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A WWII Veteran Shares His Stories In Person, Via Social Media

by Jeremy Dobbins

Today our Veterans Voices series continues as we learn about Army veteran Jim Martin who despite being 93 years old, parachuted into Normandy this year to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Jim was in the now famous 506th parachute infantry regiment featured in the HBO miniseries Band of Brothers. He was nicknamed "Pee Wee" because he was the lightest man in the unit. At the end of the war, Jim returned to Xenia to build a house, raise a family, and live a modest life. But when Jim got online and connected with social media, his popularity reached celebrity status. Marine Corps veteran, and Wright State University student, Jeremy Dobbins has the story.

I'm in Xenia High School's auditorium to listen to Jim Martin speak about his experiences in the second World War. As I look around, I'm surprised by the diversity I see. I meet a man who wants his son to hear a World War II veteran speak before it's too late, a woman whose father died in the war, a couple on holiday from England who are driving across the heartland of the United States. And across from me are a group of local college students who've come to hear the story of a man who lived the history they study.

"Well, to begin with I'm here because my only claim to fame is I outlived almost everybody that went me," Jim said. "So there's nobody around right now to refute what I'm saying."

Jim was part of the now historic 101st Airborne Division. He was one of the men who jumped into Normandy to retake France and, eventually, the rest of Europe from Nazi Germany. Jim is one of the only members of his unit who served through the entire war, and is still around. He is the keeper their historical artifacts and collective story. I was curious to know how this humble, soft-spoken man began sharing his experiences.

"At reunions people would ask about certain things that happened, and all of them referred them to me," he said. "I've got hundreds and hundreds of letters that people sent me, and I've always sent pictures and copies of documents and that's how it got started."

Jim's stories eventually reached local history teacher and oral historian, Doug Barber, who interviewed him. He thought more people should know about Jim's service.

"I think there was only two pictures of him on the internet when I was doing the initial research for the interview," says Doug. "And I thought that was a shame and we have a saying that paint doesn't do any good in the bucket, and so we wanted to get his media out there. And you know I interviewed him and I found out he had all this material that no one was able to see."

"That's when it really started, when with what he did," says Jim.

"Jim's whole idea is transferring the information to the next generation," says Doug. "And if you want young people to know something you have to put it where their eyeballs are. Well their eyeballs are on social media, so we began [a public figure Facebook page](#) as a conduit for putting his material out there. It's just gone great guns, he passed 15,000 followers last week."

"You see all these I was doing it by mail, it was just little trickles, but when he put it on there it exploded, and it's 27 countries isn't it?" Jim asks Doug.

"It's more than that," he replies.

The project is a collaboration between the two men.

"Everything on there is [Jim], I just do the key work," Doug says.

"But he's the guy that makes it work," Jim adds.

Once Jim's story was on the Internet he began receiving requests to travel throughout the United States and Europe to speak publicly about his military service. He agreed to go, but with one stipulation.

"I said if you want me to go you're going to have to get somebody to go with me, because I won't go through an airport alone. So then they said well who do you want? Then I said, 'Well I think Doug should go with me.' So they pay his way too. And imagine the people we've met. In Washington DC, we went to two parties at the British Embassy. We met Princess Ann. Who in the hell ever thought that a little old guy from down here would be talking to royalty?"

I admire Jim because his service did not end when the war ended, he continues to honor the men of his unit by sharing their remarkable stories, all the while remaining a modest man.

"I'm nothing special, I am a representative of our unit. I feel it was an obligation to go. I do not consider it a sacrifice, I consider it an honor and privilege to have been a part of history. Look at what I've gained and where I've been and what I've done. It's just phenomenal."

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.](#)

Photo:

caption: WWII veteran Jim Martin with Veterans Voices' Jeremy Dobbins

credit: Jeremy Dobbins

