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And I believe we are recording. I think so. And so we'll edit out the this little bit here.

We'll start when we're ready. We'll record the session and then afterwards we'll send it to you, get your approval on things, and then we'll post it to our YouTube channel. Okay.

All right. We kind of took this model from the Veterans Breakfast Club. YouTube's got a bottomless pit of memory.

So it's very useful to record all of these veteran interviews and keep our website running smoothly. Yeah. All right.

Hi, everyone. I'm Dr. Chris Magra. I'm a professor of history at the Study of Tennesseans and More.

It's our mission to research, preserve, and share the stories of Tennessee veterans. And we're privileged today to have retired Army Colonel Gerald York with us. Welcome.

Thank you. Thank you. He is not only a veteran, not only had an extensive career in the Army, which we'll talk about today, he's also the grandson of a World War I Medal of Honor recipient, someone that all Americans should know about, and especially Tennesseans, and that's Sergeant Alvin C. York.

Would you start by telling us when you were born? And I'm assuming that you were born in Tennessee. Actually, I was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Okay.

My father was a minister, and he was pastoring down in Baton Rouge. And so when I was six weeks old, he moved back to Pall Mall. In fact, we lived with my grandparents in the house here in Pall Mall for three or four years before my dad built a house out in Pine Haven, just south of Jamestown.

So for the very start of your life, you were in Baton Rouge, but then most of your life in Tennessee. Correct. And then my dad, as I said, he was a minister.

He did not have a college education, and they told him if he wanted to continue to be a minister, he needed to go to college. So we moved to Nashville. So he went to Travaca College in Nashville, Tennessee, graduated, and then we moved for two years to Glasgow, Kentucky, where he pastored.

Then we moved back to Nashville, where we stayed the rest of his career. And what year were you born? 1947. And what was it like growing up in different places in Tennessee, Pall Mall, Nashville? It was interesting.

Nashville, of course, was a lot different than Pall Mall was. We did spend all of our holidays back up here, and I spent several summers back up here. So I enjoyed the peace and the quiet and everything of Pall Mall.

And when you were growing up, did you think about a career in the military? What did you want to do when you were growing up? Um, my grandfather always wanted somebody in

the family to be a doctor, and I thought that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a doctor. So, I, that's the path that I was going on.

And in fact, in college, I was two years, I was pre-med, and then decided history was better for me than pre-med was. So I ended up changing my major to history. But, uh, I hear that a lot.

But for the, for the army, um, I guess I never really thought about it. Uh, at my grandfather's funeral, I was 17 when he passed away. So at his funeral in 1964, there were a lot of military presence, especially from the 82nd Airborne Division, which had been his unit, 82nd All-American Division in World War I. And so, uh, the general was there and several other officers, and they kind of cornered me and said, Hey, how are you? I said, I'm 17.

They said, well, you should think about coming in the army. We have a place for you in the 82nd. And I said, well, I'm actually going to college.

And so they tried to recruit me two or three times during that period to, to come and join the army. But I, I really thought at that time, I'm going to be a doctor and fulfill my grandfather's dream of somebody in the, in the family becoming a doctor, which incidentally, my son ended up becoming a doctor and serving in the military as well. He graduated from, uh, ETSU med school in Johnson city.

So I, I didn't make it. And then in college, I started college again at Tribeca college where my dad had gone to school in Nashville. And my dad called me one day and he said, um, have you thought about going to ROTC? And I said, no, um, Tribeca doesn't have one.

He said, well, Vanderbilt has one. And I was at a ceremony and sat next to the professor, professor of military science at Vanderbilt. And they told him, I told him you were a freshman.

And he said, he wanted to talk to you. And I said, well, you know, I, I mean, I just started college and this and that. He said, well, go meet with him.

So I went and met with him and my father pushed me. My father was extremely patriotic. Uh, he had served during a World War II.

And so he's the, the Colonel kind of made a pitch and I said, well, you know, it's already a month into it. I'm sure he said, that's okay. We'll make an allowance for that.

So they actually, uh, he actually talked me into it and I joined ROTC at Vanderbilt and actually went through four years of ROTC at Vanderbilt. And, um, one summer, uh, because I gotten in history major late because of the pre-med, I actually took a course history course from UT and Nashville. Wow.

And, and then when I graduated, uh, of course, I graduated with a commission and, um, went in the service and the, the, the professor said, the, the Colonel said, we would like to make you a DMG. And I said, what's a DMG? He said, distinguished military graduate. I said, what's the difference? And he said, well, you served three years instead of two right now, you just go in for two.

But if you take the DMG, you go in for three. I said, I'll no, I'll pass. I said, I'm just going to go in for two.

I'm not going to stay longer than two. I ended up staying 31. A little bit longer.

A little bit longer. Did you, did you get a wish list? Like your top five? Yes. Did you put military intelligence down anywhere on that list? I, um, going to college, I worked part-time at Sears and I worked with a guy who was in military, who was stationed in Nashville and military intelligence in an office there.

And so he was telling me about the career and everything. So I put that number one, and ended up getting it. And what year was that when you graduated the Army and ROTC program at Vanderbilt? I graduated in 1969.

Okay. And then once you, once you graduate and you put military intelligence down, um, what happens next? Because, you know, are you, are you, are you aware of what was going on overseas and are, and are you thinking, um, I could be deployed and, and, and go overseas? Oh, yes. Yes.

Well, and of course, and in high school and in college, we studied Vietnam and at Tribeca, we actually had an individual that came back on the GI bill and had just gotten back from Vietnam. So there was a lot of discussion of, of Vietnam at the time. And of course it was, it was still going on.

And, um, so I, I knew the possibility was there of, uh, of being deployed to Vietnam. Um, in fact, I actually volunteered to go, uh, to be with a US unit. Yeah, that, um, that had to have been an interesting time to be studying Vietnam and be talking to, uh, someone coming back and to be thinking, I'm gonna, I'm a young man, I'm going to be graduating.

I've got your whole life ahead of you and you're going to go overseas and serve your country. What did you know about Vietnam? Cause I don't think a lot of Americans really knew, uh, about the place or the, or the history of the country or, or the, the war. I mean, was it, was it just kind of a, the Cold War was at the forefront of your thought in, in thinking about Vietnam and the domino theory? Uh, yeah, yes.

Um, through college, um, I had great history teachers and, uh, we studied what happened to the French, then, then Benfou, we studied, uh, what happened. So I was, I was aware of Vietnam and then from talking to the individual that had come back from Vietnam, I was aware of, you know, that, and then in ROTC, they showed us different movies and, and talked about it quite a bit. Yeah.

So it sounds like you went in eyes wide open. Yes. Yes.

And how soon after you graduated from Vanderbilt's ROTC program, were you deployed and went overseas? Well, uh, 7 November, 1969, I actually entered on active duty at Fort Knox, Kentucky, went to armor school because in those days, the military intelligence didn't have their own basic course. So you had to have a combat MOS. So I went to, they assigned me to armor school.

Uh, coldest winter they had their final exercise, the tanks wouldn't start because it was too cold. But anyway, I went through Vietnamese or I went through, um, armor school as a basic course. Then I went to Vietnamese language school in El Paso, Texas at Fort Bliss.

Then I went to Fort Holabird, Maryland in, uh, right outside of Baltimore, Maryland for my intel training. And then, uh, end of October, 1st of November, uh, after everything was finished, then I, uh, I shipped out to Vietnam. And at that point, what were your thoughts? I mean, were you thinking, uh, yeah, what were you thinking about the Vietnam war at that point? Just, just getting there? Um, it was surreal.

Um, it was, um, obviously, uh, there was a lot back home against the war. Uh, in fact, when I returned from Vietnam, they told us not to wear our uniform in the airport. Um, the bus coming off of, uh, off of Oakland, uh, where we landed, uh, they threw eggs, they threw paint.

And so it was, uh, it was, it was different being there, uh, the camaraderie, um, and you could see you were actually, you were actually helping. Um, a lot of the Vietnamese were, I was on the Cambodian border. I was out in the middle of nowhere.

And, um, the people there were like, doesn't matter who's in charge. We have to pay taxes. We have to do this.

We have to do that. But the, uh, the Viet Cong and the NVA were ruthless. And so we felt like we were, we were at least doing some good.

Um, we were protecting like the mountain yards and some of the other groups that, uh, were heavily discriminated against. And, um, so we, we did some good. Um, it seemed like every time we started gaining ground, the other side would call for a ceasefire.

Of course, I was there 70 and 71. They called for a ceasefire and they quit fighting. And then we'd see all of this ammunition be moved down from the north.

And as soon as they built back up, then they'd start again. So that was a little disheartening because we felt like we can never win because as soon as we get to a point where we have kind of an upper hand, they call a timeout and everything stops until they replenish and get built back up. And then, then we're back at it again.

And were you aware of politics in the United States and, uh, Richard Nixon's Vietnamization policy and kind of the drawback, um, or not? You were just in country and you're in your handling business and not really aware of what's going on back home. We were, it's, it's not like today. I mean, you know, you're talking 50 years ago.

Um, to make a phone call back to my family, it was, um, you got, it was \$5 a minute and you got three minutes. You had to go to Saigon to do it. Um, but yeah, you got news, but it was by the time you got it, it was old news.

Um, you know, just trying to figure out what was going on and pretty much just kind of keeping your head down and saying, okay, that's politics. We have a job to do. We need to do our job, uh, no matter, no matter what.

And were you writing letters back home or, or were you getting some letters from your family? I was, I was getting letters. Uh, in fact, uh, they have my grandparents stuff. Uh, the Tennessee state park has a lot of it archived and they came across a letter that I'd written my grandmother, uh, in that pile from back when I was in Vietnam.

So yeah, we, we wrote back and forth. Of course it was snail mail. Yeah.

Uh, there was no text. Uh, so, you know, you'd write a letter and maybe three, four weeks later you'd get a, get an answer back. Yep.

And this was 70, 71. Um, and you're working in army military intelligence. Uh, what was that job like for you? What, what was that? Uh, I mean, I, that had been incredibly complex.

Uh, it was very complex because I, I knew a little Vietnamese, but not a lot. Um, I had an interpreter that I paid, um, the, there were, it was a four man advisory team. There was a major.

I was a first lieutenant. I had a sergeant and he had a sergeant and then he had a military, um, interpreter and I had a civilian interpreter that, that I paid out of intelligence fund. Um, but it was, um, it was very difficult.

Yeah. Um, one, uh, one of the things, uh, we'd gotten a report that the NBA had moved tanks into the area and just across the border in Cambodia, because we were restricted from going into Cambodia. So they moved them right across the border.

So we had captured a, uh, local, uh, one of the guys, one of their soldiers and they were interrogating him. So I went in to ask about the tanks and I asked, um, have you seen any Chinza? And the guy kind of looked at me funny and my interpreter looked at me funny and the guy goes, hmm. So I asked him again and about the third time my interpreter said, um, come outside.

And I said, okay. So we went outside and he said, why are you asking about chickens? And I said, I'm asking about tanks. He said, no, you're asking about chickens.

I said, well, Chinza tank, right? And he goes, no Chinza chicken, Chinza tank. So it's a very tonal language. And, uh, you know, we had people that were experts in it, but, uh, it was very tonal and very difficult.

Uh, and they always told me I spoke with a Southern accent, uh, whatever language I was speaking. They said, uh, you know, you sound like you're from the South, but, uh, but it was, it was complicated. Yeah.

And the people that you served with uh, people I served with, um, like I said, there was a major, uh, the first major that was there that rotated out and we got a new one. The first major was actually from Tennessee. And, um, the second one was an ex special forces.

This was his, this was his, uh, third tour. He'd been medivac on his first two tours. He had a plate in the front of his head, a plate in the back of his head.

Um, and under him, I got to do a lot because he, as he just some days he couldn't function. And so I actually got a lot of experience because he had say today, you're wearing the green tag, you're in charge. You've got to go do my job.

So, uh, it was, and as a, as a young Lieutenant, if I was older, I'd probably have more sense and probably wouldn't have done some of the things that I did, but as a young Lieutenant, you know, it's all, it's all new and it's all interesting. And so I got a, I got a lot of experience that I wouldn't have gotten otherwise. And was this, this was 1970, 1971.

Um, I don't know, I don't know how to ask this. Is it, it's tough, it's a tough time period to be in Vietnam and it's a tough time period to, um, be doing military intelligence. Did you feel as though you were gaining ground? Did you feel, you know, you mentioned earlier being frustrated and, and, um, you know, what, did you have a sense of, uh, progress or were you just kind of keeping your head down and focused on a job in front of you? Um, we actually ended up, uh, where we felt like we had some major significant progress.

Um, I, I think I was doing progress because all of, one of the VC we captured, um, told us that there was a reward on my head. Um, so I figured I must be doing something right. And we actually went in and they had a, uh, VC district headquarters, which was a shadow.

That was the, the, the Viet Cong and the NVA had used it. Uh, we ended up stumbling over their district headquarters and got a huge firefight, but we ended up taking over and capturing a lot of documents. Uh, and so that I felt we were making great progress there.

We were able to identify who all they had recruited. They had recruited one guy out of our own, one of the Vietnamese people out of our own shop. And so we had their ledgers, who they were paying, what they were doing.

So in our district, we felt like we were making a lot of progress. And when they put a, they actually, uh, sent an assassination team once, which was 12 year old boys um, they, I, they told us, they said you're military intelligence, so you don't need to advertise that. Don't, don't wear your MI brass and this and that.

Then they gave me a Pea Green Jeep, civilian Jeep to drive, which only the intel people in Vietnam drove those. And so, yeah, they recruited a couple of boys and I was going to a meeting and it was pretty well known that, you know, this meeting happened every Saturday morning and couldn't get choppers all the time. So I had to drive sometimes down to the province headquarter, Van Locke.

And so they gave one of them a pistol and the other one, a couple of grenades and said when they saw my Jeep for the one kid to step out in front and start shooting. And when I stopped the Jeep, the other kid was to run from the bushes and throw grenades in the Jeep. Lucky for me, uh, they swept the roads each morning and when they swept the roads, they, um, uh, they saw these two kids and they asked them a question and they got nervous and started to run.

So they captured them and then interrogated them and they recovered the pistol and the, and the hand grenades. So they said, uh, you still going to your meeting? I said, well, yeah,

you neutralized the threat. So I can go now, but it worked out, but it was, I felt like I must have been making progress or they wouldn't have cared.

Yeah. Yeah. I'd say so.

I say if they put a bounty on your head, um, that would have made me sweat. That would have made, I would definitely would have lost sleep. In fact, uh, six months after I left the NBA moved in and took over that area.

That was the beginning of the end. Yeah. And, um, I talked to the guy that replaced me, he was captured and became a POW.

And I had a chance to talk to him at Fort Bragg when he was released. And he said, one of the things they kept asking is they had my name and information and they kept interrogating them wanting to know where I was. And he told them I'd gone home and they didn't believe him.

They, they buried him, you know, uh, everything. He had a rough time. Yeah.

Yeah. And so you, you came back in 71. I came back in, uh, November, end of October, November of 71 and went to airborne school.

Yeah. Yeah. That would have been so, so you were thinking that you, you, you were still thinking three years and, um, were you thinking at this point when you came back in 71, Hey, maybe I'll stay longer.

Maybe, maybe thinking about a career in the military at that point. What were you thinking when you came back? Yeah, I really wasn't thinking about a career, but I, I, I enjoyed what I did. Um, I came back and went to airborne school and was assigned to the 218th MI Detachment at 18th Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg.

And I thought, okay, uh, let's see where this goes. Um, and I, I enjoyed that. That was great.

Then I went to the advanced course from there at Fort Huachuca. And I thought, okay, if I stayed at 10, then I'll decide I either get out at 10 or I stay for 20. And, um, I had an opportunity at the advanced course.

There was a special school that had just opened up for military. It was a government run school and it was for Intel folks. And so it was, they said they interviewed, they asked for volunteers.

They told us a little bit about it and it was, sounded fantastic. So I interviewed and then I had two subject point interviews and there were like five of us that volunteered to go and they came down and they said, we're only selecting one. So I went to a final interview and actually got selected.

So in September of 75, this was in 1975, in September of 75, uh, I went to this course, it was 12 weeks long and it was, um, some military, a lot of civilians and, um, graduated out of there, got a couple of job offers out of there, but decided, no, I, I kind of want to stay in the career that put me in a special program with the army in intelligence. And I ended up, um,

thinking, you know, this is, I, it was a fantastic job. It was one where you could see results of your work.

Uh, that's one thing I, at Fort Bragg, we continually trained, uh, in the 73 war, we set out on the tarmac because I guess Russia had, um, um, activated one of the airborne brigades or divisions because of the Middle East war. So they activated us. So I, we sat on the tarmac for two or three days, never deployed, but sat on the tarmac waiting to get on an airplane.

Airplanes were there. We were there with chutes and everything. And, um, then when I got into this special program, it was more like, okay, with, with the airborne unit, we were training constantly, but it's like a prize fighter that trains and never gets in the ring.

Uh, with the other specialty I had, you were in the ring every day. And so I thought, well, I like this. And so I went into a special program and, uh, probably about 75, 76, 77 timeframe and ended up staying in that for for the rest of my career.

And it was, it was, it was great work. You could, you could see the efforts of your work sometimes. And, um, so it was, uh, it was very, very rewarding.

Was it the nature of the work that kept you in the military after coming back from, from Vietnam? Um, did you talk to your, your family about staying in the military after you got home? You know, I remember you saying you were told to take your uniform off when you got back at the airport and, um, you know, all of the politics going on in the country and the resistance to the war and the treatment of Vietnam soldiers. Um, it had been a difficult time in US history to think about a career in the military and to think, uh, I'm going to keep doing this, but you did. It was, it was.

And a lot of it was my family. Uh, especially my father was very pro military. He often said he wished he had stayed in the military and become a chaplain.

Um, but it was, my grandfather was extremely patriotic. He loved the military, loved the veterans, my father, the same. So it was kind of a, I guess a family thing.

Uh, now my grandmother kept asking me when I was going to get out. Uh, she kept saying, you've been in there a long time. And so-and-so down the road was three years.

Somebody else was two years. When are they going to let you out? And I said, well, grandma, they told me when I went in, as soon as I learned to trade, I could leave. She said, well, hurry up and learn to trade.

She said, I'm worried about you. Yeah. Now, did you get married at any point in the seventies? I was married when I went to Vietnam.

Okay. I was married. In fact, I got a 30 day extension.

I was supposed to be in Vietnam, uh, the 1st of October. And I got a 30 day extension to the 1st of November because my son was born the 1st of October. I ended up spending 30 days with him.

And then my boss actually wanted me to extend for six more months, uh, in Vietnam. And I told him, I, you know, I've got a new son at home. I haven't seen for a year.

I need to, I need to go home and be with my, be with my kid. Yeah. Which worked out great because the guy replaced me, ended up as a POW.

Yes. Now, where did you meet your wife? Excuse me. I met my wife in college at Tribeca.

Okay. Uh, was she a history major? No, she was a teacher. Okay.

Education major. Yeah. And what did she say when you got back from Vietnam and you were thinking about staying in the, in the military and possibly having a career? Um, when I first got back, there was no problem because I went to drum school and I went to Fort Bragg and she was okay with that.

After that, she was like, are we going to continue to do this? You know, she was, and then after I got into the special program, I did a lot of traveling. Uh, she was, she was not a big fan. Uh, in fact, at one point really pressed me to, to get out of the military.

Um, yeah, she was, she was not happy. We ended up getting a divorce. It's a tough life.

Yeah. Because she said, you know, I can't handle, I can't handle the moves. I can't handle your work.

I can't, I can't handle it. I'm, I'm going to go a different direction. Yeah.

Yeah. And that was when you're, you're involved in military intelligence and the programs that you're, you're, you're kind of always traveling and always going around, um, being, being, uh, being involved in that. And that kept you away from home.

Yeah. Throughout, throughout the seventies. Throughout the, throughout the seventies and eighties.

Yep. And a lot, a lot of overseas travel. And a lot of times when I traveled, I could not communicate back.

And so that, that was an issue as well. You know, I would be overseas, but I couldn't make phone calls back. Yeah.

And when were you, when were you promoted? When, when, when, when did you, um, you started out as Lieutenant. Correct. Um, take us through your promotions to Colonel.

Um, I was, I came in as a second Lieutenant, uh, got promoted 12 months later to first Lieutenant when I was in Vietnam. Uh, in fact, uh, interesting thing when I was in Vietnam, the draft was going on and I actually, my number came up while I was in Vietnam and I got a draft, a letter from the draft board telling me to report at a certain, certain date or, you know, the consequences. So I wrote them back and said, I'm currently on active duty in Vietnam, but I'll be glad to come back.

But I never heard back from them. But anyway, so second Lieutenant to first Lieutenant, first Lieutenant was in, was in Vietnam. Um, I went back to Bragg.

I was supposed to make captain in the fall of 72. Uh, they froze captain promotions. And so I had to wait another six or eight months to make captain, made captain at, um, um, at Fort Bragg.

Then, um, got promoted to major and got promoted to major. I was at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. And then when I made Lieutenant Colonel, um, I was actually in, in, um, well, I made major, I guess, yeah, at Redstone.

And then I made Lieutenant Colonel while I was still at Redstone. And then I was assigned to Los Angeles and made Colonel, uh, in 93 when I was assigned out there. And was that when you were a commander of the base? I was commander of, uh, they, it was a human element, a human intelligence element.

And each service had their own human programs. So the defense intelligence agency in 1995 took over all the service human and made it all under the defense human service of DIA. So I was in charge with the army as a Colonel.

I was in charge of the element out there. And I saw all, um, also was, uh, charged with all the science and technology collection for the army. And then in 95, we became DIA, defense intelligence agency.

And so I was the first base commander and I had all, everything west of the Mississippi river as far as, uh, um, elements. We, I had like 10 units under me. And then later on in, uh, in 95, later on, um, I was in Korea.

I was a base chief in, in Korea, 97. And then in 97, I came back and was a deputy chief at an inter-agency, um, um, element, uh, out in California. And then in 98, uh, I became a chief of, um, chief of operations for the defense human service under DIA back in Clarendon, Virginia.

Mm-hmm. Now I want to get your thoughts about the cold war and the end of the cold war and whether you think the cold war ever really did end. Um, you, a lot of your military career kind of spans, um, well, the high watermark of the cold war and then the end of the cold war.

Right. Yeah. I, I came in in 69 and retired in 2000.

Yeah. Um, yeah. You know, all the, all the courses and everything was the full, the gap, the Russians coming through with tanks.

Um, we saw all of that. We, you know, um, of course in the nineties with the wall coming down, it was, uh, it was amazing, you know, all of a sudden it looked like, uh, there was going to be peace. Um, but you know, it reminded me when everybody was talking about, well, it's all one big happy thing now and it's peace and this and that reminded me of what my grandfather said about world war one.

He said in world war one, we thought we had won freedom for everybody forever. Uh, we thought we had bought freedom for the world. What we didn't realize is freedom is not something you buy.

Freedom is something you lease. And world war one was our payment on it. And now world war two is coming up as another payment due.

So I, I think he, he had great insight there is that, you know, as long as there's people that want to take over other people, you're never truly going to have peace. You know, it was, um, it's amazing that, um, you know, I, I know my grandfather served in war. My father was, did not see combat was in world war two.

I was in Vietnam. My son was in Iraq. I said, you know, we all wish, I wish for my grandkids that, that they don't see it, but that's something you never know because, uh, sometimes men's hearts are evil.

Yeah. Yeah. You know? Yeah.

Well, and I was, I was thinking about you sitting on that tarmac too. Yeah. With your fellow soldiers getting ready for world war three.

Exactly. Um, which came close multiple times over the course of that cold war. And anyone who, who studies the history of the cold war knows it wasn't not that cold ever.

Right. Um, and then you, you mentioned, um, your son getting in the military. Um, were you, were you thinking when, when your son is getting into military, um, the world is very different.

There's been so many changes, um, or are you thinking, you know, the, the world's a lot the same. Um, I was thinking the world was a lot the same. Yeah.

It, it faces change regimes change, but you know, history has a tendency of repeating itself. And I think the, the biggest problem we have, uh, maybe everybody has, but I see especially here is we look at here and the last, we don't go back into history and look and say, okay, we're making decisions based on a 20 year or 15 year, um, knowledge when we need to look back a hundred years, 150 years, we need to look back because things tend to continue to go. I mean, the middle East, uh, you know, we're after world war one, how they divided the middle East up.

We're still living with today. You know, uh, they drew lines. They said, okay, we'll, we'll draw a line.

What they didn't realize is, Hey, you're divine. You're drawing a line that splits the Shiites and the Sunnis and different groups. And there's always going to be problems.

And so, you know, if you, if you fail to study history, you're liable to repeat it. Yeah, for sure. A hundred percent.

Yeah. Um, your, your, your official end date for your military service is what is what year? Uh, 2000, December, December one, 2000. That's a nice, neat ending.

And then can you talk about your foundation work since then? Sure. Um, when, uh, when I retired, they say old soldiers never retire, they become defense contractors. So I actually joined a friend of mine's company and we did training back to the military.

And then I got involved a couple of years after that, uh, with the, there's a Sergeant Ewerk Patriotic Foundation and I'd always been around it, but never, I mean, I'd been to some of the board meetings and my father and my aunt and my cousin were members of the board. And so, um, I, I had been to all the events and everything and I got a call and the board asked, uh, when are you going to be in Tennessee next? Cause I was splitting my time between here and Virginia. So I came and they pitched me on being the chairman of the Patriotic Foundation.

And I'm like, well, you've got a chairman. And they said, but he resigned and we would really, and I said, well, you know, I have to be in Virginia because of some other work. They said, it doesn't matter.

You know, we have two or three board meetings a week or a year rather, and we'll give you fair notes and you can come back for them. We can do them Zoom. So they kind of talked me into it.

And, uh, you know, it's it for the family, my grandfather's legacy and the work and everything has always been very close. And my daughter has been involved. So I, I said, yeah, I'll, I'll do it.

And it's one of the better decisions I've made because it's been fantastic. Uh, I took over probably 2004, 2005 timeframe. We were able to do a lot.

Uh, we're working with the state park, uh, and we do a lot of work with them. Uh, they do tours of my grandparents' home and when they're busy, they'll ask the family, either my daughter or I will, we'll go do it. And my daughter ended up moving back here from Virginia.

She worked for me in the company that I was working with in Virginia. So she moved back here with her husband in 2011 and we lost our executive director. So she became the executive director and she's been fantastic.

I mean, she has been on, and one of our first projects, major projects, um, one of our first projects was cleaning out the barn and getting it ready, which is now a rentable space for the park. And we have our veteran's day program there. Uh, our first major, major project was saving the school that my grandfather built.

My grandfather, when he came back, he realized that he was hindered by not having an education. He had the equivalent of a third grade education. And so he felt like, okay, I've seen the world.

Before he had never been any further than static Kentucky. And so he said, you know, I, I see that it's a hindrance and if the mountain kids are going to be competitive, they have to have an education. So he built a high school and we've pictures of him digging the foundation.

I'm sure he didn't dig a lot, probably just for pictures, but he helped dig the foundation. He went around the country, raising money. He told me one time he had been to all then 48 States, uh, raising money to, to build the school and to run the school.

The school opened a hundred years ago, 1926. They're getting ready to have their hundredth anniversary next fall. They've got a lot of events planned here in Jamestown at York Institute, but we were successful.

Um, my father, my aunt, my uncle, my father, especially was adamant that the building had to be saved. Um, some folks said what's going to fall down. They moved the kids away.

They built a new school about 10 feet, eight feet from the old school. They moved the kids away from that saying that the building was going to fall down. We hired folks to come in and actually, uh, architectures to look at it.

They said, half the buildings in Jamestown will fall down before this one does. This is not brick facade. This is brick.

And so we, it took us probably 10 years, 15 years fighting to keep it, keep it going. They wanted to tear it down, make it a parking lot. And they have 400 acres that my grandfather gave them.

And my grandfather told me once, he said he had more trouble building that high school from the locals than he had fighting the Germans and France. And he didn't have his Colt 45 with him, but the locals did not want a school. And he opened it in 1926, ran it for 10 years, mortgaged his farm twice to pay for the buses, the gas, the teachers, the equipment.

And locals kept going to the state saying, you've got a guy with the equivalent of a third grade education running a high school. How can you let that happen? So the state came and told him, you know, we're going to have to do something. So he agreed.

And they also accused him of nepotism because he had hired his brother. Well, he hired his brother as a janitor and he couldn't find any teachers qualified in Fentress County. So he had brought other teachers in and they didn't like that.

So in 1936, he agreed to give it to the state of Tennessee. He said, I'll give you the building. I'll give you the 400 acres.

I'll give you the buses. I'll give you everything on the condition that you run it as a state supported school, because if you give it back to the county, they'll close it. There's enough animosity.

Even today, believe it or not, I mean, there's still remnants of, it's like the Hatfields and the McCoys, you know, it didn't go away. But so the foundation got the deed to the building. We spent about three and a half million dollars refurbishing it, keeping it restoration ready.

And fingers crossed, I hope we're very close. The new superintendent, the last superintendent, several superintendents didn't want the building. The new superintendent wants it.

He needs the space. And so he's working with us to try to get it restored. And, you know, once it's restored and done, we have no interest as a foundation to keep the building.

We'll give it back to the state as long as, once it's all the money's paid for, once they sign something saying if they ever decide to tear it down, they'll give it back to the foundation. But the foundation is here. We work very closely with the park.

We work very closely with veterans. Once we can get the building off our plate, once that becomes a fact and it's restored and being used, my daughter has a lot of ideas of working with children. We're talking, we're looking at having a VA tele port thing here or telehealth for veterans to be able to get help from like the VA in Murfreesboro, VA in Nashville, do that, you know, at certain times.

And we want to do things with Gold Star families. We want to do things with children of veterans, especially children of veterans that have lost their lives. You have so many veterans committing suicide and there's so many families affected by that.

And my daughter is not only the executive director of the foundation, but she's also a certified counselor. So she's interested in working with children of veterans who've passed away, whether it's in action, suicide, whatever, of working with those kids. And we're looking at possibilities of doing some camps.

So right now, all of our effort has been with the building. It's taken a lot of time and effort and money. Once that's done, then we're hoping to do a lot more programs, especially with veterans.

Well, I just, two things always stand out to me about the York family. The military service is, a lot of attention is given to military service, but then there's also the giving back, giving back to Tennessee, giving back to the United States of America and giving back to veterans. The York family is special from your grandfather on down to you and your own children.

And the work that you do in our state makes a difference, makes a big difference. Your military service makes a big difference. And that's, it's rare.

It's exceptional. There aren't many families like the York family. And it's an honor to talk to you.

I really- Oh, thank you. Hopefully I haven't rambled too much. Not one bit.

Not one bit. Thank you so much for sharing your story. And thank you so much for all the work you and your entire family do.

It's, it's a blessing to have met you. Well, very good. It was very nice talking with you and any of the veterans that you come in contact with, make sure they know that every Veterans Day here at 11 o'clock in the barn, my grandfather's farm, we have a Veterans Day program.

You're welcome to attend. I know you probably have a lot of commitments around Veterans Day, but the park on either the weekend before or weekend after, the Sergeant York Historical Park actually has displays. They have dozens of reenactors.

They have five or six World War I style planes that come. And it's a huge weekend. Our largest weekend was in 2018, which was the hundredth anniversary of the end of World War I. We had three to 5,000 people come through and you've been to Pall Mall.

It's not that big. Yes. Yes.

But I'll make it, I'll make a special plug too. And just let people know if you haven't been to Pall Mall, it's beautiful country. You can stand in the fields and look at the hills and spend, spend a lot of time and it'll, it's well worth the trip.

Definitely. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Thank you so much. Appreciate you. Thank you.

All right. So we'll, we'll cut the recording there and we'll edit the beginning and the end, and then we'll send it to you. And once we get the go ahead from you, we'll put it up on our YouTube channel for you and your whole family to see.

And it'll, it'll be there as far as long as the center's running at the University of Tennessee. We'll also start a file on you at the University of Tennessee and it'll be another option for you and your family. You have many, I know, but if any of your family ever decide to make copies of, of any of your letters or any of your service records and photos, anything they want to share, we'll have that as an option for, for your family.

Okay. Well, thank you very much. And I hope, I hope you can get back on one of the weekends, whichever, I'm not sure which weekend they're going to do it yet, but just look at their website and it's, it's very worthwhile to come and, and they have booths set up like they did at the Great War Expo.

Yeah. It was a great time. That was my first time there.

And I would love to come back. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Would love to come back. Come back and I'll give you a tour of the house. Be amazing.

All right. Thank you. All right.

Thank you so much. Bye-bye.