

**Roberts Library, Middle Georgia College  
Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project  
Interview with Benjamin G. Spivey  
April, 2012**

*The following interview with Lt. Col. Benjamin Spivey was conducted by his son, Russell Spivey: of Eastman, GA who was 7 when his father went to Southeast Asia. Russell Spivey will be identified as "Interviewer."*

**RECORDING I**

**INTERVIEWER:** This is an interview for the Vietnam War Oral History Project. I am interviewing my dad. My name is Russell Spivey, and the interviewee is my father who served in Vietnam and was also a career military officer.

**INTERVIEWER:** We will start with basic stuff by telling your name and where you live.

**SPIVEY:** My name is Benjamin G. Spivey. I presently live in Newnan, Georgia in a retirement community called Wesley Woods. I've been here about two years.

**INTERVIEWER:** What is your birthday?

**SPIVEY:** My birthday is 25 March, 1929. I was born in Alma, GA.

**INTERVIEWER:** So that makes you...?

**SPIVEY:** 83

**INTERVIEWER:** So you just turned 83.

**INTERVIEWER:** What branch of the service were you in?

**SPIVEY:** I was in Army Infantry.

**INTERVIEWER:** And the dates you started and ended [military service]?

**SPIVEY:** I was commissioned first of all at North Georgia College in 1950, and was called to active duty in June 1951 and retired in June of 1972, I guess. '71 or '72.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you say "commissioned," what does that mean?

**SPIVEY:** That means that I completed the ROTC work at North Georgia and was given a commission in the Army, a commissioned officer.

**INTERVIEWER:** A commission as opposed to another type of service, which is what?

**SPIVEY:** Enlisted

**INTERVIEWER:** So there are enlisted people who serve and officers who serve, and the difference is that the officers have commissions, and the government grants you a commission after a certain amount of education or something like that.

**SPIVEY:** Right. After meeting certain requirements, yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you tell us about the units you were assigned to during your career and maybe just where they were?

**SPIVEY:** I started off at North Georgia College, but was not called to active duty until the following year, and was assigned to the 101<sup>st</sup> Division at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky. We were called in [to active duty] from New Orleans, Louisiana. I spent approximately 6 or 8 months at Breckinridge with the 101<sup>st</sup> Division training replacements for the Korean War. At that time, we were still under the draft system, so we were dealing with draftees.

From there I went to Korea with a TDY [temporary duty assignment] enroute at Fort Benning, GA for a company officer's course. This was '51, and then I was sent to Korea and was assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> regimental combat team, which was stationed in the demilitarized zone on the eastern side of Korea north of the Punchbowl area.

From there, after my completed tour in Korea, I came to Camp Walker in Alabama and was assigned to a unit in the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which was a National Guard division, which was activated from North Dakota and the South Dakota area. They reopened Camp Walker for a replacement facility for [troops returning from] Korea. Subsequently, the 47<sup>th</sup> Division was deactivated and returned to North and South Dakota. The division changed its name, and I was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, which moved to Fort Benning, GA.

From there I had various assignments to include a stint in the Infantry Officers Advanced Class. I was assigned then as an instructor at the Infantry school for two years. From the infantry school, I went to Alaska and was assigned to Headquarters U.S. Army Alaska as an assistant headquarters commandant. I also had a couple of other assignments while I was in Alaska; one was a special assistant to the commanding general and one was the company commander for the battle group which was stationed at Fort Richardson.

From Fort Richardson, I had ROTC duty and was assigned to Georgia Military College at Milledgeville, GA. I was an instructor for two years. Then I was assigned to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas where I was an instructor in the Command and General Staff College. After that, I got

an assignment to Saudi Arabia. I was assigned to the G3 section, which the operations and training sections for the Ministry of Defense and Aviation at the Saudi Headquarters in Riyadh, as an advisor. I was a cohort of a Saudi who oversaw the training of the units in Saudi Arabia. I went with him on several occasions to visit the troops or operations during that period of time. From a career stand point, it was a lost year, but it was a good year because I got to go to Jerusalem. I also had a trip to Tehran, Iran and also to Isfahan, Iran. I had several opportunities to get out into Saudi Arabia, particularly in the south part, which was an interesting experience.

After the tour in Saudi Arabia, I was reassigned to Fort Leavenworth to the Command and General Staff College as an instructor. I was there in the Department of Division Operations for two years. After that two year stint, which was very pleasant, I got orders to Vietnam.

At that point, most officers had a tour, at least one, in Vietnam and those who had not been to Vietnam were scheduled to go, so I was picked, because I had not been. I didn't volunteer for that tour. So I spent a year in Vietnam. After Vietnam, I was assigned to the Assistant Commandant of the Northern Warfare Training Center at Fort Greely, Alaska. After a year at that post, I decided to retire and return to civilian life.

**INTERVIEWER:** At that point you had 20 years [of military service]?

**SPIVEY:** I had a little over 20 years.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you retired as a Lt. Colonel?

**SPIVEY:** Right, I retired as a Lt. Colonel.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, the dates you were actually in South East Asia, was when?

**SPIVEY:** 1969 and 70.

**INTERVIEWER:** The unit you were assigned to was called what?

**SPIVEY:** First Field Force Vietnam referred to as IFFV. The IFFV had liaison personnel with the real units that were assigned to Korea. So, I was assigned as a liaison officer to one of the regiments of the 9<sup>th</sup> ROK (Republic of Korea) Division, so I was with the White Horse Division.

**INTERVIEWER:** Why did you join the military?

**SPIVEY:** First of all, I chose to participate in the ROTC at North Georgia College, knowing that if I completed and was offered a commission that I would take it, and I elected to serve.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was that a way to help pay for college. I know a lot of people do that now.

**SPIVEY:** There was a little stipend the last two years of ROTC where we were paid approximately 30 or 35 dollars a month to cover the cost of uniforms and books, but that was all.

**INTERVIEWER:** At North Georgia College at that time all the male students were military cadets, were they not?

**SPIVEY:** Most of them. Some of the people who had come back from World War II had entered North Georgia and wore a uniform, but they did not participate, or were not obligated to participate, in the ROTC system. There were also two or three disabled persons who did not participate. But basically all male students wore the uniform and participated in ROTC.

**INTERVIEWER:** In spite of that, it was a co-ed school?

**SPIVEY:** It was a co-ed military college. There was a dormitory full of females at North Georgia.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thank goodness, because that's where you met Mom, right?

**SPIVEY:** That's where I met my wife, and we dated for the last two years we were at North Georgia, both graduating in June of 1950.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where did you serve in Vietnam? Geographically where were you located?

**SPIVEY:** The Koreans were basically assigned to coastal security from Da Nang all the way to Saigon. My unit, the 28<sup>th</sup> ROK Regiment, which was part of the 9<sup>th</sup> ROK Division, was assigned as security to the Tuy Hoa area which housed an air force base, an artillery headquarters and also some administrative units.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was your job description, or what was your MOS? MOS means what?

**SPIVEY:** Military Occupation Specialty. I was assigned as a 1542, which was an infantry unit commander, but I was an IFFV liaison to the 9<sup>th</sup> ROK Division, specifically to the 28<sup>th</sup> ROK Regiment, which was stationed around Tuy Hoa Air Force Base. They also provided security for a deep water port called Vung Ro Bay, which allowed ships to come closer to provide fuel for the air force units that were stationed at Tuy Hoa Air Force Base, and for the other units that used fuel.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you look at a map of Vietnam, and you see the division between North Vietnam and South Vietnam, approximately how far were you away from that separation? How far was Tuy Hoa from the border between North and South Vietnam?

**SPIVEY:** We were in the south end of Vietnam and on the East Coast about half way between North Vietnam and Saigon.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you remember events, engagements or campaigns that were going on at the time you were there?

**SPIVEY:** I don't remember the operational names—they had Korean names. They did run operations in and around there—TAOR which is Tactical Area of Operations. Some of them were company sized operations, and some of them were regimental sized operations. If it was a regimental sized operation, I went with the 9<sup>th</sup> ROK commander. Everywhere he went, I went. It was not for the purpose of providing advice, but more or less as a liaison. The ROKs didn't need much advice to do what they needed to do. Sometimes they needed coordination, or additional support, such as helicopters or artillery.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you receive awards or citations for your service in Vietnam?

**SPIVEY:** Yes, I was awarded the Bronze Star for Meritorious Service, and also I was awarded a Korea citation as well as the campaign ribbons for the Vietnam service.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you belong to any veterans associations now?

**SPIVEY:** I am a member of the Military Officers Association and also the American Legion.

## **RECORDING II**

**INTERVIEWER:** This is the training section. How old were you and what was your home town when you joined the army?

**SPIVEY:** My hometown is Quitman, GA, but when I graduated from North Georgia, I took a job as a close investigator and adjustor with Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, and I was assigned to the New Orleans office. I was called in from New Orleans.

**INTERVIEWER:** How old were you at that point?

**SPIVEY:** 21 or 22.

**INTERVIEWER:** After you graduated from North Georgia College, you didn't have an obligation to the military; is that right? In other words, you graduated and started a civilian job.

**SPIVEY:** I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Infantry. I had an obligation, but I didn't have an obligation to go in at that time. I chose to accept a reserve commission

rather than going directly [from college]. So after a year in the civilian job market, I was called in [to the army] and from there I stayed in.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you expect to be right away in a shooting war?

**SPIVEY:** Yes. I graduated from North Georgia in 1950, and this was the middle of the Korean conflict. I expected to go in, but I didn't know when. But I was subject to recall, and when my number came up, they called me in.

**INTERVIEWER:** I guess most enlisted people go to boot camp or basic training, but your basic training was combined with a college education at North Georgia, right?

**SPIVEY:** Yes, with the ROTC itself, but also most Lieutenants who are coming in on active duty were sent to the basic infantry company officers course, at Fort Benning, as far as the Infantry is concerned.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long a course is that?

**SPIVEY:** It is about 6 months, but since I had been assigned to an infantry training division, I was sent to the associate Infantry company officers course, which is a level above, again for about 6 months. I was sent there enroute to Korea.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is that also at Fort Benning?

**SPIVEY:** That was at Fort Benning.

**SPIVEY:** So what was that like that six months? Was it physical, mental, was it tough?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, we already had orders for Korea, so we were bound to absorb as much as we could from that training in order to help us when we got to Korea. So we tried to get everything we could out of it.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was a typical day like? Tell us about your daily routine during that course.

**SPIVEY:** First of all, we lived off base, and depending on when the day started, we would have to assemble, and [find out] whether we were going on tactical exercises or class room work. There were classes in supply tactics. There was practical work in map reading. There were various classes that were conducted, but the basic mission was to get us ready to fulfill our mission in Korea. We had tactics instruction where we went on small patrol activities. We qualified with the M1 carbine and also the 45 caliber pistol.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you think it helped you?

**SPIVEY:** Oh yeah, it helped.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did training change you in any way?

**SPIVEY:** Yes, it gave me added confidence in what I was supposed to be doing. In Vietnam, this was a new concept, a new assignment. The Koreans were new at this and the command structure for the Korean troops, Vietnamese troops, US troops, and other U.N. personnel who were there, it was a little complicated. The Koreans insisted on commanding their own units, but they were under operational control of the US, so I had to pretty much feel my way on what I was supposed to do.

**INTERVIEWER:** So it required a lot of tact on your part?

**SPIVEY:** A lot of tact; a lot of patience, and a lot of work, too, [in order] to do what I thought I had to do. We were required to send confidential reports monthly to the ROK Division liaison officer, a guy by the name of Col. Bud Lou. I think one of my missions as liaison officer was to kind of keep track of what the ROKs were doing, because sometimes they went off on their own, so these were confidential reports that were sent through channels to [give] our observations of what the Koreans were doing; what the unit was doing; what it had planned to do, and so forth.

### **RECORDING III**

**INTERVIEWER:** This is the combat part of the questionnaire. You said you didn't volunteer to go to Vietnam, but you were assigned to go, because you were one of the officers who had not been, yet.

**SPIVEY:** That's correct.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, did they just go through and see who hadn't been? Was it a career enhancement to be sent to a situation like that?

**SPIVEY:** Well, I guess the army felt like it needed to have as many officers as possible to go through the experience of Vietnam. Of course, at that time, it was beginning to get unpopular, but any war is unpopular.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you remember how you felt when you first learned that you were going to get sent there? I know you had to be apprehensive, right?

**SPIVEY:** Very apprehensive. Of course, I had the family involved. I was having to leave at a critical stage in my children's lives. That is one of the reasons I did not volunteer, but since I

had accepted the commission and the obligation when they said “go,” I went. And we adjusted accordingly.

**INTERVIEWER:** You had four children, of which I am the last, but at that time my older sister Beverly was in high school, right?

**SPIVEY:** She was a junior in high school, I believe. The family opted to stay in Leavenworth, the city of Leavenworth, so that Beverly could graduate from high school where she had been going for two or three years and had developed ties. My youngest daughter was in junior high and also had developed [ties].

**INTERVIEWER:** Your second daughter was in junior high at that time. Then you had two boys, Bruce was in elementary school and I [Russell] was in second grade. That is when Mom went back to work at the lab job at the hospital.

**SPIVEY:** Yes, that is right. In order to supplement the income, she decided to get back into the work force, and applied for a job in the laboratory at a civilian hospital in Leavenworth.

**INTERVIEWER:** I imagine she was pretty worried about you going.

**SPIVEY:** That’s an understatement.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were you in a combat or combat support unit?

**SPIVEY:** I was a liaison to a combat unit, and as such, I participated in operations that the ROKs participated in. I accompanied the infusion of a ROK battalion into an operation by helicopter. I flew in the command helicopter that directed the helicopters in.

**INTERVIEWER:** What kind of weapons did the unit use and do you think they were adequate for the type of action that they were involved in.

**SPIVEY:** The ROKs used the same type of weapons that the U.S. forces used, to include automatic weapons, mortars, and artillery, and yes I think they were adequate.

**INTERVIEWER:** You said they could call in air support or helicopter support if they wanted to?

**SPIVEY:** They had helicopters that were in direct support of the ROK unit, and they could also through regular channels call in the Air Force air support, which they did on many occasions. The F-4 Phantom Jets were stationed at Tuy Hoa Air Force Base, but if they called in a mission, whatever unit that could support that, they used, whether it was F-4 Phantoms or some other aircraft.



**INTERVIEWER:** Thinking back on your first encounter with the enemy, can you describe what the circumstances were:

**SPIVEY:** I was never in direct contact with the enemy in Vietnam. I was with the ROK commander as he oversaw operations for his regiment. They took prisoners; they confiscated weapons; they rounded up casualties, but I was never in direct contact with the Vietnamese.

**INTERVIEWER:** How would you evaluate the North Vietnamese fight ability, and their overall strengths and weaknesses?

**SPIVEY:** I don't have any firsthand knowledge of the North Vietnamese; from what I saw and observed, they were expert in guerrilla operations. They did not want to fight fixed battles, but they were experts in small unit, harassing type ambush operations, and they were also good at intimidating the civilian population to get them to support their cause.

**INTERVIEWER:** What kind of weapons did the North Vietnamese use that the ROKs ended up capturing?

**SPIVEY:** They were primarily Russian and Chinese made weapons, either rifles or machine guns or rockets.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. You were assigned as a liaison to ROK troops. Why were ROK troops in Vietnam in the first place?

**SPIVEY:** They wanted to participate and were very eager to get their units, both marines, infantry and artillery units rotating into Vietnam and out and have their own rotation system. They were eager to get as many combat experienced personnel as possible, because their overall goal was to unify North and South Korea. Their aim and goal was to move north and take over North Korea and unify it into one country.

**INTERVIEWER:** So in other words you are saying that by experiencing and gaining the education and experience that they might get in Vietnam, it was preparing them to go back and fight in their own country.

**SPIVEY:** That's right, and they had a very good rotation system that would get as many people with combat experience into Korea as possible.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did they feel about the Vietnamese?

**SPIVEY:** They didn't like the Vietnamese. They thought they were under-handed and they didn't trust them. Of course, one of the characteristics of Koreans is that they don't trust anybody much except themselves.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you went out with them [ROK], did you carry a weapon?

**SPIVEY:** I carried a .45 pistol, loaded with additional ammunition; always, even when I went to meetings that were attended by Koreans or Vietnamese. We had meetings in the district and province, and I always carried a weapon, as did my driver carry a weapon.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you ever have to fly a helicopter or other aircraft in Vietnam?

**SPIVEY:** I didn't fly them of course, I wasn't qualified to fly, but yes, I flew frequently in helicopters. Whenever the ROK Regimental Commander went anywhere, he went by helicopter, and I was with him as was an interpreter. I had a regular helicopter flight helmet that could hook into the communication system in the helicopter and I could talk to them. The interpreter that was assigned to me was also with us. Although the ROK Regimental Commander spoke slow English, the interpreter was always there to coordinate between the liaison and him [Commander].

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you like your interpreter and trust that he would tell you exactly what the Regimental Commander said and vice versa?

**SPIVEY:** You had to assume that he [interpreter] was telling him [commander] what I said. I had to assume that he was telling me what the Regimental Commander wanted. The results indicated that that was true.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was the interpreter there for that one event, or was he assigned to you?

**SPIVEY:** He was with me all the time. I flew [in] a lot of helicopters. In fact, one requirement the helicopter people had was that during night operations, they would not go in without the U.S. liaison officer with them. This was particularly true for the "dust off" operations where they had to go in at night and pick up the ROK casualties and bring them back to their medical facilities. And they would not fly without the U.S. liaison officer and the interpreter going with them. That caused me some anguish, but that was part of the job.

**INTERVIEWER:** You told me one time about an irritating thing that happened where somebody called for a dust-off that you had to participate in and it turned out that it was somebody that was not in dire need of a helicopter.

**SPIVEY:** That happened before they required me to go with them. They were called in the dead of night into a night landing at the ROK compound which was out in the boondocks, and it wasn't really necessary for them to go. From that time on they required a U.S. liaison officer to go with the helicopter.

**INTERVIEWER:** In other words, if you had to go, it better serious?

**SPIVEY:** That's right.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you ever have occasion to evaluate the South Vietnamese fighting ability, or were you pretty much separate from them?

**SPIVEY:** We were pretty much separate. The ROKs operated in their own area of operations, and I never had any contact with Vietnamese troops at all.

**INTERVIEWER:** How would you evaluate U.S. leadership in Vietnam?

**SPIVEY:** I can't comment on U.S. troops, because I was not participating with U.S. troops, but I can comment on the ROK troops who were eager to get there and get the combat training, and experience. They were given a mission and they followed their commanders without question. They did what they were told. They did an excellent job of going in and clearing areas of operations; capturing people and equipment and they did a good job.

**INTERVIEWER:** What generally was the NVA or North Vietnamese attitude [toward Koreans]? You hear a lot about the fights with American troops, but how did they feel about the ROK troops?

**SPIVEY:** Just from second hand information, the North Vietnamese military and particularly the civilians feared the Koreans very much. Koreans had to work on the pacification process; they had to go in and get the confidence of the civilians, but still there was animosity and there was [dis]trust between the Koreans and the Vietnamese civilians. The North Vietnamese, from not reading, and second hand observation, were afraid of the ROKs. They didn't want to mess with them too much.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you participate in civilian construction or did the ROK units do anything for the civilians in the area like infrastructure or anything like that for them?

**SPIVEY:** Yes, they did. The ROK Battalions were situated so that they would go in and assist the civilians wherever they could and would protect the civilians so that they could carry on their commercial farming or whatever they needed to do under some semblance of security, and they did a good job of it.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the hardest thing that you had to contend with as an officer while you were there? Was it just keeping the communication between the Korean regiment and the U.S. going smoothly or what was the most difficult aspect of it?

**SPIVEY:** I guess the biggest problem was the language. I didn't speak Korean nor did I speak Vietnamese. Had I been able to speak Korean, it would have been a lot easier. I probably could have been more effective, had I been able to do that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Why do you think the United States was involved in the war in Vietnam?

**SPIVEY:** I think we were there to curb the communist aggression, particularly the Chinese from expanding their influence in Southeast Asia. We had a lot of interest not only in Vietnam but also Korea, and Thailand. If the Chinese overtook the Southeast Asia area, and extended their realm of influence, then it would cause us problems, not only us but also our allies.

**INTERVIEWER:** So that is kind of the big picture of why we were there?

**SPIVEY:** And to shore up the South Vietnamese so that they could run their own country. Obviously, we didn't accomplish that because we got out under kind of bad circumstances. I think a lot of that was due to civilian influence, non support of the mission, and it was difficult to come up with a clear cut mission as to why we were there.

**INTERVIEWER:** About how old were you when you went over there; to Vietnam? You had four children by then, so you were in your 30's?

**SPIVEY:** 30ish, yeah. Mid-thirties.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you personally believe the reasons given at the time and do you think your opinions have changed over time?

**SPIVEY:** I had to beat the drum; I had to follow orders and do what I was told to do, because of my military status. I had to sometimes curb my personal feelings in order to accomplish what I was told to accomplish.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you had an outward aura that you had to present to others in the military and troops that might have been below you. You had that... but you also had your personal beliefs?

**SPIVEY:** They had to be put on hold or stymied somewhat so they would not contradict what I was supposed to be doing.

## **RECORDING IV**

**INTERVIEWER:** This is the in-country section of the questionnaire.

**INTERVIEWER:** What did you think of the native population of Vietnam during your time there? How much contact did you have with them? Did your opinion of them change over time?

**SPIVEY:** I had very little contact with the Vietnamese. The country was hot; they were poor and destitute. They were eking out a living and trying to raise their families and do their jobs just

like anybody else. But I had very little personal contact with them. The ROKs tried to help them somewhat and provide security so that they [Vietnamese] could make a living and live their lives.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you think that they needed help from the ROKs?

**SPIVEY:** I think they needed security.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the threat?

**SPIVEY:** The threat was the VC, Viet Cong, who would infiltrate into villages and towns and scavenge food or valuables or whatever, and they needed security to keep the VC from infiltration.

**INTERVIEWER:** There are some terms that are thrown around sometimes that maybe need some defining. Is there a difference between the VC and NVA, the North Vietnamese Army? What is that?

**SPIVEY:** The NVA was more or less an organized militia. The VC were infiltrators, guerilla operations. I guess there was some coordination between the NVA and VC, but from the ROKs standpoint, they were all enemy; they were all VC. I can't think of an instance where the ROKs were in direct contact with an NVA unit, but they might have been. My area was very small in comparison with the whole country. The VC would sneak in and this is what the ROKs were trying to provide security from for the population, so that they could live their lives. There were some Vietnamese workers, some personnel, who lived in the ROK compound, who did menial tasks such as laundry and yard work and helped with fences. But I had very little contact with them.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was there any real way to tell or distinguish between a VC and a Vietnamese villager whether by language or the way people wore clothes or the way they might have spoken?

**SPIVEY:** I don't know of anything that could help distinguish through outward observation or listening—I don't know of anything.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you think the ROK commanders or troops were able to make that distinction?

**SPIVEY:** They might have been able, but I don't know of any specific thing. The ROKs knew the ROKs and anybody else was an enemy.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was your transportation like the first time you landed in Vietnam? Did you arrive at an airport in a jet? How did you get there?

**SPIVEY:** It was a regular contract airline. I don't know what kind it was. They had all kinds: Pan American, TWA.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you have an actual memory of that [landing]?

**SPIVEY:** Not an actual memory, but it was a long trip from McCord Air Force Base into Tan Son Nhut. I was processed there. When I got out it was hot, hot, hot, and we had to turn in what clothing we had and draw [get] fatigues and weapons and necessary combat equipment before we were assigned to Nha Trang, which was the headquarters for the 9<sup>th</sup> Division liaison office.

**INTERVIEWER:** Internal transportation while you were in Vietnam, was that primarily helicopter?

**SPIVEY:** Primarily helicopter, but sometimes there were short trips by jeep. If we were going to the Province Headquarters or to the next door units it was by jeep. There were some artillery headquarters and an engineering unit and some other units in that area and we went to those by jeep.

**INTERVIEWER:** What were your living conditions like?

**SPIVEY:** My living conditions were very good. I had a little hut, which was actually a one bedroom apartment building which had indoor plumbing. I had a bed and an air conditioner. The showers were done with an emersion heater that was on top of a building. You had to heat the water and then by gravity, the water would come out. The indoor plumbing was actually a hole in the ground, but I had a commode and sink.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you went out with the troops like you said earlier, were there times that you would stay out for any extended length of time, like a couple of nights, or did you always come back?

**SPIVEY:** If the unit stayed out for a four or five day mission, then we packed to stay.

**INTERVIEWER:** What were those conditions like?

**SPIVEY:** The ROKs would dig me a bunker and I had a cot, but they provided for me as they did for their own ROK commander. I was in a hole in the ground, protected with an over-head cover, if that was required, or I was provided a tent if that was appropriate, but they took care of me. They provided me not only food, but protection:

**INTERVIEWER:** Was anything fun or entertaining while you were there?

**SPIVEY:** Yeah. I had direct contact with the aviation unit that was stationed next door and the artillery unit, and there were individuals we played poker and bridge with, mostly poker. There were Officer's clubs on base which were pretty good facilities and a regular club.

**INTERVIEWER:** From the pictures I've seen, the Koreans were very much into Tai Kwon Do. Did they have demonstrations?

**SPIVEY:** The ROKs had their own USO-type facilities and personnel, and they toured the ROK facilities just as our USO people toured our units. I did go to see those shows, and I was welcomed. I usually sat with the ROK Commander or right behind him. The ROK interpreter was sometimes with me. Although I couldn't understand the language, the music, the beauty and the presentation was always real good.

**INTERVIEWER:** Were any of the ROK troops or commanders conversant with you in English besides the interpreter?

**SPIVEY:** To some degree. They were limited in English as I was limited in what Korean I could pick up. We had fun communicating, or trying to communicate.

**INTERVIEWER:** If you had known 6 months to a year before you had that assignment to be a liaison officer to Korea, could the army have done anything to prepare you better for that assignment?

**SPIVEY:** Yes, I think so, because the army runs a language school out in Monterey California. Going back to Saudi Arabia, we had people who were assigned to that unit who had spent a year in language school prior to going to Saudi Arabia. If it were possible for liaison personnel, or any military personnel who were going to be assigned to foreign troops, if they could get them into language school, yes it would have been a tremendous advantage I think.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the most memorable event or most humorous event that happened while you were there?

**SPIVEY:** One of the most memorable events was that I wanted to participate in an Air Force pilot flying his A-10 when he went in to put in an air strike. Those planes had tricycle landing gear and top wing with the smoke rockets mounted. They had propellers. Those air force personnel stayed in the ROK compound. So one time when he was going to put in an air strike, I wanted to go with him, just for the experience. It was a two seat-er [the plane], side-by-side. There was communication, and one guy would go in and mark the target with smoke, and then the jets would come in and drop the bombs or napalm, or whatever. That experience was exhilarating, and I was sick as a dog in the end. I didn't want to go again, but that was a memorable experience.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you encounter any type of racial or social or rank discrimination?

**SPIVEY:** The ROKs were very rank conscious, and they were very conscious of the ROK Regimental Commander and the battalion commanders and on down. There was no question of who commanded what in the Korean unit. Whatever that guy [commander] said, went, with unquestioned obedience to what he did or ordered.

**INTERVIEWER:** The ROK commander had his own staff including a driver, right?

**SPIVEY:** Oh, yeah. They had their own [command]—it was similar to our command—regimental commander, exec [executive officer] and staff, S1, 2, 3 and 4, and then the liaison section, which I was a part of, with the interpreter.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did he treat his [commander] people?

**SPIVEY:** As long as they stayed in line, he treated them fine, as far as I could determine.

**INTERVIEWER:** What happened when things did not go according to his plan?

**SPIVEY:** They [Koreans] kept their dirty laundry pretty much hidden. I didn't see much.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you hear music or songs from that era, does it bring back memories for you?

**SPIVEY:** I don't have any specific memories of the music. I got kind of used to the Korean music.

**INTERVIEWER:** What about correspondence with your family or people back in the U.S.? Did you have the opportunity to send or receive letters?

**SPIVEY:** Oh, yeah, and also through the Mars system (Military Auxiliary Radio System) [I could make] telephone calls. The Mars system was through the civilian ham radio operators. I think we should remember that.

**INTERVIEWER:** I remember Mom saying "over."

**SPIVEY:** Yeah, when you finished you had to say "over" so that the ham radio operator could click off or whatever they do to get the transmission going.

**INTERVIEWER:** How often did you get to do that?

**SPIVEY:** Probably once or twice a month or so. The bad part about it was that due to the time difference, we had to go to the Mars station, and it might have been 12 or 1 o'clock in the



morning and wait for a couple or three hours before they could get the call coordinated with the army in Leavenworth.

**INTERVIEWER:** Because you were literally on the other side of the planet.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you keep a diary or journal?

**SPIVEY:** No. My only diary, I guess, was this confidential report that was sent monthly to my boss in Nha Trang, who was a 9<sup>th</sup> ROK Division Regimental liaison, which I was required to do. I think I mentioned this earlier that we were just there—if we saw unusual things then we had to report them?

**INTERVIEWER:** Was this a questionnaire, or did you just tell whatever?

**SPIVEY:** Tell whatever in written form.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long was that?

**SPIVEY:** As long as you needed. Probably 3, 4 or 5 handwritten pages.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do these reports still exist?

**SPIVEY:** I don't know that. There was only one copy, and I couldn't keep a copy, nor did I keep a diary. Probably should have. I could have clandestinely kept a diary, but the order was "no diary," so I did not keep a diary.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you got there, did you know that it would be exactly a year before you went home?

**SPIVEY:** It was a year tour.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you knew that was approaching, how did you feel?

**SPIVEY:** With your great anticipation. I could hardly wait to get out of that place. It was rough.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have any problems [when you got out]? You hear today about troops coming back in uniform from Vietnam, so were there any bad experiences when you returned?

**INTERVIEWER:** Where did you fly in to?

**SPIVEY:** We flew in to McCord Air Force Base by way of Hawaii, I got a civilian plane into KC and your mom met me in Kansas City.

**INTERVIEWER:** You landed in a civilian location. Did you have any problems with people? Did anyone say any bad things to you or did you have any bad experiences with someone who might have been opposed to you being there [in Vietnam]?

**SPIVEY:** Not other than just being ignored. The American people did not back the Korean War or the Vietnam War. I don't think anybody cared unless they had someone in Vietnam. If they had no connection, they went on about their job and hoped it would go away.

**INTERVIEWER:** Have you had occasion to visit the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington or the traveling one?

**SPIVEY:** Yes, I have visited the memorial in Washington. I was rather awed by it, although I had no relative or friend whose name was etched in that wall. So, I didn't have a sentimental reaction to it. I was impressed with the odds and ends of stuff that was placed at the base of the wall, from cigarette lighters to boots to flowers to anything, and I did observe the names. The memorial itself was impressive. I felt sorrow and felt bad for those people who had lost their lives in Vietnam, but I had no direct contact with any of them.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you were with the ROKs as their liaison, other than the driver, was there any other American there on a daily basis?

**SPIVEY:** Yes, I was in contact on a daily basis with the artillery unit headquarters that was next door, and the aviation battalion headquarters that was next door.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you say "next door," what do you mean?

**SPIVEY:** Well, the ROK compound was surrounded by barbed wire and several sentries. Two or three hundred yards away was another compound, which had security gates. We had a BX and a floral unit. I made friends with them, especially and aviation and helicopter battalion headquarters. Good folks.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you know what Agent Orange was at the time?

**SPIVEY:** I knew what Agent Orange was. I was not in Vietnam when they used it. However, the V.A. [Veterans Administration] has ruled that you get 30% disability, even if you were not exposed. They assumed that if you were in Vietnam, you had some exposure to it. So the VA ruled that part of my disability was the result of Agent Orange.

**INTERVIEWER:** So Agent Orange wasn't being used while you were there?

**SPIVEY:** It had been used. It had been banned by the time I got there. Well, not banned—they ceased to use it.

**INTERVIEWER:** How do you think your experience might have affected your life and your religious beliefs?

**SPIVEY:** I hated it that I was apart from my family for a year. It did not affect my religious beliefs. As a matter of fact, I even attended Korean church. I was familiar with some of the songs. I participated with them from a personal standpoint and also to show that I was interested in them. I noticed that church services were full. They always ushered me to a seat on the front bench.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you say Korean church services, it [the language] was in Korean, but was it denominationally Christian faith-based.

**SPIVEY:** Yes, it was Christian faith based. I think it was primarily Methodist. But I was there just to show that I was part of it—I could sing along with some of the songs. Of course, I didn't understand the language.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the traditional religion for Korean, if they hadn't been exposed to some western religion?

**SPIVEY:** I don't know.

**INTERVIEWER:** If you had your Vietnam War experience to do over, what would you have done differently?

**SPIVEY:** I would do everything I could legally do to not go. I didn't leave anything in Vietnam; I don't even want to go back for a visit.

**INTERVIEWER:** What would that have been?

**SPIVEY:** You could put in a request to be assigned somewhere else or be reassigned.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, when you were called, you just went without question?

**SPIVEY:** I went; it was time for me to go, so I went. I can remember right now walking down that ramp at Kansas City Airport looking back at you all. I'd do everything I could legally do to not go.

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