

## Getting to Know . . .

### Marion Elmer "Mike" Alford, Ed D. AAFA #0004

*He is better known as "M. E." or "Mike" Alford. He has been working with our organized Alford effort since 1986 when he heard about us from the late Mrs. Lewis O. (Tressie) Bowman, AAFA #0039, a member of the AAFA Hall of Fame. He and Eva have been present for at least two meetings: Raleigh, NC in 1990 and Richmond, VA in 1994 and.... Mike has done much to further our cause by sending copies of publications that contain Alford information.*



Marion Elmer (Mike) Alford, 1943

I was born in Taylor County, Florida on December 19, 1919, the son of William D. Alford and Jessie McHargue Alford. At the time of my birth, my father was engaged in the lumber industry, harvesting the primieval forest of cypress and pine trees of Florida. This environment in which I lived provided



Marion Elmer (Mike) Alford, 1944

me with great memories of hunting, fishing, camping, and exploring. Obviously, there were certain dangers associated with this environment, such as poisonous snakes, alligators, and other wild animals native to



Marion Elmer (Mike) Alford, 1960

Florida. This experience provided me with an opportunity that future generations of Floridians will never know or understand.

I graduated from Taylor County High School in 1937. The economic conditions were such that it was difficult to obtain employment that would lead to a satisfactory career; therefore, I knew that I should enroll in college. The only problem was where I could obtain the finances. Fortunately, Pickett and Hatcher Educational Fund provided me with an education loan so that I could attend Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee where I obtained a B.S.



M. E. Alford Family 1962  
Marion (Mike), Eva & son Andy

Degree in history and mathematics in 1941. This was also where I met my future wife, Eva Davis.



Eva and Marion (Mike) Alford, 1992

I returned to Taylor County, Florida, where I obtained a position as a mathematics and history teacher. My teaching career was interrupted by World War II. After war was declared, I attempted to enlist in the U.S. Navy, but was unable to do so since the local draft board had classified me 2B. This classification was in response to a request by the local school board not to draft any more mathematics or science teachers. I made two more attempts to enlist, but was refused. Finally, I persuaded the local draft board to reclassify me 1A so I could enter the V-7 program of the U.S. Navy. I was called to active duty in August of 1942. I was sent first to the University of Notre Dame for boot camp, and then to the U.S. Naval Midshipman School, Columbia University, New York. Upon graduation, the Navy assigned me to Diesel Engineering School at the University of Illinois. From there, I was sent to Charleston, S.C. to serve aboard the USS Bannock. While aboard, I served in a variety of billets, with the last assignment being Executive Officer and Navigator.

While I was on this ship, we were involved in a number of engagements in both the Atlantic and the Pacific. We arrived at Falmouth, England in April, 1944, and were immediately assigned the task of moving large concrete blocks that were to be used to form a breakwater for the invasion of France. These were towed to assembly points along the English coast. While so doing, we experienced a number of air raids, but most of the damage was done to the shore installations and not to the ships. Two weeks prior to D-Day, we were relieved of this assignment, and took aboard twenty additional men and officers who were specialists in firefighting, underwater repair, and other salvage activities. On May 29, 1944, we received orders to transfer all the ship's pay records, health records, service records, and officers' personnel files, in accordance with a secret letter, to safekeeping in an old castle in Falmouth, England. The next day, the Germans, at twenty three minutes past midnight, made an extensive air raid. Damage was extensive to shore installations; in fact, the pier to which we were anchored was severely damaged. Also, the fuel storage facility was hit. These activities alerted us to the fact that the invasion of France was imminent.

On June 3, 1944, we received orders to join the main invasion fleet that was assembling in the English Channel opposite Plymouth. We were assigned to escort a convoy of landing crafts as they formed to proceed across the Channel. While the invasion fleet was assembling, the seas became rough, and we were ordered to return to port on June 4. This proved to be a difficult task as some of the ships reported having engine trouble.

We were ordered to go along side of a number of disabled craft, and move them out of the channel that had been swept for mines. We were to assist them to make repairs, if at all possible. One of the ships that we could not repair capsized, and we were ordered to sink it, which we did. On June 5, instead of remaining in the harbor, along with the invasion fleet, we were ordered to proceed to aid the USS Osprey (AM 56) which had been struck by a magnetic mine. We located the ship and boarded it with our salvage party. My task was to locate cryptographic aids and code books and destroy them. To my amazement, none of the codes had been destroyed, nor the invasion plans, called "Overlord", which had been left undisturbed in the code room. The salvage engineer notified us that the ship was in eminent danger of sinking, and we needed to gather the essential information and return to our ship immediately. Fortunately for us, it remained afloat long enough for us to remove all the classified documents. Even today, I shudder to think what may have happened on D-Day if the plans for operation "Overlord" had fallen into enemy hands. I cannot fault the crew of the USS Osprey because a great number of the dead were still aboard. After the sinking of the Osprey, we were ordered to join the convoy which was moving toward the coast of France.

Early in the morning of June 6, we could see and hear the bombardment by the battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and aircraft. We were ordered to the transport area of the Utah beachhead, off shore from St. Marie, France, to conduct repair, salvage, and firefighting operations for the U.S. and British landing craft and transport engaged in the invasion. We were at battle stations for about 36 hours, and the crew was exhausted. We were very busy assisting landing craft that were unable to get off the beach under their own power. When the tide would permit us to move in close enough, we would tow them off so other landing craft could come into the shore. After we finished our assignment at Utah Beach, we were ordered to assist in salvage operations and repair work on Omaha Beach.

At the end of July, we were relieved of our duties and ordered to Londonderry, Ireland to pick up a disabled destroyer, the USS Nelson, and tow it to Boston. Following this operation, we were assigned to the Pacific Fleet where we were engaged in the Naval operations at Iwo Jima and the invasion of Okinawa. The experience at Okinawa was entirely different from that of D-Day. At Utah Beach on D-Day, we never encountered the fanatical suicidal attacks that the Japanese engaged in at Okinawa. For instance, as we approached Okinawa, a Japanese fighter TONY, at 600

yards, leveled off at 60 feet and made a suicidal run on the USS Ard-28. Two Navy Hellcats dove on him from behind. At a range of 400 yards, the Bannock opened fire, using 40 and 20 mm. guns. One of the 40 mm's caught the Japanese fighter amidship, causing the plane to lurch, and smoke began to trail from it. The TONY sailed approximately 4 ft. over the ARD and the starboard wing of the aircraft struck the boom of a barge being carried inside the ARD. This was the first Japanese plane to be fired upon by the Bannock, and considering that 50% of the crew were new recruits, their performance was commendable. One writer says that the Navy probably suffered more casualties at Okinawa than the land forces did. Our job was to assist damaged vessels. When this became impossible, and the ship was no longer seaworthy, we would tow it to a designated area. We had so many ships in this area that we referred to it among ourselves as America's disabled armada.

Immediately after peace was declared, we remained at Okinawa continuing salvage operations. The island was hit by two monstrous typhoons in October, 1945. These storms did almost as much damage to the fleet as the Japanese kamikazes.

Following the war, I enrolled under the GI Bill at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, and in 1947, received an M.A. Degree. Then we moved to Virginia where I served in a number of administrative posts; namely, as an elementary and high school principal, director of instruction, and assistant superintendent for Norfolk County, Virginia schools. During my tenure with Norfolk County schools, I was granted sabbatical leave to attend the University of Virginia in order to study for an advanced degree. While there, I was awarded a Diploma for Advanced Graduate Studies and a doctorate in educational administration in 1958.

In 1960, I accepted an appointment as Professor at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. I remained there for two years. Two years later, I was selected to serve as President of Frederick College in Portsmouth, Virginia. After three years here, I accepted the position as Superintendent of Portsmouth Public Schools, Portsmouth, Virginia, where I remained for nineteen years before retirement in 1984.

In 1984, I had the honor of being selected by a panel of preeminent educators as one of the 100 top executive educators in the U.S. and Canada. Two years later, it was my pleasure to be named one of three distinguished alumni of Middle Tennessee State University. I have been listed in *WHO'S WHO OF THE SOUTH AND*

*SOUTHWEST, WHO'S WHO IN AMERICAN EDUCATION, AND THE DICTIONARY OF INTERNATIONAL BIOGRAPHY.* I have served on the Board of the Trustees of Norfolk State University, Ferrum College, the Salvation Army Board, and as Chairman of the Tidewater Community College Board. I participated in an international field study to the Soviet Union of their educational system, sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators.

I remained active in the Naval Reserve, retiring in 1973 as Lt. Commander. In addition, I was one of 99 Naval Reserve officers appointed to serve under General Hershey's command in the Selective Service System for nine years.

I have served the community in a variety of roles, such as President of the Rotary Club, President of the Ruritan Club, Chairman of the Red Cross Drive, Salvation Army Board, member of the Virginia Methodist conference, teacher of the men's Bible class and lay leader of the Methodist Church. I hold membership in the American Association of School Administrators, Alpha Phi Omega, and Kappa Delta Phi.

My most interesting hobby is working on family history. I continue to enjoy golfing, fishing, and gardening. I am teaching my seven year old grandson to fish, and my son and I are taking him to Alaska this summer so that he can catch his first salmon.

My wife, Eva Davis, and I will be celebrating our fifty sixth wedding anniversary on September 18, 2000. We have one son, William Andrew Alford, and one grandson, age 7, William Andrew Alford, Jr.

One of my most exciting moments in genealogy was locating the grave of my great great grandmother, Sarah Alford, in Columbus County, North Carolina. Also, locating the grave of my great great grandfather, William Lewis McHargue, from Georgia, who died in the Civil War and is buried in Richmond, Virginia.

All of us in the Alford Association will forever be indebted to Gil Alford for his work and dedication to helping us to learn more about our ancestors. Thanks, Gil.

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