

Interviewed by Judy Allen at his home in Spiro April 22, 2024 at 10:00 am

William "Leon" Mize, of Spiro, Oklahoma, served 1968-1970 in the U.S. Army as a Helicopter Crew Chief. "My job was mostly maintenance, and I also flew with the pilots. They had to have a mechanic with every flight and we did a lot secret missions, too," said Mize.

He remembers one flight that the helicopter crashed. "No one was injured, but the 'copter caught fire when it hit the ground. We put out the fire with fire extinguishers. The crash did a lot of damage, so the 'copter was airlifted back out."

Mize received basic training at Fort Polk and advanced training at Fort Eustis, Virginia on helicopter mechanics. He was then sent to Germany.

"Mama prayed me out of Vietnam," said Mize. "It was the peak, and I went to Germany." He received his basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana and helicopter mechanics training at Fort Eustis, Virginia.

Mize achieved a rank of SP 4th Class. He did not see combat. "We kept our bags packed so we could leave in a 24-hour window," said Mize. He was thankful he did not have to go to Vietnam.

Mize received a head injury while in the service. "We were taking a rotary blade off the 'copter - me and two guys were holding the end. The guy on top pulled the pin, and the blade came down and hit me in the head. I was unconscious for nearly a week." He has suffered from migraines and has permanent hearing loss because of the accident.

Mize said the Army kept him after the accident, since it was nearing the end of his service tour. He was put on light duty, watching over a boy scout cabin in the country for the last two months of service.

"The hardest part of military life was being away from home," said Mize. "The best part was getting to travel and getting paid for it."

After discharge, Mize went to work at Arkansas Glass and Mirror, putting in storefronts. He worked at this job two or three years before becoming a Union carpenter for 14 years. Then he opened an auto sales business.

He and his wife, Marilyn, had dated briefly when he was home on leave.

Mize received a higher education on the GI Bill, He has a degree from Carl Albert College.

Mize's parents were Eli and Sally Mize. Eli was born in 1898 and she in 1901. Leon was born in 1944. He had seven brothers and sisters who lived to be grown. "I was the 13th child, as some died as babies. Those who lived were Helen, Hazel, Clarence, Virginia, Stella, Lorene, Carol and me. I am the only one left," he said.

Born in Poteau, Mize went to school at Tarby, then Panama – where he graduated. "I had a brother who couldn't see and I took care of him most of the time. I got a car when I was 15 or 16. I worked on Dog Creek Ranch for fifty cents an hour and saved up for a car. I liked to go to town. We were eight miles west of Shady Point so we would go running around to Bokoshe and Poteau." He continued to work on Dog Creek Ranch until about a year after high school graduation.

He has fond memories of family gatherings growing up. "We had goats and a would hook them up to a wagon to haul kids around!" His father made a harness for the goats. "We taught them to pull a wagon and we would take it to the highway. People would stop and pay us a

quarter to let their kids ride in the wagon. That was an enjoyable time, but I didn't realize how enjoyable it was then!"

He said the Saturday night entertainment when he was a kid was listening to the Grand Ole Opry on the radio.

His wife, Marilyn, is the oldest of four. Former Tribal Council Speaker Dale Cox was her father. Another former Speaker, Delton Cox, is her uncle. Juanita Cox was her mother.

Mize has advice for future generations, "Go to church – that would be the main thing. We have seven grandchildren and nine great grandchildren." Mize tells them all it is important to attend church.

He has shared his love of hunting and fishing with his children and grandchildren. A favorite fishing spot is Elm Point on Lake Eufaula, where he catches a lot of crappie and catfish. He has also taught the kids to deer hunt. Mize still hunts, and enjoys it very much.

Mize did not get to watch the recent totality eclipse because he had eye surgery that day. He said he didn't mind missing it because he had seen a lot of other amazing things in his lifetime.

The Choctaw Nation honors and appreciates our tribal members who are veterans. We thank each and every one for their service.