

BOB BUREAU:
REMEMBERING WORLD WAR II

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The following paper, BOB BUREAU:REMEMBERING WORLD WAR II, is written from information obtained during an oral interview with Bob Bureau on October 26, 1994. Any possible mistakes regarding historical facts in this paper were taken directly from the interview.

Robert Bureau was born in Marquette, Michigan in 1919 to Emanuel and Evalina Bureau. His father was from New York and came to Marquette to work on the coal dock. His mother was born in Marquette. Bob has one brother, Paul, who was also born in Marquette.

Bob has vivid memories of growing up in Marquette. He always seemed to be at ease around the water. As a child, Bob, Paul, and their friends would spend their summer days on South beach by the Coast Guard station basking in the sun. When the sand got too hot they would dive in the water. Bob admits he would not even think about putting his big toe in that water now. He also wonders why he never developed skin cancer.

Bobs' father passed away in 1931 when Bob was only twelve. Bob dropped out of school in the tenth grade. What he lacked in formal education, he made up for by joining the Merchant Marines at the age of sixteen. He got to travel to many places and experience many different cultures by working on the high seas. His brother

Paul was in the Merchant Marines too, and they got to work and travel together.

Bob worked in the Merchant Marines for ten years.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, Bob was in Ohio where his ship, the Ishpeming, was laid up for overhaul. He was quartermaster at the time, and he ran downstairs to tell the First Mate about the bombing. The First Mate, who was asleep, accused Bob of being drunk and told him to go to sleep. Shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Bob received news that the draft board had pulled his brother Paul off his ship in Sault Ste. Marie. Bob knew he had to enlist in the Navy before they pulled him off of his ship and put him in the Army.

Bob enlisted at the post office in Cleveland, Ohio. Because he had all of the experience from sailing in the Merchant Marines, he went in rated and was put in charge of the other seventy men that had either just been drafted or were enlisting like himself.

After enlisting, Bob was sent to Great Lakes for basic training. He was only there for two weeks because men were needed and because he had all of this experience from the Merchant Marines. The only thing he had to learn at Great Lakes was the Navy way of doing things. In the Navy you go where you are told to go. In the

Merchant Marines, you could pick the ships you wanted to sail on and the places you wanted to go. In the Merchant Marines the captain was considered a friend and a boss. In the Navy you could not even talk to the captain, and you could be thrown overboard for trying to strike up a conversation with him. The captain in the Navy did not want to know you. In the Navy you were just one part of a well oiled-machine doing your duty. He quickly learned this.

Bob was then sent to Gunnery School in Bremerton, Washington. Here he was outfitted with his new crew. He became a gun captain, number one battery on the starboard bow. The crew left Washington and went to San Diego, California to join their squadron. From California they headed out to sea.

Heading overseas, Bob felt right at home. Bob and his crew took in anything that came in low over the horizon. His gun stayed on manual because he did his own firing, while the rest of the battery had guns that were on automatic because they all fired together. Sometimes there would be advanced warnings of an attack and sometimes there would be warning at all. Bob, much like the radars and lookouts, was on alert twenty-four hours a day.

Bob was never fazed by all of these new, exotic islands they would soon discover

because he had already been to places in South America and Europe while in the Merchant Marines. Some of these places he visited during World War II included Hawaii, Attu, Kiska, Guam, Saipan, and the Mariana Islands in addition to many more.

Bob witnessed and participated in many battles. He participated in the "Mariana Turkey Shoot" where our ships opened fire and shot down close to sixty planes in one day. He also witnessed a successful kamikaze plane destroy an aircraft carrier. The kamikaze pilots would go up to 10,000 or 20,000 feet and come straight down towards a ship. The only thing the ship could do was open a barrage of fire on the plane and hope for the best. These kamikaze pilots knew they never would return to their ships, and their landing gear was not even attached to their planes. These young men were inexperienced pilots that believed they could die in battle and bring honor for their emperor. Bob witnessed the sinking of the Caloin Bay after a kamikaze pilot successfully flew his plane down the elevator shaft of the ship into the bomb bay. The aircraft carrier was one half of a mile off the starboard quarter of Bobs' ship and when the smoke cleared there was nothing left in the water.

Bob was injured during the war when a shell concussion exploded just next to the ship he was on. He was thrown against the ships' side and all of his teeth were knocked out.

Bob was also very lucky to escape more serious injury, and perhaps death, in another instance. While running anti-submarine patrol in the mouth of the San Bernardino Straights in the Philippines, the HIJMS Magado shot a twenty inch shell directly through Communications in the center of his ship, the USS White Plains. The shell went through one side of the ship and out the other side and exploded in the water. It bent the ship fourteen feet around the keel. Sixty two men were killed and eighty were injured because of this shell. They buried the dead at sea the next day. The ship was repaired and they had to return to Hawaii.

Bob served on many ships, but the majority of his time during World War II was spent on the USS White Plains. He described some of these bigger ships as "floating cities". The White Plains had 5,000 men on board because during war three men were needed for every position on the ship. Each man knows every other mans' job in case something happens.

Bob made many friends during the war but does not keep in touch with them. He

never tried to stay in touch after the war had ended. He did run into someone from Marquette during the war however. He was in a Vets hospital in Honolulu when he ran into Arteth Sands, a familiar face he immediately remembered from Marquette.

After the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese decided to agree to McArthur's terms. These included stipulations such as removing the propellers from the airplanes and stripping the planes of their machine guns and piling them in warehouses. Three days before the signing of the Peace Treaty, Bob was on the first ship to enter Tokyo to make sure these orders had been followed. His captain gave them a speech the night before they entered Japan and warned them to expect the unexpected. They never had any resistance from the Japanese and figured "they knew they had had it". Word was sent back to the fleet and the rest of the Navy and Army came in.

After the Peace Treaty was signed, Bob was stationed in many places in Japan. He was stationed for the most part, however, at the Yokosima Naval Air Base. This was just twenty five miles south of Tokyo. In his free time, he got to go sightseeing and take pictures of the country he found so exhilarating. The people of Japan

seemed to look up to the Americans, even bowing at times, while Bob was there.

Bob had a great deal of hatred towards the Japanese during World War II. He says he could have killed every (expletive) one of them. Everybody on the ship hated the Japanese for the way they did what they did. It was considered the lowest of lows. Most of the men felt the United States was sucked into the war, and they were glad it happened. The hostility towards the Japanese was much stronger than towards the Germans or the Italians. There actually was a negative feeling toward the Russians, with many of the men on board feeling they were useless and could not be counted on to help against the Japanese.

Bobs' deepest hatred is definitely against Tojo. Tojo was a two-faced (expletive) that would not accept peace at any terms. He did everything behind the emperors' back, and Hirohito never knew what was going on. Tojo wanted to rule the world so he got the Japanese into the war. While Hirohito and his family stayed in the background, everybody took orders from Tojo (including the military). Even by the end of the war when the general population wanted peace, Tojo would have no part of it. He was judge, jury, and executioner.

Although Bob mourned the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt like the rest of the

country, it never worried him regarding the outcome of the war. Even though President Roosevelt was our countries' pride and joy at the time, the Navy had kept the men posted on a daily basis regarding his condition and they knew it was just a matter of time before the beloved Presidents' demise.

The only thing Bob missed about Marquette was his mother. He had been sailing for so many years it just seemed like another job to him. He only had three days after enlistment to come home, pack, say his goodbyes, and leave for basic training.

When Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed, Bob was aboard ship. The feeling was one of relief, because the men wanted to get this thing over with and get home.

Bob had an opinion on General McArthur too. McArthur was very good at what he was doing, even though he was just doing his job. He was born and raised into the Army. But apparently McArthur got too big for his britches by trying to take over power, and President Truman had to cut him to the quick. Truman was very outspoken and would not let McArthur steal the show. Truman asked McArthur "Who the hell are you anyway?", and it was not too long after that McArthur faded away.

Bob had a very different view about Admiral Halsey and Admiral Nimitz. Even

though they were never on his ship, Bob met Halsey and Nimitz in Honolulu. He called these two men "our boys" and said they were the two men everybody in the Navy looked up to.

Although Bob thought that men in the Navy were different, he was sure men in other branches of the service felt the same way. Not only did Navy men stay to themselves as compared with Army men, different parts of the Navy were in cliques too. Submarine men did not associate with the battleship men, even though they had to work together at times. It was allright to shoot the breeze with different crews, but you could never tell them the innermost details. Every branch felt they were doing more than the others to win the war, but Bob was positive of this feeling because of the way the Navy had to go into Japan to clear the way for everybody else to enter.

Bob said the war years were the best years of his life. It was the time of his life that made the most impression on him. Everyday he saw something different. All of the different countries he got to visit made his service time an education in itself.

Today Bob spends his time with his two grandchildren, traveling, and recalling the past with his friends at the American Legion (where he has been a member for

almost fifty years).

After the war, Bob came back to Marquette and went back to work in the Merchant Marines. Feeling like he was cheated out of his opportunity to go anywhere in this career, he started working for the railroad. After a year of taking peoples' rotten shifts and never seeing room for advancement, he started the paint shop at Northern Michigan University. Ironically, the Japanese were responsible for the new processing techniques and different paints (such as water paints, enamels and lacquers) Bob used while working for Northern Michigan University for twenty four years.

Bob did not get married until he was fifty years old, and he was married to Fran for twenty four years until she passed away last year. They did have one daughter together, Patty, and Bob has one stepson. When Bob speaks of his wife, his eyes light up and his voice gets crackly, and whenever he mentions her name he follows it with "God bless her". All of the war years and all of the traveling in the Merchant Marines seem to be forgotten, almost sadly, when he speaks of his wife. Maybe this wonderful man could teach us all a lesson on perspective.