

## VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

**Veteran's Name:** David Leyshon  
**Interviewer:** David Meyer (O'Shea)  
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**David Meyer:** Just before the introduction, some autobiographical stuff. Since I do it always in memory of my father, I always—

**David Leyshon:** Yeah.

**Meyer:** This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379<sup>th</sup>, of the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Today is August 6, 2010. It's around 3:20 in the afternoon. And we're in the Cambridge, Massachusetts Hyatt Regency Hotel. And today I have the great pleasure of talking to, Mr. Leyshon. Can you say your name?

**Leyshon:** David Leyshon [pronouncing LAY-shon].

**Meyer:** Can you spell your last name?

**Leyshon:** L-e-y-s-h-o-n. My father called it [pronouncing] LY-shon. He was Welsh.

**Meyer:** He was Welsh and he called it LY-shon.

**Leyshon:** Yeah. He was an immigrant from Wales. Came to this country in 1914.

**Meyer:** Why did they change it? Did people just make him change it?

**Leyshon:** No. When you read it, most people would call it LAY-shon. So I went with the crowd [laughs].

**Meyer:** I understand. What's your birth date?

**Leyshon:** April 28, 1924.

**Meyer:** And where were you born?

**Leyshon:** Denver, Colorado.

**Meyer:** And what unit were you with?

**Leyshon:** K Company, 378<sup>th</sup> [95<sup>th</sup> Infantry].

**Meyer:** When did you enter the service?

**Leyshon:** In May of 1943.

**Meyer:** And when did you leave?

**Leyshon:** End of September, 1945.

**Meyer:** Nineteen forty-five. And what was the highest rank you had?

**Leyshon:** Oh, PFC [Private First Class]. (laughs)

**Meyer:** PFC. An honorable rank.

**Leyshon:** Yeah.

**Meyer:** And these are general questions at the beginning. Were you wounded at all?

**Leyshon:** Yes. Yeah. That's part of my story.

**Meyer:** Okay. Just to begin, one of the questions they like to know is do you remember where you were when you heard about the Pearl Harbor attack? Do you remember?

**Leyshon:** Yes, I remember. I was at home reading comics on the living room floor. Because it was a Sunday morning.

**Meyer:** Yes, yes. So you were reading the comics. Did it come in through the radio?

**Leyshon:** Yeah, yeah, of course.

**Meyer:** Did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

**Leyshon:** Sure.

**Meyer:** And where did you live at this time?

**Leyshon:** I was in Wheaton, Illinois; a suburb of Chicago. My father became a printer for the *Chicago Tribune*. And he commuted from Wheaton, which is about 25 miles west of Chicago. It happens to be where Colonel Robert R. McCormick, who was the publisher of the *Tribune*, and who was a colonel in WWI. And ultimately I was awarded a scholarship that he funded at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina after I graduated from high school. But the war came along. And so I enlisted in the Army Reserve. And from there I wound up at Indiantown Gap in the 95<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Meyer:** What was going on in your life when you enlisted? What prompted you to enlist?

**Leyshon:** Well, I was at The Citadel, and I guess I got caught up in all the furor about World War Two and all. So I joined the enlisted reserve corps, then I got called up. And I wound up at Camp Grant in Illinois, where I was inducted into the army.

**Meyer:** Did you know about ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] then?

**Leyshon:** No, but I eventually wound up in ASTP at William & Mary. And from William & Mary, in March of 1944, I was sent to Indiantown Gap to meet the 95<sup>th</sup>.

**Meyer:** Okay. So you were one of the whiz kids, you were one of the smart kids who came into it.

**[TIME 4:51]**

**Leyshon:** Yeah, and it was pretty rough on a lot of very intelligent guys. It was a way of filling up the army, but I knew a lot of fellows who didn't make it who were quite brilliant, even. And sort of wasted in something like the infantry. I was just lucky as hell. And I'll tell you my story, which is, I was probably the luckiest person in the 95<sup>th</sup> Division. Because of what happened.

**Meyer:** Do you want to tell it now?

**Leyshon:** Yeah. K Company was sent to England on about the sixteenth of August in 1944 as a replacement division. And we spent about a month in the apple orchards of Normandy, bivouacked where our truck drivers were used for—

**Meyer:** The Red Ball?

**Leyshon:** Yeah, the Red Ball truck operation. And then we took a four-day boxcar ride from Normandy to the front, which at that time was near Thionville – which they pronounce it differently in French, but anyhow it's north of Metz. And I was in – the 378<sup>th</sup> then was stationed, was used to replace the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. In fact, the 95<sup>th</sup> replaced the 5<sup>th</sup> Division south of Metz and all around Metz.

And in K Company 378<sup>th</sup> we crossed the Moselle on a pontoon bridge near Corny, which is where this gal that thanks GIs [Elizabeth Gozzo] comes from. Anyhow, we went to a town near Lorry, which was just, well, it wasn't a town, it was a village. And we were bivouacked in this village for probably, oh, maybe up to two weeks while the front was stagnant there. And part of my story starts there. [Pauses, getting emotional]

**Meyer:** Take your time.

**Leyshon:** Okay. I was on patrol one night with a bunch of colleagues, you know, fellows from our group. And we hit an outpost. And there was another outpost on the road. Now the road went from Lorry, this little village, toward the German lines. And it was a quiet night. And pretty soon I heard footsteps. And they were with hobnailed boots, so I knew this was a German. And he was coming toward us, walking on this road which led to the village of Lorry. Well, the guys who were in this outpost which was right on the road called him to halt. And he stopped.

Now we don't know what this guy – what was wrong with him. Whether he was lost, whether he wanted to surrender, or what. But he made some move to take his rifle off his shoulder, and the guys in the 95<sup>th</sup>, at that point everybody was trigger happy, you know? So they shot him, and killed him.

And that sort of haunted me ever since.

**[TIME 09:42]**

But let me tell you. This guy was the only dead soldier that I saw in all of World War II. Because when, well, I was one of the guys to pick up the stretcher to carry him off after he was laying out dead. And that was pretty much the end of this episode in this little place south of Metz.

So after that we were sent up to the north of Metz, where we formed an attack. This was a major push on Metz. It started November the eighth, and we pushed off on about the sixteenth of November toward the forts of Metz. And we got to, on the night of the sixteenth, to a school in the area there which had been a barracks for the Germans.

Now, I saw the firing, you could see the sparks from the guns as we were approaching. But the firing didn't come near me or anybody near me at the time. And we went to this school. And by that time the Germans had retreated. They had gone back into the fort, Fort Plappeville, right above this school. And there was a pot of potatoes there, you know, cooking. And they had a barracks with straw ticks. So we went and slept in that barracks that night, with one tick under and one tick over. But it was cold. It was around, I want to say the sixteenth or seventeenth of November. And it was cold.

Anyhow, the next morning we were told that we were going to have an assault at that time. And it was scheduled for around two o'clock in the afternoon. And we were instructed to use marching fire, like Patton had always talked about, where you go and you keep firing and yelling, you know, you're trying to scare the enemy. And so we pushed off. And I found out later that one of the guys had entered a fort and was killed by a friendly fire when he was coming out by a second wave of guys. But that didn't happen where I saw it. And, so, I was going across a field at that point, an open field with a few trees and so forth. And a shell came near me. Landed about oh, here to the door, 15 feet away, maybe. And spun around on the ground, and didn't go off.

**Meyer:** Holy cow.

**Leyshon:** It was a dud. And shortly after that, maybe half a minute or a few seconds – I don't remember exactly – I was hit. And I saw the bullets coming and they were I think probably a machine gun, and they were hitting in this ground near me. And one of them went through the pick handle that I was carrying, and elongated into a strip of metal which spun around and tore out a chunk of flesh from the back of my leg. In my thigh. And knocked me down, of course. And initially it was very painful when it hit, but it became numb rather quickly so that I didn't feel a lot of pain.

And I laid there– now this is like 2:30 in the afternoon, we'd been running across this field maybe for, within the field of fire of this Plappeville fort. And they were out there firing at us while we were doing this. And my lieutenant, Bergoni (PH), was killed that day in a very -- close by. I never saw it, but that's what they told me afterwards.

**[TIME 14:56]**

Anyhow, I laid out on the field while it snowed a little bit [laughs]. And finally, around 11 o'clock at night, the litter-bearers showed up. And they got there [and] eventually carried me to a jeep. And these jeeps were fitted out to carry guys two in front and two in back.

**Meyer:** Hanging on the...

**Leyshon:** On litters [stretchers]. And they took me down to an old factory which was ahead of where I had been hit. But it was kind of an abandoned building, with a lot of straw and stuff. And there was a medic down there. And the medic wrapped my leg with a huge bandage, because the bandage that we carried was too small, it was just a little thing. And this was about the size of half a grapefruit and fairly large.

**Meyer:** Strings on either side of it?

**Leyshon:** Yeah. They fixed it all up, but they incorporated a little straw in the bandage. But it didn't get, it didn't touch me. It was okay.

**Meyer:** Did they pour sulfa on it?

**Leyshon:** Yeah. Well that's all we had in those days. I had sulfa with it. Yeah, they took care of that. And eventually, I guess a couple of hours later, I was taken from that basement to a MASH-type hospital, close by the front. It was probably only a mile or two back of the lines. And they had a doctor there – I remember his name was Williams – and he was a skin-graft doctor. Or he knew skin grafting, at least. It was amazing that they had somebody with that kind of skill at the time. And he peeled a piece of skin, about, oh I'd say four by six maybe, off the back of my good leg, and planked it into the hole where the flesh had been removed. And that stayed as the main repair job for the whole period afterwards. It took probably eight months or so after that for the wound to completely heal, because it was on the muscle. And as I walked, it would flex and it kept breaking the scab.

Eventually I was airlifted back to the hospital in England. And I spent a couple of months there, from November through December. And the end of January we were loaded into a train to Liverpool Harbor. And I was put on the Mauretania. The Mauretania had a hospital deck on the top of it. And it also had accommodations for returning pilots who had done their 50 missions and they were going home. And there were about 125 or so English war brides that were on this ship [laughs].

Well, we had four days of fog in the Liverpool Harbor. And by that time those girls – a good share of them – didn't remember who they were married to [laughs], or what was going on at that point. There was a little hanky panky going on, you know? With that.

**Meyer:** Oh, sure!

**Leyshon:** But anyhow, we took four or five days to go across the North Atlantic. And it was rough because February was some kind of storms and geez, and we were all a little sick. But not too bad.

Got to Staten Island, and I was walking by that time. And my foxhole buddy was a guy named Moses J. Leavy (PH). His grandfather had come from Eastern Europe, and they said, "We

can't pronounce your name. You take Leavy, that's a good American name." [laughs] So this guy was a little overweight. He was my foxhole buddy. And his family lived in Staten Island. So when I was taken to a hospital in Staten Island off the boat when we landed in New York Harbor, and they invited me to his house. So I had dinner with them, which was quite a nice thing. And I saw him afterwards, but he's gone now. I think he died 15 years go or so.

**[TIME 20:51]**

I ran into him one time in the lobby of the Waldorf Astoria. And he said, this wasn't my natural voice. He had throat cancer or something like that. And eventually I never heard from him again. It was too bad because he was a great guy.

Anyhow, the crux of my story is how lucky I was. This was the first battle I was ever in. And I got hit. I never saw anybody else. I don't know where the hell the rest of the guys were. But they all disappeared. And some of them were hit, some of them were killed. And many of them survived it. But I never saw a dead soldier, not one. Except that guy.

**Meyer:** I'm sorry about that guy.

**Leyshon:** It's absolutely useless [crying].

**Meyer:** Yeah, people are trigger-happy. People are just on edge.

**Leyshon:** It makes you into a peacenik.

**Meyer:** What would you say to people if they wanted to join the armed services now? What do you say to them? Do you recommend it? Or do you remember that guy? Or what do you say?

**Leyshon:** Well I think there's too much emphasis on war, and I take issue with the VFW. I belong to the VFW and I get their magazine. And their program for next year is to increase defense spending. Well goddamnit, we spend about 20 percent of our budget on defense spending. We don't need more money. You may need to reallocate it somehow or other, to do what people want to have done. But I was – you know, the Iraq war and other things like that. In fact, the Korean war and the Vietnam war were useless.

**Meyer:** Were useless.

**Leyshon:** At least that's my story. But I was probably the luckiest guy in the 95<sup>th</sup>. Because when I was hit, and for about the first month I worried that they were going to patch me up and send me back. And I had no idea that that wasn't going to happen. But in any event, that bullet wound was my ticket home. And it was only a few inches from my gonads, you know? From my organs. And actually it didn't break the bone, it didn't hit the artery. I mean, it was just a real lucky event.

**Meyer:** It was the lucky wound.

**Leyshon:** Yeah.

**Meyer:** Oh, gosh. So you're acutely aware of the waste of war.

**Leyshon:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Meyer:** That's [unclear] talk about. Because people glorify it as though it has no cost.

**Leyshon:** Yeah, and like President Eisenhower, he made a proclamation around the time he was leaving office, saying look out for the military industrial complex. And he was absolutely right. I mean, they spend money on lobbying, and they terrorize the public and all, and it's not right. But at any rate, that's my story.

**Meyer:** Let me ask you a few more questions. Looking back, who would you say was the most important person to you during your time in the service? Who meant the most to you?

[TIME 25:54]

**Leyshon:** Well, you're very close to your foxhole buddy. I mean this is the guy that you share digging a hole with. And that was Moses Leavy (PH).

**Meyer:** Will you talk about him for a little bit? Where was he from?

**Leyshon:** He was from Staten Island, New York. A New York Jew who was a little overweight. The kind of guy that probably shouldn't have been in the infantry. He was not a good physical specimen. But he managed to somehow or other to get through the war. He did not have – I said well, "Did you ever get hit?" He said, "Well, yeah, I had some shrapnel that hit my hand." But I don't think he ever even got a Purple Heart for it. But he spoke some French; he had taken French. And he also spoke Yiddish. So he spoke some German. And he could get by.

**Meyer:** How long was he your foxhole buddy?

**Leyshon:** Oh, from the time we landed in Normandy until I was hit. And he was a rather Orthodox Jewish person. And the Jewish holidays came in October – Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, and so forth. And he fasted for a whole day. Had his little Bible out, his Torah or whatever it is. Although he was a liberal, but when it came to religion he was very Orthodox.

**Meyer:** Did he have any special feeling about, some of the people I've talked to who were Jewish will talk about the Nazis. And they knew sort of what was going on, how the people were treated.

**Leyshon:** No, I don't think he had any idea about what was going on. At least, we never discussed that. And I think we would have if he had known anything about it. We talked a little politics and so forth, and he was a very intelligent guy. And he was at Brown. Brown University is where he had started.

**Meyer:** Was he ASTP, also?

**Leyshon:** Yeah, but I don't remember which school. He wasn't with me at William & Mary. He was someplace. University of Pittsburgh, maybe.

**Meyer:** When you got back from the war, how was it adjusting?

**Leyshon:** I had no problem with that. The people who had problems adjusting to civilian life were the second lieutenants in the air corps who were treated as super fellows. (laughter) But for me it was great. I had no problem. I had no problem readjusting.

As a matter of fact, I had a doctor at – I was sent to the O'Reilly General Hospital in Springfield, Missouri, which happened to be a skin graft hospital. And that was a real eye opener because all these guys that had been burned in tanks and in battle were in there getting their faces rebuilt. And, you know, they didn't do much of a job when it comes to really patching up a face. They really had – it's really a tough thing.

But anyhow, I had a doctor there and I told him at about midway of September I said, "I like to get out of the army so I want to go back to school and I want to go to the University of Michigan." So he got me out.

**Meyer:** He did?

**Leyshon:** So, see I had a scholarship to The Citadel but I didn't want to go to military school anymore. So I took the GI Bill and went to the University of Michigan.

[TIME 30:48]

**Meyer:** And that's where you —?

**Leyshon:** Yeah, I took chemical engineering. And I did chemical engineering during my working years. And I only retired in the year 2000. I was over seventy at the time. And I did fertilizer and chemical plant design. And that's why I traveled a lot. So I went to India maybe twenty times. I went to China ten times. Senegal ten times.

**Meyer:** So you have a broad view of what's going on in the world.

**Leyshon:** Well, yeah. I spent a lot of time traveling. And one of my most recent trips was to Jordan. And this was after 9/11. And I sat next to some Arabic fellows at dinner there, and I asked them about how they got by with praying five times a day, which I suggested was quite a burden. And they said, "Well, maybe it takes ten minutes at a time, and we manage to handle that all right," and so forth. But they don't seem to understand that that's the way their religion controls them. You know, you've got to go and do all of this or else you're out of it. You're ostracized and you're—

**Meyer:** You're right.

**Leyshon:** And it's a terrible control mechanism which no other religion does really to that extent. Well, maybe Buddhism or something, but of the big religions. Christianity doesn't do that. So I don't have much regard for the Muslim religion.

**Meyer:** Looking back at how you've lived your life so far, what do you think is important? What do you think is important for telling to your grandson or something?

**Leyshon:** Well, I'm not much of a philosopher. And I'm not religious. So I don't have a lot of advice to grant folks. (laughs) And right now we have a lot of problems because my wife is going through chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer. And you know, that's a tough one.

**Meyer:** That is a tough one, sir. That is a tough one. I don't have a lot of-- My father and my mother had been caught up in the charismatic movement of Christianity in the '70s and they became believers and it helped them during times, both of them, when they faced the end. But I do know that there is a power of prayer and good thoughts. So I'll make sure I send some good thoughts for your wife.

**Leyshon:** Uh.

**Meyer:** Just a few more questions about the service. Do you remember what you did for relaxation when you had the chance? Did you play cards?

**Leyshon:** No, I'm not a gambler or a card player, really. I read. I read, yeah.

**Meyer:** Do you remember any of the things that you were reading?

**Leyshon:** No, not specifically. I would say that I'm somewhat of a workaholic. So I tend to work rather than play.

**Meyer:** Yeah, sure. So, you were a rifleman.

**Leyshon:** Yeah, first scout. Yeah.

**Meyer:** First scout. So what was your job in the unit? For people who don't understand.

**Leyshon:** Well, there's twelve guys in a squad. And the point man is in general the first scout. There's a first scout and a second scout.

[TIME 35:51]

But in marching fire you're all parallel and you're about a yard or two yards apart from the people next to you. And you go ahead and put a bullet in the bush if you see something that looks like it might have a crowd in it. That kind of thing, you know? I never saw anybody I hit. Never saw it unless like I say, it's an unusual thing. I went into a war, went through it, got hit. And the only guy I ever saw that was dead was that German that walked out and who was either probably trying to surrender or was lost or something. It was really hit me that, how useless.

**Meyer:** If you could say something to him now, what would you say?

**Leyshon:** Well, I thought about it. He was somebody's son. And we had a lot of stories about what happened. And Januszkiewicz, Joe, well, put this book together. There's a lot of good war stories in there. But I don't know whether it was in there or another one where the guys went into a German house, somewhere around the Saar. And there was a woman there, a lady who was a mother. And she had several sons. And one of them had been on the front opposing the guys who were in the house, the 95<sup>th</sup> fellows. And they felt pretty guilty because this guy didn't come home. He was killed. And then her other son, or one of them at least, was on the Russian front. And you know that they didn't make it.

And I had a good friend that I knew in the army, that I knew in civilian life afterwards when I was starting up a plant in Finland. And this guy was a German. And he recently wrote me a story about how his father had been interrogated in Auschwitz by the Russians. Had been captured and was a prisoner. And eventually he died. And this guy became a chemical engineer and worked for a company. In fact, I think it was a branch of the same company I was with at one point. At any rate, that was quite a story too.

That was another case of all these guys – there were an awful lot of Germans I'm sure that didn't favor, couldn't handle, couldn't do it.

**Meyer:** Is there anything else that comes to mind that you want to talk about?

**Leyshon:** No, I think we've covered it.

**Meyer:** Mr. Leyshon, it's been a great pleasure.

**Leyshon:** Well, I had little trouble keeping my composure on some of these things.

**Meyer:** Well, I think it's a tribute to you that you have trouble keeping your composure. This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer. Now I have trouble keeping my composure. Company H, 379<sup>th</sup>, the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry. I've had the great pleasure today of talking to – sir, can you say your name again?

**Leyshon:** David Leyshon.

**Meyer:** And your company was?

**Leyshon:** K Company, 378<sup>th</sup>.

**Meyer:** It is now four o'clock, and thank you very much. ... That was great. I'm just so glad you came. So glad you came.

**Leyshon:** I hope it turns out alright.

**Meyer:** It will be great.

**End Track 1**

**Begin Track 2**

**Leyshon:** There's a program that covers all of the cemeteries abroad. American cemeteries, everywhere in the world.

**Meyer:** No!

**Leyshon:** In Europe, in Asia, and everywhere. And Elizabeth Gozzo is a spokesperson on that program. And I've seen it on television twice. Not the whole program, but they go to Normandy of course, you know, the cemetery up on the hill above the—

**Meyer:** At [unclear]

**Leyshon:** Yeah, this is the one that when we climbed, when I landed in Normandy it was about the middle of September, days after D-Day. Ninety days after D-Day. You got to the top of the hill and there was that cemetery up there. Boy, that was pretty sobering. Nine thousand crosses up there and all.

But anyhow, this program covers all these cemeteries. It's in Luxembourg, it shows Patton's grave there. And eventually the last cemetery covered is Saint-Avoid. And Elizabeth Gozzo is a spokesperson for the Thanks GIs who I guess do little things for the cemetery, go into ceremonies, and so forth.

**Meyer:** They adopt graves and things.

**Leyshon:** Yeah, special occasions like V-E Day and when, oh, I don't know exactly what all. But these programs are on television generally on occasions that are —

**Meyer:** Like Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

**Leyshon:** Yeah. That kind of thing. It was on on Memorial Day this year. And maybe last fall on Armistice Day. Maybe, or Veterans Day, whatever they call it. And it's a little sobering, the program, because you see all of these cemeteries. And there's a lot of them. And there's a lot of guys in these cemeteries. It's just sobering to see how many Americans have been killed in wars abroad. I think something from the Philippines, you know, there's been a lot of people, and some other places.

**Meyer:** There's the Cemetery of the Pacific in Oahu that has a huge veterans cemetery. My brother lives over there. I go there when I'm there. It's not so big as Saint-Avoid, but again, it's--

**Leyshon:** Well Saint-Avoid, I think, is the biggest one.

**Meyer:** I think it is the biggest one.

**Leyshon:** About eleven thousand or something like that.

**Meyer:** Yeah, even today I went to Bunker Hill and just hearing about the battle there and picturing the conflict there. The real, and the musket balls and the things there, it's sobering. It's easy to, sometimes I think in—

**Leyshon:** Well I think this program only covers offshore cemeteries.

**Meyer:** Offshore. Sure.

**Leyshon:** But even so it's— Yeah, I suppose they'll maybe make another one sometime of American cemeteries.

**Meyer:** You're right.

**Leyshon:** The ones around the Civil War. Well anyhow Elizabeth Gozzo is pictured, she's actually shown, and makes some remarks about the cemetery. With the GI, Thanks GIs folks.

**Meyer:** Let me take a picture of you. You're going to look good. Perfect.

**Leyshon:** Okay. I'm going to let you go.

**Meyer:** Are you going to head down? Okay, I'll walk up with you. Are you going to go back to the room?

**Leyshon:** No, I'm going to my room. Yeah. My wife's in there. She takes a nap in the afternoon.

**Meyer:** I'll walk you to your room then I'll come back.

**Leyshon:** It's about time to wake her up.

**Meyer:** The dinner tonight's, what, 6:30

**Leyshon:** Yeah, six to 6:30

**Meyer:** I'm so glad I got to see you.

5:44

**End Track 2. End Interview.**