George Douglas Anderson
Veteran

Herkimer, Fulton County Historical Society
Interviewers

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My name is George Douglas Anderson. I can't say I'm a native of Herkimer County but I have lived here for 55 years. I live on Farber Lane on Rt. 28. I moved up here right after the war. Married my **wife** Marjorie Anderson. She has taught in Ilion for 25 years. I just love the Mohawk Valley. Would not trade it for anything. This is not a commercial, I just love it. I love the snow. It's enough now, I just love it. I just have had a wonderful life here in the Valley. My home was in the Peekskill, NY, the home of George Pataki. Is that good or bad, I don't know. I have had comparatively good health. I'm 84 years old. My birthday is at the end of April so it's pretty close. I may make it. At least there is always the April fool bit. I hope to live here quite a few years more. I am very active in the old phonograph Museum on route 28. I don't accept anything but a crank phonograph. I taught in the Herkimer high school for 35 years. My wife and I have two children. One is a teacher in Whitesboro and the other is a teacher in West Canada Valley. So with that, pretty much tells what I've been up to for the last 55 years here in Herkimer. I am looking forward to a good many more.

Interviewer: Do you have any grandchildren?

I have one great granddaughter. She lives in Syracuse.

Interviewer: The reason I ask is, as a veteran, as someone who has seen war, and lots of years of life, what would you want to leave your grandchildren, what would you want them to know about your service?

Well I skipped my children. I have two boys as I told you. What I hope for them is that they continue as they are. They have had a wonderful life so far. No problems! As for my grandchild, great-grandchild, grandchild, just had a great-grandchild. I just hope I can portray to her what America is all about and she will respect her parents and other people she is going to work with the rest of her life. I have been very fortunate in that my mother lived till 102. Good Mohawk air. So we just have to play it by ear and hope we continue as we are with good health and so forth.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your service. Tell me about how you got started in the service.

I was at Oswego College. I was a junior at Oswego. We were supposed to be released from college only after we finished the four years. Unfortunately it didn't work that way. So we, I was

going to be drafted but that was a bad word back in 1941. And so I volunteered. Because I volunteered I had a choice of what service I wanted to be a part of. And so I wanted to be in the Air Corps. My brother was a dive bomber pilot in the Navy. My younger brother was a B 24 pilot so it was only natural I would want to be a pilot I guess. Unfortunately they had enough pilots and so there was nothing left except this new program somebody dreamed up where you could fly in glider and be part of the airborne picture. So in desperation I signed up as a glider pilot training. We trained for over two years before we saw any combat. Luckily I got out of it alive. A lot of my friends didn't. It was natural I guess. But I guess that is about it. Every time we went on a mission we had about 20 to 30% fatalities. Every time we went on a mission and I came back, I got an air medal and a promotion. So starting from a flight officer's status which is a warrant officer status in the Army but the flight officer is a creation of the Army air Corps. Then it went into second Lieut., first Lieut. I Was up for Capt. but unfortunately the war ended. I shouldn't say that, I didn't care about Capt. that much but I did lose an awful lot of good friends in service. And this was a volunteer service, the glider pilots. It wasn't, Kamikaze because we hoped to come back. We lost a lot of men crossing the English Channel, tow ropes broke and the gliders crashed and so forth. A lot of gliders were shot down by ground fire simply because we flew in so low over the countryside at 500 feet. So anybody could throw a stick at us and hit us. Most of us came out of it all right so I have to say I had a wonderful experience all told.

Interviewer: I want to ask you where you went for the two years of training. Where were you assigned, what field?

I was assigned to a glider training program. There was no call for gliders for a couple years of the war so we went from one town to another where we would hold up in CCC barracks. Until we moved to another place where we would get practice training in flying. We would fly little planes and then we started to fly the bigger ones. Then we moved to Lubbock Texas where the glider Museum is just opened. I have here a picture I want to show you, a painting that is done by one of my students at Herkimer. It is going to the glider Museum nationally when I get through with it. Which I hope will not be right away. But we went through the training a cadet would go through. In other words we learn to fly the little planes and then the bigger planes. And then we learn to fly without any engine. We would fly our regular planes up to about 5000 feet and then shut the engine off and glide down very much like a space shuttle. We practice doing that at night. No lights, someone would light a tin can with kerosene in it at the end of the runway and that was your guide to come in. We trained to get our flight time in every month even though we didn't go in battle. I was in two missions even though that doesn't sound like much we only had several different missions we flew during the war. We flew missions in Europe, in Burma and in the Philippines with gliders. That is about it I guess.

Interviewer: Unintelligible, can't hear the question.

Can I butt in just a minute? I was telling them just a little while ago that we had a war correspondent who came to our airbase. He was a young fellow and he wanted to jump with the

paratroopers into Holland. Our CO told him you can't jump, you got to have practice, you have to be right the first time, and you can't take chances. But he says we have an opening in the gliders. Totally discouraged he said okay I will go with the gliders. And so I've got the book here that he wrote which tells about him going in the glider. He says if you're going to go to war you can go by boat, you can crawl, you can ride a bicycle, and you can even go in a plane but don't go by glider. He says it is the worst way you can go to war. And so he tells about landing in Holland. The glider came into fast and rolled up onto its nose. The 15 men inside were all crushed down into the glider and he got out all right but he grabbed his helmet because the glider pilot said get the hell out of here after they landed. So he grabbed his helmet and started running towards a drainage ditch at the edge of the landing zone. He found a lotta fellows were following him and he couldn't figure out why they were following him. So he said to them why are you following me and they saluted him and said," we just want to go to the right to the place Lieutenant". He picked up the lieutenants helmet instead of his own. That was one of the jokes of that mission.

Interviewer: And that reporter was?

Oh I'm sorry, I'm sorry! It was Walter Cronkite. 65 years ago, Walter Cronkite, Dean of all correspondents, great guy.

They made 66,000 gliders. Everybody made them, Maytag made them. My glider, I was going into Holland and I looked over on the side of the glider and here it was made by the National Casket Company. Everybody made the gliders. They trained over 5000 glider pilots. They used over 2000 of them in combat. A lot of them were killed in training and so forth. It is hard to believe that there were 65,000 gliders made and only 2000 were used in combat. The rest were used for training. So there are two left in the world. One is down in Lubbock at the Museum and the other is at the Air and Space Center in Washington DC.

Interviewer: What about the Remagan Bridge?

Oh the Remagan bridge. That was the first bridge we captured across the Rhine. They sent me over from our encampment in France to set up an air evacuation unit at the bridge site. They didn't want the bridge to be plugged with military vehicles crossing it so they decided to make a glider airlift. They would put the wounded in the gliders on the German side and the tow ship would come down and hook into the ropes to the glider and the nylon would stretch like a rubber band, the nylon tow ropes. Just like a rubber band they would give and the glider would take off. It was very dangerous because it slowed the tow ship down so much when they cut into the lines. The lines were only 1 inch in diameter. They stretched one third of their length like nylon stockings. Then it would take up the glider and shoot off. We found that wasn't a practical way of doing it because it slowed the tow ship up so much. So we cut that out. They loaded these gliders with the wounded but the wounded were Germans so we figured if it crashed we

wouldn't lose any American boys. Of course we didn't lose any Germans either so that was good.

Nobody really liked us, the air Corps didn't like us, and the Army didn't like us. The glider pilots were hellions. We really were, we were like a Marine bunch and proud of it. It was a tough life and a tough crew. We were sort of adopted by the 82nd and the 101st because they are the ones we carried into battle. The 82nd was carried into D-Day and the 101st was carried into Holland. The 101st was also carried into Basil which was the northern crossing of the Rhine. So the airborne were very good friends of ours. In fact going into Holland I was steering the glider and I had five paratroopers with me in a trailer load of hand grenades and landmines. That was my load. The paratroopers all handed me their flack suits. We all had flack suit but no parachutes. We laid the flack suits on the floor of the glider. The flack suits were made out of metal to ward off the gunshots and so forth. I said I can't take your flack suits but they said if anything happens to you we are gone. So I said to the fellow sitting next to me in the dual controls how much flying have you had and he said," I've never flown in my life." I said are you a glider pilot and he said no I'm one of the boys from back here. I just got the front seat. I said you're going to have to learn how to fly a glider in about one hour cause it took us three hours to go from England to Holland. So I did. Luckily we got there all right. We were quite a bunch.

Interviewer: Troopers were on the flight?

Will that is just what I told you about the troopers we carried and they were injured in Sicily. Jumping in Sicily and they could not jump but they could go in glider. The sad part of it was we got extra pay for flight pay but when they went along as infantry in the glider, they got no extra pay. They were just infantry. They didn't like that too much either. That's the way it was.

Interviewer: Tell me about your life before you went into service and then your life after you got out of service.

Well before I went into the service, I went from high school into college at Oswego. Then, after four years in the service, after the war in '46 I got out and went back to Oswego and got my bachelors degree. Then I got a job teaching in Herkimer. I taught there for 35 years. Never wanted to move even though I had chances. Everybody has a chance to move. But I just love the people, love the town and love the high school, love everything. So we stayed and raised our children and never regretted it. Right now we are thanking the good Lord that we are up in northern New York state and rather than down on Long Island with the possibility of terrorists attacks and so forth. And for my hobbies, I have a lovely place upon route 28 and 3 acres. I have a phonograph Museum. It is in a redbrick schoolhouse, one of the few left. 200 phonographs in there of all types and makes. And I put on programs for church groups, historical groups and Red Cross groups and Salvation Army groups and so forth. My wife is fantastic, she's into everything, service, she's in Homestead at Mohawk, she's in the garden club, she's in meals on wheels, and she's very active in the church groups and so forth.

Interviewer: Obviously during the war you went through very difficult experiences. You said you lost many men

We lost 40% in one of our missions. 40%

Interviewer: How did you react to that?

It is a big movie. When you are in the middle of it, things happened so fast, you are detached from the moral aspect of it. When we landed in Holland, there were 14 tow ships shot down right over the LZ. And you would see the fellows bailout of the tow ship which is on fire and the chute would catch on the, unintelligible, the back end of the plane as it went in and it would drag the pilot in with it. There was a lot of that going on. You have to detach yourself from it as much as possible. And of course, being in the Air Force was a clean part of the war. You went out on your mission and came back to clean sheets and a bottle of vodka. And everything started over the next day. But when you are in the trenches like these ones in Iraq, they don't have a chance. They don't have a chance to get rid of the thoughts and the horror of war because they are right in the middle of it. We were very fortunate as long as I came back with my arms and my legs and so forth we considered that was all right. It was good. It doesn't compare with the fighting soldier on the ground. They are the ones that deserved the credit.

Interviewer: How many of these stories have you shared with your family?

Interviewer: You could go on the mission and come back unlike the soldier on the ground.

That was so true of the Air Force. You take when the B-17s were bombing Germany near the end of the war. In one mission, they shot down 30 B-17s. There are 10 men on each B-17. That is 300 men lost on one mission. Those people really suffered. But we were sort of the Special Forces in the gliders. They did not use us very much. The main purpose of the gliders was to drop behind enemy lines. This is what the helicopters are doing now. Only trouble is the helicopters are getting shot down. That was the purpose of the gliders is to go over and get beyond the present enemy troops and then come back the other way which is what we did in Normandy and Holland. So it really didn't affect us emotionally, we had time to heal. Of course, we had a lot of time off as the missions were only once in a great while. We are in England for two years before we went on any mission. All we had to do was get our flying time in, which was very easy to do. I can't stress enough that if I had a boy in service in Iraq right now, I don't know how I could take it. I hate to say this to the media but the media is spoiling everything. They bring everything to light that happens and things that don't happen. Then they repeated over and over and over again. This to me is not the way it should be. In other words the important messages should be with the people, there's no question about it. But I think they overdo it with the television. If I was a father or mother with a son or daughter in service over there, I would, in fact it is getting to the point now where I heard this morning on the television

some of the mothers are turning off the television sets. They just can't comprehend the fact that their son or daughter might be killed.

Interviewer: it seems you had a lot of time off.

We traveled a lot. We were stationed in Europe; I was stationed in Europe for three years. I was only on three missions.

Interviewer: How about your contact with people back home? Did you have a lot of contact?

Oh, we got the usual care packages and things like that. Letters, we'd write letters back and forth. I didn't see my mother for four years when I went into service. I saw her once. Once in four years. I came home on a 10 day leave. And yet, I made it all right.

Interview: what did you learn about what was happening back home at that time? Were you aware of all of the home efforts people were making in support of you?

Oh yes, certainly. In fact, in a couple of the papers I have back here they are telling how many people when Pearl Harbor was bombed, they killed over 1000 people. When an aircraft carrier sinks during World War II, a thousand, 1200 people were drowned. Those are the things that made the headlines but I have never been one for publicity.

You started do ask, I think, what you tell your boys about the war and your experiences. I have nothing to hold back because I keep telling them I did nothing. I just flew a glider into Holland and Germany and so forth. I made it back all right. But I don't feel like a war hero. I did my part.

Interviewer: when you came home what did you think about the food and gas rationing things like that in an effort to support the war?

Well we knew what it was. We had ration tickets ourselves as soldiers in service. So we could only get so many cigars a week, so many beers a week and so forth. So we were going through a rationing of ourselves. Yet the people back home no matter how strapped they were for gas, cigarettes; they would send it overseas to their sons and daughters. It's the old story that the people at home suffered more than the soldiers did. That is the thing that I worried about more than anything else. I wasn't married at the time so I would write to my mother and tell her to keep her chin up and try to bolster them you know. It didn't bother us as soldiers that rationing was going on because it didn't affect us. We knew that it was going on but it didn't really affect us.

Interviewer: What kinds of things, what kinds of stories about this time are important to pass onto young people? There is such a difference, you know, we talk about conserving things and rationing, such a difference in the way of life from that time to what children experience today or the people in their homes. What kinds of things are important to you?

I feel like Dr. Phil. As I said we never had problems with our kids. They grew up respecting things, they never drew on the walls, and they never drove while they were intoxicated. Of course when your boys are 50 years old now, it goes way back before you see they had their beer parties but nobody had a car. Anybody that smoked hid it from their parents. Now they don't hide it from their parents they just, the butt goes wherever it is handy to go. So I don't think, as far as they are concerned, that I chastised them for what they did. I don't like what the ones are doing now. I can remember my mother used to say, Marge and I always kid each other and say things weren't like that when I was a girl. And they weren't like that when we were boys and girls. But now things are different. I mean no one gets married before they lived together and that's not a bad idea when you think about it. It saves on a lot of divorces. People have a different set of standards today. You can't fight it. I don't believe for one minute you can fight it. They have a lot of psychologists working on it but they haven't done much good. I always said a psychologist is somebody with a problem.

Interviewer: when you came home from the military or I should say when the war was over, what was your memory of that day?

Well of course we knew it was coming. All the soldiers in Europe knew what was coming. When V-E Day came everybody knew the Japs were giving up too so it didn't hit us all at once. But I don't remember any burning buildings or shooting off of rockets or anything like that. We knew it was coming, once we started into Germany and got into Berlin and so forth. There was a lot more rejoicing on Fifth Avenue down here than there was in the Army camps. Oh I imagine we had the parties. Everybody had the parties. One thing they never ran short on was beer and so forth in the service. Everybody had it. The Army resented the Navy a little bit because the Navy got all the good stuff and the Army got what was left. They got all the good cigars and they got all the good beer. It got to the point the Army pilots were flying down to southern England to get the Navy supplies which were first-class rather than second-

class. I think there was more joy at home then there was in the field. I mean everybody was glad that it was over.

Interviewer: A lot of people tell the story of somebody who was close to them, friends in the service, and what happened to them whether it was good or bad. Is there someone you shared time with in the service that was important to you?

Yeah I had my best friends. As I said my best friend got killed in Holland. When you look out here and gliders are in staggered situation, two tow ships here and this glider loses a wing and this is your best friend Jesse Ferguson from Berkman Texas. I'll never forget it. All I remember seeing that glider going down into the ground. Yeah you lose friends. You can't live together for two or three years and travel together because whenever you left the base you usually went to the same base over here and over there and so forth. I guess it depends on what you're mettle is. It depends on how strong you are. Like the paratrooper that rolled his grenades into the tent and

killed his own buddies, it happened but when you think of the number of men you wonder why it doesn't happen more than it does. Most people are tough when it comes down to it. So are the civilians. The civilians take an awful beating when the war comes, because they can't touch it. They can read about it and they can listen to it but they can't touch it. It doesn't affect them really. I'm 83 going on 84 and I feel worse about growing old with my friends going. Because the first place I look and my wife looks is the obituary column. This is sad you know. So we try to live as full of life as we possibly can. Go places together, do things together and so forth. But remembering every day here is a day off down here you cannot afford not to be happy. You got to be happy if you can.

End of interview