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Oral Memoirs
of
Joseph F. Murray

A Series of Interviews
Conducted by
Megan DeFries
April 9-April 29, 2017

Collection: Oral History Initiative
Project: Duquesne Veterans'

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Legal Status

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Interview History

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed in the offices of the Oral History Initiative (OHI) and University Archives, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: Megan DeFries

Transcriber: Lauren Eisenhart-Purvis

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Final Editor: Megan DeFries

Project Detail

The purpose of the Duquesne Veterans' Oral History Project is to record, preserve, and make available the stories of Duquesne's student and alumni veterans in order to highlight the many ways they have contributed to our country and to Duquesne University.

Joseph F. Murray [1921-2018] was a veteran of World War II, serving in the US Army Air Corps from 1943 to 1946. He attended Duquesne University following his service from 1946 to 1949.

Megan DeFries was the oral historian for the OHI.

Joseph F. Murray

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Megan DeFries
April 9, 2017
Home of Mr. Murray
Bridgeville, Pennsylvania

Collection: Oral History Initiative
Project: Duquesne Veterans'

DeFries: (papers rustling) All right. This is Megan DeFries interviewing Joseph Francis Murray, a veteran of the Army Air Corps. It is our first interview for the Duquesne Veterans' Oral History Project. It is Sunday April 9, 2017 and we are here in his home in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania [ed. note: Country Meadows Retirement Communities]. Also joining us today is Lauren [Eisenhart-Purvis], a graduate student in the Public History Program at Duquesne [University], and his daughter Mary Beth [Calorie]. How are you today?

[00:00:31]

Murray: I never really expected to be interviewed by people from Duquesne, but I'm happy that you stopped here to talk about a couple of things; maybe that makes me a little bit lighter in my feelings at times. I'm Joseph Murray, and I—I am a veteran of World War II. It's rather interesting because—not the war—war—wars don't solve anything; I think I learned that when I was in it. The—it was in 1942 that the Army Air Force—the Army Air Corps was a—not a typical unit. It was Air Corps—was an exponent of the army and the army guarded that very—the air force should've never been that and later became autonomous in itself. We have a situation where we finally knew that we needed a lot of personnel and trained personnel and that was in 1942, and the interesting thing about Pittsburgh in World War II is different things happened that. The old Baltimore and Ohio Station [ed. note: the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad Station] was now—is now a—at the other south end of the bridge.

Calorie: Um-hm.

Murray: What is that called now over there?

Calorie: Is it—is it the railroad station you're talking about—

Murray: Yes.

Calorie: —dad? It might be called the Grand Concourse. Is that—

Murray: (speaking at the same time) The Grand Concourse.

Calorie: Yeah, right. At Station Square?

[00:02:53]

Murray: (speaking at the same time) That was actually—actually an operating railroad. There accumulated because we applied—now I say we—men, mostly, because there were only a few women there, what they call WASPs [Women’s Air Force Service Pilots], Women’s Army [Auxiliary] Corps and there were a few men, about sixty of us, were accumulated on a particular day in Pittsburgh, here at the old army—not the—the old railroad station. Little did we know that the sixty were bound for California on a train, a Pullman. We arrived at Santa Ana, California where the military was being put together as a receiving station for personnel. We were given the basics that included the uniforms, some not fitting so well. But the matter of putting it together, when we arrived in Santa Ana [Army Air Base], which was about—oh, it was twenty miles away from Los Angeles [California] and from there on out, some basic things were tried. It amounted to the largest number were personnel were going to be divided into—after some paperwork—divided by cadets, aviation cadets. And those cadets that were designed there were put into three places: cadets for pilots and for getting them ready there at Santa Ana, cadets for bombardiers, who had some pilot training, and the other one were navigators. And we were sent to primary schools. Mine happened to be at a place out in Arizona and it was a place for cadets to be trained in biplanes. They were PT-19s [Primary Trainer airplanes], two wings, and we were given a pretty hasty course in primary training. Some people didn’t make it, they couldn’t quite get—I was lucky I had an opportunity that I knew I’d never had, although I had flown in civilian life.

[00:06:32]

When I was still apparently a kid, my father had a business of a gas station in a parking lot [in] downtown Pittsburgh and I worked for him. And so I was able to save enough money to come down here—and there was a man by the name of George Eckert and he rented airplanes—not military—and I happened to save enough money—believe me it wasn’t a whole lot—to go to George and say, “I’d like to learn to fly.” So then, Piper [Aircraft] then was in Eastern Pennsylvania and they had little airplanes that they built with some canvas and aluminum and they built sixty-five horsepower airplanes. I learned to fly. I—it wasn’t as dramatic as I thought it was, except on one time I looked up because when I came across the apple orchard and, I think, there’s housing down there. I was too—going too fast to get into the garden area where I was supposed to land and I— (laughs) I remember what George said, “If in doubt, push the throttle forward,” and I looked up at the throttle, and it had crept forward and that’s what had happened and [I] said, “You’re not going to fly me, I’m going to creep,” and that’s what happened to me. So in the next time around—I turned—the next time and made sure everything was neutral and landed, I think, at the landing speed of about sixty miles an hour, came in, and George says to me—he said, “For a while there I thought you were going to—for a while there I thought you were going to wrinkle that thing.” (DeFries, Calorie, Eisenhart-Purvis laugh) I thought George was very compassionate. (DeFries, Calorie, Eisenhart-Purvis laugh) That was my early experience in the air.

[00:09:15]

The military was different. They had different code, they had new—where we would train with—some movie stars had airplanes there. When Pearl Harbor happened, people—immediately they were cancelled, until they found out who the—may be the enemy because the United States had never been in a war since World War I. So to try to shorten this up a second, I went on to—to what they called bomber squadrons, who were—contained ten men, two of whom were pilots, one of the persons was a bombardier and one—I was a navigator. After some extensive training, I happened to be able to go on the crew that was sent to Santa Ana—not Santa Ana, but a place—Fairfield Suisun [ed. note: Fairfield Suisun Army Air Base, now Travis Air Force Base]—was on the Pacific Coast—and everything got worked out. And it was the—the navigation then was still pretty primitive. They checked if you had a C-47, if you wanted to fly to Hawaii, you better watch the gas consumption. Today, a child can fly an air—jet landing. We find our way into a squadron, an area called the thirteenth—the Thirteenth Air Force and I was assigned to that lucky thirteen. Flew from California to Hawaii, which was a big trip then because these were all propeller driven planes, and then from Hawaii we were sent to Guadalcanal, which was a horrible place. The Japanese had been murdered right and left by marines and the army. You could smell death everywhere; they couldn't pick the bodies up. And I had looked and I couldn't believe that the dashboard on the airplane on my side was sweating because it had been up to a heat and then cooled off, just like you take a bottle of milk and sweat would appear. So Mack, the other pilot, took a—and was wiping the thing off and we came in—in the approach to Hawaii without any further trouble because we had some work to be done, then on to Guadalcanal, which was a thing in itself, at a place called Koli Field [Airfield]. The Japanese had never gotten that far—that far south and we were assigned our position in the squadron.

[00:13:18]

There had been some nasty things that happened; we lost a couple of crews. We started to attack. The Dutch were great sailors, as you probably know, and the two islands that we were going to try to deny the Japanese from, one was called Truk, T-R-U-K, the other one was called Yap. Easy name to remember. Target of opportunity was Yap. We lost one plane on a bombing run and the rest of it we drew some fire and then we flew back to Koli Field. We did the same thing to track—Truk—and worked onward to what was called the Admiralty Islands [Bismarck Archipelago] and we used that as a base. Every time the strategy of the high command was to deny one island after the other so they couldn't get fuel and without fuel, you weren't going to do too many dramatic things. So we went on to—from Guadalcanal we went on to two more islands and the—we finally got to the Philippines, which part—the Philippines, part of them was the—still occupied by the Japanese. So we—we went on for operations in the Philippines and landed at a place called Samar, S-A-M-A-R, and the place [we] were able to stand up—that's where president—what was the president's name then?

Calorie: (laughs) That's a good question, Megan probably knows.

Murray: It's a big family.

DeFries: The President of—of the United States? Roosevelt.

Calorie: (speaking at the same time) The United States? Roosevelt.

DeFries: Yes, yes.

Calorie: Okay, I wasn't sure if it was Roosevelt. I'm terrible.

Murray: But the family that I was thinking about was—later became our president. He was—he was a young—

DeFries: Oh, [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy.

Calorie: Kennedy.

DeFries: Kennedy, okay.

Murray: Kennedy. He was a young submarine—

Calorie: Oh, right, in World War II.

Murray: Not submarine—

DeFries: PT [Patrol Torpedo]—

[00:16:28]

Murray: —boat commander and used our operation field. Now we had a—things became a little more difficult as time—the best, biggest flight I was on was a place called Balikpapan [East Kalimantan/Borneo, Indonesia]—these are all Dutch names—and Balikpapan was a long distance from Samar. In fact, my airplane was—had—the occupants had the—each personal guy had a presidential citation [ed. note: Distinguished Unit Citation during World War II, now the as Presidential Unit Citation] decorated, as we had the longest air flight that was ever flown in a B-24. And the reason I mention that is, Kennedy operated that when he was a young guy like me and Jack Kennedy was very, very—with the operation of I said submarine—it was actually these powerboats [Patrol Torpedo Boats]—they used the same facilities as—Balikpapan was an operation in itself. The longest flight, the Japanese had no idea that the—they took over Royal Dutch Shell and the Japanese had already taken that, so the high command said, “What we're going to do is bomb you until you can't see straight,” but they didn't see the—I remember the briefing that morning. We'd had a very meager breakfast. We took off at four o'clock in the morning, it was still dark, and we were on our way. We flew in a formation to get to a certain, what we called, initial point and that's where the whole flight turned and started on the bombing run. And one after the other, we dropped bombs on Balikpapan, which was still a cracking plant for oil, for fuel to the—that Japanese could use to operate against—continue to operate against the Philippines at Samar. And at that time, I flew two of the flights. I flew the second operation. When I left—when our airplane left, I tipped out over our wing, looked out and Balikpapan, the cracking plant, it was ablaze from 20,000 feet. We had on our gas and our oxygen mask and I could see it and I wondered how people were surprised, and they certainly were. There must have been a lot of dead people down there.

[00:20:17]

So back to the Philippines, there were two more missions, but one of which I flew, and then there was another time that the Fifth Air Force came in and started to fly missions against them. And somehow, as Balikpapan was a difficult situation, there was these places that we should send our airplanes and there are other places the trade winds or monsoons are starting up, and we got what we called the trade winds monsoons. Wind that would keep us on a stand down, no airplanes were going to fly. During that stand down, a couple things happened. We received a really rainy day and I went up and got the mail from the officers there and they must have got their own mail, but there was mail and I thought to myself there was a rather large package. And my beautiful sister, wonderful woman, (Calorie laughs) Rita, had taken a—baked a quart of whiskey in—(DeFries laughs)

Calorie: In a loaf of bread, right dad? (DeFries and Calorie laugh)

Murray: —in a loaf of bread, mailed it, and it got all the way across there.

DeFries: Wow. (Calorie and DeFries laugh)

Murray: And I remember cutting into that whiskey and I—(Calorie and DeFries laugh) and sent a letter back on V-mail to Rita and she said, “That’s okay,” that she had—she was just—had a sense of humor, (Calorie and DeFries laugh) “Please don’t stay sober.”

Calorie: The timing couldn’t have been better. (laughs)

[00:22:34]

Murray: Something more tragic happened. I had two gunners, one was named Connor[s] and the other was named Kenshaw and they shared the same tent. So when I was coming back from the mailroom, or mail shack, I heard this bang, bang, and when I got there—there was somebody ahead of me and there was the one gunner, Connor[s], was holding—holding his thigh and the other gunner had his—the gun that had just been fired. He would’ve been bleeding to death if our flight sergeant, Dean Haslan, hadn’t come in and [inaudible]. What happened was the one guy that was shot had been telling Connors, the other guy, that his wife was unfaithful to him while he was overseas—we’d been overseas then for a year—and Connors grabbed his forty-five caliber pistol and fired and the command had to—that was a military offense. We were short of crews and the colonel called all—called the squadron commanders and he said, “Something is going to happen that you’re going to not like. You’re going to tell them that Kenshaw—that he accidentally pulled the trigger to his pistol. He didn’t aim it, he was cleaning it and he—and it fired and I want these people to know that. You’re not going to send anybody back to the States for a court martial,” and this guy was a tough guy. So I had to go in there and after a while I said, “Now listen you heroes, you listen to the doctor here, because you’re not going to go home. You’re going to stay here. You’re going to fly your missions,” and so they did. One of them never spoke to me again. He didn’t want to fly in my airplane, but he had his reasons.

I guess I flew a couple land operations—they had a division—ground division—was being balled up and my group commander said that I was to go over there and see what could be done to make maps for operation of our unit, which I did, and came back. I think he looked surprised at that—thought maybe—he thought maybe I was going to be killed, which is a very easy thing to do, if you got in the wrong place. And so Deany, Dean Haslan, put an order in to take me back to the States. They were afraid I had—what’s that disease again?

Calorie: Malaria?

Murray: Malaria.

Calorie: Dad, yeah.

[00:26:53]

Murray: And I had to get back to a hospital. I went down to about 145 pounds from 165. I went back to the States and the war still going on and talking about how things—how life turns it around. The doctor and I before I—I had no more missions to fly. I had flown then fourteen—I guess it was forty missions, forty missions altogether. Therefore, I went just as a pass the time thing. Some kid flying a navy fighter came in and it was obvious on the—used the airstrip. We thought it was strange because the navy never landed aircraft. He came down and you could see there was a bomb, a 250-pound bomb that wasn’t released and it was hanging there. And he was making his approach and touched down and this fighter that he flew, it was flying—was—had metal in the back, but the bomb went off, shrapnel went everywhere and the ironic thing was, that a mechanic up on the hill was hit and killed. He was a ground man. I think about it before I got to bed often because his family must have been expecting him to come home pretty soon because he wasn’t doing dangerous work. He was just killed. That’s what I mentioned before, if you have—where you were, sometimes you weren’t going to make it even though you were, for all intents and purposes, it would be a safe situation and I never forgot about that.

Coming back home, that was a serious experience, I had one, got off—wasn’t flying back home, it was taking a ship, an attack ship, back home. I got to San Francisco [California], got my pay at the military station, went out the Mark Hopkins Hotel. There was a nurse and two guys who were officers at the Mark Hopkins and I came in, took two—two drinks—three drinks, looked at the nurse, she looked at me. I was single and she—I said in front of everybody, “You wouldn’t mind dancing with me, would you?” (Calorie and DeFries laugh) That was the danger that I was facing. (Calorie, DeFries, Eisenhart-Purvis laugh)

Calorie: That was the rejection possibility. (laughs)

DeFries: Did she say yes?

Murray: I don’t know, maybe I shortened it too much, but those were the highlights. Some—some of them we called milk runs. No attacks, no fighter interceptors, but there were some later on. That’s where we lost some planes and I came home and I think my mother and dad, you can see the—yeah that was it. [Reaches for photograph]

[00:31:20]

Calorie: Do you want me to show that—do you want to show that to Megan?

Murray: (speaking at the same time) Yes.

Calorie: Sure.

Murray: [Pointing to photograph] This is my mother—and they lived in Dormont [Pennsylvania] then—and this is my dad and this is me.

DeFries: This is when you were home?

Murray: Yes, I was home one month for leave; the war was still going on.

DeFries: Okay.

Murray: But because of the weight loss, when I got checked out, I didn't have scarlet fever or—

Calorie: Malaria.

Murray: Or malaria.

DeFries: Thank you. Oh, wow. Those are nice pictures.

Murray: My younger brother Donald was in the navy, so he wasn't home at the same time. And that was—

Calorie: What?

[00:32:12]

Murray: About the South Pacific—I think the most questioning part of me then was how come I wasn't killed. It was as simple as that. In England—I was lucky not be assigned to England against Germany because initially the first B-19s were shot down. They call them the unassailable one because they, the British, did not bomb during the day and they bombed during the night and we bombed Germany during the day and the Germans had notoriously— (knock at the door)

Housekeeping: Hi. I just brought back his laundry.

Calorie: Thank you.

Housekeeping: (speaking at the same time) You're welcome. You want me to put it away for him?

Murray: (speaking at the same time) The better weapons system—

DeFries: I'm sorry, just a—should I pause? Okay, I'm sorry, go ahead. (talking in background)

Murray: They had better weapons systems, better aircraft. We had a type of aircraft—

DeFries: Just making sure we're okay. I'm sorry.

Murray: Those are the conclusions, except for one thing. I was a pretty young kid and I still took part of me and left it over there and that part's still gone. That's a strange way of saying it, I guess. And that picture of my wife [points to photograph]—because we—I knew her from being in high school. She was a sophomore in high school and I was a big senior, but I never went with her, and I finally did went with her. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) That part of me, I think I was—would be happier without. I'm not sure where I stand, but one thing is tragic. World War II was concluded by a signature of Japanese hierarchy. Most people know that World War—that subsequent wars that we had later on, were never signed by a treaty. In fact, we have American troops over in—where's that place? Where—Japan?

Calorie: Iraq, Afghanistan?

Murray: North—

DeFries: South Korea? Is that where you're thinking?

Calorie: We have them there now, dad?

Murray: The one where David happened on—

Calorie: Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran?

Murray: Yeah, there were ones we never signed any—had any lasting treaties.

Calorie: Um-hm.

Murray: And they never—Vietnam was a disgrace. Fifty-six thousand young soldiers, a system that were—the Communists had been in there. You know the Communists were everywhere in Southeast Asia, but they were nowhere because you never knew when a farmer plowing his field was a—really what his politics were. Many of them were Communist and they would continue to plow that field, no matter who was there because that's the way the people—many of the people, they'd say, "I'm taking care of my work, why don't you wise up and don't—let politics work," (Calorie laughs) but I thought that was a kind of a strange thing, that we would allow wars to continue, at least on paper.

Calorie: Um-hm. Yeah.

Murray: And never a sign a treaty—treaty or anything like that and finally was driven out of Vietnam, and—thanks. [speaking to housekeeping]

Housekeeping: You're welcome.

[00:37:24]

Calorie: Oh, dad, we were looking at—at this picture before you came and this is the picture (air conditioning noise) of you. Who were the people with you?

Murray: [Referring to photo with fellow servicemen] This is—we—I think it was when we stopped off together, we said we were—I met them on board the boat coming home.

Calorie: Oh, okay. So this was after you were stateside then?

Murray: Yes.

Calorie: This was stateside.

Murray: We were in New York City.

Calorie: You were in New York City with this photo? Oh, cool.

Murray: Spending everybody's money. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) I met a girl (Calorie and DeFries laugh) in New York that helped me spend my mine. I was—the girl's name was Mittie Gustafson. Her background was Norwegian and I met her in a restaurant. She was part of the act. They had ice skates and they pushed me—she pushed me around. They had little race and Mittie and I won the race. She was the pusher with the skates and I was the rider. (Calorie, DeFries, and Eisenhart-Purvis laugh) And the—I learned that there were different people who had different viewpoints on things. Mittie one day said to me, “Joe, you know we got along fine,” or words like that, she said, “But I think you ought to marry me.” (Calorie laughs). I said, “Joe didn't ask.” (Calorie and DeFries laugh) Her poor face—it couldn't develop in any particular way. Mittie had gone off the ice restaurant trail and found somebody who wanted to marry her. And that was another lesson that the war taught you, if you want to get married, you better do it fast. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) I don't know if that was that suited to what you want.

DeFries: No, that's great. Thank you for sharing everything. Do you mind if I ask you some specific questions about different things?

Murray: No.

DeFries: Okay. So when you enlisted, were you drafted, or did you volunteer?

[00:39:59]

Murray: No, I volunteered.

DeFries: Okay.

Murray: At that time—I mentioned about George's airplanes, but I really didn't know they had bundles of people that were enlisting. When we enlisted, we enlisted as aviation cadets.

DeFries: What—when—what month in 1942 did you leave for California? Do you remember?

Murray: In nineteen—1940—1942, I left that day for California.

DeFries: Okay.

Murray: And then—I don't remember the day.

Calorie: Was it in March—March—I wish I had the paper. Was it in March?

DeFries: I have March 1943 was the start of service—

Calorie: Okay.

DeFries: But I don't know if he—

Calorie: Okay.

DeFries: —that's when he enlisted or if that was when he was commissioned?

Murray: Yeah.

Calorie: So I think that might have been commissioning.

DeFries: Oh okay.

Calorie: Yeah I think so.

DeFries: Okay. Do—what do you remember about your commissioning and the end of your training? Is there anything you can—

Murray: Pardon me, I didn't—

DeFries: Oh—what do you remember about being commissioned at the end of your training? Do you remember the ceremony of being commissioned at the end of your cadet training?

Murray: Oh yes, they had—they had so many people that the—it was pretty hard. There wasn't—every Sunday the cadet corps drilled for the Hollywood people and the higher military command. They would put on a cadet drill, which it seems when the war going on I thought it was kind of sick PR [public relations] photos if you want to watch the movies, but I could never quite get with that. Maybe I was looking for the basics and everything.

DeFries: Can you tell me a little bit more about what life was like in your camp or bivouac when you were in the Pacific? What daily life—

Murray: (speaking at the same time) When I was overseas?

DeFries: Yes. What daily life was like?

[00:42:33]

Murray: Oh, you know—you know what they called the huts, the military huts at Duquesne, they're still up? (air conditioner noise)

DeFries: The Quonset huts?

Calorie: Yeah.

DeFries: Yeah.

Murray: They stayed a month in one of those. Then we got—we built our own, had engineers come in and build shacks for us. So there was always a chance for rain and we were—had—these mean one thing after the other. When I was coming through the Admiralty Islands, there was a beautiful—what we called a burry shack—there that I was able to sleep in and I looked up there and said, You're safe, because there was a netting, which the snakes liked to get into. When I was up there, the first night, I looked up there and I heard something and since it was a thatched roof, this snake was at home. They like things like that. So I yelled and this police officer came in and he had a—I'll never forget the uniform he had, it looked like an opera, you know? Like the baritone in an opera. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) When I was ready to move on, he came in and he said—I said, "Thanks a lot for taking care of this snake," and I handed him an Australian pound note and he said, "You're a puckagin." [ed. note: Language and translation unknown] (all laugh) I never did find out what a "puckagin" is.

Calorie: Didn't know if it was a compliment or an insult.

Murray: "You're a puckagin." I—(laughs) I remember him because they wore their hair like later guys did, you know, maybe ten years after the war here. In those days the kind of—but the burry, yeah, wonder if it's still standing with the snake. (all laugh)

[00:45:05]

Yeah, that was a—that area there is hard to describe, you know. Now there are probably many resorts. Guadalcanal, that we bombed, the command used to be—used to be a resort for the Australian people (clock chimes) and the Japanese took it over. There were so many mixed up things, but particularly where the Japanese were able to get a stronghold because like Germany, they had been preparing for this war. They had a—a token feeling of—a political feeling they called bushido and that meant that if you died in the war, you were going to go to heaven. There was still us as—we people, there's still—are in parachutes, they went to heaven fast. Chutes to chutes, going to heaven fast. No stops, no purgatories. (Calorie laughs) We had a number of them in here—countrymen whose—but they were fortunate in having that. We—for ten months, we didn't have a Mass and as Catholics, that was a loss to us. Finally when we got to Samar, we got—how funny things—one more funny thing?

DeFries: Um-hm.

Murray: I hope it was funny.

DeFries: Yeah. (Calorie and DeFries laugh)

Murray: I can remember the ship and there were soldiers from the Seventh Cavalry Division, whose regiment persisted—in the Seventh Cavalry was General Custer during the [Civil] war—and there was a kitchen there with a huge cauldron with a plug in it and later found out it was a cereal, hot cereal, and some clown in the Seventh Cavalry came in one morning for breakfast and pulled the plug out of the—then frantically started to try to put—and the tragedy is, the cereal was eaten—hot breakfast—it’s like a sloppy joe or a—and this sergeant that I got to know, he said, “Have you ever had any troop training that you were supposed [to do]?” I said, “No.” He said, “I’ll—he said, “Lieutenant, I’ll take care of that for you,” and he was a tough guy, so I left him. (DeFries laughs) But I don’t remember exactly how long it took to—for that plug, for that cauldron— (Calorie laughs) oh, the most important thing was there were at least—I remember somebody slid on the deck with the—all the cereal there and broke their arm.

Calorie: (speaking at the same time) Oh my gosh. (laughs)

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Oh no. (laughs)

Murray: Yeah, so that much is marked in my memory. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) I didn’t eat cereal then or now. Let the brave do the job.

Calorie: Yeah.

DeFries: Right.

Murray: Getting back—back to something like that whoever thought—if it were I, what are you doing breaking your arm, you know? (Calorie laughs) I’d have a little chat with myself, but I didn’t get near it. I exercised my privilege of aids bringing me my C-ration, which was, I think, the—I thought if I hadn’t done this the Japanese might win the war, so I ate it. (Calorie and DeFries laugh)

DeFries: What—what month did you leave—did you leave the Pacific? Because you said you had malaria and were sent home. So when did you actually leave Samar?

[00:50:15]

Murray: (speaking at the same time) Leave for overseas to get home?

DeFries: Yes.

Murray: I was overseas for fifteen months. (people talking in hallway)

DeFries: Okay.

Murray: And that was—in that time I was in Australia in the hospital. They were trying to get readings and then I went to the middle of Sydney and was able to joyously find out I didn’t have it then, but what was I losing weight for—the military very cautiously, in their own way, gave me the chance because I may have contracted whatever it was I was getting. How did—I think my sister Rita and my mother prayed me home. I’m sure there were other people out there, as I said—

Calorie: A combination of prayer and whiskey worked.

Murray: Yeah. (Calorie and DeFries laugh)

Calorie: Because Aunt Rita was the one that sent him the whiskey in the bread. (laughs)

DeFries: Right.

Murray: Yeah.

DeFries: The times that you were flying missions, how did you feel while you were flying the mission and you were under fire?

[00:51:56]

Murray: Actually, it wasn't all—you could get into a fire zone. The Japanese were not good shooters. We were lucky in that respect. They were losing personnel in other theatres. A friend of mine, John, was in the Fourteenth Air Force. He was flying a B-24 squadron and the Fourteenth Air Force had Chinese people that were Chinese indigents (chair creaks) who worked as runway workers and even the little boys—if they got bombed, the little boys picked up little pieces of pebbles and took them in and put them in the holes. These were the children and I've often wondered how they made out after that, you know, but he said they were all right, as far as he was concerned. Thinking about children and war, I think it's the worst thing you can think of. Being hungry, being—needing clothing, having all these necessities denied you and now they think about it, still in different places, still in places like Afghanistan, where various religions can confiscate the people and for conversion. That's what happening now. Our present president, whether it's he or whether it was he, or whether it's somebody from his office, failed to use the same technique of contacting different people that won the war, but apparently, it isn't working too well.

DeFries: I just have a few more questions for you, if we're doing okay.

Murray: (speaking at the same time) Sure.

DeFries: Okay. How—how did you receive your Purple Heart? How were you injured?

Murray: It was on the twenty, it was on the twentieth mission and (chair creaks) I remember seeing this burst of fire, as we were getting out of the airplane. I—went through my boot—flying boot—and the other thing that I couldn't understand, my ear, this ear, [points to ear] was—was bleeding. So it's a possibility that two things were happening, but they turned out to be the same effect and I couldn't walk on the inside of my foot for—until I got something that looked like metal and was and that was enough to get the decoration. I thought it was pretty bad—I got off pretty easy right there. I had just gotten out of the airplane when I was there on the field and taken a Jeep back to the headquarters area when this happened.

DeFries: And it was enemy—it was enemy fire that—that got you?

Murray: Yes.

DeFries: Okay.

Murray: They think that there was a concussion of some kind, that's sort of the bleeding in here. And after a while it started to cure up, but the anxiety I think was more that I had—(coughs) had more to do with it, but even in the tropical areas, people don't heal too well. That was the trouble in military operations was soldiers, they don't heal really. Maybe in England they would have, who knows if they were. Not just in England, but places where the atmosphere was better. That included people going South during the wintertime, because you get awful chilly. Maybe when you get as old as I am, that happens. (DeFries laughs) So maybe they should send me to Florida. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) I'd be away from the people I love.

DeFries: Aw.

Murray: My brother's down there.

DeFries: Oh is he? He was in the navy during the war.

DeFries: Oh, okay, how many siblings do you have—did you have? How many siblings—how many siblings, brothers and sisters, did you have?

[00:57:31]

Murray: One brother, who was more of a military speaker. My—I had three sisters—Madeleine, Rita, my sister, and Lois.

DeFries: Okay.

Murray: Lois was—Milsak—was down there. Yesterday, we celebrated her one hundredth birthday.

DeFries: That's wonderful. (laughs)

Calorie: Yeah, she's down in building one. So that the first building you came up against.

DeFries: Yeah. That's great she's so close.

Calorie: Yeah, yeah she is. She is there.

Murray: She is very important.

Calorie: Um-hm. Yes, yeah. So dad's the baby brother, although Uncle Don really carries that title.

Murray: Yeah.

Calorie: Uncle Don turned ninety-four on the—Saint Patrick's Day?

DeFries: Oh wow.

Murray: Yeah.

Calorie: Yeah, so he's the baby. (Calorie laughs)

DeFries: And so he served in the navy during the war?

Calorie: Right.

DeFries: Okay, okay.

Calorie: He served in the navy.

Murray: He was.

Calorie: Yeah.

Murray: He was.

Calorie: Yeah.

Murray: He's—he went to Pitt [University of Pittsburgh] when he got out of the service with the military operations and I went to Duquesne and then went to Pitt for advanced education. I guess I actually remember I had a lady from Pitt when I was in it; she was my mentor for a PhD and I remember if it was Betty, Bebe [his wife]—

Calorie: Um-hm.

Murray: —she would—she took care of the kids, allowing me to do it because we didn't have any (clears throat) of the things they had today and she helped me get my PhD.

DeFries: That's great.

[00:59:54]

Calorie: Yeah, I remember we were in a house in Green Tree [Pennsylvania] and it was an older house and it had coal cellars, true coal cellars, so you had the basement, which was all stone, but there were two rooms that you kept the coal in. And you had a desk in there dad, to get away from everyone (DeFries laughs) and you'd just go down there, close the door. On the one side, there was a desk that you would write—

Murray: Yeah.

Calorie: —and on the other side was a punching bag hanging from the wall, do you remember?

Murray: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, yeah.

Calorie: We could tell how the writing was going—

Murray: (speaking at the same time) That was a hangover.

Calorie: —by how much punching the bag got. (DeFries and Calorie laugh)

Murray: That was a hangover. If you don't succeed, beat it up.

Calorie: Yeah. (laughs)

Murray: I had the mentor—she—she was a Jewish lady, from the—I came one morning and the world seemed to have turned upside down and she said, “Did you bring this—” the—whatever I had been writing. I said, “Yes,” and I picked it up and threw it on the floor. She said, “What's that supposed to mean?” She said, “You were supposed—let's forget about that and let's tell me when you're going to have this ready. Watch me pick this up,” (Calorie laughs) and she picked it up and handed it back to me. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) She's smart. She was really on the ball and I think that was the—there was some people who just had a natural talent for handling people and I certainly acted like a—a little person, who had been, what I thought was, abused. Put me to work. Betty had some things to do, before I went in to see my mentor. I was really abused (Calorie and DeFries laugh) at having a lovely wife and a wonderful mentor, but I wonder why I couldn't see that at the time? Certainly, I never got mad. (all laugh)

DeFries: Sounds like you made out pretty good. (DeFries and Calorie laugh)

Calorie: A few bumps in the road. Just a few.

Murray: Yeah, yeah.

DeFries: I'm just going to ask you a few more questions, since it's been about an hour, so I don't want to take up your whole afternoon today. (laughs)

Murray: (speaking at the same time) Yeah. That's okay.

DeFries: I was actually wondering what was the name of the aircraft you flew because I knew a lot of these planes had special names, so do you remember the name?

[01:02:49]

Murray: Ten Hi.

DeFries: Ten Hi. What was the—okay.

Murray: This is—(papers rustling) [showing photographs] this is somebody in the training tent, [reads caption of poster in photo] “I ain't never careful.” (Calorie and DeFries laugh) And this is me, let's see if I can pick that—this is me in front of Ten Hi and the rest of them. Can you pick me out?

DeFries: Let's see. Are you—look at that picture—

Murray: We—

DeFries: Is that you? Is this you right here? [points to Murray standing in back row of photo]

Murray: Yeah.

Calorie: At the end.

DeFries: This one?

Murray: We had the flight jackets on.

Calorie: Let me see.

DeFries: Okay, and that's—

Murray: And this is Ten Hi. It was a Consolidated airplane. The Consolidated—the Flying Fortress [Boeing B-17 Bomber] was, up to that time, a bomber, and yet there were more B-24s manufactured by Ford, Consolidated, and two more operators [ed. note: Douglas Aircraft Company and North American Aviation]. And we manufactured 19,000 airplanes. (Calorie laughs)

DeFries: Wow. What's the picture of the—the crashed aircraft?

Calorie: (speaking at the same time) The crashed airplane. That one dad. That photo.

Murray: Yeah, this was a—an airplane that—this was an accident at our—we had a full mission and when I had came in for the approach on the mission the—the flight engineer was supposedly—he came up and I said, “I'm getting a nose wheel lock.” He said, “No you aren't. You got it on the dashboard,” let's say, he said, “But the nose wheel hasn't locked.” Well in the B-24, there were three wheels, there were two main wheels and then a—one in the nose and when we came in, we had—the gas was low. We hadn't many challenges to tell all the men to go to the rear of the airplane. Made the approach and I thought, If I turn this thing around and I lose the gas mileage I'm going to drop. I'll drop and then the nose will get on fire and then I told myself that wasn't going to happen. So I get the crew, the rest of the crew, George McShee and I sat in there, hold it back as much as we could before the wheel touched, and George, bless his heart, we had to dig him out of the front end of it because he was—he was on the—what they call the pedestal—had to throttle the controls and everything. (clears throat) It was his side and he said to me, “You're not going to leave me to burn in this thing are you?” Connor[s], the guy who was shot, he was a circus clown when he came and he was one of my favorites because he taught me how to swim in the ocean. (all laugh).

Calorie: A good skill.

Murray: Yeah and he helped me. He had a crow bar and with those big arms of his from exercising, he grabbed that thing and he pulled it back and George's body came out. If it weren't for that, I don't know what would have happened.

Calorie: Yeah. Wow.

Murray: But that's what—that's what had happened. One of them, the register of the—let's call it the dashboard—showed that the—we noticed the nose wheel was off. The actual one was red and it was a socket that was a a—that meant there must be no locking there and it took the thing.

DeFries: Wow.

Murray: But we didn't get away with everything.

DeFries: Well I'm glad no one was hurt in—in that accident.

Calorie: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, you got George out. That was—that was amazing.

Murray: Yeah.

DeFries: Is this the same crew in this picture [looking at photo of the crew with the Ten Hi] as the accident? Or is this a different—

Murray: Yeah, I think so. Oh yeah, this was stateside.

Calorie: (speaking at the same time) Oh, okay, okay.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) This is after the war? Before?

Murray: Yeah, somebody—when I—after the—everybody had the peaks of their caps tipped backwards. I think this must've been another mission, not—not Balikpapan or—

Calorie: Um-hm.

DeFries: Okay.

Murray: Yeah.

Calorie: Is this at the same—is that the same plane that you're posed in front of dad? Is that still Ten Hi? It doesn't look like it.

Murray: (speaking at the same time) No it wasn't, it wasn't the Ten Hi.

Calorie: It was another one, yeah.

Murray: It was the same model.

Calorie: But not the same one, yeah.

DeFries: Okay.

Calorie: Yeah, because that's you down here on the—

Murray: Yeah.

Calorie: Yeah.

DeFries: So—

Calorie: And then that's you up here, that would be my dad, right up there. [pointing to man standing in back row of photo]

Murray: (speaking at the same time) Yeah.

DeFries: Okay.

Murray: We had—

Calorie: And that would be him, he's—he's second—

DeFries: Oh okay.

Murray: (speaking at the same time) They had a photographer who looked like he was a Mexican and I think he was. He took the pictures of the—see, that was his pose when we came back from the mission from—from Balikpapan.

Calorie: (speaking at the same time) Oh, okay.

DeFries: Who were some of your best friends while you were in the Pacific? Did you have some—some of—fellow officers or crew that you were better friends with?

[01:09:26]

Murray: Well, I think—I think I believed that it was best to not mingle too much with the enlisted men. I found out there were things to be said that our old man was twenty-eight years old, (laughs) get the message out. Rest of us were younger.

DeFries: Um-hm.

Calorie: I like the story—do you remember dad? When you would do the reunions and I can't remember all that—the particulars—when you first went to one of your first reunions, the one guy at the reunion thought you had died in a mission that the commander didn't like you (Murray laughs) and he was the one that died and you were—you were to fly that mission—

Murray: (speaking at same time) Oh yeah, he was—

Calorie: Yeah.

Murray: He was our group commander.

Calorie: Right.

Murray: And then he—for some or another, he didn't like me. (Calorie laughs) I was claiming that he didn't like me. (Calorie laughs) So when I went on a—I went to his shack, we called it, and I says, "Colonel, I'm leaving to go back to the States," and he said—he said something like "What does that mean?" Because he would've tried to kept [me] there for as long as he could and (laughs) that August—at the end of August, I found out that he was flying a B-24 and he hit a volcano in the Philippines and killed himself and all of the [crew]. A simple mission, that's what I meant before. When

you think, Oh, I'm going on a run, things don't happen to me, you know. I think of the kid who was up there when—the kid flying the fighter had the bomb attached. He was—probably that night said, “Nothing's going to happen to me,” because I think that—

Last thing, I think that this is the funniest thing. We flew with all our—with all our briefings after breakfast. Many pilots, including other crews, would have their breakfast before they went to the briefing and a guy who was the CQ, Charge of Quarters, would go around to the different shacks where they were and get them up, get the guys up. He came in to me the first time and well, I was my usual beautiful personality and I said, “If you don't get out of here with that flashlight, I'm going to shoot you right through the head,” (all laugh) and he said, “Oh.” Pretty soon he did it again, I said, “I have to apologize to you.” He said—what was it that he said? He said, “You look familiar to me, but I don't know,” and here the guy was a CQ, was a bank messenger in Pittsburgh. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) Conrad was his name. I said, “Conrad, you're not going to shine that—shine that flashlight.” He said, “Not this morning.” (Calorie and DeFries laugh)

Calorie: You're still not a morning person.

Murray: No (all laugh). (speaking at the same time) And he was—the poor guy, he was—

Calorie: (speaking at the same time) Neither am I.

Murray: He would say—he was—he was a nice guy. He especially when they used to do extra things like get the mail and things like that. (Calorie laughs) Didn't get any good food. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) I don't think he had any to spare. We didn't exactly have the best of food. Many of it was canned—

DeFries: C-rations? Is that—

Murray: I can't—I can't—

Calorie: Like freeze dried?

Murray: Everybody was sharing the same thing. And after a mission, something I didn't expect when I went in to be debriefed—what had everybody seen on this trip. It could be it looked like something was being built or something, and there on the mission, there were ten glasses and the doctor was there and the whiskey was there. (Calorie and DeFries laugh) So those guys, we'd go back to the shack and go to—just flop into bed, you know.

DeFries: So that was a nice treat. (Calorie and DeFries laugh)

Murray: If you wanted it. I didn't think I was—I don't think I drank any whiskey, some Australian beer.

Calorie: (speaking at the same time) Um-hm, that doesn't surprise me. Yeah, yeah, a little beer, but—

Murray: What, no beer? (all laugh)

DeFries: How did you feel when Japan formally surrendered? What did you think when the war was finally ended?

[01:16:04]

Murray: I was at home then.

Calorie: Um-hm.

Murray: I thought it was—I'm not sure I knew then. I probably was told by my father not to cry and I think I did. I came home with two people, George McShee from Massachusetts and another friend, I lost in the last two weeks that I was operational. They ran into some kind of a anti-aircraft trap. They were shot down. And I began to think about people like that and my mother said, "That's all right, put your head on my shoulder," (Calorie laughs) which I did. Mothers need—guys need mothers. Maybe that's some of our trouble today; maybe husbands too, I think.

DeFries: How do you feel about the war now? How do you feel about your time in service now?

Murray: I—I feel that we were pushed into it in a strange sort of way. It wasn't Vietnam, wasn't that kind of—nobody knows at the top how long you're going to keep people (clears throat) in vulnerable positions. (clears throat) Today, I'm not so sure that the innocent isn't swept away in the war, no matter how well you think you're going to train. There's—the weapon systems are so dangerous, not only the—I think that—I used to think maybe that that would prevent a war. Now, I think the religious concepts of different faiths as just a cauldron of insecurity for generations and that's what worries me as I enter my late years. The insecurity of not being able to wake up and get your child or your husband or whomever. You say, "I'm going to see you tonight," you know. I—I don't think—I don't think wars are ever going to solve anything. It's too dangerous, you can get hurt and children, of course, they're so innocent, and they—I look and I—every once in a while I hear at Country Meadows [Murray's residence] that people bring their children in [to visit] (clears throat) and I don't—some babies and you see these little toddlers—how are you going to be treated in this world now? I think the—(clears throat) I think they need our prayers, to be protected against something happening that they certainly didn't want.

DeFries: Well, I want to thank you for taking the time to share your memories today (chair creaking) and for telling me about your time in service. So thank you for your time and thank you for your memories.

Murray: Thank you very much.

DeFries: And thank you for your service. (Calorie and DeFries laugh)

Murray: Thank you.

DeFries: Thank you.

end of interview