

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Jackie Moreland

COLLECTION: 4700.0967

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Robert Talley

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATES: 2/11/75

FOCUS DATES: Dec. 1962-June 1966; Feb. 1963-Aug. 1965

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1414, Side A

Born in Texas, 1943; grew up in conservative town of Fort Smith, Arkansas, population 70,000; military tradition in family; grew up in Methodist church; received good education; city with highest church attendance in nation; strict conservative attitudes; Kennedy years while Moreland was in high school; ideas about stopping growth of Communism; believed America was always right; went to Southern Methodist College in 1962, injured in football, withdrew; chose to enter Marine Corp because it was disciplined and physically rigorous; boot camp in San Diego, beginning to train Marines for Vietnam; didn't know much about Vietnam yet, thought of it as setting of old Humphrey Bogart movies; assigned to intelligence field, went to intelligence school for training in information gathering, cartography, linguistics; first assignment was in Okinawa; realizing there was a war in Vietnam that the American people knew nothing about; Air America in Laos was CIA front; realizing that US was planning for a very big war there; real threat was China; key military targets; Vietnamese were our innocent victims of US conflict with China; China's drive to rule the world; at that point, Moreland still felt US was right; making strategic maps of Southeast Asia to prepare for battle; combat units getting sent over; men volunteered to go to Vietnam instead of serving time in brig; Australia and nationalist China also sent troops; US support of Ho Chi Minh during WWII, trouble afterwards when French wanted to resume their power; French defeat at Dien Bien Phu; farce for Americans to protect interests of French; US supported Catholics although Vietnam over 90% Buddhist; Buddhists as a natural barrier against Communist threat; had to get into Laos to make maps; barbarian tactics to gain support of people; purpose was to win minds of people to western ideals; complex history of Vietnam, they thought entirely differently; Gulf of Tonkin incident; build up without knowledge of American people; US was mainly concerned with China; many reports of atrocities were made up; Americans capturing North Vietnamese, rumors intelligence center started; not sure the war was necessary; empathy for the Vietnamese people; tragedy of a country that had been at war for 3,000 years; contact with other peoples in area, Thais, Laotians; Vietnamese culture compared to other surrounding cultures; Chinese forces had to keep machine guns on Vietnamese in combat to keep them from running, Vietnamese didn't want to fight; total lack of discipline in

Vietnamese troops; Thai people more cultured, loyal to their country; working out of Laos; Laos was training area for North Vietnamese forces; government of Laos; Americans allowed to work freely in Laos; Laotians were happy go lucky people; hill tribe people were good soldiers; Chinese nationalist forces in area; Vietnamese seemed unconcerned, wanted to be left alone; Buddhists protested war; sabotage techniques and fear tactics of Nationalist Chinese forces; restricted use of automatic weapons; US wanted Vietnamese to do the fighting, just backed up by US forces, but didn't work that way.

Tape 1414, Side B

Most Vietnamese supported communists; frustration of having to fight a war that you couldn't really fight in; trained that you should go in and annihilate if going in there at all; realizing the war would never end, couldn't hold territory in jungle warfare situation; not much antagonism toward Americans at first; most Vietnamese civilians didn't realize a huge war was coming; American influence on Asian black market in Laos; Laotian leader who ran prostitution ring; difficult to get supplies to American forces in Vietnam because items stolen; having to buy or steal US military supplies back from black market; poor distribution system for goods, corruption; it was a farce, not a war; no anti-war movement at home in early years; Moreland was brought up to do as he was told; by late 1964 people started to think it might be another Korea; no big drug scene in early years, at home or abroad; popularity of betel nut, drugs, with indigenous people; ceremonial use of drugs in religion; high morale in early stages, especially within Marines; no concept of protest early on; stationed in California, going back and forth constantly to set up training; job was to brief units who'd be going in to Vietnam; divisions of parachutists from the Marines being sent to Vietnam; counter-intelligence, subversive missions; many intelligence people killed; starting to question US role in Vietnam, was it worth the lives lost; decided US was wrong to be there; North Vietnam had a right to rule Vietnam; Ho Chi Minh was a worthy leader; American people should have had say in intervention; changes in US government resulting from war; he would have done whatever he was ordered to then, but now he'd rather go to jail than do some of the things he did.

Tape 1415, Side A

Moreland was with 3rd Marine division intelligence office, working with 9th division; full regimental unit could be loaded out and ready for combat in 3 hours; often just went to Thailand, then came back; combat units committed; cooperation with CIA and other intelligence gathering units; hierarchy of intelligence people; intelligence joining combat units in field; Chinese movements and installations; North Vietnam had mostly Chinese and Russian weaponry; China's role and strength in Southeast Asia, weaponry; China trained many troops in Laos, served same advisory role to North Vietnamese that US served for South Vietnam; Ho Chi Minh planned to retake South Vietnam from the beginning; US fear of domino theory wasn't warranted; captured documentation from North Vietnam; intelligence mission on river traffic, river landings; everything they did, especially topographic maps, was classified, top secret; involved in preparing and interpreting maps; counter intelligence work; propaganda portraying North Vietnamese as murderers, Americans as friendly; blurry divisions between good guys and bad guys; fear tactics of North Vietnamese, not much trouble getting support of people; most villagers supported VC more than ARVNs, really wanted to be left alone; kept confidential info secret until became widely known; just did what he was told to do, right or wrong; importance of

blind obedience in war; white god was killed at Dienbienphu, Vietnamese knew they'd eventually win; he had never heard of Vietnam before he was sent there; predicts more war for Southeast Asia, perhaps China will lead an all-Asia army; excellence of Indonesian army; predictions for future of Asia; US shouldn't commit more troops to anywhere again.

TAPES: 2 (T1414, T1415)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 45 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None