

**T. Harry Williams Center of Oral History**

**Tape 892 Finding Aid**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Lieutenant Colonel John Masters

**COLLECTION:** 4700.0610 Tape 892 (Tape 2 of 2)

**IDENTIFICATION:** Briton in Pre-Independence India

**INTERVIEWERS:** Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan

**PROJECT:** British Voices from South Asia

**INTERVIEW DATE:** 5/18/72

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 47 minutes

**OTHER MATERIALS:** None

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**Tape 892, Side A**

**Masters (Part 2 of 3)**

- 001 the position of principal at the public school gave a sense of duty and carrying out responsibility; you are given a job to do and you do it unsupervised
- 008 British in India were given more responsibility than anywhere else; there isn't a job that compares to a district commissioner
- 012 went out to India at nineteen, did his years of attachment; before his twentieth, he went from commanding a platoon of twenty-five to thirty British soldiers to commanding a company when he joined his Indian regiment; had two companies to command because the other commanding officer was away on leave
- 018 three years later, was in charge of one hundred soldiers, wives and training recruits
- 021 the British public school system, as it was working in his time, was a considerable help in achieving his accomplishments
- 023 it gave people confidence; it goes back to a racist idea: that every British institution is perfect
- 029 life at the stations was very isolated; there were no movies, theaters; part of the problem was the stations were so small due to the small number of civil citizens; average civil

station had two government people in it, if you take away the army troops; there may be one or two civilians

045 civilian with a capital “C” meant a member of the Indian Civil Service; a civilian with a small “c” was one who bought, sold, and traded things

048 wife went to Shahapur where there was an arms factory and rum factory; there were many civilians there to help run the factories

061 military is always different; in the hot weather there would be six of them, twelve in the winter; there were no civilians in some places

064 in the north, there were relatively few isolated civil stations; in the south and east parts of India, there were hundreds of civil stations

071 in some of the larger places, a traveling judge would come

073 you had to know your position: senior wife would decide when it was time for the women to leave the dinner table; you went to the bathroom according to seniority

077 India could be considered a sub-culture because it had its own rules

081 he doesn’t believe in allegories or heavily loaded symbolism; did try to create a broad canvas of British India and the Indians in it; if you read it all, you would have a good idea of what it looked like, smelt like, and felt like to be there and live through it

095 there were moral dilemmas in India, mostly sexual ones; there was real problem of sexuality because there was a sexual imbalance: there were about twenty men for each woman; women had a hard time, especially in trying to retain their virtue

104 in a broader sense, the only thing that separates India from anywhere else is the dilemma of wondering why you were there, especially if you were sensitive; didn’t bother many people because it was just part of history

111 in the long run, he believes British occupation didn’t do any harm, but did some good.

115 a good ICS officer was considered good because he was aware of the dilemma of wondering why he was there

118 Philip Mason was a friend of his wife’s; was deputy minister of defense in Delhi when Masters was there; wrote *Call the Next Witness*; those books shows the awareness of the dilemmas; he sensed a moral dilemma and solved it

127 deals with inept administrators in some of the situations in his book because of the real life ideals: soldier always disagrees with administrators

125 for example, when there’s war on the Northwest Frontier, the political agent’s interests are with the enemy because those are the people they like; they would not be any good if they didn’t associate themselves with the private point of view

139 however, when they are out there getting men killed, they don’t think it is funny

142 military necessity and outlook is always different and the political agents are always their superiors, unless the situation gets completely out of hand and they are called upon

146 ICS was magnificent service; there were some that were not as good because they were indecisive; Masters wanted to show that and believes facts of history will show how good the ICS did

159 in some cases, if you did not have a bad administrator, you would not have any crises and therefore no story

163 discuss some of his characters and their desire to be “odd men out”; Robin has to leave because he cannot be tied down; William has to act alone and become almost like an Indian; if someone is going to be like that, he must obviously be different from the other “hearty fellows”

- 174 the more extraordinary the person is, the more you have to differentiate him from the ordinary people
- 177 doesn't know if William could have passed as an Indian; Richard Burton, who was an officer in the Indian army, was able to do so
- 183 problem with having an outstanding character while making it typical of the way the British felt; overcame it by making reader realize he was not particularly bright and enjoyed being alone
- 195 to some, India was an overwhelming place, but only in later generations; there was enormous confidence in race and religion
- 212 Indian culture is non-absorptive; as tempting as it is for you to "sink back" into India, they would not accept you; you could not do it in at least two generations; the Skinners, who were once English, are now Indian because they married Indian and have not married British
- 247 in general, if you had a long ties to India, you did not have a problem of deciding what was home; England was home because you were born and educated there; Masters never thought of India as home: it was where he worked
- 267 Molly's motivation was to reveal two points of view without having two characters: one character can be both English and Indian if he has this background; suppose it's an extension of the need for tension
- 288 discuss book and character William Savage; moral dilemma was between a good, moral guy who went out to investigate murders, only to find himself doing them
- 311 would say that staying in India after independence would be a bad idea for some British, but the alternatives could have been worse; tells about the old English women that had apparently married Indians and were widows: suppose they could not face going back to England
- 332 many rest houses in India, especially going up the hills
- 356 went back to India in 1957, 1960, 1962, 1963, and 1973
- 363 going back and staying with the army is great; the rest of India is a mess because some things don't work; in the army, things do work
- 368 the army has retained some of the old traditions; only trouble is that English is now being taught third hand; modern Indian army corporal or general has difficulty, reflected mostly in their writings
- 382 civilians are in fear that the army is going to take them over; some general made the comment that the civilians were crazy because the English did not want to take over the awful mess that has developed there
- 387 far more aware of problems of dismantling an empire verses constructing one
- 398 in *Thunder at Sunset*, posed a problem from a previous, unpublished book: the hereditary queen of a fictional area declares her state part of the United States; would have made good platform for some of the American problems
- 426 similarities between the hereditary queen and the English ambassador sent with orders to get rid of a country at all costs; soldiers decide they cannot carry out orders because the ambassador can't really do it
- 439 he thinks of himself as an American writer, which may be different from being an American; he could not have become a writer unless he had come to America
- 453 as long as he stayed in England, he was trapped in a certain pattern; he was going to be either Commander and Chief of the Indian army or CIGS of the British army because he is

a Master's  
 463 decided the typical jobs he would have taken were not for him  
 480 was asked to take up politics after leaving the army, but he could not figure out what he was  
 going to do for a living; turned it down  
 485 coming to America made him see England through eyes that saw it, not those that live there  
 492 he is known more in England than America; anyone who is interested in India has read his  
 novels  
 510 American image of India has changed, due mostly to events; those that are interested in  
 India of the past will have a modified view of India;  
 522 the prime source of India for everyone is Kipling; you have a definite picture, drawn in  
 distinct colors of India  
 533 when talking about the modern American view of India, they are discussing those people  
 that are in their sixties or older; very few people under sixty have read Kipling; younger  
 people get their information from television and news; their views are incomplete  
 554 everyone of Master's generation and before had some real contact with India; there were  
 many people passing through and bringing things back; enormous connections with India  
 back then  
 587 most famous story is the two Anglo-Indians in England discussing an old man in  
 Hindustani; when the man gets up, he makes a reply to them; you couldn't speak  
 Hindustani anywhere in England if you wanted to be secretive because it was more  
 frequently known than French or Spanish  
 606 modern British outlook is formed by fact that three-fourths of the doctors in Bradford are  
 Indian;  
 611 there are racial feelings against them now, whereas back then there was not; most evident  
 at his last job, where the Indians would all show up working the same types of jobs:  
 railways, buses, transport  
 624 end of tape

No recording on Tape 892, Side B