

## **Johnson AMERICA 250 Transcript**

**Biographical Sketch:** Amos Johnson (b. 1944) of Headland, AL, was drafted into the US Army in 1964. After training, he was assigned to 1st Cavalry Division as an infantryman and served in Vietnam from late September 1964 to late July 1965. He received the Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, and Purple Heart and was promoted to Specialist 4th Class. He did not re-enlist. After his service, Johnson worked in the steel industry until retiring in 1990. He moved to Dothan, AL, in 1998.

Original interview conducted by Nuite Sherman, April 15, 2009.

### **00:00:00 Marty Olliff**

Specialist 4 Amos Johnson was born in Headland in 1944 and served in the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division during the Vietnam War. He was a combat infantryman whose mission was search and destroy and who engaged in numerous firefights during his 11-month deployment.

Johnson recounts as being drafted immediately after graduating from Dothan's Carver High School, his training, and his combat experiences that led him to receive the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

He discusses the emotional and mental toll that close, almost constant jungle combat took on himself and his comrades throughout their lives.

This interview was conducted by Nuite Sherman, himself a veteran and then a student at Troy University Dothan Campus, for an oral history class in 2009.

In this first clip, Mr. Johnson confirms that he was drafted immediately after graduating from Carver High School in Dothan, and he speaks about his training.

### **00:01:03 Amos Johnson**

I was drafted straight out of high school. I had headed on to Fort Jackson to Fort Stewart to Vietnam.

Basic training about eight weeks then they give you AIT, maybe another six weeks, eight weeks.

### **00:01:17 Marty Olliff**

As a combat infantryman, Johnson's mission was search and destroy in the jungles of Vietnam.

He describes his work and the particular horror of ground combat augmented with close air support and the dropping of napalm.

### **00:01:33 Amos Johnson**

When I first went over there, we was, like, pioneer. We were one of the first ones to arrive. We had no basecamp set up, we get here and make camp and live in tents and stuff like that.

Our mission was to search-and-destroy. We stayed out in the jungle all the time. Once in a while, we got a chance to go back to the base area for a couple of days and freshen up and get a hot meal, and then we go back out.

I didn't know them, and they didn't know us. We go over there fighting against them, and then when we run into them on the search-and-destroy missions, once you have attacked, you have to kill or either be killed, you had got to fight a war.

We come up on a firefight or something like that. Sometimes we'd have to call after support from the Air Force. That jet dropped napalm down on us, otherwise, all of us got killed. Getting help from the Air Force, they were a lot of men got to die. And then a lot of us got killed because they were dropping it down the line, and they don't see where we were, right on the line. Otherwise, we all would have got wiped out, the whole company.

But anyway, so that's the job we have to do. We didn't like it, but to survive, you have to do what you're told.

We mostly had firefights. Some units got some hand-to-hand, but most of them were just firefights. You know, they attack and they take off, and then we go ahead on to where we're going, then they get attacked again, sniper shoot two or three men and then we pick him off, and have something going, set up another place.

The worst thing that can stay on your mind, and you can see it just like it was yesterday, was Cambodian. I don't know how many regiments the North Vietnamese had, but they were overrunning our company.

We had dug in and they were coming and we were shooting; there were too many of 'em. And so the only way we's going to survive, they called in the airstrike. When they called in, it was so close to us, there were so many of them, they had to call around the line asking where we were. That means they had to drop their napalm on American soldiers. Or otherwise, we all would have got killed. The next morning, I had blood all on my uniform, boots, and everything. All I could see, I see bodies, American soldiers, Viet Cong, their dead. Everywhere you walked, you walking over a dead body. After about a month, they had so many dead bodies on ships coming back home.

That fight would last you for the whole seven months you were there. That one fight. There were so many soldiers who were killed, so much fightin' going on.

**00:04:19 Marty Olliff**

Mr. Johnson was wounded and received the Purple Heart, and later, the Bronze Star.

**00:04:26 Amos Johnson**

I got a punji stick through my left leg. I got the Purple Heart right then and got the Bronze Star later on.

**00:04:33 Marty Olliff**

Much of Mr. Johnson's interview concerns the long-term effects of combat trauma on himself and his fellow soldiers.

**00:04:42 Amos Johnson**

Yeah, it had a lot of effects on your life, on your marriage and everything that you do. Some people it did more than on others.

I had a real hard time adjusting because a lot went on. We lost a lot of people I know where got killed in the war. Then all that activity, fighting.

It took a toll on us, because I was young, like 19 years old, or 20, never been away in my life, sent halfway around the world.