



## **Jim Alexander**

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2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the First Infantry Division and Air Force  
October, 1960–July, 1981

I grew up in Van Horn, Texas, about 100 miles east of El Paso. When I got out of high school, I did not have the money to go to college so I enlisted in the Air Force and asked for electronics work. I did get into the electronics field and I learned to repair equipment in a teletype relay center.

My first assignment out of tech school was to San Pablo, Spain, where we monitored communications that were sent from (areas going into Europe). The highlight of that tour of duty occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis. We were able to monitor the communication going through the center from Washington to Moscow. It was quite informative. I spent three years there. During my first trip to Spain, the base was very small. We were base personnel and we lived on the economy. I was surrounded by Spaniards all day, every day. One day I bought a motorcycle and got lots of attention and conversation because it was a BMW. I learned to speak, read, and write Spanish in about 6 months.

I took a break from the service and was out about nine or ten months. I re-enlisted, got into radio maintenance and went to school. I was assigned to a tactical squadron in New Mexico: 727<sup>th</sup> detachment 3 where we played Army. I really did not know that tactical meant just that. We moved from detachment 3 to Austin in October, and in November they sent nineteen of us to Ben Hoa, Viet Nam, a large airbase near Saigon. When I

asked the people in personnel where the antennae farms and things radio maintenance persons would be using were, they chuckled and said I was going with the Army. Assigned to the Army, I was in Viet Nam during 1967 and 1968. When assigned as a radio operator with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the First Infantry Division, I did not know what to expect. We had a base camp, but we really did not stay there. We were regular combat infantrymen who controlled radio air strikes and called in air or artillery for targets. We did sweeps where units were looking for Viet Cong. We did night duty or ambushes. In January, I took a temporary assignment helping two other airmen rebuild a site that had been overrun by the enemy before the TET offensive in 1968. We were stationed on a rock hill with an oil base runway that served the base camp Duc Pho. VC broke through, but they were suppressed. I did not find the morale in Viet Nam bad at all. People understood why we were there: we were doing our job. There were some complaints, but not really that many from those I was around.

When my friends and I left Viet Nam, we decided the worst assignment we could get would be to SAC, the Strategic Air Command. That is what we got. We went to Francis C. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming where we repaired missile communications and monitored and repaired all communications going into the missile sites in Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska. After two years I got a nice assignment. I went back to same base in Spain, but it had been down-sized, and I was there only two years before being sent back to San Antonio. At Kelly Air Force Base I was in charge of the Nav Aids. We repaired equipment for the aircraft monitor and controlling devices of Nav Aids for a couple of years.

Then spent a really nice three-year period in San Vito, Italy, where I was chief engineer of an AFR TS station of the Armed Forces Radio and Television Network. We built an on-site TV station and provided all entertainment services for the base. I went to McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas, and worked with a different type missile altogether. Wyoming was Minutemen, but Kansas was the Atlas. I was there for three years and I retired from McConnell after 21 years in service.

After being discharged, I took the service manager position with Curtis Mathis in Wichita, Kansas. Being a manager was not what I wanted to do, so I quit and went to Wichita State University to become a teacher. While teaching math and science, I met a ninth grader who could not read. In order to learn how to teach students to read, I changed my major to elementary education. Recently I retired as a bilingual teacher from Birdwell Elementary in Tyler. I spent five years in Spain and speak Spanish well. I taught the students English as well as the curriculum.

Looking back, I can see God's Providence in my life. I saw things that changed the way I thought about everything. I grew up in a Christian home, but I saw what lack of Christianity could do to people. Indeed, my life has been blessed. I came to Tyler in 1991 and to Green Acres year later. I met Pat, a member here, and started coming with

her. I was saved early in life at the age of 8 or 9. Yes, every place I have ever been had a chapel. It was always open. When I was in Spain the first time, Franco was still in power, and it was against the law to be Protestant. We worshiped on the base. A lot of change had taken place when I went to Spain the second time. I benefitted from being in service. I have seen thirty countries located all around the world. Pacific and Atlantic and much of the area close to the equator. Viet Nam is beautiful country with a nice culture. I had traveled only to Arizona before I went into service. The military experiences changed my whole life's direction. I was able to see things I never would have seen otherwise.