

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: David LeBlanc

COLLECTION: 4700.0960

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: Dudley Meier, Jr.

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/22/76

FOCUS DATES: 1966-1970

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1402, Side A

Grew up in Hammond, LA; from middle class home; father was professor at Southeastern; involvement in sports; friction with his parents during high school; only studied enough to be eligible for sports; father suggested he join service; choosing which branch of service to join; enlisted in Marine Corps; trip to boot camp; arriving at boot camp in San Diego; terrifying commanding officers who met them at airport; waiting for assignment to platoon; boot camp, learning to get up early and follow orders; mental strain of boot camp; easier to brainwash young people; bad ass attitude of Marines; arrival in Vietnam; swallowed his chaw during ambush, spent his first fire fight vomiting in a ditch; worries during boot camp; drill instructors; pride in surviving boot camp; what became of recruits who were duds; psychological changes during boot camp; volunteered to be platoon leader, probably biggest mistake of his life; got in trouble every time of his men screwed up; eager to finish boot camp so he could be a real Marine; not allowed to send or receive mail during boot camp, hunger for mail; mail call was the most important time of the day; got married just before he went to Vietnam, divorced now; failed marriage, reasons why; length of service in Vietnam; went to Vietnam twice, was in California during interval between trips; training, war games in California; surprise at being sent back to Vietnam; got sent back on an eight hour alert; arrived during the Tet Offensive; what military intelligence knew about Tet Offensive before it happened; Vietnam-specific training; went to communications school; had John Wayne visions; training in ambush, guerilla warfare; war games in Brazil at an air force base, jump school; training helped build his confidence a lot for the war; part of upper crust of Marine Corps; when he got to Vietnam, started questioning what they were doing; build up in Vietnam, mid to late 60s; thinks 1968-70 were worst years of the war; how Marine Corp breaks you by degradation; getting beaten with broom sticks during training; attacked a commanding officer, ensuing trouble; sweat box; decided if it got that bad again, he'd blow his own brains out; considered deserting, vanishing; sadistic schools for Marines they heard about; people messed up by training; LeBlanc still bitter, still wants to kill the man who broke his nose; some of this training inflicted on guys who'd been in for a few years already; stationed in Dong Tam in Vietnam delta; Navy riverine forces; anti-aircraft cannons shot from river boats; river boats were very effective; whole war was built around helicopters; getting picked up by Cobras; frustrating because they couldn't follow enemy into Laos or

Cambodia; by 1968, US forces illegally crossing into Cambodia and Laos; their job was to engage NVA, harass them, move on; length of missions; interviewer talks about missions of his own commanding officer; all you think about is day to day survival.

Tape 1402, Side B

Mission in 1968 blowing up a North Vietnamese plant; two Navy Seals who were excellent at taking out sentries; close call escaping from mission; aggravation of lack of front lines, frustration of territory won being reclaimed by enemy; criticism of US strategy in Vietnam; losing faith in military, becoming bitter; awards ceremony where officers who weren't even there got awards; Vietnam was a ladder for the lifers to get a little further ahead; LeBlanc had general duty, supporting river outfit; fire fights, counting bodies; majority of his time in Vietnam was combat duty; mostly Recon, patrol, night ambushes, occasional sniper duty; LeBlanc didn't care for the M-16, it always jammed; Zippo boat, a floating napalm machine that spat flames, allegedly had range of 500 yards; weapons with eight inch steel jacket bullets, every fifth shell was an explosive; Phantoms versus gunships; Air Force was useless; saw an air fight between a MIG and a Phantom in 1968; heat-seeking weapon that would chase helicopters; Navy air support was useless; efficiency of gun ship pilots; impressions of Vietnamese people; ARVNs inferior to North Vietnamese soldiers; corruption in South Vietnamese government; never got close to ARVN soldiers; preferred the rural people; wants to visit Vietnam again; beauty of Vietnam; most Vietnamese didn't seem concerned with anything but getting a good meal; LeBlanc reached a point where he didn't care what the hell happened to them; black market trade in cigarettes; corruption, people burying helicopters, stealing jeeps; lots of theft of military equipment; guys who could get you anything you wanted; drug use; prostitution; GIs who worked as pimps; Leblanc didn't want to pay for sex, would rather buy her groceries and things; R&R was fun; went AWOL for ten days in Australia because he enjoyed R&R so much; everybody liked Australia because it was like being at home; military made him grow up, but could have done without it; things that remind him of Vietnam, flashbacks; wishes that he'd joined Air Force or Navy instead; veterans who couldn't readjust to US; feels like after effects are hitting him now; started pre-med, dropped out; was dating a girl, got serious, then itched to get away; went to Texas and raised horses for two years; drank five bottles of wine per day for a while; felt guilty because the public was so against Vietnam veterans; problems with dating a Catholic high society girl; hardly said goodbye to her, took off to Texas; returned to LSU to study sociology; doesn't want to do manual labor for life, but is unsure what to do; thinks the military might be why he can't get his shit together; right now is trying to find peace of mind within himself, is scared; interest in labor relations in industry; theories on psychology of workers, conformity; LeBlanc catches himself conforming in the workplace; LeBlanc doesn't like bosses to stand over and watch him; got in trouble for beating up a Navy officer.

TAPES: 1 (T1402)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 30 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None