

RED WHITE BLACK & BLUE

PRODUCTION NOTES: BILL AND ANDY

Director Tom Putnam first met Bill Jones at an Aleutian Island veterans reunion in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Putnam remembers his first interview with Bill: "Many of the veterans we interviewed had served in the Aleutians during the war, but very few had seen combat. And then Bill sat down. Not only was he on Attu for the entire 18-day battle, but he happened to be at nearly every key moment in that battle, and was even one of only a handful of men who survived a Japanese banzai attack against one of the American medical camps on the battle's final day."

Comments producer Matt Radecki: "We immediately knew that Bill was not only the perfect 'tour guide' to walk us through the battle, but he was also someone who still struggled to come to grips with the many conflicting emotions the battle brings up for him."

After three days of interviews, Putnam and Radecki returned to Los Angeles, and editor/producer Jeff Malmberg began assembling the footage.

The Two Bill Jones

"We were all determined to allow the veterans to tell their own stories," remembers Malmberg. "But what was particularly compelling about Bill's interviews were how many different stories he seemed to tell. In one interview, he would recount that his job was to kill the enemy, no more, no less. In another, he would break down at the thought of what he was forced to do with a flame thrower. It wasn't that he was contradicting himself, but that in order for him to survive, he had to hold two opposing beliefs."

We realized that to tell this story properly, somehow, some way, we needed to take Bill back to the island and allow him to confront his past."

A 60-Year Friendship

A few months later, Putnam, Radecki, and director of photography Alex Vendler found themselves at the Anchorage International Airport waiting for Bill (age 83) and his

friend and fellow Attu veteran Andy Petrus (age 87) to arrive.

Putnam: "Bill had just gotten out of the hospital and I had only spoken to Andy over the phone. And there we were waiting to take these two elderly veterans to one of the most isolated and dangerous places in the Northern Hemisphere."

As it turned out, Bill and Andy were a story unto themselves. Andy, an avid bowler and TV enthusiast, goes to the gym six days a week and has the muscles to prove it. Bill, a retired major, finds solace in his books when he's not battling his emphysema or writing letters to the media and the American government in protest of the Japanese monument on Attu. According to Bill, their friendship began when Andy let him choose which bunk to sleep in. Years later, and on separate coasts, the two comrades have remained good, if not unusual, friends.

"They're All Dead, Andy"

Upon arriving on the island, the filmmakers set up a series of "spy cams" in vehicles and rooms around the station to capture the reality of the journey for the two elderly veterans and some of the frank, seemingly off-camera discussions between Bill and Andy between interviews.

Through these conversations, Bill's true leadership is revealed (he was wounded six times over the course of the war) as well as the harsh reality of front line infantry combat. At one point, Bill and Andy attempt to remember a pivotal location of a Japanese machine gun nest. Bill turns to Andy and comments, "Who's going to argue with us, Andy? They're all dead."

Bill's New Battle

One exceptionally emotional moment of the documentary came with Bill's confrontation of a massive Japanese monument on the island. "We got to a place called Engineer Hill," remembers Putnam, "where on the last day of the battle the final 800 Japanese soldiers charged through the American front lines and overran the Army's medical area. They bayoneted and killed everyone in the camp except for a dozen or so men in one tent. And Bill Jones was in that tent. Bill pulled out all these letters and maps and speeches he had written, and we discovered that he had come back to basically protest this monument being here for our cameras and let the world know that he wanted it removed."