Donald G. Hauprich
Narrator

Michael Russert
New York State Military Museum's Oral History Project
Interviewer

November 21, 2002
New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, NY

MR: Can you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

DH: My name is Donald G. Hauprich. My date of birth is February 10, 1924 and I was born in Albany, N.Y.

MR: What was your schooling before you entered military service?

DH: My schooling was in Albany, NY and I graduated from Albany High School in 1942.

MR: Where were you and what was your reaction when you heard about what happened at Pearl Harbor?

DH: I was at home and it was a Sunday–I lived on upper Second Street at the time. The news came over the radio while I was doing my homework, which was a *no no* in those days. I was really upset because I didn't know what was going to happen or what would happen to the family and our lives. I told my parents the news had just come over the radio and of course they were nervous and upset too.

MR: Did you enlist? Or were you drafted?

DH: I was drafted into the U.S. Army.

MR: Where did you receive your basic training?

DH: My basic training was at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri in 1943.

MR: Was this your first time away from home?

DH: Not really. I was in the Boy Scouts for many years so I had the opportunity to camp and get away from home once in awhile.

MR: Can you tell us about your training? Did you receive any specialty training?

DH: I was trained with the Engineer Corp. and our training included rifle range practice and we had hikes and close order drills. We had all of our shots and they prepared us to go overseas. We were not trained as a combat unit, but as a support unit. The 1084th Engineer Utility Detachment was what I was assigned to.

MR: Did you stay in the United States very long? Or did you go overseas directly after boot camp?

DH: I was in the United States a very short time before being sent to Fort Claiborne, Louisiana where I joined my permanent unit–the 1084th Engineers. From there we prepared to ship overseas.

MR: How did you get overseas?

DH: From Fort Claiborne, Louisiana we took a troop train and were taken across the country to California–San Francisco. Camp Stoneman was the port of embarkation. We were there a very short length of time before we were put aboard a troop ship –The New Amsterdam– which was a converted passenger liner. We sailed under the San Francisco Gate Bridge and we were on our way. For forty-two days we did not know where we were going, but we stopped at various ports along the way. We stopped at New Zealand, Australia and Sri Lanka–went through the Indian Ocean into the Red Sea and then on into Egypt–and disembarked in Suez on the Canal.

MR: So you went across the Pacific…

DH: [Nod] Across the Pacific, into the Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea. That was the route. Then we disembarked at Suez in Egypt–on the canal.

MR: Did you have any ceremony when crossing the equator?

DH: Yes–we did! We had the King Neptune Ceremony and that was quite enjoyable. [Chuckle] I think it was even more enjoyable because the commanding officer got dumped in a pool. [Laughter] So that was all part of it. We had church services aboard the liner … and a lot of drills because the liner went over unescorted. That was rather nerve-racking. At night there were no lights showing–all the portholes were covered. The only protection we had was anti-aircraft fire and depth charges that could be launched over the sides. Fortunately, there were no incidences on the way. The anxiety was mainly *where were we going*–which we did not know until we hit the Red Sea going into Egypt.

MR: What did you do once you reached Egypt?

DH: Once we reached [Egypt] the first thing was an inspection … we had to stand for inspection. Then we had to develop a campsite on the desert outside of Suez. That involved masons and carpenters putting down a cement platform and 2X4 framework for our tents. Then we were assigned various duties in construction in that area.

MR: Could you tell us about some of your duties?

DH: My duties were mostly in the electrical end–I worked in an electrical warehouse. At one point some of my unit were moved to a commando base on the Mediterranean Coast. The base had to be dismantled because it was no longer in use … the invasion of Southern Italy had begun and they didn't need us [in that location] anymore. We had to take these bases down and load all the equipment and materials onto trucks which would then be recycled. That was one of my duties.

I don't want to skip too far, but at once point I was shipped to Dakar in West Africa and that meant a plane ride up the coast of Africa–stopping at Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and so forth … and to Morocco and down.

MR: What were your relationships? Did you get to meet a lot of the people in Egypt?

DH: We were told when we went over that we had to be very careful about fraternization with the population. Although they were not openly hostile, they still favored the Axis Powers. We were told to never go into the cities by ourselves. We were always to go with someone else –or groups would be better– and we did that. When we had time off we would visit Cairo, Egypt–and Alexandria. We couldn't go into Suez were we were stationed initially because of Bubonic Plague–that was never open to us. We could go into Port Said, which was on the canal. We basically kept to ourselves. We would go into cafés and bazaar areas and buy gifts for home. We didn't have an awful lot of time off, but when we did we would ride on the back of an armory truck that was moving supplies around. We'd sit on top of these trucks and be transported to the Egyptian cities. These excursions would usually extend just two days.

MR: Then your next assignment was in Dakar?

DH: Yes. We flew down the West Coast of Africa on the Atlantic Ocean side–refueling several places along the way. The last place we refueled was way out in the desert where there was just a little gas station and a few tents. Then we went on into Dakar where there was an airfield and roads under construction at that time. I was assigned to work at a diesel fired electric generator power plant–on shifts. That is where I met my fate … my injuries.

MR: Do you want to talk about that?

DH: I was working alone at the time on a night shift. Some gasoline got on my shirt and somehow it was ignited when changing a battery. There was a spark and I was put on fire. As a result I suffered first, second and third degree burns. They thought at this time I should be shipped back home for treatment–which was a wise thought. I was loaded on a plane with other injured and flown to Casablanca in Morocco. There, after being stabilized, they put me aboard a Liberty ship –The Robert Dale Owen, I believe– and we were transported back to the States in a huge convoy. I don't know how many ships were involved but it was from horizon to horizon, practically. Occasionally depth charges would have to be launched over the side due to submarine activity. We were probably about ten days on route back to the states and just about a day before we entered port when we heard news that the Axis Powers had surrendered–that was joyful news. Then we landed in Newport News in Virginia.

From there I began my trips to hospitals for recuperation. I was sent to Rhoads General Hospital in Utica, NY for evaluation of my wounds and the doctors determined that I needed skin grafting on my right hand. To do this, I had to go to Valley Forge General Hospital in Pennsylvania–I believe it's near Pottstown. A lot of burn cases were coming in from soldiers injured in tanks … where they would catch fire. They did skin grafting on my wrist, hand and fingers of my right hand. There were two operations and then I was sent for rest and recuperation to Lake Placid, NY for several days–and then to Atlantic City for reassignment. At that point the Army figured I'd still be useful to them for awhile since the Japanese were still engaged in war with us. I was assigned to Fort Dix in New Jersey where they were receiving veterans to be discharged. My job there was a record clerk. I was a T5 Corporal at that time and had a small crew working with me recording things that had to go on the surface records–such as, shots and date of entry back into the U.S., and so forth.

MR: And how long did you do that?

DH: I did that until we got the joyful news that the Japanese had surrendered. The A-bombs had been dropped and the Japanese had capitulated–and we celebrated. We figured that was about it for us and we would soon be discharged.

They did the discharging on a basis of points–so much for service, so much for overseas time, and so on.

I was discharged in 1946 and had all of my records taken care of right there where I was working. Then I was loaded aboard a bus that took me to The Port of Authority in NYC. From there I took a cab to Grand Central Station … and then a ride up the Hudson River –the BEAUTIFUL Hudson River– and then home … to Albany, N.Y.

That was basically the end of my service.

MR: Did you make use of the G.I. Bill after serving?

DH: I did. I received the eligibility certificate under the G.I. Bill and I went to work to learn the hardware business. There was a hardware store in Albany, NY in the south end and there I learned how many items they had, what they were, how to sell them and how to stock them–it was very interesting. I did that until a short return to high school–I wanted to pick up some subjects that I missed before graduation. Later, I met my beautiful wife and we were married and raised a family–ten children.

MR: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

DH: I did. I joined three or four. The American Legion, for awhile–then The Catholic War Veterans and The Veterans of Foreign Wars. Currently, I'm in The Disabled American Veterans. I've been a member for over 20 years and I'm a life member.

MR: Does the group you belong with have any reunions or have you kept in contact with anyone?

DH: I did keep in contact with some of my buddies and friends from overseas for quite a while, but I believe they are all deceased now. I never went to any reunions–I was never really aware of any. I would read in the paper where certain reunions were being held but I never saw my company involved, so I just assumed they were not reuniting for any reason.

MR: How do you think your military service affected your life?

DH: Well, I think it made me grow up somewhat. I mean, as a nineteen-year-old going into the service you're not very mature at that point. I had a lot of things to work out. [Laughter] The discipline helped me a lot. It taught me how to work … and to work in shifts–and to be responsible for what I was doing because other people depended on me. Basically, I think it made me a better citizen. I was glad for it … eventually … in hindsight.

MR: Now, you brought some things in?

DH: I did.

[Pause while Donald's Army uniform jacket is taken out of a plastic clothing bag and handed to him by the interviewer.]

DH: What we're looking at here is the blouse worn when we were dressed up on parade or going home on a furlough. This was my last grade–T5 Technician Corporal. [Pointing to the bottom patch on the right sleeve of the blouse.]

The U.S. Army insignia. [Pointing to a metal pin on the right side collar.]

The United States Great Seal, here. [Pointing to a pin on the left shoulder of the blouse.]

This indicates a discharge from service. [Pointing to pin over the right side chest pocket.]

This patch indicated the Middle Eastern Theatre in Northern Africa. [Pointing to the top patch on the right sleeve.]

This pin is the US Army Corp of Engineers. [Pointing to a pin on the right collar.]

This patch was worn after I returned and was assigned to the Quartermaster Corps in Fort Dix, New Jersey where I did the record work. [Pointing to the top patch on the left sleeve.]

This was a Good Conduct medal … American Theatre … The Middle Eastern Theatre … and this was The Victory medal. [Donald named these while running his finger along a rectangular pin that had several different icons attached to it.]

This was for Good Conduct … and this was The Victory Medal. [These additional two pieces described while pointing to two medals with striped ribbons that are located immediately above the left chest pocket.]

MR: Do you have any papers with you?

DH: I do.

[Donald then opens a small clear plastic bag and begins taking out documents and describes them as he hands them to the interviewer.]

DH: This covers –in a very general way– my service. My father was quite a writer in his day. He loved to write letters –that was his job in a steel company– so he wrote to the newspapers. [Donald shows a single page from a photo album that encases newspaper clippings as well as some old pictures.] The pictures are of me after I was wounded and home … and of some of my friends. That's my sister and my father. These two are my friends. He later went into the Navy with his brother here. [Pointing to his two friends.] On the back there are others ... here you have a picture of how I looked on the desert in my desert hat.

[Pause while interviewer holds page up to camera to get a close up of the photographs and news articles.]

DH: This is another picture that I would like to keep for my children. [Additional photo is pulled from a small plastic cover.]

MR: We will make copies of them.

DH: This is me in Alexandria, Egypt in 1943. [In this photo Donald is sitting on a low fence made of metal with a palm tree in the background. He's wearing the same Army uniform dress blouse that he is donating to the museum. This photograph was taken prior to receiving all of the patches, medals and pins previously described, however.]

DH: This is my discharge–and this is the military work list. This is part of my passport. I think there are two sheets of the passport there–you can keep those.

MR: Are you sure?

DH: Yes. And this is my dog tag. You can keep that with the uniform if you want to.

MR: Are you sure?

DH: Yea. I don't think anyone will want that. [Humble speculation]

MR: You should check before you do that … with ten children … and how many grandchildren?

DH: Twenty-five, I believe … at latest count. [Laughter]

MR: Thank you very much for the interview.