

Interviewer: Okay for the camera could you say your full name and where you were born?

Stophel: Full name

Interviewer: Your name

Stophel: Robert A Stophel Centerville County Tennessee 15th of November 1920.

Interviewer: What branch of the service did you serve in and what was the primary unit that you served in?

Stophel: I was in the army and I was in the 219th general hospital Stofield Barracks ____.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names and what did they do for a living?

Stophel: Well they've been dead 82 years. My father's name was Charles and my mother's name was Vennia. He was carpenter and she didn't do anything. Both of them are dead.

Interviewer: Do you have any brothers and sisters and how long did they remain in school?

Stophel: I've got or had four brothers and one sister. Two of the brothers are dead well let's see three of the brothers are dead and all three of them was in the military in World War II. My sister is still living she is in the nursing home in Selmer and she turned 100 last December.

Interviewer: Wow that's impressive. What branches of the service were your brothers in?

Stophel: All of them but one was in the army and he busted off someway and got in the navy. We forgive him.

Interviewer: What did they do in the services?

Stophel: Truthfully I don't know I never crossed them when I was in the army. I seen one of my brothers once or twice but other than that I don't know what they did.

Interviewer: Were any of them wounded or anything like that? Or where did they serve do you know that?

Stophel: None of us was wounded got out clean clean as a bell.

Interviewer: Do you have any memories of the great depression?

Stophel: Very little very little.

Interviewer: Very little so you don't of any hardships or anything your family had to cope with?

Stophel: See when my parents died in 1928 I was eight years old almost eight. They put the three young kids or brothers in Tennessee ____ Home here in Clarksville which is here that's how come I'm here. We

had it good we didn't miss a meal and had a good place to sleep. So I don't know the truth in the depression it doesn't register on me as being bad.

Interviewer: Wow that's I guess that's exceptional for the time.

Stophel: It sounds funny but I mean it I had it good in the sense that I had three meals a day and a had a good place sleep.

Interviewer: Did you do any work before your time in the service or did you

Stophel: Out of school in the service.

Interviewer: Just directly in?

Stophel: Yeah

Interviewer: What sort of job did you do in the service and how much did it pay?

Stophel: You won't believe this. I went in the army in 1939 the pay of a private was \$21 a month that's a month. Went I come out 6 years and 26 days later I was getting sergeants pay and I got \$97 a month. You think you could live on that now?

Interviewer: I don't think it would be possible.

Stophel: But on the other hand a colonel when I got out just made \$333 a month a full chicken colonel.

Interviewer: Wow that's

Stophel: That's something to talk about.

Interviewer: Before Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the threat to America by the Nazis and the Japanese? How much did you know about it in newspapers adios did you?

Stophel: Very little I do know a week before the Pearl Harbor attack the Japanese envoy ambassador or whatever his title was come through Hawaii coming to Washington to talk to Cordell Hull and boy the headlines was all peace peace peace. And lord next week they bombed us that's the way it was. Right out of the clear boob they got us.

Interviewer: Okay I guess this one will be kind of funny. Do you recall where you were when you head the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Stophel: I know exactly where I was I watched those yo-yos. I was in the station hospital Stofield barracks ward 21 where I could see right down to Pearl Harbor Wheeler Field and watch them. It was 7:55 a.m. December 7, 1941.

Interviewer: Do you have any particular memories of that day or?

Stophel: No just goes together. Nothing exciting other than that happened.

Interviewer: Do you remember seeing the damage and what was your

Stophel: I went a week or so later I was on a detail and went to Honolulu for something and we stopped at Pearl Harbor on the way there or back. And I seen a lot of the damage that was done but it didn't register on me it was just damage. But the hospital I was at we took care of all the wounded and killed that happened at Stofield barracks and Wheeler Field. The ones at Pearl Harbor was navy but the military at Stofield barracks and Wheeler Field which was a humongous installation our hospital took care of all of them. We had probably oh I don't know how many hundred I mean how many dead and how many wounded. That was our we was the hospital that took care of that and I seen them.

Interviewer: So what was your feelings while you were watching it happen? Did you

Stophel: Well it was a good show actually it was a good show. I was too stunned to realize it was the real McCoy. It was just like we were seeing a movie but as I say I wouldn't want to see it again. Greatest show on earth it's amazing.

Interviewer: Yeah did you listen to FDR's speech The Day that Will Live in Infamy speech the following day?

Stophel: I may have and I may have not I don't know. I don't remember it now. I remember the speech from school and from history and from all of that but as far as hearing it in person I don't remember it. But he evidently said it.

Interviewer: I know your it seems like from the book you showed me your opinions of FDR aren't that favorable now on how he handled the issue. But how did you feel he handled it back then or how do you remember thinking?

Stophel: Well if

Interviewer: Shortly after Pearl Harbor.

Stophel: Back then we didn't know the difference. That book of course didn't come out until long after until information and stuff come loose. But probably if they'd have knew then that Roosevelt did the things he did they'd have tried him for treason. If Bush would do it now the things that he did then they would impeach him and try him for treason because it was treason the way he manipulated things. But if you read enough history somewhere in the North Atlantic some place up there. There was a instance where the German submarines sank a cruiser I believe or a destroyer. Roosevelt supposable set that up thinking he would get Roosevelt and Churchill wanted the USA in the war in the worst way. And they just couldn't everybody was against the war so they couldn't say we're gonna go to war with Japan so they set this thing up. It didn't work but they turned around and taken out the Japanese enough in the Pacific when they attacked Pearl Harbor. That was all they needed and boom we're in the war fulltime.

Interviewer: But shortly after Pearl Harbor pretty much what were the feelings of the people you knew? Were people pretty much united or was there some division still or?

Stophel: Actually the people I came in contact with or the men people of the armed service most of what I there was very little change as far as routine. The only difference we went on long routers. We cut out certain things but the routine didn't change very little for a long time. Of course Hawaii was if you haven't been to Hawaii I spent the entire war in Hawaii rough duty boy real rough duty. But as far as change it didn't back here it may have caused but rationing of course in the army rationing didn't affect us. So there wasn't nothing really nerve racking as far as being in war except I couldn't come home.

Interviewer: So as bad as it could have been you had it fairly well.

Stophel: Oh I had it good well off.

Interviewer: Okay of course you enlisted before the war. Why did you enlist was there any particular reason?

Stophel: Well there was nothing else to do I mean there was no jobs. So I figured I'd go in for two year come out and things would be different. I went in for two years they wouldn't let me out so I ended up spending six years before I got out.

Interviewer: How difficult was it to get into the military at that time? Were there IQ tests or?

Stophel: Sign your name.

Interviewer: Sign your name.

Stophel: Sign your name walk in.

Interviewer: As well where did you have your basic training at?

Stophel: Stofield barracks.

Interviewer: How difficult was that?

Stophel: Well just routine. Just like another days work.

Interviewer: Okay

Stophel: It wasn't hard. And incidentally I was in the army six years and I never had a gun in my hand.

Interviewer: Seriously

Stophel: Seriously I'm serious as a heartbeat I didn't have a gun in my hand I don't think. I don't remember it of course the military the medics but they issues us a 100 carbeams sometime during the war the company. And what did they do they stacked them up and made a service counter out of them. Never even took them out of the box.

Interviewer: What was your impression of your fellow recruits when you were going through basic?

Stophel: We was all about the same nothing else to do so we joined the army.

Interviewer: So you liked in Tennessee I'm guessing your entire life before then?

Stophel: I was born in Tennessee raised in Tennessee and still in Tennessee.

Interviewer: Did you meet any interesting characters from other parts of the country?

Stophel: Oh lord.

Mrs. Stophel: Don't tell that.

Stophel: What yeah during before World War II there was predominance of Pollock's in the army. Now don't ask me why and every one of them danced with the name Ski. Have you known any Pollock's? All of their names end with Ski and I don't care where you send him you call him Ski and he answers. But our outfit had I'd say a third or probably a quarter of the men were Pollock's from Pennsylvania and that part of the country.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Stophel: But every one of them answer to the name Ski.

Interviewer: Okay I think I know where was the fort where you did basic in?

Stophel: Stofield barracks Hawaii.

Interviewer: Hawaii so you went straight to Hawaii?

Stophel: Yeah I was I enlisted in the army July 25, 1939 and September the 1st I landed in Hawaii.

Interviewer: How did you get there did you take a train from Tennessee to

Stophel: From I enlisted in Bristol we went from Bristol to New York by train. From New York around through the Panama Canal to San Francisco by transport and San Francisco to Hawaii by the same transport.

Interviewer: How long was the transport?

Stophel: How big a boat?

Interviewer: How long did it take to get from New York to Hawaii?

Stophel: Well roughly two weeks. Of course we spent a week in San Francisco around we went from New York down through the Panama Canal and up to San Francisco. Laid over a week in San Francisco and then went on it took four or five days from San Francisco to Honolulu by boat.

Interviewer: So was your impression as a whole on that journey? Was it difficult, easy, interesting experience?

Stophel: Well I was a young kid it was excitement 18 year old kid lord going half way around the world.

Interviewer: So you enjoyed it quite a bit?

Stophel: I enjoyed it I enjoyed every minute of it.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the other recruits you met once you were in the army after Pearl Harbor when people started enlisting? Were they a different breed were they more gun hoe were they more

Stophel: They were a different breed but they were basically the same. I mean they was there not because they wanted to be because they had to be. I was there because I enlisted and they were there because they were drafted. That was the only basically the only difference. We was all there in the same pot.

Interviewer: This next little bunch the living conditions were fairly good and I'm guessing you weren't that prepared to fight since you never

Stophel: Well it's like this field rations they only time I ever ate field rations when I was in the army was when I was in I came back to the states on furlough in 1945. And when I was in casual camp coming to and from they I think they fed us I think they called it field rations. It wasn't what we had been eating. I know that. But in my outfit we had I mean steak was just I mean it was routine. We had turkey for dinner I'd say for two years straight Sunday dinner. I mean we are off of china dishes and we had white linen sheets. I mean I didn't suffer I didn't suffer. But I was 2400 miles from home.

Interviewer: I'm guessing you were housed in permanent barracks.

Stophel: I've got a picture I'll show you my barracks that I stayed in.

Interviewer: But I'm guessing they were fairly good quality as well.

Stophel: Well they was built in World War I but they were good barracks for the time being. They wouldn't go over now but they're still in use.

Interviewer: You said you worked in the ward as kind of a clerk. Did you receive any specialized training for that and?

Stophel: No

Interviewer: No they just put you in and

Stophel: It's just like if you're in the army you can do it. Now the last four years I was a payroll clerk. They didn't give me any specialized training for that either all you had to do was peck a typewriter.

Interviewer: Did you have any well I guess you did. How many civilians did you know in Hawaii?

Stophel: I'd say personally probably a dozen. Mostly Philipinos and a few women. We had three or four or five women working in the hospital and a whole slew of Philipinos working at the hospital. And I got to know a bunch of them but other than that.

Interviewer: What was the civilians in Hawaii opinion of the war and since many of them

Stophel: What was their what?

Interviewer: What was their opinion of the war on the army base there?

Stophel: Truthfully I don't know. There was a lot of Japanese over there but I don't know that. We called them all gooks the first thing the drill sergeant said there's Chinese, Japanese you name it they're over here but said they're all gooks.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the officers you worked with?

Stophel: Well actually they were mostly medical people. And they were good people to work for they didn't give you any hard time or nothing. Most of them were doctors I mean they were all doctors and dentists.

Interviewer: Did you have a lot of free time?

Stophel: Well we worked 9 to 5 or 8 to 5 after that we'd pull emergency duty whenever out time came around. If there was 10 in the office every 10th day we'd pull a night shift. But other than that we'd go to the movie every night had the movies right in the neighborhood. So it wasn't bad.

Interviewer: So you watched movies in your free time what else did y'all do?

Stophel: Well every the movie theatre was about as far as from here not much further from here to that house over there from the barracks. About I'd say 300 yards and every night we'd be at the movie. It just cost 20 cents.

Interviewer: Let's see what else. Were you promoted at all during your time in the service?

Stophel: Yeah I made buck sergeant.

Interviewer: Did you do you feel like that promotions received were for people that deserved them or was there a good ole boy system at all?

Stophel: Just like the army now whoever butters the first sergeant up gets the promotion. Yes sir I would tell you otherwise but it's on this thing. The brownnoser I'll put it this way the brownnoser gets the promotion. It was that then and it's that way now.

Interviewer: Do you think the same was true with combat units or?

Stophel: No not necessarily I think but I've known some since I've known some one in particularly that got a battlefield commission. I don't know how he did it but he did it because he didn't have sense enough to come in out of the rain. But he ended up a captain.

Interviewer: So did you talk to the wounded at all that were stationed there?

Stophel: Well after things got organized I mean the war got going our way we would get battle casualties from we'll say Guadalcanal or places like that. Within 24 hours after they was shot we'd stage them they'd bring them to our hospital and ___ hospital and they may stay two or three days get stabilizes. Then we'd ship them on stateside. And I got I mean I didn't get down and buddy buddy to the but I met a lot of them. You're not familiar with a guy here named James Crance. And go d research you'll find out you'll find out he was a gunner on a bomber. And I don't know what caused him to do it but one day he decided that bubble in there where he shot out could explode and I'm gone. He made him a harness and secured it to the plane. I think on the next bombing mission his bubble burst out and there he goes sailing out of the airplane hanging on the end of that harness. And if I don't know whether the Time Magazine fronts are still available but he was on Time Magazine it showed a picture of him dangling out of that bomber.

Interviewer: Is he still alive?

Stophel: Yeah he survived. His hands got he got frost bit quite a bit. I met him personally and of course he lived here and I met him two or three times after he come back here.

Interviewer: Is he still in town?

Stophel: In don't know whether he's still around or not but his name's James Crance. But he did live out around going out 41A towards Nashville. There's a little section out there they used to call Brown's store he lived out there. But he may still be here in town I don't know.

Interviewer: Alright I'll talk to you a little bit more about it.

Stophel: But he was pretty famous for that trick he pulled dangling out of that airplane. But I knew him personally.

Interviewer: That's interesting I'll have to talk to you more about that when we finish up. Where was I at I'm sorry. Okay I was talking about the wounded. Did their opinion of the war change after they were wounded? Did I know you didn't talk that much with them.

Stophel: I can't say yes or no because they weren't there long enough for us to really get all our problem was get them in there get them some pain get them where they we were just a staging area in a sense. We did emergency we stabilized them is what we did and got them on to the states where they got whatever they needed.

Interviewer: Okay I guess this doesn't exactly pertain to you but if you can maybe tell the opinions of someone you talked to or people you talked to. Were they impressed by the enemy bravery, agility, tenacity or tactics or anything like that or?

Stophel: I knew a bombardier flew B24s or flew in B24s and he said they were pretty sharp operators when it come to airplanes. Said you had to watch them. Now whether they were smart or whether they were just lucky I don't know. But he told me a many time that they were good at what they were doing. But other than that that's all I didn't talk to anybody about the ground men.

Interviewer: Did you have any friends or anybody you knew locally that was in the war and wounded or anything else?

Stophel: No they didn't come near us.

Interviewer: Did you have a sense of the big picture ever just from reading the newspapers or anything like that as in regards to the strategy going on with the war?

Stophel: No

Interviewer: Can you tell they were focusing on Germany first?

Stophel: Well we knew they was doing that because that was part of the plan. Part of the plan was to eliminate Hitler and then take care of Japan which they did or we did.

Interviewer: What was your opinion on the atomic bomb when that happened?

Stophel: The best thing that ever happened they should use it now.

Interviewer: Do you have any other interesting stories or anything like that?

Stophel: No

Interviewer: What did you do after the war?

Stophel: Came back and went to Austin Peay graduated from Austin Peay.

Interviewer: GI bill?

Stophel: GI bill I was the second GI to sign up for the GI bill at Austin Peay after World War II.

Interviewer: Wow

Stophel: When I started there in 1945 September of 45 there were six men in the student body and about 95 women. That was the total student body. The next quarter it more than doubled and before I graduated when I graduated there was 60 something in the class. And that was 60 years ago this spring. In fact the commencement they are having now or just had has it come yet?

Interviewer: Not yet

Stophel: Well it will be my 60th anniversary from Austin Peay. Took me 33 months to get a B.S. degree 204 quarter hours.

Interviewer: Two hundred and four.

Stophel: I don't know what that is in semester hours. But see they went to semester hours later but we did quarter hours and it was 204 quarter hours 33 months.

Looking back on World War II I know you didn't have that harsh of an experience in the great depression but do you some people who were more stateside and had a didn't have as much difficulty kind of look back on it as a good time. Because it was the first time a lot of them had got out from home and saw the world and things like that. So in general what was your opinion of the war was it I won't say good for you but is it something you look back on slightly favorable?

Stophel: Well it changed everything. Changed the way we did everything regardless I mean whether it was milking a cow or driving a car or whatever. World War II was the changing turning point everything it was never the same. Because like a said a colonel made \$333 a month a colonel now I had one next door here retire on \$4200 a month retired. And World War II was the turning point everything was for the better after World War II.

Interviewer: Do you have any fond or not so fond memories of the war?

Stophel: No

Interviewer: Pretty much indifferent?

Stophel: It's just indifferent it had to be.

Interviewer: And do you have anything else you're like to add or say?

Stophel: No but I've been married to this thing here for 58 years.

Interviewer: Did y'all where did y'all meet?

Stophel: I was teaching school in Cumberland City and I room and boarded with her aunt and she showed up one day. The rest of its history.

Interviewer: And after all of your traveling and things like that you decided to come back to Tennessee?

Stophel: Well I come back right after the war that was the only place I had to come to. Of course my people live in East Tennessee and I come to my sisters when I come back and come down here and went to Austin Peay. I've been here all my life.

Interviewer: Well thank you I appreciate it.