

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Michael Blakeney

COLLECTION: 4700.0937

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Dudley Meier, Jr.

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATES: 2/7/74, 1/24/75

FOCUS DATES: Feb. 1969-Feb. 1972, Mar. 21, 1970, Mar. 20, 1971

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1363

Blakeney was helicopter pilot in Vietnam; from career military family; upbringing and family; ROTC training and education at LSU; took advanced ROTC training to avoid being drafted before he finished school; hoped to wait out war in college; ROTC flight program; commissioned as 2nd lieutenant in Armor; basic training at Fort Knox, KY; helicopter school at Fort Walters, Texas; advanced helicopter training at Fort Rutger, Alabama.

Tape 1364

Served in Air Cavalry troop; three platoons into which Air Cavalry was divided; gunships, scouts, and slick platoon; Blakeney assigned to slick platoon; pilot pilots; mission to Quon Loi; formation flying; ash and trash missions; process of becoming aircraft commander; pressure to become a scout pilot; dangers of scout work; working at Cambodian border; Cambodian invasion; boastful reputation of 1st Cavalry unit; description of battle at Cambodian border, as seen from air; Blakeney's decision to become a scout; people who volunteered to become scout pilots; advantages of being a scout; Blakeney became scout, shot his nerves, nicknamed "Shaky"; ten months as scout pilot; duty with the 25th Aviation company; no contact with Vietnamese people while serving as scout; piloting a Vietnamese warlord who killed anyone he wanted; [SIDE B] difficulty of crossing rice paddies on foot; Viet Cong bunkers built of mud; piloting Vietnamese warlord; booby traps; similarities between terrain of Vietnam and Louisiana; hooch maids, old Vietnamese women who cleaned their quarters; Vietnamese attitudes toward Americans; Viet Cong murdering South Vietnamese during night; pro-communist sentiment of many poor people; Blakeney's empathy for Vietnamese; American efforts were fruitless; prostitution as an institution created for American soldiers; staggering scale of drugs, prostitution, black market activities; soldiers who functioned while on heroin; heroin was drug of choice; Army encouraged soldiers to drink; prevalence of prostitutes; prostitutes on front lines in Quon Loi; black market trade; military payment certificates; spread of secret information in Vietnam; Blakeney's service as piaster control officer; contact with Air America and attitudes toward them; culture shock of being in Vietnam, then returning to US; bravery and sacrifice of men in Vietnam; hope that Vietnam would

be the US's last war; worries about US getting involved with Middle East.

Tape 1365

Raised in Army family; education of parents; Blakeney's education; father's work in Vietnam in early 1960s; participation in ROTC; didn't want to go to Vietnam; trouble in French Indochina ever since WWII Japanese invasion; Tet invasion; training as Armor officer at Fort Knox, KY; learning about tank units; flight training at LSU; friend blown up in tank; Israeli and Egyptian officers training at Fort Knox; Vietnam terrain ill-suited for tank war; nasty weapons of Americans; dangers of flying helicopters; other dangerous occupations; camaraderie between soldiers in flight school; learning to fly helicopters; Vietnam simulation in Alabama; arrival in Vietnam; adapting to Vietnam; assignment to unit that moved troops and supplies; scout platoon; grenades they used; tear gas; rift between Army and Air Force; close fighting in Vietnam; inefficiency of Air Force approach; Army aviation's relation to ground troops; light observation helicopters; reconnaissance missions; color coded platoons; special skills needed to operate in Vietnam jungles; tracking the enemy; flying missions at first light and last light; patience of VC; strategy of VC.

Tape 1366

Why Blakeney decided to become a scout pilot; assignment to slick unit; new pilots paired with experienced aircraft commanders; responsibilities of crew chiefs; duties of aircraft commanders; alcoholism among aircraft commanders; had to be unanimously voted into position of aircraft commander; learning to fly in formation; pressure on Blakeney to become a scout; lots of crazies volunteered to become scouts; flying into Cambodia during invasion; getting shot at in Cambodia; decision to become a scout; traits of scout pilots; scout training; purpose of being a scout; chasing enemy, trying to make them mad; visual reconnaissance missions; weapons; distinct smell of gangrene; Vietnamese were experts in camouflage; Vietnamese man offering a naked woman to soldiers as peace offering; mission in Quon Loi.

TAPES: 4 (T1363, T1364, T1365, T1366)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 4 hours

PAGES INDEX: 9 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None