

## **Texas City / World War II Oral History Project**

### **Audited Transcript**

Interviewee: Duane E. Barger

Interviewer: Rebecca Snow

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[0:02]

R: Okay, now we're going to start. Thank you very much for coming, Mr. Barger. My name is Rebecca Snow, and today is March 22, 2012. We're here at Moore Memorial Library in Texas City, Texas, and I'm going to ask Mr. Barger to share with us some of his experiences during the war years in Texas City and when he was in the service, too. So thanks again for coming. The first question I'm asking you is, now, when did you come to Texas City?

D: I was born here.

R: You were born here?

D: September 16, 1926.

R: Were you delivered at home?

D: My mother and father, they were between jobs in different places. They had moved in with my grandmother, my mother's mother and father. The house is still built, though. It's still over there.

R: Where was it?

[1:16]

D: It's on 4th Avenue.

R: 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

D: It would be 4th Street, between 4th Street and 5th Street.

R: And it's still there.

D: I think it was—I can go right to it. 5th Avenue, instead of 4th Avenue.

[01:38]

R: Was it a home delivery?

D: You wouldn't know him, but the original Dr. Danforth, who didn't have anything to do with—

R: I know Danforth.

D: The older one.

R: Frank.

D: Is that Frank? Because Duncan is the younger one. So, anyway, he delivered me. 12:45 at night. At that house, and we were on the second floor. He told them he'd come back the next day and write out the birth certificate for them to remember the time, which was 12:45 A.M.

[2:16]

R: So you grew up here and went to school here?

D: Yes. My whole—what happened, when I was five years old, we lived in Alta Loma for about six or seven months. My mother didn't want me to go to school out there, wanted

to wait until we came back. So I started school a year late, or half a year late in Texas City. And we went to Wolvin School. Do you know where the Wolvin School was?

R: Yes.

D: Well, that was my first school to go to. And it was an elementary. Of course, it was everything at that time. Had all the grades. And I stayed there until they built Danforth Elementary on 4th Avenue, 24th Street and 4th Avenue.

R: What did your dad do?

D: Well, at the time, when he first moved to Texas City, he helped build 6th Street. He was a laborer. He went to work with—my grandfather had come here earlier and he was working down at Republic Oil Company. He got on down there, and worked at the South farm, which was a transfer system for the refinery. He stayed there—I'm sorry, first he was at Knox Refinery, which is no longer here, but at that time it was next to Amoco Oil, Pan American Refinery. That belonged to Shell. And so they transferred him to Illinois, Wood River, Illinois. We went up there and lived six months and came back. Then he went to work out at Republic. He was an operator type at Republic.

[4:15]

He was in what they called "oil movements." Light oil is what they usually called it they dealt with transfer oil and stuff.

R: Yes. Right.

D: Which I did at Amoco, or Pan Am, when I worked out there. Anyway, he was there, became a foreman, then became a supervisor of light oils and during the '47 explosion he was killed down at the docks. But that was his history of being at Republic. He worked there for twenty, twenty-some-odd years.

R: Did you grow up still living with the grandparents?

D: No, they moved—

R: Did you have your own house?

D: We had our own house after the—they lived with them—

R: You came from Alta Loma?

D: When they came back from Alta Loma, they lived at another place, and I don't know the address.

R: Mm-hm, that's fine.

D: And I don't even know if a house is still there. I don't pay any attention to it. But then they bought a house at 802 4th Ave. N., which is still there. And it's pretty run down, right now. If you took a picture of that, you would say, "Well, how would he live there? (Laughs.) You know, it was that type of thing. It was built in 1950—well, it was in a picture in 1950.

R: Because he worked for one of the oil companies—

D: Republic Oil Company.

R: —it wasn't a company's house though.

D: No.

R: No. He bought it?

D: My mother and him bought that house.

R: They bought it.

D: He was kind of an entrepreneur. He bought property and sold it and built houses and sold them, even while he was working for Republic. He was a pretty busy guy.

R: Good for him. So you remember growing up in that house?

D: Yes.

R: Until you went—and then what did you do for high school? Did you go to high school or did you—?

D: I went to high school, they called it Central High School at that time. It was out on 6th Street, between 4th Street and 6th Street, between 3rd and 4th Avenue.

R: Right.

D: All the buildings that involved high school were there. Gymnasium and home economics, woodworking, and stuff like that, whatever they call it.

R: Yes, shop. Well, we called it shop.

D: Yes, shops.

R: Yes, "industrial arts."

D: The old building was there for a long time. After they tore down some of the front ones, they still had the old building, which they used for a little bit.

[7:00]

And Danforth Elementary was back down behind it.

R: Yes, I never even saw Danforth and now it's gone.

D: Well, I was one of the first that moved in there.

R: Now it's gone.

D: They jumped us a grade. You know, you went from 11th to 12th grades?

R: Yes.

D: When we signed up, we was only going to go eleven years. While I'm in school, and just before seventh grade, they turned it into twelve years. So when I moved from Wolvin to Danforth school to seventh grade, I jumped a grade. It was just because they raised another year, not because I made big grades or anything like that.

R: (Laughs.) Uh-huh. So you were in high school when the war started?

D: Yes. The war started in '41—

R: Tell me what you remember about the war starting.

D: What do I remember about it? What happened when it happened? (Laughs)

R: Yes, like how much were you following it, or your parents following it? Like before Pearl Harbor, even, maybe?

D: Well, my dad still had Republic. He was a supervisor. Things like, they furnished him gasoline when they started rationing it.

R: Oh, they did?

D: And they gave you bulk stamps to buy your food, and all that.

R: So you got more gas rationing than other people?

D: You had A, B and C. If I remember right, C was the most gasoline you could get.

R: Okay.

D: In other words, you'd go and fill up, you'd have to have a C stamp to be able to get this much gasoline. And he had a C. Now if it's the other way around, I'm wrong. But I believe it was C. And he put the gas in his car and it was his after that. But as far as his job, he had to have transportation. So they gave him a C rationing.

R: That makes sense. So, do you remember when the war started, do you remember Pearl Harbor?

[9:08]

D: Yes.

R: Like where you were?

D: Well, it was on a Sunday morning. I'm trying to remember what I was actually doing on Sunday morning, besides sleeping.

R: Did you all listen to the radio? Did it come on the radio?

D: Yes.

R: Would you listen to the radio during the day, would it be on?

D: At that point, during the day, I'm not sure. But I think we all did. Radio was all you had.

R: Once you heard that something had happened, yes.

D: So then you started trying to find out what really took place, here.

R: Right, right. So, do you have siblings? Brothers and sisters?

D: No, I had a sister that was born three years after I was born. But she didn't live but three or four days.

R: Oh, I'm so sorry.

D: That's the only sister or brother I had, personally.

R: So your mom, she was a housewife?

D: Correct. Well, during her lifetime, she worked at Chambers clothing store, down there. She worked at that a little bit. She worked at another place but housework is what she generally—you know, she raised me, which was a big job. (Laughs.)

R: Right. I'm trying to think of your birth date. So, in '41—you were—

D: I'd be fifteen in '41.

R: Fifteen. So you were really still in high school. You were not getting out.

D: I just went into high school.

R: You just went in?

D: '41, '42, '43 and '44. If I had started on the regular rate, I would have graduated in '43.

R: Got you.

D: But I was half a year late, so I didn't really get enough to graduate until '43 and a half. But I finished in '44, so I stayed with the group.

R: Right.

D: I only had to take two things to graduate, to finish the school.

R: Oh, just two more classes. Huh.

D: And I worked at Beal's Tire Supply, when I wasn't going to school.

[11:28]

R: Yes, so when did you start working? Or did you do a lot of odd jobs as you grew up?

D: When I was real young, I was riding a bicycle and I was working for the *Texas City Sun*. It only had a paper which was once a week, for a while, then it was twice the week.

R: I saw that, yes.

D: And I worked as a paperboy for that. I can remember throwing the paper, I can remember going around knocking on doors, and trying to collect and all that. That was my first job. And as we went down through, I had a really good friend. He was the closest thing I ever had to a brother. He was killed on our senior picnic, when we were graduating. He was killed in an auto wreck. But he was the closest thing I had to a brother. But anyway, he was working down at Cameron's five-and-ten-cent store, which later became Rock's. I don't know whether you know Rock's.

R: No, but that's okay; I'm sure I can look it up.

D: None of it's there now. Anyway, he got me on down there. I worked with him. We did clean up jobs, straightened up the counters, and all that kind of stuff.

R: And how old were you when you were doing that? Or, what grade were you in, do you remember?

D: I have to kind of think that it would be—

R: What school were you going to? Were you still at Central?

D: I was working at Beal's Tire Supply in '44 and '43 and '42. So I think it would be '41.

R: So when you were in high school?

D: Yes, I was still in high school.

R: What kind of supply store?

D: It was an automobile supply store, that during the war, they sold everything in the world. They sold shoes and clothes and automobile stuff and camping stuff—just a general store.

[13:20]

R: Like a department store.

D: Yes. But he was really a good guy. He tried to get ahold of everything, if he could find something to get a good price on, he bought it and brought it in there.

R: Do you think, actually—he was just, [he] happened to be selling during the war, but you're saying that the war made him branch out?

D: Yes. He couldn't get certain things.

R: That's what we heard. What kind of things was there trouble getting?

D: Oh, offhand—little camping supplies and automobile parts. You generally could get them, but you didn't need them. Right next to him was Ford company, so people who had Fords went there, they didn't come to him. But he tried to sell everything he could in there. Boxes of matches, and—he'd have sold peaches if he could get them. That's the type of thing it was.

R: They talked about in the wartime about housewives and kids having to line up to get goods. Do you think that happened here in Texas City?

D: I don't know, my mother died. She would know all of that stuff. Here I'm in high school, running around—

R: Of course, you're not going to notice a lot.

D: —and having a good time and my mother's out there trying to get groceries and everything else.

R: But did you have like facilities at your house, like did you have any animals? No?

D: We never did go for dogs and cats—

R: Chickens?

D: I had a duck. I had two ducks.

R: But not for eating.

D: No, they were my pets. One of them got run over by a car and the other one died from heart. You know, he lost his mate, and—best we could figure, he died from losing her because she was run over.

R: Oh.

D: Now, we had chickens. Because I can remember my mother—we were over there to the homestead I was telling you about before. Out in the back—we didn't even have indoor restrooms.

R: Right. All the latrines were outside—or, outhouse.

D: Yes. And then, behind us was nobody so we had chickens and stuff like that. We didn't have any cows. Not there. We had some out in Alta Loma, when we lived out there, for about a year.

R: Do you remember like not being able to have sugar in your—well, you weren't drinking coffee in high school. Or, any other shortages, like meat quality going down?

D: Well, like I said, they issued different kind of stamps for different foods it was hard to get. Just like gasoline.

R: Like butter.

D: Now, I myself, I never went to the store during those years, so I don't know what's (unintelligible) problem—

R: You weren't grocery shopping.

[16:15]

But when you were eating, you didn't feel like you were getting less.

D: Oh, we grew up good. The only problem I had when I was growing up was I had to mow the lawn with a hand lawnmower, didn't have any power mower. Our grass would get this big.

R: We had one of those.

D: I can remember that kind of stuff, but as far as going to the store and buying—like now, I go to the store all the time. But back then I didn't—

R: Right. Then, you weren't doing the shopping.

D: I wouldn't even know where the store was at.

R: But they said for some things, like even the parts, like if the lawnmower wasn't working, well, you'd just sharpen it, or whatever.

D: I had to do the parts for brakes on my bicycle. And there was a bicycle man down there. He was also a lawnmower man. Now, they didn't have power mowers. At least we didn't. But anyway, you would do as much as you can to repair the thing, go out and

buy a part if you could find it, but some time it would have to be used. If you couldn't fix it, then you'd go to that guy, who was a kind of roundabout mechanic.

I, for instance, tore down my new departure brakes. And new departure brakes have got, I don't know, a hundred or so discs in there. And I had them in a bucket. I couldn't get it back together. I'm what, thirteen, fourteen years old. So I went down to him, walked in with the bucket and he started laughing. (Laughs.) He put it right together, oiled it up like it's supposed to be, put it together, and I'm gone. I don't even remember what it cost, now.

R: So you don't remember like the gasoline rationing was cutting down on you guys being able to go anywhere. Would you go to Houston or Galveston in the car?

D: I know as a kid I didn't get to use the car as much as I would like to have. But my dad was the one that was possible for the gasoline in his job. And I didn't get any gasoline. But, I didn't start driving until I was fourteen.

[18:19]

I learned when I was thirteen. And right here, in this area, there was nothing but prairie. This is where I learned to drive. I'd leave the house, and come out in the prairie, and learn with a '36 Buick, driving all over the place, learning how to shift gears, and all that. In '39, he got a new Chevrolet. In '41, he got a new Ford. And I learned on that.

R: When were you able to drive? When were you able to start driving?

D: When I was fourteen, I got my license. Almost fifteen.

R: How did you get a license in that time?

D: If your mother or dad signed an indication that you needed to drive, and you could prove you drive, they would issue a license. I got mine over in Galveston. They didn't have anything here.

We went over to Galveston County offices and the patrolman gave us our test, "us" being everybody that came in there to take the test. "Us" didn't mean me and somebody I knew, it's just me, I'm going in there to get my license. After, you got your write-up, just like you do nowadays, but the difference was he sent you out to drive the

car, show that you could drive it. You didn't make any parking, you just drove around and came back up and got your license. That was it.

R: Not so complicated then.

D: But like I say, there wasn't any gasoline there for me. So whatever gasoline—every mile I drove was off my Dad's car.

R: He made you aware of that. You couldn't go out, take a girl out, in the car—

D: Oh, I took the girl, in fact, I'm married to one right now that I went with all the time that I was in high school.

R: You did.

D: She came here in '43, which is two years before we graduated. We've been married sixty-five, sixty-six years this year.

R: That's wonderful.

[20:25]

So, World War II. So how did you feel, do you remember how you were feeling, were you like anxious to go? Or were you glad that you were younger? Or did you know older guys who went on?

D: As soon as I graduated from high school, I went in the Navy.

R: You volunteered.

D: My parents had to sign the paper. I was seventeen and I didn't actually go in until I was eighteen, September 16. But I joined when I got out of school. They signed you up, and when you became eighteen you went on in. But I was seventeen.

R: Someone told me that they might have gone in when they were seventeen, if the parents signed permission.

D: I'm trying to put a date on it—I think—

R: You don't have to say the date.

D: Well, I know, see, I became eighteen on September 16. But I went in, I'm trying to think I went in in August. Which still would be seventeen. But by the time I got to boot camp, and all that, I was eighteen years old.

R: Did you have any trouble getting your parents to sign?

D: No. No, (laughs) the thing that comes to mind there, whenever I left to go—I'd already gone to boot camp, we came back and they sent us off somewhere else to train. And I had my uniform and everything, I got pictures of where we lived.

[22:01]

And that's the first time I'd ever seen my dad cry. When I left. And I couldn't figure, "What's he—why is he crying?" And then when my sons went off to the Army and the Marines, I did the same thing. (Laughs.)

R: Yeah. And you were the only son, too. The only child. So, when you signed up, where did you go sign up? Was it in Texas City?

D: Dallas.

R: You had to go to Dallas?

D: We went up there and they gave us our physicals, and had about a day or two of testing to see all your medical and was you smart enough to be in the Navy—

R: You had to do some testing or write some things?

D: —and then when you left there you were being— I was trying to think that you actually raised your right hand to join right there, the next day.

R: That's what I've heard. You do join right then.

D: And then when I came back I got the notice later, when to report.

R: Right. But how did you get to Dallas?

D: Drove up there.

R: Who drove?

D: Well, I didn't drive but, no, I must've rode the bus. Because my dad didn't go up there with me.

R: Why couldn't it be in Houston? Something like that, closer?

D: Well, I think New Orleans was the eighth Naval District and Dallas was part of it. I think you had to either go there or there at that time.

R: Was it because you definitely wanted to join the Navy?

D: I went into the Naval Air Corps.

R: The Naval Air Corps.

D: Yes.

R: You knew you wanted to do that.

D: Yes. I wanted to be a radioman. I wanted to join the Naval Air Corps and be a radioman. And that's under the V-6 program, they called it. The V-12 program was pilots, and I didn't care about being a pilot, particularly. But anyway, when I joined, my idea was, I was going to become a radioman.

R: Where did you get that idea?

D: Advertisement. "Hey, join the Navy and become a radioman," and all this kind of stuff.

R: So there was like—what was the paper you guys—were you guys reading the paper then? Was the *Sun* coming to your house regularly? Were you getting it? Like, how did you get the news?

D: Well, the *Texas City Sun* you got, maybe by that time, a couple times a week, I don't know. But *Galveston News* was available and I can't remember if my parents took it then or not. I don't remember that.

[24:44]

R: Do you remember what you were reading about? Were you reading like, the magazines?

D: Well, you'd go to picture show, the big thing on the screen.

R: Ah.

D: That kind of stuff. We went to see cowboy shows, you know, Westerns, in those days.

R: And then they'd have the newsreels.

D: Then would come a newsreel, they would show what's going on over there. By that time the war was fully going on. People were being in the Army and the Navy and the Marines. Here I'm sixteen, seventeen years old, and "Hey, I want to be in that place."

R: You weren't scared?

D: No, it never did bother me. We went in to training, and they was teaching you how to be in your outfit. I told you about the Corpus Christi training, the two planes landing together.

R: Yes. So where did you go for the first boot camp?

D: Florida. Jacksonville, Florida.

R: Whoo. And then you came back—did you do any flying then?

D: No.

R: Just the regular—

D: All you did was march in the sand down in Florida. (Laughs.)

R: What did you think of Florida?

D: I thought it was hot. We had people from all over the states down there. Like, one guy, I met a guy and he became a friend in the Navy. He was from Colorado. He was fair-skinned and the sun was eating him up and we'd get out and make the five-mile run and it just wore him out.

If somebody fell down, they wouldn't let you stop and help him. You had to keep running, or marching, whatever you were doing at the time. We had a—I can't remember his rank, but his name was Mosely. He was the head of our outfit down there in Florida, at boot camp. And he was proposed to be a Texas football star and all this kind of stuff.

He put us through everything in the world. People fell in ditches—and everything you did was pretty tough. Which I understand now they've even got some more that's maybe tougher, I don't know. But in those days we thought that was pretty rough on us. And the enlisted man was a petty officer, first class. He was our outfit, underneath the other officers.

[27:22]

R: Enlisted man—was that the rank that you guys were? Not yet, because you were still—

D: Well, when I was down there, you went in as a seaman first class.

R: Seaman first class.

D: Well, you went in as a seaman second class, but by the time you got a couple of weeks in boot camp, you became a seaman first class. You stayed at that rank until you got to be a petty officer third class, in whatever rating, whatever rank, whatever thing you were working on.

R: Right.

D: And I could have got to be a seaman third class but changing my rating when the war ended, we were still in class. And a friend of mine in Oklahoma, he did, he changed out and he became a third-class petty officer. Well, I mustered out; I'm still a seaman first class, but I'm still in training of the things that I was doing and that type thing.

The same way that they do nowadays on your ratings, you have to earn it. You have to pass a test, and all that. But I never fooled with it. I just went ahead and stayed a seaman first class until I got out. The war had ended, and they put us down in New Orleans, to sit there and wait to get out.

R: So you went to Jacksonville and about how long was that? A few months?

D: Eight weeks.

R: Eight weeks. So, a full two months.

D: By the time you'd get out of there, it would be nine weeks. But the training was eight weeks. And they sent us to Norman, Oklahoma, which now is a college. (Laughs.) At that time it was a Naval base.

R: How did you get up there, did you all go—was it always train?

D: Train.

R: Trains? Right out of this Texas City depot?

D: No. We left out of Florida, on a train the government was moving you in.

R: But you didn't come home first?

D: Not after—

R: Not after boot camp?

D: Not after boot camp. We went straight up to Norman, Oklahoma, and went into whatever program. They made you a radioman, a gunman, a machinist—(laughs) and I wound up—

[29:43]

R: And you couldn't say, "I want to be a radioman?"

D: I tried. I signed up that I wanted to be a radioman. But they—"You're a radioman, you're a gunner, you're a machinist, you're a tinsmith," right down the line. And I wound up being a gunner. It's all right. Got the same pay. (Laughs.)

R: Right. But then, you had to actually—well a radioman would be in the plane too?

D: Everybody except like a tinsmith, or a machinist. They didn't fly. They were just on the base.

R: So how long did you have your training up in Oklahoma? That was what you were still doing when the war ended?

D: No. No, we got through with the training there, they sent us to Purcell, Oklahoma for gunnery school. Machine guns and pistols and rifles.

R: Did you get to go home first?

D: Yes. You got leave. The only problem was, sometimes you couldn't get but an overnight leave, I mean, pass. You can't make it to Texas City and back, overnight. But if you got one for three days, you could make it down there and back. Every time I got a three-day pass, I came to Texas City.

R: How would you come back?

D: Hitchhike.

R: Hitchhike.

D: I did a lot of hitchhiking when I was in the Navy.

R: That's a good amount of time. How long did it take you? Eight hours?

D: Well, if it was a holiday, and everybody was out on the highway, you might never ever get there. One Christmas—

R: Wait, I thought, if there's a lot of people on the highway, more chance to get picked up.

D: No, I'm talking about soldiers and sailors.

R: Oh.

D: Everybody got out there with their thumb.

R: Huh.

D: This one Christmas, I was trying to get home for Christmas, and the south side of Dallas, got stuck. Couldn't find another ride. So, a car pulled up beside me. Said, "Where you headed?" And I said, "I'm trying to get to Houston." That's easier than saying Texas City.

R: Right.

D: It was full of younger people. I think they'd been drinking, the way they were talking. And I passed it up. I didn't want to get in that car. Even though it might have got me further down the road, I wouldn't get in that car. And I'm glad I didn't. I think there was four or five of them in there, and they all were drinking and having a big time. I passed that one up.

[32:12]

But any other car stopped, you looked at them, they looked halfway okay, you got in the car and took off. And that's the way you—I never, well, when I was stationed in Corpus Christi, I borrowed my dad's car sometime to get down there and back. My friend had a motorcycle. The one that was out of Oklahoma. And we did a lot of riding on it, back and forth. He was too far away, so he always came home with me.

R: You would take the motorcycle together from Norman down to here?

D: No. When I moved to flight school in Corpus Christi.

R: Okay. So you met him in Oklahoma—

D: He bought a motorcycle, and I would ride with him. And he'd let me drive it sometime. But that's the way we got back and forth, and we came home quite a bit that way. You could get home in a few hours.

R: And did people—when you were hitchhiking, did people pick you up more quickly because you had a uniform on?

D: Yes.

R: And would they ask you how everything was going?

D: They would question you, but nothing serious. Just how're you doing, or what's going on. I caught a ride with two guys in a Buick. I was stationed in Corpus Christi, and I got my mother to take me out to Missouri City. She dropped me off there on the Highway 9, at the time it was the biggest highway.

I stepped out of her car, and she came on back home, and I walked out on the highway and stuck my thumb up, and this Buick—I mean, I don't know how fast she was running at that time, but it stopped, and it took him about 200 feet to stop, and he backed up. And he said, "Where you headed?" I said, "Corpus Christi." He said, "Hop in, that's right where we're going." These two guys. And they were in the front seat, and I'm in the back seat.

I said to myself, "We're going pretty fast." I looked over and it's going over ninety miles an hour down Highway 9 in that Buick. And they were talking, carrying on—they were cattlemen. They claimed one guy owned an oilfield so they had a lot of money, I

suppose. They had a big Buick. I got to Corpus Christi in no time at all, like three hours. It generally took four or five hours to get to Corpus Christi (laughs). We got there in three hours.

[34:49]

I walked up to the base at night and everybody had already turned in. I went on in and went to bed.

R: So you were how long in Oklahoma, about?

D: I'm trying to think what it'd be.

R: That was the basic training? You did your basic, boot camp?

D: The boot camp is basic—

R: That's the basic.

D: To get you how to operate as a sailor, you know.

R: Yes.

D: Under the auspices of reporting to which are supposed to be doing. Then they moved us to ordinance school, radio school, all that was up in Oklahoma. Norman, Oklahoma, which is now where Oklahoma University is. And I don't think there's any buildings still there that belong to the Navy. But they took everything over when the war ended. They busted that thing down.

R: So you were in like some kind of training there, and then you went into gunnery.

D: They had an airfield there. I remember sitting there or standing there doing guard duty. Oklahoma gets pretty cold sometimes.

R: I bet.

D: We'd freeze out there, (laughs) guard duty.

R: What about the uniform? They didn't give you a warm uniform?

D: Do you know what a pea coat is?

R: Pea coat?

D: That's about all you had. You'd have a slicker, but out there in the snow, that's pretty cold.

R: And what did you think about the flying? Being in the plane? Did you just get in the plane for the first time in Oklahoma?

D: No, we flew in Corpus Christi. The only thing I did—

R: You didn't fly until you got down to Corpus Christi.

D: They had the planes up there, and we got in them, but we never did fly. We were there basically to take the program for whatever you would like — I was going to be an ordinance man, which is a gunner. You're there to study that, you're not there to be in a—you didn't get any flight pay.

R: I got you. You have got to learn how to do it first. How to operate the gun?

[37:00]

D: After you left that, they sent you down to Purcell, which was about fifteen or twenty miles south of Norman, Oklahoma, where we was before. And you went through gunnery school, which is all kind of guns, machine guns.

R: How long was that—a couple of months?

D: It was about two months on the gunnery school. The one I'm trying to think, what it was on the ordinance school. Eighteen weeks comes to mind, but I don't know. I was trying to think—

R: What was the total amount of time you were in?

D: Twenty-two months. It wasn't quite twenty-four months. I went in of August of '44. I came out, I mustered out in September of '46. That's two years, minus one month and whatever days.

R: Right. So you were down in Corpus.

D: Corpus was when the war ended. We were still in flight school then, when the war ended.

R: How long were you in Corpus, a year? Or eight months? A few months?

D: Let's see. We got married in Texas City, took my wife back down there with me.

R: You did?

D: Yes.

R: After you had been stationed in Corpus.

D: I came home quite a bit.

R: Yes, you sound like—

D: My mother got sick, had to go to the hospital for some problem on her back. So I got, the Red Cross got me loose from down there to come home to see my mother.

R: Good.

D: I asked my wife to marry me while I'm here, and we got married. (Laughs.) So I have to say, it was during the time she was on sick leave type thing, that we got married.

R: But she got better.

D: Oh yes, it wasn't nothing real bad.

R: Was she at the wedding?

D: Yes. Yes. It was at my wife's home, my father-in-law and mother-in-law's house. Brother Hood, here in Texas City, with the Baptist church, been here for years—he did everything for me. Baptized me, performed the marriage ceremony. I grew up in the First Baptist church. Anyway, it happened over there in there. Then we went to Galveston—you know, we went to Galveston for our honeymoon? (Laughs.)

R: Really?

D: People go now down to South America and everywhere else.

[39:45]

R: But you went to Galveston.

D: We went to Galveston. Jean Lafitte Hotel.

R: And this was the last years of World War II, 1943?

D: No, we married in '45.

R: Oh yes, I'm really getting off here, yes.

D: (Sound of shuffling papers, knock against microphone.) We stayed over there at Corpus Christi for about a year, in round figures. With the wife and I, we rented an apartment. On the Naval base, if you was lucky enough, you could get a job on the base and get fifty cents an hour.

R: For your wife.

D: For me. On top of what I was doing. In other words—my wife, we rented a house, or an apartment. But I came home at night, and went back to work in the daytime. Just like everybody else.

R: You didn't have any trouble getting housing, finding a place to rent? Some places I know they did. With the wives coming and—

D: Well, they created places in Corpus Christi you wouldn't believe. The first place we had was an old porch that had been closed in. And you know how they built porches? If you laid something on the shelf, it would run off. And it was one room, big thing across the whole house, and you went inside to use their restrooms.

And then we were on the list for another place over there that had three—they had built a small efficiency building, that had three apartments in it, they called it. And two of them were larger rooms than the middle one, and it had one restroom in it. So here's a couple living here and a couple living here and a couple living here, and out in the hall, across the hall, there's a restroom. And that's—

R: And no indoor—I mean was there like any shower?

D: Yes.

R: There was a shower.

D: There was a shower in. Now—

R: But what about that porch thing? Was that just somebody who owned the house and trying to make a buck, or were they telling him—?

D: You're living in somebody's house, on their back porch. But it's closed in.

[42:03]

R: But do you think the Air Force was trying, I mean the Navy was trying to get people to help out with the housing? Or were people just trying to—

D: Well, during the war, I imagine a lot of people were trying to make money, to make a living. And over here in Texas City, my dad had, like I told you, he built a lot of things.

R: Yes.

D: He had the old homestead and he had a little efficiency apartment and he had a three-room house. And all that was built just to rent to people (unintelligible). In fact we were—

R: Was that during the war years?

D: Yes. (Coughs.) Pardon. I was still in high school when I remember there was this base here that the Army had out here at Kohfeldt.

R: Hitchcock? No.

D: Well, there was one right outside of here, west Texas City, Kohfeldt School. Outside of that, where they've got a lot of field out there now.

R: Yes.

D: In fact, there's some buildings, units out there.

R: They said there was a small army detachment here. For a little bit. Is that what you are talking about? The 135<sup>th</sup> Infantry?

D: Yes. Well they became, you know, those soldiers, they became friends with everybody. And they knew my dad and they got to come and seeing him and everything.

R: How did they know your dad?

D: He worked at Republic.

R: Yes. How did the soldiers get to know him just because he worked at Republic?

D: Well, everything you did—Texas City wasn't this big.

R: He was to do still with the distribution? Of the oil, of the movement?

D: That was inside the refinery. It didn't have anything to do with—

R: Outside contacts, or anything. Uh-huh.

D: The only outside contacts he had was if like a pipeline was coming in or going out.

R: Okay, so it wasn't through this work.

D: His business was right there. Like I had an uncle, and he was in a unit. That was his job.

[44:10]

And he had what—six or seven units, but the—my dad's job was to help furnish all the units, with getting oil in and getting oil out. Just like I did at Pan Am and Amoco.

R: Okay.

D: Anyway, what I was going to tell you about, the soldier?

R: Yes.

D: I woke up one morning, and somebody was in bed with me. (Both laugh.) I looked over and I got up and went in there, and my mother and dad had the front bedroom. I went in there and I asked my mother, I said, "There's somebody in my bed." She says, "Oh?" So she gets up and came and looked in and said, "Oh, that's so-and so. He got in too late to get to the Army base, so he came and slept in our—." (Laughs.) He came crawling in bed with me, I didn't even know anything about it. Kind of a surprise to wake up—now, I didn't—see, you didn't lock your doors. Your screen door, you didn't even have a hook on it.

R: Right. Do you remember any like—so when you came home, was there any like rallies or anything? Do you remember like people dying? Was there anyone in your unit who went overseas and got killed?

[45:23]

D: Well, I knew some, of course, but they were older than me. Before I got out of high school had one very popular man that got, he got killed. He had married before he had

went over. You knew all of that, but he wasn't a friend of mine. I just knew him from school.

R: Mm-hm.

D: I can't say that we had any big rallies like they do nowadays. You had USO.

R: They had something like in Galveston; they had put up an effigy of Hitler. You don't think they did that in Texas City?

D: I don't remember it.

R: Or do you remember any kind of, German families? Was there any kind of like talk, or saying things to them?

D: When I was stationed in Corpus Christi—

R: Or Italians? Yes. Oh, uh-huh?

D: —we had a German prison camp type thing.

R: Okay.

D: Off with the camp, you know, here we are and here they are. And they used the German prisoners to keep the yards, clean the buildings, and all that kind of thing.

So while we were in our room, one night, one day, I looked up and there was some people working outside the window. I went and raised the window, and it was Germans. And I was talking to them. They could speak English, I mean, they understood what you said. And he wanted to know if I had a cigarette. At that point I did smoke. During that point when I was in Corpus Christi in the Navy. And I gave him a cigarette, in fact, I gave him two or three of them. That kind of stuff—they had a guard standing out there in the distance, but they didn't make you not talk to them or anything.

R: Right. And I think there were some in Hitchcock too, at Camp Wallace for a little bit. They had some then.

D: Yes, that's where I wanted to go, to wait to get out of the Navy, that's where I wanted to go. And they had the same kind of unit below New Orleans—Houma, Louisiana. And it was a blimp base, just like Hitchcock. And when you asked where to go to wait for your discharge, I asked for Hitchcock.

R: When the war ended, was there any celebration for like D-Day, I mean V-E Day, for victory in Europe? Or was it just waited until the Japanese victory?

[47:55]

D: Well of course—

R: You were in the service.

D: We didn't move over here until the Japanese, until the bomb went off, the Japanese give up. We didn't move anywhere, we were still in school. They moved me to New Orleans, which is four hundred miles from Texas City. (Laughs.) I could've been, what, ten miles from Hitchcock. They moved my buddy, who lived in Oklahoma, to Hitchcock. (Laughs.)

R: So when the war ended, they had to deploy you but they didn't just let you go home.

D: No. You had to wait. I waited six months.

R: I saw some things, where the guys were like overseas, in the Philippines, and they're like putting up signs [like] "We want to go home," because they were sick of it.

D: Of course I wasn't overseas. We were comfortable in our barracks and stuff. I don't remember any big deal.

R: No protesting.

D: I don't remember anything about that.

R: Or did you complain? You said you really wanted to get out.

D: No—

R: Or you wanted—

D: I wanted to get home with my wife. But I don't remember being obnoxious about it at all. We didn't make any statements, we didn't send any papers out, we didn't make any signs, we just waited until time to get out. It was just part of the world, as far as I was concerned.

R: Right.

[49:22]

And so your wife was with you right up until when you had to go to Louisiana?

D: When they sent me to Louisiana, my wife, we packed her up and took her to Texas City.

R: So then you guys were apart, for the first time.

D: Well, I came home quite a bit. You could get leave down there really easy. I was on the Naval base, okay? Then, as long as I was there, we weren't doing anything to amount to anything, except eating and playing.

R: You weren't flying?

D: Nope. Nothing was going on. You weren't being trained, or anything. You were sitting there—they had to reactivate the base to put food back in there. I remember climbing the water towers, taking pictures, and playing ball—they had a bowling alley. And we did a lot of bowling. I created a better bowling alley score just from being there, because you bowled a lot.

R: Uh-huh.

D: But anyway, I came home quite a bit, because—and I did a lot of hitchhiking there to get home, because I still didn't have a car. Come down from New Orleans to the Houston area.

R: Right. Were you sorry that you couldn't get to go? Were you sorry that the war was over?

D: I don't remember that.

R: Do you remember being happy that the war was over?

[51:02]

D: Oh, yes.

R: You were.

D: If we had failed in our program, we'd have gone right out to the Pacific Ocean. (Laughs.) You'd become a C, at the time they didn't have C—what do you call it, but you

would automatically be in the war. If you failed your program, you're gone. In other words, within a week you're out on the islands somewhere.

R: You mean, all the time you were in that ordinance training, or the—

D: But ordinance training, you pretty well passed it pretty good. And gunnery training—

R: More especially the gunnery training, and then down in Corpus?

D: In Corpus, in flight school, you did a lot of things that you didn't do up there, of course, involving airplanes. If you didn't pass the test that they gave you, you were gone within a week.

R: And then what did they do with you out there? If you couldn't—

D: You're part of the Navy. (Laughs.)

R: You were just like on a ship.

D: You're battling then.

R: You were on a ship. They weren't going to put you on a plane.

D: No.

R: Because you had failed.

D: You wouldn't be in a plane.

R: Did some of the guys you knew, that happened to?

D: Only one man I ever knew that didn't pass, he was gone within a week. I don't even know what happened to him, didn't hear (unintelligible).

R: Wow. And did you write letters to your family, to your mom and dad, when you were in—?

D: Not as many as I think they wanted. But I wrote letters to them and they wrote letters to me. And for a while, I had some of mine, but I don't know where it is.

R: Were they censored?

D: I don't know. I don't remember anything being marked out of it, that type of thing.

R: And so I want to ask you about your parents a little bit. Like your dad, there was no question of him going to the war?

D: When I joined up, he immediately ran down there and wanted to join.

R: Ran down where?

D: To the Naval office.

R: Wait, you said the Naval office, you had to go all the way to Dallas. Somewhere in Houston or Galveston?

D: I don't know where he was. All they told me was that he wanted to go join the Navy because I joined.

R: Yes.

D: And they offered him a lieutenant commander's job, in the oil fields. You know, taking care of the Navy's oil, gasoline and all that.

R: Here, in this country.

D: Yes. But, he didn't pass the heart test. He had a bad heart. So they didn't take him. And that's unusual. You go in the Navy, become a lieutenant commander, that doesn't happen.

R: So he would've taken it even if he was still staying here?

D: Apparently, he was wanting to go because I went in. That's the only thing I could figure out.

R: You never asked him, "Why'd you do it?"

D: Well, he got killed in '47.

R: Oh, that's right. I'm so sorry. Yes.

D: He was forty-two years old when the ship blew up.

[54:23]

R: When you came home, all those times you were hitching back during the war, did he talk about increased production, or was the war like—they took over some of the—any problems with the trains?

D: No.

R: Extra hands?

D: Before I went in the Navy, I knew a lot about—I had even gone down to where he worked barefooted. Those days, they didn't have rules, like they got now. But he'd have to go down to do something, and so I would jump in the car and go with him.

And one time they had a hundred-octane transport truck get hit by a train out here in La Marque. You know where the tin smelter used to be?

R: Roughly, yes.

D: The railway goes through there?

R: Yes.

D: There was two railroads there. This guy's driving a hundred-octane tanker truck, and he heard the whistle, but he crossed one of the railroads. And he thought that's what (unintelligible). He came up to the other one, and he clipped between the tank and the cab.

And I went out to it—like running to see a fire, I guess. You're not supposed to, but my dad had to go because it was a tanker that came out of Republic.

R: Were you in high school still, or was that when you—

D: Yes, I was still in high school at that time.

R: So you were able to go in. How about the security? Because there was defense plants? The Army, I mean the government, took over some of that.

D: Well, they had guards, but they weren't like they are nowadays. Down at the docks—I went down to the docks quite a bit, of course everybody knew my dad. The dock runs—now, it has the levee and everything, with the road that goes by the old docks there on the canal, all the way down to the big docks. You didn't see anybody. You might pass

somebody that was a patrolman, but they didn't have gates or anything else like that. You didn't have to have permission to go down there.

R: Right. Do you think more people got work at that time, during the war years? We don't know? We're not sure?

D: Well, people had to go to the Army and Navy and stuff, somebody else comes in off a farm (laughs) and gets to go to work at the refinery. He makes a lot more money.

R: Yes, but I thought that most of the people that were working at a job, they didn't have to go. It wasn't so much so many people going from Texas City.

D: Well, sometimes it's not a case of you had to go, it's a case of wanting. There was a lot of patriotic stuff going on in those days. It's like me and some of my buddies, we were waiting to get out of high school to go in the Army and Navy. I mean that's just an attitude you had.

[57:37]

R: Of course. Did you feel like the Germans or the Japanese were the worst enemies? Did you have any feelings about that?

D: Well, I thought the Japanese was. Because I had gotten older, when the Germans first, after everything the English and everything, here I'm *this* size (chuckles), to the Japanese, I'm *this* size. And that's basically your—more opportune to say that the Japanese were worse than the Germans, because of us.

R: The culture was different, yes. More different from us. Not as much, maybe. Did your mom do any kind of volunteer, like you know, they had those kind of civil defense things where they would, calling people—

D: She was never into civil defense. I was in the civil defense when I was in school.

R: You were!

D: I still had my helmet and everything else for a while. But I think that's gone.

R: Tell me about that.

D: It may still be around. I never throw anything around. I think I planted a flower in it here, a few years back, and it rusted out. World war helmet. You know how they fixed them big, tall, with a little bitty rim around it.

R: Yes, yes, with the rim.

D: Nowadays you have the smaller one with the—you know, that kind of stuff. But I had it for years and years and years. Not too long ago—time escapes me, but ten years ago, I think I planted flowers in it, hung it up for (unintelligible) and it rusted out.

[59:21]

R: So what did they use high school boys for? I know they taught like first aid, and they had like blackouts, of course.

D: You went around and—

R: What did you do?

D: Went around to houses and knocked on doors, and asked them to do this or to do that, reminded them that they shouldn't be running their lights at night.

R: So you went around checking to see if there was light?

D: Yes. If they were near the coast, and their lights was on, well they didn't want that.

R: Right.

D: So that type of stuff. And then, not necessarily sitting in a place to watch for planes—

R: Coastal watchers?

D: Yes.

R: They had those, but we haven't been able to find anyone who did it.

D: Yes. I wasn't really sitting in a place to watch for planes, but we studied planes to see what kind of planes was coming over, what type.

R: Did they show you like pictures and everything? And who showed it to you, the mayor? Helen Moore? Mrs. Moore?

D: A lot of it in the Boy Scouts.

R: Boy Scouts.

D: I had some of that in the Boy Scouts. When I was in the Navy, we had to learn every kind of plane there ever was made. And you had to identify them quickly. But that was just because you was in the Navy and when you were going to shoot somebody down, they wanted you to shoot the right one.

R: Exactly. Right.

D: Things like that, back when I was in high school, I don't remember just exactly why I had a helmet. Anybody that volunteered to be doing something, they issued a helmet and an armband, and stuff like that.

[1:01:06]

R: We have some of those—I think we have an armband here someone gave us.

D: I don't think I've got anything like that. I've got some Scouts stuff, but I don't have—

R: And there was like air raids? Were there air raids? Do you remember that? An air raid siren going off and people having to go—

D: Well, they had tests—

R: Just tests, not a real raid.

D: —but I don't remember ever having anybody attack us.

R: Just a test, though.

D: Now they had submarines in the Gulf. And when I was stationed in Corpus Christi, that's one of the things on our training, that we were supposed to be looking for submarines.

We flew all over the Gulf, and out in the Atlantic for a little ways. We didn't go far out in the Atlantic. But off of Florida and out there. You was always looking. Because you could see a submarine in like the Gulf, you could see a submarine. Looks like a big fish down there, until you're up high.

R: Did you ever see one?

D: No.

R: No. They didn't see a lot. I think there were a few, that Melanie, I forget her name, she wrote —she's a woman up in Houston, she wrote a book about U-boat sightings in this area, mostly Galveston and everything. But there was U-boat activity, and it stopped some of the shipping, too, I think.

D: Well, they knew they were out there. And so when we were in our training, that's one of the things we were supposed to be watching out the side of that bubble window you saw. If you spotted something down there, then they flew around and come back to see what it was, and all that kind of stuff.

R: You didn't get airsick on the planes?

D: One time.

R: I heard, my dad was a pilot and I—there are these big swings you were supposed to go up in to get yourself acclimated.

D: One time. What they did in Corpus is they trained Army pilots in the PBY's and the PBM's, which the Army didn't have, but they sent Army pilots over there to train them.

Now we was in a PBM. Now, the PBM has got a great big wide body, small wings. If it lost its motor, it don't glide. The PBY, it was opposite, it would glide if it lost its motor. Anyway, I remember it being a PBM. And I went down to get my hours in for that month. You had to get so many hours, like four hours, you got extra pay. I went down there and signed up to go, and I didn't know who was doing what.

I got on the plane, it turned out to be an Army pilot that they was training. Down there, your seaplanes took off and landed inside of the barrier islands that are out there. You had these islands, and then over here you had your surf. Well they come in—the work was done here, not out here. He thought he was in a fighter plane. He took that old bird, we put up, it was about three or four of us in there: the pilot, the copilot and two of us in the back.

Now I was supposed to be working the east, I mean the west side, the right side of the plane, on the starboard. Whenever they call for something like a bucket, you throw the bucket out and it drags so he can make his turn quicker. Anyway, to make a long story short—

R: You mean there wasn't any window?

[1:04:47]

D: Yes, it's a bubble.

R: Hatch?

D: You saw the bubble there.

R: Okay. But how did you throw a bucket out?

D: You raise the bubble up.

R: Yes. Okay.

D: He's up here, and he starts doing figure eights. With this big old plane. After he did about seven figure eights, I started feeling hey, like I was on one of these planes, these things over here in Galveston. So I told the guy next to me, the guy that was on the other side, I said, "You know, I think I'm going to be sick." He said, "Well, I feel bad, but I don't think I'm going to get sick." And he did that several times.

Then he came in, and was going to practice landing. He came in, and he hit the water. (Hits the table with his hand with smacking sounds.) And I'm already upset, so when he's hitting the water, he doesn't come in smooth like the Navy pilot, because he didn't know about those planes. Anyway, he hit the water real bad. He took off, went up, came over and did it again. He did it three, four times, trying to smooth out his landing. I got sick.

R: Oh my gosh.

D: And so, I took the bucket that we used and I used the bucket, instead of throwing the bubble back. So the last time he landed, he called for starboard bucket. I said, "I don't know. I think I might have to use this bucket myself." And he got down, he had to have it turned by a certain time to get up into the shore. Well, he didn't make it, because I didn't give him the starboard bucket, to make the drag, you know.

R: For leverage, yes.

D: So he took off again, he flew around and said, "I want the starboard bucket this time, or somebody's going to be thrown out of the plane." So when he hit the water, I threw the bubble back and threw the bucket out. He landed, pulled up on the—they have

wheels to just drive them up the shoreline, the ramp. He landed, he got his bucket, made his turn, came up on—I didn't even wait for him. I bailed out with my—signed out, and went on in, embarrassed. I never did see that guy again. (Laughs.)

R: Wow. Well actually, I think I'm out of time because I have to go on the desk. That's a great story. Can you think of anything you think is important that we haven't talked about? Or you haven't asked, you haven't—

D: No, we've covered everything.

R: You have said like, you really did care about wanting to fight, and that was your goal, getting in the service. And so even all that time in the training, before the war was over, you still wanted to go there, or you were still ready to go.

D: Yes. Everybody I knew, really patriotic in those days. I don't know if it was because of the way the advertisements did or what, but every guy I ever knew, that was my age, they wanted to do this, they wanted to do that.

R: I think a lot of men and women, too, still, we've still got people in the service.

D: There's a lot of good people in the service. If they were in another job, they would be—

R: But you didn't want to continue in the service?

[1:08:15]

D: Of course, I didn't want to grow old in the service. (Chuckles.) I got out, I wanted to work for Pan-American refinery, is what I wanted to do. I had worked there for three months before I went in the Navy.

R: Yes.

D: Well, I need to tell you that.

R: But you had said that you had worked down there when your dad was did like with Knox?

D: No, he worked at Republic. No, this is Pan-American.

R: You were at Knox, before though. Weren't you?

D: No. Knox and Republic is my dad.

R: Okay. But I thought before the war, you also got some—okay, so it was Pan Am.

D: I just went down there with him. I was a kid.

R: Right. But I mean you did say that you actually also worked there.

D: I worked at Pan-American refinery.

R: Okay.

D: Three months before I went in the Navy. When I got right out of school, I went in there and stayed three months. It might not have been quite three months, almost three months. And then when I came back, I couldn't get on, because I had quit them. I didn't figure, "Hey, I'm seventeen years old. I ain't going to work for no refinery all my life." So I quit, instead of getting a Naval, getting a military leave.

R: Oh.

D: So when I came back, they didn't want to hire me, because I had quit them. So my dad, he called over there and (unintelligible) this and that, he's trying to operate with the other guy that's in the refinery that would be equal to him, and he's trying to get me on, and all that, but it didn't never work.

I went to work for Dow Chemical, down in Freeport. I worked there for about eight, nine months. And they laid off ten percent every year. I didn't figure that I was going to get laid off because I was like thirty percent in my department. And they were laying off ten percent. Well, they shut down two units, got rid of a whole lot of us. And I came back over here and walked in, Pan-American refinery, which was Amoco later and all that kind of stuff. Walked in, and went to work that day.

I think the Lord takes care of some people who can't take care of themselves, you know?

R: But they took you.

D: I walked in there, and me and another guy that I knew, we hired in that day. And I told the man, I said, "I have to go back to Dow and quit, resign, instead of just calling him on the phone, telling him, "I ain't coming to work." So I went back down there, and I didn't go to work until the next Monday, and that man went to work on Friday, so he

had three days' seniority on me. (Laughs.) Because he went ahead and went right in, but I didn't want to walk off and leave the guy—

R: That's good. But maybe there was a difference you were down already working at Dow Chemical, so they had a different look at you, maybe.

D: Well, they were needing to hire people.

R: And you were there.

D: I was there.

R: Thank you so much for your time. I'm sorry it's been so long.

D: Well, you've been interesting. I didn't know what you were going to want, out of me. Because I—

R: Well, it is still a work in progress. Okay? We're going to close this up now.

[1:11:28]