

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: David K. Smith

COLLECTION: 4700.0984

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Samuel Magruder, Jr.

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATES: 2/4/74, 2/21/74

FOCUS DATES: Jan.1961-present; May 1968-May 1969

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1437, 1438

Father was Army officer, David raised on military bases in South; father's military service; David's education and ROTC; worked in field artillery and chemical corp; has masters degree in management; siblings; felt that going to Vietnam was a good move for his military career; Vietnam-specific training; his jobs within the First Infantry Division; rubber plantations in Vietnam; mission was to prevent NVA takeover of three provinces north of Saigon; impeded supply lines; worked with ARVNs; felt the ARVNs were dedicated and professional soldiers; differences in motivation between ARVN, NVA and US soldiers; ARVNs often left each other in the field; NVA saved their wounded, and tried to claim bodies of their dead; US soldiers worked hard; working in isolated area; montagnards; friction between montagnards and Vietnamese; description of typical day in the field; planning nighttime mortar attacks; logistical problems of the war, e.g. lack of port facilities; was never opposed to the Vietnam war; Army performed its mission well; ARVNs were well equipped; why US brought weapons home instead of leaving with ARVNs; served in Korea; his unit suffered high casualties; body counts; frustration of seeing enemy massed for attack just across border in Cambodia; got warm welcome when he returned from war; people in South weren't opposed to the war; bothered by the way war covered by television; inaccuracy of body counts; procedures for body counts; choosing bombing targets; the 1st Division's effectiveness at maintaining defense perimeters; his own motivation; comparative corruption of various Asian governments; unlikeliness of Vietnam ever having free elections; disillusioning to find a more current issue of Playboy in the enemy's bunker than was available in the PX; problems of low morale; rubber plantations owned by France and Belgium; beer and radios prohibited on fire bases; Stars and Stripes newspaper; apathy about the rest of the world; letters from home; fond of the Western Pacific countries; lived in Korea, Japan, Philippines; flora of Vietnam; defoliants; used base camp of rubber plantation; rubber plantation was still operating, run by young German man; tried not to shoot rubber trees, which would bleed rubber to death; specified strike zones; Vietnam broken into areas of operation; relations with manager of rubber plantation; rubber plantation had to pay taxes to VC and NVA; role of First Division in area; trying to overrun COSVN headquarters;

working in sparsely populated area; found the combat troops professional and highly motivated, but guys in rear more slovenly and likelier to use drugs; high opinion of most young officers; combat divisions engaged with the NVA had fewer personnel problems because they were too busy; combat units who tracked VC were more frustrated; problems of half-American children left behind; military waste; computer-assisted supply system cut down on waste and theft; views on religious morality and warfare; ideas about future of Asia; problems of splitting countries into north and south, e.g. Korea, Vietnam; predicts that Vietnam will not unify under communists; worked with ARVN and Air Force, but not Navy or Marines; government of larger villages; villages protected at night like armed camps; villagers forced to play all sides; programs designed to help South Vietnamese with education, agriculture; US should have backed Buddhists better; religious friction between Buddhists and Catholics; Vietnam government could do little to protect villagers from communists; rumors of Communist conspiracy to get American soldiers hooked on drugs; enjoyed Vietnam because he felt like it was his big chance to perform as a professional in his chosen profession; plans to stay in military for 20 years; why he didn't attend more advanced training; officers now more likely to question their superiors; could have used more soldiers in Vietnam; military needs to motivate good people to join; military equipment left in Vietnam.

TAPES: 2 (T1437, T1438)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 2 hours, 30 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 45 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None