

**Henry J. Del Percio**  
**Narrator**

**Wayne Clarke**  
**Mike Russert**  
**Interviewers**

**Interviewed on June 26th, 2003**  
**At Days inn Hicksville, NY**

**Q:** Can you give me your full name, Date of birth, and place of birth.

**HD:** Henry J. Del Percio, born March 28th, 1985 in Flushing New York.

**Q:** Ok. What was your educational background prior to entering service?

**HD:** Alright graduated high school, within three months of my birthday I was drafted I didn't have much opportunity.

**Q:** Ok... Do you remember where you were and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**HD:** Yes, It was Sunday morning I was in the local stationery store to buy the newspaper and like everyone else I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was I never heard of it and I didn't know it would affect me because of I'm still I guess about sixteen or seventeen years old.

**Q:** So you were drafted?

**HD:** Yes, within three months

**Q:** Ok drafted and I noticed you went it to a aircraft battalion.

**HD:** That's right, I was signed to the 8 43rd anti-aircraft Battalion at camp Stewart, Georgia.

**Q:** Where was your induction and where did you go for your basic?

**HD:** There camp Stewart Georgia and I became a half track gunner.

**Q:** Now was this the first time away from home?

**HD:** Yes more or less

**Q:** How did you feel about that, especially going into the south?

**HD:** I missed home, yeah I didn't know about the south I learned to like the south a lot.

**Q:** Okay um can you tell about some of your specialized training since you went it to a half track with an aircraft unit?

**HD:** Yeah I was a machine gunner in a half track it's a quad machine gun and we were on maneuvers in the Okefenokee Swamp I had some experiences there I feel in quicksand alone and was able to get out, I almost got bit by a rattlesnake cutting camouflage but anyhow as soon as we got back to camp there was a notice on the bulletin board that the air force needed personnel and I took the test for the air force the

army air force and was sent from the swaps in Georgia to Miami beach Florida nothing could be better than that.

**Q:** Okay what kind of planes did you train in?

**HD:** Okay then from Miami beach I went to Elmer's school in Lowry Field in Colorado and gunnery school in Fort Myers Florida then I was assigned to a b25 Mitchell at Columbia Air Force base with a crew my own crew of 6. We trained at Columbia South Carolina.

**Q:** Okay still did your crew stay together for your entire time.

**HD:** Yes here's what happen we finished training and they gave us a brand new airplane by the way my pilot was only 19 you wouldn't give him the car they gave us a brand new airplane and we flew along to Naples Italy. It took 14 days to get to Naples Italy.

**Q:** Now what route did you fly?

**HD:** the Southern route to South America all those short hops ascension Island and to North Africa.

**Q:** So you flew alone

**HD:** Yes, we flew alone our own plane my bombardier was also a navigator we made it some didn't but we made it. But 14 days you can go quicker by boat but it's a small plane with limited range. A Mitchell, as you know, is the same type of plane that Jimmy Doolittle used from the bombing of Tokyo from the carrier.

**Q:** Did you get a chance to name your plane at all

**HD:** No we didn't name our planes, but when we got there I got there in a lot of part of the war you didn't keep the same plane and even the crews mixed around too. A lot of our planes did have a name as you can see from here.

**Q:** Well why don't you hold that up and tell us about that than right now since you mentioned that.

**HD:** Ok this is the 487th squadron of 340th bomb group in the 12th air force mediums we were called the dog face squadron these pictures were originally sketched by Bill Mauldin.

**Q:** Now let me focus on everyone so just hold it for it there for a minute. Now why was it called the dog face squadron do you know?

**HD:** Because we supported American Infantry and Infantrymen were called dog face full of mud as you can see, unshaven that was our biggest job was the low-level support of the infantry and we did bomb bridges, tunnels, and railroads.

**Q:** Now you told us this was a unique declaration, why was it so unique?

**HD:** Well as you know nose art on the aircraft were women they used women this is unique that there are no women and this is the only squadron Bill Mauldin ever painted.

**Q:** Alright thank you very much, so where was your base where you were stationed or did you move around?

**HD:** Okay we were stationed at Corsica the Island of Corsica owned by France but of the coast of Italy are missions were not long missions like the B17's generally ran around 3 hours most of our bombing would be in Brenda pass railroads to try to cut heavy supply lines we got up to Vienna once or twice and then we moved to Rimini Italy. Rimini is on the Adriatic coast of Italy are air base was 14 miles from the front line. It was a captured air base and we flew there until the end of the war at least I did VE day was one of the happiest days of my life I didn't think I would survive some of my friends did not survive but the ones we still meet now some of them were prisoners we still have reunions and we enjoy each other and I must say the one thing I am very, very proud of the men I serve with because every one of them was willing to give their life and their all for their country which I don't think you'd find so prevalent today.

**Q:** Now you said you were a tail gunner what was so unique about being a tail gunner on a B25?

**HD:** Well, for one thing, a tail gunners riding backward you never see where you're going you only see where you've been its very lonely because you don't see any other crew.

**Q:** So you can't move back and forth?

**HD:** No a tail gunner of a B25 has to kneel down you don't have a seat it's not a turk (?) or anything like that you kneel down, in the beginning, it's the lay down but then you have a little bicycle seat and you can kneel down and you have to kneel down as long as you're in enemy territory which could lead to cramping of the legs and stuff like that but you could never go it almost impossible to go from the rear of the plane to the front of the plane you have to climb over the Bombay there are only 12 inches from the top of the plane to the Bombay so we didn't generally go up front and they generally don't come to the back.

**Q:** Now, did you wear a parachute?

**HD:** No you couldn't wear a parachute in the tail until we changed parachutes to back parachutes then you could wear a parachute. But you could have anything in front of you because your controls were there and it was very narrow my shoulders could touch both of the sides of the planes the ammunition belts ran along your shoulder.

**Q:** So did you have a snap on chute?

**HD:** Yes, it was your harness and a Mae West underneath well I like in this picture you will see that.

**Q:** Ok why don't you hold that up?

**HD:** You can see what we wore even though it could be summertime you still wore heavy clothing to keep warm as you know military planes were built for comfort they have no heating no bathrooms anything like that they have today.

**Q:** Now, did you wear a heated suit at all?

**HD:** No

**Q:** You didn't go that high?

**HD:** We never wore heated suits and never carried oxygen

**Q:** Did you wear a flak jacket at all?

**HD:** You could yeah.

**Q:** Did you wear one yourself?

**HD:** I would not wear it I would put it underneath on the bottom or the side. We were young men so.

**Q:** Did you ever decorate your jacket at all?

**HD:** Most people yes.

**Q:** Did you?

**HD:** No I didn't, the Italian artist were very good at that. Actually, my jacket was stolen somewhere along the line so.

**Q:** Ok, was your plane ever severely damaged?

**HD:** Oh yes man flak holes and stuff in fact I have a picture if you look closely at this picture you see this fellow this was my original plane 7j we had numbers and a flak hit right on the chin on willie It's called willie from GI JOE and the flak hit on the chin and we just patched it up but there were many other holes and stuff before XXL ok?

**Q:** Could you describe some of your missions that you may or was that really come to your mind?

**HD:** Well one mission that I was most frighten was near the end of the war we were attacked by a Messerschmitt Me 262 and I couldn't believe the plane could go fast I tried to get the guns on them by the time I got the gun here the plane was that way.

**Q:** Tells use what a Messerschmitt Me-262 was.

**HD:** Oh a Messerschmitt Me-262 was the first German jet plane I guess if they had enough of them they would've done enough damage but you couldn't it was impossible to shoot them down. They were shot down by fighter pilots while they were landing they could never shot them down in a dog fight.

**Q:** Were you aware that the Germans had jets or was it the first time?

**HD:** No it was a shock to me you know people don't understand when you're in the service and military and combat you don't have the newspaper, you don't have radios, you could get a radio access sally a German radio so, therefore, you don't have information.

**Q:** Were there any other missions that come to mind maybe you want to relate

**HD:** No not particularly I flew 32 combat missions what comes to mind my friend bailed out he was a tail gunner and his parachute didn't open I saw that and my other buddy I watched get shot down and he became a prisoner of the Germans. I found him

14 years later and through an article in a magazine because he was in prison camp and the war ended we went back to America and there's no communication you know.

**Q:** When did you return to the United States?

**HD:** July 4th, 1945 I left Italy, I was home in time square on VJ Day unbelievable I wasn't sober

**Q:** It must have been quite a celebration wasn't it?

**HD:** It was but I don't remember it that's the problem. The people would swarm out I had to walk from the railroad station from my home you couldn't go a block without them swarming out with a tray of drinks, and stuff so I don't remember too much.

**Q:** So anybody in a uniform was considered a hero?

**HD:** Oh absolutely.

**Q:** Do you recall your reaction to the death of President Roosevelt?

**HD:** We got it much later after it was over it was very sad but you don't we found out one day in combat you don't worry about exterior things as much as you concentrate on staying alive your main job when you're in combat weather you were infantryman or in air force is surviving that what it's all about because you see it all around you someone's number's up your job is to survive that's why I was so happy on VE day unbelievable, celebrated.

**Q:** Do you recall your reaction when you heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs?

**HD:** Yes, I felt very relieved I am one believed that the atomic bombs saved my life because we took our planes home we were going to go to Japan or that area with them and I don't think we were going to survive if we had to continue what you're doing very few people survived it's luck you know.

**Q:** So you flew back to the states from there which way did you go?

**HD:** South southern route again have you ever heard of Ascension Island.

**Q:** Yes.

**HD:** Ok.

**Q:** So you flew back with the same crew.

**HD:** Yup I have the pictures home same crew. Exempt the engineer he was wounded so he was treated and left the outfit I don't know what they did to him. He got wounded twice in fact.

**Q:** When you returned to the states and discharged did you ever make use of the GI Bill?

**HD:** Ah yes, I was looking for a future so I went to school for air conditioning servicing and all that, unfortunately, it was a little too soon the air-conditioning was not that popular yet in 45 and 46 but I think GI Bill was one of the best things they ever created.

**Q:** Did you make use of the 52-20 club?

**HD:** Yes, part of the time, yes that helped too.

**Q:** I know you already somewhat answered this but did you stay in contact with those that you served with?

**HD:** Yes, not right away but later on we formed, one of them formed a reunion association now we have a 57 bomb wing reunion association which varies bomb groups B25s and we meet every year and we have a good time for a week and the stories get bigger and bigger and bigger in fact when you go home you have powder burns all over your face from all the war stories.

**Q:** Did you join any veteran's organizations?

**HD:** Yes I am a member of the American Legion.

**Q:** how do you think your service changed or affected your life?

**HD:** It changed my life because it made me much more serious about life and how it made me realize how valuable life is and it gave me a purpose in that one of the reasons I became a New York firefighter down there because it gives you the opportunity to help people and if we're going to leave a happy life on this earth you would have to help people. There's a great deal as you're doing yourself a great deal of satisfaction and helping people and firefighting does that as other jobs do too.

**Q:** Well thank you very much for your interview.

**HD:** Thank you.

**Q:** And were back on, ok go ahead.

**HD:** I flew 32 missions as a B25 tail gunner, I was awarded air medal with 2 leafs and 2 battle stars, and some of my recollections are like I said before you feel alone in the tail of the airplane, and I wanted to say that there was no pleasure in killing the enemy we use to go down and strafe German troops and I'm telling you it still haunts me today the lines of red cross ambulances leaving the battle seen and none of the men I served with could never take any pleasure killing enemy. Hollywood would like you to make you think that war is glorious but it is not. It's a necessary job that needed to be done and like I say I am very proud of the men I served with they were willing to give there all war is a terrible thing and I wish another means can be found to solve the world's problems, thank you.

**Q:** Very well thank you ... Ok yup let me zoom in on it and you can tell us where you are and who the rest of the members are ok go ahead.

**HD:** Ok this is my crew we trained together and flew a lot of missions together not all of them and the pilot is 19 years old he's the guy in the middle the co-pilot was he was an old guy 24 and the Bomb-bayer was 19 years old, the radio man is 18, I was 18 and the engineer was about 26.

**Q:** Point yourself out in the photograph.

**HD:** Ok I'm the one kneeling in the middle right here.

**Q:** Do you want to give their names?

**HD:** No, not at this time, in fact, my pilot just became deceased.

**Q:** Ok well thank you very much.