

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Dennis Metzger

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember - Vietnam Oral History project

Interview # VRV-A-L-2018-078

Dennis Metzger, a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War who nevertheless spent five years in South Vietnam working with Vietnamese villagers, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember – Vietnam War Oral History project*.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Dec 14 & Dec 28, 2018 & Jan 2, 2019

Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:52 + 2:09 + 1:27 / 1.86 + 2.15 + 1.45 = 5.46 hrs.

Session 1: Early life & beliefs as a Church of the Brethren member and VN service

Session 2: Experiences in South Vietnam helping village farmers with irrigation projects

Session 3: Departure from Vietnam, year in Taiwan and return to the United States

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on February 13,
2019.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield,
Illinois.

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Abstract

Dennis Metzger, *Veterans Remember*, VRV-A-L-2018-078

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Dennis Metzger was born in May 1946 in Warsaw, Indiana and grew up on a farm in Kosciusko County in a strong Church of the Brethren family. The denomination has an historic tradition of pacifism and is one of a select group whose active members are usually awarded conscientious objector status upon request. He graduated from Sidney High School in 1964, and from Manchester College (North Manchester, IN) in 1968 with a major in Peace Studies. He then felt called to serve in Vietnam and attended training in the United States at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Maryland. Following Vietnamese language training in Saigon, he was sent to the city of Tam Ky on the coast of South Vietnam, working for the Brethren Volunteer Service.

For the next five years Metzger worked with rice farmers in villages just west of Tam Ky, primarily on irrigation projects. The region was generally controlled by the South Vietnamese government during the day, and by the Viet Cong at night. Dennis stressed that he kept his political views to himself and was safe as long as the villagers felt they had ownership of the resulting irrigation systems. He attended church services with a protestant congregation in Tam Ky. It was there that he met his future wife, Lê thị Vân, noticing her while she was leading the congregation's many children give a Christmas pageant. They were married in a traditional western ceremony at their church on April 12, 1973. This was shortly after the Paris Peace Accords were signed. In early 1974 Dennis and Vân decided to leave Vietnam and moved to Taipei, Taiwan, a place where both would be foreigners. While there, Dennis attended the National Taiwan Normal University and studied Chinese. In 1975 (following the fall of South Vietnam), they moved back to the United States. Dennis earned a Masters' Degree from Indiana University in East Asian area studies, then took a job in Springfield, Illinois working for the Church World Service as a fund raiser. Dennis and Vân remained in Springfield where they continued to live at the time of the interview.

Subject Headings/Key Words: conscientious objector status; Church of the Brethren; civilian service in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War; irrigation projects in Vietnamese villages; Church World Service; Manchester College; Vietnamese language; Taipei, Taiwan; Tam Ky, Vietnam;

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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