

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
NORBERT J. "COLEY" GRIFFIN
Court Reporter, U.S. Navy, World War II
2003

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Griffin, Norbert J. “Coley”, (1916 - 2009), Oral History Interview, 2003

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes, analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes, analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

ABSTRACT

Norbert “Coley” Griffin, of West Bend, Wisconsin, worked for nearly 70 years as a court reporter before his retirement in 2003. Some of his most memorable trials and hearings came during the four years he served in the U.S. Navy throughout World War II, covering court martial proceedings and mutiny cases. Griffin initially was deemed ineligible for military service through the selective service system, but he continued to look for ways to help the war effort. After the Pearl Harbor attack, he was able to enlist in the U.S. Navy and he went to work documenting military legal affairs. Griffin said he was honored to use his profession and shorthand skills to benefit the armed forces. He left the Navy with the rank of chief petty officer, and returned home to Wisconsin to resume his work in the court system.

Biographical Sketch

Norbert “Coley” Griffin was born in Jefferson, Wisconsin, on Dec. 6, 1916. He graduated from Jefferson High School in 1934 before marrying and becoming a father of five.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, 2003.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 2003.

Transcript abstract by David Hunt, 2015

Interview Transcript

Driscoll: Okay, this is John Driscoll, and today is Nov. 12, 2003. And this is an oral history interview with Norbert “Coley” Griffin. Coley is from West Bend, Wisconsin and he was a court reporter in the armed forces during World War II, and good morning. Thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview.

Griffin: Thank you.

Driscoll: Can we start at the very beginning? Would you tell me where and when you were born?

Griffin: First of all, my name is Norbert Griffin, and I have been known most of my life as “Coley” Griffin.

Driscoll: How did that come to be?

Griffin: I don't know. I remember getting it but I don't remember why. I was born in Jefferson, Wisconsin, on Dec. 6, 1916, which makes me eighty-six years of age, at the present time. This was during the Great Depression. I mean, I went, we went through that, and when I was in high school, I studied shorthand and typing for two years because I hoped it would help me get a job. I knew with, we had a large family and I knew that I would never be able to go to college. In fact, I graduated from Jefferson High School in 1934 and only four students out of my senior graduating class of sixty were able to attend college. The rest of us tried to get jobs.

Driscoll: I can understand that.

Griffin: So, I was, I applied for a secretarial job at Jefferson Junction, at a malt plant. And there was one other, they needed a male secretary. And there was one other applicant, and he happened to be the valedictorian of the class, so he got the job. And probably rightfully so, with his record. And so, having lost out on that application for a job, I went back to caddying at the golf course in the summer. We didn't earn very much. Twenty-five cents for nine holes, and fifty cents for eighteen holes. And sometime during the summer, there was a first degree murder trial. A notorious case at Jefferson. And the superintendent of the malt plant where I had been turned down for the job remembered that I wrote shorthand, and so he was able to arrange that I get into the court room and sit with the newspaper reporters and take down what I could. And I would go home at night and type it out, and he would pick it up at my house at midnight, and this was a nine day trial.

And he promised to give me \$2 a day for the services I rendered.

Driscoll: That was big money.

Griffin: The reason, this was a notorious case. The person that was murdered had been the bodyguard for the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

Driscoll: [Throughout the interview, Coley graciously spells out words and names that might be difficult to understand. I did not copy the spelling letter-for-letter.]

Griffin: Down in Indiana. And his boss, the Imperial Wizard, was tried for rape and murder down in Indiana, and this man, who was killed in Jefferson, was named Earl Gentry. And he got a job tending bar for a lady that was fifty-nine years of age. Her name was Carrie Gill. And this was Prohibition days. And she ran a saloon during the daytime. I think 3.2 was the amount of alcohol they were limited to having. She was also the Sunshine Lady of the English Lutheran Church. And she had another occupation. She ran a speakeasy in her basement of her home. And so customers could come down there at night. So, bear in mind, she couldn't sell any intoxicating liquor in her tavern, and she was the Sunshine Lady of the church, but she sold any kind of drink you wanted at night.

Driscoll: Okay.

Griffin: Well, this Earl Gentry drank a lot, and he beat this lady up, and it came out in the trial that he had raped her different times. And she finally had enough, and so an itinerant painter came to town, and she hired him to help her do away with this Gentry. So he came home and one of them hit him over the head, and the other one shot him, and they put his body in his car and parked it down the river bank where it was found the next day. But, anyway, that was a really, there were reporters from all over the country reporting that. Well, that experience made me fascinated with the idea that I could probably some day be a court reporter.

Driscoll: Okay.

Griffin: Do you want to test this to make sure it is going all right?

Driscoll: Sure, let's do that.

Griffin: I really wanted to become a court reporter. Well, this same company that had turned me down, this malting company hired me to test malt. They built a laboratory and taught me on the job to test the malt. So I was a malt chemist

without ever having taken a chemistry course in high school. And during the late fall of 1934 I heard that the court reporter for the judge where I had substituted in court, or tried to be a court reporter, I heard that reporter was going to retire. So I went to the judge, whose name was George Grimm. And I had caddied for this judge out at the golf course. And I said, "Judge, I'd like to apply for the job of court reporter in your court." And so he took me into his study and he dictated the kind of instructions they give to a jury, and I sat there and took it down. And he said, "Now, that is the slowest you are going to have to write. And if you found that fast, you may never be able to make it as a court reporter, because you have to be able to write as fast as they talk in the courtroom." So he introduced me to his court reporter, whose name was Francis Grant. And they said, "Don't quit your day job. Practice, practice and practice." So I had a girlfriend that would dictate to me and I would periodically go down to this court reporter. Who lived in Janesville. I borrowed a car from a friend for that purpose. And finally they said, the recorder said, "I am convinced you will be able to make the grade." So the judge said, "I will appoint you as assistant court reporter." Now, there was no provision in the Wisconsin Statutes to pay an assistant court reporter. They just had a salary for the official reporter. So the judge said, "I will give you \$50 a month," and he said, "I've got a Pontiac and I don't drive. You'll have to drive me to court, and when we have a day off, you will have to take Mama and me to Milwaukee, or wherever we want to go. And you will have to cut my lawn and put on my screens and windows, and weed my asparagus bed. And, for that, I will pay you \$50 a month." And the court reporter said, "I will pay you \$25 a month, but you will have to type everything that is ordered to be typed." And the reporter said that he would get the money for it. I wouldn't get anything out of what I typed, but he would pay me \$25 a month. And, in the long run, this judge would spend hours trying to settle cases and this court reporter would talk to me about ethics and different things, and actually, while I might have thought that I didn't have a very good deal with the \$25, looking back, I should have paid him for everything he taught me.

Driscoll: Yeah, sure. An education.

Griffin: So, finally, on June — I know the exact date — June 1, 1936, I was appointed an official court reporter. And I worked for the Twelfth Judicial Circuit, and that included Jefferson, Rock and Green counties. The judge and I would travel around these three counties and try all the major cases. And in my first year as a reporter, I reported two first-degree murder trials, 12 other cases, four cases that were appealed to the Supreme Court, and that was quite a job for a 19-year-old court reporter.

Driscoll: Yeah.

Griffin: Now, when I was appointed the court reporter, there were no Stenotype reporters in Wisconsin. Every reporter wrote pen shorthand. They wrote either Pitman, or Gregg. Strange thing was the Stenotype machines had been invented in 1911. Now, bear in mind, this is 1936, and there are still no Stenotype reporters in Wisconsin. And, see, the Stenotype machine, the first one, weighed 54 pounds, and that wasn't practical.

Driscoll: That's that little thing with the tape machine?

Griffin: That's right.

Driscoll: Okay.

Griffin: And then, the one that was invented in 1911 weighed eleven and a half pounds, and the first court reporters in Wisconsin that used the Stenotype machines were a freelance court reporting firm in Milwaukee. So, this is the reason why I became a pen shorthand reporter.

Driscoll: I see. I was in a hearing, a courtroom, and the recorder had the Stenotype, but she had a tape running also. Okay. Go ahead. That is interesting.

Griffin: So I had a chance to transfer to another county, another circuit, and that was the Thirteenth. My previous circuit was the Twelfth Judicial Circuit of Wisconsin, and I had a chance to get an appointment in the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit, and that included four counties, and they were Waukesha, Dodge, Washington and Ozaukee counties. And the judge was Edward J. Gehl, and he later became a Justice of the Supreme Court.

Driscoll: Wisconsin?

Griffin: In Wisconsin. Well, now, I was appointed by him September 1, 1941. We are getting near to Pearl Harbor. And he had no hesitation appointing me because I was 4-F in the Army. I had a whole bunch of allergies, and he said, "Well, you're never going to be drafted, so I am safe in appointing you."

Driscoll: Right.

Griffin: Well, September, October, November, December 7th, 1942 [sic], we had Pearl Harbor. My three brothers had been drafted into the Army during 1941. So, here I

was, after Pearl Harbor, unmarried, and 4-F. And I wanted to do something for my country. I know in the Viet Nam War, things were entirely different, but everybody was patriotic after we were bombed at Pearl Harbor Day.

Driscoll: Let me interrupt just a minute. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Griffin: You bet it do.

Driscoll: Can you talk about what you were doing? What you thought?

Griffin: Yeah, I was playing sheepshead. Are you familiar with that game?

Driscoll: Oh, yeah.

Griffin: In the living room of my home, with my dad and two other gentlemen. And all of a sudden, there was an announcer, and his name was Gabriel Heater. He came on with this news that they were bombing Pearl Harbor, and then bombs dropping on all different islands, and countries. Guam, and everywhere. And, well, we had a radio. There was no TV at that time, and everybody was just petrified. And so I went to Judge Gehl, and I said, "Judge, I feel terrible. I know the country's services need court reporters. They are going to need reporters, ships at sea and various places around the world. And here I am, able-bodied, as far as I am concerned, but I am ineligible to get in." And Judge Gehl had been a colonel in World War I, and he said, "I know exactly how you feel." And he said, "Why don't you go down to Great Lakes and see if you can enlist in the Navy, because they will have lost so many of their personnel on Pearl Harbor Day, and the days following that. They will probably touch you, and if your body is warm, they'll take you. They won't even ask you for your draft classification." So, I went down to Great Lakes on Wednesday, the 10th of February, in 1942.

Driscoll: February?

Griffin: February. See, Pearl Harbor, there were a couple of months intervened there. And I said, "I would like to enlist in the Navy." And the old chief petty officer that was there, he says, "What is your occupation?" And I said, "I am a court reporter." And he grabbed me by the arm, and said, "Don't move!" He picked up the phone, and in five minutes, the legal officer was down there. They were desperate for court reporters. "Can you get sworn in today?" And I said, "No, I am court reporter in a four county circuit, and the judge will have to get a sub, if he can find one." The legal officer was Lieutenant Samuel O. Givens, Jr. He was the legal officer for the Ninth Naval District. Now, the Ninth Naval District had thirteen

states, mainly in the Midwest United States. And he called Judge Gehl and said, "We are desperate for court reporters. Your reporter wants to enlist. Can you get a sub?" Well, the judge said, "This war is going to be over in six months." Most people felt, Japan was a small place. And the judge said, "I know a court reporter that is retired and I'll see if I can talk him into coming back to sub for six months." Well, he called the legal officer back that same day, and he said, "I can get this substitute reporter." And so, on Friday, the 13th of February, in 1942, I was sworn in. And I was sent around to get my uniform and that. Monday morning, oh, the legal officer said, "I am, we are going to get permission to have you not go to recruit training, or boot camp, because they may just put you in an outgoing unit, and you are gone. We'll lose you. And we need you right now." So, I didn't tell them that I didn't know how to swim. That becomes important, later on. So, on Monday morning, I was the reporter in a general court martial case at Great Lakes. And handled routine duties. I was sent to Indianapolis for about a one week trial. It was tried down at the Naval Reserve Armory in Indianapolis. And then the admiral, who was the commandant of the Ninth Naval District, his name was Driscoll Downes. He got word from the Secretary of the Navy in Washington that a Congressional Committee was coming to Chicago. They were going to interview owners of war plants, to try to get them involved in the war effort, and the admiral, the Secretary of the Navy said, "You must send a court reporter down there, to record what is going on because they are not going to bring a court reporter out from Washington. They are too scarce out there." So I forgot to mention, my enlistment was as a second class petty officer, a second class yeoman. And I think that is probably equivalent to a corporal in the Army, a second class petty officer. And it was important to me, because instead of an apprentice seaman got \$21 a month, and I started at \$78 a month.

Driscoll: That was a lot of money.

Griffin: That was a lot of money. And I had been earning \$250 a month as a circuit court reporter, plus transcript fees. Everything I typed out, I got paid for. So it was quite a slash in income but I was very glad to do that.

Driscoll: Now, this daughter of my cousin that I mentioned, in Pennsylvania, that is where she makes most of her money, on the copies.

Griffin: Right. So, the admiral, and I was a second class petty officer, and the admiral that was in charge of this meeting with the Congressional Committee, and he said, "Yeoman Griffin, you've got to do a 100 percent job on this. What kind of orders should I issue that you can do it?" And I said, "Well, it looks like there are between a hundred and 200 people here. And I have no idea. I have never seen any

of them before. So, each time somebody is going to speak, unless they have a very common name, if you would have them give their name and the name of their war plant, or the plant that might be used in the war effort.” And so, that lasted one day, that trial, I mean, that hearing. And then I had to get out an immediate transcript and send it to Washington, so this was very important to the war effort. They were able to act on that. And I, the idea of the legal officer was that he was going to, when I went into his office, there was only one other court reporter there. And they had the money to hire civilian reporters but court reporters have always been scarce. In scarce supply. So, the legal officer said, “Eventually, when we get enough civilian reporters, you will go to sea. Sea duty.” And so, they had me, also, learn to read over summary court martial cases that had been tried in various places in the Ninth Naval District. A summary court was composed of three officers. A general court was anywhere from five to nine officers. That was all the major trials. And so he had me review those, and then, as they got new officers in there, they would take over the reviewing. And they had to route their work through me. Now, these men were all lawyers. And if the work wasn’t right, I would scratch it out and send it back to them. And one of them, and I don’t know if I should mention his name or not. But he was a lawyer that graduated from Harvard and he was law clerk for one of the Supreme Court Justices, Supreme Court of the United States. And so, he was one of the people whose work I had to review. And I’d scratch it out and send it back to him. And he went up to the legal officer and he said, “Mister Givens, I resent having a non-lawyer enlisted man scratching out my work and sending it back to me.” So, the legal officer said, “Myron.” I can tell you his name, it was Myron Gordon. He said, “Myron, I don’t want to see these things until they have Coley’s initial on them.” You know, this legal officer, he was so glad to get me, he called me by my nickname. And that afternoon, as I was going up a — in the Navy they call it a ladder — I call it a stairs. A spiral staircase, Mr. Gordon happened to be coming down and we met half-way. And he read me out. He really told me that he was an officer in the Navy and I had no right to do this. And, finally, when he got through with his tirade, I said, “Well, Mr. Gordon, you’ve told me what you think of me. All I can do is think.” Well, from that day on, we got along fine. It turned out he was actually from Milwaukee, and he was elected a circuit judge in Milwaukee. And he called me at West Bend to ask if I would come in to be his court reporter. So, he had forgotten that I had ripped up his work.

Driscoll: Good.

Griffin: But I had children that were in the school system at West Bend and didn’t want to make the change. And then this Mr. Gordon was then elected to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and then he was elected, or he was appointed a Federal Judge.

And he is now a retired federal judge but he does occasionally, or federal judges can work for the rest of their lives. And whenever we met from then on, we were fine, as far as that friendship.

Driscoll: Let me stop and turn this over.

[Beginning of Side B of Tape 1.]

Driscoll: Okay, there we are. Okay, this is Side 2 of Tape 1.

Griffin: I am just going to show you a picture of the, this is the picture of the personnel of the legal office.

Driscoll: Of the Ninth?

Griffin: Well, by that time, he was a lieutenant commander. Samuel O. Givens. And this is my picture here.

Driscoll: Oh, okay. A good looking guy.

Griffin: And Mr. Gordon is somewhere along here. Anyway, we had a very large office. All of the naval officers were lawyers. So then...

Driscoll: Let me ask a question. You're not wearing regular blues?

Griffin: I became a chief petty officer. I am going to come to that.

Driscoll: Okay. Don't let me get you out of line. Go ahead.

Griffin: Because the legal officer thought I was doing a good job, he got my time for advancement cut in half, to reach that end. And, finally, he wanted to appoint me as a chief, or have the chief of naval personnel appoint me as a chief petty officer, but sea duty was required. You could not be, they'd have to waive the sea duty and so I have a letter here that was written to Washington, pointing out my work, now specialized it was, and the secretary of the Navy authorized my appointment as a chief petty officer. So, you are very observant to catch that. Can you stop it just a second, please?

Driscoll: Sure. Okay, we are back on.

Griffin: Even though the Ninth Naval District was pretty much in the center of the United

States, a lot of people would desert from ships and they would be from the Mid-west, and if they were picked up in the Mid-west, they would be tried at Great Lakes. In general court martial cases. And so the secretary of the Navy authorized that the charges could be issued by the commandant of the Ninth Naval District, instead of having to do it out of Washington. And the legal officer had me make a study of those and I was in charge of the department. Even though all the officers were lawyers, I was, as a non-lawyer, I was in charge of that. And I got out probably a couple thousand, and because I was very careful in proofreading and that, and none of them were ever tossed out by the courts. And that becomes important a little later on.

Driscoll: That is great. Yeah.

Griffin: There was a limit of two years of shore duty, and then all personnel had to go to sea, or overseas. And this legal officer, Samuel Givens, was transferred to the Pacific, and he said that he was going to try to get me transferred over there. And to my benefit, this poor legal officer, his plane crashed in the Marianas Islands. And so I would have been with him.

Driscoll: Yeah. Sure.

Griffin: And he was succeeded by a William Thompson, who was a lieutenant commander. And I was doing the same work. Well, I was doing court reporting, but I was also in charge of making up, they called them charges and specifications, and they were the same as an indictment, or information in a criminal case that District Attorneys get out in a civilian court. And so my two years of shore duty were up and this commanding officer, at that time, of mine, Lieutenant Commander Thompson, wrote a letter to the Chief of Naval Personnel in Washington that said, I as a chief petty officer had done sixteen hundred some charges and specifications without anything going wrong with them, and he asked if I could get a 90-day extension of time because I was indoctrinating two officers to take my place. And he said, at the end of 90 days, "Chief Griffin will be released to go to sea, and we will not need a petty officer to replace him. The officers will replace him." So this is what happened 90 days later. I was on my way, and it was kind of a joke down there that they replaced a chief yeoman, an enlisted man, with two naval officers. So I was, my orders read that I was to report to the commander, Naval Forces, Northwest African Waters. And at that time, the admiral in charge was named Hewitt. Admiral Hewitt. And he had his flagship was the cruiser U. S. S. *Memphis*, named after the city of Memphis. And he had a shore base unit in Naples, Italy, and that is where I was to report. So I was transferred over to the receiving station in Oran, in Africa. It's actually three miles

outside of the city of Oran. And I was held there about two weeks waiting for transportation to Naples, Italy. And finally the word came through that I was going to depart the following day at 8:00 the following morning. I had to be on the plane to fly to Naples. But the previous day, a messenger came down from the receiving station at Oran and said, "I'm looking for Chief Griffin." I said, "I'm Chief Griffin." He said, "You are to report up to the receiving station." So, we got up there and here was this British Navy lieutenant, and he said, "We have a trial aboard a British merchant vessel, and our court reporter was taken to the hospital yesterday. We have to have a court reporter, and you are the only one at this base right now. So, I went back and picked up some stuff at the Quonset hut, where I was billeted, or stationed. And I picked up a pen and notebook, and some ink. And I got into a Jeep with this British naval officer and had a wild ride through the streets of Oran, and there were Arabs sleeping in the streets, and there were donkeys and carts going back and forth, and he just laid on his horn. So, we get into a motor launch driven by an enlisted man, a British sailor. And we go out about half a mile out into the harbor in Oran, one ship after another. And we finally came to this merchant vessel, and for those who are not familiar, the ship starts out from the water, and then it bellies out, and this British sailor took us to a rope ladder that was hanging down. Kind of swaying in the breeze. It was anchored a little bit, and, bearing in mind that I can't swim, this British naval officer got up and he got out first, and he went up that ladder like a chimpanzee or a monkey climbing. And I said to the enlisted man, I said, "How do I get up there?" And he said, "Did you see the way he went up?" He said, "That's the way you go." I said, "Well, don't leave me." I said, "If something goes wrong, I can't swim." He said, "I'm not hanging around here. There are German subs in these waters and I don't want to get blown out of the water. And so I start up this ladder, and it is going back and forth, and I am carrying this notebook and I am praying, because one false step and I am a gonner. The motor launch is gone. And I finally climbed over up on top. Just jumping ahead a little, this dumb sailor had taken us to the port side of the ship. Whereas, on the starboard side, there was a beautiful ladder to walk on, you know. And when we left the ship, that is how I left. I didn't have to climb back down that rope ladder.

Driscoll: No.

Griffin: So we got to the — now, this was my first reporting assignment overseas. So we got to the courtroom and here there were two British sailors and an Irish sailor that were being tried for mutiny. And mutiny, in time of war, is punishable by death.

Driscoll: Right.

Griffin: And these two British seamen, they were merchant seamen, they weren't members of the British Navy, and the Irishman, they had captured the captain of the ship and put him in irons, and they were going to run the ship. But then the first mate got some help and overpowered them. So the trial was held. When you hear British people, they have beautiful, clipped English languages. It is nice to hear them talk. But these were Limeys, and I've got to take this down. And the Irishman had a brogue so thick you could have cut it with a knife. And so the trial is held, and it concluded at four o'clock, and the British, the court-martial board went out to retire. And they came back in about fifteen minutes with a verdict of guilty, and sentencing these three seamen to death.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Griffin: So the British officer said, "Follow me." Well, this time we went down that nice ladder and we, he took me to the British navy house in downtown Oran, and we went up into a room and I said, "Where are we going?" And he said, "We are going to this office right here." I said, "I've got to be back at the base. I'm leaving tomorrow morning at eight o'clock." He said, "You're not leaving until I get a transcript of this." Seeing that it probably took eight hours, or seven hours of testimony, and testimony comes in at the rate of a hundred and fifty to a hundred and eighty words a minute, and if you were able to type it out at sixty words a minute, you were doing well. So I said, "It's impossible. I got to be on that ship or I'll be court-martialed." So I finally convinced him to let me do a narrative form, in other words use their actual answers and give him that, and then when I got over to Naples, I would do a complete transcript. And I finally convinced him to let me do that. So I typed until one o'clock in the morning, and I rapped on the door, and here he is sitting out there waiting, and I handed him the transcript. And we got back in the Jeep and another wild ride through the streets back to the base. So I had to check out. And you know, you have to check out. Whenever you are transferred, you got to check out the various places, to see that you don't owe any money, or anything.

Driscoll: Yes. Yeah.

Griffin: And I was on that plane at eight o'clock in the morning.

Driscoll: How did you take down English Cockney, Irish brogue?

Griffin: It was tough. It was tough. Yeah. It, I obviously did an acceptable job because there was, I never found out whether the British Admiralty commuted it, you know, made it less, gave them life sentences or something, so I don't know

whether they were executed or not. Well, when I got over to Naples, the legal officer there was Captain C. B. Newcomb, and he had been the District Attorney of Buffalo County, New York. And he was just wonderful to work for. He said, "Am I glad to see you." He said, "I looked at your Service Record." Here, one of the officers that had been at Great Lakes wrote a letter to the Bureau of Personnel and pointed out my abilities as a court reporter, but I had all this other experience, and he said, "I've been killing myself getting this stuff." He said, "It's in your lap now." He had been in the invasion of southern France which was part of the Italian campaign. And when I was in Naples, they had already invaded southern France, but they were fighting in northern Italy. One of the cases that I worked on, after I got there. There were two other court reporters there. They were Stenotype operators. The three of us handled all of the court reporting of the northwest African waters. One of the cases that I worked on involved the invasion of southern France, and our warships had shot down either two or three of our planes that flew over the top of our warships. And the planes were supposed to have what they call IFF, which means Identification Friend or Foe, and it was malfunctioning and so anything that came over that didn't have IFF up they blasted them out of the sky. That was a terrible case of friendly fire. And then another case that I had to report was down in Algeria, down in Africa. That was a murder trial. A British, or United States sailor, was accused of murdering an Arab down there. I had to go down there for that. And then I was sent to Rome, Italy, to report a general court martial case in Rome. And I used my commanding officer's Jeep to drive from Naples to Rome, probably about a hundred and twenty miles, something like that. And I drove past all the cemeteries at Anzio and Casino, where our [unintelligible] and soldiers had been slaughtered. More soldiers. And as I drove this Jeep up through the mountain passes on the way to Rome, there was no opposition there except signs everywhere to stay on the road because of land mines. And I wondered, I mean, everybody in the United States thought why is the Italian campaign going so slowly? Well, when you drive up through those mountain passes, a half a dozen men could hold off a battalion. And that opened my eyes, and I reported that. And I happened to be Catholic, and when I was in Rome, I had a chance to go to the Vatican. And I had an interview with the Pope. Pope Pius.

Driscoll: Oh, Pope Pius the XII.

Griffin: Yes. And there were five of us, all different nationalities. And the Pope spoke to each of us in a tongue. There was a Russian, a Frenchman, a German, an Italian and myself, and he said to me, "Where are you from in the United States?" I said, "West Bend, Wisconsin." He said, "Is that anywhere near Milwaukee?" And I said, "Yes, about thirty miles away." "Well," he says, "when I was Papal

Secretary of State, I was in Milwaukee as Papal Secretary, so I know what a nice city Milwaukee is.” And then another case, well, I was transferred, our whole detachment from Naples down to Palermo, Sicily. The commander down there was a commodore. Now, commodore is kind of scarce in the Navy. I don’t think they are even making commodores any more. And his last name was McCandlish. And the legal officer, C. B. Newcomb, had gone back to the United States. He had been overseas all through the invasion of southern France. And we were waiting for another legal officer to come to Sicily to take his place. And the United States sold a Liberty ship, they were huge ships for hauling freight and men. They sold that to the Italian government. I don’t know the exact amount of money, but it was a lot of money, and the Italian lira, a bill, were huge. So, he was paid in cash with a big satchel of lira. And Navy regulations provide that if a naval officer is transferring funds for the United States, that according to Navy regulations, he has to have an armed guard with him at all times. Well, this ensign decided he was going to bypass the armed guard and he went over there, and they counted the money out for him. So he was supposed to put it in three different banks. And so he gets to the first bank, and he sets his satchel on the floor, like that. And the next bank, he takes handfuls of bills out. Well, by the time he got to the third bank, he was \$90,000 short.

Driscoll: Uh-oh.

Griffin: Of cash. So, the commodore, who was a touch old regular Navy commodore, he ordered that a board of investigation be convened. Because this ensign, they had him dead to rights. He had just violated the Navy regulations. Well, this was a supply depot for the Navy, this Palermo. And there was no legal officer yet. I served as the court reporter, and the ensign was a supply corps officer. And there was a three-man board that served, really, as the court. They were the board of investigation. And they listened to the evidence, and when it was finished, they said to me, “Chief, draw up findings clearing him of any wrongdoing.” And I said, “You know what the old man is going to say?” I was referring to the commodore. And he said, “Well, this is our decision.” So, I drew that up, and they signed it, and I took it over and gave it to the yeoman for the commodore. He took it in there and the commodore exploded. “Chief, get in here!” And he said, “You take that back to the board and you tell them to do their duty.” And so I took it back, and I went to the senior member, and I said, “The commodore really is mad.” I said, “He said to bring this back and tell us to do our duty.” So, he said, “Well,” he said, “we are going to stick to our guns. Draw up another thing for us to sign saying that we affirm our former.” I said, “He is going to really blow his top.” “Well, he can’t do anything to us.” So I took it back, gave it to the commodore’s yeoman. “Chief, get in here!” And he exploded. And he said to me, “I want you to

draw up something for me to sign and I want you to castigate them in the strongest language you have at your command.” And he said, “If it isn’t strong enough, I’ll have your hide, too.” So I really made it strong, and he sent it back, and then it was forwarded to Washington, so when the next promotions came out, those three officers were skipped, you know.

Driscoll: Oh, yeah.

Griffin: They would promote by length of service, mainly. And so, bear in mind, this commodore was well acquainted with me, because I was, well, the other court reporters had gone back to the United States. I was the only court reporter left then. Well, then this legal officer came over and it was the war in Europe ended in June. And when I was still in Naples, I was told that I would be sent to Japan. My next place. The commodore was well acquainted with me, by nature of me being the only court reporter there. So the legal officer, who didn’t know which end was up, he said, “Well, you’ve got a lot more experience than I have,” he said. He said, “You’re eligible to go back to the United States under the point system.” I was not married, so you needed more points than a married person. So he said, “I’m going to ask the commodore to hold you as a military necessity. We can hold you an extra six months.” And I am getting letters from Judge Gehl, he is, the war is over, you know. It ended in Japan in September.

Driscoll: His six months war.

Griffin: And so it is approaching four years, and the judge is writing to Senator Wiley, and wherever he could. He wants me out. And I told him they were trying to hold me as a military necessity. So this legal officer said, “Nope, I am going to insist that you be held as a military necessity.” And I said, “Well, Mr. Greer,” I said, “A chief yeoman has to be able to write shorthand at the speed of eighty words a minute. Now, a court reporter has to be able to write two hundred words a minute.” And I said, “As of tomorrow morning, my speed is going to drop down to eighty words a minute.” And he said, “You wouldn’t do that to me?” And I said, “Look, what are you trying to do to me? The war is over. My judge is begging for me to get back. I want to get back.” And so I said, “My speed is eighty words a minute. They are going to have to slow to a snail’s pace.” He said, “Well, I’ll make this promise to you. I won’t put in a request that you be held.” He said, “If the commodore does this, it’s out of my hands.” So the time came for me to go back, and I drew up orders, and I took then to the commodore’s yeoman, the same guy that had passed this other stuff in to the commodore. And I said — you are familiar with Radar O’Rielly, in Mash?

Driscoll: Yes.

Griffin: Well, I said to this yeoman, "Will you shove this in the middle of some papers that the old man will just sign?" "Yeah, he'll sign anything I take in there." So, he signed it, and the yeoman comes back and says, "Here is your orders." And, as luck would have it, the day I was boarding ship, I was going to come back on a merchant vessel. It was an empty oil tanker, that was going back to the United States, that delivered oil. And as I am going up the gangplank to get on that ship, the commodore was standing there. He said, "Where are you going, Chief?" I said, "Back to the United States for discharge." "Who signed your orders?" I said, "You did, sir," and I saluted him, and I kept going. I was just hoping he didn't say, "Stop that guy!" And then so I came back and I got back to Wert Bend, or to Jefferson, Wisconsin, where my parents lived, on a Friday.

[Beginning of Side A of Tape 2.]

Driscoll: This is remarkable. So, you got back to the States.

Griffin: I got back to the States on a Friday.

Driscoll: You came back by ship?

Griffin: Came back by ship. And that was also quite an experience, because it was an empty oil tanker, and they, on the mid-ships, they put steel structures up there, and they hauled planes over. In other words, oil was in the hold of the ship but they transported planes there. So, we were leaving, we were in the Mediterranean Sea, leaving Palermo, Sicily, and I talked to the skipper. He was a nice guy, the captain of the ship. And he said, "I am really going to make a great bonus," he said. "We are going to have great weather all the way back, and I am not taking on any ballast," which would make it, the ship, ride like it was out of balance, as it was with that steel superstructure on it. So, we get out into the Atlantic Ocean about two days and all of a sudden, a terrible storm came along. And I had been playing cribbage with an oiler on the ship. And he went down to take on ballast and he is standing there. And we said to him, "Come on. Take on the ballast." He said, "I am not doing it." He said, "The union regulations say," he said, "I could turn this with one hand," he said, "union regulations say you have to have two men to turn this." And we said, "Come on, turn it!" And he is waiting for some guy. All of a sudden, a big wave came along and swept him up against the bulkhead. And they haul him to the sickbay. Well, we were in, I don't know what you want to call the type of storm, whether it was a typhoon or what it was, but we had to, in the Navy they call it heave to. Which means to head into the storm. The storm, we were

heading west and the storm was going from north to south. And the storm lasted three days and that heave — you could take it more ways than one. I didn't eat for three days. A day and a half north, and then we turned around and came a day and a half south, which is all that kept us from, and they were never able to take on ballast. Because there was a terrible storm all that time. And the ship would almost tip over. And we strapped ourselves into our bunks with a belt. Anyway, it was quite a horrendous experience.

Driscoll: That is the most dangerous vessel, an empty tanker.

Griffin: I called the judge, and I said, "Judge, I am back." He said, "Good. We start a jury trial in Madison Monday morning." And he said, "This reporter that substituted for six months is so anxious and was really resisting going to Madison." So I met him over in Madison, in the court house, and we had a one-week trial. That was my indoctrination. I came right back to work.

Driscoll: Were you still in the Navy at that time?

Griffin: No, no. I was discharged at Great Lakes.

Driscoll: Okay.

Griffin: After four years and twelve days, I think, something like that. And, you know, I remained a chief petty officer. First of all, you have AA, which is Acting Appointment, and then PA, which is Permanent Appointment. Which I got, and there was a slight increase in pay for that. So that is the sum and substance of my service. And I remained a court reporter in the circuit court until July of 1983. I was approximately sixty-five years of age, and I retired. I thought I was retiring. My wife, bless her soul, she said, "Whenever you say you are retired, put that in quotes." Because the following week I started getting calls to substitute in various circuit courts and also to report depositions, which is probably — is it your niece?

Driscoll: Yes.

Griffin: If you are going to be involved in a trial or you are going to be a witness, they can take your testimony ahead of time. So I was getting calls everywhere, and I was getting sent to Manitowoc, Fond du Lac, Port Washington, Waukesha, everywhere. And I had to be, for instance, I had to leave West Bend at 6:30 in the morning to be in court at Manitowoc at 8:30 in the morning. And finally I got a call from a Judge Thomas Wells. He was a retired judge, and they can work as a reserve, you know. And he said to me, "Aren't you fed up with having to go to all

these different places?” I said, “Yes, I am.” He said, “How about giving us two days a week? And you just don’t want to have to come thirty miles to Juneau, to Dodge County.” And so I did that, and I stayed there for 14 years. Judge Wells died and then his successor, Judge Joseph Schultz, died, and then Judge Virginia Wolfe became the judge. And I was with her until June 25th, of 2003.

Driscoll: Wow.

Griffin: And the reason I’m not still with her is that with this shortfall in state funds, they no longer authorized a reserve judge to handle the matters we were working on, state prison cases. And, in other words, the other circuit judges Dodge County would have to resume that. So after 14 years, I hung it up on June 25, in 2003.

Driscoll: Coley, through all of this experience, did you keep your books? Your notebooks?

Griffin: We are required to keep them for 10 years. And I used to, I kept them from way back but then, when they said you only had to keep them for 10 years, then I was able to get them disposed of.

Driscoll: Could you go back to an old set of books, Coley, and read them your...?

Griffin: I could read them like I wrote them yesterday.

Driscoll: I’ll be darned.

Griffin: And in fact, I had to go back, while we were still keeping them for longer periods, after I had retired, in ‘83, I got a request from a judge in Port Washington to go back and transcribe the notes of a divorce action. They involved an insurance policy and the stipulation that they arrived at in court didn’t differentiate when they became, whether they were minors or attained their majority. And I could pick it up and read it like I had written it the day before. And mainly because I adhered strictly to the system. I never just arbitrarily just wrote something and then 10 years later you wonder what the heck did that mean at that time?

Driscoll: Okay. Okay.

Griffin: And one very interesting thing, when I got out of the Navy, Judge Gehl was still, well, he was the judge yet. And he was assigned to Kenosha, to try a murder trial. It was a gangland slaying. There were four defendants from Milwaukee. I mean, the four that were being tried had stolen some radios and various things, and they had them in their apartment. And two other brothers from a rival gang entered

their apartment and swiped the stuff. The place was full of goods and they were on their way to Kenosha to sell it to a fence. And I remember his name. Al Gnudi was the name of the fence. And when the four defendants came home and found their apartment ransacked, they knew right away who had done it and where they would be going. And they intercepted them down in Kenosha County and they killed one brother, and they thought they had killed the other brother. But he survived after he was in a coma for about 10 days. And the defendants were Dominic Lampone, Jerome Mandella, Driscoll Mandella and Louie Fazio, who later on was murdered. They found his body in Ozaukee County, and they never did find out who killed him. Well, anyway, these four were tried and I did the reporting of the case. It was a one week trial and the jury found the four of them guilty. And this is important. Judge Gehl sentenced them all to life plus 30 years. In other words, a life sentence, you got to serve so many years, but then he added another 30 years on top of that, to keep them in longer, see. And eight months later, after the trial, now court reporters have memories like elephants, believe me. And the judges, they don't always have such a good memory. But, anyway, Judge Gehl, this is very interesting, he and a group of circuit judges were invited to Waupun [Wisconsin State Prison] to tour the facility, and this afternoon they went into a room for lunch. And the waiters were inmates of the prison. So, they came and took the orders, and then this inmate came in, and he set a bowl of soup down in front of Judge Gehl. And he said, "Here's your soup, Judge Gehl." And Judge Gehl looked at him and said, "How do you know my name?" And he said, "Well, me, I'm Louie Fazio. You gave me life plus 30 at Kenosha." Well, Judge Gehl pushed that plate away. He wouldn't, well, it was, that was just a kind of interesting thing.

Driscoll: I'll say.

Griffin: But, I'll mention one other thing. The longest trial I ever recorded was three weeks. The power plant at Cedarburg, electric power plant, blew up and the city of Cedarburg Water and Light Commission sued Allis-Chalmers and also Nordberg Manufacturing Company. Nordberg had built the diesel engines and Allis-Chalmers had built the generators. And now if they have a long trial, they can usually get substitutes in there to kind of share it with you. But we had no sub. I reported the entire three-week trial, eighteen hundred pages.

Driscoll: How did you handle technical things? You get some engineer up there talking...

Griffin: This was all chemists, metallurgists. There were a husband and a wife, what I would call lay people, they lived across the street from the power plant and at the time of the explosion, a crack appeared in their plaster walls. The rest was all

technical stuff. I had to send away for *Kent's Handbook of Mechanical Engineering*. And it was a tremendous job. And, I mean, I got a beautiful commendation letter from the unsuccessful lawyer who was appealing to the Supreme Court. And get a load of this, the Supreme Court Justice in Wisconsin that wrote the decision was Myron Gordon, the same officer I had at Great Lakes. He reviewed the eighteen hundred pages and so he must have gotten quite a kick out of that. And the attorney that was appealing told me that the index I had provided saved him hours of work. I think this might be important for posterity. On October 18, of 2003, which was this past October, I was asked to speak at a seminar of the Wisconsin Court Reporters Association, in Madison. And I gave a history of court reporting in Wisconsin, and why everybody didn't write with a Stenotype right away, because it wasn't used. But there were 90 court reporting students. And so I talked on ethics, and how they should treat everybody fairly, and the ethics that I learned from Francis Grant. And I said, "I want to tell you that your work is appreciated." I said, "You may think that you are just a part of the machinery of the thing." But, I said, "I am going to read you a letter that I received from a Chicago lawyer." What happened was that there was a one-week trial and this was in 1956. And my judge was assigned. His name was William O'Connell. He was assigned to hear that case, but it was in the county court, not in the circuit court. And the county judge said, "Your court reporter is busy, we will use our court reporter." And it happened that I was working on two appeals to the Supreme Court, and I could really use that time for transcribing notes. And so my judge said, "Well, you'll have a week to work on this." So, he called me at noon on the first day of the trial and said "One of the lawyers was harassing the court reporter, a girl, making her read back every question and answer, and at noon she came to me crying and said 'I am through.'" See, she could do that because her dad was the judge in that court. Another judge might have said "Okay, you are through as a court reporter."

Driscoll: Yeah.

Griffin: Well, one of the attorneys was from Chicago. There were about five lawyers from Ozaukee County and this man was from Chicago. It involved lots of money. And he was a young man that I had never seen before, and I would no doubt never see again. And I said, I'm not trying to blow my own horn, but I am going to read this letter that he wrote to me so that you will know that your work is appreciated. And this is a beautiful letter. It is dated June 15, 1956, and it was written by a William G. Myers. And it is addressed to me, and it said,

Dear Coley,

We have recently filed a brief on behalf of the objectors in the Bostwick

Estate case. In preparing the brief, it was necessary for me to study the transcript of testimony rather carefully. In the course of reading the transcript at various times at all hours of the day and night, I could not help but be impressed with the uniformly high quality of your work. It occurred to me on many occasions that my task was considerably lightened by the accuracy and completeness of the transcript. Your reporting actually enabled me to feel that I was still sitting in the court room.

I am writing you because I feel that a person that takes as much pride in his work as you obviously do would derive some satisfaction from knowing that his work is appreciated by others. I sincerely hope that our paths will cross again sometime.

Very truly yours,
William G. Myers.

Driscoll: That is very, very impressive.

Griffin: Yeah, the fact that he would take the time to write this letter. And I felt this would do these student reporters, and maybe some of the other reporters, a lot of good to read this.

Driscoll: Let me ask you a couple of questions. You had the G. I. Bill.

Griffin: Yes.

Driscoll: Did you ever use it?

Griffin: No.

Driscoll: You didn't?

Griffin: No, not in any way. I mean, I had a nice job to come back to.

Driscoll: Yes, that's true.

Griffin: And court reporters, well, you mentioned the technical nature of that explosion file, court reporters, you have to be able to write the language of doctors or experts in any field. And the way a lot of doctors spoke like they write on prescriptions, nobody can read what they, I mean, the average person can't read what they wrote on a prescription. And a lot of them blurred their names of drugs and that. So, a reporter never stops being educated.

Driscoll: You know, there was a, you just reminded me. The quartermaster general of the Union Army during the Civil War was Montgomery Meigs and he kept a diary in his own shorthand, and there are three grad students at Columbia trying to use a computer to break that. No one has been able to break that. It was his own. I've seen it. There is no curls or wiggles in it. It's dots and lines. Strange, but it was his own shorthand. I'd love to know what he said. Let me ask a couple others. Any vets organizations?

Griffin: That I belonged to?

Driscoll: VFW? Legion?

Griffin: American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I have been, ever since I got out of the military service, I have belonged to both of them, and we raised, my wife and I raised five children. She died five years ago. She had bone marrow cancer for nine years. She was a graduate of Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, and was a school teacher, and then she became, after our kids were grown up, she became a travel agent. And I had, because I had not been able to attend college because of financial reasons, I made up my mind if I ever had children, they were going to be able to go to college, and we had five of them graduate from college. In fact, we had three in college at one time. The two oldest boys were at the University of Notre Dame, in South Bend, and a daughter in the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. All at the same time.

Driscoll: That must have been a strain.

Griffin: It was. And then my other, my next son and my daughter went to state colleges. The youngest daughter graduated from Stout.

Driscoll: Sure. My son graduated from Stout.

Griffin: Great school.

Driscoll: Oh, yeah. Jack did that. How about going to reunions and that, after the war? Did you do that?

Griffin: Reporters don't belong to any union in Wisconsin.

Driscoll: No, not unions. Reunions.

Griffin: Oh, I am sorry. I have not gone to, this legal group at Great Lakes had about four

or five reunions, and I went to them. And we corresponded back and forth, and we were very, very close. And, but I know, I read in the veterans magazines a reunion of the members of the, well, let's say, the cruiser *Memphis*, which is a huge ship, or the battleship So-and-so, and destroyer whatever name, and LST's, smaller groups. And some of them still have those.

Driscoll: I just did, I interviewed six fellows who were with an LSM group, Landing Ship Medium.

Griffin: Landing Ship Men, isn't it?

Driscoll: Medium. Like a small LST. But they had a reunion at the Dells, and Gayle here asked me if I could go up and, here, we did six interviews.

Griffin: Is that right?

Driscoll: Let me see, there area a couple. Ah, one of the things I ask, two questions I ask everybody. How do you feel now about having, you know, you spent four years out of your life. What is your feeling about that now?

Griffin: I thank God for giving me the opportunity to serve my country for four years. I do not feel that a single day was wasted, and it, you know, you see cartoons: "Daddy, what did you do in the war?" You know? Well, I never fired, they strapped a gun belt on me when I was being transferred overseas. A chief yeoman, which is a clerical branch of the Navy. And I had to patrol the Long Island Railroad to the Pennsylvania Station in New York, and I was in charge of a patrol group. And then on the way back to Long Island, to the base where I was temporarily held, these soldiers and sailors, mainly sailors, that we had, they had been overseas, they all got, they drank a lot of liquor. Well, anyway, when they were assembling us to board the trains for New York, this old boatswain's mate, with a bunch of hash marks, came up to me and said, "What are your orders, Chief?" And that to really be galling to him, in front of a feather-merchant. And I said, "Hey, boats, you know what to do. Just carry on." And he said, "Gotcha!" And I let him. And I said, "I have one request." I said, "Help me strap this gun belt on." I didn't know how to strap a gun belt on. But I thank God that I had to opportunity to help my country in my profession.

Driscoll: That is tremendous. That is a remarkable attitude.

Griffin: If I had gone to fire a gun, or something like that, which anybody could have done, I would have felt it a waste of time, but there was such a tremendous

shortage of court reporters that I really was able to render a real service to the country. And I thank God, if I had my life to live over again, and had a chance to go in and do that, I am just thankful. I owe my country so much.

Driscoll: Yes. That is a great statement to make.

Griffin: Oh, I have one thing that I would like to mention. When the war in Germany, against Germany ended, the Army and Navy people in Naples were all called out to a parade ground. And the Army Air Force band played the Star Spangled Banner as we stood there, and to hear this, in a foreign country, it just made my chest swell with pride. I was so proud to be an American. And thankful that I had that opportunity. I can't tell you, just like when I go to a sporting event, that impresses me when I hear the National Anthem and it kind of galls me if I see people just chewing gum and looking all around.

Driscoll: Yeah, me too.

Griffin: But, I owe my country, and I was able to help some.

[End of Interview]