Frank Bari
Veteran

Wayne Clarke
Mike Russert
Interviewers

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Frank Bari **FB**
Mike Russert **MR**
Wayne Clarke **WC**

FB: (Holding up a framed certificate from the US Coast Guard Auxiliary). It's so important, and these are all volunteers, just like the Army Guard and the Militia. When I looked at the site, maybe I missed it, but I do think that I mentioned that the US Coast Guard Auxiliary, which is such an important factor. It frees the regulars up, it frees up the reserves. And the work that they were doing, normally you'll find that the auxiliarists are out giving courses, boating safety, boarding vessels, and doing what the Coast Guard law enforcement, things of that nature. They're of vital importance to the Coast Guard and part of the Coast Guard family. I guess when that guy signed me up, it may have done me a favor.

WC: It sounds like it.

MR: Are you ready?

FB: Yes.

MR: This is an interview at the Westbury Public Library, Westbury, New York. It is the tenth of August 2006, approximately 1 p.m. The interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

FB: My name is Frank Bari. I was born in New York City, New York, born and raised on the Lower East Side in South Brooklyn. Even though they call it Carroll Gardens, it's still South Brooklyn to me.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

FB: I was a truant. I was not very astute at my obligation of going to school, and I dropped out of school long before legal age. But when I became 16 I dropped out. I went to work on the—because I lived near the waterfront in Brooklyn—and I started, with someone else, I was a helper on a truck on the Brooklyn docks, where I learned a lot. I also, one other thing, I did sing. People liked the way I sang and I wound up in a few clubs. Even made a recording that was in the 100 on the Billboard charts all over the country.

WC: Oh really?

FB: It was called "Loving You Out of My Mind," and I was in line to be with [unclear] Records on a song called "Hey There Lonely Girl," but the draft board sent me my card—naturally, I was prime for that. So I got to hear it over the, you know, Hanoi Hannah.

MR: Ok, so you enlisted or you were drafted?

FB: I enlisted.

MR: And you ended up in the Coast Guard. When did you enlist?

FB: It was the end of 1969. I would say Fall of 1969.

MR: Where did you enter service?

FB: Fort Hamilton in New York City. Yeah, they had just changed from Whitehall Street to MEPS over at Hamilton.

MR: Where did you go for your basic?

FB: Cape May.

MR: What was it like there?

FB: Well, outside the base was very nice.

MR: How about the basic?

FB: The basic was very physically and mentally tough. When I mean mentally tough, I don't mean crazy. I mean there were a lot of skills that I started to learn. Some things were familiar, for example, ropes—very important, you know the knots and everything of that nature. I had that when I was 14 in the docks on the truck. I was dealing with essentially skids of paper that were tons. Paper is very heavy, tons of paper. And we would have to tie these up, and so I learned much better knots with the Coast Guard. Unfortunately I'm very sad to say I don't remember them, you have to practice them pretty constantly. But I still know how to tie a cleat and probably it would come back to

me if you put it in my hands. When I was on Title 10, 9 and 11—not to jump—I was called up and I was able to tie up the 41-footers, 44-footers, things of that nature, it came natural, it was correct, it was no problem.

MR: How long was your training there at Cape May?

FB: Eight weeks.

WC: Did you go on to a specialty school from there?

FB: Yes I did. Weapons training in Yorktown, Virginia.

WC: What type of weapons?

FB: I have a little decal. Maybe I could find it (reaches behind him for his jacket). I have it right here on the floor; I have the schools that I went to. Well, naturally, the M16 and small arms .45, and we had the 5-inch specialty—you volunteered for that, those were on the high endurance cutters. You got a briefing, although we did not throw hand grenades there or fire mortars, or have any kind of mortar practice, but we had classes on it. That came later.

We went to GITMO and then Subic Bay in the Philippines before we pulled out. That's when we were given instruction on throwing the hand grenade. And mortars. What we discovered—I came later in the Coast Guard's involvement. The Coast Guard's involvement came in 1965. Very quickly, as I showed the book to the gentlemen, Paul Scotti wrote a book, our chief warrant officer Paul Scotti, retired, 33 years he was Coast Guard. He wrote a book about the entire US Coast Guard operations in Vietnam, in all four Corps, I-Corps, 2-Corps, 3-Corps and 4-Corps. And he was in Division 11 in I-Corps on an 82-foot gun patrol. He was a gunner's mate. I was striking for a gunner's mate.

I then got orders from here (points to another patch on his jacket), to go to the Dallas, which was a high endurance cutter [The patch reads: USCGC Dallas, WHEC-716]. And we went over and we got all the rites of Neptunus Rex, and my hand in the toilet bowl, and all the things you did….

WC: Now that was when you crossed the Equator?

FB: Yeah. I didn't mind. It was fun. And that's when we pulled into Subic Bay. I was a deckie, I was a seaman first class at that time. I also went to Governor's Island for further training before, because the Dallas was stationed in New York as the Gallatin was at the time—that's also another high endurance cutter that we saw. It did not go to Vietnam.

(Points to another patch on his jacket) This one's just "US Coast Guard Training Center, Governor's Island" which recently was handed over to the Department of Parks. It was

interesting, so I wrote a story in the local tri-state military paper: "Harbor Watch," from Peter Stuyvesant and General Washington to US Coast Guard Petty Officer Yarrow. He was the one person, like the caretaker, until the takeover from the Park Department. That's always been military, even before the US was formed. Governor's Island was always a military base, and it was turned over by the Petty Officer of the Coast Guard. Petty officers are equivalent to NCOs.

MR: Can I ask you a question about the decals? You called it a "high endurance" cutter. What do you mean by that?

FB: The 398 is the largest cutter in the Coast Guard. We call anything 65 feet and above a cutter. You know the icebreakers up in Alaska, Polaris? I don't remember the footage of that, but that's very large. I know people who were on it, and a senior chief gave me, when he retired from there, an icebreaking jacket he had. They're orange striped for the nighttime and warm wherever where you go. You could be out on deck, you could move, and you're insulated because these guys are out there breaking ice up in the North Pole, the South Pole.

They also, at all times, all of our vessels are cross-trained. It's important because we're a small service. We're such a small service that—and I know this is going to sound maybe somewhat—not out of line or off base—but in World War I the US Coast Guard, per percentage of men in the Coast Guard compared to the other services, had the heaviest casualties in World War I of American forces. They were sunk by the Germans several times, and we lost many, and we just don't have a lot of people. Usually we carry about 33,000—I believe the Commandant brought it up, when I was in there, to about 38,000. That includes, sometimes they include the reserves in there.

MR: How large was the crew on the Dallas?

FB: On the Dallas, we had 210.

MR: And what were the duties of the Dallas when you reached Vietnam?

FB: When we reached Vietnam after two weeks at Subic Bay, there was Phu Quoc Island, at the entrance of the Gulf of Thailand. I don't have the map, but that's where it is. In the entrance of the Gulf of Thailand, into the—if you go further you were in the Mekong. Phu Quoc was part of Vietnam, and Thuy(?) where I was later stationed on an 82-footer. They had us, when we arrived, it was in the evening, and all hands sounded, and there were mortars lined up starboard side—please forgive me, but I believe it was starboard side. The 5-inch was going like crazy, and we were just bombarding Phu Quoc. My job, I was feeding—we had a different mortar than the Army and the Marine Corps ground forces did. So I popped them in, and that was my first experience in the evening. I saw the explosions, saw the light. I didn't know anything until the following day, being a seaman first class—or a grunt you could say. They sent us ashore to see what, if any, damage we did. We were met by the 9th infantry, and the 9th infantry was in Nong Dam. It was the 60th of the 9th that I wound up working with a lot. It was the 48th of the 9th

Infantry mostly. They were there on a truck and one NCO (I think it was an NCO) was yelling at me, "Just throw what you see into the trucks." All I saw were pieces of bodies. I don't know what they were. I know they weren't American. Then we went further towards the mouth of the Mekong—

MR: Let me stop you right there. Do you know the time frame of this?

FB: Yeah, we were around Christmastime of 1969, and it filtered down that an ARVN unit was in trouble in Thailand—that's the South Vietnamese army, our allies—and we went to their aid with NGS, naval gunfire support, and we were able to get them safely on board and that was an action. We had our medics and corpsmen work on the ARVN soldiers, some severely wounded, no legs, etc.

Uh, I never saw anything like that. Essentially what I did at that point, my participation was carrying the shells to the gunners of the 5-inch. I was just carrying shells, just in a line carrying shells to the cutter. I wish I had a photo of it.

Then we did enter the mouth of the Mekong. It was very hard for us to do that because the Mekong narrows and opens. However, there was a village there called Song Onc Doc in the U-Minh forest, and that was a significant place for the Coast Guard for SPUTs(?) the special SEALS, and I would see everybody there. I would see HAL-3 come in. As I told you, this photo I have—and I had permission to go (picks up photo and points to it). I know it's hard to see me, I'm in the corner there.

(Camera zooms in on photo)

WC: And that's you in the beret?

FB: Correct. And that's the US Naval Air Station at Vinh- long. God bless every one of them and the Black [unclear]. I'll explain who they were; I'm sure you know. I was, again, I wanted to strike for gunners's mate. My best way of doing that would be to get myself aboard an 82-footer, and I eventually did, and I was on Point Banks (rummages through photos on the table in front of him). Let's see, I might have a photo or I might not…. I do but it's too small. This is kind of small—I'll use my glasses (puts his glasses on). Oh, (picks up Scotti's book, *Coast Guard Action in Vietnam*, and shows it to the camera) this is an 82-footer on the front of Scotti's book.

Again, he has actions in here that took place. Here's about he village of Song Onc Doc, to quote:

"The Vietcong came and went with little dread in the land cupped around the gulf of Thailand until the HTCs took roots there. Beneficiaries of their presence were isolated, friendly villages with their tiny forces of US Army advisers. Such a place was Song Onc Doc, which one Coastguardsman described as a village huddling nervously on the north bank of the river."

It was open to three sides of the enemy. The safety of the villages and half a dozen American soldiers. You had high endurance cutters, and as a matter of fact they mentioned the Dallas

This is all in part of the Ca Mau Peninsula, that's in the mid part to the low part of the Mekong. And you would find… Then we went further up, when I was in the Point Banks, on the 82-footer, we were able to go into the canals. The canals, sometimes, there was no draft and we were bottoming out a lot. We could not turn around and we were open for ambush. I know that it was a decision that the [unclear] was going on, and it was very heavy in the rivers. It was ordered by Admiral Zumwalt, who was very careful. His own son, who was a Lieutenant JG and was a river rat, passed away at 38 from dioxin poisoning. There's a book that they wrote, *My Father, My Son*. And they took it off the shelves because guys were trying to service connect it, but I have the audiobook, I have the audio of it and it's very moving. Admiral Zumwalt did everything he could, and they lied to him. He asked about the effect on human beings. This was very clear. His own son passed away from this, and he was very concerned about the men. I admired him and also a commandant, he was in Commander Yoates(?). I'm jumping around a lot—

MR: That's all right.

FB: That's ok? I remember I was going to tell you how the Coast Guard got involved? Do you want me to go back to that?

MR: Sure.

FB: Ok. In 1965 the Army had surveillance planes flying on the coast down around Mekong into three corps and they noticed two islands, or what appeared to be islands moving rapidly, and they reported this and were given permission to fire. It was then discovered that—as you know—Vietnam didn't have many highways. They had Highway 1 and this was all the way down in the delta. The delta was very rich in rice. A lot of people don't know it but the bananas were tremendous. They had wonderful bananas down there too. But the rice was very important to the North Vietnamese, and I think to the rest of Southeast Asia.

At any rate, the Army discovered in 1965, we got a problem. They're coming down the canals, they're coming down into the delta, they're supplying and beefing up the villages, they're using PsyOps on the villages. How are we going to approach this? The only way is by water, so naturally they called the Navy. The Navy said, we can't send a battleship down a canal, we can't send an aircraft carrier down a canal! So naturally someone said, let's get the Coast Guard. We're the ones who do interdiction. We do boardings. Because, as a matter of fact a lot of people may not know this, also, which I learned about the Coast Guard, a lot of Navy ships will have Coasties on. The reason is when there's blockades, a Coast Guardsman does boardings. The reason is, if a Navy sailor does boarding, he's under the DOD. The Coast Guardsman is under the Secretary of the Navy while he is under the Secretary of the Navy and they feel like it, but when he goes to make the boarding, he's law enforcement. He's now under what now would be

Homeland Security, so that's not an act of war. If a sailor, the American Navy, boarded, that's an act of war, whereas with the Coast Guard it changes hats. So getting back, they said "Look, they're experts in intradiction, they have the small boat knowledge, they know how to do the canals," so they sent word to the Coast Guard—it's in Scotti's book—and asked for a squadron. He has how each squadron was deployed, when, where, how and from where, whatever.

The men in the 82-footers, unlike the high endurance cutters or the medium endurance cutters, they were flown over to Clark or Townsend or something like that. Probably Clark, because that's where they joined up with their 82 footers and they gave them the names. So, that's how the Coast Guard got involved in Vietnam. But again, it's US Navy Task Force 115 that was the US Coast Guard. It later went into the 116 when they developed the swift boats. Unfortunately, as you may know, the man who developed them passed away before he could see how successful the swift boats could be for the Navy. We worked with them, we had ops with them, we had ops with many naval vessels, we had ops with SEALs, we had insertions. We inserted men in Cambodia, SEALs.

We worked a lot with the 60th of the 9th, I remember very well, 9th infantry, whose main base was Dong Tam. But they were regular draftees, infantryman, and we would bring them to the point of where they'd have to impart, and we would supply with them with NGS. We wouldn't leave them or weren't far from them. There was a time, I remember, a very good friend of mine from the 9th drank a lot, naturally, and we dropped off his – I forgot the name of it, Operation Something or other, it was an Army operation, and we dropped them off. The VC were in the elephant grass and as they're coming through the pack, they just started hitting them, and my friend was injured, I could see, and I ran out to him but there was nothing I could do. And that was that.

And we did that. We did a lot of insertions. But we would never leave.

MR: Could I ask you about those crafts? What was the size of the crew on them?

FB: We had twelve.

MR: And what was your armament?

FB: Oh, we were armed to the teeth. I'm glad you brought that up. A Coast Guard gunner's mate developed--you might be interested in this--developed a combination of an M50 and the 81mm mortar on top of the M50. So we had that forward and aft, and on our port side and starboard, of course, we had the 50 calibers and also forward we had the 50 and the M16s that two men would always handle. And naturally everybody had the M16s and .45s. When we boarded a vessel, it was very—that first time I did it, it was very—your adrenaline was going. Now I realize I was scared to death. I guess after 37 years I realize I was scared to death, but my adrenaline was high, and I think it was dangerous not only to myself but, if there was an innocent Vietnamese fisherman, it was dangerous to him as well. I was ready to just pull and forget about it. But when I went

on, they would put two of us on, and they would cover us with the 50 cal. What I learned to do from more experienced men is, they had vats (I'm not sure if they were rice or fish), but what we would do is we would make the so-called fisherman open it up and put his hands in there, open it up and go all the way in to make sure it, in fact, was fish or rice or whatever kind of vegetable sometimes it would have.

They would have markets; on the rivers there were small villes and they would actually sell on the river. The traffic on the river was like the traffic on the LIE—you could imagine that at rush hour, the traffic on the Long Island Expressway. It really was something. So we would sometimes get information from the Chieu Hoi, a Kit Carson scout. I'll explain that very quickly. That's really a Vietcong or North Vietnamese—essentially a Vietcong—who comes over in the day time and he fattens up on American food and works with us as an interpreter and things of that nature and helps guide us under the guise that he's being repatriated more into the American, the allied side when in fact we knew they were VC. There was one time that we had, well I call them Chieu Hoi, others call them Kit Carsons, we had a Carson scout and we had an Academy guy. They only stayed for four months (now it has to be six months), you know so they could get their—I don't know what rank it was, so they could say they were in combat. So he wanted to go down a canal, and we knew the canal, and that was heavily VC – we couldn't turn around, there was no defoliant. I could not see this gentlemen (points to a man off camera) if I went down that canal. If I was a Vietcong and he was on a patrol boat, he's dead. And the Kit Carson guy is screaming, "No, no!" and he pushed me off the boat. He liked me; I mean, he was a human being, he was nice to me. He didn't try to kill me then; maybe later at night he'd try to kill me. So he jumped into the water. Three other guys jumped in with us, so this guy could put us on report. So then the chief, usually you had a chief—they liked to have a senior chief or a master chief running these 82-footers because they knew how to handle it, and what to do. But when the guys were coming out of the Academy, they would give them the command so they could have combat experience. But we jumped out of that pretty quick.

We also had our techniques. I'll give you a little bit of some of the things we used to do on our 82-footers. One of our favorites worked quite well, and sometimes the Chieu Hoi's were accurate or our intelligence would give us information, that there was going to be a crossing somewhere, some canal, somewhere on the Mekong. What we would do is take two 82-footers and we would run that motor red, the wakes we would have, it sounded like a bomb coming up the river. Slowly the boat of choice, and I was in the boat of choice several times, would start calming down, cooling down, and we had a spot where we could hide on whatever bank of the canal or river we hit. You couldn't hear it because the other one made so much noise, the other one was so revved up and the wakes were all over. They're not exactly sticking their heads out. They may be looking through some elephant grass, but they're not going to see us because we're sitting still where we are, and we're well hidden. And we did catch Vietcong bringing supplies and crossing low points of the rivers and the canals. And we had heavy—you asked about the arms--oh, and the 79, the grenade launchers, we had some of them—and we were able to just hit. We had the mortars and four or five M50s going, two M16s—we had heavy firepower. And we could take them out. And that was a tactic that we used often,

successfully. I'm surprised they never learned about it. The Kit Carsons didn't know. We wouldn't bring them along with us, so they didn't know. They would just say, oh there's going to be a lot of ammunition flowing in. We'd try to figure out and guess which would be the best spot. Where have they crossed before? Where have we heard, gotten some intelligence before that they crossed? And the SEALS were very helpful; they could find trails and things like that. We would wait there. We were three days on, three days off. And no, I didn't know Senator Kerry. But I could tell you that we did, I believe we did an excellent job and I'm proud of the job we did on the 82- footers. In fact I believe we received a Navy Citation for it.

We did help the people and the villagers. There was a cholera epidemic that broke out at Song Onc Duc and the Campbell came—that's another high endurance cutter, and they had doctors, and they treated all the children and other people, so we also did our humanitarian role as well. That's an important thing, because that's part of our mission, we have many missions, and I learned that being a Coast Guardsman for, well I was 6 years active and from 1985 till 9/11 I was in the reserves. So I learned a lot about that.

A big thing with us was search and rescue. Now up to Danang, the 378th Aerospace Rescue Recovery Squadron under the Air Force wing was having an exchange program with the US Coast Guard pilots for search and rescue. This is something that can be looked up on the Internet and of course it's in the book. Lt. Jack Rittichier was a pilot, and this was when the exchange program started, he was there for about 4 months and they were in Laos. A Marine Corps captain was shot down, and Lt. Jack Rittichier and his Coast Guard crew—which was an exchange program—took off for this SAR. And there were two other jolly greens. What happened was the Marine ground signaled and said it's a trap, and they shot the two jolly greens down. Lt. Rittichier saw where the NVA (we're talking about the North Vietnamese regulars) were, he saw the flashes, and he knew it was a trap, and there were others coming that he was trying to wave off who were trying to save the captain. I at this point can just guess at what he did, but it's surmised in the book, and the Internet probably also tells the story correctly. He came from Cleveland, and they had a big thing about Cleveland. They just discovered his body, he was an MIA for all these years, although they knew where he was, he was in Laos. What happened, it had to be a joint decision by the crew and himself, but he somehow got over the entire NVA and they were taking hits from the ground, he was getting hit, so either the chopper was going to go down, but from what they could ascertain, he shut it down, turned it off and just dropped the chopper down on top of the NVA unit and he won from the Air Force a Silver Star, also the Distinguished Flying Cross from the US Air Force.

The Coast Guard exchange continued with the Air Force pilots, SAR pilots would come stateside, and we would send our pilots over to Danang in the 37th and some in the 38th as well. And that was a major action. They found his body about four years ago, and it was very big. Again, it's anybody's guess, but he was taking fire from the ground, maybe he knew he was going to go down, and they know the chopper was shut off and that was it. I don't know what happened to the captain of the Marine airplane.

Getting back to my experiences with the 82-footers, a lot of boardings. I became naturally, again I became, I was along with the FNG. I know you know what it is, but you don't want me to say what it is on here, do you?

MR: I know what it is.

FB: I know you know what it is, but you don't want me to say it? No.

So I was along, an FNG, and I would even jump before coming alongside, which would surprise them a little bit because at this point I had my M16 backwards on my back and I had my .45 out, and I was able to say "Di di mau" (pointing). I had to do them do the same things, anything that was closed I'd have them open it. If they wouldn't open it, I'd shoot. I'd use my .45 and I'd just shoot at it, and then I'd look at the guy and if there was any kind of expression, I'd shoot him too. It was my life--I didn't know what he had. There was someone, one time, a Coastie who saved my life. He was standing on the 50 and I was looking at something I didn't like on the fishing vessel I was on, and what happened was I turned away from the fishermen who were in the boat, and one took out a blade and started charging me. I didn't see this, and the guy yelled, "Frank, Frank!" and he didn't want to open up because he had the 50 cal and he would have hit me, but I turned around and I had my .45 and so that was that. And then I just jumped aboard and they did what they had to do with their 50s, the guys on the 82 footer.

Then there was a time, one insertion I remember we did with the Navy SEALS. I believe it was Seal Team No. 5. I remember him, Derek Carpenter, very beaucoup dinky dau, that I can say, he was very crazy. As a matter of fact, Hanoi Hannah had a reward out for him. He made his own card—everybody had their own cards "Done by the 9th Division," "Killed by the 9th Division"—but no, he put his home address, his name, his unit, and he had his home address, his wife's name, his kid's name, his father's name, and he put this whole thing, and when he did the job he left it there. Anyway, she put money on his head and he was laughing. What happened is, we dropped him off, we inserted him into Cambodia, and you just heard a lot of fire, and I don't see anything, it's too thick, the jungle was just too thick. Then I do catch one of the SEALS running back to us, so I took the 50 and I was shooting over their heads, I don't want to hit any of the SEALs coming our way. It's just so whoever is back there chasing them--because these guys are running--knows that there's something back of these guys. We sent out mortars, the mortar guy, he was very good, he had the range and we sent it out further and further. Out of the 8, there were 3 who were coming. I saw Derek, and he was dragging two Vietnamese, Vietcong, and he came aboard, and we shoved out of there, and we hightailed out of there. Long story short, when we got back to An Thoi, which was our main base, Derek Carpenter took the two VC and—
if you don't want me to talk about this, I won't—

MR: No, it's ok.

FB: So he cut their ears and he said, "These are yours, Frank." And I said, "No, they're not mine." I understood what it was about, I was there long enough. I said, "I didn't kill

these men." He said, "But I never would have gotten back if you didn't open up. So they're yours. They [our men] would never have come back." So he cut the ears from both guys, left them out in the sun, and made me an ear necklace and snapped a picture. I sent it home to my mother, and she didn't take it so well. I never found that picture again. He did that. That was an incident I remember.

We were very careful with the women. We were taught to be careful with the women. There was one place where the mama-san was cool, even though she had betel (points to his teeth), you know? [betel nut teeth]

MR: Uh-huh.

FB: It took me a long time to wipe it off. Anyhow, they were cool. They had a thing for us and for Charlie. They would put a flag up for us and a flag up for Charlie. And some of the girls were coming on base to do the cleaning, make our beds, do our sheets, make out lines on base (gestures writing) so they could give it to the enemy so they'd know where we were. We moved our 82-footers all the time after they were gone, after they were gone. We'd move different things on the base around.

WC: At the base, what kind of quarters did you live in?

FB: When I wasn't on board the 82-footer, I lived in a hooch, a regular hooch.

WC: No, on the ship.

FB: Oh, I had a rack.

WC: I was just wondering about both. How about if you were out on your 82-footer for a couple of days, what kind of food, C rations?

FB: Actually, we had good food. We had a very good cook, and he did a lot with what he had. The C rations came when we were on land. I did like beans and motherfuckers a lot, so I took them with me sometimes and he'd boil them for me and made hero sandwiches for me out of it. I didn't mind it. It wasn't so terrible. You get used to it. I did get accustomed to drinking only warm beer. I don't drink anymore because I'm ill, I have non-Hodgkins lymphoma, which a VA Service Rep is trying to service connect, along with diabetes too, which is a service connection, along with PTSD, because I do have problems.

But I didn't mind the food on the 82-footer, it was good. In the hooch, we had problems with the rats. You know, the best way to get rid of rats is [unclear] burn them. You'd kill one and then it became sadistic, and they'd just torch it. So they'd kill it and they'd burn it and the smell would keep other rats away. It wasn't very appetizing, you weren't in the mood to eat too much. On the 82 footers, we had soda, and he kept it cool. We had some refrigeration there. So were able to have a cold Coca-Cola. I wouldn't take it

out, or the kids would come around, you know, "cold, cold, cold" and they'd want to pass it around. No way, I wasn't going to drink [glass?] at the end of the bottle.

When we came in I listened to, about the culture and things like that, and you learn from the guys, so you know. I think a smart CO or smart officer will turn to the guy who's been there the longest and say, "Listen, I've got rank and I want you to respect it, but I'm going to respect you because I haven't been out here as long as you." I happened to know a lieutenant who did that, and people did everything to save this guy, he was ok, but we were sad to see him go. He was a very smart individual. He would say, "I will listen, just respect my rank." Fine.

Food, it was better on the 82-footer. The other thing wasn't very appetizing, and we did have the sea rats. But I didn't mind it because I liked hot dogs, I liked beans, so it was fine. It was 115 degrees, 110 degrees. That's another thing. We started thinking we were taking chances. We were very much in the open. There are shots of that (picking up the book and paging through it). We wouldn't wear the flak jackets when it was very hot, wouldn't wear the helmets, so we started taking them off. We were just there with bare shirts or t-shirt, and tie something around the head. Other than that, after a while—

(tape ends)

Resuming:

FB: (Holding up book and pointing to photo of an 82-footer; camera zooms in on photo, and then over to a picture of Vietnamese fishing boats)

MR: So that's the 82-footer, and those sampans are what they boarded. Were you ever wounded, or did you have any illnesses while you were there?

FB: Yes. (Closes book and puts it down) They told me I had dengue fever, which I understand is very akin to malaria, so I did have that. But I didn't stop. I wasn't hospitalized. They just gave me pills and I kept taking them. A lot of us for a long time had the runs, I'm not trying to be dirty or anything. Sometimes it gets very scary, especially when you're doing a night patrol, and you have to remember, at that time there are no lights out there and you don't know what's coming your way. We had motors, but they were quiet. They also had sappers who could swim like our SEALS. What the sappers—now these are not terrorists, looking to blow themselves up. They would attach some C4 and then they'd move out of there and set it off. So we had, all of us, would make one man every hour because you can't have someone standing there for a day. We were all looking out for sappers. They were excellent swimmers and they were hard to see. Especially when we were moving and there was a wake, they were right at the bottom. They'd come up right under and slap on a C4 and Boom! But they'd get out of there. They were not suicidal like some we are facing today.

WC: What were relationships like within your unit? We you guys close?

FB: Yes, very close. As a matter of fact, I have a buddy letter that I needed….

WC: How were race relations?

FB: Not a problem, let me tell you. Not a problem at all.
There were black, white, Asians with us. America is a land of immigrants, and there was nothing…. Let me tell you, if a fight could go out into the field when we dropped them in the night, and they got hit bad… This was in a book somewhere, or somebody told me. I jumped out. You don't see color when you're in a firefight, you don't see colors, you don't see anything. You're backing that guy up, and he's backing you up, and he's your brother. And that was it. The racial stories that I heard applied to themselves, but jokingly, like, ok I'm Italian, so I might say "Hey, guinea from Brooklyn, get over here" (I'm sorry). But they would say things like that. It was not meant in any way, shape or form… We were one, and we were all determined to get out. In our association… (holds up framed certificate from Coast Guard Combat Veterans Association), you can also find this on the Web, there are a lot of stories on it.

MR: Are there any persons that stand out more than others among the guys you were with?

FB: Yes. I didn't know this at the time, and it's very interesting. In service connecting, I mentioned that I have non-Hodgkins lymphoma and other problems that my VA service representative is working on; he's a member of the Vietnam Veterans Association of America, Chapter 82, as I am. We have to have a buddy letter, and as a matter of fact, I have a buddy letter. I have it here (reaches into a file on the floor next to him).

MR: How long were you over in Vietnam?

FB: The answer is all fuckin' day, but to tell you the truth, it was about 14 months, because after the 82-footer, they sent me over to the Morganthau. The Morganthau was a high endurance cutter, and then what happened, which was heartbreaking. Well do you want me to go back to the buddy letter?

MR: Yes.

FB: All right. There are two things you have to have, to have a service connection, especially when you have my kind of disease, which will kill. I have non-Hodgkins lymphoma, and I have a very rare form called mantle cell, and the doctor writing the thing about it, he doesn't know why I'm alive. At Sloan-Kettering, they told me, "We won't treat you." Whatever. I mean, when I learned what it was from and where it came from. I actually had the biopsy sitting in front of me when I was at the VA yesterday. It was chemically induced according to the pathologist. They mentioned that; they don't

come out and say Agent Orange, dioxin, 1971, 1970, but it was chemically induced, 90 percent.

Non-Hodgkins lymphoma happens to be the number one cancer. As you know, the VA doesn't recognize every cancer, and I have had some fellows contact me who have different cancers that are not recognized. Now the VA is trying to reevaluate all veterans. There's a very good organization out there, you can't forget them: MRFA.charter.net. That's the Mobile Riverline Forces, enlisted men who fought on the rivers. You had to be on the rivers. If you were just on board a ship, for example, my service rep was on the USS Boston. He spent most of his time no lower than the DMZ and most of the time in North Vietnam, you know, bombing. He's not qualified for the MRFA. If you were in country, you were on the rivers and the canals, and you fought there, this organization is on top of things, and they're fighting things. Right now, the VA is attempting to reevaluate veterans.

My father, who is a retired Army colonel (and I told you, Merrill's Marauder), has volunteered for every war including Afghanistan, in his nineties. He says get the 10th Mountain Division out of there, get me the Gurkhas out of India, and I'll go in there and get who you want. But he turned around, and he just got a big package (gestures about 10-12 inches with his hands). They're trying to reevaluate the veterans and trying to make the things for PTSD, like "Is it real?" Let me tell you, as someone who suffers from it, it's real. And it hits late, or later. It's hard for people who have never experienced it to think how something 37 years ago could come back and harm you, and disable you. But it does. It could be something very simple. You could be gassing up your car—the reason for that is that it has an odor of napalm, and also the shit burners. The base had that, shit burners. They didn't have any sewage system in Vietnam, and somebody else must have gone over this, so people know about the shit burners. But it was gasoline, and you burned it, and it smells. Cri sohn(?) I can't tell you how many times I have walked down the street, and a person would walk by me and the face would be familiar, and it would strike something so deep that I didn't know I had inside me.

I told you about, you asked me at the very beginning about my schooling. You know I'm an attorney, and I happen to be admitted in three states. What happened is, when I was out of the service, I spent most of the 1970s in a scotch mist. I worked the docks and the trucks, and my mother and grandmother from the old school, "doctor, lawyer, Indian chief and professional." So, I'm a bum, I'm a gangster. I said "But Mom, look at the money I make." And they hit me with a broom and they chased me out. So I wanted to prove that I could do it. I was making money working on the trucks and the piers and all of that, and I hired—there's no statute of limitations on this, ok? When I was younger the way I learned my mathematics, I was a runner for a bookmaker. My mother used to walk me in one end of the elementary school, and I'd go out the back, and he'd send me… He taught me how to add and multiply; that's how I learned my mathematics.

I knew the GED would be a lot harder. So I came home, I opened up the book, and I picked a tutor for everything. And he came, and I sat him down. It turned out—this was late 1979—and it turned out that this guy was like half a genius. He was a professor at

Queens College and he spoke seven languages. He had a doctorate from NYU in mathematics. I told him my problem and he said "Well, let's work." So he would come four nights a week. I registered for my GED and I walked in and I passed it, and I showed it to my mother. She said, "You're still no good." "Why?" "Well, Donnie and this guy didn't have to go to Vietnam. They went to college, and they got a masters degree…." So I had enough money—I was into the business, I had three trucks, with a partner, and I started going to St. John's. I finished in—

WC: You didn't use the GI Bill for that?

FB: No, I didn't. I refused to admit that I was a veteran. I refused until 1986. I never admitted that I was a veteran. I had one experience when I came home. My sister tried to set me up; she's an oncologist down in Florida. She's also a professor. She has a doctorate in French and Spanish, she studied over in Europe. She was kept away from the kind of milieu I was surrounded in. Very brilliant, very smart. At any rate, I forgot your question, I'm sorry.

WC: Did you use the GI Bill at all?

FB: No, not at all. What happened is this. When I came home, even when I was drinking I kept myself kind of military. I wasn't walking around in a uniform, but my hair was very short. If you saw me, you might think I was on leave. She fixed me up with a girl, and I took her out. Evidently my sister told her a little, well what she wanted to know about me. My sister told her that I had just come home from Vietnam. I took her out to dinner at a lobster place. I ordered a steak and when I picked up the knife she started screaming, and I was very embarrassed. She said, "I can't do this, I can't do this, I'm sorry I just can't do this," and she pushed away and said, "Please don't hurt me." I said, "I'm not hurting anybody, I'm just cutting my steak." I had to explain to the waiter, who said "Ma'am, do you want us to call the police," and she said "No, no, no, he didn't do anything, he didn't come after me." So I called my sister and said, "What are you doing to me?" "Well you did come home from Vietnam, and we're against all of this. You were on the campus. You came to me on the campus." "Yeah, and I felt very uncomfortable." I didn't say what I was, but I was very uncomfortable, and I wanted to hurt somebody, well I wanted to kill somebody. And I didn't, I controlled myself, and after that I just kept it to myself. I made enough money on the docks with my contacts, and I was able to pay my way through. It was legit, I had three trucks, I had a gypsy going over the road. Yes I did it through connections. In other words, if you were waiting at pier 5 in Brooklyn, my truck is going to get unloaded before you, ok? And you beefed about it, they wouldn't answer you; if you beefed about it twice, you wouldn't be unloaded. So what happened is I had the money for that and it paid my way. Then I met a priest, and I knew he was a booster? when he was a kid. You know what a booster is? He was a thief. And he's a priest, and right now he's a monsignor. I used to have fun with him. I used to leave *Playboy* in there. A friend of mine put out *Screw* magazine; Al Goldstein was not *Screw* magazine, he was a backer. My friend who really put it out, who distributed it, I used to go see him and I'd put it in [the priest's] office on his table, and (laughing) the nuns were coming in and everything. He found where I was and he

grabbed me out of the classroom by the throat, and I said, "Come on." In the old days, he came from Williamsburg, I knew him through the piers.

Anyway he had done a tour of Nam too, with the Army, drafted. Not as a chaplain, as a regular guy. When he came back he went to the seminary. So I paid my way through and I finished. And what he did for me, he did for me a favor. He allowed me to take extra credits in the summer. You know, you're allowed to take extra credits in the summer, but he allowed me to take three more each time. So that would be an extra six. I can't remember, I think you were allowed to take nine, and he would allow me to go over that, I'd take it at night. And it counts. I did the work. I graduated in three and a half years. I had a 3.3 [average]. And then something happened with some friends of mine and I didn't like it. And I went to law school and I became a criminal defense lawyer.

I was a lay attorney in Brooklyn, I was a public defender in Newark, New Jersey, and I've done RICO cases. I was a Chinese gang expert. As a matter of fact, *Maxim* wrote me up, they interviewed me as a Chinese gang expert. They would come to me and I would win most of their cases when I could. The problem was the Vietnamese and the Amerasians. David Thai, who was in *Born to Kill*--there's a book out, BTK (no, I'm not in the book), but David Thai started that and tried to keep it legitimate. These kids had nowhere to go. A lot of them would ask me, "Can you find my father? Can you find my father?" And there is a locater, and there are certain ways through… the mothers would have pictures or something like that. I tried to read the unit, or whatever. I handed them over—Vietnam Veterans of America has an organization that tries to find the father. Even if these kids were gang members in the street, I tried to help them that way—not as a gang member but to try to find their fathers. And when they did some bad things, I walked right in on Canal Street. Oh, he had a restaurant, David Thai: Pho—you know the soup?—it's very good. Baxter Street, too, Nha Trang Restaurant on Baxter Street, good pho. They know me. You tell them, Fei Jai (rubs his stomach and smiles). They also call me "The White Buddha." The nu quom's(?) great. And I went to David Thai and said "Listen, you guys are looking for trouble." There was an incident with a Ghost Shadow, that's a gang in Chinatown, that's controlled by Tongs. You know what Tongs are? You'd be surprised how a 14-year old kid could reach into China through his dai lo, which is a street boss, and I started—well this is not about China and Chinese gangs, but I was considered an expert in it. I calmed things down as much as I could, I tried to but I couldn't. They were just shooting it up, and they had nothing else to do. There was nothing for them out there. It's very nice if we take in these Amerasians—I don't know, maybe I have a kid out there, I don't know.

I was also in Korea, with Port Security Unit 305. We helped the Korean coast guard in Pusan. We all know that nothing's going to happen with the Commies up at the 37th. They're going to try to come up through the water on the two sides. The Korean coast guard and navy were very vigilant, and every two years we do work with them. I did it once, and I married a Korean girl, and I have a beautiful daughter, and that's why I go for treatment. When Sloan Kettering told me "Forget it, have a good time for four months,

maybe," I wanted to throw the guy out a window. I consulted another, got another opinion, because I want to be here as long as I can for my daughter.

Sometimes, believe it or not, there are innocent people who get convicted. I know a young man doing 16 years to life on a triple homicide that he didn't do, but I can't say a word because the guy who did the homicide was my client, and attorney-client privilege says it goes to the grave. This was a Supreme Court ruling. I sit with that. Those are some of the things I sit with.

On the Coast Guard in Vietnam, we were… Oh! Very important! Our reservists, they screamed at the Army. In Saigon, at the Port of Saigon or the Port of Danang when they're loading and unloading the ammo, they found guys smoking, and they were like, "Whoa!" And the commander just blew up at a colonel, and the bottom line is then we worked—they were Coast Guard, but wearing Army uniforms--the Coast Guard worked with the loading and unloading of our supplies, our munitions in the Port of Saigon and the Port of Danang. That was the Coast Guard. They were teaching the Army how to handle that properly. That is something we do even in peacetime, munitions. This was a reserve unit; they would come over for four months and another reserve unit that handles that, usually port security units would do that. So they have us interfacing with our sister services, and a lot of other people getting credit. It's not… the medal don't mean anything.

I told you I was in 9/11. I was five blocks away when it happened. And I stayed on active duty on Title 10 prep for two years. A lot of people don't know, but I brought in a lot of media: the Coast Guard was the first military on scene. We secured the place. We had the cutters under the bridge, the Tamaroa, which is a medium endurance cutter, came under the Throgs Neck Bridge and stood there. If you ever drove there during the time, I don't know if you know the area or what, if you drove the belt parkway, you saw that Coast Guard cutter under there, weapons up and ready. We did the first flyover, our chopper units were there. Our 41-footers were out there. Our icebreakers were out there, because we serve many missions. Our icebreaker could very easily turn into a very dangerous vessel. You stick on 50 calibers and you stick on other stuff, and boom! On our choppers, we've got 50 calibers, so we were over there, and under the Washington Bridge was the cutter Spencer, a World War II vessel. We kept it in shape. The Coast Guard keeps their ships in tiptop shape, and the Spencer was under there.

My job was media relations because everybody wanted to get down there. I was taking foreign crews from Japan, Korea, and I would be walking the streets and it was like the Twilight Zone, not like Nam or anything like that, but it was like the Twilight Zone. And maybe about a week later I saw the 69th setting up a mortar with sandbags. I have no idea why they were setting up the mortars, but I said hello and how you doing when I walked by, and I brought the reporters to where I had to. I went through the Benjamin Harrison DINFOS, Defense Information School at Fort Meade, and that was that. But a lot of people don't know. And the Coast Guard also organized--and this is documented--all the tugboats in the harbor, everything in the harbor. They were in charge of getting a million people off that island.

I mean, God bless our troops in Iraq—we're over there too. I had a friend who…. we followed out…I was sent to the Bainbridge Island because I'm a small boat sailor, that's the 110-foot island cutter, ok? Being that it's over 65 feet. It's an island cutter, not as good a fighter as the 82-footer, but a fighter nonetheless. We had to take… There was a real threat on the Iwo Jima—you know, the Navy amphibious assault carrier—and we took about two hundred miles. I was kind of happy. I'll tell you what, I still have my sea legs, but it hurts a little bit at this age. We did that. We were over in the Gulf, and we were over in the Southwest Asian area. In Iraq, over there, was to make sure that you didn't have some guy with some small little boat tied up with dynamite blowing a hole, like they did with the USS Cole. I guarantee that had a US small boat, small boat sailors, like the 110-footers or the 82- footers that we had—I'll even go so far as the 41-footers, because we'd put anything on there, and you wouldn't have had that happen. The orders were to stop them, and they were heavily armed, before they hit the US Navy, or crash them. They came close, and a friend of mine was burned, third degree burns, almost died; he was in the hospital in Germany for six months. He's home now, thank God. He has two little children now.

There's a lot of stories.

WC: How about we finish it with, how do you think your time in the service affected your life? Or changed your life?

FB: It changed my life permanently in that first of all, I grew up with military in the family, very strict. When I mean strict, I mean militarily strict, I don't mean that they would abuse you. I think it's made me extremely….I'm sad, I'm depressed a lot. It came on later in life, but there seems to be a perseverance that I've noticed. If I check where I started from and where I am now, (and believe me, I'm not talking about when I was a tough kid in Brooklyn), the statute of limitations—you can't do anything about it, FBI, ok? It's over (unlike the Mafia cops). But it made me stronger, it made me adaptable; you have to adapt, easily adapt to a situation. Like all of a sudden if you got up and you pulled a gun on me, I would just have some kind of reaction, or I may just sit here and say "Shoot."

It's made me stand up to a lot of people. After Nam, what is anybody really going to do to me? I could have been killed like anyone. I was in danger. You asked me if I was ever hurt. I didn't get the Purple Heart, but as I told you, that time that I turned away, he did stab me, get me in the shoulder. Had I not turned, had the other guy not yelled he would have had me in the heart. I'm sorry I didn't get four Purple Hearts in a couple months, like the Senator did. I never got a Purple Heart and I didn't ask for it. I wasn't looking for medals. The Auxiliary, which pleads—it's a very important organization—and I noticed that on the website, it's so important. And Homeland Security, too, they're part of it. There are watchdogs, and there are a lot of eyes out there.

The thing is, it's changed me. I'm going to go on, I'm going to take that next step. And I also have compassion. You'd think that, when I was younger I was very quick with my

fists, and if somebody looked at me wrong—I'd be a tough guy. But I'm not. But when I get in a court, I advocate as hard as I can because I feel like I'm fighting for somebody's life, and many times I am. You know, one day in jail and you could be killed. You don't hear about it, but people die every day in jail or are killed. It's a horrible thing, especially with the clients I have. So I feel like I'm still fighting. I feel like I'm still at war in another capacity. And I'm not quite sure, I'm going to be very honest with you. I told you I have PTSD. I get help for that, I have people to advise me, you know, "Do this Frank, when you feel like this, don't, pull back, do this." I can't tell you there have been times I wanted to use my hands and I stopped. And I think that Nam made me a better person.

I miss a lot of people, a lot of friends, and I'm very sorry to the Vietnamese people. I didn't mean to do some of the things that we did, that I did. And that's nothing that I can cure. That's something that hurts, and a lot of people, they ask me what's wrong and I don't tell them. I came out of the closet in 1986 about being a Vietnam veteran. It was very quickly, in law school. I don't know why but in the criminal law book, they had the Lt. Calley case in a criminal law book, and I'm sitting there quiet. I didn't say a word. And they're [other students] saying that the whole squadon should be killed, murdered in the ditch just like the babies. And all I know is I went berserk and I took the class over for an hour and a half and I explained it. I do remember my first words, I threw my chair back and I said, "This was combat Vietnam." And I remember the women were crying after that and saying they're sorry, they didn't know anything about it.

Not to bring Hollywood into this, but I'll wrap it up with one thing. I feel that I don't like particularly watching any war pictures (well, John Wayne westerns you can't help), the thing is, except the first 20 minutes of Saving Private Ryan, Spielberg had people who were there, just the first twenty minutes and then it became, to me, Hollywood. Well, a girl wanted to see Rambo, and it didn't bother me at all except one thing at the end and I'm finished. I understand, it's Hollywood, bullshit…. Rambo, bull. I was hiding, I ducked. I'm not a hero. I'm a coward. I wanted to live, I wanted to come home in one piece, but Rambo's colonel said to him, "What do you want, John, what are you looking for?" And he turned around…. a lot of Vietnam veterans miss the one good line in a Rambo movie, and that is "All I want is what every other guy who came here and spilled his guts out: I want our country to love us as much as we love it." And that's what I'd like to see. I think that's a good line. And I'll end with that.

WC: Thank you.