ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH DON PRATT IN LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY
ON JULY 9, 1997

**ERNST:** I'm just going to ask you some basic questions and hopefully I won't talk too much today. You just say whatever comes to your mind and hopefully I can prompt you on a couple of points. I guess the first thing I looked at, is when did you enter the ROTC program and what institution and what was the year?

**PRATT:** I entered after high school because it was mandatory at UK unless you were a member of the band and/or you had some reason not to--physical, mental, psychological--as you would have with the draft system.

**ERNST:** What year was that exactly?

**PRATT:** I graduated from high school in 62, it was the fall of 62. Also, after the second year, I enlisted and stayed with the program, which required my agreement to finish ROTC training for two more years. At that time, I was really somewhat reluctant and basically wanted my parents to make that decision but because of peers and friends that I had within the program, I stayed with it.

**ERNST:** When did the Vietnam War become an issue for you?

**PRATT:** Probably my junior year. When after being elected and extremely involved in the Presbyterian Fellowship on campus and what became the United Campus Christian Fellowship, a national organization of unity between the Presbyterians and the Disciples of Christ and a couple of other small religious groups, I was selected as a national representative as well as a regional representative and attended a conference in Chicago at McCormick Theological Institute, and various issues of young people being debated, including sex out of marriage or premarital sex, drugs, democracy, and the War in Vietnam and women's rights, civil rights. There were a lot of issues as a naive Lexingtonian and Kentucky limited exposure, I was really surprised and startled by how much more people were talking about issues that face the nation than say, you know, we would at a local level. And so at that conference, they were debating whether they should support the War in Vietnam and I being an ROTC candidate, voted to support the War in Vietnam, simply on the issues support your troops but was in conversation with a man who actually was passing out leaflets. And he asked me how much I knew about Vietnam and I said very little, and he suggested a book, Vietnam Reader, by Bernard Paul and Marcus Rascum, which I pursued when I returned. And at the same time I was reading Martin Luther King's book, Why We Can't Wait. And because they basically were social consciousness and one call for action, the other one debated the issue and because the civil rights movement was demanding whites out at that point and let blacks take over the leadership and the rise of black power, those type of issues, I really did pay more attention to the War of Vietnam and the draft issue and became quite involved in both organizing and open public descent at the University of Kentucky. As a result of some vigils we organized, I can't remember always what group it was called, but I think it was The Citizens for Peace in Vietnam, and that group organized vigils to have on campus and there was maybe 5 or 6 of us that began and it grew to 20 and 30, just silently standing in a prominent place on campus, protesting the War in

Vietnam and that was the beginning for me. And I was photographed and placed in the newspaper whereupon the commander of the ROTC program. This was after my senior year, after I completed the program, called me in and asked me to stop this protest or resign my commission, which I said at this point I didn't believe in the War in Vietnam, and I would not lead troops into battle, which basically told him that I would not change my position and I would also not give up my right of free speech. Well they wanted me to leave the ROTC program then. They honorably discharged me and that's when my career with the judicial system basically began.

**ERNST:** At that point you're placed back, you're put in the draft pool?

**PRATT:** Actually, he intentionally did that. The ROTC commandant, or whatever his title was, he intentionally put me back into the draft pool but actually the local board wasn't that desirous to pursue; in fact, they tried to get me to go for conscientious objector status, and because of the march on the Pentagon, I was organizing a bus load to go to that, I was asked the question about do I plan to burn my draft card, and I said, no, the city of Lexington burned it and they actually had because I threw it in the trash and they had an incinerator then. And, of course, the person that read it did not think it was very funny and eventually the FBI came out to do an investigation and I was then drafted as would any normal citizen. The local board knew two things. I was at that point unable to serve due to two major lung surgeries, which would have given me 4F status and they actually had wanted me to go for the conscientious objector status and asked me to come in and do an interview. I refused both, and the basis of that was a conference in Washington DC where we were trying to nominate Martin Luther King and Dr. Benjamin Spock for president and vice president. It was a drafting committee to try to have an alternative candidate to the democratic and republican candidate. And at that conference, during a debate on the issues, including the draft, a young man was screaming about resisted draft, you know, this position should be to resist the draft, you know, get this group to stand to resist the draft, not comply with the draft, and he was so adamant and screaming and yelling. I turned to a lady sitting next to me and asked why is he so strong in his position, and she said, well he is 4F. And it struck me, and I couldn't tell someone else to resist the draft if I was 4F, and I couldn't tell someone else conscientiously to resist the draft if I took a deferment. And at that time it was very discriminatory, the draft system was. It depended upon the local board, it depended upon your personal status or recognition in the community, depended upon your ability to get into the National Guard, and so people that didn't have that power or influence or didn't pursue that power or influence, became the cannon fodder of the military. And I didn't want to tell an individual to refuse induction if I wasn't willing to take the consequences. I also could have gone to Canada. In fact, a number of people that I knew had already gone and ...

**ERNST:** What prevented you from doing that?

**PRATT:** Same principle. You know, I needed to stand and deny the state the right to use me in a war which I felt was immoral and illegal, so I took that stance and pursued refusal induction.

**ERNST:** What year are we talking about?

**PRATT:** You are asking me the wrong question. I mean I'm not a person for dates and even person for names, I'm really bad; but it's there, it's record. It's in The Colonel. Ironically, that

move by the ROTC to take away my commission was national news and was probably the first and maybe only military change of policy--what would be a good term for it--release from duty due to opposition of the War in Vietnam. There apparently were a lot of candidates throughout the nation then that tried to get out of their commission because of the War in Vietnam and they could not because they would lose so many.

**ERNST:** Were you fairly high profiled at this point in local newspapers, and ...

**PRATT:** In Kentucky, yes. Actually there were two of us, myself and Mohammad Ali, but Mohammad Ali was refusing in Houston, Texas, I believe, and that was a very wise decision on his part, as well as he had quite a bit of counsel, he had money that I didn't have. They knew they would have a lenient judge as opposed to Louisville, where I had a hanging judge for the defense. And so one irony of that was that I also worked all through junior high and high school and college. I had a paper route, a fairly sizable one, and one afternoon on one of the routes-- I had more than one actually, I took another route. On one of the routes, I was sitting there waiting for all my papers because I only had one group of papers that I was supposed to receive that day. I had already received the editorial page, and my name and Mohammad Ali were the subject of one of their comments--"Let's send Don Pratt and Mohammad Ali to Russia with a one-way ticket." And I had to deliver probably 500 of those papers, thinking here I am supporting free speech, but, you know, telling people who actually knew me and liked me, that I should be sent to Russia. If that isn't a strange feeling to do that and I did it, and I really wish I had a copy of that paper, too. But those are the twists and turns of fate.

**ERNST:** Did you have much support in the Lexington community or even from professors on campus and other students?

**PRATT:** Actually I did, it was amazing. There was a great group of people who not necessarily were willing to take the stand themselves, but admired and respected and complemented and boosted the ego when it was necessary and at the same time I knew I was right and felt quite confident. In fact, the feeling of being right about that was well remembered and even the spot that I remembered. It was sort of like the Kennedy killing, I remember where I was when I suffered that feeling. But I was just halfway between the Education Building and the University of Kentucky Administration Building right near the rock wall there on Limestone. And I said I am going to do this, I am going to free myself of what I really think is wrong and I am going to stand and reject the military and refuse induction. It was extremely liberating feeling, even though I faced incarceration or maybe worse, I knew that I was right, it was right for me, and it felt great. So the support was there. The legal support actually came from one individual who was probably one of the great mental legal minds of this country and still is-- A man named Robert Seddler, who rose and gave me free defense, even though it cost me money to file the briefs that went to both the pellet court and to the supreme court. He also did it in a second case--I've been to the supreme court twice-- The second being trying to get on the ballot despite the controversy in my right to vote, those type issues, and challenge that law. In reference to the Vietnam War, he raised a number of points, which to this day, it seems as if everything changed, though they wouldn't rule that way in court on my behalf, and he was probably the most significant character in terms of support. Another person of renown that supported myself and certainly added to the public recognition of this act, was Wendell Barry, who wrote the book, Long-legged House. In that

writing, there was one chapter in there which he dedicated to the conscious and citizenship of Don Pratt in Lexington, Kentucky, and that became a major book throughout the nation, both on college campuses, as well as literary circles because he is very well known.

**ERNST:** How did you come to know Wendell Barry?

**PRATT:** Well he became to know me. He was an English professor at UK at that time and he saw and heard about my case and wrote this and read it at a rally. I'm not such a great reader and such a well- versed individual, I'm really pretty pathetic, as far as discipline and organization in academic affairs. He read this at some rally or meeting and was quite profound and certainly moving to him. He is a very emotional individual and put himself into that for sure. And there are others, you know, and people who I remember standing in the rain when I went off to jail at one point that didn't even know me but they were there for me, so it wasn't as if anybody really knew me. I'm not a person who allows too many people to get close, only my children probably; and my daughter is probably one of the few people that knows me as well as anybody. And I'm fiercely independent and certainly controversial still about my positions on many things and I would be damned what everybody else thinks, and if I believe I'm right I'll stand up and condemn whoever, and it is not an unpleasant position to be in at times, but it certainly has meant that I haven't had those really close friends and ties that I had before--and that as a child-- In fact, the only time I really had that close support was my parents, I guess, and my father became very supportive. My mother never really did, my mother was more conservative. My father even wrote letters which impressed me. Here I have him who was basically in support of the administrations began to question. I saw that kind of change personally more than most would see.

**ERNST:** Did you have any siblings at this time.

**PRATT:** Brother and sister and adopted brother.

**ERNST:** Where did they come down on your stance.

**PRATT:** Well, at this point I am not close to my natural brother and sister. My younger brother, who is adopted, and I are pretty close. My sister, in reference to the War in Vietnam, she became pretty supportive in terms of criticism of the war, and that was sort of hard on her because her husband was in the defense industry. How much she did or didn't do, I don't know because she lived in Fort Worth Texas. She was supportive of me. My older brother, you know, he was friendly during all this time and never was critical that I can recall. One of his sons became an MIA POW type conservative-- Let's save 'em all, let's go back in, let's take over Vietnam again-- and had no recognition of right or wrong that I consider just. And we differed, not necessarily probably, but they never would talk with me. It was sort of like to boot every question of what I had to say or think, and maybe they were afraid, or maybe they learned to be afraid because, you know, I really am strong on my convictions.

**ERNST:** What was the trial like, do you remember at all?

**PRATT:** Well, the first trial was the one where-- One of the questions was the jury of the peers and that I remember the most because the average age must have been 65 to 70 of people who tried

me. One of the fellows was a shoe-shine boy down in the basement and that is essentially how they referred to him. He was a black man who had worked in the building of the federal court, and they called him up for my trial, and he was probably 75 or 70 years old. And to use these kind of people to try and identify with myself or the issues was strange, and, of course, they questioned some people's position on the jury and removed a lot of the people, the federal government did, and I remember some of that, but not that much. I mean, you know, I remember testifying but really not that much of the trial. It was in Louisville. I refused in Louisville. I remember that better than I do the trial because of where I was and the excitement at the time, the ride to Louisville, on a bus with a whole bunch of men, some of whom were going to be drafted that very day. That was an eery feeling compared to the trial. The trial was much more secure and, of course, environment was much healthier, I think, though than the results were.

**ERNST:** Did you all chat much on the bus ride in? Was it quiet?

**PRATT:** It was sort of quiet. I knew one person there who I had been in high school with, and I leafleted. And I was sort of scared to do that because I didn't know this crowd, and didn't know if I would get attacked or what, but at the draft center in Louisville, they even tried to keep me from leafleting. They put me in different rooms, they would send me off to do errands. And I would suspect that while I was gone, they talked to everybody and maybe even took up the leaflets I passed out on the War in Vietnam. But you know, I don't know what they did or didn't do and I know that they knew I was there and why I was there and they were certainly aware of me, that I didn't know the process or didn't know when to expect them to get me to do anything. But at one point they said you are going to have to go to take a physical and that's the point I refused. I knew that if I took a physical, that I would be rejected and _____.

**ERNST:** So you really did stand up for principle?

**PRATT:** Yeah, it was straight up in principles and, I mean, it was right, I knew the war was wrong and unwinable but...

**ERNST:** So you were sentenced to five years and $10,000 fine.

**PRATT:** $10,000 fine, and that was the maximum, though I heard some other judges in their anger, may have given them more than one sentence, you know, two or three, five year, $10,000 fines. This judge actually had a son in Vietnam apparently. Not only did he give us that sentence but he made us put a supersedeas--I'm not real sure of the terminology--supersedeas--bond--which meant that upon failure of appeal that that money would be submitted and we would take a financial loss immediately. Supersedeas is the right term I believe, and neither of us had the money or did not want another party to be punished for our actions. My parents were willing to put up that bond, but they may have suffered the pain with consequences of having to pay. The bond was illegal. The judge imposed it in anger and you know I have always wondered and wanted to know if he ever learned to change his mind, and I don't know if he is still living or not. I really should have asked that or pursued that earlier than now but I've always wondered if someone like that, if he ever knew that he had made a mistake.

**ERNST:** Yeah, like your son made it out of Vietnam.

**PRATT:** Or his did.

**ERNST:** And colored his judgments later.

**PRATT:** That's interesting.

**ERNST:** You did 20 months in prison?

**PRATT:** Approximately.

**ERNST:** Where was that at?

**PRATT:** Well, more interesting, Tom, was in the Jefferson County Jail when we were on a supersedeas bond and I spent something like 42 days there. And that was a real treat because of the living quarters and the number of peoples we met and even the number of police killers that we were exposed to because I was put in with them twice. The experience in county jail, which was the pits, was probably more interesting. Federal prison was in Milan, Michigan, it was a young adults' type facility, and they went up to about 28 years old, though there were occasionally inmates who were much older. Due to security, they would use this facility for protecting certain inmates and they would put them in there occasionally and I lived there for the majority of the time. It was primarily a dormitory type of facility and after a while you could graduate into individual cell but I didn't want to take advantage of that. I liked the dormitory kind of living and meeting and residing with a lot more individuals. The new people came in and short-termers came in. You got to meet them and what they were there and I did a lot of talking with a lot of people, a lot of writing and reading, compared to what I would do on the streets. That was majority of the time. I had Sunday visits once a month. Also at the last part of my stay there got to go to the University of Michigan and take some classes, and that was quite rewarding because I did quite well one semester. The second semester, my father was killed and I never completed it, never went back.

**ERNST:** Were there any other war resistors in the facility?

**PRATT:** Oh yes, uh huh. Again, the war resistors--it's not again, is it-- Most war resistors were somewhat conscientious objectors that couldn't get that status. Others were actually political as well and opposed specifically to the War in Vietnam and including some that had done some draft file actions or actions against some draft boards. I'm not real sure of everybody's sentence or conviction, but the majority of those that were there were conscientious objectors, some of whom were religious, Jehovah Witnesses. There were very few there at first, and I was quite different than most of them because most of the draft resistors were introverts, and being an extravert comparatively speaking, you know, I was wild and crazy, and the sense of humor different than they had ever been exposed to as well as the sense of humor different than most inmates. So what we did in prison was a little bit different, or what I did in prison was a little bit different than most inmates.

**ERNST:** Did the prison officials treat you all well, as far as your stance on the war, or was not

implacable?

**PRATT:** Well, there were different kind of guards and different kind of administrators at the times I was there and usually you weren't treated any different than anybody else. But they knew that the draft resistors that were there were generally higher educated than the others that were there, though as a result of drugs and drug dealing, there were a number of better educated inmates, and that changed what they did with you in terms of assignments. They gave us jobs in the education department or in the dental clinic or more technical jobs than others and we probably had better rating in terms of security than others and could do things that did not require massive supervision and that was a little bit of difference, I'm sure. I don't really know what rules and regulations or policies they had and I didn't really have to pursue them, I just knew that it was a little different.

**ERNST:** I hate to ask and if you don't want to comment that's fine, but you did mention your dad was killed during this time. Did that have an impact on your release...

**PRATT:** Immediate. Actually, I was 12 days short of coming home anyway and, I got a call the day before... I got a call the day before, and it was sort of unusual that my ex-wife was coming up. The day before they told me my ex-wife was coming and I knew it was unusual, and then the next day I went in to visit, and of course, she told me, and they told me that I would be immediately released. And after she told me, I went and packed everything I had in my locker into boxes or a box, I can't remember, and they escorted me through the gates. And it was different in that they usually go through a different kind of search and dressing.

**ERNST:** They got you out early, though, just a few days, though.

**PRATT:** Yeah, and probably it was the hardest, I mean it was easily the hardest part of the sentence.

**ERNST:** Were you married during this time?

**PRATT:** Yeah, and that's when I really got some sense of freedom and I got to visit with my wife on Sunday trips to town, somewhat illegal visits because I had conjugal visits as a result of getting to go out in town. But there was other inmates that went to town for work or school and I'm sure that they couldn't stop that kind of activity and certainly I didn't prove them wrong.

**ERNST:** What was her position on the war?

**PRATT:** Actually we met because she was opposed to the War in Vietnam. And a really profound minister out of Louisville, George Edwards, was invited to speak at our Presbyterian Center and she was brought there by some students at a local high school who wanted her to meet me. And it was sort of an instantaneous romance, and instantaneous marriage that lasted for 5 or 6 years. Again, I'm not good at times and dates. But the actual incarceration was probably the downfall of that relationship and maybe I shouldn't have been married and certainly maybe she shouldn't have been married to me. But that was during the time I was incarcerated as well as prior to the time. And it was, I mean, and I have no regrets about being married, I'm just sorry it wasn't to the right

long-term kind of partner or we couldn't reconcile. We did have one daughter who is a wonderful, talented artist and photo journalist.

**ERNST:** What happens after this point? Are you still involved in the antiwar movement?

**PRATT:** Occasionally, there is an issue that is obviously war related and I'm asked to speak but-- everything from the death penalty to zoning and planning to children's rights, to other issues-- drugs, legalization, civil liberties, civil rights-- I'm still involved in anything and everything I feel I can have some input.

**ERNST:** Would you consider yourself a political activist?

**PRATT:** Well, I think everybody else would, too.

**ERNST:** Do you think it stems back to your Vietnam experience?

**PRATT:** Obviously, well actually it started with civil rights. I was involved in recruiting at UK for black basketball players and that is where I first got most politically active and we were successful in changing some of the university policy and even Adolph Rupp had to change his private statements and become publicly involved in recruiting and did recruit a black player.

**ERNST:** This was before the Vietnam?

**PRATT:** Yeah.

**ERNST:** That's somewhat of common experience for a lot of people in the antiwar movement, I mean each movement kind of built on one before.

**PRATT:** Yeah, Well, if you didn't come along though in the civil rights era, if the timing wasn't right. There were people who joined us in the antiwar movement that were too young to know too much about civil rights. But King was probably the mentor that precipitated my, both exposure as well as decision to act and the manner that I acted.

**ERNST:** Did you have an opportunity to meet any of these prominent figures?

**PRATT:** Oh yeah, King was one of them, it was in a long session. I'm really sort of confused right now in terms of whether he was the person who delivered the Sunday Service or not. The civil rights event-- I went to Atlanta to study the civil rights and civil liberties in Atlanta and relationships between blacks and whites, and we went to King's church. At one time he wasn't there and we met his father. And the other time, I'm sure he was the one that delivered the sermon and I had the opportunity to shake hands and of course I went to the dedication of King's memorial next to the church the first year after he died. I went to any number of activities in Lexington regarding civil rights and then later in the antiwar activities. I went to New York, Chicago, to Washington, time and time again, both to the lobby as well as to speak. And at each of these events there was an opportunity to meet some people, sometimes accidentally, sometimes intentionally, and sometimes just for brief moments and sometimes for exchanges of ideas. Jane

Fonda, Joan Biaz and Dave Harris her husband, Stokely Carmichael, Andrew Young, Careta Scott King--a lot of people like that. The one interesting was with Jane Fonda, Mark Lane, and Jay William Fulbright. I ran into Hubert Humphrey in the hall once just by chance at Washington. Let's see, who else--lots of people like that. Dr. Spock I'm pretty sure was at the Washington conference so I didn't really speak to him.

**ERNST:** Which one was the most impressive or did any of them leave you ...

**PRATT:** Jay William Fulbright probably, because it was more personal, it was an accidental meeting. The girls in his office, I mean we were at the extreme end of his inner office. We were answering letters. And the girls were so excited about the presence of Jane Fonda and I just humorously said, "Oh I know Jane Fonda," or, no, I didn't say I knew her, I said, "Do you want to meet Jane Fonda?" And they said yes, yes, yes. They said you know Jane Fonda, you're in the movement, aren't you. And I didn't know Jane Fonda from beans. But I said, "Do you want to meet her?" And they said, yes, yes, yes. I said, "Where is she?" They said she had gone to Senator Gadell's office. So I said, "Where's the phone and what's his number?" And they looked it up real quick, and I called Senator Gadell's office and I matter-of-factly said this is Don Pratt in Senator Fulbright's office and I gave the office number for where we were and not for Senator Fulbright because I didn't even know his number. So in walks Jane Fonda, Mark Lane, and I think Buffy St. Marie and this little Indian woman and maybe it was her mother, I'm not sure. And they walked into the office where we were and they were sort of startled that they were in this office and there was this bunch of people taking letters apart, envelopes opening. And I looked up and these two women just lost it. One of them ran down the hall, inner hall, and I didn't know where she had gone, and this other one was just losing it. I said, "Yes, ma'am, can I help you?" And she said "Yes, somebody asked me to come here." And I said, "Who are you?" And the way she said it really was what precipitated my response. She said, "I'm Jane Fonda." And then I said, "I'm Don Pratt, what you are doing here?" And she said, "Well you ask me to come here." I said, "No, no, what are you doing here? Why are you in Washington, why are you in Senator Gadell's office?" And then she proceeded to tell me that she was there for a GI bill of rights and she was lobbying congressman and senators. And about that time, the second woman who had run down the hall, came running back and says "Senator Fulbright would like to see you," and so we all got to go sit and talk with Senator Fulbright for about 15 minutes. He was so eloquent and so profound and so sensitive to what was happening at the time and was so aware of feelings and concerns of both the decenters as well as Jane Fonda and Mark Lane and what they were interested in in reference to GI's. The man was really a genuine scholar and conscientious leader. If I had my choice, that probably had been the person I would follow. Of course, King was such a powerful speaker. I don't remember the sermon that Sunday but on that same trip to Atlanta I met Luster Maddox, who was obviously the anti civil rights leader of Atlanta, Georgia and later I think to be governor but I remember confronting him and finding him illogical in some things that he said and believed, and he had to back down on some things he said and believed, which was surprising.

**ERNST:** Were you voluntary in Fulbright's office at that point in time?

**PRATT:** Yeah. I was just volunteer. They ask me to open letters and pick out thousands of letters and they were just inundated with letters of support.

**ERNST:** What's interesting about Fonda in working with the GI Bill of Rights or in general, because, many of the soldiers still do not feel, you know, antagonism towards her. Yet, here she is...

**PRATT:** They don't.

**ERNST:** Many of them still do.

**PRATT:** Oh, still do, yeah.

**ERNST:** Because she is working for their rights. That is kind of interesting.

**PRATT:** Well she was really naive. I mean I think she even sort of later said that she shouldn't have done what she did in reference to annoy the prisoners of the Vietnamese armies. And I'm sure that they tortured and did crazy things. I mean Amnesty International would have told you that. On the other hand, I think her position was right and to end the War in Vietnam and to show the Vietnamese that we were compassionate in addition to being so militaristic. Some friends of mine sailed into Hifon Harbor with medical supplies. They were Quakers and their intention to supply needed medical supplies was denied. Well, the atrocities that we committed in Vietnam are far greater than they ever committed to the RPOWs. There is no doubt about it. And the atrocities they are suffering today due to the chemical exposures that we have pitched on to their lands and pitched on to their peoples are far greater than any of the POWs. And if you will read how they killed and slaughtered many of the Vietnamese soldiers and tortured many of the Vietnamese soldiers, not necessarily the good soldiers of our armies but sometimes the good soldiers of our armies and sometimes our representatives of Vietnamese or the Koreans that we took into vietnam. The atrocities were many on both sides, probably more so our side. We probably committed far more than they ever did to the POWs.

**ERNST:** ... Koreans ...

**PRATT:** Australians ...

**ERNST:** Thai's...

**PRATT:** Yeah.

**ERNST:** I'm curious, though, as to why you mentioned Koreans because that's my latest research interest.

**PRATT:** Is it? Well because they were probably far more interested in torture than the US Army were in terms of treatment of their

captives-- I mean, notorious. You know, it is sort of sad that we let that happen in our name and we continue the process. Well the French did the same kind of thing.

**ERNST:** What was Stokely Carmichael like?

**PRATT:** Oh no, that was a brief encounter. I was going to the march in New York City and we gathered at the Columbia University and marched through Harlem to join the group in Harlem and Stokely was head of that group and I got as close as you are to him and of course, today, you know, you probably may not have that ability to get close to somebody like that. Same with Bobby Kennedy when he was in Kentucky. Today, you can't get close to people like that. Back then I got that close to Stokely and we marched together to the United Nations, is what I was doing there when I ran into him. Of course, he was known for his black power statement and call for black power in a time when everybody was afraid of that term and, of course, it was later adopted even by King.

**ERNST:** Did you have much interaction with Bobby Kennedy?

**PRATT:** That was not regarding Vietnam. He was in Kentucky for a study of welfare and poverty in Eastern Kentucky. We had a trip, I had a new car, and some of the colonel staff at UK wanted to "cavort with Kennedy," and we went to, I think, Whitesburg to catch up with him and ended up in some really humorous events, one of which was we each took time walking beside him, taking pictures of ourselves with him and not really communicating because he was busy talking politics of Eastern KY and campaigning, I'm sure, for his future run for president. The same was true when Lady Byrd Johnson came to Kentucky. I accidentally rode in her parade and ended up riding around with her and I'm sure today that wouldn't be possible because of security reasons but that was another event in KY and not related to the War in Vietnam.

**ERNST:** It's all the same time, though.

**PRATT:** Oh yeah, absolutely. Lady Byrd Johnson came to see poverty and education in Kentucky and dedicate the Linden Banes Johnson Elementary School in Jackson, Kentucky. Of course I was there and I remember seeing everything from the outhouses to the fans on her parade route through Jackson. I spent practically the whole day with her, accidentally, of course.

**ERNST:** Is there any particular event that sticks with you during this Vietnam era or just directly associated with the Vietnam War that we haven't touched on that kind of stays with you, compelling event of sorts.

**PRATT:** Well, all of the demonstrations, the march on the Pentagon, the rallies in DC, of course, surrounding the White House once, not by numbers, but because we were coming, they put buses around the White House. I'll never forget that image, of all those buses tightly against one another so that the protestors couldn't get to the white house.

**ERNST:** Next to Administration?

**PRATT:** I can't remember. It was just one of them. And then the Cambodian invasion and then,

of course, the events at University of Kentucky are probably the most profound and that was after the killings at Kent State. Of course, I remember before that, the killings at Jackson State, is that right, Jackson State?

**ERNST:** Uh huh.

**PRATT:** And how it was disturbing the nation did not recognize black students that protested the War in Vietnam were killed at Jackson State and there was no concern or compassion like there was at Kent State and, of course, when the white kids were killed at Kent State, there was a massive demonstration. My participation in that, I was not a student at that time; I was working, I think, at that time on campus in a project for the architecture school. I can't remember times, they all get mixed up, but I remember the killing at Kent State and how we rallied in front of the ROTC building where I had been a student for that number of years. One of the university administrators who was pretty friendly, came up to me and said Pratt get out of here because they are going to get you, they are going to get you and I said, you know, I'm going to be here with my friends and my supporters, as well as I'm going to support them in their opposition to this work, and this is their form of opposition and I will be here. And she was legitimately concerned. I don't know what she knew or what she was trying to tell me, but that we were there, including the student body president, a guy named Steve Wright, who is renowned now for his anti death penalty work and throughout the nation. I mean he is one of the great minds of the death penalty.

Well, at that location and throughout that demonstration, of course, I became the icebreaker, you know, I generally could tell a joke or could read. I had back then a wonderful quote from the newspaper which I would read at times, on "You may have worms and not know it," and it was an old commercial that they had in the paper on "Your family may have worms." And I could read it with Kentucky accent that usually got everybody including the opposition, the police, and everybody else laughing. And I could tell jokes or I could quote something in the newspaper which would, you know, be very funny and I would use that at times. And that was pretty much what I did through the whole event, though I was very aware of other things going on, very active during the whole demonstration. The first thing I remember was that at that location, a man who we thought was an agent provocateur and later discovered that he was a police officer and went back to police work somewhere else. He was a demolition's expert and constantly yelling for us to attack and bomb and kill and all this other kind of stuff. And we thought whoever this guy was he was ludicrous and crazy, why was he there doing all this. His name was Allen Cole. And at one point, he and another guy who we knew was certifiably insane were standing at the door steps to the women's gym, which was adjacent to the ROTC building, had broken in and were going through the files of the women's gym looking for secret CIA information. And of course even if it was hidden there it wasn't worth the effort to look through all those records. At that demonstration, that wasn't our purpose anyway. Well, here were these two loonies were standing there, yelling, "Seize the building" and they were looking in a way to go into ROTC and there may have or may not have been, but they were going through women's personal files and we had to go in there and get them out and say this is crazy, this isn't why we are here, and that was our own self-discipline. Later, we just literally followed this man around, the agent provocateur. Every time he spoke, including to the media that the Black Panthers were coming down from Dayton and they were going to shoot the cops and they were going to support us and this kind of thing, we had to go behind him and tell him that this was a lie, this was this guy's way of confusing and creating

hysteria.

The next event, if I remember correctly and things run together a lot, was we went to the board of trustees of the university, to call upon them to condemn the War in Vietnam and to condemn the killings at Kent State as a legitimate concern of the students and academia, that this is not behavior of the United States Government or its representatives should stand for, and to, you know, take into position that the War in Vietnam threatens everyone, including the funds at the university. Well, they refused, and of course we were in mass up there. I remember the other significant event where AB Chandler struck Michael Greene, I think is his name. And that incident I knew so much better because I knew both Judy Schroeder, a girl that more or less precipitated that confrontation and I knew Michael well enough to find out their side of the story. Judy was trying to get his attention and ask him why he wouldn't take such a strong stand and why he didn't have a concern, and he, Chandler, that is, reaches up and taps on her cheek and says, "Well little girl, some day you'll understand." And Michael standing there did the same thing to AB Chandler, tapped him on the cheek and said, "Well old man," or something to that nature, "one day you'll understand." And with that, Chandler apparently grabbed his shirt and started punching and Michael then may have grabbed his tie to keep from falling, but I don't know, there may have been some other things that happened. But the initial assault was a touch on the cheek by Chandler of the girl, if that is assault, and then Michael touching him on the cheek, if that's assault, and then Chandler's actual striking him and Michael never hit him. Michael never pursued it because Michael was on probation for a marijuana offense, I believe, or a drug offense and did not want to go back to jail because of the power of the politics of Chandler.

**ERNST:** You didn't get to see it but you got to hear the breakdown of it later.

**PRATT:** Yeah, well I saw it happening, I wasn't close enough to hear it, I was there in that area and saw it happen but I got the breakdown later, but that was the other incident. We gathered so many times, including one time when we were out on the lawn speaking about the War in Vietnam between back of the ROTC firing range and the student center and, of course, that's when they brought the tear gas out and started spraying people and, of course, when we left and moved from there. I was fingered by the State Police and they said get him, and I knew the university so well since I had grown up there as a child. I was there longer than Singletary ever was and certainly had been on campus more than he had up until that time. And they were calling me an outside agitator, so it was sort of funny to hear that kind of term referred to me and they pointed at me and said get me, and I just sort of darted through the building and they never caught me. But the rest of the student bunch went around the side of the building and when we got back together on the other side of the building, I remember a couple of things well-- because I saw them although I didn't participate-- They arrested the student body president. There was another leader of the opposition to the War in Vietnam that was up on the hill and we could see it. They were beating him with sticks, for what reason I don't know. We couldn't hear what the exchange was when they arrested him and I think he was mad because they arrested Steve Wright, the student body president, were taking him off. And we were in mass moving from the university over to the Lexington Theological Seminary where we eventually took up residence...

....Because all these things run together, and Gatewood Galbreath was part of this incident. When we saw Peter Mitchell, no not Peter Mitchell--I can't think of his last name--getting beaten, people

were concerned. But there were police officers standing right there, and there was one guy who was also probably the only friend or close friend of Al Cole, a guy named Steve Swartz, who was a fairly big fellow and really evil looking type guy, saw this very same thing. And he started yelling, "You mother fuckin pigs, you God damn sons of bitches," and using all these expletives that, you know, nobody else in the group that was together and cool and calm moving peacefully with this police supervision from the university property. And he yells that out and, of course, they get really angry, and they cut through us and start chasing him. And he jumps into these bushes going down a hill and, of course, he can't get away and they catch him. And the next thing we see is this little sheep with his head, "Oh please don't get me, don't hurt me," and just like, you know, the complete opposite of this real tough guy standing there just pleading for his life, changed his tone immediately. And that was one of the funny incidences that happened in cases like that.

**ERNST:** Was this all during the May 1970 week after Kennedy.

**PRATT:** This is the Cambodian invasion, Kent State. This is after Kent State. We also went to DC that next weekend for the massive demonstration around the White House. That may have been when the buses were there, too.

**ERNST:** Do you remember anything about when the old ROTC building burned?

**PRATT:** Well that happened during that time. I can't remember--yeah, I was there, and after that incident on the hillside, where they went into the women's gym, that started in the late afternoon, that demonstration. And we stayed there and we are on that hill but we had actually gone down into the student center to set up a press room--spontaneous--I mean, it was really amazing how many things were done. We set up a press room to put out press releases because we know the administration was getting to make statements and we saw some of the things they were saying and doing, and we wanted to get out something to the media that was really representative of our position in reference to the War in Vietnam. So we set up this little press room with typewriters and some people who were competent writers, and the incident there was one I'll never forget, and it was just a spontaneous thing on my part as well as coincidence. It happened, and the two, well, actually they had hung this big white sheet that someone had painted a peace symbol on in between two of the barriers that went into this little card room that was down in the basement of the student center where we were using for writing press releases. And up comes, I think the right name is Dan Chandler, AB Chandler's son, with a bunch of football players, and they were coming to whoop ass, and they saw this in the student center, and this, you know, supposition it was Dan Chandler, I'm sure it was one of the Chandler guys, and he had brought all these football players over there. And they came in there to steal our flag and take our flag. And there were two guys, a guy named Lou Colton and John Crump that immediately jumped in front of the flags, confronting like 6 to 8 big football players and these were small guys and they jumped in with a karate stance to defend this flag and it was so ridiculous looking from my perspective. I jumped between them with these football players at my back and said, "John, Lou, we don't worship that flag, we don't worship the flag any more than we worship the American flag, it's only a symbol, if they want this flag, let them have it, we don't need to fight for something as absurd as a piece of cloth."

**ERNST:** What was on the flag?

**PRATT:** A peace symbol, just a white sheet with a peace symbol on it. And they quit. And those football players took that flag away, no fight, went off, and the next thing I heard, that flag was in the back of a police car. Now, how in the world it got there and why it was ever taken there and what those football players said or did after that time, we don't know. Eventually leaders of the UK football team joined us in our demonstration. While we were down in the basement, if I recall correctly, someone came in and said the ROTC building is burning, the ROTC building is burning, and immediately I thought of the one on the hill, which is where we were protesting, which was the Army ROTC building. The Air Force ROTC building was on the other side of the student center. Since that time, you know, I've heard any number of claims of who burned it and a lot of people bragged that they burned it and even I understand Lou Colton said he burned it but he was in there with us, so you know, so I doubt that he could have, but the people that said they burned it, but you know, one of them I suspect did, but I don't know, I wasn't part of that and I certainly didn't appreciate his doing that on behalf of the demonstrators as I didn't appreciate Lou Colton and Crump defending that flag or John Juno and Al Cole going through the women's gym. So you know, there is stupidity and mistakes made and things said that shouldn't have been said but the spare of the moment, people thought they were doing revolutionary things and, you know, they were doing stupid stuff.

**ERNST:** Was Colton an actual employee of the police department?

**PRATT:** We think so. We actually found out that he was a demolition's expert, Miami or Florida Police Dept, and came up there and he left right after that. He also was tied in with Swartz in providing drugs we heard at the Atlanta Pop Festival. That was another incident. After we left that spot where Steve Swartz went crazy, we went over to the Lexington Theological Seminary where the seminary let us stay from that point on since the university declared itself, whatever, closed, and we couldn't come to the property. That afternoon, we did go across because the faculty senate met at the law school auditorium and voted to close campus and no longer test because of the opposition, so the finals were called off with that evening. That evening was funny, too. Of course, we were on seminary property, not on university property, so at that point the National Guard has taken over the university and the humor that went with that evening was the Lexington Police were between us and the university, supposedly protecting the university from us, but, you know, we weren't over there. During that time, at the faculty senate was when Al Cole said that the Black Panthers were coming and there were going to be some killings of cops tomorrow or when they get there, and all this kind of crap, which he was just totally off the wall. And we went to the meeting and said this man is crazy, he is lying, he is just an agent provocateur, don't listen to him. That night, we were there on the seminary line, and I don't know how we got a loud speaker or megaphone or something. And that is when the captains of the football teams joined us and said you all have demonstrated your collective calm and this right to descent far better than the university has and we join you. We can because we are seniors but most of the football players can't because they are still on scholarship and the university would penalize them and they were leaders of some football players who we don't know. And they spoke and it was really well received and appreciated that they had joined us. You know, thousands had joined, you know, when we started this whole thing, there were 5 or 6 of us, and here we are thousands of people and it was just amazing how much, in a short period of time, opposition the war became, polarizing as well as intellectual like people thought and people really committed themselves. And I think that is the excitement of the time and when you were excited about something, you began to listen, you

began to question, you began to think far more than you do. It's just like that moment in class when one thing hits you. There was a lot of things hitting everybody during that time and they were being hit with it because they were being confronted by it and was there to be thought about.

Well that night, the FBI agents that I knew showed up, the ones that arrested me, and one of them tried to hide behind the telephone pole, which is sort of funny. And of course when I got the megaphone I pointed out who they were and everybody welcomed them and said hello and I pointed out which one was the good guy, the bad guy. The bad guy actually had tried to put hand cuffs on me when they arrested me and he had called my house to tell me they were coming and I said well I'll meet you downstairs and I met him downstairs when he rang the bell. Then he wanted to put hand cuffs on me. I said how stupid, I told you I would meet you downstairs. I could have run if I was going to leave. And the other guy was who was much more logical, said you don't have to put hand cuffs on him. And that is what happened when he showed up, I said that's the bad guy, and I told the story and, of course, he was embarrassed and maybe that's the reason he hid behind the telephone pole.

The other thing that we did during the night, there were people that stayed there overnight, waiting for campus to open the next morning-- they didn't close campus totally, they closed it at night, what was it, the rules, you couldn't be on campus after curfew. No this was curfew as being the dormitory, but you couldn't be on campus after they closed it. The next morning they opened it. That night we were on the seminary lawn and there was a group of us and some of them were smoking dope, you know, wild and crazy. It was a wonderful evening. One of the guys, I said you know what we ought to do, we ought to have a contest, to see who can touch the building furthest on campus and of course the Lexington Police were gone and we were just camped out there. The National Guard actually was over in the bushes, we didn't know it, we couldn't see them. So the game was to go touch a building on campus and come back and who could get away with it, and so this one guy, being the most daring and probably the most stoned, said "I'll do it," and he was this real healthy athletic guy and he said "I'll touch Memorial Hall," which is right in the center of this collection of buildings. And there was this big grassy area up to it. What we didn't know was two things. University had not removed a wire that went around the other side of that area because they wanted to keep students off the grass, and from our side it was clear. And we also didn't know that the National Guard was hiding in the bushes and watching us. So when he took off running, this guard came out of the bushes to get him and, of course, they didn't know that wire was there either and when they, in their full combat gear came running at him, one of them hit that wire and you could see this guy going 'fwoop', doing the double flip in the air with all this combat gear and of course he was the closest guy to him and so when he saw him, he turned around, ran back and he never got caught, but this National Guard member may have been injured. That was the only injury possibly during this whole event for any of the military or police, but he hit that wire, and the next morning... Oh yes, during the night, the narks came and of course they were trying to catch people on the seminary lawn and of course while we were lying there, you heard this "nark nark nark nark, and they are all over. This hill side was like a bunch of lightning bugs, warning us that the narks were there--nark, nark.

And that incident reminded me of the time we did march through town, going to Transylvania because they had run us off campus, and on the court house steps were some of the narks. And one Lexington Police officer who later became Julian Carroll's right-hand man who also later was

sentenced to prison for aiding and embedding a murder of a prosecutor in Florida. He provided the gun for the woman that killed the man. Those guys were standing on the courthouse steps with sub machine guns ready to take us on. So here they came again and they certainly were sleazy dudes during that whole process and of course they all ended up being arrested for drug sales and murder and any number of other crimes and they were just a bunch of trashy thugs that were in police uniforms. Those were some of the incidents I remember, I remember well, and of course, the next morning we went back on campus and walked hand in hand and arm in arm with the national guards back to their headquarters where they were to report the next morning and that pretty much ended until the student trials. And that was another funny incident where the university just blew it, you know, they really had incompetent prosecutors trying to prosecute students for offenses that they never should have been tried for and the university should have been tried for its insane judgements and lack of support of students and faculty and opposition of the War in Vietnam when they had the opportunity to.

**ERNST:** When did that occur, the next fall?

**PRATT:** It was the next summer I think. I think before the year started to keep the students out, they were in the office trials again in the same area where the board of trustees met, they had these trials. The man who defended me, Bob Seddler, defended the students and all except for one who apparently pled guilty, a graduate student, and he was the only one that was convicted and he had thrown some stones I think at the ROTC building and broken some windows, maybe I'm not real sure. But his name was Jason Taylor, and I remember him pleading specifically guilt to that and that may have been a plead bargain to keep him from losing his graduate assistantship or something, I'm not sure.

**ERNST:** That's all I've got. You got anything else?

**PRATT:** Oh, I'm sure there are other things, it's just you have to precipitate my memory. The one event was Gatewood Galbreath, which is indicative of how some of these people perceived what we were doing and their intentions were about. Gatewood, I think, said we ought to go drink beer at the Paddock, which was a popular drinking spot, as opposed to demonstrations at one time, and that was his solution to the problem. But the Gatewood incident that was so memorable was, George Wallace was coming in here for his presidential campaign and the student activist got together at the student center planning, how do we respond, what kinds of activities, and in that meeting I suggested that we have a hippies for Wallace demonstration instead of an anti-Wallace demonstration and dress up in the worst, ugliest, nastiest clothes that we could and demonstrate in front. You know, “We love George.” And some of the people thought we ought to be honest with the public. And we brought signs that said “Get a Shave at George's Barber Shop” in whatever, Alabama, where he was from, and “A Bar of Soap for Every Bathroom,” and signs that were just totally ridiculous and absurd. And we demonstrated in front of the Memorial Coliseum and it was great because people had gathered around that who were supportive of us and cheered us and some people had gathered around who knew that we were basically making a mockery of George and gave us some lip. But up comes Gatewood Galbreath leading about three or four people with some anti George Wallace signs and of course they were protesting us, too, and then that made it possible that everybody who loved George had hated us had somebody else to hate worse, because they had some anti George Wallace and definitely were anti George Wallace and it confused the

hell out of them. And we still persisted in our support and our activity. And we went inside Memorial Coliseum and we were standing up there cheering, "Yea, George, we love George, George," and all kinds of things that we made up. And George was on stage, and he made some nasty remark about us, and his student coordinator went up to him and said, George they are cheering you. They are not criticizing you, they are on your side, and he apologized to us, but I mean he didn't know what we were doing, and of course that made national news as well. This was during that time, which was all inclusive of a lot of things including environmental awareness and women's rights and the rise of any number of other movements as a result of antiwar and pro-civil rights activities.

And I guess that is probably all I can reflect on right now, but I could go into many other stories if they were brought back in time in memory, but I guess that's enough.

**ERNST:** Yes, that's good.

**Donald Pratt**

Interviewer:

Not too many people know about the South Koreans and their...

Don:

Australians..

Interviewer:

Thais..

Interviewer:

I am curious as to why you mentioned the Koreans because that is my latest research interest.

Don:

Well, because they are probably far more interested in torture than the U.S. army was in terms of the treatment of their captives. They were notorious, and that is sort of sad that we let that happen in our name, and we continued the process. The French did the same kind of thing.

Interviewer:

What was Stokley Carmicheal like?

Don:

Oh no! That was a brief encounter. I was going to the march in New York City and we gathered at Columbia University and marched through to Harlan to join the group in Harlan and Stokley was the head of that group. I got as close you are to him and I got as close as you are to him and of course today you probably may not have the ability to close to somebody like that. But, same with Bobby Kennedy when he was in Kentucky. Today, you can't get close to people like that. Back then, I got that close to Stokley, and we marched together to the United Nations, was what I was doing there when I ran into him. Of, Course he was known for his Black Power statement and call for Black Power in the time when everybody was afraid of that term. Of course it was later adopted by King.

Interviewer:

Did you have much interaction with Bobby Kennedy?

Don:

That was not regarding Vietnam. He was in Kentucky for a study of welfare and poverty in Eastern Kentucky and we had a trip, I had a new car, and some of the Colonel staff at UK wanted to quote covert with Kennedy. And, we went to, I think, Whitesburg to catch up with him and ended up with some rather humorous events. One of which was: we each took time walking beside him taking pictures of ourselves with him and not really communicating because he was busy talking the politics of Eastern Kentucky and campaigning I'm sure for his future run for President. The same was true when Lady Bird Johnson came to Kentucky and I accidentally rode in her parade. I ended up riding around with her, and I'm sure today that wouldn't be possible because of security reasons. That was another event in Kentucky not related to the war in Vietnam.

Interviewer:

It's all the same time though.

Don:

Oh, Absolutely. Lady Bird Johnson came to see poverty and education in Kentucky and dedicated the Lyndon Baines Johnson Elementary School in Jackson, Kentucky. Of course, I was there. I remember seeing everything from the out houses to the fans on her parade route through Jackson. I spent practically the whole day with her, accidentally of course.

Interviewer:

Was there any particular event that sticks with you during this Vietnam era or just directly associated with the Vietnam war that we haven't touched on that kind of stays with you a compelling event of sorts?

Don:

All of the demonstrations, the March on the Pentagon, the rallies in D.C., of course, surrounding the White House once not by numbers but because we were coming they put buses around the White House. I'll never forget that image of all those buses tightly against one another so that the protesters couldn't get to the White House.

Interviewer:

Nixon Administration?

Don:

I can't remember it was just one of them. And then the Cambodian invasion, and of course, the events at the University of Kentucky are probably the most profound. And that was after the killings at Kent State. Of course I remember before that the killings at Jackson State. Is that right Jackson State? How it was disturbing the nation did not recognize black students protesting the

war in Vietnam were killed at Jackson State, and there was no concern or compassion like there was at Kent State. And of course when the white kids were killed at Kent State there was massive demonstration. My participation in that I was not a student at that time I was working on campus in a project with the architecture school, but I can't remember times they all get mixed up. I remember the killing at Kent State and how we rallied in front of the ROTC building where I had been a student for that number of years. One of the University Administrators who was pretty friendly came up to me and said, "Pratt get out of here cause their going get you." And I said "I am going to be here with my friends and my supporters as well as I am going to support them in their opposition to this war. And this is their form of opposition and I am going to be here." And she was legitimately concerned and I don't know what she knew. I still don't know what she was really trying to tell me. But we were there including the student body president a guy named Steve Wright who is renowned now for his anti-death penalty work throughout the nation. One of the great minds of the day of the death penalty. At that location and throughout that demonstration, of course, I became the ice breaker. I could generally tell a joke or could read a wonderful quote from the newspaper which I would read at times on you may have worms and not know it. It was a old commercial that they had in the paper on your family may have worms and I could read it with a Kentucky accent that usually got everybody included the opposition, the police, and everybody else laughing. I could tell jokes or I could quote something in the newspaper which would be very funny and I would use that at times and that was pretty much what I did during that whole event. Though I was very aware of other things going on, very active during the whole demonstration. The first thing I remember was, at that location, a man who we thought was an agent for provocateur and later found out that he was a police officer and went back to police work somewhere else. He was a demolition's expert and constantly yelling for us to attack and bomb and kill and all this other kind of stuff. We thought that, whoever this guy was, he was ludicrous and crazy. Why was he there doing all of this? His name was Alan Coal. And at one point he and another guy, who was we knew, certifiably insane were standing on the doorsteps of the women's gym which was adjacent to the ROTC building had broken in and were going through the files of the women's gym looking for secret CIA information and of course even if it was hidden there it wasn't worth the effort to look through all those records at that demonstration it wasn't our purpose anyway. But here this two loonies were standing there yelling, "Take and seize the building." and they were looking for a way to get into ROCC there may have been, but they were going through women's personal files and we had to go in and run them out and get them out and say this is crazy. This isn't why we are here. And that was our own self discipline. Later, we just literally followed this man around, the agent Provocateur. Everytime he spoke, including to the media, that the Black Panthers were coming down from Dayton and they were going to shoot the cops, and they were going to support us and we had to go behind him and tell them that this was a lie. This is this guys way of confusing and creating hysteria. The next event, if I can remember correctly, was we went to the Board of Trustees of the University to call upon them to condemn the war in Vietnam. And to condemn the killings at Kent State as a legitimate concern of the students and academia that this is not behavior that the

United States government or its representatives should stand for and to take the position that the war in Vietnam threatens everyone including the funds of the University. Well, they refused. Of course, we were in mass up there. I remember of another significant event where Avey Chandler struck Michael Green, I think that is his name. That incident I knew so much better because I knew both Judy Schroader the girl that more or less the girl that precipitated that confrontation and I knew Michael well enough to find out their side of the story. Judy was trying to get his attention and ask him why he didn't take such a strong stand, why he didn't have concern. And he, Chandler that is, reaches up and taps her on the cheek and says "Well someday little girl maybe you'll understand." And Mike was standing there and did the same thing to Avey Chandler tapped him on the cheek and said, "Well old man or something of that nature one day you'll understand." And with that Chandler apparently grabbed his shirt and started punching him. Michael may have grabbed his tie to keep from falling. I don't know there were some other things that happened, but the initial assault was a touch on the cheek by Chandler on the girl but if that's assault. Then, Michael's touching him on the cheek if that's assault. And Chandler's actually striking him, and Michael never hit him. Michael never pursued it because Michael was on probation for a marijuana offense, I believe, or a drug offense. And didn't want to go back to jail because of the power of politics of Chandler.

Interviewer:

You didn't get to see it, but you got to hear the breakdown of it later.

Don:

Well, I saw it happening. I wasn't close enough to hear it. I was there in that area, and I saw it happen. I got the breakdown later. That was the other incident. We gathered so many times including one time where we were out on the lawn speaking about the war in Vietnam back the ROTC firing range and the student center and of course that is when they brought the tear gas out and started spraying people. When we left and moved from there, I was fingered by the State Police and they said "Get him." I knew the University so well since I had grown up there as a child I was there longer than Singletary ever was and certainly had been on campus more than he had up until that time. They were calling me an outside agitator. So it was sort of funny to hear that kind of term refer to me. They pointed to me and said "Get him." I just darted through the building and they never caught me. The rest of the student bunch went around the side of the building and when we got back together on the other side of the building I remember a couple things well because I saw them though I didn't participate. They arrested the Student Body President. They also, there was another leader of the opposition to the war in Vietnam, that was up on the hill, and we could see it. They were beating him with sticks for what reasons I don't know. We didn't hear what the exchange was when they arrested him. I think he was mad because they arrested Steve Wright, the student body President and were taking him off. We were in mass moving from the University over to the Lexington Theological Seminary where we eventually took up residence. Gateway Gallbrith was part of this as well as this incidence was

when we saw this man Peter, I can't think of his last name, getting beaten, people were concerned. There were police officers standing right there. There was one guy who was also probably the only close friend of Al Cole, a guy named Steve Swartz, a fairly big fella, really evil looking type guy saw this very same thing he started yelling, "You Mother-fucking Pigs, you god-damned sons-of-bitches," and using all of these explicatives that nobody else who was in the group that was together and cool and calm and moving peacefully with the police supervision from University property. And he yells that out and of course they get really angry. They cut through us and start chasing him. He jumps into these bushes going down a hill, and he can't get away. And, they catch him. Then, the next thing we see is this little sheep saying, "Oh no Please don't hurt me." The complete opposite of this really tough guy standing there just pleading for his life, changed his tone immediately. That was one of the funny incidences that happens in cases like that.

Interviewer:

Was this all during May, 1970?

Don:

This is the Cambodian invasion. This is after Kent State. We also went to D.C. that next weekend for the massive demonstration around the White House. That may have been when the buses were there.

Interviewer:

Do you remember anything about when the old ROTC building burned?

Don:

Well, that happened during that time. I was there. After that incident on the hillside, when they went into the women's gym. That started in the late afternoon, that demonstration, we stayed there and were on that hill. We had actually gone done into the Student Center to set up a press room. Spontaneous! It was really amazing how many things were done. We set up a press room to put out press releases because we knew the Administration was getting to make statements, and we saw some of the things they were saying and doing. We wanted to get something out to the media that was really representative of our position in reference to the war in Vietnam. So, we set up this press room with type writers and some people who were competent writers. The incident there was one that I will never forget. It was just a spontaneous thing on my part as well as coincidence. They hung a big white sheet that someone had painted a peace symbol on in between to of the barriers that went into this little card room that was into the basement of the Student Center which we were using for our writing the press releases. Up comes Dan Chandler, Avey Chandler's son, with a bunch of football players. They were coming to whoop ass. They saw this in the student center. They come in there to steal our flag. There were two guys, a guy

named Lou Coleman and John Crump, that immediately jumped in front of the flag confronting like six to eight big football players. These were small guys and they jumped in with a Karate stance to defend this flag. It was so ridiculous looking from my perspective that I jump between them with these football players at my back and said, “John, Lou, we don’t worship that flag. We don’t worship that flag anymore than we worship the American flag. Its only a symbol. If they want this flag, let them have it. We don’t need to fight for something as absurd as a piece of clothe.”

Interviewer:

What was on the flag?

Don:

Peace Symbol. It was a white sheet with a peace symbol on it. They quit, and those football players took that flag away. No fight, and the next thing I heard that flag was in the back of a police car. How in the world it got there, and why it was ever taken there? What those football players did after that time we don’t know. Eventually leaders of the UK football team joined us in our demonstration. While we were down in the basement someone came in and told us that the ROTC is burning. Immediately, I thought of the one on the hill where we were protesting which was the Army ROTC building. The Airforce ROTC building was on the other side of the Student Center. Since that time, I have heard any number of claims as to who burned it. A lot of people bragged that they burned it. Even our Lou Cole said that he burned it, but he was in there with us. I doubt that he could have, but the people that said they burned it, you know, one of them I suspect did. But, I don’t know. I wasn’t a part of that, and I certainly didn’t appreciate him doing that on behalf of the demonstrators. Just like I didn’t appreciate Lou and Crump defending that flag. Or John Juno and Al Cole going through the women’s gym. There was stupidity and mistakes made. Things said that shouldn’t have been said, but at the spur of the moment, people thought they were doing revolutionary things, and they were doing stupid stuff.

Interviewer:

Was Cole an actual employee of the police?

Don:

We think so. We actually found out that he was a demolition’s expert with the Miami or Florida police department. And came up there and left right after that. He was also tied in with Swartz in providing drugs, we heard, at the Atlanta Pop Festival. That was another incident. After we left that spot where Steve Swartz went crazy, we went over to the Lexington Theological Seminary where the Seminary let us stay from then on since the University declared itself closed, and we couldn’t come to the property. That afternoon we did go across because the Faculty Senate met at the Law School auditorium and voted to close campus and to no longer test because of the

opposition. The finals were called off that evening. That evening was funny too. We were on Seminary property, not on University property, so at that point the National Guard had taken over the University. The humor that went with that evening was the Lexington Police were between us and the University supposedly protecting the University from us. During that time at the Faulty Senate was when AL Cole said that the Black Panthers were coming, and their going to be killing some cops tomorrow when they get here and all of this kind of crap. He was just totally off of the wall. We went to the meeting and said this man is crazy. He's lying; he doesn't know what he is saying. He is just an agent Provocateur, don't listen to him. That night we were there on the Seminary lawn, and I don't know how we got a loud speaker. That is when the captains of the football team joined us. You all have demonstrated you collective, calm right to descend far better than the University has. We join you. We can because we are Seniors. Most of the football players can't because they are still on scholarship, and the University would penalize them. They were leaders, football players that we didn't know, and it was really well received and appreciated that they had joined us. Thousands had joined us. When we started this whole thing, there was five or six of us. Here we are with thousands of people. It was just amazing how in such a short period of time opposition to war became polarizing as well as it was intellectual. People thought; people really committed themselves. I think that's the excitement of the time. When you were excited about something you began to listen, you began to question, you began to think far more than you do. It is just like that moment in class when one thing hits you. Man, there was a lot of things hitting everybody during that time, and they were being hit because they were being confronted by it. It was there to be thought about. Well, that night the FBI agents that I knew showed up, the ones that had arrested me, and one of them tried to hide behind a telephone pole which is sort of funny. Of course, when I got the megaphone, I pointed out who they were and everybody welcomed them and said hello and I pointed out which ones were the good guys and the bad guys. The bad guys had actually tried to put hand cuffs on me when they arrested me, and he had called my house to tell me they were coming. I said well I'll meet you down stairs. I met him down stairs when he rang the bell, and then he wanted to put hand cuffs on me. I said, "How stupid. I told you that I would meet you down stairs. I could have run if I had wanted to leave." The other guy, who was much more logical, said you don't have to put hand cuffs on him. That's what happened when he showed up. I said that is the bad guy, and of course, he was embarrassed. That was probably why he hid behind the telephone pole. The other thing that we did during the night there was people who stayed there over night waiting for campus to open the next morning. They didn't close campus completely. They closed it at night. The rules were you couldn't be on campus at night. You couldn't be on campus after they closed it. The next morning they opened it. That night we were on the Seminary lawn, and there was a group of us and some of them were smoking dope. It was a wonderful evening. One of these guys said, "You know what we should do we oughtta have a contest: see who can touch the building furthest on campus." Of course, the Lexington police were gone and we were just camped out there. The National Guard was actually over in the bushes. We didn't know it; we couldn't see it. So, the game was to go touch a building on campus and come back and who

could get away with it. This one guy being the most daring and probably the most stoned said I'll do it. He was this real healthy athletic guy. He said "I'll touch Memorial Hall," which is right in the center of this collection of buildings. There was this big grassy area up to it. What we didn't know was two things: the University had not removed a wire that went around the other side of that area because they wanted to keep students off of the grass and from our sight it was clear. We also didn't know that the National Guard was hiding in the bushes watching us. So, when he took off running, the Guard came out of the bushes to get him. They didn't know that wire was there either. When they, in their full combat gear, came running at him one of the guys did a double flip in the air with all of this combat gear, and this was the closest guy to him. Of course, when he saw that he ran back and never got caught. The National Guard member may have been injured. That was the only injury possibly during this whole event for any of the military or police. He hit that wire. During the night the narcs came and were trying to catch people in the Seminary lawn and while we were laying there we heard, "narc, narc, narc." And they were all over this hillside like a bunch of lightening bugs warning us that the narcs were there. That incident reminded me of the time that we did march through town going to Transylvania because they had run us off of campus. On the court house step where some of the narcs and one Lexington Police officer who later became Ewing Carrol's right hand man who later was sentenced to prison for aiding a murder of a prosecutor in Florida. He provided the gun for the woman that killed the man. Those guys were standing on the court house steps with machine guns, sub-machine guns ready to take us on. Here they came back again . They were certainly sleazy dudes during this whole process. They all ended up being arrested for drug sales, and murder, and any number of other crimes. They were just a bunch of trashy thugs that were in police uniforms. Those are some of the incidences that I remember well. The next morning we went back onto campus and walked hand in hand, arm in arm, since the National Guard was back in their headquarters where they were to report the next morning. That pretty much ended it. Until the student trials. That was another funny incident. The University just blew it. They had incompetent prosecutors trying to prosecute students for offenses that they never should have been tried for. The University have been tried for its insane judgments and lack of support of students and faculty in opposition to the war in Vietnam when they had the opportunity to.

Interviewer:

When did that occur, the next fall?

Don:

It was the next summer, I think, before the year started to keep the students out of school. They were in the Office Towers in the same area where the Board of Trustees met, they had these trials. The man who defended me, Bob Seller, defended the students all except for one who apparently pled guilty, a graduate student. He was the only one that was convicted. He had thrown some stones at the ROTC building and broken some windows, maybe. His name was

Mason Taylor. I remember him specifically pleading guilty to that. That may have been plea bargain to keep from loosing his graduate assistantship.

Interviewer:

That's all I've got; if you've got anything else...

Don:

I am sure I have other things. You would just have to precipitate my memory. The one event with Gateway Gallbrith which is indicative of how some people perceived what we were doing. Gatewood said, "We oughtta go drink beer at the paddock," which was a popular drinking spot as opposed to demonstrations one time. That was his solution to the problem. The Gatewood incident was so memorable was because George Wallace was coming in for here for his Presidential campaign. The Student activist got together at the Student Center planning how do we respond; what type of activities? At that meeting I suggested that we have a "Hippies for Wallace" demonstration instead of an anti-Wallace demonstration. We could dress up in the nastiest, ugliest clothes and demonstrate in front, "We love George!" Some of the people thought that we should be honest with the public. We brought signs that said "Get a shave at George's barber shop in Alabama," or wherever he was from, and "A bar of Soap for Every Bathroom." Signs that were absolutely ridicules and absurd. We demonstrated in front of the Memorial Coliseum. It was great because people gathered around who supported us and cheered us. People, then, knew that we were basically making a mockery of George and gave us some lip. Up comes Gateway Gallbrith, leading about three or four people with some anti-George Wallace signs. They were protesting us, too. That made it possible for everybody that loved George, that hated us, had somebody else to hate worse. There were some anti-George Wallace people there and it confused the hell out of them. We still persisted in our support and our activities. We actually went inside Memorial Coliseum and were in there cheering, "Yeah George, We love George!!! George! George! George!" George was on stage, and he made some nasty remark about us. His student coordinator went up to him and said, "George, they're cheering you not criticizing you. They're on you're side." Quickly, he apologized to us. He didn't know what we were doing. That made National news as well. This was during that time that was all inclusive of a lot of things including environmental awareness, women's rights, and the rise of any number of other movements as a result of anti-war and pro-Civil Rights activities. That probably all I can go into right now. But, there are many other stories I could go into if they were brought back in my mind and memory. But, I guess that's enough.

Interviewer:

Yeah, that's good.

Beth Ellwood
April 23, 1998

**Interviewer**: The following is an interview with Don Pratt, Lexington, KY, on July 9, 1997.

I'm just going to ask you some basic questions and hopefully, I won't talk too much today. You just say whatever comes to your mind. Hopefully I can prompt you on a couple points. I guess the first thing I looked at is when did you enter the ROTC program, at what institution, what was the year?

**Mr. Pratt**: I entered after high school because it was mandatory at UK unless you're a member of the band and/or you had some reason not to; physical, mental, psychological, as you would have with the draft system.

**Interviewer**: What year was that exactly?

**Pratt**: I graduated from high school in '62. It was the fall of '62. I also, after the second year, I enlisted and stayed with the program which required my agreement to finish the ROTC training for two more years. At that time, I was really, you know, somewhat reluctant and basically wanted my parents to make that decision. But because of peers and friends that I had within the program, I stayed with it.

**Interviewer**: When did the Vietnam War come, become an issue for you?

**Pratt**: Probably my junior year when after being elected and extremely involved in the Presbyterian Fellowship on campus and what became the United Campus Christian Fellowship a National Organization of unity between the Presbyterians and the Disciples of Christ and a couple other small religious groups. I was selected as a national representative as well as a regional representative and attended a conference in Chicago

at McCormick Theological Institute. And various issues of young people being debated including sex out of marriage or premarital sex, drugs, democracy, and the war in Vietnam, and women's rights, there was civil rights. There was a lot of issues which as a nieve Lexingtonian in Kentucky, limited exposure, I was really surprised and startled by how much more people were talking about issues that faced the nation than say we would at a local level. And so at that conference, they were debating whether they should support the war in Vietnam. And I being an ROTC candidate voted to support the war in Vietnam simply on the issue support the troops but was in conversation with a man who actually was passing out leaflets and he asked me how much I knew about Vietnam. I said, "Very little." He suggested the book Vietnam Reader by Bernard (unintelligible) and Marcus Roskin, which I pursued when I returned. At the same time, I was reading Martin Luther King's book Why We Can't Wait. And because they basically were social consciousness and one called for action and the other one debated the issue and because the civil rights movement was demanding whites out at that point and let blacks take over the leadership and the rise of black power, those type of issues. I really did pay more attention to the war in Vietnam and the draft issue and became quite involved in both organizing and open public decent at the University of Kentucky. As a result of some vigils we organized, I can't remember always what group it was called, I think it was the Citizens for Peace in Vietnam, that group organized vigils to have on campus. There was maybe five or six of us to begin and it grew to twenty and thirty just silently standing in a prominent place on campus protesting the war in Vietnam. And that was the beginning for me. And I was photographed and placed in the newspaper, where upon the commander of the ROTC program, this was after my senior year, after I completed

the program, called me in and asked me to stop this protest or resign my commission. Which, I said at this point, I didn't believe in the war in Vietnam and I would not lead troops into battle. Which basically told him that I would not change my position and I would also not give up my right of free speech. Well, they wanted me to leave the ROTC program. They honorable discharged me. That's when my career with the judicial system basically began.

**Interviewer**: And at that point you were placed back into the draft pool?

**Pratt**: Actually, he intentionally did that. The ROTC (unintelligible) intentionally put me back into the draft pool. Actually the local board wasn't that desirous to pursue. In fact they tried to get me to go for conscientious objector status. And I, because of the march on the Pentagon, I was organizing a busload to go to that, I was asked the question, do I plan to burn my draft card? And I said no, the city of Lexington burned it. They actually had because I had thrown it in the trash so it was in the incinerator by then. And of course, the person that read it didn't think it was very funny. And eventually the FBI came out to do an investigation. And I was then drafted, as would any normal citizen. The local board knew two things: I was, at that point, unable to serve due to two major lung surgeries, which would have given me Four F status. And they actually had wanted me to go for the conscientious objector status. They asked me to come in and do an interview. I refused both. And the basis of that was a conference in Washington D.C. where we were trying to nominate Martin Luther King and Dr. Benjamin Spock for President and Vice-President. There was a drafting committee to try to have a alternative candidate to the democratic and republican candidates. And at that conference during a debate on the issues including the draft, a young man was screaming, resist the draft, the

position should be to resist the draft. This group should stand to resist the draft, not comply with the draft. And he was so adamant, screaming and yelling. I turned to a woman sitting beside me and asked why is he so strong in his position. She said well he is Four F. And it struck me as I couldn't tell someone else to resist the draft if I was Four F. And I couldn't tell someone else conscientiously to take a deferment, or to resist the draft if I took a deferment. And at that time, it was very discriminatory, the draft system was. It depended upon the local board. It depended on your personal status or recognition in the community. It depended on your ability to get into the National Guard. And so the people that didn't have that power or influence or that didn't pursue that power or influence became the cannon fighter of the military. And I didn't want to tell an individual to refuse induction if I wasn't willing to take the consequences. I also could've gone to Canada. In fact, a number of people I knew had already gone.

**Interviewer**: What prevented you from doing that?

**Pratt**: Same principle. I needed to stand and deny the state the right to use me in a war, which I felt was immoral and illegal. So I took that stance and pursued refusal induction.

**Interviewer**: What year are we talking about here?

**Pratt**: You're asking me the wrong question. I'm not a person for dates or even a person for names. I'm really bad. But it's there. It's record. Ironically, that move by the ROTC to take away my commission was national news and was probably the first and maybe only military change of policy, release from duty due to opposition to the war in Vietnam. Apparently, there were a lot of candidates throughout the nation then that tried to get out of their commission because of the war in Vietnam. And they could not because they would lose so many.

**Interviewer**: Were you a very high profile in the local newspapers?

**Pratt**: In Kentucky, yes. Actually, there was two of us, myself and Mohammed Ali. But Mohammed Ali was refusing in Houston, Texas, I believe. And that was a very wise decision on his part. As well as, he had quite a bit of council, money that I didn't have. They knew they would have a lenient judge, as opposed to Louisville where I had a hanging judge for the offense. And so one irony of that was I also worked all through junior high and high school and college, I had a paper route, a fairly sizable one. And one afternoon on one of the routes, I had more than one actually, I took another route. On one of the routes, I was sitting there waiting for all of my papers because I only had one group of papers I was supposed to receive that day, and I had already received the editorial page, and my name a Mohammed Ali were the subject of one of their comments. Don Pratt and Mohammed Ali to rush on with a one-way ticket. And I had to deliver probably 500 of those papers thinking, here I am supporting free speech but telling people who actually knew me and liked me that I should be sent to Russia. If that isn't a strange feeling to do that. I did it and I wish I had a copy of that paper, too. But those were the twists and turns of the fight.

**Interviewer**: Did you have much support in the Lexington Community, even from professors on campus and other students?

**Pratt**: Actually, I did. It was amazing. There was a great group of people who not necessarily were willing to take the stand themselves but admired and respected and complemented and boosted the ego when it was necessary and at the same time I knew I was right and felt quite confident. In fact, the feeling of being right about that was well remembered and even the (unintelligible) that I remembered it was sort of like the

Kennedy killing. I remember where I was when I suffered that feeling. I was just halfway between education building and the University of Kentucky administration building, right near the rock wall there on (unintelligible) and I said I am going to do this. I'm going to free myself of what I really think is wrong. I'm going to stand and reject the military and refuse induction. It was an extremely liberating feeling. Even though I faced incarceration or maybe worse. I knew that I was right. It was right for me. That felt great. So the support was there. The legal support actually came from one individual who was one of the probably great mental legal minds of this country and still is. A man named Robert Sedler(?). He rose and gave me free defense even though it cost me money to file the briefs that went to both the appellate court and to the Supreme Court. He also did it in a second case. I've been to the Supreme Court twice. The second being, trying to get on the ballot despite the controversy and my right to vote and those type of issues and challenge that law. In reference to the Vietnam War, he raised a number of points, which to this day, it seems as if everything changed, though they wouldn't rule that way in court on my behalf. He was probably the most significant character in terms of support. Another person with renowned support of myself and certainly added to the public recognition of this act was Wendell Berry(?) who wrote the book Long Legged House. That writing, was one chapter in there which he dedicated to the conscience and citizenship of Don Pratt in Lexington, Kentucky. And that became a major book throughout the nation both on college campuses as well as literary circles because he is very well known.

**Interviewer**: How did you come to know Wendell Berry?

**Pratt**: He came to know me. He was an English professor at UK at that time. He saw and heard about my case and wrote this and read it at a rally. I'm not real sure. I'm not such a great reader and such a well-versed individual. I'm really pretty pathetic as far as discipline and organization of academic affairs. And he read this at some rally or meeting and was quite profound and certainly moving to him. He's a very emotional individual. He put himself into that, for sure. There are others. People who, I remember standing in the rain when I went off to jail at one point that didn't even know me. They were there for me, so it wasn't as if anybody really knew me. I'm not a person that allows too many people to get close. Only my children probably. My daughter's probably one of the few people that knows me as well as anybody. And it's just, I'm fiercely independent and certainly controversial still about my positions on many things and be damned what everybody thinks. If I'm right, I'll stand up and contend whoever. And it's not an unpleasant position to be in at times. It certainly is meant that I haven't had those really close friends and ties that I had before. That is a challenge. In fact, the only time I really had that close support was my parents, I guess. My father became very supportive. My mother never really did. My mother was more conservative. My father even wrote letters which impressed me. And here I have him, who was basically in support of the administration, began to question. I saw that kind of change. Personally more than most would see.

**Interviewer**: Do you have any siblings?

**Pratt**: A brother and a sister and an adopted brother.

Interviewer: Where did they come down on your stance?

**Pratt**: At this point I'm close to my natural brother and sister. My younger brother, who is adopted, and I are very close. My sister, in reference to the War in Vietnam, really became pretty supportive in terms of criticism of the War and I was sort of hard on her because her husband was in the defense industry. How much she did or didn't do, I don't know because she lived in Fort Worth, Texas. But she was supportive. And my older brother was friendly during all this time. He never was critical that I can recall. His two sons, or one of his sons became an MIA/POW type conservative. Let's save 'em all. Let's go back in and take over Vietnam again. Had no recognition of right or wrong that I consider. We differed not necessarily privately because they never talked with me. It was sort of like taboo to ever question what I had to say or think. Maybe they were afraid because I really am strong in my convictions.

**Interviewer**: What was the trial like? Do you remember at all?

**Pratt**: Well, the first trial was the one where one of the questions was the jury of the peers. And that I remember the most because the average age must've been sixty-five to seventy. The people who tried me. And one of the fellows was a shoe shine boy down in the basement. That's essentially how they referred to me was the man, a black man who worked in the building of the federal court. They called him up for my trial. He was seventy, seventy- five. To use these kind of people to try and identify with myself on these issues was strange. And of course, they questioned some people's position on the jury and removed some people, the state did, or the federal government did. I remember some of that, but not that much. I remember testifying. But really not that much of the trial. It was in Louisville. I refused in Louisville. I remember that better than the trial. Because of where I was and the excitement at the time the ride through Louisville on a

bus with a whole bunch of other men, some of whom were going to be drafted that very day. And that was an eerie feeling compared to the trial. The trial was more secure and of course the environment was much healthier, I think. Though the results weren't.

**Interviewer**: Did y'all chat much on the bus ride in?

**Pratt**: It was sort of quiet. I knew one person who I had been in high school with. And I (unintelligible) it. I was sort of scared to do that because I didn't know this crowd. I didn't know if I'd get attacked, or what. But at the draft center in Louisville, they tried even to keep me from (unintelligible) they put me in different rooms, they would send me off to do errands, and I would suspect that while I was gone they would talk to everybody and take up the leaflets I passed out on the War in Vietnam. But I don't know what they did or didn't do. I know that they knew I was there, why I was there, and they were certainly aware of me though I didn't know the process or when to expect them to get me to do anything. But at one point, they said you're going to have to go to take a physical and that's the point I refused. Because I knew that if I took the physical that I would be rejected and they knew it, too.

**Interviewer**: So you really did stand on principal?

**Pratt**: Yea. It was straight up on the principals. It was right. I knew the War was wrong.

**Interviewer**: So you were sentenced to five years and a $10,000 fine?

**Pratt**: $10,000 fine, that was the maximum. But I heard some of the judges and their anger may have given more than one sentence. Two or three year or $10,000 fines. This judge actually had a son in Vietnam apparently. And not only did he give us that sentence, but he gave us, he made us put a super, I'm not sure of the correct terminology,

a supersedious bond which meant on failure of appeal that money would be submitted and we would take a financial loss immediately. Supersedious is the right term, I believe. And neither of us had the money or did not want another party to be punished for our actions. And my parents were willing to put up that bond but they may have suffered the payment consequences of having to pay. (Unintelligible) was illegal. The judge imposed it in anger. I've always wondered and wanted to know, if he ever (unintelligible) to change his mind. I don't know if he's still living or not. I really should have asked that or pursued that earlier than now. I've always wondered that, if someone like that, if he ever knew that he made a mistake.

**Interviewer**: His son was in Vietnam, so that colored his judgement. You did twenty months in prison?

**Pratt**: Approximately.

**Interviewer**: Where was that at?

**Pratt**: The more interesting time was in the Jefferson County jail. We were on the supersedious bond. I spent something like forty-two days there. That was a real treat because of the living quarters and the number of peoples that we met and even the number of police killers that we were exposed to because I was put in with them twice. The experience in the County jail, which was the pits, was more interesting. The federal prison was in Milan, Michigan. It's a young adult type facility and they went up to about twenty-eight years old, though there were occasionally inmates much older due to security they would use this facility for protecting certain inmates and they would put them in there occasionally. And I lived there the majority of the time. It was primarily a dormitory type facility and after awhile you could graduate to an individual cell, but I

didn't want to take advantage of that. I liked the dormitory kind of living and meeting and residing with a lot more individuals. The new people came in and the short termers came in and you got to meet them while they were there. I did a lot of talking with a lot of people about writing and reading compared to what I would do on the streets. And that was the majority of the time. I had Sunday visits once a month. I also at the last part of my stay there got to the University of Michigan and take some classes. That was quite rewarding because I did quite well for a semester. The second semester my father was killed and I never completed it. I never went back.

**Interviewer**: Were there any other war resisters in the facility?

**Pratt**: Oh, yes. Again, the war resisters were conscientious objectors who couldn't get that status. Others were actually political, as well, and opposed specifically to the War in Vietnam and including some that had done some draft file actions. Actions against the draft boards. I'm not real sure of everyone's sentence or conviction. But the majority of those that were there were conscientious objectors, some of whom were religious. Jehovah's witnesses. There were very few there at first. I was quite different from most of them because most of the resisters were introverts. And being an extrovert, comparatively speaking, I was wild and crazy, a sense of humor different than they had ever been exposed to, as well as a sense of humor different from most inmates. So what we did in prison was a little different from or what I did in prison was a little different from most inmates.

**Interviewer:** Did the prison officials treat you all well as far as (unintelligible) the War? Was that not applicable?

**Pratt:** There were different kind of guards and different kind of administrators in the time I was there. Usually you weren't treated any different than anybody else. But they knew that the draft resisters that were there were generally higher educated than the others. Though, as a result of drugs and drug dealing there were a number of better-educated inmates. That changed what they did with you in terms of assignments. They gave us jobs in the education department or in the dental clinic or more technical jobs than others. And we had a better rating in terms of security than others. And could do things that didn't require massive supervision. And that was a little bit of difference, I'm sure. I don't what the rules and regulations or policies they had and I didn't really have to pursue 'em. I just knew that it was a little different.

**Interviewer:** I hate to ask and if you don't want to comment, that's fine, but you did mention your dad was killed. During this time, did that have any impact on your release?

**Pratt:** Immediate. Actually, I was twelve days short of coming home anyway. I got a call the day before and . . . I got a call the day before and it was sort of unusual that my ex-wife was coming up. And . . . the next day, the day before they told me my ex-wife was coming up. And I knew it was unusual. They next day I went in to visit, and of course she told me. And they told me . . . that I would be immediately released. And after she told me, I went and packed everything I had in my locker into boxes or a box. I can't remember. And they escorted me through the gates. And it was different in that they usually go through a different kind of search and dressing.

**Interviewer:** That got you out early, though. Just a few days.

**Pratt:** Yea. It probably was the hardest. It's easily the hardest part of the sentence.

**Interviewer:** Were you married during this time?

Pratt: Yea, and that's when I really got some sense of freedom. I got to visit with my wife on those Sunday trips to town. Somewhat illegal visits because I had conjugal visits as a result of getting to go out in town. But there was other inmates that went to town for work or for school and I'm sure that they couldn't stop that kind of activity, and certainly I didn't prove them wrong.

**Interviewer:** What was her position on the War?

**Pratt:** Actually we met because she was opposed to the War in Vietnam. I had a really profound minister, George Edwards, out of Louisville, who was invited to speak at our Presbyterian center. She was brought there by some students at a local high school who wanted her to meet me. It was a instantaneous romance and an instantaneous marriage. It lasted for five or six years. Again, I'm not good at times and dates. But the actual incarceration was probably the downfall of the relationship. I certainly shouldn't have been married and maybe she shouldn't have been married to me. But that was during the time I was incarcerated as well as prior to that time. It was, I have no regrets about being married just sorry it wasn't the right, long-term kind of partner. We couldn't reconcile. We did have one daughter who is wonderful, talented, artisan photojournalist.

**Interviewer:** What happens after this point? Are you still involved in the anti-war movement?

**Pratt:** Occasionally there is an issue that is obviously war related. And I'm asked to speak. But everything from the death penalty to zoning and planning to children's rights, to other issues, drugs, legalization, civil liberties, civil rights. I'm still involved in anything and everything I feel I can have some input.

**Interviewer:** Would you consider yourself a political activist?

**Pratt:** Well, I think everyone else would, too.

**Interviewer:** Do you think it stems from your Vietnam experience?

**Pratt:** Obviously, well, actually, it started with civil rights. I was involved in recruiting at UK for black basketball players. That's where I first got most politically active and we were successful in changing some of the University policy and even Adolf Rupp had to change his private statements and become publicly involved in recruiting a black player.

**Interviewer:** This is before Vietnam?

**Pratt:** Yea.

**Interviewer:** That's somewhat a common experience for a lot of people in the War movement. Each movement kind of built on the one before.

**Pratt:** Yea, well, if you didn't come along, though, in the civil rights era, if you weren't, if the timing wasn't right. There was people who joined us in the anti-war movement that were too young to know much about civil rights. But King was probably the mentor that precipitated my both exposure, as well as the decision to act, and the manner that I acted.

**Interviewer:** Did you ever have an opportunity to meet any of these prominent figures?

**Pratt:** Yea, and King was one of them. It wasn't a long session and I'm really sort of confused right now in terms of if he's the person who delivered Sunday or not. The civil rights event, I went to Atlanta to study civil rights and civil liberties in Atlanta and relationships with blacks and whites. And we went to King's church one time. He wasn't there we met his father. Another time, I'm sure he was the one that delivered the sermon. We just had the opportunity to shake hands. Of course, I went to the dedication of King's memorial next to the church the first year after he died. I went to any number of activities in Lexington regarding civil rights. Then later in the anti-war activities I

went to Chicago to Washington time and time again. Both to lobby as well as to speak. At each of those events there was an opportunity to meet some people. Sometimes accidentally, sometimes intentionally. Sometimes just for brief moments sometimes for exchanges of ideas. Jane Fonda, Dave Harris, her husband, no, Jane Fonda, Joan Baez, and Dave Harris, her husband, (unintelligible) Carmichael, Andrew Young, a lot of people. The one interesting one was with Jane Fonda, Mark Lane, and J. William Fulbright. I ran into Hubert Humphrey in the hall once just by chance. Lots of people like that. Dr. Spock, I'm pretty sure was at the Washington Conference, but I didn't really speak to him.

**Interviewer:** which one of them was the most profound?

**Pratt:** J. William Fulbright probably because it was personal. It was an accidental meeting. The girls in his office. We were at the extreme end of his inner office. We were answering letters. The girls were so excited about the presence of Jane Fonda. I just humorously said oh, I know Jane Fonda. Or, no, I didn't say I knew her. I said do you want to meet Jane Fonda? They said, yes, yes, yes. Do you know Jane Fonda? I didn't know Jane Fonda from beans, but I said do you want to meet her and they said yes, where is she? They said she had gone to Senator Gedel's office. So, I said, where's the phone, what's the number? The looked it up real quick. I called Sen. Gedel's office. I matter-of-factly said this is Don Pratt at Sen. Fulbright's office and I gave him the office we were at, not for Sen. Fulbright's because I didn't know his number. In walks Jane Fonda, Mark Lane, and I think Buffy St. Marie, and this little Indian woman, maybe it was her mother. I'm not sure. And they walked into the office where we were and they were sort of startled that we were in this office and there was this bunch of people

that were letters apart, envelopes opening. I looked up and these two women just lost it. One of them ran down the hall. I didn't know where she had gone. The other one was losing it and I said yes, ma'am can I help you. And she said yes, I, someone asked to see me. I said who are you. And the way she said it really was what precipitated my response. She said I'm Jane Fonda. And then I said well I'm Don Pratt. What are you doing here. She said well, you asked me to come here. I said no, what are you doing here? Why are you in Washington? What are you doing in Sen. Gedel's office? She proceeded to tell me that she was there for a G.I. bill of rights. And she was lobbying congressmen and senators. At about that time, the second woman who'd run down the hall come running back and says Sen. Fulbright would like to see ya. And so we all got to go and sit and talk with Sen. Fulbright for about fifteen minutes. He was so eloquent and so profound and so sensitive to what was happening at the time, so aware of feelings and concerns of both the dissenters as well as Jane Fonda and Mark Lane and what they were interested in for G.I.s. The man was really a genuine scholar and conscientious leader. If I had a choice, that probably would've been the person I would follow. Of course, King was such a powerful speaker. I don't remember the sermon that Sunday, but on that same trip to Atlanta, I met Lester Maddux, who was obviously an anti-civil rights leader in Georgia and later government. I remember confronting him and finding him illogical in some things that he said and believed. He had to back down on some things he said and believed, which was surprising.

**Interviewer:** Were you volunteering in Fulbright's office at that time?

**Pratt:** Yes, I was a volunteer. They asked me to open letters. He got thousands of letters. There were just inundated with letters of support.

**Interviewer:** What's interesting about Fonda and the G.I. bill of rights, many soldiers feel antagonism toward her. She was working for their rights, that's interesting.

**Pratt:** Well, she was really nieve. I think she even sort of said that she shouldn't have done what she did. In reference to Hanoi and the prisoners of the Vietnamese armies. And I'm sure that they tortured and did crazy things. On the other hand, I think her position was right. To end the war in Vietnam, to show the Vietnamese that we were compassionate in addition to being so militaristic. Some friends of mine have sailed into Haiphong Harbor with medical supplies. They were Quakers and their intention was to supply needed medical supplies. The atrocities we committed were greater than they committed to our POWs. There's no doubt about it. The atrocities they're suffering today due to chemical exposures that we have pitched into their lands and pitched into their peoples are far greater than the POWs. We, if you will read, had killed and slaughtered many of the Vietnamese soldiers and tortured many of the Vietnamese soldiers. Not necessarily good soldiers of our armies, though sometimes the good soldiers. Sometimes our representatives of Vietnamese or the Koreans we took into Vietnam. The atrocities were many on both sides; probably more so on our side. We probably committed for more than they had done to POWs.