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Subject: World War II (Military serve at Iwo Jima, views on using atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, African Americans perspective on Beaumont Race Riot)

Interviewee: Larry Boswell **Interviewer:** Janice Boswell

Interviewer: ...talk a little bit more about the Japanese and their part of the war do you feel like it could have been handled differently hadn't they attacked Honolulu.

Boswell: This could have been handled differently.

Interviewer: yeah

Boswell: Well we, we wasn't at war with the Japanese until they bombed Pearl Harbor. So... that's right, they told them time's up [inaudible few words] hmm.

Interviewer: Did you ever...did you...when... did you read any stories about Hitler in the paper when you was over in Hiroshima

Boswell: unh unh.

Interviewer: so you weren't aware of what was going on in Germany...

Boswell: well I...

Interviewer: while y'all was...

Boswell: only what the radio was telling us

Interviewer: Were you there when they bombed Tokyo with the - that bomb?

Boswell: I was on Hiroshima. I even saw the planes going.

Int: You saw the planes going in...

B: I saw the planes, yeah. One single B 29. Bomber. And it was miles in the sky just [inaudible two words] you could see it from the reflection of the sun on it. Just one single bomber. And he was way up there. And I think that was the plane that bombed... what was that ... Nagasaki? In other words, they bombed two cities in Japan and that was the plane that did it. One plane. One single plane. Other times they had... they had about five or six hundred planes in the air. When you wake up in the morning, about five or six o'clock they was going, and when you go to bed in the evening, they was going back. And some, was all shot up. And some landed on Hiroshima. And they couldn't make it back to Saipan the base was on Saipan and they couldn't make it back there. That's one of the reasons why they took Hiroshima. [Inaudible] of the plane they couldn't get back. They had an [inaudible few words] that one of those big [bombers?] could land on.

Int: Well do you remember seeing that plane that went...

B: I saw that plane that was going on there [inaudible] that mountain. I saw that plane. It was about five or six miles up in the air. One single bomber. Usually it'd be...the sky would be full of them passing on Hiroshima but that moment it was only one. And that's when we was alerted that they had bombed these two places. And I don't know if they bombed them at the same time but I'm sure I saw that plane.

Int: When y'all heard about the bombing of Japan, was everybody shouting and happy and stuff

B: Mhmm. Everybody was happy, they only wanted to go home.

Int: Do you think the war ended behind that bomb?

B: Yes, I think the war ended behind that bomb because after that, the Japanese surrendered. They surrendered after that bombing. Perhaps it wouldn't have been...they would have been still fighting if they hadn't bombed it.

Int: Okay so your feelings about Japan was that the war ended because of the bombs.

B: yeah

Int: was Hitler still around when that happened? The bombing happened?

B: Yeah Hitler was still around. Yeah, VE day in the Pacific was before VE day in Europe

Int: What do you mean by "VE day"?

B: Victory in Europe and victory in Japan. Yeah, Hitler was still around. They were still fighting in Europe. But, it was close at the end of the war then. They had bombed Germany and oh, they had bombed Berlin at that time. And they were still bombing. And the allies that invaded, they invaded Europe at that time. And they was [cursing?] on through Berlin. The Russians was coming from one way and the Americans and other allies was coming from the other. And they met up somewhere in Germany, I don't know if it was in Berlin or where. But that's why they put that wall, East and West Germany

Int: the wall...

B: Yeah, you know that wall...

Int: that they destroyed...

B: between the East...yeah they just tore it down not too long ago. Yeah, that was between Russia and the allies. The Americans had so much of Germany and Russia had so much of Germany.

Int: [inaudible]

B: Russia had East Germany and the allies had West Germany.

Int: So your views now on the war as a whole, is what?

B: Never start one if they can help it. If they can prevent it. Always try to prevent a war. A war ain't nothing to play with.

Int: okay let's talk a few minutes about the race riot of 1943.

B: 1943

Int: That was before you went in the service

B: Well, yes, I was in, I was in [inaudible] Virginia. Working in the navy yards. And then, I was drafted. I came back here, see my draft [inaudible few words] so I had to come back here to be in the army. And as I was coming back, I didn't exactly knew it was a race riot at that time. Not until I got home. But on my way from the train station, I had to walk home, and I couldn't see nobody. There was nobody on the streets, nobody on that street but me, walking home. But I didn't know it was a race riot and I ain't see no whites, I ain't seen no blacks. The only blacks I saw was those who were peeping from behind the house. They was peeping from behind the house to see what was going on in the front. But I still didn't know it was a race riot

Int: How did you find out that it was, that a race riot that had broken out?

B: When I got home.

Int: What did they say?

B: They told me it was a riot going on. My uncle or grand somebody he was sitting right in the little [hole?] just as you walked in the door with one of them old long john guns. It was about that long. And that's when they told me it was a race riot.

Int: do you know what started the race riot?

B: I think it was about a black man and a white woman, I guess. That's what I think it was about, but I don't really know what started it.

Int: Were you here when the national guard and all them police came supposedly at county, to keep peace?

B: I don't know if the National Guard came. It was one ranger I know that was here. His name was Gonzalez and he said that it was only one route and only one man and he was that man. But I don't remember the national guards coming in to restore order or nothing like that.

Int: Well do you know- I remember you telling me about something about someone – you had knew someone who had participated in the race riot. A white man that owned a store or something

B: Yeah, I said it was, but to tell you the truth I don't know definitely that he was in it or not. But I know I used to work for him, he knew me and he knew my whole family and nothing happened to them. And this is only what I heard somebody say, that he was in there with them. I don't know if that's the truth or not. I ain't gonna name his name.

Int: What feelings did you have about the race riot?

B: A race riot is something else that's bad. A race riot is terrible also. Anybody is subject to get killed.

Int: Do you know anybody that got killed in that riot?

B: No, I don't know personally, nobody that got killed in it, but I heard that quite a few people got killed on both sides, but I don't know none of them.

Int: Where exactly did the race riot take place that you know of?

B: mostly on Gladys, you know [all these?] main Negro streets. [Inaudible word], Gladys, and Buford and Irving. That's where all the Negroes hung out at, and that's where all these white folks came in that neighborhood. They also say that some of them got killed too.

Int: In your opinion, you think it began because of a black man and a black woman?

B: Black man and a white woman.

Int: and a white woman, I'm sorry. But you don't know exactly what happened.

B: I don't know exactly the real cause of it but that brought something [inaudible words].

Int: Did you think the race riot changed anything or it made it worse?

B: Well, I don't think it made it any worse. And I don't think it changed anything. Not in that time I don't think. I don't think it changed nothing, but I don't think it made it any worse, not until later on, did things begin to change. During the days of Martin Luther King when he come in there

Int: But during the 40's, living in Beaumont as a Black man, how do you feel that- how do you feel as a- being a black man, living in the 40's in Beaumont, what was it like?

B: Well, it was segregated. But living in Beaumont wasn't bad, living in Beaumont. If you're [inaudible words] segregation that you couldn't do this and couldn't do that. But it wasn't bad living in Beaumont. I wouldn't say it was. You just couldn't go in these white

places or anything like that. [Could?] go to any store in Beaumont that you wanted to, but you couldn't go in any café. You could go in the café too, but you'd have to go around the back.

Int: Did they have a special place for Blacks to sit in the back or you just ate in the kitchen?

B: No, it wasn't in the kitchen, it was a little old place set aside that you could go in. Well, it wasn't very many Blacks that would go there. Cause you never did have a crowd of Blacks in a white café.

Int: Oh, I see.

B: There was only one or two that would go there.

Int: What kind of- so you don't remember the national guard coming after the race riot?

B: No, I don't remember the national guard coming. Or maybe that was before I came here. I don't remember the national guards coming at all.

Int: Before you got off the train

B: yeah, uh huh

Int: oh, okay. Do you have anything to add about the war and the race riot, in your opinion?

B: well, about the race riot, it's not a good thing to have. If you can prevent it, it's always better to prevent it than to suffer going through it. And as far as war is concerned, it's not all, [all the time?] it's you that starts it. But [anybody?] else starts it, you must fight it. Fight it, fight it because if you don't, then your liberties and freedom will be taken from

you. So you got to fight. And the people in America, the soldiers got to fight if they want to stay free

Int: So you think freedom is a very important part-

B: Oh freedom is a very important thing. It's a very- and its worth fighting for, yeah, it's worth fighting for. Even today, if you look at these people in Russia. They are not say, free, they are not free, but they're still- they're fighting to be free. And one of these days, [inaudible few words] they will be free.

Int: So getting back to World War II, what is the most memorable incident that stuck in your mind about when you were on the ship and you saw the planes in the air, what is the most thing that really sticks out in your mind at that time in your life?

B: Well, the most memorable thing that I have in my mind is that during the time that we had to leave the ship, [from ship to shore?] that is the hardest work I've done ever in my lifetime. I ain't never worked that hard, you know, getting those things off of that ship.

Int: What things did you have to take off the ship?

B: Well, the only thing I had to take off was my own personal belongings. But you had to climb down a rope with that heavy bag on your back. That was something. And the other thing is that, a good sight to see, is those airplanes going over our heads going toward Tokyo. [inaudible few words] See, the bombers would come from Saipan, but the fighters, they would come from Hiroshima. See [you'd go along with the bombs?] [inaudible few words] fight off anything that comes, cause you know, shoot them down. [a lot?] of the airplanes was crippled when they was going back so they couldn't make it to Saipan, so they landed on Hiroshima. And those were some big old [bombers?] B 29. They had the fighters [well?] the mustangs, and the [what was that one called?] mustangs and- I don't know but it had two [inaudible word] on it. One on this side, one on that one. They'd use some of them as night [inaudible word] all painted black but these [inaudible few words] I forget the name they call it. But they [inaudible few words.]

Int: So you feel that war is not good

B: No war is not good.

Int: You feel that the only way you'd fight- would be necessary- the only reason why you would fight, unless it was necessary.

B: yeah, yeah. You just can't let somebody come in and take things away from you. You've got to fight. Or else they'll kill you.

Int: Getting back to the race riot part of the interview, so you feel it was no change, after the race riot, do you think that tensions between blacks were...

B: oh yeah, tensions were very high between blacks and whites

Int: ...was very high at that time-

B: at that time, but its eased off as time went by. But not at that time. Tensions was very high.

Int: Do you consider yourself as prejudiced or against whites, or you just- what are your views

B: well...

Int: At that time, in the 40's.

B: Oh in those times, well even during those times, [as it is now?], there was some good white people, and there was some bad. Just like there was some good negroes and there was some bad negroes. So, it's the same thing on both sides, I think. Only the white people got the upper advantage on negroes. That's the only difference that I see in them cause some whites are bad, some blacks are bad. Some whites are good, some blacks are good.

Int: so in general, more or less, it all depends on the person

B: That you come in contact with, yes. It all depends on the person. (20:45)

Int: [inaudible few words] what was we talking about?

B: About, how did I feel about the war

Int: So, you think the changes in Beaumont- the race riot didn't change anything

B: No, it didn't change anything. Not until these later happenings with Martin Luther King [when?] things did begin to change. Segregation [inaudible few words] back doors to cafes and back doors to a lot of things, [chains?] and that's when a lot of the changes began to be. But during the riot, that didn't change nothing then.

Int: Were you around in the- during the depression era?

B: yeah

Int: 1929 to 1940.

B: Yeah, I was [inaudible word] along there, but I was small. But I remember some of the things, things were tough. Jobs was hard to find, food, you had the [inaudible two words] food. Beans and rice and sweet potatoes. I had an old uncle, he told me that he asked the lord, "Lord if you would take me off of these sweet potatoes, I'll serve you for the balance of my life." He said the Lord took him off of those sweet potatoes and he was serving the Lord ever since. Sweet potatoes...

Int: Do you think now, did blacks have it worse than whites, or everybody had it bad?

B: Blacks have always had it worse than whites. Now there were some whites that had it bad too, that was the lower class of white folks. And they were just as bad off as we were, but the other class of white folks, they had it good. They had everything going their way so, negro ain't had nothing and poor whites ain't had nothing. And, the white man has always had that advantage over the negro. Today, still got it. Still got advantage over the negro. I don't know when that might end but it may end someday.

Int: So you feel that being black today is still a disadvantage.

B: Yeah, it's a disadvantage. You've got to work harder. You've got to work harder, you got to be twice as good to make it, you know, even with a white man. Or even make the same salary that he makes. Even today, a black man don't make as much as a white man, even today. They might say that it is, but it's not. But I'll tell you this, things have changed. We've come a long way, a long way from the 30's and 40's stuff, and I mean a long way. Things seems to be getting a little better as the days go by.

Int: I just- first of all, I want to thank you for your time and taking the time to interview and stuff. And I learned a lot about the war from you, and I hope that this tape will help someone else to understand the war. But you never really had been in combat, one on one?

B: No, not really. I was in the combat zone, but I wasn't fighting. We was a [inaudible word] of transportation [corps?] hauling food and supplies. Sometimes we had to go right up to the front line [inaudible few words] but we never done any fighting. See that flag?

Int: Mhmm.

B: That's Mount Suribachi that's [where?] they're raising that flag. on Mount Suribachi.

Int: This is a picture of the marines planting the stars and stripes on Mount Suribachi. Did you see them raise that flag?

B: Unh unh, I didn't want to see them. I was on that ship

Int: Ready to go home?

B: Yeah I was ready to get away from there. If I ain't mistaken, all of those men got killed.

Int: These three here?

B: Mhmm.

Int: In this picture?

B: Yeah.

Int: Anyway, I thank you for your time and [inaudible few words] ships that you were on?

B: Let's see, LS[D?], is that an LS[D?]? Yeah, that's what we went overseas on, on an LS[D?]. Those type that [run ups?] to the land and opened at the front door of it and then you go [inaudible words] be right up on the shore.

Int: This is back in the attack on Hiroshima. This is pictures of- what kind of ship do you call it?

B: LS[D?] I think you call it.

Int: Supplies [pour in?] you would be the type of person that was taking the ships [off?]

B: No we didn't put it on that kind of ship, see that kind of ship would go right up to the shore. But the ones we had to get it off- we had to go into the water, and they would put a load of something on our truck and we would bring it on back to shore. That's the kind of ship we went over on no, we didn't go on that kind of ship, our vehicles went on that kind of ship. They ran right up to the shore and you drive the vehicle off. It was [water?] it could go on water or land. What's that? Yeah, Mount Suribachi. [inaudible few words] that's it there.

Int: they were fighting over this... rock?

B: over that rock. They was all under that rock, in caves under there. Now the other part of that island was sand, black sand.

Int: Why was the sand black?

B: I don't know maybe that's the kind that was there. I know they had been bombing that island for about 70 something odd days, 72 days. And there wasn't a tree on it, there was nothing on it. Nothing but Japs on one end and the Americans on the other. We took Mount Suribachi off the southern tip of Hiroshima Island. It's a rocky extinct volcano, in its caves and crannies, the Japs were hidden and heavily armed. [inaudible sentence] on D-Day plus four. A four-man patrol.

[inaudible few words] 28 marines ascended the volcano on February 23rd followed by a
[inaudible word] that there was [little?] fighting in the early days and the rock was first softened
by...

Int: neighboring air bombardment

B: right. The [picture navy and?] coastguards, LS[T's?], that's right, [inaudible word] about the
base of mount suribachi [inaudible few words] in the foreground

[Inaudible 30:38-31:05]

Int: is that Hiroshima?

B: Hiroshima looks something like a pork chop, you see that?

Int: Mhmm. We're looking at a picture of Hiroshima in the book.

B: Yeah, looks like a pork chop. That was how big it was, I think the mountain was here.