

# **National Museum of the Pacific War**

## **Nimitz Education and Research Center**

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

**Mr. Jack Fletcher**

September 24, 2013

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**Interviewer: Floyd Cox**

Mr. Cox: Today is September the 24th, year 2013. My name is Floyd Cox and I'm in New Braunfels, Texas today to interview Mr. Jack Fletcher who resides in Australia, concerning his experiences during World War Two. This interview is a part of the Educational Research Center for the National Museum of The Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. To start off with I'd like to shake your hand, Jack, and tell you thank you for your service to our country during World War Two. It was....at that time you guys were my heroes. I was about eight years younger than you so I was about nine when you started to do your thing. I'd like to start out by asking you a little bit about your background, where you were born, a little bit about your parents and your siblings, and we'll just take it from there.

Mr. Fletcher: Alright, well I was born in Spur, Texas on September 21, 1925. I had three brothers and a sister, who was the baby of the family, and at an early age we moved to Pecos, Texas, and Dad had tourist court out there that was called the Motor Inn Courts and we had a service station and a cafe and we had a cattle yard, of all things, down behind it. And, because we always had a milk cow and I started milking when I was about eight years old, but anyway, our early years were in Pecos and that's where I was living when World War II commenced.

Mr. Cox: You were in high school at that time?

Mr. Fletcher: Yes sir, I was a....I was a.... senior, I would have been a senior in 1943 at Pecos High School, but my mother was killed, and so, well she died as a result of a car wreck, she was an invalid but, ah, but we buried her the Sunday after Pearl Harbor, and uh, so I had to go to Spur to live with my grandparents, so that's where I was, I was living on the farm with my grandparents after that, and uh, and that's when I decided to go win the war, you know. I had a, I had a girlfriend named Betty and Betty told me we were losing and I had to go win the war.....well when I went off to win the war they built an airbase in Pecos and they started training pilots there and when I got on Guadalcanal I had a dear Jack, kinda like a dear John letter and she married a Yankee, so that's, that was the start of my war career right there.

Mr. Cox: Tell me, I believe I heard that uh you tried to get in and your Dad didn't want you to go....

Mr. Fletcher: Well, I was in Spur with my grandparents, and I'd....I'd seen the movie "Dive Bomber," with Errol Flynn, and old Errol, he....he had on that leather jacket and that white scarf and all the girls would come running to him, and I thought, hell, that's what I want to do, I want to be a war hero, so I slipped off from the farm, and....there at Spur, and I went to Dallas and I joined the Marines, I'm gonna be a tail gunner, a war hero, and uh....I took the oath, and we were on the troop train going to the West Coast, and Dad met the train in Sweetwater....

Mr. Cox: Sweetwater, Texas....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, and uh....the Sergeant told my Dad, well, we're sorry but he's already taken the oath, and my Dad said I don't give a damn, I've already got two other sons in the service, all my older brothers were already in, and, uh, he said he's got chores to do and he's going home, so I went home. So, it took me....it took me from then till I turned seventeen in the following year, and in....well in '42, and so he finally agreed to let me go in, in '42.

Mr. Cox: You weren't called AWOL all during this time, were you?

Mr. Fletcher: No, no, see I had my brother Pat, uh, had gone in, he was uh, two years older than me, he was 19, Bob went in, he was 21, and my oldest brother hadn't gone, quite gone in yet, he had a.... but he was married, had a family, so he was exempt, so uh Dad figured that, you know that was enough. So....

Mr. Cox: So he.... the second time it held, and you weren't in the Marines, now where did you take your boot?

Mr. Fletcher: Well, I uh, I was shipped out to California and uh, I guess the, my eyes let me down and I think they thought I was too valuable to be a tail gunner, so they made me a....they drafted me in the hospital corps, and uh, I, uh, I scored out of about 480 I was about the 80th, but then there was a second school, I was 4th out of about 400 guys, and uh I really, I really, I really liked the hospital corps, and I was real proud, I wrote Dad and said, Dad they made me a Hospital Apprentice second class an HA second class, well son if you can't be a horses ass first class don't be writing me, so anyway, uh, and so, uh, they shipped me off to Pensacola, and they had a field down there called Bloody Baron, where they was training

pilots, and our jobs was to clean up the corpses to send home, well I got kinda sick of that and uh I wanted to go win the war, I wanted to see some combat, I thought, and so I volunteered for duty with the Marines, with the Fleet Marine Force, and that's when I wound up with the 34th Replacement Battalion on uh, at Camp Elliot, California, and uh, I wound up then going to the Third Marines.

Mr. Cox: Now....during this time did you have any combat training as far as admitting, how to....

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, yeah, they put us through a lot of training, and of course the Marines, uh, the Marines make it so damned tough on you that you want to go kill somebody, and uh, but you know the night before I shipped out, though, I had, uh, I had dated a girl in Pecos, Texas, and she was, she became the first Lois Lane on Superman.

Mr. Cox: What was her name?

Mr. Fletcher: Uh, well her screen name is Phillis Coats, her real name is Gypsy Ann Stell. Well, I.... I took Gypsy Ann dancing at the Palladium in L.A. the night before I shipped out, to Les Brown and his Band of Renown....

Mr. Cox: Oh, boy....

Mr. Fletcher: And uh, we jitterbugged the night away, but uh, the next thing I knew I was on Guadalcanal, and training to....training for Guam.

Mr. Cox: Now what year was this, Jack?

Mr. Fletcher: That was in uh....that was in '43, and uh, well, you know, I think....I tell you, that in 1940 the, uh, the military challenged the aeronautics people to come up with a bomber that would fly 5,000 miles, uh, and for half that distance would be able to carry a 2,000 pound payload, and so they came up with the B-29, and....and uh, the Marianas was the perfect spot to, for the B-29 to bomb Japan, so that was....that meant the target for the Third Marines was, was Guam, and uh, which we hit in July of '44.

Mr. Cox: Now tell me a little bit about....uh, were you on a transport and unloading, and tell me a little bit about being....the process of landing on Guam.

Mr. Fletcher: Well we, of course we were.... we were on transports initially, but then you....you go into landing craft to, you know, to go in there, and uh....uh, actually, uh, the operation was called Operation Forager, and uh....it was 550 ships involved, and it was the largest, uh....I think it was something like 127,000 troops on those ships, and....the Japanese had a new uh....aircraft carrier that they was really proud of, I think it was called the....I think it was the Taiko, and they were in the Philippines, and so, when we were going up to Guam they sailed to try to intercept us, and uh....uh....the uh....we shot down something like 400 of their planes, in that....in that battle. The battle was called the Marianas Turkey Shoot, you might have read about that years ago, and the Taiko was sunk, and it was the worst defeat in uh, a battle in....you know, a naval battle, in World War II, and they were trying to head us off at

the pass to keep us from hitting the Marianas, uh, Guam, Rota, and Saipan, and....uh, so, now just, I was a corpsman, and....uh, a Pharmacists Mate attached to the Marines, and the Marine Infantry, and....

Mr. Cox: What was that specific designation, Third Marines, First Battalion, or....

Mr. Fletcher: It was First Battalion, Third Marines, Third Marine Regiment, Third Marine Division, was my, and uh....I had trained with Able Company. Well....the Japs, they figured one corpsman was worth twelve marines, uh....and uh.... and uh....a lot of the corpsmen that....it had been the experience on Tarawa and on Guadalcanal and other uh....previous combats, that uh....they would, they'd like to take out a corpsman first, so.... the corpsmen were taking a lot of unnecessary chances to save a buddy, so they just, they moved us around. They took me out of the Able Company and put me back in headquarters, and, when we hit Guam, so I....I wasn't in on the landing at Guam....

Mr. Cox: How did you feel about that?

Mr. Fletcher: Uh, my....guilty conscience, it bothered me for years, I had....my, my company hit....hit a place called Bundschu Ridge on Guam, in fact a guy has just written a book about it, and he got in touch with me about a year ago and he wanted me to remember as many names as I could because he found me and there was only about three of us corpsmen still alive, and

uh....uh, but when they hit it, Bundschu Ridge, uh....in the first hour of battle we lost 46% of the company, and seven real close corpsmen mates of mine were either killed or wounded. And, it....it wiped out every corpsman in the, in the group, and uh....uh, you talk about a....a guilty conscience, Goddamn I had one, I tell you, it, it bothered me for years, I've, I've got to where it.... I, I've kinda like to feel like maybe the Lord had other plans for me, you know, but uh....that kinda, kinda helped, uh....but for years it really bothered me. And, uh....because uh....but, it wasn't long, because the company was wiped out, that I was, I was back with....with what was left of, you know, of the company. I was put back uh....in the field, so to speak.

Mr. Cox: So when did you land on Guam?

Mr. Fletcher: Ah, it was several days after the landing, and uh....I uh....you know, Floyd, there's a lot of....a lot of the blood and guts and stuff that I've....I have trouble remembering, because I just, I wanted to forget it, you know? But uh....we lost, uh....we lost on Guam, we lost, something like 400 corpsmen or some God-awful figure, and like on Iwo we lost 38% of the corpsmen. In fact, on Iwo when we finally got 44% were either killed or wounded, of the 70,000 that went ashore, so, uh....the corpsman lost his, in general, with the Marines, would run around 35 or 40 percent.

Mr. Cox: Same thing, I think, applied to Vietnam.

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, but, uh....

Mr. Cox: How long were you on Guam, Jack?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, we were there, uh....oh, gosh, uh....we....we were there for training, uh....training for Iwo, uh....several months, and we hit Guam on July, '44 then we went up to Iwo in February, '45, so we were there 7 or 8 or 9 months, something like that.

Mr. Cox: So you made the initial landing, and....and uh....uh, as they advanced on the island, what did you do as a corpsman, were you still right up at the front?

Mr. Fletcher: Well, I was mostly at an aid station and then, uh....as, as we started, uh....uh....mopping up, I was with my company one day, and we'd gone....we'd gone by a house that had a record player and some records in it, and uh....I told the Sergeant, I said hey, when we come back by here I want to pick up those records up and take them back to camp. He said okay, Doc, we can do that. So we came back by and the....the house was about 20 yards down a path and they all flaked out on the trail there and I went up there and I walked in the house, and uh....and uh....there sat four Japs, one of them with a rifle across his knees skinning a lizard, and another guy was peeling a banana, and I don't remember what the other two were doing, and I broke and ran out the front door hollering, "Jap, Jap," and we carried a .30-caliber carbine, and I jumped behind a log and cut down on them, and here come the platoon....well,

I had a guy in the platoon named Bobo, and Bobo up on the canal he'd always bring a stool, on the canal, he'd bring a stool for me at the movies, because he....he wanted to be sure old Doc could save him if he ever got shot, you know. So, anyway, I running out behind that log and hollering, "Japs, Japs," and I could hear Bobo coming, "I'm coming, Doc, I'm coming," and here come the platoon and Bobo he pulls the pin on a grenade and lobs it into the house and it went right underneath that record player and all them records, and it blew them all to hell. I said, "Bobo, you Son-of-a-bitch," I said, "If you get shot, I'm gonna stand and watch you die," and uh....God, he used to plead with me after that, he'd say "Doc, I didn't mean to...." you know, but then one time we had a fellow named Livingston, who was wounded on Guam, a Jap just parted his hair, and uh....we slipped out one night and went to a dance, about three-fourths of the way through the campaign, and we met these girls, and uh....so Livvy was supposed to get the name of the....the password for that night, because we had machine-gun emplacements all around the battalion. Well, he....he, we got out there, we went to the dance, uh....we had a big time, and about 2-3 o'clock in the morning, and then we started back to the camp to slip our way back in and I said, "Uh, what's the password, Livvy?" I said, "Livvy, you get it?," "Aw, shit," he said, "I forgot,"....but he said, "It's the President," so we get up there, "Halt, who goes there?" and we said, "President Lincoln,".... Brrrrrrrrpppppppp, here comes that damned machine gun, mowing down all that brush around us, you know, that jungle, and I said, "God-damn Livvy, that's not it," and uh...."Madison,"....Brrrrrrrrpppppppp, here it come again, and so we started pleading with them, "I'm from Spur, Texas, and Livvy, he's from Dayton, Ohio," and finally they let us through, but uh....I told him, I said, "Damn you, I'll never go out with you again," you know.....

Mr. Cox: These girls, were they native girls, or.....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, Chamorro girls, and one of 'em, one of em's daddy was a Chief in the Navy, and uh....he', he'd uh....in fact he was a off there when the Japs had taken....had taken Guam, but you see on December the 8th after December the 7th the Japs took Guam, and uh....that, uh....you know, they buried all their silver and all their good sheets and all that stuff, and uh....so the Japs wouldn't get them....well, another thing happened to me while we was going along there, and they came up to me and said well we need a doctor or a corpsman. There was a lady having a baby, so they told me to go with these guys, and I thought....God-damn, I wonder where babies come from, Momma and Daddy never had told me much about uh....you know, we didn't talk about sex back in those days....I was just barely eighteen, and uh....I thought "Damn, where.....," but then I got to thinking, Floyd, you know when I was a kid there in Pecos, I'd, on Saturday I'd go to the movies, and Johnny Mack Brown was in a film called "Wagon Train," and they were crossing the West out there and the Indians would attack and they'd circle the wagons, and I remembered, seem like, every time there was a wagon train that happened to, there was a lady on there having a baby. So, when Johnny Mack Brown, very coolly, would say okay we've got to build a fire and we've gotta tear up some sheets, and so they'd....that's what they'd do, so when we walked in that house they'd just dug all them sheets that they'd had buried to keep the Japs from gettin' 'em, and I saw a whole stack of them there and I said, okay we've got to tear up them sheets and start boiling some water, so Man, I had them tearing up sheets and boiling water, there was about nine people, and there was old Granny over in the corner with this baby, with this girl moaning,

so here I am over in the corner with all my boiling water and all my sheets and about that time she holds this baby up by its heels, and "Waa, Waa," this baby was crying and I felt these nine hostile eyes looking....people looking at me, I said, "Well, I guess y'all don't need me anymore," and I got the hell out of there. But, that's uh....that's the only baby I almost delivered, you know....

Mr. Cox: So you tore up all their sheets....

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, yeah, I had a whole pile of them torn up sheets they'd had buried since December the 8th, 1941, you know, so....

Mr. Cox: They didn't call upon you again, did they?

Mr. Fletcher: No, no, but, uh....Bull Halsey steps out of it, he stops and steps out of his car, and, and I....brought my rifle to attention, snapped to, and he said, uh...."Son, what's your rifle number?" Well, I was....my voice was changing about that time and I says, (high voice) "Aw, who knows, Sir?"....and he said, uh...."You follow me." And he gets back in his car, and I'm double timing behind his car and we run about a mile to get back to Battalion Headquarters, and he falls out of his car, "Colonel Rogers, Colonel Rogers," and the Colonel comes running out of his tent and old Halsey points at me and says, "This man does not know his rifle number." So Colonel Rogers looks at me like I slapped my grandmother, you

know, and uh...."Get your combat gear on and report back here on the double." I weighed 128 pounds and my combat gear weighed 70 and my rifle weighed 10 pounds, so I ran down there and got all of it and they put me on a parade ground....they said, you walk ten paces and present arms and you say.... "This is my rifle, it is my best friend, its serial number is 152076."

Mr. Cox: You haven't forgot it, neither, have you?

Mr. Fletcher: Naw, I sure as hell haven't.....and you walk ten paces and you present arms and you say, "This is my rifle, it is my best friend, and the serial number is....and you do that until we tell you to stop." Well, I did it until I passed out....and, uh, and I told that Rotary Club in Fredericksburg, I said, "If you have trouble learning your rifle number, get Bull Halsey to teach it to you." And, uh....that's where I learned my rifle number.

Mr. Cox: Well, you were....what was the name of that river you were swimming in?

Mr. Fletcher: That was the Metapona, M-e-t-a-p-o-n-a.

Mr. Cox: Were you, were you in your fatigues, or were you in a.....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, naw, I was just in my fatigues, and I'd been down there, you know, and probably had on my leggings and my fatigues, and had....and you always carried your rifle with you.

Mr. Cox: That's what I was going to ask you....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, .30 caliber, we should....you know, they should have gave us pistols, because uh....rifles when you, uh....treating wounded, you can't, you can't....rifles are a pain in the ass. I never fired mine, uh....about twice, that time I's telling you about going into that house and another time, the only time I ever fired mine, and uh....because that just wasn't your role, your....your job was just to treat casualties, you know.

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, thirty caliber, we should, they should 'a gave us pistols, because uh....rifles when you, uh....treating wounded, you can't, you can't....rifles are a pain in the ass. I never fired mine, uh....'bout twice, that time I was telling you about going into that house and another time, the only time I ever fired mine, and uh....because you just....that just wasn't your role, your....your job was just to treat casualties, you know.

Mr. Cox: Now how big was your....uh, I don't know what you'd call it, a pack that you would carry into combat?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, Gosh, it was, well....you know, it was....it was, you know, it was pretty good size, listen here you had, uh, you had, uh....by the time you got everything in there you probably had sixty, seventy pounds of gear in there, you know, you got.... morphine, you got bandages, you got all kinds of stuff in there....and, tourniquets, and you know, but, uh....

Mr. Cox: Once you run out of supplies, say you're in combat, you're getting low in supplies, how did you re-supply your, uh....

Mr. Fletcher: Well, you had to get back to, uh, you know, you had to get back to your point of supply....and uh, but, uh...

Mr. Cox: Was it easy to get access to morphine, to, say....

Mr. Fletcher: Well, yeah, it was easy to get it back, (unintelligible), sometimes you had a little trouble, uh....like I said, you know if you were a corpsman you were, they sure liked to pick you off.

Mr. Cox: Did you have a cross on your helmet?

Mr. Fletcher: No, no, they stopped that real quick, that would have been asking for it....yeah, and uh....

Mr. Cox: Have you got any other stories you....that come to mind?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, well, naw I never will forget that rifle number, I tell you that, I use that to this day on some of my credit cards. And, uh....hot damn, that Bull Halsey, hm....

Mr. Cox: He was a tough....

Mr. Fletcher: You know, he said, he said that the deadliest thing in World War Two was the kamikaze, and it, oh it, uh, it took out a lot of ships and a lot of men, you know. Naw, we, uh, we had a corpsman, uh, I'll call him South Carolina so I don't use his name, but....but I had a Sergeant named DeWitt that had real bad heat rash, and I told Dewitt, I said I gotta get you up to sick bay to see Doctor Slivka, because uh, damn you gotta do something about that heat rash, so he went up to sick bay and South Carolina was on duty, and uh so after a while he came back down to the company and he was walking down the street, and he was jerking and walking....staggering, and I said, Damn Sarge, what happened, what's wrong with you. Uh, I been to sick bay and they gave me something for this heat rash, and I said what did they give you, and he said well Dr. Slivka and South Carolina give me a shot of adrenalin. I said well damn, how much did they give you, he said, aw he give me a water glass full, 'bout that tall. Well, hell, it's a shot; it's not something you drink in a water glass. And he's drinking a whole water glass of adrenalin. So, we....I slapped him on a stretcher and took him back to

sick bay, and Dr. Slivka said, well the only thing we can do it tough it out, and uh, you know he never had heat rash again after that.

Mr. Cox: And he lived....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, and he lived, but you know, it, uh....when South Carolina was on duty it got to where nobody would go to sick call, and so we all wanted to pull duty with him 'cause we could play poker, 'cause nobody was gonna come up there because they was afraid to. One time he, uh...one time he, we had (unintelligible) acid, uh, solution we treated fungus, uh foot rot with, and he, uh, he painted, just before we went up to Iwo he painted a Sergeants tonsils with it and by mistake instead of his, instead of his fungus on his foot, and hell his damned tonsils sluffed out, you know....but, uh, but we used to....you know, it, uh....it was a great bunch of guys.

Mr. Cox: Some funny things happen during war, don't they?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, they do, yeah.

Mr. Cox: Once the campaign in Guam was over, you were preparing for....Iwo....

Mr. Fletcher: For Iwo Jima, in fact, you know, what happened was, they gave a test in the division, of all the corpsmen, and they were going to send one of us back to the University of Texas to make a doctor out of us. I scored the highest, so my commanding officer said, Fletch you're going home, said you're, we're going to make a doctor out of you, we're sending you back to the University of Texas, he said we, we've got to wire your school and get your grades to the University in Austin, and uh, I said well Sir, I like one semester finishing high school, and he said well, you don't get to go home then, what you get to do, you get to go to, what turned out to be the bloodiest battle in Marine Corps history, and uh, so a guy named, uh, I forget that character's name, he was a alcoholic, he got to go back to the University of Texas.

Mr. Cox: You were quite disappointed at that point, weren't you....

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, yeah, and that's when I...I resolved, I wrote my Superintendent, and he came back to me, and he said look, Jack, on the strength of the grades you made in the two military, uh medical schools you've been to, I would've graduated you if you'd have told them and just sent, and just sent me, just had them send for my, send for the grades, he said I would have graduated you, but I said well, you know my Dad told me never to tell a lie and I just couldn't, couldn't do that, you know. But, uh, it made me resolve to....when I got out of, when I got out of service, to go to university, which I did. I, uh, I....actually, to be honest with you, May 29 last year, I graduated from Spur High School.

Mr. Cox: Well, congratulations.

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, I uh, seventy years late....

Mr. Cox: Were you, uh, at the graduation ceremony?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, yeah, there was twelve in the class, and uh, I told the Superintendent, I said uh, look....I wrote and asked him if I could get a diploma and he said sure you can get one. I got the first distinguished alumnus award at Sul Ross State University, and I'm in their Hall of Fame out there, and he said, uh, sure, he said would you come home and receive it? I said okay, I'll come home under one condition....you tell those other kids, those other eleven people that are graduating with me, that I wasn't a slow learner. So, I was seventy years late, uh, naw they uh, they brought the house down....it made the national news last year, when I graduated, but uh....

Mr. Cox: So, you're, you're there on Guam, now you're practicing for a landing on Iwo....

Mr. Fletcher: On Iwo.

Mr. Cox: Did you, did you practice landings....

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, yeah, what happened on Iwo is, the....because the Third Regiment, because of that, uh....damned near being wiped out on Guam, uh....uh, we got the Presidential Unit Citation on Guam, but when we, when it came to Iwo, the Third wasn't committed until the second day of the invasion, and only elements of the Third were, in the Third Regiment, was committed, but the corpsmen were put to work, because what was happening, what happened on Iwo is....well, we got a booklet that told us there was between twelve and thirteen thousand Japs on Iwo, well there was twenty-two thousand, and they were all in caves, and uh, and uh, uh....when they, when they got on the beach, the, at first we were settin' up aid stations on the beaches, trying to, but the damned Japs were, were killing the....killing the guys in the, in the aid stations, on stretchers, the corpsmen would be standing there and a damned sniper would get him, so what they did is, they, they uh, set up to uh, to put a lot of casualties back on ships, so we, we wound up, while we were taking casualties, we wound up on a transport, uh on the AP 89, uh, a ship, and we would, we would receive casualties there, because you just couldn't do it on the beach because there wasn't a safe place, there was only eight square miles on the whole island, and what was spooky, is that, uh, we didn't find a....a dead Jap wasn't found for a week or two, because they'd take 'em and put 'em back in those caves, stack 'em like cordwood and you wasn't killing nobody, and they was killing one of us about every 1.4 minutes, one of us was either killed or wounded, and uh....and that went on, that went on night and days for days, you know.

Mr. Cox: Now, while you're attending....once you're in combat and you're attending a wounded buddy, you, you, you think about being shot at, or you focus on your patient?

Mr. Fletcher: Aw naw, you, you know we, we carried a thirty-caliber carbine, hell but you, you didn't have time to fool with a damned weapon, you had to give it, see....Iwo was the first campaign where we had whole blood and where we had penicillin, and you take that volcanic ash, if it gets into a wound, uh, in twenty-four hours you got gas gangrene. And then when you got that you got an amputation, and Boy, we had lots of amputations on Iwo Jima, and, uh, in fact, uh, uh, uh, uh, you know, God, those, those poor kids, you know, with lung (unintelligible), with lung wounds you couldn't do nothing for them, all you could do was make them comfortable and....and wait for them to drown, that's what they'd do, they'd drown, their lungs fill up with blood, uh.... but, uh....

Mr. Cox: Well, how long, say in combat, how long after you attended somebody that's just been wounded, how long would it be before they could get them back to the ship?

Mr. Fletcher: Well, we were getting them back, you know, within hours, uh, because, uh because, a lot of the....a lot of the ships there, and, and they were uh, they were treating casualties on every damned one of them, because you couldn't, you couldn't treat them on the beach because it was too damned dangerous. And uh, so we had a, a very bad case we....the Captain of our ship, uh, uh, we had his son come aboard, he was a Sergeant, and uh, a mortar had landed between his legs and had blown off both his legs and both his arms, and uh, and he was a,

he'd laugh about....he said wonder what the girls are gonna think about me when I get home and, uh, we kept him alive sixteen hours, but uh, uh, that was really sad, his Dad of course had to sign his death certificate and uh, but uh....

Mr. Cox: What was most of, the ones you treated were they from snipers or grenades or....machine guns?

Mr. Fletcher: I'd say, uh, I'd say that, uh, mortar, mortar shells and shrapnel, and you know they, uh, most of the time on the bullet wounds, you know they're not, uh, they're a little, they're a lot cleaner and you take shrapnel and this and that, and that volcanic ash gets into a wound and uh, and uh, but boy we did lots of amputations, uh, I don't know, there was one series there on the ship where in thirty-six to forty hours we did over three hundred amputations, you know....

Mr. Cox: Oh, my goodness....

Mr. Fletcher: And, uh, I don't know, I couldn't, on that ship I can remember going back to the fantail and dumping a.... buckets of arms and legs over the side, you know....but, uh, naw the casualties were....the casualties were horrendous, you know....

Mr. Cox: When you mentioned the value of whole blood, can you explain why was it so valuable when you went to whole blood?

Mr. Fletcher: Well, because uh, uh, the big killer was shock, and, and, you give a guy whole blood and you'd just see him come to life, and of course it was, uh....when we had that blood bank on Guam, then they had mobile blood banks that they finally got on Iwo once they had a little sanity there where you could get something ashore, but that wasn't until a week or ten days into the campaign. But, uh, whole blood, up to then it was just strictly plasma that they had, and uh, ....

Mr. Cox: It doesn't work the same, does it?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, no, whole blood is just the difference in night and day, and of course it was the first time we had penicillin, and uh, uh, and ironically uh, uh, I had a little sister that was seventeen, and when we had our....back on Guam when we had our first mail call, uh, she had written me a letter and she was football queen and she was on top of the world, and she was worried about her brothers and....then we had another letter from my sister-in-law and said, uh, Joyce Ann was such a beautiful corpse....and she'd been killed in a car wreck.

Mr. Cox: Now these were the same letters, the same day?

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, had they, had they had penicillin they would have saved her, but uh, the military had all the penicillin and uh, but uh, that penicillin was fantastic, and uh....

Mr. Cox: It saved a lot of lives....

Mr. Fletcher: You know when you, when you've got a whole tent or a floor full of guys dying, you know, it's a....it's something, it's hard....

Mr. Cox: It's hard to take, isn't it?

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah it is, it's uh....

Mr. Cox: Is, does....this stuff probably didn't bother you as much at the time, did it? I mean, you were so busy....

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, no, no, it....you, you, when you were in the throes of it you just, uh, you don't have time to do anything but try to uh, you know uh, stop hemorrhage and treat a wound and, uh you're totally concerned about your patient, you know....

Mr. Cox: Speaking of those patients, has any of your former patients that, say that were on Iwo or Guam ever contact you later, try to get ahold of you and say, hey, thanks a lot?

Mr. Fletcher: No, I never uh, uh....you know, most of the guys I served with were from....Ohio, and way off, they weren't uh, weren't any Texans in there, in my group, but me....uh, now I'm going to, uh, I'm going to Tampa, Florida here this weekend, and uh, for a client, to study a project, but uh, one of the guys that's uh, he's four years older'n me that served with me, there's only two, one of them is in Pennsylvania, uh, he's got Alzheimer's and he doesn't even remember being in the war. The one in Florida, it was another close buddy, and I'm going to see him for the first time in about thirty years, when I go to Florida this weekend, but, uh....

Mr. Cox: That'll be a nice reunion.

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, but he, he, he was on a landing craft going into....when we hit Guam, and he was standing by one of his best buddies, and it, uh, it blew his buddy's arm off and blew his lower jaw away, and, uh, but uh, and it didn't even hurt Clark, didn't even shake him, but that's, that's the silly things that could happen, you know....

Mr. Cox: Did his friend survive, or did he die?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, no, he died, yeah, he uh, he uh....but old Clark, he uh, yeah, he, you know the Japs there on Guam, they would....there was quite a ridge they was trying to get over, and they'd roll, they'd just roll the damned grenades down on you they, and you'd, course you'd build a foxhole with a berm to keep the grenades from coming in, and uh, but, uh....

Mr. Cox: Now did you have a lot of bad weather, on either Guam or Iwo?

Mr. Fletcher: On Guam, on Guam we did, but not so much on Iwo, but uh....on Guam it was, on Guam they had, they had frogs twice as big as that tape recorder there, and at night it sounded like a horde of Japs coming at you, and Boy, we've blown many a frog to Kingdom Come, you know, and uh....you know, the Marines sent me a flag flown over the Iwo Jima Monument, which I was flattered to get because, uh, but there was a lot more guys deserved something like that a lot more'n I do, but uh....I wrote them a letter here and I told them, I said uh, you shouldn't....it should be a requirement that, if you're in the infantry, in the Marines, that you not be circumcised because we had guys that would stand up at night to take a leak and they'd get shot....well, I told them, not me, I said I'd hold in that foreskin and fill her up and let it soak in, and I said, uh, so....you should never send a guy into combat that's been circumcised....and they wrote me back a letter and said thank you for the suggestion, but....I told them, I said you know when I had five boys and they finally circumcised me and I wanted to have mine tanned and hang it over the fireplace, but I said you know my wife wouldn't have a (unintelligible) of it, she just couldn't believe what we'd been through together, you know. But....I used to tell the....I used to tell the pilots, those B-29 guys flying

off Guam, I said, you know you guys, hot damn, here we are in a foxhole and you've got a relief tube, you know they had in the cockpit, I said, and you do over Tokyo all the time what we'd like to do, you know. And uh, but uh....naw we, I was in the regular Navy and so, once we went back to Guam we were training to hit, uh, Kyushu, in November....

Mr. Cox: Japan....

Mr. Fletcher: And uh, we had a, we had a Corpsman named Demerest, and uh we were, we were training and, we'd uh, we had these 105 millimeter, big.... big guns, and they'd shoot on a phase on and we'd advance on it.... well, we had a shell fall short and it hit right about 30 feet in front of my foxhole, and uh, old Demerest, it blew away his lower jaw and he, he took a safety pin and he put it through his tongue to keep from swallowing his tongue and pinned it to his cheek, and he tended to, all of his platoon, helped, you know, helped treat the wounded, uh, and he, he died, finally, but that was one of the bravest things I had ever seen.

Mr. Cox: Did he get any kind of award for that?

Mr. Fletcher: I don't know, but....and then I ran up and jerked a poncho off of a guy, uh, and uh, and he had uh, well I reached over the poncho to see if he was alive, he was still kneeling like he's digging his foxhole, but he'd uh, his head had been blown off, and my arm ran right down in his chest cavity and I come up with a piece of shrapnel, and he had a blade of,

(unintelligible), I'll never forget that name, it's just been imprinted on my brain. But, uh, but he was dead and uh....

Mr. Cox: And that was, if I understand you correctly, that was so-called friendly fire.

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, that was a training accident, and I've tried to find, uh, I've tried to find reference to (unintelligible) and I never have been able to find anything, and so I guess the Marine Corp just glossed it over, but uh....oh, it, it killed or wounded 30 or 40 guys, it was, it was pretty bad, but uh, but that was in getting ready to go up to Iwo, and uh....but then after, after that, I was in the regular Navy and all the Reserves went home and uh, when the, when the war was over, and somebody....

Mr. Cox: Where were you when the war was over?

Mr. Fletcher: I was on Guam.

Mr. Cox: Oh, you were back on Guam....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, we was getting ready to Kyushu, so they asked me, said, Damn, Fletch, are you concerned that the war's over and I said, yeah I'm worried as hell, I said, Roosevelt's died and Truman don't even know where I am, you know? I figured, we all figured Roosevelt always knew where each one of us was, you know....so, Man, I, you never seen as many guys crying in your life as we did when Roosevelt died.

Mr. Cox: I was going to ask you about that, you remember that day?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, yeah, yeah, we all cried like babies.

Mr. Cox: Where were you, where were you again, on Guam?

Mr. Fletcher: On Guam.

Mr. Cox: On Guam?

Mr. Fletcher: Yep. And, uh, yeah we was on Guam, training to go to Japan, and uh....

Mr. Cox: And when you, obviously you were on Guam when they dropped the bomb. What did you think as a, as a ....

Mr. Fletcher: Well, we didn't, we didn't know anything about it for several days and uh, 'course when we finally found out why we were just delirious we were so happy that uh, that we weren't going to have to hit.....'cause we, we just knew that if, uh....well, you know the game plan to hit Japan was....Truman said they had seven atomic bombs and they were going to rain those down on Japan just before we hit. And, uh, there was, we were going to be the point division for uh, since we had been uh, the Third had been spared on Iwo, our troops had....they gave the corpsmen a pretty good workout, but uh, the troops you know, and we were going to be the point, the point regiment or the point division, hitting Japan and there would be three Army divisions in behind us....well, if they had dropped those seven atomic bombs probably radiation would have got all of us too, you know, and, because they didn't know anything about radiation back then, and uh, like, when we....I went into Japan after the surrender, and I was amazed at, at how uh, how neat the Japanese were in all that rubble, from all that bombing, uh, and uh, and sweep the streets, and the people were very subservient, they'd bow to you and, and uh, uh, you know, for people who was supposed to commit hari-kari when they saw us coming, they, they sure did, uh you know....and, uh, but you know, I've been in Japan a lot since the war, and I've got some real close Japanese friends, which is something I never thought I'd ever have, and they've told me about their childhood, about how they were told we were cannibals, that we'd rape their women, and, and uh, and I've got some very, very close friends, in fact we had a real bad tsunami over there last year you remember, and uh, I have a friend that was the head of (unintelligible) Company, he used to,

they used to market my grain from Australia, and I hadn't seen Ken in twenty-five years and I tracked him down just to see if he's okay, and that thrilled him to death to hear from me, but, uh, I just thought that much of his family and of him, but I never thought I'd ever....well, the first time I went into Japan in '68 the hair was standing up on the back of my head, there was, you know, 'cause they were like animals to fight, you know....

Mr. Cox: That's right....Boy, I sure sympathize with you for that feeling, because I was just a kid, and of course, propaganda, basically we were taught to hate Japs and I never saw one, you know? Here I am a nine year old kid; I didn't know what a Japanese guy looked like, except what I saw in the movies.

Mr. Fletcher: You know something that really bothered me on Guam was we killed a uh, what we thought was a Japanese woman trying to pilfer food, and I'm sure she was a Korean comfort woman, is probably what she was, and then when I later found out about comfort women, aw, Man, that really bothered my conscience a lot that we'd killed that lady, and uh, but uh....

Mr. Cox: War brings out some strange happenings, certainly does. Well, to get back to your combat, can you uh, give me a typical day when you were in combat, how you slept at night, uh, how you, what you ate....

Mr. Fletcher: Well, you ate, ate a ration that they gave you....

Mr. Cox: C ration, K ration?

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, yeah, just cold rations, and you, you slept in your clothes, I mean you didn't uh....you just slept the best you could in....might be raining, might be raining all night or you, you got a poncho that, you know, kept you, kept you a little bit dry, but uh, it was pretty miserable....

Mr. Cox: Well, once you, when you were on Guam, how long was it after you landed on Guam that you had a hot meal? Do you remember?

Mr. Fletcher: Aw, it was uh, uh it was, it was probably two or three weeks I'd say, something like that. Uh, you....course you had, you know, hot coffee, you know, hot uh, stuff like that but you didn't....you didn't have a proper meal, and uh, it's not, uh, you know, it's, it's, it's pretty tough.

Mr. Cox: Yeah, I'm sure it is. Well, how about mail, now you mentioned that you got the two letters, which I'm sorry to hear about, but how often did you get mail?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, it uh, oh, maybe once a month, something like that, and uh....course back in those days, you know, we had censorship, and course you, uh....I've seen letters I've written home which

was cut all to hell, and uh, uh, but uh, yeah we'd get mail, you know, we'd get mail fairly regular, and uh, course back in those days you had a special airmail, remember? About so big, and....

Mr. Cox: Right, and you fold it all together and it made an envelope.

Mr. Fletcher: Right, yeah, and uh, but uh....

Mr. Cox: Well how about USO, did you ever have any USO shows?

Mr. Fletcher: Naw, not out there, well, one time Bob Hope came out there, uh, and uh, it was thirty miles on a truck to see him, and I, so I just didn't go, I uh, but uh, old Bob Hope came out there one time and he was the only one that we ever saw. But, he was a great ambassador, that guy.

Mr. Cox: Oh, my goodness, he went....well, during Korea, he went to Korea, and during Vietnam he went to Vietnam, and ....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, and used to be a big thing was the Lucky Strike Hour, on the weekends we'd get uh, on the radio, we'd get the Lucky Strike, you know, Kay Kaiser and his band, and....

Mr. Cox: The Band of Renown.

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, and all that, yeah....but, uh, no we didn't have much uh, whole lot of mail.

Mr. Cox: You develop some real close friendships when you're in the military, don't you?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, a real bond, yeah, you bet, yeah, you take this guy in Florida, uh, he and I were very close, and uh, and that guy in Pennsylvania, uh, we had a guy from Rochester named Frego and he was killed in Korea, he was real close to all of us. But, corpsmen, you know, we're kind of a corps within a corps, and uh, we all get real close, and you know, you....I think so much of (unintelligible) as I do of my own brothers, you know. But you really bond, you know their sweethearts, you know about their families, and uh, you share all of that when something happens, and you know....

Mr. Cox: Well, your....the Marines really took care of you guys, too, didn't they, and tried to protect you as much as they could, did they not?

Mr. Fletcher: Oh, yeah, they, uh....I love the Marine Corp for the esprit de corps, it's uh, you're in a real group, you're part of the team, you're uh, you know the....the New Zealanders have what they call the Hakka, and before a game they get down and they, Boy they....if you ever see the Hakka, it'll scare the hell out of some people, and uh, and I, and I love it, and that's what I love about the Marines, was the spirit, you know, the corps, hot damn it's everything and (unintelligible) my Third Marine Division.

Mr. Cox: I was going to ask you if you belong to any if you ever go to any of the reunions of the Marines.

Mr. Fletcher: I've never been to any of the reunions but I'm a life member of the Third Marine Division Association, and uh, but I never have been where, near where they were having a....they've had some here in Texas but unfortunately I'd be in Australia at that time, you know, and uh, but uh....

Mr. Cox: So you were on Guam getting ready to, uh, for the invasion of Japan when the war was declared over?

Mr. Fletcher: Yep.

Mr. Cox: Uh, what happened there? Were you let out right away, or tell me a little bit about that....

Mr. Fletcher: No, what happened was, the uh, the reserves....I was in the USN, I went in on a minority cruise when I was seventeen till I was twenty-one, uh, the guys that were in the reserves, like Clark, the guy in Florida and the other guy in Pennsylvania, they went home immediately, right after uh, within, uh, oh gosh, uh, within, but then the month of August they went home, but uh, they put me on Magic Carpet duty because I was regular Navy, and uh, so I went on a ship to Japan and China, uh, right after, not long after the atomic bomb, and so uh, I didn't get home, I didn't get home for, oh, about 37 months, and I uh, because I was in regular Navy, you know, because I was on Magic Carpet duty, and what that was bringing troops back from, from Japan and China, back to the States, and so I was, I made about three Pacific crossings doing that before I got leave myself.

Mr. Cox: During these trips, did you attend to fellows that had been wounded over there?

Mr. Fletcher: Well, uh, most of them....we had one ship load of troops who had, uh, psycho patients, and uh, so we were down in a hold with them and they wouldn't, you'd go through the chow line and you'd try to get a fork and they wouldn't let you have a fork, they'd only let them eat with a spoon, and you'd have to eat with a spoon, you'd say well I'm not one of them, they'd say yeah I know, you know, get you a spoon. But uh, but hell we had guys tried to commit suicide and uh, hang themselves, you know, and all kinds of nuts, and....it wasn't any

fun....one group we took back there was about ninety that was down in, confined in the hold of the ship, and uh....we had a lot of that.

Mr. Cox: It was like a psycho ward....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, that's right, what it was, and uh but, none of them were wounded or uh, 'course it was after the war and some of them I think was just trying to get out of the service, you know, and uh....

Mr. Cox: Once you got discharged....when did you get discharged?

Mr. Fletcher: I got out in November of '46.

Mr. Cox: Okay. Now after you were discharged, Jack, did you have any....what shall we call them, nightmares? Uh, reliving some of the things that you'd been through over there?

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, I had, I had, I had nightmares for several years, yeah.

Mr. Cox: Does it bother you any now, at this....

Mr. Fletcher: No, naw, I uh, but I tell you what, I can be in a cafe and if a little kid, you know how they can scream, I almost hit the deck. It's just something you never get....if something startles me, you almost, you just catch yourself....one time I was back in the States in '46, just before I got out, and....where the hell was I....San Francisco, I believe, and a trolley went by and it sparked and made some....and there was three of us and we all three hit the deck.

Mr. Cox: Reminded you of gunfire....

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, that's what you did, you hit the, hot damn you hit the deck, you know, but uh, naw it took me several years to....uh, my boys Mother told them that, you know, I used to have nightmares all the time, you know, but uh....

Mr. Cox: When you got back stateside, were your brothers all safe, too, did they all come home?

Mr. Fletcher: Well, Pat, Pat was on the USS Manila Bay, and he was a Signalman, and he was hit by a Jap kamikaze and he was, uh, he was wounded pretty bad and filled full of shrapnel, which he had 'till the day he died, and uh, uh, he, he went home and he never, he never was worth much after the war, he never, he'd, he'd would be real healthy for a while then he'd go downhill, you know. Bob was on a yard minesweeper up in the Aleutians and uh, we used to kid him that he used to have to chip the ice off his boat to keep from turning over, and I had

an FBI friend in Washington, told him one time, said, Bob you weren't a veteran you were a victim, but uh, you know John Wayne and Ben Johnson wanted to do a movie about, about our program in Australia, and they, they had it on a, they'd planned to do it, and death got both of them before we could get it done, but....

Mr. Cox: On the ranching operation?

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, but uh, uh, John Wayne bought my brother Bob's minesweeper, the YMS328 and converted it into the Spruce Goose, which is his yacht.

Mr. Cox: Right. That was the one Bob served on?

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, that was the one Bob served on.

Mr. Cox: My goodness.

Mr. Fletcher: And uh, but, an older brother, Jessie or Pete, uh, he had two kids, and he served all the time at a Naval Hospital up in Oklahoma, Oklahoma City. So he never did go into combat, but three of us, Bob were in the Aleutians, Pat was, Pat was in about uh, oh hell, twelve battles

in all, he went back in for Korea, and uh, but uh, he was torn up pretty good when that kamikaze hit him, you know.

Mr. Cox: I imagine so....so you got back to the States, your brothers are back safely and you decided to go to college?

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, I went out to....I wanted to go to Texas A & M but there was a queue, a long queue, of veterans already got out ahead of me, 'cause I didn't get out 'till November of '46, and a lot of the guys were out by then, and so....a lot of my mates from West Texas went to this little school called Sul Ross State University, and so I went out there and uh got me a job in the laundry and one in the bar at night and went through school there, and uh, so....

Mr. Cox: You got a graduate; you graduated with a degree in what?

Mr. Fletcher: In Agriculture, and I, I uh, I said if I ever got off that farm....I was pulling cotton when I joined the service, I said if I ever got off that farm I'd never go near that damned farm again, and I wind up in Agriculture.....

Mr. Cox: You own these thousands of acres over there....Australia.

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, that's right, and uh, wound up with a ranch of 4.3 million acres, you know, and uh, but....no, one of my officers in the Third owned the laundry at Alpine, at uh, Sul Ross, and so he gave me a job working in the laundry, and then I had another friend that had a bar, and I went to work for him in the bar at night, and that's the way I got through the university. And I graduated with honors, and uh....I was real, I got the first distinguished alumnus award they'd ever given in that school.

Mr. Cox: What year did you get that award?

Mr. Fletcher: In 1981 they gave it to me, and uh....

Mr. Cox: Well, from what I was reading you still stay active at your age....

Mr. Fletcher: Well, yes sir, I've got a client that just bought a big project in, uh....and I've got a group of uh, guys from (unintelligible) that are wanting me to put together another project like the one that I describe in my book, and so I'm hopeful....I might be King of the Cowboys again one day, you know?

Mr. Cox: And how many trips have you made back and forth to Australia?

Mr. Fletcher: Well, this was my one hundred and fifteenth time across the Pacific, and forty times through London. And, uh, so....you know I've always kept a diary and I'm miserable if I can't write in my diary, but uh, when I fly out of here it will be my 3,085th flight since 1965....47 years. Three thousand and, what is it, three thousand and eighty three coming in here the other day, so the next one will be three thousand and eighty four.

Mr. Cox: Well, they should give you some kind of wings....

Mr. Fletcher: I, uh, you know the historical society in West Australia, they came to me after that big flood, after we lost everything, and they said we was the last big icon in the North, and they wanted all my records for the historical society, so I gave them all to them.

Mr. Cox: In Australia?

Mr. Fletcher: Yeah, and uh, but uh, I belong to a group out there called the Flyer's Club. I pioneered the helicopter and fixed wing muster roundup with cattle, and so they got me to join this group, and we started out, we started out about uh, oh eight years ago with two guys having breakfast, and I think every Spitfire and Liberator pilot in England moved to Perth after the war, because now we have a hundred and sixty members, they're all my contemporaries and most of them served in World War Two and uh, it's a, it's really a great group, and uh, the

only thing wrong with it, every time you go to a meeting, one or two of us have dropped off the perch, you know, but uh....but it's a great group.

Mr. Cox: Well I'd like to shake your hand and tell you again, thank you very much for your time and your service to our country, and uh, it's been a pleasure.

Mr. Fletcher: It's been a real honor to be with you.

Transcribed by:

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January 23, 2014