

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Mr. X

COLLECTION: 4700.0950

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: John Davis

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEWDATES: 5/6/74

FOCUS DATES: April 1970-April 1972

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1369

School of engineers; most military men sent to Vietnam; special schooling didn't protect you from infantry; Mr. X was never in any fighting, never shot at; basic training is hell; describes typical day in basic training; getting harassed by officers about little things; hated the haircuts; not enough time to eat; calisthenics in the morning; resisting orders from commanding officer; platoon leaders could get away with more; drill instructor was professional football player; Mr. X wasn't a good runner; trouble with drill sergeants; hand to hand combat training; clubbing other soldiers for practice; learning to hate; grass drill in sawdust pits; worries about spinal meningitis; precautions against spinal meningitis; AIT in Virginia; refrigeration training; assisting refrigeration instructor because Mr. X had more refrigeration experience; cleaning barracks; foreign diplomats visited fort; parade duty on Sundays; denied weekend passes if barracks looked dirty; hard to play army and go to school at the same time; one week in the holding companies; grass cutting duty; trying to get on a good detail; CQ duty; getting orders for Vietnam; travel money; Mr. X didn't get promotion he expected; became bitter; ways to maximize travel pay; receiving orders to Vietnam; paperwork hassle of processing out; Army screwed Mr. X out of chance to become teacher; MUST systems, portable hospitals; Mr. X lacked courage to run off to Canada; believes it takes more courage to buck the system; flew to naval base in Japan first at base of Mt. Fuji; different routes to Vietnam, via Alaska, Hawaii or Guam; holding center at Cam Ranh Bay; how people get assigned to battalions and brigades; stayed in Cam Ranh Bay for about four days; confusion re: international date line; first day in holding center; first time he saw people smoking marijuana; lots of liquor, lots of dope; soldiers hassling new guys; sent to Nha Trang, to a unit that was closing down; whore house in Nha Trang; assigned to 362nd signal unit, sent back to Cam Ranh Bay; stationed at Hawk Hill, communications school for Vietnamese located there; rivalry on hill between 518th and 362nd; description of hooches soldiers lived in; Mr. X's roommates and neighbors; Mr. X lived with a prostitute for five months; Vietnamese friends; tried to respect the Vietnamese; Vietnamese are very friendly people, extremely poor by American standards; reasons girls became prostitutes; amount of money prostitutes made; rates for prostitutes; water truck drivers smuggled the girls onto the base; girls stayed a few days, working; other females who worked on base, doing laundry, working in mess hall; higher echelon of military also involved with prostitution;

description of massage parlors, known as "steam and creams," located on base, and services offered; differences between girlfriends and prostitutes; Vietnamese knew how to manipulate Americans to get money; limited vocabulary of Vietnamese girls; older people spoke French, younger people learned English; tried to explain snow to his girlfriend; Vietnamese attitudes toward Americans; most Vietnamese he met had some connection to military; met a couple of Vietnamese farmers when out buying charcoal; heroin use in Vietnam, saw two guys OD; boredom led to drug use; excellent marijuana available; just as many alcoholics as drug addicts; black market linked to prostitution; money changing for Vietnamese girlfriends; prostitutes gave money to their mamasan, or pimp; changing money and the black market; pushers, source of heroin; limited number of money orders a soldier could buy; friend who got caught selling PX goods; setting up signal site in Nha Trang; visiting off-limits places in Nha Trang; Korean soldiers in Nha Trang whore houses; ranks of men in whore houses; danger of being caught by MPs; kids stole things off trucks; Coca Cola houses, built out of cardboard boxes; mamasans brought heroin onto base; bar girls; drugs and high-ranking officers; best marijuana came from montagnards; definition of a "lid" of marijuana; explains "ready rolls" and "ojs"; soldier who grew his own marijuana under his hooch; hill where authorities stuck all the trouble makers, deviants, drug addicts; thinks Vietnam war was a very bad mistake; Vietnamese function better under a dictator than democracy; total bombardment of North Vietnam would not have solved the problem; admiration for anti-war protestors; identified with anti-war radicals; cousin who was conscientious objector, family kicked him out of his house; proud of his cousin for having guts to stand up for what he believed.

TAPES: 1 (T1369)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 20 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages

RESTRICTIONS: Maintain anonymity of narrator; may only be referred to as "Mr. X"