

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Edward T.C. Lewis

**COLLECTION:** 4700.0961

**IDENTIFICATION:** Vietnam veteran

**INTERVIEWER:** Robert Talley

**SERIES:** Americans in Vietnam

**INTERVIEW DATES:** 3/14/74

**FOCUS DATES:** Dec. 3, 1969-Dec. 2, 1971, Aug 1970-May, 1971

**ABSTRACT:**

**Tape 1403, Side A**

Lewis was drafted into Marine Corp during his junior year at LSU; had neutral attitude toward war; boot camp in San Diego, then Camp Pendleton for infantry training as machine gunner; air base at El Toro, CA; orders to go to Vietnam; served in Vietnam August 1970-May 1971; rank, training; was a good machine gunner; family background, grew up in small town Louisiana; extracurricular activities during high school; attended LSU; feelings regarding military, anti-war protests; likes to believe US follows sane, responsive policies; strong military tradition in his family; many of his relatives involved in WWII; shock at being drafted; was disenchanted with college life anyway; honor and duty of military service; expected to go into Army, but Marines had a shortage of men; expected Marines to choose larger guys than him; wasn't eager to go to Vietnam; shocked he survived Marine Corps boot camp; Lewis is quiet and unassertive, prefers to stay in background; lots of individual attention in boot camp, was new experience for him; verbal abuse at boot camp; changes that took place in boot camp; allowed to keep no personal possessions except religious reading materials; arrived at boot camp very tired; drill sergeant who looked just like Lee Marvin; not allowed to sleep first night; boot camp is closest approximation to hell on earth; infantry training; shocked and surprised to get MOS in infantry after getting high score on intelligence test; they don't give good jobs to people who will only be there for two years; didn't particularly care for machine gun training; training involved statistics in aircraft maintenance; involved in an off-base Christian organization called the Navigators, who influenced his subsequent life; former attitudes toward Christianity; El Toro was an environment hostile to Christianity; got orders to Vietnam, first had another month of training in infantry weapons; Vietnam-specific instruction; had no particular expectations about Marine Corps; had low hopes of finding meaning in life; had no expectations at all, expected only to live and die; since he didn't consider himself important, other people weren't, either; looked on military as easy way out; people in the military that influenced him re: Jesus Christ; Jesus is alive today and has an influence, Lewis was changed by Bible; faith in Jesus made him a more conscientious Marine; travel to Vietnam via Okinawa, arrived in Danang; worked as rifleman for

5<sup>th</sup> Marines; went on patrols; night missions outside Danang, setting up night ambushes; became platoon radio man for 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon Bravo company; also served as squad and platoon leader for Hotel company, 1<sup>st</sup> platoon; spent two weeks in a Vietnamese culture school in Vietnam learning Vietnamese language, learned about 200 words; searching for POW camp near Laotian border; secret operation in Laos, resistance was lighter than expected; didn't find POWs; extreme heat, ran out of water; another operation where they landed a helicopter on top of a mountain, helicopter hovering eight feet off ground, people all fell out; found cave inside mountain, enemy supplies hidden inside; impressed by the way the cave was well-furnished with natural materials; guy who thought he saw an NVA, threw a grenade, forgot to pull pin; relations with ARVNs, ARVNs tried to get them to buy stuff at the PX; weapons, booby traps; guy who pounded his tent stake right into a booby trap; soldiers hurt by booby traps; conduct of US servicemen varied; saw American soldiers knock civilians off motorcycles with their rifle butts, just for laughs; prevalence of drug use, prostitution.

### **Tape 1403, Side B**

Prostitution in Vietnam; setting up ambushes outside villages; squad leader securing services of local prostitute for his squad; marijuana cigarettes laced with opium; drug user squad called "heads," another squad of "straights"; leader of squad couldn't stop guys from using drugs; few penalties for drug use; most people at least experimented with marijuana; hand grenade thrown into hooch of guy who informed on someone else for smoking marijuana; marijuana as easily available in Vietnam as candy bars in the US; Vietnamese wanted American money and goods, had drugs and sex to exchange; Vietnamese stole Coca Cola, sold to soldiers in the field at a huge mark up; people would be so hot and miserable they'd pay exorbitant price for cold Coke; smart Vietnamese kid he met who spoke three languages; this kid had conception of spirits, but not God, talked about seeing ghosts; US policy re: black market; black market goods sometimes benefitted the NVA; prices for drugs and prostitutes; economics of villages depended on black market; trading currency, American money, Vietnamese, military payment currency; what \$5 could buy in Vietnam; what prostitutes would take for their services; Vietnamese prostitutes who were skilled pickpockets; kids who picked pockets; hypocrisy in the war on parts of both US and Vietnam; unsure of US motivations for fighting Vietnam war; wants to believe US stands for what it's supposed to stand for; NVA threw satchel charges at a Catholic orphanage, killed lots of people; instances where Americans killed civilians for no apparent reason; how Christianity influenced Lewis' perceptions of Vietnam; people often did what was easy rather than what was right in Vietnam; how different people reflect American values; thoughts on anti-war movement; bombing North Vietnam; at height of war, US couldn't stay in, couldn't get out; opinion of draft evaders; admiration for Mohammed Ali's stand on war; moral implications of going against majority opinion; people who dodged draft for convenience rather than moral reasons; story of friend in Vietnam who got killed in the name of duty; Vietnam Veterans Against the War; wasn't so much the U.S. at fault in Vietnam, just whole general situation of mankind; guy from Tennessee that he met in Vietnam and really admired; admirable and not so admirable Americans and Vietnamese; admiration for the NVA; still in contact with some war buddies; impoverished Vietnamese children, babies; Vietnamese people who managed to be clean and proud and somewhat happy despite poverty; Lewis didn't see much of the horrors of war, fighting was almost over; people need values; no real solution to the Vietnam problem; for Lewis, humanity has a derived value from being created by God; lots of Vietnam veterans around, doesn't feel unique; variety of experiences men had in Vietnam; race relations in

Vietnam; tremendous degree of segregation in US society; Lewis has a hard time remembering his Vietnam experiences, hardly ever talks about it; a lot of his friends now probably don't even know he was in Vietnam.

**Tape 1404, Side A**

Vietnamese language training in Danang; other schools people could attend in Vietnam; going to some of these schools was almost like R&R; instructors in schools; his classmates in school; learning Vietnamese phrases, grammar; recreational activities in spare time; Red Cross girls; tour of Danang on last day of school, stopped at orphanages, Buddhist temple; Vietnamese civilians tried to get you to buy them stuff they could sell on black market; Marine civil action group that lived in Vietnamese villages; many Vietnamese spoke good English; landmine workers school; chaplains in Vietnam; denominations of Christians, from liberal to conservative, in Vietnam; regular Protestant and Catholic services held in rear; attendance at services was very low; chaplain came out to village to conduct service, no one showed up; chaplain who particularly impressed Lewis; function of military chaplains; only met one chaplain in Vietnam who wanted to preach about Jesus; many younger chaplains more interested in their military roles; excuses to go to rear; soldiers' indifference to religion; amazed by the lack of knowledge that soldiers had about basic tenets of Christianity; people's lack of commitment to moral values; black people know more about the bible; close calls in Danang, sniper fire; confusion of shots in the dark; soldiers who accidentally discharged their rifles; finding enemy's regimental headquarters; majority of people in the headquarters somehow escaped; enemy had good military intelligence, moved out in time, eluded ambushes; found lots of records, documents, materials left behind, a few weapons; description of enemy latrines; Lewis admired most of his officers; effects of drugs on armies; people who smoke marijuana begin to lose ambition and motivation; demo man who used drugs; drug problem was out of control, but mostly overlooked; making prostitution deals with village chief; soldiers' treatment of civilians; people bragged about atrocities they committed; soldiers bragging about raping Vietnamese civilians, shooting them and throwing them down wells; many Vietnamese had good reason to hate Americans; Americans defeating their aims by mistreating Vietnamese; lots of good soldiers, too; lack of moral commitment of American soldiers to cause.

**TAPES:** 2 (T1403, T1404)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 2 hours, 15 minutes

**# PAGES INDEX:** 6 pages

**RESTRICTIONS:** None