

Mike Mercredi, Frank Tomkins, Ron Laliberte

Métis Political Activist Interviews (Jan 24, 25, 2004)

Tape 3

Start Time: 9:37:06.14

(Video Time: 9:37.06.14) Mike Mercredi: Another thing that, that's important for us to remember is that when you're in the military you are not political. You have a job to do and a battle to fight and so on and as long as you're in there you're doing that. And the political movement is pretty foreign to you all the time that you're in the military. It wasn't until certainly after I get out of the army in 1974 that the politicians start to take over...

(Inaudible) ...more influence on the military and I think that's disappointing as hell, because the, the politicians are ignorant of the military way and the military objective, things that they have to do. They have no idea about that whatsoever and it's, for many of us it's, it's sad as hell when we get to realize that we're really being directed by the political movement within a certain party that happens to be in government in Canada at that time. And I think wars have changed now. You don't know who your enemy is. The Americans fighting in Vietnam and the people fighting in the, in the Middle East right now. You're never really certain who your enemy is, whereas during the First War and the Second War, you know, the line was here and everybody on that side of the line was the ones you were shooting at and they were doing the same thing to you. Now the lines sort of, are non-existent and they're sort of all around now. And I think this is become

primary of the political movement because you get the politicians of two different countries sort of arguing and we used to say that, you know, we would have no wars if we took the politicians and put a uniform on them, give them a rifle, say you go stand up there and shoot somebody. But they don't do that they take the young kids, the children of our nation and waste them on political objectives and political aspirations of, not bad people, but maybe not too smart. There wasn't a doubt that Aboriginal people play-, played a very important and significant role during, during the military. When I was in there was a lot of Aboriginal guys. But when I reflect back on them now I didn't know whether they were Métis or, or First Nations. And it, they didn't make a hell of a lot of difference. David Ahenakew, I didn't know he was an Indian until after he got out of the army. And Dave and I shared many bottles of beer, bottles of wine and saki and we had a great time. It was many years later that he got very politically involved, and politically astute. We had a guy in our outfit by the name Tootoosis and I didn't know Tootoosis was an Indian name 'til I came back to Canada and there were just so many Tootoosis all over the place. And I imagine they thought the same things when they heard a guy by the name of Mercredi. They figured I was probably the only bloody Mercredi that ever lived but there's a whole mess of us all over the place. It wasn't important. What was important was that you could pull your weight and do your share of the work. And that's an extreme significant magnitude when you're under a lot of pressure, a lot of combat and, and things like that. And people are being hurt all around you. Now can we take that kind of attitude and, and apply it in Aboriginal political

movement back in Canada when they come back? We know that, that when an Indian, and I learnt this after I, I was out of the army, we know that when an Indian signed up to join the army, he gave up his, his treaty status. He become a Canadian. That's a hell of a thing, eh? He become a Canadian so you go fight the war and, and all this other stuff. When he was finished fighting the war he went back to what he knew before which was his reserve. And again the, the boundaries of the reserve were closing around him and all of the opportunity would, would, would be essentially on the outside of the boundary and they, they couldn't get out. So after they fought a war for five years and they come back and the conditions didn't improve for them whatsoever and because they were, (I'm just speculating now), because they were in the military and had five or six years of being sort of non-political, they weren't inclined to be, to be political when they got back home. It wasn't until many, many years later when guys like Ahenakew stepped forward and many of the others. It was a shame and I think we, you know, you hear this quite a bit now on television, on radio, in the newspapers that the governments, no matter what damn party they were, but they just saw that if the Indians went back to the reserve and the Métis went back to the, to the road allowance, you know the problem was solved. And while the non-Aboriginal soldiers were assisted right after, Aboriginal people didn't know it, and again because as Frank was saying, their education wasn't that good so they didn't apply for the benefits that they should have got. They should not have had to apply, you know, there should have been somebody there that said, "Look now that you guys are getting out of the army here's some of the

benefit's that you can apply for and you should apply for them." And recognizing the fact that during the Second World War many of our, of our people, not only the Aboriginal people, but really didn't know how to read and write. Somebody should have been there to, to say this is what you can apply for. I got out of the army in 1974. When I went into the army I had grade 8. I didn't know a bloody thing. And I just was looking for, for a job for three years.

End Time: 9:43:00.67