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Veteran's Opinion During the 60s-70s

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Hist 155, Fall 2016 / Mr. Anamuro

Student Interviewer's name: Nestor D. Anamuro

Interviewee name: Dennis Marrow

Time and Location of Interview:

The interview was conducted in one session on one date and lasted approximately thirty-nine minutes. It was conducted at the Bradley Healthcare & Rehab Center in Cleveland, TN. Only Nestor and Dennis were present.

About Dennis Marrow

Dennis Marrow was born in Cleveland, Tennessee on February 17, 1952. He sought to sign up with the Navy as a gunner, but was cut short due to a medical condition. This interview covers his life during the 60's, his enrollment to the Navy, and after the 60's and was conducted on November 10, 2016 at the Bradley Healthcare & Rehab Center in Cleveland, TN.

Interviewer: Nestor Anamuro (NA)

Interviewee: Dennis Marrow (DM)

NA: Alright. I am going to be asking you a couple of questions.

DM: Sure.

NA: First of all, introduce yourself.

DM: My name is Dennis Marrow. My date of birth is 2/17/52.

NA: And where were you born?

DM: 2/17-

NA: I mean where?

DM: Oh, in a...lets see...Cleveland I think? Yeah I was born in Cleveland I think. That's been so many years ago that I don't.

NA: Fair enough. And...so...what did you...sorry, where did you train, so what...excuse me for my...

DM: That's ok.

NA: Alright.

DM: I tell you what. I'll start from the beginning.

NA: Sure.

DM: And go as far as I can. And if you have any questions in between I'll stop. Ok?

NA: Alright.

DM: When I was in the twelfth grade, well, I wanted to join the Navy. So they had a recruiting office here in Cleveland, Tennessee. So I went to the recruiting office and I took several tests to uh see what I am qualified for. Either on a boat, you know, or ship or, have a, you know, a sailor. And I found out I'll be better off to become a seaman. And so I went to school here in Cleveland for uh that what I have chose. And during that time, well, that's when they did the test on me to see how healthy I was. Then they found the...slope spot in my head, you can still feel it. It's still there it will never go away. And that's when I discovered that I had a problem with my head. I wasn't physically disabled. I wasn't sick all the time, but I did have a...sickness when I was a kid. And they found that I have a ringworm in the back of my head. You ever heard of a ringworm?

NA: Sort of. But could you explain?

DM: Oh yeah, it's a worm that enters the body and gets under the skin and lays of the skull. And it feeds off of that, just any worm would. And I got a place in the back of my head about that big a round and you could feel it. Where my skull-

NA: Wait. Big or Round? Could you like...what was the size...like could like...size of a ball or size of a...

DM: Well that's a flat place, ok? And like I say you could feel it if you want to feel it. You don't want to feel it. (Chuckle)

NA: No thank you. (Light chuckle)

DM: And...but...I couldn't...my daddy couldn't get rid of it. So I had to sleep on my face all the time. I was in a lot of pain. So one day, a guy comes by and uh; he asked my daddy he said, "What's that boy's problem?" Daddy told him it was a ringworm. So the man told him how to get rid of it. This was the old days. So daddy asked him "What do I do for him?" And he told him "Get yah a green walnut." And we had a walnut tree. And he told daddy, he said "Get a green walnut, take the juice from that walnut, and rub on his head." And he did, and the ringworm died. And so, now I got a scar up there. And there's a dead place in my skull like this. And uh...but it kills the ringworm. So they found that, the Navy did. And they decided, you know, they didn't know what the problem was, just like you, your confused, they were confused. So other than going through a whole lot of hassle, they wouldn't let me join. So that's the story.

NA: So but why radio. You said you wanted to be a radio operator, right?

DM: No.

NA: Oh?

DM: No, I wanted to be a...what was it. I went to school for it. In the Navy, while I was trying to get in the Navy, but I wanted to be on a ship.

NA: Oh, so what were you training for again?

DM: Oh, I wanted to be on the ship as a gunner.

NA: Oh, as a gunner.

DM: Mmhm, yeah. So I can travel on the sea and take my place where I was suppose to. But, there was so many red flags, I couldn't get it. They wouldn't let me.

NA: Why a gunner?

DM: Huh?

NA: Why a gunner?

DM: Well I always like guns. Always. I still do.

NA: So during the Army, would you...did you have to worried about being hazed? When you first joined? You know.

DM: Well I didn't actually join.

NA: I mean like when you were in the academy.

DM: I wasn't in the academy.

NA: Oh. But you train for three months right?

DM: Mmhm, in Cleveland. Take written test.

NA: Written test?

DM: Yes. Physical. They won't do anything physical because of my head.

NA: So in a way, you never got any proper training?

DM: No.

NA: Never got...

DM: I did paper work

NA: So...you told me earlier that you trained for three months?

DM: Yeah, I did paperwork for three months.

NA: Oh, paper work.

DM: Every morning I went to the Naval co... over here in Cleveland. Down below the courthouse and that was a long time ago. And...in 19...70, I think it was, that I wanted to go to the Navy. So I graduated in high school and then I went over there, to see if I can get my way in to the Navy, as soon as that happen. So, it didn't happen. But I graduated with twelve years of high school.

NA: Alright then. So, the war that you were going to be participating in was the Vietnam War. Am I correct?

DM: Yeah.

NA: What were your thoughts of the war? Like did you feel like America was going to win or...?

DM: Well, no, that wasn't the problem. I was having friends to die over there and I wanted to join them. If I got killed, I got killed. But, I couldn't stand by and watch my friends, and I had a lot of friends, die in the Vietnam War, a lot of them. I went to a lot of them funeral. And I felt bad because I couldn't be one of them.

NA: So...then let me see if I can phrase this right. Because at the time, there was a lot of negative talk of the war, like some people wanted to get out. What were your thoughts on that?

DM: I wanted to go in.

NA: So you...

DM: Because I was having friends die all over. Good friends of mine. And I felt bad because I couldn't go to help the nation and do my part and them dying. That makes sense? This the best way I could explain.

NA: So, what were your thoughts on the protest that were happening around the war? The protest against the war.

DM: Some of them was good, and some of them was uncalled for. And the ones that was good was a positive side that the soldiers had. If it hadn't been for the soldiers

at that time, and we lost that war, we would have been in bad bad shape. Very bad. So, I just wanted to play my part.

NA: So you were for the war or against the war?

DM: Well, I was against it. But that didn't change my mind. I was against it. I'm never for a war. No horror, no place, no time. But if America's involved, I feel that it is my place to do my part, at that time. And I was losing friends; I could call off probably ten of them if I thought real hard right now, the people that died. And it torn their families all to pieces. The boys was going over and they coming back in coffins, and that disturbed me. So I thought, well, when I was trying to get in and couldn't, well I felt bad. Because I was losing friends that I felt like if I went into the service and not have this problem with my ringworm and they wouldn't take me, I felt bad that I thought I was, more less, I felt that I was letting them down.

NA: Well...Well anyway. So in a way. But it wasn't just the war that was going on that people were protesting. There was other protests like Civil Rights and all that.

DM: I don't believe in protest. No. I just don't believe in it. Cause they never accomplish nothing. Can you name one that accomplished something by protesting?

NA: Well in a way the Civil Rights...

DM: Oh yeah. But you know, many people die over the Civil Rights.

NA: True. So but uh, what were your thoughts of the Civil Rights Movement at the time?

DM: I didn't approve of it. Because basically it was for the blacks, and I believed in the white people and I didn't agree with the way blacks was doing, so...

NA: In what way you didn't agree with what the blacks were doing?

DM: Because they wanted everything for nothing. At that time they wanted their rights and do away with our rights. And they wanted all more than their rights to come back to them. They wanted free this and free that, I need this, I want this, I feel like I need it because I am a black man.

NA: Did you felt personally attacked by the Civil Rights?

DM: No. No, I didn't.

NA: So, what were your thoughts on Martin Luther King Jr.at the time?

DM: Well, I look at it this way. Blacks and whites, I have not preference of either one of them. I am a white man and the blacks I respect them just like I expect them to respect me, and no more, and no less. Because they're human, their heart and

blood flows just like mine does. But if they go against something that I believe in, I not going to kill one of them for it. You know. I may not like it, but you know, if you show me anybody or tell me of anybody that loves everything in this country and has lived and loved everything in this country, I'll like to meet him.

NA: Besides the Civil Rights, what was your thoughts on the hippie movement?

DM: I didn't approve of it. I wasn't a hippie; I was born on a farm, working. I might have been different if I lived and been born in a hippie movement, and had long hair and dirt. (Laughs)

NA: Have you encounter any hippies at the time?

DM: Oh yeah. Yeah. Some of them was good, but most of them was like me. They didn't believe in the hippie movement.

NA: Really?

DM: Yeah. When you're born in the country, as I was, you live on a farm and you get up every morning working on the farm before you have to go to school to get your education; because I get up in the morning and my daddy worked. I go to the barn and turn the cow in. And while the cow was eating, I milk on one side and the calf would suck the other. I did that every morning, before I ever got ready to go to school, which I had to be there in short time. I never miss the bus except once. And when I miss the bus, my daddy taught me that I would miss it no more. So when he took me to school that morning, I never missed it anymore. I was a working person. At that time in my life, see I am sixty fiv...will be sixty-five in February. At that time in my life, we worked. You didn't get up, take a bath, go to school, hang around, and this, that, and the other. You worked. That's the only way you lived.

NA: So...that is because the hippies were a bit diff...they...they had their own philosophy in a way.

DM: Yeah. And the marijuana and the drugs they were taking didn't help them.

NA: Could you tell me one story of your encounter with a hippie?

DM: Well I didn't have most...encounter with them because I stayed away from them. When you don't like nothing, its foolish it get inside it. You know. To me, that's the way I feel. It ain't no use to hide under a shell until uh...you find something wrong with it. If you don't like to start with get out, quit, don't wait, don't bother. See that's like blacks. I like black people. I really do. Have all my life. My best friend that died was a black person. And they don't...I don't have not qualms with them. I mean I slept in bed with them. You know not physically. You know but I shared a bed if I went and spent a night. I slept in the bed with him or his brother or whoever, you know. That's they way it was back then. You go and

spend a night—you didn't warm bedroom. So you have to share it. I didn't mind sharing it, I didn't mind being seen with them. No. I went to church with them, I associated with them and I still look at them the same way. You see there's people out here, I don't care what nationality they are, all of them has a fault. You can look at it and if you look long enough you will find it. But if you just, take it as it is, you'll be fine.

NA: So um...you were born in 1952 correct? So during the fifties, there was a...there was like...there was a way of living to be an American. Like, how was that for you?

DM: When I was born?

NA: I mean like when...during your young years during the fifties.

DM: Work, work, work.

NA: Just...

DM: You had to have work. You couldn't watch television cause we didn't have a TV. And uh so you stayed busy and then the only time you really got a break was when school was out for spring break. So we had a spring break just every other school did. But, while we were out of school, we worked on the farm. I mean we weren't rich, we didn't... I didn't have a car until I was a...golly I guess seventeen years old. That's when I got my drivers licenses and I got me a car. Rest of the time when you worked on the farm. If people ain't never done that they don't know what I am talking about. I have to turn the calf in and let the calf suck one side and I milked the other. And that's the way we did it. We raising a calf and getting milk for the house. Oh yeah, I milked a lot of cows. (Chuckles) I even worked in a dairy once, and uh that was a pretty good job. Didn't pay much. (Chuckles)

NA: Um, another thing I actually want to touch on. During the time, like, you had American ideals to fight against communism ideals. Like, how did you feel about communism?

DM: I didn't approve of it. No. I didn't believe in people running other people's lives. That's what communism was, to me. Certain people wanted to rule your life. And they were communist, to me. And I didn't like it.

NA: Were you ever scared of them?

DM: No. I ain't never been scared of nobody. (Chuckles) Make the long story short, ain't never been scared of nobody. You know why? The man up yonder, God in heaven, He's got control. I don't have control. I don't take control. He's the one that keeps control in my body. He surely did. And that was drummed into me when I was a kid.

NA: Was joining the Army for Vietnam actually a fight against communism.

DM: I don't think so, there's a conflict. If it have been communism everybody in the world would have been fighting against it. Basically it was Vietnam and the Vietnam war in my eyes was a thin out population.

NA: Um...also you mentioned to me earlier in the first interview why you considered yourself as a veteran. Could you care to explain that again?

DM: Because I went to school and I spent long time in school in the morning at the Naval office. Day after day after day. And then when they found the ringworm in my head and then they told me that I couldn't join, it broke my heart. It sure did. But, I didn't get angry; I just took as it come. You know. I tried that's, all I could do. And if it came up today that's all I can do, is try. But I can't do it now, but yeah I wanted to go because I was having friends die. And I see them come back on an airplane and take them off in level field. The airplane would bring them home and they would have hearses down there carrying my friends out of that airport and the families that was down there and take them to the families home or families funeral home and it was breaking my heart. So I did everything I possibly could. I mean if they took me, I'll went. I was ready to go. And so I figured the time that I spent trying to protect get ready for and then when I had the opportunity to take the test, I couldn't because of my head. And nobody can acclaim to me yet. I asked them what were they going to write on my papers? I asked them that. And the person I don't remember if he was a sergeant, lieutenant, or what he was. I asked him "What are you going to write on my papers?" And they said "Well we just have to put a 'hole in the head'." And that's what they put on my papers. What was wrong with me?

NA: So well, this next question though, it was around 1971 on April 23 where about a thousand Vietnam veterans protest against the war by throwing their combat ribbons, helmets, and uniforms on the capitol steps. How did you feel about this?

DM: I agree with them. I agree with them. They were trying to show the wheels of the United States, the presidents and all the upper people what it was. And I worked with a boy in a grocery company and he was in the Vietnam War. And he told me some higher telling tales. And he said that he seen so many boys died and he was a boy himself. He said he went to bed every night and slept with one eye open and one eye closed because the next day and a lot of times, I didn't know this until he told me, that the United States would furnished beer for them for soldiers. And they...when they come off of a...situation, well then they give them a couple of days off to regroup their minds and their bodies. And then they let them get drunk. So what does that tell you? All sober, what does that tell you? That if I went, and I was in the battle like Vietnam and I was waiting for the Vietcong to come in and kill me, and that's what they did, and the United State said "Ok boys take the day off and have a party." And he told me, I didn't experience this, he did, he said after that

everybody just wanted to stay drunk. They still do their fighting, but they didn't have the pain they have. Does that make sense?

NA: So in a way, they were losing motivation.

DM: Yeah. And he...last time I saw him, he probably dead now, but uh he still knew people that I knew in the community were virtually up there and uh he told me one time that he was gonna...he had a best friend that died over there. And they wanted him to escort his best friend's body back home. And he told them; he couldn't do it. And they said, "Well, we're giving you an order to do it." And he said, "You can't give me an order to take my friend home, he's dead," and said, "Further more I ain't going home, because if I do I ain't coming back." They wouldn't let him go home. Because they were afraid they'll lose him. He was angry and he probably still is if he is still alive. Oh he told me some horror stories, but I wouldn't have cared if I've been beside him. Because he had...he had uh the ambition to fight. He had a cause for that ambition and he wouldn't...he accepted that. The bad parts and the good side, to make sure that the Americans' won that war.

NA: How did you feel when America pulled away from the war and it was loss?

DM: Oh yeah. I didn't like it at all. They should have waited and...or...they should've done what they went over there to do. That was to take care of that mess, clean it up, and not hold back, and do what had to be done. But no, when they got the upper hand, they cut it down. And they were losing so many and they was having so much conflict with the American people angry at the military for losing all those men, oh god, that was a lot of people. And you know that as well as I do. So they got angry.

NA: The college shootings, yeah.

DM: Yeah, they got angry. So what they do? They decided, "Well we need to back up, we need to back off." And they did. All the dead people are still dead, and the ones that living; they still got mental problems. So, it was a useless war.

NA: How do you feel about the veterans, who were treated, when they got back? How they were treated?

DM: Terrible. Terrible.

NA: How do feel about it.

DM: I didn't like it. I honestly could tell you I don't like it. The Americans sent them over there to do the job. But they didn't let them finished their job. They stopped it before it was finished. And then the next thing you know, they were being treated bad and they still are. They still are. Look at the people that's gotta... they go to...what's that hospital they go to... they go to now?

NA: Veterans hospital.

DM: Yeah, they won't even doctor them.

NA: Really?

DM: No. I heard it on the news. I didn't go see it, but I heard it on the news. Where they were needing help, you know, they have physical problems. And the hospital is supposed to be a veterans administrated hospital. They ain't got enough people to run it. Mm. Nope. And I know you heard of that. Yeah, if you watch television anytime, you heard that.

NA: How they were treated, yeah.

DM: Yeah, sure have. Naw I don't like it, because that was the main part of the United States. Their military was supposed to be strong. All the things that come with the military was...we going let you fight, you going to fight we are going take care of you. All the veterans that came back, they didn't take care of them. And they still don't take care of them. And you have heard that on the news in the last year for the veteran administration. Don't have enough doctors, they don't have enough nurses, they don't have enough hospitals to take of what needs to be take care of. Now have you not heard that?

NA: That I haven't, but...

DM: What's wrong. (Light chuckle)

NA: That's something.

DM: You don't know that?

NA: Well, I knew it was bad, but...

DM: Yeah, they took them and put them in there in harms way, and then wouldn't take care of them. Agent Orange is a good opportunity. Agent Orange, they-the Vietcong used Agent Orange on the soldiers from American to get rid of them, you know. That was part of fighting, Vietcong and Americans, was Agent Orange. I worked with a man that had Agent Orange. And he was going to the veterans administration to have-get medicine for it. Then before last time, I talk to him was a couple of years ago, oh its been several years ago. I don't remember how many years, but he spent a lot of years and he tried to get help from the military, the United States veterans. And uh he couldn't get it. Because, they wasn't suppose to be using Agent Orange over there per say. And they was. And once they found out that they were using Agent Orange, Vietcong. Well then, United States said ok we'll take care of the vets that has Agent Orange. So he, last I saw him, he was taking

treatments for Agent Orange. And that was a chemical that was never suppose to be used. But the Vietcong use it.

NA: Chemical warfare.

DM: Mmhm, yeah. That's all it was.

NA: So, in a way...did you think America lost moral at the time? Like they were troubled of what they were supposed to be as an American?

DM: No. No. Everyone that I've ever talk to and been around and whatever, they did their job. The American's, the politicians didn't do theirs. Because that guy that I was telling about Agent Orange, he had went to the veterans hospital and they told him he didn't have Agent Orange. Well, he kept going, and finally they decided and found out he did have Agent Orange. So last time I saw him, he was still alive, but he was suffering terribly.

NA: Speaking of politics, like...it was also around this time when Nixon got in trouble for Watergate. Could you tell me your side, like where did you hear about it and how did you felt about it?

DM: Well I heard about thru the...basically the papers and the news and all of it. And how did I feel about it, he needed to be done to just like he was. Kicked out of the White House. That what it was, he was kicked out of the White House. If you well know that, he was kicked out and that's what they should have done. Kicked him out of the White House. Because that was...they tore down everything that the military had basically built. And it was coming down from a high side down to a low side if you know what I am talking about. Build up high and was dropped down. After Watergate, everybody thought it was done, it was. Must have been a mess for, I don't know how many years. (Light chuckle)

NA: Basically, he technically resigned before they can kick him out.

DM: Right, right but I say kicked him out. (Chuckle) That's a better term for me. (Chuckle)

NA: When this happen, people were starting to lose faith in the government. Did you as...?

DM: No, I never did lose faith in the government because I had read and I have seen and talked to people that...the bottom line was that the good Lord was in control. And I knew that and I didn't know how long it was going to take, but he was going to intervene, in which he did and which he has now and now we're just waiting for him to come back and take us home. But, yeah...I never did lose faith, no. I wasn't never my...thing to lose faith. I have been a fighter all my life. That's the reason I am here, in this facility, when I came here I couldn't talk, I couldn't walk, I couldn't

do anything. And these people here, with my help and the good Lord's up above, now I walk, I talk, I do everything that I can as a man just like you do. So that right there shows me that there still is a God because He's the one that controls our bodies and our minds. He is. A lot of people don't believe that, but I do, I was raised in the church and I was raised know that God was in control. And some people around here, they say "I might die today" and I say "Nah." If you do, it ain't your doings, because God said our days are numbered. When our number comes up, regardless of what we do to hang on, if our numbers up we're going. If you choose to go to heaven, you be going to heaven. But there are hell to. I know you heard of that. I am sure you have. If you ever went to church you did. I hope you went to church. (Chuckles)

NA: Of course I do.

DM: Sure, so you know there's a heaven and a hell. In heaven, Jesus Christ himself was born for that reason. And not only that but He was laying on the Cross for our sins. And the devil, he's after every single one of us every single day. You have to fight him to stay alive. God's going to help us. Yeah. That's the way I look at it.

NA: That sounds like a good place to end the interview, because I am out of questions.

DM: (Laughs) Well, I hope I answered them like, you know. But I can only tell you the truth. Yeah I wanted to go the military I sure did. And I was heart broken when I couldn't. But the people that was in there, when they come home on a leave, oh yeah, I visit them and listen to them and talk to them and people I worked with before I got here and other places. I talk to them and they tell me some bad stories. Sometimes I listen to them and then I go away and I shed a tear for them. Which how much I like it, not the war, that's how much I like if I had been in it. You know, you want to do something so bad your hands are tied, that you can't and you feel bad. I don't know how you feel; I can't say how you feel.

NA: Well, thank you for your time.

DM: Well, yes sir anytime.

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