

Darrell Matthews
World War II
Cedar City, Utah
Steven Decker, Shelly Goodwin, Interviewers

Int: Why don't we just start with stating your name, and where you reside, and what branch of the service you were in.

Vet: Darrell Hymus Matthews is my full name. I usually just use the H for the middle name, and I was born in Idaho, Liberty, Idaho, and lived in Cedar City for the last 55 years, and this is our home, now. I was in the Air Force in the service. I started out in the medical corps, and then had a chance to apply for the cadets, and I applied for cadets and went through the training, but they didn't need too many cadets, so they put me in as a radio operator, and that's what I did during the war.

Int: In the Air Force, is that what you said?

Vet: Yeah, I was in the 15th Air Force, 98th Bombardment in Italy. I was a radio operator for the first number of flights that we did. Then I became what's called a radar jammer, and worked as a jammer for the rest of the period. I was in Italy when the war ended over in Europe.

Int: So what years did you serve?

Vet: Okay, I went in in June of 1943, and left the service, separated, in November, 1945.

Int: What brought you to Cedar?

Vet: Oh, they wanted someone to work with the joint appointment here with the university, and I taught at the university, and I worked with research work for Utah State University, and they had a project started out here, a large sheep project, and they wanted somebody to work with that, and then also teach classes, animal science classes, and so this is why I came.

Int: You probably don't remember, but in the mid-70's I bought some of your sheep from the college, had an Ag project over at Parowan High School, and I came down and picked up three of your ewes, added them to my, I don't know, I had a dozen or something, just enough to lose money on. Okay, were you decorated in the service?

Vet: I wasn't decorated, no, other than the area signs that certain Air Force (inaudible) I have about four of those. If you participated in this particular campaign in various areas. That would be the Mediterranean, Europe, and, oh, I've forgotten what the names of them are, but there's several different names. That's the only thing I have, and the Air Medal, of course, Air force Medal, I've got that.

Int: Okay. When you look back at your military service, what experiences are most vivid in your mind?

Vet: Oh, probably the discipline, learning how to toe the mark and do things that you should do. As a farm boy, I hadn't ever faced the fact that you had quite a bit of discipline in order to do these things, these chores, and so, probably the discipline. And I enjoyed the, learning certain things. As a radio operator, and as a radio mechanic, I learned quite a bit in the service.

Int: Anything particularly funny that you remember?

Vet: Oh, they're hard to remember. Well, I, it's not particularly funny, but it's ridiculous. When I was in gunnery school, they have air to ground fire, and you shoot at a target, well, there's a whole series of targets. You fly over them, and you had 50 caliber machine guns in the waist. You shoot those out the window, you shoot down at the ground, and when I was shooting this one day—they always told you “Now, shoot a full burst!” What a burst meant was seven rounds or ten rounds, seven to ten rounds each time you pulled the trigger. You didn't want to shoot just one or two, and you didn't want a whole big, long (inaudible). Well, I was up there shooting, and I shot the first time, and I only got about four out. The gunnery instructor, as those Army guys were, he cussed me something fierce, told me the next time get a burst out of there. So the next time I flounced down on the gun, and before I knew it, I was back against the wall on the other side of the plane. We were in a B-17, and it just hit, took me and pushed me right back to the other side. And the shots went out through the armor plate below the window, out through the window, everywhere else. And about, oh, I looked up, and the gunnery instructor was there, and he had a whole series of little shrapnel marks down his arm, and his wrist had been cut by one, and he was bleeding, he was really bleeding, and I jumped over there and grabbed his arm, and he thought I was scared, and he was gonna bust me one, and then I showed his arm, and he quit. About then the co-pilot showed up, and he lit in to cursing and swearing, and he said, “Who in the ----- shot through the wing of the plane out there?” Course, I did. What happened, the mount crystallized on that doggone gun, and it just took me and put me right back against the back. After it was over with, the gunnery instructor said, “I don't know how in the world you ever held on to that thing.” He says, “Funny you didn't unload it right out through the side of the plane.” I shot about ten, twelve shots out through the side. But that wasn't funny. It particularly wasn't funny when I got back to the base, and all the big officials in the base there, and they took me into the plane and wanted me to explain everything about it, and some of them kept asking, “What did you do to do that?” Well, I didn't do anything. It just did it, so it was quite a deal. The thing about that gun, though, we learned a lot about fifty caliber machine guns, and I could shoot them, but after that time, I could not get ten rounds out of there on a burst. Just wouldn't do it, just was scared of the thing. Well, that's not funny, but it's...

Int: Well, it's probably funnier now than it was then.

Vet: Oh, yes. Yeah, it was.

Int: Were you drafted, or did you enlist?

Vet? I was drafted.

Int: Were you married?

Vet: No, I wasn't. I was out of high school at 18, and I had a full tuition scholarship to the University of Idaho. I kind of wanted to go at the end of that, and this was when the war was going, after the Pearl Harbor, and things of that kind. We'd discussed it, all the boys had discussed, "What are you gonna do, what are you gonna do, you going to join the Army? You gonna do something...?" Well, I decided I wanted to go get that first year of that scholarship, so I went up to the University of Idaho. When I got there, about three months afterwards, the draft board sent me the letter, said "You're to be drafted on such and such a day." Well, in order to save the money that I had put into that year's thing, we appealed to them. There's about four of us in the same position. We appealed to the draft board that if they'd let us go till the end of the year, we'd be drafted as soon as we got home. And that's what happened. I was drafted on about the seventh of June in 1943. I had about a week, week and a half, at home before I went in the service.

Int: How did you feel about the support of the country? When we compare the support then, and I don't remember World War II, but when I think about the support that I think was there then, and maybe the support that's for this last conflict we were in, there seems to be a little different feeling in the country.

Vet: There certainly was. There's a lot of difference. Back then, everyone supported it. The people at home, they were under rationing. I don't know whether you know anything about rationing or not. They had to have an allotment to buy sugar, an allotment to buy gasoline, and everything else, and it was tough, but they supported it, 100 percent. You had people that were working in different areas, women working in riveting in these factories, and stuff of that kind. You didn't see that in this last. I don't think you ever would again. But it was, it was just really well supported. You had to feel the support, and they showed it, too. There's a lot of, when we were in the service, we had a lot of programs. They came around to the various bases, and most of these were contributed by citizens, and there they expressed the support for the boys, and for everything else. It was just super. That's all there was to it.

Int: Darrell, how were you treated when you came home?

Vet: Well, we were treated fine, no problem. There was a, well, you were, for instance, the first week home, you had to talk in church, which wasn't too much, but that's the way that—they wanted you to let people know what was going on, what took place. I happened to drop into stake conference, they asked me to get up, they called me out of the audience. Course, by then, I was married. I got married the last two or three months of my service. It was interesting. But we were treated very well. I don't remember any problem, anywhere.

Int: Any particular moments of spiritual or religious experience during your time in the service?

Vet: Yes. One is, I asked for and got a three day pass, and that three day pass was to go to another area in Italy where they were holding a conference of the church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. About 110 of us showed up at that conference, and we had three chaplains, Mormon chaplains, who conducted. One of them happened to be Royden Braithwaite, that's where I met him. And, it was a very interesting thing, it was just really super, oh, it was spiritual, very spiritual occasion. You didn't get too much, in fact, there was hardly anyone else in the whole area that you were in in those bases that was LDS, or the same religion as you were, and you didn't have any place to go to church. Now, we did in the states, because you could always find them, but when we got overseas, there wasn't very much. That was a good, good experience. I don't know, it's hard to think of anything else right quick.

Int: How did your time in the service color your outlook on life after that?

Vet: Well, it changed. You, you developed this feeling towards the country, your feeling towards other things. It changed considerably. I don't remember thinking too much about the service, or the country, or anything of that kind before I graduated from high school and went into the service. Then, after we did, of course, there was all this that I went through during the service, and you developed a high degree of loyalty, and caring to help the country as much as you could. Then, another thing that helped us was, and I think this was true of all the GI's that went into universities right after they got out, you studied. You knew that there was a lot out there for you if you would just do it. And we learned that in the service. In the service, they more or less forced you to be very, very determined and to study and do things. You saw that that was a benefit, and it was when you got back into school.

Int: If you had your grandchildren here sitting around this room, what advice would you give them?

Vet: In regards to what, life?

Int: Life.

Vet: Well, there's several things that are important, I think. One is for them to plan a little bit, to plan for, not only for money and things of this kind, but to plan for their school, plan what they want to do. Now, they may not end up doing that, but just simply by planning and putting things together, they become more determined and stay closer to doing the thing that is important for them. I think that would be one of the things I would talk to them. We've had that several times. You can guess what's the favorite story when we sit down and talk about the service.

Int: I don't know.

Vet: Me shooting down an airplane...when that gun got loose.

Int: Shooting down your own airplane.

Vet: They thought that was funny, yeah, shot my own airplane.

Int: What about Congressional or political support of the military today? Do you think they have the support they need, do you think they are kind of put on the back burner till they're needed, or do you think we are as strong as we need to be?

Vet: Oh, I think we change considerably. I think here, oh, two or three years ago, they were a little bit wishy-washy, they weren't too sure about things, but, I think, once we started into this war thing with Iraq, why it built. Then we had support from senators and representatives, and from the general public. It increased greatly. It disturbs me very much, all of these people that just keep protesting, and they even find out that what they're protesting is not the real thing, but they still want to protest. I don't like that.

Int: Any regrets?

Vet: In the service?

Int: In the service.

Vet: Yes. One. I wish I had stayed in the reserve, Army Reserve, the Air Force Reserve. Of course, that's mainly because I'd have been able to save money a little bit quicker than I was able to otherwise because you could stay in that until you retire, and then go into these other things that I do, and it would be of benefit to me. My brother-in-law, my wife's brother, stayed in. He was a gunner on a plane, but he stayed in, and he eventually became the armor officer for that particular unit that he was working with, and then he stayed in the reserve. Now he's retired, and he does a lot of things that he wanted to do after he got out, and he can do them. He has the money to do it, and has the contacts. For instance, he and his wife can go out there in Ogden, they can go out to Hill Air Force, and buy anything they want at the PX. They have rights for that, and that is really nice for them. It doesn't cost them near as much. But that's the only regret that I have, I think, that I didn't stay in the reserve and retire after so many years. It would have helped.

Int: Anything else you want to tell us?

Vet: Oh, I'd like to go dwell back with this support the country had for the service. I'm a member of the American Legion now, and occasionally we get a little bit of criticism for some of the things we do, and I don't see it there. It's criticism because of, well, people feel that we're ignoring certain things. But that's another thing that should be done. I do appreciate my government many, many times more than I did before I served in the service.

Int: Darrell, how do you feel when you see the flag go by?

Vet: Well, I feel good about it. I own a flag that can be put out front here. Of course, the girls come by with this MIA thing. We pay them to put their flag out, but I have a post right here in front of the house, and I can put my own flag out there if I want to. It looks a little ridiculous to put two out, so we don't do that too often, but I feel...I'm proud, I'm proud of the country. There's some things that are wrong, occasionally with it.

Int: I was interviewing another veteran a couple of days ago, and he talked about the flag, and he talked about the burning of the flag, and how wrong he thought that was.

Vet: That bugs me no end. I don't like to see that at all. Of course, there is the time to burn the flag, and that's when...the only way to destroy it...etiquette, flag etiquette. When it's ruined, it's no further value, we burn it. Let's honor that flag.

Int: Why don't we change direction a little bit, and tell us about this little museum we're sitting in?

Vet: Oh, this stuff here? Oh, we spent six years in South America, three years in Bolivia, three years in Ecuador, and for some reason you get to liking things of that kind they have, for instance, these wood carvings. I just can't pass them up, anytime. And we have a lot of that. This here's full of stuff that we got down there. These paintings up here. That, by the way, is a painting of Old Quito, Quito, Ecuador. It's the old part of it. It was painted by a 17 year old boy in high school. We got a chance to buy it down at the market one day, and we bought it. He painted this one up here, also, the top one. And, probably, they mean a lot more to us than anyone else ever would think. The one behind there is a village, not a village, a street in Peru. What's the name of the city now, where you go up to Machu Pichu. This is the area. But that, you can walk through that and it looks just like that, leans down. There's nothing there at all. So we enjoy that. But we've enjoyed all of these things, and we've collected a lot of them, a lot...too many. I should take you in my bedroom and show you some other things, but it's a mess. This stuff back here, most of it is metal, and things of that kind, just stuff that they have to sell to the public, to tourists, and we were tourists, so we bought it. I guess that's the way you would put it.

Int: You were down there training in agriculture, is that right?

Vet: We were developing the country's ability to produce in agriculture. In Bolivia, that meant that I taught the people how to manage sheep, how to shear them, that it was a valuable product. They didn't shear sheep, if you can imagine. There were 8 million sheep in Bolivia when we went down there. They didn't shear them. They did shear them when they had to, but that was their bank. They had money in that wool that was on those sheep, and they could get it off and take it to town if they needed something. If they didn't need anything, they wouldn't do it. They didn't shear every year like they

would here. But that was my job to teach them how to shear sheep, and I taught some 4000 people how to shear sheep with hand shears, while I was down there. It was a different sort of a situation to teach them this particular thing. Then, we improved the sheep, showed them how to select better rams to put on even these old Criollo sheep. Their grade looking sheep is called a Criollo. You put a good ram on there, you more that double the production on the next generation. It's a really tremendous improvement. Then, oh, there's some other things. We taught them how to manage things quite a bit, get them working at it.

In Ecuador, I was more technician than I was out working with the people. They had seven ranches with sheep on them, and when I went down there, the government was disgusted with the way the sheep ranches were operated. They would have a lambing percent of 20 percent or less. They just wouldn't get any lambs. They didn't know what to do with them. So the department of agriculture in Ecuador just turned them over to a group of sheepmen, which was like our woolgrowers association here, and that's who I worked for when I was there, was this association called Anco, and I was the... what I said went as far as management was concerned, and things of this kind. I would go to these various stations, talk to the managers, and get them to do anything. We'd decide what's got to be done here, and what there. Then, they sent me and the manager of this company to New Zealand, and we purchased 7000 more sheep for them, and brought them back by ship to the port, and then went down and picked them up with trucks, hauled them up to these farms. That was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed seeing things down in New Zealand. Everywhere you looked, there were sheep down there. They have something like 60 sheep in the country for every person. But it was fun to go down there. Then, that's one of the really special things because this company that sold us the sheep delivered tickets for us to go down there, and places to stay, and everything else. They put me in business class on that plane, and there were some little gals there that, man, I couldn't wiggle in the middle of the night because they'd be right there, "Mr. Matthews, can we do something for you?" Gosh, they'd take care of you. It was tremendous. It was really ridiculous.

Int: Darrell, where'd you get your education, then? What schools did you go to?

Vet: I went to University of Idaho, as I mentioned a minute ago. Then I went to Utah State University. I have a BS degree in Animal Science from Utah State, and an MS degree in Animal Physiology from Utah State. That's all I've had.

Int: And you taught here for how long?

Vet: I taught here for 38 years. Now that includes those years I spent in South America. I worked for Utah State for 40 years, and Southern Utah for 38 years. Now put them together, that's a lot of years. But I had a half-time appointment with each of them. So, one year I'd work—well, I really worked 60 percent for Utah State and 40 percent for SUU. And when you figured it out, I spent 40 years with Utah State and 38 years with SUU.

Int: I think that's all I've got unless you've got something else for us.

Vet: Well, there's a lot of rubbish in this report thing here I'll give you. I don't know whether you want to use it or not. There's a few of errors, spelling errors and whatnot in it.

Int: That won't bother us.

Vet: I'll show you this here. All we did was pull—this is my history that I wrote. I started on this in Ecuador. I wrote it. My granddaughter has typed it for me, there's 47 pages in the history, and a lot of it is nothing to do the service. This is our crew when we were in Italy. This is me here. (inaudible) This is a little notebook that I kept over there, that I just jotted down little items each day, where we went, what we did. Most of the time it says: "Washed out again!" And it did. Gosh, you didn't go fly because it was bad weather or something of this sort. This is all the way through. And the next thing it says, most important thing is "No mail from Florence today!" Florence was, when we first met, I was 18 and she was 16, and then by the end of the war, I was 22 and she was 19. That's when we got married.

Int: Is she an Idaho girl, too?

Vet: She was born in Pocatello, and raised in Bear Lake country. She's the only member of the church of her whole family on both sides. She had joined the church years before I met her. Her willingness to accept some of those things was what really attracted me to her.

Well, this, this here is fun just to go through and read some of those things and see what in the world we did do in those days. Let me read you one just for the fun of it. Maybe you need to go somewhere?

Int: No, we're okay.

Vet: When we first got over there, we went by ship, and landed at Naples. Then we went to what they called Caserta, just a little town outside of Naples. There is where we stayed for just about a week. Then they shipped us out other places. Trains for Caserta, in all, forty and eight train cars. Train slow and cold, and nothing but K rations to eat. Arrive Bari, midnight. We were on those old train cars. All they were was box cars. They put us on those and shipped us clean across Italy and down the east coast to where we were stationed. Gosh, that was the coldest time I've ever spent.