

Bill Forte

Tape 2 of 2

Question: You know, I've heard of SOS, shit on a shingle, but what's on a lifeboat? Bare shit on a life raft. That's the -- one is the chipped beef on toast -- creamed chipped beef on toast, the other one is that hamburger ground up, broken up hamburger, over toast, that's bear shit on a life raft.

OMV: Do you know they're still serving that on board today?

Answer: Yeah, yeah, true story. And they're still serving the beans -- still serving the --

OMV: Now they put it on rice instead of the bread that they used.

Answer: (laughs)

Question: Innovation.

Answer: Bear shit on a life raft.

OMV: I had some down in San Diego last year and --

Answer: Did you go down -- we went down for a ship reunion last year.

OMV: We went down there -- our son was close down there. He's in the VFW -- or the Veteran's Administration. And the Kitty Hawk was there. And we had -- got to go aboard. Helen wanted a cup of coffee so they took -- (laughs) Geez, I've never heard the last of that yet.

Answer: I saw that cruiser down there when we were there. I saw it -- they've got a cruiser now that they wouldn't go into a lot of detail, but we got a tour of the Naval base because we were Navy. And we got to go around where the seals are where they don't let people go in where the seals train and look at their equipment. But because we were all Navy and the Admiral approved two buses to haul us around in. We got to go aboard -- and we looked at that cruiser. They've got a cruiser now that can go from zero to 30 knots in about three minutes. It's got four engines in it, they put out 900,000 pounds of thrust. And the thing squats when it takes off. And they can stop it -- they can reverse the thrust on that and going 30 knots and stop that thing in probably two or three minutes. Just -- it just squats right in the water. And I thought boy, Jesus Christ, when I was on that battleship, Pennsylvania, took us a week to get up to full speed. And when we were going to stop at Pearl, we started slowing down a day out. You couldn't even see nothing and they said well we're about a day out of Pearl Harbor.

OMV: Did you know that the USS Enterprise, the first atomic carrier they built, can do 65 knots?

Answer: Yeah, isn't that something?

OMV: Sixty-five knots. That son-of-a-bitch is unbelievable.

Question: Wow. You could almost water ski behind that.

OMV: Well, hell yes you could.

Question: Hell of a wake, but -- (laughs)

Bill Forte

Tape 2 of 2

Answer: We got to go aboard that John Stennis when we were out there and I'm going to tell you something. Boy, you can't believe the difference the Navy we were in and -- and that -- everything is so gung-ho and everything is just -- it's like puppets. When those guys get out on the flight deck and go to work, everybody's just -- you know, like they're programmed to do something. And it's just -- and I'll tell you something. Those God-damn kids, I'll tell you, I'm proud of them. We went down to that Naval base and they had a dinner and the commanding officer spoke to us. And I'm going to tell you something. Those kids are just unbelievable. They're so God-damn well trained, and it just -- it just makes you swell up with pride to see those kids function and the way they take the Navy. It's unbelievable. And when we were in -- we were in Seattle and we went to Bangor and went aboard the Ohio that was in dry dock. So, because we were all Navy again, we got to go aboard this nuclear sub. And we got down there and we got our picture taken looking through the periscope. And there's two crews, a gold crew and a blue crew. Well the gold crew was in and we got our picture taken looking through the periscope, with a Polaroid, and then the captain signed it and this photograph, see. And they took us through there, served us a lunch. You ought to see the galley in that son-of-a-bitch, and the dining room. Geez, everything is first class. So I got talking to a first class signalman, which is what I was. I was chief, temporary chief, TA, temporary flight. So I got talking to him and I said you know I'm going to ask you a couple of personal questions. You don't have to answer them if you don't want to, but how much, as a first class signalman aboard this nuclear sub, I said what kind of money did you make? Well, he said last year I made \$35,000. Thirty-five thousand. Pretty good for a year. I said when I made chief, temporary, when I just -- just before I got out of the Navy, I was getting \$258 a month. And you made \$35,000. He says yeah, I just made chief and I shipped off -- I got \$29,000 shipping over my -- Jesus, that's as much as I made in my whole cruise in the God-damn Navy. Twenty-nine thousand dollars. He says if I got out of the Navy, he says with my experience in nuclear subs, he says I can do anything on this submarine. I can take any man's job on this submarine, that's what you have to do. He said it would cost the Navy, they figured \$29,000 to train a guy to get me out, so they gave me \$29,000 to stay in. And he says plus he made \$35,000 last year. His wife's going to have their second baby, all paid for, all the dental, all the food, all the clothing, plus he said, when they cruise, when they go out to sea, they get extra money when they -- they get diving money, and yet if they go so far away from wherever their station, Bangor, they get a little extra. And there's more God-damn trim than you can believe. It's unbelievable.

Question: Now did you get combat pay?

Answer: Yeah, let's see, did we get combat pay?

OMV: Big deal, what was it, ten percent?

Answer: Yeah, ten percent combat pay, and oh, we got -- oh, I was thinking. We got a vet's bonus. We got a bonus -- a vet's bonus in the State of Washington, when we got out.

Question: One thing that I've seen -- when you look at the time that you spent in the service in relation to your full life, it actually was a very small part of your full life. But yet there is this very unique bond among you and your fellow patriots that were out there serving our country.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Can you describe that at all? I mean, this is 50-some years later, but yet the - the relationship you have is different than anybody that didn't serve in that. I mean I could

Bill Forte

Tape 2 of 2

go to college for the same amount of time, four years, five years. I could care less if I see anyone.

Answer: Well, I don't know. It's a camaraderie that's kind of hard to explain, but -- and this is not just from my shipmates. We meet yearly and we talk about the war and we talk about some of the funny things in our R & R in Sydney, Australia, and some of the funny things, and really we don't dwell on a lot of the action, you know, but we enjoy each others' company and we go sight-seeing. And every year it's a different place. We were at Atlanta here just a month ago. And we're going to Los Vegas next year. And then somebody will come up and say, well, I'll take it in my area next year. And we try to go back and forth across the country and the central part and every year this reunion is just more interesting. And we lose more guys but now the second generation -- we had three girls from Texas come up and join us this year in Atlanta. Their father was aboard the ship. We had another fellow join us that's got seven months to go to get out of the Navy at 30 years. His dad was on the ship and he came and joined him. Another fellow from Poulsbo, Washington, his dad was a navigator on the ship. He come down and joined. The second generation is getting involved in our reunion and they're so enthused, finding out what their dads did during the war that they're carrying on. They can't wait till the next reunion, see, they get started with it. And it's funny about -- like I wear this cap and I do it for maybe a selfish reason. I wear this whenever I go out in a crowd because we're always looking for shipmates. And we've had a couple of guys walk up and said what do you know about that ship; I was on it, you know, they'd come up and recognize because guys seen the hat. But in the airport in Atlanta, a guy walked up to me that was a destroyer sailor. And struck up a conversation. Were you in World War II? Yeah, we're here for a reunion. And we started talking about World War II and he was a tin can sailor out in the South Pacific. So everybody that served out in that South Pacific that was in the Navy shares some of this camaraderie. I was at Mount Rushmore, wearing my cap out like I do, hoping somebody will recognize it. And a guy come up to me, he was another destroyer sailor. He was just returning from a reunion so we struck up a conversation. And we had cruised at the same time his ship had cruised, been in the same places in the South Pacific at the same time. So that's -- there's just an unspoken camaraderie between the sailors, and most of them are proud of the ships they were on. You know, everybody went out and did their job as little or as big as it was -- went out and did their job. And the result was a final victory. And I've never -- I've never been impressed by a lot of people's BS stories about -- you know, some of these guys that try to make themselves heroes. Because I will maintain to my dying death the heroes are still out there that didn't make it. They are the only heroes to come out of World War II is the guys we left behind out there. And there's parts of it I'd like to forget and parts of it I hope I never forget. Something I'd never want to do again in a lifetime, but I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience. How would I ever get to Japan? How would I ever get to Australia? How would I ever get through all that South Pacific? And I have hopes of going back to Saipan and Australia. In a couple of years I'm planning on it now. But -- it's just something that -- there's just a feeling amongst the guys that slept together, ate together, fought together. Not necessarily on the same ship. We all went through the same thing -- the same Japanese were trying to kill us, so, you know, there's a camaraderie there between all the sailors.

Question: What do you think -- what's the major message, do you think, from World War II for generations to come? What do you think there is one?

Answer: Well, I'm going to tell you, I -- we've discussed this and we've talked about it, too, before. It's a -- you get a different generation of people now. In World War II, when it started, it jammed the recruiting offices. Everybody just volunteered -- they come from all over the country and just -- I want to get in, defend their country. There's a different feeling now. With -- people are wise to the lousy politics, you know. And the way the country's run.

Bill Forte

Tape 2 of 2

And if somebody attacked this country, and I'm not too sure that down the road Japan won't try it again -- see, they're not over it yet, the whooping they took. They're not talking about it in school; they refuse to admit they were lost, just like the South refuses to admit that they lost that war. Well, I'll tell you the Japanese are trained to beat us economically and they're being successful at it. And I'm not too sure that we're not making a mistake by giving them all our technology and give them our Japanese -- our fighter planes. They know everything that we know. And we're actually we're literally selling out our country. We're selling out our country. And it's done for dollars, bottom line, dollars, in Washington, D.C. We have got the lousiest bunch of people running this country you've ever seen in your life. And they're all doing it for selfish purposes. They don't care about anything but themselves. And if another war started, I'm not too sure they wouldn't run just like the rest of the population. Run for Canada, run for Mexico, wherever. I don't think if it happened again, you'd ever have that mass want to get in and defend their country. People think different now. And they say, for what? Let them come and take the country. Can't be any worse than it is now. So.

Question: Two last questions. You're standing on the deck of The Pennsylvania and you're a 17, 18-year-old kid, scared shitless out there. When this all happened, did you realize at that time that you were a major part of the American history?

Answer: No, I'll tell you something. I was just so God-damn scared I couldn't believe it. I'm not afraid to admit that I was scared. I was scared. I thought I was going to get killed. And I didn't join the Navy -- I joined the Navy to get out of school and get away from my dad. And I bit off more than I could chew. So I'll tell you something, it was -- I was scared and not afraid to admit it. Scared to death. And I didn't think I'd be a part of history as a result of my service time. I guess I'm a small part of history. Just scared, scared. I went through the whole war scared, not afraid to admit it. When we left a place called Treasury Island, which is just south of Bougainville, to Green Island, which is the last island in that chain, the Solomons, we're right across from Rabaul, which is a big Japanese base. And all the planes coming back to Rabaul, I'm sure, are going to empty their bomb loads right on Green Island. And I was on the signal bridge and I was privy to a lot of information that was coming and going and when the message come in that we're going to Green Island, I says we're not going to come out of Green Island. This is the end of the line for us. Well, as a result, we went to Green Island, set up the successful seaplane base, and went into -- with the initial assault at Saipan. But I was just sure I was a dead duck at Green Island. And so there was just that fear there all the time, sure. And you sleep with one eye open, so to speak, because you're down below decks, you know. And you have to go to sleep, but you know this might be the night, this might be the night. And you don't get a lot of notice when a bomb goes of in your quarters. You know, so -- (gestures), but I'm here.

Question: One last question -- this is one that's been interesting to see the answer that I've had to it. Were you proud that you served?

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm awful proud of my service, yeah. Proud of the Presidential Unit Citation. To get that -- that the president identified the job we did and signed a citation for us. That -- the fact that he did that. And this is one of the things that I've been against that they didn't give the Korean War guys and the Viet Nam guys the recognition they deserved. We got our recognition that we served. We got our state bonus, we got like our Presidential Unit Citation that we served. And we were recognized as heroes, so to speak, you know, to the victor goes the spoils -- that we won the war that we were in. I guess that's the top of the heap when you win, and those guys got no recognition. In fact, some of those Viet Nam guys got come back, they were spit at, you know, for being -- and something -- and that is so disgraceful in my mind. Those guys deserve recognition. The guys in the Korean War deserve some recognition. And you know, no, I'm proud that I did my little bit.

Bill Forte

Tape 2 of 2

Question: Where were you when you heard the war was over?

Answer: On our way to Eniwetok -- we had got rammed out in the South Pacific, we'd been back to Pearl Harbor, got fixed, back on our way to Eniwetok when the word came out. So we went on into Japan for occupation duty.

Question: And what was that?

Answer: Oh, every gun -- every gun on the ship fired and I tell you, there was -- there was a melee, you can't believe it. Unbelievable.

Question: I mean, so was that dramatic, the feeling that --

Answer: Oh, I'm telling you, it was like somebody taking a weight off your shoulders. It was finally over. We knew it was close to over. When we were in Saipan before we ever got rammed and went back to Pearl Harbor, we knew it was -- it was practically over because those B-29's -- I'm going to tell you something. From Tinian and Saipan -- I don't know how many B-29's we had, but it seemed like there was one taking off all the time. They just pounded that Japan unmercifully. And I've got a couple pictures in my album that I took of buildings that are left standing over there, but it's got to be just one or two of the few. They just burnt that country down. So it had to be over. And when they were talking about landing in Japan, we didn't believe it. We didn't believe they'd ever put troops on the island because, you know, there couldn't be that much left. Because it was just pounded hourly. Those B-29's, I tell you, it was just a solid streak of them going in the sky all the time. We had planes out there covering them in case they got in trouble, had to ditch, we had planes in the air, 24 hours a day because those guys were coming and going back and forth from Japan. So we knew it was pretty close, so -- but we got hit, went to Pearl Harbor, got repaired, come back out, and we thought we were going back to our station in Saipan, I assumed, see, but we were going to Eniwetok and when we went to Eniwetok, we got the word, you know, that the war was over. The news we got -- the news flash we got -- Japan surrenders. Two word message. Japan surrenders. And I'll tell you something. It was like sounding battle stations. Everybody went to their battle stations, started firing, you know, bang, bang, the five inch, the 40 millimeter, everything was going, everybody shooting up in the sky. Yeah. There was a pistol on the bridge, a 45, and I was standing out in the wing of the bridge firing that 45 out in the air. (laughs) It was over.

Question: And at this point you're now how old? At the end of the war.

Answer: Well, let me see. I had to be 20 or 21. In 1940 I was 16, how old would I be in '45 -- 23. Guy's quick with his math. Twenty-three.