

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

Manuel Ortegon

An interview conducted on

November 16th, 2021

Interviewer: Allison D. Huntley

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“William and Don Griffis Vietnam War Oral History Archive”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Manuel Ortegon are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on November 16, 2021.

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HUNTLEY: Alright so, um, I have- so I'm Allison Huntley, and I'm talking here with Manuel Ortegón. Um, it is November 16th, 1:15 P.M. and we are here in Angelo State campus in the library. Alright, and how are you today?

ORTEGÓN: I'm doing good.

HUNTLEY: Okay, um, we've got some prepared questions and I'll just ask them, and um, feel free to answer them as fully as you want. Um, and I may ask some follow up questions as we go.

ORTEGÓN: Okay.

HUNTLEY: Okay. Um, so I'll let you reintroduce yourself cause the first question there is what is your name. [laughs]

ORTEGÓN: My name is Manuel Ortegón.

HUNTLEY: Okay, nice to meet you. Um, and then, uh, our next question is: where and when were you born?

ORTEGÓN: I was born in San Angelo, Texas- October 6th, 1946.

HUNTLEY: Um, so you just had a birthday not too long ago [laughs]

ORTEGÓN: 75 years ago, two weeks ago, three weeks ago.

HUNTLEY: Oh wow. Did you have a big shindig?

ORTEGÓN: No, no.

HUNTLEY: {laughs} 75 is a big one though. Um, and then did- did you grow up here in San Angelo?

ORTEGON: Yes ma'am.

HUNTLEY: Okay. Um, and then when and where did you enter the armed forces?

ORTEGON: I entered the armed forces in Abilene, Texas in, oh- gosh, I'm gonna guess here- in September of 1966.

HUNTLEY: Okay. Um, gonna write that down.

ORTEGON: September...

HUNTLEY: Said 1966?

ORTEGON: 1966.

HUNTLEY: Okay, and then which branch did you serve in?

ORTEGON: Army.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: Served in the army.

HUNTLEY: Alright. And then, so you, uh for your years of service- you said, uh, started around 1966. Do you know when you, um- [whispers] what do you call it- [louder] when you left the military?

ORTEGON: Uhh...

HUNTLEY: Wait you're-

ORTEGON: I was drafted in 1966.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. And then, what years- what were your years in service?

ORTEGON: My- and then I volunteered.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay, I see, I see

ORTEGON: So I went from a US to an RA.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm

ORTEGON: I don't know if that means anything to you.

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: I went from a draftee to a volunteer in the army

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: And I- I completed my actual service in, uh, September 1969

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: And then of course, you spend another 3 years, uh, in the- kinda like on the side.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] Like in the Reserves?

ORTEGON: Like the Reserves.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTLEY: Um, so when you went in initially as an enlistee that was '66?

ORTEGON: Yes, '66 I got drafted.

HUNTLEY: Okay, then- oh sorry that's right. Draftee in '66, and then did you, like, reenlist to go into the Army or is it one continuous?

ORTEGON: No, they're- let me tell you a story. When I was in basic training-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I was kinda gung-ho. Cause I grew up in a ranch- I spent a lot of time in a ranch near Fort McKavett with my daddy. My daddy used to be a ranch hand.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: He cowboied all his life so I was a pretty good cowboy. I enlist- I got drafted in '66. When I was in basic training, we had a paratrooper come on over there, and you can call him Bray [spelling unsure]. Watching now at the time he wasn't- he came in there to talk to all the draftees, wanting to see if anybody wanted to volunteer for paratrooping school.

HUNTLEY: Oh.

ORTEGON: For- for parachute training, and I liked the way he was dressed so I uh- I told that sergeant, I says 'I wanna be one of them. I want to join the paratroopers.' He says 'Well you gonna have to change from US to RA, regular army because that's volunteers only.' And that's where I got started.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: And then when I was in, uh, parachute school, the same thing happened again. After I graduated as a paratrooper, I had my silver wings and those uniforms were sharp-looking. This long range patrol company- ranger company- came on over and they were trying to form a company for long range reconnaissance patrol in Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Mhm.

ORTEGON: And they were forming a company and they looked real good.

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: Cause they had those, uh, -the- y'know that ranger training. And so I volunteered for that and the rest is kinda history. Ehh so...

HUNTLEY: Yeah, that's- no, that's, that's cool.

ORTEGON: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] You're like, I like their uniforms.

ORTEGON: Yeah, so I volunteered for that, but it was a lot of- it was a lot of- uh- a lot of it was because of the way they looked and I was kinda gung-ho.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I- I guess I had been watching too many John Wayne movies, and then when I got in there, and later on in life- and we can talk about this later if you want to- and, and the real thing happened, and I was telling myself 'my gosh, what did I do?'. But I had to- I had to stick it out then [laughs]

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: [laughs] Does that make sense to you?

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: I had to stick it out then. Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Oh.

ORTEGON: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, that's- well, we'll- like you said, we can talk more about it later.

ORTEGON: Okay. That's how I got started.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] Okay. Um, and then, which military conflicts did you serve during?

ORTEGON: I was in- in- in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. [pause] Alright, and then what units did - or what unit or units did you serve in?

ORTEGON: When I was- I went over with the 101st Airborne Division. My unit, we were an F company- a long range patrol, we were attached to the 100- 101st Airborne. When- when I was in Vietnam, they changed that to, uh, Lima Company, 75th Rangers, and we became part of the 75th Ranger Regiment. But, we was all one in the same company, just changed titles- just like you do with- I mean anything else in the world, y'know. They just, same outfit.

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: just- yeah. But it was- we started as Air 58th Long Range Reconnaissance- long range patrol company.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: Is what it started with.

HUNTLEY: Okay, and then you switched to L Company, 75th Rangers.

ORTEGON: Yeah. It- it was the same company. All they did was change names. It-it- no changes there. They just- it was the same company. All they did was change names.

HUNTLEY: That's bureaucracy for you, right?

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah, that's what it was.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, um, so uh, you said why you enlisted. So you enlisted because you were-

ORTEGON: I was drafted.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. Right, right- okay

ORTEGON: I was drafted.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And, uh, once y'know they had the draft back then.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And then, I just wanted to be a Ranger. I wanted to serve with, y'know, I wanted to be with the best, I guess.

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: I don't know if that makes it- at the time, tch- y'know young, gung-ho.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: But, uh, it happened. Too many John Wayne movies.

HUNTLEY: No, that makes sense cause-

ORTEGON: Yeah.

HUNTLEY:- Y'know, when you're young, like you said you wanted to be with the best, you don't want to, uh...

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTLEY: ...you don't want to be- yeah, yeah, I get it. Um, and then, what was your training like?

ORTEGON: The training- we did a lot of training in, um, in, um, Fort Kimble, Kentucky, and then when we went to Pensacola, Florida where the Ranger training camp is.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: In those swamps down there by that- what's the name of that? Susqua- oh, something swamps. Right there in Pensacola?

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Yeah, so there's- we spent a lot of time training there. And then we deployed to Vietnam as a unit.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON; There was a whole company.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: And then, when I was in Vietnam- and this is something that I want to emphasize on because this is one of the best things I ever done in my life. When I was in Vietnam, the 5th Special Forces Group in Vietnam, had a MACV Recondo school.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And the way- let me spell that for you. It um- [rustling, pen] Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: [pause] It was run by the 5th Special Forces, and, um, you have a copy of this certificate.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: If you find it, wherever it is, you can have a copy of this.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. [pause, rustling, writing]

ORTEGON: When I was in Vietnam, I graduated from that school.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: That school, you need- if you wanna research something that's very rare.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Research that school.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: There's a lot of stuff out there on the internet.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Very few people graduated from it.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: If you graduated from that school, you got an automatic sergeant.

HUNTLEY: Oh wow.

ORTEGON: And then when you went back to your unit, you got your um, own team.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: So, when I graduated from this school, and I went back to my unit, I was a team leader of a six man operations team.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: And that's- I'm very proud of that cause I was only 22 years old.

HUNTLEY: Oh. [laughs]

ORTEGON: When I did that. And, um, I mean- that is awesome, and I'm proud. And you guys somewhere over here have a copy of that MACV Recondo certificate cause I made you a copy.

HUNTLEY: Okay, so you said it's the MACV Reconnaissance for whoever's listening.

ORTEGON: Yeah, that Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: That's what that means, and it's run- it was run by the 5th Special Forces Group.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Those where- it was actually run by Delta Force instructors from the 5th Special Forces Group. It's- I'm very proud of that.

HUNTLEY: How were you selected for that or did you like, apply or?

ORTEGON: The- well, my first sergeant says, 'Man, I would like for you to go' and I said 'You, sure?' He said, 'you come back, you pass, you get your own team.' I says, 'Yeah.' That's kinda gung-ho.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: But, uh, that's something that you might- there's a lot of information on the internet on that if you wanna research that, Alison, and I don't know if you want to or not, but I was proud of it. The interview- if you read about it- I'm not going to explain what happens, and that's cool. You can find out for yourself.

HUNTLEY: Okay, so is there anything you want to tell for the interview about it or you just want to leave it? [laughs] It's up to you.

ORTEGON: Well, it's whatever you want to do. You're the interviewer.

HUNTLEY: Is there any particular account about that that you would like to share right now? Or..

ORTEGON: Well, I'm glad I graduated from it and after that, that's cool. I was on a six-man team when I got to Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But, I went to that school in [pause] February during the Tet Offensive.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. Oh wow.

ORTEGON: I went to- I went to that- I went to that school.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: In February, and I graduated from it in March- March the second, I think is what it says on my certificate.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And then when I went back to my unit, I got my own team, and that's very significant to me.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: To your history- I don't know.

HUNTLEY: No, that's cool.

ORTEGON: But- but regardless, forget about me.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Learn about that school because that, that school will never happen again in the history of the world.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Never will, uh..

HUNTLEY: Why is that?

ORTEGON: Huh?

HUNTLEY: Why is that?

ORTEGON: Because, uh- I don't doubt it that we'll have to get involved in another jungle war.

HUNTLEY: Oh- right. Oh, okay. That was in Florida. You were- the training was in Florida?

ORTEGON: No- MACV Recondo school- that's in Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Oh, sorry. I'm having a moment [laughs]

ORTEGON: That's in Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. Wow.

ORTEGON: I was already in Vietnam. That- that school was in- was in Prang, Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Now, [pause] that school was in Vietnam. That- it- I was already there.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: That was my last training that I had, and that was in Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: The aggressor for the North Vietnamese [intake of breath] it was- it was a real thing school.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: Something you need- but that's what I'm saying, you'll never see anything like that again. Very few people graduate and I'm real proud of that. But you- I'm not telling you this so that you can say, 'Wow, Manuel went there.' That's not the point. The point is that there needs not to be taken away from the history of Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: In- very few people know about it, so-

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: -so I'm telling you that so you can promote that school because it was awesome. Not, nothing to do with me-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: If you ever decide to do a history on it, you leave my name out of it altogether, I don't care.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: It's something that needs to go down as awesome and American history of the Vietnam War, my opinion.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. What- what do you think, um...

ORTEGON: Uh.

HUNTLEY: ...kinda makes it that? Why do you, um, think of it that way?

ORTEGON: Say that-

HUNTLEY: Like that it was awesome. Like what about it- what would-

ORTEGON: Because in that school, people actually got killed.

HUNTLEY: Oh, I see.

ORTEGON: It was- it was a school, but it- it was to make team leaders out of people that we used to operate behind enemy lines.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: This school- they- you actually go out with an instructor behind enemy lines.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: They want to see how you act, if you can control your deals- people actually get killed in that school. You'll never have another school like that anywhere in this-

HUNTLEY: Yeah, I see.

ORTEGON: And it was a- it was a- very special.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And, uh, not too many people graduated from it. But that was what it was assigned for.

HUNTLEY: Okay. Um, well, let's see [pause] Well, going- um, is there any other training that you want to share about or- I understand- I understand that this was the one that, uh, you feel- that-

ORTEGON: No, all I'm asking is that- and you don't have to do anything- all I'm asking is that if you wanna research something about Vietnam, research the MACV Recondo School.

HUNTLEY: Okay

ORTEGON: That was in Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: It wasn't here- it was in Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: And it was run by the Special Forces.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: That's- that's all I'm saying.

HUNTLEY: Oh, no, no, no- I was just- I- so the question just asks about your training so I was just wondering if there was any other training-

ORTEGON: No, that was part of my training.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: But that training was training like you- like you've never had before.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: People actually died in that school.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Got killed, y'know.

HUNTLEY: Well, um, yeah, now- you said it was during the Tet Offensive so-

ORTEGON: No, that's when I was there.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: I was there- I happened to be at that school during the Tet Offensive.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I wasn't out there fighting in the Tet Offensive, but I was in that school.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: That's what I'm saying. The Tet Offensive was bad all over the country, but y'know, they was- where I was there, the- the 5th Special Forces had everything under control pretty good.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: So the students- it didn't affect us.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Y'know.

HUNTLEY: Um, well, um, lemme ask uh, a new question. So, um, what con- what conceptions, sorry- what conceptions did you have of the United States at the time of your enlistment? So how did you think about the United States at the time of your enlistment?

ORTEGON: Well, I really believed that we were- what I- after I got drafted, and I looked at all those guys- in um, I really believed that we were doing it for democracy.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I don't believe that anymore, but-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: At the time, I- I'm- hey, y'know, trying to make a democracy out of this country.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And I- for the United States- gung-ho, gung-ho, gung-ho.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Um, so- so the next question asks, what did America symbolize for you, and then, what did you think it stood for? So- sorta to break that down- so like at the time of your enlistment, um, what did America symbolize for you?

ORTEGON: America- man-

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: -is freedom!

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: The land of the free.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I mean- I've- I've always loved this country. Always.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And- and that had a lot to do with it , y'know.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. And then, um, when you're thinking about what it stood for, it would- how would you answer that?

ORTEGON: It- what America stood for?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Like, at the time of your enlistment.

ORTEGON: At the time of my enlistment?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: What it stood for to me, was opportunity. I mean, that you could come to this country cause my daddy was from Mexico.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And to me, America stood for hey man, this country if you're willing to work, and do all this, and open doors- you can go places.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: That's what it stood for to me.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know, I, uh, about the same time that I was in Vietnam, your people and mine could've had a different viewpoint.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Because you were all going through holy hell in Alabama-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: -and all that.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But at that time, I didn't even know about it. I learned all this later.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Cause I grew up- y'know.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I was too busy cow- cowboying, and doing my own thing.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: But I didn't know. I mean- uh, how tough it was for you guys.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Does that make sense?

HUNTLEY: Yeah, uh, like where you grow up and what your experiences are-

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTLEY: They shape-

ORTEGON: See I grew up in West Texas, we didn't have those problems here. Not all that much. Course there was discrimination- there's always- but y'know, there always will be.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know, but it wasn't as bad as it was in Alabama and all in there, y'know.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, yeah, um, so if we go to the next question- so since your time in the military, has your conception of the United States changed?

ORTEGON: Now, that is-

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: - a question we can talk on about for hours.

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: Let me- let me start here. When I was a little kid, my mom would always encourage us to vote Democratic.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm

ORTEGON: Because- and I still remember her words- because the Democrats are for the poor, and the Republicans are for the rich.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: That was gospel.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: Okay. Based on that, I grew up believing a lot of that stuff. And then, on my last year in Vietnam, I started getting smarter. Y'know, you get wisdom with age.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And I realized that all the glory that I thought was gung-ho stuff- John Wayne stuff- was, was just not true.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: War is horrible so I started looking at- once I got- during my last year, I finally started looking at- and I didn't know what was going on in the States.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know. But I started putting things together that, uh, I say, y'know? We're going to lose this war.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I says, because our hearts were not in it. We were- had too many, uh, rules of engagement and all kinds of stuff. And our hearts were not in it- and- and some of the black people were having problems. Because- and I don't blame them-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Hell, they want you to go die over there for us, and they were going through hell over here in Alabama and- y'know what I'm saying, I don't blame em. Would you blame em?

HUNTLEY: I don't think so.

ORTEGON: I wouldn't either. But uh, it was going, and so I started looking at things different. And I changed parties.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I started looking at, y'know, y'know, it's- it's [pause] it's not all that good. And what really changed it for me, uh, are you recording all this?

HUNTLEY: Uh, yeah- we can-

ORTEGON: Oh, no, no, we can record it, that's fine.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. [laughs]

ORTEGON: What really changed it for me, is when I came back.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: What I- I mean- my sorta- end of my tour- I said hey I made it, I'm alive, I've been through all this. I don't want to go into the combat parts of it- that's not what I want to talk about. And I said, man, you're going back to- you're going home. I got in that plane, and I had my Ranger cap on, and all my colors, and gosh, I said, man. I got to San Francisco, and then I got to San Angelo, and everything changed.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: The hero that I thought I was- people didn't care. That hurt me so much right there.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: That hurt more than anything. And uh, it just kinda changed- I decided to get out of the army, and I decided to- I changed parties, and I decided that the doors were still there.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: That all you gotta do, Manuel, is go open them.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: So, I got out of the military, and nobody gave a shit if you were an Airborne Ranger or not. Nobody cared. [laughs] You don't- eh, I'm- I'm putting it bluntly.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And that's what happened.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: So I came to the ASU on the GI bill.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: and I got out in '69, and I graduated in '72. I went three years and made a degree in general business.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: And I was- I remember when I was going to school here. I wouldn't dare let anybody know that I was, uh, had been over there because even in the classrooms-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm

ORTEGON: It was bad. People were- were very anti- anti- Vietnam, y'know what I mean?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: So I- somebody, I don't know- a few professors might have known.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Anyway, I graduated, and then I went to work for Verizon as an engineer.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: So, I did pretty good. Spent 31 years as an engineer. But, uh, I was- that changed my attitude on it. Uh, a lot of stuff happened back there, but I didn't- we didn't feel like heroes when we came back, y'know.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And- and let me tell you, I worked with heroes. One of the guys that, that was in my company, and I used to talk to him a lot, he's a Cherokee indian. His name was Billy Walkabout. He was a sheriff. He was in my unit. Me and him used to talk a lot. I wasn't a hero, but he was. He was the most decorated American Indian of the Vietnam War.

HUNTLEY: Oh, and you knew him here?

ORTEGON: I- I knew him in Vietnam.

HUNTLEY: Oh, I see.

ORTEGON: Yeah, he's already- he died about eight years ago from Agent Orange who killed him. But his name was Billy Walkabout, and I used to know him. Pretty, pretty sharp guy. So, ask me another question.

HUNTLEY: Well, let's- I'm trying to make sure the recorder isn't about to act up or, but I think we're good- okay. Um, so my next question is, um- okay so you've talked about- well, I'll just

ask the question, and then you can- so, ask- it asks if you were deployed overseas and then, if so, did you reflect much about your unit's mission and how much you believed in it?

ORTEGON: Well, yeah. It- when I first went in there, when I volunteered, tch, it was for America. It was for democracy. It was for everything I believed in- everything they teach you in school-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: - to believe. That's not true.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But I didn't know that at the time.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But everything that they taught you then, but, uh, yeah, I believed in everything. I was real gung-ho

HUNTLEY; Mhm-hm. So-

ORTEGON: Yeah, but now- and you might not agree with me- but to me now, Vietnam was just like Iran and Afghanistan. It's a political war.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: It's all it was. And we got hated for it but-but that's why it hurts- why it hurts so damn much.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: It's not that it was so much a political war. I'll- I would do it again for my buddies because I've- we've got- we-we established a- a brotherhood over there.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But it was politics.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y-y'know. That's all it was.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. So when you were deployed overseas, that- those were some of the thoughts you had, uh, um, about your unit's mission?

ORTEGON: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Okay, good.

ORTEGON: I thought we were doing when- where we were deployed overseas, I thought we were fighting to prevent South Vietnam from falling into communism, and to make it a democracy- I really believed that at the time.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: But as you grow older and you get wiser, let me ask you a question. Now listen.

HUNTLEY: Uh-oh.

ORTEGON: Ehh, do you really believe that one of these days we'll get an Islamic nation and turn it into a democracy?

HUNTLEY: Well-

ORTEGON: Based on the religion?

HUNTLEY: [laughs] I'll answer it by reflecting what you said. That my answer at eighteen would've been very different from my answer now. I'll say it like that. [laughs]

ORTEGON: [laughs] I- I don't believe you can get any Islamic nation converted to a democracy. The religion itself is anti-democratic.

HUNTLEY: Well-

ORTEGON: Women will never- you can't become a democracy if women are second hand citizens.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. I mean like I said- you said your idea's about those things-

ORTEGON: They change.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, they change a lot. Yeah.

ORTEGON: They change a lot.

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see... Uhh- okay, so the next question. What did you think of the local inhabitants that you encountered? So, I guess the South Vietnamese that you encountered?

ORTEGON: The South Vietnamese- one of the things that I found out in war, and didn't take long to find out- all you gotta do is look [pause] We were well equipped. We got plenty of good food.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: The North Vietnamese- I don't know- they weren't as well equipped as we were. But they had plenty of food.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: The people that were starving to death and getting it from both ends were the people that lived there.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: They were the ones who suffered the most.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: You asking me, that's what I saw.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I- I saw- I saw kids, y'know, fighting over people throwing them scraps.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Yeah.

ORTEGON: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Um, so going along with that- when you interacted with local inhabitants, um, what do you think their conceptions were of the United States?

ORTEGON: [Pause] I mi- I could be wrong...

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: ...but I don't think that the poor people give a damn one way or another if they're democratic or communist.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: They just wanted to live in peace. Uh- uh- I- I could be wrong on that, but that's what I got out of that.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I don't think that you or them gave a damn one way or another as long as they live in peace, as long as they got something to eat.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Well, going along with that, did you ever engage them in a conversation about America?

ORTEGON: I never did learn the language- I- just the few words, that I did, but no.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I never did. Um, uh, I spent a lot of time out in the- behind enemy lines.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: With the LRRPs.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Which is what I was with, Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol Company.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But, uh- I- I wasn't in a place where I could see these people. I was mostly in the field.

HUNTLEY Mhm- hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know. But sometimes we would see them out in the field. And y'know- you just could see that they were torn. They had nothing.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Because- because they were in the middle of it

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: They weren't destroyed by- if their villages weren't destroyed by U.S. forces-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: -they were destroyed by the North Vietnamese.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: So, they were kinda like between a rock and a hard place, I think. That's what I saw. Not a lot of- it, it's horrible. But I think civilians in a war zone are the ones that suffer the most from what I saw.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Alright. Um, let's see...Uhh, okay, so for the next question, asks about, um- did you receive any medals or special recognitions for your service such as Pur- Purple Heart? When, if so, and can you explain the circumstances related to that?

ORTEGON: I didn't receive any Purple Heart or any medals outside of the regular campaign medals.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Um, so what kinds of campaign medals- uh, you get it for service-

ORTEGON: For- for service, yeah.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay, yeah.

ORTEGON: Yeah. For service, yeah.

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

ORTEGON: [clears throat] Not that, that's for sure.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] Yeah.

ORTEGON: We had radios that you had to carry them around in a backpack.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, yeah.

ORTEGON: Yeah. That was our communications.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: I mean- we didn't have that.

HUNTLEY: Yeah [laughs]

ORTEGON: Yeah, we still went by maps. GPS- we didn't have it.

HUNTLEY: Yeah [laughs]

ORTEGON: Yeah, we still went by being able to read maps to find out where you were.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Um, what about technology, with regards to transportation?

ORTEGON: Well, just, uh, helicopters.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Helicopters were- we used to go in and out, usually on helicopters.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Uh, yeah.

HUNTLEY: And then ground transport- it was all-

ORTEGON: Ground transport- it was mostly for the infantry companies and stuff like that.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah. We- we were mostly helicopters.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: Almost everywhere we went.

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see...uh, what were race and/or gender relations like in your unit?

ORTEGON: Race and gender?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I've heard [pause] that there was some issues, and I told you little while earlier, that in a way I didn't blame them, but I didn't experience any, but I'd heard that there was some problems with- between some soldiers and black soldiers.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But if there was a case- I don't know that I can blame em, because I knew what was- y'know- even though we were in Vietnam, you'd read what's going on back in the states sometimes.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Uh, stuff- but I never experienced it. Everybody in my units regardless of who you looked like- we all- we were like brothers. We took care of each other.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: We looked out for each other, fought for each other. It didn't matter.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know, it didn't matter. I've heard that there were issues with that, but I didn't see any.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: But I've heard about it, because, I didn't really know much about that stuff really.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Paid much attention because we were all trying to stay alive one day at a time, but I heard more about it when I came back, because it was still going on in '69. In '69 it was still- the Black Panthers were doing a lot of stuff in '69. Is that not right? Am I-

HUNTLEY: Yeah, yeah, you're right.

ORTEGON: Yeah [laughs] I thought so. But that's when I really started- I didn't have much time to pay attention to that stuff when I was in Vietnam. I was trying to stay alive.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know, but uh- I didn't see any problems in my unit, but I heard other units that had those problems. And that's from talking to vets.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Here. Years later, y'know.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But I don't know.

HUNTLEY: And then gender relations?

ORTEGON: Gender rela- there's no women out there.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay [laughs]

ORTEGON: [laughs] That- that- gender relations- that- that's a new thing! That's a new thing.

HUNTLEY: I'm asking the questions on the sheet. [laughs]

ORTEGON: Huh?

HUNTLEY: I said I'm asking the questions on the sheet.

ORTEGON: Yep, there's- there's a good question but-

HUNTLEY: Okay. So no nurses or anything like that?

ORTEGON: Well, in the hospitals. I was in the hospital for a week and one of the nurses was a female nurse at that hospital. But, not, I'm talking about in field.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: Not in the field- there's no women out there. There's all men.

HUNTLEY [laughs]

ORTEGON: Back then. I understand there's some now, but I don't know.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: Uh...

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see, umm, tch-tch-shooh, um- what did you like or not like about your overall experience in the service- or, no, sorry, I skipped a question. Um, what are your most vivid memories of your time in the service?

ORTEGON: My most vivid memories?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I still keep in touch today with the- those of us that are still alive. We uh, um- it- it's like a brotherhood. They're like my brothers. We stay in contact, we go to some of these reunions. And um, there's very few of us in my unit-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: That are still alive, and we- we- it's like family.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I mean, you just get this- the bond. It's- it's hard to explain.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But it's a bond there that stays there forever.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And that's some of the- the other thing. That's about it.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. So when you meet with other veterans, that memory of that bond or that brotherhood is most vivid for you?

ORTEGON: Especially if I'm getting together with veterans that I served with.

HUNTLEY: Oh.

ORTEGON: And we-we have a reunion or something.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Oh yeah, that bond is amazing.

HUNTLEY: And you've kept in touch with a lot of them?

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah. They're all in my phone right here. It's not too many left, but I've kept in touch with a lot of them.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Um, let's see... So now we're on to the question of uh, what did you like or not like about your overall experience in the service?

ORTEGON: What did- what I liked about it? My overall experience and it wasn't until later, I believe my experience in Vietnam got me closer to my Almighty Father in Heaven.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Uhh, I believe there were at least two nights and a day where I know He was with me, cause I didn't think I was gonna see this last light of day again.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And a lot of veterans had opposite-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: -uh, experiences, they say. Y'know- there ain't no God, because God wouldn't allow this kind of stuff to happen. But, uh, He liked me, and I said, He told me- He says, 'Hey man, it's not my fault, it's your fault. You guys are the ones that go kill each other. I didn't tell you to go do that.' That's my God. I got closer to God- that's one of the best things. Made me a better man also.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: It, uh, uh- I believe it made me a better man.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. And uh, when you say it made you a better man uh- military service or being closer to God or both?

ORTEGON: Both.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: Both. Uh, made me more appreciate life a lot more.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I know how easy it is to take it away.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: [snaps fingers] Just like that.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: If you really want to- it- it makes me appreciate- life is precious. Let me tell you, take good care of your life and do some good stuff because I do- and this is getting into religion but I don't care- I do believe there's a Judgment Day.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: You gotta be ready for it, girl [laughs]

HUNTLEY: Um. [laughs]

ORTEGON: Y'know, I really believe that [laughs]

HUNTLEY: [laughs] Um...

ORTEGON: But y'know, some people think they're going to live forever but they're not.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. Especially when you're young, right? [laughs]

ORTEGON: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. Um, let's see. Is there anything you didn't like about your overall service in the - or your overall experience in the service?

ORTEGON: Yeah, but I'm not gonna go into detail about it because it doesn't serve a purpose.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But, people in war are humans.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But sometimes you see atrocities out there, yeah. That they happen. Y'know, people are human, war is ugly. It can be ugly. You know but uh- you know about some already that happened- the ones that, uh, a lieutenant or somebody- they all went to a big court or trial or something. In Vietnam, well, they wiped out this whole village.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Stuff like that happens out there. It's ugly, people get frustrated.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: The death part of it- and- and this is one of the things I learned, cause I thought the war was all glory and John Wayne type deal. It's not like that. That is not like that.

HUNTLEY: Yeah, um.

ORTEGON: Yeah, y'know.

HUNTLEY: Um, yeah. Yeah, um, so let's see... You've talked about this a little bit, did- but- did you expect- so did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

ORTEGON: No! That is the one thing that hurt me the most and it caught me by total surprise. I thought I was coming home a hero.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And I wasn't, and I came back as a baby killer or whatever, y'know what I'm saying?

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: And even in my own hometown in San Angelo- even here when I was going to school.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I would listen to some of these kids bring up a subject about, uh, the- we used to call them hippies cause I was a cowboy.

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: But they would bring up this peace and love, and calling the military as murderers. And I used to listen to that in some of these classrooms.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And I just used to say 'gosh'. I even let my hair grow so they wouldn't even know I had military, um, deal there.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: So, um- that- that was- that surprised me.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Yeah, and, uh, uh, I didn't know. I knew it was bad in San Francisco cause a lot of people had been talking about it at the airport there when the vets started coming in.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But hearing West Texas, in San Angelo, in the middle of red West Texas, y'know.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: It surprised me.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. So, it looks like, you would've expected it if you'd gone to a place like San Francisco, cause you weren't expecting it in San Angelo

ORTEGON: Well, I wouldn't expect it here, but it was here. It was all over the country.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know, and that's when I found out more about what was going on with, uh, the Black Panthers and all that kinda stuff.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Yeah.

ORTEGON: Back in '67, and '68, I didn't have time for that crap. Y'know what I'm saying?

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: We thought we were doing good.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. So, let's see... So, if you want to- I know you've answered this but if you want to add on to it, so did you face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

ORTEGON: That was my- I've always had a pretty strong alpha personality.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: [sniffs] So, the challenge was- that's why I says, 'man, I'm going to do something with myself' and, and I went to school but- yeah, the challenges were there but uh, I- I knew I could overcome them because- yeah, y'know because to this day, the best thing we have is freedom.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I get real concerned sometimes with some of the things that are happening in this country because I feel that there's some people in this country that try to take away our freedom, and gosh, that- that bothers me.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON:- because freedom is the greatest things we- we got. It's freedom.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Yeah.

Ortegon: It's so...And a lot of it is in the universities. I know that, I mean, I'm pretty smart, and I know what's going on in the country. A lot of us in the universities- if I don't care, I'm gonna call a spade a spade. That people trying to take away our freedoms is bullshit. Y'know?

HUNTLEY: I- [laughs]

ORTEGON: [laughs] I'm telling you that way you can call me whatever you want to. If you want to burn my interview tomorrow because-

HUNTLEY: Oh no. [laughs]

ORTEGON: -ASU doesn't want to publish it, I don't care.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] It's- it's fine.

ORTEGON: That's how I feel.

HUNTLEY: No uh, this is your interview, your feelings [laughs] are valid. We won't censor you. Um, let's see, let's uh... Okay, so how did your service influence or affect your family?

ORTEGON: My daughters- I got three daughters and they're all doing well.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Everyone of them's doing well. The- the military helped me put them through school.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: The VA. I'm a disabled veteran.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: I am- I'm a disabled veteran so- uh, what was the question?

HUNTLEY: Uhm, did your service influence or affect your family?

ORTEGON: My daughters- the- the service helped me put them through school.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Okay, they're doing well. My daughters know about Vietnam but they don't know a lot of stuff cause I don't like to- I don't like to talk to them about a lot of that stuff.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But- but they don't know it, and like, like you- I'm not going to talk to you about war stories.

HUNTLEY: Right.

ORTEGON: Y'know, I'm not gonna do that. But, uh, [sighs] overall I think it did a lot of help.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Because it helped me put them through school.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And they're doing well. Yeah. All three of 'em graduated from college.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. Um, all in Texas?

ORTEGON: Uh, Lisa graduated- she got her masters in her nurse practitioner out of ASU.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: But she graduated from Texas Tech.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: April got her doctorate in physical therapy from North Texas-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: -University.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And Crystal got her agriculture degree and she works for the state of Texas at UT.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah, they did- they're doing well.

HUNTLEY: Um, were they born before or after you were in the service?

ORTEGON: After.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

ORTEGON: Oh, yeah.

HUNTLEY: I was just-

ORTEGON: Yeah. Lot after. Lot after. I wasn't married when I was in service.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay. Um, let's see... Um, so how well do you think communities in West Texas, um, have treated returning veterans?

ORTEGON: Now?

HUNTLEY: Mhmmm- or you can-

ORTEGON: Or-or back then. Um, in my experience, it was awful. And I think there's a lot of veterans that will share that.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Back then. Now, aw man. It's- it's like somebody opened their eyes or either that they feel guilty in trying to make us feel real good about it. Y'know.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm..

ORTEGON: I don't know what it is.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: But uh, now they- the VA now is- uh, uh- is doing super good stuff for us.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Especially when Donald Trump was there. Aw man, he did a lot of stuff for us.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Uh, I'm very grateful for that.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Even when he didn't know when to keep his mouth shut [laughs]

HUNTLEY: [laughs]

ORTEGON: Now pay attention to that. But he did real good for the vets.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Oh, he really did.

HUNTLEY: So, you've seen a big transition in like-

ORTEGON: Huh?

HUNTLEY: From the, uh, from the late sixties until the 2000s, you've seen a big difference in the way the community treats, um-

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTLEY: -returning veterans.

ORTEGON: Yeah. I guess- when did they start, around 2000? Is when they started- I guess when they were coming back from Iraq, is that right?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Yeah, so like 2001, 2003.

ORTEGON: Yeah, yeah, I see a big drift- difference because- I look at history. I think history is important.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: The World War II veterans didn't get that.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And they fought there- they were out there for the duration.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And they- I'm sure they had all this deals too.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: and they didn't- they didn't get that. They had to come back and go to work.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: They didn't get all these benefits so I think the country is doing exceptionally well starting around 2000.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: Y'know. And I don't know if Vietnam was a result of them doing that or not. I don't know.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But, uh, a lot of that was, hmm, well, the country was divided back in the 1960s just like it is right now.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: It's divided pretty bad between the peace guys and the, uh, kickers.

HUNTLEY: You said the kickers?

ORTEGON: Here in ASU-

HUNTLEY: Uh-huh.

ORTEGON: You were either a hippie or a kicker and I- a lot of the kickers were the cowboys.
[laughs]

HUNTLEY: Oh I see. Um, let's see... Um, we got about ten more minutes, um, so I don't hold you too long. Um, let's see [pause] So, what long term impact do you believe veterans such as yourself had on communities in West Texas after the war?

ORTEGON: Long term impact?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: [long pause] I don't know. I know a lot of veterans that are doing a lot of good for people, but I'm not one of them.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I know some veterans that are already involved in a lot of community projects.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But I'm not one of them. I, uh [pause] I don't know. That's...

HUNTLEY: That's- that's a fair answer.

ORTEGON: Huh?

HUNTLEY: That's a fair answer.

ORTEGON: I don't know-

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: -if we've had any impact or not. I think- I think I- vet- veterans now are treated a lot different but I don't know if it's because of the reception we got when we came home or if

it's because they opened their eyes in Afghanistan, and they- in Iraq and Iran and they- it changed.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I don't know if it was the Vietnam vets that changed that or not.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Well, or maybe just part. I don't know.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: So, I don't know.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. So you think that there is an impact but you don't necessarily know or- you see the change but you don't necessarily know if it's an impact of returning veterans.

ORTEGON: I don't know but I hope and I hope we always will as part of it- I hope that good prevails more than evil as we go forward and not the other way around.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: So I hope that we promote more and more of what's good and less and less of what's not.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know.

HUNTLEY: Um, let's see... So, how would you feel about military service looking back?

ORTEGON: Looking back?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: What it did to me and how it changed me is how- is how I look at people like you.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Shoot man, I think it had a tremendous impact on me because I know firsthand how precious life is.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And your life is precious.

HUNTLEY: Yeah. Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Yeah. Y'know, I would- I would venture to say that if worse came to worse and you became in a difficult situation then I would be right there for you.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I'd have your back.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I'd venture to say that.

HUNTLEY: And you feel like that came out of your military service or you think it's just something that you had before going in?

ORTEGON: Ahh, both. I think the way my father raised me is got a lot to do with it.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And the military reinforced what my father- the way my father-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: -raised me.

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: I mean, my father was no nonsense. Y'know.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: Yeah. We need more of that in this country, y'know.

HUNTLEY: [laughs] Yeah, huh. They were tough [laughs]

ORTEGON: Yeah.

HUNTLEY: I- um, let's see. Do you have any advice for young men and women who are just entering the service?

ORTEGON: The only advice I have for anybody.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Is whatever you do, be the best you can be.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Whatever you do. When I retired from Verizon-

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm

ORTEGON: -I had fourteen engineers working for me and I was a senior engineer.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: And I think I was pretty dang good.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know?

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

ORTEGON: Whatever you do, military or whatever you- I- military's not for everybody.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: But if you think that you want to get some discipline, that's a good place to go

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm

ORTEGON: To the military for discipline because I got a lot of discipline. But I got a lot of discipline from the kind of father I had.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Y'know, he raised me to grow up and work and not to steal and to earn a living and be proud in everything you do and give it your best shot whether it's, um, shoveling cow manure in the pens or working somewhere.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I believe in that.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: My advice to young people be, choose something you like, work on something you enjoy either you looking forward to Monday. Lot of people have jobs and 'aw man, it's gonna be Monday again, I hate it'. That's awful! Think about it. That's awful. Look forward to Monday, and give whatever you do, your best shot.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm. Um, let's see... do you have any items, objects, correspondence that you wish to share with the project?

ORTEGON: You got them.

HUNTLEY: Okay, yeah. And I'll check on that, um, and talk to the project about that.

ORTEGON: You've got them.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: You've got-

HUNTLEY: And what are some of the other things you-

ORTEGON: They got some- I forget- they got some pictures?

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: Of me and my LRRP team, I know they got that. And they have a copy of my MACV Recondo combat school manual with that Recondo number on it?

HUNTLEY: Okay.

ORTEGON: And... I don't know what else. But they got-

HUNTLEY: Yeah, I'll look into it.

ORTEGON: Yeah, they got some of that.

HUNTLEY: Um, is there anything else you'd like to share about your service?

ORTEGON: Yeah- uh- the only other thing I'd like to share about it is, is, that uh, I think... I think that for the most part, experiencing combat if you believe in God- I think that for the most part experiencing combat will make you a better person.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

ORTEGON: I really do.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm

ORTEGON: Maybe that's what's wrong with some of our people in D. C. is that they don't have that experience. Maybe they should.

HUNTLEY: Military experience?

ORTEGON: Yeah. Maybe they should. I don't know. But that's what I believe.

HUNTLEY: Alright, well, um, Mr. Ortegon, I thank you very much for sitting down with me today. Um, and, uh, thank you very much for participating in the project. Um, and, I think that will, um, finish it off there so it is- it is 2:13 pm, um, November 16th, um, and we are signing off. Thank you.

[End of Transcript]