

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Robert L. Wooten

COLLECTION: 4700.0994

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Dale Jenkins

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATES: 12/6/75

FOCUS DATES: Jan. 6, 1963-May 26, 1970

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1450, Side A

Born in Kelly, LA, near Monroe; parents' occupations; ordinary country boy childhood; education; attended Southern University in Baton Rouge; involvement with ROTC; leadership training at Fort Benning; assigned to Korea in March, 1963; trained Korean soldiers; returned to States, responsible for training recruits in weaponry; sent to Vietnam right after marriage; reasons he was told for US being in Vietnam; arrival by ship; responsibilities in Vietnam; visiting beach; lived in villa in city of Vung Tau; describes typical workday; moved to Chu Lai, where they became logistics base for newly activated Americal division; built base in Chu Lai; recreational options at Chu Lai; career officer's course at Fort Benning; training not Vietnam-specific; advanced training; reassigned to lead mechanized infantry company at Fort Knox, KY; training a stateside combat unit; jungle training school in Panama; jungle survival skills; Wooten served as advisor during second tour in Vietnam; lived off local economy; traded with American units when possible; chronology of his movements after Panama; served as deputy senior advisor at Tan Tru; Vietnamese attitudes about being trained by Americans; suggesting tactics to Vietnamese; Wooten's Vietnamese interpreter who became his close friend; composition of Wooten's unit; low education level of rural Vietnamese; ARVN officers better educated than most Vietnamese he knew; limited contact with ARVNs; daily contact with civilians; regrets never learning Vietnamese; visiting with professionals in area.

Tape 1450, Side B

Division of hamlets, villages, districts; villages as gathering places; description of hamlets; hamlet, village and district chiefs; most chiefs lived in the province capital for their own safety; security of villages; VC appointed their own chiefs to each hamlet and village; danger Wooten faced in villages; program wherein Wooten rated hamlets for safety from VC; dangerous trips Wooten made alone to villages; VC tax collection system; intelligence work, hunting for VC sympathizers; several of Wooten's informants were assassinated; bribing the locals with soap and candy; tried to be friendly and respectful with civilians; getting out of tradition of honored guest eating the chicken head; drinking rice wine and tea with locals; learning local customs, e.g. eating with chopsticks; Vietnamese housing arrangements after marriage; Vietnamese weddings; wedding receptions; introducing Vietnamese to custom of dances; class differences in

Vietnamese society; visiting villages; getting warned by villager about VC in village; two forms of prostitution -- "girlfriend" hired by the month, or bar girls; VD risks; no prostitutes in area Wooten was in during his second tour; mamasans, bar owners, who pimped young girls; female companionship; Wooten didn't go with prostitutes; enlisted men paid less for prostitutes than officers paid; high cost of virgins; drug problems in Vietnam; officers had to set example, turn down all drugs; drinking alcohol; misuse of cough syrup; Army's attempts to curb drug use; no obvious divisions between drug users and non users; black market activity in cigarettes and camera equipment; attitude toward superior officers; opinion on enlisted men; race relations; racial incident when movie "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" shown on base.

Tape 1451, Side A

Favorable impression of the Vietnamese; substandard living conditions; Vietnamese adopted American materialism; discrepancy between farmer's earnings and American soldier's salary; drinking with Vietnamese men; war effort was unsuccessful; democracy wouldn't work there; enemy was more motivated to win than the South Vietnamese; mistake of relying on body counts as indicator of winning; US should have kept bombing Hanoi; Americans couldn't win hearts and minds of Vietnamese people; how the war changed him; corruption in government; opinion on Watergate.

TAPES: 2 (T1450, T1451)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 40 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages index

RESTRICTIONS: None