

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

DONALD "DC" PRESSENTIN

Fighter Pilot, Air Force, World War II

Contracting Officer, Air National Guard, Korean War

1997

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Pressentin, Donald C., (1923-1998). Oral History Interview, 1997.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 67 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 67 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Donald C. "D.C." Pressentin, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as a fighter pilot with the 324th Fighter Group, 315th Fighter Squadron during World War II and as a pilot with the Air National Guard Defense Command during the Korean War. Pressentin graduated from Madison East High School in 1941. After high school, he worked for a year then enrolled at the University of Wisconsin to study engineering. Pressentin explains he joined the Air Force cadet program at UW in 1942, intending to be a bombardier or a navigator. He describes his basic training at Miami Beach (Florida) and Gettysburg College (Pennsylvania) with the military's first college detachment program. While there, Pressentin completed ten hours of flying time and discovered he loved piloting, although he had never been in an airplane before. Next, Pressentin was sent to Maxwell Field (Alabama) for pre-flight training, which involved physical training, learning Morse Code, and navigation classes. He remembers mild hazing at Maxwell Field for underclassmen involving memorizing lists and marching in white glove uniforms. Pressentin characterizes the college detachment as a "homogeneous group" of young men mostly from the Midwest and New York. Next, Pressentin describes in detail his basic flight training at Bainbridget (Georgia). He practiced landings, lazy eights and chandelles, adjusting for wind drift, and getting out of spins. He also notes he used an early flight simulator for instrument flying. Pressentin addresses why he wanted to be a fighter pilot, stating: "It was me and the airplane, and if I screwed up...I didn't take a whole bunch with me." After Advanced Flight Training in Marianna (Florida), Pressentin reveals he refused an offer to become an instructor because he wanted to fight. Next, he outlines his trip overseas from Dover (Delaware) to Naples (Italy) via the Straits of Gibraltar. He was in a convoy of twenty troop ships and aircraft carriers that brought the "Jugs" (P-47s) the pilots would be flying. Pressentin, now a first lieutenant, comments on the officers' cushy accommodations and states that, unlike the GIs, not one of the pilots on his ship got seasick. Pressentin was assigned to Corsica with the 324th Fighter Group. He discusses at length flying in formation during combat. Pressentin comments that he received help and advice from veteran pilots, and that after three or four missions, he was considered a veteran himself. Pressentin details his first combat mission in which he flew "top cover" for the Invasion of France in August 1944. He also flew "top cover" for Patton's invasion of Germany. Pressentin explains his role was to protect bombers and ground troops from enemy fighter planes; however, he describes these missions as "milk runs" because he encountered no German fighter planes. Pressentin reports he flew 58 missions and only encountered German fighter pilots once. Pressentin states the most difficult missions involved strafing and dive-bombing airfields in France while avoiding

German flak towers. In addition, Pressentin addresses military life. He describes spending the entire winter of 1944-45 in Douvres (France) and mentions he took leave in the French Riviera and Paris, where he saw the Glenn Miller Orchestra. Pressentin states he enjoyed France, contrasting it with Corsica where the civilians were wary of American troops fraternizing with Corsican women. He tells a story of drinking and playing cards on New Year's Eve in 1944 during a lull in fighting, then receiving last minute orders to fly a five a.m. mission on New Year's day. In Spring 1945, Pressentin tells how he was flying back from a mission over Germany when he crash-landed due to mechanical problems. Unconscious, he was rescued in the woods by French civilians. He woke up in a hospital in Nancy (France) and learned he had broken his back. Pressentin describes his recovery at length: he was sent to Marseilles General Hospital and put in hyper-extended casts for four months. Around V-E Day, he was flown from Torino (Italy) to Boston Hospital (Massachusetts), ending up in Fitzsimmons General Hospital in Denver (Colorado) in July 1945. Pressentin reports he was on an all-officers orthopedic ward. He praises the Army's medical care and reveals he was allowed to play golf in Denver in lieu of traditional physical therapy. In August 1945, Pressentin states he got married while on medical leave in Madison. After the war, he returned to the University of Wisconsin, majoring in Economics. Pressentin touches upon his readjustment to civilian life, commenting that housing was hard to find and it took a couple months to readapt to student life. He suggests World War II veterans had a "built-in support group," unlike in Vietnam, which lead to less post-traumatic stress. Also, Pressentin describes the changes to the UW campus because of the G.I. Bill, stating classes were held in huts and churches because so many veterans attended the college. After finishing his B.A. in three years, Pressentin started law school and joined the Air National Guard. In addition to the G.I. Bill and his Air Guard salary, Pressentin paid for law school by working for Oscar Mayer. He tells how winning a company golf tournament at Oscar Mayer got him a job with Farmer's Mutual Insurance; however, he worked there only a few weeks before the Air Guard was called to active duty in the Korean War. Pressentin was assigned to the Defense Command at Truax Air Field (Wisconsin), where he flew P-33 and F-89 jets over Wisconsin and Illinois on "scrambles" to monitor the domestic airways. Pressentin compares flying jets during the Korean War to flying propeller planes like the P-47 and B-51 during World War II. For the final six months of the Korean War, Pressentin reports he was sent to Sioux City Air Force Base (Iowa) where he held several different jobs: provost marshal, PX officer, contracting officer, and defense counsel on all court martials. In 1953, Pressentin resigned from the Air Guard because he wife was concerned about the risks of flying. He states he joined the DAV, VFW, and briefly the American Legion because he enjoyed the camaraderie. Pressentin also joined the P40 Association, a civilian pilot group dedicated to flying the P-40. Throughout the interview, Pressentin discusses various aircraft including the P-47, P-40, PT-17, P-38, B-40, B-51, B-15, F-89, and the F-86.

Biographical Sketch:

D.C. Presentin (1923-1998) was born in Madison (Wisconsin) and graduated from East High School in 1941. In 1942, he enrolled at the University of Wisconsin and joined the Air Force cadets program. After training to be a fighter pilot at Gettysburg College, Maxwell Air Base, Bainbridge (Georgia), and Marianna (Florida), Presentin was commissioned a first lieutenant and assigned to the 324th Fighter Group, 315th Fighter Squadron. He flew 58 missions in Italy, Corsica, France, and Germany until he got injured in a crash in Spring, 1945. Presentin spent the last few months of the war in hospitals in Marseilles, Boston, and Denver before his discharge. After World War II, Presentin got married and returned to UW-Madison to get a B.A. in economics and a law degree. He paid for his education with the G.I. Bill, his job at the Oscar Mayer factory, and his salary from the Air National Guard. In 1950, Presentin passed the bar but was called to active duty in the Korean War shortly after. He served at Truax Air Field (Wisconsin) and at Sioux City Air Base (Iowa) with the Air Defense Command. He left the Air Guard in 1953. A member of the VFW, DAV, American Legion Presentin was a life-long lover of flying. Later in life, Presentin joined the P40 Association.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997

Transcribed by Joanna D. Glen, WDVA staff, 1997

Transcription corrected and edited by Channing Welch, 2008

Abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2010

Interview Transcript:

- Mark: Today's date is February 16, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. D.C. Pressentin of Monona, Wisconsin, a veteran of World War II. Good morning, Mr. Pressentin. How are you doing?
- D.C.: Fine.
- Mark: Good. Let's start from the beginning I guess. Perhaps you could tell me a little bit about where you were born and a little bit about your upbringing and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- D.C.: Well, let's see. I was born in Madison, Wisconsin and I received all of my education in Madison. I graduated from East High School in June of 1941.
- Mark: Just before Pearl Harbor then.
- D.C.: Just before Pearl Harbor. I was one of the ripe ones. I had a-- my older brother had been drafted and he was in the service at the time. In fact, he was home on medical leave on December 7th of 1941. Ironically, he was told over the radio to put on his uniform and from then on we were at war. [laughs] I can remember that because we were listening to the Bears-Packers game. When they came on and said that the Japanese had attacked us at Pearl Harbor.
- Mark: Now as an 18-year-old kid did it strike you that this might impact on your life in some way?
- D.C.: Oh, I ...
- Mark: Did you think at the time "I'm gonna end up in the military," or did that thought not occur to you?
- D.C.: Oh, yes, it occurred to me. Only you gotta remember at that time they weren't drafting 18-year-olds. I worked for a year so I could go to college, and I signed up for cadet program in I think it was November of 1941. No, wait, '42 because that was about the time they started talking about drafting 18-year-olds. At that time I was a freshman Engineering student at the University of Wisconsin.
- Mark: Here in Madison?
- D.C.: Yes. Because of that 18-year-old thing we asked the military, I was accepted and was sworn in on the day that Wisconsin beat Ohio State when Elroy Hirsch ran wild. I can't remember the exact date but it was in November I

think of '42. We asked whether we should start school again the next semester and they told us go ahead because we weren't going to be taken for a while. I guess things changed and it was later explained to me that they needed pilots and that's why we were taken back into the cadet system.

Mark: I see. Now to go into the Air Force and to be a pilot, was this your intention from the beginning?

D.C.: No.

Mark: Because that's sort of an elite group there, not that many people stumble into necessarily. I'm wondering how you got into the pilot program and eventually got to be a fighter pilot.

D.C.: Well, I'll tell you, I'd never been in an airplane in my life and what I was intending to be because of all my math background, I was going to be a navigator or a bombardier because you could get commissions fairly quick - four and five months - rather than in the pilot program and of course, I didn't know anything about the particulars. I went through Miami Beach for my basic training and then we were the first in this college detachment program.

Mark: The ASTP?

D.C.: I don't know what-- It was a college detachment program. My group went to Gettysburg College and because we were the first in the program, they divided us according to tests that we took, with education, you know, history and math and all that stuff and they had to start sending groups to the program. It was supposed to be a five or six month program and they had to start sending , immediately they had to start sending, cadets to the program to get them intraining. Because of my college, just coming out of college and I was one of the lucky ones, I was out of there right away. I was only there a month or two I think and then we went to Nashville for classification. But while I was in Gettysburg we got ten hours of flying time in a Cub.

Mark: This was the first time you had ever flown in your life.

D.C.: Yeah. First time. After three hours, I could tell that I was catching on, you know, and I loved it. I'd, you know, never been in one, had no idea what it was like and I just loved it. So when we went to Nashville we were the first group out of Gettysburg when we went to Nashville they gave us our choice. I qualified for all three of them: pilot, navigator and bombardier. At that time they told us that if you qualify as a pilot and you don't make it, you can wash back into the bombardier and navigator program. But if you wash out of navigator or bombardier program you couldn't wash back in to pilot. So, I

said "I'm gonna go first class. I'm gonna try to be a pilot." So, that's what happened. Then I went to Maxwell Field for my Preflight.

Mark: I'd like to backtrack a little bit. Your basic training was where again?

D.C.: Miami Beach.

Mark: Miami Beach. I'm wondering if you could describe what sort of training you did. Is this the traditional boot camp where you got the haircut and the drill sergeant?

D.C.: The drill sergeant but not the haircut. I don't remember. They didn't cut our hair. You know, we cut it pretty much, everybody was pretty much the same anyway. You don't have long hair like they do today.

Mark: Yeah, that's true.

D.C.: Then we had a tough drill sergeant. It was bad, Miami Beach, the training I had down there was real bad. The weather was the only thing that was nice about it, 'cause this was in January of 1943. It was basic training, you know, the marching and that's all it was. Marching and PT. After that we got out of them. The food was terrible, the worst I ever had in the service if you can imagine that, but it was. Anyway, we got up to Gettysburg and that was super treatment.

Mark: I see. This basic training this was for the Air Force itself, this wasn't some sort of regular Army basic training.

D.C.: No, no, this was Air Force.

Mark: I'd be interested to know if you could comment on some of the people that got into the Air Force at the time, some of the people you trained with in basic training. Did you get any sense of what parts of the country they came from, what sort of educational or class background they may have had.

D.C.: Well, they were all pretty --well were all-- we were tested several times, two, three times, mentally and we were all pretty much the same. The guys that were in college, I think a little bit above the norm like the people were as far as intelligence goes. You had to get in the program. A lot of them washed out here in Madison just taking the mental tests and they washed out. A lot of them did, but the guys, the group that I was with when we started I was primarily with Midwest. A lot of guys from Chicago, Wisconsin, a few from Michigan, that's what we started with. Then along the line a lot of them washed out and got some different assignments. I ended up with a bunch from New York really.

- Mark: Was this your first time out of the state? Out of the midwest at least?
- D.C.: I had been to Chicago once with my parents. I'd never been out of Wisconsin other than that. And, that was when I was about 16 or 17 years old.
- Mark: I see.
- D.C.: [laughs] Only a couple days I was out of Wisconsin. All the rest of the time I spent in Wisconsin.
- Mark: How did these people from different parts of the country sort of get along or meld together?
- D.C.: Oh, it's just about like - probably a little easier and better than you would find in just taking a group of people regardless of their educational background and upbringing. Homogeneous group I guess. These guys were all pretty good and of course one of the codes of the cadet corps was you got caught fighting and out you go. So, you know, that was always in the back of everybody's mind. It was really pretty good.
- Mark: Okay. So Preflight was in Maxwell Air Force Base, that's Montgomery, Alabama.
- D.C.: Right.
- Mark: Explain this sort of training to me. What's involved in Preflight? And, what sort of wash out rate was there for this kind of thing?
- D.C.: Wash out rate was low there because all's we did was had PT every day and we had courses, code--we had to learn the Morse Code. We had physics. It's been so many years ago, it's hard for me to remember what else we had.
- Mark: A lot of classroom type things.
- D.C.: Yeah. We had some navigation. That's where I first started navigation.
- Mark: Was there anything like a flight simulator like we have today?
- D.C.: Now, wait a minute. Let me see when I first got into that. Gee, I can't remember if that was at Maxwell or-- I can't remember.
- Mark: But there was one somewhere?

- D.C.: Oh, we had it all through our training. We had that simulator for instrument flying. Yeah. I had that. That was very interesting. I liked anything that had anything to do with flying. It wasn't work. It was just a joy to do it.
- Mark: So your training at Maxwell lasted how long?
- D.C.: Two months.
- Mark: Two months. And then you got into the airplane somewhere I take it.
- D.C.: Yeah. I went to Douglas, Georgia for Primary and just, I can't say enough of what-- I just loved to fly that's all. The more I flew the better I liked it. That's what it amounted to.
- Mark: Flying is sort of a freedom activity and yet you were under some sort of military discipline and regimentation.
- D.C.: Oh, yes.
- Mark: What sort of flying did you do at your basic flight school there in Georgia?
- D.C.: That was primary flight training. That was just the basic flying "S"s across the road and maintaining your altitude and learning about wind drift and that's what that "S" across the road was and just learning to solo and we had three different phases, I can remember that. The first one was that basic flying and solo. The next one was, let's see, oh it was -- well the last one was acrobatics. That's I remember in the _____[??] I had more damn fun in that! And the second was getting out of spins...
- Mark: Some survival skills it sounds like.
- D.C.: Something like that. Anytime you flew when you were flying the instructor pulled back the throttle that means forced landing. You better be into the wind when you get her down near the ground and you better be doing it right. Because you got the hell chewed out of ya. My instructor was-- boy, he'd really go after ya. But he was a good pilot and a damn good instructor.
- Mark: By this time were you divided into bomber pilots, and fighter pilots, and cargo pilots?
- D.C.: No, no.
- Mark: All the pilots were all in one--

D.C.: We were all, no none of us were talking amongst ourselves you know, we had sort of got an idea of what each guy wanted in our close relationships, but, no, you had nothing to do with that there.

Mark: Was being a fighter pilot the more popular thing to do? Were there a lot of people who wanted to become cargo pilots or ---

D.C.: I think there were more people that wanted to be fighter pilots than there were bomber pilots.

Mark: That's certainly the more romantic notion anyway.

D.C.: Yes.

Mark: I'm wondering if that was the feeling among the pilots.

D.C.: Yes. I think most of them wanted to be fighter pilots.

Mark: I see.

D.C.: We didn't make that determination until the end of our basic training. There you'd give your, you'd let the instructors know what you were interested in. Of course, I took fighter pilot and I think all of us took fighter pilot, the four or five of us that was with my instructor in basic flight training.

Mark: What made fighter pilots so attractive to so many guys?

D.C.: Well, I can only tell you about me.

Mark: Okay. That's all I can ask really.

D.C.: I didn't have anybody behind me to worry about, you know. It was me and the airplane and if I screwed up, it was me and I didn't take a whole bunch with me. That was basically, and of course what you could do in the aircraft. You know, you take a bomber, you just fly straight and level, make a couple of turns and that's it. In a fighter you can do acrobatics, you can do rolls and loops and chandelles and lazy eights and all kinds of stuff that was fun.

Mark: What's a chandelle? I never heard of that one.

D.C.: A chandelle is when you're flying along and you pull it up and make a 180 degree turn. It's to gain altitude.

Mark: I see.

- D.C.: You make a 180 degree turn. Just before it stalls out you level off, that's a chandelle.
- Mark: I see. So, is it Georgia, then you went to some other training?
- D.C.: Yeah. I went to Bainbridge, Georgia for Basic Flying Training . Flew the B15 there.
- Mark: I see. Now you were stationed in the South a lot.
- D.C.: Yeah. I was in the Southeast Training Command.
- Mark: At these various places you were at did you get off the post much? Was it post or base in the Army Air Force? Just out of curiosity. It was always a base when I was in the Air Force and the Army talks about a post.
- D.C.: Well, off the post. That's what we usually called it. Or a base, it was used I think interchangeably. In my group, they told us that they needed fighter pilots and well, of course, we went along with the group, the entire group of pilots until I got to my last station in Advanced Flight Training.
- Mark: Which was?
- D.C.: That was in Marianna, Florida. There they told us that you know we were all fighter pilots that had gone to Marianna, I mean we'd signed up for it and we were the ones that had made it. They checked us out and gave us tests and the recommendation, and all this stuff and fortunately. I got to be a fighter pilot and go to Advanced Flight Training and all the others went to twin engine. It was always called single engine or twin engine. We went to single engine. I basically wanted to fly the P38 and so I took the position that "well, hell, if I don't make single engine fighters, probably I can get it out of a twin engine," which never would have happened I found out later, but that's what I always felt like. But, I made it so... Then when we got to Marianna they told us the program: to get fighter pilots, a whole bunch of 'em. The need had dropped for some reason, and of course, I was a young guy then, 19-20 years old. The need had dropped for Fighter pilots, so they took two squadrons of us in Advanced, and we all competed for it-- to be fighter pilots and all the rest were going to go all over the United States, back most of them to, instructing, which I didn't want. I have turned down-- they asked me to come back and be an instructor at Bainbridge and I just told the commanding officer, "No, Sir. I want to be a fighter pilot. I don't want anything to do with teaching pilots how to fly." I ended up in that first two squadrons and we were the fighter pilots and half of us after we got done at Marianna, half of us went up to Tallahassee to fly 40's and 51's and the other half of us went to Richmond to process for flying P-47's.

Mark: Where did you go?

D.C.: Richmond, Virginia, and that's where I ended up, in Richmond. From there we were processed in Richmond, we got new oxygen masks and helmets and new flight clothes and all that. Then I was shipped up to Dover, Delaware for my replacement training unit and I flew Jugs there.

Mark: Flew Jugs?

D.C.: P-47's.

Mark: I see. So, in the South, to get back to this, did you get off the post much and did you have much intermingling with the Southern people, that sort of thing?

D.C.: Not really. We were always together when we did get off post. I went through, I was one of the last groups to go through this training at Maxwell Field, the class system. That was really rigid. The upper classmen would get at you when you're standing in line and you had to eat square meals and all these things, but it was all part of the discipline. They dropped it right after us. Somebody got killed or some damned thing and then they didn't have no more hazing. We were just like they were in West Point. You know, they'd haze the heck out of you when you were an underclassman.

Mark: What sort of hazing did they do? I've heard of this, but I haven't really pursued this line of questioning too much.

D.C.: Well, what they did, for instance, we had to memorize the Southeastern codes. Don't ask me to say it now, 'cause I can't. And memorize a lot of stuff. Then, of course, if you got excited or you lost it, then they'd give you gigs, so many gigs you'd end up on your free time, you'd spend an hour walking a square area with white gloves on and a rifle. You'd get so many – what the heck did they call 'em? There were gigs and then ...

Mark: It's like a demerit of something.

D.C.: Yeah, they were demerit points.

D.C.: You'd get so many demerit points and then you walk each hour for that number you got.

Mark: But this hazing didn't involve any sort of physical violence or anything?

D.C.: No, no, no, no. They wouldn't do that.

Mark: Well, some people would.

D.C.: I walked enough hours, I'll tell ya. [both laugh]

Mark: Lots of gigs, huh? You mentioned training accidents. Did this happen frequently? Like students crashing the plans and that kind of thing?

D.C.: In my class, my class was one of the lucky ones. All of the places I was at we didn't lose a pilot. But I remember my first night of night flying was real hazy down in Bainbridge, Georgia and they shouldn't have flown us, but they did and we all got back down. There we lost about, in my squadron, we lost about five guys. They just absolutely refused to go up in the night. So they washed out right there and the next day they were gone. Up in Americus, Georgia, that night they lost seven kids. Seven or eight of them. I can't remember the exact...

Mark: Bad weather or something?

D.C.: Well, it was so hazy. They have the fires in the fall down in the South and that stuff is worse than—it's just like clouds. They lost eight kids up there and I guess somebody caught hell. The guys for havin' 'em flying. But we shouldn't have been flying that night either, but fortunately, I lucked out I guess and most of ours did because we didn't lose anybody that night.

Mark: That's good. I've heard pilots talk about the flying accidents and those kind of things. You seemed to have had a lucky experience from what I can tell at any rate.

D.C.: Well, we had the, in Primary, we were flying the PT-17 which had a very narrow landing gear and if you ground looped one of those, you're out and you had to be real careful flying, and it was just a matter of really paying attention to what you're doing and it just made you a better pilot, that's all. But, of course at the time, we were scared to death. You know, "Don't do it." But that's all it was about. They washed those guys out right away.

Mark: So, you finally got overseas. From Dover did you say?

D.C.: Yup.

Mark: Did you take a boat over?

D.C.: Yup. Convoy.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe your trip to me. You took off from Delaware and landed in England somewhere?

D.C.: No, no, no. We were, well no, I landed in Naples.

Mark: Oh, Italy, that's right. I should have...

D.C.: We went down to Newport News and we left there and we had a convoy of 19 or 20 ships, three of them small carriers that were carrying new Jugs over. On the way over, we had it nice. I was with a buddy of mine and we had a stateroom. We were officers you know. The poor GIs that were with us. God, I felt so sorry for them. They were down in the hold, you know, but we got to talk to them you know during the day, and all that [unintelligible] stuff, but it took us damn near three weeks to get over there in that convoy.

Mark: I suppose you had to go through the Straits of Gibraltar.

D.C.: Oh yeah.

Mark: Any storms, and seasickness, this kind of thing?

D.C.: Now there were 90 pilots that went over on our ship. There were 90 of us. Not a one of 'em got sick. Those poor GIs down below, they were hanging over the rails and puking and oh, lord. They were just-- But, that's that air sickness, see, and none of us had it-- all flyers.

Mark: Yeah, I was gonna say, was it your accommodations? Or was it the fact that you were used to this sort of...

D.C.: We were used to it. I've never been airsick or seasick or anything in my life and I never was on a boat or in an airplane until I went into the service, so, you know.

Mark: Yeah. Just sort of a natural ability to cope with that.

D.C.: Right. I guess that's what it amounts to.

Mark: OK, so you landed in Naples. Describe for me the steps between landing there and actually getting to your plane and prepared for combat.

D.C.: OK. We went to a place outside of Naples. It was a big pool for pilots. Pilots coming home go through there and pilots going to their squadrons would go there. I can't remember - I wasn't there more than a week.

Mark: Until you got an assignment somewhere.

- D.C.: Then we got an assignment and what they would do, at least my group did, I was - they just called me out and said, "You're going with this..." and they introduced me to him. There was a major and they'd flown over on a C47--no B25. They flew over in a B25 and I got my stuff and threw it in the B25 and we took off and we landed in Sicily. That's where my outfit was when I joined it.
- Mark: That was the 324th Fighter Group?
- D.C.: 324th Fighter Group, yeah, and I was assigned to the 315th Fighter Squadron out of there. There was only two of us that went over. A kid by the name of Putt and myself. Pressentin and P-u-t-t, I suppose it was alphabetical and he got killed coming back from Germany in the mountains there on the western side of the Rhine. It was bad weather and they were letting him down. We used to call it a pop-eye. It was the forerunner of radar. We did it a lot of times. Fortunately, they put us down right, but they led him right down into a mountain. So I was the only one of the two of us that lived through it.
- Mark: In Sicily then, what...
- D.C.: No, this was Corsica, I beg your pardon.
- Mark: Oh, Corsica.
- D.C.: Corsica.
- Mark: I see. How long was it before you started flying combat missions? I mean, once you got into the unit then did you have to do some more training...
- D.C.: No.
- Mark: ... learning to gel with the other fighter pilots or...
- D.C.: Nah. Nope. All they did was they told me to go out and take a Jug off and that was about a week and a half or two weeks, I don't know what it was, and then they said, "OK, there you go, you're on your way." They did give me a little help with flying combat formation and it's nothing like flying in formation when you see around here, you know the right wing to wing. We were out about just where you could read the number on the leader's airplane and that was quite a ways. You had to be mobile so that if anybody attacked him I could turn into him and help him or vice versa and that was combat flying. There were ways to make turns and that sort of thing and there were things we had to do that I never did before in an airplane like this formation flying in combat.

Mark: These were seasoned fighter pilots that you were with?

D.C.: Oh, sure.

Mark: And you were the new guy.

D.C.: Yeah.

Mark: When you study the Vietnam war, the new guy in the unit was sometimes looked down upon or seen as a problem. I'm wondering how you were viewed, how you perceived that you were viewed by the other pilots. Were they wary of your skills or did they treat you well? I'm interested in how you got along.

D.C.: They were super. They'd help you out. Tell you what to do, you know. After three or four missions, hell, you're a veteran. You know because you knew what to do and just hope the hell you stayed alive. That's just about what it amounted to.

Mark: I see. So on Corsica, where were you to be flying? What was your mission there? Escorting bombers and stuff like that?

D.C.: Well, the first, when I first got there my outfit was changing over from P40's to P47s and I had to fly a 40 back to Naples, across the Mediterranean there to dump it and it was an old war bird, there was a bunch of us that were flying them and then they picked us up and flew us back, you know, all of us together, we just dumped all the 40's and we had all Jugs in our outfit. I never flew a 40 in combat. I'd flown it in the United States but I never flew it in combat, I had all Jugs.

Mark: Do you recall your first combat mission?

D.C.: Yup.

Mark: Will you describe it to me?

D.C.: We flew top cover for the invasion of Southern France.

Mark: This was the summer of '44.

D.C.: Yup. Summer of '44. August 15th I think it was.

Mark: I'm forgetting the date. I should know that.

- D.C.: I don't remember them either. It just sort of rings in my head, I think it was August 15th. We flew top cover on that one. Just so there wasn't any German planes attacking our guys when they were landing.
- Mark: So, top cover is high up in the sky?
- D.C.: No, no, not so high. 10,000 feet.
- Mark: 10,000. That's not so high.
- D.C.: No, and I flew top cover for the invasion of Germany, Patton's invasion of Germany. We were there at the Rhine flying up and down waiting for German airplanes, but none of them ever showed up either place.
- Mark: Operation Anvil, that's what it was called, right? The Invasion of France. Anvil, if I'm not mistaken.
- D.C.: I don't remember, I don't recall.
- Mark: Was there German resistance?
- D.C.: No.
- Mark: Did you run across the fighter pilots? Not at all?
- D.C.: Not in either one of them. They were milk runs. [laughs]
- Mark: So you didn't shoot your guns or anything?
- D.C.: Nope.
- Mark: Well, I guess that's the kind of combat mission to have.
- D.C.: Yeah. But that ended right after that.
- Mark: Once the invasion had started and got inland a little bit, you started running into fighter pilot opposition?
- D.C.: No, no we didn't. Only once in the 58 missions I had did I run into fighter pilots.
- Mark: And where was this?
- D.C.: That was in Germany, that's when they had the ME262, that's that jet that they came out with.

Mark: Oh, I see. What did you - I'm interested in your reaction to that. Did you know that they had these new jets?

D.C.: Oh, yeah.

Mark: You were aware of that.

D.C.: We saw them all the time. You just had to be careful. We'd operate right underneath them. They'd be up there 15-20,000 feet and we're down there strafing their troops. But you had to keep your eye on them because the first time they come down on you - could they go! I thought if those got into production, we'd still be over there fighting.

Mark: So, their advantage was speed?

D.C.: Oh, boy! Look at the jets today and the reciprocal aircraft. Not even close.

Mark: So, you flew 58 combat missions.

D.C.: Uh-huh.

Mark: Was there one or two that were particularly more difficult than the others?

D.C.: Oh yeah. Airfields.

Mark: Strafing airfields?

D.C.: When we strafed airfields. We always, we lost one kid, at least one kid, every time we did it. I did it about I think four or five times and we lost one kid every time.

Mark: Did you do this in Southern France or was this mostly in Germany?

D.C.: This was in, no, not so many-- No, when we were in France, we got there in the Fall. D+1 and we were in France. I was at Le Luc, France just north of Marseilles and we were on a dirt field, you had to wait till the guy ahead of you took off, the dust and junk could clear before you could take off and that was the last place really, I mean really, where you were concerned about the facilities, but we were only there six or seven days I think. Then we went to Estre's, France and that was the German pilot training airfield. There you could lie eight guys in formation on the ground and take off all together. It was that big of a field. I always remember that. Then we moved up as we, then we were chasing the Germans out of France. You'd strafe them and dive

bomb them and they didn't have any petrol and you'd go up afterwards, a day or two later and watch them take the big tractors and push them off the road to get the road so the army could go up the roads. They'd have their graves on the side, a lot of the Germans that got killed while you were strafing them and all that stuff. I didn't go for that too much but it was done and done, you know.

Mark: So, what was the main danger to you in these missions?

D.C.: Well, these guys are shooting back at you.

Mark: Yeah. I mean, was it like, if you're doing an airfield for example, was there flack or antiaircraft?

D.C.: Flack towers. I've got a picture right here in my office that shows-- it's a painting that was done by somebody and got a hold of it and-- I paid a lot of money for it. I'm looking at it right now. It shows a Jug going right down and strafing the airplanes on the airfield and the flack towers, their spitting their-- that was it, the flack towers-- the guys that got it usually.

[Tape is interrupted for ca. 70 seconds by a WVM page message.]

Mark: Where were we? You were looking at a painting in your office as I recall.

D.C.: It shows a Jug strafing an airfield. It's a painting. This store that handles all of these airplane paintings is in Virginia someplace and I sent for it. It's a hell of a nice picture.

Mark: As you pushed the Germans back, did you move your airfield at all?

D.C.: Oh, we moved every-- when we started in Southern France we moved, ah, if you were there two weeks you were there a long time.

Mark: Yeah. I was gonna say as the front moves you're going to have to move too.

D.C.: We did. In fact, we'd take off on a mission and land at the new airport. They called it the A- something, A-Group would come up and bring all our clothes and everything and when we'd land we'd be at the new airport.

Mark: So as you said two weeks was a long time for you to be in one particular place.

D.C.: Yeah. Until the winter of '44-'45.

Mark: I suppose the weather slowed down the advances.

D.C.: Well, not only that but the Maginot Line. They got stopped there. So we couldn't go anyplace. We just had to stay there until they got them out of there and that winter of '44-'45 and that's when they had the Bulge and all that stuff so we didn't move too much. We were in Douvres, France that whole winter. It was a concrete field that had been patched up but you know the revampments and all that stuff, you had to be real careful when you were attaching the jug because if you get off, if it sank on you in the mud and if you stopped the prop [propeller] when it was going then you had to have a new engine. So, you had to be awful careful and taxiing the P-47 was a little more difficult than any of the other fighters I flew.

Mark: I see. How often did you fly? Did you fly every day? Every other day?

D.C.: Well, just about every day that you could. A lot of times I can remember there was a period of a week or two prior to Christmas of '44 where we didn't fly. I can remember on New Year's Eve we asked the weather officer, we were all together and raising hell you know like you do--a bunch of guys-- "Do we have to fly tomorrow?" "Nope. Don't worry about it the weather is so bad." Christ, everybody got drunk, and drank as much as them, not everybody, but most of us you know, played cards and at five o'clock in the morning, they wake us up and said "You're flying." We'd probably only been in bed two hours, you know. But we flew and nothing happened. We didn't lose anybody that day.

Mark: That brings up the issue of what you did on your off time. You mentioned card playing and a little bit of drinking and these kinds of things. What was life like back on the base?

D.C.: I think I was in Paris four times on rest leave. Three or four. Can't even remember anymore. I was down on the-- what did we call it, down on the beaches on the Mediterranean? I forgot.

Mark: The Riviera?

D.C.: Riviera, yeah. I was down there once, and we had a good time there. I had a great time in Paris. In fact, in Paris, one of the times I was there I was going to see Glenn Miller and his orchestra and that's the day that he disappeared. I'll never forget that. You even hear about it now. I saw a movie the other day and they were talking about him and saying that he had disappeared coming across the English Channel. I guess they found him. Couple years ago they found him.

Mark: Is that right? I hadn't heard that.

- D.C.: I heard that. I don't know if they did or not, but that's what they told me they did.
- Mark: As an officer, you got perhaps a little more of this rest leave than other people did and certainly you must have had a little extra cash in your pocket.
- D.C.: Well, you gotta remember in a fighter group, the pilots are the only ones that saw combat. Nobody else, the TAC officers and the enlisted men, nobody saw combat but the pilots. So they were sort of a pampered group. I have to say--
- Mark: That's not what I meant to imply. I'm just -- you had a little extra time as officers do.
- D.C.: Well, that's I guess what you'd call it. I mean just call it a spade. They did pamper us a little bit more. I know that some of the enlisted men went on leave and they got it, but not anywhere near as often as we did.
- Mark: I see. Did you have much contact with the Corsicans and then the French?
- D.C.: The Corsicans hated us.
- Mark: Did they?
- D.C.: Oh yeah. You couldn't even approach a Corsican girl you know, and the guys were young and virile.
- Mark: What was the -- do you have a sense of what was the reasoning for that?
- D.C.: I, no--
- Mark: I know there's tension between the French and the Corsicans. I wondered if it had something to do with that?
- D.C.: I don't know. I don't know if they were sympathetic to Germany or what it was, but I know I tried to, I approached a couple young ladies you know and they just turned around and walked away from ya. Wouldn't even talk to ya. All of us had the same reaction.
- Mark: That was different in France then?
- D.C.: Oh yeah. France was just the opposite. That was great. My first rest leave in Paris was right after it was taken. The Americans moved in and I'm telling you, that really was, I had a great time there.
- Mark: It was a good place to be an American at the time?

D.C.: Yes! That didn't last long though. [laughs]

Mark: Not when I was there, anyway.

D.C.: [laughs] Well, that was great, that first time I was in Paris.

Mark: So relations were pretty good with the French in your experience?

D.C.: Yes. They were until later on in the year just before the war ended. The Frenchmen didn't particularly care for us and I didn't particularly care for them and when the group of us found out that all of the different airfields that we were landing at and fighting out of, that we were renting them from the French - had to pay them money for them, that's when I really got a little bit upset. Here we were over there we were freeing those people and we're paying them money to do it. I just couldn't understand that and I still don't. But that's politics I guess.

Mark: So, as you moved then, in '45 you then moved further north, did you get into Germany at all? Or did you stay in France?

D.C.: The day that I crash landed, the following day they moved into Stuttgart, Germany. I didn't get there. I was in a hospital.

Mark: I see. So, I was noticing on the form I had you fill out, that you were in the hospital when the war ended and you crash landed. Was it a combat thing? Or, was it an accident?

D.C.: Well, I got back-- I knew I'd been hit but I got back. I could hear the bullet go in. The only thing that happened was my engine temperature started to go up. I pulled off the target and we had cowl flaps and you just pulled the cowl flap, I opened it a little bit and it went right back in the green and I watched it and watched it and finally we went back home and I thought, well, it's all set and when I pulled up to land and then we'd come off of a - what the heck did we call 'em? - we'd come in in formation and then peel off and when I peeled up and I put my wheels down, my engine stopped and I was only about 200-300 feet off the ground.

Mark: That's still pretty high for a landing, I guess.

D.C.: Well, I mean, see with me we came around on a tight turn and you follow one another in. You can land eight airplanes in probably five minutes. You'd be on the ground right now. It was a maneuver that bomber pilots never knew about and I saw one of my friends get killed doing that. Then I tried to get the

wheels up and I must have lost my hydraulic pressure because I couldn't get the wheels up and that's the last I remember, trying to get the wheels down.

Mark: Then you were unconscious then for the rest of it.

D.C.: Well, that's the last I can remember, and then they told me that I picked out a field and it was a good field, if the wheels had come up I'd have walked away from it. But they didn't and I shot across it I guess, they tell me, and I broke the wheels off on a river that I shot across and then I went into a woods and I don't know - a couple of Frenchmen pulled me out of the airplane, burned to the ground. I don't remember any of it. Only the last thing I remember was pulling trying to get my wheels up.

Mark: I see. Then you woke up in a hospital somewhere.

D.C.: Yeah. [laughs]. About nine hours later up in Nancy, France . We were at – what the hell was the name of that place we were at that time? It was – Nancy was north of there. Then had a station hospital. That was the only one, the nearest one, and that's where I ended up.

Mark: You must have been fairly badly injured.

D.C.: I broke my back. Hit myself in the head, I had some stitches in my head and my arm, and I broke my back..

Mark: No paralysis or anything.

D.C.: Nope.

Mark: You recovered from it but it was a serious injury at the time, I'm sure.

D.C.: Well, I was in so much pain they told me when they were trying to x-ray me, they just got a couple of shots and they couldn't find anything and then we were only there, I was there three or four days and then they told me they were going to send me down to Marseilles to the general hospital and then probably home or back to my outfit. I went down there and every day, less pain. I got there, and finally they were going to send me to a halfway house and then back to my outfit and the doctor there, thank God for him, he was a brand new doctor from the States, an orthopedic man who was one of the best, a young guy, and he came in and looked at me and said "You go down, and we're going to take some more x-rays and then we'll send you out." I said, "Okay, fine." I got down there and they found the break, it was a compression fracture and then they wound me up with all the gauze and all that stuff and I had one of these hyperextended casts where you put your weight back you know. I had that on for about four months or three months, I guess. Thank God for him.

Mark: So they decided to discharge you then.

D.C.: No. They put us on a V-Day, Victory Day, I think it was May 1st they put us on a hospital ship and there were 12 officers. I was the only Air Force officer, all injured and we headed back to the inside of the boot of Italy-- in Torino, Italy-- and we picked up part of the 15th Air Force and then we came home, all by ourselves. There were German U-boats out there they told us, but at least we came home in a big hurry. I think it only took five or six days rather than the nineteen it took going over.

Mark: And you landed in New York or something like that?

D.C.: Nope. Boston. I was in Boston Hospital and then they gave us our choice, pick out the general hospital that you want to go to and then pick out your second and then then pick out your third of these choices 'cause this was near the end of the war, you know. The war was over in Europe now and I picked down in Chicago first, and then I picked-- I had a girl in Virginia-- and I picked

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

one in Virginia, and my third one was Denver. I ended up going to Denver because all the others were filled.

Mark: You spent how long in this hospital then?

D.C.: I was in the hospital – let's see. I got that cast put on end of April. They put another cast on me because it was so damned filthy and dirty, and I think I had that cast taken off in Denver. I think it was near the end of July and then I had to go through all this exercise crap, you know.

Mark: I was gonna ask what sort of rehabilitation program did they have.

D.C.: Fortunately, I was at Fitzimmons General Hospital and that's where Eisenhower had his heart attack, you remember that?

Mark: No. I'm 32 years old; I don't remember Eisenhower.

D.C.: Oh, well, you don't remember then. Okay. At Fitzimmons General, which is located East of Denver at the time, it's probably all grown up around it there, I don't know, but they had a golf course. I was in the Officer's Orthopedic Ward. It was a big building, they were all officers in there and all orthopedic guys, see, and I'm a golf nut. I wanted to be a golf pro, that's what I wanted to be. I went to the major who was in charge of physical therapy and I said

“Major how would it be if I could take my physical therapy on the golf course?” He looked at me and said, “Well, if you promise to play at least a couple of times a day.” You know I could have kissed him! So, I ended up playing golf three times a day, morning, noon and night. A GI there who was a good golfer and he and I started to play a lot together and then we played in tournaments all the way around Denver after we got out of that cast. Gee, I had a lot of fun out there. Air Force treated us super.

Mark: I was going to ask what was your impression of the Army’s medical system and the care that you got?

D.C.: Super.

Mark: Super.

D.C.: Absolutely super. I might have been lucky because I knew this guy had just come over from the United States. He was a Los Angeles orthopedic man, just got in the service and he was over there and he knew what he was doing. He didn’t fool around. He was not one of these guys who’d laugh with you. [laughs] He did what he had to do, and that was it. Thank God for that.

Mark: When I was in the Air Force, I was a Physical Therapy technician.

D.C.: Oh, were you?

Mark: So I’m familiar with that sort of thing. I remember how the patients didn’t like us ‘cause we used to have to make them do all these horrible things. Sounds like golfing wasn’t a problem for you.

D.C.: Oh, God, I loved it. Still do.

Mark: So you eventually came back to Madison then?

D.C.: Right.

Mark: Do you remember when this was?

D.C.: Well, let’s see. I met my wife again when I was home on medical leave. I was home here for sixty days. We decided we’d get married and got married August 25th .

Mark: Of ’45?

D.C.: Yup, and then I had an opportunity to go to Brazil or one of those, I think it was Brazil, to teach fighter pilots how to fly. I just, I got back here, we got

married August 25th. I got back here one Friday. I went back out to get discharged. I got back here on a Friday and Monday the University started I thought, well, why not. I had a hell of a time the first semester, settling down, studying, after you lived the life I lived for a couple of years you know. I was going to take that Brazil job and my wife was 100%. Anything I wanted to do she was ready to go. Finally, before I was supposed to report to someplace down in Miami, and just before we had to go I started settling down a little bit I thought "Aw hell, I'll stay here and go to school."

Mark: So, you were officially still in the Air Force at this time?

D.C.: I was on terminal leave, yeah.

Mark: But you were about to be discharged.

D.C.: Right.

Mark: I'm interested in the post war experiences as well. In fact, it's my own selfish personal research area. So I have some questions about what happened after the war as well. You started school early compared to a lot of other veterans?

D.C.: Right.

Mark: How much school did you have before the war started? A semester and a half?

D.C.: I had one semester. No, I had to work a year after I got out of school because I didn't have any money. I had to work a year and save my money so I could go to Engineering School. I went to one semester of Engineering School. That's all I had.

Mark: When you came back, did you go back to Engineering?

D.C.: No, no. I knew then that when I came back I didn't want to be an engineer. So, I went into the Econ School.

Mark: I'd be interested in your perception of how the campus was different before and after the war and having been there early, perhaps, how the campus changed over your undergraduate years as more vets came to school.

D.C.: Well, you know, at first, they didn't have the buildings. Well, not the first year. It was like it was previously because the vets didn't start coming back then. But they really started coming back at the end of my first year and they then were building these huts for having classes in 'em, and we'd have classes in that big church on University Avenue. I had there. I had Poli-Sci out there, I can remember that. They just didn't have any room, you know. I had

my Econ 1A and 1B, that's where I had Kiekauffer, who was the greatest professor ever, ever, and we had that in Music Hall. You'd never see anybody miss that class. They never took attendance, but nobody ever missed it 'cause he was so great. But then, of course, you know, I was out there-- when I got back they had two years of-- he was so great. You could get three semesters in a year. No Easter vacation, no Christmas vacation, and you just went right straight through school so I completed my, let me put it this way, I completed my junior year in two years with the extra help I had with my Engineering grades. Then of course I had time on the GI Bill left and they of course credited a year's time if you went two semesters in a year that was a year off your time. So I went three semesters in a year and that was just a year time off my credit. So I was getting ready-- I was done with all my-- I couldn't take any more Econ courses. I was done with all my preliminary courses, English and History. I had all those in, so the last year I was going to be there I just had to take electives. That's all I could take. So I thought "why not go to Law School?" That time you could use the Law School grades from the first year as your electives for your regular degree and you'd have a third of your way through Law School, so I just sort of doubled up and I went to Law School. That's why I went to Law School because I had all this time left.

Mark: And the rest is history.

D.C.: Well, no. While I was going through Law School, I had two children and one thing I would never recommend anybody do is go through Law School and have to work.

Mark: I've got a nine-month old and I'm a graduate student myself.

D.C.: Oh, boy.

Mark: I understand completely.

D.C.: Well, see when I joined the Air Guard out here and I was one of the first pilots in the Air Guard out here at Truax. We were flying '51's and I went... Let's see. What's ironic about it, I started school three days after I got home. We got home on Friday. Saturday, Sunday, Monday I started school. I went through undergrad school and Law School and I was admitted to the Bar September 1, 1950. At this time, though, I was flying on weekends in the Air Guard because I was getting paid for it and that all helped. I was working at Oscar Mayer four to five hours a day and the GI Bill. With all that, we made it. I didn't have to borrow any money but I didn't save any either.

Mark: So the GI Bill, in your experience then, it helped but didn't finance your education completely?

D.C.: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Is that right?

D.C.: Oh, gee, there would be a lot of us today that wouldn't have our degrees if it wasn't for the GI Bill.

Mark: Was it more effective in your undergraduate years? Did you need more financial help than in graduate school? That's the impression I got.

D.C.: No, I was working all the time. When I was in Law School I was working. We were getting along. We didn't have any money but you know we had a house that I rented and put food on the table for the kids. As I said, I got out the first of September 1950. I was admitted to the bar and I was working at Oscar Mayer, and they offered me a heck of a job over there if I'd stay. But you know, a lawyer?

Mark: What kind of a job was it? Was it like on the floor somewhere?

Presentin: Oh no, no, no, no

Mark: Office position?

D.C.: Yeah. They wanted me up in the Executive Offices up there to do something. I worked out there for two solid years you know. I got to know a lot of people and they offered me this job. I probably should have taken it. But, gees, you graduate from Law School and for what? So, I said "No, I want to do something that's got to do with the law." So, I went to work. I got a job at American Family. They were called Farmer's Mutual at the time and they were located in that Bethel Lutheran Church across the street from old Central High School. That's where they were at the time. I think I went to work for them in October of 1950 and November 1st I was notified that I was recalled to active duty.

Mark: For Korea.

D.C.: Yeah. So, Farmer's Mutual-- they were awfully good to me. They gave me a month's pay when I left them and I'd only worked for them a month and a half when I finally had to leave. They were really super. I can't say anything bad about those people. And then I got recalled to active duty.

Mark: I've got some questions about the post-World War II period.

D.C.: Okay.

- Mark: So if we could hold off on Korea about ten minutes.
- D.C.: Okay.
- Mark: I've got some more questions. Housing on campus and then after you graduated.
- D.C.: Oh, it was terrible.
- Mark: Some vets had problems finding homes.
- D.C.: Oh, absolutely terrible.
- Mark: Now you got back to campus fairly early, do you think that gave you an advantage in finding a place to live for you and your family?
- D.C.: No. I found my own place. I had a close friend of mine who is still a close friend of mine, went through Law School with him and we were buddies in high school. His parents were just super. Then they owned a lot of property and the dad, he could have got \$100 a month for that house at that time and he said, "Pres, I going to let you have it for \$50 a month." My wife was pregnant with our second girl and we had **[10 second gap on tape]**
- Mark: What about employment? You worked a lot of jobs, I would imagine there were a lot of vets looking for jobs as well. Was finding work a problem?
- D.C.: No.
- Mark: Or finding decent work a problem?
- D.C.: Not for me it wasn't. A lot of my friends, you know, they didn't get married right away but most of my close friends we were all married around the same time. But, I didn't have any problems. It just worked out. I got a job at Oscar Mayer the summer before I went into Law School. I was, now let's see, no it was the first year after I got out of Law School. First year – I completed my year in Law School and I was out there in the Maintenance Department and they started a golf tournament at Oscar Mayer, a match play golf tournament, first one. I won it. I beat several of the executives. Two of them, three of them.
- Mark: Was that a good thing or a bad thing?
- D.C.: Oh, they got me the job. They liked me. I talked to them when I was playing golf with them and got to know them and they said "How would you like a job

during the year?" I said "Boy, I'd love it." Bango, I got a real good job out there and I worked out there my last two years in Law School.

Mark: I got some questions about some of your medical readjustments after the war. You were wounded in the war and I would imagine that some of the medical problems perhaps plagued you years after discharge?

D.C.: My back.

Mark: Did you have contact with the VA medical system?

D.C.: Oh, yeah, yup. They were good. They did as good a job as I could have expected. There was never any question about it you know. My record showed that I got clobbered and, no, they were excellent.

Mark: The Vietnam War brought up the issue of some of the psychological problems some veterans have, and you having been a combat veteran I'd be interested to know if you had to make any sort of psychological readjustments.

D.C.: Well, you know there were so many of us, all in the same boat, [laughs], a lot of them in combat, and I think I read about this stress now they're talking about and all the baloney, but I think there were so many of us, you'd look at another guy and say, "Well, I'm not so bad off, look at him." I think that helped. Now if that's a fact, that there is a lot of this stress going on because of combat and all that stuff, I think that helped all of us. We'd look at each other and say, "Hell, he was, bad off, this guy was over in a foxhole in the South Pacific you know and what am I crying about?"

Mark: So, it was kind of a built in support group.

D.C.: Oh, absolutely. I really believe that. I don't know if I'm right or not, but I believe that.

Mark: I see. There is a term I come across: "nervous out of the service." Have you ever heard that before?

D.C.: Yup.

Mark: Perhaps you could tell me what that meant to you.

D.C.: Well, I never, I mean I was nervous out of the service because I was trying to adjust to civilian life and student life again from what I had been through. But that calmed down. I finally adjusted to it. Takes--

Mark: After about how long?

D.C.: Well, my first semester in school, I would say about the first two months. I was ready to-- I was throwing books and I couldn't study, but then after that things started coming around and got better every day and finally the next part of my education was a lot of work. You just studied like heck 'cause that's all there was to it. A little older and a little smarter, you know. That helped. That hiatus in my life and my education life really helped me. 'Cause I don't think I was mature enough to go to school.

Mark: So, Korea. You actually went to Asia then?

D.C.: No. Nope. I was in the Defense Command.

Mark: Here at Truax?

D.C.: Yup.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe your Korean War experience.

D.C.: As we would-- we'd get-- We were on duty and they'd alert us. They took good care of the United States because if we were on alert we'd have to be on duty for 24 hours and once in a while when you're on at night, they'd scramble you. They'd find some unknown airplane flying around down by the Illinois border or someplace and they'd scramble you and you'd get in the air and go down and find them and see who it was. Then you report in and say "It's a Cub down here, flyin' around that hadn't been reported." Some silly stuff like that.

Mark: What was the threat you were told you might encounter or what was the reason for being activated and scrambling? Was it Russian...?

D.C.: Just for that. They didn't know, I mean you know they didn't let us young pilots or old pilots whatever we were, they didn't let us know the theories behind what we were doing. They'd just say, "Hey, you're scrambled!" They'd blow the horn, you jump in your airplane, your crew chief would be there and he'd help you in your parachute and your helmet and away you'd go. Then you'd get up and you'd contact whoever was complaining and they'd vector you down to the plane that you're going after or whatever you're looking for and then you'd find them and then you'd call them and say "Hey, it's a Cub." Of course, they aren't going to be carrying any atomic bomb or anything I don't imagine. Then they'd say "Return to base," and we'd come back to base.

Mark: Did this happen a lot at Truax during the war?

D.C.: Sure.

Mark: Like once a week, once a month in your estimation?

D.C.: Well, the only reason I would know it is because when I was on alert, I got scrambled a couple of times. Some of the guys didn't. Hell, I love to fly so it didn't make any difference to me.

Mark: By the time of the Korean War did you have jets or were you still flying '51s?

D.C.: We were just going into F89's. When I got grounded for some unknown reason and I was sent to Sioux City Air Force Base for the last six months of my commitment.

Mark: What did you do there?

D.C.: I was the contracting officer. I was the provost marshal. I had three or four jobs. I was the PX officer. I was the defense counsel on all court marshals. What else did I have? It was just impossible to do it because they couldn't do all those jobs and they didn't have any TAC officers, that's why. Then on the weekends my family stayed home here and on the weekends I would fly, they had a 51 outfit down there and I would take the place of some of these guys who wanted to go home with their wives on the weekend and I'd fly on the weekends for them.

Mark: Did you get to fly in the jets at all?

D.C.: Yeah. I got into the starter, not the 89. What did they have? They had a training jet, P33. It was a nice aircraft.

Mark: How would you compare it to the propeller planes. The 51 in its time was state-of-the-art and then the jets came along. I'd be interested in your impressions and comparison.

D.C.: Oh, the jets--you can't--The one I wanted to fly was that F86, that was a beautiful aircraft but I never got to fly that. Sure, they're so much faster and jets are the thing! That 51 is a nice airplane to fly though. It was a fun airplane.

Mark: When did you finally leave the Reserves? Was it after the Korean War?

D.C.: Yeah.

Mark: How much longer after?

- D.C.: I don't know. I can't remember, but I know I got out of the service in October of '53 and my wife and then we had three children, she was pregnant with the fourth and she got nervous about me flying and so I resigned from the Guard.
- Mark: Just out of curiosity, did you continue to fly?
- D.C.: No.
- Mark: Like at the airport?
- D.C.: Nah. I've flown a little bit, but not anything that would mean anything.
- Mark: I just have one last area of questioning and that involves veterans organizations and reunions and those kinds of things. Have you ever joined one of the big groups like the Legion or the DAV or any sort of groups like that or some of the smaller groups?
- D.C.: I'm a member of the DAV, life member. I am also a member of the P40 Association, which we are going to be meeting down in Alabama in September. I was a member of VFW, short time, American Legion. It was one of those things where you joined because they got things going, but I never went to them so I never participated. Joining something you don't go to, I didn't like to do that.
- Mark: Did you join soon after the war or was it later on in your life?
- D.C.: Well, The American Legion I remember they recruited me. It wasn't too long.
- Mark: You were still in school?
- D.C.: No, I was out of school. It was in, let's see, when did we move, probably 1954-'55, somewhere in the area.
- Mark: I'm interested in why you joined these groups.
- D.C.: Camaraderie. You get 'em in the air and fly 'em. I also belong to a pilot group and we meet on the fourth Monday of the month and they're all pilots. You got to have over 500 hours. But they're not necessarily military. See, they're all pilots. Most of them are small airplanes. But they're a good group and they're a bunch of fun.
- Mark: So, as for veterans groups today, your involved or you attend some of those reunions and those kinds of things?
- D.C.: Oh, yeah.

- Mark: I'm interested in what makes you interested in meeting with some of your old colleagues or comrades or whichever term you prefer.
- D.C.: It's the same old story. You know, hell I'm going to be 72 and these guys are the same age and we did the same things, we flew the same airplanes, you get together and talk about – you get 'em out of the hanger, so to speak at night. I just joined this 40 group. We were out in the Air Force Academy, my wife and I were out playing golf out in Colorado this past Fall. "Let's go out there," so we went out there and we went through the Academy and just can't believe everything they've got out there and there was a big group around a P40 and we were walking together and I walked over and said "What's was going on?" and "Oh, we're dedicating the P40 to the Air Force" and they had a big replica of the 40 and the 51 was there and the 47 and the 38 and I said "The heck I flew the 40." I said "I flew it for ten hours in Marianna, Florida," and I said "I haven't, you have!" I said "[I haven't] got very much time in it." But he said "That's all right, as long as you flew it." So I signed up, and I just got my notice that I am a member of the P40 Group and they just announced that we're going to meet in September down in Alabama. So that's how that went. I can join the 51 Group and I can join the 47 Group, but I haven't got around to doing it yet and I don't think I will. One's enough.
- Mark: I suppose. Costs, dues money too, I suppose.
- D.C.: Not really. I paid them \$100 and I'm a life member. [laughs] That's not too bad.
- Mark: Those are the questions that I had. Is there anything you'd like to add, something you think I missed?
- D.C.: Nah, I guess you got my life history.
- Mark: Well, your military history anyway.
- D.C.: Yeah.
- Mark: That's what the Veterans Museum is here for, at least. Maybe the Law School can interview you about your Law Career some--
- D.C.: Ah, I don't want to go near the Law School.
- Mark: I see.
- D.C.: Glad I'm out of it. [laughs]

Mark: I see. I appreciate your taking the time to talk to me.

D.C.: Okay.

Mark: It's been very constructive.

[End of Interview]