

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Charles E. Edwards, Jr.

COLLECTION: 4700.0949

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Dudley R. Meier, Jr.

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATE: 5/1/75

FOCUS DATES: Feb. 26, 1968-Jan. 21, 1970, Oct. 1968 - Nov. 1968

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1387

Father was an ex-Marine; dropped out of school in 1967, entered Marines in 1968; trained in California, left for Vietnam in November; twelve weeks of boot camp; weight loss after joining Marines; Marine training, emphasis on discipline; enjoyed organization and orderliness of boot camp; advanced infantry at Camp Pendleton; staging; training was totally Vietnam-oriented; can't imagine being in service at a time when country not at war; stereotype of Viet Cong, fake villages for training purposes; questions realism of villages; during training, shocking to remember that they were really going to kill people; indoctrination, learning to hate enemy; limited understanding of communism, was gung ho and patriotic; foreignness of Vietnamese; felt like a game, we were there to stay alive for a year; in WWII, you went for the duration, not just a year; couldn't hold onto territory; frustration of not knowing who were friends, who were enemies; no more massacres in Vietnam than in other wars, but more TV coverage; too much military policing; having too many rules in a war is counter-productive; Viet Cong hiding behind the Vietnamese people; need for a reason to fight, a cause; how commanders reacted to men having their hands tied; incompetence, ignorance among troops; ARVNs not as well disciplined, well trained or motivated as Americans; would have had to stay and occupy Vietnam as a police state to keep Communists out; feelings on foreign aid; mistakes US made; inevitability of bombing innocent people; didn't understand war protestors; people don't understand what it was like; arrival in Vietnam; landing postponed because of rocket attack; description of rocket attack; using reflexes and survival instinct during attack; wretched poverty, bad smells of countryside; if it weren't for war, would probably be nice vacation spot; didn't notice how colorful Vietnam was until got back to States and looked at his pictures; worked as supply truck driver; remembers his first ambush, wasn't like target practice; fear in first and last months in Vietnam; convoy missions, delivering supplies; coping with land mines; air support from helicopters; Danang as supply depot; heavy fighting near Dong Ha; his unit was mostly supply, but also had infantry duties; artillery, Russian-made rockets; supply unit got lots of rocket and mortar attacks; spent two weeks as a mailman; flying a Marine helicopter; hated rain, being wet all the time;

admiration of pilots; use of M-14 rifles in Marines; use of gunships, power of helicopters; use of helicopters versus use of airplanes; preferred Cobra gunships to B-52s; current dangers of heat seeking missiles, etc., to pilots; remembers first time he saw someone's guts falling apart; tragedy of lost limbs; more disturbed by pain than death; losing relationship with time in Vietnam; afraid of dying in rocket attack just before going home; leaving Okinawa, excitement of going home; arrival in US; surprising his parents with his homecoming; has trouble remembering details of war; US didn't accomplish anything, pointlessness of war; war was mostly drudgery; liked M-16 rifles better than M-14s; awesome firepower of helicopters; doesn't think of himself as a soldier; before war, could never picture these old vets with guns in their hands; ambivalent feelings about time in military; doesn't believe war is a necessary part of growing up; status of Vietnam veterans, nobody cared; fighting somebody else's war; people were leery of him when he returned; no justification for murder, even in war; lack of a real cause in Vietnam; importance of having a cause; foreignness of Vietnamese language, culture; feelings on the draft; WWII had a cause, whole country was behind it; stereotype of Vietnam vets vs. WWII vets; feelings of uselessness, wasting a year of his life; should have worked construction in Vietnam; feels bitter, but not screwed up by war; difficulty adjusting to life in US; counting days till going home; cultures were too different to relate; military on focuses on taking over; feelings toward enemy, indoctrination; admired the enemy for standing up to Americans; trying not to take things for granted anymore; life so easy here compared to in Vietnam; appreciates US more now; widespread waste of military; problems with the way US tries to eradicate communism; sickened by wasteful ways of military; black market; thoughts on prostitution; damage military does to towns; how military disrupts economy of towns; widespread corruption; you lose your sense of values when killing people; problems inherent in setting up someone else's government; terrible, useless toll of lives; people in the US only care about the economy; instances where war is necessary, e.g. self-defense; maybe communism is better for them; people only care about war when people they love are affected; US is wrong to judge what's right and what's wrong; thoughts on the draft; Nixon's involvement in war; Vietnamese people not used to freedom; Vietnamese people didn't want us there; lessons we learned in Vietnam; R&R in Singapore; wouldn't want to return to Vietnam.

TAPES: 1 (T1387)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 30 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None