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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE 2/7/86

Fredrick Donovan
(Signature - Interviewee)

10 Brum H, 11 Rd

(Address)
Charleston, WV

DATE 2/7/86

Jack Henney
(Signature - Witness)

DONOVAN, FREDERICK W.
2/17/86
WVW-2G6

John: This is Friday, February 7, 1986. This is John Hennen. I'm interviewing Dr. Fred Donovan in his office at the Shawnee Hills Mental Center in Charleston, West Virginia, for the Oral History of Appalachia Vietnam veterans project. [audio difficulties] I think we're solid now. Okay, do you prefer I call you Fred or Dr. Donovan?

Fred: Fred.

John: Okay. Fred, we'll just get a general life history background before going into your work here and with the VVA. Where were you raised, a little bit of family history.

Fred: Okay. I was raised in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. It's a small farming community, I guess you could say, resort area now more than it was then, in Northeastern Pennsylvania in the Pocono's. And my father was a farmer. I'm the eldest of four children, and uh, you know, grew up on a farm with my grandparents and parents.

John: Attended high school in that area?

Fred: Yes. Started out, went to a one-room school, actually on the corner of our property, on the farm for the first five years, then transferred into the Honesdale consolidated school system, and went through all high school, junior high and all that.

John: And when did you join the service? And did you enlist or were you a draftee?

Fred: I was drafted in I guess it was February of '69, and I was in graduate school at that time. (John: At...?) I was at the University of Iowa at that time, in graduate school.

John: Sixty-nine. I forgot to ask you what year you were born.

Fred: I was born in 1946.

John: Forty-six, okay. Drafted while in graduate school. What were you studying in grad school?

Fred: Clinical psychology, same field that I'm in.

John: Which is what your degree's in?

Fred: Right. I had gone to Penn State previously. I graduated in '64.

John: What were your, just generally, what were your attitudes?

Fred: Graduated in '68, high school in '64. (John: Okay) It could be confusing if you don't clarify that.

John: What was your response to the possibility of being drafted and when the call came? Were you ready to go, or did you have doubts?

Fred: Oh, I had lots of doubts. You know, I was pretty convinced at the time that it was a mistake, you know. You know, it's not the action the country ought to be taking. In terms of myself, I guess I was fairly apathetic, or maybe I even sort of denied what was going on to me personally, and just sort of blindly forged ahead with my professional career, even though I knew I really was going to be drafted. You know, I knew I had deferment through undergraduate school, but did not have one for graduate school, of course. And I realized I would be drafted. And so I sort of just went to graduate school until I got drafted.

John: Now, at that time, was the lottery in effect or did that come...(Fred: That came later)...that came one year later, I think. And you got your orders for Vietnam?

Fred: Yes, I went to basic training and the AIT, is what they call it, the next level or whatever, at Fort Dix. And then I got my orders there to go to Vietnam.

John: And how long were you in the country before ... (Fred: Before I was wounded?) Uh-huh.

Fred: I was uh...well, I was, it's interesting. I was looking at my papers the other day

and it says 52 days. I'm not sure whether that includes the time I was in the hospital in Japan or not. But I went over there in July and in August, I was out by the end of August some time. So, it wasn't a very long time. It was, you know, somewhere between 30 and 50 days, some place in there. A little over a month, I guess.

John: And you lost a leg?

Fred: Right, below the knee.

John: And where was your rehabilitation? When you got back to the states?

Fred: At Valley Forge Hospital, right outside of Philadelphia.

John: Is that the same hospital Dave Evans....?

Fred: No, Dave was in Philadelphia, where was he at? Was at a Naval hospital. I can't recall the name of it right now. But it's not the same.

John: I was wondering. It had been about the same time I think.

Fred: And we sort of knew the folks over there, particularly amputees. You know, we used to go to the same prosthetic shop in town. And you know, we'd hear about the folks coming over from, you know, the Naval hospital.

John: So did you return to Iowa then?

Fred: No, I decided to switch graduate schools and went to the University of Illinois.

(John: Champagne?) Champagne, Urbana. Yeah.

John: What was it like going back to school after your experience in Vietnam?

Fred: Uh...that's probably...it was really difficult, not the school work particularly. But I found the, the attitudes of the, you know, I just felt not a part of it, you know, somebody who, you know, was doing something that most people disapproved of, and you know,

that really affected me. And it was real difficult.

John: Was there considerable anti-war sentiment by that time on the Illinois campus?

Fred: Yes. Yes. You know, amongst my classmates, amongst everybody. And, you know, I didn't really disagree with that. But I felt that some of it was directed toward the veteran personally. And that was difficult to handle.

John: And when you finished up your masters program, did you come to West Virginia right after that?

Fred: No, I did a doctorate up there. (John: Oh, yeah, I guess you would have) Yeah. And, yeah, and then I came to West Virginia after, when I finished my doctorate. I moved to, to Fayetteville, actually. I worked for [inaudible]... And it's very interesting. I noticed, at that point, a major shift in attitude toward me as a Vietnam veteran. It was, I mean, it knocked me over it was so noticeable. That the folks in Fayetteville, you know, really thought that that was a good thing that I had done. And I was sort of respected for having served, and you know....no matter how they really felt about the war. Although I imagine, there was a lot more people sort of pro-you know, our involvement. Nevertheless, as a veteran, you know, I felt very much accepted, you know, accepted into the community, where I never really felt that, you know. I always felt a certain tension in Illinois amongst my classmates, in particular.

John: But you didn't get that as much here?

Fred: Oh, really not at all. I mean, it was just like a flip-flop in Fayetteville. And you know, I can remember really talking to some folks about it. Saying, you know, "This is really different, you know, I really feel more accepted."

John: Now, that's interesting. Because you're coming from another part of the country. Most of the people I've talked to were from this area originally. Well, at least, at least, coming from another part of the country a good while. We always hear about the traditional attitudes toward military service in this area, respect for authority, willingness to do the patriotic duty. From your perspective, mid-Western experience, and your work with the VVA since you've been in this area, was that undermined at all by the experience in Vietnam? Were there doubts cast upon that traditional patriotic chore, respect for authority among West Virginia soldiers? Have you found that in your work here?

Fred: Gosh, I don't really know. I don't have, you know, sort of a pre-picture of it here. Because I don't know what it was like. You know...what strikes me is that there was, is still a lot of it left now. You know...I think that was what I was picking up, you know, not amongst the soldiers necessarily, but the community at large were still very supportive...you know. You know, I would say yes, in terms of the mid-West and that certainly that was undermined, you know.

John: When...when did you come involved with the....well, the VVA was organized in '77? About that time, I think?

Fred: Yeah. And I don't really know when I got involved. I was sort of involved early on, and then became pretty inactive and didn't really do very much, other than just be a member and pay my dues. And then got involved again oh, I'd say...well, about two years ago a little bit and then a little bit more last year, and now I'm pretty active. I'd say I've been pretty active for the last 15 months or so.

John: And did you first become involved with the Charleston chapter? 38?

Fred: Yes, that's where most of my involvement was.

John: And at that time, was Jim Rogers still the president of that chapter?

Fred: Yeah, Jim was president at the time..well, I was, attended meetings before Jim was president. And then, during, while he was president, then there was that lapse when I wasn't very active. And then came back. And when I came back let's see, who was president? Rick was president. (John: Rick?) Rick...Richards, Rick Richards.

(John: Oh, yeah, okay)

John: When did you join the state council? That's an elected

Fred: Right, I was elected to that last summer, representing the 38.

John: And what do you see, some of these questions are gonna be pretty general. What do you see as the role of the state council? It appears to me that it sort of evolved from the, the small almost public relations-oriented group to more of an activists lobbying type organization. Has it became more formalized in the last couple of years, the work of the VVA?

Fred: I think it's becoming more formalized really only very recently. And I think only since Ernestine has been director of the state council have we...really taken a more, you know, business-like sort of thing, having business meetings and making sure we vote on everything and the majority rules and that sort of thing. We're certainly doing a lot more of that. I also see the state council limiting the issues that it speaks out on to more of those that are clearly associated with veterans issues, particularly Vietnam veterans issues, and being an advocate and a lobbyist advance, causes that are

specific to Vietnam veterans. You know, not that we're not going to get involved with some other things, too. But I think there's been a flip-flop in terms of priorities. And I think Dave was planning on talking to you about what the state council did back in his days. And I think if you look at some of the newspaper clippings that he's going to show you, you'll see that, you know, the issues, there were a lot of issues that were pretty general, you know. And that now the focus has turned more to the strictly Vietnam veterans issues.

John: Is that reflective of overall growth in the organization? Is that the same type of process that's going on at the national level, isn't it?

Fred: Yes, but this is really independent of that. And it was happening before the national actually passed an amendment saying that state council's can't get involved with these other things. But, you know, we sort of, our movement here, predated that. For me, it was that we're not gonna get our own work done. You know, we're not gonna get the things done for Vietnam veterans, unless we really focus ourselves on, that we're not large enough at this time, that we don't have enough energy, unless we really target what we want to do. You know, it's nice to speak out about everything, but maybe you're not able to do much about anything. So let's, you know, agree on what are our priorities and put all the effort that we have into that.

John: Is it possible that speaking out on a wide range of issues in a way undermines the legitimacy say, with the state legislature, or...in any way puts them off or...?

Fred: I think that there's probably a possibility of that. I was speaking to some guy just yesterday that called me, said that well, he'd been a member some time ago, but he

was sort of put off. And he was talking about Chapter 38, about their radical attitudes and stuff. And I think what he was saying was not that we are a radical on the veterans issues, but some of these other things he didn't agree with. And I think that's the problem when you start speaking out on these other things that, you know, the veterans movement split down to the line on a lot of these things, you know. Should there be, you know, should we be involved in Central America? Well, 50% think one way, 50% think another way. And if an organization like ours takes that as their foremost position, you loose half of those members. While, in fact, we are really unified, you know, almost totally on issues that are [inaudible] to us. I mean, there isn't any question about what we want on Agent Orange. And everybody, you know, wants the VA to really look at the research and begin to compensate people who have been damaged by it. There's no disagreement about that. And you know, while some people on the outside and the VA and other places, might thing that's radical, be pushing that within the veteran's movement, there's no disagreement about it. Or least among Vietnam veterans. Now, there probably-, there is some within the larger veterans movement. And you know, I think David will probably be able to tell you some of the resistance that they got initially when they took on Agent Orange and the traditional veterans groups didn't want to have anything to do with it. Didn't want an Agent Orange study in the state, didn't think they needed it.

John: That leads to another question. What...how is the relationship between the VVA and the traditional veterans organizations evolved or changed in the last few years? I know for instance at one point, the national commander of the VFW called Robert

Muller a communist, or a communist sympathizer. How has that changed in the last few years, or has it?

Fred: Well, I don't know. I think it's changed somewhat on the national level there, whatever they call them, the [inaudible]...commander of the VFW, was a Vietnam veteran. And so when, during his reign, I think some overtures were made to, you know, patch things up. But certainly on a local level I don't things have changed at all. That there's still, there's still problems. You know, a good example of that, is the movement to have a Vietnam memorial on the Capitol grounds? And there was, you know, a resolution passed last year in the senate, you know, urging the governor to set up a commission, which he did. And the veteran, other veterans, have reacted against that saying "No," that they don't want that, that there are other memorials on the Capitol grounds and that what they really want is an all-wars memorial, a memorial that would, one memorial would take care of the Spanish-American veterans, World War I, World War II, Korean War, you know. And what I think that shows is a real, real lack of sensitivity to the needs of Vietnam veterans. I mean, these, these other veterans organizations, their leadership don't have the faintest idea what the problems are of Vietnam veterans and being accepted and feeling that we haven't been welcomed home, you know. You know, they're just seeing that this is just another memorial that's the same as, you know, and we all ought to have equal number of memorials on the Capitol grounds. And you know, maybe that's true. But that certain ignores a glaring problem for both Vietnam veterans and this country. Because there's lots of folks that have problems wanting to welcome Vietnam veterans home, too. And they don't have

an opportunity to do that, like a memorial would provide them with. And, you know, they're not aware of those problems. I mean, they're [inaudible].... And they see, see us through those glasses. That's why we need a VVA.

John: I was gonna say, does the VVA and the state council, is that part of their agenda, is to point out the differences that their constituency is going through? Even...it would seem that other veterans by, of other wars, by this time would be aware of that. But you can't assume that, can you?

Fred: No. You know, in some ways, this might not be true. But it seems to be that in some ways, veterans of other wars are less able to see it than people who aren't veterans. I mean, you just talk to the average, you know, grandmother out there, or mother, and they understand what happened to Vietnam veterans and how they weren't welcomed home and how the veteran got blamed for losing the war and stuff. But you talk to a veteran of World War II and he doesn't see that. Because he, again, I think sees things through his glasses and you know, he sees it, filters everything as World War II.

John: Do Vietnam veterans still get the cry-baby [inaudible]...put (FD: Sure) on 'em by other groups?

Fred: Sure do, sure do.

John: Now...it seems to me that the other veterans organizations would be making a serious effort to take care of that problem, because their pool of potential recruitments is Vietnam veterans.

Fred: Yeah. You think that they would. But if you don't see, you don't see.

John: It's just not happening around here.

Fred: Right. I don't see it happening. I'm sure....I mean, we get invitations all the time to join, you know, and they'd like to have us as members. But if you don't have the vision of what the people need, you're not able to deliver it. I truly think that that's it. It's not, you know, that they...you know, they want to screw us or something. It's just they don't have any idea what our needs are.

John: Digressing just a little bit...could you give us an outline of just what are some of the special needs of Vietnam veterans that could be related to the nature of the war itself, conduct of the war, and their, the adjustment period, just a brief outline of those.

Fred: Okay, one of them certainly is, you know, a welcome home, you know. And that could be done a lot of different ways. Now, I think you see that happening in society now. We're turning around and you know, we're finally able to deal with it. But, you know, that's been a major problem, that veterans haven't felt that they haven't fit. You know, I was talking about when I was at, you know, the University of Illinois, when there wasn't a place for me. And I, I done something that everybody thought was wrong, you know. And then you have other people think that we're doing the right thing, but we were, of course, poor soldiers and you know..... So that's a need. And Vietnam veterans need to be able to support themselves in that, and you know, to make sure that we don't believe that. But we understand that we have a place and then to be helping society, you know, welcome them back. True things, like memorials. True things, you know, like special programs and make sure people get back in jobs programs or whatever. But, you know, signifying that the-, make sure Jane gets this

[referring to telephone ringing], yeah, she'll get it. So that's, that's one thing. You know, another thing is certainly PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. For a lot of factors, there's a lot more folks suffering from it, you know, from the Vietnam conflict than other wars. Although that was certainly there, it was unrecognized. And, and we just don't have [inaudible]....facilities. I see that is something that, you know, we as an organization need to be pushing for. Because its not recognized by the VA and certainly by the Service Organizations at the priority that it needs to be.

John: I don't mean for this question to sound spectacular or uh, but how about the instance of drug addiction in returning Vietnam veterans as opposed to other wars? Big difference?

Fred: At least that's what the figures say. Certainly toward the end of the war. You know, Vietnam's a lot of different wars. It wasn't the same for everybody. And you know, I think that when I was over there, I was over there just when the disillusionment was setting in, you know, in '69, when things were, you know, coming apart. But you know, you know, there wasn't, at least where I was, a lot of drug addiction. I didn't see it. People were smoking pot and that was about it. But I think from that period on into the '70s, I think there was a lot of addiction, which came out of the character of the war, the corruption of the war, and you know, the hopelessness and meaninglessness of it all. You know, that carries on. It's got to compound things, you know, the psychological adjustment.

John: What do you see...I know that like this time a year ago there was a lot of media coverage of the Tet anniversary and the fall of Saigon. Did that serve as a stimulus for

more awareness and the problems of the Vietnam veterans, was that sort of a glossing over sort of a one-time payback to the Vietnam vets? And did it generate anything....?

Fred: You know, I didn't see that as helping the Vietnam vets too much. That was sort of celebrating the downfall and all. Other things, you know, I've seen as being more useful, you know, like the memorial, movies, books, that are beginning to accurately talk about it. You know, the New York memorial. Did that happen during that period? You know, I don't know when that happened. But that seemed to be (JH: I think so, yeah) in the parade. But as far as, you know, the anniversary itself, no. You know, I just think generally society is, you know, had enough time to be able to come back in terms with it. Another issue, before we get off the issues, of course, is Agent Orange. I mean, a lot of folks were exposed and this is, you know, something that is purely, you know, Vietnam veteran issue. I mean, everybody is ignoring it and it's almost symbolic of the way, you know, veterans were treated when they came back. They were sort of ignored. And of course, it's not the first time. It's the same thing as the atomic veterans. They were sort of ignored, too. And you can understand why people don't want, you know, everything to come out and that [inaudible]...be established. You can understand that. But nevertheless, it has to be done.

John: Some...I'm sure that some vets feel that, that there's direct construction by, by the government and the business, I won't say business world, but industry that's most directly affected. What, what are your sentiments along that line?

Fred: I don't know. You just have to guess. I would expect, sure there is. I mean, if you were president of a company that, you know, made Agent Orange, I mean, would

you want, you wouldn't want to expose it. Would you want your company to go into bankruptcy?

John: Yeah, which is what it's gonna mean.

Fred: Sure. You wouldn't want it. I mean, the same thing if you're, you know, running the Veterans administration. And what's that gonna mean to your budget? I think the Veterans Administration has got its own bureaucracy that just slows things down that really isn't always necessarily meaning to, you know, be malicious. But that's part of the process. You know, it seemed like they pretty well, you know, if I can get the issues correct, you know, Jim would be better on this. But Congress directed them to come up, you know, what are exactly the standards, the proof that will be needed to establish that there is a causal link and they basically didn't do that. They won't put in writing what the evidence has to show in order for us to start compensating people. I mean, i don't know what that is. But being an obstructionist....I mean, why can't they say? It's just what we want to show. I mean, when the evidence shows this, and all they can do is write general stuff, the studies have to be well done, etc., etc. to be reviewed. Well, that's bullshit, because nobody can hold them to it later.

John: I need to flip the tape over.....

END OF SIDE 1 - BEGIN SIDE 2

John: You were making a few statements about Agent Orange. And I wondered if you...how do you feel that the, this is getting a little more in the area of policy. But how was the, how was the, the impact of the budget cutting process that this country's obviously going to have to go through in the next 25 years. What effects do you see

that as having on Vietnam veterans?

Fred: Yeah, I'm afraid it's going to cut right into programs for them. I'm, I'm afraid that folks who have conditions that are clearly attributable to the war, that result from their service, are gonna get less service because of that. You know, right now the VA is set up to serve veterans for all sorts of things, whether it's directly attributable to the war. Now, I think the political pressure is gonna keep that happening, and so we're just gonna cut back on all sorts of things, including those people who have clear service connected disabilities. They either won't get service connected, or they will and they won't get the service they need. You know, that's one of the things I feel about PTSD, is that there aren't very many people service connected for PTSD, compared to the number of people who are actually suffering from the disorder. This whole....the way the VA deals with things is to give people money and basically buys them off for the disability. And what they really need is treatment. (John: Ongoing...) Right, ongoing, they need. You know, they've developed really sophisticated in-patient units now, and really the VA has funded that, and you need to give them credit for that. But nowhere near the number of beds that are necessary to treat all the people that are suffering the effects of the war. But what happens at some place like Huntington, they don't have the resources or feel they don't have the resources to devote to giving psychological treatment when they got all these 50, 60-year old men coming in with heart attacks from the natural aging process, with which they feel they need to take care of. And I just think there needs to be another system. I don't know if everybody needs to be compensated and given money for having that. But what they need is to be able to get

the treatment that would help them.

John: [coughing] I'm sorry, I have to get a drink. We were talking about PCS, PTSD and the possible cut-back in treatment.

Fred: Well, there's not enough treatment now. What's going to happen to this cut-back? What's gonna happen to folks who don't have an official recognition of it, because they're not service connected, but they still have problems.

John: Is that one of the areas that there's a conflict with traditional veterans groups, also treating PTSD?

Fred: Yes, I would say that's not a recognized area that they're certainly pushing that. I suppose that's part of the cry baby syndrome, that, that we should have been stronger.

John: Where is the...I mean, you're sort of coming out of the service already close to working on a doctoral degree. I would assume you are more the exception than the rule of coming home and your employment prognosis is (Fred: better) stronger than others. (Fred: Right) What's...the capital employment profile of the West Virginia Vietnam vets right now?

Fred: I don't really know. Except that just my impressions that they have-, that employment is bad in West Virginia to begin with. There's high unemployment figures and it's worse for Vietnam veterans. And so, I don't really know more specifics than that.

John: No real swings one way or another in the last couple of years?

Fred: In terms of things getting better?

John: Yeah.

Fred: I wouldn't see any indication to that.

John: Now, did you go-, you were in Detroit [inaudible]...Convention, weren't you? As I understand it, there was a pretty heated contest between Mr. Muller and Mr.-, he was opposed pretty strongly in the election this year, wasn't he?

Fred: Right. It was a fairly close election. It was a very close election, actually.

John: And who was his opponent? His main opponent?

Fred: Who was his main opponent? [speaking to another person in the background]
[inaudible]....was another opponent.

John: Yeah. That was Dr. Jim Rogers, the other voice we just heard, who joined us. Well, is that...as you said earlier, the state council seems to be getting more directly involved in directing their energies towards areas specifically for veterans rights. The national organization seems to be going the same way, at least publically. Is that a valid assumption?

Fred: Certainly publically they're doing that. Because that, you know, Bob Muller and his organization certainly pushed very hard for that amendment to be passed that restricted the bill, the national, or state councils to speak out on issues that weren't, you know, directly pertaining to veterans issues.

John: Was that something you think that, that Bob wanted from his own standpoint, or just a realistic political move to broaden his base?

Fred: I don't know.

John: Or was he running scared? Worried about....

Fred: I don't know Bob Muller. I have never spoken to him personally. And so I don't have any inside tract to his feelings. He said that in his travels across the country he recognized that this was what, you know, the veterans movement wanted, that it was the diversity of opinion on all these issues and the movement was gonna be strong if they were able to accommodate people who had all those various views. Now, what his motivations were, I don't know. I would expect realistically that he wanted to get re-elected and he thought that some of the stands that he had taken in the past were unpopular, certainly with the portion of the membership, and that he wanted to do something to contain that problem. But on the other hand, he pushed it after he was elected. But he was re-elected president, and he still pushed it. So I would think there is other agendas there, also. Now exactly what they are, I don't know.

John: Membership is pretty consistently growing, isn't it?

Fred: Yes, that's...I think that they've had real good growth this last year.

John: What's the status of the, the national charter? I know we're getting a lot into national questions.

Fred: Yeah, you're asking me questions that you ought to be asking Jim, when you interview him next, because he certainly has more knowledge about them than I do. As I understand it, it's bottled up some place in the committee.

John: In the senate?

Fred: Yeah, Judiciary. I don't know.

John: Uh...given the sort of populization of the or the exploitation of the Vietnam War, and the movies in the last year or two, what sort of response do you personally have to

Ramboism and the marketing of that picture and other veterans that you're associated with in the organization?

Fred: Uh...I guess most veterans are disturbed by it. And I am, to the extent that it really portrays things so unrealistically. It's sort of a disservice to...to paint things in such black and white terms and to make it seem so easy and you know..... To really ignore any of the lessons that we hopefully might have learned about Vietnam and you know..... But on the other hand, I sort of don't take it very seriously. And I don't, I can't think that very many people do really believe that. Movies are fantasy trips that we all go to and it's entertainment and....you know. Realism is not always that entertaining. And it's like Indiana Jones. I mean, nobody really believes that, either. And sort of to me, Rambo is in the same sort of category. It's, it's fluff and everybody knows it's fluff. I can't get really upset about it, you know...because it's just another Hollywood production.

John: It's more for entertainment than to get across a particular message.

Fred: Oh, it's not getting across any message at all. It's to make money and to entertain people. I mean, to the extent that people believe that. It does do a disservice.

John: How is the relationship of the local VVA, if it's changed, since Governor Rockefeller left office, and what's the relationship of this current administration? Any better? Any worse? No change?

Fred: Well, I wasn't really involved with VVA that much with the old administration. I think that Rockefeller was pressed pretty hard on some issues. And we really haven't

had any issues or disagreements so far with the Moore administration. The Moore administration did say they supported the memorial, and hopefully, they're gonna continue to do that. We don't know whether they are or not. So far we haven't seen a very aggressive pushing of it. And you know, our fear, of course, is we're gonna wilt under the pressure of other organizations. I mean, if that happens, I think you're gonna see a quick souring of the relationship. But I can't really think of any major issues that we've dealt with...you know....so far.

John: One last question about the budget cuts. Is that gonna...do you think that's gonna directly affect the, the counseling centers? Are they gonna be cut back or maybe separated into the regional VA hospitals?

Fred: You know, I don't know. I think that, that program is already slated to be phased out. And I think it would have to be extended. And I'm not sure about that. But, that's already a short-lived program.

John: What do you they have? Like a 4-year funding, and then another 4 years, something like that?

Fred: Yeah. '87 or '89, or something like that, is supposedly the end of it. It would have to be extended. So I would think that it would be real hard battling to extend the program that's slated to be, you know, phased out. But that's been a very successful program.

John: Yeah. That's an impressive new center they've got downtown. Compared to the way they were (Fred: To what they did have) yeah.

Fred: It's not real impressive when it's compared to some other vet centers. (John:

Right) It may be the best that we could find in Charleston, I don't know. It's very much, it's like a clinic sort of atmosphere, I think.

John: Do you, in your practice, do you treat patients from all walks of life? I mean, you don't specialize...you're not a Vietnam veterans counselor, in other words?

Fred: Right. I'm not really a counselor, to tell the truth. I'm sort of in an administrative position. And so I don't really see people for counseling. Back when I was doing that, I wasn't a veterans counselor specifically. Although I had seen some veterans, I never really specialized in that.

John: Dr. Rogers is obviously planning a big change here soon. What are your...just part of the life history. We like to get an update. What are your immediate plans? Are you gonna be in the area, as far as you know, for a good while?

Fred: Yeah, I expect to be here.

John: Do you have family here?

Fred: Oh, no, no. But we developed some support systems here. I'm comfortable here. I like Charleston, you know. I like the work with the VVA, I like my job. And so there's really no reason to move. I mean.....

John: How about Chapter 38? That's the Charleston local. What's its status currently?

Fred: I think that it's getting strength. It's certainly gaining members, getting a fairly diverse range of members, all sorts of Vietnam veterans. From professionals to folks who just haven't adjusted at all, or are basically unemployed. And [inaudible]...people who aren't Vietnam veterans themselves. And I don't know what the high was. But certainly since I've been involved, that it's high in terms of membership.

John: Do you think that reflects the direction of dealing more directly with strictly veterans advocacy and maybe moving away a little bit from....

Fred: I think that would probably be too early for that to have had that sort of effect. I mean, you might have a couple of people who were, you know, attracted. I think it has to do more with just the general tone of the country. And if Vietnam veterans are willing to sort of be Vietnam veterans and to come out.... I mean, we're working real hard in the chapter to try to develop an organization structure, where's there's lots of folk-, where there's lots of slots for people to be involved in. So it's not just a few chapter offices that have all the responsibility. We're trying to diffuse that responsibility now amongst tons and tons of people. I think that's beginning to work a little bit. And I really see that blossoming within the next year. So that.... Because I think the folks out there are really ready to join and want to do something. And the place that we best see that is we have our annual corn sale at, at Vandalia. And people always came up to us then and we gained some members and talked to people. This year we did it at Regatta, and I don't know if it was a different crowd or what. But we seemed to get a much greater response at Regatta, in terms of people coming up and people joining the chapter. We got a lot of members following Regatta. And people who didn't join, but expressed interest and just got on our mailing list and all of that..... And so, one of our problems is visibility. People don't know where we are, how to find us. We don't quite have the resources yet to have a location.

John: You have like...floating meetings? One month you'll meet one place.....

Fred: No, no we always meet at the Kanawha County Courthouse Annex. But that's

not really a place that you can drop in. If I meet somebody on the street, I can't say, "Come down so and so, we're always there, drop into the office," and so it makes it difficult to meet us, having once a month meetings. Now our board meetings sort of float around. Sometimes we have them in this office, sometimes we have them other places. Wherever it happens to be convenient.

John: Are you currently the president?

Fred: No, I'm the treasurer.

John: Who are the other officers?

Fred: Mike Totten is president, and he works for DuPont. Ernestine is Vice-President. She's also president of the state council. [referring to Ernestine Thornton, another interviewee] Let's see, Frank Stulfer is secretary. Members of the board are: Danny Jones, who's the sheriff, and Rick Morgan, who's a stockbroker. And both of those folks aren't very involved, except when we sort of need their help. For example, when we sent the letter recently to the Governor, saying how important this memorial was to us, they were willing to sign that and say, "Hey, yes," and so, both of those folks have Republican political connections. And it was important to, you know, make sure the Governor knew that an establishment Republican Vietnam veterans were behind this issue.

John: Right. Is Rick Richards on the memorial?

Fred: Yes, he's been appointed to the commission. He's also a board member. David's a board member [referring to Dave Evans] uh, Larry Edwards is a board member. I guess that's it.

John: Rick's got some Republican connections?

Fred: Yes, yes. But not quite the sort that the sheriff of Kanawha County does.

John: Yes. [chuckles] How's the response been...I'm sure people pretty much knew Ernestine before she was elected. Has there been any adjust-, much of an adjustment for the membership and for her as...as...(Fred: Because she's female?) member of the state council, yeah, uh-huh.

Fred: No, I would say no. I certainly haven't seen any sort of problem, or anybody even thinking there's a problem because she's a female. Actually, I sort of think it's been a benefit, in terms of let's getting a little publicity out of it. Because it's sort of a unique thing, and people have noted that there have been several newspaper articles about it, and you know. So we've gotten a little attention because of that. But...and Ernestine was a combat nurse over there. And she certainly has the respect of people who served, and it is absolutely no problem with it.

John: Yeah, I was gonna say, that would almost be an instantaneous respect, I would assume, from a vet.

Fred: Yeah, yeah, and nobody has any feelings that she did less or anything like that. She can certainly hold their own, so there's...she's certainly not a shrinking violet, if you have interviewed her.

John: Yeah, I talked to her today.

END OF INTERVIEW