

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Earl Dover

Conducted by Deb Barrett

May 27, 2009

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library
in partnership with the Library of Congress

This interview is being conducted on May 27, 2009, with Mr. Earl Dover at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Mr. Dover was born on October 6, 1916, in Chicago, Illinois. After the military he sold advertising, and was associate publisher of an electronics magazine. He learned of the Veterans History Project through a family friend. Also with us today are Earl's wife, Dorothy, and his son, Dave. Mr. Dover has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.

Life Before and Entering Military Service

Earl, just before you went into the military, what was your life like? Where were you living?

I lived in Chicago. I worked for a mail-order company, Spiegel, Inc. I worked in stock, not sales. It was a mail-order company and we got a lot of overtime during certain parts of the year. Actually, it was because they didn't want me to take off on Monday nights for drill I only did the three-year enlistment.

So you were enlisted in the National Guard?

At the expiration of my term of service, I did the three years – I did the full deal.

So you did three years in the National Guard?

It was horse-drawn field artillery, which people can't believe that anymore.

So from 1935 to 1938?

That's right.

Why did you join the National Guard?

I had a good friend who wanted to join the Navy. He flunked the physical, so I didn't join either. But he had a connection with the Guard and went in, and they were very happy to take us. One of the things was that they had a tremendous sports program. They had a football team, they had basketball teams, and a track meet every year. Not only that, but you made a dollar for drilling, you made a dollar for being an usher at the polo game on Saturday night, a dollar for major races – so sometimes you made three or four dollars in a week to supplement your income.

So it seemed like a pretty good deal.

It was a good deal. I played a lot of basketball and was on two championship teams. I really got a lot out of it. The thing about the Guard in those days – in Headquarters Battery, almost all of the rank for the table of organization were guys in there ten or twelve years. They worked for Commonwealth Edison, or they worked for the gas company, General Motors or something. There was no advancement there, anyway, so you were just a Private. But it was a great program and I enjoyed my three years.

During this time were you living with your parents?

I lived with my parents.

So you worked, you went to National Guard and lived with your parents. Did you have any plans of going further in the military?

Well, I did take the ten series course to be a second lieutenant, and I worked about maybe six or seven of those ten units. But I couldn't devote enough time to it.

Tell us a little bit about those courses. What were they all about?

Well, you were going to be a second lieutenant if you got the ten done. One would be on sanitation in the field; one would be on cooking and messing; one would be on first aid; one would be on the articles of war – it was a general thing that you would learn if you were a freshman in, say, West Point or some military organization.

So this was something that you studied on your own?

Yes. It was strictly a correspondence course. The regiment had a full-time Master Sergeant who was the top honcho – he was over all the officers; technically he was a regular Army Master Sergeant. Then you'd turn it in to the Sergeant Freeman and he'd give it back to you in a week with the grade on it. And if you passed all right, he'd give you the next course. If he didn't like your answers or how you performed, it would be marked and you'd probably have to do most of it over. It was a training process that would put you in good stead to become an officer and get you in the field with a unit.

And this was still part of the National Guard?

Oh, yes. This was part of the National Guard.

So you did three years in the National Guard. How old were you when you were there?

I guess I was still 18 years old. I enlisted in September, so maybe I was going to be 19. I was going to join the Navy, as I mentioned before, and I wasn't that sharp. Because I went in and talked to this Chief on Randolph Street, and he asked, "How old are you?" and I said, "17." He said, "You better go outside and ask someone how old you are!" (Both chuckle) So I turned around and said, "You know, I made a mistake. My birthday is such-and-such. I'm 18." So he said, "Okay, here's the paperwork." So we filled out the papers and they ran me through the physical. We were getting dressed after the physical and the guy I went down there with, I asked him, "How did you do?" And he said, "They didn't pass me." So I said, "I'm passed." So we just got dressed and I walked out with the forms.

And that's when you went to the National Guard?

About a week or a month later we went to the National Guard. We had no problem there.

You were in the National Guard for three years. When those three years were up, what changed?

Well, I had three more years in the company I was working for. I wasn't the manager, but I was one of two managers in the hardware and sporting goods. And I had about 10 or 15 people who worked under me – stock people and packers and that kind of thing. This was during the Depression and we felt lucky to have a job.

So you got out of the National Guard in 1938. When did you join the active military?

First of all, Congress passed a law that they were going to pull all the National Guard divisions into a year of active duty. And the 33rd we knew was going to be one of them. I wasn't in it at this time. But I figured, at that time I was 21 years old and I figure I'm going to get drafted. I had no responsibility other than that, so I went back – everybody went down to the Guard. The old-timers I spoke of, they didn't want to go away for a year. And it was opening up. So I went to my old battery commander, and I knew a couple of other battery commanders. I presented my wares and I made the best deal I could make my old battery commander. He said, "Dover, I'll give you three stripes if you reenlist now. I guarantee you'll make "Staff" as soon as we are made federal troops." It was a good deal, so I took it.

Three stripes meant what?

Staff Sergeant – no, just a Sergeant is three stripes; Staff Sergeant you get a "rocker."

So you would get three stripes ...

Three stripes to reenlist; and that's in the paperwork. Here's the paperwork. Here's where I made Staff Sergeant.

So that was going into the regular Army?

Well, we were in the National Guard, but I think it was October 31, or maybe November. I have the notice about when I had to arrive for induction.

So this is still the National Guard – you were going back into the Guard?

I went into the Guard. One day I'm in the National Guard and the next day I'm in the regular Army.

From National Guard to Active Duty Army

Where were you inducted?

In the armory – I took the oath in the armory. The whole battery was there. I was in the Headquarters Battery. There were six firing batteries – A, B, C, D, E, F; and there were service batteries to support them. It was a typical team. The medical contingent and the band were attached to Headquarters Battery. So they lived with us when we went to Camp Forrest, Tennessee. The whole team went down there, and went, “Here we are.” We were in Hyde Park on the IC Railroad ...

So you went down on the IC?

Well, no. They used the IC tracks, but they were freight trains.

Regular troop trains?

Regular troop trains, yes.

How did your family feel about your decision and your leaving?

I told my mother and my dad. They knew I was in it. But I don't think they thought about us really going to war. And we weren't going to war – we were just going away for a year. But anybody with a brain knew you weren't going to get away with a year. As a matter of fact, we had a year in – see, my enlistment date starts when I reenlisted and they said we would be away for a year. But we had a year in and then they made it 15 months.

Right – they extended it.

They extended it. Then Pearl Harbor came. And after Pearl Harbor, right away they started taking the 124th Field Artillery and divided it up. An officer who had a lot of experience, he was pulled out. He was a Captain, and overnight he was made a bird-Colonel. And he took two or three second lieutenants out of the group, and then he was looking for sergeants. And I stayed away from him, (both chuckle) because we had an idea where they were going. The rumors were out from the Quartermaster telling what was happening with the clothes they were issuing.

Let's back a little bit. Let's go back to 1938. Your family was saying good-bye to you. Then you went to Camp Forrest?

Yes. We were there for a year – over a year.

What was it like when you got down there? Had you been away from home before?

Well, I had been in three camps, three different years with the Guard, with the same guys.

Had you been down to Camp Forrest before?

It was a brand new camp. It wasn't even finished when we got down there.

You got to inaugurate the camp. What was your typical day like when you got down there?

Well, a typical Army day – you live a “garrison life” as they called it. You got up in the morning – they had this fellow with the bugle; there were bugles on the television the other day – and we woke up with the bugle. And we’d close out the day at 4:00 or 4:30. There would be “retreat.” You stood “retreat” at least four days out of the seven. And it was formal, as I mentioned. I was the regimental color sergeant, so I would have to be dressed and back out on the field. There were two sergeants and two corporals who were the color guard. And the four of us, we’d be at parade rest and all that, but we’d do the whole thing. It was interesting – a lot of discipline – but I guess I responded well to it, because I kind of got caught up in the thing. I even have this: “Secretary of War, Stimson, came to Tennessee,” And there’s the entire division and colors standing up. You can’t tell me, but I’m either the second or third red flag. Red is the artillery color, and the 122nd, 124th, and the third one is the 58th Brigade.

This is a newspaper from August 3, 1941. The caption reads, “The Colors of the 33rd Division at the airport at Manchester, Tennessee, a few miles from Camp Forrest where Illinois National Guardsmen are in training.” That’s a great thing to have. What time did you get up in the morning?

Oh, 5:00, I think; maybe 5:30. We did calisthenics and then you’d go – individual mess was by company, or by battery.

The whole company went at once?

Yes, except if someone was on duty somewhere; maybe they were on guard the previous night and they hadn’t come in yet or something. But it was simply garrison life.

What type of breakfast did you have?

Oatmeal, eggs ...

Was it a big breakfast? Tasty?

Sure. You could eat what you want: “Take all you want, but eat all you take.” That was it.

Did anyone not eat everything they took sometimes?

Gee, I don’t know.

You didn’t see that?

No. It was interesting; very interesting. It was a great experience.

So you finished breakfast. Then what did you do?

Then you had duty. We had a fleet of trucks in Headquarters Battery, and that came under my jurisdiction. I had two mechanics and we had to maintain those vehicles – they had to be ready to go. That, and then maybe we had an exercise for the day. We'd take two trucks and lay wire – hypothetical wire – but we actually laid wire and then picked it up ...

For communications?

For communications. What we did was furnish the main communications if we went into the field to the individual batteries and headquarters.

So you did that right after breakfast?

We did a lot of exercises and getting ready and all that. And I think it was maybe in May they set up a maneuver that went all through Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas. We went on the road just like a field Army.

How did you move from place to place?

We had our own fleet of trucks. It was like moving out and driving back – they had umpires and referees who would show up and throw a sack of white flour at you and you'd be “dead.” It was very interesting. I have some pictures here.

So they tried to make it as realistic as what you might see at the front?

Yes. Moving into positions you could set up a line and protect it. They even had National Guard from Illinois flying around and they could drop powder bombs on you. It was quite interesting. We learned how to take a fleet of trucks in to the woods and show how it came out. But it really didn't come out – it was buried back in the woods yet. A lot of things. You learned camouflage; you learned all that stuff.

All the skills you would need.

It was an education to save your life.

What other types of drills and things did you do? What other types of education? Did you have classes to continue your education?

Well, the units would break down. We had two or three people who were proficient on the Browning automatic rifle as opposed to the sidearm that we carried. In addition to that you would have things like – well, the cooks and the bakers, two of them would go up to the Quartermaster and there would be a school where they learned how to make pies instead of just bread, and how to buy meat and order it from the Quartermaster and get it cut the way they wanted it. It was like a little world in itself. You were kept busy.

How long did this whole process last?

Well, the maneuvers were six, seven, eight weeks. We were gone that long. When we got back it was September, and after that ordeal and living in the field that long they allowed us some furlough time at the bases. And they decided that Memorial Day would be in November – not Memorial Day; Armistice Day – and the entire 33rd Division was brought back to Chicago. Because, for the most part, the infantry was all along Madison Street – west Madison – and, except for things down in the middle of the State, there were isolated squadrons – they would bring them back. It was a mass movement. We left Camp Forrest at 3:00 in the morning, and we got to Evansville, Indiana and they had big gasoline tanker trucks on side streets – one after the other – and somebody was directing you in there and filled your gas tank and you kept going. And all these units went back to their armory and stayed there until the next day, and the parade started. And they went through Chicago and went back to the armory. Then they would take all the vehicles back to Tennessee again. But it was a training exercise on how to handle a convoy and all that.

So you were just there overnight for Armistice Day?

We were actually here about three or four days.

Did you stay together?

No. You could go home. They let you go home.

It must have been nice to get into your own bed!

Yes. But you had to be back in the armory the next morning, reporting in. A lot of things you could do in the Army – you could get some free time, but you had to check in because it was still a civilian army as opposed to a regular committed. You had a little leeway with the Articles of War, I guess.

So you went back down to Tennessee, back down to Camp Forrest.

Back down there. And that's when we saw the cadre team broken up, pulled out and that. And that's when I went down to the division education officer and got the forms to apply for the transfer. Because I figured I could get a better job in the air corps. I had been trained in high school in aeronautics for that year until I joined the National Guard. I had an instructor who had two airplanes he maintained, and taught flying in. One was owned by a judge and one was owned by the guy that owned the Mercury speedboat on the Chicago River. You couldn't get a job at that point, so I'd spend maybe three or four hours a couple of days a week, and maybe all day Saturday. And I'd get 15 minutes flying time. You'd get a lesson. But 15 minutes – you didn't do much flying in 15 minutes.

But it was better than nothing.

Well, yeah. It parlayed me into the air corps.

From the Army to the Air Corps

So you were in the Illinois National Guard. You were going for a year of active duty, but you were still considered National Guard. And so when you were coming close to the end of the year you said instead of going into the Army – the regular infantry – you wanted to go ...

Well, we were regular Army at that point. And I applied for a transfer to the air corps. And Carlson, my CO, said, “You can’t do it. We need you.” And I said, “Well, would you please send it up to the ‘hill’?” The hill was where the Colonel was. And I knew the Colonel. He knew me. When he saw me the next day at PT, he said, “Dover, I’m not going to sign it.” I said, “I didn’t expect you to. Carlson wouldn’t sign it either. So it has to go to Division.” And he said, “You know, they won’t sign it for you either.” So I said, “Well, you’ve got to send it up.” He said, “I’ll send it up.” I figured he put a note on it, too (both chuckle). But it went to Division and Division sent it to Corps. In those days we had Corps – Corp Headquarters. It went to Corps and somebody read what I had written on the application – you had to write a letter about why you wanted to transfer – and whoever saw it sent it back and said, “Transfer this man to the air corps.”

How did that officer respond?

You know, by the time that got back there, they were worried themselves about what was going to happen to them. My commanding officer, Captain Carlson, was an actuary on LaSalle Street. He didn’t want to go away, either. New Guinea – that’s where they ended up. The guy I went into the National Guard with ended up in New Guinea.

So you went to the Army Air Corps.

That’s right. That was back in Missouri, and they ran me through tests.

What type of tests?

Mechanical aptitude and knowledge of aircraft – I mean, just everything. It was maybe two days for two or three hours each day. Then they graded the papers. In the meantime I ran into spinal meningitis. The camp was closed.

You had spinal meningitis?

I didn’t have it. But the camp was closed – they shut it down and nobody was in or out for a week or ten days.

You were quarantined?

Yes. When the orders came out I was hoping I would get Rantoul – that would only be 60 or 70 miles from home. Then there was one in McKeesrock, Texas and another. So where do I go? I go to Boeing School of Aeronautics in Oakland, California.

That was quite a ways from home!

Yeah. But I was on rations and quarters in a private operation. Boeing was running the show and I wasn't on an Army base anymore. I went to class eight hours a day.

What was life like when you were in that school? How different was it from when you were in the Army? What was it like? You've got some more pictures.

There it is.

You're still in your mechanics uniform.

It was a class uniform. We [transcriber's note: there is a sound of pages turning for several seconds]. There's the courses.

You have your diploma here for the courses you took. There was an airline mechanics course. It included shop mathematics, mechanical drafting and blueprint, airplane fundamentals, metal work, electricity, airplane structure, hydraulic systems, propeller, instruments, engines, electrical systems, induction fuel oil systems, engine operation and test, engine change and change inspection, and airplane inspection and maintenance: 880 hours. You got 89.4 out of 100. That's pretty good! So how long was this school?

I think it was about 20 weeks. Maybe it says on there what it was.

And that was August 7, 1942. So from Oakland where did you go?

From Oakland I was assigned to a heavy bombardment group. It was B17's at Walla Walla, Washington. I was in the 96th Bomb Group, 413th Bomb Squadron. I started there. It was just being built up. They were getting ready to go overseas and they were short probably 30 or 40 men in a squadron. So there were about four or five of us who were assigned to the 413th, and we started working on the line. They had a half-dozen B17's and they were weary – flight weary. So we worked on those. We were there maybe about a month or six weeks and they moved the whole group to Rapid City, South Dakota. We went to the second phase. In the meantime the pilots are learning to fly and the bombardiers are learning how to drop the bombs, and we were just maintaining the aircraft for them. And after ninety days there they moved us back to Pocatello, Idaho for the third phase of this training period. Part of this was learning how to move ...

How did you move back and forth? By train?

By train, except the pilots flew and some of the ground people flew with the pilot. But we got to Pocatello, Idaho. I, in the meantime, had applied for OCS. I didn't want to be a mechanic. I wanted to be a line chief. My orders came through. They were going to go overseas in about two weeks time. And Colonel Olds, who was the group commander, he blew his top when he found out there were two guys going to OCS.

You and somebody else.

So they packed us up. The thing was, I was a PFC. I don't know what the other guy was – he wasn't even in my squadron. But if you were a PFC and they transferred you to the group headquarters in the grade of corporal, the group headquarters had to transfer you out because they were going overseas. So they transferred you to the base squadron and raised you to a sergeant. It's just like the teachers. And they handed you your papers and your train ticket and you were on your way. So I went to OCS in Miami.

OCS Training

So you went from PFC to Corporal to Sergeant in pretty short order.

Yes – about three days! (Both chuckle)

Where was Officer Candidate School?

In Miami Beach, Florida.

What time of year was this?

It was in late November.

So that was a pretty nice time to get down to Miami! Was the school on a regular base, or was it ...

No, we lived in hotels. I lived in a little hotel just off Collins Avenue. A little interesting thing, was, the day I checked in at the squadron – it was a squadron – half the squadron was underclassmen and half were upperclassmen. The day I came in as an underclassman, the upperclassmen were moving out, and I didn't get his room but somebody got Clark Gable's room (both chuckle).

So you just missed Clark Gable.

I shook his hand. We met him. And, of course, OCS – they called us '90-day-wonders' – but almost everybody in OCS had enlisted man experience; you had come out of the ranks. OTS is where they took stock brokers and attorneys and that type of thing and gave them a direct commission. And they were the ones who goofed up the TO's for all these units.

What were TO's?

The "Table of Organization." A squadron would have a 'light' Colonel and a couple of Majors, and maybe four or five Captains and some First and Second Lieutenants. Of course, an attorney comes in and he's already a Major. That was the deal he made with the recruiting. And he didn't know left from right, but he's got the deal. The only salvation was that when I became a Second Lieutenant they counted all my National Guard time and enlisted time, so I got paid like

a First Lieutenant. And when I made First Lieutenant I got paid like a Captain. And when I finally made Captain I made Major's pay and Dorothy picked up a ration (all chuckle).

When you were down in Miami with the Officer Candidate School and you lived in the hotel, how many men were there?

I think there probably were 40 in each class.

How many of you shared a room?

I was in a room with three other guys. It was a regular hotel room. But the beds had been changed. In other words, the room would have been maybe two double beds, and they put four single beds in it. There was inspection every day; every day. If not, the officers, the upperclassmen would go through. They ran it like West Point – they'd call you out in the hall and make you stand at attention and haze you and make you go through all that. It was like barracks.

So the upperclassmen really ran it and it gave them practice.

Yes. There would really be only one tactical officer for each hotel. And the tactical was a regular Army Air Corps officer.

And the upperclassmen were really in charge of what was happening. Did you ever get into any trouble with the upperclassmen?

No, I really didn't get into any. We had a great squadron. As a matter of fact, there was "retreat" on the main golf course, and you marched there and you marched back, and you sang going and you sang coming back.

What did you sing going back and forth?

I don't remember – goofy songs.

Cadences?

Our squadron had won the ribbon on the Guidon as the best marching squadron in Miami. And we were under pressure to get the next ribbon, which we did. So I don't know what the guys we left behind suffered.

How was it determined who got the ribbon?

The regular Air Corps officers judged it. As you were marching by you'd see these guys and you knew darn well they were judging you. Anybody out of step or something would get a demerit. They tried the best they could to make it like West Point.

So, in addition to the marching, what were the things you learned? What were the classes that you had?

Well, most of it was stuff that we already knew. The things that you learned were close-order drill, and you'd go to classes and you'd get first aid and different things like that. And you'd have classes on food – some of these guys were going to become mess officers in a squadron. So it was general stuff. Probably back to the story of the old “ten series” and becoming a Second Lieutenant. But now it was done by the Air Corps instead of by the National Guard.

Did you have any time for relaxation during this? Any free time?

Not very much. You had to get permission to even leave the room. But the upperclassmen would take you to do things. Like, along about the last three or four weeks as an underclassman they would take you to the tailors on Lincoln Road because you had to get measured for uniforms.

So other than that it was really 90 days of as much Army as they could get into you.

It was very intense.

And when you finished the 90 days was there a ceremony of some sort?

Not really. There was a parade and, I'm not sure, but I think the upperclassmen broke ranks and walked back and the rest had to march back. And, of course, the next day you had orders.

And where were your orders for?

I really thought I would get orders to go back to the bomb group. Even if I had to get shipped to England, I thought I would go back to my group. I got orders and didn't even understand what they were. There was a guy there – he was a regular guy in the Air Corps – so I asked him “What is this ‘AAF School of Applied Tactics, Orlando, Florida, Fighter Command School, Controller's Course’?”

So you didn't have to go too far, did you?

No.

So you ended up going to Orlando?

And I was trained by the British to be a fighter controller.

What did a fighter controller do? What were your responsibilities?

I think I'm going to show you something now which will tell you better than I can. That's a commendation.

This is Earl's commendation: "I wish to commend you and your personnel, especially controllers, for the superior control you are exercising over eight Air Force fighter groups. In modifying and reinstalling your equipment, your personnel used their initiative. And by ingenious methods constructed a complete multiple control unit which has enabled our fighter group to intercept and destroy the Hun in his own backyard in spite of his superior numbers. Your controllers have demonstrated superior judgment in their handling and directing of our fighter groups, which has permitted them to engage the enemy with all the advantages that accrue from prior information as to who, what, where and when. From the answers to these questions which you provided them, the how is made easier for our combat pilots. The confidence expressed by our fighter groups, and the ability and judgment of your control is extremely gratifying." Signed by Doolittle.

This was the endorsement by my direct commander, Colonel Weatherby, who was the Signal Corps officer under whose supervision we put this thing together.

He said, "The following message has been received from Lt. Gen. Doolittle, commanding general, Eighth Air Force, and is quoted below." That was what we just read. "I wish to add my personal thanks and commend you for the wonderful Job you are doing, using the same perseverance and initiative and hard work which you have shown in the past, we can be confident of the same good results, and even better, will be continued in the future, until final victory is achieved." It is signed by Edward P. Weatherby, Jr., who was Lt. Colonel. Very good! So you went to Orlando, and the British trained you.

There was a course, a class. The three guys out of uniform – I'm one of them. (Mr. Dover is referring to a picture he is showing to Ms. Barrett.) There were four Marines in the class. The rest of these guys are direct commission people who never went to OCS.

So you had people from different branches of the American military as well as British.

Yes.

Was it all American and British?

Yes.

How long was this training that you had in Orlando?

I think. Well, we got there and we missed the [start of the] class. They didn't want to put us into the middle of it, so we had a week or ten days to lay around Orlando and wait to start.

What did you do for those days?

We didn't really do anything. It was at the fairgrounds in downtown Orlando. You were on your own for meals, so we used to walk down to a cafeteria and have dinner and that kind of stuff.

Did you go sightseeing? Did you go to any shows?

No, not really.

How did you pass the time?

I don't remember too much about it. We used to go in and fool with the equipment they had there, so we would know what we were doing when we got there.

You did a little practice on your own with the equipment?

Yes. And there was a post theater there where the show changed every day.

A movie theater?

Yes. That was pretty much it. And as soon as this class started you put ten hours a day in it. They really pushed us through it. As soon as the class was over you were immediately moved out. We went up to First Air Force at Mitchell Field in New York, and they assigned you. Some of the same people who were in this class with us, they had all come out of a fighter control wing on the east coast – from Richmond, Virginia or somewhere – and they all wanted to go back to those units. And there was this regular Air Force Sergeant – the guy had been a career soldier – and he was the guy with the list. So we were the last ones – those three guys I showed you; me and those other two guys; Don Radtke. Don Radtke was from Illinois. The other guy – Charlie Viebrock – we became friends. We were in Germany together after the thing was all over. Anyway, Viebrock – those two guys – they had been at Pearl Harbor the morning that the bombs hit. Charlie got all blasted up with chunks of concrete. But, anyway, we were at Mitchell Field and were the last ones in line because these guys were all muscling through saying, “We’ve got to see so-and-so.” There’s always a guy like that. But, anyway, we get to the sergeant and he says, “What do you three guys think you want to do?” And I spoke up right away. I said, “Sergeant, we don’t care where you send us. We just want to go together.” He said, “That’s no problem. I’m going to send you to England and the three of you will go together.” And that’s what he did. He cut the orders for us. So we were assigned to a fighter control squadron in Richmond, Virginia. And we got down there and they were getting ready to go overseas. So we went through all that – getting the footlocker stenciled and all that kind of stuff. In the meantime we were doing calisthenics and everything. But actually we moved out of there and went up to Camp Miles Standish, and from there we went across.

Shipping Out to England

How long from the time from the sergeant who cut the orders for you to the time you left for England?

Not a lot of time. I would say we were in England in September of 1943. We landed in Scotland. We were 21 days on the water.

I was going to say 21 days is what it took. Do you remember the name of the ship you were on?

Yes. The Synthia – Her Majesty’s Ship, The Synthia – a Cunard White Line. That was a story in itself!

Was it one of the cruise ships that had gotten converted?

No. It was a cruise ship, but from 1918 or something (Ms. Barrett chuckles). The Red Cross comes and gives you all these magazines to read while you’re on the ship like that. And someone found a National Geographic that told of the maiden voyage of The Synthia of the Cunard White Star Line. The ship probably as a tour ship had 500 people on board – that’s a guess. They had 5,000 people on the ship now!

Wow! Ten times as many people!

Not only that, but my commanding officer was the only field officer – he had an oak leaf, so he was the ranking officer. There were a lot of colonels, but they were surgeons – the general hospital was on with us. We were about two days out in the Atlantic headed for England when a little Canadian corvette comes alongside and says: 14 knots at 1400 hours – you better step up the speed. Well, I think about three hours later we knew we were moving. Then there was a great explosion. They had blown the boiler out on the thing (both chuckle). Here we are off the coast of Newfoundland, so they had to take the ship back. When we went into New York City and tied up at the Cunard Line. Instead of getting a different ship for us they brought some welders on board and they fixed the boiler with electric welders. We left again two days later after they got it fixed. We spent 21 days on that tub.

You said you had ten times the number of people that ship normally held. What were your living arrangements like? Were you sleeping in the cabins? Did they have those hung up?

They weren’t hammocks. They were bunks. They had fitted them with bunks.

How many bunks on a wall?

Well, they couldn’t put three, because they would have had to slide them in this way.

Did they have two bunks?

We got a break on the deal. My commanding officer, Major Houton, was the ranking commander, so we became ship’s company. We got the guard duty and could be out on deck at night and watch and police the area and that kind of thing. So it broke the monotony.

So, with all those people on ship, you must have had shifts for eating and everything else.

Yes, for everything. Although we ate in the dining room – the officers ate in the dining room.

Where did the enlisted men eat?

In a chow line; some down below decks. I never did go down there.

The food was decent?

It wasn't bad. It was English food. I'm English, so I didn't mind it (both chuckle).

In those 21 days – you said there were magazines that the American Red Cross gave you. What else did you do to pass the time?

We stood out on deck and got a lot of fresh air because it was cold. We would go north and then come back down. It was a very interesting voyage. At night we were attacked by convoys. But they put the troop ship at the center and they surrounded it with cargo ships and then they would have gasoline tankers around the outside perimeter.

To try to give you a shield?

A cushion, yes. I know they lost a few ships in our convoy.

Were you aware of it at the time? Were you able to see?

Well, I could be out on deck at night so I could see the red flash on the horizon.

You said it was 21 days. Did the ship do a zig-zag to get there?

Well, you don't really know what's happening. All you see is a ship on this side of you and a ship on that side of you ...

All around you?

Yes.

Had you been on a ship before?

Just once in high school. I went across from Chicago to Benton Harbor. That's the only ship I'd ever been on.

So this was a little bigger, but still it was a long time on the water.

Yes, yes. A lot of people had seasickness.

You said you landed in Scotland?

Yes, Gourock. We got off the thing, got on a train – box lunch train – and spent all night on the train and got into a little town called Stamford, north of Cambridge. Are you familiar with England?

A little bit.

A little bit toward The Wash – where The Wash comes down in there. We got there – our Wing had been there ahead of us; the Wing headquarters. We were the fighter control squadron for the Wing. We were met by a couple of officers from the Wing. They have a transportation officer and a quartermaster officer, and they were going to get us settled. I remember the guys talking to our commanding officer. They said, “Major Houton, we’re sorry but all the rooms have been taken in Stamford in the George Hotel and some other hotels. We have secured billets for you and your officers at RAF Station Wittering. And everybody was apologetic that we were going to be at Wittering. But we had the best of both worlds, believe me!

Why was that?

Six meals a day! And the officers – they had taken what were group captains’ private residences; they went on active duty and their families were dispersed or something. I slept in the dining room with a friend and there were two guys in the living room. There were single bedrooms upstairs that some people had. We used to walk across the soccer field to the British bachelor officers quarters which had the mess hall. We ate off white table cloths. They had tea and sandwiches in the morning, and tea and cakes in the afternoon, and three meals a day you were served. The bar was open at noon and the bar was open at night. At 10:00 they closed the bar and the meals would be over. But the night fighters would be going out, so you could go and get Welsh rarebit or something with the night fighters.

So it seemed like not that bad a deal (chuckles)?

Yes. Sherman said war was hell, but the British knew how to fight it! (Both chuckle)

How long were you in those quarters?

I lived there until October the following year. I lived there a year. I would still have been there except they had developed this microwave early warning system. The controllers up to this point, the wing controller – there would be three wings, and there would be five groups of fighters in each wing; a group consisted of four squadrons, so a group has roughly 50 fighters in it, and there were 5 – so a wing puts up 250 fighters for a maximum effort and there were three of them. Anyway, you sit in what was like a great hall in an estate. We lived in Walcott Hall – our fighter group was in Walcott Hall. They had tiered it up, and there’s a great map of Europe there, and they had five or six stations around it where WAFF, British girls, would get a head set and they would move these little things. All the information you’re getting is probably old, anyway, and there needed to be identification. But you’re sitting up here above this, watching it, and I’ve got a full colonel up here with 50 fighters, and I’ve got to listen to every word he says, and make sure he’s not in trouble anywhere that I’ve got to direct something to him from another group or something. It’s very interesting. You’re really part of the action in a disconnected way.

Of course, right behind me is combat operations office. General Anderson, who was the head US Colonel of the Eagle Squadron – the American Eagle Squadron; he was an American officer – he stood behind me or next to me watching the mission on the board. Sometimes he'd tap me on the shoulder and said, "Tell me what's going on." So you're really part of the action. The invasion came June 6.

In Normandy?

Yes. We knew it was coming – we knew it was going to be the 6th, because on the 3rd we got verbal orders to pack up our gear and go to Duxford – there will be a truck at Duxford with the 66th fighter wing; they consolidated the three wings into the one wing. So I worked my group from Duxford's control for three weeks. Then we went back because things had settled down. Life went on that way until October – I couldn't give you the date. Things had transpired in the preceding year, year-and-a-half. The British, we were told, the commandos went in and took apart an antenna along the coast of Norway. That was the story we got. They brought it out and disassembled it and sent it to MIT – Massachusetts [Institute] of Technology here – and they worked on it, and they came up and analyzed and decided this was the key to what they wanted to do. So they built what was known as the Microwave Early Warning Systems. And you were not allowed to say "microwave," because it would give away the frequency. The first I heard about it was that they brought it back to England to test it. They took it to Greyfriars first, which is up on the North Sea, just north of Great Yarmouth – that's the farthest east point and the highest level. And they tuned this thing up and started looking at it, and discovered at 20,000 feet over Berlin they could see the bombers!

Really!

Yes. So they decided this would be great – we've got room on the continent now. So they decided to make a mobile unit out of it. They packed it up and sent it to Greyfriars. But there was nothing – there's never been a picture taken of the equipment. It was so secret they didn't want anybody to know. But I got called in by the chief controller. He said, "Dover, Colonel Myers at fighter command is asking for you and George Smith. He wants to transfer you two guys to Greyfriars. I said, "Why me?" He said, "I don't know. You must have a guardian angel!" So they cut orders on us and I went to Greyfriars. And here I find two of my friends!

Those two from before that?

One of them is with us, but the other guy is not there. The other guy, in the meantime, has been moved over to 9th Air Force. But he's doing the same thing on the continent with the 9th Air Force. But instead of chasing German aircraft, he's supporting American tanks. If there was a tank column that was in trouble, they could call him and he'd get a group of fighters in the air and put them on the German tankers and wipes them out. So we're getting back together again! Anyway, I find out and get to Greyfriars and they're getting ready to go on the continent. Of course, I don't know if they knew I had artillery trucking experience or what, but I immediately got the job of putting the truck convoy together. They get out there and look at this thing. They have an air corps recovery trailer – you could put a whole B17 on it without the wings – and they had mounted the antenna on there. And the antenna is 40 feet long, with a high beam and a low

beam, and that 40 feet turns every 30 seconds. And they had range finders to get the heights up, and we had 20 channels of transmission and 20 channels of receivers, and each truck had two channels on it. I don't mean trucks; they were communication trucks. In there was two things. All the equipment, and they had big diesel engines in trucks that would power this whole thing. And they had this whole room with these consoles in it. So now I have a console, and we ran some missions with it. I can go back this way and see my group taking off 50 miles away on a field, and I can just keep tracking them. When they pass me I can just switch the thing and I can follow them out. I discovered when it got on Europe and we were sitting there outside of Aachen, Germany, I could pick up my group coming out of some town and follow through and watch them all the way to bombing Berlin. I can't identify them, except that I had tracked them every 30 seconds for two-and-a-half or three hours – I know that's my group. And then I can report back. But as they're coming back, if somebody is shot up, I can isolate him, identify him and get him over friendly lines. Or we might even have a base, now, in southern France or something where we could get him to. That's why Doolittle was so appreciative of what we did for his fighters.

So you could track the whole squadron, but you couldn't identify individual planes.

You can't, but you can talk to the guy. You know the formation because you know how the bombers are flying, and then this guy says he's just coming up on the lead box. The bombers are pretty static, but the guy is coming up on the lead box. We could also use the equipment for precision pinpoint bombing. We would bring a fighter in – a flight of four with 500 pound bombs – we could put it in an alley and put out a garage door. That's how accurate it was. We used to do that with Colonel Shilling, the 56th Fighter Group – he came back and became CEO in Michigan.

This antenna you were talking about. It was moving up and down the English coast?

The antenna? The antenna is sitting here.

[Mr. Dover's son speaks: Something that got lost in the shuffle here, Dad, was that you didn't explain very clearly – you explained you put the convoy together that took the antenna, but you didn't explain how you got across the Channel and actually moved from ...]

Oh, I'm sorry. I got ahead of myself. We got ready to move, Eighth fighter command. There were two liberty ships anchored at Southampton for us. They were liberty ships that had self-contained cranes on them. They could unload and didn't have to go to port or anything. So we packed all that in and the antenna sat up on the deck in front of the wheel house. The two liberty ships, the captains conned the ships from a control unit. We had the main cabin up on top where the wheel was and all that. They had cots in there for us. They did have a Navy gun battery in the fantail of each of the two ships to protect it. The ground forces had moved and LeHavre was open. The captain said he was going to take us up the river a little bit, and he took us maybe four or five miles. There was a school there. But they anchored in the river and unloaded everything in the parking lot. And we weren't supposed to leave there because there was a Burgermeister in the town, wherever it was. And he thought he had control of everything that came in. But we had a guy from Pinetree with us. He could do anything he wanted and just signed Doolittle's

name to it. He said, "We're not staying here with these guys. We're going tonight." So at 5:00 at night or 6:00, we just cranked up the trucks and away we went. We went out of France, up into Belgium and into Holland. That's where we were – at Witten, which he's got the picture of [referring to Mr. Dover's son]. We sat there between Witten and Aachen, Germany. Aachen was the first city that fell on Germany soil. It had been the headquarters for the Luftwaffe – Goring's headquarters. We stayed there until the war was over. We were getting ready to move because we wanted to go farther, but the Russians came faster than we thought. We were going to go to Kassel, which is up on the Hanover Plain.

Around what date was it that you got up into that area of Holland – what year was it?

It was before the winter set in. It would be late 1944, because by the time winter got in – I remember on New Year's Eve we had two groups – or parts of groups; fighters – on the continent, sitting in Luftwaffe bases so they could get that greater range; they could pick up 50 to 75 miles to be with the bombers longer to get to Berlin. And what they could do; what happened – the Germans decided that they would be partying all night and so they staged this low-level attack on those two American groups that were there. They did destroy a few aircraft. But, you know, the Americans rose up to get them, I guess. The stories we heard – a guy would take off and run down the runway, and there's a guy coming after him, and the guy coming in to get him would overshoot him and the American would shoot him down; he'd hunch down in front of him and shoot him. There were some fantastic stories told.

So the Americans were quick to respond?

Yes. There were a lot of stories we heard. You see, we'd be privy to the debriefing at the end of the mission – you could get on the phone and talk to the colonel you had, or one of his men or someone. There were stories told where somebody would get shot down and he would crash land the plane in an open field, and his wing man or a couple of guys would come down and keep circling to keep the farmers and the people away from him. And the other guy would come in and land and they'd get up and throw the parachute away, and one guy would sit on the other guy's lap and save him. All of a sudden headquarters found out what these guys were doing, and they stopped it. They didn't want to run the risk of losing two people. Have you ever heard any of these things?

I hadn't heard that story before. No. This work you were doing with the antenna – were you working in twelve hour shifts, or eight hour shifts?

You worked the mission.

You worked the whole mission?

Yes. We only were on offensive. We were not out there to protect. While we were in England the British took care of the protection.

You just followed the whole bombing mission out and back?

Yes. We would pick up our bombers and our fighters as they went out, and we'd follow them and get them back. We also – I'm not talking now about the microwave thing – but in the 67 Wing which was our headquarters, where we had the five groups, we also had the air-sea rescue there. And the guy that I roomed with, George Aldrich, he was the air-sea rescue controller. We had three receiving stations that had an azimuth on the antenna, and somebody would have to ditch and they'd be in the water, say off Great Yarmouth or someplace like that. Well, before they would go down, or someone else would see them down there, and would call in and we would get an azimuth fix, and where the azimuth crossed, that's where the guy should be in the water. And we had a direct line to the air-sea rescue people at Great Yarmouth, and they'd come out in a high speed launch. Sometimes they'd go right into the harbor in Holland or somewhere to pick a guy up and get him back. And, of course, there were a lot of people the Underground would take care of, and they'd walk them over the Pyrenees into Spain and they'd get back. There was a lot, enough that it was a significant amount.

This was very intense work that you were doing – listening. You said you had to listen to every word that was being said. So when a mission was over and the squadron returned, they needed some time to rest before they went out again.

Yes, first of all their aircraft had to be taken care of. The bombers were always beat up – full of flack; full of holes – and even some ...

Some of the crew members were pretty beat up, too.

Yes. They would come back and park their aircraft and the ground crew would take over and get it ready for the next mission, and they would get trucked up to an interrogation room where they would be debriefed. I don't know about the other Wings, but when we first went operational, in October 1943, this Colonel Anderson – he's now General Anderson – he said, "I want you to send the controller who's going to work with a group, I want him to go and live with those people for a week, get to know them, so they know who he is and who stays there." And that was very helpful. It also made it necessary – we had to fill out a mission report from our standpoint at the end of a mission, so you'd have questions about what happened; because you can't begin to visualize out there – 50 guys milling around in a dog fight – so you could call the group leader and talk to him, and maybe he'd say, "Why don't you talk to my wing man." So there was this communication thing, which made you part of the team, but it also gave you an opportunity to do a better job for them.

Right. You understood each member of the team and how they communicated. When they had their down time, you had your down time?

Yes.

And besides probably sleeping, what did you do to handle some of the stress you had from this job?

Oh, I don't know – I don't think we had stress.

Did you read? Did you play cards with these guys?

No. Well, you know, what happened – we didn't work with the same guys all the time after we got on the continent. We'd get the teletype on the mission, and the mission would say, "Four fighter groups." By this time we knew all the groups – all fifteen came under our control – and so you know four, and there were some of us – probably eight or ten controllers – who never worked a mission all the time we were on the continent, because there were more controllers than they needed most of the time. But the call would come in – we're in the officers' mess – and the call would come in and would say, "They need four controllers on the hill at 12:00." So if I'm there, I'd say I'd go. Because I didn't want to stand around – they had a Hearts game going that went on 24 hours a day.

You didn't like playing Hearts? (chuckles)

Not really. I mean, I'd rather be on the mission – that's what I came here for. And, you know, Dave Thomas and I and Bob Campbell – who we don't have a picture of Bob – and a couple of other guys. There was one guy who always took the phone call, but never went himself; we used to call him "Volunteer" (chuckles). I mean, I'm letting my soul out here, but that's what it is. We loved what we were doing. Because we had a rapport with the people, and they appreciated you ...

Their lives depended on you! And that was why you were told to live with them and get to know them. It sounds like you ...

Except they went home after 25 missions (both chuckle).

And you didn't! How long were you doing this job on the continent?

Roughly two years.

That was a long time to be doing this job.

From September of 1943, when we got there, and we were there until we came home July 1 – 22 months.

You said you were there until the war ended?

Until VE.

Returning to the States

The European Theater.

No. We came home – they pulled us out. We were surprised, because in three or four days we're back in England from Germany where we were. We were back in England and we were getting processed. In fact, again because I had been an enlisted person in the regular Army, I

ended up with the platoon I had chaperoned over the first time – I had gotten to take them back to England. The first thing we did was to collect all their money and go up to the finance officer. The next thing you know there's a big ruckus going because my 80 guys turned in more foreign money than they had collected from the Army in all the time they were in the service (chuckles). So what were they going to do with it? I know I had about 7 or 8 cartons of cigarettes – and I didn't smoke. I gave them to one of my sergeants and he said, "No, we're not going to take them – I don't smoke; we're going to sell them." So I wrapped them in a blanket and the next day he comes over and gives me some money and I said, "Okay. Take your cut out of it." And he said he didn't want anything out of it. I said, "What did you do with the blanket?" He said, "I sold the blanket, too!" (Both chuckle) Anyway, we go into a place called Camp Stoneham, which was out-going people – armored crews and that who were going back to the States. And they put us in that and the next thing we knew – that was a brand new Army transport which eventually sold to a cruise line to make a ship out of – and we came back.

So it was a better ship than you went out on.

Oh, yeah! It was made to carry troops. And, there again, there was a card game that went on 24 hours a day down in the second hold or third hold. And in another hold they had an equipment auction – they were selling captured rifles and pistols and all that stuff. Of course, we got home – we landed in New York the last couple of days before end of June. They shifted us back. I got 30 days leave and went home on the first, and we were married on the seventh.

Quick plans! [Directed toward Mrs. Dover: You were very glad to see him home!]

[Mrs. Dover: Absolutely!]

Pacific Theater Assignment

And I think it was on the tenth when we talked to her mother. She said, "There's a wire here for Earl saying, 'Your 30 days is canceled, revoked. You will report to Kerns, Utah for overseas replacement within 48 hours.'" They said transportation would be provided by Fifth Army in the Opera Building in Chicago. I went down there and got a copy of the orders, a train ticket and per diem and all that stuff. The next night I was on the train, and I'm not alone – there's about 25 or 30 of us; we all came back together and we're all on the same train! (Both chuckle)

You were moving on!

We got to Kerns, Utah and got processed. And after three or four days we were moved to San Francisco. We checked in and they said, "If your name is not on that sheet you have until 6:00 tomorrow morning to do whatever you want. If you're on that sheet, at 6:00 you're going at 4:00 in the afternoon; you're leaving. And that's the way it went. We took off and landed in Hawaii. We got off the airplane, but we stood there on the field and got a box lunch. And, incidentally, there were two generals riding in the front of seat at the bulkhead – this was a DC4 with seats – and they took the generals off and took the seats out and put plywood in there – 4 X 4 sheets of plywood. So you know what kind of ... (both chuckle). We had a top priority. We went from

Hawaii to Johnston Island, Kwajalein, Kwajalein to Guam, Guam to Manila; Manila to Okinawa. In Okinawa they said we belonged in Manila, so we turned around and went back.

So you got to see both theaters of war.

Yes. We landed on Okinawa the day they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima; no, Nagasaki – Hiroshima happened already. Then we had no way of getting home! But again we lucked out – we got on one of these new Army transports. I guess they built a half-dozen of them during the war.

Hearing About the End of War on Each Front

Let's go back a little bit. You were in Europe when the war ended on the continent. How did you hear about it? How was it communicated to you?

Oh, we knew everything, because (both chuckles) we were headquarters.

Who told you – your commanding officer? How was it communicated to you?

We probably read it on a field order.

And what was the reaction to it when you got the news?

Well, everybody was going into the orderly room. They wanted to get some time off to go to Paris! (Everyone chuckles) I didn't tell you – a little sidelight. I hope you're not going to record this.

Why? It's up to you?

[Mr. Dover's son interjects: No! I know where you're going with this. This is like what was going on when he wasn't working and wasn't sleeping. (Mr. Dover chuckles)]

When we got to Holland, our advance party – a couple of guys from our group and a guy from Pinetree; Pinetree was headquarters for the 8th Air Force and he was assigned to us – the guy from Pinetree was told, "Give them whatever they need and take care of them." That's what he was told by Doolittle. So they had gotten there before we came up with the trucks. They had gotten there and they took over a chateau that was owned by occupied by the director of mines for the Netherlands government. It was beautiful – the grounds and everything. So there were three bedrooms on the third floor, and our colonel and major – the medical officer we had – and a couple of captains, they lived in bedrooms in the chateau. And there were these three bedrooms upstairs. We were living in this crummy little hotel down the highway. And my friend, Dave Thomas, he said, "Why should we keep those three bedrooms for guys who come over and visit and spend two days to see what's going on, and all they want to do is come and find out what's going on and find a pistol they can take back." Thomas says, "We're going to take those three bedrooms." So he gets a jeep and we pile our stuff in. And we check out of the room we had and go to move into the rooms. And that night we go into the mess hall. And

Colonel Weatherby, the guy who wrote that thing, he sat there and said, “Hey, Dover! I hear you and Thomas moved into the chateau.” And I said, “Yeah.” He said, “It’s pretty nice over there, isn’t it?” And Thomas was right behind me, and he gets on Thomas because someone must have told him Thomas was the ring leader. And Thomas says, “You know, Colonel, we’re not the Bulgarian Home Guard. We’re going to take the chateau. We’ve got the third floor – no elevator; we’re walking up.” (Both chuckle) And we just stayed there. Thomas wouldn’t back down. If there’d be no mission – England would be socked in – and we would have a cocktail hour every day at 4:00 or 5:00 if there was no mission; out in the garden.

[Mrs. Dover interjects: He had the best staff.]

Who did?

Dave Thomas.

[Mr. Dover’s son interjects: Tell us, on the ‘stuff of life’ kinds of things; tell us about the laundry trip, and tell about your motorcycle and the dry cells ...]

Well, the first time we got strafed, ME109’s, the guy from Pinetree says, “This can’t go on.” So in 24 hours he’s got a battery of anti-aircraft for us with the big trailers with four .50 calibers on them. He’s got four of those stationed around us. And he’s got four .40mm rapid fire canons. But he was detached service, so my colonel has no jurisdiction over him whatsoever. So he takes a truck and a trailer and goes up into Aachen – we used to talk about shopping in Aachen – and he comes back in about eight or ten hours and he’s got a Mercedes and two motorcycles on the trailer. And I said, “Hunter, what are you going to do with the motorcycles?” He said, “I thought somebody would like to have one.” I said, “I’ll take the BMW.” (All chuckle) He said, “There’s no battery in it.” I said, “Don’t worry. I’m an aircraft mechanic.” (All chuckle) So I scrapped four single-core dry cells together – that gives me 6 volts – and I wired it in to replace a six-volt battery. The only thing is, the batteries only lasted for a week. But I drove that motorcycle back and forth to the chateau every day (all chuckle). He had a Mercedes on the trailer, too, but no wheels. So his motor sergeant remounted four jeep wheels and put them on it. So he drove that Mercedes around. A lot of that stuff. You know, it’s opportunists.

So you were in Aachen when VE Day happened, when Europe was over.

Just west of Aachen. Aachen is right on the border of Holland and Germany, and Witten is in about four miles.

Returning to the States ... Again

So war in Europe is over. You came back to the U.S., got married and headed west, and then headed to the Pacific Theater and ended up in Okinawa. And you were there just before the bomb was dropped ...

No. The bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki; Hiroshima was already. Then we sat at Clark Field, which is the big air base in Manila. We sat at Clark Field and eventually the found a way to ship us back home.

How long was it from the time you left Chicago, again, to go out west, to go to Manila and Okinawa ...?

I left San Francisco – it’s hard to pick up the dates. We got back home in December, before Christmas.

[Mrs. Dover interjects: It took him about six months to get home.]

Being Discharged ... and Reenlisting

Directed to Mrs. Dover: You had quite a first year of marriage! Directed back to Mr. Dover: When you got back, where were you discharged?

At Camp Grant.

Was it when you were coming back from this trip that you were discharged, or did they have something else for you to do in the meantime? You came back from the Pacific ...

Right into Camp Grant for separation. The only thing I’ll say, and I don’t know whether this happened to other people, but you arrive in Camp Grant and they give you a barracks number. It’s too late in the day to be processed, so they tell you to have breakfast and come in at 9:00 the next morning. So you go in and you sit around and hear a lecture about this and that, and they’re reading you a lot of stuff. And so someone says, “How do we get out of here?” And they say, “Well, you have to be processed.” So the guy asks, “When are we going to get processed?” They say, “Well, we’ll work on it. Come back after lunch and we’ll have some paperwork for you.” So we get back after lunch and they call people’s names and they go up and sign and it’s done. We’re sitting there and it’s about 4:00 in the afternoon, and a couple of us go up to the counter and we say, “When are you going to call our names? We’d like to get a bus and get out of here.” They answered: “Well, they process the ones that joined the Reserve.” I said, “You mean you have to join the Reserve to get out of the Army?” And they said, “We can only process so many.” So we go back the next morning. Most of us said we’re joining the Reserves; where do we sign.

So did you join the Reserves?

I joined the Reserves, sure. That was the only way you were going to get home. You’re tired of moving around.

So how long were you in the Reserves?

I was in the Reserves until John was born. I would say five years. And the reason I resigned – I had joined the Reserves, and I was getting back into the courses, by mail, from Selfridge Field,

Michigan. Anyway, I get this letter from the Air Corps headquarters that they're setting me up in an interview for such-and-such a date at 8:00 in the morning to review my status. And I had to sign it and send the thing back. I showed up for the interview, and there's a WAFF officer – a major – and I go in and sit down. I said, "Major, I have a busy day and we can both save our time. I'm resigning my commission." She said, "Captain, just be seated. We're not accepting it." They were looking for controllers. My MOS – military operating specialty – was hot. When I went to the Pacific there were guys who had gone through the controller course with 50 points that were going home. I went to the Pacific with 97 points – we had the points system – I had four battle stars; anyway, they were looking for controllers for Korea. There were only five of us in Chicago – we knew who we were: Dave Thomas, myself, Don Radtke, John Gilberts; I knew all of them. They took two and left three of us alone.

And obviously they eventually accepted your resignation.

They didn't then, but maybe a year later I got some paperwork that said if I wanted to continue they'd be happy to have me. But otherwise they wanted to clear their records.

So you went to Europe, then the Pacific, and then they wanted to send you to Korea after that.

Well, anybody that would volunteer, I guess, could go (all chuckle). I didn't want to do that! I feel I did my part.

When you came home – you said you were discharged from active duty – you came home, you were married, you had one child?

Two. David has a brother.

[Mrs. Dover interjects: No. We didn't have any children at that time.]

[Dave interjects: My brother was born in 1949, so he was the first.]

Returning to Civilian Life

So you went back to civilian life. What did you do when you back to civilian life? Do you remember what it was like getting re-accustomed to that?

The hardest thing was trying to find a suit to wear (all chuckle).

Tell us why.

I don't know. There wasn't any clothing.

[Mrs. Dover interjects: We found something at Bonds that was a suit that went for \$29.95 or something. It was horrible, just horrible! But it was the only thing we could get.]

There's a little thing here that might be of interest. Dorothy was working, and I'm still in uniform. She worked on LaSalle Street, and I went in and was going to pick her up for dinner or lunch – I don't remember what we were doing – but I had met her boss ...

[Mrs. Dover interjects: They came to our wedding.]

I had met him, and he said, "What are you going to do, Earl?" I said, "I don't know. I'm still on the government payroll for a while, so I don't have to rush into anything. I have a job waiting for me in California if I want it." In fact, the man who offered me the job had an apartment rented for us. I should tell you that he was the contractor who built the Oakland Airport. So you know he had a little clout somewhere.

[Dave interjects: And didn't you meet him while you were hitchhiking out there?]

That's right!

[Dave interjects: This is a great story. My grandmother went to visit him. Anyway ...]

The first day we're in California – the two guys and I who were from Illinois – we had nothing to do and we're going into San Francisco. So we're out on the highway and we're thumbing a ride.

Was this before you went out ...

I'm not in the Boeing school yet. I had just arrived and I've got nothing to do over the weekend. And we bum a ride, and this guy picks us up. He says, "Where are you going?" And we said we were just going down to San Francisco and get something to eat, and eventually we'll go back to the base. Maybe we'll take in some of the sights. I don't think any of us had been to San Francisco before – probably not. Anyway, he says, "I'm tied up today, but I'll take you in and take you anywhere you want to go. But," he says, "I would like to take you guys around and show you the sights on a weekend. I can't do it today, but how about next Saturday or Sunday? Just give me a call." And he gave us his business card. So the following week we had nothing to do, and I said why don't we call that guy and see if he's on the level. And he said, "Yeah. How about Saturday I'll pick you up at 1:00?" And I said, "That would be fine, but I don't think you can pick us up – we're in a restricted area." He said, "I know where you are: you're in building number so-and-so (both chuckle)." I said, "Okay, we'll be ready." He said, "The three of you?" And I said, "Well, at least two of us. Maybe the third one won't be there." We couldn't spend any money in San Francisco from then on until we got out of there. In fact, my mother even got to know him and his wife. And my mother went to California. They were like family. But nobody had ever taken him up on his hospitality. Then, he said, "I could use you in my business. I'd love to have you." Because I kind of kept up with it – the other two guys didn't.

[Mrs. Dover interjects: He was probably disappointed, but I didn't want to move (chuckles).]

So you're back in Chicago, Dorothy is working on LaSalle Street and you're talking to her boss.

Yeah. And he said, “How would you like to sell advertising.” I said I didn’t know anything about it. He said, “You don’t have to know anything. The guy I’m going to send you to will train you.” So I said – it must have been at lunchtime – he said, “How about this afternoon? I said, “Well, I’ve got nothing to do.” So he picks up the phone and calls, then says, “You go down here on South Clark Street in the Rand McNally Building, up on the tenth floor, to American Poultry Journal, and talk to Les Klevay.” I get down there. And, of course, I’m in uniform. And I’ve got this ‘fruit salad’ on my shirt, and they were impressed. So he said, “I’d like you to meet Mr. Eisert – he owns the company.” You’d look at this place and you’d wonder about it, because Rand McNally was a printer and the presses are shaking the building, and I’m up on the tenth floor. And I go in this room and there’s three or four people working – gals – Klevay sits in the corner; he’s the number two honcho. Anyway, I get taken into the next office, and there’s this old roll-top desk, and Mr. Eisert is in there, and we sit and talk for a while. Twice in the conversation he pulls a drawer out and he’s got a fifth of Old Granddad, and he hits that bottle and puts it back. (Both chuckle) He didn’t offer me a drink! But, anyway, the interview went better. He said, “You’ve got to talk to my son. He’s not here today, but he’ll be in tomorrow morning,” which would be Saturday, and he says, “He’s going to be running the thing. He’s got to make the decision. I want you to meet him. You be here.” So, I go down on the train the next morning, and I meet Henry Eisert. And we talked for about a half-hour, forty-five minutes. He’s through and says, “I’ll tell you what. Could you be here on Monday morning with enough clothes for about four days on the road?” I said, “You mean I’m going to work here?” He said, “You wouldn’t be here this morning if my father didn’t want you yesterday.”

That started your civilian career.

That started my civilian career. And I stayed four years there. And I knew everything there was to know about farms. I ran the agricultural census with an old hand calculator. I could tell you everything about a farm. And then I had an opportunity through an associate of Dorothy’s in the technical field, and I interviewed for the job and got it.

So your cast was set for you as a civilian.

I guess so. I went to work for Sutton Publishing. I know I was the top salesman for many years. It got to the point that I didn’t have to move to New York because I had too much going for me in Chicago. I ran the Chicago operation.

Keeping in Touch and Lasting Impressions

Do you ever keep in touch with any of the guys you met in the service?

Dave Thomas was a Vice President of Northern Trust Bank. He and I had lunch maybe two or three times a year. I used to meet him, and he was an area banker – he ran Michigan and Ohio and that. He’d be in Grand Rapids and I’d meet him. I’d know he was coming and we’d get together and have dinner in Morton House or someplace like that. And we used to correspond with Bob Campbell. I have pictures of him, but he wasn’t on that little side trip. He’s a Canadian. He was kind of interesting. He’s an American citizen, but his father moved back to

Canada – they were Canadian. And when we got into the war, he was in the Canadian Air Force, and the Americans took him over. So he was now an American. They gave him a commission in the American Air Force. But when he was discharged he went back to Canada because he had a livelihood there. It was an in-and-out deal. But we finally, after many years, got around to going there and visiting him – Dorothy and I. His wife – he married a gal, a Briton, there [a British war bride]. I had met her at Greyfriars right after they were married – a real sweet gal, nice lady. We’d correspond with them. We talked to him on the phone all the time. But Bob passed away a couple of years ago, and Dave Thomas passed away. I don’t know about the rest of them.

[Dave interjects: You were in touch with Bill Clisby for years and years.]

Oh, yeah. Well, at Wittering I got to know two or three British pilots. They were Naval aviators, but they were at Wittering, which was experimental like our Wright Field. Wittering served that for the British. They were doing experimental work – they would test fly aircraft and that kind of stuff. Clisby and I became great friends. He’d been incapacitated. He was on the aircraft carrier, *Illustrious*, and had just landed in the Mediterranean from a sortie and taxied up to the elevator shaft in the front; the elevator took him down with the plane, and a Stuka put a bomb right down the elevator shaft. So he was blown clean off the carrier and out into the water. He was still flying, but he was not on operations anymore. A couple of others – Johnny Oxmen. And then a squadron leader, Wilson, was an ad-min officer at the mess and I got to know him very, very well. His family was in the silversmith business in Sheffield. And we’d correspond by Christmas cards for ten or fifteen years, I guess. I made a lot of friends in the service.

Did you belong to any veterans’ organizations?

I finally got around to joining the American Legion about seven years ago. The reason I did – The man who sits behind us in church on Sunday, one day he said, “Earl, how do you know Gordon Early?” I said, “Dorothy worked for his father’s secretary, and that’s how I got into the business.” He couldn’t believe that. Anyway, he said he belonged to an advertising publishing Post in Chicago. I went down there with him, and he talked me into joining the thing. I stayed in it until it folded – it got down to seven people. So I quit going. I still belong – they assigned me to Bloomington, Illinois; to the headquarters Post. Are you familiar with the Legion?

Just a little bit.

I hope this won’t offend you, but I never joined the Legion after the war. Because I played junior Legion ball for a Legion Post in Chicago – I played Legion ball. And we talked them into sponsoring the basketball thing. The only reason they would sponsor us was because we’d work at their darned carnival every year – the basketball and the baseball teams; we’d take tickets and sell them at the carnival.

So they got some work out of you.

Yes. And the crazy thing is, the Post was, I guess – although I was 17, 18 years old – the Post was all World War I veterans. And they were more concerned with the bar and the club room. No one ever came to the games. They did buy the equipment for us.

After you'd had all these experiences in the military and came home to civilian life, did your military experiences – how did they affect the way you looked at life, the way you looked at things that happened in the war? How did your military experiences affect your thinking?

Well, I would say one thing I got out the military would be discipline. Discipline. If a person never got anything more than discipline out of it he would be way ahead. You learned to take orders – right or wrong, he's always the boss. You don't have to cow-tow to him. That's one thing. I don't know. Times were to my country. I guess I'm one of the last few patriots.

People look at the world in very different ways now than from the days gone back. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

different. If there hadn't been the war, which created this tremendous expansion of manufacturing, the growth of the country – all these things that came out of the war – so I suppose I owe something to the war. I owe something to the country – I always thought I owed something.

If you have nothing else we'll go off record. Thank you for sharing your story.