

Colonel Stetson Siler Oral History

October 7, 2011

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Siler: Hi I'm, Stetson Siler. It's the 7th of October 2011, and I'm at the Pritzker Military Library.

Kiefner: Hello Colonel Siler, I wanted to start by just asking you when and where you were born.

Siler: 29 December '52, in Lafayette, Indiana.

Kiefner: And did you grow up in Lafayette?

Siler: No, we moved to Chicago when I was two.

Kiefner: Okay, how did you enter the Air Force and why?

Siler: I started college in the fall of 1971, and the Vietnam War was still going in 1971, although the troop levels were considerably down from the peaks in the 60s. However, the draft was still active, going on at that point, and I was going off to school. During the 60s, and into the beginning of the 70s, a lot of people used the fact that they were attending college full-time to get what was called a 2S deferment, which was just based on making progress at a higher education. They did away with that right before I went to college. They were trying to make things a little more equal, I think, about who was being drafted, and they replaced it with the

birthday lottery system, and your chance of being called up depended on what number your birthday was assigned to, 1 to 365, and my birthday ended up being 101, which was in the top 3rd. Probably, as it turned out, I wouldn't have been drafted, because the draft calls were getting smaller and smaller at that point. However, there still was an option of getting what they called a 1D deferment, which was if you were a member of ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] at college. Additionally, ROTC didn't carry any commitment to active military service, until you began your junior year unless you were on some kind of scholarship. So the method of the day in the fall of 1971 to dodge the draft was, believe it or not, to join ROTC. The Air Force ROTC at my university, where I went to school was, we had an enormous number of cadets in the program. A large percentage of whom were there specifically for that reason. As a matter of fact, if I remember the numbers correctly, we had something like 250 freshman cadets, and the draft ended the spring of my sophomore year, and people were lined up out the door to get out at that point. We only ended up, of that large number, we only ended up commissioning fourteen of us; so that at least gives some quantitative idea of how many were there specifically for draft evasion, if I can, that sounds a little bit of a strong term, but certainly in a lot of cases, that was the reason. In my case, I started out in the fall of '71 there, and I actually found that I liked the program and what I was doing in it, and I decided, even before my freshmen year was out, that I think maybe I'll give this a

try, and I competed for a scholarship at that point, and I got a three year scholarship, so the Air Force put me through the last three years of school. So, at the beginning of my sophomore year of school I was sort of in a different category than a lot of the rest of the people. One of the momentous decisions at the time was the change to the all-volunteer force, and the doing away of the draft in the spring of 1973, and from a timing point of view, if I had decided I wanted to get out, that timing would have been perfect, because that would have been right before I finished my sophomore year. So jeez, I guess I don't have a story like you know, "I always knew since when I was three years old that I wanted to be in the service," or something like that. But that's how I got there, and I thought, as long as I like what I'm doing, and I have a good feeling that I'm making contributions and that I'm happy with the way things are going, I'll stay in. And that proved to be the case for 30 years of active duty. So...

Kiefner: What was it like, the Cold War, at that time that you made the decision to stay with it?

Siler: I think, well of course, the Cold War was there in the background, at least from the Berlin Airlift of 1948 all the way up until 1991. So it certainly, the Cold War was in the background, but I think most people were looking at it from the point of view of the hot war at that time, since Vietnam was still going. I remember in the spring of my freshman year, which would have been in 1972, if you remember the details from the Vietnam War, there was a long pause between when President Johnson

announced that he wasn't going to run in 1968, and from 1968 until 1972, after president Nixon got elected, the number of people being drafted went down. The number of people stationed in South East Asia was going way down, but... still, Vietnam was foremost in a lot of people's minds, and the spring of 1972, the North Vietnamese launched their spring invasion, and that kind of got things hot again. And I remember the uproar on campus that was caused by the '72 spring invasion. And, even at Miami [Miami University, Oxford, Ohio], at that time, where I was going to school, it was still a, even though it was a state school, it was still a pretty conservative school, and probably had one of the largest contingents of the Young Republicans Club there on campus. There still was quite an uproar to the North Vietnamese Spring Invasion and throughout the subsequent months, the war looked like it was turning hot again at that point.

Kiefner: Could you describe some of the demonstrations? What that looked like?

Siler: A lot of it were, things like at exactly 9 pm, everyone on campus should flush their toilets, and other things sort of like that. I guess one that particularly comes to mind is, and this was a little bit later, this was in... '73 or '74 maybe, and actually, the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January '73. All of the last troops didn't abandon the embassy in Saigon until '75. At any rate, we had the two ROTC units on campus; the Air Force and the Navy had an annual, what was referred to as the presidential review. And the idea was the two units would have a parade

for the president of the university, and there would also be an occasion where both of the units would give out awards and recognize people that had made contributions, and had done outstanding jobs. I remember, it was in the field house, and there's a 10,000-seat stadium where the review was conducted. And so all the cadets and the midshipmen are showing up, and there's a few demonstrators out front with signs, and this is a wild guess, but maybe there were half a dozen of them, or something like that. And, what really made me mad about it was, the next day, on the front page of the student newspaper there was a big headline that said, "Demonstration Mars Presidential Review," and I thought, here's a handful, a tiny handful of the demonstrators there. There wasn't anything in the article about the function itself, and the performance that was being recognized, and the awards that were given out to the people that were participating. It was all aimed at this -- tiny little demonstration.

Kiefner: What was your military specialty and the training you received, and how did you make the decision to go into that specialty?

Siler: For the most part, as best I can remember, the Air Force picked it for me. I was scientifically oriented, and I was majoring in math, so I got assigned, operations research was the specialty. And, I guess I found out about it when I got my orders to report, and it was, you know listed on the orders that that's what I was going to be, so it wasn't any conscious decision on my part. When I was still a cadet, I did harbor the idea that I wanted to

fly. And, the way that the Air Force had what they called "category agreements" in ROTC was, as you entered your junior year, you were assigned to pick the categories, pilot or navigator, scientific or -- everything else and I was in the pilot category. Unfortunately, at least my view at that moment was, by the time I was commissioned in 1975, the number of pilots being produced through the training pipeline had plummeted significantly because of the end of the Vietnam War, and so, most of the people that had been commissioned that were waiting to go to pilot training, lost their pilot slots. So, when I was commissioned, I thought I was headed for pilot training, and I never got there. And then, they assigned me as operations research, looking at scientific principles to solve, military related problems. And I guess I was upset enough about it at the time, but now that I look back, in retrospect, I'm not the least bit sorry about how it worked out -- I think it worked out great so... Oh yeah, and you mentioned about training. There's not a specific technical school; it's not like they teach you how to fly a plane to do that, so I did go immediately to my first assignment. There were a lot of subsequent periods of training. And a lot that related maybe more to the military issues rather than technical issues, going to schools like squadron officers' school, intermediate service school, and those things were not specifically directed at particular specialties, but more towards the military environment and leadership, and management kind of issues.

Kiefner: So your first assignment, where did that take you? And what was that like?

Siler: It, actually, I have thought about it quite a bit during this last hour, listening to the discussion about the Battle of Midway [interview took place at the Pritzker Military Library right after Craig L. Symonds' presentation of his book *The Battle of Midway*], because all of that hinged on signals intelligence intercepts, and I was assigned at Air Force security service, which was headquartered at Kelly Air Force base in San Antonio. The main function of the command was that program, so a lot of the things that he [Symonds] said, I could relate to pretty specifically, about techniques and problems associated with intercepting and analyzing intercepted messages. I specifically was assigned within that command to a unit called the Air Force Electronic Warfare Center, and we spent a lot of time evaluating the performance of electronic warfare equipment, and how effective it was against the equipment it was designed to operate against. That's probably how I spent most of the four years of that assignment.

Kiefner: During that time that you were in Kelly Air Force Base, the Iranian Hostage Crisis was going on, and the Air Force was involved in the rescue attempt. Did you have any involvement with that, or any feelings about that?

Siler: I certainly had feelings about it. I had no involvement in it. I remember, I was travelling on a temporary duty assignment in April of 1980, which

would have been right at the end of that assignment, when the Iranian, Operation Eagle Claw, the attempt to free the hostages in Iran took place, and I saw it on the news no sooner than anybody else did. So I certainly had no involvement in that. I guess, maybe my opinion wasn't too different from a lot of, at least my contemporaries, in that they were captured, as I recall, in like, maybe January '79, and this rescue attempt was in April of '80, and they weren't even released until right when President Reagan took office, in, early in '81. So, it just seemed like, why were we piddling around so long before we got to an attempt like this, because it had been a long time. Of course it wasn't. I subsequently, in the mid '80s, did serve a tour at the special operations unit at Hulbert Field, and a lot of people there had participated in it. This was long after the fact, but certainly, talking to them, and getting some information from them about what was required just to put that together, that's not something you would do in two weeks; this took months of planning and practicing. Still though, it seemed like a heck of a long time between when the hostages were taken and when we finally, actively did something about it.

Kiefner: From Kelly Air Force Base, from the Air Force Electronic Warfare Center, then you moved on again, and you were in Kansas. How long was that and what was your role?

Siler: That was actually a pretty short assignment. I was there for 18 months, and I was in a unit that was specially put together to test some

modernized avionics for the B-52, which may sound kind of ironic, since later in my career, there was another avionics modernization, because the modern stuff that we put in in 1980 was no longer modern anymore, and now I think they are ready probably for even another generation. They are still flying the B-52 but they need to continually upgrade the avionics. At any rate, the 1980 version of the modernized avionics, I was involved in the testing of that program. That essentially took all of the old 1950s guts out of the radar, and the navigation system, and the weapons delivery system. That was all ripped out, and we put in new stuff, and part of that was to accommodate the cruise missile, which was another brand new weapon that was coming on a line at that point, so a lot of our testing also involved the cruise missile testing, because the B-52 was the first carrier of the air-launched cruise missile. And so I was involved in looking at the performance of system with all of the new equipment on it, and I certainly enjoyed that assignment quite a bit because I got to fly [as a flight test engineer] quite a bit. The station that the B-52 electronic warfare officer sat in was not needed for this testing, so we put our, we used that seat for scientific analysts to ride on, who would operate instrumentation equipment and keep on top of what was happening, as we were collecting data on the flights. So I particularly enjoyed that assignment. I'm pretty hard pressed to tell you assignments I didn't enjoy, I guess here, at any rate (Chuckles).

Kiefner: The US Air Force Airlift Center at Pope Air Force base in North Carolina, what was your occupation, your duties?

Siler: Yeah, the role of the unit was as Military Airlift Command's test organization, and it looked at all the different systems on all the different airlift type aircraft, which at that time was primarily C-5s, C-141s, and C-130s, so I was involved in a number of different projects associated with those aircraft. A couple of the ones I particularly remember is -- in the late 60s, when the C-5 was being designed and coming off of the production line, there was an issue with the design of the wing, and the Air Force opinion at that time was that Lockheed had over-designed the wing, and it could get by with a different design that would have been less expensive, so when I was there in the early 1980s, we had gotten to the point when these C-5s were only having 5,000 or 7,500 hours on them, and they were running out of fatigue life on the wing, which was a pretty serious problem to say the least. So the Air Force went back to Lockheed and ironically, Lockheed's solution to the problem was, "We'll give you the wing we designed in the first place." And so all of the C-5s were retrofit with the new wing. At any rate, my role was, we tested the performance of the aircraft once the new wings had been installed. And, of course, there was technical data available that the crews would use to plan their missions, and the old tech data, of course, was based on the old wings, and you would use that to plan missions, and it would be, they used a metric called specific range, which is kind of analogous to miles

per gallon on a car. How many miles can you fly for every thousand pounds of fuel burned? And the question was, how has that number changed now with the new wing? Because, if that changed significantly that would make big changes in how missions were planned. So we actually had to collect quite a bit of data, and we compared what we referred to as the cruise performance of the modified C-5, with the new wings, compared to the fleet that had the old wings on board, so that was a pretty interesting test program. And we came up with some pretty interesting mathematical techniques for how to analyze that. I'm kind of proud of how that came out; we came up with some pretty good stuff on that.

Let's see, another particularly exciting program we did there, we were able to, if you remember, in 1982, the Israelis had a shoot-off with the Arabs, and the Israelis had captured some equipment from the Arabs that was of Soviet origin, and we had an opportunity to get our hands on some of that. We took some of our aircraft out to see how it would perform against this Soviet equipment that was, not only had we obtained it from the Arab air forces as a result of the shooting war with the Israelis, not only had we gotten it that way, but it was still in use by the Soviets, so we were able to look and see. We took our aircraft out to some of the ranges out in the middle of the desert, and looked to see what the capabilities of this equipment was. The one that I particularly remember, is one of the tactics manuals for the C-130 was written that described what tactical

procedures you should take if you encountered one of these weapons, and as it turned out, when we got our hands on it and tried it, the manual was completely wrong. It was based on intelligence data, and it was the best that was known at the time, but once we actually had our hands on the weapons system, and we could actually get out there and try the counter tactics, we found out that it was not only wrong, it was 180 degrees wrong. It wasn't the best thing you could do; it turned out, if you did what was in the tactics manual first, it was the worst thing you could do, so that enabled us to re-write what was in the tactics manual, what tactics to employ if you encounter this weapons system. So that was exciting, and I'd say a pretty rewarding opportunity to get to work on that.

Kiefner: Anything more about being at Pope in North Carolina that you'd like to share?

Siler: Well Pope was an interesting place, because it's in Fayetteville [Fayetteville, NC] and surrounded by Fort Bragg. So we had a little sea of Air Force blue, and the Army on all sides of us, which made for an interesting situation. Of course, they not only surrounded us, they outnumbered us by quite a bit too. Jeez, I mean, there's a whole airborne corps there, and so they probably had ten times as many people as we did. So it was interesting, sharing that space with the Army, and I did that a number of times during my career, but that was probably my first significant time that I did that.

Kiefner: And then you moved on to Hurlburt Field in Florida from there?

Siler: And I was also involved in flight test programs there. The unit I was in was specifically responsible for, flight testing relating to special operations kind of aircraft, and most all the special operations aircraft in the Air Force at the time were stationed at Hurlburt, we were the 1st Special Operations Wing that had C-130 model gunships, and the combat Talon model 130s, which were also used for -- penetration of denied territory, and the ability to drop off special forces teams in forward locations, and those aircraft had that kind of mission. And then we had a helicopter squadron there too that had another similar mission. So those were the kind of aircraft we were working with, and we looked at a lot of somewhat similar programs to what we had been doing at Pope. We put several different types of electronic warfare equipment aboard those aircraft, and evaluated its performance, and -- I'm trying to think if there's a specific program, I remember we did one of the first... oh, this was a good story. The AC-130 gunship, a modified version of the C-130 cargo transport had, and has still, a whole array of guns on it. The version then had a 105mm Howitzer, and 40 and 20mm guns, and the idea was, it would just fly around in a circle with a target in the center, and it could bring all these weapons to bear against a target like that, and it's a fantastic weapon for a permissive air defense kind of an environment. If you are worried about an enemy having surface to air missile systems on the ground, or something, and you're not going to be able to do an attack

like that, where you're just running around in a circle, but for a lot of missions, if there is a permissive air defense environment, it's a fantastic weapons system because it can stay on station literally for hours, and it can haul huge amounts of ordinance. So we were looking at the navigation system on board that aircraft, and the, let's see if I remember the different types. We had a proposal... I'm trying to think of the name of the company. One of the companies that built one of the inertial navigations systems, and it was particularly the inertial navigation system that was used in the B-1 Bomber, it was called the HAINS, which was the high accuracy inertial navigation system. They offered this to us to test on the C-130, because the C-130 had an older, more primitive, navigation system, and this system had proved so effective on the B-1. The idea was, "we'll get light years improvement in terms of the navigation ability if we put this B-1 INS [Inertial Navigation System] in." So we did, we put it on board, and we tested it out on some simulated missions, and the system worked fine, was very accurate, until we got to the point in the missions where we started firing the guns, and the firing of the guns actually was interfering with the performance of the inertial navigation system. The inertial navigation system has got accelerometers that sense accelerations in 3 mutually orthogonal axes, and then it solves that equation to determine what the position of the aircraft is. The gunfire was actually getting in and shaking around the accelerometers to the point that the performance of the navigation system just went

haywire, at the point that they started firing the guns. So, and it was a wonderful example to me, who spent a lot of my time in the Air Force as a tester, because one of the main ideas when we put the B-1 INS onboard the gunship was, "well why are you even bothering to test it? I mean we have all this data that we collected on the B-1 and we've proven how accurate it can be, there's not really any need to even test it." No one even thought about what would happen when you started firing the gun. Obviously if the system can't perform when you are firing the gun, it's pretty useless, because, I mean, that's what you've got the airplane for. So that was another one that gave me a good feeling about how that project turned out (chuckles).

Kiefner: After being at Hurlburt Field, then you took a little bit different turn with going to an air warfare course, and then where did that lead you? Tell us a little about that course and its involvement.

Siler: The reason why I was going to that course was because when I left Hurlburt, I was headed for Europe. I was assigned to the US Air Force headquarters in Europe, which is at Ramstein Airbase. That course was in preparation for that assignment, to learn about operating in the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] environment, and how NATO was organized, and what the NATO doctrine was. So that was kind of a logical lead-in course before I got to Germany. Then in Germany, I was on the headquarters staff there, so we were working headquarters staff kind of issues. I was in the plans and programs shop, so we were looking at some

future, some short range, some long range plans. The shop had responsibility for putting together all of the European war plans, but then we also took further looks out, and we had all kinds of things about chemical warfare planning. Even sections in the war plan that would deal with biological warfare, and casualties, and all the rest of that stuff were some of the typical kind of things that we looked at. During that time, in '87 and '88, we had a lot of business when the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty took effect and, if you remember what happened on that, that was when Ronald Reagan essentially eliminated an entire class of weapons systems. The US systems were like the Pershing 2 and those Army surface-to-surface missiles and the Air Force system was the ground-launched cruise missile, and both of those systems were eliminated. We were in the process of deploying those. It seems kind of forgotten about now, but -- that was quite an effort to stick his [President Reagan] neck out, that he did that, and it turned out to be very successful, because then the Soviets eliminated the SS-20 missiles as part of that treaty, and we had to do some big changes in the war plans, because the systems we were taking out would no longer be available to use in the war plan. So we were looking at "how can aircraft be substituted to do particular missions, and what are the range of particular aircraft, and do they have the ability to make it all the way to some of these targets and get back again, or some of these targets should be eliminated as targets, and removed from the war plans?" We scrambled quite a bit at that

point, to change a lot of the details of the war plans, and that would have been, probably about '88, that the INF treaty [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty] went into effect. So those were some of the kind of things we were looking at there, at the Air Force headquarters. We had, the NATO headquarters was also in our building, so we had the US Air Force headquarters and then the one wing of the building was the NATO Air Forces, and six of the NATO Air Forces were represented on that NATO staff. There was the US Air Force, of course, but then, there was also the Germans, the Belgians, the Netherlands, Germany, and Canada were all there, and in front of the building were the flags of each of those six countries, so they called that part of the building Six Flags Over Ramstein. I loved being in Germany; location wise, Germany was the highlight of my career. I did everything I could to learn about the German culture and explore, and I had a wonderful time in Germany.

Kiefner: What was it like being in that multinational NATO environment?

Siler: In 1987 and 1988, I felt completely like we were partners, like I said, we even had those other Air Forces in our building. We worked very conveniently with them; we were all on the same side, the military -to-military contacts, I thought were all very good. There were plenty of Luftwaffe officers in the officer's club on Friday night, and that was fine. The thing that I thought was a little bit different though, was going to Berlin. I was on leave and went to Berlin in early '87, and even then, which is not that long before the wall came down, I still felt like we were

part of an occupying force there; that was just my perception. I remember crossing the border into East Berlin at Checkpoint Charlie and it was like going from color to black and white when you walked across to the East Berlin side. What a difference you could see from being there, the Soviet system compared to our system. You've got all these, on the West Berlin side, there's all bright department stores with yellow and red colors, and then you get into the Soviet zone and it's gray, and it's dingy, and their number one store is on the Alexanderplatz, and it's like a Woolworth's, or a Five and Dime store, or something like that. And I also got the feeling that as soon as I crossed the border at Checkpoint Charlie there; I was always being watched, and that probably wasn't necessarily true; there were all kinds of people going back and forth. Under the rules at that time, to cross the border, you had to be in uniform, so we're walking through, on the East Berlin side, in uniform, so obviously they can decide who they want to look at, they know who to look at. A lot of that, maybe, was just perception, or almost paranoia on my part, but I felt it was kind of spooky, a little bit. But then, I left Germany at the end of '88, and then by the end of '89, the wall was coming down. I never would have dreamed that within approximately a year, we would have gotten to, almost at that point, to the end of the Cold War. Also, in late 1988, I took two other trips on leave. One was to the Soviet Union, and the other was to Budapest, Hungary, which of course was part of the Warsaw Pact at

that point. I flew on Aeroflot Airlines, and I flew on the Hungarian Airlines, and Aeroflot served, you know, bread and water on their flights

Kiefner: (Chuckle)

Siler: I mean really, they did, that was the in-flight snack (chuckles). It was, again, it was like day and night, black and white, and color between. I remember leaving Leningrad at the time, now St. Petersburg, again, but that dingy, crummy little airport there, flying into Frankfurt at the end of that ten days in the Soviet Union, and what a difference! It was just unbelievable. And there, in the Soviet Union, they've got the, at least back in those days when it was the Soviet Union, they had their state tourist agency that orchestrated all of the events when people came on vacations there. I remember we landed at the Moscow Airport. I was with a group that was probably about half Americans, which were all military, and then about the same number, roughly, that were Germans who were just part of the group on their vacation. The Soviet guards that did the customs inspections, they were just kind of routinely rude to the Americans, (disgruntled mumbling noise). For the Germans, the Soviets had not forgotten about World War Two, and every one of those Germans, when they went through the line, they made them open up every corner of the suitcase, and they looked under every pair of underwear, and we were three hours at the Moscow airport before they finished all these customs procedures, and we got on the bus and were able to go to our "tourist" hotel. I'm kind of off on a tangent there, I think (Chuckles).

Kiefner: Not at all! What was it like while you were actually in the Soviet Union, after your actual process of getting there during the Cold War?

Siler: They, in the Soviet Union?

Kiefner: Yes.

Siler: They, -- I forget the name of the tourist agency, whatever their government tourist agency was; they only put you in certain hotels; they were only for visitors. They didn't even take rubles at these hotels; you had to use some kind of a hard currency, like a dollar or a pound, or a mark to buy anything in the shops. They orchestrated all of the events, although there was a little bit of flexibility to get off on your own. I did ride the subway system there, which was interesting. They have a very efficient, well-designed subway system, I thought, but you were pretty much, you know, "Lunch is going to be at 11:30 and it's going to be here. Then at 12:30, we're done, and we're doing whatever's next on the afternoon's schedule." Before you leave, US Forces brief you on, "You're going to be in a tourist hotel, and they know you're military, because you have to put that on the form." They had some examples of some people who put "school teacher" or something like that on the entry docs; they got in tremendous trouble with the Soviets for doing that. So they said, "You have to be up front; they'll know you're in the US military," but it just occurred to me, we're in the enormous hotel; there's like 500 rooms in it; they are not monitoring conversations in 500 rooms, so I thought that was a little bit paranoid, in terms of the briefings. Maybe earlier in

the Cold War it was more of an issue, perhaps. I still don't think that they would have had the capability to monitor everyone, but at any rate, you had to be on your guard for what you were doing, and what you were saying. There was no doubt about that. We spent the time in Moscow and in Leningrad; we also went to Kiev in the Ukraine. I remember seeing the Baby Yar, those huge statues there, with the site of that massacre, and talking about how the Ukrainians -- how they could have welcomed Hitler as a liberator from the Russian Soviets. That could have been the Ukrainian point of view, but it didn't work out that way, so we talked a bit about the history of that, and that was pretty interesting.

Kiefner: While you were at Ramstein, in West Germany, the Ramstein air [show] disaster occurred...

Siler: Yes it did. I was there at the time, it would have been '88, and 70 Germans, I think, were killed. It was the one day of the year that we opened the base and let the Germans come in and see the operation, and it wasn't just the US show either. The accident was the Italian team, and three of their planes collided and went right into the middle of the crowd, and I'd say like 70 people were killed; it was pretty awful. I wondered if they were ever going to have another air show after that. I know that they did modify the procedures for air shows. They were doing this, one airplane, there is two airplanes are doing a heart, like this, and the third airplane comes through the middle; and, well, they collided. All of the wreckage while they were doing that, the crowd was here so all of the

wreckage was just headed in that direction, and just flew right into the middle of the crowd. I know that they learned some lessons from that about how to design particular maneuvers during air shows, trying to avoid something like that happening again. There was a bit of, one of the issues, and this was only tangentially involved in that, but the issue was, Germany is so crowded; we needed so much low-level air space for training, and it was so hard to come by. After that happened, it was even more difficult to get to do training,, so a lot of the units would go to Turkey, for example, to do that, or Canada; the Goose Bay base, there in Labrador was another spot. As a matter of fact, one time I was headed, this was earlier, when I had been to Germany just on a short trip, on a test program, and after a couple of months there, I was coming back to the states; it was when I was stationed in Florida, and we landed there in Goose Bay, "Well Germany's behind us now." The first morning, going into the mess hall, there's the big sign on the wall that's "Frühstück," German for "Breakfast." So, and there were all the, because a number of the NATO countries used the base there, and all that virgin forestland there for training.

Kiefner: All of the travel, what were your feelings towards, "you left Chicago, you've moved to all these places." What was your feeling towards all the mobility the Air Force gave you?

Siler: It's too bad my wife's not here, she could give her comments on that too, which might be a little bit different. Although I did get married halfway

through my career, so she wasn't there on the early ones, but at any rate, I enjoyed moving, typically. I liked the idea of an assignment, getting to work on different projects and different things. I thought that that was all very exciting. I didn't really mind moving at all. I think her view would be something like, "it was extremely traumatic," you now after the move was over, it was ok, but the lead up to the move and getting ready for it and your household goods disappear and the truck drives off. She was pretty traumatized with that. I think I took it better than she did, but particularly when I was single, I liked moving around; even after we were married, I enjoyed new assignments and new experiences, and seeing a new place, a new piece of the country, or a new country. I enjoyed all of that.

Kiefner: What about the relationships that you formed along the way?

Siler: That's the wonderful thing about military service is everybody moves constantly. I can give you an example, right now, I volunteer one day a week at the USO [United Service Organizations] at Midway Airport. My wife and I both do that. We get a lot of people in who are retirees, or more senior people. I can talk to any of them for thirty seconds, and we've got something in common; we knew somebody, or knew of somebody, or we were at the same place, or one was right after the other, or right before the other. It's the community that we have, and the fact that everybody's moving, everybody's a new guy at some point, so -- I guess maybe looking back, that's one of the things that I liked the most,

that you could go somewhere you've never been before, be the new guy on the base, but you almost would instantly recognize somebody about, "Hey, we were stationed at such-and-such together, and I haven't seen you for years!" That would just happen all the time, all the time. So the military is just one big community, and we're a big pot, and everybody's just stirred up, and we all end up back at the same place... sometime or another.

Kiefner: So from Germany you returned back to the States; and what was your new assignment?

Siler: I went to Staff College at Norfolk, Virginia [Joint Forces Staff College]. That was six months, there on the East Coast. It was being in an academic environment, so it was pretty, a change of pace. I remember the commandant at the school was a Marine, two-star, so it was a joint school, and he said, "I know how hard you guys work, and how hard you're going to be working on your next assignment. Take it easy here, you're just a student!" I guess I took that to heart, but it was a good experience there too, not too far to Washington, and Norfolk was a good spot.

Kiefner: Was that in preparation for anything upcoming or was that just...

Siler: It was an intermediate service school, so it was termed, which was just kind of a mid-point in your career; you're ready for that type of assignment. It's not real specifically preparation for anything; it's just preparation for whatever comes ahead. You're coming to more senior positions; you're going to be in leadership roles more; you're going to

have more people subordinate to you; we looked at issues like that, and a lot of other stuff to; but it's to prepare you for more senior rank and more senior responsibilities, rather than any specific assignment.

Kiefner: And did you go then directly from that Staff College in Virginia on to Panama?

Siler: Panama, right.

Kiefner: Tell me a little about your Panama experience.

Siler: Looking back on it, I enjoyed my time in Panama too. Most of the time in Panama, I was on the Southern Command staff there, so we had the responsibility of all the military forces in Central and South America and we were headquartered there. The main thing I spent most of my time there, was working on the Counternarcotics war. We did a lot of projects where we were working with the different Latin American air forces to provide them radar systems. The idea was, we would give them a radar and they could use it for whatever they wanted to; they only had to agree that they shared the radar data with us. So, I worked with a lot of different Latin American air forces, which was pretty interesting. We worked with, jeez, the Hondurans, the Venezuelans, the Columbians, I said Hondurans I guess, right? Honduras was really a particularly interesting place, because it was the second poorest place in Latin America, behind the Dominican Republic, if I remember, but they spent a lot of money on military. They had quite an air defense system, actually, most of which had been supplied by the US. They had fighters on five-

minute alert; they had a completely integrated air-defense system there, and they did not take kindly to anybody violating their airspace, and they would shoot first and ask questions later, but they had this capability, because we had been working with them, and supplying them with the equipment, and the know-how of how to operate it. I remember being in a meeting with the commander of the Honduran Air Force, who was a colonel, actually, to give you an idea of the size of their forces, and he had shot down an El Salvadorian aircraft in the 1969 Soccer War. Have you ever heard of the Soccer War?

Kiefner: Yeah.

Siler: 1969, he was one of the fighter pilots that had shot down one of the El Salvadorian aircraft. At any rate, he had spent a lot of time in the US; he spoke perfect English, but at the meeting, he refused to speak a word of English. He would talk to us in Spanish, and then he would have his guy interpret it, and translate it, and say it to us. My Spanish at that time was reasonably good, and I could understand it pretty well. Whereas, on the other hand, I remember being in Venezuela, and we were working with the commander of their air-defense forces there, and I couldn't understand a word he said. It was like his mouth was full of cotton or something (chuckles). I couldn't understand it. At any rate, the program to put radar systems in Latin America, I worked on that quite a bit. Also, we were getting a new aircraft that we were putting in the theater, the C-27, which actually, we're buying again now, which seems interesting

because we bought a squadron worth of them in 1990, and they only served five or eight years and they were retired because they really were not very satisfactory aircraft, but now we're buying a whole bunch of them again now, after these all went into the bone yard, but the biggest point in Panama, from the point of view of the military part of my assignment there, was I happened to be there during Just Cause [Operation Just Cause, United States Invasion of Panama, December 1989], so we took about a two week break, three week break, maybe, from the counter-narcotics war to take care of Noriega. Now there, I did have some advanced warning on what was going to happen, unlike the Iranian hostage situation we were talking about. I was on this, Southern Command Headquarters was at Quarry Heights, which is right near downtown Panama City, and we were in a little tunnel, into the side of the mountain, not a huge mountain, big enough for a big tunnel in it, and that's where the command post was, and the Commander in Chief of SouthCom was there, and all the component commanders were in there. And we were fighting the war at the highest level, from the theatre in there. But, all the shooting part was over within two or three days, it didn't last too long. There was, if I recall, twenty-three total US casualties between all the services. And Noriega holed-up in the Vatican embassy for a week or ten days; and then he finally surrendered to General Thurman; and we shipped him off to Florida and he was put in jail there, and subsequently tried, and he has spent his whole jail term there now.

They were recently talking about sending him to France, what's the word? Extraditing him to France, and I don't know, I haven't heard the latest on that. At any rate, he fairly recently served his term in US prison. I never did really quite understand about seizing the head of a foreign, sovereign, foreign country from that country, which is what we did. I can't say where that falls under international law, but we weren't particularly worried about that part of it at the time when we were carrying out the operation. I was in downtown Panama City for several days during Just Cause. We were, the part of the staff that I was on, was working on, was all civil affairs operations, so it was operations to put the country back on its feet again. From the Air Force side, we were looking at things like getting the airport open again. The 82nd [Airborne Division] went into the commercial airport and it was pretty well trashed at that point, and we took the **t??k** to restore the navigation aids, and we had to certify them and there were tasks like that. Plus, there was all kinds of other tasks we were working on, like burying the dead, and making sure there was fire protection, and there were a lot of displaced people, and we were bringing in food and shelter, and tents and food packages for them, and I was working a lot of the aircraft loads that were coming in for those kinds of missions to do that. So it was a pretty interesting short little diversion that we were, it happened over Christmas, as a matter-of-fact, it was right before Christmas, so that's what I was doing on Christmas day 1989; we were working (Chuckles).

Kiefner: You mentioned General Maxwell Thurman, what was your experience with him? Anything you'd like to share?

Siler: Yeah, Mad Max was the way he was known. His reputation was that he slept three hours a night on a cot in his office, and spent all the rest of the time working. Perhaps a slight exaggeration, (chuckles) but he was a pretty intense guy, and being on his staff was, we joked, as a matter-of-fact, when war broke out, because we went to strict twelve-on, twelve-off, twelve-on, twelve-off shifts, and we were just joking about the amount of hours we were working was reduced. Because in the lead-up, the preparation, all of the planning phases that we were working on, we were working a lot more than twelve hours a day, so the twelve hours was (chuckles), viewed as a respite by some people. But he was quite a guy to work for, he always had some task that he would send out, and he would send out the same task to different areas of the staff and have them unknowingly compete with each other, in terms of putting together plans for him and things, he -- It was quite an experience to work for him (chuckles).

Kiefner: So while you were in Panama, involved in those situations, the Berlin Wall comes down. What did that feel like for you?

Siler: Well I'm trying to remember when I heard about it. Actually, -- it came down November '89, does that sound right?

Kiefner: Exactly.

Siler: Just Cause didn't kick off until the middle of December; the 20th, I think was the date. I remember, I was in the states on temporary duty in November, and I remember seeing on TV the wall coming down. It was being broadcast on all the stations. I guess it kind of goes back to what I was saying earlier, from when I was in Germany. I was shocked that one year after I left Germany, that here was the wall coming down, and look at all these changes; and look how the pace is accelerating; it was absolutely amazing. I just couldn't believe it, but I certainly was happy to see it, too.

Kiefner: Were you expecting that? Did you have any expectations prior?

Siler: I guess I had a vague expectation something would happen eventually, but, not in that kind of time period; no I didn't.

Kiefner: Would you say, for you, that was the end of the Cold War, did you realize it at that time or?

Siler: I'd say. I'm not sure I thought of it in those terms, but yes, that's probably the time. Even in the beginning of the 90s, I had some opportunities to get into East Germany, and that was a pretty good sign that the Cold War was over. I guess some people point to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the outlawing of the communist party, and that was more like '91, I guess, but... pick one, I guess. To me, getting into East Germany, that seemed like that was a pretty good marker that the Cold War was over.

Kiefner: So you left Panama and you went to DC from there?

Siler: To Washington DC, right.

Kiefner: What was your assignment in DC?

Siler: I was at the Defense Intelligence Agency, which is at Bolling Air Force Base; I guess a couple of things, I mean, jeez, it's the Washington DC, the ultimate in the bureaucracy there. It certainly made me think that I really didn't want another Pentagon assignment, or a Pentagon assignment for the rest of my career. That was pretty important, because at that point, I'd say in 1992, I made Lieutenant Colonel, and then '98 is Colonel, and boy I knew as a Colonel I certainly didn't want to go to the Pentagon, because I didn't think there were any good jobs at the Pentagon. I would rather be in the field, where some real work was getting done. I had a little bit different job when I was there in 1990-93, being at the Defense Intelligence Agency, because that was a joint assignment too, it wasn't a (clears throat), strictly an Air-Force assignment. So, I did like the thing we were working on at DIA; we were looking at, I was in the, it's called the Scientific and Technical Intelligence Directorate, and we were looking at, "Well what will the Soviets have in terms of the capabilities of their aircraft radar systems twenty years in the future, and what capabilities will they have in 2020 to jam our satellite downlinks?" We were looking at those kind of questions, and of course, we quickly shifted from the Soviet, because that was at the time that the Soviet Union was being disestablished, and it was replaced for a while by, they called the Commonwealth of Independent States. I'm never sure that was really a legitimate government, that was the Commonwealth of Independent States, but I remember we changed a lot of things in the intelligence

reports from, "Do a global search on Soviet Union, and replace it with Commonwealth of Independent States," that was a real quick fix that we did on a lot of stuff. I enjoyed doing scientific and technical intelligence. An example might have been, I was looking at US systems, and the vulnerabilities of US systems based on what we were projecting for what the bad guys might be doing, whoever the bad guys might have been at that point, but one of the satellites we were acquiring was Milstar, and that was a real expensive communication satellite system, and the question was, for the Milstar, which would be operating at geosynchronous orbit, 24,000 miles, what would be, at that time in the future, the Soviet capability to intercept and destroy a satellite operating at that kind of altitude? And the intelligence reports, before I had gotten there were, "Yes we project that they are developing, and they will have that capability, so the Milstar needs to be designed with the ability to maneuver out of the way of anti-satellite systems." And I think we quickly decided that that was a real pie in the sky, and the intelligence reports were changed at that point, and that allowed the satellite system to be redesigned without these super expensive capabilities, based on a much more realistic view of what the threat was going to be. So that was like the programs that I was working on, there at DIA.

Kiefner: And then you went on to testing the B-2s?

Siler: I spent four years at Edwards Air Force Base, which is the Air Force Flight Test Center.

Kiefner: Tell me a little about the B-2.

Siler: Well, this was the end of the test program. I got there in 1993 and the very first of the B-2s was being delivered in 1993 with very little capability. It was one of the earliest versions. Between '93 and '97, when I was there, we were testing later models that had essentially the capability that you would need to go to war. And then at the end of '97, that was the end of the test program, and the last of the B-2s was being delivered then. We only ended up buying twenty, although at one point, it was going to be, I think the biggest number that I remember was, we were going to buy 132 of them, and then the number kept going down, and we only ended up buying twenty, and that's all that's out there now. The one wing, the 509th bomb wing at Whiteman AFB is the only B-2 organization now, which is those twenty; actually, one of them crashed, so that would make it a five percent smaller fleet now. But again, it was cutting edge technology, and it was a real exciting program to work on. I worked a lot on the survivability testing, which was key of course, because the stealth design is specifically for that purpose, so it's not detectable, or it's very difficult to detect by enemy radar systems, so we did a lot of testing on that. That was some pretty exciting testing.

Kiefner: Describe some of that testing, if you could.

Siler: We would look at... based on projections of Soviet capabilities, we would look at what kind of ranges aircraft could be detected at, by early warning surveillance radars, and also what kind of capabilities would surface-to-

air missile systems radars have in terms of being able to detect and track a B-2. Those were kind of the things we were looking at.

Kiefner: Of the aircraft that you worked with, did you have a particular favorite, something you enjoyed more than others?

Siler: In terms of the, I suppose, I was going to say the cutting edge of technology and the design of it would be the B-2, but I enjoyed working on the B-52, too. Even though it was certainly, by that time, it was [1980], I mean the first B-52 came off the production line in the early 50s, but they are still flying them. The H Models are still flying.

Being at Edwards was an exciting assignment too. In some ways, it was like being overseas, because, I mean, it's right in the middle of the Mojave Desert, and the nearest town is like, twenty miles. They say, "Don't take your family there at night," because you come to the sign that says, "Welcome to Edwards Air Force Base," and then you drive about 15 miles before you come to the gates, and there's no lights. You can't see anything in there; it's as pitch dark as you can imagine, because like I say, it's in the middle of the desert. But the desert was a good place to be, too. Anything grew if you gave it enough water, so I liked being in the desert there, even if it was 115 [degrees] there every day, all summer.

Kiefner: Tell me about the transition then, from the B-2 test program at Edwards Air Force Base, to your next assignment, being commander of the Air Force ROTC Detachment at Manhattan College in the Bronx.

Siler: Certainly that was a big change; no doubt about it. I would of course, as I mentioned, I was an ROTC product myself, and now I was at the other end, being the commander of the unit. It was kind of a difficult environment there in New York. There wasn't a lot of, if you're the commander at Texas A&M or somewhere like that, you've got all kinds of people lined up that want to participate in the program. It was more like pulling teeth there in New York. They didn't have that kind of tradition of military service quite as much as maybe some other areas of the country. Jeez, right outside the door, there were eight million people, but from an Air Force point of view, we were in the middle of nowhere. I mean, there was our tiny little unit, and there was no base around. For support kind of things, we went down to McGuire Air Force Base, which is down in central New Jersey. We did that infrequently since you had to get through all of New York, and then you had to deal with the New Jersey Turnpike to get down there for any kind of business you had to do there. And there were a few recruiters and a few people over at the UN [United Nations], but there was hardly any active Air Force people in NYC. So I found myself in a position where I was really representing the Air Force to the community. There were speaking engagements and that kind of thing that I liked doing, and so that was a good experience too, and that was pretty different from what I had been working on out in the middle of the Mojave Desert. But I liked being in the position where I had as much say as I did about who was going to be commissioned, and who was going to

serve in the Air Force as a commissioned officer, because ROTC had this complicated analytical process that they went through, where they looked at grades and PT [Physical Training] scores, and grade point averages, and all the rest of this, and they stirred it all up. But my input was 50% of the grade, so I had pretty much, even someone that was doing terrifically in terms of classes, I could overrule that person, and they wouldn't get commissioned. It emphasized to me, among many other things, that there really isn't a strong connection between grade point average and leadership ability. Just because somebody is a four-0, doesn't mean they are a born leader, and just because somebody is barely struggling along at a two-two, doesn't mean that they won't be, because I saw examples in both directions. ROTC was pretty particular about needing to maintain progress toward your degree, and when students failed classes and fell behind, and were in positions where they weren't going to make their scheduled commissioning date, we had to work pretty hard to get those people retained in the program. The first such failure, I could waive myself, but then we got to more failures, and I had to forward that up to headquarters, and I had to make the case why this person, even though they got another F in their civil engineering class, they should be retained, and there's one guy I can think of in particular. This guy, he had really struggled academically, and he was just kicking along at right above a two-point-0, and just barely staying academically eligible, and failed another class and it looked like headquarters wanted

to give him the boot, but I successfully made the case that the guy really was a born leader, and I don't know what's happened since he got commissioned and came on active duty, but my guess is that he did pretty well, because you could just tell those kind of things. I don't know if you've ever, you've probably seen the movie "Mr. Roberts?"

Kiefner: No, I haven't.

Siler: Henry Fonda, or whatever, it's based on a book, and if you read the beginning of the book, the first several pages talk about all the officers on the ship, and most of them were reservists, and most of them didn't want to be there, and they were all off hiding somewhere. It said that there was only one officer on the ship that resembled a true naval officer, and it said and that was Mr. Roberts. "He was a born leader; there is no other kind." That's kind of the way that I felt about this guy, too; he was just that kind of a guy. I made the case. This is my perception; people at headquarters might have a different version of the story, but you know Tewey Spaatz, of course, one of the famous Air Force officers led the Air Forces in Europe during World War Two. He graduated at the bottom of his class at West Point academically, and Hap Arnold was marching tours on his graduation day. I put that in the justification that I put forward to try to make the case to retain this guy, and they did. My opinion is, that it turned out the way that it should have. I liked being in a position where I had as much say as I did about who was going to make it through, and who wasn't going to make it through.

Kiefner: What was it like, just going from being surrounded by all military personnel, to being around those young cadets? Would they be considered cadets? What was that like, just in the personnel you were surrounded by?

Siler: Well, of course, one of our objectives in the training is to get the cadets to get into that military mindset, and we did that. You know, taught them how to march, and how to wear their uniforms, how they fit into the organization, and all those kind of things. So that was a large part of the training that we did. It definitely was all out in the civilian environment, especially, even away from the school, too. There was no base to live at; we lived in Yonkers. In a lot of ways, I missed the close-knit feeling that you have on the base, but we tried to make up for that with our little ROTC unit. The most we ever had was nine active duty personnel there, but we tried to set up trips to the, one of the local taverns on Friday nights, and those kind of things to try to mimic the environment that you might have, you know, the big crowd on the base, so we tried to do that.

Kiefner: Was it your decision then, to leave all of these transitions that you made? How much influence did you have on when you left a certain assignment and moved onto the next?

Siler: I'd say, most of my career, the Air Force kept people moving around. Maybe there's less of that now. I've been retired five years, and I couldn't really say, but any ideas to get experience and different things, different procedures, different weapons systems, and so on. Particularly leaving

ROTC, the Air Force only wanted people in that assignment for three years, because they wanted people that were freshly coming in from the field to interact with the cadets. They didn't want any people spending a career in that academic kind of an environment. So for that assignment in particular, there certainly was no choice that it was time to leave, but I guess at the three or four year point, I always felt like I was kind of ready to leave, and I had a reasonably good say in most of my assignments. I could talk to an assignments officer at the personnel center and he could say, "Ah we got this one, this one, this one and this one" and I could say, "You know that one sounds like it might be the best," and we could negotiate on that kind of stuff.

Kiefner: So when you left the Bronx, you went on to Kirkland, out back to the desert again?

Siler: It was back to the desert, but it really was a different desert, I'll tell you, because Albuquerque is 6,000 feet above sea level, and in three years, there was only one day that got to 100 degrees. It was very pleasant, weather wise, I mean, maybe it's almost the most pleasant weather wise that I could think of, any place that I've been, but it still was the desert, there's no doubt about that. New Mexico is called the land of enchantment, and I think it's well named. We really enjoyed being in New Mexico, and travelling around; seeing the Indian cliff dweller sights, and going to Los Alamos [Los Alamos National Laboratory], where they built the atomic bomb from the Manhattan Project, and all that, touring

around. So, I enjoyed New Mexico, and I loved the assignment down there. I spent a lot of my time in the Air Force as a tester, and this was the headquarters of the Air Force Operational Test Center, and by that time, I was a colonel, so I had 150 people working for me, and I really enjoyed being in that environment. I liked the things we were working on. I had, based on the kind of things we were working on; I was able to touch virtually every new weapons system that the Air Force was buying, in terms of what we were looking at, and how we were testing it; so it was a great assignment.

Kiefner: You mentioned you're a Colonel, when did you get that promotion to Colonel?

Siler: It was while I was at the ROTC unit, as a matter-of-fact, the second and third year I was there, I was promoted to Colonel. It was really only a Lieutenant Colonel position, being the commander there. Once I was there, and I had a year behind me, they weren't about to move me at that point, so I spent two years being an overage in grade.

Kiefner: So in your operations testing at Kirkland, in New Mexico, tell me a little about your involvement with Operation Iraqi Freedom, and some of the tests you were doing.

Siler: One of the major systems that we were acquiring at that time was the JDAM, the Joint Direct Attack Munition, which was just an iron bomb that we put a kit on it, with some guidance, and it had the ability to -- receive the GPS signals coming down from the satellites, and use that to guide

very accurately to a particular target. The question was, “how vulnerable are those weapons to enemy jamming?” So we looked at some programs on that, that we tested immediately before Iraqi Freedom started, and we were able to quantify what the answer to that question is, and the forces that started off flying the first missions had that information.

Kiefner: And in your thirty-year career, what would you say your views were towards technology? What was the most exciting new thing? There were a lot of technological changes going on.

Siler: Yeah, I'm not sure what I would say was in first place. The stealth technology, and certainly the GPS, and the revolution it's had on navigations systems, and, just computers, and how computers became. I mean, in 1976, when I came on active duty, there was a big mainframe computer that was down in the basement, and you had to do IBM cards, Hollerith cards to feed to it, to run a program. Whereas, when I retired, of course, everybody had a computer on his desk. Another thing about 1976 is, not only were there no computers on the desk, everybody sat at their desk and smoked, and looking back on it, it's hard to believe that that could ever have happened. I mean, you'd sit at your desk, and I didn't, but lots of people sat at their desk and smoked, walked up and down the corridors inside buildings, smoking, and sitting in mess halls and smoking. That was a big change. It's not a technological change, but I remember, it must have been in the 80s, the first thing the Air Force did was, they decided they were going to outlaw smoking in conference

rooms, that was the first step. I remember, there were some cases where there were some senior staffs, where a general officer is running a staff meeting and well, if he's a smoker, who cares about the no smoking in the conference room rule? But that completely changed now, I mean, you wouldn't see any of that, but anyway, that's really off the track. I suppose the computers and the computer technology, and it's not anything specifically even that we worked on, it was just the assimilation of that technology, how it changed your job, in most cases made it speedier and easier, although I think, in a lot of ways, it contributed to more paper. We're supposed to have the paperless office, but we never got the paperless office, and if anything, we use more paper than ever before. "There's a tiny little mistake here, so reprint the whole thing again and again and again," rather than, "Oh it's just a tiny mistake we'll just send it in as it is."

Kiefner: Your final assignment at the Material Command, at Wright-Patterson, in Ohio, what was that final assignment, and did you know going into it, that it was going to be your final assignment?

Siler: Well I knew that, as Colonel, I couldn't stay on past thirty years commissioned service, and I got there at twenty-seven years, so I guess I didn't rule out something else happening, but I knew that that was probably going to be the end of it. I didn't go there for this reason, that's for sure, but it's the closest I was to Chicago during my whole thirty years, so we were able to get up here occasionally, because my parents still lived

up here, and my wife's got family in the area too, so we were able to occasionally get up here a couple of times a year. But again, that had nothing to do with why I got that assignment. It was another test and evaluation assignment, but of course, it's at the point where, I'm a Colonel working on a major command staff, so I'm not doing any testing and evaluating; I'm sitting at a desk every day. I had responsibility for the funding of the material command test bases of which there are three. There's a big test wing at Eglin [Eglin Air Force Base, FL] and then all of the base at Edwards, and at Arnold [Arnold Air Force Base, TN], which is in Tennessee, and has all the big wind tunnels down there. Those were our test bases. It was about a billion dollars' worth per year to fund the operation, the day-to-day operation of those facilities. It was the first time in all of those years that I really got into a job where I had to deal with, ostensibly, with money, and I hated it. It's amazing that I avoided it as long as I did, because a lot of people start getting more and more senior, have jobs where they've got to worry about budgets and money kind of issues. And maybe, that reminds me of "The Right Stuff," you certainly must have seen that movie, and Ridley is asking somebody about "You know what makes that ship go up?" and the guy says, "Well, you know, the aerodynamics alone," and Ridley breaks in and says "Nope, Bucks. No bucks, no Buck Rogers." So as much as I hated doing it, you could see (chuckles), why it has to be done, and why you need to fight for the dollars you think you need. We were in a position where Material

Command got so many dollars. We knew what that number was going to be, and there were some battles internally, within the command, about how much should this pot get, how much should this pot get, and how much should this pot get, but we knew it had to add up to some number. It wasn't like the rest of the US government, where you could keep borrowing more and more and more and more and more money. That wasn't an option, so we had to live with whatever number we knew was ours for the year, and then we had to argue about how it was going to get divvied up. So anyway, my duty was the test and evaluation piece of the budget, so...

Kiefner: Were you awarded any medals or citations? Any that were more near and dear to you, maybe than others?

Siler: As I retired, I did get a Legion of Merit, which is the highest order of the ones that I got, and it's certainly not unusual that that would be awarded to a retiring Colonel, but I still felt good about getting that, because that's a pretty significant medal. I guess, maybe a couple in Panama for participating in Just Cause. Those, I guess, would be the ones I can think of.

Kiefner: And, the friends you made while you were in the service, do you continue contacts with some of those friends?

Siler: I've got a pretty long Christmas card list. People that I've known over the years, and my wife does too, she knew a lot of the wives, and we knew

each other as families also, so yeah, I'd say we've kept in contact pretty well.

Kiefner: And, since your retirement now, what are you doing with yourself?

Siler: I'm not doing anything that brings in any money. I'm retired-retired. I'm doing a lot of volunteer activities; I mentioned that I do one day a week at Midway, at the USO there, which I find very rewarding. I also enjoy it, because my wife and I do it together, so we kind of do that as a team. I'm a Chicago Greeter. We're part of the tourism department, show out of town visitors around. I like showing off the city; that's a good assignment. And I'm an alumni recruiter for my alma mater, for Miami [Miami University, Ohio]. I've got, earlier this week, I was at one of the college fairs, so we're talking to juniors and seniors in high school, and trying to pitch going to Miami, and if they ask, I can mention about ROTC, too. You know, all of those things can keep me pretty busy.

Kiefner: How would you say your experience with the military may have changed your outlook on life in general?

Siler: I'm not sure what my outlook on life was when I was eighteen, so I'm not sure how it would have changed, how it would have evolved if I hadn't had any military experience. I guess, I would say that the way it did work out is I'm pretty imbued with that military kind of mindset. I think about that all the time, and when I'm seeing shows on TV, and news reports and so on; I certainly see things in that light. Maybe that relates specifically in military kind of things, but maybe it relates to other things, too, really,

some of the tradition, and the loyalty, and those kind of aspects of military service apply in other ways too, that I think describe me pretty well.

Kiefner: What advice or wisdom would you pass on to future generations? The take-away message

Siler: This is, I'm not exactly sure what you're asking, but I think about when I was in ROTC, as an ROTC commander; I was dealing with a lot of twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two year old kids, and to them, a four-year military commitment was absolutely a lifetime; they just looked at that as forever; whereas to me, thirty years has just flown by, and I'm trying to pitch it to them for the point of view of, well, okay, you spend four years, even if you can't stand it, and you're going to get out after four years. You're twenty-six years old, and look what an advantage you have over a twenty-six year old who's four years out of college, and has been struggling getting a career going. Look at the leadership opportunities that you've been afforded, at such a young age, and what kind of experience that's given you. And then, I can point to my wife, who's served for many years as a, she worked for Hallmark Cards, and she was a personnel manager, interviewing people, and reviewing resumes and so on. I can say, at least citing that as an example, that someone who has that kind of a resume, of a twenty-six year old with four years of military service, particularly as a commissioned officer, the experience that they've got makes that person so much more desirable to hire. That four-year commitment, that's just a

tiny little blip there, and maybe I sold that in other cases, but in other cases, I couldn't make that case. A lot of people were thinking that, "Well, I'm going to walk right out of here, and I'm going to just stumble onto a 80,000 dollar a year starting salary, and so on." Those I couldn't get to, but I don't think military service hurts anyone really, not everyone is necessarily qualified for it, but certainly, for those that are, I think almost everybody is better off if they've had that opportunity and that experience.

Kiefner: Are there any questions that you thought I might ask today that I didn't or anything else that you'd like to share?

Siler: I'll probably be sitting on the 'L,' going home and think of one, but I can't. No, I can't think of anything.

Kiefner: Well, it has been a pleasure interviewing you. Thank you so much for participating in our program and good luck in your retirement.

Siler: You'll see me here, on and off; I'm sure, so if you keep working here you'll see me in and out.

Kiefner: Well thank you very much.

END

