

Mike Mercredi, Frank Tomkins, Ron Laliberte  
Métis Political Activist Interviews (Jan 24, 25, 2004)

Tape 3

**Start Time: 11:40:23.07**

**Ron Laliberte:** Frank if I could ask you a little more about your past. What was your role in the Veteran's Association and in founding it? I know that you, you were involved with other people like Edward King and Vital Morin and people like that. Could you comment on that aspect?

**(Video Time: 11:40.59.18) Frank Tomkins:** Well this goes way back, I guess, because, right to, to the war. You know there was twenty-four of my extended family that was involved in the war. And there was four of my cousins that were killed, and those that came back after the war, there was nothing. They couldn't, there was very few jobs and one of the things that, that always came to my mind when I was terribly disgusted was, was it, it almost looked as if the Aboriginal person was deprived or denied any opportunity to get something started. I come from a small community, a place called Jousard, and it was mostly French people there. Not that I have anything against French people, but most of those, all those French people that was involved in the war were conscripted, they were called up eh, they didn't volunteer like all the other people did. And because they were conscripted they never saw any combat. They were sent to either Jamaica or to Newfoundland or to Alaska, Attu Island as the home guard. And yet after the war it was mink ranching was the big thing after the war. And just about

everybody, everybody that was involved in it and the French person that was involved in the war started up a mink ranch back home. One guy started a dairy farm, another guy started farming, and none of the Aboriginal people had an opportunity to get anything going for themselves. Two of my brothers they made, I don't know how many trips they made all together to Edmonton to Veteran's Affairs and the train used to run three times a week back and forth for two hundred miles away. You'd get over there, they go to Veteran's Affairs and they say come back tomorrow or come back next week. So this got disgusted and say well there's no use. This is hopeless. And I guess this, this applied to just about everybody, any relations that I had anyway, in so far as getting anything started. So I felt this was, this was, you know, certainly not right. Every one of them was a member of the Legion but as far as being in the war was concerned the Aboriginal people... **(Inaudible)** ...as my hometown was concerned we're, we're the minority. And of course the white people if there was any chance to get any kind of, get anything started they had first kick at the cat. So our people were always left out. Like the Legion wasn't very supportive, you know, they helped their friends first because all the executive was white, let's face it. And they helped their friends first. I found that they keep up their membership but they don't bother going to meetings because they say, "What's the point?" you know. They, they don't really know anybody. So the three guys that I mentioned earlier Walter Bear, David Knight, and, and Wal-, Walter Deiter. They had started a, started the, the Sask-, Saskatchewan Indian Veterans Association. And they were guys that said, "Hey, you know, we deserve something here."

People had come back from, from the war, they went back to the reserve. Some that there was nothing to do on the reserve and this is most, and some of them went out working. A lot of my relatives because there was nothing much to do, they ended up hoeing silver beach or white farmers or maybe picking rocks and stones for some veteran friend that got some land. And, you know, this was, this wasn't right. So people were talking about it. Finally in the early '90s, this government decided to do a survey on the needs of Aboriginal veterans, see if they, you know, if they had received anything. And, you know, government always does this, you know. If there's anything to be done well they've got to have a survey. You know, a damn survey. They didn't have to do a survey if a guy had any rights coming because every man that was in the army they have a record of it. They have a record of everything. If you lost a day's pay it's on there. If you were sick it's on there. If you were in combat it's on there. Where you served, the whole bit. When you joined up, when you got discharged, everything is there. What was the point of doing the survey? They had all the records already. But what they did was they got a Métis person and, and a Status Indian to do a survey in each province. And, of course, the surveyor was, I, I filled copy out and they were all loaded questions. And anybody that was then by, by when they get these forms anybody that is critical didn't have an opportunity to go and, and address their concerns to the Senate. It was half a dozen guys that went to Edmonton to address the Senate on their, on their so called grievances but if you had a grievance there wasn't much chance of getting a chance to talk to the Senate. My brother was picked. The code talker, he was picked to, to

He speak to the Senate and all he talked about was, they asked him, "What did you do in the army?" Well a question like that you tell them, you know. He was a code talker, he was a tank driver. And, but they were a lot, they'd allow walk-on speakers so I went to Edmonton, three hundred miles one way, and spent a couple days in a hotel. I spent, you know, my own money. I spent a couple days in Edmonton because you had to, long ways to go home, but I was a walk-on speaker. And I addressed the concerns that my brothers had. You know, trips to, back and forth, you know, and, and not being able to get anywhere. As they French people used to call them "zombies" if you were a call-up, you know. They, they got grants from the government whereas the Aboriginal people didn't get anything. And some were wounded, some of my relations were wounded. And they got, you know, the pension but no great amount.

**End Time: 11:47:38.10**