

Gray County Veterans Memorial & Archive

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

M. Sparky Hefner

September 12, 2014



INTERVIEW
YEAR

M. Sparky Hefner
2014

GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: **M. Sparky Hefner**
DATE: **September 12, 2014**
PLACE: **Cimarron City Library, Cimarron, KS**

INTERVIEWER: **Kathleen Holt** TECHNOLOGY: **George Martinez**

PROJECT SERIES: **Korean Era Oral History Project for Gray County**

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

Sparky Hefner was born in Mayfield, Oklahoma on August 1, 2934. His family moved to California during the Dust Bowl and Mr. Hefner resided in Holtville, California where he graduated from high school. Two older brothers in Mr. Hefner’s family were in the Marines during World War II and the Korean Conflict. Both brothers saw much battle. Sparky and the friend with whom he enlisted were both recognized high school athletes.

Mr. Hefner enlisted and received his draft notice immediately after. He served in the 598th Field Artillery, 52nd Group and attained the highest rank of E-5. His service dates were 2/16/54 to 8/26/57. During basic training, Mr. Hefner received orders to ship out “overseas.” A few days before he was to leave, the Armistice was signed in Korea, so instead of shipping out to Korea, he served out his time at Fort Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Upon the eve of departure for Korea as an infantry soldier, the Armistice was signed and Hefner’s service experience was changed radically. Depression, Dust Bowl.

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

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ORAL HISTORY
M. Sparky Hefner
Interview Date: September 12, 2014

Interviewer: Kathleen Holt (KMH)
Interviewee: M. Sparky Hefner (MSH)

(KMH) - And, this is just a conversation, so it doesn't matter if you want to back up or whatever it doesn't matter, we're just talking. Um, this is Kathleen Holt. This is September 12, 2014. I'm at the Cimarron City Library. It's about 2:40, um, in the afternoon, and I'm here with Sparky Hefner. Sparky would you tell me your full name, your date of birth? Then we'll get started.

(MSH) - My full name is M. Sparky Hefner, born August 1, 1934.

(KMH) - OK, do you tell people what the M. stands for?

(MSH) - Mister.

(KMH) - Mister, I see. OK, a man of few words there! (Laughter) Um, Sparky, tell me about your service. Did you enlist or were you drafted? What -- how'd you get into the military?

(MSH) - Well in 1950, I got out of high school in 1952 and, in those days we knew that soon as you turn 19 we were probably going to get drafted, and it was difficult to find a job, being 18 years old. I always had a job but, nothing that I wanted to make a career out of, and, at any rate. I got noticed that in December, of '53, that, we were next on the list, so a friend of mine, Earl Tackersley and I, went to the draft board and told them, if you want us now, we're willing to go. So, I was inducted in February 16, 1954, at Holtville, California, where I grew up, and they bussed us to Los Angeles for a, warm body physical and, everybody passed.

(KMH) - (Laughter)

(MSH) - And got to Fort Ord in a, driving rainstorm about, 2:00 in the morning and, started basic training at Fort Ord, on the 17th of February and, lived there through my first eight weeks of infantry training in the 63rd Infantry Regiment, and we were re-assigned then in May, of 1954, to transfer to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to reactivate the 598s Field Artillery Battalion, which was an all-Black battalion at the time, and the, approximately 700 soldiers in my training company, went to Fort Sill and re-activated the 298 Field Artillery Battalion.

(KMH) - Wow, what made you pick the Army?

(MSH) - I didn't really care, which I had two brothers in the marine core . . .

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - One of my older brothers served in the First Marine Division from 1939 to 1946 . . . spent, 40 months in the South Pacific, in combat, during World War II.

(KMH) – Right.

(MSH) - And another brother was in the Marine Corps during the Korean War. He went in in '51, and spent time in Korea, and, they told me how tough those Marines were and I didn't know if I was tough enough to be a Marine so, I told them they could put me where ever they wanted me.

(KMH) - Oh, I see.

(MSH) - And they needed more grunts in the Army.

(KMH) - I see, so they picked you out that way, so that's how you got to the Midwest?

(MSH) - Yes mam. Connie and I got married in '53 and had been married just a short time, when I got, got drafted.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - Andh, she and I got in our '46 Ford in, May and reported to Fort Sill on May the 10 of '54 and, I was fortunate. I was able to go to some schools, in field artillery and guided missile training as a fire direction computer.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - And learned to repair air to ground radios.

(KMH) – Oh.

(MSH) - And that was why in October of '54, I had the opportunity to make, to go to these schools, and, but to do that. I had to have three years, had to be able to serve three years, so I enlisted for three years on October of '54, so I actually spent three and a half years in the Army.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - And, during my time at Fort Sill, of course there was nothing going on much in the world, combat wise in those days, and I was fortunate enough to be able to participate in a lot of athletics at Fort Sill. Earl Tackersley, this friend of mine -- we grew up together -- were called out of formation, oh, about the middle of May, a few days

after we'd gotten to Fort Sill and they told us to report to Butner Field at 1:00, and of course, we just did what we were told! (Laughter)

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And we got there and it was a baseball practice, and they had read in our 201 files that, Earl and I had played some baseball in high school and some semi-pro baseball and, we were fortunate enough to make the team and, so we played baseball all summer and. . .

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - Then when football season started, the. . . they invited us to try out for the Fort Sill football team and we did and we were both fortunate enough to make the football team.

(KMH) – Wow. (Laughter)

(MSH) - So we got to do a lot a, a lot of traveling around the country playing football and played against some. . . Earl and I and, one other fella named Jack Brownfield were the only three on the Fort Sill football team that hadn't been to college, and, most of them were second lieutenants that had been to ROTC. There was Johnny Matsock played at Michigan State, Fred Yagers was Rookie of the Year in 1951 in the NFL with the 49ers and I played with Billy Vessels and Buck McPhail and . . .

(KMH) - Wow, wow.

(MSH) - Leon Heath, Manny Mavridis played against Johnny Lattner.

(KMH) - Oh my gosh.

(MSH) - Cotton Davidson. It was a wonderful experience for us.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - And, at, at the end of our enlistment, Earl and I were both offered a scholarship to play football at Cameron State University.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - . . . a school there in Lawton, so . . . It was a junior college at the time.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - And accepted and decided to stay in the Midwest, and. . .

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - We, we've been here ever since, moved to Cimarron in 1964.

(KMH) - Wow, so that was . . .

(MSH) - Fifty years ago.

(KMH) - Yeah, wow.

(MSH) - July the 14th.

(KMH) - Isn't that something! Wow, um, that was such a different experience. Now when, when you went in, you were not anticipating that was going to be your career, was it?

(MSH) - Oh not at all, we. . .

(KMH) - Yeah?

(MSH) - We were, it was certain where we were going, and as a matter of fact a couple of weeks before our basic training at Fort Ord was over, they, they told us all to send our new address to our families.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And it was our name, rank, serial number, APO San Francisco, so we knew where we were going, we were going to Korea.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And in that, in that short period of time they, they signed the truce and stopped sending troops.

(KMH) - Isn't that amazing?

(MSH) - And I always felt I would've done whatever I was told to do.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - But I, I felt like, I was fortunate enough not to have to go in to combat.

(KMH) - Yes, yes, that's right.

(MSH) - Had a brother that, all that time he spent in the Marine Core in the South Pacific, he was, he was never the same.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - That's, still emotional.

(KMH) - Yes, yes, I think it is, it is, um, so you were eighteen, what a formative time of life, but you were already married.

(MSH) - I was 19.

(KMH) – Oh, OK.

(MSH) - I was 18, I was 19 when Connie and I got married.

(KMH) - Oh ok.

(MSH) - But I was 19.

(KMH) - Well that's pretty nice, that you could, all went through that together, too.

(MSH) - This, this friend of mine that I mentioned earlier, Earl Tackersley and I started Kindergarten together and went all through high school together.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - . . . played sports intermural and varsity sports in high school.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - And Earl was an outstanding baseball player. He was, he signed a pro contract right out of high school.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - Never made it to the “biggs,” but he made it into A-ball.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - And then of course he was in the same boat the rest of us were in, when you turned 19, you were going to get drafted.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - Unless your daddy was on the school board! (Laughter)

(KMH) – Oh! (Laughter)

(MSH) - Or on the draft board, I mean!

(KMH) - On the draft board. (Laughter)

(MSH) - But that was -- we went three, three and a half years, Earl signed up for the same schools I did and he, spent exactly the same amount of time in the same unit, in the Army, then we spent two years at Cameron uni-- Cameron Junior college together.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - Before we were ever more than, ten miles apart, we were 26 or 27 years old.

(KMH) - Wow, where did he go then?

(MSH) - He's in Amarillo now.

(KMH) - Oh, oh.

(MSH) - He's, he went on and finished his degree at Oklahoma State as Entomologist.

(KMH) - Oh.

(MSH) - And had one of his sons, his youngest son, was, had a rheumatic fever I think it was.

(KMH) - Oh.

(MSH) - And, lost his hearing, before he was two years old.

(KMH) - Oh wow.

(MSH) - And Earl and his family moved to Amarillo so he got the boy in the school for the deaf there.

(KMH) - Oh oh, yeah.

(MSH) - And that's where he stayed, but he, he had a spraying service, he had his pilot license, and he went to work for Bell Helicopter.

(KMH) - Oh.

(MSH) - And spent 35 years or so with them.

(KMH) - Wow.

(MSH) - And he's still in Amarillo. In fact I talked to him just a day or two ago.

(KMH) - What was his last name? Tankersley ?

(MSH) - I'll tell you why in a minute.

(KMH) - Tankersly . . . That's sort of bit . . .

(MSH) - His grandson pitches for the Florida Marlins.

(KMH) – Ah.

(MSH) – Taylor.

(KMH) - Oh really? Oh wow. What do you think your life would've been like if you had gone to Korea?

(MSH) - Oh, I, I, I have no idea what, probably I would have, had I survived, I would've probably gone back to the Imperial Valley in Southern California and. . .

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - Find, try to find a job as a high, high industry in produce, vegetables, lettuce, carrots.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) – Melons.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - It's great farming country.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And that's probably what I would have done.

(KMH) - Was it pretty typical that if two friends went in, they ended up staying together, from those you knew?

(MSH) - I don't think so -- but I was and H and he was a T, we were far enough in the. . .

(KMH) – Oh.

(MSH) - That in our, our, at Fort Sill, I was in C company and he was in B company.

(KMH) – Oh, OK.

(MSH) - But we were right across the parade grounds from each other .

(KMH) - Oh, so just serendipity?

(MSH) - Earl spent, Earl wasn't married and, or he spent, just about every weekend with us.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah, how cool. What about your friends and classmates?

(MSH) - I had very few of my classmates of, were, of, in the Army. Some of the fellas that were a year or two older.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - Were in, but just of the top of my head, I don't recall any of, of my high school graduating class serving, or in the service.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - I, I, you know we, we try to get a picture of what the, those middle '50s were like.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - Because the Korean conflict was so different from World War II.

(KMH) - Oh yes. Yeah, and it's interesting to see just the different stories, and the variation of the stories that people that served during that same time, had such different experiences.

(MSH) - Most of, most of what I, only considered ever, ever high school kids, had these good friends and. . .

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - We were a small enough class in a small enough town that everyone knew everyone, but of my good friends, kids that I grew up with and run around with all my life. I don't know if Earl and I were the two that actually served in the, in the military.

(KMH) - Really?

(MSH) - Yeah.

(KMH) - That's interesting, kind of in the in-between.

(MSH) - And I may have, I may have, forgotten one or more of 'em.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - But I, I can't think of any of the fellas that I actually, most of them went on to college.

(KMH) - Yeah, huh, that's interesting, so you feel like your time with the military was well spent and you got a lot out of it, I'd say.

(MSH) - Absolutely, I was, I wouldn't trade it for anything. It was, it was like, any young couple. Our two, our two daughters were both born while I was, Connie and I were in the service, and at the Fort Sill . . .

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - . . . Army Hospital. Our son Russell was born shortly after I got out of the service at Lawton, Oklahoma.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - Yeah, we, we thought we were OK at the time, you know, looking back on it.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - It wasn't, it. . .

(KMH) - It wasn't that great? (Laughter) The good old days are now, you know. (Laughter) Where'd you live, did you live on base or . . .?

(MSH) – No. We had, we had an apartment.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - Lived in, lived in a little community of Medicine Park, about 12 miles. . .

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - Simply because the rent was cheaper.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) – Huh.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - And Connie was a telephone operator with Pacific Bell, when we got married and. . .

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - There's a, fella out there, had a, had some little cabins, named after the Dionne Quintuplets.

(KMH) - Oh yeah?

(MSH) - And he had a switch board. That little community had a, local telephone company.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - And she was able to get some part time work.

(KMH) - Oh neat.

(MSH) - As a, as a switch board operator.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - While we were in the Army, and while I was in college, she was the, she was a, switch board operator for the Lawtonian Hotel at Lawton, which was a new, nice hotel at Lawton at the time.

(KMH) - Oh, wow.

(MSH) - So, she worked as much as she could, with the two girls.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - While we was in Army, and, and . . .

(KMH) - So, so did she and the kids travel with you on all those sports trips?

(MSH) – No.

(KMH) - Or was that, that was the '50s wasn't it?

(MSH) - That was the '50s, they didn't, no.

(KMH) - She took care of the kids?

(MSH) - As a matter of fact, we got to, to Colorado Springs, to play them in '56 it would've been, and they drove the bus up to the, where were supposed to stay, and they started calling off names, of who could, who should get off the bus, and they called all officers names, which was only half a dozen enlisted men on the time, most of them had been through college and had gone through the ROTC program, and our coach was Bill Pace, who was at KU, the football coach there, and later at Vanderbilt.

(KMH) – Oh.

(MSH) - He had coached there, but he said, what's going on here, and the, our guide, was a captain, he said, well the, officers are staying here, the enlisted men we're taking them somewhere else, he said, "No, we're not either! We're all going to stay here," but it, the Army was still segregated.

(KMH) - Oh, I see.

(MSH) - I . . . enlisted and officers, and still Black, and it was still Black and white.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - We had a number of colored fellas on our, on our football team and, they were treated just like the rest of us.

(KMH) - Huh, that's good. What happened when you went to Lawton though, was it still . . .

(MSH) - It was, it was segregated, desegregated. Truman had desegregated the Army, but it was still, all of the officers in cadre. . .

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - In the 598, had transferred from Fort Polk, Louisiana, they had no, no grunts in it. . .

(KMH) – OK.

(MSH) - All the officers in cadre. . .

(KMH) – OK.

(MSH) - Were Black.

(KMH) - And so then you came in as . . .

(MSH) - We came in as a, diversified unit. We had Japanese fellas, Chinese people, we had Mexicans, Irishman, Englishmen, Germans. . .

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - Just a mix of people, in the 700 of us that were sent in to fill those slots.

(KMH) – Wow. And that's the way it was, other than that kind of status thing, was there racial tension then?

(MSH) - Not much. Some of the fellas, later on, most of the people I went down there with, were in it from the west, west coast, and farther west, but as time went by, and people new, new soldiers come in, some from the south and yeah there was still some of that, yeah.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - There was still some.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - It was . . .

(KMH) - How was that in Oklahoma, relating with the community?

(MSH) – It – Oklahoma. I, I left there in 1964 and during the early '60s.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - There was a lot of. . .

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - A lot of it going on there. No, the, there was a, a place in town where the Black people lived and a place in town where the other people lived.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - In . . . and they didn't, criss-cross.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - As a matter of fact the, the schools were not segregated, but very few Blacks went anywhere except to the Black schools.

(KMH) – Huh.

(MSH) - If they were an outstanding football player, they'd go cross the line up from, and bring 'em in to Lawton High School, at the time. There was only one high school in Lawton, a town of a hundred thousand.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - Where, Fort Sill is there, and there's now four or five schools there, but . . .

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - It's totally desegregated now.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - But at the time, it was, you know.

(KMH) - Yeah, that was still kind of early, '64 for the . . . a lot of the racial tension really blossomed after that.

(MSH) - Well, they were, they were . . .

(KMH) - They were started. . .

(MSH) - Hosing them down pretty good in the south .

(KMH) – Oh?

(MSH) - In the early 60s.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - And, but it was more of it there than I've seen since, anywhere else that I've lived.

(KMH) – Huh.

(MSH) - Well there was only, that's the only, there and here.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - That's all the places I've really ever lived.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - In my adult life.

(KMH) – Yeah. I just, find that, interesting, as what it would be like if all the officers were Black and then they brought in a diversified group of, for those officers to supervise.

(MSH) - We didn't really think anything about it.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - I went to high school in Holtville, California, eight miles from Mexicali, old Mexico.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And, we had not many, but we had Elsi Maggi and Tommy Lee, and his sisters, there was four or five Black kids in our, in our class, and we played ball together. We went swimming together. We did whatever.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - Kids do together.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And, we didn't care about what color they were.

(KMH) - Uh hum, uh hum.

(MSH) - But it wasn't that way in Oklahoma.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - In those days.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - And I must say, it's, still not, totally. . .

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - The way it should be.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - There's still -- there's still some animosity there.

(KMH) - That's interesting. So what's the biggest lesson you took with you from the military?

(MSH) - Oh, I think how to get along with people.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - You gotta bite your lip sometimes when, when you're dealing with people that, that are not educated.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And -- not that I have a lot of, I only have two years of college. That's all I have, but, a little common sense.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - I learned that, you have to, a lot of times you have to do some things that you rather not do. Then just, bite your lip and go ahead and do 'em and go about your business.

(KMH) - Uh hum

(MSH) - I think getting along with people, different kinds of people, was -- I had reasonable success. I made rank.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - In three and a half years I went from a private nothing to a staff sergeant.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And was able to get some education -- military education, that I, I think has helped me down the long. I learned how to study.

(KMH) - Oh yeah?

(MSH) - I went through the six week leadership school, and the first thing they told us is, this is not OCS, but we tried hard.

(KMH) - Oh?

(MSH) - And it was, the first four weeks was, you do this and you do that, and you were on a very rigid schedule and, a physical schedule, and lot of, some of which was hard work.

(KMH) - Wow.

(MSH) - But the last four weeks of it was in the classroom, and you got tested at the end of every week on everything you did, and, and I -- I, I studied hard and, and did well in my. . .

(KMH) - Yeah

(MSH) - And, I learned how to study, I think is. . .

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - Is, was the main thing.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - That you, you can't learn anything if you don't.

(KMH) - Yeah, so . . .

(MSH) - Pay attention.

(KMH) - The two schools you went to then, were one of them -- was one of them that school?

(MSH) - One of them was. I went to fire direction computer school.

(KMH) - OK, oh yes.

(MSH) - Which --- we were forward observers.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - And of the forward observers, would call descriptions in to us -- longitude, latitude. We were shooting one 55mm guns that, traveled 35 - 40 miles, if, if you need them to.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - Depending on the powder load and that kind of thing, they would send their location to us, the target they wanted us to hit, and we would mathematically compute their altitude, the range, the deflection.

(KMH) - OK.

(MSH) - And within three or four rounds, we could hit, we could hit a target 30 miles away.

(KMH) - Wow.

(MSH) - Even with the technology they had then.

(KMH) - Wow. Were there computers?

(MSH) - Slide rules.

(KMH) - Really?

(MSH) - Oh yeah.

(KMH) - Wow.

(MSH) - Yeah, you used slide rules.

(KMH) - I must've been in on the tail of that one. (Laughter)

(MSH) - The, the -- Fort Sill, has always hosted the junior class from West Point, for a two week session. Every summer they used to do this, and at two years, I was able to be a part of the fire direction team that put on the demonstrations for the --

(KMH) - Oh, oh!

(MSH) - Cadets, and of course we, we fuzzed a little. We had been on that range a lot of times. We'd shot at those same targets, and they -- It was fun watching those cadets, sitting in these -- 300, 400 of them, sitting on the bleachers with their field glasses looking at something three or four miles away.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - And they called us over the loud speaker. They'd call us the, the fire mission, and we'd hit it with the first round.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - We'd hit it before. (Laughter)

(KMH) - (Laughter) A little practice?

(MSH) - And they were, they were pretty impressed, but it, it, that was fun.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - And we got to mingle with those kids, and, and . . .

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - They'd come and ask us questions, and we'd, had, had the, able to do that.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - But no. I had, I had a, a lot of fun.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - In the Army doing some things that I, otherwise I'd never done.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And it's for sure, I would've never would have wound up in Fort Sill at, Lawton Oklahoma.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - Being from . . .(Laughter)

(KMH) - Yeah, that's for sure.

(MSH) - Being from California, I thought, all you're going to find in Oklahoma was a hitching post for a horse, or an outdoor toilet or something that.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - A bunch of Okies, you know, and I, and I am one. (Laughter).

(KMH) - Yeah (Laughter) Where were you born? Did I see that?

(MSH) - Yeah, Mayfield, Oklahoma.

(KMH) - But then how'd your family get to California?

(MSH) - My dad had a farm at Maricopa, just at Mayfield.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - In the early thirties, he and mom, I had four older brothers, two older sisters, moved there and he had a, a section of ground and, was farming.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And, of course, the Depression hit.

(KMH) - Dust Bowl, yeah.

(MSH) - And he, run out of, something to sell, he couldn't raise the crop.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - He told me, the only time my mother ever came back, I got 'em at '58 and, my dad told me, went to the, the home place, where I was born.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - To visit the cemeteries and see family there.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And, my dad told me that, when he left there in August of 1935, he couldn't raise enough feed on that section of land to feed one milk cow.

(KMH) - Wow.

(MSH) - And he, hadn't paid any taxes for a couple of years, and, he sold his section of land, to a neighbor, a Mr. Martin, and, loaded -- my oldest brother was married and I haven't -- have a neice 14 months younger than I am.

(KMH) - Wow .

(MSH) - And went to California, and I was a pretty good sized kid and . . . My mother had family out there, up around, Riverside, and San Jacinto, Hemet. . .

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - Beautiful country up in there.

(KMH) - Uh huh, yeah.

(MSH) - And, and we stopped at 45 miles west of Yuma, Arizona, in the Imperial Valley, and I didn't think anything about it, until I was a big ole kid. I remember in high school I said, "Dad, all of mom's family, grandma, grandpa, and aunts and uncles were all up in that nice, cool country up there. What in the hell are we doing in Holtville? Why, why did we stay here?" He said, "Well, when we got here, I had a \$1.65 left," and he said, "I had to find a job," and my dad started to work three days later.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - For Saudi Farms, and worked 93 days in a row, driving a Caterpillar, for \$.50 a day.

(KMH) - Wow, wow.

(MSH) - So that's how we got to Cali, the, the. . .

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - The Jobs and the Grapes of Wrath.

(KMH) - Yup, that's right.

(MSH) - Camped along the side of the road.

(KMH) – Yup.

(MSH) - And got to California that way, and I tell everybody that I, went to California when I was a year old and took my family with me. (Laughter)

(KMH) - Oh (Laughter) We have branch of family out there too.

(MSH) - Do you?

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - Where they at?

(KMH) - They're up in Santa Cruz.

(MSH) - Oh wow, that's, that's up at the high rent district.

(KMH) - Well, you know, it is now, but it wasn't then/ They, they bought road -- they worked on Route 66, building it out there, and when they got out there, they had some road equipment, and so they started building roads into the hills.

(MSH) - Uh hum.

(KMH) – And ended up staying there.

(MSH) - Until my brother served in the, in the CCs. [*Conservation Corps*]

(KMH) - Oh yeah?

(MSH) - And -- before World War II started.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - And they, they built in those -- Cleveland National Park between the Imperial Valley and Sand Diego.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - Those mountains, in through there, they built a lot of roads, fire shelter belts.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - And fire breaks and stuff like that.

(KMH) - Stuff like that, yeah, that's something, so -- any, any -- How'd your kids feel about that time? What do you think they know about that time period, you think?

(MSH) - Oh, they know things. They know everything that we know, because we told them.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - And they, our kids were, were -- I think they've heard it. I think they're proud of it.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - They're, they're all, this is always, Cimarron's always going to be home to all my kids.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - We moved here, Robin was in the third grade, Stevie was in the second, and Russell started Kindergarten here.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - So it don't matter where we go anymore.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - This will always be home to our kids.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - And no, they've, they get a kick out of --still, listening to the, talking about the -- They still can remember things that when they were kids in Lawton and we've taken them back down there several times over the years, and go where we used to live here and used to live there.

(KMH) - Oh yeah?

(MSH) - And they, both the girls remember vividly, the Christmas they got their first bicycles.

(KMH) - Oh really?

(MSH) - And riding down the hill.

(KMH) - Oh, that's neat.

(MSH) - And all of that stuff, yeah.

(KMH) - Yeah, oh that's cool.

(MSH) - They're cool with it.

(KMH) - Yeah, that's neat.

(MSH) - I think they're proud of their, their family ties.

(KMH) - Yeah, that's neat. Tell me what, if you remember anything, like what was the political climate about Korea in the '50s 'cuz you were there. What, do you remember the reaction after the. . .

(MSH) - I think most of the, the fellas I was around, we never did understand why they didn't call it a war.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - It was a police action and kind of the saying was, it's a long hard beat in a tough neighborhood.

(KMH) - Oh yeah.

(MSH) - You know, not to be able to shoot back.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - And that was the thing that bothered most of us. That if, as I said -- I was fortunate enough not to have to be there, but the fellas that served in combat, there was times they could, they could see somebody shooting at them and they weren't able to shoot at them 'cuz they were across the 38th Parallel or something.

(KMH) - Oh yeah?

(MSH) - They didn't think it was fair.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - And if you're in, if you're in war, you're gonna have to kill people.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - Or you're going to get killed.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - And, they didn't quite understand that.

(KMH) - Yeah . . . So people that came back were they bitter about that or . . .

(MSH) - Some of them were, yes.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - The, the conditions were terrible and especially the winter conditions over there were terrible.

(KMH) - Huh.

(MSH) - Yeah, just from, and I had no personal experience from that.

(KMH) - Yeah, yea.

(MSH) - But just from talking to . . .

(KMH) - The things that people said ?

(MSH) - People that were there. It was, it was, pretty primitive.

(KMH) - Yeah, did people process in and out of Fort Sill then, during that time? That had been there?

(MSH) - Oh yes. I served with a, oh yeah, as a matter of fact, all of those cadre from the #598.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - The officers in cadre had been in, were Korean veterans, combat veterans.

(KMH) - Oh really?

(MSH) - Yeah, they were all sergeants and lieutenants and. . .

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - The highest ranking officer that was there was a captain at the time, but we had a lot of sergeants, first sergeants.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - Or bucks staffs.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And they were, they were all, wore combat infantry badges .

(KMH) - Uh hum, uh hum, wow.

(MSH) - So they, they were, eyeball to eyeball with them.

(KMH) - Yeah, huh, so they would just stay to finish out their terms then, I suppose that's true.

(MSH) - Most of them, most of them were career.

(KMH) - Did we withdraw those troops then at that time? Is that what happened after the Armistice?

(MSH) - The, pretty much, yeah, they left, I think we still probably have 50-, 60,000 troops in Korea

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - Even now, that it, at the time, yeah.

(KMH) - Uh huh.

(MSH) - Most of them came home.

(KMH) - Yeah. Interesting.

(MSH) - But most of those , most of that -- people that I was first acquainted with in, in '54, had been to Korea.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - Most of those, most of those sergeants were career.

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - -- military.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - They, they were on to serve out their . .

(KMH) - Yeah?

(MSH) - Time in the military.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - And, sure understand why . . .

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - It's hard for them to find jobs.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - If you understand the south.

(KMH) - Yeah, coming back.

(MSH) - Even in, even in the 50s and 60s.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - Black people didn't have much of a chance to get a top job.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah, that's right.

(MSH) - It was, hard to get into any schools.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - They wouldn't let 'em in.

(KMH) - Yeah, at that time, yeah, for sure.

(MSH) - As a matter of fact in '57 we were playing football at, we went to Tyler, Texas, to play Tyler, and we had three Black fellas on our team, all of them starters, and they couldn't stay on the hotel with us, 1957.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - Coach had to put them up in a private residence.

(KMH) – Wow.

(MSH) - We played Arlington, Texas, Arlington State, at Arlington, in '57, and they couldn't stay in the hotel with us there either, couldn't eat at the dining room with us.

(KMH) - Wow, huh.

(MSH) - But, that's been. . .

(KMH) - Times changed, didn't they?

(MSH) - Yup, that's been, that hasn't been, that's been just a little bit over 50 years ago.

(KMH) - Yeah, wow, wow.

(MSH) - And you know, the, those young men didn't, they didn't hold that against anybody, they just said, that's the way it is and we wanted. . . They're working their way out of it. They were in college.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - And they's gonna do whatever it took to get done.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - And the three fellas that I specifically remember was Billy Brown, Tommy Lee Johnson and Simon Perkins, and they all finished, got a degree. Tommy Lee got his at Weatherford, Oklahoma. Billy Brown went to New Mexico University on a full scholarship when he got out of school there, and Simon Perkins was from Virginia.

(KMH) – Wow . . . So they did it.

(MSH) - They did it.

(KMH) - Wow, that's something. Did you use the, training that you got in there, other than you mentioned the leadership and the studying stuff. . .

(MSH) - Pretty much, yeah. You'll, you had to. Part of that training was how, how to get up in front of people and speak.

(KMH) – Yeah.

(MSH) - And, in my -- I've been in the crop insurance business for about all the time I've been in Cimarron and, I've attended lots of and instructed agents' seminars and gone to some. .

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - And some national committees and things like that, that . . .

(KMH) - Uh hum.

(MSH) - Yeah, it was very helpful.

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - From a . . .

(KMH) - Yeah.

(MSH) - Public speaking, techniques and things like that, sure.

(KMH) - Yeah, good, any other things I haven't asked you?

(MSH) - I don't know anything.

(KMH) - Can't think of a thing, I've tried to ask you everything, I can think of. . .

(MSH) - I'll just, I'll just tell you what I know about, whatever you, whatever you want to know!

(KMH) - Well good, so you're in, you're in Cimarron now. . .

(MSH) - Yes.

(KMH) - That's for good ?

(MSH) - As far as I know, yeah.

(KMH) - Yeah, yeah.

(MSH) - I don't, where, why would, go anywhere else.

(KMH) - Yeah, that's neat.

(MSH) - We love it here.

(KMH) - That's good, OK, any questions you can think of? Well, thank you Sparky.

(MSH) - You're quite welcome.

(KMH) - We really appreciate it.

(MSH) – OK.

(KMH) - Yup, watch for your name in lights!