

David Vartanian Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler. Today is the 31st of August, 2012. I'm in Austin, Texas and I am interviewing Mr. Dave Vartanian. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information related to this site. I'll start out by thanking you, Dave, for spending the time today to share your experiences on World War II and I'd like to get it going by having you give us your full name, date and place of birth, and we'll work from there.

DAVID VARTANIAN: My name is David Charles Vartanian and my date of birth is August 21, 1924.

EM: And where were you born?

DV: Chicago, Illinois.

EM: And tell me a little bit about your family. Brothers, sisters?

DV: I have one brother who's five -- he's 10 years older than me. I mean 10 years younger than me. I'm the eldest of the children. I have a sister that's five years younger and I have a brother that's 10 years younger. There's three of us.

EM: So what part of Chicago were you born in? There's Chicago and then there's Chicago, you know.

DV: We were born -- we lived on the south side. I remember the place of birth is the Lying-In run by the University of Chicago. That was the maternity ward there.

EM: What did your dad do for a living?

DV: He was involved in the carpeting business.

EM: And your mother was a?

DV: My mother was a housewife.

EM: House manager.

DV: In those days women didn't work.

EM: They worked, but they didn't work for wages. You've got to be careful on that.

DV: You can't say that. It's sort of an insult.

EM: So did you grow up in Chicago?

DV: Partially I grew up in Chicago, but I also lived in New York and I also lived in Crown Point, Indiana for a while.

EM: You got around.

DV: We got around a little bit. I was born in Chicago, we lived there for a number of years, then we moved to New York, we lived there for about -- lived in Brooklyn, oh, for about nine years, then we moved back to Chicago.

EM: So where were you living when the war started?

DV: At that point I was living in Crown Point, Indiana. Which is not too far away from Chicago.

EM: Now where did you go to high school?

DV: Went to Lane Tech High School.

EM: In?

DV: Chicago. It's a boys' school. We had 10,000 guys going there.

EM: Good gracious.

DV: It was one of the very few of the high schools that ever had automobile -- it was a technical high school.

EM: Automobile mechanics?

DV: No. It was a technical high school, but I took a college prep course in high school. But they had automobiles that you actually drove. They had mockups in the classrooms and they had -- you actually drove on a site they had set up with traffic lights and everything. It was one of the first schools in the country to ever have anything like that.

EM: So you were probably still in high school when the war started, weren't you? Or had you -- because you're born in '24.

DV: Yes, I was born in '24.

EM: So you were 17, I guess, when the war started.

DV: Right, I didn't turn 18 until the war had been started already. And as soon as I turned 18 in those days you had to go to the draft board within so many -- two weeks or something after your birthday. So before that I figured I'm not going to -- I had talked to too many men that had been in the infantry in World War I. There were plenty of World War I vets around in those days. And none of that sounded very good to me, especially if they worked in the trenches and that's where an awful lot of them were. So I decided I'd like something a little better setup than that, right? Have a bed to sleep in at night. So they had a program called the Aviation Cadet Program so I thought this sounds much better to me. So I went down, enlisted, and I passed the tests and everything and then waited to be called into active duty.

EM: So where did you go to enlist?

DV: I had to go to Chicago to do that.

EM: You had to go in to Chicago?

DV: I had to take a physical test and a mental test they give you. They give you a mental test that screens out about 70 percent of them, believe it or not. I don't know how they grade it or just general knowledge or what. All I know is about 70 percent of them don't make it.

EM: But you did.

DV: But you did. Well, they were trying to get the best they could get, you know. Then they gave you a physical --

EM: Your eyes are okay and --

DV: Yeah, all that stuff. So then you had to qualify. Well, they're using you for a certain purpose; they wanted a certain degree of mentality. They wanted a certain degree of physical fitness too. They wanted both. And I thought it sounded like a better deal to me, that's all.

EM: Beats the heck out of being in trench warfare.

DV: That's what I thought at the time.

EM: You had nowhere to go but up.

DV: Before and after I still think it was the best thing.

EM: And you still think it was a good decision?

DV: Yeah.

EM: So where did you do basic training?

DV: Did basic training in Miami Beach, Florida.

EM: That sounds like a cushy deal.

DV: It was nice. The weather was great. It was wintertime and it was a good place to be.

EM: Especially if you're from Chicago.

DV: Yeah, and I went there and it was February, February or March, and it was still rather chilly up north.

EM: So this is February/March of?

DV: Of '43. They swore me in active duty on December the 15th of '42. I became a member of the armed services. I enlisted in the cadets when I was 18 which is in August. They took that long to swear me in and then a few more months to actually call me up.

EM: So how was basic? Was that pretty straightforward or had they already starting to get you flying (inaudible)?

DV: No.

EM: Still too early for that?

DV: You're mixed in with other people. It's just regular basic training. You're going through it as an aviation student they called you, or something like that, because they had other plans for you. In other words, you weren't just regular basic training. You're scheduled to go into something else. So that lasts for about three months, two or three months, something like that. Maybe it was two, I forget. And then from there we went -- they started some new programs because at one time they wanted to have college graduates and they would settle later on for two years of college, then later on they would settle for no college at all. And it turned out they automatically sent everybody to -- I did have some college credits, but they sent me to what they call a CTD which is a college training detachment and they sent you there for about two and a half

months. I went to Meadville, Pennsylvania to a college that's now called just Allegheny College. Those days it was called Allegheny State Teachers College. Now it's called Allegheny College. It's about 90 miles north of Pittsburgh and matter of fact, that's where the Talon Zipper Works were. They were the people that made the zippers. That's where they're headquartered, in Meadville, Pennsylvania. I think it's a big cutting tool company there too. Still make real good -- they make cutting tools, they make pliers and their real high-end line of tools. I can't remember the name of them, but they're quite expensive. They're good stuff.

EM: So after that where did they send you?

DV: From there they sent us -- let me see. We ended up from there we went to classif-- oh, we went to basic training, I'm sorry. We're out of basic training, went to college, now we go to classification. Classification took place in Nashville, Tennessee and in Nashville what they do is they give you a lot of psychological tests. They give you what they call motor tests to check your reflexes, this and that, depth perception, all types of thing and very thorough physical. And there they also rate you as to what you're going to be suited for. They had tests called psychomotor tests. Manual dexterity tests and various odd

type things that they had developed. And then they gave you a classification. You're going to be a pilot, a bombardier, or a navigator. It ended up I qualified for all three which was fortunate in some respects because they sent me to pilot training which I ended up going to and like many other people I washed out for lack of progress. They can teach anyone to fly, but they didn't have the time. If you were one of those that picked it up very readily, fine, you're in great shape.

EM: Or if you had already been flying before, yeah.

DV: You've got some knowledge, you'd be fine, but it was the first time in my life I was ever in an airplane. We was trained in Piper Cubs there. At college, I should mention, at CTD, we did have 10 hours in a Piper Cub. We went out 10 times with an instructor. That gave them some inkling of what knowledge you had or what adaptivity you would have for flying. Anyway, in Nashville they gave you all these various tests and everything else. So I qualified for pilot and that's all I knew at the time, but it was all three I found out later. From there they sent me to primary flying school which is in Americus, Georgia. Happens to be the same airfield that Lindbergh soloed from.

EM: Did he?

DV: It was a dirt field even in those days and all the roads leading up to it were dirt. It's a small little airfield out of a small little town in Georgia.

EM: What town again?

DV: Americus. So anyway I just soloed. That's about as far as I got. They didn't like --

EM: What did you solo with?

DV: We used Stearmans, PT19 Stearmans, a two-seater, open air.

EM: Bugs on your teeth, goggles on?

DV: Yeah, the whole bit. The silk scarf and everything. Everybody had to buy a silk scarf. They felt it was sort of necessary.

EM: It was part of the deal, huh?

DV: Part of the deal. So anyway I ended up one day my instructor said, "You're going to ride with the Army tomorrow." So the [smees?] felt I'm not progressing as fast as they would like so the Army will take you up with a graduate pilot that's already in the service, second lieutenant usually, maybe a first. So I go up with him, I landed and took off again. They had me before the board and he says, "We decided for lack of progress you're going to have to -- we're going to have to cut you off. Would you like further air crew training?" The idea is if you did not qualify for anything else you'd go to gunnery

school and in probably three months you'd be overseas and that wasn't what I was shooting for really. I would like to have been an officer and be a bombardier or a navigator or something like that so I says, "I'd further air crew training" which gives them the power to send you anywhere they want. And as it turned out I qualified for all three. Had a big head in those days too of course. So I says navigation didn't sound so exciting, bombardier sounded more exciting or I thought I would like it more, I don't know why. So I said, "I'd like to go to bombardier school." It ended up I did go to bombardier school, but they also told us a lot of dead reckoning navigation and we had a lot of navigation we did, navigation flights we took. And it ended up, I didn't even know until after I was discharged, that on my discharge I'm a rated dead reckoning navigator.

EM: Which means?

DV: I can navigate without using celestial, I can do navigation.

EM: You've just got that sense of direction, huh?

DV: In other words, our navigator gets training in celestial which is the longest thing to learn. It takes a lot longer to learn. Dead reckoning is very common form of navigation and one that's used very often. If you're not using the

stars and the sun you have no choice. It happens to be dark out, you have to use the stars, or in the daytime they can shoot sun lines with a sextant and things like that and still find out where they're at. Because our crew actually flew back without me many months later. They stayed around until, oh my goodness, August they were still in Italy. And after they went to the cadet system -- I mean I went into a bombardier pool to wait. They gave you a two-week leave. I went home for two weeks and finally I ended up in bombardier school. There you learned -- we had a lot of navigation classes and learned how to use a Norden bombsight which is the best (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Which is the best of the two bombsights they had. They had the -- they were going to train us in the Sperry also, but they figured the Norden was better so they were phasing out the Sperry training and just used Nordens because I guess they're the better of the two bombsights. And then we trained there and went on navigation trips and everything else and did a lot of navigation hops. We took a lot of those and plus learning how to use the bombsight. We bombed at daytime, we bombed at night to give you the different feeling and so forth for --

EM: This is all out of?

DV: This was out of Carlsbad, New Mexico, the bombardier school we went to. Where the Carlsbad caverns are. Wish I ended up going through them. After that we went from there where you went -- as soon as we left we went to Lemoore, California, I think. No, (inaudible) Lemoore, I'm sorry. We went to -- I'm trying to figure how we formed our crews. We went and formed crews. We went to Tonopah, Nebraska. No, Nevada. Tonopah, Nevada, I'm sorry. We went there and we formed crews and they sent the crews out -- they sent some of us out to Lemoore, California for two weeks just to give us -- all the people -- they put an air show on first actually and there was a guy that was flying. He was the chief test pilot for Lockheed and he was flying a P38. And he was doing this because a lot of the people were very disappointed, the pilots, because they all wanted to be single pilot pursuit, you know? Pursuit craft flying a single engine plane and so forth.

EM: (inaudible)

DV: Yeah, they all want to be hot pilots, you know. So they sent us there to show how well multi-engine planes performed. So the whole crew had to go. And of course they used the P38 because it was much more peppy. It was a fighter. It was still a fighter nonetheless. Why they did

that I'll never know, but we stayed there for a couple of weeks watching them maneuver --

EM: You just watched, you didn't actually fly one?

DV: No, we didn't do anything to that. Then we went back to Tonopah and then after Tonopah what we were doing, we formed the crews and then we went on navigation hops and we went on aerial gunnery courses, we dropped bombs. I as the bombardier did a lot of bomb dropping. My navigator would go and we would do navigation trips for him, nighttime stuff.

EM: So when you're bomb dropping what are you dropping bombs out of?

DV: We were dropping bombs out of an AT10 I think they were called, bombardier trainers. They would hold 10 bombs, five in each sound, 100 pounders. These were the blue devils. I mean they were painted blue and filled with sand and they all weighed 100 pounds. They carried a five-pound charge of black powder so you could see them when they exploded at night. You could take a picture for a camera photograph or in the daytime it was a puff of black smoke so you can tell where it hit. And we went for bombardier school. That lasted about four months.

EM: Oh, you did a lot of training, aren't you?

DV: Yeah, quite a bit. And then after this we were assigned to a place where they sent us all out. They sent 50 crews out and we ended up just outside of Frisco. In Oakland there's a place called Hamilton Field and Hamilton Field is just across the bay from Frisco on the Oakland side. And there we're all fully trained now and we're all supposed to go to the south Pacific. All of our enlisted men had to turn in their winter clothing and they all received nothing but an extra issue of suntans because you wouldn't need the wool clothing there. And the officers didn't have to do that because we bought our own uniforms. They gave us allowance and we bought our own winter and summer uniforms.

EM: So you're an officer at this point?

DV: Yeah.

EM: So, what, are you a second lieutenant?

DV: No. In those days they had just instituted a new law. I was one of the earlier flight officers. I had a low, very low number. My serial number was 5635.

EM: Boy, you were.

DV: With a T in front of it.

EM: You were early on, weren't you?

DV: So anyway that was the way it worked and you graduated as one or another. Turned out they had so many -- remember, the Army Air Corps was a division of the Army. It ended up

we were so officer heavy they had to come up with something else so really a flight officer is the closest thing to a - - it's like a warrant officer, see. You're not considered a commissioned officer. Because here they were loaded with -- they had 10 times more many officers in the Army Air Corps -- remember, the Army was composed of corps. The Corps of Engineers, the Corps of this. And we're loaded with officers because they graduate everybody as second lieutenant. So they had to change that where they came up with a flight officer so they wouldn't have so many officers in there. That's all it was. A way of getting around the problem.

EM: So at that point did you know what kind of an aircraft you would be a crew in?

DV: Oh, yes. Our training in Tonopah, Nevada in [phase?] training was in B24s.

EM: It was all about the liberator.

DV: That's all they had there. We even had pilots that had been sent to transition in B17s and they ended up in 24s there. And these people used to land and they'd cut the throttles at the end of the runway and glide in. Well, they didn't do that with a 24. They were used to doing that in a 17, but I guess they switched a lot of people around to get things moving. If a B24 place needed more

people they ended up putting them there. If they needed 17s they would send them there.

EM: Did you ever fly on a 17?

DV: Yeah, I flew 17s too, but it --

EM: How do you feel about the 24 as an aircraft?

DV: I think it was a better -- I think it was better suited for war than the 17 was. The 17 did not carry the bomb load we did. It could go higher than we could. It was slower than -- we could carry a much heavier bomb load than them, we could go much farther than them, we could go faster than them. The only advantage that they had, they could go higher, be out of the range of the flak a little more. So we were the ones usually chosen to -- if there were two groups and they're both at the same height they usually try to concentrate on the 24s because they were lower because they're easier targets to hit. So that was a disadvantage, I would say, sometimes. Other than that I think it was a better plane.

EM: A B17 was prettier.

DV: Yeah, it was nicer looking. The 24 might have been a little more ugly, but yet it could do all the things, could carry more bombs, go farther, and fly faster.

EM: It was a better aircraft.

DV: It was a better aircraft, I guess, for the purpose of what it was intended to do. Did a good job, I guess, and was pretty good. It held together pretty well. And we got shot up one time real badly, but --

EM: So when did you actually go overseas?

DV: There's a story there in itself. It ended up we got to this place in Hamilton Field. Little by little they'd take a crew and they would send them up to Fairfield Susan in California and they would get a brand new B17 that had about five hours on it. They'd take them out there and they'd fly that from there over to Hawaii and back for like a shakedown cruise. Anything that they found wrong they would -- when they came back they have fixed and repaired. But they always found excuses to stay a few extra days because it was wintertime too and Hawaii was very nice, the weather. Much better than Frisco.

EM: Yeah, Frisco would be a bit chilly.

DV: So after that they'd fly back and they would change or fix anything that needed fixing --

EM: These are all 17s?

DV: No, this is the B24.

EM: Because you said 17 earlier. I just want to make sure I --

DV: I flew one of them once a few times.

EM: Okay, but the shakedown cruises are in B24s?

DV: Yeah. I left out we had gone to gunnery school too prior to that. After we left basic training the first thing we went to, we went to pilot school, I washed out of that, then I waited to get to bombardier school. Before I went to bombardier school there was flexible gunnery school. I had to go to that too. So I went through that prior to going -- the navigators and bombardiers all had to go to gunnery school too, flexible gunnery. That took about almost two months right there. And then we went to Hamilton Field. Not Hamilton Field. Then we went to Tonopah for our crew forming and then we did all that and we ended up in Hamilton Field. All of the fellows that went out there, all 50 of the crews, came up on orders, they'd get a plane, fly off to the Pacific. Little by little it ended up there's five of us crews left only. And nothing happened. So we went into town and we told a couple of guys that were staying, "We're going to be in town, here's the hotel we're staying at, if you see any orders come up let us know. Just across the bridge, we're in Frisco." So we're there about three days, nothing happened, and all of a sudden we get a phone call. Says, "We're up on orders." So we went right back to the base, we look on the bulletin board, sure enough there it is. There's our five crews left and it said code letter D. And

this had never appeared in the previous orders posted on the bulletin boards. So I went in the office and I asked one of the girls there, I said, "What is this code letter D?" Said, "I can't tell you that." And I said, "Hey, look here. I'm on the list, here's my ID card." "I'm not supposed to tell you this, but you're going by water." I said, "We're going to the Pacific by boat?" She says, "Not exactly." I said, "How are we going there?" She says, "I can't tell you that either, but you're not going to fly there." So next thing you know the following day we're assembled out there and they put us on a train, our own private train. We have a civilian dining car, normal dining car, with all the --

EM: White tablecloths and everything?

DV: White tablecloths and the whole bit. And then one end of the car -- the enlisted men are at one end of the car and the officers at the other end. All of us had compartment cars and we went all the way across the country to Patrick Henry, Virginia. And this is an infantry staging area. And we're wondering what we were doing there. Well, we soon find out. First of all we have a little air group there -- I'm sorry, I keep messing it up. But they had a guy who was a retread from World War I, a fighter pilot from World War I with his decorations and wings on. They

had called him out of the reserves. He was just serving in an administrative job like that. He was in charge of the Air Force detachment at Camp Patrick Henry. And we stayed there about a week and from there we got on a boat, a liberty ship convoy. I think it was the Leland Stanford, if I recall correctly. And this took us almost 28 days, 27 and a half days it took us to get to Gibraltar and in Gibraltar we were going through -- they had the submarine net open so only one ship at a time could go through it. They have a net to keep the subs out. At that time in the middle of the night we're in Gibraltar going through, we're asleep in the middle of the night, all the bells and the whistles started to go off, depth charges started to go off and the sirens and everything. Apparently a wolf pack had hit. They only went after the tankers. We had oil tankers on the outside perimeter of the convoy. There was three of them on each side. They sunk all six of them. We came up on deck, they're all on fire, every one of them are sinking and on fire. The E-boats that they had are going around shrieking with their sirens going dropping depth charges and everything else. And this is happening all of a sudden; go on deck, middle of the night. It's dark out. My God, there's a war going on.

EM: There is a war.

DV: And we were surprised. I mean all we had on was our shorts on and we all were on deck and heard this noise and of course they had all the bells clanging and everything for everybody to get on deck. We didn't know if they were going to shoot us, torpedo us or not. They were just after the tankers apparently and that was it. They were gone. We went up, the subs were gone. The E-boats were running around shrieking with the sirens going and dropping depth charges all over the place. So that night we did go through the -- we went through the submarine net. Still one ship at a time goes through. We pulled into the harbor at Oran on the north coast of Africa and we stayed in close to shore. At night we anchored for the evening. The next morning everything looked clear and that and we headed for Marseilles, France. We had locomotives and tanks on the top, stretched across the top deck, and we used to roll quite heavily from that weight. There were locomotives and tanks, about six of each on each side of the deck.

EM: That makes you top-heavy, doesn't it?

DV: We were very top-heavy and when we hit a few storms on the way over this thing rolled like, man, that ship, I'll tell you. We were playing cards one side in an area one time and one of the times we rolled it took us, the card table, and threw us against the bulkhead. And we had so much

weight on the top, I mean all those locomotives and tanks, these German tanks and they're all headed, I guess, for France. All the stuff was destined -- which was a point of debarkation because for supplies.

EM: What are we talked now? Late '43, early '44?

DV: We're getting into '45 now.

EM: Oh, we're up to '45 now? Okay. Because you got a lot of training.

DV: Yeah, it took us 28 days.

EM: It took you a month to get across the Atlantic.

DV: Then we went to Marseilles. The next morning we got to Marseilles and then we debarked and they told us, "If you want to go into town the first thing you do is take your 45s with you and go over to the MPs and get ammunition for your guns."

EM: Water?

DV: Maybe a little bit.

EM: Okay, keep rolling.

DV: So we go into town and we went to the MPs and got the ammunition. We find out that everybody that goes into Marseilles, every enlisted or officer has to carry a loaded gun. And you go to the bars, the little wine shops and that, even the nurses and WACs, they had all had carbines slung over their shoulder, guys with machine guns.

EM: It was a rum town.

DV: Well, they were having trouble with some of the troops.

EM: Really?

DV: It was a problem they had with the black troops there.

EM: Really?

DV: They were going after white officers and hamstringing them and things like that.

EM: American?

DV: Yes, American troops.

EM: American black troops?

DV: Well, they were using them there for the loading and the unloading of the ships. It was a big port of entry, still is. And there was a lot of animosity between the black troops and white officers mainly. And they would hamstring a lot of them and do them a little bit of damage. So you weren't allowed in town unless you carried a loaded gun. Male or female, no difference. You had to carry a gun or you get out of town. They'll take you right back to where you came from. And that was it. It had to be a loaded one. You don't take any chances. So he says, "If you're going around always go with two or more and try to get back on the trolley car taking you back where you came from." We were in a little French villa there along the oceanfront and we had to go by all the barracks there where the black

troops were. That's the people they were having the problems with. And we lived in a place, oh, I forget the name of it, but it's farther east along the coast. It's another small town. That was the end of the trolley train and we would take a trolley from this town, go along the waterfront. And one night we missed the last trolley and we had to walk back alone and lucky there was three of us, we all had our guns out too in our hand, and we walked along and there were groups of troops around there and they just merely looked at us. We felt very uneasy about the whole thing. Here's all these black troops there.

EM: So where'd you go after Marseilles?

DV: At Marseilles, they put us there in an officer's rest camp for a while. We were in a tent with a guy that was shot up, an infantry guy, and he was amazed too at how much luggage we had. Everybody carried an A2 bag parachute, a footlocker, a B4 bag, and I think we had a regular big barracks bag, all full of stuff. This guy says, "Where are you people going?" He says, "You're going on a vacation or something with all this luggage? You want to see what my luggage looks like?" He goes under his cot, pulls out a 30-caliber ammunition box, he says, "Here's my luggage." Everything he carried with in there. When his clothes got

dirty he went over to quartermaster, just got new clothes, threw the other ones away.

EM: So, what, was he in infantry or what?

DV: He was in the infantry, yeah, but it was an infantry officers' rest camp for those who were wounded in battle. So he was out of the hospital, he was getting along okay, and --

EM: Figure he was in the Italian campaign or what?

DV: I don't know where he was. I mean yeah, he was somewhere. No, they were still in France at this time.

EM: That's true, but --

DV: I don't know where he was, but he was wounded and that's all I know. But he was getting better. After that we got on another boat called the [Chantillion?] run by the British Navy. It was a French boat run by the British Navy but full of all kinds of people. Guerilla fighters, women soldiers with bandoliers of [bolt?] string across them, kids, little children in there, every nationality known to God was in that thing. Different kinds of uniforms I had never seen. I don't know what country they were from. This ship was jammed to the rafters with people. And me and my navigator and pilot and copilot, we had big rooms, a great big stateroom, all done in French provincial furniture. I mean it was a real big stateroom. It was

large. It was twice the size of this room we're in, that's how big it was.

EM: That's big.

DV: Darn big. It was up on the top deck, all French provincial stuff in there. And we ended up eating British style because this is the way they worked it over there. But I'll give you an example. Our first meal there, which was breakfast, whatever it was, they marched you in, you go into the place where you're going to eat, the restaurant, and they have a British mess boy, he's about 12, 13 years old, 14 years old, and there's six of you to a table. And he sits you down at the table, he brings a whole bunch of great big plates, puts them all in front of you, and then they brought a whole bunch of casseroles of food and they put them on a sideboard like a shelf like you see here inside. And then he comes around with one of these big casseroles and with a big spoon or a fork and he puts something on your plate that's in that casserole. Then he goes over there and he sits down. And we're looking at it and there's the rest of the casseroles and he says, "How about the rest of it?" "Sir, you eat this first."

Remember, the ship was jam packed with people and this is how we're being fed. This is British style apparently.

Because then he comes and takes all the old plates, all new plates come out, now comes the next casserole, whatever it was. And they bring that out. Maybe it's vegetables and you get a little bit of that. Then we go through the same routine. He takes them out, puts them all away, all new plates again. And we go through the whole meal like this. The meat's separate, everything is separate. And you know, being as crowded as it was and everything else, but this is the way the British Navy works. Tradition. So anyway we're through with the meals. That's how they were. Later on that day all of a sudden I hear something, bong, bong, somebody's hitting something like a --

EM: A gong?

DV: A gong of some sort. I couldn't quite figure it out. I open the door, there's a guy like he stepped out of a Hollywood movie, red pants, gold stripe down it, epaulets here and a big fancy hat with ostrich feathers on and hitting this gong. And I said, "What's going on?" he said, "It's tea time, sir." (laughter)

EM: Only the British could figure this out.

DV: So we go there and we had tea, tea and some crackers and stuff like that. So we got a kick out of that. Anyway then later on we back to the room and we figured we'd like to do some card playing. We found out there was an

officers' club over there so we walked over. A bunch of us start playing poker. I think there's about six or seven of us playing poker. And we were dressed casually and one guy had fatigues on, this and that, put something comfortable on. So all of a sudden a British major -- British captain. He comes in, he comes up there, and he's got black puttees on and all of that and real, you know, a swagger stick, the whole bit, the mustache and all that. And he comes up to the table, he hits my back and hits another one and another in the back, "You, sirs, you have to leave. You're in the wrong officers' club." It turns out there's three officers' clubs there. They have the lower officers' club, the middle grade, and the higher ranks. They had three officers' clubs on this boat. It was so crowded like that and this is a big officers' club that we're in, but we're in the wrong one. And so all of a sudden we have a fellow at the other end in a pair of fatigues sitting there, and he happens to be a bird colonel. And he's playing poker with us and he gets up and the guy sees his stuff on his shoulders, sees those silver chickens on there, and he said, "Will you please leave us alone. We're just having a game of cards. You're interrupting our game." All this captain did, he salutes, clicks his heels, make an about face, and that was it, and left.

EM: Isn't that strange?

DV: We found out later the civilian population on the ship, there was all kinds of different mixed peoples there and our enlisted people, they didn't have hardly anything to eat. They had like two meals a day. They said that they'd been fed out of what they call slop buckets. They were all sleeping like 20 to a room in hammocks and everything else and we had all this room. I mean the British --

EM: (inaudible)

DV: Yeah, I mean the British really have a class system going on.

EM: Oh, you said it.

DV: Apparently that's how they go. Three officers' clubs on this boat that's crowded to the gills, three they have to have.

EM: That's strange.

DV: I thought the whole thing was strange. So we finally got there. We finally got to Naples. That's where we debarked in Naples. Both harbors we had to go over sunken ships and everything. The harbors were all full of sunken ships.

EM: In Naples?

DV: They had boards everywhere to go over the ships. We got to Naples and they took us by truck to Caserta which is a replacement depot, a repo depot I used to call it. We

stayed there a few days. Then we get on a train, go down to the train station, they march us down there, and we see this beautiful streamlined train there. It's stainless steel like the Burlington Zephyr and stainless steel and turquoise in color. Beautiful looking train. So we march right past it and we notice that they're loading in Italian officers. They've got gray uniforms and all in black. They go into this beautiful train that's going to go north. It's pulling out of there and they're loading it up with these people. And we stop by a load of boxcars, old-fashioned [forty and eight?], filthy, dirty boxcars. I mean filthy. And this what we were going to get into. We got into these damn boxcars. They were dirty as hell. I don't know what they were carrying in there.

EM: You don't want to know probably.

DV: And don't want to know. And we took those, overnight trip to Bari and we'd stop for a rest stop and just go out in the field every so often if we had to relieve ourselves. We tried to build a fire there. It was cold, it was wintertime. So there was a station where you had stopped on; there was some bales of hay. A couple of us ran out. We got some bales of hay from the adjacent train that was stopped; we threw them in there; we tried to build a fire. That didn't work because it got smoky as the dickens. We

couldn't do anything with it so we got rid of it, got rid of the fire, but we thought we'd spread the remaining hay so you could lay on the floor. It was filthy. And then we found out we started to itch. There were bugs in there and everything else.

EM: Oh, no.

DV: That was the wrong thing to do. Anyway we finally got to Bari the next day. Goofy trip. And we had people, we had full colonels within our group and they were in boxcars. The Italians have -- our prisoners have this nice new streamlined train. Couldn't figure it out. Anyway we got there. We got to Bari. I think we stayed there about overnight and then the truck took us out to our respective bomb groups. I went at that time to the 456th bomb group. This is where I flew my missions. I did all my flying with the 456th. And one day a person came into the tent, he said, "I'm looking for Vartanian." I said, "That's me." He said, "You've got an hour to pack, you're being transferred." No orders, no nothing, no paper work, anything. So the next I know I'm on a truck, they take me over to another bomb group. We have a lunch there. Some of the guys I had gone through training with, it was the 98th group who stopped by, we had lunch with them. They had

taken over a German airfield intact. Everything was German there, the plates, spoons, everything.

EM: Really?

DV: Completely intact, all made out of millwork and everything. Not tents. They lived in real houses had been sent from Germany, all millwork and everything else. German plates and everything else, knives and forks had the swastikas on and everything. Just like our stuff. Well, oversized spoons, forks, knives, everything. And then they left it intact.

EM: Where was this?

DV: This is the 98th -- this was at the 98th bomb group. We just stopped there for lunch, that's all. Then we ended up at the 376th and we stayed there a few days. Then they destroyed everything. We had bulldozers come in and dig deep holes everywhere and everything that they had in the way of GI equipment we had to turn all our stuff in and a lot of they took and they burned it all up. They put it in these holes, poured gasoline over it, and set it all on fire. And then after that the bulldozers came and took the same dirt and pushed it over everything. They had an arrangement with the Italian government that they would leave the land as pretty much as possible the way it was

when they arrived there. They burned perfectly good food, clothing, shoes, everything. A lot of stuff brand new.

EM: Was the war over at that point?

DV: Nope, still going on. They had other things in mind for us. See, that's why I had been pulled out to the other group. The 376th had started out in North Africa and they had a lot of people with a lot of points, enough to get out, and the war was starting to wane down quite a bit in Europe. They had plans for us that we didn't know about. We found out very shortly because right after they tore up everything and buried everything we ended up on the USS West Point. It was made as the -- produced as the USS America, never saw civilian service because the Army took it over as a troop ship, called it the West Point. Nine days later we're back in the States and they told us too not to take any government property with us and I had taken a carbine, a brand new one. The guy that runs the -- takes care of the -- all the guns and ammunition are there. The ordnance officer. He said, "Hello, would you like a gun? I've got a nice 45 here." It was a satin gray finish Colt. You don't see too many of those. And he said, "How would you like a carbine? I've got it all wrapped up. Still wrapped in cosmoline and everything. Would you like to

take one of these?" Either that or they're going to set fire to it and bury it.

EM: Yeah, they're going to put it in the ground.

DV: Right. I said, "Yeah, I'll take it." So we found out later, we had signed, each officer had signed their own customs report saying we didn't have any government property, blah, blah, blah. Which they never checked anything because I went on deck the night before. I got cold feet. I go up there and it was everybody up to doing the same thing, getting rid of their guns. I threw my carbine overboard. It was brand new.

EM: Where did you board the West Point?

DV: Toronto. We left Toronto harbor. So it only took us about nine and a half days to get back. The Toronto harbor is not too far away from the airfield, a few miles away, wasn't real far. But anyway when we got the boat everybody had the same idea, they were getting cold feet. Everybody's throwing guns overboard. Didn't have the nerve to take -- I didn't have the nerve to throw the 45 away. It's a waste. I asked somebody if he wanted it and he said, "Yeah, I'll take it." And you know what happened? They never did check our luggage at all.

EM: So you could have gotten it all.

DV: I could have had a brand-new carbine that was going to be destroyed anyway --

EM: And a 45.

DV: And a brand new 45 Colt satin blue steel finish. That's just a parkerized deal.

EM: Where did she end up? You went back to the States?

DV: Yeah. We ended up -- right after that they put us on a train and we ended up in Camp Atterbury, Indiana. They gave everybody a 30-day leave and we had to return back to Atterbury and all the enlisted men that had all the points and stuff like that, even the officers and that, they all got discharged. They all went to discharge. Because they had started out in North Africa. They had --

EM: Way back.

DV: They had plenty of points to get out. They had been over there, some of them, since '42. Yeah, they were there in '42. And 376th was one of the oldest groups there. They started out in North Africa like the 98th did. So anyway after spending 30 days at home I happened to be home during VE Day. My crew and them were still over there. They didn't leave actually until August of '45. And this I'm talking about is in May. April or May we left. So anyway we get back there to Camp Atterbury, go on a troop train, we end up in Harvard, Nebraska. Harvard, Nebraska is a B29

replacement training depot. So we were going to be changed over and still kept the same [bob group?] number. We'd be called the 376th but we'd be very heavy bombers. Won't be a heavy bomb group, be very heavy, which is the B29. We started to train B29s. That's what it was all about. So I was cherry picked out of my group. I don't know why or how. I don't know what moderm they used of evaluating how I should go there. Don't ask me. I have no idea. All I know is I had flown as a deputy lead squadron, as a bombardier once, on one of my things, but it's the only thing I could think of. But anyway we started training in B29s, they dropped the bomb, that's the end of the whole deal.

They took groups of us here and there. Took about 15 here, some there, 15 sent over here, another 20 sent them over to the closest airfield. I ended up in Lincoln, Nebraska of all places. Where do you think they sent us to? A combat indoctrination center. We had to go through that for about two or three months and listen to these people. We had a guy up on the stage one day, we're all in the front row in this big auditorium and we're all sitting in the first row and there's a guy up there from the south Pacific and all the rest of the people here had never been to combat. So

he's giving this talk and he's talking and he's starting to get very dramatic about some target they were going after and there's shelling and there's 400 flak guns here and the flak was bursting. And we just started laughing a little bit, he stopped the speech, he looked down at us, "You gentlemen find something funny about what I'm saying? Something amusing?" And a guy says, "Yeah, we just came back from targets that had over 3,000 guns." And he said, "What are you doing here?" And he said, "That's what we'd like to know." We still stayed there, had to go through the school.

EM: It's crazy.

DV: We attended all the classes we were supposed to attend.

This went on for about a month and a half or something like that, two months, I forget exactly what. All of a sudden I got orders I'm going to Biloxi, Mississippi. So I go there, they make me a mess officer. So I go to see the guy that's running it, the sergeant, I said, "Look, I don't know nothing about your job and I'm sure you know what you're doing, you've been probably doing it a long time, you've got master's stripes on and everything." A whole bunch of the overseas stripes and everything else. So I said, "Just keep running it. I don't know what I'm supposed to do anyway." And he said, "We're going to get

along great. What do you like? Filet, lobster, what do you like?" I said, "I like stuff like that, sure." He said, "I've got a private dining room near my office in the back all draped and carpeted. Since I'm not going to do anything to help run this because I know nothing about it so just keep going like you're doing now. We're going to get along fine." And he told me about the food. After all I got tired of the lobster tails and the filets I wanted something to do. There was nothing to do. You know, I had no duty at all. So I went to the office, I said, "Look, is there another assignment you can give me? I don't care what it is but is there something else available?" So she said, "Yeah, we have an opening at the gunnery, at the pistol range. Would you like go to there?" I said great. So I went over to the pistol range and I learned how to fire the 45 at long last and also I learned to be a pretty good shot with it. It was practice being made perfect. We used to play a little game. Do I need any more time?

EM: You've got plenty of time?

DV: I didn't know if you were --

EM: No.

DV: Okay. I got to learn to shoot the pistol pretty good. I never could shoot it -- the best I could ever get was marksman before which is the lowest graded thing there is.

So there I start shooting it. We used to play games with it to help you learn to shoot the pistol well. I mean some of the guys were real crack shots. They could shoot better with that thing than you could with a rifle and I'm not kidding you at all, they were that good at it. We used to play games. We would go in front of a silhouette target, take the full range, the 20-yard range or whatever it was, the farthest away where the gun stand was, and we'd each stand behind the silhouette target, the farthest distance away. And we would all line up and we'd start shooting. Now, the idea was to knock over the silhouette target which means you had to hit a piece of wood about three quarters of an inch in diameter, in size. It's a little piece. It's not even an inch. And you had to get two bullets within probably this much of each other, less than an inch of each other and otherwise that thing's not going to go over. You're going to have to hit the wood holding it up. And they had to be real close together. The first guy to knock the silhouette over, when it falls over, wins the pot. And it's funny how much of an incentive that money is to make you a good -- you know, the incentive was to shoot better because you're going to make money on the deal. Took me a while before I was ever able to get a pot though.

EM: Where was this happening?

DV: This was in Biloxi and it was out in the Desoto National Forest. A bus had to take us out there every day.

EM: So is the war totally over at this point?

DV: No, it's still going on in the Pacific. In Europe, yes.

EM: Yeah, VE Day.

DV: I was home for VE Day in Chicago. But no, it was still going on in the Pacific for a while. I'm trying to remember exactly. No, I'm sorry, it must have been over.

EM: They surrendered in August.

DV: When they dropped the bomb that ended our training and that's when they sent me there. No, I'm sorry; the war was over then at that time. But they were hanging onto us. I don't know they just didn't --

EM: Let you go.

DV: Get it over with. I mean it's over. So they had won, but they couldn't react. They couldn't adjust to this so rapidly. First one's over, then the other's over, and they didn't know what to do. It took them time to do all these -- set up all the discharge centers and everything else that they did. So anyway what happened there is they're putting us -- warehousing us, you could say. So they gave us different things to do. By then there were 45 range -- you have the guy that ran it, they moved him somewhere else, I ended up running the 45 range. Then there was

maybe another month or so. Then all of a sudden I got orders to go to discharge and I got my discharge and that was about the whole story there.

EM: So did you ever actually get to fly the B24 as a crewmember?

DV: Oh, yeah. I flew 11 sorties.

EM: Tell me about those.

DV: Well, they all were -- only had one bad one.

EM: Tell about that one.

DV: They wrote a book about that. It was called *The Log of the Liberators* by an Australian guy, I forget his name. But my wife bought it because it had a B24 on the outside cover and it was printed in 1956 or '55 or '56. She was in a department store and the book area; they had covers and a big sign with a B24 on it so she bought it for me because she knew I was in B24s. She gave it to me for my birthday. I still have it. My 40-something birthday, maybe 50th birthday, whatever it was. And I happen to be going through the book and it's about -- it's broken down and the B24 and the various theaters and in one chapter it says the B24s Italian style, one of the chapters. And in there they had four pages devoted to one mission that the 15th had flown and I was on that mission that we had flown. And that was the one that we had gone to --

EM: So you were a bombardier on that one, on that mission?

DV: I was a bombardier navigator. See, that day I was both. I was the bombardier and the navigator.

EM: All that training came in handy, I guess.

DV: Well, we got shot up pretty badly.

EM: So this is ground fire?

DV: What it was, we hit the IP, the initial point when you start your -- you can see a black triangle in the sky just as plain as day, a perfect rectangle, the [rictus?] of the plane and the [dent?]. And we had flak all the way from the IP all the way to the target. And this is written on this book. My wife didn't know about this. I read the book and hey, that's the same one I was on.

EM: I was there.

DV: I was there. I remembered. And it was very, very bad.

EM: What was the target?

DV: The target was the Hermann Goering tank works. They call that -- the town was Saint Valentin, no E on the end of it. It's real close to the Swiss border. It's a big manufacturing area.

EM: This is far northern Italy then, is that correct?

DV: No.

EM: Or southern Germany?

DV: We're in Austria.

EM: It's in Austria?

DV: It's in Austria. But you're up real close to Switzerland.
Matter of fact --

EM: Where were you flying out of now?

DV: Cerignola was our air base. The biggest town was Cerignola and actually the -- it was a tiny town; I forget the name of it. It's on the tip of my tongue, one of those things I can't recall, but the biggest city to us was Cerignola and that wasn't too far from us. But there was another real small one, very, very small, near us, but I forgot the name of it.

EM: So you're flying up to Austria so that means you're getting into the Alps.

DV: Yeah, they're not very far away. But that was the worst of all the missions I ever flew.

EM: So your old B24 took a bit of a pounding, huh?

DV: Quite a bit. I mean we lost -- that day we lost about 40 percent of our aircraft.

EM: Whoa.

DV: It was very bad. As soon as we got into -- we got into the flak way before -- we had flak all the way on the IP all the way to the target. And as it got close to the target the flak was more intense. And you could hear it. It was like somebody was taking gravel and throwing it -- first

you'd get the shock, the explosion, and the plane would jump. You could feel it. And then it sounded like somebody took a lot of gravel and threw it against the aircraft. And you can see it and hear it, ting, tong. You could hear all the noise. It's going through us like a sieve. It made us into a sieve. As soon as the flak started engine number two and number three and number four, the right-hand engines, went out immediately. We had to feather them. And then we also ended up with the number two engine, that got hit and it was streaming oil. We had one engine going on the left side, that number one engine, and about half an engine out of number two. It was streaming oil and smoking. And that was just about the time we dropped the bombs.

EM: So she still flies with one and a half engines?

DV: One and a half engines.

EM: As long as you don't have a bomb load.

DV: I asked my pilot -- yeah, we released the bombs. I think we dropped like -- in the book I found out we dropped the bombs -- the lead bombardier dropped them prematurely on purpose.

EM: So [you were scared of that?].

DV: It was terrible. Everybody got hit bad. Not only did we lose aircraft, but I mean every plane had holes in it. So

anyway we got home. I asked him, "What do you want to do? Do you want to go to Switzerland? We're 30 minutes from Bern, Switzerland, or do you want to go back?" "No, I don't want to go to Bern, Switzerland." I said, "Give me an emergency heading for Zara." That's an emergency base which is just a bit -- you know where Venice is in the northern part of the Adriatic? About 50 miles down from there was an emergency base, 50 miles or so, they had built a German phony emergency base. They had copied one called Zara which is farther south. The Germans had set up a fake one manned by people that spoke perfect English with no German accent. Perfect English. And they used to bring in the planes and catch them that way. They'd ask for a heading, maybe their compasses were screwed up, they'd give us a compass heading and they'd get in there. They wouldn't even know they were in German hands until they got out of the aircraft.

EM: They thought they'd landed at --

DV: At the real Zara. The real Zara was about 50, 60 miles farther south. So I gave him the heading for the correct one though. We got to the correct one. I knew about that one. We got there and my pilot said, "I bet we could go down to Venice" which is another British one farther down. He said, "What do you think?" I said, "You're the one that

knows about our fuel supply and everything." He said, "I can guide you there but I don't know if we can make it." "You're asking me if we can go, do you think we can make it?" "I have no idea." "You know how much gas we have, that's our problem."

EM: That's his call.

DV: He said, "Okay, get me a heading for Zara, for Vis." So we went to Vis. It's a British base off the coast of Yugoslavia. In other words, you're on the other side. You're on the west coast of Yugoslavia. So we got to Vis. We're losing altitude all the time. The one thing I did forget to tell you about, I said, "You know I'm not going to give you a dogleg to fly there" because there's a German airfield right at the head of the Adriatic and they've got about 400 fighters down there. This is a beautiful sunny day, cloudless sky where we were, and I said, "I'm going to take you right over the airfield because I'm not going to give you a dogleg. I know we're short of gas." So we went right over the field, not one plane came up. And we were going over that field probably maybe six, 7,000 feet, that's all we were. We're losing altitude all the time. And not one plane came up. And they're all laid out as neatly as could be. And that was because of the oil campaign. They just didn't have the fuel. And they

probably only used the fuel they wanted to. Certain groups that they didn't like for some reason or other, like they surrender and pretend they surrender and shoot the fighter down or something like that.

EM: I guess one crippled liberator is not worth using up a bunch of gas to get to.

DV: Well, that's about it. They couldn't take off unless they're given orders to go after a certain group or whatever it was. They just didn't have the gasoline. They couldn't waste it. So it was nice and neatly lined up, all these aircraft are there, and not one. Mostly all JU88s and ME109s and a few other. They had some 110s or 220s.

EM: Never ran across the jet aircraft, did you?

DV: Never saw one. It could have been, but we never --

EM: They stayed on the ground, you don't know.

DV: But anyway we went over the field and not one plane took off. And we weren't up that high at all.

EM: So you made an okay landing though, huh?

DV: We got to Zara and he said, "You know, could you give me a heading for the base? I think we can make it." So okay, let's give it a try. Thought we were going to ditch in the Adriatic for sure. I didn't think we'd make it. I gave him a heading for the base, we got to the base, and we got there, we landed and everything else, and there was nothing

left in the tanks but fumes. We were lucky as hell because there's no way on earth we should have had any gas to even get across the Adriatic because we had lost -- when we found out what they had to do first of all they repaired our aircraft. They had to put all new gas tanks in the plane.

EM: It was that shot up.

DV: It was that shot up. We had 400 and some holes in the aircraft. And the scariest part of the whole thing is when they hit the oxygen system for the forward part of the plane. That's where all of us were in the front, the pilot, the copilot, the navigator, the bombardier, and matter of fact they didn't have -- I was the navigator and the bombardier that day.

EM: Yeah, that's what you said.

DV: And we had the nose gunner. Then we were out of oxygen. It was okay because we were going down anyway.

EM: Yeah, you were down low.

DV: We were going lower. You know, as soon as you break away you start going down. And we broke away and went down. We had to anyway, you didn't have any oxygen. So we had a double purpose for getting lower.

EM: So you kind of dodged a bullet on that flight.

DV: We were very, very lucky. I mean nobody got -- I got hit with a piece of flak, that's the only thing. I did get hit and I thought I -- it hit me in the gut. It felt like somebody hit me with a baseball bat, but I have the flak pieces at home, little souvenirs. The piece that hit was no bigger --

EM: Than the end of your little finger.

DV: And it actually, I got the plates at home in my souvenirs. It actually tore the plate apart, it tore it. And it pushed them and the piece of flak that big was sticking through the inside where the corduroy is in the flak suit. It didn't go through though.

EM: But it saved your life.

DV: Where it hit me is in the groin area.

EM: Well, saved that too. (laughter)

DV: That was the only time I ever wore that -- this is not a lie. This is the truth. They have the little thing to protect your groin? That's where it hit me. When I went to get the flak suits out of the wooden box they keep them in, the [harsh stand?], I went in and I said, "What are these triangular things?" It's to protect your groin area. They got two snaps in the jacket when you put -- and these snaps go in to protect your groin area and that's where it hit me, in that little piece. I should have taken the

whole damn thing with me. Left it. I just took four plates out of there. They're bent and one of them is actually torn like you would just tear a piece of paper. But it was amazing. And then such a little piece. It wasn't that big. I felt like it must have been something large, you know. I felt that I was afraid to look down there at first.

EM: (laughter)

DV: I mean I had a black and blue stomach for, oh, hell, for two weeks.

EM: Did you have any other close calls on flights?

DV: No, that was --

EM: Everything was pretty much standard?

DV: Yeah. It was the only time we ever had any real problem.

EM: So what targets were you tending to go to?

DV: [Marshalling areas?] were big targets. Wiener Neustadt, they were still making planes. We went there twice and bombed Wiener Neustadt. Railroad bridges we used to bomb. This one here was the tank works and it was Hermann Goering's. Remember, all these people, they owned the -- Goering owned that, it was his. All the profits of that were going over into a Swiss bank all the time.

EM: Only in Germany.

DV: I mean they all took care of themselves.

EM: Did you ever have fighter escorts?

DV: This time we had called for a fighter escort and never got it. We were supposed to meet up with 25 P51s were supposed to meet us at the target and of course we called Mayday, Mayday, we wanted help. They're all down the deck shooting up everything. That's what they did most of the time because there weren't many fighters around. And as a rule I didn't even see a P51 that day and we called for fighter escort.

EM: Of course I guess --

DV: We never got any.

EM: I mean they're not going to help you if you're getting hit with flak.

DV: I mean afterwards. We would like an escort home if you're going to go over that German airfield.

EM: That's true.

DV: And we're going to go right over, you can't miss it. Because we were heading for Zara, I mean you have to go right over it. I said, "We're going to go right over it." I told him the map, I looked at the map (inaudible) we're going right over it. He wanted to go there, we did. Nobody came up from the [bane?]. We were [sunked?], you know. We were damn lucky.

EM: Yeah, you were.

DV: Well, that was the only real bad one we had. Others, I'm sure we got flak but nothing like this. There's no comparison.

EM: Did you mention you had disability?

DV: It's all from mostly the hearing.

EM: It is?

DV: Yeah.

EM: Just from the noise of being --

DV: Yeah. Everybody in our crew ended up being deaf or close to it.

EM: I can understand that.

DV: See, they didn't have noise suppressors. They didn't even know what they were. In the pistol ranges they didn't use noise suppressors. We went to gunnery school, no noise suppressors or anything. Remember those 50 caliber guns? You're in a turret, they're right within inches of your ears, the firing chamber. Everybody on the crew ended up being hard of hearing.

EM: You ever think about the war after the war was over? Ever have dreams or any of that stuff? Or just kind of put it behind you and went off, huh?

DV: I just had memories of it, but that's all. Never bothered me that way. I mean sure we got shot at a few times. Only

that one mission was bad. Made up for the ones that were -

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EM: I was going to say, it sounded pretty rough.

DV: I don't think -- I didn't think we'd ever make it back. I thought we'd crash land somewhere or bail out or something like that. I didn't think we could make it because I know our gasoline and we were dripping oil. That one and a half engines is no joke.

EM: It's not a joke.

DV: I mean I didn't know how the heck it did it, but we got home.

EM: The old B24 was pretty tough.

DV: We did throw some stuff out though.

DV: I bet you did.

DV: We threw, I think, some of the waist guns out and some of the stuff that was heavy. But we got back safe and that's about it.

EM: That's what's important.

DV: We got back, we had no supper. I forgot to tell you.

EM: You missed dinner?

DV: We got back and we went over to the tent. He said, "You know what time the mess hall closes." I said, "We were held up, we were in a fight." He said, "We're closed, goodbye. Go away, you're bothering us." So we had nothing

to eat that day and no combat [chops?], no this, no that, no interrogation, nobody missed us. It wasn't like in *Twelve O'clock High* --

EM: Nobody debriefed you or anything?

DV: Nothing. And you call it debriefing, in those it was interrogation. The debriefing came out later for the next war, I think.

EM: Yeah, I guess.

DV: But we were -- interrogation it was called. And nothing. We didn't have interrogation, we didn't have the combat [shots?], we didn't have the supper, nothing to eat, anything. That was it. Because you know when the mess hall closes, it closes at 5:30 or 5:00, whatever it was, and we're there later than that. So we didn't have anything to eat that night either or drink or anything else.

EM: Oh, wow.

DV: Just one of those crazy things.

EM: What else you want to tell me about the war years?

DV: I don't know. I don't know if I missed anything.

EM: You probably did.

DV: That was the only bad one we had though. We got flak on all the rest of them, but nothing like that one day. One unusual thing that happened one day, we're rendezvousing

over the Adriatic, as soon as we got out over -- usually by the time we got up in the air we're rendezvousing, getting information, and all of a sudden a puff of flak comes at us. Not too close to us, but a piece of flak. Where the hell is it? We look down, there's a submarine down there. He's probably up there charging -- a German sub is charging its batteries probably. This really happened. I mean it's unbelievable. We look down there, there's a long sub, he took a pot shot at us with his gun, a deck gun.

EM: Just for the heck of it.

DV: Just for the heck of it. Nobody's going to -- the fighters hadn't even left yet. They don't leave until way after we leave because they're faster. And they know that and so he took a shot at us and we're not going to break formation or anything for a sub. It was the funniest thing in the world. You look down and way down there's this little submarine and he took one shot at us, that was it.

EM: I'm surprised there were still U-boats around in the Med or the Adriatic at that late date. I thought they'd pretty much cleaned it out.

DV: This was in probably March, April.

EM: I mean that's just a few months before VE Day.

DV: Yeah. But he was doing there I have no idea.

EM: That's probably what he was wondering too.

DV: Maybe it's I never saw a plane; I might as well take a shot at it. But that was the funniest thing of all. Although you never got a kick out of it because where is this coming from? And the only place to look down, there's water and you see a submarine down there. But it was nowhere close to us though, but what are you going to do? But it was strange just to see it. I'm trying to think of any other funny things. Eh, that was about the only thing that I could think that was sort of funny. What was he doing, doing that? Oh, another time, we went to bomb Bratislava in support of the Russian ground troops. We used parafrags and it was overcast that day and you couldn't see where you were going, but it was okay to use it. We had a panther ship, I guess, for radar and it was okay. And it was a cloud cover. So we were dropping parafrags and all of a sudden we start seeing flak. This is just to support the Russian ground troops. It was Bratislava. It's called like the gateway to Vienna. And all of a sudden flak starts bursting in the air around us. The Russians are shooting at us. They knew we were coming. It was probably their idea that we give them some support. So we do that and the flak starts coming up when we're doing that. This is to support the Russian -- and they didn't know we were coming? Of course they knew we were coming. They probably

were requesting our headquarters to give us some help and they actually shot at us.

EM: Those rascals.

DV: Well, he dropped the bombs and sort of scattered after that. But I mean here we're helping them and that's the thanks for it. I don't buy the fact that they didn't know we were there because they asked us to come there. I'm sure they asked us to do it.

EM: May have been right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing.

DV: I think it was the case, just could have been whatever. It was a real screw-up; it's all I can say. Because just as we're going to drop parafrags, and we only did that one time. You know, it's unlike us to carry such a bomb.

EM: Parafrags, yeah, that's unusual, isn't it?

DV: It's the only time I ever heard of them being dropped by us, by a 24.

EM: Is that so you can fly low and you won't blow yourself up, right? Because I mean it's a fragment bomb with --

DV: It goes down so far, then the parachute comes out and it's got a timer, slows it down and you're nowhere near it when it goes off. But it explodes before it hits the ground.

EM: Oh, it does?

DV: Yeah, that's the whole idea of it.

EM: So it's an anti-personnel as much as anything, isn't it?

DV: Basically and that's what it was for. In other words, the infantry is advancing, they can get a little help, and the Germans were out there to do some damage to the troops. It's strictly an anti-personnel thing as they say. That was funny about that though. Some of the unusual things that you think back on.

EM: There's always unusual things that happen. Anything else?

DV: Nothing I can think of I left out. Probably I have left something out.

EM: You're always going to leave something out. I mean that's the way it is.

DV: I can't tell you about anything else that's unusual.

EM: Okay.

DV: I think that's about it right now.

EM: We'll stop it there then. Thank you for spending the time to share your experiences.

DV: You're welcome.

EM: Thank you for what you did for our country during World War II. We appreciate that. We don't tell you guys enough so we'll say it again.

END OF AUDIO FILE