

DR. BOB JOHNSON
ON
KODIAK, ALASKA, DURING WORLD WAR II,
And
His arrival in Kodiak
Kodiak before the War

By
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LE: Well, let's break that into two parts and talk about ones related to the war...

BJ: Okay, well a good source for this by the way would be Hank Eaton if you don't have him on your list because he worked out at the base and knows a lot about that. Ah, a naval station was built with housing for naval personnel, with a fully equipped hospital, and an army camp...a tent city was built on the station over the process of one or two years, or maybe three at the most starting... before Pearl Harbor and extending beyond...how many troops we had in here, I think we had 25,600 people in here at one time...there may have been 50,000 troops at one time...what they were going to use them for, they had reasons, and I'm not sure that I know them...they didn't do much because there wasn't any ground fighting here or on the Aleutian Chain, but I'm sure they didn't know that there wasn't going to be any so (?)...the naval station was a headquarters for submarines and for aircraft, and they flew between here and Dutch Harbor and out to Shemya as you would read in "The One Thousand Mile War" to bomb Kiska and to recapture it and Adak which was also captured by the Japanese...a lot of work went on out there...a lot of work went on in town because town swelled by the addition of construction workers for the naval station which was being built by (?) the service workers who came in to help operate the base...and the town grew by leaps and bounds from a population of 550 to a population of about 5000 I think over four years...part of what went on there, the town became incorporated as a first class city in 1940, I think, and a lot of businesses were built...I have a list of the things that were built but I am not sure if you want me to go into that...transportation companies, a radio station came in, a phone company that didn't exist-we had no phones, Pacific Northern Airlines-we had no air transportation in here prior to 1940 but in 1940 we had begun service between here and Anchorage and then Alaska Airlines between Seattle and Anchorage started-a route to Kodiak that was much easier than the one used by steamships...we came by steamship and I went back and forth to school by ship as a matter of fact...and that ended after '42 so the airline service wasn't much, but it had been started...we had a post office, of course, when we came...the Kodiak Island, no, no, no...the radio station, we had no radio station here but the military started a radio station called KODK, and that was probably in 1940 shortly after the

was a chap who was in charge of the "Kodiak Bear" which was the naval station newspaper...his name was Roy Kraft, and he had a great sense of humor which I think helped keep the morale of the Navy men up...they didn't have anything much to do...it was pretty hard keeping your morale up sitting around somewhere a long way from home, without your family and you don't feel like you're doing something useful...but he helped a lot, he was good for (?) morale...and then there was the armed forces radio...the Rotary Club, as a matter of fact, financed the first radio and the military took it over and it was the armed forces radio and it was our only radio station for years...I think it started about then...Names of people who touched the family, there was a young marine named Danny Hogue who came from the east coast, a very enterprising young fellow that captured the heart of my parents so he spent a lot of time out at the house...he was one heck of a enterprising trader and everything he traded or sold made a profit and that impressed my Dad very much...he wasn't very good at that sort of thing and he thought this was a really enterprising young man...and he subsequently did (?) become quite well-to-do on the east coast after he got out of the military...he was in the marines here and spent a lot of time in our house and helped chop wood and we drank beer together...I took him swimming one day and in the raft (?) we anchored off one (?) point in the ocean with a little diving tower and a diving board...that might surprise you that people would recreational swim in the ocean...and he was pretty perky and willing to take a dip in the ocean...we didn't swim in a leisurely fashion but dive in and get out in a hurry...one day, I'll never forget, he brought a friend, a southerner, a marine, a slow talker with a drawl and I said, "Hey, how'd you like to go swimmming?"... "Oh, you swim up here? Sure!"...Okay, he said, so we got into a little skiff and rowed out to where we had the anchor (?), put on our suits, a nice warm sunny day like we used to have, rode out to the raft-a pretty-good sized raft and Danny and I knew what was going to happen, you know...he hadn't put his fingers in the water, he didn't know...and so I ran out to the end of the board and dove in, made a very great effort not to blow my breath out and puff and huff when I came up and I swam back leisurely to the raft and Danny did the same thing...and that took some doing because you tend to lose your breath the moment you hit that water...it's in the low 50's...so this guy, this fellow came out to the end and jumped off the board and he almost came out of the water before he went in...I've never seen anybody surface so fast...and he came back to the raft panting and gasping for breath...we had a wonderful laugh out of that...it wasn't very kind...anyway, that was some of adventures with some of the servicemen here...I don't remember any others...I think there was a Navy man who came up to the house who

with red paper...and you could kind of get pretty good at being able to hear obstacles like trees in a yard, and if you ever moved around in the dark in a very familiar place, you know you feel some kind of sound wave come back, some kind of wave come back from an obstacle as you get close to it and you get pretty good at reading that...yes, we did have blackouts everynight...and, let me see, here's an interesting quote from the "Mirror" - "January 17, 1942, a new order has been issued by military authorities that henceforth the masking of lights must be done with red instead of blue cellophane...red flashlights appeared in great numbers last night in stores...we are having a run on the new color"...that was in the "Kodiak Mirror"...we did have a civil defense force...the civilian community was organized and I thought that E.J. Erskine was in charge of that, I know I was to be a messenger boy...in case there were any hostilities, I got to drive a little dinky car that Mrs. Erskine owned and I could hardly wait for hostilities to break out but they never did...so I could drive the car...how did it effect us other than the blackouts?...well, not much really, life went on as usual except for our town was burgeoning...just to give you an idea I have here right in front of me just a minute ago, remember I just read off to you what we have in town...when we got here...I just came across what we had in town a few minutes ago (looking through notes)...there it is...in 1943, okay...I'll do that in a minute but I want to tell you one other thing...here's a interesting quote that tells you something about the plight of the military man in Kodiak...this is taken out of the "Mirror" - "May 23, 1942, I am a soldier. In town the other day, I met a sailor. The two of us agreed on several things. We didn't care to visit the ladies of easy virtue; we didn't care to sit and drink coffee - a drink or two would not be bad but what to do after that. We walked out past Al's Chicken Inn. Next time we'll walk out the other way. Then what?"...there wasn't much to do in Kodiak but for somebody who was used to living somewhere else...for us in Kodiak it was skating, hiking, there was hunting, there was a lot to do, we thought...but for somebody who was used to organized activity outside there wasn't much to do and there were a lot of them in the service...here in 1943 after four years of growth that was the result of the naval station being built we had 8 bars, (END OF SIDE ONE)...2 churches, a hospital-(?) the Griffin Memorial Hospital-it's now the Mental Health Center, 3 transfer companies, an ice cream parlor, 2 liquor stores, a movie theater, armed forces radio, 2 drug stores, a cab company, a phone system, a community water supply, an electric association-KEA, a police force, the city government, mayor and council, and a bank...we had 41 businesses listed in the "Kodiak Mirror"...we had a

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