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### Oral History Interview: Frank Mattie

Frank Mattie

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MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

ACC # 612

ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25701

ORAL HISTORY

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Frank Mattie  
(Signature - Interviewee)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Address)

DATE: 9/26/90

Norman Buckley  
(Signature - Witness)

**MM:** It's November 26, 1990. I'm at the Regional Vet Center in Huntington, and I'm interviewing Frank Matte, a Vietnam veteran. Okay, Mr. Mattie, first of all, can you, were you drafted...how did you get into the war?

**FM:** Okay, I enlisted 10 August 1966...in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. That's how I got in.

**MM:** And you're not a resident of West Virginia? Okay. In '66...uhm...at that time, when you got into, when you went over there, what was your perception of the war? Did you know what you were getting into, or did you know why you were being sent to Vietnam?

**FM:** Well, I, when I was raised, my father had been in World War II and I had been taught that people who had true convictions were willing to take part of their own personal life out to serve their country. And so, I was just convinced that I had an obligation to this country. So, I volunteered and ended up in Vietnam.

**MM:** Okay. Did you just serve one tour?

**FM:** No, I served, I was with B Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, [inaudible]...Infantry, and I was there from January '68 to January '69, and then again from August of '69, or September '69 to August of '70.

**MM:** Okay. Can you tell me what your perception was when you were in Vietnam about for instance, the war? How did you...what was your perception at the time of the Vietnamese, of the government, that you were protecting? How did you feel?

**FM:** Well, I had no contact with the Vietnamese. I uh, I mean, we had the orphans, but we didn't see them very often. Again, at that time, I was told, you know, you have a job to do. Like I got to Vietnam, they said, "You're in this company." We run out in the field and people were shooting at us. So our job was to protect ourselves. So we shot back.

I, I think the intellectualizing of Vietnam came years later. And while I was in Vietnam, I certainly didn't have all the philosophical arguments about what was good and what was bad and why were we there. I think that's all crap. I think that's something t.v. made up. And I think people that had guilty feelings about not serving in Nam made that up years later to justify their cowardness for not serving.

**MM:** Okay, so you don't think that it was... you think a lot of the [inaudible]...anti-war movement, how...you think that was more brought on by the media?

**FM:** I think that, I think that if you're 18 years old and you have no convictions, you were raised to be a prima dona, and a lot of us were, that you're suddenly told that you were gonna be given a responsibility to defend this country, and you didn't want that responsibility, I think you would grab a hold of anything that you thought was gonna save your life. And what I'm saying is, I think a lot of people jumped on the anti-war movement to keep from going to Vietnam. Not from some deep personal conviction that the war was wrong. I don't think at 18, I think deep personal convictions were rather vague at 18.

**MM:** And how old were you? Were you 18?

**FM:** Eighteen, yeah.

**MM:** After you, the war, okay, now while you were in the war, for instance, the tet offensive, were you involved in that? (FM: Yes) Okay, how did you feel about that? Did you think that was a success? Because a lot of people now think that it wasn't.

**FM:** Oh, I didn't know a lot of people now say it wasn't. I, tet of '68 was just, I mean, I an remember that we got the 189<sup>th</sup> and they said we can check records on this. We

had you know, a few people killed. But I mean, we took bulldozers and dug out large holes in the ground and buried thousands of enemy soldiers. I mean, there were, we literally stacked bodies up and sat on 'em, and ate on 'em. And then when they, the base camp sent up the bulldozer and dug a big hole in the ground and they just pushed all these bodies in like, it reminded me of [inaudible]...they showed these pictures of the gas ovens after and how people looked then. We just had all the bodies pile up and then they just pushed them in these holes. So I know that...I mean, I never lost a fire fight in Vietnam. I, you know, we had helicopters, we had artillery, we had a very, very advanced army. And I just can personally say, we...I, all the fire fights I fought in Vietnam, we never lost one...you know...we lost people. But then we would regroup. And I, I just we have never lost a fire fight. What we lost was uh, was public support.

**MM:** Did, okay, do you think, if you would have stayed, that we would have won, or that we would have won?

**FM:** I think if we would have had a committed society, I think actual combat soldiers, as I recall, something like .05% of our population actually served in combat in Vietnam. And I think if we would have been committed to the war, I think if we would have went in to a do a job, and to win the war, we would have won. You know, I really believe it. Anyone who just doesn't use their emotions, but simply looks at it from tanks, weapons, you know, the machinery war, obviously we would have won. But, too many people were not committed to serving this country. And basically, I think it's because that was the baby boom generation, that was the pampered children. I can remember listening to people now talk about this neutron bomb and how the German government point-

blank said, "Look, we don't want a neutron bomb in our country, because we know you're little baby boomer people. We know they'll use this neutron bomb because they have no morals. So they'll let us all die and then have the country living. Because they betrayed their people in Vietnam. We have nothing for them. And society [inaudible]....now, talking about they didn't want a commitment for the American government because they were afraid the government would abandon them like they abandoned the American soldiers in Vietnam. You know, if you abandon Vietnam, you also abandon the ideals and all the things that people fought for that went to Vietnam. I mean, you can't separate the two. The media has done a real good job at portraying that. But the bottom line is the people that served in Vietnam were stupid. When you just hurry up and run out of a country because you're college students or whoever, are too afraid to fight, we get the message. And the other thing that [inaudible]...with this, it's interesting now that all those cowards that didn't serve in Vietnam are so on the band wagon now about Saudi Arabia, it's interesting because now I guess they feel they're too old to serve in combat, so it's safe for them to be for a war. And I just am real hard-pressed at how sick these people must be psychologically. I mean, first they're too big cowards to serve in combat. And then years later, they so sick that they are really, what 86% in support. I'm, I'm for us getting back Kuwait. But I'm not one of these people that, that's, you know, gonna hide and say.... I think that if we want to get people out of Kuwait, then let's take all these people that didn't serve in Vietnam, and I did serve two tours. I would still go. Let's all go to Saudi Arabia and let's do it. Now, don't let a bunch of 18 year old kids get killed again. These people that are having all

these problems because they didn't serve in Vietnam, let's take 'em. And I think that'll settle the issue.

**MM:** That's interesting.

**FM:** Sorry about that.

**MM:** That's okay. That's a good point. Once you got back, what was, what was it like coming back?

**FM:** Okay. I guess, you know, the same horror story. When I came back, I was going to Penn State to college. And I got back from Vietnam, I came back from my first tour and it was crap. So I volunteered for a second tour because I honestly was so aggravated after my first tour and all, that when these kids started calling me a baby killer and all that, I wanted to hurt them.

**MM:** Oh, people did do that?

**FM:** Yeah, yeah. And I, I did hurt. I mean, I got in a lot of fights, I shot a bunch of people, I was very violent. And because, if, you know, fine, they have their freedom of expression and back then I had mine. And uh, it's, you know, to this day I just can't believe how naive these people were. It was all right for them to insult you, it was all right for them to spit at you, but if you hit 'em, that was just, they couldn't believe....or if you shot 'em, my goodness, you mean people shoot at people? Just like they're real naive. Again, I had that impression that there was two generations. Those that served in Vietnam and those that were the prima donas, that were very baby-fied by their parents. And so they had this false impression of how valuable their life was. And so, when I came back, these were the people I kept running up against. And back then, I

really wasn't able to process that. So I got in a lot of fights, I got so disgusted that I volunteered to go back to Nam. Because I knew it was either Nam or jail. I went back to Vietnam, spent another year of Hell, came back from my second tour, was in the United States a year and a half, putting up with all this crap again, and volunteered for my third tour in Vietnam. Well, they didn't send me for my third tour. They figured, you know, you're a ground soldier, it's 1972, we're not sending any ground troops to Vietnam. But to answer the question, homecoming was so bad, that if I could have stayed in Vietnam, I would have. And I certainly attempted to do that. I, like I say...and it's just so interesting to me now about how again this baby-boomer generation and now feels no threats toward their jobs, no threats to their houses, no threats to them getting sent anywhere, no personal sacrifices that they have to make are now willing to welcome back the Vietnam vets. My goodness, that's big of them.

**MM:** That's what I was gonna say. Isn't there a, how do you feel about...for some reason it seems like Vietnam is so much in the news and everybody's getting, Vietnam veterans are always getting praise, and there's no much movies, and memorials. Do you think that this is people feeling guilty?

**FM:** Yeah, I felt that...now. Now again, I was giving you how I felt, yeah. Now, it's like I believe that there was this, again, I believe that there were a lot of people ashamed of the fact that they didn't serve their country, and they knew that they were cowards down in-, or else, they felt they were cowards deep inside. So what they did, they took all their own guilt and threw it on these Vietnamese-, these Vietnam veterans. And they, you know, just all the hate they had for themselves, they inflicted on these veterans.



And now they come out with these, I mean, silly movies. Uh, Apocolys Now. I mean, I spent two tours in Vietnam. We didn't run around having these eerie seances, you know, huge drug smoking and marijuana-, big marijuana parties and... I mean, when I was in the field, I was a combat soldier. When you were in the field, if you wanted to get high, you died. Now, maybe if they had-, I don't know, maybe some of these did stay in one position their whole tour. We didn't. We moved around a lot. If you wanted to get drunk or if you wanted to get high in the field, Charlie'd shoot you, you know. So I didn't get high, I didn't, I mean, [inaudible]...the rear. We'd rotate in every [inaudible]...back to the rear. And you'd spend three days in the rear, you know, safe base camp, and then you're back out to the field. When I was in the rear, I got real drunk. But when you're out in the field, you had to have it together. Charlie was smart and he had his stuff together. You know, I was an airborne soldier, you know, I had these little plaques on the wall [inaudible]..... Charlie, you know, I came over there thinking I was a bad butt and Charlie, Charlie pretty well made sure that I understood that he'd been fighting that war for a few years, too. So he just did, too. So you couldn't get.... And all these movies to me somehow show that Vietnam soldiers not being noble. You know, you see the one where everybody raped this Vietnamese girl. I, you know, [inaudible]...I mean, they chewed garlic or they, you know, had this root that numbed their mouth because they had bad dental work and smelled and were dirty. I don't know how...maybe somehow sexually they weren't attractive because of that. Or gee, all of a sudden, they have this Vietnamese girl that 50 men just have to have. And I mean, it's real, it's always these very negative portrayal of Vietnam

veterans. Vietnam veterans or like World War II veterans, Korean veterans, I mean, veterans are veterans. You go, somebody tells you this is what we got to do. You know, some guys in the Pacific side probably, you know what it's like to fight guerilla warfare. You know, some people played by the rules more than others. But war is war. I mean, once you see one guy dead, I mean, I don't care. After I think, after about killing maybe four or five people, I think the next 50 were just, I mean, it was just a job. I didn't go through all this emotional turmoil for some reason the Vietnamese-, or the Vietnam veteran, you know, or World War II veteran, you know, somehow is supposed to go through, as far as the t.v. goes, I didn't see any of that. I just saw people doing their job. The job wasn't nice, and they had appropriate reaction when everybody died. They got mad or whatever. But the way I see t.v. as portraying it, it's always, something is wrong with this person. And again, I think a lot of those movies are being made by film makers who didn't go to Vietnam. Or, you know, have a lot of, you know, they were [inaudible]....soldiers is what we called them. We called them [inaudible]... But anyway, you know, they somehow pieced together a war movie and it's just real sad. It's too bad because it's, I mean, if they made World War II movies like that, and then expect people to have some appreciation of what the World War II veteran goes through, I don't think they would. So what, what, what...how do you show respect for Vietnam veteran? You show him casualties of war, or [inaudible]..... That's no respect. Gee, all these people are crazy. War is insane. Now, if you want to make a movie and say this is insanity, you show all the wars together, I agree. But they show Vietnam veterans as somehow insane. I think all it does is encourage them to get sicker.

So...go ahead.

**MM:** Okay. After you, once you did get back to school, you...I guess got your degree in counseling?

**FM:** I got, no, I got...after Vietnam, I spent a lot of years drinking. And then, after about 15 years, I stopped drinking and woke up. And I quit being mad. I quit allowing other people to influence me. I [inaudible].... I believed...people would tell me Vietnam veterans were no good, all they were, were baby killers; I believed all that, and I think that's why I was so upset for so many years. And then finally one day I sobered up and said, "Wait a minute. I did more in one day than most of these creeps will ever do in their whole lifetime." And, and, and that's just reality. And I suddenly said, "Well, there's something wrong with me to allow these people to have any influence in my life." And I just turned around. I suddenly said, "This has been silly. I feel sorry that they have felt guilty and that their not instantly cured." And I went to school then. And then after I finished a social science degree, I became a drug and alcohol counselor. And which I was well suited for, because I knew a little bit about drinking. And then, after awhile, I got more involved in the psychiatric part. I went to work on a psychiatric, head of a psychiatric ward at a hospital, and then continued to process. And then, we're talking ancient history here, but I think in '84 or '85, I started working at a psychiatric hospital and I did that for a number of years and now, well, not a number, but three years and then I retired. And then basically, wasn't gonna work again. And then decided I wanted something to do. And then I went back into counseling but this time with post-dramatic stress disorder, since that's what I did my last three years at the

psychiatric ward. So it's been a very long journey, overcoming so many obstacles that were inherited not from Vietnam, but from our civilian population in my books. And that's certainly what....you know, people can take that for what they want. I...Vietnam was not my stressor. Vietnam ended in, when I left the last time in 1970. My stressor was the United States. And uh, from '70 'til the early '80s it was a stressor. And then finally, I said, "Wait a minute, I'm not buying into this guilt trip this country's on for me." And every other veteran in society is free to choose what they want. And so that's when I started [inaudible].....

**MM:** Now, so you basically uh, or do you think a lot of the people that you do help counsel, that that's been their problem, the United States, it wasn't Vietnam?

**FM:** No, I think that what I'm finding, is just like me and just like a lot of that, there was a lot of traumatic experiences in Vietnam. I mean, just the incident there where we were watching all these bodies get buried, I mean, that's traumatic. Watching children get blown up in front of you, that's traumatic. Then you couple that.... I mean, I guess, now that I've been working in counseling, I mean, psychologically, ideally, if I wanted to drive someone insane, I'd give 'em a bunch of traumatic experiences. And then once they overcame those, I'd reject 'em and I'd spit on 'em and I'd yell at 'em. Right? We did, we did the most hideous thing we could have done and then came back and say it's the Vietnam experience. Vietnam was traumatic. And that post-traumatic stress disorder is very real. A lot of soldiers, I believe they have problems with Vietnam, and those problems have been compounded by our society. Our society is not going to say "Yeah, yeah, I accept part of the blame for that." Our society says "Give 'em some

money and and get 'em to see some doctors [inaudible]....and see what they can do for 'em. And they want a bunch of cry babies, they be like John Wayne and just suck it up and drive on. And uh, it's, it was interesting to me that, as Sylvester Stallone to me today, with these Rambo movies, who wasn't a Vietnam vet, who wasn't a coward, and now he's trying to portray a very, you know, image, and the kids like him. It was interesting that my father, who did serve in World War II, hated John Wayne. He thought, John Wayne to him was a coward that refused to serve his country. And yet, our generation thought, "Gee, [inaudible]... And you know, it's the same thing, the, the more of a coward a person is, it seems the more they have to portray themselves on the screen as some big tough hero. And it creates a very sick society. Because there's no congruence. And these Vietnam vets see these people on the screen that gee, their wife's just been raped, the kids are all being killed and they just take a swig of whiskey, spit it out and go down, we got it get on with it. And they all saw this and said, "I'm not supposed to be upset about killing these people." And so, we added more and more into that. I think that our society is better. I think the people are suddenly seeing we live in a very sick society and we need to change it. But I don't, that personal responsibility to, you know, not honk your horn at people on the street because you're in a hurry..... Just, you know, look at the other person and say, "They're having problems, too, and say good morning, shake hands to people, say how are you today?" I see all that missing. I see all that very hostile, very sick society and their very paranoid. I don't see Vietnam veterans as the only ones in this society that have problems. I see a society that by and large, has a lot of problems. I mean, like, they've

become very paranoid. And it's up to each of us to try to, you know, go back to the good '50s or whatever, whenever it was that possibly we all spoke to each other and we all laughed and we all shook hands and we all cared about each other, you know. And I don't see that happening right now. I'm hoping that as we mature, the society [inaudible].....

**MM:** Do you think...let me see...when you counsel people, do you think that....what would you say to people that, I guess, were maybe....to make them get a better grasp of-, or I guess not, feels like it was always their fault that they were the bad guy. How do you...how do you....?

**FM:** Again, a lot of it is allowing the veteran, and see, in the first part of this interview I want to back this up a little bit. Understand I gave you a lot of emotion, because that's how you get it from a non-veteran, which I am. But a lot of this is-, a little bit of this is [inaudible]..... But anyway, once you get all this hidden anger and all this frustration and what you have to do is let them hear the anger and let them feel the frustration, allow them to know that a feeling is that, it's a feeling. Feelings aren't good, feelings aren't bad. Feelings are.... And then we talk about why we feel this way. And then, we take that and we start to work. And we start to piece together, you know, like "I couldn't be mad about Vietnam, I couldn't be proud about Vietnam", so we have to re-piece together the whole story, you know. I was told that I was a bad buy for not being in Vietnam. That's a lie. Okay. Now we have to let the person know that their inner [inaudible]...is all right. That they can trust themselves. Because part of it is we've mixed them up so much that they don't feel like they can trust themselves. So it's and

it's, it takes...you know, you can't keep a guy sick for 20 years and then you say, "Gee, you're better." That's not gonna happen. I work with people, I still have people that call me from Georgia that have been working on five or six years, but they're back to work, they're back in stable relationships. They're thinking about having kids, you know, and they're doing things that they feel are productive. And, you know, that's taken five years for them to get to that point. We don't quit growing. I always try to make sure the veteran knows that he doesn't have to be an end product. He doesn't have to be a perfect soldier. He doesn't have to be a perfect citizen. I don't believe in any of those terms. He's never an end-, or she's never an end product. [inaudible]....we're still gonna be growing, when we're a hundred, we're gonna be changing, learn new things, you know, we're gonna look at some wonderful things that are gonna occur in life. And you know, constantly learning, and that changes us. So we're never an end product. And they need to know that, because a lot of them think they should be a certain way right now. And none of us are ever going, hopefully, are ever going to limit ourselves to fitting one little mold, you know. We'll keep learning things and keep growing. So we're not an end product. And that's, that's kind of how you do it step by step. It's n not [inaudible].... All I can tell you is that, it's a long-term outlook. You have to look at down the road. Because there is a lot. Like I say, it's 20 years or more for some of these guys. You're not gonna have 'em healthy in five or six months.

**MM:** As Vietnam, do you think that was...the Vietnam war could...a lot of people compare or say that that was the worst war that, I guess, comparing it to World War II, it was just...how would you compare? The impact.... Or was it just the fact that Vietnam

veterans when they came back, they had so much anti-war feeling against them?

**FM:** I think there's a lot of things that contributed to the end of Vietnam. World War II veterans spent, I think the actual historical data on World War II veterans, the facts, not all this garbage people talk, I think they spent 26 days in combat, the average....26 days. You know, Vietnam veterans on the average, 360 days. Plus you get, well maybe 355. Because there wasn't a front line. I'm talking about the combat soldiers. So okay, I had 26 days of combat experience. And this guy had 300 days of combat experience. So anything I saw, he saw 10 times as much. Okay. Now you can then start yelling, which they do and everybody says, "Who did the most for which war?" and they all raise their little flags up. There were a lot of reasons uh...that you know, each side had a lot of anger to say specifically it was this or it was that. I think our most brutal war and the war we really saw a lot of combat in was the Civil War. World War II was not won by this country. It was won by Great Britain and Russia. And if anybody reads any history books, they'll find that out very quickly. No one won in Vietnam. The [inaudible]...the Vietnamese won.

**MM:** You think that's why a lot of people were so dissatisfied, too, because.....

**FM:** Well, I mean...it's...I mean, it's nice to take credit for stuff that you don't really do. I mean, the Russians had already beat the Germans when we got in the war. That's fine. I think we fought a good war in the Pacific. But the people were set, the people were sold a bill of goods, for World War II we won. We did everything there was, and the Russians didn't...nobody did anything but us. And we came back and we were big heroes. We were served another bill of goods. Vietnam is bad, all these people are



baby killers, blah, blah, blah. And so, when they came back, there was a very negative impression. But again, there's all kinds of factors. It was a very long war. The United States is not a patient country. I mean, you're...again you have to understand that the baby boomers are, are used to media gratification. Mommy and Daddy gave them everything they wanted [snapping his fingers] right now! Well, gee, if they're gonna win a war, let's make it a Granada and let's make it Panama, let's get down there and get our prize, just like when we were little kid and cried and got our little gift from Mommy and Daddy, and we have our instant gratification. And if we're gonna be anywhere a long time, that's, we just can't do that. It's that spoiled brat syndrome. And that's not a medical term. But I certainly wished they'd make it one, because I see that. If I, if I, I see that in going past Vietnam. I see it with divorces, I see it with people getting in relationships and she didn't kiss me tonight and by God, that's bad and you know, I'm gone and he's gone. You know, I talk to people all the time and like, gee, I'm starting to wonder if this country can produce healthy relationships any more. It's just that quickness..... And in Vietnam we learn, you know, the spontaneous reaction to loud noises. And you know, and what instantaneous reactions really were. And it all, you know, still comes home.

**MM:** How did you feel about for instance, the president at this time, the Johnson administration, maybe the Nixon administration? Do you, or did you know people....what was your reaction to their policies? (FM: Again....) Or did you just thing that was ....

**FM:** I really thought, you know, again I'm going back..... It's very hard not to use

hindsight. But I keep trying to go back to when I was in Vietnam. And to me, as a soldier, that was all crap. I mean, I went there, I got sent there, people were shooting at me. And all the rest of this is justification about why we didn't go, you know.

[inaudible]...against Johnson. Christ! I didn't know Johnson. I've never been to his ranch. Dick, Tricky-Dicky never invited me out for tea. I knew none of these people, you know? And I still don't know any of these people. And all this crap about, "Well, I was against the war policy or that policy," I think that's what it is, I think it's crap. I think it's all intellectualizing. And I think, again, it's that baby boom generation that wants to impress all of us with their intellectual abilities, which I personally feel that we have the lowest-well, even in education-we have the lowest intellectual uh....educational community in the world. I mean, our education systems are rated so low it's unreal. And I think it's because of this false idea that for somehow all of us are super-intellectuals. I just don't think we're that smart. I think there's a lot of people that are pretty bright. And if we would add smart, we wouldn't keep having wars and there wouldn't be people starving. And we wouldn't have over pollution. I mean....you know, it's not the third, third, third world countries that created this ozone pollution. You know, it's all smart people. So you know, gee, go ahead, I'm sorry.

**MM:** Let's see, okay. That's interesting. Do you think that was the way a lot of people felt at that time, a lot of people was over in Vietnam that they [inaudible]...their duty, they didn't pay attention to what the government would think?

**FM:** Yeah, I think all that came after Vietnam. I honestly, I just don't remember... I just could not picture myself in the field, you know, carrying my rucksack and

[inaudible]....and debating about Lyndon Bane Johnson's policy on Vietnam. I mean, you know, you didn't get books in the field, you didn't get radios on the field. I mean, we didn't have any of this crap in the field. We didn't, I mean, I didn't walk around during the day playing my FM radio. I mean, that's insanity, too. I always get tickled...because you know, all this stuff is weight. You've got to carry so much food, if you want to eat. And you got to carry so many [inaudible]...you got to carry so many grenades, you got to carry so much ammunition. And this stuff is heavy. And I just feel, I just couldn't see carrying tape recorders and radios and having philosophical arguments in the field. It just didn't happen, you know. So...you know, I would have found that rather comical to see some guy pull out communist doctrine and a couple of manifestos and suddenly starting quoting something philosophically debating Richard Nixon's probable causes for his sexual inadequacies that caused his [inaudible].... I just don't think that would have happened, you know. Again, I think that's [inaudible].....

**MM:** Okay, how, how did you or...how was your reaction afterwards, say five, ten years afterwards?

**FM:** I think Vietnam to me was...learned me that the only person you can trust is yourself. That the people in the United States is very fickle. That if we're going to do something, then we need to look at it from a historical perspective first. Vietnam wasn't the first war that [inaudible]..shuns. I mean, that happened in World War II, that happened in World War I, that happened in the Civil War and that happened, you know, in the American Revolution. I mean, the rich never did fight. And all these senators sons, they all know how to skip out and avoid serving their country. So, I think looking

back on it, it's just simply...I have to be aware that this country historically does not reward it's war heroes. That if you're, if you believe that life, life's main accomplishment is how rich you become, or how much power you get, or if you become senator or a president, if that's your belief, then you avoid wars. My believe is that your importance in life is what you're willing to do for your fellow man or woman. And in doing it, means more than just talking it. It's walking the walk. You can talk the talk, but you need to walk the walk. And most of these people were unwilling to walk the walk. It's very easy to get rich in this country. It's very easy to get a nice position in this country. But I don't believe that's what life is. When I go to bed at night, I sleep well. Because I know I've done more than 90% of these people will ever have done for this country. And that's a good feeling. I didn't know that ten years ago. And I try to convince the vets that they need to go home and sleep a little easier. So that's, I guess that's how I look at it.

**MM:** Well, that's a [inaudible]...patriotism, do you think that was....we lacked a lot of that or we still do or....?

**FM:** I worry about people that wrap themselves in the flag, you know, that kind of worries me. But uh...I think again, I don't know if it's child waving or what, but I think it's important that you know democracy comes at a price. And just sitting around on your butt and talking about how good a patriot you are doesn't cut it. You have to be willing to sacrifice. And for someone to say, "Well, Vietnam was just not really a war, and so uh, I've decided not to go," no, that's crap. You know, you have the government and you can debate all day whether your [inaudible]...is trustworthy or what. If you elected those people to government, okay, it was your vote to put 'em in. And you're saying

you have confidence in their abilities, all right. So you elected them and they draft you. You know, that's the bottom line. That's why you put 'em in office. And suddenly for these people to talk about how screwed up the government is and how they have all these intellectual ideas, uhm...I think again, I guess it just...just hits me very hard, the irony of that. It's just that, are you telling me that they're so intellectually depraved that they haven't thought through that I'm the guy that said this guy would be a good leader and said I want to go back and bad-mouth him because he didn't give me what I wanted? Well, you're the one that elected him. Un-elect him. And you know, you don't wait until someone says "We're going to get, we're going overseas to fight a war," to say I'm against the war. You make that clear by your votes. This guy is a hawk, this guy is a dove. Who do you want to vote for? You know..... And I think patriotism is a very noble thing. And I think it implies that you're willing to make sacrifices for your country. And it implies that you'll do more than talk patriotism. It means you go out and you do things for your country. And it's been dead in the United States for a long time. I do believe that these young kids, I see some true patriotism in the kids that are in Saudi Arabia right now. I don't see it in these people that burp when they're on the street and say they're supporting these people in Saudi Arabia. They're not supporting anything. But they're getting their BMW gas, you know. Okay. Enough of this.

**MM:** That's...I think that's just about....all I have. Do you have trouble...I think, for instance, do you have trouble trying to convince Vietnam veterans that they were, that they showed their patriotism...or is that something that doesn't even come up in the discussion?

**FM:** I have, again because they've been giving this double message that somehow you were a bad guy for serving your country, that you were stupid, that the rest of us stayed home and now we've got our good jobs. You went to Vietnam so you're stupid. I have a hard time convincing them that, you know, they can trust the government, it wasn't the government that betrayed them, it was their fellow 75 million patriots here. When citizens turn against citizens of a country, that country is divided. And you know, as Abraham Lincoln said, "A nation that's divided cannot stand". We are all citizens of the United States in this particular incident. And we are not together. If citizens support citizens, then that's not happening on this type issue. I mean, in a democracy, you're free to express opinions and differ. But citizens support citizens. That doesn't mean I support your idea, I support you. And in this country, the veterans now feel like they were betrayed by their government. The thing you make them understand is that the government didn't betray you, you know, that you were right because you did what you were told to do. Okay. Because your fellow person disagreed or whatever, then we get into an argument of, you know, well, if 75 million people say I'm wrong, then am I wrong? What were your convictions at that time? What did you want to do? Why were you going to do it? I mean, why would you go overseas 7,000 miles, get shot at, watch your best friends die, get abused terribly, if you didn't have a belief. And, you know, how strong is someone else's belief that doesn't go overseas, that doesn't see any atrocities, blasts at you when you come back, has a better job than you, and has learned to whine to get their way? I mean, who do you really want to be? And a lot of times it's just making them look at reality. Which person, you know, excluding you or

excluding...which of these people would you rather be? And they suddenly realize that they're still buying that message that somehow they were wrong for going to Vietnam, when they weren't wrong for going to Vietnam. You know, they were just doing their job.

**MM:** Wonder why people are...that war is so cruel? [inaudible]..... I wonder is it education, or lack of, that .....?

**FM:** Again, when you have.....

## **END OF SIDE 1 - BEGIN SIDE 2**

**FM:** They're real angry because their wives left them or something. And I find out that they've been running around on her and they've done this. And they've just done all these unbelievable things. And that's where they are ashamed of their own actions. Well, I believe the people that say that, you know, I believe the majority of them are ashamed that they weren't, you know, fighting. That they're....

**MM:** [inaudible]....

**FM:** Yeah, and the best way to vent my anger is take it right to the source. This person just came back, they did something that I'm afraid to do, or whatever. I mean, we see at schools, when I go to the university and I see a kid that's really studying hard and really trying to learn, I suddenly feel a lot of people making fun of him or her. And I go, "Geez, this is insanity." I mean, why? Because you know, they, for some reason, they shouldn't be doing this. But what they want is a mys-, mystical belker that goes all the way like this, and everybody's gonna get A's and B's and none of us are gonna study. And if someone's willing to work and someone's willing to work for their convictions,

then we don't make fun of them. And these people in their lifetime had never had to suffer anything for their convictions. They didn't go to Vietnam, they were, you know, they were the silver spoon generation, you know, Mickey Mouse and all this other crap. And they got everything they ever wanted. And you know, it's just "Me work?" I can remember this one girl asking me, "What's that? What's that?", that she touched my brow and it was sweat. And she goes, "Oh, my goodness." And you know, this guy was telling him about, you know, like staying for 20, 21 hours in the field in Vietnam. "Ah, and they didn't pay you? Oh, my goodness." I mean, the two concepts are so different. I mean, people that understand sacrificing for a cause and people who have been handed everything in their life on a plate, are never gonna understand each other. It's going to take a very long time. And uh, I would get very frustrated. I think a lot of people would get very frustrated, trying to get those two to see each other's point. Because it's important that some day they do see the point. But most of the people that have been given everything handed to them, it's like the old myth of, it's like in the male, when the very rich child insisted that two and two is five, he didn't give a shit that two and two was four. Because his daddy was rich and you were unimportant. And that's what I see here. "Hell, I've got my Beamer, I've got my Rolls, I've got all this money. I don't care if you're right. I've got the money." And you know, I said we've wrestled with that problem for four or five thousand years or more, so....I don't see us having that in any time soon.

**MM:** Mmm-hmm. That's, the fighting in the fields, do you have to have...what are some of the problems that...[inaudible]...I read where some people still have nightmares, the



stories and things....how do you deal with that?

**FM:** Again, again, you talk out, again it's post traumatic stress disorder, you talk out all the things that you couldn't talk about. Because you were a bad person. John Wayne never let killing 50 Japanese bother him, see? So here's this veteran that's killed someone and it bothers him. And we know that's not normal. You mean killing people bothers you? And so, a lot of time I'll exaggerate. And I'll take an approach of making it sound so ridiculous that the veteran starts to laugh. And if someone laughs, that's nice. Because it releases a lot of tension and you then you go and you start talking about probably what normal reactions to this would be, if there is such a thing as a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. And we'll talk about that for a while. Yes, you know, the sub-conscience is pushing dreams up to the conscience, etc., to try to get the conscience to deal with them. And if they've been buried, you're not supposed to [inaudible].... If it causes a lot of nightmares.... And again, the way you process it, [inaudible]....you start talking about...how do you expect that this possibly came about? What would you relate that dream to in your life experience? Do you think it's all right to cry over a friend dying? What was that male macho image? What, what really does that say about us? And, and I think also, a key point here is that it also depends on the culture. Out in California the culture is much different than West Virginia. Males in California are different than males in West Virginia...to a degree, and in how you were raised. You know, what's the stereotype male in this area? What's the stereotype in that area? And so, the Vietnam experience was very different for each of them, you know. So that has to be addressed also.

**MM:** What, what do you find the majority of the West Virginia veterans, I mean, see [inaudible]....

**FM:** One is that male [inaudible].... image. I mean, husbands in charge of the family, the father's responsible for bringing the food in, and there's this very strong stereotyping of the male being the head of the family and the woman having no rights. And you know, [inaudible]....hard times. And so, with that, first you have to understand that, yes, if you want to be head of the household, that's well and good, and yes, if you want to be completely in charge of the wife, if she's accepting of that, that's well and good. But, people do have a need at times to cry, or a need at times to release anger, wherever it happens to be that that's dealing with. I mean, I can't take, I don't think I can take my beliefs on a relationship and push it on someone else. I believe just what makes me feel good makes me feel good. What makes you feel good is gonna make you feel good. And if that's what it's doing, then we'll just talk it out. The person is incongruent, if the person is, and as we've seen with the Vietnam vet, is one side of him has a lot of remorse about killing someone, and the other part is saying men don't feel. So then there's an incongruence and we have to learn to be congruent. And, and that's what we work at. But again, you know, that incongruence can get even more imbedded because there's all these positive things that a male's supposed to be. And when we do gender differences, it's ironic that when they talk genders, they talk about the female as understanding and sympathetic and etc. She has all kinds of positive virtues. And the male has aggressiveness and emotional numbing and a couple other things. So it's real interesting, some of the ways you have to go about this with your group.

**MM:** Okay. And so, like West Virginia veterans, I suppose, they would be more...is it more difficult to get them to, to express their feelings or their fears because they have this male ....?

**FM:** No...well, yeah. To a degree it is. Yet, also it's like a relief when they suddenly realize this is just a [inaudible]. I can honestly do this. And I have someone I can share this with. And, and once they've shared it they feel, you can tell there's a dramatic difference in the person, they feel really good about themselves. They suddenly get, "Gee, I'm still a male," you know, "it's all right for me to be upset that I killed a person in Vietnam." And there's this great realization that it's all right. You know, it's all right to, to mourn for a friend that died, it's all right to be unhappy that your father died in some God-forsaken coal mine. Whatever happens to be the issue, it's also tied into Vietnam. So...it has some pluses.

**MM:** Does uh, what other characteristics or is there a difference, since you've counseled another state, about the West Virginia veterans, or is that...is there...[inaudible]...

**FM:** I think, now, West Virginia vets aren't the only people I see that have this male macho image. I mean, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York. I mean, you know, it's, you could almost take the whole Eastern side, maybe except for California even. But there's just a large percentage have a very male image here. And it's not just West Virginia. It's a male image period, that I have the problem with. And then, I just, you know, there's...a veteran is a veteran, and, and the differences would be very hard for me to define. Because each state seems to think that its veterans did more than any

other veterans in the war. And I don't, you know, veterans are veterans. Each veteran served its country. That's the bottom line. That's why I work with them.

**MM:** Okay, I think that's all I have.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

**FRANK MATTIE**  
**November 26, 1990**  
**WV Vietnam Veterans**

Mr. Mattie is a former Vietnam veteran works at the Regional Vet Center. Mr. Mattie was in the infantry in Vietnam and served in B Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry from 1968 to '69. Mr. Mattie gives his perception of the Vietnamese and the government that was being protected. He also gives his view of the type of people that goes to Vietnam to shoot the war movies these days and their non-participation in the war themselves. He talks about male stereotypes out in California as opposed to those in West Virginia, how the male generation adjusted to being a civilian again, the negativism and "bad feelings" they faced from those not fighting in the war. He concludes by expressing his view of the "male macho image" and how hard it is to define the term "veteran".



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MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25701

ORAL HISTORY

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Norman Anselmy  
(Signature - Witness)

**MM:** It's November 26, 1990. I'm at the Regional Vet Center in Huntington, and I'm interviewing Frank Matte, a Vietnam veteran. Okay, Mr. Mattie, first of all, can you, were you drafted...how did you get into the war?

**FM:** Okay, I enlisted 10 August 1966...in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. That's how I got in.

**MM:** And you're not a resident of West Virginia? Okay. In '66...uhm...at that time, when you got into, when you went over there, what was your perception of the war? Did you know what you were getting into, or did you know why you were being sent to Vietnam?

**FM:** Well, I, when I was raised, my father had been in World War II and I had been taught that people who had true convictions were willing to take part of their own personal life out to serve their country. And so, I was just convinced that I had an obligation to this country. So, I volunteered and ended up in Vietnam.

**MM:** Okay. Did you just serve one tour?

**FM:** No, I served, I was with B Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, [inaudible]...Infantry, and I was there from January '68 to January '69, and then again from August of '69, or September '69 to August of '70.

**MM:** Okay. Can you tell me what your perception was when you were in Vietnam about for instance, the war? How did you...what was your perception at the time of the Vietnamese, of the government, that you were protecting? How did you feel?

**FM:** Well, I had no contact with the Vietnamese. I uh, I mean, we had the orphans, but we didn't see them very often. Again, at that time, I was told, you know, you have a job to do. Like I got to Vietnam, they said, "You're in this company." We run out in the field and people were shooting at us. So our job was to protect ourselves. So we shot back.

I, I think the intellectualizing of Vietnam came years later. And while I was in Vietnam, I certainly didn't have all the philosophical arguments about what was good and what was bad and why were we there. I think that's all crap. I think that's something t.v. made up. And I think people that had guilty feelings about not serving in Nam made that up years later to justify their cowardness for not serving.

**MM:** Okay, so you don't think that it was... you think a lot of the [inaudible]...anti-war movement, how...you think that was more brought on by the media?

**FM:** I think that, I think that if you're 18 years old and you have no convictions, you were raised to be a prima dona, and a lot of us were, that you're suddenly told that you were gonna be given a responsibility to defend this country, and you didn't want that responsibility, I think you would grab a hold of anything that you thought was gonna save your life. And what I'm saying is, I think a lot of people jumped on the anti-war movement to keep from going to Vietnam. Not from some deep personal conviction that the war was wrong. I don't think at 18, I think deep personal convictions were rather vague at 18.

**MM:** And how old were you? Were you 18?

**FM:** Eighteen, yeah.

**MM:** After you, the war, okay, now while you were in the war, for instance, the tet offensive, were you involved in that? (FM: Yes) Okay, how did you feel about that? Did you think that was a success? Because a lot of people now think that it wasn't.

**FM:** Oh, I didn't know a lot of people now say it wasn't. I, tet of '68 was just, I mean, I an remember that we got the 189<sup>th</sup> and they said we can check records on this. We



had you know, a few people killed. But I mean, we took bulldozers and dug out large holes in the ground and buried thousands of enemy soldiers. I mean, there were, we literally stacked bodies up and sat on 'em, and ate on 'em. And then when they, the base camp sent up the bulldozer and dug a big hole in the ground and they just pushed all these bodies in like, it reminded me of [inaudible]....they showed these pictures of the gas ovens after and how people looked then. We just had all the bodies pile up and then they just pushed them in these holes. So I know that...I mean, I never lost a fire fight in Vietnam. I, you know, we had helicopters, we had artillery, we had a very, very advanced army. And I just can personally say, we...I, all the fire fights I fought in Vietnam, we never lost one...you know...we lost people. But then we would regroup. And I, I just we have never lost a fire fight. What we lost was uh, was public support.

**MM:** Did, okay, do you think, if you would have stayed, that we would have won, or that we would have won?

**FM:** I think if we would have had a committed society, I think actual combat soldiers, as I recall, something like .05% of our population actually served in combat in Vietnam. And I think if we would have been committed to the war, I think if we would have went in to a do a job, and to win the war, we would have won. You know, I really believe it. Anyone who just doesn't use their emotions, but simply looks at it from tanks, weapons, you know, the machinery war, obviously we would have won. But, too many people were not committed to serving this country. And basically, I think it's because that was the baby boom generation, that was the pampered children. I can remember listening to people now talk about this neutron bomb and how the German government point-

blank said, "Look, we don't want a neutron bomb in our country, because we know you're little baby boomer people. We know they'll use this neutron bomb because they have no morals. So they'll let us all die and then have the country living. Because they betrayed their people in Vietnam. We have nothing for them. And society [inaudible]....now, talking about they didn't want a commitment for the American government because they were afraid the government would abandon them like they abandoned the American soldiers in Vietnam. You know, if you abandon Vietnam, you also abandon the ideals and all the things that people fought for that went to Vietnam. I mean, you can't separate the two. The media has done a real good job at portraying that. But the bottom line is the people that served in Vietnam were stupid. When you just hurry up and run out of a country because you're college students or whoever, are too afraid to fight, we get the message. And the other thing that [inaudible]...with this, it's interesting now that all those cowards that didn't serve in Vietnam are so on the band wagon now about Saudi Arabia, it's interesting because now I guess they feel they're too old to serve in combat, so it's safe for them to be for a war. And I just am real hard-pressed at how sick these people must be psychologically. I mean, first they're too big cowards to serve in combat. And then years later, they so sick that they are really, what 86% in support. I'm, I'm for us getting back Kuwait. But I'm not one of these people that, that's, you know, gonna hide and say.... I think that if we want to get people out of Kuwait, then let's take all these people that didn't serve in Vietnam, and I did serve two tours. I would still go. Let's all go to Saudi Arabia and let's do it. Now, don't let a bunch of 18 year old kids get killed again. These people that are having all

these problems because they didn't serve in Vietnam, let's take 'em. And I think that'll settle the issue.

**MM:** That's interesting.

**FM:** Sorry about that.

**MM:** That's okay. That's a good point. Once you got back, what was, what was it like coming back?

**FM:** Okay. I guess, you know, the same horror story. When I came back, I was going to Penn State to college. And I got back from Vietnam, I came back from my first tour and it was crap. So I volunteered for a second tour because I honestly was so aggravated after my first tour and all, that when these kids started calling me a baby killer and all that, I wanted to hurt them.

**MM:** Oh, people did do that?

**FM:** Yeah, yeah. And I, I did hurt. I mean, I got in a lot of fights, I shot a bunch of people, I was very violent. And because, if, you know, fine, they have their freedom of expression and back then I had mine. And uh, it's, you know, to this day I just can't believe how naive these people were. It was all right for them to insult you, it was all right for them to spit at you, but if you hit 'em, that was just, they couldn't believe....or if you shot 'em, my goodness, you mean people shoot at people? Just like they're real naive. Again, I had that impression that there was two generations. Those that served in Vietnam and those that were the prima donas, that were very baby-fied by their parents. And so they had this false impression of how valuable their life was. And so, when I came back, these were the people I kept running up against. And back then, I

really wasn't able to process that. So I got in a lot of fights, I got so disgusted that I volunteered to go back to Nam. Because I knew it was either Nam or jail. I went back to Vietnam, spent another year of Hell, came back from my second tour, was in the United States a year and a half, putting up with all this crap again, and volunteered for my third tour in Vietnam. Well, they didn't send me for my third tour. They figured, you know, you're a ground soldier, it's 1972, we're not sending any ground troops to Vietnam. But to answer the question, homecoming was so bad, that if I could have stayed in Vietnam, I would have. And I certainly attempted to do that. I, like I say...and it's just so interesting to me now about how again this baby-boomer generation and now feels no threats toward their jobs, no threats to their houses, no threats to them getting sent anywhere, no personal sacrifices that they have to make are now willing to welcome back the Vietnam vets. My goodness, that's big of them.

**MM:** That's what I was gonna say. Isn't there a, how do you feel about...for some reason it seems like Vietnam is so much in the news and everybody's getting, Vietnam veterans are always getting praise, and there's no much movies, and memorials. Do you think that this is people feeling guilty?

**FM:** Yeah, I felt that..now. Now again, I was giving you how I felt, yeah. Now, it's like I believe that there was this, again, I believe that there were a lot of people ashamed of the fact that they didn't serve their country, and they knew that they were cowards down in-, or else, they felt they were cowards deep inside. So what they did, they took all their own guilt and threw it on these Vietnamese-, these Vietnam veterans. And they, you know, just all the hate they had for themselves, they inflicted on these veterans.

And now they come out with these, I mean, silly movies. Uh, Apocolys Now. I mean, I spent two tours in Vietnam. We didn't run around having these eerie seances, you know, huge drug smoking and marijuana-, big marijuana parties and... I mean, when I was in the field, I was a combat soldier. When you were in the field, if you wanted to get high, you died. Now, maybe if they had-, I don't know, maybe some of these did stay in one position their whole tour. We didn't. We moved around a lot. If you wanted to get drunk or if you wanted to get high in the field, Charlie'd shoot you, you know. So I didn't get high, I didn't, I mean, [inaudible]...the rear. We'd rotate in every [inaudible]...back to the rear. And you'd spend three days in the rear, you know, safe base camp, and then you're back out to the field. When I was in the rear, I got real drunk. But when you're out in the field, you had to have it together. Charlie was smart and he had his stuff together. You know, I was an airborne soldier, you know, I had these little plaques on the wall [inaudible]..... Charlie, you know, I came over there thinking I was a bad butt and Charlie, Charlie pretty well made sure that I understood that he'd been fighting that war for a few years, too. So he just did, too. So you couldn't get.... And all these movies to me somehow show that Vietnam soldiers not being noble. You know, you see the one where everybody raped this Vietnamese girl. I, you know, [inaudible]...I mean, they chewed garlic or they, you know, had this root that numbed their mouth because they had bad dental work and smelled and were dirty. I don't know how...maybe somehow sexually they weren't attractive because of that. Or gee, all of a sudden, they have this Vietnamese girl that 50 men just have to have. And I mean, it's real, it's always these very negative portrayal of Vietnam

veterans. Vietnam veterans or like World War II veterans, Korean veterans, I mean, veterans are veterans. You go, somebody tells you this is what we got to do. You know, some guys in the Pacific side probably, you know what it's like to fight guerilla warfare. You know, some people played by the rules more than others. But war is war. I mean, once you see one guy dead, I mean, I don't care. After I think, after about killing maybe four or five people, I think the next 50 were just, I mean, it was just a job. I didn't go through all this emotional turmoil for some reason the Vietnamese-, or the Vietnam veteran, you know, or World War II veteran, you know, somehow is supposed to go through, as far as the t.v. goes, I didn't see any of that. I just saw people doing their job. The job wasn't nice, and they had appropriate reaction when everybody died. They got mad or whatever. But the way I see t.v. as portraying it, it's always, something is wrong with this person. And again, I think a lot of those movies are being made by film makers who didn't go to Vietnam. Or, you know, have a lot of, you know, they were [inaudible]....soldiers is what we called them. We called them [inaudible]... But anyway, you know, they somehow pieced together a war movie and it's just real sad. It's too bad because it's, I mean, if they made World War II movies like that, and then expect people to have some appreciation of what the World War II veteran goes through, I don't think they would. So what, what, what...how do you show respect for Vietnam veteran? You show him casualties of war, or [inaudible]..... That's no respect. Gee, all these people are crazy. War is insane. Now, if you want to make a movie and say this is insanity, you show all the wars together, I agree. But they show Vietnam veterans as somehow insane. I think all it does is encourage them to get sicker.

So...go ahead.

**MM:** Okay. After you, once you did get back to school, you...I guess got your degree in counseling?

**FM:** I got, no, I got...after Vietnam, I spent a lot of years drinking. And then, after about 15 years, I stopped drinking and woke up. And I quit being mad. I quit allowing other people to influence me. I [inaudible]... I believed...people would tell me Vietnam veterans were no good, all they were, were baby killers; I believed all that, and I think that's why I was so upset for so many years. And then finally one day I sobered up and said, "Wait a minute. I did more in one day than most of these creeps will ever do in their whole lifetime." And, and, and that's just reality. And I suddenly said, "Well, there's something wrong with me to allow these people to have any influence in my life." And I just turned around. I suddenly said, "This has been silly. I feel sorry that they have felt guilty and that their not instantly cured." And I went to school then. And then after I finished a social science degree, I became a drug and alcohol counselor. And which I was well suited for, because I knew a little bit about drinking. And then, after awhile, I got more involved in the psychiatric part. I went to work on a psychiatric, head of a psychiatric ward at a hospital, and then continued to process. And then, we're talking ancient history here, but I think in '84 or '85, I started working at a psychiatric hospital and I did that for a number of years and now, well, not a number, but three years and then I retired. And then basically, wasn't gonna work again. And then decided I wanted something to do. And then I went back into counseling but this time with post-dramatic stress disorder, since that's what I did my last three years at the

psychiatric ward. So it's been a very long journey, overcoming so many obstacles that were inherited not from Vietnam, but from our civilian population in my books. And that's certainly what....you know, people can take that for what they want. I...Vietnam was not my stressor. Vietnam ended in, when I left the last time in 1970. My stressor was the United States. And uh, from '70 'til the early '80s it was a stressor. And then finally, I said, "Wait a minute, I'm not buying into this guilt trip this country's on for me." And every other veteran in society is free to choose what they want. And so that's when I started [inaudible].....

**MM:** Now, so you basically uh, or do you think a lot of the people that you do help counsel, that that's been their problem, the United States, it wasn't Vietnam?

**FM:** No, I think that what I'm finding, is just like me and just like a lot of that, there was a a lot of traumatic experiences in Vietnam. I mean, just the incident there where we were watching all these bodies get buried, I mean, that's traumatic. Watching children get blown up in front of you, that's traumatic. Then you couple that.... I mean, I guess, now that I've been working in counseling, I mean, psychologically, ideally, if I wanted to drive someone insane, I'd give 'em a bunch of traumatic experiences. And then once they overcame those, I'd reject 'em and I'd spit on 'em and I'd yell at 'em. Right? We did, we did the most hideous thing we could have done and then came back and say it's the Vietnam experience. Vietnam was traumatic. And that post-traumatic stress disorder is very real. A lot of soldiers, I believe they have problems with Vietnam, and those problems have been compounded by our society. Our society is not going to say "Yeah, yeah, I accept part of the blame for that." Our society says "Give 'em some



money and and get 'em to see some doctors [inaudible]....and see what they can do for 'em. And they want a bunch of cry babies, they be like John Wayne and just suck it up and drive on. And uh, it's, it was interesting to me that, as Sylvester Stallone to me today, with these Rambo movies, who wasn't a Vietnam vet, who wasn't a coward, and now he's trying to portray a very, you know, image, and the kids like him. It was interesting that my father, who did serve in World War II, hated John Wayne. He thought, John Wayne to him was a coward that refused to serve his country. And yet, our generation thought, "Gee, [inaudible]... And you know, it's the same thing, the, the more of a coward a person is, it seems the more they have to portray themselves on the screen as some big tough hero. And it creates a very sick society. Because there's no congruence. And these Vietnam vets see these people on the screen that gee, their wife's just been raped, the kids are all being killed and they just take a swig of whiskey, spit it out and go down, we got it get on with it. And they all saw this and said, "I'm not supposed to be upset about killing these people." And so, we added more and more into that. I think that our society is better. I think the people are suddenly seeing we live in a very sick society and we need to change it. But I don't, that personal responsibility to, you know, not honk your horn at people on the street because you're in a hurry..... Just, you know, look at the other person and say, "They're having problems, too, and say good morning, shake hands to people, say how are you today?" I see all that missing. I see all that very hostile, very sick society and their very paranoid. I don't see Vietnam veterans as the only ones in this society that have problems. I see a society that by and large, has a lot of problems. I mean, like, they've

become very paranoid. And it's up to each of us to try to, you know, go back to the good '50s or whatever, whenever it was that possibly we all spoke to each other and we all laughed and we all shook hands and we all cared about each other, you know. And I don't see that happening right now. I'm hoping that as we mature, the society [inaudible].....

**MM:** Do you think...let me see...when you counsel people, do you think that....what would you say to people that, I guess, were maybe....to make them get a better grasp of-, or I guess not, feels like it was always their fault that they were the bad guy. How do you...how do you....?

**FM:** Again, a lot of it is allowing the veteran, and see, in the first part of this interview I want to back this up a little bit. Understand I gave you a lot of emotion, because that's how you get it from a non-veteran, which I am. But a lot of this is-, a little bit of this is [inaudible]..... But anyway, once you get all this hidden anger and all this frustration and what you have to do is let them hear the anger and let them feel the frustration, allow them to know that a feeling is that, it's a feeling. Feelings aren't good, feelings aren't bad. Feelings are.... And then we talk about why we feel this way. And then, we take that and we start to work. And we start to piece together, you know, like "I couldn't be mad about Vietnam, I couldn't be proud about Vietnam", so we have to re-piece together the whole story, you know. I was told that I was a bad buy for not being in Vietnam. That's a lie. Okay. Now we have to let the person know that their inner [inaudible]...is all right. That they can trust themselves. Because part of it is we've mixed them up so much that they don't feel like they can trust themselves. So it's and

it's, it takes...you know, you can't keep a guy sick for 20 years and then you say, "Gee, you're better." That's not gonna happen. I work with people, I still have people that call me from Georgia that have been working on five or six years, but they're back to work, they're back in stable relationships. They're thinking about having kids, you know, and they're doing things that they feel are productive. And, you know, that's taken five years for them to get to that point. We don't quit growing. I always try to make sure the veteran knows that he doesn't have to be an end product. He doesn't have to be a perfect soldier. He doesn't have to be a perfect citizen. I don't believe in any of those terms. He's never an end-, or she's never an end product. [inaudible]....we're still gonna be growing, when we're a hundred, we're gonna be changing, learn new things, you know, we're gonna look at some wonderful things that are gonna occur in life. And you know, constantly learning, and that changes us. So we're never an end product. And they need to know that, because a lot of them think they should be a certain way right now. And none of us are ever going, hopefully, are ever going to limit ourselves to fitting one little mold, you know. We'll keep learning things and keep growing. So we're not an end product. And that's, that's kind of how you do it step by step. It's n not [inaudible]..... All I can tell you is that, it's a long-term outlook. You have to look at down the road. Because there is a lot. Like I say, it's 20 years or more for some of these guys. You're not gonna have 'em healthy in five or six months.

**MM:** As Vietnam, do you think that was...the Vietnam war could...a lot of people compare or say that that was the worst war that, I guess, comparing it to World War II, it was just...how would you compare? The impact.... Or was it just the fact that Vietnam

veterans when they came back, they had so much anti-war feeling against them?

**FM:** I think there's a lot of things that contributed to the end of Vietnam. World War II veterans spent, I think the actual historical data on World War II veterans, the facts, not all this garbage people talk, I think they spent 26 days in combat, the average....26 days. You know, Vietnam veterans on the average, 360 days. Plus you get, well maybe 355. Because there wasn't a front line. I'm talking about the combat soldiers. So okay, I had 26 days of combat experience. And this guy had 300 days of combat experience. So anything I saw, he saw 10 times as much. Okay. Now you can then start yelling, which they do and everybody says, "Who did the most for which war?" and they all raise their little flags up. There were a lot of reasons uh...that you know, each side had a lot of anger to say specifically it was this or it was that. I think our most brutal war and the war we really saw a lot of combat in was the Civil War. World War II was not won by this country. It was won by Great Britain and Russia. And if anybody reads any history books, they'll find that out very quickly. No one won in Vietnam. The [inaudible]...the Vietnamese won.

**MM:** You think that's why a lot of people were so dissatisfied, too, because.....

**FM:** Well, I mean...it's...I mean, it's nice to take credit for stuff that you don't really do. I mean, the Russians had already beat the Germans when we got in the war. That's fine. I think we fought a good war in the Pacific. But the people were set, the people were sold a bill of goods, for World War II we won. We did everything there was, and the Russians didn't...nobody did anything but us. And we came back and we were big heroes. We were served another bill of goods. Vietnam is bad, all these people are

baby killers, blah, blah, blah. And so, when they came back, there was a very negative impression. But again, there's all kinds of factors. It was a very long war. The United States is not a patient country. I mean, you're...again you have to understand that the baby boomers are, are used to media gratification. Mommy and Daddy gave them everything they wanted [snapping his fingers] right now! Well, gee, if they're gonna win a war, let's make it a Granada and let's make it Panama, let's get down there and get our prize, just like when we were little kid and cried and got our little gift from Mommy and Daddy, and we have our instant gratification. And if we're gonna be anywhere a long time, that's, we just can't do that. It's that spoiled brat syndrome. And that's not a medical term. But I certainly wished they'd make it one, because I see that. If I, if I, I see that in going past Vietnam. I see it with divorces, I see it with people getting in relationships and she didn't kiss me tonight and by God, that's bad and you know, I'm gone and he's gone. You know, I talk to people all the time and like, gee, I'm starting to wonder if this country can produce healthy relationships any more. It's just that quickness..... And in Vietnam we learn, you know, the spontaneous reaction to loud noises. And you know, and what instantaneous reactions really were. And it all, you know, still comes home.

**MM:** How did you feel about for instance, the president at this time, the Johnson administration, maybe the Nixon administration? Do you, or did you know people....what was your reaction to their policies? (FM: Again....) Or did you just thing that was ....

**FM:** I really thought, you know, again I'm going back..... It's very hard not to use

hindsight. But I keep trying to go back to when I was in Vietnam. And to me, as a soldier, that was all crap. I mean, I went there, I got sent there, people were shooting at me. And all the rest of this is justification about why we didn't go, you know.

[inaudible]...against Johnson. Christ! I didn't know Johnson. I've never been to his ranch. Dick, Tricky-Dicky never invited me out for tea. I knew none of these people, you know? And I still don't know any of these people. And all this crap about, "Well, I was against the war policy or that policy," I think that's what it is, I think it's crap. I think it's all intellectualizing. And I think, again, it's that baby boom generation that wants to impress all of us with their intellectual abilities, which I personally feel that we have the lowest-well, even in education-we have the lowest intellectual uh....educational community in the world. I mean, our education systems are rated so low it's unreal. And I think it's because of this false idea that for somehow all of us are super-intellectuals. I just don't think we're that smart. I think there's a lot of people that are pretty bright. And if we would add smart, we wouldn't keep having wars and there wouldn't be people starving. And we wouldn't have over pollution. I mean....you know, it's not the third, third, third world countries that created this ozone pollution. You know, it's all smart people. So you know, gee, go ahead, I'm sorry.

**MM:** Let's see, okay. That's interesting. Do you think that was the way a lot of people felt at that time, a lot of people was over in Vietnam that they [inaudible]...their duty, they didn't pay attention to what the government would think?

**FM:** Yeah, I think all that came after Vietnam. I honestly, I just don't remember... I just could not picture myself in the field, you know, carrying my rucksack and

[inaudible]...and debating about Lyndon Bane Johnson's policy on Vietnam. I mean, you know, you didn't get books in the field, you didn't get radios on the field. I mean, we didn't have any of this crap in the field. We didn't, I mean, I didn't walk around during the day playing my FM radio. I mean, that's insanity, too. I always get tickled...because you know, all this stuff is weight. You've got to carry so much food, if you want to eat. And you got to carry so many [inaudible]...you got to carry so many grenades, you got to carry so much ammunition. And this stuff is heavy. And I just feel, I just couldn't see carrying tape recorders and radios and having philosophical arguments in the field. It just didn't happen, you know. So...you know, I would have found that rather comical to see some guy pull out communist doctrine and a couple of manifestos and suddenly starting quoting something philosophically debating Richard Nixon's probable causes for his sexual inadequacies that caused his [inaudible].... I just don't think that would have happened, you know. Again, I think that's [inaudible].....

**MM:** Okay, how, how did you or...how was your reaction afterwards, say five, ten years afterwards?

**FM:** I think Vietnam to me was...learned me that the only person you can trust is yourself. That the people in the United States is very fickle. That if we're going to do something, then we need to look at it from a historical perspective first. Vietnam wasn't the first war that [inaudible]..shuns. I mean, that happened in World War II, that happened in World War I, that happened in the Civil War and that happened, you know, in the American Revolution. I mean, the rich never did fight. And all these senators sons, they all know how to skip out and avoid serving their country. So, I think looking

back on it, it's just simply...I have to be aware that this country historically does not reward it's war heroes. That if you're, if you believe that life, life's main accomplishment is how rich you become, or how much power you get, or if you become senator or a president, if that's your belief, then you avoid wars. My believe is that your importance in life is what you're willing to do for your fellow man or woman. And in doing it, means more than just talking it. It's walking the walk. You can talk the talk, but you need to walk the walk. And most of these people were unwilling to walk the walk. It's very easy to get rich in this country. It's very easy to get a nice position in this country. But I don't believe that's what life is. When I go to bed at night, I sleep well. Because I know I've done more than 90% of these people will ever have done for this country. And that's a good feeling. I didn't know that ten years ago. And I try to convince the vets that they need to go home and sleep a little easier. So that's, I guess that's how I look at it.

**MM:** Well, that's a [inaudible]...patriotism, do you think that was....we lacked a lot of that or we still do or....?

**FM:** I worry about people that wrap themselves in the flag, you know, that kind of worries me. But uh...I think again, I don't know if it's child waving or what, but I think it's important that you know democracy comes at a price. And just sitting around on your butt and talking about how good a patriot you are doesn't cut it. You have to be willing to sacrifice. And for someone to say, "Well, Vietnam was just not really a war, and so uh, I've decided not to go," no, that's crap. You know, you have the government and you can debate all day whether your [inaudible]...is trustworthy or what. If you elected those people to government, okay, it was your vote to put 'em in. And you're saying



you have confidence in their abilities, all right. So you elected them and they draft you. You know, that's the bottom line. That's why you put 'em in office. And suddenly for these people to talk about how screwed up the government is and how they have all these intellectual ideas, uhm...I think again, I guess it just...just hits me very hard, the irony of that. It's just that, are you telling me that they're so intellectually deprived that they haven't thought through that I'm the guy that said this guy would be a good leader and said I want to go back and bad-mouth him because he didn't give me what I wanted? Well, you're the one that elected him. Un-elect him. And you know, you don't wait until someone says "We're going to get, we're going overseas to fight a war," to say I'm against the war. You make that clear by your votes. This guy is a hawk, this guy is a dove. Who do you want to vote for? You know..... And I think patriotism is a very noble thing. And I think it implies that you're willing to make sacrifices for your country. And it implies that you'll do more than talk patriotism. It means you go out and you do things for your country. And it's been dead in the United States for a long time. I do believe that these young kids, I see some true patriotism in the kids that are in Saudi Arabia right now. I don't see it in these people that burp when they're on the street and say they're supporting these people in Saudi Arabia. They're not supporting anything. But they're getting their BMW gas, you know. Okay. Enough of this.

**MM:** That's...I think that's just about....all I have. Do you have trouble...I think, for instance, do you have trouble trying to convince Vietnam veterans that they were, that they showed their patriotism...or is that something that doesn't even come up in the discussion?

**FM:** I have, again because they've been giving this double message that somehow you were a bad guy for serving your country, that you were stupid, that the rest of us stayed home and now we've got our good jobs. You went to Vietnam so you're stupid. I have a hard time convincing them that, you know, they can trust the government, it wasn't the government that betrayed them, it was their fellow 75 million patriots here. When citizens turn against citizens of a country, that country is divided. And you know, as Abraham Lincoln said, "A nation that's divided cannot stand". We are all citizens of the United States in this particular incident. And we are not together. If citizens support citizens, then that's not happening on this type issue. I mean, in a democracy, you're free to express opinions and differ. But citizens support citizens. That doesn't mean I support your idea, I support you. And in this country, the veterans now feel like they were betrayed by their government. The thing you make them understand is that the government didn't betray you, you know, that you were right because you did what you were told to do. Okay. Because your fellow person disagreed or whatever, then we get into an argument of, you know, well, if 75 million people say I'm wrong, then am I wrong? What were your convictions at that time? What did you want to do? Why were you going to do it? I mean, why would you go overseas 7,000 miles, get shot at, watch your best friends die, get abused terribly, if you didn't have a belief. And, you know, how strong is someone else's belief that doesn't go overseas, that doesn't see any atrocities, blasts at you when you come back, has a better job than you, and has learned to whine to get their way? I mean, who do you really want to be? And a lot of times it's just making them look at reality. Which person, you know, excluding you or

excluding...which of these people would you rather be? And they suddenly realize that they're still buying that message that somehow they were wrong for going to Vietnam, when they weren't wrong for going to Vietnam. You know, they were just doing their job.

**MM:** Wonder why people are...that war is so cruel? [inaudible]..... I wonder is it education, or lack of, that .....?

**FM:** Again, when you have.....

**END OF SIDE 1 - BEGIN SIDE 2**

**FM:** They're real angry because their wives left them or something. And I find out that they've been running around on her and they've done this. And they've just done all these unbelievable things. And that's where they are ashamed of their own actions. Well, I believe the people that say that, you know, I believe the majority of them are ashamed that they weren't, you know, fighting. That they're....

**MM:** [inaudible]....

**FM:** Yeah, and the best way to vent my anger is take it right to the source. This person just came back, they did something that I'm afraid to do, or whatever. I mean, we see at schools, when I go to the university and I see a kid that's really studying hard and really trying to learn, I suddenly feel a lot of people making fun of him or her. And I go, "Geez, this is insanity." I mean, why? Because you know, they, for some reason, they shouldn't be doing this. But what they want is a mys-, mystical belker that goes all the way like this, and everybody's gonna get A's and B's and none of us are gonna study. And if someone's willing to work and someone's willing to work for their convictions,

then we don't make fun of them. And these people in their lifetime had never had to suffer anything for their convictions. They didn't go to Vietnam, they were, you know, they were the silver spoon generation, you know, Mickey Mouse and all this other crap. And they got everything they ever wanted. And you know, it's just "Me work?" I can remember this one girl asking me, "What's that? What's that?", that she touched my brow and it was sweat. And she goes, "Oh, my goodness." And you know, this guy was telling him about, you know, like staying for 20, 21 hours in the field in Vietnam. "Ah, and they didn't pay you? Oh, my goodness." I mean, the two concepts are so different. I mean, people that understand sacrificing for a cause and people who have been handed everything in their life on a plate, are never gonna understand each other. It's going to take a very long time. And uh, I would get very frustrated. I think a lot of people would get very frustrated, trying to get those two to see each other's point. Because it's important that some day they do see the point. But most of the people that have been given everything handed to them, it's like the old myth of, it's like in the male, when the very rich child insisted that two and two is five, he didn't give a shit that two and two was four. Because his daddy was rich and you were unimportant. And that's what I see here. "Hell, I've got my Beamer, I've got my Rolls, I've got all this money. I don't care if you're right. I've got the money." And you know, I said we've wrestled with that problem for four or five thousand years or more, so....I don't see us having that in any time soon.

**MM:** Mmm-hmm. That's, the fighting in the fields, do you have to have...what are some of the problems that...[inaudible]...I read where some people still have nightmares, the

stories and things....how do you deal with that?

**FM:** Again, again, you talk out, again it's post traumatic stress disorder, you talk out all the things that you couldn't talk about. Because you were a bad person. John Wayne never let killing 50 Japanese bother him, see? So here's this veteran that's killed someone and it bothers him. And we know that's not normal. You mean killing people bothers you? And so, a lot of time I'll exaggerate. And I'll take an approach of making it sound so ridiculous that the veteran starts to laugh. And if someone laughs, that's nice. Because it releases a lot of tension and you then you go and you start talking about probably what normal reactions to this would be, if there is such a thing as a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. And we'll talk about that for a while. Yes, you know, the sub-conscience is pushing dreams up to the conscience, etc., to try to get the conscience to deal with them. And if they've been buried, you're not supposed to [inaudible].... If it causes a lot of nightmares.... And again, the way you process it, [inaudible]....you start talking about...how do you expect that this possibly came about? What would you relate that dream to in your life experience? Do you think it's all right to cry over a friend dying? What was that male macho image? What, what really does that say about us? And, and I think also, a key point here is that it also depends on the culture. Out in California the culture is much different than West Virginia. Males in California are different than males in West Virginia...to a degree, and in how you were raised. You know, what's the stereotype male in this area? What's the stereotype in that area? And so, the Vietnam experience was very different for each of them, you know. So that has to be addressed also.

**MM:** What, what do you find the majority of the West Virginia veterans, I mean, see [inaudible]....

**FM:** One is that male [inaudible].... image. I mean, husbands in charge of the family, the father's responsible for bringing the food in, and there's this very strong stereotyping of the male being the head of the family and the woman having no rights. And you know, [inaudible]....hard times. And so, with that, first you have to understand that, yes, if you want to be head of the household, that's well and good, and yes, if you want to be completely in charge of the wife, if she's accepting of that, that's well and good. But, people do have a need at times to cry, or a need at times to release anger, wherever it happens to be that that's dealing with. I mean, I can't take, I don't think I can take my beliefs on a relationship and push it on someone else. I believe just what makes me feel good makes me feel good. What makes you feel good is gonna make you feel good. And if that's what it's doing, then we'll just talk it out. The person is incongruent, if the person is, and as we've seen with the Vietnam vet, is one side of him has a lot of remorse about killing someone, and the other part is saying men don't feel. So then there's an incongruence and we have to learn to be congruent. And, and that's what we work at. But again, you know, that incongruence can get even more imbedded because there's all these positive things that a male's supposed to be. And when we do gender differences, it's ironic that when they talk genders, they talk about the female as understanding and sympathetic and etc. She has all kinds of positive virtues. And the male has aggressiveness and emotional numbing and a couple other things. So it's real interesting, some of the ways you have to go about this with your group.

**MM:** Okay. And so, like West Virginia veterans, I suppose, they would be more...is it more difficult to get them to, to express their feelings or their fears because they have this male ....?

**FM:** No...well, yeah. To a degree it is. Yet, also it's like a relief when they suddenly realize this is just a [inaudible]. I can honestly do this. And I have someone I can share this with. And, and once they've shared it they feel, you can tell there's a dramatic difference in the person, they feel really good about themselves. They suddenly get, "Gee, I'm still a male," you know, "it's all right for me to be upset that I killed a person in Vietnam." And there's this great realization that it's all right. You know, it's all right to, to mourn for a friend that died, it's all right to be unhappy that your father died in some God-forsaken coal mine. Whatever happens to be the issue, it's also tied into Vietnam. So...it has some pluses.

**MM:** Does uh, what other characteristics or is there a difference, since you've counseled another state, about the West Virginia veterans, or is that...is there...[inaudible]...

**FM:** I think, now, West Virginia vets aren't the only people I see that have this male macho image. I mean, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York. I mean, you know, it's, you could almost take the whole Eastern side, maybe except for California even. But there's just a large percentage have a very male image here. And it's not just West Virginia. It's a male image period, that I have the problem with. And then, I just, you know, there's...a veteran is a veteran, and, and the differences would be very hard for me to define. Because each state seems to think that its veterans did more than any

other veterans in the war. And I don't, you know, veterans are veterans. Each veteran served its country. That's the bottom line. That's why I work with them.

**MM:** Okay, I think that's all I have.

**END OF INTERVIEW**