

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project
 Edwin John Graf Interview Abstract
 September 9, 2019

Interviewee	Edwin John Graf
Year of birth	1921
Place of birth	Tomah, Monroe County, Wisconsin
Interviewer	Susan Porter
Interview date	2019-09-09
Interview location	Bella Vista Historical Museum; Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas
Keywords	Graf, Edwin John Girard, Joe Porter, Susan Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas Tomah, Monroe County, Wisconsin Baseball Education Farming Iowa Luzon Philippines National Farmers Organization (NFO) Radar Recreation Schools U.S. Army USS Monterey (ship) Wisconsin World War II
Description	<p>A member of America's Greatest Generation, Edwin John Graf, calls Bella Vista home. Serving his country was only one chapter in a life that spans nine decades.</p> <p>When Graf and his family heard the news of Pearl Harbor, he knew his life was about to change. Leaving his Wisconsin farm, he enlisted in the U.S. Army's Signal Corp. Serving first in the reserve, Graf later went to active duty. Stationed in the Luzon (Philippines) area, his unit used radar as they patrolled. Graf saw for himself the suffering war brings and the dangers of battle areas. He remembers the days surrounding the dropping of the first atom bomb.</p> <p>Before and after World War II, Graf lived on the family farm in Tomah Wisconsin. As an adult Graf purchased the farm from his father; his dairy herd was prizewinning. As a child, he attended the nearby one-room school, arriving early many mornings to get the fire going in the stove. All the students played and learned together. Teachers were evaluated to retain their position; and eighth grade students to decide if they could proceed to high school. Graf's stories of his childhood education are contrasted with the changes he sees in the education of his</p>

	<p>grandchildren.</p> <p>Graf and his brother had baseball careers, playing and getting paid \$20 per game by teams in several Wisconsin cities. He remembers an invite to a major league team tryout that he missed to attend a friend's funeral.</p> <p>Graf got another invite, but of an entirely different nature. Graf, long a believer in the strength of farmers working together, was asked to join the newly forming National Farmers Organization (NFO). The family, that would include eight children, moved from Wisconsin to Iowa. In positions with the NFO, Graf helped set up a country-wide marketing structure for milk distribution, negotiated with Brazilian farming and shipping authorities, and participated in several court cases involving the NFO.</p> <p>Throughout his career he applied techniques learned from salesman Joe Girard's "I like you" philosophy.</p> <p>Graf's work with the NFO brought him to Northwest Arkansas. Years later, he came to live in Bella Vista. He's experienced the growth of Bella Vista from a time when people were brought to Bella Vista to buy lots for a "rural home", to today's population of almost 30,000. Yes, the village is now a city, roads and traffic have changed, and problems exist. But it is still the place that residents stop to help each other and there are clubs for all interests.</p> <p>Graf loves sharing his home with his family who visit often. In preparation for this interview, Graf made pages of notes, realizing not all would be included. His children made him promise to keep all the notes and share them at the next family reunion. No one wants to miss any of his stories.</p>
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Interview sidebar	During World War II, Graf and 7,500 soldiers were sent to the Asiatic Pacific Theater on the USS Monterey. Graf recalls the luxury liner turned troop ship with its..."stateroom for 2 people now held 12-16 people...when I looked out, there were ships as far as I could see...I realized the tremendous thing that was happening." [00:16:10]