

Col David Alderfer

Born:

Died:

Period of Service Army

25 yrs active duty and
reserves

Sources: Interview

See the interview following for the Library of Congress.



VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
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Interview with

David W. Alderfer

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

August 3, 2010

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This is an interview with Dave Alderfer from Washington Island here, 1901 Detroit Harbor Road. It's August 3, 2010. We're going to ask Dave about his experiences in the military and how he got there.

Getting Involved in Military Service

Dave, when did you go into the military service? How old were you? Were you inducted or did you volunteer – how did it all begin?

Well, it all began for me – as far as the actual military service – in college, because the school I went to, Ripon College here in Wisconsin, when I started in the Fall of 1967 was still requiring ROTC of every male student if you weren't already a veteran or disabled, for two years. So when I started college I had to take ROTC my first year. I hadn't intended on doing it, but, as I say, it was a requirement of the college. Of course in those days things were changing rapidly. By the time I graduated in 1971 it was totally voluntary.

While I was in the program that first year, I got my first real exposure to the Army, although my dad was a World War II vet, and retired. So I had an ID card growing up. But other than going to the commissary and PX, that was about it.

As I got to know the people there in that first year of ROTC I got interested in it. My sophomore year it was not a requirement anymore, but the sophomore subjects were things that interested me – military history, and then in the second semester it was small unit tactics and map reading. It was out in the woods most of that second semester, and it was mostly an enjoyable half-credit, two-hour course. So I signed up for it and took it as an elective my sophomore year. By the time I ended my sophomore year, knowing the people in the program, the other cadets – the people I hung around with – became my friends. And the officers and NCOs' who were running the ROTC program, at that point I decided to continue through my junior and senior years, which required signing a contract and actually enlisting in the Army Reserves. Then, when I graduated in 1971, I was commissioned a second lieutenant in the field artillery in the Army Reserves.

An interesting little anecdote about the commissioning: As I mentioned, my father was a World War II veteran. I was able to be commissioned with his second lieutenant bars, his cross-cannons – because he was also field artillery – and his U.S. brass for the lapels. It was a rather meaningful commissioning ceremony for him and I.

It certainly was. That's very unusual, actually.

It certainly was. It doesn't happen a lot.

Did you have to make a special request for that? How did that evolve?

As far as the uniform was concerned, I had regular brass that I was going to wear once I was commissioned, but dad still had his brass. In fact I still have it now if any of my nephews or grand-nephews end up going into the military. So we just put that on my uniform for that day – for that ceremony. And as far as my becoming field artillery for

the next generation, you got to request a branch – when you enlisted you got three choices. This was during the tail end of the Vietnam War, so if you put down one of the combat arms, which field artillery is, you were pretty sure of getting it. So that wasn't too difficult to make sure, but I was also field artillery for the second generation.

When you went to active service where did you go? Did you have regular basic training?

Yes. Like I said, I was commissioned in the spring – May of 1971. I didn't actually go onto active duty with my officer basic course until September. In fact I spent most of that summer here on the island working for the REA – a summer job – and camping out on some land my dad had bought.

So I reported to Fort Sill in September of 1971 for my field artillery officer basic course. Actually, I reported in September but my class – the class I ended up going to – didn't start until October. That basic officer course ran until January of 1972.

While I was going through the basic course I was looking at staying at Fort Sill for my initial active duty assignment and decided I didn't want to spend two or three more years in western Oklahoma. It's pretty brown most of the year. They were looking for volunteers to take assignments in Korea, so I volunteered for that – which was to go over to Korea with a sergeant missile unit. A replacement packet for that unit was organizing at Fort Sill to be trained and sent over in the summer of 1972. So I volunteered to go with that unit, which included additional schooling after I concluded my officer basic course.

They sent me to the Recon and Survey officer course at Fort Sill. That was January or February and March into April. I graduated from that course, reported into this replacement organization that they were putting together – basically, every six months they recycle half of this missile battalion in Korea. So I reported to that unit at Fort Sill. They were organizing and getting trained up, which included going down to White Sands Missile Range in June of 1972.

That's in New Mexico?

Yes. One of the firing sections actually fired a real sergeant missile as the graduation exercise for our evaluation. As a recon and survey officer I wasn't directly involved in the missile operations, but, like I said, we got to go down there for several weeks and go through all the various tests and inspections and pass the certification so we could go to Korea.

Deployment

Then, in July of 1972 I reported to the unit in Korea. I actually spent one night there. As it turned out – as I said, this was at the end of the Vietnam, and outside of Vietnam there were various personnel shortages in Army units in Europe and other places. In Korea the primary unit was the Second Division, which was stationed up north of Seoul, right along and behind the demilitarized zone. They were at 50% strength in officers in the division artillery, so they were really short artillery officers. And since I

wasn't a qualified missile officer in this missile battalion – I was a Recon and Survey officer ...

What does 'recon' mean?

Reconnaissance. Basically, as a reconnaissance and survey officer, most of my duty was survey: Surveying in accurate locations for the firing positions.

Does that include real surveying work?

Yes. You're out there with theodolites. Nowadays they use electronic distance measuring. Back in those days we had a 30 meter steel tape that we would use. We'd mark it every 30 meters and you'd measure the distance between points using the steel tape, turning your angles with a theodolite which is a fancy version of a transit. You'd start from a known set of coordinates which was brought in by usually your next higher headquarters – fairly close to where you were going to be operating.

My job for my platoon was to extend that accurate location and direction to where the firing positions actually were.

So you're outside tromping through the mountains and hillsides.

Yes. Down the roads and rice paddies, and in Korea over the ground. You try to take the easiest route – it may not be a straight line route. But if you're measuring distances with a steel tape, you've got to have fairly decent terrain to do that. Sometimes we were able to extend the surveys just by using triangulation – measuring the angles from a known location.

So you did that through this area north of Seoul near the demilitarized zone?

Exactly. I did that for most of the next year with the unit they moved me to in the Second Division artillery – which actually was a rocket battalion. It was somewhat similar to what I was doing with the missile battalion. I did that for the next year along with a number of additional duties which all second lieutenants get.

When you have measured an area, surveyed and laid it out, is that a standard then or do they have to redo that when you guys leave? Does that go into the data book?

It goes into the data book at that time. It depends on the sort of monumentation you leave. If it's just something temporary, for example it's for an exercise or training mission, you're probably going to put in wooden stakes in the ground. You're going to accurately survey the location of those wooden stakes and the direction between. You're going to have two or three stakes in each position so you get a position and an accurate direction. But because they're wooden stakes they're either pulled or they don't last very long.

For more permanent locations: We had a number of locations which were war time firing positions. They were designated for response in case we were attacked by the

North Koreans. Those were monumented with concrete markers and usually a brass marker that would be set in the concrete. That was buried in the ground – usually ground level or a little bit below ground level. Those were surveyed in accurately and were much more permanent. But part of my responsibilities as a recon and survey officer was to periodically check on those and make sure they hadn't been damaged, hadn't been moved, disturbed or anything like that. So, in the worst case scenario, if we had to execute a war plan, our firing positions would already be accurately located and we simply would have to move the rocket launcher there, set up and fire the rocket.

Very interesting. You were there for how long?

I was there for thirteen months – I was there for a year.

So we're into 1973.

Now we're into 1973.

Did you see any particular activity, or was it largely peaceful at that time.

As it turns out, the year I was in Korea I spent six of those thirteen months as a forward observer up on the demilitarized zone. At that time the United States maintained two outposts that were directly on either side of and overlooking Panmunjom. They were still under U.S. control – we still had a United States infantry battalion stationed up in the DMZ north of the Imjin River, and they'd man these two guard posts. Every week the division artillery would send in a forward observer team, which was a lieutenant, an NCO and a radio operator who would spend one week in these guard posts which were basically platoon size concrete bumper complexes. So every week the division artillery would send two of these teams up there, and they rotated this responsibility amongst all of the battalions in the division artillery. Since I was the only artillery officer, lieutenant, in the rocket battalion who wasn't assigned to a firing platoon – one of the rocket platoons – I got it every time it was our battalions turn.

You were lucky (chuckles)!

I can't complain. So I spent six weeks, six different months up in the DMZ in either GP Oulette or GP Collier. As I say, it happens that the year I was up there was relatively quiet. The North Koreans were constantly messing around with the South Korean army units that were around the rest of the DMZ, and there were a lot of casualties and incidents between the two everywhere else. But the year I was there, they decided, for whatever reason, not to do a lot of messing with the Americans on that small section of the DMZ that we still had control of.

They hadn't heard you were there (chuckles).

It could have been. There was one night that was pretty scary – potentially, at least. There was a really, really dense fog which was not uncommon for that time of

year. And the fog was so thick that we couldn't see the outside fence. It was a chain-link fence around the outside of the guard post. But we had a small radar sitting on top of the guard post that could pick up individuals at short range – a couple of hundred meters. And it picked up people outside the fence which obviously were not Americans, because we were all inside the fence. So the North Koreans were there on the outside of the fence, and we found footprints the next morning. But that was all. They didn't fire or anything like that; didn't cause an incident.

Like I said, I left in the summer of 1973 and it was within a few months after that that things started getting a little more tense between the North Koreans and the Americans. I think the next incident was the one where they killed an American officer, I believe it was, when they were out on a detail cutting down trees and vegetation to clear lines of sight and lines of fire. The North Koreans attacked and killed at least one American. That was just several months, but not too long after I left. But the year I was there was relatively quiet.

Redeployment

Then you were shipped off to where?

I left Korea and my next assignment was at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. For the last two years of active duty – I did four years of active duty – with the 101st Airborne Division. I was assigned to one of their artillery battalions and spent about – well, the first four or five months as the battalion ammo officer, assistant S4, basically hauling ammunition to the firing batteries. Being in the 101st Division at the time, which was referred to at the time as air assault – it was air mobile – so everyone and everything moved basically by helicopter. I had the only actual trucks, if you want to call them that, in the battalion, so my job was to haul ammunition if they couldn't get re-supplied by helicopter. My job, my platoon, was to haul ammunition to the firing batteries. I did that for four or five months because they had a big examination – a big exercise – coming up.

Then I spent six months, nine months, in a firing battery with one of the firing batteries. Then the last year or so I was there they weren't able to get a lieutenant for their survey platoon, so I went back to being a recon and survey officer for the last year I was at Fort Campbell.

Did you have any specific duties at Fort Campbell? Did you have to do any unusual things or was that pretty standard by then?

Most of it was pretty standard. There were two things that were kind of out of the normal experience for an artillery lieutenant at that time.

One of the things the Army was doing at the time – that was post-Vietnam, at the end of the Vietnam War and draw-down, and going into what a lot of people refer to as the “hollow Army” in the mid to late ‘70’s. The training bases, training facilities, had been cut back so dramatically that they were not able to handle the number of recruits that the Army was bringing in. One of the solutions that the Army came up with was that rather than sending the recruit after basic training to a fort like Fort Sill for their artillery training, they shipped the basic recruits right out of basic training directly to their units.

And then the units, the battalions, were responsible for doing the specific – in this case what’s called the MOS, the military occupation specialty – the specific training to turn these young basic trainees into field artillery crewmen. So we got assigned I think it was like 50 or 100 of these guys. So the battalion put together a training program and I was one of the lieutenants assigned to do this for a couple of months, where we ran basically a mini-version of what they did at Fort Sill – basically the same program of instruction, the same classes and training that was required except we were doing it for a small group with our own resources at the battalion level. So I did that pretty much as an everyday duty for a couple of months.

Then I also went to an exercise at Fort Bragg from Fort Campbell with one of our artillery section – two of the howitzers. They were firing some sort of test for the Army artillery design people, or the ammo people – I forget exactly what it was. Anyway, we had two howitzers we had to send to Fort Bragg. Basically, we set them up in a specific location and fired ‘X’ number of rounds in a certain direction each day for several days. Of course whenever you fire live field artillery, you have what’s called safety officer who was responsible for making sure that the howitzers, the guns, are aimed in a safe direction and a safe elevation, and firing the proper safe propellant charge so the rounds would actually land in a designated impact area. So I was to expedite the processing and firing when they had to fire these test fire missions. They sent two lieutenants out there, so each piece of artillery, howitzer, had its own safety officer right on the gun. Usually you had one for every firing point, which could be as many as six guns. You’d simply go from gun to gun. It takes a little while to get everybody checked out and make sure they’re safe. In this case they had one officer for each of the howitzers so there wouldn’t be any delay in making sure the guns were safe before they fired. So we were there camped out in the woods somewhere on the firing points of Fort Bragg for several days.

That’s in North Carolina?

Yes.

And firing for this test. I don’t remember any of the details because I wasn’t involved in the actual firing missions.

These howitzers are hauled in by air from Fort Campbell?

Yes. We moved by C141 – Air Force cargo aircraft – from Fort Campbell to Fort Bragg, and back. In this case, at Fort Bragg, they used trucks to haul them out to the firing point where we set up. But during normal operations back at Fort Campbell, everything would be moved by helicopters – CH47 Chinook cargo helicopter, which is designed to come in and has an external hook on the bottom of the helicopter. It will pick up the howitzer and what’s called an 822 bag, which is a large canvas bag about four foot square, in which all the equipment and ammunition gets loaded. You may even have two of these bags. Those are hooked up below the howitzer. Then, like I say, the helicopter comes in, picks up the whole load and carries it as an external, what’s called ‘sling load,’ to the next location.

That helicopter must be capable of picking up a heck of a lot of weight.

Oh, yeah. The howitzers which we were using, which was the small 105mm – the M102 howitzer, which was basically an aluminum frame on which the steel firing part of it was mounted, was relatively light. I think they were maybe around 20,000 pounds.

But the helicopter would pick that up.

Oh, yeah. In fact, the helicopter would pick up a lot more of them.

One of the things I got involved in during the six months I was there – six or nine months, whatever it was, that I was in the firing battery – is my battery commander was a very, very senior captain who had literally thousands of hours. He was an Army aviator – a lot of field artillery officers were Army aviators at that time – and he had just thousands of hours in both rotary and fixed wing. They were doing some testing and working out different tactics and techniques for moving the howitzers. Like I said, normally it was one helicopter to move one howitzer. But we were experimenting with various ways of rigging up the howitzers and putting together, for example, two or three howitzers under one helicopter. Because we got newer models of the CH47 that had a lot more powerful engines on them and could carry a lot more load than just one howitzer and its ammunition. So we were looking at ways of bringing up the loads so the helicopter could carry two or three howitzers at a time with all the personnel inside, and the howitzers and ammunition slung underneath it, for things like artillery raids where you drop in a location for a couple of hours, fire the ammunition you had at a specific target. Then the helicopter would pick you up in an hour or two and you'd have fired all your ammunition and got out of there. If they could do that with one helicopter that would make the risk a lot less and the signature a lot less. In fact, we experimented at one time – we rigged up – Tommy McFarland was the battery commander – he rigged up a large metal circle about three feet across that had six posts on it – one for each of the howitzers. And we actually rigged up and lifted – there was nobody else on board the helicopter except the pilot and co-pilot and crew chief. But they actually lifted and moved a short distance all six howitzers at one time.

Oh, my!

Which was pretty much maxing out what the helicopter could do on a good day.

That's amazing! How did they grab these howitzers? Were there eyebolts?

Yes. There's various lifting hardware built into the howitzer where you could attach these large nylon slings to the howitzer and those slings are linked together at the top with a large ring donut – basically a three foot nylon ring that goes through all the other ends of the straps and is linked together. Then that's hooked together on a hook at the bottom of the helicopter. And the whole thing is lifted together by these nylon slings

That's amazing!

It was one of the things that you learned with that organization – everything moved by helicopter. Virtually 90% of the movement in that division was by helicopter.

They must have moved an awful lot of dust along with it.

Oh, yes!

So you were out there for your final years in active service.

Yes. Two years of active duty.

Return to Civilian Life and Reserve Enlistment

That brings us up to 1975?

September of 1975. I finished my four years in active duty. I got off active duty and went into the Reserves. I spent three months in what's called a control group, which is basically a database at the St. Louis personnel center for all Reserve personnel.

Then, in January of 1976 a friend of mine from college – one of my fraternity brothers, fellow ROTC cadets at Ripon – was in the Army Reserve unit in Sheboygan. He was the battery commander there. It was a field artillery training unit in the 84th Division, which was headquartered at that time in Milwaukee. He knew I'd just got off active duty and talked to me about getting into the Reserves and becoming a regular active Reserve soldier. So I went down in January and had an interview with the battalion commander, a guy named John Webb, who became a very good friend. John Webb was at that time a major as battalion commander. He went on in the 84th Division to make full colonel, commanded two different brigades and was a Division IG for a while as well.

He was probably the last Army colonel with only a high school degree – he never went to college. He'd been mobilized during Vietnam with the Wisconsin National Guard – he was a transportation officer, a lieutenant at the time. So he went to Vietnam for a year with the Wisconsin National Guard, came back and eventually ended up in a Reserve unit. John was one of the finest officers I ever served for, both as a battalion commander and later on he was my brigade commander. John became a very good friend and one of the finest officers I served with.

Anyway, John decided I might make suitable material, so in January 1976 I started active service in the Reserve where I was drilling one weekend a month and going for my two weeks of annual training in the summer.

And you lived in Milwaukee then?

Actually, I lived in Green Bay at the time.

So you had a commute.

Right. When I got off active duty my parents had moved from the Chicago area to Green Bay with my dad's job. So I ended up looking around for a civilian job and had located a Corps of Engineers office over in Kewaunee, Wisconsin. They were looking for some survey technicians, which is what I had done most of my time on active duty and I really enjoyed it. So I put in my application and was accepted to work as a civilian over in Kewaunee. At that time, like I said, my folks were living in Green Bay so I moved in with them for most of the next fifteen years or so. So I was commuting from Green Bay to Sheboygan for Reserve meetings and that sort of thing.

What were you doing in civilian life?

In civilian life at the time I had started work for the Corps of Engineers as a Department of the Army civilian, and as a survey technician.

So you were actually engaged ...

Right. I was on civil service with the Corps of Engineers as a civilian. So I worked from 1976 until 1991 as a survey technician out of the Kewaunee Corps of Engineers office, doing mostly what they call hydrographic surveys. We would regularly check the depth of water in the various shipping channels in Green Bay and a dozen or fifteen active harbors in the western half of Lake Michigan – everything from down in Indiana all the way up through Illinois; Chicago Harbor, Calumet Harbor, Milwaukee Harbor and all the various harbors up and down the Wisconsin shoreline – up as far as Escanaba. So we were on the road two or three weeks a month, mostly checking the depth of water in these various regular shipping channels.

The Army Corps of Engineers puts out a monthly bulletin on lake levels on the five Great Lakes. I get that and find it very interesting. Did you feed material into them?

We weren't directly involved with that. What we did, what those reports are based on, is gauge stations that they have set up around the Great Lakes. Twenty years ago a lot of them were still manual where they would record on a paper graph as the lake level went up and down during the day and from month to month over the course of the year. But they would replace these paper rolls periodically. Nowadays it's all automated. It's all done through satellites and it's all digital. But the office out of Detroit is where that report is generated. They have a number of gauging stations all over the Great Lakes where they maintain a continuous record which goes back now over 150, almost 200 years – 175 years, probably – of what the lake levels had been over time, over the years. It is very interesting.

How do they get accurate measurement of the lake level when there's wave action going on all the time? How do they isolate that?

There's two things. First of all, every one of those gauging stations has been accurately surveyed in, which is another thing we did as part of our job with the Corps of

Engineers. There's a benchmark – probably several – in close vicinity of every one of those gauging stations to which accurate elevations have been surveyed to. So they have a very accurate, a very precise elevation to measure from as far as what the lake level is. And what they do to dampen the effects of waves and things like that is they will have a large tube – we used to use an 8” square wooden chamber, which would be six or eight feet long, and closed at the bottom with a small hole; usually like a quarter or half-inch hole in the bottom. And you'd put this down in the water so the chamber would fill up. But because you only had that very small hole, it didn't have the reaction time to go up and down with the waves. So it would simply go up and down as the general water level went up and down. Then, what you'd do, is put one of these recording gauges on the top of that tube – and nowadays they use plastic tubes that are six or eight inches in diameter. And they have a float that goes down and sits on top of the water, and comes up and goes over a wheel on the gauge and usually has a weight on the other end to keep it tight. And it's hooked into a tooth arrangement on the old mechanical one. Like I say, nowadays it's all digital and everything. But as the water level goes up and down, that float goes up and down. And because the connection is kept tight it will register on the gauge what the water level is as it goes up and down during the day, and from day to day and from month to month. And that chamber with the very small hole that lets the water in is what dampens all the wave effects.

That's amazing. I've always wondered about that – how they measured the water when the wind is blowing.

They had one over here in Detroit Harbor, I believe.

So you spent until 1991 working on these projects.

Right, as a civilian, to the various harbors up and down from Indiana through Illinois and the eastern half of Wisconsin; the western half of Lake Michigan. I did that until 1991 as a civilian. I actually came up here as a civilian on several occasions because there's a federal channel in the Detroit Harbor where the ferries go in and out. There's also a small federal channel at the mouth of Jackson Harbor so the fishing tugs and the Karfi can get in and out. So I was up here on several occasions surveying those water levels. I also got one summer where I was up here for a couple of months – several weeks – because, as I said these gauging stations have accurate elevations surveyed into them, and also in the area where these federal channels are that we have to check the depth of, we have to have accurate horizontal location as well, usually north and south grid coordinates. The survey control which had been put into the two harbors on Washington Island here was really old and a lot of it was being destroyed and wasn't usable anymore. So they somewhat reluctantly sent me up here for a couple of months one summer to completely redo the survey control in both Jackson Harbor and Detroit Harbor, which basically required that I run a survey from Boyers Bluff because there's a very accurate – what they call a first order of the highest accuracy – survey mark underneath the light up on Boyers Bluff. So we surveyed from there, down the main road, and jumped over to the harbor, around Detroit Harbor, around the ferry dock area and put in a number of survey markers, a couple of which still exist; most of them are

gone – this was back in the mid to early ‘80’s. We jumped across the harbor to Range Line Road, ran up Range Line Road to Jackson Harbor, put in several control points in and around Jackson Harbor – one or two of which are still in existence ...

Are those the cement markers you spoke of?

Right. They’re brass disks set either in a concrete post in the ground – which a couple of them are. Or there’s one out on the concrete base of the light at the entrance to Jackson Harbor. Ice has moved that, unfortunately, so the survey information is no longer accurate on that point, but the brass disk is still out there cemented into the concrete base. And then back to ... [Boyer’s Bluff] to close the survey out.

That was a nice ...

Good assignment.

Yeah, being able to stay up here for the summer.

So you retired in 1991?

No. This was strictly a civilian job. All during that time, from 1976 on, I was also a drilling Reserve unit soldier in a unit down in Sheboygan. I was in the Sheboygan unit for eight years as a lieutenant and captain. My first year I was there I was the battery training officer for this friend of mine who was the battery commander who got me into the unit. Then I was a battery commander for that unit for four years – it was a field artillery training battery. Basically, the unit’s responsibility was to do the field artillery training for basic trainee soldiers – like I talked about a little bit earlier at Fort Sill. We were the Reserve back-up to Fort Sill if they had to expand capability in case of a large-scale war, or if they got reduced manpower at Fort Sill, they would bring us in as Reserve soldiers to do the training at Fort Sill.

So I had been a battery commander of a field artillery battery for four years, which was about 20 enlisted people, mostly senior NCOs. About half of them were drill sergeants and half of them were instructors – E6’s and E7’s – who actually did the basic artillery training for the basic trainees. We would do that. We’d practice that on the weekends and then go down to Fort Sill every summer for two weeks and actually do it with the real trainee soldiers down there when they had what’s called a ‘surge’ down at the training centers. They’d get a larger than normal number of trainees they’d have to get through during June, July and August every year. So they would appreciate the extra manpower that we would bring down. We were only there for two weeks, but we’d give them a hand during their real peak period.

Like I say, I was battery commander there for four years. Then the last three years I was in that unit I was the battalion operations officer. That was from 1976 until 1984. Then I switched Reserve assignments up to the Reserve unit up in Manitowoc – still in the 84th Training Division. At that time it was the field artillery training committee. They had reorganized and put all the artillery instructors into one organization. Like I say, when I was a battery commander I had instructors in my battery. But they had reorganized that and moved all the instructors into one organization which was headquartered in Manitowoc.

So I was the chief of the self-propelled training division for the committee in Manitowoc for three years. Once again I had, in this case, about 40 or 50 senior NCOs – mostly E6's and E7's – and they were all the experts in training these new trainees in the basic level 1 skills as a field artillery canner. So we would once again practice that on the weekend drills and go to Fort Sill every year for a couple of weeks. Or sometimes we would go to Fort McCoy for that two weeks, when we had a lot of our own people we'd have to train.

Where is Fort McCoy?

Fort McCoy is over in western Wisconsin.

Is that near the River?

Yes. It's about 45 miles east of La Crosse. It's right where the interstate 90-94 divides: 94 goes west to La Crosse and 90 goes up to Minneapolis. Fort McCoy is kind of right in the 'Y' where that's created. It's between the small towns of Sparta and Tomah.

I know right where that is.

In fact, I did some training there when I was an ROTC cadet. The first time I went to Fort McCoy was as a young ROTC cadet in the spring of 1968. They were doing some training for the juniors every year in ROTC. At that time, between your junior and senior year the cadets went to a six-week summer camp. They were doing some training at Fort McCoy in the spring of that year, which they did every year, for the juniors who were going to be going to their summer camp that year – to give them some extra training and some polish before they went to their six-week summer camp.

So I'd been going to, at that time 'Camp' McCoy since the spring of 1968.

So some of our annual training, both in Sheboygan and in Manitowoc, were at Camp McCoy. One time we went up to Camp Ripley up in Minnesota, which is four or five hours north of Minneapolis. It's up at the headwaters of the Mississippi River, near a small town where my grandfather grew up – Little Falls, Minnesota. We got to go there for annual training one year.

How long were you actually in service?

I was four years on active duty and 21 years as a drilling reservist. I retired out of the uniform in 1996. From 1984 until 1987 I was in this artillery training committee in Manitowoc, and then after that the next three years, from 1987 through 1989, I was the battalion executive officer for one of the training battalions we had at that time headquartered in Kewaunee. That made it convenient because for those years both my Reserve job and my civilian job were in the same town.

I was the battalion executive officer for that battalion in Kewaunee for three years. In the last year of that – 1989 – the 84th Reserve Division that we were all a part of started the series of large-scale mobilization exercises. As I said, our responsibility in the

Reserves was to back up the training center – in the one brigade that was artillery training – was to back up the training center at Fort Sill. We also had armored training brigades that were there to back up the armor training at Fort Knox. And another brigade that was cavalry training that was located out in Nebraska that did the basic skill level training for cavalry soldiers.

In case of a full all-out mobilization war, we would end up taking over a location of a major active duty base like Fort Hood, because all of the active duty combat units would be gone. They would go to wherever the war was – probably in Europe at that time, during the Cold War. And we would come in to Fort Hood with the full division – all the brigades – and we would set up a new training center to do all that training because of all the recruits coming in for a full scale European type war.

So in 1989 we started a series of exercises to test that. That started in February of 1989. We actually set up a small training center at the National Guard facility called North Fort Hood – on the north side of Fort Hood – where, between February when we started setting up and by May we were finished and closed everything down and went back home.

We basically ran two batteries of trainees who would have gone to Fort Sill for their artillery training – their basic training. We ran them through the same training that they would have gotten at Fort Sill, but we did it at Fort Hood. We did it all with Army Reserve resources – basically the 84th Training Division that I was in.

Fort Sill active duty people were there to evaluate and provide quality control to make sure we were doing it right and doing it correctly. Once again, at the end of the whole exercise they gave us an overall evaluation of the exercise.

One of the things they set up to provide some continuity throughout that several month period, was they brought in a number of Reserve soldiers on active duty tours that extended over that whole period. They would locate those active duty soldiers in certain key positions throughout this organization they created to run this training center, one of these was the battalion ‘XO’ for the training battalion. I volunteered and was accepted to be the battalion XO for that job.

What do you mean by ‘XO?’

Executive Officer, pretty much like deputy commander – ran the battalion staff
So I spent from February until May of 1989 on active duty at Fort Hood helping them set up and then running this training battalion as the executive officer for the training battalion, and then closing things down and going back to Wisconsin in May.

During that period we would get the bulk of our soldiers who ran the center would be there for two week annual training. They came from – in my case throughout the battalion organization I was running – they came from battalions from throughout the 84th Training Division. So we got six or seven rotations. Every two weeks I would get in a new battalion commander, a new battalion staff, we had one or two of the NCOs in the battalion who were on active duty like I was. Then we had two batteries. And the battery commanders and the senior drill sergeants – one drill sergeant per platoon – were on active duty. But they would get – every two weeks – they would get in a different first sergeant, the other drill sergeants and then the training organization. We had a few people there on active duty, but the bulk of the people rotated every two weeks. So

you're running a regular active duty training cycle, and every two weeks you're getting a new group of people to run the place.

You're starting all over again.

Basically, except for that small group of active duty people like myself who were on special active duty to provide continuity. And that was usually a 24-36 hour overlap between the two increments. It was well-planned and well-run. But it was an interesting operation. You basically turned over 80% of your organization every two weeks. I did that as a special active duty soldier for those several months in 1989.

Did the civilian job ever interfere? I mean, did that interfere with your civilian duties? Did they ever have a complaint or a conflict?

Yes. Interesting that you bring that up. Yes. They were not happy with this. Because of the way federal law is written, they could not stop it. There are federal laws that prohibit discrimination and retaliation against Reserve and National Guard soldiers in all the services from their civilian employers. But they were not happy about it.

I had a running battle, if you will, with one of the senior people there. He made life as miserable for me as he could, and I basically reciprocated. Whenever I got orders to go on active duty I would take them. Beyond the normal two weeks of annual training that you did every year with your unit, there was also schooling. I did my officer basic course in 1971 at Fort Sill. But in 1977, I think it was, I started every summer for four years, two weeks of extra active duty to go through my officer advance course as a Reserve soldier. Then in 1980 I started Command and General Staff College. That was an extra weekend in Milwaukee every month, which didn't necessarily affect my civilian job. But it was two weeks of extra active duty every year to go through the summer two-week phases to go through the Command and General Staff College.

Along with, in the late 1970's, early '80's, I got involved with the Army Reserve pistol shooting program. And I shot as a member of the fourth and fifth Army Reserve pistol teams on and off for about ten or fifteen years. I wasn't able to go to all the matches every year because of my other military requirements, but twice a year I would go on active duty for a week or two with the pistol team, which didn't endear me with my civilian employer.

Did you continue, then, in the civil service?

Right. In 1991 – as I mentioned, I worked for the Corps of Engineers until 1991. Let me back up a little bit.

In 1989 we had this mobilization exercise down in Fort Hood and I was gone for several months. Which, once again, did not endear me with them. At the end of which, in an old Army tradition because I had done a really good job down there, according to what they were saying, my reward, if you will, was to get dragged kicking and screaming on my weekend Reserve unit assignment down to division headquarters in Milwaukee. Like I say, at that time I was in Kewaunee and getting as far away from headquarters as I could get, which is what I wanted.

But they reassigned me after I got back from that operation in 1989 to division headquarters as the assistant G3 operations officer for planning. So I started drilling my weekend drills and annual training down in Milwaukee at division headquarters. And my basic responsibility was to plan the next of these exercises, which was going to be two years later in 1991. We were going back to Fort Hood. We weren't doing the artillery training – we weren't doing the big, long twelve week artillery training cycle. In 1991 we were only going to do an eight week basic training cycle – just plain old basic training; no field artillery training. So my weekend job as a reservist in 1989 and 1990, leading up to 1991, was to be the primary planner for the division to set this thing up. Once again, this took a lot of extra time – weeks of annual training and that kind of stuff.

And then, leading up to the actual exercise in 1991, well, first of all we had Desert Storm just before – in the fall of 1990 and spring of 1991: Desert Shield and then Desert Storm. So I was involved in the mobilization at Fort McCoy again. The infrastructure at Fort McCoy, of course, is designed primarily for training Reserve units. They do year-round training there, but usually are busiest during the summer when most of the units are doing their annual training. But Fort McCoy is also what's called a 'mobilization station.' When the Army needs to mobilization, like in this case going to Saudi Arabia for Desert Storm, the operations at someplace like Fort McCoy will increase five or ten-fold. So they have to bring a lot of extra people in to run that operation. In December of 1990 and January of 1991, they had a big surge of mobilized units and reservists coming through Fort McCoy, getting ready for when the ground war started in the spring, or at the end of January of 1991.

So they were looking for some additional support. There were about 41 of us from the 84th Division who volunteered to go up. We were there for about six weeks in December of 1990 and January of 1991, basically helping the Army readiness group run the training side of the house. We were running ranges. We were mostly instructors and people that ran rifle ranges, machine gun ranges, grenade ranges – all the basic infantry weapons that the mobilized soldiers had to be qualified on and had to be trained on. Because sometimes they were getting newer equipment than they had back in their Reserve units. So I brought up, as the OIC, the office in charge, I brought up about forty NCOs and lieutenants from the 84th Division – all the various units in the 84th Division – and we were on active duty for six weeks at Fort McCoy helping this training organization basically run a number of their qualification ranges and instructional ranges and things like that during December of 1990 and January of 1991. So I was up there doing that during Desert Storm.

In January 1991 I went back to my job planning this operation. Although at that time, before the four-day war, we weren't sure it was going to happen – if the war in Iraq in 1991 had not turned out as quick and as easy as it did we were probably going to have to cancel that operation.

But in any case, I went back to set that operation up. As I mentioned, in the previous exercise we had done, there was a series of critical people who were there for the whole operation on special active duty. And I went down there again to Fort Hood. In this case it was summer – May to August – as deputy commander of the training center. I had moved up one level of command from the battalion where I was the executive officer in 1989, I now was the deputy commander or executive officer for the

training itself in 1991. Since I had been basically planning it for the past two years, I was definitely the logical person to do that.

So once again, every two weeks I got a new brigade commander and his brigade staff, and the same thing about the battalion and battery I talked about earlier that would come in. We did the second exercise with the 84th Division – those ex and battery I talked about earlier that would come in. We did the second exercise with the 84th Division – those exercises were called ‘roving caissons,’ – Roving Caisson 1 in 1989 and Roving Caisson 2 in 1991.

And at this point in time, in the summer of 1991, I had been working with this Corps of Engineers job for fifteen years as a civilian, and I was 40 years old. It was an outdoor job four months out of the year, which I didn’t mind in July and August. But in January and February I was not really in-tune with spending my day out with the snow mobile out on the ice of Green Bay or some other harbor, drilling holes in the ice to check the water depth. So I basically decided at this point in time I needed to make a career change.

I had gone, on several occasions when I was at Fort McCoy, to a school they have up there called the ARTech – the Army Reserve Readiness Training Center – which was a school that the Army Reserve had set up at Fort McCoy. Basically they train their full-time unit support people: The civilians who are in the Reserve unit full-time, Monday through Friday, and the active duty soldiers who are assigned to those Reserve units and are there regular time, 9:00-5:00, Monday through Friday, to keep the Reserve units operating between weekend drills and annual training. This organization was set up to provide them functional training. Usually it’s one-week and two-week courses of instruction in personnel, finance, logistics, training and things like that.

One of the major additional duties I had throughout my period in the 1980’s and into the 1990’s with the 84th Division, one of my additional duties was as a mobilization planner for the various units I had been in, including planning for these mobilization exercises. So I was rather knowledgeable and experienced in the mobilization planning it would take to bring a Reserve or National Guard unit onto active duty at an installation like Fort McCoy, get them trained up, qualified and certified that they could do their active duty mission, and then ship them out to wherever the war zone is. One of the two-week courses that this school at Fort McCoy taught was a mobilization planners course, where, for two weeks, they would train the NCOs and lieutenants in the various Reserve units all the things they had to have prepared ahead of time for when the phone call comes in saying a unit is being mobilized. And most of those were civilian instructors. It was about 50-50 at that time: active duty military instructors and civilian instructors. So in the summer of 1991, while I was in Fort Hood on this mobilization exercise, I applied for a civilian job as an instructor with that school. And while I was there that summer, I was accepted. So I transferred out of my civilian job while I was on active duty at Fort Hood in the summer of 1991 from a civilian job with the Corps of Engineers in Kewaunee to a Department of the Army civilian job at Fort McCoy with this ARTech school.

So, when I got off active duty in August of 1991 I went directly to Fort McCoy, reported in there and started the civilian job as an instructor working this mobilization planning course at Fort McCoy.

How long did that last?

I did that for ten and a half years. I did that as a civilian from August of 1991 until April of 2002 – the spring of '02 – during which time I stayed in the Reserves until 1996 when I retired out of the Reserves.

Anyway, it's interesting the way the two dovetailed, because after I got back from the Reserve side of the house – after I got back from the 1991 mission – I moved on from the G3 operations and training office in the 84th Division headquarters over to the G2, which was the intelligence planning office. They were also responsible for the mobilization planning for the division. So my weekend job then for the next year was that I was the mobilization and training planner for the division, so I was doing that as a Reservist and I was also doing that as a civilian. So it was a nice dovetailing to my civilian job. That lasted for almost a year.

Then, in the summer of 1992 I went over to our training brigade in the division as the brigade S3. This friend of mine from college who got me into the Reserves in 1976 was the brigade commander, and he needed an operations officer. He offered me the job and I transferred down from division headquarters down to the brigade headquarters. From 1992 to 1993 I was the brigade operations officer for the training brigade in the 84th Division.

In 1993 I made lieutenant colonel, and that was a major's job, so I had to get out of that job and find a lieutenant colonel's job as a drilling Reservist. And, like I said, in the early 1990's that was one of the draw-down stages after Desert Storm and a lot of Reserve units were being eliminated and consolidated. That summer of 1993 into 1994 – the 84th Training Division I had been in for seventeen years as a drilling Reservist was losing, I think, two brigades. And that was five jobs that were going away. So they didn't have any openings for me as a lieutenant colonel in the 84th Training Division.

So in 1993 I started looking around and found a staff job down in the reserve unit in Chicago at Forest Park at the 86th Army Reserve command, in their operations and training staff again as chief of their mobilization plans division. That was a lieutenant colonel's job and it was open. Once again, with my experience both as a drilling Reservist and with my civilian job, I was extremely qualified for the job. So I went down there and interviewed. They accepted me and in September of 1993 I transferred from the 84th Division down to the 86th ARCommand as chief of their mobilization plans division. I did that from 1993 until I retired in 1996 – in June of 1996.

I had 25 years between active duty and the Reserves. In 1996 the 86th ARCom was one of the Army Reserve units that was being inactivated – once again with the draw down in the 1990's after Desert Storm and after the end of the Cold War. So I just figured after 25 years – I qualified for my Reserve retirement when I had 20 good years – and I figured with 25 years in I had done pretty much everything I anticipated doing and it was time for some of the other guys to run with the ball, if you will. So I decided to retire out of the green uniform in June of 1996 – out of the 86th ARCom.

But, as I said, at that time I was also the civilian instructor for mobilization at Fort McCoy. That lasted until the spring of 2002 when I was offered a promotion as a GS employee to a job with a training support brigade with an Army unit at Fort Meade, Maryland, where I would be doing mostly mobilization operations in national disaster preparation work.

So I went to Fort Meade, which is just outside Baltimore, in the spring of 2002 for this civilian promotion. I did that for a year.

Isn't Fort Meade also the Secret Service?

No, not Secret Service. That's the National Security Agency. At Fort Meade the NSA has their headquarters, which is a huge, extremely classified, extremely secure facility that was co-located with us at Fort Meade. They had their own entrance gate, their own security and basically they were stationed at Fort Meade but we had no real contact with them. Because the National Security Agency is so highly secure and so highly classified that we pretty much stayed away from that area.

It's physically at the same location. I would drive by it on the way going to work. I could see it back through the trees – all their big satellite dishes.

You were in civilian service until 2002?

Until 2006: 2006 is when I retired as a civilian. In 2002 I went out to Fort Meade as a civilian – as the mobilization planner and disaster response planner for this training brigade at Fort Meade.

And a year later, after I got out there, I got a phone call back from Fort McCoy, from this civilian personnel office at Fort McCoy, that the same job I was doing there had opened up at Fort McCoy. They also had a training support brigade at Fort McCoy and a civilian position for mobilization and disaster planning. And that individual had taken a job in Germany, in Europe. So that job was open. I was on a list, so rather than going through the whole process of publishing the job and recruiting for that job, they just called me up and said I was qualified for the job back at Fort McCoy and asked if I wanted to take a lateral transfer and go back to Fort McCoy. And because all of my family is back here – my mother is here on the island and my brother is in Chicago, and all my family, aunts and uncles, cousins are in the Milwaukee area; most of my immediate family is in this area – I decided to take the offer. So in the spring of 2003 I transferred back to Fort McCoy as the mobilization planner and emergency preparedness planner for the brigade at Fort McCoy. Which meant I was very busy because they were involved in the mobilization for Iraq and Afghanistan and that sort of stuff. So I was very busy as a mobilization planner in that civilian job in 2003 at Fort McCoy.

Then a year later I got offered another promotion. In the spring of 2004 they were standing up – increasing – they were adding another team to an organization down at First Army headquarters down in Atlanta; a training organization down there. They were adding a third team down there. Once again I had qualified on a previous list for what's called an exercise officer's job, which is another civilian promotion to GS12, down in Atlanta. So they offered me that and I took that. So in August of 2004 I moved down there and went to the First Army headquarters at Fort Gillem, Georgia, which is just south of Atlanta, outside the beltline. So I moved down there in August 2004 into this exercise officer position.

What that organization did was they did training and evaluation exercises for National Guard civil support teams. Every state and territory has a small – around 22 people – small team, and they're all active duty National Guard and Air National Guard

soldiers and airmen. These civil support teams are a small group, as I said, 22 people, extremely well trained. They go through years of training in chemical, biological and nuclear warfare. Their mission is to be able to respond to terrorist weapons of mass destruction incidents. They provide, like I said, an extremely well trained and qualified and extremely well equipped with some extremely sophisticated equipment personnel to determine exactly what is there – what chemical or biological agent, what radiological sources are there; what the area that's contaminated is; what the level of contamination is – and they provide a very valuable, very highly qualified resource to the local civilian fire, police, emergency management people from the state and county insofar as the technical aspects of what's there, where and how much it is and how to deal with it – how to mitigate it. The medical effects: They have a small medical group as part of this 22 people. They are extremely well trained, and they have some extremely sophisticated equipment.

Every state has one of these?

Every state has one of these.

So that would probably be in Chicago for Illinois. What about in the downstate areas?

No, actually the one for Chicago is surprisingly located in Peoria. The one from Illinois is in Peoria.

So it covers more of the state?

It covers more of the state. There's been talk of making a second. Some of the states have two. Texas has two, New York has two teams and California has two teams because of the size of the population. So in time Illinois may get a second team. I heard some rumors about that but I don't think it's happened. The Wisconsin team for example, is located in Madison, which fairly centrally located as far as the major population is concerned.

But these National Guard teams are extremely well-trained and equipped to handle any of the WMD type terrorist incidents. And what our organization did was we had a group of about eight personnel who would plan, coordinate, set up, write and execute exercises to not only train them, but periodically evaluate them – whether or not they were capable of doing their mission.

So I got picked up as one of the exercise officers on one of these teams. I was not a chemical officer. I had the standard nuclear, biological and chemical training that anybody in the Army gets. But everybody else on the team were all retired chemical corps officers or NCOs; extremely well trained. We had at least one guy who had retired from one of these state civil support teams, and as a civilian came on board our team. Our medical person was a retired Navy Seal. He had been a Navy Seal medic on active duty for 20 years. Once again, highly qualified people. So we would go around –our team would go around, set up and run these training exercises.

Did you go to the individual state?

Right. Our team was – once again, a little bit of serendipity here – the guy who ran the organization down there at Fort Gillem took a look at me and said, “Alderfer: You’re from Wisconsin, you know the Midwest. I’m going to put you on the Midwest team,” which was the team they were forming up. So the team I was on was responsible for Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia and Kentucky. We would get to each of these states a couple of times a year, either just for training – setting up and running a training exercise. We actually ran a full-blown exercise about every 18 months in each of the states. But we would do small exercises and training exercises with them.

Wouldn’t that take about a couple of weeks you had to be down there for?

Each one would take about a week. You would make several trips to set it up – two or three or four days at a time – to coordinate with the state headquarters. Because you try to coordinate in the facility you’re going to use. Because you’d try to find facilities like arenas, stadiums, shopping malls – places that were likely, high priority targets – and that’s where you’d try to run your exercise. So you would make two or three trips before the exercise setting up with the state headquarters, with the local government people, the owners of the facility and that sort of thing. And the actual exercise you would usually be there for four or five days.

The exercise itself usually ran around 18 hours. It would start usually at ‘0 dark 30’ in the morning. You would call the unit commander. It was unknown to him – he knew it would be somewhere during that week, but didn’t know exactly where or when. So you’d call him at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning and say “X just happened.” You’d read him a scenario and tell him he had 90 minutes to get all his people together at the headquarters and be ready to go, get on the road – or whatever the timeframe was.

One of us from the evaluation team would already be at their headquarters when the call came in. We’d record when the first guy came in and the last guy, that they started doing this or that – out of our eight man team we’d have people scattered wherever they were keeping track and evaluating what they were doing as far as the preparation and movement to and operation at the site.

Was the grading fairly severe?

Yes. It was pretty much ‘pass/fail.’ We had a several page evaluation guide and most of it was critical. There were a few things – if they didn’t get it 100% right they wouldn’t necessarily fail the operation. But a lot of it that if they didn’t do it right the whole thing was a fail.

Wow.

And we occasionally had to do that – on rare occasions – we had to tell them we’d be back. Then we’d set up another one in like six weeks or two months. This happened

once or twice while I was there where we had to go back and redo the test because they failed the first one.

So you actually were doing a lot of traveling around the Midwest.

Yes. Our headquarters was in Atlanta, but we were on the road two or three weeks out of the month. In my case, because I was not a trained chemical officer, I was doing a lot of training. When I wasn't working on an exercise, I would be going to one of these schools that the Army and Air Force runs – the Department of Energy and so forth – so I could get my technical skills up to speed.

Basically there were two exercise officers on each team. One guy ran team, and I was the deputy. And we would alternate exercises. Jay was the guy's name I worked for. He would be responsible for an exercise where he would do all the prior planning and all the prior coordination. He would write it with help from the rest of the guys on the team. He would set it up, he would get everything squared away and would be in charge of running it while we were there. And I would be the guy who was his deputy. I would be the guy who would be running what was called the 'white' cell or 'control' cell where I would be running the messages from other people. I would be interjecting media requests from the governor and things like that. I would basically be running the exercise control cell. And the next exercise we'd flip. I would be the one responsible for writing it, setting it up, coordinating it, getting everything all together.

We had a chemical laboratory we'd take with us if it was a chemical scenario. There was a biological laboratory.

More than just litmus paper.

Oh, yeah. More than that.

So Jay and I would alternate. He would run one and I would help him ... [run it]. Then I would be responsible for the next one, which, once again, would take several months to set up. So I worked on these.

We were traveling a lot. We were on the road at least two or three weeks – at least two weeks a month. In my case it was probably three because I was doing a lot of the training and stuff.

So you're pretty well satisfied that throughout the nation we have some pretty savvy people ready and waiting.

We have some very qualified people. They're not going to stop anything from happening, but they're going to keep it ...

The response is there.

Yes. The response is as good as we can possible make it. They should be able to keep it from getting worse, mitigate it as quickly as possible, handle the medical effects as well as possible.

Do you work with FEMA?

I worked more with FEMA when I was working with a training support brigade disaster planner. FEMA gets a little bit involved with this. FEMA does not get that much involved with terrorist activities.

It's more nature.

Right. That would be Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice – those people we work with. FEMA is more responsible for natural disasters – hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, fires. And non-terrorism incidents – chemical accidents and things like that.

How long did this last?

I did that until November of 2006.

I thank you for taking the time, Dave, to tell us all about this. We'll sign off now and let you rest! I do appreciate it. We'll end and thank Dave for his service to our country and sitting with us here today.

And thank you for your service.