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Jacob Battieste
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Jacob Battieste

Jacob Battieste was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in the year 1939. He was attending college at Southern University, when his grandfather, who he was very close to, had passed away. The longest he was able to leave school was three days, however he took off ten days. When he returned back to school, the administration proceeded to let him know that he could no longer attend because he had broken a rule that was directly enforced upon him. Since he was in college he wasn't able to be recruited into the Army. As soon as they had knowledge he was no longer attending university they jumped at the opportunity to draft him to serve in the Vietnam War.

In 1962, Battieste was drafted into the Army at the age of 19. Battieste was part of a strike unit stationed in Fort Campbell, Kentucky called the 101st Airborne Screaming Eagles. His strike unit was supposed to be prepared for anything because during that time the Cuba Crisis was occurring. They were trained to be in Cuba within forty minutes from Kentucky, if anything were to happen. Battieste was also part of an airborne team, which he says, "were the Seals of the time". In the words of Battieste, a lot of the times the soldiers were so scared and disturbed they were given marijuana by the Army to help calm their nerves. Even though he was scared, Battieste kept pushing and didn't let anything stand in the way of serving his country. As his

time in the service grew, he was also trained to be a boat operator. Battieste served for only two years and eventually was able to leave in 1964.

Battieste shared that he enjoyed his time in the service. It taught him how to look after himself because not everyone will be there for you. However, a lot of the soldiers had no real idea about what they were fighting for. At this time, they were fighting because they had to stay alive and they had to protect our country. Battieste, along with many others, knew that the war in Vietnam was a bad call. Being African-American, there were some difficulties because racial segregation was present during this time. African-American soldiers were treated poorly and put in harm's way more often than anyone else. According to Battieste, They were the ones being put in the front line most often, and because of this, there were more African-Americans being killed than white Americans. They were limited to opportunities and not seen as equal as everyone else was. He also showed a double standard between white Americans and African-Americans. He had wanted to become a Lieutenant and had to go to school for that. However, that would only have allowed him to be a second Lieutenant, even with all the training and education he would have gotten. For caucasian men, they had the privilege to become a first Lieutenant straight out of highschool, without an expectation of any kind of knowledge from a university. Battieste also mentions that something that stuck with him were the stories he heard back from other soldiers that there were children being used as weapons. To distract soldiers, they would say that they were hungry and by the time they would get the soldiers attention, they would blow themselves up along with anyone that was near them. After a while, the soldiers couldn't risk finding out whether a child was sent to kill them, or was actually genuine, so they had to shoot any children that would come in their direction. When the veterans returned from

war they were spit on, treated unfairly and seen beneath everyone else.

After his service ended in 1964, Jacob Battieste moved to California and found a job in El Segundo. Battieste made a great life for himself, his wife, and his kids after his service. In 1965, one year after leaving the Army, he was going to be called back. However the military was looking for him in Louisiana, so he never got the information. When word finally got to him in California he was exempted from going because of his family and job.

Battieste explained that many Vietnam War veterans are very deeply impacted and have serious cases of PTSD. Battieste says that about 72% of Vietnam veterans came back to no or difficulty getting jobs and end up becoming homeless. So for him to have no mental disorders and to have a job, he feels very blessed. Battieste shared a story of his first training day and remembers it being very stressful. He was put in a situation where he and a couple other men were being shot at and they had to crawl under the bullets. The two men in front of him had both seen poisonous snakes and jumped into the line of fire and were instantly killed, right in front of him. Battieste, now seventy-seven years old, still jokes around about the times he had visiting the houses of girls late at night with his friends when they wanted to have some fun. Jacob Battieste was such an amazing and uplifting man, anyone who could have the privilege to talk to him would be honored to hear his story. He will forever be appreciated for everything he has done to help make our country the way it is today.