Civil Air Patrol
Oral History Interview

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MR. DEL J. GALLIER

NATIONAL HISTORICAL COMMITTEE
Headquarters CAP

CAP ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Number	
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H. Del, why don't you start with a little personal background. Where you came from, when you got into aviation, how you drifted to CAP and those sort of things.

D. I was born and reared in Beaumont and I started out after I got out of school in the welding business. I stayed with that for quite a few years until the war came along but before this I got interested in airplanes through Johnny Walker. Johnny's from seven one and he was working with the same people I was working with. He said, "Let's go out to the airport and take a little hop." I never had been up in an airplane. Course Johnny had been flying since 1931. So we went out and he took me up and I really enjoyed it. So I got to flying with Johnny occasionally.

H. When was this, Del?

D. This was in...probably 1935. I'd go up once in awhile with Johnny and got to liking flying quite a bit. In the meantime I had met some of the instructors out there. And I talked myself into taking flying lessons from one of the old-timer, instructors, and what turned out to be one of the best friends

I ever had.

H. Who was he?

D. Earl West. He had a couple of Cub Coupes that he was giving instructions in and flying some short missions. Courier missions, stuff of that kind. And he also was working for Lower Natchez Valley on picking up water samples out of the Natchez River and he would go up, oh, a couple of hundred miles up the Natchez River picking up water samples about two or three times a week and usually he'd con somebody into riding up there with him. He'd ask somebody if they wanted to go for a ride out at the airport and the'd say Oh yeah, sure. And he'd say well come get in the car with me. He'd say we got to make a little run up here. (This'd be in the morning fairly early) And he'd take 'm off. Shanghaid'm, see. They'd have to spend the day with him or either get out and walk back. (Laughter) So I had got almost time to solo with Earl. There was another airplane out there that I liked a whole lot. 22 Fairchild. It belonged to a Chrysler dealer over at Sour Lake (?) . Well, I couldn't afford to buy the plane on my own. I didn't have enough money. So I had a friend of mine go in with me and we bought this airplane from Les Handcomer. It was in mint condition. He was the type of guy that would.....everything had to be perfect. He kept the airplane clean and all the inspections up to date and everything like it was supposed to be. So I flew this....I got somebody else to give me some instruction on this 22 Fairchild before I soloed with Earl. Another

instructor by the name of Wiley Sullivan. He rode with me for about an hour one day and says, "You go ahead. You can make it." So he got out on me out on the field and I made it around all right and shot a few landings and came on in. From then on I was hooked on flying. We'd make trips to Dallas. Made one trip, the furthest one was to Miami, Florida. Went down to an air show. And almost went to Cuba, but I got to thining about that water. Ninety miles of water, crossing, and backed out on that deal. There was a bunch of airplanes from there that did go and I guess they all made it over there and back. I never did hear anything different. But we were at an airshow up in Dallas on Pearl Harbor Day. They were just fixing to start this air show when the news came over the loud speaker about Pearl Harbor. So that just knocked the air show in the head.

H. They cancelled the air show.

D. Yes. They cancelled that out and I think you might have read in that one paper there something about Jimmy Marshall and Hadaway was wanting (unclear) air show.

H. Yes, I think so.

D. So that was about the time that CAP appeared on the surface. I forget who it was, but I think it was Jimmy Marshall was the one that indoctrinated it down at Beaumont amongst the flyers down here and they had a meeting coming up at A & M College. About 8 or 10 of us got together and went to this meeting.

Most all of us got into the CAP after that. We found out what it was all about and we had airplanes and by this time I had a little better, a heavier, airplane. I had a ZKS 7 Waco, which was a good patrol ship. They needed some heavier airplanes other than those Voyagers and stuff like that, you know.

H. You got into CAP about when was that, Del?

D. That was shortly after Pearl Harbor.

H. And that was in the Beaumont Squadron with and that bunch.

D. That was in the Beaumont Squadron, yes.

H. Were you part of that predecessor to the Beaumont Squadron, the Wingover Club?

D. No, I didn't belong to that. That was a little bit ahead of my time. That was several years ahead of when I got into it. That was a bunch of the oldtimers that were into it for quite a few years before I got in it. From then on we made several trips to Dallas. Harold Byrnes had an office there and he was made Wing Commander of this area. So that was where I met my wife up there. She was secretary to Harold Byrnes in the CAP office and his oil office.

H. In Dallas.

D. So shortly thereafter they moved some people from Dallas and

a few more scattered around from different parts of the country down here to Beaumont and started setting up the base here for the coastal patrol and they got Red Waldron down as a radio man and he had been building radio stations for different companies. They got him to come down and join the CAP and stayed with us and built the station we used for the entirety of our operation.

H. He built the station himself.

D. He built the station outright.

H. When did you join up with Coastal Patrol 10?

D. Well I joined up about the time that they came down and got started setting up here on the original setup on it.

H. Then you were one of the 'founding fathers,' so to speak.

D. Yes, I was one of the first ones in it. There was probably fifteen or twenty people from this area and surrounding area, fairly close, that were in it on the start.

H. Where did the others come from, Del?

D. Well, they were from west Texas, south Texas, some (one or two) from New York, from Pennsylvania. They were scattered from all over the United States.

H. Just came in to do their patriotic duty, so to speak.

D. Right. By this time the CAP was getting pretty well

publicized where people knew what it was and they would go to these airports and talk to people that had available aircraft that could be used for this type of work. They would get them to consign an airplane to our operation and them come down with it or if it wasn't possible for them to come down if there was any way that we could fairly decent airplanes to fly.

H. Now you put your Waco in the pool, so to speak, then. Right?

D. Yes. It was one of the first ones to go in. (pause)

H. Go ahead. You're doing fine!

D. It wasn't too long after we got started down here that we had a hurricane come in. Had 80 to 85 mile winds and we had a pretty good warning on what to expect and had all the ships tied down out on the field and had them kind of scattered out and separated. We didn't lose any of them. Made that storm in good shape. So we were kind of patting ourselves on the back about that and about a week or ten days later had another storm coming. We decided we'd better not crowd our luck too much and move these airplanes away from here. Right off of the coast. To Randolph Field. We flew about ten to fifteen airplanes to Randolph Field. Some of them were put into hangars at Municipal Airport. And of course some of them we didn't have pilots for and they had to be tied down on the field. We got up there and spent one day, made it pretty good and the next day that

storm hit right about where we were.

H. It moved over to San Antonio instead of coming in here. (laughter)

D. I lost my Waco. It tore loose an SM8A Stetson that was tied down pretty close to my airplane and some of the people up there that saw it said that it went up in the air, turned over upside down and fell right on top of my airplane.

H. That was at Randolf?

D. Yes. We lost about four or five airplanes in that storm.

H. Do you remember about when that was? What month?

D. I sure don't remember the dates on it. It probably was in August or September, somewheres along in there.

H. Do you recall the first patrol flight that went out of Beaumont?

D. No. I don't know exactly which was the first one, but I think that Bill Casson in his (Stagger Wing Beach) was probably the first one to go out on patrol. And I don't recall which airplane went with him.

H. Your first flight was July 7, 1942. And you say you think that was Bill Casson and

D. I'm fairly sure that was Bill Casson. He was with MacDermott Oil Company from San Antonio.

H. Was it his plane or MacDermott's?

D. It was MacDermott's airplane. But he had been flying for them for years. He was their pilot and they assigned him and the aircraft both to our base. Helping out.

H. Back to your situation, Del, and your getting involved in Base 10: You just quit your civilian job and moved in out there full time or how did you handle that?

D. Yes. I finally just got a leave of absence, more or less from my regular job and of course we didn't have too much income, other than we made a little off of the airplanes, you know, and got a small per diem which didn't do too well on carrying you very far. After I lost the Waco, I had some more planes on the base that people weren't going to take, from Wichita Falls and I bought another Waco from a man by the name of Weisman from Wichita Falls and got back into the flying business.

H. Did the insurance company pay you for the Waco or...

D. It was paid for, but didn't have near enough money on it. I learned a lesson on the first one on how much to insure it for. By the time you buy an airplane and put instruments in it, radio equipment and all that stuff, you don't relize how much money you actually have in it, until you sit down and have to start figuring it up.

H. So you got yourself another Waco and stayed on. You were

full time. You didn't have another job on the side?

D. No. I didn't have any other outside job. No.

H. Where did you live at the time?

D. I was living with my mother and dad at home. We lived in Beaumont. At that time I was staying with them until I married.

H. So you married Mavis after she came down here to work at the base and you were at the base also?

D. Yes. And I married her and we opened when? In July, or June?

H. June. Well, June and you started flying in July.

D. Yes. And I married her in November. I got leave of absence from the base and we went to Mexico City for our honeymoon. Were gone about two weeks. Came back, and got back into it. I was going on a mission to pick up an airplane in Fort Worth and it just happened that John Henry Dean and Dean Ward were on a leave for a few days and I was going to hitch a ride with them to Fort Worth to bring this airplane back, being assigned to the base. So the weather was bad when we left Beaumont. Not bad enough to keep us from flying, but visibility was pretty bad. When we got half way up to Fort Worth a little better, came to a little town and John Henry Dean ~~dicsided~~ decided he'd drop

down a little lower and check the reading on a water tower to see where he was exactly. And that was (Mexia?) Texas. And after we read the water tower he made a climbing short turn to get back on course to go to Fort Worth and he pulled that airplane up too tight. It was overloaded with three of us in it and our baggage, too. It went into a high speed . It spun over the top and headed straight down immediately with full power. I'd say maybe 400 ft. And he did manage to get it out of the spin just in time to level off and hit a bunch of trees. Flew through these trees.... and of course it took off all the wings and tail section off the airplane. And it went over on one side and landed in a lumber yard, in downtown Mexia. So I was pretty well stunned, but still conscious the whole time and I was trying to get out of the airplane. The back seat where I was sitting was the only place on there that wasn't torn up. There was some people there immediately. Course all they had to do was come in off of the sidewalks or street and help me out of the airplane.

H. That happened then in the daytime?

D. Oh yeah. So I knew that the pilot and the co-pilot in the front.....I could see what happened to the airplane, I knew that there was no way that they could be saved.

H. Did you have a fire or anything?

D. No fire. Very fortunate. So they took me to the hospital

and I called back to the base and told them what had happened. They sent some people from the base up there immediately to check everything over that they had to do on a crash of that kind. I spent about a week in the hospital with no more than banged up all over and a broken ankle was the only thing I had to contend with.

H. Truly fortunate.

D. I was very fortunate. When I finally got to where I could go back to beaumont, I was unable to fly with a broken ankle and they were looking for an engineering officer. So they assigned me to engineering. With my background and experience and all, I was qualified to do them a good job. On which we did.

H. Going back now, before you got into the crash, you were flying offshore missions and things of that nature?

D. Oh yeah. Yes, I had made quite a few off-shore patrols.

H. What did you generally feel or see or do when you were out there, Del?

D. They would give us a grid with longitude and latitude and everything marked off on it and we would fly a zig-zag course from one end of that grid to the other and send in a report every thirty minutes to our base station on a location report. We would stay out, depending on the fuel capacity of the airplanes, most of the missions were three

hours to maybe three and a half hours. Two airplanes would always go on the same mission in case something happened to one of them, maybe the other one could be of some assistance, to radio in location reports and stuff of that kind where it would help if needed.

H. Now your crash at Mexia was, from looking at the records on it, about the 16th of November of '42. Now a week before that you had a crash down here at Beaumont where you lost two pilots also, didn't you?

D. I don't remember the date on that crash.

H. November 11, actually, on Armistice Day of '42.

D. We had Colman Taylor, and Taylor had, I think it was his first day on the base....with his airplane.....the airplane was checked over at the hangar and everything seemed to be in good shape, qualified for offshore patrol. They went out on a mission and something happened to the engine. From the reports, it might have been a crank shaft that broke in a Ranger Engine.

H. That was a fairly common problem with Rangers, wasn't it?

D. Well, that was one of the problems. They kind of suspected that that might have been what put them down. Of course they had a position report on them right away.

H. Who was flying cover for them, do you recall?

D. Don't remember who was with them. They immediately sent the Sikorsky out to see what they could do about picking them up. The weather was pretty windy and not real bad weather, but it was windy and kind of stormy. Visibility wasn't too bad, but the waves were probably 12 to 14 feet high. J.K. West and Wimpy Neal in the Sikorsky located them without any trouble from the other airplane that was holding a position on them. And they went in to land in a trough as close to them as they could get. They got within about one hundred yards of them. But upon landing they knocked one of the pontoons off one wing and that wing got down in the water. By this time they had the Coast Guard out of....I'm not sure whether it was Cameron or where the Coast Guard came from. I think it was Cameron. They had to call for volunteers to go out on the Coast Guard boat on account of the rough weather. Anyhow they got the crew together on the boat and got out there in time to pick up J. K. West and Wimpy Neal which by this time was separated quite a ways from Corm and Taylor. They did pick up all of them. After they had them all picked up they hooked on to the Sikorsky and were going to tow it in. In picking up Corm and Taylor, one of them had already died from exposure which was around four hours, I guess, that they were in that cold water. The other one died about the time they got in to Cameron with him. In towing in the Sikorsky, they towed it a little ways, then it went down and they had to cut loose from it.

H. So that was the end of the Spirit of Africa.

D. That was it.

H. How did that airplane come to get down here, by the way?

D. I don't remember that exactly. Somebody....Hadaway, probably, knew who had it and we were on the lookout for a duck for rescue work and he probably promoted it from somebody.

H. He promoted it! I was just curious. That was an historic airplane. The Taylor-Corn thing was just one of those tragedies where the weather was too bad because apparently you all knew where it was.

D. Yes. Had the weather not been so cold, the water so cold, they would have made it all right.

H. That's one of the amazing things about this whole proposition: The survivability rate of those crashes at sea was somewhere about 83%, which you normally wouldn't think you could survive that readily out there.

D. Well, the other airplane (we lost two more airplanes) that went down and we didn't have that problem because the weather wasn't so cold. They were picked up by the Coast Guard after several hours without any problems.

H. Do you recall any specifics of those two crashes?

D. One of them was Charlie Kehoe. I don't recall who was his observer. They were out around the 18 mile light off from Sabine. Had an engine failure and had to set a Waco down. They were both picked up within two to three hours and didn't suffer any damages from their experiences. Then we had Sumner Evans and his observer who was named Winnfield. Were down off from High Island. They were out about 20 miles from High Island. They went down one evening. It was quite a bit after dark before the Coast Guard could locate them and pick them up. They didn't suffer any physical damage.

H. They were lucky getting picked up after dark.

D. Yes.

H. What did you all carry for survival equipment, Del? Just a Mae West or something?

D. Just a Mae West. Everybody had to wear a Mae West before they would leave, get to the water. Other than that, we had dye markers that colored the water. But other than that we didn't have much protection.

H. How about flares or flashlights? They got rescued after dark and they were real fortunate. There were only two other cases where people went down at sea?

D. Yes. Well, we lost an airplane in the surf. And on the beach.

But that was the only two that went down on patrol off shore.

H. Where'd you lose them in the surf?

D. Well, one of them was down around Cameron. It landed on the beach and was picking up some bales of rubber that had floated in off a sunken ship. There was all kind of debris on the beach most of the time. Most all of the pilots would love that beach patrol, just to see what all that was there.

H. Natural scroungers, huh?

D. That's about right. He had overloaded his airplane with bales of rubber. Tried to take off and he got into the water. He had his wheels into the water some way or another and couldn't make it. It got away from him, went over on his back.

H. Who was that, Del?

D. That was John L. Fitch. The other one happened down between High Island and Gilcrest. They had landed on the beach for I don't know what reason. But on takeoff they had a real strong north wind. Wind put them in the water, and after he got his wheels in the water he didn't have much chance of taking off. So it went over on its back. Probably in one to two feet of water. We lost two airplanes on that.

H. Were those airplanes totalled out or did you, did somebody, go down and get them?

D. One of them was repaired. Oh, yeah, the airplanes were dismantled and brought back into the base.

H. Did you get them with a boat?

D. Well, we didn't have to have a boat, because the water wasn't that deep.

H. Well, you were on the beach. Did you go down and get them?

D. No. I wasn't involved on picking them up. We sent a motor truck with somebody with a float on it...you know, big enough to haul something like that, and sent some of the boys off the base down there with it. Sent the mechanics. They would dismantle it and load it up and bring it back into Beaumont.

H. One of these beach crashes (I haven't been able to find out from you all which one it was) the official Army records read that it was in connection with a search for a missing bomber that had crashed down around Cameron. That was actually southeast of Mud Lake. Somebody landed on the beach, quote, to do it, and flipped an airplane at that time.
I don't have the specific date reference on that particular thing.

D. I don't recall that one.

H. I can probably find it in just a minute. Why don't you just keep on talking and tell me what went on until we get that. Now you had a little incident....you and Herman had an incident at High Island yourself, didn't you?

D. Yes. Well, we were not actually at High Island. We were at Gilcrest. What had happened is that they had an SM8A Stetson go down in the marsh. He landed on a ridge. Had engine trouble. He didn't hurt the airplane on landing. So my mission was to take a mechanic down there to work on the airplane. We dropped them off. We landed in there beside where the Stetson had landed, and dropped the mechanic off with only a few miles over to Gilcrest where they had a landing strip right beside the road. Hadn't been down there in a year or two on this landing strip, but every now and then somebody would land there. We were going to go get something for them to eat, for that crew working down there in the marsh. So I drug this strip over and it looked real good. I made two passes at this landing strip. It looked real good, so I turned around and came back in and landed. I had Herman Coll with me. We were doing real good. Made a good landing. Got slowing down to about between 15 and 20 miles an hour, and one wheel went in some loose sand on a wash that they had filled in. The airplane stood up on its nose and almost balanced and then went over on its back. We were uninjured. Of course we had to call in and get somebody to come down and get us

from the base.

H. How'd they come get you? They flew in?

D. No. They sent a station wagon down to pick us up.

H. Whose airplane? Was that your airplane that that happened in? Or somebody else's?

D. Yes. That was my airplane. When they got down, we righted the airplane and had one cracked spar and the cowling was bent a little bit. There really wasn't much damage to the airplane cause in that soft sand it went over real easy.

H. How about the prop?

D. It didn't hurt the prop. We were just lucky the prop was (I guess) crossways when it went over.

H. And they didn't worry about all those things like slips and stops on the engines in that time, did they?

D. So that airplane was repaired without much trouble and put back into service.

H. Did you fly it out of there after you repaired it down there or did you carry it back?

D. No. No, we had to dismantle it and bring it in on account of the cracked spar.

H. Back to the crash on the beach (unclear) it was your airplane, Number 10-23. I don't know the type of airplane it was or anything else.

D. It was 10-07.

H. 10-07? And this was in February of '43. No. The one that I was talking about that crashed on the beach landing by a bomber.

(pause)

Your airplane was 10-07. This one in the record was

D. Oh. No, I don't remember the number on that airplane. It was a Stetson.

H. Okay. This one said 10-23 was lost on land near while attempting to land on the beach in connection with a sighted crashed bomber. It was just a typical log entry like the one I gave you last night. And it said it crashed on the beach and burned. Do you recall anything of that nature?

D. I sure don't. That could have been a Grand Isle airplane.

H. Not with a 10. Not with a 10-something. That would have been yours. It would have been a 9-something. Well, it's just one of those things. Again, a lot of my source of information is those Army records like I showed you last night. Most of the time they're pretty good, but they - like everything else - somebody makes a mistake in those too.

So you and Herman mostly hurt your pride.

D. That was the main problem. (laughter)
We were back in the air before too long.

H. When you said after your crashed, you were the engineering officer for awhile. Did you stay that way or did you just do it for awhile and then went back to flying full time?

D. No. I was pretty well hung with that job because no one else wanted it. I was more or less assigned to it and no way I could shake loose from it. But I did make some missions after my leg got to where I could fly again. Not like I would have if I hadn't been in engineering.

H. Yes, 'cause that kept you pretty busy, I imagine.

D. Every now and then I would make a trip.

H. What was your total time flying? Do you remember, out there? How many hours did you fly?

D. On the base? I don't remember exactly. Probably was around 1500 to 2000 hours total time.

H. Did they give you an air medal for it or not?

D. No.

H. They didn't give you a medal.

D. No.

D. On lots of days there we'd fly seven, eight hours. Sometimes more than that. Make two missions, or three. We were short of airplanes. Then there was quite a few courier trips away from our base for business purposes. Procuring things from Houston, San Antonio, or taking some of the officials to different locations.

H. While you were out there doing your searches and convoy duty and things of that nature, did you ever spot any submarines or anything of that nature?

D. Personally, I didn't ever see any myself.

H. Do you recall any pilots' stories about seeing them?

D. Yes, some of the other pilots had reported sighting.

H. Did any of them drop bombs on them that you know of?

D. No, but they never had any bombs to drop at the time that they saw the subs. We would call into the base and the base would call Galveston and they would send PBYs out and drop depth charges or bombs or whatever they were going to do. After we had our planes armed with depth charges and bombs, I don't recall of any more sightings of subs.

H. At the time what did your airplane carry? Did it carry a bomb or a depth charge?

D. Depth charge.

H. 'Cause you had a bigger airplane that could carry that.... what? 350 pounds?

D. 350 pound depth charge.

H. So you could carry one. You didn't have to settle for a little hundred pounder.

D. Like I mentioned before, when you had that depth charge hooked on you didn't have but about 3 to 4 inches of ground clearance and you would really make some real smooth landings.

H. How about your takeoffs? They were pretty long, I imagine, when you had that much weight on it.

D. No. Well, on a Waco it doesn't make much difference what you put on it.

H. A lot of left over power.

D. They would almost fly up out of a well. Had a lot of lift. Had a short takeoff.

H. That was a good airplane for that.

D. One time (talking about the short takeoffs and a lot of lift) we had a Stetson Voyager go down in a pasture area at Cameron, Louisiana. A couple of pretty good size men in it and all their gear for patrol, but they made it in to the beach off of patrol and had to land at Cameron with engine trouble. They landed in a little field there that

was, oh, probably a thousand feet one way and maybe fifteen hundred the other way. It had water down on one end of it. So they just barely made it in with this Voyager. George Hadaway, our base commander, told me to go over there and pick them up. I had J. K. West (he wasn't on a mission) and he said "I'll ride on over there with you." We were in my Waco. We went over and landed. These two pilots over there were Voyager pilots and that class of airplane. And they said, "Man, we can't all get out of here with this short a field and all this weight!" I said, "Yeah, I think we can make it." So we got them all loaded up. Got out on the end of the field, up in the corner. They thought I was going to go out the long way. Had some low trees over on the short side and I could get out with half the distance, you know. So I just reved it up and turned the brakes loose and headed out the short way of this field, and these guys would have jumped out if they could have got the door open! (laughter)
They knew there was no way you could make it, cause they'd never been in, evidently, an airplane that would fly like that. I ran right to the trees and then just pulled it up just as easy, you know. They didn't believe that was possible.

H. Made Christians out of them, huh?
Let's talk a little bit about the base itself. Was it pretty well set up? Did you all have all the facilities

you needed or what?

D. We had everything that we needed, almost. What we didn't have, well, we had some pretty good people there that could get it for us. Major Hadaway was one of them that was a real good promoter on anything we needed.

H. When you weren't flying, what did you do? Go to class or something like that?

D. Well, they had training programs on navigation and meteorology and calisthenics, things of that kind.

H. Who ran those? The Army, or did you all run them for yourselves?

D. No. We ran them ourselves. We had some personnel that was qualified to do almost anything that you wanted done. It was one of the things about CAP. You had somebody from every walk of life almost that you could think of. Some of them were Army, Navy, business people, bankers, mechanics, just about anything that you needed. Well, you could pull them out of the people that we had there.

H. Your mechanics out here.....were they aircraft mechanics or were they any kind of mechanic that you could get?

D. No. They were aircraft mechanics.

H. 'Cause Grand Island, for example, had to get by with a lot of automobile mechanics.

D. We were fortunate to have some real good aircraft mechanics that promoted from different places.

H. The big Indian boy was one of them that you mentioned last night.

D. Oh, yeah. He was an aircraft man, mostly on covering airplanes.

H. I imagine that was a problem down here in this part of the country. You had to recover them once in awhile.

D. Well, the base, really, on our operation, if you had good cover when it started, you know, we weren't here long enough for the cover to go bad on them unless it were damaged some way or another.

H. Who was it that had an airplane they called the "circus wagon?"

D. That was Doc Connor. He was a dentist from Dallas. It was painted pretty loud. They called it the circus wagon.

H. It wasn't patched up. It was just painted up?

D. Yes. It was just painted up. Kind of loud colors.

H. That was his individuality.
How about your food and stuff like that? Did you all have a mess hall or a canteen?

D. We had a canteen and were fortunate to have some real good cooks and they always had good meals three times a day or

anything you needed almost any time of the day.

H. Did you chip in for that or was it a flat fee?

D. You would just pay for your meal. They were set at certain prices. You know, just like a regular café. You'd go in, order what you want, and pay for it. Kind of like a regular café.

H. How about recreation? Did you all have time to do any kind of playing like softball games or anything of that nature?

D. No. The most recreation that they had was played on dominoes and cards.

H. Dominoes and cards.

D. Yeah. (laughter) Actually, they did have enough young people there to play baseball and things of that kind, you know, but most of the people had a little age under their belt.

H. They didn't want to play.

D. No.

H. How about the finances? Did you get paid regular or anything like that?

D. Most of the time we would get paid on time. Every now and then it would be delayed. But it would finally come through.

H. What did you get paid? $8.00 a day or something like that?

D. We got a per diem of $8.00 a day.

H. And paid for your aircraft by the amount of time you used it?

D. Right. By the hours on your aircraft.

H. Did they pay the same rate for all airplanes or did they pay by the size?

D. No. Different horsepower airplanes drew different amounts of operation and maintenance.

H. Did you keep that money or did you give it to the maintenance people?

D. Well, the base got all of the maintenance out of the airplane. The individual that owned the airplane got probably one third of the total for the operation and maintenance for his part of it.

H. And that helped depreciation and things of that nature. Who paid for a new engine? The base or you?

D. The base paid for it. They paid for the overhauls and things of that kind. Once in awhile we'd send an engine to the factory and get it measured. The base would pay for that.

H. How about radios and things like that in your aircraft? Did you have pretty good radios?

D. That was one of the qualifications that you had to have to get an airplane assigned to the base. You had to have a

two-way radio.

H. Did they say anything about the quality of it? Were they pretty good radios or

D. Well, it had to be something that would pass a radio inspector's approval on whether it would make it or not.

H. That was this guy Red?

D. Red Walter. (Waldron?)

H. Would inspect your radios.
How about the military aspects? I believe you all had to do some drilling and things of that nature too, right?

D. Yes. We had to do a certain amount of drilling every month. I don't remember how many hours but everybody was supposed to do it and most of them did.

H. Most of them did! Some of them found ways out of it, huh? Like you with a broken ankle.
I noticed one thing (and this is somewhat of a side-line interest item:) you had a guidon with a Coastal Patrol symbol on it. Do you remember it? A flag which you used to carry that had the submarine on it?

D. Had a submarine on it? I remember the flag, but I don't remember the origin of it.

H. I was wondering. Do you happen to recall the colors of it?

D. I think it was white and black.

H. White and black. Okay. It wasn't gold and black, like your submarine patch? It was white and black?

D. I think it was white and black.

H. The pictures you loaned me shows it and it looks like its white and black to me but somebody mentioned it was gold and black. It's pretty hard to tell.

D. Well now, it could have been. Of course I wasn't involved too much in that parading.

H. Yes, with a bum leg....

D. Not only that. Even before that. A lot of the guys were flying while all that was going on. That was out of the guards and the base personnel, operations and mechanics. But they didn't let any of that interfere with the patrol part of it.

H. Your uniform basically was an Army-type uniform with the red epaulettes?

D. Right.

H. Which you liked very much.

D. Well it had quite a bit of confusion about the red epaulettes.

H. Nobody wanted to wear them.

D. They were pretty conspicuous, you know. Any place you used to go in public, used to stand out like a sore toe and not any of the personnel really liked them but they had to wear them.

H. Until they were finally abolished.
Going on a little forward with your experiences relates to this thing: When you closed down out at Base 10 I understand some people went to this maritime thing over in New Orleans. And some of you, like yourself, went on to someplace else, didn't you?

D. Yes. The people with qualified airplanes were assigned to tow-target bases out in California. Some of them went to the East Coast on patrols after the gulf base closed they were still in need of patrol planes on the East Coast and they were in need of tow-target planes on the West Coast. I was assigned to a base as San Jose, California, about 50 miles south of San Francisco with a tow-target base.

H. Did you say last night that was Tow-Target 7?

D. Tow-Target Number 7.

H. And what did you do there, Del?

D. Well, we would fly search light missions at night over San Francisco and Mare Island, an ammunition dump. We would fly these missions at night and we would do straffing missions in the day time around San Francisco on the warves

and around the bridge and even at one time we were doing straffing missions around Mare Island, a big ammunitions dump until somebody got wind of what was going on and they put an abrupt stop to that. Those airplanes diving in on that ammunitions, in case of a crash no telling what might happen.

H. Blow up San Francisco!

D. And we were being assigned for tow-target operations at about a half dozen places between Los Angeles and San Francisco. You'd be assigned to go down to Santa Maria and you might spend two to three days there, with these gunnery people, towing targets for them.

H. How was that thing rigged in regular civilian airplanes? You'd throw it off the window?

D. No. It had a pretty good-sized winch put behind the pilot's seat. You'd have to take the back seat out. They had a winch that was about 18 inches in diameter of the drum and it was about 18 inches wide. It had ¼ inch steel cable on it up to about 2500 feet to 3000 feet. You had a trap door cut right behind the winch that was big enough to get your target out. Target was 24 inches by 10 feet. The bridle and the front part of it was made out of pipe that would fold up into halves where it would make a small package. It would be folded up and rolled up where you had a small enough package to get out through this door. And your

cable was coming off the winch going down to a pulley below the belly of the airplane. It'd come back in and you'd hook your target on it and drop it out. Immediately it would open up and start stringing out behind you. You'd let out, you had brakes on this winch to let out whatever.

H. You had somebody else with you to work the winch.

D. Oh yeah. Somebody would have to operate that. You'd let out whatever was required on your target.

H. The longer the better, huh?

D. Well, really, it was pretty safe. We never had anybody shot down. Had a lot of them scared. Some cable shot off about half way between the target and the airplane.

H. That's getting close enough to scare you.

D. Well, when you've got maybe 1500 to 2000 feet of cable out between you and a target and there's a gunnery officer that stands with each gun and to have a post stop on the guns where they can only swing so far and when the airplane gets clear of this post where there's no chance of that gun getting around to the plane, well he'd tell them to commence firing. They'd have to the gun back the other way from the plane to pick up the target, see. We'd fly over several different gun positions and radio contact with the ground crew, fly over several gun positions and they were all shooting

different colored bullets. Make several passes and then they'd tell you where to drop your target.

H. Then you dropped your target off. You didn't try to....

D. We'd have a fish that you'd drop on that line. What they call a fish and when you dropped it on there it had a cup shaped end on it that when the wind would catch it and it would probably stall in the air in one place. And when the target cable got to it, it tripped a release on the target and the target would fall straight down. If you dropped this fish on your line right over where you're going to drop, it would come down within a hundred feet of where they wanted. They would examine the target and see who had been hitting it by the color markings.

H. Then you just pulled your cable back in without the target?

D. We would wind the cable back in to where we could put a new target on it. We would carry a whole big box full of targets with us. You may put a half a dozen targets on one mission before you'd land for refueling and more targets.

H. That was no mean trick to pull your winch line back in because you didn't have level.

D. Oh, yeah, it was all electric.

H. Yes, but you still had to keep your line from getting fouled up.

D. No. It would wind up. You wouldn't have to worry about it.

It would wind up enough. It was not like on a fishing reel. It would wind up on the drum enough to where you didn't have to worry about guiding it on the drum.

H. I'm familiar with winch lines. When you're pulling in the field they don't wind up nice. But they got a string under them and I guess that line didn't have that.

D. Well, we didn't have a level winder or anything on these cables. They would just wind up on the drum. Had plenty of room for it.

H. How long did you stay at the tow-target operation?

D. We may have spent two or three days with one outfit. We wouldn't go back to our home base until we got through with them.

H. As an individual, how long did you stay out there doing tow-target work?

D. I was out there about one year.

H. About one year. That would have been August of '44 before you came back hone.

D. We also had other missions out there. We were hauling mail and freight for the Fourth Air Force. We would go into , Nevada. Was a big bomber base. That is where we'd fly across the Sierra Nevada Mountains and that deep snow rather than to go around by Reno, Nevada

and come back up through those valleys. We would cut across those 10-11,000 ft. Sierras with the high snow during certain months of the year.

H. Did Mavis go out there with you or did she stay in Beaumont?

D. No. She was with me.

H. She worked on the base out there?

D. She wasn't involved in any operations after we left Beaumont. We rented a house up on the side of a mountain, about 1,500 feet above San Jose. The house belonged to Savage Arms Company. They were on a delayed stay in Mexico. We were fortunate enough to get this house. It was about a split-level house up on the side of this mountain with a big picture window across the living room where you could look out and see these apple orchards and peach orchards, see San Jose, California. On a real clear day you could see San Francisco.

H. That was pretty good living, then.

D. Oh, we had it made out there! Really. And it wasn't much hazardous other than things that were, situations that we created ourselves, you know. Like crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains with all that snow. If you'd ever go down there, the'd find you next summer.

H. You stayed out there and then what did they do? They closed that base down on you, too? At San Jose?

D. It closed shortly after I left. I forget the exact month, but at that time the Army was getting pretty desperate on their draft situation. By the time the war was over they had about exhausted all the personnel that they could find. They were just hunting everybody. So I finally got on a draft list. I had to come back from California and be indoctrinated into the Air Force in San Antonio. With my flying qualifications and mechanical qualifications, they sent me to Wichita Falls, Texas. To Sheppard Field. I was going through mechanic training. I spent several months after that in the United States on different bases. Biloxi, Mississippi and Truax field in Wisconsin and Amarillo Army Air Base and finally I wound up on a boat going to Okinawa. I got to Okinawa. I was made crew chief on a B29. I stayed on Okinawa for nine months. Finally was shipped back to the States for discharge.

H. So you went from flying your own airplanes to crew-chiefing for somebody else.

D. Yep.

H. Any particular reason why they didn't make a pilot out of you? A liaison pilot or something?

D. Well, I was really too old. And at that time they didn't need any more pilots. They were pretty well filled up all the way around. The Ferry Command.....I was too old for fighter pilot.

H. pilot or service pilot or something like that.

D. If I hadn't been drafted when I was, in another thirty days I wouldn't have been drafted at all because the age limit would have kept me out.

H. Is that what kept you draft-exempt? Your age? All along? They just hadn't got to that age bracket? How old were you at the time?

D. When I was drafted into the Army I was 28 years old.

H. That sounds funny because of your age and my age right now, but 28 was an old man. That was an old man then.

D. Well, it would have been an old man for a fighter pilot or something like that. As far as making a fighter pilot out of an experienced pilot, I don't think they would attempt that at all. You get to thinking on your own in different situations and they really make a machine out of their pilots.

H. There are some interesting stories along those lines.

D. You'd know too much about flying on your own and probably would do the wrong thing at the wrong time or right time.

H. Keeping in mind , Del, that one of the things that I want to do is cover the whole gamut of your CAP experiences, not only at Base 10 but the tow-target thing....did we pass

up anything that you did in this area?

D. No. That was about it.

H. You've got a real interesting background. Actually you were on active duty for almost three years with CAP.

D. Yup. Right at it.

H. The search light thing. Going back to that for just a minute. That in itself was pretty hazardous from the standpoint that if you ever screwed up and looked at it you were in bad shape.

D. Well, the hazardous part of that was flying a hundred miles off shore in the type of aircraft that we were using.

H. You flew off shore on the search light missions, too?

D. No. I mean on this anti-submarine patrol.

H. Back to the search light missions, though:

D. No. We didn't have any offshore.

H. If you made the mistake of looking at those things at night you were in pretty bad shape, weren't you?

D. Well, you can't see anything. When those lights hit you the only thing you can see is your instruments. You'll turn around and get out maybe go on for 10 - 15 minutes to get out of range where you lose your lights and they finally cut'm off of you. They'll tell you where to come in at

what altitude. You'd come back in for another pass.

H. That's a relatively unexplored area of CAP active duty, with the search light mission thing.

D. Yes. No one liked that night flying on the search light missions. It was a kind of an uncomfortable situation. The nighttime wasn't so bad, but when one of those lights hit you, well, that was just it. You just had to get on your gauges and get out far enough for them to lose you.

H. Yes, because that wiped out your...you still had to land and that didn't help your night vision at all.

D. We had no problems on landing at night because we'd all had a lot of experience on night landings even before the CAP. We would go out to the Municipal Airport at maybe 10 - 11 o'clock at night and fly around for thirty minutes and come in with no lights on the field. No lights on the runways or anything.

H. That was not a lighted field at all, was it?

D. No, it wasn't lighted at all. You'd go by the highway car lights and the boundary lights and a few lights on the hangar.

H. Pick your spot and put it in.

D. Yeah, Just kinda feel for the ground.

H. After you went in the Army and came back, did you stay flying?

D. No. By that time I had sold my airplane. I lost one Waco right at Lake Tahoe in California. Had a young pilot flying it. He cut across the Sierra Nevada Mountains and he got about half way across and the engine started icing up on him. He turned the manifold heater on. Everything was fine. Flew along for awhile. And he turned the heater off. Flew along a little further and it started icing up again. He tried to pull the manifold heater back on but by that time it was too late. A big rotary valve had opened the exhaust ports into the intake manifold and it had frozen up. He couldn't get it open. So the engine iced up on him. He crawled back into the back of the airplane and started to jump.It was snowing. He got to thinking about he might not be 300 feet above those tree tops. He was flying about 11,000 feet. So he crawled back up in the front and decided the best thing to do was just to slow it up all he could. And just ride it out. As luck would have it, he had just crossed a bluff across Lake Tahoe. As you get across that there is about 5,000 feet straight down, almost a sheer bluff. He had crossed over that part and he kept watching his altimeter and it kept getting lower and lower and lower. He was expecting to crash at any moment. Couldn't see anything,just maybe sometime a little bit just straight down. Finally the first thing he knew was some trees going by him on both sides. He flew through a bunch of trees, not very thick, and it took the wings and part of the tail section off. Had he been

50 feet further over he would have landed on a pretty good little road. Little dirt road.

H. But he couldn't see it.

D. No. He couldn't see it. By this time he was down around 5,000 feet. He didn't have any idea, he didn't know exactly where he was. So he up overhead. Had one up there and one in the instrument panel. He broke that compass out from overhead up there and took it with him and started walking down this road. He had just got started good. Some old rancher had heard him crashed and had come over to see what was happening. He was pretty close to it. And he picked him up. He wasn't 5 minutes away from the crash site. Picked him up on this road. They were about 10 miles outside of Menlen, Nevada. So he called in a report of what had happened. I flew in there the next day to see what it was going to take to get the airplane out. The ice and the carburator air scoops, it was solid ice and there was ice all over the cylinders. The fins and the cylinders. Caked with ice. On the way down, after that thing - quit him, he'd picked up a lot of snow and stuff and it froze. That air scoop was almost solid. No air could get through it at all.

H. What did you do? Just tow the airplane out or just leave it there?

D. Oh, it was totaled. Yeah.

I had a friend who was on a base in New Jersey who was transferred from Coastal Patrol Base 10 in Beaumont. He went to the New Jersey base.

H. Who was that?

D. Dub Jackson.

H. Dub Jackson.

D. We corresponded pretty regularly, and some way or another I knew that somebody on that base had a Waco for sale. So I called him up and got hold of the man that owned it and found out all the details on it. I caught an airliner and flew out there. Flew to New Jersey and picked up that airplane and brought it back.

H. Back to San Jose?

D. Back to San Jose, and was still using it at the time I had to leave.

H. When you came back home after the war, you didn't fly too much then, or what?

D. I didn't fly any after I got back home. While I was overseas I had a friend of mine in California, on the base out there, sell the airplanes and I got out of the airplane business. I came back home and it was time to start doing something else with the family.

H. Yes, that happens to a lot of pilots.

D. I didn't have too much interest in flying, really, after that. My son-in-law owned several airplanes. I'd fly them around maybe for 30 minutes or an hour.

H. Still carrying your license or what?

D. No. I let my license expire. That was about the end of my flying career.

H. It was an interesting and varied one. You did a lot of good work back then.

D. We all thought that we were doing a good job for the country and I'm sure that we did.

H. I don't think it would have gotten done any other way, other than with dedicated volunteers.

D. They didn't have the airplanes or the personnel to put on that patrol.

H. No. They didn't really. That was an interesting subject in its own right. I had read and studied the agreements that were made back in the thirties between the Air Force and the Army Air Corps and the Navy about who was going to be responsible for what. There was quite a disagreement between them and basically the Navy was going to be responsible for submarine patrol work. But they finally admitted at the beginning of the war that they weren't

equipped and couldn't do it. So the Army Air Corps got involved into it and converted a lot of observation squadrons and tried to do it with old 047's and things of that nature. They didn't do a very good job and that's when the CAP came on board with their work. For your information and what it's worth, there's some real dramatic statistics on what happened to the ship sinkings when CAP started flying coastal patrols. They were dropping ships off the East Coast three, four a day. When CAP got to flying, the sinkings just started stopping. CAP doesn't claim credit for sinking a lot of submarines or anything but they sure scared a bunch off.

D. I think that was the main effect we had on them. I'm sure that they sunk some (unclear) The mouth of the Mississippi River out in the Gulf was really a hot bed of them out there for a long time. I wasn't too familiar with the action on the East Coast.

H. Well, the East Coast, of course, was the beginning bases. But all of them were established between April and July. The first one was at Atlantic City. It was a thirty-day trial period starting in April of '42. Once it worked out, on the very first mission out of Atlantic City (unclear) and that bunch actually were a part to rescuing a whole bunch of people that were on a sunk tanker. And that proved the men right there. Fifteen minutes into their first flight they spotted this

this tanker and a whole bunch of survivors and directed the Coast Guard out there.

D. Well, I'll be darned!

H. That pretty well sold CAP involvment at that particular point. When they saw what happened to the subs, getting spooked off, that really locked them in. They built it up to where I think the last base that was established was in July of '42 at Beaufort, North Carolina.
Twenty one bases is a lot of bases.

D. Oh, sure!

H. I think the peak manpower load was around 6,000 people and that's a lot of people.

D. I didn't realize there was that many.

H. No other way other than patriotism could that thing have been accomplished.