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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Frank Knowski
Conducted by Dr. Richard B. Verrone
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Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Dr. Richard B. Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, I am conducting a video
2 oral history interview with Sergeant Frank Knowski. Today is November 12th, 2005. We
3 are here commemorating the 40th anniversary of the battles of the Ia Drang Valley, LZ
4 (Landing Zone) X-Ray, Falcon and Albany. Sergeant, I'd like for you to discuss a little
5 bit about when you got into X-Ray and then you're going to move out to Albany. You
6 wanted to talk about—this interview in general, please.

7 FK: Right. First of all, I would like this dedicate this to Vincent Locatelli. As we
8 knew him, his name was Loco. He was killed over there.

9 RV: Tell me a bit about Loco, was he—

10 FK: Loco came into our company probably a couple months before we deployed
11 over to Vietnam. Loco was kind of young and I kind of took him under my wing. Me and
12 him were very close.

13 RV: Was he a rifleman?

14 FK: Yes.

15 RV: And you were Alpha Company, 1st of the 5th, in Captain Forrest's company.

16 FK: Right. So I would like to dedicate this video to him.

17 RV: Yes, sir. It's done. Tell me about that day, did you come into X-Ray on the
18 16th?

1 FK: Yes, we did. We flew into there and we—I couldn't have imagined the
2 troopers that were there, when we relieved them, they were shell-shocked. You know,
3 you couldn't talk to them, they were just gazing. Once we went out to the battlefield to
4 see if there was any North Vietnamese still alive, I could see why. To this day, I will
5 never forget the smell of death. It was just rank because of the bodies decaying. And you
6 become when you're over there, you hate to say it, you become an animal. Because you
7 just want to live. I come across this North Vietnamese dead soldier and he had something
8 in his hand. I took it out and picture of his wife or girlfriend. I stuck it in my belt fold.

9 RV: This was at X-Ray when you first got there?

10 FK: Yeah, right. They had feelings too, you know. I carried that picture for many,
11 many years. Nobody knows. Just to speed the healing process. So then that night we set
12 up naturally and you know, back and forth the whole night with artillery coming in and
13 firing weapons.

14 RV: Was there any contact made there?

15 FK: We thought there was. One of the guys next me, I don't know if they got
16 scared or what, but he threw a grenade right in front of me, in front of our foxhole, me
17 and two other guys' foxholes. Thank god it went over us, but the concussion just rattled
18 our brains you know. We were up all night, everybody opened up, we fired all the
19 claymores and everything, thinking we were being attacked. So next morning I don't
20 remember the time even, they decided to move us out to Landing Zone Albany. We were
21 up all night naturally, tired. I couldn't, to this day I still question why they walked us out
22 instead of flew us out.

23 RV: Right, was there any question then? Do you remember people going, "Why
24 are we walking?"

25 FK: Oh yeah, "Why are we not flying out of here", you know. And from what I
26 can gather over the last few years at the reunions and that, was that the helicopters needed
27 maintenance.

28 RV: All of them? (Chuckles)

29 FK: I don't know if that's true or false or whatever you know, but that was part of
30 the reason why they walked us out.

31 RV: Tell me about that day.

1 FK: We were very tired, all of us. We'd walk a little ways and then rest. We were
2 coming in to this area and just hell broke loose. Loco was probably the first one killed,
3 right in front of me.

4 RV: Is this after you all had stopped, Forrest is going forward? And did you help
5 get everybody into a perimeter and set up?

6 FK: Yeah. What we did was, Loco and Loco's point man that day and Lieutenant
7 Hess was with him. The mortar came in and it flew up right in front of us. Blew up right
8 in front of us and all hell broke loose. We had mortars coming in, gunfire. You didn't
9 know whether to pray, shit, or go blind.

10 RV: Was Loco killed by the mortar?

11 FK: Yes, he was. Right off the bat.

12 RV: Did you see this?

13 FK: Yes, I did.

14 RV: How do you—what do you do with that at that moment? I know you go into
15 the survival mode as well and a protection of your buddies.

16 FK: You're trying to look out for people, you're trying to but you can't fire your
17 weapons ahead because you don't know where the people—only thing we could do is
18 start firing at trees, because they're up in trees, they're all over. We finally got pulled
19 back. Set up a perimeter. Finally got you know, where we could halfway organize.

20 RV: Is that when Forrest came back down and got everybody organized?

21 FK: Yeah, right. I was joking with an Air Force guy in there. A little bit ago. I
22 said, "You know, I never was a fan of the Air Force, but after Albany" I said, "You guys
23 are the greatest."

24 RV: For coming in and supporting?

25 FK: They came in and dropped napalm, they you know, they bombed all around
26 us. So close, you can feel the heat. It was very—I knew what those guys went through
27 after.

28 RV: How did you make it through that? What happened to you?

29 FK: Well, we finally got everything halfway organized. Set up perimeters and
30 kept trying to get the wounded back in and so that night we had a lot of flares dropping in
31 and Captain Forrest got a call from, I guess they call it Ghost 4-6 or something, I'm not

1 real positive. But there's some guys out there, still outside the perimeter, trapped out
2 there. Captain Forrest wanted to send some guys out there to get them. So we came
3 down, and naturally we're fighting all day and tired and I said—I told my buddy Rip,
4 "Man, I don't know if we should go out to them. It's going to be suicide." Rip told me, he
5 said, "Ski—" They called me Ski in those days, he said, "Ski if that was me out there, I'd
6 want somebody coming after me." I said, "You're right Rip." So we're all—there's
7 probably, I'd say twenty to twenty-two of us with the Sergeant that night. Went out after
8 him. Thank god it was night because I think the North Vietnamese were scared as we
9 were, and they didn't want to attack us and naturally we didn't want to attack them.
10 Because we wanted to go out and get them guys. So we picked up quite a few guys along
11 the way. We finally got out to where these guys were and started going around seeing
12 who all was seriously injured, who was able to walk and who was able to make it back.
13 We only had a certain amount of stretchers between us. So we filled up the stretchers
14 with the wounded, the worst, and told the rest if anybody could walk with us, they could
15 come with us. We had guys crying, begging us to take them and we could only take so
16 many. That was a really hard thing to leave them out there.

17 RV: Did you say, "Listen, we'll come back as soon as we can?"

18 FK: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Sergeant said, "We'll be back in the morning. We'll be
19 back for you." Matter of fact, he left his medic out there. The medic was left out there.
20 We get them all up and we got as many as we could coming back in. I don't know to this
21 day how many we brought back in, but it was around thirty or so. But they couldn't walk.

22 RV: Did you all ever get back out to those men whom you left? The ones that
23 were more injured?

24 FK: Yes, I did. It bothered me for many years leaving them out there, but then I
25 understand that they went out and got them all the next day. So then when we were
26 coming back in, we got to our perimeter and everybody made sure we were coming in
27 and everything was supposed to be clear to come in and about that time as we started
28 coming in, this one kid never got the word and he opened fire on us. He hit me and he hit
29 (Editor's note: Inaudible name) and another sergeant. So the three of us got shot coming
30 into our lines.

31 RV: Where were you hit?

1 FK: I was hit right here. Lucky, I had a peel of my boot shot off too. But thank
2 god it didn't hit the heel.

3 RV: Right. You got back in?

4 FK: Yeah. Got back in, they finally—I finally flew out that afternoon. Got me out.
5 They were trying to take the most wounded, the worst guys out first and I had the leg
6 wounded, which I said, "Go ahead, go ahead."

7 RV: This is an intense twenty-four hours basically that you had.

8 FK: Oh yes, yes.

9 RV: I can only assume that you lost others besides Loco that you knew and cared
10 for.

11 FK: Oh yes.

12 RV: How have you dealt with, first of all, the decision to walk? And then, how
13 have you dealt with the loss of these men? I mean, you went on and finished your time.

14 FK: Well I got back and kind of went in denial. I got hired on with IBM probably
15 a month after I got out of service. Tried starting over again.

16 RV: Is that what it was for you? You had to start over?

17 FK: Yeah, pretty much. I met a lovely woman and we got married in September
18 of '66. She's brought me through a lot of this. So we've—

19 RV: Tell me about being in the reunions and have you been to those before this?

20 FK: I never used to go to them. I tried to keep them out of my mind, didn't want
21 the stuff coming back. But it used to always come back, you'd always dream about it,
22 you always had feelings. First one I went to—we had one for our company in St. Louis. I
23 think it was a fifteen year one or whatever. So we got to see a bunch of our guys that was
24 in our company. It really helped. So then I came to one here in D.C. after that. So I've
25 been to probably, counting this one, four reunions I think.

26 RV: How's it been here forty years after the fact, at this reunion? Being with
27 Captain Forrest and the rest of your guys, has the healing continued?

28 FK: Oh yes, very much so. You have—you continue to heal yourself. I'm getting
29 better. It did bother me a long time. Used to get very depressed, drank too much at times.
30 The only times I used to talk about Vietnam was when I was drunk.

31 RV: Did you ever have the opportunity to meet Loco's family for anything?

1 FK: No, that was something I really should've done. Matter of fact, I'm going to
2 do that. I'm going to—his nephew set up a memorial for Loco and I tried to get a hold of
3 him because when the memorial was set up, it was a couple of years after I found that
4 out. Tried to get a hold of him and couldn't get a hold of him. So I mailed this guy and he
5 got me a phone number for his nephew. I don't think his mother and dad is alive
6 anymore. I did get his mother's address and I used to travel to San Jose, California all the
7 time and he lived in San Mateo, or she did. I never could bring myself to go talk to her.

8 RV: Looking into the future, how do you want people to know about that march
9 in Albany and what happened? And what would you like them to remember about your
10 men and your buddies.

11 FK: Well, one thing I would like to do is, we have so many fallen heroes over
12 there. So I would like to say god bless them all. Because without them, I wouldn't be
13 here. It's very—I just wish they could be with me. That's all I can say. And I salute them,
14 you know.

15 RV: Okay. Alright. Well, thank you very much Sergeant for sharing your feelings
16 with us and your thoughts with us.

17 FK: Thank you.

18 (End of interview)