

Oral Memoirs

Of

Alan R. Holtz

An Interview Conducted by

Jared Grossi

November 13, 2014

Community Veterans History Project

University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida

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Interview Histories

Interviewer: Jared Grossi

Transcriber: Jared Grossi

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, and Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

The Community Veterans History Project, a RICHES of Central Florida Project at the University of Central Florida, includes interviews with Central Florida veterans from all branches of the United States military. Beginning in 2010, the UCF Community Veterans History Project is collecting, preserving, and making accessible to the public the experiences of Central Florida's veterans so that future generations will better understand the realities of conflict. It is a collaborative endeavor supported by multiple departments and offices at UCF. The histories, which are collected by students and faculty, are archived and made digitally available through the UCF library. The UCF Community Veterans History Project will also contribute selected veterans' histories to the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

Jared Grossi was an undergraduate student at the University of Central Florida.

Alan R. Holtz served in the U.S. Navy. He served in Vietnam and helped mobilize Naval Reservists during Operation Desert Shield, and Operation Desert Storm. He completed his service as an E6 rank.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Alan R. Holtz is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on November 13, 2014.

Abstract

Oral history interview of Alan R. Holtz, who served in the U.S. Navy, during the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Shield, and Operation Desert Storm. Born in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, New York, Holtz enlisted in the Navy during the Vietnam War. He later joined the U.S. Naval Reserve and helped mobilize Reservists during the Persian Gulf War in 1991. This oral history interview was conducted by Jared Grossi on November 13, 2014. Interview topics include enlistment, boot camp, the USS *Hancock*, the Vietnam War, the Naval Reserves, and Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.

Alan R. Holtz

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Jared Grossi
November 13, 2014
Orlando Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Holtz Three.

Grossi Today, it is November 11th, 2014. I am interviewing Alan [R.] Holtz, who served in the Navy. He served in Vietnam [War] and helped mobilize Naval Reservists during Operation Devert[sic] – Desert Shield, and Operation Desert Storm. He completed his service as an E[nlisted]-6 rank. My name is Jared Grossi. We are interviewing Mr. Holtz as part of the UCF Community Veterans History Project. We are recording this interview at – in Orlando, Florida.

0:00:33

Background

Grossi Alright. So Mr. Holtz...

Holtz Yes?

Grossi Where were you born?

Holtz I was born in Brooklyn[, New York City], New York.

Grossi Okay. What was your childhood like?

Holtz My childhood? It was very good. I, uh – my parents were very, very good. I had three brothers. We had a great time. I really had a good childhood. I liked it.

Grossi You, uh – are you the oldest of the brothers?

Holtz No, I'm the second. I have one older brother and the rest are younger than me.

Grossi Okay. Um, what did your parents do for a living?

Holtz Uh, my father was in the Army during World War II, but then he was – but then he, uh – he worked for a packaging company, I believe, in – in Brooklyn.

Grossi Okay.

Holtz And my mom, uh, stayed home and raised us four kids. I don't think she worked outside though.

Grossi Alright. Um, did – Other than your father, did anyone else enlist before you?

Holtz Uh, my father I had a couple of uncles that were in during World War II, and that's it. My brother tried to enlist in the Air Force, and I think his vision wasn't good, so he didn't – he didn't make it.

0:01:45

Enlistment

Grossi Okay. Um, what type of education did receive before your service?

Holtz Uh, right – right out of high school, I enlisted.

Grossi How old were you when you enlisted? I mean, you said it was after high school.

Holtz Yeah, 18.

Grossi Okay. Um, what caused you to enlist?

Holtz Uh, it's kind of a long story. They had the draft at that time, and people were being drafted into the Vietnam War, and it was, uh, sort of a lottery system, where would they tell you your number and you had a better chance of getting drafted, so I had a pretty good chance that I was going to be drafted. So to get a better choice of where you want to go, I enlisted.

Grossi Okay. What did your family think of your enlistment?

Holtz Uh, they – they were happy about it. Like I said, my uncle was in the Navy and said it was the best one of the services, even though my father was in the Army. So they were happy about it.

0:02:50

Boot camp and USS *Hancock*

Grossi Okay. Uh, what was, uh, boot camp like in the Navy?

Holtz Boot camp – it was – it was very tough for me, because it was the first time I was like away from home, alone there, and not, you know – scared what was going happen, but I ended up doing good[sic], 'cause I had, uh – I was in pretty good shape. So the physical stuff wasn't that hard for me, so I – I did good[sic].

Grossi Alright. Um, where were you stationed after completing your training?

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- Holtz** Uh, after – after boot camp, I went to training in San Diego, California, and the first place I was stationed was onboard an aircraft carrier, U – USS *Hancock*
- Grossi** Okay. Uh, what was your experience when you first arrived where you were stationed?
- Holtz** When I first arrived, it was – it was just very different than anything that I had seen before. Nev – I’d never been on a ship, and it was really big. Um, lot of people. You have to live in, uh – sleeping on a little bunk in a room with a lot of other people. So it was – it was hard to get used to.
- Grossi** Um, what was your instructor like?
- Holtz** In – in boot camp, you mean?
- Grossi** Uh, yes.
- Holtz** Uh, he, eh – He was good. You – first you get there, and you’re scared, and you’re – hate them and everything, but you get used to it. Then once you graduate, you appreciate what he did, you know, what he taught you, and everything.
- Grossi** So you mentioned living on the carrier. What was, uh, the Navy life like?
- Holtz** Well, I – I liked it. Once you get out of boot camp, you realize it’s more like a job and it’s not all going to be like you were – like it was in boot camp. So you, uh – you get used to it pretty fast. It was good. It was fun. Some of it.
- Grossi** Alright. Um, was there any – what was not fun about it?
- Holtz** What was not fun was the hours. You work a lot of hours, a lot of hard work, and, uh, the thing I got trained for was, uh, personnel, which is human resources. So when you work in human resources and in an office, they – the other people on the ship don’t think you’re doing anything, ‘cause you’re not out there manning the guns, or steering the ship, or anything important. Your, uh – you know, according to them. So you get volun – you get volunteered to do other work to help other departments. So it’s – it’s a lot of work, a lot of hours.
- Grossi** Alright. So what were some of your other duties then?
- Holtz** Uh, I worked in the – in the laundry, pressing uniforms and stuff, and, um, just, uh, security watches and stuff, go – security. Guard duty is called “watches” in the Navy.
- Grossi** Um, what were the watches like?

Holtz Uh, you get different hours, like you'd have f—a four-hour period, where you just, you know, stand guard over something or, you know, security of the ship.

0:05:55

Vietnam War

Grossi Alright. Uh, what was your assignment during the Vietnam War?

Holtz Uh, I was in the personnel office on the aircraft carrier, and I was, uh, in support of an air squadron, where they—the, uh, pilots would fly off the carrier and do whatever they had to do over there, and just their support, like their—make sure their pay, their paper work got done, you know, transfers, retirements, whatever they had to do. All the office work.

Grossi Okay. Um, tell me about your, um, Western Pacific [Ocean] and your Mediterranean [Sea] cruise?

Holtz That, uh—well, the Western Pacific was while I was on the aircraft carrier, and where they would go off the coast of Vietnam for a while, and then after that, they would go into different ports. So I got to see a lot of the world over there. It was—it was really good. The Philippines was my favorite place.

Grossi Oh, what made it your favorite place?

Holtz Uh, just that the people are very—they're very friendly. They're very nice. They—they support, you know—they supported the military. Met a lot of nice people there, and also the, uh, beaches, mountains, everything—just a beautiful place to relax, after being out at sea for a long time.

Grossi Okay. What was the typical day like during this period?

Holtz A typical day? Uh, like I said, there's—there's[sic] long hours, and your—Besides the regular office hours, which is—they try to make it eight to five, but then you're on call and other things come up, so you end up staying there a lot longer or being called in the middle of the night, and then, if you had one of those, uh, watches or some other duties you had to do that—they don't take the hours away from your regular office work. You still have to be there. So some days you'd be working without any sleep.

Grossi What was the food like?

Holtz The food was—was actually good. I know people complain about it, but it was—it was good. You had a lot of choices. You got—you don't have that much time to eat sometimes, but the—the food was really good. They did a—they did a good job.

Grossi Um, what would you do to entertain yourself at times?

Holtz Uh, they had different activities, and s—you know, sports. 'cause we would like—'cause when I'm on an aircraft carrier that has a big flight deck, so during the times that they're not, uh, landing and taking off aircraft, they're—use it for sports, games, and they had movies, and they—we would get our mail stuff, and they didn't have the Internet back then, but...

Grossi [laughs].

Holtz We could make phone calls and send messages.

Grossi Okay. Did the Navy change after the Vietnam War?

Holtz Uh, it cha—Yeah. It changed a lot. A lot of things changed.

Grossi Could you tell me about some of the changes?

Holtz Uh, well, see, it seemed during the war, they were more relaxed about, you know, haircuts, uniforms, A lot of things. Uh, even—even drug use was pretty prevalent during the Vietnam War, and they didn't—seemed like they really cared that much, and it went from that to the zero tolerance policy pretty quickly. You know, I guess they realized it was getting quite out of hand [laughs].

Grossi [laughs].

0:09:22 Naval Reserves and going back to school

Grossi Um, tell me about the Naval Reserves.

Holtz They—well, after—after my first four years, I got out for a few months. was going back to school, but then I decided to go back in and I went into the—it was called Training and Administration of the Reserves program, Where I'd work at Reserve centers and air stations, just training—training Reserves, and supporting them, doing there paper work, and keeping records and things.

Grossi Alright. You said you went back to school. Um, what'd you go back to school for?

Holtz Uh, I—I went back to get an AA [Associate of Arts] degree, which I did, you know, start. When I got out, I started going full-time, but then I went back in the military and went just part-time 'til I finished then.

Grossi Alright, and then you said you wound up going back in? Um...

Holtz Yeah.

Grossi Why'd you decide to do that?

Holtz Well, I got married, and then I was going to have a kid. So I thought that would be—I thought that would be a good, uh—good career to have, since I liked it a lot for the first four years. So I decided to go back in and make a career out of it.

Grossi Okay. Um, what was your job in the Reserves?

Holtz Um, it was still office work. It was, um, personnel, but, uh, helping with the training of Reserves. Like the Reserves that would come in one weekend a month, and they'd get trained. The—the person—the administrative ones—I would help train them, and also keep all there records and everything for all the Reserves. You know, transfers, retirements, promotions. Everything they do.

Grossi Okay. Um, how did moving up through the ranks change your responsibilities?

Holtz Uh, it changed a lot. You get a lot more responsibility pretty quick[sic] from when you first go in and just—I made it all the way up to E6, which is, uh, supervisor. So it's a lot of responsibility, because you have a lot of other people to worry about and make sure there doing their job as well.

0:10:23

Liberty and awards

Grossi Okay. Uh, what was one of your most memoral[sic]—memorable days throughout your service in your career—in the serving career?

Holtz Uh, most memorable days? Uh, I guess, uh, being on a ship and traveling. You know, any one of those days, when you're—you know, you work hard, but then when you finally get into a port, they give you a lot of time off to do what you want and relax, and I like that part of traveling. Seeing new places.

Grossi Traveling must have been fun. Um, what were some of the things you do when you um, would dock at ports?

Holtz Uh, they would have—they would have tours available, you know, they're trying to encourage you not to just go out to bars, like some people did. Um, so I didn't do too much of that. I went on a lot of the bus tours and they had events scheduled for us. Like you could go help, uh, different charity events, go help, like—I remember one time, we painted a church or helped this, uh, shelter for people. A lot of things like that, where you can help the community too. They didn't want us to just go out there and have fun and leave [*laughs*].

Grossi [laughs] Um, did you receive any awards?

Holtz Yeah, I've got a lot of – a lot of different medals and awards for different things. I don't even remember them all.

0:12:48 **Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm**

Grossi How did you help exactly in Operation Desert Storm and [Operation Desert] Shield?

Holtz Uh, well, that – at that time, I was at a Reserve center, and they mobilized some of the Reserve units to send them over there to – to, uh, well, fight, or set up things, whatever, and so we were – when you're in the Reserves, they have these drills all the time about mobilizing the Reserves and calling them into active duty, and you think it's never going to really happen, but that was the real thing. We had to mobilize them – and I think it was about three hundred people from our Reserve units – and get them ready, get them there orders, paper work and everything, and travel arrangements, and send them over there.

Grossi Alright. You said there was[sic], uh, drills and you actually wound up having to do them. Um, did the drills you feel help? Or was the actual event...

Holtz Uh, the actual event's a lot different than – it – it helped – it – the drills helped you prepare for it, but then when it actually happens, they – there isn't time to actually to do it – there wasn't time to actually do it step-by-step the way you plan. You know, Set up the incoming – set up the tables, set up the – what forms they're going to need. So it – it worked out a lot different than you planned, but you still got it done.

Grossi Okay. Um, did your experience in Desert Storm and Shield differ from Vietnam?

Holtz Uh, yeah, it was a lot different, 'cause I was just at the Reserve center, and – and preparing these other people to go where I – I – In Vietnam War, I was actually on the ship, right off the coast there, and even though I was working the office, I was more, you know – closer to the action that was going on, supporting the people, but, uh, for that for that – for that operation, I was just at the Reserve center, and getting them ready to go there. So it seemed like it was further from the actual thing.

0:14:43 **Off-duty activities**

Grossi Okay. Um, what kind of activities did you do while off duty? Um, I know you mentioned you – you'd go on tour and stuff...

Holtz Yeah.

Grossi During the dockings. Um, was it just—I mean, uh—I guess when you're off duty, what did you do?

Holtz Oh, just—well, if I'm in a different—At the Reserve center or at the...

Grossi Uh, I—just In general

Holtz Well, if you're...

Grossi when you were off duty.

Holtz Well, when it—when it—it's different when you're off duty overseas. I would just, you know, travel, see, you know—See what I could find, enjoy the scenery and new places, but once I was at Reserves center, Reserves center is in the—in that program, I was back home. So I was married and had kids. So I was just doing normal, you know—normal daily life, and it was more like a regular job, than when you're on a ship.

Grossi Did you visit back home often?

Holtz Yeah, I would. Yeah, my parents were still in New York most of that time, so I would—I would fly home whenever I could. Get vacation. They gave you a lot of time off in the military, when—when they can.

Grossi Um, when you were back home, what did you do for work or just entertainment then?

Holtz Oh, spend time with my parents and my brothers, and visiting, mostly.

0:16:07 **Keeping in contact with other sailors, injuries, and September 11th**

Grossi Um, did you still keep in contact with any of your friends you made in the Navy?

Holtz Uh, I did for a while, but it was hard to do that, 'cause so many people get transferred, and you don't see them again, and—So I lost track of a lot of them, but there was a few that I—that I still kept in contract[sic]—contact with.

Grossi Okay. Um, could you tell me about some of the injuries you received?

Holtz Well, first injury—first injury I got—when I was working on that aircraft carrier, I worked in the laundry, and pressed my hand down on...

Grossi Oh.

Holtz On the steam press. So that's how I got that injury. So I call it my "Vietnam War injury," but not really. It was on the aircraft carrier,

working in the laundry, and got – got that hand burned, and some other things: I just hurt my back while I was there, so – but nothing too serious. I'm still able to work.

Grossi Okay. How did, uh, the events of 9/11¹ affect you?

Holtz How did it affect me? I was – I remember being very angry when it – when it happened, and wishing I was back in the military, so I could go do something about it, you know? Help fight whoever was doing it.

0:17:31 **Civilian life**

Grossi How was the transition from the Navy life into the civilian life?

Holtz Uh, it was very hard, at first, to – when you're looking for a job, and you try to relate what you did in the military to civilian job. So you work in an office and, you know, you find out that all you're qualified to do is be a secretary, or something like that. So actually, I was, uh, a medical services secretary, when I first got out. That was the first job they had at, uh, Humana[, Inc.] health care.

Grossi Okay. Um, how – how has the civilian life affected you?

Holtz Oh, well – well, I got used to it pretty quickly, and I had other jobs since then, and then finally found UCF [University of Central Florida], which I like.

Grossi Okay. How have the – the way the civilians treated you over the years – how has that been?

Holtz It's – it's been good, mostly. Most people – most people, you know, they appreciate what you did. they – there's, you know, this preference for veterans, and a lot of jobs that you go for, you know – to at least get you the interview to see if you're qualified to get the job, but, uh, most people treat you – treat you good[sic]. I never had anybody who didn't.

0:18:55 **Lessons learned from the Navy**

Grossi What lessons, from your time in the Navy, do you consider valuable?

Holtz Uh, I think I learned a lot about working, do, uh – doing the best job that you can, getting it – trying to get everything done, so you can enjoy your time off, and, uh, doing a good job working with other people – Team work. A lot – a lot of things you learn there, you know, still relates to whatever job you have outside.

¹ September 11th, 2001.

0:19:20

Closing remarks

Grossi Do you have any, uh, unusual or funny stories in your time of the service?

Holtz Um, no, not really [*laughs*] – not really that I can think of. I'm sure there were some.

Grossi Um...

Holtz Well, now, there's some unusual things when I was working at the Reserve centers. There sometimes – sometimes, they're the only military in the area. So they've let you – make you volunteer for a lot of different things, like security and different things that you don't need security for. They just wanted the local military to be there, and doing funerals, and things that I didn't like to do.

Grossi Okay. Um, is there anything else we missed or you would like to talk about?

Holtz Um, no. not – not really. Not that I can think of.

Grossi Alright. Uh, do you have any messages or lessons you'd like to pass on to the young – the young people?

Holtz Oh, about the military? Just that it – it is a good career. Uh, the benefits are great, now that I'm retired. I did – I did, you know, 20 years. Now that I'm retired, it's really worth it to, uh – the benefit you get, through retirement, the medical care, everything. So it's worth it.

Grossi Alright. Uh, questions?

Unidentified [inaudible].

Grossi Okay. Um, well, I'd like to thank you, Mr. Holtz, for your time. I and the UCF community really appreciate you coming out today and telling your story, Um, in the – in the short time in the interview [*laughs*]. Thank you.

Holtz Okay.

Unidentified [inaudible].

Holtz Thank you.

End of Interview