

Oral History Transcript

Interviewer: Gabrielle Callaway

Interviewee: Tawanna Jones

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**Q:** So we can just go ahead and start, where are you from?

Jones: Im actually from Miami Florida, I was born in Newark New Jersey but I was raised in South Florida, Miami Florida in a little city, at the time it was called Carrow City and it got renamed and now it's called Miami Gardens.

**Q:** Was that a small town? Big town?

Jones: It's a fairly.... Large, town (hesitantly). Actually, it's the largest middle class black neighborhood in South Florida...in Day County, Miami is Day County and Broadway County South Florida and I lived in Day County. And actually, there is actually 62 cities in South Florida. So it is one of the large areas compare to... like I know a lot of the people around here talk about Miami Beach, Miami Beach is only like maybe downtown Tuscaloosa and then you go another street over and its another area, like South Beach or Pal—no Palm Beach is another County, in Broadway County so it's not even in Day County.

**Q:** Oh okay, so it's pretty big, different than Tuscaloosa (laughs)

Jones: Oh yes, a whole lot different!

**Q:** So was your highschool pretty big then too?

Jones: Yes, I was at a fairly large high school um in the part of the city that I lived in, the highschool that I went to was considered, what we called a white school compared to an African American highschool because the major high schools was Miami Northwestern and Miami Jackson and then there was Miami Carrow City, okay. They rivalry schools but in a good way like when it comes to football, I know you know what I mean when I say football. You know high school football is high on the latter you know like it is here, so that's how it was.

**Q:** Yeah, was it, what was the dynamic there with you being in the “white school”, was that something that like, a lot of the kids in your neighborhood were also in the white school or was--?

Jones: Well you gotta remember—well you don't have to remember (laughs) but I put it this way... at the time that my family moved to Carrow City, that was in the early 70s, no the late 60s and at that time on the street that we moved in we was the second black—I don't want to talk too loud—we was the second black family that moved on that street (in a quieter voice)

**Q:** Oh wow

Jones: there was one other black family near, so over there was some other black students that went there but it wasn't many, but it wasn't just black and white we had a lot of Hispanics there at the same time so it was a good combination there at that school but it wasn't like the school I had previous came from which was a all black school

Q: In Newark?

Jones: No, no in Miami in what we call Liberty City area, in that part of Miami, so I still lived in South Florida, we just lived in a different part of South Florida

Q: I gotcha, you had like moved across town

Jones: Yeah, we moved across town yeah

Q: So you deciding to enlist, was that new for your family or do you come from a military family?

Jones: I didn't actually come from a military family per say... um even though before I went in my older brother had done went to the military, I had a uncle that had gone into the military I had an auntie that had went, I had other family that had went and had been in the military but at that time Veterans wasn't talked about a lot, least not around me because I was raised in a family where little kids stayed in little kids place, so if they talked about it I didn't know about it

Q: Right

Jones: More my direction that got me into the military is that I could remember watching the movies about men in uniform and military movies and they used to always catch my attention as far as me watching those movies

Q: Oh how interesting!

Jones: Yeah

Q: What do you think you were drawn to? Like the respect that they had?

Jones: That and the way they wore their uniform and it was just something about the way walked, to me they walked with a certain type of pride almost, you know they always seemed bigger than the average man, not big as in size but something about them just stood out you know when I seen them movies I just remember the... actually you know I went into the army but when I got ready to join I was gonna go into the air force but I changed my mind when I found out they went in for four years and the army just went in for two years. I had told myself that I rather do the two years cause if I didn't like it I could do two years as compared to four so I did it as a stepping stone.

Q: Right, how old were you when you decided to do that?

Jones: I was actually in 12<sup>th</sup> grade so I was still 17 at the time so I was planning on... well my goal really was that I was planning on getting into politics and part of my history was and why I wanted to was most politicians served in the military so I was going into the military to get that military experience cause I was on the debate team in school. So what ended up happening was I did the entry delay program where I signed up before I finished high school to where I was going right after I graduated high school.

Q: Wow that's very impressive that—

Jones: and I was doing on the buddy buddy system cause I got a girlfriend that was going too and both of us was gonna go into the airforce and when we went to the recruiter it was back with those stovefront buildings had all of them you know the army, the marines and that's when we found out about the two years compared to fours years and we said oh no lets go over here to this one! (Laughing) so that's what caused me to go into the army instead of the airforce.

Q: And she did the same thing?

Jones: Yeah she went to the army too

Q: Were you guys able to go through basic training together and stuff?

Jones: That's just it you know what happened was that I was supposed to had went in straight after highschool but I had an aunt that had got sick and I had asked them to delay me for a while cause my aunt had got sick and she had passed and at that time I had just got aware of breast cancer and my aunt had breast cancer so and she end up passing away in that same time frame because the date I was supposed to go in was the same month she had passed away so I had asked if they could delay my date going in and I ended up going in a couple months later, of the same year though

Q: Oh okay

Jones: So I went in the same year, but that caused me not to be in the same class with her and the other part of that is I signed up because I wanted to go to California. I had never been, all I knew was that California at the time, I don't if you could recall but Route 66 and those sunsets, I wanted to go to California because of Route 66 I want you to know that I have not been to California to this day!

Q: Well you gotta get out there!

Jones: Well what had end up happening was I got through basic and it was cold it was out in North Carolina in Fort Jackson it was cold it was snowing and I know you seen in the movies where you finish training and they come in with your orders and you figure out where you're going cause you don't know where youre leaving at til you get ready to graduate and you kinda leaving a couple days after you graduate or even on graduation day so your orders get posted up on a board and they had me going to Germany. I can remember calling my mom crying on the phone saying 'mom, mom they not sending me to California they sending me to Germany!!' and she said 'girl you better go because you never know when you get the chance to again, just go' So I end up going to Germany

Q: wow that is crazy so how long were you in Germany?

Jones: well that first tour, and remember I was only on a two year enlistment so I ended up being there a little over a year that first tour I did in Germany

Q: And that was in 74?

Jones: Well I went into basic in November of 75 and went to Germany in the 75 cause it was around this time of the year, I left on Easter Sunday sun shining everything beautiful and I got to Germany and snow on the ground, cold cold, first time I remember seeing snow or anything and I could remember they ask you at the process center where would you wanna go put three places

down and I thought shoot I wanna go home I don't wanna be here and I cant even remember what I put on there if I put anything on there at all because I went really by myself even if it was a plane full of soldiers none of them was really from my class as far as my AIT class of my basic training, so finally they put me in a jeep and took me to this little place called Gleeson Germany and Ill never forget, at the time WACK cordial, and my class was still when they kept the women separate from the men but my class was one of the last to graduate in the WACK core, they was integrating the women in with the males. So I had to tell you that to tell you that to tell you this, my unit, the first unit they sent me to—that's when they used to say that sergeants looked like bulldogs and I remember I sat outside it was the sergeant major he came outside he looked at me and he said "we don't want her send her back where she came from" and that's when I made my mind up I was gonna stay and I sat outside his door with my duffle bag the whole time until about dark and then finally someone came with a jeep and picked me up and took me to the unit I was going to I guess they had figured out what to do with me cause I just refused to move. Not that I think they was gonna send me back anyways that was just his demeanor but I remember they sent me to the unit... and what it was they had just finished integrating the military the way the battalion itself was integrated black and white but not all the units was so the unit they sent me to was a all black men's unit that they send me to. The officers at the time was white but the rest of the unit was black and I ended up being the first female to go into that maintenance unit... and you talk about someone that had a little bit of fear in her, probably a lot of fear it ws like wow you know but it was one of those experiences that I learned a lot because I picked up 200 brothers and back then the sergents was separated from the enlisted and so on and we stayed in our place. That's where they used to say that your squad leader and your platoon sergeant was your mama and your daddy when they told you what to do when to do it and how to do it and you did what you was supposed to do so it wasa still under the...you still had a guardian over you, you still had to ask permission to do certain things but it still was this unspoken thing that because I was there I always had to push myself to show that I was as good as the males. It never came out of they mouth but it was the attitude of what I couldn't do and what they wouldn't let me do, not so much of the safety part of it just more like as if I was invisible

Q: Yeah I can imagine with you being the only one.

Jones: Yeah and then about two months later we got another female in and her name was Cathy Wilson, Ill never forget her and she was a white female but that didn't bother me at the time because of the way I was raised. And there was still not a whole lot they could do with us because in order for us to go out into the field there had to be three females to go to do field exercise. Now within that community as a whole that I was stationed in, there was six females as a whole military in that area that I was at so what they did was the area we stayed in was the officers quarters building but it wasn't used by the officers because the sick hall was downstairs and they kept us upstairs but all us from that community was there even though we wasn't all in the same unit so in the evening we was all together but during the say some of us were in maintenance one girl was in transportation and one lady was even in the headquarters she was the only one that was in the headquarters but in a was I mean we sort of got away with things as far as how we was dressed because they wasn't really up on it but we were all still invisible we still had to do that extra like when it came to us when we did PE as far as running and exercise we always had to push ourselves. Like when we fell out the run it was always more noticeable that we wasn't making it compared to the males that fell out and didn't make it.

Q: Right, yeah because there is only two of you so...

Jones: Yeah but even throughout my career that always been there because I can remember later on I always had an issue when like we would do 5 mile runs 10 mile runs and then on certain

days you know we would do certain runs and I might fall out the run but then when it came time for the fitness test or whatever I am maxing my run when it came to the PT test but yet when all of us get together there was some distance I wasn't able to keep up with so it always caused us to push ourselves a little harder as far as proving that we could do the job and not complain about it so you know that was always there but its one of those things where my overall experience was a good experience but I overlooked a lot I just know I always had to push and be one step better than the males

Q: Yeah, did you feel like that dynamic of you being a woman was harder than being a black woman? Like was the gender dynamic more challenging than the racial dynamic?

Jones: Well, I put it this way, most of the time I was in a unit that the majority of us was black therefore my color didn't really play a part in it okay it ws just me being a woman. It wasn't until... actually I think maybe when I first got there I might've had a couple of experiences as far as say if I wanted to pull the race card but I didn't have that many of them because the unit I was in was a good unit as far as I had some good leaders as far as prepping us for what we needed to know and what we needed to do but the only thing overall sections I always had to prove I could do the job and I think that had more to do with me being a woman than with my skin color.

Q: Yeah that makes sense

Jones: Yeah and that's what it was even yp to the time when I retired, me working I always had to prove myself. Being a woman in the military even compared to—like my last duty assignment I was a commissary manager in a store. The person that was over me was a male civilian and then the person that was under me was another woman but a civilian woman. She had got more respect for her position than I got for mine.

Q: oh...

Jones: its like, me as the military female I always had to go that extra mile to prove I could do it.

Q: Yeah... wow he might have felt threatened by you, being a civilian man he may have felt threatened by your service or....

Jones: well you know I don't think it is so much of the threat part its just that military women are invisible, even now as a veteran—I wear this button here (motions to red white and blue button that reads "VETERAN") and you wouldn't believe how many people still ask me was I a veteran and then they turn around and ask me "oh was you a nurse?" You know so its still got that that stigma. I had an opportunity—and I don't want to knock it down cause it was an awesome trip—I went on an honor flight with the Vietnam veterans where they fly all the Vietnam veterans to Washington DC and give you that tour and everything. It was an awesome trip. I went on the trip, I thought I was the only female but I found out there was another one on the flight but when I first got to the Tuscaloosa airport down here the line is here and it says 'Veterans Sign In Here' it said if you was a—not a caregiver but like a sponsor, I forgot what they called them but they go with us to help because some of the Veterans need help... but they had on blue and a blue hat. Now before I got the shirt and the hat that they give the veterans, I also went down there with a hat on that says "Veteran" I had my veteran button on that say "I'm a veteran" and I'm in the line with the Veterans and when the men in front of me is walking up and signing their name and getting their hat it is said to them "Thank you for your service, what is your name?" When it got to me I got, "Are you the veteran?"

Q: They thought you—

Jones: You see what I'm saying they thought I was in line for someone else.

Q: Right they thought you were just a placeholder for someone else

Jones: Right and I'm taking it because I was a woman. Once I got on the plane I had the shirt on, all the veterans had on the shirt it said "Vietnam Veteran" and we had on a hat also said "Vietnam Veteran" across the top. Even as we went on the trip and went other places, it was like, even though I was on the plane with all those other veterans it was almost as if I was isolated on the plane... then finally we got to DC and got on the buses, the coach buses, still isolated I am checking it out but I am trying not to get an attitude because I am saying to myself that I am blessed for going on the trip and finally a lady come up to me and she started talking and she says "oh I'm a veteran too" but I could tell she had been downplaying herself as being a woman veteran for so long you wouldn't have known she was a woman veteran. It just happened she was on the trip with her husband. And that happens a lot when women veterans are married to veteran men, they do downplay themselves as not being a veteran. So even while we was on that trip everywhere we went the people that they had there to greet us they kept walking past me and then finally someone says "oh you a veteran too?" and I say "Yes I'm a veteran too!" and they say "oh what was you a nurse?" and I'll give you an example, I caught her off guard and I can't remember what the lady's name was, the politician from Tuscaloosa... (neither of us can think of the woman's name so Ms. Jones continues) and it's not to throw her up under the bus but she was there and she was shaking the veterans hands and what not when she got to me and I was standing there she said "oh, that's your husband?" and I said "No, I'm the veteran." And she said, "Oh that's right girl! Tell everybody you the veteran!" but that just goes to show you how we are invisible to some people.

Q: Even to women.

Jones: To women, we are still played down as if we don't exist and I think that's what bothers me the most you know even though I spent my whole career in the military you know I was raised up in the military as an adult you know I wouldn't change none of it it's just you always had to go that extra mile and it's not just with other veterans it's also with the civilian population too because they still kinda look at you like "okay..." and no matter what they kind of take it like no matter if it was 2 years 4 years or you retired it's as if for your work experience you ain't did nothing at all.

Q: And for you, that was 20 years of your life right?

Jones: Yeah, yeah but it was a great experience though, I wouldn't change none of it

Q: And so, while you were in Germany, what were your day to day tasks like?

Jones: okay when I first went in, I started out as a 71 tango and the MOS ended up faded out and that was the clerk that was assigned to the motor pool that did the record keeping for the vehicles. Okay, I started off doing that kind of work first, working in the motor pool with the guys that did the maintenance and all that kind of stuff then from there the MOS changed and they came out with the computers, the first IBM computers in the military which was data entry. And at that time, I think it was my squad leader we used to call him Sergeant K because he had this long name and he told us "If you gonna stay here in the military, decide which path you gonna go and if you gonna go that path you learn all you can about it that job." And at that time you could be a specialist or you could be a sergeant and the specialists went all the way up to spec 7, or you go

up to sergeant first class and the difference was if you was on the spec side that means you specialize in whatever it was you did and if you were a sergeant you had to take care of your troops too but they did away with that rank and cut it off at spec 4. But anyway when I went into that field I started doing the data processing and learned how to work with the computers and then from the motor pool I went to the warehouses and you know each warehouse they have all the stuff coming in and all the warehouses had a data processing center that was kept in a trailer that was hooked onto them... that was way back when computers was them big clunky things and we didn't even know what was coming and then from there I ended up going into the clothing sales store and did that type of work. I actually was fortunate enough that by the time I got out I worked my whole MOS and what I mean by that is from the supply room to what we call S4 and battalion level supply as far as the report part of it and running all the reports. I was putting all the data together, sending it out to all the units and all that... I worked in computer vans for maybe three years I did computer processing work where we went at night time and we took all the data that came in and we ran that. I worked like 12 hour shifts...

Q: Oh did you work through the night?

Jones: Yeah I worked through the night, that was the shift I was on because all that data had to be put into the computer and then the computer run the job and it was those big real to reel tapes and from there it comes out on paper and we had to separate the paper and we had those reports for all the units that was on base so it was a big processing center. I did that type of work and even when I was in a combat unit working in the field also because the computers came out to the field and ran off generators but we still had our other additional duties like pulling guard duties and had to go and like dig the foxhole you know they had it to where I was blessed enough to where I didn't have to actually see any action because each time I was in I was always on the opposite side of who had to go... like even when the gulf war came out, with me being in the pacific, I didn't have to go but we did a lot of field exercises preparing for it and a lot of those field exercises and at night we would have what they call interactive war games where the infantry from another battalion was gonna come and attack us and we have to take cover and do our thing. A lot of times during that time I worked in strategy and was recording what was coming over the radio plus we worked the guard duty and those was 12 hour shifts but when I wasn't doing that, my regular job was the MOS so as far as me working in the computer vans or working in the computer library and stuff like that an at the different stations I had different positions and different jobs where I got to do a different part of what my MOS covered. I actually got to experience my whole job description instead of just that one little part because every three or four years I was transferring to do something else. Okay so in Germany, I went to Germany and in Geeson and from there I reenlisted and I went to Fort Louis Washington and then I went back to a little town in Germany and then I was back to the US again and I was in Fort Hood Texas and after I left there I went to Hawaii then Japan then back to Germany but in between all those, in my summer sessions I would go back to school in Virginia to logistics school to train for my MOS

Q: So that was your choice after every tour to get retrained?

Jones: Yeah I had to put in for it but you know every time I went I had to fight to get through the school I still had to do more than the male that was in class because it was still that thing of like "why are you here?" "how'd you get to come here?" It wasn't until I got to the rank where I had soldiers up under me that I got the respect, the rest of them aint see nothing that I do. They couldn't believe anything that my squad got accomplished. You see what I'm saying, that was my little squad there...

Q: Yeah and they believed in you but you were still fighting--?

Jones: Yeah that was the only ones that ever believed in me to the point where the others would say “Oh she can’t get that job done” and when I did get it done....

Q: And when you did get it done there was always some excuse—

Jones: As to why I got it done exactly. It was almost like they was waiting for me to be a failure. It was like even with the PE and running they always got on me cause they said sometimes it was like you always falling out the run.. but it was never the 2 mile runs it was always the 5 mile runs and I’m not making excuses but it was one day where the sergeant—and you had to take a fitness test every year to stay in—and I could remember taking my fitness test and I can remember always having to push the hardest because it was like I was always being critiqued so hard while doing like my pushups, did my arms have the right angle and this and that and I used to look and its like they counting that persons push ups but when I get there my angle wasn’t right and this and that to where it never failed that I always had to do my test more than once to get through... sometimes even three times to where I get to the Sergeant Major and he say he’s gonna have to take disciplinary action but he go I don’t understand this, youre maxing your run and youre maxing your sit ups but what is happening with the push ups? And I say I can do them they just ain’t count them and he say let me see them, then I do one or two and he say okay I tell you what I give you another chance and you better pass it this time. Then when I go do it again the person passes me! But its just like I always gotta go to the level of higher stress.

Q: You were just held to a completely different standard?

Jones: Yes it seemed like it was always just that way and I can remember even with the run it one time came a time where my Sergeant even said, he called me out and said in front of the group, “I just want yall to know, Boykin maxes out her run on the PT test every time she take it so yall got to know even when she fall out the run its not cause she not doing her best.” I was embarrassed but I was shocked at the same time that he put me out there like that but turns out it was because my squad leader was saying I wasn’t fit and it turns out they wanted me to be in a remedial program for fitness so.... Yeah. It was always like that.

Q: Where do you think you got that type of resiliency? Where you were able to stay in it and not just say you know this isn’t fair... was that in your childhood and how you were raised or do you think it developed in the army?

Jones: I think some of it developed in the army because I was fortunate to have some teachers coming up that would say hey you can do whatever it is you wanna do if you just push yourself and they showed belief in my. And I would say in my military career, even though that first unit I went to was all male, my platoon sergeant he would give these speeches about having pride in what you was doing and they really showed me how things should be done as far as, making my bed, passing inspection all of that... those guide rules that they gave us was to the point where they would drill us on military history even so I think a lot of it developed there. And it was even to the point that at other times in my career I would run into them on other bases and let them know I was still there and they was telling me they was proud of who I had become... you know it is like I ran back into them at the right times in my career

Q: Right, to keep you going?



Jones: TO keep me going and its those people that I met that pushed me forward. And like I said for what the military stood for, like a lot of the older veterans they have a lot of pride and they see things a whole lot different but they still had that dilemma of how to treat women in the military... and in a way I understand that because they don't see men and women as equal and that has a lot to do with how it is in America, see in America men are brought up to take care of the women and be guardians, now its like we are here on the side of them with our rifles saying I'm gonna fight with you too but mans frame of mind is not that we supposed to be protecting them, even though women always been the backbone of men....

Q: Yeah they just didn't share that perspective?

Jones: No they didn't have that perspective and I can tell you this, one time I had a squad leader and during a field exercise he said you and so and so go on out here—and that spot he put us in, he said yall might as well go here and get killed first so we aint gotta worry about yall.. and that's because he was looking at us as the weak link in the patrol.

Q: Was that you and the other woman?

Jones: No, that was me and another guy, the guy had what we call a profile. So my attitude was, you wanna put me out here to be killed? They finna catch all of us cause ima tell them where we all at. (laughs) Cause I knew it was a game (still laughing) and I probably shouldn't say this but when they came at us, sure enough I took my hand it put it on the trigger let them know where we was and my whole platoon got captured, but that let them know not to put me out front like that...we laughed about it after but he had meant it when he did it you know even though it was a field exercise and those exercises are training we did take the training seriously, so for someone to say that to you... I mean we didn't respond in the responsible way we probably should have but

Q: You were sending a message

Jones: sending a message yeah don't send me out here to be killed and I can remember looking back on it it had to have bothered me because I talked about it for a long time...from one duty station to another you know it bothered me but I didn't know how much it had bothered me that my duty sergeant said that you know "we gonna get rid of you now"

Q: well yeah its very serious given that you know... it was in training but you are still at war

Jones: Yeah and like I say, I reacted to in a way that got all of us caught and that wasn't really what I wanted but I couldn't believe they wasn't looking out for me as my platoon. You know there should be a pride in not letting anybody get caught..

Q: Yeah, yeah definitely. So, and if you don't mind me asking, what role did your faith have when you were in those difficult moments?

Jones: You know what, Im gonna say it was high but it wasn't so much my faith as my mom because my mother was very spiritual and she got me through a lot I can remember back when they had phone booths... we when would be on the run and I would drop out I would call my mom crying that I couldn't do it and she would start praying and she would say now you get back out there and you finish the run. There was days that one of my squad members you know maybe they family had passed away or something and I would call my mom say can you pray for

them and she would start praying and say no go back to work... even when I was overseas I would call

Q: So she was your support system through all of that?

Jones: Yeah she was and at the time my brother was in the services too and I was actually still in the service when my mom passed away and that was the biggest thing—not that she passed away because I knew she was gonna be okay it was just like who is gonna pray for me now and I can remember walking down to the chaplain office and telling him I was so upset and I told him Im not worried about my mama's soul Im just worried about my soul and who gonna pray for me now? And he said you gonna pray for you now. So my faith was there but my foundation was my mama..

Q: Did they have any kind of—cause you know, it's a big deal now to have mental health resources for everyone—did you have anything like that?

Jones: No we had nothing, matter of fact I didn't know there was no such thing as a mental disorder. Actually believe it or not, and I didn't know this about me until later on when I started having people up under me and I was in that leadership roll, I was able to be that for the people up under me. You know I wasn't mental health, I wasn't a social worker but I was able to sort of be a counselor for them. If they had marriage, family, money, work problems they came to me and ima say other soldiers had that opportunity with their sergeants but only if that sergeant had the ability to give them the answers that they need. Otherwise, they send everybody to the chaplain for everything cause I can remember being there in the military and having marriage problems and I went to the chaplain and he was so biased to where everything was my fault, and they never had to worry about going to that chaplain again because it was almost as if the man was always right... but really you have nobody within your platoon unless you can just find somebody that know enough to help you... that's all you have as far as someone to talk to and in my military career you know I did meet people to where I could call them to this day with an issue you know that's the difference between back then and today's military when I came up we had those kinds of leaders... because you know not everybody cut out to be a leader some of us just need to be specialists in our jobs... but no there wasn't really anybody to support us even when somebody have alcohol problems there was no where to really get help because you are more scared of getting kicked out and the repercussions behind it

Q: Right, plus all the stigma that is behind it

Jones: Yes a lot of stigma

Q: So, since you enlisted right out of high school, the whole time you were in highschool, the war was going on. Do you remember what sort of perceptions you had about the war?

Jones: You know actually I didn't have a whole lot, but the family member I had that went in I can remember when they came back the kind of treatment that they got you know... but it was one of those things where I didn't quite understand what was going on with them at the time because us small kids was kept out of the conversation a lot, I just knew things was wrong

Q: Did you experience any of that when you got back?

Jones: I had a hard time adjusting to (long pause) just something as simple as people just saying good morning or people respecting the flag (long pause) I could understand why people felt, you

know for example... well first of all when I tell people I is in the military and where I was they didn't take my experience as seriously

Q: Because you weren't stationed in Vietnam?

Jones: Yes and then it was like I couldn't understand how people disrespected the military, people that was in the military... there was a lot of disrespect out there and I guess I didn't understand why people was angry. To me civilians was just angry for no reasons I just notice that a lot of people live in a box when it comes to what they know, its just the county they live in and that's it... I think some people don't realize what we have compared to other countries, like they take they life and jobs for granted... I volunteer here at the VA hospital and that's my comfort zone because a veteran understand another veteran

Q: What was you decision—was it hard to make the decision to retire from the military?

Jones: Well you know I used to tell myself that I would stay in as long as I enjoyed doing what I was doing... and over the years the military had a lot of changes and you know I always adapted real well to change. But one day I just woke up and said this change here—and I don't even remember what that change was but I said you know I think it is time to get out because anything could ruin your career and cause you to lose it... and some people do make big mistakes but things was happening to where you had to worry about your weight to be in service and for me, I stayed on the chubby girl program because according to the books, for my height and my weight I was overweight and its not that I didn't exercise everyday, to me I just always was who I was you know I still looked presentable in my uniform. But something as simple as disobeying an order could cause you.. a misunderstanding from you and your spouse get in an argument or your kids get in trouble in school could cause them to send you back from overseas. And that's the other thing about domestic violence in the military, a lot of them don't get taken care of even though they supposed to take care of the spouse too because they will just send your family back home instead of sending the family to counseling they will separate the family. So those kind of things were just playing a bigger role and theres just a chance that people who stayed in the military long enough to get what they call retirement retention could lose it and it all has to do with the commander of the base and what I mean by that... whatever that commander believes is gonna trickle down

Q: Right, he creates the entire culture

Jones: uh huh and with the leadership under him if you fall to the left or right you could mess up your whole career. You know people who had served 16,17 years and then get a DWI... well what caused them to drink and drive all of the sudden? That kind of stuff... but back to the question you asked me why did I get out I just woke up one morning and said its time you know I don't want to do this anymore. I wanna do something else because for the first half of my adult life I was raised in this strict, service environment. You know I have two daughters and I even say they was raised in the military because they was in high school by the time I got out and one of them was even in ROTC. Even now when we talk sometimes we can tell the difference in people who been raised around other races and in other cities and stuff like that. One of my daughters has this thing where she wanna go to every state and when she was in South Dakota you know I say well how you like it there and she told me mom you forgot, I was raised in the military I can adapt to anywhere it is easy for me to find something about that place and understand the beauty of it. So the military teach you how to get along with people, how to love one another it teach you how to have family that is not blood family.

Q: It sounds like you still have a sense of community within the military, you said you volunteer at the VA?

Jones: Yeah I do, you know that's my comfort zone and sometimes I find myself counseling them and then sometimes when they coming in my office that encouragement is for me. Its just that comfort zone of understanding...

Q: Right, you have this shared experience that only someone who has done it can understand.

Jones: Right even like I can watch war movie and get a lot out of it even more than the director intends probably... I still get that steady confidence and therapy from the people at the VA

Q: Let me check my notes... yeah I think we have covered everything I wanted to ask you... have you been with the VA since you retired from the military?

Jones: No I went into law enforcement, well first I went back to school but before that I was working in retail you know it was like I hadn't done nothing.

Q: Oh so that's what you mean, there was no respect in the private sector for all the experience you had?

Jones: Yeah I had to work in retail because no one else would hire me and once I was in retail I was making minimum wage. Only 5 dollars and something an hour because it was like I had no experience or something and I can remember throughout my career in retail my supervisors would always tell me "You work good for a part time employee" and it was like this is not the first job I ever had. So I really had to work myself back up and I ended up using the GI Bill to get my degrees I ended up getting four degrees

Q: Wow.

Jones: I was on a work program in college and then I started working in law enforcement and I worked in the academy for police officers when they first enter and we did the testing for entry level correctional officers and we did promotional testing. You know working with them was still like the military because of the structure and when they did have graduation it was also more like a military ceremony. So I did that for a while and then I moved up here after I finished my masters degree in about 2011

Q: What is your masters in?

Jones: Public safety and emergency management cause I was doing disaster planning also because in Florida you know there is a lot of hurricanes and after doing that I moved up here and started volunteering at the VA. So I been working with them and I joined a disabled American veterans association working with them and filing claims for service connected disabilities and I'm also a member of the Vietnam Veterans of America where I'm the treasurer plus I'm the women's veteran coordinator for the state of Alabama so I try to encourage as many women veterans as possible and explain the resources we have so they don't let it go to waste, like school and healthcare. We have the VA center and a lot of women don't know they can use it because you only see the men.

