a sudden, there's all this radio chatter on what we called the guard frequency. This is a reserved radio frequency for emergencies, and that's always kept open, and no one uses it except someone going down or in a bad situation.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: But all of a sudden, there's an explosion of chatter. And I'm trying to tell what they're talking about, so we turn off all the other radios, and it's the night that—I'm blocking out the name of the moon landing—occurs.

DANYOW: Oh.

JONES: And it's happening—

DANYOW: Right, 1969, yeah.

JONES: —right in the middle of the night, right. And all the different pilots from the different forces are talking about how “It had to be a Navy guy.” “No, it had to have Air Force training.” [Chuckles.] “No, he had to have some helicopter training to be able to put it down.” But at any rate, this went on for about 10 or 15 minutes [chuckles] at the moment of the landing. So that was my connection to the world.

DANYOW: And that was on the emergency frequency.

JONES: Right.

DANYOW: That they were using that for.

- JONES: Fortunately, it stopped quickly, but it was—it was pretty funny.
- DANYOW: Now, one thing I have to ask after that anecdote: Where do you get a recording of wailing souls? Was it, like, something they recorded with instruments or is it, like, a traditional, like,—
- JONES: It was just, like, a traditional Vietnamese opera singer,—
- DANYOW: Oh, okay.
- JONES: —who, you know, I mean they were part of dramatic recordings or something, but they were, you know, filtered down not to have any dialogue or anything else. They were just moans and groans.
- DANYOW: Interesting.
- JONES: It was horrible.
- DANYOW: Yeah, that doesn't seem like the best tactic, but I'm no expert.
- So, I mean, thinking now, you know, towards, say, your last couple, you know, months in Vietnam, did anything kind of, you know, change in your attitude towards, you know, being apprehensive about, say, being shot down before you could get to leave, or was anything like that in your mind?
- JONES: There was always some talk about that.
- DANYOW: Yeah.
- JONES: There's a term called short-timer, which means someone who's down to—
- DANYOW: Yeah.
- JONES: —the last week—month or so of—and so everybody thought: This is time to be a little more careful, not to volunteer for anything really stupid and so on. But almost everyone came to the same conclusion. You would just drive yourself crazy if you tried to become avoidant. You just had to do everything you normally did. And, you know, it was very rare that, you know, these tragedies would happen, where someone was a few days from going home—

- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: —and managed to have a bad accident, so—now, if—it was nothing more than some talk, usually around a can of beer.
- DANYOW: Sure. Now, another thing I have to ask about is how—I mean, if you don't mind talking about it—how severe was the attrition rate for your unit? Because you mentioned going through four commanding officers, at least one of which was a—I mean, was it—was it, you know, constant for helicopters to go down? Was it relatively rare? Was it somewhere in between?
- JONES: Well, it was certainly constant throughout the theater.
- DANYOW: Yeah.
- JONES: And it was, you know, talked about as one of the most dangerous, short-lived jobs anywhere.
- DANYOW: Yeah.
- JONES: All of us who were decent pilots always held in the back of our minds the idea that, well, skill plays a huge amount of the determination of who does something they shouldn't do, who flies the aircraft badly, who flies an aircraft that shouldn't be flown.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: So we all ended up believing that we had some control over that. There is a record. There's actually a website that maintains a lot of the records for the company that I was assigned to, and there is an explicit count of the people who did not return.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: During 1969, a rough guess was—would be about eight pilots and an equal number of crew. And, of course, we didn't have ground troops.
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: We did have support troops that ran the mess halls and all that, but they were never in the air.

- DANYOW: Not in combat.
- JONES: Every once in a while,—I mean, one of the fun parts of being in a rubber plantation is in their brilliance, the Army decided to defoliate all the area around the rubber plantation, but that just made it easy, under the cover of darkness, for the Viet Cong, mostly, maybe some RBF [reconnaissance by fire], to come in with mortars and just pepper the base all night long, the fire base, with mortars. So almost every night we would be running—we also had to dig our own bunkers, which were these trenches underground covered with planks and sandbags. Almost every night we were running for the bunkers, only to get up the next morning and find out that the real target was to blast the aircraft, which they did pretty regularly [chuckles]. So we probably lost a person or two in those nighttime attacks, but in a company that averaged about 110 to 120 people, I don't think there were any more than 15 or 16 casualties during the time I was there.
- DANYOW: Okay.
- JONES: Now, I may find I need to correct that in either direction if I look at the website, but—
- DANYOW: I was interested as much in, you know, your perception of it at the time as much as, you know, what the actual loss statistics were, because I think that's important, too.
- JONES: Well, one of the things that we all felt strongly about was that the casualties, to a person, were not caused by hostile fire. They were caused by failure of logistics,—
- DANYOW: Wow.
- JONES: —badly maintained aircraft, flukes. Decent pilots—I don't remember a single one where, you know, the conclusion reached later was, "Boy, that was the stupidest thing anyone's ever done." It was, "God, that's the most unlucky circumstance that anyone could face."
- DANYOW: Right.
- JONES: So these losses were—except for their need to be there at all, they had nothing to do with the alleged hostile action we were—they were supposedly there to engage in.

DANYOW: Huh. Interesting.

So one thing I haven't really asked you about yet but I'd like to hear a little bit about now is, you know, over the course of your time there, what was your perception of, you know, the validity of the larger war effort? Were you, you know, already somewhat opposed to the war? Obviously, you're an officer. You have your orders. You have to do your duty. But, you know, personally, I mean just a few guys, you know, talking over beer at night, did you question the war at this point?

JONES: Sure. Constantly.

DANYOW: You did.

JONES: Yeah. I think more so when there was at least a tiny amount of [chuckles] leisure to think.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: Because most of the early times were really concentrated on survival and understanding what it was to regain some control.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: But after a while, what news we could get was I think uniformly denounced as bullshit, whether it was [President Lyndon B.] Johnson or Nixon or [Secretary of Defense Melvin] Laird or any of the others, [General William C.] Westmoreland. It was pretty clear that if you were to generalize from our day-to-day activities, we were doing nothing but playing defense. We were accomplishing nothing. Of course, there was no ground to take, but we were just moving around, spending enormous amounts of money and blood treasure and—nothing. Only to have it change again. So there was never any feeling that we were getting anywhere. And, of course, we were all aware of the corruption in the South Vietnamese government and how that was being swept under the rug.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: So, no, it was I think more a matter, for most of us, that because there was nothing we could really do about it that

would be effective—I mean, we could make some hollow gesture of protest and have no impact—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —our main job was to get through a situation we did not choose to be in and deal with that kind of problem as a much more systemic social issue when we had the means to do that.

DANYOW: That makes sense.

You know, thinking before, when you mentioned how, in the latter half of your time there, you began to cooperate more with South Vietnamese troops, did your interactions with them feed that realization that, you know, the South Vietnamese state was larger corrupt and that their army was, you know, often ineffective?

JONES: Unfortunately not, because we didn't have the control over that communication. We were the truck drivers for the infantry, who really ran the Cav, so they took care of all of those relationships and negotiations, —

DANYOW: Okay.

JONES: —and we were just asked to come and pick them up and pull them out and move them around, resupply and that sort of thing. There was no influence at all, and, you know, I think we were aware that it was happening because of major policy changes that were being pushed down through—but in terms of understanding the details and having any direct impact, none.

DANYOW: Okay. It was just something I was curious about.

So I guess now it makes sense to talk about, you know, leaving Vietnam. Can you just kind of walk me through what you remember from your final few days in country and what it was like to leave your unit and ultimately how you traveled back to the U.S.?

JONES: Well, the pattern for everyone who came and went was that everyone in the company was thrilled to wave goodbye to everyone who left, so there were no emotions, no difficult issues. I'm sure there were some people there who actually

loved what they were doing and they were not in a hurry to leave, and some of them went back one more time,—

DANYOW: Mm-hm.

JONES: —possibly twice. But for the most part, everyone waited for their day. The company commander, who I had a good relationship with, did cut down my flying quite a lot in the last ten days, to almost nothing. So that was pretty uneventful. Packing up. There was really not much to pack, a few uniforms and [chuckles]—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —and hop on the plane back home, ultimately to meet my wife in Boston.

DANYOW: Did you get some leave initially when you first got back?

JONES: Yeah, there were I think three weeks, possibly a little more than that, but that time was partly taken up by another concern, great concern because my orders that I received as soon as I got home were to be sent back as an engineer to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, the place I probably hated most of all my experiences so far.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: So I began writing letters to a list of people whom I was told could have some influence on that choice, explaining my family situation, aging parents and grandparents and so on and how being that far away from New England was going to be a hardship; was there a possibility I could be assigned somewhere closer. And happily a couple of weeks later I got altered orders to go to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. So that was a tense period, but,—you know, I almost wish I had some of the pictures here that—during that leave, over Christmas, my wife almost couldn't stop laughing because I had gone out to clothes stores in Providence and bought a bunch of clothes that looked like what people were wearing [chuckles] who were not in the military, which I had never owned before. So I, you know, clearly, all of a sudden was ready to be reintegrated with the rest of the country.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: —and not to remain in the military, even though I knew I had over two years left.

DANYOW: And so, from what you wrote online, it sounds like you spent the remainder of your military commitment teaching at this engineering school?

JONES: Yes.

DANYOW: A question that raised for me is: Basically, why weren't you instructing at Army flight school? You know, it sounds like you were a phenomenal helicopter pilot, by all the accounts of, you know, your company commander and all that. Was that by choice that you wanted to teach engineering over flying?

JONES: No. Actually, the assignment to Fort Belvoir was just what the order generators knew, but I guess if I were to make a bet on the true explanation for why I wasn't assigned to a flight school, is that no one really had any idea what was in the records, so once my—you know, my dossier got to [Washington] D.C. or wherever it was that all these things were being handled, I was just a name and a number and, you know, a branch affiliation: Corps of Engineers.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And it may be that even by then, they thought: We do actually have enough helicopter pilots, and so we're not going to be training as many, and they may even have started to close down some aspects of both schools.

DANYOW: That makes sense.

JONES: But I don't know that. I'm sort of making that up now. But—

DANYOW: Sure. No, that seems—

JONES: —it does seem reasonable since, by 1973, they were throwing helicopters off ships into the ocean.

DANYOW: Right. Were there any notable experiences that stick out during your time teaching at the engineering school, or was it mostly just kind of mundane, day to day?

JONES: Again, by good fortune I fell in with a good, talented group of people who weren't really invested in the military except for the unit head, who was a lifer. There might have been one or two who intended to stay, maybe not for an entire career, but the rest of us were just finishing out our assignments. But they were all smart, and we worked hard at doing a very good job. And I almost brought them along, but I have, like, a stack of papers an inch and a half thick, which are letters of commendation from the commanding general and all the people around for the scores that we had gotten from the student evaluations in our instruction, which was recognized as *the* dullest subject [chuckles] in all of the engineers school. So we had spiced it up as best we could and tried to do a good job. But that was really a nine to five job.

DANYOW: Sure. Very different from what you'd been doing.

JONES: Oh, absolutely. And it gave me time to take some courses at Washington area universities and begin to get—to plan on seeing if I could make the return here.

DANYOW: Was there any—yeah, I really want to talk about that, but before we get back to Dartmouth, was there anything you found difficult about coming from, you know, being in a pretty intense combat zone and coming back to, as you described, still military but basically a nine to five job? Was there anything hard to adjust in that for you?

JONES: Fortunately, at the engineers school there wasn't very much Mickey Mouse. You know, I got to fly my minimum flying hours a month to keep my flight pay and do those other kinds of things, and, you know, the instructional faculty and administrators were—were good folks. I think if there were any difficulties, it would have been the process of making the transition to leave it behind and wanting to do it a little faster. And also, you know, I had to keep my hair cut fairly short and all of that, and yet I wanted to go down and participate in the protests, which were happening in the D.C. area regularly.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: You saw some of the photos in the thing there.

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: Because by that time, I was absolutely and thoroughly persuaded that this had all been *the* biggest mistake of my lifetime. I mean, not my *being* involved but the fact that the country had slid into this and justified it and sold it to the American people. I no longer believed that to be true, thanks to [President] George W. Bush and his Iraq and Afghanistan invasions, but at the time it was.

DANYOW: Fair enough.

So can you know walk me through coming back to Dartmouth and, you know, first how you got approval to come back and then what it was like coming back as a student after having had some, let's say, experiences that were very different from what the majority of people on campus then would have had?

JONES: Well, I had no very clear idea what to expect. I'd talked to a dean who outlined the process and said I would have to write a letter that included whatever documentation I thought would support the case for resumption, which I did. I met with a committee, and I think within a very short time, they approved the readmission. And this must have been in around July or August, maybe a little earlier, of '71. And then, because I was expected to resume studies in—I guess September was when the starting date was back then—

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: -maybe October—I actually got dismissed from the Army a couple of months early, compared to my actual commitment, in order to permit that. Now, of course, I'd been married since '68, so we moved back, got a rental house in White River Junction. My wife got a job at a local research organization, not in her field but something she could do. She had finished her M.A. at Brown while I was away.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And I just dove back into course taking. I had no social life with students whatsoever—I mean, except in classes, and, you know, I got to know them—

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES:— —quite well. But, of course, I was now sort of on track for the graduating Class of '73, not '68.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And I decided I was going to try to minimize the amount of time that I had left, so I had some things to make up and did some coursework during the summer. Did a little bit of RA [resident adviser] work, but mostly I made my living as a musician for three or four years. But I was fortunate to meet some people in the government department, including one fellow who is not there anymore; left probably in the late '70s to take over as headmaster of one of the prep schools [chuckles] in Mass., and I can't remember now whether it was—which one it was. But at any rate, [Donald W.] "Don" McNemar was I think raised as a Quaker, and he was one of the first who had gone through some programs at Princeton [University] in what was then known as peace research. And it was basically all about international relations and conflict resolution in a way that would reduce the likelihood of armed hostilities.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: And I thought that was probably something I could head toward and do graduate work in international relations and so on. So I spent a lot of time with him and with everyone else in the government department and with a fellow named [Richard F.] "Dick" Winters, who I don't think is still around. But I learned from him how to analyze data—you know, election surveys and other things like that. So I gradually got back into social sciences and quantitative analysis of social data, such as it was in the early '70s.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: Ended up taking on—I forget what the term for it was back then, but a sort of a senior project that I designed to study the impact of fear-inducing communications on people's attitudes toward nuclear deterrents. So [chuckles] I talked several professors into allowing me to survey their students three times. And I had a treatment group and a control group set up. They were self-selected into, you know, American government, foreign relations or IR [international relations]. And I knew that the IR people were going to be shown a film,

a British film about the devastation of nuclear attacks, and it was a horrific film for its day. It's still running. You can still see it today.

DANYOW: Mm-hm.

JONES: But it always caused a very strong reaction and made even the most hard-line, you know, nuclear proponents start to think twice. And I was interested in just what sort of effect—whether it would have lasting effects on anyone. And, of course, my only subjects were college-age students, so [chuckles]—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: I did a beginning of course survey with a 25-page questionnaire—I mean, these were all half sheets, and they were all very simple things to answer. And then something like three or four weeks into the course, they showed the movie, and I went back—and I used the same timing for the U.S. government—the foreign relations people who had seen the film; the American government had not.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And then, at the last day of classes, I returned one more time and did the survey again. Analyzed the data to show that the film did indeed cause a *massive* change in attitudes but that it drifted back off, over time, but not back to zero. People were still significantly more negative of the deterrence concept and how it worked or how it was implemented.

DANYOW: Interesting. Let's take one more short break.

[Recording interruption.]

DANYOW: Okay, starting back up here. So we were just talking with Mr. Jones about arriving back at Dartmouth after the conclusion of his military service. You know, one thing I want to talk about a little bit more specifically is, you know, your status as a veteran. Is that something, you know, other students were aware of? Did you, you know, openly talk to other students

about it, or was it something you felt necessary to conceal? I mean, what was your experience with that?

JONES: I didn't mention it except in answers to questions. I think in social conversation it would turn out that I was older than most of the others and married and so on.

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: So if asked what explained that, I wouldn't hide anything. There was nothing I was, you know, feeling in any way should be concealed or not discussed. But I didn't have any particular need to bring it up. I was primarily focused on moving forward, past it, seeing [chuckles] if I could find a way to erase five years that I would rather have not happened. And I think it took many more years, when I was in graduate school or well beyond that and into a career, before I began to finally become comfortable with reintegrating what had happened. I still, again, don't tend to tell people about it unless there's some specific reason in the context of a conversation, —

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: —because it's personally important, but it's usually not at all important in too many interactions with others. At the time, I didn't seek out or have interactions with the small number of other veterans who had returned. I wasn't trying to avoid them. I just really didn't want to spend any time on those sorts of matters.

DANYOW: Hmm.

JONES: And when I was back, there was also a good deal of continuing antiwar protest. The war had not ended, by any means. Nixon was running for reelection. The whole Watergate issue blew up.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: At that point, it was just confirmation of what I felt I knew all along about the corruption of the administration and most of the people who had participated in the prior four years, so I thought at that point, again, my strategy should be to focus on the future, completing undergraduate and graduate education and then getting down to business, on reflecting

on it all, and if there was anything to be done about it, and, as I said, I thought I was headed toward possibly some sort of academic career in peace research, that would be the way to do it.

And in the meantime, as I had mentioned before, I made my living as a musician. I met some Dartmouth graduates from a few years even before—I mean, I think they were Class of '67 or '66 or earlier, '5, even. And we played music in the area and socialized, and so I had relatively little to do with students when I came back. But there were a few whom I got to know quite well, and several of the faculty, I got fairly close to.

And that was much more interesting to me, developing future connections—

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: —and faculty connections, finding out what their life was like and a good way to make that happen and make it sustainable for a long period of time.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: That was where my interest was then.

DANYOW: That makes sense for a 24- or 25-year-old, as opposed to, you know, an 18- or 19-year-old, which other students would have been.

JONES: Fortunately, the G.I. Bill [Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944] was reasonably generous in those days, so I did not have to rely on Dartmouth or any other institution for support. I made my living, and I appreciated those after-the-fact educational benefits and went on from there.

DANYOW: Yeah. Absolutely. Were you involved in any sort of protest activity while you were here on campus or were more just aware that it was going on?

JONES: Not on campus. I had been in the D.C. area,—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —but I don't recall a single instant of it. I do recall that at that point—I had conversations [chuckles] with my wife and myself about trying to reach a point of greater objectivity about the whole situation and remaining more distant from it. That may in fact have been just a compensation mechanism because I wasn't really ready to engage back with it quite so soon. But, no, I did not seek out any involvement, especially any kind of visible or leadership involvement in any of those activities.

DANYOW: Fair enough.

So I guess next, do you mind kind of walking through, you know, your experience graduating from here and then what you proceeded to do in the year or few years immediately after graduation?

JONES: Mm-hm. I applied to a series of graduate programs with my wife during the last year here, '72-'73, and she was in the humanities, in English, and, of course, I was in politics and government and international relations. We didn't do very well on overlapping on places where we were accepted. I wanted—I thought I wanted to go to [University of California,] Berkeley, and she didn't get a good offer there. She wanted to go to other places, where—I'm not even remembering now. But the best place we both were accepted was the University of Chicago, so I thought we were going to go there the very next year.

We had lived in a few communities, in rental properties in the Upper [Connecticut River] Valley, and we both just loved the area, and we weren't quite ready to leave that summer, especially given everything we'd heard about Chicago from some good friends who had done graduate work there,—

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: —so we decided to take one more year and live around here, so I continued to play music, she continued to work, and we stayed here until '74 before we headed off to the Midwest.

DANYOW: Okay. And, I mean, can you talk a little bit about what being a grad student there was like?

JONES: It wasn't long before I concluded that I didn't make a great choice. The two people I most wanted to work with there were both professors in American politics and highly quantitative, and it was their methodology rather than their subject area I was most interested in, because they were both doing very good things. They hated each other. They would not get along. Each was trying to push the other out, and I ended up being a little closer to one of them, and the other succeeded in pushing that one out of UofC to another institution. And I was pretty angry.

I also found that in a lot of the other areas, especially the international relations area, the faculty was much more under the sway of the realpolitik generation and the, you know, [Leo] Strauss and [Joseph] Cropsey crowd, who I did not see eye to eye with ideologically. I was moving to the left, and Chicago was not a good place to be, either in politics or economics or most of the other social disciplines.

So I gradually drifted away from studies there, and I had worked part time at an organization called the National Opinion Research Center. This was affiliated with the University of Chicago, even though it had been founded in Denver, but it was housed at the university. And I had been working on surveys, behavioral studies, large-scale—in fact, contract research for federal agencies: longitudinal studies on education and labor, a variety of other things.

And it turned out that I had something of a knack for doing that as well and ended up being offered a job there and being promoted quite quickly, so I decided I would give up on the graduate work and concentrate on developing that organization, which was a pretty small organization at the time, maybe three to four million in annual revenues. And a new crop of us who were hired at around the same time got engaged with some of the specialists there, and we grew the company to a forty to forty-five million dollar business in, like, three years.

DANYOW: Wow.

JONES: So we thought we were onto something, that we had the right message to bid to government agencies, because this was all open, competitive procurements,—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —so we continued to do well there for the next 15 years.

DANYOW: Okay, great.

So two things I want to ask that are a little bit more Vietnam related during this time period, is first, just—I'm sure you were aware when Saigon fell in 1975. You know, what was your reaction when you heard that that had happened? If you had a reaction.

JONES: You probably experienced similar things when you've known something was coming for a long time, you knew it was going to be difficult, embarrassing—you know, to call up a lot of visions of questioning why a government with the properties that allegedly the U.S. government has would end up going so thoroughly down that road and so completely ignoring the critics and the people who understood better what should have been done, and vilifying those people and ridiculing them.

So it was—it was not easy to watch. And yet, at the same time, it felt like, in a sense—even all of the protesters who may not have known everything they would like to have known had better beliefs, had an understanding that was ultimately vindicated. And you know, it was a heartbreaking time,—

DANYOW: Yeah.

JONES: —because you had to think, at the same time, of everything that was lost. And it wasn't that long after that,—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —several years, that the Vietnamese War Memorial [sic; Vietnam Veterans Memorial] in Washington brought that to much greater focus. You know, the thoughts were whether or not this would stand as all the evidence we needed to avoid making the error in the future, and it proved to last barely a generation, which is unfortunately typical of how these things have worked historically and across cultures.

DANYOW: Yeah. And I guess the other thing I wanted to ask about—you know, Vietnam related in the later part of, you know,

thinking about your career, et cetera, is from something you said earlier, I got the sense that even as your, you know, understanding of the larger war has kind of solidified and you've become very against the larger war, have you figured out how to process and kind of accept your own service and the role you played better? How did that occur over time?

JONES: On the whole, I have tended to put it in a current interpretation of how difficult it is for everyday citizens, who have no access to the kind of information that decision makers who make these kinds of commitments do, to operate in an effectively democratic way and fulfill their responsibilities as they are often characterized by proponents of constitutional democracies. And I guess what I have done is arrive at a sense of peace with it, for the simple reason that I think it was so easy to deceive so many people. The majority of the people, until way late in the game, were very supportive of the whole operation,—

DANYOW: Sure.

JONES: —even people who had sons and daughters at risk.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: And that can only happen because of strenuous and willful attempts to deceive, both by acts of commission and omission. And, you know, I didn't at one point think it would happen so—in such a way again, only to witness it happening in even a worse way with these fictions about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Willful mischaracterization.

DANYOW: We've kind of been dancing around this for a while now, but this is one of the final questions I always like to get people's perspective on, and you've certainly just given some of it, but I guess if you could just, you know, kind of elaborate more on what you've kind of described as, you know, the government's deception in Vietnam and, you know, the lessons that were learned or not learned and how—you know, if you could elaborate a little more on how you saw those playing out in, say, Iraq more recently.

JONES: Well, I think the problem that was presented—namely, the concealment of relevant information from what should have been open debate and discourse—is not a problem that's

ever going to disappear in a capitalist kind of economy and a nation where even the highest court in the land decides that corporations are the legal equivalent of persons, have rights of speech, and that can follow any amount of financial resources.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: So then the question becomes: What's the antidote? And I have not developed an answer for that. It does seem to me that there are reasons to be greatly concerned by the way education is being financed in this country and that it is depriving especially liberal arts schools of the kinds of resources that should promote skepticism, doubt and realistic, hard thinking and challenges to what those who happen to hold power at any given point in time are trying to convey as reality and truth, in order to support decisions that have massive consequences for the population, whether it's their health and safety or possible risk of death in war or just the plundering of the economy, which is probably even a worse (if it's possible to be worse) effect of Iraq and Afghanistan.

DANYOW: Yeah, sure.

JONES: So what I've concluded at this point in time is that the fight is never going to end, to look for ways to use—whether it's technology, communications channels, things that haven't been invented yet and even things that need to be resurrected from the past. We have a greatly diminished sort of generational transmission of information these days. I mean, just looking at the demographics of the country makes it clear why. So we constantly have to rely more on external institutions to educate our young people and middle-aged people. And I don't see any great saving graces that are likely to come out of the top levels of the power structure.

The real hope I see, and the practically, realistic way of looking at it for me is that we have to continue to promote and adversarial governmental system, a rigorous, multi-party debating system, and I think we're at most risk of that now because of the amount of money that's controlling, you know, the primary system and ultimately the selection of who candidates can be for the most powerful offices we have.

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: The way the country has locked itself into—to simply, blue and red states, a polarized society where there's no turnover in the party identification of people in different areas is not new, but it's more—it's more deeply entrenched now than any time in history I can remember except maybe right after the Civil War. But I don't think there's any other way to work this out differently in the future except to change the nature of politics from what it is today.

DANYOW: Yeah. Do you have any more thoughts on how to change the nature of it? And you don't have to. I mean, it's just a question.

JONES: No, I think that is another lesson that maybe has just been lost because it's too difficult, too demanding, but we did have a period in the '60s and '70s in the U.S. that's markedly different from anything 40 or 50 years before or since. There were periods in the '20s when there were really active protest activities and young people got involved, and there may be others, but I wonder now, looking back, if there weren't a draft in the '60s and '70s, would there have been—if we had an all-volunteer army then, would youth all over the country have risen up the way they did? And that's an unanswerable question.

DANYOW: Yeah. Well, just one final question I'd like to ask, kind of in a different vein, but I always ask this to veterans at the end, and that's, you know, if you've returned to Vietnam since the time you were there in the war and if you'd consider ever going back.

JONES: I would consider. I have not done that. I've met a number of people, you know, natives who have moved to this country, and we've talked a little bit about the circumstances there, but, you know, especially—and it's very easy now to read about what's going on there,—

DANYOW: Right.

JONES: —and all is not, you know, sweetness and light, by any means, especially economically, but the transformation there has been of a character that—it just makes all the politicians who were favoring war back in the '60s and '70s look so absurd. And would this have happened anyway if there had

been no Vietnam conflict? I think the probabilities are high. So I would be interested, but it would not be at the top of my bucket list for things to do.

DANYOW: Fair enough.

Well, Mr. Jones, unless you have anything else that you'd like to add, I think that pretty much wraps up what I wanted to cover today.

JONES: Yeah. Thanks. I've taken up much more of your time than I think we intended.

DANYOW: Yeah. It's been a pleasure.

JONES: Same here.

DANYOW: Thanks again for your willingness to do this and for your service.

JONES: Thank you.

[End of interview.]