

Mr. Alexander Arthur, Jr.
Narrator

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Interviewers

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RVH: This is an interview of Mr. Alexander Arthur, Jr., here at the Rochester Culver Road Armory, 25 April 2001. The Interviewer is Lt. Colonel Robert von Hasseln and the Videographer is Wayne Clark.

RVH: Tell me Mr. Arthur, when and where you born?

AA: East Rochester, NY.

RVH: When?

AA: 1926.

RVH: Have you lived here all your life?

AA: Yes I have, except for my military service.

RVH: Tell us about your family, your mother, your father.

AA: My mother was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland. My father was born and raised in Basket, Scotland. They came here after the war. My father served with the Edinburgh's own, which is with the British Army. When he came here with a lot of the other Scotsmen, he, and they, worked in the car shops until they retired. And after that, he took life easy and took care of his house. My mother raised my brother and me. Then, during World War 2, when my brother and I were serving in the United States Marine Corps, she worked for Minas, which made parachutes. She inspected the seams, she made sure they were alright. So, that happened and then my brother and I were discharged from the Great Lakes in World War 2 in 1946. Then in 1950, we were recalled under the reserve system for the Korean Conflict. I stayed stateside all during the time. My brother served with the First Marine Division in Korea. Fortunately he came back unscathed. We finished our service at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. We were separated in 1951. I received my honorable discharge from the Korean Conflict in 1951 and I've been a civilian since or however you want to put it.

RVH: Let me ask you some questions. Going back to when you were growing up in Rochester, you had one brother?

AA: I have a twin brother.

RVH: Any other brothers, sisters?

AA: No.

RVH: What did you think you wanted to be when you grew up?

AA: Never gave it a thought.

RVH: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

AA: Yes, I was caddying up at the Monroe Golf club, up in the snow. They were using a black golf ball.

RVH: Winter Rules?

AA: Yes.

RVH: So, you were at the links when you heard about it?

AA: Well, we were on a 9 hole course and when we were going into the bar, needless to say, I had a cola while the other gentleman had a drink. We saw it on the television that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We thought it was some kind of maneuver they were talking about, it was actually World War 2.

RVH: Do you remember what you were thinking at the time? How did you react to the news?

AA: I thought, was this really necessary? What is going to be the outcome? I was a freshman in high school at the time and when I got out, it was volunteer or be drafted. So, my brother and I decided to go with the Marine Corps. So, we were accepted and we went into the Marine Corps. We ended up in Paris Island for our Basic Training. Then were sent up to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where we were assigned to a Machine Gun Platoon. After training in a machine gun platoon, we were reassigned and went across country via train trip to San Diego, then Pearl, then Guam and eventually, China. We spent 9 months in China and we were stationed at Chin Won Tao. We were at the northern most free water port and about 12 miles from the Manchurian border, so we stayed there. One of the things we got to do there was escort a British Admiral that came in to Tin Shin, where he was having some kind of conference. So, we got to see Tin Shin for a couple of days. Then we went back to Chin Won Tao.

Also, all of our food was brought in by freight. So, we had the experience of unloading 50 pound boxes of potatoes, oranges, and all this stuff. We were also assigned to guard railroad tracks and bridges, because at that time because the Chinese 8th Army, which was now under the Communists, operated in that area. We were there to prevent them from blowing up the tracks

and bridges. So, that was our experience over there. But when we came back home, my brother went to work for Todd's, which eventually became Burrow's. I went into the banking business and I was in it for 28 years. Then I when the banks consolidated, after 3 or 4 years, I was let go. And for the next year and a half, I was out of work. For the next 12 years, I delivered flowers. Then I retired after that and I just stay around the house bothering my wife now.

RVH: What about children? Do you have any children?

AA: We have four children. Our son is the oldest. He recently completed twenty one and half years in the Army. He was stationed in Korea when he met his wife and married her. We have two grandchildren out of that. Then he came back to Fort Hood, then he made the rounds. We visited him during the time he spent three years in Germany. Then later on, he went back to Germany for a couple of years before he was discharged. Our oldest daughter works here in Rochester, our second and third daughters also work here. Our second daughter isn't married, but our third is. She has one child, and Debbie has two. We have four children and five grandchildren.

RVH: Let's go back and talk about a couple of things. You volunteered with your twin brother?

AA: Yes, we volunteered and enlisted.

RVH: Did you two serve in the same unit?

AA: In World War 2 we did, during the Korean Conflict, I stayed stateside, and he went overseas.

RVH: Are you two identical or fraternal twins?

AA: Identical.

RVH: Did that cause a problem in the Unit?

AA: Sometimes, in fact, in the Boot Camp we were going through, they had three sets of twins.

RVH: It must have gotten confusing for your Drill Sargent.

AA: Yea, they were kind of rough, but we got through it. We started with 59 men in boat camp, we lost 10, and came out with 49.

RVH: So, when you got over to China that must have been a very strange experience for somebody, for a young man from Rochester, very different.

AA: Oh yes, because up there, the ones we came into contact with were workers. They worked for the British. The British ran most of the stuff at Chin Tao. And they had only two pieces of clothing. Insulated top, insulated bottom, cause they were in the workman's class, not like they were in Peking, or Tan Shin or so forth. One of the amazing things about up there was that they got paid in flour, no money. You see them go back every now and then with a big bag of flower.

I assumed they bartered somehow, and exchanged it and so forth. So, when we were on the track and I started earlier, most of our stuff come in by train, you'd unload it, but umm, at times to get extra stuff, we would barter for eggs and so forth.

RVH: Now, did you get to see anything else about the Chinese while you were there?

AA: Yes, we got up to the Forbidden City and so forth.

RVH: What was that like?

AA: Well, I never really gave it much thought. I just looked at it was like, wow, there's another really big palace. It was a name that draws you to it. Never did get up to the Great Wall of China. I would have liked to, but things did not work out that way.

RVH: I've heard all sorts of stories about China's marines, what was your daily life like?

AA: Most of the time it was normal, get up, have breakfast, work around the compound and clean your weapons and so forth. We also had your usual inspections where you had keep your rifle clean and so forth. I don't know about the Army, but in the Marine Corps, the M1 was not called a gun, but unless you wanted extra duty, it was a rifle, not a gun. So, we had to be able to strip the M1, put it back together in a minute and make sure it was clean. So, it was a lot of your normal military duties, and of course, you had guard duty and so forth.

RVH: So, did the ordinary Chinese do a lot of work for you?

AA: Yes, we had a house boy who took care of things and we had people who did our laundry for us and so forth. We, well up there we didn't come into contact with too many of the Chinese people, just the ones who mainly serviced us.

RVH: Was it considered good duty in the Marines?

AA: Yes, well it was nice over there.

RVH: Were you ever concerned about the conflict between the Nationalists and the Communists?

AA: No, not really. For some reason it didn't bother us too much, because the Chinese 8th Army was nearby, so they didn't really bother us. They stayed clear of us.

RVH: When you got back, you did the Marine Corps Reserve?

AA: No, we didn't enter the Marine Corps Reserve until 1950. I'm not exactly sure why we went back in. We got called for the Korean War.

RVH: Between World War 2 and the Korean War, you weren't drilling on weekends?

AA: Oh nag, no, no, no we were strictly civilians. We got discharged out of Great Lakes and that was it.

RVH: When you got called back for Korea, when did they call you and where did they send you?

AA: We were sent to Tent Camp, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. We stayed there for about a month until we were processed for wherever you were going to go. I was sent to Camp Lejeune's Post Exchange and after a little bit of time, we were sent up to Little Creek, VA. There, we were to service the Marines that were there for training, for amphibious duty.

RVH: So, you were working in the PX at Camp Lejeune and Little Creek?

AA: Both. Actually, I ended up working in a Tailor shop, worked with a lady in the Tailor shop. We took in the clothes for washing and so forth. I worked with her. My brother flew oversea in January of 1950. Served with the Marine Corps over there until he came back in July, 1950, because all World War 2 veterans were brought back to the States. He served with a Guard unit up there until we were discharged in September 1951.

RVH: How did you feel being recalled?

AA: Well, I wasn't too happy about it. I wasn't married at the time, so it didn't bother me about that, but I figured we're in it, let's go, and let's see what happens.

RVH: So, it carried a lot of problems for your job?

AA: No, my job was there when I got back.

RVH: So, you were stationed in Chin Tao near Mook Tai?

AA: Yea, near the Manchurian border.

RVH: About 9 miles from Mook Tai?

AA: About 12 miles.

RVH: While you were there, did you ever hear about what the Chinese did at Mook Tai?

AA: No, we never heard anything about the Japanese. The only thing that was a little surprising was that during the time we were stationed in China, is that the Japanese would bring in lumber into the port of Chin Wan Tao, and we the Marines had to go aboard the Japanese ship to make sure that the Japanese and Chinese didn't fight. So, this was just after the war. It seemed kind of funny to us that here we were having fought on side of the Chinese against Japan, and we had to keep the two from fighting each other.

RVH: Well, did it seem that the Chinese still had a lot of animosity towards the Japanese?

AA: I really don't know about that. But we were going to make sure they didn't fight.

RVH: I see something in your file about Mastery Gunner Lou Diamond?

AA: Oh yes, when we had boot camp, he was the one who greeted us when we got to the center where you got your clothes and so forth. Or whatever terminology you want to use. That was Christmas day and he was a little upset that he had to leave his home and come and process us. He made sure that knew he was upset.

RVH: Did you ever see him after that?

AA: No, I never did. But I guess he earned the reputation by putting a mortar down a Japanese ship and blowing it up. I don't know if that's true or not. But that's the story going around, to build up his reputation.

RVH: When you look back at it all, do you think the Marine Corps changed your life?

AA: No.

RVH: Anything else that comes to mind when you think about your military service?

AA: No, but I'm glad I picked the Marine Corps. Which kind of makes my son unhappy, was all Army. So, we have a discussion about that every once and a while.

RVH: Who wins?

AA: I let him win.

RVH: You were proud that you were a Marine?

AA: Yea.

RVH: What is it that makes Marines so special?

AA: I would say their training. I would have to say there is something about their training and so forth and the spirit and decor. It made you proud to be a Marine, now I haven't been in since September 1951, but when they hold the services down in Washington, Clayton Powell says stand up when your service is called, and I'm in my living room and play the Marine Corps hymn, I'm up. Or if their playing the Marine Corps hymn, my wife gives me a big smile cause knows how proud I am that I served in the Marine Corps. I don't know about the rest of the guys, but somehow the Marine Corps puts the spirit in you and so forth. Just makes you're proud that you were a Marine.

RVH: All the Marine Corps training, it never gave you an advantage later on?

AA: No, cause I went into the Banking business and spent 38 years there. The training unless, I maybe say the discipline helps you control yourself, think before you act. But otherwise, not too much.

RVH: Well, were coming down to the end of the tape now, any last thoughts? Anything else you'd like to talk about?

AA: No, no, well the only thing I think about is when I came out of the service, I thought that would be the end. My father served, I served, and that was it. But when my son graduated from high school, and when my son joined the Army and he went on to serve his twenty one and a half years, the came and that was it. But when my granddaughter graduated from High School, she was a Basketball star for Freeport, went to play Basketball for Monroe Community College. But she couldn't juggle the academic work, so she was offered a pretty good deal and went into the Army. I never figured there would be four separate generations serving in the military.

RVH: Thank you.

AA: Okay.