RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CASPER W. DESCHU

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Ryan Smith: This begins an interview with Casper Deschu on October 25, 2002, in Flemington, New Jersey, with Ryan Smith and …

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

RS: Mr. Deschu, can you tell us where you were born?

Casper Deschu: I was born at New Brunswick, New Jersey, right in Rutgers' hometown, on April 29, 1921. My parents lived up on Comstock Street, which is just one block down from the Ag School at that time. It's no longer the residential section it used to be, but I think the last time that I was there, at the house, it had been taken over by somebody that was renting it out to Rutgers students now. I had a short walk to the Ag School when I had classes up there and had a long walk when I had classes across town at the Rutgers campus.

SH: Tell us about your father, what his background was and his family history?

CD: My dad came over from Hungary, Romania actually at that time. It seemed to be that every time they had a little battle, there was a change of borders and I'm not sure whether they came from Hungary or Romania now, but both he and my mother came over as young people and they married over here and had four children. I was the youngest of the four.

SH: Can you tell us about your mother and father's family? Did they come as a family unit or did they come singularly?

CD: They came over singularly. My mother had a sister over here and she first came over when she was twelve years old. … She went back to Romania then and came back over here when she was sixteen and my dad came over because of the persecution, war, and religion. … Both settled down in New Brunswick. They lived in different towns in Romania, but they met here and married at a young age.

SH: Were there family members here for your father, as well?

CD: My father had a cousin, I think, who was over here, but I'm not too certain just where he lived. … They worked in a rubber factory in New Brunswick, making boots, and my mother worked in a cigar factory on Somerset Street.

SH: Did they talk a bit about what it was like to be immigrants to this country?

CD: I wished I had taken an oral history of my folks that I could refer back to, but I don't recall too many of the details. They were content and happy here, I know.

SH: What about the customs in your home? Did they keep some of the customs that they brought from Romania, the food, or the traditions?

CD: Not too many I don't believe. They spoke German actually, it was a German-speaking village that they came from and they did speak German with a very different dialect than what

you hear today. … But, I never did do too much conversation in German. My mother did take me over to Romania when I was eleven years old and I got to see my two grandfathers, but my two grandmothers … had passed away already. I have slight recollections as an eleven-year-old; I wish again I had a better memory of information of what existed over there.

SH: Did your mother take all of the family with her or just you?

CD: No, just me. I was the baby at that time. My brother was seven years older than I and my sisters were eleven and twelve years older. I was the favorite baby, I guess.

SH: At least that's what you were told. [laughter] Do you know what precipitated the trip for your mother to go back to Romania?

CD: I think she just wanted to see her father and knowing it was probably the last time. I recall, when I was over there we had an eightieth birthday for him, which brings me to the point where I had my eightieth birthday at Winants Hall here a year and a half ago.

SH: Did you really?

CD: Yes.

SH: That's wonderful. Then tell us about what it was like to be a young kid growing up and what did your father do? Was the home always there near the Ag School?

CD: My dad worked at Paulus Dairy, which was a dairy in New Brunswick and ended up managing the plant. There he started out as a delivery boy and they had horses and buggies in those days and I remember the milkman coming up and down the street with their horse. In the wintertime, with snow, they came through with a sleigh. They had their milk on the back of the sleigh.

SH: Where did you go to grade school?

CD: Very close by my home, it was called the Nathan Hale School and it has since been torn down and it is now, I think, Martin Luther King School. [It was] just a block and a half from where I lived.

SH: What did you do as a young boy in grade school for fun?

CD: We used to play out in the streets, played nip and roller skate and ring-o-leveo and marbles. We could play on the street and not have a car come by for an hour or so. … Today you'd be run over inside of thirty seconds.

SH: Do you know what nip and ring-o-leveo are?

RS: No, I don't.

SH: Can you tell us what those games are?

CD: Nip was a game where you cut your mother's broomstick off and you took a six inch piece of it and sharpen the ends, and the other piece you used as a stick, and hit it like a baseball, tip it up. That was nip.

RS: Like street baseball, I guess.

CD: Yes, except that we didn't use a baseball, we used this little wooden stick and the longer you used it the points would wear down more and more.

SH: And what was ring-o-leveo?

CD: Ring-o-leveo was just the hide-and-seek type game played out on the street, whether it would be in daytime, or nighttime under the street lights, a big change from what it is today.

SH: Were you involved in a church as a young man growing up?

CD: Yes, I was in the Dutch Reformed Church. My parents were Catholics over in Europe. When they came over here they converted to the Dutch Reform Church, which was on Livingston Avenue in New Brunswick. I was active in the youth group and we had good times; put on plays and went to baseball games in New York. I don't know what the church is today.

SH: What about in high school, what were your interests and where did you go to high school?

CD: I went to New Brunswick High School, which was on Livingston Avenue in New Brunswick. … I'd say it was about a half mile from my home and I participated in track and cross-country and a little basketball. As a senior I was telling Ryan before that I really didn't know what I was going to do when I graduated, so I went back and took a postgraduate course because I graduated in February. We had semesters that are half years and I needed some other credits. … I went to Rutgers Prep for a year after the postgraduate, before I went to Rutgers itself.

SH: Who encouraged you to do this? Was it somebody in the school?

SC: I think it was probably more my older sister and brother-in-law. My older brother and the brother-in-law, who married my sister, had gone into Rutgers or was in the process at that time. … I think Ed, more or less, encouraged me, more than my parents did. Not that my parents denied it, but he was the one who encouraged me.

SH: What is your brother-in-law's name? Did he graduate from Rutgers as well?

CD: Ed Glass and he graduated, I believe in the Class of 1932. My brother, John, Class of 1936, who is seven years older than me, had already graduated from Rutgers when I started, so he was an influence, too.

SH: Did you have another sister?

CD: Yes, I had another sister, Kay. She went to, I believe, a business school in New Brunswick, Drake Business School?

SH: Did the other sister go to college as well?

CD: I think Marge took a business course, also.

SH: That's pretty impressive for your mother and father to get their four children through college.

CD: It wasn't a full fledge college that they went to, but they turned out to be very good, and lovable, such successful sisters.

SH: [laughter] I was going to ask you when you were a kid growing up, because you were so much younger, did you have a lot of interaction with them or were they pretty much on their own?

CD: Well, I think, I did have quite a bit of contact with my younger sister. I shouldn't say younger, but the youngest of the sisters. I recall having gone to her home, stayed there with her quite often. I was probably a teenager, young teenager, and Kay was already married and working and living on her own.

SH: In high school, did you have a job after school, or in the summers?

CD: In my senior year, I had a job. As a matter-of-fact, I worked for the Dean of the Ag School for a few years, a few hours a week doing his grass cutting. … I'm just trying to think, there were two of them, one was a pharmacist and then Dean lived right across the street and I worked in both of their places doing yard work.

SH: Was this Helyar?

CD: No, it wasn't, not Helyar. I remember the pharmacist's name, was Hoagland.

SH: We can look that up.

CD: He had a drugstore on George Street. I wish I could remember the Dean's name at that time. Oh, yes, it was Dean Martin.

SH: We want to ask you then about your decision to go to Rutgers Prep? We've heard a few stories about Rutgers Prep; can you just tell us what your experience was with Rutgers Prep?

CD: Well, basically, I went to pick up a few credits that I hadn't taken in high school. Chemistry, I believe, and I took a literature course, and, I think, I took an algebra course, if I'm not mistaken. It was experiencing quite a year there. … I played some basketball and football at

Prep, which I didn't do too much of in high school. I did play football at the prep school; there were only thirty, forty, people in there, so it was a very limited number. I got the feeling, Rutgers being so close by, because at that time the Prep School was right there, across the street from Winants Hall. … Since then they had moved to River Road.

SH: When you decided to go to Rutgers, it sounds like it almost was an evolution kind of thing, did you have to go for any kind of interviews, or did you qualify for any scholarships?

CD: No, I didn't have any scholarship, but again, I think the whole cost of living at home and the tuition was, I don't know a couple of hundred dollars I believe at that time. … My dad didn't make a fortune, but on the other hand he had steady work. He was never out of work during the Depression, and he was constantly a hardworking individual, so between them and my twenty-five cents an hour work, I guess, we afforded to go through Rutgers.

RS: Before you went to Rutgers did you have an idea what you want to study or did you just kind of come to Rutgers a couple of semesters?

CD: I guess I probably had at that point an idea, only because my whole family was involved in the dairy business. I had an uncle that owned a dairy and my brother-in-law Ed, worked for him. … My dad was in the dairy business and then my brother went to school and he took up dairying, so, I guess, it was a logical evolution that I go into the dairy business.

SH: Did anyone have a dairy farm?

CD: No, none of them had a dairy farm. We were all involved in the pasteurizing and bottling and bacteriological and laboratory end of it.

SH: What about the Depression and what do you remember about the effects that you saw?

CD: I've been asked that question many times, I guess, and I really don't have too much of a Depression story to tell because my dad worked right through and evidently had a steady income. … We always had milk and butter on the table. … So, I guess maybe I missed some of that or I had forgotten it.

SH: When you came to Rutgers when did you decide what you were going to study? What was your course load like?

CD: Well, I took Ag courses right from the beginning. When I went to Ag School…I guess, it was pretty much laid out at that time. I think it's much more open today, that you can determine your own courses, and I think I had pretty much of a set curriculum.

RS: So they'd basically hand you a piece of paper saying this is what you should take?

CD: Yes, right. I remember taking Soils, introductory, an Ag course and I think that was where I met Dr. Helyar. That's going back a few years, and I don't remember all the courses, but in my

freshman and sophomore years they were pretty much laid out. After that it was helter-skelter when the war came along. That's another story.

SH: We'll go back to that.

RS: Would you say, in general that any student going to Rutgers at that time had to have an idea before going to school what they wanted to study? I mean nowadays it's more that people can just go, it will come after a couple of semesters or…

CD: I imagine it was much more structured at that time, that you knew you were going into Ag, or you knew you were going into engineering, or political science, or something like that as compared to today. I imagine it's much more difficult to make that decision with so many courses and the university being so large. When I went we'd have 300 in a class, I think between three and four hundred and I would say maybe a quarter or a third of us were in the Ag School at the time. We pretty much knew what we were going to go into. Didn't know what we were going to end up with but… [laughter]

SH: What about ROTC? Was that mandatory for you as well for two years?

CD: The two years were mandatory, yes. …

SH: You would have to come across campus then to do that.

CD: Oh, yes. Most of the times I was cross-town in the morning and in the afternoon I would have the Ag courses over near my home, and there were several of us. Several of them lived on the Ag school and I recall we used to walk back after the morning classes and stop at the Bond Bakery, day-old bread and cake store. … The students, of course, I lived at home, were living in buildings at the Ag farm and supplied their own food.

SH: Do you remember some of the students that you would walk back with? Do you remember their names?

CD: If I looked at a list of them now I think I would recognize several of them, yes, Charlie Targen, Irv Baker, John Baylor, John Pino, Bob Gardner, Charlie Thayer, John Wheeler.

SH: One question I wanted to ask was about mandatory chapel. As a commuter student, who actually lived within a few blocks to the school, did you have to appear in chapel?

CD: Yes, we did have that mandatory chapel.

SH: Do you remember any of the speakers?

CD: No, I don't remember specific names now.

SH: Was it a pleasant experience? Do you recall how you felt about it at the time, or was it just expected because it was mandatory, or what were the reactions?

CD: I think it was accepted pretty much, but, oh, I don't think we probably wouldn't have gone had it not been attendance you know. [laughter]

SH: What about your social activities? Did you get involved with the dancing and wasn't there a reception with Douglass, NJC at that time? Didn't Rutgers College freshmen meet NJC freshmen women in a little social?

CD: I think there were. There were a couple of them, but I did join a fraternity so I had that connection so far as social. At that time it was the Alpha Kappa Pi, which no longer existed and they have changed houses two or three times in the past, I know now that it was the Alpha Sigma Phi, which I think they have lost their privilege to be on campus now. We didn't have the problems they have today. Although I think we did sneak a six-pack of beer once in a while, but today I think it's more like a keg of beer instead of six packs.

RS: What was the fraternity experience like? Did you enjoy it?

CD: I did. You have contact with and a place to hang out over on the main campus there. I didn't sleep there, maybe a few times overnight, but I did have a meal in there once in a while and socially it was a place to go for a dance or, as I say hang out.

SH: Why did you choose that fraternity?

CD: Well, I had a coach in high school, in track, who belonged there prior to, a fellow by the name of Joe Marino, and my brother had belonged to that fraternity, so again it was the logical track to follow, I guess.

SH: You talked about being in track and in football and basketball in high school and in Prep school, did you do anything like that at Rutgers?

CD: I played 150 pound football at Rutgers for one year, but, again, everything was helter-skelter with the war having come. … I think it was the next year that it was abolished altogether.

SH: For the record we should state when you came to Rutgers, what year?

CD: I started at Rutgers in 1940 and I was in my sophomore year when Pearl Harbor happened.

RS: I just wanted to ask you about your experience with the 150-pound football. When I saw your file I had never heard of it before, and I looked it up and it's actually a collegian sport. I thought it was more like an intramural, but it was actually a sport.

CD: It was at that time, yes. I think there were only six or seven teams in the East who played that. I never got over 150 pounds. I used to eat steaks in front of some of the fellows that could only have a cup of tea. … I felt guilty at times, but I was never, never bothered with my weight, but some of them had to get down to 150 pounds the Friday night before the game.

SH: Who was your coach, do you remember?

CD: Tom Kenneally, if I recall, was coach of the 150 pounds at that time, yes. I forget who the other coaches were now, but I do remember Tom.

SH: That fall before Pearl Harbor, you played 150 pounds football, but did you also attend the varsity games?

CD: Yes, as a matter-of-fact, I used to attend the varsity games as a teenager, pre-high school I guess. They had a bleacher stand in New Brunswick there, up at the far corner on Neilson Field. At any rate, we used to be able to get in free Saturday at around noontime for a two o'clock game and we used to be the Rutgers cheering section there. The cheerleaders would come over and run some cheers in front of us, probably two, three hundred kids would come in there so that was, you know, Rutgers was *the* school at that time.

SH: These were male cheerleaders, were they not?

CD: Yes, there were no women at all at that time.

SH: Ok, put on record for Ryan.

RS: So they had a pretty good crowd for the games then?

CD: Well, comparatively speaking, yes. I guess, five-six-seven-eight thousand was a pretty good crowd at that time.

RS: They probably get less than that now at games. [laughter]

SH: Attendance at the game was almost mandatory for freshmen and sophomores, wasn't it? I remember reading in the *Targum*, letters exhorting people to come to the games.

CD: I don't recall that. I think you got a book of tickets, maybe that was part of your tuition, that I cannot recall, or if it wasn't you paid a minimal fee to attend the games.

SH: We're going to really make Ryan jealous. [laughter] What were some of the social activities that were involved in that fall semester before Pearl Harbor? Do you remember, as a freshman, were there bonfires, or pep rallies, or dances?

CD: I recall some bonfires and pep rallies on a Friday night before a game and, if my recollections correct, they were held over there where the dormitories are right along the river now, on the river bank in back of Neilson Field, which as I said it's no longer Neilson Field.

SH: Can you tell us where you were and how you remember Pearl Harbor? The reactions that you saw?

CD: That I distinctly remember, and I wish I could remember his name now, but having lived in New Brunswick right near the Ag School, Russ and I, and I don't remember Russ' last name, were studying for an exam. At that time I think we had exams coming after the Christmas vacation and we were studying up in my bedroom. I had a desk up there and Russ came down to the house and that's where we first heard of Pearl Harbor being bombed. … It was a Sunday afternoon and, you know, to this day I don't know whatever happened to Russ, but I understand Russ enlisted next day and I never saw Russ again after that.

SH: He was a sophomore as well?

CD: Yes, we were both sophomores and had similar courses.

SH: Prior to Pearl Harbor, and going back to Hitler's coming to power, were there any discussions in your family or in your social group that talked about that event and then the coming war with Poland being invaded in '39. Was this something young men at that time were talking about or were aware of?

CD: No. I can't say that I'd given any thought at that time, at all. We were pretty much involved, into Rutgers at that time and school and a few social activities and football games, and so forth. But, politics and war that was not on our mind.

SH: Even when the war then turned toward England and FDR's lend lease programs? This, again, wasn't anything that was discussed?

CD: You're talking before the…

SH: Before Pearl Harbor.

CD: Not before Pearl Harbor, no.

SH: As far as the policies, like the WPA program, and the different programs of the New Deal that President Roosevelt set forth, was your family politically opinionated at all in this?

CD: I do recall, when you mentioned WPA, I was a Boy Scout, and I knew WPA was active at that time because we used to go camping down at Allaire State Park, as our Boy Scout troop. … I remember going down there in the middle of the winter one time, over Christmas, and WPA had created this enormous pile of firewood clearing out the trees, and I was so thankful because we burned up a pile of wood that weekend, or a few days, trying to keep warm. I know the WPA programs existed.

SH: Were your father and mother politically active at all?

CD: No. I don't recall them being.

SH: Did they have any thoughts about Roosevelt as far as his presidency?

CD: Oh, I don't recall that they voiced those, again sixty-seventy years later.

SH: How far did you go with the Boy Scouts?

CD: Oh, I don't think too far into my teens, maybe thirteen or fourteen, something like that.

SH: Let's go back then to that Sunday when you hear about Pearl Harbor with your friend Russ. What was your reaction and tell us what memories you have of how your family reacted, and your classmates, and what did Rutgers do?

CD: At that point there was sort of a bedlam type thing. It was practically daily that students were leaving and over the next eight, ten, twelve months. The fraternity was sort of a dull place, and students were being called out and called up, and I don't recall the full details, but I remember I was still there, and I had already enlisted with the Navy in the spring of '42.

SH: How did you come to enlist in the Navy? Were there recruiters on campus or did you go to them?

CD: I don't recall. I never had any idea of pursuing the elective ROTC and, I guess, I just always liked the water. Did some fishing, even though I got seasick once in a while I still enlisted, and I went to New York and enlisted in the V-7 program, which was an officer's training in the Navy.

SH: How did you hear about that?

CD: I guess, there were all sorts of information on campus at the time. It was whether you're enlisting, or being drafted, and so I went into New York, and enlisted in that. But at that time the war effort was going full blast and shortages of all sorts of help, and I had gone over to Raritan Arsenal, which was a Army supply depot in Edison. It was called Raritan at the time. … I started working over there, and I was only over there for a short time when I enlisted.

SH: You were still going to school?

CD: I think it was right at the end of the semester.

SH: It must have been the summer then.

CD: When I enlisted, they said, "Boom, go right back to school, summer school. We'll call you when we're ready for you." So, I went back and started summer school. … At that time I was also working at J&J, [Johnson & Johnson]. Then, when I gave up the arsenal job to go back to school, … J&J was right across the street, on George Street, and they gave us all sorts of options to work whenever we wanted to, and as little or as many hours we could, weekends or any one of the three shifts, or hours of the three shifts.

SH: What were you doing, what was your work?

CD: In the sterilizing department, just hauling bandages that the women were packaging, and boxing and nailing up crates, and wheeling them into sterilizing division. … I recall there were several other Rutgers students there working, too, at the same time. They're going to school at the same time, too. … I did that for over a year and, by that time, I had completed my junior year already with the summer school, and I was into my senior year already when they finally called me. I had been in my second summer session, and the policy at that time was seven-eighths of your work, if you had completed it, you got your degree. So, the Navy called me then, after I had my seven-eighths-plus work done, and I went to Notre Dame as an apprentice seaman, then became a midshipman out there and got commissioned.

RS: So you finished your seven-eights at Rutgers, and then when you went to the University of Notre Dame, you finished up the eighth there?

CD: No, I never did, they didn't require that, and what I got out of Notre Dame was strictly Navy. That was all Navy courses. Even at Rutgers, my basic degree was in Dairy Technology, but I had a minor in math because I took an awful lot of math, partly as a request of the Navy, and partly as the fact that there weren't any Ag School courses being given. What courses there were was being given by individual Profs, and you might have one or two in your class, or you wrote a term paper for that seven-eighths. The first semester senior year, and the second semester, too, but I had a prof, I remember Professor Button, [Forest Button], I had to write a couple of term papers for him as my course requirement.

SH: I have some questions about Rutgers before we go on to Notre Dame. First of all, who was your favorite professor in all of your studies at Rutgers?

CD: Well, I think I have to say Prof. Button was a good man, and he was my major, and I had two or three courses with him. What courses were still open in the senior year, I recall that I was taking a dairy manufacturer's course. It was an ice cream making course, and the shortages had already hit at that time, and we made ice cream out of everything we could find available, out of soy flour, and lard, I guess, instead of butter fat and sugar. I don't know what we used, but there was probably some corn syrup. It was a fascinating course, because everything didn't go the way he had planned or would have gone under normal circumstances, so I recall some of those days.

SH: Were there other courses like that, that were either geared towards the war effort, or were impacted by the war that you recall?

CD: There were a lot of courses that were eliminated, I think that were not even given, because there just wasn't that many students involved, and, as I say, I think my senior year, or that year that should have been my senior year, there were only two of us left and in what we call Dairy Manufacturers. … It was probably seven or eight others to begin with.

SH: Do you remember the other students' names?

CD: You know, something is on the tip of my tongue, if I look through the yearbook I could probably.

SH: Please tell us about how the courses were accelerated, with summer courses being offered and like that? For Ryan especially, tell us what it was like to go from a 300 to 400-man class to how few there were, or what was your activities, and things like that on campus?

CD: I would have to say the last year that I was there activities were very limited and small. … I didn't expect that I would be left to go all that time by the Navy and I figured, surely, they will call me, but at that point in time there was one man left in my fraternity, besides myself. … Stan was ineligible; I forgot the exact reason, whether it was diabetes, or something like that. He was not called because of his physical, so, actually Stan was the only one left in the fraternity at that time. Everybody else had either enlisted or was called up.

SH: Had the ASTP come to campus at that point?

CD: ASTP?

SH: Army Specialized Training Programs.

CD: Oh, yes, I'm sure they were.

SH: I think they marched to and from classes.

CD: Yes, some of my classmates were called up as a unit. There's a group of them, they still call themselves the Black Fifty, because they were all called together. … They were going down South on a train with the coal engines, steam engines, and the soot, by the time they got down South they were all black, so they called themselves the Black Fifty, and I'm sure some of your other people had told you that, but I'm not a member of that.

SH: Was it difficult to be a healthy young man and know that you were enlisted and you've done your part, but you're still not called? Were there any repercussions either from people on campus, or in the community wondering why you weren't in the military yet?

CD: I didn't get that impression. There were still others around, but I mentioned that about the fraternity because there was only one person left, but I don't know how many total were around campus. My graduation, I wasn't even there. My parents stood in for me. It was in October, and I seem to recall there were twenty or twenty-five students that graduated. I think it was the 12th of October, and they accepted my diploma at graduation. So, these twenty-five people, I don't know what that represented, so there must have been some people left there.

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RS: Besides your fraternity, did you notice that everywhere else?

CD: I'm sure that, I recall that there was a lot less on campus, but it seems to me there were still activities going on, as the Army Reserves and so forth. But I wish I could remember more about it, but unfortunately I can't.

RS: You said you enlisted in '42?

CD: Spring of '42.

RS: They wanted you to finish school; was that a common thing that they would say? Did they encourage you to finish school and then you would go off to war, or was it kind of up to you?

CD: I don't know that it was that they encouraged me that much to go back to school, as it was they had a demand for officers, but they didn't have the officers that were ready to go in. So, their only option was to send you back to school until they could get a pipeline of officer training working. Because there was a shortage of ships, at that time, they were building like mad, and so, they had a pipeline of people that they just didn't have the places for them to go.

RS: They decided to accelerate you guys to get you out of school?

CD: Well, they put us in there more or less as a holding pattern, storage tanks, so to speak, and waiting for the pipe to open up, and I guess, eventually, it did, because they were building ships. Up in Ohio, is where the ship was built that I had, *LST-667*. … That ship wasn't even built when I enlisted. There were a lot of others of course. All the Navy yards were building like mad, at that time. That's where Rosie the Riveter came in, I think, because they needed welders, and so forth.

SH: Were there other schools that had the V-7 program other than Notre Dame?

CD: If I recall, there were four of them. One was University of California, Notre Dame, Columbia, and, I think, maybe Northwestern. … You asked whether I felt any obligation that I was still on campus. I don't think I ever told my parents, as they passed away, that I had an option at that time of going to Notre Dame or Columbia. … Columbia would have started another three or four weeks later, and I said, "it's time, I'm going to go." … I went to Notre Dame, and maybe I missed that last three or four weeks of summer school, too. … I would have had the option of going to Columbia, which was much closer to home, of course. … There was one other fellow I went out with from Rutgers. He was a graduate student and his name was Ernie Chris. He was a pomology major at the Ag School. Ernie and I went out to Notre Dame together.

SH: When you went to Notre Dame, were you in uniform, or how did that work? Did you have to go through any kind of a boot camp?

CD: No, we just reported to Notre Dame as civilians. We went out on our own, went out by train. We met a group in Grand Central terminal in New York, and from there we went out together, but they were coming from all over the country at the time. … Every three months they had a new class come in. That's where the "ninety-day wonder" comes in, that we were members of, took three months to go through and they started another class. I started as a midshipman, no, as an apprentice seaman, and after a month we were appointed midshipmen, and at the end of the ninety days, we were ensigns, given the commission as ensigns.

SH: Where did you get your uniforms and things, or when did you start wearing your uniforms maybe I should ask?

CD: Oh, the day we got to Notre Dame they gave us the seaman's uniform, and after a month, we got our midshipman's uniforms.

SH: These ninety days that you were at Notre Dame; are there other undergraduates going to regular classes at Notre Dame? Were you part of regular classes?

CD: No, we were completely separated, but there were regular classes going on, but we had our own dormitories that the university had turned over to the Navy. … I think there may have been three or four dormitories that were used, and each one was segregated into a company. … There was football still going on at Notre Dame when we were out there and Notre Dame is probably one of the few that didn't suspend the football season. … I recall the Navy didn't make too much of an impression on the Notre Dame president at that time, because most of the teams that were playing were service teams at the time, Great Lakes, and the Army teams. … Of course, we being in the service, we rooted for the Navy, or the Army service teams, [laughter] and the Notre Dame president thought we should be rooting for Notre Dame, but we still rooted for the service teams.

SH: Were you being taught by Notre Dame professors, or were you being taught by military, or Navy Reserve?

CD: They were all Navy people, yes. The basic courses were navigation and gunnery and military courses and a lot of physical ed, and shots, obstacle courses and so forth. Swimming, I remember, they made you go in the pool whether you could swim or not. I didn't have any trouble with it, but some of them did I know.

SH: Were the people from all over the country that were part of your class?

CD: Yes, they came from all universities in the country. Most of them had graduated, I think, but there were still a few of them that had not graduated that were taken in.

SH: Did you have to help those who hadn't already gotten the college degree?

CD: No, no, we were all in the same boat. We all had to do the same thing and same courses and classes. I think most of them were already graduated, or were in their, maybe, junior or senior years. There was not too much of a difference there.

RS: Were you tested on a lot? Was there a high demand on passing?

CD: We were tested, but I don't recall that there were too many flunkouts. I don't remember how many didn't make it, but it wasn't a large percentage.

SH: Would they have flunked out more for physical reasons rather than academic reasons?

CD: I think probably it was, as many physical, and I know we had one fellow in our floor there that went into an epileptic fit and scared us all. He is lying on the floor there and, unfortunately, he was weeded out, but that was strictly a physical thing. Up to that point, we would have never known of that.

SH: How rigorous was the physical training? Were you already in pretty good shape, so you didn't notice?

CD: Yes, I guess. We had our obstacle courses, and it was a physical challenge to us. My biggest recollection is getting all the shots and having to go out and do fifty, or whatever it was, push ups with tetanus shots and so forth.

SH: How much of your training was done using film? What kind of films did you watch?

CD: I'm sure we had films in the classes there, and learning the technicalities of the ships, and so forth, which none of us really had, outside of, maybe a fishing boat, knowing the bow and stern, but, so far as all the other details, I'm sure we had a lot of it.

SH: Other than the swimming pool, was there any other training on water?

CD: Not at Notre Dame, no. At Fort Pierce, where I ended up, it was all water training.

SH: At Notre Dame, when you came to the end of the ninety days, can you tell us what the procedure was like? For example, how long were you there before you started getting orders? Did you have to do the ninety days and then wait there to find out where you're going to go? How did that work?

CD: No, we all had orders already, when we left Notre Dame, when we got our commission out there. We weren't all shipped out together at the same place. I was, and quite a few of us, I don't know what the percentage was, but I was designated for Little Creek, Virginia, as my first order, but I didn't stay there. This was the amphibious force, where I was ordered to. I would say maybe twenty to twenty-five percent of us went to amphibious school. We started out in Little Creek, Virginia, but we were only there for a week, then we went to Fort Pierce, Florida.

SH: What made them change their mind?

CD: I think Fort Pierce was a newly constructed amphibious base, and never been used before, and it wasn't even completed when we went down. I made some notes here, to recollect, otherwise I would have forgotten about it. But we went down there and it was a large inlet at Fort Pierce leading out into the ocean. So, it was an ideal place for us to make our landing craft, beachheads. The base was not equipped to handle us all. … I don't know whether it was 2000 or 3000, but we all came down with diarrhea and dysentery right off the bat. So, we all went on K Rations or C Rations until they finished the mess hall, and after that we had our regular meals there in the new mess hall, and things settled down then. … It was strictly a tent-type facility.

They had small landing craft there in the river, and we would take them out into the ocean and make practice landings on the beach at Fort Pierce.

SH: What specifically were you being trained to do?

CD: [I was] in charge of a crew for landings, landing craft, which might have been anywhere from four to six to eight people, depending upon the landing craft. Most of them were four man crews.

SH: The crews that you were training with were those enlisted men?

CD: Yes.

SH: So, there was actually a crew there.

CD: One officer and four to six enlisted men.

SH: From the time you left Notre Dame then you were an officer and were assigned a crew once you got to Fort Pierce.

CD: Yes, we were still training down at Fort Pierce as amphibious people, because we had no training at that.

SH: When you were in Virginia, did you get your crew there and then you went as a crew to Fort Pierce?

CD: We did take some people down with us, and, yes, basically, down in Fort Pierce is where they gave us our crews. … From there on, we really took them onto the LST with us.

SH: Did that crew stay pretty static?

CD: For the time being, but, there was a lot of movement around, including myself.

SH: Can you tell us a bit about that?

RS: Going into this amphibious training, you were just as new to it as the enlisted men, even though you were an officer.

CD: We learned from actual experience, yes. We'd take the landing craft, small landing craft, and go out the inlet, and make our run for the beach, and drop the doors. … We didn't have the Army personnel to run ashore, but in so far as learning how to land on the beach and get off again.

SH: Who was training you?

CD: We had some officers there that had some qualifications, but a lot of it was learning ourselves.

SH: Do you remember what time of year, and what year this was?

CD: Yes. I was in Fort Pierce from February through May of '44, that's about three or four months that we had the training there. From there, we went to pick up our first LST in Gulfport, Mississippi. This was a brand-new LST that was made up in the Ohio River someplace, and the shipyard crew brought it down the Mississippi to Gulfport or Biloxi, we were in both places, and that's where we picked up the ship and where the crew was assembled. There were many more than just our amphibious. We were only the ones that were involved with the amphibious group. The LST had four landing craft, amphibious landing craft, and each one of those had an officer and four crew. … Then, there were gunnery people, gunnery officer, and navigators, and stores and supplies, and we all sort of came together and formed a crew there. You're talking about the officer not having qualified. They were so short of officers at the time, qualified officers, and the ship that I went on, *LST-667*, was commanded by a chief petty officer, only because he had more experience and qualifications because he had been in the Navy for twenty some years, and us greenhorns only for ninety days, so you can imagine that they did know more than we did. So, the officers were taking commands from a converted chief petty officer, and he was in command of the ship.

SH: Now, was he given rank as an officer?

CD: Yes, he was given a rank then. If I recall, he was ensign. I'm not really certain about that, but he was in charge anyway, I know that. [laughter]

SH: You said that he was no longer in charge once you went overseas. Did you have a new captain come onboard, or how did that work out?

CD: No, he was in charge overseas, too.

SH: So, each amphibious group on the LST was commanded by an officer such as yourself?

CD: Yes, there were two amphibious officers onboard. There were normally ten or eleven officers onboard an LST, and we had a complement of about 125 men total. … As I said, there were navigators and stores officer, executive officer, captain, and the engineering officer took care of the engines, and so forth.

SH: When you weren't involved in a landing, the hierarchy of course would be the captain then the engineer and navigator. What was your duty when you weren't actually making a landing as the amphibious officer?

CD: Well, basically, training, and we would be standing our watch duties, every four hours on and eight hours off, while underway, taking care of the small boats and equipment. We didn't do an awful lot of landings, at least I didn't. We were only involved in three or four landings, and most of those were after the D-Day, as opposed to the European landing, the French coast

landing. By the time I got out there, a lot of the bigger battles had been already landed, and fought, and won.

SH: Let's back up a little bit and talk about your time in Mississippi here. What was the typical day like for you? Your ship had been delivered, and now you're training. What was your shakedown cruise like? Where did you practice and train? Please walk us through that.

CD: We really didn't have too much training after that, so far as landing goes. What we got was at Fort Pierce, Florida, but more of our training was raising and lowering the craft, getting into the boats, crews, and making sure the supplies were sufficient there, and, I guess we landed probably a few times over in the Pacific islands there, just to practice, more or less, of lowering and raising the craft, as that was a challenge with the ship rocking, and so forth. … The crews, they had their chores as well aboard the LST, and they had to do their share of painting, and chipping paint, and so forth. I guess they worked in the galley on occasions, too. We didn't have an awful lot of work while we were underway. It was a fairly serene effort then, until we got out in the Pacific.

SH: From Biloxi where did you go? Map your route for us if you could.

CD: Biloxi to Gulf Port to New Orleans to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and then the Galapagos Islands**.** I just looked at the map. Unfortunately, my orders don't have any locations in them. [laughter] They just have numbers, ship numbers and so forth, but I have a map here, and I don't know how many different islands we hit, but we were more of a, should I say, supply and cargo, than we were actually landing.

SH: Did you go through the Panama Canal?

CD: Yes, Panama Canal.

SH: Did you go through as a convoy? Were there a lot of LSTs going through, or you went alone?

CD: We went alone. We were pretty much on our own once we left New Orleans.

SH: Before we talk about the Pacific, can you tell us, did you have any leaves or memorable occasions keeping your crew together, or getting your crew together, or anything like that?

CD: You should mention that; it brings back one memory. The officers, there were ten of us onboard, and we had two black stewards that did our cooking and serving in the officers' quarters, and it was down in the Panama Canal, where we had stopped, and we were anchored out before we really went through the Canal, or maybe it was on the other side, but one of these little black stewards jumped ship. They picked him up eventually. He said, "But I cannot swim," he says, "I'm not going to go over." [laughter] So, I don't know what had really happened to him. I think he was brought back into the Navy, but he didn't come back onboard ship anyway. He had enough from New Orleans to Panama Canal. [laughter] He wasn't about ready to go to the Pacific.

SH: Did you get a replacement then?

CD: I guess, because we had two stewards all the time. That's the only one that I remember that jumped ship like that because he couldn't swim.

SH: Where were the people from that were on your ship?

CD: Oh, pretty much all over the country, yes.

SH: Were their ages pretty much the same, or did they vary?

CD: Oh, yes, varied from the chief petty officer, I think he must have been probably in his fifties, and the captain he was probably in his fifties. We had a chief petty officer, who was in charge of the crew downstairs, and he was a lifetime Navy man, and a few others were regular Navy, but most of them were on the younger side, and new to the war effort, enlisted.

SH: What was your battle station?

CD: At the small boats, we had two on each side. I have some pictures there that showed the LST, with four small boats, landing crafts. We called them small boats, because they were small compared to the overall ship, just like lifeboats, that's what they were, also lifeboats as well as landing craft.

SH: Did you have any thought that you would have wanted to go on something besides a small amphibious crew like this? When you were in Notre Dame, did you have visions of being on a battleship or carrier?

CD: Not really. I didn't really know what was going to come about. … I guess with the Navy, you more or less follow the command pretty much, and at that time there was no big idea that I wanted to go on a battleship or cruiser, aircraft carrier, or whatever. I went with the flow I guess.

RS: So you really didn't have a choice; the Navy said, "We need these guys here."

CD: That's what it amounted to, yes.

SH: You said you went to the Galapagos, then where did you go? Do you remember anything about the crossing of the Pacific? What did you do for entertainment or what did the men do?

CD: We stopped at the Galapagos and, I think, we must have picked up some supplies or something. I don't know. I do remember most every island, the natives would come out to the ship, we'd be in anchor at the bay, and they'd be begging for cigarettes, or whatever. They could come out with their outriggers and there were some of them came out for illicit reasons, too, I think. [laughter] Over in the Philippines, in particular, I remember the women would come out and tie up in back of the ship and some of the fellows would climb over the back of the ship.

RS: Just to say hi. [laughter] So, when you weren't on duty on the ship, what did you do to pass the time? I've read many people played cards on ships and just read books.

CD: There was some card playing. We didn't play too much of it in the officers' quarters, but I know they did. Oh, we played a few times when the Army came onboard, where we were involved in taking them to some island, or some landing. It wasn't a real bad life. We ate pretty good, and we had movies onboard most every night, or every other night, and take them and trade at land bases, if we were in port, and, I guess, reading. We had music onboard. Time seems to have gone pretty quick. When I stop and think back, we didn't really have that much to do. We didn't do any great deal of training overseas.

SH: Where did you get your supplies, your fuel oil and like that? Land based or from other supply ships?

CD: Mostly oil from supply ships. Well, even food from the Navy supply ships, but occasionally, they would be from land-based supplies. We had a doctor onboard our ship, which most LSTs didn't. Not that we were a hospital ship, but, I guess, maybe one out of every flotilla had a doctor. Doc didn't have too much to do. I guess, we were pretty healthy, so every time we got to a port or anchorage, Doc would take off for land and he would scrounge everything he could from the Army, and I recall one episode when we were around the middle of the South Pacific, hot as blazes, and, lo and behold, the Doc comes back with a half a dozen sheepskin coats that were warm enough to keep warm in the Artic, and I don't know why he got them, but he did, anyway. But that was his passion and I had more Army shorts than I did Navy shorts, only through Doc. He was a character.

SH: What about the weather and how did that impede your ability to get supplies, or practice, or train, or whatever?

CD: We got our food supplies, basically, through refrigerated ships and we had a freezer onboard, and, as I say, we ate fairly well, I would say compared to the Army. We had fresh eggs and meat. Vegetables weren't necessarily that abundant all the time, but if we had a supply ship, we ate pretty good for a few days.

SH: How were your cooks?

CD: They were pretty experienced. We had a chief petty officer that was in charge of the galley, and they put on a fairly decent meal for us. As a matter-of-fact, I'm kind of glad you people came up now, because it made me gather some of my material together that I really had forgotten all about, and I have a menu there that they put out for our Christmas dinner, back in 1944, I guess it was, and having a list of all the officers and all the men that were onboard, plus the menu for the day, and it brought back some memories to me that I had completely forgotten about. I think you met my daughter, Nancy, who was the one that was instigating this whole thing, and last time she was here she saw that and she says, "My God, you have something here that you got all the names." Unfortunately, I have no further contact with any of them now that they were all over the country, and I wonder whether any of them are still around, living, and

where they are. I should go on the Internet, not that I do, but I thought it would be interesting at this point.

RS: Concerning the general atmosphere of the ship, did you guys all get along? Were there any altercations?

CD: A few episodes like a cohort from the amphibious training that was onboard the first ship with me had an unfortunate episode. He proceeded to go out on deck smoking a cigarette after dark, which was taboo. Everything was curtained and sealed off, no lights whatsoever, and this captain, who was the chief petty officer, caught Joe, and Joe just walked out nonchalantly, being new, smoking a cigarette. He wasn't court-martialed, but, he may well have been because he was confined to his quarters for, I forgot what the time element was, but he was a ninety day wonder, along with me. So, I was smoking at that time, too, but I never went out on deck with a cigarette in my hand.

RS: It seems that a lot of people smoked.

CD: Yes, I guess, at that time, Ryan, it was more or less the thing to do.

RS: I've heard a lot of accounts where guys said they never smoked before, but the minute they went in the service several started smoking.

CD: And I think that's where I picked up this habit, too, drinking coffee. There was a pot of coffee on twenty-four hours a day, and when you were on watch you took your coffee up on watch with you.

SH: Did you ever sight any submarines when you were on watch? What was the most exciting thing you saw on watch?

CD: I didn't sight the submarine, but we had one episode. We generally traveled in convoy, with maybe nine to twelve LSTs, and we would have one destroyer escort with us, following us, as we were not a fighting ship. We had some aircraft guns onboard, small ones, but so far as being able to sink a submarine, that was out of the question, unless we rammed into it accidentally. [laughter] I don't think we would have even sunk that, as we would have probably run over it. We were a flat-bottomed boat. LST was for landing on the beach. But we did have one episode where the Japanese submarine did come up on the surface, and fired a torpedo and got a ship across from us. The destroyer escort missed him, somehow or other, and that was a moonlit night. But, I never did see the submarine and I don't really know what the overall outcome was, but we don't stop for that, we just kept going, we have to just keep on going. But, he did get an LST, as I said. We were surprised that they would even waste a torpedo on an LST, because we were, basically, supply and cargo ships.

SH: Were there any survivors, or you just had to keep right on going?

CD: There were survivors, but we kept on going. I don't think the ship was lost completely, but it was damaged to the point where it did not follow us.

SH: When did you first take on any of the Army troops to deliver to another place?

CD: We took on more Australian troops than we did American troops. When we took on American troops we were basically moving them from one location to the other, but we did take on many Australian troops.

SH: Where did you pick them up?

CD: You know I was looking at the map; again, I'm not really certain, it was a little town on the east coast of Australia. I remember going through the Barrier Reef there and I'm assuming it was Townsville, but I'm not really certain whether that was it or not. It was not Sydney or Melbourne or any of those. We did pick up troops there.

SH: Did you go ashore at all when you got there?

CD: I do recall going ashore in Australia, yes. We were there for a couple days and I recall eating, having jackrabbit for dinner. We took onboard rabbit as a meat supply. Wasn't too bad.

SH: When you took the Australians onboard, how did it work out with the officers of the Australian forces?

CD: Well, we got along fairly well, and they stayed up in the officers' quarters with us and, as you mentioned about card games, I think there were a few card games. I'm getting ahead of myself here. After the second ship I was on, we were a bridge-playing group on our ship, so there would be four officers always that were off duty, out of the ten, so we used to get together and play bridge quite a bit. There would be one or two officers on duty, and the rest of us would be off.

SH: When you left the Galapagos, you headed down towards Australia at that point?

CD: There were so many different islands that we hit there, and a lot of them we were moving from one to the other, taking off one island maybe jeeps or equipment, and moving it to another one, and so forth. I wish I had mapped out my actual route.

SH: You are answering very well, thank you.

CD: We stopped at several islands there, and I remembered some of the names, but in which direction or sequence I don't remember fully.

SH: Basically, you were going into an Army type of base and taking their equipment to other locations?

CD: Most of the time, yes. We did make a few landings while we were out there, but most of it was in the Philippines. But my first real base, that we stayed at for any length of time, was New

Guinea, Hollandia, and that was a jumping off point for a lot of the islands. We did not make a landing at New Guinea, but that was established already when we got there.

SH: Can you tell us a little bit about what you saw when you got to New Guinea, as that was the first base that you came to, where there had been fighting going on?

CD: Yes, before we got out there. We were basically anchored out in the bays and areas adjacent to where there was a lot of the fighting had gone on, but we got ashore. But they were basically Army bases there. A few of them had naval bases, naval supplies, but, as a whole, I think most of all these islands had Army bases.

SH: When you're going to a base like that.

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO----------

RS: This continues an interview with Casper Deschu on October 25, 2002 in Flemington, New Jersey with Ryan Smith and Sandra Steward Holyoak.

SH: Please, talk about the interaction that you had with the different natives, and how your men came on shore, if they did and that sort of thing?

CD: You ask me that question, Sandra, and it reminds me of one time that we had in New Guinea. I guess, it wasn't all bad. We had a chief petty officer in charge of the galley and when you're off duty we would go ashore and the chief petty officer would bring some frozen steaks and build a fire, and we ate pretty good. [He] grilled steaks for us, might be a half a dozen of us that were off duty… You can't beat that, up in the middle of the Pacific, so the war wasn't all firing guns and sinking ships. The natives, they were quite friendly, and they demonstrated how they went fishing with hand grenades. They would throw a hand grenade into a pond and the fish would come floating up. … They would have their dinner and we had our steaks. We really had no problems; at least I never did, with the natives there. They were quite friendly, and they were not coming right onboard ship, but they never did cause any problems that I know of.

SH: Were you given any orders not to fraternize with the natives?

CD: I can't say that we fraternized with them. When I say grenades, I'm sure they got them from the Army, who were based there, and the Navy, we didn't have grenades, but they showed us how they fished.

SH: How relaxed are the officers and the men on the LST? Was there still a very rigid division between officers and men, or with a smaller ship like this was it little less rigid?

CD: I would say it was less rigid. We were not running around saluting every time, or anything like that, but we kept our distance. They had their quarters and we had our quarters, but I would say, off hand, that it was much less rigid than it would have been on a battleship.

SH: How spit and polished were you as an officer, and the crew? How often did you have inspections?

CD: On board the LST, it was not the spit-and-polish at Notre Dame. It was all spit-and-polish when we're being indoctrinated into being an officer. If you couldn't see your reflection in the shoe, well, [however,] out in the Pacific, they didn't care whether you have shoes on, or not.

SH: Was your dress code also relaxed, I mean, you talked about wearing Army shorts more often than Navy shorts? Was it relaxed for all members of the crew officers and enlisted men?

CD: When I say shorts, I meant under shorts, khaki as opposed to the whites. We didn't wear shorts, really. We had our work uniforms, which were gray uniforms, gray pants and shirts. We didn't wear any whites or dress blues in the Pacific at all. I don't know, maybe when we got to Pearl Harbor, or something like that, on the way back.

SH: The first ship that you were on went to Holland in New Guinea?

CD: Well Hollandia is in New Guinea, that's where the base was, yes.

SH: Do you know where you went from there?

CD: Most of our time was spent in the Philippines. We went to several other islands over all that time, but I can't recall all of them. … I sometimes wonder if I was the only one or if there were others in my same situation. I wonder how we won the war. I say it was a year before I was called, and then, my transfer from *LST-667* to *454* took another three months.

SH: Why were you being transferred?

CD: I'm not really sure why. Whether they needed somebody else, at any rate I got orders to report to *472*.

SH: Are these within the Pacific?

CD: This was in the Pacific, yes.

SH: The Philippines at this point?

CD: It was around the Philippines, but it could have been any number of places, that I don't recall. My orders tell me all the ships that I had gone to, but they don't tell me where I was, and I only bring this up because I was three months, traveling, trying to locate my ship. … I would go to one port; in the meantime the ship would take off for another port, I have a chronological order here, only to find out when I got near the ship that it had been torpedoed and sank. So, fortunately I never did catch that *472*. … Then it took another month, I got new orders and chasing the ship, the *454*.

SH: When you say chasing it, how do you get onboard another ship to go to the ship you have been assigned to?

CD: I must have been on five or six different ships trying to catch up with the *454*.

SH: Do you have your chronology there?

CD: Yes, I do. I was on the *395*, well, that was going to the *472*, which was the one that was sunk, lost in action. … I was on *LCI-972*. I was on the *LCI-709*, these are all for a matter of a couple of days to a couple of weeks. … I was on several land bases waiting for it to come in and it never did come in. … I say if everybody was like that, they would never have won the war. I was on the USS *Charles Loomis*. [I] reported to a land base, the commander of the Seventh Fleet. … I went on *LCI-1003* and I reported Naval Base 3149. I don't know where it was, but probably someplace in the Philippines. … I was on *LST-466*. I went on another one, *590*. … I finally reported on the *454* on March 14, 1945 and it was over three months that I was changing ships and getting new orders in between that time. Only to get on the ship, *454*, one afternoon, early afternoon, and I don't know how it ever happened, but I had two bags of mail on that ship before I got there. Mail got there before I did. My parents and girl friend had sent boxes of cookies, in the meantime, and they were nothing but crumbs. So I had a full afternoon reading mail I hadn't gotten for a few months. … Lo and behold, at a movie that night in what we call the lower deck, where the tanks and jeeps are loaded, we're watching a movie and I had the worst pain in my gut come up and it turned out that I had my appendix acting up. … I was packed in ice that night, the next morning I was shipped off to an Army hospital, had my appendix removed, and I go, "Oh, here I go again." But fortunately, after ten days I was put on a hospital ship to wait for my *LST-454* to come back and it did. I was really tired of traipsing around, living out of a bag, and so that I reported back to duty after about ten days.

RS: As you were going to all these different places trying to find your ship or trying to catch up with it, did you run across any other Rutgers graduates? Was there anybody from around your area by any chance?

CD: I did run into a brother of a brother-in-law out in one of the Pacific Islands at a Bob Hope Show he was putting on. … Charlie was a Rutgers graduate before I; he was more of my brother's age. I can't say offhand that I ran across any other Rutgers men that I knew.

SH: Because you're only temporary, trying to get to another station, what would be your duties when you were onboard?

CD: Some of the ships I did stand watch for them. It gave me something to do anyway, besides eating and sleeping, but I really had no assigned duties and, I guess, the captain asked me to.

SH: When your appendix acted up were you at anchor in the bay near the Army facility?

CD: Yes, we were in the Philippines. I don't recall what island in the Philippines, but I recall we were anchored and they took me into the Army hospital, tent hospital, there.

SH: Did you think you had good care?

CD: Yes, I seemed to recover quickly and I was fortunate that everything went fine. … I was released and the LST had gone out to another chore. I don't know whether they went to any invasion, but I don't think so. … They came back in and I was on the hospital ship there for a day or two waiting for them.

SH: Which hospital ship? It sounds like you were pretty well recovered after a couple days. What did you do on the hospital ship and what did you see?

CD: I think I was only on there overnight. They shipped me out there to get me out of the Army hospital, I guess, into the Navy ship, the USS *Refuge*. They gave me a physical probably and said I was fit to go back to duty. Then, the next day, the *454* came back in.

SH: Which of the LSTs were you on when there were landings?

CD: Actually, they were all on the *454*, yes, that we had any landings.

SH: That would have been in the early spring of '45?

CD: Yes. I don't really have that, locations of them, here, but I do have, oh, we made several of them in the Philippines, but they were only one or two of them that were D-Day and they were not really major landings. We did make landings on Leyte, if I recall, at D-Day +9. At some of the smaller ones we made D-Day landings, but they were not really that combative.

SH: What about air cover and the Japanese Air Force?

CD: I only really recall seeing Japanese, and I think it's the only time that the ship ever fired at anything, was at Leyte, when the Japanese came over. … There were many other ships in the harbor at that time and I don't really know whether they got them or not. We did fire, I seem to recall, but I don't know that we ever came anywhere near that because there were a lot of bigger ships there. That was the only time I can say that guns were fired outside of practice range.

SH: You talked about the Christmas dinner and the formality of the card and all that, were there other holidays that weren't celebrated quite as gloriously, so to speak, as this?

CD: Yes. I don't think there were any others that we had. … I guess, I was in Pearl Harbor, on the way back, on New Year's Eve, but that was all on land. … Other holidays, I don't even know whether we recognized them or not.

SH: While we were changing the tapes we talked about Borneo, were you involved in that?

CD: That I was, one of the few that I made a D-Day landing with all the training we went through in amphibious forces; that one I also recall the aircraft. They pulverized the beachhead before we even went in and I have a few pictures. The palm trees look like sticks standing up where the beachhead was just blown to bits before we went in.

SH: Would you make more than one landing? Would you have time to come in and off load and then go back for another run?

CD: In a small craft we just went in with the personnel on D-Day, dropped them off and went back to the ship once the Army secured it. They had overhead aircraft, but I can't imagine what European D-Day was like compared to this smaller operation. We carried pontoons on the side of our LST where we couldn't get into the beach far enough to get the equipment off. … Any jeeps or tanks or vehicles, they waited until we got the pontoons in, to the shore, and then they would go off. The Army personnel, they would be taken in by small craft.

RS: The few D-Day landings that you say you made, do you feel that your training had come through and paid off?

CD: Yes, I think probably it did from the standpoint that we knew a little bit about what to do if we hit the bottom before we got there, and so forth. … We didn't want to ride up on the beach where we couldn't get off. With the LST, we never really went in D-Day itself. I would have been really a little more concerned to beach ourselves and not be able to get off, but I guess there were some, but we never did on our LST.

SH: Did you feel that this crew you were with that they were confident?

CD: I think so. I was there at the last half of the war. … What they had to go through in the first half with the Solomon Islands and Iwo Jima, I was out there, but we were not involved in it. There must have been a lot more shooting and firing going on, battles, than what we saw.

SH: Of the people that you took ashore, did you ever see any of the officers that you said were part of your wardroom? Did you ever connect with any of them again or see anybody after?

CD: After the service, no. The only one I really had connection with for a while was the Captain, Dave Morrison.

SH: When you had US Army personnel onboard and officers, what was the interaction between those officers and the Navy officers. I mean, were they compatible, were they combative?

CD: No, I don't think we ever had any combatives, that I recall. They ate with us and they were pretty much part of us there, and the enlisted personnel they were in the crew's quarters and we got along quite well.

SH: What was the most interesting cargo that you carried?

CD: Oh, I recall when we went into Leyte several days afterwards and our main cargo there was this airstrip metal grid that they laid down on the beach for aircraft to land on. That was probably the most interesting thing because we were there for a few days while they unloaded and also laid the strip and there were even some planes that came in at that point that we saw. We were sitting right on the beachhead. I don't know where the planes went to, I guess, carriers

probably before the strip was laid down and they were, basically, Navy planes. The airstrip was laid down for the Army.

SH: Was it Seabees putting these down?

CD: Yes, Seabees were quite common.

SH: Did you ever transport any of the Seabees and their equipment?

CD: I think there were Seabees involved in that. They took charge of the loading and unloading. We really did not do the loading or unloading that much. We took the personnel with us that used the equipment, jeeps and tanks, and we didn't carry too many tanks, a few smaller ones.

SH: Did you, as an officer in the US Navy, ever have an embarrassing moment?

CD: Oh, we had some fun there. We were onboard ship and, of course, a few of the people were old Navy people and we were polliwogs, they call us, whether we're officers or enlisted men. … Crossing the Equator, we had our heads shaven and you had to be addressed as "polliwogs," or some minor thing. I have a diploma over there that they gave to me as having crossed the Equator and I was given a subpoena and a few charges that were ridiculous things. So we had some fun adventures, as well as some serious ones, too.

SH: So, you're a member of the Shellback Society?

CD: Yes. I had that even framed, but I never hung it up, but it's still framed from fifty years ago.

SH: It must be quite an undertaking for a kid from New Brunswick, New Jersey to be all over the South Pacific.

CD: Yes. I never knew about that until it happened that these things are tradition with the Navy, which everybody goes through them.

SH: Did you encounter a typhoon or any unusual weather?

RS: Yes, like the weather, what was that like?

CD: I do recall one typhoon that I think we spent about three days avoiding it. We had very, some very rough weather out of it, but we went far out of our way to avoid it, someplace out there in the Pacific I recall, the Coral Sea or one of them. … Anyway, it was a very severe storm that they kept radioing, "Do not get into it."

SH: How much were you kept aware of what was going on in Europe? You said it was nothing like the D-Day in Normandy. Were you aware of that before or after?

CD: I don't think I was aware of it at that time. No, that was all past history. I've heard about it over the years now, but I wasn't aware of it. We were trained for amphibious, but we were evidently just too late to make it to the European Theater, at that time … we didn't really know that they were going to have that invasion in Europe.

SH: As an officer on an LST, did you keep track of what was going on in Europe or was your focus on just the Pacific, where you were at the moment?

CD: I think we're pretty much in the Pacific, because I don't really recall. It's mainly through history now that I know more about Europe than I did at that time.

SH: Did you ever feel that the supplies and the manpower and the equipment, were being led to the European Theater more readily than they were the Pacific Theater?

CD: I don't think I ever said we didn't have the equipment we needed.

RS: Is it true that there is a science to how they would load the LSTs, or how they would usually put jeeps and everything in the back? Then, did you still do that with not being part of the invasion force?

CD: There definitely was a science to it, but, again, the Army really called a lot of the shots on that because they were the ones who are going to be using it. We went in and said, "Here you are, boys, take over you're the one who's going ashore." Even with the personnel sometimes I felt guilty, in a sense, that you take them in and drop them off, and you put your boat in reverse and pull your stern anchor and off the beach you go and back to the ship. The Army, they had to go in and trudge through the sand, and the mud, and find a place to pitch their tent, I guess.

SH: What about the Marines? Did you have any interaction with the Marines?

CD: I don't think we had too many Marines on; there might have been a few with the Army. I don't recall, in the Philippines, I know we made a few D-Day landings there in lesser islands, Cebu and Mindanao. … That came up in the news here not too long ago, that Mindanao is where the terrorists were weeded out. We went in there, but if we had gone in for D-Day landings more, I'm sure we'd have more Marines.

SH: When you transferred to the other ship in March of '45, you were then onboard that ship, when the war was over in Europe. Was there any reaction to that on your ship?

CD: We heard through the radio. The *LST-454* was one of the original ships that were built, so that was an older ship, and we didn't even have radar. The *LST-667* was one of the newer ones and that had radar on it, but we had radio communications within our own flotilla, and we heard of the atomic bomb, but I don't think we really knew what the atomic bomb was at that time or until later on that day, or the next day that it was a catastrophic bomb that was dropped. We didn't realize what had happened.

SH: Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when the word came that the surrender was in fact going to happen?

CD: I think we were underway and in a convoy, probably to go pick up another load of something, and I don't know that we were diverted then or not.

SH: Was there any celebration?

CD: I think after the war there was probably some high fives maybe, and what not, [laughter] but I don't think we quite realized when the first bomb was dropped anyway that the war was going to end. But then after the second one, when we got word, probably some jubilation and particularly by a couple of the older officers like Dave Morrison, the captain, he was not a regular, but he had been in earlier on and I guess soon after the Armistice, the Navy announced that if you had a certain number of points, you were going to be released, and Dave was married already at that time, and so I'm sure he was happy knowing he was going to be released. I think was V-J Day +9 that we went up into the Tokyo harbor at that time.

SH: Really?

CD: Yokohama, yes, and, of course, at that time we knew what was going on already, the Armistice had been signed.

SH: What were your orders at that point then?

CD: I don't really know why we were sent there other than perhaps it was the show of force. We didn't carry anything that I know of. If I recall, we were in the harbor. We never docked, we never had anything unloaded.

SH: Did you go ashore?

CD: We did. We went ashore a couple of times. I think we were there for probably four, five days. I don't remember exactly.

SH: So you were in Tokyo Bay.

CD: Yokohama Bay, yes, but we went ashore and we're pretty much free to come and go around Tokyo. I have a receipt there from a restaurant where we went into and had dinner in Tokyo and pictures of the bombed out buildings. Some of the liberty I recall being on was an overhead train running around Tokyo. We weren't really restricted and didn't have any problems with the Japanese at all. So, I don't know what the reason was that we went in other than a show of force. Maybe we were nearby, in the Philippines, and MacArthur said, "Let's go in and show them that we're still alive."

SH: In some of the photographs that we have here, your ship is transporting Japanese prisoners. Can you tell us how you came to have Japanese prisoners of war onboard?

CD: All these pictures here were taken with Australian Army personnel guarding Japanese captured Army. There were quite a few Australian in that those Philippine invasions. They had them in confinement on the islands, and we took them to centralized locations where they had prison camps. … As a whole, we had no problem with them, whatsoever. I think, they were as happy as a pig in mud to be onboard. They got three square meals, and you gave them a hammer and put them on deck to chip paint. … I don't recall any uprisings whatsoever, yes, and they were all Australian personnel that were guarding them.

SH: Was this well before the war was over, that you were transporting these Japanese prisoners of war?

CD: Yes. I don't think we carted any of them after the war.

SH: How did the men treat them on the whole?

CD: I don't recall we had any animosity on either part, their part or our part. They were in separate quarters. They weren't free to just roam the ship at all, but they were served their meals and were taken out on deck in the air and we had no problems at all.

SH: Considering the experiences that you had, how long were you in Japan, and did you have many points? Were you ready to come back home at this point, because you have been floating around for a very long time? [laughter]

CD: I was floating around for two-and-a-half years, but my time didn't start really until I went to Notre Dame. I was not on active duty before that, even though I was enlisted for a year. No, but Dave Morrison, my captain, and the executive officer, they had been in the service for a longer period of time, so Dave had points enough to get out while we were in Japan. … Anyway, it was just a matter of a few days or weeks, a couple weeks I guess, and the executive officer, he was moved up to captain, and I was moved up to executive officer, and Dave went home. … A couple of weeks later, O'Neil went home, and I was moved up to captain. So, that was completely out of the clear blue sky. I went from a lowly apprentice seaman at Notre Dame to captain of the ship. The war was over at that point. So I did have responsibility of the ship all the way home after we left Japan.

SH: Did you cross with a bunch of people or ships or did you crossed alone?

CD: No, we came alone. We did stop in Guam on the way back and we had two Christmas days because we crossed the International Dateline there, all thirty-six hours of it. … We spent New Year's Eve in Hawaii. Then we came back *via* California, San Diego, and down the coast back to the Canal, and decommissioned the ship at Charleston, South Carolina then. That was the last function that we had, to decommission the ship. I had accumulated over two-and-a-half months of leave at that time. While I was out there, I got no leave at all. I forgot what the schedule was, how many days per month, so, I was kind of rich when I came home, I thought at that time. … I was able to get married and bought a car when I got home. But, the cars were so unavailable, at that time; all I could get was a 1929 Buick Roadster, off a used car lot. [laughter]

SH: Was your wife from New Brunswick as well?

CD: Yes.

SH: Before we move out of the Navy, one question; How well behaved was the US Navy man?

CD: They were fairly well behaved; my biggest problem, when I was captain, was on the way home. Today, I guess it would not even be considered, but one of the chief petty officers was found in bed with one of the seamen. At that time, it was a big [deal], today, I guess sixty years later, probably not, but they were court-martialed for it and I don't know what happened after that.

SH: Were they court-martialed once you got to the West Coast?

CD: No, I think that was out there someplace. It was in Hawaii where it became evident. We didn't do court-martials onboard ship at all, they were put ashore.

SH: Were they put in the brig on the ship until you got to…

CD: They were court-martialed there and I'm not sure what came about after that. That was unusual in those days; maybe it was happening a lot more than we knew about. Otherwise, I can't say that the personnel were any big problem.

SH: Was there ever any thought in your mind to stay in the Navy and continue with your career?

CD: Not really at that point. They had offered enlistment in reserves, but I didn't pursue it. I got my discharge and after my leave was up in June of '46, I got released altogether, detached completely.

RS: You were talking about points, and how to get out, how did you accumulate points? Was it just a matter of how much time or how long you were in?

CD: I think basically that's what it was, but I'm not sure whether marriage had any bearing or maybe children, but it didn't affect me at all, but I know Dave was married and I don't think he had any children at that time.

RS: It wasn't how many landings you have made?

CD: I don't recall that. I didn't get released on points, I just got released because the war had ended and we got our ship back and decommissioned. The only other episode I recall was back in Charleston Harbor, there in [Cooper] River. We were decommissioning the ship when one of the freighters that was tied up broke anchor and drifted into the bridge and did some damage to the bridge, and it was one of the main arteries going down South. We only had a handful of people and so many of our responsibilities were suspended, and one of them was, I guess, my doing. We weren't keeping logs anymore, all the weather reports that you had to do every hour, and they came onboard looking for our log. We had no log.

----------END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE----------

SH: You were talking about being investigated and not having a ships log. Did this lead to any repercussions to you as captain?

CD: Fortunately, not. They maybe felt sorry for us at the time because there were only a handful of us left, and we didn't have much of anything left on the ship anymore.

SH: Were you still living onboard?

CD: We were living onboard, the few of us. I don't recall exactly, but there might have only been ten or twelve of us left, all the equipment was removed anyway, and getting ready to put the ship in mothballs up in the Cooper River, where there was a whole string of LSTs tied up, … so, the ship was being readied to be towed up there and decommissioned.

SH: Where did you go from there?

CD: From there, I went to New Brunswick, New Jersey.

RS: Prior to reaching the Pacific, or even prior to going to Notre Dame and starting your training, did you have any expectations of what the war would be like or what you would actually be doing?

CD: I really didn't know what I was doing, I'm not even sure why I joined the Navy, but I thought I wouldn't be trudging around the mud, and maybe a cleaner life and, if anything was going to happen, I wouldn't even know about it with being out on the water. … I always, even to this day, I like the water. I still go swimming. [laughter] No, I didn't really anticipate what was going to happen to me at all.

SH: Were you discharged right from Charleston?

CD: No. I was actually discharged in New York, three years and ten months later, same place I signed up, 33 Pine Street.

SH: Your brother was he involved in the military?

CD: No, John, my brother, he was married and had a couple of kids already at that time, so he was never called.

SH: Could you just walk us through your life since your discharge, please?

CD: Well, after my discharge, I was married before my discharge. I went to work, my brother and I, we had a dairy lab in Bound Brook. … We operated that dairy lab. We were doing bacteriological work for several dairies in the area from the Shore up to North Jersey and we pursued that for, I guess, about ten, twelve years. … Then my brother had the opportunity to go

manage a plant in Heightstown, where Ryan said he was from, and I had the opportunity to go up to a plant in Easton, Pennsylvania. So we gave up the lab at that point, and I worked up in Easton for two years and came back down to New Jersey, New Brunswick and Bound Brook, and started working here in Flemington in 1957. I commuted for about five years and bought a place in Flemington here and worked at Johanna Farms as director of quality assurance and retired from Johanna Farms in 1986, after twenty-nine years there. Florence and I married in 1985 and I've been here ever since. Never regretted retirement. [laughter]

SH: Could you tell us about your family before we end the interview?

CD: I have three children, all college graduates, two from Rutgers, and none of them had any children, so I have no grandchildren and I always kid Florence I married her because she had grandchildren and some great grandchildren already.

SH: Have you stayed involved with Rutgers?

CD: I have to a certain degree, my class, anyway, the Class of '44, we've been quite active yet and I think Rutgers should start paying me a salary because I've been to three football games in the last three years and they won everyone of them. [laughter]

SH: There may be something to that.

CD: Of course, they have all been homecoming games.

SH: I thank you very much. Can you think of any questions that we didn't ask or any stories that you would like to tell us before we end?

CD: Just off hand, without going into further detail here, I think that covers my uneventful career in the Navy. I'm thankful that I never caught the *LST-472*.

SH: What kind of an impact do you think World War II had on the man that you are today, or the man that you were in the '50s and the '60s?

CD: I had forgotten pretty much about it. I don't think about it probably near as much as the people that were in Vietnam or the Korean War. I think we more or less took that for granted, that it was something that had to be done in those days, and I don't know that there was anybody ever in my association that regretted or said, "Gee, I wish we hadn't gone." But it was just more or less, a foregone conclusion that we had to defend the USA from this Japanese attack. Whereas today, I think there's a lot more hesitancy in war, which I feel that way, too. We don't want to have to go to war again. Maybe if it came down to it I guess with the World Trade Center bombing, certainly I have felt more or less that, yes, something has to be done there.

SH: I thank you very much, this was a delightful interview.

CD: Thank you and you made me reminisce on some of my experiences that I had forgotten about.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by David Whitman 3/21/05
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 04/06/05
Reviewed by Casper Deschu 6/22/05