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WEST VIRGINIA VIETNAM VETERANS

AN INTERVIEW WITH: James F. Hill

CONDUCTED BY: John C. Hennen, Jr.

INTERVIEW DATE: 9/27/84

TYPIST: Gina Kehali Kates



## M A R S H A L L U N I V E R S I T Y

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DATE 9/28/84

John Henrich  
(Signature - Witness)

HILL, James F.  
9/27/84 TAPE 12a &b

John: This is September 27. This is John Hennen, working on the Vietnam Era Veteran's Project for the Oral History of Appalachia. I'm in, on uh, Dixie Street in Charleston, West Virginia with uh, James Hill, a veteran who's uh, volunteered to share some of his uh, life history with us and what's the cat's name, Dewfus?

Jim: Dewfus.

John: Dewfus is here, too. So, okay. J...you prefer Jim?

Jim: Yes, I do.

John: Okay uh, we just get a start here on your...your, little bit of background and upbringing uh, uh, might as well start out with where and when you were born.

Jim: I was born here in Charleston. Next week, a week from today, be 46 years ago. Uh, I was raised on the west side of Charleston, and I attended uh, school here, elementary and junior high and high school; graduated from uh, Stonewall Jackson High School in '56, late May of '56.

John: Uh, do you have any family still around Charleston?

Jim: Yes, uh, my mother uh, she lives on the west side still, in a housing project uh, and my sister lives on the west side also, up on the hill, Picadilly Street. Uh, my biological father's is uh, let's just say we're not close..., (uh-huh), never had any...,uh, Mother's and him divorced when I was quite young. He's just not in the picture. Mother's remarried shortly after she divorced him in '45, I believe, or who ever divorced who ever, I don't know. It doesn't make any difference. Basically I was raised by my stepfather, who died in my arms around four years ago of terminal cancer here in Charleston. But I considered him my dad, real dad.

John: Uh-huh. Uh, when did you en...when did you enter the service and what branch of the service were you affiliated with?

Jim: Okay, I entered the military the first time, oh, I'm what you call, or was, or and a rifle, but some were younger, so I'm probably a little bit older than the average veteran that you're talking to. (uh-huh) Actually, I'm almost 46. I entered the service the first time three weeks after I got out of high school. I...

John: You said that was 1956, right?

Jim: Yeah.

John: Okay.

Jim: I waited a week, thought about it, uh, I mean, I was only 17, and I needed my parent's permission. I decided I was

going to do it any way. It was one thing to do back in those days, it was the... just proper for a young man to go in the military. Then I turned in my two weeks notice where I worked. I worked at a uh, drugstore on the west side of Charleston. Worked that out, and the day following that I entered the military. Of course my mother did sign the approval papers. Entered the Air Force, spent four years in the Air Force, uh, all that was basically in the United States. Had one year up in Canada on a radar line; I'm a radar operator, pretty desolate duty up there. (uh-huh) Liked my work. I did it in the Air Force, but uh, rank was extremely slow in those days. I made E-3 in less than a year and got out in three years of. They had enough guts to ask me to re-enlist and I laughed at them. I would have liked to stayed in there; if I could have made more rank, I probably would have. After I got out of the Air Force, I became a professional bum for a couple, two and a half years. Upon leaving that I uh, I went to school here and there, worked here and there. I went to school in Cincinnati and Charleston, University of Cincinnati, West Virginia State, uh, University of Houston, University of Texas, North Carolina State, etc., etc. (uh-huh) Uh, for a semester each place, and move on. When the Cuban crisis happened in uh, '62, October of '62, I believe. I was in Houston and a lot of my friends where I worked there in Houston, were Cubans; Cuban refugees, and not..not yet, uh, U.S. Citizens. So, I decided I'd go down and kick Castro and Kruscher, backed down and I saw myself staring three years in an army base. But uh, a guy named Ho Chi Minh started something in Vietnam so my three years was taken up. Then I kept on that--being associated with Vietnam for a few other years. I spent a couple of years training when I went in the army in '62; went in October of '62; got myself exactly two years' training, Fort Polk, Fort Bragg, Fort Benning (59), 1830 (59) Air Corp, 11th Air Assault Division, which is usually part of first Aircab (60). And then the Gulf of Tonkin incident uh, up some of these, uh, some of the people's movement was supposed to, go over as a whole division. The rest of the division [coughs] pardon me, did later on go over. Do you mind if I smoke?

John: No, go ahead, sure. No, thanks.

Jim: And uh, but uh, that Gulf of Tonkin incident uh, made the honchos, the generals and whoever, people if anybody see they needed some help right away before they, you know, could get their division together. So I...my unit just accompanied --I was in a caribou is a fixed aircraft, stall aircraft short takeoff and landing..., (uh-hmm), under combat assaults, combat supports, and so forth. We were not over 64. I extended two months on that particular tour of duty in Vietnam uh so in order to get home for Christmas for...for eleven years, til I did get to come home for Christmas that Christmas in '65. Want me to go on? (sure) Uh, while I was in Vietnam that first time, I uh, decided to extend-i re-enlisted. While I was down in Saigon, you've heard the old story the guy gets drunk and re-enlists? (uh...) I never did believe that stuff but I did.

John: Is that the way it was?

Jim: Yeah, I'm surprised that that they um, do it cause I just wrote--I had to be held up, I was that intoxicated. I had a drinking...I would say I had a drinking problem than this I was only 24, 25, 26, something like that; I was more than a social drinker, (uh-hmm), at that time. My story of \_\_\_\_\_ you could see that it became more than social drinking to problem drinking, alcohol abuse, then alcoholic. But oh, I wasn't sorry I re-enlisted because um, this was ...looked like a good future to me, except for a war once in a while, well, for a man with a poor education, all I had was a high school education at the time, and I had done taken care of a lot of things going on back here in the states, um, it looked like a good deal. When I left Vietnam that time, I got sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, not...not the prison...(uh-hmm). There was an airfield there..., (right). Sherman Airfield at Fort Leavenworth. I was the airfield NCO most of the time; sometimes I was the airfield commander, you know, I was just an enlisted man, had an officer that he wasn't there too often, really didn't have too many uh, senior NCO's; I was the junior NCO at the time, and I went to school in Mississippi Air Force School. Went to that school previously when I was in the Air Force. And uh, about a year later, give or take a day, I was back in Vietnam.

John: 66, 67?

Jim: Yeah, oh, I forgot! When I went to Kansas, stayed a few months, I went to Mississippi, that school, stayed a few months, back to Kansas, stayed about one day and they were ready for me, they sent me to uh, to Germany. I forgot about Germany. I went to uh, Fifth Quarter in Germany but I couldn't handle the traffic.

John: Why?

Jim: Too damn much beer problems, too, out in the woods too much uh, although I was in 5th quarter, which supposedly we had a non-combat type of environment and attitude uh, we were clearly correlated with second armored division. They were right across the street to a certain degree, and they needed a couple of munition people and needless to say, I was one of the guys who was volunteered. They was in the woods all the time, you understand. When they went to the woods, I was there waiting on them. And they left the woods a few hours, a few days later after that, I would be in the weeds more than they were. I didn't like the duty...

John: When you say being in the woods, that means...

Jim: Out in the field...

John: Okay. Active. Okay...

James: Played war games, you know. I hated the weather, extremely cold over there. They wouldn't let me have no top on my jeep. I was driving around in the Brazilian Alps 20-30 below. And I didn't like the people up, they're arrogant, like we were lucky to whip them in two wars and the next time they're gonna get us.

John: They gear it up for the next one.

Jim: Oh, yeah, but they're getting ready. I don't think we gotta fear the Russians. I gotta fear the Germans, next time around. To get out of Germany, since I disliked it so much, I volunteered for 'Nam. Why? My drinking was becoming more and more of a problem. To a certain degree, I left it up, to start again as a request you might call it; I forgot the words, my crowd thought it would be best that I go. I went back to Vietnam-second tour, and then after I left Vietnam on that tour, I went back to Kansas again. Tried to make and hayseed out of me, I reckon. Uh, then I stayed there for about a year, give or take a day or two and then was a year also that \_\_\_\_\_ Kansas, Mississippi Air Force school and come back within a year, this time a year or two. Career Soldiers uh, were unofficially guaranteed a year by gift of status, but that didn't always work. Sometimes you got a day, sometimes two years, you know, depended on what they needed you know, your skill. And on that tour of duty in Vietnam, I...I extended my tour, if you extend it for 6 months, then that counted as a full tour, so that one made my fourth tour. I got a free 30-day leave anywhere in the world; free transportation, ext., etc., in order to keep you and right after that come the uh, well reduction in force; apparently Nixon signed a peace treaty uh, Vietnamized the war, you know, it was..., (uh-hmm), getting too many troops out, just slowly start shifting people out 'til shortly after I extended my tour, they decided that I...I wasn't needed, although they kept me for that six months. But uh, they stopped after that time, approving any more uh, extensions, they just didn't do that anymore. They were really trying to get rid of troops, and I think I mentioned earlier, my...my drinking uh, becoming more of a problem, although I was in a position of responsibility. When I went to work uh, it was getting to be a problem. I think I was using booze as an escape to a non-sentimental state of morality, the sort of things I did, thought I did, saw, thought I saw..., (uh-hmm), heard, thought I heard, so forth. Uh, I didn't really much go for drugs; I did smoke marijuana one tour, but I didn't do the other stuff, then. When I left Vietnam that time, I went to uh, Georgia, none of the crop after I left Vietnam that last time, uh, had orders for Fort Rucker, Alabama, and uh, decided I didn't want to go to Alabama, so I went down, \_\_\_\_\_ got that changed, went to Korea, and that's when my drinking really got to be a problem uh, got shuffled around, a lot due to my job, but a lot due to my irresponsibility, the drinking and also I was a group

corp trouble estoccer to replace \_\_\_\_\_ of no use, difficulties in that, and they knew I got results, they didn't care for my methods at times but I did get results. Vietnam was like Korea, I was pretty good at my work. Then I left Korea, well, got tied up with this lady in Korea, supposedly got her pregnant. We were gonna get married, but my tour of duty was up before we were able to accomplish that. They were not approving \_\_\_\_\_ extensions and I think personally to promote discouragement \_\_\_\_\_ when they're in there, so forth...

John: Did they do that to try to discourage you from uh, marrying a native?

Jim: Yeah. These...all kinds of communities, ~~unintelligible~~...didn't matter who it was, especially teen, let's say seventeen - eighteen year olds. (uh-hmm) Saw 'em for the first time, we'd fall in love with a girl..., (right), and go to bed with them. But uh, I was a 30, 31, 32 year old man or something like that at the time, but uh, I don't care if you're a hundred year old general, they're still going to go through all this b.s. they put you through. Then I went to uh, \_\_\_\_\_ Georgia. There I did get into a lot of difficulty after I got, well, I got in a little bit of trouble in Vietnam, the number of tours, \_\_\_\_\_ is what they call article fifteen in the army, and I had one of those in Korea also and in Georgia, I got a court-martial. Somewhere I think was my mute type you know, wasn't paying any one officer, being insubordinate and so forth.

John: Uh-hmm.

Jim: Never was reduced in rank, fortunately.

John: Was there a fine?

Jim: Supposedly you could not go back to Korea for three years, want your leave there. Well, I got back in fifteen months. Of course, I think my irresponsibility with the drinking got me out, got back to Korea, was a thirteen-month tour, didn't make it, they kicked me out of the army after seven months...

John: Kicked you out?

Jim: I got a honorable discharge due to unsuitability and unsuitability due to alcoholism. Probably the only reason I got a honorable discharge was uh, my war record. (uh-hmm) If...it wouldn't been so hot in Vietnam I would imagine that I would have gotten, uh, at best, the general, or undesirable or maybe even better conduct or I guess, I think, the worse you can get is dishonorable, I was not where near that category, the dishonorable category, but I was fairly irresponsible. I did manage to marry that girl, same one. She did have a child, now about five. And I thought it was mine and I knew that they'd been in contact with her, uh, since I got back. I

got kicked out in December of '72. I got back home, it was total chaos for years.

John: You're back in Charleston now?

Jim: Yeah, I came back to Charleston. I did fly, woke up in an airport in Chicago, two bottles of whiskey in my hand. A security guard uh, was gonna run me in for being a bum and a vagrant, and all that, you know, althought I had a ticket, because I didn't have a ticket, I guess that someone gave it to me. Well, I didn't know if I had a ticket or not; the last I remember was San Francisco; I don't remember even getting to Chicago. I thought for sure I had a ticket, he says, "where to?", and I hadn't the slightest idea and I looked at it, and it was Charleston. So, apparently in my drunken state in San Francisco, I decided to come back here, it was total chaos for a few years. Uh, even though I do work for the Board of Education as a janitor uh, all these don't take for, for about four and a half years. I still wasn't able to hold a job. I got run out of every damn apartment, was in and out of funny farms, uh, what I mean funny farms-places for alcoholics, drying out, (uh-hmm), rehabilitation, jailers. A few years ago I uh, believe it was five years ago, I quit drinking all together. I've been five years dry. That was one of the reasons I was going to, well, reject this, even though I uh, was drinking say the first few years, five or six years. I still knew education was the key, besides, you know, getting sober, which I realize I still didn't, still didn't want to, still didn't think I had a problem, I wouldn't realize it. And I started back at State, I didn't claim none of the hours I had taken there and so forth, just started it fresh. (uh-hmm) Started majoring then in political science. Well, I...I was a political science major but after a couple of semesters in that, I grew disenchanted, so I got in deep waters again and uh, took an introductory course in uh, social work, decided that was for me, major in social work. Pretty rough going those first couple years of school because I'd get drunk and wouldn't go to class or forget, you know, just irresponsible. Then when I got sobered up, I kinda glossed along and finished up fairly fast, although all together I was a student there nine years, for a four-year degree.

John: Did you find any uh, difficulties associated with being uh, in a different age group than the others students? Or I...I'm not sure about State; it may...it may be uh...

Jim: Yeah, there was a lot.

John: A lot of students that age there.

Jim: There was some difficulty, I was uh, like I said, mid...late thirties, early forties, and uh, was twice as

as most of my peers, almost twice as old. Some of them were in their twenties. On occasions, I would have somebody in my classes who was un, close to my age and I knew two who were even about my age. I believed in learning a year or two uh, or I'll say possibly, race this year or two fresh out of high school. As you get older and I hate to admit it, you don't remember as well new things, it's hard to uh, see them in your mind. Possibly ah, I don't think I would say uh, discrimination, I would have a class member, you'd have to uh, comprehend it or get out, you know. (uh-hum) there were a few comments made by the other students but uh, generally I just ignored those.

John: Were there many other veterans in school at that time?

Jim: No, very few. Even less now, probably. Uh, all veterans, especially Vietnam veterans, at least at State, they just didn't see or couldn't realize for one reason or the other education was big, or how you used it as the key to the future. I believe most of the other veterans who, uh, didn't or already had something called employment, didn't see the school was helping any. And the others who didn't go, weren't...were not physically or mentally able or there may have been other reasons, uh, like family problems, financial problems, some were just as anti-U.S. Government due to their experiences that even though this monthly outlay of VA benefits uh, they don't intend to do it. (Hmm) Figured they didn't have the luck of \_\_\_\_\_.

John: Is there...is there time limits on those benefits? I mean, do you have to use them up in a certain...

Jim: Yeah, there was. Mine was uh, I think, originally ten years. I believe it was extended once or twice uh, and I think it was originally for thirty-six hundred; I probably got it jacked up to forty-five. But I mean, mine's all finished. (uh-hmm) Like I can't get the VA off my back. They say I owe them money, which I probably do, but of course, I just had to sign \_\_\_\_\_ and taking my checks and getting drunk. I guess it's catching up with me. I don't rely on \_\_\_\_\_. Have a hell of a time paying it back, you know.

John: Now, let's...okay. Say it was, you spread out uh, your four-year course over about nine years. Was...were you constantly going like part-time or would you go for a year and cut it off and sit out a year or...

Jim: It was...it's quite varied. There would be times when I went to school, after I got out of the army uh, I'd go full-time and I...I wouldn't work at all. I would...I would live off, you know, what income I had from uh, the VA, (uh-hmm), and uh apparently I could do it. I didn't...I didn't eat too damn good. I had to live in pretty funky apartments, places that weren't even apartments.

John: That's student time, man.

Jim: Yeah, I mean, I had nothing to do with the campus.

John: Yeah, I know.

Jim: I lived in...

John: ...the life of a student, yeah.

Jim: Live in some real dives here in Charleston. Uh, there were times I would not go to school for a semester, for a reason, so I'd drop out. And there were times I would uh, go part-time and then work full-time. Sometimes I'd go full-time and work full-time, plus pull down a couple part-time jobs. (uh-hmm) There for about a year and a half, I'm not mistaken, I...I got no more than three hours sleep a night or taking about 15, 16 hours, full-time job with the county and a couple part-time jobs, leading a hell of a social life, too, and made good grades. At that time I was able to work fairly well under pressure and when I was in military, I worked fairly well under pressure uh, I found the older I'm getting, I'm not as capable of doing any more than I take home, immediate-type pressure jobs, (uh-huh), cause I just don't feel confident in that as I used to be.

John: What kind of work would you do, just pick up pretty much whatever you could, when you worked for the county; what did you do?

Jim: I was a janitor, custodian, basically I worked at West Junior High School in the in the west side of Charleston, although I did uh, work part-time at the warehouse at the \_\_\_\_\_ uh, drove delivery trucks delivering supplies, (uh-huh), to the schools. Also, spent a lot of day that the least of days, sometimes up to a month or two uh, at different uh, schools here and there, out doing janitor work, or sometimes light maintenance, which I was no good at. I'm not mechanically inclined at all. But, basically I stayed at that one school for uh, four, four-and-a-half years.

John: So when did you finally finish up your...well, okay.

Jim: Wait, I didn't...I didn't answer your question; also had a lot of the telephone sales jobs. I, (right), used to...used to be pretty good at it.

John: Short term stuff.

Jim: Bullshitting all these callers. Sold everything from cars to windows. Uh, I guess I went after uh, pretty good telephone sales, to supplement the uh, VA and uh, the county janitor jobs. I think there was a couple other non-related jobs, the sort of things I had to do. Basically, just telephone sales.

John: Okay, so then you earned your undergraduate degree... .

Jim: Three years.

John: Two years?

Jim: Yeah.

John: And that's...was it social services, counseling, uh?

Jim: Social Work. (uh-huh) Uh, I don't believe in this state you have uh, a bachelor's for counseling. Might be done at Marshall, I've heard something about it, but I don't believe... .

John: Well, there's a lot of counseling programs down there, but I'm not sure if they have an undergraduate degree or not.

Jim: I think they've all graduated. In fact, I'm pretty sure, although at times you might see a person in the paper, bachelor's in counseling. I don't think they offer that\_\_\_\_\_ at State. Maybe across the river, that might be true. But uh... .

[End side 1]

John: Okay.

Jim: Might say I worked for a year and uh, think decided that the bachelor's wasn't enough education. I wasn't going to get anywhere with a bachelor's degree. So I enrolled down at \_\_\_\_\_ and went for a year. About halfway through the program, I was sitting out of fun, sitting out of a job, and everything. You can't get a job today in this area, not outside of the staging area, in any type of human service work. It's almost impossible to buy that, I wouldn't have anything to buy it with anyway.

John: You know all the, I guess all the civil service jobs are tied up, too.

Jim: There are a few but then again they're very selective. Of course, I don't blame them but you have a hundred applicants, take the top person. I've been out of work uh, been cooking for work nine weeks this past Monday, and live secured four interviews, and I consider myself fortunate. I thought I was going to get a job down at Human Services. They had six vacancies, this was about two or three weeks ago and I know there were at least five people interviewed, I know they hired two of the five and I was part of the majority, three that were not hired. So that tells me something that even though they had six vacancies, they were only gonna hire two... (uh-hmm), so they must be having management problems also, (uh-hmm), which gets into politics, which sometimes I get angry, so maybe I better not talk about

that. Uh, the other job I thought possibly I was going to get, I was up, the wrong age and the wrong sex. There's a lot of reverse discrimination in social work. Poor women been getting the shaft for years so \_\_\_\_\_. I'm not exactly a women's libber but then again, I'm not a male chauvinist pig either. Uh, a man, especially a man my age, entry-level, which I'm at, my status, (uh-hmm), was that you gotta be a fairy or something. Uh, they can give me my work with children, which I have done in the past and I enjoy, or...or old people. My major at college counseling and I would like to, I've been devoting most of my time on it on my essays and so forth, on alcohol counseling. (uh-hmm) I think I could offer something there. I get the right education, with my experience, things should make a winning combination. But you...

John: That's...that's th...they find the c...the alcohol counselors, isn't it usually, uh?

Jim: Not entirely; it's about fifty-fifty. About half of the counselors are these bright, perky young people who uh, probably have never drank over a cocktail or two in their life but they have the uh, sheepskins on the wall, the credentials.

John: See now, that's one field in particular that I...I just don't ...I don't really understand and that, I don't understand that sort of counseling...

Jim: Well, I thought I did.

John: If you haven't been through some of that yourself; just can't see it.

Jim: Uh, I don't either. There...seems to me, there are enough recovered alcoholics and th...there's quite a few alcoholics, and there's enough recovered alcoholics that have some degree of education, what I mean some degree, not necessarily that they have even a bachelor's degree, cause uh, for some of them, this may be too much to go to college, uh, maybe even it shouldn't require a high school, I don't know. I think the whole thing needs to be looked at, I think they've oh, they, when I say they - the different agencies, the government, especially the great cowboy in Washington, our...this is making it too, too technical, too difficult, really is a very simple field. Try to encourage people to quit drinking and I don't care how many titles you have after your name, M.A., Ph.D., B.S., or whatever, unless you been through it, I personally don't see how you could quote 'help another person.'

John: I don't, either. I really don't.

Jim: That's like, well, a friend of mine counseled a Vietnam veteran uh, female and this is abnormal, cause she does exceedingly well. But, she is a natural in social work,

she's a mature person, my age, possibly even maybe even a couple of years older. This is very rare: most of these Vietnam veteran counselors are...are Vietnam veterans themselves. And either had their education, which very few had their education before they went to Vietnam, most of them got it after that uh, and they're able to relate to the vet. Dewfus, jump down! He knows he can't get up there, but he does.

John: Tests you every once in a while, uh?

Jim: Yeah, he's showing off for you. Look out the window at the birdie, not up on top there. You've been busting my records, buddy. Maybe it's that new album that there's something new to him, see, he's studying, checking that out. And there's five or six different places there in the Kanawha Valley where supposedly a person could work uh, for about \$411. But most of them won't even take an application, but you can't get in to see anybody uh, you might be able to force a resume down their throat.

John: These are primarily operated places, I guess.

Jim: Yes, well, one of them is uh, quasi, uh, it's a Local mental health/mental retardation center uh, where they're quasi. But uh, I haven't even been able to get in that doorway and I've got personal friends who are Ph.D's over there. You just have an abundance of people in this field. I mean, that I saw a job in the paper this morning that says, 'bachelor's degree.' To a certain degree I've wasted a 20 cent stamp sending in my resume because it says bachelor's degree, which means a bachelor's salary, like anywhere from 10 to 15 a year, a thing that pays that low has \_\_\_\_\_. Fifteen people with uh, Master's degrees are gonna show up...[tape ends]

[side 2]

John: Uh-huh.

Jim: Might lower that bachelor's salary. It's that bad. We just have an overabundance, due to the, quote, cut-off of funds, since the present administration is in power, looking more and more daily they're going to stay in power for a few years. I mean, I'm not giving up, I get discouraged, never give up. But I \_\_\_\_\_ think you'll find \_\_\_\_\_ any veteran that got his act together, if you lived through Vietnam, then you don't give up. Things... (uh-hmm) ...may seem awfully tough, if you can't go another damn inch, let alone a mile, but you don't give up. Uh, when I want something entry level, emptying the damn bed pan, I want to learn to do this from the ground up, and I know it from the patient angle; I've been through it, I've been through five or six funny farms, but I want to know it from the, quote, worker's level; (uh-hmm) eventually work my way in to a professional position.

John: So the interviews you have had, at least they've been in, in the field that you're directing yourself to? (no)  
No?

Jim: No. The interviews I've had has been in social work uh, or connected with social work, Animal/Human Services being an economic service worker, that's the person who's gonna, you can have this much food stamps, you can't have any at all, you know, we kind of jack the knife to a certain degree, you got to sell your car in order to qualify for food stamps, so forth, things, (uh-hmm). Another interview I got was this uh, a sort of a rest home, nursing home for seniors; really a death hotel. I went down to Job Service to interview uh, claimants coming in for uh, coming in looking for work, and not..not getting employed by anybody. (uh-hmm) But uh, in fact I guess, all of my interviews, well, not that one nursing home, most of them, of that four, have been uh, three have been through the state. All but one been private enterprise. And uh, pay's pretty low but uh, whole bunch of people beating at the door, trying to get in.

John: Does the uh, you mention there's a veteran's uh, outreach branch here in Charleston. Do they have a uh, substance abuse counselor on their staff or is all their counselors trained in that area?

Jim: Okay, the...but you can't take what I'm going to say for law here, because this is my generality, (uh-hum), although I worked there a year and a half, there's such a thing as confidentiality, (uh-huh), and uh, ethics which I'm quite sure you're familiar with. The counselors, the one in Huntington, I think you mentioned one or two, you know, down there...(uh-huh). Here's a math book with the name and numbers with, (oh, okay), the one you're talking about.

John: Yeah, thank you.

Jim: Me and him are feature people.

John: Yeah, okay.

Jim: Uh, all of them have to have a minimum of a Master's, in therapy, or behavior, or psychology. I think they're really in the process of switching over to social work, you gotta have a social work degree. My buddy works at the center down here, I think, has two Master's and neither one of them are in social work and he is in the process of enrolling to get an additional Master's in social work. Uh, the best I can answer that question, say, oh, general counseling still. And I believe through their education they are exposed, how much I don't know; I believe they are exposed to substance abuse. Not necessarily alcoholism, but their drugs, other chemicals \_\_\_\_\_ I...but I've had a year of counseling at

Master's level myself and I can tell you in that year I had really quote no exposure or it may be my exposure would the latter year, the last year, whenever I get to finish that up. But if you want to look for a specific thing to counsel, you've got to capture it yourself. The professors are not going to shove you any particular way. Don't get me wrong, I'm not speaking derogatory of the person, but it's left ~~sit~~ to the student's initiative. But the cost and going back to your question um, no it don't quote, say, have a to my knowledge, I had a year and a half with that, workstudy there, a substance abuse counselor. Now what they do in Huntington I'm not for sure. (uh-hmm) If the man's drinking problem is minor, let's say that is not his major problem, his major problem may be like PTSD, post traumatic stress syndrome. As a counselor here, I am quite qualified in that, a lot of education, post-graduate work. Then uh, he'll handle it, if the problem is quote, major, major, then you know, I'll have to shift him to a funny farm, or the Chillicothe VA hospital and dry him out. (uh-hmm) And so forth. If it's somewhere in the middle, between minor and major, then the counselor down here uh, has an occasion not, not many times, because quote, I'm not legally a counselor, I do not have a Master's. (uh-hmm) I'm not certified by the VA; you gotta have a whole list of titles after your name, will ask me to talk to Joe or Sam or Betty or whoever. I have talked to a couple, maybe I've done 'em some good, maybe I haven't. But uh, substance abuse counseling, no, I think you're talking too much specialist there uh, their counseling skills, general and a, if you want to call, a major, it's PTSD. They sidewind on chemicals, Agent Orange, marital problems, babies, I think even a sexual dysfunction uh, economics, employment, so forth. PTSD, and your class facts of nightmares already cut to the \_\_\_\_\_ their major concern is the bedtimes \_\_\_\_\_. Some are uneducated comments, cause I'm not certifiable to the \_\_\_\_\_ people. This general observation... (uh-hmm) as a client and as a work-study student.

John: Uh-huh. Well, you obviously look, told me you haven't some difficulties in finding satisfactory work. Is uh, I would gather especially in this area that's not unusual for... for veterans, is it?

Jim: No, not unusual at all. In fact uh, going back to what... just saying a minute ago, uh, PTSD is probably the major thing but crowding is awful close right now. You know a counselor can not actually give a man a job down there, he does a lot of referrals, he gets a lot of information, I even attended a dinner to\_\_\_\_\_. That is definitely crowded uh. Employment's a problem for everybody in this area, uh, I believe the latest figures are something like 13% in the Charleston area, maybe 13 in Huntington. Let's face it, that's the highest in the nation. I don't think those figures are correct, I think it's much higher.

John: Yeah, those are way too low.

Jim: Because I know a lot of the street people, I've met an ex-street person and a quasi-street person. Now I know

it's higher. But a lot of them are just discouraged and not even on the rolls.

John: Uh-hmm.

Jim: Like I'm drawing unemployment but I'm counted. But I know a lot of people down there that are not drawing unemployment for one reason or the other and they're not even counted but they're down here, they're ...they're a person and they're unemployed.

John: Yeah, unless I'm mistaken, those who draw benefits, once they expire, then they're not on the rolls anymore, either uh...

Jim: True. And they've uh, apparently been employed but then again they haven't. I...this is, they've had the conflicts between the state government and the federal government on how to count people. (uh-hmm) Which gets into something else. And veterans, their unemployment rate is definitely, that I can see, higher than say the general populous. Our educational level is lower than the general populous. Our experience level is lower. Our level of responsibility and our stability is probably lower and a responsible job would not generally speaking, good risk. Although most of the veterans over half maybe 80-85% have quote readjusted somewhat; they're not having problems, I read that in the paper. Uh, that, that 15% or more are...are always looking for work and I'm one of that 15%; even though I'm one of the quote better educated ones of the ...the whole one hundred percent. Of course I think that's due to the field I have chosen and also a lot from my personality characteristics, everything like I do, really apparently I do, this part the employers look at. Our...our unemployment level's higher. No doubt about that.

John: Are you active in the VVA?

Jim: No.

John: They do have a branch here in Charleston, don't they?

Jim: Yes, I was the first president.

John: Oh, is that right?

Jim: Uh, when we started VVA, we...a council was instrumental, I'm refraining from using names here preferably for the council.

John: Right, right.

Jim: The council was instrumental in getting it started and we had a, I thought a really good bunch of veterans. Ah, I say they was two, three hundred of us, maybe fifty of us that were hardcore, what I mean hardcore. We were out,

out to kill the Communists and this was um, our major goal in life and we, we were at the Viet Center almost daily, (uh-hmm), drinking coffee, telling war stories, crying on each other's shoulder.

John: So this would been 1975, about that time, or...?

Jim: No, 1970, okay, yeah, I guess '75, '76, '77. I'm having trouble with that, exactly which year it was, I'm not sure.

John: Uh-huh, it's not really important.

Jim: Well, okay, we had one big general meeting down in the local church, downtown all of the hundred, hundred fifty veterans show up. Really i was elected vice-president, another veteran was elected president, but even before the next meeting he had to bow out due to some personal problems, so I took over as president. I was not a respected president because I was tied up with a second marriage that, I did marry that Korean woman but I eventually divorced her; that was going sour. I think I was still having drinking problems, I can't remember for sure. No, I wasn't drinking. but carrying a full load in school, marriage, children, I just wasn't able to devote to it what I wanted to. I help the post for a year. We had a lot of dissention, after the first meeting or two, we started breaking up into basically, generally speaking, two groups--liberal and conservative, as far as uh, philosophy. The conservatives were the people like myself, the uh, like I say, we just...we just think we should have a strong defense, no problem, generally speaking, what we done in Vietnam was correct, our goal, our aim and no kissing ass to the Communists; not adopting any socialistic qualities at all. We left, of course, an almost frivolous peace behind us. (uh-hmm) Ah, maybe some of us were in the center, but eventually it got down to the sharp economy that we had, fist fights, guns drawn. Well, it got to be a problem, they were going to assassinate me, so I decided, I mean, I wasn't in a world of relaxing anymore, but I lived through Vietnam four times so naturally I didn't come back here to Charleston to get my ass wiped out, (yeah...), because...because of a quasi-political deal.

John: Yeah, really.

Jim: And so I wasn't into relaxing and it was quote rigged for the present brand of leadership that they now have uh, and they are not running it and they're all left-wing. I will not say they're the left, they're the left wing, I will not say they're Communist, I will not say they're Socialist, they are left, and they have a very small membership because all of us hard-core right-wing radicals and I guess we are somewhat radical uh, we do not attend, we have given up our membership and it is generally looked at as being kind of a radical

organization to the left. all the way from the top, you remember, the first, or still maybe the president of the VVA is the one who laid the wreath on the Chu Ninh's tomb in Hanoi and this caused quite a...

John: The National President?

Jim: Right.

John: Yeah, right, okay.

Jim: It seemed he was pampered down there. They just hold uh, different views than what I think serious organizations should hold. Nothing like the other sort of organizations like American Legion, VFW, DAV order of the Purple Heart.

John: Yeah, I...I was wondering what the...what the relationship between the VVA and other veteran's organization is. Don't sound like it's very friendly.

Jim: Terrible, terrible deal.

John: Are you uh, associated with any other veteran's organizations?

Jim: Not right now. Uh, several reasons why uh, main reason is finances, even though membership is not larger, ten, fifteen a month. I was a member of all of 'em at one time, (uh-hmm). It got so damn high in my wallet. Being a man who wants to stay away from drinking, although I'm, I mean, you could pull out a bottle right now and drink all you want, it wouldn't bother me, but it's good philosophy not to, to go to places, where there's drinking, (uh-hmm), involved if you don't want to drink, but I'm an addictive person, I've proven that, it took me thirty-five years to get rid of it.

John: Yeah, I guess all the vet's clubs have bars, and ...

Jim: It's...it's just one big drunk, (uh-hmm), it's like the military, just one big added complication. You either do the booze or other drugs. Uh, if I get busy, which I hope I will, I'm either feast or famine. The past ten, eleven years I've been out of the service, I've either gone balls to the wall, I have worked full-time, went to school full-time, took care of the family, uh, church responsibilities, I've went to church also for a long time and I worked. Every minute of my day was planned. I had to operate, not by the watch but by the micro-second, I mean, (uh-hmm), or it's nothing like it is now. I've got nothing to do. Nothing! The big highlight tomorrow is because I'm going to go wash my damn clothes. (uh-hmm) I'm in the National Guard's for a while, being a drill sergeant. That took me uh, five years of trying to get in the Guard, the reason why the type of discharge I had. It took me awhile to get my

records straight there, they even screwed up down there. After half a year in the Guard, that's it, I haven't had any problems with past drinking. It's either feast or famine. I'm either real busy or not. So I'm not presented engaged with any service organization. If I could ever get my act together as far as proper education, proper work, proper home life, you know, all the ole' white picket fence routine where everything's sweet, hunky-dory, what you read about in the story books, then maybe I could devote time to something like that. But my life will never be complete I know that now; probably kidding you or myself. I'm the kind of guy who's always searching, constantly searching for something better, whether it be employment or education. (uh-hmm) Like right now I'm a bachelor, too much to resist it, doesn't have to stay that way. I'm not anti-service organization, I think I'm ... I'm very much a pro. VFW doesn't know what...

John: So you pretty much figure on staying in this area?

Jim: Yes. I have limited myself to staying here because I want to complete school here, college. I probably could have gotten work, say, maybe as close as Huntington and Parkersburg or wherever. I personally do not even apply because I didn't send a resume. (uh-hmm) So, in order to stay here, to complete my education here, I would have to get a job in Hardy County, even though I might get a shit-pot full of money, but how in the hell am I going to complete my education?

John: Wouldn't get that degree, though.

Jim: [Reply inaudible]

John: Yeah.

Jim: So, I limited myself purposely. I will not even today, play it, maybe it my unemployment runs out, maybe I'll look at it a different way. (uh-huh) But to date I'm going to stay here. I've got a whole family I have here, a lot of friends is here; I just don't want to start new but damn, I lived out of a suitcase a...a duffel bag, (yeah), for twenty years and I'm tired of that shit. I don't like traveling; it burns me out, especially if you have children in it. I don't think I'm going to get an education at all. Lots of today.

John: I've never spent hardly any time at all in Charleston. Of course, growing up in Huntington, there's a, there always seems to be a, a competition there between Huntington and Charleston. But my sister's been here for about four years and she loves it.

Jim: I think it's marvelous, the competition that we have between the two cities makes each one of them strive to be a little better.

John: I think so.

Jim: It's good for everybody; it's like Dallas and Fort Worth, maybe Dallas and Houston, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, on a smaller scale we got it, but it's pretty good.

John: There's one, one more question I want to ask, it's kind, it's a general thing, if we can backtrack a little bit. I don't know if you even, if, even have an opinion or given any thought to this but, uh, you mentioned the, the split in the VVA, you know, the left-right split or whatever, was there anything akin to that in Vietnam? Was there, I mean, was there, were there political attitudes at that, in Vietnam, or is this a day-to-day get by, let's get by and not worry about that kind of stuff.

Jim: The only political attitude expressed by the GI's in Vietnam, especially the grunts, or your infantry that had some association, not only fuck Ho-Chi Minh, fuck Lyndon Johnson, I mean, they don't give a damn who, uh, was president then, although Lyndon Johnson took a major...(uh-hmm), fall for it. Uh, President Nixon, President Kennedy weren't present at the time.

John: And you saw the whole thing, and you were there from the...

Jim: Yeah, I was there.

John: ...basically from the early days through the buildup and...

Jim: Yeah, when I first went there, there was five thousand troops and I guess between my second and the third tour, it dropped from half a million my last four years scaling down to a quarter of a million people. That's the only political bit expressed by the people...

[End]

[Start tape 12b]

Jim: Said there, that there might have been, and I'm sure there were some people who were liberal in their political beliefs in Vietnam. But I don't recall anybody expressing them, in all of my tours and associations. In fact, a man would have been insane to express them. He'd been in Ho Chi Minh, what he's doing, rah-rah, that'll be, show 'em, I think Lenin and Marx are great people uh...

John: That's what they got you for over there.

Jim: Oh, that would, that would have gotten you into a body bag...(uh-hmm)... That's as far as it'd got you. And somebody in that position, the others abuse them. Let's

just keep your damn mouth shut, then, practically eat them, eat 'em until we won.

John: How prevalent from, from the veteran's that you've been associated with is, is PTSD? I mean, is, is that a hard thing to pin down, PTSD, I mean, it's, it's not, it's not strictly a, a combat-related difficulty, is it? I mean, there's it's un...

Jim: Okay, I can only give you qualified answers because I do not have the expertise as a counselor as ... (uh-hmm) ... the name I gave you, it seems to be like I say, the major problem, that now is, employment, (uh-hmm), there for a while was the major problem. People didn't bother to look for work, they had some people who quit getting better or even adjusted to... PTSD is Post Traumatic stress Syndrome and a whole bunch of more technical names give to it and so forth. Generally speaking, in a layman's terms, it's flashbacks ... [inaudible]...nightmares. What went on, what didn't go on in Vietnam, a lot of the association was almost entirely, I can't give you a percentage, associated with combat about what they did or didn't do, what the enemy did or didn't do... (uh-hmm)...what was perceived to have happened. Uh, perceptions got distorted there and are still distorted. Probably the best examples you've seen a couple times are when we have diversions on television. A man and woman, a man and wife sleeping and there's a cloud above his head and he's, he's seeing these old guys in black pajamas running around again, that's the VC, the VA. Uh, he's fighting that war again. War's a traumatic experience. Uh, it'll be with the veteran til the day he dies. He might live a hundred years from now. (uh-hmm) And even though he's supposedly, most of the killing that he did, it's justified in the name of the war, you know, kill her god and so forth for democracy. He had then and has now, and having more so now, second thoughts about morality thoughts. I don't think today's veterans, Vietnam Veterans, is any different than uh, veterans of World War II or Korean, I won't, could comment on World War I veterans but in that area, I haven't known too many of 'em. (uh-hmm) World War II, they called it uh, battle shock; Korean War, combat fatigue; Vietnam, PTSD; and the next war, might be called a tree for all I know. (uh-hmm) People generally, to conclude veterans, are just more sensitive now, we're more aware of our environment, the people around it. And even though most of the killing or meeting or so forth that he did was quote justified at least in a legality sense, you know, you have to kill that man before he kills your commander or you. Uh, people were just having second thoughts about it because that was an individual, a human being. He probably had a wife and family, mother, father, aunts, uncles, even giving them the word, sometimes that some troops on both sides is going a little bananas. And of course, the best example is Lieutenant Calley \_\_\_\_\_

from Providence. (uh-hmm) He got out or some on both sides but he got caught.

John: Yeah, I think what you said is important, now it just seems like people are more aware of it. That, (right), it's always been there.

Jim: Well, veterans of the past uh, did it. They were not, they were the, they were also, I hate to use the word misfits, but the name comes in my mind right now; they're misfits of society. Some people actually come back from war; they just don't fit in, and that's 10 percent or more. We're not, we're fitting in I personally do not have any or limited PTSD problems; I have other problems, but we just don't f...we're...we're not able to relate as well as we would like to. Most of us would like to, some of 'em don't want to relate... (uh-hmm)... withdrawn into their own little world with the people who didn't go for whatever reasons. It's pretty damn hard to come back uh, when you were there in Vietnam once, got \_\_\_\_\_ to go and you like it like I loved it, served three or four tours. One minute, \_\_\_\_\_ be in the damn jungle; sixteen hours later, walk in your parent's home or your wife's home and uh, hello, how are you, (uh-hmm), sixteen hours before you were gunning some mother down and he was shooting at you. Uh, people showed no compassion, but they couldn't show any empathy. They didn't want to show understanding. I think the whole nation was for a long time and were slowly drawn out it, a guilt trip. Not just the veterans. The war was lost, yeah.

John: Do you see that changing now?

Jim: Yeah uh, we're, Vietnam Veterans are becoming respectful again. For a long time, if you'd look at the state of \_\_\_\_\_ that, that if you were looking for work and you, of course that uh, that you could deny you was in the military, you know, go out and seal your DD114 separation paper, you just told the opposite, and you...you desperate, didn't put down on any resume, I'm a Vietnam Veteran. John Wayne, combat hero of the Cannonballs. People didn't..people don't want to hear that because people, it's still, then, left a bitter taste in their mouth because they wanted to shove the blame for losing the war off on somebody and the veterans were handy. (uh-hmm) In fact, a lot of other service organizations, World War II vets, Korean war Vets, World War I vets; if we'd won our war,, why didn't you mothers win-win-win yours? They would soon realize a lot of geo-political stuff involved in it. Our commanders were not authorized to do what they should have done, as far as, say, securing a victory for us, and while commanders be given liberty, we as the soldiers, we were done. (uh-hmm) And we were damn good soldiers in Vietnam; the best. Charlie was a good soldier, too, not right to sell mother fucker wrong. He was tough, he was a tough little man. But uh, I didn't mean to get in a tirade there but uh, some of us

just have trouble adjusting and you probably heard the stuff, but, but this was true, like I'm not going to shit you and all that. I was drunk when I renenituted, this stuff never happens, you just read about it in books. Here's something else you probably read about in books and saw on TV, when I come back from Vietnam the first time, in 1965, December '65, the war was still fairly popular. There were not many troops over there. (uh-hmm) Uh, I was still looked upon as a weirdo. I come back here to Charleston, I spent a few days in Frisco, a few days in Los Angeles, I bummed around the country, you know, seeing friends and so forth. I was basically intoxicated at those places, I really didn't pay much attention what people thought, but here in Charleston, my home, I was more sensitive, I guess I was also a bit more sober. Uh, there was no band playing, no red carpet, and I'm never gonna, my father, my biological father came home from World War II, there was a damn band playing, (uh-hmm), and I don't think he done anymore in his war than I dont in my war. In fact, he sat on his ass in the south pacific on an island. Uh, my parents accepted me, my sister called me a damn fool, she was one of the first to get involved in the anti-war movement. I'm not saying, well, that was right or wrong, but it, it was just beginning to evolve, (uh-hmm), here it was kind of late. She, maybe one or, number of one or two in town to get involved in it, (uh-hmm). She's uh, kind of a kook, I think. But then, she thinks I'm one, too. But I, after I spent Christmas here, spend New Year's, I went up to Michigan, a buddy of mine lived up there, Traveler's City, Michigan, I had on civilian clothing on, I had a GI haircut, drinking, my buddy and his wife, I've known them for years, we went to a New Year's eve party and we were guests in these people's home, where the party was, plenty of women, plenty of booze; it was gonna be great. And this attractive lady about my age, I was what, 24, 25 at the time, come up to me and said are you the one just back from Vietnam. I said, yes, ma'am. She says, uh, how does it feel to kill uh, babies and uh, old women. I said one thing's better and that's loading them on a barge in half with a pitchfork. I figured she was drunker than I was, so forth. She started calling me everything but a white man. God, lady, you're...I had to get away from here. I went over to my buddy Steve, I was his guest, but we were all guests at somebody's home, (uh-hmm), I said, what's the matter with that damn woman over there, I said, who is she, what, is she, Ho Chi mad at somebody? Oh, that's our hostess for this evening. I said we better get the fuck out of here. And he says, why? So I told him. Steve...Steve should have been a

Steve was a real, he wants to settle everything by the fists, you know, you don't believe what I'm talking about--he jumped up on the table, cleared off all the whiskey bottles, cake and so forth, and he said he's gonna whip all the mother-fuckers in the house because they was accusing me of doing this and doing that and come on out in the damn snow, and we...we'll just settle this. Steve and I left and we forgot his wife. We wound up in Madison, Wisconsin, well by the time we got there

John: Well, it was New Year's...

Jim: Two days later, we were same people. But we were, we were accused of this... (yeah)... killing women and babies and old people. it got so that we didn't wear our uniforms to, us \_\_\_\_\_ had to travel post to post across the state. we'd get reduced discount if you applied wearing your uniform. I just went ahead and paid the full fare, just put money in my pocket, I couldn't afford to keep on wearing because always near, of course, there are hippies, you have people that spit at you, they could, they could tell more about your uniform than you. They could this patch meant that, this patch mark meant that, that regiment meant that, you were branded a murderer. We've had a lot to quote live down and we don't think it was justified. Generally speaking, a few of us have done things that we have second thoughts about. but uh, we were good soldiers, no doubt about it, we were damn good soldiers.

John: Gee, it's been like that, like what you mentioned with the lady at the party and a while ago you observed that uh, it seemed like the whole country finally has sort of, the guilt of Vietnam is where it all, well, it's...it's things like what that lady said that cause guilt and hurt and people like her. Eventually now maybe it's...(well) they're starting to face it a little more; it's where they said, well I, you know, I was...

Jim: You know she had her right to say that um, especially in her own home, what, so forth. Two years ago....

John: Yeah, but you know, she felt guilt about saying something like that eventually, she had to. I would of.

Jim: A lot of people are pretty dieharded. Uh, they believed in their cause just as much as we believed in our cause, and you know, generally speaking, our cause was killing communists, at, at a cost, you know, that was the name of the game. And their's was quote stopping us from killing communists. They might have used a little bit moralistic tones about it than we really needed to get recruited, but we, both sides were generally were dour, or almost a religion. (uh-hmm) But two years ago, I think the country's come out of this uh, Viet...Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C. was dedicated. I was not able to go due to work, school, hell, I don't know. They're gonna turn over that memorial, and nice thing, one thing about that memorial, it was designed in architect by a young uh, Oriental. It, (uh-hmm), consisted of stone cold black wall with the names etched, which you know a lot of that was a 167 design, what more for my buddies, you know, 58,000 americans came back feet first, uh, they're gonna turn this over to the National Park Service, ad also dedicate a statue showing three infantrymen: a black man, a white man, and I think a hispanic soldier. This I can stand, but it's not going to have to come. I'm gonna try to go, now if I can get enough money together and so forth. But that was the

purpose for i think, you know, there's a crescendo building up to that, (un-hmm), veterans' day two years ago. Uh, you could see that on television, it was all over television, (yeah), and i saw more wet-eyes, people on television, people watching it, then I saw when President Kennedy got assassinated. Uh, people were glad it happened. (un-hmm) I almost cried. I...I cried in 1959 the last time I ever cried, I'm one of the kind of guys that can't. I want to but I can't. Someday I will and it'll probably help me when I do.

John: Yeah, that service really opened things up. I remember that.

Jim: Here's this bit on \_\_\_\_\_ after she saw that group, but there's a piece there.

John: Oh, yeah, well, the...the girl at the office there was gonna send me a newsletter but I haven't got it yet.

Jim: Well, you can have that if you'd like. I think I have another one. I might have scribbled on it but there's a piece in there about the veterans trip to uh, to Washington and, we're trying to raffle tickets, you know, get some money to pay for transportation, the hotel rooms and so forth, and I'm looking forward to...to going.

John: Oh, they got the rates and everything here.

Jim: Yeah, it should be a nice gathering but ...

John: This is a good looking diesel. Here, let me turn this off.

(end of interview)