

Texas A&M University-Commerce

A&M-Commerce Digital Commons

All Oral Histories

Oral History Collection

2016-10-06

John Turner, Oral History Index

John Turner

Madison Garcia

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.tamuc.edu/scua-oral-history-all>

Recommended Citation

Turner, John and Garcia, Madison, "John Turner, Oral History Index" (2016-10-06). *All Oral Histories*. 119.
<https://digitalcommons.tamuc.edu/scua-oral-history-all/119>

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Collection at A&M-Commerce Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of A&M-Commerce Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@tamuc.edu.

Interviewee: John Turner
Interviewer: Madison Garcia
Technical Support: Amberly Trevino
Location: Center for Disabled Veterans Location, Greenville, Tx
Date Recorded: October 6, 2016
Duration: 50:11
OH#: 1212
Collection: East Texas War and Memory Project
Archive: Special Collections, Gee Library, Texas A&M University-Commerce
Indexed by: Madison Garcia
Date Indexed: December 1, 2016

Summary:

John Wesley Turner Jr. was born in Clinton, South Carolina on November 14, 1944. He was the eldest of six children who were raised in Greenwood, South Carolina by their parents who worked in textiles at a cotton mill. On June 18, 1965 Turner enlisted in the inactive Navy reserves and, four months later, he was sent to Great Lakes, Illinois to receive basic training. Next, he went to Pensacola, Florida where he attended communications technician school where what he learned is classified. Turner met his future wife in her hometown of Olanta, South Carolina. Six weeks later they were engaged and they were wed on August 20, 1966. In April 1967 Turner was sent overseas to the Mariana Islands, Guam. After 18 months in Guam, Turner attended advanced non-morse training school at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. From 1969-1972 Turner was stationed in Germany until he volunteered for submarine operations in Fort Meade, Maryland. He spent several years in Maryland working on submarines before developing a medical problem that sent him to Sugar Grove, West Virginia to supervise satellite dishes. Two years later, Turner was considered fit to return to working on submarines. From 1977-79 was stationed in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii before being shipped to Japan for a two year tour. Finally, Turner returned to San Diego, California where he taught students how to work with submarines until his retirement from the Navy in 1985. He and his wife almost immediately moved to Texas where Turner worked at L3 until 2007. Turner has been involved in the Disabled American Veteran Organization and helps chair meetings and conduct public outreach

Index:

00:00-00:34 [Introduction and biographical details]

00:35-2:11 [What was your family background? Was there a history of military service in your family?]

Turner was the oldest of six children. Both parents worked the in textile industry in cotton mills. Father served in World War II.

02:12-4:12 GARCIA: When you were growing up did you have any intention on going into the service?

TURNER: No, I didn't give it much thought, to be honest.

TURNER: I was working away from home and my uncle came home from Turkey in Air Force and he says, "John, you better do something or they'll get ya." And he said, "If I were you I'd join the Navy because they have the best technical schools." So I started looking around and decided it was time. I had a day off from work, and I joined the Navy.

After graduating high school Turner worked at a grocery store as a stock clerk and worked his way into to assistant manager. Turner enlisted into the Navy on June 16, 1965 in inactive Reserves.

4:35-4:44 [Where did you receive your basic training? How did it compare to your expectations?]

Turner received basic training at Great Lakes, Illinois.

TURNER: It was pretty much what I thought it was. A little difficult but a lot harder than thought it was.

4:44-5:25 GARCIA: Do you remember the first day that you were there?

TURNER: Oh yeah.

GARCIA: What was that like?

TURNER: It was...I've never been ordered around so much in my life. It was go here, go there, do this, do that. I do remember that we were in our civilian clothes for about four or five days before we got into our Navy uniforms.

GARCIA: Why?

TURNER: [shrugs] They didn't have the uniforms ready for us.

5:25-5:47 GARCIA: What was the most difficult part about basic training?

TURNER: Remembering the basic general orders of the century. First time I was asked I forgot, that cost me about sixty push-ups.

5:47-7:18 [Where did you receive advanced training?]

Turner went from basic training to an intelligence communications school in Pensacola, Florida to become a communications technician. He attended advanced training for six months.

Turner then was transferred to Guam, Marianas Islands where he was a communications technician.

7:18-7:48 [What was your relationship like with the other soldiers?]

TURNER: I did what I was told, so I had no problems. You learn early on.

7:48-9:10 What was it like adjusting to being outside the country?

Turner recounts that he did not have any problems. Turner discusses how after being in Guam for six months he brought his wife to live with him.

TURNER: The islanders, a lot of them were not too friendly. So we had to be very careful.

Turner got married on August 20, 1966.

9:10-11:20 GARCIA: Where did y'all meet?

The Turners met in Olanta, South Carolina. He was set up to meet her on a blind date organized by his fellow sailors, and they dated for six weeks before getting engaged.

Turner was in Guam for eighteen months and then transferred to Port Devons, Massachusetts to attend a school. Advanced non-morse school.

11:20-12:39

Turner transferred to Germany

GARCIA: What was that experience like?

TURNER: Fantastic. That was probably the best tour we had when I was in the Navy.

GARCIA: Did you get to interact with the Germans a lot?

TURNER: Oh yeah.

GARCIA: How did you feel about them?

TURNER: Loved them. Loved them. Enjoyed the people, enjoyed the food, enjoyed activities.

While there Turner and his family toured around Germany and neighboring countries. He stayed in Germany from December 1969 to September 1972.

12:39-14:35 GARCIA: Now you were four or five hours away from Berlin, but you were still in Europe? Was it interesting being kind of closer to the Cold War situation?

Turner recounts visiting several cities that were experiencing the Cold War.

14:35-15:19 GARCIA: Were y'all getting lots of news about what was going on at Vietnam at that time? And how did you react to the news?

TURNER: Somewhat sad, somewhat angry.

15:20-16:03 GARCIA: Where did you go after Germany?

Turner went to Fort Meade, Maryland.

TURNER: What I was doing there was completely different. I volunteered for what they call Direct Support, Submarine Operations. It was a team of people sent out to keep the submarine out of harm's way basically.

16:03-16:20 GARCIA: And so were you actually in the submarine?

TURNER: Oh yeah.

GARCIA: So how long were you in a submarine at a time?

TURNER: We were told to pack our gear for up to nine days.

GARCIA: Was that how long you were actually out there?

TURNER: Most times we were out there for seventy-seven days.

16:22-17:59 GARCIA: Describe what it was like living in a submarine.

TURNER: It was hard to get used to at first. I'd been out about three weeks, and I was sitting there operating my equipment one day and all of a sudden I just stopped, looked at my equipment, and I remember clear as a bell saying, "John what the hell are you doing out here?" After that I kind of got over it. Thirteen years later I retired.

But it's totally different because you're assigned two men in a bunk. You operate on twelve hour shifts.

18:00:18:36 GARCIA: Was there a reason that you volunteered for this?

TURNER: I wanted to do something different.

18:37-18:49 TURNER: What did you do in your off-time when you were back up?

GARCIA: Studied, worked, trained,

18:50-20:10 GARCIA: Did you enjoy that better than what you did before?

TURNER: Oh yeah.

Turner worked in submarines for thirteen years. For a period due to a medical problem Turner transferred for two years to Sugar Grove, West Virginia and became the supervisor over some satellites. Once Turner was fit for service again he was transferred to Pearl Harbor.

20:13-20:50 TURNER: [Pearl Harbor] was at the time the most prejudiced place I'd ever been.

GARCIA: Racially Prejudiced?

TURNER: Yes. The Hawaiian people didn't like anybody. It may not be that way now, but even

20:50-21:50 [Did racial tensions ever effect your service?]

TURNER: I was not involved in it, but I did see it.

Turner was in Pearl Harbor for two years.

21:50-25:27 GARCIA: You were in Guam and Pearl Harbor which were two places where significant things happened during World War II. Did you see any remnants of that while you were there?

TURNER: Yes.

Turner was able to see in Guam several bunkers from World War II and a couple of years after he left they discovered the last Japanese soldiers holding out there. He saw Japanese submarines. His son found a World War II bayonet.

Turner was in Pearl Harbor from 1977 to 1979 and went to Japan after that. He enjoyed the tour and the Japanese people.

25:27-27:50 GARCIA: What was the most difficult part about being on a submarine?

TURNER: Being away from family.

Turner ended up having two sons, and they got to experience being in different countries but do not quite remember. Turner then transferred back to San Diego, California and continued to work on submarines and retired in 1985.

27:50-30:32 [Why did you decide to leave the service?]

Turner's Detailer called him and stated that he had to either reenlist or retire. Turner only wanted to reenlist if he could stay in San Diego, but he would have to get moved and have his position change, so he opted to retire. Also he was working on a software program for the people working in the position that he was on the submarine.

30:32-31:02 GARCIA: And so you were training new people? Did you enjoy that?

TURNER: I loved it.

31:02-33:05 [Why did you settle in Northeast Texas?]

While in San Diego Turner was working with a General Dynamics contracting plant, and he got a job at E-Systems, and he worked there until his retirement in 2007.

33:07-34:00 [How did you adjust to civilian life?]

TURNER: This may sound odd, and I think my wife can attest to this, but I've never really found things hard to adjust to. When I move from thing to another I

just move into it. I think I pretty well adapted, I had a little trouble, but I don't think it was a terrible adjustment.

34:00-34:56 [What treatment did you receive from the general public?]

TURNER: I didn't have any when I got out. I had some while I was in. I mean, there were times when I did not wear my uniform, that was back during the Vietnam era.

34:56-39:02 [Are you involved in any Veterans Organizations/]

Turner is a member of the Disabled American Veterans Organization. Turner became an active member in 2008 after retirement.

TURNER: I wanted to do something to help out and give back.

Turner chairs meetings, is the representative to the local representatives and officials, and chairs the veterans parade in Greenville. He also in charge of people needing help, and the funds from the organization help support disabled veterans. Being a part of this organization has helped shape how Turner looks at his service and has made him respect members of the branches of service more.

39:04-41:00 [How did the military evolve during your time of service?]

Turner remembers how after a certain point in his service politics became increasingly involved in military actions.

41:00-43:15 [How affective were our nation's political and military leaders during your time of service?]

Turner didn't think that civilian leaders understood how the military worked or what it was like to be a part of it, so they stressed about it.

43:17-44:25 [Why were we as a country in the Cold War? How effective were we in achieving our goals?]

TURNER: I'm not exactly sure why we were there, but I'm pretty sure we came along pretty well with our goals.

44:25-44:44 [How has the United States remembered the cold War?]

Turner doesn't think that we have remembered it at all.

44:44-47:27 [What was your most difficult moment in the service?]

Turner talks about how one of his sons was taken to the doctor and the doctor simply told his wife that he had leukemia.

47:27-48:25 GARCIA: Have you had many interactions with the VA hospitals?

TURNER: Oh yes.

GARCIA: What has been your experience?

Turner has been fond of his experiences.

48:35-49:25 [How has your time in the military shaped your life?]

TURNER: It has given me direction. I no longer take the easy road. Things either have to be done right or they shouldn't be done. I was told by an old E9 Master Chief that "when in doubt, do it. It's easier to ask for forgiveness later than permission before."

50:00-50:11 [Closing Remarks]