Transcript: Testimony of Jerome Weise

I lost hopelessness when I came back home and I didn't fit in. I was just another employee. You know, all the all the accolades of being a combat medic didn't make no difference. You know, if you're late you're docked and you can be fired for doing something. It just didn't make sense to me that all that was gone, you know? Does that makes sense I'm trying to say? When I came back from Vietnam I was told to go to this hospital at Fort Belvoir, and work in a hospital. And there were some sergeants that, you know, they kind of got on to me because my mustache might have been a little bit past here, or sideburns, or my boots weren't shiny enough for them. And I really kind of thought, "you know what, here's this guy - he's never been in combat. I still have friends in combat. They were finishing their tours in Vietnam out, and this guy was really concerned about my mustache?" You know, and it was hard for me to accept that this is what it's come to. Even when you came back from Vietnam and still was in the army, you got no favoritism. None.

Q: Do you think it affected your health in any way?

Oh absolutely. You know a few years ago I contracted prostate cancer and had to go through the radiation treatment at Christie Clinic. I wasn't really aware that prostate cancer is one of the top three symptoms of Agent Orange poisoning until after I'd gone through this. When I got to looking into it, it made sense to me that possibly I could've been exposed to Agent Orange because as an infantryman, as a grunt, you know you fill your canteens up in the stream for fresh water. You take baths in a stream and you sleep on the ground, and certainly there were areas we'd gone through that the vegetation had been defoliaged, I guess is the right word.

… You know the war still going on and I came back and I deal with this too: that not everybody felt the same way I did. I was at Fort Belvoir once, just after I came back from Vietnam, and I'm somewhat dark complexioned anyway and exposed to sunlight I got very dark. And I stopped at a gas station to buy back cigarettes and there was a woman behind this counter that kind of reminded me of Aunt Bee. She was just an older woman looked like she could make an apple pie and win a blue ribbon. And she said, "you just get back from vacation in Florida?" And I said, "No I just got back from Vietnam." And her whole attitude changed towards me. So I thought maybe I shouldn't tell people this. Maybe I should keep it to myself.

When I told her I got back just got back from Vietnam, her exact words were, "big f**ing deal." And I thought, "OK, I got it. I understand." Now, you know, maybe she had a son in Vietnam and was killed. I have no idea. But her whole attitude was, "just get your cigarettes and get out of here." And she was an older lady. And

this was actually just outside of Washington D.C. So there was a lot of protests going on then too. This shocked me, you know? It just literally shocked me that somebody would say that to my face.

I had a few things … my mother my father were living in between Fort Belvoir and Washington D.C. in a mobile home park. And I was visiting my mom and my dad. My dad was gone and my mom said, “you know what you need to do, you need to walk over here to Route One and get a bus and go on the worse in D.C. to Georgetown and get drunk and have a good time.” And my mother had convinced me that this is what I should do because I didn't have a car. And so I took off walking and I got to Route One there was an older black gentleman who was making a living collecting pop bottles. He was riding a bicycle. It had two baskets on the back of it full of pop bottles and he was going from trailer to trailer asking for bottles. Route One was a four-lane road, very busy. He tried to ride his bicycle across traffic. He sort of pushed it. And a white Valiant hit this guy and took his leg completely off. I mean bang, and threw this leg over to this apartment complex. And he landed on the curb and hit his head.

And the car, the white Valiant, was driven by a white guy and a white woman. It took off and there was blood all over the car. And I was right there. And I went to this this gentleman on the ground and I took my belt off and applied a tourniquet. He was probably dead already and I kept telling somebody to “call an ambulance, call an ambulance!” Actually I think I was using the word “dust off.”

And this apartment complex was full of black people and they got around and they started talking about how this guy had took off. Apparently his wife had talked him into coming back, you know, not to run. And when that car pulled up they almost killed this guy. They dragged him out and started beating him. And by that time the police were there, and the fire truck was there and the ambulance was there. I never knew for a fact whether or not this old gentleman made it or not, but I feel pretty sure he did not make it. And went back to my mom's trailer, I had blood all over me, and I said, “I think I’ll just stay home. I’ll just stay home.”

Yeah that was one thing. And the other thing that happened there was I was with my two younger brothers and somebody shot two rounds through my mom and dad's window. And I remember getting my brother down on the floor very quickly. My wife would tell you that today I am still very quick to react to loud noises and stuff. I guess you'll never get through that or away from that.