

"Dutch" Velma Hopf

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Question: First, before we get -- I need to do two things. Just so I have it on tape, what is your first and last name and the correct spelling of it?

Answer: Oh, Velma Hopf, H-O-P-F.

Question: And how did you get the name Dutch?

Answer: I had Dutch since I've been three years old and I'm 85 now. And I couldn't speak very plain and my brother-in-law used to set me up on the counter and listen to me talk so they could laugh at me. But I write my checks, a lot of times, I get checks, Dutch, and one time we were on a tour and we were traveling, Indian Air out of Seattle and I got there and my ticket was "Dutch" Hopf. I had to buy a whole new ticket, a whole new ticket.

Question: Cause your ID said --

Answer: My passport said -- I've had a lot of trouble with my passport.

Question: See, my dad's like that. His real name's Phillip Henry but he goes by Skip. And he -- he was ten years old before he knew -- knew that that was his real name.

Answer: See my real name is Florence Velma but I never liked Florence -- I just always had Velma

Question: You didn't like Florence?

Answer: Didn't like Florence.

Question: Just not a Florence, I guess.

Answer: No, no, I didn't feel like a Florence. But everybody knows me as Dutch so I just -- automatically they send checks to me and I cash them. Long as I can cash them, don't really matter. (laughs)

Question: That's exactly right. Now, you grew up in Port Angeles then?

Answer: Well, yes, I grew up in Port Angeles and I lived awhile in Oregon. But mainly when we came out here, as I say we went up to Twin, which was a big logging camp, it's about mile, 30 miles out, I guess. But when we got to Deep Creek, well we missed the train that went up to the logging camp. We was in an old Model T. And nobody had gone over the road before. And we didn't have any money, my mother was sick, there was hardly any gas in the car, so we had no choice but we just took off. So then we got stuck and they brought a team of horses and hauled us out. We finally got up to Twin. Twin was up on the hill. And so we had to turn the old Model T around so the gas would run the other end so we finally got up there. And then the next morning we kids had never seen the ocean. And so we run down to see if it really tasted like salt. But as I say, I went up there blackberry picking, oh, about eight years ago, in that place, looking for this. Because there was a school house with, and there was cabins and a dance hall and a big train depot. You would never know that there was one thing ever been in that whole piece of ground. It was just all gone. So anyway, to get back to the war.

Question: Well, before we get to the war, I want to kind of step to it. When you moved up there, was this during the depression, before the depression --

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Answer: During the depression. That's probably why we couldn't back up when we had to go over the hill with the gas because we just didn't have any, you know, just didn't have any. We were poor. We were poor. We came up from Oregon and -- and we just didn't have anything to eat. I mean people don't realize that you people don't have anything to eat. Even in the country where it's -- course that was a long time ago and it was really before the depression started to do. But --

Question: As a child were you aware that you were poor? Like everybody else was at that time. Or were you just a kid?

Answer: Well, I think maybe one Christmas we was down in Oregon and my sister had diphtheria

Answer: And she was sick for quite a long while so we were quarantined and we were poor and my mother had to sell her sewing machine to buy a wooden coffin. And they wouldn't even let us put her in an ambulance because of the diphtheria

Answer: And I really realized then that we were poor. But I was -- I wasn't ashamed of being poor. Because I can remember that Christmas. We each got an orange and my aunt sent me -- sent us some pecans from Oklahoma, because my family had come from Oklahoma

Answer: But it's no fun to be poor. But you know, most of the time as a child, you don't realize that you're poor. I know in my Sunday School Class we have a -- sun.. I have a Sunday School class with about 21, 22 adults, and they all come from good families, they were all teachers, and all of those things. And I said you know, I come from dysfunctional family. I said you guys don't know what it was like. To do. And I thought one time when I went to high school you know, I was, I didn't have things, and I was out on my own from the time I was in the 8th grade. And I thought I was just really neglected. Well, I wasn't neglected but, I mean, it was terrible because all of these other kids, had lots better things than I did and they were maybe smarter, maybe they wasn't. And I wasn't -- I wasn't having fun and things like that, I guess. And we was at the class reunion and I was saying, you know how the rest of you guys had families, you had a nice home and everything. Oh, yeah, but they said, you were really popular. We really envied you. And I -- I have a hard time (laugh) I thought gee, just for one week, if they could have lived in my shoes, maybe they wouldn't have envied me to do. But uhm.. it's hard -- it's hard to do that. But you know I think that -- I think that you're programmed when you're young that you don't know that. You don't know you're poor. You don't know you only have one pair of shoes. You don't know -- you don't worry about what you're going to eat tomorrow. And of course that was in the depression too and there was a lot of -- just like it is today, the food bank. And the food bank now you get a lot of variety, meat and the food bank. Then you got beans, I mean which would be comparable to beans, yeah.

Question: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Answer: Yeah. We were living right -- was living right alongside at the airport. And -- and I remember that morning that we got the word. And I thought oh, you know, that is terrible. That is terrible. To do. And how could they be so negligent, in letting that happen? Because I've always felt that it was just been pure negligent. And how could they go to Hawaii and stand and.. that ship was underneath there with all those dead men still on it, I have a hard time accepting that. But we probably knew more about it than most people did because we were on the coast. So immediately we got the air raid siren, the air thing out at the airport, and they started building onto the airport and on -- on the north side they built inlets, things where they had camouflaged guns and tanks, only they really wasn't guns and

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tanks, they were just models with gunny sacks and stuff over the top of them to look like that. And all of the whole west end, I mean for the cemetery out, there was probably eight barracks. And there was barracks all around the airport. Some of those barracks, well the sides of them anyway, as used. And nowadays there's out there -- there's a gun shooting range there, and that was made from the barracks, and Serenity House mainly was made from the barracks, that was left over. But my husband, we were lucky because my husband delivered milk, was a milk man. So we got all the milk and all butter and ice cream, everything that we wanted. Also all the gas. And another thing he had to deliver to all of.. to the camps there that was right on 18th Street by the airport. And so there was always something to trade. So we had most all the meat and you know, and stuff like that. And there wasn't very long ago and I was looking in my garage and here was a great big box of shells. Now there must have been some trading going on to get those shells with my husband. And I called up one of the guys I knew that was in the gun club and he -- he, you know, he come and got the shells. I said I really want the box, you know, cause they come in really good boxes. But I never ever did get the box. But anyway out there my husband would go up into the round building that was the lookout and -- at nighttime, and I can remember not having any lights going to town. And closing all of the blinds. And I can remember they had -- they had them all camped all over town. They had the Morse -- on the Morse, Masonic Building, and our Methodist church, they had them there. And also we had a big hall and they would come for their recreation. It had beautiful old floors, you know we no longer have beautiful old floors because they wasn't all that fussy about their floors and we didn't care. We really, really didn't care. And so then we got the Red Cross going and I joined that and I was a lieutenant. And we had a great big huge truck that we took out to Klalock and out to Forks. And we'd usually take five or six ladies with us, anyone that wanted to come. And they would bring them sewing machines and sew on the guys' badges and mend anything that needed mending. And the young girls, of course, looked the soldiers over and the soldiers looked the girls over, which would have made a change, you for them, instead of just looking at each other. And so it was fun driving that truck and doing that. And we also -- there was a fire out at Forks, a big, big forest fire. And it came really close to the town. So we took the truck out there and -- so the men could be fed. But we really did make a lot of cookies to take out when we went or things that they might need, or even just to look -- just to look at somebody else, where they wasn't looking at that time. So that kept you pretty busy. But we were all happy when the war ended.

Question: Had you ever driven a big truck like that before?

Answer: Well, of course, I come from a farm, I mean we didn't have a big farm but we had trucks and things like that. So I had driven a big truck before. I'd driven other things. So it wasn't really not that big of a problem. Although, then, when you're young, you know, when you're young you don't worry about -- about anything being a problem. You just get behind the wheel and go. And I think afterwards, gee, you know, they left us with that big truck. And that's a long ways to go, lot of curves.

Question: And I imagine the roads weren't --

Answer: Oh, the roads weren't, you know, the roads weren't good at all to have to -- to have to go out there and go that far and to come in. But we felt we were doing our thing towards the war, which we probably didn't mean a darn. But we did have one gal that went to our church and she had an older sister. And she -- she moved to Oregon, I think it was around Gresham, she went to Oregon, the northern part of Oregon. And she and her husband -- he was a minister. And they took some kids out in the woods and the kids found the bomb, the balloon bombs that the Japanese made. They had girls, 8, 9, 10, making those bombs, with the balloons. And they released hundreds and hundreds of them out on the West Coast,

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and they drifted -- well, they released them farther than the Coast, but they did yet come there. And she was killed. And two or three of the kids. And that was the only casualty that happened on the Continental United States.

Question: So they were --

Answer: It was those balloons that probably was just like a regular balloon but probably, you know, and they had bombs or something inside of the balloons and they said that a lot of the children that made those balloons was killed with them going off. But they released thousands of them over the United States. And of course we -- we got quite a lot of them. But, and of course a lot of them was in the water before they ever -- ever got here. And that's probably what happened there and the kids just looked and said oh, gee, there's a balloon, you know. Just like kids do. But it was really a tragedy. She was six months pregnant, I think and it was kind of makes you think.

Question: Now it's interesting because of your location here. It seems like there be a great fear of being attacked.

Answer: Oh, yeah, but you know, of course with me then I was young and crazy, but yeah. Oh, we were, we were, all along the Coast. But out -- about ten miles out, at around Freshwater and the other side of Freshwater and Tongue Point, they had big, big embankments and they had them furnished with bedding and all the necessities that people had to get in there. I think there was four big ones, and another one upon the hill, that I think that they shot once to practice. (laughs)

Question: That was probably the only shell they had was that one they fired.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Did you do -- cause I can remember as a kid we did air raid drills, we had to crawl under our desk. Did they do that here and if so, what was that like? What did you have to do?

Answer: Well I can't remember but I'm sure that they did. I'm sure that they did. Especially here that they would have to because we would be so much more vulnerable. Because all that they would have to do is stop the flow.

Question: Now you talked about your husband going up in the lookout tower at the -- at the airport.

Answer: Yeah, he worked in the daytime and then at night time, he went up looking for any planes flying over, but that didn't happen, I mean we didn't have any of that. And they had lookouts up in the mountains, too, up in the Olympics they had. I know one of my friends went up, and they were the only two that was up and they cataloged every plane that went over. And what it looked like and they had to know what it looked like, that part of it. But you know, I don't think we didn't realize what could have happened. What could have been, you know. The one submarine got awfully close at Neah Bay, it had come in. And I think even now, I cannot understand them building Bangor where they built Bangor and the bridge that they have to open up. Cause if we was in any war, all they'd have to do is blow that bridge up and there it sits.

Question: Do you remember when they sighted the sub off the Coast here, the Japanese sub?

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Answer: Well just afterwards, they never -- they never had anything until, you know, afterwards, that they did. The only thing probably how we learned about these balloons was because it was so close to home. And the girl's sister and everybody knew her. That -- because they had just moved down there. But that -- that was the only tragedy and that was a tragedy to have happen.

Question: What was the harbor like out here? Were there Navy ships coming and going or --

Answer: Oh, yeah, we had Navy ships all the time, all the time. Lots of Navy ships. And it was what -- it was a tragedy, you know, to have a lot of Navy ships out there. Because we have one of the deepest harbors in the whole Coast and no place for them to go. Of course we did have the USO. And we had the USO in town, and it was managed by, at the Elks Club, and they had a manager. And of course all the women -- a lot of women worked down in the eating part of it. And I know that we made cakes to take down. And there was this one kid from back East. I think he was really lonesome. And he really liked this cake that I made. And so I said you come in next week and I'll have this cake for you. So he came in and I went and got the cake and I cut a great big piece of the cake, starting to serve it, and a great big cockroach walked right across the top of that cake. (laughs) I felt so bad. I thought, of all the times -- why didn't that cockroach stay at least underneath the -- (laughs) the thing.

Question: So was that -- you went out and worked at the USO?

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah. And it was really funny because I got so many things for -- that the boys would send me, when they would go to Germany, you know I've still got perfume bottles from Paris and uhm.. I did have a lot of other stuff but I give it -- I did give it away for -- for (inaudible) as memorials. But it was -- it was an experience working down there and meeting the people, and how lonesome they were.

Question: Were they from all over the place?

Answer: They were from all over. All over. New York, Bronx, South Carolina, I mean, all over, from all over the United States.

Question: And did they -- did the ships anchor out and these were soldiers that came off the ships -- or where did they --

Answer: No, the soldiers -- we didn't have too many -- well, we did have the sailors off the ships. But we had more soldiers. I mean we had tons of soldiers. Tons, I shouldn't say tons, but hundreds of soldiers because there was so many embankments and campings from out -- 50 miles out from here, you know, 50 miles out, the Coast was well protected. Probably not as protected as what it could have been but we've got a long coastline to completely protect it.

Question: So if they got a little R & R, they --

Answer: They come in.

Question: They came into Port Angeles to --

Answer: And we had USO and dances. I can remember I took the truck one time out--way up above Sequim to a dance with them. And we had other dances. But mainly it was

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them. And they stayed around if they met some of the girls and they married, you know, they came back and married the girls, or the girls went back East, I know one of the girls. She married a young lieutenant, and he was sent overseas. He was a Jewish boy. And he was in Africa and he was hurt, he was injured. And then they put him back on the line again. Before they put him back on the line again, from the hospital he wrote a note. In the meantime she'd had twin boys. And he wrote this beautiful letter. I wish -- I should have brought that letter and read it to you. About how he wanted these twin boys raised and how they should be good men and good people. And it -- it's just really heart rendering to see that, because the next week, he was gone. He had gone out on another tour and was killed. But later she had got that letter -- it came through, that he had written to his twin boys that was just two months old. And it was really heartbreaking.

Question: That had to have been.

Answer: Yeah. And it's -- and the two boys, one boy died when he was 17, he got cancer. And the other boy died, oh, two years ago. Or three.

Question: At the USO, did they have bands come?

Answer: Oh, yeah, lots of dancing at the USO.

Question: Any notable bands?

Answer: Not that I remember. But I'm sure -- I'm sure that there was. But, and the girls come out of the woodwork to go. And there was a lot of romancing going on. But there was so many of them. I mean probably we had 15 barracks at least, and you get that many men and nothing to do, nothing to do. Only we did try to give them recreation down at -- at the church, with basketball, and at the Masonic. But other than that, we didn't have any big high schools then or gymnasiums, you know, so they could really --

Question: And all the young -- I assume a lot of the young men are --

Answer: All our young men are gone, you know, because they were all in the Reserves and the Reserves went out right away, a lot of them, you know. A lot of them went to - down at Port Townsend. And I know that one of them went to Texas because he brought back a gal from Texas. And then one of my friends, he joined the Navy. And I -- I was going through my pictures and I found this picture and his commendation and he got as far as Los Angeles and then he was sent over on D-day. But he saved a whole bunch of men and he was from Port Angeles, and he got a hero's commendation that they give them when they've done something outstanding - a hero -- they do. I -- it's kind of sad. He was a nice looking young man. Of course it's just as bad for a nice looking young man to get killed as it does for -- (laughs)

Question: So he did get killed?

Answer: He got killed in the landing, after he had saved, I think he saved 20 men. And then he died. Then he got it. Yeah, so it was -- there was a lot of lot of sad stories. A lot of sad stories to go on. I know one of my friends, she -- she was about eight or ten years old when they attacked Pearl Harbor. And she lived there at the time. Her dad was in the service. And she said really, that they really didn't know what was going on when the planes come over. They didn't give it much thought. And her dad had just had these varicose veins fixed in his legs. And so they called him and they said you come in, whether -- whether or not, you have to come in with a wheel chair. We need -- we need your help. And I said well what did -

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- what did they do with the families -- did they put them out? But they put -- they eventually then put them in hotels. And I said, that doesn't seem quite correct to put them all in hotels, to be blasted all -- but anyway, probably many, many stupid things happened. Many stupid things happened. And things that we don't know about.

Question: Do you remember where you were when you heard that the bomb had been dropped, the war was over?

Answer: Yeah. I was out in my yard. Hoeing. And I thought -- I just couldn't believe it. It didn't mean anything. You know, you didn't guess until you -- we're so far -- we were far away. You know, it doesn't. Just like the things that are happening today. They're so far away that we don't even -- I think the only time that we really realize is when all of these soldiers, when all of the sailors was coming in. And just, you know, to keep us safe. And we had to ration ourselves. I didn't ration too much but then I was one of the lucky ones. But I mean other people had to really ration and turn their lights off and make sure all of their blinds was pulled before they turned the light on at night and that was quite a thing that you would be scared that they could see the lights down here. And that that was kind of silly too because we had the mountains behind us full of snow, and they say, well, there it is, right down there.

Question: That's one of the -- I think it was Harold that I was talking to. He said all up and down the Coast, there were blackouts, but he said, if you went to Coney Island, it was going full bore. And he said that you would have Coney Island -- when the ships and the Jap sub out here looking in. Well, you know, there's this whole silhouette. There's some funny things -

Answer: Yes.

Question: -- funny things --

Answer: A lot of funny things happened during the war. A lot of funny things happened. A lot of funny things happen now.

Question: Do you think there's a message for the future generations that you and I are never going to meet about World War II --

Answer: I don't think so because I don't think they can visualize it. You know it's hard to visualize. And then we're just continually doing the same thing. I mean just the other day we did the same thing. And it might come back home. All of the men that came -- and women who came back from the Desert Storm. They -- they had far worse off than we had sitting here.

Question: Did you have, during World War II, were there a lot of kids that you grew up with that went off to serve?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Do you remember them coming home?

Answer: Yeah, I -- I remember when they came home.

Question: Did it change them -- what you saw?

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Answer: Well, they -- they grew up. They grew up. They grew up fast. Even when my son enlisted in the Air Force after high school, didn't take him long to grow up, because he couldn't understand why those guys was standing there cussing at him. (laughs) Face to face, you know, and telling him all of those things that he never found that at home. You know, and that was the same way for the kids. The young men. They never visualized any of this thing happening. Or what they were really getting into.

Question: I guess the biggest thing that I talked with different vets that enlisted and were drafted and whatever that were engaged and then got -- enlisted and got married before they went over. My question is --

Answer: Why did they do that?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: I've always thought why did they do that? That was about the worst thing that they could have done. And they're still doing it today. You know you see a big battleship pull in Bremerton, and here they -- here all of these kids, wives and kids --

Question: The answer I've got is because it wasn't going to happen to me.

Answer: That's right. We don't think anything's going to happen to us. It's a good philosophy, you know, to have. That nothing's going to happen to you, you know. Because there is some people who worry about what's going to happen to them. But if I can't do anything about it, there's really much sense worrying about it. But that is my philosophy of life.

Question: That's a good theory. As long as the theory holds true.

Answer: But it's hard to do.

Question: Yeah.

Answer: It really is -- it's hard to do to not worry about -- as long as I can't see it, and it's out of sight. That's how I felt with my kids. Cause we had horses. And we had a pack train. And my daughter was probably 12 and my son was probably 15 or 16 when he run a pack train. And we'd have horses that we'd have to break. But I would just go in the house. I would just go in the house. I wasn't going to watch them.

Question: If I don't see it, it's not going to happen.

Answer: If I don't see it. But I tell you about one time when my daughter started to screeching --