

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

DALE ALEXANDER

An interview conducted on

March 17, 2017

Interviewer: Skye Wick

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of John Alexander are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 17, 2017.

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WICK: So, what is your name?

ALEXANDER: My full name is John Dale Alexander.

WICK: Alright. And when and where were you born?

ALEXANDER: I was born on May the 28<sup>th</sup> 1944 in Raton, New Mexico. R-A-T-O-N, Colfax County, New Mexico.

WICK: And where did you grow up?

ALEXANDER: I grew up in Amarillo, Texas.

WICK: Alright, when and where did you enter in the armed forces?

ALEXANDER: I entered in the armed forces on September the 20<sup>th</sup> 1966 . . . in Amarillo, Texas.

WICK: Which branch did you serve in?

ALEXANDER: United States Army.

WICK: And uh, what were your years of service?

ALEXANDER: I served from 1966 to 1987.

WICK: During your years of service were you primarily in the enlisted ranks, a non-commissioned officer, an officer, or a warrant officer?

ALEXANDER: I served one year as an enlisted man and then I served nine . . . Uh, 20 years as a commissioned officer.

WICK: And, uh, if you served as an officer, what was your . . . What was the source of your commission?

ALEXANDER: I was commissioned at Fort Benning, Georgia from, uh, the . . . uh . . . program for . . . officer programs in Fort Benning, in the infantry.

WICK: And how do you spell Fort Benning?

ALEXANDER: F-T B-E-N-N-I-N-G.

WICK: Alright . . . Um, in which military conflict did you take part?

ALEXANDER: I served in Vietnam.

WICK: Why did you enlist in the armed forces?

ALEXANDER: I was drafted. I was one of the last years of draftees and then, after I was drafted, I reenlisted and stayed in the army for 22 year . . . 21 years.

WICK: So, what made you decide to stay?

ALEXANDER: I liked the military. I served in ROTC in high school and college and had intended to join the army.

WICK: Um, what was your training like?

ALEXANDER: Training at, uh . . . When I went in as an enlisted man was at Fort Bliss, Texas. It was very hard. It was very tough. Uh, there was eighteen hundred of us and uh . . .

WICK: Wow.

ALEXANDER: . . . in basic training at that time and I graduated number one in my class of eighteen hundred.

SKYE WICK: That's awesome. And that's a big deal because there's so many of them. Um, what were race relations like when you were enlisted?

ALEXANDER: We really didn't have any problems with race relations. Everybody served, everybody helped each other, and everybody worked together. It's . . . I had no problems with race relations.

WICK: Did you find your service challenging?

ALEXANDER: Yes, it was challenging. It was, uh, a lot of things going on and, uh, learning new stuff. Uh, as I went along it was always something new to learn. I went to school every year for 20 years, uh, to learn something new and there was always something new to do. And uh, it was challenging and very interesting.

WICK: Uh, what conception did you have of the United States at the time of your enlistment?

ALEXANDER: Well, I felt the United States was the number one country in the world. Uh, we did more for the world than anybody and we defended most of the world for freedom and I felt very strongly about that. And I felt that being a part of that was something I wanted to do.

WICK: Uh, what did Americ . . . America symbolize to you?

ALEXANDER: Well, America symbolized a very strong country. We were very strong militarily. We, uh, were helping the world and I looked forward to the . . . that I was a part of America's armed forces and . . . and helping to defend the world.

WICK: And uh, what did you think it stood for?

ALEXANDER: That's kind of redundant.

WICK: Yeah, because they symbolize and . . .

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

WICK: Yeah, gotcha. Um, were you deployed overseas?

ALEXANDER: I was deployed two different times overseas. Once during Vietnam in 19 uh '69 to '70. Or correction, 1970 to '71. I was over there eleven months and, uh, served in the . . . in a war zone. And then I was deployed again in 1985 to '87 in England.

WICK: Which one was more challenging out of the two?

ALEXANDER: Well, out of the most challenging would have to be Vietnam because there we were on front line combat troops. And we were day to day with encounters with the enemy and with people trying to shoot us.

WICK: Um, what did you understand about the mission that you were being asked to complete?

ALEXANDER: My mission in Vietnam was to [clears throat] to maintain and . . . and help defend the, um, Vietnamese people and to fight, help them fight for their freedom.

WICK: Uh, what unit did you serve in during your deployment?

ALEXANDER: I was with the uh, 95<sup>th</sup> MP Battalion at the [clears throat] at Long Binh and the 18<sup>th</sup> MP Brigade, in Vietnam.

WICK: MP . . . ?

ALEXANDER: Uh, Brigade is uh, B-R-I-G-A-D-E.

WICK: Um, I think you already answered this one, but did you serve in direct combat during your deployment?

DALE ALEXANDER: Yes.

WICK: And you said yes in Vietnam, right?

ALEXANDER: Yes.

WICK: Um, were you wounded in action?

ALEXANDER: No.

WICK: Did you become a prisoner of war?

ALEXANDER: No.

WICK: What did you think of the local inhabitants that you encountered?

ALEXANDER: I . . . I liked the Vietnamese people. They were very nice. Uh, we got along well with them. They were well respected while we were there and they helped us as much as they could. And, uh, to help defend their country. They were . . . That's . . . They were good folks, good people.

WICK: How about in England? Did you encounter anyone there?

ALEXANDER: In England we, uh . . . We lived on the economy in England and we enjoyed them tremendously. We did a lot of things in . . . in England. We got to travel with them and go . . . got to visit the queen and, uh, got to go to Edinburgh Castle with them. And uh, we got to do a lot of different things. England was very good.

WICK: That's awesome. When you interacted with local inhabitants, uh, what did you think their conceptions were of the United States?

ALEXANDER: Most of them feel the United States was a huge nation that, uh . . . They had a lot of misconceptions about what we were in some of the things through movies and things that they saw and they didn't . . . They believed that a lot of it was actual and factual. When a lot of the movies were just movies themselves. Uh, that's the only way they had to judge us but they felt that we were a very strong nation and very willing to jump up and help somebody else that was not doing so well and, uh, needed to be defending. They were very supportive.

WICK: Now in the, in the movies, did they like, did they depict us as violent? Or?

ALEXANDER: No, they thought that, uh, there was still cowboys and Indians and things like that.

WICK: People still think that there's still cowboys and Indians in Texas too. Um, did you ever engage them in conversation about what America meant to you?

ALEXANDER: Not per say, uh . . . You . . . You get a feeling for it after you've served with them and you work with them. They felt, uh . . . They were very respectful of America and they, uh, were glad to have us there. And, uh, I never felt any animosities.

WICK: How did your service influence or affect your family at home?

ALEXANDER: Well, I end up getting a divorce over Vietnam. So, I came . . . I was single when I served over there. And when I came home it was my mother and father and that was fine. There was no problems there.

WICK: Uh, what are your most vivid memories of your time in service?

ALEXANDER: Well, I guess my 12, 11, 12 months in Vietnam was . . . was very vivid. I . . . I . . . I can't say that it was all bad. There was some very good times to that. Um, in my 21 years of service I got to go in different . . . 87 different countries at different times. Um, I enjoyed my tour of England. My headquarters was in Germany so I did a lot of time in Germany and England and got a chance to travel an awful lot. Meet with the government, become very familiar with their government and enjoyed working closely with foreign governments. So, foreign service was very good. I enjoyed it tremendously.

WICK: Um, what sorts of technology did you use in the service?

ALEXANDER: Well, I was an infantry officer. I was a military police officer. I was a quarter master officer. So, I not only provided uh, supplies and maintenance for . . . for our units but I worked as a . . . as a policeman for a long time and then also I was an infantryman out in the field. So, technology we . . . We used the latest that was available to us through military, through Air Force, through everything to . . . to combat. And, uh, it was . . . It would get better every year. We just had more and more things to use and do in our mission.

WICK: Like as the . . . as the technology improved?

ALEXANDER: Tremendously.

WICK: Uh, did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

ALEXANDER: Not really. I . . . I didn't have any problems transitioning back.

WICK: That's good. Uh, did you face any challenges when you were . . . I just read that.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, that's what I said. That's 22 and 23, that's . . .

WICK: They're the same thing. Uh, did being . . . Did being from in Texas shape your years in service in any way?

ALEXANDER: It was always, uh, Texas was always a bragging point. We always talked about being in the biggest state even though Alaska was there but . . . And a lot of folks would ask you where you were from and they were impressed that you were from Texas. So, it was just, it was a good point to be. I enjoyed it.

WICK: After your time in the military, has your conception of Texas changed?

ALEXANDER: No, Texas is still a wonderful place to live, offers a good living and, uh, it's . . . It's great for folks to be here.

WICK: And uh, what about the United States. Has the conception of that changed?

ALEXANDER: No, it's just that we need to be stronger and to continue to fight for freedom and continue our . . . our struggle to . . . to be out there and to take care of folks. And we've had trouble doing that the last few years and I hope that gets better.

WICK: And, um, how do you feel about your military service looking back?

ALEXANDER: I enjoyed every minute of it. If I could, I would've stayed longer. It was tremendous.

WICK: Do you have any advice for the young men and women who are just entering the service?

ALEXANDER: You need to look hard to find a job that you like to do. Do what you enjoy and work hard at it. There's a lot of benefits in the service. Not only traveling and getting to meet people but you learn a lot of different things from different places and it's . . . It's very interesting and it can be very, very, beneficial. And, uh, you'll just get an education that's worth more than a college degree by the time you leave there.

WICK: Now, whenever they put you in um, certain uh, sections like positions, do you get to choose what to do? Or do they put you in?

ALEXANDER: No, you're assigned. Whenever you get your orders, you're assigned to different positions. Uh, my first two years I ran, uh, infantry rifle range in Fort Polk, Louisiana and then I was transferred to the stockade as a military police officer and, uh, I ran the stockade for four years. Then I went to Vietnam and I was assigned a stockade at Long Binh for a while and then I went out into the field. And, uh, different places, traveled around Vietnam and was involved in different things but . . . Uh, then I came back and I went to the reserves for a while and I was stationed a quartermaster outfit and learned how to do supply and resupply. And, uh, then I got called back to active duty in 1980, '84. And then I was shipped to England in '85, so.

WICK: Uh, do you have any items or objects to correspondence that you wish to share with the project?

ALEXANDER: Oh, I didn't think about that baby. I didn't bring anything.

WICK: It's okay, I didn't think about it either. And would you like to share anything else about your service?

ALEXANDER: No, I just think service is a good foundation if somebody doesn't know what they wanna do when they get out of college or whatever. It's . . . It's a good basis to start and it could give you some good foundations and help you with your life and getting settled. And uh, I find nothing wrong with service and the branch of service depends on what you wanna do. Not everybody was for the Army, there's Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, they're all very good.

WICK: Alright. Well, that's it.



ALEXANDER: Alright kiddo.

WICK: Thank you.

ALEXANDER: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am.