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Interview with Richard Dinning

Richard Dinning

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview #309
DINNING, Richard**

DINNING, Richard

Army Air Corps Cadet 1943

At Winthrop: Spring 1943

Interviewed: October 17, 2012

Interviewer: Robert Ryals

Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Length: 02:34:58

Abstract: In his October 17, 2012 interview with Robert Ryals, Richard Dinning details his thoughts and memories as an army air corps cadet at Winthrop. Dinning includes details of his career in the Army Air Corp during WWII. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Army Air Corps Cadet, Fort Bancroft, Basic Training, Germany, B-17

Interview Session (October 17, 2012): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 **[no question]** RD talks about military instructors briefly. RD reads his 10th hour check ride – performance review. RD talks about being the product of the Great Depression. Mentions auto union sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan. Governor Frank Murphy reaction to the strike – hired people to break up strike, fired tear gas.

00:05:05 **[no question]** RD talks about his childhood. Describes his family and home life. RD talks about isolationism and religion. Mentions change in culture towards patriotism and militarism. RD describes UK bombing in 1944.

00:10:00 **[no question]** Continues talking about WWII.

00:11:00 **[no question]** Dunkirk incident. Pearl Harbor. RD reminisces about hearing the news of Pearl Harbor. RD discusses a relationship with a girlfriend.

00:14:50 **[no question]** RD at Northwestern. Recruitment for soldiers. RD examined by a

- doctor, suggested RD become a pilot. RD's friends also got called up by the military: one washed out, the other succeeded. RD called up around the end of 1942. RD sworn in in a church basement. RD talks about the trip to Miami Beach from Detroit. Intensive thirty days at Miami Beach.
- 0:19:10 **[no question]** RD talks about getting “shipped” to Rock Hill in February 1943. RD talks about passing the female students on campus and meeting them for the first time. RD pulls out scrapbook.
- 00:22:20 *Question:* What was the first time in a plane like? *Answer:* Strange. First time in a plane as a student at the stick.
- 00:23:55 *Question:* How long did you correspond with Katy Little? *Answer:* Not sure. RD changes subject to night-vision test. RD got classified to cadet. RD talks about the differences between under and upper classmen. Getting orders from upper classmen.
- 00:27:25 **[no question]** Sent to Jackson, MS for primary flight training. Instructors were all service pilots. Went to Florentine field. RD remembers landing one day – landed in a crosswind, tip of the wing hit the ground and spun the plane. RD punished after landing.
- 00:30:05 **[no question]** Turn-around-flight, where instructor becomes student – had to do this in order to graduate. RD reminisces about his turn-around-flight. Had 21st birthday during primary flight training.
- 00:32:50 **[no question]** Basic training – Greenville, MS. RD refers to more pictures in his scrapbook. Flew BT-13 and BT-15. RD had a problem in basic training – night flight. RD got in trouble with instructor for a landing.
- 00:39:35 **[no question]** Training in winter. Sister came in for graduation, March 1944. RD assigned to B-17 training and talks about difficulty in steering the plane.
- 00:43:55 **[no question]** Sent to crew training in Mississippi, summer of 1944. Went to Savannah, GA to get a plane to fly to England. Innocence Abroad was RD's crew name. When pilots flew lead, they flew different planes.
- 00:48:00 **[no question]** Went to England for more training. RD impressed by ground transportation. Trains were dirty and old, but they always ran on time from one training base to the next. RD impressed by the people who handled the infrastructure in England.
- 00:49:50 **[no question]** First mission. RD compares the military to school. Second mission – getting to know his crew. Tail gunner did not respond to an oxygen call. RD recalls a

- crew member getting injured. RD talks about the importance of knowing and keeping an eye on your crew.
- 00:56:25 *Question:* Where were you flying to? *Answer:* Neuremberg.
- 00:57:10 *Question:* How did you feel in combat? *Answer:* If you're not flying, "you just sit there and curl your toes." There was nothing for the passenger to do.
- 00:58:00 **[no question]** Next mission. The target was the synthetic refinery in Poland – prime target, because the Germans got their aviation fuel from here. 36 airplanes were bombing this refinery. The mission was 9 hours long but uneventful. Commander ordered pilots to do a 360 – pilots dreaded this. RD talks about his experience doing a 360 – his plane was hit by flack.
- 1:02:25 **[no question]** Continues with mission. This mission was lost – seven planes lost, two ended up in Sweden, etc. RD talks about drifting away. Fourth mission in combat. RD talks about an uneasy feeling. RD didn't know he was going to fly lead. Mentions fifth mission.
- 01:05:40 **[no question]** RD talks about sixth mission. Copilot in the hospital with a "bad cold". B-24s.
- 01:10:40 *Question:* What did it feel like when flack hit the plane? *Answer:* Depends on where flack hit and from how far away.
- 01:12:35 *Question:* Flack was feared? *Answer:* Yes.
- 01:14:35 **[no question]** Mission 13. RD goes over details of thirteenth mission. Talks about squadron formation. Mission 15 in Berlin. "Rendezvous in the Dark."
- 01:22:00 **[no question]** Continues talking about Berlin "Big B".
- 01:24:40 **[no question]** Cambridge. December, seventeenth mission. Merseburg – oil refinery. Missed most of the flack because of the high altitude. A lot of mid-air collisions.
- 01:27:05 **[no question]** RD talks about *Twelve O'Clock High* as one of the most realistic movies about war. RD talks about Gregory Peck. RD talks about getting vertigo for the first time.
- 01:29:40 **[no question]** First time as lead at high altitude.
- 01:31:15 **[no question]** Battle of the Bulge. Flew copilot. No flack. No damage. RD learned after this to always take a pair of shoes with him. Got diverted three times. December

- 24th – morale mission. RD talks about Christmas Eve dinner – getting sick and going to the hospital.
- 01:36:10 **[no question]** Payback dinners. More talk about Battle of the Bulge and the weather during the battle. December 27th, targets were bridges. P-51. December 31st – pre-dawn take off. No crew members died.
- 01:43:30 **[no question]** Talks about flying the lead during a bomb run. Oil pressure dropped, RD decided to keep going rather than drop out. Ended up as group deputy in most missions.
- 01:47:25 **[no question]** Group lead. Had to bail. Cologne.
- 01:53:50 *Question:* Where did you get your pictures from? *Answer:* From a WWII museum.
- 01:54:40 *Question:* Pressure to destroy a target but not destroy landmarks? *Answer:* RD visited a modernistic church in Germany that had been bombed by the British.
- 01:57:00 **[no question]** January 20th, 1945. Target supposed to be a synthetic oil plant. Went to a secondary target instead. Bitter cold temperature. RD continues talking about bad weather.
- 01:59:45 **[no question]** Flying with Major Roper. Palace Hotel, Southboard England.
- 02:01:00 **[no question]** February 19th. RD's copilot flew lead for the first time. Saw the Alps. RD talks about the author of the Little Prince who died in a P-38.
- 02:06:50 **[no question]** Awards. Final mission. Escape maps.
- 02:12:30 **[no question]** RD thought he was through with WWII. Went to the University of Chicago. Put RD in a master's program even though he didn't have an undergraduate degree. RD went through law school. Married. Worked in Washington summer vacations – Interline Trade Association. RD with Trade Association for five years. Started working for the airline. Finished an airline career. RD got involved with Bob Collins.
- 02:21:05 **[no question]** RD points out more pictures.
- 02:22:00 **[no question]** Wrapping up interview.
- 02:34:58 *End of interview*