

ORAL MEMOIRS
OF
ROGER GILBERT
An interview conducted on
July 2, 2020

Interviewer: Lydia Dillen

Angelo State University
West Texas Collection
“George Ricks Memorial WWII Oral History Archive”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Roger Gilbert are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on July 17, 2020.

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The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

DILLEN: Alright, this is Lydia Dillen. I'm interviewing Roger Gilbert over the phone, it is July 2, 2020. So let's go ahead and get started. Um, what is your grandfather's name?

GILBERT: Johnnie Alexander Dimas.

DILLEN: And when and where was he born?

GILBERT: He was born in Rosebud, Texas. Um, June 24, 1924.

DILLEN: And where did he grow up?

GILBERT: Uh, he grew up in Waco, Texas.

DILLEN: Is that where he entered the armed forces?

GILBERT: Yes.

DILLEN: And when was that?

GILBERT: Um, he was 17 years old.

DILLEN: Alright. What branch did he serve in?

GILBERT: Marine Corps.

DILLEN: And what were his years of service?

GILBERT: Um, they get a bit... that's hard to really know because he doesn't remember much from it. Um, I know he was - he was medically discharged. Um, so I don't think he was in longer than a year.

DILLEN: Alright. And, um, during his years of service - or his year of service, was he in the enlisted ranks, a non-commissioned officer, an officer, a warrant officer?

GILBERT: Uh, enlisted ranks.

DILLEN: Alright. And do you know why he enlisted in the armed forces? What motivated him to do so?

GILBERT: Uh, a couple different things. Um, I mean for one he was always very proud of being an American and his country needed help. Um, and also I know things weren't going well, his mom had passed away from Tuberculosis, his dad had re-married, and her whole family moved in with them and there was some family tension and so he persuaded his father to sign for him to be able to join.

DILLEN: Hm. Do you know anything about what his training was like?

GILBERT: No. Nope, and neither - neither did he really. Um, I know it was, um, you know boot camp was - was difficult but, um, when he came back, he didn't have much memory of anything.

DILLEN: Hmm. Did he ever talk...

GILBERT: I guess we would call that... What?

DILLEN: I'm sorry, go ahead.

GILBERT: I was going to say I think we would call that PTSD now, but they didn't have a name for it then.

DILLEN: Mm. Do you know anything about what race relations were like when he was enlisted?

GILBERT: Um, between the different races?

DILLEN: Yes.

GILBERT: Um, well I know there was a lot of prejudice. Especially in Texas.

DILLEN: Right.

GILBERT: I would say yeah, his generation especially. I think there was probably still some segregation and grandpa still is pretty - pretty racist even after all these years.

DILLEN: Mm. Um, did he find his service challenging?

GILBERT: Uh, definitely. But very proud to do it.

DILLEN: And was he deployed overseas?

GILBERT: Yes, Guam.

DILLEN: So he served in direct combat during his deployment?

GILBERT: I believe so.

DILLEN: Was he ever wounded in action?

GILBERT: Um, he does have a scar on his leg. Um, I don't know what it was from. He always assumed it was some sort of shrapnel but we have no proof of that.

DILLEN: Hm. Did he ever become a prisoner of war?

GILBERT: No.

DILLEN: Alright. Do you know anything about his family back home and how his service influenced or affected them?

GILBERT: Um, I know it was hard on his dad. His dad was concerned about him, obviously.

DILLEN: Right. Did he have any siblings?

GILBERT: Yeah. Yep.

DILLEN: Were they affected at all by it?

GILBERT: Um, yeah I think - I think the war - the wartime, I think it was the time that, you know, people really came together and were ready to defend their country. But I think it - there were obviously negatives to sending your - your family members overseas to fight.

DILLEN: Of course. Did he ever talk about the kinds of technology that he used while he was in the service?

GILBERT: No, mm-mm. No, the only stories I heard were when he was actually in the VA hospital when he came back.

DILLEN: Oh. Um, did he face any challenges when he returned to civilian life?

GILBERT: Yes. Yeah. He definitely had the PTSD. Um, it severely impacted him. They were doing electroshock treatments, he would have spells of just almost like not knowing where he was and then he would, you know, almost be catatonic. And so they were doing, like, electroshock therapy with him, other people... and he remembers one guy went in and he came out with a sheet over him and he had died during the treatment so...

DILLEN: Wow.

GILBERT: ...that was - my grandpa checked out. He checked out pretty quickly after that. He kind of went, um, against medical advice and just left.

DILLEN: Hm. So what kind of jobs did he have after he returned to civilian life?

GILBERT: Um, he was a singer in the nightclubs, he taught salsa dancing, and he was a chef.

DILLEN: Wow. Did he keep up with any of his fellow service members after returning from the military?

GILBERT: No.

DILLEN: Uh, do you know anything about if his feelings about military service changed looking back on it later in life?

GILBERT: He - I know he was very proud of serving, very proud of America, very proud of the Marines. Even - he just had his 96th birthday and, you know, a lot of people got him Marine kind of memorabilia and things and it always chokes him up, he gets emotional. Or when he hears the national anthem he gets choked up and...

DILLEN: Hm.

GILBERT: He was very proud.

DILLEN: Of course. Do you know if he would have any advice for young men and women who are just entering the service?

GILBERT: Um... I mean I'm trying to think back on things that he said. Um, I think he would - even though he came back, you know, with emotional scars, I think he would have done it all over again. I think he, um, he knows that every life that's - that's given for our freedom is - he got to see how worth it it was in his 96 years after service that, you know, could've gone very differently had we not had people enlist. So...

DILLEN: Right.

GILBERT: I would think he would commend them and tell them, "If you don't think it's worth it now, it will be later." [chuckles]

DILLEN: Hm. Did he keep any objects that reminded him of his service?

GILBERT: Um, he had a uniform that when he was having problems with time lapses and things like that, that he doesn't know what happened to it, he lost it. He thinks he probably was in a hotel and just basically never came back for it and didn't remember where he was staying and that sort of thing. So no, he really didn't - really didn't have anything like that.

DILLEN: Hm. Is there anything else that you'd like to share about his service that he told you about?

GILBERT: Um, no I think that's it really.

DILLEN: Okay. Well, thank you for talking to me today.

GILBERT: Oh, you're very welcome.