

SERVICE: VETERAN STORIES OF HUNGER AND WAR  
Episode 15, with George Hardy

[Theme opening of 1940s film scoring underneath:]

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** You are tuning into Service...

**Veteran John Bistrica:** “John E. Bistrica: Private, first class!”

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** Veteran Stories of Hunger & War...

**Veteran George Hardy:** “....they joined the service, ‘Remember Pearl Harbor. Remember Pearl Harbor....”

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** A production from iHeartRadio....

[Record scratch interrupts opening, and then cheery music comes in and underscores:]

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** Hi there, this is Jacqueline Raposo, the host of Service and the lead producer. Service launched last year as a co-production between iHeartRadio and my company – WordsFoodArt. But with the Covid-19 Virus pandemic, our multi-year deal with iHeartRadio has been cut from their lineup.

I’m not yet sure from where we’ll get funding to continue forward. Or when we’ll be able to start sending engineers into the homes of our Korean War veterans for our next season, because Covid-19 is not nearly over. But those things in their time.

We still have stories to share from our World War 2 veterans’ interviews. We believe in sharing stories, especially stories kept quiet in the shadows by those who get to scream with fame or fortune. Especially in support of the nationwide protests right now demanding those stories be heard, we believe sharing more stories from our Black veterans matters.

Service is not a political podcast. It’s a podcast about people. But people create policies. And policies determine who gets the opportunity to do what. So now, I very clearly invite you to do what I have subtly invited you to do at the top of every single episode: Slow down, maybe sit, and spend some time with someone who is probably not a lot like you in some ways... and probably is a lot like you, in some ways, too. Step into their story. And then ruminate on how you might bring their struggles and triumphs into your conversations and actions going forward.

[Music ends. Sound of plane flying overhead.]

Today we continue with more of George Hardy’s story. It’s a story of desegregation in the armed forces and the backlash that followed.

[1940 piano music comes in and underscores, and cityscapes and the sounds of car horns join.]

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** We featured George in our 4<sup>th</sup> episode – Airmen Flew High – covering how he became one of the first African American pilots of the U.S. Army Air Corps – known as the Tuskegee Airmen – flying overseas in Italy.

After WWII ended, George left the service and moved to New York to study engineering. Then in 1947, the Air Force evolved from the Army as a branch unto itself. After a good amount of recruitment, George signed to join back up after his semester ended in June of '48.

But just before George went back in, that April, the chief of staff announced that the Air Force was desegregating...

**George Hardy:** And that changed so much.

[A training whistle, and music cuts out.]

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** Let's back up a second....

[slow, twangy southern banjo and bass comes in and underscores the following:]

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** We've heard in several of our veterans' episodes how shocked they were to land at base camps in the Jim Crow-segregated south – not that race relations were brilliant up north and west by any means, but we're talking violently supported segregation. Segregation laws varied by state, and they were enforced across state lines...

[Music fades and transitions into a clip from George in Episode 4 – Airmen Flew High – with the sound of a train going over tracks underscoring the following:]

**George Hardy:** They gave us Pullman tickets, which surprised us, three privates. And that was really great! We were in a Pullman car and there were two berths on each side. But then when we got to Cincinnati, they switched to L&N Railroad. Leaving Cincinnati, you go in through the south. And the laws in the south say white and coloreds must be separated as far as eating. So they had heavy curtain across with a few tables behind it for Afro-Americans. We had to go through to the dining car and then sit behind the curtain. And the curtain was weighted so that if someone went through it would - [zipping noise] - close on the bottom. And that's where we had to eat when we went through the south until we got to Biloxi, Mississippi.

[banjo music comes back in:]

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** But politically, from the Civil War forward, conservative white voters in those southern states swung pretty solidly democratic: Arkansas, Georgia, North and South Carolina, Texas... very blue. New Deal policies had helped bring economic relief to poor Black and

white Americans, while opposing but not directly challenging states' individual segregationist policies.

And then... World War II.

[Music transitions into a clip of [A. Philip Randolph speaking with President F.D.R. in 1941](#):]

**A. Philip Randolph:** Mr. President, it would mean a great deal to the morale of the Negro people if you, you could make some announcement about the role the Negro will play in the armed forces of the nation.

**F.D.R.:** We did it the other day.

**A. Philip Randolph:** If you did it yourself.

**F.D.R.:** Yeah, yeah...

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** With pressure from Black activists like A. Philip Randolph and a need for all hands on deck, President Roosevelt [desegregated the Defense Agency in 1941](#), meaning that Black civilians working in war industries could not be treated differently than their white counterparts. 1.2 million African American men and women then served in uniform—in segregated units, yes, and often overseen by white officers. But also, with increased opportunity for higher rank, equal pay ratings, and full access to the new GI Bill.

After the war, President Truman established the President's Committee on Civil Rights in 1946 to investigate civil rights status nationwide. One year later, the committee [reported suggestions including](#) a civil rights division within the department of justice, desegregation of that interstate transport, and the enforcement of federal anti-lynching laws which, if you're following the news, our senators have still not confirmed, as of the time of this broadcast.

In 1948, Truman then issued [Executive Order 9981 – full desegregation of the military](#).

[Hail to the Chief comes in and underscores:]

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** 1948... was an election year...

**George Hardy:** Truman was going to integrate, and Truman was a Democrat. And he had a tough fight against Dewey of New York and this fellow from South Carolina...

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** South Carolina Senator [Strom Thurmond](#) entered that 1948 presidential race as the States' Rights party or the "Dixiecrat candidate" – a party ideologically aligned with racial segregation, southern nationalism, and white supremacy.

**George Hardy:** People in the south who were Democratic, they all left the Democratic Party and became States Rights Party. Strom Thurmond won a couple of states. But Truman won the election, which meant that his executive order remained in effect.

[Hail to the Chief ends.]

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** Now, Republican Dewey was actually projected to win this election, and Truman's upset [was huge](#). But Thurmond won 4 states—South Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi—and while the States' Rights party was dissolved before the 1952 election, this foreshadowed how [white backlash](#) against Truman's integration policies into the 50s and the Kennedy and the [Civil Rights movement of the 60s](#) would be fuel for Republicans to then hide [racially charged motivations within their](#) "War on Drugs" and "Law and Order" speeches, progressively luring southern voters to the deep red we see on presidential election maps today.

But now, back to George.

**George Hardy:** So, in '49, the Army, Navy and Air Force submitted their plan for racial integration.

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** Investing in a military career for the long-term, George knew that one accident and he'd be taken off of flight status indefinitely. So, he asked to go into a radar training program at the Keesler Air Force Base—his 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group was stationed at the Lockbourne Army Airfield, but those planes didn't have radar on them—and he graduated 50 weeks later as an expert in radar equipment and maintenance.

The Air Force's desegregation plan was approved that May.

[The sound of planes landing and taking off at an Air Force base comes in and underscores:]

**George Hardy:** The Air Force would move so fast that by the end of June, they deactivated the group at Lockbourne, the 332nd. And within weeks, everybody got orders transferring them to white bases all around the world. Almost instant integration.

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** Let's just follow George's story for a while now...

**George Hardy:** I had always been assigned to a Black group, see, and I knew people at Lockbourne. I knew them. I could go back there and not worry about anything. Now, suddenly, I'm liable to show up on a base with all whites and not know anybody on the base because when I was in the Service you didn't get a chance to meet any of those people.

And when I graduated in August, I received orders to the 19th bomb group on Guam—a B29 outfit, four-engine group—as a maintenance officer. I ran a maintenance section for radar on B29s. I had about maintenance people, airmen—all white—I supervised them. But I was a pilot. So I was able to check out in the B29, demonstrate I could fly the B29, four-engine bomber—it

was a long range airplane, that's the plane that dropped the atomic bombs over Japan—and in 1950, they put me on a combat crew as a co-pilot. I still had my maintenance job, but I flew as a co-pilot on a B29 crew. And when the [Korean] War started, we moved to Okinawa and I got fly combat missions over Korea in a B29.

I did have that racial experience, there...

I had a number of good trips in a B29. I really knew how to fly the B29.

But then in May of 50, we got a new squadron commander: Lt. Col. Fred W. Miller. Who, uh... I soon found out that he wouldn't even speak to me, except in the line of duty. If he had a question for me about maintenance, he would talk to me. But other than that....

[Sound of a dining room – voices, dishes clattering – joins the air base sounds:]

Neither one of us had our families over there, so we would eat in the officer's club. And several times I would start talking to him and he'd turn and walk away.

[Sound of boots walking away.]

The second time it happened, I realized it wasn't an accident.

And uh... and uh...

We moved to Okinawa and started flying missions over Korea. And our crew flew six combat missions over Korea. And 12th of July 1950, we were a schedule for our seventh mission. And I was in the cockpit, going through my checklist before we got onboard to take off. And I heard this voice say, "Hardy, get down out of the airplane." I looked out the window, it's Colonel Miller.

And I got down and he replaced me - he didn't want me flying, so he replaced me.

[Sound of quick *whoosh*]

I was very discouraged when I saw them take off without me.

[Slow takeoff of plane overhead.]

And, uh...

I went to maintenance shop for a while, then I went back to the barracks where we stayed—we all stayed together—so I went back there and then I realized that the planes were going to land at such and such a time in the afternoon. If I'm not flying, as a maintenance officer, I'll be there when they come back to find out what's happened.

[Sound of boots on concrete.]

So I'm walking down the taxiway to get to where our airplanes are. And I see, out of operations office, two people come out and one of them is Colonel Miller. And I tried to avoid him, but he came over, I want to salute him.

And he stopped me. And put his hand on my shoulder. And started talking in a low voice, letting me know that the plane with my crew onboard had been attacked by fighters over North Korea.

[Slow sounds of anti-aircraft and plane fire.]

And they set an engine on fire.

[A low strum of Japanese string music comes in and add to the air attack sounds underscoring.]

And they all had to bail out.

[Underwater sounds join.]

Most of them had been saved by now.

They think two of them were captured - they weren't sure yet.

My airplane with my crew onboard.

And, uh...

And some people said, "Well, he saved you from that." But I always felt if I'd been there, it may not have happened. Because I was the one who was responsible for the gunners on the airplanes, see, to make sure they were alert and ready all that time. I was always the one to do that. The aircraft commander, he got back, the first thing he said, "George, if you had been there, I don't think it would have happened."

They sent them all back to the States. So now, I'm without a crew and he wouldn't let me fly anymore.

About ten days later, he was transferred to be Deputy Group Commander, and a new Commander put me back on flying again.

The Bombardier and the navigator were captured by North Koreans on the Bombardier, Bob, he died in prison camp.

But, uh... That was Colonel Miller.

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** George came back to the States in '51 and worked in SAC as a maintenance officer. He got his BS in Electrical Engineering, spent 3 years on an air base in Japan—where he made Major—and then in 1960, got transferred to Plattsburgh Air Force Base in northern New York where, as Major, he became Squadron Commander of an Army Electronics Maintenance Squadron.

**George Hardy:** And the wing commander was now full Colonel Fred W. Miller—that same officer who pulled me off the airplane, wouldn't speak to me. I worked for him for two and a half years up there and it was a best two-and-a-half years for my career. I loved working with him the second time. I couldn't have had a better commander the second time. He thought I was the greatest guy going, somehow. He said it the last effectiveness report: "The best of my six squadron commanders."

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** What happened that made Colonel Miller change? What racism had he faced within himself? Was there ever a formal apology or reconciliation?

**George Hardy:** I don't know what changed. But I love working with him the second time.

**Host Jacqueline Raposo:** George didn't know – and it's not his responsibility to know. It's our job to fix the harm we've inherited and the harm we cause, right?

George continued his Service through the Cuban Missile Crisis—which he summarized by saying they were “very busy”—and then got his Masters in Systems Engineering at the Air Force Institute of Technology. Six years later, he was made lieutenant colonel and Chief of Engineering and program manager for the Overseas Autovon switches program.

And then came the war in Vietnam. Which we'll get to in another season...

[Theme music from the opening returns]

Thank you to George Hardy for all he shared in this interview, and our time and talks together. George lives in Sarasota, Florida and he's being as safe as possible during the rise in Covid-19 cases there. You can find more of his story and his full episode at [ServicePodcast.org](https://ServicePodcast.org). Thank you also to Joe Faust of [Tuskegee Airmen Inc.](https://TuskegeeAirmenInc.com) for originally connecting me with George. As this episode was not produced with any official funding, we're accepting listener donations, 50% of which will be donated to their Aerospace and STEM Academy programming. Learn more and contribute at the website, and thanks for your support.

Thank you to those serving, those who have served, and those on hospital and supply chains and protest frontlines around the world.