

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Curtis Jeppesen – Life During Vietnam

By Curtis Jeppesen

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Oral Interview conducted by Cami Jeppesen

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

Cami: Today is February 28, 2004, my name is Cami Jeppesen and I am interviewing my father, Curtis Jeppesen about the Vietnam War. According to your understanding what were America's goals during the war?

Curtis: We wanted to stop the spread of communism. We wanted to keep the Vietcong from taking over South Vietnam.

Cami: Did you know anybody that was drafted or volunteered in the service?

Curtis: Yes I do.

Cami: Who were those people?

Curtis: My cousin Dennis Jeppesen got drafted to go to Vietnam.

Cami: Did you receive any letters or anything from him?

Curtis: Yes, I did regularly.

Cami: Do you remember what any of those letters were about?

Curtis: Yes, I do.

Cami: What did they say, read in those letters?

Curtis: They said, he said where he was serving and what division he was in and what regiment he was in the army and he always talked about how they'd been shelled before how their barrack had been shelled by the Vietcong and how they went on patrols and they had met the Vietcong face to face and they had some pretty fierce battles. They called the Vietcong Charlie.

Cami: Charlie?

Curtis: That was their fond name they had for the Vietcong was Charlie the enemy Charlie.

Cami: Wow, what were your feelings about the drafting process?

Curtis: I thought it was a fair way to do it. In fact, I was, I remember I was close to being drafted right before the war ended. In fact my birthday was put into the lottery, the draft lottery. I can't remember where I fell into the lottery, but I was in it.

Cami: What do you think about those who resisted the draft?

Curtis: The ones who went to Canada and went to other areas like?

Cami: Yea.

Curtis: I think that they were kind of they were not patriotic and they were not really representative of the main population.

Cami: When did you first recognize that there was an anti-war sentiment in America?

Curtis: After the war was over when our troop came home they were not treated with well, or they were not well received. We didn't throw our arms around them, and really make a big deal about how when they come home, because I think the war was an unpopular war. I, that's what gives me the idea that there was a lot of anti-war sentiment, especially I remember they had a lot of demonstrations throughout the county at college campuses, anti-war demonstrations. One of them I remember in particular was at Kent State in Ohio, where four students were shot to death by National Guards men when they were throwing bricks at National Guards men. The guards returned fire on them and killed four kids; state students. I still remember the front cover of all the magazines and the newspapers with the picture of that one screaming lady over the body of her dead boyfriend.

Cami: What were your feelings about the purpose of the war?

Curtis: I, I understood why we were there, and why we went over there to stop to spread of communism because communism was a threat to the world, world peace, and eventually a threat to us as Americans if we didn't stop communism right there. I supported the troops and I supported our president in the war. I remember there was some pretty scary news bulletins on the TV all the time about the war and all that. It was pretty scary times and I remember I thought that I might end up going over there when I got out of high school, but the war was over. There was a treaty made before I even got out of high school so I never got drafted.

Cami: During the war did you see a lot of druggies among the Americans, especially the teenagers at the time?

Curtis: Drugs when I was in high school during the war was as far I was concerned was pretty nonexistent, I didn't have any kind of relationship with anybody that had drugs or used drugs. I didn't know of any drugs, I didn't even hardly know what a drug was I far as I know that was not applicable to me.

Cami: Where were you during the war, what city were you in, state?

Curtis: I lived in Smithfield, Utah.

Cami: To your understanding, how did the soldiers treat the native population in the countries in which they fought?

Curtis: There were a lot of stories about the mass slaughter of civilians by our troops, but I don't know how true they were. I remember them saying that you didn't know who the enemy was. You didn't know who had bombs, who had guns it seemed to me that a lot of times the army was running into people who would open fire at them and then they didn't even expect them to be the enemy. So there was a lot of stories about, and some of the military leaders were brought charges, charges were brought against them. For leading slaughters against the civilian population in South Vietnam. I can't really remember about how they turned out the charges, but I do remember one massacre in particular named Mai Lai massacre in which the general was brought, had charges brought against him and I cannot remember what happened on that, on that case.

Cami: What were feelings about the final peace settlement?

Curtis: Like I say, I was about a year away into going into the military, I was pretty satisfied when I heard that they had had a treaty, a settlement and I was happy that we wouldn't have to hear anymore about Americans getting killed over there.

Cami: That is all the questions I have about the war. I was just wondering I want to know a little more about what life was like in America the United states of America during the war was so, as a teenager what did you do for fun?

Curtis: I went to movies, I went to dinner, I went with friends to see relatives. I went to college basketball games, and football games. Pretty much entertainment oriented is what I did.

Cami: What kind of movies did you go to?

Curtis: Mainly, comedies, comical movies. Some where they had lives of teenagers the age group we were in.

Cami: What kind of restaurants did you go to?

Curtis: We went to the sizzler, and to local restaurants, and once in a while went to Logan Canyon. It was called the Zanatavoo, it was a very popular restaurant, up in Logan Canyon.

Cami: What kind of food did they serve at the Zantavoo?

Curtis: Just a regular steak and shrimp and seafood, buffets.

Cami: What was the clothing like?

Curtis: Plaid pants were in, T-shirts, regular dress shirts, Levis Strauss, levis were very popular when I was in high school.

Cami: What did you wear?

Curtis: I wore Levis Strauss and t-shirts mainly.

Cami: What were the hairstyles like?

Curtis: The hairdos were Beatle hairdos. Everybody had their hair down, like into a bowl shape like the Beatles. They had their hair in their eyes and long hair down the back, and the neck.

Cami: Speaking about the beetles, did you notice any anti-war songs that were sung by the beetles?

Curtis: They did sing a song about the Revolution. Which was sort of a, I thought an anti-government. Well, maybe it wasn't an anti-government, maybe they, maybe they were against a rev, I think what the song was trying to put on was people were talking about a revolution but they were saying how bad it was a revolution would have been. So, I think the beetles pretty much were patriotic, they supported the government.

Cami: What kind of car did you drive?

Curtis: I drove a square-back Volkswagen.

Cami: What did that look like?

Curtis: It was a, little bigger then the bug and it had a little kind a little square shape back, and it was good on gas I remember.

Cami: Were a lot of cars like that?

Curtis: No, it was pretty unique really.

Cami: So, what would you say was the normal kind of car in that day?

Curtis: Chevrolet had some sports cars that were pretty popular that had a Z20. Cheval Super Sport had a big engine in it, 396. Super Sport was a real powerful car, it had a red stingray was a pretty popular car.

Cami: Now that we're in the year 2004, what changes since Vietnam war have you noticed and have impacted your life?

Curtis: Well, I kind of relate a lot of this war in Vietnam to what were going through now, and wars against Iraq and Afghanistan. I kind of think it brings to light in all of us that we are not like back in the Pearl Harbor days. We are not above being attacked by an enemy and we need to have our guard up all the time. And I think a lot of these things that's happened now brought more security to us. Like when we go to airports now the security is so much tighter and it costs more money for airline tickets and cruise tickets

now because you have to pay a portion of your ticket for security that we didn't used to have to pay. And everyday on the news you hear about threats and our safety is forever in question you never know when something is going to happen when you turn the news on there will be a major calamity.

Cami: That is very true, ever since the 1960's there has been a lot of changes in technology, can you tell me about the changes?

Curtis: Well, everything is computerized now. You go to the bank and they have to look your account up on the computer, they used to when you put money in you just hand them a deposit ticket and they'd do it manually and enter it into a main computer but now it's every teller has a computer, and I remember when I first started working at the Fremont County Courthouse, where I work now, there was very limited computers there just a few, maybe a few one or two offices would have a computer, now every desk has a computer and they are big computers they're very expensive in our computer room, we're always undergoing changes in our data processes room office, because we're always changing main frames. Changing, upgrading system of more modern equipment and every where you go, everything is run on a computer. You go to the store now to buy your groceries, and its all calculated right in front of you. On the screen you can see everything you've bout and the total of the amount you paid is electronically transferred from your count immediately and technology is just changed so much it has just improved so much, it we don't know what we did years ago without the computers.

Cami: What about changes of education?

Curtis: Education is a lot different now the students at high school are required to take a lot more advanced classes that would have been college classes at in my high school days, the ones that they are taking now at high school, and the requirements are more difficult to graduate from high school, it is a very lot more challenging to graduate form high school, meet the requirements for graduation now, then when I went to school, the classes plus the technology part of it, everything is computerized once again, and they have to learn about technical aspects of life, keyboard everybody knows how to type, when I went to school typing was an elective, but now it's a must a requirement the computer, everything was elective when I was in high school and now it is all required.

Cami: I know that since the 1960s there has been a lot of changes in the family and home life. What changes have you noticed?

Curtis: The families are more the wife is gone all the time working at a job and the father gone at a job all the time and the kids are running everywhere and it seems like it's more difficult to get the family together for any kind of a family activity because there is so many things going on. I remember when I was a kid, my mother was a full-time mother and that just doesn't happen anymore. The cost of living has gone up so astronomical. The both parents have to work, and it seems like there's more activities at school to keep kids from home. Kids are not really home a lot to help out with the household duties. It's just more difficult home life now a day to keep things functioning.

Cami: I know that probably throughout your life you've gone through a lot of trials and you have much experience in a lot of things, is there any advice you'd like to give the future generation that could probably help them through their life?

Curtis: I would say get your education do good in high school, junior high and high school get a grades go on to an university maybe a post university have a goal of what you want to do in your education have a goal have a job lined up in your mind. What you want to do so that you're doing things that you want to do that will make you happy and so that you will make sufficient income for the needs of your family.

Cami: Those are all the questions that I have, do you have anything else to add to this interview?

Curtis: I would just like to say that this interview has brought back memories that I have long forgotten and it has brought some good things to mind and some bad things to mind. So I appreciate doing the interview and good luck.

Cami: Well, thank you Dad.