

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

Ron Springer

An interview conducted on

March 1, 2024

Interviewer: Dr. Allison Huntley

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

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HUNTLEY: Alright. Um, so I am Dr. Allison Huntley. Um, it is March 1st at 1:40 p.m. Um, I'm here with, um, Ron Springer and his wife Melinda Springer, um, and we're going to go ahead and get started. So, um, I sent you the questions ahead of time, um. So, as we said that they're grouped into your background, your time in the service, after you got out of the service, and then kind of looking back on things. Um, alright, we'll go ahead and start easy. So, what is your name?

SPRINGER: My name is Ron Springer and, uh, I live here in San Angelo. I have lived here all my life and, uh, uh have two kids, and, uh, my kids are grown up and, uh, then, uh my wife is Melinda.

HUNTLEY: Awesome. Alright, so when and where were you born? So, you said you were born in San Angelo.

SPRINGER: Well, I was born in Seminole, Texas, and we just lived there less than a year and then moved to San Angelo. But, uh, I considered just always growing up here in San Angelo since I had a short time in Seminole.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. You won't let them claim you?

SPRINGER: No.

[All Laugh]

HUNTLEY: Alright, so you grew up here in San Angelo?

SPRINGER: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

SPRINGER: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: So, when and where did you enter the armed forces?

SPRINGER: I entered here in San Angelo and, uh, what led up to that is, uh, I had- I had graduated from Central High School in 1969 and then I started- started college at, uh, ASU and, um, [clears throat] I went I think two and a half years and, uh, and I was, uh, watching on, uh, TV, um, when they were beginning the first, uh, lottery drawing and, um, where they had the ping pong balls and they had the numbers, uh, on the ping pong balls and that was going to tell you, they had it broken up into... thirds and of the 365 days they had it broken up into thirds and so if you were in the first third you for sure were going to be drafted. If you were in the second third it was sort of a 50-50 and then if you were in the last third it was pretty sure you weren't going to be drafted. So, I was watching Walter Cronkite, and he was going through the first drawing and had the ping pong balls there on TV and they had a drawing and he pulled out the, uh, he pulled out uh... one of the ping pong balls and it had my birthdate on it and uh... and it said that was number one. And I thought, well, this is just a demonstration.

[All Laugh]

SPRINGER: Well, it wasn't a demonstration. And so, I ended up being number one. And so [clears throat] um, I thought, well, you know, you know, some people said, well, you could have gotten a draft deferment or whatever, but I thought, well, I might as well just go ahead and go in. And if you volunteered to go in, you could sort of choose what you wanted to do rather than—I didn't want to get put in the—something that I didn't care for. And, uh, so anyway, I volunteered. I chose what I wanted. And, um, and then, uh, I went into the, uh, military here in San Angelo, uh, and we got on a bus here and went to Abilene and then from Abilene, uh, they took us to Fort Polk, Louisiana and that's where I had my basic training.

HUNTLEY: Okay, um, so, let's go back and I forgot to get some dates. So, for when you were born, that date that they pulled out on the ping pong ball?

SPRINGER: Yeah, my date, birth date is 9-14-50, but it was, uh, 9-14.

HUNTLEY: Okay, oh, so for everybody who's up in the window, that if they were 9-14, okay.

SPRINGER: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: And then when did you enter the service—Armed Forces?

SPRINGER: I entered in, uh, 1972.

HUNTLEY: Okay. Alright. Um, and then, let's see, what branch did you serve in?

SPRINGER: In the Army.

HUNTLEY: Okay. And then what were your years of service? So, 1972?

SPRINGER: '72 to '75.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

SPRINGER: And I was supposed to be in 36 months and, I think I was really in like 39 months because they always say you can get out at their convenience.

[All Laugh]

MELINDA: Thirty-six, thirty-nine, forty.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. So, do they just, uh, like when your exit date comes up, they just say we're going to keep you for a little bit longer?

SPRINGER: Mh-hmm.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

SPRINGER: Mhm.

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see. And then what military conflicts did you serve during?

SPRINGER: Yeah, I was in during just the Vietnam era.

HUNTLEY: Okay. And what units did you serve in?

SPRINGER: Well, the only unit after my training and everything I was in was, uh, I was, um, in the Army in the 223rd Aviation Battalion in Germany.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

SPRINGER: And even though I was in the Army we had—there was a special branch and we were an aviation branch.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. Okay. Um, and then I guess you told us a little bit about why you enlisted, but if we want to talk more about that. So why did you enlist and what was your training like?

SPRINGER: Well, I—I mainly enlisted because, uh, I thought well I might as well go ahead and do that because I can get the rest of my college paid for and I really—at that point—I really didn't know what I wanted to do. And so, I thought well, I might as well try the military and just see and then after I'm done, well, I'll have my military, my college paid for and maybe I can decide what I want to do. And what was the other part of that?

HUNTLEY: Uh, what was your training like?

SPRINGER: Oh, my training, uh, well, I had, uh, I had selected [clears throat] um, being a chemical staff specialist. And, um, I really don't know why I selected that because I really didn't know what it was in- involved in.

MELINDA: [laughs]

SPRINGER: But what it was is that's a training that they were doing back then for the biological warfare and stuff like that. And so, after Fort Polk, Louisiana, then where they were doing all the training for the, uh, biological and stuff for the chemical staff specialist was in Fort McClellan, Alabama. And [clears throat] excuse me, and, so anyway, uh, I was supposed to show up there in September and I got there on a Friday and, uh, our classes were supposed to start on Monday. And, um, there were just very few of us that showed up on Friday, and then there's two or three more showed up on Saturday. I think one or two more showed up on Sunday. And anyway, this training program was set for teaching a hundred—like one hundred and fifty students at a time. And they had big auditoriums and stuff like that. And so, on Sunday evening, we're sitting there with just seven people.

HUNTLEY & MELINDA: [laugh]

SPRINGER: And so, they're saying, well, how did we lose all those students?

MELINDA: [laughs]

SPRINGER: And so anyway, they had [clears throat] several meetings to decide if, what they were going to do with us. And so anyway, they ended up saying, okay, we're going to go ahead and do it, have the training for just the seven. And so, when you had blocks of training time for one hundred and fifty students and we had seven, we were [snaps] we were done like that.

MELINDA: [laughs]

SPRINGER: And we would be in a big auditorium, and we'd just have the front row. And, uh, so it was nice and, you know, the—the instructors, you know, they were not having to do all that, like they would for a hundred fifty students so it- it made it nice, and we had a lot of free time.

MELINDA: Why did you pick army over all the other branches?

SPRINGER: I don't know.

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

SPRINGER: I don't know.

HUNTLEY: It's like what do you want from me? After...

MELINDA: After—after, uh, forty-four years of marriage there are still questions I want answered.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] Okay, um, let's see. So, what conception did you have of the U.S. at the time of your enlistment?

SPRINGER: Of the U.S. or the army, or military?

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see, uh... like the US as a country.

SPRINGER: Oh, well I thought that it was just, you know, um, being- being from a small town in Texas. I- I just thought it was, uh, everything was fine, and I didn't have any real concept of all the issues going on and stuff and, so, I, uh, I just thought everything was fine.

HUNTLEY: Um, and then what did America symbolize to you?

SPRINGER: Well, I think it was just like, uh, you know, it, uh, I thought everybody should, every-everybody probably, I thought everybody should think like I did or I thought- I hadn't been

out. I hadn't, I really hadn't had any travel when I was getting ready to go in the military. I'd just been in different places in Texas but hadn't really traveled anything, any place further and so, um. I had a lot of things that my eyes could be open to. I- I didn't have a lot of um... I guess a lot of opinions or anything like that.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. Um, and then, what did you think America stood for?

SPRINGER: I thought it stood for the right thing to do, and everybody, I thought everybody liked America. And, uh, you know, you always brought up hearing about the Statue of Liberty and everybody coming into the United States. And- and uh, and now we've just got a lot bigger problem in everybody wanting to come to the United States. But anyway, that wouldn't- that thought like it uh, it is now, that was never an issue.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: That you heard about.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. Um, let's see, since your time in the military, has your conception of the U.S. changed?

SPRINGER: Uh, well, uh, you know, the older you get, your- your conceptions of a lot of things change.

[All Laugh]

SPRINGER: Uh, but, uh I guess it has. You know, when you're young and going in the military for the first time, you- you uh, you're pretty stupid about a lot of things. And, um, the older you get, well you, you start forming some ideas and stuff like that. But, uh, overall, I, like for my time in the military, I enjoyed it.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. Um, let's see. So, were you deployed overseas?

SPRINGER: Yes. I went from Fort McClellan, Alabama to, uh, Nelligen, Germany, which was close to Stuttgart, Germany. Nelligen was just a small little, very small German town. And, uh, and then, uh, Stuttgart, which was a closer big city, was probably like, um, 30 minutes away.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. And then how long were you there in Stu- err- or in Nelligen?

SPRINGER: I was there two and a half years.

HUNTLEY: Okay, so out of the three years that you were in, you were there for most of the time.

SPRINGER: Mh-hmm.

HUNTLEY: Okay, um, let's see. While you were overseas, did you reflect much about your unit's mission and how much you believed in it?

SPRINGER: No, not really.

[Both Laugh]

MELINDA: This might be a short interview.

[Continued Laughter]

SPRINGER: I didn't have a whole lot of reflection. Uh, I was over there, I got over there, and uh, I think I got over there in September, and, uh, it was beginning to get cold and stuff, and- and I had no concept of foreign countries or anything like that. Everything was just brand new to me. And, uh, but the unit that I went to, they were very, uh, easy going, laid back. And, uh, compared to, uh, basic training and everything, I thought, oh, this is- this is great. Nobody's bugging you as much and all that stuff like that. But, uh, um.

MELINDA: But there was- there were drugs that were keeping some of the...

SPRINGER: Well, yeah, there were. That was a thing that, um, there was pretty much two, two factions. Uh, you either were, uh, you either were straight and you didn't do drugs, or there was the- the druggies, and, uh, everybody kind of knew who, who was who. And, uh, the druggies, they would, on weekends and stuff, they would never leave- hardly leave their room, let alone leave base. And the other people, they would go out and travel. I had a car and, uh, so I did as much traveling as I could.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And um, but yeah, the drug thing was, was a, um, a definite eye opener. And- and they really didn't even start testing for drugs. We didn't have any testing until I'd been there probably, oh, probably a good year and a half or so. And then they started testing. But, uh, it was real evident that they had a problem.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

MELINDA: And it was marijuana mainly, wasn't it?

SPRINGER: No.

MELINDA: Oh, really?

SPRINGER: It was.

MELINDA: LSD?

SPRINGER: No, it was from the poppy or the- tulips or poppies, what is that? Hashish?

HUNTLEY: Like heroin?

SPRINGER: Heroin?

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. So, did you have a sense of if they were getting it there or if they were bringing it over?

SPRINGER: I- I never knew. Uh, you know, they- you would hear since you were in the barracks there, and they had, the barracks had, uh, rooms that were either for two or three people or for single. And, um, and so it wasn't like you were in a great big bay or something like that. And so, people would go to the druggies room, well everybody would have a certain knock.

HUNTLEY & MELINDA: [laugh]

SPRINGER: And uh, so you could, and then, you know, they'd say, who is it? Who is it?

HUNTLEY & MELINDA: [laugh]

SPRINGER; And so, um, I never did stick my head out and say, oh, what are you delivering there? Or what are you coming to get? I don't, I don't know how all that worked.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. You were minding your own business.

SPRINGER: Yeah, I was minding my own business.

MELINDA: But tell her how that led to your, what you did in Germany for your job.

SPRINGER: Well, uh, what happened on that is I- I- when I first got there, I was working for a sergeant, and, uh, he was mainly- he mainly dealt with, uh, personnel records there in the battalion.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And... uh, I mean, he was nice as he could be and everything, but I was not a desk person. And sitting there typing up different personnel records, that just was like watching paint dry for me. And uh, so anyway, I had seen where there was a, uh, opening for a battalion courier. And, uh, and then about that same time, there was a colonel's driver and up, in our battalion and, uh, they ended up finding him one sunny morning and he had taken the Colonel Sedan and parked somewhere on base and he was shooting up heroin and stuff.

HUNTLEY: Oh.

SPRINGER: And so he was gone in like two days and they sent him to Leavenworth, Kansas. And, uh-

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

SPRINGER: So he could think about it.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] He could think about his choices.

SPRINGER: Yeah. So anyway, they had an opening.

MELINDA: [laughs]

SPRINGER: And so anyway, Sergeant Major said, well, yeah, he said, you can be the uh, battalion courier and you can be the colonel driver. And, um, and, uh, I got along real well with the Sergeant Major. And so that- that's how I ended up in that position. And I, I stayed in that deal- in that position until I left. And, uh, and I got to drive a lot. Um, I got a certificate for 60,000 accident-free miles driving in Germany. And that's pretty significant, because German drivers were like crazy.

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

SPRINGER: And uh, a lot different than here. But, uh, anyway, um, that was uh, a good move that I had-

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: had done.

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see, so what did you think of the local inhabitants that you encountered?

SPRINGER: Uh, the local Germans, they were very friendly. Um, the, um, the local ones, um, I mean the older ones, um, you might go up to them and, and try to ask them, uh, something in um, English and they would start out trying to get you to say it in German. And then uh, but eventually they would- everybody over there pretty much knows how to speak English and so they would go ahead and start speaking English. But they would prefer you start out with German and, but they were always real friendly. Uh, younger ones would always talk to you in English. And um, but uh, it was uh, just a real friendly safe, uh, area.

HUNTLEY: As long as you weren't driving. [laughs]

SPRINGER: Long as you weren't driving. That's right.

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see. When you interacted with local inhabitants, uh, what do you think their conceptions were of the United States?

SPRINGER: Well, um, I think they were probably, you know, they- they had had US military there for a long time. And, uh, I think they just sort of perceived it as, you know, they're here and we get along and-

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: -but, um, I- I don't think it was any- anything that they objected. I think they just thought it was the thing that was ever present.

MELINDA: But he did learn some German and... he was received more warmly by people when he would use their language rather than expect them to know his.

SPRINGER: Yeah, you could start out and I could get along with speaking what little I could and then they- they could, they would start speaking English and stuff.

MELINDA: But his last name being Springer, I think they thought he-

SPRINGER: Yeah.

MELINDA: -was a-

SPRINGER: Springer was a good name to have-

MELINDA: because it was a German

SPRINGER: German name and, uh, so that was- that was a lot to- sort of got you a foothold.

MELINDA: Yeah.

SPRINGER: And opened the door there and they'd ask you about and then they'd say where you from? You'd say well, I'm from Texas. Oh, you're from Texas! Texas was always popular.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

SPRINGER: So that was good.

HUNTLEY: Everybody's from Texas.

SPRINGER: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Um, okay, let's see did you engage with them in a conversation- in conversations about America or Texas. [laughs]

SPRINGER: [sighs] No, not really. Um, no, we didn't. If we were talking, we weren't really talking a whole lot about anything in particular. It was just pretty much you just passing the time.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. Um, let's see. So, did you receive any special medals or recognition for your service such as a Purple Heart? Um, if so, could you explain the circumstances?

SPRINGER: No, I didn't.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: No, I just, the only thing I received was the certificate for safe driving, but nothing other than that.

HUNTLEY: That's pretty- and how many miles was that again?

SPRINGER: Sixty thousand.

HUNTLEY: I think that that's a special recognition.

SPRINGER: That was good.

HUNTLEY: Uh, let's see, what sorts of technology did you use in the service?

HUNTLEY: [sighs] We didn't have any technology.

[All Laugh]

MELINDA: Not a lot.

SPRINGER: Uh, we uh, you know, we, at that time there was no- there were not any computers, there were, uh, well, any computers that we had access to uh, but uh, there weren't any computers per se and uh, no cell phones and anything like that, and, you know, we just had to plan on manual typewriters and you pick up the phone on the desk and all that stuff like that and- and, uh- but when you wanted to call home, uh, there wasn't even a phone on base there. It was a small base. There wasn't a phone there you could use to call, make, uh, international calls. And so we would have to get a ride to the airport, which was about 20 minutes away. And you would go to the airport and there would be a, uh operator there, in a little booth and you would tell her that you wanted to make an international call back to the states and she, you would give her the number and then you would sit down and then she would, uh, start the call and then she would signal to you when it was time to pick up.

HUNTLEY: Ah.

SPRINGER: And, uh, and then you had to kind of figure out when to go to the airport because there was an eight hour time difference from calling home. So, you didn't want to call back to the states at 3 o'clock in the morning, but there was a short window in there that you had to make it to the airport so you wouldn't be calling at the wrong time, and, and back then, when you did place a call, it usually- it typically would cost you somewhere around \$3 a minute. And uh, so

you'd- you really watched how long you were talking, and you had to pay up in cash there. You didn't have credit cards or anything like that.

HUNTLEY: Oh, so you paid for how long you thought you were going to talk?

SPRINGER: Well, you would, you would go ahead and talk, and then you would pay up at the end.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. Okay.

SPRINGER: But you had an actual person there that you paid.

MELINDA: And then he would write long letters. He had thick letters he sent to his parents. And he would record on a cassette tape.

HUNTLEY: Oh, right.

MELINDA: And then mail that.

SPRINGER: Yeah. And they would record cassettes and send them.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And uh, so you could... hear their voice and see what's going on and stuff instead of making the expensive long, long distance calls.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. Now that's, it's very much like a cassette war. Like that's one of the modes of communication, these cassettes.

MELINDA: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Do you have like one of the little ones with the handle?

SPRINGER: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

SPRINGER: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see. And then what kind of car did you drive? The one that you drove as a courier.

SPRINGER: Oh, as a courier?

HUNTLEY: Mh-hm.

SPRINGER: I had- I had five different vehicles. I had a sedan. I had a Jeep. I had a van where I'd go pick up people, like go up to Frankfurt and pick up new people coming in. And I had a, uh, truck. And then I had a larger, um, truck that was called a deuce and a half and that's what you normally see in these older military films where everybody's jumping in the back of the big deuce and a half.

MELINDA: Like MASH, MASH TV show.

SPRINGER: And that but anyway I had- you had to get certified on each one and anyway I had five vehicles that I could go to the motor, motor pool and get.

HUNTLEY: That's cool. Um, let's see. Here's the question that Melinda was excited about.

MELINDA: Yes.

HUNTLEY: So what were race and or gender relations like in your unit?

SPRINGER: [sighs] Uh, well, uh, everybody was real, um, I mean, received really, really well. We didn't have a lot of race relations. It was just more or less like you were there to do a job and, um, nobody really talked about any of that. Um, I guess it was about, um, in the latter part of '74. Uh, yeah, about the latter part of '74, middle part of '74, that we started receiving, or we started getting women, enlisted women into our, um, battalion. And, um, they, uh, they had similar jobs as the enlisted men. And, uh, um, some of them might have worked in, you know, as in the what you call S2, which is security clearances and stuff like that. And then some of them worked in flight operations where they, uh, did some of the training and, um, some of them were company clerks and stuff like that. But, um, anyway, when they first started coming in our particular battalion and stuff, they hadn't- they hadn't made a lot of preparation. And the barracks, um, the barracks were two story. And the latrine was on the first floor. And like I said, the rooms were either a single room or rooms for two people. And, anyway, so what they ended up doing was one of the barracks they made the second floor for women. But, uh, for the, um, latrine, uh, they just had a sign and it said, on one side it said women occupied. And so if you're a woman going down there, you'd turn the sign and then they did, uh, take out the urinals there but, uh, but there will be a lot of time that you know I mean you're- the women and men were all using the same restroom there, especially getting ready in the mornings and stuff like that. But, um, they could lock it where they were in there and taking showers and stuff like that. But they- they didn't do much more than that. That's the way it was until I left. But they didn't have a lot of planning on any of that.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] Probably somebody lost a court battle.

SPRINGER: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTLEY: Um, do you think that made it harder for the women who were serving? That they didn't have those preparations?

SPRINGER: I don't think so. I never did hear them complain. OK. It was all, uh, pretty easy going.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. It was pretty much like everything else just make it work.

SPRINGER: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTLEY: It wasn't any big thing.

MELINDA: Can I ask a question?

HUNTLEY: Sure.

MELINDA: Do you remember, do you have any memory of how much you got paid and what did you do with your money? You remember, was it monthly or weekly or?

SPRINGER: You got paid monthly, uh, yeah, I can't remember. I, uh, hmm. I guess I must have gotten paid, uh, in some kind of a check and then went down to the PX and cashed it or whatever, but I do remember I would send money home so they could put it in the savings or whatever like that, but, uh, I was always sending money home every month, but- You didn't get paid much, you might got paid- I'm kinda thinking it was like- maybe \$150 or \$200 a month, something like that. It wasn't much.

HUNTLEY: So in the, like in the States, what type of job would that, like would that equate to? So like that, getting, what sort of job would you have in the States to get paid that?

SPRINGER: Oh, I don't know. Oh, okay. Because, you know, back, I think in, uh, I don't know. like in, I think in 1969 the minimum wage was \$1.65.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And so probably in 1972 or something like that it might have been \$2.00 and something or whatever for minimum wage or something like that. So-

HUNTLEY: Okay.

SPRINGER: Certainly, more than minimum wage, but not.

MELINDA: Did you feel like you were getting well paid at the time for what things cost?

SPRINGER: In the military?

MELINDA: Yeah.

SPRINGER: I didn't have anything to spend it on. Cause, uh, I mean, I had a place to sleep and they fed you. And I did have my car, which that was nice, and I paid for the insurance on that and stuff like that. But- Now people, I had a good friend, and he and his wife, they lived what they call on the economy. So, they lived on the German-

HUNTLEY: They looked like off base.

SPRINGER: Yeah, off base. Yeah. And that's what they called the economy. And, um, they had, uh, I mean, they were pinching pennies. And he was the same rank I was. And, uh, they had, uh, like a little German apartment on the second floor of this German house. And it was just like a- It had a bedroom and it had a little kitchen. And that's it. And it didn't have- it had a commode, but it didn't have any shower or bathtub.

HUNTLEY: Ah. They were like on a hall?

MELINDA: Ooo.

SPRINGER: And it didn't have it. And so, they would have a dish pan or whatever in the kitchen. And that's where they kind of did their spit baths and stuff. And then every three or four days, well, they would both come on base and then they would go to a barracks and take a shower and stuff like that. But, uh, otherwise, but they were- they- I mean they were there with that apartment for like a year and a half or maybe a year. And but they were, uh, trying to save money but still at the same time it was kind of a stretch but when i was there it was a good time as far as what the evaluation of the American dollar to the, uh, German dollar was and uh, I don't know. I think now, uh, well I think- Back then, you were getting like almost four, I can't remember what that's called, what's the German money, uh Marks. You could get almost four marks to the American dollar, and now they've gone to the Euros, and I think the Euros now are like something like two and a half or something like that. But, the rate of exchange was really high when I was there, and so we had a good- a good exchange rate.

HUNTLEY: So just out of curiosity, and you might not have an answer for it, but did they have housing for families on base?

SPRINGER: They did, but you- you had to be in the upper, uh, rank.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

SPRINGER: And now if you were an officer, yeah, they had, uh, housing, but then there was some of them I know that lived off base. And then- but majority of the sergeants that were like, uh, a specialist five or specialist six or on up, they had base housing.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And it was, they had housing that looked like big apartments and stuff like that.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And, but yeah, they did.

HUNTLEY: I was just curious. Um, what are your most vivid memories of your time in the service? In service.

SPRINGER: Uh, most vivid, um, well, I had a chance while I was in the army over there to go to Berlin.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And you had to put in paperwork for that. And then it took three or four months to get approved. But there was a train that you could take and- and, uh, it would only run at night and it would go from Frankfurt like into Berlin and then, uh, you would go to the, um, West Berlin military base there. And I rode that and, uh, it was kind of different because as you're driving or riding on there at night, they would stop the train two or three times and it was like somebody was checking it out and stuff like that from the outside and stuff. But anyway, when we got to, uh, West Berlin then, uh, we went in a bus and you could go to where the wall was and they had these high rises that you could walk up on and look over into East Berlin and it was just like a, um, it was just like a colored photo and a black and white photo put together the West Berlin you could look and see in the houses were different color and stuff and- and, uh, then you look into East Berlin and everything was pretty much black and white. Very little color. The people didn't wear any color. They wore just mostly blacks and grays. And so, it was real. It was just like you drew a line and took a photo of black and white and took a photo of colored.

HUNTLEY: And they have high rises on the East Berlin side that you can see over into West Berlin?

SPRINGER: Uh, well, on the East Berlin side, they had, uh, they had guard towers.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. So, they could see. They could see. No one else needed to.

SPRINGER: No. It was just the guard towers that were looking.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. Wow. Let's see. What did you like and not like about your overall experience in the service?

SPRINGER: Uh, well, what I liked is I liked- I liked the unit, the battalion that I was in. I liked that we were an aviation battalion. We had a lot of different helicopters and I got to ride in a lot of different locations in the helicopters. Also, uh, I liked my time that I had being able to travel and if I wasn't working on a weekend then I was usually, uh, traveling somewhere. And, uh, so that was the main reason I had a vehicle and so I could go out and see some of the country and stuff. Uh, what I didn't like, oh, I guess it was just typical military, uh, what I didn't like. You know, it's always a lot of things were like hurry up and wait on whatever. They would have something going on and it was always never on time usually or whatever and um- And then the

other thing is I probably would have stayed in the military, but I always. I never did like to move, and so I didn't want to have that problem of moving every two or three years.

HUNTLEY: Mhm.

MELINDA: Well, and you also said that they tried to, uh, make Christmas special because, and didn't you feel the loneliness of being away from your family?

SPRINGER: Yeah, uh, you know, I mean, like on holidays, like Thanksgiving and Christmas, you would have special meals and stuff. But, uh- and then a lot of the higher enlisted or officers, they would invite you over to something they were having or something like that. But, uh, a lot of times, or sometimes, you know, it was just sort of another day, especially if you had to work and uh- but it wasn't. And plus, you know, it's different, I think, if you were married or something over there, but being single, um, didn't have a whole lot of connections and stuff.

MELINDA: Tell her how you bartered for a fruitcake at Christmas.

SPRINGER; Well, um, when we would go to the- When we'd go to the field for maneuvers over there, they would always hand out your ration. And they would be in a little box and you'd have a can of something and then you'd have- you'd have like a- a dessert can in there or whatever and the desserts always were in like a can that looked like a tuna fish can but it was either a marble cake or a tuna excuse me a marble cake or a fruit cake or a chocolate cake. Well I like fruit cake and nobody else like fruit cake so I would always trade my cake for their fruit cake or whatever and so I would keep my fruit cakes and save those and then when we were back from the field we'll then that was my snack in the room.

HUNTLEY: So, they had, like, different types of cake, and it was kind of a wild card witch card type of cake you would get?

SPRINGER: Oh yeah, it just, you know, they were just handing out a brown box.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, and they'd be like, Springer's the guy if you want to get your fruitcake.

SPRINGER: Yeah, yeah, either that or you'd see them just sit it aside. I'd say, hey, is that a fruitcake?

HUNTLEY & MELINDA: [laugh]

SPRINGER: Yeah, I don't like that. Give it to me.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, you're like, what will you pay me to take that off your hands?

SPRINGER & MELINDA: [laugh]

HUNTLEY: That's so mean. Let's see. So going to the next set of questions. Um, did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

SPRINGER: No.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

SPRINGER: No, because I just never expected anything and I didn't really see anything. The only thing I saw was things on TV.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And, uh, but in San Angelo, Texas or whatever, I didn't see anything.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. So, you were like, I'm just going to go back to what I was doing before?

SPRINGER: I just went back and came back and- and signed up for college and continued on.

[All Laugh]

MELINDA: You know, you would see always on the national news about, you know, and you hear about it now that the Veterans said, you know, we had no parade and of course in World War II they did. And, but they said, well, nobody, you know, everybody was so antiwar that everybody was very negative. But, you know, we're sort of isolated out here. I- I- I would assume that you wouldn't expect to have a parade or any of that kind of stuff.

SPRINGER: No.

MELINDA: So, you know, it's like it is now. News can be very, uh, manipulated, you know.

SPRINGER: And it- I mean, you didn't expect it and we didn't get it in, you know, you didn't know that there was a problem until you turned on the TV- other cities

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. Yeah, I guess like sometimes with the news, like it can be sort of, because like when you watch national news, that sometimes it can be sort of, that they're focused on other parts and they're not, say, focused on.

SPRINGER: Yeah, and they embellish a lot of things that they shouldn't, and, you know, the people that are right there in another part of the town may not even know anything going on, but they kind of blow it out of proportion and stuff.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm. Let's see. Um, did you end up facing any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

SPRINGER: No.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

MELINDA: The only thing I think you've told me is your original plan was to be at ASU and then to transfer to A&M. And that changed because then when he got back, he was like three years older than everybody else and he was ready to get his degree done. So that, you know, I'm sure there are a lot of veterans that their original vision changed.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: Yeah. You get more knowledge.

HUNTLEY: When you were on campus after you came back and you were three years older than most other people, were there other people who were like three years older or was it like really obvious?

SPRINGER: No, no there were there were other, uh, veterans that were in classes and, uh, so you know I mean there was always three or four, something like that in class, so it wasn't like you were the only one.

HUNTLEY: Okay. Um, let's see. How did your service influence or affect your family?

SPRINGER: Oh, I don't know. I think they were probably glad that I- I served because back then pretty much everybody went into the military. The draft was active and so it was just automatic that, you know, once you reach a certain age you were going to pretty much be in the military. And, um, a lot of my uncles and and stuff like that. They were all in the military. And, uh, so it was, I think it was just thought of as, you know, you're just doing your-

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER; -normal thing.

HUNTLEY: Going along with that, how well do you think communities in West Texas have treat, have treated returning veterans?

SPRINGER: Well, um, I think they probably treated them better than in other parts of the country. Uh-

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

MELINDA: I think we're- I think West Texas is very much, and Texas in general, I think is a very God and Country, you know, community thinking. And so, um, I know, you know, they've had a couple of really well-known community members that when some of the veterans came back from the most recent, you know, war, I guess you'd call it. You know, they treated them like they were gold. They take them on a hunt. They go to Midland. They go to San Angelo. And they are greeted at the airport. Um, you know, and I think that people looked on the Vietnam War, if you were a veteran from that. You know, I never felt anything about hating these people that represented the war itself. And I think they were all just, I think, respected for what they did. You know, you're kind of at the mercy of the politicians. So, you know, you enlist or get drafted or whatever and you do what you're told to do. So, I don't think, I know in the valley coming

from South Texas, I never saw anything that would make you think that, uh, they were anti-person, you know-

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

MELINDA: -and probably not even anti-war. Again, I think that was a lot of TV stuff-

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

MELINDA: -news stuff.

HUNTLEY: So, did you see any other returning Vietnam veterans? Like, or it's just kind of people were like you and they went and did their service and they just went back to how they were living their lives?

SPRINGER: Yeah, because I mean I would see veterans when I came back and, uh, started college again. And, uh, I mean as far as I know they just- they were just trying to get their degree finish so that they could get into the business world or whatever. But, uh, to me, we were all just in the same boat and we were all pretty much doing the same thing.

HUNTLEY: And other students, they just let you guys go about your way?

SPRINGER: Yeah. We didn't have any protest at ASU.

HUNTLEY: I was just curious. Okay. Let's see. Uh, what long-term impact do you believe veterans such as yourself have had on communities in West Texas since the war?

SPRINGER: Uh, I don't know. What impact, uh, you know, other- other than just, you know, them knowing that you served, and you did your part for your country, uh, I don't know of anything.

HUNTLEY: Okay, that's fair.

MELINDA: But you have always told people that you're glad that you did do your stint.

SPRINGER: Yeah, I was glad that I went in.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

SPRINGER: And I... I still think it would be good. You know, there's a lot of people who say they don't believe in the draft, but I still think it would be good for a lot of people. Because there's a lot of people that, they don't know what they want to do, and the military gives them time to figure out what they do, want to do, or what, for sure, what they don't want to do. And, uh, so I think it's good in some respects like that.

HUNTLEY: So how do you feel about your military service looking back?

SPRINGER: I liked it. Yeah, I liked it. And I got to travel. And I got to, uh, have contact with other people, uh, across the United States that I wouldn't have ever had contact with. And, uh, and you get to know about how the military goes about things and stuff like that.

HUNTLEY: Uh, do you have any advice for the young men and women who are just entering the service?

SPRINGER: Well, um, you know, I think take advantage of- of all the places that you go to and see as much of the world as you can and be out amongst the locals and- and absorb all that and it gives you more knowledge for down the line.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, is there anything else you would like to share about your service?

SPRINGER: No, no overall it was a good experience and I'm glad that I did it. [sighs] I think it was good.

HUNTLEY: Awesome. Anything else?

MELINDA: Well, I was going to say that couple that had no bathtub, we see them every time we go up to Oklahoma, because they're right there in the same town with our son. So, he stayed in touch with the husband. And, of course, he knew the wife, because they were both married over there, I mean, at the time. But I have gotten to be really close with the wife.

HUNTLEY: Mh-hmm.

MELINDA: And so, it's fun to have that extra relationship when we go up to see our grandsons.

HUNTLEY: Oh wow.

MELINDA: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTLEY: So, did he stay in the service for longer than the three years?

SPRINGER: No, no. He got out and he became a hospital administrator.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

MELINDA: But he was able to get the rest of his college paid for. What else? They'll bury him with special honors. [All Laugh] And he could have taken flight classes.

SPRINGER: You could have taken several things that you- you were able to do since you were in the military, but college was really the only thing I really took advantage of.

HUNTLEY: Don't sleep on that getting buried with special honors thing, right?

[All Laugh]

SPRINGER: Well, that's something that I won't know about.

HUNTLEY: Alright. Well, thank you guys so much for meeting with me today and going on a tour of the campus.

[All Laugh]

MELINDA: That's quite enjoyable.

HUNTLEY: So, it is 2:35 and we're going to go ahead and end things here. So again, it's Dr. Allison Huntley and then Ms. Jerome Springer and Mrs. Melinda Springer. Alright.