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**ORAL**

**HISTORY**

**PROJECT**



*Capturing Memories from Edgecombe*

**Edgecombe County Genealogical Society**



**Lealon Edward Strickland born March 1, 1923, Nash County, Samaria Community, the son of Edward Strickland and Patsy Hilliard Brantley. He is married to Josephine Vincent Strickland of Pitt County. He served in World War II in the New Guinea area and Mindanao Island in the Philippines in Radar. They reside in Edgecombe County, Whitakers, NC and he is a farmer**

**Date** July 14, 1997

**Interview by** Minnie Jo and Norman Gay

**Interviewee Information**

**Name:** Lealon Edward Strickland

**Address:** [REDACTED]  
Whitakers, NC [REDACTED]

**Telephone #** [REDACTED]

**Birth Date:** March 1, 1923

**Birth Place:** Nash County, Samaria Community

**Genealogical Information**

**Father of Interviewee:**

**Name:** Edward "Eddie" Strickland

**Birth Date:** 1887      **Birth Place**

**Death Date**      **Death Place**

**Mother of Interviewee:**

**Name:** Patsy "Pattie" Hilliard Brantley

**Birth Date:**      **Birth Place**

**Death Date:** 1979      **Death Place:** Nash County

**Notes:**

**MJFG:** Today we are interviewing Leolan Edward Strickland who was born in Nash County, the son of Edward "Eddie" Strickland and Patsy "Pattie" Hilliard Brantley Strickland. In World War II he served in New Guinea and the Philippines in the South Pacific.

In 1955 Leolan purchased the Ruffin Farm in Edgecombe in the Gethsemane Community and lives at Rt. 1, Box 390, Whitakers, NC on the Speight's Chapel Road. This is another of our efforts to capture the stories of our veterans.

**Leolan,** how did you happen to go into service?

**LES:** I was drafted. When I was in high school I was one of those really gung-ho guys and I wanted to join the Marines and my mother and dad said, "Not on your life!" So I took that for their word and went on about my business. Sometimes prior to my going in they lowered the draft age from 21 to 18 so I was ready to go. I was attending North Carolina State College at the time and had enrolled. The Dean told us if we came out within a certain number of days, that after that law was passed, we would get a greater portion of our money back. I was ready to come home anyway. (Chuckle). So I did and came home and that was in October and I was drafted, February 11, 1943, actually. I took one week leave and went back the 18th of February.

**LNG:** Where did you take basic training?

**LES:** Not basic. I spent two weeks at Fort Bragg mostly polishing floors with a tooth brush. I went from there to St. Petersburg, Florida to take my basic training. It was not a camp. We slept in hotels. All the men were not that lucky but my outfit slept in hotels that none of us could have afforded if we had been civilians. I remember March 1, 1943, my birthday. I had all those injections, was half sick from those, and homesick, but I didn't let anybody know it.

**MJFG:** What outfit were you in?

**LES:** Well, I ended up 595 Signal Air Watch but I think I was in more than one outfit. We were attached to different Air Forces. We drew our pay and groceries from different Air Forces. I do not remember now what they were. I know I signed with two or three different ones.

**LNG:** When did you go overseas? How long was it before you went overseas?

**LES:** The ninth day of April. I can remember that very well, it was on a Sunday. We shipped out of Camp Stoneman in San Francisco. I always figured I spent about thirty-five days on the water but I got my discharge out and actually I left on the ninth and got there the thirtieth. So according to them it was actually twenty-one days but unless I am mistaken, we spent a over a week docked in **New Guinea**. I started to say Hollander Bay but it wasn't it was **Lae**.

**LNG:** How long were you in New Guinea? Did you stay there the whole time?

**LES:** Well, no, I moved to two different places in New Guinea. I left Lae. To start off (the journey) they had pretty good main roads, the artery, but my outfit was a radar outfit so we had to go way back and set up on the highest place we could. We had to cut Kunai Grass as high as your head in **Markum Valley**. That was the name of the place in **New Guinea**. Being a farm boy, I said "This would grow some pretty cows." We had to cut it down with a machete at the campsite and snakes, the longest snakes I had ever seen. When they crawled through the grass, the grass would part they were so big. They were not poisonous, Constrictors, deadly, I imagine, but not poisonous. We set up and operated there for a while. That was sort of the central part of New Guinea and seemed like, in the back of my mind, that was supposed to be one of the biggest of the Islands there was.

The battle was still going on in the **Northern part up towards Bibi** and after that was secured we loaded up, we could not go by road. If I remember right, we loaded up and went to **Biag** and that was a Coral Island and we settled down there for a while and we operated there. I can't remember how long we stayed. From there we went **Mindanao Island** in the **Philippines**, I think.

**MJFG:** Did you have any close calls or anything that sticks out as being exciting?

**LES:** Well, being in a technical field, the most of the stuff I did was routine. Well, I went on a patrol but that was voluntary. There was an outfit and, I never have known why, they called them the Calvary, and there wasn't a horse around. There was a fellow called "**Tex**" and he would come by. You see we pulled regular eight hour shifts. We would be off sixteen hours and "**Tex**" would come by and want to know if some of the boys wanted to go on patrol. We still had Japs in the area and he was going on patrol if anybody wanted to go. I went on several with him because it was a little bit exciting, and I didn't have sense enough to know any better. I learned danger. I went with him and one day, I still say my mama's prayers were looking after me. He came by and I was in bed. I must have worked night shift. He tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Strick, I'm going on a patrol this morning, you want to go?" I said, "I'm going to pass this one up this morning. I believe I'll be better off just to stay here." They ran into an ambush and killed him and two or three of the other boys and I think the Lord was with me. The times I went with him, the only times we encountered anybody, it was not a deadly situation like they did.

I often wondered because it was supposed to have been an experienced man that led that patrol right up a Valley, it was like going up a Football Stadium, and on each side and right up in front of them they opened fire on them and you could not go back and get them for a long time. When they got them, of course all the Japs were interested in were the clothes, shoes and that kind of stuff. That was upsetting.

**Operating Radar was pretty interesting**. I could pick them up 150 miles out and I could tell what kind of plane it was, whether it was enemy or friend and we could track them right in, you know. We were making a one hundred eighty degree sweep and could track them right overhead. Get out and go out and look and see them going over, but you made sure everything was blacked out. That was in the **Philippines** when they were still bombing up there around **Zig Zag Pass**.

I tried to get out of Radar. **I went through Raleigh and I wanted to be a pilot**, so bad, and being nineteen, very gullible. I qualified for all branches, each one said, "Come with us, we can use you." I said, "No, I want to be in the Air Force. I want to be a pilot." Finally the man in the Army said, "You can't, there is no opening. You come with us and you can transfer any time you want to." So I went in the Army and it won't that easy (to transfer). Every time, "You've been trained in Radar." They had checked me out. I really thought they weren't doing it but I gave people's names for reference and they checked it out and then you couldn't get out of Radar. At the time I went in it was very secretive. If you were in school and they caught you talking about any of that outside you were in trouble. So I tried, took my physical and took the test and the Sgt. said you can't leave, you have orders to move and they never would let me go. Sometime while I was in New Guinea the call came, "we need paratroopers". They said, "You been wanting to get out, come on." I said, "No, Thank you, I have been here long enough learn now what is safe and what ain't!" I did not want to jump, so I finished my time out in Radar.

**LNG:** When were you discharged, Lealon?

**LES:** The 25th day of January, 1946. I spent two years, eleven months and fifteen days in service. I got on the boat, I believe it was the 24th of December coming home and got back to San Francisco the fifteenth of January, 1946.

**LNG:** Were you discharged out of Camp Stoneman or did you come back to Fort Bragg?

**LES:** They brought us back to Fort Bragg and that was the best ride I ever had on an old train. I think I stayed up the whole time looking out the window. 'Cause I could tell when I got to North Carolina. I could see the Pine trees. I think I stayed up the whole time looking for them.

**LNG:** Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**LES:** I was in Andrew Jackson Hotel in Raleigh. Why I was there, I don't know, but the boy I went with, we hitch hiked. We didn't have no other way, so we hitch hiked to Raleigh. I guess we were just country boys, wanted to see what it looked like, I guess. We saw service men running down the street. I mean getting out of there! Just going away! Then we heard about Pearl Harbor. I remember very well about that.

**MJFG:** You grew up in Nash County. How much did you have to purchase at a store?

**LES:** Nothing! I was grown, just about, before I ever got a Pepsi. It's amusing now how you have to go to the store three times per day now, at least. Back then, I don't know how, but mama very seldom went to the store. "Eddie, you bring back five pound of sugar or a pound of coffee", or whatever it was. That was about it and one time a year, I hate to tell you how poor we were. One time a year, it was eleven of us kids, and one time a year she got money and went to Moss's in Wilson to shop and the shopping was a pair of shoes each and the rest of the stuff was made out of whatever was handy. We never went hungry, and we never went without a job. It wasn't bad.



**MJFG:** Don't you feel that you were rich?

**LES:** Oh yeah, we kept cows to milk, we always killed hogs. I was a little different. I must have been interested in animals as a young boy because my dad gave a bull calf. I remember raising him up, **he was a Jersey bull and they are mean.** I was little enough that when he would lie around in the little old pasture at the house in the sun, I would go there and lie right down between his legs and go right to sleep. When I went to Ferrel's School I was pretty young. That ended at seventh grade. I would ride him across the pasture to the dirt road where that school bus wreck happened. I lived up in the woods from there and I would ride him over there and get off and leave my rope there and if he was around I would call him and ride him back to the house. He got where he was getting bigger and meaner. He would run people up trees in the pasture. I was never afraid of him, he never bothered me. But they were smarter than I was and knew that a bull was a bull and could hurt me so they sold him and I think **they got twenty five dollars for him** when they sold him, a grown bull! I remember there was **one lady** who crossed that pasture and back then you took all the short cuts you could. She **wasn't afraid of him.** She said if he comes after me, I'll just step behind a tree and get me a little brush and **beat his nose bloody** and he will leave. That's right and I have learned since then that the most sensitive part of an animal is the nose. My neighbor, Mr. A. W. Strickland, lived down there and the bull got out. One of my sisters, that I don't see often, lives in Texas. I saw her not too long ago and she brought that up, "Lealon, do you remember one time when we were barning tobacco and the bull came down there and scared everybody away from the barn and Mr. A.W. got his shot gun and shot him (stung him). I said, "Yeah, I remember." He had a pasture joining ours and that bull broke into his pasture and broke out of it and broke into ours and was standing at the gate. He was ready to go. Life was good then, I think about now. I knew where every squirrel had a den in the woods. I knew where they built nests. I knew where the rabbits had dens and I knew the good fishing places. I think the only person left in the family is my nephew, Jimmy. He is something, he could live in the woods, like Joe Parker.

Well I won't nervous, I talked too much. I should have just answered the questions you asked.

**MJG:** No, You are doing just exactly what I want you to do. When you were a boy, living on the farm did you have specific responsibilities? Did you raise chickens?

**LES:** Yeah, when I was in my early teens I took an old tobacco barn my daddy gave to me. Norman, it was a sawed log barn, the logs were square. I took it down and built a chicken house and I built a furnace in it and it would accommodate 300 chickens at the time. My sister mentioned that and she said, "You remember we would go out there and stay in that chicken house and it was nice and warm and you were looking out for those chickens." I remembered, and I raised chickens for a long time. I bought them from the Hatchery, Massey's Hatchery, in Zebulon. I got sophisticated after I got older. I built me a chicken house and had a wire floor and it is still a good way to raise chickens. They stayed on the wire from the time they were born until you killed them to eat. I could raised 300 out there and I raised them commercially and sold them. I think I was getting Fifty cents each for a two pound chicken. I was making money!

**MJFG:** Did you make your own butter, also?

**LES:** Butter, eggs, and we raised chickens to eat and we had meat. We raised wheat and carried it to Rock Ridge Roller Mills, at Rock Ridge. Carried a barrel of wheat or so many bags and traded it. We would get a barrel at the time. I don't remember what it weighed but it was a whole lot of flour. A hundred pounds, I think. That's what we did. We had our corn and carried it down to the Hoover Murray Mill Pond. Anybody who lives in that area will know about it. Our corn was white and we nubbed the corn on each end because the end grains were not always good. We nubbed it, shelled it, and bagged it up before we carried it to the mill. I enjoyed going to the mill because the water rushing across the water wheels and we always went on a cold day he would have a fire in the old heater and you look out the window and see the water rushing down over it. I was baptized in that same pond at Samara, Hoover Murray's Mill Pond. I enjoyed that. It was about like the one at Spring Hope there at Tar River. Of course, nobody runs it anymore.

Before we stop this thing, I want to pay tribute to Donnell Murray, Kenneth Tant and George Whitley. Donnell was the one I was with in Raleigh. Donnell Murray was what his name was. The Tant boy was raised by Mr. George Whitley. I think I am right and George and he both went off to service and I think both of them got killed. Donnell got killed in Germany. Somebody was with the outfit that got captured and Donnell was a tremendous man and he would not allow them to take him. You cannot be like that when the other man has the gun. There was a boy from up 97 somewhere, who was with him, when he got killed. C. S Marks was a prisoner of war at the very end of the war and he said they treated him good.

**MJFG:** This is exactly the kind of thing we want. To get a history of everything.

**LES:** Well, I got out my discharge before I came and went through it and I thought, well maybe I don't have all those things in my mind. But surprisingly, I did.

**LNG:** Do you remember your Army serial number?

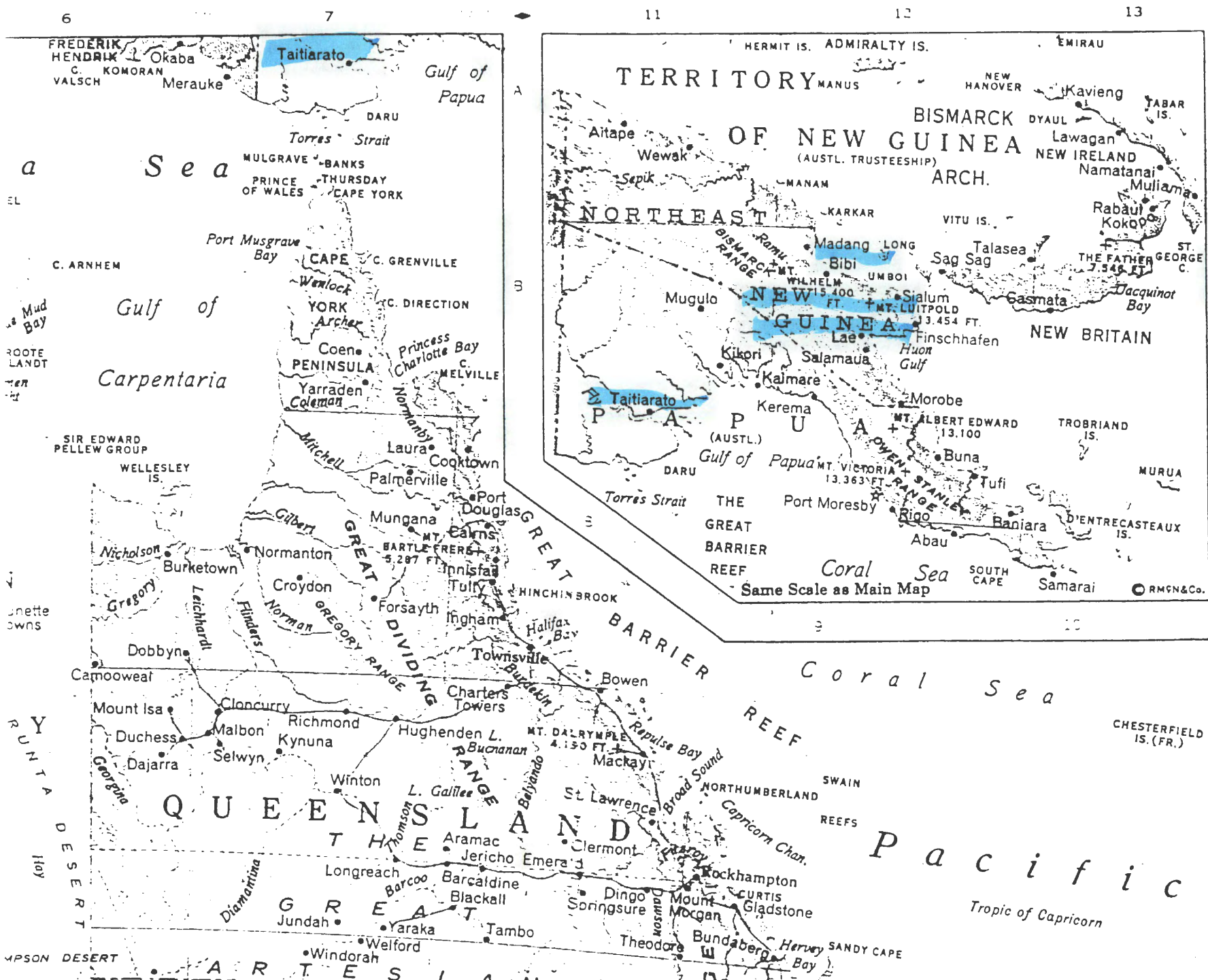
**LES:** **34666736. That number comes just as natural.** You know someone will say what is your Social Security Number? I don't know but that Army number comes natural.

**LNG:** **34663632.** I was inducted January 22, the same year you were. You were about two weeks later. When you got on the ship in New York you had to give your last name, initial and the last four numbers. I would say G3632.

**LES:** Well, my boys are all grown and grandchildren coming along now. I know that with the situation like it is it would probably disturb me for them to have to go into service, but I still say some good comes out of it. Discipline, if nothing else.

**LNG:** I think it would do any high school boy that gets out of high school at 18 years of age to serve two years in the military in basic infantry training and get out.

**LES:** The way college is getting now that could be a prerequisite to getting educated. Serve some time and then we will help with your education.







## RELEASE

### EDGECOMBE COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

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*His Mark*  
(Signature) Colon E. Strickland/mfg  
(Date) July 14, 1997  
(Researcher's Signature) Minnie Jo E. Fay