

Bob Godfrey

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Question: So, it's Bob, right?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Okay. And you were in the Army.

Answer: I was in the Army, yes, had a little mobile radar outfit, Signal Aircraft Warning Battalion, was the name of it officially.

Question: And so where were you when you discovered the war started. When you -- do you remember?

Answer: When the war started. (laughs) I was doing dishes in a little ... in a little boarding house up in Spokane, that's what I was doing that morning. And I was working to pay off part of my board you know and all of that stuff. I was going to telegraph school up there at the time and that's what I was doing.

Question: So you weren't in the service yet?

Answer: No, no, I didn't join until November of '42. My twin brother and I both working around mostly with telegraphy work with the railroad, and we decided we should be in the service. So we just quit our jobs and went home and finished picking apples to finish out the harvest for some friends cause they couldn't get people to pick. So as soon as apple harvest was over then, November 24th, we both went down and enlisted. By golly.

Question: So you were what, 19, 20?

Answer: Yeah, we were 19, yeah. It was '42.

Question: Just kids.

Answer: Well, yeah. I suppose. (laughs)

Question: And where did you first see battle duty? Where -- what was your introduction to the warfront?

Answer: To battle?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Oh, Iwo Jima. I was the -- that was the only -- the only battle I was involved in.

Question: That's a big one.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Did you realize at the time you were a part of history?

Answer: Oh, yeah, sure, you can't help but be involved in something like that and not think that you're a part of history. I mean just seeing that huge bunch of ships getting ready to invade this little bitty old island, for the love of Pete, that -- you can't help but feel it. It's an exciting thing. I wouldn't give a million dollars for my experiences in the service, really,

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during the war. It was a tremendous thing. And I helped -- I think it was a great thing for the young people for guys at my age group, the ones who weren't killed or hurt or anything. But over all, it's life experience, I'm just so thankful I was privileged to serve, really. It was good.

Question: Now you were from Spokane and you ended up in Iwo Jima. Did you even have the faintest idea where Iwo Jima was before --

Answer: That's right. Didn't have any idea at all. In fact we -- I went in November '42 and then went down to California for -- for basic training with the signal corps and Camp Kohler is fairly close to Sacramento. And, oh that was rough, rough old -- two months. Physically. But I was in super good shape. Really, I'd been hiking and fishing and working hard out in the orchards and even their obstacle course didn't bother me a bit. Just -- I enjoyed it just because of the challenge. But it was great. We stayed there for a couple of months, then went down to Los Angeles and I had a gravy train for three months going to radio school. Spokane Radio School was the name of it and we sat a number of hours every day listening to code, taking code, and I got pretty good at it, really. I got so I could take 25 words a minute, mixed code groups, you know. Which was pretty good -- that was their goal, you know. And then I could take press -- straight press for 35 words a minute. And it got so that they -- the words would just flow through my mind and out my fingers. And I enjoyed that very much. Then they shipped us to Florida for operational tour for training, really, out in the -- (laughs) -- Tampa Bay area. And out in the jungle and chiggers and great big rattle snakes five feet long and holy smokes. (laughs) And we --

Question: Your view of the service was changing at that point?

Answer: Yeah, I spent an awful lot of time just digging slit trenches and digging drainage ditches cause we had rain and awful mud, awful mud. We'd keep moving our camp, too, you know, moving our set-up to get practice in taking it down and setting up the thing. Oh, boy.

Question: Now when you landed at Iwo Jima, the Marines had already come in, right? They'd already had pretty heavy casualties.

Answer: Oh, yeah, because -- they went in on the morning of D-Day, of course, the Marines did. And we -- we tried -- we tried to land in the afternoon -- I guess it was afternoon or late morning of D-Day, and at that time I was telling you, we -- were shelled like a son of a gun and we took 22 hits and boy the boss got us - he got hold of a tug and had us towed out of there fast. Because we'd lost everything if we hadn't. And so we waited until D plus 3 until we actually landed and started getting our gear out and setting things up.

Question: Did you, again this is a hard thing for me to understand. When you went on to Iwo Jima, did you live in constant fear? What was your thought? Here you're a 19, 20, 20-something year old kid, out in this war zone now. What --

Answer: No, I -- I didn't have any great feelings of fear; some of the guys did. We had - - we lost two or three of them to fatigue -- what do they call it, mental fatigue or whatever it was and everything. But I had a pretty good grounding in Christianity, church teachings, and we had a lot of faith. And actually that -- that particular idea didn't bother me that much. I had a couple of really scary moments and all that. In fact sitting on board that ship just off shore there when we were getting shelled -- we didn't know what was going on. Boom, boom, boom, you know. But there were other guys with me that, you know, misery loves company and all that stuff, and I couldn't -- I couldn't get too scared really as far as being scared goes. It wasn't a matter of bravery, it was just a matter of accepting the situation and going along

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with everybody else. Cause everybody else I think felt the same way. I was in that -- in that compartment on the ship there with six great big Afro-American guys, great big husky fellows, good football player types and everything, and it didn't seem to bother them too much either. You developed sort of I guess the word is camaraderie, you know, where you're all in the same boat together. But I had a couple of bad moments after we -- after we got our radar in a hole, you know, revetted. We had to dig a big hole with bulldozers, the Seabees and that but we got it in there. Had a bad storm one night and there were rumors of Jap infiltrators that night. And by that time, a couple six weeks had elapsed. And we were kind of in fox holes up in there and they asked for volunteers to go up and man the -- and man the radar, you know, to stand guard. And so I volunteered and that saved my life because that night a - - one of these ducks, you know, these Navy -- oh, they go on land and the water -- anyway they came up through there and they missed their turn and the road and the sand and this one drove right over (crying)

Question: Okay.

Answer: Drove right over my fox hole. And he straddled the guy -- my fox hole mate who right beside me and the treads went right over -- over where I'd been. That's -- I still dream about that. But anyway I wasn't there. I wasn't there, you know, and I was so thankful the next morning, my gosh. But they showed me the tracks and everything. So the good Lord was with me. They say never volunteer, but I'm glad I did. Of course there was no problem at the radar and everything went fine. But you hear funny noises in the rain and everything and your imagination works, you know. But anyway got through that okay, and had a few other close ones on Iwo a little bit but overall came out of it just fine, just fine.

Question: Now you talked about a thing a lot of the guys have talked about and that's kind of the friendships that you formed. You talked said company loves misery and we're all in the same boat.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And I talked to some of the guys about that. I mean when you look at their whole life, how long their whole life is, and then you look at this part that was the military, actually a pretty small part of that big picture, but yet some of these friendships you talk about being so special. Did you experience that?

Answer: Yeah, yeah. I have pictures of two or three of the guys. We kind of quit corresponding after -- after 20 years you know, 20, 30 years, but I did experience and I expected -- I experienced a very closeness, very close feeling with those guys. And it was great. Except we don't have them in civilian life really. Or at least I've never experienced them -- that type of feeling, comradeship, you might say. It was awfully good.

Question: And I assume some of that has to go with the fact that you -- your life and their life depended on you, your life depended on them, that it was a life or death situation that you were in.

Answer: Yeah, yeah. We had to account for each other pretty much and so we did. We tried. There's a young fellow there, name's Paul, and I was older and everything. But I kind of took him under my wing in a way and real nice fellow. And he had -- he'd ask me questions a lot and everything. But we had that good feeling. I wrote to him for a number of years afterwards. And we went swimming together after we got the island secured. We were there eight months for the love of Pete, that little old place. (laughs)

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Question: See now that's interesting cause that's some of what the history books don't cover is that there had to be some normal life that went on in this war.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So what was that like? I mean, talking about going swimming. Here you are in Iwo Jima, I mean, anybody my age thinks of Iwo Jima, we think of Iwo Jima, the warfront. So here you are, you've secured it, it's -- did it become average day, eight months, or were you constantly?

Answer: After four months, well I think it was in April we had our last infiltrators from the Jap people. We had a few bomb scares from planes coming in from the north. They would -- they would bomb our tent -- we were in tents by then -- that took three or four months. And we had caves we could go into -- the big sandstone caves. And about three times I think we took shelter in the caves. But we made it okay. They did a lot of damage to the tents a couple times cause they used the anti-personnel bombs. But other than that it wasn't bad. And once we got away from that sort of thing we did a lot of hiking around -- around the island. What can you do on 8-1/2 square miles, you know? (laughs) They warned us. So we lost quite a few guys overall because they'd pick up -- pick up sabers and hand grenades and stuff, you know, like that. And blewie. Just blewie, they'd blow them up. What's the word I'm trying to think of. Booby traps. They had booby traps all over everything and in fact some of the Marines were lost because of that. They would find these booby-trapped things in caves and it was a shame to lose their lives for such -- one time I was on a hike up by Suribachi -- it was first part of March. And I found a case of Japanese hand grenades. Just about three-quarters full. Great Scott. A whole bunch of them, you know. Oh, it was a temptation to reach over and grab a couple of those rascals and put them in my pocket. And boy oh boy, I can just imagine that thing being bobby-trapped and the whole case of them blewie. But it's kind of interesting. So I -- I stayed away from that sort of thing. I didn't want to get anything like that. We -- our -- we lost our signal officer, young lieutenant. He was out moving the -- we had trip flares out around our area, you know, and he was out doing something with them and one of them went off and it didn't kill him but boy it sure did -- did him a lot of damage. Just a plain old flare.

Question: What did you guys do to pass the time? I mean did it become -- I mean once you stabilized, once in awhile you'd have a bombing raid come and stuff, but did it become average -- was it a job then all of a sudden?

Answer: Pretty much. We had our shifts we had to pull, six or eight hour shifts as radio operator you know. Had to pull those shifts. And then we had company duty which would be KP or police -- they did -- we did a lot of policing up, you know, to go out and keep things clean. They were real emphatic about that sort of thing. And we did have some spare time though and I did quite a bit of hiking. And then they had some old bushes that were pretty well beat up there. And I scrounged around and got some seeds and planted them and by golly they came up. Out by the tent.

Question: So you had a little garden going?

Answer: Yeah, just about. Sure it was fun. You had to do anything you could. Lot of -- there's an awful lot of gambling, poker players, some guys just made a mint playing -- playing poker. With their buddies. Sent home hundreds of dollars every week really, which was fine, which was fine. You had to find something to do. Another kid -- this kid I was telling you about -- this young fellow Paul. He and I found a place to swim and I learned how to body surf. They had -- we had this big bay -- it was about three feet deep you know, and with a

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tide and everything, and I got so I could body surf, just shoot along on my stomach, it was fun. We enjoyed it.

Question: At Iwo Jima?

Answer: At Iwo Jima, yes.

Question: Those are two words I never thought I would hear go together, body surfing, Iwo Jima.

Answer: Yeah, well I did a lot of that out on the north shore of Oahu there on the Hawaiian Islands too. But I had some good swimming there out off Iwo Jima after things got settled down. It got safe enough so we could venture out alone.

Question: So where were you when you -- do you remember where you were when you heard the war was over?

Answer: Let's see now. Well we were there obviously on Iwo. I don't remember exactly where or what I was doing. No, I don't remember. It seems -- let's see now. I could probably get my memory refreshed though but I can't think of it off the top of my head.

Question: Do you think that there's a message from World War II, or what would you want the message from World War II to be for future generations?

Answer: Well, that's very very difficult because I don't think wars, per se, give messages. They all just say hey, this is too terrible a thing and no more, there should never be another war. But that would be the message to take out of World War II but look what's happened in the 50 years since then. That message just falls on deaf ears. And I don't think it will ever fall on ripe receptive ears. I hate to say it but that's the way mankind is. I don't like to be pessimistic about it but I don't think we spend two or three hundred million dollars a year on -- on the military because there's never going to be another war. You know you get my point. Because I'm not alone in thinking that pessimistic feeling and the government does. Governments do all over the world. They're preparing for it. And it bothers me but I don't know what we can do about it.

Question: When you were in the war, did you feel you were fighting a people or a country or what was your concept of enemy?

Answer: I would say country really. Japan. And that's, yeah, yeah. Fighting the country which had attacked us, you know, tried to wipe us out and all that stuff. So that was my feeling. I didn't feel we were fighting a people particularly because it's a governments that start the wars anyway. People fight them but the governments are the ones that are responsible. So I felt we were fighting the country.

Question: Did you feel or do you feel after the war, any animosity towards the Japanese people or was that all left behind or what happened?

Answer: I think I pretty well left it behind, really. Because there again, you know, you realize that everything the Japanese did -- they were being directed by their higher-ups, and the ones we'd come up in contact with wouldn't have had anything to do with it. And no, I didn't feel any animosity toward them particularly. It would be useless.

Question: Are you proud that you served? Are you glad that you served?

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Answer: Absolutely. Yes. I thought it was the thing to do. My twin brother and I just talked it over and we decided, hey, it's the right and proper thing to do. We -- let's get at it. You know, and join up. So we did. We enlisted. Of course I'm sure we'd been subject to the draft later on, but that got rid of that problem.

Question: So you thought it was the right thing to do out of patriotism or, I mean you were going to go fight for our country. Was that --

Answer: Yeah, I think so. Patriotism. I wouldn't want to make a big deal out of thinking. Of course I suppose there would be the element of doing it just because everybody else was doing it, you know, and also so that people wouldn't look down their noses at you, why aren't you in the service. I suppose that's an element that is involved in young people's decisions on something like that. But I don't know, we felt that from a patriotic standpoint, it was the right thing to do -- enlist, do the job. Because men in our age group, that was our job at the time, really, it should have been a basic commitment, really.

Question: What do you think the history books have left out of World War II? Do you think that stuff has been left out?

Answer: Left out of the history books. Well, I expected that the history books as they are re-written will be changing, really, and reporting it differently. I do think that -- that they have left out pretty much the basic causes, what led up to World War II. What I mean, what happened back in the 30's and our relationships with -- with Germany and our failure to do anything when the low countries were invaded. And sitting with our heads in the sand while Japanese bombed our -- the major part of our fleet there at Pearl Harbor. I don't think those will get really reported enough because I do think there's a lot of blame for all of those that should go to our government. Which -- which either brought on the war or worsened it. And I don't think all that stuff has been reported accurately enough.

Question: Tom talked about this -- he said he was wary enough of the propaganda that was being fed to them. The Marines, are the strong, the brave. And so they were being indoctrinated with that. I'm sure you faced some of that, too. What did you think about -- about that? The indoctrination?

Answer: We didn't get all that -- that hard ball indoctrination the Marines got. I'll tell you what -- those guys -- we heard about a lot of it, of course. And my heart went out to them. The poor fellows. They were just -- it was just terrible, you know. We saw trucks -- I saw truck loads of dead bodies coming back from up there in the boonies there in -- on Suribachi and around there. Just big ole truck with back end full of bodies. And it just -- it was just -- it was just disheartening. My gosh. Poor fellows, nothing they could do about it, you know, each guy had to do his own job. I was lucky. I didn't -- we were fired on by snipers a few times and we received quite a bit of small artillery fire at times but they all succeeded in missing us and I felt that I came out of that in real good shape.

Question: Do you have any funny stories? Do you have any funny humorous stories from your time in the service?

Answer: Humorous stories. ... Oh, gosh, no. Not really. Except that time that that the Navy plane fired on us there at Kaneohe Bay there out of -- out near Honolulu, he fired. And then I guess our commanding officer got on -- on the radio and just chewed him out. And in clear language, you know, didn't use code or anything, just really chewed him out. That gave everybody kind of a good laugh. But the pilot was killed a few months later. It was too bad.

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Question: Now what happened on that? How did he end up firing on you? That was friendly fire, right?

Answer: Oh, I thought I -- maybe I told -- okay. We were having operational training with our radar and radio stuff on board ship on this LST. And cruising around Kaneohe Bay, which is a beautiful bay there in the Hawaiian Islands, Oahu, and all of a sudden this plane, Navy fighter came down, ostensibly taking pictures of us. But he pressed the wrong button. (laughs) I was standing at the door of our radar right up on the steps -- or our radio shack, radio van, and I saw these lights flash up. I knew what was happening, just right instantaneous, you know. And he had fired 21 or 22 50-caliber slugs down into us. And there was a bunch of stack of 20,000 sand bags, right six or eight feet from our radar van -- radio van, from me. And by golly it started them on fire, you know. Boy oh boy. But anyway this -- our commander got on the radio right now. (laughs) That poor guy.

Question: That's one of those ones I don't think I would bring it in for a landing -- I would just keep on going.

Answer: Yep, you bet you, just keep on going. He could have killed a bunch of us, you know, and luckily nobody was killed.

Question: So he thought he was taking pictures and grabbed the wrong --

Answer: Evidentially, that's what evidentially that's what happened, pressed the wrong button, whatever. That was humorous for the moment and of course the fact that nobody was hurt.

Question: I was going to say that makes it funny. Had people been hurt it would have --

Answer: Yeah, that's right, that's right.

Question: Difference between comedy and --

Answer: But you've got to look for humor wherever you can find it. I had some good times on -- in Honolulu there in the year that we were there, operational training. I did a lot of swimming in the pool at Fort Shafter, learned how to dive and did a lot of swimming under water and all that and did a lot of walking around and ogle the pretty girls down at the university, of course. (laughs) And I started giving blood there when -- they had a good Honolulu blood bank and I started giving blood there with the Red Cross.

Question: Did you guys pull any practical jokes?

Answer: No, I don't think so. No, I don't remember any practical jokes. We did have fun though.

Question: I can imagine. You had the fear of war and everything like that, there's still --

Answer: Yeah, but it was -- it was pretty nice. We did our jobs. Did a lot of hiking on the island above Honolulu. And then when we were out on the north shore at Kahuka Air Base -- that's K-A-H-U-K-A -- kind of a funny thing. But we put our tents up. We had -- they had these landing mats, you know, steel landing mats, that were made out of just steel mats with round holes in the bottom. And they would use them for fighters to come in and land on. But they had discontinued use out there so we set up our tents out there and made that our

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operational base for six months. And had a lot of fun there. In fact there were pheasants out there in the cane fields, these big old cock pheasants, you know. Which are nice. But we did a lot of hiking and all that stuff. It was good duty.

Question: I was going to say you got a little vacation in a very tough zone.

Answer: Yeah, yeah, it was -- there was a lot of good in it.