

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN C. DUNBAR

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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John Eiche: This begins an interview with Mr. Norman Dunbar in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on May 17, 2003, for the Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II with John Eiche. Mr. Dunbar, we would like to thank you for taking time to come talk with us. I want to start by asking about your childhood and where you grew up?

Norman Dunbar: I was born in Concord, Massachusetts. I don't remember any of that. My father was a clergyman and, ultimately, he had a church in Norwich, Connecticut, and I do remember living in Norwich. I remember going to first and second grade in Norwich. Then, he took a church in Flemington, New Jersey, and that would be in 1928, I think, and I remember, of course, living in Flemington, because I went all through the public schools in Flemington, Flemington grammar school, Junior High School and High School. [I] graduated in 1939. I had applied for [a] State Scholarship at Rutgers, which was granted, and, in September of 1939, I started at Rutgers and was taking the engineering course, mechanical engineering. Back track to the time in Flemington, I remember, ... in the '30s, the terrific snowstorms that we had and the cold weather and how, in those days, Flemington was a real farming community. People still had horses and I do remember, one winter, one of the locals took his team of horses and a double-runner sled, pulled by the horses, to take food out to [the] farmers that lived outside of town. I remember tagging along, with my sled hooked on the back of his sled, and that was quite an experience, which I still remember. There's not much to say about public school. It was typical, I guess, of so many. I started at Rutgers, as I said, in [1939]. Oh, yes, the Lindbergh trial in Flemington, I remember that very well. Airplanes would come out to a field outside of town to pick up the reporter's reports or whatever they called it. There were no tape recorders in those days and the town was quite bustling with all the people that came in. I can remember standing up on the sidewalk alongside [of] the jail to ... try to look at [Bruno Richard] Hauptman and trying to look in the courtroom and so forth. So, I do have vague memories of that.

JE: What year was that?

ND: What year was the Lindbergh trial?

Jacqueline Dunbar: In the '30s.

JE: You said you came to Rutgers on a scholarship. Do you remember which scholarship that was?

ND: As I recall, it was a New Jersey State Scholarship. It paid for, in those days, the tuition and the general fee. The tuition was two hundred dollars and the general fee was 143 dollars or something like that. It did not include room, board or books. I do remember, that freshman year, my father was very adamant that I keep financial records. He did. He kept his own. He could tell you, on such-and-such a date, he spent six cents for two three-cent stamps to mail a letter. I didn't go that far, but I did keep records. I do remember that, [during] the first year in college, my total expense for room, board and books was 340 dollars and that included dates, cigarettes, as well as room and board.

JE: That is a far cry from what students pay today.

ND: Yes, that would be like one day. Then, I had to work summers, of course. My father didn't get that much money as a minister and, between high school and college, I worked for the government on the Dutch Elm Disease Eradication [Project]. Between the freshman and sophomore year, I started out on that, but they had reduced the number of hours and they sent me way up to Poughkeepsie, New York, for five days work. I got sick of spending almost all I earned on living up there. So, I quit and I went to work for a tree surgeon. I worked for him ... the rest of the year between freshman and sophomore [year] and between sophomore and junior year. I have to stop and figure [out] what the years were, but you can figure that out. At the end of the junior year, well, I know that was in 1942 after the war was declared and the college decreed that engineers and, I guess, chemists and ceramic guys and some of the others, ... I guess we were told [that] we had to go to summer [school] and we would graduate come spring of '43. So, I borrowed another 150 dollars from the Flemington Rotary Club and started in on the senior year and I was bound [and] determined I was not going to get drafted. So, I tried to enlist in the Navy, but I couldn't pass the eye test. So, I went to Newark and enlisted in the Army Air Corps and that was in October of '42. I was not supposed to be called to active duty until into '43, but, at the end, in December, I guess it was, of '42, I received orders to report to Boca Raton, Florida, and this was before graduation. I don't even remember taking final exams. So, I said, "Bye-bye," to the college and took off. There was one fellow in my class, and I can't remember who it was at this point, [who] went ahead of me, but, I was the second guy from the class, ... well, from the engineers, at least, to go on active duty, and so, now, we're in the war, too. I was at Boca Raton and I went to New Haven, to Yale, where they had the technical training. In August of '43, I was commissioned and went around several places in the States and ended up in Buffalo, at the C-46 school, in October, November, somewhere along in there. At the completion of that course, I got orders to go to Miami Floridian Hotel for an overseas assignment and, from there, I went to India. It took five days to get to India by plane. When the war was all over and I came home, I came home by plane to Karachi, and then, by ship and it took five weeks and five days. [laughter]

JE: I want to back track and ask you about your father. Did he have any memories about World War I and the Depression?

ND: Yes, he was at Colby College when the war ... [broke] out and he got drafted, even though he was a ministerial student. They didn't recognize it, because it was of the courses that he was taking, I guess, at Colby. So, he got drafted and he ended up as a second lieutenant in the infantry. It had nothing to do with his aim for being a clergyman and, after the war, he finished his schooling and got his degree from what then was known as [the] ... Newton Theological Seminary. Now, it's Andover Newton ... and he was very ecumenical-minded. [Editor's Note: The school is now called the Andover Newton Theological School] Well, he ended up in Flemington and he had church there until he was seventy-two and they told him he had to retire. He was active not only in the church affairs, but he was an active commander, more than once, of the American Legion. He was secretary of the Masonic Lodge for twenty-five years. I joined that same lodge and, now, I'm rambling, aren't I? ... He was active in the American Legion. He was a founder of the Hunterdon County Medical Center [and was part of] one of the groups of people that founded that. He was an organizer of the local ambulance squad. ... He was a Rotary Harris Fellow. [Editor's Note: The Rotary Harris Fellow organization was founded by

Paul Harris. Members are referred to as Paul Harris Fellows] ... You name it in Flemington and he was there.

JE: Yes, it seems that way. Did he go overseas in the war?

ND: No, he was not overseas in the war. He was at Camp Devens [in Massachusetts], Fort Dix in New Jersey, and Fort Lee in Virginia and, as far as I know, they were the only three, without going back and looking in his records, which I may or may not have.

JE: What do you remember about growing up in the Depression? How did the Depression affect you?

ND: Well, there wasn't much money, although he [Mr. Dunbar's father] was paid regularly and probably [made] something like twenty to twenty-five dollars a week. I can remember not buying a whole coal bin full of coal but buy a ton at a time. We ate regular. We weren't starving, by any means, and a lot of the parishioners, I think, helped out. It was not near as tough as, I think, my wife's time during the Depression. Her father did not have a regular paycheck.

JD: Basically, everyone was in the same boat.

ND: Yes. If I had an allowance, it would be twenty-five cents a week. You ... could go to the movies for fifteen cents or twenty-five cents. I didn't go to many movies and, I guess, as a PK, [preacher's kid], I was a terror in town. I was in a lot of trouble, but not serious.

JE: What kind of trouble were you in?

ND: Oh, sassing the teacher and being sent home from school and fighting with other school kids, some[what] different than today. [laughter] The teachers didn't come out and break it up and have the police come over and haul you in. I don't know. It's just the way it was. I know that's what you want me to tell [you], how it was. I had a bicycle. It was given to me, [a] brand-new Iver Johnson, ... by a friend of ours, who was a banker in New London, Connecticut. I rode that. I got it at age twelve, which would have been in 1933. Then, in the war, the Second World War, my father used it, riding around Flemington. Of course, that was only ten years later, wasn't it?

JE: Did he ride that to save gas because of rationing?

ND: Yes.

JE: While at Rutgers, are there any experiences that still stand out sixty years later?

ND: I worked for a tree surgeon when I quit working for the government at their Dutch Elm Eradication Program and he was a son of a gun. I liked him, but he was tough and we worked ten hours a day, six days a week, forty cents an hour, and I think that would amount to something like twenty-four dollars a week and, of that, I probably saved twenty dollars of it. That's the

only way I could make it in college, except to borrow money, and borrowing money, [if you] borrow one hundred dollars, gee, boy, I mean, you're going [to be] into debt up to your eyeballs.

JD: You [held] jobs while you were in college, so, you did not have a lot of extra time.

ND: Yes. I had a job in the mechanical lab, setting up stuff that had to be set up prior to experiments, lab things that we did, students did. I did maintenance in the lab, our power lab, in the auto engine. We had a big old steam boiler, coal fed and, I think, [I] shoveled, as I recall it, and there were machine tools in the machine shop and I worked on those, ... cleaned and scraped and painted. I guess that's where most of the money I earned at school [came from], which wasn't a heck of a lot, and I don't remember what they paid, fifteen cents an hour, twenty cents an hour or something like that, but I learned a lot. I didn't object to it, but I didn't have much time. So, I didn't enter into very much in the way of extracurricular [activities]. I was manager of the 150-pound-football team, I guess, all four years. So, that only went through the fall, but I managed to get behind in my lab reports and that always was a tough thing to get caught up [on]. I lived off-campus. Yes, ... the first two years, I lived in rooming houses or whatever you want to call them. The first one was up by Phi Gamma Delta, across the street at Mrs. (Reinhart's?), I think that's her name, and she was a doozy. Another fellow from Flemington by the name of Norman Cary, a year ahead of me, ... he and I and another guy (Joe Keating) lived on the third floor. I had a single room and Cary was in with Joe and Cary wanted to have a private room. So, we just traded rooms. [We] still paid Mrs. (Reinhart?) the same money and, at midterm, which is what you call between first and second semester, we were notified that we were kicked out of there. We were out of there. Mrs. (Reinhart?), that was her name, did not like not being told [about] this. So, we went down and we took a room for the second semester, both of us, along with a fellow from Newark, Moesher, I think it was. The house was right opposite the [New Brunswick] railway station and we were on the second floor, which was right opposite the railroad tracks. The first few nights, you hardly slept with all the trains going through, but we survived it. The next year, ... I had a room over, I don't remember the name of the street. [It was] off campus, with Mrs. (O'Rourke?) and that went fine. Then, I guess, the junior year, I was in a dormitory, but, [in] the summer, I don't know why it was, I had a room in a fraternity and I don't remember which one, don't even remember where it was, for the summer, but I remember the summer of '42. It was hotter than hell, and then, the second semester was at the quadrangle. Is that what you call it now? We went by it today and I said, ... "I think that's one of the buildings," but it's so different that I couldn't tell. ...

JE: Is it the Bishop Quad, near Bishop House on College Avenue?

ND: I think so. Yes, that sounds familiar. You can see it from the bus route that we took today that goes by the old gym [on College Avenue].

JE: Yes. It is catty-corner to the old gym.

ND: Yes.

JE: Okay. That is the Bishop Quad. You mentioned that you had worked on the problem of Dutch Elm Disease.

ND: Yes.

JE: How did you become involved with that? What sort of work did you do?

ND: Dutch Elm Disease Eradication was actually what I was involved with. It was a job that I heard about and applied for. I lied about my age and I was always crazy enough to do crazy things and what I ended up doing was climbing trees, elm trees that had the symptoms of Dutch elm disease, and cutting a sample out. Then, the sample was sent to the lab and the lab would say, "Yes, it was Dutch elm," or, "No, it wasn't," and, if it was, another crew would go out and cut down the tree and burn it. I did that for the summer of '39, and then, I was not involved with the cutting or burning or any of that. It's just what they called, at that time, "scouting" and ... we, the other guys that were involved with this program, I think we looked at every elm tree, we were supposed to have, anyway, ... in Hunterdon County. That was fifty cents an hour and it was eight hours a day, six days a week. That was a good job and I enjoyed it. Then, that kind of put me in line to get the job with the tree surgeon, the nursery man. After being up in Poughkeepsie and quit, [I] came home and worked for George Bloomer. He was a character.

JD: He kept his climbing rope for years and years and years, until just a few years ago, when he and a friend used it when they were taking down a tree in our yard. The friend was on the end of it. He pulled and it just went right over his back. The rope separated and, [after] all these years, [you would think] he'd say, "This probably isn't safe." [laughter]

JE: You mentioned that you were called to active service immediately before graduation. Can you tell me a little bit about your training?

ND: In Boca Raton, we were given, essentially, a repeat of the first two years of ROTC. So, that part was a breeze and we had, then, to learn some of the stuff about [the] Army Air Corps. Of course, Rutgers was infantry at that time and we had some basic, I remember, aircraft identification and that sort of thing. Then, at Yale, it was a technical training, which had to do with aircraft electrics, aircraft structures, aircraft hydraulics and that sort of thing, plus, the constant drill and, well, I guess that's essentially it. It was an extension of basic training, and then, after being commissioned, I went to a whole string of assignments, Bates Field in Mobile, Keesler Field in Biloxi, Randolph Field in ... [Texas]. Then, I went to Curtis Field at Buffalo Airport. Now, it's actually Wheatfield Airport, [near] Niagara Falls, that area, where they made P-40s and C-46s. I was being trained on [a] C-46 cargo plane, which was a Curtis design [from] just before the war. I've forgotten how many of them were made. That's in a book at home, but most of them ended up in North Africa and India and that's where, of course, I ended up, in India.

JE: Did your two years of ROTC at Rutgers prepare you for your basic training?

ND: We just did it once, so, we did it again at Boca Raton, essentially. [laughter] I know, in ROTC, we had map reading, but I don't think we had map reading for the Air Corps part.

JE: Did you take part in the Army Specialized Training Program?

ND: No. That was one of the questions on the thing I filled out the other day, like paratrooper [training], ... no, none of those.

JE: You mentioned that Yale University was one of your assignments.

NE: That was the second part of the so-called basic training, which involved technical training. No, [there are] quite a few in the class that went to Yale, [but] none were in my group. Dick DeSante, who is big on this reunion, who just broke his hip, I think, I know he was there, but I never saw him. He was in [a] different section, different group.

JE: It was a big group.

NE: Oh, yes. There were hundreds, I don't know how many hundreds, but, ultimately, we ended up being commissioned. Dick, as I recall, got commissioned before I did, because he didn't have to go to Boca Raton. ... The idea was [that] they [would] send some down to Boca Raton, send some to Yale and the ones that were at Boca would come up to Yale and the ones that were at Yale would go down to Boca, but they got shorthanded in the war, and so, they scrubbed going to Boca. Dick DeSante got commissioned before I did and, yet, I was the second one in the class, I think, to go on active duty; so, let's go to India.

JE: You were sent to India. What was your assignment there?

NE: I landed in Karachi and, after several days, some period of time, I went up to Assam, which [is] in the northeast corner of India, and was assigned to an air base called Tezpur. I only was there for a couple [of] weeks, maybe. I don't remember doing very much there, other than one [assignment]. I had one assignment to go out with a sergeant and some Indian coolies and re-bag bags of wolframite, which, is tungsten ore, which when the planes came back; I didn't say any of this. To give you a preview, Assam was the big area where all the planes started from to fly the Hump to keep Chiang Kai-shek in the war and get all these supplies to China. The planes would go over, of course, loaded, and then, come back empty and many of them were nose-heavy. So, to keep the plane with a better flying characteristic, they would put ballast in the tail end and the ballast was burlap bags of wolframite.

JE: Really?

JD: Which was heavy.

ND: Yes, it's dirt. It's ore, metal ore. Well, they would be unloaded and stored in an area and, in Assam, it's one of the wet places of the world. Mold grows like crazy and the burlap would rot and the ore would spill out. Pretty soon, you have a pile of wolframite, I think it's wolframite, ore and a bunch of rotten bags. This was to go to Russia, and so, this first assignment with the sergeant, I don't remember his name, was to go out and re-bag wolframite. Of course, we had a piece of paper that said there were umpteen hundred bags at fifty pounds a bag or whatever. It was pretty obvious that we weren't going to get that many bags of wolframite. So, some of that wolframite got mixed; change that. So, a whole bunch of Assam

dirt got mixed up with the wolframite to get the weight on these bags up, to go by truck to somewhere, I suppose up to Afghanistan. I don't know. I mean, that was beyond my assignment, but, anyway, those poor Russians got gypped on their ore. Well, after a short period of time, I was reassigned to the largest airbase in Assam, called Chabua. In Chabua, ... my principal assignment was, I was weight and balance officer. My job was to make sure that planes were properly loaded and that the correct, not too little, not too much, cargo weight was put on the planes and [that] it was stowed properly to keep the plane in balance and it was properly tied down, anchored or whatever, for the trip over the Hump. I was there from whenever that was, the spring of '44, until after the war was over. Things went, I think, quite well. I had, I think it was, probably four enlisted men assigned to me and I trained them, so that they could do everything, practically. So, I had the opportunity to volunteer to go on some other assignments. I can look in these papers. In April of 1945, I, along with, looks to me like thirty other officers and as many enlisted men, were sent on temporary duty to K'un-ming, China, to ... move Chinese troops down to Chekiang, which is on the coast south of Shanghai, I think. I never went to Chekiang, ... and, after two or three days, I was transferred over to Chanyi, where I was, I guess, [for] a couple of weeks, supervising the loading of horses and mules in C-47 aircraft for transferring down to the coast. That was very interesting and didn't those planes stink and it was quite an experience. We would load them on and I think it was like six to a plane, four or six, but we found out, when we put them in, [we] put the head of the animal forward, and then, put a timber right behind his hind legs, right tight up, so [that] he couldn't kick. Then, there'd be two more in back of him. There must have been four and another timber up. So, that turned out to be an interesting experience. I took some pictures of it and, of course, the government confiscated them, but, actually, after the war, they returned them.

JE: Really?

ND: Yes. That was in April. ... Then, when I got back from that, I was a stickler to go and volunteer for something, especially if it did [mean] a change of terrain and stuff. I volunteered to participate in a convoy of trucks, weapons carriers, jeeps, trailers and .105-mm howitzers to China over the Burma Road. So, I took my section of twenty-five prime movers and whatever trailers and drove the Burma Road. [We] dumped most of the stuff off in Kunming, and then, went on for a couple more days and I don't remember that part of it. I remember the trip, [but] I don't remember what it was for. So, that was a little different experience. The Ledo Road was a road built in out of the jungle, the mountains and stuff, from Ledo, which is a town, down to [an] area near Myitkyina, where it joined up with the old Burma Road, and then, they called the whole thing the Stilwell Road. I guess I'd been over there a year when I had some leave time coming and, of course, I'd been writing to my father. It seems that his college roommate, a fellow by the name of Dr. Gordon Gates, was a professor at Judson College in Rangoon, Burma. When the war broke out, he sent his wife out to India, and then, he stayed on until he had to leave and he walked out of Burma to India, not with Stillwell, but by himself. He ended up in a Methodist college in Allahabad, India. I got his address from my father and I ... and my buddy there, John Cross, applied for ten days, or something or other, leave to go visit Gordon Gates in Allahabad, India. We ... flew to Gaya, I guess it was, or Agra, I don't know which now, [and] got the train down to Allahabad. That was quite an experience, with wonderful hosts, and they showed us around, but they were quite religious people, of course, as a Baptist college. John and I went off to the Allahabad British fort there on a Saturday night. We probably got bombed and

the fellow that had invited us had already been transferred out, but we had a very enjoyable leave. [laughter] That's about Gordon Gates, then. Gordon Gates was the world's authority on earthworms and earthworm study. He had, I guess, in Rangoon, the combined libraries of the two previous earthworm or worm authorities, but all of that went bye-bye with the Japanese occupation, because all he took out was what he could carry on his back. He had his microscope [and] he took that as far as he could and he finally left that. Later on, toward the end of the war, he had a letter from somebody [that] said, "Would you like your microscope back? I found it [at] such-and-such a place and I'll see that you get it. If you want it, tell me where to get it sent and I'll send it to you," and he got his microscope back.

JE: Really, after all that time?

ND: Yes. So, there were some honest people back in those days, yes. So, anyway, when the war was over and I had enough points to get returned, ... I flew on back to Karachi and waited two or three weeks at Malir, I guess it was, out in the desert, with terrible food. We couldn't even get a case of beer, because, up in the valley, we'd be lucky to have two or three cans in a month, but we guzzled a lot of beer. Finally, [we] got on the [USS] *General A.E. Anderson* and came back through the Red Sea, the Mediterranean [and] ended up at Pier 50 [or] 51, whatever it was, [the] famous pier in New York. [Editor's Note: Mr. Dunbar is referring to Pier 50, Chelsea Piers, in New York City] Then, [we] came out to Kilmer ... and we stayed there one night and went to be, supposedly, phased out. They said, "You don't belong here. You belong [at]," I don't know whether it was McGuire, then, but, "Fort Dix." Oh, yes, that's right. We went to [Fort] Dix, Captain Diamond and I. He was from Philadelphia. I don't know his first name, never talked to him since. I don't know the day of the week really. We went to be checked out there and [they said], "You don't belong here, you belong at McGuire." "Okay, get us a jeep or get us over there." So, we got over there and, ... as I recall, it was Armistice Day, Sunday, and the base was essentially shut down, except for [the officer] in charge of quarters and the guards on the gate. "Well, this is for the birds. We're not going to sit here." The bar wasn't even open. So, he's going to Philly and I'm going to Flemington. I didn't have what was called then a Class A uniform. All I had was khakis, two pairs that I had been wearing for five weeks. I didn't even own a necktie and I'm going to go up to Trenton and get on the bus and go to Flemington. I got to the gate and, of course, the MP [military police] says, "Lieutenant, you can't go off base dressed that way," and I said, "Well, Sergeant, I haven't got anything else and I'm going off base and I'm going to Trenton."

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ND: I've forgotten the conveyance from the base, but he asked me how ... I would go and I said, "Well, I'd go to the bus station," which is not too far from the train station. So, this gate guard, ... he was okay. He says, "Well, Lieutenant, I'll tell you what. You get on the bus and you get in the back and you stay seated and you stay as much out of sight as you can. This bus that you're going on will go to the railway station, and then, it will go to the bus station. At the bus station, you get off, get your ticket and you stay out of sight as much as you can to get to the bus to Flemington," which I did. Nobody stopped me. I got off the bus in front of the house, which is right next to my father's ministry there, and church was just letting out and, I guess, they were pretty well shaken. They didn't anticipate my arrival. I don't know whether they even

knew I was [coming]. They must have known I was coming home, because it took five weeks to get there.

JE: Had you written ahead saying that you were on your way home?

ND: Probably, oh, yes. Well, I had written, "I guess I'm out of here. I'll be home some time." Then, shortly after that, I went back to McGuire and checked in again and they gave me orders to go to Newark, which is where I had enlisted, and I would be discharged from Newark, which I was, end of [the] war.

JE: Where were you, what were you doing and what do you remember about the day Pearl Harbor was attacked?

ND: It was a Sunday, December 7th. I was at a girlfriend's in Philadelphia and I was down at her house. ... Well, I think we kind of anticipated that, sooner or later, we're going to get in this war. [We] didn't know it was going to be like Pearl Harbor. [I] got on the bus and came back to the campus and we proceeded with classes and so forth. Everybody talked about it and [said], "I guess we're going to get drafted," or, "We'll go enlist," or whatever. I don't remember a great earthshaking thing other than, "Yes, we ... [have] a war now and I'm going to be in it."

JE: Was anything out of the ordinary happening in Philadelphia?

NE: Oh, everybody was talking about it, just like the 9/11 towers in New York. [Editor's Note: Mr. Dunbar is referring to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City.] Everybody talked about it, but they still went along [and] did ... whatever they had to do. I don't remember anything special. I don't even remember V-E Day, don't even remember it, ... and V-J Day was when they dropped the first bomb, or is it the second bomb, on August 7th?

JE: The 6th and the 9th, I believe, and the Japanese surrendered on the 12th or the 14th. [Editor's Note: Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, and May 8, 1945, was declared V-E Day. The first bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945, on Hiroshima. The second bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945, on Nagasaki. Japan surrendered on August 16, 1945, V-J Day.]

JD: I remember more about D-Day than I do V-E Day, you know, because everyone was anticipating the invasion.

ND: I don't remember a lot about that, other than when it happened, and I think it was after the fact, because ... we had our own little war there. Everything was local that we had to do.

JE: Since everything was localized, what was that experience like for you?

ND: The big project, of course, was cargo and people to get over the Hump and that was the everyday effort. There would be some periods, ... I don't remember the time, where the command, the high command, decided, "This is the day we're going to make one maximum effort and get the biggest tonnage over the Hump that we ever have." Of course, that day, I

think, the weather turned bad and they lost a lot of planes, I can't put dates and numbers on it. The everyday effort, we read what we got in *Yank* Magazine. That was the paper. ... It was *Yank* [Magazine] and it must have been *CBI Roundup*. No, that's the present one; well, anyway.

JE: What was the Hump that you were sending the supplies over?

ND: The Hump was a mountain range between northeast India and China. Well, of course, Mount Everest is part of it, but we were not [there]. That was north and we were flying not north. We were flying, basically, east, but the Hump, the mountains were up to as high as, I think, twenty thousand feet. In the early days, we had to fly south, to go over some of Burma, and that was occupied by Japanese. So, there was always the danger of getting intercepted by Japanese fighters. As the war progressed and, I guess, into mid or certainly late '44, the Japanese didn't have any air force there and ... I think we upped the cargo allowance on the planes, so [that] it could get more over and we got trained better. Everything went better, but, anyway, it was a high-altitude thing and, if you didn't get up enough, didn't have enough altitude, why, you could run into a mountain. The weather was terrible a lot of the time, storms, winds, updrafts, downdrafts.

JE: There were a lot of weather-related problems in that area.

ND: Yes, and there are books written about the "Aluminum Trail," which is the trail down there. [Editor's Note: The route was called the "Aluminum Trail" due to the number of crashed aircraft which were scattered through the high mountains.] They're still finding wrecks over there. I get a monthly magazine, I guess one would call it, where they tell about where they found another one, *Ex-CBI*. (CBI being China-Burma-India) *Roundup* was the paper and, now, it's published privately. They keep this thing alive, I guess.

JE: Were most of the supplies you were sending out going to support the Chinese Army?

ND: Well, there were two, yes. The Chinese or to China, ... the China Theater, and, early on, in '44, we were pushing stuff down into Burma. The Japanese got pushed farther and farther back toward Rangoon and, when the road was opened up, that was supposed to eliminate the need for flying everything, but we still flew a lot of stuff into Burma. When the Ledo Road was opened other stuff went to Myitkyina. I had an assignment one time of supervising the loading of six-by-six GMC two-and-a-half-ton trucks and road graders and bulldozers in planes. Most of it had to be cut apart with [an] acetylene torch and re-welded when they got down there. You could take a truck apart and get most of the six-by-six truck in, but, if you had a road grader, you had to burn it apart.

JE: You actually had to take the bulldozers and the heavy equipment apart, cut it and reassemble it.

ND: And then re-weld.

JE: You had to cut it.

ND: Well, it was done by the Engineers or Ordnance or whoever was furnishing stuff, [it] would have been the engineers, and then, another group would put it back together down in Burma. My job was to see that it was properly loaded and stowed on the plane and [to make sure] the planes didn't get wrecked, because, after all, they're only made out of aluminum. When you've got to drag a bulldozer blade in, you're not going to drag it up the floor. You've got to put something down to make sure, otherwise, you, you know, wreck the planes.

JE: While you were in India, did you have any interaction with the local population?

ND: Well, I went on that one leave that went to Allahabad. We were pretty much free to come and go amongst the Indians. We had an Indian bearer. He was a houseboy, or whatever you want to call him. I didn't have to shine my shoes. They weren't shined anyway over there, [but he] made your beds, swept your room and that sort of thing. He was a nice guy. I've forgotten his name now. I did know [it] at one time. We'd go into town once in a while, go to the Chinese restaurant for [a] steak dinner, which was tough water buffalo.

JE: Were the Indian people generally friendly and receptive to you?

ND: [I] didn't have enough contact with them as such to really say. Of course, ... as I read about it, they were very much interested in independence, so, there was an underground thing going on, but we didn't get involved with that. Up in Assam, it was way out in the boonies. It wasn't like Calcutta or Delhi or even Karachi. Of course, Karachi isn't India anymore.

JE: You never had any problems.

ND: No.

JE: After you were discharged and sent from Camp Kilmer to, I believe it was Camp Dix at that time...

JD: No, it was Fort Dix. It was Camp Dix in the First World War and Fort Dix was in the Second [World War].

ND: Oh, yes, you're right, you're right.

JE: After you left Fort Dix and went home, did you ever join the Reserves?

ND: No, I decided, "I [have] had enough of this for a while. Don't call me, I'll call you," and I never called them back. I guess I was reserved, but I was not called for Korea and it's long ago, just gone.

JE: What did you do after you got back from India and settled back into civilian life?

ND: Well, I taught substitute teaching for a while in the local high school, and then, I went to work for Western Electric in Kearny, [New Jersey]. I stayed about six months, but I had two Masonic affiliations. I had made contact with a production superintendent at the Roebling Wire

Works in Roebling, New Jersey, and he arranged for me to have an interview and I got a job with Roebling and I quit Western Electric. [I] went to work for Roebling and I worked for them from '46 to 1962, [the] end of '61. [In] January '62, I went to; by then, Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation. They had bought the Roebling Company and part of Colorado Fuel and Iron, CF&I as it is known, also included the Wickwire Spencer Plant. There were some in Worcester, Massachusetts, and a bunch out in the west; ... no, the ones in the west were not Wickwire. They were CF&I, pure and simple, but Wickwire Spencer also had a plant in Buffalo, Tonawanda, New York, which is near Buffalo. The same fellow that arranged for me getting hired got transferred out there as plant manager and he asked me if [I] would want to come up and be an engineer for him up there and I said, "Sure," and we moved to Buffalo. I went up [on] January 1, '62, and, by September of '63, it was all being shut down. 1,390 out of 1,400 people were given a pink slip and I was one of the pink slippers. Then, I went to work for Bell Aerosystems. They were working on the LEM project, which was the Lunar Excursion Module, and I was hired as a facility engineer. I didn't have anything, really, to do with the product, other than testing, and they took my engineering experience in the steel mills, buildings and equipment and stuff that would [be] helpful. My experience would be helpful to them. So, I worked two years for them. Then, I went to work for Morgan Construction, which built steel mill equipment in Worcester, Massachusetts, and I worked for them. I was assistant chief engineer for a machinery department until the fall of 1977 and they gave me, let's see, the expression is the Golden Finger. I left there, worked a couple of years for another local machinery builder, and then, I got a job with a metal processing plant in Gardner, Massachusetts. ... Oh, I forgot how we did that. We were in Buffalo, Tonawanda, North Tonawanda, when I went to work for Morgan. Of course, that's in Worcester, Massachusetts, so, it's a long commute. So, we moved to Holden, lived there a year, and then, moved over to Princeton, Massachusetts, while I worked at Morgan, then, a short time for another machinery builder, and then, [I] got this job in Gardner, Massachusetts, building the steel products that are used in office furniture, chair irons. ... So, then, when it came time to retire, I stayed on for about six months at Collier-Keyworth, and my best friend there was chief engineer and he got the Golden Finger. He says, "Out. You're out of here." So, if I stayed on and I would have stayed on maybe a whole year or so longer, I said, "Well, Bob isn't going to be here, [so] I'm not going to be here, either," so, I quit. I retired, and then, [that was the] end of the work career, really.

JE: You mentioned that you worked with the Lunar Excursion Module. Was that for NASA and the Apollo Missions?

ND: Was that Apollo? I guess. They hadn't been to the moon.

JE: That was the moon landing?

ND: Yes, and this was the engine, that would get the module off the moon again [and] back to the [Earth].

JE: How long did you work on that?

ND: Two years. I didn't work on the product. I had nothing to do with the product. They'd say they want to test this thing and they ... have to test [it] in a vacuum, because of the zero air

pressure on the moon. So, one of the projects I had was to ... obtain a humongous tank, air tank, which you could evacuate all the air out of, and put this thing in it and fire it and squirt water on it to end the test. [Then, you] provide the vacuum in it and the water in the water tank, ... I've forgotten the quantity of water, but it was like twenty thousand gallons that you had to have stored up, and then, pump in under pressure to force it in, under pressure. Although it was in a vacuum, you still had to move it through the pipes and get it in there. ... I don't remember it as that. Well, it was only for two years and, having done a lot of structural work in the steel mill, why, a lot of that schlepped over. I could do it here. They wanted me to stay, but I wouldn't stay. I went on to Morgan and Worcester.

Chabua Airbase was big, big, big. They had, what was called then, a colored squadron. They had their area and there were two or three other enlisted areas, [an] enlisted men's area and an officers' area, and they decided they would build a swimming pool. They can't build four or five at the same time, so, the officers got their pool first, naturally. Then, the war in Europe, I guess, must have ended and they decided, "Well, we've got to let the enlisted people use it, the facilities." So, I think it was once every week or two weeks, it would get drained and refilled with water. Well, the officers had first dibs, of course, and then, the white enlisted had the next bunch of dibs, and then, [the] colored troops had it the last day. Then, the water was dumped out. There was a lot of squabble with the Southern boys about even letting them use it, the colored guys. I didn't have any problem with that, because, as a matter-of-fact, for a short period of time, I was the adjutant for that colored group and they were okay. I didn't have any problem, because, of course, as an officer, I would deal with sergeants and the sergeants were okay and they [would say], "Don't you worry, Lieutenant, I'll take care of that." [laughter] It was fine, but that was an interesting sort of sideline. There was another one, when they built the officers' club, this is another experience, and, again, I don't remember. Oh, yes, it was in the winter, so, it must have been [the] '44-'45 winter. The only officers' club and they had big time celebration and we had Carew's booze, Carew's gin and Carew's rum, terrible stuff. Well, they were going to celebrate the opening of the new club at night, but a lot of us couldn't go at night, because we were working and because it was a twenty-four hour operation. So, the next day, after the big celebration, there were pilots and ground people who couldn't get out of bed and were puking and [had] diarrhea, terrible, awful. Well, the commanding officer got uppity, "You guys can't hold your liquor. Oh, shut that damn thing down," and, "We'll take care of you guys." Well, it turns out that I was one of the ones that wasn't there that night at all, because I was on duty. They had a little bit of celebration at noon, in that we had eggnog, and it was made with fresh eggs, fresh eggs from China, and what finally developed was that, in making the eggnog, they had dropped shells in and fished [them] out and they had paratyphoid germs on it and that's what we all got. It was so bad that they had to transfer some of our planes to other bases to keep them in the air, keep them working, and they hauled us off to the hospitals right and left and one guy died. I don't know whether he died of paratyphoid or something else, I don't know, but it was not a healthy experience, I'd say. [laughter]

JD: You have had a bad feeling for the Red Cross ever since.

ND: Oh, yes. Well, it was so short of supplies. We had a cot. We were out on the porch. We were given canvas cots with the cross legs and two blankets, two Army blankets or one, one or two, I don't know. The Red Cross came around and, ... because we had nothing, gave us [a] toothbrush, gave me a toothbrush, I remember him. He wanted it back when I went to the hospital. [laughter] So, I have a lot higher opinion of the Salvation Army. [laughter]

JE: You were far enough from the frontlines that you had an officers' club and a swimming pool and you could come and go as you pleased.

ND: Pretty much, yes. The air base was bombed early on. They'd get a Japanese bomber or two or three or something [to] come over and drop a bomb, but, after early '44, I mean, spring of '44, it never happened again.

JE: That is about when the Japanese were on the ropes.

ND: Yes, and the big thing with the Japanese war there, the last big battle was Mitchina and that's the one that there were so many people that are down on the commanders. Stilwell was still the theater commander and he had Engineers that had never fired a gun up on the lines, people, the Merrill's Marauders, which was a four digit, five thousand something or other, four digit. It had a funny title, I can't remember it now. [It was made up of] guys that had been wounded or were in the hospital or were sick and they sent them right back up [to] the front, long before they should have been. There's a lot of criticism on Stilwell and the commanders, commanding people of that, but, after that, after ... the Allies, Americans, essentially, and Chinese, secured the Mitchina, why, they kept pushing the Japs back and they kept retreating. So, I was at Mitchina, too, [and] another place [for] several days.

JE: Which one of your jobs after the war stands out as your most or least favorite?

ND: I guess, some of the early [ones], well, I don't know. I'd say the two long-term jobs had bad endings, but, at Roebling, working at Roebling was great, especially in the beginning. As it got toward the end and I went to Buffalo, things were kind of going downhill, I thought, under Colorado Fuel and Iron. I had some personality problems with somebody, and then, at Morgan Construction, ... I still don't know why I got the Golden Finger, really, but ... it was a very rewarding job. I just moaned about the hours because I was putting in fifty to sixty-hour weeks. I put in more fifty to sixty-hour weeks than I did forty-hour weeks in twelve years, but that was the nature of the job and I was devoted to it. I was going to get stuff done and so on, and [my] least [favorite], I don't know. The rest of it is kind of, whatever, not bad, not good, just a job.

JE: When did you meet your wife?

ND: Just before I started Roebling, wasn't it?

JD: His parents had a birthday party for him (in August?). They had a cookout and they invited the girl across the street and she had a houseguest and that was me and that's how we met.

ND: I was just quitting at Western Electric. I was still working there, but hadn't I already agreed to take Roebling? I don't know, I'm not sure.

JE: You were in the process of changing jobs.

ND: So, I lived in Flemington [and] commuted to Roebling. That was about thirty-eight miles, something like that, and she lived in Mount Holly and that was another fifteen [miles] beyond that. So, in dating her, I started Roebling in September and, [while] dating her, I had to be at work at eight o'clock in the morning. So, I'd have to go fifty miles from her, home, sleep, get up [and] get to Roebling by eight o'clock in the morning. So, I never dated her two nights in a row. [laughter] So, that was in September and, I guess, we were engaged in October [and] got married in January, in a snowstorm up in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. She's the same one all these years. How many years is that, fifty-seven, fifty-eight? [In] '47, 1947, [so, it has been] fifty-six years.

JE: That is wonderful, congratulations.

ND: We have two boys. One is a carpenter in western Massachusetts and the younger boy owns a boat yard, wood boat yard, in Brooklin, Maine, which is an area for wood boats, especially sail boats.

JE: Really?

ND: That whole area, particularly Brooklin, that part of the coast is wooden boats. ... When we lived in Princeton, Massachusetts, there was the town veterans' agent, which, I worked for the town, but I had to comply with everything with the State, bureaucracy, with a capital K, no, starts with a B, doesn't it? [laughter]

JE: Did you ever take part in any of the veterans groups, like the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]?

ND: I belong to the CBI, that's [the] China-Burma-India Veterans' Association. They have meetings. I don't belong to a post as such. In fact, there's only one in Maine now and that's way down in Portland and Portland is hundred-fifty miles. ... I belong to the American Legion and the VFW for thirty years. I belonged to the Legion right after the war, and then, I quit and resigned from it, and then, I joined when, oh, well, I'm a bagpiper.

JE: Really?

ND: And we were practicing in an American Legion hall, so, I decided the least I could do was join. Then, we began practicing in a VFW hall, so, I decided to join them for the same reason. [The] Legion [is] in Massachusetts, the VFW is in New Hampshire and I live in Maine.

JE: Can you tell me a little bit about being a Free Mason?

ND: At that time I joined, you had to be twenty-one and I was twenty-one when I joined. This was before; well, this is between the time I enlisted; well, actually, I joined it about the same time and, after the war, when I returned to Flemington, then, I became real active with them and became master of the lodge in 1955 and have been more or less active with them ever since. I was very active until we moved to Buffalo in '62. I keep saying Buffalo, but it's North Tonawanda. I have remained mildly active with them after that, since then, and, when I moved

to Maine, I became [involved] with [a] local lodge [that] really needed help. They needed people to come and do things and so forth and be participants in it. So, I now belong to a second lodge, not only the one in New Jersey, but one in Deer Isle, Maine. I won't take an active officer's job, but I'll go and help them with the projects they do and so forth. ... I have enjoyed belonging to the Masons. There aren't as many people now. They're shrinking, like all the rest of the organizations.

JE: Was there any way that your war experiences in India had an impact on you for the rest of your life or later in life?

ND: I can't really think of any particular experience. I have always had a high regard for the military. I don't always agree with some of the things that they do, have done, etc., but I have been very supportive of [the] military. In fact, being a piper, when we lived in Massachusetts, we were frequently called to Fort Devens to participate in retirements and promotions and stuff like that. They always want a pipe, like [for] funerals, they always want the pipes [and] at weddings, they always want a piper. [laughter] Anyway, back to the question in the military, I have never been sour on the military.

JE: You are at Rutgers today for your Reunion Weekend. Have you enjoyed yourself?

ND: Oh, it's been a lot of fun. I was quite reluctant to come, actually, because it's only six hundred miles and we drive it. It's as easy to drive it as it is to try to fly it. [laughter] See, I wasn't at graduation. I worked my tail off as a student and, after the war, I told you, we were married and all that. Things got pretty busy and, when I worked for the steel company, for Roebling, it was a lot of hours. So, I don't recall coming to a reunion until, I think it was 1968. It would have been the twenty-fifth. We lived in Princeton, Massachusetts, and I drove down in my Volkswagen Bug and I think it was only for the one day. I did stay overnight somewhere. I must have. Oh, yes, it was at my sister's, sure. So, I must have come over here for one day. I don't really remember a thing about the reunion and I haven't been to one since. Dick DeSante, who was in the next room to me in sophomore year, and he kept bugging me to come and then John Archibald, he got on my case and he kept writing to me and calling me, "Why don't you come? Why don't you come?" I finally said, "Okay, I'll come." So, here we are; we drove down. We left up there on Thursday and drove to our son's in western Massachusetts, and then, drove to my sister's yesterday, came over here today and, tomorrow, we're going down to Cape May. No, I've never been there.

JE: You will like it there.

ND: Then, tomorrow night, we'll stay down there, hopefully, and, Monday, we'll go back to Flemington and, Tuesday, we'll head back to Taxachussetts and, Wednesday, back to Maine.

JE: You had not been on campus between 1943 and 1968. Can you describe the difference between campus in the '40s and '60s?

ND: I don't know what to call things now, but where the old library [was], I don't know, was there another building? Is the engineering building, then, the chemistry laboratory and the cross

street below [the] back of the Silent Willie or the Seminary? [Editor's Note: Mr. Dunbar is referring to Silent Willie, a statue of William, the Prince of Orange, that has stood at the end of Voorhees Mall since 1928.] Then, there was the physics building, somewhere in there? I don't know whether the economics [building] was in there or something. I kind of forget. Then, there was nothing really between there and whatever the road is that the old gym's on. [In the] back of the gym, the parking lot was the drill field. There's a stadium, which I understand now is no more, which was first used when Rutgers beat Princeton for the first time since the first game in 1800 and something and Rutgers won in 1939, I think it was, and it was the first game in the stadium or something like that. [Editor's Note: Mr. Dunbar is referring to the first college football game, which was played on November 6, 1869, at Rutgers against Princeton University. Rutgers is considered the "birthplace of college football." On November 5, 1938, the day of the dedication of Rutgers Stadium in Piscataway, New Jersey, Rutgers beat Princeton for the second time in sixty-nine years.] We used to walk from here over to that stadium. That's how we got there. I don't remember any busses or anything. You had to walk. Well, the Old Queens ... and Kirkpatrick Chapel, ... and then, on the left flank of that was ... where Eisenhower had some stuff.

JE: Winants Hall.

ND: Of course, that was there. That was, essentially, the campus.

JE: That was the campus in the 1940s.

ND: '39 and '40, and then, on the corner [in] back of what was the library, there was another building, which I remember had a hydraulics lab in there. It had a swimming pool in the basement. That was used for the hydraulics. No, no, the swimming pool was over in the gym, I think. It must have been.

JE: There is a pool downstairs.

ND: Right, in the old gym. Well, that was the campus, as far as I remember. Well, of course, and there was the Ag School over at NJC [New Jersey College for Women], two miles [down the road]. Then, spotted all around were the frat houses. Oh, the Music Department was on the corner somewhere. I can't remember now where it was. The CT, there was a CT then, Corner Tavern was on the corner. [Editor's Note: The Corner Tavern is on the corner of Easton and Somerset Avenue.]

JE: Yes, I believe it is still there.

ND: It was on the corner.

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

JE: This continues an interview with Mr. Norman Dunbar for the Oral History Archives of World War II with John Eiche and Jacqueline Dunbar. Mr. Dunbar, you were describing the campus when you were here at Rutgers. You mentioned the Corner Tavern.

ND: Yes, but ... I didn't frequent it. It cost too much money to always buy beer.

JD: Tell them where you used to eat.

ND: Yes. I probably lived on two meals a day, because I guess I told you that I hardly spent any money, because I didn't have it. I ate at the Crystal Restaurant down on, what's the street that comes down from the railway past here, Albany Street?

JE: George Street is right here.

ND: Well, if you went down to the railway station and turned left and walked along that street, which would eventually come down, on the railway side of the street was the Crystal Restaurant, a Greek restaurant, and I used to go in there and I ate so damn many chicken croquets with gravy, mashed potatoes and peas and the guy that served it, I made good friends with him, because I could always get a second, big roll.

JD: That's where you learned to like liver and onions.

ND: No, actually, there was a fellow that worked in the lab at the college, in the mechanical lab, a machinist, and, on Thursdays, I think it was, he knew a place where he and I would go and we could have liver and onions, all we could eat. As a boy, I hated liver, but I sure learned to like liver when, for thirty-five cents, you could get all you could eat. Lenny, and I can't remember his last name, he went in the Army, was in Ordnance and was killed in an ordnance blow up. No, he wasn't a student. He worked for Mr. Low, who was the head machinist in the shop. You keep asking, "Who is my favorite professor?" I don't know, but I sure loved Lenny. I can't remember his name, so, I didn't ever put that down, but Mr. (Lo?), the machinist in the shop, he was one great friend, end of story.

JE: Can you tell us how the campus has changed since the late 1960s and what you see today?

ND: Big, big, big, out of sight. [laughter] Busses, oh, my God, the articulated busses that you have. I [had] never even seen those in the State of Maine. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mr. Dunbar is referring to the free, campus-wide Rutgers bus system.]

JE: Did they take you to all the campuses, Busch and Livingston in Piscataway and the College Avenue, Douglass and Cook Campuses in New Brunswick?

ND: I don't think so. We went over to the Grove of Remembrance [of the Class of 1943] and back.

JE: Did you see the campuses in Piscataway, across the river?

ND: Yes, we went across the river, but I don't remember any big campus; we didn't go by [any]. It's all construction, it seem to me. [Editor's Note: Mr. Dunbar is referring to the construction due to the Route 18 expansion project.]

JE: Once you went by the Grove of Remembrance, you are on the Livingston Campus.

ND: It seemed like we went in and came out, but, in '68, we did. The engineering building is over there, or it was in '68.

JE: Yes. That is across the street on the Busch Campus. A lot of buildings are over there.

ND: I really don't remember. I don't even remember much about that trip. I have a brother-in-law who was a student here after the war and he lived over there. He and my sister lived in the barracks, which were used after the war and we went in there, but, again, I don't remember a thing about it.

JE: Mrs. Dunbar, I understand you have a story about your Rutgers experience.

JD: Well, we live on Deer Isle, Maine, which is off the Blue Hill Peninsula. We have ... very good markets, I think, for a small community. In connection with that, there's a variety store where they sell a little bit of everything. One day, I went in and they had a bin full of red corduroy caps that said, "Rutgers," on them and they were only two dollars. So, they were a surplus of some sort. So, I bought one for my husband and one for my brother-in-law, but, while I was there, some women came in and they were looking at them and one of them said, "Rutgers, what's that?" and the other one said, "I don't know. I think it's some kind of beer." [laughter] That's my story.

ND: If I'd worn that hat instead of this, we'd fit right in with the red hats that they had today, [it] said, "Rutgers," instead of "'43."

JE: Mr. and Mrs. Dunbar, I would like to thank you for taking time out of your reunion weekend to talk with me. The Rutgers Oral History Archives would also like to thank your class for its generosity. Thank you very much for your time.

ND: You're very welcome.

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

Reviewed by Stephanie Darrell 11/23/04

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/3/04 & 3/16/05

Reviewed by Peter Asch 12/05