

Wednesday, May 14, 2003

Summary of an interview with Harry Corpening Martin, born January 12,1920, on his experiences during World War II. His home was in Blowing Rock, North Carolina. The interview was conducted by Lou Harshaw

Harry was in college at the University of north Carolina, Chapel Hill. He was attending classes year round due to the eminence of the United States entering the war. He graduated June 7, 1942 and enlisted in the army on June 15, 1942.

He was sent to Raleigh, North Carolina to be sworn in and from there was sent to Fort Bragg in North Carolina to be classified. He was classified for photography school and sent to Fort Jackson near Denver for Basic training.

After finishing Basic Training as a private, he was sent to Biloxi, Mississippi, assigned to the Army Air Corps. In September he was sent to Colorado to take a course in photography. He studied aerial photography, photography processing and other related subjects. He learned to photograph bombing damage from planes and also military sites in preparation for bombing runs. All his photography work came under the heading of intelligence gathering for the military.

At this time all his photography was "still" photographs, although later he would take and learn to read photographic strips of pictures taken continuously as the planes flew over the targets. His camera was classified as a K-20, hand held. There were others that were attached to the plane. At this time the planes in which Harry was flying all carried cameras instead of bombs. The planes were B-25s, two engine bombers.

Later Harry was trained in Tri-metrics (Three Cameras, one shooting from each side angle and one shooting straight down at the target) These Cameras were mostly automatic. This was a six week course at Lowery Field near Denver and at Peterson Field.

At Peterson Field Harry was assigned to the 86th Combat reconnaissance Squadron. Major Anutta was his commanding officer.

When this phase of his training was finished, Harry was sent by train to the Bay area of California.. He was billeted near San Francisco. It being winter and bitter cold all the men were outfitted in cold weather gear.

Still outfitted with cold weather gear he boarded a ship, formerly a luxury French Liner, now the US Rochambeau The ship was named for the French officer, Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeure, Comte de Rochambeau, fighting for the Americans in the Revolutionary War who, as Harry puts it "put the cork in the bottle at York Town and was the cause of the surrender of the British Troops and the end of the Revolutionary War with the Colonies becoming independent.

Although the ship had been a luxury liner Harry didn't enjoy much luxury during the nineteen

days he was aboard. They did, however, eat regular Army food in a mess hall And the crossing was not too bad.

They had Christmas of that year on the ship.

Their destination was New Caladenia, south of Australia.. He had not been here very long when a group of twelve, including Harry, volunteered to set up an advance team for photography in Guadalcanal. This was in January, 1943 (about the 12th, Harry thinks.) The group of twelve was classified as Detached Service. According to Harry the group operated as a sort of "loose cannon" unit. They were stationed for the most part at Henderson Field, going on Navy and Marine patrols. Their job was to make pictures and process them. They were then sent back to the intelligence officers to be analyzed.

While here he ran into Lieutenant James Howard who had been a classmate of his at Chapel Hill. They enjoyed a pleasant visit together.

It was about this time that the US Army went on the offensive for the first time and invaded Guadalcanal. The fighting was still going on when Harry went in. He was still with his group of special forces when he went onto Guadalcanal and there was still sporadic fighting going on. They were bombed every night. The Japanese did not bomb during the day because the US forces were too strong and offered too much opposition. Harry and his group dug bomb shelter and slept in them at night. Four or five men were in each shelter. They dug these shelters deep in the ground and put heavy logs across the top. Then on top of the logs they piled three feet of dirt. At the opening of the shelter they put up a sign that said: "Through these portals pass the fastest men in the world."

Slowly, as the Allied forces "climbed up the ladder" as Harry put it, island by island, his group would move in behind the main fighting of the front lines, the assault troops. They were not in the main assault line under General MacArthur. They were under a Naval Headquarters under the command of a General Patch. Generally the Marines went in first and then the US Army. Guadalcanal, in March or April, then on to New Georgia, and so on, island skipping according to the over all battle plans of the Pacific.

There was always heavy anti air craft fire. Then when the troops moved in Harry's group would first live in put tents. Later as the area was secured, they would set up four or five larger perimeter tents that would hold three or four people. An important job was to get the generators working as soon as possible so that they could have electricity. They needed this very badly as not only did they have to have general lighting and other power but they had to set up field dark rooms where they could process their photos. Not an easy task. They also had to have materials with which to work, cameras, film, photo supplies.

Harry and his group of 12, being unattached to any official military unit did not have any ground duties such as kitchen, clean up, digging of latrines, They listened closely to the conversation about where the best food was being served and went to that place each meal. For instance, if they heard that a certain mess line would have fresh eggs that morning, that's where they went.

All the regulars of the unit would be served first and then if there was any left, Harry and his group would be served. Generally they ate well for Army life. When they moved from one island to the next, at first they would carry in their own food. In the first days on a new island they would be with the Marines. Then as the Marines moved on to the next assault or to clean up the sporadic fighting, the US Army would move troops in and set up more permanent camps. Harry and his group would be taking pictures, providing intelligence for the areal bombings. Only in the first days and weeks on the island would the group of 12 be in actual danger. After the first assault and the army gained control they were very good at moving in and setting up air fields and camps. After that, generally it was not a hazardous situation.

As to news, not only of their war theater but in Europe, but also of the situation in the Pacific, one of the first things that was done in camp was to set up a large bulletin board. And every day Harry says news was posted of how the war was progressing. However, Harry says, a lot of the news was what they wanted you to know. For instance, in one news bulletin, Harry said they learned that (in 1943) there were headlines that 500 American planes were flying and bombing over Germany. On the Island where he was, they were lucky if they had 50 planes to put into the air.

They moved on to Bougainville which was a lush, heavily forested, green island in contrast to the mostly barren, brown islands where they had been before. They learned that they were not going to have to battle it out for each and every little island.

At this point, Harry had been in the Pacific for 18 months and was due for a leave. He came back to Hawaii. The Squadron came into Henderson Field.

During his island hopping duty, Harry had done some photography flying with Navy, Marine and some Army pilots. His squadron had the job of taking the bulk of the photography for the last 18 months. Harry arrived back in Hawaii in March of 1944. He was stationed on the North Shore in one of the hotels for R &R. He says the people there were very hospitable and friendly to the troops who were on the North Shore. Once or twice he did get down to Honolulu, but he says that for the most part his group preferred to stay on the North Shore as there was plenty to do there. He was there for six weeks. The same twelve except for one was still together. One had gone home due to an injury.

On a Navy plane, a D-6, they were sent to Saipan.

They were on Saipan for a little over a year, during 1945. At this time Harry was not doing any flying. Mostly on Saipan the planes being used were B-17s, a four engine, B - 29s, B- 24s.

He said that at one point, Betty Gable flew in on a B- 29 Service Tour of the Pacific and everyone went to the air strip to see the planes come in and then to see her performance. On Saipan there was still some hand to hand fighting going on. The Japanese were being fed terrible propaganda about the Americans, how cruel they were, what terrible things they did to the Japanese prisoners of war and at Marpi Point, (spelling?) where there were very high, dangerous cliffs the Japanese were jumping off committing suicide. They were throwing women and babies off the cliffs to their

death to prevent them being captured by the Americans. Harry says the Japanese propaganda against the American forces was absolutely brutal. It was a sad and disturbing thing.

The Americans tried to counter the propaganda by broadcasting that the stories being put out by the Japanese were not true and by putting up large speakers and trying to talk to them through a broadcasting system. For the most part it didn't work.

Harry stayed on Saipan. It became the headquarters for three campaigns, reconnaissance was done from these headquarters. This was photo intelligence for the Air Corps or Navy and later on for the Army. Harry said he brought home a whole collection of the photographs he took while he was on Saipan. By this time they were using strip photography for Reconnaissance and sometimes would have negatives 100 feet long that would give the entire flight pattern and ground damage.

In 1945 Victory was announced in Europe.

At that point, on Saipan, Harry had been overseas for about two and a half years. He was eligible to go home for TD R & R. He could leave by the first available transportation.

He flew to Hawaii in a four engine flying boat. Harry says that was the most pleasurable plane took he has ever been on. They had a three or four Navy crew to wait on them, excellent food, comfortable bunks in which to sleep. It was a slow flying boat having a speed of only 230 miles an hour. It landed near Johnson Island, probably to refuel and in all took two and a half days to get to Hawaii. They landed near Pearl Harbor on the water - this being a flying boat.

Pearl Harbor had been cleaned up to a small extent from the damage done in the first Japanese attack but Harry says there was plenty of damage and war wreckage still around. There he ran into a relative, Jake Harshaw and they joyfully spent time together. He was so glad to see one of his relatives and hear any news he might have of back home.

Harry came back to the states on a light cruiser, taking four or five days to get across. From the West Coast he got on a troop train that was very crowded. In spaces created for two people, they had placed three and four. Harry says he went back to the mess care and offered his services to the mess crew. It was okay with the Sargent in charge and so he had a comfortable place to shower, a bunk to sleep in and of course, first chance at the food. He had to help with the mess, cooking, cleaning up afterward, but it was a small price to pay for the comfort he enjoyed by assisting the mess crew. At every stop, soldiers would get off the train and head for the nearest store selling whisky. The problem was that the MPS would be waiting on them at the train and would take their bottles away from them and break them across a big barrel that was placed near the boarding doors.

All the way across the country, Harry said their train was met by no Salvation Army people or no Red Cross personal offering coffee or other refreshments. They finally pulled into Fort Bragg, NC. From there Harry was able to get a bus to Boone, NC which is nine miles from Blowing Rock. He walked the last nine miles carrying his knapsack and arrived back at Martin House at 11:00pm in June, 1945. The Martin House in Blowing Rock was an inn owned by his family. He

said he tiptoed in, dropped his knapsack in the front hall and made his way quietly up to the third floor where his room was.

Even though the Germans had surrendered, the Japanese resistance got stronger and stronger as the American Forces got closer to the home island. Harry knew the war would go on two or three more years and that thousands of lives would yet be lost in the battle to take the main island of Japan.

The atomic bomb was dropped while Harry was at home at Martin House. He said that even when he learned of the first news he thought the war was over. Even though the Japanese said nothing, he was sure it was the end. Before the Japanese announced surrender, Harry was on his way back to Fort Bragg and was fully expecting to go back to the Pacific. Back to Saipan.

Sometime around 2:00 PM on the day he got to Fort Bragg he was called up to the assignment desk where he was told he would have an additional 15 days leave. So he went back home to Martin House. After his leave he went again to Fort Bragg and from there was sent to Greensboro, NC in a "decompression outfit."

Then it was back to Fort Bragg. Harry while serving in the army had been accepted at Harvard Law School. The Army gave every soldier the money to travel anywhere in the US that they desired. Harry chose to go directly from Fort Bragg to Boston and Harvard. He was officially discharge September 19, 1945, entered Harvard October 19, 1945.

Harry's brother Jacob, not being eligible for service physically, had attended Harvard. His other brother Charles had remained on the family farm in Burke County during the war.

At this point Harry pulled out his key chain and showed me his metal identification tag which he had kept as a key chain ornament every since his service days.

When asked how he felt about the United States dropping the atomic bomb. Harry said that was difficult and dangerous. That Harry Truman had made the decision in the right way. That the Japanese knew the war was not going to end without unconditional surrender. That had it not ended when it did we would have lost thousands of men.

On the war, Harry said, war is a bad time for all people. That the United States in fighting a war must extend all mercies to their own people first and must consider the American lives lost.

He said that even with the number of years the war had taken during his life, he did not consider it the defining event of his life. He looked upon it as something that he had to do.

His law practice, starting in Asheville, after his graduation from Harvard and passing the bar, and later his service as a Judge was the defining events of this life. He met his wife Nancy, in November of 1954 introduced to him by one of his law partners. She had one child, a boy. She had lost her first husband who was killed in service. He was an air plane pilot. Nancy and Harry married and then had two children.

When asked what he would say to the young soldiers fighting today's war. He said that he thought about patriotism. That what these men are doing today has been done before them, by other men. And that it will probably have to be done again to preserve the American way of life. That the young men should not expect to receive and great rewards for their service, that what they are doing is to preserve the security of their nation.

Harry said that every person in time of need should step forward to do their part.

Important note: Approximately halfway through this interview, the tape recorder stopped working. The defect in the machine was not noted either by Harry Martin or the interviewer. The last half of the notes were taken from those taken by the interviewer during the session.

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