

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HENRY DUERKES

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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BRICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Henry W. Duerkes on February 25th, 2008, in Brick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and William Hawkins. Also in attendance are Mr. Duerkes' relatives. Please say your names.

Tom Doyle: Tom Doyle

Dorothy Doyle: Dorothy Doyle

Jenny Gray: Jenny Gray

Wayne Duerkes: Wayne Duerkes

Margaret Reeves: Margaret Reeves.

SI: Thank you very much everyone for having us here today and thank you Mr. Duerkes for sitting down with us.

Henry Duerkes: Oh, well you're very welcome on that.

SI: To begin could you tell us where and when you were born?

HD: I was born in Red Bank, New Jersey, October 25th, 1924.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, what their names were and where they were born?

HD: Well, my mother's name was Gertrude and my father's name was Charles and I was one of nine children. I was in the middle there someplace. ... My dad worked for Prudential Insurance Company, my mother, of course, was a housewife and she raised nine children.

SI: What did your father do for Prudential?

HD: Bookkeeper, he was a bookkeeper in charge of the bookkeeping department.

SI: Did he work in Newark?

HD: In Newark, in the Newark office, yes.

SI: How did both sides of your family get to New Jersey? Do you know anything about your family history?

HD: Boy, far as I can remember, we've been in New Jersey forever.

WD: The Duerkes side has been. The Klaas family came over one generation before your mother, if I'm remembering right. ...

SI: Your mother and father always lived in New Jersey.

HD: Always in New Jersey, yes, yes.

SI: Klaas, is that the other side of the family?

WD: That was his mother's name.

JG: Maiden name.

HD: Right, yes. On my mother's side, her dad was German. ... Grandmother was English and my grandfather was German and I forget how long ago they came into the United States ... and they had God knows how many children. ... I don't remember that.

DD: They had thirteen, but only five lived through infancy.

HD: See, women retain all this useless information. [laughter] That's the reason I need the women here. ...

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your life in Red Bank growing up? What was your neighborhood like?

HD: Well, it was a rather quiet neighborhood. Being one of nine children I had a very interesting family life, nothing exciting to talk about. I was happy, we had a good family and it just went from school ... to high school and nothing exciting to report, normal run of the mill family, you know. I managed to stay out of jail which was important. ...

SI: Did you have to do a lot of chores around the house? Did you have any jobs when you were young?

HD: We all had work to do. We had to make work less for Mom and Dad, because Dad worked every day of course, and Mom would have to bring up nine of us. We all had to do the dishes, do this and do that. So, we did it unwillingly, but ... we knew we had to do it. ... We had a nice family, had no problems there, you know. ...

SI: You were born in Red Bank. Did you grow up in Red Bank?

HD: ... I forget how long I stayed in Red Bank. Then, we moved to a place called North Arlington, which is up in Bergen County, and that's where most of my life I was brought up, in North Arlington.

SI: Most of your memories are from living in North Arlington, then.

HD: Right yes. ... You remember that, of course.

SI: Was it a suburban community?

HD: It was, yes. It was like this area [Brick, New Jersey]. It was like this, yes.

SI: What would you do for recreational activities? Did you play sports?

HD: I never liked sports. Unfortunately, never liked sports, never could, but I just enjoyed my brothers and sisters and we just had fun. That's all.

JG: ... Did you like to go roller skating? ...

HD: Not until ... I started going around with Mom, we went roller skating. ... A lot of bicycle riding and all, but just regular family fun, you know, nothing exciting. I had a very boring life, ... but a happy life, right, yes. [laughter] ... As I said before we all managed to stay out of jail. [laughter] ...

SI: Where did you go to school?

HD: Well, I started ... my kindergarten and grammar school and high school in a place called Queen of Peace High School, up until my senior year, and then Mom and Dad moved into Asbury Park. ... I finished up my schooling in St. Rose High School in Belmar.

SI: Why did the family move from Red Bank to North Arlington and then to Asbury Park?

HD: That's a good question. I wish I could answer that. I have no idea why Mom and Dad moved. They never confided in me. No, I really don't know why. ... Well, Dad was retired ... by the time we moved to Asbury Park.

WD: I don't think he was old enough to retire by then.

HD: Yes.

JG: No, I don't think he was.

DD: He took the train from Asbury.

HD: That's a good question. Next time I see mom and dad I'll have to ask them. ... [laughter]

SI: A lot of people moved around a lot because of the Great Depression.

HD: No, I understand that. I have no idea why we moved. ... From North Arlington down to Asbury Park is about seventy, eighty miles, yes. Well, of course we did have grandparents down there. My Mom and Dad's parents lived in Asbury Park so maybe ... that was the drawing card, I don't know.

SI: When you were in high school did you have any jobs?

HD: Oh, I had my little paper route and I worked for a little grocery store just to earn a few bucks, candy money if you want to call it. ... Mom and Dad had no money to spread around so we justified ourselves by working on our own. I know my sisters worked, and I forget where they worked and I forget where your Dad worked.

WD: He worked in electronics.

HD: ... I had Uncle Bob and Uncle Charlie, and then, Aunt Lil and Tom--don't know you're going back too many years. ... Ask me what I had for breakfast yesterday, I might remember, yes. [laughter]

SI: Was religion and the church important to your family?

HD: ... Yes, yes, they were. Mom and Dad were very involved ... up in North Arlington. Down here, they were up in years, in Asbury Park, so they weren't involved in the church. We went to church of course, but they weren't involved as much. ... Up in North Arlington I know Mom and Dad were involved in minstrel shows and what have you. They were very active that way, yes, oh, yes.

SI: Were you an altar boy or in the choir?

HD: I never was. I was the only one in the family out of all my brothers that I was not an altar boy. I have no idea. I just never went for it, you know, never went for it and the choir--I couldn't carry a tune with a bucket. ... I didn't even bother trying to sing, yes. I just kept ... by myself. I had a nice quiet life, until you know what, yes. [laughter]

SI: What about the Great Depression, how did that affect your family or your neighborhood?

HD: I was so young, see that was '39, I was born in '24. ... That was fifteen years. I think I was too young to realize what was going on. I don't remember being in any hardship that I know of. ... I think Dad did not lose his job, so we just maintained our normal lifestyle.

JG: She remembers some stories.

DD: I remember from the Depression now, this was because my mother and father told me, but your mother used to have a party every Friday night. They didn't have a lot of money ... and nobody could afford to go out and have fun, so Nana--which was his mother--would ... just get the gang together and she would have my father's family too, and they would all have to do a skit of some kind--sing.

HD: Oh, really, yes.

DD: ... They said they had the best times of their lives during the Depression.

HD: How do you remember all this stuff?

DD: Because my father and mother told me.

HD: Oh, okay, they kept me ... in the closet all the time. [laughter] Yes, thank you Dorothy, good.

SI: You do not remember any of the entertainment your family would have?

HD: No, not really. ... As I said before, I had a very quiet, sober life, kept to myself pretty much. ... There were nine of us, I think I was number six. See, I had my oldest sister next to me, [who] was fifteen months older, so I had a girl in front of me and I had a girl behind me, so I didn't communicate with them too much, you know. You don't mess with sisters. ... My brother was too old. Uncle Bob, he was the next oldest after Violet, and then, we had twins and they were too young. So, I was a loner. I want you to feel sorry for me, I was a loner. [laughter] ...

SI: Did you have a lot friends in school?

HD: Oh, I sure did, yes, oh, yes. ... I was very active. No, I had a lot of friends in school. I wasn't on any ballgames or nothing like that, I never liked sports, but I did have friends, yes, and even in the neighborhood, I had friends. ... Yes, they put up with me. ...

SI: When you were in school what were your favorite subjects?

HD: Algebra. The only subject I really liked was algebra, the rest of the stuff you could have, yes, right. [laughter] Arithmetic and algebra I excelled in.

SI: Before you went into the service, what did you think you were going to do with your life? Did you think you were going to go to college, or that you would join the service after you graduated?

HD: To be absolutely honest with you, I had no thoughts at all about my future. I had no thoughts about my future at all, until when Pearl Harbor happened. Of course, that was 1941. ... I didn't get into the service until '43. [Editor's Note: The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941.] ...

SI: What grade were you in school?

HD: ... I was finishing up my junior [high school] and going into high school, in St. Rose in Belmar. ...

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, did you know what was happening in the world?

HD: Not much, no.

SI: You did not read about Hitler or Mussolini?

HD: No, I didn't, no. Mom and Dad used to talk about it much, but I never paid that much attention to it, if you will, children don't. ... You're too young to worry about what's going on down the street. ... I should have, maybe, I don't know, but I couldn't have changed the world even if I knew, you know.

SI: Were there any discussions among you and your friends about having to join the service?

HD: We never talked about it at all, no. Funny thing, we just never bothered with it, you know. We didn't think it would hit us, until it did, yes.

SI: What do you remember about the day Pearl Harbor was attacked?

HD: I was in Asbury Park with my grandparents--[Wayne], your dad was there and mom--and they had the radio on, no TVs at that time and they had mentioned something about Pearl Harbor, but who knew where, what was Pearl Harbor, what was it? ... That's the first time I heard that we had a conflict, that war was declared by Roosevelt at that time. So, that's the first time I knew anything about that. After that I continued school until they drafted me and I was taken out of school in my senior year to join the service. ... March 29th is when I got my draft notice and I left school, knowing that I was going to get my diploma, and then, while I was in service, I know my Dad received my diploma during the commencement exercises. ... I took basic training in Camp Croft, South Carolina, and then, I followed that up with advanced training ... in Camp Swift, Texas. ...

SI: I want to ask you a couple of questions about the time in between Pearl Harbor and when you went into the service. Did you see a lot of changes on the Home Front?

HD: At that time it was too premature, no, didn't see much at all. ... I don't think the realization set in with people that war was really declared and we were in a world war, you know. If they did, I didn't notice it.

SI: Did they start the blackouts right away?

HD: ... I don't remember. Did we, Tom? I guess we must have had.

TD: Yes.

HD: I guess, probably, New York, had to be blackened out, yes.

SI: I know New Jersey had blackouts because they were sinking the tankers right off the coast.

HD: Yes, they were, oh yes, sure. ... You would see a lot of tankers that were torpedoed in the Atlantic, in the ocean, and the oil would come on shore, oh, yes. We knew then something was happening.

SI: Do you remember going down to the beach and seeing the debris?

HD: Yes, yes. You couldn't go swimming because the oil was all over the place, oh, yes.

SI: Was there any fears of German agents in the area? Did they tell you not to talk about things that you saw ships moving?

HD: Well, as I always say, the walls have ears. So, they'd always say, just be careful what you say, because you never know. ... Then again, I was still too young to realize what was truly happening. I know ... the country was at war, but it didn't again affect me right away, not right away, but it did, eventually. It caught up with me, yes.

SI: Did you make a choice about going into the service or were you drafted?

HD: I was drafted and I was to graduate in June. ... I got drafted in March and I left. ... I went right into the service.

SI: Did you think about joining any other services like the Navy?

HD: They drafted me into the Army and that's where I stayed. I ended up in Fort Dix, first, before going to Camp Croft, South Carolina, and then, I did ... all my training in South Carolina, and, as I said before, in Texas, yes.

SI: What was it like to leave your home and go into the service?

HD: ... I didn't mind it so bad. It was something, it was sort of an exciting thing to do, you know, not realizing what was ahead of me, you know, because we're too young to realize and to think of what could happen to us. ... Not being in a war before, you don't know what to expect, ... but I was anxious to join the service and, as I said before, I will say now, that I'm sorry that I'm too old to fight for my country again. I love this country and I always will, and I wish I could join again and do it all over again, but I'm too old. [laughter] I'm too old. Well, let's leave it up to the young men now, but I hope you never have to, let me tell you. People get hurt during the war.

WH: Absolutely.

HD: Yes.

SI: How did your family react to you going into the military?

HD: Well, they didn't like it at all. Mom was in tears. Dad, he had mixed emotions about it, but he knew I wanted to go. ... Of course, Mom was all upset about it, you know, which she would be of course, yes.

SI: Your father had not been in the military?

HD: No, no.

SI: Had any member of your family been in the military?

HD: Uncle Willie was in the service. ... If I remember [correctly], he was drafted. This is the First World War though.

DD: ... Your brother Bob was in service the same time you were.

HD: Uncle Bob was in the Navy.

MR: My father couldn't go, he was 4-F. ...

HD: He was deferred.

WD: He was asthmatic.

DD: He has asthma.

HD: Oh, okay.

DD: They wouldn't take him.

WD: Dad was deferred.

HD: Okay, I understand, right, yes.

DD: ... I thought you and Bob ... were both in the service at the same time.

HD: Yes, Bob and I were in, yes. He was in the Navy and, of course, I was in the Army, yes.

SI: Did you have the opportunity to talk with any family members who had been in the service about what to expect?

HD: No, no.

SI: So, you really had no idea what to expect when you went in.

HD: It was all a big surprise, yes, right.

SI: Were you the first of your family to go into the service, or have your brother gone in first?

HD: Was Uncle Bob in first? ... I don't know.

WD: He had to have been.

HD: My brother and I we were both in the service. He was in the Navy, of course. I was [in] the Army, and I don't know who went first.

DD: ... I think it was Uncle Bob.

HD: It was Uncle Bob. ...

DD: I remember seeing him when I was really like a little girl and we were living in Lyndhurst then. ... We were living in Neptune when you went in. So, Bob must have gone in first.

SI: I just have one more question about Asbury Park. My grandmother grew up in Matawan which is not that far and she remembers going to Asbury Park and meeting British sailors that were in town. Do you remember any foreign military people being around?

HD: ... I had two sisters who were of dating age, Violet and Grace, and they would bring these sailors home, yes. ... We had an roller skating rink in Asbury Park ... and they met a lot of the sailors there, yes, right. That was the first time I met anybody in the service, yes. I never did get to know them real well. ...

SI: Would they come over to the house for dinner?

HD: Right, whatever, yes, pick up my sisters and what have you, yes. Of course we didn't like it, but what are you going to do? [laughter] ...

SI: Did you notice any coastal artillery?

HD: We didn't see any of that, not in Asbury Park, no.

SI: How long were you at Fort Dix?

HD: That was just the recruiter, where I went in to register. And then, after that, then, we went on to Camp Croft, South Carolina.

SI: How quickly were you sent to Camp Croft?

HD: Let me check my notes.

SI: Okay.

HD: Just for you, I did this a couple days ago. I reported to Fort Dix on March 29th, ... that's when I left St. Rose, and then, April--I don't know what date in April--it had to be early April through July I was in Camp Croft, South Carolina, for my basic training. ... July through September was in Camp Swift, Texas, where my advanced basic training [was].

SI: Tell me a little bit about basic training. What do you remember about it?

HD: Drilling, drilling, drilling, and what have you. Well, you go through the whole nine yards in basic training, you know. They teach you how to fight, how to protect yourself, how to throw

grenades, what to do in case of a battle and all the other stuff that goes with fighting. They can give you the basics, but you don't know until you get there to the actual combat you know. ... It was interesting. I was still young, not realizing what was ahead of me, and it was all fun and games for the time being, you know, all fun and games, as Wayne knows. ...

SI: Do you remember your drill instructor?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Let me turn the recorder back on. In general, was there a lot of discipline? Were you yelled at?

HD: ... All the time, that's part of basic training, sure, got to whip these people into shape to fight a war. We were kids, we were still kids, ... hardly shaving yet, you know, yes. [laughter]

SI: Do you remember some of the things they would do to whip you into shape?

HD: Well, you'd take your twenty-five mile hikes overnight, twenty-five miles. You walked all night long, all day and what have you, and then, they would simulate battle conditions and what have you, ... the whole nine yards, yes.

SI: Were most of the men in your training unit from the Northeast or were they from all over the country?

HD: All over the country, right. ... They had a lot of people, men from all over the States, yes.

SI: Did everybody get along?

HD: Oh, yes, you make out. ... There was no problem. In fact, I enjoyed basic training. It was something different, you know, but I didn't mind it. ... I had no idea what was in front of me.

...

SI: How was the training in Texas different?

HD: Texas was the worst place in the world to go to, [laughter] hated that state, God almighty. That was just advanced training, you know, and right after that then we left for overseas, yes.

SI: Were you placed into a unit in Texas or were you still unattached?

HD: I was still unattached until I got overseas.

SI: You went overseas as a replacement.

HD: Right, yes.

SI: Were you trained in any kind of specialty?

HD: Just infantryman, right, yes.

SI: Did they train you how to use bazookas?

HD: Oh, yes, machine gun, bazookas, the M1 rifle and the BAR, Browning, automatic weapons, you know, yes, all that. You were well-trained, as far as how to use the weapons that you had available, yes.

SI: Do you think you were well-trained and prepared when you went overseas?

HD: As good as they could train you for. I mean, they can't train you for everything, too many unknown factors could enter into a war that you don't know. So, they do the best ... they could, and then, you went ahead and did it, went ahead and did what you had to do, yes.

SI: Do you remember them bringing any real world examples into the training?

HD: Well, they would have movies and what have you about what to expect, but in the movies nobody ever gets hurt. ... They would have what the Germans are up to and what have you because we knew we were going over to Europe. ...

SI: When did you know you were going to Europe?

HD: When I got there. [laughter]

SI: When you got to Europe.

HD: When I got to Europe, right, yes.

SI: When you were in Texas, you didn't know if you were going to go to Europe or Asia.

HD: No, no. We boarded the ship and it was called the *SS Abraham Lincoln*--on September the 14th--a troopship. ... That's when we headed out and I think at that time we knew we were heading to Europe, because we're heading for Italy, yes.

SI: What was that trip like?

HD: It was just a regular troopship and, on the way over, we were attacked by a bunch of planes, we lost a couple of ships and, at that time, I was still gung ho. ... I didn't want to go down with the ship and so I joined the gun crew and after that everything was quiet, until we got to Italy.

SI: Where did the planes attack you?

HD: Where? Out in the ocean someplace, I don't know where, but out there somewhere, yes. [laughter]

SI: Was it by Gibraltar?

HD: No, no. We were only a few miles out, it wasn't far. I don't know how soon they got us, but I don't remember how many days we were out before we were attacked, yes.

SI: Were the planes flying from France or Italy?

HD: ... I have no idea. I didn't ask them. [laughter] Nobody told me so I didn't ask them. ... That was kind of scary, though. That was scary, you know.

SI: Did anyone strafe your actual ship or was it just the ships around you?

HD: Just ships around me that were hit, yes. No, we didn't get any attacks at all ourselves, luckily. ...

SI: It was after the convoy was attacked that you joined the gun crew?

HD: Yes, yes. I decided to join the gun crew. I wanted to go down fighting. I was still gung ho, still a young kid, not knowing what the heck I was getting into. ...

SI: You could see from your ship the other ships getting hit and going down?

HD: Yes, oh, yes.

SI: Did the convoy have to keep moving while it was under attack?

HD: Oh, yes, you have to, yes, sure. ... I'm not sure if they blew the airplanes out of the sky or not, I don't remember that.

SI: Did they order everybody down into the hold during the attack?

HD: Yes, yes. You're safer down there, yes.

SI: Most people do not see any combat type action until they are actually in the field.

HD: Yes, you're right.

SI: Did that give you an indication of what kind of danger you were getting in to?

HD: Well, it was starting to set in. It was like rigor mortis. [laughter] ...

SI: Then you went in to Naples, Italy.

HD: We ended up in Naples, Italy, right, yes.

SI: How did you get to the Third Infantry Division? Were you sent to a replacement depot?

HD: Well, when ... they were notified that we were on ship, waiting to be unloaded. They thought that our ship was torpedoed. ... They said, "What men? There's no men there." Yes, we have a whole troopship of men sitting here, waiting here to be assigned. ... Then we were. We left the ship, went to Italy, and then, I was assigned.

SI: How long were you in the holding area before you were assigned?

HD: Oh, about a week or so. ...

SI: What was that like?

HD: More training, it was more training again. ...

SI: How did you feel about not being in a unit yet?

HD: I can't answer that, I don't remember how I felt about it. I guess I was anxious to get started, still being young, not knowing that I could get killed. I was ready to go somewhere, you know. So, pretty soon, they told me, yes.

SI: Was it far enough behind the lines that you would not have to worry about enemy air attacks?

HD: Right, yes.

SI: How did you get up to the line?

HD: Marched, we marched, and my first day in combat was my birthday. I was nineteen years old, October 25th, 1943 in a place called the Volturno River. It was right outside of Naples. That was my first day in combat.

SI: What do you remember about your first day?

HD: Not too much, not too much on that. ... It was one battle after another and of course at that time, about a week or so later, I was wounded. ... I was blown off the side of a mountain and ruptured my left knee and that took me to the hospital for about six months, couldn't move for six months and, of course, the war kept going. ... After that, I rejoined the outfit and they were in a place called Anzio. ... Anzio was such a horrible place to be in, I don't remember any part of Anzio. I remember jumping off into Anzio, and it was a hell spot, and all I know is that while I was in Anzio I received my first Purple Heart, because I was shot up with my left hand, in a tank battle, and I ended up in a hospital again. At that time, I wasn't too happy. [laughter] [Editor's Note: From January 22th, 1944 to June 5th, 1944, Allied forces engaged the Germans during Operation Shingle, the amphibious assault on the Anzio beachhead. The Allies suffered over 43,000 casualties in the ensuing fighting.]

SI: When you were blown off the mountain and ruptured your knee, you received the Purple Heart.

HD: Yes, I'm sorry, that was my first one. My left hand was my second one then I'll come to the third one later, yes. Just be patient we'll get there. [laughter] ... My left hand, I got shot up on May 12th, and I was in the hospital from May to July.

SI: How long were you in Anzio before you were wounded?

HD: A couple of weeks. ... Yes, right. As I said before, I don't know much about Anzio, it was such a hot spot that it's just a blank to me. All I know, at one of the battles I was wounded, and then, I went into the hospital.

SI: You are only initially with the unit for about a week before you were injured.

HD: I think it was a week or so. I could be wrong, but I think so, I'm not sure.

SI: Like were you able to integrate yourself into the unit or get to know anybody before you were injured?

HD: Well, in the service, when you're fighting--and Wayne will verify that--you don't make friends. You have buddies, but you don't make real friends, because you never know if they are going to be there the next second, you know. No, it's a tough way to live it is, but you do what you have to do.

SI: Do you remember the name of the mountain that you were on when you were wounded?

HD: No, I don't know. It might have been a field, it might have been woods, I'm not sure. ...

SI: I'm just trying to get a sense of how far had you gone in that week between your first day in combat and then getting wounded.

HD: Well, as I said before, it's a tough question to ask because I don't remember too much of all the time I was in Anzio. ...

SI: How far had you gone from the Volturno River to that mountain?

HD: I don't remember, can't answer that question at all.

SI: Did you make a lot of forward progress?

HD: Oh, yes, we kept moving. We kept moving, and it was one town after another that we were trying to get, one battle after another, you know.

SI: Had you gone through Naples or were you still trying to get to Naples?

HD: This was beyond Naples.

SI: What was life in the field like?

HD: During or after battles?

SI: During battles.

HD: During the battles, staying alive, that's what you had to do. You had to stay alive because as Wayne knows ... you're trying to stay alive even though you're seeing your buddies fall down right alongside of you, being wounded and killed. You often wondered, "Gee am I going to be next?" Before a battle you're nervous and afraid as like the devil. You can't believe how afraid you are. It's a wonder we didn't die of fright, but once the battle started then you're busy trying to stay alive. Oh yes, war is hell if you want to use that word. [laughter]

SI: How would they prepare you for each day's fighting? Was there an orientation?

HD: Yes, there was always orientation first, which after you've been through a couple you didn't want to hear it anymore, you just as soon go home, you know. I wanted to go home. I wanted to go home to Mom. [laughter] It wasn't fun and games, let me tell you.

SI: Does anything stand out about that first week? What were you doing when you were hit? What were you trying to do?

HD: Just fighting, just fighting. Incidentally I was under General Patton's ... Army, Third Army. I was in Company G, 7th Infantry, 3rd Battalion under General Patton. ... I was in with Patton from the time I was assigned. I was assigned to the 3rd [Infantry] Division which was governed by Patton, and I had been with him ever since, yes.

SI: You mentioned that you remember getting into Anzio. Can you tell us a little bit about that period? Did you go in on a landing ship?

HD: ... I didn't make that landing. All I remember, the part of Anzio before I forgot about everything else, we were in a trench waiting to be called to go into the service, and all I know there were GIs laying around which had been killed right alongside you, and I remember looking at them and this and that, wondering, "God, am I going to be next," you know, and then we were called up, and then after that, I have no recollection after that.

SI: It must have been difficult to go back that second time into Anzio.

HD: Oh, yes, sure, but you do what you have to do. I was not a conscientious objector so you do what you have to do, you know, hoping that you'd get out, that you stay alive the next day, yes.

SI: Do you remember any cases of men that you were with that they refused to go forward?

HD: No, we never had that. ...

SI: At night would you continue fighting, or would you just stay down in a foxhole?

HD: Yes, you would be in a foxhole. There would be lulls--it wouldn't be fighting twenty-four hours a day. You would have skirmishes here and there, as Wayne knows. ... You're not fighting twenty-four hours a day, you know.

SI: Would you be in the foxhole with somebody else?

HD: Always somebody else, right, yes. Because when I had that shrapnel on my left hand I was in the foxhole thinking I was safe, and the tanks attacked and they shot off whatever they did and it hit a tree and I got a piece of the shrapnel in my hand, here. It wasn't very kind of them, no.

SI: The other soldier in the foxhole--was he the one who initially treated you?

HD: No, he was all right. I was the lucky one. ... I ended up in the hospital again. I spent more time in the darn hospital than I did on the frontlines.

SI: What was the hospital like?

HD: They treat you well. ... I had no problems with hospitals, yes. They do what they had to do to get you out and I was always anxious to get back to the service. I was still gung ho.

SI: How were you able to get back to your unit? A lot of soldiers that got wounded would end up in other units.

HD: I always ended up in the same outfit, always ended up in the same outfit. How I did it I don't remember, but I always ended up in the 3rd Division. One time I got back and the lieutenant says, he said, "My God Henry, I thought you were killed." [laughter] I said, "No, here I am." What bothered me was they could have sent a telegram to Mom and Dad saying I was killed dead, you know, but I surprised them--I came back.

SI: Where was the hospital?

HD: It was Naples, it was down in Naples. Naples is a filthy place, filthy place--God it was terrible--yes, but the hospitals were clean.

SI: The Germans did a lot of sabotage in that area. Do you remember seeing wrecked ships and that sort of thing?

HD: Oh, yes, that was always there, yes, right, because that was long after they had left.

SI: Was the German Air Force a big threat while you were in Italy?

HD: Not too much. We had depleted the Air Force. There weren't too many planes left, you know. We were lucky there because being strafed by an airplane is terrible. You can't get away from it, nor can you get away from tanks. ...

SI: When you were on the line, were you ever attacked by airplanes?

HD: Yes, oh, sure. They would strafe us. Not many planes were available, but they used what they had. What are you going to do? ... I rejoined the outfit after I was hit in Anzio. I took part of the invasion of southern France--that was only three months after D-Day--and I was involved. I did my training when I came back from the hospital, rejoined the outfit and I was there long enough to train for the invasion. ... On the invasion itself, we came down the ladder that you see on the ships, climbed down the ladders onto the landing craft and we headed for shore. ... The landing craft hit a water mine and forty men were killed and a half a dozen of us were left. ... There was something on my back--I couldn't move--and I was afraid I was going to drown because the ship was sinking and I could swim like a fish. Finally, one of the survivors came along and cut me loose and I was bleeding--that was my third Purple Heart. So, again I ended up in the hospital. [laughter] I had reservations in the hospital, let me tell you. [laughter] [Editor's Note: On August 15th, 1944, the Allies initiated an amphibious operation in southern France named Operation Dragoon, with American forces suffering over 10,000 casualties.]

SI: What was on your back? Was it just your back pack?

HD: I have no idea. Something was lying on my back, it could have been whatever it was--I couldn't move. I couldn't get out. ... He came along and cut me loose, then we came on shore. I ended up in the hospital for a week or so, and then, I rejoined the outfit again in southern France. ... Of course, during that time we had a lot of battles, town after town until finally at one town that we hit. The Germans counter-attacked with tanks, and we had to give up, we couldn't survive, all we had were infantrymen, and you can't fight tanks with guns. So, we just had to give up. About thirty or forty of us were made prisoners of war, and I was only a prisoner for about two and a half/three months. ... Then, one morning, the Americans overtook the area where we were stationed. The Germans left, and I was back with the Americans.

SI: You captured in the period after the Battle of the Bulge?

HD: I wasn't part of that at all. Fortunately, I wasn't part of the Battle of the Bulge. That happened, but ... not where I was. ... That was out in Bastogne. ... Patton wanted another invasion just three months after D-Day, and he wanted another invasion to get behind the enemy lines because they were getting strong and that's why we went there.

SI: What do you remember about that long period from when you got out of the hospital to when you were captured? What was like daily life like?

HD: ... Get out of the hospital, rejoin the outfit, invasion of Southern France, and then we were captured. It was just one battle after another. There was one battle after another, one town after another we took, you know, and there's one town that we were captured. We were trying to avoid capture so we were running from house to house and it got down where my buddy and I

got to one house and we wanted to run to the next house and he said, "Well, what do you think Henry, do you want to go?" I said, "I'll follow you." So, he took off, and the tank opened up and he disappeared. ... Then we just had to give up, and that was the end. Then, I was a prisoner of war, and then, I was recaptured. So, in a nutshell that's the story of my life in the service.

SI: You were hungry when you were a prisoner of war?

HD: ... Well, a little bit. ... When I came home again I ended up in the hospital. I came home and because of the lack of food and the diet I came down with yellow jaundice, and I couldn't stay out of the darn hospitals. So, I came home and Mom and Dad had to take me to the hospital. I was in there for--I don't know for how long. ... Anyway, but we got through it.

SI: How did the Germans take you from where you had been fighting to wherever they held you?

HD: Walk, walk and walk, just walking. We must have walked three or four hundred miles, maybe five. For three months we just kept walking. The frontlines were moving so fast that they had to keep us ahead of the lines and we just kept going. Food was scarce. I don't know how we ate or what we ate, I have no idea. We sure didn't carry any food with us and the Germans had nothing. So whatever we found in the woods or what have you, we would gather and eat just to survive, you know.

SI: Was it always just this group of thirty to forty guys?

HD: Oh, no, we joined a whole gang, a couple of hundred of them, yes, quite a few.

SI: You make it sound like constant marching. Did they ever put you in temporary camps?

HD: No, maybe for a day or two they would stop, and you'd be sleeping outside all the time, no barracks to stay in. You were always outside in all kinds of weather, you know. You asked about what time of the year [it was]. ... That was April, so it was getting a little warm. March 15th is when I was captured.

SI: It was May when you were liberated?

HD: Yes, you're right. ... March 15th to May 20th.

SI: You were liberated after the Germans had surrendered on May 7th, 1945.

HD: Yes, yes, oh yes, oh, yes. I made the invasion of southern France three months after D-Day, because Patton wanted a group of men to go in behind enemy lines because we were taking kind of a shellacking at that time, so he needed support. Did you ever see the movie *Patton* (1970)? ... I forget who it was, but he was the one in charge of putting us together to make the invasion. Invasion is quite an exciting thing to be part of, let me tell you. All these ships and all blasting away, you know how it is--Wayne you know--but I lived through it, the good Lord was good to me, sure.

SI: When you were wounded on the beach how quickly did they get you off the beach?

HD: Well, that afternoon, because it was a morning assault and because I was bleeding from the eye like crazy, so they took you right off. ... The hospital ship was right out off in the harbor, so they took us right over there.

SI: Being in and out of the unit because of your injuries, was there a lot of turnover?

HD: A lot of turnover, yes, right. See I was in the hospital too much--the only thing I made was PFC. I wasn't there long enough to show what I could do. I should have gotten Congressional Medal of Honor for being in the hospital most of the time. [laughter]

SI: How did you get along with your officers?

HD: Oh, fine, I did okay. You have to get along with them whether you like it or not. ...

SI: When you were in battle did you feel that you always had the supplies?

HD: No, always had what we needed. No, the officers I had no problems [with]. Now, we would have these what they called "ninety-day wonders" you know, but they were knocked off pretty fast. The Germans seemed to single them out, you know, so I'm glad I wasn't an officer. I was just a doughboy. ...

SI: Did you have any contact with civilians in France and Germany?

HD: Once in a while we would. If we overtook a town they would bring out food and wine and stuff like that, yes, because the French people they like their wine, you know, but I didn't become an alcoholic, no. The civilians were fine. They were happy to see us, let me tell you to get out of the German hold that the Germans had, and when the Americans came they were very delighted to see us. They couldn't do enough for us.

SI: What did you think of the Germans as an enemy?

HD: They were like mad dogs, that's all they were, but they weren't bad. I'm glad I was a POW of Germany rather than Japan because the Japanese, they were insane, but the Germans who held us captive, they weren't too bad. I mean they weren't good, they mistreated us a little, didn't feed us or what have you, but at least my recollection being a POW I knew I was okay, but I worried about Mom and Dad receiving the telegram that our son is missing in action. That's what bothered me, because they received three telegrams before that saying I was wounded in action. ... I always say the Germans couldn't kill me so they had to capture me to see what kept me going.

WH: Did you ever get to shoot the breeze with the Germans who took you prisoner?

HD: With the Germans? No. ...

SI: Did you see the Germans more as people once you got closer to them?

HD: Oh, yes, yes. No, as I say, while they didn't mistreat us, ... they didn't treat us good, you know. After all, we were prisoners of war, you know, we were POWs. ... They were all right, but again I was delighted that I was a prisoner rather than fighting. At least I know I was going to get out of this mess alive. ...

SI: Since you were never brought back to an actual prisoner camp, were they able to get word out that you were being held prisoner and were not just missing in action?

HD: No, no.

SI: You were always listed as missing in action.

HD: Missing in action. ...

SI: Your family did not know until the end of the war that you were alive.

HD: Right, yes, absolutely, yes. Once we knew we were safe back in American hands, I forget how I notified Mom and Dad. ...

WD: The Red Cross would have probably handled the notification.

HD: They would have to.

DD: I remember when they found out you were missing.

HD: Yes, yes.

DD: I think your father [had a heart attack].

HD: I got that telegram here.

SI: He had a real heart attack?

DD: Your father fell off the train, had a heart attack that day.

HD: Yes, he did. You're right.

DD: I remember my mother getting the call, ... my mother was his sister, and just coming back and sitting in a chair and crying her eyes out that her brother was missing.

JG: How did you get out of being a POW? How did that take place?

HD: We were in a field ... every night or staying some place and this one morning the Americans overtook the area and the Germans fled. They knew the Americans were close to them so they fled and left us alone. ... The next thing we knew ... the Americans had us. ...

SI: Had you lost a lot of weight during that time?

HD: ... Nothing to eat and walk and walk--good exercise, let me tell you. Yes, I was a picture of health. [laughter]

SI: Did the group lose anybody?

HD: No, no. We did have a nationality that was there, I don't know how he was killed. Whether he tried to escape or not, I don't know, but we had to wait an extra day or so because they had to cremate the guy ... and set him on fire. So, that time we had to wait a day or two until that was done--still outside, you never got inside. If it rained, so you got wet, you know, you sleep wherever you sleep and what have you.

SI: Did the guards mistreat you by hitting you?

HD: No, they weren't brutal. I mean at times it was tough, but it was all right. I say all right--at least I know I was alive. I knew, I realized I wasn't fighting anymore, and I realized 99% I'm going to come out of this alive. I was delighted to be a POW--at least I wasn't fighting anymore. Whether or not we were going over to Japan to fight them, I had no idea. There was some talk about it, but I'm glad I didn't go. ... They didn't ship us out.

SI: When was that, after you had been liberated?

HD: Yes, after I was liberated. We were still fighting Japan, you know, but there was some talk about us going over there, but fortunately we didn't have to go. So, I came home instead where I was safe and cuddly with my parents.

SI: Can you tell us a little more about what it was like living in the field during battle?

HD: It seemed to me normal living ... if I remember. I think it was normal living. You just were hoping that you'd be alive the next night, but without the battles you relax, you didn't have to worry about it. You kept your weapons clean, you had enough food to eat. Americans always made sure you were fed, you know, so it wasn't bad during the interim between the battles. It was just when the battle was coming up, that's when you were scared to death, you know, but it was all right. Fieldwork wasn't bad, being out in the field wasn't bad. It could have been worse, but it wasn't bad.

SI: Are there any battles beside the invasion that stand out?

HD: I think the invasion stood out more than anything else. ... It's everything that you see in the movies, climbing down the side of the ship with the ropes and what have you, and all these ships

shooting at the enemy. ... It's exciting--dangerous, but exciting. Yes, the invasion was the ultimate that, I thought it was great, not wonderful, great, you know.

SI: Did you have any non-physical problems during that period?

HD: No, not until I got home. When I got home then I was nervous and jerky. Of course, I'm always jerky anyway, you know. [laughter]

SI: In these battles, what was the biggest threat, rifle or artillery fire?

HD: Artillery. Oh, you can't get away from that, that's brutal. I mean that was the first thing that I was told when we joined the outfit--during an artillery barrage go as fast as you can away from it, not backwards, frontwards, just get out from under it because that stuff comes all over and, of course, I understand you never hear the one that you get killed with. ... The area always smelled like sulfur after the battle was over, after the artillery was lifted, but no I dreaded the artillery [more] than the rifle. ...

SI: Were you ever able to get better shelter from the artillery like because the foxhole does not give you much protection.

HD: Oh, I know it doesn't. I know it doesn't. You didn't want to stay in a foxhole. You had to keep going because if you were in this area and the artillery was coming in, ... you want to get the heck out of there so you just kept going forward so to keep from getting killed.

SI: Were you ever in a position where you could like see your enemy's faces?

HD: A couple of times we did. That time when we were captured, of course, we did, no question about that, you know, when the tanks surrounded us. We could see the tanks and, of course, you can't do anything with rifles against the tanks, you know. Yes, that's the time we did see them.

SI: Were there other times?

HD: Yes, yes, there were other times when you knew you were fighting Germans. ...

SI: Did that make it different to be able to see the enemy? Most people we talked to say that war is kind of impersonal and that you do not see the people you are actually shooting at.

HD: Not really, not really, no.

SI: Was it usually just the case of you firing a general direction and providing cover fire?

HD: Yes, you had gun emplacements and they would put up defenses, and you had to eliminate them. So, you would attack that particular area and fight like the devil to overtake them, so you can move on, yes. ... Don't ask me how many Germans I killed, I have no idea. I won't say that,

I have no idea. It's not something that I'm proud of, but you do what you have to do to survive. It's to survive.

WH: Do you remember any cease fires for the holidays?

HD: Cease fire? ... No we never had that.

SI: Did they ever pull you back for rest and relaxation?

HD: Oh, yes, yes. [laughter] Oh, a funny thing happened. This time, I ended up in the hospital again. We went to Rome and we were on furlough for thirty days leave, whatever it was, and I had a particular guard duty. So, we were marching along, and all of a sudden I had a bayonet go through my foot, and I said, "What the heck is that?" ... I stepped on it real hard and somebody had lost his knife or bayonet, but I found it for him. [laughter] I ended up in the hospital again. You know a story I tell about that--it's not true. I said, "Yes, we were in hand to hand battle and we were fighting the Germans and I had one German, he and I were fighting each other and he came after me with his bayonet, I shot him dead, he fell and his rifle went into my foot," which is not true. It sounded exciting though, doesn't it? So, I ended up in the hospital again.

SI: How long were you in the hospital that time?

HD: A couple of weeks. ... It was a cut about that deep, but that healed pretty fast.

SI: Do you remember the weather? Did it affect you?

HD: The weather never seemed to bother me.

WD: Of course not, you were in the hospital.

HD: You're right, the hospitals were warm--the nurses were beautiful. [laughter]

SI: When you were a prisoner did you have to march through snow?

HD: It was April to May so it was clear, but we just kept walking and walking and fortunately, the Germans had to walk to, the guys that were guarding us, they had the same walk, the same march that we had. We just kept going.

SI: Were your boots able to hold up or did you have to like start repairing your boots yourself?

HD: I don't remember that. I remember one time we were laying over in Stuttgart, Germany and I remember we were in that area and a couple of German rocket planes flew over so low it scared us to death. I don't know where it came from, I have no idea. I remember that part of it, being a prisoner. That was in Germany. ...

SI: You mentioned that they did not give you much food and that you had to get your own food.

HD: Whatever you find [you eat]. I remember I told Jenny a bunch of times, we found sugar beets in a field, so we ate them. We had diarrhea for a week, yes. Oh they tasted good, but not when it went out. Yes, yes, sugar beets they're brutal, they were brutal. I don't know how we ate. ... The Germans didn't have much to feed themselves, but we stayed alive. ...

SI: Did anybody ever talk about trying to escape?

HD: We thought about it to be honest with you, but we were so far behind enemy lines, what can we do? We had no rifles, no ammunition, and no nothing so we felt we're safe enough where we are, let's stay here, to heck with it. No, we thought about that many times. We could escape, but we'd only get recaptured and of course they may just kill you for trying to escape, so I figured I'm safe where I am.

SI: Did anybody in the larger group try to escape?

HD: No, we all had the same idea to stay where we are.

SI: Were the guards older men?

HD: Mixed. I would say mixed, yes.

SI: When you were in battle did you know if the people you were fighting were SS or regular Army?

HD: They were all regular Army. We didn't run into the SS. No, they were just regular Army people. ... The SS would be more vicious, right, but the regular Army were just like us. They were just trying to stay alive, same as we were.

SI: The SS units were not in your area.

HD: Oh, yes, right. They were not in our area.

SI: What was it like to meet your parents again after you had been a prisoner? What was the homecoming like?

HD: Ask Dorothy.

DD: I was, I think, seven years old and we were at my grandmother's house which would be his mother. ... Knock on the door, and it was Uncle Henry. So, I opened the door and he picked my sister and I up and swung us around and around. ... From the kitchen I could hear his mother like, "Heeeeeeeeeeeenry," like, "Oh, God." He was home and he was alive and that's my big memory from Uncle Henry coming home.

HD: Mom and Dad said, "Damn it, he's home." [laughter]

DD: It was very exciting to be there and if you could have heard my grandmother's voice it brings tears to my eyes every time I even think about how the sound in her voice when she knew he was home and safe.

SI: Did anyone know he was coming home?

DD: I was only eight. I don't know.

HD: I don't remember when I notified Mom and Dad I was coming home. I have no idea. I don't even remember if I called them or I just walked in. I don't know Dorothy, sixty-five years ago, [it's] hard to remember.

JG: You wrote them a letter to tell your sisters to get ready. You wanted to take them out roller skating or something. I wish I had brought those letters. I have some of them at home.

HD: I had to notify them somehow.

JG: You were talking about your now twenty-eight inch waist because you had lost so much weight, that you were telling them that you were starting to put inches on, that you were getting back to your normal weight. You wrote down your measurements, my waist is this, and my height is this, I weigh that, yes. ... You said tell Grace and Violet to get ready, you know, I want to take them out on the town or something. So, you were writing to them before you came home.

HD: Okay, I had to. It could have been just that time I walked in the house. Many years ago, many years ago, details I forget, you know, I forget what I had for breakfast yesterday. [laughter]

SI: How long did you have to stay in the Army after you came home?

HD: Oh, I was discharged within a couple of months, it wasn't long.

SI: Did they have you do anything else or was it just a matter of getting you better?

HD: Just a matter of getting out that's all, but I didn't get yellow jaundice until I got home. I think I was still in the service, I'm not sure. Again, I stayed at the hospital. I had permanent residence in the hospital. ...

SI: You said that in general, the treatment that you got was good. Were there any hospitals that were better or worse than others?

HD: ... Oh, no, they were all good. We were treated like kings all the time. ... I had no problem there. They fed us well, treated us good ... because they wanted to get us healed up so we could get back, but my longest time in the hospital was the knee, I was three or four or five months in the hospital. I couldn't walk. I remember the first day I was able to walk, what a glorious feeling that was. The doctor said, "Okay, Henry now you can walk." I took a couple of

steps and it was like a miracle because I wasn't able to walk for quite a while and that knee has been giving me trouble ever since.

SI: Do you have lasting effects from your wounds?

HD: Yes, right. It swells up--my daughter Jennifer knows that.

JD: He gets water on the knee a lot and they have to drain it.

DD: I remember one other thing from the day you came home. That night all the family came over.

HD: Yes, yes.

DD: Everybody was asking you questions.

HD: Yes, yes. I remember the next morning, Dad's breakfast. He would cook ham and eggs by the hundreds because everybody was there. That I remember. My home life I remember more than I do the Army, yes.

SI: The food must have been better.

HD: I left a daughter's name off that list [the pre-interview survey], Judy. ... I'll put her down here.

DD: ... Judy's birthday is March 26th.

JD: I'm '54, so she must have been '55.

HD: Here it said any of my children served, I said no, [but] yes, there were two. ... Where do you want me to put that?

SI: You can just say it in the tape then. We are correcting Mr. Duerkes responses in pre-interview survey.

HD: Right, yes, because in the interview they asked me did any of my children serve in the military and I said, no, but it is yes. I had James, which I have that information here. He was in the service ... September '67, and then, John, he was in Germany in '72. ... When were you there? ...

WD: '65, '66, '68. He [James] was in '67. He was discharged in '69.

SI: According to the pre-interview survey, you got married before you went overseas?

HD: No.

SI: When were you married?

JG: 1946.

HD: Got that right here, '46, August 24th, 1946. Now, I remember. Don't tell my wife though, all right?

SI: Had you known your wife before you went into the service?

HD: No, no.

SI: So you met after you came back.

HD: Yes, yes.

SI: How did you meet?

HD: My sisters worked in Asbury Park in the "five and ten" and they knew a lot of women. So, when I was home they invited a lot of women to come visit me, take me out on dates and what have you, and during that time I singled out my wife to be my girl. Yes, I fell in love with her right away. ... She was special.

SI: What was her name for the record?

HD: Ida Mary Carver was her name, right.

SI: Did you make use of any of the GI Bill benefits?

HD: I went to night school, took up accounting and what have you in Neptune for about a year or so. That was the only thing I took for GI benefits. I do receive a disability of 30% for wounds received in action, I get that.

SI: What about the GI mortgage?

HD: My first house I did use that, yes, right, yes.

SI: Did you go to work right away after you came back or did you take some time off?

HD: No, I came home, and within a couple of weeks I started to work for New Jersey Natural Gas Company in '45. ... I was with them for twenty years until I left, and then, went to other businesses. Then I ended up owning and operating my own plumbing and heating business up until about three or four months ago. Then, I had to close it up because of health reasons.

SI: How did you come across the job in New Jersey Natural Gas Company?

HD: I just applied for it. At that time jobs were plentiful because the GIs were coming home and I was able to apply for, I worked in the general accounting department in Asbury Park, then I became district manager, and then, commercial and industrial representative. ... Then I got tired of working for them, and then left and went into the other businesses, then ended up in my own operation.

SI: You have seven children. Is there a reason why all their names start with the letter "J?"

HD: We didn't start it out to be that way, because the first name was Jimmy, and then there was John. We started with "Js." ... I'm Henry, "H," my wife is "I," and then, "J." I said, "Let's stay with all "Js." "H" and "I" and the seven "Js."

JG: There is you and Mom when you came home.

HD: Yes, that was my pretty girl. ... My outfit [was the] 3rd Division blue and white outfit, yes.

SI: Why were you still in uniform?

HD: I was home on furlough. I was home on furlough, I wasn't discharged. Oh, yes, look at my citations there, I'll be darned, yes, look at that. I got my Purple Heart in there, ... and I got my POW thing in here, I'm sure you've seen all that. Yes, it had to be before I was discharged, yes, I forgot that. I knew Mom before I was discharged, but that was after I came home though.

WH: Did you ever travel back to Europe and revisit any of the locations you had been to as a soldier?

HD: I had occasion to go back, because my son John served in Germany for communications or something like that. So my wife and I decided to go over there and join him and I went over to this town where I was recaptured in Germany, but nobody recognized me, couldn't understand it, fifty years later nobody knew I was around. ... We went over there and I had business to attend to while we were there ... for my business anyway. So, we were there for a while.

SI: Was it difficult to go back to these places?

HD: No, not really. We knew it was safe and clear. This is fifty, sixty years later, you know, maybe forty years, I don't remember.

JG: He never talked about the war, never.

HD: It took me fifty years to even talk about it.

JG: None of us knew.

SI: It sounds like you put a lot of it out of your mind, which is common.

HD: Like it never happened, like it never happened. I mean I never gave it a second thought until one day I was working on a customer's house. Dorothy never heard this. ... We were talking about playing golf and I said, "Well, I don't like golf because it's too much walking." I said, "I walked enough when I was a POW." "You were what?" His brother ran a newspaper in Point Pleasant Beach. Couple of weeks later I was interviewed by him and I had quite an article written ... for me on that. That was pretty good.

JG: That is when he started talking about it. But before that, all our childhood, he would never. ... My husband's father talked about the war all the time, you know, but we really didn't have any stories from him until much later in life.

WD: He talked with me about it once. I was a young boy, I was visiting at your house, me and Jimmy were in the backyard, this is when you lived out there by the cornfields. You were cutting the lawn, and because I remember this, you hit pine cone and it shot out and hit Jimmy, he fell off the swing, and Jimmy was, you know, like most of us young men, "Ooo," and you said, "That's not as bad as getting shot," and I just stood there and I walked over and said, "Were you shot?" You took me to the back step, we sat down there and you told me, "Getting shot is not as bad as worrying about it." ... I can remember. ... I don't know how old I was at the time, ten, twelve, something like that.

HD: Yes, right. Probably the only time I ever talked about it because I forgot all about it. [It] just didn't enter my mind after that. ... I would wake up screaming at times, nervous and jerky, you know. Of course, I'm jerky anyway. ...

SI: You would have nightmares?

HD: Yes, yes. It's obvious, you know.

SI: A lot of airmen said they would not fly after the war. Was there anything that you would not do?

HD: Well, I told you before that I only regret that I'm too old to fight for my country again. I'll do it in a minute believe me. I love my country, I love the flag.

JG: The only thing you hated was walking. I know you didn't like to take long walks.

SI: Did the cold bother you?

HD: The cold?

SI: Yes, like cold weather or walking in cold weather?

HD: Now it does because I got a problem with my lungs. ... During the war I was cold, oh, yes-frozen at times. ...

SI: Did you have any problems with frostbite?

HD: I had that. ... Boy that burns like the devil--burns like the devil--but I didn't go to the hospital for it. [laughter]

SI: Is there anything you would like to add? Do you want to say the names of your children?

HD: ... My first child was James Michael Duerkes, born December 22nd, '47. The next one was John. ... He was born November 29th in '52. Then Jane was February 16th, '54. When was Judy born?

JG: March 26, 1955.

HD: We had Jerry, June 1st, in '57, and then, Jennifer, July 10th, '59, ... and then, my last one was Jeffrey, May 22nd, '61.

SI: When your sons came of age to go into the military, how did you feel about that?

HD: I wanted no part of it. My wife, she cried to death when--we didn't think Jimmy would be drafted because he had an ear problem, but they drafted him anyway, you know, but John was all right. This is long after the war, but James went to Vietnam--where Wayne was--but he was in communications fortunately. ... He was safe enough, if you want to call it safe enough. He wasn't fighting, yes.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record, or anything that we missed?

HD: ... I think that about winds it up.

SI: Okay, again if there is anything that you remember that you want to add to the record, you can do that later.

HD: Okay, will do. I do thank you for this interview. I appreciate it.

SI: Well, thank you very much. We appreciate everybody's time.

HD: I hope you don't mind my gang. ...

SI: Let me ask them, are there any other stories that you heard that you would like to either tell or prompt him to tell?

DD: I remember that when he was in the Army that his mother went to mass every day. My sister and I stayed with my grandmother for a little while when my parents were moving down the shore, and so we were there for about half a year I think. ... Every day we went to mass with Nana.

HD: Well, it worked, it worked.

DD: She was quite a person. ... She was out there praying for those boys.

MR: Did Uncle Bob make it home before Henry?

DD: That I do not remember. I don't remember him coming home.

HD: I don't either.

MR: The only thing I remember about Uncle Bob being in the service was Nana looking out the window every morning and saying, "Red in the morning, sailor take warning, red at night is sailor's delight.

HD: Right, red at night is sailor's delight. ...

MR: She would be looking out to see whether it was a good day for Bob or not.

HD: ... If I remember Uncle Bob's story, they were attacked one time and they did shoot the plane down. ... Bob said all he remembers is the plane came over the ship and ended up in the ocean and Uncle Bob was worried about the pilot, that he was dead. ... That's the only time Bob ever said anything.

MR: I think some of the guys were killed during that time. I remember him saying that someone said, "Bob why don't you come up here and sit by me," and he said, "No, its okay I'll stay where I am," or something. ... That guy got killed.

HD: Willy, yes. ...

SI: You mentioned writing letters to your family. Did you write to them often or were you able to receive letters from your family?

HD: Occasionally, we would. When you're up in a battle, you don't have time to write, but when you came back for rest area for a couple of days then you would get the mail call and I would receive a letter now and then. ... I don't know if I wrote a lot, I don't remember that. I don't remember if I had time to write or even if I owned a pen.

SI: How important was it to get the mail? Did it boost your morale?

HD: Oh, yes, it would help. Mail will always help, getting mail from home, no question about that, sure.

SI: Were there other things that would boost your morale?

WD: You want me to have Jenny leave the room? [laughter]

HD: Just knowing that you lived through the day, that's what would boost your morale, yes, absolutely, yes.

SI: What about church services?

HD: We would have that when they could have it, oh, yes. We always went to services when they were held, of course, and the Army was very good at that. We always had a chaplain and priest that came along with us and when it was quiet we would have services, yes.

SI: Did you find yourself praying more?

HD: ... When I did guard duty, all I did was pray the rosary. I would pray the rosary every time I would have guard duty. I knew how long it was to say the rosary and if I was on guard duty for two hours--you're on for two, off for four--and I would say the rosary, and I think that's what brought me through was that. Yes, very religious, [I was] a very religious man, yes.

SI: How long would it take you to say the rosary?

HD: Maybe ten minutes, something like that.

DD: For each station yes. Depends on how fast your Hail Mary is. [laughter]

HD: Well, I was in no hurry.

DD: I think it takes me right out of a half hour from beginning to end because sometimes while I'm driving home in a storm, I do that to keep myself from being afraid. It will take right out of a half hour to drive home.

HD: I didn't think it was corny to say the rosary.

SI: No, no.

HD: Let me tell you.

SI: Did you have a lucky rosary?

HD: No.

SI: Did you have any lucky charms?

HD: No. Never had any, no.

SI: You never had a lucky rabbit's foot or anything?

HD: No, no, none of that. If I had a rabbit's foot, I probably would have eaten it. ...

SI: I see that you still have your medals, documents, and decorations from the time you served.

HD: [Yes.] That's the Purple Heart, this is the Prisoner of War Medal, this was the write up which we've just been through. That's the write up that was done, I forget when.

SI: This is from 2002, *The Ocean Star*.

HD: ... If you want that you may have it.

SI: Do you have another copy of it?

HD: ... Yes.

SI: Is it all right if we take this copy?

DD: I made copies for all of my children. ...

SI: Thank you for bringing all these materials out for the interview.

HD: You're very welcome.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record?

HD: That's it for now.

SI: All right. Thank you very much, we appreciate it.

HD: I think you have covered the waterfront.

SI: We appreciate your time and your service to the country.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 04/5/2012

Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 04/10/2012

Reviewed by Jennifer Gray 05/7/2012