

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

JACK DU MEE

Pilot, Naval Air Force, World War II and Korean War

2008

OH
1191

**OH
1191**

Du Mee, Jack (1921-2009). Oral History Interview, 2008.

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 113 minutes) analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 113 minutes) analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Jack du Mee, a native of Holland, flew for the Naval Air Corps after moving to Milwaukee (Wisconsin). Du Mee describes his Naval Air Corps training at the University of Iowa, Naval Air Station Glenview (Illinois), and Corpus Christi (Texas) where he “hunted submarines.” He explains takeoff and landing training in detail. Du Mee describes working for the Naval Air Transport Service taking supplies to the Caribbean, South America, and North America. He mentions the differences between Air Force and Navy pilot training. Du Mee also mentions his reaction to V-J Day and transporting survivors from Bataan and other places. He mentions his service in the Korean War stationed in Malta with his family.

Biographical Sketch:

Jack du Mee (1921-2009) served with the Naval Air Transport Service in WWII. He flew in the Caribbean, South America, and North America. In the Korean War flew in Malta before gaining discharge in 1955.

Interviewed by Ellen B. Healy, 2008.

Transcribed by Liane M. Baranek, 2009.

Transcription checked and corrected by Calvin John Pike, 2011.

Corrections typed in by Lauren Kelly, 2012.

Abstract written by Rebecca Cook, 2015.

Interview Transcript:

Healey: Jack du Mee--the last name is spelled d-u-M-e-e – who served with the Naval Air during World War II and Korea. This interview is being conducted at 301 Riverview Drive, Marion, Wisconsin on June 7th, 2008, and the interviewer is Ellen Bowers Healy. Jack, I'm going to ask you some questions about your background and the circumstances before you entered the military. What's your birth date?

du Mee: November 21st, 1921.

Healey: And where were you born?

du Mee: In Haarlem, Holland.

Healey: And how do you spell Haarlem?

du Mee: H-a-a-r-l-e-m.

Healey: And who were your parents?

du Mee: Jack du Mee, Sr. and--I got the information here, my mother and my dad's naturalization papers.

Healey: Okay. So they came to the United States?

du Mee: Yes.

Healey: And when did they come to the United States?

du Mee: October--September of 1923.

Healey: And were you the only child at that time?

du Mee: Yes.

Healey: Okay. Where did your parents settle?

du Mee: In Milwaukee. We had friends in Milwaukee so that's where we settled and that's where I was raised.

Healey: So they knew that they were going to go to Milwaukee before they came to the United States?

du Mee: Yes.

Healey: What did your father do?

du Mee: He was a draftsman.

Healey: Okay. And you went to school in Milwaukee?

du Mee: Right.

Healey: And where did you go to grade school and high school?

du Mee: I went to William McKinley Grade School and West Division High School.

Healey: And did you complete high school?

du Mee: Oh, yes. I graduated in June of 1939.

Healey: And after you graduated from high school, what were you doing?

du Mee: I got a job with A&P Tea Company in their grocery stores and worked with them until after I enlisted in the Naval Air Corps.

Healey: And when did you enlist in the Naval Air Corps?

du Mee: I had to go to Chicago to the Board of Trade and took all the required exams and physical, and it took three trips to Chicago before I passed everything, so I had to show them that Jack du Mee was my real name and I had to show them my birth certificate, which I didn't have a copy of. I had my original from Holland and they couldn't read it because it was in Dutch [laughs], so I was sworn in as Jack Frederick Andrew du Mee.

Healey: And why did you choose the Naval Air?

du Mee: Well, I always thought I'd like to be a pilot, and when Roosevelt said we were going to build a hundred thousand airplanes and we would need about a hundred thousand of our pilots, then the requirements were lowered from college graduation to high school graduate, so I qualified at that time and I thought it would be great if I could be a Navy pilot and it came true.

Healey: Okay. What did the people back home think about your choice of going into the military?

du Mee: They were pretty happy. Very pleased.

Healey: Let me go back a little bit. When the war broke out with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, do you remember where you were and what the circumstances were?

du Mee: A friend of mine, best friend and I were just going downtown to see a movie. It was a Sunday, as everybody knows, and I still remember, we saw a movie called Warsaw Concerto, and just before we reached the theater we heard the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and we were at war. It was pretty shocking, but I still remember the music in the movie.

Healey: What was that music?

du Mee: The Warsaw Concerto.

Healey: Oh, that was the name of it.

du Mee: Hm-hmm.

Healey: Okay. Both the name of the movie and the music?

du Mee: Right.

Healey: Oh, okay. War broke out and you were still working at A&P?

du Mee: I was still working at A&P, and I thought, according to the officer who swore me in, I'd be called in a few weeks for active duty to my training station. I wasn't called until December as I recall. I received the notice on my birthday and I was sent to preflight training school at University of Iowa, and that was called preflight school.

Healey: What type of things did you study there?

du Mee: We had a very strict regimentation of course, and there was three months of intense training and all sorts of physical activity. Our days were divided into approximately four hours of academic work and four hours of physical work, which covered at different times football, basketball, wrestling, boxing, gymnastics, and then we always ended that with a 15-mile hike through the countryside. This was the program. The arrangements were reversed every two weeks so that we went to ground school in the morning and had the athletics in the afternoon, and after two weeks we had the athletics first and ground school after that.

Healey: What was your impression of your training?

du Mee: The training was terrific. I enjoyed it because I was pretty athletic and in good health. I weighed about 178 pounds.

Healey: What was your height?

du Mee: Six feet.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: I had done some track in school and I also was on the gymnastic team which was one of the best in the city. They had the gymnastic championship for ten, eleven years, both freshman-sophomore and junior-senior, so I had no problem with the athletics. The ground work, the classes were pretty involved and I had to get a little help from my roommates in the math because they went from algebra to trigonometry in a few weeks, and I never cared too much for mathematics, but I passed everything so I was real happy about that. The course was really difficult because each class after three months had an average of about 20% of the class cadets were drained or dropped for either physical reasons or school problems.

Healey: Where were you sent after University of Iowa?

du Mee: I was sent to primary flight training at NAS, Naval Air Station, Glenview, Illinois. That was about two and a half months of flight training.

Healey: Were you actually training in planes at that time?

du Mee: Yes. Finally after 13 weeks of preflight school we got to see an airplane, found out whether we could learn to fly [laughs] or not.

Healey: What kind of planes were you in?

du Mee: It was called a Stearman N3N-3. It was about a 250-horsepower single-engine plane with an open cockpit, and made for some pretty rough situations because it was--I was there in January, February, March, coldest months of the year. Some of our pilots even froze their ears and had trouble with their eyes afterwards because of the bitter cold with nothing to protect us in the cockpit except winter flight gear and goggles.

Healey: Anything else you particularly remember about your time in Glenview?

du Mee: Well, what made it pretty nice is that at that time the--I think it was March--the railroad situation was ideal. They had an electric train that ran from Milwaukee to Chicago and stopped in Glenview. So it took only an hour and a half to get home to Milwaukee on weekends whenever I was off and I could see my family and my girlfriend that way.

Healey: So I take it in that way you might have been more fortunate than some of the other people that you were training with.

du Mee: There were primary flight schools all over the country. Some of them were not such ideal locations.

Healey: In your training group, were most of the people from the Midwest or were they from all over?

du Mee: They were from all over.

Healey: Okay. So where did you go after Glenview?

du Mee: After I completed the flight training, I had the minimum of 150 hours, I was sent to Corpus Christi Naval Air Station in Texas for advanced flying.

Healey: And that was in June of 1943?

du Mee: That was June of '43, and that was--the flight training became more intense and diversified. We had a lot of instrument flying, both in the Link trainer and in the air and we learned to fly in formation and practiced landings and takeoffs, learned to shoot a rifle and a .50 caliber machine gun, which we had to take apart and put together blindfolded. I don't know why. I never had to do that afterwards, but probably the best part of the training was the last phase of the training. It was called advanced. I wanted to be a fighter pilot like all the pilots, but they said I was more adapted to be an engine pilot so I learned to fly in the PBV, the Catalina Patrol Bomber, and this was the active duty and that was hunting for submarines and for survivors on the ocean after a shipwreck or a bombing, when I graduated I had to wait two weeks for orders, and instead of being assigned to a patrol squadron in the PBV, I was assigned to a transport squadron, and it was at that time I learned that we had--the Navy had about four transport squadrons that were based in the states, so I told my girlfriend that there was a chance that I might get duty stateside, and if she wanted to we could get married and take a chance of being together instead of being separated by thousands of miles of ocean, so I finished the flight training in Atlanta, which was really--also increased our capabilities. We had a twin-engine Beechcraft plane which only seated six passengers, and all our flights were takeoffs and landings with what you call a hood. It was like a--it looks like a horizontal screen but we could not see beyond the cockpit, but the pilot could on the left side, so all of our flights we would take off, fly around the city on instruments, and then make an instrument approach, which at that time was rudimentary but we had--the airfields at the time had only minimum electronic equipment, but probably the most important which was GCA, ground control aircraft, so we could fly around the city behind this screen not being able to look out, and it's the strangest feeling. After two months of training with all the flights obscured, I did not know that the airport was—Holler (??) Field was on the south side of Chicago. I pictured it as being on the north side because we had to fly blind, and when we landed we would home in on the beacon that was transmitted from the airfield, and we would cross that beacon and we had a pattern to fly, running down, listening to the sounds on the radio which always contained the letters A and N; dash-dot for N, reverse, dot-dash for A, and the dash-dot for N, and as we came closer to the transmitter, which was located right on the airfield, then we knew where we were. We could let down as though we [unintelligible], and it was amazing how we could do that, and the instructor would take down the blind when we were over the runway about 50 feet ready to land, and I really appreciated that training afterwards in the patrol squadron on active duty,

VR-7. In Miami all the flights are over water and all throughout the Caribbean and South America, and I experienced and made use of all this instrument flight training and used it, because almost every flight over the jungles we have run into thunderstorms and just torrential rains and lightning and thunder, and we'd often hit up or down-drafts in the thunderstorms that would--we were almost out of control, and the drafts in the thunderstorm would raise or lower the airplane about a thousand feet per minute or actually in a few seconds. We had to listen to the signal and fly through the storm and make a safe landing. I had to do it several times. Quite a feeling of gratitude and amazement.

Healey: Why did you fly transports in South America and the Caribbean?

du Mee: Why?

Healey: Hm-hmm.

du Mee: Well, I was part of the Naval Air Transport Service, which abbreviated was NATS, and we had--all of our planes were multi-engine, and the Navy had about four squadrons in the states and several overseas that were necessary to transport equipment, mail and supplies to these various bases in the Caribbean and all along the coast of Brazil and North America. There were small bases that--

Healey: U.S. bases?

du Mee: U.S. bases, also which were--contained blimps, Navy blimps that patrolled for submarines, and on our flights we were always over water and we were always on the lookout for submarines. We never saw any.

Healey: Now go back a little bit. Where did you eventually get assigned? You said there were four transport units in the United States.

du Mee: When I graduated from--after the school in Atlanta, the NATS training school, I received another two months of training with Capital Airlines out of Roanoke, Virginia, and these were--the pilots and instructors were all airline pilots with just a vast amount of experience, and we flew out of Roanoke to become proficient at flying the twin-engine Douglas. It was at the time and still is known as one of the best twin-engine planes ever built, the Douglas DC-3. The naval designation is R4D, and when I finished the training there I was entitled to two weeks leave and I decided to -- my wife and I went to Washington to find out if there was a chance to get into one of the squadrons in the U.S., and they said if we cut our two weeks leave short and reported ahead of schedule more or less in Washington, I might be able to be assigned to a stateside squadron.

Healey: Is that Washington, D.C. or Washington state?

du Mee: Washington, D.C.

Healey: Okay. Now you all of a sudden had mentioned you have a wife and not a girlfriend. So how did that happen?

du Mee: Oh. Well, when I was at NATS training school in Atlanta I found out about the four squadrons that were based in the states, so I called Gladys and we decided to take a chance and get married, so she flew down to--she came down on the train and we were married in Atlanta on New Year's Eve; December 31st, 1943. We had six fellow pilots and ensigns in attendance, and our best man--we liked to joke about this--my best man was Andy Williams. It wasn't the singer. It was a boy from Chicago. His name was Andy G. Williams.

Healey: And where was your wife from?

du Mee: My wife was from Clintonville. I met her in Milwaukee at a dance at the Eagles Club which was a great place in those days to go dancing. They had a big huge globe on the ceiling with mirrors on it. Lights played off the mirrors and shone all around the room as the globe would circulate. For a few dollars we had a dance every week, and we danced to the music of Glenn Miller and Eddie Duchin, Vaughn Monroe was there, Tommy Dorsey and his orchestra. That's where we met, on her birthday, on her 20th birthday. She had left Clintonville the day after she graduated in '40, 1940, and moved to Milwaukee, so just by chance we met at one of the dances at the Eagles Club and it happened to be her birthday.

Healey: And then you got married in Atlanta, Georgia?

du Mee: We did in Atlanta, Georgia. Been together ever since more or less.

Healey: When did you become a cadet? When were you commissioned, or not a cadet? An ensign. When were you commissioned?

du Mee: I was a cadet when I started preflight school in Iowa City, University of Iowa, and then I graduated at NAS Corpus Christi November 13th, 1943, and after that I had advanced training, flight training in the Beechcraft, and that's when we got married, as soon as I finished the course there.

Healey: And what else do you remember about your wedding? Where did it take place?

du Mee: We were married in a Lutheran church on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, and we went to dinner at a restaurant with our entourage; six pilots, Navy pilots. A couple of them were married by then, and even though it wasn't--supposedly it was against the rules to be married as a cadet. We had to wait until we graduated, but two of the pilots had married and their wives were with them. So Gladys had a matron of honor as well as a best man, and we went from our dinner after the wedding we went to the Henry Grady Hotel and we had reservations for dinner and dancing there. So we stayed in Henry Grady overnight, and the next day we--with two other couples and--

another car and two couples we drove through the snow and the mountain passes in the Smokey Mountains to Roanoke, Virginia, and that was a converted **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** beautiful hotel converted to naval quarters for the naval detachment there, and the field was where we went to school at the airport, and we stayed in this hotel for about two months and flew the twin-engine Douglas, which was the biggest plane at that time that we had training in. It was after we graduated.

Healey: You mentioned you drove to Washington, D.C. to find out what your new duty station would be and which squadron you'd be attached to. What did you find out?

du Mee: They had one opening left with VR-7, the task force squadron in Miami, so we took the train to Miami and arrived there on February 17th, I think it was, and it was beautifully warm and soft breezes.

Healey: Your first time in Miami?

du Mee: Our first time in Miami, and we had a few days to get situated. We found an apartment, furnished apartment with a kitchenette, living room, bedroom and shower, and we rented that for \$35.00 a month and we stayed there while I was--almost two years while I was flying out of Miami with the Patrol Squadron 7--not patrol squadron, Transport Squadron 7. All of our flights were--we made flights to Roosevelt Roads, Cuba; we made several landings there, Jamaica, Panama Canal Zone, and all these Navy and some Air Force bases on the coast, flying to Brazil.

Healey: What kind of plane were you flying?

du Mee: This was the DC-3, the Douglas twin-engine plane the Navy called the R4.

Healey: You mentioned you took mail. What other things did you transport?

du Mee: Mail, oh, some commissary supplies and whatever they needed, and these bases were pretty isolated so we had a--it was like a small airline. We had about 20 planes, oh, about 35 pilots, and two flights left every day from Miami, either to the Caribbean destination or Trinidad. That's another stop, and we landed in--at that time it was called the Guianas; Dutch Guiana, French Guiana and British Guiana, and they all had an airfield in the jungle and we would bring their supplies and take back mostly correspondence. An overnight stop was Belém, Brazil, which was the Amazon River country, and one thing that impressed us, the Army Air transport command sent planes to Russia via the same group. They would use some of our airfields for their stopovers, but each trip seemed like--each trip that we made, and I made thirteen round trips to Rio de Janeiro which was the end of the four-day trip, and we always had a notice on the board to watch for--to watch over the jungles and if we could spot any wrecks of Air Force planes that crashed, and several times we met pilots at the officers' club, buy dinner at these bases. They were amazed at what was going on. They were the same age as I was, twenty-one years old, but they didn't receive a third as much training as the Navy did, and the Navy was pretty

proud of our training. It cost a hundred thousand dollars to train each pilot, and some of these Air Force pilots flying the same type of aircraft have had – they had less than a hundred hours' flight time, and when I joined the squadron they wouldn't let me fly or even train on the DC-3 until I had 500 hours of flight training with a pilot in the other seat, and we made all these instrument approaches to the fields in South America and we didn't always need the screen on the cockpit window. It was horrible flight conditions, thunderstorms, and always on the earphones, but we never did find any of the wrecks, though, from the crashes, but in the two years I was in the squadron we had one--two unfortunate mishaps. One of our crews coming into Recife, Brazil, which is on the east coast of Brazil, they flew a little bit too low and ran into a mountaintop as they were making the approach to the field in a rainstorm and they were all killed, three pilots and several crew members. There was one other disaster when one of our most likable pilots had to--he and another pilot had to fly one of our planes to Jacksonville Naval Air Station for an overhaul. They had to change the engines, and when they came back they were deadheading passengers on an empty DC-3 going back to Miami, and we had a big air base in Jacksonville. One of the fighter planes collided with the DC-3 and ended up in the St. Johns River, so we lost the three pilots the year I was there, but thanks to all the instrument training I had had, I made it, all those trips to Rio. Rio de Janeiro is just a beautiful city.

Healey: Beautiful from the sky or were you able to--

du Mee: Oh, when we landed in Rio we always had two days and three nights off and they quartered us in the Luxor Hotel. This was on Copacabana Beach, and we usually had a room on the top floor. It was about ten stories high. We would get up in the morning, put on our bathing suits and check the weather. The ocean was right across the street, and first we'd call down to the kitchen for café et chocolat, and they would bring us hot chocolate and pastry for breakfast and we would enjoy that before we went across the street to go swimming. I always remember, we used to comment, what a way to fight a war! And it was because those flights away from home, which took four days each, so I was gone for eight days on these flights and to outlying bases.

Healey: Were there other places where you had layovers for a day or two or more? I use the term layovers; that you had to fly down and then had a couple of days before you turned around and flew back?

du Mee: Yes. Occasionally we had a short flight and we went as far as Trinidad and maybe [unintelligible].

Healey: You stopped in Trinidad and you'd stop and get off at the airport?

du Mee: We had quarters on the base at the airport. I remember, I think I only stopped overnight in Trinidad once, and at the bar we had Cuba Libre, and on the radio they played Drinkin' Rum and Coca-Cola, which was a real popular song that the Andrews Sisters recorded, and there they were singing about us. It felt like they

were singing about us because they were songs that if you've ever been to Trinidad "the native girls were very bad," or something--never went swimming there, but there was a Manzanilla Beach, we were just a little ways away from there, so we thought that was rather poetic that we should have our drink while they were playing the song about Trinidad.

Healey: Any other memories from your time with that squadron in Miami?

du Mee: Well, the trips to Rio of course were always a highlight, and I had wonderful experiences there. We went sightseeing, went up on Sugar Loaf Mountain and took the tramway up to Corcovado, the statue of Christ, just a short ways from Dakonne (??) and beautiful view of the city from there, and at nights we usually went out, ended up going dancing at the Copacabana Hotel which is on our street there, only a few blocks away from where we stayed, and I met some nice young ladies there. Danced with a girl from Ipanema and got to know one from Brazil. I never corresponded with them but they were very pleasant to us, and met their parents, you know. They approved of their going out with a naval officer. The city was so different. They had these beautiful mosaic sidewalks, patterns, and then you'd walk along these streets. I just enjoyed seeing the city and I always wanted to go back when I was able to since the war.

Healey: After you left that squadron in Miami, where did you go?

du Mee: Back in Miami, whenever we came back from one of these day trips, it was like a honeymoon again. We would go out. At that time we never drank much in the way of liquor, but we used to go up the street about six blocks away to the nearest soda fountain. We loved to have vanilla malteds.

Healey: Vanilla malts?

du Mee: Hm-hmm.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: One of our senior pilots lived next door to us. I still remember, his name was Lt. Henderson. He must have had his rum and Coke every night because he would snore. In the daytime, he had to be careful that he wouldn't drink when we had to go out on a flight the next day.

Healey: When you weren't flying, what was your typical day like?

du Mee: Some sightseeing in Miami. We went to the dog races and an occasional horse race. We'd go to a movie, downtown shopping.

Healey: You weren't required to go into work on your non-flying days?

du Mee: No.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: Which was really pleasant; all we had to do was fly. We might have had an occasional hour or two of refreshing the navigation or Morse Code to keep up proficiency there. Gladys, actually after a short time, she got a steady job working for Miami Shipbuilding Company which was downtown on the Miami River, and this company built PT boats, the kind that President Kennedy commanded during his service, and once or twice they even had an outing for the people in the office, and they got a ride on the PT boat, and she had her own little service and enjoyed working there. Almost two years that we were there, so she wasn't always available. I had to go to the races myself sometimes but it was always fun, going to the horse races. One of the things that we miss. Now there aren't places like that to go around here. At night she was free. That's when we went out and just enjoyed each other's company.

Healey: Did you see another duty station after Miami or--

du Mee: Oh, yes. After Miami I was transferred to the west coast, and that was a really interesting experience too, because everything in the states was rationed. I had coupons to buy gas and we had to drive across country so we had enough coupons to supply us with gas all the way from Miami to San Francisco, and I had enough time to go to Milwaukee to visit our relatives and friends before we went out there. I always remember it took about six days to get to the coast. We had two weeks so we had a few days in Milwaukee. We were in the middle of Nevada or Utah one hot day. This was June of 1945, and we saw a car ahead of us that passed us with Wisconsin plates and we beeped at them and said hey, maybe we should stop and talk to them, so we did, and they were from Gladys's hometown, Clintonville. They were out in the desert.

Healey: Did she know them?

du Mee: She did.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: And we stayed in a quaint hotel practically in the middle of the desert that night and had a reasonable room, but was nothing fancy like today. In the middle of the night our car horn started to honk. It woke everybody up and we had to go down to the car to disconnect the wire so the horn would stop. We had a big laugh out of that, but Gladys' high school chum also moved to Miami and she had an apartment there with a cousin so we spent quite a bit of time with them, and she went cross-country with us and she got a job. Did Margie work for the government, Gladys?

Gladys: Yeah, we both did.

du Mee: And when we got to our destination we checked in there and we found an apartment in Alameda across the bay from San Francisco, close to Oakland where the air station was. Gladys got a job working for the payroll department in the Navy. Where were you, Gladys? Oakland Air Station?

Gladys: Alameda Air Station.

du Mee: Alameda Air Station.

Healey: When you were out there, what was your squadron and what was your mission?

du Mee: This was VR, which stood for transport. VR-11. The one in Miami was VR-7. My lucky numbers.

Healey: Why did you get a move from one transport unit to another?

du Mee: Why?

Healey: Yes.

du Mee: Well, the war in the Pacific was still on.

Healey: Okay. Did others from your squadron in Miami go too, or just you?

du Mee: Several of the other officers all were transferred. The squadron remained in Miami. I was sent to--after I was attached to Oakland Naval Air Station for about four weeks, I had training and learned to fly the four-engine Douglas, a DC-4, or R5D the Navy called it; Skymaster was the nickname, and we actually were temporarily assigned to detachment in San Joaquin Valley, a little town called Modesto, and after we got situated there, Gladys and I rented a hotel room and stayed there the week of my training. Very intensive training in the flight. This was very similar to flying the twin-engine Douglas and this is four engines now. We had to learn all the fine points of flying with four engines.

Healey: Tell me, what's the advantage of four engines versus two engines, if there is any.

du Mee: There wasn't--there were too many miles of water between islands in the Pacific so they had four-engine planes out there.

Healey: So they could go greater distance.

du Mee: When I finished my training there, then I was officially attached to the S-11 and I was flown out there as an extra crewman, and it was a ten and a half-, 11-hour flight from Oakland to Oahu, and the first flight I made out there had a USO show on board, and that was quite a memorable flight. One of the--two of the entertainers

were movie stars. One was Eddie Bracken, who was a comedian. He appeared in quite a few films, and he just died last year. I also met Peggy Ryan who appeared in television movies, on Hawaii 5-0. She was the secretary on the program, and I met them and had a memorable flight, enjoyable, talking to the entertainers. There were about, oh, about six or eight dancing girls and singers, and they were going to different bases in the Pacific, the USO, but once I joined the squadron, we flew--just like in Miami you had a schedule board. We had to check our status every night, see if we were going to fly the next day. I roomed with a buddy that I had met in Miami, and his name was James Nutz. We shared a Quonset hut, a double barracks there with no ceilings over our individual rooms. Crazy things. Some of the pilots between flights had a few beers and they would just throw the beers over the partition of the room that they were in and they would smash on the cement **[End of Tape 1, Side B]** in the hallway, but I never did that, but when we were scheduled to fly, then it was always with a different crew as a copilot until I had qualified to be the plane commander. After three flights in the Pacific I was officially designated plane commander, which the Army would call First Pilot.

Healey: What was your rank at that time?

du Mee: I was a Lieutenant Junior Grade.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: The flights were over miles and miles of water. A flight from Miami--from Oakland to Honolulu took 11 hours, and it was four hours to Johnson Island, a little bitty island west of Hawaii that we would put in for supply and refueling, and from there we went to Kwajalein which only a few months before had been owned by the Japanese, so there was a lot of rubble around from the bombing and the fighting there, but by the time I started to fly there the conditions were safe and we had good meals at the mess and we ran into no problems.

Healey: What was the status of the runways in places like Kwajalein and Johnson?

du Mee: They had been upgraded and repaired so they were—**[pause in tape]**

Healey: Recorded on June 7th, 2008. You talked about the runway and the length of the runway compared to the island.

du Mee: The runway was about 5,000 feet long and it went from one end of the island to the other.

Healey: How much runway did you need?

du Mee: We needed about 3,500 or 4,000 feet, and we had a drastic visual reminder to make a careful and slow landing there because at the end of the runway we would – prevailing winds were from the west so we ran it from east to west and

we touched down at about 95 miles per hour and then we had reverse pitch that would put the engines in reverse and slow us down and then, of course, we had hydraulic brakes, and at the end of the runway was a B-17 that didn't make a short enough landing and it crashed into the ocean, but it was in shallow water so probably the crew of that plane was rescued, but on my very last flight, which wasn't until November of 1945, Johnson Island, we had problems with the hydraulic system. The pressure dropped. It dropped below normal, which was 2,500 pounds, and we had to declare an emergency and alert the airfield that it was an emergency landing, and we had to--fortunately we had what was called a plane commander. It was actually a mechanic that serviced the plane for us and he flew--there was one on every flight, and he watched the engine temperatures and maintained the aircraft in good condition, and he had several gallons of fluid and he knew what to do with it and he poured it in the system and then we pumped the pressure up. There was a handle on the floor that we raised. We pumped it up and down until the pressure got up to the minimum before we made the landing, and we didn't know what the problem was, whether there was enough pressure for the gear to stay up, so I made an especially slow approach, and I still remember just before we reached the end of the runway, while we were over water I was going about 90 miles an hour. We dropped perhaps to 85 and it started to shake and now it's as close as you can get to the slow speed, but made the landing all right and then we reversed the engine, the props, and coasted to a stop and held our breath when we pushed the brakes and they worked, but we had to really step hard on them. We stopped about 20 feet from the end of the runway and then there wasn't enough pressure left to turn the nose wheel. We had a little wheel on the pilot's side, you turn the nose wheel. We had a nose wheel on the main landing gear back then, and they had to send out a truck to tow us into the station. We had lunch there and the plane was refueled and it took about two and a half hours. They found the problem. Somewhere the system had developed a leak, had lost all its hydraulic fluid, but it was okay after that so we went on to Kwajalein, about a six-hour flight, and had no more problems, but this flight was the last one I had because the war had ended in August and I still had a lot of flying to do out there. I had applied before the war ended and, of course, almost all of the pilots who were in the Naval Reserve as I was, and we had to apply for discharge and it took a few weeks before I got orders to come home, but I had some very interesting flights. One of them--I made ten flights to islands in the Pacific as far as Guam and Manila in the Philippines and Kwajalein a few times, and had one flight where I had a USO group on the plane and we had about 40 or 50 nurses, Army/Navy nurses that were flying out.

Healey: Flying out to where?

du Mee: To the islands.

Healey: The Pacific islands, Hawaii, or somewhere else?

du Mee: I think they got off in Guam and from there another plane took them wherever they had to go, and I had another flight with only--no passengers except two Marines

with side arms and a rifle. They were there just to protect the bags that we had, mailbags, that had \$13 million in the mailbags that were going to Tokyo to pay the-- This is after the war, and this was to pay the Sixth Fleet payroll.

Healey: Where were you when the war ended, when you got word that the war ended?

du Mee: I had a day off and was at the golf course between flights, and my roommate Jim and I went to--we went out golfing, the only time I did that in Honolulu. We played the Oahu Country Club. We played nine holes of golf and said, "let's go and get lunch," and we started--it was the ninth hole, started to walk to the clubhouse up the hill, and all heck broke loose; church bells ringing, whistles blowing. Of course, Jim and I knew what it was.

Healey: That was for the war end. Prior to that had you--

du Mee: That was the day that Truman announced the war was over and the Japanese were going to surrender.

Healey: But you had already heard about the bombs that were dropped.

du Mee: Yes.

Healey: How did you get word of the A-bombing?

du Mee: Hmm?

Healey: How did you get word that the bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

du Mee: Oh, by radio I guess. I don't remember having a newspaper at that time, access to one.

Healey: At that time what impact did that have? I mean did you think well, this is the end of the war, or weren't you sure, or just what?

du Mee: Oh, when the first bomb was dropped and we read about the results and how huge it was, how many people were killed, we knew that and when we had heard they were going to drop another one and said they'll never be able to keep fighting after that, this is going to end the war, so Jim and I were expecting it when they dropped the second bomb on Nagasaki. There was talk about whether we should or not, but all the--

Healey: At that time there was talk or are you talking about historically or later on?

du Mee: Scuttlebutt and all the rumors that we discussed. Jim said, "Jack that will be the end of the war if they drop another one," and he was right. As I wrote in a newspaper

article about being--playing golf the day the war ended, Jim and I knew right away what all the commotion was about, all the whistles and noise from the city of Oahu, Honolulu, rather, and we just gave each other a big hug.

Healey: And how long was it before you--After the end of the war in August of '45, how long was it before you applied to get out?

du Mee: The Navy and the Service had billions of pounds of equipment and servicemen that had to be taken back to the states, so we just kept flying from the islands to Honolulu and an occasional flight back to Oakland.

Healey: What type of things were you transporting?

du Mee: Mostly personnel. The last one I had in Honolulu to San Francisco, I had--all of our passengers were survivors from Corregidor in the march on Bataan, and these poor guys were--they were skinnier than I am now and emaciated. They had suffered for years like John McCain in prison camp, and it was a very traumatic experience, always up to ten hours after we saw the coastline of California, and they would take turns being up in the cockpit where they could see. Most of them never thought they'd ever see America again.

Healey: And approximately how many were you bringing back?

du Mee: About--between 45 and 50.

Healey: Did you pick them up in Hawaii or did you pick them up somewhere else?

du Mee: We picked them up in Hawaii.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: And then they got out in Oakland, the naval air station. That was the last flight I had to the states, and then when I came back to Honolulu to the naval air station, my orders had arrived and they sent me home on a Navy communications ship, the USS Rocky Mount.

Healey: Was that your first time on a ship?

du Mee: [laughs] That was my first and only time on a ship.

Healey: On a Navy ship in the Navy.

du Mee: I thought oh, how revolting. Several times the crews--when the planes flew over, four-engine planes, I knew they had to be transport carriers from our squadron and I felt pretty bad about that, but then I thought well, at least I can say I spent a few days at sea on a Navy ship. The rest of the time it was all up in the air, so I was

lucky to get back. When I landed, later on I thought it was quite poetic. I've driven across the Oakland Bay Bridge, flown over it, and now I'm on a ship, and when the ship docked at Pier 13 Gladys was there waiting for me. We both had tears in our eyes we were so happy.

Healey: And when was that?

du Mee: That was December 9th, 1945.

Healey: And where were you discharged?

du Mee: At Oakland Naval Air Station. Well, we had a special place where I was discharged and we had to sign off for our flight gear and get our orders. We had two weeks leave and got gas coupons to go home.

Healey: Oh, the Service gave you the gas coupons?

du Mee: Yes.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: But that was only to buy the gas. What was it, 25, 30 cents a gallon? Gladys and I stayed in a hotel that night and then we drove to Los Angeles and stayed a night there at the St. Francis Hotel, and then we drove home on Route 66.

Healey: How far did Route 66 take you?

du Mee: All the way from LA to Chicago, just like the song, but that was quite an experience in itself. It was December when we left Los Angeles, Southern California. There was snow on the mountains and it was cold and had to have heat on the train and we had--seemed like we had nothing but problems. The train lost--had two engines to take us through the mountains and one of them had problems, couldn't make it. They had to take it off in Flagstaff and--I'm getting my tours mixed. We drove home. That's how come we stopped in Los Angeles, and we drove home on Route 66 and it was in Flagstaff. Northern Arizona had a pretty cold spell summer, below zero, and we weren't prepared for it. We had to stop in a little town to have our radiator drained so that the heater wouldn't freeze up, and there was no place to stay. We were in a little town called--Gladys? What was the little town that we stayed in when we drove home from San Francisco? Ash Fork? Ash Fork. Yes. This was one of the main routes east out of Southern California. Motels were very new then and there was no place to stay. We got permission to sleep in the lobby of the Harvey Hotel, and I had a single Army cot in the trunk of my car and we both slept on the Army cot in the lobby under the stairs going upstairs, and that night they had a fire in the town and the corner bar and store burned up. We went outside to watch all the commotion about 3:00 in the morning, and Gladys slipped and almost fell on the ice, and after that, the next morning things were back to normal. We picked up

our car and the mechanic that drained the radiator forgot to drain the air and water out of the heater so it was pretty cold by day, but at night it started to get ten, 15 degrees colder, somewhere around 20 below, and we didn't dare stop because we were afraid the car wouldn't start. There wasn't any water left in the radiator, and we stopped and talked to the--had a cup of coffee and sandwich and the man said, here's something to help you." He gave us a cloth bag of salt so that we could-- because our heater didn't work because he forgot to drain the water out of that, so the windshield frosted up continually. We kept putting our hands on the window. Gladys would be able to make a hole in the windshield so I could see to drive, and I remember I was wearing my warmest officer's uniform, green Navy gabardine, and I had my flight suit, jacket. I put that on. We had a blanket for our knees and we drove all night making holes in the windshield so we could drive, and I remember I was shaking on the inside but we made it through the night, and in the morning we stopped and pulled off the road, took a nap for a half hour, and at noon we reached Amarillo, Texas and checked into a hotel there and went to bed, and we got up about 6:00 to go to dinner. I collapsed, I was so cold. I was suffering from exposure, didn't know it. The hotel doctor came up and said, "You better keep him warm, give him some hot soup, and wait until tomorrow before you drive," and that was that. Exciting trip home.

Healey: How was your homecoming when you got back to Milwaukee?

du Mee: We didn't have any big celebration, but my dad and mom, sister and brother were overjoyed. We got a get-together and had a good time talking about World War II.

Healey: And what did you do in your civilian life when you returned to civilian life?

du Mee: I got a job selling storm and screen doors. It was a company called Rusco, R-u-s-c-o.

Healey: Was that in Milwaukee?

du Mee: In Milwaukee.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: And I see there's a company here called Wasco. I wonder if they took over that company and changed the name, but anyhow, I was a poor salesman so the job didn't last long, two or three weeks, and then I had to find something else, and one day before I quit I talked to a gentleman about the windows and I found out that what he did is he was a bus driver and said he really enjoyed it. He said I ought to do it, get a job with Milwaukee Electric Works Service Company, so I applied to them and took a driving test and they said it was the best test that anyone ever took. I was a born transport driver, and the little company paper, that's the notice they put in when I was recalled to active duty, is that Jack will still be a transport driver when he goes back in the Service, but instead of that this was eight years after the war.

Healey: And you were called up in Korea also.

du Mee: Right.

Healey: When were you called up for Korea?

du Mee: This was in--I got the orders in September of '53, and because of the Korean War the Navy needed all the engine-experienced pilots to fly this bomber.

Healey: Had you kept up your flight qualification in any way between--

du Mee: Yes.

Healey: How did you do that?

du Mee: I joined the Organized Reserve, which is like the National Guard, and every month I had to spend a weekend at Glenview Naval Air Station, the primary training base **[End of Tape 2, Side A]** and we would take flights around the country in the DC-3, twin-engine Douglas.

Healey: Were you training--Were your flights purely training flights or were you transporting anything?

du Mee: They were just training flights.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: They might have sent correspondence. I don't recall if it was anything special, but we made flights around the country. We went to Lincoln, Nebraska; Corpus Christi, Texas--or Pensacola, all the way to Miami, Washington, and after two years I had hoped to re-enlist or be able to be recalled. That was the time of the Berlin Air Lift, and my buddy that I had roomed with wrote me and said, "Jack, you should call them up and find out." He said he was over there flying with the four-engine transport there in the Pacific, and so I wrote a letter and they sent it back and said they were sorry, they were filled up, they didn't need any more help, so then a year later I was dropped from the Organized Reserve because I made--I had a promotion to Senior Grade Lieutenant and they said they weren't allowed more lieutenants in the squadron. Myself and another pilot had to be released to inactive duty, so I felt that was going to be the end of my flight career. A year later I came home from my bus driving job which I had gotten and I had a big envelope with orders recalling me back to duty. Just like that.

Healey: Was that unexpected?

du Mee: Oh, yeah. That was out of the blue, so that's when we decided well, we won't let the Navy separate us just because we have a family. We had a boy and girl, five and seven years old, and we put our house up for sale and I reported for flight training in Illinois and I went to Washington at that time with five other pilots who were puzzled why they were called back. One of them had about five children and one was an airline pilot. He didn't want to lose his [pause in tape].

Healey: Jack du Mee. And when we left off we were talking about why you were called back, and you said it was because of the Russian--

du Mee: The Russian threat to the NATO nations and the U.S. At the time, the Russians were building submarines, nuclear subs, and the U.S. CIA said they had about 400 subs, a lot of whom were around on both coasts of the United States, and we had only 100 subs to counteract them. They had determined that the best way to fight the submarines is to [unintelligible] aircraft could fly many hours over the water, hunt for these subs, drop bombs and depth charges on them, and we didn't know if we had engine pilots, so that's why we were called back. I went through training at Norfolk Naval Air Station and learned about all the electronic equipment in the bombers and learning to fly the Peking Neptune made by Lockheed and joined the squadron at Patuxent River, Maryland. Then spent a little over two years with that squadron, and almost all the flights were over water. We never actually saw a Russian sub, but we didn't want to mess with the U.S. subs, practicing dropping depth charges, and finding the submerged subs.

Healey: Was your family with you at the time?

du Mee: Yeah.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: Gladys said we're not going to let the Navy take us apart, so when I went to Norfolk for training she put the house up for sale, sold it, the furniture with it. We became nomads and found a little apartment in Norfolk. I had six weeks of training there, and then I was sent to Patuxent River with the fleet, Patrol Squadron 21. This was a big twin-engine bomber with all unimaginable gear on it where you had three double-barrel--double sets of machine guns, .50 caliber machine guns where you drop bombs or mines, a radio, sonic buoys, and we had rockets, sixteen rockets on the wing, and we had a searchlight on the starboard wing.

Healey: Where did you do your training runs, your bombing runs?

du Mee: Over the Atlantic. All our flights were over the Atlantic, and these patrol squadrons, whenever possible we could get an overseas base they sent the entire squadron to a foreign station for five months. We were only in the squadron a month and they sent all of us, we had twelve planes, the crews, the planes all flew to Malta in the Mediterranean. We used the British base there, the facilities, and from there we had

numerous exercises with the Sixth Fleet, and the NATO forces over there; Turkish, British, French, and we went on--

Healey: You were at Malta all of that time.

du Mee: All at Malta for five months. The Navy was pretty tricky. They said six months deployment they would pay for the travel, but because we only stayed five months we had to pay for our own transportation for our families, so we got reservations for the following year when we had to go back again. Gladys went over there with the children on a Greek ship and they had a great experience with the Greeks and the ocean voyage.

Healey: You were back to Malta again?

du Mee: I lived in Naples, and we flew to Malta, found an apartment there on that island and I spent three months. Unfortunately our time was cut short because they decided the runways had been beaten up too much by our big bombers. They had to repair the runways. They moved us to North Africa; Tripoli, North Africa the last three weeks of our tour there so Gladys and the children had to go home early and I took a week's leave of absence and we flew to Rome and took a high-speed train to Geneva, Switzerland, Paris and Amsterdam, and Gladys and the kids went home on the Rotterdam, a big ocean liner, steady enough for a hurricane. They crossed the Atlantic and Gladys got sick and had a terrible headache and the kids survived, thought it was great fun, but our daughter, Sherry, was only six, seven. She said, "See, mom, I told you we should fly home." [laughs]

Healey: Now you didn't go back with your family.

du Mee: No. I had to stay. I had to fly the plane back to Malta after they fixed the runways, and about three, four weeks later the whole squadron flew back to Patuxent River. While we were gone they changed our base to Brunswick, Maine, the naval air station there. I lived in Maine for four or five months. When we arrived there they didn't have the housing completed. I had to rent a little cabin and stayed in the cabin.

Healey: What were the kids doing for school at the time?

du Mee: They went to school wherever they could. They went to Chinley Park (??), a local elementary school in Brunswick. They went to school somewhere. They probably had more experience than most kids when they came home, so they grew up to be very intelligent kids.

Healey: How long was your tour of duty, and when were you discharged?

du Mee: Just over two years; two years and three months. I was discharged in June of 1955.

Healey: And where did you go after that?

du Mee: Went home to Milwaukee. That's when I tried to sell windows and had a bus job with the electric company and got a bus driving job. Just great, just like flying again but with four wheels, and I enjoyed it.

Healey: Is that what you stayed at then, bus driving?

du Mee: No.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: I got--I was employed by--I went back to the A&P Tea Company and they were enlarging stores and building supermarkets, and I was put in charge of the dairy department and sold all kinds of cheese and dairy products. I had a whole new department there, and when they were busy I helped out as a cashier, too. I have to challenge my remarks I think. When I came home a few months we decided to take advantage of the GI bill and we could go to school, so we all signed up for Louis Hotel Training School.

Healey: This was after World War II or after Korea?

du Mee: After Korea.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: And we went to Washington, D.C., 13 weeks at this school. Went to manage a motel and did a lot of cooking, and we got a job managing a new motel on the eastern shore in Maryland, and then that led to a motel in Jacksonville, Florida, and eventually we got to Miami and I worked for a luxury hotel on Key Biscayne for a couple years.

Healey: Did you work for the same company or did you just go from hotel to hotel?

du Mee: It was the same company in Jacksonville, so we bought a house, built our own home in northern Dade County in Miami, and I worked two years at the front desk in the Key Biscayne Hotel.

Healey: Well, after your Service life--and I don't know if you did this or not--but did you stay in contact with any of the people that you had met, or were you part of any veterans' organizations?

du Mee: I joined the VFW a few years ago.

Healey: Here in Marion?

du Mee: Yes.

Healey: What brought you back to Marion, Wisconsin?

du Mee: Gladys.

Healey: Okay.

du Mee: Gladys missed the—we might have stayed in Florida when we retired. My last position there was administrator of a senior citizens' housing, 15-story building on College Avenue right across from the ocean, and I got the job because I knew Gladys's boss and she worked for 26 years for—in the hotel corporation that built the—managed six HUD projects, Housing and Urban Development, for senior citizens around the country. When it was time to retire they needed a manager there and they liked me and knew me and I became administrator of this hotel on Miami Beach, and Gladys was a comptroller in the office and spent four years working for them, and when we both turned 65 within five weeks of—five months of each other, we retired, and Gladys said, “I don't want to live in Florida any more, I want to go back home to Wisconsin.” She has quite a few—she has two sisters and five brothers here. I had my sister and brother, and so we came back to Wisconsin.

Healey: And where do your children live?

du Mee: Gladys said at the time she couldn't live in Florida after we had no jobs because she said you never know whether it's Christmas or the 4th of July. So we came home to Wisconsin. Our children; son, Jack, Jr., lives in Phoenix. Daughter—and our youngest son, Bill, daughter Sherry, live in Florida. Can't get them out of there. Probably I should have stayed in Florida because I like the hot weather. Gladys can't stand it when it gets hot. I was very fortunate to have had such wonderful flight training, plus the traveling in the United States and foreign countries and making a lot of good friends. Navy life turned out to be pretty good to me, six years of active duty. I did my part.

Healey: When you were discharged, what was your final rank?

du Mee: I was Lieutenant Senior Grade, two stripes.

Healey: Well, I thank you for participating.

du Mee: You're welcome. I enjoyed it.

[End of Interview]