

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Frank L. "Dusty" Rhoades

COLLECTION: 4700.1171

IDENTIFICATION: Louisiana petroleum industry engineer and WWII Bomber Pilot

INTERVIEWER: J. Noah Rost

SERIES: Military

INTERVIEW DATES: April 22, 1999; April 27, 1999

FOCUS DATES: 1920s-1990s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1703

Rhoades is born in Shreveport, LA, and moves frequently throughout childhood as father's oil industry career dictates; relays parents' backgrounds and introduces four siblings (one older sister, three younger brothers); describes chores and allowance money; reviews elementary and high school experiences (friends, teachers, favorite subjects); relates his and siblings' going to college (he attended Louisiana Tech), paying tuition, room and board; summer jobs in construction at the oil refineries; lists friends in college, favorite subjects, activities and professors; mentions status of women and minorities at LA Tech (women half of student body, only one African American); recalls hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor and the reaction of his fellow students (most left school immediately for Shreveport to enlist or were drafted); Rhoades joined the Air Force (then Army Air Corps) because he always wanted to fly; relates mother's refusal to allow his entry into flight school, so he chose aviation engineering school at Chanute Field, Chicago "Learned about everything on an airplane, how it worked and how to maintain it."; serviced B-25s during this period; after engineering school, Rhoades transferred to primary flight training in Orangeburg, South Carolina, flying PT-17s; moved on to basic flight training and BT-13s; discusses friends and personal life during flight training; moved on to advanced training in Albany, Georgia, flying twin-engine AT-10s; after flight training was assigned as a bomber pilot (flying a B-24 "Liberator") based on his height, "Well, I wanted to fly fighters, naturally" and learned that he would be stationed in England; describes the composition of his crew (their positions & names); live firebombing training; relates the trip to Europe aboard the ocean liner Queen Mary, modified to accommodate 19,000 troops; stationed at Horsham St. Faith airbase in northern England; discusses rivalry with British pilots, interaction with Britons in town; assigned bomber 179P (nicknamed Dusty's Double Trouble, "... trouble for the Germans and trouble for everybody else."); relates first missions, following the 458th Bomb squadron leader across the English Channel in formation, dropping bombs; relates memorable missions, losing squadron members in air battles; explains the harsh conditions inside a bomber in flight,

special protections against the extreme cold, the thin air and projectiles (fighter bullets, flak shrapnel); describes schedule of flights with regard to weather and time off; visits London in between bombing runs, “Blacked out . . . they were still shooting those V-2 rockets over.”; relates story of influential woman demanding that images of naked women be removed from squadron’s airplanes; describes unwitting participation in bombing missions to “soften up” Germans before D-Day invasion, “Everybody was guessing but we never did know . . . They couldn’t do a lot of advertising.”; explains the nature of flak and how the Germans determined how high to aim; Rhoades was elated by news of V-E Day, but restricted to base at the time, “Dance a jig was about all we could do.”; returned to the States in anticipation of being sent to Pacific Theater, but spared this by the dropping of the Hydrogen Bomb; discharged as First Lieutenant.

Tape 1704

Rhoades returns to a story of his navigator: getting lost over the US in a flight training exercise and having to find his way back using visual landmarks; on making a perfect landing – “just once”; explains who would take the lead in a bombing formation over German soil; discusses radio silence within formation; gives opinion on The Bomb and having avoided service in the Pacific Theater; is discharged and returns school on the G.I. Bill; Rhoades meets wife Venice in college cafeteria, “Boy, that’s a beautiful girl.”; repeated courses failed or not finished before the war, worked in construction on the refinery plants in between semesters; graduated and then enrolled in the University of Oklahoma for a degree in natural gas engineering; took first job at United Gas Union Producing for three-hundred dollars a month; worked on the barges in the marsh near Morgan City but left when learned that the company planned to keep him down there indefinitely, “When [Charlie] came back and told me that, we both went and looked for a job immediately.”; began working for Otis Engineering in sales, continued with that company for eleven years, moving frequently throughout Louisiana and Texas; Otis acquired by Halliburton Co., which led to Rhoades’ leaving the company and buying a machine shop in Bossier City with two associates.; new machine shop called Hourh Engineering, “for House and Rhoades...it was [pronounced] just like hourglass.”; Rhoades increased sales and managed shop, continued for a year and a half, then quit to work for an ordinance plant in Minden, “making bombs and bullets.”; plant manufactured helicopter rockets and anti-personnel cluster bombs for then escalating conflict in Vietnam; explained security clearances and the need for badges in case plant explosion destroyed human remains; left after one year, “Everybody said the same thing I did: They were ready to get out of there.”; went to work for Ling Temco Vaught (LTV) in Dallas, TX, building the tail section to the Boeing 747; explains the APU (auxiliary power unit) in airplane tails that powers the electrical system; left LTV to work for smaller company designing hydraulic test units for executive aircraft after airplane industry began downward economic slide; this company soon felt economic pinch and Rhoades moved on to another temporary management position; discusses moving around, taking temporary positions, “contract work pays more than salaries”; moved to then booming Houston to work for Brown and Root on pipeline engineering; speaks on the Houston housing market; discusses working overseas on pipelines in Saudi Arabia, then to Alaska for a hardship tour north of the Arctic Circle, “Boy, I tell you that was cold. I guarantee you.”; described regret at lost opportunity to work in Iran during the time of the Shaw; returned to Saudi Arabia (Al Kobar & Dahrán) with spouse, “It was like being in Mexico, except everybody had money.”; describes great financial benefit of working overseas;

speaks of local customs, especially the strict sanctions faced by women; explains construction and religious significance of Saudi toilet; high price of food, water, illicit alcohol (sadiki); returns for a third time to Saudi, this visit working for Eagleton Engineering; had to remain throughout Desert Storm (Gulf War); proximity to the border and SCUD attacks; on wearing gas masks; returns to US and more contract work; finally takes position with Louisiana State University (LSU); this time wife Venice stays in Houston.

TAPES: 2 (T1703, T1704)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 3 hours

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 126 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Edited draft

RESTRICTIONS: None