

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Robert J. Theriot

COLLECTION: 4700.0986

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Robert Talley

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATES: 12/4/74

FOCUS DATES: 2/69-10/72

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1440, Side A

From New Iberia, LA; from family of eight children; attended Catholic schools, graduated high school in 1968; always fascinated by war, especially Civil War and WWII; interest in Vietnam; planned to enlist in Navy; spent summer after graduation in Florida, working for construction company; entered USL, studied to be math teacher; lost interest in math, wanted to join Navy; military service in family; basic training in San Diego; difficulty of boot camp; naval air facility in New Iberia; jet that was donated to city of New Iberia; declining popularity of military in New Iberia; Theriot's decision to join military; feelings on going to Vietnam; expectations when joining Navy, anticipated lots of travel; spent most of his time on west coast; meeting with recruiter in New Iberia, induction in New Orleans; being a new recruit; recruit training, primary and advanced; doing laundry by Navy regulations, tying up laundry to dry with correct knots; punishments for knots tied incorrectly; corrections center, also known as "4050 Camp"; Marine recruits who jumped fence, tried to escape at night; four departments on Navy ship; preparing for graduation from boot camp; mess cooking; going to destroyer in Long Beach, California; schools his classmates attended; maintenance work on ship; keeping watch while at sea; other chores on ship; plotting other ships on radar; maneuvers off shore from San Diego; Theriot seasick at first; short maneuvers; journey to Vietnam via Hawaii; trouble with ship, almost ran into memorial; 35 days in Gulf of Tonkin; stayed on ship along California coast for six or seven months; in early 1971, requested transfer; escort ships; ceremony for ship when commissioned; "plank owners," people on ship when first built; Navy continues tradition of plank owners.

Tape 1440, Side B

Spent six months in Gulf of Tonkin, mostly on destroyer escort; primary duty was to protect aircraft carrier; sent to Sea of Japan, near Korea; Russian MIGs passed over frequently; drills aboard ship; winning awards, medals, certificates for various expeditions in Southeast Asia; decided to volunteer for service on the ground in Vietnam; military needed people with aptitude for foreign languages, Theriot had high score on aptitude test; two groups of Navy personnel in Vietnam: support and advisory, roles of each; Theriot sent to Cam Ranh Bay; booby traps; could swim in bay, but suspected booby traps in rocks; security usually tight; riding jeep or pickup truck around surrounding areas; couldn't distinguish between North and South Vietnamese;

Vietnamese civilians who cared for barracks, did laundry; Catholic Vietnamese woman who cleaned his barracks; impressions of Vietnamese people; availability of television, radio; Vietnamese astounded by amenities Americans brought, often stole them; money changing; prevalence of drugs; Vietnamization process; spacious quarters in barracks; cleaning woman delivered marijuana to men in barracks; intermittent drug testing; people sent to drug rehabilitation center; prostitution at Cam Ranh Ville; soldiers brought "dates" to club on base; venereal disease; prevalence of prostitution; Vietnamization; Naval communications station; returning to US, flew back to San Francisco; returned to New Iberia, traveled through Texas selling plastic plants; enrolled in LSU in Spring, 1973; legacy of his Vietnam experience; remembers Vietnamese as thieves; cutting trees back from road so VC couldn't hide; worries about spread of communism; Theriot's uncle and aunt in California who worked at Naval Weapons Center.

TAPES: 1 (T1440)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 30 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 3 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None