

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

JESSIE MERRIFIELD

An interview conducted on

November 1, 2021

Interviewer: Dr. Matthew Gritter

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“Greatest Generation Oral History Archive”

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MERRIFIELD: Prior to the military?

ROEHRIG: No...Well.

GRITTER: We'll do a little bit prior to the military, so alright. I'm here um with Jessie Merrifield and um Susan Roehrig is going to provide some help and my name is Matt Gritter. We're doing an interview today for the Greatest Generation Project. So I'm going to ask you some questions. If you need to be- them need to be repeated, that's fine. If you don't want to answer anything, that's fine, and the first question is what is your name?

ROEHRIG: Tell 'em your name.

MERRIFIELD: Uh.

ROEHRIG: Tell 'em your name.

MERRIFIELD: Jessie Merrifield.

GRITTER: Okay. So when and where were you born?

MERRIFIELD: What?

ROEHRIG: Ballinger, Texas. July-

MERRIFIELD: What?

ROEHRIG: You were born in Ballinger.

MERRIFIELD: No.

ROEHRIG: You were born in- Where were you born?

MERRIFIELD: I was born in Stella, Arkansas.

ROEHRIG: Stella, Arkansas!

GRITTER: Oh, wow.

MERRIFIELD: It doesn't exist!

ROEHRIG: That's something I didn't know! [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: It doesn't exist anymore.

ROEHRIG: Okay. July 9th, 1933.

GRITTER: So, July 9th, 1933, and where did you grow up?

MERRIFIELD: 1933.

ROEHRIG: Yeah, did you grow up in Ballinger?

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

ROEHRIG: Did you grow up in Ballinger?

MERRIFIELD: Yeah, uh I graduated from High School there in 1942. Uh, '52.

GRITTER: Okay, and um this question like um since you um since you grew up in West Texas. Do you think of yourself as a West Texan?

ROEHRIG: You consider yourself a West Texan?

MERRIFIELD: What?

ROEHRIG: Do you consider yourself a West Texan?

MERRIFIELD: Yes, since I grew up here.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: Mhm, so.

MERRIFIELD: You know, Ballinger was home.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: And then of course, after I got married, East Texas was for 17 years.

GRITTER: Oh wow. Huh. Okay, so how do you define West Texas, like is there a particular place where you think it begins?
[long silence]

MERRIFIELD: What? I-

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Yeah.

ROEHRIG: Yeah, you're going to have to get closer for him to hear you. How do you-

GRITTER: I can move over here.

ROEHRIG: How do you define West Texas?

MERRIFIELD: West Texas, I'd say anything East or West of [pause] San Angelo is East or West.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Because we're pretty well- where we need to be in the center.

GRITTER: Definitely, and um what do you think is different um between West Texans and Texans from other parts of the state?

MERRIFIELD: Well you figure, during World War II, Texas was lined up with airbases,

GRITTER: Definitely.

MERRIFIELD: that was all because they were center of the United States.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: It had to get to somebody else before they could get to those bases.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: I know my Dad built about half of them.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: Oh, wow! That's great. So has West Texas changed in your lifetime?

ROEHRIG: Has it- has West Texas changed in your lifetime?

MERRIFIELD: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Some of it doesn't exist anymore.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Several little towns, they've-they've got, you know their town name, but uh there's nothing there anymore.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But it's still a town regardless of, it's a ghost town.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But the uh, thing about, especially where we are, we're [sighs] as close to being I guess center as you can get nearly. Because if you gotta go south you'd have to go way down south to get to another city, actually to get past Austin.

ROEHRIG: Uh-huh.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And going north, well, you hit Dallas of course. [laughs]

GRITTER: Yeah. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: But, going west- you- you had El Paso or, or Texarkana, border another side so.

GRITTER: [laughs] Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And thinking about it, until the interstate came in, it's highway 90 running along there. And uh that's where they lost a bunch of little towns was when they-

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: Put the interstate through, they-they lost all those little off road-. They're still there but you don't see them unless you make a trip to see them.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm. Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: And you have to know what part of the country you were in and I grew up in that country.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Uh, my Mother was born in Ballinger.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm.

MERRIFIELD: And that's where I grew up. I was born in Arkansas but, a year later we were back in Ballinger so.

GRITTER: Mhm. Okay. Interesting. So what schools and colleges did you attend?

MERRIFIELD: What?

ROEHRIG: Graduated from Ballinger High School

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: And you didn't go to college did you?

MERRIFIELD: No, I uh, had an early discharge to get out of the Marine Corps to go back to college.

GRITTER: Okay.

MERRIFIELD: And I had ten days back from spring semester.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And they gave me a forty-five-day early discharge to do it.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Only thing along with it, they gave me a cold shot from the first and only I've ever had and will.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Uh, I left San Diego and it was 80 something degrees and I got to Ballinger and there was two foot [sic] of snow on the ground.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

MERRIFIELD: Next day I went to bed with pneumonia and I lost 25 pounds.

GRITTER: Oh. Interesting.

MERRIFIELD: And the only thing I had to do to get in school was pass the physical.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs] And you couldn't pass it huh?

MERRIFIELD: No, couldn't bluff that out.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: I lost 30-something pounds there.

ROEHRIG: Uh-huh.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: That little stand.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

MERRIFIELD: Since then I haven't really been sick either.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But that cold and I haven't ever had another cold shot either.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: But-

GRITTER: Interesting.

MERRIFIELD: My system is allergic to most of the stuff they say will help people. They don't help me, it-it might help them.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But, uh, sorta like penicillin when it came out that was a great thing for some people but for other some people it wasn't and I was one of one of the others. That didn't help me at all. Yeah-

GRITTER: Interesting.

MERRIFIELD: The uh, of course, now as I was growing up, we don't have so many different doctors and things. My family doctor- he'd probably been my doctor since I was out of high, y'know. And then when I got married, and we moved to Killeen. When we moved to Killeen, there was one clinic owned by a doctor. My second daughter was born in that clinic, rode across the street to his new clinic. And he delivered eight more there after that.

GRITTER: Mhm. Oh wow.

MERRIFIELD: Or seven-

ROEHRIG: Seven more. You got eight daughters and one son.

GRITTER: Oh wow. That's great.

MERRIFIELD: Oh yeah. Eight daughters and a son.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: My oldest is 63. My youngest is 44. See the thing about it, my wife warned-warned me and I wasn't paying attention.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: She told me, that, uh, before we got married, she says- we'll have at least six and she meant that.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: We was married fourteen months, the first one came along- October, November, December, January, February.

GRITTER:[laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD:- then she miscarried with one in March and she kept two years and started over and that six became nine. Eight girls and one boy.

GRITTER: Wow. [laughs] Interesting.

MERRIFIELD: So, uh, It's been an interesting life.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs] Yeah, it sounds like it.

MERRIFIELD: Like I said, I been riding that one and I'll put some of those deals the same.

GRITTER: Definitely [laughs] Alright, so-

MERRIFIELD: But I have son-in-laws from every branch of service or what have you.

GRITTER: That's great.

MERRIFIELD: I'm still cleared for secret myself so [long pause]. Yeah, the thing about it, growing up, wouldn't a whole lot to do, besides that, half the deputy sheriffs in Runnels county were related to us, so..

GRITTER: Oh. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: You didn't want to do anything wrong.

GRITTER: No. [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Cause mom and dad wouldn't be the first ones to know it. It's sorta like, uh, our senior year in high school. Of course from Ballinger to San Angelo, that was the run y'know, if you was just burning gas. And, Highway Patrolman let us go by about half a dozen times.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: And the last time he come by, he pulled us over and he says, "Now boys, y'all haven't broke any rules that I know of but I wish you'd go home." [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: But yeah, it real nice how he said it, "now you haven't broken any rules" and so "now I wish you'd just go home tho."

GRITTER: [laughs] That's interesting. So-

MERRIFIELD: Well, you know the generations change.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: Yup.

MERRIFIELD: And people change and 'specially the ones that start gettin' up in my age and y'know, um, uh, they uh, well, let's see. In Ballinger, when I graduated from high school, there was 52 seniors.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: That of the whole class, 26 girls and 26 boys. One set of brothers, one set of sisters, and one brother and sister.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And, we had an equal number of girls and boys in the, in the class. But, [sighs] it operated so much different. Course, I had some well-to-do teachers, let's put it that way.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: San Angelo was, uh, a world- a world capsule of the world.

GRITTER: Yeah.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: And, my English teacher for two years owned half the wool warehouses in San Angelo.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

MERRIFIELD: That tells you.

ROEHRIG: Uh-huh.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: So, for our senior trip, she rented the second floor of the Hotel in Corpus Christi.

GRITTER: Oh, nice. [haha]

MERRIFIELD: This whole second floor of that little ho-motel. It wasn't a motel, it was a hotel really.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But we had people that were teachers too.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: They weren't handicapped by a bunch of paperwork. Come a long way since then. And I know that mind, cause my one daughter is a teacher. Well, more than one, more than one I guess now. Still, I don't know for sure what exactly position, the youngest teaches teachers.

ROEHRIG: Yeah, yeah.

GRITTER: Okay.

MERRIFIELD: I haven't figured it out yet but I'll go along with it.

GRITTER: [laughs] Interesting.

MERRIFIELD: But, she was, uh, a baseball, softball coach for fourteen years and won district ten out of fourteen years and that grass come up and they- I think the last team she had got to play two games.

GRITTER: Oh yeah.

MERRIFIELD: She...Went back to teaching. Now she teaches teachers.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: So ...but.

GRITTER: Interesting.

MERRIFIELD: It's funny.

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

GRITTER: So what was your first job?

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

ROEHRIG: First job?

MERRIFIELD: What?

ROEHRIG: [louder] Your first job?

MERRIFIELD: My first job?

ROEHRIG: Uh-huh

GRITTER: Yup.

MERRIFIELD: Oh that? I worked all my life.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: Nice.

MERRIFIELD: My- I grew up in the building business.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: My dad was a carpenter. His brother was a carpenter. The one next door was a carpenter.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: The two cousins down the streets were carpenters so y'know, and dad owned a cabinet shop when mother and him got married so y'know I-

GRITTER: Yeah. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: And I been in business, well, I- I turned in my deal last year, I could still renew my contractor's license if I want to, but I got my contractor's license in San Angelo in 1980.

GRITTER: Okay.

MERRIFIELD: That tells you I been here around awhile.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: He had a gold hard hat, and his truck had the sign on it that said that the male-

MERRIFIELD:-male-

ROEHRIG: The male with the golden hat.

GRITTER: Nice.

ROEHRIG: And that's- that's all that people knew of him.

GRITTER: Nice.

MERRIFIELD: And my uncle was, uh, working with-Cola- Coca-Cola here.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: When I's was growing up and every summer I come over to spend the summer with him and [pause] he come out one day and he had a sad story to tell us. He gave us a big coke, uh and he said "Now enjoy it"- says "next one's going to be more expensive."

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Says cokes just went up from a nickel to six cents.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: A whole six cents to buy an 8oz coke.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: The bottle was worth more than the drink was.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: But..

GRITTER: Nice. And then you served in the military?

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: A lot of history was made back then. Course, y'know, until Australia started going into the sheep business.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: We were rulin' the world.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: So, but they survived. They had uh, bases out there during World War II and-

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Thing about the World War II era- my dad built airbases.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: All through the war so-

GRITTER: Right. Nice.

MERRIFIELD: I know where a lot of them are, 'specially along the highway- well, 90- because Highway 90 cuts across the center of Texas and they figured by the time they could get to an airbase, whoever was coming at them had been shot down.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: So you- you went in the Marines January of 1950..54-53?

MERRIFIELD: I went in the Marines January six- 1956

ROEHRIG: 56- oh- okay.

GRITTER: Okay

MERRIFIELD: Yeah.

ROEHRIG: So did you work a little bit before you went in the Marines?

MERRIFIELD: In the Marines, not- not before. I'm-I'm joining Marines January 6th, 1953.

ROEHRIG: That's right. That's what I thought you told me.

GRITTER: Okay.

MERRIFIELD: And then I had an obligated service that they voted in after that.

ROEHRIG: Uh-huh.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And uh, they said "well, you can go to meetings for two years and we'll release you." Only thing was, I lived in Ballinger and you'd have to drive to Abilene to go to meetings.

GRITTER: Uh-huh.

MERRIFIELD: And I says, naw, I'll just drag it out.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Course, I could've been called back anytime within that 8 years, but that's fine too. But [pauses]

GRITTER: Interesting.

ROEHRIG: Yeah. [quiet]

MERRIFIELD: We, uh, made lots of changes that'd been made in our world since the forties and I'm here-

GRITTER: That's true.

MERRIFIELD: -To tell you. The farmers around here back in the thirties- cotton, and oat and wheat. And I know, cause I shoveled a bunch of wheat 'n oats cause dad had those two and a half-ton trucks and it didn't dump 'em in to the thing. You went around and shoveled it off the dadgum tarp they had on the ground. I was never so glad in the world when I saw that first hopper coming along and start dumping them in the truck.

GRITTER: [laughs] Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: But, but. People- it was a different kind of life then, too.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: and,- our- I guess Texas, if you look at the whole United States, Texas has stayed more central in the occupied- in hard times we-we may be low on-on people but check up north and see how low we are. We're still well-employed down here.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And, Texas is one of those few states that- they were a republic so they were a country themselves. They can tell 'em to jump in the lake if they want to.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: So, You know, it's funny the things people if they aren't really paying attention, where they live and what they do, how much history has gone through this part of the country.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Just from El Paso to Texarkana. Just take that route going across there-

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And see how many things you're going to be within a hundred miles of the highway going by or less.

GRITTER: Mhm. Definitely.

MERRIFIELD: Because, because you go through- and you pick up places like Austin, Abilene, off of that road going to the others.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And me...well, let's see. I got my driver's license at fourteen.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

MERRIFIELD: Cost a whole fifty cents.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Fifty cents.

GRITTER: Wow.

MERRIFIELD: A year later, I got my commercial license.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: That was a dollar.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Then three years later I was an accountant parts manager for Lincoln-Mercury dealership and I had to have a chauffeur's license to drive a demonstrator.

GRITTER: Oh yeah.

MERRIFIELD: So by the time I was 21, I already had a chauffeur's license.

GRITTER: That's super interesting.

MERRIFIELD: But, it's been an interesting life, I'll tell you.

GRITTER: Definitely.

MERRIFIELD: And I grew up, and there was fifty-two kids in my graduating class. Half girls and half boys

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And they were all- well, out of 52 seniors, [pause] it'd be a toss-up how old of them- 12 of them that weren't farmer kids.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: Cause my brother and I and one cousin- our dads were carpenters and the rest of them could be nearly anything.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Well, but they...they kept better- ahh, I don't know. Well, for one thing, the teachers were not [pause] tied down by a bunch of paperwork like they are now. That's sad to say, but it's the truth.

GRITTER: Mhm. Definitely.

MERRIFIELD: Cause teachers are good people and they have to be pretty good to become a teacher in the first place. And if you're a real good one, you do well, which I got a couple of them that did well. And, but- uh, we grew up in a time- I was born in '33 well the Depression was going.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: Bout the time it started trying to ease out of the Depression, along come Germany and decided to start a war. Well, we got all involved with that and next thing we know, Japan decided to bomb Pearl Harbor.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: Then we was at it full blast.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: One thing about it, they've tried it a couple of times since then but not near as much as they did when they bombed Pearl harbor. They made a mistake. They made the country mad.

GRITTER: [laughs] Yeah.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Well, United States is been, [pause] well, as honest as they could be really.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Yeah, because certain things that are secret can't be told.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: I know, because-

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: I'm still a registered secret.

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

GRITTER: Mhmm. So did you-

MERRIFIELD: I can go any-

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

GRITTER: So did you have any connections to service people during World War II?

MERRIFIELD: What?

ROEHRIG: Did you have any connections to people who served in World War II in the military?

MERRIFIELD: In World War II- hey, you asked for them to be old people.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Uh-huh.

ROEHRIG: Any of your relatives or neighbors serve?

MERRIFIELD: I'm trying to think. Well, on our fiftieth graduation, we'd only lost about uh, eight or nine out of 52 graduating seniors.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But the last time there was only about eight or nine of us alive. So, that last ten years, there're probably only seven or eight of us still alive.

ROEHRIG: But what about- did you know people who served during World War II?

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

ROEHRIG: Did you know people who served during World War II?

MERRIFIELD: Did I-

ROEHRIG: Know people who served during World War II? Neighbors-

MERRIFIELD: Well, part of it would be part of World War II because, it started- our war started before we ever had aware.

ROEHRIG: Yeah, right.

MERRIFIELD: That's the thing. Now I got out of high school in 1952.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Well, things were popping because they fired MacArthur cause he told em, they should've went in and took care of Korea, and didn't make him do it. And uh, [pause] I think he regretted that after that too but [pause] cause MacArthur told them if they- the should've went on in and settled Korea's situation right then. Been a lot of the men's lives saved, and a lotta economy changed. But when we finally got a little more wise about that interchange between going out and coming in products because [clears throat] at one time there and Japan was first and us was half stuff with importing.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And what were they getting out of us? A new car or two every now and then.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: I don't know, I can't remember anything that they- justified and glorified it enough to make it important

GRITTER: Mhm.

[beeping in background]

MERRIFIELD: And well, the Japanese were people that could duplicate anything.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: They really weren't inventors themselves but they could duplicate it.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Now, the people during World War II and all up to the end of World War II, if Hitler hadn't got so greedy it'd been a whole different situation cause Germany made the best steel in the United States. Not second.

ROEHRIG: Better than-

MERRIFIELD: The best.

ROEHRIG: Better- better than the United States, then, huh?

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

ROEHRIG: Germany made the better steel than the United States?

MERRIFIELD: Well, see the thing about it, we- when we started getting into the war being this without thinking-huh!

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: We uh- we really weren't equipped. One was then-J-J-Japan came in and sneaked in on us, and we'd already walked in something we shouldn't have gotten into to start with- with Germany, we should've let them settle in a little bit before we got into it. The older generation can look back and see what's happened and the younger generation it's hard for them to see it because they didn't see what was happening before that.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And that's where I have an advantage when I'm talking to somebody about things that happened forty- hell- he wouldn't born forty years ago.

GRITTER: Oh, I was.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: So I was, y'know.

GRITTER: I'm 41 so. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Forty years ago, I was nearly 50 years old so you know.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm. So did World War II and Korea change your community?

MERRIFIELD: Oh. What?

ROEHRIG: Did, uh, World War II and the Korean conflict- did they change Ballinger?

MERRIFIELD: Well sure, it changed uh- see Ballinger during World War II had a cadet base there.

GRITTER: Oh really?

MERRIFIELD: That's where their airport is now.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Or it was, last time I was there. I hadn't been to the airport in a hundred years.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: My dad built those airfields. All along Highway 90.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And, uh, they, uh- well, we were the part of the United States that industry was booming because we were less likely got to before somebody could shoot them down.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: So-

GRITTER: Interesting.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And, uh, sorta like the Twin Towers, now ooh- ohoho- if we'd have seen that coming, it never would've happened at all.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm.

MERRIFIELD: Cause they would've took that thing right out of there right in the air.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: But there again- there goes back to that history back.

GRITTER: Mhm!

MERRIFIELD: Most people and see, I can talk because I got the age.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: The ones that are 23- ain't the ones ten and twelve!

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: But, these- they thinking about it. Uh, that extra ten years tells you a lot that they didn't ever know about.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Yeah. Well, let's see, heck, I probably -when'd you- what year were you born?

ROEHRIG: 1949.

MERRIFIELD: '39?

ROEHRIG: '49

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

ROEHRIG: '49!

MERRIFIELD: Yeah, I was a junior in '49. Junior in high school.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: Sophomore, yeah.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: When she was born.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs] So how was World War II remembered in your community?

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: How-how was, uh, World War II remembered in Ballinger?

MERRIFIELD: [sighs] A whole lotta- one thing. Little cities like Ballinger.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: [coughs]

MERRIFIELD: Back then, nearly every little city had a National Guard.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: So naturally when the World War II started, those were the first guys called up.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Cause they didn't have to spend so much time training them.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: So, and they lost a lot of them too.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Because they hadn't had enough training. Uh [pause] oh, boys that were say, six years older than me.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Probably only half of them made it through World War II. From my area, I'm talking about. Cause they would take them, as fast as they could talk them into going. And-

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: Our draft. [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: And draft- the draft coming along and then after they saw ones, they set a limit on what they could do, on that deal which they should've done a long time ago.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: Oh yeah.

MERRIFIELD: But that's somethin' a lot of people didn't realize how-how it changed from that point on.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Because that- that meant they couldn't send a remaining- they send it back in the military without him volunteering.

ROEHRIG: Uh-huh.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm.

MERRIFIELD: And, well, now like the Marine Corps- you never had any trouble. Y'know, fancy name, Marine Corps.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Yeah, well, 13868985, alright I'm out of the Marine Corps. Sure on sixty years but I still got my serial number.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs] Interesting.

MERRIFIELD: But you, uh, run into all kinds of people from all parts of the country.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And mostly us being located, the guys that went in service round this area would uh be- you'd end up starting out- you'd sign up whatever town of- Abilene or San Angelo or something- and they'd bounce you around to the little deals a few days and then now- put you in an uh, hotel in an uh, Dallas. You're up there about four days, trying to figure out what the heck you're doing, all you're doing is just doing.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And then all of a sudden, okay boys, we're gonna start classifying. Okay- zip, zip, zip, zip.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Uh-uh- And uh, the ones I went in service with, only one of them, I ever saw after that.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Cause they all went a different direction.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And one of them, was after the Korea deal was over [pause] I was walking down the street, and I heard this- it was this four guys out on the coast saying and I heard this kid, and I says, "Sullivan?"- he says, "Merrifield! What're you doing?"

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: It was a guy I went through boot camp with. That's the first time I'd seen him since we left boot camp.

GRITTER: Interesting.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: And he said that - uh, almost a fourth of the guys we went with, went to Korea with him and Said a bunch of them didn't make it back.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: Korea- they never did plan that outright even though MacArthur gave them that opportunity and he wouldn't do it. That was Truman's fault.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Truman had two, three faults [laughs] matter of fact.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Looking back, I can tell. [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: But better than peanut farmer, huh?

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs] Well, let's- let's not get into that. Let him ask his next question. [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs] So, were there other- we've talked about World War II so are there other major events that shaped your life?

ROEHRIG: Other major events that shaped your life.

MERRIFIELD: What?

ROEHRIG: Major events that shaped your life.

MERRIFIELD: I'm not- I'm not picking you up something.

ROEHRIG: [louder] M-any major events!

MERRIFIELD: In my life?

ROEHRIG: That shaped your life.

MERRIFIELD: Other than getting married?

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG [laughs] That'll do it.

MERRIFIELD: Y'know I was married 61 and a half years when she passed away.

GRITTER: Oh wow, mhm.

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: And uh, she, uh, I was home on leave and next last leave I came in off of 'fore I got out of the Marine Corps. And I had known her all my life cause I played dominos with her mother and dad.

GRITTER: Oh, K.

MERRIFIELD: And I- I was five 'n a half years older than her.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And during the process of going through the Marine Corps, she had grown up.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

ROEHRIG: Mhm-hm [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: So, I come in- and that was next leave- next- it was the last leave I came in on before I got out.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And uh-

GRITTER: So you were in the Marine Corps '53-56?

MERRIFIELD: Um.

ROEHRIG: How long were you in the Marine Corps? [louder]

MERRIFIELD: From January 5th, of '53, to uh, retirement was January 5th of '61.

GRITTER: Of '61, okay.

MERRIFIELD: Because they added that 8-year obligated service.

ROEHRIG: So- so how much of that was active? Was it all active?

MERRIFIELD: Well, yeah.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm.

ROEHRIG: Okay.

MERRIFIELD: Cause you have to serve it out.

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: But that is- sometimes it's active and then reserve.

MERRIFIELD: Yeah, well, you had that obligated service- but you had to work it out, but it was still service.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Don't let 'em tell you it's not, cause I can go back and tell you it was.

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

GRITTER: Mhm, mhm. So where were you stationed when you were in-

MERRIFIELD: Well, see the thing about it, when we start getting into this kinda stuff- now I went straight outta highschool as an accountant and a parts manager at a Lincoln-Mercury dealership.

GRITTER: Okay, mhm.

MERRIFIELD: At eighteen years old. In 1952, I was making a thousand dollars a month, 2% profit, and a new demonstrator driver. Now, why would I want to do anything else?

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Well, some girl I graduated with in high school called one day and says "Uh you get a preference?" and I said "What?", "You're being drafted."

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG:[laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Oh, thanks.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: So I went up to Abilene and I had to take an exam from the Air Force and I got up there, you're overqualified.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: I heard that a lot of times too believe me.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: But, uh, I uh, went and walked into the Marine Corps and signed up and they said "Now take this exam." The exam was ninety, I scored one-hundred and forty.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: So there come that big dias right there.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: So where-where were you stationed?

MERRIFIELD: Uh boot camp in San Diego.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Oceanside a whole forty-something miles north.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: Was where I was at.

GRITTER: Oh nice.

MERRIFIELD: Oceanside, Cal-

ROEHRIG: The whole time?

MERRIFIELD: Camp Pendleton was right across the highway.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Against the coast and you'd walk across the highway and it was Camp Delmar. You'd walk across the bridge and you is in Oceanside, California. And [long pause] it's a wild time. Yeah, talk about a cut in pay.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Whoo. I made a whole sixty-eight dollars a month in boot camp.

GRITTER: Wow. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Whoo. I graduated top twenty-five so that went up to seventy-five dollars. Oh, boy.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Along, about that time they decided, well we're sending you to third tanks, okay. [long pause] Which didn't mean a whole lot cause I still at the same Camp Delmar.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But, I went down on a tank pad two times and they called me up to the office and said they wanted to talk to you up there and I said okay, and the Sergeant down there he says if you don't like it come on back. And three of us went up there and we came back and we told we don't- we don't want it. He says you're already transferred, all three of you.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: All three of us got transferred into the same office.

GRITTER: Okay

MERRIFIELD: So we stayed together the rest of our Marine Corps career. But the thing about the military, if they get somebody they like, they're gonna to try to keep him as long as they can.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And they got ways of working it- oh my god. I uh, [pause] tried to uh, get transferred from California down to Corpus Christi.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Because my dad was working down there on a naval airbase.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Oooh no.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: That'd be too simple.

ROEHRIG: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Well alright, I've had lots of things happen in my life. Some were good, some were bad.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Most of it- I said the best thing I ever did was marry the woman I did.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: She forewarned me so I couldn't complain with the results, y'know, because...

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Before she- we got married, she said we'll have at least six kids and she meant that.

GRITTER: [laughs] Mhm.

ROEHRIG: Mhm, yeah

MERRIFIELD: And course, I didn't think she was going to do it just, October, November, December, January, February- y'know.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs] Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And then she miscarried in March, so.

GRITTER: Mhm.

ROEHRIG: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Let's-Let's go back to your time in the Marines.

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

ROEHRIG: Let's go back to your time in the Marines. [louder]

MERRIFIELD: In the Marines. Well, like I say, I was at Delmar. I- I was head of the battalion office there.

GRITTER: Okay.

MERRIFIELD: Everything went through my office but what was I doing?

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: I saw everything that went through it, but I was cleared for secret so it had to come through me to get to the next guy down the line. And- and. It was a fun time, 'cept for the pay.

GRITTER: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: The pay stunk. As a sergeant, over two years, a hundred and thirty six fifty a month. 136.50 a month.

GRITTER: Oh wow. Uh-huh.

MERRIFIELD: Now, you look at these guys and you tell em- what do you get now? Oh we get about 2500 to sign up. Yeah [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: Not when they're drafted.

GRITTER: Yeah [laughs] So um-

MERRIFIELD: Well, yeah- huh?

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: So has the way World War II been remembered changed during your life?

ROEHRIG: Uh- [laughs]- has the way World War II is remembered changed during your life?
[louder]

MERRIFIELD: The world?

ROEHRIG: Uh- World War II. The way it's remembered

MERRIFIELD: Some of it has and some of it hadn't.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: There's certain places that didn't change, I think, were a lot.

GRITTER: Yeah

MERRIFIELD: Now the parts that I was in during those times that I was in, like the Western Coast - ah, things changed some during that period cause we had Korea and desert storms and a buncha others, non-war deals.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: But, uh [pause] we [pause] the people, I guess, were-were different. It's always property and stuff out in California were so out of sights you couldn't judge with what you'd get at home, y'know. If you owned a good piece 'a property out in California, you could buy ya a heck of a piece in Texas.

GRITTER: Yep. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: So, but, and, I, uh- I had one kid I kept through good track of until [pause] I lived in Selene about 17 years and I moved and I lost track of him. He was from El Paso and he was in one of the branches that are close to me all the time so there were times when we were going by and we saw each other. But- but- the- places out there- course I ain't been out in the last few years in Southern Cal- well, I've been out but just...

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But, uh, everybody [sighs] is classified and they may not know they are but they are.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And- and that's sorta like now. I have uh, my daughter whose's other half is the head of the VA.

[vibrating sound in background]

MERRIFIELD: Okay, she's 41 years old and she controls your benefits.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: All of em.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

MERRIFIELD: And, and that's the way the military is. They classify you. They offered me my commission when I told them I was getting out. I took a 45 day early discharge to get back in college and they offered me 'go ahead and sign up'. And, I could go to an officer cadet school if I didn't make it, and they'd guarantee me a tech stripe.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But I- then you're there for another four years.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: Oh yeah. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: So. But people- not only us and- I guess the people got greedier over the years for one thing.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: I mean- it's- it's one of the things that happens.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: It's gonna happen to any- any civilization that starts progressing.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: It's going to change some of them, cause some of them's gonna want to get headshot guy so he's going to step on a few toes to get there, and if you've been in the right place, right time, you know the people that let you know not to do this and not to do that, and you'll get along just fine. [laughs]

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: The guys that are in service, tied with any kind of military of work- especially if they're handling stuff that goes through as classified, man, and- and- now classified doesn't mean secret. It's just classified.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: And you can be classified and you can be handling a lotta pretty important stuff but not even know what the heck it is.

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: Cause you get a- now we didn't have computers back then, by the way.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs] Oh yeah.

MERRIFIELD: Teletype.

GRITTER: Yeah. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: A- a deal that you could research right now on a computer. [pause] It might take you an hour to get a complete history on it. Now, on teletype, it might take you a week.

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: But, we, uh, well any civilization that either progresses or don't make it- so far we've been lucky. We've had enough people with success to cultivate some of these things that would keep us going. Uh- I keep telling kids I see, if you're getting out of school, you don't want to go to college, take you a classified, certified job so you'll have a thing you can say I'm certified to do this. That's more than a dadgum college degree, that says you got a degree. Unless you're working in that degree.

GRITTER: Mhm. [pause] So what do you think of this idea of the Greatest Generation? [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs] What do you think of the idea of the Greatest Generation? [louder]

MERRIFIELD: The Greatest Generation?

GRITTER: Mhm.

MERRIFIELD: Y'know- I was born in the wrong time.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD Y'know. [laughs] '33 wouldn't a very good time to start.

GRITTER: Yeah. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: And so World War II was going by '40.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm.

ROEHRIG: Mhm-hm. [stutters and falters unintelligibly]

GRITTER: Yeah.

MERRIFIELD: And then by '48, Korea had jumped into the fire.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: It just hadn't been a real smooth ride since then.

GRITTER: Yeah. [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: But, uh, the people survived it. The thing about it, uh, America people- [pause] they're all pretty intelligent.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: And they know when they're being taken and they know how to get back to them sooner or later

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: And, that's like- I've always been fortunate because I got that bookkeeping. I scored on the Air Force exams- they were ninety- I scored a hundred and forty.

ROEHRIG: Yeah.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: Marine Corps, I scored a hundred and forty-one.

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

GRITTER: Nice.

MERRIFIELD: But you know what went top of mine first. I mean- it did say carry an M1. It said O, one, four, three - office

GRITTER: Interesting. Mhm-hm. So do you have any items or letters that you want to share with the project?

ROEHRIG: Do- do you have any- have any memorabilia- any letters or anything like that from your time in the Marines?

MERRIFIELD: Oh, I might find some. Oh, my daughter has my complete record.

GRITTER: Oh, okay.

ROEHRIG: Which one?

MERRIFIELD: See I- huh?

ROEHRIG: Who- Which- Which daughter?

MERRIFIELD: Uh, JJ.

ROEHRIG: JJ. MmmK.

MERRIFIELD: My one who's going to be my executor of estate. She has a complete military record of me-

GRITTER: Nice

MERRIFIELD: - including the signed secret papers with everything else so, some-somebody had inquired about my secret, somewhere- I don't even know who it was.

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: But they called and asked sergeant so and so was classified secret. I said, "yes ma'am, that's all you can get."

ROEHRIG: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: That's it. Yeah, from that point on, they couldn't get anything else

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

MERRIFIELD: They had to have a special order.

ROEHRIG: Well, we'll have to check out what you might have and.

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

ROEHRIG: We'll have to check out what you might have and get back to-

GRITTER: Great. Do you have anything else? Do you have any concluding remarks?

ROEHRIG: You have any final remarks? [louder]

MERRIFIELD: Huh?

ROEHRIG: You have any final remarks?

MERRIFIELD: I don't know.

GRITTER: [laughs]

ROEHRIG: Okay [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Hey, you wouldn't believe they got me doing so many things right now.

GRITTER: Oh really. [laughs]

ROEHRIG: [laughs]

MERRIFIELD: Uh, let's see- we had this today

ROEHRIG: Uh-huh

MERRIFIELD: And I got another one tomorrow.

ROEHRIG: Something, yeah

MERRIFIELD: I don't know which one it is.

ROEHRIG: Yeah

GRITTER: Mhm-hm

ROEHRIG: We'll have to check with Lisa.

GRITTER: Alright, well.