

Leadership Excellence and the Vietnam War:  
The Contribution of MTSU ROTC to Past Conflicts

Jake A. West

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the University Honors College

Fall 2016

Leadership Excellence and the Vietnam War:  
The Contribution of MTSU ROTC to Past Conflicts

By:

Jake A. West

APPROVED:

---

Dr. Hilary Miller, Director  
Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans  
and Military Family Center  
Project Advisor

---

LTC Jackie McDowell  
Professor of Military Science, ROTC

---

Dr. Roger Heinrich, Professor  
Electronic Media Communications  
Honors Council Representative

---

Dr. John Vile, Dean  
University Honors College

**OR**

Dr. Philip E. Phillips, Associate Dean  
University Honors College

**Abstract**

This thesis is an oral history of ROTC graduates from MTSU who were commissioned and served during the Vietnam War. The researched stories of these Veterans will be used to further the development of ROTC Cadets in leadership and professionalism. Specifically, this thesis investigates the command positions held by commissioned officers to correlate their direct relationship of service in the Vietnam War and the lessons taught during their time in ROTC. This University will have the unique privilege of seeing the role it has played in the history of an American war and understand the sacrifices its alumni have made. The stories shared present an opportunity to hear the untold experiences of war and how ROTC has shaped their values and beliefs. It is important to know the life experiences of officers during that time, but it is just as significant to understand the struggles they currently face as a veteran. This thesis delves into the history and current condition of MTSU veterans in relation to the Vietnam War.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	6
Methodology.....	7
Literature Review.....	7
Conclusion.....	10
Interview Transcripts.....	11
References.....	21
Appendix A.....	23
Appendix B.....	25
Appendix C.....	28

Leadership Excellence and the Vietnam War:  
The Contribution of MTSU ROTC to Past Conflicts

With President Woodrow Wilson's signature on the National Defense Act of 1916, the Army's Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) was offered on college campuses across the country. However, long before the Act higher education institutions already felt the need for this type of training. For instance, in 1819, before a federally funded officer-training program was created, Captain Alden Partridge established the American Literary Scientific and Military Academy for military instruction. This strategic academy originated the combination of civilian and military studies to produce more educated and effective citizen soldiers. It resulted in the establishment of Norwich University in Vermont ("History of Army ROTC," n.d.).

The institution of the military draft from 1960-1973 dramatically affected the role of ROTC programs on college campuses. At the time of the Vietnam War, draft-age men faced many possible paths to enter the Selective Service. They could either be drafted to enlistment and be told how to serve, choose their branch of service in ROTC, or seek to opt out of service as a conscientious objector. Over 2.2 million draft-age men served in the Vietnam War, and many received a commission through college ROTC programs.

According to Cadet Command, ROTC totals 275 programs that enroll more than 30,000 students. It produces over 70 percent of the second lieutenants that join the active Army, the Army National Guard, and the U.S. Army Reserve. Army ROTC is the largest officer-producing organization with the American military, having commissioned more

than half a million second lieutenants since its inception ("History of Army ROTC," n.d.).

The Middle Tennessee State University Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) is directly responsible for the annual training of over 64 Cadets with the goal of developing them for their future roles as second lieutenants. This four-year program consists of intense evaluations of cadet leadership and physical fitness, while incorporating an academic component to create successful future leaders of soldiers. One key area of importance for cadets is the understanding of military history as it relates to their roles as Platoon Leaders. In order to expand vital education for Cadets, this thesis will investigate the experiences of commissioned officers during the Vietnam War specifically from our own ranks: the MTSU ROTC program. 14 General Officers have started their careers as MTSU Cadets while many more have gone on to have successful officership; MTSU has commissioned some of the finest officers to serve in the United States Army. Exploring their command roles during their time of service will provide examples of leadership current Cadets can use to mold their future careers.

### **Definition of Terms**

- Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) – College based, 4-year officer training program to commission officers into the military.
- Vietnam War – Conflict that took place from 1964-1975 in which United States forces were sent to engage enemy forces in the country of Vietnam.
- Cadet – A trainee contracted to an ROTC program with intent to serve in the armed forces.

### **Methodology**

Working closely with the ROTC department and the MTSU Charlie and Hazel Daniel Veterans and Military Family Center, I compiled a qualitative historical analysis of three Vietnam-era graduates from the MTSU ROTC program. This data was acquired by engaging in a facilitated conversation with the selected graduates. These stories were analyzed and transcribed for an accurate disruption of the experiences they shared. This thesis is a compilation of stories of MTSU Veterans and will be used in the ROTC program learning objectives.

### **Literature Review**

The Vietnam War was a trying time for soldiers and officers alike, where the challenges facing American forces were both emotional and physical. The leadership of officers during this time directly affected the success of unit operations. It is the hypothesis of this thesis that due to the caliber of officers commissioned during the time of the Vietnam War, MTSU has had a positive benefit to the command and subordinate units whom they served alongside. These lessons of quality leadership will be used to enforce the necessary skills needed for Cadets to lead and maneuver their future units. Tracking MTSU's own alumni and their contribution to the armed forces will create a better understanding of the efficacy this university has had in the far reaches of the world.

Many reports depict Army junior officers as incompetent, with poor leadership abilities during the Vietnam War. A review of Not a Gentleman's War supports this theory by saying, "Much of the literature of the Vietnam War treats junior officers with disdain. They are often portrayed as inadequately trained nighty-day wonders whose poor leadership and tendency to look the other way when their soldiers committed atrocities

greatly contributed to Americas defeat” (Sherwood, 2010, p. 246). Based on the information gathered for this thesis, it would seem that quote is inaccurate. The veterans interviewed shared stories of being bold leaders that made effective decisions for mission success.

As a young Infantry Lieutenant, Paul Hutchins faced some of the most critical and dangerous situations that maneuver units experienced. His ability to lead his platoon in life threatening conditions came from the lessons taught from training and prior experiences. Mr. Hutchins shared stories of patrol through An Khe to clear the area for the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. His tactical and technical proficiency is attributed to his knowledge and competence of effectively leading his solders in battle (P. Hutchins, personal communication, October 18, 2016).

The relationship between an officer and his or her subordinate soldiers is instrumental in the unit’s ability to conduct operations according to standard. A report in “Measurement of Group Cohesion in U.S. Army Units” sheds light on the roles of unit relationships; “In a later analysis, Shils (1950), after examining data obtained from the Army Reserve Branch, concluded that good primary-group relationships – soldiers confidence in the officer’s capacity to guide, protect, initiate, and serve as a model – resulted in high combat morale in the American soldier during World War II” (Griffith, 1988, p. 152). The same sense of positive morale that was portrayed by unit leaders during WWII is embedded in the stories and experiences of ROTC graduates as they served during Vietnam.

The interviewees shared their perspective of unit morale and the role it plays in mission success. Lieutenants are directly responsible for the condition of the soldiers

assigned to them. Paul Womack shared a story for this thesis where his morale was compromised by negative events. Sometimes, we cannot control the things we experience, but we do control how we let those experiences influence our morale. Mr. Womack shared that in even the difficult times we face, it is our duty to be morally resilient and not be consumed by the darkness of negativity. Mr. Womack's choice of attitude had a direct result on his team's ability to continue to accomplish the mission and be successful in future operations (P. Womack, personal communication, October 07, 2016).

The lessons the Vietnam War can teach to current military professionals can shape the future of their careers. Browler writes that; "given the long shadow of Vietnam, and the truths we supposedly learned from our devastating experienced there, the time is right for the compelling interpretations of our actions during and after the war" (1999, p. 239). In order to improve the future, we must understand the past; lessons of the Vietnam War can ensure young junior officers have more information and practical experience so they can lead with confidence.

Joe Roberson's worldview was shaped by his service in Vietnam. His experiences have developed into elucidations of what Vietnam represented in the geopolitical realm. It is difficult to fully understand viewpoints until individuals are removed from that environment and time has passed for truthful reflections. Mr. Roberson has spent time reflecting on his accounts during the war in Vietnam. He states that sometimes the mistake of military involvement occurs, but the lessons taught from that can be beneficial to the success of future efforts (J. Roberson, personal communication, October 11, 2016). We must never discredit the brave and daring sacrifices of those who have served our

country, but rather use their interpretations to develop new practices and policies that reflect what has been learned.

### **Conclusion**

To gain a fuller understanding of the contributions this university has made to our Nation's wars, the stories of its alumni's sacrifices must be shared. The interviews embedded in this thesis contain common themes of philosophies and stories that will guide future cadets path to more successful careers. It is through difficult times that the most beneficial lessons of life emerge. Paul Womack, Joe Roberson, and Paul Hutchins have, once more, demonstrated genuine benevolence to those who follow in their footsteps. This thesis has confirmed that the Army's Reserve Officer Training Corps produces quality officers that lead their soldiers effectively; the stories shared are a testament to that hypothesis. Vietnam Veterans possess perspectives that are unique to their experiences and involvements. It is our duty to engage in meaningful conversations that share their stories of strength and resiliency.

### Interview Transcriptions

**Interviewee:** Paul Womack

**Interviewer:** Jake A. West

**Date of Recording:** October 07, 2016

**Recording Format:** The devices used were Evernote Recording software on a MacBook Pro, as well as, an iPhone 6 voice recorder. No video recordings were made.

**Recording Length:** 01:06:28

**Location:** This interview was recorded at the residence of Paul Womack in Chattanooga, TN.

Time/Counter	Topic
00:00:37	Mr. Womack expressing his understanding of this thesis and “wanting to share his story.”
00:01:29	Graduating high school in 1964 after being a native of Chattanooga, TN while his father worked for the railroad.
00:01:37	Discussed a family tradition and expectation of attending MTSU, rather MTSC at that time. This led to his decision to attend college.
00:02:07	ROTC was a requirement during the first two years of college and unless “physically unable” you were in the program.
00:03:01	There was a heavy veteran population of campus and during Mr. Womack’s early years there was not a lot of anti-war sentiment.
00:04:20	Mr. Womack spoke of LTC Critsburg and his mentorship to encourage him to stay in ROTC and continue to serving.
00:05:50	There has always been a tradition of service date back from WWII to the Civil War in the Confederate Army. This created an ethic of “Doing your Duty.”
00:08:01	Joining ROTC, in lieu of enlistment, became a practical decision based upon the expectation to attend college and right to choose ones own path.
00:10:13	The instructors at the time were very knowledgeable about the proper environments to effectively train Cadets. Most had an understanding of where they would deploy after commissioning and conducted exercises to prepare them for those scenarios.
00:10:41	Most Cadre were Vietnam veterans themselves and “did the best

	they could” to train Cadets in the atmosphere they would quickly be apart of in Vietnam.
00:12:09	Spoke of Major Disbukes and LTC Critsburg as being the influential cadre instructors that mentored him the most during his time in ROTC.
00:12:56	Mr. Womack commissioned Active Duty in the Military Intelligence Branch.
00:14:29	ROTC did a “well enough job” at preparing him to go to training schools, but “preparation for [his] first duty station was almost impossible.”
00:16:13	Spent 9 month at Vietnamese Language school at Fort Bliss, TX.
00:17:09	After schooling, Mr. Womack deployed to Vietnam without reporting to a unit or duty station. The first time he stood in front of his unit was down range in country.
00:17:45	Posted in the 25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Long Bihn, Vietnam. He was selected to serve in the Interrogation Section, as an Interrogation Team Leader.
00:19:51	Cu Chi Base Camp was where the Division HQ was located. This gave little interaction with the indigenous population other than the civilian workers. Most of his interaction was with American soldiers.
00:21:53	The equipment issued was “adequate” at the time and reliable.
00:24:37	Mr. Womack discussed the units moral and the difficulty of seeing the progress American forces made. In April of 1970, he interrogated a Vietnamese soldier who had been fighting since the 1930s. Mr. Womack asked, “How do you expect to defeat this army that I represent?” The soldier simply replied, “We can wait longer than you can.”
00:25:38	It was at that point Mr. Womack realized America was fighting an unwinnable war.
00:27:30	One interrogation took place at an ARVN Camp during the Cambodian invasion. He reported to the Assistant Division commander that gave specific instructions to “not interfere with anything seen or observed. Do the interrogation and get out.” Mr. Womack “was horrified by the brutality [he] saw.” That was the point where his moral was negatively impacted the most.
00:28:47	It was hard to say whether the brutalization of interrogations was more common than not. “War is a brutal enterprise and the is no way around it; it is not neat.”
00:29:25	Some interrogation took place in 12 <sup>th</sup> EVAC Hospital and the emergency room was full of sights where bullets and metal fragments did terrible things to soldiers.
00:30:09	He began to wonder, “what was this about?” It was the Geopolitical climate that influenced that mentality. The Army

	doesn't start wars, the civilian population does and the Army is tasked out to fight them.
00:31:01	One of Mr. Womack's classmates from MTSU and Fraternity brothers was killed during Vietnam.
00:32:01	He always viewed the Vietnamese as individual people and would never "dehumanize" them by using racial slurs.
00:32:26	These were human beings that had families just like the American soldiers fighting.
00:33:27	There was always a "power imbalance" during the interrogations. Sometimes prisoners were given rewards such as, Coke Cola or candy bars, but they always had an understanding of "who was in charge."
00:34:40	His viewpoint of the Vietnamese prisoners never changed throughout the duration of the war.
00:35:20	This viewpoint of enemy soldiers remained consistent even through Desert Storm and his interaction with the enemy there.
00:35:43	Mr. Womack talks about how "circumstances can make you hard" and could find himself drifting toward a darker mentality.
00:37:02	He has not spoken to anyone he has served with in Vietnam since.
00:37:35	"Just because you're in a crazy environment, doesn't mean you have to go crazy." It is very difficult to maintain that mentality.
00:38:50	When you are an officer in whatever respective branch, you need to be the most technically proficient officer you can be. Know weapon systems and communication systems, but you have to know your own heart and soul. "If you find yourself drifting to the dark side, go find the chaplain and say you're losing your focus."
00:39:35	The one thing he always remembered from ROTC is that you must always know your limits. If you push beyond your limits you will get someone killed, and maybe yourself killed.
00:40:23	Mr. Womack talked about respect for the enemy and their humanity. They are just as committed as you are and it is a terrible environment that pits the two against each other.
00:42:04	It is important that Mr. Womack is not remembered as a "professional veteran." He states, "Life is long, but my life is more than Vietnam."
00:44:50	He expresses no regret of being a compassionate Interrogator. Mr. Womack would like to think that his methods of interrogation are more effective and promising.
00:48:12	Coming home from Vietnam was hard. Mr. Womack talks about a "great need to belong" and coming home from war without a community to belong to was difficult. Go to war as an individual and coming home as an individual left "a great sense of isolation

	that was powerful.”
00:49:53	In 1988, Mr. Womack rejoined the Army as a Chaplain giving him the community he had been longing for and was very important.
00:52:08	Mr. Womack decided to reenter the Army hoping he had something to offer and not wanting to waste the experiences he could share. “I went back in to be useful.”
00:54:50	Mr. Womack’s experiences have created a viewpoint of the world that is uniquely related to his time in service.
00:58:29	The Army is a human institution and it has taken care of him along the way. “I have benefited from the system.”
01:00:22	One of the things that Mr. Womack has cried with him is the guilt of always wondering if he could’ve done more. “All three wars have affected me.”
01:04:26	Closing Words – National Policy is not always right and you may find yourself in a situation where you may defend a policy that you may know is wrong, but at least you know it’s wrong. That may minimize some of the arrogance of power. You can be a patriot and know that your county is wrong, it is tough but always get a second opinion.
<b>END</b>	

**Interviewee:** Joe Roberson

**Interviewer:** Jake A. West

**Date of Recording:** October 11, 2016

**Recording Format:** The devices used were Evernote Recording software on a MacBook Pro, as well as, an iPhone 6 voice recorder. No video recordings were made.

**Recording Length:** 00:53:08

**Location:** This interview was recorded at the Spring Hill Community Library in Spring Hill, TN.

<b>Time/Counter</b>	<b>Topic</b>
00:00:54	Mr. Roberson begins with discussing his early life in Murray Co. He began at an early age studying Spanish in grade school that was instrumental to his military career.
00:02:20	His passion grew for the Spanish language, which he continued to study at MTSU. Two different times, his tours of duty lead him to Columbia South America to serve as a translator.
00:03:25	In Fort Gulick, School of the Americas, he was selected to serve as a guide for those that attended the school. It was clear Spanish was a major influence in his career path.
00:04:15	Mr. Roberson was posted at Long Binh, Vietnam from 1969-1970.
00:06:00	Mr. Roberson's uncle, after whom he was named, served in the Battle of the Bulge in WWII where he was captured as a POW.
00:06:36	His only exposure to military life growing up was seeing Columbia Military Academy cadets in the community.
00:07:31	Entering college, Mr. Roberson mainly took ROTC for the first two years to supplement his PE credit. He began to appreciate what the program stood for and its relevance to the Vietnam war.
00:08:23	He was during his time in ROTC and wanted to spend more time at school. Mr. Roberson earned his masters degree following his commissioning which gave him an extra year at MTSU.
00:10:18	Mr. Roberson started schooling at Memphis State, but decided to transfer to MTSU in order to move closer to home and join his friends who were attending as well.
00:11:12	There were excellent instructors in ROTC, which stemmed from their prior experience in Vietnam. "That adds a whole new dimension of serious approach and reality to training."
00:12:47	Even though most of the Cadre had served in Vietnam, most

	tactics that were taught were from the WWII era. "The training was very general and still a European scenario."
00:13:44	Mr. Roberson commissioned Active Duty in the Quartermaster Branch. Because the unit he was assigned to required a combat arms branch, Mr. Roberson re-boarded into the Armor Branch.
00:15:01	His first duty assignment was Fort Bliss, TX where he was a staff officer before deploying to Vietnam.
00:15:45	The earlier units who deployed to Vietnam were able to train with their Platoons prior to arriving in country. Mr. Roberson was not so lucky and deployed to Vietnam individually.
00:15:53	This made his time in Vietnam more difficult and harder to adjust. "People are trained for one thing, but when the flag goes up there is a great need for something else."
00:16:27	His time in ROTC helped him prepare for the basics and fundamentals, which can be applied anywhere in whatever roll you might play. Organization structure, taught in ROTC, gave him the ability to adapt to his initial roll in Vietnam.
00:18:30	Adjusting to the culture and environment in Vietnam was near impossible. "I wanna go back to the World, it was such a completely different foreign culture to us."
00:19:40	Mr. Roberson was first assigned to the S-3 Staff Section in Long Bihn Post. He served as the perimeter officer patrolling the wire.
00:21:12	The clothing and equipment were adequate for the conditions that his unit operated. Because of the size of the post, they had a functional Mess Section for dining.
00:23:44	The equipment was never in bad enough condition that altered mission success.
00:24:28	Mr. Roberson discusses his feeling, which has been developed over the years that the U.S. shouldn't have been in any war after WWII.
00:26:07	During Vietnam, you were so tied up in what was going on and your respective duties, that you didn't pay attention to whether or not it was a meaningful war.
00:27:02	Morale at Long Bihn was "at least good enough." When bad events occurred you could see a downward shift in morale.
00:29:13	Being a large installation, they were more isolated attacks beyond the wire. Mortar rounds became a regular occurrence, but not any ground attacks from a recognizable force.
00:30:14	Mr. Roberson didn't have a lot of interaction with the Vietnamese and developing a perception of them as individuals was difficult.
00:32:43	Coming home from Vietnam was not easy. "We pretty much hid." For a long time Vietnam Veterans never shared stories of their time in service.

00:33:34	“It was that war that supposedly we lost and it’s only been the last couple of years that Vietnam veterans are publicly saying I did my thing for my country.” We really didn’t come home as winners like they did from WWII.
00:33:45	“No one ever fought better than Vietnam Soldiers.” There was never any psychological rest.
00:35:47	It made dealing with the psychology of Vietnam that much more difficult by not being appreciated.
00:36:35	“I am so proud of my service and wouldn’t change a thing.” Mr. Roberson served a total of 30 years in the Army retiring as a Colonel.
00:37:09	He stayed in the military after Vietnam because of the experiences it gave and being with outstanding people. “The military was the highest and most recognized value to citizens.”
00:39:31	Mr. Roberson’s military career gave him a life long philosophy of leadership that can be attributed to the memories made as early as Vietnam.
00:40:03	Being to so many countries, it has broadened a worldview that can be measured against all the places and cultures experienced. “You don’t know the real world I’ve seen.”
00:41:08	The emotional difficulties faced from Vietnam have become less bearing over the years. Only in the last couple of years did Vietnam veterans reconnect and share their stories. “There have been some pleasant things to come from that, and not so pleasant things.”
00:47:50	Closing Words – As individuals, Vietnams soldiers did as well as anyone else ever did. No one ever fought harder and under more harsh conditions, it was a very unforgiving environment. Regardless of the perception of the overall conflict, it wasn’t our fault. The Vietnam soldier fought as hard and valiantly with character as anybody ever fought for this Country.
<b>END</b>	

**Interviewee:** Paul D. Hutchins

**Interviewer:** Jake A. West

**Date of Recording:** October 18, 2016

**Recording Format:** The devices used were Evernote Recording software on a MacBook Pro, as well as, an iPhone 6 voice recorder. No video recordings were made.

**Recording Length:** 00:47:45

**Location:** This interview was recorded at Just Love Coffee in Murfreesboro, TN.

Time/Counter	Topic
00:00:47	Born in Coffee Co., Mr. Hutchins was raised in Manchester, TN all his life. Being so close to home, MTSU seemed like the best viable option for college.
00:01:27	Mr. Hutchins graduated in 1964 with a degree in technology with a minor in education. ROTC commission as Active Duty Infantry.
00:01:53	His first assignment was Fort Campbell, KY to the 101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. In the summer of 1964, he reported to Fort Benning, GA to attend Infantry Officer School.
00:02:56	As a Platoon Leader for 2 <sup>nd</sup> PLT/A Co/2 <sup>nd</sup> 3-27 IN, Vietnam was becoming a more prominent war. In 1965, he deployed with the ADVON party to represent 1 <sup>st</sup> BDE.
00:04:41	They had a month to prepare the Brigade site before the remainder of the unit deployed to Vietnam.
00:05:29	There was no exposure to military life early on, except for two uncles with prior military service in the Marine Corps and Navy.
00:06:02	During his first tour, they were taking graduates from their respective schools and assigning them back as Cadre instructors.
00:06:40	In the summer of 1966, Mr. Hutchins returned to MTSU to serve as an ROTC instructor until 1968. He taught the Freshman class.
00:07:11	During that time, he created the "Forrest Raiders" which is still prevalent to our program today as an elite Cadet Platoon.
00:08:50	As his last duty assignment, Mr. Hutchins served at Fort Bragg, NC with the 5 <sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group until February 1970.
00:09:30	The desire to serve in the military came from the first two-year requirement in ROTC. "LTC Critsburg really impressed upon me to continue my service in ROTC."
00:10:56	Training in the advance program had increasing responsibility and leadership. "The instructors were good examples of Army officers."

00:12:35	John McConaughey was an instructor who made a tremendous impact on Mr. Hutchins development as a cadet and future officer.
00:13:14	“ROTC did what they could do to prepare me for military service, but nothing prepares you for taking the leadership of men as a Platoon Leader.”
00:14:03	After 6 months of being at Fort Campbell, his unit deployed to Vietnam. “The platoon had real strong NCO base that prepared to unit for deployment.”
00:15:20	It was not too difficult to adapt to the culture of Vietnam. Initially he was placed in Southwest of Cam Ranh Bay that gave the unit time to adjust during deployment.
00:16:17	They set up a firebase that was large enough to hold Battalion staff and a HQ Company with rifle platoons patrolling the area.
00:18:00	First arriving to Vietnam, the weapons and equipment were not sufficient. The Army was not prepared for the environmental conditions. “It took a couple of months for the Army to get caught up and issue the right equipment for Vietnam.” Eventually, they had everything needed to fight.
00:19:23	Morale was very important to mission success. Coming to Vietnam as a unit helped with operating as a cohesive force. “When you’ve been with people you know them, and you know how they act and what they’re gonna do.”
00:20:42	In 1968 on his second tour, personnel began to turn over and people began to come and go. Morale was not as strong.
00:22:31	When Mr. Roberson deployed for the second time, he stood before a Company he had never seen before. “I didn’t know any of them. I didn’t know what their capabilities were, how they’d react or what they’d do. It came with time.”
00:23:06	A leader always affects morale one-way or the other. It is leadership at its core. “They’ll spot a competent or incompetent leader really quick. And one that doesn’t care about them”
00:24:38	Training prepares you for the first initial experience of combat “to a certain extent” but any new experience teaches you new things.
00:26:01	Their first patrols were in An Khe to clear the area for the 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. Their first Officer was lost during those operations, the first officer in the 101 <sup>st</sup> Airborne to be lost in Vietnam. He was a graduate of MTSU, Lt. Burkhart.
00:27:24	The enemy soldiers were mainly guerrilla forces with older weapons, but still very determined and well trained. “The issue was you didn’t always know who they were.”
00:28:53	There was lot of effort put into not trying to harm the wrong people. “We did all we could to protect the civilian population.”

	The combat troops didn't have a lot of exchange with the culture.
00:30:18	In the mountains, they ran into very primitive cultures. Some hunted with bows and arrows.
00:32:03	As time went on, combat assaults became second nature. "The more you do something, the better you become." You learn from past experiences to make the best decisions.
00:33:05	Mr. Hutchins time as a Platoon Leader helped mold him to be an effective Company Commander during his second tour. "I had been a rifle Platoon Leader. I knew what they were thinking and what they should and could do." It helps you be a better leader.
00:34:10	If you're an experienced Company Commander, you know most of the time when decisions were right and when they were wrong.
00:34:36	Mr. Hutchins didn't experience some of the things that other veterans faced when returning home. "It was almost like you didn't get recognized."
00:35:32	After his time in Vietnam, Mr. Hutchins came back in 1969. He had close to 6 years of service retiring as Captain.
00:36:45	Contemplating a career of military service, during his second tour, Mr. Hutchins realized that the Army was not good for his family. "Family is more important than career."
00:38:51	"If you are in a combat situation as an officer, you learn to lead or you won't be there." Leadership principals are the same in any vocation. Leadership is leadership.
00:40:27	After you experience military and military in combat, it molds your way of thinking. It can change your perspective of what matters. "You best devise what's important, what's not important because sometimes people lives depend on it."
00:42:41	Some of the same difficulties faced in Vietnam are still faced today. "Some of those same feelings come back."
00:43:30	Closing Words – At one time we had 500,000 men in Vietnam, and we lost over 50,000. There are three kinds of wars: Cold War, Total War, and Limited War. Limited war, by definition, says that you won't win. You fight to a draw and you lose all those people. Don't go to war unless you've got good leaders, and go in with everything you've got. Go in, win it, and get out. Don't send people to war to die for limited engagements.
<b>END</b>	

### References

- Bowie Jr., T. G. (1999). Dereliction of Duty or the Wrong Way? Learning the Lessons of Vietnam. *War, Literature & The Arts: An International Journal Of The Humanities*, 11(1), 228
- Griffith, J. (1988). Measurement of Group Cohesion in U. S. Army Units. *Basic & Applied Social Psychology*, 9(2), 149-171.
- History of Army ROTC. (n.d.). Retrieved April 05, 2016, from <http://www.cadetcommand.army.mil/history.aspx>
- Sherwood, J. D. (2010). Not a Gentleman's War: An Inside View of Junior Officers in the Vietnam War. *Journal Of American History*, 97(1), 246.



## Appendix A



August 25, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jake West and I am currently a senior in the ROTC program at Middle Tennessee State University working on my Honors Thesis. In order to expand vital education for Cadets, my thesis will investigate the experiences of commissioned officers during the Vietnam War specifically from our own ranks: the MTSU ROTC program. The Vietnam War was a trying time for soldiers and officers alike, where the challenges facing American forces were both emotional and physical. The leadership of officers during this time directly affected the success of unit operations. These lessons of quality leadership will be used to enforce the necessary skills needed for Cadets to lead and maneuver their future units. Tracking MTSU's own alumni and their contribution to the armed forces will create a better understanding of the efficacy this university has had in the far reaches of the world.

As I research the experiences of MTSU Veterans, your stories will be used to further the development of ROTC Cadets in leadership and professionalism. MTSU will be able to see the part you have played in the history of American war and understand the sacrifices their alumni have made. It is important to know the life of officers during that time, but it is just as significant to know the struggles you currently face as a veteran. This thesis delves into the history and current condition of veterans from MTSU's own ROTC Program in relation the Vietnam War. Working closely with the ROTC department and the MTSU Veterans and Military Family Center, I want to compile a qualitative historical analysis of five Vietnam-era graduates. This data will be acquired, abiding by all IRB guidelines, by engaging in a facilitated conversation with selected alumni. This thesis will be a compilation of accurate stories of MTSU Veterans and will

be used in the ROTC program learning objectives.

If your schedule would allow, I would be honored for you to be a part of my thesis project in creating an oral history account of your leadership experience during the Vietnam War. Your contribution would be vital to the success of my thesis and the future development of cadets in the program. Please feel free to contact me either by phone or email. I ask that, if you would, let me know by September 8<sup>th</sup> whether or not you would like to participate. Thank You for your service and the sacrifices you have made! I look forward to hearing from you.

Very Respectfully,

Jake West  
Cadet, U.S. Army  
Middle Tennessee State University  
[west679@gmail.com](mailto:west679@gmail.com)  
(423)-258-8871

**Appendix B**

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

**Leadership Excellence and the Vietnam War Interview Protocol****1) Background and Family History**

- a. Where and when you born? Did you grow up in the same town?
- b. Did you have any exposure to military life growing up? Was any of your family in the military?
- c. When did you first have the desire to join the military? What was that experience like?
- d. When did you first learn about ROTC? Before you reached MTSU?

**2) College Experience**

- a. What motivated you to attend college, specifically MTSU? Did other members of your family attend college?
- b. Why did you decide ROTC and not enlistment? Did the draft influence you decision?
- c. What was training like during your time in ROTC? Did you feel like your instructors were informative?
- d. Were there any influential classmates or instructors?
- e. How large was your class size? How many commissioned?
- f. What was your commissioning branch? What was your first unit assignment?
- g. Did your training in ROTC prepare you for your first duty assignment?
- h. Was your first Platoon receptive to you as a young leader?

**3) Military Career during Vietnam**

- a. How soon did your unit deploy to Vietnam once you arrived?

- b. Did you feel prepared to lead your platoon based upon your experience at MTSU?
- c. Tell me about your first few weeks in Vietnam? How did you adjust to the environment and culture?
- d. What was your initial assignment as a Platoon Leader? Where were you posted in Vietnam?
- e. Describe the weapons, equipment, clothing and rations received. Were the weapons reliable, the clothing appropriate for the weather conditions the rations adequate?
- f. How was morale in your unit? What was your influence to unit morale as their platoon leader?
- g. Were you able to communicate to family back home? How often?
- h. Did your unit experience combat? Describe that first experience?
- i. Did the training you received at MTSU prepare you to lead your platoon during that time? How reliant were you on the NCO's of your unit?
- j. How did you and your fellow soldiers regard enemy troops as fighters? Were they well trained and were their weapons effective?
- k. How did you view the enemy as individual people? Did this view change after you encountered them in battle?
- l. Was dealing with the experiences of combat difficult? How did your experiences mold you as a leader?
- m. How long was your deployment to Vietnam? How many times?
- n. Did you have any role other than platoon leader? What other ranks/assignments did you hold?
- o. How did your experience as a 2LT prepare you for that future role?
- p. How did the community receive you when arriving home? How did others react to you?

#### **4) Military Career after Vietnam**

- a. How long did you continue to serve after Vietnam?
- b. What rank did you achieve before retirement? What were your assignments?
- c. What awards and decorations did you receive?
- d. Why did you decide to stay in and continue your career?
- e. How did your memories of Vietnam change your leadership philosophy?
- f. Were you able to use those experiences to better your units training?
- g. Do you think the role you played as a 2LT in Vietnam help shape your military career afterwards?

**5) Life as a Veteran**

- a. Has your view of the rest of the world changed as a result of your experiences?
- b. Tell me about the difficulties you face today as a result to your time in service.
- c. Do you feel like you're adequately cared for? How could it be better?
- d. Are you involved with the Department of Veteran Affairs? What is your level of involvement?
- e. What do you want people today to know and remember about Vietnam?

**Appendix C**

**Interviewee:** Paul Womack

**Commissioning Date:** 1968

**Branch:** Active Duty Military Intelligence

**Unit:** 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

**Rank at Retirement:** Colonel (O-6)



**Interviewee:** Joe Roberson

**Commissioning Date:** 1967

**Branch:** Active Duty Armor

**Unit:** US Army Training Center

**Rank at Retirement:** Colonel (O-6)



**Interviewee:** Paul Hutchins

**Commissioning Date:** 1964

**Branch:** Active Duty Infantry

**Unit:** 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division

**Rank at Retirement:** Captain (O-3)

