

Robert Finley

Tape 2 of 2

Answer: Mimi and my wife were born just a few days apart so they became very close friends. She visited us over here several -- several times, and we visited her over there. And my wife, about ten years ago, was dying of cancer. And Mimi -- Mimi and my wife were born the same year, same month, just a few days apart. So every Sunday Mimi would call from Belgium to see how dear Barbara was. And so finally I had to tell her that Barbara had died. And I didn't hear anymore from her until later. I got the word that, on her birthday, the following September, her sister took her down to Brussels or down to Louvain, to buy her a birthday present, and on the way back they were in an automobile accident and Mimi was killed. So Mimi and Barbara were born the same year and died the same.

Question: Pretty hard, huh?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So when you got back home, did -- your mother was still --

Answer: Still what?

Question: Your mother was fearfully waiting for you?

Answer: Oh, she was relieved, of course, yes. I think all mothers were. And fathers. Oh, that was kind of a funny thing, too. I -- my wife and I were there and one day my father motioned me, he says come in here. Went into the bedroom, and he says, he had kind of a smile on his face. He says, I don't know what this is, but he says, you've got a letter from Belgium and it looks like some girl's handwriting. And it was from Mimi.

Question: Thought you had a girlfriend.

Answer: Yeah. He thought that -- (laughs) you know how men are, you know. So I explained to him that she was just -- she was the interpreter for me. And so he says well I wasn't sure, I didn't want to cause any problem. (laughs)

Question: Did -- what do you think was the hardest thing about your time in the service?

Answer: Oh, I enjoyed it. I -- I thought it was great.

Question: Wasn't anything that was just --

Answer: Oh, you know, GIs gripe about different things, but I think the -- oh, I don't know. You just learn -- I learned a lot of things, you know, that's a very impressionable age anyway. And I enjoyed what I was doing and I griped just like everybody else, but all in all, I was -- I was pretty happy doing what I was doing.

Question: Is there anything that you think that history left out about the war and about that time?

Answer: That history left out, you mean?

Question: That's not in the history books.

Answer: Well, you know, there were how many million men in the service? There area million stories that haven't been told. Or have been told. I don't know that there's anything of any consequence that hasn't been -- but each one has an experience, or a series of

Robert Finley

Tape 2 of 2

experiences that -- it makes up the individual, you know, later on. It's part of our -- it's like what we learned in school and what we learned in the service or what we learn in marriage or what we learned in our business life, it's all a part of our make-up.

Question: So in that time of your life you made friends for your life or --

Answer: Well these -- these Blue Flames, as I say, we're closer than brothers.

Question: And Mimi and --

Answer: We're going to meet -- I wrote a letter to them last night. I think it would be nice if we each chipped in about 20 bucks or and buy some flowers and send them to the wives --

Question: The ones that aren't there anymore.

Answer: (Nods head yes).

Question: Is -- is that bond that you have with the Blue Flames -- have you ever had a connection like that with a group of people since --

Answer: I have a -- I have a very good friend that we started grade school together and we've remained friends all of our life and that -- it's a real tight bond. But nothing like the Blue Flames.

Question: I just hear different veterans say that they'll see somebody and whether it was their unit or another unit, they see a patch or a hat, they don't even have to say anything -- that there's some unique bond in there that -- that a lot of us will never, ever experience.

Answer: Yeah, that's right.

Question: Do you have anything you wanted to say to your -- the kids that haven't been born yet or grandchildren about your life and the times and what you did and --

Answer: Well, I've enjoyed my life.

Question: Do you think there's a message in what you did as a young man during World War I -- or II, and what the country did for future generations that they should know?

Answer: Well, I think -- I think that our -- our age group was ... we came up through the depression, you know, and I think maybe that has had a bearing on us. And then I -- I don't know. I'm sure that the fellows that were in the Korean War and were in the Gulf and so forth have similar experiences and -- and -- I'm sure that they did the job well. I can't think of anything that -- that we did that was so spectacular, you know. We did what needed to be done. And -- I don't know what else to say.

Question: That's quite a message just in itself, though.

Question: What do you think when you see the American flag go by? What does that mean to you?

Answer: Well, I ... I respect it. And I -- I hate to see these guys wearing it. (laughs) As clothing. It means something.

Robert Finley

Tape 2 of 2

Question: Does your time in Europe fighting the enemy and you were telling me before we started this that you were in a writing class, and was it your instructor that turned to the group and said that your the only person that's ever killed anybody in the room?

Answer: Yeah, that's -- one night he says, you know, I think Bob here is the only one who's ever killed anybody.

Question: Did that surprise you?

Answer: Yes, it did. It kind of shocked me. And -- I -- yeah, that was -- kind of caught me up short, you know. (laughs)

Question: So you had to think about that? That --

Answer: Well, I -- you know, when you're -- you don't -- you don't see the death that you -- you cause, normally, in the work that we were doing. Now if you're -- if you're in a dogfight and you shoot somebody down, you know that. But, say, we didn't -- we didn't really run into planes dog fighting much in the mission that we were doing. But one day I was -- it was at -- crossing the Rhine River. We just got a foothold across the Rhine. And so our mission was to go out. We had three or four different possible targets to go to -- we had quite a triangular run to make. And the order was that any moving stock going toward the front was fair game. Could be horse-drawn wagons. They used to -- they brought ammunition, you know, under hay -- hay wagons. Or any kind of movements of trucks or anything going toward the front was fair game. So I had my flight out this one day, there were four, four of us. And I noticed a truck going down the highway. So I called it in and I peeled off and went down and the truck came up to a "Y" in the road and stopped right there at the "Y". And it was a -- a beautiful target for me because I could just run my sight right up that road and when I get to a certain point I drop my bombs and I know the bombs are going -- where they're going to go. So I dropped my bombs and I pulled off to one side and looked down and that whole intersection was just completely obliterated. So I -- I must have bracketed that truck. So I must have killed at least the driver. There might have been other things in there. I don't know whether there was ammunition or whether it was personnel or whatever it was, but I know I must have killed somebody that day. If -- if -- if no one else, you know. But that -- that was my mission and that was what I did.

Question: You enjoyed your -- sounds like you enjoyed the people that you were working with --

Answer: I did. Yeah. It was -- I, I, you know, people say you mean you enjoyed killing? No.

Question: You enjoyed the people --

Answer: I enjoyed getting the job done that needed to be done.

Question: And you made lots of friends along the way it sounds like.

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, especially these nine fellows are real close friends, you know.

Question: Will you ever go back to Europe one last time, do you think or --

Robert Finley

Tape 2 of 2

Answer: Oh, I've been over there several times.

Question: Have you been there since Mimi passed away?

Answer: I haven't been there since Mimi passed away, no. No, I -- I was in the travel business, you see, so I got a chance to travel all over the world. I've been to, oh, about a hundred countries, island groups.

Question: Have you ever talked to any -- anyone on the other side that might have taken a shot at you?

Answer: Matter of fact, I did. (laughs) I was -- I was on a trip to Guam, I think it was Guam. And we had a -- a German anti-aircraft -- he was a travel agent. And he -- there was one other fellow there, what did he do? But anyway, I think he was in the Infantry. American Infantry. And I was in the Air Corps. This German was in the tanks so we went out one evening and had a party together, the three of us. It was great.

Question: Well, very nice to meet you.

Answer: Nice to meet you, too. I hope you got all you need.

Question: Oh, very interesting.