

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAM SPOONER

An interview conducted on

Feb 18, 2018

Interviewer: Patrick Ramirez

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Sam Spooner are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on Feb 18, 2018.

This interview was conducted as a course assignment for a class in the Department of History at Angelo State University in collaboration with the *War Stories* Project.

Interviewer: Patrick Ramirez

Transcriber: Patrick Ramirez and Cassandra Schultz

Editor: Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai

The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

The following document has been edited. For an unedited version, please visit the Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection.

RAMIREZ: Okay, and what is your name?

SPOONER: Sam Spooner.

RAMIREZ: Alright. Just gonna write down some of this stuff, just so I won't forget.

SPOONER: Okay.

RAMIREZ: Alright, second question of the . . . of this questionnaire is when and where were you born?

SPOONER: I was born in, uh, 1966 in Parma, Ohio.

RAMIREZ: Um, and did you grow up there?

SPOONER: Yeah, I grew up in . . . grew up in Middleburgh Heights so I always was very close to there. So . . .

RAMIREZ: What's it like around there?

SPOONER: Uh. Kind of right outside of the city of Cleveland, so about 14 miles out. Pretty industrial area.

RAMIREZ: So, you . . . so, city? City life?

SPOONER: City. City life. Pretty much, yeah.

RAMIREZ: So, do you like it better? Do you . . . I mean, obviously you're in San Angelo.

SPOONER: Oh, yeah, I like West Texas.

RAMIREZ: Yeah?

SPOONER: Definitely enjoy West Texas, yeah.

RAMIREZ: You're from . . . You've seen. You . . . How long you been in San Angelo again?

SPOONER: Since 2006.

RAMIREZ: So you've seen . . .

SPOONER: So, 11 years.

RAMIREZ: You've seen it grow. You were here for the oil boom. And you might see it again. The oil boom is what they're saying.

SPOONER: Right, yep.

RAMIREZ: That's pretty cool. I was there for an oil boom and I've seen it before. I was a part of two of them, so that was pretty . . .

SPOONER: That's cool.

RAMIREZ: It was pretty interesting. How would you define West Texas?

SPOONER: I would define West Texas as a uh . . . a uh . . . an area that . . . kind of a hidden gem, I guess. West Texas would be a hidden gem. Uh, there's everything here that you could possibly need and more. It's a good environment, weather, probably 90% of the time. And, uh, people are friendly and are willing to help you and work together.

RAMIREZ: Would you say they're a little aggressive? Friendly, a friendly type of aggressive?

SPOONER: Nah, just the regular aggressive. I just . . . No, not . . . Not aggressive but, uh, more . . . uh, of a, uh . . . just a friendly . . . uh . . . Make eye contact, ask how you're doing.

RAMIREZ: Yep.

SPOONER: And genuine, uh, genuine good peop . . . genuinely good people.

RAMIREZ: What do you think the different is be . . . uh . . . is between West Texas and Texans from other regions of the state?

SPOONER: I don't know if there's a whole lot different to tell you the truth. Uh . . . I really don't see a lot of difference when I go visit different parts of the state. Um, I do see a, uh, ability to adapt here 'cause it's a little more remote than some of the other parts of the state. Uh, so, you're able to adapt to the weather changes, adapt to the, um . . . the heat, and, uh . . . that type of environment and still get the job done. So, I think that's . . . that I see. But I think that's pretty much . . . I think there's a lot of pride across Texas and . . . and being, you know, a Texan, so I see that.

RAMIREZ: Growing up in Texas, like, you see that a lot, a lot of people who identify as just Texan. So, it's really nice.

SPOONER: Yeah yeah. Yep, yep.

RAMIREZ: How would you characterize West Texans' relationship to the military?

SPOONER: Oh, I think it's excellent. I think it's superb. Being a military guy, a veteran, uh, 21 years in the military, uh, especially here in San Angelo, uh, when I was wearing the uniform there was several times people thanked me at lunch. Couple times people offered to buy lunch. Uh, they just went out of their way to show that they were proud of what we did as, uh military. And that we were, uh, supported here in the community.

RAMIREZ: Did you ever feel uncomfortable? Uh . . .

SPOONER: Never.

RAMIREZ: Never?

SPOONER: Never. Never. I felt welcome everywhere in my uniform. In fact, uh, encouraged to come in because I was wearing the uniform, so . . .

RAMIREZ: Was there ever a . . . uh . . . an awkward time while wearing the uniform that Texans kinda . . . that's not . . . not, uh . . . invaded your privacy? But, like you said, you were at lunch, so you were just wanting to eat just . . . you've had . . .

SPOONER: No! No, in fact, it was welcome. It was welcome. And, and it . . . wuh . . . Ya know, I felt, uh . . . you know very proud that I could be wearing the uniform and . . . and supporting the, uh, community and the people around.

RAMIREZ: That's good. Where and when did you enter the armed- armed forces, and what branch did you serve in?

SPOONER: Well, I was commissioned in, uh, through, uh, Reserve Officer Training Corps through Miami of Ohio, Miami University of Ohio. Um, commissioned back in May of 1988, a long time ago. And, then I entered, uh, active duty down at Keesler Air Force base in February of 1989, so down in uh Mississippi.

RAMIREZ: So that's where you started like, really . . .

[Unintelligible]

SPOONER: That's where I started, Buloxi, Mississippi. That's where I started.

RAMIREZ: Wow, really, so the . . .

SPOONER: Yep. And when I went from . . .

RAMIREZ: How is it over there?

SPOONER: It was . . . It was great back then.

RAMIREZ: Really?

SPOONER: Yeah, it was great. It was, uh, you know, you had the ocean weather. It was warm but it was really nice, yeah. Really nice place.

RAMIREZ: What . . . What other, uh, place in Texas would you consider . . . compare that weather to Mississippi's weather? In the beginning stages like you said.

SPOONER: I . . . The humidity is not the same, so I couldn't really compare. Yeah, there's, uh . . . sometimes Wichita Falls would get humid a little bit when I was up there, stationed up there.

RAMIREZ: I can see it getting . . .

SPOONER: But realistically, yeah, realistically I haven't seen it here like, like I did in Mississippi, the humidity level.

RAMIREZ: Okay. Did you go to the ocean a lot over there?

SPOONER: Mmhmm, yeah. Well, every time I . . .

RAMIREZ: Awesome.

SPOONER: Every time I . . . Every time I got the chance.

RAMIREZ: Yeah?

SPOONER: 'Cause I was a young man back then, yeah.

RAMIREZ: Oh, I bet that was awesome.

SPOONER: It was fun.

RAMIREZ: What were your years of service?

SPOONER: Oh, I came in in 1989 and then I . . . I retired in uh 2009, so . . .

RAMIREZ: My wife being in the military, um, can you just stay in as long as you can kinda . . . kinda . . . ?

SPOONER: Mmhmm, yeah. I stayed in as long as I could and then I decided that I just wanted to try something else, you know. I was eligible for retirement so I, uh, I did that and I still stayed with the government for a while 'cause I stayed on as the Goodfellow Air Force Base's chief of safety for about six years almost.

RAMIREZ: Is it . . . Is it that kind of . . . of idea, once you get out they call you back? It's like, it's pulling me back in? Did you have that feeling around . . . 'cause I mean you were in there for a good while and . . .

SPOONER: Well, you . . . Yes, because you get, um . . . you get . . . This is, if any other organization, I would imagine, for the most part, you get kind of, um, integrated into that organization, so you really don't wanna leave that . . . that type of environment.

RAMIREZ: Is that . . . is that . . .

SPOONER: Now, that environment was very, very . . . You know, I can't complain about that environment at all. For my entire life, it was a good environment and, uh, I enjoyed the environment, and . . . and, uh, wanted to stay in it for . . .for quite a while.

RAMIREZ: I mean, you really did. It's really awesome.

SPOONER: It was fun.

RAMIREZ: Let's see. During your years of service, were you primarily in the enlisted ranks, a non-commissioned officer, an officer, or warrant officer?

SPOONER: I was an officer. I came in, uh . . . Like I said, I went through R.O.—Reserve Officer Training, uh, Corps . . .Corps—in Miami of Ohio. Uh, I was commissioned in 1988 and I spent my career as an officer, uh, retiring as a lieutenant colonel, uh, in 2009. So, yep.

RAMIREZ: And did you . . . And then, all those ranks, did they take a good while to get . . .

[Unintelligible]

SPOONER: Yeah, normal progression . . .

RAMIREZ: Or were you an exception . . . ?

SPOONER: No, normal progression. Normal progression throughout the ranks. Uh, try to do [Unintelligible] do absolute best with the best people around me each and every day and normal progression through the ranks.

RAMIREZ: That's great, though. So, if some of these questions, if I if I feel like you're . . .

SPOONER: No, no, go ahead.

RAMIREZ: 'Cause it's first time.

SPOONER: Any time.

RAMIREZ: So, the next, uh, the next one part of that . . . that question I just asked was, if you served as an officer, what was the source of your commission?

SPOONER: Yeah, source of commissioning was ROTC. Yep. Perfect, yep.

RAMIREZ: 'Cause I've . . . I've always wondered, um, you know, kinda joining in this military family. Never been a part of it really, 'cause I've had some cousins and whatnot but as . . . Now

as a spouse . . . You becoming a lieutenant colonel, I mean, is it usually a, uh, pretty good progression or is it something you just pick up and you just know it and you just . . .

SPOONER: You're given a variety of different jobs along the way. I was a, uh, communications and space background, uh, officer but, uh, had a variety of different, uh, opportunities in there. Anything from, uh, mobile communications to, uh, being a commander at Sheppard Air Force Base, um, which most of my unit, uh, was aircraft maintenance, uh, so lot of different opportunities. I think the biggest thing is to have great people around you and count on them to do the great things, and . . . and they . . . they do, and . . . and make sure you can lead in the right direction.

RAMIREZ: Now, it might not . . . Some of these questions might not pertain to you . . .

SPOONER: Okay. No, that's fine. That's fine.

RAMIREZ: In which military conflict did you take part?

SPOONER: Well, I was over in Iraqi Freedom, so, I was uh over there, uh, in 2007, um, to right before 2008. Um . . . Over at, uh, the name of the base at the time was LSA Anaconda or, uh, or Balad Air Base is what it was also known as over in Iraq.

RAMIREZ: Why did you enlist in the armed forces, and what motivated you to do so?

SPOONER: Well, I . . . I . . . I like the military structure, I like the organization by the military. I felt it was kind of my duty and calling to join the military at the time. And I . . . And so, I looked at that as an opportunity through the ROTC program, and then when I initially went in I thought, "Well, I'm gonna do my service time in four years and I'll be out and do something else," and then I started enjoying it more and more and stuck around and, next thing I know, twenty years goes by and I'm ready for retirement. So, I just enjoyed it every . . . Every assignment was a . . . was a new challenge and I think what I really liked the best about it is the challenges that came my way. Uh, I had two unit, uh, stand ups during my career. Which were from scratch, brand new units, so that . . . that was absolutely fantastic to be a part of an organization stand up and- and just be able to do right from the beginning.

RAMIREZ: And for them to give you the reigns, and like, "Alright we trust you" and that's really . . . That's really awesome.

SPOONER: It was great stuff.

RAMIREZ: So, at an early age, did you just . . . Did you just like the idea of just being structured with the military? Just... you just liked it, just it caught your attention.

SPOONER: Just thought it was a good way to go and I . . . I enjoyed it and I knew the people that I was gonna be working with were gonna be top notch and they were gonna be patriotic as well and . . .

RAMIREZ: Do you think it's that idea of the 80s and like just the . . . you know, patriotism?

SPOONER: Oh, yeah, that was a big structure back then in that time frame because that was even during the Reagan years. Back then where, you know, the U.S was very patriotic, um, I mean, go back to when I was about sixteen-years-old, we had the Olympics where the . . . where the American team beat the Russia team in hockey. I still remember watching that with my dad and getting excited and thinking how great that was, getting to see that. I mean just . . . You could feel the patriotism across the country at that point.

RAMIREZ: Speaking of the 80s and patriotism, because I have older brothers and . . . and we're big pro-wrestling fans. So, now around that time, were you, I . . . You don't have to be the biggest wrestling fan but, obviously, you know Hulk Hogan .

SPOONER: Right, I knew Hulk Hogan.

RAMIREZ: And fighting like Iron Sheik and all these bad villains. So, to add on to that, I mean patriotism in the 80s just was . . .

SPOONER: Oh, it was. Yeah, yeah, they bring the American flag out and be proud of it and, yeah, there was a . . . There was a big . . . big feel behind that. I like that as well.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, and the 90s and now it's . . . [Unintelligible]

SPOONER: It was Andre the Giant.

RAMIREZ: Andre that giant, and big . . .

SPOONER: All those guys.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, and now you see the patriotism kind of . . . It's still there, but it's . . .

SPOONER: Mhm. I think it's still there. I think . . .

RAMIREZ: It just gets blended with so many radical ideas because now people see it like, "Oh, if you say this, then you're this" and that's just . . . I hate to see now.

SPOONER: Well, I-I-I don't wanna really say . . . I wanna say, there is those . . . There are those areas of political correctness that are occurring. I understand that. Um, I don't think patriotism is one of those areas where, you know, that . . . that you really can be grayed. Either you're patriotic or you're not. Either you're, you know, in love with the country or, you know, here, or you're not. Uh, there . . . I don't see a lot of gray area there. Uh . . . To me . . . I . . . You know, I've seen the greatest things here in San Angelo. I saw a baseball game wanting to start here, uh, back when the Colts were here, and . . . and they didn't . . . The guys when onto the field and they hadn't sang the national anthem yet and the stands yelled at them to get back in the dugout until the national anthem was sang and some lady started a cappella. It was awesome. That's . . . Yeah, that's the kind of patriotism you see in West Texas. So, I appreciate that.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, uh, I agree, and, uh, to speak on that a little bit with the NFL, with all that going on, I went to a Cowboys game and no one kneeled. Not saying you can, you know, I'm not on one side or the other but I knew . . . I knew there, like in Texas on Thanksgiving, you're not gonna see that. And sure enough you didn't. Everyone stood, but . . .

SPOONER: Nah, yeah, I mean . . .

RAMIREZ: It's just a diff . . . like . . . [Unintelligible.]

SPOONER: It is different, yeah. It's different over the years and, you know, but, um, I'm still . . . I'm still gonna be the same, always. Yeah, I won't change.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, I mean that's great. What was your training like? I bet it was a little different now.

SPOONER: Well, back then, uh, we went through basic training. Um I wouldn't say it was extremely difficult. You know, they . . . They wanted you to be able to adhere to orders when they were given and, you know, if they were legal, and moral, and within your ability, then you should have fall out and do . . . do them as . . . as told, and that's, uh, kinda the way I grew up with things and you didn't question the authority as long as, like I said, it was legal and moral and it was morally right then . . . then we do what we needed to do. Um, didn't have, uh, too much trouble with that. I went through communications, uh, computer training, uh, there at . . . there at Keesler in Mississippi. Uh, it was, um, kind of just an add on from my bachelors in computer science, so it took it to the next level, uh, in what they were expecting in how to program and do different things in the . . . the computer area. And, uh, apply those skills. Uh, that's what they expected, and then . . . then they gave us plenty . . . plenty of opportunities to learn. Throughout my career I was able to, uh, actually get three masters degrees throughout my twenty years so . . .

RAMIREZ: Were they in computer science?

SPOONER: Uh, well, uh, I have one in, uh, information management, one in, uh, software engineering, and one in, uh, here at ASU believe or not, Angelo State University. I have it in curriculum and instruction. I wanted to go back and get a teaching degree, uh, prior to, uh, prior to finishing everything.

RAMIREZ: So, you ever wanna go into teaching, you can go into teaching if you want? That's really great. So, to . . . um . . . From . . . From when you first enlisted to 2009, was there . . . was training just dramatically changed over . . . within the military when you saw it or really nothing changed?

SPOONER: Well, it did change. It changed, uh, um, because you had different levels of training. Uh . . . For example, when you were a . . . a captain in the Air Force, uh, you had to do Squadron Officer School, and then you had Air Command and Staff College as a major, and then you had, uh, Air War College as a lieutenant colonel. So, what it . . . What it taught you is the basic

history behind the military decisions that were made, uh, not only the basic history but to understand what's going on across the different, uh, areas of the globe, so you had a little bit of, uh, cultural awareness across . . . in different areas. So, that did change over the time that I was . . . over those 20 years because, obviously, our cultures, you know, we had to be aware of, you know, Afghanistan, Iraq, all those things now are part . . . playing a bigger role than say they did in early, you know, late 80s early 90s. Uh . . . We got . . . We have much more, you know, um, intelligence regarding the . . . the cultures, and have to be aware of those cultures especially if we're going to fight in those countries.

RAMIREZ: To speak on that, uh, what were your race relations like when you were enlisted?

SPOONER: Oh, they were . . . They were fan . . . They were fantastic. Uh, that's . . . That is, uh . . . one of the, um . . . I guess blessings in the military. I really truly feel that. Uh, really race relations didn't come into play. It was absolutely . . . When you were in there, I truly and honestly . . . We didn't think about race. There was no question about race or gender. That wasn't important. We had a mission to do, we got it done.

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

SPOONER: We never looked at it that way. We looked at it by your last name. Whoever you were, you were Smith, Jones, Spooner, didn't matter. You were part of the team, got it done, and you were expected to perform, and there was no . . . nothing at all to do with that. So, I . . . Race relations were absolutely fantastic, uh, while I was in the military.

RAMIREZ: Great, great.

SPOONER: Never had any issues.

RAMIREZ: Did you find your service challenging? Maybe not the whole time but, I mean, obviously, there was probably some . . .

SPOONER: There were . . . There were challenging times to my service. There were . . . There was . . .

RAMIREZ: I'm just making sure. I'm sorry.

SPOONER: Okay, still going. Yeah, there were challenging times to my service. There were, uh, you know, during the unit stand-ups, there were . . . there were a lot of things that did . . . questions that had to be answered, challenges that had to be overcome, but the, um, what I truly found out is that, no matter what it was, you had enough intelligent people around you that you can come up with a solution that would work. You just had to be willing to listen and willing to apply those . . . those things that people are bringing to your . . . bringing forward.

RAMIREZ: Can't be such a control person . . .

SPOONER: No, you can't . . . You can't be the person that thinks you know everything. As soon as you do that, yeah, that's when you're in trouble 'cause you need, uh . . . No matter what level—lowest level to highest level—people got great ideas. You have to be open to 'em.

RAMIREZ: And did you . . . Did you ever see that with some . . . some of your fellow soldiers was, uh . . .

SPOONER: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

RAMIREZ: . . . Just some people just didn't wanna let go of the reigns, and, like, uh, let some of us work with you?

SPOONER: Uh, there were . . .

RAMIREZ: 'Cause some people just like to think like, "I know it . . . it's the best way" 'cause I've . . . I've found myself sometimes at work doing that when I should just ask, "Hey, what do you think?" So, do you ever . . . [Unintelligible.]

SPOONER: There were . . . there were times. There were time where we had that, where we had someone that was just kinda headstrong. But, in most cases, they still came around, and understood because they have a bigger . . . you have a bigger mission in the military, so you just . . . You can't think just in your compartmentalized box. You have to think beyond that. If you listen to those ideas, um you know, as a commander, we . . . You know, DUIs, for example, were an issue for the young, you know, young airmen.

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

SPOONER: We wanted to stop those, so, you know, the ideas came from everywhere. Well, what if we, uh, what if we instated . . . if you make it 50 days, we have a, uh, small party for the unit, you know? That we did great. Sure, great idea. Um, what if we bring in somebody from Mothers Against Drunk Driving to talk to us about, uh, you know, uh, or from, you know, another organization to talk about the impact that has, and get into people's heads that way? Great idea. So, those are the things we did, but the ideas came from everywhere, and came from different, ah, different levels.

RAMIREZ: Like the idea of leaving Goodfellow. When, you know, they have those signs like, "call" [Unintelligible.]

SPOONER: Right, exactly. "Don't drive drunk, call." Yeah, exactly, yes. That they have Airmen Against Drunk Driving, exactly. 'Cause . . . 'cause the key is, you know, you're endangering everybody. There's no reason to endanger anyone. [Unintelligible] Um, you have no right to . . .

RAMIREZ: And you're representing the Air Force, and . . .

SPOONER: Right.

RAMIREZ: It's just like, you know, better, but, um . . .

SPOONER: Yep, exactly.

RAMIREZ: Let me see . . . I think we already answered this with growing up in the 80s, with the patriotism, but just want to . . . if, you know, want to add anything on . . . to that, what conception did you have of the United States at the time of your enlistment? What did America symbolize to you? And what did you think it stood for?

SPOONER: Oh, to me, uh, I mean America still in my . . . in my eyes always will be the greatest country in the world. I mean, there's no doubt about it to me. Uh, the opportunities are there, uh, if you're willing to do the work, any door can be open for you. You just have to apply yourself. That's what my dad taught me. He says, "Just . . . You can do anything, just apply yourself." You really can but you have to be willing to do that. And just . . . and there's patriotism in every which way and there's people, no matter what you see on the news, and what you may . . . There are awesome, patriotic Americans everywhere. And, you know, we saw that this year even in the Houston, you know, with the . . . with the floods down there, and people just, you know, reaching out to help each other, um, . . . So, I believe there's a lot more good than bad. And I always believed that. I think . . . I think this country is . . . will come together when . . . when . . . always when needed, and will always do great, so . . .

RAMIREZ: Have you ever heard of the term, uh, it's called PMA. It's called positive mental attitude?

SPOONER: Yep.

RAMIREZ: Uh, that's . . . that's basically what . . . what you're saying and that's such a great thing to have, because, you know, you have certain situations you can always just . . . there's always . . . I always tell people, "There's always good weighing out the bad or . . ."

SPOONER: Mmhmm.

RAMIREZ: You know that saying. Like there's . . .

SPOONER: Absolutely.

RAMIREZ: Guarantee you. So, that's really great. That's really awesome that you still think that about America.

SPOONER: Oh, absolutely.

RAMIREZ: Because I have those same . . . those same conflicts. Sometimes you watch the news, and you're just like . . .

SPOONER: No, and I see it in the young, uh, you know, when I was still at Goodfellow, I would have to talk to the young men and women that were coming in straight out of Lackland. They

were coming to get their technical, uh, school badge whether that be in—as a firefighter or being an intel analyst—but, you know, the patriotism is there, and . . . and it . . . It made me feel good to know that these young men and women are coming forward to carry the . . . continue to carry the flag on. Uh, you know, one of my favorite sayings, one of the young men over there, he's . . . I, you know, I asked him why they were coming in, you know, what their reasoning behind it, whether it be education, to serve their country, whatever. And one of the young men sitting . . . he's sitting, he said, "I heard there's a war going on. I figure you couldn't win it without me."

RAMIREZ: That's awesome.

SPOONER: So, I mean, that's the . . . That's the kinda, you know . . . And that just is motivating, you know? You hear those, you know, that's true, you know, they wanna do great things for the nation, so . . . That's what I like.

RAMIREZ: Were you deployed overseas? If so, what did you understand about the mission you were being asked to complete?

SPOONER: I was deployed to Iraq there, and, uh, during Iraqi Freedom, and . . . And our mission, obviously, was to, uh . . . uh, stabilize, you know, the, uh . . . stabilize the . . . the area, and the environment. Uh, I . . . I enjoyed, you know, that time there, and uh . . . you know, as much as you can being in a deployed environment but, uh, you know, bottom line is we're helping . . . helping the uh . . . humanity, you know. Uh . . . The people that I met there that were from Iraq, uh, looked very weathered in some cases, you know, just from the sun, and that kind of stuff, and understandably. But when you went to shake their hand, their whole face lit up when they . . . when they smiled at you. You know, they were glad that you were there. They were glad you were protecting them and they're glad their way of life is gonna . . . was getting better.

RAMIREZ: Did you ever see any resistance from some of the Iraqi . . . ?

SPOONER: No.

RAMIREZ: No?

SPOONER: No, I never . . . never saw any.

RAMIREZ: So, is it just kinda the propaganda in the news kinda showing they don't want you there or . . . ?

SPOONER: Well, I'm sure there were some people who didn't want us there . . .

RAMIREZ: Well, I'm sure.

SPOONER: Yeah, but . . .

RAMIREZ: It is a war!

SPOONER: But . . . But the people that I ran . . . The people that I ran into were very happy that we were there and supporting them, so . . .

RAMIREZ: That's great.

SPOONER: That's the ones I saw.

RAMIREZ: That's really great.

SPOONER: There's always bad guys out there.

RAMIREZ: Oh, yeah. So, were you there just to make sure, like, you stabilize and make sure everything's good?

SPOONER: Yep.

RAMIREZ: What unit or units did you have . . . did you serve in during your deployment? Um, I . . . You already talked about some of . . .

SPOONER: Right, I talked about that, yeah, yeah. So that was . . . yeah.

RAMIREZ: Did you serve in direct combat during your deployment or . . . No you . . .

SPOONER: Not direct. No. We . . . We had, uh, you know, at that . . . at the base, at the time, we had, uh, mortaring attacks periodically uh coming in over the fence, and just kinda random shots. You know, they were nothing . . . nothing aimed at anybody directly, just kinda came in and landed and shook the earth for a little bit around you but that was . . . That was it but I was never, uh, direct combat.

RAMIREZ: And was . . . Was that when it would happen would it kinda give you a jolt or . . .

SPOONER: Mmhm, yeah. Yeah, you'd hear the ground shaking, yeah.

RAMIREZ: So, was there ever a time you thought, really, you were gonna have to go into combat?

SPOONER: No, no, I never had that type of mission there . . . while I was there. I was more of a support organization on the . . . on the actual base, so I didn't have to get outside the wire to do some . . . some of those things. Uh, I had plenty of friends that did, uh, but . . . but I didn't have . . . have to do that.

RAMIREZ: So, the next question I don't think's gonna apply to you. Were you wounded in action?

SPOONER: No.

RAMIREZ: You did not become a prisoner of war, just to double check.

SPOONER: Nope. Nope.

RAMIREZ: What did you think . . . I think you've already me . . . like some of these questions, you know [Unintelligible.]

SPOONER: Are repetitive. Yeah, that's fine.

RAMIREZ: Yeah! That's fine.

SPOONER: Yeah, I understand.

RAMIREZ: What did you think of the local inhabitants that you encountered?

SPOONER: Oh, I think they were great. I, uh . . . Yeah, I didn't have any issues with any . . . any of them. Uh, they were good people, um, the ones that I encountered. Um, what's interesting to me was the Ugandans were, uh, actually providing security at . . . at one point, on that base a little bit . . . some of the, you know, building security and stuff like that. And if you look back to the 1970s era when they had Idi Amin, you know, as their dictator, um, it's kinda, it was kind of um, ironic that they'd be there supporting the Iraqis, uh, get out from underneath their dictator.

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

SPOONER: So, that was interesting to see that, and they were very, very nice people, and, uh, always big smile on their face wanting to say hello to you.

RAMIREZ: Were they good, uh . . . was the language barrier a little hard . . . ?

SPOONER: No, the Ugandans were, uh, most of them spoke, uh . . . English very well, and, uh, were very pleasant and nice . . . nice to meet.

RAMIREZ: That's really great.

SPOONER: So . . . A handshake and a smile go a long way.

RAMIREZ: Oh, yeah. [Unintelligible]

SPOONER: No matter what it is. Doesn't matter which . . . what . . .

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

SPOONER: It goes a long way.

RAMIREZ: When you interact with the local inhabitants, what did you . . . what did you think their conceptions were of the United States? Did you ever engage them in a conversation about what America meant to you?

SPOONER: No, I never had that kinda relationship with them. We had more like a just, you know, "How are you?" type, very general . . . you know. I didn't ever had to have a long term or- or friendship type building, uh . . . experience with any of them, you know, unfortunately, you know. It would have been . . . I would, you know, it would have been good, but I didn't really have that, so I didn't have an opportunity to ask them how they felt or really tell them how I felt . . .

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

SPOONER: Obviously, I would . . . I would think they'd be able to see how I felt 'cause, you know, I was there, and, you know, be over there is one thing just to be over there supporting them and wearing the uniform doing it so . . .

RAMIREZ: Good. Yeah, you don't want to get into that argument sometimes, 'cause you don't know . . . where . . . if it's gonna become an argument or if it's become like, "Ah, okay that's your opinion, that's mine, and let's leave it at that."

SPOONER: Nah. Ah, right.

RAMIREZ: 'Cause you never know people in . . . during that . . . in . . . in a certain area and mindset's different, so . . . tha's good then you don't have to . . .

SPOONER: Yep. Yeah, yeah.

RAMIREZ: How did your service influence or affect your family at home?

SPOONER: Yeah, it did. I mean, uh . . . Being deployed, uh, you know, was tough on the family a little bit, and . . . uh . . . but, uh . . . I think it helped my son and my daughter grow, uh, as, uh . . . they're both . . . Well, my son's a senior here at ASU and my daughter's a freshman. But I think it . . . It helped them grow by being able to move around so much, 'cause I moved about nine times in my military career. So, they got an opportunity to go to different schools and be educated in different ways, and, um . . . and just to see a lot of the country. So, that . . . that did influence their . . . their ability to, uh, be, um . . . you know, to . . . to be transient for one, and move, you know from place to place, but also to, uh, be, um . . . be able to . . . um . . . be flexible, and . . . and adjust to the environment, so I think that helped a lot too.

RAMIREZ: So, did you come from a family of military? I don't think we've talked about it.

SPOONER: No, no. I mean . . . I mean, I didn't, uh . . . No, I grew up there. Uh, my dad, uh, was not military. However, each of my, uh, I have, uh . . . uh, two half-brothers, one full brother. Uh, my full brother just got back on Monday from Iraq. He's a colonel in the United States Marine Corps.

RAMIREZ: Wow.

SPOONER: Uh, my two other brothers had served, one in the Army, one in the Navy, so we covered all four services.

RAMIREZ: So, somehow just . . . [Unintelligible]

SPOONER: We just . . . we're just all in the military, yeah.

RAMIREZ: Around the same time or . . . ?

SPOONER: No, it was quite an age range difference.

RAMIREZ: Okay.

SPOONER: So, anywhere by . . . The age difference maybe 25 years between youngest and oldest, yeah.

RAMIREZ: Really? Okay.

SPOONER: Yeah, so quite an age difference.

RAMIREZ: That's cool, though that . . . that just you ended up going in . . .

SPOONER: Yep. All served. Yep.

RAMIREZ: . . . And now you got . . . do you ever swap stories with them, and . . . ?

SPOONER: Yeah, we get together and swap stories, yeah.

RAMIREZ: That's really great.

SPOONER: It's pretty nice.

RAMIREZ: And your brother, he just got back?

SPOONER: Mmhm.

RAMIREZ: Wow.

SPOONER: Just got back from Ira . . .

RAMIREZ: So, how long has he been . . .

SPOONER: He was over there for a little six months.

RAMIREZ: Six months, wow.

SPOONER: Yep. Yep.

RAMIREZ: What are your most vivid memories of your time in service?

SPOONER: Hmm . . . Probably my, uh . . . probably the time . . . One of the times was . . . was, you know, when I had the opportunity to be a commander at . . . at Sheppard Air Force Base, I think, was one of my highlights of my career, and I still think that was the best job I ever had because, during that time, I got to lead about, uh, five-hundred . . . some people every day, almost six hundred. And some of them were brand new recruits learning how to be aircraft maintainers and, uh, communications, uh, maintenance team. Some were the permanent party that were actually the trainers for all them, and some of them were people where they were temporary duty get their advance level training. So, any given day, I would have 500, 600 people under the command to, you know, lead, and make sure they had the equipment they needed.

RAMIREZ: So, they're just in line, just looking right at you, 600 people . . . [Unintelligible]

SPOONER: Well, no, no. No, but, oh, you know as organization. I would lead the organization.

RAMIREZ: Okay.

SPOONER: And then . . . but there were times on . . . on, uh, Fridays we'd get together and we'd have our Friday call with, uh, all our new airmen, and we had about 250 of those maybe 300 anytime, and we all do push-ups together out in the . . . out on the, uh, grounds, and it was so great.

RAMIREZ: [Unintelligible]

SPOONER: And, uh, that was some of my greatest times. I had two, uh . . . two, uh, two young, uh, men get, uh, promoted below the zone. Uh, basically that means that they were given their next rank, uh, by the, uh, by the general, uh, by their performance, so some things like that. There were some great opportunities where I saw some people achieve amazing things. I saw one . . . one individual become . . . become an officer. Um, you know, through . . . through the officer training school, and through submission of this paperwork and things like that, so . . .

RAMIREZ: And that gave you just that . . .

SPOONER: It gave you a good feeling because, you know . . .

RAMIREZ: It was under your leadership, right?

SPOONER: Well, it was under my leadership, but, you know, it was their work, no doubt. It was their work, but to celebrate with them was the best part of being . . . I think, that was the best part about being in the military was to see the, uh, celebration and the achievement people had.

RAMIREZ: That's really great.

SPOONER: And to achieve the missions that they were given, and . . . and to see the success on people's faces, whatever it may be. That was the best part of the military.

RAMIREZ: That's really great. That's awesome.

SPOONER: Yep.

RAMIREZ: 'Cause they had a . . . I mean, just like . . . like you . . . you want to give credit toward . . . you know, to them, but they gotta give credit to you 'cause without your leadership, without your . . . without your . . .

SPOONER: I supported them. I supported them whenever I could, absolutely I could. If . . . If I could support them and help them out in them achieving their goals then I did. [Unintelligible]

RAMIREZ: So, I know this is one of the questions that, uh, we went over. What sort of technology did you use in service? Now, if you didn't really have any that's fine. I mean, I know it's a . . . it was a question that . . .

SPOONER: Well, I mean when you're talking about technology I saw a change all the way from, you know, when I started out at the, um, very first I was at the Pentagon, and we had the, uh, this is kinda dating me, but the old IBM-3090, um, large frame . . . main frame computers. Uh, you know, that, uh, now . . .

RAMIREZ: That could fit the whole wall.

SPOONER: Fit the whole wall, exactly. And . . . And storage tapes . . . We actually had storage tapes, and we would record information and data. And I look at it today. . . to the technology, well, we got everything on our desktop. Probably more processing power than I had initially in the early 90s is sitting on your desk, so I saw technology change from the standpoint of . . .

RAMIREZ: Just drastically.

SPOONER: Drastically. From the very basic word program to, you know, what we have today which is all the office products and other products that are out there.

RAMIREZ: So, when you were at the Pentagon around . . . around that time, was that stuff, that technology just so advanced to you at that . . . at that moment?

SPOONER: It was just starting out. Well, I had a computer science degree, so it was starting out . . . So, I was just familiar with some of it. But I mean I think one of the programs was called WordStar at the time, and I mean it was kinda the preemptive to Word. And . . .

RAMIREZ: Yeah, okay.

SPOONER: So, it was very basic, very, you know, uh . . . Most people typed with one finger at a time back then. Lot of people didn't . . . don't, uh . . . Typing skills today compared to the typing skills back then are . . . are completely different.

RAMIREZ: Oh, yeah.

SPOONER: So, I saw typing skills, you know, go . . .

RAMIREZ: 'Cause people just started like, "okay . . ."

SPOONER: Yeah. Incredibly, yeah. From . . . From one finger to . . . to, uh, you know, both hands not even looking type thing, so . . .

RAMIREZ: Oh.

SPOONER: And then the technology's obviously shrunk quite a bit 'cause the phones we had back then were actually, you know, large . . .

RAMIREZ: [Unintelligible]

SPOONER: Yeah, exactly, large phone with antennas.

RAMIREZ: Apparently, they can cause tumors . . . They can give you tumors or whatever that . . .

SPOONER: Right. Right. Well, I don't about . . . yeah . . . but they . . .

RAMIREZ: There's something behind that . . . that theory, like 'cause they were so big and . . . something or . . . and you . . . you had to pull out the large thing.

SPOONER: Yeah, we had the antennas that you'd have to pull out and that stuff and, yeah, the flip phones and, yeah. And now we're . . . Today we've got the iPhones and the . . .

RAMIREZ: Yeah, and just the most simplest . . .

SPOONER: Little tiny stuff, and . . .

RAMIREZ: The tinier the better.

SPOONER: Yep, we had no way of doing the digital pictures. Anything like that, you had to get them, you know, take them to the photo shop and get them printed and then you could send them to somebody. So, a lot . . . a lot different than today.

RAMIREZ: Oh, yeah, and grow . . . and I know I'm not . . . ah, obviously we have age difference too, but growing up in the 90s . . . uh, growing up outside of pretty much how I was, so I can . . . I can sorta relate with the technology, and now I see everything . . . uh, I told Dr. Lamberson this

morning when I grabbed the . . . uh . . . She told me what . . . what we had to do after . . . get the recorder with the USB, and I'm . . . and I'm like, "Oh, I'm not tech savvy at all." She's like, "Don't worry. Don't worry." But I'm . . .

SPOONER: Yeah, it's not terrible.

RAMIREZ: I . . . I know I'm growing up in this age . . . another age of technology, but . . . but I just . . . It goes over my head, and . . . as long as I can work a phone and I can . . . and a laptop . . .

SPOONER: You're good to go

RAMIREZ: I'm like "I'm fine."

SPOONER: Yep. Yep.

RAMIREZ: Um, did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life? If yes, what challenges?

SPOONER: No, when I transitioned . . . Well, no 'cause I . . . What had happened to me is I retired, and then I came back, um, still with the government but in a civil service type environment. A little different because it's not quite the same, you know, as the camaraderie as wearing the uniform, but . . . but nonetheless the respect was still there. Uh, and even when I went to the corporate world from the government world, uh, same level, you know, the job is just different. Uh, the respect is, uh, I think respect's universal. Uh, I think that's a key thing to know throughout your career is that, you know, as long as you respect people and respect their . . . their abilities, their knowledge, their . . . what they bring to the table, you're gonna do fine. Uh, understand where they're coming from, listen more than talk, you're gonna do fine. And, that's kinda what I learned uh going . . . going through into the corporate world. I . . . I enjoyed the corporate world from that standpoint.

RAMIREZ: Really?

SPOONER: Really getting into that. Yep. It was, uh . . . It was different, uh . . . especially the monetary . . . uh, money . . . because money's you know, and, um . . . it's based on profit. It's based on bottom line.

RAMIREZ: Yep.

SPOONER: So, it's a little different than, you know, than the, uh, government world in that case. I mean, that's . . . government world. It's still important the bottom line and money . . . but it's . . . it's, uh, a little bit, uh, magnified in the corporate world, I guess.

RAMIREZ: Okay.

SPOONER: That make sense, uh . . . ?

RAMIREZ: Yeah. Oh, yeah. I think the, uh . . . Did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

SPOONER: Uh, you know, when you first start out you . . . you're kinda nervous. You're like not sure how . . . you know, this is different because now you're, uh . . . the structure of what you're used to . . . You have to learn a new structure, so those challenges were there, you know. Uh . . . They're not the same as a military organization's structure. It's relatively the same regardless of what unit you're with the . . . the organizational structure's there. Whereas in the corporate world, you may have a different department here, there's a different department there, and . . . and you have to get used to those, um, connections and . . . and, uh, how they're interweaved versus the military world. I think that really was the biggest thing. I, uh, I felt comfortable going into the . . . into, uh, outside of the military. I felt prepared to do it. I felt like I had had the opportunities of leading and the opportunities of working with people that, you know, if you can work with a team, you can apply those skills anywhere. And that's really what I found.

RAMIREZ: Did you ever kinda . . . not get mad, but frustrated with sometimes . . . I mean, going from the military world, you have, uh, you have a certain due date, you have a time you have to meet, so going into the corporate world, was there ever a time where you had to hand something off to somebody and they're like, "Yeah, I'll get to it when I . . . when I can," and did there . . . was there ever a situation that that kinda bothered you, knowing- 'cause you had a team . . .

SPOONER: Mmhm.

RAMIREZ: Know what they're doing is quick, gotta get that to get to "B" to get to "C" to get to do, so did you ever find that [Unintelligible]

SPOONER: Well, I . . . There were times when you get frustrated like that but then it's just like in any other organization. You learn who to go to and who not to go to. And so. So really . . .

RAMIREZ: Don't go there, go . . . go around that person.

SPOONER: You really kinda, yeah, you kinda learn where you're gonna get your help and where you're not, and so, uh, you know, you . . . you lean on those people that are gonna get you where you, you know, the information you need, and the ones that are gonna be more productive. Uh, not to say you can't go to the others but I'm just . . . You know, depending on what your time frame is and what you need, um, you, uh . . . you know you just adjust your approach to make sure you still get things done.

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

SPOONER: And you approach the right people with it, so . . .

RAMIREZ: Now . . . Now, you can't wear your . . . your uniform in the corporate world. So, do a lot of people know you were military or . . . or . . . or a veteran, so that they kinda knew to deal with you differently, or you just didn't show off you, you didn't bring it up.

SPOONER: No, I didn't. No, I didn't. I didn't bring it up. I purposely didn't bring it up. I didn't want that, uh . . . I wanted to be able to stand on my own.

RAMIREZ: Right.

SPOONER: Uh, military have helped prepare me for that. I didn't want to use it as a . . . as, you know, I'm proud that every moment that I spent in the military, I'm proud of the time that I spent doing what I did but, uh, that . . . I didn't want that to influence, uh, someone in the way they worked with me or otherwise. I wanted to be able to work with anyone on any grounds without them knowing this, uh, background and things like that. 'Cause, uh, in some cases people do adjust, you know . . .

RAMIREZ: They change completely.

SPOONER: Just, they change their way of working with you. Um, be it good or bad, and so it's just better just to approach, you know . . .

RAMIREZ: Keep quiet, and just . . .

SPOONER: This is my job, and this is what I'm doing, and this is how I do it, and . . . and you go on from there.

RAMIREZ: So, did being in Texas, did it shape your years in service in any way?

SPOONER: It did. Uh, um, I . . . I got to Texas in 2004. That's when I got to Wichita Falls and then I stayed there 2006, you know, usually two year, uh, commander, uh, time. And then, came down here to, uh, San Angelo in 2006, and stayed 'til 2009 as active duty, and then retired and stayed here at . . . at Goodfellow. So, I've been really here, um, and enjoyed Texas. Uh, that's the reason I retired and stayed here. I do love, uh, West Texas. I think it's, uh . . . and Texas in general. I believe it has everything to offer that you need. Uh, I love the environment. I'm an outdoors person, so this . . . this . . .

RAMIREZ: Yeah, so it's perfect, yeah.

SPOONER: . . . is perfect. Uh, you very rarely will see me in front of a TV. Um, in fact probably the only time you usually see me there is when I'm not feeling well maybe. So, I like to be outdoors, um . . . either just running, walking, whatever it may be, hiking. Doing something outdoors. Uh . . .

RAMIREZ: So what about San Angelo? What was it . . . I mean you obviously have Austin. That's two . . . about two-and-a-half hours. San Antonio, that's three, Dallas . . .

SPOONER: Yep, Austin, San Antonio, Abilene's only an hour-and-a-half.

RAMIREZ: Yeah. So, San Angelo . . .

SPOONER: But, right here you've got . . . You've got, uh, the lake, you've got Lake Nasworthy.

RAMIREZ: Mmhmm.

SPOONER: Uh . . . There's a recreation camp here at Goodfellow, so I could rent a boat.

RAMIREZ: Yep.

SPOONER: As a military member, I could rent a kayak. I can . . . I can do a number of things on the water in the summertime. I can do a number of races right here, running races. Um, got all kinds of gyms here in the . . . in the area which, you know, it gives you all kinds of options for that. Uh, course you got all the sports at Angelo State to go, and . . . and be part of. Uh, there's just a variety of things here. Everything you could . . . could need, and that's why I wanted to stay here.

RAMIREZ: And did you like the idea of . . . ah, of . . . Obviously, it's growing as a city, still growing from 2009 to, you know, 2018. Uh, did you just like the idea it was still kind of a hometown, like a small . . . Did you like that?

SPOONER: Mhm. Absolutely, yeah. Absolutely like that, that it's got a . . . oops . . . got a hometown type or a feel to it. Uh . . . When you compare it to most of the larger cities, the crime rates are relatively, uh, low. The, uh, people are, uh, genuine and . . . and good people, and . . . And, you know, I just think it's a . . . it's a good place to . . . There's not a place in the . . . in this entire town that I . . . I feel like, you know, I can't go or not . . . or to feel comfortable in. I . . . I, you know, I . . . I . . . It just is a good environment and there's . . . and I like that. I just, uh, I just like being, uh, part of an . . . to . . . you know, it's a very, uh, tight knit community, and, you know, we look out for one another, and I like that.

RAMIREZ: Oh, yeah. I have that same feeling. Um, obviously we're talking about Texas, and you're military, so after your time in the military, has your conception of Texas changed at all? Why or why not?

SPOONER: No, in fact it's probably even gotten stronger because I see the patriotism there is in Texas, anywhere from the rodeo to the other events that go on here. I mean, they're all open, you know, honoring our, uh, nation, national anthem, everything else, and . . . and it's . . . all the ballgames I've ever been to, uh . . . I told you earlier about that. Uh, it is what it . . . what it, uh, appears to be, even from an outsider looking in, you know, it's a very patriotic state. It's a very uh, um . . . the country and the nation is very important to Texas and . . . and, uh, Texans are proud of the U.S. and . . . and . . . and, uh, the nation overall. I think I can say that in general.

RAMIREZ: So did you, uh . . . Did you end up picking up an accent after these years?

SPOONER: Not really.

RAMIREZ: No?

SPOONER: Nah, not really. Little bit. Um, I'm not as strong . . .

RAMIREZ: Do you ever say "ya'll"?

SPOONER: Well, yeah. I say "ya'll" and "fixin'" but I, uh . . . I don't, uh . . . I'm not as strong as . . . as some. Uh, still got a little bit of, you know, the Cleveland accent. Uh . . . but . . .

RAMIREZ: I didn't . . . I didn't know if Cleveland had a . . . that's what I was gonna ask, like . . .

SPOONER: Well, it . . . It can depending on, you know . . .

RAMIREZ: Where you are in Cleveland?

SPOONER: Right, yeah, where you are, and, you know, if that environment, and . . . and I guess some more . . . if I get more, uh, excited and animated it comes out a little bit more.

RAMIREZ: Oh, it comes more out? Okay.

SPOONER: It comes out more, also.

RAMIREZ: Um, 'cause at my job was . . . I told you I worked at Denver Mattress. We get, uh When they get When salesmen get promoted, they come from all over the place, you know. The last guy that got promoted, uh, went back to Colorado, so the . . . Denver Mattress is [Unintelligible]. So, it's funny to see somebody, uh, Kansas, a guy came from Kansas, a guy from, uh, Colorado. So, it's fun to see them over the years that they cha . . . It changes, so it's always fun to see that. So . . . That's really cool to . . . and, obviously, you're here so long, so you get that drawl . . . and fixin' or . . .

SPOONER: Yeah. So long, yeah, yeah. Got more of a Texas. It's kind of a transplant now, yep.

RAMIREZ: It's not bad to use it sometimes with certain older folks in Texas.

SPOONER: Mmhmm.

RAMIREZ: 'Cause it's just that language they speak. So, it's easier just to . . . "ya'll," and they're kinda more comfortable with you, so . . .

SPOONER: Yep.

RAMIREZ: I find that sometimes at my job all the old . . .

SPOONER: That's very true, yeah.

RAMIREZ: . . . the older gentlemen, you know?

SPOONER: Yep.

RAMIREZ: They may not feel comfortable with me at first but then I start talking to them and they start opening up. And so that's really . . . yeah.

SPOONER: Yep. That's very true.

RAMIREZ: After your time in the military, has your conception of the United States changed? I don't think it has really from the 80s, and that . . .

SPOONER: No, it's . . . No, I'm still . . . still just as patriotic as I ever was. Uh, still a believer. This still the best country in the world and always will be. Uh . . . Tha's not gonna change for me.

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

SPOONER: I still, uh . . . I still look and see the great things people are doing and the patriotism that's out there, no matter what the bad things are that you see on TV, I still know there's more good than bad in this nation.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, I don't have cable and . . . and sometimes when I do see, uh . . . When I'm at the gym and you see what they show, I mean . . . and . . . the . . . I try to truly avoid it 'cause you try to focus on the good like you said.

SPOONER: Mmhmm.

RAMIREZ: You know, it's really . . . yeah.

SPOONER: Mmhmm, exactly.

RAMIREZ: So, we've talked about your military service and everything, so . . .

SPOONER: Okay.

RAMIREZ: So, looking back.

SPOONER: Mmhmm.

RAMIREZ: How do you feel, like, knowing you put in your years, and . . . and . . . and all your knowledge that you have gained. So, how do you feel looking back on it?

SPOONER: No, I feel . . . I feel blessed that I had the opportunity. I mean, I was given a great opportunity to do that. Uh, you know, growing up in, you know, where I grew up and stuff like that. I, you know, just going to, uh . . . Not sure what I was gonna do with my life and then the military came about and gave me great opportunities to do things are . . . I know I would never had the opportunity to do otherwise. I mean, I've, uh, had the opportunity to lead tons of people, to work with great people, to follow great people. And then I've also had the opportunity . . . I've been to . . . I've been to countries, uh, all around the world and maybe not for very long but I've been over to Korea, I've been to Japan, I've been to Turkey, I've been to Italy, I've been to Germany. You know, uh . . .

RAMIREZ: Japan's one of those ones that's on the bucket list.

SPOONER: It's beautiful.

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

SPOONER: So . . .

RAMIREZ: It's a bucket list for me.

SPOONER: I mean, the military to me has been a blessing. I mean, I would never have thought I'd get to see the Leaning Tower of Pisa right there but I got . . . I got there and I was . . . I was there next to it and, you know, some of those things were just great.

RAMIREZ: So, do you just have . . . Do you just have a photo album or anything like that like just . . . or were you not the type of . . . ?

[Unintelligible.]

SPOONER: I . . . I'm not a big photo type guy 'cause, uh . . .

RAMIREZ: Yeah, I'm the . . . No, I'm the same way . . . same way yeah.

SPOONER: We didn't have phones to take pictures at the time. We did a lot of things now.

RAMIREZ: Even now, though, you're just like . . .

SPOONER: But, uh, I have some photos. Uh, I meant to bring my coin collection to show you, and I can call you back on that. I thought it was in my trunk but it's not. . . It's at . . . It's . . .

RAMIREZ: Don't worry, no, that's fine.

SPOONER: But I gotta show you. It's kinda neat, so I wanted you to be able to take some pictures of that if you wanted them.

RAMIREZ: That would be great, yeah.

SPOONER: 'Cause it's really cool, yeah.

RAMIREZ: 'Cause there's a question, actually, uh . . . [Unintelligible]

SPOONER: Yeah, yeah, I can . . . I can bring those in. I thought they were in those boxes in my trunk, and it's not . . . and I was like, "Oh, man, I put that away in the . . . in the hou . . . or in the apartment [Unintelligible]. Yeah.

RAMIREZ: No, not at all. No problem at all.

SPOONER: Yeah, the compartment there.

RAMIREZ: Um, so, as we . . . As, uh, just asked you looking back in . . . in all these opportunities going to, you know, different countries, continents, or . . . What have you . . . Do you have any advice for young men or women who are just entering the service?

SPOONER: Uh . . . just entering? Take advantage of all the opportunities given to you. Don't, uh, get your education. Take advantage of the education. Um . . . Do everything asked of you. Don't be afraid of anything. Um . . . You can accomplish it. You'll have the right support people around you. Be willing to do anything, you know, they ask you. Uh, just . . . just . . . just . . . have the right attitude, really. I mean, 95% of everything in the military's your attitude. Uh, you can get through anything. You just bring the right attitude to the table and you're gonna get it done. And the people around you . . . I . . . Twenty years and, there wasn't anything we didn't accomplish that was asked of us in 20 years. Uh, can't tell you a single thing that we didn't get done when asked to do it. And it wasn't . . . I say "we" because it wasn't ever a single person doing it. It was a group and it was a team effort, so . . .