

Don Zimmerman

Lowe Veterans Appreciation Video – November 11, 2020

Don Zimmerman. Donald, but they call me Don and United States Air Force. I was 35 years old when I first came in and served for 20 years until I was 55. And interestingly of the 20 years, 13 were overseas. And then seven years were in the states at various bases.

I grew up in Michigan, Lapeer County, and my folks moved out to Phoenix, Arizona in 1956. And in my high school, it was a high school in Phoenix that had the very first Army ROTC, Junior ROTC in United States years ago. And so I started my military career there in the Army ROTC. And I took drafting and tool design.

And so, when I graduated, I went and got a job with Motorola military electronics, and I was working on bomb fuses, which were used in Vietnam. And because of that, I had a deferment, and so, I didn't have to go to Vietnam. I always, I was at, I was that age, but I worked out at Motorola and work that.

So that when when I was heading to seminary, I was going to do my seminary work in India and to an English-speaking school. And my wife was in college to be able to teach the children, missionaries' children, and I was in Phoenix keeping the bills paid before we go there and she was in Seattle, Washington. She graduated from school and on Wednesday, and started home with two children in the car and got 82 miles south of Seattle, and something went wrong with the steering mechanism in the car and she was instantly killed. So that put me on a shelf for a while because I had two children, a five-year-old and a three-year-old.

And and so I went back to drafting and working that. Learned to fly; bought an airplane. And then when I was down in Mexico for a Thanksgiving vacation, some folks from Brazil were teaching and they - next day they said, "You know, Don, hope you're not offended by this but you know we missionaries had a prayer meeting last night, and we were wondering if we knew anybody that would make you a good wife."

And they knew that this gal from Michigan who had worked with her - with them in [?], Mexico. And so Ann and I started writing and telephoning and so on. And so she – it was her first year of teaching down at Vandercook Lake south of Jackson. She was from St. Johns, Michigan, but soon after that we were married and she and and so at that point we went to seminary in Kentucky and by that time I was I was almost 35.

And there was a navy chaplain that was there [?] postgraduate studies and he says, "Boy, Don, you'd make a good navy chaplain." And the chief of navy chaplains visited the school that week and he said, "You know, you're not over the hill yet. You can see down the other side but I, I need the pastors who are who are mature that can minister to my sailors." And so I was endorsed by the United Methodist Church to be a navy chaplain.

And the opening was - there was a fella that retired from the Free Methodist Church as a colonel and I took his place and we went off to a place where the kids were hoping to see airplanes. And it was Cheyenne, Wyoming. Minuteman missiles. No airplanes.

So of the 20 years I spent, I spent 13 years overseas. Well, anyhow, we would - we were there at Oslo one the interesting things is did a lot of skiing and Ann taught kids in school – took them out for recess to skate, ski, and so on.

And we had a day where we went to the top of the mountain where we, where our kids had a ski day and I, and, and the kids were skiing. And I was with another parent going side by side and we were skiing along behind to make sure any kids didn't fall out and here came a man along with his dog. And so, I stepped over to the side and got up to the next thing and were the

parents up at that point excited. “Did you see the king?” That was King Olaf of Norway with his dog out skiing that day; interesting things.

But, the interesting things also, when we were at Ramstein, Germany, I got sent down to Bahrain for the Gulf War. And we were, we were there and the Saddam Hussein shot scud missiles. You’ve heard of the scud missiles and here are parts of the scud missile that I picked up off the ground [shows a display of missile pieces] because we had an army unit that had Patriot missiles at the end of the field. And when a scud came, the Patriots took out the scud and there's a there's a scud. I keep it up.

The wonderful thing with a with a chaplaincy you, you minister to everybody and, you know, not just Christians. But I had to know how to relate to Muslims and, and, and so on. And that I was, as a supervisor, I had, I had a Baptist chaplain and the Roman Catholic priest and then three enlisted people as well as myself as a Methodist. And so we all worked together there with the people.