

Glenn Mitchell

Saw the flag go up at Iwo Jima

WWII war veteran Glenn Mitchell was at the Battle of Iwo Jima, was part of the occupation of Japan and guarded the Nagasaki bomb area. Nagasaki is the second atomic bomb that was released in Japan.

Glenn Mitchell's parents were William and Iva Virginia Bell Mitchell. They had a 160-acre farm of allotted Indian land they raised their family on. The rural area did not have running water or electricity, and it took all ten of the kids helping to make a life for the family. "It must have been tough providing for all of us." Glenn remembers being given whole corn and a flour sack and a hammer to beat it with. This was how he turned corn into corn meal.

"My mother and father saw that we went to church or brush arbor meetings when transportation was available." The entire family would attend and enjoy the fellowship. Glenn remembers putting a cat on top of the arbor one time and causing a ruckus. "The cat fell right through onto the pew."

Glenn said his mother died in childbirth and his father was killed in a cattle drive. "Five of us children enlisted in some branch of the military during WWII. Two in the Marines, three in the Army. One came home a mental case and died in the Veterans hospital in Ardmore. Four of us were overseas at the same time during WWII. One was a girl, Lou," he said.

Glenn shared memories of the battle of Iwo Jima. "I was assigned to an artillery battalion. My job was communication and occasionally forward observer. The artillery lays down line for the troops to move out to take more land or knock out a cave or whatever.

"At the time of the battle, I was a PFC, and was 19 years old. The incidents as I remember were over 70 years ago. Most of the WWII vets still alive are in wheelchairs or in nursing homes. I may be the only one alive who participated in these three things Iwo Jima, occupation of Japan and guard duty of Nagasaki Atomic Bombing.

"I have named my part of the Iwo Jima battle – 'Hands on the Battle Field'. I didn't drive no trucks, I didn't fire no big guns or fly an airplane – I just strung that telephone wire and things that pertained to the very ground of Iwo Jima. From foxhole to foxhole, front line to our direction center - so let me tell you what I did at the battle of Iwo Jima.

"D-day started February 19, 1945. It was the biggest one-day bombardment of the Pacific War. U.S. ships opened fire at 6:40 am and the beach invasions came later.

"First wave 8:59. Second wave 9:03. So far, the Japs had not opened fire. The Japanese waited until we had many troops and much supplies on shore. That would be howitzers, mortars, machine guns. They opened fire between 9 and 10 o'clock. I hit the beach around 11 o'clock. Things were in full swing. Our small boats and amtracks that were coming ashore were prime targets for the big guns at Mt. Suribachi.

"Coming to shore was brutal. We were caught in the cross fire. We were caught in the enemy Jap hell zone. Overnight we had over 2,000 casualties trying to get off of that beach. I remember being in a foxhole all afternoon and night. We suffered and bled, though we did not panic. The next day we pushed out and the fourth day we took Mt. Suribachi.

"We raised the American Flag. I saw the flag go up. Things had been really bad, but when I saw that flag go up, I knew we would survive! May our flag wave forever. There was much hollering

and whooping. Ships blew their horns, and sirens. We knew we had a toehold on that island – and we WOULD BE VICTORIOUS!

“Little did we know, that we had some 30 more days of hard combat ahead of us. I was laying telephone lines as a forward observer. I came to a temporary stopping place.

“I was held up close to the front line. The problem was, a squad of ten infantryman formed a semi-circle at a large cave entrance with a tank firing point-blank a 75 mm gun. Along with these, a flame thrower attached to the gun was blazing away into the entrance. We also had two 30-caliber machine guns on tripods zeroed in on the cave entrance. Everyone was firing their rifle into the cave entrance. When the little Japanese (he was little and he had nothing on but a loincloth), came out of the mouth of that cave, ran over the sand dunes and got away, we applauded.

“Another incident, I was laying lines. I was less than a quarter mile from the front line. I peeked around a rock and saw three Japanese pilfering some dead Marines. They were probably looking for water. I had a carbine rifle and three grenades. I had just passed some Marines who had come back from the front lines so I waved and got their attention as to what my situation was. Meanwhile I threw my grenades, wounding one Japanese, and the other Marines finished the job.

“Another time I was tracing a phone line for a break. I became aware of a ‘HELP’ call. Somebody was pretty close. There were many mortar holes and large bomb craters. In one of these mortar pits was a badly wounded Marine. I could barely hear him when he asked, ‘Are you a Corpsman?’ I said, ‘No, but I will help.’

“One hand held my hand as he asked me not to leave him. The other hand held his guts in. I kept hollering ‘Corpsman, help!’ and I stayed with him until help came.

“One time a Marine and I were gathering some quarter mine behind front lines. Most of us were in fox holes. I was making some food to eat, then mortar rounds came in and exploded nearby. The man next to me said I had blood on my back. A small rock chip had entered my back, nothing much to it. A man took his knife, dug the chip out, took some sulfa powder on the wound, bandaged it, and I was okay.

“We had progressed about 2/3 the length of the island. A buddy and I were on the west side of Iwo Jima. The tide was out. The terrain is beach, water, flat 100 yards inland, then sheer cliffs. We could see the cliffs, but not all the way to the base of the cliffs. Several holes in the cliffs were visible. As we walked inland there was a gradual rise to the ground and we could see the base. We witnessed the most horrible site ever. Ghoulish better describes it. A pile of blackened enemy bodies, burned. Twisted. The result of a flame thrower that entered the caves from above and the people jumped because they had been set on fire.

“We secured the island March 26, 1945. I boarded a boat for Hawaii for further training for the invasion of the mainland of Japan. Some months later, we landed on the homeland of Japan as an occupation force. We would have landed as an invasion force if they had not surrendered after the atomic bomb.

“We landed on the large island of Kyushu. The people were nice. They kept as far a distance as they could from us. Never tried to interfere with us or anything. They didn’t have anything. I gave them what rations I could get. They didn’t have anything. The war effort had taken away everything they had.

"The common Japanese knew at that time the Japanese war with the USA was wrong. While there in their country as an MP, a buddy and I drove around in a Jeep and saw it was common for a woman to do all the hard labor. Every time we saw a woman pulling a loaded cart, we stopped and took her out of the harness and put the man in the harness and made him pull the car.

"We said we were the first to westernize Japan!

"I was sent to Nagasaki to do MP duty to guard the atomic bomb blast area. I did guard duty on streets leading to the blast area to stop the people heading there to tell them how very dangerous it was because of radioactivity, and it was very toxic.

"Once I was in a jeep on MP duty and we drove to a point to see the blast area. Nothing was there. Even the ground looked crystalized. Where once a factory stood, there was nothing but big steel girders. These were melted into the ground. I was looking through binoculars about a mile away. We had an interpreter with us to try and talk people out of there. I assumed people probably lived in there at one time. They had no cars. They walked or had bicycles, so they probably had homes near the factory.

"I got to do many small duties. One duty was destroying some small arms and ammo, during which I broke my wrist. I went to the infirmary and they put a small cast on my arm. The next day I was on a hospital ship heading to Seattle.

"The cast was taken off my wrist and I was sent to San Diego for discharge March 11, 1946. The next day I was on a train heading to Oklahoma to see my mama and daddy!

"After what I had seen and witnessed, my conclusion is, God has given to mankind the knowledge to destroy our universe in the blink of an eye. Please, God, give us your loving power to love and preserve our world."

Cut line:

WWII veteran Glenn Mitchell shows Assistant Chief Jack Austin memorabilia from his time in the service.

Photo by Judy Allen.

Cut line:

Commemorative flag and knife presented in honor of Glenn Mitchell, veteran of Iwo Jima.

Photo by Judy Allen.