

2015-07-13 SIDE B

Joe Prejean, Anthony Mouton, and Paul Francis talk about their experiences while in the military and working on the Alaska Highway in the Yukon during WWII

Title from accession sheet: Project 92 Voices of Prejean, Mouton, and Francis. Lafayette, LA.
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Joe Prejean talked about being born in Lafayette, Louisiana and raised in Duson. He entered military service in 1941. He was twenty-one years old. After he was in the service for ninety days he was made a corporal. He was made a sergeant when he got to Alaska. After he had a falling out with the cook over food his pay was reduced. The cook was shipped back to the United States. He was then trained to be a cook. He talked about his men coming back from the field and the cook hadn't saved any food for them. He complained to the captain. He said the service was a good experience for him. He said he went into the service with very little education and he made a great accomplishment while he was in the service through his cooking. He came back to Lafayette and became a top chef. He worked in kitchens for forty-four years. He has five children. His youngest is twenty-nine. He has a retirement now and living pretty good. His children are employed as a radiologist, a surgeon, and a musician. His daughter is married to a professional baseball player. His youngest son is married to a registered nurse. He has five grandchildren. He has been married for forty-six years to Inez. He sent all of his children to college.

Anthony Mouton said he was born in Lafayette, Louisiana on June 22, 1922. He went into the service on June 2, 1941 in Camp Livingston, Louisiana. It was quite an adjustment for him. He had never been away from home or his mother. He couldn't get used to being on his own. He became the company recreational non-commissioned officer. He was in charge of the day room. He designed a mail distribution for the soldiers. Before they went to the Yukon he was transferred to headquarters' company and was put in regimental supplies. He stayed with regimental supplies all of his time overseas. He taught himself to type and became a clerk typist. He was transferred to Arizona when they came back to the states. He took up tele-typing with the Signal Corps until he was discharged. He went to California and played professional baseball. He played in the AAA league. When his mother died he came back home. His siblings convinced him to move closer to them. He went to Texas University at Houston. He worked as a waiter and bartender while he attended school. He worked in the insurance business in Houston. When he retired he moved back to Lafayette. The interviewer asked him to talk about some of his experiences when he was working on the Alcan Highway. Mouton said it was very, very cold and he had to get adjusted to that. When they were in Skagway living in tents a few of them went up a mountain. When they got ready to come back down he got to a point where it was very steep. He finally jumped and made it down. He said when he was in the military he met some friends that elevated his thinking about himself as a person. Paul Sanderford had a college degree and was from New York. Mouton said Paul would help him to understand words and educated him. Paul encouraged him to go to school when he got out of the service. He wanted Paul to

know what an impact he made on his life. He took it upon himself to learn to type and teletype. He said he did this because Paul Sanderford told him he could do this.

Paul W. Francis said he was born in Lafayette on August 7, 1922. He entered the service in April 1941. He first went to camp in Mississippi and then went to Camp Livingston where he received all of his training. They left from there and went to Skagway, Alaska. He did not advance beyond a private first class. He said they wanted to promote him. All of his good experience was at Camp Livingston. Once they got into Skagway it all changed. He feels if he stayed in the states he would have advanced. When they got to Alaska they were about a half mile from Skagway. They didn't have anything to do while they were waiting to move. They went into Skagway to see movies. They were the only Blacks there. The officers did not want them to mix with the local people and made up some information. They were only allowed to go into the movies early in the morning. This disgusted Francis. He was in Company B. They did the impossible. They were up front of the construction. They were the first ones up in Carcross. He said the officers kept the meat that was shipped in for themselves. They used to go out and do their own hunting so they would have meat. Once they sent horsemeat up to them. They decided to do their own hunting. They had rifles, but not ammunition. They had to check out ammunition. They were putting up a bridge before winter came. They had to cross a stream about fifty feet wide. It was minus 20 degrees in the morning. They worked thirty-six hours without any sleep or rest. When they got out of the water they could go to a fire to warm up. The officers would never get in the water. Francis said he knew someone who had severe frostbite. They were moving from Donaldson Creek back to Skagway. They had to walk thirty miles. The only trucks available was with a white outfit. They started walking down the highway. It was forty below zero. When they got down the road to where the white outfit was one of the sergeants could barely walk. His foot swelled up and they had to cut the boots off of him. One of the officers came in and looked at him and let him stay there. They took him to Fairbanks for treatment. He had to have part of his foot cut off. He was then sent to Seattle. He talked about unloading barges when it was cold. He was putting his feet in the water when he was unloading the barges. His feet were bothering him but he was told to go back out to unload the barge. Francis went back to the barracks and his feet were numb. They were sent to Adak, Alaska. They put them on a WWI ship. The ship was loaded. The captain said they had to stay below deck because there was a Japanese submarine nearby. People were seasick. The people from Company B were strapped in the gun turret. He was put on one side of the boat with a gun. The water was so rough it was stripping things from the sides of the boat. People couldn't eat because it was so rough. When they got to Adak they dug wells for water with a pick and a shovel. They went down thirty frozen feet. When they hit the old ash deposits they knew that they were close to water. The white engineers didn't dig wells. He said they were the workhorses. The interviewer asked him what the living accommodations were on the Alcan Highway. They did not have any liberties. In the evening people would play cards and dominoes and sang. There wasn't any recreation. Some of them were sent out to kill game by their officers. He described how they were clothed in the cold. They were wrapped up around their heads, but were still cold. He talked about one officer who was good to the soldiers. They returned to Fort Lewis, Washington. He said the officers were even tougher at Fort Lewis. The only time the soldiers could go to the infirmary was at night. He was so sick that the doctor decided to put him in the hospital. He was mostly demolition and carpentry when he was in the military. He built roads and bridges and that is all he ever did.

Anthony Mouton said at Christmas in 1942 it was minus 70 degrees in the Yukon. They were living in tents. They chopped firewood for the wood heaters that would keep them warm. On Christmas Day there were four of them in their tent. They had Vienna sausage, mashed potatoes, and corned beef hash for dinner. They had a little wind up phonograph. They had one record, Serenade in blue. He said he can still hear it now. They played it all day and talked about home. If they went outside for five minutes their eyebrows and eyelashes would get covered in frost.

Paul Francis talked about mountain training in Washington. He said it rained the entire time they were out there. The water came into the tent. There was one soldier that was very sick and was not allowed to go to the infirmary for three days. He described getting sick while he was on training and using a home remedy.