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Oral History Project: Frederick McDade

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Student Interviewer's Name: Brady Tull
Interviewee Name: Frederick McDade

Time and Location of Interview:

The interview was conducted in one session on November 3, 2015. The interview lasted about fifty-five minutes. Only the interviewer and interviewee were present at the time of the interview. The interview took place in the home of Mr. McDade in Dalton, Georgia.

About Frederick McDade:

Frederick McDade was born on October 21, 1938 in Chatsworth, Georgia. When he was ten years old, Frederick and his family moved to Dalton, Georgia, where he still resides today. An African-American, Frederick attended Emery St. High School, an all black school, and starred in both baseball and basketball. After high school, Frederick got signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers and also played for the Washington Senators. However, military service interrupted his short baseball career.

Frederick McDade served four and a half years in the United States Army. He was severely injured in combat after only a few months into his deployment in Vietnam. A rocket-propelled grenade struck his vehicle, effectively blinding Mr. McDade and costing him his right foot. Seven years after his injury took place, Frederick went back to school to earn a degree in social psychology. After two years at Dalton State College and six years at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga, Frederick McDade overcame his disabilities and earned his masters degree. He then became the counselor at Dalton High School and served in that position for nineteen years.

Mr. McDade has been married to his wife Marcella for twenty-four years. He has nine children. Frederick McDade is willing to share his story with anyone who wants to hear it.

Interviewer: Brady Tull (BT)

Interviewee: Frederick McDade (FM)

BT: First question, what were you doing before you joined the military?

FM: Before I joined the military I was playing baseball.

BT: Baseball, was that professionally?

FM: Yes.

BT: Can you describe that lifestyle for me?

FM: Ok. Um my professional baseball career was very exciting. I got signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers and traded to the Washington Senators who are now the Texas Rangers. And I didn't get to play up in... I played in the minor leagues for about a year and a half down in Florida. And then I was called up to come up and play with the big leagues, big boys, and I only played for one week and three days until I got drafted in the Army. And exciting, we travelled back in the days, this is in the sixties, and when we travelled, you know, black players had to go sleep in the black communities and the white players slept in the rest, I mean the hotel. And when we travelled on buses, in the minor leagues we travelled on buses, and when we travelled we stopped at restaurant, I had to go around, the black players had to go around to the back and eat in the little room while all the white boys played, I mean ate, in the restaurant. Now that may sound strange back then but that's just the way it was and, but we could play together. But we just couldn't stay in the same area when the ballgame was over. So that's how it was back in the days when I was there for a short period of time. And a lot of people may think, and I tell this story, I tell this story and people ask, "Well didn't that make you angry?" No, because I realized that's just the way it was in the sixties. And they signed that bill in sixty-five or sixty-six and this was sixty-two or sixty-three. So that's just the way it was. As long as I was playing baseball, that's what I enjoyed and that's what I focused on.

BT: Did you have any time for a family life?

FM: Yeah uh, well not very much while I was playing baseball because we travelled a lot. And back then I didn't have, I wasn't married so I didn't see my family very often. In the winter I played summer baseball. I mean winter baseball so I came home maybe about three weeks out of a year. Maybe a month out of a year. But not very much.

BT: So you were drafted, how was that experience and how did that take place?

FM: Ok, that happened in 1962. I was playing, I went to a all-black school here in Dalton. And the only sports they had was basketball, so I had to go play with the

guys in the city league, which was all-black team. And they um, a scout came by and scouted me and um... I can't remember his name now, but he was a scout and he came by and scouted my brother and me so he invited us down to Florida to, you know, try out for the team. And that's how, you know, I got signed. They thought I was good enough and they signed me.

BT: So now moving on to your military career. You were drafted into the military, how did that happen?

FM: That happened on a one, on a Sunday afternoon. We just got done playing the Yankees and the first time I was there that we was able to beat them. We was the Washington Senators at that time and they're the Texas Rangers now. And normally, we was in last place. We was in last place and I guess that was why I was called up. But anyway, I was playing baseball and my draft notice came, and that's when the draft was going on and my first draft notice evidently my family didn't send it to me. So they sent me the second draft notice and they sent it to me and it said I had ten days to report to Atlanta or I'd be a draft dodger. So I did, I packed my bags and said farewell to the guys and left off to Florida, I mean to Atlanta, and the convention center where they examined me and um, you know, I went through a lot of examinations, and after you go through that you just raise your right hand and be sworn in.

BT: What was your reaction to being drafted?

FM: Angry, I was very angry. Now I'm thinking, ok, you know, ok now I have six brothers, and I'm wondering, "Now why couldn't they have drafted either one of them?" But I understand that every male in the United States, in the states that they in back in the draft day, your name and birth date goes down to Atlanta and put in a computer. And if the Pentagon says and tells the government that they want so many men from the state of Georgia, maybe about five or six hundred men from the state of Georgia. They just punch this computer and your number come up and they send you a draft notice. That's how I got drafted. And I guess my number came and so they sent me a draft notice.

BT: What was your initial life in the military like, specifically the training aspect of it?

FM: My training the military was very extensive, very strenuous, very hard, but I made it easy because I was already playing baseball and in good condition. And even so I played in basic training, basic training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. And, so, that was in the summer time. And um the company, the battalion rather, had a baseball team, so they asked me to play with them. So I was fortunate enough to take training for only half a day and play baseball the other half. And it was fun as far as I was concerned but I had to make up the time on my training that I didn't do when I played baseball. But the days I didn't play baseball, I had to make up that training. So it was... I didn't like it, I liked to play baseball, but the training was very exciting, very hard, and the main thing is that the meaning of responsibility. I

though that I had a lot of responsibility when I was when I out, but when you in the army, you really got to have responsibility, and you really got to be obedient and follow the rules and the regulations and so you had to get used to all of that, which was not a happy thing for me, but after a while you get used to it and know that's what you have to do so you just automatically do it.

BT: In what ways did being in the military change or interfere with your life before your deployment?

FM: Ok, the way my life was changed, it changed the way I had to live, you know, the way I had to do things. Back then, you know, I'd get up when I wanted to, but in the military you had to get up when they wanted you to get up. And you had to go eat your meals when they wanted you to. You had regulation in eating meals, you had regulation in even when you took a shower. So all that was changeable for me. So in civilian life I could eat and shower when I wanted to, but in the Army you had to shower when you had the time or when they gave you the time to do it. And you could not eat when you wanted to, you had to eat at a regular time, and you know, meals was served in the morning five or six o'clock and noon was between 11:45 and 12:30 and I guess afternoon meals was served around five o'clock. If you missed it then you was just out of luck because that's just the way it was. But my life was changed in that I, I didn't mind being on a strict job, the disciplinary way of life, doing things timely and being able to do it right, but that's what my life was changed like. You couldn't do it the way you wanted to do it, you had to do it they way they wanted you to do it. So that was a change, big change for me, and I was just used to doing things my way and then you had to do it the military way.

BT: What was your reaction when you found out about your deployment?

FM: My reaction when I found out I was getting ready to deploy to Asia, Vietnam. I was sent out to California where I was waiting to be deployed to Vietnam. I stayed down there about three weeks before I was deployed. Now I don't know if you read it, a lot of soldiers tried to drop, dodge going to Vietnam and go to Canada to avoid being deployed to Vietnam. Yes I started to go to Canada twice to avoid going to Vietnam. Now I packed my bags three times and that's where I was going to go. I didn't want to go to Vietnam. I didn't know anything about Vietnam and I didn't want to go and I knew there was a war going on over there. And so, I got to thinking, if you was a draft dodger or evaded your responsibility to the military, then playing baseball they wouldn't allow you to play. And so I said, "If I do that I'm not gonna be able to go back and play baseball." And so I said, "I'll just stay and go over and do my time and do the best I can with it." And that's what I did, but I sure enough didn't want to go.

BT: What did you do to prepare yourself both mentally and physically for your time overseas?

FM: What I did to prepare mentally and physically before I went overseas, mentally I said, “Ok now, I know that I’m a U.S. citizen and this is my responsibility. I have to go where they send me to help protect this country.” And moreover, I went because my family. They drill that into your head, you know, you’re going to fight the enemy to keep them from coming here to destroy your country or maybe even your family. So mentally that’s what I was saying. I’m going over to fight for my country and my family. You know, we live here and that’s part of my duty. That was mentally, and physically I kept myself physically exercised and all kind of, you know, training, self-defense and, you know, did all that kind of training to protect myself. I knew I was going into a war zone so I taught myself to do that and I learned all the techniques and the strategies to be safe.

BT: Did you feel prepared?

FM: Well, I thought I was prepared until I got over there. And when I got over in Vietnam, it was all different to me. Like another world. It was very hot and back when I got there it was like a jungle. That’s the way it looked. It was very hot and very dusty. It was something for me to really get used to after I got there. And like I said, it was strange to me. I was very shocked to know, you know, that this country was like that. I didn’t read about it or I hadn’t been talked to about it, but now I see how it was or how it is so I had to adjust again. And to be able to adjust I had to learn how to deal with the heat and also I had to learn how to deal with all the dust that was over there. So that was the ordeal for me.

BT: The Vietnam Conflict had been going on many years prior to your deployment in 1968. Did you keep up with the events of the war as a young adult?

FM: No I didn’t. As a matter of fact, like I said, before I was drafted into the army, I don’t even think I read about Vietnam. I was told in High School a little bit about the conflict and that that’s how it started out to be, a conflict, but it has turned into a war. But anyway, we didn’t study too much in the black schools about, you know, Vietnam. That’s where I graduated from, a black school in Dalton, Emery St. High School. And we didn’t study a whole lot about Vietnam and we studied history a little bit about the, you know, Civil War and World War 1 and 2. That was as far as we ever got. We didn’t study anything about the Vietnam War. But I learned fast after I got there.

BT: What were your views on the war and the fight against communism?

FM: My views about the war and fighting communism, what I learned about, I wondered, first of all, “Why are we over here?” Then, “What are we doing over here?” And I was told that we were over there to keep communists from spreading. Well ok, I understand that but, you know, I couldn’t understand why they, you know, called it a conflict. And then when I was over there it turned into war. And I wasn’t over there but a short period of time but then what my job was as a platoon leader, platoon sergeant, which I was in charge of about twenty-five men and about

fourteen vehicles which, you know, was what I'd done for as far as my work. You may want to get to that later; I'm not sure. But anyway...

BT: In late 1967, General William Westmoreland, the head of the military, was telling Congress that the war was close to being over and that the enemy was about to retreat. What were you hearing, regarding who was winning the war, from your commanding officers and your peers?

FM: Now that's a very good question, now let me tell you straight. I was only over there in January of 1968 but back up to 1967. Yeah I was heard that there was conflict and that the war was going on and we was winning. You know, that it, you know, it would be over soon. And I said well, and then they deployed me over there and I said, "Maybe it won't be long. Maybe I won't be over here very long." But I was very much surprised after I got there, I found out the war was not ready to be ended and we was not winning. Now, it was a body count. Everyday you had to report how many kills and how many we lost. Well the President back then back in the States was saying, "Well, we winning. We killed so many Vietnamese. We might have killed maybe two hundred Vietnamese that day and we only lost maybe twenty or thirty." But that was not the truth, because we lost a lot. About as many as we killed. And, so that was a shock to me to when I got over there. We was not winning like the report to people in the United States was saying. They was lied too.

BT: Moving on to kind of a different topic, can you please describe you voyage to Vietnam? How did you get there? What stops did you make? And what thoughts were going through your head on the way?

FM: Alright first, my travelling from California to Vietnam was in a TWA First Class Air Jet, you know, airplane, civilian airplane. We flew over there and we stopped in Hawaii to refuel and to freshen up, eat, grab a sandwich or something. And we stayed there long enough to be serenaded by the Vietnamese, I mean Hawaiian girls, with the flowers and stuff. And we stayed there long enough to be serenaded, we stayed there I guess for four or five hours there serenading. And then after all the serenading was over and they said goodbye to us we flew on in to Vietnam in this TWA First Class Airplane. And we landed in South Vietnam where I was stationed there to be deployed to wherever I was supposed to go.

BT: What is the first thing you remember doing when you landed in Vietnam?

FM: When I first landed in Vietnam, the plane landed on that runway, as we was getting off the plane, like I said it was dusty, an incoming rocket, and I'm in my khaki uniform and I hit that dirt. And I said, "Boy, this is not a place for me now." And we had hardly gotten into the country good and I'm having to get down and get in the dirt. I wanted to get back on the plane and fly back to the States but I couldn't. So that's what I'd seen and felt when I got there. I said, "Oh boy, I'm in the wrong place." And I was very frightened. Because incoming rockets, you know, I read about those rockets and they killed. They don't explode until they hit

something and when it does it just (explosion sound) spread out. And that's what I saw when I first got off the plane, incoming rockets.

BT: As a part of the 11th Armored Cavalry, you were in Vietnam at the time of the surprise communist Tet Offensive Attack. Where were you at the time of the attack?

FM: Ok, yes I was in, right in the middle of that. I was in about fifteen to twenty miles south of Saigon. That's where my 11th Armored Cavalry were. We got attacked, as a matter of fact, there was a lot men, troops down in that area. And they was there trying to protect Saigon. So we watched Ho Chi Minh and his army come down the Ho Chi Minh Trail by the grove and just march up. But we could not attack them because they was next to the last border over there. And we didn't want to get the Russians and all them involved because they would come down right by that border over there so we just had to watch them. And after they got down in the area and got set up and deployed their army, they come at us with all, all full forces. I mean, it was a fierce battle. We lost approximately in that Vietnam Tet Offense, we lost approximately fifteen to twenty thousand soldiers in that whole area. But the report back, and we killed a lot of them, and I agree that we must have killed, I don't know, maybe about ten, twenty, or thirty thousand soldiers of them. But we lost a lot of soldiers and that's where I got hurt, during the Tet Offense. I was taking supplies in a convoy. I had four big trucks and a jeep. I was taking supplies up to C Complany. And they was in a fierce battle with the enemy. And as I went through this village, which was a little town called Cu Chi, and that's what they called the village, and as I went beyond that village, maybe twenty or maybe thirty yards, I heard this rocket coming in (whistling rocket sound), and I know it was dark, it was three o'clock in the morning. I knew it was a rocket, but you didn't know which way it was coming. So we heard it and so the next thing I knew it hit, it hit the jeep that I was riding in. Right underneath the passenger side where I was sitting. And it tore that jeep to pieces. Now, I had a guy that was second in command, I was the platoon leader and I had another guy that was second in command. And I knew it was going to be dangerous from when I took this mission, I told him, "You be in the last vehicle, and if I get hit, you are in charge and you got to get these supplies up to that C Company." And so, and you might want to ask this one later but I got hit and that's where I lost my eyesight and my right foot and went into a very deep coma and stayed in it for thirty-three days. But that was a big shock. And maybe go ahead and tell you this because you may not ask, but what happened, the next man in command, the reason I know that, about two years later, it was told to me that my jeep was torn to pieces and that they had to moves the scraps out of the road so they could get by. And this was way two years later because I asked what happened.

BT: So that was during the Tet Offensive in January, correct?

FM: Yes, well no, this was in May. Yeah I was only over there three, about three and a half, about four months and twenty-four days and four hours before I got hit.

But I got hit May the 24th in 1968. That's when I lost my eyesight and that's when I got hit with the rocket. May the 24th of 1968.

BT: Going back to before that event, as a part of the transportation platoon, what was your specific job in the unit?

FM: Yeah I'm glad you're backing up. My specific job were, like I said, I had twenty-five men in the platoon, I had to supply all three companies with everything they needed, ammunition, food, water, clothing, gasoline. Everything they needed that was my job. My men and my job, to get it to them. I had gasoline tankers and, you know, big trucks and there were these track vehicles that go over tough terrain, like an army personnel carrier that ran on tracks like a carrier so it would go over real tough terrain. And my job was to make sure that supply got out. And so we had the helicopters that fly in and we fill a net up and hook it under the belly of this helicopter and it would lift it up and fly it to anywhere it was going and let it down and they would get the supplies from the net. Sometimes a company would be where a track vehicle could not reach them so they take a helicopter to get to them. But that was also part of my job. I didn't fly helicopters but I did knew pilots that did. Ok I had to radio them in and tell them when I need them.

BT: What would have been a normal day of work?

FM: A normal day of work was getting up in the morning, five A.M. in the morning, eating a fast breakfast, and then preparing for the day's journey which you would not know that day faced you with until that day happened, because we was fighting three different peoples over there. And what I mean by three different peoples, we was fighting the North Vietnamese regular army, and we was fighting the Vietcong, and we was also fighting the insects. So I'm saying two different types of people but also we had to fight the insects. What I mean by insects, there was snakes and scorpions, spiders and stuff like that. And we was all out in the jungle. This was a jungle area. And moreover than anything, and I might be getting ahead, I might want to wait until a little later but anyway, that was our daily duty. We had to be prepared to go at any moment. And when we got a chance to sleep, which was not often, we had to sleep, we slept in a tent, which is what we slept in, we slept on a cot. And the mattress, we had both heads on each side, and incoming rockets, we had to roll out of the mattress and they'd fall on top of you. So if there was an explosion, you know, all the shrapnel from the explosion wouldn't hit direct you, it would hit on top of you or whatever. The explosion would, not the rocket itself because the rocket would tear you to pieces. That's how we slept when we did get sleep. Now, I didn't get a whole lot of sleep. Sometimes I didn't get about an hour of sleep and some days I got to sleep six or seven hours, but never normally would you get to sleep eight hours because either the incoming rockets would wake you up or somebody would say, "We're under attack." And that would wake you up. So we also had to be ready at any moment.

BT: What were some of the typical complications you ran into when transporting supplies?

FM: Ok, the complications that you could run into was that you may run into a attack, you know, the enemy maybe hid off down there in the bushes so you could go by and be attacked and they shoot at you from that way. And then you also had the people that you didn't know, the people that you thought was on your side would sometimes be after you and attack you. So being attacked and then sometimes, you know, we was in a wheeled vehicle, and sometimes we would have a flat or something happen to the vehicle and we would have that stall on us or we had to know first line of maintenance, which the driver knew how to do the first line maybe, you know, change a spark plug or maybe something like that in that kind of area. That's what we was running in to sometimes on our travels.

BT: In general, what were the relationships between the locals and the soldiers like?

FM: In general, the relationship was fair. Now I won't say it was good because they was under pressure to. And in some of their villages, they hid the enemy. I mean the Vietcongs, which was among them. We thought they was on our side, as a matter of fact the Vietcongs helped us in the day time and then fought us at night. Because they was actually living in the South with their family. So it was, and when we could find a friendly person that wasn't afraid of the Vietcongs, which was their own people, they may give us information. But normally they was afraid to give us to much information because, you know, some of their family members may have been Vietcong which was fighting us at night. And the only way we found out was we captured some and then we had the experience to know that they were Vietcong. And see, like I said, these Vietcong was people we was supposed to be helping in the South. We was helping the South fight the North. And we didn't know there was Vietcongs for a while, until the war was already maybe in 67 or 68, when they really realized there was Vietcong. And then we found out, like I said, they was helping us in the daytime and washing our clothes, cutting our hair, and, you know, working in the mess hall. But anyways, it was very complicated because you really didn't know after all who we was fighting.

BT: What was the general feeling among the soldiers about Vietnam?

FM: The general feeling among the soldiers in Vietnam was angry. Most of them was wondering, "Why we over here? Why we here?" Because we was treated like, you know, people back in the United States didn't, was wondering why we was over there. But the soldiers were very upset, and the black soldiers especially because they sent us out a lot of times and when it was dangerous, just to be honest with you. We was sent out first in the danger area. As a matter of fact, if you was a soldier that, foot soldier, you had to be a point guard. Now, what a point guard is, is you walking in front of the rest of the troops and at point. So if you got attacked, you'd be the first one that got shot. And a lot of soldiers, some of them even refused to fight sometimes, and we had a lot of them going to the stockade over there, you

know, the stockade was like a prison, like a jail where they sent troops that didn't follow orders. The morale, that's basically what you're asking, the morale over there, I would say maybe not the majority but quite a few was angry everyday because they just didn't think that the reason we was over there. They didn't understand. And even myself, I didn't understand why we was over there. I knew why we was over there, but I didn't understand the way it was fought, why we was doing this because we wasn't really fighting like we was supposed to. We would take an area. Then we would have to pull back. Then let the enemy take it again. Then we'd go back and get the same area, and every time we did we'd lose twice as many people.

BT: What were your views on the enemy?

FM: I thought the enemy was very well equipped and the terrain we was in because they knew the area over there that we was fighting in. That was one of the things that I was really hurt about. We was fighting them in their own territory. I didn't know how to get through the jungle. They knew where to hide up in the jungle and we tried to experience and we tried to learn. And we never had or was trained in the a jungle, training back before we went over there. And we had to learn that kind of tactics over with first hand experience. And believe me, it was not fun to go through an area of jungle and you didn't know who was on the other side of these bushes or whatever. And it was just, you know, turmoil. So the feeling about the enemy, we was very tense, you know, because we really didn't know who all we was fighting. And we knew we was fighting the North Vietnamese because they was dressed in uniform. But that other, the Vietcong, we really didn't know, so it was very frightening to us. And we was just almost, you know, wiped us out there once until we learned exactly who all we was fighting. So it was treacherous in order to get through each day.

BT: In March of 1968, search and destroy sweeps were launched against the Vietcong. Was your unit involved in these sweeps?

FM: Oh yes, we were very much involved in the sweeps. That's when we really learned, just a few months ago, really learned who they were. That's when we started, you know, started, sweeping them through the villages and to, you know, seek them out. But it was a hard deal because they was among the civilians we was helping. So we had to be very careful.

BT: How did the sweeps work? What were the procedures?

FM: The sweeps was that we would search the village, search hut to hut and try to, you know, get information from civilians that wasn't afraid about where the Vietcong was hiding. And that's how we went through the sweeps. But one lieutenant, you may have read about him, but one lieutenant went through a village, and his men got shot at and he just lined the whole village up in front of a ditch and wiped them all out. But he got court-martialed but that was, you know, I don't very

much blame him because you didn't know who they were and they was just mixed among the people we was helping.

BT: Moving on to you injury in May, did the events of that day seem any different than any other day?

FM: Yes the events of that day, like I said, it was about two or three o'clock, and the day before we started out with that convoy was a very mixed time, too. The soldiers had to load up the trucks and prepare to go on this mission that we was going on that night. We always fought at night over there and we travelled vehicles through night. And the way you saw the vehicle in front of you, you had the two little cat eyes in the taillight, that's how you saw. But we prepared and this mission we knew, I informed my men that its very dangerous and they all realized it was going to be dangerous. So they prepared to, you know, meet the enemies anywhere that we was approaching. So then I trained the people for the attack. But we was prepared pretty good because I prepared my men so if I didn't make it, like I said, there was a second man in charge and he got the convoy on through.

BT: What was the extent of your injuries?

FM: The extent of my injuries was blinded in both eyes, lost my right foot, and the left leg got burnt with white phosphorous, and I got a couple of shrapnel into my body. So it was an extensive, and I went into a deep coma for about thirty-three days.

BT: How long were you in the hospital?

FM: I was in the hospital for twenty-seven months. I had fourteen major operations and minor. And so I had to live in the hospital basically for about two years. The last eight months was as a out-patient, but I had to go back every week, but I got to come home on the weekends.

BT: Did you ever get depressed or ask "why me?"

FM: Absolutely. After I got out of my coma, I went into a coma, and after I got out, I was in San Antonio, Texas. They transported me from the fields of Vietnam to Japan, from Japan to San Antonio, Texas. That's when I woke up out of my coma. And I didn't even know I had lost my eyesight. I was so heavily sedated until I didn't really feel any pain or anything. When I woke up and just kept lying there in the hospital bed, the first thing I said was, "Where am I?" And they said, "You're in the hospital." I said, "How'd I get here?" They said, "You was transported here?" I didn't even think that I was blind then. As a matter of fact, for another three or four days, then I finally asked the nurse, I said, "Why is it dark in here?" And she said, "You don't know?" And I said, "No." And she said, "Well let me get the doctor." So the doctor came in and he said, "Son, you're temporarily blind." Well I'm listening to the word temporarily blind but much longer and the bandages stayed on

and I'm wondering, "Ok Doc, something ain't right. Why are these bandages still on my eyes?" And he says, "It's temporary." So about the second visit I visit with him, he had the psychologist there so I knew it was probably going to go off, and he told me, "You are going to be blinded. You're blind." And I did. I withdrew from reality, went into a deep depression, and would not talk. I would not talk for about four or five days.

BT: How did you learn to live with your blindness?

FM: I learned to live with my blindness after a while, after realizing that, you know, that this is the way it's going to be. I started listening to a lot of Christian records, and started listening to them and started praying and stuff. Then one night, I knew it had to be God, I had a vision of the bright image of this man, and basically it was God, and he just gave me peace in my mind. And he said, you know, "Peace be still, this is not until death." So I just started, from that day, started accepting my condition.

BT: Besides not being able to see, what was the biggest adjustment you had to make?

FM: The biggest adjustment I had to make was doing things without sight and being able to walk again. Now, walking with an artificial leg when the other one was in a cast was a great ordeal for me. I'm thinking, "Wow. What in the world can I do? I'm not going to be able to do anything and I'm not going to even be able to walk. If I can walk maybe, you know, I can do things. I've seen people blind walking around when I can see." Now, I couldn't even walk, so I had an ordeal and that was to learn how to walk again.

BT: What was the hardest everyday activity that you had to adjust to and relearn how to do?

FM: The hardest thing I had to do was concentrate. To concentrate on what I could do with my hands and what I was feeling without sight. I had to concentrate on what I touched and to be able to identify by feel. And that was very hard for me to do because I didn't have to rely on it when I could see something. That was a very hard thing to be transferred from sight to blind was feel.

BT: What was the thing that helped you the most to get through everything?

FM: The thing that helped me the most was my family. You know, supporting me. And, you know, that really helped me and praying to God and, you know, depending on Him to get me through, and help me to adjust to what I was going through?

BT: In what ways did people treat you differently because of your blindness?

FM: When I got back, people treated me differently, you know, some of them, I guess they thought if they come near they'd go blind themselves. Or they always say, "I don't know what to say to you." I would try to help them. I'd say, "Well, say the same thing to me the things you say to everybody else. It's just I can't see. I can hear and I can think. So you don't have to try to change what you say." And, you know, some of the boys would say, "Did you do that? Did you say that?" And I say, "Don't guard your words or try to place your words, you know. Just be normal. Try to react with me as you would with anybody else." And I tried to help them do that by, you know, joking around, saying something that would ease their mind about something, I would make a statement like, "Boy that sure did look good over there. Did you see that person over there?" And they would laugh and I said, "That's ok to laugh. Now, tell me what it looked like." So I would try to help them get through it.

BT: There are many cases of post-traumatic stress disorder regarding Vietnam veterans. Did you or any of your friends experience anything to that effect when the war was over?

FM: Yes there was a lot of post-traumatic stress. Some of them, you know, you could make a noise like that (Clapping) and they would hit the ground because they think it's a bomb going off. Now, even I had that for the first four or five months. I used to wake up and try to scream. I think my mind was going back to when I first got hit, although I don't remember it because I went unconscious. But I think my mind was trying to take me back there and it was an ordeal for me over there. And it when on for years later, until I finally got beyond that.

BT: After the war, you went back to school. Describe that experience.

FM: That was a scary experience at first. I didn't really want to try it because I didn't think I could do it. But I went over to Connecticut to learn how to get around by myself and learn how to deal with learning by listening and feeling. And then when I took the test, the psychologist said, "You got a very high IQ. Why don't you try going to college?" So he recommended me to go to college and I did and took the test and past the first time I took it. And the scary part was knowing I had to go to one class, one classroom to another, and that was scary. But the first day that I was there, a student was approaching me that was eager to help. I mean from one classroom to another. And he would help me study. I studied in a group and, you know, some of the students was skeptical of me, but a lot of them, you know, was very helpful.

BT: What degree did you end up getting?

FM: My degree is Social Psychology. I graduated from Dalton State College over hear with a general science, which was only a two-year college when I went there. And I graduated there with a associate degree in general science. And then there was getting a job with only an associate degree. You couldn't get one. So I went on to UTC Chattanooga where I got a B.S. and a masters in Social Psychology.

BT: What the biggest reason for you deciding to go back to school and get your degree?

FM: The biggest reason was to help deal with myself first. That's why I took psychology, to understand reasoning and be able to think things through and be able to deal with things that, you know, was put forth in front of me. And to be able to accept and, you know, I wanted to help others understand people that couldn't see, that had a handicap, and to make them more comfortable around me. So that was my focus.

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