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Oral History Project/ James Taylor

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HIST 155, Fall 2015 / Daniel Masela

Student Interviewer's Name: Daniel Masela
Interviewee name James Taylor

Time and Location of Interview:

This interview was conducted in one session on November 8, 2015 and lasted approximately forty five minutes. It was conducted over the phone. The conversation was between the interviewer and the Interviewee.

About James Taylor:

Mr. James Taylor was born in Lincoln Nebraska in 1950 and has lived most of his life in Nebraska. He served in as a medical technician in a research lab near Washington DC for most of his time in the army during the Vietnam War. Later he was deployed to Vietnam to serve there. He enjoyed his time in that work and serve for two years, until he left and worked in eastern Tennessee. He is married with two boys. This interview was done over the phone and was conducted on November 6, 2015.

Interviewer: Daniel Masela (DM)

Interviewee: James Taylor (JS)

DM: Mr. Taylor, I know you're a busy man working out at the farm and taking care of various needs around the school. Thank you for joining me on this phone interview. Tell me, where were you living at when you receive the call to serve??

JT: Daniel, thank you for inviting me to share my experiences. It was a privilege for me to serve the United States as a medical technician. I was studying to be a doctor at Union College in Lincoln Nebraska when I made the decision to serve. I spent a lot of time praying to God, asking for his will.

DM: How did the call impact your family?

JT: It was tough on my wife. We were just married for two months, but I had the feeling that God was calling me to serve. My mom and dad both objected to me going, because as Adventists, they were afraid that I was going to break Sabbath commandment and the commandment not to kill anyone. Thankfully, my leaders was tolerant of my Christian faith. Every Sabbath morning, we would have Sabbath School and church. Unfortunately, some of my friends were not as lucky as me.

DM: Had you fought in the military before?

JT: No I haven't. As I said, my mom and dad both objected to me going to war, but when I told them that I was going out as a medical technician, they had a change hearts.

DM: The Adventist Church's position is that someone can go to war as long as he is serving as a non-combatant. How do you feel about that?

JT: I agree strongly with this statement. The Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill." Even though I was not inside the battleground, I still had family and friends that served in the Army. Ellen White counsels us to only serve as long as he or she does not carry guns. One of my brothers lost his life in Vietnam (starts to cry). The Adventist Church has a long history of people serving in the military without carrying guns.

DM: Why did you pick the service branch you joined?

JT: I preferred the army. My brother was already serving, so I wanted to be in his footsteps. My brother was one of 116 Adventists that died during the Vietnam War.

DM: Do you recall your first days in service?

JT: Very much so

DM: What did it feel like?

JT: Very stressful. It was a new environment. There were people I have never met before.

DM: Tell me about your boot camp/training experience?

JT: After I arrived there, I received training to be a medic and did well. They had new equipment that I have never used before, so I had to train under my boss to learn how to use the equipment. It was complicated at first, but all went well.

DM: Do you recall the day your service ended?

JT: yes, because I enlisted as I AO. I was persecuted by the Army officers at my boot camp. After one month oi was moved to a better training center, where I was treated kinder and gentler. They were able to respect my Sabbaths off.

DM: Where were you?

JT: I first went to Ft. Leonard wood in MO, but was transferred to Ft. Sam Houston Texas.

DM: What did you do in the days and weeks afterward?

JT: After the army, I volunteered at a school for handicapped children in TN for 23 years. It was a challenge through because by this time, my son was already born, so I had to move my family from Union College to east Tennessee. Two years later, we moved to Harbert Hills Academy. It was a challenging in the life of my family.

DM: Do you have any close friends buried in Ft. Sam?

JT: Several of my friends are buried in the cometary, including some that I treated during my time in Ft. Sam.

DM: Did you make any close friendships while in the service?

JT: I made several close friends during mu time in the service, including Elder Keith Watts, ministerial secretary. Unfortunately he and I have lost track of each other.

DM: Did you continue any of those relationships?

JT: I do. One of those relationships is Joe Simpson, principle at Harbert Hills Academy. Joe served in Vietnam. He was another Adventists that was transferred to Fort Sam. He was the one that extended the invitation for me to become a part of the team here at HHA. He and I have been good friends since that time period.

DM: There are many people who are conscientious observers, or Quakers who chose not to fight in the war. What is your take on this?

JT: Every person should have the right to follow his convictions, not to kill. The Constitution guarantees the freedom for all Americans.

DM: Did you know anyone who did this?

JT: I have several friends who chose not to carry guns. They came from various Christian denominations, who believed that God does not want people to kill anyone, even if that means to protect their country.

DM: What was the opinion on this policy in the eyes of other citizens?

JT: Most people agree with it.

DM: How did faith come to play?

JT: Faith is a most important factor. Without my faith in Christ, I would not have survived. Every time I get a chance to pray with someone, I would do it. Without God's safe protection and his loving kindness, I would not have survived.

DM: What would you say to anyone seriously thinking about joining the military?

JT: Follow your convictions. We all have different convictions. For me personally, I believed that we should not be carrying guns. I realize that others have different viewpoints and I totally respect that. The Adventist Church has its organization that is similar to the NSO (National Service Organization). They will support anyone and give advice. Southern Union Conference has a representative. The Seventh-day Adventist Church supports that members that serve in the military as non-combatants, but accepts those who elect to serve in other capacities or not serve at all-according to the conscious of the individual member. Seriously pray about this. This is not an easy decision.