

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Question: What I'd like to do is just to get your name, first and last and the correct spelling. So if I can get your first and last name and correct spelling so I have it on tape and I like to set my audio levels, too.

Answer: Okay. My name is Curtis Baskin, It's C-U-R-T-I-S, B-A-S-K-I-N.

Question: Do you go by Curtis or Curt or --

Answer: Both.

Question: Both. Just don't call me late for dinner.

Answer: Amen. (laughs)

Question: Now, which branch of the service did you end up in?

Answer: Army.

Question: By choice?

Answer: Ah, yes, well, no, not really. I was drafted in -- in '43 from college. And went through basic training in chemical warfare because I was studying chemical engineering at the time. And took my basic there and then they put me into -- what they called a cadre school, which is sort of a leadership training course. And I was assigned to a -- a training company, to train recruits. (laughs)

Question: Where were you -- where were you going to school?

Answer: I was at LeHigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvani

Answer:

Question: Oh, really. Wow. Huh, that's two Pennsylvanians, is that right?

Answer: Yeah --

Question: Two Pennsylvanians we had.

Answer: Oh, is that right? (laughs)

Question: Yeah, two -- this Juls, I can't think of his last name now, but he's from a mining town in Pennsylvani

Answer:

Answer: Well, that's where I grew up, too.

Question: Oh, is that right?

Answer: Little town called Freeland, actually. (laughs)

Question: So were you -- so you were a little bit older than a lot of the kids cause you were in college at the time, right?

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Yeah. In fact I was in college and I had deferments because I was studying engineering. And then I got the notice to report for induction physical, interview, and as I was getting on the bus in my home town, the head of the draft board -- say, Curt, what the hell are you doing here? Well, I said, you didn't extend my deferment. He said did you apply? I said yes. And he said, well it never came before the Board. Would you like to appeal? And I said no, I don't think they'll take me. Cause I had rheumatic fever as a kid, and I had a slight heart murmur at the time. And they wouldn't take me in ROTC in college because of it so I didn't think I'd be drafted. Well, that afternoon, I do. (laughs)

Question: Life changes as you know it. Wow.
So I ended up in Camp Sibert Alabama in chemical warfare.

Question: Now was chemical warfare pretty new for World War II? I mean, were we really developing a lot of technology or --

Answer: No, it was a carry-over actually from World War I, you know, with the mustard gas and that type thing. They had mustard gas and phosgene and oh, there were a couple others. I forget what they were now, but our job was to train to handle them and to disburse them, you know, by shells or fog machines or whatever.

Question: So what -- what -- so how did they train you? I mean, what types of things --

Answer: Well, mostly it was, you know, the basic Army training. Military, firing a rifle and marching and drilling and (laughs). And then studying and stuff. But then we also loaded and fired the 4.2 chemical mortar, which was a -- one of the means of disbursing, and we also did a lot of work in transferring the toxic materials from one tank to another or, you know, in the loading procedure, etceter

Answer: And the -- the -- and also in decontamination routines. Or, you know, how to use the proper clothing and gas masks and decontamination of vehicles and personnel. That's basic our training.

Question: So did they -- I assume you didn't train with live stuff or did you or what did they use for --

Answer: Well, they -- they told us it was live, so I don't know. (laughs) I can't say for sure. You know, but they did train us, you know, like using tear gas, for the proper use of the gas mask and things, so that part was -- was actual.

Question: It's interesting, 'cause when you think of World War II, at least the first thing that jumps into my mind wasn't chemical warfare. I would think of Viet Nam and some of Korea for that. But -- so in World War II, we were facing some pretty good chemical warfare, also.

Answer: Yeah, we were prepared for it, but I -- as far as I can recall, I don't think it was ever used, at least not to any degree that became public, anyway. But we were prepared. (laughs)

Question: So how did you like boot camp?

Answer: I didn't mind it at all. (laughs) I got along pretty well, and the only thing is, I was inducted in August, early September, and sent to Camp Sibert -- oh, boy, going south for

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

the winter from Pennsylvania, and I froze my butt off. (laughs) We were living in just tar paper shacks, and two pot-belly stoves, one on each end of the building.

Question: Did you --

Answer: One incidence I remember. One of the platoons was -- they were going to really ace the morning inspection so they poured water all over their floor to mop up, and it turned to ice. (laughs)

Question: (laughs) It probably looked real nice. Nice sheen on that. Yeah, we waxed it. Everybody -- that's it -- everybody had these little things that they did as they went along, and funny little stories that happened to them. Huh. So it was -- I mean -- pretty -- pretty crude living you had at that?

Answer: Oh, yeah, it was -- well, they had a -- just everything was a tar paper shack in the whole -- whole area at least where I was involved. And we did, you know, our field training up at, oh, what was that? I can't remember. It was up in Virginia from Alabam

Answer: That -- where we did our actual field training, after basic training. (laughs)

Question: Is there a certain school that people go to know -- to learn protocol? I mean, as you join the Service, there's all this different protocol you've got to follow. Who you salute, and who you don't salute, what, you know --

Answer: That's all part of the basic training. (laughs)

Question: Do they actually have a class in it or -- or is it learned by --

Answer: No, they actually have classes that, you know, tell you. You salute an officer and salute a car with -- with a star on it, all that kind of stuff, yeah.

Question: Seems like you had a lot to learn. Because I mean, you're not only learning what you -- you have to learn, but you're also wanting to live, like I said, the protocol and all that.

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, as an enlisted man, about all you got is yes sir or no sir and (gestures).

Question: Oh, wow.

Question: Now you -- you kind of had an interesting -- a little different experience than a lot of people, cause you ended up, where -- South Pacific eventually.

Answer: Well, in the Philippines, yeah. In grave registration. See, after basic, as I say, I went to cadre school and I was training and I went into a supply room, helping the supply sergeant in this training company, and the supply sergeant was shipped out and I ended up as supply sergeant, still as a buck private. But from there I was -- put in for -- to go to an advanced supply and administration school up at Fort Lee, Virgini

Answer: It's an NCO school. And while I was there, they had openings for an OCS class. Officer candidate class. And I was selected for that, and that's where I got into the quartermaster, from chemical warfare. (laughs)

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Question: You took a very windy road there.

Answer: So from there, you know, I completed OCS and got my commission and was assigned to a -- oh, I forget what they call it. A retraining battalion, as the motors officer. And then from there they were forming a new -- two new companies. The graves registration companies. And I was selected as one of the officers in the 4587th Graves Registration Company. And we did our -- you know, our -- unit training there in Fort Lee and ultimately ended up going to the -- to the Philippines as graves registration.

Question: So how did they -- how did they train -- I mean, what training was it they were giving you --

Answer: Well, actually, proper technique in finger printing, making of tooth charts, taking bone measurements, skull measurements, all that type of thing. And then also the layout for temporary cemeteries and just in laying out roads and setting things up for -- for mostly as a temporary burial, but sometimes and in some areas it ended up as permanent.

Question: Boy, that's -- you know, that's one aspect of the war you don't even think about, was the fact that -- you know, we know tragedy, we know that soldiers were lost and you forget. I mean I know, I interviewed a Seabee from Iwo and he was -- he had pictures of the -- the graves or cemeteries that they put in. But you don't -- I mean, they were there, you didn't think about anybody having to do it or track these people or anything like that, and so.

Answer: We actually set up little models, cemeteries, as part of our training. You know, without the bodies, but you know, laying it out and in setting up the crosses and keeping them straight and even, and then also the proper recording of all the information that you could from the dog tags or whatever.

Question: So when -- when you went over, the bodies hadn't been buried at this time?

Answer: Not when we took over, no. But you know, at the cemetery was there, already there when we got there. But another company had started the -- the cemetery and our company took over the cemetery and did a lot of the beautification, because the other company was just basically, I think, throwing them in the ground and marking them and that's about it.

Question: So was that a -- an effort that happens all during the war? I mean, while active battle's going on, there's this --

Answer: Well, yeah, that's the -- the primary purpose of the Graves Registration Company was they -- they normally have people stationed at the battalion aid stations or you know, as the wounded were brought back. And then if they didn't make it, they were -- the Graves Registration took over and hauled them back to a -- well, normally a temporary cemetery of some kind, there in the rear areas where they would be properly identified and buried.

Question: So there wasn't a big lapse in time -- if I had been killed in action or wounded and came back and ended up being put in a temporary one, it was a fairly timely process then?

Answer: Yes. You know, they didn't want the bodies laying around and decaying or anything like that, so it was that way.

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Wow. So when --

Answer: And actually our unit -- when we went overseas, we were originally scheduled for the fifth wave of invasion of Japan. (laughs) Which is sort of scary.

Question: Yeah, because they had -- they already had all of the medals ready 'cause they knew there was going to be this huge loss. Purple Hearts were already all cast and --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And you know, it's -- wow.

Answer: Yeah. But fortunately the -- the peace with Japan was declared while our company was on the West Coast getting ready to ship out. (laughs)

Question: So where --

Answer: And I was assigned as the advance representative for the -- for the company. And I was -- went out to San Francisco a couple weeks before the unit was due out to make sure that all of our equipment got there and everything that we had ordered was on hand to go with us when we boarded ship.

Question: So what types of equipment did you take with you?

Answer: Oh, just basically all of our company supplies and transits and things like that for laying out areas and compasses for -- and then just the basic transportation equipment.

Question: So where did you -- so you shipped out of San Francisco?

Answer: Right. Hm-hmm.

Question: And then you landed --

Answer: In Manil

Answer:

Question: In Manil

Answer:

Answer: In the Philippines, yeah. After about a 40 -- 40-some day ride in a boat.

Question: Now that part doesn't sound fun. And it's 40 days of water, isn't it, I mean, pretty much most of the time.

Answer: Well, it was strange. We -- we no sooner left San Francisco and something broke down on the ship. So they bounced around out there just off shore for, oh, I don't know. Seems like it was a day or two while they worked on the ship. And they said everything was okay so they -- they headed out. So we got out there near Pearl Harbor and had to be towed into Pearl Harbor. So we lived on the ship, but we did -- were able to get off during the daytime once in awhile at Pearl Harbor.

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Cause you're kind of at the tail end of the war and were scraping the barrel for equipment and -- duct taping it together, you had baling wire and put together --

Answer: Yeah. But actually, then from -- from Pearl Harbor, we went from Pearl Harbor to Manila and unloaded and set up at this -- at the cemetery that -- the Armed Forces Cemetery in Manil

Answer:

Question: How many -- what type of numbers are we looking at? People -- plots -- they had in Manila where you were at? Ballpark.

Answer: Oh, probably five, 6000. By the time I left. And then they expanded it. Doubled the size of it just right after I left, from what I've heard.

Question: Wow.

Answer: I have some -- I brought a couple slides with me that show -- shows the cemetery and the layout.

Question: Well, good, he'll be putting those on tape. So when you got there, was this a -- there's some that -- so the cemetery's started, right?

Answer: Yeah, another company that had been there for awhile had started the cemetery, and actually I guess the Memorial Division wasn't completely happy with their performance. So they moved our company in with the instructions to get it cleaned up and -- get things in order.

Question: So you had some soldiers that had already been buried and you had soldiers yet that needed to be identified and --

Answer: Well, when we got there, there was no backlog, so to speak. Everything had been -- but part of our company's responsibility was to remove all of the bodies off Corregidor into the cemetery. And then also to have teams out along the death march, interrogating the -- the natives and the people, along the route of the death march, trying to find where any bodies had been buried. And it was -- you know, they were -- the Filipinos were under penalty of death if they even hardly looked at an American. But it's amazing, some of the stories that we did get from people along the way. They would -- you know, they couldn't read or write, but they'd remember guys names, his family's name, where they lived and that type of thing. And where they had buried them or where they had seen them buried.

Question: So, wow, boy, that's -- that had to be a -- a pretty hard job. 'Cause you see now, I've interviewed some people that were actually in the Bataan Death March. One guy that played pinochle -- on the death march. He went out and played pinochle. And I'm thinking, wait a minute, this isn't what I've heard in the history books.

Answer: Well, actually, for a healthy individual, the death march was really an easy march for anybody that was healthy. But the thing is they were -- just about all of them were half starved to death and suffering with malaria and dysentery and all that type of stuff. So that is the reason there were so many losses along the death march. The march itself, you know, for a healthy individual is bag of -- easy.

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Question: So -- so you actually were out in the area where the march was?

Answer: Yes. Well, not me personally, but men -- men from the company, and we had native interpreters that we had hired to, you know, that spoke the language and knew the country to go out with us. And then we'd also get inquiries from -- oh, from the Air Force or -- well, the Army Air Force at that time that a plane had thought to have crashed on Mount Uchiwatchi or whatever, and we'd have to send teams out to try and see if there are any bodies or anything available, if we can find the site and like that.

Question: So you would, if you found like a grave, you would exhume the body --

Answer: Yeah. Bring them back to the central cemetery in Manil

Answer:

Question: And then go through an identification process --

Answer: Yes, if they weren't identified, you now, by dog tags or something like that. That was the main purpose of the dog tags was for identification of the -- of the dead or the wounded, when they couldn't tell you who they were.

Question: Did -- I mean, were the dog tags usually left with the people or --

Answer: Most of the time, yes.

Question: So that made it a lot easier. Did you also have to then still do dental work, or you just went by the dog tags if the dog tags were there and that was --

Answer: If the dog tags were there, that was normally considered enough. But if there was any doubt, then we did dental charts and skull measurements and bone measurements, et ceter

Answer: And one particular incident was that we had an inquiry -- I think it was the Secretary of the Navy -- Patterson or something. I think it was -- at that time. And he was looking for the whereabouts of a nephew by the name of Lieutenant Handy. And we checked our records and we found four Lieutenant Handys, same serial number, same unit and the whole works. (laughs) So we disinterred all four bodies and there again, took very detailed tooth charts and bone measurements, skull measurements and pictures, and you know, et ceter

Answer: And sent them all back to Washington. And just before I left the Philippines, we got a notification that one of them was Lieutenant Handy. And the other three were identified as enlisted men in his platoon that he had given parts of his identification to -- to hopefully get better treatment as officers than enlisted men when they were taken prisoners.

Question: Oh, wow. So then -- oh, okay. Wow.

Answer: So they were all actually identified as Lieutenant Handy from parts of his identification.

Question: Gosh, what a -- I mean, what a gesture to do. I mean, to help this -- his soldiers get this -- a little extra protection, maybe, out there.

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Boy, so it's a pretty intricate process you had to go through. I mean, it's a -- it's a real little --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: -- sleuthing that you had to go through a lot of times to --

Answer: Yeah.

And we had two US civilian personnel that had been in the Philippines before the war. And actually had been interred at Santa Tomas-- the Santa Tomas Prison Camp around Manil

Answer: And they had both spent most of the time during the war in Santa Tomas. But they had worked for the military prior to the war. And in fact they had both worked for the Memorial Service, at that time it was -- what was it -- Fort McDonald I think was the name of it. And they had a small cemetery there also. And I understand now that this big cemetery that we built is now called Fort McDonald Cemetery. But it was interesting. These -- well, in fact the one old guy, he must have been, well, in his late 60's or early 70's, that we had, well to back up a little bit. When we were there -- we had -- there were a bunch of Japanese POWs that were in a POW camp not far from the cemetery. And we used them for labor around the cemetery. And they -- they had an interpreter along with them that spoke English. And this old guy saw this interpreter one day and he asked for permission to speak to him. And he found out that he thought he'd recognized him. And this interpreter had been a barber in Manila before the war and used to give this guy his shave and his haircut. (laughs) So it's --

Question: Small world. Wow.

Question: So what was the -- what was the cemetery like that you set up over there?

Answer: Well, it was basically a -- relatively flat area and we just laid it out, you know, with a road down through the center and set up sections for easier identification, and you know, where things were. And lined up, you know, built and lined up all the wooden crosses which you'll see in my slide that I have. And just kept things beautiful, and of course kept all the records of who was buried where. And there -- there was one area that was unknowns. It wasn't a big area, but it was -- there was a bunch of unknowns there that had no identification on them whatsoever.

Question: So the -- the soldiers that were buried there -- are they generally left there, or were soldiers brought Stateside eventually or --

Answer: I'm not sure. It was my understanding that if the families requested it, they were disinterred and shipped back to -- to the mainland, to the US. And there again, well, we were there, any current dead were usually -- we tried to -- if they were going to be shipped, we tried to embalm them and ship them home. Others were -- were just buried right there.

Question: 'Cause I said, it's a part of war you don't -- you don't --

Answer: You don't think about.

Question: 'Cause, that's it. Identifying and keeping track of them, and then making sure it's the real person--

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Yeah.

Question: -- that is actually in the grave.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Wow. Was that -- was that a pretty hard job to do? I mean, because you knew that these were all young soldiers, or did it become --

Answer: Well, it's -- it's something you really never get used to. But it's, I guess just like a funeral director here. I mean, it's -- it's a job to be done. And most of the guys handle it pretty well, or seemed to anyway. And it wasn't a personal deal. If you ended up with somebody from your home town that you knew, why, I guess it become pretty personal but --

Question: Did you run into any of that -- anybody you served with --

Answer: No, no.

Question: So there's divisions that -- this is their job. When we have a war, there's a division that --

Answer: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, the Graves Registration Companies are strictly a wartime unit. I mean, they're -- they don't exist during peace time.

Question: Thank goodness.

Answer: Yeah. And now, I don't know what the situation is like in Bosnia and those areas right now, where they're -- there are casualties. They must have some -- maybe the medical personnel are handling that aspect of it.

Question: See, that's why I was surprised when I saw the -- the cemetery at Iwo Jima, because I didn't even think -- didn't even think about that. Because you always see -- nowadays, you see the casket coming and the flag's draped and the family meets them at -- at -- usually Andrews Air Force Base.

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: You know, that's one person, but --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: -- but thinking of, you know, tens of thousands of people over in South Pacific, in Europe and. So you ended up just kind of happenstance in that -- from chemical training over into -- huh. So how long did you spend over there?

Answer: Just a little over a year, actually. I got there in September and I was shipped back home in October. So just a little over a year.

Question: And what did you do when you after your time over there. Did you stay in the Service or did you --

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: No, I got out of the Service and signed up for the Reserve, and I went back to college. Ultimately got my degree in chemical engineering.

Question: Didn't become a mortician?

Answer: No. (laughs) Almost. Because I had a relative that was in the business and wanted me to come in with him.

Question: You had all this knowledge now and all this experience.

Answer: But then I was recalled for Korea also.

Question: Oh, you did the dual thing. Wow.

Question: Did you -- when you were over there, did you, in that year, have time to -- to be able to see the area at all or were you pretty much --

Answer: Oh, I saw quite a bit of Luzon, which is the main island, Manil

Answer: And oh, went up into what they call the summer capital of the Manila, Baguio, which was military had taken over as rest and recreation area

Answer: And they had a nice golf course and a nice club house. Was able to get up there for a couple days. (laughs) But, and then Clark Air Force Base. We normally had runs to Clark Air Force Base to pick up dead from there, too, bring them back to the cemetery.

Question: So was it just a devastated area or --

Answer: Well at that time it was very devastated. There's -- there wasn't very many buildings left in downtown Manila that were whole.

Question: Wow. Are you glad you came in on the tail end of it rather than the early stages?

Answer: Oh, yes.

Question: Give you -- did you get a reality of war, I mean seeing buildings and things like that, or was it still, because you weren't there when it happened --

Answer: Well, it gives you a little bit of insight as to the damage and the devastation of war, but not having actually experienced it, it's not the same. So, yeah, in that respect I didn't have any of the -- but one incident, though. We had a platoon that was removing all the American dead from Corregidor, bringing them back to Manil

Answer: And one afternoon, they were coming back from a work party where they had been disinterring the bodies and preparing them to ship back to Manil

Answer: And here comes a whole group of Japanese walking down the trail towards them. And (laughs) what's going on? Because the Infantry had declared the island of Corregidor clear of all Japanese. And actually it was about 30 or 40 Japanese that actually surrendered to our platoon. They weren't carrying weapons or anything, they just surrendered. And our guys were armed with 45's, but I doubt if there was five rounds of ammunition in the whole bunch.

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Armed or not, they were still Japanese in uniform coming at you, you know so --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: I think that's shorts changing time.

Answer: But anyway, then the -- they took them back in and turned them over to the Infantry, and I guess the next day or two the Infantry and couple of our guys went back -- was taken back up into the hills by the Japanese where they had been hiding out. And they had supplies and equipment and everything. They said they had it all laid out like a full field inspection. Just perfect.

Question: That's the amazing thing.

Answer: But they had seen, you know -- read the pamphlets and everything that had been dropped, and didn't hear any action, I guess decided it was all over, might as well surrender. But they had, you know, rifles, ammunition, the whole works.

Question: So, that's interesting, 'cause the war is over and they surrendered. So are they prisoners at that time? Or are they -- just set free at that time?

Answer: Well, as far as I know, they were still prisoners. Considered Japanese prisoners of war.

Question: That's -- you always hear these stories about the islands and the tunnels and everything like that. And people that, you know, ten years later came out of a tunnel still thinking the war was on. Huh. Boy, that's a -- that would be a little -- little eye opener, coming at you. Wow.

Question: So where were you when you heard the bomb had been dropped? Were you just getting ready to leave or --2

Answer: I was actually up at Camp Stoneman in Pittsburgh, Californi

Answer: Well, no, not when the bomb had dropped, but when Japan declared peace with the US. I was at Camp Stoneman and making final arrangements for the arrival of our company from --. And it was interesting, the camp commander restricted everybody on the base. He said nobody leaves the base. And we had -- we were on a bus from The Presidio with a civilian driver, fortunately. So we had to -- all go up and spoke to the camp commander to be -- get permission to go back on the bus to San Francisco. And he was -- he was very reluctant. He said, boy, don't you get off that bus until you get to The Presidio.

Question: Was he afraid you were going to go out and celebrate or --

Answer: I guess so.

Question: AWOL or what, you know? Huh.

Answer: But anyway, but I'll tell you that -- that San Francisco, that first night when they announced the peace with Japan, was -- everybody was happy and drinks were free and every woman on the street gave you a big hug, if you were in uniform, all that kind of stuff. But the second night, it really got nasty. Because everybody, I think, was hanging with a hangover

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

and (laughs). Yeah, we had -- we were out at The Presidio, of course, that next day, doing business. And we came back into the hotel and we were staying at the St. Francis Hotel. Man, it -- it -- we could tell, it was getting nasty. So we just high-tailed it to the hotel and stayed there.

Question: So that quick. I mean one night of celebration and --

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: Huh.

Answer: Yeah, the next night they were, you know, they were busting store windows and turning cars over and, you know -- real vandalism type things.

Question: So I guess some things never change.

Answer: No.

Question: So you must have been -- 'cause, like you said, you were going where -- you were heading over to Japan.

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: So that must have been a relief -- or did you realize what you were really headed into before the --

Answer: Well, we didn't know because the orders were sealed, and we just had a copy of them, not to be opened, you know. (laughs) Till we were on board the ship, actually. But the orders were for the fifth wave into Japan for the invasion of Japan. So it was pretty well organized by that time.

Question: Wow. So did -- did the attitude in the -- in the military change real quick? I mean, now we've signed the treaty and -- did -- was it kind of like at ease, or just -- you moved ahead with business.

Answer: Well, for us it was just moving ahead with business. (laughs) Yeah, you know, I don't know what the, you know, the actual combat troops were feeling, but I'm sure they felt relief that -- that it was going to be over.

Question: So the ship that you were going on, going over, was that pretty much all new people or were there some war-experienced soldiers in there?

Answer: No, I think it was pretty much new people. There may have been some transfers from the European theatre but you know, I -- you sort of stuck with your own company group so --

Question: Was a green group of kids going over and -- that's -- wow. So are you -- are you glad of your Service? I mean are you glad that that's where you ended up and --

Answer: I have no regrets about being in the Service. I think it was a good experience and I got to go a lot of places I wouldn't have been able to go. You know, I stayed in the Reserve, and I ended up ultimately with about 30 -- about 33 years in Service.

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Wow. So when you came back and went to college, GI Bill?

Answer: Yes.

Question: So what did that mean to you? Well, you were already in college so -- so -- you would have probably gone on with college anyway, whether --

Answer: Well, yeah, I had -- I had a full tuition scholarship to LeHigh to start with.

Question: Oh, wow.

Answer: Athletic or educational or --

Answer: Educational. I went to a little private school in Freeland, Pennsylvania called Mining Mechanical Institute. And one of the main reasons I went there was to try to get a scholarship. Because they gave out at least four scholarships every year to the individuals with the highest four-year average. And it was privately-endowed by the Cox family, one of the big coal mining family there, and the school originally started 1878, I think it was. Training for mine foreman, because that was sort of a night school for mine foremen.

Question: Huh.

Answer: And then it became a -- a day school for the children of mine employees. And ultimately it -- and that's -- and they had, as I say, it was heavily endowed. My tuition was four bucks a month, which I worked for at the school, to, you know, cleaning the hallways and the blackboards and the labs and all that kind of stuff.

Question: So it was -- it was a -- a full mining town that you grew up in?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Now the Depression has ended and did you sense any of that? I mean, come in kind of tail end with war starting, it's picked up some, but do you remember facing the Depression in that era, or --

Answer: As a kid I don't remember too much about it. My dad, fortunately was -- was working most of the time. He was off for a lot of the time, but he did a lot of home remodeling, as it -- he was a machinist, but he did some home remodeling during that period of time to supplement.

Question: So he was a machinist, did a lot of work for the mine company.

Answer: Yes. We have Valley Coal Company in Drifton, Pennsylvania

Answer:

Question: I don't know if you've seen -- was it October's Sun, about the kid that went on to NASA, was from a mining town somewhere. But part of it is -- his dad was a miner, has no interest in rockets, and he meets the machinist who turns him and keeps telling him stuff while his dad catches the guy, happens to be a black guy, and fires him and so, you know. But it's a great story if you ever - book or movie.

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Question: So did a lot of the kids that you had gone to high school with and stuff, well is it a big town where you grew up, or small?

Answer: No.

Question: Pretty small town.

Answer: Pretty small town. I think the total population was around 7000 which is relatively small.

Question: So did a lot of the kids that knew and you grew up with end up going off to war or --

Answer: Oh, yeah, just almost all of them, yeah. And I lost a few, but most of the guys came home, from the hometown, which is pretty lucky.

Question: Was it a pretty patriotic city?

Answer: I think so, yeah. It was actually quite a diverse population as far as European nationalities. A lot of Italian and Yugoslavs and Hungarians and Polish. There was very few, if any blacks. I only remember one black family that came to our church but they weren't -- didn't live in town. They lived out someplace. But, I guess that was the only blacks I ever met until I got in the Service. Or I guess away to college, actually.

Question: And you were so far away from the Coast that probably the idea of Pearl Harbor -- the Japanese attacking was, you know.

Answer: Yeah, I was --

Question: -- worlds away.

Answer: I can remember I was sitting at my desk studying on a Sunday afternoon when I heard on the radio.

Question: Did you realize it was a part of history at the time, or just like -- things happen to us today and --

Answer: Just, like things happen to us today. I mean it was -- they bombed Pearl Harbor. Well, we knew we were going to go to war, that's for sure. But --

Question: Huh.

Answer: And I guess at the time, you know a lot of people -- young men, went down and signed up immediately for the Service. But the draft, I guess, was already in effect because --

Question: Yeah, it's amazing, the ones that you hear. That that was -- I mean, it was like the next day they went down. Especially as you got more out to the Coast because it was here was a threat, kind of.

Answer: The San Francisco area, I guess, particularly. Yeah, they -- well, all along the Coast, Seattle, all the way down, yeah.

Question: I talked to some lady in Indiana and she said, you know --

Curtis Baskin

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Yeah --

Question: You know, that was -- I mean, even just thinking of Washington, was a world away at that time so --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Huh. Well, thank you very much.