

**John A. Grogan
Veteran**

**Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

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At Holiday Inn
Kingston, New York**

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

JAG: Yes, John A. Grogan, 11/26/24, Bronxville, New York.

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

JAG: Three and a half years of high school, East Chester High School, Westchester County, New York.

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

JAG: Yes, as a matter of fact, vividly. I was home alone, listening to a New York Giants football game by radio, and I remember the interrupted game and the announcement that... that must have been in the early afternoon, Eastern Time, the announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Q: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

JAG: Probably not. Most didn't.

Q: What was your reaction to this?

JAG: Well, I was excited. As a young man, I was... my father was involved in community things—volunteer fire company and the Board of Education—and I was always interested in politics and what was in the world. So when this came in, you know, I realized it was a very big ticket item, and it would affect me maybe and my family. And so I was anxious to hear about what happened, but there was very little information outside of the announcement, even in that world, for several days or a week. So, I don't know, they were always talking about we couldn't tell too much because I might give information to the enemy and that kind of thing. I guess as a senior citizen, I know that

they also withheld information for a lot of reasons. And certainly, there was a big tragedy for our country. No, it wasn't good news, for sure.

Q: Did you enlist, or were you drafted?

JAG: I enlisted in January of 1943. I enlisted in a special program. I was in my senior year in high school then, and I had to take my Regents tests, like, in December or January in New York State to more or less qualify for graduation. So I did that, and I think I had a friendly science teacher who got me through those state Regents. But in any case, I went into a meteorology program, one that trained people to be weathermen, mainly for the Air Force at that time. There was the option to attend different colleges or universities that were part of the program. So that was also an opportunity, in a way, to get some college experience, although I never thought of it in that way.

Q: Why did you select the Army?

JAG: Actually, it was the Army Air Forces. Why did I select that? Actually, because it was the program that was there. My parents were very concerned about the oldest son and what would happen, and so there was a lot of interest in what you know, well, what could you get into that would perhaps be safer from the war and so on. But this program interested me. I think it was the principal in the high school who knew about the program, so I was happy to join this rather than maybe get situated in some domestic Army base or something of that kind. This was known to have a challenge to it, and the idea of the Air Force and playing a role in that was important to me.

Q: Where were you sent for your military schooling?

JAG: I was sent first to Bowdoin College in Maine, and I was there for at least a year, probably until the spring of 1944. Not sure about the dates, but they closed the meteorology program down because they said they had enough weathermen. That was a wonderful experience for me. At the time, going to college in sort of an Ivy League kind of setting—cold in the winter but challenging. I had a rather limited science and math background, so I was challenged by calculus and vector analysis at that time. I had to struggle, and with the help of my roommates, I got through the program until it closed down.

Q: Did you attend classes in uniform?

JAG: Yes. It was pretty much like I suppose an ROTC program. As a regular Army and Air Force trainee, we had some interesting people there. The person who taught physical education at Bowdoin was Adam Walsh, one of the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame. He was a wonderful man and an inspiration to me. The other professors were marvelous, and I think they opened up a lot of vistas for me. It was a WASP school in those days, but there were outstanding people teaching in the program, so I felt very blessed to have that experience.

Q: Where did you go after Bowdoin?

JAG: I was assigned to radio operator school at Scott Field, Illinois. That was about a six-month program, sometime in 1944. We were still using Morse code at the time, and so we learned all that and a little bit about tinkering with the radio system. I qualified for radar training in Boca Raton, Florida.

Q: What did you do in Boca Raton?

JAG: I went to Boca Raton, and that was probably like a three or four-month program. I don't remember exactly, but I studied radar and had quite a bit of flight training with it. My main drama during that experience, apart from the heat in Florida, was getting lost over Cuba when I was guiding the plane. Part of my training involved that.

Q: What was your first assignment?

JAG: I was sent over as a replacement in December of 1944, and I was assigned to a unit that flew B-24s. My first experience, just prior to my first mission out of Guam, was on a B-24, and it was all new to me. All of that training experience on B-17s wasn't too much help. I was sent to the west coast after Boca Raton to Fort Hood, and then boarded a ship named the *Orizaba*. It was a six-day trip to Hawaii, and from there, we got on an LST and went to Guam.

Q: Where did you go after Guam?

JAG: I was assigned to the 7th Air Force, and that was my first overseas assignment. I wasn't assigned to a specific crew, so I filled in for other radar operators. Every morning, we would check the chalkboard to see which crew we were assigned to. It wasn't a highly organized thing; there was a big board with a lot of chalk writing on it, and you had to find where you were.

Q: What was the difference between being trained on B-17s and being assigned to B-24s?

JAG: The main difference was the location of the radar station. On the B-17, I had a little more visibility, but on the B-24, the radar station was behind the bomb bay in a sort of cubby hole. It was isolated, and you could barely see anything except part of the wing. It was a scary experience because during my first mission over Iwo Jima, we encountered some Japanese zeros. The gunners were firing, and it was my first real experience in combat. I also had to go down into the bomb bay to pump up the radar globe to reduce air resistance during the bombing run. It was a pretty intense experience.

Q: How did you feel about your first mission?

JAG: It was nerve-wracking. I was a young man, and the whole experience was intense. I remember the noise of the aircraft, the vibration, and the sense of being so far from home. The crew seemed to be doing their jobs, and I was just trying to do mine. I was pretty nervous but focused on the task. I had no idea what to expect, but I followed my training as best I could.

Q: Can you describe your first combat experience?

JAG: It was quite something. We had Japanese zeros in the sky, and the gunners were firing their machine guns. I was down in the bomb bay, pumping the radar globe to reduce air resistance during the bombing run. You could hear the noise outside, but inside, it was just the sound of the engines and the crew's actions. It wasn't until later, when I had a moment to think, that I realized how dangerous it was.

Q: What was the hardest part of being a radar operator?

JAG: The isolation. The radar station on the B-24 was behind the bomb bay, and it felt like I was in a little cubbyhole, cut off from everything else. You didn't have a clear view of the outside, so you really couldn't gauge what was going on. That made it feel a little more uncertain and scary. You were relying on others to handle the situation around you while you focused on your own job.

Q: How did you manage the isolation?

JAG: It was challenging, but you learned to focus. You couldn't afford to get distracted by what was going on outside the aircraft. Your job was to monitor the radar, and that's what you did. Of course, there were times when we were all aware of the dangers, and you could feel the tension, but in the moment, I just kept thinking about the task at hand.

Q: Did you ever get used to it?

JAG: You never really get used to it. The fear and the uncertainty always stayed with you, especially during combat. But the more you trained, the more you learned to manage it. The camaraderie with the crew helped, too. You were all in it together, and that made a big difference.

Q: How many missions did you fly?

JAG: I think I flew about 35 missions. Some were routine, but others were very intense. Every mission felt different, depending on the situation we were in. Some days, you came back to base and were just glad to be on the ground, while others, you'd be looking forward to the next mission with a sense of determination.

Q: What kind of missions did you fly?

JAG: Most of the missions I flew were bombing runs over Japanese-occupied areas, including Iwo Jima and other Pacific islands. We targeted strategic locations, military bases, and supply lines. There was always a sense of purpose, but also a lot of uncertainty. You never really knew how things were going to go.

Q: Were there moments when you thought you might not make it back?

JAG: Absolutely. Every time you went up, there was a chance you might not come back. You could hear the flak from anti-aircraft fire, and sometimes you saw aircraft go down. It wasn't a question of if you were going to be in danger—it was a question of how much. We did everything we could to minimize risk, but there were moments when you'd look out the window and see other planes going down, and it would make you realize just how fragile it all was.

Q: How did you handle that fear?

JAG: You had to push it aside and focus on your training. Fear could paralyze you, and you couldn't afford that. It was about doing your job, trusting your crew, and knowing that you were part of something bigger. That sense of duty and purpose kept you going.

Q: How did you deal with the constant danger?

JAG: You had to compartmentalize it. If you thought about it too much, it would overwhelm you. But you had to keep your focus on the mission and on your job. We had a lot of guys in the crew who were good at helping each other stay calm and focused. That camaraderie helped us deal with the stress.

Q: Were there any close calls during your missions?

JAG: There were several. We had a few close encounters with enemy fighters, and there were times when we took hits from anti-aircraft fire. I remember one mission where we got hit, and the plane was shaking, but we kept going. It was scary, but you didn't have much choice but to keep flying. You trusted your pilot and the rest of the crew to get you through.

Q: Did you ever lose any comrades?

JAG: Yes, unfortunately. It's something you never forget. We lost several planes during our missions. You knew the risks, but when you lost someone, it hit hard. The bond we had with the rest of the crew made it even more personal. It was always a reminder of how dangerous our work was.

Q: How did you feel when you finally returned home?

JAG: It was a mix of emotions. On one hand, you were relieved and happy to be home. But on the other, there was a sense of guilt, especially when you thought about the guys who didn't make it back. The whole experience changed you. You didn't really feel the same way about things once you had been through something like that.

Q: After the war, how did you adjust to civilian life?

JAG: It was tough. You came home, but the world had changed. You had changed. It took time to adjust, but the skills and experiences you gained during the war helped. I didn't talk much about it at first, but over time, I began to reflect on what we went through and what we accomplished.

Q: Did you wear a flight suit?

JAG: Yes, yes, a flight suit, and I think I had a Mae West that I wore, or I think I wore that. I wore a flak jacket also or a flight jacket.

Q: Did you wear a parachute or was that on the floor next to you?

JAG: That was nearby, yeah.

Q: So you know, and the second mission from Guam I came back, by the way, and I slept, and it was one of those deals where somehow I lost a day. You know, I couldn't imagine that. I must have skipped Sunday or something like that, and it was Monday next time I went out. The second mission was sort of eventful in the sense that we were, you know, I did my thing. They had a navigator on board, so finding a boat was not a big deal, but you could, they asked for confirmation on the radar, and we'd give them the location by the clock, you know, to reference the plane, what point on the clock the island was located and what the distance was and so on. The radar at that time on the B-24 was not the latest radar they had, but it was pretty good. It was a sea-oriented radar and very efficient, I thought. And so, we got very close to the island on that mission, and just before we went into a bombing run, the captain announced on the radio that the commander down on the naval ships below asked that we not proceed with a bombing run because I could see on my screen there were ships, all sorts of ships, mainly south of Iwo Jima, that were filled with Marines, I guess, and they were probably going to start shelling pretty soon. And so, they didn't want us dropping any bombs in the air, you know, in the event that one should go astray and some of them would be killed by friendly fire, that kind of thing. So, we dropped our bombs on the way back, I guess, into the ocean. That was exciting, and it was important, but it wasn't the typical mission.

Q: What do you mean by the radar was sea-oriented radar?

JAG: Well, there were a lot of different kinds of radar operating at that point, and this radar was oriented towards water and whatever electronic sensitivity... when I trained in the radar, I did fly over Cuba, and you know, you could point out some sort of populated area as you get more feedback on the radar screen from those. But I don't know whether it was lesser sensitivity or greater, but they always distinguish between that particular radar. I forget the number of it, but they called it a sea-oriented radar. It had to do

probably with the physical electronic feedback, the difference between land and water, and of course, anything you would see on the water would stand out more than if...

Q: So those are your only two missions that you had?

JAG: That's right.

Q: What did you do the rest of the time while you were on the base?

JAG: Actually, not a great deal. I didn't travel on the island to visit towns or villages or anything of that kind. I grew through them a number of times. A very, very beautiful island, very primitive in terms of natives and so on.

Q: Did you have any problem adapting to the climate of Guam?

JAG: Well, yes, the heat and the sun were pretty extreme, and in retrospect, as you see this bending here, that's... I have it on for cosmetic purposes right now because I have a scar there from basal cell carcinoma, which was sort of, you know, ingrown a bit. So, they had to cut a little deeper around the skull. But the sun, I think I was, what, 18 and a half, and my birthday was, of course, November 1924. So, I was 17 at the time of Pearl Harbor, or close to 17, just a couple of months past 17. Then 18 during 1944 and 1945, I don't remember the exact date of the missions, but they say that the damage that we experience from the sun occurs mostly during those early years. So I always think about that. I don't have any service-connected disability, but maybe I do.

Q: Did you ever have any diseases or sicknesses while you were there, other than back stirring and so on?

JAG: That I don't know. Whether it was in Hawaii where we were, one of the things that we didn't know why before we went down was to load naval shells. What part of the shell? That was the powder part of whatever, I don't know too much about it, but they were on trolleys, you know, and so we had to... we had some function around that, whether it was directing them or lifting them off, you know, in some fashion. So, that was sort of difficult work, I would say. And otherwise, I was in the kitchen while in Hawaii, 13th Replacement Depot near Wheeler Field.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard the news about President Roosevelt's death?

JAG: I think I was probably in the Philippines at the time, if I remember correctly. It was spring of 1945. We were still doing some work on the islands. I wasn't directly involved in the action but certainly knew it was happening, as we kept up with the news as much as possible. It was a bit of a shock, but at the time, we were all so focused on the war effort that the news kind of hit us more as a momentary distraction.

Q: How did the news affect morale? Did you notice a change among your fellow soldiers?

JAG: Well, I don't know if it affected morale as much as it probably would have at home. I mean, we were already going through a lot, and the war was obviously still ongoing. So, it's not that we didn't care, but at that point, we were all just focused on getting the job done. Roosevelt was a significant figure, of course, but most of us knew that it would take a lot more than a single leader to stop the war or even slow it down.

Q: Did you have any interactions with the local population in Guam or the Philippines? Were you able to talk to civilians?

JAG: Very little, actually. We were very much isolated from them for the most part. On some of the islands, the locals would sometimes come around the base, but we weren't encouraged to interact too much. There were a few moments where we'd be able to talk to some civilians who were helping with manual labor or other duties, but generally, we kept to ourselves. We were busy with our training and preparations, and there wasn't a lot of opportunity for socializing with the local population.

Q: Were you aware of the Japanese civilian population in these areas? Did you ever encounter any civilians who had been affected by the war?

JAG: Yes, I was aware, especially in the Philippines. There were some civilians who were caught up in the war, but they kept their distance for the most part. You could tell there was a lot of fear and confusion among them. We saw evidence of it in the aftermath of some of the battles, but it was rare that we were in direct contact with Japanese civilians. Most of our interactions were with American military personnel or those from allied forces.

Q: Do you recall your reaction when you first heard about the atomic bomb being dropped on Japan?

JAG: Yes, I do. It was certainly a major shock. When we heard the news, there was a lot of disbelief at first. It was such an incredible thing to hear about. I remember thinking, “This is it, it’s over. This could be the game-changer.” But it was also bittersweet because we all knew that the war wasn’t just going to end with one bomb. The devastation and the loss of life were unimaginable. At that point, we were just hoping for it to be over, but there was also a sense of solemnity that came with it. It wasn’t a victory we could celebrate in a traditional sense.

Q: How did the end of the war affect you and your comrades? Were you immediately sent home?

JAG: No, not immediately. We were all eager for the war to end, of course, but there was still a lot of cleanup work to do. We had to help with the occupation of Japan and some other post-war duties. It wasn’t like the war ended and then everything was over. We stayed active for a while, and it took some time before we were able to return home. The transition wasn’t easy for a lot of us either. After being away for so long, it was hard to readjust, even when we finally did make it back.

Q: Did you have any specific plans for what you wanted to do once you returned home?

JAG: Not really, I was just looking forward to getting back to some sort of normal life. I hadn’t really thought much about it at the time. I just knew that I wanted to put the war behind me and get back to my family and friends. I wanted to get back to work, maybe go back to school, but I didn’t have any grand plans. At that point, it was just about finding some peace and stability again.

Q: Do you remember your feelings when you first returned home?

JAG: It was a mix of emotions. I was relieved to be back, but there was also a sense of disorientation. Everything had changed while I was away. People had moved on with their lives, and I felt like I was a little bit out of place. I think it took some time before I really felt like I was home again. It was strange to come back to civilian life after everything I’d experienced.

Q: Did you keep in touch with any of your fellow servicemen after the war?

JAG: Yes, I did. I stayed in touch with a few of the guys I served with, especially the ones I had become close to during the war. There was a fellow from Queens, New York,

named Joe Simmons. He was a radar operator too, and we kept up for years after the war. I was fortunate enough to reconnect with him a few times over the years. We would talk about what happened, reminisce about the missions we were on, and just catch up on life after the war. Sadly, I also lost a friend who died in a mission over Japan. That was a tough loss, and it made me realize how fragile life is.

Q: Was there a specific moment or event during your time in the service that you'll never forget?

JAG: There are a few moments that stand out. One that always sticks with me is the time we had to abort a bombing run because there were American ships below us, filled with Marines. I could see them clearly on my radar, and the decision was made not to drop bombs for fear of hitting friendly forces. We dropped the bombs into the ocean instead. It was a tense moment, but it also showed how complex the situation was. It's easy to forget that in wartime, it's not just about hitting the enemy—it's about making sure you don't harm your own people in the process.

Q: Looking back now, how do you feel about your service?

JAG: I'm proud of my service. It wasn't always easy, but it was necessary. I think it helped shape who I am today. I learned a lot about responsibility, about leadership, and about sacrifice. But it also left its scars, and I don't think anyone comes out of something like that unchanged. It was a tough time, and I carry those memories with me, but I'm grateful for the opportunities I had after the war. The education I was able to pursue with the help of the GI Bill was something I really appreciated.

Q: You mentioned that you went to college after the war. What was that experience like for you?

JAG: It was a bit of a culture shock at first. After being in the military for so long, transitioning into a classroom setting was a big adjustment. But I was motivated. I went to Iona College in New Rochelle, which was a wonderful small school at the time. A lot of veterans attended, and we supported each other. The GI Bill made it possible for me to go to college, and I'm very grateful for that. I was able to pursue my education and eventually go on to graduate school, which I don't think would have been possible without that support.

Q: After you graduated, what did you do with your degree?

JAG: I went into social work. My background and education helped me get involved with various community programs. One of the most important things I worked on was related to traffic safety and juvenile justice. After my grandson was tragically killed in a DWI crash, I worked with others to get a grant to study justice courts and improve community safety. It was a meaningful way to contribute back, and I felt like it tied back to my desire to help others, something that became clear to me during my time in the service.

Q: That's a very impactful way to continue serving. Do you think your time in the military had an impact on your desire to pursue work like that?

JAG: Absolutely. The military taught me a lot about the importance of community and teamwork. We all had a role to play, and we depended on each other. That sense of responsibility and duty didn't go away when I left the service. If anything, it just grew stronger. I wanted to do something that would make a positive difference in people's lives. Whether it was through community programs or my work on social issues, I always felt that I was in a position to help, and that feeling started during my time in the military.

Q: How do you feel about the way veterans are treated today compared to when you came home from the war?

JAG: Well, I think things have certainly improved. When I came home, there was a lot of confusion and lack of support for returning veterans. It wasn't like we had a lot of resources or guidance, and I think a lot of veterans felt like they were just expected to pick up where they left off. Today, there's a much greater recognition of the sacrifices veterans make, and there are more resources available for them. I'm glad to see that, but I do think there's always room for improvement. Veterans deserve to be supported, both during their service and after.

Q: Thank you again, Mr. Grogan, for sharing your experiences with us today.

JAG: Thank you for the opportunity. It's been a pleasure to talk about it.