

Moffett, Alex
interviewed by Jon Andresen
transcribed by Jon Andresen

Tape #1 Side A - May 2, 1993

Jon: Why don't you begin by telling me where and when you were born.

Alex: Well, I was born in Sujo China in nineteen five, o-five. My parents were missionaries in China and a my mother taught me in the first few grades. We had a big family, and then I finished high school in Shanghai in the Shanghai American school in 1923.(laugh)

Jon: That's interesting, were your parents affiliated with any church?

Alex: Yes, they were with the Presbyterian church.

Jon: So, I suppose you speak Chinese.

Alex: Well, I spoke the Shanghai dialect. I never did get proficient in what they call the putongwa now, the Peking dialect. And I've forgotten a lot of what I knew.(laugh)

Jon: So, you came back to the States...?

Alex: I came to Washington Lee to college in Virginia. And then went to Vanderbilt for medical school. And hospital training stayed on in Nashville and a couple of more years in a small town near Nashville, Tennessee. And then after my wife, Virginia, and I were married we went back out to China in 1935. And were in the medical work in our mission for five years, the first time.(laugh)

Jon: So, you were there until 1940?

Alex: Yes, and then we were there during the Japanese invasion then and came out in 40'. And then we wanted to get on back but it was 47' before we got back. Then we were there for just over a year when we had to leave on account of the revolution and the new government.(laugh)

Jon: That must have been quite a time there.

Alex: Uhmhum.

Jon: Tell me about high school. What was it like to go to high school in Shanghai?

Alex: Ya, it was an American school. Most of the students were American, had a few from other nationalities and it was organized primarily by missionaries because they wanted to have their children prepared to go to college you know. And course a lot of em' studied at home like I did to begin with. So, we had a good good, a good school a very high standard because they had to prepare the students for any college in the United States. Course they scattered all over the United States you know.

Jon: Right.

Alex: And ah, it was a great experience.

Jon: What did your parents do exactly, as missionaries?

Alex: My father was a minister, and he worked with the small country churches, small town churches. So, he was somewhat analogous to the old Presbyterian, old Methodist circuit circuit riders we have about it over here. And ah he worked with his Chinese ministers, and once a month they'd come up to our home and he would have a day or two of a intensive Bible study.

And then over the weekends he usually tried to get around to one or two places there. So, he had a very fine career. He enjoyed it a lot.(laugh)

Jon: That's wonderful. Did your parents stay there their whole lives?

Alex: Yes, course it was broken off, broken up uhm by the Japanese war and later our W.W.II. But they stayed there until retirement age, and then my father supplied in number of different churches in this country until he was close to seventy.(laugh).

Jon: So, were your parents sponsored by a church here in the states?

Alex: Yes, by the, well by the, at that time we had the Presbyterian church was in two parts as you might have heard. As the northern and the southern, split up during the Civil War.(laugh) And ah, so, we were under the southern church, the mission board of the southern church.

Jon: And then you came back here to go to college.

Alex: Uhum

Jon: What was college like back in 1924?

Alex: Well, it was quite an experience. I'd looked forward to it for so much.(laugh) Cause I'd been away, we had one furlough during during my earlier years but I'd been away for from the first grade until finished high school. So it was tremendous anticipation.(laugh) And ah it took a little time to get used to things but I really loved it.

Jon: So, you really didn't really know much about the United States, or what it is really like to live here?

Alex: Not, well there was a lot that I didn't know.(laugh) Ya.

Jon: So, what struck you the most about coming to the States?

Alex: You remember hearing about the Volstead Act and Prohibition in the United States?

Jon: Right.

Alex:(laugh) Course we had Prohibition at that time, and ah I was used to seeing American sailors drunk in Shanghai, but I just thought that was people in the service you

know. And when I came over to college and ah the first few nights everybody was celebrating a good bit and quite a few of the boys were had been drinking too much, and ah it was quite a shock.(laugh) But I soon found out that that wasn't the whole the whole of student life.(laugh)

Jon: So, ah I just wrote a paper on Prohibition.

Alex: So did you?

Jon: Ya, so was it easy to get alcohol during Prohibition?

Alex: Yes.

Jon: It was everywhere?

Alex: Yes, uhm there were bootleggers almost everywhere. I went to a member, a minister in our church, told us about one visit when he went down to the county jail which is down the street, down the main street from our church in Lexington, Virginia. And ah he said he noticed that when the time was came for singing there was one of the men that wasn't singing, so he says " Brother why don't you join the singing?". Well, he says, " I can't sing", ah " I just sold some liqueur to some of the officers in your church down the street and it just doesn't seem right to me now for you to be down here giving a service expecting me to sing."(laugh)

Jon: That's really funny. Spent, you spent four years in college.

Alex: Uh-hum.

Jon: Did you study biology?

Alex: No, well yes, but I started out I wanted I wanted to go into the ministry myself. And ah so I majored in English, but finally I decided in my junior year to to go be, to go into medicine. So I had to take some extra science courses. At that time the pre-med.. courses were very heavy in science. Now they've I'm glad to say have gone into including more of the humanities which I think is a excellent thing. Um, so when I graduated in uhm I was, at that time you, we didn't think about applying to fifteen or so

medical schools like you do now. You just decided where you wanted to go and you went there.(laugh)

Jon: That would be nice.

Alex: Most people could, I suppose most people could get in. And ah I narrowed it down I wanted stay in the south, to Tulane and Vanderbilt and the University of Virginia. And ah, I learned that at Tulane at that time that they had a strange custom of flunking about half or more of the freshman class.

Jon: They flunked 'um?

Alex: Ya, take in a big class and only keep about I think forty percent. Which I thought was rather stupid, hard on those who started out and got kicked out. And then I ah had a friend who knew the lady who ran the one of the cafeterias on Vanderbilt campus and so he said he'd get me a job washing dishes for my meals.(laugh) So that decided me on Vanderbilt in Nashville. So I went there and ah after being interviewed to see if I could get in I didn't have enough science so I had to take an extra year. I took that in academic school, and I took some more chemistry there. And then went in next year and graduated in '32.

Jon: Was medical school expensive back then?

Alex: Not like it is now. Uhm, I had a a, our mission board gave more or less subsistence salaries to the missionaries, enough, plenty to live on but there wasn't any extra. But they had stipends for each of the children, so all through school I got, in college I got \$29.17 a month. And it was later increased to just over thirty, I forget what. So, I had that which went a long way. And then I always was able to get jobs for my room and my board. And the rest of it I borrowed a little bit but not much, I came out with a small debt and I got several scholarships that helped along the way. So I don't remember any great agony over it.

Jon: You say you worked for your room and board?

Alex: Ya.

Jon: Did you stay on campus, or did you have an apartment during med. school?

Alex: Well, the first year I lived in a little apartment, we cleaned the apartment and then I worked over on the campus in the cafeteria for my meals. And ah, let me see, that was for a couple of years. And one year my parents were on furlough so they all came and we lived together and I managed to eat off of them that year.(laugh) And the last year I had a student internship in a mental hospital, uh so I was, there were two senior students who were senior interns, medical student interns and that gave me a nice room and board there and a little extra.(laugh)

Jon: What did you do for fun in college and medical school?

Alex: Well, in college I really, I just loved swimming. I didn't miss many days that I didn't swim.(laugh) I was on the swimming team. And then also the last two years we had ah two clubs there, rowing clubs. We didn't have any intercollegiate rowing but we had two rowing clubs so I got on one of them and rowed there. And I enjoyed that a great deal too.

Jon: Did you row in the river?

Alex: Yes, ah a river, it wasn't ah it wasn't very, it didn't have a very long stretch so we had four man , ah four oar shells instead of eight.(laugh)

Jon: So, you swam and you rowed?

Alex: Rowed and my brother was there the last two years and ah he had a very good voice and so we had a couple guitars and we played a lot.(laugh) We had a lot of fun with that.

Jon: And in medical school did you get to do swimming?

Alex: Ah medical school there wasn't much time. And enjoyed having dates and dances and so forth, but ah aside from that that was about it.(laugh) But I loved it, every day of it.

Jon: And after medical school did you have an internship?

Alex: Yes, I stayed on at Vanderbilt and took a, I wanted to go into surgery. But ah, I had an internship that where I thought I would get a fair amount of surgery. I decided not to go in for the long ah university training. I should have done it, but I decided not to because I knew if I went to China I'd have to do a little bit of everything. So I thought if I could get as broad a, get into as many fields as I could it might be more useful. So the first year I was in this place that had a rotating internship we called it, but the professor of medicine stopped me in the hall and asked me if I would be one of his interns on medicine.(laugh) I couldn't turn that down, ah he was a great hero of mine. So, the first year I had just strictly internal medicine so I was very glad of that. And then the next two years I got a scholarship, I got a residency in a community hospital. Ah, there was only one resident physician, so you had to serve all of them and there were three surgeons and two of them I worked with mostly. And ah they were just as different as they could be and I learned so many different things. One of them was very aggressive and ah not afraid to tackle anything. So, I got some, I hope I learned a little aggression from him. The other one was so cautious.(laugh) That he was very slow and deliberate about everything. And between the two I think it helped me a great deal in my career.

Jon: How many years did you spend in your internship?

Alex: Well, just three years and most of the now if your into surgery you usually spend five. But during the interval after our first furlough, when we came back I worked in a hospital where under surgeon who helped to uhm ah apply to the American College of Surgeons and do a little extra work getting ready for that, and so I was admitted to the American College of Surgeons Now you can't get in without the full at least five years training before hand, but at that time it was a little, not quite so strict.(laugh)

Jon: So, when you were in medical school you knew or thought you wanted to go back to China?

Alex: Yes, I knew I wanted to go back.

Jon: As a missionary or just a?

Alex: No, as a missionary. Ya.

Jon: They needed a lot of doctors there?

Alex: Yes, yes they certainly did.

Jon: When you went back to China, had you been back during college or medical school?

Alex: No, just the one time when I was six years old I came back. I mean, no that was coming this way no I didn't get to go back.

Jon: When you went back to first time, what struck you about going back?

Alex: Well, it was, it was ah, it was very natural. In a way like getting home. Not that I didn't feel America was home but it just felt like another home. I'd wanted so badly to go, and I was lucky that Virginia was willing to go with me.(laugh)

Jon: When did you meet Virginia?

Alex: Uhm in my, in my last year in med. school. No, I met her, I met her the year before that ya we didn't really start getting to know each other until the last year.

Jon: How did you meet her?

Alex: Well ah, there was a girl that I'd been having dates with, who just occasionally, and she had a bridge party at her home so she invited me to come and that's where I met Virginia.(laugh) Neither one of us played much bridge, and certainly weren't very good at it, and we've hardly played a game since(laugh) of bridge.

Jon: So, you both went back to China?

Alex: Yes, uh-ugh.

Jon: How did you ah, go about practicing?

Alex: Well, I went right into a mission hospital. The one in our in the town where I grew up. As a matter a fact we had an apartment in my parents home that first year. And ah the doctor who built that hospital was our family doctor, I'd grown up with him. and he was my role model for life I spose, a wonderful person. And ah, it seemed to me like he could do almost anything(laugh) And ah, so I got to work with him for a short time, and then he became ill and died so. But I was ah, the hospital had about a hundred and

twenty beds. And ah, the superintendent was at that time a Chinese, he was a Chinese doctor. A very fine man that I worked under, I really admired him, and then there was another surgeon that was just about my age who and we worked together a great deal there. But after a year of that, well the first six months was we started language, then after a little over a year the Japanese came in and ah so they burned up our homes and the hospital.

Jon: They did?

Alex: Burned all the hospital except the nurses home. And ah we ah we, Virginia we had two, we had one one child by then and another was about ready to come so we were refugees in Shanghai for a while. And then I went back up in the country, ah the Japanese were occupying that area then and managed we got in there without too much trouble from the Japanese. We got to know some of them, and ah worked in a little, actually had a clinic in a country home. A Chinese country home where we had our clinic, and I had a room in in a Buddhist temple right near by.(laugh) So when we had surgery we were right there in the Buddhist temple. We didn't do a great deal of surgery, it was mainly emergency work there. We did it right in the temple with the Buddhist gods in the background.(laugh)

Jon: How did you get supplies when after the Japanese came in?

Alex: It was, it was pretty rough, pretty hard. Uhm usually I could get back and forth to Shanghai. Uhm you hard to go wherever, well the gurillias were fighting here and there you know so we sometimes the railroad was closed. We didn't have a railroad to our home but we could get to a railroad and that sometime that was closed. But we lived on the Yangtze river so sometimes I could go by river. One way or another I'd go up about once a month to see the family and get a, get a couple of suitcases of supplies and bring 'um back.

Jon: How did you, when you were a refugee in Shanghai how did you live?

Alex: We lived in the American school.

Jon: Oh.

Alex: Ya, the the school opened, course most to the borders weren't able to get back again. And it was a a campus, something like a little college campus and with a big building in front the dormitories and the refectory around the back. And we stayed there for awhile and then we got into an apartment. And later I took my family back up into the country and we were able to stay there for awhile together

Jon: Why do you suppose, the Japanese were in Shanghai right?

Alex: Yes.

Jon: Why do you think they didn't burn down the American school too?

Alex: That was interesting. We were in the, that's before we were in the war with Japan. And ah so they were ah they were pretty careful about getting too rough with the Americans.

Jon: I see.

Alex: But while I was there, I don't suppose you remember hearing about the Panay incident? The US, the United States steamship Panay (spelled out Panay) Panay. It was a tiny little gunboat, do you remember hearing about that ?

Jon: I think I have.

Alex: Tiny little gunboat that ran up and down the that we took from the Spanish in the Philippines in the Spanish-American war. (laugh) And they had regular patrol duty up and down the Yantze river. And ah that was a that was altogether a matter of American prestige because it was just a little a tiny little boat, and ah even the Chinese respected them most of the time. And ah it was anchored offshore at Nangjing, which is about hundred and fifty miles up the river, and ah with the American flag on it. And one day they just bombed it and sank it, and that was one of the things that lead up to tightening things up, lead up to the war. Course the Pearl Harbor was the real incident, but that that really made things get a little bit tense.

Jon: Before Pearl Harbor though um, weren't the Americans and the British supporting the gurillias fighting, the Chinese gurillias..?

Alex: The gurillias were so poorly organized, they were mainly just little groups of ah adventuresome young men (laugh), a good many roughnecks among them scattered around so we weren't supporting them. But we were supporting the Jung ki sheck's and his army, the nationalist army, ya.

Jon: I was wondering because ah if the Japanese knew that why didn't they give the Americans trouble.

Alex: They did up to the limits of what they thought they could. They made it hard for you. For instance, ah I had they made me come in to report to headquarters every now and then. Um they'd talk endlessly and tell you what you ought to do and lecture you.(laugh) And ah uhm we had to have passes all the time, local passes and they gave you a lot of trouble getting a pass. You'd apply for it and you'd have to come back the next day to get it, well it wasn't ready yet, come back another day and another day.

(laugh) It ah was mainly just a matter of making it rough. One day I ah, after we came back to my town and took up a little nursing home and opened it as a little hospital, uhm had I think about twenty beds then. We were able to do our surgery and so forth then, and I got called into the headquarters and told that we had to register with the Japanese government, the puppet government. Well, the Americans were taking a stand against doing anything like that. In other words we would try to get along with them but we wouldn't register with them. So I told 'um we wouldn't do it. And ah so, they insisted and well I said we'll just close the hospital.(laugh) Actually it was the only hospital there in town. It was a city of about fifty-thousand. And after about three days I got word that, ok, they'd let us open it up again.(laugh) So, we were able to open.

Jon: The Japanese knew you were you a doctor?

Alex: Oh yes. In this, in the little town where I was at the country first there were was a. How big is a platoon?

Jon: Forty men.

Alex: Forty well there was a platoon there of soldiers in that town. And I got to know them, some of them, one of them fairly well. He had a little English and he wanted to practice his English with me. And some of them came to our clinic, they didn't have a doctor they came to our clinic for small things and so they tolerated us. Its funny because uhm also I knew some of the gurillias and ah before we opened in the city I used to go back and forth and have a day a week maybe in the outpatient clinic in the city. And one day when I was leaving to go into the city one of the soldiers, Japanese, came to me and told me, you be careful about those gurillias now said they are all through that country out there.(laugh) Well I wasn't as afraid of the gurillias as I was of them.(laugh) But ah, and then another time we had a, I had to go and get a man who was wounded, had a bad neck wound and bring him into our little hospital to take care of him. And we had to come through the canals, that was canal country, we had very few roads but there were a whole network of canals with houseboats and boats on them. So I had the man in the cabin of the boat. And I knew, it hadn't happened at our place but at other places they had gone into hospitals and pulled out the young men who were wounded and taken them shot them. And ah, he was in the back so I got out on the front of the boat and as we passed under one of the bridges why one of the sentries that knew me waved at me and I waved at him and we talked until we got by and got the man safely stowed away and they never came after him, but I was afraid they would.(laugh)

Jon: Would have gotten in trouble for taking care of him?

Alex: What did you say?

Jon: Would you have gotten in trouble for taking care of him?

Alex: Probably at that stage they would have taken him out and given me a lecture probably. I don't think they would of, they might of made it rougher for me from then on I don't know.

Jon: After Pearl Harbor did the Japanese get rougher with the Americans?

Alex: Well, ah we came out on a furlough in August of '49 so we were in America at that time. And they, yes, they ah expelled them from China and put some of them in prison. One of my uncles was in prison for quite a while, or rather in house confinement he couldn't get out. And then one of my colleagues who was also a doctor was in a group of people who were sent down to the Philippines and put into a concentration camp. So they, we were just lucky we didn't get put into a concentration camp.

Jon: So, did you spend the war years in the States?

Alex: Yes, uh-hu.

Jon: You worked as a doctor?

Alex: Yes, in a a I was up in a little ah hospital up in the mountains in North Carolina in up in the sticks.(laugh)

Jon: How old were you then?

Alex: Well lets see, from five to, uhm I went back in '48 so I went back to China the last second, the last time in when I was 43, so I was in my forties over here.

Jon: Did you ever think about joining the army or anything?

Alex: Yes, yes I thought a great deal about it. And ah, the hospital we were in in Banterup, North Carolina was ah quite a remote area and at that time ah the doctors had to supply the number of that the army required. So, we had one man in North Carolina who was in charge of requiting the doctors, and so ah uhm he never did call me and I never did volunteer but I did talk to him and asked him what he thought about my going in. Well, there were so few doctors in that area he said you better stay where you are. Well I stayed, I regretted it ever since that I didn't volunteer.

Jon: Why is that?

Alex: Well, my brother went and he came back uhm -

Tape # 1 Side B

Jon: Right so, you didn't you didn't

Alex: I was ah I wasn't as strongly as anti-war as I am now. This is before the terrible experience of Vietnam and of even Korea. And ah I felt like it was a just war, I still think it was. I don't know any other way we could of done and to fight the Hitler regime, I mean it was sweeping over Europe and threatening Britain.

Jon: Right.

Alex: And ah I felt like, and so many of my friends went, that I've I've often regretted that I didn't volunteer. Then if they told me not to go and stay up in the mountains why I would have been more comfortable about it.(laugh)

Jon: What differences did you see in diseases and things like that between what people had in China and the States?

Alex: Ah some of the diseases that we had begun to get under control in this country were still wide spread in China. For instance, small pox was almost unheard of in this country, and it was wide spread in China. And ah there was a great deal of Typhoid fever, we still had disgracefully, well what had we had was a disgrace over here but it was nothing compared to how where it was in China. Last time we went I went out there in our hospital we had at one time about over twenty people with Typhoid Fever in one ward at one time.(laugh)]

Jon: I've barely ever heard of Typhoid Fever.

Jon: No, you wouldn't it's almost unheard of now. Small pox, Typhoid Fever, and then we had a great deal of malaria. A great deal of Malaria. And then we had diseases over there that we just don't have over here now, a good many parasitic diseases, Typhus fever we had, ah and cholera we had that in the summers in some areas would devastate a lot of areas a lot of people. But there were a lot of parasitic diseases. And ah infections, this was before we had penicillin or even the sulfa drugs. And we had, infections were a terrible problem over here. But I remember how delighted I was, the first patient that came in to our hospital with an injury or, I forget what the injury was, a cut of some sort

that I was able to treat and get the wound to heal I mean the wound healed without an infection.

Jon: Right.

Alex: Almost the rule that if a person got a wound uhm that it would become infected.(laugh)

Jon: So did you get penicillin in China about when we got it here? Or did you have to wait awhile for it?

Alex: The ah, when we went back we could we got some penicillin. Yes, but not much. No, wait a minute, no we didn't no we did not. Ah because we didn't have any until '49 when I was over here when I remember I first started using it. We got one of the ah, one of the ah earliest forms of the sulfas, there were a few of them in China. But ah we only I only remember getting to use it a very few times. And then not enough not enough for a full course of it.

Jon: So you were in China during the Korean War?

Alex: No.

Jon: No.

Alex: No, that was after, uhm that was I forget what year it was, that was fifty early fifties where. We came back back in '49 the last time.

Jon: Oh. From your perspective that you've been in China and living then in the States what did you your opinions on the Korean War?

Alex: The Korean War? Ah, it's hard for me to say because I think so much of it now in retrospect.(laugh) Looking back on it. But ah, I don't think we ever knew how terrible it was. We had some idea. Ah Ernie Pyle was a tremendous newspaper man, have you ever heard that name? Ernie Pyle, Pyle (spelled out Pyle) and a great a great writer and a great reporter. And he was right in the thick of it here in ah Korea. And he gave some wonderful reporting, he died of course a long time ago. What did I think of the Korean War? I still thought it was it was justified.

Jon: I know the Chinese were involved heavily in that.

Alex: They came toward the end, yes.

Jon: Was there a lot of anti-Chinese sentiment in the States?

Alex: Ah, I don't think so. Because there was already a great deal of anti yes anti-communist, yes, were against communists Jon. We talked about free China, ah the nationalists army and their government came over to Taiwan you know and a certain number of Chinese also came over to Taiwan. And we called that free China.(laugh) And we ah we scorned communist China and the government. Uhm, it was terrible when they first came in, left after, I didn't see any of it. But they did wholesale murder, and then killing of landlords, that was the main thing, anybody that owned land. Was was they were just killed fight and left. And then the the a intelligentsia were put work in the fields and the factories. And then there was the the uhm cultural revolution, which was those horrible ten years when they, in fact all the universities and colleges closed, and the students went wild. They didn't, they closed the they didn't they had very few classes in the colleges. And all the kids your age were out with their red banners going over, tearing things up in the countryside. Hunting down the intellectuals and just burning books.(laugh) It was a terrible time. But they got over that. And then there was the great leap forward when ah ah Chairman Mao told all of the intellectuals to come out and write, and ah into the field of writing and express their opinions. And they did that and a great many of them got promptly clapped in jail for it.(laugh) And things, of course you know about Tienamen Square, and ah things have opened up a good a good deal. And then the large number of Chinese students who have come over here I think have helped us to, to say that well we'll a little more tolerant of them running their own government, that after all it's theirs. And ah we'd like to see more human rights in China. But ah, there has always been a good feeling between the Chinese people and the American people, always. Except for intervals.(laugh) The Chinese like Americans.

Jon: I assume that you have a lot of friends still in China when you were back here?

Alex: It was so completely closed that I almost lost touch entirely. I have had some touch with a doctor that I that he was a student in our mission high school. I didn't know him as a student, then I knew him when ah he was taking his internship, he went on to study medicine, I knew him than and saw him once or twice, I never saw him many times. But I've had a few letters from him through the years including one recently. And ah my son Sandy and Betty, I don't 'spose you've heard, but they've just they've just back from China.

Jon: Oh really?

Alex: They had a wonderful two weeks , ah little over two weeks in China. And ah he was able to make contact with this friend of mine. He didn't see him but he had a telephone conversation with him. And ah so he made we touched base in that way, but I've just about lost contact with all of my Chinese friends. Course I'm 87 so most of my own generation have died.(laugh)

Jon: So you were in China and you missed, probably not that it's a bad thing, but you missed seeing the Great Depression in the (undiscernable)

Alex: Well, I was in school at that time.

Jon : Oh, right.

Alex: Ya, and I still got my \$29.17 a month.(laugh) And ah ah, people didn't have so many things. I mean, ah you didn't want so many things then. Not, in my dormitory there were only a few who had phonographs we called 'um then. And you had to crank them, you didn't have radio didn't have radios, course didn't have televisions, and you just you just had a wonderful time without all those gadgets.(laugh)

Jon: Were a lot of people out of work?

Alex: Uh, yes, when I was in in medical school there were a lot of people out of work. And ah, its its funny but in the in the academic world, where I was inside a hospital, I didn't know it. Well, the Chinese its, there was so much poverty in China.

Jon: Ya.

Alex: I guess that's one reason that I I grew up thinking that people have got to be poor.

Jon: So it wasn't..

Alex: I don't mean that I made light of it, but I don't think it hit me like. I'll tell you what really hit me. Uh uhm in 1935 when we went out to China, why course Roosevelt had come in and turned things around a lot, but it still it things were pretty bad. And Virginia's father, my wife's father, lost his his job, and that really made an impression on me.(laugh) He just lost his job. There were many reasons, his health wasn't too good, but but ah I I put the depression as the main thing. One of the main things.

Jon: The depression seemed made a big impact on my my grandparents.

Alex: Uh-huh

Jon: And my grandmother she, for Christmas she gave us a book called We Had Everything But Money.

Alex: Oh ya.

Jon: And ah well, she cites the reason why she spoils us was the depression, " Well, we didn't have anything so I can spoil you."

Alex: (laughter)

Jon: Is that what it was like? Did you have everything but money?

Alex: Uhm, isn't that funny. My mother used to tell me this when we were children. She said, "Well, children" she said." We're rich but we don't have much money but we're rich." We really felt like we were, I felt like I was privileged all my life. I really did. A friend of ours, a single lady who was another missionary in our mission station, had a little phonograph with about fifteen or twenty records maybe. We we didn't have a phonograph, we I never thought about wanting one. I just thought about well, we just don't have one and that's it. And she let us keep hers most of time, and we learned those records by heart, we just loved 'um.(laugh) That's where I got, she had only a few classical records, but we we listened to those and sang with them.(laugh)

Jon: Do you like the, classical music the most?

Alex: Ya, I love classical music. My mother, mother was a musician and ah she taught music and one of my daughters taught music. And ah Sandy is quite musical.

Jon: Did you ever get into jazz or..?

Alex: I never cared much about jazz. Ah when he was in high school I was pretty much, I always loved hymns, hymn singing, we'd grown up with a great deal of it and I loved hymns. And ah ah I loved classical music, and Sandy in high school years, that was before rock and roll, I guess it was early rock music. And one day he had a record (laugh) on in the house and it was pretty loud and pretty raucous. And I says, Sandy, I says, how can you stand that?(laugh) And he never, he hardly ever came back at me, and he says, daddy the trouble with you is you're narrow minded.(laugh) He said, I like classical music as much as you do, he said, I like this this music too. Well, you know it really turned me around on my my, turned me completely around, and I realized that you you got to listen to all kinds. And ah I still don't care for rock music, but I least I willing to admit that it is music. And I don't want to, I don't want to turn it down unless it's too loud (laugh) Do you like music?

Jon: Ya, I like music.

Alex: What kind?

Jon: All kinds really.

Alex: All kinds.

Jon: (indistinguishable)

Alex: Do you play?

Jon: I used to play the trumpet.

Alex: Oh did you?

Jon: Did you ever play an instrument?

Alex: Just just the guitar. I never, and ah only just a few chords. I never got very far with it. After I retired I studied it some but I couldn't, it was to late to learn then. I couldn't somehow get on to it.(laugh) I I like the harmonica.(laugh)

Jon: When you came back from China in 1949 what did you do here in the States?

Alex: Well ah, I ah we thought we'd get back anytime. So, first I just I got a temporary job the place, in Alabama. Working for a doctor who had a contract practice with a big mill there, did that for a year. And then ah I went all over a number of places looking for a place where they needed a surgeon. I wanted to be to a small hospital.(laugh) That's what I was used to.(laugh) And ah found this place in North Carolina and they they were gonna build a hospital, but it wasn't ready yet. So, I got another temporary job through, no that was the temporary job I got for a year. And then went into in 1950 when they just, right after they opened this little hospital, and stayed there until I retired. And did surgery there.

Jon: Where was that in North Carolina?

Alex: Taylorsville. Do you know where Hickory is?

Jon: No.

Alex: It's right in the Piedmont area, right in the, we could drive in an afternoon and get right up in the Blue Ridge mountains(laugh), and back.

Jon: Where you happy there?

Alex: Yes, ya it was great.(laugh)

Jon: Did you raise your children there?

Alex: Yes, uh-huh they all finished high school there, three of them.

Jon: What do you remember the most about living there?

Alex: Well, the the people. That's the longest we were ever, we were there twenty-nine years, the longest we were ever in one place. And getting to ah, well, in the beginning I did some obstetrics too and deliver babies and see 'um grow up. In one case deliver (laugh) the second generation of the same person. I mean, deliver a mother who whose mother has, wait a minute.(laugh) I was with her when she was born and then I was with her first child when it was born. I always say, you don't deliver women they deliver themselves. We just stand by and do what little we can do to help the miracle of

childbirth.(laugh) And then I loved doing the surgery, uhm and then working with the doctors for a long time I was the only surgeon there, and there just two other active doctors. And we had a very close relationship, we were not in partnership but we worked very closely. And then one or two others came in and we never had a large, more than five or six in our county.

Jon: You say during W.W.II you weren't against war, and not so much in Korea. What happened to change your attitude?

Alex: Ah, I guess it began when I began to wonder what the end results were. In Korea you may remember that we drove the the communists all the way up to North Korea. and we though we licked 'um, and then they turned around and pushed right on back. And now where are we, got two Koreas. Ah, are they better off now than they would have been if they'd all been Korea, if if they had all been communists, if they were all a communist government. Would the the a South Korean who are such good businessmen, would they have been able to temper things, I don't know. Ah, and we, the Chinese of course got a tremendous ah boost in their self esteem when they came down into North Korea and turned the tide of battle and actually fought with us and showed that we couldn't push 'em around. I think that my be one reason that they have been as strongly anti-American as they have until Nixon sort of warmed things up a little bit.(laugh) And then then the Vietnam war. I have a nephew was in there, was a Marine, right in the toughest of it, he volunteered. But has had very little to say about it since then, but it's pretty clear that he feels like it was the wrong thing to do. And ah with all of our might we got, we got licked. And I haven't been able to see the wall in, the Vietnam wall in Washington, but that impressed me so much, pictures of it. And then uhm after all is it right is it right to kill people under any circumstances?

Jon: Ah how old were your children during the Vietnam war?

Alex: Sandy is, Sandy is 56 now. What the last year of the, what was the year of the Vietnam war?

Jon: Ah '65 through '72.

Alex: six, six

Jon: Ah '72 would be the last year.

Alex: '72, ya, well he was going on 36 cause six from (indiscernible), he was in his thirties, thirty, 37.

Jon: So, non of your children were in danger of being of going to Vietnam?

Alex: He might have been taken in and the other two were girls, and ah they weren't drafting girls.(laugh)

Jon: Ya, was that ever a big worry for you that your children might have to go to war?

Alex: Ah no, I guess they weren't ah. I don't remember thinking of it.

Jon: Ya.

Alex: He did go into the army, but it was in the peace later on when he went in for a couple of years.(pause) What what, how do you feel about war?

Jon: I don't know, I would I would probably go if they drafted me but I don't know as if I'd volunteer.

Alex: Uh-hum, that's that's good a good stance.(laugh) I mean, I respect that.

Jon: During W.W.II though, you you said that you thought about volunteering. Why, why volunteer? You were in your thirties, and you have a wife what made you want to volunteer? Was it just the attitude of the country or?

Alex: Well, mainly feeling like I ought to do my part. I don't like the idea of other people over there being killed. A lot of them who had to go in. And of course since that, since the one of the terrible things about the terrible things about the Vietnam war was the uhm fact that so many blacks had to go. The white white boys could get out of it very easily.

Jon: I didn't know that.

Alex: Oh yes, ah you could all sorts of, you could get out to prolong your college education. Or you could get out for this or well, even Clinton and I admire him and he's my man.(laugh) But ah he had a little a little pull not to be on the continual list of going

into the lottery machine. And then he was got the scholarship, the Rhodes scholarship, and ah they were, well at that time we wanted the young men to we wanted enough men of the officer class to be the people to run our wars. I guess we always will. And the ones at the bottom who don't have maybe can't, don't have a job anyway, there is no reason for not drafting them so put 'em in first. I heard the other day that at one time, I read it was just this last week, during the Vietnam war that ah there were three times as many black casualties as whites. This was an article by a black doctor who was, who was in Vietnam. Right in the worst of it.

Jon: I wonder what that says what how the war was run, and who was sent to fight?

Alex: Ya.

Jon: What was it like to live here in the States during W.W.I.I.? You had rationing and all that stuff?

Alex: Yes, it wasn't any big deal. We were up in the mountains and we couldn't we could only get a small amount of gasoline so you couldn't go anywhere much in your car. But the children were little and we didn't need to go anywhere much anyway.(laugh) And ah oh little things like you didn't have as much coffee as you wanted, but that that was a small deal.(laugh)

Jon: What was it like to live in the mountains there, was it really a a rural setting?

Alex: Yes, it was ah ah I've always loved the mountains anyway. We had our church had a mission up there. We had a hospital, a orphanage and a junior college and ah they were all under the auspices of the church. And ah it was more like like a mission hospital in China than anything else. I was used to that you know. As a matter a fact before we were ever went to China I we visited there one time and I remember saying that if we ever have to leave this is where I'd like to stay the rest of my life.(laugh) And ah there was a two doctors there, only two doctors one of them I respected very much, he was a surgeon, he taught me a lot. And ah ah I like the mountain people.(laugh)

Jon: How was it like China?

Alex: Ah there was so much disease in the summer time that all the missionaries, almost all of 'em, tried to get into the mountains somewhere. We lived in the plains where it was very hot. And so we always went to the mountains ah all through my childhood, during the summers at least the family would go. My father would take us up there and he'd go back, back to work and then he'd come back and spend a month at the end of the summer. And ah so we ah, so I always loved the mountains. Was that, what was the question?

Jon: How was living in the mountains...?

Alex: Oh in N. Carolina?

Jon: Ya.

Alex: Oh yes, it was fine. We we ah got in on some of the college activities and got to know a good many of the students. Just like I like it here because we share some of your Grinnell experience, and get to know quite a number of the students at one time or another and the faculty. It was it was delightful.

Jon: So, uhm basically all your life you have been heavily involved in mission work?

Alex: Well, during most of the years in North Carolina of course I was in in my own private practice and not directly related there.

Jon: What else can you tell me about living in China, how it was different from living in the States?

Alex: (long pause) For one thing we had servants.(laugh)

Jon: You had servants?

Alex: Servants we had a cook and what we called a house boy, a man, and a Ahma who was a woman, we had three servants all the time. And ah uhm one thing we had to have somebody to do the grocery shopping for us.