

Stan Jones

Stan joined the Air Force in the fall of 1967. He was first stationed in Korea in 1968, and then volunteered for Vietnam in 1969. He claims to have volunteered for 2 reasons. The first was that he and his best friend figured that because Vietnam and Korea were the only two active war zones in the world at that time, they would get to choose a nice point of duty when they returned and would receive a nice bonus from the hazardous pay. The second reason was that his best friend had heard rumors that Vietnam had great dope. Once in Vietnam, he served as a Security Policeman in the USAF at Pleiku AFB. As a Security Policeman, he was charged with guarding the perimeters of the base. This was not his only duty at Pleiku. He was chosen to be part of the first group of airmen trained to run Mortar Pits, which he perceived as a “choice assignment”. He was also charged with determining the coordinates of where Vietnamese rockets were being launched at the base from.

Stan did not join the Air-Force because he wanted to be in the military or go to Vietnam. He was personally against the war in Vietnam, but did not want to risk being drafted into the army. He had no immediate plans to go to college and knew that would have made him a likely candidate for the selective service. He also knew that his odds of serving the war were much higher in the Air-Force than in the Army.

“As a matter of fact, I joined the Air-Force. It was kind of a calculated move, because I figured I would join the Air-Force and spend four years in the Air-Force, and that was better than getting drafted for a two year stint in the army. I didn’t think my chances of survival were as great being drafted into the army and being a grunt in Vietnam.”

-Stan Jones

Stan was not wrong that he would have likely been drafted to serve in Vietnam. The selective service drafted 296,406 young men in 1968, the same year that Stan was given his first assignment in the Air-Force. This was the highest number of men drafted throughout the entire Vietnam War (Selective Service System). Without any form of exemption, Stan would have likely been one of the young men drafted. Stan’s decision to enlist in the Air-Force rather than be drafted into the army was not baseless. The US Army had the highest number of casualties in Vietnam by far. This was due to the fact that the duties of those in the army were more likely to put them in close contact with the Vietcong than any other military branch. Below you can see the number of casualties in Vietnam separated by branch of service.

*Statistics attained from US National Archives

Casualties by Branch of Service in Vietnam:

- Air Force: 2,586
- Army: 38,224
- Coast Guard: 7
- Marine Corps: 14,844
- Navy: 2,559
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Substance Use in Vietnam:

“Let’s volunteer for Vietnam, they’ve got great dope.”

-Stan’s best friend in Korea

Smoking marijuana was a large part of Stan’s experience in Vietnam. He described smoking what were known as OJs (Opium dipped marijuana joints) frequently. He claims that he viewed it as medicine to handle the stress of the war, similar to the way many view medical marijuana today. Today, Stan receives disability payments for PTSD. He attributes this to the constant stress caused by the rockets launches at Pleiku AFB, where he was stationed. In his interview, Stan described how there were different groups on base who dealt with the stress in different way. He claims that some drank to deal with the stress, others, like him, smoked marijuana and then some did not use any substances to deal with the stress. Stan also recalls being weary of those who did not use any substances because they were constantly on edge.

Stan recalls smoking OJs when rockets were hitting the base saying: “I can remember passing a joint outside the barrack when we were getting hit, the base was getting hit with rockets. And all of our fellow servicemen were running to the bunkers. The instructions were: you put on a helmet and a flak jacket to stop shrapnel and head for the bunker when you’re getting hit. And I can remember clearly standing outside the barracks while we were getting hit, standing there with two other guys... standing there, we were all in our boxer shorts and passing the joint back and forth and basically looking up at some sort of imaginary enemy in the sky an saying “bring it”. So we were young and idiotic.”

The first thing that is important to note in Stan’s story about rockets and OJs is where he was stationed. Stan was stationed at Pleiku AFB in Vietnam. Starting in 1967, a year before Stan arrived, the 9th Air Commando Squadron was stationed at Pleiku. The 9th Air Commando Squadron led bombing raids on both North Vietnamese targets and the Vietcong in Southern Vietnam. This made Pleiku a common target for Vietcong rockets (Hall 31-33). Being stationed at Pleiku, Stan experienced rocket fire from from the

Vietcong on a regular basis. Standing outside, smoking a joint and yelling at the rockets was idiotic, as Stan pointed out, to some degree. But it also shows just how stressful the rocket fire was for those stationed in Vietnam. Today, Stan receives some compensation for PTSD, but he believes that smoking marijuana helped him to ease his nerves and keep his sanity throughout his year in Vietnam. He believes that his PTSD would be much worse today if he had not used marijuana and OJs to cope with the stress of the war.

Drug use in Vietnam was fairly common. Stan and his friends were not the only one smoking OJs to deal with the stress. Stan recounts that he used a combination of Marijuana and Opium to maintain his sanity and eludes to others who drank to deal with the stress. History also tells us that Heroin was commonly used by soldiers in Vietnam. Richard Davenport-Hines writes “Scarcely any military leaders in world history have been so naive as to expect a young conscript army to face battle conditions without the help of some intoxicant” (Davenport-Hines 423). Drug use in Vietnam was driven in large part by the fact that for the first time in US history, many of the men serving in the US military were not legally allowed to drink. Most of the men drafted in the US Army to serve in Vietnam were 19 years old and military regulations maintained that the sale of alcohol to anyone under 21 years of age was strictly prohibited. This led many young soldiers to find other intoxicants in Vietnam (Davenport-Hines 423).

Between 1965-5 arrests among US troops for marijuana offenses increased 2,553 percent. This prompted the US military to take measures to cut down on the marijuana supplied to troops. There was also the problem of marijuana’s smell. It is potent and hard to contain. The crackdown on marijuana offenses in Vietnam prompted many troops to turn to the more discrete substance, heroin instead. During the early 1970s, it is estimated that about 80 percent of troops arriving in Vietnam were offered heroin within the first week of arriving. It is also estimated that in 1971, 10 percent of enlisted men were using heroin to some degree. Many were just occasional users who did not partake frequently enough to become addicted and quit using the substance completely after returning home (Davenport-Hines 423). These statistics show that Stan was not alone in using drugs to deal with the stress of the war.

Agent Orange Effects:

One of the things Stan wanted to talk about was how he believes he has been negatively effected by the chemical known as Agent Orange. He recently suffered some seizures which he believes are an effect of neurological damage caused by Agent Orange. However, the VA does not currently consider seizures to be a health consequence linked to Agent Orange and therefore does not provide any compensation for them. Despite the fact that seizures are not currently on the list of health problems associated with Agent Orange, Stan did complete an examination for the Agent Orange Registry.

The Agent Orange Registry health examination program was created 1978 by the VA for Veterans concerned about the negative health impacts of Agent Orange. Since then more than 315,000 Vietnam veterans have completed examinations for the Agent Orange

Registry. Examinations include medical tests, consultations with specialists if necessary, physical examinations and provision of a detailed medical history. There are tests that can measure the level of dioxins in the body, but the VA does not perform these claiming that there are serious questions about their value to veterans. The VA presumes that all veterans of the Vietnam war were exposed to Agent Orange, however they explicitly state that there is no way to prove that a specific veterans current health problems are directly linked to Agent Orange exposure (VA Environmental Agents Service).

Stan's belief that Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam was the cause of his recent seizures is not far fetched. Agent Orange contains TCDD, a highly toxic dioxin which has been listed as a human carcinogen by the US Environmental Protection Agency. Research into the health effects of Agent Orange and TCDD is still a relatively new field. Until the 1990s, the VA only provided compensation for Agent Orange if the claimant had a skin condition called chloracne (Frank). Since the 1990s the list of health problems associated with Agent Orange has been steadily growing due to the Agent Orange Registry. Stan has been examined for the Agent Orange Registry and it would not be shocking if many other veterans who had also been exposed to Agent Orange were experiencing similar seizures. Despite the fact that at the moment Stan cannot get compensation for his seizures, other cases like his could lead to compensation for Agent Orange related seizures in the future.

[Stan Jones Interview Transcript](#)

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Further Reading:

"Agent Orange: Information for Veterans Who Served in Vietnam." *United States Department of Veterans Affairs* <https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps37040/AOIB10-49JUL03.pdf>

Davenport-Hines, Richard. *Pursuit of Oblivion*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2002.

Frank, David. "Many Vietnam Vets Don't Know They Now Qualify for Agent Orange Benefits: Expanded list of diseases linked to the herbicide means more veterans and their survivors qualify." *AARP* Nov. 2, 2018. <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/voices/veterans/info-2018/vietnam-korea-agent-orange-benefits.html>

Hall, Mitchell K. *The Vietnam War*. New York, Routledge, 2018.

"Induction Statistics." *Selective Service System: Official Site of the United States Government* <https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/Induction-Statistics>