Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins at the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
University. I’m beginning my oral history interview with Colonel Seldon Graham of the
United States Army. Today’s date is the 10th of March 2004. I am in the Special
Collections Building on the campus of Texas Tech in Lubbock and Colonel Graham is in
Austin. Good morning sir.

Seldon Graham: Good morning.

LC: Sir, I’d like to begin by asking you just some basic biographical information. Can you say where you were born and when?

SG: Franklin, Texas, April the 14, 1926.

LC: Sir, in the information that you provided to us, you mentioned that you had exceptional parents. Can you give their names and tell me a little bit about them?

SG: Well, my father, Seldon Bain Graham; was the superintendent of schools at Franklin when I was born and my mother, Lillian Struwe Graham was a schoolteacher. One interesting aspect was that Franklin is in Robertson County, Texas and my father wrote a Masters Thesis in history on Robertson County in World War I at the University of Texas.

LC: Now what were his findings? Could you summarize them?

SG: Well, he didn’t have any findings as such, but I discovered recently that Robertson County has a portion of his thesis on the Internet.
LC: Oh is that right?
SG: And it just gives the statistics of the young men from Robertson County who
served in World War I, served overseas in World War I.
LC: So he helped to document that service?
SG: Right.
LC: Did he continue as superintendent of schools there?
SG: No, he moved on and became a psychologist with the Veterans
Administration.
LC: Oh is that right? What years did he work for the VA?
SG: I don’t know the exact years, but he retired in Dallas with the VA.
LC: Did he have military service himself?
SG: Yes, he was a World War I veteran.
LC: Do you know much about his service?
SG: Only that he was in the 1st Army Artillery Ammunition Depot in Germany
and had five Battle Stars.
LC: Really? Did he talk to you much about that either when you were young or
later on through your own career, did you talk?
SG: Not all that much.
LC: Is that right? It wasn’t something that you kind of grew up with?
SG: Well, I grew up knowing that he was a veteran and that’s about the extent of
it.
LC: Now had others in his family served in the Army?
SG: He was the youngest of his parent’s children and they were too old to serve
in World War I.
LC: Okay, and any earlier service do you know?
SG: What do you mean by that?
LC: Well, previous generations, the Civil War for example.
SG: Oh yes, his father was in the 18th Texas Calvary Regiment in the
Confederate Army.
LC: And do you remember your grandfather’s name?
SG: Yes, Jesse Milton Graham.
LC: Okay. Sir, where did you go to high school?
SG: Graduated from Denton High School.
LC: In what year?
SG: 1943.
LC: How were you as a student in high school?
SG: How was I?
LC: Yes, were you a good student?
SG: I was a good student.
LC: Okay.
SG: I think I was the number three male student. At that time, the males took trigonometry and physics and chemistry and the females took typing and home economics, and so naturally the Valedictorian and Salutatorian were girls.
LC: Yes. But you came in pretty good in your own amongst the guys, you came in pretty good.
SG: I did.
LC: Did you play sports?
SG: No I didn’t.
LC: Oh really?
SG: No, I was in the band and you couldn’t do both.
LC: Okay, right. What did you play in band?
SG: I played the trumpet.
LC: Okay. Was it a musical family?
SG: Not really.
LC: Did you enjoy though doing the band experience?
SG: Oh yes.
LC: Okay. Did you continue to play after leaving high school?
SG: Not in the band. I had the distinction of being the bugler at Texas A&M at the time.
LC: Is that right? (Laughing)
SG: Before I got drafted.
LC: Okay. So, did you go in the fall of 1943 to A&M?
SG: No, I went in the summer.
LC: Oh, you started right away, okay.
SG: I just started college just a few days after I graduated from high school.
LC: Now how did that come about?
SG: Because there was a war going on and people at that time just didn’t feel like wasting any time.
LC: Is that how you felt too?
SG: Well, I knew I was going to get drafted just as soon I was eighteen, so I might as well get on with as much college as I could.
LC: And when were you in fact drafted?
SG: I was drafted in, after I reached age eighteen in 1944.
LC: Okay. So, you had a year almost at Texas A&M?
SG: Yes, right.
LC: And what was college like for you that first year?
SG: Well, it was all right.
LC: Did you enjoy it?
SG: I enjoyed it.
LC: What were you looking towards studying?
SG: I was in Engineering.
LC: Okay. When your draft notice came, do you remember how you felt about that?
SG: Well, not really.
LC: Okay.
SG: It was so commonplace then that about the only remarkable thing was you usually got a party or a reception before you went into the Army, but it was so commonplace and no big deal.
LC: Right, no surprise.
SG: Right.
LC: Where did you go to Basic?
SG: Fort…then it was Camp Wolters, Texas. It was as Infantry Replacement Training Center.
LC: And was Basic just the standard six weeks for you?
SG: I don’t remember how long it was.
LC: Okay. Do you remember much about it at all?
SG: Well, I remember how miserable it was.
LC: Can you say a little bit about that?
SG: Well, during the bivouac, which came at the end when you were out in the
field the most, it was cold and raining in the fall of ’44.
LC: It sounds a bit miserable.
SG: And it was miserable.
LC: Now, did you go from there to an advanced training?
SG: I was lucky to be selected for Infantry Officer Candidate School and my
friends who were with me during basic training probably went into Europe as
replacements right after the Battle of the Bulge.
LC: Yes sir.
SG: And I felt lucky to be going to Fort Benning and do OCS.
LC: And how long did OCS take?
SG: Way too long. (Laughing)
LC: (Laughing) Okay. And you say that because why?
SG: Well, let’s see. It was just a long process and the war ended in both Europe
and Japan while I was in OCS and when I got out of OCS, the war had ended, but I was
sent to the 20th Infantry which had come up from the Philippines to take the surrender of
the Japanese Army in Korea. So, I actually served in Korea in World War II.
LC: When did you actually go over to Korea?
SG: It was the first part of 1946.
LC: Did you feel perhaps as if the war had passed you by in some way?
SG: Well, I felt real lucky that I wasn’t on…I felt extremely lucky when they
dropped the atomic bomb and that ended the war in Japan because I felt certain that I
would be hitting the beaches of Japan otherwise.
LC: Was that being told to you in briefings and so forth? Was that generally the
preparation?
SG: Well, it wasn’t told, we just all knew.
LC: Okay. And so you felt that the decision to utilize the atomic weapon was a
good decision?
SG: Oh yes, it saved a lot of lives.
LC: And do you still think that sir?
SG: Absolutely.
LC: Okay. As you know, that’s been a very controversial issue at least among
historians, but as a veteran, it’s important to get your prospective on that into the record.
SG: Well, everybody that otherwise would have landed on the beaches of Japan
pretty much owe their lives to the fact that they dropped the atomic bomb.
LC: Yes sir. How long did you stay in Korea with the 20th Infantry?
SG: Less than a year.
LC: And what was your rank and what were your duties?
SG: Well, I was a 2nd Lieutenant of the Infantry, but they just didn’t have very
many officers because most of them had the number of points; they used a point system
to rotate officers out of the Pacific and if I remember correctly, I had twelve points which
was very, very small compared to the people that had been in the Pacific for long periods
of time.
LC: Do you remember what the threshold was for rotating out? I mean
theoretically?
SG: It was at different times, you know. When I was going over, the people with
seventy-five points were coming back, that sort of thing.
LC: Okay, so that gives some perspective of where you were.
SG: Right.
LC: Sir, what happened after you left Korea? Where did you go next?
SG: Oh, I got out of the service and went back to college.
LC: Were you basically demobbed?
SG: Well, what happened was I accepted a reserve, I mean, yes, a reserve
commission. It was the Officers Reserve Corps at that point and I was a 2nd Lieutenant
Infantry Officers Reserve Corps as a civilian and went back to college. And one thing
that had happened to me while I was in Korea was that my congressman had given me an
appointment to West Point, but my mother turned it down because she said I was already
a Lieutenant and when I got back to college, the congressman had again wrote me and said he would offer me that same appointment if I wanted it and so I accepted it after I had gotten back to college.

LC: So you were at Texas A&M when this happened?
SG: No, actually I was at North Texas.
LC: Oh, North Texas, okay. In Denton?
SG: In Denton.
LC: Okay. And did you know what your mother had done?
SG: Oh yes. I tried to reverse it, but it was too late.
LC: Sure.
SG: The class had already started.
LC: Now, who was the congressman first of all?
SG: If I remember it correctly, his name was Gossett.
LC: Okay, and was your family connected to him in some way, perhaps your father knew him?
SG: No.
LC: How did he come up with your name, do you know?
SG: Well, going back a little further.
LC: Sure.
SG: I tried to go to West Point while I was at Texas A&M.
LC: Okay.
SG: My family lived in Austin and my congressman was Lyndon B. Johnson.
LC: Yes sir.
SG: And he told me that he would appoint the person making the highest grade in the Civil Service Exam. So, while I was at Camp Walters, I took the Civil Service Exam and Congressman Johnson never told me what I made, how I came out on the exam or anything else. But interestingly, many, many years later, well, first, my mother was a member of the Garden Club in Austin.
LC: Okay.
SG: Back when they had Garden Clubs.
LC: Yes sir. This is one of the things that women did.
Right, and one of her friends announced that her son was going to West Point and my mother being naïve said, ‘Well, is he taking the Civil Service Exam?’ And she said, ‘Oh no, Congressman Johnson is just appointing him.’ And my mother said, ‘Well, there must be some mistake because Congressman Johnson is giving a competitive exam to see who he will appoint.’ Well, the bottom line is, years and years later, I had a friend by the name of Ed Travis who was an attorney with me with Exxon in Houston and it turned out that Ed was the one that had been appointed by Congressman Johnson. And he did not take the exam and that exam was just a waste of time. (Laughing)

LC: It was kind of a snow job would you think?
SG: It was a snow job.
LC: (Laughing)
SG: And Congressman Johnson never communicated with me about anything after I had took his exam. So, I’m still waiting to hear from Congressman Johnson on that. (Laughing)
LC: That’s a very interesting story.
SG: And before George Christian died, he and I had a lot of fun with that story because he being the Press Secretary to President Johnson.
LC: Yes sir.
SG: You knew him very well. (Laughing) He said that was so typical.
LC: (Laughing) And probably very effective.
SG: Very effective. But anyway, I had been trying to get into West Point and that’s why Congressman Gossett, when I was in Korea, had sent me that letter.
LC: Okay. You continued to be interested in Engineering, is that correct?
SG: Right.
LC: When did you actually enter West Point?
SG: In 1947.
LC: With the Fall entering class, is that correct?
SG: Well, they enter in…
LC: In the summer, a little earlier.
SG: In July.
LC: Yes that’s right, I’m sorry. Sir, do you remember arriving at the Point?
SG: Oh yes.

LC: Can you describe your arrival and what it looked like in those years in the late 40s? Was it busy?

SG: Well, even though I had never been up there, I knew quite a bit about what would transpire and I also knew some of the upperclassmen at West Point because I had served with them in the Army.

LC: I see.

SG: And they had gotten appointments before I had. But, it was a very salty class that I entered with. There were about twenty-six former officers in the Army and about one hundred and fifty former enlisted men in the Army and some of us had then served in combat units before we got there, so it was a more experienced plebe class than you would normally find.

LC: Absolutely, with a greater range of age as well.

SG: Right, if you had been in the Army, you could be a little older.

LC: Okay.

SG: We had, for those twenty-six former officers; two of them were captains in the Army before they entered.

LC: Sir, just for the record, can you name some of those upperclassmen that you knew or perhaps those two captains who entered in the same class with you?

SG: Well, one was Quinn, if I recall correctly and I don’t recall who the other captain was. I think I have had his name filed away somewhere. There were a number of decorated individuals in our class in my company. There were about twenty in each class in each company and of the twenty or so of my classmates in my company, one, Bill Bradley had been a sergeant in combat in Germany. You know, just to give you an idea, and there were two of us, George Hardesty and I had both been Lieutenants over in the Pacific; he in Japan and me in Korea.

LC: It must’ve been quite something to talk to and hear the stories and recollections of those men who had already been in combat and now were at West Point.

SG: Right.
LC: Yes, really quite an amazing opportunity. And they listening to you as well. Sir, can you tell a little bit about your experience at West Point? I gather that most everyone studies Engineering of some form.

SG: When I was there, everybody took the same courses except for foreign language. I took Russian, but as far as the other courses, I took the very same courses everybody else took and it was generally, well it was a Bachelor of Science degree, but there was no mention of the specialty because there was no specialty. It was a general degree.

LC: Was a set curriculum?

SG: Basic, with a set curriculum; basically equivalent to general engineering at another university.

LC: And how did you handle the academics?

SG: Well, I handled them fine.

LC: Okay.

SG: I actually did not work as hard as I could have because I discovered that I really didn’t want to compete in the first sections. That was not my style and I looked to see how President Eisenhower was in his class and I tried to emulate his standing in the class as much as I could.

LC: Now, what was his standing?

SG: About a third down.

LC: Okay and that was what you were going for?

SG: And that was what I was going for and pretty much succeeded.

LC: Okay. (Laughing) And he didn’t do to poorly out of that?

SG: No, no. It’s kind of amazing that even the cadet rank doesn’t mean anything at West Point. We had three four star generals in our class, only had about 475 members of the class and there were three four star generals and two of those were sergeants during the first class year. That was the lowest rank you could get.

LC: Who were those men?

SG: Well, one was General Shy Myer who became Chief of Staff for the Army.

LC: Yes sir. And you work with him later on in your career, is that correct?

SG: Right.
LC: Okay.

SG: And one was Roscoe Robinson who was the first black four star general in the Army and one was Bill Richardson. So, it was pretty obvious that cadet rank really meant nothing in the long hall.

LC: Did you play any sports just on any teams?

SG: At West Point, you have to play sports.

LC: Yes sir.

SG: And it is just a matter of whether you chose to play varsity sports or what they call intramural sports, which in most places is more than just intramurals. For instance, intramural football was with full football uniforms with helmets, pads, and the whole bit whereas intramural football in most colleges is sort of a tag sport.

LC: Sure.

SG: But yes, you do play sports and athletics whether you want to or not and the way they do it, if you’re not on varsity, you don’t play the same sport twice.

LC: Oh really, well, that’s interesting.

SG: If you played intramural football one season, you go to something else the next season.

LC: And were you playing at the intramural?

SG: The only time I was on a varsity team was my freshmen year, my plebe year. I thought it would be pretty neat to fence because that sport was so foreign to a Texas boy, we certainly don’t have anything like that down here and so I went out for fencing plebe year and I wasn’t all that good at it. I was a hot shot at the riposte, which means somebody has already attacked you and you try to defend yourself.

LC: Yes sir. You were good at that part.

SG: I was good at riposte. I wasn’t too good at the attack.

LC: Okay.

SG: I was fencing saber.

LC: And there after you…

SG: I went to other sports.

LC: Okay. And you sort of went around the intramural gamut then.

SG: Right.
LC: Okay. Were there any that you particularly liked?

SG: Well, no, I enjoyed them all except water polo, which is pretty much trying to drown your opponent.

LC: (Laughing) Yes sir. And it’s also hard work, yes?

SG: Yes.

LC: I want to ask about your choice of Russian language, was that something you came to on your own or was it advised that you pursue that?

SG: No, I came to that on my own and only because I thought it might do some good since Russia was our obvious opponent at the time.

LC: Did you do well in Russian?

SG: I did all right.

LC: Okay, was it something that you kept up after leaving school?

SG: No, not really. It’s hard to find somebody to converse with in Russian.

LC: Yes, yes sir. You have to make a real big effort.

SG: And the only real good it did was to talk to panhandlers when someone was trying to bum money off of you. That usually shut them up.

LC: Yes. (Laughing) You graduated from the academy in 1951.

SG: Right.

LC: Did your parents come up for your graduation?

SG: Yes, sure did.

LC: Okay. Yes, I would think so.

SG: And actually, my wife, my now wife, she was not my wife then, but my girlfriend came up with my parents for graduation.

LC: Now, she was from Texas?

SG: Yes.

LC: What is her name?

SG: Patricia.

LC: And her maiden name?

SG: Noah.

LC: N-o-a?

SG: N-o-a-h.
LC: Okay.

SG: Her father was the head track coach at North Texas.

LC: Oh okay. And so she came along as well.

SG: Right.

LC: And sir, what were your plans or what plans had been made for you by the Army for your posting after completing the curriculum at the Point?

SG: Well, I was to...everyone, well let me back up and say this.

LC: Sure.

SG: At the time, there was no Air Force Academy, so 25% of our class went to the Air Force and of course, I had a choice of going to the Air Force if I wanted to. And I was pilot qualified, which meant I had taken the physical exam for an Air Force Pilot.

LC: I see.

SG: And if I had selected Air Force, I would’ve gone to Flight School, but I chose Infantry and was assigned to Camp Carson, Colorado after I finished my branch school. Everyone that went to the Army first went to their branch school.

LC: And the Infantry School was where?

SG: And the Infantry School was at Fort Benning.

LC: Yes.

SG: At the time, every graduate of West Point that went to the Army had to be in a combat arms. So, there was of course infantry, artillery, armor, engineer, and signal corps and those were the choices.

LC: Why did you choose infantry? What was the basis for that?

SG: Well, first of all, I had been an infantry officer.

LC: Yes sir.

SG: And second, I thought that that was where the real leadership qualifications would come to the forefront.

LC: Okay. How long were you at Benning this time?

SG: I think I was at Benning, I think the course is about three months, four months, something like that.

LC: Okay and just in general terms, can you describe the curriculum?
SG: Essentially, I found it almost going through OCS again. It was pretty much trying to get you ready to be an infantry combat platoon leader.

LC: And so a lot of that was review in a way for you.

SG: A lot of that was review.

LC: Okay. And the assignment to Camp Carson…

SG: Well, that never panned out.

LC: Okay.

SG: As it turned out, there was a situation in the Army where they changed the unit at Camp Carson from Infantry to Calvary. And I was not a Calvary Officer, so they sent me to a pool and what they had promised before we graduated from West Point was that number one, since the Korean War was in full swing, we would not be sent overseas for six months after we graduated from branch school. And number two; after we got overseas, we would not be assigned to a National Guard Division. And because of this change up at Carson and me being assigned to a pool, I was overseas with a National Guard Division 17 days after I got out of branch school.

LC: So the promises just kind of broke down.

SG: Promises, promises, promises.

LC: Okay, what was the significance of those problems as for someone who isn’t up on what the shorthand there is?

SG: All right, the significance was that the previous class, the class of ’50, had gone over into combat ill prepared in Korea and killed off a great number of the class. And so they were trying to prevent our class from being killed off in Korea quite so rapidly.

LC: Right. And was that clear to you guys? Did you know all of that back-story?

SG: Oh yeah. We knew exactly what was going on.

LC: Okay.

SG: But I was in Germany with a National Guard Division.

LC: Right, with which unit sir?

SG: With the 112th Infantry [Regiment], 28th Division, Pennsylvania National Guard and I was the only regular army officer in my battalion.
LC: And your rank at that point was what?
SG: I was a 2nd Lieutenant.
LC: Okay. You were the only regular Army officer?
SG: I was the only regular Army officer in my battalion.
LC: How did you mesh in with the reserve men?
SG: Well, I was really an anomaly because they didn’t know what to make of it.
LC: Yes sir.
SG: The National Guard had a bunch of vacancies when they were shipped overseas so they fill those vacancies with Reserve Officers and the Reserve Officers pretty much hated the National Guard Officers and the National Guard Officers pretty much hated the Reserve Officers and I was sort of a neutral go between since they didn’t know what I was anyway as a regular army officer.
LC: Right, you didn’t fit in with either group.
SG: And I didn’t fit in with either one.
LC: Sure. Did that turn out to be advantageous for you as the go between?
SG: Well, I don’t know. It was just sort of a strange situation because the Company Commander who was a National Guard Officer wouldn’t speak to the Reserve Officers and he would come to me and tell me what to tell the Reserve Officers and the Reserve Officers wouldn’t speak to the National Guard Officers, so they would come to me to tell me what to tell the National Guard Officers.
LC: It’s like having fighting parents.
SG: It was like I was a translator.
LC: If you had to kind of capitalize it, what was the source of this bad blood?
Was it just that they different command lines or were there more to it?
SG: You know, I think that was it. They both had different experiences and gotten their commissions different ways. The National Guard Officers were not all college graduates and the Reserve Officers were all college graduates. It was just a different species.
LC: Did they have different, I don’t know, we use this word maybe too much, but I think you’ll know what I mean, different cultures between the two groups at all?
SG: Yeah, that was pretty much it.
LC: Okay. What was the mission, the overall mission of the 112th?

SG: Well, our mission of course was to defend in the event of a Russian invasion of Europe. And we had defensive positions along the Rhine River. But most of the time, we were just simply on maneuvers. Well, in one 100-day period, I remember on my calendar, 98 days, I was out in the field, all maneuvers. So, it was pretty intensive.

LC: Yes, you were very busy.

SG: We were very busy.

LC: And was part of that level of activity, do you think to dissuade observers from the other side from doing anything? In other words…

SG: Well, I’m sure that many of these maneuvers were coordinated with Russian maneuvers because at one time, as an aggressor force, I was up against the Czechoslovakian border so close that I could…the only communications I could get on my radio were Russian.

LC: Really, wow.

SG: And this only had a ten-mile range.

LC: So you were closer to them than you were really to…I’m getting a feel for where you were. (Laughing)

SG: And I knew the Russian’s were having a maneuver right opposite us.

LC: Sir, was there observable damage from the war in the areas where you were posted?

SG: Oh yes. We had gotten there really, so near the end of World War II that the city of Manheim for instance was just still leveled and the city our unit was stationed in which was Heilbronn had pretty much escaped most of the bombing. But, there was an incident where the Germans hung some American officers who had come in under a white flag.

LC: Yes, I believe I read about that.

SG: And after that had happened, there was some pretty intensive bombing and shelling of that SS Regiment that had done that. So, yeah, there was considerable damage.

LC: Did you get to go away from the unit on R&R downtime such that you could get a little bit of a feel for German civilian life at that time?
SG: Well actually, I got the feel of German life by getting married and bringing my bride to Germany without being sponsored by the U.S. Army.

LC: How did you manage that?

SG: With great difficulty.

LC: (Laughing) I would imagine.

SG: And we lived at 14 Pestelats; [street in Heilbronn] on the German economy.

LC: Okay, when you say living on the economy, for people again who might not get that reference, could you clarify that?

SG: Sure. That meant that we had no PX privileges; we had no commissary privileges. We had absolutely zero from the U.S. Government and I had arranged to rent a room in a private residence for us to live and I had done all that just like a German would through the German facilities.

LC: Okay, so you found about the availability of this rental room on your own.

SG: Right.

LC: And you made that arrangement personally rather than through the military.

SG: Right.

LC: And when did you get married?

SG: We got married in ’53.

LC: Did you get married in the states or in Germany?

SG: We got married in Denton, Texas.

LC: Oh okay.

SG: I flew back, we got married, and we went back over there. Thus, well at least part of my time over in Germany was single and then the last part of it was married.

LC: And you are still married?

SG: And still married.

LC: Okay, well congratulations because I know that that’s fifty years.

SG: Fifty. Fifty-two, fifty one and a fraction years.

LC: Okay. Sir, can you talk a little bit about your wife’s adjustment and she’s probably trying to go shopping and do those kind of daily things, what were food supplies like, what were prices like?
SG: Well, she would shop in the German market for food supplies because we had no other choice and we did fine. Now, fast forwarding a little bit to the point when I resigned from the Regular Army, my Division Commander at that time tried to talk me out of resigning because he said that in twenty years, I would be sitting in his chair and that I should reconsider. And he wanted to know the same things you’re asking; what were the difficulties of trying to maintain a wife in a foreign country when you’re not sponsored by the government.

LC: Sure.

SG: And I told him that it was very, very difficult and particularly so because I was a Regular Army Officer and couldn’t even get commissary privileges because at that time until you came to the point where the government would bring the wife over, you got nothing.

LC: Right, you had to manage it on your own.

SG: You had to manage it on your own. And there were very few doing that, most officers would wait the months or years until their name came up to get their wife over there. Well since I had been single for so long, it was very doubtful that my name would come up to bring my wife over during the three years I was in Germany.

LC: Sure.

SG: So that’s why we did it on our own. Anyway.

LC: Sort of the heck with that.

SG: He took copious notes at that time and his next assignment was the Deputy Chief of Staff for personnel for the U.S. Army and so he made all the changes I had recommended.

LC: Is that right? What was his name, do you remember his name?

SG: I don’t even remember his name.

LC: Okay.

SG: But I do remember some satisfaction is seeing that I had done some good in recommending how it really ought to be done.

LC: Yes, some changes.

SG: Yes.

LC: Sel, why did you decide to leave the Regular Army and go to the Reserves?
SG: Well, it happened about 3 a.m. at Hohenfels, Germany. Hohenfels was the major infantry training center for Germany and I was umpiring every infantry battalion through their annual maneuvers for their annual testing in Germany. And I had spent the whole summer in Hohenfels doing this.

LC: Is that the summer of 1954?

SG: It must’ve been ’54. Anyway, no, it may have been ’53; I’m trying to get the timing in here correct. I believe it was ’53.

LC: Okay.

SG: But anyway, about 3 a.m. one rainy night, we were in the approach march down in Muddy Road and there were two-columns of infantry on each side of the road and there was just enough light to see that the soldier in front of me had something on his shoulder and I moved up to where I could look down and see what was on his shoulder and there were three stars on each shoulder and it was Lieutenant General James Gavin, my Corps Commander who was marching in front of me. He was talking to the guy across the way and I noticed he had something glittering on his shoulder so I eased up and looked down and there were also three stars on his shoulder and that was Cortlandt Van Rensselaer Schuyler and I was marching along at 3 a.m. with two Lieutenant Generals. And it dawned on me that in fifteen or twenty years, I too might be a Lieutenant General and if I were, I too would be marching along at 2 a.m. on some rainy night with the troops because that is what leadership is. The real leaders are down there with the troops.

LC: Yes sir.

SG: And I thought about that for quite a while because it was a long march and I thought, ‘That’s no way to raise a family.’ And it was after I got back to the [Kasserne?] that I resigned from the Regular Army mostly because I realized that that was not the environment to raise children.

LC: That must’ve been…I mean, clearly a turning point, but also somewhat difficult decision to make.

SG: Oh it was very difficult decision to make.

LC: And of course, you took some heat for it. You already mentioned that…
That’s right, the only way they would let me out of the Regular Army was to accept a permanent commission in the Reserves and that was all right. I had owed them something and that was fine with me.

LC: Okay. So you left Germany?

SG: So I left Germany in ’54.

LC: Do you remember at what point in the year you left?

SG: It was probably May.

LC: And at that time, you may remember that in Indochina, the French were on the verge of it that they had not already surrendered Dien Bien Phu, do you remember that?

SG: Well, I was too…

LC: Busy?

SG: I vaguely remember that occurring, but at the time, first things first.

LC: Oh yes, of course.

SG: I was about to enter civilian life without a job.

LC: And what arrangements did you put in place to handle that?

SG: And I had none.

LC: (Laughing)

SG: After I got back to the United States, I knew I wanted to be an engineer and so I checked around to see what the majority of engineers were in the state of Texas because I wanted to live in the southwest. I discovered in 1954 that there were more petroleum engineers in Texas than any other type. So that led me to the petroleum industry and then I checked to see what company had the best training program for incoming engineers and at that time, then the Atlantic Refining Company, ARCO, had what was considered to be the best training facility, training program for incoming petroleum engineers. And it just so happened that ARCO offered me a job and I accepted for eighteen-month training program.

LC: Okay, and where were you to live during that training program?

SG: Well, I moved around all over.

LC: Okay.
SG: I started in Duncan, Oklahoma and went from there to Deridder, Louisiana and from there to Great Bend, Kansas and from there to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

LC: As you were moving around and going through the training process that they had designed for incoming engineers, were you thinking, ‘Yes, this is what I want to do’?

SG: Yes, I was enjoying it.

LC: Okay. What kinds of things were you being trained in?

SG: On how to operate an oil field.

LC: Okay.

SG: That’s about the simplest way I can put it.

LC: Sure.

SG: And the part of the training that I was going through left me in Tulsa, Oklahoma where I stayed as an engineer for quite a number of years.

LC: And was it at Tulsa then that you were able to as it were, integrate back into the reserves?

SG: Yes, I was in the reserves as I say, I had to accept a permanent commission and at Tulsa, I established a home in the reserves there. As an infantry officer, I discovered that infantry officers did not fair very well in the reserves at that time.

LC: Why is that?

SG: Because there were no infantry units in the reserve.

LC: Okay.

SG: The reserve was consisting of combat support units rather than combat units.

LC: Right, okay.

SG: And so I found a signal operations battalion in Tulsa that had a bunch of infantry officers in it, so I became the executive officer of this signal battalion. In a week…we had summer camp at Fort Hood and that sort of thing and pretty much enjoyed that experience.

LC: And that went on for a number of years through the late 1950s?

SG: Yes, because the office was in Tulsa was abolished. I moved to Oklahoma City and didn’t stay there long enough to get into any reserve unit. I finally quit ARCO and went to the valley where I spent a year down in the valley with an independent oil operator. And it was during that time that we had the Cuban Missile Crisis.
LC: Okay.

SG: I had been trying to get into a reserve unit down in the valley and actually found one of the few infantry units in the reserve, but I couldn’t get into it because it was a pay unit and there was a long waiting line of officers trying to get into a pay unit.

LC: What was a pay unit?

SG: Well, that’s when you get paid for drills. See, most of the time, you don’t get paid for drills.

LC: Sure. So, that was very popular, people were trying to get into that.

SG: It was very popular and it was very hard to get into. Until the rumor got out that they were going to call this unit to active duty so that it could hit the beaches of Cuba in an invasion of Cuba. And at that point, I got this phone call that said every officer in the unit had left and had gone to the control group.

LC: Wow.

SG: And that, would I like to command the unit as it prepared to assault Cuba.

LC: What did you say?

SG: And I said sure. So, for a while, I was the Commanding Officer of this unit in McAllen, Texas.

LC: About how long?

SG: Less than a year.

LC: Were they ever even partially mobilized?

SG: They were never mobilized.

LC: Okay.

SG: So we didn’t get to land in Cuba and in my job, I moved up to Corpus Christi and in Corpus Christi, I took a leave of absence for six months and went to the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth.

LC: Now, was that something that you initiated?

SG: That was something I initiated because you cannot get anywhere in the Army without being a graduate of the Command and General Staff College. And so you could do it other ways, but the residence course is the best and I just took a leave of absence. I was then from Mobil and I took a leave of absence from Mobil and went to the residence course of the Command General Staff College.
LC: And can you describe the curriculum of the college?

SG: I would describe it as the highest tactical school the army runs. You can actually learn to command a division and of course operate as any of the staff officers in that division.

LC: Any of them, so it's preparing you for each of the particular areas, logistics, and personnel and all of that?

SG: Yeah. This is mostly combat operations.

LC: Okay.

SG: And I don’t recall too much emphasis on administrative or logistical, that sort of thing, but I enjoyed the fact that it was concentrating primarily on combat operations on the division or a higher level. But anyway, after that, I tried to get mobilization designee assignments at the Pentagon from that point on in the reserve. And here we go into the Vietnam War era.

LC: Right, and you were successful in getting that type of appointment at the Pentagon.

SG: I was pretty successful. I first started out in the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for logistics. And the closest thing that you can come to in the Army and so far as being related to the oil industry and to be blunt, that was pretty boring.

LC: (Laughing) Okay.

SG: So, I moved over to the office of the deputy chief of staff for operations and they run the Army pretty much.

LC: Okay.

SG: And that was more exciting.

LC: And you made that transition in the early 70’s?

SG: Yeah, somewhere in there, yeah.

LC: Sel, one of the things I wanted to ask you about was things you might recall from your trips to the Pentagon during the war era. Can you characterize the atmosphere in Washington say when you were still at the boring logistics work in the mid 60’s, I guess from ’64 to about ’68?

SG: The most vivid recollection I have is the burning of Washington. I was on my two weeks of active duty in the Pentagon and I would always stay at Fort Myer,
which was a simple walk over to the Pentagon, but when Martin Luther King was
assassinated, there was great havoc in Washington.

LC: Yes sir.

SG: And I remember standing out there on Arlington Ridge and counting the
number of fires where I could count the blazes above the rooftops. And there were
several dozen fires burning all over the city of Washington where the flames were leaping
above the rooftops. And a friend and I had arranged to go over to the airbase, I think it’s
Andrews and he and I drove over there during all these riots and every burglar alarm in
Washington D.C was going on. No one was paying attention to it and there was looting
going on. It’s a wonder we did all that safely because we drove through all of this as it
was transpiring and it was very upsetting to see your capital burning and being looted.
And that is by far my most vivid experience in all of the times I went up to the Pentagon.
But it was routine during the two weeks when the Vietnam War was going on for the
protestors to be waiting on the steps of the Pentagon every morning and usually they
would have some kind of crazy uniform on or skeleton or what have you and you would
step over them in order to get into the front door. And at one point, someone had put a
bomb in one of the men’s latrines, which exploded and probably did a lot of damage, but
it didn’t hurt anything, hurt anybody.

LC: And that was inside the Pentagon building?

SG: That was inside. That was the only time I know of that someone had gotten
inside and planted something. But most of the time it was just business as usual. Once
you got in, you know, you kind of blank yourself out on what was going on outside and
got to work and didn’t know about it till you left.

LC: And the protestors were still there at the end of the day or different ones?

SG: Not as many.

LC: Okay.

SG: They tried to be there as everybody entered.

LC: And you said they were dressed up, did they say things to you?

SG: Oh yeah. They’d try to insult you and the best thing…you know, I never did
hear anybody argue with them or try to even reply. The best thing to do is ignore them.

LC: And just keep going.
SG: Right.
LC: Did it every get anymore physical than that where you had to step over them? Did they ever actually try to block people or did you not observe that?
SG: No, no, no. I think they probably did once and it didn’t work or the MPs let them know that people do have to get to work and cannot be denied access to their building. But as far as I ever observed, they never tried to block, they just tried to insult and do their thing.
LC: Did you Sel, with the training and background that you had, have a view about a strategy that was being pursued in Vietnam?
SG: The operation end of it that I would usually deal with and let me back up and say that the way the Pentagon is run is that there are action officers in each of these offices that are assigned a particular action and they birddog that action through from beginning to end and then after they finish, they go to the next action their assigned to and because of this, you get a specialized viewpoint of one particular action each time you run one of them. And during that two week period, I might get as many as twelve actions or I might get as few as four actions, but each one of those would be separate and apart to most everything else that’s going in the world and for a little a while, you would get for instance, a specialized viewpoint of the readiness of combat units that were about to be deployed to Vietnam and you’d work that action from start to finish. And then the next action might be something in Germany. So, it was kind of a hit or miss as far as what you happen to be working on at the time and you never really got a broad viewpoint of what everybody else was doing.
LC: So you were to some degree, segmented in what you were looking at.
SG: Yes, right.
LC: And had charge over, had influence on.
SG: Right.
LC: No doubt you were aware of particularly after the TET Offensive in 1968, aware of the media’s treatment of the war and the United States engagement in Southeast Asia. Did that mesh with what you were observing and what you made from your training?
SG: Oh no, not at all. You know I’d go up there and talk to these guys that had just come from Vietnam and I knew what I had been reading in the papers and it didn’t mesh at all.

LC: Really?
SG: Not at all.
LC: Did that bother you?
SG: Well, you know, I think everybody just accepted it as the way it was because they couldn’t do anything about it.
LC: Right.
SG: And let me digress a minute.
LC: Okay.
SG: I have a real good friend over in Sun City, Georgetown.
LC: Yes.
SG: By the name of Sandy Meloy and he’s a retired major general and he’s probably one of the most decorated veterans in America and I’ve talked to him about this interview and the Vietnam Center.
LC: Yes.
SG: And he was so bitter about media in Vietnam that he said, ‘I’d rather not be a part of anything like that.’
LC: Really?
SG: Yeah. And I think those that were in Vietnam and experienced first hand the unfair media relations they had are certainly bitter about it.
LC: Yes sir, yes sir. And it wont surprise you to know that other veterans of the era that I’ve spoken to all the way from combat infantry men who were just drafted and showed up in Vietnam with a rifle all the way up to people in the command structure have talked about that resentment and it’s not something that’s surprising at all. I think just some common sense you know, that men who served, put their lives in danger, had friends killed, men who paid extraordinary prices to serve the country feel upset.
SG: They just didn’t get a fair shake with the media. That’s what they’re feeling.
LC: Yes.
SG: Anyway, I wanted to digress a minute.
LC: Yes, that’s fine, that’s fine. I think it adds another element because you can talk to people in the position that General Meloy is in just because of your background, where you’ve been that if he decides not to participate in an oral history, at least we have a sense of why.

SG: Yes.

LC: And it’s a reasonable conclusion to reach.

SG: And I think the same thing was going on then. I was talking on a regular basis to people who had just come back from Vietnam.

LC: Sure.

SG: And everybody knew that we just couldn’t do anything about the feelings, that some were instigating against the military. The military was very unpopular.

LC: Yes sir.

SG: And gee, here I was in the oil business and it was unpopular.

LC: Yes sir.

SG: The general population was down on both oil business and the military and here I was trying to work with both of them.

LC: And the mid-1970s were, as you’re pointing out, not a good time for the oil industry with the embargo and again, bad publicity in the media pointed at the oil companies.

SG: I was in an unique position where I could see what was going on in congress. Candidly, the democrats were trying to destroy the American oil industry and President Carter was doing one heck of a good job at it.

LC: Now what was the…can you talk a little bit about the motivation behind that and what it looked like from your point of view?

SG: Well, first of all, I could see certain things that everybody else couldn’t see or wasn’t aware of and that was the fact that there was a fellow by the name of H. David Freeman who was a college professor, did not know anything about the oil industry, but wrote a book about it. And his book was entitled, Oil, the New Era. And unfortunately, Carter made him his energy advisor and this book had for the first time ever, the term, ‘windfall profits’. And of course, Carter would have these fireside chats where he would
put on a sweater and sit by the fireside and tell you about all the crooks that were closing
in their oil wells and this was coming right out of Freeman’s book.

LC: Yes sir, I remember those talks.
SG: I was way ahead of Carter because I knew what he was going to talk about
next week because I had read Freeman’s book.

LC: Okay.
SG: And Carter himself pretty much destroyed the American oil industry because
we started having congress getting excited about the windfall profits and they voted in the
windfall profits tax and they voted in two tear pricing. Each thing that congress did
destroyed a few more oil companies and laid off a few more oil workers and finally
Carter was the one that gave Kuwait our oil business and it was a matter of U.S. policy
that we would then fly U.S. flag tankers to haul oil out of Kuwait. You know, which
started all kinds of instances like the Stark.

LC: The USS Stark.
SG: USS Stark and the shooting down of that airliner and all kinds of things
including the Gulf War and actually, I was kind of an insider on the Gulf War because I
discovered that the think tank that’s associated with the war college had issued a
document as to why the United States could not be dependent or independent on crude
oil. And I got a copy of that document and wrote a descending view.

LC: Was your descent published?
SG: No, no.
LC: Okay.
SG: Mine was never published.
LC: Who did you send the descent to?
SG: To the war college.
LC: Okay.
SG: By then, I had graduated from the war college, so I had a little stroke up
there.
LC: Sure.
SG: Knowing how they operate and who their insiders are. It was absolutely,
well, I could tell that this research paper was written by a major who was promotable to
Lieutenant Colonel that didn’t know a frazzling thing about the oil industry and so the weaknesses just popped out, but my descending view never got anywhere. So, we had the Gulf War. I can’t say that I could’ve prevented the Gulf War, but certainly there’s another opinion out there.

LC: Yes, and you were trying to contribute to the policy discussion.
SG: That’s right.
LC: That was part of the gear up for that conflict.
SG: Yes.
LC: Sel, I should just get you if you would, to clarify where you were working at that time.
SG: I was in Houston, Texas. I was a counsel in the headquarters law department of EXXON.
LC: Where and when did you go to law school just so we can get that on the records?
SG: All right, when I was with Mobil in Corpus Christi, I was the expert witness in many railroad commission hearings. Railroad commission is the agency that regulates the oil and gas industry in Texas of course.
LC: Yes sir.
SG: And I was the expert witness and as a matter of fact, when I was at Leavenworth going to Command and General Staff school, there was a reorganization while I was away and I came back and discovered that I had actually benefited from the reorganization.
LC: While you weren’t there?
SG: While I wasn’t there.
LC: That’s like the first time in history. (Laughing)
SG: (Laughing) Isn’t that the truth? That I was now in charge of regulatory affairs for Mobil as an engineer.
LC: Wow.
SG: And this was the highest regulatory job Mobil had.
LC: Yes sir.
SG: So anyway, as an engineer handling regulatory affairs, I was in a team composed of an attorney and an engineer at most of these hearings.

LC: Okay.

SG: And after a while, my attorney was Jim Fitzpatrick and I said to Jim, ‘I’m a pretty slow learner but after four years or so, I figured out that you’re making a heck of a lot more money than I am and I’m doing all the work. So, I need to get your job Jim.’

LC: I need to get what you have, yes.

SG: (Laughing) And so he said, ‘Well, why don’t you go to law school Sel?’ And I said, ‘I think I will.’ And I knew having worked with the railroad commission that they had a job in the commission for a half time engineer who is a law school student and my friend who was in that slot was about to graduate from law school. So I applied for his job and took a leave of absence from Mobil again to go to law school and did so.

LC: Now where did you go?

SG: At the University of Texas.

LC: Okay and…

SG: And I graduated in 1970, I guess it was and Humble Oil & Refining Company now EXXON made me an offer I couldn’t refuse. So I went with Humble, now EXXON. Well, I spent a year in Midland first and then they brought me into headquarters as head of regulatory matters for all the oil and gas production.

LC: And you’re still there, is that right Sel?

SG: And I retired from EXXON in 1985.


SG: Right.

LC: But you’re still working, is that right?

SG: I’m still an attorney. I’m not an attorney in the oil business, but I am an attorney.

LC: Are you in your own firm?

SG: Yes.

LC: Okay. What’s the name of the firm?

SG: Well, I’m just Seldon B. Graham Jr., Attorney at Law.

LC: So you’ve got your shingle out basically?
SG: My shingle is out.

LC: (Laughing) Okay.

SG: But I’m very selective as to my clients.

LC: I would think you’d be in a position to be, yes sir.

SG: My principle client right now is West Point.

LC: In what regard?

SG: Oh man…

LC: (Laughing)

SG: I don’t think either of us have enough time for this next one. (Laughing) In 1997, one of my best friends who is a classmate of mine at West Point was found dead in Galveston under very mysterious circumstances and at his funeral, I gave the eulogy.

Now I discovered later that his widow having been married for ninety-seven days, had filed a five million dollar lawsuit on his estate the week before his funeral.

LC: Wow.

SG: And so it is that lawsuit that I have been on and am still on. Isn’t that incredible?

LC: That’s amazing. Now, was there any age disparity between these two?

SG: Yes, very much.

LC: Okay.

SG: This friend of mine was my classmate, class ’51 and he married a West Point graduate, class of ’82. Now, he wanted to give his money to WestPoint.

LC: Okay, so you’re representing…

SG: She wanted…

LC: She did not want WestPoint…

SG: She did not…as a WestPoint graduate; she does not want his money going to West Point. She wants it to go to her.

LC: Okay, and so you’re representing the interests…

SG: I’m officially the attorney for the Association of Graduates of the United States Military Academy.

LC: Okay.
SG: Because the Association of Graduates is the organization that takes care of money.

LC: Yes, and the endowments and that kind of thing, gives…

SG: Gives to West Point.

LC: To West Point. Well, that’ll keep you busy.

SG: (Laughing)

LC: It’s undoubtedly complicated.

SG: It is extremely complicated and we thought we had ended it in ’99 when we gave her a million and a half dollars to never bring her claims again.

LC: Sure, a walk away settlement.

SG: A walk away settlement, and in 2001, she brought all her claims again.

LC: After accepting the 1.5 million dollars?

SG: After accepting and the crazy part about it was, the judge had never heard of res judicata in her life apparently.

LC: Oh no.

SG: And so she allowed it to go forward and so I spent a year getting her off the bench and getting another judge.

LC: So this just wont lay down and go away.

SG: It just won’t die. And it’s on appeal right now.

LC: Okay, to what court?

SG: To the first court of appeals in Houston, Texas.

LC: Well, sir, you have your work cut out for you.

SG: (Laughing)

LC: I wouldn’t trade places with you.

LC: I want to ask you just a couple other questions. Sir, did you ever visit the wall in Washington?

SG: No I haven’t. I have not been up there since the wall was put in.

LC: Okay. In 1975, you were still working occasionally active duty and going to the Pentagon, that was when you were with operations.

SG: Right.
LC: And that’s the point at which the war in Vietnam ended of course with the North taking control of the South.

SG: Right.

LC: Did you have any particular feelings about that or was it just the end of a chapter in American military history for you?

SG: Well, most of my feelings came from the feelings of friends.

LC: Okay.

SG: Yes, I guess I thought this thing just wasn’t going like my friends thought it should be going and I sympathized with them and felt the same way.

LC: Sure. Sel, is there anything else that you’d like to add to this interview that perhaps I neglected to ask you?

SG: Well, I think we pretty much milked it dry. (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing)

SG: Because…

LC: I’ve kept you going now for an hour and a half.

SG: I’m real disappointed that I’m not receiving the same treatment that our president is receiving because I’ve got a big blank hole in my service record during the Vietnam War, but I’m not being accused of being AWOL.

LC: Yeah, well, we’ll see…I’ll get back to you on that.

SG: There was a time in 1969 and ’70, that I was actually teaching command and General Staff College.

LC: At Leavenworth?

SG: No, I was teaching here in Austin.

LC: Okay.

SG: When I was going to law school…I was going to law school and working; I couldn’t run up to the Pentagon.

LC: Okay.

SG: So, in order to get my reserve points, I was teaching at the Army Reserve School here in Austin and I was teaching the second year of command and General Staff College to about a dozen students. Well, my dozen students got credit for being there,
but I never got credit for being there. The instructor never got credit for being there. Can you imagine that?

LC: Well, I have to say, I didn’t notice it on your military CD, so something’s wrong with this picture is what I can conclude. (Laughing)

SG: (Laughing)

LC: Now the students got credit though.

SG: The students got credit and so they weren’t AWOL, but the instructor who taught them never got credit.

LC: Now were you able to rectify that ever?

SG: Never.

LC: (Laughing)

SG: Never, and at least I want the media to accuse me of being AWOL.

(Laughing) I think that’s only fair.

LC: We’ve given them the ammunition, now we’ll see if they use it. (Laughing)

SG: (Laughing)

LC: Sel, I want to thank you very much for your time.

SG: Well, I’ve had fun and thank you.