

George W. Griepenburg.

WWII



When did you enter the Military?

“I was drafted in the twelve month of the ninth day, nineteen forty-three.”

How old were you when you entered the military?

“Eighteen.”

And how long were you in the military?

“Two and three quarter years”

What boot camp did you go to?

“Newport, Rhode Island. It was the last boot camp company in Rhode Island.”

Oh, that’s pretty interesting. How long was the boot camp?

“Oh, I don’t know, I think it’s; what? Six weeks? About six weeks I think it was.”

Did you go to a second boot camp?

“No, I went to cooking and baking school also, in Rhode Island. That was another five weeks, something like that.”

Did you join the Military voluntarily?

“No, I got drafted...when you’re eighteen years old they draft you.”

What branch of military were you in?

“The Navy”

What kind of equipment did you use on a daily basis?

“Um, I was a cook, so...”

So, like stoves, or...?

“I was in the kitchen, pot and pans, stuff like that.”

In the kitchen, what kind of food did you have to make?

“Ha, well, we only ever seemed to make what we had. We didn’t have that much. I was on a small ship and we got supplies every, what seemed like, four or five months.”

Also, how many people did you cook for?

“Um, sixty”

Wow. In the military, what rank did you achieve?

“Ship’s cook, second class. S.C.S.C.”

Were you wounded while in the military?

“No, not really wounded.”

If you were, like, cooking, did you ever get burned or anything like that?

“No, I cut my fingers.”

Oh, ow. Were you in any famous campaigns or battles?

“Yes, we were in four invasions. We were in the invasion of Leyte Gulf, Bataan, Corregidor, and Borneo.”

Also, did you receive any awards or medals for your service?

“Yeah, I forget what ones I got. (Looks at sheet) We got the Asiatic Pacific Medal, one star, American Victory Medal, and the Philippines Liberation Ribbon, one star.”

That’s interesting. What was the normal or average day in the military?

“Five O’clock breakfast, lunch, supper, and work until eleven O’clock at night to clean up. When I was by myself, there was two cooks, and we used to take shifts.”

What was your most normal or common routine when at war, or battle?

“Well, everybody had a battle station, and when we really went into the beach, during an invasion, you were assigned a position, and you were on a gun, or a fire hose, or an emergency something or other. I was a looker, a sightseeing person, other than my kitchen work, my galley work. Sometimes I loaded the gun, sometimes I had to stay watch in the morning, be a gun watcher. Now what you wanna know?”

What type of firearms did you use?

“Well we really didn’t have, well we had rifles but nobody really used the rifles, we had twenty millimeters, three on a ship and we had a forty millimeter on the bow. Let me show you this (takes out photograph of the ship), here’s the forty millimeter on the bow. Twenty millimeter here, twenty millimeter there, and one on stern.”

Can I show the camera?

“Sure. That’s an L.S.M., Landing Ship Medium. You can have that.”

Cool, thank you.

“See, here’s a picture of Corregidor. The paratroopers landed first and then the next day we landed and brought them supplies. And as we brought them supplies, there little ships here landed and brought more ammunition and men to relieve the paratroopers. And the Japanese people, they opened up on us, they opened up with machine gun shots. Some went in right through my galley. I think there were three people on our ship that got shot by them.”

Can you tell us more about this?

“Well, here’s the beach, and this was the biggest beach they had on Corregidor, it’s a small island in the middle of the Philippines. That’s an island maybe a couple of miles around, and Bataan is twice as wide.”

How did the men get in there? Was the water shallow?

“Yes, well the water on the bow was only three feet deep and the stern was four or five feet deep. So when you went into the beach you were like fifty or forty yards out. You would drop and anchor, there’s an anchor off the stern, so you’d drop the anchor and it would grab in out there and then you would hit high and dry. Well this one tried to get in first but he didn’t get in far enough. So our captain gave then the guns and went in high and dry. So the bow opens up and the rail falls down. So when you get off you reverse the engines and put the anchor which drag you off.”

Oh, see that’s what I didn’t understand, how you get off.

“This ship had to be towed off because we were too high, the tide was out and it was that deep so you gotta get help getting off. But the L.S.T.’s can’t do that.”

Why?

“The L.S.T.’s are too large to get in.”

What’s an L.S.T.?

“Landing Ship Tank”

Oh.

“They’re bigger than this; this’s two-hundred and twenty feet long. L.S.T. is about four hundred feet long.”

It’s the straight boat they use to land war machines, right?

“No, no, no, this deck inside here is hollow. Here’s a, here a picture of the Japanese we’d caught after the war was over. We brought them home, they was going from one island to another island and we brought them home. We took them from one place to another place and brought them home. We brought them from one island to another island. There’s probably pictures that show the inside of my ship. See here, here’s the picture, see the inside is hollow. There’s the drums we brought, drums of gasoline. We supplied everybody.”

Were your ships one of the main storage units going across the sea?

“Huh?”

When your ship went across the seas, were they one of the most important storage units for the navy?

“No, no they had storage ships too. After we unloaded our ships, we used to go out and unload cargo ships. We’d pull next to them and they’d fill us up and we’d bring them to their ships. And there was church services.”

I didn’t know they had church services.

“Yeah, they did. And see here’s the anchor. And there’s the storage bay, there’s some trucks in there. (Hands a book over the interviewer) That book’s got a day by day of where we went.”

What’re those?

“We had tanks inside our ship, tanks and bulldozers. It tells you on the bottom, I think, what they are.”

What kind of tanks were on your ship?

“Well, the army tanks, whatever kind of tank. A tank is a tank, you know, it’s not like they have specialized ones, like today. Here’s a picture of the front, there’s the forty millimeter gun on the bow. Right on the front; see that, after the war was over, these ships, they made rocket ships out of them. They took a lot of the stuff and made their rockets outta them. Heh, rocket ships. This’s part of Corregidor, lot a people don’t even know what Corregidor is; well there is it right here. That’s right in the middle of the Philippines right there. There’s Manila bay.”

Can you explain to me what Corregidor is?

“Corregidor is an island, right in the middle of Manila bay, and the Japs used to be holed up in there and Bataan is on the other side and they had a big fort on the other side. If you had any ships going into Manila they could get you from either side. So first we had to take Bataan, which we lost one of our men who was in our crew originally, the ship ahead of us hit a mine and it lost three navy guys. They were like the length of this property away from us when they hit the mine. A hundred and twenty-six army men got killed, blown up, and if we were the first ship in there I might ‘a’ got it too.”

Was your ship turned into a rocket ship after the war?

“No. But afterwards I got transferred, I got sick, they transferred me to a yellow seven fifty four after the war. This was number fifty two and I got to number fifty four because, after I cut my fingers they put four guys in my place.”

When the other ship hit the mine, did you come to appreciate anything anymore?

“Well I appreciated that I wasn’t there first. Ha-ha.”

Ha-ha. Good point! Um, so, did you use any heavy weapon artillery while at war?

“Twenty millimeters and the forty millimeter. I wasn’t reloading the forty, I was the twenty. But I was a sighter on the forty millimeter at times. That was near the front landing gate. It was a good thing to get into the service, it gives a lot of education. I got my discharge here and I got another discharge from joint reserve afterwards. The army man said he had to be in six years, but the navy man didn’t have to be in six years, especially if you were drafted. I was put in for four years active reserve and was discharged just a week before Korea. I’m damned glad for that, they couldn’t put me back in for Korea.”

So is there any difference between these two discharges?

“Yeah, one was from the initial service, while the other one stopped them from putting me back in for Korea.”

Wait, so one was from your first two years, and then you’re inactive?

“Inactive, right.”

And then you were there in case they needed you?

“Yeah, that’s what inactive means. And I missed the Korea war by *one week!* Everyone else they activated again to go to Korea. If I had been one week later or they had been one week sooner, they could have put me back into the service again.”

Would you have been happy or disappointed by that?

“No, after four years I didn’t want to go back again, no sir. Ha-Ha. I’d had enough.”

So, while at war, what helped you pass the time, did you like play cards or anything?

“I didn’t have much time. I was busy all the time. I didn’t get much time off, they say that the cooks worked one day on and one day off, not me, I was working every day. When I was the only cook for sixty men I worked from dusk ‘til dawn. That’s how I cut my fingers, I was tired and fell asleep. When I asked them for help and they didn’t give it to me. When I moved onto L.S.T. six seventy-seven,

the hospital ship, they operated on me twice, my fingers and my appendix. And then when I got back to the ship after six weeks they had four people in my place. So..."

You had your appendix taken out?

"Yeah, on the L.S.T. hospital ship, them people should have got medals, they were great."

What does L.S.T. stand for?

"Landing Ship Tank, that's the next step up from what I was on, in terms of size."

Why was your appendix taken out?

"Because it was hurting, I was on the hospital ship, working the galley and it started hurting. That night I had aches and pains and when I went to the doctor he said 'your appendix gotta come out'. When you don't feel good, where do you go? You go to the doctor right? That's where I went."

Before the war, were you a cook?

"No, I was working for truck drivers. But when I went to, I was a helper, I only had that job for about six months or a year. Because I quit school, I was in so long for school and I quit to work. If you was in school and you turned eighteen years old, they didn't let you finish school, you had to go get drafted. So I quit before that, because I knew I couldn't make it so I quit. I never graduated high school."

So after the war did you turn to being a cook?

"No, I went back to trucking again. But there were so many people discharged from the service that instead of working five days a week I was working Monday a week. Ha-ha. And then I kind of quit because there wasn't enough money and I had to get an operation."

What was your operation for?

"A hernia, you know, when you strain something."

While at war, what helped you get through the hard times?

“Just everything. You gotta just look out for yourself. You gotta do the best you can. There was enough work there, I never had any time off.”

When you got back, did your perspective on anything change?

“Well you appreciate yourself, you appreciate everything you took for granted.”

Did you carry anything with you after the war, would you like to share any memories?

“No.”