

Interview with
DICK DIXON

March 16, 2017

RANDALL J. BUNN
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

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DICK DIXON

Dick Dixon was interviewed by Randall J. Bunn on March 16, 2017 in St. George, Washington County, Utah. He related his experiences during World War II. Dr. Douglas Alder and Heber Jones also participated.

RB: Before we get started on [your war experiences], I wonder if you could just give a little bit of background about yourself? Where and when were you born?

DD: I was born in Menard, Idaho. You will not know where that is because it has blown away. [Laughter]

RB: Whereabouts?

DD: It is about five miles south and a little bit east of Fairfield, Idaho. Fairfield is on the road between Kerry and Arco and goes across the valley and comes out — it is the route to Boise when you go straight through from Idaho Falls.

RB: When were you born?

DD: [I was born] January 28, 1922.

RB: Do you have siblings?

DD: I am the ninth child of a family of ten.

RB: What were your parents' names?

DD: James and Sarah Elizabeth [Dixon]. They were married in 1906, I believe.

RB: Your full name is, what?

DD: Dick Dixon.

DA: It is not Richard?

DD: Not Richard, and I don't have a middle name.

RB: How do you spell your last name?

DD: D-I-X-O-N.

RB: [Tell] a little bit about growing up in Menard, Idaho?

DD: I went to an old school that was in Menard; but of course, it is torn down now. There was a big room for the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The little room was first grade, second grade, third grade and fourth. I received the kind of an education that you would normally get in a place like that. [Laughter]

RB: What was the highest grade that you attended in school?

DD: I moved from Menard to Gooding [Idaho] when I was in the twelfth grade. I finished high school there in 1940. I went from there to [college at] Idaho Southern Branch at Pocatello [Idaho] in 1940.

RB: What did your parents do for a living?

DD: They were farmers. My dad owned a herd of beautiful thoroughbred Holstein cows. We separated the milk. I turned the old handle on the separator for a long time as did all the rest of the family.

RB: Was he primarily a dairy farmer?

DD: That is most of what he did; but he raised hay and barley and [those] sort of [crops]. Alfalfa was the main crop. I helped in the field stacking hay and I tended the horses that were pulling the shocks of hay along with the stack. We made nice hay stacks all around. In the winter they were the food for the animals.

RB: You graduated [from] high school in 1940. What did you do after high school? You said you went to the —.

DD: I went to the University of Idaho Southern Branch at Pocatello where I enrolled as a freshman. I completed one year there. [I] did not have a lot of money, but it was cheap to go to school then. Tuition was not very much. I got along just fine by getting jobs. I had a job in the eatery. All the students from the campus ate there. I ran the china clipper. You might guess what the china clipper was. It was the dishwasher! [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: We had just finished the Sunday meal and the dishes were all put away and somebody came running in and said, "The Japs have just bombed Pearl Harbor!" I did not even know where Pearl Harbor [Hawaii] was. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: I soon found out. All the young men my age realized that it would not be very long until we were all going to be in somebody's uniform. But the training facilities right after the war started were all full and no one was being rushed into [military] service. Gradually, as they were built up, more and more people were

—. I [found] a summer job up in north Idaho at Lake Pend Oreille. [This was] where they were building the Farragut Naval Training Station to train Navy people. I spent the summer swinging an ax.

RB: Would that have been the summer before Pearl Harbor or afterwards?

DD: That was afterwards.

RB: You said you graduated high school in 1940 and started college in the fall of 1940?

DD: Yes.

RB: So you went through 1940 and spring of 1941?

DD: Yes.

RB: Then you went back to school in the fall of 1941?

DD: Yes, I did.

RB: So after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and after Christmas, did you go back to school?

DD: Yes, I did.

RB: So you completed two years?

DD: I finished the school year after Pearl Harbor. Then I [found] this job up in Northern Idaho.

RB: What was that job?

DD: Swinging an ax and cutting down trees. [Laughter]

RB: A timber man?

DD: Timber man. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: I eventually started getting letters from the draft board. I was to get ready. "You are going to be drafted." I did not want to be drafted into the [United States] Army. There was an [air maintenance and supply depot] over at Geiger Field in Spokane, Washington; which was not very far from where we were working. I went over and took the test for [an] aviation cadet and passed. [Laughter] The

doctor [who] examined me, I have still [what] he wrote on my paperwork: “A well-nourished Caucasian male well suited for pilot training.” [Laughter]

RB: That is quite a recommendation! [Laughter]

DD: So I was in. I was taken into, I think it was the Army Reserve at the time because all of the training facilities were —.

DA: How much did you weigh?

DD: I weighed 160 pounds.

RB: What time frame are we talking about? In the fall of 1942?

DD: Yes, the fall of 1942.

RB: When did you actually enter training?

DD: I forget what they called it, but it was the same [training] that all Army troops [have], you learn how to march and —.

RB: A basic training course?

DD: Yes, basic training. That is what it was; but there was one difference, I did not have to do KP [kitchen patrol]! [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DA: I did not either.

RB: Was [the unit] a part, at that point, of the Army Air Forces?

DD: Yes, it was.

RB: When did you report?

DD: I arrived there in, I believe, it was December 1942.

RB: Where?

DD: [In] Santa Ana, California. Then I went to Hemet, California where I entered primary flying school. I was there for three months. You may have seen an advertisement that [shows] two fellows riding along in an open airplane. I do not know what they are advertising; but that was the [type of] trainer [we used]. [Laughter]

RB: Was that the same Army Air Forces training aircraft?

DD: A B-22, I think. Then I went to the middle training and flew a BT-13. I did training in instrument flying. I [was] put in the back seat. He put the hood on me and the trainer was in the front seat.

RB: Was that also at Hemet?

DD: No, that was at Merced, California. I had three months of training there. Then I went to Douglas, Arizona and flew a twin-engine Cessna and continued the same kind of training. I did a lot of navigation work there and flew night missions. I flew my first night mission at Merced though. The instructor got into the front seat. He said, "Now we are going to teach you to fly at night." I had never flown at night before. He said, "I have to go to a party. So I will not spend too much time with you."

RB: [Laughter]

DD: We went around the pattern once, I think, and I shot one landing. Then he said, "I have to get out and go to the party." [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: I took off. It was a good experience for me flying at night. I could see the big highway that went through the San Joaquin Valley. Then I was on the radio. That was the first experience with a radio. They would call you in and assign you a quadrant. There were four quadrants so that we would not run into each other. I was assigned a quadrant for a while and then they called me in to make a landing. I went in and made a landing and everything turned out alright. I went around again and they told me, "That is it for tonight." That was my first solo night flight.

RB: Were you successful then?

DD: Yes, I was.

RB: You got back on the ground.

DD: Yes. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: After I finished flying at Douglas, Arizona they had a big parade because this was graduation. I [received] my bars for second lieutenant. When I went out the front gate they saluted me. [Laughter]

RB: Were you commissioned as an officer at that point?

DD: Yes. I [was] sent from there to Roswell, New Mexico to learn to fly the B-17.

RB: You did? [Was the] B-17 made by Ford Motor Company?

DD: No, Boeing [Aircraft Company] made that. That was the biggest airplane I had ever seen. [When] I got in that airplane, I could not imagine one being that big! But I was successful with the B-17. I thought that I was going to England where the B-17 was being used. Dozens of them were being shot down over there by the Germans.

RB: Would this have been sometime in the middle part of 1943?

DD: Yes. I was in Class 43K that graduated the first part of December. Right after that I went into the B-17 training.

RB: Where was that training again?

DD: In Roswell, New Mexico. I [received] my orders and it was not to a B-17 outfit. It was to a B-29 outfit! Nobody had ever heard of a B-29 because it was a new airplane. They had one in Clovis, New Mexico. It was painted OD [olive drab] Army colors, you know. They sent one there just for us to look at.
[Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: Later, they took all the paint off of them because it weighed too much. [Paint] for the whole airplane would be 100 pounds extra.

RB: Extra [weight], right.

DD: I continued training in the B-17. I got a few B-17s down [to New Mexico] and that is where I continued to train there. In the meantime, I had [a] ten day leave. I went home and married my sweetheart.

RB: Tell about how you met her.

DD: When I was going to school at Pocatello, I roomed with a fellow from Shelley, Idaho. His name was Ralph Davis. Pocatello is fairly close to Shelley and he would go home for the weekend. He kept telling me, "Why don't you go home with me for the weekend? You can have a date with my younger sister." I kept turning him down, telling him, "I am not going home with you. I do not want to get involved with somebody's little sister." [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: The next year, the little sister showed up at school [in] Pocatello. [Laughter] We courted for as long as I was around. We decided to get married when I finished my training at Roswell.

RB: When did you get married? What is your anniversary date?

DD: February 24 —

UV: 1944.

DD: 1944. That is right.

RB: Where did you get married? Back in Idaho?

DD: No, in the Salt Lake Temple [Salt Lake City, Salt Lake County, Utah].

RB: Very good.

DD: Yes.

RB: So I take it that you are a Latter-day Saint?

DD: [For a] long time.

RB: Long time? [Does] your family go back as Latter-day Saints?

DD: They go back to the Revolutionary War. They were Loyalists. Do you know what a Loyalist is?

RB: I do.

UV: Yes.

RB: [Laughter]

DD: [Laughter]

RB: They were on the other side.

DD: They were on the other side.

RB: [Laughter]

DD: Who was the famous fellow that —.

RB: Benedict Arnold?

DD: Benedict Arnold! There was an English general [who] decided that he was going to start up in Canada and go down the Mississippi River and cut the colonies in half. Benedict Arnold met him with an army, defeated the British and he became a big hero after that. One of [George] Washington's most loyal generals. But at the same time, he was bothered by the Loyalists. He threw a bunch of them in jail, including two of my grandfathers. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: When the war ended the King was so grateful to them for supporting them during the war that they gave them land up in Ontario, Canada. The [LDS] church was not even formed at that time. Brigham Young went on a mission to Ontario, Canada and he helped my great-great-grandfather [James Lake, Jr.] build a house up there. Brigham Young was an excellent carpenter. But he did not convert him.

RB: [Laughter]

DD: Two missionaries came by and converted him and all his family later on. He was the first person in my genealogy [Lake Family] to join the church. He lived there for a while and wanted to join the main body of the church which was in Kirtland, Ohio at the time. So he moved [with] all [of] his family to Kirtland. They helped build the Kirtland Temple. [They] quarried rock out of wherever it was. He followed the saints wherever they were.

RB: Very good. Let us go back — you [were] married [in] the Salt Lake Temple in early 1944. Then what happened?

DD: Well, she followed me around all [the rest of] my life. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] Yes. Were you reassigned?

DD: Yes.

RB: Where did you go?

DD: I went to Walker Army Air Field. That is where I picked up my crew. They had been training at other bases. I picked up one more pilot, the flight engineer, the navigator, the bombardier and gunners. There was a radar operator. All joined my crew at Walker.

RB: Where is Walker Army Air Field?

DD: It is in Kansas. [Laughter]

RB: Oh, in Kansas. I have not heard of that one.

DD: There were four [in Kansas]: Salina [Kansas] — I cannot name them. There were four bases that were training B-29 crews. They were the only bases that were training the B-29 crews. I will tell you a little bit about the B-29. After Pearl Harbor, the Americans realized that they did not have any way of touching the Japanese homeland. There were no airplane that were good enough to do it except [when General James “Jimmy” Harold] Doolittle flew sixteen of them off of an aircraft carrier and hit Tokyo, but they really did not do much damage. Some were lost. The first B-29 rigs were made by Curtis [Wright] for the B-29. [B-29 was made by Boeing Aircraft Company.]

DA: Did that have something to do with the length of the airfields?

DD: Yes. After I finished training at Walker, I [was] sent to Kearney, Nebraska. We could not imagine why we were being sent to Nebraska. We were combat ready. Ready to go! [But] we were sent to Kearney and there we sat. Nobody could [understand]. “What are we doing here?” There was a lot of speculating going on that we were to go here and there. The [United States] Marines had just taken Saipan and ahhh — we realized that is probably where we were going to go. [Laughter] There were no runways on Saipan that would hold [the] B-29. The [United States] Seabees, which is a construction battalion belonging to the Navy, came in there with bulldozers and all kinds of heavy equipment. They tore down mountains of coral, spread it out and made two beautiful runways.

DA: [Did] they have to be 900 feet long?

DD: Almost. I think [inaudible] —.

DA: I thought you were saying the B-17s were 600 feet and the B-29s were 900 feet.

DD: Yes, a thousand [feet].

DA: A thousand [feet]?

DD: That is approximately right. Yes. We used to take off [from] there and the end of the runway was about a half a mile from the ocean. We were 200 to 300 feet above sea level. So when you took off [inaudible] down, picked up speed and took a deep breath. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: If you are heavily loaded that is what they —.

DA: And get a bottle of water as you are going —. [Laughter]

DD: [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] When you were in Kansas, [did] you complete your B-29 training?

DD: Yes.

RB: Then did you deploy overseas?

DD: Well, we went to Kearney, Nebraska.

RB: That is true, yes, and waited and waited.

DD: And waited and waited. Waited [for] them, forever, to build the runways on Saipan.

DA: Did you wait three months?

DD: No, we must have waited two months. My wife was with me all this time. When we took off from Kearney, Nebraska she headed home, back to Shelley, Idaho to be with her family.

RB: Did you sail to Saipan or did you fly?

DD: We flew our airplane. We took off and went to Sacramento, California and then we went to Hickam Field, Hawaii. Then we went to Kwajalein. Do you know where Kwajalein [Island] is?

RB: [Laughter] More or less. [Laughter] In the South Pacific.

DD: We went from Kwajalein to Saipan. When we arrived in Saipan, there were a few crews that had arrived at the airstrip earlier than we did. They were the experienced dogs. [Laughter] Our wing commander had already been shot down over Tokyo. [Laughter] He tried to fly one mission and [was] shot down. [Laughter]

RB: Oh dear!

DD: Yes. The fighters got the fuel tanks on fire and they had to jump out. He spent the rest of the war in —.

RB: As a POW [prisoner of war]?

DD: The Army did not get a hold of him. The civilian people had him in jail in downtown Tokyo.

RB: Oh!

DD: Yes. He [was able] to witness all the bombings and everything.

RB: Wow!

DD: He used to live in Florida some place. I flew my first mission near the end of 1944. It would have been in November of 1944. It was the last day of the month or something like that. We were all high-altitude bombing. The first part of my bombing was at high-altitude at 30,000 feet or something like that.

RB: Where did you fly and drop bombs?

DD: We used Mt. Fujiyama for the strike point. We hit downwind and tried to hit an engine factory or something like that.

RB: Was it different targets in Japan?

DD: Yes, in Japan. You know what the jet stream is? You see it on the map all the time.

RB: Yes.

DD: We were just learning a little bit about it at that time. Crews were reporting some kind of phenomenal speeds as they went from Mt. Fujiyama to a place on the coastline where they would be 600 mph!

RB: [Laughter]

DD: Everybody said, "That is impossible! You could not be doing that." They finally found out that they were trying to bomb in the jet stream. [Laughter] They were riding the jet stream in! [Laughter]

RB: I would think that made it difficult for accuracy.

DD: Very difficult. [Laughter] One mission I was on was a formation of nine B-29s. We were [flying] in formation. The bombing target was just west of Tokyo and the bombardier missed the target. He could not find it. The [fellow] leading the formation decided he was going to turn around and go upwind. Well, that put us right over the middle of Tokyo.

RB: [Laughter]

DD: [Laughter] And that was the most flak! [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: Big guns! They had our altitude and everything. Man, I tell you they really [received] a lot of flak!

RB: Right. Literally! [Laughter]

DD: A lot of airplanes had holes in them when we came back from that. We learned that you cannot bomb upstream in a jet stream. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] Tell a little bit about the B-29. How many crew members?

DD: [There are] eleven.

RB: I am assuming two pilots.

DD: Two pilots, flight engineer and he rides backwards, always, his instruments are in front of him, but he is riding backwards. And I had a navigator, a bombardier, a radar operator and the rest of them were gunners. They had a new type of a sight on the — they all sat in a blister in the pressurized part of the cabin and fired their guns with a handheld computer is what it amounted to. They would sight the attacking airplane. It was attached to guns on the top and was very effective.

RB: How many bombs did it carry on a mission?

DD: It would carry — depending on where you went. The missions were fourteen to fifteen hours. Seven hours up and seven hours back. If we had an especially long mission someplace they would put bombs onto a gas tank in one of the bomb bays. It would normally carry twenty bombs in each bomb bay. There were two bomb bays. I might tell about a mission [that I was on where] I [received] the Distinguished Flying Cross.

RB: Yes, please tell about that.

DD: The squadron was briefed to go single ship from Saipan all the way up to a point just south of Mt. Fuji, circle, form up in formation, climb to altitude and go into the target. When we got up there it was so cloudy we could not even form up. So we [received] word to go single ship to our target and then bomb by radar, which we could do. It was not too accurate, but we started to do that. I started to climb. I got to about 27,000 feet, broke out between layers of clouds and right ahead of me was quite a gaggle of Japanese fighters waiting for us. [Laughter]

RB: Oh no!

DD: I think they called it a Tony [code name for Kawasaki, Ki-61 Fighter aircraft]. It was not what the Japanese used all the time. What do they call that thing?

DA: Zero?

DD: A Zero. Yes, that is right. There were Zeros and that airplane. First time I saw that Tony, it was right ahead of us and he headed on past us. He put four twenty

millimeter shells in the airplane. Two of them went right between the bombardier's legs [and] one of them exploded under his seat. He got flak in the back of his legs — a little blood, but not bad. We doctored him up a little bit. He [received] a Purple Heart for that.

RB: Did he? Because he was injured?

DD: He was the only fellow on the crew [who received] the Purple Heart. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: He [the Japanese pilot] knocked the number three engine out [and] cut the cables that were holding the bomb bay doors closed. The fourth shell went right by the tail gunner's head — apparently he was going [leaning] kind of sideways. We had four holes in the airplane. We leveled off at about 24,000 feet and [of] the other airplanes that were there, one of them tried to get around and get ahead of us. They were afraid of the tail gunner. They did not want to tangle with that. The tail gunner had a twenty millimeter cannon and two fifty caliber machine guns. Somebody making a pass, they [would] have a good chance of getting hit. They would not make a pass on him. One of them tried [and] came up on our side, but he thought he was far enough away that he would not get hit. The bombardier had control of four fifty caliber machine guns on top and he just let that [fellow] have it. The last we saw of him he was smoking and going into the clouds below us. [Laughter]

RB: Wow!

DD: But everybody [inaudible] —. But there we were with one engine out. We had three good engines running. The navigator and flight engineer started figuring out if we had enough fuel to go home and [inaudible]. Those bomb bay doors were not closed and they caused a lot of drag. [Inaudible] First, they said [that if we used the winds that we had as we were coming up here, we [would] never make it. Well, we had to try because that was the only option. We had not taken Okinawa. We did not have Iwo Jima. [There were] no bases that we could go to unless we wanted to land in Japan. [Laughter] That was not healthy. So we took off and started a gradual descent to save as much fuel as we could by [flying] fairly slow.

By the time we got to Iwo Jima, which was half-way home, we were at 12,000 feet and they were still saying we were not going to make it. When we got to 2,000 feet we could see Saipan. We could see it. I knew that as soon as you put the flaps down — all the fuel gauges were reading zero at this time.

RB: So you were running on fumes.

DD: Running on fumes. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: We had transferred fuel from the inoperative engine to the other three engines [so] they were all getting the same amount of fuel; but we knew as soon as we put the flaps down — when you land an airplane and put the flaps down you kind of feel it pulling. We knew that the fuel pumps were right in the bottom of the tanks and the fuel gauges were reading zero. If you put the flaps down the engines are going to quit. [Laughter] So I planned an approach, real flat, with no flaps. I got up to where I figured we could glide on in. My co-pilot put the flaps down and all three engines quit. [Laughter]

RB: So you were going to have to glide in?

DD: We glided in and hit the runway. As soon as we hit the runway and the nose came up again, the engines started again and we taxied to our hard stand. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] Wow!

DD: Our maintenance crews that were assigned to our airplane were all happy to see us because they did not think we were coming back. We were an hour late coming back and all the other airplanes that had been on the mission had come back an hour before.

RB: So you surprised them?

DD: Yes.

RB: Was your heart beating a little fast coming in?

DD: For that I [received] the Distinguished Flying Cross. [Laughter]

RB: Excellent! You said we had not taken over Iwo Jima. The [Battle of] Iwo Jima was in February of 1945. So this would have been in maybe January [of 1945] or in the fall of 1944?

DD: I do not know. We could see the battle ships around Iwo Jima, but the battle had not started yet. Later, I came up the tarmac one day and I heard an SOS [distress signal] from an airplane. The airplane had some rafts in the top of it. If the crew landed the airplane successfully [inaudible] and they wanted to ditch [inaudible] they could get those rafts out. They had a kite with a long line. They had to set it in a thing and crank. I remember that. We heard a crew somewhere out there [inaudible]. We honed in on it to see if we could see if anyone was in there. Pretty soon we could see fellows down there in rafts and sending that SOS signal! [Laughter]

We asked the people on Saipan, “What do we want to do?” They said, “Circle it and land at Iwo Jima.” But we had just taken Iwo Jima! There was not any runway on Iwo Jima! They said, “You can make it. You can make it. You can

make it.” It was a dirt runway. So we did. We had to leave before they were picked up; but they were eventually picked up by a submarine and they were all okay. [When] we landed on Iwo Jima, [we] had never seen so much dust! [Laughter]

RB: Was that after the battle?

DD: [The island] had been taken about three weeks [earlier].

RB: I have that the battle dates [were] February 19 to March 26, 1945. So would that have been early spring?

DD: That sounds right. I remember that we pulled into a place to park there and all of the [fellows] that were there jumped up into our airplane to grab our water jugs. They all sat on the ramp to drain our water jugs. [Laughter]

RB: Were they out of water?

DD: The water was horrible on the island! They finally pumped the water into us [by] hand and [inaudible] pumps into our tank thinking they could get enough water to get us on to Saipan.

DA: When did you start flying over Japan?

DD: The end of November 1944.

RB: I understand in the European theater, at least the B-17 pilots because my father-in-law was flying out of Italy to Germany, initially they had to do fifty missions, but then they cut that in half to twenty-five. They counted it as one mission up and one mission back. How many missions did you do out of Saipan?

DD: [We did] fifty.

RB: Fifty?

DD: No, excuse me [it was] thirty.

RB: Thirty missions?

DD: Thirty missions.

RB: Did you complete your thirty missions?

DD: Yes, I did. After the thirtieth mission, I figured they were going to ask us to fly more. The crew was all sitting in the Quonset hut. Pretty soon the first sergeant came in and said, “You [fellows] have finished your mission. You are ready to go

home now, but we do not have any transportation for you. It will be a three-week wait before we can get you home. There is a troop transport down in the harbor and [that] is going to Hawaii. You can get that far. If you would like to go down and get on that ship you can go to Hawaii.” So we got on that ship and zigzagged! You know, the war was still going!

RB: Right.

DD: Have you ever heard of the *Indianapolis*?

RB: No.

DD: It was a light cruiser. This is going to be another story, really. [Laughter]

RB: Alright. [Laughter]

DD: The *Indianapolis* was the ship that brought the atomic bomb that was [in] New Mexico. It was already to go and they did not have any way to get it to Tinian, which was supposed to be the seaport where they were going to load and then drop it. They finally decided they would have to take it over on a ship. So they put it on the *Indianapolis*. It was a fast cruiser. This was the time [when] President [Harry S.] Truman had made the decision that we would go ahead and drop the bomb. This was a big [issue] that they had been wrestling over, whether to drop it or not.

RB: [President Franklin Delano] Roosevelt died in late April [or] early May of 1945 and Truman became President. So between May and August there were preparations.

DD: It was all go. Truman said, “Yes, drop it.” The *Indianapolis* was taking [the bomb] over to Saipan. [The pilot] dropped it off at Saipan and then was going to go to Manila [Philippines]. He took off immediately and headed for Manila; but he did not zigzag. He went in a straight line. He broke regulations [and] they were torpedoed by a Japanese submarine.

There were hundreds of people onboard and they all ended up in the water. They were there for days before anybody missed them. They finally came to their senses and said, “Where is the *Indianapolis*?” They all started looking for them. A little fly boat that they had over there found it first. These fellows were in such terrible condition. They had been in the water [and] the sharks had been after them.

RB: They are not even in rafts? They are just in the water trying to hold on?

DD: No. They did not have time [to get into rafts].

RB: Wow!

DD: The captain of that ship survived, but he [was] court martialed for not zigzagging. [Laughter] Anyway, I was telling you that the ship that I rode on zigzagged all the way to Hawaii. It took ten days. I had been over to personnel to see about getting orders for transportation home and they told me it was going to be three weeks more. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: I was walking back over to where I was going to live and saw a B-29 coming in from the west. I [thought]: I am going to go down to see who is on that airplane. It landed and I had never seen so many people get off of an airplane! Dozens of them were on that airplane. The crew finally came across the ramp and I could see that one fellow was on there that I knew. I had known him when we were at Douglas, Arizona. We were in the same class. I went up to him and asked him if I could get a ride home. He said, "Well, I do not have any parachutes." There is a rule that you had to have a parachute. So I figured that I was not going to get on with him. Pretty soon he came up to me again and said, "If you will be here in the morning at 8:30 or something like that, I have a Mae West. I do not have any parachutes, but you can ride back with a put-put." There is an unpressurized part of the airplane.

RB: They called that a Mae West? That was the airplane?

DD: It is a flotation [device].

RB: Oh, I see.

DD: It is named after [Mae West]. Have you heard of Mae West?

RB: Yes, I have.

DD: This piece of flotation gear was named after her. He said, "I am only going to go up to 8,000 feet so you will not have any oxygen problem." That part of the airplane that he was talking about has a put-put. It provided the electrical power to the airplane when it is on the ground. So the next morning I threw my bag up in there and I rode home to [inaudible]. [Laughter]

DA: Without oxygen!

DD: Without any oxygen because he did not go above 8,000 feet. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] [Did] you go to Oakland [California]?

DD: I went to Travis Air Base [Fairfield, California]. Have you heard of Travis Air Base?

RB: Yes, I have been there.

DD: That is [how] I got home.

RB: I am retired Air Force, by the way, a Lieutenant Colonel, JAG [Judge Advocate General, legal arm of the United States Air Force]. I was stationed at Yokota Air Base, Japan with a view of Mt. Fuji, west of Tokyo.

DD: I climbed Mt. Fujiyama one time.

RB: So did I. [Laughter]

DD: [Laughter] I remember a [fellow] up on the top. One of these Japanese fellows said —.

DA: Were you there when the atomic bomb was dropped?

DD: No, I was home. I got off [the airplane] at Travis and I will tell you, I was the most happy fellow you have ever [seen].

RB: [Laughter]

DD: After what I had been through, my chances of coming back were [inaudible].

RB: I assume you saw [knew] some of your comrades who did not come back or knew some.

DD: I lived in a Quonset hut over there with three other officers, for four crews, when I first got out there. When I left, I was the only one [who] had not been lost.

RB: Wow!

DD: The other three had all been lost.

DA: When you [arrived] home, did your wife have a child?

DD: Yes. As soon as I arrived at Travis, I went up to personnel and [received] a set of orders that put me on thirty day leave. I went home to Shelley [Idaho]. My wife and I were sitting out on the lawn. It was hot.

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

DD: We were sitting under the shade of a tree and her dad had been downtown. He came home with a newspaper and plunked it down in front of us: *Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima*. That is when I found [out].

RB: So you were in Idaho when the war ended?

DD: That is right.

RB: You were on thirty day leave. When [were] you discharged?

DD: I [was] not discharged.

RB: [Not] at all? [Laughter]

DD: No, I had to go to Rest and Recuperation.

RB: [Laughter]

DD: [Laughter] I was supposed to be there thirty days and I [received] a letter from somebody in Washington [D. C.]. I do not know who it was. They wanted me to stay in and be part of the Strategic Air Command which was being equipped with B-29s. They were looking for people with B-29 experience. I figured it out. First of all, what are we going to do? Then I decided I was going to do [this] for a little while – maybe a year or something like that. I ended up doing it for twenty some years! [Laughter]

RB: So you retired from the Air Force?

DD: Yes, I did.

DA: Then [did] you go into some airplane activities as a civilian?

DD: Yes, I did.

DA: What [did you do]?

DD: I flew the B-36. Do you know what a B-36 is? Can you bring it up on your computer?

RB: Yes.

DD: Show him what a B-36 is. I flew that for awhile, but the one that I was in most of the time was a B-47.

DA: Was this for a commercial airline?

DD: No. I flew the first B-36 — what is the name of that town in South Dakota?

RB: Convair B-36 Peacemaker?

DD: Yes. The first B-36 [that] came into Rapid City, South Dakota.

RB: Not a very good picture, but a fairly large wingspan.

DA: Whooo!

DD: I tell you, it was so big that if something was wrong with it the engineer could walk out in that wing, shut down the engine and keep working on it for a while. That is how big it was.

DA: Was that a military plane?

DD: That was a military plane.

DA: How long did you keep doing military [work]?

DD: Until I retired.

DA: When [did] you retire?

DD: I retired in 1971.

RB: With how many years [of service]? Twenty-five?

DA: You were in for thirty years?

DD: Yes, twenty-eight [years].

RB: What rank did you retire at?

DD: I was [inaudible].

RB: You did not fly the whole time, I assume.

DD: No.

RB: What did you end up doing? Did you command?

DD: I will tell you. When the missiles came in they did not have anybody to man them. So they tapped squadrons that had people [who] would fit in the little box that they had around them. [Laughter]

RB: So you became a missileer?

DD: Yes, for a while.

RB: Wow! At some of the silos?

DD: Yes.

RB: Wow! On the northern tier or whereabouts?

DD: There were nine Atlas E missiles stationed around Spokane, Washington. I was just an operations officer [inaudible] in it.

RB: [Laughter]

DD: I was in one of the silos the night that the Russians put the missiles in Cuba.

RB: Yes, [in] 1962?

DD: Yes. [President John Fitzgerald] Kennedy gave an ultimatum [to the Russians] to get those missiles out of there or else! [Laughter]

RB: So you all were on high alert?

DD: High alert! [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: The base commander of SAC [Strategic Air Command] came on the intercom and said, "Get ready men! This is it! Be ready to go!" [Laughter] Everybody was ready to go.

RB: Wow!

DA: So after you retired, did you go into commercial airlines?

DD: Yes, I did. I went into commercial airlines [and] flew with commercial airlines for eleven years.

DA: What companies did you work for?

DD: I worked for small airlines that were taking passengers [in California] from the San Joaquin Valley to San Francisco and Los Angeles primarily.

RB: Did you live in Fresno [California]?

DD: I lived in San Luis Obispo [California].

DA: When did SkyWest [Airline] come into being?

DD: It was coming into being at the same time we heard about it. The rest of them, eventually, went by the wayside.

UV: It was [a] pretty small [airline] for a long time.

HJ: When you were dropping bombs on Japan, did you know what kind of bombs you had when you were dropping them?

DA: The first ones were general purpose bombs that explode. When we started burning the cities, the first raid that happened [was] on March 9, 1945. General [Curtis] LeMay had taken over the command of all the B-29s on Saipan, Tinian and Guam. He organized a bomber string where they were all thirty-seconds apart [to] go at night with incendiary bombs. I was about the third airplane in that string of bombers. The navigator was following us on the radar. He was telling me [that] we are now over Tokyo harbor and there was not one light anywhere! They had that thing perfectly blacked out.

RB: Wow!

DD: We went to our aiming point that was on the edge of the harbor, and then we had to fly three minutes on a certain heading and drop the bombs. A couple of ships [were] ahead of us and a little fire started, not too big. I went straight and to avoid the other airplanes coming in, made [a] pretty good move out and back. I was [inaudible]. I have never seen anything like that in my life! That fire — the flames and smoke. I could smell it up at my altitude.

RB: What was the target? Some industrial building or something?

DD: [To] burn the town. People!

RB: So it was just the Tokyo bombing raids?

DD: Yes. [We] burned seventeen square miles on this raid.

RB: Wow! So you could see these massive fires from — how high were you at that point — 12,000 or — ?

DD: My bombing stayed at the same altitude.

RB: What was the bombing altitude?

DD: I was at 4,000 feet at night. We all thought it was a suicide mission because we were not flying at a high altitude. It would have been a milk run [inaudible]. The airplanes towards the rear [were] thrown from 6,000 feet up to 11,000 or 12,000 updraft from the fire. [Laughter]

RB: Goodness!

DD: I was so glad that I was in the front! [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

RB: [Did] you say you retired about 1970?

DD: [In] 1971, I think.

RB: So you were involved in the Air Force during the Viet Nam era, but you weren't involved directly with the war?

DD: No, I was in that missile outfit. I remember that I flew all the time that I was with that missile outfit. I was flying [to] somebody [who] had lost an engine someplace and I [would be] taking them the engine. I was talking to the control room and they said, "We have an order for somebody to go to Viet Nam. Would you like to volunteer?" I said, "I guess not today!" [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: The fellow [who] volunteered had never been in combat. That is how they judged who would go. He was over there three weeks and he was flying a mission. His spirit had been lost and he never came back.

RB: Wow! Alright.

DD: I am glad I did not go. [Laughter]

HJ: Did you have anybody with you [who] spoke Japanese?

DD: No.

HJ: [You] could not intercept their talking?

DD: No. After the war I also flew missions over North Korea.

RB: You did?

DD: Yes.

RB: During the Korean conflict?

DD: I was at Yokota Air Base, Japan.

RB: Were you?

DD: Yes. [Laughter] Then we took off from Yokota and went over to North Korea. I bombed Pyongyang. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

DD: There were not any targets in North Korea that was worth it, but we were bombing bridges and [places] like that.

RB: I appreciate your time sharing some of your experiences. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us that you have not talked about – either your war experience or otherwise about your life?

DD: [Laughter] I have lived a dull life. [Laughter]

RB: A dull life? [Laughter] How many children did you end up in having in total?

DD: I had five children. One of them was killed in an aircraft accident.

RB: Oh dear.

DD: He was a skydiver. He owned a school that was teaching skydivers and they were doing formations. I have pictures of him doing the rings and some of that [other formations]. They were not doing that at that time he was killed. This happened thirty years ago. He was riding a lift plane. The lift plane flew over some mountains and he saw some people on the ground. He wanted to buzz these people and caught his wing on a tree. He was sitting in the back with four other [fellows]. Two of them survived.

DA: When [did] you retire from the commercial airline business?

DD: I cannot give you a date on that. [Laughter]

DA: Was it twenty years ago?

DD: Oh yes! I have been in St. George for twenty-five [years].

RB: You said that you retired from the military about 1972 and you spent eleven years in commercial aviation so —.

DA: So that is 1983.

RB: About 1983.

DD: The reason I quit flying is because I could not fly [civilian] passengers after I was sixty years old.

RB: Oh, that is right. That is right. You were born 1920 or 1921?

DD: [In] 1922.

RB: So in 1982 you turned sixty [years old].

DD: Yes. That is about what it was [when I retired].

RB: Did you retire from normal work life at that point or did you —.

DD: I did some management work for the airline for a couple of years and I did not like it. [Laughter]

DA: Why did you choose St. George to retire to?

DD: We wanted to leave down there [in California]. There were not any relatives or anything down there.

DA: Why did you not go to Idaho?

DD: [It was too cold to] live up there. [It was warmer in St. George.]

DA: Was your family grown?

DD: Yes.

RB: [Did] your wife choose St. George?

DD: This is as close to snow country as we wanted to get. [Laughter]

DA: [Laughter]

RB: That is a good reason. [Laughter]

RB: What was your wife's name?

DD: Norma.

RB: And her maiden name?

DD: Davis.

RB: Norma Davis?

DD: Yes.

RB: I understand she has passed away.

DD: Yes, two years ago, [on] September 29, 2014.

RB: You celebrated how many years of marriage before she passed away?

DD: Seventy years!

RB: Seventy years of marriage!

DD: We celebrated our seventieth anniversary in February and she died in September.

RB: Of all of the things that you have done in your “dull” life, you say, is there anything that sticks out that you would point to as one of your achievements that you are proud of?

DD: I will tell you, I was a bishop for six years.

RB: Were you?

DD: Yes.

DA: Where?

DD: In Lompoc, California.

DA: While you were still in the military?

DD: I was in the military for part of that time.

RB: [Were you at] Vandenberg Air Force Base?

DD: Yes.

DD: I guess that would be —.

DA: Were most of the people in the military?

DD: Half of them were in the military and half of them [lived] in town.

RB: I think we will conclude. I just want to mention that [Dr. Douglas] “Doug” Alder, and Heber Jones joined us today and asked some questions. I appreciate you, Mr. Dixon, for your time and sharing these experiences. Thank you very much.

DD: Thank you.

UV: [Unidentified Voice]

[END OF RECORDING TWO. END OF INTERVIEW.]