

Interview with Mr. Vernon L. Katz

Veteran: World War II

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Narrator: J. T. Horacek and Byron Brown

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Narrator: This is the interview with Mr. Vernon L. Katz, who was born May 11, 1924 in Hodgeman County, Kansas. Interviewers are Byron Brown and J. T. Horacek. Mr. Katz served in the Army during World War II.

Narrator: Were you drafted or a volunteer?

Katz: Drafted

Narrator: How was the food that you were served in the Army?

Katz: It was pretty good food. . . I mean, I was satisfied.

Narrator: How long were you involved in the war?

Katz: Right at four years.

Narrator: Did you develop any long lasting friendships or people that you stayed in touch with afterwards?

Katz: Yes, one of them. His name was Lovelady, that's who it was. Sergeant Lovelady. He lived in North Dakota.

Narrator: What kinds of things would you do for entertainment during your down time?

Katz: Well, we didn't have much down time, but what we did have we went to theaters, and we'd hit some baseballs. That's about all we did.

Narrator: Would you encourage the people of my generation just coming out of high school to go into the military?

Katz: I sure would.

Narrator: Could you explain your reasoning on that?

Katz: Well, I think if you kids can't afford an education to go to college and I know a lot of boys here cannot, I indeed think you should go to the army and get the training. Then later on when you get a little older in life you'll know more what you want to do. Otherwise, if you stay home you're going to wander around and you don't know . . . you could get into trouble. I indeed do think every one of you young kids should join the

Army, and I've had a lot of young kids ask me. They went to the Army and they all enjoyed it, like Bret Bartlett you know, a lot of guys.

Narrator: What was your most memorable place where you were stationed at in the Army?

Katz: Well, I was stationed in quite a few places. I would say Hawaii Island and Guam. I flew B-29s when I helped pilots test them out when they came after bombing and stuff. I helped with them and I enjoyed that very much. I enjoyed the island of Guam very much.

Narrator: In being involved in the war, what aspects would you say of your life were changed? Did it help you develop better character?

Katz: I'd say it did. It taught me how to take more orders because I had worked with my father by myself. It was a good experience really.

Narrator: If you had a chance to go back and see the country, what part of the country would you want to see again?

Katz: Okinawa.

Narrator: You said before you didn't have conversations with your family, right?

Katz: No, never did.

Narrator: And what was your average day in the Army? What was your job?

Katz: Well, most of our jobs were, well, we were training most of the time before I went to the service. And then afterwards I got shot. My duty was to run a D-8 Cat and caterpillars to clear trees for Bell Telephone Company, coconut trees so they could put up lines through jungles. I drove a jeep for a doctor to help him deliver babies out in the jungle.

Narrator: Exactly what branch of the military were you in?

Katz: Infantry.

Narrator: What battles were you involved in?

Katz: A battle on an island southwest of Okinawa, the last half of it, and on Okinawa the full battle of Okinawa.

Narrator: Could you describe those kinds of positions? Could you describe what your goal was?

Katz: Well, we didn't do too much on Leyte. Then I helped them clean up in their campaign. We organized and went to Okinawa and made the invasion. I was one of the first men who stepped off the amphibian to make the invasion.

Narrator: What was the lifestyle like in comparison with America and what you were used to?

Katz: It was altogether different. The climate was different, and you had to get along with foreign people because you never got to associate with anyone. A lot of foreign people you had to really learn how to get along with them.

Narrator: What was your impression of the Japanese and the Orientals?

Katz: They were out to do their job and I never did hate them. I just had to do what I had to do. They were friendly people when you got them in camp and put in concentration camps. They assigned me to a laundry for three months, and I would take these Japanese prisoner girls to do all the washing and laundry and then take them back; that was pretty risky.

Narrator: What kind of training did you endure before you headed overseas?

Katz: I was at camp in Texas. Our main training was M-1 rifles and B-57 guns. That's not a cannon but pretty good sized shell that you shoot.

Narrator: Were you involved in quite a bit of hand-to-hand combat?

Katz: Yes.

Narrator: In the battle?

Katz: Very much.

Narrator: As you stated before you sustained an injury. What caused it?

Katz: Yes, I was shot by a sniper through my shoulder (points to left shoulder.) One shot me in the back and it came out just above my heart. After I came home fifteen years later I had to have my arm removed because calcium grew up so big from the bullet wound that went through there that it would stop my heart.

Narrator: What branch of the military would you think is probably the most difficult?

Katz: I'd say the infantry.

Narrator: Does it do more combat?

Katz: Yes, there's more combat, rougher training. Getting in is a hard deal all the way. It's foot and fight.

Narrator: Do you believe that military service should be voluntary or mandatory?

Katz: I think it should be voluntary.

Narrator: Did you have a chaplain or minister accompany you?

Katz: You know, no we didn't. Well, I guess there were chaplains, but Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Protestant would meet up on a hill once a month. You could take your communion and everything no matter who you were or what you believed in. That's what you did.

Narrator: What is your opinion on today's Iraq war?

Katz: Well, I really don't think they should leave our boys over there. I think they have served their purpose, and I think they should send the boys back home and maybe leave a few over there for guards. I don't think they should leave our boys over there to keep getting killed because they're not gaining anything.

Narrator: What were your thoughts while in battle? What kind of thoughts went across your mind?

Katz: That's a hard question that would be hard to answer. A lot of times you're numb when you're fighting. You don't know what you are doing. You're just out there, just luck that I got through it.

Narrator: After you came back from the war, what was the thing that you missed most from America?

Katz: Well, when we came back from the ship and we saw the Golden Gate Bridge. That was the most exciting.

Narrator: What awards did you receive?

Katz: Well, I got the good conduct medal and medal of AR-600 68 and the Purple Heart and then the 23GT medal and the 32nd Infantry Badge. Also I had the Rifleman Badge which I didn't list on my discharge but I did receive it. It's a badge with a rifle on it, and then I got the 45th Victory Medal.

Narrator: Could you describe what the medal AR-600 68 was?

Katz: I think it's more of the battalion being that I was the leader of the 32nd infantry. I got all these medals after I was discharged. I never received money or anything because I was always out in the war. My wife got all of my money because I was never one place

or another. I moved around that fast, except I was a year in Guam. I did receive a little PX money, but the rest was sent home to my wife.

Narrator: You talked about PX money. Was that money the Army gave you to use?

Katz: Yes, PX is what we had to go get our beer and candy bars and stationary or anything that we wanted, or postage. I wrote a lot of letters in the war, and they received them.

Narrator: Do you believe that the military today is probably not quite as tough?

Katz: No, it's not nearly as rough as it was 60 years ago. We were in the war. It's more educational for the kids, and I think that it's good training for the kids for a good education. I really encourage the kids to go, and then if they have to they are going to be ready because we don't know when we are going to be in war again.

Narrator: Is there anything that you would like to say that would influence our generation:

Katz: No, I don't think so. You mean influence you kids? Oh, I think you kids should go get your education and get your training if you need it. That's all I can say.

Narrator: What did you do after you came back?

Katz: From the service? I was discharged from Fort Douglas, Utah and I came back to Dodge City, met my wife, went to farming, and I also took the mail route in route 3 for three months.

Narrator: Was it hard getting back into civilian life after being in war? How was that transition?

Katz: Oh, I don't think it was as I had a wife to come to and a father and farm. I got back on the old schedule again. If you didn't have something like family it would be tough because you had to start your life all over, and that's not easy.

Narrator: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Katz: No, not that I know of.

Narrator: We thank you for sharing