

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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DUNCAN H. DOOLITTLE

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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
WORLD WAR II VETERANS

INTERVIEWEE: DUNCAN H. DOOLITTLE

INTERVIEWER: DR. EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: WORLD WAR II VETERANS

DATE: DECEMBER 1, 2004

EMC: This is an oral history interview with Duncan H. Doolittle, who lives in Narragansett, Rhode Island. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I'm the curator of the Naval Historical Collection. The interview is taking place in my office in Mahan Hall at the Naval War College. Today's date is December 1st, 2004. Mr. Doolittle, I'd like to begin the interview by asking you where and when you were born?

DHD: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, December 12th, 1920.

EMC: What did your parents do in Providence?

DHD: My father at the time worked in the management of a textile mill. Later on he went into the brokerage

business, stockbroker.

EMC: Well, the '20s were a dangerous time for that.

DHD: Yes, they were.

EMC: At least the end of the 20s. Did you have any siblings?

DHD: I had three sisters and one brother. My brother was lost in the Pacific on a B29.

EMC: Oh, dear. That's too bad. Where did you go to school?

DHD: I went to Providence Country Day School in East Providence.

EMC: And after you finished the Day School, did you go to college?

DHD: Yes, then I went to Yale and I graduated from there in December of '42.

EMC: Well, that was early, wasn't it?

DHD: Yes, they pushed us through in the summer of '42 after Pearl Harbor, and said we were going to graduate

in February and then they changed it to January '43 and then they said it's going to be December '42.

EMC: Okay, so you went through the summer. What did you major in at Yale?

DHD: I majored in Modern European History.

EMC: And can you comment at all on the bombing of Pearl Harbor? I assume you were at school then on December 7th, 1941, and what was the reaction, your reaction, and the reaction of the students?

DHD: Well, it was a surprise. I think we all knew, and we all felt, even though we didn't want to believe it was going to happen; we all felt we were going to be dragged into the war, and the general feeling was it was going to probably be initially with Germany. So the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor was a complete surprise.

EMC: Did you note any of the feelings of patriotism of the students? How did they react immediately? Was there a lot of war fervor there or eagerness to join the armed forces?

DHD: Before that, there had been great debates as to whether America should stay out of war. In fact, there

was one debate at the Yale Political Union, and the debate was going toward the idea that we should support Britain and get into it, then from the back of the room strode a young senior named Kingman Brewster, later President of Yale, and he took the podium and he turned the meeting completely upside down, and they voted not to get involved and to stay out of the war. That was a lot of the feeling. It was mixed, but once the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, it was just a question of what service are you going into? What are you going to do? There were one or two conscientious objectors, but other than that, it was just, we're in it, let's go.

EMC: Great. Was there any military background in your family at all?

DHD: Yes, my father had been in World War I and he was called back as a retread, I think that's what they called it, in World War II.

EMC: Really?

DHD: He was one of the oldest captains in the Air Force. The Air Force was expanding so rapidly, they needed some people in the middle ranks where he could be of help. He served in England in a photo recon group interpreting photos, and my uncle was a Lt. Colonel. He had been in the Reserves, and he served, too.

EMC: Oh, that's amazing. How old was your father then, 40s?

DHD: He was 51, I think.

EMC: Oh, 51. Oh, wow, they really did dig deeply to get their people.

DHD: Yes, they did.

EMC: Was he in for the whole four years?

DHD: No, after they filled the ranks, the Air Force deactivated him. He served overseas in Europe for about a year, then he came home. He got out about 1944.

EMC: So he was in the Army Air Corps?

DHD: Yes.

EMC: Okay. Well, that's very interesting. Were you in ROTC in college?

DHD: Yes, and usually ROTCs went to summer camp and then you got your commission, but because we went to college in the summer, they said, "All right, we're

going to put you through, graduate you from college, and send you to OCS for three months and then commission you," and that's what happened.

EMC: Why did you select the Army and why did you select ROTC?

DHD: Well, I selected it because my father had been an artillery man and my uncle had been an artillery man in the first World War and Yale had an artillery ROTC.

EMC: That was your motivating factor then. Once you graduated in December of '42, I guess, you had to go to OCS then.

DHD: Yes.

EMC: And where did you go?

DHD: The first week in January we left and reported to Fort Sill OSC.

EMC: And was that just general training?

DHD: It was a regular officers' candidate school for three months and then they commissioned us.

EMC: Okay. And you were commissioned as a?

DHD: A second lieutenant in the field artillery.

EMC: Okay. Second.

DHD: Field Artillery Reserve. We had a different serial number than the usual graduates out of OSC.

EMC: What exactly would a field artillery man do?

DHD: Good question.

EMC: You'd use artillery obviously.

DHD: Act as junior officers in a battery, which is similar to an infantry company. They'd have to learn how to adjust fire of guns and how to calibrate guns and how to employ the use of various types of cannons as well as they had to learn about vehicle maintenance and surveying, generally functions compatible to the needs of employing field artillery in combat.

EMC: So they were using cannon then?

DHD: Oh, yes.

EMC: Still.

DHD: Yes, they had --

EMC: It sounds archaic today.

DHD: Well, they had guns and Howitzers? They had old fashion French 75s at first, which came from World War I. There weren't enough of the newer ones to go around, but by the time we finished OCS we were employing the new -- they called them 105, 105 millimeter Howitzers.

EMC: Well, that sounds quite intensive.

DHD: It was.

EMC: You had to know a lot, that's for sure. After you finished your three months there, where were you assigned?

DHD: I was assigned to a brand new division. As the US Army was expanding rapidly, they'd take cadres from units and send them out to a camp and take young officers from officer candidate school and send them to the same camp and really form a whole new division. I was there from May into August, through late July early August. Interestingly enough, the unit I was in, the 106th Infantry Division, I eventually left that because I volunteered for flight school, but that unit later on

arrived in Europe and was at the point where the Germans hit in the Battle of the Bulge, and they were wiped out.

EMC: Decimated.

DHD: Two of my college classmates were killed and one wounded.

EMC: Now, that was a terrible battle, a lot of casualties.

DHD: So I guess I was lucky.

EMC: Yes, you were. When you were at this camp, where was this camp?

DHD: This was Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

EMC: Oh, okay, so you were there during the summer of '43.

DHD: Yes, beautiful weather.

EMC: I'll bet, hotter than heck. And no air conditioning, and you had to train.

DHD: Yes.

EMC: Outside, I presume. I think when you're younger, you can survive it better. Well, you were in that 106th Infantry Division for a while and when you were at Fort Jackson, did you decide to change specialties?

DHD: Yes, we had an opportunity to go up in a Piper Cub with a pilot and observe fire one day and practice fire and then there was a sign on the bulletin board, would anybody like to volunteer for this, and I thought it might be pretty interesting, so I volunteered and then left the division and went out to Texas, to Denton, Texas, where we trained for six weeks, just learning how to fly a Piper Cub.

EMC: Now, what was distinctive about a Piper Cub?

DHD: Well, they were slow. And you could almost sit above and see, and you could land on short airstrips. Later, the next batch of training was at Fort Sill, back to Fort Sill for the tactical use of the plane. We had to learn how to land over barriers, and take off with a barrier in front of us or land on a road; or how to employ the plane to improve the observation capabilities of the artillery. As it was, a man on the ground looks at the target. When you get up 500 feet, you can see more of the target.

EMC: Oh, I see. Now, did you have guns on these?

DHD: No.

EMC: They were unarmed?

DHD: They had nothing. The planes were 65 horsepower. They would land about 37 miles an hour. You could keep aloft for about three hours, and you were supposed to take an observer with you, and you'd go up and observe. It also had a radio. The radio was quite heavy, and you'd radio back to the guns. They'd fire a shot out. You'd see it and then you'd say, all right move 200 yards to the left and 100 yards up.

EMC: Radioing to other planes?

DHD: No, we'd radio to the guns on the ground.

EMC: Oh, on the ground, oh, okay.

DHD: They'd call it a fire direction center, like a fire direction on a ship, I guess.

EMC: Oh, okay. All right. So you basically were spotters then?

DHD: Yes.

EMC: That's what you were. That's kind of interesting. And you'd be over land, wouldn't you, most of the time?

DHD: Well, it depends. We were in different places.

EMC: We don't want to get ahead in our story, but anyway, you did go to Texas as you said for six months to train.

DHD: No, six weeks.

EMC: Oh, six weeks. Oh, just six weeks to train on a Piper Cub.

DHD: And then we went to Fort Sill for another seven or eight weeks to learn this landing on roads and over barriers and different ways to use the Cub.

EMC: Did you like this?

DHD: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you like flying?

DHD: I rather liked it. I'd never flown before, but as I got more confident, it was fun. I enjoyed it.

EMC: Did you go up with a trainer at first?

DHD: Oh, yes, you had an instructor who went up and then you had tests, flight tests, and then you kept moving along.

EMC: Did you have to study manuals first? Did you have ground instructions first?

DHD: During it, we had. We'd fly in the morning and have instruction in the afternoon and vice versa. And one time they gave us instruction on how to put the plane together. The plane they said comes in a crate, and you'd better pay attention to this because sometime you might need it. We said, "This is silly. The tables of organization say that there are going to be two mechanics with every unit, so the mechanics put it together." But when we got to New Zealand and reported, there were no mechanics, and we had to put it together.

EMC: You actually had to assemble a plane?

DHD: Well, we had to put the wings on it and the propeller on it.

EMC: The moving parts.

DHD: The notes we took in flight school came in very handy.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. So you doubled as a mechanic when you had the opportunity to do so. Did you have any mishaps when you were at Sill or Denton or did anybody that you know have any mishaps?

DHD: No, some people when they got to Sill were washed out. The instructors didn't pass them. Later on I had some mishaps but not then, and I don't know anybody else that did at Fort Sill.

EMC: How many people could the plane carry?

DHD: Two.

EMC: Just two.

DHD: It was tandem, one in front and one in the back. Usually the pilot was in front and the observer in the back. It was pretty crude. The planes had a compass and an altimeter and an air speed indicator, which was red-lined at 120, and if you were going down the plane would never have gone 120 unless you were headed down, but you shouldn't go over that or you'd probably pull the wings off. The gas gauge was a cork on a piece of

wire that went up through the gas cap, very simple, and when the wire started getting down toward the top of the gas cap, you knew you were running out of gas, so you went home. It wasn't anything high tech but it worked.

EMC: It worked. What was the fuel capacity?

DHD: I've forgotten, but it was about three hours.

EMC: How many gallons? Oh, three hours, you said. Yes, three hours you could stay up, right, but you didn't fly very fast then?

DHD: Oh, no, if you were going downwind, you would go much faster than going upwind. For instance, in flight school I took a trip between two points, once downwind and once into the wind, and it took me I think a half an hour more going into the wind than downwind.

EMC: Oh, sure, that's even true today. I know you fly back from Europe faster than you go. Oh, well, that's very interesting. Well, after you finished your Fort Sill training on the tactical use of a plane, did they give you an assignment?

DHD: Yes.

EMC: Overseas?

DHD: They shipped 44 of us. We all took the train from Fort Sill, Oklahoma to the west coast. We were one day and one night in Camp Stoneman, Ca., I think it was, and then out we went on the USS West Point, which had been the S.S. America, the ocean liner America. And the whole ship was loaded with troops and some nurses, and we went to Noumea, New Caledonia.

EMC: Did you disembark there?

DHD: Yes, we disembarked, and we were put in a replacement center for about four weeks or five weeks.

EMC: What was a replacement center?

DHD: Well, they'd ship all these troops out to this camp, wherever it was, and then as units up in combat need them, they'd peel off so many sergeants, so many privates, so many lieutenants and send them on. There were four divisions fighting in the South Pacific at that time, and we were peeled off, eleven of us, each to different divisions. Among the divisions was the 43rd Infantry Division, which was the unit originally from Rhode Island.

EMC: Now, were you in that?

DHD: Well, I heard it needed people, and I asked if I could go, because I was vaguely acquainted with a few people in the unit. And so I was shipped out to the 43rd. I thought we were going up to the Solomon Islands. The 43rd had been fighting very heavily in a place called Munda.

EMC: M-u-n-d-a?

DHD: Yes.

EMC: And this is '43, late '43?

DHD: It was early '44.

EMC: Okay.

DHD: And the long and short of it was the ship took us to New Zealand because the 43rd was coming out for a rest, so we joined them and had a rest and refitting, and we joined them there. I was assigned to the 103<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.

EMC: Where were you in New Zealand?

DHD: We were in the North Island. And we went on maneuvers two or three places around the island up in

the north, and we were based at a place around Auckland. There were a whole bunch of little camps for the division.

EMC: Did you ever get a chance to go into Auckland?

DHD: Oh, yes.

EMC: How did the New Zealanders welcome you?

DHD: Oh, they were wonderful. Of course, New Zealand's contribution was just unbelievable. I mean, they had a population for the nation about the size of Detroit. They had an Air Force. They had a Navy. They had troops in the Middle East with the British 8th Army. They had troops that got lost at Singapore. Their sacrifices were horrendous. Most people don't think much of it. Proportionately they made a major effort.

EMC: They were welcoming. And how long did you spend in New Zealand?

DHD: We were there for four months.

EMC: Four months, okay.

DHD: Yes. We were there from late February until I

think it was early July -- late June, early July.

EMC: Well, that was quite a nice rest, wow, four, five months. Well, that's pretty good. You just did your maneuvers during that period of time, and what were the camp facilities like? Were they pretty simple? Were you in tents or what?

DHD: They weren't plush, but they were mainly little huts. Huts holding six men; some three men, and some larger barracks like the United States Naval and Army barracks. The thing we pilots had to do was to convince the people in the 43rd, the artillery men, that these planes would work. They had been in the jungle fighting for six months or so and their observations -- they hadn't been able to see anything except from some kind of a bomber, a navy bomber, flying around with an observer, and that wasn't very adequate. So we had to show them what the planes could do and how to do it.

EMC: So did you convince them that they were useful?

DHD: They began to get religion, and later they were completely convinced. But naturally, they had seen an awful lot, and they didn't want to buy the Brooklyn Bridge on the first pass.

EMC: They were skeptical at first.

DHD: Skeptical, yes.

EMC: But then they were convinced, which was good. Well, you had a pretty nice war experience so far, I should say, as far as June '44. And where were you assigned after that? Were you going into combat?

DHD: Then the division was moved up to a place in New Guinea called Aitape. I think it's A-i-t-a-p-e. And to me it was just a great big coconut plantation. But anyway, the Americans had a Jap Army closed in because on one side the Americans were at a place called Finchaven, then you went up the coast west and there was a Jap base called Wewak and then further on was Aitape, so we were blocking the Japanese so they couldn't get out. I was put on a ship with the airplanes, and it was, I think, an AKA. It had a naval gun crew on it. We were unescorted. And we went up. As we arrived we could hear the artillery thundering about five miles down the coast. Then eventually the ship got unloaded, and we brought the planes ashore, and put them together.

EMC: Oh, you did that?

DHD: We had mechanics by that time. They weren't

trained mechanics. They were automobile mechanics. They were just Native American mechanics. By native, I mean US born. They knew how to put things together.

EMC: Oh, that's good. So did you go out in the planes to observe?

DHD: Yes, well, then we went up, and we'd go along the coast to where we thought the Japs would stop, and the ground rules said, fly no more than 500 feet altitude and try to keep it 200, but you couldn't see anything. As the Japanese didn't have any Air Force, we'd go up high and stay at 1,500 to 2,000 feet and observe, look for trails, look for signs of campsites and just keep an eye out for things. There was a coconut plantation that ran a mile in from the shore and then about ten miles beyond thick jungle. Then the mountain rises up 2,500 feet and we'd take our people over the mountains. They were scouting and such, and we'd land on these little tiny fields.

EMC: Oh, that the Americans had on the other side. Oh, I see.

DHD: And they'd be out there for weeks at a time.

EMC: In the jungle?

DHD: Yes, right on this little open grass high on the mountains, and they were blocking any Japanese that came. Once I had to go out and pick up a fellow who was very sick and then bring him back. He had dengue fever, which was terrible. And the higher you get, the harder it is to take off in the lighter air. He was a big man, but we got him in the plane, sick as a dog, and somehow the plane took off.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes.

DHD: I saw him later in the Philippines. He said he was the only one who went to a hospital with dengue fever at Aitape and went back to duty. All the rest were shipped out. It was such a disease that hit. It was some kind of a mosquito bite or something.

EMC: Oh, and malaria, too, you could have gotten there.

DHD: Malaria, too, yes. We had these yellow Atabrin pills every day and you'd just turn yellow.

EMC: Oh, really. It must have been quinine?

DHD: Well, we never had quinine. It was this Atabrin, they called it.

EMC: Well, you had to take it because --

DHD: Oh, yes, and I never got malaria.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Well, you had some experiences there. Were we attacking the Japanese there or were you just kind of strangle holding them?

DHD: We locked the door and they were trying to get out. And there was a river called the Drunimor River which they tried to cross a couple of times. Just as I arrived, the artillery was pounding away at it, but they didn't get out. Occasionally, Japanese would be picked up, but they were sick and tired and hungry, but they wouldn't give up.

EMC: Yes, they were really stalworth fighters then. So there wasn't any real direct combat --

DHD: No, not really.

EMC: -- in that area?

DHD: No, it was good training, good break-in, and then the next one in December, the day after Christmas we boarded to go to Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines.

EMC: Oh, right.

DHD: We combat loaded and landed in the Philippines. It was January 9th, 1945. There was a tremendous US fleet. I guess it was one of the biggest fleets. We didn't see the big ships, but we saw, of course, lots of aircraft and some destroyers off to the side, and we had a few air attacks. They didn't come too close to us, which was good, and then we were unloaded onto a landing barge.

EMC: With your planes?

DHD: Yes. The plane was on a truck with its tail over the cabin. The wings were bolted to the side of the truck, and the propeller was on, so you had to compact it, and those navy guys they somehow slung it, loaded it into this landing barge and away we went to the beach. We were on what they called the third wave. I got ashore and everything was unloaded but nothing lined up with my maps. Then I figured out that we landed on the wrong beach.

EMC: Oh, with your plane?

DHD: Yes. On the truck.

EMC: Anybody else there? Any other planes?

DHD: No, no other planes but other vehicles and men.

EMC: Just you?

DHD: Well, we had my truck with the plane on it and another weapons carrier with fuel and supplies and such. We landed on the beach. The beach was busy, and a lot of hustle and bustle, but it wasn't the one we were supposed to be at, so we said, "Well, look, let's get out of here," so we went up away from the beach.

EMC: You mean you flew?

DHD: No, I just led the truck with the plane on it. I said, "Follow me," and I walked up the road, and down the road came two Filipino women with laundry on their heads. The war wasn't going to interfere with the laundry, and one of them said, "You are very welcome."

EMC: Oh, that's good.

DHD: It sort of made us realize that the natives felt that way. Then somebody from our unit came and said, "Look, there is a river between us and where you're supposed to go. You can't get across it. Find a field and put the plane together and take off."

EMC: Sounds kind of disorganized.

DHD: Well, war is disorganized.

EMC: Yes, war is disorganized.

DHD: So the next day we got the plane flying and then they gave me an observer. I had never met the man before but he was a nice fellow. He was a supply officer but he didn't have anything to do at the time. I found out later that at the beach I was supposed to go to, the planes arrived, and they started putting them together. That night there was a 12-inch Jap gun shelled the beach and three or four planes were destroyed and one mechanic was killed. I was just as lucky to be where I was.

EMC: Isn't that something?

DHD: So things worked out. The first time up I had the observer and the rules said or the book said: fly 200 feet high; no more than 500 feet, and keep 200 yards behind your own lines. But you never knew where the lines were. I mean, they were moving ahead.

EMC: And so the Japanese were still there?

DHD: Oh, sure, and suddenly, I heard a whack, and something hit my ear. A Japanese sniper hit and put a

bullet up right behind this observer and out through the Plexiglas window and a piece of the window had hit me. After that we went up higher. We then flew higher most of the time.

EMC: Yes, because they could shoot at you.

DHD: Yes, well, that's what they were doing.

EMC: Yes, right, they were doing that.

DHD: So then we gradually got in contact with ground troops. We made contact through the radio with the units we were supporting, and we were looking for targets and such, and this went on day after day.

EMC: Did you have any base where you landed?

DHD: This field that I started out with was the base for a time.

EMC: Oh, okay.

DHD: And then they decided, well, we better make a good field here. They got a bulldozer in and the operator was pushing dirt to one side and smoothing out the ground. Then we got a call that we had to get a plane up into the air quickly. So I started up with a

crosswind blowing. As I was just taking off the crosswind blew me sideways and I hit the pile of dirt. The plane tipped over on its back. It was a mess. So I walked away from that and a few days later with a new plane for the next two or three weeks, we were along the shore holding the Japanese from coming into the invasion strip while another American force was trying to make a rush to Manila, our 43<sup>rd</sup> Division was holding the left flank of the Army. That's when I had a chance to adjust fire for the Battleship Pennsylvania and a number of destroyers. Some Naval observers were with our infantry and said, "Can you give us some targets?" So we adjusted fire for them. Sometimes if you fired a small caliber gun, you couldn't see where it burst. If it burst into a hollow or in the woods, the rounds frequently were lost. With the Pennsylvania you knew where it landed. With the Battleship Pennsylvania you knew it was there.

EMC: Yes.

DHD: And we fired that for a while and then I adjusted fire for a number of destroyers. The destroyers were pretty accurate, and it was fun firing.

EMC: So in other words, did you spot for them?

DHD: Yes, we'd find a crossroads. You'd see vehicle

trails going into the woods. Well, maybe they're just having a picnic but maybe they're not, and you'd fire on the woods. Sometimes the infantry would radio: "Look on the reverse side of that hill there's a little something there. Can you see what it is? Then we would report that there were a bunch of foxholes there, so we would fire at the foxholes.

EMC: Oh, I see.

DHD: We would infrequently see the Japanese getting up and running.

EMC: Yes, so you were giving them targets.

DHD: Yes, giving them targets and then reporting back to them on what happened.

EMC: So you were above the fire, I presume, or were you out of the way by then?

DHD: We tried to stay off to the side, so that we weren't in the line of fire.

EMC: Direct line, yes.

DHD: Yes, a direct line. Sometimes we'd go way out and look back, and we could see our guns firing, see

the flash; and we were behind the enemy target. At that time there was no Japanese Air Force. We thought we were supreme in the air, but it didn't turn out to be that way, because later on I was up alone, and I was adjusting fire on a target. Then I said, "Somebody's firing at me," and I looked and I turned the plane. Then I looked over my shoulder and a Japanese Zero came right by me.

EMC: What is a Japanese Zero?

DHD: It was a fighter plane. And he passed by me. He had a big red ball on the wing. He came by and turned around. It was like the old movie, "Dawn Patrol" with Errol Flynn where the plane comes and goes straight in. Well, he came straight in at me, and you could see the tracers coming from his guns.

EMC: Oh, my Lord. You must have been terrified. What did you do?

DHD: I said, "Get the Air Force here," and then my mike went out. The fellow on the ground heard the gunfire and the Japs' engine. Later he said, "Gee, I thought they had you because the mike stopped for a minute."

EMC: Yes.

DHD: And then I got the mike back on. The Jap had come down firing, but he missed me.

EMC: So where did you go though?

DHD: Well, I went right down very close to the ground, but then I was way over into the Japanese territory, so I headed back and the quickest way home was right through a place our own artillery was firing on, and I said into the mike, "Stop the fire. Stop, I want to get home."

EMC: Well, it's lucky he didn't chase you.

DHD: I think he lost me then. I was so low, and he was going so fast.

EMC: Oh, oh, okay.

DHD: See, our planes were so slow. He probably thought I was a fighter plane, and he was leading me, and doing all those things fighter planes do, but he didn't touch me.

EMC: Oh, well, that's good, but it was really a scary incident.

DHD: Well, it shook me up.

EMC: Yes, I'll say, and that was on Lingayen?

DHD: Yes, on Lingayen and then we went down toward Manila. We got in some mountains west of a place called Clark Field, which is a big base where MacArthur's Air Force got wiped out, and we started receiving real Jap anti-aircraft fire. That was disconcerting. Then we went down just outside Manila. We had an airstrip on the outskirts of Manila, and we'd go out in the daytime, out to these forward little strips and we'd adjust fire. And we did that 'til the end of the war.

EMC: Did you have any other incidents like that?

DHD: Not the plane, but a number of times we got caught in anti-aircraft fire, and it was very unpleasant.

EMC: Yes, I'll say.

DHD: And you'd just hear this pump, pump, pump, pump, pump, a number of times we got that. Then when we were in Manila, we were just on the outskirts of Manila on this abandoned airstrip. We went out one night to eat. We had been flying -- I had been flying eight hours.

EMC: Oh, that long.

DHD: Not continuously. We'd come back, get gas, go out again, come back, get gas, etc.

EMC: Really, for how long? You said eight hours at a clip.

DHD: No, I guess two and a half hours to three hours each trip. When I returned to the airstrip at about 10:30 at night, the Japs had infiltrated and put a hand grenade in my plane.

EMC: Oh, they were that close?

DHD: Well, they were somewhere.

EMC: Right near your abandoned field then?

DHD: Yes, the so-called front lines were 10, 15 miles out, but these Japanese weren't.

EMC: You noticed it, I hope?

DHD: Well, the plane was out for about -- it took about five or six days for the mechanics to put it back together.

EMC: Oh, did it explode?

DHD: Yes, the grenade blew up.

EMC: Oh, it did blow up?

DHD: Yes.

EMC: Oh, my heavens, yes, that's quite something. Did you have a barracks there?

DHD: No, it was an abandoned convent on which half the roof was gone, but there were a couple of solid floors in it and somebody put some tin on the roof and we just stayed there.

EMC: Oh, you stayed there actually?

DHD: Yes. We set up cots and slept there.

EMC: You slept there?

DHD: Yes. No one was living there. And then we went up to a place called Cabanataun, which was the camp of the prisoners from the Death March --

EMC: Oh, yes.

DHD: And it was the saddest thing. You'd fly over this cemetery and these mounds with these just makeshift wooden crosses and that's where we heard the war had ended. But before that, we were getting ready to go to land in Kyushu one of the main Japanese islands and our division was one of the ones to take the lead and make the initial landings. They'd rigged up what they called a Brodie device on an LST. The LST had a mast forward and a mast aft and on the top of the mast, way up the mast, there was a boom on each one going out over the water, about 30 feet above the water, and between the ends of the boom was a long cable with a loop on it. They put a hook over the cabin of our plane, and the idea was they'd hook us onto the loop, lift us off the deck, move us out on the boom. Somehow or other they transferred us back to the stern boom and then we'd start up. The ship would be going into the wind. We'd shoot down the cable. There was a plunger in the plane just like the old toilet plungers, and you'd pull it to release yourself from the cable and fly away. Then you had to come back, and they had the thing rigged up so you'd hook the loop when you came back, and they'd somehow brake you. We went out to practice this, and they figured because of the planes we'd lost on the landing at Lingayen. We'd probably have the same trouble in Kyushu. We went once around with an instructor in the front seat and then I got in the front seat and went around with him in the

backseat. Then it was time for lunch, and who should come aboard but Admiral Wilkinson, who I think was the commander of the Amphibious Force. I don't know what his title was. Wilkinson said, "Well, I've heard about these things. I don't know whether they're any good or not." It was my turn to solo after lunch, but I did it with the Admiral present.

EMC: Oh, wow.

DHD: A friend of mine though on another day had released the hook too soon, and I said, "What happened?" He said, "The plane went into the drink."

EMC: Oh, boy.

DHD: And I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I turned around to the instructor." And I said, "What did he do?" My friend said he was out swimming. As soon as I hit the water the instructor got out of there. So my friend got out, too. I guess they saved the plane.

EMC: Hopefully. So you were practicing.

DHD: We were practicing this for the invasion of Japan, which was to take place sometime in October or November, but the war ended.

EMC: Sure.

DHD: And we went up to Japan and landed in Yokohama, and Yokohama wasn't atom bombed, but it was decimated. It was like going from the Baptist Church in Providence to Trinity Theater and all you saw were maybe a couple of cement blocks and a safe that was rusted out. That was all. I mean, just acres and acres of just nothing.

EMC: Nothing?

DHD: And then --

EMC: Did you land there?

DHD: The ship landed there.

EMC: And you got out?

DHD: We got out and went north to a place called Kumagaya, which was an airfield.

EMC: With the planes, I presume?

DHD: With the planes, the planes on the trucks and then we got word that the division was going home. I had only been overseas about 15 months, but the rank

and file of the division had been over there three years, and they went home, but I stayed for another -- oh, another month or two and then I came home, too.

EMC: Where did you stay?

DHD: I was with a unit, demilitarizing Yokosuka, a naval base.

EMC: What did that entail?

DHD: Make everybody turn in their sidearms and their swords and their pistols.

EMC: The Japanese?

DHD: Yes, and then what do you do with them? And I must say it might have been unfair but --

EMC: People probably stole them.

DHD: -- some Naval officers from the cruiser Boston came and said, "Listen, we've been at sea for months without any souvenirs, do you suppose you could get us some souvenirs?" And our commanding officer said, "Gee, they're very hard to come by." Well, the CO had two rooms full, so he started trading, and he gave these fellows a few pistols and some Japanese swords

and in return we got, I think, four weeks of ice cream and a jukebox with records. That was the end of the war.

EMC: Yes, I'd figured that they'd want the swords and the pistol. That was quite something then. I wanted to doubleback and ask you a few questions about the Philippines when you were there at that deserted field at the convent and doing the spotting. Were you out just during the day doing spotting or could you spot at night?

DHD: No, we had flown once or twice at night, but we didn't have the instruments and so we didn't. And I don't know that we would have seen anything, but we'd fly off just before dawn, and we'd get a truck behind us and the truck's headlights would light up the strip in front of us. The truck would follow us down as we took off to light the way and then we'd stay out for two and a half to three hours, and just as we were ready to come back, our replacement would come. Then he'd be over the area, so there was always a plane over the target area. And we'd be back for a rest and then at night we'd close it down.

EMC: How many missions would you say you were on per day? Three or four?

DHD: Two to four.

EMC: Okay, so you were five hours or even ten hours flying.

DHD: Yes, I'd say two to four and then sometimes we had to be a courier, take messages from one headquarters to another. Sometimes they had to take and pick up wounded and such.

EMC: Oh, so you did that as well?

DHD: Occasionally, yes. I wasn't too involved in that part of it. Two of the pilots won the Silver Star, and they were, I think, for picking up wounded. But the object was to keep a plane over the area where the infantry was at all times to protect them from dawn to dust.

EMC: Very good. Well, what was morale like in your unit?

DHD: Oh, good. There was a little moaning and groaning. It's human, but no, you'd start off with the idea you can lick the world and then you get hit by something, and you'd realize, boy, this is for real. I won't say gung ho. We just said, look, there's a job to do and let's do it, and no, I don't think with any

downcast defeatism or anything like that.

EMC: Oh, that's good. What did you do for recreation or did you have any out there?

DHD: Well, the general in New Guinea, the general loved to play volleyball, so he'd have a volleyball game every afternoon and other than that there was some swimming in New Guinea. In the Philippines, we'd go out at night, and we met a couple of lovely Spanish Filipino families, and as I might have mentioned, one of them we still keep in contact with, and we'd go out dancing with them. We learned how to rumba, and it was fun. But an interesting thing that I didn't know 'til about ten years ago, this woman, Nena Cueras and her family always had gone back to Spain for education for hundreds of years for college, but her mother was so impressed by the American pilots whom she met, that she decided that her children were going back to the States to be educated, and there was a donnybrook in the family. The mother won, and they all came to the United States. Some of them came to live here permanently. One other interesting story that this woman told. She was only 17 and they were in a hacienda in the hills overlooking this village, and they knew the Americans had landed somewhere in Lingayen. They hadn't seen any Americans. Suddenly, they looked down into this town and they saw these strange looking people with uniforms

and some kind of helmet they'd never seen before. Americans! Yanks! She didn't tell me this until about ten years ago. She said she started rushing down the hill with her sister. Then suddenly she said, "I forgot my lipstick." And she went back to get the lipstick. Then they came down expecting to find these big strong healthy clean-cut American soldiers, but here these tired, dog tired, bearded doughboys came slogging through, but they made good friends with them, and they brought them food or something.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. How did you ever meet these people?

DHD: Well, I don't know. I was wondering that the other day. One of our pilots somehow ran across them and the young girls took him home.

EMC: Because they'd be pretty sheltered. I don't think they'd be running around with Americans.

DHD: Boy, this was the first unchaperoned date in that family in 300 years. We all stuck together. And one woman, young girl, she also was the same age, she had been in the Walled City of Manila that was terribly bombed by the Japanese. The grandmother was hit, and they had to leave her, then they made a rush to get out and the mother got hit. They started to stay with her

but the mother said, "Go, don't wait, go," and they never found the grandmother or the mother again.

EMC: Sad story.

DHD: Yes, they went through something terrible, so that was the only sort of thing we did just to relieve the boredom.

EMC: Recreation-wise, right. How was the food?

DHD: Well, Spam, I still don't eat it.

EMC: Did you get a lot of that?

DHD: C rations and different kind of rations, and oh, yes, we got enough. We didn't starve. It was perfectly healthy food, I guess, and that was about it.

EMC: Nothing great?

DHD: Nothing great, and then there was a brewery in Manila, and you'd line up, the door would open, and whatever they had they'd sell and then they'd close the doors again. There wasn't much of that.

EMC: Not much drinking, yes. How was the camaraderie among your group, your division?

DHD: Oh, very good. I was very close to two of the men, Hardy and Marshal, and the others, we had a reunion of the pilots at my house about ten years ago.

EMC: Oh, okay.

DHD: They came from Canada, one guy from Canada. The fellow from California, he couldn't make it. And two of them we couldn't find. And some others had died, but we had about five.

EMC: That's great.

DHD: And the wives.

EMC: That's fantastic. And how many pilots were in your unit?

DHD: There were eleven.

EMC: Eleven.

DHD: In the division.

EMC: In the division. Okay. Well, that's pretty good. That's almost half. That is fantastic.

DHD: We had a general who wanted to fly.

EMC: Oh, really?

DHD: And we taught him how to fly. And I mention that in my book, but the air officer in charge said, "Listen, general, I can't let you solo. If anything happens to you, I'll be in the hot seat." Well, the general swallowed that, but then one day at the end of the war we were at this Cabanataun Camp where we went. We had a new mechanic, who was young and just as green as grass. He was on duty fixing planes, and the general came down at the crack of dawn and said, "I think I'll take that plane out." "Yes, sir." The general flew off. When we went down to the strip someone said, "Who's flying?" "Oh, the general is." "Oh, he is. Who's flying with him?" "Oh, he went up alone." He then landed and everybody was polite. "Nice flight general?" "Yes, yes," and that was the end of it. He flew from then on.

EMC: Yes, he got his opportunity to fly. Did you get any medals for your World War II service?

DHD: I think we were all awarded --

EMC: The air medal.

DHD: An air medal and two clusters. And we had a Pacific campaign ribbon. I think two campaigns and an arrowhead for landing in the early waves. That was about it.

EMC: Oh, that's great. Well, you were sent back to the States, you said. Was it October or November?

DHD: November.

EMC: November of '45.

DHD: Yes.

EMC: How did you get back?

DHD: A troop ship that just had thousands of people on it, and we landed in Tacoma and we were shipped the next day east to Camp Edwards? No, what's that camp in Massachusetts?

EMC: Edwards, I think.

DHD: Edwards is on the Cape.

EMC: Cape, right. I know what you mean.

DHD: We were demobilized there and sent home.

EMC: Oh, it's right outside central Massachusetts, Worcester. Devens.

DHD: Devens. Camp Devens. Fort Devens.

EMC: Right, that is the one, and so you were demobilized there and you returned home, I presume, to Providence. And what did you do after the war?

DHD: I went to work for Brown and Sharpe Manufacturing Company, and I took a training course there for two years.

EMC: What did they make?

DHD: They made machine tools and measuring tools.

EMC: I think Bill Sheffield was there.

DHD: Yes, and I was there for most of my working life, both here and in England.

EMC: Oh, so you were abroad for a while. Oh, good, and how did you happen to settle in Narragansett?

DHD: Well, through my wife's family, with their connection to Wakefield and then on and on it goes.

EMC: So that was the family home. Okay. Very good, and you're still there. Well, you had your reunion, so that's your contact with your World War II servicemen. If you had to sum up your World War II Army service and its significance for you, what would you say? Did it change your life? What was its impact on you?

DHD: Well, I think the people I met and the respect I got for what they could do, regardless of their education. I have great respect for education, but some people could do some amazing things. You got to learn some quite unusual things just because they were who they were or their skills or whatever. I had great respect for them and made some very close friends, very close friends. Also, I had a respect for the naval and military service. You certainly have a better understanding of it when you read the press sound off about certain things, and things are never what they say in the press.

EMC: They're not there.

DHD: Also, an ability to ask questions and not just accept things blindly. Was it a worthwhile experience? Yes. I think a term of service, military and naval, would do any young person good.

EMC: Very good. Well, thank you very much for your comments.

DHD: You're welcome.

EMC: I appreciate it.

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