

Flint Whitlock, recording 1

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00:00 Flint Whitlock

This is the machine I'm going to be speaking into?

00:03 David Allison

Yes, actually, it's a really good microphone, so I'm just gonna leave it right here.

00:06 Flint Whitlock

I've never seen anything quite like that. Did that come from outer space?

00:09 David Allison

It looks like it should be from outer space. It has input jacks here and all this stuff. So let's get started. I'd love for you to maybe start just by introducing yourself.

00:21 Flint Whitlock

Okay, my name is Flint Whitlock and I live in Denver, but I spent a lot of time in Broomfield.

00:28 David Allison

Wonderful, wonderful. So tell me kind of your story a little bit more. I know you've been in the service. But like, let's go back further than that. Like we're you were born and where did you grow up?

00:41 Flint Whitlock

Okay, I'll give you the background story here. I was born in Hammond, Indiana, in 1942, and Hammond is right on the Indiana Illinois border state line, the bottom of Lake Michigan. And when I was six years old, my parents and I moved across the state line to a town called Calumet City, which is a Chicago suburb. My father had been in World War Two with the 10th Mountain Division, came back from the war, bought a home on the GI plan and we moved. We had been living in an apartment for my first six years. So we were able to buy a home and that's where I grew up. I played a lot of sports in high school, I wasn't very good at any of them.

I had two passions. One was history and one was art. And I did a lot of drawings and paintings. I was the art editor and sports editor for my high school yearbook and high school newspaper and went off to University of Illinois 1960. And I majored in art. I thought I'd maybe end up as an illustrator or in graphic

design and advertising. And while I was in college, I continued to play sports at an intramural level. Dick Butkus was one of our major football players,

02:30 David Allison.

Big name there.

02:32 Flint Whitlock

Yeah, yeah. And I also attended ROTC. At that time, every male, in what they call the land grant university, had to take ROTC at least two years of that. And my Dad said, "Well, you know, with the draft on, you'll probably be called up and it would be better if you went into the service as an officer than an enlisted man." I said, Good advice. And so I took four years of ROTC and was commissioned upon graduation as a second lieutenant. And I took what they call a regular army commission; you could either go regular army, or reserve. Reserve was a two year active duty commitment and then a whole bunch of years where you'd be subject to recall, if they called up the reserves. And they said, if you take a regular Army commission, that's a three year commitment. There's no reserve commitment after that, if you choose to not make the Army a career, and we guarantee your first assignment. I thought, that's a pretty good deal. So this was 1964 and I wanted to get to Europe and get stationed in West Germany. And so I got that assignment. And you had to go into what they called a combat branch. And the one that I chose was Air Defense Artillery, the Nike Hercules missiles. And so I did that. I had about four or five months of training in Fort Bliss, Texas to learn about how to be a missile officer, and then I went and I had to either go to Airborne School or Ranger School. So I chose Airborne School and survived three weeks of very intense training and five jumps.

And so then I got my orders for overseas and I went to West Germany for the next two and a half years. Because I only had to be in the combat branch for two years, I needed to either stay in it or transfer to some other branch. And I got married at the time over there. And Vietnam was beginning to heat up so I said, or she said, "Why don't you transfer to some non combat branch that will be a little safer?" And I thought, well, okay. They're not really... Viet Cong don't have any airplanes that need to be shot down. So if I stayed in the air defense, I probably wouldn't go to Vietnam. But I took her advice and transferred to Quartermaster Corps, which is supply and logistics and I became a supply officer for about another six months or so in Germany. And then I sent in my request for resignation, to resign because I was coming up on my three-year commitment anniversary and the Army said, Thanks, but no, thanks. We really need you in Vietnam as a supply officer. So they curtailed... well they didn't curtail me, but they sent me to Vietnam for a year. I got there at the end of January of 1968, the day before the Tet Offensive began, which was kind of an interesting way to enter a new country with fireworks going off. So you guys didn't have to go to all this trouble, you know, a simple welcome; maybe a card or something in the mail, it'd be good. (Laughter)

They said, No, we want to give you the full Monty here. So I spent a year in Vietnam. We were occasionally shelled and rocketed. I didn't have to go out on combat assignments into the jungle or anything. I had an air-conditioned office I worked in. So you know, I guess it was probably the best assignment that anybody could have in terms of safety. I don't feel like I contributed much to the war effort. But, you know, we don't always get to pick and choose what we want to do. At the end of my year, I put in another request for discharge, and they said, no, no, we need you at Fort Carson, Colorado, which is where I ended my Army career with one year, down in the springs at Fort Carson,

which, interestingly enough, my father when he mustered out of the service, with the 10th Mountain Division, he mustered out at what was then Camp Carson.

07:50 David Allison

Oh, wow.

07:51 Flint Whitlock

So we have that little bit of combined history. And so after I got out of the army, I decided I would get into the advertising field. And I started with an agency there. And it was a young small agency, and we were very successful and won all sorts of awards for creativity. And it also happened, one of the reasons I wanted to go to Germany was because I wanted to be in a soccer culture. I played soccer for the University team when I was at Illinois, and I just fell in love with the sport. And so I played and coached and refereed and was an administrator in Colorado Springs for the soccer program down there, and then I got an offer to become the public relations director. Yeah. The public relations director for the first pro soccer team in Colorado, called the Denver Dynamos, in 1974. I thought it was going to be my dream job, but it was actually terrible. The only good part was the soccer part; dealing with the owners and the manager and general manager was a nightmare. I had nightmares years after the job ended.

But I stayed in Denver and I went to work for the biggest ad agency in in the state at that time and was there for a couple years and they had some financial issues and I got laid off; went to work for another agency and continued to work for either other agencies or for myself as a freelancer, doing both copywriting and art direction. I was also at that time doing painting. I had several gallery shows and had a gallery that represented me back in Chicago as well as Denver. And I started doing some writing projects and I wrote an article about the 10th Mountain Division. A 10th Mountain veteran saw it and thought it was pretty good. He said, "I've been collecting hundreds of pictures of the 10th Mountain people and scenes. I've been looking to maybe put together a coffee table book. And I'm looking for somebody to write the text. And you seem to have, you know, what I'm looking for."

So he said, "Would you like to co-author with me?" And I said, "that'd be great." And I thought, Well, okay, take about six months and flesh out my article. Now, six years later, I'm still working on it. I'm interviewing dozens of veterans. He and I are hitting publishers all over the country, trying to get a publisher to be interested. And finally, we found one in Boulder. They're called Paladin Press. They don't exist anymore, but they were very excited about it. So we got a book contract for that and it was also optioned for a Hollywood movie. But that never came about, which is what often happens when you're dealing with books in Hollywood. And so I continued in advertising until about the mid 90s. I was just about to have my fourth book published and I decided I'd get out of advertising and just devote full time to history and to writing and lecturing and things of that sort. And so I did that. And I've had 16 books published thus far. I just turned in number 17 to the publisher yesterday.

12:15 David Allison

Congratulations.

12:16 Flint Whitlock

Thank you, and I'm working on number 18. That's due by the end of May. So what am I doing sitting here? I should be back in my writing suite, working.

12:25 David Allison

I was thinking the same thing. (Laughter) Yeah, so that's great. You are also inducted into the Colorado...

12:31 Flint Whitlock

Colorado Authors Hall of Fame in 2021. Well, about.. well, back in... my math isn't very good. I would say about seven or eight years ago, Dan Daru from Channel 31 was here at the Broomfield Veterans Museum, doing a live broadcast. And I remembered that I had been here a few years prior to that, when Jacqui Ainlay-Conley had been the, I guess, she was a curator here. And she and I were both soccer referees. So that's the connection and she knew that I had an interest in military history. So come on out and see the museum; came out here, it was about half the size that it is now. So that's pretty interesting. I didn't think too much about it.

And in the year 2000, I and a group of other people, including Dave Liddell, decided we wanted to start what we call the Colorado Military History Museum. And we worked for several years, trying to make that viable, and we never got it off the ground. We had lots of people who said, you know, we've got a lot of artifacts, we'll donate to you. But where's the building going to be? Oh, we don't have the building yet. Well, when you get a building, give me a call and my collection is yours. So you know, it was one of those things that went on for several years, and we just didn't feel that it was actually going to happen.

So I kind of put that dream away until about seven or eight years ago when I saw Dan Daru here at the museum talking about the fact that the last nonprofit had moved out and the City and County of Broomfield had offered the entire building to the directors of the museum. And I said, I want to get involved in that. My dream had always been to be involved in a military museum and here it was, staring me in the face. So I came down. They were just about to have their annual meeting. And I volunteered for just about anything, you know, I can get my hands on, and they were glad to have the help. And so since then, I've been involved with exhibit design, historical research that goes into the exhibits. When you want to tell the story of a unit, a battle, a ship, a veteran, whatever, you know, do the research. And then also just being involved in the operation of the museum in whatever capacity. And it's been great, you know, ever since I joined here, it's 20 miles one way from my house, to the museum. And depending on traffic, it takes anywhere from 25 minutes to 45 minutes, sometimes an hour if there's a wreck on US 36. But I just, you know, love this place. The people here are great. As Bill Bates said, at our annual meeting, he'd never been a part of an organization where everybody got along, or where there was no infighting, where there were no cabals that were forming. And that everybody is here, for one reason, and that's for the good of the museum, to make the best museum it can be, and to honor the veterans, for their service. I mean, it doesn't get any better than this.

16:29 David Allison

Yeah, that's wonderful. And I know a couple of the things that you have done, as well; you also have given a number of talks in the coffee and conversation program. You've helped with some of the advertising promotions, that sort of thing.

16:41 Flint Whitlock

Yeah, because of my background in advertising and journalism, peripherally. I've done a number of press releases for the museum. Because we can't exist... How many people have come to the Museum and said, I've lived here for all my life, and I never knew you guys existed? Well, you know, that's a fault of, you know, not getting the word out. So I want to do whatever I can to get the word out, because I don't want the work that I've put into this museum to go unrecognized. Not, not for me personally. I don't want people to say, Oh, you've done a great job here with your displays. I want people to come in and say, Oh, this museum is awesome. I love it. You know, I don't know who does your exhibit. But you know, we love this wonderful little slice of history that we have here in Broomfield. It's such, I think, a cultural resource.

A few years ago, there was a dream vacation magazine that named the museum "The Number One Thing To Do In Broomfield" and you know that, that's the kind of recognition that I want, not for me personally, but for the museum and for all the other veterans who have given their time and effort to make it what it is. And hopefully we'll continue to grow and prosper. We won an award from History Colorado a couple of years ago. And I just think we are an educational resource. You know, the kids today. They don't know anything about military history, especially as it pertains to Colorado history. I mean, if they do video games, like Call of Duty or something like that, they know a little bit about it. But when I see families come into the museum, and they bring their kids, and you can just see the kids' eyes, like, I don't know any of this. They don't teach us in school about any of this. And the parents, you know, likewise, say our kids are not learning about this. And it's such an important thing that we have to know about our country's and our state's history. And the people, the men and women for over 200 years who have sacrificed, in many cases, given their lives to protect our country. You know, I think it's a crime that today's educational focus is not on what we teach here at the museum.

19:29 David Allison

And I think it's one of those things, too, because the stories are, you know, in many cases straight from the veterans themselves. And the people that are giving the tours are also often veterans and associated with the military and writers and that sort of thing. It just creates that sense of connection in a different way.

19:51 Flint Whitlock

Yeah. Well, you look today, I think I saw a figure a couple of years ago that said that only like one or 2% of the American population has a relative currently serving in the military.

20:11 David Allison

Yeah.

20:12 Flint Whitlock

You know, and it used to be at least 10%, probably more during World War Two. And so if you don't have a family connection to the military, then you know, we might as well be selling dog biscuits here. Because it's not something that touches people's lives on a daily basis. They might follow the news. And they might know, you know, where American troops are in harm's way around the world. But they don't have a son or daughter, husband, father, who's, you know, actually a part of that. And I think it's incumbent upon us to make that story known. So people realize that that's just not some nameless,

faceless mass of people in olive green somewhere out there in a country, we don't even know how to find on a map.

21:19 David Allison

Right, right.

21:20 Flint Whitlock

I think it's very important as a citizen to be well educated and this is part of that education.

21:27 David Allison

Yeah, something that can happen here for sure. So tell me just a little bit more about how you've seen the museum grow over the past few years. And then maybe what you would envision, like in your wildest dreams, what would this museum become or what would it have?

21:48 Flint Whitlock

Yeah. Well, when I first joined, there were a number of display cases. Lou Roman was the head of the display and exhibit committee at that time. And Lou, I feel like I'm following in his footsteps, because he set us on the path to where we are now, and hopefully, where we're going, wherever that may be. But we had a number of displays that were very incomplete. One or two artifacts in a case and there are a couple of cases that had a little sign that said, "a case of unlimited possibilities." And so I felt it was my duty to fill those possibilities. We also, I remember this very distinctly on the website, where people can write in their comments, and most everybody writes, "wow, what a great museum. I didn't know it was here. What a fabulous resource for Broomfield", blah, blah, blah.

But there was one comment that said, "It's okay, but nothing special." And that, that offended me. And that happened right at the beginning, you know, when I first joined, and I said, I want to do whatever I can to make it special and so that we don't get comments like that. And since then, I haven't seen anybody who, you know, dropped a bomb like that or left, "it's not very good", you know. And so, you know, that was kind of my goal. And, and it's not something that can be accomplished in one day, or one week, or one month or one year, that everything is done incrementally. I mean, you might have a nice display on something, but it's 75% complete. And so I feel my job and the job of my committee is to, what can we do to make it 100% complete? What are the artifacts that are missing and what are the personal veteran stories that are missing? What, what graphics will grab people and bring them into this exhibit? And so that's always the challenge.

As far as the future goes? Sure, I'd love to see us expand our footprint here. Unless we went out that way, to the east. I'm not sure if that could actually happen. And I kiddingly tell people well, we've got displays from the Civil War to the global war on terror. We can't have any more wars because we have no more space to talk about them. And so I was going to write to the President and make sure we're not in any more world wars because we don't have the room. So certainly having more space would be a major goal. I'd love to see us, and this is one of my goals for this year, is to change out the fluorescent lights in the display rooms and put in spotlights. Any museum you go to these days, the lighting is that way, it's very dramatic. It's focused on, you know, the artifacts, the displays, the posters, whatever.

25:28 David Allison

Highlighting things.

25:29 Flint Whitlock

Yeah, exactly. And that's really, I feel my next major goal here is to upgrade the lighting, so that it really showcases what we have on display. We have a person here, excuse me.