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Veterans Oral History Project

Transcription

Mixell: My name is George S. Mixell and I was an orphan boy, never knew my parents. I had two foster mothers, one in Harrisburg and one over in Rossville, a little town on the way to York Pennsylvania. When I was 7 years old they diagnosed me with lung cancer in my left lung and they sent me down to New Jersey. And they cured that down there in one year. I came back and I was no longer in Harrisburg with that foster mother but I had a new foster mother. Her name was Rebecca Dismer. She died and she was an old maid. And her and her mother raised 20 children; 20 boys over the years. And I always said that out of the 20 boys I was the only one that went bad. Everybody gets a kick out of that statement because they know otherwise because of my army service. And I went to high school in Wellsville, Pennsylvania. And the last year of high school I got impatient with the school and I wanted to see the world, so I quit high school. I was a drop out. And back then they didn't have much say about that at the time. The state gave us a break. They said anybody that enlisted between 1940 and '45, and didn't finish their last year of school, that they could go to their local high school and get their diploma, which I have in there. And I said well now I'm a drop in. But I was anxious to see the world. I was a very inquisitive young man. I went to this farm, little weed farm up there. When I came back from my tuberculosis cure, they sent me out there to Rossville to this Rebecca Dismer, up in heaven right now. She did her job, her and her mother. Of course, when my wife showed me this in the newspaper, I went down to Dillsburg to the new high school that they built, showed them my discharge, and they promptly gave me my graduation certificate. In fact, it was the last one issued for the old building before they put the new building up. She said you've really got a collector's item here, she said this is the old building here, what we're giving you, this is the last one they have. So that took care of that during that period.

When I quite high school, I told Becky, I said Becky, I don't like leaving you, but I said I've decided to join the army. I want to see the world. I want to see what's out there. And I said all I've seen so far is 8 years over here at the farm and the all the animals and I said we get along ok. I'd like to go out among new people and see how the world lives. I wanted to see the Panama Canal. That was the big thing in history in high school that we talked about. So I enlisted to go to Panama. Three years I was supposed to been down there. I met a Spanish girl down there by the way. But I had a handicap, I couldn't speak any Spanish. All I learned was (speaks Spanish) and that says the lady is beautiful. Anyway, I went down there with the idea that I'd be there 3 years, and I originally went to York, Pennsylvania and signed up. And the recruiting agent promised me to give me the position I wanted and I said I want to be a tail gunner aboard one of the bombers in the air corps. Oh that can be arranged, he said that's alright. I got down to panama and we were up on the side of a hill called the 5th infantry. I asked the sergeant one day when Iam I going over there to the air force. You could see it over there, it

was a big spread. He said what are you talking about? I said for the recruiting, Sergeant promised me I could join the air corps. He said mister you're already in the 5th infantry. And he said you're going to get all the 50 caliber machine guns and learn to grow grenades and bazookas. This is the heavy weapons company you're in. So that was that. I didn't get to be a tail gunner

In the next month in a half I went through recruit training it was 114 out in the shade down there and out in the sun it was a lot hotter than that even. And I was always allergic to wool clothing and that's what they put on our backs and that winter clothing. And he said you won't be allergic no longer. He said what we do here is, we send you out in the field in training and your uniform soaking wet, we spray you with a hose. That wet uniform keeps you cool. So we went through our 6 weeks training with soaking wet uniforms all the time. Of course we dove into dug outs, trenches, went through mud, training underneath the barb wire. And we were one awful looking mess and again we went under the hose, rinse the dirt off of you. And I'll tell you it was pitiful 6 weeks of training. I never went through anything as hard as that in my all life. But they made a soldier out of you. You learned to march a 100 men together. you marched out there in the group and everyone was in step. If you weren't in step you were in big trouble. You could go through the recruit training again. If anyone of those subjects you missed, you didn't receive your graduation certificate. And of course I got malaria while I was down there. I went out to the beach one Sunday and laid there in the sun and unknowingly a female mosquito bit me, called an anopheles. And that's the one that carries malaria. I got bit and that night I went back to barracks and I was burning up already with a fever. And the Company Sergeant said go on an report to the hospital. He said you've got malaria. So I went over to the hospital. They come out and put me in a hospital gown and next trip was a shot glass full of ply nine, worst tasting medicine there is in the world. Has to be, it's so bitter. He said now drink this down in one shot. Don't try to even taste it. Well you couldn't help but taste it after it got in your mouth. I knocked it down in one shot and half an hour later I passed. I was burning up with this fever and I was out of this world for one a whole week, and never knew it. 7 days, 7 nights and I never knew it. I came in there weighing 189, came out weighing 86 pounds. And they told me God must love you and you must have a strong will to live because this kills 99 soldiers out of 100. He said you're one of the lucky ones. And of course I came back with that malaria, for years and years I kept getting it. You couldn't take my blood, if you were dying, they wouldn't give you my blood because it would kill you right out. It's a deadly disease. And I figured right then and there that God was on my side. He had further use for me.

And I went from there and back to my unit and it wasn't long after that that Pearl Harbor was attacked and they called our group together and they said ok boys you've been living off the government free for a good many months. Now you're going to start paying the government back. He said you're shipping out a couple weeks from now. That's when they brought the Arizona national guard down, put them with us. They took all the old men out of both units and sent them to Germany and all the young ones went over to Australia and up into New Guinea.

And we fought up the coasts. We were there 3 years and our biggest battle was the one at army and watekey and we were outnumbered. They told us 4 to one. And one of our marine corps had gone in there to fight them. And they were called the Tojo's Best Troops of His Nation. They were called the Tiger Marines and they were tough. They were really warriors and they were very deceptive. They had all kind of tricks that they played on you trying to kill you. I you picked up a fountain pen as a souvenir after a battle and push the button it could explode and take your whole hand off and wound you. You could be blinded by it. So we were told not to pick up no souvenir s of any kind because some soldiers payed the price to find that out. We battled this organizations. We battled this organization. Tojo said I'm sending the best men I have against those Bush masters. And he called us the bloody butchers of new guinea. That's the title he gave us. And Tokyo Rose, the exonerated her and they were going to try her as a war criminal in the united States. But all the veteran s said no she wasn't no war criminal. She played music for us over the radio all the time and she told us if our girlfriends back home were being unfaithful. The government took the soldiers' recommendation to heart and they never did try her as a war criminal. They told us that the Marine corps came out of there, what was left of them , all bandaged up, limping on crutches, every which way, they lost half of their unit. About three or four thousand men died attacking that Japanese forest. And he said you guys don't know what you're in for. And he said you've got the toughest group here that ever existed as far as the enemy goes. And we went into Panama and they had a cave up on the side of the mountain and they had that thing hollowed out inside where they kept all their ammunition and man power and they just slaughtered those guys coming up, trying to attack that mountain, and killed them and wounded them left and right. And they finally pulled them out and we marched in against them. And the [army official] comes along, he looks the situation over and he say boys we're going to tackle that cave first. But I'm not sending one man up there. I want a Sherman tank in here. We'll take a position to hold. When they brought a tank in, he said I want a flame thrower on it and could shoot a flame 3 times the length of where you're car is parked. And they come up and parked that tank and they opened up fire against that tank with all those small weapons and that just do no good. And he opened up that flame and shot it up in there and that whole mountain, cave blew up. We never knew how many men were in there but we knew that's where all their storage for ammunition was in there. I powered fighting gear so we still had the new soldiers that were out in the field around that area in the jungle. And the sergeant came over to me one day and he said George you mad expert on every one of your weapons and we need a man like you for body guard for the colonel. What do you think of that? And I said. I'm at your mercy. I have to d whatever you ask me to do. I'm not going to say no. I consider it an honor to be his bodyguard. And then they took the company cook and he sat on one of the colonel when he was walking and I sat on the other corner.

And we got called up there one day, about 15 or 20 day s into battle. And they sent 500 troops up through the jungle now there were navy ships off the shore. And it was all busted up. The jungle was a tangle, terrible to get through. And it turned out that the Japanese had sharp shooters and they were picking off the men. You couldn't see them, where they firing form.

And 500 men hit the ground. Laying flat on the ground. And the commander called back and the colonel got the message. He said come up, see what we can do about this. We don't know where those snipers are, but they've killed 25 and wounded 15. And he's said my men are all pinned down on the ground and we had no idea where that was coming from. So Charlie and I and the colonel, we went you through there. And these guys, when we got in that area, they were cursing us out. They said what guys have a death wish? Get the hell down! And they used more violent language but I don't want to put it on tape. But they said that we had a death wish. Well I was zigzagging and Charlie he was zigzagging. The colonel he walked straight across to where the major was behind a coconut palm and they were laying there talking about this. And I was laying there at his feet looking back and Charlie's looking the other way. And I saw a Japanese soldier tied up in the coconut tree. They used to go up the trees and tie themselves up there. Well I shot at him and the con said what are shooting at Mix, he called me Mix. I said well over there in the coconut tree there's a sniper up in the tree. I saw pieces flying off of him so he could have been dead already and his body's decaying up there. And he said ok and he goes back to talking to the major. And suddenly because I was down on the ground I looked back and I knew right away it was a trench, 75 ft long, and there's seven rifle barrels standing up against the trench. It wasn't very deep. All armies teach the soldiers don't lay your rifles on the ground. I pulled a grenade off my belt, I threw it over as far as I could and I was 5 ft short of it going in the trench. Well the snipers knew right away that they were discovered. And the colonel said you're right Mix. When I threw that grenade he wanted to know what the hell I was doing. He said you said scared the jacket off of me almost. You're fighting your own private war here. I said well look back there colonel there's seven snipers there in that trench. They're off to the units left side. They were shooting you as you walked up and they were killing those men as they walked up through here. They weren't even in the area where the troops were. Well he said to the major take care of that. Then he said come on boys and we jumped in the jeep which was about a road away from where we were at and I was back there about a half an hour and a runner came back and he said Mix you know that nest you discovered back there. They came out and surrendered they put their white shirts over their gun barrels and they came out waving them, this is known as Geneva cot, you don't do anything to them. They assigned tow soldiers to take them back to the prison compound. On the way back these prisoners tried to escape and they killed all seven of them. Now I don't know if that's a true story or not but that was the gossip at the time and of course all these soldiers, the ones wounded especially, they were grateful to hear this news.

And it rained in the jungle. It was six months of dry season and six months of rain. And you knew what a mess you were when it rained. You jumped in foxholes half full of mud and water and you went in bunkers stood guard duty around the camp. I'll tell you what happened the first time we went into rest camp. We were in coconut log bunkers in a big circle around this area and we were protected by troops and the Japanese couldn't get by us. And I learned how to set a trap at night to discover anybody walking or sneaking around in the area. You took a string and hung it between two trees around the front of your trench, and you hung a can, any

kind of a veggie can. Bent the lid over, hung it on hat wire about a foot above the ground and put cartridge shells in it and if anything hit that wire it rang like a church bell almost, it really rang out. We were in the bunker one night about two o'clock in the morning and this thing went off. And I grabbed a grenade and threw it over where I had this and I didn't hear nothing else after that. And of course they put the siren on in the camp to alert the camp and everybody jumped in muddy foxholes to see what happened. Come morning I went out to see what I got. You wouldn't guess what that was that tripped that wire. It was a German police dog and it was laying there with its guts blown out. And the Japanese took our uniforms off of the captured or dead men and beat those dogs without uniforms and that filled the dog's soul with hate for us and they would attack you and kill you. They'd go right for your throat. So they sent them out after dark. And I thought ok, that's one food can that served a double purpose.

Then Tokyo rose would get on the radio and say ok we're sending one bomber out over your area. We know where you Bloody Butchers are. One plane would come over and we'd call him Washer Machine Charlie. But it would come over and drop one ball, over in our rest camp. It could be an area as big as Mechanicsburg. Tokyo Rose would say, well we're coming over tonight. You won't even be able to get to go home to your unfaithful girlfriend or unfaithful wife and then she'd play something like modern music. We'd get a kick out of her.

We were sitting by headquarters one day and all of a sudden we were eating our lunch and this was clean out of the battle area and we didn't expect to see any Japanese or anybody around. But after a bit we heard it; artillery shells coming in. And we were around a group, as big as this home is. I saw guys there with their feet blown off, arms blown off, they were blinded, just eating their lunch. You never knew when you were safe. There was no such a thing as safety. You were in jeopardy no matter where you were or how you moved.

And I'm wearing hearing aids today because this is when I was a bodyguard another man and I were told to go back behind the the line 7 miles from where the ammunition dump was and get a jeep loaded with boxes. So he and I went back there to load up the jeep and all of a sudden boom, back in the jungle. This beach was said like a half moon. 7 miles up there they had an artillery gun and they spotted us getting the ammo down there. I told the other guy they see us down there getting the ammo and they're figure out their target. And a pretty soon another shell cmae blowing over and it was much closer. And I said we better get out of here and I bent down to pick up a box and when I did he took of in the jeep. And I never knew who the guy was, he was driving like a maniac up the cost with this load of boxes of ammo. And the third shell that came down there, I knew it was going to hit right where we were. And there was this great big tree with huge roots coming out of it; 15, 20 feet above the ground. I said the Lord put that tree there to protect me. And there were still about 40 or 50 boxes there yet. And that third artillery shell came in and hit right on that dump. And if I wouldn't have been back here, I dived in behind this root, and I put myself in the position under your stomach, you raise your stomach up above the ground, and you held it up in the air on your tiptoes to keep from rupturing your insides. You don't need to be hit by a shell directly if they fire an artillery shell in your area and

it explodes, that concussion can kill you right off. But I got a concussion behind there. I was about ten feet away. And that's how I loss all my hearing. I couldn't hear right. When I got discharged the sergeant came out and he said you're going home George and that was after 3 years up there, all kind of combat, dangerous. And he said here's a piece of paper, he said this one says on here you need to go back in the hospital for 30 days to fatten you up. You're too skinny. You're almost 100 pounds underweight from when you came into the army. We have to send you home in better health. This other paper here is your discharge. And he said you have a choice, take your discharge and go home the way you are or go in the hospital for 30 days. I said sergeant I want to go home. I've been away four years and I did 7 months in the state driving a jeep. And I took that choice and when I did I gave up my pension rights. I didn't know that that would mean I would lose my pension. Finally I went to the same guy that got me these medals and he got me this hearing aide too and he sent me down to Lebanon. I came back I struggled with that malaria for years. I worked for the civil service unit down in the army depot, 34 years I put in down there. And I lost a lot of money because of malaria sickness. It took me years to get rid of that, to get it out of my system. I don't get it no more, but I've got the blood and in this cold weather, if I don't dress properly I get the chills.

When I came back to the states, they send you to a work station and they have all kind of jobs and the guy told me if they ask for a driver, don't fall for that. They'll give you a wheel barrel to push around, hauling rocks around. He said I've got one job left, I need a driver, would you volunteer for that? And I said, yes I'll take it. And it was driving a jeep for a major. For 7 months I went to four different camps for this major, he was in charge of shipping orders for whole regiments and divisions that went overseas to fight in Germany and the South Pacific and everywhere and he told me George if you stay with me, don't take this discharge, I'm going to Germany next month. I'll give you sergeant stripes the day you get there. You should have had them anyways, but you didn't get them. And I wanted them in the worst way and rank was something you tried to achieve because it satisfied your ego. And you felt more important for some reason or others. Guys said you just want them to show off with. But anyway I turned it down. I said my foster mother isn't well. I'm going to take the discharge and go home and show her my honorable discharge. One old guy bet 50 bucks that I would never get in the army very long until I was in the brig, that's the jailhouse, for fighting. And I said I never got in the jailhouse for fighting. I controlled myself. I went home to see Becky and she cried when she held that discharge in her hand. I can see her yet. When I left home, she walked out behind the barn on that little farmhouse and she stood there for half an hour until I walked out there to the main highway and I was out of sight. She was crying and she was a great religious woman. She left an impression on her boys. She got down beside her bed every night and prayed to God, prayed for that family, prayed for the world conditions and so forth. And she left a great impression with me. When I was in the service, I avoided all kind of entertainment. Troops would be given leave every Saturday and they gave them a pack of condoms to be safe because they went down to the houses of prostitution or they would go in a bar and get drunk. And I

never participated in any of that. I didn't believe in it. I didn't need it. And I think God honored me because of it.

I'm here today at 89. And God walked with me every step of the way. I came back home and my first wife; she was dying of spinal meningitis. And I said a prayer for her in Holy Spirit hospital and the Lord took that spinal meningitis away from her, said there's no cure for her. He answered prayers for my first two wives too. My first wife she had a bad heart and then she got this spinal meningitis. And she came to me one day and said, George don't pray for me anymore. I'm so tired. I've been fighting this for years. I want to go meet my Lord. I said honey I'd never pray for nobody to die, but I'll pray that God gives you his will and helps you out of this. So she died of this failing heart. And my second wife had ovarian cancer. She didn't know it for three years. It was all through her body. But she went out to Illinois on a trip with us to see a circus and I took her out to see that and when we came back the next day, she moved a desk in this ladies house. She said you have this out in the middle of the living room. I'm going to move this against the wall. And the lady said, you can't move that. It took seven men to get it in here. Well she moved it and ended up with a hernia. And when she went in the hospital to have that hernia operated on here in Carlisle the doctor came out and told me your wife has got ovarian cancer. I'll give her about 8 months to live. She lived 5 months and died there in the hospital. I took care of her here, in this very room. I waited on her every day. The doctor told me, George you can't wait on a woman.

My Sergeant, Sergeant Perkins, he was a Patton Sergeant. He went out on a patrol while I was in the hospital with malaria. The radio beside my bed said Sergeant Perkins was killed today in an ambush. I'll tell you, he was like a father and a brother combined to me. I never knew a man I loved so much. You see, I loved him. And I guess I laid there and cried for half an hour. And when I came home, at Christmas, I'd think of him and I'd cry. There is this Perkins restaurant here in Carlisle. But I don't go there today. If I can stay away from it I will because it brings back that heartache to me. I'm not one to be sentimental to very quickly, but that breaks me up. He was one of the greatest. And the way I met him at rest camp, I used to sit at night and make hot chocolate. And he'd come walking down the road and he smelt this hot chocolate. And he'd come in one night and he'd say hey George, I'm a lover of hot chocolate at night. Can I come in for a cup? And I said yup. We had been there for thirty days and every night he came in and we'd talk. He had a wife and three little children out in Michigan. I wished before God many a time that'd I'd gotten his home address so I could have written to his wife and told her was a grand time we had together. But I never got that opportunity. All these events in your life take place and you can let them break you or make you.