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Interviewed 2008

AB: Both my parents served during World War Two. My mother served in Patton's Army as a morning clerk. And she was state side in Iowa. My father also served in Patton's Army. They didn't know each other. He was with Red Ball's Express during World War Two. He served in Europe, during World War Two. He was a truck driver. He sort of stayed with that profession up until the company he worked with closed. His rank was PFC and her rank was Private – both Army.

Q: Did you know much about what your parents' military involvement when you were young?

AB: No, not really. My father was second generation Army but I knew my grandfather served. He was stationed at Camp Gordon, which was right here in Atlanta – where Washington Park is now, in southwest Atlanta. But beyond that I didn't know much. And the same thing about my father and my mother. I really learned most about their military career in their latter years. But when I was growing up, it was just understood – if you get drafted then you do your part. If you join, you do your part and that was it. Neither one...it wasn't about a career it was just about an obligation. It was sort of passed down and that was it. And my mother was sort of adventurous kind of person and so when the war came she felt an obligation to serve. She was raised by a mother who was blind and raised nine children right here in Atlanta. That was just her nature. And I guess I just picked it up.

Q: What type of influence did your parents have on you?

AB: They were very influential in that they sort of raised me if you have an obligation you have a responsibility – not only to yourself but to others and to your country. And that's just what they brought us to believe. Respect authority...those kinds of things. And the male child was sort of obligated to spend some time in the military. It was just understood.

Q: Did either one of your parents have more influence over you than the other?

AB: My father always thought me to understand it was my responsibility to work and take care of the family – those kinds of things. And my mom was more the intellectually. She was the thought provoking person. She would engage my sisters and I in debates to keep us mentally stimulated. I think that the thing that I remember most about that area

happened to me when I was going to jump school. The second day in jump school I wanted to quit. And I called home. I didn't want to talk to my dad about this. Because I know his response, "You don't quite anything. You start it, you finish it!" But my whole life my mom would use little techniques to get the best out of us. So, she told me, "Well, if you want to quit that's fine. But no son of mine has ever quit. None of my sons would quit anything." So I was thinking about that, and after the conversation I was walking back across the field and I thought, well I guess since none of her sons have ever quite anything I shouldn't either. It was a little bit later on that it dawned on me that I her only son. So, I guess she sort of tricked me into never quitting anything. I guess that stuck with me. That's the kind of person she was. She would use passive persuasion to get you to do anything.

Q: What kind of relationship did you have with your dad before you went into the military?

AB: You know, in my generation I think all sons never feel that they do enough to meet their father's expectations. I don't think I was any different. My father was gone most of the time. He worked two jobs. So, there were events we did. We'd go to the air show and we'd go on trips together...things like that. But, as far as really connecting it was after I was in the service – years later before we truly connected and got to fully understand and appreciate each other. And I really, really, really look back upon that and feel very blessed that I had that opportunity to get to know him before he passed. We were busy living and I was busy trying to meet what I thought were his expectations, in the early years, when I was growing up and trying to raise a family and doing those things. We really didn't talk in depth. And it wasn't until he had a stroke and was going to therapy. I was helping him and had a chance to connect, to get to know each other and to know what made each other tick. And I was surprised to know I wasn't very different than him. And his expectations of me were far less than what I had placed on myself – thinking that's what he wanted. But you know, I think that's just the nature of the beast.

Q: Did you dad tell you of his expectations for you?

AB: Well, yeah in a way. In fact, over the course of that period of time he probably became more poignant about it. He knew that's what I was doing. But he didn't know how to tell me when I was experiencing that. And after many years, and I mean by this time I was in my forties. That it came home. He made it very clear to me that all he ever wanted for me was to know I loved him and he wanted me to know he loved me. And that was it. It was no more than that. You know, in my mind, like so many other sons...all he wanted me to do was be happy and content.

Q: How does that shape you as a father?

AB: Well, you know I think in way I wish I had known that earlier. Because there were things I could've said to my sons when they were much younger that maybe they would've given them permission to enjoy growing up more. Rather than thinking all I wanted out of them was to achieve certain goals. That were really...now this is me interpreting their actions, them thinking that they were their goals but they were really my goals. And I probably imposed them on them, being...spending as much time in the military that I did, I just wanted that for them. And I'm not sure if I communicated effectively with them. And I know I didn't listen to them as much as I do now.

After hearing my father, I realized that much of what transpired was I wasn't listening to him when I was growing up and he wasn't listening to me. And that became one of the very clear points that we came to. But we both understood that, and I think that's what made us closer. We were always close. We talked, manly talk – goals, accomplishments, earnings, tasks...you know, those kinds of things. We didn't talk about the [emotional] kinds of things. And I think that's what so many fathers and sons miss out is way beyond changing that pattern. And I've tried to do that with mine, and my grandsons.

And I'm very serious, but we did have a chance to say that and really meant it. It wasn't superficial. It was a really deep felt acknowledgment of each other and expression of love. That we didn't grasp until that time. And then it was, I think had he not had the stroke. Had I not been available to be his chauffeur and everything he need during that time period it may never have ever happened. And that's a sad thing to me. We would've lived this pattern of being...talking, but not really talking. And those kinds of things. But that was the kind of world we lived in. That's the way he was raised by his father and that's the way he raised me and that's the way I started raising my kids.

But by the time I realized there was room for that my kids were nearly grown. It makes a difference at whatever stage you come to that realization. It's like that proverbial light that goes off. You know, hey this works!

Q: Talk about how you got into the military.

AB: Well, when I was in high school I was in the ROTC. I was...the last two years the school was in Atlanta. So I was in one of the first two classes transferring from an all black high school to a predominantly all white high school. And winded up in the ROTC and did pretty well. I was the battalion agonist and did well. But I had no inclination at that point to go into the service. I was planning to go to college. In fact, I was in my freshman year when I went. I had already registered with the draft board, 64, so I was

registered. Did all the things I was supposed to as required by law. So that wasn't an issue.

And the lady that was in charge of my local board said well don't apply for deferment until after you finish your freshman year. And so I said, ok fine. I'm cool with that. And I did. And lo and behold, this lady died. And her replacement came in and I got a letter to report for a physical and I was supposed to report on April 14, 1967, which was almost near the end of my freshman year – just out of high school. So there I was going just for a physical, or so I thought. And I didn't go back home. Actually, we had the physical and I was drafted all in the same day. April 13, 1967. That was it. It was just like that. I called my parents and said, "Mom, dad...they won't let me come home."

And my mom called my dad working and so they went tearing over there trying to find out what happened. By that time, we were on a bus. It was almost 5 o'clock in the evening and we had been sworn in. They didn't care if you raised your right hand or not. You were going. And at that time it was the same whether you were Army, Air force, Marines. And I was an Army guy. So that's how I ended up in the military. And went to Fort Benning and went to the reception over there. And they kept us up the whole day and half the night giving us tests and then trying to convince us to sign for more years and get other MOS's. If not, you'd be in the infantry. So I said, "I guess I'll be in the infantry because I'm going to spend more than two years." Because I wasn't that keen on going to Vietnam, but I figured my shot was that do the shortest amount of time and get it over with and go back home.

I had no inclination that I was going to wind up spending twenty-two years in the military. That wasn't on my agenda at that stage. In fact, after basic and MIT and actually you know, going to first class of non-commissioned officers candidate course and becoming one of the shake and bake NCO's, that's what they call them – shake and bakes – instant NCO's after MIT and jump school. After, ending up in Vietnam, I just knew that was it. I was never...once I got out of the service, if I was fortunate to get out alive I wasn't going to spend anymore time. So, when I got out – I came home, bummed around the country for awhile. I went to Detroit, St. Louis, went to North Carolina – finally finished school in North Carolina.

Came back to Atlanta, and was working in an alternative education facility for kids who had dropped out of high school. And I did that for awhile and got very frustrated because the Atlanta Public School System took over and it became an administrative nightmare. I mean, instead of teaching I was spending more time being an administrator in the classroom instead of a teacher. So I said, I have to find something else. But this was during time when the economy wasn't doing that well. Jobs were down and I ended up

working for the City of Atlanta as a correction's officer. And while doing that, which was actually paying more than what I was making as a teacher...but after doing that I decided if I'm going to be in uniform, I may as well go back and be IN uniform. So I ended up going back into the service.

And I ended up ultimately going to...I was at Fort Huachuca, an Army Intel school. And they really, I mean, the Army Intel school didn't know what a soldier was. They didn't tell people. They didn't wear a uniform. They dressed casual. It was really laid back. It wasn't a place for a soldier like me. So I didn't have to do anything there to really shine there. I was accustomed to polishing my boots and wearing my uniform and being in stride. I was supposed to be a radar operator and ended up teaching map reading. And the school commandant and battalion commander recognized it and recommended me for OCS and I was the first OCS selected out of there for ten years – out of Fort Huachuca.

I ended up going back to Fort Benning and becoming an officer and enjoyed it. And I truly did enjoy the military, truly. And I was at a time that our military was going through a transition. There were two basic schools of thought that were being bantered around. One was the, what we call TQM, which was total quality management system. And then there was the old soldier, the backbone of the Army, which was the leaders are born and managers are made. And that philosophy was prevalent and I guess I was from the old school, if you will. And I just felt like that was a good place for me to be. And my family benefited from that I guess. I think they did.

Q: Could you elaborate on leaders and managers statement?

AB: Well, you know in...I don't know what happened. I think a lot of things occurred at the end of World War Two that sent some things in motion that we have now come to accept as a standard. And one was we elevate people into management positions by virtue of their training, by virtue of their education, by virtue of a multitude of different reasons. But, we have granted them a great deal of authority over our systems and our people and things function. And we relegated leaders almost to a position of being nonexistent.

We don't advocate natural leaders, actually rising to the occasion. In fact, we've established methods of shutting them down before they actually have a chance to bloom. And we've allowed managers to manage us into, I think, into some pretty bad situations. And we're quick to recognize managers as hero. And we're in such desperate need of that, we tell pretty much any one who manages something to what is defined as successful we allow them to be able to be in a position of making the decisions. But managers just maintain. That's all managers do by definition – they maintain.

Leaders on the other hand are those out of circumstance or situation. And they rise and move a nation or move a people or move something to another level. And that's the level that managers come into maintain. But we haven't had that kind of leadership. We have a vacuum of leadership in this country. But it's by design. And I just think the last, well actually maybe even longer than thirty years, maybe fifty years we've been groomed to be the case. And every aspect of our life we allow managers to set the standards. And all they really can do is maintain where they are. So we don't really see that elevation. And America was one of those country's that given to allow leaders to rise to the occasion.

And leaders aren't perfect people. But we seek perfection – public perfection. Therefore if a person has a blemish in their history, if a person is not socially acceptable then meet our litmus test for certain kind of behavior then we push them aside or we shun them or undermine them for the sake of exposure. But, if we look at those people in our history who have actually moved our country forward – seized on situation and rose to the occasion and truly moved our country forward then we would see there is a distinct difference between leaders and managers. And managers should be given the due their due for maintain but leaders should be allowed to do that.

George Washington would've, probably in today's society, probably wouldn't be there. He was a bright guy, but he had a lot of failures. Managers don't have those failures. They avoid them like the plague. Whereas leaders take those risks that cause failure, we shun that. We say it, but we don't really mean it. Failure in character, failure in substance...no, no you have to move to the back of the bus! I think that's the kind of military, if you look back on history and what the United States Army was before World War Two, look at our military in general before World War Two and none of those generals, except for a small few and they were junior officers and they became generals during the war. But the generals at the beginning of World War Two didn't last.

They were managers. They were there to maintain. The real cream of the crop came to live because it was just too much for those managers to handle. And you saw the same thing in Vietnam and you're seeing the same thing in Iraq. But yet, from a societal standpoint we are still hanging on to these managers because they are safe. But America's not about that. If you really look hard at our history – I mean ever aspect of our life. If you look back at even someone like Billy Graham and the influence he had it was because he was a leader. He said things and did things that other organized religious people didn't talk about. And if you look at our president's – those who have really moved our citizens to action...they have their frailties.

Think about John F. Kennedy. He had his frailties. He wasn't, by today's standards, the ideal guy. But look what he did. Look what he did for my generation. He made us look

beyond what we are. I mean, we didn't even think about that. And now, my generation – the baby boomers if you will – are changing the way people are thinking about retirement. We don't think about sitting around, those kinds of things. That was never apart. So it's the same thing. So we are trying to impart that on our children. And we show our children and I tell my son's this all the time, "Don't be afraid to get out of that context of what others define as successful. Find your own level and those natural abilities that you have to garner the support of others. It will manifest itself if it won't. But you can not just accept that as being the benchmark for life."

And I think as an older person, as a person who has sort of lived and seen this stuff. And I don't think I'm smarter than other people. I think everyone sees it, I just don't think we want to recognize it. We want the polished, well preserved, uneventful person leading us and let that person set those unrealistic standards for all of us. And yet we do things that make absolutely no sense.

Q: Talk about getting your orders to Vietnam and you're feelings of the situation you were in.

AB: Well, I guess because I was on this track – I was in infantry so I had no choice. I was definitely going to go to Vietnam. The thing was when was I going? And I thought it would be probably very shortly after I got advanced individual training (AIT) in parachute training school. I thought that's when it would be. But I was fortunate to get picked up in non-commissioner's officer training school so that delayed my departure to Vietnam by about three months. But I knew, I knew even as early as finishing basic training that I would go to Vietnam. But I just thought it'd be in about four months rather than seven months. So my parents and I were a bit prepared for that.

My father did not want me to go. He knew some people he knew Herman Talvich. He tried to work to get me out of Vietnam. I mean, he worked *hard* at it. But time kept ticking and finally the day came when my sisters and my mother and my father took me to the airport so I could fly to Oakland to Travis Air Force Base so I would be departing to Vietnam. And that was in December. It was December 9th, 1967. I remember that day very vividly. It was a Sunday morning – *did not* want to go! But what choice did I have?

And I don't think I really thought about it that much. I didn't want to go but I knew I had to go. I mean, I wasn't going to run away. What was I going to do but get on the plane? My dad said he would park the car and let my sisters and my mother walk me to the gate. And at that time, at the Atlanta airport you'd just walk right up to the gate. And they did. But before the plane departed my dad was there and he got on the plane. He worked for Delta and I was on a Delta flight so he got on the plane. He just told me, "Be careful.

Whatever you do, keep your head down.” And I never will forget that. Whatever you do, keep your head down. And I was like, ok dad. And that was it. And I took off and I had a chance to call them once I got to California. But I didn’t talk to them again for about six months because I was in Taiwan on R&R. But I wrote them and they wrote me.

And my grandmother cooked these fried peach pies. And that was my favorite food, besides fried chicken. And she would wrap each one individually. And my dad had found – at Delta they had Saran wrap and they had a way of sealing it. And he’d take them out there and seal them and wrap them in foil and then put them in a box and ship them over to me. So I got one of these boxes about every three months. And it would be at least two dozen of these fried peach pies. And I would get one, *one* out of this two dozen of them! And they were made with these dried peaches and they had to be prepped and all that. But she would just work so diligently on that. And my mother and grandmother would do that. And that was probably...that was a taste of home.

I got a care package when Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. We didn’t know. I was in the jungle, we didn’t know. I got this box. And when I opened the box, at the top of the box was the Atlanta Journal Constitution newspaper and that was the headlines. And that was a real shock for everyone in my unit. It wasn’t on...it wasn’t being broadcast over the radio – the Armed Forces Radio Network. We used to listen to that every evening on the radio, *every* evening. We had one of those transistor radios. It was a neat little gadget. You’d get some of the best music of the day. But she didn’t even mention it. Months later she did, but at that time there was no mention. But then a lot of the signals were being blocked. So it was a tough time. But that’s how we found out, through those care packages my parents sent.

My dad used to send me magazines. And I would send him back rolls of film that I had a little miniature camera I stuck up in my helmet. And I would send the film back. And some of those they wouldn’t develop. They might’ve developed them, but they wouldn’t have given them to us. They couldn’t give them back. In fact, I think somewhere around here I still have two rolls of the film that had never been developed. It’s probably worthless now, but it’s never been developed. But that’s how we communicated in letters. I don’t remember, the one time I was in advanced individual training I never got a letter from my father.

But when I went to Vietnam I got a letter from my dad. And at least every resupply there was at least one letter from my dad. And that was special. It didn’t say much. Still, he would always end all of his letters with, “keep your head down.” So obviously, that was something he learned well in his training. And he wanted me to learn.

Q: Can you give us a description of what it was like being in the plane and descending into Vietnam?

Oh yeah. We took off...actually we were there in Oakland at the processing center and all of our gear, everything we had with the exception of the uniform we had on was stored there. We had on khakis and TW's. We boarded a jet, like a 727 or DC-7. It wasn't a 747, because we didn't have them back then. We went to Alaska. And we were all wearing khakis and to disembark in Alaska it was cold as all get out. Because we didn't fly straight to Vietnam, we flew up there, re-boarded and then you flew to Vietnam.

We had these stewardesses on the plane – all GIs and it was about business. But it was nice on the plane. They fed us and they had beer. It was decent, it was really decent. It was like the last supper if you will. And we took off and then all the sudden it got hot. The plane got really hot and we did this quick descent and landed in a place called Cam Ranh Bay. And that was where we landed. And I mean, it was just like, “Ok, everyone off this plane!” I mean, we have like ten minutes for everyone to be off this plane. They never turned the engine off. As we were getting off on the front end, there were GIs getting on in jungle fatigues in the back end. We were moving. And the guys getting on were telling us, we were in trouble basically.

But we didn't hear all that. Every thing was just moving so fast and it was just so much excitement. And it was just there – such a quick descent. And fear...I mean, I guess one thing, the fear and the reality of where you really are is when you landed. Because everyone just got off of the plane and expected someone to be shooting at you. But it didn't happen. It was a secure area. But we didn't know that. We really didn't know what to expect. And when we got off the plane we were there. They put us on the back of deuce and a halves and Air Force busses and got us away from the plane to the terminal. And just told us we'd be moved on to Long Ben – which was LBJ, which was the name for the place just outside of Saigon, which was MACV headquarters. That was the headquarters for everybody at LBJ.

They also had an Long Ben Jail, but that was the joint tactical center at Long Ben. We had the short name for what was LBJ – Lyndon Baines Johnson. That was a mess. Needless to say, that's where we were. That's where they took our TWs and gave us jungle fatigues and gave us our weapons and assigned us to our units. And that's where I ended up at the 173rd, which was my unit. I didn't know what unit I was going to. I knew I was going to a paratroop unit, but I thought I would probably be the 82nd or something like that. But it was the 173rd, which was really great. It was a great unit to be with, no nonsense. But one that was, you know, had been decimated from Hill 87, which was one the worst battles of the war.

I got there just in time for all the Tet Offensive at Cemetery Hill, which is in Tuy Hoa. And that's where I was assigned – fort battalion headquarters in Tuy Hoa in Bravo Company. So I was there for that offensive in Cemetery Hill, which was really right on the beach. None of us have ever understood what was the significance, other than it was a beautiful place. Probably one of the most beautiful places you ever want to see. Because being on the beach and you can look inland and see the palm trees and see the palm bushes and far in the distance you can see the mountains. It was just beautiful. And the sand on the beach was just beautiful and the water was so blue. It's odd that I can remember that in the midst of all that chaos. Because it was chaotic, it truly was. But that was my introduction, and it was pretty quick. From start to finish, I don't remember how many days, but it wasn't a week. From the time I landed, from the time I was there.

And then of course, we had all the counter offensives. And we went over to a place called, Buon Me Thuot which is over near the Cambodia-Vietnam border – again, very beautiful place. I am always shocked how I can remember the beauty of the land and I can remember the smells and those things stand out more to me. I remember when I came back home, my parents knew I needed to talk to someone. They made arrangements for me to talk to a psychiatrist, because we didn't have vet counseling centers when I came back. We didn't have the VF Hospital's answer was, "Why don't you take a drink or two every now and then to calm your nerves and then press on." Or, "Here's take these."

I mean, that's what they did. I'm not talking about what someone told me. That's what I went through. I personally went out there for something else, and the guy asked me about how I felt about Vietnam and I said, "Man, it's just there." And he said, "Why don't you just take a drink or two?" So I have two vices in my life that I have the military to thank for. One was smoking. I didn't smoke until I got drafted. And the other was drinking. I didn't drink until I was in the service. But those things stand out. Looking out over some of the valleys – just flocks of parakeets, these beautiful birds flying...like we see pigeons and sparrows here. It was just beautiful. And some of the rubber plantations, and all of the stone work...those kinds of things. It was just beautiful – astonishingly beautiful.

But some of the uglier things...I get flashes of them but I think I've done a pretty good job of suppressing them. I really...I don't think that...The doctor told me that I may be very fortunate in that I may have a way of compartmentalizing and suppressing some things for whatever the reason. But it may be a mechanism that I use to overcome so I don't question it. And I don't try to bring it back, I really don't. But that was in there, getting over there and those things I remember.

But I wasn't alone. Two of my...there were four of us that grew up together – four guys. We grew up together. I mean, if you saw one of us, you saw all of us. From elementary school, from kindergarten really – through elementary school through high school we were always there. And when I got drafted, my buddies decided they would join. Marlon and James joined the Marines and Grady tried to join but for medical reasons he rejected. On August 8th, 1968, Marlon who was in the Marines and my unit, the 173rd, somehow or another for some reason our units crossed.

Our units, we physically crossed paths and we didn't know. I didn't know he was there and he didn't know I was there. And then I found out after I got back home, about a week after that he was killed in a firefight. And on October 10th, 1968 my other buddy James also a Marine, again our units passed. I had a chance to see him, just like Marlon, just for an hour. We were there. And I found out when I got back home, he too had died in a firefight. And my parents wrote me and told me. I didn't know. When I got back home is when I found out. And I think that was, of all the things, the most painful.

I was also very thankful that I had a chance to see them. I mean, we really saw each other. It was like, wow! We were there. And I think the next time was many, many years later. I was in Washington and I was at the, by chance, I didn't intentionally go visit the memorial – the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It wasn't by design. I was trying to get over to the US Department of Labor Office. And there was a demonstration going on and I was running late. And the cab driver said, "If you cut across this grassy hill and just go straight across there you'll see the Department of Labor Office." And I did. And then en route, I saw the memorial. And I never made it to the meeting. I didn't get past the memorial. I remember seeing Marlon's name and James' name.

And I guess a lot of things came rushing back. And I never got to that meeting, never got there. In fact, I don't think...I think later on that night I went back to the hotel and the next thing I know I was back at home. And that was it. That was 1989. So, sixty-eight – eighty-nine...twenty-one years later – a long time.

Q: Tell the story of when you found the letter on a Vietnamese soldier.

AB: We had...we went to secure a site where one of our lurches – a lurch was a spotter helicopter, real small helicopter that was used to be a spotter for the Air Force. An observation platform for armed forces and we called the lurches because they sort of just lurched around. One had been shot down and my unit was the closest one so we hustled over to secure it. And in the course of that, of course a firefight ensued. And this time it wasn't the VC, it was the NVA. The regular North Vietnamese Army that was engaged.

After everything was over we did our body count. This guy, this Vietnamese...he was like a sergeant. He had a little book with him. And in it, was some letters. I couldn't read Vietnamese but we had a Chieu Hoi with us. A Chieu Hoi was VC who changed sides and became like a scout for us. Nguyen, I'll never forget him. He was a funny character. He was actually a part Montagnard, which was a tribe of Indians who lived there. He used to chew the beetle nut and smoke the cigarettes he would roll. IT was like a cigar, but it was a cigarette.

He started interpreting what it said. One was a letter from this guy's wife. And the things that she was saying about missing him and the children and when he comes home and how much she loved him. And he had written a letter that he hadn't posted to her and how much he dreaded how bad the weather was because it was the rainy season. And he hated being wet all the time. He was saying the same things we complained about. Being wet all the time, hungry, moving – which made no sense. The same things, he had the same thing. But unfortunately, he never returned to his family. I think now that I'm older, I look back on that and it's sad. But that was a unique experience. Because you didn't think about it then, I don't know maybe others did. I didn't think about the enemy being anything but a VC (Viet Cong) or an NVA. It was just that was that.

I didn't think about them in any context. I didn't think about them as being like me, having feelings or thoughts. It was just, "Hey this guy is trying to kill me so I'm going to try to kill him." It may be simplistic, but that's the way I thought. There was nothing registering other than that. I'm not saying there wasn't any value. I didn't recognize it as such. Now, I look back on it and think, "Wow, he was just like me – trying to get home. Not thinking about anything else but what was at home." And I think we all too often, we don't think about that. But I can say now that I understand why it's always old men who start wars and young men who has to fight them. And I think it should be the other way around. At least I think the ones who start them should be out there fighting them.

Q: Can you talk about the oppression that you experienced during your time in Vietnam?

AB: Even at the time I was experiencing it, there was definitely a difference. I mean, there was a difference...you know, we want to say that when we are in the green we are all wearing the green. And that's true, when it comes down to it. We all never forget it's us against the enemy. I mean, we never forget that. But like all human factors, we tend to gather with the things we feel most comfortable with. From a political sense, Hanoi Hannah used to play music that appealed to African Americans. She played "The Temptations". She played "Diana Ross and the Supremes". That was the kind of music she played. And it was directed at us. It was some of the best music. I mean, she could really play it.

And there were just groups; it was a clique almost when it was down time. It wasn't that you devalued anybody else but it was there. And I can remember when we found out about Martin Luther King Jr. assassination. And the athletes at the Olympics raising the black glove fist – what that meant to us. We knew, because we came from a struggle back home you know. And there was a big struggle for equality and recognition that we were all the same. And coming out of the south it was really prevalent.

I can tell you of an incident when I came back home after Vietnam that stood out for me and it was very poignant. I had to go and get my driver's license renewed. And being a veteran in the state of Georgia I knew it wasn't supposed to cost me anything. So, I went out, on Confederate Avenue no less, to the Georgia State Patrol Headquarters to get my driver's license renewed. And this state trooper, who was only joking with me, I mean, I see it now as a joke. But at that moment, it wasn't a joke. He said, "You want to renew your license? For you it will be \$10." And I just thought that was out of line and I was going to get out of line. And it just escalated and escalated.

And I guess there was another GI who was on the state patrol who recognized what I was going through. And he interceded. And quailed what would've been a very bad situation. It would've turned ugly fast. Over a guy making a simple phrase, "For you it will be \$10." He meant no harm by it. But I didn't know that. I was angry. You know, I was frustrated. And that was the case. And while in Vietnam, there were a lot of things that it was just that way. There was racism that was pronounced – even in the dining facility. And it wasn't...some of it was very overt.

I had the opportunity to meet Wallace Terry, whose the author of "Bloods", in fact I had an autographed copy. In there, there were several stories very similar to mine. But I had a chance to sit down and talk with him and to get to know him, because he came and did a workshop once here in Atlanta. And he said, "If there was any really good thing for race relations out of Vietnam was that we could clearly make the distinction. And as such, we have a start point to move forward on." And I just thought that was a very profound thing to say because that was very clear to us – those who served over there on the ground. And we knew that while we were there we had to depend on each other. There was no doubt about it. And when we go back home we'd probably go our separate ways. But there were bonds that were created that would last. And that would be the foundation for some real change.

Q: Population wise, was the unit still predominantly white?

AB: In my unit, it was...I guess it was about 50-50. We had a few Hispanics in the unit. But, no actually I think people of color in my unit may have been the predominant. I don't know if that was just during that period I was there. As I look back on it, we were

predominantly a unit of color. But I don't think that was by design. I just that was just at that particular time what happened.

Q: Any stories from Vietnam you'd liked to share?

AB: I remember this one young kid from Philadelphia who was brand new. Bare in mind, after five months in country I was a seasoned veteran. And this kid had just got in the unit and we were trying to build a fire support base. And he didn't think he should have to dig holes. And I remember, you know, he was in my squad and we dealt...justice was swift in that time period. And I remember just smacking him one good one. And he dug and filled sand bags and dug foxholes. Because you weren't going to die on my watch for being stupid. And that was one of the things – swift justice. When you're out like that there's not a lot of people to move things up the chain. You have to handle your business out there.

Q: Anything else you want to talk about?

AB: I'm having a hard time getting past where we are right now as a country. And that's not just all Iraq. I see the excesses and I see the lack of moral character. Nobody accepts responsibility for their actions and everyone is quick to point the finger. I see all of that. And I probably saw all that before but I think I see things in a much clearer way now. And I think that's most annoying to me. I see people gaining much pleasure out of the pain of others. And that is just horrendous to me. You look at the news and all the news is about others gaining pleasure about the pain and anguish of others. I mean, we take...you name a sector of life it's there. It's in every common life – from religion to education to entertainment – everything. And that just says we are just such voyeurs of living. We just don't live. Because you can't live without making mistakes and no one recognizes that.

We are so quick to punish. Justice and punishment are two different things and I think we've lost track of in this country. And that's one of the things, if nothing else; being in a war teaches you is tolerance. And that's the last thing you want to do. But that's our first reaction to everything – is to eliminate and share no responsibility of blame. I think too, one of the reasons I didn't talk about Vietnam was when I came back I wasn't greeted well. There was no favorable acknowledgement. I didn't ask to go. But it was my duty. But that's not greeted us upon our return. And I think, for me, was the turning point. And I said I'll just keep this to myself. It was twenty years later, twenty years, before I...Even when I went back in the service and was stationed at Fort Huachuca I didn't wear my CIV. I didn't wear anything. I hadn't thought about that for years, but I didn't wear it. I was just another soldier.