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Veteran**

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Culver Road Armory, Rochester New York**

Q: Where were you born, sir?

DE: I was born in Rochester, New York, on February 16, 1925.

Q: So you're a native?

DE: Yes.

Q: Did you grow up and attend school in Rochester??

DE: Yes. I went to school in East Rochester.

Q: How was that?

DE: It's just seven miles east. My grandfather had a grocery store and meat market there. He also had two farms in Webster, West Webster. My mother married his son. My father left home when I was three years old. He was an alcoholic. But his father—my paternal grandfather—provided us a house to live in for nothing, for my mother, my brother, and myself. So we lived in East Rochester. It was a large double house. Then the Depression hit hard and he couldn't manage it anymore. My maternal grandfather held the second mortgage on the house, which was \$1,500. The first mortgage was \$3,500. So my father's father went to my mother's father and said, "I'd like to turn the house over to Delora"—my mother's name was Delora, spelled D-E-L-O-R-A—"so Delora and the boys have a place to stay." He said, "If you forgive the \$1,500, I'll sign the house over to her." My maternal grandfather, a tough old farmer from Pittsford, agreed, but said, "I'll forgive the \$1,500, but there are three lots there. The house is in the middle. You have to give her two side lots." And he did. So that's where I was—East Rochester, on South Washington Street. I lived there most of my life. I worked 32 years at Kodak as a machine builder and retired on March 1, 1983. In June of that year, we moved to Penfield, off Creek Street, into a contemporary ranch on a private road. By then, I had saved enough money. I had two acres, a contemporary ranch with a finished, walkout basement, an in-ground pool, a 1976 Eldorado convertible, and a hot tub.

Q: When did you graduate from high school?

DE: I was supposed to graduate in 1942, but I failed physics, so I graduated in January 1943.

Q: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor happened?

DE: I was in the kitchen of the house. As I mentioned, I later moved to Penfield, but we sold that house last December. Now I've moved back into the original house we lived in. I converted it into a five-family house—26 rooms in total. My wife and I live there now; all our children have moved out. I was in the kitchen of that house. Back then, we had a coal stove in the kitchen, and in the end it had three gas burners. I was sitting there when the news came over the radio. It was a Sunday morning, I believe. Yes.

Q: Do you remember what went through your mind at the time?

DE: Back then, East Rochester was a small town. Places like Pittsford and Penfield were just a little bigger than hamlets—not by much. And if I went from East Rochester to Rochester and got off at East Avenue or Main Street, I would be lost. In school, we didn't learn much about war. You really didn't know much. It was all kind of vague.

Q: Did you go into the service right after graduating from high school?

DE: I turned 18 on February 16th, and I was drafted on April 23rd, 1943—same year.

Q: Where did you go for basic training?

DE: The first two or three days, we went to Fort Niagara for processing—aptitude tests and that sort of thing. Then I went to Atlantic City for basic training with the Air Force.

Q: Did you know you were going into the Air Force?

DE: No, I didn't. They took the top third of people based on the test results, and those individuals went into the Air Force. We lived in beautiful, big hotels along the boardwalk. I don't remember how many stories they had—more than I had ever seen before. It was the first time I saw a lavender bathtub, or any colored bathtub, for that matter. The troops were housed in these hotels. One hotel, just across the street from mine, was used as the mess hall and for other services. Every day, we'd fall out and march five miles to what used to be the Atlantic City dump. They had filled it in and leveled it—probably a swamp before. They called it Brigantine Field. That's where we did our push-ups and other drills. I remember there were pieces of glass there—not trash, but glass. We'd do close-order drills and marches, then march back to the hotels for lunch, and then go back out again. In the afternoons, sometimes we had orientation where they'd read us the Articles of War.

Q: Where was your basic training?

DE: In Atlantic City.

Q: Atlantic City. And after Atlantic City, where did you go?

DE: Back in high school, I guess everyone in my senior class took some kind of government-related test. I don't remember exactly what it was, but I must have scored high enough because they sent me to City College in New York for engineering. I didn't really want to go there. It wasn't part of the Air Force—it was an engineering program. We took additional tests there, and I was never good at math. I knew I didn't score very well. After the third day, we had an interview with a captain and a civilian. They asked, "Are you interested in this program?" I said, "No, I'm not." They were surprised—most of the guys from New York City wanted to stay, so they'd never heard that before. He asked, "Why not?" I said, "Well, I know I didn't do well on the math part. I don't think I'd succeed in the engineering program, and I'd rather go back to the Air Force." It wasn't long before they sent me to the reclassification center in Greensboro, North Carolina. From there, I went to Biloxi, Mississippi, to the Air Force Airplane and Engine Mechanic School. It was a round-the-clock program, and I was in the midnight to 8:00 a.m. shift. We were there for about three months. After graduating from there, I was sent to aerial gunnery school in Laredo, Texas. That training lasted six weeks.

Q: How was Texas?

DE: It was in Laredo, right on the Mexican border, across from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The area was dry—no grass, no trees, nothing. It was also the first time I had ever flown. I remember sitting in the back seat of a single-engine training plane. It had a .30 caliber machine gun mounted facing backward on a circular iron ring. We wore helmets and goggles—just like in the movies. The pilot took off and flew us over a target range where mock-up planes and trucks were laid out. The gun had 200 rounds of .30 caliber ammunition. We had to stand up in the slipstream, swing the gun around, lock it in place, and fire as the targets passed beneath the wing. It was 4:55 p.m. The pilot said, "I've got a date at 5:00 in Laredo. If you don't get them all on the first pass, just pull the rounds out and toss them." But I hit all the targets. We returned, and I remember watching the ground fall away beneath us as we took off—it amazed me. I didn't get sick or anything. After that, I went to Casper, Wyoming. I was assigned as engineer/gunner and crew chief on a B-24 Liberator bomber. We flew training missions all over the mountains, including Yellowstone.

One night, we took off around 4:00. By about 11:00, we flew into a severe thunderstorm. I don't know how high we were—there was lightning, heavy rain, and thunder. It was a very bad storm. The wings started to ice up, and the lightning interfered with the radio. We were lost. Time passed, and eventually the radio operator managed to contact someone—I'm not sure who. He was the oldest member of our crew, 34 years old, Raymond Narramore from Massachusetts, I believe. Around 1:00 a.m., the pilot announced we were preparing to land. As the engineer, my job during landing was to

stand slightly behind and in the center. The pilot sat on the left, the co-pilot on the right. Between them was a pedestal with four throttle levers for the four engines.

During takeoff, the pilot and co-pilot would press down on the brakes with their feet while revving all four engines. The plane would bounce at the end of the runway. When the engine pressure reached a certain point—measured in inches of mercury, due to the turbo superchargers beneath each engine—they would release the brakes and the plane would lurch forward into takeoff. For landing, I stood behind the pedestal and watched the airspeed indicator on the control panel. I had to call out the airspeed because the pilot, with the nose of the plane tilted upward, couldn't see the ground well. I'd call it out: 125... 120... 115... 110... As we reached around 100 to 110 mph, the wheels would touch down. You'd hear them squeal and see smoke from the tires. The third wheel was under the nose of the plane. Before landing, someone had to go beneath the flight deck to engage a small lawnmower-like engine that powered a hydraulic pump. The nose gear had a tendency to collapse, so there was a large steel clamp that locked it in place. You had to turn a bolt down to secure the gear and prevent collapse. We also started a small auxiliary engine, which always seemed to work. The hydraulic pressure was supplied by a pump on engine number three. That system controlled the brakes, the flaps, and many other hydraulic functions. In the bomb bay, both sides were lined with stainless steel hydraulic lines, about a quarter of an inch thick—maybe a little more. This was my assistant's responsibility: to go underneath, start the hydraulic engine, and secure the nose gear with a clamp. As I mentioned, I called out the airspeed until we landed. We had gotten lost that night, and the pilot announced that we had found the landing field. I didn't think much of it at the time—I felt us touch down. It turned out to be a very small field—possibly even a grass field. In any case, it was very small. We were still traveling at over 100 miles per hour. The pilot said nothing. We overran the end of the runway and crossed the Lincoln Highway. I believe the nose of the aircraft struck it. My assistant, Nick from New York City, was underneath the flight deck, and the underside of the aircraft filled with dirt. It was now 1:00 a.m. We had crashed. It was completely dark—no lights, nothing. The first thing I heard was Nick crying out for his mother: "Mama, mama, mama." I looked up. The only light I could see was coming from a hatch at the top of the fuselage, about 30 inches square. Just next to where I was, there was an aluminum post, about that wide, with small step cutouts—places to climb up onto the top of the aircraft. That hatch had broken open. I looked up and saw the hatch, so I started toward it. At the rear of the flight deck, on the wall opposite the bomb bay, there were four glass tubes, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in diameter, filled with gasoline. They indicated how much fuel was in the tanks. I believe there were four gas tanks. There was also a control valve on the pump that allowed you to transfer fuel between tanks if one engine was using more than the others. Those tubes shattered in the crash. I was soaked with gasoline and covered in shards of glass. As I said, the only light came from above. I began climbing. The bombardier, Lieutenant Breeze, was ahead of me but got stuck. I shouted, "Breeze, get out of here!" He replied, "I'm stuck. My arm's caught." His left arm

was pinned between the fuselage and the hatch. He was wearing a wristwatch that had become caught. I didn't respond. I stepped up, put my shoulder under him, and shoved him out. It tore up his wrist, ripped off the watch, but he made it out onto the wing. By then, the trailing edge of the wing was only a few inches from the ground. I followed him out. We climbed down and the crew gathered nearby. Engine number three had caught fire, but it must have been a small fuel line near the carburetor because it burned out on its own. The pilot asked, "Is everyone out?" I said, "Nick is still under the flight deck." So the pilot and co-pilot climbed the wing, re-entered through the fuselage hatch, made their way onto and beneath the flight deck, and got Nick out. He had a broken back, but the spinal cord wasn't severed. I don't know how they managed to lift him from down there to the top of the plane. I didn't go back down, so I don't know how deep the dirt was. But they got him out. We were taken to the local hospital and stayed overnight. I never saw Nick again. By then, the police and ambulances had arrived. We were taken to the local hospital and stayed there overnight. The next day, a colonel from the Casper, Wyoming airfield flew in. He asked, "Who's the engineer?" I replied, "Oh, I guess I am." He said, "We're short on electric motors for our gun turrets. Can you remove them?" I said, "Yes." So I grabbed a toolbox, went back to the crashed plane, cut the wires, and removed the electric motors he needed. We flew back to Casper on his plane. After that, each crew member was interviewed individually to give their version of the crash. Then they said, "If you complete five more training missions—you've already done 15 or 20—you'll get a two-week furlough." I hadn't been home in about 14 months. So I flew five more training missions. But when the time came, they told us the furloughs were cancelled. I went to the commanding officer, a captain, and said, "You promised us a furlough. If I don't get it, I'm not going to fly anymore." The pilot called me a coward and so on. At the time, I was a corporal. As a result, I was demoted to private. After that, I worked in one of the hangars for 30 days. Then I was shipped out to a port just outside Hollywood, California—I can't recall the name of the seaport. We shipped out overseas from the West Coast. Our route took us south of Hawaii and across the equator. The ship's crew performed the traditional crossing ceremony for us. They didn't put us through the usual ordeal, but we all received some kind of certificate—I forget exactly what...

Q: So you're a shellback?

DE: Yes. That's right—we received a diploma for it. We sailed to Bombay, India. I think the journey took 30 or 31 days. We disembarked in Bombay, and from there, we traveled all the way across India to Calcutta on a narrow-gauge train. I believe the tracks were no wider than about three feet. The train cars were small. Each person had a single seat—that was your assigned space. At night, everyone slept on the floor and in the aisles. The cinders from the locomotive would blow back into the cars—it was extremely hot. I think we were on that train for five days and six nights, heading to a camp called Castro Pora, about 30 miles west of Calcutta. I stayed there for a couple of weeks, and then I was sent

to an airfield 200 miles north of Calcutta called Chabua—C-H-A-B-U-A, or something like that. From there, we flew over “The Hump” into China. As we were boarding the plane—a C-46 or C-47, like you mentioned earlier—guys were calling out, “You’re gonna be sorry! They shot down two planes yesterday!” and so on. But we flew over without incident. We landed in Kunming, China—western China, in the southwest region.

Q: Can you describe what it was like?

DE: It was a very dusty, dry place. We arrived late in the afternoon. They fed us, and then we were assigned to tents. Each of us had two duffel bags—about this high and this wide—filled with clothes, a gas mask, and other gear. One of the key protocols at the time was that during an air raid drill, you had to grab your gas mask immediately. Not long after dark, the air raid sirens went off. The Japanese had been bombing the area regularly. We didn’t panic, but we were very nervous. I grabbed my duffel bag, shook everything out to get my gas mask, and ran outside—only to trip over a tent rope. I found a slit trench—a kind of foxhole—and jumped in until the raid was over. The Japanese didn’t do much that night. They dropped bombs, but the area was surrounded by mountain ranges. Some Chinese civilians lit fires in the hills to guide the Japanese planes toward the airfield. They had a general idea of where our runways were. All of our aircraft were stored in revetments—U-shaped structures made of high earthen walls, taller than this room. Each revetment housed a bomber. The design was such that if a bomb hit, it would only destroy one aircraft. I worked on the ground crew under a man named Bill Kenneth from Missouri. There were four of us in the crew. We ate locally—there was no GI food. Meals consisted of rice, water buffalo, and very tough chicken. The food was poor. I weighed only 128 pounds at the time. Each crew was responsible for one aircraft. We performed maintenance—changing engines, carburetors, and so on. I remember one day I had to change a carburetor. It might have been made in Rochester—Stromberg carburetors, about 12–14 inches long, 6–8 inches wide, and 6–7 inches high. They were four-barrel carburetors used on 1,430-cubic-inch radial engines. After I finished, the pilot came down and asked, “Is the work all done?” I said, “Yes.” He asked, “Did you change the carburetor?” I said, “Yes.” He replied, “Let’s go for a ride.” If you worked on the plane, the pilot made sure you had done the job right—by taking you up in the air.

Q: Were these Liberators?

DE: Yes, four-engine Liberator bombers.

Q: Obviously you did a good job.

DE: Well, you had to make sure you did. Along the runway, in one of the earthen revetments, there was a space they called “The Cave.” I don’t know if it was reinforced, but at night, you could go there and get a 12-egg omelet and a glass of cocoa for a dollar.

There must have been a lot of chickens in China—lots of eggs. All the bread was made from rice—it was very heavy.

From there, we went up to another airfield about 20 miles outside of Kunming. We flew from there. I wasn't in a flight crew, but if you wanted to go anywhere in China, you had to fly. The roads were just mud. I remember one time, I had to travel with another guy to a place called Paoshan. It was on the Burma Road, in the middle of the Hump. It was a very small airfield. We flew there in a Liberator. The pilot banked the plane sharply, and as I sat on the floor near the waist window, I could see the facial features of a Chinese man in a rice paddy—we were flying that low. When we landed, they had what's called an A-frame: a steel tripod with wheels on each leg, held together with a half-inch cable. It had a chain hoist on top. We rolled it over the engine, lifted it slightly, unbolted everything, disconnected the fuel lines, removed the damaged engine, and installed a new one. The plane had blown an engine during a mission. We finished the work and flew back with that crew to our base. One day, there was a mission involving 14 bombers in our squadron. I believe our group had four squadrons. They taxied down to the end of the runway to take off. The first plane exploded at the end—10 men were killed instantly. So they turned the rest of the planes around, went to the opposite end, and tried again. The first plane from that end also exploded. The mission was canceled. I have a photo of it in my picture frame. I have a write-up I'd like to give you. It explains that my outfit—the 308th Bomb group—received the Presidential Unit Citation twice. I mean, receiving it once was already impressive, but twice? That was almost unheard of. The write-up tells the whole story. We sank nearly a million tons of Japanese shipping, including troop transports. That write-up documents it all. I've kept it in a slot behind that framed picture. Then the atomic bomb was dropped, and the war in the Pacific was over. So they shipped us down to India, and our air operations were done. At that time, I was still in Kunming, and I got sick. I couldn't eat for seven days. I finally went to sick call, and the doctor said, "You've got yellow jaundice—hepatitis. Go straight to the hospital." So I was admitted and stayed for 2 or 3 days. I had a couple of footlockers full of stuff—silk, ivory, and carved jade elephant sets—which I had bought to bring home. They flew me down to Calcutta to a large base hospital. I only had time to grab a few things: my underwear, my summer flying suit (which was like overalls, with multiple pockets), my cap, shoes, socks, and my wallet. When I arrived in Calcutta, the hospital was so crowded that I had to sleep on the porch. All the beds were wooden frame single beds with rope webbing. There were no mattresses, just a rope support and a very thin pad on top, secured with buttons. Each bed had a mosquito net around it. At night, you had to tuck the net all the way around you, completely enclosing yourself. While I was still at the hospital in Calcutta, I came down with bronchitis and started coughing up blood. I stayed there for about a month, and then I was put on a hospital ship. We sailed across the Pacific, then returned home via the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, and finally back to New York. This was in December 1945, just before Christmas. We encountered a terrible storm at sea. I went up on deck and leaned against one of the

smokestacks. When the ship dropped down into a trough, you could see 60 feet of water above us before it rose back up. You could hear the officers in the forward part of the ship yelling. I was just sitting on the upper deck watching. We sailed south to escape the storm, and eventually docked in New York, possibly Long Island. When we arrived, they played “God Bless America” over a radio or Victrola. It was emotional. There were people on board, including the son of a high-ranking government official. A boat came out before we docked and took him off early. We were taken ashore and brought to a hospital. That night we had roast beef, ice cream, and whatever else we wanted. It was the first good meal in a long time. From there, I was transferred to a general hospital in Utica, New York, and then to an Air Force hospital in Coral Gables, Florida. The hospital was made up of two large hotels, with two swimming pools and two 18-hole golf courses. They even took us deep-sea fishing. I was B.I.N. (Battle-Injured Non-combatant), but I was mostly homesick. I could’ve stayed there for months, but after a couple of weeks I asked to be discharged. They sent me to Fort Dix, and within a few days I was officially discharged. I forgot to collect my \$45 mustering-out pay, so I had to take a train back to Fort Dix, picked it up, then returned to New York City, arriving at Grand Central Station. I caught a train to Rochester, arriving around 10:30 or 11:00 PM. There were no buses running at that hour. I walked to East Avenue and Alexander Street, and hitched a ride from a stranger who kindly drove me all the way home. In those days, houses were never locked—but mine was. I figured my grandfather was sick, so my mother must’ve been staying with him. I went to my aunt’s house and stayed the night. The next morning, my aunt told my mother I was home, and she came to see me. It was a very emotional moment, a very happy time.

Q: How would you summarize your military experience?

DE: Well, I’ll tell you—I’ve always regretted that I didn’t continue flying. I really would have liked to finish it out and go further, even though I had already seen combat. I don’t know... I have no idea where I would’ve ended up. Not long after I left, the planes started flying missions to Ploesti, targeting the Romanian oil fields, and they were losing 30% of the aircraft on those missions. There was a guy, General “Killer” Kane, who led those bombing runs. I just feel bad that I didn’t complete it. But I had some incredible experiences in China, and it opened up a whole new world for me.

Q: Let’s document this with a photograph.

[Cameraman adjusts and focuses]

DE: This is a picture of me with my commanding colonel. It was taken when we were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. I’m not sure if you’re familiar with it—see, it has an oak leaf cluster in the center, which means we received it twice. Here are my gunner’s wings. This is the Flying Tiger badge. This is one of my dog tags. This ribbon is for the

Asiatic-Pacific Theater, with three campaign stars. This one here is a decoration awarded to all Americans who served in China. Here's the Good Conduct Medal, and next to it, the Victory Medal. That one is for the American Theater. Down here are the New York State medals, including the Distinguished Service Cross, the state service shield, and one for the CBI Theater (China-Burma-India). And this is the citation write-up that came with the award. This was my commanding general, Claire Chennault. He was a Major General, but he originally started out as a Captain. Due to hearing loss, he left the U.S. Air Force around 1937 or 1938.