

Taped Interview

Dallas Reunion 2006

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Pancho Fernandez, Co. I 411th

I am Pancho Fernandez. I am Spanish. I moved from West Virginia to Michigan in 1937. I stayed there and worked for a while. In 1942, I enlisted in the service. I wanted to get into the Cavalry because I like horses. But they would not put me in the Cavalry. So I went to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. I was probably the first one in there in '42. I went through the maneuvers and all that. I was in Company I, 411, 103rd Infantry Division. Then I was in the machine gun squad and went on maneuvers. Then we moved to Gainesville, Texas. My first buddies went overseas.

The ASTP boys came in '44, the smart boys I'll say. We didn't have much training at that time. When I first got in, I saw this machine gun on a jeep. I wanted that real bad. When I got in they took the machine gun off the jeep and gave it to me and I carried it. I got to be the assistant gunner. Then I had to hit the ground all the time and I kept damaging my right arm. I said, "This is pretty tough; I think I ought to be a gunner, because you had the tripod." And later on, I said I could do better than this. I think I will be a sergeant. You get more pay and everything. I stayed with them as long as they stayed here.

In 1944, they left me here even with all the training I had. I took the training and then they said, "You can't go overseas". I had a bad elbow. As long as the outfit stayed here, I could stay with them. I really felt bad. All that hard training that I took and I

suffered with the arm. That is what kept me from going overseas. As long as they stayed here, I could stay with them. I stayed with them from Dec 1, 1942 to October 1944.

They discharged me and sent me to Chicago. I was wandering around and I met a guy from the Merchant Marine. He said I should join the Merchant Marines. I said no. I went back to Detroit where I had worked for Ford before I entered the service. I could have gotten deferred because I worked in the steel mill. I worked there for forty-five years, in Dearborn.

I liked cattle so I moved up north and bought some cattle. I got a little ranch up there and I raise Longhorn cattle. I am getting too old now. I raised the cattle a couple of hundred miles north of Detroit; a small town of National City, Michigan. The last time I retired, it was in '84, but I moved up there in '74. I drove all the way back there for ten years, driving back and forth. I established this little ranch with the cattle. I still have them but I am going to have to get out of it because it is too much.

We have them dairies up in Michigan with five thousand to six thousand cows. It is getting bad for the farmers, lot of manure and stuff like that. They are going to close them up. It is going to be tough.

I didn't find out about these reunions for a long time. I have been coming to them. I wish I had known more about them. A lot of the guys who were coming here are dead. My buddy over there was our clerk in 1942. He is in one of the pictures.

I told somebody that they had pigeons at Claiborne. They had pigeons at Claiborne for communications. They had trailers and had the coops in the trailers. The Signal Corps had pigeons. I am not sure what they did with them. They had pigeons in

the First World War. When I tell people that they had pigeons in the Second World War, they do not believe me.

I liked the Service. I stayed in there as long as I could. I just felt so bad that I could not go overseas. The ASTP boys came in. I went down and got a lot of them at the station when they came to camp. I had to go down, get them, and bring them to our company and all that. So, that's what they did. They did not have much training. You guys didn't have much training. They told me that the ASTP boys had to live in hotels. I met a lot of swell people. They came to Gainesville.

Gainesville had a horse riding stable there. They also had a longhorn. I have a picture from 1944 of me riding him and me twisting his horns. They had horses and I used to ride the horses in a little town called Pilot Point. Have you heard of Pilot Point, Texas? It is outside of Gainesville. I used to ride these horses. I met these swell people who would take us in for the weekends.

In Dallas, they had this big airplane factory. They had a lot of people working there during the war. This woman had a big plantation home. She had people staying there working. They let us stay there too for the weekend. You did not have to pay anything. That was in Dallas. I had a good time. I can't wait to get to see Gainesville tomorrow. They tell me everything is gone. *There are still foundations and a water tower left. You can see where the barracks were. There is no wood; just the concrete footings.* I wonder if I could find our place. *The only structure is the water tower.* First time I saw chicken farms like in Delaware was in Arkansas a few years ago.