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SENIOR PERSPECTIVES



BOY SCOUT Charley Ford adjusts a video camera with other Scouts prior to an interview for the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project with World War II veteran Wm. Butler, a resident of the Gardens at St. Elizabeth in north Denver.

Scout project preserves vets' memories for the future

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Scout project preserves vets' memories for the future

BY TOM BARRY

On a remarkably warm winter's day, war veterans mostly in their 80's and Boy Scouts came together atop the Gardens at St. Elizabeth retirement community to literally and figuratively record history.

These venerable soldiers of yesteryear were participating in the Veterans History Project, preserving recollections for the Library of Congress. Boy Scouts and supportive parents were led by Charley Ford working on his Eagle Scout project.

"We quickly learned that war is not a picnic and taking orders was crucial," noted Jim Ellsworth, of Hudson, Colo., who served with the 254th Combat Battalion in Germany during World War II. He shared that he boarded the Queen Mary, which was converted from a luxury liner to transport soldiers overseas to the battlefield. Fittingly, Ellsworth was interviewed by his great-grandson, Joel Meyer, along with other Scouts for this memory preservation project.

This rigorous effort videotaped various soldiers recounting innumerable war stories to youthful and attentive interviewers. Ford and his parents, Leonard and LuWanda, both top Scout leaders of Troop 231, invested 18 months learning and preparing for this unique opportunity with their son.

"My mom learned about this project from a Web search. The more we learned about this ambitious project, the more interested we became," said Ford, a junior at Pomona High School. "This project will help preserve the legacy of our vets and future generations can see the contributions made by these men and women that have bravely served our country."

In a touching expression of love and admiration, Charlene Butler helped her husband Wes recall some of his wartime memories previously shared during their 57-year marriage. The young Boy Scouts asked prepared questions and listened intently to the colorful responses from the Butlers.

Butler had an interest in flying and worked on a support team with flight crews and served time at Lowry when it was an Army Air Base. In a touching way, Butler's wife, who sat across from him, assisted in prompting memories of interest to the Scouts. He ended up retiring from the Federal Aviation Administration.

"My most difficult wartime memory was when people would ask us soldiers for our table scraps after our meals," said Ellsworth. "Some of the people we saw were starving during the war. It was a real eye opener.

"We spent some of our time disarming land mines," he added, "and unexploded shells in Germany."

The Scouts were wide-eyed when they learned about essentials the soldiers used to survive. With a smile on his face, Ellsworth told about using a small pup tent for two people and only basic supplies.

In preparation for this project, Ford organized and trained 11 fellow Scouts and parents to interview, videotape and run the computers. Neatly dressed in their Scout uniforms, they spent time before the interviews reviewing photographs and memorabilia displayed by the respective veterans.

To earn his Eagle Badge, Ford is required to organize and manage a notable community service project. This challenging project will result in over 20

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

For more information, visit the Library of Congress Web site at loc.gov/vets

hours of unedited videotaped interviews of wartime experiences. Many of the participants are residents of the Gardens at St. Elizabeth located in the Highlands neighborhood of north Denver.

Troop 231 is associated with the Wilmore-Richter American Legion Post 161 in Arvada and therefore takes a special interest in veteran-related activities. Ford was required to raise funds to support the rental of equipment and other expenses. The veterans post exceeded the requested donation amount. Ford will donate the remaining funds to aid an organization for homeless veterans.

"This Veterans History Project taught me that these older Americans served our country and many died for us protecting the freedoms and rights we enjoy today," Ford said.