

JUD DALMADGE

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Jud Dalmadge

Hello. Today is January 12, 1994. My name is Charles Nelson. I am a volunteer with the Midway Village and Museum Center which is cooperating with the statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens who participated in the momentous events surrounding World War II. We are in the office of Midway Village and Museum Center Village interviewing Mr. Judson Dalmadge who lives at 4893 Braewild Road, Rockford, Illinois. Mr. Dalmadge served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that war. Jud, would you please start by introducing yourself to us?

DALMADGE: I am Jud Dalmadge and I am now living in Rockford and I am now retired. At one time I was in the United States Naval Air Force and I am being interviewed and discussing some of the events before World War II and during the war.

NELSON: Please give us your full name, place and date of birth.

DALMADGE: My name is Judson Bernard Dalmadge. I was born in Watertown, New York, on July 11, 1923.

NELSON: And the name of your parents.

DALMADGE: My Parents are Irvin Dalmadge and Florence Dalmadge.

NELSON: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

DALMADGE: I had 11 brothers and sisters.

NELSON: Are there any details about you and/or your family that you would like to give?

DALMADGE: No, other than we were a regular family at that time, sort of struggling as I remember, mostly in the depression time. We lived outside of the city of Watertown about 9 miles and my father got this so he could have a

big garden so we could supply food for the family.

NELSON: Good. What was life like for you before the war and especially during 1941?

DALMADGE: Well, before the war as I explained, we lived out in the country. We had no electricity or running water. Toilet facilities were outside the home. It was sort of primitive, as we know it today. In 1941 I had just graduated from high school and I had to wait until I was 18 and I entered into a ...

NELSON: What thoughts did you have about the war before the United States became directly involved in the conflict?

DALMADGE: Well, as you know, we were all aware of what was happening in Europe. The people I grew up with felt we were eventually going to have to join into the fighting because it didn't look like anything that Hitler was doing eventually had to be taken care of us by entering the war.

NELSON: How did you hear of the December 7th, 1941, of the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. If so, where were you at the time and what were you doing and what was your reaction and the response of those around you?

DALMADGE: Well, my brother and my brother-in-law and sister had been deer hunting up in the Adirondack Mountains and we got home to our home about 10:30 in the evening and we had the radio on. Put the radio on and we heard the announcement of the bombing. We couldn't believe it. We didn't believe it. It kept repeating itself, repeating itself. We so we felt something did happen but we weren't quite sure, so it was really a surprise to us that something like this was happening because we had been away for the weekend deer hunting.

NELSON: Had you formed any prior opinion or developed any feeling about what had been taking place in Europe or Asia?

DALMADGE: Well, to repeat what I said. , I had an opinion that nothing was going to stop Hitler short of us getting into the war. I did not think too much about the Japanese at that time because I was not aware of some of the conditions that were transpiring that the Japanese was not a big factor at that time.

NELSON: Do you recall reading newspaper accounts of German aggression in Europe?

DALMADGE: Yes, continued transgressions of Hitler and all his takings, yes, I do recall very vividly that we read about this on a daily basis.

NELSON: You had knowledge of his speeches, his ideas and his actions?

DALMADGE: Yes, definitely.

NELSON: What events led to your entering the military service? Were you already in service, drafted or did you volunteer?

DALMADGE: No. My brother and I he was 2 years older than I was. We were supporting the family at that time and we decided right away that one of us would have to stay and one of us would have to go or would, go. We were both working at New York Air Brakes (?). We were started making ammunition, if you want to call it, and we were working 7 days a week, but we both knew that one of us would go and one of us would stay. So we flipped a coin and he won. Prior to that he had taken his test for the Army Air Corps. I had taken mine for the Navy Air Corps and at that time they didn't give anything for dependents as a cadet and so that was why we decided that one would have to go and one would have to stay. So with him winning the toss, he went into the service. I was supposed to stay home, which I sometimes regret in a sense as I went against what we decided to do. I went against what our agreement was.

NELSON: Basic training when and where were you inducted?

DALMADGE: I was inducted at Albany, New York when I finally decided that Watertown is Fort Drum now, was always a camp since World War I and they have about 30,000 or 40,000 troops there at all times and Watertown is roughly 30,000 population. It got so you couldn't go down the street or go out on a date without being called a 4F. So eventually I decided with the last 2 or 3 people I hung around with they decided to go in the service. I had already been in the category 5A. I was supposed to after women and children because I had 5 dependents, 5 brothers and sisters. Anyway, I did go in. From my understanding my mother and father thought they were holding me back and so she gave me permission, or she agreed that maybe I should go in the Navy. So I went in the Navy and . . .

NELSON: I am going to ask you the next 4 questions. You can answer them in own. How old were you? What happened after you were inducted? Where were you sent? Where did you take your basic training?

DALMADGE: I was 19 years old. I was inducted at Albany, New York and I took my training at Samson Navy Base that Samson, New York. From there, which was a period of about 12 weeks, for boot camp. Because I wanted to get in the Navy Air Corps and eventually become a pilot or thought I would be, I had to take either Aviation "Mech.", a machinist's mate that is, or Aviation Ordnance, or Aviation Radio, which I selected. Aviation mechanics and I was sent to Norman, Oklahoma, for schooling which was a 6-month deal.

NELSON: What did you think of that training?

DALMADGE: I thought it was very good. Of course, I had been an apprentice toolmaker before I went in and so I was somewhat mechanically inclined and the regiment in this type of thing did not give me any problems that I remember.

NELSON: Okay. Did anything special happen there? Tell us about any other training camps

you attended. Did you have any leaves or passes? If so, how did you use them?

DALMADGE: Well, mostly after a period of time, probably 3 or 4 weeks before they would give us any liberty and they would give us liberty for 1 or 2 days on a weekend with I think about a 50 mile radius that we could travel in. Most of the time, I happened to meet up with a fellow from near my hometown and we would hang out together with and we used to play golf and play tennis together at the University of Oklahoma, which was just outside our gates. Most of the time, we were in that area. As far as anything unusual, I don't recall any particular thing. From there we went to, also because at that time we decided I was going to become a gunner, I had to take Radar which was at the same place in Norman. Then I went to Purcell, Oklahoma, for a period of 5 weeks of gunnery school. And from there I went to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for operational training which was partly schooling and partly flying.

NELSON: Okay. I think you have answered what your assigned duties were in the military unit. What was your participation in the conflict? Where did you after completing your basic training and I would like to know the group you were with and the squadron and so on and so forth: And the area you were in.

DALMADGE: From Fort Lauderdale we went up to Seattle, Washington. We were in a [cashew] outfit which was a group, you may say, of different classifications. You were just waiting to be reassigned as they so desired. At that time, Air Group 9 had just returned from overseas and was on the Essex Aircraft Carrier and they were regrouping and so this was where we got assigned to that group. And so, Air Group 9, I was in the Torpedo Squadron 9, which was made up roughly of 16 torpedo planes along with part of the Air Group. When we went to Pasco, Washington, which was near Walla Walla, Washington, we trained out of there, flew out of there on a daily basis usually and we went to up to Whidbey Island for our torpedo practice and went down to San Diego to practice carrier landings. Went to Salton Sea, which is in California for rocket runs and operation. So we were

up and down the coast for a period of probably of 6 months. At that time we were sent over to Hawaii.

NELSON: This was on your way to overseas?

DALMADGE: This was overseas. From there we went to overseas. The first place we landed was Hawaii and we stayed there for approximately 2 months and we were sent down to a small little island down off of __?__. It was just large enough—it was a coral reef that was made over by the CBs, and we stayed there about a month for just training and to get time on every aircraft. We were supposed to get 50 hours before we went aboard ship. From there, in January 1945, we went and hit the fleet at __?__ Ulysses and that was when we met the huge fleet of everything—carriers and this type. At that time we went aboard the USS Lexington, which ended up to be preparation for the first time that the Navy Air Force was to hit Tokyo as a major operation. There were something like a thousand planes in that operation. We only stayed about six weeks aboard the Lexington. During that time we also covered operations for landing on Iwo Jima and after that operation we transferred to the USS Yorktown and went back to the States. So from that point on we just kept from the Yorktown we just kept hitting Okinawa basically and the mainland ...

NELSON: Can I interrupt for a minute? Can you tell me the type of airplane—This is not the question, but I think it should be in here. What type of airplane and what your job was on this airplane that you were assigned to?

DALMADGE: Yes. This was a Grumman torpedo plane. They called it the TBF. It's a torpedo bomber. "F" means for Grumman, the manufacture. It's a 3-place, 3-man plane—the pilot, the radioman and a gunner. The gunner was on the turret. That was my location. The gunner was down in the bilge and so I had 50-caliber machine gun and the radioman had a small 30 caliber and basically my role was to keep track of where other planes were and also as a gunner be aware of the enemy at least.

NELSON: At this point, what did you think of our nation's war efforts and your feelings on it?

DALMADGE: Well, we just happened to hit the operations or combat at its good time. The Japanese had been beaten pretty well, even though they were hitting—still had a lot of Kamikazes, which was probably our biggest fear, but basically, we could fly almost anywhere any time without seeing too many enemy aircraft. The big serious threat at that time was the kamikazes which I think at one time practically every large carrier and small carrier was hit at least once, which we all went through. It was a time when Kamikazes and Japanese knowing they were fairly well beaten. I hit the fleet at a good time as far as that goes.

NELSON: Can you list for us in order of occurrence all subsequent combat action in which you were involved?

DALMADGE: Well, the first was when the Fleet hit Tokyo. We were on 2 missions there. We hit a small aircraft plant, making aircraft, I should say, about 70 miles north of Tokyo and of course the B29s later on said that all we did was break the windows. We dropped like 100 pounders and we reloaded with 2000 pounders, but we didn't get back there because we ran into a snowstorm and the whole operation was cancelled. From there we sort of, we came back and we hit Iwo and we covered the invasion of Iwo Jima. From the air it didn't look like much was happening down there. We dropped "Daisy cutters" which was an anti-personnel, which was opposite Mount Suribachi. As I recall it was because we were like number 2 man in and all we seen was a fantastic amount of dust and debris because we went down to probably 50 feet from the ground and those anti-personnel bombs were throwing up the dirt. What we found out later was just from the volcanic ash. We did very little damage as I recall from what we heard later. Anyway we stayed on station there, as I recall, for roughly a week. We lost 2 planes in that particular time, not so much from enemy action but through neglect of flying or whatever you want to call it. I do recall that.

NELSON: Okay. How about casualties? How did they occur and how were they treated?

DALMADGE: Well, as I said, we lost 2 crews on Iwo. One was, I thought was pilot error. What happened, when we were aboard the Lexington, each ship had its own way of determining what planes we were going to fly in. Well, the Lexington, we were assigned to a particular aircraft and it happened to be, they were going to try a new pilot to lead the group. His plane was the last plane to take off so everybody else had joined in and he came rushing up to become the lead man. I witnessed this from the flight desk and what happened was he rushed up to get the lead and when he did, he must have pulled back the stick, of the throttle, and he actually went into a wing tip stall, trying to get in location. He went into the water. That's the first time I ever saw a TBF explode because we didn't carry that much fuel to explode like some of the bigger planes. So that was my first—and so those bodies—two of them were recovered by a destroyer but—they did the memorial service right aboard the destroyer and they were destined to the sea. In other words they were buried at sea.

NELSON: Did your mental attitude change as combat continued?

DALMADGE: Well, it's a funny thing. When you see the people you've been with for a couple years, training and stuff and losing them now and then. The thing I recall we sort of joked about it. If something is going to happen, it's going to happen. I didn't think and I don't think anybody thought too much about it, whether you were going to make it or not. We just sort of made it a joke type thing before you went off, you'd talk to your fellow flyers and say, "Well, if you go down can I have your dungarees?" and this type of thing. It was sort of a joke in that way. You see in the Navy, what people don't understand about the Navy, if you volunteered to fly in the Navy, as far as crewmen goes, you could quit any time and this was hard for some of the Air Force people to believe, but that's true. And we had, after the first hope after Tokyo, we had about 6 crewmembers that quit and they were flown back after the operation to one

of the islands. The skipper came in at that time and suggested that even though he knew we could quit any time, he suggested, that to stop this situation, he made a statement. Anyone else who wanted to quit, he would guarantee them at least 2 years on the worst island out there. So, knowing some of the stuff, the galloping crud and all that stuff on some of these islands it sort of stopped our thinking of ever wanting to quit.

Charles Nelson stopped the tape at this point and began again.

NELSON: Did you write many letters home and did you receive many letters or packages? If so, how often? What type of things did you like to get in packets?

DALMADGE: Yes, I remember writing. I probably wrote every week or so. This is funny, before I went my last leave before I went overseas, I had a deal with my mother that, because I found out we couldn't even tell anybody we were in the Pacific. We had a deal that the last paragraph to let her know where I was. We had—I set up a little code that I would ask for one of my particular brothers and that would mean I was either Hawaii or Japan. I had a little code I used to do that but the funny part of it is, when I got home after the war, I found that she didn't even remember we had that so all was for naught. She never did know where I was. Anyhow, I thought that was funny. Now days you wonder—you know exactly where everybody is. We just couldn't even tell them we were in the Pacific. That is how things have changed. Yes, I wrote and I received it. The destroyer used to come along side, probably once every 2 weeks or so on, whatever, and they would bring the mail. That was a big thing about the carrier. Everybody used to go down and watch them when they transferred the mail over. So it was quite an occasion, something to look forward to. As far as packages, I remember getting packages but most of the time it was cookies or something like that. But by the time it got to us, it was just a pile of crumbs and the mail bag thing was full of crumbs. So nothing really came as they were sent.

NELSON: Did you forge close bonds of friendships with many or some of you combat companions?

DALMADGE: Oh, yes. I still have friends and we still get together. We still correspond. I continued every few years to go to reunions and this type of thing. I would say probably that I had 4 real good close friends that we continually were very, very close in our friendship.

NELSON: Some of these questions may not pertain to you. I will read them. I think this is more about people out in the field. Did you ever help retrieve a wounded buddy from a field of combat? Answer yes or no.

DALMADGE: No.

NELSON: During your combat duty did you ever capture any prisoners. If so, please describe the circumstances.

DALMADGE: No.

NELSON: Prior to the end of the war, were you aware that any civilian concentration camps existed? If so, please explain how you learned about them and how much you knew at the time.

DALMADGE: I didn't know an awful lot about them and I didn't really know about them. Being in the Navy I think you're away from that type of thing. But I will say this, that it was a real thorn in my side at the time. One of the kamikaze planes was shot down and the pilot survived. We were aboard the Yorktown at the time. The admiral was aboard our ship. They brought him aboard the ship and they interviewed him and so forth. Our personnel officer of our squadron used to be the head registrar of Union College and he was a great—I don't know what you'd call him, but he caused a lot of problems with me, mainly because he was a great Samaritan. He came in said to try to write a letter home every month and let our parents know where we were, or what we were doing and he wrote and said the Japanese prisoner he wanted to come back to America. Getting back to this story of the Japanese Kamikaze pilot and so he was writing this home to my mother and saying that

his favorite dish was ice cream and all these great things about what he was doing and what he wanted to do and how he liked America—and would have liked to be in America.. It didn't sit with me because my brother—I had just been notified my brother had been killed in a B24 over in Europe. I explained to him that I didn't want this sent to my mother because she thought I was up there trying to win a war. This caused an awful lot of problems with him and I. He became very indignant and never did treat me the same afterward but that's the way I felt. So I was aware of at least one prisoner of war, and that was the nearest I ever got to it.

NELSON: You can answer this with yes or no. Did you help liberate any enemy prison camps or concentration camps? If so, which ones? Please describe them especially what conditions you found in the camp.

DALMADGE: No, I did not.

NELSON: What was the high light occurrence of you combat experience?

DALMADGE: Well, I guess probably being shot down. We were dropping bombs that had 1 hour to 24 hours on an air field on a small island between Taiwan and Okinawa where the kamikaze were coming. We were trying to upset the runways and we happened to hit it during a thunderstorm if you want to call it. There was about a 200 or 300-foot ceiling and so we had to hit going at roughly 250 knots in the process and about 50 feet off the ground. Our plane got hit in the engine by small fire or 20mm we think.. We had to abandon the ship shortly after off the coast. The seas were about 20 feet. So probably that was a high light. We did get picked up. We went about 7 o'clock in the morning and got picked up just before dusk in the afternoon. Originally we could see the Japanese when we first went down trying to get at us. Coming out in a boat for us, but we had fighter cover all day long. Every 24 hours or so they would change so they would attack whatever was coming put after us. Anyway, we got picked up by a PBM, a Navy PBM, and it had Jato on it which is an assist take off. They said that they would never be able to take off in those waves or that sea

without Jato so it was sort of a good experience and we stayed aboard for like 4 days a seaplane tender before brought us back to a ship off Okinawa.

NELSON: This isn't one of the regular questions. Was anybody injured?

DALMADGE: My radioman broke his ankle. Other than that, no.

NELSON: Tell us what you and the other men did to celebrate America's traditional family holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas?

DALMADGE: Well, we—one Thanksgiving when we were in Fort Lauderdale was very funny in a way when I think about it now. After we had the traditional turkey and all that, they suggested if we wanted anything because they had an awful lot of turkey left over that we could take whatever we wanted. So I took a tremendous large big drumstick and took it back and put it in my locker and proceeded to go on liberty. All day and all night long I kept thinking this drumstick was going to be nice to come back to. And so, in those days they had curfew. The lights went out in the barracks at 10 o'clock. We got back a little after that and I went in and opened the locker. Of course, the lights were off and I proceeded to take one great big bite out of this turkey leg and my mouth exploded. Not knowing what it was, I ran into the head and here it was, just thousands and thousands of just big red ants. So I spit for needless to say hours. And then the next time we were in Hawaii and as far as I know like Thanksgiving we always had our turkey and this type of thing. Then at Christmas time down in this island of [Konan]—It's a little island, we had rations of 2 cokes or 2 beers a day and we had a ration card and everything. I don't recall really what we had at that time. It was a little bit less far as having any problems with eating and that sort of thing. I can really say ...

NELSON: You had plenty?

DALMADGE: Yes, compared to what other people had, we were well off.

NELSON: When and how did you return to the United States after the end of the war?

DALMADGE: We came home in July of '45. I was home on leave when the war ended and so I—it was 4 days before I had to get back. I was destined to go to a refresher gunnery school. From Oklahoma I was supposed to go down there. But I was home on leave when the war ended and so anyhow, naturally we celebrated because I was home at the time.

NELSON: Please tell us about your military rank and your decorations especially your campaign ribbons.

DALMADGE: Well, I guess, first of all I had the Flying Cross, 3 Air Medals, I believe. And then I guess there's several Presidential Unit Citation things. I don't really know other than that. But that's the only one individually awards that I know I have.

NELSON: What was your rank?

DALMADGE: I was Aviation Machinist Mate, Second Class.

NELSON: How many campaigns were you in?

DALMADGE: Well, I really don't know how they determine—but Iwo, the invasion of Iwo could be considered one and Okinawa. Okinawa was probably our biggest. We probably had 30 to 35 missions over Okinawa. For several reasons, some of the missions were to land. I should say, Okinawa was our biggest—probably we spent 30 to 35 at Okinawa. Some of the missions were just to drop supplies. It rained so bad they couldn't get supplies so we would land and put everything on parachutes and fly over with our wheels down and drop them. We would always get hit with the small arms fire but I guess you would say that was the first I mean those were the two main operations—would be Iwo but I don't know how the services or how the Navy determines which is an operation.

NELSON: Now, this is a return to civilian life. How did you get along with the men with whom you had the greatest contact?

DALMADGE: I got along great with them as far as I knew. If I knew I was going to come back I would had had a hell of a good time, as it was I had a good time.

NELSON: Are there things you would do differently if you could do them once again?

DALMADGE: Well probably, but I don't know what they would be off hand.

NELSON: What was the most difficult thing you had to do during your period of military service?

DALMADGE: I guess probably several times when we were on missions that got a little scary. I guess that would probably be considered the ones I had concerns about the most. But, actually, yes, I think that probably some of the missions we were on that probably was concerning the worst situations, but I think you sort of got used to it and you didn't take them quite as I won't say serious but you didn't get too concerned with it. I really don't know, of course, a lot of things could be said—a lot of things you didn't like and you would wish you were somewhere else. At the time and under the circumstances, I really don't know what I considered the most difficult.

NELSON: Okay. Is there anyone thing that stands out as your most successful achievement in the military service?

DALMADGE: Well, I think being just being party to a group of guys that were pretty well dedicated and looking back and saying we did what we could do and what we were supposed to do and I think I did it pretty well. I think that to me what I considered a good thing, I think and what I considered a good American and what I was supposed to do as an American and for my country. I guess at the time. I think that was ...

NELSON: You did your job and did it well.

DALMADGE: Yes. I think I did it was well as anybody could do it and so I felt,—yes. I did what I should have done.

NELSON: Okay. How did you learn about VE Day and what was your reaction to it?

DALMADGE: VE Day, we were flying and we got it over the intercom—over the radio and they announced it that VE Day and we were very happy. We knew we were going to win and that was another indication that, yes, we were going to win this thing.

NELSON: What was your opinion of the use of the Atomic Bomb when it was used against Japanese civilians in August of 1945?

DALMADGE: I loved it. I loved it. I thought it was the greatest thing that ever could happen. When we left the fleet in July they were preparing for the next operation. It was going to be landing on the mainland and we had to leave all our equipment, flying equipment and stuff we had to available to our squadron knowing that they were going to have to use it. We also knew what they projected for the casualties so I was very pleased. Happy.

NELSON: Has your opinion changed in the last 50 years? If so, how?

DALMADGE: No, It has not changed. I've heard all these people and all the people who made their comments on how bad it was. But to me being there, the situation has not changed on iota.

NELSON: When and where were you officially discharged from the service?

DALMADGE: In New York—outside of New York City, September, 1945. The Navy had a deal. If you had a DFC or above, you didn't have to wait for points and all that. Of course, in my case I had a lot of points because I had a lot of dependents, so we were out hardly before the shouting was over.

NELSON: Do you have a disability rating or pension?

DALMADGE: No.

NELSON: Do you have any opinions or feelings about our national military status or its policies?

DALMADGE: Not really. Not really.

NELSON: Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

DALMADGE: I use to have it. I had a lot of trouble with my ears from flying but after about 10 years of fighting with them, I gave up.

NELSON: You've answered the next question. Have you ever gone to a VA Hospital or Medical Service?

DALMADGE: I have never gone to the hospital but originally, right after the war, if you had anything at all, they would make sure it was taken care of. After a year or two they forgot about that situation and—I had a situation with my ear drum that had been taken out of place due to some altitude flying and dive bombing, so that has always been a problem with mine. But after about 10 years, they refused to do anything about it. I gave up. I'm not happy with the way they treated it, but that's the way it goes.

NELSON: Would you like to tell us about your family support during your military life.

DALMADGE: Yes. There were 5 of us in the service, 5 brothers during that time. Some got in at the tail end but there were 4 of us in practically 3 years or so and the youngest brother, he went in at the beginning of 1945. We were pretty well involved with it. The whole family—my sisters used to write and my mother. So we were pretty much of a family tied up with this war.

NELSON: Okay. Over subsequent years what has this support meant to you?

DALMADGE: Oh, well, it was what I expected. It was what America used to be at one time. You supported people who were in the military and supported the wars the government got involved in. Whether they were good or bad or what. That's the way we were brought up—the way I was brought up.

*This appears to be the end of the interview.
There is no "sign off."*