

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

JACKIE NEFF

An interview conducted on

April 12, 2015

Interviewer: Ashton Secundino

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 Jackie Neff are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on April 12, 2015.

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.

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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.

SECUNDINO: This is Ashton Secundino and I am here to interview a West Texas veteran. What is your name?

NEFF: My name is Jackie Neff.

SECUNDINO: And when and where did you enter the armed forces?

NEFF: I entered the armed forces in March of 1989 in Sterling City, Texas.

SECUNDINO: And which branch did you enter?

NEFF: The United States Marine Corps. Is there any other?

SECUNDINO: What were your years of service?

NEFF: Um like I said, I entered March 1989—March 5, 1989—and I served six years, and got out in 1995 . . . March 1995.

SECUNDINO: During your years of service, were you primarily enlisted ranks, a non-commissioned officer, an officer, or a warrant officer?

NEFF: I was just a simple, enlisted person. I did get out of the Marine Corps as an NCO, a non-commissioned officer, and . . .

SECUNDINO: Okay. If you served as an officer, what was the source of your commission?

NEFF: Well, I wasn't an officer. I was a non-commissioned officer, but it was in the enlisted ranks. So, I wasn't actually an "officer" officer.

SECUNDINO: In which military conflict did you take part of?

NEFF: I was in Operation Desert Storm. That was the first Gulf War that we entered into. Um, it was back in . . . I actually got there New Year's Eve, 1990 and it was very, very cold the night we arrived. And uh, I remember going over because we were in this uh . . . we were on a commercial line, airline, and uh we stopped in Germany and they wouldn't let us off the plane. So, we sat there for hours, waiting just to go to Saudi Arabia. And uh . . . we entered into Al Jubail—that's in Saudi Arabia. It was the port . . . one of the largest port cities in the world. And uh, that's where a lot of marines and sailors and . . . and Army came through, was at the port city. And uh got there on New Year's Eve, very cold. Very cold. And uh was there for about four months, actually. Wasn't there very long, but I was there about four months.

SECUNDINO: Okay, um, why did you enlist in the marines?

NEFF: Why did I enlist? Well, I was living in Sterling City with my mom. And uh, if anybody knows Sterling City, there's nothing there, really, except oil and rich people, and I was neither. And so, uh I was working at the local Town and Country, and my . . . I just felt like there was

more out of life, and . . . and the . . . to experience. And I figured, well, you know, the military. What better way to go than the . . . the military to learn something, to make something of yourself? And so, I went and told my mom that I wanted to join the military. I said, “We need to go to San Angelo.” I said, “I’m going to sign up.” I said, “I don’t care who sign . . . who . . . who it is, I’m signing up for six years and that’s it.” And so, I remember going into town, and uh we got there where the recruiting offices were, and everybody was out to lunch except the Marine Corps. It’s like they work all the time. And so, I said, “Well, I guess I’ll just go in here and see what they have to say,” and they talked me into it, and I sign in on . . . signed on the dotted line, and that was my . . . start of my journey. My adventure, I should say.

SECUNDINO: Did you find your adventure challenging?

NEFF: Oh, extremely so. I didn’t realize I . . . what I was actually getting myself into, really. Um, starting with boot camp, of course, you hear all the horror stories of Marine Corps boot camp, and I know when I went through in ’89 it was . . . it’s a lot different now than when I went through. But uh it was an experience, you know. We . . . we got there early morning. It was dark outside. And of course, they’re all yelling at you to get your . . . you know, the women had to go to Parris Island. That’s where all the women went. And uh, of course the . . . the guys had either Parris Island or San Diego. And so, I remember getting there that night, and it was dark, and . . . and all this yelling. I mean, they were yelling. Nobody ever yelled at me. I didn’t get yelled at. But all these people were just yelling at you, and uh, you know, “Get on” . . . you got these little yellow footprints, and they tell you to get on these yellow footprints. And . . . but it was uh . . . it was the beginning of . . . of something that later, to me, started meaning a lot. You know, being a part of something and uh . . . uh, a whole different family, so to speak. And uh, boot camp was really challenging for me because I’d never really been athletic. I mean, I . . . I did athletics—you know, basketball, volleyball—but I never was a runner, and that’s all you do is run and everything else. But it was so exciting, also, because going through the different phases and . . . and uh earning my uh . . . how to shoot, learning how to shoot. And that was exciting because I just love guns. And of course, I never made it past marksman, but still loved it. Still loved it, and I . . . in . . . in fact, I . . . I stayed pretty much out of trouble until that time. You know, they even teach you how to put makeup on at boot camp, which, you know, I already wore makeup and stuff like that, little girly stuff. But anyways, all the physical stuff that we had to do, and . . . and having to become . . . learning how to become an individual within a group, but still learning how to be a team member was challenging. And . . . but uh, I loved it. Absolutely loved it. Was happy to graduate, but loved it.

SECUNDINO: What’s your favorite memory, or your best memory of boot camp?

NEFF: Of boot camp? Uh . . . this is going to sound weird but I think it was during second phase. Um, I think it’s when we were at the rifle—was it rifle range? I think so. Or was it third phase? Anyways, we were in class and there was a drill instructor—she’s very nice, but she was also a hard-core. But something happened, and I . . . I can’t even recall even what happened, but something had happened and I could not stop laughing for . . . for nothing. I mean, whatever it was, I just died laughing . . . could not laugh . . . and she got my face. I . . . and that was the first time I actually ever really got noticed or in trouble in boot camp. And she took my butt out back and put me in the sand pit, and . . . and I had to do all sorts of things for like thirty minutes

straight. And it was hot, and there were no breaks, no water, no nothing. If I stopped, it just got longer and longer, and . . . but it was a while before I stopped laughing, even in the sand pit because I . . . I don't know what set me off, but it was funny. She didn't think it was funny, but I did. And so, I . . . that is still one of my best memories because even though it was . . . I was hot, dirty. It was awful by the time I got through, though. I . . . I'll never forget that because that was one of the best memories I have.

SECUNDINO: And what is the sand pit?

NEFF: It was a little pit. Um, they take you out—it was just filled with sand—and . . . and in Parris Island, these sand fleas are awful—awful!—because they get into everything, on you, and you itch and you itch and you itch. And, uh, you know, you're in camis and it's hot, and these boots, and they're having you do all sorts of exercises and . . . and stuff. And it's just a . . . it's just big, old sand. You try doing that in full garb in sand, jumping jacks or push-ups or whatever they tell you to do. It's hard, and uh you do get to stop laughing after that. But uh, it was really just uh . . . that was the one and only time I ever got put in the pit, though, so I was . . . I was doing pretty good compared to some others.

SECUNDINO: And what would you say your worst memory . . . memory of boot camp was?

NEFF: I . . . oh, I wouldn't really say a worst memory other than uh . . . well, there might be a couple of them. One is that I had . . . I had to be on light duty for almost a week because I got . . . I got some really bad shin splints. And the sorest thing you want to do is uh get on light duty in boot camp because if you miss too much, you'll push back. You got to start all over. You got to join up with another platoon. You got to start all over, and nobody wants that. And so, I was almost . . . I was on crutches for about . . . about a week because I had, like I said, I had really bad shin splints. And . . . and I didn't care what they said, I wasn't . . . I wasn't stopping because I . . . there's no way I would go back through all of this. And I still remember one time in our later . . . later phase, we were out on a training mission—one that they had set up—and it was uh . . . we were out there night and day, and we'd go through all these exercises, you know, uh combat exercises. And it was cold. It was rainy. It was miserable, very miserable. You couldn't sleep because you . . . it just . . . everything was awful. And we lived in these tents. You had to pitch your own tent. Couldn't get my dadgum tent to stay up. Didn't care, but I was miserable. And the worst thing that you had to do is you had to take these outdoor showers, and you had to take a shower with your rifle because you . . . at that time, you don't leave your rifle anywhere. Your rifle is always on you. "This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine." And so, that was . . . that was one of my worst memories is taking a shower . . . an outdoor shower with my—cold weather—with my rifle. And then we had to clean our rifle, of course. They don't give you much time to do much. Everything is [snapping] "now, now, now." Not to mention, being a shy person, you had to take a shower with all these women. Didn't like that either, but you got over that really quickly because we were all in the same boat.

SECUNDINO: How long were the showers?

NEFF: Uh, I wouldn't even call them showers. They were more like, you get in, you get wet, you're out. Couldn't wash your hair, couldn't do nothing. About the only time uh . . . you do

have free time at the end of the day. I don't . . . it wasn't very long. Thirty minutes, maybe. Maybe an hour. Uh you've got to remember, this was a long time ago. Uh, that's . . . a lot of times, that's when I would go in and I'd take a shower because your free time, you can do whatever you wanted. You weren't on no time table, so a lot of times, that's what a lot of us would do is we'd go back in and take another shower because we were filthy. And so, uh . . .

SECUNDINO: And this time was it . . . was it warm water or was it still cold?

NEFF: Yeah, it was just normal. Yeah, we were back in our barracks uh during that time frame, and uh we . . . you know, a lot of people write letters home or get your gear in order because you always had to have your stuff squared away, otherwise you brought attention to yourself. And you didn't want attention. Uh, I just . . . you know, there were a lot of different phases that I really liked, and . . . and I did like the rifle range. That was very enjoyable. Uh, I liked taking the rifle apart, cleaning it, putting it back. It was just something that was just . . . meaningful to me.

SECUNDINO: How did you get shin splints?

NEFF: Well, a lot of running. Concrete. Running. Running on concrete. And it just happened to . . . you know, it was different for me—and others, it didn't affect—and I just got some hairline fractures, and uh my legs, they were . . . they were hurting really bad. And I had gone to s . . . you know, to see the sick bay, and took x-rays, and it was fine. They didn't want me to irritate it or anything, so that's why they put me on crutches for about a week.

SECUNDINO: So, when you joined the Marines, what was your conception of the United States at that time? What did America symbolize to you?

NEFF: At that time, um living in Sterling City, and . . . and, you know, it's a little West Texas town, nothing really happening. Um, you know, you don't really hear about anything that was on the news and I don't really know of anything that was really, you know, happening around then. But I love America. I mean, is there any better country than America? Really. Um, you know, some people are just born with that uh deep, inner feeling about the country that they come from, and . . . and I wanted to do my part for . . . for America because um she was so good to me. I was . . . I was fortunate enough, I was blessed enough to be born in a country . . . uh a free country, you know. Uh, so, I wanted to do . . . you know, my life was going nowhere, like I said, and . . . and I wanted to give back somehow. And what better way is to serve my country? "God, Country, Corps" in that order.

SECUNDINO: Were you deployed overseas?

NEFF: Uh, yeah, even though they told me I would never get . . . I would never be able to go, or I wasn't going to go, and that I didn't have nothing to worry about. I was actually stationed at Camp Lejeune, and uh while I was there, I got stationed at the air station, which is a few miles down . . . uh, Marine Corps air station. And at that time, I had to go back to my parent company, which was actually on the base at Camp Lejeune. And uh, when we got word, and . . . that we were being shipped out. And so, we wanted to go, but we didn't want to go because we didn't know what was happening, we didn't know what was expected. Because I worked in dispersing.

I worked in the financial office. You know, I paid the marines. Uh . . . but uh, you know, in the Marine Corps, we're all riflemen, that's first and foremost. I mean, we're a soldier. We're . . . we're . . . we're Marine Corps, uh, and that's what we were taught to do. And so, when I got the word, of course I wasn't happy, but I had to uh, you know, make it work. So, I got in the right frame of mind and got sent over to Saudi Arabia and didn't know how long we were going to be there or . . . or what, and made the most of a . . . of a bad situation.

SECUNDINO: So, you didn't understand um the mission . . . the complete mission you were supposed to . . . ?

NEFF: Well, my mission—because I was in the financial office—my mission was to go over there and uh support as in uh financial ways because, you know, regardless where we're at, you got to get paid. You know, you still have bills, you still have family back home. Uh you still got . . . need to get paid, you s . . . you know. So, we were there to support and uh pay the marines.

SECUNDINO: What units did you serve in during your d . . . deployment?

NEFF: Well, I was in the financial disbursement office, and um when we got sent over there, we were . . . I think it was Camp Four that we were at in Saudi Arabia. But, the only reason I c . . . I can really remember that is that uh us and the postal people were all there because that's where all the postal . . . all the postal stuff came in. I mean, there was beaucoup . . . piles and piles and piles of mail. Um, and you'd see that every day. And . . . but next door to us was what they called a "club med." And next door—we only got to go over there one time—but it had a swimming pool, which was awesome even though you couldn't go swimming because it was cold. Um, which is odd because you wouldn't think Saudi Arabia's cold that . . . but it was. And uh . . . but I worked in the dispersing office, and . . . and actually, I had a really . . . a really good time over there. Uh . . . so, I paid people. Paid my . . . paid my fellow officers, and uh soldiers, and who knows? You know, whatever.

SECUNDINO: Did you serve in direct combat during your deployment?

NEFF: Well, I wasn't actually direct combat. Um, I do remember it was very uneventful there for . . . for a while. I got . . . like I said, I was over there—I got there New Year's Eve—and uh nothing really happened up until around mid-January because that's when the air raids started. Um, I think there was an ultimatum that was given that mid-January, and . . . and it wasn't met, so, therefore, the United States and . . . and the coalition forces, they all started the air raid. I think it was on January 17<sup>th</sup>, and I remember that because when the time came, they told us that uh from here on out, you are to always be in uniform, always have your rifle present, and always have your gas mask no matter what. And when the air siren went off, you were to . . . to grab everything and go into the bunker where we were. It was just a big old hole in the ground, basically, where everybody . . . that's where you met and were accounted for. Uh, there were different ones for different areas of the camp. And uh, I do remember the first night that the air raid went off, it scared the crap out of me even though I was expecting it. Uh, scared the crap out of me. And so, uh, we had to run with our rifle and our gas mask, and get in the bunker. And the first few times uh, we didn't really do anything with our gas mask, and then they started . . . I

guess they heard something about maybe chemical weapons, and so from there on out, we were to don and clear our gas mask every time we went . . . we went into the bunker. We were required to.

And uh there was this one girl . . . I bet you we went through six or seven times that first night the air raid went off . . . the . . . the siren went off. And it was . . . I mean, it was just constant. Uh, not so much during the day, but it w . . . at night, it was like, always. But, there was one time I remember vivid . . . vividly, it kind of hit home. But it went off one night, and we all donned and cleared our gas mask, and there was a . . . a fellow marine. She forgot her gas mask. Uh she was crying. We all had gas masks on except her, because you didn't know what to expect. You didn't know what was going to happen because our camp was not . . . we were in the city of Al Jabail, but we . . . we were not, you know, we weren't right by the port city. So, you know, I don't think we were in that immediate of danger but um . . . she pretty much got a little hysterical, which, I don't blame her because they were . . . all of us were scared. And uh . . . but thankfully, nothing happened. She's okay. She never forgot her gas mask again, though.

And uh, another . . . another one I remember—and . . . and this is . . . this one's documented because I did a little research on it—because we were told one night, . . . one night, it went off and that's when um . . . there was this scud missile that uh—that was the ones that the Iraqis used, was scud missiles—and it went over. It went right over our camp. And . . . and you can see it, and . . . but that one had apparently . . . we learned later that it had gone off course. Because normally, when the scud missiles came, our patriot missiles would shoot them down no problem. Well, this one happened to actually hit in the port city, but it didn't actually hit the city, it hit right outside the . . . in the water. And uh, something about the software . . . something happened with . . . that's why our patriot didn't go off. Something about the software malfunctioned or did something. I later looked it up, and there's a report on it. But uh . . . but that was one of the scariest, too, because I think at that time when you saw that scud missile . . . you know, the air raids were something different because I mean, you don't . . . you don't see anything. You don't see the threat. But when you actually see the scud missile . . . because we didn't really see com . . . we didn't see combat, not like, you know, the people that were on the frontlines. So, that kind of hit home for us. Uh, I think that changed a lot people's perception uh to, "Oh," you know, "this is real, and they mean business here. And you know, you could die here. You could." And so, that was a little nerve wracking, but you had to get . . . you know, you had to work through your fear and survive until the next day. There was a lot of working parties, too. Working parties. Hated those. That's exactly what they were, working parties. And, so, uh . . . interesting.

SECUNDINO: So, as . . . when you were stationed there for that set of time, did . . . were you always . . . was that fear always present, or did it just kind of become routine at the end?

NEFF: Uh, at first it was present because we were entering into something we didn't know or . . . I didn't know. You didn't know what to expect. It was a different country, different culture, different people, different situation. It was a wartime. Um, didn't know where we were going, what was expected, but there were a lot of days that were just . . . just routine stuff that, you know, if you didn't know any better, you were back home, just going through the day-to-day. It was just a different atmosphere. And uh, there were times that uh . . . like, you know, when the air raids would go off or a scud missile . . . or uh there were times when uh . . . there was one time when I was on duty—I was on night duty. Of course, we all had to take . . . take our turns at



duty at . . . you know, we had to stay watch, and uh . . . full garb, gas mask, rifle. And I was at the uh dispersing office because, of course, we had a lot of money there. That safe, money. And so, it was right by this uh side road that was . . . it was a busy side road. We didn't get to go out much. We weren't allowed to. I did go out once, but that's another story. Uh, but you always had to stay vigilant at night. And uh I remember the first time I was on guard duty by myself. It was interesting. Uh, the first night, of course, was just pretty boring, like, I fell asleep, I hate to say. But uh one night, there were a bunch of cars always going back and forth, and then you . . . you hear voices outside the gate, and . . . and you didn't know what to expect because you didn't hear it . . . I mean, it wasn't English. So, you didn't know what to expect, so you always had to stay vigilant and . . . and . . . and make sure that you had to keep an eye on things and always be ready.

And uh, one thing I did do—and most girls don't do this—was dip. I took up dipping, chewing, whatever you want to call it. It kept me awake at night. Uh didn't last long, but it was only about the time I was over there. But it . . . it did the trick. Kept me awake at night when I was on duty. And one time we went out in town. I forgot what we were doing. We were on a mission for something. We had to go somewhere and pick up something or . . . can't even remember. We were out, and there was three of us, and the driver happened to get lost in town. And that was a little scary because we were out there all by ourselves, got lost, didn't know where we were going, didn't know how to get back. But thankfully, the Lord was looking over us and nothing happened, and nothing untoward. But, you know, little things like that. Your . . . your fear is present. Uh, but I tell you, the people over there that we've encountered on . . . on the camp . . . on the camp there was . . . because there was a little uh food . . . like a food truck, but it was a little building uh, that you could buy their food. They had the most delicious chicken recipe ever there. But the people there that we've . . . that I encountered were oh so nice. I mean, you . . . you wouldn't think that we were at, really, war with them. I mean, just to show you that every nation has their bad apples, rotten apples. The . . . the people that I encountered, they were so nice. Very friendly. Um . . . they're friendly.

SECUNDINO: What were some of the convers . . . conversations you had with . . . ?

NEFF: Well, you can't really have conversations because I mean, they didn't speak English. Or, the ones I encountered didn't speak English. And so, it was a little . . . you know, they could be saying anything to me, but they were nice. Um, but they would smile, and they would laugh, and they would be nice to us, and you know, uh . . . never pose any threat. Uh, all . . . they always had a smile on their face, you know, um, and felt comfort . . . comfortable with them. So, it's not really a conversation, but we tried to talk to them as best we could—you know, hand gestures—and they could understand a little bit more unless they were just, you know, understood English and didn't want us to know they understood English. I don't know. But uh, the ones I . . . I encountered were very nice and uh enjoyed them. They're good cooks, by the way.

SECUNDINO: Were they primarily men, women, . . . both?

NEFF: Oh, they're all the men. I've never . . . I didn't encounter a woman yet at . . . at all over there. I . . . I did see, you know, when I was out on that . . . the run got . . . when we got lost, I saw women. But I didn't uh . . . I don't recall a woman being on . . . on base with us. It was always men.

SECUNDINO: And when you went into town that one time, did you . . . you don't come into contact with any of the locals?

NEFF: No, we weren't . . . we weren't even allowed to . . . to . . . no. In fact, I don't even think we finished what we were supposed to do because as soon as we found a way back to the camp, we went straight back to camp because they . . . we had gotten lost. Uh, I don't know what our driver was thinking, but thankfully . . . uh, I'm not sure we wanted to encounter anybody. We saw a lot, but we didn't come into physical contact or verbal contact with anybody.

SECUNDINO: Did y'all get in trouble because you got lost?

NEFF: No, at that . . . no. Well, . . . well, I didn't. Now, the driver? I don't know. Um no, I don't recall ever being really in trouble over there. Uh that's not a place you wanted to be in trouble, even with your own unit.

SECUNDINO: When you were on watch duty, if something were to happen, what was . . . what was the process you were supposed to follow?

NEFF: We . . . well, there was a . . . it wasn't just me there, so there was always a higher rank there uh, just to go through protocol and . . . and procedure of informing them. And thankfully, I didn't have to find out firsthand what to do because I didn't want to do . . . I . . . I . . . I didn't want . . . you know. Nobody wants to be in that situation. Uh but we'd have to follow protocol, and . . . and . . . and call it in, and do whatever was ordered. Those were our orders.

ASHTON: Were you ever wounded?

NEFF: [Laughs] No. Uh I wouldn't call . . . you know, I never got shot at. I never got uh anything like that exciting. But you know, uh—not that I'd want to get shot—but, you know, it was war, and you wouldn't think that . . . actually, it was a quite enjoyable four months that I was over there. Because even though the times . . . there . . . there were some times that, you know, the fear kicked in, uh in times, it wasn't. I mean, it was just uh . . . it was like everyday living, really, just . . . just . . . just different people. The people were a different nationality. And . . . and we'd go on a lot of uh, uh, working parties, like I said. Uh, one time, we were doing working parties at the port city. Uh, it was long and hot, but it was also enjoyable because I mean, it got out . . . it got us out of our camp and interact with other uh marines and other people. Uh got to see, you know, by the . . . we lived right there by the sea, the ocean.

And uh . . . or . . . and then there were working parties that we had to go inland to other camps, and help set up as far as their tents and the camos. And that was kind of enjoyable because we got to see all the camels, and . . . and, you know, it was just desert. That was the first time I ever really seen a desert and camels. You know, you seen a camel in what? The zoo? But these are just, you know, weird. It was weird seeing all these camels and people uh on them. And uh, we'd go out to other camps and set up, and I was the lightest person, so I always got to go on top of the tent and put the camel netting in . . . on. Uh, that was interesting. Uh, very thankful that we were in those kind of camps because, you know, there was tent . . . all the sand. I mean, sand was everywhere. There was not an inch of you that did not have any sand on you. It . . . it

got in your hair. It got in your eyes, your ears, your nose, your mouth. Uh, you'd have to wear your goggles all the time, and it was just awful. Your clothes, you just . . . ugh. But it was fun, on one hand.

SECUNDINO: I see that you wear glasses. So, how was it wearing goggles with your glasses?

NEFF: Huh, well, that was a challenge because I can't see nothing without my glasses and I didn't wear contacts. And so, uh when I had my goggles on, uh sometimes I'd try to make them fit over my glasses. It was a little awkward, but it helped. I mean, it worked. Uh, a lot of time I'd just . . . if I knew I was just right there with . . . you know, doing something, I had to have my goggles on then I did the best I could. Uh . . . yeah, it was a challenge.

SECUNDINO: How did your service affect your home and family life?

NEFF: Um . . . oh, I don't know how it really affect . . . affect back home. I mean, I know uh . . . I was twenty-four when I joined the Marine Corps, and uh that's kind of old for some people. But uh, I know my mom was proud. My dad was proud. Uh my brother, my oldest brother, done a . . . a short stint in the Marine Corps, and uh . . . but, I mean, you know, when you get back home, nothing's really changed. So, I don't know how it really affected . . . other than, you know, one could say that, "Oh, my daughter is a marine." Other than that . . . and uh I think you think different once you serve in the military. You have a different way of thinking, and you see things differently. And uh . . . and I think that's a lot of the reasons why people who've never served in the military don't see the way that people in the military . . . how they see it. Uh, or can't . . . or they can't understand, and uh . . . you don't know until you serve.

SECUNDINO: How did it change your thinking?

NEFF: Um . . . it made me uh . . . less self-centered. It made me uh a broader view of thinking. It made me . . . made me stronger. I think more independent. I was able to uh . . . look at things different.

SECUNDINO: Okay, how did service affect . . . affect your marriage or your children?

NEFF: Well, um, I was married. I did not have any children at the time. Uh . . . it was uh . . . it was a little rough. I mean . . . because I mean, we were newly married, and uh I was glad to be home. He was glad that I was back home, you know. Uh thankfully it was only four months, as to where other . . . others had . . . have gone longer. Uh, but that was only four months, and I was thankful for that. I was thankful for my time over there, and I was thankful for . . . for actually coming home alive, unhurt. Uh but I think it was just a short vacation away from my husband, and that was really about it.

SECUNDINO: Did you plan on getting married in the Marines, or were you going to wait to get out. What was . . . ?

NEFF: I had no plans of getting married, no. I did have plans on getting children, though, because I love children and I always wanted a child. I knew that. I knew somewhere down the

line, I would always be a mother. Of course, there entailed getting married. Um but I remember the first time . . . or the first night I was at Camp Lejeune, when I was stationed out of boot camp and went home on leave. And first night I got to Camp Lejeune, uh I happened to be uh . . . with one of the girls. I knew one of the girls there, so we went out, and I actually happened to meet my husband at that . . . that night. Didn't know it . . . he was going to be my husband, but I met him that night. That was uh . . . that was interesting. But no, I . . . I didn't plan on getting married when I was in the service, it just kind of happened.

SECUNDINO: Did the service ever keep you away from your children when you had them, or were you . . . ?

NEFF: No, I was never having to . . . to . . . to . . . to leave my children uh like some do, you know. Uh, some will leave them with the . . . with the other spouse, you know. Like the husband would be deployed, and the wife, even though she's military . . . active military, she has the kids. So . . . but I wasn't uh . . . I wasn't in that position, so I was never having to leave my children, when I had children.

SECUNDINO: What were your most vivid memories in your . . . in . . . during your service?

NEFF: Like, from boot camp to . . . until when I got out?

SECUNDINO: Yes.

NEFF: I had an awesome gunnery sergeant. Uh, he was my boss at the uh . . . at the financial management office in Camp Lejeune dispersing office. Loved him to death. He was the best. Uh, always made me laugh. Uh, he even made me a birthday cake. Everybody liked him. Uh that was . . . that was nice, having a boss that was . . . you know, that you can always depend upon, and that always had your back. And uh . . . but it was . . . it's a job like any other. I mean, it's just not . . . I don't really have vivid memories of . . . of, really, anything. It was just because it was . . . other than my . . . my short stint in Saudi Arabia, it was just like any other job. I was just having to . . . you know, it was just the military.

SECUNDINO: Did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

NEFF: Um . . . expect? No. Did I get a few? Yes. I just figured, you know, because I was . . . I'm a pretty easygoing person, I just figured I'd just dive right back in to where I left. And you know, a lot of people can, and a lot of people can't do that, you know. You know, my MOS was just the finance . . . you know, I was in the finance office, so it's not like I was, you know, a grunt or communications or anything like that. So, I didn't really have any . . . you know, anything to worry about when I came home. I was very glad to be home, though.

SECUNDINO: After the military, has your conception of the United States changed?

NEFF: No, I love the United States. Um I . . . I do think that um to some degree, I think the military has . . . has gotten a bad rep in more ways than one. But as far as my country is concerned, I would . . . but I mean, what other great honor is that is to . . . is to protect your

country that uh . . . you know, you could be living in a third world country, or you could be living in . . . in some place like Saudi, you know, or Iraq, Iran. Um, all the stuff going on nowadays anywhere in the countries that are . . . that are just at war with each other all the time. To be so blessed and thankful to live in a . . . in a place like this. How could you not be thankful and want to protect her, or at least to do a small part that you can, you know? Serve somehow. Uh and I think some people just got that inner—I don't know if I'd call it—well, pride, or just that inner . . . that inner voice just in there, just, you know, wanting to do your part—however little it can be—to protect your country.

SECUNDINO: I know you said you served six years. Did you ever want to serve longer?

NEFF: Yes, I did, actually. I did want to serve longer. Um . . . my total commitment was actually eight years. I was six years active, two inactive. And uh, during which that two . . . two years inactive, they could call me. I was out, but they could call me back anytime they wanted if they . . . need be, and I was never called back. And one of the reasons I got out was I had twin boys, and uh . . . that was a handful. Very challenging. And it was just at the point at my life that I just . . . I had to get out and take care of my family. I had a . . . or I already . . . a . . . a baby girl, then I had twin boys, and it was just a lot. And so, I got out. Did I regret getting out? Yes, absolutely. If I ever, you know, had a chance to go back in, I would. But at that time, my family came first. Uh so, I never got to . . . to go back, and that's one of the few regrets I have in my life is I did not stay in and retire.

SECUNDINO: Did you think about going back after they got a little bit older, when it wasn't so hard?

NEFF: Uh, yes and no. Um, it would have been a little bit harder because, you know, you only got a certain time frame uh to get accepted back in because it's . . . there's an age limit. And . . . but uh, you know, idea floated around in my head, but it never really came to fruition. So, it played in my head, but that's about as far as it got.

SECUNDINO: And how do you feel about your military service, looking back now?

NEFF: Uh, some things I would have done different. Some things I would have uh probably met . . . met more head-on, and . . . and uh . . . experienced more fully. But at that time, I was . . . you know, I was just going through the motions sometimes. And uh that's sad sometimes, but uh . . . but I wouldn't change, you know, not going in the military because I think everybody needs to . . . to experience that to some degree, so they . . . you know, it's easy for somebody to . . . to say something about something they never experienced or relate to it. And everybody has different ideas of the military, even if the ones that have served in it, we have different ideas in what it's done for each one of us. But um, I loved it. I loved my time in the military. Wouldn't change it. And uh . . . if I could get any of my kids to join, I would. But it's their choice, and uh none of them are military-minded, so that is out the window. But uh, I don't think there was any greater—other than my children—there's been no greater accomplishment than my service in the Marine Corps. And uh, I do thank the Marine Corps for that, and uh my drill instructors. But I wish I had gotten more . . . I was more passionate at the time. That's what I wish.

SECUNDINO: Do you have any advice for the young men or women who join today?

NEFF: Well, the only thing I can say is that if you do make that commitment and you join, give a hundred percent every day and just soak up all that you can during that time frame. And, you know, you have your good days, you have your bad days, but . . . the experiences that you're going to . . . that you're going to find there, are probably going to be the best experiences ever. And uh suck it up, stop your whining, and get the mission accomplished. And uh . . . some of the greatest people you're going to meet are in the military. They really do have your back. I mean, you know, we have our bad apples just like anybody else does, but that . . . you know, that doesn't outweigh the good of our military and the people, the men and women, that serve in our military. Because they . . . you know, they selflessly go into something. Regardless of what reason anybody has going into the military, once they're in, they're in, regardless of the reason. And uh, so, they're there to protect our country, and uh I think at that point, regardless, they need the respect of . . . of the others that uh . . . they're putting their life on the line. Or they could put their life on the line at any time. You never know if you're going to be deployed or not deployed, or sent to Afghanistan or uh . . . you know, we've seen . . . we've seen worse out there. We've been through worse. And uh . . . you know, if you could do one small thing to help your country or your fellow American, why not do it? And uh, just stay strong and enjoy it because it can be enjoyable.

SECUNDINO: And is there anything else you'd like to share about your service?

NEFF: Mm . . . if I could do it again, I would. Even at my age, I . . . if I could, I'd do it again because . . . was I . . . did I stand out in the military? No. Loved . . . loved the military life, though. Other than moving around—a lot of people don't like that. But uh . . . you belonged. You belonged. It was just a . . . a different feeling, and one that I'll take to my grave with me. Oorah.