

**Raymond J. Gamble
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
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Interviewers**

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

RG: Raymond J. Gamble, born February 19, 1925, in the city of Philadelphia Pennsylvania.

Q: What was your pre-military service education?

RG: None.

Q: Did you go through high school prior—

RG: No, I went through like a year or two of high school then I quit and went and joined the Navy. I volunteered for it in 1942, that's when they (Navy) dropped the registration to eighteen. I was seventeen at the time. I asked my mother to let me go, she says no. When it dropped to eighteen I told her I wanna join the Navy, she says ok so I handed her the papers to sign. I was sworn in in December of '42, then they sent me home and [unclear] me to active duty February 5, 1943.

Q: Could you tell me why you picked the Navy?

RG: Well... I didn't like crawling in the mud. That's one of the reasons why. [Both laugh]

Q: Ok. Could I go back to something else too? When you heard about Pearl Harbor, where were you and what do you remember about your feelings?

RG: If I remember correctly, Pearl Harbor, that was on a Sunday, I had gone to church and then we met the girls in an ice cream parlor. We left them there and went to the bar. That's when I heard about it. At seventeen I was ticked off. Mad. Not much that I could do. I had a very good friend of mine, William Anderson. He and I decided to turn around and join to go together at the same time. I had a little problem because my mother and father divorced, what held me back a little bit was guardianship. My mother had to get papers to prove that she was the guardian before I could get into the Navy.

Q: When you enlisted in the Navy where did you go to do your basic training?

RG: I went into 90 Church St. Manhattan, and they sent me to Bainbridge, Maryland on February 5, 1943. I stayed there till around April, then they sent me to signal school at the University of Chicago, Illinois. I stayed in Chicago for three months, then around July they sent me to Little Creek, Virginia for amphibious training. I was made 3rd Class Petty Officer while I was down there. They kept me there till January of '44, then we came to New York because we were being shipped overseas—I'll tell you a story— I was home I [unclear] at 42nd St., and I lived at 96th St. Manhattan. I says to the chief "hey chief, can I get home?" He says "where do you live?" I told him and he says "[unclear] you're back within an hour". So, I went home, I told my mother goodbye and everything like that because they said I'm going overseas. But unbeknown to me, I come back, we go to Lido Beach, our point of embarkation. I wound up staying till the end of January, my mother says "Oh, I thought you were going?" I says "I am don't worry".

When we did go overseas we turned around from Lido Beach to Long Beach, we walked, they made us hike it. We got to the Long Island Railroad, shipped to center Jersey somewhere, I don't know what part of Jersey. We Backtracked to Jersey City, the Piers I guess. Got the ferry, went across to, I think, Pier 90 and got the Cunard Line at the Aquitania. We left for England. We pulled into the Firth of Clyde. Greenock and Gourock were the towns there and we were stationed at Rosneath. The Navy had taken a base over there, that was an amphib base. We stayed there for a good part of January-February. Somewhere around March is where I picked up the Gunboat, the U.S. LCGL 7—

Q: Why don't you show us that picture?

RG: [Holds up photo of U.S. LCGL 7] We picked up this gunboat here [points at photo]. It was an English gunboat, two-hundred feet [in length]. See, [unclear] what they did they turned around and made a gunboat out of it, it was a landing craft originally, but they made a gunboat out of it. On this here they have two 4.7's and two 20mm aboard. We were training on this for the invasion of France. [unclear]... That had no bunks, you had to use your hammock. It was the first time I ever slept in a hammock. Then for about a month or so we sailed along the coast of England down to Salcombe, that's where our home port was. We had gone in and out, doing a little training. We had gone to Poole, England because that was the English amphibious base. We had a Marine Major come aboard and show our gunsmen how to use the guns, the 4.7's. While there, they were training us how to use the bayonet. I was surprised as hell. Here's a sailor learning how to use a bayonet. But, what it was for, they [gunboat] have a low waterline and it [bayonet] was supposed to repel any invaders. That's why they were teaching us but we didn't know it at the time.

[Grabs paper] Let me refresh my memory. We sailed back to Salcombe, then we left Salcombe on June 5. The water was very rough so they called it off and pulled

is into a town called Port Weymouth. We stayed there for a few hours, then we pulled out on the 5th. The 5th originally was supposed to be D-Day, but because of the weather they made it the next day, June 6th. Later that same night we sailed toward the coast of France. At 6 AM, or thereabouts, the invasion of France began. We fire at least three-hundred rounds that day into the shores. The reason why I was taught how to use the bayonet was because we were supposed to engage any German anti-amphibious craft that came out of the harbor. But, they never did [come out].

Q: Now, was this a close support vessel? How close to the shore did you go?

RG: Well, We got maybe a couple hundred yards off. That wasn't our purpose, our purpose... we did fire in because one of the guns may happen to spy a bunker, or whatever it was, that was holding up our line of tanks. The captain turned around and says "fire a shot, see how close you get". And we did, we fired three-hundred rounds with the two guns. Our range wasn't that far, but we could shoot further inland. Then we hung around for about seven days.

Q: What beach were you—

RG: Utah. It was Utah beach. Reading through history I found out that's the one theater Roosevelt had. But I'll tell ya, going in and ya turn around and look at a small boat with army guys in it, look back and it's gone because the 88's were knockin' em' out. If anybody says they're not scared they're full of bologna because I was for the first half-hour, then after that I says "ahhh to hell with it, you're just going to get hit, you're going to get hit, you'll never know the difference anyway". We stayed there for seven days and we pulled out just before that big storm and we went back to Salcombe. I got a five day leave. I went to London, and while I was in London, who do I meet... I meet the Major who was teaching us how to use the guns. [he] Showed us a good time. Then we come back, I stayed there [Salcombe] until September... We were coming home on the Queen Mary, but there was the Normandy and the Aquitania. For some reason Churchill picked the Queen Mary so we had to hang around a week waiting for him.

Q: You told me this downstairs, what was your connection to the Queen Mary?

RG: Oh [Laughs]. My mother had a friend that worked on the Queen Mary. When they'd come to New York she would bring me aboard in '38 and '39. We'd tour it, go around, and then September '39, that's when England declared war. That's when the Mary took off, went home. Then when I come home [from Salcombe] I wound up on the ship that I used to board. It took us seven days to come home on the Queen Mary because we turned around and [unclear] two destroyers escort to Halifax where we dropped off Churchill

Q: Did you ever see Churchill?

RG: No, It's funny, I never seen Churchill during the seven day trip that we had. The only time I seen him I was on the boat deck looking down and he was getting off the gangway going down to the shore. That's the only time I'd seen the man, and it was only about five-thousand of us aboard the ship at the time that were coming home. I don't know why he never come around, but I guess he had his reasons.

Anyway, we pulled into New York and that's when they had a big hurricane hit New York City in September of 44'. So I got twenty-five day leave and five day travel time, and they gave me orders to report to Camp Elliot, San Diego. I was out in Camp Elliot, San Diego for a few weeks, then they shipped us to Coronado to pick up an LCI. [unclear] LCI I went up to terminal island, which is right next to San Pedro, and I picked up the ship there, APA troop transport. I was on APA, it was USS Briscoe, APA 65. Then when I got to Pearl they transferred me to USS Thurston AP 77. As I said, I left Terminal Island in December, we went to Pearl Harbor on the way over, then in the latter part of January, maybe the 20th, 25th, somewhere like that we turned around and took off to Iwo Jima. We didn't know it 'till we were underway, that we were sailing to Iwo Jima, then we stopped at one place I think [unclear], then we turned around and went up to Iwo Jima. I wrote my mother a letter, I told her, geez I had a big July 4th celebration and she never caught on, 'cause it's February 19th, 1945 and that was my birthday. I didn't go ashore 'till about five days later 'cause we were held back, we had part of the army air force [unclear] after the fifth day I went ashore. I stayed about six, seven days, and cause the ship I was on took off and sailed to Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides. Then the ship that I got, the Carteret APA 66. As we left we had a lot of fun crossing the equator.

Q: Could you tell me, what did you do while you were on shore at Iwo Jima as a Navy personnel...

RG: ... Well I was in the beach party, and our job was to take care of the small boats and everything that was coming in, it was Blue Beach on Iwo. We were supposed to take care of everything that comes in. We were there like a director, traffic cops, and to help them out if any problems [arose] or anything. I was the signalman so I had signaled whatever had to be, whatever the captain told me, or whatever the skipper told me to signal. So we stayed there for about six, seven days. I'll tell ya, I was scared. We had gone ashore and there was a few fox holes left from the Marines so what we did, we fixed them up, put tarps on top and everything like that. I heard a noise at night, it kept me awake a whole damn night. If anybody popped his head in that hole he woulda been shot because I didn't know what it was. But, what it was, the next day it was the end of the tarp flapping. It kept me awake for the whole night. Then when we were getting ready to leave...

Q: ... Can I ask you a second, were you there when the flag was raised?

RG: No, I was aboard the ship at the time. We were told. My job was always up on the bridge [of the ship], they had noticed it, and through the binoculars I seen it on there. When we were getting ready to leave to go back to the Thurston I had packed all my gear. I was issued a Carbine while I was there. I went down towards the water and when I went back the Carbine was gone. So, I told the skipper about it and he said don't worry about it when you get back aboard the ship you'll get another one. I said I don't care, if the guy could use it let him use it. That was supposed to be a three day operation and it wound up being thirty-three days. They got a big surprise. The 3rd, 4th, and 5th marine divisions were there at the time. I think the 4th was the one that was held back, the 3rd and 5th had made it. The beach was [unclear], you could see the wreckage on the beach but the [unclear]. Anyways, we left the island, go back on the ship, the Carteret. Got down to Espiritu Santo. I got aboard my ship and they handed me a rifle, and I was like "aww geez", they had it packed in Cosmoline. I had to take the whole thing apart to clean it up and put it back together. So, I didn't lose it again.

Anyway, we picked up part of the 27th division and took them up to Okinawa. I wasn't there for the actual invasion of Okinawa. We brought them up and put them on the island which was still fighting, still part of the invasion. We were supposed to take them to, if I remember, to Aoshima, but they diverted them to the mainland because that's where the fighting was. The group I was with, the beach party, they went ashore. The doctor wouldn't let me go because I had acne on both shoulders and he didn't trust me going ashore so he kept me aboard. To tell you the truth, I wish he hadn't because GQ in the morning, GQ at night. You see the planes flying, you don't know which ones which. You were nervous.

Q: Did you see any of the kamikaze attacks...?

RG: ... Well I seen one fly by, they were shooting at it. It was on the port side of the ship going forward I seen it, it was off in the distance it wasn't near us. We were lucky, I have to say I've been very lucky that during the course of my time that I never seen anybody killed along side of me, but I seen it at a distance. I knock on wood for that, say a prayer for that, because I don't know how I would react. You never know until it happens. We stayed there part of April and May. We left in May and went back down to Guam, and they dropped us off at Guam, the beach party. We were staying at Guam in the midst of training and everything. We were at [unclear] that was the amphibious command of the Pacific. That's where we were. Of course, we were getting ready for Japan. I would say my best President was Truman, when he dropped that bomb and saved my life and a lot of others, believe me.

We stayed there, then in November of that year, '45 I came home aboard the USS Yorktown. Thirteen days to Treasure Island. I got off at Treasure Island and they said "where's your peacoat?". But I didn't have any cause out there you're warm, you never figure November would be cold so I just had a little brown jacket. They

issued me another peacoat and put me on a train. It took five days to get home, then December the 11th I was discharged. And the only time I volunteered, I volunteered to be a cook cause I had the best of everything, you always had first choice. It was good.

Q: Let's go back, I think I stopped you describing your crossing the Equator.

RG: Oh yeah, we were coming back on the Carteret. They have an organization called the Shell Backs. If you've never crossed the Equator before you were called a poliwig and every other thing. They have an initiation that when you cross the equator, being a poliwig I got saltpeter, stuff to chew or liquid. They paint your body, you had to kiss Neptune's belly. They'd get the fattest guy aboard and you'd have to kiss it. [unclear] they'd give you a little shock with the spear, Neptune's spear. It was a whole day ceremony. It was good. It took me quite a while to get the stuff off my body. Oh Jesus, we had a lot of fun.

Q: Why don't you show us your card right now that you...

RG: [holds card up to camera] This is the card here, it's make-shift. You can still see the seal on the back. This is the card that was issued to me, I also have a big...

Q: ... Certificate?

RG: Yeah certificate.

RG: [holds up ID card] And this is, believe it or not, don't know how good you can see it. This is the faded ID card that I had from then.

RG: [holds up Navy certificate] This is what they gave me when I got out even though it's broken in half, but this was to let you know that you were in the Navy.

RG: [holds up jar of sand] I wanted to show you [this]. We were talking about Iwo Jima, this is the sands of Iwo Jima that I brought home. That was 1945.

RG: [holds up a professional style portrait photo of him and his brother in their Navy uniforms] I'd like to get my brother in this. This is a picture of my brother and I. It was September 1944. That's the only time we were home together.

WC: Who is who?

RG: [Points to person on the left] This is me, Raymond. [points to person on the right] This is William Gamble. The one with the white hat is my brother, Bill.

Q: Where did he serve?

RG: He served in the Pacific and he was on Okinawa. He was in the Seabees, the [unclear] 6th construction battalion. He got caught in that typhoon that wiped em' out, it wiped everything they had. But, he stayed in a few years extra.

Q: So you missed that typhoon? That was one of my questions...

RG:... Oh yes, we had sailed out of there. We were going back towards Guam and Saipan.

RG: [Holds up certificate] The French government gave me a medal and this certificate for the invasion of Normandy.

RG: [holds up discharge certificate] Believe it or not, out of the two discharges I like this one here. This is the discharge that I got when I was discharged from Lido Beach December 11th, 1945.

RG: After I got out in 45' I turned around and I got a job with Edison, and I stayed with Con Edison for about four years, five years. Then I turned around and I reenlisted in the Navy. I was going to make a career out of it but after reenlistment I met my wife. They called me back to active duty for twenty-two months. I was stationed in Clifton New Jersey at the reserve training center there. Then they put me aboard the ship the USS Marietta in '82 and it was stationed out of Floyd Bennett Field and was [unclear] harbor defense New York. I didn't want that, I wanted to go with six fleet but I stayed aboard there. I stayed for twenty-two months.

WC: That was during Korea?

RG: The Korean war, yeah. [holds up discharge paper] This is the discharge I got from them. You know why I like the other one?

Q: Why?

RG: It's got the Navy ship on it.

Q: Oh ok, yeah, it's more decorative

RG: Right

RG: [Holds up ID card] This is the ID card that they gave you for the Korean war.

Q: Is there anything you wanted to mention that you maybe forgot?

RG: Yeah that's why I'm looking [at his paper]

Q: Ok, that's what I thought.

Q: How would you say your military service affected your life?

RG: It transformed me from a boy to a man, that's for sure. You got an experience that you'd never have got if you hadn't gone in. You grew overnight. I'm still a Navy man through and through, in fact I got told when I was at the Iwo Jima Association dinner this past February I'd won a jacket and it had a big US Marine on it. I said to John [unclear] "can you take this off and put the Navy

emblem?”. But it was embroidered, they couldn’t do it. So we turned around and had a Navy emblem put on this side here [points to right side]. I had people [ask] “why do you got the Navy emblem and Marine?”. I said “well you see this group here, the Navy. This group here took this [marines] to Iwo Jima”. That’s what I’d tell em’ on that. [Laughs].

Q: Did you ever make use of the GI bill?

RG: I just made use of it when I bought the house. That’s the only thing. I never joined the 52-20 club. You know, fifty-two weeks of twenty dollars, I never joined that. I did use it to buy a home and I got four and a half percent interest on it. That’s the only thing as far as the GI bill that I used.

Q: When did you get married?

RG: I got married March 1st eleven minutes after eleven in 1952. In fact I was stationed at Clifton New Jersey and I’d gotten off Saturday morning and it snowed like a son of a gun. I was supposed to be at the City Hall at 10 o’clock, but I never did make it till 11. The snow hindered me from getting in on time. I’ll always remember the time, March 1st eleven minutes after eleven. I was married for forty years, my wife died January 10th of 92’. Had good years, a good marriage.

Q: Did you have many children?

RG: Yeah I have a boy and a girl. The boy, he’ll be fifty in December, and my daughter is forty-six.

Q: Did you have anything else you wanted to...

RG:... Well I don’t know

WC: Well let me just ask you this, have you kept in touch with any of your old ship mates?

RG: To tell you the truth, [unclear] moving around, I never had occasion to be anywhere too long. I did meet one guy in Buffalo a few years back, and I don’t remember him. I had a picture at home of the group, but I never did get in touch.

Q: Now you did mention downstairs you’ve gone to some of the reunions and some different events?

RG: Well I belong to the American Legion and I go to all the partner conventions and I try to make [it to] the national conventions like Anaheim, New Orleans, Salt Lake City. It was Charlotte this year. San Antonio.

Q: That’s good. Ok, well thank you very much for the interview.

