

Frances E. Frohnapple
Howard J. Frohnapple
Veterans

Orchard Park, H.S. Orchard Park, NY
Interviewer

Interviewed on November 25 2006
Orchard Park New York

Q: Mr. Frohnapple, were you drafted or were you enlisted in the war?

HF: I volunteered.

Q: Volunteered? Okay. And why did you volunteer?

HF: Someone had to do the job, Courtney. And it took me three attempts to get in because they didn't want me (Frances laughs). I could not meet the minimum weight requirement. I circumvented this by, on the third attempt, just before being weighed, drinking a quart of milk and eating a bunch of bananas, which just eased me over the line.

Q: And what about you? I'm guessing you volunteered, because women weren't drafted.

FF: Oh yes, it was all volunteer. Yeah.

Q: And why did you volunteer?

FF: Oh, I just thought it would be a good way to serve in the service and get out of the rather bland home all the time.

Q: Do you remember your first few days in the service?

FF: I remember the first day (laughs), because I had the worst meal I ever ate. And I thought "oh this is horrible."

Q: What was it?

It was fish and we were in Hunter College and it was on the steam table and all I could smell was this horrible fish, and I go "Oh, I'm not gonna live through this!". But after that it was great (laughs).

Q: What about you?

HF: The first meal that I ever remember was at the training center in Nashville, Tennessee and we were on a dirt road lined up for about three blocks. We went up a hill to the cafeteria, the cafeteria if you will, and the word came back that we were going to have, of all things, fried oysters. Now, for a naive person like myself, never having

enjoyed these, I gritted my teeth and said “Howard, this is the point where you gotta make up your mind.” So at that point I decided, no matter what they served, I was going to enjoy it. And that’s pretty much the history of success at the dining table.

Q: Tell me about your training experience.

HF: The classification for Aviation Cadet Service, which is what I ended in, was very profound and very detailed. They examine you not only mechanically, but psychologically. And such things as, whether you could hold a pen pointed at a ring so that it did not touch the side of the ring, which would set off an alarm. They tested your nerves, in other words.

Q: Do you remember any of your specific instructors?

HF: After we were assigned classes, there was a lieutenant lead that I remembered. A real gentleman, and a real good instructor who led us in a battle against the New York cadets. Because, we who were only high school graduates, felt that we were maybe not equal to the task of graduating from our training. However, that incentive caused us upon graduation day to exceed. The smart guys from New York City, we all enjoyed it... kind of. Repertoire, if you will.

Q: And what was your training like?

FF: Well actually, I just went to boot camp, which was giving information about the navy. This was the third regiment, so they were in great need of people on the base, and I had the secretarial qualities. So they kept me there, gave me a rating, and that was it.

Q: How did you stay motivated while you were in the war?

FF: Motivated?

Q: Were you happy that you were there, or did you ever have doubt and think “I wish I was home”?

FF: Oh, I enjoyed it very much.

Q: Did you?

FF: I was very lucky in having nice roommates and nice people to work with, and we all got along very well, and it really was a fun thing.

Q: What about you?

HF: Repeat the question.

Q: How did you stay motivated during the war? Have you ever seen combat when you were overseas?

HF: Yes.

Q: Yes. Was there ever a time that you wanted to just go home because you were sick of it?

HF: No.

Q: Never?

HF: Never.

Q: Wow! So you enjoyed?

HF: Only when the job was done, and we did it.

Q: How did you guys entertain yourselves?

HF: That's a leading question, so I'll give you an opening. We were in England, and we lived in Nissen huts. Those are corrugated iron... steel, if you will, buildings. And there were about four crews in that building. We were the new guys. And when we went in... and they were dark... the ones that were there said "I wonder if they'll come over tonight." Uh, who's coming in? "Every night they come over with the bombs! Then you never know what's gonna happen. Then, you'll know it when they hit nearby!" So we tried to put our luggage in shape, and whatever, and all of the sudden, "BADOOM! BADOOM!" The building shook, and the older guys paused for a minute, and they started laughing. They said "Oh, don't worry, it's just those jokers next door rolling bricks off the building!" So, that may answer your question.

Q: I'm curious. How did you guys meet?

FF: Playing badminton at the turbine in Buffalo.

Q: So, it wasn't during the war?

FF: No.

Q: No?

HF: Before.

Q: Before the war?

FF: Yeah.

HF: Well no, before we went into the service.

Q: What was it like keeping the relationship while you were in the service?

HF: It was difficult.

FF: We were so busy that we didn't have much relationship (laughing).

Q: Did you write letters?

FF: Oh yeah. Yup

HF: Yes. We used what was called... what? V-mail? Are you acquainted with V-mail?

FF: Well it's sort of a lightweight material that you sent during the war.

HF: And you write your regular letter, post it, and they would shrink it down into this low weight, small size, to facilitate postage service.

Q: Oh wow. What was your most memorable experience?

FF: (laughing) You answer that (nodding to Howard).

HF: I can answer that. Also, what determined my getting out of the war. It was D-Day, the landing at Normandy. I flew my 19th and 20th combat mission in B-24's, and on the third pass over our target, because of cloud cover, we had to circle. On the third time, our plane was hit by Flak. I was hit by Flak. And fortunately, I was the only one of the crew injured. But the ship was pretty badly damaged, and we had to then return to Southampton, England, where we had a semi-crash landing. By that time, I was in shock so badly, I hardly knew what was going on. But when I had woken, if you will, I see a priest giving me last rights. And that was it. That was my most memorable.

Q: That is pretty memorable. Were you awarded with any awards or citations?

HF: Oh yeah. Purple Heart, and two Air Medals with clusters, and New York State was kind enough to award me a Conspicuous Service Award.

Q: Do you recall any particularly funny or unusual events that happened while you were serving? Or pranks that you would pull, or that somebody else would pull?

HF: I'm sure. Well, this was kind of a funny thing. We used to accumulate our little chocolate wafers from our K and C-rations and we'd take a little rubbing from other crews because we would also accumulate our milk. We'd mix the two together and take them up on a flight, and when we came down, we had ice cream.

Q: Where did you travel when you were in the service? What were some of the places you went to?

HF: Well, mine was rather narrow. From Buffalo, we went to Nashville, Tennessee for classification. That's to determine what you're capable of, and then you're usually given a choice. Pilot, navigator, or bombardier. I wanted to know where I was going, so I chose a navigator. Then-

FF: Well, you were in a different area in all those places.

HF: Oh yeah, well I don't know if they want that. On the way after extensive training, in Monroe, Louisiana, I graduated with a commission, and then we were assigned

overseas. We went from Florida, by way of Blythe California. The world's healthiest air base. Because it was so dry and hot, nothing could live there. Then, we flew down to Venezuela, South America to Fortaleza, South America. Flew over the South Atlantic to Dakar, Africa. Over the mountains there, to Ireland... I can't think of the name of it. We went up to Ireland and Scotland for modification of aircraft. In other words, they updated the aircraft. Then from there to where we were based through our combat missions. That's in England.

Q: Did you travel a lot?

FF: (laughing) Only to visit him when I could get away.

HF: (To Frances Frohnapple) What happened on your first leave?

FF: Oh, he was in Monroe, Louisiana I believe.

HF: Yes.

FF: No, wait a minute, that was... well anyway, I had to go first by subway, then I had to go by train, then I had to go by bus, and then I had to go on a little ship across. This was in Newport News in Louisiana, and there were no seats. I'm looking for a seat. I finally found one, I sat down. Well, everybody's looking at me and laughing and I wonder "what the heck?" It seems that back then I wasn't used to the South. The colored did not sit with the whites, and I was in the colored section. So, I got up and left. I wasn't used to that.

Q: How often did you get to visit him?

FF: Maybe, at the most, four or five times.

HF: She had good roommates and they covered for her.

FF: Yeah. I went AWOL more than once (laughs).

HF: She went AWOL.

Q: Did either of you ever keep a personal diary?

HF and FF: No.

Q: Where was your favorite place to stay?

HF: (laughing) Well, home.

Q: Other than that.

HF: Other than that, I had no favorite.

Q: No favorite, it was all the same?

HF: Why... see... when you collect it, maybe intentionally to mention, on her trip to Monroe, Louisiana we were married.

FF: Yeah, that was my first leave.

HF: She was a war bride (Frances laughs). In a sense.

FF: Sort of.

Q: Did you guys stay in touch with anyone you met while in war?

HF: For a brief period of time. But, our crew were kinda special. They were replacement crews. We never had the opportunity, like so many people in the military have to establish a rapport with the group and stay with the group. I miss that.

FF: I retained a friendship with several girls that was in the service with me. I still send Christmas cards to them (laughs). One has passed away, but we were good friends.

Q: Can you remember anybody that you guys were in war with that made a lasting impression on you? That did something courageous or honorable that you'll never forget.

FF: I don't know.

HF: Well, my pilot was an exceptionally skilled person. And the fact that he was able to bring that plane back and set it down after the hit during Normandy, during that period... it's just remarkable, I'll never forget it.

Q: How did you guys stay in touch with your family back at home?

HF: By correspondents. We had no email, cellphones, anything of that sort.

Q: Did either of you keep anything with you to remind you of home like an item or a picture?

FF: I don't think so.

HF: Not really. We weren't great for that sort of thing.

Q: Did you ever feel really pressured or really stressed sometimes? Was there anything that just got to you? Were you having mental breakdowns?

HF: As far as myself is concerned, I went in expecting this. So, I wasn't really surprised. There is one thing I'll mention, and this was on the first combat mission that I was in. As we were approaching a target, I could feel a little tear coming down here. And it wasn't from fear, but it was recognizing the futility of all the wars. How, if part of the human life... and it's like, it could be like this forever... and there seemed no way that we had as yet found that we can eliminate war. So, here we are, all young people, with what could be potentially full lives ahead of us, on both sides and equally futile on both sides.

Q: Do you remember the day the war ended?

FF: Well there really were too many. So it ended against Germany first, and then Japan. When the war ended with Japan, I was in the hospital having a baby (laughs). The sad part was that there were some Japanese women there, and... that was sad.

Q: So what about you? Do you remember the day the war ended?

HF: No, but I remember the day when Roosevelt died. He was thought of as being a true casualty of the war.

Q: What did you do in the days and the weeks afterward... after the war ended. After you came out of service, how did you return to your normal life?

HF: Well, I had gone in, more or less, from a courteous right where I worked, let's say... expediter. And so I was eligible to return to that position. When I went back over, they found a position for me in the wood and plastics lab. Which, then moved over to Cornell in the same capacity, from which I then went to UB. No one in my family had ever gone to college. So here I am, able to the G.I. Bill of Rights. Although we were married and had a youngster, we thought the long term sacrifice would be a good thing. Well, I don't know if it inspired our kids or not to do any degree, but they're all graduates.

Q: Did you ever join a veteran's organization?

HF: Oh yes! Both of us have. In my case, it's the VFW Legion, the Eighth Air Force Society, Disabled American Vets, uh... what else?

FF: That's all.

HF: That's it.

FF: Did you say the Legion? I just joined the Legion.

Q: Has your experience in the war affected how you view war today, or the military?

FF: Oh, yes.

Q: In a positive way?

HF: I have to have your definition of what's positive.

Q: From what you experienced, do you justify the reasonings for what the military's doing now?

HF: Okay, I'll accept it. It was the same decisions that had to be made during the Revolutionary War, during the Civil War. Who are the good guys and wear the white hats? And who are the bad guys that wear the black hats? I think we did the right thing. Terrible price... horrible price. But, if we don't do it, who is going to do it? And that's the same reason that put me into the military. If I had to force my way into this service because they needed people, was that the right thing to do? There's never been a doubt in my mind that I did the right thing.

Q: I see you brought pictures of things. Do you want to tell us about some of them?

HF: Yeah, my wife will... that's her part (nods to Frances).

FF: (laughs) Well, we're moving the 1st of November. I have everything packed, and this is the only thing I came up with. And this was our wedding picture (laughs), if you will. We were married in Monroe, Louisiana and I went there on my first leave. And he was still in navigation school, so he only had one day off and that's when we got married. And I didn't know anybody of course, so we had an all-male wedding. There were no girls in my wedding (laughs). When I went to the priest, he was typing up the wedding license and he was getting me married to the best man. So I said "That's wrong." So he says "Well you type it!" so I had to type up my own wedding license. (Shows other picture) This was, I guess, on our first leave when we went home, and that's a little more formal. But that was our wedding day.

HF: We didn't have a coach with horses (Frances laughs). We had bicycles.

FF: Yeah, and we went swimming the next day. And that's the first time I ever went swimming in a pool that was hotter than outside. Oh, it was a hundred and something in that pool. I mean, it was terrible. We're... I was used to Lake Erie.

HF: Why don't I ask about this. We didn't know what to print frankly. Perhaps I won't even go over the subject. But, being students, you may be interested in these. Stars and Stripes was a newspaper, and these two are related to the push on Normandy. That's theirs.

FF: I guess... just go ahead and take a copy.

HF: Yeah, she said something about copies. Okay? Uh... not having electronic equipment, or nothing like that, maybe you'd like to see the instruments I had to work with to calculate positions, speed, and that sort of thing. That's my calculator.

FF: Now you don't need this. You don't have a navigator. You just push buttons and it goes.

HF: And here's my star charts, and you can take a look at those.

Q: And you could figure out where you were and where you're going based on these things?

HF: Exactly.

FF: On those things (laughs).

HF: And we had a loose general control rule. If you can get within three miles of you're going and no more than three minutes off your ETA, estimated time of arrival, that's considered very acceptable.

Q: Oh my gosh. This looks so hard.

FF: Sure different than it is now (laughs).

Q: Oh yeah, now you just plug in where you want to go on the computer and it shows you right where to go.

HF: But if that never goes out, you better have some knowledge of this stuff to fall back on.