

Ron Scott interviewed by phone March 11, 2022 by Judy Allen

Story written and edited by Ron Scott and Judy Allen

Ron Scott, served in US Army 1971-74, Rank: ~~E3-PFC~~

The son of Rev Jasper and Savannah Williams Scott, Atoka County, Oklahoma, Ron Scott is one of seven children. He went to school in Tushka Oklahoma, and notes that Tushka is a Choctaw word for Warrior. "With two older half-brothers who visited in the summer when school was out, there was plenty of action going on in the household. Like most people in the community, there was no electricity or running water at our home. We managed to survive by living off the land," said Ron.

"Our parents taught us the value of hard work; Choctaw heritage; language; songs; education; and love of Chihowa (God). We raised hogs, dogs, chickens and Pete, our mule, along with a large garden on our small farm."

Ron said, "Dad had a bad heart from battle injuries sustained in WWII, so was unable to maintain a full-time job as he got older. He contracted work building and repairing fences for other farmers and ranchers around Atoka County. I was always proud of my father because he fought in WWII. Our family's military history extends back to the Civil War where my great-grandfather, Marin S. Crowder, was a 1st Lt. in the 1st Choctaw Mounted Rifles. My father, Jasper, had knife scars across his face and abdomen from a German soldier who tried to kill him in WWII. My oldest brother, Preston, spent ten years in the Army and another brother, Sam, did his tour in Vietnam in 1968 during the TET Offensive. After he returned from 'Nam, I joined the Army expecting to go to Germany but the Army had other ideas and sent me to Vietnam. My brother Roger was too young for Vietnam, so did his tour in Panama. My son Yannash joined the Army for ten years and did a tour in Iraq after the Twin Towers were attacked. My stepdaughter, Autumn, did a tour in Afghanistan and is currently serving in the Oklahoma National Guard and the Choctaw Honor Guard.

"After high school, I wanted to do more than build fences for a living, so I joined the Army to better myself. I took my first plane ride to Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri for Basic Training, then to Ft. Lee, Virginia for Advanced Individual Training. My MOS was Stock Control and Accounting Specialist. I then reported to Ft. Lewis, Washington before being deployed to Vietnam – we landed in Cam Rhan Bay, Vietnam for a few days before I was assigned to Long Binh Depot, the largest Army Depot in Vietnam. The first week I was there, some of us got perimeter duty, which consisted of setting up Concertina wire fence around the perimeter. I was halfway around the world and still building fences. What an irony.

"Another time we went out on surveillance for the Viet Cong (VC). While walking across the heading towards the jungle I heard someone holler, "HELP"! I looked to my left and saw a soldier waving his hand. After a minute I saw him sinking into the ground. It looked like the earth was pulling him in. I waved to a nearby Sergeant. The soldier had stepped into quicksand. We quickly threw some branches to him and with a rope we pulled him out. But he was still carrying his weapon above his head like we had been told to. Whew! What a first week!

"My day job was stocking the warehouse, which consisted of loading/unloading supplies – parts for tanks, jeeps, heavy artillery. This included missiles, etc. coming in from places in the States such as the Army Ammunition Plant in McAlester, Oklahoma. I also kept account of

everything received and distributed to other units throughout Vietnam. My night job was to guard the perimeter from enemy attacks. Occasionally VC would shoot at a tower we were in. Fortunately, I never got hit but I did see a couple of guys get shot – one in the leg, one in the arm. I did NOT tell my parents.

“When I first got to my hooch (sleeping area) the clerk told me my partner was on duty. His name was Michael Scott and it was his 21st birthday. We had a celebration that night. Two weeks later he rotated back to the States. I eventually ran across some Indians from different tribes and, like me, were the only Natives in our specific Unites. We would get together every chance we got. I was eventually promoted to E-5 and ran a crew of guys that kept records of Document Control. I also got to see Bob Hope do a show for Christmas entertainment at Long Bihn. He and the girls made us forget we were in enemy territory for a little while.

“I spent the rest of my time missing home, family and friends, but was happy to receive letters from home. After 50 years, I still have those letters Mom saved from my military service.

“After my tour in ‘Nam, I was assigned to Ft. Belvoir, Virginia to an Army Engineer Base about 20 miles outside of Washington, DC. My first weekend off, I was walking around trying to locate my cousin Toney, who was also stationed there when a car pulled up and someone said, “You need a ride, soldier?” I looked inside and it was my roommate from Long Bihn, Michael Scott. He was getting out the next day. We celebrated our reunion and his discharge. It was nice to see a friendly face.

There was an emotionally charged moment from Vietnam that Ron remembers. “My Commanding Office who we were fond of, celebrated with us before he was to go home. We heard later his chopper was shot down. It really brought back sad times when I was back home watching the last episode of MASH.

“While stationed at Ft. Belvoir, I met Theresa Schottman and got married. Shortly after, I received an Honorable Discharge and returned to Tushka. We were blessed with two boys, Yannash and Nittah. I worked odd jobs, hauling hay, cutting wood and building fences (ha ha). I also joined the Oklahoma National Guard for three years, being promoted to E-4. I joined VFW, DAV and American Legion in Atoka. In 1979, I attended SOSU in Durant, and took a class in journalism. I was fortunate to publish number of articles on local veterans of Atoka County, called Atoka County Veterans, and also published a column called Ron’s Veterans in the tribal paper, Bishinik.

“May of 1983, I was hired at the Stringtown, Oklahoma Correctional Center as an officer. The facility is now known as Mack Alford Correctional Center. Friday the 13th, in May of 1988, the Stringtown Correctional Center was overtaken by Aryan Brotherhood members. They took officer Sgt. Jeff Byington (a Choctaw) hostage, and a riot ensued taking seven more officers, including me, hostage. Millions of dollars of damage occurred the next three days. I thought I was going to die a couple of times as they separated me and another guard, Harold Yoder, to a burning building at knifepoint. We were kept under guard, forced to exchange our uniform for inmate clothes in case something went wrong, so we would be shot first. I was isolated from the other hostages for 24 hours when someone inquired of my whereabouts because me and Capt. Lewis McGee were the only minorities held hostage. Byington had been released earlier. Afterwards, they brought me out to the gate to show I was still alive with an inmate to the right side of me holding a knife to my side, another inmate holding a knife to my left side and yet

another inmate walking behind me with a knife against my throat. They would make me kneel while negotiating with Correctional Officials and the FBI.

"Once, while negotiations were taking place an officer shot at inmate "Bullethead", hitting him with shotgun pellets. When the inmates heard the shot, I was dragged back to the building with the knife still at my throat. Bullethead wanted to kill an officer and I was the closest one! Fortunately, the leader refused, wanting to keep me for further negotiating power. After approximately 68 hours, I was released at 10:20 am on Monday. I saw myself on the Dan Rather News that evening as I was being released. After the riot, we all returned to work to remain until retirement. 25 years was enough for me.

"July 1983, I was elected to represent Atoka County as a Choctaw Nation Councilperson. I was honored to take the role and contribute all I could do. We were under a new Choctaw Constitution. Our tribal budget was small. We did not have a community center, so we formed The Atoka County Council of Choctaws. We had fundraisers for Christmas sack giveaways, monthly meetings, and our first Princess contest. During my time of service, I was able to implement Atoka County's first Head Start program at Harmony School, Senior Citizen luncheons at Jerry and Mae Stephens Restaurant and passed a Council Bill to purchase property to construct a Choctaw Community Center in Atoka."

Another legislative act that passed during Ron's tenure as Council was to construct the first Bingo facility in Durant. "This employed a lot of Choctaw people," said Ron. "Today, the Bingo Palace has been replaced with the large casinos we have today, including casinos at travel plazas, hotels and resorts throughout the Choctaw Nation. I have met many wonderful Choctaws nationwide and am proud of my term served. I still have contact from people to this day. I thank Atoka County for the pleasure and honor of serving!

"February 1998, I volunteered for the newly formed Choctaw Nation Color Guard, now called Honor Guard. We stayed busy with funerals, pow wows, parades and school activities. I believe we did 52 funerals the first year. We attended a ceremony at Congressional Cemetery to honor Chiefs Pushmataha and Pitchlynn. I credit the late Chief Greg Pyle for his support of our Guard and veterans. It has been an honor to give our fallen veterans a military ceremony, which they deserve. We also took part in a repatriation ceremony of a Choctaw warrior whose remains were in a museum and brought to Choctaw Nation through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA program).

"Also in February of 1998, I volunteered for the newly formed Choctaw Language Program as a teacher. We each had to pass a certification process instructed by Olin Williams and Henry Willis. We learned the history of Choctaws and origins of some Choctaw words, along with consistency of how they expected the classes to be taught in classrooms. My first class included 35 students at the new Atoka Choctaw Community Center. I was excited that everyone was interested to learn or relearn our Choctaw language. I enjoyed our social events, songs, prayers, history and culture. We even won 2nd place for a float in the Atoka Christmas Parade that year. We dressed culturally while singing Christmas carols. I was very proud. We had frybread sales to raise money for T-shirts. Language is a part of who we are, given to us by Chihowa. Language is what distinguishes us from other tribes and races. Be proud of your heritage. Chahta Sia Hoke! I continue to teach Choctaw language in my new home state of Florida where Chahta lived centuries before Spaniards and other Europeans encountered Natives. You can still see traces of Choctaw in panhandle Florida today.

"Another fun time in 1998 was when I and several other Choctaws were selected to play REAL LIVE Choctaws in a TNT Movie called "Two for Texas" with Kris Kristofferson, Irene Bedard, and Rodney A. Grant. If you look hard and quick, you can see me in the background in a canoe, another time throwing fish in a basket, and times moving amongst the crowd in my beaded hatband. They were all great actors and people. We took pictures with them, had lunch together, and laughed with them.

"In 2003, I married my current wife, Marilyn, who is also Choctaw. Her children, Jason, Autumn, and Austin became a part of my extended family. Marilyn's father was a Korean War veteran and her brother served in the Navy. We are a family of veterans and proud of it.

"Marilyn and I decided to have our wedding ceremony the Choctaw way. I stood about 75 yards from the minister (brother, Roger Scott) with Marilyn about halfway. When Roger dropped a handkerchief, the race was on. I thought she would take her time and it would be easy. I had to kick it into turbo to catch her just before the finish line. It has been worth the chase. Seems like yesterday, when it has been 20 years.

"2014 I was selected as Outstanding Choctaw Male Elder for the Choctaw Nation, with Rosa Gilmore chosen as the Outstanding Female. I was also selected Distinguished Choctaw with Ruthie Anderson of Councilman Anthony Dillard's District 10.

"In 2018, I was among Color Guard who were presented with a 20-year plaque for our services to fellow Choctaw veterans.

"I have been blessed with a beautiful, loving family and life. I have tried to be a good son, brother, father, grandfather and husband and friend. I want to be someone who looks on the good side of people. My family, my culture, my people are what is important to me. Our children will be our leaders someday. They will take care of our land, our Choctaw Nation and the world. It is up to us to teach what we know. We all have our ups and downs. As long as we can get back up, we can better ourselves to help others. Treat everyone with peace, kindness, love and respect. Reach for the stars, but don't forget who you are and where you come from.

BRANCH OF SERVICE Army 1971-74 RANK E3 PFC