

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

John David Jones

Conducted by Martin Willard Thomas

February 11, 2005

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

Part 1: Introduction

This interview is being conducted on February 11th, 2005 at the residence of John and Louise Jones in Downers Grove, Illinois. My name is Martin Willard Thomas. I am speaking with Mr. John David Jones. Mr. Jones was born on August 4th, 1919, in Duluth, Minnesota and now lives in Downers Grove. He learned of the Veterans History Project when I interviewed his wife for the project, who I interviewed on January 17th, 2003. Mr. Jones has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project. Here is his story.

Mr. Jones, how would you prefer to be addressed during the interview?

I believe just by my initials, but I'm more accustomed to J.D.

J.D.

Or John, either way.

I know your wife, Louise, calls you J.D.

So does everybody else.

Oh, so you're most common name, the people that know you call you J.D.

Yes.

Part 2: Entering the Military

J.D. when did you enter the service?

Let's see, that was after graduation from college in '41. That would have been August, I guess, 1941.

August of '41. Where were you living at the time you entered the service?

I just graduated from school in Raleigh where I'd been a resident for some years.

That leads to my next question. I was going to ask what you were doing before you went in the service. So you were in graduate school?

No, no, just a Bachelors.

Oh, Bachelors degree?

Right.

And that was at?

North Carolina State.

North Carolina State. Were you drafted, or did you enlist?

No, I guess I was drafted. I had a Second Lieutenant's commission, and we were just ordered to report for duty. I guess you'd call that drafted.

Yeah. Were you in ROTC down at North Carolina State?

Yes.

And that's how you...

Right, four years.

became a commissioned officer?

I've never asked this before, but what was ROTC like?

I enjoyed it. It was a bit of a stress, because you had to be in uniform in the hot weather and go to your room and get dressed and kept your rifle and all the whole business. But yeah, I stuck with it. We weren't required to take four years as I recall. I think it was two obligatory or something like that, but I just went along with it.

And you got college credit as you progressed?

Roughly how many hours a week during the school year would you be involved in ROTC activities?

I can't recall. I can't imagine more than three. We'd have a drill, you know, between classes or something like that, drills, and close order drills and that sort of thing. Then we'd have parades during the football season. Of course, I was playing football, so I didn't get in all of those, but no matter. Sorry to be so vague on that.

Oh no, that's all right. As far as the ROTC goes then, they didn't get you deeply involved in military science; it was more the drill and that sort of thing?

We had classroom work; lectures from regular officers on various principles of tactics and that sort of thing.

But with all that, the total of time occupied was about three hours a week, roughly.

Yeah, I'd say so.

And during the summer you were...

Yeah, right.

How well do you think the Reserved Officers Training Corps prepared you for your military life?

It was entirely different.

It really was different?

Yeah. As far as, you see, I wasn't in combat and there was no... We had a summer camp where we went through all that business. And I suppose if I'd had to go into the infantry or something like that, it would have been valuable. But I was in a support unit and never had to tote a rifle.

Where were you inducted?

Let's see, that would have been Fort Bragg, North Carolina. That's a well known name.

Oh yeah, I was at Fort Bragg. What were your first days like at Fort Bragg?

I didn't stay there long. I was sent to school with some other officers up in Philadelphia, the Quarter Master School.

So Fort Bragg was more just in processing?

Yeah, right.

Getting uniforms, shots and that sort of thing?

Yeah, yeah.

Do you remember the name of the Quarter Master School at Philadelphia or what base it was on?

I think it was based out of Holibird, I'm not sure.

Fort Holibird, Maryland?

Yeah.

I was there, too. I'm following you.

We were booked in a hotel in downtown Philadelphia.

Oh, I see.

And then we went out to the Quarter Master, to the facility. I'm not sure how valuable that was, but we went through the motions.

Do you recall, were there any other schools or training going on at Fort Holibird besides the Quarter Master Training?

I wouldn't have the foggiest idea.

That's very interesting. When I was there, there was no Quarter Master School that I know of. How long were you at Fort Holibird?

How long was I at ... Well, everything was being in Philadelphia. I think it was all summer. Maybe about as much as ninety days.

What kind of training were you getting there?

Just essentially, oh I couldn't remember the terminology. Strapped Cap Chin and things like that, I never thought it was too significant, put it that way.

I've never heard that term before, Strapped Cap Chin. What does that mean?

Well, that was just indicative of the way they would like it to be. Rifle, Caliber 30 so and so, ...

Oh, I understand, the nomenclature.

Yes, right.

Is there a formula or a pattern for that?

Well, you'd identify the product.

First the product.

And then what it's used with, and then I guess its utilization: Strap, Cap, Chin.

I see. I've heard some military terms for products and it always seemed strange to me, but I never realized that there was a pattern to it.

Oh yeah.

Like shorts, boxer, white.

(Laughing) Yeah.

After you graduated from the Quarter Master School, what happened next?

I was sent to Harlingen, Texas, to the Army, it was the Army Air Force at that time, Gunnery School and assigned as Quarter Master Officer to take charge of a... What was it? It wasn't a Company. It was a portion of a Company of a Transportation outfit. It was colored soldiers who provided transportation for the base.

So your first actual duty assignment was at the Army Air. Is it Air Force or was it Air Corps at that time?

I think it was Army Air Corps.

And that was in Harlingen, Texas. Roughly how many troops were you supplying?

How many in that group?

Yes.

Oh, I don't think there were more than fifty.

These fifty were working for you, or these were fifty people you provided for?

Oh, no. The soldiers, I would say there were fifty of them. It was a segment of a transportation battalion or something like that and spun it off. How many were at the base?

Uh, huh. (Affirmative)

Whew, I'd say several hundred.

So fifty of them were working under you as Quarter Master personnel?

Right.

You mentioned that these were black soldiers. Black soldiers were working in Quarter Master, or they were your customers for your supplies?

No, they were Quarter Master troops as I understand it. Of course, they were under the control of the officer who, a Major Colson, I guess he became colonel, a regular Army officer who was also a Quarter Master. He was the one we reported to, and these guys through me to him.

I've heard about segregated units up until, I guess, Harry Truman, I think, desegregated the military. Was that the situation there?

Oh yeah. We had a separate dining hall, barracks and their assembly was held separately. They were near the motor pool is what it amounted to. Segregation was the result and the intent.

Did that ever cause any conflict or problems to your recollection?

None that I ever had. The only problem I had was these kids, they'd go into town and they'd get hustled by one of the guys that was running the bar. But I spoke to him, and I think he saw his business going out of (laughing). It wasn't that I was throwing the Army at him.

What kind of scam was he running on them?

Well, you know, these kids would get drunk, I'm sure some of the natives would come in and lift their wallets and over charge them; just the usual thing that happens when ...

But you actually went into town and talked to guy to get it straightened out.

Oh yeah, went to his place and ...

Good for you.

Well, what the hell, you know, the Army then was considered powerful and they were, not so much as a matter of force, but as a matter of money. We were making that guy rich.

Sure. J.D., How long were you at that Gunnery School?

About a year.

Any other experience that happened there that you think might be interesting to relate?

In our time off, we'd go down to the water and what they called, they were resacas, they were little bays that came in. And walk out in there, we had no protective gear of any kind, we'd just walk out in the water and wait for the ducks to come by and shoot 'em and then take them back hope somebody would eat them. It was pretty tame. Tour into Mexico. At the time, you see, before the war was on, we were free to go across the border. We'd just go there, pretty seamy, we didn't spend much time over there.

What was the border town on the Mexican side of the border?

The big one was Matamoras.

Oh, Matamoras.

And then further up the river, I can't remember the name of it. We didn't go across much; there wasn't anything over there.

Yeah. You went in as a commissioned Second Lieutenant.

Mmm, mm. (Affirmative)

What was your rank at the time you were in Harlingen?

I think I may have made First there.

Uh, huh (Affirmative). And after your assignment there, where did you go next?

I was transferred to overseas and shipped out of San Francisco and was assigned to a, I think it was an Air Force Service group in New Guinea. I didn't have any friends in the military.

(Laughter) Well put.

I wasn't looking for any either; that didn't bother me.

Before we get you over there, one thing I'd like to cover, as I mentioned at the beginning, the reason I'm here today is because I interviewed your wife, Louise, two years ago. Louise and I met each other at the YMCA locally. She told me during her interview that you were dating before you went overseas. Would you tell me about your life there. I mean, when and where did you meet? What was your relationship at the time you went overseas?

Oh. We met in Raleigh where she was working while I was in school. We dated, I guess, through my senior year. I was pretty much of a book worm. Didn't spend a lot of

time socializing. Then, before I left... Well, I was back home once to see her while I was in Harlingen; we drove up from there, four of us all the way.

Four of you?

Yeah, in a car.

Four of you soldiers?

Yeah, we took off and drove; it's a little crazy.

How long a drive was that, do you recall, I mean, in time?

Interminable.

Yeah, I guess.

No air conditioning. It was my car, no power steering. Of course, we didn't know any better and young, what the hell, twenty-two years old.

That's a long distance. Do you remember how many days it took you? Or did you drive straight through?

No. Well, we pretty well just, two or three sleeping in the back, one guy driving, each swap off and ...

You must've really loved her, that's what I'd say.

They were all Southern fellas, too, and they wanted to get home, you know. One of them, I don't know, Charleston all up and down the line there. But then, before I left, that was the last time I saw her and before I left, I phoned her from San Francisco and asked if she'd care to get married when I got home. She said that sounded like a pretty good idea. Three years later, I came back.

Just to jump ahead, we'll talk about your experiences in the Far East. How were you able to keep in touch with her and other family while you were away?

They had ... What did they have? I've forgotten. They had a particular name for an Army sponsored mail system?

Victory Mail? V Mail?

V Mail, that was it, I think, yeah. And, of course, it all had to be censored and everybody sort of used that.

My understanding was that you didn't have to pay for any postage, is that true?

No (meaning they didn't have to pay for postage).

I've heard various descriptions of what the actual paper looked like and how they, some say they shrunk it. Would you tell me what your understanding was of how that worked?

You mean how they transmitted it?

Yes.

I think they transmitted, I suspect that were transmitting the actual paper.

Did you think it was special paper?

I had no feeling that it was. It was a special, well, let's put it this way: it wasn't an eight and a half by eleven sheet. It was already prepared to be folded.

So it became its own envelope?

Yeah. And you had to, I think, as I recall, there was a place to indicate that somebody had censored it. You know, anything that the troops in our group... . You see, I took over control of that service group, I mean that element of the service group. We were doing vehicle maintenance and gasoline supply and that sort of thing. If anything went out, I had to censor it, and I guess my correspondence went up to the headquarters and it was ...

This is great. You're the first person I've interviewed that actually was on the other end of the censoring. Most people only knew what they suspected was the process. First of all, the letters that you're censoring, do you know, did you know the writers or did they send you...?

Of course. They were men that worked for me.

O.K.

That was a fairly small group and we weren't segregated for any reason.

So you actually, you know everybody's business or at least what they put down on paper to their loved ones.

Yeah.

Was that ever embarrassing?

No, I don't recall that it was. I was, of course, I really didn't care what they were telling their girl friends; the idea was security, you know. (Laughing)

Yes, right.

I never... I can't recall having a problem. I might have had once or twice I had to scratch something out, but I've forgotten that.

As far as the type of information they weren't supposed to put in a letter, were there written guidelines?

We probably had some in the Headquarters tent. Had a great First Sergeant, Sergeant Enoch. When I first got there, a lot of the people that I've got, well, I guess one reason that I got them was because the location wasn't considered one of the best assignments in the Army. And these guys, a lot of them were old regular Army, and we had a First Sergeant who could hardly sign his own name. Fortunately, he became ill, not fatally so, but he was sent back to Australia, and I never saw him again, which was a great relief because we got in this great young man, Sergeant Mark Enoch. Got promoted, he was a Corporal at the time, so we made him First Sergeant. And, hell, that was, I didn't have to worry about paperwork..

He was able to do it.

He was a top notch; I lost sight of him, too.

Now, did he help with the censoring, then?

Oh yeah. Did he?

Yes.

No.

No. That had to be done by you. As far as the guidelines go, I guess there's common sense rules, but what type of thing would you be looking for that you'd have to scratch out?

Specific location was one.

Location.

Anything that was other than vague. You could say, well it got hot around here, you know, if you'd had a bombing raid or something like that. Just nothing that could be tied to where you were.

Could it be...?

You couldn't say I'm in South New Guinea.

O.K. You could say, "I'm in the Far East."

Yeah.

You could say, "I'm in the South Pacific."

Yeah.

Could you say, "I'm in New Guinea" but not South?

I don't believe that was permitted, as I recall. It was a selfish interest there, too. You didn't want them to put anything out that the enemy could even get a hint of what size you were or anything like that or even where you were, you know, in New Guinea. It wasn't too rigid. Those V Mail things were small enough so there wasn't a lot of room to write on them as I recall.

Sure.

Couldn't ramble on and on.

That's understandable that you don't want to have information of military value to the enemy put in there. What about morale related things? Could a soldier get away with saying, "I hate it here," or, "I hate my First Sergeant," or...?

I don't think that ever became a problem, but I imagine there was certain amount of belly aching, and that was all right.

I doubt that you were censoring this type of letter, but do you think a soldier could say, "We were in combat last week, and we really got hit badly?"

I don't think so.

As far as the letters that you censored, did you ever see any really personal love letter type writing?

So they get passionate?

Yeah, that's what I'm trying to say.

No, I think they were hindered in that the same way I was apprehensive about it.

Sure.

I didn't want to read it; they didn't want to write it.

Sure.

Maybe they wanted to, but they felt ...

Couldn't get away with it?

Well, you know a stranger's going to..., well I wasn't a stranger to them.

Worse than a stranger, somebody that knows you, sees you, daily.

Right. Just my recollection of it.

I sort of took us off on a tangent there because, like I say, I've never talked to anybody that's actually censored the V Mail.

Part 4: Going Overseas

You went to New Guinea, and you went directly from San Francisco to New Guinea?

No, no, we were on a troop ship and landed in Melbourne.

O.K.

And then put on a troop train, and I had some responsibility. I can't imagine I was responsible for that whole thing. But then we went from Melbourne to Sydney and the Australians, for some odd reason, had two different gauges of railroad, so between Melbourne and Sydney had to change trains. You had to be sure you didn't lose anybody. What saved me as far as my responsibilities, had a bunch of old regular Army Sergeants. We had one kid who was always in trouble; I can't remember his name; he was just a pain in the ass. I could have killed him. Finally, he came back crying into me one day, "Oh, Sergeant so and so and they ganged up on me." I said, I guess I told him, "You're damn lucky they didn't kill you; I'd like to." (Laughing)

(Laughing) He didn't get the sympathy he was looking for.

I don't know what became of him. What was his name? I thought I'd never forget it. But there's always an oddball, you know, in the bunch. But those guys were good. Then they were old Army; they knew the ropes.

Is there any particular experiences you had on the troop ship from the West Coast of the United States to Australia that would warrant talking about.

Complete boredom. Weren't supposed to take any booze aboard but, of course, that was somewhat overlooked.

Do you remember the name of the troop ship?

No, I don't. It was a former passenger ship that had been converted; it had a lot of people on it. We had, the officers had upper deck, not upper deck, but above the first deck there were rooms. There was nothing fancy, but at least we weren't down in the hold, you know.

How many to a room?

Oh, I think in my case, I think, there were about six of us in a, I don't know, just a series of bunks up there; there wasn't any hardship. There were nurses aboard, and there were some camaraderie there; they were isolated, of course, wisely. They had sort of better quarters. It was a long trip; it went way down south and then came around. I don't know how long, seems like forever.

What year are we talking about?

What year did the war start?

Well,

'41.

attacked in '41 and you went in in '41.

I went in in '41, but then I didn't ship out until '42.

O.K. so about a year. By that time...

That's right, I was in Texas; we were partying when the word about the war came through, about the attack on...

Pearl Harbor.

Yeah, right.

So, you say you were at a party in Texas when you learned that now we are in this thing.

Yeah. Family there and a whole bunch of officers down and dinner and lunch, you know, and drinks.

If we can go back to that just for a minute. You're at a party; everybody's having a good time; and all of a sudden the word comes in. What was the mood like? What was the reaction by everybody there?

I guess shock. I don't know that the announcement while were at the party, but it was that day that it happened. Because it was around, it was a weekend, I thought it was a weekend. Yeah, and in Hawaii, too, wasn't it; it was a Sunday. So it was probably Sunday, noon, but we probably had the word before we got there, I don't know that. Well, it didn't, well, I suppose it was a great topic of conversation at the party, but it didn't slow it down much.

(Laughing) The reason I ask about what year it was that you were heading to Australia, you went, probably through some hostile waters. Were you in a convoy?

No, no, it was a big fast ocean liner; I can't remember the name of it. It had been converted for military use, and they wanted to avoid any potential problems with submarines, so we went way down south; came up to the south island of New Zealand; they let us go ashore there, and then we went up to the north island. Those people thought we were the First Marine Division coming back, because they had stationed through there before they went up to Guadal.

I see.

And, oh, man, were they welcome until they knew who we were because it was heartbreaking, you know. Those guys had, I think they had trained there even so they were well acquainted with the local population. Then we went on up to Melbourne from there.

So, you went ashore on the south island of New Zealand. What town did you go to?

Oh, I cant' remember. There may be only one where a ship that size could get in.

Yeah. Anything of interest go on in either of the two stops in New Zealand?

They had beer there. Of course, they shooed us all back aboard. We didn't have much time; it wasn't an overnight thing. It was just... and I'm not sure that everybody, you know, all the troops, got off the ship. It was just a little break.

In Melbourne, did you spend any significant time before you took the trains to Sydney?

As I recall, we were bunked somewhere in some sports field or something like that just long enough to get everything put together and get lined up to go up North. But I don't recall how long it was. I can remember writing home then and feel like boy, what a mess this is. At that time I had no responsibilities, of course. I was just another casual.

But you said that once you started this train excursion to Sydney, then you got stuck.

Somehow I got involved in something like that, and I was only a First Lieutenant; I don't know where. Maybe the Captains and Majors were smart enough to avoid the train; they went by air.

So besides the big switch when they got to a different gauge track, were there any incidents or anything of note that we should talk about there except for the trouble maker young guy.

No, no. Other than that it was just boring.

What happened in Sydney?

I've forgotten how we got up there, because I'm sure that whole load didn't go up. They had a sports field there where they put a bunch of us down. I must've waited around a while before I got my papers to go up to New Guinea, but that was by way of Townsville; that was the jumping off point. I think I caught a flight up there, but I'm not sure of that; it could have been the train.

Townsville, is that in Australia?

Townsville, yes.

That's on the North shore?

You know how there's that peak, that point that goes up there, well it's down in here, just south of Cairns.

Oh, sure, yeah. So that was the port?

Townsville was the port.

Townsville.

Yeah. Cairns was the hospital center for the troops and also a popular place to go on furlough; you didn't have to go so far once you came out of New Guinea. Of course, it was full of pubs and women and all that attractive ...

Bugs and women, you say?

Pubs and women.

Bugs?

Pubs.

Oh, pubs.

Bars.

Yeah, now I got you.

And they had, their sanitation, I was struck by it in Townsville. Go into what they had, a milk bar, and you step into the bar and the fact that they hadn't properly cleaned the bar surface or the cracks in it just make your stomach roll.

When you say a milk bar?

Yeah, they serve milk shakes and ice cream and that sort of thing. Of course, then they had "bar" bars.

Uh, huh.

The aroma there didn't bother you. But there was just, their sanitation just wasn't what we were accustomed to.

From there then, was your next assignment New Guinea?

Mm, mm. (Affirmative)

How did you travel to New Guinea?

Went up by air.

By air. Where in New Guinea did you...?

Port Moresby.

Port Moresby. Was that where you spent the duration?

Yes. Our camp was actually called Seven Mile. They had a group of air strips in New Guinea, and Seven Mile was where the bombers came through to stage to go up to Ribaul and hammer the Japs. And that's what we were doing there; we were providing gasoline and bomb storage and lodging. They had a place they called Arcadia over near the airport which was Seven Miles. They were named Seven Mile, Nine Mile, Eleven Mile, and I think those other two were Fighter strips.

I was just getting ready to ask you, how did Seven Mile get its name?

Seven Miles from Moresby.

Ah, that's imaginative.

And it shot right out over the ocean, so you didn't have to climb a lot to get out.

How about landing? Did they come in from the ...?

No, that was... To me, it looked pretty easy. The mountains, you could drive into the mountain area very quickly. But I think they sort of paralleled the coast, and Seven Mile was just a short mile, the way they took off; they took off over water. I mean there was a little land and then they were out over the water right away.

You mentioned the target for a lot of the bombers, Ribaul. Would you spell that?

Ribaul, R – I – B – A – U – L. That was the Japanese base on New Britain, I think it was.

An Air base?

Yes. Ribaul was the city.

So, the mission of your unit was to supply them with fuel, ammunition and that sort of thing.

We might store the ammunition, but they moved it.

I see.

They didn't let anybody mess around those bombs and the airplanes, to the airplanes, other than Air Force personnel. In fact, the guys that, the men that loaded the bombs, rode with the plane, I think. So, they knew they were going to do it right. (Laughing)

(Laughing)

Boy they wouldn't do any sloppy work when they put those timing wires in there.

J.D., what was your unit?

It was the Fifth Air Force Service Command. We were in a, God, I thought I'd never forget it. It was called a Service Group, and I can't remember it, can't remember the number of it (8th Service Group, I now recall, 5th Air Force Service Command).

And a Service Group would be roughly how many people?

Oh, they had Signal and ...

Oh, O.K.

All the services that the Air Force needed, all the ground services they needed other than hospitalization. Radio men, electricians, all the ground support that was required. It was run by a Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, who was had served his time as a flying officer, so he was sympathetic; he knew what was needed.

Mm, mm. (Affirmative) Now, how long... Were you there until you returned home?

No, no. I guess I spent a year there.

One year, O.K.

Then I don't know how I lucked into it, but they had, and I don't know where they got the other officer. His name was Frank Putt, and he lived in Chicago, and they wanted... Well, the Air Force was extremely negligent of their vehicles. We had to maintain the vehicles. That's what our group, that's one of the things our group did, the unit I was assigned to, in command of. We had to keep the tankers running. They'd bring the gasoline in fifty-five gallon drums; take the tankers down there, and they'd have these little put-puts and fill them up. Then they'd take them down to the air strip (and) gas the planes. Some damn fool was smoking down there one night and burned one of these things up. It's too bad he didn't burn himself up.

Oh, gee!

You know, how do you court martial a Private, and where do you send him?

When he's in New Guinea?

I could have shot the son of a gun.

Before we move you to that next assignment, you were there for about a year with the Fifth Air Force Service Command. What was your specific function?

Running this group that did this business of transporting gasoline and maintaining the tankers, that was the big thing, and other vehicles.

O.K.

(At some time, around here, I was transferred to the Ordnance Department).
Not only, well, for any Air Force unit around there that needed repairs. It was up to us to get the parts and fix 'em up.

I have some other questions that I'm going to wait 'til we get you to the next assignment, then I'm going to ask you, just covering the whole time you were over there. You were a year there at Seven Mile, and anything else of note occur while you were there other than the daily?

Unbeknownst to us, and we finally figured it out, when the Japs came over to bomb, we were the target.

Part 5: Combat

While you were at Seven Mile?

(Laughing) Yeah, it was, it seems a little absurd, but when they'd park these seventeens, these are all B-17s at the time. They'd put them in what they called revetments, horse shoe shaped shields (of earth), you know. And then they'd stag...

Earthware shields.

Yeah, right. They'd stagger the planes, so that if a bomb dropped right in front of one, it wouldn't get more than one. But the Japanese quickly learned that the key to tying those airplanes up was to tie up their service. I hadn't been there but two nights, I guess, and I had occasion to go around. Seven Mile was here, our camp was here.

About how far away was your camp from Seven Mile?

Oh, maybe half a mile or something like that.

O.K., Uh huh.

Back in, maybe not that far, back, and then the air strip was here, and I was coming around here to go down to where the control tower was. And all of a sudden I heard these booms and saw these little sparks jumping up. Nobody had told me what it was supposed to sound like, and I jumped out of that command car and into a ditch. And I thought that they were shooting for the planes, but one of those bombs lit in our camp right next to a Signal Corps tent, and the poor guy in the tent had just cleared the slit trench when the bomb went off, and he was so shaken they couldn't get him away from that trench. They finally just had to ship him out. He just had cleared the top of that thing. I went by the next morning, and the tree by the side of the Signal Corps tent looked like a Christmas tree, all these tubes and wires and everything hanging from it. And it just shattered his nerves. But we were the target. Of course nobody made a big deal out of it. One night they moved us around to the other side of the air strip. They had movies, outdoor, of course. We were down there, and the red alert went off and all of a sudden we heard this single plane. It was funny, no matter what altitude they were, you could tell when they dropped their bombs; you could hear their engines; you'd hear a sudden surge as the bombs left. A single plane and there was no place to go; there were no slit trenches around there. We had them next to our tents, but you didn't have them out there at that (site). All I could think, there's a book I had called *Fragments from France*, and two soldiers, one's telling the other, "Get lower, get lower!" in the bombardment. And all he could say was, "I can't, me buttons are in the way!" (Laughing) These are British soldiers.

(Laughing)

That's all I could think of when I was down there on the ground, there was no place to go; it was all just flattened out. They let the bombs drop, and they went just over the hill into the camp area where nobody was. There wasn't a soul hurt.

When you talk about the slit trenches, were these trenches for taking cover in an area or were these for ...?

Oh, these were just for shelter. You had one near your tent, if there was an alert, you ducked into it.

So besides that incident you just talked about, were there any other times that you were bombed while you were there, or was this a regular occurrence?

We must've had, I guess in my time we didn't have more than four raids. The Japanese were on the run at the time. They didn't know it, but we didn't have any ground troops there for some time. Then, the Forty, I think it was the Forty-second Division came in. The Aussies were holding them (the Japs) over on the north side of the island. And they

had to come over the Owen Stanley Range to get to us. Then, of course, they got better aircraft. We had P-37s which were pretty, well, they were good ground support planes. They fired a thirty-seven millimeter cannon through the propeller hub, but then they got P-38s. The Japs made their final push; we didn't know it was at the time, it was a hundred plane raid, and boy those 38s just chewed 'em up all the way in and all the way out for which we were grateful.

Oh, Yeah.

Because they'd come right over the air strip, and we never saw the anti-aircraft guns hit a thing.

But you had them, probably, ringed around your ...?

We never knew exactly where they were, but they moved one in behind us, and I think they did that for obvious reasons, because they knew that the planes were going to be looking for us, some of them anyway, maybe not in that big hundred plane (raid). Well, that hundred plane raid was daylight, but they put that Seventy-five in behind us, and they fired that thing off without telling us it was coming, and (Laughing) everybody jumped about three feet; we thought we were dead.

(Laughing) Now that particular one, was that a twin barrel gun?

We never saw it.

Oh.

Just made a helluva racket.

Just heard it. J.D., after Seven Mile, you were there you said about a year. Where did you go next?

This other officer and I...

Is this Frank Putnam?

Frank Putt, P - U - T - T.

Oh, Putt, P - U - T - T.

were assigned, and I don't know how we got the assignment. I shouldn't have any drag; maybe he did. But we were assigned to take a crew of about three enlisted men and tour the whole area checking the vehicle maintenance and suitability of their equipment for all the Air Force units. So we went up to the end of New Guinea.

(End of Side A)

We're back on record; we ran out of tape. J.D. was telling me about the new assignment he had where he and another officer, Frank Putt, and three enlisted men would tour the island making vehicle, or equipment checks. While we were off record, before we discovered we were out of tape, he also mentioned he went to Australia so that's where we'll pick up.

J.D. would you continue telling about this assignment, how long did it last and what did you think of it?

I'd say we were there maybe nine months, maybe as much as a year. We got up to Darwin, and we went down to wherever there was an Air Force unit that had ground vehicles. It was our responsibility to check, primarily, the level of their maintenance because they were having a heck of a time. Well, naturally, their concentration was on their airplanes and the auxiliary equipment sort of took the hind seat. I don't know how effective we were, but we'd make out a full report vehicle by vehicle. The Quarter Master was, not all these were Air Force personnel, some were Quarter Master assigned to the Air Force that did the heavy hauling with their two and a half ton trucks. So, they were better about their maintenance because they were relying on vehicles; the Air Force was relying on airplanes, and that's what they took care of.

The three enlisted men that were on your team, were they permanent members or were they rotated in and out?

No, they were permanent. I don't know how they lucked into that either.

You didn't have anything to do with choosing them? You didn't get to select your team?

No, no. I didn't have anything to choosing any of it. Went down to Sydney and the, I think he was a Major or a Lieutenant Colonel in the Quarter Master Corps, he told us what the assignment was, and that was it. So, we fly around Australia and back up to New Guinea.

Was that your final assignment overseas?

No. That finally petered out. I don't know if it was from that we did such a great job or they finally threw up their hands and never get anybody in the Air Force to check anything other than the windshield wipers. No, I was assigned to the Service Command. By then I was a Captain, I guess. Joined them, and by that time they were preparing to go into Leyte Island, and I joined them up in New Guinea up on the North, the island of Biak and Owi; they were two islands, one next to the other.

Now, were those New Guinea or Philippines, the last two you mentioned?

To get to the Philippines, we left from the very north end of New Guinea.

Uh, huh. (Positive)

Put us on an old scow. Let's see, we were Service Command, it must have been Air Force Command that was on Biak, and that's one that they would bomb.

Oh, how do you spell Biak, J.D.

B – I – A – K.

B – I – A – K.

No, no, we were on Biak, and it was Owi that they would bomb, and that's where the headquarters was. And we liked to see that since they weren't bombing us.

What is Owi?

O – W – I.

Oh, O – W – I, and that's part of which island chain?

That's an island, two islands very close to the very north of New Guinea.

Oh, these are part of New Guinea?

Yeah.

And you say they were bombing. Who was bombing whom?

Well, that was the Japanese.

Bombing us?

Yeah.

And you could see it?

Yeah, I'm not sure they hit 'em but a couple of times.

And where were you when this was going on?

When that was going on?

Yeah.

We were on Owi, I mean Biak.

Oh, you were watching?

Yeah.

How far apart were the two?

Oh, maybe three or four miles.

So you were actually able to watch the ...

Yeah. Well, it was dark, after dark.

Oh, oh, oh sure.

See the lightening, see the flashes of the bombs.

Uh, huh. (Affirmative)

But we never heard any report of any casualties, though. I don't know how effective they were.

So then, did you end up in Leyte?

Yes. From there our whole group was put on board an old scow, and we got to Leyte on V plus two, I think, and they put us out in the harbor. Lots of ships there. And we could sit there and watch the Japs come down the shore line bombing the troops and the ships that were loading and unloading. Of course, when they had the red alert like that, they said, "Everybody in the hold." Well, to get in the hold, they had about three or four ladders, big long things, and you'd go way down in the belly of the ship. I didn't have any troops for which I was responsible. I don't know who was keeping them in line, but I didn't. I'd be damned if I was going down there. I just stayed upstairs and watched up on.... I'm no sailor, stayed on the top deck where I was bunked and watched the show.

How long did an attack like that last?

Oh, maybe fifteen or twenty minutes. They'd come flying over there, and you'd see the anti-aircraft going up and made all kinds of racket and lights and everything. I guess the troops on the shore were really catching hell.

Were these Japanese fighter planes or bombers or a combination of both?

So far away I couldn't tell, after dark. Then they put us... There wasn't a big bunch of them. You'd see a single plane come across and then there'd be another one. Maybe they were just wild pilots that just wanted to raise some hell with the Americans. Then we were disembarked from there and located down south of the main... Tacloban was the main landing area; we were down south of there. T - A - C - L - O - B - A - N.

Thank you.

Muddy, wet, it'd rain all the time. I had some kind of vehicle responsibilities, by then I was a Captain, I should have had something to do. I can remember riding around in the rain, and I had gotten an Aussie helmet. Some Aussie had given me one. And I was riding around with this other officer and he said, "You know that looks an awful lot like a Japanese helmet." I said, "That's a good thought." (Laughing)

(Laughing) If all they see is your silhouette ...

I put that in my kit bag, and I never did get home with it. I put on the old coal scuttle and put that on.

Was that what they called them, coal scuttles?

Well, yeah, that was the name for the German helmet; it's even worse than that. The only untoward incident we had, they had a commando outfit coming in, and they flew right over our camp and fortunately for us, they had been hit and they were on the way down and they, oh, they must have landed, maybe, a hundred yards from us. Of course, just one big flash and they were all gone. But that's the closest we had to any contact from the enemy. They never bombed us or anything; they had better targets than that, of course. What they were really hurting about was those people that were landing there on the island and getting braced to go north. So that calmed down. Then I was transferred to Mindoro in this same headquarters group.

Did you say Mindoral?

Mindoro, M - I - N - D - O - R - O.

And that was in the Philippines, was it?

Yes, that's an island south of Luzon. I can remember I had some responsibility for keeping track of vehicles, but no troop responsibility. It was Headquarters. I did some screwing around there by myself for some assignment; I've forgotten what it was. All I can remember, I had to help of some Navy people blow up some bombs one time. Said they had to have an officer, and they ran out of officers.

Were these bombs that had been jettisoned ...?

Yeah, well, yeah, they were enemy armaments that they wanted to destroy.

Oh, oh, oh, they were Japanese bombs.

Yeah. Those Navy guys were good. They were bomb disposal people. They'd go in where the bombs were still alive with the fuses in them.

Fuses.

That was a job I wasn't trained for and was happy not to have to get involved with. I didn't mind pushing some plastic explosive and putting a cap in there and getting the hell out of the way when they blew it up. Then we were transferred from Mindoro to Clark Field on the main island of Luzon, and I was still shuffling papers there keeping track of vehicles. It was there I was promoted to Major.

Oh. I saw your photograph here with the Captain's bars. So you were promoted to Major?

Yeah. I never took much credit for that. You know the whole system is built on what they call a TO, Table of Organization. No commanding officer ever made any brownie points by cutting back on his TO; the idea was to fill it up. I really can't recall that I was doing any significant work there. There was something to do with vehicle supply. I can remember getting into an argument with some guy. He said, he was new, he just had come in. He gave me some kind of an order. He said, "I got a lower serial number than you have." (Laughing)

Oh, yeah.

He was a Major. I don't know how that was resolved. Then I had the option of sticking around or after, see I'd been there three years getting a thirty day R and R. I took the thirty days.

When was this, J. D.? What year and month, if you can recall?

Three years after '41, that's '44 or '45.

Uh, huh (Affirmative) Was it near the end of the war?

Oh, quite near the end of the war.

Do you remember what month or what season of the year?

Yes, right. When did the war end, what month?

August of '45.

All right, well that was '45.

So, '45.

Yeah, came home.

You came home on the R and R?

Yeah. Damn if they didn't, instead of taking us out to the West Coast, they took us all the way around to Baltimore, seaport.

By ship?

Yeah, through the Panama Canal. Gave us a grand cruise.

So, it couldn't count towards your thirty days R & R. Your R & R starts at the time you get back to The United States?

Damn right. (Laughing)

How long did it take you to take that ship home?

It seemed interminable. It must have been only a couple of weeks.

At least.

We went through the canal and came up.

To Baltimore, did you say?

Richmond, I think, Richmond, yeah, I think it was, yeah.

So getting near the end of the war.

Right.

And you're on a thirty day R & R.

Right. So then they put us on a troop train, and I had some responsibility on that one, too. I remember we stopped one time, and those guys left that train like quail scattering, and I knew there was no sense my standing out there saying, "Halt," or send the Sergeant out to do something. (They came back to the train, of course, of their own accord – didn't want to be AWOL at discharge time).

But now, you're going home for R & R, what were they on the train for?

Probably doing the same thing. But there were some bars near the railroad; they were just going up there to get a drink or flirt with some of the girls or something. I think we got them all back on. We didn't lose anybody.

If you're going on R & R, it seems like not the thing they'd run away from. What point does your R & R start then? Not while you're on the train, does it?

When we get to Fort Bragg.

Oh, O.K.

Then they turned me loose.

Where was your girlfriend, Louise, at that time?

She was out in San Diego at the Marine Corps base.

San Diego. Uh, huh. (Affirmative) So what happened when you started your R & R at Fort Bragg?

Well, then I remember most vividly, she flew back, hitched a ride on an Air Force plane, and flew back and met me in Washington, and then we went down to Waynesville, her home and were married. And I, of course, was still under the threat of that return to the war. They dropped the bomb; the war ended just when we started ours. We were on our honeymoon and coming back to her hometown. We were having dinner, and boy the bells started going off, and the war was over. It wasn't long after that I got my orders that I didn't have to go back.

So you did not have to report back to the Philippines?

Right, right. But then she had to go back to the Marine Corps base, and I had to go back to Fort Bragg. They wouldn't let me be discharged on the West Coast; I had to go back

to Fort Bragg. So I took her out there. And then I had the worst train ride of my life. Couldn't catch a flight, and all the way to New Orleans from San Diego I rode at the space between the cars. You know?

On the little platform, outside?

Yeah. On my duffle bag. And, oh, just soldiers and their families and their kids. They were all loaded up when I got there. I had to take the space I could get. My rank didn't make a bit of difference.

Not by then, yeah.

So I got to New Orleans, I said, "The hell with it." I got off the train and got a ticket on (another) train; I paid for it myself; it was a sleeper. I slept all the way to Raleigh, seemed like. Then I was discharged at Fort Bragg, and that was it.

I want to go back and ask you a few questions just about your entire time in the Far East.

Sure.

These are more like personal things like human comfort and so forth. What was your food like while you were in the Far East?

It was variable. Of course, when we were in Australia, we got accustomed to their food and drink and their strange ways of fixing things. In the field, when we were operating as a Service Group, it was pretty good.

You had mess halls, you weren't eating K-rations or C-rations?

Oh, yeah, right, right. No, no. we didn't have to go that route. Sometimes you had to eat and drink outside like when we got to Leyte we didn't have a mess hall or anything.

In Australia you said getting accustomed to their food, were they operating the mess halls?

No, no. I mean when we were on leave.

O.K.

Food and drink.

When you were in the Philippines, did you eat out on the economy at all? Did you eat Filipino food?

No, we were strictly, we didn't mingle much with the natives. We drove down to Manila a couple of times. There must have been a bar or something there, Officers Club. I can remember driving back on the day they changed the rules from driving on the right side to driving on the left side or the other way around. Here I was in a little jeep, crazy. But the food, I think a lot depended on the Mess Sergeant. When we were working, we'd stop at various Air Force installations, and some of them were excellent, and some of them were just sort of mediocre. I can't ever recall being disgusted with the food. I think they made a great effort to realize that an Army travels on its stomach. The Mess Sergeants and their staff were of varying capabilities. I had no real complaint about it even if you had to eat out of a Mess Kit. Sometimes we'd get, I forget what they called the ration, three in one, ten in one, something like that.

I don't know.

It was a package ration for emergencies, really. It had chocolate in it. But they weren't what we were supposed to have access to, that was for emergency.

You mentioned the chocolate. What was the chocolate? Was it sweet chocolate or was it...

Yeah, right.

or just an energy bar?

No, as far as I knew, it was just sweet chocolate.

What else would be in a packet like that besides the chocolate?

Oh, stuff you could put in hot water. I'm not sure that if they had a package that had it, contained its own heating element and you broke it.

They had those back then?

I don't know if I had that then or not. But the food was never, I don't remember the food as ever being a major concern, because usually we were eating with I'd say, the Air Force groups. They, of course, got the best if only because they could fly it in on their own planes if they wanted to; buy it on their own.

What about the housing? What kind of living quarters did you have generally?

First, in New Guinea, all we needed was tents, tents and a mosquito bar.

What's a mosquito bar?

It's just a thin, mesh net that you put over your cot so the mosquitoes don't eat you alive.

So you're in tents in New Guinea.

Usually we were in tents regardless of where we were except when we finally got to Clark Field in the Philippines, we had barracks.

Was that the first hard side quarters that you had?

Yeah, as I recall, otherwise we were... Yeah, we visited, where was that? I think it was Mindoro. And then they had a tent for transients. And that was crazy. I was coming out of my tent in broad daylight, and it was just after, who died, what president?

Oh, Roosevelt.

Yeah, just after he died, and the flag was at half staff, and this 25 was coming in. I wasn't more than one hundred feet from it coming in here. All of a sudden I noticed it jerked a little bit and then he hit the right wing, just outboard of the right engine, and he clipped that wing right off.

On the flag pole or what?

Yeah, on the flag pole. It was on a hill; it was the headquarters. I was over here, and he was here, and it went over, and it didn't kill anybody except the whole crew on the plane. We had an Ordnance Officer on that, been there three years, been there as long as I had. They were running a, they called it a Fat Cat flight, back from... They take a plane, this happened to be a B-25, they'd take a plane down to Australia and load it up with booze and bring it back to the Officers Club.

And they called those Fat Cat flights?

Fat Cat flights. That's what we called it.

Is that what this plane was carrying when he...?

Yeah. They were down there on vacation and just come back, and it was their group that they were flying over, and they were letting them know that they were home. He was buzzing.

Oh, he was just sort of...

He was buzzing it on the way in to land. Just about ten feet too low, poor bastards. Boy, and that flag pole went down and hit the ground with such force that it just corresponded

to the variations in the ground, just flatter than a flounder. And I was, if I'd been, oh, maybe thirty seconds earlier, I'd been in line for it.

Oh, to be hit by it?

Yeah.

Oh, man. Well, they must do an inquiry on something like that. Did they make any conclusions like was he sampling the product that he was hauling? Or was it just a matter of...?

Oh, I'm sure they had to investigate it some way, but I don't think that would enter into it. Well, I can't imagine, well, you never know, people do crazy things.

So everybody on the plane was killed, but nobody on the ground was killed?

No. No, fortunately They just hit in a busy area, too. Flat area down below, approaching the air field.

I don't know if I understood. Did anyone on the plane survive?

No.

Not a one of them. This Ordnance Officer, you knew him?

No, I didn't.

Oh.

He was a... We never made contact. I just heard that he was due to go home. Bad luck.

(There are) a couple of other things I have to cover. One of them, of course, we talked at length and that was your mail and how you kept in touch with your family and your fiancé.

And we got presents. In fact, while I was still at Seven Mile, my Uncle sent me a bottle of Scotch, and I'll be doggone, when it was delivered, the carton was broken open, you could see right in there what it was.

And they still didn't steal?

Nobody touched it. I had to share it with some of the guys in the tent. The liquor that came in: "Johnny Walker."

Was liquor and alcohol, was that hard to come by where you were?

They pretty quickly got Officers Clubs established and then, of course, with the Air Force, they had a good means of transport, and I think even that the non-coms clubs, enlisted men's clubs shared in that, but that's not something we frequented. We wouldn't have been welcomed there anyway.

But it wasn't a rare thing?

No, no. We had... When we were at Seven Mile we had a... The natives were used to build shelters like mess halls and that sort of thing, not barracks. They put one way on the top of this hill. Go up in your jeep, it's a wonder some people didn't get killed coming down after having a few drinks.

Because it was steep and winding?

No, just steep. It went up, I don't know, it was crazy. Nice little club, you know, just open, thatched roof.

Open walls, I mean open sides?

Yeah, right. You'd get up there and shoot dice and play cards.

What other types of entertainment were available to you during that time?

It would have been pick-up stuff. There weren't any tennis courts or football fields or anything like that.

You mentioned earlier, movies.

Movies.

Outdoor movies. Do you remember any of the titles, and were they new movies of the time, or were they old recycled stuff?

You know, the only one I remember watching was that one where they bombed us and couldn't tell you for the life of me what it was.

I guess that was sort of eclipsed by the event.

But you know anything that was on people would go to because there was nothing else to do. Once the sun went down, you couldn't even read.

Couldn't even read? Oh, yeah. Couldn't read because you weren't allowed to have light for fear of attack?

I don't think we had electricity.

Oh, oh.

They must have had in some of the Headquarters units because somebody had to be on duty twenty-four hours a day.

But out where you were there was no electricity? You must have had some lighting. Kerosene lamps or anything?

You know, I've forgotten.

How about USO show? Did you have any USO shows along while you were there?

Not that I know of. There might have been some on Manila, and they'd have been well attended, I'm sure. We saw the, what was it, what were the bombers that dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Was it B-52?

No, it'd be a B-29, I think.

B-29, that's what we saw.

The Enola Gay.

We saw them at Clark Field.

You saw the actual planes?

I don't know if it was THE plane, but we saw two or three of them there at the field, and that was before they dropped the big ones. But man, they were tremendous, and they were really guarded. Didn't matter who you were; unless you had official business there, you didn't walk up and pat that thing. (Laughing)

(Laughing).

Didn't want it known. That's one of the greatest mistakes we ever made, I think.

Was what?

Dropping those bombs.

Do you think that they would have surrendered without?

Sure, they were done; they were done. In fact, there was an element in the federal government that didn't want (to hold back the bomb), and I think his name was Grove. He was responsible for...

Lefty Grove? Well, no, General Grove, not Lefty.

a lot of the development. Boy, that tarred us forever. We're the only people that have ever used that against a civilian population, so we can never complain when we get our turn. Stupid. They were licked; they were done.

Well, some people said that even though they were beaten, and they knew they were beaten, their code of honor wouldn't allow them to...

We didn't have to shoot. No, all we'd do is just isolate them. Let 'em eat Chinese lanterns or whatever.

There was a question I was going to ask at the very end, but as long as this is the topic we're on, I'm going to ask it now. At the end, maybe I'll re-ask it.

Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general? But since you mentioned this use of atomic bombs on two civilian cities, do you see any parallels with what's going on today. Rather than contain a threat to just try to go in and eliminate it?

I don't quite understand what you're asking me. Do I anticipate that that kind of weapon will be used against us?

Yes, or that we will take preemptive actions.

Oh, to isolate some country that's on the verge of developing it or something like this?

Yes.

I guess we would have to. I don't like the idea. But we can't take the high road and say, "It's beyond the limits of war," dropping, exposing a civilian population to atomic bombs. We've done it. I can see, yes. I can see how we would feel somebody would have the information that we'd be so close to be subjected to it that we would strike first.

Where exactly were you when Japan surrendered? That would have been August.

Waynesville, North Carolina.

You were home on R & R when they surrendered.

We were having dinner after we came back from our honeymoon. Boy, everything started to go to hell. The church bells ringing, people hollering in the streets. And that was it.

Part 6: Life After the Service

So you were discharged. Louise was discharged. You got together. What did you do in the days and weeks after you were out of the service.

Well, I had to figure out what I was going to do next. I didn't have a job. Originally, the plan was I'd go back and run a farm that my uncle had in Western North Carolina, but I hadn't been in school long before I knew that wasn't going to work. Well, fooling around with equipment like I'd been doing, even in school, worked on an old Model A and ran it up and down North Carolina. I figured, well, why don't I go to engineering school? So that's what I... I put in to MIT. I put an application in and, of course, because I'd had such, here's where your past catches up with you. I'd had such good grades at NC State, that I didn't know any better to study all the time. But, yeah, I was a shoo in. So, I went there for... Well, they had an accelerated course. We didn't have any vacations.

You just went year 'round, no summer breaks?

Yeah.

Was that supported by the GI Bill?

Oh, yeah.

Wonderful. When you graduated, did you have a Masters in Engineering then?

No, no, just a Bachelors.

Oh, I see. What did you do after that?

I liked the West Coast, and I thought about getting a job out in San Francisco or something. The only thing I could get was an Engineer at a Logging Camp. I figured that wouldn't do. So I put in with Boeing Company, and they hired me as a Junior Engineer, and I was there about two years.

In what city?

Seattle.

Oh, at their Seattle headquarters. And you and Louise lived together out there?

Yep, yep. She moved out there with me. By that time we had, we only had one child then.

After Seattle then, where did you go?

Came back to North Carolina and worked for Olin Mattheson in Brevard, North Carolina, as an engineer. My uncle had a sales operation going in the Midwest with Lincoln Engineering who built... Well, back in the days when they used to have grease guns and service stations. Not only that but they had automatic lubrication systems for vehicles. In fact, I had one on a Ford. The only thing you couldn't lubricate from your driver's seat was the rotating fittings on the drive shaft.

Really?

Yep. I've got parts of the kit still around. It was operated by the engine vacuum, and you just push a button, and these lines were attached to the various pieces fore and aft, and you'd get a squirt of grease in there.

I've never heard of that.

Well, now of course, they're non-lubricated; you don't need to lubricate them. Yeah, that was great. It never caught on, but I got a set and put it on a car. I've got some parts of that around somewhere. But after that I was working in sales for him traveling in Illinois and Wisconsin. I had a draw of five hundred dollars a month. I can't believe that supported my family.

What year was that?

That was in Peoria.

Oh, you were living in Peoria? What year was that?

Oh, my God. When did the war end?

Say, '45. And you were a couple of years out on the West Coast.

No, short time on the West Coast. Oh, yeah, you're right, it was Boeing. O.K. so, call that '48, '50.

Five hundred a month was pretty handsome draw back then.

It was early fifties, yeah. We rented a house; I had a car. But that wasn't going anywhere. I wasn't seeing any increase in my sales. I think my uncle was getting a little bit distressed, too. He was paying the five hundred, and I wasn't bringing in five hundred. So, I looked around, went to a head hunter. Viskase Corporation which was then a division of Union Carbide was looking for somebody in Chicago. I had an engineering background, and I had that agricultural background, and they were selling packaging materials, among other things, up in the Wisconsin area. I guess they put those three together and said, "Hey, here's a guy we want." So they hired me, and I spent thirty-five years with them.

Was that where you retired from?

Where I retired from.

J.D., since you got out of the service, have you stayed in contact with any of your wartime friends at all, like Frank Putt or anybody like that?

Frank Putt I lost track of. Only two of them that I served with down in Harlington, Texas: Louis Aite, he was from South Carolina. He went home and took over his daddy's wholesale food business. (The other man was Keith Greaves. Became a medical doctor, I recall, and retired in Salt Lake City or nearby).

I certainly wandered away from some of your questions.

No, that makes it all the more valuable because you know what you saw and did, and you know what to volunteer.

Can't think of that kid's name; he was a little fellow.

Is this the one that became a doctor?

Yeah.

Part 7: Conclusion

Well, while you're thinking, I'll ask you, I did ask you already if you joined a Veterans Organization, and you said you do belong to ...

To American Legion Post up in Wisconsin, and I joined that because I was traveling with a young man who came from there and was active in the Legion. He said, "Oh, come on, you might as well join." Pay my dues, never been near the post, and that's it.

But you're on their roster. I've asked all the questions that I have to ask. Is there anything that you might have thought of while we were talking that you'd like to add to the record?

No, not that I can think of. I must have been born with a rabbit's foot in my back pocket. When you figure how lucky I was.

You mean the assignments you had and the fact that you got through it?

Yeah. We lost some real good men over in Africa, fellas I went to school with, top notch, not so much students. One of the fellas I graduated with became Chancellor of the Greater University of North Carolina.

Really?

He was a smart one. He socialized while I played football. I think I had more fun than he did. Any how. No, just been lucky.

Greaves was that doctor's name.

Greaves?

Keith Greaves. G - R - E - A - V - E - S.

Oh, T.

Keith

And the last name was?

Greaves. G - R - E - A - V - E - S. I'll have to call each one of those guys.

If you do, if you think they'd be interested in being interviewed for the Veterans History project, you might suggest to them that they try to find an interviewer out there. They're all over the country.

Is that right?

Oh, yes, this is nationwide program.

Let's see. What can I write that on.

Well, J.D. Thank you very much for participating in this interview this morning, and if you don't have anything else, we'll go off record.

Fine.