

**Herbert 'Lee' Davis
Veteran**

**Wayne Clark
Interviewer**

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Slingerlands New York**

Wayne Clark WC
Herbert 'Lee' Davis HD

WC: Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name, date of birth, and your place of birth please?

HD: Herbert Lee Davis, born September 6, 1925 in Carney, New Jersey.

WC: Did you attend school in Carney?

HD: Yes, high school.

WC: What year did you graduate?

HD: 1943.

WC: Do you recall where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

HD: I was listening to the radio in my room and my next-door neighbor was outside working on his car, and I heard it, then I called him from out the window and told him. He then started marching up and down the street like he was carrying a gun or a rifle.

WC: Did he end up going into the service?

HD: Yes.

WC: Was he older than you?

HD: Yes.

WC: You didn't go into the service until 1943 because you were still a student, did your life change after that moment?

HD: Not really, what I did was took a test for the Aviation Cadet program and passed and they called me within a week or two after I turned 18.

WC: You enlisted in the army?

HD: Airforce.

WC: How did your family feel?

HD: My mother was dead, and I don't think my father reacted strongly.

WC: Where did you go for your basic training?

HD: Miami, Florida.

WC: Was that your first time away from home for an extended time?

HD: Yeah, other than going to YMCA camp.

WC: How was basic training?

HD: We lived in a plush hotel, it wasn't too bad or too tough. Because officers in the air force previously had to have college educations, they sent me to Michigan state university for six months in lieu of me not having a college education.

WC: What did you study there?

HD: I just did some general courses; mostly math and science.

WC: Did you have any difficulty with the courses?

HD: Not really.

WC: Were you a fairly good high school student?

HD: Yeah, I was good in math and science.

WC: Once you completed your six months at Michigan, where did they send you next?

HD: I went to San Antonio, where they gave me a battery of tests to see what I was best suited for. Turned out to be bombardier. Then I went to Big Spring, Texas I believe.

WC: Was that a bombardier school?

HD: Yes, I think so. I went to two different places. Big Spring and [Pause] I forget the other one. One of them was like on-the-line training, like a mechanic. Then I went to bombardier school.

WC: Did you find bombardier school difficult at all?

HD: No, I don't think so. Maybe fairly difficult.

WC: You went up in airplanes to practice bombing; do you recall what type of aircraft you flew in?

HD: Yes, AT-11. Twin engine and twin tail.

WC: Did you drop dummy bombs?

HD: Yeah, ten-pound black powder bombs.

WC: Besides the bombardier training, did you get any training to be an officer?

HD: Yes, I ended up being a flight officer. When you finish training, you either get to be a lieutenant or a flight officer. I don't know exactly what the criteria was, but I became a flight officer.

WC: Do you know if that was something like a warrant officer?

HD: Right.

WC: You were a warrant officer?

HD: Correct. I call it a flight officer, they're similar.

WC: How long was that bombardier school?

HD: I think about six months.

WC: Once you completed that training, what happened next?

HD: They kept me at the airbase. Because the training had changed over a period of time, I stayed there and taught the techniques to returned combat bombardiers so they could become instructors.

WC: I see. Did you work with the Norden bombsight at all?

HD: Oh yeah. That's mainly what I used.

WC: Was that complicated and hard to learn?

HD: I did very well with it, in fact, we did something that I didn't think was proper. My partner in the training, his scores weren't good enough to graduate, so my instructor said "we'll put your name on his scores, and his scores on your name." I didn't think that was very smart, if you weren't able to hit the target, then you just put everybody at risk.

WC: Did he graduate as a flight officer also?

HD: No, I think he graduated as a lieutenant [Laughter]. He was in service previously, he was a sergeant.

WC: You stayed in Texas as an instructor for the rest of the war?

HD: Yes, as soon as the war ended, they discharged us as excess.

WC: What was life like in Texas? Did you have a lot of time off?

HD: Yeah, it was quite funny. My roommate was a returned combat, and he forced landed in Sweden, and they're supposed to be kept there for the rest of the war. But they had an agreement, the United States flew unmarked planes in and took them out. He was my roommate, but he didn't have enough points to get out. But I was declared excess, so they discharged me right away. I had a lot of time off since I was an instructor, and I ran into him at the discharge center, and he said "what are you doing here?" I said I was getting discharged. And he blew his top! [Laughter]

WC: During your time off, how were you treated by the civilian populous? What was the closest big city?

HD: The closest big city was San Antonio. I was treated fine.

WC: More specifically, if you didn't have a ride or were hitchhiking, would people pick you up if they saw you in uniform? Or if you were to go into a bar, would the drinks be on the house?

HD: No, the only place where drinks were on the house was the Elks Club. They only served officers there. Otherwise, you paid for your drinks. Being an eighteen-year-old kid at the time, I enjoyed it. [Both Laugh]

WC: What about entertainment? Did you have any USO troops or shows come by the base you were at?

HD: Yeah, we had entertainment and music. I remember particularly an all-black jazz band that was excellent. They were regulars there.

WC: Do you remember the death of President Roosevelt?

HD: Yes.

WC: I know we've interviewed a lot of veterans and Roosevelt was the only president they had ever known and there was a lot of apprehension about Truman being the next president when a lot of the guys didn't know anything about him.

HD: That's true, he was a Kansas City politician.

WC: What about when the war in Germany ended? Was there a lot of celebration in base? And on top of that, were there any rumors about the Pacific?

HD: Yeah, I always joke saying that when I graduated from bombardier school the Germans had about it and dropped out. And then when I was going overseas, Japan heard about it and then they quit. [Laughter]

WC: When you heard about the dropping of the atomic bomb, was that hard to comprehend? That one bomb could be so destructive to take out an entire city?

HD: Yes.

WC: Did you hear any rumors about the weapon being developed?

HD: I think so. I forget the fellas name that was instrumental in developing it –

WC: Oppenheimer?

HD: Yeah.

WC: Once Japan surrendered, until you left the service, what was it like on post? Did the training stop?

HD: Yes, as soon as Japan surrendered everything stopped immediately.

WC: Where were you discharged?

HD: Tampa, Florida.

WC: Then you went home to New Jersey?

HD: Yes.

WC: How did you get home? Did you take a train or travel by plane?

HD: I went by train.

WC: Was there a celebration when you got home?

HD: I don't recall too much of a celebration.

WC: Did you make use of the GI bill?

HD: Yes, definitely.

WC: You got your college degree?

HD: Right.

WC: Did you use the 52-20 Club?

HD: Yes.

WC: Did you join any veteran organizations?

HD: No.

WC: Did you stay in contact with anyone you were in the service with?

HD: No.

WC: Did you attend any reunions at all?

HD: No. I have a tendency in everything in my life; once it's over with, it's over with.

WC: So, you graduated from college and got your bachelor's degree in education. What was your first job after that?

HD: Pharmaceutical detailing.

WC: How long did you do that for?

HD: Nine years. And I was getting a divorce for my wife, and one of the conditions for me getting custody of my daughter was having a job where I'd be home every night. So, I went into teaching, since my pharmaceutical detailing had me traveling.

WC: Where did you teach?

HD: I started in Walton, NY and then Catskill, NY.

WC: What grades did you teach?

HD: Junior high.

WC: How many years did you teach?

HD: Sixteen.

WC: You mentioned working for the Red Cross?

HD: Yes, that was my last job.

WC: What did you do at the Red Cross?

HD: I was a development officer. Basically, a fundraising job.

WC: And then you retired?

HD: Yes.

WC: What year did you retire?

HD: 1989.

WC: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

HD: It added a discipline to my life. I was more on top of things; made sure they got done. I didn't procrastinate as much. It made me more disciplined.

WC: Is there anything else you'd like to touch on? Maybe some particular incidents you can recall from back in your service days?

HD: Yeah, I can recall a day that almost cost me my life. We were going on a night practice mission. And the pilot was kind of a wild guy ... he got into the plane and he noticed the landing gear indicator was in neutral, and he said "the plane is standing here on the runway, it must be in down position," so he put it in down position. Then he started to take off. What happened was, as soon as the plane lightened up, the wheels collapsed, and the plane dropped. He circled the field, and they put the floodlights on him and said "your wheels are down now, but we don't know whether or not they're locked or not. So, we suggest you go around again." But this time the plane was rattling and everything, so he said "no, I'm coming down and staying down." When we got out of the plane, the crew chief came over and both props were bent like this [Demonstrates a forty-five degree bend] and I just can't understand how they didn't fly out of the engine.

WC: Wow, so the props hit the runway when you landed.

HC: Yeah, and we landed when we were taking off.

WC: Were there a lot of training incidents?

HC: Yeah. There was a guy in our barracks who died during the training.

WC: So, the training itself was pretty dangerous?

HC: Well, those two incidents were the only ones I remember being fatal.

WC: Anything else you care to add?

HC: I think that covers it.

WC: Thank you very much for your interview.

HC: Thank you.