

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Stephen Thomas

COLLECTION: 4700.0987

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Jacob Oberman

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATES: 5/4/75

FOCUS DATES: Aug. 27, 1969-Feb. 29, 1972

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1441, Side A

Stephen's nickname; education, flunked out of college; enlisted in June, 1969; why he chose the Army; psychological training at Fort Polk; boot camp was rough, got shoved around, harassed; training in Virginia; trained to work computer supply system; had one of the few air-conditioned jobs in Vietnam; feelings about being sent to Vietnam; cushy job in rear; never had to shoot at anyone; arrival in Vietnam; stayed in Chu Lai for his year there; orientation training in Chu Lai; training he never wound up needing; limited contact with Vietnamese civilians; Vietnamese were used to Americans; one-eyed maid they called "Deadeye"; prevalence of drugs; heroin brought in on Air America, soldiers bought dope from VC; use of military payment certificates (MPC); bought dope with MPC; restrictions on what soldiers could do, everyone felt like their hands were tied; never left military base the whole time there, except while flying; engine stopped on one flight to Saigon; worked long hours; transferred to driving truck, operating fork lift; unit moved to Quan Tre, Thomas left behind; felt like war was tapering off; prostitution, letting prostitutes sneak onto base; picked up dope at the dump, could buy sandbag full of marijuana for \$10; people used heroin while on duty; sometimes alert crew was too loaded to go out and pick up downed helicopter; My Lai was a trouble spot; reactions to massacre at My Lai; Americal division nicknamed "Baby Killers"; black market; swapping parts for helicopters; swapping for other supplies; stealing a generator; got ripped off for half a day at Christmas; didn't deal with Vietnamese on black market; Vietnamese people wanted Americans to go home, preferred communism to war; every Vietnamese male he knew had been shot; ex-NVA soldier who swept his office; program where North Vietnamese could surrender to South Vietnamese side, work for them; Kit Carson scouts; every Vietnamese person has lost a family member; Danang had bigger PX; only officers, not enlisted men, could buy beer at PX; could drink liquor at enlisted men's club; Thomas didn't drink much; opinions on Vietnamese; young Vietnamese woman who did keypunching on their computer; name "Nguyen"; half breeds, Vietnam lost its racial purity to war; friction between black and white GIs; touring musical groups; armed race riot during musical performance; tear gassed his major one time; incidents of fragging commanding officers; major was badly burned by tear gas; Vietnam war was a big fiasco; can't see any logical reason for the whole thing; no motivation given during training; Thomas almost court martialed on

trumped up charges, slovenliness; Thomas' promotions, eventually made E-5.

Tape 1441, Side B

Introduction; tape abruptly ends.

TAPES: 1 (T1441)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 45 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 2 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None