

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

ROB FRANKLIN

An interview conducted on

March 15th, 2018

Interviewer: Blue Franklin

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 Rob Franklin are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 15, 2018.

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B. FRANKLIN: What is your name?

R. FRANKLIN: Rob Franklin.

B. FRANKLIN: Where were you born and where did you grow up?

R. FRANKLIN: I was born in Lubbock, Texas. I grew up in Midland, Texas.

B. FRANKLIN: How do you define West Texas? Where does it begin?

R. FRANKLIN: I think West Texas begins in Abilene and extends all the way to El Paso. It includes a lot of the Panhandle too.

B. FRANKLIN: What do you think are the differences between West Texans and Texans from other regions of the state?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, I just think West Texans are a hearty, friendly bunch. You have to grow up in a very desolate environment and it takes a lot of sticking together to get through it. So, I just think they are very hearty. They're very helpful and very friendly.

B. FRANKLIN: How would you characterize West Texan's relationship to the military?

R. FRANKLIN: Oh, they're hardline, all in favor of supporting the troops, and supporting military action, and very patriotic.

B. FRANKLIN: What is the name of your relative who served in the armed forces?

R. FRANKLIN: My uncle, Charles Robert. His name is Chuck. Chuck.

B. FRANKLIN: Do you have any others?

R. FRANKLIN: Not off the top of my head. I'm sure I do, but Uncle Chuck is the one I remember the most.

B. FRANKLIN: When did Uncle Chuck enlist in the armed forces?

R. FRANKLIN: He enlisted when he was 18-years-old and I believe that was in 1960. I believe. I would think.

B. FRANKLIN: Which branch did he serve in?

R. FRANKLIN: He served in the navy.

B. FRANKLIN: What were the years he was in service?

R. FRANKLIN: He was in from '60 to '67.

B. FRANKLIN: In which military conflict did he take part?

R. FRANKLIN: He was in Vietnam.

B. FRANKLIN: Why did he enlist in the armed forces?

R. FRANKLIN: He decided he wanted to go do something for his country. He wasn't gonna go to college and he really didn't have a career plan, but he was very strong willed and wanted to do something for his country.

B. FRANKLIN: Did he ever explain anything to you about what he was going to do or was it all your father?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, all this information really came later because I wasn't born till 1964, so all this information was passed down to me later by both my father and my Uncle Chuck.

B. FRANKLIN: What were your thoughts about your family member's decision to serve when you learned?

R. FRANKLIN: Oh, I just . . . I admire anyone who has the fortitude and the gumption to serve their country in the armed forces at any time.

B. FRANKLIN: What were your hopes and or concerns about their service?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, considering I learned about it after, he had already served and I was a little bit older . . . I mean, I was just really proud that he served as, you know, a member of the military.

B. FRANKLIN: Was your family member deployed overseas?

R. FRANKLIN: Yes.

B. FRANKLIN: What was your conception of the United States at the time of your family member's service?

R. FRANKLIN: I don't think I understand what you mean by conception . . . What you mean . . . I mean, I just think . . .

B. FRANKLIN: What was your viewpoint of the U.S.?

R. FRANKLIN: Oh, I just, I've always been that . . . the U.S. was doing the right thing. Yeah. That the government was doing the right thing.

B. FRANKLIN: When you got older what did you think about the conflict in Vietnam the more you learned about it?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, I mean, obviously hindsight is 20/20, and the more we learned about our generation, the Baby Boomers, they obviously protested a lot about the war, but that's easy to do in hindsight. At the time, you're trying to protect American interests and American strongholds. Later as you learned that it was really . . . that really wasn't the situation. You could do that with almost every war. I mean, you can do it with the Iraq War. You can do it with any war. It doesn't matter. You can second-guess it all you want to but, at the time, it seemed like the right thing to do.

B. FRANKLIN: So you really didn't have negative feelings looking back at the anti-war protests?

R. FRANKLIN: No. I mean, I'm thrilled to death that people have the right to protest and, by all means, they should, at any level, at any time. I think that . . . that's what makes our democracy great. I think we are getting away from that now. I think a lot of it is we end up putting ourselves in a situation where we don't stand up for what we believe in. So, I think it's important that it is done whether you agree with people's viewpoints or not.

B. FRANKLIN: Did you keep in touch with Uncle Chuck throughout his life before he passed away?

R. FRANKLIN: Yes.

B. FRANKLIN: How did you keep in touch?

R. FRANKLIN: Oh, just various things. Various family get-togethers. Conversations, phone conversations. Just random things.

B. FRANKLIN: Did he give you any vivid descriptions of what happened while he was over in Vietnam?

R. FRANKLIN: The most vivid description I got was he was a victim of an Agent Orange attack on his aircraft carrier. And it lingered with him for a long time. He died at age 60 and a lot of that I think had . . . He had alcohol problems. A lot of that stuff I think came from the Agent Orange attack. So, yeah, there was some negative with that as well.

B. FRANKLIN: Did he go into detail about how the attack went down?

R. FRANKLIN: No.

B. FRANKLIN: How does it affect you knowing he was in active combat?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, as I said before, I'm proud of him. I think it's . . . I'm incredibly proud of him. I know it had an adverse effect on his health, but I also know that he didn't have a lot of options when he was 18-years-old. He was . . . The military life, for him, was something that gave him structure. He didn't have a lot of structure to his life.

B. FRANKLIN: Did you ever learn . . . Obviously being three years old when he did leave you wouldn't know it then but, when you got older, did you learn the Agent Orange attack or was that later in life?

R. FRANKLIN: Oh, I didn't learn about his Agent Orange attack till I was in my twenties. So, it was just something he kind of intimated to me.

B. FRANKLIN: What were your fears about him being a Vietnam veteran going into the time period we were . . . Obviously in the mid and late '70s, a lot of veterans were getting a lot of stick for being Vietnam veterans. How did you feel about him coming back and how certain people treated certain veterans in ways if they didn't come and protest the war as well?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, it was less of a problem for Chuck cause he stayed in West Texas his whole life and, to be honest, the anti-war movement was not huge in West Texas. He was welcomed back as a hero as they all should be. But it's one thing to protest the war, but you should never protest someone who is protecting you. You can protest the war. You can protest the idea of the war, but the people that are taking the orders . . . you've gotta stand up for those folks.

B. FRANKLIN: What difficulties did your family member, Uncle Chuck, face?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, I kind of alluded to that earlier. He had alcoholism problems. He had emotional problems and a lot of that stemmed from what he went through in the military.

B. FRANKLIN: Has your perception of the United States changed at all after learning about his military service?

R. FRANKLIN: No, no. I mean I'm not a hindsight guy. You're gonna make mistakes and you're gonna do things the right way . . . You put your full force and faith behind your government whether you agree or disagree with who's in office or what's taking place. If they are standing for the strength of our government then I am ready to roll.

B. FRANKLIN: You don't have any blood relatives serving (currently) in the military, but you do have a son-in-law serving in the military?

R. FRANKLIN: Yes.

B. FRANKLIN: Would you have any advice for families of young men and women who have husbands or children that are just entering into military service on how to deal with it?

R. FRANKLIN: My best piece of advice is . . . and I know this sounds crass, but I'm gonna say it anyway, they know what they signed up for. So, you, as a family member, have to know what they signed up for, and be willing to support them.

B. FRANKLIN: Do you have any items or objects or correspondence that you wish to share with the project?

R. FRANKLIN: Not really other than I'm a strong military supporter. I'm a believer in the military and the people who serve in it. I'm also a believer in the right to object to whether or not we're involved in conflicts or whatever, but once we are involved I think our full support needs to be behind our military folks.

B. FRANKLIN: Going into college in the mid and later '80s how did the backlash of the Vietnam War affect—especially college life because the majority of protests bigger ones were on colleges (campuses). So, how did that affect college life at all?

R. FRANKLIN: It didn't really affect us in the '80s because, honestly, we were in the Cold War period at that point and all of our thought processes were dealing with whether or not, you know, Russia, China . . . situations like that were going to escalate. So, it was more of a status quo thing. We really . . . I was really kind of a generation behind . . . I'm on the very end of the baby boomers so I was kind of a generation behind the actual full protests of the '70s. I was in elementary school when that was going on. So, as a college student in the '80s, we were more concerned with the Cold War.

B. FRANKLIN: Did your viewpoint on the government change at all the more you learned about the Vietnam War?

R. FRANKLIN: No. I know people made mistakes. I know people did . . . There were illegal activities, but that's happening in government now. It happened in government when it first started. You have infallible humans trying to run a situation off a piece of paper, things are going to go wrong. My full faith is in the Constitution and the people that uphold the right to defend it.

B. FRANKLIN: After getting certified to be able to teach history at the high school level . . . Looking back on the Vietnam War, do you see any parallels in how that war played out with what is going on currently?

R. FRANKLIN: I've seen parallels with every war, not just what's going on currently, but every war. Good and bad things, strategic good decisions, and horrible strategic decisions. Decisions based on anger instead of strategy and vice-versa, you know, based on strategy instead of repercussions. So, yeah, I mean there is something to be learned from every armed conflict going forward.

B. FRANKLIN: Do you think—because obviously through your adult life you've gone through the Gulf Wars, you've gone through Iraq . . . During the Gulf War period, the Soviet Union collapsed . . . Did you still have that same impending sense of doom, in terms of the Cold War era with the likes of China, or was it back to the status quo of America goes and does what it needs to do and that is it? There's no one to contest them?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, that's kind of the way I felt about the Gulf War, and I felt that way about 9/11 as well. I felt like the rest of the world looked at what we were doing as our business. And I

know a lot of people would say that about the Russian-Afghan situation in the mid-80s. A lot of people should have looked at that as Russian business. But, especially in the Gulf War, I felt a lot of the superpowers . . . Well, that's America taking care of business. And especially after 9/11.

B. FRANKLIN: Due to growing up in the Cold War, what are certain things, especially in elementary school, that you had to do because of the Cold War situation?

R. FRANKLIN: Oh, you've heard all this. We did it in high school too. There were bomb shelters in our elementary school. We went through drills and, you know, it makes me sad. There are parallels. We were discussing parallels. That's what we are looking at with school shootings now too. I mean what kids are having to go through with school shootings now, we went through with Cold War things. We thought we were gonna die. We thought somebody was going to drop a bomb on us and we were going to die. Well, you fast-forward it now thirty-something years, forty-something years, and we've got kids feeling the same way about school shootings. We've got little kids in elementary school going through drills to protect themselves from active shooters. It's horrible. I mean when you're that age you should be footloose, fancy-free, and learning your multiplication tables, but that's not the way it is.

B. FRANKLIN: Going back to Uncle Chuck. Were there any times where—because as you said he had alcohol problems and it all stemmed from the Agent Orange attack—were there any instances of where something like that affected him and it came out and you were there to witness it?

R. FRANKLIN: Not . . . I mean, not per se as a personal witness. I mean I was a witness to the alcoholism obviously. But as far as something violent or whatever, no. No. He was a happy drunk. I know that's funny, but he was a happy drunk.

B. FRANKLIN: Your father was his older brother. What did your father tell you about his influences on Uncle Chuck in terms of enlisting?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, it was dad's idea for him to enlist. Because my Uncle Chuck moved in with my parents when he was . . . My dad is nine years older than my Uncle Chuck, and Chuck moved in with my parents when he was fifteen because his dad couldn't control him anymore. And so he finished high school for three years living with my parents. My mom made sure he did his homework. My dad made sure he behaved. And he didn't make good enough grades to get into college and there wasn't really a future for him, and my dad thought the best future for him was military service to straighten him out. In all reality, had he not gone into military service he'd have been in jail. I mean flat out he would have been incarcerated. So, I mean I know there are some negative aspects obviously from the military service, but it also taught him to be a man.

B. FRANKLIN: What did Uncle Chuck ever tell you about how he felt about enlisting?

R. FRANKLIN: Ah, he never really got into that with me. We never really had those conversations.

B. FRANKLIN: I'm assuming he had those conversations with your father.

R. FRANKLIN: Oh, yeah. Well, and he, to be honest, he felt that was kind of the only place he had to go. I mean according to what my dad said . . . I never had conversations with him, but my dad said, you know, I told Chuck he was going to go into military service or we were going to get him a civil job and he was going to go to work for . . . making minimum wage or whatever and you couldn't live on it. And at least if he went into military service he could learn a trade.

B. FRANKLIN: Did your father ever tell you about the conversations he had after he came back?

R. FRANKLIN: No. No, I wasn't privy to any of that. None whatsoever.

B. FRANKLIN: Not even later in life?

R. FRANKLIN: Nah. My parents were really private people. My Uncle Chuck was a private person. And that was their generation. I mean, now they post that on Facebook. They didn't play that back then.

B. FRANKLIN: So Uncle Chuck never said anything about the Vietnam War to you in person at all?

R. FRANKLIN: Well, not per se, other than telling me about the Agent Orange attack. But that was much later in life.

B. FRANKLIN: So, you don't know if he was ever deployed on the front line? Just in the navy on the seas?

R. FRANKLIN: Yeah.