

**Daniel David Griffin
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
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Interviewers**

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Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth please?

DG: Daniel David Griffin, 9/25/30.

Q: Okay. What was your educational background prior to entering service?

DG: I went to General Motors Institute in Flint, Michigan.

Q: Did you say where you were born?

DG: Corning.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

DG: I enlisted.

Q: Why did you decide to enlist?

DG: Because my draft notice from the school.

Q: Why did you pick the Navy?

DG: Well, my brother was in the army and he got banged up pretty bad, so he told me to go in the Navy or something else.

Q: Have you been in World War II?

DG: Yes.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

DG: Great Lakes.

Q: How long were you up there?

DG: Well, for the period of boot camp, and then I became sick and was held back for three weeks.

Q: What happened to you if you don't mind?

DG: Pneumonia.

Q: So you must have been up there in the winter?

DG: Oh yeah.

Q: Nice place to be in the winter isn't it? [Laughing]

DG: [Nods]

Q: What was boot camp like?

DG: It was quite an experience from being outside, I'll tell you. We got along good and people treated us good. The only thing I didn't like was I went in alone. I didn't know a soul. Then I got to the one in St. Louis and I got the 3407597 serial number and then I got in and they all said "where are you from?", and I said New York State. And it didn't add up because if I went in at Buffalo or Syracuse I had a complete different set of numbers.

Q: Where did you go after Great Lakes?

DG: Vallejo, California. Submarine base, inland. Picked up a destroyer.

Q: So you were immediately assigned to a destroyer?

DG: Yeah.

Q: What destroyer were you sent to?

DG: USS Higbee, DDR-806

Q: What does the R mean?

DG: Radar picket.

Q: How long were you on the destroyer?

DG: All my time.

Q: So for your entire service?

DG: Yes.

Q: What were your duties?

DG: I ended up being a gunner's mate, second class.

Q: What type of guns?

DG: Automatic 3"/50's.

Q: How often did you train on these?

DG: On the first trip over to Korea we had 40 millimeter guns and we came back and got retrofitted with the brand new 3-inch, 3 1/2 inch 3"/50's.

Q: What was it like, your first trip over to Korea? How long were you there?

DG: I think 6 months. We came down a channel and went underneath the Golden Gate Bridge and that was quite an experience.

Q: Right, I imagine.

DG: And all of the seven different currents coming in, you know. And I didn't know, you know, whether I was going to be sea sick or not but fortunately I wasn't. And I did pretty good.

Q: Now your first time off Korea, what were your jobs; your ship, what was its mission?

DG: Submarine detail, run with the battleships and the aircraft carriers off the rear quarter, sonar patrol, submarine patrol.

Q: Did you ever encounter any unfriendly subs or anything?

DG: Yes.

Q: Were they Korean or Chinese or Soviet? Do you know at all?

DG: I don't know. We laid the depth charge pattern and fired the K-guns and rolled them off the back, went back and forth about 3 times after that and got a substantial oil slick, and that was the end of it. And then it made Time magazine, the front cover of Time magazine back then, and I guess from hearsay we almost died in a third world war, I don't know. And that's about it.

Q: Did you spend any time ashore at all? In Korea?

DG: No.

Q: Never got to go ashore?

DG: No.

Q: Now your first six months, you were off the coast of Korea the whole time?

DG: Yes.

Q: Did you ever do any counter battery fire into Korea?

DG: Yes, shore bombardment.

Q: Shore bombardment?

DG: Yes. Night.

Q: What time of year was it that you were there?

DG: Winter.

Q: Winter? How was it on the ship during the winter off Korea?

DG: Cold. Well I used to have to chip off from the recoil springs on the 5 inch 38's. I'd go up and straddle the barrel and clean it off before we could fire them again.

Q: Now that was during your second time off the coast. How long were you there the second time?

DG: I think about the same.

Q: About six months also?

DG: Five and a half, six months.

Q: Were your duties basically about the same?

DG: Yeah.

Q: What rank were you at that point?

DG: I think I made 3rd class. Seamen are 3rd class.

Q: Was your ship ever fired on, do you know?

DG: No. We were running with the [unclear] ship Missouri. And that pulled in, Wonsan harbor, and dropped anchor, and everybody on that ship was at parade rest with the undress blues. It was just like similar to this territory, like the mountain up there. And those people up there just started shooting at the battleship and missing it by, say, 20 feet or so. So they sounded general quarters, and then we were ordered out of there to get on the other side of the harbor. But nobody ever got hurt, nobody ever got hit. But, you know, they had these retractable guns that they build right into the side of the hill and they would come out and fire them, then they would go back in and you couldn't tell where they were. Quite interesting.

Q: Were there any moments that stand out more than others while you were there?

DG: No.

Q: Did you ever get sick at all while you were at sea?

DG: No.

Q: What were your officers like?

DG: Very good. Especially the SEAL. Graduated from the Naval Academy.

Q: Now at this time during the Korean War, the service was integrated. Did you have any blacks in your units?

DG: Yes. We had, I think, four on the ship.

Q: They weren't just stewards, were they?

DG: No, they fit right in. Some were engine men, some were gunner's mate and some were boat's mate.

Q: Were there any other problems at all on the ship?

DG: No.

Q: Okay. With your equipment, besides having to chip ice off, did you ever have any problems with your guns where you had to repair them or anything?

DG: No.

Q: Did you ever get to see any USO [United Service Organization] shows?

DG: No.

Q: One thing you said that was kind of interesting was when you were being refueled. Could you talk about that?

DG: Yeah. Well, being a radar picket ship we'd be dispatched by our self-several times, sometimes a week at a time. And we got out there and we missed our tanker to take on fuel, so we figured we had 3 days fuel left, I guess. So some way or another, I don't know how, they worked a deal with the Merchant Marine, the British Merchant Marine. And they said they would give us fuel. We rendezvoused with them and they were sitting dead in the water, it was dead

calm. They put over the fenders and we just knotted right up alongside of it, and put over 3 or 4 ropes and locked right up to it. I don't know who was the officer of the deck or what but he came out and looked right up on the mast and he saw a Chaplains flag. So he asked our officer of the deck if we had a Chaplain aboard, and he said yes, and he said "You suppose you could come over and hear confessions and say mass?", and he said fine. So he paged John Rooney. Great man, good priest. It was going to take us probably an hour to take on fuel, and that thing was nothing but a rust-bucket. Of course back then, you joined the Merchant Marine and you were gone sometimes, what, 20-25 years and you never went back home. So anyways, the fuel was good and we tied up and took on the fuel, and when the Chaplain came aboard - I don't know how he found out that I was a Catholic - I got paged to go up to the quarter deck. I went up and he was a full Lieutenant. I shook hands with him and he said, "David, what are you?" and I said "I'm a gunner's mate." He said "Well I got another duty for you," and I said "What's that?" And he said "Well you're going to be my altar boy." [Laughing] What a mess that was. So anyway, we went aboard the tanker and he heard confessions-I don't know maybe six or eight I guess, they hadn't been in a church or heard confessions in 20 years, some of them. We got that done, we went down to their galley and we had mass. We set that up, and then that was over with. Then the captain came down- I had a little aluminum case that I put everything in. He asked the father, he said "Are we done?", and the father said "Yes." [The captain] said "Will you and your sidekick come with me?" So we went in the captain's quarters - which is unheard of on a Merchant Marine - and I never was so impressed in all my life. That thing just glittered - all solid [cherry wood]. And here's a cabinet over there [gestures] with some of the best booze in the world. So he gets out a shot glass, about double shot glass, I'd say about that high. [Gestures] I don't know what it was but he got it out, poured it full for Padre and myself - and we were still taking on fuel - so we sat there and nursed that along, and he comes and gives us another one. [All laugh]

Q: So you were taking on fuel too? [Laughing]

DG: Oh yeah. I'd say we had probably about four shots, we hadn't had a drink in probably 35 days. So, we got excused and shook hands, and the captain and the ship were very grateful for Father coming over. We had a little tiny gang plank - we were about that close to each other [gestures] - and we walked across that, and Father John says "Keep this under your hat," and I said "I will." [Laughing] It was fun, we had a lot of fun and I'm sure the people appreciated it.

Q: Were there any people on the ship that you were close friends with?

DG: Only my fellow gunner's mates. I think we had... we were supposed to have eight in our crew and I think we always maintained at least six to run the gun mount.

Q: Now you said one of the mates turned out to be one of your best friends?

DG: Yes. He was a gunner's mate, 1st class. Jack Rogers.

Q: Where was he from?

DG: Michigan.

Q: Did you ever stay in contact with him after you left service?

DG: I tried to, but I lost track of him. Never heard from him again.

Q: You were in four years, so how long were you at sea during that whole four years?

DG: We made four cruises. I'd say probably half and half.

Q: You had two tours off Korea, where else did you go? Were all of them off Korea?

DG: Yes.

Q: Did you notice any change in your fire missions or what you were doing in the four times you went there between '51 and '55?

DG: Yes. I guess it was the first cruise over, and we were doing night bombardment with the five-inch 38. We had the field glasses, and we could see these - maybe I shouldn't say this - but we could see these big tank farms. [Name, unclear], [Name, unclear], I don't know what the third one was. A great big tank farm like Donald [unclear]. I said, "Why the hell can't we shoot at them?" No. They were off limits. We had spotters that were blowing up bridges and railroads but we couldn't shoot at those tanks. I got kind of a disgusted feeling, you know, 'What am I doing in here?' It really kind of took the wind out of me. We never did get to shoot at them.

Q: Did you ever get to see any USO shows at all?

DG: No.

Q: All these targets, these were all in South Korea but you never were allowed to fire at them or were they in North Korea?

DG: North Korea.

Q: After your four cruises, were you discharged?

DG: Yes.

Q: Did you ever make use of the G.I. Bill?

DG: Yes, they paid the remainder of my school off in Michigan.

Q: Did you join any veterans' organizations after you returned?

DG: The Legion. VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars].

Q: Are you active in them?

DG: No, not anymore.

Q: Did you ever have any reunions at all of your ship?

DG: Yes. Back about six or seven years ago we had a 50th reunion. What an ending that was; I mean it was just out of this world. We try to visualize what people are going to look like and... it was probably one of the best ones I've ever been to. It was programmed real well, and I met a lot of nice people who we used to be with, some were bald, some weren't... [All laugh].

Q: How do you think your time in the service had an effect on your life?

DG: Well, I never got a thing or anything when I came home from the Korean conflict, like the veterans got after World War II, there was none of that. I mean I was a little hurt over that. And then sometimes I felt like I just wasted four years. Then other times I didn't.

Q: You said your brother had been in World War II?

DG: Yes.

Q: Did you ever talk to one another about your experiences?

DG: Not that much, no. He said very little from the time he went home until he died.

Q: Did you have a patch that you wore on your sleeve? Do you want to pull that out?

DG: Yes, I found it today. I couldn't believe it. Gunner's mate, 2nd class.

[Displays patch to the camera]

[Footage cuts to another clip]

DG: There was a third trip, or maybe a fourth trip. As I said, we got dispatched a lot, and we were up in North Korea. There's a [unclear] river that comes down. We were sent up there on a darkened ship; everything off, all power off. I had heard from another gunner's mate on another ship that they were putting down the floating mines where they knew where the currents were. They had the contact [bombs]. I said "oh I've never seen one of those." So anyway we were up there, and we were anchored, dead in the water, and I had a 48 watch in the morning. I went up there and we had the... we were with the watchmen, so I grabbed the binoculars and I was looking, you know. And jeez if I didn't see one. Boy I'll tell you, I went in and I woke the captain up. He was standing up on the bridge [unclear]. I put my hand on his shoulder - which you're not supposed to do - and I said "captain, we're in trouble. We've got floating mines coming down. He said "let the boys get on 3"/50 and let them have a little fun." By God, I'm telling you. I think it was five different mines that they blew up. They didn't hit us, they would have blown us up. And that was quite interesting, I thought.