

Interviewed by Judy Allen July 10, 2023

Vietnam veteran Steven Gail Jones, Sgt. E-5, joined the Army when he was 17 years old. He was a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Signal Corps. When asked why he chose to enlist in the Army, Steven replied, "Probably because I was talked into it by a recruiter! I hadn't even finished High School and didn't know what I was going to do, but realized I needed some skillsets to get a decent job. I graduated High School when I returned home."

Basic training was in Fort Polk; Advanced Individual Training (AIT) was in Georgia; and Combat Infantry Training was in Washington. "The best part of training was learning skills to protect yourself. The worst part was knowing you could possibly have to use them on another human being," said Steven.

His initial employment after AIT was in Germany with the 7<sup>th</sup> Army for a year. After a 30-day visit home, Steven was sent to Vietnam.

"The day we landed at Cameron Bay, it was attacked. We had no weapons. I still remember getting off the plane. We saw Special Forces people running around like crazy. Alarms were going off. The base was getting attacked with mortars. Talk about some scared puppies! We didn't know what to do. They were trying to get us lined up in formation and we wondered why we weren't hiding someplace. They called roll, then moved us to a secure location.

"In Vietnam, we were assigned to the 25<sup>th</sup> Division. We provided forward base ground communications," said Steven. He received training on basic radio, then advanced training on how to put the whole network together. "I learned how there could be different types of phones. The units each had their radio people who would talk to each other and our job was to make sure frequency was working, whether on the base or out in the field. That is part of what we did with radio 'shots' – broadcast over a large area for people to talk to each other. We also maintained satellite communications."

Steven said, "The whole base was like a city. Everybody had phones - and our division was responsible for the phones working. We occasionally went out into the field, and we used microwave shots and/or satellite communications. I was in Vietnam almost a year in the combat zone. My unit assignment (attached to the 25<sup>th</sup>) was referred to as SATCOM Support Attachment. The 1<sup>st</sup> Signal Brigade handled all the communications in Vietnam, and assigned their people to different bases to provide support.

Steven said his commanding officers were good to the soldiers. "Germany was a lot more disciplined dealing with upper ranks and even each other. In Vietnam, it was more relaxed – there could be friction on occasion. For some reason it was handled differently in Vietnam. I don't think I would ever dream about telling an officer how I really felt about something. In Vietnam, people could do that as long as you were not abusive. Everyone really, really needed each other."

While in Vietnam, there was a dog that stayed around Steven's unit as a pet/mascot. "He was solid white and probably the best-fed dog in Vietnam," said Steven. "We would have cookouts and make different things out of C-Rations. We interacted with mess halls all over the base. We might put in an extra phone for somebody and get something in return – like a case of steaks. The dog would eat with us, drink beer with us. I think everybody was attached to her and she was attached to our unit, too!"

Steven met his wife, Gayle, through a Christmas card while he was in Darmstadt, Germany. "She saw my name in the newspaper with a listing of service people overseas."

Gayle added, "In December of 1968, the Daily Oklahoman asked people to send cards to the servicemen overseas. For two weeks, they ran lists of names by cities of where the soldiers were from. I picked names that I liked. I sent Steven a card, pointing out that we had something in common – his middle name was Gail. He wrote back and asked, 'Why am I getting all this mail?' His APO was New York – I didn't know he was in Germany. I sent him a picture and he sent me a picture. When he came home on leave, he was afraid to meet me in person. He knew he was going to Vietnam and so I got a postcard with a helicopter on it asking if I would write him while he was over there. We dated when he got back from Vietnam, and were engaged in February of 1972. Two years later, we had our first son, Stewart."

After three years in the service, Steven said he knew he wanted to return to civilian life. "I needed to get away from there. Combat does strange things to you. I was a young person, still trying to mature. My brain hadn't completely formed yet." Steven said the military teaches structure. "That is why they put importance on making beds and following orders. In civilian life you could blow that off, but not in the military life."

"If I could change anything, it would be to not allow anyone under the age of 21 to go into military service. When I think back and remember when my son was in high school at the age of 17 . . . We were in the kitchen one day and it hit me – I looked at him and thought, 'That was me when I went into the military.' I am convinced that the biggest problem with PTSD, especially younger members, is what they see in combat. There is no way someone that young can be prepared emotionally or mentally. I think it totally conflicts with faith values. They struggle with those issues. Even the veterans I meet with monthly struggle with them, and don't understand why. I was so young and some of the things I saw were in total conflict with my values as far as humanity. It was an absolute difference in religious beliefs. When you are older, I think you can do a better job of balancing, of understanding, that better. For young people, it is a real struggle."

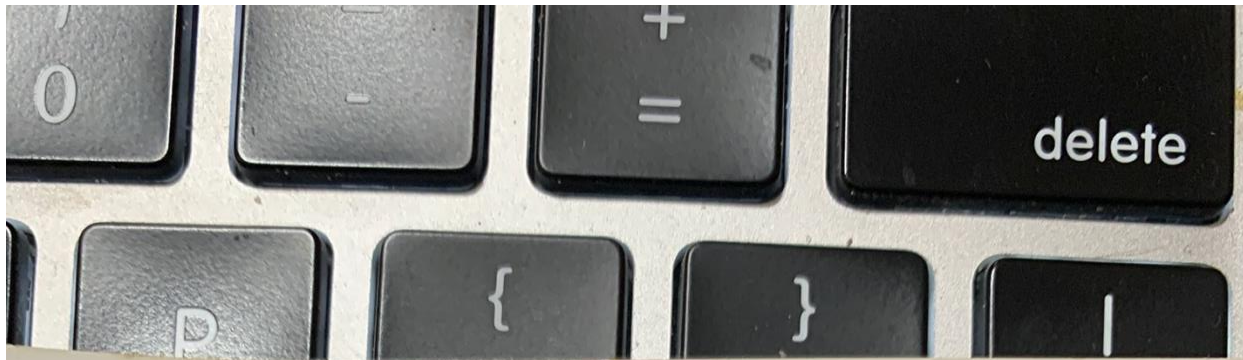
After returning home, Steven graduated high school with a GED, then enrolled in college (UCO) for a year. He began a career with SW Bell. "It was hard to be on call and go to school," said Steven, so he concentrated on his job. He continued to work with SW Bell until his retirement.

Steven's family has always been close. His second to oldest brother passed away, and his youngest brother recently passed. He has one older brother, Gary Gordon, and an older sister, Linda.. Their parents were Gordon Harrison Jones Jr. and Thelma Seboree Jones. "I still have all the letters I sent my mom from Vietnam. She kept all of them."

"The military was probably the best experience of my life. I enjoyed my service in Germany, meeting the people, learning the culture. Germany was beautiful, especially in the wintertime."

Steven said that most war veterans don't talk much about their experiences. He meets monthly with a group of about 15 veterans. It began as an official group with a counselor, but after the counselor moved, the group continued to meet. "We help each other. We check on each other," he said. They email, text and call each other. "It is like having 15 additional brothers."

"I am a patriot to this country. I took an oath that I deeply believe in," said Steven. "Most veterans are good, decent people. They care deeply about this country."



Advice for future generations: "Everyone should learn to get along with one another."