

Tell me about yourself, your upbringing, and how you got into military service?

My father was an Air Force officer. He did 26 years from E-1 to O-4, and he did it during the 60s and 70s. There was a lot of turmoil going on then, and most of that time we were overseas in Germany. We came back, and I think I went to eight different schools before I was 14 and ended up going to high school right here at James Madison. I was in the second full graduating class and loved going to Madison. San Antonio just became the place for me – Mayor Cisneros in '84 gave me the keys to the city. From that military upbringing I was able to meet the right people, and I was fortunate enough to be selected to go to [American Legion Boys State], and then I was runner-up for Boys Nation. But I was trying to show off and ended up getting a severe injury to my elbow and kind of ended that part. Just growing up in the military was phenomenal. I didn't feel like I needed to serve since my entire childhood was as a dependent, so I didn't go into the Navy until I was almost 35.

Actually, I had my 35th birthday at Great Lakes at boot camp. [Governor George W. Bush] at the time had to write a letter to the Navy to get approval for me to graduate boot camp after 35. Then I did 10 years with the Navy, and my last duty station was Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. At that time I was a single dad, so I had three sons that were all in high school at Flour Bluff down there, and then they ended up all going into the military right after high school, as well. I have one son that did 12 years in the Marines, and two sons that did at least double tours with the Army.

How did you get involved in the experience of holding the flag during the National Anthem of the Valero Alamo Bowl last year, and what did it mean? What was it like? Describe the emotions.

My role with the Texas Workforce Commission is with a program called the Texas Veteran Leadership Program. Our role is to be in the community for resource and referral specialists who need to know all the different resources that are here in Military City, USA. In that process, I met [Adrian Ramirez] with HeroHut and [Victor Salazar] with [Alamo Area Council of Governments]. So, I was doing a lot of different activities with them and very, very involved in the community on the veteran side as well as just giving back and volunteering. I had helped with HeroHut and the pregame experience the year before. I had a really big booth, pretty popular, so a lot of people were coming by and we were getting a lot of traffic, and when I started talking about it this year he had mentioned that they were going to put it out for some veterans to do the flag. I started talking about it, we all started putting it out, and then they they asked me if I wanted to do it as well. I have 10 grandchildren, they're really into "G-Pop" and all the things that I do, and it just overwhelms them, all the fun things that I get to go to and get invited to and the people I get to meet. Then I told them that, hey, I may get to hold the American flag for the Alamo Bowl! They went crazy.

We had to be there really early that [gameday] morning, and there were a lot of different nonprofits that were there. I had worked with the Wounded Warrior Project before, saw a lot of my friends from there – quite a few of my friends are amputees. Most of us are 100% disabled veterans. So, it's kind of a tight community, but a lot of those same people were there, so that was an experience in itself. And then we did the walkthrough. And when we did the walkthrough is when everybody first started understanding what it means to hold the American flag like that. A lot of us are combat vets. A lot of us come from military backgrounds and families. But just that experience, it's almost as big an experience as when you're on deployment and you're coming home...it's just that overwhelming sense of pride, respect, and just being an American. Then we get to hold the flag?! On the field?! So, when we did the warmup everybody got really, really emotional. And they told us, y'all can't be emotional when you're doing it, you're going to mess up and people are going to get underneath the flag!

We had all set up in different areas, so I wanted my grandchildren to be able to find me. I wear a cowboy hat a lot, so I had on my hat, and I ended up being right in the middle of the end zone, Colorado Buffaloes, right in front of the goalpost, and that was my spot. Everybody in my family from all over the United States could see exactly where I was at, and the on-field experience during the game surpassed everything that we had done when we were just warming up, and it was even more fun. The electricity leading up to it, the going down [to the field]. My fiancé was up in the stands and she sat with a whole bunch of people that also happened to be veterans, two of them went to my high school that I didn't even know about! It was just an overall amazing, unforgettable experience, and then my grandkids were calling me, G-Pop, G-Pop, we saw you on TV, we saw you holding the flag! They had really good pictures and my friends from different agencies took videos, so it was an unbelievable experience.

Have you ever participated in something like that before? Is there any other sort of recognition that you've been able to be a part of?

I've been able to do quite a few things with the Wounded Warrior Project up in Dallas for the Armed Forces game, and I've done some other flags but they were always 40 or 50-yard flags, not 100-yard flags. When I was at boot camp, I was in a performing division, but then that same elbow that I had injured got re-injured. So then I was a flag holder, and I got to hold the Navy flag for all the presentations. In my last eight weeks of boot camp, we were doing presentations at Navy Pier, up in Milwaukee for Bucks games, with the Chicago Bears. So, I had been in those kinds of situations before, but never with the flag like that. I didn't have to speak or anything. All I had to do was just hold the flag, lead my guys out, and just be there. It was great.

So, you were able to attend the game after the ceremony too?

Yes. I thought the game would be better. When Deion got signed back in '89, that's when I had got signed by the [Atlanta] Falcons. His rookie year was my first year with the Falcons. I had met him before, back when MC Hammer was the big deal. So, I was really hoping that they would play better and do better. Hunter had just got the Heisman. The Deion hype was in full effect and the Alamo Bowl factor and whole new Big 12. And then they definitely did not perform well.

You said you signed with the Falcons. You were in the NFL for a little bit?

For a little, little, little bit, yes. Back in the late 80s, early 90s, we had a minor league before the USFL. There were a few different other leagues, but the minor league was sponsored by the NFL, and there was, I think, 10 teams across the country. I played for the Florida Renegades, and the Florida Renegades were feeders to the Falcons, Dolphins, and the Bucs. And that was the year when the big cornerbacks started coming out of college, like the 6'2", 215 cornerbacks. Like, that's not a cornerback, that's a linebacker! Then there was 5'10", 205 me, but I ran a 4.38. So, I had crazy quickness and speed, and I just liked to hit being from Texas. I got signed by the Falcons and went through the preseason, and got hurt in the second preseason game up in the Meadowlands against the Giants. Tore my ligament, tore the tendon, took the bone in my right ankle. I went from a 4.38 to a 4.49, 4.50, and you can't compete at that level like that.

This was prior to your Navy years. At that point, serving was probably not even a thought for you, right?

Not at all. My dad passed away in 2001. We had had three deaths of patriarchs and matriarchs in our family in like an 80-day period. So, I was going back to Virginia, back to Virginia, back to Virginia. I was working for Sprint PCS at that point. They're in the Quarry, we'd opened up that big store and I used up all my leave. After we buried my dad on February 13th, 2001, I didn't have any leave left, didn't know what I wanted to do. So I decided, you know what? I'm going to take a break, and I'm going to go into the military. They gave me a really big bonus. I went in to be in IT, and I really enjoyed that experience going in at that age. I'd always told my children I was going to be smarter, stronger, and faster than them until they graduated high school. So that just made it easier to stay in that mode, in that shape, and in that frame of mind.

Did you ever attend the Valero Alamo Bowl prior to this year? If so, are there any memorable moments you've had?

I'm a San Antonio guy, I went to Madison. Super proud of being from San Antonio, came back right after COVID. I've been to the Alamodome a lot for UTSA games, as well as the Alamo Bowl. I think it was the OU-Oregon game was my first one back, and that was a lot of fun. And then when UT played, that was amazing. So, I've been to multiple Alamo Bowl games. This year, I think the overall experience, not even because I was in it, just the overall, the pregame, the game, everything was even better. Every year has gotten better, in my opinion. The past two years, I've been involved with booths. But last year, we did the pregame, we did the booths, we did the whole [HeroHut] veterans area, and then we did the game with the flag. So last year, even if we wouldn't have done the flag, would have still been even better than the previous years.

You mentioned earlier that you felt a lot of military and American pride holding the flag. How do you see that reflected in the game at the Alamo Bowl? There's another moment during the game where we ask all the veterans to stand to be recognized. So, when you think about the Alamo Bowl and the military aspect of it, how do those two things tie together for you?

For me, San Antonio is kind of a sports town. It's not as big as Dallas or Houston. It kind of is, but we don't have the same type of teams. At the beginning of every experience – the [San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo], the Alamo Bowl, Spurs games – they always recognize veterans. When they recognize veterans here, it's almost like, please stand, and then have a moment of silence, as well. Most places you just stand and do your veteran wave and do your clap with everybody else. But here, it's like a solemn moment of respect.

When I lived here, we had five active bases. Now, we have [Joint Base San Antonio], and JBSA is an entity unlike any other part of the country. That all resonates somewhere here, and so many families are a part of military history, regardless of if they served or not. So, there's a full relevance and understanding and respect for the military. We were in the final running with San Diego for Military City, USA, and San Antonio ended up getting it. We really do live up to that name. If I'm not mistaken, Texas is the only state that has its own Veterans Commission. I work for the Workforce Commission on the veteran side, but we have our own Veterans Commission. Just so much happens here.

If you could describe the atmosphere of the Alamo Bowl to somebody who's never been, what would you say?

I would say it's way more than just a football game. It's an experience, a holiday experience in San Antonio with America's game. You've got people from all over the country coming in, you've got amazing weather, you've got amazing culture, and you're right downtown by the River Walk. So, before the game, you can have entertainment. During the game, you have amazing entertainment. It's a gorgeous venue. It's not even new, but you still have that new effect. Especially the players, when they play there, like in the Final Four, they talked about "this is huge!". It really is that big. People don't get it when they drive by it, but it's huge. It's like Texas, it's just bigger, better, best, never let it rest.