

**Jack Groskin
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
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Interviewers**

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SUNY Cortland, New York**

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

JG: Jack Groskin, date of birth is March 23rd, 1925, in Syracuse, New York.

Q: Okay, how far up in school did you go before you went into the service?

JG: Well, I enlisted in the Marine Core in the beginning of 1992- I believe- 1942. I didn't graduate from high school because Pearl Harbor was bombed and I thought I'd like to do something for my country.

Q: Why did you pick the Marine Core?

JG: I had friends that were in different parts of the Marine Core and I thought that I would like to do the same as they did.

Q: So you enlisted here, in Syracuse?

JG: Yes.

Q: Do you remember what month of 1942 you enlisted in?

JG: I believe it might have been in the middle of the year or something, I just don't quite remember the month.

Q: So you were about seventeen when you went in, right?

JG: Right.

Q: Did you have to get you parents' permission?

JG: My mother passed away when I was four, and my father reluctantly gave me his permission to go because I told him that I really wanted to go.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

JG: Yes, I was selling the evening paper. It was about nine o'clock at night, and I had a corner of Onondaga's Fallatum (?), I used to sell two or three hundred papers a night, and I always remembered when the movies got out at eleven o'clock, you know I was hollering, "Extra, Pearl Harbor bombing!" (laughs). And they asked me where it is and I didn't have the slightest idea, but that's where I was at that time.

Q: Do you remember how you felt when you heard about this?

JG: I didn't have any feelings at all, I just didn't have any feelings but I knew it was good when I was hollering and I was selling papers and at that time I was happy to do that.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

JG: I went to Parris Island, in South Carolina, and I spent three months there, and-

Q: Was this the first time you were ever away from home?

JG: Yes.

Q: How did you feel when you were there?

JG: Well, I felt really great because I wanted to get away from my two sisters that were breaking me up (laughs). That fall, I played football for Central High School. I basically sort of enjoyed Parris Island because of the training and the discipline and that's what I needed.

I remember the first day, we all fell out, there were about thirty in our platoon and we had the drill instructor walk up and down. He had one of those scout hats and he had a swagger stick and he walked up and down the line and looked at everybody and we were standing at attention. And, I'll never forget this, he says, "There's two ways of doing things," then he'd hesitate, and walk up and down again, and he'd say, "Your way, and my way. And your way is the wrong way." And that set the tone.

Q: Okay, how long were you in Parris Island?

JG: I spent three months there in training and the whole thing. Actually, now that I look back and think about it, it was like you were training for a war, which we were doing. When you're that age and you're learning, you're motivated, you know?

Q: Did you think you were trained enough for the combat you were in?

JG: Yes, because previously before Iwo Jima, we had veterans that were on Guadalcanal, and they experienced a lot of things, and that was a great help to us. Of course, the difference of fighting was completely different. I had very good experiences at Parris Island.

Q: Now, did you go on to any advanced training after that?

JG: No, that's why I was sort of disappointed because they sent me to do guard duty in Norfolk, Virginia at the Naval Air Station, and I was constantly griping. I said I didn't wanted to go here and I wanted to join some division, and I remember this camp man says, "Well, your time will come." And little did I know it did come eventually. I left Norfolk and went to Camp Pendleton, California. We were camped out in San Diego right near there.

Q: Now, when was that?

JG: That was at the end of, I think, at the end of 1942, and then they put me in a fourth marine division. They were just getting back from Sai Pan and Tinian, and then we were training there for quite a while. Then we got aboard a ship which, I think, was a 1995,

I'm getting confused on dates, 1945, and we were training to go in for combat. We didn't know where we were going up until about two days before, and they told us to board a ship there. They were talking to us, trying to brief us, they said that it's a very small island, it's five by seven, and the most you should be there is about four days because they explained to us that the bombers, when they were coming back from Japan, they'd drop their loads there. And they did that, which is hard to believe, for seventy- two days previously, and everything was the furthest from the truth because they didn't hit anything. The Japanese were dug into caves and they just didn't do hardly any damage, so to speak. The biggest surprise we got, we were at Makin, was when we got there at about eight o'clock. Our ships were lining up so the Japanese knew where we were going to hit, there was no problem, and at nine o'clock, we were brought ashore. We were there on shore about fifteen minutes-

Q: Now, were you on the first wave in?

JG: Yes, that was the first wave.

Q: Which beach did you land on?

JG: We landed on Yellow Beach Two, that was assigned to our second battalion, the twenty- third Marines, actually.

Q: You went in in amphibious tractors?

JG: Yes.

Q: Was there any opposition at all when you went ashore?

JG: No, no everything was just fine. You know, for us, and there was the fifth division also hit, and we were just getting organized. And we were supposed to take the airfield the first day, that was above the beach, and then all hell broke loose. And I mean really broke loose. We couldn't do anything. Iwo Jima, the terrain there was volcanic ash, and when you had you backpacks on and turned your gun, you just sunk in. So we got rid of some things, and I had a picture that was taken of all of them, all the Marines with their heads buried because we had no place to go. We were disorganized, and people were getting killed.

I say it was a good experience, but that was reality, you weren't training, you were right in there. We had to leave there at least five or six hours, because we didn't leave the beach until the next day, and then we started to move ahead and roll through the end of the island, which actually took about twenty- five days for us to complete, there were others that came in that mopped up. But we were part of the assault troops, and we just kept driving forward and taking casualties. I think the records vary on how many men were killed, anywhere from 5,000 to 6,000 killed. And the casualties, they ran about 20,000 to 21,000, and I'll never forget that. I had actually had a guy dream of ambush all the time, and I think about it, it's never left my mind.

Q: When you went ashore, was your goal towards the Hibachi or the other end of the island?

JG: Well, we were right at basically the middle, so the Hibachi was to our left, and we had nothing to do with that. Everybody was assigned things so we all knew where we were going, or try to get there anyways.

Q: Were you aware of the flag raising up there at all?

JG: Yes, because everybody started to talk and clap, that could see it, and I saw the flag go up because you could see that all over the island, it was the high spot of the island. We didn't think anything of it because we still had to drive on, we had a long way to go.

Q: Were you able to, when you first encountered the Japanese, could you see them?

JG: Yes, yes they look like little, I don't know how to describe it, running around the mountain side or something, the side of the hillside or something. Night was the toughest part because we had hand grenades that illuminated after they hit, and somebody would holler. They liked to infiltrate our front line there, and so somebody would holler and we were in fox holes, two men in each hole, and I remember distinctly that somebody would holler that the gook or something coming through, we showed our hand grenades (laughs). And in the morning, we kept hitting the same guy, when it got light out, and it was one of those things that was disastrous.

Q: So, you were in combat almost continuously for the twenty- five days?

JG: Well, we were relieved, then we went back again. But the communication was a lot different. We had somebody like a rudder that went from fox hole to fox hole, without our company there, to say what time we'd be shutting off. They would get the word from headquarters or something, but at that time, in 1945, we didn't have the communication things that we have today, and that was it. I remember, they always tell you what they're going to do. They said we were going to be the first on and the first off, and we were. They kept their word. They took us off when we got to the end of the island, which was about twenty- three or twenty- five days.

Q: Did you have to clear caves out where you were?

JG: Well, we just kept moving but the Marines in other waves took care of a lot of the mopping up.

Q: So, you bypassed some of these caves?

JG: Yes, our main goal was to keep going from one end of to the other. We didn't have to watch our backs too much like the Marines in Iraq and the places there really had it tough. We thought we had it tough, but they had it tougher than us.

Q: Were you wounded at all?

JG: No, I wasn't scratched. It's actually a miracle, I was right with them, same battles. Occasionally somebody would wander off and get lost or whatever, but then we had replacements because we were getting thinned.

Q: Did you lose many men in your unit?

JG: Yes, in our company. I don't know the percentage, but it must have been pretty close to half. But then again, they kept bringing in the reserves to fill in the holes that were left there, and there were a lot of them.

Q: Was there ever a time when you went without food? How were you resupplied?

JG: Well, we would take a break, and the food we had was K- rations. I didn't like the Spam that they had so I used to trade off cheese. And I don't remember too much about the foods. I've had other interviews at different times, and they would say, "Did you shave, how did you go to the bathroom?" (laughs), and I used to talk to high school seniors, and I'm just very appreciative. And I'm thankful-

Q: Now were you ever able to clean yourself at all in the whole twenty- something days?

JG: No, nothing.

Q: Were you ever given any pills to keep your going? There were some units I know on Taro that were given uppers to keep going.

JG: No, the only thing we did was before we went into combat they gave us a lot of shots.

Q: Any problems with the tropical diseases like Jungle Ruedd or Malaria or anything like that?

JG: No nothing.

Q: Now, you have a photograph. If you hold your magazine just like this, in front of you, Wayne can focus on just the picture at the bottom. What is that a photograph of, if you can describe it for us?

JG: Well that was taken, I believe, about maybe the eighth or ninth day, I'm not quite clear on that. We were pulling up and then we stopped to get organized again, and I was facing one direction and the combat photographer was over on my left. He says, "Turn around," and as I turned I knelt, and the picture that he took was of me standing near a Jap that was just hit by a mortar and his chest was blown open.

Q: So, that's you, your hand is almost pointing to yourself in the left corner, and the Japanese is down in front of you?

JG: Yes.

Q: So, this was about D plus nine, you said?

JG: Yes, somewhere in that area, I'm just not sure. What had happened when we got back aboard ship-

Q: Okay you can put it (the picture) down now.

JG: He asked around and finally located them and figured out who was on the assault troops, and he finally tracked me down. He met me and said, "I'm not sure if this is your picture or not, but I got the negative and if it's not, you'll just throw it away." So, this was about five years after I got out of service and I was looking through things I was looking that I used to send home. I went down to a camera shop, and the picture was the one you see on here in the fiftieth edition.

Q: You have the original negative to that?

JG: I think I do, someone else asked me that one time, but I think I do. I've had large pictures made, clearer than then in the magazine. They were cast a lot better.

Q: Now, when you went back aboard ship, where did you go from there?

JG: We went back to Maui, Hawaii. That's where we trained originally and we were training to go to Japan. In fact, I was asked to start learning Japanese and they gave me a book, but we just thank God, we never had to go when they dropped the atomic bomb in August of 1945.

Q: How did you feel when you heard about that? How did your unit feel when they heard about that?

JG: Well, we were happy because, basically, the war was over. Most of us just wanted to get out. I know they said that they'd give me a rating of Sergeant if I stayed on for another four years, but I just wanted to get out.

Q: What rank were you when you left the service?

JG: Corporal.

Q: Let me just go back to Iwo Jima. When you were there and you encountered the Japanese, did you ever take any prisoners?

JG: No, I read a book about that, where they took prisoners, but I don't remember taking any of them. I mean, I won't say they weren't taken but my company, we just went forward. I don't know what happened, it could have been, I have ideas but I'd rather not (laughs). The main idea that I have was, as I look back now, on the day we invaded it, and we were getting shot up and we couldn't even get off the beach they kept sending troops in, so someone must have finally smartened up and said, "We better not send any more men in." Because the more troops, the more concentrated we were, that's where a good share of the casualties were. Anything they threw at us, somebody would be a casualty. The cries I remember, when guys that were hit, yelling for core men. The memory really stays with me but I had to let a lot more now than I did because of my exercise and my running.

Q: When were you discharged?

JG: I believe February 16th, 1945- or 46- I'm sorry, yes.

Q: After you left the service, did you ever use the GI Bill?

JG: No.

Q: Did you join any veteran's organizations at all?

JG: No.

Q: You still aren't a member of any VFW or Marine Core League or anything?

JG: I just didn't care. Now I remember of, I think, the Post 1130 of the DAV because I ended up with post-traumatic stress, which I didn't know until years later what I had. I went to a friend of mine, who was a physician at the time, and I told him about my headaches and things like that. And he got to a point where he said to me, "I think you ought to see a psychiatrist." Got very upset, I said, "I don't think I'm crazy," you know. But, actually, that was the smartest thing I could have done at the time. I finally ended up at the VA (Department of Veterans Affairs), I had group sessions and therapy with a psychiatrist, and also a psychotherapist. They really were a great help to me and, of

course when my eyesight started to go, they helped me. I'm very pleased and very comfortable with those things as I look back.

Q: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that served with you?

JG: I tried to, I used to go to the reunions, and the last one was a Mardi Gras in New Orleans. They had it there, and that was about maybe ten, fifteen years ago. When you go to reunions, you check in, and look down to see, and put what company you were in and what battalion, this was the fourth marine division reunion, and it got to a point where I didn't see anybody that I knew and I just stopped going. I didn't know if they just didn't go or they just weren't around or whatever.

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

JG: I think it had a great effect because the discipline made me a better person. I'm very thankful, as I look back. I actually started to look back, maybe in my seventies, when I really appreciated that I got to be in my seventies, and I just felt good about everything that I've accomplished. I've been very fortunate basically all my life. I married a wonderful person and she sort of straightened me out (laughs). And we've been married, coming now this June 22nd, fifty- six years. So, I'm just grateful and fortunate.

Q: Alright, well thank you very much for your interview.

JG: Yes, I appreciate this, and I hope someone that sees this would get an idea of what all veterans of all the different WWII parts, Pacific and European. Everybody did a great job, it was mostly volunteers and then they started drafting people, so I'm just very fortunate and very appreciative for the government.

Q: Okay, well thank you very much.

JG: You're entirely welcome.