



Bob Stangier

Bob Stangier flew B-25 bombers in World War II. Stationed in Italy, the Pendleton native and his six-man Army Air Corps crew destroyed railway and highway bridges as “bridge busters.” They often returned from missions with fresh bullet holes in the plane’s shell.

Unlike fighter pilots, who engaged in dogfights, the B-52s flew in precise patterns. Tight formations included six airplanes flying in double-decker vees. Along with bridges, the planes bombed railroad yards, electrical transformers, personnel and buildings. Needing to fly as close as possible, their wings sometimes overlapped. As Stangier’s plane roared on after the drop, his tail gunner would peer down and report whether the bomb had done its job. Nineteen-year-old Stangier flew 70 missions. He remembers debriefing sessions after each raid, during which each crew member received a couple ounces of alcohol to calm the adrenaline levels.

After returning from war, Stangier flew a crop duster for a while before operating various businesses in Pendleton including an ice cream manufacturing plant, children’s clothing store and Hallmark shop. He and wife Mary Jane raised four children.



Colosseum in Rome, circa 1945

Generations of war

After interviewing each man individually, reporter Kathy Aney invited veterans Bob Stangier, Tom Tangney, Ron Jardine and J.D. Lambert to the *East Oregonian* offices for a group conversation. They discussed service, homecoming and the meaning of patriotism.

Kathy Aney: Tell us about when and why you joined the military.

Bob Stangier: I was a senior in Pendleton High School in '41. I was 18, and you registered for the draft when you were 18, so in December of '41 I registered for the draft, and I graduated from high school in '42, June, and that fall went to Oregon State, now Oregon State University. In those days, when your draft numbers came, if you physically received it, you were drafted. I was in Corvallis and my mother called up one day and said, “Your draft notice is here,” so I immediately went up to Portland and enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

The Army Air Corps was kind of a glamorous thing and all the young fellows all pictured themselves as fighter pilots and I included. So I joined the Air Corps. Then in a few months I was called up and went through the Air Corps training system and ended up for about six months on Corsica, and then the bomb line got too far from us, and so we moved to northern Italy and finished the war.

Tom Tangney: I joined the Marine Corps because I went to the draft board when I was ready to graduate from high school and they told me that I could get into college, I could be deferred, but may not get there before I was drafted. I thought I was kind of pressured a little bit, but I had been a, for those days anyway, a very, very good football player, and I had a fellow by the name of Amos Alonzo Stagg, who was the grand daddy of football come into our cow barn and offer me a scholarship to [University of the Pacific]. But my dad had a little problem with drinking, and so forth, so we never had any money.

I thought, “Even though I got the scholarship, I can’t afford to go.” A Marine Corps recruiter came by and told me, “Now, if you enlist in the Marine Corps, we have real good football teams at Camp Pendleton ... and you can play football in the Marine Corps. When you get out, we’ll pay for your college education.”

Now, I’m from the sticks, you know, in Prineville, so I’m not too world-wise, so I bought that story and I enlisted in the Marine Corps. And I never saw a football while I was in there.

Ron Jardine: I was drafted in 1966. I didn’t want to join anything because I didn’t like the military and in those days, well, the Vietnam War was really getting hot. Guys were looking for all

kinds of ways to get out. Well, I didn’t want to do certain things to get out, so I went. I was at Fort Bliss, Texas, for nine-and-a-half months, and then I went to Vietnam for one year. I was supposed to go to the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, but it was all filled up. There was about 45 to 50 people of our unit left over. They said, “Well, the third battalion marines up on the DMZ, they need some guys up there. That’s where you’re going.”

J.D. Lambert: Unlike these guys, I had the luxury of being able to join instead of being drafted. I decided to join the military for discipline. I’d grown up with discipline in my home and had good role models and wanted to make something of myself, and I had seen people in my community like these guys that were respectful, respectable, upstanding citizens that I wanted to be like. After a couple of years of goofing off in college, changing what I wanted to do, I decided to sign up for the Army knowing that I could get school paid for once I decided to get out. It was an experience that I do not regret.

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Aney: Describe the environment where you spent most of your time and some of the physical and mental challenges of being where you were and doing the job that you did.

Tangney: The bad thing about Korea was it was so terribly cold, and we had times that it got down to 50 below zero. We slept in bunkers in sleeping bags, and you slept with all your clothes on. If you found somebody that had some pants a little larger than yours, you would wear those over the top.

The second thing about that area is cleanliness was not real great. You had to be very careful about what you ate and what you drank. You were always a little bit conscious of that, but we also found out that even though we had one hot meal everyday, our other meals were C rations, or rations that you warmed yourself. If you didn’t warm them properly, and you ate them still partially frozen, you got diarrhea, and you don’t want to have diarrhea when you’re wearing two or three pair of pants.

Other than that, the lack of water was a real problem. They would send people out to get snow, and always thought it was amazing because they’d always send them out with one bit of advice, “Don’t get the yellow snow.” It didn’t always work completely well for me, because I ended up getting

dysentery out of it.

Jardine: In the northern part of Vietnam, it’s hilly, whereas the southern part is flat and you got rice paddies and things. The north has a whole bunch of little hills (where American military outposts were located). We would just transfer from outpost to outpost. It was to guard against the (North Vietnamese Army) coming across the border. At that time, starting in January of 1968, it was called the Tet Offensive, and that’s when things really started getting bad. Our hills, they were just barren. There wasn’t a whole lot of trees, mostly just bushes and grass. Lots of tall grass everywhere. Like Tom, water was a hard thing for us, ’cause we didn’t have fresh water. In the monsoons, we would gather the rain in our ponchos and run it down into buckets. In the summertime it was hot, I mean real hot. We’d have to take our water from the rivers, and we’d have to put little red pills in it before we drank it to purify it.

Lambert: For me, in Iraq, it was just the heat. We had different technology. It was easier to get things in. Supplies and water came in by the truckload. But the heat. It was 130 degrees in the daytime, 95 at night, and you were shaking like a leaf. I mean you’re freezing because you’re so used to it being so hot.

Tangney: Did you have problems with your weapons because of all the sand?

Lambert: Yeah, especially Army’s philosophy of scrub it, scrub it, scrub it. Put oil on everything, and it was just a magnet for dust. The dust just stuck right to it. Yes, we were always cleaning.

Stangier: Well, when we were on Corsica, we lived in a little town about the size of Rieth called Ghisonaccia Gara, which meant it was the railroad station for the town of Ghisonaccia. Ghisonaccia was down the road, seven or eight miles, and about the size of maybe Athena. We lived in a three-story stone house. It was actually a hotel, and it was probably built in the 1700s. It didn’t have any plumbing. It didn’t have any wiring. The Army brought in one drop cord in each room, so we had electric lights, but the plumbing was out the back door in the orchard. I was in the Army for three years and I cannot remember one meal that I ate. I can’t remember a Christmas meal. I can’t remember a Thanksgiving meal. I can remember what the dining rooms looked like, but I cannot remember what we ate.

“I wanted to make something of myself, and I had seen people in my community like these guys who were respectful, respectable, upstanding citizens.”

— J.D. Lambert, on why he joined the Army