

King High Remembers: Bertram Frank

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Bert Frank is a 91 year old WW2 veteran, born in Rochester, New York in 1924. He is one of two children born to Mr Frank, an Englishman, and Mrs Frank, a Russian/Polish woman. Frank married at twenty-seven to the late Anna Frank and had birthed three children who have all since had kids of their own.

Frank's early years were relatively easygoing despite the many hardships thrown at him. He survived America's great depression period and lived normally while nearly everyone was on relief. Although many Americans didn't survive these hard times, Frank's family was making out alright. His father, who was a cabinet-maker earning \$18 a week, was the only one on Frank's entire street who still held a job. Frank's father's good fortune followed Frank to war, for he stated that during his three years + serving he never experienced any severe injuries. "The only injury I ever got was from blisters forming on my rear end from the bumpy weapons carrier rides," described Frank. "I remember going into the tent with all the nurses and feeling a little embarrassed because men had head and arm injuries and legs shot off and I was just there were with a sore backside."

In 1941, at the age of 17, Frank graduated high school and enlisted in the army only a year later; encouraged to do so by a banner advertising the war and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Frank's younger brother joined the navy in 1944 so his family was no newcomer to the detrimental effects caused by a loved one being in battle. "Everyone", explained Frank, "was patriotic. We all wanted to fight for our country. I wanted to serve my country because it was the right thing to do at the time. My mom didn't want me to go, but she always supported me. Both my parents were very supportive of [my brother and me] going to war. I am really proud that I served. I don't regret a second of it."

Bert Frank spent his service in the Pacific as a member of the United States' army signal corp where he dealt with the new technology at that time. The reason why he chose that specific field of interest was because inventions such as the radio were new innovations that sparked Frank's curiosity and interest. He first enlisted himself in Atlantic City, then was transferred to Washington D.C, where he celebrated his 19th birthday with his cousin, and finally to Florida and Georgia, where he began his training in radio and radar in the signal corp. In Florida, he was stationed in the secret Camp Murphy in the Everglades swamp. His first overseas transfer was to New Guinea, which was followed by other places such as the Dutch East Indies, Philippines, Okinawa, and South Korea. His duty was to set up communications on islands through ships or airplanes. He had flown on a plane about four to five times, however the experience to him was frightening. Frank described his experience in the war as a constant worry about survival. With all the horrible things happening in his surroundings, he learned to be accustomed to those bad things because he just knew it was bound to happen.

It was clear that his time spent in the Pacific was a very important aspect of his life. He recounted the living conditions of 6-7 men in a tent and remembered how such close living quarters allowed the men to grow very close knit relationships. Although the war was stressful, Frank and his fellow comrades found means of entertainment during the times where things were quiet. He had attended a few dances that were held in the Philippines as well as watching movies in their camp and attending U.S.A shows. Though he fondly remembers these memories of brotherhood and good-hearted fun, they do not outweigh the bad ones for Frank. In a photo album he shows and explains a picture of himself standing outside a Japanese cave. A big problem for American soldiers was the fact that the Japanese would often hide in foxholes or

caves and ambush them in a type of guerrilla warfare. So the Americans would literally burn them out and Frank, in this case, would go in and “get some souvenirs” as he put it. This surprisingly was not nearly as traumatic as one particular event during his time in the Armed Forces, as one could imagine what might’ve been inside those caves. This particular event, he explained, still affects him to this day.

This one prominent memory that held great significance to Frank was his first experience of witnessing the infamous Japanese kamikaze attack as he was stationed in the Philippines. There were one hundred ships stationed in the harbor, as Frank was in one of them, when four kamikaze planes flew by. Everything became chaotic as each ship tried to shoot down the Japanese planes, and as one can possibly imagine, the noise was really bad, which had later damaged part of Frank’s hearing. Fortunately, Frank was located in one of the ships that was not hit by the planes. He explained that he was grateful to be alive but also went on to say that it was for that very reason that he did not think of himself as a hero. He believes it was the men who died that day that really deserve to be called a hero. When asked what his least favorite part about the war was, it was this memory that he chose. Directly after the attack Frank and his ship attended a speech made by General MacArthur, commemorating the men that lost their lives.

As of May 1945 the war was basically over for those on the European front, for those like Frank however, it seemed like they still had a while to go. The Japanese refused to surrender and therefore U.S. officials had to figure out how to end the war while still preserving as many American lives as possible, in other words, deploying 2 atomic bombs. Frank was in Okinawa at the time and remembered how they were told about the bombs after they were dropped. They were ordered to get as far from the blast zone as possible and they did just that.

The atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not close enough for Bert to hear, although he was stationed 350 miles away from the explosions. Next thing, the first sergeant lined everyone up to announce that the atomic bombs were dropped. Everyone was in complete shock, Bert described it as “they couldn’t believe it.” After this, he went to South Korea for about two months. Finally arriving home safely was described as “contented to be alive” and still is. Once Bert was home, he decided to further his education and if it wasn’t for the G.I Bill, he wouldn’t have been able to afford the business administration degree he earned. He used his degree and worked for Metropolitan Insurance in Rochester, New York, then moved his job over to Santa Monica, CA. Bert highly admires President Truman, in fact he was his favorite president, and also says that the men in the infantry and pilots are his heroes. Bert Frank stated how he was very grateful for a young man who was stationed with him for taking pictures of every moment during the war. If it wasn’t for him he wouldn’t have been able to show our generation what he saw and what he lived. He says “it still feels like a dream,” but once he visited Normandy for the 60th anniversary of D-Day, it all felt very real and brought back many memories. Bert Frank is apart of the Disabled American Veterans group due to hearing loss caused by the Kamikaze attack he was in. He tries to share his memories with other veterans from the war, although they are all slowly passing away. he attends the Disabled American Veteran reunions in Culver City as a way to feel more connected. Bert now, contently lives and spends his time dancing with his lady friend of the past 23 years, Mary. The one thing Bert Frank wants to pass on to future generations that he learned from his experience, which “changed [him] from a baby into a man,” is that war should be avoided unless it is necessary. “World War II was supposed to be the war to end all wars. There have been 6 wars since then and nothing was

accomplished.” World War II was necessary because it preserved our nation’s democracy or else “we would have been apart of Germany and Japan.” Truly, our democracy has been preserved due to Bert Frank’s honorable contributions. Once he came home, an article dedicated to Frank was published and the headline stated “Sgt. Frank Back in U.S.” Once again, welcome home Sgt. Frank.