

Veteran: MITCHELL, Boyd H.
Service Branch: ARMY
Interviewer: Gace, Michael
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Transcriptionist: Terry Moore
Highlights of Service: **World War II; 36th Infantry Division; Served in North Africa, the invasion of Italy and France; participated in liberation of Rome, Anzio**

Interviewer: What is your full name and rank?

Veteran: Boyd H. Mitchell. The highest I ever got was corporal.

Interviewer: So you volunteered for World War II?

Veteran: I volunteered in '40, but I got down with the flu in 1940, and I waited until January of '41 and went with the first draft.

Interviewer: So you were drafted?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Where did you do basic training?

Veteran: Camp Bowie in Brownwood.

Interviewer: How was that?

Veteran: It was pretty hard training, because they were getting us ready to go over there. Then they took us to Camp Blandon, Florida, and had some more there, and then some in Carolina, and then some amphibious training up in Massachusetts. We went overseas from Cape Cod.

Interviewer: You went through Pearl Harbor, also?

Veteran: No. I went to Europe and landed in North Africa.

Interviewer: How was that?

Veteran: It wasn't too bad in North Africa. We didn't go into no actual combat there. We took a bunch more training and got ready to make an invasion of Italy at Salerno.

Interviewer: Once you left North Africa, where did ya'll go?

Veteran: We went over and made the invasion of Italy at Salerno?

Interviewer: And how was that?

Veteran: Pretty rough. I had eleven months there in Italy. They pulled us out and took us up to Anzio beach head. We broke out of there and went on past Rome. Went on and took Rome, and then on up toward Florence. Got up there toward Florence, and they pulled us out and gave us replacements, and then we went over and made an invasion of Southern France. From there we went all the way up through France and Germany and Austria.

Interviewer: How was it the first time you shot your rifle at the enemy?

Veteran: It's hard to say. You just did what you were supposed to do. Some of them said they didn't get scared, but that's a bunch of s—t. Everybody was scared. I've had people asked me if I ever prayed in my foxhole, and I told them anytime it got rough enough to get in a foxhole, I was too scared to pray. {Laughter} The worst part, like in Italy, France, and up through there, that's all cold, freezing mountains—ice and snow, and laying out in it. That was the roughest part of it.

Interviewer: Did the Army provide you with enough clothing?

Veteran: Oh, we had adequate clothing, but still it wouldn't keep you warm. Your feet and hands ...

Interviewer: How did you get your equipment replaced?

Veteran: It wasn't too hard. You could pick up pistols and stuff like that after a battle. They'd gather 'em up and you'd always have plenty of weapons and ammunition.

Interviewer: Any interesting stories you want to tell?

Veteran: Not necessarily.

Interviewer: How was it when you liberated some of these countries? How did the people feel?

Veteran: Oh, France and even Germany and Austria, they were happy to see us. We'd be moving up, and they'd be out on the streets and sidewalks and welcomed us in.

Interviewer: That must have made you feel good, huh?

Veteran: Yeah. They were always happy to see us.

Interviewer: How was your leadership? Were your officers any good?

Veteran: We had good officers. I was in the 36th Infantry Division, and we always had good generals and good officers.

Interviewer: How was the discipline?

Veteran: Well, the discipline was pretty good. Of course, at times, you know, when you'd get a break people would go party and drink. You could get all you could drink over there. It wasn't any trouble to get cognac and wine and whatever. But other than that, the discipline was good.

Interviewer: What else did you do when you weren't on duty?

Veteran: Just lay around in the bivouac area. If you were close to town, like Naples, you'd go into town and party around the wine joints.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you learned that you were going overseas?

Veteran: At that time, we were young and didn't think anything about it. It was just like going to work. Didn't think anything about getting into battle. Even over there, when you have a battle, I've walked over bodies that were blown up, shot up, and burned, and just didn't think a whole lot about it. That's why they want young soldiers. Older ones worry too much. It doesn't register on the minds of the younger ones like it does on the older ones.

Interviewer: So, you just got used to seeing the sights?

Veteran: Yeah.

Interviewer: Over there, did you get to read any newspapers?

Veteran: We had a little old newspaper over there called *The Stars and Stripes*. We got that all the time when we were back in the rear.

Interviewer: What was the morale of your company?

Veteran: It was always pretty good.

Interviewer: What did you think about the other guys in your group?

Veteran: Everybody got along good. Didn't have no trouble in the unit.

Interviewer: How would you characterize your unit's conduct points?

Veteran: We had 15 Congressional Medals of Honor, Lord knows how many others—medals and presidential citations.

Interviewer: So they pretty much whipped some butt, huh?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you see any guys become shell shocked or just couldn't take it anymore?

Veteran: Yeah, we had two or three they had to send home. We had one guy who couldn't stand that bombing. His nerves couldn't take it, and they had to send him home. Another one was up on a road crossing up in the front, and they were shelling that crossing all the time. One shell blowed him off the road—didn't wound him—and there was an old rock building there on the corner that the medicos was using, and they took him there and got him straightened out. Another damn shell hit that building and blowed him back out. That finished him. It broke his nerve, and they had to send him out. There was a few like that.

Interviewer: Did you take any part in any special operations with other countries?

Veteran: No, I spent a little time with an English artillery unit one time, but that's about all.

Interviewer: How were they?

Veteran: Oh, they were good. They were mostly Irishmen; they weren't the real old English, but it was the English army. Those Irish were good guys.

Interviewer: How effective were your weapons? Did they ever jam up on you?

Veteran: No. You didn't hardly have no trouble with the M-1s jamming.

Interviewer: Did you capture many prisoners of war?

Veteran: Oh, Lord yes. I think we captured over 100,000.

Interviewer: How were the enemy POWs treated?

Veteran: Well, there's all kinds. First, we were capturing older soldiers, and then right towards the end of the war we were capturing soldiers 16 and 17 years old. They were just putting everything in there. Those hard core soldiers, like in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, they were pretty rough.

Interviewer: Did you receive any special training to deal with the POWs?

Veteran: No, we sent them back to the rear, and they took care of them.

Interviewer: How was the morale after hostilities ended?

Veteran: Morale was always pretty high. We didn't have any trouble like that.

Interviewer: Did you receive any awards or commendations?

Veteran: No, not any special medals. I had three Bronze Stars, and one arrowhead that told how many combat areas was in, like North Africa, Italy, Anzio, Rome, Southern France, Germany. Medals like that, but that wasn't like a Silver Star or anything like that.

Interviewer: How was your homecoming?

Veteran: After the war was over, we were in Austria and were holding a bunch of prisoners of war there—about 5,000. Up there in the Alps Mountains, we spent a lot of time sitting by a hot stove. I didn't get discharged out of the 36th Division. I spent all my time all during the war with the 36th. When the war was over, what they called high points for somebody who'd been over there a long time, the 36th

had too many high point men, so they transferred some of us out to new divisions so we would get to come on home. They transferred me to the 12th Armored Division, and I stayed over there about two or three weeks. Then they sent us on home.

Interviewer: How was it to see your loved ones and your friends again?

Veteran: It seemed kind of funny to come back and see what people were doing over here. Once in a while we'd get some new recruits over there, and they'd tell us what was going on, and that was all we knew about what was happening here.

Interviewer: Did they offer any education grants to you?

Veteran: That hadn't gotten started then. That started after World War II.

Interviewer: Did you find it easy to transfer back from Army to civilian life?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. It wasn't nothing. Like I said, you'd just take it as it come. I laid around about a month at home after I got back, and then I went and started to work.

Interviewer: Do you belong to another other associations other than the VFW?

Veteran: No, back in the '40s, I joined the American Legion up in Goliad, but after I left there, I got away from it and joined the VFW, and I've been in it ever since.

Interviewer: Alright. Thank you, Mitch. It was nice talking to you.

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