



MILITARY WRITERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA

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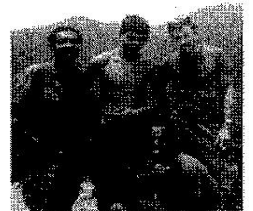
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Author: Larry Mitchell

Book: "Potawatomi Tracks: The Ballad of Vietnam and Other Stories."

Interviewed by: W. H. McDonald –
President of the MWSA



Larry Mitchell in Vietnam

Q: You write about your tour of duty; can you tell us how you and your family felt about that war before you went to Vietnam?

A. I would see tribal members from my tribe coming home from Vietnam and wearing their uniforms with all their medals and I wanted to be like them! In Native American communities it's an ingrained kind of thing to want to serve your country and protect your people. Back then I never thought of the Vietnam War in terms of right or wrong, I was young and reckless to say the least.

Q: Did you get community support while in Nam from your tribe or friends?

A. I got support mostly from my mother and my brothers Gary and Eddie. They would write me letters while I was in Vietnam. I would look forward to their letters; they always made me feel better when I was going through the harsh conditions out in the boonies.

Q: How hard was it for you to sit down and write about your experiences? ...in Vietnam and your life afterwards?

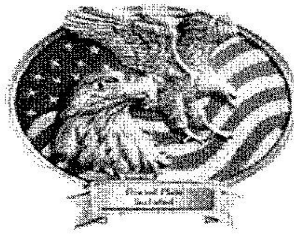
A. It was really painful writing about some of the years in my life, but I glad I wrote about my Vietnam and how it affected me. Writing for me has been a way of healing. I could have gotten a ghostwriter and my book could have been 400 pages long, but then it wouldn't have been my book.

Q: Did you find any healing from looking back on that part of your life?

A. I have filled notebooks with the nightmares and flashbacks I had about Vietnam and the shameful treatment I got when I came home. For me writing has been my way of dealing with all of that.

Q: Do you still have any problems with PTSD?

A. My wife says a night doesn't go by when I am not "nightmaring" as she puts it. There is **nothing** in those little black bags at the VA that can help me forget the war. I felt like I have lived in darkness for years. Since I came back from Vietnam, I could never figure out why fear came over me at times and why I had to battle guilt and depression all those years **without getting** some kind of help somewhere. I guess I am like a lot of other veterans in that I didn't trust the VA.



Q: What was the reception like that your book got when you got it published?

A. I self-published my book so there was not much of reception. My book came out in July of 2003 and I got a print interview with the Potawatomi Traveling Times, the tribal newspaper of the Forest County Potawatomi over in Wisconsin that August and then in September of 2003 my book was chosen as the book of the month by the Native American radio station 'Native America Calling.' Then it seemed I then ran into a stonewall.

B. They say an author should promote his book, because nobody else will promote it for him...that is so true. So I got an author website and have promoted ever since it came out. I will promote it as long as it is in print.

Q: Do you have any plans for another book or some articles?

A. I have written poems-songs since 1979. I would like to come out with another book with some of my song-poems.

Q: Do you have any advice for other veteran writers on sitting down and creating a book?

A. I would say give it a chance, writing about what you went through can only help you.

Q: Did you receive any help, aid or encouragement from others with your book when you were trying to do the manuscript?

A. My brother Gary who has written a book called "Stories about the Potawatomi," said you will find out people don't care and from what I have seen, he has been right. There is no interest in Native America about my book. I don't know what the reasons are; maybe they don't like to read books or just don't want to give an unknown writer a chance. I know it is not a lack of promoting it on my part.

Q: Why did you write this book? What were your motives and why did you want to share your story?

A. I found out the more I wrote, the better I felt. I have seen non-natives write Native American histories and stories and I wanted to write my story from my own perspective.

Q: Those that have read your book have been very vocal about how interesting it was - so why has the Native American community not picked up and read your book like I thought they would? Do you think it has something to do with THAT WAR (Vietnam) and the negative views people still have?

A. I self-published my book, so there was no major book reviews, that goes with the territory of a self-published book. Most bookstores don't want to carry self-published books either.

Q: What do you do for a living?

A. I have been retired from federal service.

Q: What hobbies and things do you enjoy doing?

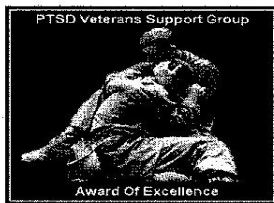
A. I read all the time and do some writing. I enjoy spending time with my wife and my two sons.

Q: Do you stay in touch with any of the guys from your old outfit that served with you in Nam?

A. I was in touch with a squad leader in my old company that has a website and he has my website on his favorite sites, but I haven't heard from him in awhile. My company in 'nam has a reunion every year, maybe one of these years I will attend the reunion.

Q: Do you have any words of wisdom to pass on or things that you have learned about life?

A. I would like to say to the vets coming home the war in Iraq to be not



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afraid of seeking help.

B. They don't have to suffer in silence like many Vietnam Veterans did. There are many ways to cope with the stress of war, like painting and writing and the many outreach programs that are available.

Q: Tell us a little about your life now that you have published your book. Has it in any way changed your relationships with others or with your own self?

A. Since writing my book, it seems like I have rejoined the human race again. It seemed like I lived in the shadows for years now I am not living such an isolated life.

Bill's closing remarks: Thanks for taking the time to answer our questions. Good luck on your book and your life.

***You can learn more about Larry Mitchell visit his website.**
