

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Bill Fullerton

COLLECTION: 4700.0952

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Robert Talley

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATES: 5/1/75

FOCUS DATES: June 3, 1968-Nov. 18, 1969, Apr. 15, 1969-July 1, 1969

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1389

Raised in North LA; education; community's attitude toward military; decision to join Army in June, 1968; was in favor of fighting communism; LSU students' feelings toward compulsory ROTC; college and the draft; priorities of LSU students; how students dressed; freshman football team quarterback killed in Vietnam; Fullerton left school to join service; description of first day in military; describes first week, waiting for assignment to basic training unit; Fort Polk favored over Fort Bliss; basic training at Fort Polk; Fullerton was out of shape; people who didn't pass boot camp; learning to get along with superiors; Fullerton made squad leader; attended two-week leadership prep course; applied for OCS; dropped from OCS for lack of motivation and poor leadership potential; Tigerland at Fort Polk, training ground for Vietnam infantry; soldiers terrified of Vietnam; advanced infantry training, field training; Infantry Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Fort Benning; Fullerton promoted; sent to Vietnam; processing period in Vietnam; assigned to Americal, the worst division in Vietnam, in Chu Lai; retraining period; description of companies in battalion; joined Recon unit; description of Recon activities; description of engagements in field; exorbitant casualties; arrival in Vietnam; Chinook helicopters and landing zones; inspecting dead body of young nurse; description of field hospital where nurse worked; carrying heavy pack; new soldier got nervous and shot at pigs; killed about 20 NVA in area; encounter with NVA soldier with rifle in road; sniper killed three men; mission to hill that was swarming with NVA; mission that interrupted Vietnamese funeral; eerie old French fort; working in area that was heavily booby-trapped; VC forced villagers to set booby traps; saw a kid blown up setting one; advantages of making villagers set booby traps; differences between booby traps and land mines; types of booby traps; friend killed by bouncing betty booby trap; pungy stakes; bamboo whips; capturing VC prisoner, taking him on mission; 12 year old boy killed setting booby trap; old Vietnamese farmer filling up canteens for his whole company; making village chief dig up grave to check for hidden VC ammunition; watching Americans completely wipe out village; comments on Calley, commander at My Lai; climbing over a heavily booby trapped hill; Fullerton ordered to kill first person that moved, including civilian; Fullerton and other men in unit hit by booby traps; kept pistol handy to kill himself if captured;

VC gave bounty for head of a Recon man; description of way VC mutilated American bodies; checking himself for injuries; eye and arm injured; tried to comfort new kid in unit who'd been injured; 4 killed, 10 wounded, out of 21 men; Medevac couldn't pick them up from top of hill; getting to help; treatment of injuries in Danang; threatening life of Vietnamese patient; sent to Japan to try to save his remaining eyesight; infectious material in exploding booby traps; description of eye injury; entire face covered with scab, part of a spring embedded in his face; compares booby trap contents to grapeshot used in old canons; saw picture of booby trap so big it blew up a tank; setting different types of booby traps, set by kids; young kid who blew up Marine truck; Army told him he'd be totally blind for life; discharged in November; went to expert ophthalmologist; treatment he received for cataracts, etc.; electro-desiccation treatment of eye; used cortisone for eye treatment; atrocities, My Lai, torture; US rarely uses torture; Fullerton has seen pictures of Americans with severed heads; 5,000 people killed to protect VC infrastructure; Calley's description of hearing American being tortured; saw photos of tortured Americans at Fort Benning; opinion of Jane Fonda's anti-war sentiments; civil wars are traditionally nasty; shortcoming of anti-war movement; felt sorry for Vietnamese; total upheaval of traditional life, very rural, lack of roads; Vietnam is beautiful country; older Vietnamese wanted to be French, younger Vietnamese wanted to be American; Vietnamese rock bands at NCO club; communism; Westerners's vs. Vietnamese view on communism; effects of Communism on Vietnamese; water buffalo charging Americans because they don't like American smell, Americans shooting water buffalo; aerial views of Vietnam from helicopters; old foxholes used for booby traps; glad for sake of Vietnamese that war is over; resents the Vietnamese leaders; friends that died in Vietnam, legs blown off; feels lucky that he is alive despite loss of vision; things he can't do because of poor vision.

TAPES: 1 (T1389)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 30 mins

PAGES INDEX: 5 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None