

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

National Guard History

Personal Experience

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HENRY CHANCE

Interviewed

by

David Arms

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: HENRY CHANCE

INTERVIEWER: David Arms

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A: This is an interview with Mr. Henry S. Chance by David Arms for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project, on May 7, 1976, at approximately 2:05 in the afternoon, at the National Guard Armory on Rayen Avenue.

Mr. Chance, could you start this interview by possibly giving me a little bit of your background, where you were born, brought up, and educated?

C: I was born and raised in Niles. I attended Niles public schools. I volunteered for the United States Army on February 12, 1941, and was sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for the thirty-seventh division. That was one year prior. It was known as the old peacetime. We were stationed at Camp Shelby, Mississippi until Japan bombed Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941. A division at that time was known as the four square divisions, four infantry regiments, command groups. It was commanded by General Beighlter, a well-known two-star general from the state of Ohio. As you well know, the thirty-seventh division has a wonderful history in World War II.

A: Why did you join the Army to start with?

C: In October of 1940, they had the big registration and I volunteered for the twelve month period at that time. Then they started inducting from Niles to greater Youngstown area, which included Niles, Warren, Youngstown, and Campbell. The first big induction left from Youngstown on approximately January 19, 1941. We were all sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, as filler for the thirty-seventh division. At that time it

was peacetime.

A: I see.

C: The plan was to be registered in October, 1940, when they activated the hiring in the National Guard and the thirty-seventh division. They were sent to Camp Shelby.

A: So when you went down there, what did you train for? What did you do when you were there?

C: Our training consisted of first basic infantry. Then after infantry we were given branch qualification. I was fortunate enough to have some wonderful services in the medical service field as a medical technician. The company aid man walked with the troops and stuff like that. It was very good experience. It had schooling specializing in first aid then. The primary purpose of the training was to be always ready for combat. As the company aid man you are the first one who is being moved. Being on the tactical unit, I would have extra morphine. I would put splints on. Of course, in medical procedure you are under the old department in the Army policy.

Well, after we finished basic training, then we started having what we call maneuver problems in and around Camp Shelby, Mississippi. That was well-known for the pinetrees. We cleared them in June of 1941. We were sent to Louisiana. It was called a division meeting. We maneuvered and slept in the field in pup tents and lived in a combat situation for thirty days. Then we returned to Camp Shelby in July of 1941. In August of 1941 we returned to Louisiana. It was known at that time as the biggest Army maneuver that the United States Army ever had. It was the whole United States Army including the old horse cavalry.

A: What happened when World War II started?

C: This becomes a little bit interesting. As you know in those days money was tight. They speak of money today, but then after you finished four months of training you were paid \$21 a month. You had a bed; you got three meals a day; and you got paid once a month. After you completed the four months training, you were then given \$30 a month. Then you worked and performed for the first stripe, which was known as the PFC rating. It took a lot of doing because they didn't come easy. When you made PFC, you got \$36 a month. Then when you made corporal, you got \$40. It was known as the butt side; you made \$44. This was all prior to Pearl Harbor.

The rank in those days was really rank. There was a fine line between the lower rank and the higher rank, which was

the enlisted men, and a very wide line between the officers and them. It was a tough thing to get through. The discipline was really tough. There was no playing around; there was not anything like that anywhere you stood. The discipline was hard, but it was good especially when it was fair. The only time there were any problems created was when the discipline fell by the wayside and got lax. The inspectors came in and made corrections right then and there. There were no long, drawn out affairs. The discipline was hard, but it was tough and it was good.

I returned to Camp Shelby with rear detachment in October of 1941. We had straws to see who was going to go home for Christmas, and who was going to stay at camp over Christmas, because it was an amendment to the selective service act that there was an extension of six months which they claimed at that time that it would take that long to process you out of the Army after you had serviced. Well, as you well know and I speak the truth, the day they bombed the Harbor, we were playing pinochle. It passed the time away. We knew who was going home first. Of course, we still didn't know who was going to go for the New Year. But that little bomb they started down there wiped everything out. We were alerted and on standby. We were informed to stay on standby. Then in January of 1942, they automatically reorganized the divisions and made it from what they used to call a four square division, which was four infantry regiments to three infantry regiments. We were highly mobilized. They were duties like the Gulf of Mexico, Aruba, and South America. Most of the division came to you in time in February of 1942. They stayed there until June 14 and then were shipped to the west coast. I was sent to Fort Sill in Oklahoma. I was assigned to the 17th Field Artillery Brigade and trained there. Then I went to England. But an overall picture was quite an experience.

A: Did you get to see action very well during World War II?

C: Yes. I participated in four campaigns including . . . we each had four minors for D-Day at France. I was assigned to an evacuation station on the beach. I was with the combat engineers. I went in the beach first. The Navy calls her "Beach Master," charting the beach. We had to have evacuation because we had space on the beach.

A: Then what happened after the war?

C: Well, during the war I went all the way to Germany and saw the concentration camps and stuff. The Army had the point system. Most of us had more than enough points to get back home. There was a little thing called the MOS, Military Occupational Specialty. I had picked up a course in April of 1941 as a personnel clerk and never used it. In July of 1945, when I was slated to return to the States, I was called

to headquarters and assigned to the thirty-sixth infantry division. They stated to me that I couldn't go home because I had critical MOS specialty to attend to and that I was now part of that in that division. I stayed there until January of 1946.

I returned home and got married. Then I joined the U.S. Army Reserve system and stayed in that for three years and was discharged in 1949. I enlisted in the Ohio National Guard August 23, 1951.

A: Why did you join the reserves when you came back?

C: That is a good question. These stations, like Indiantown, Pennsylvania, stressed a strong military reserve system at the reduced strength of the regular armed forces. With a little thought, it would be nice because the conditions overseas . . . they were ready to start the Marshall Plan. There was a lot of hearsay. You didn't know what to believe, but to the dictates of your own conscious, you felt, well, what's another three years?

To go back to when they bombed the Harbor, there was notation made on everybody's enlistment record to serve the duration plus six months of duty. Most of the men who enlisted in 1941 had been in for four years and got that notation on his record. There was no set time, just a blank statement, duration plus six months. So if that war had lasted ten years, we would have had to stay in the Army for ten years.

A: Did you join the reserves in Youngstown?

C: Here in Youngstown.

A: What kind of a unit did you join then?

C: It was a military police unit just for annual training. I went to Indiantown again for annual training. I wasn't active. At that time they had a place on Federal Street before they left the union army reserve here on another street.

A: I see.

C: It was just the second floor.

A: So what did you do? Did you have a civilian job too?

C: Oh, yes. I became somewhat of a wandering record. It was hard for me to adjust there for a long time. I tried several jobs, one of them right in the school. I didn't do that. I got married. That is just about it. I came from a big family, a large family. We still have our little

- squabbles. My brother is a paratrooper and my oldest brother is a Sea Bee. My other brother and son were in the Air Force. I had another brother in the naval air. Every time we get together we say, "Who's got the best service?" It all boils down to one thing, we all served our country.
- A: I see. So you only stayed in the Army Reserves for about three years? Is that right?
- C: Three years.
- A: Then you got out?
- C: Out completely.
- A: Discharged completely from the reserves?
- C: Right. Then in June or August, in 1951, they formed a new unit here. It was known as 177th Anti-aircraft Battalion, with ninety members looking for personnel that was strictly volunteer.
- A: You signed up?
- C: I signed for three years, without realizing that I would be here a total of twenty-four years.
- A: I see. What was your job when you signed up under the volunteer program.
- C: I worked in Niles in the old Mahoning Valley steel mill. I had worked there before I went into the Army.
- A: So what did you do when you went to drill? What kind of drilling type thing was it?
- C: Well, from my own experience, they more or less made me an instructor. By the way, I taught medical subjects and chemistry subjects. I was assigned as personnel.
- A: I see. How was it organized? Was it a full company?
- C: Full headquarters.
- A: I see. Then how was this broken down?
- C: It was broken down into four firing batteries. We had a battery here in Youngstown, a battery in Warren, a battery in Alliance, a battery in Kent, Ohio.
- A: Each one of these had an officer at them?

- C: It had an officer; it had full component of men. The enlistments were down. You would just go up there and be faced with basically the same thing trying to get the youngsters interested, trying to get the men to serve.
- A: Would you say it was the same men? I mean did people have the same type of attitude toward serving in the National Guard?
- C: No.
- A: Was it different?
- C: Totally different costs. You enlisted where you wanted to belong. A lot of men don't like regimentation. By regimentation, I mean the daily barracks life. But these men still love the uniform on a part-time basis, and they make good troops. It is proven in Korea. They don't want to go home. It is strictly voluntary. There were no deferrals, nothing. You belonged because you wanted to belong. At that time we trained troops here. We didn't send them away. We trained them right here in the area. We did an amazing job.
- A: Why do men join today?
- C: Well, sometimes it is for money. Some of them don't work with this new pay system that we have. Prior service men, after they have been home for a while, have told me if they would have stayed in they would have had their twenty and could have retired. I only have one answer. I said, "Whoever told you to get out?" It may not be the best answer.
- It is an age old story. It is amazing. I have to say one thing here. We talk about kids today. But we are very fortunate in this country. We have to sell these kids because there are a lot of good kids around. That is our salvation.
- A: Yes, I see. Why do you think someone would choose the National Guard over the Army Reserve?
- C: Well, in most cases the National Guard has just one concept. A lot of people are misled or not given the true facts. You must understand the breakdown of our defense system. The people in the community think that it is a state guard. This is a negative answer. It is very negative. Go back to 1916 when the National Guard was really organized. They made it the first ready reserve branch off of the regular Army. This what we sold to back up the regular Army in case of any emergency. Their training program is all training. Most of it is training. Sometimes there is a little table work involved in it. It is training for one purpose. You have a mission. Your mission is to back up the regular forces,

This makes it interesting. It is a challenge to anybody that accepts it. Being just under cavalry for two years, I could see the difference. I have 125 men right now. Out of 125 I would say 90 of them really want to belong. That is a big challenge out of any stance. We have just about every branch of the service in this armed cavalry.

But mainly because of the training, you do have a retirement system. This is the only part-time job in the world where you can qualify for retirement just like the rest of the service. We are all under the same regulations. There is a little paycheck. Now with what we call the jump system you are paid once a month. You come in and get your money for the month. But your prior service men are mostly now in their late twenties or early thirties, and they get to thinking about it. If we sell this program right, it is not a bad deal to look forward for another retirement at the age of sixty.

A: That is true.

C: If you are getting paid. This is one of the biggest reasons. But to elaborate a little more on the guard concept--where the fallacy lays--they think that the National Guard is the state guard. The state has very limited doings with the guard and command and money and everything. Everything that we have here, our pays, our equipment, our uniform, is all federally funded. It comes out of the United States government not the state of Ohio. The state of Ohio does furnish the building. Then you visualize this. Each state has guard for emergencies, flood, and such and such that the full-time Army just doesn't have enough troops to go wrong. This is the only time where we are under state control when we are activated like the big snow that was here in 1951 or 1952 for emergencies such as that. That is the only time they are paid from state funds.

A: Let me ask you . . . You work full-time for the National Guard. How does that work?

C: Each unit for administration, enlistment, personnel work, process of payrolls . . . we are known as administrative supply technicians. We do the work, five or six men, on a full-time basis. This saves a lot of money. We are known as administrative supply technicians. We are on the civil service program and must belong to the Army National Guard.

A: I see, but you are a federal employee?

C: We are federal employees paid by federal funds.

A: Is it like the Air Force?

C: Air Force and Navy have the program.

A: Navy doesn't have the program?

C: I don't know about the Navy. I always thought they did. I know the Army Reserve had this program. The Air Force has this program. The National Guard had this program.

A: So is your GS rating the same as your rank held in the . . .

C: No, no.

A: I see. Do you fulfill the same job in the Guard?

C: Right. I'm like four men during the day wrapped up in one. Then during weekend training periods, I am the first sergeant, which is not just my sole function.

A: Do you just sit here? Are there other people to do the same job like down at headquarters at Columbus?

C: Well, we have correspondents go there. We have a troop clerk. We have a mess team. They are trained for this purpose in case of evacuation of an emergency.

A: I see.

C: But I am the chief hauncho running the unit. All of the responsibilities are laid on me in getting the troop set up.

A: But there is a reserve commanding officer? Is that it?

C: As part-time.

A: Part-time.

C: Just like every other part-timer it is his purpose and assumes a lot of responsibility. We represent him.

A: Now how does your family feel about this participation on their part?

C: They look at me and feel that as long as I'm dedicated to it there is no problem for me. I have a rare family, sensible. Although there are times the wife asks, "How come?" I could go home for supper and get a phone call and I'm right back down here. I can call and say that I won't be home for supper because I might have an enlistment. There might be some extra work. It is hard to say, but sometimes it does become irritating with her because of the hours during the week. To accomplish what we are doing we must do this. We don't get paid overtime or anything. We are just dedicated men. Sergeant Yorkovich and myself are just . . .

A: What do you see for the future of the Guard?

C: I think after this year the Guard will be on a basis of the old Guard but with new equipment and new attitudes. It will be strictly voluntary because we are not phasing out the last of the service men. They must remember that is one sixth of the year and they have signed it for six years. By the end of the year, we will have most of them phased out and they are completing their six year obligation. They can still go back if they want to belong. It is here. There are a lot of benefits. They become dedicated. The biggest thing is that they want to belong. This is what the armed forces need; people that want to belong.

A: That volunteer?

C: The volunteers are the men; that is the key. I want to help armed service. Right now I imagine all the armed forces are fighting more or less for survival because of enlistments, turnover of personnel. It becomes a real challenge to anybody that is in the program such as myself to stay with it, talk to the older men, sell the program to the community. It is not an eight hour job anymore.

A: Well, how many years have you been at it?

C: I have a total of thirty-one years of service with my Guard time, my Army time, and my reserve time.

A: How many civil service time do you have?

C: Twenty-four years.

A: Now when you retire as a civil service, you get a civil service pension?

C: I get a civil service pension.

A: Then at age sixty . . .

C: At age sixty I get a reserve retirement pension. Being that I worked civilian jobs I'm still entitled to social security.

A: Well, that sounds like a fairly decent retirement anyway.

C: Yes, it is. It is there to be had.

A: Sure.

C: We've had our faults with the armed services and have made mistakes. We have a lot of correcting to do. The only way we are going to correct it is let the community know. We are here for a purpose. Adjustments are being made, and it

is a good program. One thing that comes to my mind is a high school graduate. Out of high school this year they say that jobs are not plentiful. Well, we can guide them into a position, and I will just say this as an example. This doesn't happen all of the time, but it can be done. Take a youngster coming out of high school who wants to be a mechanic. Well, if he enlists and volunteers for the Guard, he can be trained as a mechanic after his basic training and get his advance unit to train. Then he is subject, if he wants to on his own because he starts here and ends here, to apply for a regular school that teaches mechanic, like at Aberdeen Proving Grounds at Fort Meade, Maryland. These courses are paid for if you put them in a military value. It costs them a lot of money at Terrence Vale School.

He is getting this all free here. One nice thing about the Army and the services is that they cut out a lot of unnecessary paper work. They cut it to a real fine point. If you grasp it, you have got something. That is good. It is good for the community; it is good for the kids who are looking for something to do and so something right constructively. This is what we need. We have to guide them this way.

A: I see. Well, thank you very much, sergeant. I appreciate you sitting here talking to me. Is there anything else you would like to add?

C: Well, just sum it up. There is opportunity in the National Guard. There is opportunity in the whole reserve system of the United States. Today there is bigger opportunity in the armed forces.

I'm not trying to sound biased, but we mean it. We have to live with it. This is our country--whatever little we can do for it is great. We look down on a lot of youngsters and condemn and condone, but we are very fortunate in this country. We have a lot of fine younsters. All we have to do is sell them the program. We are fortunate in that because we don't have anything to worry about. Well, I would sum up in one way, that when there is more bad than good then we are in trouble. In fact today we are in pretty good shape because we don't hear the good things. I have a daughter who is now a schoolteacher. She went to Youngstown State. It is here. It is wonderful. If we can just get that point across there are a lot of good kids. Why condemn a whole generation just because one or two is bad? They went astray in my generation too. This may sound nasty, but we weren't angels. It was just a different type of living then. For you and me, being in the reserve system is what we must do to let the community know we are here. This is what we are trying to do now. But it is a wonderful opportunity. I had a man that had thirty years in the Navy. He drives to Chicago for his training. He is in the Sea Bee's and drives

back down here. But we don't have that type of rank that he has. So I referred him down to Worthington. It would be closer for him to drive there instead of Chicago. Now this is dedication.

A: Yes, it sure is.

C: But by the newsmedia and hearsay and little articles written in the papers today, they are starting to grasp this thing.

A: Starting to pick up a little bit of it.

C: Yes, it is. But when you find stuff like that, we know that he is going to tell the people he is in contact with, "Well, all the Guard men, they give you the answers. They are willing to talk to you, lay it out for you. This is the ticket." It is a good system. It has to be sold today. It is not any more taken for granted about the deferments in the selective service system. It is going to have to be sold. The men that enlist are the men who really want to belong to the system.

END OF INTERVIEW