

Fall 12-8-2015

Oral History - Grant Tuttle

Avery Botticelli

Southern Adventist University, averymckinney@southern.edu

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Recommended Citation

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HIST 155, Fall 2015 / Avery Botticelli

Student Interviewer's Name: Avery Botticelli
Interviewee name Grant Tuttle

Time and Location of Interview:

The interview was conducted in one session on November 3, 2015 and lasted approximately half an hour. It was conducted at McKee Library in Collegedale, TN.

About Grant Tuttle:

Grant Tuttle was born in Melrose, Massachusetts on June 23, 1924. His parents were named Eva and Grant Tuttle, and he had three sisters: Linda, Marjorie, and Marsha. Grant was the second oldest. He moved around the country throughout his childhood, living in a total of six states before beginning high school. He graduated from Georgia Cumberland Academy in 1966, which he only attended senior year, and found himself at Southern Adventist University the following year. After completing one year of generals, he joined the Army in July of 1968 and volunteered for the Whitecoats in Ft. Detrick, Maryland until March of 1970.

Once out of the Army, he went to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville for one year with the intention of becoming a doctor. He met his wife, Pamela, in church on May 15, 1970 and married her four months later on September 6, 1970. In August 1971, they moved to Collegedale, Tennessee, where he was planning on studying nursing at Southern. However, he started at McKee Foods Corporation on August 3, 1971 and rose through the ranks until he was placed in purchasing in August 1987. Despite never finishing a college degree, he has now had a successful career at McKee for the last 45 years.

He and his wife had twin girls, Jennifer and Janeane, on October 23, 1973.

This interview covered topics ranging from his experiences at Ft. Detrick to what it was like as an Adventist in the military, and was conducted on November 3, 2015 at McKee Library in Collegedale, TN.

Interviewer: Avery Botticelli (AB)

Interviewee: Grant Tuttle (GT)

AB: Thank you for meeting with me today. How are you doing?

GT: You's welcome. I'm fine.

AB: Okay, so, this time around it's more detailed. Feel free to tell me stories and memories and all sorts of stuff. Let's start with what inspired you to join the military in the first place.

GT: Well, I don't know if you'd call it inspiration, but back in 1968 they were drafting just about everybody. I mean, Vietnam was hot, and I mean, they were drafting just left and right. And, so, I...I didn't want to just get drafted and go to Vietnam, even as a medic. I knew I was going to be a medic when I went in because I was a 1AO—a non-combatant. I

was gonna...you know....

So, I knew there was a unit called the Whitecoats made up of Adventist guys *only*, and it was up around D.C. And you were human guinea pigs, but uh, you never left the States. I had worked in a hospital as an orderly, or actually, I was at the time, so I wasn't...I wasn't afraid of needles nearly as much I was of bullets. So I can say I volunteered for that 'cause I had known a couple of guys that had gone here to Southern that had been in the Whitecoats, so I found out how you got into the Whitecoats. And what happened was the commander of the Whitecoats along with Colonel Clark Smith, who was the Adventist liaison to the military, would go to Ft. Sam Houston twice a year, and they would interview, uh, Adventist guys, who would volunteer for that and pick who they wanted according to what they needed or whatever.

So, and it just so happened that my dad had been a college buddy of Colonel Clark Smith, so I had already met him. I didn't really know him, but he knew the name, and I knew him a little bit. So, I found out *when* they would be there, and then I went to my draft board, and I said, 'Okay, I'm gonna get drafted before too long anyhow. Draft me between here and here.' And so they did. They drafted me right in the middle, which was March of '68.

So, I went in and went to basic training at Ft. Sam. And, uh, sure enough, Colonel Clark Smith and Colonel Crozier, the commander of the Whitecoats, came out there and interviewed. And I volunteered, and I got picked! Which was good. So, after my advanced medical training there at Ft. Sam, I went to Frederick, Maryland—to Ft. Detrick. And my job there...I was assigned to work in the hospital lab 'cause there at Ft. Detrick, they had a small ward. I guess they could probably have maybe like 10 patients...for dependents and people who worked on the base.

So, of course, we were there in the barracks, and the barracks there...some of the rooms had as many as six or eight guys in...I'm not sure exactly how I lucked out, but I got in a room with just me and another guy. So, it was kind of like living in the dorm here at Southern. I mean, it was no big deal. At any rate, so I worked there in the lab, and I—I trained on all different parts of the, of the...like, if you're a regular lab tech in a hospital, that's the kind of stuff we did. We drew blood, we worked on—did urinalysis, did blood work—did all that kind of stuff. So, they trained us to draw blood and to do all the tests.

So, I did that for the whole time I was in the Army, but after I had been there for a few months...maybe five or six months—and there was another guy, Robert Lawhorn, who had been here at Southern with me, um, that was working there. And there was also another guy named Willis Robertson, who had been at Southern. And he actually lives around here now. At any rate, we were all working there at the same lab. And after a while, a few months, they needed someone to cover the lab at night in case some dependents came in or somebody got sick and had to have bloodwork done. So, I'm not sure how I got assigned that job. I probably asked for it. So, we would come in at four o'clock in the afternoon, or 4:30, and we would stay until eight o'clock the next morning. But that was every other night. And the rest of the time, they didn't care where we were. They really didn't care. Um, so, every other night and every other weekend.

Well, Bob Lawhorn and I did that for a few months, and then somehow we talked the...the Colonel, Colonel Crozier, into...or letting us um, have a third guy. So, we got, I think it was Willis Robertson; I think he was the third one. So, we did every third night and every third weekend. And (chuckles) I remember one...Bob Lawhorn got married that summer, so he would come in at four o'clock on his night, stay until about eight o'clock or nine. I would come in; he would go home. And so, he was only there like every third night for like three or four hours. 'Cause he was...he was a newly married guy, and I mean...

AB: Mhm.

GT: If you came down there and stayed on the, on the ward (because they had a place down there where you slept), you got to eat there on the ward. And the hospital food there was good! The cook there was the cook who had been on the battleship that MacArthur did the surrender in the Philippines on.

AB: Wow.

GT: An old Filipino guy, and he was a good cook. He'd make you basically whatever you wanted. So, I wanted to eat down there, so I didn't mind. So anyhow, then, and during the day—during the day, uh, Bob and I both had a job in town at a little warehouse right by the airport. And what we did, we cleaned airplane parts and crated them up and sent them to third world countries. That was our day job, and then at night, we would be there at the lab. So, we had a great time. Great. Did that the whole time I was there. Uh, and I remember being at the, at my civilian job during the—I think it was a Sunday, I don't remember...maybe it wasn't a Sunday, but anyhow, I remember they had a TV on there, and we would watch Neil Armstrong when he landed on the moon.

AB: Oh, wow.

GT: Yeah, so that was one thing I remember. But, uh, anyhow, that was kind of what we did. And I didn't even eat in the mess hall on base the last year I was there. Never went in the place.

AB: Because you ate—

GT: Because I ate down there on the ward or went out and got something. And it was, uh, yeah, the food on the ward was much better than the food in the mess hall.

AB: Wow. Everything that I read about it, any interviews, all the men that had been interviewed seemed to have a positive experience while there.

GT: You know, I've heard a few negative things over the years where people have said that somebody died because of it, etc. etc. But I've never talked to anybody personally who ever said anything like that, and I've never known of any official documentation or anybody who really knew of that happening to anybody. So, I'm always thinking that may have just been a kind of sour grapes thing.

AB: Hah, yeah, 'cause I read—I read that there had been other instances where the military had, you know, not necessarily informed their participants of different things, but, you know, that it wasn't like that at Ft. Detrick. Everybody felt like they understood what was happening and nobody died because of the testing.

GT: As far as we know, that's—that's true. Now, it is also true, as far as I understand, that now, uh, in this modern era, they wouldn't even do some of the testing that they did back then because they figure the protocols they did were too dangerous. They weren't safe enough. Back then, I guess they didn't know. Uh, yeah, it was interesting. Now, some of the guys got really, really sick for a week or two with a high fever or something. As far as I know, that's the worst that ever happened to anybody—that I know about. Um, but I mean, I had a good experience. I had a good time. I enjoyed myself. I enjoyed the people I worked with. You know, I made a lot of good friends. Learned a lot.

AB: You went through one test, right?

GT: Yes. I was in one walk-in project. It was Western Equine Encephalitis. I tell people that's why I am the way I am today, but I far as I know it didn't affect—I was crazy already, so it didn't matter.

AB & GT: (Both laugh).

AB: Can you tell me about that process? Like, what happened?

GT: Okay. What that was—basically, they were testing that vaccine. And that's a lot of what we did up there was test vaccines. They would develop and test vaccines. So, on this Western Equine Encephalitis, they would give us the vaccine and see if it made us sick. Now, I think they had already tested this one through a few times, and this was one of the later end-tests because we didn't have to stay in the hospital or anything. They just gave us that thing, that shot, and then they drew our blood once or twice a day and just monitored our blood.

Now, I—I remember having a—I don't remember having any kind of a fever, but I remember having some headaches from it. Not bad, but over a few days. And that lasted for two weeks. I think they drew our blood for two weeks. But it was the only one I was on, and it didn't cause me any grief at all. I still worked every day, did everything that I normally did. Um, I remember there was one done while I was there that I would go in and draw blood off the guys. I think it was the Sandfly fever project. They were actually in the hospital for two weeks, on the ward. And they got—some of them got fairly sick, but you know I mean fevers, chills, stuff like that. But I don't think anything more than that.

AB: I read a lot of things, well, a couple of things about how you would get into this machine and then you would—

GT: Breathe in the mist?

AB: Yeah.

GT: Yeah, that's what they called the 'Q ball.' And I never—I never even saw that thing. There was, there was two areas up there. There was 'behind the fence,' they called it, and I believe it was back there. And then there was the 'general area.' Well, I worked in the general area, so I never even got clearance to go back to the secretive area. And only the people that they needed to have work back there did. But I believe that was where the Q ball was. And what they would do, that—that thing was a big, stainless steel sphere, and they would make a mist in it, and then they would have guys on ports breathing that stuff, and then they would vaccinate them, or they would vaccinate them first. I don't remember, but maybe they vaccinated them later and see if it kept them from getting whatever. And I know they, they, they did some Q Fever and stuff like that. But I *think* that was before I got there. I think that was earlier, 'cause you know, I was there July of '68 through March '70. Back when you were a youngster.

AB: Oh yeah! Okay, so, now, it was mostly Adventists who were in the program, so—

GT: It was *only* Adventists actually.

AB: Only? Really?

GT: They only accepted Adventists. And the reason for that was they had—the Department of Defense, they didn't want to get a bunch of grief from people about doing this, and they had talked to some of the Adventist leaders. And they knew that the Adventist church sanctioned it because the Adventist church sanctioned medical work but not fighting. So, it was only Adventists.¹ And another reason was that, in general, the Adventist lifestyle is a little healthier. In general, less of them smoked and drank and did—now, some of them up there drank like a fish and smoked like a chimney, but in general, the majority of them was a healthier lifestyle base for them to start from. And that was another reason for it. (Clears throat). And uh, (clears throat), of course, there were some Adventists who didn't agree with it, but hey, I mean, there's a matter of opinion in everything you do, so who cares?

AB: Sure. Well, I was wondering, you know, if you guys were able to get together and worship on Sabbath.

¹ Mr. Tuttle is mostly correct in this claim. In fact, while most participants were Seventh-day Adventist, being a member of that organization was not a requirement. Phillip R. Pittman, et al, in 2005, state that, "From its inception in 1954 to its termination in 1973, approximately 2,300 individuals participated in this program, more than 90% of whom were Seventh Day Adventists." Phillip R. Pittman, Sarah L. Norris, Kevin M. Coonan, and Kelly T. McKee, Jr, "An assessment of health status among medical research volunteers who served in the Project Whitecoat program at Fort Detrick, Maryland," *Military Medicine* 170, no. 3 (2005): 183-187.

GT: Beings that we were in Frederick, Maryland, there was an Adventist church there. And uh, most—a lot of us went there. But a lot of us also went down to Washington D.C., which was only forty miles away. Uh, and they had built—the church had built a—or the Adventist church—had built a big serviceman center there. This huge room...you could probably sleep at least 100 guys there in bunks. And there was kitchen upstairs, and a big open area with a big double-sided fireplace. It was like a—it was like a lodge, where the servicemen...‘cause there were so many Adventist servicemen in the military, they built this big place, and that’s where we would go on the weekends. They would feed you, and uh, you could sleep there. And it didn’t cost you anything!

AB: Wow, that’s nice.

GT: That was—that was very close to CUC, and I don’t know what it’s called now, but it was Columbia Union College, and uh, a lot of us would go to church there at Sligo or some, some would stay up at Frederick. And up at Frederick, I—well, down in D.C. I had a good friend of mine that I had roomed with in high school, who lived there and worked at the Washington hospital, the Adventist hospital. And he had an apartment not too far away, and I would go down there and stay with him on the weekends a lot of times. Well, first I would stay at the servicemen center, but after I found out that he was there, I would stay at his place.

But then, um, when I would stay in Frederick, I would go to the Frederick church. And there was a guy in Frederick, a Dr. Demazo, a medical doctor, and I think he’s still alive...he and his family would take care of the Adventist service people. And he, to this..., not so much now—I am not positive if he is still living or not—but for many years up until not many years ago, he would send out letters, and they would have reunions. I mean, you know, there are several people in this area that were in the Whitecoats. I don’t know if you know...do you know Katie Lamb? She was a nursing professor. Her husband, Ed Lamb, was up there not at the same time I was.

AB: Oh, yeah.

GT: Bud Platt, Willis Robertson, and myself. And there’s a bunch more—I can’t even think of who all they are. But uh, and yeah, so we had a couple of different places to go easily. And one thing that happened on our ward where we worked, uh, whoever was there on the weekend was expected to buff the hall, okay? Well, Colonel Crozier retired and Major Massey took over, and he was brand new to this, and he didn’t know anything about Adventists or anything like that. And he came in there one Friday night, and it was my—my weekend, and he said, ‘All right now, I want you to have this all buffed’ and all this kind of stuff Friday night. I said, ‘Sorry, I can’t do that.’ He said, ‘What?!’ I said...I explained it to him, and (chuckles) he learned quickly. And we would do it after sundown on Saturday night and on Sunday, and we didn’t have any problem with that. But uh, um, he was kind of taken aback that I said, ‘Sorry, I can’t do that.’

AB & GT: (Both laugh).

GT: But he learned, and he was fine. But anyhow, we, you know, the—the nurses, uh, were great to work with. I don't even remember the doctors. I—I remember the head nurse up on the ward, Captain Ackerson, and that's a fairly tall lady, but that's...I don't remember much. And I remember the cook, of course. I don't remember his name, but I remember that he cooked very well.

AB: What is one of the most interesting things that happened to you while you were there?

GT: Hmm. You know, I don't know. One of the most interesting? You know, I don't know. I had so many different things—I can't pull one out. I know we had a lot of good times down in D.C. on the weekends. I can't really remember what—I would go down, I would go down and spend a lot of time just driving around D.C. looking at the sites. And then another thing, another thing I would do, 'cause I'm kind of...I'm kind of a little bit of a history buff, a war history buff. I would go up to Gettysburg, which wasn't, isn't that far away. I would spend a lot of weekends up there, um, driving through there, walking through there, looking around. Taking pictures with an old camera.

AB: So, if you're a war history buff, what were you thinking during that time? What with the Vietnam War, and even the Korean War that had happened recently?

GT: You know, I wasn't really thinking about that at that time. I really wasn't. Um, I've always enjoyed war stuff, and reading about it and seeing it and stuff. But um...not the blood and guts part. I don't particularly care for that part. (Chuckles). But I really wasn't thinking about that at that time, you know, I was what? Twenty, twenty-one years old? I had my twenty-first birthday while I was in the advanced medical training at Ft. Sam. And, um, at that age, you look at things differently than when you're getting close to seventy, you know? Of course, you wouldn't know yet.

AB: I can imagine. But, did you guys...were you aware of what was going on in Vietnam?

GT: Yes, we were. But, you know, I'm not so sure we paid *that* much attention to it, really. Because we weren't gonna go over there. Now, some of the guys in the Whitecoats were stationed at Forest Glen, which was down in Washington D.C., which was part of Walter Reed Army Hospital. And they worked in the hospital, and they saw a lot of this...this stuff because of the people coming back. And on the occasions I had to go down there, you know, you would see a lot of these wounded guys. But where we were? We were pretty much insulated from it believe it or not. And I don't remember thinking that much about it, really. Um, I guess that's kind of strange, but I really don't. I don't remember that. 'Cause, you know, we, we—it was almost like, for us, it was almost like there was nothing going on except for what we did there on base, which was probably a good thing.

AB: Yeah.

GT: No—no traumatic stress disorder after the war or things like that.

AB: What was the appeal of joining the Whitecoats?

GT: For me, it was not going to Vietnam. And I had—I had already worked in the hospital as an orderly, so I didn't mind that kind of work. And I had kind of planned on being a doctor anyhow, so it all just fit for me.

AB: Okay. It wasn't intimidating to you at all?

GT: No, it wasn't! Not a bit!

AB: Wow.

GT: You know, some people tell me, 'Oh, I could never do that.' But to me, it was so much more desirable than going to Vietnam and getting shot. I mean, but now I will have to say that a lot of people considered what we did extremely dangerous. I didn't at the time. Because several years ago, ten, twelve years ago, public TV came out with a show called "Suicide Missions." And it was about very dangerous things—suicide missions—that the military did. You know, where there was a good chance you wouldn't make it back or whatever. They did four segments, and I don't remember what the other three segments were about, but *one* of the segments was about the Whitecoats. They considered it that dangerous, and I never did...until later. I said, 'Well, maybe it was,' but we didn't know it. So, maybe, I don't know, maybe we were just too young and invincible, you know?

AB: Yeah, maybe.

GT: When you're 21, you're bulletproof.

AB: Yeah, that's interesting.

GT: But that, but as I think back on it, it is kind of, maybe, maybe kind of strange. But still, I still think, from my perspective, I would have picked the Whitecoats over Vietnam any day because I had talked to people who had been over there. I knew people who had been over there. And it wasn't pretty. It was hot; it was...it was hell. I mean, it was horrible. Of course, that's what war is. I mean, people.... I mean, when you're in war, political correctness is not...not the right thing to do in war because you'll never win.

AB: How did you first hear about it? I want to go back to that.

GT: You know...(sighs). I...I'm not positive how I first heard about the Whitecoats, but I believe...I believe I probably heard about it from somebody here at Southern, who had been in the Whitecoats, and then come back here to Southern. I'm pretty sure that's where I heard about it, but I'm not positive. Because I'm not sure where else I would have heard about it to start with. But since I graduated from GCA in '66, and I was up here in '66-'67, and the Whitecoats had been in place since the mid-50s, um, and ended, I think, in the mid-70s, I'm pretty sure I heard about it from somebody up here. In fact, it might have been Lee Holland. Maybe he had been in the Whitecoats and had just gotten out. 'Cause when

I came up for Academy days, that may have been when I heard about it, I don't know. That's been a long time.

AB: Yeah, well. So, have you attended any of the reunions?

GT: I have. Not all of them, but I have been to three or four. Uh, and, one of the last ones I went to, and I couldn't tell what year it was without checking back in my picture records, they gave us each...I think they gave us each a letter from the department of the Army and a letter from the Adventist church. And two medals. One I think was from the Department of Defense and then one was from the church, which I have hanging in my closet, uh, on ribbons for our participation and for our...whatever in the Whitecoats. And I don't really remember what they say, but I mean, my total experience in the military was good. I had a good time at basic. I had a good time in AIT. I had a good time in Ft. Detrick. I just didn't know any better.

And there was a guy in our church that had just gotten out of the Navy...just before I went in the Army. And I talked to him a lot, and he said, 'Okay, I'll tell ya. If you do this and this and this, you won't have any problem in the military.' And so, I listened to him. And basically, it was 'yes, sir,' 'no, sir,' and be respectful and don't talk back. Which worked great because I had no problems ever with anybody. I never did. And I remember in basic training, there was this one guy named...his last name was Switech. I don't remember his first name. He...he was one of these kind of guys that knew everything and was always right and always kind of a mess. When I left, when I finished basic training in eight or twelve weeks or whatever it was, he was still being recycled back through basic training because he would talk back or whatever. And I don't know if he did it because he didn't want to go anywhere and they would hopefully knock him out or whatever, but he caused himself all kinds of grief.

AB & GT: (Both laugh).

GT: It was hilarious. But uh, and uh, we had a...in basic training, our captain, Captain Nicholson, big 6-foot-four, 6-foot-six Airborne Ranger guy. Very gung-ho military. I heard later that he got sent to Vietnam, and he was a commander over a unit or platoon or company or whatever. And he was so gung-ho that, uh, in Vietnam, one thing that did happen was if...if your men didn't believe you had...in other words, if your men didn't think you tried to protect them, if they thought you put them unnecessarily in harm's way, they had a thing they called 'fragging.' And what that was...a grenade would roll into the officer's tent some night and kill him or whatever. Or he would get shot in the back and nobody would know who did it.

AB: Oh, my.

GT: It happened a lot in Vietnam, and it happened to him. Because if your men didn't think you were...if your men thought you weren't being careful with their lives, they would do that. I can't really say that I really blame them a whole lot. I mean, I couldn't do that, but I mean, I can understand where they come from.

AB: Do you think if there hadn't been a draft situation going in the country, would you have joined the military?

GT: No. No, not at all. Because when you join the military, basically...drafting and joining were two different things. If you joined the military, you basically had no rights. If you were drafted, there were things you could...you could do or not do that you couldn't if you joined.

AB: Interesting.

GT: Like if you joined as an Adventist, you could expect to throw Adventism out the window and do whatever they said whenever they said it. If you were drafted, you were not coming in on your own terms—I mean, you were coming in because they said you have to, and I mean, they had to cut you more slack. So, I mean, yeah. Some Adventists joined. I would not have for that reason, if no other.

AB: Hmm, yeah. I understand.

GT: Anymore hard questions?

AB: I don't know. Is there anything left that you'd like to tell me?

GT: I don't know. Let's see. Well, you know, there's a lot of good people in the Army, in the military. There's a lot of bad people in there, too. Um, one thing I—I did notice in basic and AIT, and all that kind of stuff, and in the training, if you've ever seen a war movie, you've probably heard some language. You know, some bad language. They use that, at least that much and maybe more, on a regular basis.

AB & GT: (Both laugh).

GT: Yeah, it's true. But, then again, when you're in combat or when you're in a stressful situation, it's life-or-death, and they have to do something to get your attention. They don't have to do that in training, but they are used to talking that way, and that's just how they talk. So, when I see a movie, and it has no bad language in it, and it's a war movie, I think to myself, 'Well, this is great, but this isn't how they really talk.' Although I don't like the language, so anyhow.

AB: Well, all right then!

GT: I don't know what else to tell ya! Other than good luck.

AB: Thanks!