

Floyd Simmons

Choctaw family man, WWII survivor

Floyd Simmons said he remembered the Dust Bowl era. "It was 1932 or 1933 – I was twelve or so. I was plowing and I was looking up at the sun." He squinted his eyes and held a hand to his forehead, shading his eyes, as though reliving the moment. "There was so much sand blowing that the sun was just blotted out. Things got really bad." Floyd said a lot of people began moving out of state, going as far as California. He and his family stayed in Oklahoma. "There was no work, no money. A dime seemed as big as a ten-dollar bill is now! People would work for a ham, and be glad to get it! Times were hard then, but everybody was happy!

"Mother was born in 1896 and she had allotted land at Hontubby. That was the land we farmed."

Floyd was born 101+ years ago to Sam and Edna Simmons who were married Oct 15, 1911. Floyd was born in February of 1920 in Hontubby. He had four siblings - Lola, Cleo, Jewell, and James.

Floyd attended elementary school in Hontubby and went to High School in Heavener, where he and wife Madine live. They attend Trinity Baptist Church in Poteau. Some of his interesting family history includes the fact that Floyd's grandfather, John Simmons, was an interpreter for the Choctaws and Chickasaws.

Soon after High School, Floyd joined the service for several years, then moved back to Hontubby until he was 40.

"I was drafted into the Army, and did boot camp in San Luis Obispo, California." Floyd was a medic in the Army. He said right after boot camp, trainees were given IQ tests and then placed into further training.

Floyd recalls living in England while in the service just before D-Day. While there, he stayed in a private home.

"When we got to England, at roll call you stepped out when your name was called. Me and another guy stepped out and the police took us and led us ten or fifteen blocks to a house where people boarded us," said Floyd. "I stayed there from February until June."

"I thought my hosts were old – they were about 50 years old!" he laughed. "The people quizzed us and I was curious about them, too. They thought I didn't look like a cowboy. They thought everyone from the United States should look like a cowboy! I asked why I was staying in their house. Military were out of room at the base, so the bobbies (police) came knocking on my hosts' door and looked at the house, surveyed the rooms and said since they had room for two sleepers, they would be paid monthly. The Army set up beds – upper and lower bunks - for me and another guy in this house. 'The bobbies came 'round and told us we would take two', the hosts told me. 240 enlisted men lived in private homes in the suburbs of that city. Tents were pitched for kitchens and clinics at a park."

This was on the western side, southern tip of England. Floyd could not recall the name of the town, but said Liverpool was about fifty miles to the North.

Floyd has other, more vibrant memories of the time he served in WWII. "I remember June 5, 1944. The staging area was along the coast. A British paper came out early that morning that the Allies had invaded France. The invasion didn't actually happen yet - the newspaper had the secret that someone had told them about the plan, and had printed the paper, but the invasion didn't happen on the 5th. The invasion was postponed one day, delayed because of weather. The channel was impassable. D-Day happened the following day, June 6.

"I went as a medic on the 18th, twelve days after D-Day," said Floyd. "We landed with planes and heavy artillery. Soldiers had already scaled the cliffs and drove the enemy inland about a mile and a half."

His wartime career was spent in the European theatre. "I went into Normandy on the 18th of July as part of the 102nd Evacuation Hospital. When I got to Omaha Beach, I could see evidence of what they had done at the cliffs.

"Being a medic was a busy job – twelve hours a day, seven days a week."

Floyd received three battle stars, Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge and Belgium.

He said, "Right after Omaha Beach – about a month – Germans started retracting and things started going our way. Germans retracted all the way to the German line, at the end of the British Province, near Normandy and Brest, France. We were about three weeks taking that town. Submarines were in a submarine pen with six feet of concrete on top of them at Brest.

"For close to six weeks, bombs were dropped from the air on top of the concrete pen where the subs were in. This U-boat bunker in Brest was the largest built by the Germans during the war.

"The rest of the line had moved on to Paris by the time Brest fell," Floyd remembered.

They had six entrances at the Battle of the Seine River. While at the Seine, Floyd went blind in one eye. It happened one night. "I got a hemorrhage in the right eye. It was November of 1944. I stayed in the hospital eight months. I was discharged December 4, 1945, with the rank of Corporal Technician 5th Grade."

Awards and citations include three battle stars, Good Conduct Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal (EAME) and three Bronze Service Stars, WWII Victory Ribbon, and American Theater Ribbon.

Back home in civilian life, Floyd had diverse jobs, including farming, working at the Talihina hospital as an unlicensed nurse (nurses aid), pipeline worker, running a service station, working at the ammunition depot and working on the Highway Department. He always enjoyed being outdoors, and said working on surveys for engineering roads was one of his favorite jobs.

Cut line:

Floyd Simmons, WWII Veteran, tells Chief Gary Batton about landing at Omaha Beach.
Photo by Judy Allen.