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Different Generations of Veterans on Learning to Share their Stories

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**Different Generations Of Veterans On Learning To Share Their Stories**

by Jeremy Dobbins

Jeremy Dobbins served four years as an infantry rifleman in Afghanistan, and when he got out in 2012 he found it difficult to talk to people about his military experience. But when he was ready, he chose to tell his stories to an old family friend from Springfield named Charlie Dyke. Jeremy had joined the Marine Corps at age 17. Charlie enlisted during World War II shortly after his 18th birthday. Both men returned to Springfield after their service ended to raise families and begin new lives.

Charlie Dyke is a close family friend who I’ve known for most of my life. Charlie survived some of the fiercest combat in the European theater during World War II. Out of the 250 men in his company at the onset of the invasion of Sicily, five had survived by the end of the war; Charlie was one of those five. The last time I saw Charlie was at his 90th birthday party over the summer. While I was there he gave me an American flag quilt he’d made. We spoke then but not for long, so early one Saturday morning I drove out to Charlie and his wife Eddie's house to talk some more.

I started off asking him what convinced him to begin making the flag quilts.

"Well I just like the red, white and blue, and Eddie had that flag pattern," said Charlie. "I give them to veterans, people that got kids that’s in the service, or friends you know I think need a flag. She does most of the cutting because my hands are so stiff. I do some cutting but she does most of it. But people like them flags, they really appreciate them. Then I put their names on them and they really appreciate that. I never quilted in my life until I was 80 years old. It’s relaxing."

It takes about six hours to make one flag quilt, and on a good day Charlie makes two. This keeps him busy. I find being busy is a good thing, because it helps me cope with my wartime experiences. As we talked our conversation shifted to intense memories.

"So we stored all this TNT that we’d taken in our barracks. Well we didn’t know our barracks was booby trapped too. So it blew up, and we lost one whole platoon. It was in that explosion. I can remember one guy up about four floors hanging by his neck, just where the cot you know. I still see that real vivid in my mind, and I was only 18 then. Barely 18 and that kind of stuck with me..... Yeah."

I asked Charlie if, when he got home, he talked to anyone about what he had experienced in Europe.
"No, no, I never said no more. We didn't talk about it because we were just glad to get home. We didn't talk about the war to nobody," he said.

I told Charlie about my own experiences when I came home, and how I had to learn to let things I experienced go.

"Yeah, you can't hate. You've got, you got to show that you have love in your life. I told me great grandson that got married the other day. I said, 'I got a little advice for ya.' I said if you got love I your life you're all right, you'll get through and I've got the best one there is down stairs there," said Charlie. He then called downstairs to his wife. "Hey, Eddie."

Charlie and I spent over two hours talking that morning. Despite everything he has experienced in life, he remains an unremitting optimist. As we shared experiences I could see in his eyes from time to time a deep sadness and it was obvious to me being happy and optimistic isn’t always easy. It’s a choice. Charlie has survived a lot, and I have little doubt his attitude has sustained him through some of the worst experiences one can encounter.

For more information on services available to veterans, visit the resource page at the Wright State University Veteran and Military Center website.

Veterans Voices is part of Veterans Coming Home, a public media effort to support veterans, made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

PHOTOS:

caption: WWII veteran Charlie Dyke with his wife Eddie
credit: Jeremy Dobbins

caption: Charlie Dyke and Jeremy Dobbins
credit: Jeremy Dobbins