

Veteran:
James Dempsey

Interviewer:
Ryan Pong
Hudson Falls H.S.

Interviewed:
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Hudson Falls H.S.
Hudson Falls, NY

Interviewer: INT
Veteran: JD

INT: How did you get into the service in New York?

JD: I was drafted actually; my room number voter name was 158 that was the 1st number that was picked out of the draft. My father was on the draft board, so I never knew how we didn't get a wind of that so I scooted right in and spent 4 years.

INT: So you were 4 Years in (Inaudible)?

JD: I Think

INT: So how long did you train for?

JD: Pardon?

INT: How long did you train for before you um got to use a B-25?

JD: Oh we trained in the United States for about uh, 6 months, actually we trained in B-17s, and when I got overseas we switched to the B-25 (Inaudible) ... much about airplanes

INT: Its 4 O'clock

INT: Quicker

JD: Oh yeah

INT: B-17's they lost a lot of them on their base

JD: And a lot of great B-25s

INT: Yeah, I have a book I read that has all-all the aircraft in World War II in it, from the other German, American--

C: What was written about the B-25s was interesting 'cause they were the ones that learned how to do it over here

INT: So what-what was it like to be a B-25 tail gunner?

JD: Well it was a little bumpy, 'cause you would run into turbulence, I'm in the back of the tail of the plane which goes like this and the front end goes like this, so it was a little bit bumpy, but I got used to it. There was barely any space just big enough for your body, no room to move around at all, I had to crawl in and back out.

INT: Was it like the B-17 where they put you in there and (Inaudible) holds a door and you (Inaudible) leave it all in?

JD: No, we came in the back hatch; dropped down... you got a 25 there?

INT: It's a 25...it's not a big picture of the hatch

JD: (Inaudible)...it's about as fine as I've seen it. The beauty of this is that if you get into any uh shootouts, all I had to do was we had a plastic closed rear end, bullet proof on the sides and if we started going down, all I had to do was we had a red handle, all I had to do was pull that handle and id shoot out right out of the tail, I never had to do it but it was nice to know it was there

INT: Yeah I'm sure--

JD: It was the safest part of the plane actually

INT: (Inaudible Question)

JD: Pardon?

INT: It said in the article you served in Italy. What was the role that you guys played in Italy?

JD: Well we were uh - Laval Corps was the biggest force in German army and they...they tried to take over Africa and when they got... when the English pushed them out of there they came across the Mediterranean and went into Italy on their way back to Germany and they were ruling everything in Italy too so we were assigned the task of getting them peppered, we did- we- eventually we forced them (Inaudible) to the mountain alps, (Inaudible)

INT: They what?

JD: They stopped there, ya' know and they bombed Laval Corps
(Inaudible interaction)

INT: So basically you guys were just doing bombing runs right?

JD: We did bombing uh...uh we didn't do any anti-personal bombing, we just, we (Inaudible)... bridges. See there were very few roads over the mountains and then we had the caves were hard to get through the whole way. They had all these caves thrown about bridges (Inaudible) and what they did was we would come over certain targets, they knew we were gonna bomb them they pulled the bridges right into the cave with big cables. We dropped our bombs thinking we hit the bridge, we come back- surveillance plane come back after the bridge. Bridge was right back where it was.

INT: Yeah, they were thinking about you guys using those bridges.

INT: Were you involved in the bombing of Cassino [Monte Cassino] the Italian monastery that was on a mountain top? Were you involved in that? It's written that you did a lot of major bombings up the Italian coast.

JD: We bombed uh mostly – central and northern Italy. In fact after we got Laval Corps backed into the mountains we changed our base to parts of criminity which is in northern Italy. Now before that we were flying 500 miles for a target and 500 miles back, Sometimes we didn't make it we didn't have enough gas sometimes .

INT: Since you guys were flying 500 Miles did you have fighter escorts?

JD: Oh no...there were no fighter options to begin with the air force was practically depleted at that time

INT: So you guys didn't have the bomber/fighters at all?

JD: Nope

INT: I was reading in the paper about the experience you had on the um plane where you guys lost the tail

JD: Yeah...I was in the tail when it hit. Cut half of it off, luckily it was far away from me it was deflected ... (Inaudible)... 'cause the wood was coming right through... (Inaudible)... luckily the pilot was so well experienced he was able to get back to the base

INT: I heard stories about how many times ... (Inaudible) the way you describe it

JD: 500 some odd holes in the plane when we came back, and then the crew chief was going crazy, "I had to patch the damn holes up in this damn plane, get smart!"

INT: So how much flak did you guys have to deal with when flying over the targets, was there a lot of flak in some places or?

JD: Oh every place everybody had flak, in fact you would get flak on the way to the position, going through central Italy, they had...flak batteries all over the place, we may be flying 100 miles away from our target and all of a sudden BOOM BOOM BOOM! They never knew how high we were, that was our... 'Cause we flew at different altitudes about every 20 minutes to keep away from the stated altitude we were flying 'cause you could alter the flight plan if we needed to.

INT: Yeah I heard that you guys didn't like paper trails to much ... (Inaudible)

JD: yeah well also we threw flak – or we threw shredded foil out when we were heading through flak and that screws up there radar, the foil going through the air, makes the radar absolutely ... (Inaudible)

INT: So they just started shooting blind through the air?

INT: Do you have - do you remember any like combat mission that you did that just stands out

in your mind?

JD: Pardon?

INT: Was there like any combat mission that you did that stands out in your mind?

JD: I'm a little hard of hearing you guys should speak up

INT: Was there any combat mission that you really remember well like, any of them that stand out in your mind?

JD: The one that the tail got shot off in is very much in my mind because I was that far from death. Although, we had another mission that uh, we rolled over the target, and we opened up the bomb bays, this was an anti-personal target, and we went and rolled up, and the bays...the bays...the bombs didn't release, the trigger mechanism was open but for some reason they all stuck in there, now we gotta' go back, land with a bomb bay full of bombs, and land with bombs? We tried – we tried to get rid of them we couldn't shake 'em loose the pilot says if you wanna' – if you guys wanna' jump out ill bring the plane in myself and we all said no, we all gonna' stick with you all the way through and we landed that plane just as smooth as can be, never knocked one lose.

INT: Did you guys have anything like that ever happened like that again, any malfunctions like that?

JD: No

INT: Do you have any really interesting experiences on the ground, like when you were off duty?

JD: I'm not gonna' put that in there *chuckles* ... (Inaudible)...One of the things I saw was Benito Mussolini hanging by his heels in -

INT: So you guys -- You actually saw him? From the hanging?

JD: ... (Inaudible)...I got pictures of him somewhere; I carry them on camera everywhere at length

INT: Do you have a lot of pictures?

INT: Are there any circumstances of any one taking their own life?

JD: Of taking a what?

INT: Taking their own life.

JD: Oh no, they didn't take their own, in fact our ground forces were a ... (Inaudible)...army, the biggest force they had, they didn't stay mobile, they kept on their tail, they did a lot of damage, ... (Inaudible)...

INT: (Inaudible Question)

JD: ... (Inaudible)...we had a bombing raid 2 weeks before that, so they weren't too happy to see us.

INT: So what kind of missions did you run into Germany?

JD: We didn't run into Germany at all, just training.

INT: Yeah because I know that toward the end of the war, a lot of the bombing raids were toward the south too.

JD: Yeah that includes a lot of B-17s. And B-24s and there the long distance craft.

INT: So how did you feel when the war ended? Free?

JD: Our crew's destined to go to the south certainly... (Inaudible)... back to the states to get out I had enough points to get out, I had been living there 4 years. My crew's all fairly newcomers to the service, I was late and they took off without me and I got ... (Inaudible)...

INT: So you were there for 4 years then?

JD: mhm

INT: So you ran Italy and to North Africa?

JD: I didn't go to North Africa the only overseas duty I had was Italy...I spent the first 2 ½ years of my service in the Coast Guard Auxiliary. ... (Inaudible) Puget sound navy area.... (Inaudible)...

INT: So what did you do after the war? What was your occupation?

JD: My occupation? My family had a concrete (Inaudible) in south Glens Falls, actually it was in Hudson falls. When I first got out of the service, I went to work for my father. We built a big plant out near Glens Falls, that was... I was getting into the structural steam business making frames for big buildings. That kept me busy. That's what I did until I was 72 until I retired. That was long ago. ... (Inaudible)...

INT: So how did the movie version go when you guys went there? ... (Inaudible)...

JD: The night they showed it?

INT: Yeah, uh like um I read about that paper that was... (Inaudible)...

JD: It's... basically everything I did in the service, very well done documentary. My daughter is taking a film making course at Skidmore, Should of gotten an A+ for making that movie. She did the background music, everything. She put a lot of personal information about me. ... (Inaudible)...

JD: What they did with the B-25 after Italy, they took them back to the States, and refitted them, they put a gun in the nose, a 37mm caliber cannon in the nose 'cause they were ... (Inaudible)...

INT: Yeah I read they changed the post 9/11... saw another interesting thing was this was the same kind of plane that hit up the upper world trade center buildings .

JD: Oh yeah, na that was a bigger plane. A 307s or something like that...1...2 guys like that can do that much damage...how many people been were killed now? 900? Quite a few.

INT: Too many right?

INT: So how many planes did you fly in formation when you...

JD: Well we had a squadron which made up of 16 planes. Each mission – that sometimes would break the away and uh one plane would have bottles were dropped, and after the bottles were dropped one plane would circle back around and come back over the target and take pictures of it. ... (Inaudible)...

INT: So you guys were -

JD I flew 50 missions, I flew 100-

INT: So you guys did reconnaissance?

JD: Yeah

INT: Interesting

JD: ... (Inaudible)... transition the whole target, you could one that was planted a mile away or it showed up in a picture

INT: That's pretty interesting because that's like a part of the war that was... (Inaudible)... part of the war I thought that was most interesting was the air war. That's why I'm glad I'm here – 'cause I wanna' to hear what's it was like to be in the planes. I heard one story that it was really cold

JD: Well yeah well you know yeah... electrical planks... (Inaudible)...heated us up, in fact uh – part of the things I mentioned in that interview was that fact I had to take 2 of them back and throw them away. ... (inaudible)... Plane go like that, then tilt up like that again, I was there holding back there holding on for dear life. I came to the uh the sergeant of supplies, I don't own the damn things so dig a hole burry them. That's \$300!

INT: Did you serve with the same crew the whole time?

JD: Yup

INT: Did you guys ever lose anybody on a mission?

JD: Did we ever lose anybody? No we had uh – one of the co-pilots got hit, wacked through his helmet, nicked his skull, but it did knock him out. He did. He got a purple heart for that. He was bragging for quite a while though *laughs*

INT: He's a lucky bird though I mean --

JD: The gunner, the mid gunner the guy in the middle of the plane got hit by flak; we wore flak vests, heavy armor vest. He got hit right here. Knocked him out and I was in the tail and the pilot says I think you better go up and check on him; he got hit on the head. I got back there, and I got the old smelling salts out, starting rubbing it on his nose, "ah what the hell you doing he had a welt on his skin like that through the flak suit. If he didn't have that it on it would of gone right through his body.

INT: So where did you guys uh, where, what was the air fields ...(Inaudible)...

JD: The what?

INT: Which Airfields did you (inaudible) from?

JD: Of course we had our own field there; the Corps of engineers came in, cleared off a lot of land and put these metal runways in. ...(Inaudible)... we trained in Colombia South Carolina... FT Meyers, Florida

INT: So you got to see a lot of places? Travel the world?

JD: Yeah

INT: So what did you do training to be a tail gunner? Was it different from every training?

JD: It started how to take a gun apart and put it back together again. If the gun jammed on you, you had to ... (Inaudible)... we could draw the gun right back into the turret. The gun rotated like that, you could see somebody up there you just turn it on. We had tracer bullets. Every 4th bullet was a tracer; which gave you an idea of where they were going. We trained in South Carolina against uh B-26's which were... (Inaudible)... and we were actually shooting at those planes. It was a dud bullet but it was colored. When we came back we saw many of your bullets hit that plane. ...(Inaudible)...

INT: So while you were a tail gunner did you shoot any planes?

JD: Never got attacked.