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Martin Griffin

Rosie the Riveter
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
Shanna Farrell
in 2015

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Interview 1: February 17, 2015

Farrell: This is Shanna Farrell with Martin Griffin on Tuesday, February 17, 2015, and this is tape number one. Marty, can you tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:31

Griffin: Well, I was born in Ogden, Utah, on July 23, 1920. My parents were in business. My dad was in business in Ogden. They were a fairly prosperous family and they had a cabin up the Ogden River, about twelve miles from their home in Ogden. My mother loved the out of doors. So I was born up there in that cabin. The doctor had a heck of a time getting there on time. And I asked my mother afterwards why I was born in the cabin. She said, "To be closer to nature." It was really wild up there. There were bald eagles and a lot of fish in the river. My dad was a great fisherman. The first three years of my life were sort of dominated by the river running by and the cry of birds, and lots of different wildlife, and the smell of sage and trout and willow sort of dominated my early years.

Then the Great Depression started. My dad's business, which was extensive—they were in the butter business and food supply business. They were right where the railroad crossings were, the Union Pacific, so they shipped a lot of stuff to logging camps and mining camps and railroad camps all over the West. They had to give all that up because of the Depression. There was no bank insurance for depositors, so the bank where my dad banked went bankrupt. Mr. Bigelow was the president of that bank and I've heard his name often from my parents. My parents decided to move out of Ogden because it was just too humiliating for them to be bankrupt in Ogden. They went by train, to Portland, my parents and my brother and I. I was just about four years old and my brother was only two.

We lived in Portland for a while. That was wonderful, because my dad loved to fish. Within just a few miles of where we lived in Portland, you'd go across the Columbia River and you were in the state of Washington and here were these magnificent rivers that had not been dammed. So the fishing was fantastic. One of my first visions is crawling to the edge of a bluff, at a place where we camped up at Battle Ground Lake in Washington, and looking down. There I saw a pool full of twenty-inch steelhead trout. They were trying to get up over a falls and they would slither and gradually make it. Some of them would fall back and try again. That sight inspired my whole life.

Anyway, my dad couldn't find a decent job in Portland so we moved to Los Angeles, where my grandparents were now living. At that time, Los Angeles was absolutely gorgeous. It was a Mediterranean climate, of course, but there was a few of these snow-clad mountains. It had public transportation, it had streetcars, and it was a great place to live. My uncle, who also moved with us, was an engineer for the Army Corps of Engineers, and he helped design the

Los Angeles River, which was concreted from one end to the other. I remember the big architectural drawings that he'd pin to the wall where he lived, of the Los Angeles River. That vision has stuck in my mind. I've always been interested in water development in California, since then.

01-00:06:11

Then we moved to Oakland, where my mother had located a relative, a Mrs. Fenton, Elvira Fenton. Her family had bought a beautiful tract of land in California, right where the Mountain View Cemetery is now. They had a dairy there and started Fentons Creamery, which has become world famous. So we lived with her for a while, while my dad was looking for a job. She was an interesting woman. She was in her nineties then. She would sit every evening, before dinner, in front of her fire, and rock back and forth in her chair with her feet sitting on her big Airedale dog. While we were there, the dog died and she had it stuffed so that she could continue to rest her feet on it. That vision has persisted in my mind. Anyway, her son-in-law, Sam Gardiner, became an attorney in Marin County. Our paths crossed repeatedly after that in a very dynamic, dramatic way. I'll tell you about that later.

Farrell:

So I want to back up and ask you a couple follow-up questions about your childhood. Can you tell me a little bit about what your father's business was in Utah, before the bank failure led to the closure?

01-00:08:40

Griffin:

Well, he and my grandfather Seth and his brother Herbert had a business in partnership with a man named Blackman. They shipped dairy products and food and seeds and anything out to mining camps and logging camps and railroad camps. It was a thriving business and my grandfather was very prominent. They were not Mormon, but they had relatives that were Mormon. Apparently, there was some kind of a theft in the business and one of the partners was sent to Leavenworth Prison, which I think is in Kansas—but he died the day before he got there. So I've been interested in following down that history. Anyway, they had a big business. My dad spent a lot of time fly fishing on the Ogden River. Made his own flies and made his own fishing pole. So both my brother and I are expert—I had to say it that way—in fly fishing. We fly fished all our lives. It's a great sport, thrilling and beautiful. The last few years of our fishing, we've released the fish. My brother Bob had a really interesting career. He and I both went to Oakland Technical High School, which was a miraculous high school that taught both industrial trades and prepared people for college. I loved that high school. It had all kinds of special programs for people. I loved to sing, so I was in the Technical High School glee club. Also I played the violin; my mother made me take violin lessons. I played in the orchestra. Let's see, where was I?

Farrell:

The outdoors was a big part of your life and then when you had moved to Oregon, you said that it inspired your whole life. Can you tell me a little bit more about how it inspired the rest of your life?

01-00:11:56

Griffin:

Yeah. In Oakland, where we finally settled and my dad found a good job, I joined the Boy Scouts. That was one of the best things I ever did in my life, was be a Boy Scout. I worked my way up to an Eagle Scout. Our camp was only a few blocks from where we lived on Piedmont Avenue, to Fruitvale. You go up Fruitvale and you get into the foothills. The foothills, in those days in Oakland, were wild. Lots of animals and beautiful forests and huge redwood trees that you could see. When boats came in the Golden Gate, you could still see the redwoods of the East Bay, giant redwoods. We had an incredible naturalist named Bugs Cain, Brighten C. Cain. He was really my mentor, my main inspiration in life, besides my parents. He was a graduate of Stanford University, in entomology, and just knew an awful lot about nature. I became his assistant at the little bug house that they operated up at the Oakland Boy Scout camp. So I had a lot of responsibility from an early age. Also becoming an Eagle Scout, you have to pass, I think, something like twenty or twenty-four different merit badges in anything that you choose. Those were hard work. So I learned a lot. But the interesting thing was that the war was definitely coming. Even as a small boy in Oakland, I realized that there was a war going on and building up in Europe. So the Oakland Boy Scouts were sort of semi-military, in a way. We lined up, we marched, we had leaders and discipline. It was wonderful training. It had no military aspects or weapons or anything like that; it was all about nature.

Unfortunately, Bugs Cain—oh, it's interesting. He liked to have two or three rattlesnakes in his bug house at all times, and giant tarantulas, which are harmless. Boy Scouts would stand there and he'd let his tarantula crawl across your fingers. Scared me to death. We never picked up a rattlesnake, but I went with him once to a talk that he gave at a Rotary Club, where he took two rattlesnakes. While he lifted one out very carefully, the other one bit him on the hand. He was very calm. He put them back and he told the group that he'd been bitten and that he needed to go to the hospital to get an injection of antivenom. So somebody volunteered to take him, and he packed up his rattlesnakes and left. He survived.

We had two wonderful Boy Scout camps that were both semi-military style. That was because Lord Baden Powell of England, after World War I, decided that the young men of England needed more training and outdoor experience after the slaughters took place in Belgium. In those land battles, there was over a million men involved and hundreds of thousands of men killed. He just thought that the boys of England needed more rugged outdoor experiences and so he started the Boy Scouts. And it spread all over the world and became really a big factor in educating young boys. We had two Boy Scout camps, one in Oakland and one in the Sierras. I was the hike master the last two years before the war started. We hiked all over the Sierras. We organized trips. I'd already, when I was in high school, hiked the whole length of the new John Muir Trail with Wilbur Twining, a classmate⁶ of mine who still lives up in the Sierras. He's ninety-three. That was an incredible experience.

01-00:18:12

My mother sort of pushed me into many different activities. She was probably the main influence on my life. She'd come from humble beginnings. Had been born in Kearney, Nebraska. A grandfather on her side, George McClellan Stoddard—I have these connections from the Civil War. He was born during the Civil War, in 1862. Yeah, 1862. Named after Lincoln's first general, General George McClellan. So my grandpa was named George McClellan Stoddard. He lived with that name all of his life. But the first few years of his life, it was a terrible name to have because McClellan refused to fight at the start of the Civil War and Lincoln had to borrow his army. That's what he said, "George, may I borrow your army? You're not doing a very good job." So he fired McClellan and that name became sort of an enigma for the next few years.

Farrell:

Can you tell me about some of the jobs that your father had between the time of Ogden and settling in Oakland? And did your mother work at all?

01-00:20:16

Griffin:

My dad was essentially a businessman and a salesman. He was a first-class salesman. That's what he did in Utah, in Ogden, before they lost the business, so he looked for sales jobs, sales manager. He finally found a really good job in Oakland and became the sales manager for Tea Garden Supplies, which later became Mary Ellen Jams and Jellies. It was bought by Safeway. So it was jams and jellies and syrup that put me through college. He was a Mason. Very high up in the Masonic Lodge. He always wanted me to get into that, but I didn't like that type of organization. So I never joined, much to his dismay. One of my daughters now is really the head of Eastern Star in Central California, which is a Masonic organization. So that would've made them very happy, to know that one of his family continued his interest in Masonry.

01-00:22:05

Griffin:

My mother was very gregarious, and had made a lot of friends, and was president of the PTA of the grammar school I went to in Oakland, and the high school's. But the main reason, I discovered, was so she could keep an eye on me and keep me motivated. Anyway, I worked hard in high school, mainly because she would inspect my report cards and say, "Well, lookit, Marty, this will never do. You have to do better than this." Anyway, I had a wonderful high school experience. Took all the premed courses I needed, and took music and athletic[s]. I wasn't a very big boy. I remember I was on the track team, doing the high jump, and I flipped wrong and fractured my wrist. The school called my mother and said, "What'll we do with Martin? He's got a fractured wrist." She said, "Well, I'll be right down and take him to the doctor." About six months later, I did exactly the same thing again and they phoned her up. She said, "Well, put him on the streetcar and send him home." She took care of it herself. She'd watched the doctor, how he set my wrist. She did the same thing in Portland. I had tonsillitis repeatedly and so she had my tonsils out and sent me down on a streetcar to have them out, at a doctor downtown. I survived that.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about your schooling? You went to Oakland Tech High School, correct?

01-00:24:34

Griffin: Correct.

Farrell: Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience there? I know that you were the editor of the *Oakland Tech Scribe* and you were also valedictorian.

01-00:24:50

Griffin: Yes. I think that it was the music that really sort of inspired me. I loved playing the violin and the guitar and the piano. My brother and my dad and I had a little orchestra, a little family orchestra, and my mother would sing. We knew all the modern songs. I can even remember my mother dancing with me after I was born and singing *Dardanella*. But in high school I wasn't a great student, but I was a persistent student and got good grades. We had some incredible teachers at Oakland Tech. I had to take Latin. I took three years of Latin, which was the best thing I ever did. It's the best way to learn English. Our Latin teacher was sort of a character. She was a very interesting teacher. She thought she was a Roman woman reincarnated. So she always wore a robe to school every morning, with a laurel wreath around her head. She taught us all about Roman history, as well as the language. So when I got to Cal, I just fitted right in because I'd had such a wonderful high school education. Oakland in those days was very wealthy because of the railroad sitting right there and a lot of industry. It's sort of sad to see how it's gone downhill. But it's one of the most beautiful places, I think, in the Bay Area. Wonderful climate. It's coming back. I think it'll resurrect itself.

Farrell: How diverse was your high school? What was the ethnic makeup of the student body?

01-00:27:37

Griffin: That's a good question. The high school was about 50 percent new-coming families who'd just migrated to the United States within the last few years. I remember one of the girls in my class was named Nellie Romelli. Had a couple of German girls in our class and quite a few blacks and Hispanics. Wonderful president of the high school and vice president, they got everybody into the magnificent auditorium. In those days, the high schools were beautiful. Our high school, Oakland Tech, had Roman columns sixty feet high, and big playgrounds. What was it you asked me?

Farrell: About the diversity in your high school. But yeah, I think you answered that.

01-00:29:08

Griffin: One of our teachers, Miss Budlong, turned out to be a fly fisherman. So I got along really good with her. I didn't do so well in math, but I did well in biology. Oh, I did go down to Stanford. Well, my mother took me down to

Stanford—this would be back in the 1930s—just to visit the retired professor of German, who was a relative of mine. His name was James O. Griffin. He was the first professor of German at Stanford, after it was started by the family. He lived in the first professors' houses built on the campus road there. But my mother was so proud of that connection of having a relative that was a professor at Stanford. I spent a whole day down there with her and visited the different parts of the university, and was really impressed by it. But I love Cal. I spent four years at Cal. I should've only spent three, but my mother insisted that I take education courses and so that added another year to my university training. It was sort of wasted; it was how to teach. Didn't teach you what to teach, it taught you how to teach. When I graduated from high school, I did get the citizenship award and valedictorian award, along with a woman named Elaine Britton. I've lost track of her. I've tried to keep track of everybody I could from that class because I had such an incredible experience in high school and in college.

Farrell: In order to raise money for Cal, you worked at a logging camp for six summers. Can you tell me a little bit about working in the logging camp?

01-00:32:30
Griffin:

Well, two summers. When I went to Cal it was only costing \$25 a semester. But that was a lot of money in those days. I think the minimum wage was 25 cents an hour. So my dad said, "It'd be good if you could get a job in the summer and help pay your entrance fee." So I did and I worked in this logging camp. I was in a fraternity at Cal, the Delta Tau Delta. A couple of my friends there lived up in Sonoma County. They lived on a ranch. I visited them occasionally, and I loved the lifestyle they lived. So Martin Hoffman and his whole family all sort of participated, and we got a job. We rented land from the Southern Pacific Lands Company and we learned how to log giant redwoods and how to cut them. We had to buy a sixteen-foot saw. We learned how to make springboards so you could work your way up the side of a tree. You made a notch in the tree and stuck this board that had a metal tongue on it, into the hole at a slight angle upward, and then you got on it and your weight made it level. Then from there, you could take your axe and ring the tree. You had to first be very careful where the tree fell, because it would shatter if it fell across another tree. So we marked the area where the tree was going to fall very carefully and prepared the place where it was going to fall so that it wouldn't shatter.

We worked up there for two summers, on the Navarro River. Beautiful stream, just loaded with Coho salmon. Since then, it's been dried up, practically, by all the vineyards that have been planted in the vicinity and on the ridges, which interfere with water. So I learned a lot about forestry. And at Cal, I became friends with a Professor Immanuel Fritz, who was professor of forestry at Cal, and a great believer in cutting every redwood in California. He and I were friends, mainly through his daughter, this girlfriend of mine, who

was a friend of Buggs Clark. So I learned a lot about forestry from him, and it stuck with me and influenced my life.

I also learned a lot about—oh, Bugs Cain told me that when I went to Cal—he was our Boy Scout naturalist—he said, “When you go to Cal, you’re going to have an incredible opportunity to learn things that nobody else can have the opportunity to learn. Don’t take any premed courses, if you can avoid it.” He wanted me to go to Stanford medical school. He said, “You get all that when you go to Stanford. Your premed courses will become your medical courses.” So I took some really interesting courses in paleontology. I learned about the dawn redwood, which is a prehistoric form of redwood tree. I took a course from a fellow who had found that this Dawn redwood still existed in a valley in the Yangtze River Basin. He wanted to go over there right after the war ended and visit that valley, but somebody beat him to it. They got all the publicity and fame for discovering this ancient tree, and he didn’t. He also lost out—he knew all about the oil deposits in the Middle East, where they most likely were, and he lectured about it in class. A couple of guys who heard his lecture went over there the day the war ended and made deals with the Saudi princes, and got the concessions for the oil. He lost out on both counts.

01-00:38:53

Oh, the other great experience I had at Cal was with the men who invented the atom bomb. Our class, class of ’42, was the war class. About 200 members, I think, of our class were Japanese who were interned, that we lost. They just disappeared from class. One day there were there; the next day, they weren’t. Let’s see, what was I talking about?

Farrell:

Your experience working with the men who invented the atom bomb at Cal.

01-00:39:40

Griffin:

Well, Cal at that time was probably the most famous public university in the world and had an incredible faculty. I took chemistry from Dr. [Joel] Hildebrand, who was highly noted, and from two or three of the men who were working on the atom bomb down in Los Alamos. We didn’t know what they were up to; there was the deep secrecy. But they were a nervous wreck! I remember him coming, teaching classes. They must’ve been under terrible stress. We took ROTC [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps] classes, where they actually informed us about the war in Europe that was progressing. We learned that the Germans had built about 2- or 3,000 ramps on the coast of France, all aimed at London. These were for shooting unmanned missiles that had magnets and little engines and stuff that guided them. So they were way ahead of us, in that type of technology. So I think there was great fear that they also had the atom bomb. Of course, they practically destroyed London with the Blitz. So that there was a lot of fear, I think, that resulted in the Japanese being taken out of classes and put in remote internment. It was sort of a sad thing.

It didn't happen in Hawaii, which was the most amazing thing. The Japanese were more honored there or something—I don't know what it was—and they didn't get interned. Anyway, on December 7, 1941, I was in my fraternity room at Cal, studying for a test, when it was announced that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Within a few days, I got a letter from the War Department that said to report to a military base on the East Coast, where I would be taught about LSTs [Tank Landing Ships], these landing boats that the front drops down and you dash ashore and get shot. Anyway, I was registered as a premed student at Cal. So I went over to the UC medical school in San Francisco and told them I needed a letter that I was going to be starting medical school in the summer. I went over there; they said, "Well, we're sorry, we don't interview anybody for medical school until April." So they wouldn't give me a letter. So I went down to Stanford and they treated me like a doctor and a gentleman right off the bat. It probably didn't hurt that I had worked up at Yosemite during winters, and knew Dr. Tresider there, who was the president of Stanford University. Anyway, I got accepted.

Another little story there. My grandmother Griffin Callie, who'd been in Ogden and moved to Los Angeles, was a friend of the Curry family that had the concession on Yosemite National Park. I can't think of their names right off. But anyway, I got into Stanford. So my dad said to me, "Well, if you're going to Stanford, you've got to get a job. I can't afford to send you to Stanford." So I went to work in the shipyards. At that time—this was shortly after war was declared; I don't remember the exact dates—but I went over there and they hired me. They said, "Do you want to work day shift or night shift?" I said, "Well, what's the difference in pay?" It was like \$1.25 for day shift an hour, and \$1.50 for night shift an hour. Doesn't sound like much, but in those days it was good money.

So I took the job for night shift. My dad lent me his car so I was able to get over to Richmond. It was hard work. They put me out on a pier, on a huge platform that stuck out from the shorelines of Richmond out into the bay. I couldn't find it when I went back there two or three years ago. I think maybe they covered it over. But at the time of the war, when they were building their first ships, this huge platform was sort of a pre-assembly platform. My job was to take a template and put it down on a huge piece of steel, which had been lowered on this platform and then mark the edge of it with chalk. Then a welder came along and cut it; then they lifted it up, moved it elsewhere, and it became part of the hull of a ship. It was really cold. My God, it was just—you could see the Golden Gate. The wind came right through the Golden Gate and everybody who was working on this platform was frozen. You had to wear a hat down over your ears. They had a place where you could go and get warm, a warming room. But everybody smoked in those days, and I couldn't go in the room, hardly, because you couldn't see across the room. Everybody was smoking. I think it was Chesterfields or Lucky Strike or something like that. They brought in something like 20,000 people, over a period of time, to work in that shipyard. I've been over there and seen the exhibits, and the living

conditions were pretty bad. But the government gradually built a lot of housing.

I've forgotten how long I worked there, but probably two or three months. I've forgotten whether it was before that or after that I worked for about a week for Cutter Laboratories, on an assembly line filling bottles of electrolytes, fluids, for shipment overseas. Anyway, that was hard work at the shipyards. I caught a cough that I couldn't get rid of for years. I think I got bronchitis out there. Didn't get pneumonia, I got bronchitis and gradually got rid of it. But I did have this nagging little cough.

Farrell: Was that from working nights, or the smoking that was there?

01-00:50:48

Griffin:

I think it was a combination of the wind from the Golden Gate and—I don't remember if there were any fumes from the torches that they used to cut the steel. I don't think so. I think later, they built covers and tried to block the wind. But the smoking, I never did smoke. My grandfather Seth was a rabid anti-smoker. My dad tended to have a cigarette or two when he was on his trips, and he'd come home and my mother would sniff his clothes and swat him. So we were really an anti-smoking family. My brother never smoked. But in those days, *everybody* smoked. I remember at the fraternity, where I was at noon, the pretty girls would come by, sort of scantily clad, with a little tray and cigarettes, boxes of cigarettes, and hand them out to the boys. Then the magazines, even the *Cal Monthly* magazine and the other—oh, *The Pelican*, the University of California *Pelican*. I've saved all the copies of it, because it's such an interesting magazine; every issue had gorgeous pictures, in full color, of girls in their beautiful clothes with a cigarette; and pictures of Army officers with their capes on and saluting and a cigarette dangling from their fingers. So they really pushed cigarettes hard during the war.

Farrell: Do you remember if there were any injuries or accidents when you were working at Kaiser in the shipyards?

01-00:53:48

Griffin:

Yeah, there were. But I think they were just—I don't remember any serious injuries. I do remember a lot of sickness. I was really impressed that they offered medical insurance to the employees. First time I'd ever seen anything like that happen in California. So they really treated the employees pretty warmly and looked out for their welfare. It was policed pretty carefully, too. I didn't see any robberies or anything like that. I knew Richmond pretty well because during the time I was at Cal we often went out to the little town of Point Richmond, which had a wonderful restaurant called [Hotel] Mac. It's still there. Gosh, if you're ever there, be sure you go visit Mac. We had fraternity parties out there at Mac. Oh, and we swam in the big pool out there. They had a wonderful natatorium in Richmond. Big pool. It was a saltwater pool, sort of like Fleishhacker's in San Francisco.

Farrell: I have a few more follow-up questions, but I'm going to change the tape.

Begin Audiofile 2

Farrell: This is Shanna Farrell back with Martin Griffin on Tuesday, February 17, 2015. This is tape number two. Marty, when we left off we were talking about your time working the Kaiser Shipyards. Can you tell me a little bit about your training, the training that you received for that job?

02-00:00:26

Griffin: I don't remember too much about the training except that they said, "Well, you're a college graduate now, so we're going to put you in a job where you're going to have to use your brains." So it wasn't much of a job, but my job was marking these templates. So they did train me how to do it and how to be careful of the cranes and the moving vehicles and the acetylene torches. They didn't mention the wind. But no, there was good training. I probably could've advanced to a bigger job if I wasn't planning on leaving. But I enjoyed the work there and meeting people. When we went to visit Rosie the Riveter [World War II Home Front National Historical Park], at some kind of dedication, my gosh, the guy that was right near me had been working on the same pier that I was, so we got to talking about that. That's a wonderful national park and a wonderful service to the Americans. I wish we could get more people to visit it.

Farrell: Yeah. It's what we're working on now.

02-00:02:14

Griffin: Oh, yeah?

Farrell: Did you work with any women? Or do you remember sort of the gender divide at Kaiser, if there was one?

02-00:02:26

Griffin: Well, I was very aware of the racial divide, having gone to a mixed high school in Oakland. Oakland had really come to grips with the racism and there didn't seem to be any tension in Oakland before the war. In fact, I worked as the supervisor of a playground in West Oakland—right now, it is the black area—for a while, in high school. Worked for the Oakland Recreation Department. There was no sign of any tension, no gangs. I think it was because families were still relatively intact. These were all people who worked on the railroads who had pretty good jobs, good incomes—porters, different jobs related to the railroad. The racism, I noticed out at the shipyards. Henry hated it, the racism, and I think they made some orders that there would be no discrimination. But while I was in the army—I was still in medical school in the army—they had that big blowup of an ammunition ship on the American River, in the delta, and a couple hundred blacks were killed.

Farrell: Port Chicago?

02-00:04:51

Griffin:

Port Chicago. That was a terrible thing. Then they threatened to charge them with treason if they wouldn't go back to work and threatened them with hanging. That provoked outrage among the people of Oakland, who were pretty socially conscious at that time.

Farrell:

Do you remember some of the actions that were taken or in what ways it provoked the community of Oakland?

02-00:05:31

Griffin:

The Port Chicago thing? I don't remember. There was a lot written about it. The army was pretty hard-nosed about it. They said, "It's mutiny. It's the same thing as mutiny, if the blacks refused to go back to work." Nobody blamed them. So there was a lot of sympathy for the blacks, and I think the army loosened up.

Farrell:

Can you give me an example of some of the racism that you saw at Kaiser in the shipyards?

02-00:06:28

Griffin:

Of racism? I think in the warming huts, there was a little just—I've sort of forgotten what happened in those warming huts, whether there was any shoving or pushing or anything like that. But the fact that there were women working sort of modified the racial things. It was wonderful seeing women working and working night shift. Berkeley, at that time, was very liberal. Really liberal. So I think that carried over to the entire Bay Area and to the army, too. But I don't think that people realized that this war was coming on. I think the Golden Gate Bridge was completed in a hurry because they knew the war was coming and they had to be able to get to Hamilton Field and all the other little airfields up in Sonoma County, where they trained fighter pilots. I think the Caldecott Tunnel probably got built so that they could get to their huge ammunition storage dumps along the Sacramento River. The Naval Net Depot, which is right around the bend here; it's now the Romberg Center. There was great concern for years before the war actually started, about submarines coming through the Golden Gate. The California Academy of Sciences feared the dolphins couldn't get through the nets that they put across the Golden Gate to keep out enemy submarines. The harbor dolphins, which there used to be hundreds of inside the San Francisco Bay, were completely excluded by these nets. I don't know if you've ever been up to this—I don't know why; it's slipped my mind—where they prepared the nets and the huge blocks of concrete—huge things, as big as a house—to hold them down in the fierce currents that go back and forth through the Golden Gate.

Then during the war, people don't realize that the University of California was a prime target because of the work on the atom bomb. So there were barrage balloons all around the university campus and around the Golden Gate Bridge and other places, that prevented enemy planes from coming in and strafing them or bombing them. A lot of my classmates—I don't know why they got

so lucky, but—they got assigned to this defense zone, which stretched ninety miles from Bodega Bay down to Port Montara and Half Moon Bay. That was all heavily militarized, with machine guns and spotters and cannon. They were really afraid of the Japanese. Because the other thing they didn't say anything about was not only was the Pacific Fleet destroyed at Pearl Harbor, but my cousin was on the USS Houston, which was—. He'd joined the navy before the war started, and he was stationed on this battleship, the Houston, that got trapped, along with about fifteen other big warships that belonged to other nations. It was the international Asiatic Fleet. They got destroyed. Every ship went down when the Japanese trapped them in the Java straits. He was really lucky because his ship was tilting like this. But there were flames all around it, from oil. The Japanese were machine gunning men in the water. The captain of the ship happened to be a friend of ours, Captain Harold Rooks. Anyway, he gave George—as he went by the place where they had the decoders—somebody gave him a decoder and told him to take it to the bottom and drop it. So he did and that saved his life. He went right through the flames and down to the bottom and the sea was warm. He dropped it and then he could look up. He was a good swimmer; we all swam together up at the American River when we were kids. He managed to get away from the flames and come up, and then he drifted back and forth all night long, and survived. Got captured. He was moved from Hiroshima just at the last moment for some reason. Then he came home to San Francisco, and I took care of him when I was a doctor at Letterman Army Hospital.

Farrell: I want to back up a little bit and talk about your time in ROTC. That'll transition, I think, into your time in medical school and as a doctor. I know that you joined in high school and you did ROTC through college. Can you tell me a little bit about your decision to join ROTC and what your experience was like?

02-00:15:05

Griffin: Well, I wanted to join ROTC. We didn't have that opposition to ROTC when I was there. It was sort of a privilege to be in ROTC at Oakland Tech and we had wonderful advisors from the army, who advised us and taught us and trained us. I'd read about the war, World War I, and we'd heard all those stories. It was pretty frightening. Germany was so powerful and the armies were growing immensely fast. So we knew something was really happening in Europe and it was probably going to spread to the United States. We wore uniforms in high school, when we were on parade. We had an expert rifleman. This fellow in that picture down there, he was an expert rifleman. It was sort of a badge we wore with honor. I learned a lot about defense of San Francisco and the Bay Area, from the ROTC, that I would never have known otherwise. We learned about all the fortifications along the coast and around the Presidio and both sides of the bay. It was an honor at Cal, to belong to the ROTC. We had to get out and parade and march, carry our rifles. The rifles were old models {inaudible}. Then we had Naval ROTC and Army ROTC. I think that the ordnance had their own group of trainees at Cal. My friend Ross Reagan

there, who became the superintendent of schools for Acalanes High School, in the East Bay—very smart guy—he rose rapidly when the Army war started, in ordnance. Then I had a friend in Honolulu whose father was a general in ordnance, and I learned a lot about the problems of getting ammunition to the soldiers on time and getting them rifles and the works, and all the problems of supplying soldiers with uniforms and stuff. I really appreciated that training. It was sort of supplemented by the Boy Scout training by Lord Baden Powell, in England, after World War I.

Farrell: So while you were doing the training, you spent two weeks for a couple summers at Fort Ord. Can you tell me a little bit about that experience?

02-00:19:52

Griffin: Yeah. As I recall, we were sent down there by train from Oakland. They still had the trains running to the Monterey Peninsula to Monterey. We were in uniform and it was very well organized. The only problem was that that whole area down there, there's an incredible amount of poison oak. Everybody who wasn't really careful and didn't know what it looked like got terrible poison oak. Then while we were there one summer—it was the summer that Germany invaded Poland—did I tell you this?—they seized all of our weapons at Fort Ord, rifles and machine guns and mortars and small cannons, and sent them all to Murmansk, up in the arctic, for shipment to Russia. Russia was rapidly becoming our most powerful ally. So from then on, we didn't have any equipment; but it was getting pretty close to the time that war was declared.

Farrell: They were training you to be expert marksmen or sharpshooters?

02-00:22:00

Griffin: Well, they wanted everybody in ROTC to be a sharpshooter. So we had rifle training, especially at Fort Ord. They had a huge area set aside for protection and the targets were against big dunes down there in Monterey. So I think I became a sharpshooter. But it ruined my hearing because the guy's rifle was right next to you and we didn't have ear plugs. I strongly believe in a civilian army. I don't think we would've had all the problems that they've had in Iraq, if we had a civilian army.

Farrell: So during this time, your girlfriend's name was Buggs Clark. Can you tell me a little bit about her? You had told me a story before about her brother-in-law.

02-00:23:40

Griffin: Oh, right. Well, at Cal I was very fortunate to meet this girl named Buggs Clark. She had two sisters. Her family were very religious, which is the reason she probably never married me, because her mother didn't like me because I was only a doctor and she didn't believe in medicine. But Buggs had a sister, Margo, who was a beautiful woman. She married a fellow named Forrest. I remember him because he was such a handsome smart fellow, and he was a trained bomber pilot in the Army Air Force. When they declared war against

Germany, his group of ROTC pilots were ordered to go to Normandy, I think it was, or wherever they were fighting right then. Before they left, they gave them all an injection of anti-hepatitis A immunization. It was contaminated. It was made of horse serum, but it was contaminated with the virus of hepatitis B. These viruses were not too well understood. Hepatitis B actually is closely related to the AIDS virus. All three of these men—three or four men—who'd gotten this injection died of an overwhelming hepatitis infection.

It really had a hard effect on me. Of course, this whole Clark family were devastated. Margo, eventually, she just disappeared. I felt so badly about it. But it sort of guided my medical thinking, and I tried to learn as much as I could in medical school about hepatitis. After the war I took a special course in epidemics over in London, when our family was over there. I went to school at the University of London medical school for three months. After we got back I'd been practicing internal medicine for about seventeen years and I decided to change my whole course of medicine. I went back to Cal in 1971 and majored in public health. It was a good thing for me to do because I had the good training in medicine, and with the public health training, it opened my eyes to world-wide health problems.

Then later in life, when I was probably fifty years old, I was living up in Healdsburg. We had a ranch of there and I needed money, so I took a job with the State. I was the Public Health Officer for the big Sonoma State Hospital, which was all for brain-damaged people. That's a story in itself. But because of my public health training and interest in hepatitis, I got hired by the State Department of Developmental Disabilities to be their consultant and chair of their Hepatitis B Task Force to try and eliminate hepatitis B from the state hospital system. It had become endemic and was killing people, killing residents and killing employees who contracted the disease. And it was costing the state an awful lot of money in lawsuits against them. People don't realize the size of the state hospital system in California. It's probably the biggest in the world. There's probably 30- or 40,000 patients in the state hospitals. There are six psychiatric and five developmental hospitals. So this hepatitis B was a big deal and was costing the state an awful lot of money. So they assigned a fellow named Don Bowling to try to work out a {inaudible} program to control it. He knew about me, and he hired me to be the chairman of the state Hepatitis B Task Force. It was a big job.

02-00:30:49

The first thing I did was to try and eliminate hepatitis B from Sonoma State Hospital, where I worked. It was overstocked with patients; had too many patients, not enough facilities. It's a beautiful hospital up in Glen Ellen. It was a site chosen by the president of Stanford University's wife, Sarah Stanford. Anyway, I started methodically. I was able to get a grant from Abbott Laboratories. They had just developed a testing method to take people's blood to see if they were immune to hepatitis B, whether they were susceptible to hepatitis B, and whether they were carriers. So we could do those three tests

with one sample of blood. So we did it on everybody who worked at Sonoma State Hospital and every one of the patients. So there were about 4- or 5,000 people who worked there and maybe 3,000 patients. We found a very high percentage of carriers who were contagious, and we found quite a people who were already immune, and some who had no antibodies at all against hepatitis B, so they were very susceptible.

I only had one nurse helping me when we started this; but within a couple of months, I had eleven people working with me. Statisticians. The statistics problem was terrible. But we found out who were the carriers and we were able to isolate them. Then I found out that a vaccine had been developed by Merck, Heptavax. We were able to persuade them to give us enough of it to immunize all the susceptibles at Sonoma State Hospital, all the employees and all the patients. We weren't allowed to call them patients; they were clients. So we went through very rapidly. We weren't required to get permission, which would have killed the whole thing because a lot of these patients were incompetent. They had a trustee you'd have to get permission from. So we immunized everybody who was susceptible, and within a year, we wiped out hepatitis B in Sonoma State Hospital.

So then they hired me to do the whole state. So I had to travel all up and down the state, to the eleven state hospitals. It was an eye opener, I'll tell you. California's a big state with a lot of problems and this is one of their biggest. So we wiped it out statewide in four years. I got a nice letter from the governor and from different people and got awards, got this points to award. I'm a hero, a public health hero. [Laughs] So that was the best thing I ever did in medicine.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about your time at Stanford med school and your training? Then I know that you were assigned to the Presidio during med school, but yeah, so if you could tell me a little bit about that as well.

02-00:36:10

Griffin: Well, Stanford Hospital was in San Francisco when the war started. It's just a few blocks from the Presidio. Big brick building up at Clay and Webster. It was probably fifty, sixty years old when I started there. [Narrator addendum: Fortunately for me there were three very smart female classmates among the first women medical students in the US. I fell in love and married Mary (Mimi) Murray in our first year. We had to take three fellow classmates on our honeymoon so we could use their gasoline and food stamps. I could write a book about our seven years of training during the height of war. Mimi was a great help to me, and together we raised our four daughters.]

But the first year, we spent down on the campus because they had a really good facility for teaching anatomy down there. I was in uniform down there because when I got accepted to Stanford medical school, I was in ROTC and in the Army already. So I wore a private's uniform all through Stanford

medical school. I got paid to go to medical school by the Army Specialized Training Program, ASTP. I was stationed at the San Francisco Presidio. So I had to report there and be examined. They told me in no uncertain terms, "If you don't get the good grades at Stanford, you're right back in the Army, fighting." So I worked hard at Stanford medical school. The second, third, and fourth years, we spent up in the city, at this older hospital. Wonderful training, a wonderful internship. I really enjoyed being associated with the Presidio. I attended lectures at the Letterman and got to know all the different hospitals around the city.

I knew I was going to have to pay the Army back for this free medical education, so at the end of the war I spent another year and a half treating men coming back from fighting overseas. We had them spread in different hospitals. There were 267,000 men killed in battle; probably a million who were injured; and then there were an awful lot of men who had diseases related to where they were fighting. Like up in the Aleutians, the men who sat in wet trenches up there got severe disease of their arteries—narrowing of the arteries and an ulcer of their leg, and eventually, amputation.

Then at the end of the war, my brother was overseas. He'd been an instructor in warfare at Fort Benning for three years. He was very good at that. How he ever survived without getting shot—because they had to teach men how to crawl under barbed-wire fences with machine gun bullets flying over their head. He got stuck in the Philippines at the end of the war, and it took him a year to get home. My cousin George, who was on the USS Houston, came by ship, and he's down to ninety-seven pounds after having been a prisoner of the Japanese for four years.

The defense zone for San Francisco Bay stretched all the way from Point Montara, in Half Moon Bay, up to Bodega Bay and heavily militarized. It's sort of interesting that the footprint of that defense zone is pretty much the same as Point Reyes National Seashore and Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The Golden Gate National Recreation Area has 80,000 acres and about 70,000 acres in Point Reyes National Seashore. The Air Force had training fields up in Sonoma County. Out of Hamilton Field and beyond, there were a number of places where they trained fighter pilots how to skip bomb and how to strafe. How to bomb and how to avoid getting killed in an air fight with the Japanese, which had superior fighter planes. Zeros, I think they called them. So it's really interesting to me that this great area that defended San Francisco Bay is now Point Reyes National Seashore and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Farrell:

You mentioned after the war you were stationed at a hospital that was receiving a lot of men that were coming back from the war. Can you tell me a little bit about what you experienced there, some of the things that you saw?

02-00:43:38

Griffin: Yeah. I was stationed at the Presidio and worked at the Letterman. But they really needed some doctors down at—oh, what's the name of the—?

Farrell: Menlo Park?

02-00:44:06

Griffin: Right near Menlo Park, the big airfield right there.

Farrell: Moffett Field?

02-00:44:13

Griffin: Moffett Field. At Moffett Field. Every day, there'd be planes bringing men back from the Pacific Islands. There were a million men on islands encircling Japan, ready to invade Japan, and they didn't; the war ended. But all these men had trouble getting back. The government was broke. They did their best to get people back. By now, I was an officer in the United States Army Medical Corps, a captain. I'd had a lot of experience with psychotic men in my internship. I'd spent two months during my internship at Stanford in psychiatric hospitals, so I had some experience. The men who came back to Moffett Field were mainly psychotic men who were being brought from—they'd been assembled and brought to Okinawa and flown from Okinawa to Moffett Field. They'd come back in camisoles because the pilots wouldn't fly if they thought that there was a psychotic man onboard.

So my job was to assess the mental status of these men being brought in, sometimes two or three planeloads a day. I had a lot of psychiatric technicians helping me. I'd walk right down the aisles and talk to each person. I'd say, "Are you really psychotic? Why are you on this plane?" So we'll talk. "I did this just to get home." I'd say, "Well, I can understand that." So those we processed: admitted them to a hospital, worked them up, and got them out of there as fast as we could to get them back to their homes. Some of them were sick; they were psychotic or neurotic. A lot of them were farm boys who should never have been in the Army. Their main problem, it seemed, was not being shot or injured; it was that they just couldn't get along with the men they were with. Going to the bathroom toilet, for them, was a traumatic thing, being lined up with twenty men in a long latrine, and they'd get constipated.

So that was a major problem in already borderline inadequate people. But this big veteran's hospital near Palo Alto was set up for psychological problems. It was really an experience being there. It was before the days they had antipsychotic drugs, and we had to rely on hydrotherapy, not very effective. The only thing we could give them medically was sodium amytal, which would knock them out. Or we could give them electric shock therapy for severe depression. I'd had training in that at Stanford. Stanford was the only hospital doing electric shock therapy, EST, and I knew how to do it. An anesthesiologist gives them an injection of a drug, so they wouldn't collapse a vertebra when they had the shock. It was extremely effective in controlling

severe depression, psychotic depression, where they'd kill themselves. So we did quite a few of those. Ken Kesey, who wrote *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, worked in this hospital with me, and I got to know him a little bit. So I've been reading all of his books. But our orders were to get these men home as fast as possible; get them out of California, if possible. Once you get to California, nobody wants to leave. So my job was to phone the home of somebody who was ready to leave the hospital. I'd get on the line, I'd say, "Mrs. Smith, your son is here in California and he's coming home on the plane tomorrow. We're going to send him especially right to you." They'd say, "Well, doctor, we don't really want him to come home." They were having psychiatric problems, or problems, before they even joined the Army. They really scratched the bottom of the barrel, trying to get enough men to invade Japan.

Farrell: I wanted to ask you a couple of reflective questions. During that period of time, and your time in ROTC or med school or postwar, were there any lessons that you learned, that you kind of took with you, or shaped or influenced the rest of your life?

02-00:51:23

Griffin:

Well, I just always have loved everything about nature. That's shaped my life. Still does. Religion, to me, is nature. And God is nature, and nature is God. I believe that the different religious groups that have developed were the idea of one man. It wasn't inspired from afar; it was one man's idea, to start a group. Then that idea spread and pretty soon you had disciples and people spreading it, and you had a religion. So that's okay. But I think it's interfered with people's recognition that this is one Earth, just one. It's the only Earth we have. So you better protect it; it's your home. I majored in zoology at Cal, along with pre-med. So I've always been interested in birds. I've noticed that wherever birds thrive, people thrive. So to me, birds and all wildlife matter. They matter a lot. There's far fewer bugs, lizards, snakes, frogs, fish. I've worked hard to save thousands of acres of wildlife habitat in West Marin County. So my whole life has been dedicated to try to save California. I saw it at its best, before the war. I was the third president of our little Marin Audubon Society here and helped to save Richardson Bay. The Gold Rush was a terrible thing for California. It just absolutely ruined our rivers and brought a lot of people here who just raped California. So I've worked all my life, trying to save what I could.

Farrell: What do you hope that future generations remember about the war years?

02-00:55:19

Griffin:

I don't know, I think they've already forgotten. It's amazing how fast people forget and don't remember. History is so important. That's why I wrote this book, *Saving the Marin-Sonoma Coast*, to tell the story of what I did, and others, in saving Marin County. It's still going on; the battle is still going on. They use so much pesticides and insecticides and herbicides. I got into the

wine business after having practiced here for seventeen years. I did practice here. My wife Mimi—we're separated now, but we had four children who went to schools here.

But we started a practice here; we were about the first doctors here at the end of the war. We were in the Marinship clinic. They built Liberty ships right here in Sausalito. That was Bechtel. We rented their beautiful facilities, which the government just dropped like a hot potato, as soon as the war ended. They just tried to cut expenses everywhere. So I was one of the first doctors. The other doctors, who had stayed here during the war, were exhausted. Really exhausted. I bought one doctor's practice for \$50. He had, I think, fifteen pregnancies that he had to deliver. I'd had some—maybe a month—experience in obstetrics at the county hospital during the war when I was interning. So I took on all of these pregnancies. I went over to Cal. I knew the lady who was in charge of obstetrics, and she let me deliver every baby for a week that came through the Cal service at the county hospital. So I did that. You had another question?

Farrell: I think that was it. Was there anything else that you wanted to add before we wrap up?

02-00:58:52

Griffin: Well, I think that the Rosie the Riveter National Park should get a lot more attention and that it's really well done. Just seeing one of those package Jeeps really brought back the whole war to me. I don't know what's going to happen to California, I really don't. The population is growing by 400- to 600,000 a year. It's more than we can handle. There's an incredible show at the California Academy of Sciences right now called Habitat Earth. Have you see it?

Farrell: No, I haven't.

02-00:59:55

Griffin: You ought to see it. Honest, it's incredible. It was done by a fellow who had training from Lucas. It just shows the whole Earth. It shows California and our relationship to the whole Earth. This is a special floristic area. It's one of the most unique areas in the world, is coastal California. It's called a global floristic zone. Its Mediterranean climate and cold upwellings off the coast and its redwood trees able to grow and the desert climate. So I just think we need to do a lot more education about what we have and how we can keep it.

[End of interview]