

**James Bump
Veteran**

James Bump **JB**
Unidentified
Interviewer **IN**

The interview is undated.

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IN: We’re here this morning in Umatilla, Florida. I’m with Jim Bump and we’re going to talk about Jim’s experience in the service. Jim, can you tell me what were the dates of your service, what branch you were in?

JB: I was drafted by the United States Army in 1966 through the early part of 1967. I spent my basic training at Fort Polk in a leadership program; I went to Fort Polk in AIT Training and some other training, in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

IN: And AIT, Jim, is?

JB: Advanced Infantry Training.

IN: So once you got done with training, then where did you go?

JB: After training we were sent home for a while, and then we were assigned to go to Vietnam.

IN: Can you tell me a little bit about waiting to go overseas?

JB: Yeah. It was a different experience. During that time, I think it was 1966—I can't put a date to it—it's been a while back, the planes were on strike, so we had to take trains out to California. I'm from Illinois, originally. There was, probably, 80 percent of the people that were on the trains were GIs, and it was quite an experience going from Illinois to California because we knew where we were going, so it was a party from the moment you stepped on until you got off, ok? Getting there, we went out of Oakland, and it was different. We knew some of the people that we had served with, and we were training with. It was different. A lot of them were a lot more boisterous, a lot of them were more opinionated, a lot of them were a little bit tough on the outside, but when they knew where they were going, a lot of it was retracted back into being quiet and reserved and concerned about their responsibility from that point on.

IN: Once you left Oakland, you went straight to Vietnam? They flew you over?

JB: Well they flew us and they dropped us for a minute in Hawaii, then Guam and Wade, and then we finally ended up coming through Saigon and then they shipped us up to—I was with the First Cavalry up in An Khe, which is in central Vietnam.

IN: What were things like when you first got there, Jim? What was the first day--?

JB: Everything that they told you in trying to prepare you, just kind of washed away. Because when you walked off the plane, you experienced... no way could they teach you. The people looked different, the people acted different, the country was different from what you expected. It was an emotional switch right away, concern right away, you go into this survival mode, and you start looking out for yourself and you wonder what your next step is. And of course, sitting there waiting for orders to be cut, and where you're going, is a little

bit of an experience the way it is. A lot of pressure on young men.

IN: Wherever you got to, Jim, the first place you were stationed in, in country, did that continue to be kind of a base camp that you operated out of?

JB: Well, after I got assigned to the Second and Fifth, then I was sent to the Second and Fifth. In those days, our living facilities were all tents, dirt floors, tents. We worked out of that, and mess halls were attached to your company, and you had your companies lined out. The Cavalry was one of the biggest outfits over there, and we basically fought out of helicopters. We'd make our air assaults out of helicopters. In the beginning, it was taking you out, familiarizing you with the area you're in, giving you just a brief idea of what you were going to be contacting out there, get a feel about what the people were like, stuff like that.

IN: How were you accepted into the group? Were you part of the team?

JB: It's kind of a like a development center, you go in and one person will... automatically you had old-timers, people who had been there before, who had been baptized in a combat situation. Being through what they'd been through, they'd accept you willingly. You'd have to feel your way through. If you asked questions, the old-timers would tell you what to do and where to go and stuff like that because it's going to benefit them, not only yourself but them.

IN: You mentioned Jim living in tents. What about food and drink--?

JB: Food at our base camp—which we'd never see very often—the mess hall put it together. GIs can adapt to anything. The food over there was adequate, it was fine, we never gave it a second thought. We were just more concerned about getting on with what our jobs were going to be. When

we were in the field, I spent probably 10-1/2 months back and forth in the field, and we just ate C rations. Once in a while they'd take us and give us a rest area, maybe on the China Sea or another LZ or something like that, and they would bring in hot rations then.

IN: So pretty much, it was C rations?

JB: Yeah. We spent a majority of our time in the field. A combat soldier will spend... I spent, I would imagine, 90 percent of my time in the field, in the jungle.

IN: So Jim, talk about in the field.

JB: Well... [looks off into space] I'm looking for different experiences without going too far.... Um.... This is a little bit tough, so I'm going to try to hit on it briefly, about the stuff that I can still talk about.

There's some situations that come up that are kind of funny that some GIs when they come back will talk about. With the First Cavalry we had a Green Line that was a security line around the camp. And you would be brought back after combat, to get some rest time. You'd lay back and they'd bring you hot food and other things, cigarettes, you know. There would be occasions where they would bring the new troops over and they would send them out to familiarize them and people would get lost out there. It was kind of a funny situation. You'd hear them talking on the radio, and GIs would come back with half their helmets, some would lose their weapons, being so, trying to get themselves together. Scared, that was the bottom line, they were scared. When you've been out in the jungle, you'd see that as kind of funny. I know what you want, and I'm trying to get there, ok?

A couple situations. I'll give you a little example. We got called back and we were sitting on an LZ, and we'd just got through a couple of days of a firefight with some North Vietnamese. Lost a lot of troops, and came back to give us a

break. We just happened to be watching these helicopters taking off. Over there, everybody is a wild man; everybody does their own thing. These helicopters were kind of racing.... once we seen one crash into a mountain. Being there a while, we all knew what our jobs were. So we got the orders; our orders were to pack up and move out. We were going to go back and see if there were any survivors and see what we could do over there. Within half an hour we had another ten choppers up in the air, and we were going over to check the situation out. We got over there, came down, and we went in there and it developed into a real bad situation. We pulled back and lost a lot of troops. 'Cause we weren't looking for that, there was no information of any enemy in the area. So we lost quite a bit, got pulled back, and they moved us that night into another area. To experience something that you never could imagine... we worked with a fine outfit called "Puff the Magic Dragon." And Puff would lay down a line of bullets, cover a whole football field within seconds, and every other tracer round, you could see it happening at night. And so everybody knew what they were going into. We might have to rappel in there, we might have to go in to bring back survivors if there are any, or bring out the dead.

Another situation we were called in to take care of the 7th. The 7th got beat up pretty bad, and we were asked to go in in support, and catch up to them. They were pinned down in the mountains, so we tried to get to them. It took us, I think, about 12 hours to get up to them. When we got there, they were just all spread out—the ones that were left—and waiting for us. They had probably been in combat, fighting, for probably 6 to 8 hours. When we got there they were emotionally and physically drained. So our job was to let them rest, go to sleep, and feed them, take care of them, and get them back on their feet a little bit. Those are some of the things that you experience over there.

IN: Did you have much contact with the Vietnamese people?

JB: At different times. Of course when you're moving through different areas you have... people are different in different areas. I remember moving through a really thick jungle area you'd run into Montagnard people, who were very friendly. They were very friendly to the Americans. They didn't like the North Vietnamese. And we would have contact with other South Vietnamese and others; they would be selling products to the GIs. We would try to get some information out of them about what was in the area... [they were] not too cooperative because they had to take care of themselves. They were concerned about their own selves with the North.

IN: Were there any points at that time when you were in there that you took any prisoners?

JB: Yes, many times. A lot of times they might send out a recon outfit, and the purpose was to go out.... They might bring you into an area... one of the tactics was to bring you into an area where they were bringing troops out, where they had just had some combat. And when they would bring choppers to pick up the different LRRT outfits, the people that were going to go for prisoners would drift out when the other GIs would come in, and they would go into the jungle and wait. They knew where they were going to set up. After, usually, a battle when the Americans would move out, some of the leftover enemy would come back in to pick up maybe helmets, maybe some weapons that were laying around that the GIs forgot or just got so emotionally tired they just left things behind. Maybe C rations, whatever they could scarf up they would come back to get. And that was a good way to pick up a prisoner or two. If they did, they'd bring them back to camp and there was a set amount of procedures to go through. Now to get the man from point A to point B, it might be very difficult because GIs build up this resentment, this hate for the enemy. Treatment of the prisoners was fine the majority of the time, but there were some times when we would go over the edge with them.

IN: In the time that you were in Vietnam, a couple things. One, did your rank increase at all?

JB: Yeah, it would go up with the time you were over there, the kind of actions you were in, stuff like that. Men that were in combat weren't really concerned about rank. Your main purpose over there was to get the job done and get back home, get back to your families, your jobs or whatever, ok? I wasn't too concerned about rank. If you were a lifer and you were going to spend the rest of your time, then I think you were going to be concerned about that.

IN: What about R&R, Jim, rest breaks—did that happen at all?

JB: Yeah, many times if you're over there. I spent 10-1/2 months in Vietnam, so during that time, after 6 months you usually get a break. Maybe in country, out of country; if you're in the country they'd send you maybe to Thailand or someplace like that. Out of country was the Philippines, Hawaii, Australia and some other places, I don't know. What came up for me, I ended up going to the Philippines. Six days in the Philippines was six days that you don't remember too well because of the alcohol and the ladies involved—some of the things you want to put behind you.

IN: When you were back in country, were you able to stay in touch with your family at all?

JB: It's kind of funny, we were telling this story the other day. I had a younger brother, four years younger than I am. When I went over there, I gave him my car and I told him, "I don't know if I'm coming back, so use my car until I come back. I'd like to have some wheels when I get home. But go out and have fun." So when I was over there we would get letters from home. GIs aren't known for writing too many letters, we wrote a couple, maybe when we needed money or whatever. And I got a letter from my brother, and the first letter was "Sorry about this," and there was a picture of my car being crunched

up on one side. A couple months later I got a picture and the other side was banged up. A month later I got another picture of my car being pulled out of the water in a frozen lake. So those are the little bitty thoughts about your family, how you still make a connection with them.

IN: It sounds like when you were in Vietnam, you really did have a group that you worked closely with as a team.

JB: Yes. Companies broke down into platoons and squads, and you formed a little family. The feelings are you didn't want to get too close, but there's no way you can't not get too close. You had to work with these individuals, you shared their lives, day and night you automatically started talking about your girlfriends, your friends, what you did, sports, what you did at home, what you planned to do at home, what kind of car you want when you get back home, all these kinds of stuff. So it becomes a family, yes. It becomes a brotherhood. I speak to two of the young men that I served with over there, two of them that I went to AIT and Basic and Leadership School. We don't talk much. The one that shared the experience that I did in the field was Johnny Cole up in Vermont, and we spoke one time out of 30-some years, he came down to see me, and we spent one hour talking about what happened after I was hit. What he experienced, what I experienced, and we haven't spoken about the issue after. It's not comfortable... a man that's been in combat won't sit around and tell stories. A man that's been in combat, he wants to put it behind him, he wants to get on with his life. He doesn't want to bring it up again. I spent a good deal of my life trying to rehabilitate myself back into society, it wasn't just a quick turnover. I spent... Until I met my wife—and it sounds really far out, but it's the truth--I built a home, I took care of my family, I would sleep with a light on and a .357 next to the bed, and I didn't care a whole bunch about a lot of things. When my family came along and the responsibility for my child and my wife, things changed. And that was the best therapy for me.

IN: Jim, I want to come back to talking about after the service, but when you were in Vietnam, did you receive any medals or awards or citations?

JB: Too often in Nam when you got back—it usually doesn't happen in a combat situation—not that I experienced, none of the troops that we were..... When we got back I can only talk as one that came back and was injured. I received mine through the VA hospital, I received mine in the naval base hospital; I was in the Army, but I was sent back..... After I was injured... I'll talk a little bit about that.

When I was injured, I was injured in, 10-1/2 months in Vietnam, we came into an area and we were trying to get some troops out of there that were in there for two days, and they were pretty battered up; it got pretty bad. So we went ahead and we got caught, we lost a platoon right away. We lost 30 men within minutes, and so within 6 to 8 hours after I was in there, we were pinned down and we spent I think 3 hours trying to fire ourselves out of a bad situation. We were able to retract back out, to get back into another position which was to advantage to us. We spent maybe another 4 or 5 hours, the rest of the night, trying just to take care of ourselves, there were about 7 of us left. When we went in there we probably had 20. The next morning our job was to police up and to get the wounded out if there was any left and carry the dead out. We had to cut an LZ into the jungle area where we could bring in one chopper at a time. Of course, the survivors, the wounded went out first, and then the dead went out, and then we came out. Would you shut that off for a minute?

[Recording and interview resumes]

IN: Jim, we were talking about just before that situation where you were injured...

JB: You want to run with after I got injured and follow through it?

IN: Sure.

JB: I was injured in an area called Bong Song. We were helicoptered out. Go back a step. When I was injured, we were carrying the dead out. We had just taken a bunch of wounded out, and we had a one-chopper LZ cut in the jungle. So my job with my boys that was left over was just to secure the area. Being there 10, 10-1/2 months you get short, you start to get scared, and you can make mistakes. My mistake was to, after... we were the last chopper out, so my mistake was that I put everybody on... I brought the chopper in so I kind of showed that I was the authority figure. And if there was any snipers left over, which there was, they're going to take that person out. So they took me out. I was the last one that jumped up on the helicopter, got hit, pushed myself off the chopper, hit the ground. The ground went up with all automatic fire, and I caught one in the arm, I caught one in the side, and—at that time I didn't know—but one passed through my ribcage and hit my spine on the way out. That was the beginning of my dealing with a disability.

They sent me to a field hospital, and then sent me to Cam Rahn Bay for recovery. I spent two weeks in a coma, came out of it in a field hospital before I went to Cam Rahn. I think I spent three weeks in Cam Rahn then I was sent to the Philippines where they operated on me again to clear up some situations in the back. They sent me to Japan and I spent three weeks in Japan in a hospital in Japan that was run by nuns. I was treated very well all the way through. All the nurses, doctors, a lot of care shown.

IN: You obviously, Jim, have a good life and a beautiful family after a situation that was tragic. What happened after that?

JB: Why I fitted back into society? Ok. The main reason was I came back and went through—it was a little easier for me than for some people that were, in 24 hours, coming from a combat zone and put back in the States. It was easier because they had to come from a real bad situation and try to

adapt to a civilian situation. The mental switch, you can't do it overnight. A lot of young men couldn't handle it; they went to drugs, alcohol, got themselves in trouble.

I was processed through being in a hospital atmosphere. I had to go through recovery, I had spent two years in a hospital bed trying to recover from my wounds. I had people that [cared] for me. Life came easier for me, I had a lot of wonderful people around me, and I had a wonderful family waiting for me back home. I came from a family that my father was a country boy, my mother was Italian, and they devoted their whole life to their children. When I was brought up we didn't have a whole lot, we came from a small community; they offered us love and a secure home, and we never had to go without. We didn't have a lot of things, but we had enough, and the most important thing was knowing that we could depend on my parents. That was the thing that got me by. When I came back I had that support. I had my brother, I had a sister that supported me, that took me in. They got me out of the hospital atmosphere. The hospital atmosphere... I came back and I was shipped to Great Lakes—wonderful medics, nurses in Great Lakes. Going to a VA, we had wonderful people working at the VA for us. It made my change a lot better, a lot easier.

IN: Once you did get out of the service, what did you do after that?

JB: We had a family business back home, we ran a tavern and restaurant. So what I did, my job was to do the books, do the ordering, take care of the money, the banking, and then on the side I ran a gun business. I sold and bought guns and I was an outdoors person, so I spent a great deal of time trap shooting, shooting, hunting, fishing, stuff like that.

IN: And then you raised a family?

JB: I got married late in life. When I met my wife she worked for the State of Illinois job service. After a couple years of

being married, my son came along, and between the responsibility of her and my son—he's into sports—you don't have much to do other than to follow your son around and help your wife get through her job daily. I'm [unclear], I enjoy every part of it, because I go out the door and I look out and I've got a hundred acre lake, I've got five acres here that I run my Labradors on, and I have my content moments in the morning with my coffee when there's no one around and no responsibility.

IN: Do you maintain some contact with your friends from the service?

JB: I have Greg Carey in New York. Greg looked me up, he found me on the internet after a while. We went through a leadership program and I think we did basic or AIT together, I don't remember for sure. We hit it off when we were in the service, we buddied around a little bit. Some people you never forget, some people make an impression on you. I don't know if it was his personality, I don't know if it was just his makeup or what--he's an impressive man. Johnny Cole, just the complete opposite, I mean in trade and everything else. A wonderful guy. Johnny was in Vietnam, one of the men that pulled me out after I got injured. He was in my squad. He's a fireman up in Vermont, and he's a great family man. He's had his trials. One of his children had a tumor on the brain; and we think maybe it was part of the situation that we dealt with over there, with the Agent Orange. Great family, great wife. He's contributed to... changed his life [unclear]. He could have been one of the GIs that fell aside, he could have went to jail or got into drugs or alcohol.

There's only two. The other fellows, I never got affiliated with.... I was affiliated with different veterans' groups up in Illinois. I worked with a group called AMVETS, and I was associated with, a member of the VFW, the American Legion. A good friend of mine, Marty Roux [?] over there, was in the Cavalry too; we went to school together, played sports, and we brought a \$7.5 million veterans home program to our

community, which benefits the community, not only the veterans. I got out of the veterans' organizations after spending about fifteen years holding different offices and doing different things to benefit the community and the veterans. I got out of it and focused on my family, my sports, my outdoors which I love, and I'm happy now.

IN: Jim, the experience you've had in the service, did it shape your perspective about the future and your life, you know what I mean? Did that experience shape who you are today?

JB: Well, when a young man goes in the service he usually goes in without any responsibility. So automatically you're schooled, the responsibility is put in front of you. If you're going to make anything out of yourself, it's a good stepping stone. The bad thing about the service, is that in case there is war or anything like that and if you have any feelings for your family or country you have to put yourself out there. Service is a great teaching stone for young people; it makes them responsible. I came out of it with responsibility. I think I came out of it with a sense of appreciating what life is really like, what we really have in this country. I've been in some countries, I've seen some really bad situations with how people live in other countries. The old saying, I know young people hear it all the time, that they don't really know what they have, but it's true. There are so many people suffering in other countries, and we do, we have the opportunities given to us. If you're not lazy and you care about others and you care for yourself, you can grow. Most people that I'm affiliated with or I know have taken that step and made something out of themselves. They haven't let their disabilities, they haven't let their service time... many men who had been in a combat situation or in that facilities [?], could have any excuse in the world not to go ahead and do something with themselves, but I see many of them have done it. That part of it I'm very proud of the people that have come back and adapted and done something with themselves. I feel more proud about that than, sometimes, than the part about me serving in Vietnam. Coming from a bad situation that they did and doing

something with their life after it and not using it as an excuse to be a failure.

IN: Jim, you've got a unique perspective about having been in the service, having seen combat, having been wounded in combat. All of that—if we were to share a message to younger people today?

JB: Share a message? There's so many messages... I guess really appreciate your family and people who love you. Take time out to really find out what you want to do with life. If the military is part of what you want to do with life, go into it with your eyes open. There's many gains you can make in the military, many things you can learn in the military. When you come back out, there's so many things that the United States offers young people.

IN: My sense too, Jim, is that given that whole experience you went through, I don't sense bitterness.

JB: I don't think I would have what I have if I had bitterness. I don't think anybody that has... you can't look back. What am I going to do, use the wheelchair as an excuse to be a failure? Life is either make something out of yourself or you don't—it's kind of simple. If you want to live with lies, if you want to look back and live in the past, if you want to sit around and talk war stories—most people that talk war stories never experienced anything. I haven't shared anything with you about the heartaches that I have lost, that I've put behind me, about young men that aren't here. I think there's 65,000 young men that haven't come back from Vietnam—the numbers I don't know anymore, I got out of it. But there's a lot of faces that I've forgotten that I couldn't forget for many years. Thank God for my family, my kids, my love of nature—I've gone by that. The world's simple: you either make something of yourself or you don't.

IN: Jim, I don't have any more questions.

JB: Good! [Laughs]

IN: Is there anything else you want to add?

JB: Yeah, just a little bit. I think the only thing I would like to add is that I think people like yourself, and I don't know completely what you're going to do with this. But if it benefits somebody, if it benefits a young man and opens his eyes, or if it's something that might help somebody down the line, then it was worth talking to you this morning. Because it's all about children. When we had the Gulf situation—you can ask my wife—I spent glued to the TV. I wanted to see things happen that didn't happen in Vietnam. Thank God for the generals and the people who ran it, it happened better. That's it. It's been a pleasure, and I appreciate you doing it.

IN: Jim, It's been a pleasure. Thank you.