WAR, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND HIGHER EDUCATION:

AFRICAN AMERICAN VIETNAM VETERANS,

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, AND THE G.I. BILL

by

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ABSTRACT

The story of Black veterans and their experience in the Vietnam War is one of little investigation especially with regard to those who are from the state of Alabama. This study particularly focuses on the experiences of African American Vietnam War veterans from the state of Alabama. The observations are based on the educational, occupational, and day-to-day life experiences of a select group of Vietnam veterans from Alabama upon their return home. By focusing on the domestic experiences of these veterans upon their return, this study scrutinizes how the ongoing civil rights conflicts of the time impacted their lives. More specifically, the objective of this investigation is to analyze the influence and impact of the 1966, 1972, and 1974 iterations of the G.I. Bill from the first-hand perspective of study participants. Their experiences, viewed through the lens of historical narratives, provide insight into the untold obstacles they faced such as attainment of educational and occupational benefits as well as coping with the generally hostile treatment that an African American veteran endured in his community upon discharge from the military. A proper examination of the domestic experiences of the Black servicemen during a time of Jim Crow, the fight for civil rights, and a divided nation, provides a lasting voice for those who have not had the chance to tell their story until now.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone who helped me and guided me through the trials and tribulations of creating this manuscript. In particular, my family and close friends who stood by me throughout the time taken to complete this dissertation. The sacrifices each of you made to help me during this program will forever be remembered, and I am incredibly grateful. To the veterans that made this research possible, the candid interviews, transparency, and honesty allowed for in-depth discussions and examinations about the Vietnam War and life in Alabama during a very racially divided time. Without you this work would not have been possible.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ETS	Expiration of Term of Service
MOS	Military occupational specialty code
APA	Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity
QUE	Omega Psi Phi Fraternity
HBCU	Historically Black College and University
PWI	Predominately White Institution

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1966, 1972 and 1974, generally known as the G.I. Bill, and its impact on African American Vietnam veterans by obtaining knowledge about the post-war experiences of African American veterans who fought in the Vietnam War. The focal point of this study is the firsthand accounts of veterans from Alabama and their pursuit of educational attainment and equality. The Vietnam War and domestic interracial conflicts were two major crises of the United States in the 1960s and early 1970s; these conflicts intersected in the lives of African American veterans, and history provides vivid images and accounts of lost opportunities to obtain educational, medical, and job benefits during this period. For example, the G.I. Bills that passed during the Vietnam conflict (1966, 1972, and 1974) provided little, if any, support for disadvantaged and minority veterans.[1] During this time, ensuring specific benefits to those who faithfully served their country would have seemed to be of the utmost importance to elected representatives in Washington, D.C. This was not, however, the case due to the reduced level of funding that followed the original 1944 bill. The most criticized portion of the revised bills was the decreased level of educational benefits. The importance of attending college and obtaining a post-secondary degree had new meaning for military service members during this time. As World War II ended in 1945, over 1 million African American veterans returned home to the United States with hopes of obtaining

1. Mark Boulton, "How the GI Bill Failed African American Vietnam War Veterans," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 58 (2007): 57.

their benefits. Regrettably, their hope turned into frustration and despair after numerous denials of home loan requests and education benefits. The issues related to veteran benefits, along with the intentional strife of racism and dishonorable discharges, are key in addressing the unjust and unfair policies and principles attached to the experiences of African American veterans. It is important to note that not all African Americans experiences were the same. Themes such as location, social-economic status, and education play a role in the lives of veterans, and acknowledging the differences in the experiences of the veterans provide support to this study. [1] The firsthand accounts in this dissertation will create a place for their voice in history and will aid in the development of this study.

The underlying system of racial bias of the time, better known as the Jim Crow laws, created a variety of barriers for people of color. These obstacles seemed far greater for the African American men in the military. The stigma placed on Black men in the military during the mid-1900s was often based on the notion of being a part of something that was described by Dr. Martin Luther King as a "White man's war, a Black man's fight."[2] Notions such as this, underscored by the unjust conditions of the period, created a significant level of discord among members of the Black community as well as between the Black and White communities. As history demonstrates, the acts of violence Black men faced during this period were egregious, ranging from death by lynching and unjust murders to police brutality. The harsh reality of the deep-seated hate that African American men experienced before the war resulted in a greater

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2.Robert M. Hauser and Douglas K. Anderson, *Post-High School Plans and Aspirations of Black and White High School Seniors: 1976-86*: American Sociological Association, 1991), 263.

3. James H. Willbanks, Vietnam War: The Essential Reference Guide: The Essential Reference Guide (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2013).

determination and resounding motivation to fight for a better life.[3] Through service in the military and the military as an occupation, Black men saw the chance to create new opportunities and a new world for themselves and their families and communities. They desired to have the chance to have a higher quality of life and equality with their countrymen. The federal government's attempt to acknowledge such service was channeled through the creation of veteran benefits, the G.I. Bill, and its subsequent iterations.

Significance and Purpose

In his book, *BLOODS: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*, William Terry notes that even in the midst of the Vietnam War, Black and White soldiers often fought each other, leading to what he described as a "bitterly divided America like none other since the Civil War, becoming a double battleground pitting American soldier against American soldier."[4] The racial division abroad and at home coupled with personal and unique perspectives for each veteran play a role in this dissertation.

Upon returning home from war, the Black Vietnam veteran faced an uphill battle on many fronts, commonly referred to as the "three-pronged problem" or "tripartite adaptational dilemma"[5] (TAD). The three areas of adjustment were: (1) his identity as a Black American; (2) the stigma of having served in Vietnam; and (3) the adverse psychological effects of combat

3. David H. Onkst, "'First a Negro, Incidentally a Veteran': Black World War Two Veterans and the GI Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948,"*Journal of Social History* (1998): 517-543.

4. Wallace Terry, *Bloods: Black Veterans of the Vietnam War: An Oral History*, 2nd edition (New York: Presidio Press, 2006).

5. Erwin Randolph Parson, "The Intercultural Setting: Encountering Black Viet Nam Veterans," *The Trauma of War: Stress and Recovery in Viet Nam Veterans* (1985), 359.

stress.[6] The varying layers of readjustment faced by the Black soldier and problematic areas for Black veterans, particularly in the State of Alabama, shed some light into the prospect of being a Black Vietnam veteran returning home between the mid-1950s and the end of the war.

The purpose of this dissertation is to bring forth the untold narratives of the Black Vietnam veteran from Alabama and their place in history. The journey of each veteran is examined through firsthand accounts and narrations of events and obstacles faced as a civilian and a service member.

The inclusion of benefits for veterans introduced during World War II is a point of reference for this dissertation. The four main areas of the original 1944 bill were education and job training, loan guarantee, farming assistance, and unemployment pay. These key areas of the bill held tremendous value to the World War II and Korean War generations.[7] By the time the original G.I. Bill ended, 2,232,000 veterans had enrolled in college. The education produced 450,000 engineers, 238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, 22,000 dentists, and more than a million vocational college-trained men and women.[8] Close to eight million veterans participated in some form of the G.I. Bill education or training programs under the original G.I. Bill.[9]

During the 1940s and 1950s, the original G.I. Bill, the military, and the United States were on the brink of entering a new era that involved new groups of people, each bringing

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6. Joel Osler Brende and Erwin Randolph Parson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery*: New York: Plenum Press, c1985, 1985).

7. Marcus Stanley, "College Education and the Midcentury GI Bills, *"Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, no. 2 (May 2003): 671-708.

8. Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (New York: Walker & Co, 2004).

9. Mark Boulton, "How the GI Bill Failed African-American Vietnam War Veterans," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 58 (2007), 57.

different values, beliefs, and ideologies. Embracing these differences forced the military to learn to deal with various races and skin colors that were more reflective of the United States of America. The integration and national policy changes of the military became a national issue of contention during the early and mid-1940s. The conversation on race and military came to the forefront on July 26, 1948, when President Truman issued Executive Order 9981 calling for "equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the Armed Services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin."[10] While the order did not specifically end segregation, it alerted the military that the status quo of racist practices would no longer be tolerated.

These changes were part of a larger conversation that represented the origins of the Civil Rights Movement that occurred in the next decade and directly influenced the foundational values and landscape of the military as it related to race. The dilemma of racism for the African American soldier can be seen from the local to federal level during this period.[11] The military knowingly played a role in the shaping of perspectives regarding certain social issues during this time, and effective changes within the Army have brought some lasting results to various areas of society.[12] While the pace of restructuring within the military has been questioned regarding social change, reform, and mobilization, one cannot deny the elements of change that have occurred over time;[13] however, the pace varied depending on the type of change and whom the change benefited the most. Embedded in this shift is the idea of reactionary forces and their place

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10. Paul T. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," *Journal of Black Studies* (1971): 57.

11. Hilary Herbold, "Never a Level Playing Field: Blacks and the GI Bill, *"The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 6 (1994a): 104-108.

12. Robert W. Mullen, Blacks in America's Wars: The Shift in Attitudes from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam, 1st edition (New York: Anchor Foundation, 1991).

13. Robert W. Jackman, "Politicians in Uniform: Military Governments and Social Change in the Third World," *The American Political Science Association* 70, no. 4 (December 1976): 1078.

in the military during this era. This idea is directly tied to the argument that the military is more concerned with preserving social order than adapting to forms of social change.[14] This type of activity is designed to protect the status of entrenched elite groups and inhibit economic and social change, "hereby actively keeping out those who fell under the categorization of underprivileged and underrepresented." [15] This notion was particularly critical during the mid-1900s as movements for change, such as the Civil Rights movement, were taking root throughout the United States. These changes had an enormous effect on the day-to-day lives of African American veterans. Not all African American soldiers came from the same background and conditions. Some, including former Secretary of State Colin Powell, argued that changes made in the military during this time "restored pride, and [it] has been a fabulous military force since."[16] Nevertheless, changes within culture did not directly correlate to policy or a shift in the armed forces.

On the surface, the policies set forth in the G.I. Bill entitled every veteran to the same educational benefits, but in reality White veterans secured and gained almost all of the entitlements from the federally mandated bill. Thus, White veterans who had the chance to secure the benefits of the bill experienced a vastly different reality than Black veterans, who essentially had to fight for what was rightfully theirs, a recurring theme over time.[17] One example of limitations was the incremental changes that can be traced back to the aftermath of the original 1944 G.I. Bill. Indeed, over the course of a 20-year period, alterations to the

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14. Ibid., 1078.

15. Ibid.

16. Colin Powell's Vietnam. *Vietnam* 29, no. 2 (08; 2016, 2016), 22.

17. Hilary Herbold, "Never a Level Playing Field: Blacks and the GI Bill," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 6 (1994a): 105.

educational portion of the bill became a common occurrence. These changes included decreasing the amount of tuition coverage.[18] These variations set a precedent for subsequent legislation and policies put in place for educational benefits and resources for military veterans.

While many details of War World II and subsequent wars have been recounted and evaluated, the focus of this dissertation study is limited and based on issues that Black Vietnam veterans faced once they returned to the United States. The post-service issues addressed are: the racial caste system during the war; the Black and White educational attainment divide, and federal policy. The emphasis placed on each of these sectors provides the framework for this study.

Family

The importance of family is a common theme expressed by many of the interview participants in this study. During the mid-1900s, the Black family was the centerpiece of progression and achievement. Family value and self-worth were important characteristics within the family structure. The parents were the glue that kept the family together. They sought to protect and cherish the values passed down from generation to generation, and aid in the development of their children. Especially in the South, the larger the family, the more able bodies there were that could be used for the betterment of the family. The vast majority of Black parents worked day and night for the betterment of their families. Alongside the parents, the children often played a meaningful role in the upkeep of the household.[19] The Alabama-based

18. Marcus Stanley, "College Education and the Midcentury GI Bills," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118, no. 2 (May 2003): 671-708.

19. Mozell C. Hill, "Research on the Negro Family," *Marriage and Family Living* 19, no. 1 (1957), 25.

Vietnam veterans vividly described core family principles such as respect, support, and trustworthiness that they depended on as young Black men growing up in the South.

The way these families made their living was both resourceful and unorthodox. The occupations of the Black family were often based on the skills passed down from previous generations with little education. The divide between education and work was evident as each interviewee explained his childhood and upbringing. Interview participants such as Roy Hill and Harry Jones worked in the cotton fields as young Black men in the South. Samuel Duncan and John England, Jr.'s fathers worked in the coal mine and steel mill industries. Cotton fields, coal mines, and farms were a consistent means of work for many veterans' parents. These jobs contributed to the overall wellbeing of the families, but they also fueled many of the participants with the desire to serve in the military. The opportunities to serve allowed servicemen the chance to embark upon areas of life that may not have been reached otherwise. The chance to leave the life they knew and create the life they desired was a focal point for some of these veterans.

Family background and lineage are major factors in the experiences of Black culture, and these experiences are intensely connected to the lives of African American Vietnam veterans. A person's birthplace often plays a significant role in his or her life; it provides a community and instills culture and tradition. A birthplace plants a person in an area's history. A birthplace can directly influence every facet of life, such as social and economic well-being, resources, and general welfare. The values and traditions embedded within each family helped shape and mold each veteran into the man he is today.[20] A series of themes, including the Selective Service System, education attainment, and military discharge, are contained within the framework of this

20. Walter R. Allen, "Black Family Research in the United States: A Review, Assessment and Extension," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 9, no. 2 (1978): 167.

study. The veterans' candid and honest discourse creates a sense of the historical implications of birthplace, which is presented within the content of this study.

As with many predominantly Black areas of the South, there were only a few occupations that were available to Blacks in Alabama. The most productive way to take care of one's family during this time had little to do with education and the completion of school. The most common method was hard labor, often with unequal and little pay and long, taxing hours. The physical attributes and abilities of the Black man were essential and far outweighed the importance and interest in his intellect. The function of the Black man and his body were used on many fronts and occupations, which was a standard ideological truth in Alabama. The usage of Black male bodies, whether in combat, the steel mill, or farming, plays a role in the context of these narratives.

Family size was also an important part of the Black infrastructure in the South. Larger families had the ability to produce labor forces that yielded higher results in the cotton field and other labor-intensive activities. The destitution of Black families in the 1940s and 1950s made it difficult for Blacks to seek education when labor and income were severely needed at home.[21]

The Black Vietnam Veteran

The Vietnam War has been described as the "working class war" because so many individuals who fought and died came from poor and working class backgrounds.[22] While college deferment was in place, a significant percentage of Black youth had not been accepted or enrolled in college at the age of 18. In addition, the academic deferments only applied to full-

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21. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (Oxford: University Press, 1996).

22. Yvonne Latty and Ron Tarver, We Were There: Voices of African American Veterans, from World War II to the War in Iraq (New York: Amistad, 2004).

time students at four-year colleges, another setback for the low-income Black student.[23] So from the outset the Selective Service system inherently contained a level of racial bias. Approximately 12 percent of men eligible to be drafted were African American. However, qualified Black men were drafted at twice the rate of qualified white men.[24]

During the Vietnam War, recruiters persuaded Black youth with the prospect of generous benefits, marketable skills, and the opportunity for personal growth for years to come.[25] In return, Black soldiers found themselves on the front line and assigned to low-status jobs in the armed forces. The Black Vietnam veteran entered the armed forces during a very contentious time in America. As with Black soldiers from previous wars, the system of racial exclusion was in place, but Vietnam added an element that differed from other wars – the division within America. In addition to the fighting in Vietnam, there was an internal conflict in the United States for civil rights at the same time. The Black Vietnam soldier was central to the military and the movement of civil rights in America.[26] The role of the Black Vietnam veteran during the 1950s and 1960s help shape this investigation by way of oral history. The methodology and methods used to conduct this study provides insight into the lives experiences of each veteran and their recollection of a time of racial division and social unrest.

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23. Herman Graham, The Brothers' Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

24 Ibid.

25. Graham, Herman, I.,II, *The Brothers' Vietnam War : Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience*: Gainesville : University Press of Florida, c2003, 2003).

26. Ibid.

Methodology, Methods, and Design

The methodology used in the investigation is oral history.[27] William Cutler describes oral history as the "knowledge about the past passed by word of mouth from generation to generation, and not only must the scholar capture it but he must also try somehow to filter the significant from the inconsequential as well as the truth from the exaggerated."[28]

The dates and connections of history taken are dependent upon the historian and participants in the context of the study. To further signify the importance of oral history, some historians point to the fact that all history was based on oral communication before the development of writing.[29] Varying traces of oral history seem to be prominent and are illustrated through the diverging lens of the Greeks, Africans, Aztecs, and others. The timeline and makeup of oral history narratives converge on the commonalities of historical events yet preserve the importance of other forms of narratives that overlooked the significance of oral history and its place in society.

The oral history methods used in this study involve the selection and recruitment of participants, location and length of interviews, and transcription and usage of interview material. The selection and recruitment of interview participants occurred over a four-month period in the state of Alabama. Recruitment took place at churches in west and central Alabama, along with advertisements and word of mouth. The selection of the participants was based upon meeting the following requirements: African America male; Vietnam veteran; and Alabama resident during the time of service. Nine total participants fell under these requirements and agreed with consent

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27. Rebecca Sharpless, "The History of Oral History," *Thinking about Oral History: Theories and Applications*, eds. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpness (New York: AltaMira Press, 2008), 7.

28. William W. Cutler, *Oral History its Nature and Uses for Educational History*: New York University, 1971), 184,

29. Ibid.

for participation. The interviews took place in a church, participant's residence, and a dining establishment. For comfort and privacy, the participant chose his interview location. Each interview lasted an average of 40 minutes and was comprised of a set of interview questions that allowed for consistency of information. At the completion of each interview, a summary of the interview was written to assist with the transcription and development of the research.

Data transcription occurred after all the interviews were completed. Next, data saturation and identification of analytical and descriptive themes occurred. These themes set the stage and outline for the study results and narration. It is important to recognize my position relative to the study as a researcher. As an African American male, my race and gender help guide and frame my interest, access to, and understanding of the interview participants. The opportunity to embrace the stories of African American men and learn from their experiences through history and research is very critical when describing my role as a researcher in this study.

Chapter Organization and Overview

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Each chapter is written with the intent to provide an accurate assessment and perception of the experiences of each participant. Due to the complexities of narration and ways in which stories are told, a historical roadmap of American wars from 1940 to Vietnam occurs in the first chapter of this study, followed by an overview of the Vietnam War in Chapter Two, Methods and Methodology in Chapter Three, and the examination of veteran benefits, iterations of the G.I. Bill, and insight into the Selective Service system during the Vietnam era in the final four chapters of the study.

Chapter 1 provides a brief history of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The chapter also provides the historical context of each war and the creation of benefits beginning with World War II veterans and continuing on to Vietnam veterans. The original G.I.

Bill can be seen as the gold standard for educational and additional benefits for veterans. During the Korean War and Vietnam, the benefits lessened but still had a significant role in the lives of veterans.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the Vietnam War on three major themes: Selective Service, education attainment, and military discharge. Historians have always viewed the Selective Service, a draft classification system, as an important part of Vietnam. During the era, a large percentage of Black men were drafted and served in Vietnam resulting in a negative perception of the draft within the Black community. Education attainment varied during the era. While men were either drafted or enlisted shortly after high school, some Black veterans were able to utilize the college deferment exception. At the completion of their service, members were provided the chance to attend a post-secondary institution of their choice and to return to their institution to complete their degree requirements.

Chapter 3 includes the methodology, selection sample, data collection, and data analysis from the study. The selection sample displays the specific location of the interview participants and the areas in which they currently reside. Data collection and analysis occurred in stages based on participant interview date. The sample, collection, and analysis followed the approval and timeline of The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board.

Chapter 4 presents the narrative and perspectives of the interview participants in this study. The narratives are presented in chronological order examining the pre- and post-war experiences of each veteran. These previously untold stories provide insight into the lives of each veteran, and they are firsthand accounts of their time in armed forces, from enlistment to discharge. Underlying factors, such as the type of enlistment, the branch of service, and the military occupational service code (MOS), are shown to be critical areas in the narratives of each

veteran, specifically the MOS, which determines a serviceman's specialization of duty at the completion of basic training. These three main areas help shape the narrative of each participant and formulate discussion surrounding their experiences as a Black soldier during the 1950s and 1960s.

The narratives add to the body of literature of Vietnam veterans by focusing on a sample that had largely remained unexamined until this point: Black veterans from the state of Alabama. The choice of Alabama was an important one, as it was a hotbed of activity during the civil rights movement. Two major themes are developed within this chapter: the mentality of the Black soldier as he returned home; and the value each veteran placed in having the chance to have served his country.

Over the course of each interview, I witnessed levels of openness and trustworthiness from the participants, a genuine willingness to express their stories with the confidence that aids in the development of the dissertation. Each veteran allowed me to ask questions freely and without pushback, and many informed me that they had not discussed these stories in over 30 years.

Chapter 5 explores the two enlistment types, voluntarily or drafted, along with the theme of military discharge. Black Vietnam veterans were assigned lower codes of discharges at an alarming rate. These lower codes often led to additional scrutiny and job uncertainty in the civilian world. For the veterans granted discharges in good standing, their return home and the lack of work and employment were still bleak. The courage they displayed on behalf of their country wasn't rewarded, as they often faced racial tension and unfair hiring practices. As a result, many Southern-born veterans relocated to the Midwest or the East Coast for work and additional opportunities.

Chapter 6 examines life after the war as well as employment and education opportunities. The education attainment varied among the interviewees. All interviewees completed high school before service and two interviewees were drafted during college, one as an undergraduate and the second after graduate school. Some veterans utilized the G.I. Bill while others gained education credits during their service time domestically and abroad. The chance to attend college at some point was available to each veteran, as knowledge surrounding the benefits became more readily available. Poor communication from the armed forces administration was a common theme for the veterans in this study, as they expressed ignorance about what benefits they could claim immediately after their discharge.

The chapter closes with each Vietnam veteran displaying his gratitude for having served, and thankful for the military structure that has been a consistent part of his life, combined with the formation of a brotherhood, regardless of color and ethnicity, and the honor to have served at a time where many questions and concerns existed. For individuals who did not have the chance to convey their experiences during a time of division and civil unrest, it is important that they are finally able to tell their stories.

Chapter 7 discusses the implications of this research for African American Vietnam veterans and future research possibilities regarding those who served during the war. The chapter summarizes the finding of the interviews and how they expand existing research and challenge some historical norms as pertaining to military discharge among Black veterans. The chapter also provides concluding thoughts addressing the themes of Selective Service System, military discharge, and education attainment. The future research possibilities allow for further understanding of previous wars and the role of Black veterans from Alabama. During World War

II and the Korean War, many Black soldiers from the South were enlisted, and their experiences are also significant from a historical perspective.

CHAPTER 2

THE WORKING CLASS WAR

This chapter begins with a historical exploration of the Vietnam War and the divided past in the U.S. Next, the underlying themes of the draft process, education attainment, military discharge and the Black veteran's adjustment to civilian life are examined. The purpose of this review is to provide an understanding and historical roadmap of previous research as well as to set the stage for the narratives of the participants in this study.

The Vietnam War and domestic racism are two major calamities in the history of the United States. By being a central component of both, African American Vietnam veterans experienced war on two fronts.[1] The Vietnam era was a time when America was split between the conflict in Vietnam and the reason for its real existence. Historians have stated that many American citizens viewed the Vietnam War as a "devastating example of the tendency of the United States to support its colonial allies."[2] The roots of the Vietnam War came from the United States' decision to aid France in Southeast Asia by "taking on the job of propping up successive South Vietnamese governments tottering precariously atop an inherited colonial state structure."[3] The growing concerns about communist-controlled areas and countries that supported such efforts, dating back to the mid-1950s, captured the attention of the U.S. government and

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1. James M. Fendrich, "The Returning Black Vietnam-Era Veteran, *"The Social Service Review* (1972): 60-75.

2. Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, eds., *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

3. Ibid.

influenced its plans for the war. The Eisenhower administration vowed to support the South Vietnam government, resulting in armed conflict. This support continued into the next three presidents' administrations (Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon).

Over the next decade, the United States began to try to dominate the region by way of its military, with one administration inheriting from the previous portions of the war by default. The most acknowledged "escalation" of the war occurred in fall of 1964 on the heels of the presidential election in which Lyndon B. Johnson was elected. Scholars identify the period between November 1964 and July 1965 as the most critical time of Johnson's administration due to this escalation. The escalation in Vietnam was sparked by an assault on an American air base at Pleiku, which killed eight American soldiers and destroyed a number of planes and helicopters on base. The attacks led to a meeting with the president and top advisers in Washington. President Johnson promised retaliation for the lives lost. "We have kept our guns over the mantel and our heels in the cupboard for a long time now[1]," he said. His words were followed up by several months of strong air attacks known as the "Rolling Thunder" campaign, which destroyed North Vietnam roads and railways.[2] This escalation was the start of a harsh and deadly war campaign in American history against North Vietnamese soldiers and civilians.[3]

As the U.S. involvement increased under the Johnson administration, so did the rate of military personnel departing for Vietnam. By the end of 1963, there were an estimated 17,000 American soldiers in Vietnam. One year later, there were 23,000, a small increase in comparison

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1. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

to years to come.[4] As the war continued, there was pressure to increase the number of troops sent to the region. The Johnson administration placed 185,000 personnel in Vietnam by the end of 1965 and 450,000 by 1966. This figure rose to more than 500,000 by early 1968. That is an increase of more than 400,000 military personnel over a five-year period.[5] This sharp rise in military presence in the region naturally increased the number of casualties (killed, wounded, hospitalized, and missing) on both sides of the war. An estimated 2,500 causalities occurred in 1965, and by the end of 1966, this number had risen to 33,000. By the end of 1968, at the peak of America's involvement in the war, this number had eclipsed 130,000 for the period.[6] The Vietnam War illustrated deep-seated racial issues and indifference of the work for the American government and its citizens, thus creating suspicion and inquiry regarding the decade of armed conflict abroad. Throughout the war, a growing sentiment seemed to emerge that the United States was engaged in a war that it truly could not win.[7]

Civil rights activist and Black journalist William Worthy was an avid World War II opponent. In the 1960s and 1970s, he published several articles at the Baltimore *Afro-American* as a reporter questioning American military involvement in Asia and Africa. Worthy branded the war in Vietnam a racist, "dirty war," and called it "a potential colonial prelude to a World War III of color."[8] Worthy argued that the United States would insist that Vietnam could be lost to the

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4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Gary R. Hess, "The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War," *Diplomatic History* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 239.

8. Daniel S. Lucks, "Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Riverside Speech and Cold War Civil Rights, *"Peace & Change* 40, no. 3 (2015): 395.

communists and would result in a war "with no real battle lines."[9] Worthy's warnings about the racial implications of American foreign policy fell on deaf ears, and his attacks against U.S. Cold War policy in Asia earned him the animosity of the federal government. Worthy's understanding of the war was exhibited not only in the high number of Black solider casualties during the war but more specifically his firsthand experiences abroad. Worthy's career consisted of "trips to remote prisons in politically and militarily threatening countries, violence, war, exits on short notice, aliases, challenges to the government, hardships, and redemption."[10] Worthy "represented a missing voice and provided a distinctive perspective on world events" by bridging the gap between the public, media, and the government during times of change and division.[11]

One major issue to note during this armed conflict was the intentional tendency to place Black service members on the front lines of the battle for combat rather than in units that supplied support or other divisions that were far less likely to see frontline combat action.[12] This disturbing pattern can be seen through the sheer number of African American deaths that occurred over the course of the war. Between 1961 and 1972, 47,244 U.S service personnel were killed in action and 5,711, or about 12 percent, were African Americans.[13] African Americans constituted about 9 percent of the total active duty personnel assigned to the Vietnam conflict

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9. Jinx C. Broussard and Skye C. Cooley, "William Worthy (Jr): The Man and the Mission," *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 3 (June 2009): 386.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. James E. Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 11-12.

13. Ibid., 13.

and accounted for nearly 12 percent of the total deaths, which was roughly 30 percent higher than the death rate for all U.S. forces fighting in Vietnam.[14]

This sentiment directed at the war transitioned into a level of resentment, not only exhibited by way of voice but also through action. For most of the 1960s, peaceful protests took place at several higher-education institutions. In May 1965 at the University of California, Berkeley, 20,000 people participated in a teach-in on Vietnam, a coordinated central gathering of students created by the Student for a Democratic Society (SDS). In April 1965, the largest anti-war demonstration to date was held in Washington, D.C. and between 20,000 and 25,000 student activists participated.[15] Many of these efforts were led by student-organized groups that opposed not only the war but also the racial tensions within the United States. Organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), and the Youth International Party (Yippies) all played a role in challenging the war and racial injustice. These groups were referred to as the "New Left," and they were primarily from majority White institutions. Over time, the anti-war movement embraced a very diverse coalition including draft resisters, students, anti-war veterans, Blacks, working class people, parents, the elderly, women, and many others.[16] The unifying factor was the belief that the war must end before it destroyed the United States and Vietnam.[17]

As the war continued in the 1960s, the peaceful protests on college campuses and in major U.S. cities became more violent and aggressive. One of the most unsettling and

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14. Ibid.

15. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

16. John Campbell McMillian and Paul Buhle, *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003).

noteworthy protests of the era took place on May 4, 1970, just four days after President Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia, an effort that many believed extended the Vietnam war that he had promised to end. Leading up to the May 4 protests were a series of campus anti-war demonstrations. On May 1, 500 protestors gathered peacefully at Kent State University to express their opposition to the Vietnam War. Later on that night, some students took their anger off campus to a local bar. The incident, unfortunately, became a scene of vandalism and police confrontation. In addition, the event created a tense and fragile relationship among public officials and the campus body. In the days following this occurrence, local and state public officials attempted to cancel the May 4 protest. The students disregarded these efforts in their eagerness to defy local and state public officials. Officials reportedly handed out more than 12,000 pamphlets announcing the cancellation of the protest, and Ohio National Guardsmen were called upon to assist with the student demonstrations. Despite the actions of the state and public officials, nearly 2,000 protestors attended the rally, which started out peacefully but ended with the death of four students and the wounding of nine others by the National Guard. The killings instantly brought national headlines to the campus and sparked a series of protests on an estimated 350 campuses with almost 2 million students participating.[18] While the vast majority of protests were geared toward anti-war sentiments, the fight for equality at home was often overlooked, as evidenced by the killings that occurred at Jackson State University.

On May 14, Jackson State University, an HBCU, faced the same crisis as Kent State had 10 days earlier. During the early days of May 1970, Jackson State students had protested on campus in response to tensions over the draft, the Vietnam War, and the violence that had taken place on other campuses. The protest began on May 13, 1970 and carried over to the next day.

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18. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

On the night of May 14, a string of events led to two killings on the campus. One particular confrontation between protestors and police was interrupted by a noise similar to a gunshot, and fired on 100 unarmed protestors, resulting in two Black men dead and eight others injured. The officers in question were eventually acquitted due to lack of evidence, and no one was ever charged for the shootings.[19]

The process to leave Vietnam was undertaken in Nixon's first year in office. The Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, and National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, assisted the president with the exit strategy from Vietnam.[20] By the end of 1969, the decision was made to pull out soldiers slowly and support improvements to the South Vietnamese military capabilities. With Laird and Kissinger having different strategies, the direction of the war varied from plan to plan. Nevertheless, by March 1972, an estimated 90,000 American troops were in Vietnam, compared to more than 500,000 in 1969. As the steady withdrawal of troops began to take place alongside the ceasefire in January 1973, the war finally appeared close to a resolution.

The Vietnam War era challenged many aspects of American culture. The war created a division within the country between those that supported the military and those that opposed the war. Before Vietnam, there was a general unspoken perception that "the country had the means to do almost anything," and this construct was challenged during the Vietnam War.[21] The 30-year period between World War II and Vietnam encompassed a great degree of change and a wide range of "freedoms, entitlements, and gratifications." Both wars, but especially World War

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19. Melandie McGee and R. E. Platt, "Article 2: The Forgotten Slayings: Memory, History, and Institutional Response to the Jackson State University Shootings of 1970,"*American Educational History Journal*, no. 1-2 (2015): 15.

20. David L. Prentice, DAVID L. PRENTICE, "Choosing "the Long Road": Henry Kissinger, Melvin Laird, Vietnamization, and the War Over Nixon's Vietnam Strategy," *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 3 (06, 2016), 445.

21. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

II, ultimately created "a moral cause of transcendent power" that inserted the ideology of rights, consciousness, and civil rights into the American democratic fabric and culture.[22]

Present-day historians trace the origins of the civil rights era as far back as the 1930s and 1940s, a period consumed by international war and domestic conflict.[23] Violence, imprudent speech, contentious race relations around the world, and the injustices during this period marked these decades and set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement as it is known today. A careful examination of the effects of this era as it pertains to war and the African American veteran's post-war experience and placement in society, more specifically higher education, should be considered. The armed conflicts and their connections with the birth of the Civil Rights Movement provide additional context to these pivotal moments in time.

The history of African Americans and their place in U.S. society has been an ongoing narrative for more than 400 years. Strife, anger, and mistrust have developed from generation to generation. Gradually, in the 1960s and 1970s, civil disobedience and larger movements such as "Black Revolution" and "Black Revolts" began to surface.[24] Each period has had its share of turbulent times that have led to a linkage of eras and shared experiences. The late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s insight illustrates the struggles of the period:

> The Black revolution is more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its similar flaws consisting of racism, poverty, militaries, and

22. Ibid., 790.

23. Adam Fairclough, "Historians and the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American Studies* 24, no. 3 (1990): 387-398.

24. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past, *"The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233-1263.

materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society and suggest that radical reconstruction of society is the real issue to face.[25]

This candid and honest statement reflects how one of the most prominent social movements in U.S history, the Civil Rights Movement, became interconnected and intertwined with the Vietnam War.

By continuing under the confines of our flawed society, African American service members had been forced to stagnate rather than have the chance to thrive like their white counterparts. In addition, the status and rights of African Americans in America have been a constant struggle for many years. As one historian stated, "The United States has tolerated racist practices for nearly as long as it had professed democracy."[26]

The pivotal signing of the 1966 G.I. bill into law appeared to create educational opportunities and benefits for Vietnam veterans, specifically African American veterans, although the bill faced enormous hurdles as it related to funding and cuts. The signing of legislation in 1966 resulted in intense concern and debate among service members of the Vietnam War era. As the United States actively participated in the war abroad, the new "peacetime bill," as it was referred to by the administration of the time, ignited a decade-long debate. The primary focus of the debate was the decreased amount of assistance, services, and aid to Vietnam War Veterans versus those obtained by World War II and Korean War veterans. The loss of benefits created a void in the lives of many Vietnam War veterans, ranging from jobs, housing, and education benefits. Understanding the significance of the original GI Bill and

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25. Ibid.,1233.

26. John D. Skrentny, The Effect of the Cold War on African American Civil Rights: America and the World Audience, 1945-1968 (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 237.

the decreasing benefits offered in the subsequent iterations is vital to understanding how these changes affected the Black veteran.

Essentially the third bill of its kind, the 1966 bill, and the hope that it inspired, can be traced to the opportunity to obtain a free education and additional benefits along the same lines as past bills. Unfortunately, the 1966 bill was insufficient in covering veterans' educational costs, and the veterans began to express their frustration and anger with the bill.[27]

The Vietnam War was the most widely covered and popular news story of the period from 1960 through 1976, during which there was an increasingly lost confidence in the United States government.[28] The role of the media and its impact on the confidence levels of American citizens in the political landscape of the country is a critical piece of this study. The media provided coverage and images of the War that had not been covered in previous Wars. By addressing not only the voice of the veteran but also the civilians that were able to see the treatment of those who served and defended their country, citizens could begin to provide support to the Vietnam African American veterans and the benefits they undoubtedly deserved.

The revised G.I. Bill did not garner much praise from the veterans, leading to another level of discontent and frustration unlike year's prior.[29] The vast majority of the criticism stemmed from the lack of benefits to support the rising education costs of the time. Similar to today, the opportunity to gain a college degree was seen as the most efficient way to increase one's value in society. By taking this into account and understanding the importance of quality higher education for the veterans, the media became a supporter for the veterans and addressed

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27. Mark Boulton, "How the GI Bill Failed African American Vietnam War Veterans," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 58 (2007): 57.

28. Daniel C. Hallin, "The Media, the War in Vietnam, and Political Support: A Critique of the Thesis of an Oppositional Media," *The Journal of Politics* 46, no. 1 (1984): 2-24.

29. Ibid.

the decreased benefits for Vietnam veterans. In an opinion piece, the *New York Times* declared: "The educational G.I. Bill of Rights today constituted a niggardly handout, compared to the full funding of college studies which made the post-World War II G.I. Bill so significant in the expansions of educational opportunities."[30] The *Washington Post* was very critical of the administration of the time. The paper made it clear that it believed the government was "[a] abandoning our Vietnam veterans by limiting the amount of benefits being received through unsuccessful legislation."[31] One of the most straightforward claims came by way of *The Boston Globe*, which stated "[b]because the war is unpopular, because the Vietnam veterans do not include the sons of the rich, the powerful and the articulate, because the fans of their war have been unwilling or unable to organize on their behalf, nobody cares." [32] These outlets among many others began to voice the discontent about the G.I. Bill among the veterans of the time.

It is important to note that the 1966 G.I. Bill covered combat veterans and non-combat veterans. Just a year prior, the debate over readjustment benefits centered on the proposal to extend benefits to veterans who were non-combat or peacetime veterans. Republicans, both in committee and on the floor of the Senate, attempted to limit the bill to only combat veterans, but the bill was eventually defeated on the floor and the benefits package was passed for both combat and non-combat veterans.[33] The reasoning behind the extension of benefits to peacetime veterans, as stated by the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee in reporting on the Cold War Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act, was that "never before in our history has the

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Congressional Quarterly Almanac, "Cold War Veterans' Bill Passed by Senate, *"Washington, DC* 21 (1965): 401-402.

United States had such a continued period of compulsory military service during an era of relative peace."[34]

While the majority of those seeking benefits served in Vietnam, there was a segment of the population known as the "peacetime" or "Cold War" veterans that were eligible for benefits. During a time when the nation was geared toward a more fiscally responsible mindset, the allocation of benefits was not perceived as important as it once was. The 1966 version of the G.I. Bill was in part the result of cuts to the federal budget. The new legislation did not take into account the veteran population's demographics, backgrounds, and socioeconomic conditions. These factors were evident in monetary benefits distributed to the veterans participating in the 1966 bill. For example, veterans under the 1966 bill were provided $100 per month to cover full tuition and living expenses compared to World War II veterans who had their entire tuition paid for and received $50 a month for living expenses. The cost-cutting efforts came across as a decreased appreciation for those that defended the country. Subsequent bills increased the benefits, which are discussed below. Due to the 1966 bill's allocation of funds, lower-income and minority veterans found themselves in worse or similar situations than before joining the armed forces. Many veterans entered the military with the hope of advancement in society.[35] As a vast majority of minority veterans came from lower-income status, they suffered more from receiving lowered benefits. Toward the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, unemployment remained one of the major issues for African American veterans. According to one estimate,

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34. Congressional Quarterly Almanac, "Cold War Veterans' Bill Passed by Senate," *Washington, DC* 21 (1965), 401-4.

35. Louis Lee Woods II, "Almost 'no Negro Veteran… could Get a Loan': African Americans, the GI Bill, and the NAACP Campaign Against Residential Segregation, 1917–1960,"*Journal of African American History* 98, no. 3 (2013): 392-417.

nearly one-third of African American male veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 were unemployed compared to fewer than 6 percent of white veterans of the same age.[36]

Over the course of six years, much strife and criticism were tied to the 1966 G.I. Bill, eventually leading to the creation of the 1972 and 1974 bills, for post-Korean war (Vietnam) veterans. The 1972 bill provided nearly the same level of assistance that Korean War veterans received in the early 1960s.[37] However, the financial benefits of the 1972 bill did not keep up with rising tuition costs, leading to a lower number of veterans using their benefits for educational purposes.[38] Finally, in 1974, President Gerald R. Ford signed the 1974 G.I. Bill, and Vietnam veterans felt as if their voices had been heard and much-needed help was on the way. The 1974 bill increased benefits that eased the burden on veterans and provide much-needed assistance. Veterans supported the bill, but it placed President Ford's war on inflation in danger. President Ford was a major supporter of the bill and utilized his political prowess to ensure the passing of the bill, despite the possibility of hurting the administration, the bill eventually passed in the fall of 1974. Following the passage of the bill, veterans began to seek admission to colleges at a very high rate. Later, Congress passed a bill that offered an 18 percent increase in benefits and up to $720 in tuition payments and the additional option to receive up to $2,000 in loans. The financial improvements to the G.I. Bill spoke to the needs of the countless number of veterans, more specifically African American veterans, who weren't able to find work or afford school and were barely able to survive in the very country they defended. Even the system of enlisting armed service personnel reflected the nation's problems with racism.

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36. Kathryn R. Gover and Beverly J. McEaddy, "Job Situation of Vietnam-Era Veterans," *Monthly Lab.Rev.* 97 (1974), 17.

37. J. P. Mattila, "G.I. Bill Benefits and Enrollments: How did Vietnam Veterans Fare?" *Social Science Quarterly (University of Texas Press)* 59, no. 3 (December 1978): 535.

38. Ibid.

The Draft: The Selective Service System

The function of the draft has involved the Selective Service System and several branches of the armed forces, mainly the army. Between 1917 and 1970, the United States armed forces drafted nearly two million Blacks through the Selective Service.[39] Though there were many changes between the beginning of WWII and the ending of the Vietnam War, one thing that remained constant was the ever-present pattern of racial discrimination."[40]As the draft requirements became better known, several underlying racial tactics were used. The establishment of Jim Crow laws created a false belief in the mental and physical differences between Black and white young men.[41] Lack of resources and exposure to quality education were major dividers between the races during this time. The Selective Service System did little to address or combat these measures and tested all on the same scale. The system was built for whites and the few educated Black men. Researchers have equated the Selective Service System to a form of "institutional racism," based on the notion that the four military branches included racism as part of their policies and procedures. Historically official policies of the Selective Service System have always benefited white registrants mainly geared toward theories of Black inferiority.[42] This argument is evidenced by how the military selected, ranked, and treated African American servicemen, and it illustrates the negative attitudes, bigotry, and bias that were

39. Paul T. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," *Journal of Black Studies* (1971), 57.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

part of the Selective Service System.[43] The pattern of racism in the draft changed over the course of World War I and II, and it changed again during the Vietnam War.[44] World War I's draft process consisted of the initial draft registration of all men between the ages of 21 and 31, followed by a selection process by a local board. With no formal race provision, Whites and Blacks registered with the same board, but the military inducted them separately due to the segregation military policy in place.[45] During this time, there were only five or six Black members of local draft boards across the U.S., leading to a high rate of Blacks not only being drafted but also inducted. The lack of Black members on local draft board left a void or presence on behalf of Black men as it pertains to the draft boards. More than 360,000 Blacks were inducted, which was 13 percent of those who had been drafted.[46] Overall, 34 percent of all Black registrants were inducted while only 24 percent of Whites were drafted.[47] World War II's draft process began by focusing more on the mental capacity of draftees. In May 1941, the Army introduced rules that all draftees would have to read and write on at least a fourth grade level. During the first four months of 1941, 12 percent of Blacks examined were rejected vs. 1 percent of whites.[48] The new literacy requirements became the first barrier for Blacks joining the military. The Army General Classification Test (AGCT), designed to measure mental ability, was created in 1940 by the Personnel Research Section of the Adjutant General's Office in the

43. James D. Anderson, "Race, Meritocracy, and the American Academy during the Immediate Post-World War II Era," *History of Education Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1993), 151.

44. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," 57.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

War Department as part of the literacy policy. The purpose of the test was to assess the mental aptitude of army and Marine servicemen for specialty and officer training.[49]

Taking note of the racism that persisted and the high level of separation that occurred, Black leaders organized and demanded that a nondiscriminatory provision be included in the Selective Service Act of 1940. The work of the Black coalition and the NAACP came to fruition as the Selective Service Act of 1940 was established. Senator Robert F. Wagner and Representative Hamilton Fish, both from New York, sponsored the act. Once approved in final form, Section 4(a) of the provision read: "In the selection and training of men under this act, there shall be no discrimination against any person on account of race or color." But the creation of the draft process placed Black men at a disadvantage from the outset.[50] The design and implementation of the system were based on the ideologies and mindset that the military was for white men. By a series of tests, the draft registration process suggested that all men were service eligible or deferred from service. But the methods used within this system were based on unfair and discriminatory tests that were designed for the white servicemen. The emphasis placed on these designated tests for potential servicemen provided little if any room for error for the African American draftee and his chance for enlistment. The goal of the test was to establish guidelines for qualified draftees. In addition, the test provided perspective into potential mental health issues, physical capabilities, and future industry employment.

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49. Thomas W. Harrell, "Some History of the Army General Classification Test," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 77, no. 6 (December 1992): 875.

50. Paul T. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism, *"Journal of Black Studies* (1971): 57-76.

Research indicates that in 1944, 33.5 percent of Blacks and eight percent of whites were rejected for low scores on the reading and writing examination.[51] While the differences in these numbers during World War II were largely consistent with previous World War I, the educational difference between Black and white draft eligible men was made very clear. Despite having one-third of potential draftees rejected, more than 1 million Black men served in the military during World War II. As the war ended, there were an estimated 2,438,831 Blacks who had registered for the draft, making up 11 percent of the total registration. Despite being drafted in proportion to the Unites States population, Blacks never reached 10 percent of American forces because of the military restrictions on Black enlistments. These exclusions due to race became even more evident as the Selective Service created a policy of not keeping statistics by race, which allowed the military to avoid reporting the number of Blacks deferred or the types of deferments held.[52]

The systemic nature of the process provided a level of protection from the military for white men. A leading cause of the inequity within the draft process was the deferment policy of the Selective Service System. Vastly different from the World War II and Korean War draft process, key provisions in place such as the deferment of college students did not favor many Blacks due to the limited educational opportunities of the time. In addition to the college deferment provision, the occupational deferment also negatively affected Blacks due to their limited education, educational requirements for jobs, and discrimination in employment.[53] With

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51. George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

52. Paul T. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," Journal of Black Studies (1971): 57-76.

53. Ibid.

such deferments unavailable to many Blacks, the African American community felt the burden of the draft heavily in the 1960s.

Military Discharge

The military discharge was a problem that plagued Vietnam veterans. During the Vietnam War, there were six types of discharges: honorable, medical, general, undesirable, bad conduct, and dishonorable. Discharges such as honorable, general, medical, and undesirable were administrative decisions. These discharges were put into place by a board of mainly white men but they carried no legal ramifications. One of the most common discharges for Blacks was the undesirable discharge, which was not quite a dishonorable discharge but was classified under less than honorable circumstances.[54] The discharges of bad conduct and dishonorable discharge were punitive and were put into place after a court martial. The major issue with these types of discharges was that the servicemen tended to lose their veterans' benefits with no direct appeal process in place and all at the discretion of the agency without any clear justification. Veterans Affairs records indicate that 175,000 Vietnam veterans received less than honorable discharge, including an overwhelming number of Blacks with limited education and from poor backgrounds.[55]

The military progressively utilized the administrative discharge of undesirables due to the penalty of benefit loss and legal ramifications. Offenses that led to these types of discharges ranged from drug abuse to homosexuality. The most frequent charge, "moral turpitude," included actions of political activity, including propagating peace newsletters or supporting organizations

54. Brende and Parson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery*.

55. Seymour Leventman, "Official Neglect of Vietnam Veterans," *Journal of Social Issues* 31, no. 4 (1975), 171.

such as the Black Panthers.[56] Each dishonorably discharged veteran was assigned a number, coded for a long list of offenses, which allowed many employers, administrative officers, and other personnel officials to review the veteran.[57] Having the wrong number could disqualify the veteran from employment, education, and other opportunities that amounted to a life-long struggle based on military-coded language. Military discharge affected Black veterans at an alarming rate.[58]

As the Black veterans returned home, many found the issue of racial discrimination in employment despite their military combat experience.[59] The unfair practices and instant disqualifications led to higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of education across the board for Black serviceman. In 1966, the Department of Defense attempted to combat the issue of unemployment with the creation of "Project 100,000," meant to "rehabilitate" the nation's "subterranean poor."[60] Between 1966 and 1969, nearly 246,000 youth were recruited for the program, the vast majority of them Blacks with limited education and skills outside of military combat service. The result was that Blacks were placed in jobs that were stagnant in growth and

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56. Ibid.

57. Murray, "Blacks and the Draft: A History of Institutional Racism," 57.

58. Ibid.

59. Brende and Parson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery*, 39.

60. Martin Binkin and Mark J. Eitelberg, *Blacks and the Military* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982).

had a limited future.[61] The residual effects of the disproportionate discharges of Black veterans can still be seen today.[62]

It is important to acknowledge that not all Black veterans suffered under military discharges. Veterans that received discharges such as honorable, general, and medical were set to retain all their benefits and seek additional assistance through the Veterans Administration (VA). The nine participants in this study received proper discharges from the military and thus the opportunity to take advantage of their veteran benefits. However, this study shows that many of the participants did not fully understand their benefits or their proper usage. The study shows that, even with honorable discharges, not every veteran used the G.I. Bill for education or medical benefits for rehabilitation.

Education Attainment

Over time, a high school diploma had become a nearly universal prerequisite for enlisting in the military. High school completion requirements are evident, as research has found that World War II veterans had more education than did comparable nonveterans.[63] This finding led to the conclusion that Black veterans of World War II benefited from greater education increases than their white veteran counterparts, but this growth is overstated due to the low educational outcomes of Blacks prior to the war.[64] As described by scholars, this growth of Black veterans

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61. Ibid.39.

62. Robert J. Sampson and John H. Laub, "Socioeconomic Achievement in the Life Course of Disadvantaged Men: Military Service as a Turning Point, Circa 1940-1965,"*American Sociological Review* 61, no. 3 (1996): 347.

63. Ibid., 784.

64. David H. Onset, "'First a Negro, Incidentally a Veteran': Black World War Two Veterans and the GI Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948,"*Journal of Social History* (1998): 517-543.

has been coined as a "bridging environment" for minorities.[65] The bridging, or connecting, of the environment was seen as a measure that helped in the development of Black veterans in the areas of education and vocational training. The outcome was vastly different in the lives of Black Vietnam veterans since education was becoming increasingly important. World War II service positively complemented education by combining the elements of military service, education benefits, and access. In contrast, the Vietnam War veterans' experiences were slightly more contentious and challenging, with various, over racist structures in place that kept veterans and non-veterans out of education institutions. The differences between the World War II and Vietnam eras concerning education can be explained using various racial demographics and comparing veterans to non-veterans (i.e., civilians).

Between 1950 and 1980, college enrollment rates for Black men grew slowly.[66] Reasons for the differences in the rate across racial lines were mainly due to the lack of educational resources devoted to Black students, particularly in the Southern states, where the vast majority of Blacks resided. Additionally, Black men from the South benefited less from the G.I. Bill. The bill, in essence, was race neutral in policy terms, but Southern segregation and racism in the region provided little opportunity for college access. Combined with limited state funding and lack of assistance for Black Colleges of the time, the chance to utilize the G.I. Bill to obtain a college degree was limited, which was a consistent theme during this period. At the inception of the 1944 G.I. Bill, mostly White veterans entered colleges and universities at a very high rate. These increases are explored further in the dissertation, but they can be attributed to the G.I. Bill.

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65. Sally Cook Lopreato and Dudley L. Poston, "Differences in Earnings and Earnings Ability between Black Veterans and Nonveterans in the United States," *Social Science Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1977): 750-766.

66. Mark Boulton, "How the GI Bill Failed African American Vietnam War Veterans, *"The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 58 (2007): 57.

Data from the 1951 statistical abstract of the United States revealed that enrollments for veterans in 1947 were more than one million, reaching nearly 48 percent of all total collegiate enrollments of nearly 2.4 million. Just 10 years later, however, the number had decreased to less than 400,000 but still represented almost 15 percent of total enrollment during this time. By the mid-1960s, the enrollment boom of veterans tapered off steadily for nearly a decade. However, there was a steady increase for civilians in higher education enrollment. This increase affected not only veterans but also nonveterans within higher education. Unfortunately, not every institution was prepared for such immediate enrollment increases. Institutions such as HBCUs struggled with the growth due to underfunding, lack of facilities, and other shortcomings of the time. How African American Vietnam veterans adjusted to civilian life was quite different from those that fought in World War II and the Korean War, mainly due to the changing times and divisions of society. During the Vietnam War, units began to integrate, and Black soldiers were positioned on the front lines and combat units in the military. Studies have indicated a contrast existed between the "integrated and economically" secure lifestyle of Blacks on a military post and the different lifestyle of Black civilians in their community.[67] Some of the oral history interviews reveal that contrast.

67. James M. Fendrich, "The Returning Black Vietnam-Era Veteran," *The Social Service Review* (1972): 60-75.

CHAPTER 3

ORAL HISTORY: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter describes the research methodology, methods, and interviewees for this dissertation. It provides a rationale for the selection of study participants and their reasons for taking part in the study. The chapter outlines the objectives and outcomes of the study. A proper exploration of the historical narratives from those involved can present challenges to validity and transparency, along with the reliance of memory for accuracy purposes. The chapter concludes with a summary of the items covered in the chapter.

The research methodology is formulated through the cooperative nature of academic disciplines including history, sociology, anthropology, law, journalism, and psychology.[1] The voices within the this dissertation provide profound remembrances of a segment of time that was deeply divided and entrenched with hate and confusion, through the reconstruction of "what happened" based on the stories of these veterans.[2] In the same context, the veteran's experiences yielded positive results in their lives for years to come. Lifelong friendships, benefits, and education are among the positive experiences shared in the narrative of each participant. Oral history found its place during the early part of the twentieth century.[3] One of the most prominent works of this

1. David E. Russell, "Oral History Methodology, The Art of Interviewing, "Oral History Program, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Santa Barbara, (2013), 1.

2. Linda Shopes, "Insights and Oversights": Reflections on the Documentary Tradition and the Theoretical Turn in Oral History," *Oral History Review* 41, no. 2 (Summer, 2014): 257.

3. Ibid.

time was a body of first-person narratives from everyday Americans known as "These Are Our Lives."[1] This portrayal of typical ordinary citizens created a new, profound image of society that illustrated that individuals shared more similarities than differences regardless of race, skin color, or ethnicity. Over the next 50 or so years, oral history methodology continued to grow and develop.[2] The actual impact of oral history in modern society may still be open to debate for some, but its usefulness and influence are very much needed and appreciated by those who have embarked upon the journal of oral history narratives.[3]

The process of navigating history is one of exploration and discovery. During this journey, one must first properly examine the historical notions and events that lead to the plea of emphasis of a proposed study. By effectively connecting the events of the past and utilizing outcomes, oral history narratives help aid in the development of voices and stories that are traditionally unheard. These stories encompass areas of race, class, and gender. Firsthand accounts of hardships and barriers are illustrated within historical narratives. Examples of properly examined studies and narratives are depicted in the works described by Rogers, in the essay titled "Aging, the Life Course, and Oral History: African American Narratives of Struggle, Social Change, and Decline."[4] In this work, the author states, "Social deterioration and a loss of community cohesion are recurring themes in many narratives of American history."[5] The idea of social deterioration directly correlates to the societal hierarchy referenced in this study. America

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Rebecca Sharpness, "The History of Oral History, "*Thinking about Oral History: Theories and Applications*, eds. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (New York: AltaMira Press, 2008).

4. Kim Lacy Rogers, *"Aging, the Life Course, and Oral History: African American,"* Thinking about Oral History: Theories and Applications (2007), 55.

5. Ibid.

past and present includes a plethora of ethnicities, races, and demographics. The complex layers that lie within the historical narratives of America can create a series of voices that have not been heard. Once brought forth, however, these voices can begin to penetrate and explore events of the past.

Oral history combines international and interdisciplinary lines of inquiry using research methods and historical archives.[6] These subcategories are primarily broken down into two themes – the narratives and the study of them , which serve as a catalyst for oral history. The themes are separated through "the transformation of oral communication from a source of information (data) to the production and interpretation of text, combined with the alternation of the view of oral historian/interviewee from an objective perspective to a contemplative observer to active participant in the process of the study."[7] The ability to collect rich and meaningful data allows me as a researcher to interpret and offer a response to the past, present, and future of the research participant

Participants

Nine African American men were recruited for this study, only if they were active duty during the Vietnam War and resided in the state of Alabama at some point during their service time. The participants either entered into the military voluntarily or were drafted by way of the Selective Service system. Time served in the armed forces would be no less than two years, and combat in Vietnam was not required for participation. Participant recruitment for the study occurred at a common place for many of the veterans: the church. There were nine participants included in the study, all with diverse backgrounds, years of service, and education completion.

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6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

Preparation and proper recognition of sensitive terms or phrases that could ignite memories or difficult times during the war were acknowledged before the interview. The absence of such terms allowed for open and continuous dialogue between the interview participant and me. The openness and candor of the participants showed their willing nature to tell their stories and add to the body of literature of their comrades.

Research Environment

The research took place in controlled settings to ensure the privacy of each participant. Upon acceptance of the request to participate in the study, I scheduled the time and meeting location according to the need and desire of the research participant. Participant recruitment occurred after IRB approval of the study. The three main communication channels for recruitment consisted of word of mouth, public announcements, and advertisement. Word of mouth served as the primary recruiting measure by way of family and friends of the participants. Participant recruitment lasted 28 days as participants confirmed their willingness to participate by phone. The vast majority of interviews were conducted at the home church of the participant, many times in the fellowship hall or common area of the church. In addition, some participants chose to have their interviews in the privacy of their homes, a local dining establishment, or a local YMCA. By having the interviewee comfortable and relaxed in the research setting, the interviews and data collection functioned well over the duration of the study.

The underpinning of oral history guides the framework of this study. Its existence allows for a collection of Black thought and reality from the perspective of men who never imagined the significant contributions they made would make up the formation of a dissertation study. The stories – the narratives of individual lives – are the source of oral history's particular power,

neither as document or text for scholarly assessment but as a medium for public engagement with the past.[8]

This chapter provided the historical analysis and importance of oral history and its role in this dissertation. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 discuss the results of the study. The results reflect the data collected through one-on-one interviews with the participants and interview transcriptions of the data. The results are presented in chronological order within the themes of the pre- and post-war experiences of the veterans.

8. Linda Shopes, "“Insights and Oversights”: Reflections on the Documentary Tradition and the Theoretical Turn in Oral History," *Oral History Review* 41, no. 2 (Summer, 2014), 257.

INTERVIEWEES

Jack Bishop, Linden, Alabama: Born in 1949 in Linden, Alabama, Jack Bishop grew up in the Black Belt of west Alabama. The youngest of nine children, Jack had two older sisters and six older brothers. Jack attended high school in Linden, where he participated in civil rights protest and marches. Immediately after high school, Jack was drafted into the military in 1967 and completed one tour of Vietnam before ending his service in 1969 as his draft contract expired. Jack moved to Chicago shortly after the war due to the inability to find quality work in Alabama because of the racial climate in Alabama at the time. He eventually returned to Alabama to find his wife of 38 years. Jack currently resides in his hometown of Linden, Alabama.

James M. Brown, Pike County, Alabama: Born in 1937 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, James Brown entered the military at the start of the Vietnam War and completed seven years of service prior to his medical discharge in 1964. He served at Fort Rucker, Alabama, prior to retirement, and while there he found his wife and eventually made Alabama his home in the mid-1960s. His post-military work experience included being a policeman and owning a small detective agency. James currently resides in Pike County, Alabama.

Samuel L. Duncan, Jr. Birmingham, Alabama: Born on September 21, 1950 in Fairfield, Alabama, Samuel enlisted into the military at age 18 in 1968. Assigned the occupation of wheel vehicle mechanic (63-Bravo was the military occupation code), he stated, “I never seen a screwdriver or a monkey wrench.” He worked as an infantry soldier during combat in Vietnam

while serving multiple tours. Samuel's life experiences have led him to the ministry at his home church located in Ensley, Alabama.

Jesse Echols, Tuskegee, Alabama: Born on May 16, 1941 in Waverly, Alabama, Jesse's love for the military was in his bloodlines, as he had multiple older brothers who served directly out of high school. Jesse volunteered into the military in 1960 and his service spanned over 20 years. Jesse completed multiple tours in Vietnam and was the recipient of a Purple Heart after his second tour. Jesse valued his time in the military and was thankful for all his experiences – the good and the bad. Jesse currently resides in Tuskegee, Alabama, and works as a referee for high school and college basketball and football.

John H. England, Jr. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Born on June 5, 1947 in Union Town, Alabama, John later moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where he was an active participant in protests and marches for civil rights. His fight for civil rights has been a lifetime crusade. Drafted in 1969 during his first year of law school, John served two years as a military police officer before returning to law school to complete his final two years. Over the course of his career, John has worked on behalf of minorities to help improve west Alabama. John currently resides in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where he serves on the Sixth Judicial Circuit as a district court judge.

Roy Hill, Eufaula, Alabama: Born on January 18, 1950 in Eufaula, Alabama, Roy is a product of a large farming family. For the majority of his childhood he worked on the farm, assisting older siblings and his father. After completing high school and landing a job, Roy was drafted in 1969. Roy completed a single tour in Vietnam and completed his two-year service contract. After the war Roy returned to his hometown, where he worked as a police officer for several years and then in industry at a paper mill for over 30 years. Roy currently resides in Eufaula, Alabama, and is a small business owner and church minister.

Jim Hollins, Birmingham, Alabama: Born on August 8, 1950 in Birmingham, Alabama, Jim grew up as the son of a steel mill worker and the youngest of four children. Jim lost his mother at the age of 10, but his family managed to stay intact and became a closer family unit. Jim entered Miles College at the age of 17 and completed his sophomore year before being drafted into the Marine Corps in 1968. Jim served for a little over two years before retuning back to Birmingham and finishing school. Jim found work at the sheriff's department during his last year of college, and he worked there until he started his career at the health department. His career spanned over 40 years before he retired a few years ago. Jim currently resides in Birmingham, Alabama.

Harry Jones, Ozark, Alabama. Born on December 27, 1943 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Harry grew up on a farm with his father and mother. Graduating high school at the age of 17, Harry had to wait until his 18th birthday to enlist into the military. He volunteered for the Air Force in 1961 and served for over twenty years. After retirement, Harry found a second career as a fireman and security contractor. He currently resides in Ozark, Alabama.

Ben Richardson, Enterprise, Alabama. Born on November 15, 1945 in Panama City, Florida, Ben was drafted at the age of 22 in 1967. Over the course of his storied career in the Armed Forces, Ben did multiple tours in Europe and finished his career in Alabama. Ben served for 28 years before retiring in 1995. Ben currently resides in Enterprise, Alabama, where he serves in his church.

CHAPTER 4

PREWAR: EDUCATION, SEGREGATION, AND CIVIL RIGHTS

The participants in this study are Alabama-based Vietnam veterans. Each participant was born in or moved to the state of Alabama during his enlistment or armed forces service time. The veterans personify a group of men who came from humble beginnings and who had the will to improve upon their surroundings. Each veteran's story is unique and provides a perspective that has not been shared before. These narratives not only acknowledge the usage of voice, recollection, and firsthand account, but they also reveal experiences that only the men that encountered them can convey. The accounts allow oral history to come alive in a way that displays narratives that are genuine and critical to history.

The varying environments and backgrounds from which the veterans came illustrates, even within Alabama, that differences of education and social economical status seen among members of the same race and the individuals' pursuits to voluntarily enlist or by way of the draft into the armed forces. This is evident from rural towns such as Eufaula, Alabama, to the streets of Pratt City, a municipality outside of Birmingham, Alabama. The occupation, education, family differences, and respective communities reflect the unique perspectives of each veteran as well as important similarities.

Schools and Informal Education:

Opportunities and Limits for These African American Veterans

The role of education varied among African American families of this time. The more rural areas of the country, especially in the South, historically had lower rates of education compared to the general completion percentage of the United States. Before 1930, educational attainment for secondary schools was not compiled via race according to data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). By 1940, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 7.7 percent of Black students completed high school compared to 26.1 percent of White students of the time.[1] The completion number nearly doubled in 1950 for Black students to 13 percent, while White student completion rose to 36.4 percent, according to the NCES.[2] Over the next 10 years, the completion percentage for Blacks continued to trend between 7 percent and 8 percent per year.[3] The completion percentage between 1950 and 1960 rose to 21.7 percent for African Americans, and White high school percentage rose to 43.2 percent.[4] The veteran population in this study falls into each of the decades of these high school completion percentage data. The data also serve as a reference point to the educational attainment of the parents and grandparents of each veteran and the likely levels of education attainment when assessing the national and historical data.

For most African American families, middle to high school completion was the greatest achievement for anyone in the household before and during the Vietnam War era. High school

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1. Thomas D. Snyder, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Collingdale: Diane Publishing, 1993).

2. Ibid.

3. Thomas D. Snyder, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*: DIANE Publishing, 1993).

4. Ibid.

completion for veterans in this study occurred between 1957 and 1968. According to the NCES, middle to high school completion for Black residents over the age of 25 years old in 1950, five years before the war, was 7.5 percent for Black males and other Non-White races and 9.2 percent for women. Between 1950 and 1970, the percentage of Black males who completed high school rose to 22.4 percent, and the percentage of Black females rose to 24. 6 percent. Increases in completion rates were directly connected to the growth in enrollment rates for public education.[5] The beginning of the twentieth century brought sustained increases in enrollment rates for both White and Black children. The overall enrollment rates for 5- to 19-year-olds rose from 51 percent in 1900 to 75 percent in 1940. The difference in the white and Black enrollment rates narrowed from 23 points in 1900 to 7 points in 1940. Enrollment rates continued to rise in the post-war period for all race groups. By the early 1970s, enrollment rates for both whites and Blacks had increased to about 90 percent.

Before Vietnam: Segregated Education

Separation of the races was a way of life for the vast majority of the South in the mid-1900s. Jim Crow laws and racial division were alive and well at the time. School segregation was the standard across Alabama educational institutions during the 1950s and 1960s. The vast majority of Black men called upon to serve in Vietnam experienced segregation in schools their entire lives. Inadequate resources, unfit buildings, overcrowded classrooms, and underpaid teachers were a consistent theme in the Black segregated schools. The segregated schools benefited the White students far more than the Black students of the time. Despite the 1954 ruling of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, in which the Supreme Court overturned the separate but equal doctrine, the education systems in Alabama remained segregated for many years to

5. Ibid.

come.[6] The public schools in the state accepted the rule and direction of the governor at the time. The Jim Crow ideologies of the state were maintained and very central to the day-to-day experiences of Black people during the Vietnam War era.[7]

The pre-war education experiences for almost all of the interviewees included segregated schools with limited resources as well as underpaid and undertrained teachers. As history has illustrated, despite legal factors, the school systems for White students were far more supported financially than Black school systems at this time.[8] The interviewees addressed this lack of funding and resources as they described their educational experiences before their military and workforce experience.

The faith-based community operated many Black schools during the early 1940s. Jesse Echols recollected, "having classes in a church" throughout his first years of school. The classes were made up of many grade levels in which the students were taught various subject matters regardless of age. This was common in small, rural communities such as Waverly, Alabama, where Jesse's family lived, a Southeast farming community outside of Tuskegee. Waverly's proximity to Tuskegee was very favorable for the citizens of the small town. Located fewer than 30 miles from Waverly, Tuskegee was a predominantly Black community centered on agriculture, culture, and education. It was connected to the prestigious Black college, Tuskegee Institute (now known as Tuskegee University), where Blacks sought refuge and opportunity. Founded in the late 1800s as a normal (teaching) school, it had evolved into a top college for many Black students. Tuskegee Institute was a place of learning, debate, and advancement. A

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6. Kevin Michael Kruse and Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Fog of War : The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*: New York : Oxford University Press, 2012).

7. Ibid.

8. Michael A. Boozer et al., *Race and School Quality since Brown V. Board of Education*: The Brookings Institution, 1992), 269.

pillar of success for many African Americans not only in the South but all over the United States, Tuskegee Institute had substantial success leading up to the 1940s, from the founding of the first Black veterinarian school and the first Veterans Administration staffed only by Black professionals to the Tuskegee Airmen flight training program, an all-Black squadron that played a significant role in World War II.[9] Tuskegee played a major role in the life of Jesse Echols, whose family relocated to the town to be closer to extended family and more opportunities.

As discussed earlier, African American men born in the South during the 1930s and 1940s faced a world full of hatred, bigotry, and well-established barriers to entry because of the color of their skin. The challenges set forth were both harsh and often uncontrollable. Born in 1941 on a small farm in Waverly, Jesse Echols was brought into a world where he had to fight for everything he desired. The son of farmers who later transitioned into railroad workers, Jesse was a part of a working family. At the age of 5, his family moved to the town of Tuskegee.

Regarding the move, Jesse said, "The transition was real good; it was all Black at that time; it was much better, and the teaching was better." Overall, Jesse Echols described the new educational opportunity in positive terms. In addition to the daily battles that occurred based on race, the only other negative issue that he recalled was the distance between home and school and the lack of transportation. One thing he didn't like, he said, was that "we had to walk to school every day, and it was a good three miles where I had to go to school; and there was a creek – we called it a trestle with a bridge on it."[10] The six-mile round-trip, five days a week in rain, snow, or sun, was a result of the lack of transportation afforded to Blacks during this time. Jesse faced that walk every day but also dealt with the hatred of White children and adults.

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9. Pete Daniel, "Black Power in the 1920s: The Case of Tuskegee Veterans Hospital," *The Journal of Southern History* 36, no. 3 (1970), 368.

10. J. Echols, "Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

> The white kids were still going to ride the bus, and every day seemed like we got caught on that, with the bus, got caught in that bridge and the kids would get off there; they had rocks, and they would rock us and we would run back across the bridge and wait until they got back on the bus and leave. I'll never forget that. We got rocked, every day, every day, just trying to go to school. And… sometimes the driver would stop on purpose just to rock us; it was terrible.[11]

The rite of passage for an education was a daily six-mile journey of getting "rocked" while watching White peers ride back and forth on the school bus. Notwithstanding the daily conflict, Jesse continued to attend school and successfully finished the year. As he continued his pursuit education, and graduated from high school, he followed the example set by his older brothers and voluntary enlisted into the Army. The next phase of his career is examined later in this study.

The connection between Tuskegee Institute and the city of Tuskegee illustrated a sense of community and togetherness. Approximately 140 miles northwest of Tuskegee was another college town, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The University of Alabama was the gold standard of the town and only accepted White students at the time, a key element as it pertains to college desires and aspirations for Black students of the time. A fundamental difference between Tuskegee Institute and The University of Alabama during this era was the difference in the racial makeup of the institutions, from the president to the student population. The University of Alabama was an all-white school, resulting in little interest from Black students. As an illustration of this, a veteran in this study from the Tuscaloosa area had little to say about The University of Alabama during his time there as a student.

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11. Ibid.

Born in 1943 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Harry Jones described his childhood as a "troubling period." Harry had a sincere desire to leave the only place he had ever known. His vivid education memories stemmed from Druid City High School, which he describes as "a Black school across the board." Harry had little to any interaction with Whites before his military service. He did not address or seem aware of college opportunities at the time. He grew up "four miles from Stillman College," an HBCU located on the west side of Tuscaloosa. Given the proximity of the college, I was surprised that he offered no reference or any spoken desire to attend college as an option outside of the military. His primary focus was to graduate from high school and join the military. "I went into the military when I was 17 because my mom had to sign for me to go; but see, at the time, you could not go into the military until you were 18."[12] The decision to join the Air Force allowed Harry to embark upon a stable and rewarding journey through the military ranks that is examined during this study.

John England is a product of Birmingham, Alabama's largest city, approximately 55 miles northeast of Tuscaloosa. John was born in 1947 in Uniontown, Alabama, and was moved to Birmingham as a baby when his father took a job at a steel mill there. From the time he entered school, John attended "all segregated schools, starting at Cameron Lane, [then] Lane Elementary School and graduating from Ullman High School in 1965." Being a Black child during the late 1950s and early 1960s in Birmingham was a unique and terrifying experience. He stated, "You know, during that time, Dr. King and the Children's Crusade – there was a lot of civil rights activities, from boycotting schools, stores downtown, students marching, and so I was there during the middle of that."

12. H. Jones, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

This intense period of racial divide had a profound effect on his life; especially the bombing that occurred at the 16th Street Baptist Church in 1963. John states, "I believe that when it occurred, I was at that time a junior in high school, and one of the victims was one of the girls I knew; she attended Ullman, and I think her name was Cynthia Wesley, but I knew her." He recalls, "She was one or two grades under me, and so I saw her and interacted with her some at Ullman High School." The events and racial turmoil within the school and city during this time created a sense of awareness about racial lines and safety, which connected to his participation in the Birmingham Children's Crusade march of 1963.

He explained how the rally took place at Kelly Ingram Park, located just across the street from 16th Street Baptist Church, a significant landmark for the civil rights era. Students of all ages were encouraged to attend the Children's Crusade marches and were informed by way of radio and word of mouth. The leaders of the march understood the impact that children could have and encouraged participation.

> I went to Kelly Ingram Park, where much of the marching and protests occurred. And the, you know, pictures of the dogs attacking marchers, fire hoses, well, I experienced all of that, you know; getting hosed by the fire hose, you know, the fireman had and the police with the dogs.[13]

His involvement in the Children's Crusade march and the ability to protest displayed not only a high level of courage but also the social consciousness of the times. John believed occurrences such as these helped formed a part of his Birmingham experience.

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13 J.England, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

> In fact, from my high school, there were days when we were supposed to be in school when students boycotted school and went downtown to march. I did that, but many students were marched into vans and taken to jail, but I ran, and they did not catch me. I got wet from the hoses.[14]

The education inside the classroom walls played a major role in John's life, helping shape his interest into attending college. "You know, I was familiar with George Washington Carver from elementary school [and he inspired me] to not be a teacher or preacher, but to be a scientist." The remembrance of primary schooling and the mention of Carver illustrated that John wanted to different from a young age, to be what others were not. Outside the classroom, John was involved in the fight for civil rights. As a high school student, John made the decision to protest, march, and speak on behalf of what was right, displaying a high level of courage. Despite these experiences of racist behavior, John's desire to attend college was not lessened. Coming from a family of the Black Belt region of Alabama, "no one in my family had ever gone to college, so it was a unique experience, and I was scared because it was a new thing. And I was away from home for the first time in my life, so it was a rewarding experience, of course."[15] Positive reinforcement was truly needed during this era, with the constant levels of racial violence and hatred that were present. This type of encouragement was critical in the schools, where a student would spend a considerable amount of time. John's desire to attend college was enhanced by a teacher who encouraged and motivated him to attend college. Ullman High School provided unique opportunities and resources to students that many Black high schools of the time could not provide. College preparatory classes were available, and he took advantage.

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14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

"As my classmates were preparing to go to college, so too did I, and with the help of the advisors and teachers there, you know, I applied and was accepted to Tuskegee," he said.

Ullman High School affected him in ways no one in his family had been affected before. The school aided in his development and provided the right amount of support for him to be accepted into Tuskegee. It is important to note, he stated, "[g]oing to Tuskegee wasn't directly related to what I experienced during the civil rights movement in Birmingham. [But]… in all candor, my experience at Tuskegee directly contributed to my decision to leave the sciences and to go to law school."

Education on any level can provide exposure to new ideas, people, and perspectives for any student. This dissertation examines the college and work experience leading up to the participants' time of service, but the reliance on agriculture in the state of Alabama as a main function of Black family resources and occupations for many years is also explored. The narrative of the next veteran provides firsthand accounts of how this system of living was vital to the overall upkeep of his family's household.

Roy Hill was born and raised on a farm located in rural southeast Alabama. His family had a long history of farming and agriculture. The lifestyle he knew was built from picking cotton by hand. Roy's early accounts of his childhood focused on what he did outside of the classroom and the importance of work instead of school, depending on the wishes of his mother and father. Roy stated, "In the 1950s, 1960s, you go to school half of the year because the other half of the year, you were picking the cotton while everyone else is going to school." Roy described a consistent pattern of poor school attendance due to the upkeep of the crops. Despite the truancy, he continued to advance and be passed along to the next grade. The opportunity to

learn outside of school was very important for not only him but also the next veteran in this study.

Choosing to farm or attend school was a decision that Roy faced on a regular basis. The season of the crop and when it was harvested was a top priority for him and his family. He explained the role of education within his family during the 1950s and 1960s, and he made clear the effect farming had on his educational opportunities. He endured the agricultural life of picking cotton and working on the farm. With the school year occurring during the heart of the harvest season, the particular set of crops had a tremendous impact on the education attainment for Black students. The time and dedication it took to maintain the cotton fields were not small.

The Florida Panhandle during the 1950s and 1960s was very much connected to many Alabama whites' values, centered on racism and inequality for Blacks. Ben Richardson spent his formative years in the Panhandle. He is included in the study because he made his home in Alabama after his military service and his narrative provides a far different perspective than any other veteran, even though racism played a role in his childhood, too. Ben was a native of Panama City, Florida, who knew firsthand the plight of racism that existed in that area during this time. He went to school in an all-Black school system from elementary to high school in Panama City. His educational experiences were coupled with his interactions at the city's beach. As a young man in an oceanfront city, he never had the chance to fully explore the beach, as he desired. He remembered it as, "[t]he big, old beautiful beach we got out there, and I worked out there in school." He explained that at Brown Beach, "They put a little fence around, barb wired [sic] fence around it, to separate a little area for us to go to the beach." It was called "Brown Beach, because it was meant for the African Americans, and the rest of the beach was for the white people." The separation of the beach mirrored the separation of school and other public

places. The beach was seen as a place of work rather than a place of relaxation. Ben Richardson said:

> The only reason you need to be out there, you better be working; and as time went by, they got rid of the bus, but the only reason you had to be out there was to be working. We worked out there. We had one Black man, George Rogers; they got a bus for him to drive all us at the time to work out there, and get on that bus and come back.[16]

Ben continued to explain that they "get on that bus and come back, just like going, picking cotton; you were out there washing dishes and making beds up and all of that. It was horrible." Such was the life for a Black child in the South. Discrimination was everywhere, from the classroom to working in an area designated for recreation and pleasure.

Ben described an educational opportunity – learning to swim – that was missed due to the barriers in place surrounding the beach. He said that kids could go in the water but "not at the beach; we used to have our little mud puddle that we used to swim at." The beach was off limits to him during his entire childhood. He still feels the sting and stated, "I don't even go to the beach when I go down there. My sister is the only one I've got left down there, but I've got my kids and grandkids down there, but I don't go to that beach – too many memories there." The lasting impact of being denied access to the beach cannot be overstated. The barbed wire fences of discrimination on "Brown Beach" left a permanent imprint on Ben, as proven by his refusal to visit the beach that at one time he could not step foot on. The remembrance of such ordeals sheds some light into the pre-war encounters for many of these veterans. The differences from the South to the state of Pennsylvania can be seen within the context of the next veteran's comments.

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16. B. Richardson, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

While Alabama became the home of James Brown during his service time in the military, his experiences represent a far different reality than any other veteran in this study.

James Brown was born in 1937 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Growing up in Pittsburgh was "good because I didn't have, never had any problems with anyone." James described his dad and brother as "gangsters, that was kind of part of the family at the time." The older of two siblings, James came from a small, close-knit family. During the early 1940s and 1950s, everyone in his community attended school together. It was even common for Black and White children to interact and befriend one another. This social climate was vastly different from that in Alabama during this period. The positive interactions and exchanges that James could be a part of allowed him to have an outlook on race and color that differed from many of his Alabama-based friends and family. His remembrance of relocation and service time in Alabama provides a different perspective on race relations that is addressed later in this study.

The 1950s were a continuum of the 1940s in terms of dealing with educational attainment as well as injustice inside and outside of the military for African Americans. As the race relations of the veterans who served in the 1940s contributed to the shaping and development of each Black soldier, the veterans of the 1950s and 1960s had encounters that produced a plethora of responses and results. The refusal of the government and armed forces in the early 1940s to officially end segregation in the military was still evident during the 1950s and 1960s.[17] Although separated by only a decade, the means in which these experiences take place continued to have an effect for years to come. As integration of the armed forces became official in 1948, a greater sense of the importance of race relations seemed to surface in the life of the next

17. Robert W. Mullen, Blacks in America's Wars: The Shift in Attitudes from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam, 1st edition (New York: Anchor Foundation, 1991).

generation of veterans.[18] New opportunities for advancement became available and a sense of direction and confidence birthed from progress in previous decades was also evident. The distinctive nature of the events, location, and time were significant to the men of this era. Despite the shortcomings of a rural, agricultural life, some veterans came from families that emphasized education through schooling.

According to Jim Hollins, the importance of education was stressed in his home. "See, my father didn't have an education, but he stressed education in our home."[19]

> My mom died when I was 10, so that was that. The educated boys with a lot of rough edges around, you know, that hung out and shot at folk and fought and did that, and then you go back, and you still had to go to school where the other guys did all of that, and they went to jail.[20]

Jim Hollins grew up in Pratt City, a municipality a few minutes from downtown Birmingham. Jim's high school years were unforgettable for him. "Western-Olin High School, that's now Jackson Olin High School, everything was still segregated; so, it was a Black school, which led to a lot of, you know, there was no good counseling." As a young man, he remembers going to high school with little intent to learn; he was there because he had to be. There were not the same resources available to him as there were at other Black high schools, such as the resources available at John England's school. Jim Hollins explains, "When I went to high school, you know – again, I'm a half thug, you know, hanging out; so I want to do the least I can just to

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18. Robert W. Mullen, *Blacks in America's Wars: The Shift in Attitudes from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam*: New York: Anchor Foundation, 1991, 1973; 1st ed, 1991).

19. J. Hollins, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

20. Ibid.

get by." At his high school, Jim said there was no counselor there to say, "Hey, you ought to go to college; we need to push you over this edge. They just left you alone." The lack of encouragement contributed to him becoming a product of his environment, even during the school day. Jim said, "I did the first two years of high school, you know, doing the regular curriculum, but those next two years, where I should have been doing academic stuff, I went to the auto mechanic shop and did body assembly for two years." The purpose of the auto and mechanic shop was to teach students about body assembly and using their hands. But, instead, Jim explained, "We drunk whiskey and smoked dope." He continued:

> That's what they did there. You know, you leave school, go to the movies, go get a girl and stuff; ain't nobody work on no car and nobody cared, you know. It was all Black folk and you were just there. So graduation, I hadn't applied to no college or no SAT — no nothing.

The absence of supervision and accountability had a negative effect on Jim, which was a major component in the direction of his life.

He was 16 when he graduated, wise beyond his years in street smarts, but "the counselor didn't see it," he said. "You know, but my grades were good in those earlier years. They said, well, his aptitude is this higher grade so let's move him up, so I got skipped. And then they went back and said, well, we still ain't got to him yet, so they move you up again." During his middle and high school career, Jim was moved up on three separate occasions. In retrospect, he stated, "You know, but those are bad. I would never do that again. If I had my choice, I'd stay back, stay back, because you're good with the education then, but the social aspect of it is detrimental." Growing up fast was something he had to do. The education and social climate forced him to interact and engage with students three to four years older. He said:

> You figure a 15-year-old with 17-, 18-year-olds, that's a senior in high school. Who are you going to date? Who are you going out with? So, I end up portraying myself as two or three years older, which means I have got to act two or three years older, so you walk around with a cigarette in your mouth or a wine bottle, and you act thug. You know, anybody say something because you're a little boy, young boy, you know, I'm packing, you know. And I got two big brothers, and they know about them Hollins boys; they'll burn you, burn your house down, you know. So, you portray that thug-like and that got you a little older where you shouldn't have to, you know.[21]

The maturation process in school that Jim was forced through at the age of 15 enabled him to live and see life from a perspective far different than his peers. But like other participants in this study, a major portion of his growth and development occurred outside of the classroom.

Many veterans in this study have some connection to rural counties and towns in Alabama. Many Black residents migrated from the Black Belt region of Alabama, which was originally named for its rich, black topsoil. Farming was a major component of life. James Brown knows this area well. Born in 1950 in the city of Linden, Alabama, his strongest memory of education begins with his high school interactions during the civil rights movement. However, the role of education for James was not directly tied to learning but was more intimately connected to administrative discipline, respect, and the relationship he had with his principal during high school.

James Brown's awareness of the current education system in the area allows for a more in-depth understanding of the town in which he was born and raised. "Everything is white," he

21. Ibid.

said. “They got a little private school down there right now, all white. One out here on 28, it’s one there and just the elementary is up there and the high school is down there and I wasn’t sent there. But them kids going to do what they want to do anyway. I mean you might as well put them kids together.” James’ sense of togetherness today isn’t something new. His long history of fighting for what he believes in began during his high school years in the mid-1960s.

James Brown participated in the civil rights marches during high school. Indeed, his entire city participated. “See, we was demonstrating in Linden, you know; we was marching in the streets and we return to school, we would turn the high school out.” He explained further, “Principal Dunning use to whoop us, wouldn’t let nobody go to class, and we start marching.” James said the students didn’t “have no permission,” but that didn’t stop them from marching. “They put us in jail and did all of that, but in the end, we won.” He went on to say, “We went from the poor house to the White House,” a reference that is very common in the Black community among the men and women that fought and marched during the Civil Rights era and then saw Barack Obama elected as president.

Memories of protest and civil rights activities are also prevalent for Samuel Duncan. He was born on September 21, 1950, at Lloyd Noland Hospital, located in Fairfield, Alabama. During this time, Lloyd Noland was the closest hospital that admitted Black patients. As Samuel said, “I never lived in Fairfield. I was born in Fairfield. I lived in a little suburb out here in the country called Adamsville.” Samuel attended several different schools. He said:

> I went to high school; I was bounced around now. I went to high school in Adamsville for elementary part of it; I went to Docena for the junior part, junior

high. I went to Westfield for high school, transferred to Alden, which is Graysville, for graduation.[22]

Samuel Duncan attributed his moving from school to school to the "county system; it bounces around like that." The separation of races was a major theme during his school years. He stated, "Oh, God, I didn't have the opportunity to see a White person. I didn't talk to a white person. I think I saw one upon the day I was getting ready to graduate, and she came in as a teacher. And I didn't have that opportunity to go to school with Caucasians, white people." Even amid the changing of schools and localities, the lack of racial inclusion played a major role in the life of Samuel. His environment was a direct reflection of his education experience. He said:

> I was born, raised, taught, bred in a prejudice environment. See, I mean, my mom and dad, my parents and all the people around me, they weren't, per se, prejudice, but it was a civil rights situation, back in the 60s, you know; and they didn't cross white people and they told you not to. So, I didn't have no other choice but to say I don't like white people. I grew up thinking that that was the way to go.[23]

He added explicit examples. "A lot of situations caused me to relate to what mom was saying – White people are mean, you know, and everything. Ku Klux Klan era, you know, I watched the cross burnings. I went through all of that." Samuel was involved with the Civil Rights Movement from 1960 to 1968. From the ages of 10 to 18, he was actively involved with several aspects of social justice, adding to the discussion of education and learning outside of the classroom. Over that period, he remembers being in the middle of everything. "I was in the midst

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22. S. Duncan, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

23. Ibid.

of it. In the midst of it, but I got some of my worst strappings, whoopings, from my parents for trying to be so, you know, mannish, skipping out of school, running downtown because somebody say they were rioting." He described his direct participation with the Children's Crusade March. "[In] 1963, I was right there downtown, yeah, 13 years old; shot hooky from school, ran downtown. I was about this far [arm's length] from getting the water turned on [me] when mama found us." By actively participating in several protests and going through many of the struggles firsthand, Samuel's perspective of race relations was one of white hatred for Blacks.

Upon high school graduation, Samuel's decision to join the military was largely based on the fact he was "tired of feeding my daddy's hunting dog. I was tired of making gardens every year, you know, country style; you got to, you know, plant the seeds and walk behind that stupid mule." As I explore Samuel's military endeavors later in the study, it is vital to understand his formation both educationally and culturally.

The role of education in each of this set of veterans' lives varies greatly based upon location and family occupation, but there were other experiences that were relevant to and entangled with their primary and secondary school years. One important element was the ways in which many veterans learned. The influences outside of the classroom were just an important as the learning that took place within. Additionally, the strong-willed guidance counselor or hands-on principal who ruled by action and words also were important to the overall development of some of them, whether that educator offered positive or negative responses.

All the veterans in this study completed high school, and a select few had the chance to complete their post-secondary education. Many of these men came from poorly educated families, and finishing high school fulfilled the dreams and aspirations of some of those who

came before. While some voluntarily enlisted, others were drafted. The ways in which each veteran enlisted into the armed forces are examined next in this study.

CHAPTER 5

ENLISTED OR DRAFTED, DISCHARGED

Voluntary Enlistment Versus the Draft

Military service and enlistment varied for many Vietnam veterans. The 1930s, 1940s and 1950s produced the African American Vietnam veterans in this study. While birthplaces ranged from Pennsylvania to Florida, their entry into service, whether voluntary or via the Selective Service System, instantly created a commonality among the service members. The draft significantly affected many veterans, including some of these African Americans from Alabama. Connecting each of these areas displays the path and journey that brought these individuals into the military and the values that came from their military experience.

The stage of life upon entering the military and previous work experience are areas of focus for the African American veterans who participated in this study. Of those nine, six were drafted and three enlisted. Most participants had recently graduated from high school with minimal work experience, except for what they did to help their families while still at home. However, there were a few who had attended vocational school or four years of college prior to service. The path to the armed forces presented challenges and opportunities for each veteran as he began a new chapter in his life.

Drafted at 22, Ben Richardson's path was very different from the other veterans in this study. Ben stated, "I was actually, actually, I was already married; I had four children." Ben had established himself as a husband, father, and the head of his household. He had a full-time position as a driver for a moving and storage company. However, he had tried to enlist years

before. “I tried to volunteer early on and they said I had too many children; well, when the war got hot and heavy with Vietnam, then they decided to draft me.” As with many Black veterans, he was not pleased with the draft. “I didn’t want to go at that point because I was driving trucks for a living.” But he was drafted into the army as an infantryman, leaving his family. As with many African American men drafted in Alabama during Vietnam, Ben was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, for his basic training.[1]

Joining the military brought many adjustments, including the experience of leaving home. But often the biggest shock was being around people of another race. The transition to basic training differed among veterans; the most difficult adjustment came with the interactions and working side by side with those of another race. Eight out of nine veterans in this study came from a segregated schools and community. As they entered the armed forces community, integration was now their living community. Ben Richardson’s age, maturity, and stature allowed him to take charge and lead. “I was older than some of the instructors I had, trying to teach me how to do military things; so it went – it went well. As a matter of fact, I was in charge; a squad leader because of my age and my size, so it went well for me.”[2]

After successful completion of basic training, Ben was given his specialization and orders to Fort Knox, Kentucky. He stated, “I went to Fort Knox for my advanced engine training for armor, which is tanks.” The specialization training lasted a few months, and “I left Fort Knox and went out to—I was on the plane going to Vietnam as a private.”[3] The duration of Ben’s tour in Vietnam was 12 months. The details of his experience in Vietnam were not directly addressed

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1. B. Richardson, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

in his interview, but aspects of the tour are provided later in this study. A far different experience occurred for John England, who was drafted at age 22 but used the college deferment for a year before joining the armed forces.

John received an undergraduate degree from Tuskegee and began his postgraduate degree at The University of Alabama Law School prior to joining the military. He describes Tuskegee at the time as "a center of civil rights activity." During his time there, protest and action for equal rights was a daily objective. He said:

> In fact, you know, during the time I was there, there was a, you know, a protest of what Tuskegee as an institution's role would be in the Civil Rights Movement and informing what then was thought to be a Black university, a university that could highlight the contributions that African Americans made to the nation as a whole.[4]

The role and mission of the institution was something that students did not take lightly. The protest involved, in effect, many students locking all the academic buildings from the inside so no one could come in or out and then locking in the board of trustees that were there for a meeting to force them to negotiate some of the concerns that the student activists had at the time. He stated, "You know, Tuskegee was a place where you had compulsory ROTC, and some people, many students, protested against that being compulsory."[5] John added, "As opposed to no other type of program being there, but you being required to do that."[6] During that era, ROTC was a requirement for students. The centrality of and focus on civil rights and opposition to the war were familiar matters on the campus.

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4. J. England, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

5. J. England, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

6. Ibid.

Civil rights leaders were also on campus in abundance because they utilized college students to push for civil rights. John recalled, "During that time all of the acknowledged and recognized civil rights leaders – Malcolm X, of course, he passed in 1965, so it would have been 1966, I came after he passed – …Stokely Carmichael … H. Rap Brown, James Forman, Julian Bond, they were regulars on the campus; so we met them all."[7] These individuals had a profound impact on the university, students, and, specifically, on John. He said:

> They directly influenced me, too, and of course, there was a professor there named Preston who helped me apply to go to what's called a CLEO program, the Council of Legal Education Opportunity. It was a program that law schools created to encourage minorities to go into law.[8]

The program provided exposure to areas that traditionally were not open to minorities, thus allowing John to spend his summer at Harvard University. He explained the process of figuring out why law was for him and his candid desire to work in the area that he felt needed it the most.

> I took the LSAT and, you know, got to meet with a number of recruiters and came very close to going to Yale, so I might have been at Yale when Justice Clarence Thomas would have been there. But I felt that Alabama was where I wanted to go because Alabama was where I thought I could make the contribution to civil rights because, obviously, at Tuskegee, we spent a lot of time in the Black Belt and the

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

> Black Belt is where I was born, where I spent most of my summers until I went to college.[9]

John's passion for the Black Belt created an immense opportunity to work on behalf of many African Americans who previously did not have legal assistance. He stated, "I felt a connection to the Black Belt; now, of course, Uncle Sam put all those plans on hold because I was drafted."[10]

His draft experience occurred as he prepared to attend The University of Alabama Law School.

> I was drafted and I got accepted to Alabama Law School; I came and registered for classes and started taking classes and at the beginning of the year, I got my draft notice; I was drafted probably first of September or thereabout and I went to the draft board and it was during that time, you see, you got a deferment to go to college.[11]

The college deferment allowed draftees to delay their service while in college. In John's case, he said "I went to the draft board and they gave me a one-year deferment; in other words, since I had already applied and had already spent the money to register for law school, they allowed me to finish the first year out."[12] After completing his first year of law school, John reported to basic training in June 1969 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As was the case with Ben Richardson, John's age and experience played a role in his development during basic training

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9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

and entry into the armed forces.

"Now I had finished college," John said, "and I had also done one year of law school, so I was probably 23, 24, and most of the kids there were 18, 19, and 20, and the drill sergeant was probably my age."[13] The closeness of age and experiences obtained during college seem to have provided a level of comfort for John England during this transition. "Basic training during that time was almost like pledging a fraternity; I saw the parallels because, you know, you go through a lot of changes and they appear to have no purpose."[14] The way in which he approached the nature of basic training was much different than his peers. The age dynamic did provide some challenges for John. "Now, it was difficult for me to buy all of that because, you know, like I said, I'm just as old as the drill sergeant." Being older came with advantages but there were potential disadvantages, too, related particularly to his college education and entrance into graduate school. During basic training, John recalled, "I made sure that the fact that I had finished college and gone to a year of law school, I kept that secret as much as I could; because if that became knowledge, then the people like the lieutenant or the sergeant, they would single you out and harass you."[15] In his mind education attainment and advancement was more of a hindrance than help during basic training. Coming off smarter than a superior was not an aspect of basic training that anyone wanted to be associated with. Furthermore, the more education an individual obtained, the higher rank they would receive after basic training. As a result, informing others of one's education attainment would increase one's chances of leading soldiers into battle. "So … I kept that to myself as much as I could. I also knew – because when you're in

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

the military you hear things – that the people, the more education you had, the more likely you were going to be 11 Bravo, which was infantry."[16] An 11 Bravo assignment to the servicemen in basic training meant "you were going in the bushes." Over the course of basic training, John's education level was discovered by some of his colleagues, because he was recruited to be a lieutenant. The rank of lieutenant was not something that a lot of soldiers seemed to seek. According to John, "The collective understanding of those serving as lieutenant was that they would be on the front lines in Vietnam." John expressed this was a main reason the military actively recruited and drafted individuals for first and second lieutenant.

> The reason why they were actively trying to recruit folks is because the word among, you know, us recruits was that during the Vietnam War, we were losing a lot of second lieutenants because Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese would target leaders among the soldiers and so…they needed more second lieutenants because they were being severely injured or killed.[17]

The common message among the recruits was that the military was losing more lieutenants than were entering the forces at the time.

Once basic training concluded, recruits were given their unit and assignment. John recalled the day he was given his orders and military occupation code (known as an MOS), which indicated a soldier's job and rank. "Standing outside our barracks when they announced where we were going and what our MOS was, and you knew that if you got 11 Bravo, you were

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

likely going to Vietnam," said John. "You also knew if you were sent to Fort Polk, you were going to Vietnam."[18] The public announcement of one's MOS and duty location was a fate that many approached apprehensively and eagerly. John England remembered "waiting and … hoping that you don't get 11 Bravo and … be assigned to Fort Polk. But as it turned out, I got 95 Bravo."[19] The course of one's military career can take shape and form within moments. 95 Bravo was the designation for military police, meaning that John would not be a part of the infantry unit for the war and thus, according to the other soldiers, decreasing his chances of going to Vietnam. It is important to recognize in John's narrative that the path taken from education to the completion of basic training was different depending on the soldier's level of education.

The nuances and historical implications of duty station, MOS, and branch of service were crucial in the lives of these Vietnam War-era servicemen. Jesse Echols, a native of Tuskegee, didn't have the chance to attend nearby Tuskegee Institute. Jesse recollected, "I went in the service in 1960; that's when I graduated." And his MOS was "11 Bravo, which is infantry." Jesse entered basic training at the age of 18. "I went to basic training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina; and from basic training, I went straight to Vietnam."[20] He was a part of the front line of the war in the early 1960s. His military career spanned more than 20 years and he is the proud recipient of a Purple Heart for his courage during the Vietnam War. His experiences after the war and multiple tours are examined later in this study.

The draft process during the 1960s varied by individual, as some entered directly out of high school while others had the chance to start college or an occupation. Jim Hollins was

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18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. J. Echols, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

afforded the chance to attend college prior to being drafted. But this accomplishment didn't come easily. With the assistance of his older sister, Jim successfully applied to and enrolled into Miles College, an HBCU located in Birmingham, Alabama. Jim described his sister as the person that actively prepared him for school. "She came home and she said, let me see all your stuff you got ready for school. I said, girl, I'm graduating school. She said, no, no, daddy, we don't play that here."[21] At this point, Jim came to understand that college was the next chapter in his life. "She was like the mama, you know, she was old enough then to be mama." He continued, "So I said, girl, I ain't got all that. She said, oh, no, we doing that. So she got everything fixed for me to go to Miles, and that's how that kind of just turned that around. If it wasn't for her, you know, I'd probably just have been another bum out there." The influence and impact of Jim his older sister allowed him to enter college at a young age. "I turned 17 in September. I started college in August, so I was 16, and I turned 17 my freshman year."[22]

By entering college at such a young age, Jim felt the need to stand out and seem older than he was. "So, I smoke a little dope in the morning, drink a little wine for lunch, but I still kept my grades up," In addition to classes, he had the chance to join a fraternity, Omega Psi Phi. He said, "See, the next year, I pledged, and we had fraternity brothers everywhere, so I could get my I.D. card. I wasn't but 18 but my I.D. said 21, with a picture."[23] The fake ID allowed Jim to portray himself as much older than he was. The pattern of behavior quickly changed when his older sister started working at Miles College and became aware of his conduct. Jim said:

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21. J. Hollins, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

> She would come home, and she would tell Daddy, "Daddy, he is just embarrassing you; you ought to see about that." You know, just rough. So Daddy said, "Boy, now you know your sister out there, she is, you know, she has got people out there, her reputation." So, I decided I'd do straight; I tried to be straight.[24]

In doing "straight" or the right way, Jim noticed little change in his classes and grades.

> I had some classes, like my English lit, and had a debate. I said, you cannot out debate a guy that's high on reefer, and he knows his lesson, too. I can beat you every time. You can't out talk me. You ain't going to out talk me when I got that jungle mix. You ain't going to beat it, you ain't going to beat it. So I say my grades were fine.[25]

Jim's intellect was displayed in the classroom, as he managed a GPA of 3.9 during his freshman and sophomore year.

At the beginning of his junior year, he was drafted. A sense of familiarity with the military did exist. "My oldest brother had already been in the Army, and you watch the news, folks in the Army were dying, like crazy over in Vietnam. I said, I do not want to die. I ain't that crazy. I might be high, but I ain't no fool."[26] His intuition and desire to live pushed him to question himself and establish a roadmap to survival.

> So I … told myself, I [asked], well, who ain't dying over there? They said Coast Guard. I ain't heard of too many folk in the Coast Guard dying in Vietnam. So I went

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

> down and said, well, I am going to join the Coast Guard, don't have to go. The man at the Coast Guard said, hey, you got to sign up for eight years, and we got a waiting list. I said I do not even want to get married that long.[27]

Jim then explored the Navy. "So I said, well, and we stay with the war. So I went to the Navy. So the guy in the Navy said, you got four years to sign, and they got a waiting list. I said, well, the Army folks gave me 60 days, something like that, so I got to make a move. So that was out."[28] The Coast Guard required a service commitment that was too long, the Navy waiting list did not fit his draft status, and "the Air Force, they were already full. Everybody had a waiting list that was full. So it was all these recruiters just all in one building."[29] He continued to explore his other options.

> The next one, the Marine Corps. Went in there, knocked on his door and we went in, and we talked. I told him about all the rest of them. He said, well, tell you, son, he said, if you have got a toothbrush, you could go today. Something should have clicked. Why everybody else got a waiting list? This one doesn't, but it did not click. I was still thinking I got lucky; I ain't got to go to the Army. So I signed up, signed up, signed on the line.[30]

Despite his knowledge of the armed forces, Jim failed to realize what exactly the Marine Corps was. And he failed to take advantage of college deferment. He stated, "Well, I should have

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27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

been eligible and I probably didn't fill out all the stuff, didn't do it, nobody went to explain it to me. Poor counseling again."[31] Despite being a minority college student with a 3.9 GPA and an upperclassman, he had no idea of the opportunity to continue his education and defer his military service. As noted earlier, John England utilized the deferment for graduate school. Miles College was (and is) a Black college and The University of Alabama Law School was (and is) a predominately white college, where one could assume faculty and staff members educated and counseled many white draftees on the deferment process and the options they had when drafted.

Jim completed his basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina. He said the Marines' boot camp "was and is … rough. And a lot of them get to sit back, you know, they do not make it; so they start them over until they just kick them out completely. However, like I said, I had pledged my fraternity by then, this was back in the day."[32] Jim believed that his readiness for basic training could be attributed to his pledging of Omega Psi Phi during his sophomore year of college. The mental and emotional pledging process of joining his fraternity, was very helpful according to Hollins. During basic training, he said, "A lot of guys they could not take it, they would freak out; the white folk, just oh, good, because the drill instructor was usually a little bitty Black guy, you know."[33] The leadership of a Black male was a new experience for many of the white recruits. Jim recalled specific times where one could see how his race and experiences growing up benefited him to a degree. He said:

> Yeah, and they hated big guys, you know, so that they would get it, but they liked mean folk, you know – that is Marine Corps. So the first time we were out with the

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

> punji sticks fighting, you know, they put me on a big old guy like the Hulk. And it was a white boy. He was not used to fighting with sticks, [and] I beat him up good; he was bleeding. When …when we returned to the barracks, they set me up on the sergeant's desk, gave me a cup of coffee and a doughnut, you know. Now, see, this is what you do in a war, you know.[34]

The different training and recognition were a common theme in the Marine Corps for Jim Hollins. Despite only being 19 years old, with two years of college, Jim's mentality during basic training helped him understand the true intentions of the Corps and his ability to thrive in any situation. He also attributed his success to being "streetwise. Knowing, you know, like when they come at you, you know they ain't, they can't hurt you; they might beat you up a little, but they ain't going to kill you, ain't going to shoot you or cut you, so you just take it and go on." The maturity to understand and ability to separate the training from feelings of anger or frustration were a source of success. Jim remembered a certain drill sergeant.

> He said, you got to be strong enough to carry your buddy, you know, so the pushups are necessary. He said, so, let's get ready to go to war, you know, and that is the way he did. They have to have the mental, too. That is …why they call Marines "giants." Like that bottle there, you screw the top off of a jar and put what you want in it, then screw the top back on.[35]

The physical and mental preparation was like none other, and it made Jim a "giant" in his mind, with the ability to do as he pleased when it came to war and defending his country.

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34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

After three and a half months of training, next came advanced training.

> We went through a whole barrage of testing to see what you'll be good at…. [T]he government know just how to test what and how to tell whether you are good at your hands, if you are right with school. Well, he might be a good mechanic, you know, so they know what to do. Well, this one, he like a thug, let's give him a gun. Mine, I was tapped for intelligence.[36]

The assigning of roles based on expertise and fit was far different from other branches, in particular the Army, where a large percentage of veterans in this study were placed in the infantry prior to, during, and after their training. In the Marines, Jim said, "They tell you what you are good at and this is going to be your job."[37] Jim's early life, educational background, and success in basic training were critical to his journey to this point.

The specialization training is an essential part of the Marine Corps process before deployment. Jim's naval intelligence designation was not what he initially believed it to be. "After we had graduated from boot camp, they are reading out everybody's MOS and where they were going. So I am just waiting, and they called mine: machine gunner, you going to Camp Lejeune." Jim was startled by the location and news. Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, was his new home. His time consisted of weekly tactical training. "We went out and played war games every week. We go out on Monday. If you do good, you come back on Friday, and you got the weekend off." The goal was to win and go home.[38]

Jim's weekly game came to an end when he was called into the commander's office and

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

told that "the Navy intelligence people called and said you in."[39] He then moved to the final part of his training, the Naval Communication Station in Pensacola, Florida. At the completion of his specialization, he finished second in his class and was given the opportunity to choose his duty station. He chose Scotland, which allowed him to travel abroad and further his career. The next phase in his career is examined later while looking at post-Vietnam War experiences.

In 1969, Roy Hill was drafted into the military at the age of 19. Just a year or so out of high school and working in Dothan, Alabama, Roy remembered his draft process well. "When I got drafted, got into the military, went to Fort Benning, and then there my MOS went to Fort Polk, Louisiana. Left Fort Polk… went to AIT in Fort Gordon, Georgia; left Fort Gordon… went to Fort Lewis, Washington, and then to Vietnam."[40] Roy recounted his draft process in May 1969.

> When they first draft me, they picked me to go into the Marines because they were saying [in alphabetical order by last name] 'A through this go here, D through this go to Marines,' and on like that. So after they had done that, so they said, well, you are going to the Marines; this group is going into the Army; and this group is going to the Navy; and so on. And Air Force, also. A lot of people did not step out, so they put us all back in line, and so now, the white people start coming out and then, they chose me to go to the Army.[41]

Being a member of the Army was not a choice but rather a command to Roy. In his life before deployment to Vietnam, Roy's travels allowed him to visit new places in the United

39. Ibid.

40. R. Hill, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016)*.

41. Ibid.

States. His service gave him the chance to see the world from a different perspective and prepare him for the workforce after his service time was complete. These experiences are examined later in this study.

Jack Bishop graduated from Linden High School in 1967. Linden, Alabama, is located in the heart of West Alabama, also known as the Black Belt. After graduating in May, Jack was drafted into the armed service on November 15 of that year. "See, I was a draftee that is why I did not have to do but two years. Jack stated, "They let me graduate and everything, and then I got inducted into the Army."[42] Jack is the only participant that was drafted during his high school years and "allowed" to complete high school before joining the military. His view of his surroundings leading up to the draft provides insight into his experiences during this time. "See, back in them days, too many Black people had nothing. They ain't had nothing, and if they had something, it was up north or somewhere, you know, and them people up north, the west, all over."[43] Alabama created a life for Blacks during this time that was oppressive and racist, limiting Blacks' opportunities. By being drafted right out of high school, Jack was provided the chance to see what life was like outside of Alabama. As a result, being drafted was a blessing in disguise as it allowed him to travel and gain opportunities outside of Linden, Alabama, as he traveled to stations such as Fort Polk (in Louisiana); Seattle, Washington; and Tokyo, Japan.[44]

Voluntary Enlistment

Voluntarily enlistment was not a common trend among African American veterans during the Vietnam era. As the review of literature has shown, a vast majority of veterans during

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42. J. Bishop, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016)*.

43. Ibid.

44. J. Bishop, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

this era were drafted, including most of the participants in this study. A small fraction of the Alabama veterans in this study voluntarily enlisted. Their reasoning and desire to be a part of the military during a time of social unrest and war are addressed while recounting their experience with the enlistment process, basic training, and time before deployment.

The appeal in joining the armed forces for Harry Jones was the result of all of his childhood leading up to high school. The sole reason for joining the military was, in his words, "my way of escaping the cotton fields."[45] The desire to enter the military directly out of high school was his choice. "I attempted to go into the military when I was 17 because my mom had to sign for me to go. I had just turned 17 and graduated from high school." Harry continued, "At the time, you could not go into the military until you were 18, so I had to wait." During this period, he sought employment at the steel mill his father worked at. His desire to work led him to speak with his father about the opportunity to see if it was a good idea. "One particular thing I remember when I was coming up, right after I had graduated from high school, my daddy was working at a place called Central Foundry, which is down at the steel mill and they pay pretty good."[46] Harry was driven to work and help his family the best way he could. His father firmly believed that he could assist his son with temporary hire at the foundry while he waited on his 18th birthday to arrive. "So once I got out there and talked to the guy he worked for, he kind of, yeah, he didn't come out and say it; but he felt like at the time if I would have got hired that would have been too much money going to one household, because at the time Central Foundry was a pretty good-paying job. So I didn't get hired; so I had to move on to something else."[47]

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45. H. Jones, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

The idea of a Black household bringing in excellent pay seemed to be a deterrent for the hiring manager. As a result of such an experience, he eagerly anticipated his opportunity to join the military.

Amid the delay, Harry Jones recalls the exact weeks before he joined the armed forces.

> A friend of mine had just come back from the Air Force, and so he said, well, you know, this is what you want to do. So I went down and took the Air Force exam and – the funny thing about it – the day that I left going to join the Air Force, the Army guy was on my door knocking, looking for me. My mama says, 'Hey, he has already gone.'[48]

As a member of the Air Force, Harry Jones completed his basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, his first time outside of Alabama. In the early period of basic training, Harry's choice of MOS was intelligence. He could choose the specialty based on test scores and outcomes during basic training. At the completion of basic training, Harry was given his first duty station at Caswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas. He recalls "a lot of racism there" when discussing the base and the city of Fort Worth. As a man from Alabama, he knew all too well the racial tensions that existed, and he learned quickly that Texas was no different. After 18 months in Texas, Harry had the chance to complete training in Alaska. He stated, "I really liked Alaska. I had a chance to do a lot of things that I had never done. I did some hunting. I did some skiing. I did some climbing, lived outdoors. It was just a good experience."[49] These experiences provided Harry the chance to see and do things he thought he would never have the chance to do.

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48. H. Jones, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

49. Ibid.

After spending some time in Alaska, he moved on to Panama City, Florida (at Eglin Air Force Base) and then to Oklahoma, his final station before deployment. Harry served stateside for five years before being deployed to Vietnam, the longest period of any veteran before leaving for the war.

A vastly different path led James Brown to the armed forces. Integration was an actual experience for him because a significant portion of his primary and secondary education took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After completing high school, James worked at a local restaurant while he prepared to attend college. His college choices were Alabama State University or Tuskegee Institute. He stated, "And then I left [Pittsburgh] and then I was going to go come down to Alabama to go to university or Tuskegee, and back then I got hurt. Then I just lost interest and everything."[50] Additional details of his injury at the time were not discussed, but it derailed his college career and the ultimate pursuit of obtaining a post-secondary education. James's next option was to seek enlistment into the military.

It was not solely his own decision. James's initial decision to join the military is described as a team decision between him and some of his closest friends at the time. "So my partners and I one day wanted to join the Army; so what we did, we went in and enlisted into the Army."[51] Somewhat simplistic in nature and very straightforward, James had his mind made up and acted on his decision to join alongside his partner.

James was assigned to 112 Bravo, which meant heavy mortar. His basic training took place in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where he was eventually assigned to an infantry airborne unit. Describing himself as a "young buck," James was next stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

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50. J. Brown, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016)*.

51. Ibid.

Doing this time, he discovered he was alone with little to any contact with his partners. He openly admitted, "I got fooled by following them, because I come in one day and they were, 'tell me, Brown, just follow me, come with me.' So I jumped on and they told me I was in the airborne and I like to had a heart attack."[52] At this point, he was within his rank and training for war as an infantry soldier. James's unlikely route into the military prepared him for the war and life ahead. His voluntary enlistment provided him a wealth of opportunities that is explored further in this study.

The choice to join the military was a personal one for Samuel Duncan. The farming life was not the life Samuel Duncan wanted to live, and he described his experience in the fields as "plant the seeds and walk behind that stupid mule." The level of displeasure Samuel had for the mule, plow, and farm fueled his decision to join the military. "I was still in overalls, man. I was a country boy, so yeah, and I had gotten tired of that. I knew there had to be something better, and I just didn't know what it was. I wanted to get away."[53] As a young man he was aware of life beyond his circumstances and the military was his best option at the time. In further conversation, Samuel expressed his parents' ill regard for the military and their unwillingness to sign for him to enlist. Upon graduation, his father was adamant about working after graduation. That was the rule. "You are going to work or something guts to go. So at 17, I did not want to go in the military—I wanted to get away from the chores." [54]This parental protection was illustrated by the stories of three of the veterans in this study.

Between May and his September birthday, Samuel had three months to either take part in

52. Ibid.

53. S. Duncan, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

54. Ibid.

household chores or find a job. With the help of his parents, he got a chance to work in the coal mine, a very familiar place for many men during this time. Samuel stated, "I went in the coal mine, and that was one of the most fearful things. I thought Vietnam was scary, but in 1968, the coal mine to me was frightening."[55] The coal mine was a very traumatic experience for this young man straight out of high school. "I was too young to be on that ground. I have never been that close to the devil."[56] In addition to this traumatic experience, Samuel remembers what convinced him to leave the mine as soon as he could: the negative health effects the mine had on his family and friends.

> All my uncles and my daddy and a couple of other people around, elderly people around the neighborhood, they are the ones caught silicosis and black lung. I saw them coughing, and I saw how black they came out of the mine, but I did not know what it was. However, I flat out didn't experience it. I did not want to breathe that dust, man. I had other things on my mind.[57]

Over the course of the next three months, Samuel continued plowing behind the mule, waiting for his birthday and the chance to join the military. He entered basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he was assigned the MOS as a wheel vehicle mechanic (63 Bravo). However, he stated, "The Army lies; the government lies. I never saw a screwdriver or a monkey wrench or nothing else. I went infantry."[58] He didn't want to join the infantry, but he understood that he was given an order and had to follow orders after completing basic training. He was sent

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55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. S. Duncan, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

58. Ibid.

for Advance Individual Training (AIT) at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, where he completed more in-depth, hands-on combat training to complete his duties as an infantry serviceman. The duration of training seemingly prepared Samuel for the next phase of his service in Vietnam. After 16 weeks of training, eight weeks each for basic and AIT (what Samuel described as "stateside") his next assignment was Vietnam. While wartime experiences were not central to this study, some veterans did provide insight into their experiences as Black servicemen during the war. The narrative of these experiences is addressed in the post-war discussion and the impact the war had on Black men after their return to the United States.

Military Discharge: Expiration of Term of Service (ETS), Medical, and Retirement

The years of service for the veterans in this study ranged from two years of draft service to 28 years of career service. Discharges included the expiration of the term of service, medical, and retirement. Drafted veterans such as John England, Jim Hollins, James Brown, Samuel Duncan, and Roy Hill all fell under the Expiration of Term of Service (ETS) designation. They were selected directly out of high school and college and completed their service as soldiers. All experienced the military in different ways and were compelled to explain their discharge and the ways in which it took place.

John England was drafted during his first year of law school. The college deferment was in place, which allowed him to finish his first year of school before reporting for duty. John served his time and was discharged early as a military officer at Fort Stewart. As stated earlier, due to fail processing and unit designation, John did not serve time in Vietnam but worked on the post during his service time after being drafted. Over the course of his career, he was promoted

and served as the military patrol officer on base. As his draft contract time concluded, John describes, "Well, I EOS early so I had to go and get a job."[59]

The scaled-down missions of the army as the war came to a conclusion allowed John to leave the military a few months early and begin to reestablish himself as a civilian and prepare for the next phase of his life, which was a return to The University of Alabama Law School. His exit came with little turmoil or confusion. He located work prior to law school and sought the benefits he was entitled to at the time.

Similarly to John England, Jim Hollins was also drafted during his college career but during his undergraduate studies. Jim entered the Marines with many questions and a fear of the unknown. He quickly established himself as a leader during basic training and advanced over the course of his career in naval intelligence. Jim had high levels of security clearance from his time abroad. He remembers a particular incident that helped him understand his role and the importance of the intelligence he had access to after he participated in a parachute operation while in Scotland.

> When the CO found out, you know, man, they raised the roof and they had to calm me down because, you know, I'm fixing to file charges. I told them, I said, you ain't worried about me dying, you're worried about how much money it's going to cost if I die. I'm worth this many thousands of dollars. It ain't, 'Jim Hollins, I don't want you to get hurt.' It ain't about me. He said that's money. You money, the information you got.[60]

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59. J. England, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

60. J. Hollins, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

At this moment, Jim realized that his value was not as a man but as the information he had gained over his four years of service. "So that's when I said, I said, 'OK, y'all send me back to states. I'm out."[61] Jim retuned home a few months later but was not totally clear of his military obligations. "Once I get back here, then I had four more years of inactive duty."[62] He explained, "They can come knock on the door and say, hey, you got to go, pack your stuff. They tapped the phones and they run background checks on everybody that I see, talk to."[63] The inactive period covered the next four years when he completed college and being his career. The discharge period for Jim spanned a greater time than for other veterans in this study due to the requirements set forth by the Marine Corps.

High school graduation was a requirement during the Vietnam era. Several of the Black veterans in this study were drafted shortly after high school and shipped to war after a few weeks of training and specialization. The young men were forced into manhood as they sought to stay alive during an unpredictable war. James Brown enlisted out of high school but his service was cut short due to an injury suffered during the war, resulting in a medical discharge. After seven years in the service, injuries that James sustained curtailed his career. "I went over to Vietnam, stayed three months, and then I left there and went to Korea and I got hurt."[64] He said he got "shipped to Hawaii, and I stayed there until I got out the military."[65] The injury sustained was not disclosed, but it did cut his time short.

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61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. J. Brown, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016)*.

65. Ibid.

Roy Hill was drafted nearly a year after his high school graduation in May 1969. Roy was employed in Dothan, Alabama, when he was served his draft notice and date for duty. At the completion of basic training and specialized training, he began his tour in Vietnam, which lasted nine months. Due to the end of the war drawing near, he was granted an early release from his duties, which led to his time in the National Guard.

At this point he was 22 and decided to enlist into the National Guard. Roy is the only veteran in this study who did not immediately discharge or establish a career in the armed forces. After serving in the National Guard for four to five months, Roy "got out … because they were sending me to Germany. I'm just getting home and didn't want to go." Over all, he served close to two years with the National Guard. "I actually spent about 19 months in the regiment because I got early out because the war ceased in 1971."[66]

Jack Bishop was drafted and enlisted into the military in 1968. He served in Vietnam in 1969 and completed his two years of required service. During his time of service, James noticed a distressing trend among Black veterans during this time: the label or classification of "dishonorable discharge."

> A lot of Black men got dishonorable discharged; that's stupid. You know what you're going to do, now. I know I didn't want dishonorable discharge and I wasn't going on any tangent. Now, you know, so I'm going to keep cool. I'm going to stay in line, I'm going to do what I'm told to do, and take orders like I'm supposed to.[67]

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66. R. Hill, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016)*.

67. J. Bishop, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016)*.

The classification of dishonorable discharge was something that Jack saw but did not have direct dealings with. He followed the orders and structure that were in place during his time in the military. After his two years of service James returned home to his hometown to pursue a life after the military.

Samuel Duncan voluntarily enlisted and had a troubling military experience. Samuel's original MOS was "63 Bravo, which is a wheel vehicle mechanic," but he never worked or performed any duties under that designation. Over the course of his four-year career, Duncan completed multiple tours in Vietnam and suffered from drug addiction and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). His return home was coupled with medical rehabilitation visits in Japan and the United States. He was given a chance to ETS after being "cleaned up" and deemed ready to be sent home. Unsure of his proper discharge, Samuel knew he was correctly released because he was 100 percent disabled according to the military. Medical discharge was likely for Samuel. This was conveyed as he discussed his weekly visits to the VA office and the psychological tests and medicines that were prescribed to him due to his PTSD. "I had no clue I was diagnosed as 100 percent posttraumatic stress disorder and all this stuff that come along with war."[68] His time served and experiences shed light on some of the untold stories of Vietnam and the continued path to recovery for veterans such as himself.

Similar to Samuel Duncan, Harry Jones also voluntarily enlisted in the armed services. Harry served in the Air Force for over 20 years. By being active duty until he retired, his career as military personnel provided exposure and opportunities that may not have been available in other lines of work. During his final years as he moved toward retirement, he was provided the

68. S. Duncan, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

chance to do final tour at Fort Rucker, an aviation base in Ozark, Alabama. The steps to retirement came from an initial conversation with his career officer at the time.

> You know. …[M]y career officer called me one day and asked me if I wanted, you know, to look into coming here to Fort Rucker. Because he kind of put me in a situation where if I didn't take the assignment coming to Fort Rucker, there was a good chance something even worse was coming along down the road. So I took it. And I came to Fort Rucker, which turned out to be a pretty good assignment. But I found out that some of the situations that I left when I was younger, coming from, you know, when I left Tuscaloosa, was still here, but they were just a little different.[69]

The differences that Harry saw were surprising and somewhat familiar. His place of retirement would only be a few hours away from were his career essentially started. The course of his career provided varying levels of success and his discharge as a retiree created access to benefits and services.

Jesse Echols also voluntarily enlisted into the Army into a career that spanned over 20 years before retirement. His time in the Army included multiple tours in Vietnam and a list of duty locations primarily in the South. As an active duty service member, Jesse's day-to-day activities consisted of duties within the infantry regiment.

> When I came back, back to the infantry unit, MOS take you back. It don't mean you're going back to the same place, unless you're able to change your MOS. You stay in the MOS that you have. It's called military occupation specialists, all the

69. H. Jones, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

> while you're in there. Now, there are things that happen or may happen to you, like being wounded or hurt and it could change it and you wind up doing something different. But I chose to stay in the infantry all while I was in service.[70]

Jesse's decision to stay in his original unit allowed him to stay close to home and family during this time. Prior to retirement, Jesse was awarded a Purple Heart for his services in Vietnam.

> And I said, look at me, you know, I got scratches on me from being hurt and all that, got the Purple Heart. And, I say, here are guys that can't even walk, some of them can't see, some of them have lost their limbs and so forth, but I came back with just nothing but scratches. And I said, these guys, to include myself, have gone through miracles. And so I just thank God everyday because he allowed me to come back.[71]

Jesse's more than 20 years of service allowed him to retire from the military with honor and prestige.

> I don't regret not one day, you know, having to go to Vietnam, even though we've been called baby killers and everything else. I thought – looked at it as a duty and honor to my country because I don't think there's any other country as good as America.[72]

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70. J. Echols, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

71. Ibid.

72. Echols, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

In a rare case of voluntary enlistment, Ben Richardson volunteered for the military but was rejected. Four years later he was drafted and spent over 28 years in the military. During his time Ben held several leadership roles that allowed him to help other Black veterans as they struggled with the structure and racist system present in certain areas of the armed forces. Ben noted that from his time in basic training to the end of his service, his age and maturity allowed for certain opportunities others did not receive. "I was older than some of the instructors I had, trying to teach me how to do military things, so it went -- it went well," he said. "As a matter of fact, I was in charge as squad leader because of my age and my size, so it went well for me."

Over the tenure of his career from combat duty in Vietnam to various duty stations in the United States, Ben established himself as a leader in the military.

> When I came back to the States, I was an Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO). I was, you know, in a leadership position and I would go to these meetings and would, you know, and I stood my ground, when I saw something. I took up for my brothers, you know. And I always stressed to them that you have got to be better than they are. I didn't want to use that [phrase], but you've got to be, you've got to be better and I made sure that they were better. Dress better, conduct, the whole nine yards; I made sure that they were better.[73]

Leading others was a responsibility that Ben treasured and maintained until his last day of service. Having had the privilege to have had "Black senior guys that was in my unit that was over me" led to his desire to help and assist other Black soldiers he encountered on a daily basis. Over the course of his career, Ben could have a hand in the development of Black soldiers under

73. B. Richardson, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

his leadership. His service time eventually came to an end after 28 years of active duty time served and concluded by way of retirement. The role of discharge played an important role for every veteran in this study. Each veteran discharged from the military without an Article 15, meaning they could legally receive every benefit they earned because of their service for the United States.

Military Significance and Value

In the sense of the true military experience and value gained from the military, each veteran in this study expressed a level of gratitude and goodwill for the military for their time served, whether they were drafted or enlisted. The military served not only as a catalyst for structure and discipline but an effective aid for higher education, medical assistance, and leadership qualities and skills that were gained through experiences on the field of battle or through specialized military training. The armed services functioned as a structured environment for development that created a sense of direction and discipline for the veterans in the study. As a result, many of these veterans expressed gratitude for their experience as it pertained to their personal and professional growth during their enlistment period. The military provided a solid foundation for the veterans to stand on, which played a role from academics to workforce development. Draft status did not alter a veteran's perception of the military. While the veterans that were drafted did view their service as a forced entry, after they served their memories were aligned with gratitude for service.

James Brown enlisted into the military in 1957 and retired in 1964. During his time in the services, James figured out "how people were treated and then started seeing that's what he could do." He didn't want to stand by anymore and allow others to be mistreated, which led him to establish his detective agency a few years later. Integration was also important to him. James's

understanding of how to be treated was central to his success as a civilian. During his time, he believes "it took a special man, special Black man at that time, to be in the military."[74]

Samuel Duncan enlisted at 18 in 1968 and served until 1972. After multiple tours, Samuel's process of exit was channeled through rehabilitation because of the Vietnam War. "I had to go to rehabilitation, by way of Japan, and as a matter of fact, back to the United States," he said. "And I ETS from Redstone Arsenal down in Huntsville, and I still didn't make it home until after New Year."[75]

Samuel left the military under fairly different circumstances than other veterans in this study. "If it hadn't been for the intervention of the Lord, I don't know where I would be," he said. His faith brought him through the hard times as he transitioned from solider to civilian. His journey back home and his personal battles provided moments of clarity and direction. The military allowed Samuel to hit rock bottom, which he says was an awakening period, and changed the course of his life.

Entering the military directly out of high school presented challenges for almost every Black solider during this era. Harry Jones was not exempt from these circumstances but thankful for them and the role they played in helping him become the man he is now. When asked what value the military to provided him during his more than 20 years of service, he said, "Just the fact that I had enough confidence. The military gave me enough confidence to know I could do anything I wanted to do." This level of confidence was important to have as a Black man during a very contentious time. In addition to the confidence, the military provided him with a life "outside of the cotton fields," the opportunity to do work using his hands and mind. "In the

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74. J. Brown, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016)*.

75. S. Duncan, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

military, my job opportunity was only limited by me, you know. If I didn't like a job and I qualified for another one, I could cross-train to it."[76]

Harry understood the limitations that would have been placed upon him if he stayed and lived in his hometown. The military showed him an array of hope and opportunity for his career. He recalls the crucial point when he knew the military was the best decision he had made. "You know, and it was kind of funny, after I had been in the military for about eight or nine years … I would go back home on leave, you know. Some of my friends that I graduated with was still doing the same thing."[77] Harry's decision to join and stay in the military provided him options that many of his friends didn't have.

Along with the chance for development these soldiers received, they were able to see and be a part of things abroad that more than likely they would have never seen at home. Jesse Echols valued the places he had been as a significant part of his time served. In addition, he valued "life and coming back." After doing two tours in Vietnam, Jesse's outlook on life and death was quite different. The military provided him the chance to address personal issues in his life.

> You know, it helped me turn around from a lot of things that, shall I say, that I used to do. I don't think I was wild or anything like that, even when I was young, coming up. But being in the military, it learned me a lot of things about life.[78]

The lessons learned during his time were not only important to Jesse but created life lessons for his children and grandchildren. He followed in the footsteps of his older brother,

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76. H. Jones, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

77. Ibid.

78. J. Echols, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

made his family proud, and protected and served a country he truly loves. Another veteran in this study connects life to his development in the military. James Brown valued life much more after his time in the service. “The value of life,” as he stated, had a new meaning.

> The war made me looks at things in different ways, different ways now. You know life, I mean… you can be killed at any time. I wasn’t nothing but a boy. I had just turned 20.[79]

The value of life and death for those who have experienced war is a very powerful feeling that registered with veterans in this study. The vital nature of life and how easily it can be taken away seem to have created an additional desire to live for many of these veterans, no matter the issue or circumstance, because they saw firsthand the loss of life during their time abroad.

According to Jim Hollins, “the military kept me alive.” Compared to other veterans in this study who first experienced death or conflict during the war, Jim had already been exposed to crime and the life of the streets.

> Had I not gone to the military, I would have probably died in the streets. Out here acting a fool. Being with fools. I might have been the fool, you know. I say I’m hanging with fools, but I might have been the one.[80]

Jim grew up in an area prone to violence and crime. To survive from a young age he had to learn to defend himself, but even coming from that environment he learned discipline and structure once he joined the Marine Corps.

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79. J. Brown, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016)*.

80. J. Hollins, "Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016).

> So Marine Corps grew me up. I became a man, responsible. I knew where I was needed to go in life. I needed to be able to take care of me. I wasn't a baby no more. I couldn't depend on daddy no more. I needed to be the man.[81]

The Marine Corps provided a solid ground for Jim as he matured and became the man he needed to be to survive not only during his service time but as he returned home to a community that was very similar to how he had left it.

The military can create a brotherhood or bond among those that have served. Ben Richardson valued the brotherhood and "camaraderie …[with]… his fellow brothers." The bonds that were formed have continued until today. In addition, Ben valued the "education and the foresight that I wouldn't have had if I hadn't of went into the military." Despite being rejected initially and then drafted, Ben truly was thankful for being drafted and for everything that came from his military experience.

> So I'm so glad I got drafted. That was the best thing God could ever make happen to me; and it was a great, I mean, I learned a lot of things. I was able to go to college, where I wouldn't have took that if I hadn't went in. I wouldn't have had the education that I have – but mainly the fellowship and camaraderie with my brother[s].[82]

The brotherhood and bonds formed during his military career were beneficial not only to him but his family as well. The relationships gained are lifelong friendships that would not have been in place if it were not for his service in the military.

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81. Ibid.

82. B. Richardson, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

The brotherhood aspect was central in John England's time as a solider as well. Vivid memories of his fellow soldiers and the ways in which they helped each other provided John with comfort during his time of service.

> Well, you know, one of the things was the discipline that I learned. The, you know, it's, you know, when you're going on the firing range to learn how to shoot a gun at another man or another person, you come to know about – and I know this is a very generalization – but you come to know about brotherhood of man, sort of their kin, that can cross, you know racial lines.[83]

John acknowledged that not everyone saw each other as a brother. There were those individuals that allowed the color of someone's skin to determine the trust and relationship. But from his experience he saw the positive aspects of brotherhood.

> What you've got is a selflessness, such that, you know, folks are willing to help their brother, if they're in trouble, whether it is trying to learn how to assemble, disassemble, reassemble a gun or driving a stick shift.[84]

Having the mindset and heart to help each other on the battlefield or on the base is central to the brotherhood Ben Richardson and John England reference. The idea of brotherhood is particularly important given the times of that era and the mindset of many as it related to civil rights and social unrest.

The role of education and its place within the military was very valuable to Roy Hill as he served his time. By being afforded the chance to "go back to school and learn more," he

83. J. England, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

84. Ibid.

utilized his benefits for the betterment of himself and his family. Working prior to getting drafted, the ideal of college changed after his service time in the military.

> Coming from a farm and stayed out of school half of the time, and they was able, you know, by going to the military, I was able to go learn more and become the person that I am today because without that education, I wouldn't know what I know now.[85]

Despite being drafted against his will, Roy Hill recognizes the value that came from his service time and the benefits that came as a result. It furthered his ability to obtain an education and start a career in law enforcement and later in industry.

85. R. Hill, *Interviewed by Craddock, D. (December 2016)*.

CHAPTER 6

AFTER THE WAR: WORK AND EDUCATION

The return from Vietnam was a difficult period for many veterans, specifically African American veterans. The participants in this study faced significant levels of both physical and verbal abuse. They served and defended their country by way of draft or enlistment and were treated as an enemy rather than a hero on their return. This was the case for many of these veterans, who were returning to a country divided in opposition to the war but also on the issue of race.

Jesse Echols was one of the first veterans in the study to become a member of the armed services; he joined the military in 1960. He completed two tours in Vietnam and remembered each return home vividly. "I spent tours, and there was so much animosity, you know, between the White and Blacks already, and so forth, we often thought that we were fighting a war that wasn't worth fighting." The divisions Jesse witnessed during his time did not shape his perspective or duty to defend his country. "As a soldier, I have to look at it differently; when Uncle Sam say go, if there was a war or whatever it is, it's my duty because that's what I've been trained for." The training and preparation for battle allowed Jesse to separate his personal feelings and the duty that he was obligated to fulfill. After his first tour, these feelings were put to the test. "[After] one of the tours I spent, when I got back to the homeland, as I call it, I got off the bus, a white lady spit on me." At that moment, Jesse had returned from defending his country, expecting to receive admiration and praise. Instead, he was welcomed with anger. Nevertheless, his response to the incident displays his character and maturity. "I just looked at her, and I kept going because I was not going to be starting no trouble." The restraint and discipline exhibited at that moment illustrate how Jesse conducted himself throughout and after

his military career.

As Jesse and his squadron returned to California as their first location stateside during the early 1960s, they were placed in the heart of protests and anti-war demonstrations. The environment allowed Jesse to see things from a different perspective as a Black man from the South. “It’s funny, you know, how people are … and I have to look at it, if it had been in another country, it would have probably been the same way.” Jesse recognized the anger and frustration of those against the war and empathized with them. This type of understanding prepared him for his next tour.

As the war was coming to an end, and Jesse Echols noticed differences between this tour and his first assignment. “Yeah, but that tour, it was much different. I think the people had – I want to say – gotten used to the fact, call for duty, you have to do it; but there was a different atmosphere.” The atmosphere was more welcoming and illustrated a level of appreciation toward the veterans. “A lot of people, they shake your hands, etc. … and welcome home.” After completing his second tour, Jesse continued to serve in the military and duty stations in Georgia and Alabama before retiring in 1980 after more than 20 years of service. His exposure to these areas afforded him the chance to pursue post-secondary education opportunities. As a veteran in the South following the war, Jesse returned back to a place of racism and hate. After his second tour, he was reminded of the injustice that existed by the death of a high school friend, Sammy Younge, a fellow Vietnam veteran “He got shot by a white person at the bus station because he wouldn’t give up his rights as a human being,” Jesse said. He remembered the case as the “ Sammy Younge Case” and how different things were as he returned home in 1971.

Jack Bishop entry into the military via the draft was documented earlier, but his return home was a far cry from his departure. As his tour came to an end in 1968, Jack returned to his

hometown of Linden, Alabama. It was a surreal experience for him, "When I came from Vietnam, I couldn't get a job…When I got back to fill out a resume, I take it to the job, you know, and they stop me at the guard shack. You had to stop at the guard shack, you know, and then they tell me – they tear it up in the front of my face and say they ain't hiring." Jack remembers each rejection and outright discrimination based on the color of his skin. "They wanted to give me these little grocery store jobs. I don't want all that, bag boy job; I'm a grown man. I just come from protecting this country, and you know; I put my life on the line just like they did." Jack knew he had every right to apply for any job. "I shed blood and tears, too." He had fought to protect his country, but he could not find employment there. After several failed attempts to find employment, he decided to move to Chicago. He spent nine years in Chicago working in a factory before being injured on the job and returning to his hometown to be close to family.

As mentioned above, returning home for Black veterans was filled with mixed emotions and circumstances. Samuel Duncan's homecoming was a time of ups and downs. Samuel toured Vietnam twice but did not return the same way he left. During his time abroad, Samuel became a drug user and eventual distributor. He return home far different than other veterans in this study. "I finished my first year of Vietnam; they sent me to Germany. I was in a little place outside of Frankfurt … outside of Stuttgart." Samuel's experiences in Germany were similar to those of Black veterans returning to the United States. His time was in Germany occurred 1968, and he said he "hated it."

According to Samuel, his time in Germany consisted of racial slurs and discrimination. "The Germans would call us 'monkey,' and I experienced things where as a Black man with a pocket full of money could not get laid for nothing. I mean, I have to put it real so you can

understand." The realness, as Samuel Duncan, illustrates the narrative of his story. "I hated Germany; it was cold. I very seldom saw the sunshine, you know, and I volunteered to go back to Vietnam." During this time, he knew he had a drug problem. "Germany did not have the drugs Vietnam had. There was enough there, [and] I was hooked by then. I was a drug addict by then." His usage was his hidden reason for returning to Vietnam for a second tour. After completing his second tour, Samuel had to come back to the United States through the military rehabilitation system. "My system was messed up, and, man, I needed help." His journey back to the United States led him to Japan and another duty station for rehabilitation, as the military attempted to assist with his addiction.

As he transitioned home, Samuel explains, "I had to spend those 30 days, man, trying to clean me up, and that did not work because after 30 days, they let me go because they were satisfied." The process of rehabilitation for the veterans did not completely help him. The rehabilitation was a temporary fix for the veterans, with little if any follow-up as the veterans transitioned into civilian life. In fact, the fear of returning home accompanied Samuel during his transition stateside. "I was really scared to go home because I was loaded down. We had what we call whole baggage, and whole baggage was where you sent all your stereo equipment, sent all of it home and the back of the Panasonic stereo." The stereo equipment was used in the transfer of drugs from Vietnam to the United States. Samuel's usage and distribution followed him back to Alabama. He explained that soldiers removed all the wiring and internal pieces of the stereo system. The subwoofers served as their central component to loading and packaging stereo with drugs. On his second return home, "I tried to bring half of Vietnam back," he said, meaning the drugs he obtained during his tours.

Returning from his second tour was a difficult experience for Samuel. The war affected

him mentally and emotionally. “I was not deprogrammed yet; I was raw material out of Vietnam.” The war instilled a “killer instinct” into him, he stated. His mental state during this period was to kill or be killed. “I was having Black Power meetings in my mamma’s back yard and lived right down the street from the police station.” His rejection of authority and dislike for the police created levels of resentment and frustration between him and the law. The interactions continued over the course of a few months. “I had run-ins with them. They did not like me, I did not like them. They woof at me; I would not back down.” Samuel’s reluctance to back down or show fear created a rift between him and the police officers in his hometown of Fairfield. He believes over time the dislike for each other grew, and he was set up. “So they had a thing at me, and I got arrested; they put me on the $10,000 bail…. I was on the Black market. I made money in Vietnam and all that money I had sent home.”

The war abroad and the battles at home created wealth for him. Drug distribution was his primary source of income after the war. Samuel candidly stated that he was the key person for moving drugs during that time. He said, “I was kingpin; I had the property. I had stuff, man, where guys from treacherous city like Kingston, Jamaica, coming to Adamsville, Alabama, looking for me by name because they wanted that one white horse [cocaine]. I mean, I was Mr. Stuff.” As time continued, his involvement with the Black Panthers and drugs continued to rise. His persona became too much for the police and authorities.

> They didn’t like the fact because I had my band on, my Black Power band, had meetings in my mamma’s back yard. They could look out the window and see me, the police. They could look out their door and see me. There were about 12 brothers

> out there, you know. I tell them about the Black Power and all that. The police just didn't like me, and I didn't like them.[1]

Over time the interactions with the police became violent, and Samuel eventually was arrested and charged. He stood trial and an all-white jury found him not guilty of a crime. During this period, he lost all his money as well as his desire to live in Alabama. One week after his verdict, Samuel headed to New Jersey. The transition allowed him to remove himself from the very environment that consumed him. While in New Jersey, he began to consider the veterans' benefits that he was entitled to and needed. His exploration and desire to obtain these benefits eventually led him back to Alabama.

> I needed to check my status. I come to find out after 14 years of thinking I got to be here because the State of Alabama is going to kill me if I go there, I'm on probation, but common sense should have told me that I never even talked to a probation officer, wasn't even assigned one.[2]

Over the course of a few months, Samuel was able to retrieve his records and was informed that he had no record and was never on probation. He eventually returned to Alabama seeking veteran benefits from service. During this transition, he acknowledged, "Me and my wife, we were on very bad terms. I was on the point of I'm either going to jail or hell, you know, and I decided, well, I'm walking away from this." He said, "It was the best move I ever made." The move to Alabama allowed Samuel to have a fresh outlook on life. Returning to a familiar place shifted his focus on his health and wellbeing and obtaining the benefits he rightfully

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1. S. Duncan, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

2. S. Duncan, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

deserved.

International experiences for Black veterans varied among branches, age, and rank. As noted earlier, Harry Jones returned with a new mentality and perspective on life, but also with the desire to continue his time in the military career. As a member of the Air Force, Harry Jones was exposed to areas of the military that very few Black men had the chance to see. The opportunity to serve in the Air Force and special assignments with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was a major accomplishment for Black members of the armed forces during this time. As a special assignment service member with NATO, Harry was exposed to fellow NATO members of other countries and cultures. Harry stated that during his two-year special assignment, for the first time in his life he worked side by side with German, Canadian, and French comrades. Also, he attended a four-month German language institute that prepared him for his role in NATO.

Harry spent over five years on that assignment. Along with the chance to work side by side with allies, perks included the vast number of days off. “I really liked that assignment because we got all the German holidays off, all the American holidays off, all the French holidays off, all the Canadian holidays off.” The experience of NATO provided Harry with the knowledge and skill sets to return to Fort Rucker, Alabama, in 1981 where he served as active duty until his retirement in 1987. The chance to utilize his benefits and the pursuit of education are examined later in this study.

The return from Vietnam for some veterans was the opportunity to continue with dreams and aspirations that they had before joining the armed forces. Jim Hollins and John England were both drafted as students in higher education. Due to incorrect paperwork and processing, John England never went to Vietnam, while Jim Hollins took part in international assignments that

covered Vietnam and Europe. After completing two years of service, both men returned to their respective colleges but in distinctly different roles. John England returned to The University of Alabama Law School as an original member of the first Black class admitted there, and Jim Hollins returned to Miles College as a junior who was still very young but mature from life experiences. Both returned to college with experiences and perspectives that many had not had the chance to see or could truly understand at their age.

John England's Expiration of Term of Service (ETS) occurred a few months prior to his sophomore year of law school. Utilizing his undergraduate degree from Tuskegee Institute, he was employed at a chemical plant and worked there for about six months. Vastly different from the other interviewees, John's college degree allowed him to enter the workforce with little to no resistance. His chance to return to law school allowed him to reconnect with the class that was a year ahead of him, "When I went in '69, we were the first group of African Americans. So while I was in the first class… I didn't graduate because I was in the war. I was in the Army." John graduated in 1974. After that, he "hung out my shingle here—me and Booker Ford and Sue Thompson. We started our own firm." John and his classmates created a law firm to defend the African Americans in the Black Belt and surrounding communities, the very work he set out to accomplish before his time in the armed forces.

Jim Hollins returned to Miles College as a junior with the desire to finish his degree in biology and attend medical school. Jim stated, "When I started back that summer, you know, go out and get my paperwork and stuff, a lot of the teachers were my classmates." Many of the students who Jim attended classes with just two years prior were now providing him with classroom instruction. Nevertheless, the transition from soldier to student was relatively easy for him. The discipline and structure obtained in the military provided an increased ability to focus

on completing his degree. Also, he used his military background to get employment. During the summer of his senior year, Jim decided he needed "a little more fighting chance, so I started with the sheriff's department." His prior experience in the military provided him the opportunity to work with the sheriff's department as he finished college. Working the night shift – or the "good shift," according to Jim – "I worked from 11:30 at night till 8:30 in the morning, then I went to school during the day." Jim was assigned to Baptist Hospital, where he assisted with a hospital strike in which employees at the hospital were seeking additional benefits and wages. Jim stated the best thing about the job was "the old guys that I worked with." The older men knew the importance of education and wanted him to complete his degree. In doing this, Jim stated, "I got my lesson through the night, and then the next morning, we go back down to the station. I change clothes and go to school." The support and encouragement from the older deputies pushed Jim toward graduation in May 1976 and a future career in the police department. He completed his degree in biology but continued to work as a policeman until an opportunity presented itself in the health department.

"They called me for the health department, and I did not really want that. I enjoyed being a cop, but I played the game." Jim wanted to increase his pay and took advantage of the offer from the health department. "And I told [the police], I say, hey, I got a job offer. I showed the paper, and they are going to pay me more a month." This strategy led to an increased salary and the chance to continue to do the work he loved. "You cannot guess how much more money I was going to make with the health department: seventy cents more, nine thousand and something dollars a year. That was annual pay, and it was big money." The salary increase, which may seem minimal, was a major victory for him. Over the next year, the health department returned with another offer, according to Jim, but the result was different this time "I told [the police], I

said, the health department has gone up a little bit. And they said, we are going to miss you." He knew his time as a police officer had come to an end and the start of his career at the health department was beginning, a career that lasted more than 40 years. The military was critical for Jim. "Military kept me alive. I grew up. Had I not gone to the Marine Corps, I would have probably died in the streets, out here acting a fool, being with fools." The military saved his life and opened doors for him.

James Brown and Ben Richardson experiences post-war were aligned because of conditions in Alabama. James Brown, the older of the two, returned to Alabama by way of medical discharge. Shortly after his return stateside, James made his way to Alabama. The war had a serious effect on him, and he had a nervous breakdown. "I'm sitting up one day and we were having group therapy and I was listening to everybody's problems. When I was listening to them, I said, 'No, my problem is not as bad as his problem.'" At that moment, James discovered that he could face whatever issues or problems he was facing. "So I stood up, and now I can fight the system." He took this fight and joined the police department in the Black Belt of Alabama. Living and working in Monroeville, Alabama, James fought for justice and against all levels of prejudice. Within a few years, he opened the state's only Black detective agency, Brown Security Agency. "I had an office in Montgomery and had one in Andalusia, had one in Brundidge, and one in Troy, and I did that." He took pride in going "mostly where Blacks could not go. I went and took care of business." James Brown's agency lasted for about 12 years, and he provided services to African Americans that they traditionally did not have access to.

James believed that his military experiences helped get him to the point of becoming an officer and owning his own business. "By being in there, I learned about how people were treated, then I started seeing that is what I could do." He believed that treating everyone with

fairness was something that could make a world of difference. His comfort level with Whites was vastly different that the other veterans in this study. “I never did segregate because when I got in there, I had the white guy to be with me.” His work required him to work across racial lines. But in the South, there was a high level of resistance to a Black man working in law enforcement, specifically as it related to arresting White men. James recalled countless examples of how the color of his skin created high levels of resistance when attempting to do his job. In one instance, “we went in this little place, and the waitress come, and she said, could we help you? I say, yes, ma’am. We all sitting… the two white[s], one federal and one in my office, and [the waitress says], ‘Well, we can serve him, but we do not serve niggers.” James continued, “So the FBI guy said, well, we do not even see [nigger] on the menu.” at this moment James realized that despite his role or position racism still existed in the South. As a unit, they all entered the restaurant together, but at this moment James could see the support and stance of his FBI counterpart as it pertained to race. He remembers the frustration and anger that set in during this experience. “I really got upset. What really hurt me [is] the restaurant called for the police officers to come, the white come, the Black didn’t come; but they didn’t do anything to us because I had every right to be there. That was my civil right.” James’s courage and confidence to do what is right enabled him to speak out against unjust practices and racial discrimination.

Benefits

The role of education had a tremendous impact on each veteran in this study, but it was not necessarily education resulting from the G.I. Bill. During the course of this study, it was discovered that all participants had a high school diploma and each veteran had pursued some post-secondary degree or diploma, ranging from law school to vocational school. Educational attainment was not solely based on degree completion after service. During their service time,

some of the veterans attended schools while on special assignments overseas and in military base programs. The G.I. Bill provided some of the veterans in this study with the chance to take classes and receive additional funding as a college student. While some of them took full advantage of the benefits, others were unaware of the benefits they rightfully deserved.

Though deserving of the chance, not every veteran in this study had the chance to attend college. The prospect of industry work and earning potential as a veteran to help support the family was the goal for Jack Bishop. After completing his draft service time and returning home, Jack wanted and needed to work on behalf of his family. "I did not get the education I wanted, but I had to find work when I come out. My daddy was disabled." Going into an industry and finding work for Jack was not an easy task. His small, rural hometown in Alabama provided very few opportunities for gainful employment that matched his military skill sets and experience.

Jack Bishop decided relocation was his best option and moved to Chicago a few months later, where he secured a job for nine years. He was forced to go back to the South due to an injury. Though he did not disclose the nature of the injury, he indicated the move was needed to be closer to the family for help and support. Despite his inability to use the G.I. Bill, Jack believes the G.I. Bill is important both past and present. "The GI bill, it is a blessing, a blessing for young Blacks." Notwithstanding his educational benefits, Jack did receive his medical benefits. It took him returning to Alabama to understand the Veterans Administration (VA) and how to obtain the benefits he deserved. With the help of the Black police chief, he was provided the assistance he needed. "The whole world was ganging up on me, and he picked me up and then got together with my daddy, and they took me to the VA." Jack's experience at the VA was similar to African American experiences in the past. "I did not even get 10 percent. A White boy down there, you know, I went down there and applied for it, you know, and he messed up the

papers, so I still didn't get anything." But Jack eventually received his medical benefit and got the care he deserved from his time during the war.

College deferment played a critical part in the lives of college-enrolled men during the Vietnam era. Two participants in this study were enrolled in college when they were drafted. Despite the time served and the break within their education, each participant returned to his respective college to complete his degree. The key element in their return to education was the G.I. Bill and the assistance it provided for their college education. Jim Hollins returned to Miles College as a junior seeking to obtain his degree in biology. Jim is still very appreciative of the G.I. Bill. "They paid for everything. If I said I want to take 50 classes or if I want to take three classes, the military paid for it." In addition to his classes being paid for, the G.I. Bill would "pay you for your unemployment; school paid for, your classes and stuff; they give you money for food. So I did not have to work." The G.I. Bill provided Jim the flexibility to attend school full-time with additional income. Jim explained how he "kick[ed] back like, hey, I am cool. So… it was good; If you got children, they would send them to school; you got a stipend for them, you know; it was great." The G.I. Bill allowed Jim to return to college with little to no worries, and he became a graduate of Miles College in 1976.

A team of White law students who came together to identify and assist in the development of the first Black students to enter into the law school recruited John England.[3] The opportunities to break down the racial barrier and work in the Black Belt were important reasons for John to obtain his Juris Doctor degree from The University of Alabama Law School. His service contract ended in the spring of 1972, and he returned to Tuscaloosa in preparation for the fall semester and his second year of law school later that year. John spoke in high regard of the

3. J. England, Interviewed by Craddock, D. (November 2016).

support that was provided by the G.I. Bill. “It was a tremendous help because when I came back, you know, just sort of like two years and I started back in the second year, I needed to study. I couldn’t work, and it was difficult for me to work at that time. So having a family, [the G.I. Bill] was crucial…for me.” John continued his studies and graduated from Alabama Law School in 1974. The G.I. Bill allowed him to focus on his education and support his family during this time. Immediately after law school, he opened up a firm where he practiced for 19 years, aiding and defending African Americans in the Black Belt and surrounding communities.

John England and Jim Hollins were not the only members of this group to take advantage of the G.I. Bill. Several others used the G.I. Bill but didn’t fully complete and earn four-year degrees. James Brown’s plan to attend Tuskegee Institute in 1955 was disrupted by a summer job injury. At this point, he entered the military and served seven years. After being medically discharged, James Brown returned to his hometown of Pittsburgh, where he was eligible for retirement benefits. As he settled into retirement, the desire to attend school rekindled and he entered college in 1964. Seeking to become an attorney, James wanted to assist those that needed the most help. He attended Howard College in New Jersey. “We have an off brand in Howard University in New Jersey.” During his time at the college, he witnessed racism in his classes. “So, what had happened, all the Blacks, every time we would go to try to take a test, this guy … would fail us.” James did use some of his G.I. Bill benefits and had little to no issues obtaining the benefits for college. The classes and the faculty became the major obstacles. As the semester continued and the racist tone within the classes begin to grow, James “just got tired of it, doggone it; I just got teed away. And that is when I started having my nervous breakdown.” The combination of school, family, and posttraumatic stress led to his withdrawal from school and

pursuit of a career in law enforcement. The G.I. Bill created an additional avenue for James despite his inability to complete his degree.

The majority of the veterans in this study was aware of the G.I. Bill and did use the benefits while attempting to complete their degrees. Roy Hill returned from Vietnam in 1970 and decided to enter a trade school. His route was vastly different from other veterans. At this point, Roy had little to any knowledge of his benefits from service. "Kind of just came back and you were on your own; out among people and then hearing the talk; then that is when I realized that it is a benefit there." After learning about the benefits, Roy entered trade school for "trowel trade and carpenter," more commonly known as a brick mason. After completing his trade degree, Roy continued to Troy University where he pursued his degree in criminal justice. During his time at Troy, Roy decided to use his trade degree and "went into the business and stayed there for about 10 years and got a group of people working and that type of thing." At the same time, he completed his associate degree in criminal justice and worked in law enforcement for five years before resigning and entering the field of paper milling at Mead, where he worked for more than 30 years.

Jesse Echols, one of the oldest veterans in this study, finished high school in 1960 and had little to no interest in attending college. He came from a military family in which all his older brothers had served. After serving more than 20 years in the military, doing multiple tours in Vietnam, and becoming a Purple Heart recipient, Jesse retired and started working for the Veterans Administration. During this time he also enrolled at Southern Union College. "I was going to the Southern Union extension in Montgomery, Alabama, but the problem was, at that time, things were not that well going for Blacks. And trying to go to school at the same time, try to raise a family, it got kind of hard." Jesse continued for a year before having to withdraw and

focus more on his family and career. “I stayed in it for almost a year, but I never completed; I regret it many times, and then I do not regret it.” Jesse obtained and used some of his education benefits and still has the desire to return. “I might get to go back, get a chance, God willing, to still finish before my day comes.” The benefits are a constant reminder to him that the opportunity is there if he ever wants to return and complete his degree.

Harry Jones and Ben Richardson both enrolled in courses through the military during their time abroad. Harry, while on special assignment with NATO, took the opportunity to learn the German language and work with people from various countries to ensure the success of his assignment. The program of study was connected to the City College of Chicago and classes were taught at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany, according to Harry. Over the course of five years, the military allowed him to take a variety of classes while on assignment, although he could not remember the exact type of degree, if any, that was awarded during this period. At the conclusion of his five-year assignment, Harry returned to the U.S. to finish his military career and retire. “After I had retired, I used my G.I. Bill to go to a trade school, to learn how to be a welder.” During his time in trade school, Harry’s eyes were injured and he switched to lawn mower repair. Eventually, he left trade school and started to work. Harry stated, “I had no problem at all with my G.I. Bill.”

Ben Richardson was drafted at 22 and served over 28 years in the military. Over the course of his career, he served in various roles and units, both domestically and internationally. As a career serviceman, Ben never utilized the G.I. Bill. He stated, “I had 10 years to use it after I got out.” Ben had knowledge of the benefits and knew they were at his disposal. At this same time, he remembered some of his fellow African American soldiers having little interest in the pursuit of education. “A lot of the guys was not interested in education; they did not pursue it. If

you do not care, then they are not going to tell you." Ben believed that part of the problem with African American soldiers not pursuing their education and obtaining their benefits was the fact they were uninterested in the process. "Yeah, they're not going to tell you. If you want an education … you are going to know about it because you're going to go and pursue it and look into it." Taking the initiative and actively seeking out the information needed to obtain the benefits needed for education was a major issue for African American soldiers, according to Ben.

The opposition to the war crossed many lines, including race, which is a focus of this dissertation. Many Americans had deep-seated issues with the war and what exactly the U.S. had to gain from the fight abroad. In addition to the war, many Black Americans were seeking civil rights and liberties in a country that was heavily divided on race and the war

The fight to seek victory on two fronts domestically and abroad came to be a common goal for these veterans during their time of service. The state of Alabama was a central location for the fight for civil rights, and it was where the vast majority of veterans in this study lived at some point prior to being a part of the war. The systemic structure of racism during this time – to be drafted into a military that seemingly did not protect the rights and liberties of Black citizens – displays the truth test that each Black solider faced as a member of the armed forces. It is important to take into account the day-to-day experience of a Black person who lived in Alabama during the mid-1950s and 1960s and the amount of hatred that was a part of their life.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

One of the main goals of this dissertation was to capture the voices of Black Vietnam War veterans from the state of Alabama. These are individuals who served their nation with honor but until this point had not been invited to express their thoughts, feelings, and narratives of the war and their participation from beginning to end – in other words, the chance to articulate their story the way they wanted it to be articulated. The set of oral history narratives that make up this study brings forth a collection of experiences that helped shape the lives of each of these men. Seeking to address their status as, first, a Black man and, second, a solider of the United States armed forces, it is imperative to understand their struggles and accomplishments during a time of racial hatred and divide. Born between the late 1930s and early 1950s, these veterans' constant exposure to racial injustice was far too familiar. The research and study focused on the pre- and post-war culture, structure, and lived experiences of the veterans. This focus created a sense of value, respect, and trust for these veterans reflecting on a time when the Vietnam War left many veterans with questions unanswered and stories untold.

Historically the Black voice has been often left out of the lenses of narration and perspective. In examining the narratives of each veteran from the state of Alabama, histories such as these are very hard to come by. An oral history collection of Alabama-based Vietnam veterans did not exist prior to this study. While narratives do exist of Black Vietnam veterans, none mirror the narratives captured in this study. The stories provide insight into the struggles that existed pre- and post-war and the ways in which the military prepared each soldier for his

next phase in life. The participants in this study opened up about memories that had been hidden or untold up until this point.

During the 1960s and 1970s an rising number of Black people began to speak out and make it very clear that sending Black men abroad to fight for someone else's freedom and not being free of the oppression and racism in their homeland was wrong and unjust.[1] Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s articulation of this thought was expressed during his speech, "Beyond Vietnam," at the Riverside Church Meeting on April 4, 1967.

> Perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the Black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them 8,000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. And so we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.[2]

Dr. King's speech embodies the thoughts of many Black Americans during this time who wanted to see the war come to an end. Black opposition to the war often was captured by polls from national publications such as *Newsweek*, which in 1969 released results that Black

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1. Brende and Parson, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery*

2. Clayborne Carson, *Eyes on the Prize*: Penguin Books, 1987), 203.

Americans felt that "their young are fighting a disproportionate share of the war."[3] These sentiments were further expressed as draft data from the 1960s surfaced. The reports showed that during the draft, more that 30 percent of Blacks were being drafted from the draft-qualified age group while 18 percent of Whites from the same draft-qualified age group were drafted.[4] Black draft-eligible youth were being drafted at nearly double the rate of White youth for the war, thus explaining the high level of Black men who were enlisted during this era.

Findings

The findings in this study are drawn from themes developed from participant experiences. Themes of educational attainment, military discharge, and the intersectionalities of the Civil Rights era produce the findings for the study. The experiences of the participants prior to enlistment, time served, and post military life play are critical role in shaping these findings. Overall, it is important to recognize that this study is a reminder that, even within the international and domestic discord of the 1960s, there are many stories, some troubling and some positive. As a group that served and was under recognized, perhaps Vietnam veterans are ready to tell their stories.

The first finding in the narratives of the veterans is their education attainment and educational experiences as African American men in Alabama. All nine participants graduated from high school prior to joining the military. The journey of education from elementary to high school provides insight into the segregated way of life for majority of the participants. Their middle and high school experiences explain the racial divisions in place and lack of interactions

3. Report from Black America—A Newsweek Poll, *Newsweek*, (June 30, 1969).

4. Robert W. Mullen, Blacks in America's Wars: The Shift in Attitudes from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam, 1st edition (New York: Anchor Foundation, 1991).

with White students during their elementary school to high school years. While the educational experiences of each participant were not the same, each had the desire and motivation to complete high school. The high completion rate for these veterans far outpaced the national completion rate for Black high school students. As indicated by the NCES, the completion percentage between 1950 and 1960 was 21.7 percent for African Americans students. The strong commitment to education expressed by several veterans in this study is a powerful message and displays the importance of education.

In addition to high school completion, post-secondary completion was achieved as well. The educational benefits aided in undergraduate completion for Roy Hill and Jim Hollins and graduate school completion for John England. Despite being drafted as college students, Hollins and England were able to return and complete their degrees with financial assistance from the military. John England is the only participant in this study that was able to use college deferment, as he completed his first year at The University of Alabama Law School. Education on all levels was significant to each participant. The opportunity to graduate from high school or college was a major accomplishment in the life of each participant in this study.

The second key finding is the high number of voluntarily enlistments into the military. As stated in Chapter 5, there were a high number of draft-eligible African American men that entered the armed service through the Selective Service System. Of the nine participants in this study, four volunteered and were accepted into service after high school. Their reasons for voluntarily enlistment vary but allow for an understanding of their lived experiences prior to service.

Military family lineage was the primary reason for Jesse Echols' enlistment into the military. Coming from a family where his older brother served, Jesse saw the chance to serve his

country as a duty and honor. The example set by his older brother allowed him to proudly serve and be an example for others.

For Samuel Duncan and Harry Jones, the desire to leave home led them to enlist after high school. Samuel's experiences as a farmer and brief stint in the coal mines were his sole motivation to leave his parents' home and join the military. The desire for new opportunities and way of life was exciting to Samuel. As each prepared for their service, Harry Jones became a member of the Air Force and Samuel Duncan became a member of the Army. Their time of service provided them with exposure that may not had occurred if enlistment did not take place. Two of the four participants' military experience (Jesse Echols and Harry Jones) spanned a twenty-year period with various achievements for their service and duty to protect and serve the United States.

The third key finding in this study is the limited usage of educational benefits. The G.I. Bill was readily available to participants during and after their time of service. Veterans such as Roy Hill and Jack Bishop explained how they had little to any knowledge of their educational benefits until years later. In total, three of the nine veterans utilized the G.I. Bill to obtain college degrees (Associate, Bachelor, and Juris Doctor). John England completed his law degree two years after his service time was complete. England, the only veteran in this study that had a college degree prior to enlistment, was educated about the college deferment process and his benefits prior to leaving law school for basic training. Jim Hollins completed his undergraduate degree. He was educated about the G.I. Bill during his time in the Marines and by campus administrators. Roy Hill, who attended vocational school and community college, learned of the benefits through word of mouth. He obtained his vocational and associate degree with the assistance of the G.I. Bill. Unfortunately, not everyone was properly educated on the education

benefits due to the racism that existed. James Brown started at a small college in New Jersey but failed to graduate due to the "prejudice" ways of the teachers. Jesse Echols was also discouraged from taking class in Montgomery, Alabama, after his service time. The educational experiences of each veteran illustrate the issues that were prevalent for veterans during this time but also the accomplishments that occurred despite the roadblocks that were in place.

The pursuit of education was a constant in this study. The importance of education can be traced to the high school completion of every veteran in this study combined with the fact that a large majority took a chance on college at some point in their life. Educational attainment was a battle in its own right, a won each time an interviewee entered a classroom or successfully obtained some training. The educational attainment levels for the veterans in this study crossed over military lines and educational institutions.

The need for work and money was a major priority for many of the veterans in this study once they returned from Vietnam. Some veterans, such as Jack Bishop and Samuel Duncan, relocated for more stable work and comfort of living. The need to work and support a family after the war was a far more common theme than educational attainment among this set of veterans.

Historically, dishonorable discharge among minority soldiers was very common during the Vietnam War. However, all the veterans in this study were discharged from the military in good standing, with three veterans serving for over twenty years of service and achieving a high rank. Of the remaining six participants in this study, two were medically discharged and four fulfilled their service contract and ETS at their required time.

Acknowledgment of the war and the true reasoning behind its existence still weighs heavily on a number of the participants in this study. The proper recognition of Black soldiers in

Vietnam traditionally has received very little attention. As Robert Mullen stated in his work, "There is no question that American involvement in Southeast Asia has been extremely unpopular in all sectors of the population, but the opposition of Afro-Americans to the war has received little separate attention."[5]

The value and respect each veteran has for the armed service is another key finding in this study. Voluntary enlistment or draft had little bearings on the admiration and gratefulness each veteran had for their time served. The structure, discipline, life, and brotherhood were main areas that surfaced as veterans discussed what they valued most from their time in the military.

The Selective Service System accounted for five veterans in this study. The role of the draft was crucial to saving Jim Hollings' life and kept him off the streets. Jim firmly believes that the draft kept him out of trouble and provided the discipline and structured he needed at that phase of his life. The draft positively affected John England, whose law school education was paid for from his military service and allowed him to become a civil rights attorney in west Alabama. The experiences of other draftees, such as Ben Richardson, Roy Hill, and Jack Bishop, allowed for successful careers in military service and as civilians. Overall the outcomes of the draft played a positive role in the lives of each of these veterans.

Each theme highlights key areas in the life of a Black Vietnam veteran from the state of Alabama. The enlistment type provides a sense of their desire to be a part of the armed forces and see the changes that took place after their service. Education was important during this time, but more important for many of them was employment and financial support. Many veterans had to return home to work for the betterment of themselves and their families.

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5. Mullen, Blacks in America's Wars: The Shift in Attitudes from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam

Future Research

The limitation in this study – of participant selection being solely on race and gender – provide the opportunity for additional research into World War II and Korean War veterans from the state of Alabama for a comparative and historical analysis of their experiences. Proper examination and investigation of previous wars, focusing on experiences in the state of Alabama, would aid the development of the overall literature of Black servicemen between the 1940s and 1970s; it would provide a historical lens of Black veterans and their experiences during World War II and Korea. As many of these veterans are reaching an advanced age, the importance of their narratives should be paramount.

Future research in the areas of race and gender can make a contribution to this body of literature. The study is limited to African American Vietnam War servicemen who were enlisted in the military from the state of Alabama. Future research can address African American women and other under-represented groups that served during the war. Increasing the sample size of the study by crossing gender and racial lines could provide additional insight into these types of experiences prior and after service during the Vietnam era.

The African American Vietnam veterans in this study honored their country during a controversial and racially divided period. Their open and honest narrative, which at times were hard to discuss and recollect, has created a greater appreciation and admiration not only for their duty but the struggles they overcame. The effects of the Vietnam War on Black serviceman cannot be contained within the confines of a single study, but it is my hope that the nine men in this study have provided a sense of their place in history and the remarkable lives they have achieved. The life experiences expressed in this study add to the volume of history concerning the Vietnam era from the perspective of the African American serviceman.

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APPENDIX A INTERVIEWS BY AUTHOR

Jack Bishop, interview by author, Linen, AL November, 2016.

James M. Brown, interview by author, Athens, GA, December, 2016

Samuel L. Duncan, interview by author, Athens, GA, November 11, 2016.

Jesse Echols, interview by author Athens, GA, December, 2016.

John H. England, interview by author, Athens, GA, November, 2016.

Roy Hill, interview by author Athens, GA, December, 2016.

Jim Hollins, interview by author, Birmingham, AL , December, 2016

Harry Jones, interview by author, Bogart, GA, November, 2016

Ben Richardson, interview by author Athens, GA, November , 2016.

APPENDIX B ORAL HISTORY QUESTIONS

Questions for African American Veterans with Service time in the state of Alabama

Part 1: Intro

1. Please state your name
2. Please state your birth date
3. Where were you born?
4. Can you briefly describe your childhood and upbringing?

Part II: Military Service

1. Were you drafted or did you enlist into the military?
2. When did you serve and in what kind of unit?

Part III: Post Military/Benefits

1. How did your service end? (Discharge, Retirement etc.)
2. What was life like after Vietnam?
3. Did you work or go back to school?
4. Did the G.I. Bill support your education? If so please elaborate on the school you attended. Major? Degree?
5. Where you able to utilize other benefits? (Medical, unemployment, Veteran Administration, etc.)

6. Did you join a veteran's organization?

7. What do you value most from your time in the military?

8. How did your service and experiences affect your life?

9. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this interview?

APPENDIX C IRB DOCUMENTATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF

ALABAMA

Office of the Vice President for

Research & Economic Development

Office for Research Compliance

September 15, 2016

Douglas

Craddock,

Higher Ed

Admin.

College of
Education Box
870302

Re: IRB#: 16-OR-311 "War, Civil Rights, & Education: African-American

Vietnam Veterans, the G.I. Bill, and the Civil Rights Era"

Dear Mr. Craddock:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CPR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on September 14, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without JRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent/assent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your

Sincerely,

358 Rose Administration Building I Box 870127 I
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127 205-348-8461 I Fax
205-348-7189 I Toll Free 1-877-820-3066
The University of Alabama

Individual's Consent to be in a Research

Study

You are being asked to be in a research study. This study is called "War, Civil Rights, and Higher Education: African American Vietnam Veterans, the G.I. Bill, and the Civil Rights Era." Mr. Douglas Craddock, Jr is completing this dissertation study. He is a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about?

Primarily focused on firsthand accounts of Alabama-based Vietnam War veterans and their pursuit of educational attainment and equality. The Vietnam War and the Civil Rights plight of domestic interracial conflict were two major crises of the contemporary United States. As these conflicts intersected on the lives of African American veteran's, history illustrates vivid images and accounts of forgone opportunities to obtain educational, medical, and job benefits during this period. As history displays, the notable acts of violence during this time was simply egregious.

The disallowance for educational attainment for these veterans is the central theme of this study.

Why is this study important-What good will the results do?

Further investigation into the lived experiences and voice of this particular population can help in identifying where the gap between education attainment begin to divide those of this period and how to avoid this indifference in the future.

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You responded to an announcement, ad, or social media request regarding the study. You identified with the Vietnam veteran status and are an African America male, whose unit was based in Alabama during the Vietnam War.

How many other people will be in this study?

The investigator hopes to interview 10 people from Alabama within the next four months.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, Douglas Craddock, a doctoral candidate and primary investigator for this study will interview an the agreed upon location about your experiences as an veteran returning from the Vietnam war to Alabama. The interview will focus on your career and education opportunities and interconnection with the Civil Rights Era of the time. The interviewer would like to tape record the interview to be sure that all your words are captured

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9/15/16
EXPIRATION DATE: 9/14/2017

accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes.

How much time will I spend being in this study?

The interview should last about 30 - 45 minutes, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

No compensation will be provided.

What are the risks (problems or dangers) from being this study?

The chief risk to you is that you may find the discussion of your experiences to be sad, upset or frustrating. You can control this possibility by not being in the study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not telling us things you find to be sad, mad or frustrating.

What are the benefits of being in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you unless you find it pleasant or helpful to describe your experiences with your return home. You may also feel good about knowing that you have helped future research in the areas higher education, and African American experiences from the Vietnam War.

How will my privacy be protected?

You are free to decide where we will visit you so we can talk without being overheard.

We will visit you in the privacy of your home or in another place that is convenient for you. In addition, if audiotaping occurs for purposes of transcription and accuracy. Audio files will be transferred and saved on a secure external hard drive with an encrypted password, protected only accessible by the PI. The audio transfer will take place on a secure password protected on a WEP wireless Internet connection. The drive will serve as an archive for the interview and will be stored in a file cabinet locked and secured with a combination lock, at the residence of the PI.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

Per your consent your name will be used within the research study, in the event, consent is not given; the only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in Douglas Craddock's office, which is locked when he is not there. If the participate agrees the recordings will be deposited to an archive. Audiotaping will occur for purposes of transcription and accuracy. Audio files will be transferred and saved on a secure external hard drive with an encrypted password, protected only accessible by the PI. The audio transfer will take place on a secure password protected on a WEP wireless Internet connection. The drive will serve as an archive for the interview and will be stored in a file cabinet locked and secured with a combination lock, at the office of the PI. Study records will be kept for a minimum of six years.

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What are the alternatives to being in this study?

The only alternative is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant?

Being in this study is totally voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationships with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call Mr. Douglas Craddock, Jr (334)-790-3727. If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html . After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Mr. Douglas Craddock, Jr for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

Please select Yes or No based on your consent for the study:

I am aware and agree to allow the following interview to part of the study archive:

_____

Yes

No

_____

I am aware and agree to the recoding of this interview for purpose of transcription and accuracy:

_____

Yes No

_____

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

Signature of Research Participant Date

Signature of Investigator Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 9/15/16
EXPIRATION DATE: 9/14/2017

Research Study Advertisement/Flyer

War, Civil Rights, and Higher Education: African American Vietnam Veterans, the G.I. Bill, and the Civil Rights Era Study

Be part of an important research study

- Are you an African American Male Vietnam War Veteran?
- *Were you stationed in Alabama prior to deployment*
- *Did you have the opportunity to utilize the G.1 Bill or other veteran benefits?*

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in the research study.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, generally known as the G.I. Bill, and its impact on African American Vietnam veterans, by obtaining knowledge about the experiences of African-American veterans who fought in the Vietnam War. The study will primarily focus on firsthand accounts of Alabama- based veterans and their pursuit of educational attainment and equality.

The study will consist of a short overview followed by a short interview and discussion about the research topic.

Please call Douglas Craddock, Jr at (334) 790-3727 or via email cradd002@sa.ua.edu for more information

APPENDIX D INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

* * * * *

JIM HOLLINS, JR.

* * * * *

BY MR. CRADDOCK:

Q If you can for me, please, state your name.

A Jim Hollins, Jr.

Q Please state your birth date.

A August the 8th, 1950.

Q Mr. Hollins, where were you born?

A I was born in Birmingham, Alabama.

Q Okay. So, can you briefly kind of just describe being raised in Birmingham, that experience, particularly as it relates to maybe race or, you know, what brought you to go into the military from that perspective, just growing up.

A Well, growing up, my father worked in the steel mill, we had a -- a full family. I've got two brothers, it was three boys and one girl in our family. We were -- I wouldn't just say poor, but we were close. But the thing was that in our community we were average with everybody else.

Q Right.

A So you were poor but you didn't know you were poor.

Q Right.

A Because everything else around you is the same.

Q Yeah.

A Though my father, you know, didn't have a good

education, he stressed education.
Q Wow. Okay.
A You know. My mom died when I was ten.
Q Oh, wow. I didn't know that. Okay.
A So we were kind of left in a -- to be wild.
Q Yeah, yeah, yeah.
A So, that was that -- the educated boys with a lot of rough edges around, you know, that hung out and shot at folk and fought and did that, and then you go back and you still had to go to school where the other guys did all of that and they went to jail.
Q Uh-huh.
A You know, so, you know, it was just that blessing that was hanging over.
Q That's good. Okay. So then, so, education was stressed. So within the schools itself, what particular area of Birmingham did grow up in, what municipality?
A In Pratt City.
Q In Pratt City. Okay.
A Pratt City. Went to Western Olin High School that's now JO.
Q Okay. Was that a predominant black high school at the time?
A Well --
Q All black?

A Everything was still segregated.
Q Everything is still segregated.
A Yeah, still segregated. So it was an all black -- all black schools, which leads to a lot of, you know, there was no good counseling --
Q Okay.
A -- then. When I went to high school, you know, again, I'm a half thug, you know, hanging out, so I want to do the least I can just to get by.
Q Yes, sir.
A There was no counselor there to say, hey, you're apt to go to college, we need to push you along this edge. They just left you alone.
Q Fend for yourself.
A I did the first two years of high school, you know, doing the regular curriculum. But those next two years, where I should have been doing academic stuff, I went to the auto mechanic shop and did body assembly for two years.
Q Okay.
A You know.
Q Use your hands.
A No, we drunk whiskey and smoked dope. That's what they did there. You know, you leave school, go to the movies, go get a girl and stuff, ain't nobody work on no car and nobody cared, you know, it was all black folk and you were just

there. So, graduation, I hadn't applied to no college or no SAT -- no nothing. And my sister, she worked out of town.

Q Okay.

A She came home and she said, let me see all your stuff you got ready for school. I said, girl, I'm graduating school. She said, no, no. Daddy, we don't play that here. She's the oldest. You know what I'm saying?

Q So where do you fall in the tree of the siblings?

A I'm the baby.

Q You're the baby. Okay.

A And she was like the mama, you know, she was old enough then to be mama. So I said, girl, I ain't all that. She said, oh, no, we doing that. So she got everything fixed for me to go to Miles.

Q Okay.

A And that's how that kind of just turned that around. If it wasn't for her, you know, I'd probably just have been another bum out there.

Q Wow. That's good. So her coming in, her intervention to everything --

A Yes.

Q So you graduated from high school. Did you go directly to Miles?

A Directly to Miles. I graduated high school at fifteen, sixteen.

Q Oh, wow.
A You know.
Q How did that happen?
A Well, like I said, the counselor didn't see it, you know, but my grades --
Q Were still good.
A -- were good in those earlier years, they said, well, his aptitude is this higher grade so let's move him up.
Q So you got skipped up just naturally.
A Yeah, yeah, I got skipped. And then they went back and said, well, we still ain't got to him yet, so they move you up again.
Q Wow.
A You know, but those are bad. I would never do that again. If I had my choice, I'd stay back, stay back, because it's -- it -- you're good with the education then, but the social aspect of it is detrimental.
Q Difficult.
A Because you figure a fifteen year old --
Q With seventeen, eighteen year olds.
A -- that's a senior in high school, who you going to date.
Q Yeah, yeah.
A Who you going -- so I end up portraying myself as two or three years older, which means I have got to act two or

three years older, so you walk around with a cigarette in your mouth or a wine bottle and you act thug, you know, anybody say something because you're a little boy, young boy, you know, I'm packing, you know, and I got two big brothers and they know about them Hollins' boys, they'll burn you, burn your house down, you know, so you portray that thug-like and that got you a little older where you shouldn't have to, you know.

Q So you went to college at sixteen, seventeen years old?

A No, fifteen.

Q Fifteen years old. Freshman in college.

A Yeah, it was sixteen. I went to high school in '67. I turned seventeen at September, I started college in August, so I was sixteen. And I turned seventeen that -- my freshman year.

Q Okay. Wow.

A So now, I still got to portray --

Q You do. So were you there by yourself? Were your other brothers there, too?

A My oldest brother, he had gone to Tuskegee. The boy that's next to me went to Jeff State.

Q Okay.

A So I was blazing my trail at Miles.

Q At Miles.

A But now I'm still being the -- got to portray older.

Q Yeah.

A So, smoke a little dope in the morning, drink a little wine for lunch, but I still kept my grades up.

Q So did the people know your actual age or you told them you were eighteen or nineteen?

A I told them I was nineteen.

Q And they went with it.

A Yeah. And see, the next year, I pledged.

Q Okay.

A And we had Que in everywhere, so I could get my I.D. card when you are twenty-one, and I wasn't but eighteen, eighteen but my I.D. said twenty-one, with a picture.

Q Good to go. With a picture.

A That's me. That's me. Twenty-one. You know, so, and by then, I never forget, that second -- sophomore, going to my junior year, that next semester, my sister started working at Miles. She graduated from Miles.

Q Okay.

A And I -- I was rough.

Q You had to grow up fast.

A I was tore up, tore up. But my grades, I had a 3.89, 3.9 something, but tore up, tore up. And she would come home and she'd tell daddy, daddy, he's just embarrassing you, you ought to see about that, you know, just rough. So daddy said, boy, now you know your sister out there, she's, you know, she's got people out there, her reputation. So I decided I'd

do straight, I tried to be straight. And that done made me fell down to a straight B.

Q What you were doing must have been right.

A I told them I had some classes like, my -- English lit and had debate, I said, you can't out debate a guy that's high on reefer --

Q That's true.

A -- and he know his lesson, too. I can beat you every time. You can't out talk me. You ain't going to out talk me when I got that jungle mix.

Q Can't beat it.

A You ain't going to beat it, you ain't going to beat it. So I -- so my grades were fine.

Q You were good to go. So did you eventually graduate from Miles?

A Yeah. Well, that's where the war came in.

Q Okay.

A My junior year, I got drafted.

Q So you were drafted. Okay. You didn't enlist, you got drafted, okay.

A Into the Army.

Q Okay.

A Now, my oldest brother had already been in the Army.

Q Okay.

A And you watch the news, folks in the Army were dying

like -- over in Vietnam. I said, I don't want to die. I ain't that crazy. I might be high, but I ain't no fool.

Q Yeah.

A So I said, well, you know, so I -- I said, well, who ain't dying over there. They said Coast Guard, I ain't heard of too many folk in the Coast Guard dying in Vietnam. So I went down and said, well, I'm going to join the Coast Guard, don't have to go. The man at the Coast Guard said, hey, you got to sign up for eight years and we got a waiting list. I said, I don't even want to get married that long.

So I said, well -- and we stay with the war. So I went to the Navy. So the guy in the Navy said, you got four years to sign and they got a waiting list. I said, well, the Army folks gave me sixty days, something like that, so I got to make a move. So that was out.

I went to the Air Force, they were already full. Everybody had a waiting list that were full. So it was all these recruiters just all in one building.

So I'm going to the next one, the Marine Corps. Went in there, knocked on his door and we went in and we talked. I told him about all the rest of them. He said, well, tell you, son, he said, if you have got a toothbrush, you can go today. Something should have clicked. Why everybody else got a waiting list? This one don't. But it didn't click. I was still thinking, I got lucky, I ain't got

to go to the Army. So I signed up, signed up, signed on the line.

Q So you weren't eligible for college deferment because you were already in school?

A Well, I should have been and I probably didn't fill out all the stuff --

Q Nobody told you.

A Didn't do it, nobody went -- poor counseling again.

Q Yep. Because that is what a lot of white college students were doing at that time, they were doing college deferment. They weren't going nowhere.

A They didn't go. They didn't go.

Q It was either that or the two brothers in the war, you know, one had to stay at home to continue the family name just in case. In our research, that's what I've seen, college deferment, college deferment, that is why I was surprised.

A Yeah. See, that's what kept me from my first -- so I was in England, in Scotland, when I got word that my oldest brother got hurt, and I worked intelligence. So they called me first. So that's when I said, you know, I'm a Marine now, I'm tough, I'm going to kill them all, because what came across my desk was that he was killed, you know, so, oh, man, I'm going now. So I had to call in favors just to get there.

Q Oh, wow, to get over there.

A To get there. They said no, you can't go. So I had to

call in some hard favors.
Q To make things happen.
A Just to go.
Q So from signing the ink, you went to basic training after that, I guess, couple of months later?
A Paris Island.
Q Paris Island.
A Paris Island, South Carolina.
Q That's where you did your basic at?
A I did my basic.
Q How was the transition going from an all black community, all black schools, to Paris Island that wasn't segregated, was it?
A No, no. It was not, no, no. It was really kind of easy.
Q Okay.
A Boot camp was -- is -- for Marines are rough.
Q Right.
A And a lot of them get to sit back, you know, they don't make it so they start them over until they just kick them out completely. But like I said, I had pledged Que then, this was back in the day.
Q So you went from an all black to middle school, high school, to the service, you said the Marines itself was either you are going to stay or you're going to go, basically.

A You're going to make it or you get put out.
Q Okay.
A And so with that, you know, having somebody get up in, you know, it wouldn't be all that --
Q I've seen this before. Yeah.
A You know, and a lot of guys they couldn't take it, they would freak out, the white folk, just oh, good, because the drill instructor was usually a little bitty black guy, you know.
Q Oh, wow. In the Marines?
A Yeah. And they get all -- they hated big guys, you know, so they would get -- but they liked mean folk, you know, that's Marine Corps. So the first time we was out with the pugil sticks fighting, you know, they put me on a big old guy like the hulk, and it was a white boy, he wasn't used to fighting with sticks, I beat him up good, he was bleeding. When I came back -- when we came back to the barracks, they set me up on the sergeant's desk, gave me a cup of coffee and a doughnut, you know, now, see, this is what you do in a war, you know.
Q I bet that was an experience. And it's amazing how college seemingly prepared you for the Marines, so to speak, for your military service, even the fraternal aspect of it prepared you for it.
A Right, but still a baby.

Q Still a baby.
A Still a baby.
Q How old were you now when you --
A I was eighteen, nineteen.
Q You had been two -- two years in college?
A Two years in college, straight.
Q Drafted in?
A Going straight in.
Q A grown man.
A So, a baby. And you're there with other babies.
Q Yeah, that's true. But you're more grown than them. That's the main thing. You're more mature than them. You've seen more than they've seen.
A That was the whole thing. Being streetwise.
Q Right.
A Knowing, you know, like when they come at you -- you know they ain't, they can't hurt you, they might beat you up a little, but they ain't going to kill you, ain't going to shoot you or cut you.
Q Yeah.
A So you just take it and go on.
Q It is what it is.
A The rest of them, they freak out and they go, one of the, one of them got busted because he came and told them we were about halfway through and he told us, he came and said,

look, guys, I'm not going to go through a whole lot of bull crap with you. He said, I'm suppose to come and tell you that somebody messed up so now everybody got to do push ups. Somebody did something wrong, so we're going to run ten miles. He said, nobody did nothing, he said, but I got to get y'all ready for Nam. If you're being chased, you got to be able to run five or ten miles so you can live and not get, you know, you don't get tired, you could make it.

Q Right.

A He said, you got to be strong enough to carry your buddy, you know, so the push ups are necessary. He said, so, let's get ready to go to war, you know, and that's the way he did. And it made sense and they busted him. They said, they don't want that kind of training. They have to have the mental, too. And so that is what the Marine Corps, that's why they call Marines giants, giants. Like that bottle there, you screw the top off of a jar and put what you want in it, then screw the top back on.

Q Re-programming to what they want you to be.

A That's right. And when they get done, that's what -- when I left Scotland, when I heard about my brother, Marines feel like I can kill them all.

Q Take over the world.

A You're programmed that way and you believe it. You believe it, you know.

Q So did you -- how long was -- was Marines eight weeks or is it longer than that?
A No, it's till you finish. It's three and a half months.
Q Three and a half months, okay.
A If you go straight through.
Q If you're not sent back.
A If you go straight through.
Q So, after your basic, what was your next step?
A After the basic -- well, then you got some type of advanced training. Now, for me --
Q Like MOS? Do y'all MOS in the Marines?
A Yeah, MOS. They go through a whole barrage of testings to see what you'll be good at, you know, so it's governmental, so, the government know just how to test what -- to tell whether you are good at your hands, if you are good with school. Well, he might be a good mechanic, you know, so they know what to do. Well, this one, he like a thug, let's give him a gun. Mine, I was tapped for intelligence.
Q You don't choose your MOS, they choose it for you in the Marines?
A They chose it for you.
Q Everybody else, you chose it when you're going in.
A Right. No, they tell you what you're good at. This is -- this is going to be your job.

Q Right.
A So mine was Naval intelligence.
Q Okay.
A Boy, that's something --
Q I'll be inside somewhere.
A After we graduated from boot camp, they're reading out everybody's MOS and where they was going. So I'm just waiting. And they called mine, machine gunner, you going to Camp Lejeune. Sir, sir, shut your mouth, get back in line. So I went to Camp Lejeune.
Q Where is that located?
A In North Carolina.
Q North Carolina. Okay.
A Camp Lejeune, Marine Corps Base. And I was over rifle platoon. And we went out and played war games every week. We go out on Monday, if you do good, you come back on Friday and you got the weekend off.
Q You were on the water? Were you on the water?
A We're close to it.
Q Okay, okay.
A And that's what we did. Man, I'm going, boy, this ain't what I thought, you know. So we going and so now I have got a lot of guys under me.
Q Do you? Okay. So what was your rank at this time?
A Private.

Q Private still?
A Private still, still private.
Q So you've got privates under you?
A Yeah. Well, I was PFC, private first class.
Q Private first class, okay.
A You still just private. You know, I had stripes. Regular private ain't got nothing, you know. PFC ---
Q Now, the guys under you, were they black and white and other races?
A Black and white.
Q Black and white?
A Black and white. The one that you had trouble were the Latinos, that's when they were just coming in. But they were, you know, they had their little gangs and stuff and the blacks had their little gangs. White folk were out there getting whooped by everybody.
Q So the minority, they were segregated even within the --
A Even within that, yeah. So you could, everybody had, that's when you had all the different handshakes.
Q Yeah.
A And so the Latinos are of the mind, you know, they respect because I'm, you know, we ready to fight, you know, so I was kind of a part of them. I remember I went somewhere and I was shaking hands with one of the black guys and we did like

that (indicating), you know, and that's the way the Latino would do it.

Q Yeah.

A When I did that, he went (indicating) hey, hey, hey, my bad, my bad, but I was used to doing that with my Latino guys.

Q It's amazing that Latinos and the African-Americans were clashing, were butting heads.

A Yeah, yeah. And we were both getting whooped by the same folk.

Q Yeah. But you didn't think like that.

A Babies, babies, babies, you know.

Q You're bringing where you were from to here and staying within your own.

A Yeah, yeah.

Q I never thought that.

A I cut one up, I thought I was going to jail. We were out in the field, it was like a Tuesday, and all we had to do was play the war games, you know, they have people come in there, you know, playing the other side, we're the good guys, and you capture them when they come or ambush them, you do good, you're able to go back to the base and you got the weekend off. If you don't, you got to stay all through the weekend and --

Q And correct your mistakes.

A -- start all over again Monday.

Q Uh-huh.
A So you don't get back to the base.
Q That's your punishment. Okay.
A Yeah. Yeah. So, it's, it's like Tuesday, and we dug in, got fox holes and stuff and it's night, but at night, don't light a cigarette, you can see a cigarette two miles down the road.
Q Yeah.
A You puff the cigarette, it lights up. So, we're down, we're hunkered in. You already know they're coming, it's a game.
Q It's a game.
A It's a game. You and I sitting here going, maybe they're going to come next week. Man, it's a game. They're coming.
Q That's part of it.
A If they don't come today, they're coming tonight.
Q Yeah.
A It's a game. Play the game.
Q Uh-huh.
A I kept a little box cutter, you know, I hopped down in there, (indicating), so that was the rest of them, I already knew.
Q Respect.
A James is a cut up, he's going to get you. And I hopped

in there, I hooked them pretty bad. Worse than what I thought. He had to go to the doctor. So that -- true enough, the other folk came, we did, we do, we were so good by then because they were scared then because we'll do right. Jazz will get us. We went back to the base on Thursday. Thursday --

Q Y'all knocked it out. You get a four-day weekend.

A Exactly. Back by Thursday. But Friday, they wanted me to go to the CO office.

Q Okay.

A I said, oh, he done ratted on me. They had cut him up. So I got there. And when I walked in, he said, you done did it this time, Hollins. And I say, well, I told him, you know, and before I could get all that out, he said, go pack your stuff, you're heading to Florida.

Q Prove yourself.

A The Navy intelligence people called and said you in. That was a good way to go out.

Q You went on.

A I'm gone. Yeah. So I got a thirty day pass, come home, left there and went on to --

Q You came to Alabama for a couple of days?

A Yeah. I stayed thirty days at home, thirty days in Alabama. Thirty days, just kick back, kick back, have a good time.

Q Yeah.
A Went to Pensacola.
Q You went to Pensacola. Okay.
A Naval Communication Station. And that was a year class.
Q Okay. So what year was that, do you remember?
A This was '70.
Q 1970. Okay.
A But after that class, if you finish one or two in the class, you can pick your own duty station anywhere in the world.
Q Oh, wow.
A I finished number two.
Q Wow.
A That's how I got to Scotland.
Q Oh, wow. That's all right.
A Because all the old guys, you know, the old heads, they were there teaching the class. They said, all right, you guys, if y'all can -- if you study, you get this down right, don't mess up, you get this, you can go anywhere in the world. And they were telling me about how they went to Germany, Bremerhaven, that was the number one duty station.
Q Okay.
A And Scotland was about tied with them.
Q Okay.

A You know. So, I said, shoot, I thought about Germany, I said, no.
Q Uh-huh. Where did the number one guy go?
A He went to Bremerhaven. Yeah, yeah. He and I met up on a lot of --
Q Oh, really? Okay, cool. That's cool. So by this time had you formed some relationship with some guys that --
A Yeah, yeah. You get, you know, you come back as -- it ain't quite like James Bond because everybody know everybody.
Q Uh-huh. Yeah.
A We know all of them.
Q And they know --
A They know all of us. This ain't no -- you walking down the street and --
Q You have to keep moving.
A I see you, I got you.
Q Yeah.
A You know, everybody know everybody.
Q That's all right. That's good stuff. From 1970 you went to Scotland?
A Yeah.
Q And how long were you in Scotland?
A Typically, it was four years, three, three and a half years.
Q Uh-huh.

A I stayed there. But that included going to Nam. My first --
Q Okay.
A -- time in Nam, I wasn't there six months.
Q Oh, really?
A Uh-huh. I was sent back. I went from there, within a six month period, went from Nam to Okinawa, back to Scotland.
Q Okay. Did you enjoy the time in Europe?
A I loved it. Yeah. I would still have been in. I would still have been in. But --
Q Really?
A But the -- after the first two years, they say you got to come back to the states and stay two years.
Q Okay.
A Mainly because everybody know everybody. Like that face, you got to get your face back out and then go back and start afresh.
Q Okay.
A I said, y'all send me back to the states, I'm getting out. I ain't -- I'm getting out. I'm done. And they got too much money invested in you.
Q Oh, yeah.
A So I knew the game. I knew the game. They slipped up -- we used to skydive, it was three or four of us, man, that was --

Q That was fun.
A You know, parachuting was one thing, but when you're floating, I mean, that's the -- that's the biggest high. I mean, it's just --
Q So you were a skydiver?
A Yeah.
Q That's all right.
A And we would go -- and when the CO found out, you know, man, they raised the roof and they had to calm me down because, you know, I'm fixing to file charges. I told them, I said, you ain't worried about me dying, you're worried about how much money it's going to cost if I die.
Q Yep, that's it.
A I'm worth this many thousand of dollars. It ain't, Jim, I don't want you to get hurt.
Q It ain't about me.
A It ain't about me. He said that's money. You money.
Q Yeah.
A Just trade up.
Q The information you got --
A Yeah, it's money. So, that's when I said, I said, okay, y'all send me back to states, I'm out. Now go spend your money. So they let me stay a little longer. Play the game.
Q So after you -- so you returned, you came back from

Scotland and did you retire when you came back to Alabama?
A Yeah, yeah. Once I get back here, then I had four more years of inactive duty.
Q Okay.
A So being I'm still in --
Q Yeah.
A -- but I just ain't got to go and report.
Q Was that like -- kind of like the reserves or something?
A No. Well --
Q I guess Marines is different.
A Yeah, yeah. I'm in -- they can come knock on the door and say, hey, you got to go.
Q Come back.
A Pack your stuff.
Q But you're not reporting to the base everyday now.
A They know where I am.
Q I got you.
A They tapped the phones. They run background checks on everybody that I see, talk to --
Q Oh, wow.
A Anything. Yeah.
Q All across the board. So your original agreement, was it just four years in the Marines?
A Four years.

Q So you did your four years?
A Right.
Q And came back.
A Came back and then did my four on the outside.
Q Did you go back to school once you came -- did you come directly back to Alabama or did you hit some other states?
A Yeah, came right back to Alabama.
Q Uh-huh.
A I got home like that January and took that semester and just --
Q Chill out. Yeah.
A You know, you go back and hang on the yard, just kind of chill around.
Q You're the old head by then, but still young.
A But you don't know it. You feel old.
Q So when you came back and did the four years of no service, how old were you? Twenty-three?
A Twenty-three, twenty-four.
Q Uh-huh.
A Years old.
Q You had graduated from high school, did two years of college, four years in the military.
A Yeah. So now I'm -- that summer I started back at Miles.
Q Okay.

A Went back to school.
Q What was your original degree? I didn't ask you that.
A Biology.
Q Biology.
A So I'm getting back and my thing was, when I started, I was going to be a doctor, premed.
Q Yeah.
A So now, when I start back that summer, you know, go out and get my paperwork and stuff, a lot of the teachers were my classmates.
Q That's funny. That's funny. Did the GI bill pay for when you came back for your two years?
A It did.
Q It did. So you were able to get --
A It ain't nothing like what they got now.
Q Because it just was for you, it wasn't for your -- if you had kids or your wife, it just was for you, right?
A Well, if you had kids, that GI bill, when I came under, was good.
Q So it was kind of like a 44 GI bill.
A It was true. What every military person ought to get now. They paid for everything. If I said I want to take fifty classes --
Q It's going to be taken care of.
A If I want to take three classes.

Q Taken care of.
A All right. Fine. Now, if you take a full load, if you get fifteen, I think, maybe fourteen hours, whatever it is, but I took a bunch, you know.
Q You did?
A Then they going to pay you like your unemployment.
Q Yeah.
A You get a check.
Q Check. School paid for.
A School paid for, your classes and stuff, they give you money for food. So I really didn't have to work.
Q Yeah.
A You know, I kick back like, hey, I'm cool.
Q Like you're retired.
A Yeah. So, it was, it was good. If you got children, they would send them to school. You got a stipend for them, you know. So it was -- it was great. It was great.
Q I guess you fell under the 72 iteration of the bill then, maybe, I'm not for sure.
A I don't know.
Q Uh-huh.
A But I know now, the guy that's going that I talked to, the government pays half or so and they have to put half in or --
Q Oh, really?

A Or something, you know, they got --
Q They get a certain amount a semester you can go. So, my dad, he fought in Desert Storm, so me and my sisters went, he never used the GI bill, but I used it and it paid for eight semesters of tuition and then it depends on your level of disability how much money, additional money he got. So he got like sixty percent of like -- but you, ten, fifteen percent?
A Uh-huh.
Q Probably that? Give you half, you take care of the other half and we do what we do. So that's interesting how it's changed over time from the original 44, all the way moving back up, and the money taken away.
A Yeah. Because I bought a car with the first one, you know, I'm going -- I ain't working, going to school and getting enough money to pay for a car.
Q You'll be good.
A So it was good.
Q So you went through biology, when did you eventually graduate from Miles?
A Graduated from Miles in '76.
Q Okay. Uh-huh.
A I was -- well, let me back up. Yeah. When I started this summer, you know, I was getting a little money and stuff.
Q Uh-huh.
A And so I started working, I said, well, still needed

some more, you know.
Q A little more fighting change, yeah.
A So I started with the sheriff's department.
Q Oh, wow. Okay. Yeah.
A You know, intelligence.
Q Naturally, yeah.
A Pull some strings. I tried to get with the -- after I graduated, with the U.S. Marshals and I figured I had called one of my COs and they said they were going to see what to do about. I think they had some drug stuff on there, too.
Q You can't remember.
A Yeah. Anyway, I did that. And they had me a good shift, I worked from 11:30 at night till 8:30 in the morning, then I went to school during the day.
Q Oh, wow. Okay. So you patrolled with the sheriff or you just work in the office?
A No. Actually, I was -- I was assigned to Baptist Hospital.
Q Oh, wow. Okay.
A They was having a strike there.
Q Okay.
A And what made that part good was that the old guys that I worked with, you know, I'm still, you know, thinking, you're just a baby, you talking about guys that are forty and --
Q Oh, man.

A -- up, you know, they would let me just stay on the inside of the hospital.
Q Oh, yeah.
A And I got my lesson through the night. And then the next morning, we go back down to the station, I change clothes and go to school.
Q And go back to school. So they were looking out for you and letting you get paid.
A Yeah, yeah.
Q That's good stuff.
A So that worked out good. I met Shirley through that.
Q At the hospital or through the sheriff's office?
A Through the sheriff office. We were -- they had voting booths up at Howell Sanford, up in Pratt, and we had to go pick them up, escort them back, we didn't pick them up, we had to escort them back downtown for -- so people can go vote.
Q So y'all had to protect, especially, African-Americans for their right to vote?
A Yeah. Well, no, we had to guard the machines.
Q Oh, the machines. You're doing the machine, not the people.
A Yeah, they were picking up the machines, we had to make sure that the machines weren't tampered, you know, nobody stole them -- just body guard.
Q Yeah, uh-huh.

A So we went in, you know, all the guys up there, you know, uniform, they didn't have the Glocks and stuff back then, I had the big bull barrel 357.
Q Oh, wow.
A They going, that dude crazy, he got a gun and a badge.
Q You had them all.
A Yeah. He has got a gun and a badge. He was already crazy.
Q Yeah.
A So, I saw Shirley, I said, who that? And so the guys told me about her. So after then, I used it with -- would ease up to the center.
Q Uh-huh.
A And she had told one of her girlfriends that told her that worked down at McAlpine, said, after we had started seeing each other, little bit, said one of the guys down there had come up and said, word down at McAlpine some new center lady up in Pratt. And said, said, she ain't said nothing, but she heard them talking, said, that's one of them Hollins boys and the rest of us said don't fuck with him.
Q Say he's crazy.
A She came and told Shirley, said, I don't know who that nigger you got but the niggers down there said he crazy.
Q They ain't going to mess with her.
A They ain't going to mess with her. Don't even try to

talk to her because that nigger crazy.
Q They knew who it is. So how long did you stay with the sheriff department? Until after you graduated or --
A Well, after I graduated, I graduated in --
Q Biology, right? Did you stay in biology?
A Yeah.
Q Okay.
A So I start putting in jobs, you know.
Q Yes, sir.
A They called me for the health department.
Q Oh, okay.
A And I didn't really want that. I enjoyed being a cop.
Q Really? You liked it, yeah.
A I mean, I liked it. But I played the game.
Q Yeah.
A And I told them, I say, hey, I got a job offer, I showed the paper. And they going to pay me more a month.
Q Uh-huh.
A You can't guess how much more money I was going to make with the health department, it was seventy, I think seventy something cents, not an hour, but a year, it was annual. The guy was going to make seventy cents more, nine thousand and something dollars a year, that was annual pay. And it was big money. Big money.
Q Uh-huh.

A Going to health department. And I told them and the sergeant down there, he said, well, we'll see what we can do. And they matched it and gave me a little bit more a month. So I stayed.
Q Yeah.
A So, maybe about another year, they called and I told them, I said, the health department has gone up a little bit. They said, we're going to miss you.
Q It's time to go.
A So I went with the health department.
Q So that is how your career started at the health department?
A Started at the health department.
Q You were there for twenty plus years?
A Almost forty.
Q You were with them for forty years?
A Almost forty years.
Q Wow.
A Yeah.
Q So you're working and all that. What do you value most, I guess, from your military experience, I'll say that?
A Military kept me alive. I grew up -- had I not gone to the military, I would have probably died in the streets. Out here acting a fool. Being with fools.
Q Uh-huh.

A I might have been the fool, you know, I say I'm hanging with fools, but I might have been the one, that's what we found out about Jim, we tried to shelter Jim and keep him away from folks, Shirley worked at Wiggin, so you've got all the thugs in the (inaudible) that hung their wears, and we tell them, well, we don't want you hanging around them thugs. And one of them said, that's what my mama said about him. They said, he the thug, they don't want us hanging around him.

Q Wow.

A So, the man you talking about might be the one you looking at in the mirror. So I might have been the one. But, you know, I knew I was -- dangerous to have my dad in Pratt --

Q Worse than it was sometimes.

A That night. That night. Shirley was hollering and crying one night because I went up there to the house, I use to go up there and hang and keep my eyes on things, this wasn't too long after I got back, I hadn't gotten with the sheriff department then.

Q Oh, wow. Okay.

A And guy was -- yeah, I hadn't been long there. Young guys now.

Q Yeah.

A They running the --

Q Yeah, yeah. You're old man now.

A You used to be bad, didn't you? Still bad. We run

things now. And I said, okay, fine, you know, I got no comments, starting no mess. One of them go, how bad you used to be. (Indicating) that bad. And it was about seven or eight of them. And then they started clicking the knife, I said, oh, and I looked at one of them, one of my cousins, he was kind of a distant cousin. Said, you, too? Backed off. I only lived two blocks around the corner. And all of them had to come down there one street from Howel Sander, I took my car, parked it across the road, loaded two shotguns and I had two 357s and I'm waiting. I'm killing everybody that come down the street. I said, I ain't changed.

So Shirley called one of my home boy, Joe. She said, go get Jim, he fixing to get in trouble. Joe said, I know where he at.

Q He knew exactly what it was.

A Joe pulled up, pulled his car right in front of mine, he had two sawed offs. She called him to come stop me and said --

Q He came to help you.

A My boy.

Q Uh-huh.

A My boy. When they came down the road, they told them, you can either die here or you can go a long way around home. And no more problems out the young bucks no more.

Q They knew what that was.

A No more problems. I used to go up to the gym and, you know, like you got nice shoes, Marine Corps tennis shoes were green and they were -- we call them, they Sketchers now, but they weren't even Sketchers then, they were worst than that, they were scared. And nobody said nothing about -- except Joe, the guy that came and pulled up. Boy, when you going to get them slipity slides out from up here. Ain't nobody else going to say nothing. And Shirley finally told me, we were dating and she said, I don't know how to tell us this, but I know you got the money, she said, can you buy some nicer tennis shoes. I said, ain't nothing wrong with my -- and she bought my first good pair of tennis shoes. They were Ponys. Ponys. Yeah, she bought my first good pair of tennis shoes.

Q The pony express. You were still programmed, though.

A Yeah, yeah, with the Marine Corps. These were good. And it served a purpose.

Q That's all right.

A Ain't nobody going to -- they didn't -- what?

Q No worries.

A So Marine Corps grew me up. I became a man, responsible, I knew where I was needed to go in life. I needed to be able to take care of me.

Q Yeah.

A I wasn't a baby no more. I couldn't depend on daddy no more. I needed to be the man.

Q Uh-huh.
A And that's what I got at Marine Corps.
Q That's good stuff. One thing I failed to ask you, did you have any -- seems like you really didn't have any -- any -- anything as it relates to race that really affected you throughout this time? Or did I just kind of skim over it? Are you talking about everybody kind of, segregation, integration seemed like it went okay for you, that's -- it's kind of been a point of conjunction in other interviews that some people -- that transition was difficult for them. But earlier you said it really wasn't that bad, everybody respected each other in the Marine Corps for the most part.
A Marine Corps was family.
Q Family.
A It was small, it was a small group.
Q Elite men.
A Yeah. And if you're able to make it, then you see -- they got that strong brotherhood.
Q That's good.
A It's a closeness.
Q Yeah.
A We went up to the Wall in Washington, me and my brothers, you know, and I'm the -- with the Marine, kind of tough. I went down the Wall, it's hard to talk about, even think about it now. But you go down and you look and

there's -- when I went, it was like I could see -- I could see names, I saw faces.

Q I got you.

A And I broke down. And then I was ashamed because here I am the big tough guy and my brothers are holding me, carrying me up out of this thing.

Q Wow.

A And I told them I could never go back to that again. I could never -- the Wall has come here in Birmingham, I can't go look at it. I can't go look at it. It's a closeness. It's a different -- it's a different thing.

Q I appreciate it. That's kind of what I really wanted to hear your experience leaving Alabama, coming back, everything in between and always appreciate you for your service and the things that you did for your country and sharing some candid stuff that I think a lot of times African-American men don't have the opportunity to just discuss, just talk about their experiences that you are saying, not somebody else is saying for you. I appreciate that.

A Now, I tell you one other thing, Vietnam Vets, we never got welcomed home.

Q It was such a divided time.

A Yeah. World War I Vets, they had parades.

Q World War II Vets.

A World War II.
Q Korean War.
A Korean.
Q Uh-huh.
A But when it came to Nam, we were called baby killers, they spit at you, college demonstrations against the war.
Q Uh-huh. And then this time you also had the intersectionality, the civil rights movement.
A Right. We never got welcome back home.
Q I was talking to --
A Just showed up.
Q I was talking to one of your fellow vets and he said to this day he still don't know why he was over there, that the government itself never provided the reasoning behind it.
A Just go.
Q Just go.
A Because they told you to go.
Q Because they told you to go.
A Told you to go, you had to go.
Q Uh-huh.
A And you went. And from that point, you did what they want you to do because you want to stay alive.
Q Be alive.
A Stay alive.
Q I appreciate you. I know many more people that do.

Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

(End of interview)

* * * * *

INTERVIEW OF SAMUEL DUNCAN

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BY MR. CRADDOCK:

Q Can you please state your name.

A Samuel L. Duncan, Jr.

Q Samuel L. Duncan, Jr. And within that, can you state your birth date, if you don't mind.

A 9-21-50.

Q Okay. Just celebrated a birthday not too long ago.

A Not too long ago.

Q And can you tell me where you were born, Mr. Duncan?

A I was born here in Alabama, Fairfield, to be exact.

Q You were born in Fairfield. Okay. A young man that I know that -- Ed May, just won the --

A Oh, yeah.

Q Your friend. Yes, sir. Now, as it relates to being in the military, were you drafted or enlisted in the military?

A No, I enlisted.

Q Okay. Okay. What year did you enlist in the military?

A In 1968.

Q So eighteen, okay.

A Yes, yes.

Q All right. So eighteen. So what -- when you went in, what was your MOS?

A I went in as a 63 bravo which is a wheel vehicle mechanic.
Q Okay.
A But the Army lies, the government lies, I never seen a screwdriver nor a monkey wrench nor nothing else. I went infantry.
Q You went infantry. Okay.
A They gave me a rifle and said go get it.
Q Wow. So where did you do your basic training?
A I did my basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. I did what we call AIT, which was the schooling part of it.
Q Yes, sir.
A At Fort Huachuca, Arizona.
Q Wow. Okay. My dad, he did his basic at Fort Benning as well. So I'm a military, born in Frankfurt, Germany.
A Go head on, man.
Q My dad was infantry as well. And what is it, 101st Airborne?
A 101st Airborne.
Q We were in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for a little while, Fort Hood, Colorado Springs.
A Yeah, military brat.
Q Uh-huh. Yes, sir. Okay. Perfect. Now, Fairfield, did you graduate from Fairfield High School then?
A No, no. When I said I was born in Fairfield, that was

in Lloyd Noland Hospital. I never lived in Fairfield. I was born in Fairfield. I lived in a little suburb out here in the country called Adamsville.

Q I know where that's at.

A I was born and raised out there.

Q Is that where you went to high school and stuff at, too?

A I went to high school, I was bounced around now, I went to high school in Adamsville for elementary part of it, I went to Docena for the junior part, junior high. I went to Westfield for high school, transferred to Alden, which is Graysville, for graduation.

Q So you were on the move a little bit.

A Yeah, yeah. County system, it bounces around like that.

Q Especially during that time.

A During that time.

Q Were schools still -- were they segregated somewhat?

A Oh, God, I didn't have the opportunity to see a --

Q Person of another race?

A I didn't -- a white person. I think I saw one upon the day I was getting ready to graduate and she came in as a teacher. And I didn't have that opportunity to go to school with Caucasians, white people.

Q Oh, really, white people?

A Yeah.
Q Okay. As you made the transition into the military, did you start to see a difference then, were you around more white people then?
A Absolutely, absolutely. I was born, raised, taught, bred in a prejudice environment. See. I mean, my mom and dad, my parents and all the people around me, they weren't, per se, prejudice, but it was a civil rights situation, back in the sixties, you know, and they didn't cross white people and they told you not to. So I didn't have no other choice but to say I don't like white people. I grew up thinking that that was the way to go.
Q Yes, sir.
A And I had to grow out of that on my own.
Q Yes, sir.
A Life had to teach me different.
Q Uh-huh.
A So, you know, I grew up prejudice.
Q Because really, when you think about it, from '60 to '68, so you were ten years old to eighteen years old between '60 to '68, during the heart of it all.
A I was in the midst of it. In the midst of it. But I got some of my worst strappings, whoopings from my parents for trying to be so, you know, mannish, skipping out of school, running downtown because somebody say they were rioting.

Q Part of the movement.
A 1963, I was right there downtown.
Q Thirteen years old.
A Yeah, thirteen years old.
Q Uh-huh.
A Shot hookey from school, ran downtown, I was about this far from getting the water turned on when mama found us.
Q Oh, wow.
A That was one of the worst whoopings I ever got. You know, mama going to find her children, you know, anyway, I went to a lot of that, man.
Q Yes, sir.
A A lot of situations caused me to relate to what mom was saying. White people are mean.
Q Uh-huh.
A You know, and everything. Klu klux klan era, you know, I watched the cross burnings. I went through all of that.
Q Yes, sir. So when -- what made you decide to go into the military?
A Because I was tired of feeding my daddy's hunting dog, I was tired of making gardens every year, you know, country style, you got to, you know.
Q Tiller.
A Plant the seeds and walk behind that stupid mule.
Q The thing that makes the line straight.

A The plow, they plowed the field. And my job as a child growing up, you know, I was still in overalls, man, I was a country boy. So yeah, I had gotten tired of that. I knew there had to be something better. I just didn't know what it was. I wanted to get away. But at seventeen, my parents would not sign for me to go in the military. And they -- my daddy had a thing where you're going to work when you graduate, you're going to work or something got to give. So at seventeen, I didn't want to go in the military, I wanted to get away from the chores.

Q Yes, sir.

A And all that, physical labor and all that good stuff. But they wouldn't allow it. They wouldn't sign the papers for me. Because, see, I was fortunate, I graduated from high school at seventeen.

Q Oh, wow.

A I graduated in May and I wouldn't turn eighteen until September, so that was three months I had to kind of still stay behind the mule and they got me a job in the coal mine.

Q Okay.

A I went in the coal mine and that was one of the most fearful things, I thought Vietnam was scary, but in 1968, the coal mine to me was frightening.

Q Okay.

A I was too young to be under that ground. I never been

that close to the devil.
Q Yes.
A That's the way I felt. And I didn't have the geographical knowledge -- I thought I was smart in school, but nobody ever told me you can go underneath a river.
Q Wow.
A I had no knowledge you can go underneath a river. And when I went in the coal mine, they told me I was drilling coal underneath a river, all I was waiting to see was a drop of water, but I was too fearful to stay up under there. It was too frightening for me, dark and all they had was the little light on your head. They didn't have like the modern technology, what they have today. So I understand now it's like a little city under there. I don't know because I will never go back. I lasted about twenty-five minutes.
Q Got to come out of there.
A Yes.
Q That reminds me of, I read the A. G. Gaston book, he's talking about the coal mines and his time during the coal mines.
A It was hard times.
Q Had to get out of there.
A I didn't get a chance. All my uncles and my daddy and a couple other people around -- elderly people around the neighborhood, they are the ones caught silicosis and black

lung, I saw them coughing and I saw how black they came out of the mine, but I didn't know what it was. But I flat out didn't experience it. I didn't want to breathe that dust, man. I had other things on my mind. I was fashion, I liked girls.

Q Everybody got a vice, I guess.

A I had a plan, man.

Q That's good stuff right there. Okay. So from there, from eighteen, you went into the military, did your basic, then came back. When you came back to Alabama after Vietnam, did you come out of the military then or did you stay in or how did that work?

A No. I went to -- after my basic and all that good stuff, that was what we call the state side, that was my training. That was over. And eight weeks of basic, eight weeks of AIT, and after that, I went straight to Vietnam.

Q Okay.

A And when I went to Vietnam, stayed that first year, my experience on my hatred, my hatred, I develop a nasty attitude. I was like Paul, you understand Paul, I enjoyed killing.

Q Okay.

A Sad to say and thank God for Jesus, I have been delivered from that.

Q Yes, sir.

A I enjoyed what I was doing.
Q Okay.
A And I developed a vindictive spirit. And I thought Vietnam was the farm capital of the world and I did. Move, drop it. I want to go home. That was my thing. I'm going back to Adamsville, I don't know about y'all, if you move, drop it. No questions asked. You know, I didn't settle wood -- the difference in the Vietnam War and what they're going through now, my heart goes out to Afghanistan and Kuwait, Persian Gulf, my heart goes out to all my military brothers, but jungle warfare is entirely different. You can't see your terrain, see, what they going through now, you have a possibility of running over a land mine or stepping on a booby trap. But over there, you had a set of wood that didn't even belong to you, you know. They understood the wood, you didn't. That was their country. So you were really fighting for your life.
Q Day in and day out.
A It was extremely dangerous. I thought it very fearful and I didn't like it, but I had fun with what I was doing because they gave me a gun.
Q And you were going to make it back to Adamsville.
A I had a gun, ammo, I had grenades, I was strapped like Rambo, man. I did some damage and I knew what I was doing, but I had developed that killer instinct.

Q Because you had to. It was me or --
A I felt like it because I didn't ask to go over there, I didn't know why I was there. Nobody to this day ever explained the Vietnam War.
Q That's true.
A All I know we went over there, we came back and we were treated like dirt, you know. And I almost used the word, but my spirit won't let me, and I say, no, nobody ever told me why I was over there. And then it was a very drug-infested country. Very drug infested. And some were getting high to survive. Oh, man, if you want to stay high, you ain't going to make it over here. I was one of those people. I was one of those people. And that was part of my vindictiveness, you know, yeah. Yeah.
Q So, once you returned, did you do more than one tour?
A I returned, they sent me to Germany, I finished my first year of Vietnam, they sent me to Germany. I was in a little place outside of Frankfurt, I was outside of there called Stuttgart.
Q I know exactly where that's at.
A I hated it. I hated it. And then they sent me off to a little place called Nelligan.
Q Wasn't no better?
A Wasn't no prejudice in Germany in 1968 until -- just couldn't get to nowhere because they call us monkey with

(inaudible), you know, and I experienced things where as a black man with a pocket full of money couldn't get laid for (inaudible), I mean, I have to put it real so you can understand.

Q Yes, sir.

A And I didn't feel the freedom that a lot of people felt. Nothing. People loved it there. There's a lot of my brothers that loved it and they -- some retired and stayed over there. But I hated Germany. And it was cold. I very seldom saw sunshine, you know, and I volunteered to go back to Vietnam.

Q Okay.

A And I used my brother for that excuse. My brother had orders to go to Vietnam. He had just married and him and his wife had lost their first child. And I told him, I said, look, you get your commander to flag your orders, to hold your orders, and tell him your brother is on his way to Vietnam and they could not send two brothers at the same time. So I went back to Vietnam a second time on a voluntary basis and kept my brother from there. And I said, well, I got a little experience, so I guess I know what to do.

Q To survive.

A Germany did not have the drugs Vietnam had. There was enough there, I was hooked by then, I was a drug addict by then.

Q When you -- so your first tour was in what year? Was that in '68?
A 1960 -- I went over January of '69.
Q Okay.
A Right behind what was called a tea defensive.
Q Tear defensive.
A It was still going on when I showed up.
Q Okay. And then your second tour was in --
A My second tour, I left Germany and I went back in 1970.
Q Okay. So after you did your tour, again we talked about the sacrifice you made for your bother, and came back, when did you return back to Alabama?
A I came back to Alabama in January -- well, no, I didn't. No, I didn't. I came back in '72 -- no, I came back in 1972, but I had to go by way of rehab.
Q Okay.
A Like I say, I was -- my system was messed up, man, and I needed help.
Q Yes, sir.
A See, my habits were out of control. And when they told me to take a urine test, I think I almost burned the bottle up. It's not a joking matter. And I'm saying it like humerous. But that's what it was. Richard Nixon said, you're needed in this thing and it determines whether or not you go home from Vietnam or whether you get shipped to some rehab

facility, then you discharge from the Army.
Q Okay.
A So I did all that, man, and I had to go to rehabilitation, by way of Japan, and as a matter of fact, back to the United States.
Q Okay.
A And I ETS from Redstone Arsenal down in Huntsville.
Q Okay. Did you? Okay. Was that in '72?
A That was 1972. I was just late -- they gave me an early Christmas drop.
Q Yeah.
A And I still didn't make it home until after New Years, yeah, because I had to spend those thirty days, man, trying to clean me up and that didn't work because after thirty days, they let me go because they were satisfied.
Q Yeah.
A But, I mean, I was still messed up, you understand, it was -- I hadn't kicked the Joneses.
Q Got you.
A I was really scared to go home because -- I can't go to jail for it now. I was loaded down. We had what we call whole baggage, and whole baggage was where you sent all your stereo equipment, sent all of it home and the back of that Panasonic stereo --
Q You had what you needed.

A -- and them speaker, woofer speakers, I was loaded for bear, man. I tried to bring half of Vietnam back. And when I came back to the United States, that was really a recovery period.

Q Okay.

A Really. I mean, if it hadn't been for the intervention of the Lord, I don't know where I would be because I was king pin. I was king pin. I had the prop. I had stuff, man, where guys from treacherous city like Kingstone coming to Adamsville looking for me by name because they wanted that white horse. I mean, I was Mr. Stuff. And I jeopardized my mom and my dad. I put their life in danger. And I knew then that I either had to do something, I had to defecate or get off the pot. So I got in trouble.

Q Okay.

A My first sergeant, my Top, we called him Top, my first sergeant looked at me upon -- my first sergeant looked at me and he told me, he said, Sergeant Duncan, he said, be careful. What are you talking about, Top, you know, I'm high, I'm like yeah, what are you talking about. He said, you got a penitentiary stare, so I want you to be careful, because I had a killer instinct. I didn't care. And he said be careful. You have got a penitentiary stare. And I was home by six months and I was in jail. I ended up in jail.

Q Okay.

A You know, my first felony, you know, because somebody told me what to kiss and I was not deprogrammed yet. I was raw material out of Vietnam. I was having black power meetings in my mamma's back yard and lived from here to that wall down there from the police station.

Q Wow.

A So, you know, I was having run-ins with them, they didn't like me, I didn't like them. They whoof at me, I wouldn't back down. So they had a thing at me, and I got arrested. And I got arrested, they put me on the ten thousand dollar bail, put a ten thousand dollar bail, I had made money. I was in the black market. I made money in Vietnam. And all that money I had sent home. They say, well, they put me in on a Friday, they took me to jail -- what they did, I got mad because it was not true, it was unfounded.

Q Okay.

A They didn't get -- they didn't like the fact because I had my band on, my black power band, had meetings in my mamma's back yard, they could look out the window and see me, the police, they could look out their door and see me, there was about twelve brothers out there, you know, I tell them about the black power and all that, the police just didn't like me and I didn't like them.

Q Yes, sir.

A So, once a young man told me what to kiss, kiss a rock.

Q You know what --
A I say, tell me again. I dared him. I said, tell me that again. And he did. And there was a two-by-four laying on the ground, and it felt so good, you know, just the first contact, so I, you know, and it was because of his parents and my parents, the way that camaraderie between our parents, they would not see me going to jail because me and this young man were friends, we grew up together, we played together, we fought together. But it was a different fight because I had been in Vietnam, he hadn't even left Adamsville, you know. So I got in trouble behind that. But on the strength of his parents and the community wrapping around us and then this guy didn't have sense enough to be mad at me, we fought like that, even though I damaged him, yeah, to this day we're very good friends but he has a plate right there, a metal plate. And I say, Lord, you know, today, thank God for friendship, thank God for --
Q For grace.
A Forgiveness, thank God for grace, you're right. And they put me under -- they arrested me for assault with intent.
Q Okay.
A And they put me under a ten thousand dollar bail. Well, they put me in on a Friday evening. On Monday morning, my feet was on the ground.
Q Walking out.

A See, they told me at least you're going to stay for the weekend, but that cash money got me out of there. And I had a good lawyer, cost me three thousand for the lawyer and ten thousand dollar bail, there went my money, there went my little Vietnam savings. Now I have to fight this trial, you know, and all that stuff. Well, I guess their attitude was, if this dude got this kind of money, we're going to see if he's got ten thousand more. And what they did, they come and knocked on my mom's door, out of the clear blue sky, middle of the daytime, Adamsville police. And say, Sandra Duncan, what y'all want? I'm looking through the screen door now. What y'all want? We got somebody down at city hall want to see you. I said, huh? Somebody want to talk to you. I said, I ain't walking and I ain't talking. Don't nobody want to see me. What they want? Well, I don't know, they just told me to come up here and pick you up. I said somebody told you wrong. Well, they gave me an option. They say, well, let me tell you something, little Sammie, because they knew my daddy, too, my daddy and mamma, they scared of white folks at that time. Okay. Well, little Sammie, let me put it like this, you are either going to go down there the hard way or the easy way. And I said, well, since you sound like a threat to me, I'll take the hard. I take the hard way. And he backed up on me, he backed up on me, I backed up out of sight because he had a gun and I had one, I just had to get around the corner for

mine. I had to go to another room. But he started hollering, you bring him out of there right now. He snatched my mamma's screen door open, my mama got hysterical, she started hollering, screaming, crying and she -- go ahead, baby, it's going to be all right. Me and your daddy coming right on down to get you. Took them six months to get me. But they did. Up in Forestdale, Alabama, somebody had gone by a car wash and pistol whipped this white boy and tried to rob him.

Q Put it on you.

A Yes, they did. And they put me on another ten thousand dollar bail. They put me in that jail cell, a little two by jail cell, it wasn't but three cells in the whole joint, they put me in the joint. They brought this little white boy in there, face all cut up, you know, where they pistol whipped him, and pointed at me, the white boy said, they grabbed him by the collar and took him out of sight and brought him back again and he pointed at me again, he said, and they come through the door on me, you under arrest. Robbery. No bond. I said, what did -- shut up and sit down. Took me six months to tell that story. I didn't even know what had happened. I didn't know this white boy. I didn't know the name of the car wash I told had been robbed. But six months later, mom and daddy and them had to fight for me through my lawyer and my money, I mean, every dime I thought I made in Vietnam, these

white folks took it.
Q Took it from you.
A They took it. And I was mad and vindictive with them after that. And they asked me, said to me, what do you choose to do, we've got you up here on the eighth floor of this county jail. And then you are on your way to Atmore. And we are going to send you on down the road for a while. We're going to teach you a lesson. We are going to break you. But I tell you what, they sound like, you know, sound like Nebuchadnezzar, promised the Hebrew boys a little bit of justice --
Q What are you going to do to me.
A Well, if you just bow down to me, then all will be well. But he offered me a deal, plea bargain and said, look, we got fifteen years for you, say, we'll give you fifteen years and that's putting it lightly because you're on your way to jail for life and we're going to see to that. And they said, now, if you take the deal, then all be well. And I cried, I cried for the first time another man done broke me down and took my money, took my little fry, you know, I'm up here on a county jail locked in a cell, they coming in and out the cell daily to talk to me, they wouldn't let me out to talk to me. They take me in a little private room where they go in there and they beat the head, if you want to, but I guess there was somebody at the grace of God they wouldn't just let

them beat me down. They put fear into me. They called me names unbecoming to a human being and they put a little fear in me, but I stood my ground. And they said, you going to accept the deal, you got three days to think about it. So I knew I was going to be there another three days, I have been there six months, what's the difference. So I got in touch with my daddy. I said, daddy, get my lawyer up here, y'all get here now. My daddy came up there, brought my lawyer, my three thousand dollar lawyer, you know, that just chump fee, that man looked at me, my brother and say, Sam, he said, I'm a lawyer, don't you ever lie to me. I can't help you if you lie to me. Said, did you do it. And I said no, sir, I did with tears in my eyes, I said no, sir, I did not. He said okay. Let's go to trial. Said we're going to take it to trial. He said, if you're telling me the truth, he say, I'm going to get you off. And he wasn't so good as to get me off, he bought me off. That was part of all the money I was paying him. Yeah. Yeah. He go in there and greet the judge, they bought me off, you know, but I would take it any time -- freedom I could get, you know. So, anyway, they came back and they asked me, said, what is your decision. Say, we got the chains, that's the busses, we got the chain running this week, we can get you on the next group going down to the prison. With tears in my eyes and trust in God and my lawyer, I told him, I say, strike twelve, give it to your mama. Boy, the hatred was in the eye,

they hated my guts. I thought they were going to kill me before I left the jail. But, see, upon doing that, I had to go all the way to Louisiana to Supreme Court to get a second bond. They froze the first one, that was ten thousand dollars, they wouldn't give me another bond in the State of Alabama, they wanted me. I had to go out of state to get a twenty thousand dollars now.

Q Wow.

A So, I mean, I was caught up in a whirlwind, I was caught up in the justice system and the justice system, nowhere probably is not fair, but in Alabama, justice system, you got, judicious system. It's a hard thing here. They can make you or break you. And they were breaking me. They were stripping my manhood. They were just --

Q Everything they could.

A But I was determined that if I go to jail, I'm going to jail, but I ain't going to jail for nothing I didn't do. I'll die first, you know, before.

Q Right.

A Then struck twelve on me. And I beat an all white jury in the State of Alabama.

Q Nothing but God.

A All -- nothing but God and then my innocence. I hadn't done a thing. And the truth shall stand. I don't care how vindictive you think I am or how I claim to be or how I would

do this or do that, this time I have done nothing. And I'm not paying a penalty for something I didn't do. So strike twelve. Take it to the jury. Well, the jury was made up of Adamsville white folks, grocery store owner, the one that gave mamma and daddy their little credit, you know, and they paid in coal mine money the first of the month, the circle was made up of (inaudible) that knew everybody, they knew all the black folks, they knew this little Sammie Duncan boy wasn't a threat, and I'm here, but anyway, they struck twelve off and I beat that jury. When they came in and said not guilty, didn't nobody could prove nothing they were saying. They brought the little white boy in there that were going to be their little star witness, he just fell apart. He cracked.

Q Because he knew it wasn't true.

A My lawyer throws down on him so hard he cracked. I had a good lawyer. He was expensive, you know, he was a crook, too.

Q Yeah.

A But he doubled down on him, he cracked. And the police couldn't make no sense and all. It was inevitable that the jury had to come back -- they were prejudiced, too, but they got to be a fool to come back and say guilty and everybody sitting there, my family, spectators.

Q Oh, yeah, everybody.

A They come in there and they said not guilty. I don't

know what feeling I had then because my legs got weak, you know. I was on the table crying like natural causes. But they come to me and my sister, she flew in from New Jersey to support me, and she asked my lawyer, she say, can he leave the state under the conditions, you know, they already found me not guilty, I had been in jail before on an assault charge and all that, so to leave the state was a no-no, according to the law.

Q Oh, wow. Okay.

A You can't leave with a felony and all that, but then they wiped off both charges. And the parents and the mama and daddy, they forgave me on the first one, so they didn't press no charges. On the second one, what the state tried to do, they found not guilty.

Q Right. So it was expunged.

A The lawyer told my sister, he said, I tell you what, you better get his black -- that's white man talking, you better get his black ass out from down here. And I was going to wait -- we -- I was going to stay another week at least, you know, and take my time and walk around the community and so --

Q See everybody.

A And all that, but they had it in for me. My next step was dead. My next step was dead. Adamsville police was mad, furious at me, the county sheriff had got the news, they were

Q That was fun.
A You know, parachuting was one thing, but when you're floating, I mean, that's the -- that's the biggest high. I mean, it's just --
Q So you were a skydiver?
A Yeah.
Q That's all right.
A And we would go -- and when the CO found out, you know, man, they raised the roof and they had to calm me down because, you know, I'm fixing to file charges. I told them, I said, you ain't worried about me dying, you're worried about how much money it's going to cost if I die.
Q Yep, that's it.
A I'm worth this many thousand of dollars. It ain't, Jim, I don't want you to get hurt.
Q It ain't about me.
A It ain't about me. He said that's money. You money.
Q Yeah.
A Just trade up.
Q The information you got --
A Yeah, it's money. So, that's when I said, I said, okay, y'all send me back to states, I'm out. Now go spend your money. So they let me stay a little longer. Play the game.
Q So after you -- so you returned, you came back from

Q So did you go back to New Jersey?
A I went to New Jersey and stayed fourteen years without looking back.
Q Wow.
A And after fourteen years, I decided that, you know, I had got a good job in the steel mill up there, I had came back to Alabama long enough to get my little high school sweetheart, put her in a Volkswagen and took her back to New Jersey.
Q Took her back with you.
A And a son, so I had my family. But after awhile, I had a good job in the steel mill and did like they did there, door start closing, they start shutting it down, you know, and I was going through an ugly divorce.
Q Okay.
A My thing is that I just want to go home.
Q Yeah.
A I need to check my status. I come to find out after fourteen years of thinking I got to be here because the State of Alabama is going to kill me if I go there, I'm on probation, but common sense should have told me that I never even talked to a probation officer, wasn't even assigned one.
Q Not one time.
A No. Out of all them years, and I come back to find out, you ain't got no probation.

Q You didn't have no record.
A Yeah, they done told me that and they done wrote this thing down probation and all this kind of stuff, you ain't even got a probation officer. And see, I didn't know that at the time, I was too young, I was too vindictive, I didn't have time to check into it.
Q It's time to go.
A But when I found out that I could freely leave New Jersey, I was tired of shoveling snow.
Q The cold weather.
A Yeah, cold weather and all that good stuff. And then me and my wife, we were on very bad terms, I was on the point of I'm either going to jail or hell, you know, and I decided, well, I'm walking away from this.
Q Time to go home.
A I walked away.
Q Came back to Alabama?
A I walked away. And when she saw me again -- when she heard from me again, four months later, I was in Alabama. But it was the best move I ever made.
Q Now, during your time in New Jersey and Alabama, did you ever use the GI bill or get any of your benefits from the military?
A Sure, I'm getting them now. I try to tell the story now, because I'm well taken care of. One hundred percent.

I'm one hundred percent disabled. Yeah, mentally, physical.
Q Did you ever go back to school or anything or have your kids go back?
A My son went into the military, my son is forty, he'll be forty-eight on the 15th of this month.
Q Wow. Okay.
A My daughter is thirty-five, she did a little schooling off me, but the children didn't have no interest. Especially my son, he went into the military hisself and cried like a baby. He got an honorable discharge and all but he's doing good. He's in North Carolina.
Q Nice.
A My daughter is still in New Jersey with her mom. So, you know, my children's doing good. And me, myself, all I did was play with the GT bill. I went for that money. I didn't care about going to school at my age. I should have, I should have because I was still young.
Q Yes, sir.
A I was still young. When I got out of the military, I went to a junior college for a year, up in Pennsylvania, I went to junior college for a year and called myself going to take master education and then it put me in a journalism class, and I have no interest, I had no interest in journalism.
Q Yes, sir.

A So I quit. I started missing classes. I worked my way right on out the door.
Q Free school.
A Yeah. Free school. And I was going for the money, which is a bad concept. I got some education but I just messed over it. But it took me about a lot of years to get to the point I'm at now because I didn't know nothing about the money I deserved. I didn't know nothing about what I deserved for being in Vietnam. I had no clue that I was deserved of one hundred percent post traumatic stress disorder and all this stuff that come along with war.
Q Uh-huh.
A Nobody was talking to Veterans. White boys was getting it and they were not talking to us, you know, and a lot of black Veterans was not communicating. When I found out about it, man, I had been out of the military seven or eight years, and then took me another five years --
Q To try to get everything.
A To try to get everything, the wheels in motion, you know. So when I finally got it, thank God for Jesus, they had to go back and pay me up to about three years back pay, suppose to gave me a lot more than that, but they went back three years and twenty-three, twenty-five thousand dollars right there, plus monthly benefits, so I had one hundred percent and every little financial disability, I do good.

Q Yes, sir, that's a blessing.
A I do good. Plus, I developed congestive heart failure breathing aluminum dust and stuff from that steel mill and all, standing over that hot stuff pouring over -- that hot metal and stuff, you know, and I got one hundred percent Social Security behind that. I became disabled Social Security as well. So I'm now one hundred percent Social Security, I'm one hundred percent disabled Veteran. So, I just look at my mail man and smile and be his best friend.
Q Be a blessing to everybody else around.
A Oh, yeah, that's what I do, man. I use my blessing to be a blessing. That's my --
Q Blessed to bless others.
A That's my spirit. And I do it. I love my seniors. And when I came into the ministry, I didn't do it myself, God put me in here. When God called me, it took me, it took me fifteen years to hear that.
Q Uh-huh.
A I kept telling him not me, not me, Lord.
Q Not this Sammy.
A I was like Samuel in the Bible, me Lord, I hear you calling, is it me, but no, no Lord, not me. I fought it. I fought it. I fought it until the congestive heart failure came in. I fought it until God knocked me down. And when God say, look, I been talking to you a long time now, I got a way

of stopping you, I got a way of getting your attention, and he put me flat on my back. I got so sick. I fell out in Fairhope, Alabama, and I had remarried then, and my wife is from down in Baldwin County. And I fell out and I laid flat on my back, my brother, for ten days not knowing I was in this world. And see, when I say flat on my back, man, I'm serious, they couldn't turn me over to reach for the bar to try to help myself, they couldn't roll me over because I was cutting up so bad, they just turned me aloose. I couldn't turn left, I couldn't turn right. And I couldn't turn over. The Lord put me flat on my back. I could look only straight up. And he got my attention. He said now you can only talk to me.

Q Right.

A And when they gave up on me, man, I had a staph -- a bacteria infection so bad that the VA -- and I claim it to this day they'd given me bad blood and got bacteria in my system. I was on my way out of here, man, they shipped my wife to Birmingham to get my funeral arrangements in order. They told me in the hospital, say, we don't know what the problem is, they couldn't even find it. We don't know how to treat it. All we know ain't nothing else we can do. They say, did you ever get any bad blood. See, I couldn't answer them because I was so incoherent. My wife was speaking for me. You know, everything they asked me, they told me I was talking about pigs and stuff, you know, my wife, VA denied it

A -- up, you know, they would let me just stay on the inside of the hospital.
Q Oh, yeah.
A And I got my lesson through the night. And then the next morning, we go back down to the station, I change clothes and go to school.
Q And go back to school. So they were looking out for you and letting you get paid.
A Yeah, yeah.
Q That's good stuff.
A So that worked out good. I met Shirley through that.
Q At the hospital or through the sheriff's office?
A Through the sheriff office. We were -- they had voting booths up at Howell Sanford, up in Pratt, and we had to go pick them up, escort them back, we didn't pick them up, we had to escort them back downtown for -- so people can go vote.
Q So y'all had to protect, especially, African-Americans for their right to vote?
A Yeah. Well, no, we had to guard the machines.
Q Oh, the machines. You're doing the machine, not the people.
A Yeah, they were picking up the machines, we had to make sure that the machines weren't tampered, you know, nobody stole them -- just body guard.
Q Yeah, uh-huh.

sick on my death bed, I said yes, Lord. 3:00 o'clock in the morning, just a private conversation with nobody but me and the Lord. My wife came back, brought my sister with her, and they were prepared to -- she had the arrangements already made to get me transferred. And they say, Mrs. Duncan, we don't know what happened, take your husband and go home. We don't know what happened. She say -- I was on the side of the bed playing with the nurses. I did like flip flop.

Q Just that quick.

A Yeah, flip flop. God worked a miracle. He worked a miracle in this life. And I got so thankful. And in 1995, I've been preaching ever since. I tell everybody, I don't know how to do nothing else.

Q But preach the word.

A That's it. That's it. I don't want to work nowhere. I've been unemployed -- right now they have got me listed as unemployable.

Q Okay.

A You know, that's military terms. I'm unemployable. And I have been this way since 1992. I came out on disability in 1992 and I became unemployable and all that kind of stuff -- my status now, man, they offer me retraining, military asked me, would you care to go back, we encourage you to a program to re-enter to work for us. I have been unemployed since 1992, you know, that too long to even

consider, so, no, please, talk to someone who really care. I'm going to try to help you understand the scenario, if you gave me a job, I wouldn't show up on time. When I get there, I wouldn't do the work. And I'll leave when I get ready. I will quit at will. So I'm untrainable. I won't follow instructions. So, no, you better try to talk to somebody who really care. Right now, I'm at a status where I want to be. Y'all leave me alone.

Q That's a blessing.

A And they backed off. They backed off, my military records say that I was permanently disabled. The word permanent means they can't touch me. They can't evaluate me every five or six years.

Q Because that is permanent.

A I'm locked in. I'll be disabled till the day I die. You know, so I -- I made it out real good. And my life story is, you know, it's frightening to people that don't know the real God, you know, if you know the real God --

Q Anything is possible.

A Yeah, anything is possible.

Q It's all a part of it, like you said.

A Yeah, yeah, you know, they prayed, they prayed in jail. You know, come on, the gate is open. See, that's what happened to me and my life and it's my story, then it's all in my testimony, you know, my wife don't even hear this in the