By Amy Morgan

89-year-old Jesus Couling could not have guessed when he first held a trumpet to his lips at the tender age of 7 that someday he’d be playing for international dignitaries. As a little boy, Jesus grew up on his grandparents’ ranch in Duval County, south of Corpus Christi. He began playing trumpet in elementary school, so when he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force right after high school graduation in 1947, he auditioned for the Air Force Band in Pensacola, Florida, where he was stationed.

He became one of just 14 selected for the Air Force’s traveling dance band. It was the swing era, and these military bands were the best show in the business. Whenever a celebrity came to town, an Air Force Band would be recruited to provide the entertainment. Throughout his 20-year military career, Jesus spent time in the Air Force Band of the Rockies in Denver; the Air Force Band of the West at Lackland AFB; and bands in Las Vegas and Newfoundland, Canada.

He played for Frank Sinatra before the Strip was even built – Las Vegas was just a few casinos, he said. In Newfoundland, Jesus played for the Queen of England and the King of Denmark in the 1950s. That’s where he met his wife, Doris, with whom he had six children in their 65-year marriage he described as a fairy tale.

In Denver, Jesus spruced up his skills and played the evening trumpet call for President Eisenhower. A fellow band member, John Williams, eventually became the famous Hollywood composer who conducted and wrote the music for Schindler’s List, War Horse and Jaws, among others. The two became reacquainted at a band reunion in the 1970s, where John encouraged Jesus. “He told me I was a good trumpet player,” Jesus said. “He remembered all of us; it was a heck of a meeting!”

Jesus’ last post was to Lackland, where he played for Bob Hope and marched in parades across Texas. Jesus attended a concert there recently and was moved when the crowd recognized his alumni status with a standing ovation.

He retired from the military as a technical sergeant and sold electronics at the Central Park Mall Sears for 20 years. He settled his family in Windcrest in 1976, and played trumpet at St. John Newman Catholic Church.

Doris’ death two years ago prompted Jesus to move to Independence Hill last year. He has met a new lady companion with whom he enjoys attending the Sunday night musical shows and Friday dances. Another fellow resident - a saxophone player from Abilene - inspired him to pull out his trumpet again. “I’m a bit rusty,” he said, but hopes to perform again soon.