

Jack W. Sparks of Smithville entered into the Army in 1969. "I was drafted, and after testing, they offered me a school for ICBM Nike Hercules, if I would enlist for one year." Sparks was in active service until 1972, ranking an E-5 Specialist. He served in Direct Support Platoon Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 7th Artillery. "I was on recall for up to ten years," said Sparks. I was in a critical MOS (Military Occupational Specialty)."

He served in the European Theater near the Czechoslovakian border, Conn Barracks, Schweinfurt, Germany. His job was direct support for Internal Guidance, Launcher Electronics on the Hawk Missile.

Training on equipment was "hands on," said Sparks. He continued, "Our missile batteries had three minutes to intercept hostile aircraft. Igloos (bunkers) where we repaired chassis were made of magnesium. If invaded, we were to throw a thermal grenade in our igloo to destroy it. After that, we would have 72 hours to make it across the Rhine and Main rivers. We were told that within seven minutes, our site and everything surrounding it would be a no-man's land (if this procedure was enacted)."

Sparks added, "We had seven CAV (air cavalry) helicopters and an armored division. We were spread out through the mountains. The HAWK missile was important. They could fly the missiles up and over the mountain."

He said, "Since we were the support unit, when a missile battery went down we did repairs. An example of a problem would be if the launcher wasn't working properly. There were guys at the battery who were first echelon maintenance, but if they couldn't repair problems, they would call us."

Sparks remarked on an incident with a young Russian Pilot – an instrument malfunction. "He had come off a Czechoslovakian airstrip. He was picked up on radar by Bamburg Battery. "They were monitoring any traffic coming from Czech. If (enemy) pilots come past a certain area or if they go past a certain distance, we would go on Red Alert. Orders would be given to destroy the plane at a certain point.," said Sparks. "At this incident, our F-15s were coming to intercept the Russian. NATO gave authorization to fire. The Russian pilot was commanded to turn back, just 12 km from where Charley Battery (or the Air Force F-15's) would have destroyed him," said Sparks, commenting on what a close call it had been. "12 km is not far in a jet!" Sparks said a phone call was received and an apology was issued because of the malfunction in the MIG.

Sparks remembered, "We had guard dogs - Alga and her son, Sue, - at the base. You could let Alga out and she would make her rounds. If she didn't come back in ten or fifteen minutes you would go find her because you knew she found something out of the ordinary Sergeant Neal was her handler."

Sparks started his family while in Germany. "My wife and I had just gotten married in December. I got my draft notice in February and was in the Army in March. She went with me to Fort Bliss for Advanced Individual Training. I received specialized training in reading schematics, wiring and soldering," said Sparks. He said the instructors were very patient, which created a different atmosphere than Basic Training.

"I grew up in Damon Valley and Buffalo Valley. I went to Haskell Institute, so it wasn't anything new to be in the military life-style."

"My wife, Helen, also joined me when I was assigned to Schweinfurt, Germany. Our son was born in Germany," said Sparks.

Sparks said his wife eventually helped make the decision that the military was not his best career choice. "She said she wasn't raising our son in that environment."

"I believe my wife and I grew closer during that time (military service). We depended on no one, and could get along on beans and rice, cheese and bread. When the boy came you'd think it would get worse, but it just became a threesome. The best part of my service experience was my wife and son being there."

While in the military, Sparks received the National Defense Service Medal and the Good Conduct medal.

"I really believe in Democracy," said Sparks, commenting on how his service experiences affect his life. Asked how the military service impacted his feelings about war and military in general, Sparks said, "I think war is a necessary evil that is manipulated to make money for the greedy. Indian history is a good example."

He also shared a life-lesson he learned from his time in the military. "You can always take one more step, and if you find someone who is down, give them a hand-up and share your strength."

What does Sparks wish more people knew about veterans? "Veterans are a bunch of good 'ole boys who honored the call to duty." He also said, "And we were called a bunch of losers by a 5x draft dodger 45th president."

Sparks was the first son born to Bud and Bonnie Sparks at the Talihina Indian Hospital in 1949., Sparks attended school in Buffalo Valley and loved to hunt and fish. He had two sisters and one brother. Family traditions included family gatherings for "big feeds".

"I think I am pretty carefree and happy. I am surprised that I have lived this long," he said.