

**Harold Russell Deneger
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on October 3, 2003, 1:15 p.m.
Division of Military Naval Affairs
Latham, New York**

Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

HD: Harold Russell Deneger, May 12, 1921, Hudson New York

Q: What was your educational background before entering the service?

HD: I graduated from Pharmacy College in January of 1943, but I was already in service. I enlisted in the reserve corps. in October of 1942. We were supposed to be called up as soon as we graduated, but the army was not too organized and instead of being called up on January 18th when we graduated, it was June before I got in. I think I received the notice on May 22nd.

Q: What do you recall about Pearl Harbor? Where were you and what was your reaction?

HD: I remember exactly where I was. I was in my apartment, my feet up on the desk, the window was open. It was a beautiful afternoon. I was listening to music and trying to study when I got the news of Pearl Harbor. That night, my buddy and I went over to see the dean to ask what we should do. He said "Boys, now don't do anything drastic until we see what is going on". So, I continued my education and enlisted in October.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

HD: I went in with 16 or 17 fellows from pharmacy college. We went to Camp Upton on Long Island, and all of us except for 2 went to Camp Pickett for medical training. I don't know where the other fellow went. I went to Artillery school and Camp McQuaide in California. I trained on 155 guns. I think I was the only pharmacist that was ever in the army and helped fire a 16 inch gun, 155 gun, anti aircraft gun, machine guns, and everything else. It took me almost a year to get to the pharmacy corp.

Q: Where were you stationed with the artillery?

HD: I went to Fort Funston California, which was right outside San Francisco. I was lucky in some ways. Most of my company, by that time did not need coast artillery. They switched them to field artillery for European service. Another fellow and I were left in

camp. I was all alone in my hut for 10 or 12 days. I used to play poker with the officers, which was against the rules I guess. Then one day I got the orders to report to Fort Funston, outside San Francisco, and I was there until the following May. Then I persuaded a captain to get me a transfer to the medics. I continued to be with the coast artillery all the rest of my career but I served with service commander in pharmacy.

Q: So you stayed on the West Coast?

HD: Yes. I went from Fort Funston to Fort Scott. I could look out of my window and see the Golden Gate Bridge. I could look out my other window and see Alcatraz island. When I walked in that day off the mail truck, Major Rossy (a doctor) said "Well, we'll probably keep you here for a couple of months and teach you the army way of doing pharmacy and then you'll ship out." I watched Major Rossy go out to seas and come back again, and I was still there. Sometimes you get lucky.

Q: What were some of your duties in the artillery unit?

HD: I was powder man. I helped handle the bags of powder that went into the 155s. We each had charge of one gun. When we finally came to real practice, our first shot knocked the target out of the water in the Pacific Ocean. I don't think anyone else had ever done that so, it was probably pure luck. But I was the man who slipped the powder in there, and then stepped back for the firing. Then the same thing came along when we went up to San Francisco. We only fired the guns I think twice while I was there, but I will never forget the first firing. Again, I was the powder man and there you had a big bag that you would bring the powder in and shoved it in. The men in offices who fired the first time I was there had never fired before. They had forgotten that in between times, the birds and pigeons built nests because these things were all underground. Well when we fired, birds' nests, dirt and dust came down. They forgot to take the manhole covers off the floor and they jumped right up and hit a couple of guys. We learned a lot with that first firing, but it was interesting.

Q: As a pharmacist, what were your duties?

HD: When I arrived at Fort Scott, there were a couple of pharmacists; one of which had been discharged immediately. He had been serving almost 3-4 years in the army. I don't know what the reason was. The other one was a man named sergeant Kyle who was not a pharmacist, but had been trained in pharmacy and I worked with sergeant Kyle for about a year. He was a very nice fellow. Then he got discharged and I was pharmacist in chief at Fort Scott for a while, a T4, but that was very satisfactory for me.

Q: So, being a pharmacist wasn't considered an officer's field?

HD: I was on guard duty at Fort Funston one night, with another fellow- he was also a pharmacist. We were sitting there in the guard house and an announcement came over the radio because the army was urging pharmacists to enlist as they needed them. Well

this fellow very slowly lowered his feet to the floor and says “Did you hear that guy?” because here they are urging pharmacists to enlist, but they had two of us on guard duty. But no, they didn’t offer commissions in that field unless you went on and took OCS or something of that sort. But when I was in the gunnery outfit at Fort Funston, I kept trying to get transferred to the medics, and the commander at the time- well he was lieutenant, and before I left he became a captain- said “If you apply for OCS because you qualified, then I’ll see if I can get you transferred to the medics if you don’t like it”. Well I went for an OCS board and a full colonel and a bunch of lesser officers questioned me on pharmacy and I answered the questions the best I could. Finally, a little lieutenant asked me “Soldier, why do you want to be an officer?” and I said “Sir, I don’t want to be an officer, I just want to be a pharmacist.” Well you could have heard a pin drop and of course my application came back rejected. But when the captain noticed that I had been rejected from the OCS he said “Okay, I made my promise” so he got me transferred to the pharmacy unit at Fort Scott which was very good. And I was very happy. I learned a lot, even there with army pharmacy because we treated all kinds of men and we learned a lot of psychology too. Also, as a pharmacist, you act as an aid man. I drew blood and sewed up a fellow one night that had a big cut on the top of his head from logs swimming in the ocean. I was in charge of giving all the shots for the end of the war. I would go around with a couple of men and making sure everyone got their shot and checking them off the list. So it was a very satisfactory army experience.

Q: Did you ever get to see any of the USO shows?

HD: Just one when I was in training camp. A fellow by the name of O’Brien I remember was the movie actor and I forgot who else it was, some woman who had come through to a USO show. Fortunately, Fort Funston and Fort Scott were both close to the shows and stuff in San Francisco. I saw a lot of shows and musicals of that sort in opera houses and playhouses in San Francisco. I saw “The Corn is Green” and I saw the black singer who got in trouble because of his affiliation with the communists- Paul Robeson. A lot of my friends did the same and took advantage of it. The other thing I would say about being there was being bored. Half the time, you would go in mornings and you didn’t have much to do unless you had preparations or something of that sort. So the rest of the day drove you nuts.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

HD: I certainly do. I had decided that in my spare time I would get a job in a pharmacy in San Francisco in my hours off. I was talking to the store owner by the name of Bowerman when the news came over the radio as we stood there talking.

Q: Do you remember what the reaction was?

HD: I was very upset because I was a big admirer of Roosevelt. And having come from German town, just a little ways from the park, my grandfather was a democrat that had been down to Roosevelt's place a few times. So I felt very bad about it. Right now I'm reading Ernie's war and I think I felt just as bad when Ernie Pyle was killed. Certainly, Roosevelt's death was a shock.

Q: What about your reaction to the dropping of the atomic bombs?

HD: I thought "Boy, I'll be going home pretty soon now". People who say we shouldn't have done it, I wouldn't agree with them. It was the right thing to do at the time. Perhaps we could have dropped them somewhere out in the country, but I question whether even then the Japanese would say "Hey listen, we know you're faking it".

Q: Did you make use of the GI bill?

HD: Yes, I did. I went on and got my master's degree in teaching. When I got back from the war, I took a job at the Pharmacy College in Albany, and one of the things I wanted to do was get a further degree so I went to college and took use of the GI bill.

Q: Did you ever use the 52-20 club?

HD: No.

Q: Did you join Veteran's organizations at all?

HD: Yes, I've been a part of the American Legion since 1952.

Q: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone?

HD: Nope. I visited one fellow from the Fort Scott dispensary in Massachusetts but that was all. That is one of the big regrets of my army career: that I did not stay in touch with people. A few years ago I stopped in Billings, Montana to see a fellow that I had been really friendly with, perhaps my best buddy and I found out he passed away. There was a fellow in California that I stayed in touch with for a couple years but he died in 1956 from hypertension.

Q: How would you say being in the service affected or changed your life?

HD: Well it certainly changed my attitude about the army and about people in general because I was a country boy who went to college and thought I would get myself in a corner somewhere and do chemical research. As a result of my army experience, I was able to meet and talk with people. When I came out of the army, the dean asked me if I wanted to teach. I think the army experience perhaps influenced me a great deal because I probably would've gone on to try to get a further degree at a pharmacy college and then gone into chemistry, but it turns out, I went into teaching for 35 years.