

**Frank J. Furno  
Veteran**

**Noelle Heaney  
Perry Junior High School  
Interviewer**

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**Q:** I'm Noelle Heaney, Perry Junior High February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010. Could you please state your name for our records?

**FF:** Frank J. Furno.

**Q:** I'm going to start with some basic questions. What was your pre-war education?

**FF:** Pre-war education...High School. Notre Dame High School in Utica and I went to Fredonia State University for one year. And then I went into the NAVY.

**Q:** Did you have any pre-war occupations?

**FF:** Nothing too significant. I mean I worked for Oneida County for a summer. I worked for the Utica Water Board for a summer. And just before I went into the NAVY, I worked for the Bendix Corporation.

**Q:** You enlisted?

**FF:** I did.

**Q:** What was your reasoning for enlisting?

**FF:** At the time, the Vietnam War was going on. I went to Fredonia and I never got an A, a B, or an F. I got all Cs and Ds which means my GPA was about 1.77. And as I recall, there was talk of starting up a lottery. I was pretty directionless to be frank and I thought, if I'm going to be called up in the lottery as a possibility then I would be better off if I just joined up because then I could maybe learn some kind of a skill, so I decided to enlist in the NAVY. I also figured that if I went into the NAVY I probably wouldn't have to go to Vietnam, which was consideration at the time.

**Q:** What was your usual daily schedule while you were working in the NAVY?

**FF:** Well, first you go to Boot Camp and that's several weeks. After that it is decided whether or not you're going to get any further training, which I was. And there were two electronic schools that I had to go to, Electronics A and Electronics B. The first one was at Great Lakes. The second one was in Dam Neck

Virginia and that's where I learned how to work on guided missile radars. So basically, the first part of my NAVY career was going to school and learning how to do the electronics to take care of these radars. Then in around September of 1970 I went to Mayport, Florida to be assigned to my ship which wasn't there, so I had to go on another ship to wait until my shift got there. Finally, my ship came in, I got all settled in and I went home on leave. While I was on my ship, we went on a few, what they call breakdown cruises to get used to being on a boat. Chronology isn't always exact in my head, but it's got to be close to Christmas in 1970 and that's when we found out that we were going to be the last ship from the East Coast to go to Vietnam. That raised a lot of problems for me because, by then, I wasn't too sure I was in agreement with all that was going on over there, so it becomes a very difficult decision-making process.

I went on leave for Christmas time, I came back and we were due to leave in January. I talked to my parents about it at home, and they said "I don't know, do what you wanna do" [laughs] so uh... [sighs] I went back a couple of days early I remember distinctly I went to a hotel in Jacksonville and I stayed there by myself for a couple of days and I just thought things over, tried to write things out. Finally, when I went back to the ship I had a letter written out, telling them that I couldn't see any way out of this other than to tell them that I was a conscientious objector, that I didn't want to go to the war. Of course, things kind of blew up then because, you're on the ship you're supposed to be working on radars and now you're telling us you don't even want to go to the war. So, that began a whole series of events being interviewed by psychiatrist, senior officers, being restricted from doing my job because my job, you needed a security clearance to be working on these radars. Of course, they immediately assumed that if you're a conscientious objector you're not going to want to have anything to do with that, because it's a weapon of war.

So they took me off all those jobs, but they let me go on the cruise and it ended up being a wonderful experience from the point of view of... we left from Florida; we went down through the Panama Canal around over to Hawaii. We stopped at Pearl Harbor. We went from there to the Philippines and from there to Vietnam. We were in Vietnam for several months. And all this while my case was quote on quote, pending. We also had stops to have ship repairs, refueling, resupplying. We went to Japan for that, so I got to see Japan. And then on the way back we went down through Singapore and Hong Kong. We went back down through the Indian Ocean, so we went to the Seychelles Islands. And all this time, I was really working just as a crewmate, just a bosun's mate. Working on chip and paint, keeping places clean, standing watch every once in a while, things like that. So, then we came back, we went down around the Cape of Good Hope down around the bottom of Africa. We went to Rio; we came back up around Guantanamo Bay and then we went back to Mayport. It was literally a trip around the world, which was fabulous! You know you can't beat that. In retrospect, it was wonderful.

And they still hadn't made any decision about what they wanted to do with me, then a few months later one of the officers on the ship, a commander told me they had decided to discharge me, to discharge me honorably which was a thrill to me. You know it was very conflicting because I love my country, I think everybody should serve their country, I thought that at the time. But you know people were... it was a very upsetting time, a very confusing time. I did what I thought I had to without, I mean I had opportunities, I actually spoke with people who wanted me to go to Canada, wanted me to go AWOL... you know I just couldn't do that. It put me in a very bad position in a way because you know, people who are in the NAVY, and in favor of the war looked at me like I was some kind of a traitor or something and that wasn't it at all. I think some of the officers and eventually the one that really took me under his wing kind of understood where I was coming from. It was very interesting. But it ended up okay. I'm an honorably discharged NAVY veteran. I'm very proud of it. And in the end I'm really proud of what I did because I felt it was the right thing to do. So, I never really worked on radars too much but I was trained to do it. I don't know what else I can tell you, it was quite an amazing experience.

**Q:** I read that you enjoyed becoming a Shellback?

**FF:** A Shellback is when you're on ship and your ship is going around the world and you cross the International Date Line, you become a Shellback. It was a big ceremony, it's a lot of hazing, and it's a lot like some kind of a fraternity hazing where you have to crawl around the ship. You have to kiss the belly of the Sea God. Somebody sits up there like Neptune's wreck he's got the trident. You get to do silly things then you get a big certificate which I was going to bring today but I couldn't find it. But I got a certificate for going over the International Date Line, you also get a certificate called, becoming a turtle I believe. When you become a turtle, you go across the equator, you get a certificate for that. It gives the exact longitude and latitude that you crossed over and it's kind of exciting. So, I got both of those.

**Q:** What did you do for entertainment?

**FF:** Played a lot of cards. That seemed to be the big diversion. I learned to play cribbage in the NAVY. I learned to play poker in the NAVY. I learned to play pinochle in the NAVY. That's all we did all the time. That and going on the shore of course. Shore leave was always great!

**Q:** How did you feel about the way foreign nationals treated Americans?

**FF:** You know for the most part my experience was excellent. I don't know if it was just me but I never had a problem. Never felt like they didn't want me to be there. In any country in... Asia, Africa, and South America I always felt welcomed. I always got along well with everyone.

**Q:** Who are the people you're going to remember the most?

**FF:** Well, I remember bosun mate chief Driggers. He hated me so I remember him a lot. And the commander that I spoke about who kind of took me under his wing I remember him a lot. There were guys that, when we were in radar school in Dam Neck Virginia we were allowed to live off-base. I had three roommates there. Two of whom I occasionally keep up with, one I haven't heard from in quite a while. I remember all those guys

**Q:** How did the war impact your life?

**FF:** Well I don't know if I ever would have went in the service to be honest with you if the war hadn't been going on. It just wasn't something that I ever really thought about when I was growing up. My father had been in the army, but it wasn't like we were a military family or anything like that. Just, all of a sudden it became an option. I knew one thing that I didn't want to be on the ground in Vietnam, so I thought, this is the way to go. Satisfies my obligation. I can be true to my country loyal to my country, but I won't have to get killed, was the way I thought. And from there when I got out, I think you grow up a lot. Taught me how to take charge of my own life. I got a job; I eventually went back to school. I kind of did the circuit route of school too. I went in the NAVY I came out, I went back to school I did really well. Then when I got out of school I knocked around for a little more while then I went back to law school [laughs]. Eventually, I got to be a lawyer and I'm really happy with that. I've been a lawyer for twenty years now. [smiles] ... What else?

**Q:** When you went around the world basically, and you went to all the different ports, what did the military do in those ports? What was the purpose of going to all those places, since, we were active in Vietnam, why did we hit all those other places?

**FF:** Well most times it was to refuel, to get supplies and pick up mail and things like that. When we went to Japan, we had some things that needed to be repaired, updated so we were there for a couple of weeks. It's also to get you off the ship. You get a little stir-crazy on a 427-foot bowl with a few hundred guys... every few weeks you want to get off. It was maybe two weeks to get from Mayport over to Hawaii. So, then you're ready, then you go off. Mostly that's sightseeing and drinking mostly you know... [smiles]

**Q:** Was two weeks the longest you were at Sea?

**FF:** No, we were at sea, when we were doing carrier escort off Vietnam. What that is basically when you tail around and behind the aircraft carrier that's going up and down then Gulf of Tonkin. We were out there, that's called being on the line. We were in the line for something like 44 days, something like that. It was a long time. And we were there right in the middle of summer, so a lot of days were hundred degrees or more. It's uncomfortable you're ready to get off the ship then.

**Q:** Did you have any other shipmates that were conscientious objectors as well?

**FF:** Not that I know of, not on my boat. There was a guy I remember who got off the boat because he sequestered himself in a compartment with a gun, said that he was going to kill himself. It was maybe one or two other guys that kind of went AWOL but I think they were just nutty. I don't think they did it for any particular reason, other than they just didn't go back for a while. No, there was no other conscientious objectors. There was guys that I talked with about it. And like I said, when I was in Mayport and we found out that we were going to go there, I kind of made it known to a couple of friends that I was handing in this letter. That's when they hooked me up with people that they knew that were counseling guys, and going to Canada, and real anti-war guys

**Q:** Were there any guys that gave you animosity about that, or treated you differently?

**FF:** Chief bosun mate Driggers... he was the big one. And there were others but most of them were you know... just as long as you're doing what you're doing... they're not gonna bother you. It was weird, I was kind of ostracized for a while.

**Q:** I was thinking that that would set you apart from other people and they would not necessarily trust you, you must have felt very alone.

**FF:** There was a period of that. Especially, when they first made the decision and they decided that I couldn't be a fire control technician which is what the job is called. Fire control being people that shoot things off, missiles and or guns. When they decided, at first, they really didn't want to do with me, except they knew they didn't want me in the radar room, and they didn't want me in the computer room just for security purposes. So, then they finally decided "well, you're going to bunk down with the bosun mates." At first it was definitely "who the heck are you?" And the chiefs of course knew why I was there. The regular sailors didn't. It only came out through the grapevine, but only the big boys were advised what my status was. So, for a while it was definitely weird yeah. I was on my own for a few, [pauses] months.

**Q:** So, when did you go in and when did you come out?

**FF:** October of 68 I went in. And March of 72 I got out. Almost four years.

**Q:** So you were at the end too? You enlisted for four years, was that what you had signed on for? Well they discharged you just shy of your four years-

**FF:** Yeah, we were the last ship from the east coast to go over. Well at the time, especially since the war was quote on quote winding down by then, by 72, starting to. They were offering a lot of early outs. A lot of people that had four-year hitches got out in three and a half, that kind of thing. It was a big decision for them too apparently because they actually I think talked about me not going on the cruise at all. I mean I handed the letter in a week before we were supposed to

go or ten days however much it was. I think there was a lot of discussions about should we even let him go...

**Q:** What did you want to do?

**FF:** If the decision was that I had to go I was going to go. I wasn't going to not obey my country, let's put it that way. If they said, "you're going to go", I went! But then they said, "You're not going to do anything that involves anything with security or shooting the missiles or anything like that." I said well, ok. That was punishment enough, I guess. Because I had all that training. I'm sure they weren't too happy about that, costs to train me.

**Q:** Would you have preferred that they had just let you avoid the cruise, I mean at the time looking back now, would you have preferred to stay?

**FF:** At the time, I think would've preferred not to go. In retrospect, I'm glad I did. [Smiles and laughs] it ended up sort of like a happy ending. I've been babbling about it my whole life. After I became a lawyer, one of my first jobs was in Syracuse and I met some guys that were in the Italian American veterans post out there. My father was Italian, so I went and talked to them. I got pretty good friends with one of the guys, he wanted me to draw up his will. He was like, "ah you got to join the post, we need a sergeant in arms" I have to admit I felt funny about it because even though it's an honorable discharge, it says you're discharged because you're conscientious objector [laughs] and I'm like, how are these vets going to take that, you know... I screwed up my courage and I brought my DD214 which is your discharge papers. I said "here it is... honorable discharge" they said "that's all we care about"

**Q:** I would think that, you wanted to serve your country, it's just that you objected the war. They are two very different things.

**FF:** But when you're 19 or 20 years old, it's kind of... scary... to be honest with you

**Q:** now more technical question, what about the ship itself, like what kind of ship it was, what its name was, what it did?

**FF:** It was a brand-new class of ship at the time, it was called a guided missile frigate. Designation was DLG which means destroyer-like cruiser. I don't know how they got the G, but DLG-32 and the name of it was the William H. Stanley who had been a former admiral in the Navy. It's slightly bigger than a destroyer but it's smaller than a cruiser. What they did was, on this particular class, they maintained a five-inch gun. Usually what they had were two guns. One on each end. A five-inch gun on the back and a five-inch gun on the front. But with this class of ship they kept the five-inch gun on the back, but they put the new guided missiles on the front. They were ANSPS 55 Bravo missiles. It was like a missile launcher on the front rotating with two missiles. All I got to do afterwards was repaint it after the missiles flew off [laughs]. But that was the first class of guided

missile ships. After that they went to missiles front and back. That was a whole new Spruance class. Like I said it was 427 feet long and crew of about 212, something like that. It was a good ship.

**Q:** When you said you painted after the missiles were fired, were missiles fired in combat or was it missiles just being tested?

**FF:** Tested. Never fired in combat. When we went over there, we went to general quarters twice I think. What that means is you scramble to be ready in case of an attack. You're all sleeping, and the alarms goes off and everybody has to go to their battle stations. That only happened twice. But Vietnam doesn't have much of an air force so there really wasn't that big of a threat. But we still had to protect the carrier.

**Q:** So, you were in the Gulf of Tonkin area itself, which is controversial, just I mean the name with the resolution... vastly different wars.

**FF:** well the whole reason for it was different. It was the first time that I thought that we were in a war that we couldn't really figure out why. Why are we fighting this war? Didn't seem like immediate threat to us. That's where I came down anyway. And I knew that, I mean I couldn't... see my choices were, walk away. I dint want to do that. It just didn't seem right. So, the conscientious objector was really the only avenue open to me. I mean I don't know to be totally honest; I told the doctors I don't know that I'm really a conscientious objector to war in all its forms. I just know I don't want to go to this one. They said all kinds of things... I'm immature, you know that kind of stuff.

**Q:** You were 19...

**FF:** but it was, yeah, it was the only way I could see that I could still do it within the confines of the rules. So that's what I did. And apparently, they must have thought "well, at least he stayed within the rules, so we'll give him an honorary discharge". Honorable discharge.

**Q:** well obviously the military did something for you, in terms of education-wise because you obviously changed your ways and became a lawyer which is a lot of schooling. So, what else did the military do for you? Because you said that you think everybody should serve their country, which is you know a great thing to do.

**FF:** Oh absolutely, I think it goes a long way to teaching you some discipline. How to organize yourself. How to get yourself up every day and do what you got to do. I even had some leadership courses while I was there. I think it just makes you mature, realize that the world isn't going to be handed to you. I think you know I'm, sort of a fan of Israel on that. They make everybody go for two years. It's a growing up time. You're out of the nest, here's two years of training, what it's going to be like, there you go! [chuckles] I think that's good philosophy.

Especially today I don't know that all the parents are doing that kind of a job. Part of a parent's job is to prepare you to do those things. What else?

**Q:** Of all the places that you stopped, I know you were in Japan for a couple of weeks, what place did you love the best, and why?

**FF:** I think I really like Thailand the best, overall. The people were the nicest and it was really ironic in a way, because that was one of the places I like the best. Then years later, almost twenty years later, we were able to have a Thai exchange student. Just worked out fabulously. And then my wife and I, I'm not married to that woman anymore but, [laughs] we went back to Thailand and saw her graduate from college and everything it was fabulous. So I would say Thailand was one of the best. I really liked Rio, the people down there were fabulous. I liked everywhere we went. Japan was incredible. We got to go to two cities there. We went to Tokyo and Sasebo. We went to see all kinds of Buddhist places and Shinto places. You just couldn't beat the experience. I got pictures; I should've brought my pictures. I'm putting an album together when I get it all together I finally, after all these years. I got an album, I'm going to put all the pictures, it's going to be great.