

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RICHARD MCGIFFIN
Military Police Officer, U.S. Army, Cold War
2006

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McGiffin, Richard (b.1952). Oral History Interview. 2006.
Approximate length: 2 hours 13 minutes

Abstract:

Richard McGiffin, a Rice Lake, Wisconsin native discusses his service during the Cold War Era and Vietnam War as a Military Police officer, as well as his early life and his experiences after being discharge from the Army. In anticipation of being drafted, McGiffin enlisted in the Army in 1971 for three years, and he discusses choosing to serve in the Military Police in Europe. McGiffin describes his basic training at Fort Leonard Wood [Missouri], the drill sergeants that he came into contact with, and being sent to Berlin, Germany. He discusses the relationship he had with civilians and his day-to-day duties at Checkpoint Charlie and Bravo. He goes into detail about the checkpoints and the movement of civilians between East and West Germany. McGiffin comments on travelling around Berlin, playing football, and being an extra in the movie *Inside Out*, which was filmed in Berlin. He briefly discusses receiving a German Occupation Medal, a shooting badge and a Berlin Patch. McGiffin describes being injured in a car accident and his barracks at Checkpoint Charlie. He discusses being reassigned to Fort Sam Houston [Texas], bringing his German wife, whom he had met in Berlin, and his stepson to the U.S., and being discharged due to injury he had acquired in a car accident in Germany. McGiffin discusses his education and career as a civilian. Lastly he reflects on his participation in the Cold War.

Biographical Sketch:

Richard McGiffin (b.1952) enlisted in the Army in 1971. He served with the 52nd Military Police Company in Berlin, Germany and then finished his service at Fort Sam Houston. He was discharged in 1975.

Interviewed by Todd Wagner, 2006
Transcribed by Lexie Jordee, 2014
Reviewed by Helen Gibb, 2015
Abstract written by Helen Gibb, 2016

Interview Transcript

[Tape 1, Side 1]

Wagner: This is an interview with Richard McGiffin who served with the 52nd Military Police Company, Fort Sam Houston and the Berlin Brigade in Germany during October of '71 to December of 1976. This interview is being conducted at the Barron County Court House at the following address: 330 East LaSalle Avenue, Barron, Wisconsin. The date is February 3, 2006. The interviewer is Todd Wagner, the County Veterans Service Officer for Barron County. Richard, tell me about your background and life circumstances before entering the military service. What year were you born?

McGiffin: 1952. February twenty-eighth.

Wagner: Okay. And your hometown was?

McGiffin: Rice Lake.

Wagner: And that's here in Wisconsin, Barron County.

McGiffin: Correct

Wagner: Okay, where did you go to school—your elementary?

McGiffin: Elementary—first through fifth grade, was at the Barron County Teacher's College.

Wagner: Okay. That's not even standing today.

McGiffin: Nope. Well the second building is, which is now back behind the Dairy Queen in Rice Lake.

Wagner: Ann Street?

McGiffin: Yeah. That was the second building for them and then later when—I think when the college came into existence, the Barron County Teacher's College was phased out and everything was moved to the new campus. And then later that building—the Votech used it for classrooms.

Wagner: Okay. How about your high school?

McGiffin: Rice Lake High School. Graduated 1970

Wagner: While you were in high school did you participate in any special functions? Sports or any club activities?

McGiffin: Football

Wagner: Football

McGiffin: Football

Wagner: Okay

McGiffin: FFAL four years.

Wagner: Okay. How about your family? Parents?

McGiffin: Parents—uh

Wagner: What was your dad's name?

McGiffin: Francis or Mac McGiffin

Wagner: Okay, your mom?

McGiffin: Mother, Alma McGiffin

Wagner: Okay, how many brothers or sisters did you have?

McGiffin: Two brothers

Wagner: Older?

McGiffin: Yes. Both older. Bob was the oldest and Tom was next. They were only two years apart and then I said they went until the—my parents went until the end of the Korean War for me. 'Cause those two were born before the World War II.

Wagner: The last is best, right?

McGiffin: [laughs] Depend upon who you're talking to

Wagner: Did your brothers join the service too?

McGiffin: No, uh, both of them—the oldest one deferment for—because of the knee, he'd had it operated on when he was in high school, he hurt it in football. And then the next one had a farm deferment.

Wagner: So you were—were you living in town at the time or did you have a farm?

McGiffin: Out in the country

Wagner: Out in the country?

McGiffin: Yeah. Born and raised on a dairy farm.

Wagner: Okay. I can remember doing dairy farm work in the summer for my uncles so I can appreciate the labor that you went through and your lifestyle at the time. Describe your entry into the military service? How soon after high school and what were you doing?

McGiffin: After high school I went to Rice Lake Votech for year, did welding. And got out of there and first place I worked at was in Ridgeland at Nedland where they used to make chopper boxes and manure spreaders. And then I went to Jerome's, was in maintenance.

Wagner: What did Jerome's do?

McGiffin: Well at the time that I went there, they were building a new blast-freezer unit.

Wagner: Okay, this was the turkey plant?

McGiffin: Correct

Wagner: Okay, how long did you stay with Jerome's?

McGiffin: Until my—I found out what my draft number was, which was eighty-three.

Wagner: [laughs] Okay. And when you found out what your draft number was—how did that change your mind process—your thought process?

McGiffin: Well I thought, "Well I don't wanna go to Vietnam and get shot at, so let's go find out what the other ones have." So first I went to the Navy and they didn't have any openings in the CB's [Construction Battalion] that I wanted. The Air Force was four years; I didn't feel like four years. The Marines, I figured, well I wasn't crazy enough for that. So the Army said, well they had two years and you could pick what you wanted to do or where you wanted to go. Or if you went three years you could pick both, where you wanted to go and what you wanted to do. So I done that for three year—went the three year route and done military policing in Europe, was the original contract.

Wagner: Okay, and they kept the contract?

McGiffin: Yeah, they did. There was word when—got to MP [Military Police] School that they were going to cancel all contracts because they were needing so many more military police in Vietnam

Wagner: And how did you feel about that?

McGiffin: Well I said, "Well I have to go, gotta go." So there was—I remember two guys in company that I was in, they didn't wanna go so they signed up also for Airborne. I think those were the only two guys in the whole company that ended up going.

Wagner: Yeah, I can believe that. Okay, you said you enlisted?

McGiffin: Correct.

Wagner: Okay so where did that take place?

McGiffin: Minneapolis.

Wagner: So tell us about the induction or the enlistment physical and what it was like going—entering as a young fella right out of—pretty much—what about two years or year outta school?

McGiffin: Year

Wagner: A year outta high school.

McGiffin: I went on the delayed enlistment

Wagner: Okay

McGiffin: I think, when was it—like July or August that I went over and had the first physical and stuff. And all the paper work. And then for going in in October. It was different. You weren't quite sure what—what all it was gonna be.

Wagner: Anything stand out about your—I guess we call it the Meps today but your—the induction center or whatever, anything stand out about that?

McGiffin: I had to sign a lot of papers.

Wagner: Sign a lot of papers [laughs]. And how'd the doctors treat you?

McGiffin: What I can remember, okay.

Wagner: Okay, now where did you do your basic?

McGiffin: Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri

Wagner: And so the Fort Leonard Wood—now is that the furthest you'd been away from home?

McGiffin: No, I'd been to Dallas, Texas one time for a National Luther League Convention. Another time I'd been to New York City on a Luther League Convention. In spring of '69 I'd gone with my mother over to Norway.

Wagner: So you were an international traveler?

McGiffin: Kind of.

Wagner: So Fort Leonard Wood didn't surprise you too much?

McGiffin: No, no.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: Other than it was the first time ever being on a military post.

Wagner: What were the camp and the facilities like, when you got there?

McGiffin: When I first got there I can't think of what it was called right now but where we were at was the old buildings from World War II yet, the two story wood barracks that even then they said they could burn down in ten minutes.

Wagner: Mm-hm, okay. And what were you trained for? You were in basic so what was that like? What did they do? What was your daily routine?

McGiffin: Daily routine. Up early, get in line to eat, get away from there, get back to the company and—I know when we first got to our company we were told by the senior drill instructor to—when we were told our room and bed, get it up, get our stuff up there, get back down as fast as we could. So that's what we done and after everyone was back down he said, "You guys are too slow, now drop down and give me fifty push-ups." [laughs]

Wagner: Somehow I think you would have been too slow even if you were really fast.

McGiffin: Yeah [laughs]

Wagner: Okay, how long were you in basic?

McGiffin: Be eight weeks.

Wagner: Eight weeks.

McGiffin: Finished December 17th, 1971.

Wagner: Anything—any special drill instructor stand out?

McGiffin: Yeah there were a couple of them. If I can find their pictures—yeah here they are, yeah. They—drill Sergeant Kudo [sp??] definitely did. He was like uh—our senior drill instructor was Sergeant Ebert [sp??].

Wagner: I take it he was a—what interests you about him?

McGiffin: Oh just, the way he could get around for his size. There was another one, oh yeah, Sergeant Schafer [sp??]. I remember when I was on guard duty one night, I was late and I was told to go down and wake him up. And he had said that to wake him up you just lightly tap him on the foot. He said, “Any place else he'll be up and you don't know”—he said “You guys aren't gonna know what the heck happened to ya.” A lot of them, the drill instructors had done two, three tours in Vietnam. So that's why they were on the jumpy side.

Wagner: Mm-hm. So what uh—now the first man you mentioned—

McGiffin: Kudo, he was the only one that—of all the drill instructors that was the closest to Wisconsin, he was from Iowa.

Wagner: Any special stories that come out of this time period?

McGiffin: Yeah I remember our training officer. We were three weeks into basic and there were fifteen of us that were called down to the company day room. And he came in and told us that you know all of our physicals have been good and all of our tests and background check had been good and if any of us wanted to, when we're finished with basic we could go to West Point for four years. And I thought, “Well what about our AIT that we want?” And he said, “Well, you could either probably go to that—depend upon when you finish you could go to that, finish that and then you'd go to West Point.” And we said, “Well we heard that a lot of officers are getting killed in Vietnam, is that true?” And he said, “Yeah.” I don't think there was any of us that opted for that. And then two weeks later, it turned out that ten of the fifteen that had come down, the first time were called down again and said, “Well with all of our—that we've been doing—all of our training and that and physicals, if we wanted to we could change our MOS to,” I forget what the number was and he said, “That's for a chopper pilot.” And I think he got the same question again, phrased a bit little different, “Choppers getting shot down in Vietnam a lot?”

Wagner: And who was your senior training officer?

McGiffin: Our company commander was Captain Pitts

Wagner: Captain Pitts, okay.

McGiffin: And the one that had come down and talked to us was Lieutenant Fitzgerald.

Wagner: So they were looking for someone to become a—

McGiffin: Officer

Wagner: Young lieutenant or—?

McGiffin: Chopper pilot

Wagner: Chopper pilot

McGiffin: Well if we woulda gone for chopper school, by the time we woulda finished the chopper school, Vietnam was pretty much over. But who knew then.

Wagner: Yeah, luck of the draw

McGiffin: [laughs] Yeah.

Wagner: Okay, after basic you went to AIT?

McGiffin: Correct

Wagner: And where was that at?

McGiffin: Fort Gordon, Georgia. By Augusta.

Wagner: Lovely Fort Gordon

McGiffin: Yeah they called it Fort Garbage. Well Fort Leonard Wood they—was called Fort Lost-in-the-Woods in the state of Misery

Wagner: Mm-hm.

McGiffin: And then Fort Gordon was Fort Garbage

Wagner: What do you remember about Fort Gordon and AIT? What stands out?

McGiffin: It rained a lot there. It—it wasn't as physical on the body as it was in basic. I do remember after finishing basic I was in better shape than when I played football in high school.

Wagner: Okay

McGiffin: After running a lot and doing a lot of push-ups, yeah later on, do 75 push-ups, it wasn't so bad.

Wagner: Does anyone stand out specific? Or do you have any recollections of buddies that come from that area—from Fort Gordon?

McGiffin: There was six of us from our company that—we all ended up in the 287th Antique Company in Berlin. Our—I remember our XO, he was—he had gone to college and then OCS for William of Mary and he played football. One time we got out Sunday and played football and he was wondering, you know, where in the heck were we from?

Wagner: Okay—you're—you said your first—after graduation from AIT you said you were assigned to the 287th?

McGiffin: Correct. Well first from AIT then we went to Fort Dix, New Jersey. And 'cause we just had you know the contract of Europe. So we went there and we went into a big room, probably about fifteen of us. And they gave us a piece of paper and there's a map on the wall and they says, "Pick out where you wanna go, pick out three places." So I was told by a high school teacher to pick places like down in Bavaria, he said, "It's so beautiful in Germany." So I picked three different places down there and gave it to him and about half hour later, called me up and said, "You're going to Berlin." "Oh, okay. What's Berlin?"

Wagner: Now how far was Berlin from Bavaria?

McGiffin: Oh, quite a ways.

Wagner: Quite a ways.

McGiffin: Yeah. Berlin was by the Autobahn 110 miles from the West German border, 60 miles from Poland.

Wagner: So your first assignment was Berlin? How did you get there?

McGiffin: From Fort Dix we were taken by bus to JFK. And flew from there to Frankfurt and then changed plans and flew into Berlin.

Wagner: So no chance to get an ocean cruise.

McGiffin: No, no. Some guys ended up in Frankfurt and went to a replacement center there and then were sent out. And usually from there they would go on the duty train from Frankfurt to Berlin.

Wagner: Okay, what was—what was it like flying at that time? I'm thinking you probably flew—were we flying in jets?

McGiffin: Yes.

Wagner: Jet transport?

McGiffin: Yes. I'm thinking JFK to Frankfurt I think was on TWA [Trans World Airlines]. And then Frankfurt to Berlin was on Pan Am. Pan Am was the only American commercial airline that could fly into Berlin. The British, the only airline they could fly into Berlin was with British Air. And the French could only be Air France.

Wagner: So you were still dealing with a period of the Cold War and the Berlin situation was still pretty tense?

McGiffin: Mm-hm.

Wagner: In a lot of ways.

McGiffin: Yeah. When the commercial airlines flew into Berlin they used the same air corridors that were set up for the airlift.

Wagner: Okay, okay. Your first impressions when you hit Germany—when you hit Frankfurt?

McGiffin: “Holy smokes we gotta pay to go to the bathroom?” [laughs]

Wagner: Okay. So how did you overcome that?

McGiffin: Well all that we had on us was American coins so we gave them like, I think, fifty cents, which was—I think we could have gone about six times on that then. 'Cause back then when we got to Berlin, it was three—I think something like three mark, eighty-five pfennig to the dollar.

Wagner: Okay. So this was in 1971?

McGiffin: '72

Wagner: '72

McGiffin: 13 March '72 landed in Berlin

Wagner: Okay. And how were you—how were the people towards you? Now I know at the terminal it's one thing.

McGiffin: Yeah

Wagner: And in the city of Berlin its—

McGiffin: Civilians

Wagner: The civilian. But how—but generally how did people respond to you?

McGiffin: 99 percent of them loved us. Because they knew if we weren't there, the Russians were going to be there. And I remember one German family told me that if they kept—if the British French and Americans went out one side, the Russians would be right in before we even left.

Wagner: So how did that make you feel?

McGiffin: Kind of glad for being there.

Wagner: Did you have much inter—inter-exchange with the British and your French counterparts?

McGiffin: The French not so much, the British yes. Was off and on for probably a total of six to eight months I'd worked at Checkpoint Charlie. So right there at the little building in the middle of the street there was the British, the French and the U.S.. So we would work together real close there. And then it was the same thing at Checkpoint Bravo which was never heard about, which was on the Autobahn going from Berlin to West Germany. So the ones had to check in there also if they were in a drive.

Wagner: What—what basically did your duties consist of? At Charlie and Bravo?

McGiffin: Checking people in. Well at Bravo they would be checking people in that would be driving to West Germany. And they would tell them the do's and don'ts. How fast they could drive and they only had so much—certain amount of time to get down there to West German border. And if they got there too soon, well then they'd automatically get a speeding ticket because they were speeding if they got there too soon. And they were allowed—I can't remember what the—I think it was a minimum of two hours and a maximum of four. So after four hours, well then ones would start being called and they'd probably—I don't ever remember it happening—they'd send a—probably an MP unit down the Autobahn to check, see what had happened.

Wagner: Now, basically you must have had some memorable experiences working in the—in this environment. It seems like being at check on point on guard duty all the time could be kind of mundane but you must have encountered some unique people.

McGiffin: Oh yeah. Yeah there's—well at Checkpoint Charlie it was kinda different than—than the Bravo part. Where there we had to make sure that everyone was authorized to go into East Berlin on their leave orders. We had to make sure that their ID card—their photo matched themselves. Like one time a naval officer came out there and he wanted to go over. He had his paper work, said he could,

but his ID card—he did not have a beard and he was standing in front of us with a beard. So he either had to shave the beard or get a new ID card. And the closest place for him to get a naval ID card was back at Bremerhaven, out at the—

Wagner: Mm-hm.

McGiffin: So he decided, well, he'll skip Berlin this time.

Wagner: He—not gonna shave?

McGiffin: Correct. And another time there was a—one of the staff officers from Heidelberg and he was assigned with U.S. Army get-up, a full bird trail and he wanted to go over to East Berlin but his papers said he wasn't authorized to go over to East Berlin and, oh was he mad. And he wanted to talk to our chief of staff. Yeah, he was with the chief of staff from USAREUR

Wagner: Uh-huh.

McGiffin: So we got our—made phone calls and he was able to talk to him. And our chief of staff from the brigade sent his duty staff car out, and picked him up and brought him back and—and the next day he came back, somehow they must have flew in the correct papers and that, that things have been changed. He apologized to us, then he said, "That's what happened sometimes," then he said when he gets back, "Heads are gonna roll."

Wagner: [laughs] At least it wasn't your heads. Did you encounter anything unique about people trying to come in or go out? You know as far as—

McGiffin: May, first part of May 1972 at Checkpoint Charlie, I'm thinking it was like three o'clock in the morning, I heard some footsteps coming from the East. And I was just sitting there reading a book, only thing you could do was try to stay awake because at Checkpoint Charlie no one was allowed in East Berlin from midnight to six in the morning. So we knew it wasn't going to be any of ours but we still had to stay awake and be there because of the whole border situation. And then pretty soon the steps turned into running. And I looked off to my left and where people are normal coming, all lit up sidewalk through the whole area there, nothing. I looked off to the left, and holy smokes here's an East German soldier and he just got passed the wall and turned and went down and also there is a German customs right there, they had a little office on the side of the street—or up on the—past the sidewalk. And they were talking with some of the German policemen. And they saw him and run off after him and one of our guys in our building he got up and went over there too. And it was translated to us that first thing he done was said, "Don't shoot, don't shoot!" So he musta been told that you know, you get over there—over on that side you're going to get shot right away. But not a shot was fired that night. And within fifteen minutes he was in a vehicle and away from the border. They took him to a safe house where his—he got—

they probably found out all the information they coulda, what he knew from there, east side. And then got him a new—I think a new identity and papers and everything and within about twenty-four hours he was flying out of Berlin to West Germany.

Wagner: So you had defector

McGiffin: Correct, a survivor. Six months later another one tried it in the middle of the day and he got, only half ways.

Wagner: Didn't make it, okay.

McGiffin: Berlin was kind of a unique military police company and I think it was the largest in the whole U.S. Army because of everything that we had to do. We had the regular MP patrols, which was six regular patrols and one traffic accident patrol. Then there were the two check points in Berlin: Bravo and Charlie. We had a detachment of MPs down at Helmstedt right on the East German, West German border. I think there was like thirty down there and they were mainly just for that, to do the same thing's that Checkpoint Bravo done. In the summertime they had a boat patrol that was in a large lake in Berlin. That was on the border with East Germany. And we had the rail duty, which there was a duty train, just military and their dependents can ride free from Berlin to Frankfurt or all the way to Bremerhaven for free. So each night there was six that went out on two—three that went out on two different trains. And sometimes they were in West Germany so there had to be another unit ready to go the following night, so there must have been about twenty guys on that. I think at one time we had like two hundred and fifty MPs in our company. Not counting the CIDS that were assigned to us, and then there was MPI and military police investigators _____[??] place protected. Then there was one other place where there was ten of us out and that was—we were there mainly for security. It was an old building, we were in the downtown area of Berlin. And the reason we were there was because there was British, French, American and two Russian air force officers there twenty-four hours a day. And they were the ones that monitored flights coming into Berlin. They didn't listen but _____[??] other than our main civilian flight was coming in that had to be crewed by all _____[??] different military. So like if the President was going to come in, all of them had to be _____[??] so that he could come in there.

[sound of tape stopping and starting]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Wagner: This is side two, tape one. We're interviewing Richard McGiffin. Richard, we've covered pretty much your military duties in the Berlin area. How much—how did—what about sightseeing? Did you get to—you must have gotten to travel the country a little bit.

McGiffin: The country—it was kind of hard in Berlin because of the time it would take to get to West Germany and then to return so you more or less used a whole day to a day and a half for that. And then the cost to fly out was too much. So every once in a while if we were—one of the infantry units was in West Germany and they were doing some special training of some sort, sometimes they would say that, you know, if some of us MPs wanted to come down, we could, so it would be like what they called an FTX - a field training exercise.

Wagner: What did—if you didn't get the chance to travel around Germany too much, what did you do for off-hour recreation, to keep your sanity?

McGiffin: Well we had everything available in Berlin that you could think of. The compound where I was at, it had been a Prussian officer compound and then during the '36 Olympics it was housing for the ones that were in the Olympics.

Wagner: For the athletes.

McGiffin: For the athletes. They had built a large indoor swimming pool there, Olympic-sized swimming pool, so we had that available for us.

Wagner: Hm.

McGiffin: Just driving around Berlin or even riding the city bus it was fun just to go and look around. You could sit up—ride one of the double-deck buses, sit up there and you could see a lot from up there and it didn't cost very much to ride the bus.

Wagner: When you were in Berlin in the early seventies how was—was West Berlin still showing the damage and scars of WWII or had they been pretty much erased by then?

McGiffin: Pretty much erased by then. There was a few buildings—I remember two for sure, out by Checkpoint Charlie that were right along the wall that were still damaged. Matter of fact, one of 'em, another guy and I went out there and walked around to see if we could find any souvenirs of anything and we thought well maybe there's a basement. So we opened up a door and well, we didn't want to go down there because about four steps down then it was all water.

Wagner: Okay. So between—now did you participate in any—any team athletics? Baseball, softball, anything like that?

McGiffin: Football I did.

Wagner: Football, okay. Who'd you compete against?

McGiffin: Then it was different units in Berlin that we would compete against. So everyone wanted to get rough with us because we were the MPs.

Wagner: Yeah. You were a target?

McGiffin: Yep, oh yeah. We were a target.

Wagner: It's free and legal to hit an MP on the football field.

McGiffin: [laughs] But it was flag football.

Wagner: Yeah [laughs]. Okay, flag football.

McGiffin: But I know one of our guys on defense he put two quarterbacks in the hospital in one game [laughs].

Wagner: You said that you had—there's a, you know, like a camaraderie with the British

McGiffin: Mm-hm.

Wagner: How—and you said the French didn't really—were they kinda—

McGiffin: I think more so the language barrier there, it was.

Wagner: Okay. Not so much political but it was basically just the language

McGiffin: Correct, yep.

Wagner: Okay. Did you have a chance to deal with the Russian counterparts at all? Except for the distance that you saw across the border?

McGiffin: When I worked at that building that I was telling you about it was the ACA building we called it, the Allied Control Authority building. After the agreements were signed at Potsdam with Truman, then they moved into West Berlin and started using this building for all their meetings. And since there was Russian Air Force officers there, you know, we had to be cordial to them also. And they were nice with us and if a—some work had to be done in a room in that building, like maybe some tiles coming over or some plaster or whatever, some wood had to be worked on. We had to escort 'em into whatever room that is.

Wagner: And you stayed there while they did the work?

McGiffin: Yep, we stayed with 'em all the time. They were never out of our sight until they were back out of the building. So during the '72 Olympics I had to take one up into their main room where they all sat and worked together. He had to do some tile work along the side of the wall. And it was kinda funny up in there they had a dart board, and here was the British, French, American and Russians, they were playing darts against each other [laughs]. So they were having fun. And use—the

officers there I think—I don't think there was none under a major. Everything was major. There might have been a captain but I think it was all major and light colonel.

Wagner: Field [??]. Did you have any other duty assignments or duty stations in Germany?

McGiffin: I did go on exchange. Five MPs from Berlin were picked and we were sent down to—I think my old paper said the 503rd in Frankfurt, and at the same time they sent five up to Berlin, so no one was shoot—short on personnel. And then at Frankfurt then they sent us out to different small platoon-type units. And where I was sent to was Friedberg. Well it turned out it was the same unit and place where Elvis was stationed at when he was in Germany. So that was interesting

Wagner: So Elvis was—the typical “Elvis was here.” signs.

McGiffin: Yep. Well kinda. But the people loved him there, you know, he was still their main guy that ever came through. And that town, Friedberg, and then the next one where there's U.S. military at, name of the town was Bad Nauheim and that's actually where Elvis had bought a house and lived at. Neither one of those towns during the war were bombed because there was nothing military—

Wagner: Nothing strategic—

McGiffin: Strategic about 'em.

Wagner: Okay. Did they—at that time then did they have indicated that this was Elvis's home. Or pretty much just left it alone?

McGiffin: Word was out that yeah, yeah. What it had been was a house up on a hill, half-ways up the mountain kinda. And it had been a hotel and it wasn't doing very good. I suppose because of that time era, late '50s. So Elvis didn't wanna be right there and because of all the other stuff so he decided to—he told the owner, "Well I'll buy it and when I leave I'll sell it back to you for the same price." So that's what he done and the guy after that never had a problem booking rooms.

One thing that took place and I think was the main thing that I remember from that exchange was that [coughs] the night before I got there—no early that morning the German police had made a raid—I can't remember if it was in Frankfurt or Stuttgart—yeah Frankfurt area. On a suspected terrorist hide out and they had captured, I think it was five of them. I think two of the five were killed. But the rest had got away and that turned out to be the Baader-Meinhof gang. And then later on it turned out that Erica Meinhof, she got captured in Berlin, by a German Kripo which was like the—our FBI. And a little unit in our same compound in Berlin, it was called detachment A, because of the full power agreement no highly trained military could be in Berlin, of any of the four. So you know they could have regular military—infantry but they couldn't have like

rangers for hire. So this small unit was called detachment A. Well that's what it actually was. You'd put special forces detachment. So that's what they were. But they didn't look like any of them in West Germany, you know, they weren't you know the high and tight military cut, you know, these guys, long hair, beards, so they blended in and they worked with them.

Wagner: Okay. I notice on your uniform that you have here in the room with us that you are wearing the German Occupation Medal and that's because you were assigned to Berlin.

McGiffin: Correct.

Wagner: 'Cause Berlin was still considered an occupied city.

McGiffin: Correct. 'Till the wall went down.

Wagner: Okay. And I noticed that you have—tell us what the, is it the sharp shooters? The German—

McGiffin: I suppose that'd be classified as a sharp shooter, theirs.

Wagner: It's the Fourgier[?] with the a—

McGiffin: Brass

Wagner: The Brass with a German Eagle on it.

McGiffin: Correct.

Wagner: Okay. Tell us about the qualifications and what you—what is the standing, what does it mean? Tell us how you earned it.

McGiffin: That is equivalent to our shooting badges that we get, that's what the West German would do. It would be a braided—you would—the braiding itself would always be the same it's just that when you re-qualify then and you qualify again then the medal part changes. But how that came about was on '74. When's—if we wanted to we could volunteer and go on a training deal down to West Germany to an MP company down there that were gonna be at one of their training facilities. So there was—I don't know how many originally signed up and twenty of us were picked to go. Two, four, six, eight of us drove jeeps down with all of our supplies and stuff in trailers. And then the rest went down on the duty train and we picked them up at Helmstedt and we went near Wolfsburg where the Volkswagens were made, I remember going past that town to a town, I believe that it was called Ehra-Lessien. And to get it, the shooting award, we had to fire their P38 pistol, their rifle, machine gun, bazooka and the PPK, small pistol. And you had to you

just like us to get expert and so forth you had to do very good, I think—yeah I'd done our version of expert on all of 'em.

Wagner: Okay. So there's three categories, bronze, silver, and gold.

McGiffin: Correct

Wagner: So the first time you tried it didn't make any difference how good you did, once you met the score you got a bronze.

McGiffin: Bronze. And then the next time you would go and—

Wagner: Compete again—

McGiffin: Compete again it would be a silver—

Wagner: If you qualified.

McGiffin: If you qualified. And then the third time that you go then you qualified and then you got the gold.

Wagner: Okay. And even though this was a German decoration, it's authorized to be worn by the—

McGiffin: U.S. Army

Wagner: U.S. military

McGiffin: Yeah, U.S. military, was any branch I believe could—

Wagner: Yeah. I've noticed Air Force people that were signed over there, some of 'em had—not many

McGiffin: Mm-hm. And then we also at the same time we were down there went for their—only thing I can think of right now is their sports badge

Wagner: Mm-hm.

McGiffin: Which—let's see now, you had to do the discus, the shot put, you had to do a fifty-meter dash. You had to do a—I think a two mile—I forget what—what there was, was like a two-mile run. And you had to swim. And I think there was two or three other things in there.

Wagner: That sounds strenuous.

McGiffin: Yeah it was, it was. I especially liked the fifty-meter dash. I didn't get it the first time—or didn't do it the first time. So all they said that in a little bit you can try it again when you want to.

Wagner: So these—this was like a timed event?

McGiffin: Correct. And you had so many seconds to do that fifty-meter. And I think the first time that I done it I was like ten seconds over. And then the second time I done it I was five seconds under.

Wagner: So either somebody lit a fire, or you were taking it easy going down the first time—[laughter]

McGiffin: All of the above.

Wagner: All of the above, okay. Your entire overseas tour was in Germany?

McGiffin: Correct.

Wagner: Okay, so then you—you returned to the states.

McGiffin: Correct

Wagner: And—

McGiffin: Got reassigned to—oh—let's go back to Berlin. There's something that took place. I met my wife there and over there since you are [long pause] are military and in order to get all the papers you have to have permission to marry. Well, you could actually just go to the German civilian and have it done but then it doesn't authorize you to get the papers, to get her cleared through—to get the green card when you come back. Now I know that one is in here 'cause I saw it not too long ago. But when I met her and then we agreed and—for the wedding and that we had to get a lot of papers. And there was probably six or seven of 'em that were all the same. But I asked, "Can you use carbon?", and they said, "Nope, no carbon." Everything had to be—

Wagner: Filled out

McGiffin: Filled out individually. And then we had to have extra papers all of a sudden because one of her brothers was living in East Germany. So we had to fill out more papers, just for that. Oh here's something I picked up—or I kept. There was our starting log for Checkpoint Charlie.

Wagner: Mm-hm. Your daily staff journal, duty officer's log. Okay [pause]. Approval for application for permission to marry.

McGiffin: And then I also had to take papers and my fiancé to my company commander and he had to approve it. So they actually had more power than someone's parents back here.

Wagner: So you had to actually get cleared by at least two or three people above you—

McGiffin: Correct

Wagner: Not planning on talking to the parents.

McGiffin: No, no. Not even—no, forget about them. They didn't even count.

Wagner: And you gained permission to marry Monica Kewicht [sp?]?

McGiffin: Kewicht [sp?]

Wagner: Kewicht [sp?]. That's interesting.

McGiffin: Meanwhile back at the ranch.

Wagner: When you married Monica then you must have lived on the economy?

McGiffin: Correct.

Wagner: And you said earlier that generally we were—you were accepted by most of the people and did you run into any of the old German military?

McGiffin: Oh yes. Ones that—in Berlin we were the only MP unit in Germany that had German policeman assigned right to our MP station. So then if we had a German policeman riding in our patrol car we could stop anyone. Even if it was that so-called political-type deal that you could not stop because of their particular plate.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: And except for the younger ones, all the older German policemen that worked with us had all been in the military. One of 'em I remember, telling me that he was in their regular infantry—or I believe it was the Wehrmacht.

Wagner: Mm-hm.

McGiffin: He said he was on—he was one of the lucky ones and he was on the Eastern side so he was first fighting the British and he got captured two times. And they escaped. And then towards the end of the war—well then word was out that if you had decided to go and surrender, you know, right away the SS would—was gonna shoot you. So he said this one night he decided, well, he had enough of that. He didn't wanna get shot by the SS or killed by artillery or bullets. So he didn't tell

anyone, he snuck away and went to—surrendered to the Americans. And it was so late in the war that he never did end up coming as a POW over here.

Wagner: So he was basically held in a—

McGiffin: Camp over there—

Wagner: Compound—

McGiffin: Compound over there.

Wagner: Yeah, okay.

McGiffin: Probably transferred to Belgium, something like that.

Wagner: Did you run into—basically those that were of a negative nature—did you encounter when you were on the economy and you were eating in the German restaurants or *hofbrauhaus* I guess whatever they call it—did you encounter any of the old SS or did they just—would they just ignore you and just walk away or could you tell?

McGiffin: No, couldn't tell, you know, if they were or not, you know. The only one I remember was—I never asked him and I was told if you did ask him—this was one of the German policemen—if you did ask him, you know, he would clam up right away, he wouldn't say anything. But he was in the youth SS at the end of the war.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: But I learned—I remember I learned quite a bit from him too, that German policeman. One time I was at the provost marshal's office and the desk sergeant got a call from the main gate that there was a taxi cab out there and a GI in the back seat passed out, drunk. The German policeman, Blackie [sp??], and I went out there and he went up and kinda slapped his face and he wouldn't come to and he said, "You got ammonia capsules?" and I said, "Yes." What we done was up inside the—from the top of our MP hat we'd tape two ammonia capsules. So I gave him one and he says, "No gimme both of 'em." So he took both of 'em, put 'em up the guy's nose and broke 'em in the nose. And pretty soon he came to [laughs]. So I learned how to wake someone up, if they were passed out.

Wagner: Just don't wave it in front of their nose—just put—

McGiffin: Throw it up the nose and break 'em there.

Wagner: Yeah, okay.

McGiffin: Here's something. Pay, 1973.

Wagner: Well looks to me like you had an end of the month pay of \$118.

[Sound of tape stopping and starting]

McGiffin: Well that was after—

Wagner: After you got all the deductions.

McGiffin: Yeah, yeah. That was my—my base pay was \$396—\$369.90. As an E4.

Wagner: And that went a long way

McGiffin: Yeah.

Wagner: See you were on separate rats—that was a—rations—that was \$4.65.

McGiffin: That was—at that time I was working at Checkpoint Charlie—I mean no—Checkpoint—that ACA building. And since we were too far from the company we done our own cooking there. So we had two upright deep freezers and two refrigerators, and all the pots and pans to do our own cooking. So twice a month on pay day we would go to the commissary and buy our food. So sometimes—maybe the day before payday we might be down to bologna and mayonnaise sandwiches.

Wagner: Any other things that you wanna talk about from the Berlin period?

McGiffin: Oh, yeah! Almost forgot about them. In early '75 we was working—okay we had the day shift, the swing shift, and the mid shift—no mid shift and then the swing shift. We were finishing up the swing shift, coming in and oh we were tired, you know, so we—our operation sergeant came up to four of us and asked us, "You guys wanna—" Forget what he said, what he actually wanted to do and said, "Oh they're making a movie, wanna go?" Well, I don't know. He said, he goes "You';; get some free food." "Okay." So it turned out the movie that they were making was one called *Inside Out*, and there's the characters that were in there—the actors.

Wagner: Hm. Telly Savalas, Robert Culp, James Mason.

McGiffin: Aldo Ray.

Wagner: Aldo Ray, yeah. Günter Meisner and Charles Korvin. *Inside Out*. Okay. A lotta young—young Telly Savalas and young Robert Culp.

McGiffin: Yeah, Telly Savalas was popular.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Tape 2, Side 1]

Wagner: This is tape two, side one. Interviewing Richard McGiffin and were picking up with the fact that the—he was becoming a movie star so to speak. Richard you indicated that they were filming the movie *Inside Out* in Germany at the time—East—a West Germany, and over in the Berlin area? In the Berlin area. And that you'd been asked if you wanted to participate and, if nothing else, get some free food.

McGiffin: Right

Wagner: Okay. And we were talking about Telly Savalas and Richard Mason, Robert Culp and so on, and Aldo Ray—

McGiffin: James Mason

Wagner: James Mason, I'm sorry. And you indicated that you actually ended up being a—had a minor part.

McGiffin: Correct.

Wagner: Would you enlighten us on that?

McGiffin: Well the story—what the story is about was that supposedly during the war one of Hitler's main people, Rudolf Hess, had side-tracked some gold and hid it some place and that was before he flew to—and crash-landed in Scotland. Now I can't remember who the history teacher was that I had in Rice Lake but I think I remember him telling me something of that when I was in high school, that supposedly that was—had taken place and I think he—he was in one of Patton's units during the war and I think to where they were kinda—at the end of the war kinda hunting around for that. But then the movie's story was about these guys getting together to where they had heard that this gold was in—being hidden. And to find out about it they were gonna have to get this person out of prison—they changed the names, it wasn't Rudolf Hess it was something similar to that—Heintz or Hantz or something like that—out of this prison and to find out where it was hidden so they had done that, they had drugged him and got him out of there and they found out well it was in East Berlin. So then they had to commandeer a car and get over to East Berlin to find it.

So what they needed us—most of us extras for was at the prison site—which Rudolf—yeah—Rudolf Hess was at Spandau Prison which was in the British sector. And they needed us for the—of the guards. They also used some of the U.S. military that were from the TV and radio station for some of the minor

speaking parts. Well we didn't know what we were gonna end up doing in the movie or what part was gonna be used in that, you know, after the editing and that. But then the first time I saw it was after I got to San Antonio and, "Hey! There I am!" [laughs] And it turned out that a doctor was to come in to see Rudolf Hess—I think it was on a daily basis or once a week—and it was where he pulls up in his car and I'm standing there to check—to check him. And I remember when the—I think like an assistant director came up and told me, "Okay, when the car comes up this is what you do" And I said, "Well do I say anything to him?" And he checked with the gal that had the script—darn script must have been about that thick—and he said, "No, they don't have anything." And he asked me "Well what would you say?" and I said, "May I see your identification please sir?" He said, "Hey, yeah put that in!" [laughs] And it turned out that we got twenty-five marks a day just for being there, whether they used us or not, plus the free meal.

Wagner: Mm-hm

McGiffin: And then if we said anything, even just one word, we got thirty marks extra for that day. So I got thirty marks extra that day and—and I was there a total of three days. But it's fun watching the movie because all of the extras—I knew 'em all. They were either MPs or ones with the radio and TV station.

Wagner: Now if I saw that movie today would I recognize you?

McGiffin: Possibly [both laugh] I was a little thinner then.

Wagner: A little thinner and not as much gray hair right?

McGiffin: Right, right. I still have a mustache.

Wagner: [laughs] Okay.

McGiffin: It was fun at the movie site—well Robert Culp and James Mason were kind of having a, a little feud 'cause—no not James Mason, Telly Savalas. Telly Savalas got the lead part and Robert Culp thought that he shoulda had the lead part so they were kinda having a feud. So when they were done with a scene with them, right away they left, went to wherever their trailer was or whatever where'd they be in until they were needed again. But Aldo Ray and James Mason, they more or less just hung around there. You know 'cause it might be twenty, thirty minutes before they were used again so instead of going away and coming back again they just stayed there. So Aldo Ray one time was sitting down, talking with—or he was just sitting down on a stump there and we kinda slowly went over there and started talking with him and he was real nice. And then in a little bit here comes James Mason and we were talking with him. And, well there's a picture I took of Telly Savalas.

Wagner: Okay. He doesn't quite look like the character from the—

McGiffin: *Kojak*

Wagner: Well *Kojak* or the character from the—oh was it *The Dirty Dozen*?

McGiffin: *Dirty Dozen*, no [laughs]. That's what we talked with Aldo Ray and James Mason—they kind of asked us if we—we remember movies that they were in. And we told 'em and we said that the only movie we remember Telly Savalas was *The Dirty Dozen*. And he goes—what was his name in there? Maggot.

Wagner: Maggot, yes.

McGiffin: And here is Aldo Ray.

Wagner: Sitting here?

McGiffin: Yes. I didn't get a very good picture but inside the car here's Robert Culp. And right here is James Mason. I never got a picture when they were—James Mason and Aldo Ray was kinda like standing right together with us, they were talking and they were asking us what it was like being in the military there in Berlin. And we told them. And then they asked us, you know, any good night spots to go to? [laughs] Oh we had a lot of them to tell them to go to.

Wagner: Lot of places to go?

McGiffin: Yep

Wagner: So basically Aldo Ray and James Mason, even though they were stars, they didn't—

McGiffin: They didn't show it or they didn't put it out to you that they were.

Wagner: Was this before or after Aldo Ray—I think he played in a special, Green Beret, with John-

McGiffin: It woulda been after.

Wagner: Woulda been just after that?

McGiffin: Oh quite a bit after. 'Cause this was in early '75, this movie was made.

Wagner: Yeah, okay.

McGiffin: Well this pictures here remind me that I was sent down to Bad Tölz, down in the Alps, south of Munich, to NCO academy. And I got to know one of the guys that

was stationed right there at that—at Bad Tölz. And that was—he was with the 10th Special Forces. And another time I was in West Germany and I had some time and went down there and saw him and that was in the summertime and I watched them. One time on a Saturday they had a jumping club where any of the civilians that wanted to could join the club and they'd show them how so that's what they would do. They didn't use a plane, they used a Huey.

Wagner: Okay. Next question is did you join the club?

McGiffin: No, no [both laugh]. They didn't think I'd do very good either because it was after I'd been in a car accident there—in Berlin. I dislocated my hip in the car accident. That—I remember that at the car accident we had hit a big tree and I went out the window and hit the hood and because of the cuts on my—on my forehead and face they didn't wanna take time to medevac me to West Germany so they took me to the University hospital there in Berlin—a thirteen bed hospital.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: And that was different.

Wagner: How was it different?

McGiffin: One of the days when I was in ICU, the regular nurse had the day off so the one that was assigned to me—she was from Yugoslavia so she only spoke Yugoslavian and German and I was English with very little German. So it was a lot of sign language [laughs].

Wagner: Okay. Are you sure that tree didn't step out and hit you?

McGiffin: No, no. I wasn't the driver [both laugh]. He actually had to go up on the sidewalk and get it. Here's a bridge that's—was famous.

Wagner: It's the Remagen Bridge. No?

McGiffin: Not quite, not quite. This one was between West Berlin and going into Potsdam which was the bridge where in '72 the U.S. made the exchange of a Russian spy for Gary Powers.

Wagner: Oh yeah. Can't remember that—the name—but that's where the Powers exchange took place.

McGiffin: Yep, Freedom Bridge we called it because of Gary Powers getting his freedom. Now I know East Germany had a lot of buildings—or East Berlin had a lot of buildings that were bombed, yeah.

Wagner: Yes.

McGiffin: Bullet holes in them.

Wagner: You said the Olympics took place when you were there, right?

McGiffin: Yes, the '72 Olympics, yeah.

Wagner: Did you—did your unit or anyone get involved?

McGiffin: Almost. After the terrorist attack there—

Wagner: On the Israelis—

McGiffin: On the Israelis. All of a sudden word goes out that the U.S. was gonna pull military police from all over the units in Germany—or all over Europe and send them there to watch over the U.S. athletes. So for about—I think four days that was floating around. And the German government said, "No, that's okay. We'll take care of it all ourselves." So a lot of us said, "Phew."

Wagner: Okay, what do you have here?

McGiffin: Oh there's.

Wagner: What are these pictures of?

McGiffin: Okay. This one's of Checkpoint Charlie but then the others are at the original 1936 Olympics. There's where the Olympic flame—

Wagner: Uh-huh.

McGiffin: Here's the engravings in the wall. I forget how many times that Jesse Owens name's in there. And then this is the backside of it where all of the field events were held at. We had a—spring of '74 there was gonna be a track meet between the French, the British and the Americans- military. So anyone that wanted to volunteer, we could go and try out. So I think there was about five of us MPs that thought, "Well we'll give it a try. We got the day off." And we went up there and tried some different things. I tried the shot put and didn't do too bad. And then I thought "Well, what the heck. All of us are running around the track, we'll try that." We didn't have to go all the way, it was just if we could, we could and if we couldn't, we couldn't. I got about a third of the way around that big track and that was it [laughs]. That was—

Wagner: What you're saying is that you were no Jesse Owens.

McGiffin: Not even close [both laugh]

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: Oh yeah. They had Allied Forces Day Parade every year in—I think it was like the first part of May, middle of May. Where all of the three allied forces in Berlin would parade down this one street. So there was—us MPs were picked out to work different spots of security. So myself and another—and a British MP was on a street by a bridge right by—by a canal. And we were there to where if rioters were starting to come, we were to notify 'em and they would get German riot units up to that spot. 'Cause in '72, Vietnam was still going on. And I remember during the parade what some of the rioters would do would fill—put paint into balloons then throw them at the different American vehicles. And I was listening to the radio in our car and one of the guys was giving us a play by play deal of one of the riot deals and they said, "Oh looks like there's about fifty of 'em there. Well here comes the German police riot unit. Uh oh, they just let the dogs loose." [laughs] Yeah so they—when I was there they—they didn't mess around, you know, with riots. Oh, yeah the Russians had a memorial. I don't remember what it was actually for, I suppose they just wanted to do it because they stuck it in West Berlin before all the wall went up. But they had people there all the time. And you couldn't get very close to it. And they had different barriers off the—the German police had put up so ones wouldn't try and shoot them. 'Cause I think a Russian either got wounded or came close to getting shot at there one time. And that was before I got there. [pause] There's about the Berlin patch.

Wagner: Okay. Now do you—were you wearing that on your—?

McGiffin: Yes.

Wagner: Okay I didn't see the other side. Yes, okay. "Shoulder insignia: U.S. Army Berlin and Berlin Brigade. Berlin Patch is the same that is worn by the U.S. Army in Europe except that it is surmounted by the Berlin arc. It is derived from the insignia designed by general Dwight D. Eisenhower's comp-command during WWII, supreme headquarters, allied extraditionary forces. Shape: the original shape patch was on a field of black, heraldic symbolizing Nazi oppression. In July '45 the field was changed to blue symbolizing a state of peace, the restoration of which was the objective of WWII allies. Upon the field of blue is shown a sort of liberation in the form of a crusader's sword, the flames are rising from the hilt and leaping up the blade. This represents avenging justice by which the enemy power was broken in Nazi-dominated Europe. Above the sword is a rainbow, emblematic of all the colors of which the national flags of the allies are composed. The distinguishing Berlin arc has been worn by the U.S. Army in Berlin since 1951." That's great. That is nice. It's a nicely designed patch.

McGiffin: And there's on our unit crest.

Wagner: Your unit crest, the Berlin Brigade Combat Support Battalion, okay. "Combat support battalion received its present provisional designation as a result of the reorganization of the brigade units that became effective on 1 August 1979. It consists of the 42nd Engineer Company, Company F, 40th Armor, Battery C, 94th

Artillery, and the 287th Military Police company, the U.S. Army signal support company and the Helmstock support detachment. Functionally its lineage as a separate unit is derived from the 7780th composite service battalion which was organized in Berlin in July of 1945, under the designation U.S. Army Berlin Brigade Special troops. It was first authorized its distinct insignia in July of 1968. Its crest consists of a flaming torch, two battle axes, the Berlin wall, and the motto "Serves and select". As described by the institute of Heraldry, the flaming torch rising from behind the wall symbolizes the free city of Berlin and the wall of shame which seals it off from the rest of the world. The battle axes supporting the torch refer to the battalion's mission in the role of safeguarding the cities freedom." I noticed that those were really unique. You said something earlier Richard that when you'd be wearing your crest on your field hat—

McGiffin: Mm-hm

Wagner: Something would happen when you would walk down the street.

McGiffin: More so in West Germany as they didn't know our particular unit crest. And we would be walking down and all of a sudden we'd be meeting another soldier and they'd end up saluting us 'cause at a quick glance it looked more like a gold oak leaf. And in the military, when in doubt, salute.

Wagner: Yeah if it looks like a major or a lieutenant colonel's rank, depending on how the light was shining on it—

McGiffin: Right.

Wagner: So you got saluted a lot.

McGiffin: Yep. And normally—in Berlin we always said that we were there for show. So even our tactical vehicles weren't the flat OD they were the glossy OD. So everything that we had, we would shine. So after I got to Berlin I took the gold buttons off and bought everything silver to make it shinier.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: So we would, you know, get off duty with this uniform. We would shine everything up and then cover everything so it wouldn't get dirty until we went to wear it again. So by the time these unit crests—they were nice and shiny—we'd be sun hittin' 'em and that was—that was a gold oak leaf salute.

Wagner: So you took the salute any time you could get it?

McGiffin: [both laugh] Yep

Wagner: Well that's—that's good as a sergeant.

McGiffin: Well, only an E4 then.

Wagner: Yeah, okay.

McGiffin: I didn't make sergeant 'till I got to San Antonio. Here was the map of our compound in Berlin—or Andrew's barracks. And during WWII this was mainly a compound for the SS. Well right in here there was some trees planted. After the war some were cut down. But if you could see it from the air, they had planted the trees in the form of a swastika right in this area.

Wagner: Mhm. Okay, I can see the layout how it would lend itself to that.

McGiffin: Yeah and these were just foot paths coming through. Yeah this one was a BAQ, BOQ, BAQ. This was our softball field and our practice football field. We had—MP company had this portion of the building, transportation was here, and signal was here. Over in—let's see now—here's where the band was at. And then this one was our battalion headquarters. And over here was headquarters company and right in here was detachment A. Over here, this building and this building was all ASA.

Wagner: And ASA stood for?

McGiffin: Army Security Agency. They were the ones that went out to the sites and listened to all the communications going back and forth. Over here was 42nd Engineers. They were assigned with us. The field artillery was at McNair barracks.

Wagner: Mm-hm.

McGiffin: You know, the chapel, where I was—wife and I were married. In here was the swimming pool and then a bowling alley. In here we had a day room for a movie theater, snack bar, tailor, a small PX, laundry. Let's see now. Over in here there was a bubble for tennis and we also had another place in here for a smaller swimming pool and basketball court in here. Right over here was the provost marshal's office. And the rest was all transportation. Some place in here we had an underground shooting range, where we could go in and fire.

Wagner: Maintain proficiency.

McGiffin: Yeah, yeah. And all this more or less just refurbished buildings after the war. So even the underground firing.

Wagner: Okay. that's an interesting layout. How did—I'm gonna make the assumption that by the time you got there all vestiges of the SS having been there were all removed.

McGiffin: Oh yeah. Yep, yep. Even—well this was the main entrance. someplace I'd see a picture where this was up on the upper part of the building and it had "Adolf Hitler Barracks". And that was all taken down and erased. I think—I don't remember how in the heck it was called "Andrew's Barracks" after one of the military. Some old Berlin paper. And let's see here, oh. Okay, there we go. Armed Forces TV and radio listing.

Wagner: Okay. I see they've got John Wayne and *The Train Robbers*.

McGiffin: Ah, movie, *The Owl and the Pussycat*.

Wagner: *Life and Times of Judge Roy Beans*. There's some good old shows that they're showing here.

McGiffin: Yeah. [laughs] and they were new then.

Wagner: Well as we come to the end of this tape, it's basically the end of our tour in Berlin I would think. Unless there's some other things you want to talk about.

McGiffin: Oh there's probably other little things that just don't come to mind right now.

Wagner: Okay, okay. As you're making your transition—okay you have a picture here.

McGiffin: The older summer uniform

Wagner: The old—we used to call them 1550's or—

McGiffin: Khakis but later on they went—

[sound of tape switching]

[Tape 2, Side 2]

Wagner: Okay. We're starting side two of tape two with Richard McGiffin. Okay Richard why don't we pick up where we were talking. You were—you said you have some remembrances of Checkpoint Bravo.

McGiffin: Yeah. Here's what Checkpoint Bravo looked like up inside.

Wagner: Okay. Looks pretty much like any other—

McGiffin: Yeah

Wagner: Entrance area.

McGiffin: From the outside when I first saw it, it reminded me of—well back then it was the Fred Harvey Restaurants going into Chicago on the toll way. Up above the freeway you can drive straight under.

Wagner: Okay

McGiffin: That just reminded me when I see this that all the branches of service—you can see the flags up on the ceiling of where the ones sat.

Wagner: See the British, the American, and the French

McGiffin: Yep. And at Checkpoint Charlie we had one telephone that we could dial civilian numbers on also. And then we had two telephones that were just strictly military. So sometimes between the British right next to us at Checkpoint Charlie and ourselves, you know, kinda boring, “Hey, let's pull a trick on them at Checkpoint Bravo”, you know, especially if everyone knew who was working where. So what we would do is take the phones, dial the number, one for the American at Bravo and one to the British at Bravo and then we would reverse 'em and cup our hands around 'em so these two at Bravo pick up their phones and answer to each other. [laughs] And then they'd look at each other and then— [laughs]

Wagner: How long does it take 'em to figure out?

McGiffin: Oh about five seconds after they answer [laughs]. Here's the ACA building

Wagner: Okay

McGiffin: It—

Wagner: Typical German architecture.

McGiffin: Yep. It was finished in—I'm going by picture that was in the big room—uh there was a date of 1913. and it was for the Prussian court system.

Wagner: Okay

McGiffin: And there was 750 rooms in the building. I—after the Potsdam Agreements and that and during the late '40s and '50s, all of the rooms were being used. But when I was there, there was only thirty-three that were set up to be used, not counting what we had for our own rooms to live in.

Wagner: Mm-hm

McGiffin: And one time, I'm thinking it was November '72, yeah, about November '72, they had full power agreement where all four ambassadors came there. And that's where the Russians agreed that they'd lift restrictions on West Berliners. There

was a small community in Berlin. A big map doesn't show it but this one just barely does. Okay here is—

Wagner: Okay, that's Potsdam area

McGiffin: Yeah. Okay. Here's the Freedom Bridge right here. And this little community, okay, right down here called Steinstücken. And it was forty miles—no, forty acres, the town was. And when the wall was going up, they did not want to—wanna take that back, here's, its out here, Steinstücken here it is down here—they did not want to join the East. So the Russians, by way of the East Germans, just built around—a wall around the town. Well to keep it posted that was another unit that detail when I first got there. That once a week they'd fly by helicopter three MP's out to Steinstücken. And we were just there for, you know, to make our presence known. And they lived in the bottom of the—in the basement of the house of the *bergermeister*. And I remember working as a radio operator that every time we had a duty change we had to do a commo check with them. And then in '72, then they made the agreement and in—they opened up the wall in '73 sometime, I can't remember exactly when. To where then they could drive and then a bus was—had a route going into there also.

I remember—musta been one of the first GIs going out there, some place in all my slides I got a picture of it. Some GI spray painted on the wall that you drove between, going out to Steinstücken, in red they painted "Kill a Commie for Irving Texas, Texas El." But it was able to be seen by one of the East German guard towers [laughs]. He made it big enough. At Checkpoint Charlie one time thought "Hey, let's do something." I only ended up with three. Oh some Americans that came over to the West, or I mean went into the East. There's this one from Steven's Point, these two girls were together, so that's when they went in, 1st of February '74. And then this one, uh, him and, you know, two others, I believe they were both fighter pilots, came up to go over to the East and filled out our log sheet and checked their papers and everything, everything was fine, and I says, "Okay, I gotta take you over to our break room." and we had a detailed map and a layout of what to do going into East Berlin, where to walk through, they had blocks and scales—scale model of East German checkpoint. And told them what they could take pictures of over in the east and what not, the main thing was that—[sound of tape being switched off and on] Okay and what they could take pictures of over in East Berlin, they could not take pictures of any military or any buildings with flags on it, or any military personnel.

Wagner: Hm. Okay so—

McGiffin: And so I asked them if they had any questions and they didn't. And they told me roughly how long they were gonna be over there cause they were gonna be walking everything and I said well they couldn't use any eastern transportation of any sort. So I said, you know, "Feel free to use our bathroom here and we'll see you when you get back." So I went back out and I started looking at them and his

name, and said "Man, that looks familiar" and his face looked familiar. So he was the first one out of our building and I went back there, out there, and asked him "Excuse me sir are you from Wisconsin?" and he says "Yeah" "From Rice Lake?" "Yeah" And then I introduced myself and well it turned out his dad had a men's clothing store in Rice Lake and he has a brother that graduated a year ahead of me in high school.

Wagner: Okay, so did you ever find Richard Larson again?

McGiffin: No. [laughs] I've never seen him again. But one of the times I'll give him a copy of the—that. He knows he's been there. And another thing that I remember that—they had a dedication there in Berlin of a—I think it woulda been a C-47, that woulda been the last type of cargo that was used for the airlift. And the person that was there to do it, just before he got reassigned it was done, was Colonel Gail Halvorsen.

Wagner: Who was that?

McGiffin: He was a full bird colonel and he was in charge of the air force there in Berlin. And I can't remember if it was the plane but it was the same model that he was one of the pilots during the air lift.

Wagner: He was the candy bomber.

McGiffin: Yep, he was the candy bomber.

Wagner: Dropping candy to the children.

McGiffin: Yep. I got his book and read that and his—that was interesting reading about that. Here's a paper. In order to travel on the duty train or to go on the autobahn, you needed to get—

Wagner: From point to point.

McGiffin: From—between West Berlin and West Germany.

Wagner: So you're authorized to travel, name, ranks, identity number, nationality, town of origin, destination, dates and when you're due back. So it's kinda like a passport?

McGiffin: Yep or yeah like a passport or a visa

Wagner: Visa.

McGiffin: I've got quite a few of these, kinda got 'em in order. First time I done it was 28th November of '73. While I was still in Germany and after my car accident 'cause of the cuts, I decided well let's, while I'm still in the military, try out for some

plastic surgery. So I got papers and got TDY, temporary duty assignment, down to West Germany and was sent to Landstuhl. And at that time was the second general hospital, they had another main hospital in the Frankfurt area. Now it's funny seeing different things coming up, with one's from Iraq and now just recently with ABC news being at Landstuhl.

Wagner: Yeah. As you were—you said earlier that when you left Berlin you ended up back at Fort Sam Houston.

McGiffin: Correct, got reassigned there.

Wagner: To the 52nd?

McGiffin: Correct.

Wagner: Okay. Now I'm a—you flew back there or was that a different—'cause when you came back this time you had your family with you?

McGiffin: Yes my wife and stepson, we flew Frankfurt to JFK, JFK to Chicago, you know I had thirty day leave. And then from Chicago flew into Eau Claire and since we'd just gotten married a few months before we had a big reception at our house out in the country. And then from there—I'd bought a car on the military plan type deal through the dealerships, automakers.

Wagner: So it was waiting for you when you got here?

McGiffin: It was finished just after we got here. And drove that down to San Antonio. Got down there, oh left Berlin think it was like the 4th of September 1975 and got down to San Antonio in first part of October.

Wagner: Okay. What was the first impressions? I mean you'd been there before but what about your family? When they hit Wisconsin, what was their first impression? Or when they came to the states—

McGiffin: Not too much because it was at nighttime [laughs] but then afterwards they, they couldn't—they were surprised on what it was like here and we said well were gonna go up to Hayward. And they thought "Oh were gonna see Indians, you know, dressed up like in the movies." But didn't see one [laughs]. My wife remembers that she never saw one Indian while were up there in Hayward. That I can even remember that maybe did but doesn't ring a bell.

Wagner: And as they traveled south—

McGiffin: They couldn't believe how big it was.

Wagner: Yeah, are we there yet?

McGiffin: Yeah [laughs].

Wagner: Okay. So when you got to Texas did anything stand out about your coming into that unit? The 52nd.

McGiffin: Fort Sam Houston was small compared to Berlin.

Wagner: Mm-hm

McGiffin: Yeah. Even though the American sector was only like a third of it but it was the bigger of the three sections of Berlin. But it was small, Fort Sam Houston was.

Wagner: Did you always work at Fort Sam or were you over at—they had another called Presidio where they had some—a small outpost, not far from Fort Sam Houston. But they had what was called the Presidio where they, I think where they had—kept Geronimo.

McGiffin: Oh, oh, okay. That when I was there was called the Quadrangle.

Wagner: Quadrangle, I was wrong.

McGiffin: Quadrangle

Wagner: It was the quad, yes.

McGiffin: Yep. Well since that was right in Fort Sam that was mainly the headquarters for 5th army, when I was there.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: We would have an MP assigned to the main entrance in there but it was no big deal.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: When I first got there I remember, you know, finally, you know, learning the post and where things were around there, for patrolling and that. And the shortcuts getting from one place to another place, need be. It was an open post because there was two streets that went right through it so if there was a situation came up well then we had to know which street we had to go to for checking. And since the main hospital there, Brooke Army Medical Center, the—turned out that that was where President Johnson had—was taken to and died. That room was—where he died in was more or less—it wasn't used anymore and it was a memorial to him. Couple times I was working the mid-shift and we, we put someone at the hospital to check up and down the hallways, make sure the men were on their side

and the women weren't, weren't being bothered. Or vice versa. And so there's, you know, times—just killing time, stop in and talk with the nurses and ask what things were like there and one time when I stopped in to one of the units they were playing monopoly, killing some time.

Wagner: So you'd say your duties at Fort Sam became almost like a garrison type?

McGiffin: Correct

Wagner: It wasn't—there wasn't very much excitement, it was just a matter of maintaining

McGiffin: Mm-hm.

Wagner: Do you remember any specific situation or humorous situation that occurred at Fort Sam while you were there? Or any—

McGiffin: Well one thing that does stand out was when I was in the hospital one, was when I was talking with the nurses at the burn unit. Just prior to that there'd been an incident in the Mediterranean where the aircraft carrier [USS] *Kennedy*—they were doing some maneuvers and ran into one of our destroyers. And those naval personnel were brought—all of 'em were brought to Fort Sam Houston to the burn unit. And the nurses were, you know, telling me about them and you know I was hearing of the stress that it was just on the nurses. And I remember one of 'em, she was a major, saying that usually the nurses in that burn unit work four to five months and that's it. They'd have to transfer out and go someplace else because it was so much—the stress on—of just seeing the people. And she had to go and make rounds and just check on ones and, and how she was able to do it, I don't know, but she—I must have been talking and you know asking enough nice questions that she showed me one of the naval personnel that—he was burned, it was something like ninety percent of his body, and then after we came back, back outta there she said, "You wouldn't believe that that was a black guy." And I said, "No, no I wouldn'ta" You couldn't tell if he was black or white.

Wagner: He was just a soldier.

McGiffin: Just a, a person laying there with all their skin gone—skin off.

Wagner: How about any people that you encountered? Did you run into any—when you were overseas or state side, did you encounter any other U.S.O type situations or?

McGiffin: No, not U.S.O. I do remember one time in Berlin there was a concert and I liked the group. And they were at the Philharmonic, where the Berlin Orchestra performs. This group was a little overpowering in there, it was Blood, Sweat and Tears. And this place was set up to where the orchestra would be in the center and no—so no matter where you would sit in there, the sound was the same. You know so it could be a very quiet notes being played and you could hear it very

easily. But when someone like, you know, Blood Sweat and Tears with the brass horns playing, you kinda walk out and "Huh?"

Wagner: They reverberated.

McGiffin: Very.

Wagner: That sounds to me like you had some pretty good tours and—

McGiffin: On my last eight months at Fort Sam Houston was the AWOL section.

Wagner: Okay. Well you musta met some characters there.

McGiffin: Oh yeah, yeah. We had the southern eighty counties of Texas. So from Judge Roy Bean's famous place of Langtry, go east just above Austin, all the way to Beaumont, everything south of there all the way to Brownsville was our area that we covered. I remember the first trip that I was able to go on to—Houston was in our area. We picked up ten guys that had been arrested that—for that one week. And one of 'em was gone ten days short of ten years. He was on desertion status. And he was—he told us that the FBI picked him up and they said they knew where he was and they just, you know, kinda kept an eye on him till one of the main kinda had a slow period then they went and picked him up. And this guy, he said he was working construction, running a bulldozer and that he also owned two semi-trucks that was out on the road. And after we picked them up then we took them to Fort Hood to where they were all processed. When I found out that on desertion there was no statute of limitations and the main thing is that the finance office, the records are more or less still open until either the warm body or the cold body turns up. One time, I'd gotten a call, and I don't remember exactly where they were calling from but it was the state department. And they asked if we still had papers on so and so, so I looked 'em up in our file cabinet and said, "Yes we do." And he says, "Okay I've got some information for you. His body was found in Guadalajara, Mexico in a gravesite." And they had done their forensics and he'd been shot, like forty times in the belly from a nine-millimeter machine gun. So we figured, well he musta—was in to some of the drug trafficking and done something wrong and they shot him there.

Wagner: Did you do anything for good luck? Did you—just to, to make it from one day to the other, did you have any—did you have a good luck charm or?

McGiffin: No

Wagner: No?

McGiffin: No.

Wagner: Okay. What was your typical day like?

McGiffin: Oh. Get up, go in to work, be there at 8 in the morning. And then get ready to start doing a lot of typing, filling in reports. We had a big file cabinet—cabinets.

Wagner: Okay. Well, I know that typing paperwork, staff work, especially as you were gaining in rank, you spend more time in the office than you do out in the patrol or as you gain responsibility. What did you do to entertain yourselves? How did you keep your sanity going?

McGiffin: Well in Berlin we would go out at night to all the dance places and meet the German girls and dance with them. San Antonio, well we would—wife and I we would—family we would go and tour some place like down at the Alamo or maybe on a weekend just go to the Quadrangle and in the Quadrangle they had animals.

Wagner: Rabbits, deer.

McGiffin: Rabbits, deer,

Wagner: Peacocks

McGiffin: Peacock

Wagner: Ducks

McGiffin: All kinds. Just go in there and it was fun to feed 'em.

Wagner: Kids like that.

McGiffin: Yep. Or we'd—we can go down to the Gulf of Mexico.

Wagner: When you were overseas did you pick up any favorite food that you liked?

McGiffin: Oh yeah. One it was in Berlin, it was called shashlik

Wagner: Shashlik

McGiffin: Yes. It was at—in Berlin they had these, what we called the curvy wurst stands all over. They're little buildings kinda like what you would—or little trailers like you would see at a fair selling food. And shashlik it was a piece of beef, onion, pork, onion, beef, pork, onion beef, pork, it was like that with them intermixed. And what they would do would be would cook it on a grill, slowly so all the meat and everything was cooked.

Wagner: Kinda like a, kinda like a—

McGiffin: Kinda like a shishkabob but not as—but it didn't have the tomato or that in it.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: And when they were done they'd just set 'em off to the side of the grill and then when you wanted one, they'd take it—well they were probably 'bout 6 to 8 inches long on the stick, they'd deep fry it quickly, take it out, and then put like a Worcestershire sauce on there then a little curry powder. And those were good. Sometimes if you didn't get to a stand early enough they were gone.

Wagner: What about your tour in Texas?

[sound of tape stopping and starting]

[Tape 3, Side 1]

Wagner: This is Todd Wagner. Tape three, side one of the interview with Richard McGiffin. We are talking about his discharge from the military and he had just indicated that due to hip injury that was caused by the auto accident in Germany that he was starting to have some problems. And Richard will pick up there with the doctors telling you what?

McGiffin: That I was gonna need a hip operation. So I was admitted like the middle of August and a lot of x-rays and bone scans and stuff. First part of September done—they done a operation. I think I was discharged in November sometime. And then they put me on their temporary retirement list to where if my condition improved I could come back in at the same rank and everything. So I thought, "Well, I might as well go on to do some college." Because as you'd advance in rank they wanted you either to have a degree or be working on it." So I thought, "Well I might as well do that." So I went to a college down there for law enforcement. And then it turned out that they were not going to take me in. And afterwards I thought, "Well maybe I shoulda fought it."

Wagner: So ended up with a medical discharge at—out of Fort Sam. And you returned to Wisconsin then?

McGiffin: Nope, we stayed down there for another four years.

Wagner: Really?

McGiffin: In San Antonio. Since I stayed there—they were hoping that I would stay there so they could keep an eye on me and how my hip was doing 'cause I was on crutches for thirteen months after the operation. And then I was going to college right there then, in San Antonio.

Wagner: Okay. And now did you finish your degree?

McGiffin: No, I have one semester left [laughs].

Wagner: One semester left.

McGiffin: After they, they told me that I wasn't gonna be able to go, go back in I think that kinda, figured it was law enforcement—I figured that well I probably wouldn't be able to pass a physical for any police department cause I wouldn't have been able to run.

Wagner: Okay. So what were you doing then? What type of work did you do?

McGiffin: So I went in to—I thought, “Well, I can drive.” So first I worked for a homebuilder down there that would buy chunks of ground and build houses on it and sell 'em. And they had their own yard where all the supplies except for the concrete went on it.

Wagner: So you became a trucker

McGiffin: Mm-hm

Wagner: Were they short distance? Or long haul?

McGiffin: While I was with him it was all short, just within the San Antonio area.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: And then well, let's, let's try the over the road stuff. So then that's when I started in to semi stuff.

Wagner: Okay. So you stayed down there for four years?

McGiffin: Yes.

Wagner: And then you—at the end of the four years you returned to Wisconsin?

McGiffin: Yes

Wagner: Okay. Did you have any kind of a homecoming at all?

McGiffin: No.

Wagner: Did you feel that you missed out on something by not having one?

McGiffin: No.

Wagner: No. Okay when you, when you came back to Wisconsin you said you continued your trucking then?

McGiffin: Yeah, for a little—maybe a month and then the guy sold out so I thought, "Well, maybe this isn't gonna go so good." So I went back to school for agriculture sales. I got out of that, finished that. And then well it didn't help that all of a sudden the price of milk was dropping, people weren't hiring, so I went back to the truck again.

Wagner: So basically you went for school and went in to trucking? And were you able to use any of your veterans benefits during that time period?

McGiffin: Yeah I did.

Wagner: Okay.

McGiffin: For the law enforcement and then for the agriculture sales.

Wagner: Were you able to use your education for anything after you got out or—did it work for you to—in your adult life then?

McGiffin: Yeah, I think it's helped out with a lot of it and the experiences that I'd had to make my judging of things a little bit easier going than not just a one track type deal. I more or less see both sides of it and take it a little bit easier than some.

Wagner: Your injuries and your education, were you able to take and work with a—work toward a service connected disability then? Through the VA, were you able to get that?

McGiffin: Yes.

Wagner: Okay. And did you continue any contact with your friends in the military? Do you maintain any friendships or?

McGiffin: Yeah. Yes, I do. I contact every now and then with one, two, three that I was in Berlin with

Wagner: And it's been thirty years.

McGiffin: Mm-hm. One that I was in Fort Sam Houston with. He was my NCO in AWOL section. I used to be in contact with one from Berlin and he was my company commander and after I got here and he had been reassigned to—back to the states before I was. And I forget how it was that got in contact that way with him after I got back here but we stayed in contact for quite a while and the last I had heard from him, oh, was probably in the mid to late 80's. And he was up as a full colonel and in charge of CID out at Fort Ord.

Wagner: Okay. And more than likely he's retired by today?

McGiffin: I would say so.

Wagner: Okay. Did you join up with any veteran's organizations when you first came back or did that take some time?

McGiffin: That took some time. After we got to San Antonio and found out a little bit more about it I joined the VFW post down there for a couple years. And then the NCOA—Non Commissioned Officers Association—I belonged to when I was down there. But then after we moved up here they didn't have anything close at all.

Wagner: As far as the NCOA goes?

McGiffin: Correct. And now just recently I joined back up with the VFW

Wagner: That's the Almena post?

McGiffin: Correct, 8512.

Wagner: 8512 out of Almena.

Wagner: Have you attended any reunions for your military units?

McGiffin: No. There's a Berlin association for all veterans that had been to Berlin—in Berlin, no matter what branch of service it was. And they just haven't been close enough really for us to be able to do it. And they're always in July and that's always a busy time of season for a lot of stuff.

Wagner: Right. Looking back at your military time and your experiences, how do you feel about that? Would you do it again?

McGiffin: Oh yeah. Yep.

Wagner: No regrets?

McGiffin: No regrets.

Wagner: What has it meant to your life—for your life? As far as your service?

McGiffin: Learning about other people than just yourself. Learning, like in Germany about the people and what it was like for them during the war and then after the war or right at the end of the war when Russians had control over all of Berlin. And then

what it was like when the city was divided, even before the wall went up and after the wall went up.

Wagner: Have you gone back to Berlin?

McGiffin: Not yet.

Wagner: Would you like to go back?

McGiffin: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We were—my wife and I were almost gonna go back this year 'cause her mother turns 80 but now—and that's in July so that's high-time for a ticket.

Wagner: Mm-hm. Well I hope you get that opportunity, hope you get that opportunity. Anything else you want to say as we close off this interview?

McGiffin: Well, sometimes I've always thought "Okay you hear of one's—okay the different combat conflicts, you know" okay you, you know someone will ask, "Well when were you in it? Vietnam era?" Well, I guess, officially or on paper, yeah it was the Vietnam era. But then no, we were over there on the other side of the world. So you—and then—

Wagner: It's almost as if people forget we had occupation forces in Berlin.

McGiffin: Yep.

Wagner: Because Vietnam was the war, if you will.

McGiffin: Yep. And no one realized—or until—like when we got there we were told "okay we were a hundred and ten miles from West Germany and there's twenty Russian divisions around there." And here we are, there was only a American Brigade, a British Brigade, and a French Brigade, you know, what are we gonna do if they decide to come in. Take our sheets off, hang 'em out the window, and go back to sleep?

Wagner: Well that is a question. A lot of people have said that the military that was assigned to West Germany, to fill the gap, and Berlin basically were going to be sacrificed.

McGiffin: Yeah.

Wagner: And so you do not consider yourself a veteran of the Vietnam era as much as you do a veteran of the Cold War?

McGiffin: Correct. And then you don't hear much of things of the Cold War. Except for, you know, maybe a sentence, a little one.

Wagner: Yeah a lot of the Cold War dealt with the secret sides of the military.

McGiffin: Yeah

Wagner: More than what we usually see.

McGiffin: Oh yeah. I remember MI—military intelligence—once a year they would come in and talk to us on what to look out for, that the Russians or East Germans were gonna try to gather information from us.

Wagner: Mm-hm.

McGiffin: You know, on the secret side were gonna try and trick us and do like a blackmail.

Wagner: So if you were going to say anything to young people today who may listen to your tapes, what would you tell 'em?

McGiffin: [sigh] It was a good experience to learn about other people. Some—I remember Berlin they wouldn't hardly do anything, you know, they would more or less just go from here and then maybe just to a GI bar and then back and that's about it. I remember sometimes what some of us guys would do, we would get in one of the other guy's cars and we'd go farther away from the military part of Berlin and just go to one of the little German bars and just go in there and sometimes, not very often, they were a little bit quiet about us at first, but then after a while they would start talking. I remember one time there was almost a fight because we were in there and some younger ones came in and we didn't know what they were saying but it was translated to us afterwards that they were kinda badmouthing us, downgrading us, and then some of the older ones that were in their 50's and 60's, they got after them and almost beat 'em up. But they ended up chasing 'em out so the German police didn't have to be called. Because a lot of them had been little kids when the Russians had came in, so they had told the younger ones that had came in and kinda started it that they don't know what it was like without the Americans there. So that kinda put—made us feel good.

Wagner: So one of the things that we've, you know, you'd suggested is that if somebody is going to go in the military that they're going to travel. Don't just stay on the base but get out.

McGiffin: Get out and experience.

Wagner: Learn about the people, learn about the country, experience the culture

McGiffin: Yep

Wagner: And, uh, grow.

McGiffin: Absorb as much as you can.

Wagner: Well Richard. That's true, I think we're all guilty of that. We go to an ethnic restaurant and we hate to—I hate to see somebody come in and order a hamburger, you know, when you have so many other things to choose from. Richard I wanna thank you for your time, and allowing us to share in your memories and for the many things you brought in today. Even though we're not talking about a war and were not talking about medals and citations and combat, your role was, was very important and I think you recognize that. And hopefully that those people who listen to this tape will find this as interesting as I did.

McGiffin: I remember being told by an officer one time that first—in Berlin—first we work for the state department then we work for the U.S. military.

Wagner: Mm-hm. That's true. Anything else? Okay.

[End of interview]