

INTERVIEW

Glenn Dohrmann

YEAR

2005

GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: Glenn Dohrmann

DATE: November 30, 2005

PLACE: Ensign, Kansas

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Suellentrop

PROJECT SERIES: Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

Glenn Dohrmann enlisted in the Air Force and was trained as a B24 aircraft mechanic. He served as a line chief in the United States servicing and repairing the large planes with a crew serving under him. His crew also trained crews for wartime. The responsibilities of his work affected his health and he had surgery for ulcers after his discharge. Returning with his wife and daughter to the family farm after the war, he raised his family in Gray County.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Entering the service and training and life as a line chief over a crew of mechanics that served in the United States repairing and servicing aircraft. The training he helped to give to crews on the B24 and later on the B29 for wartime service were discussed. His return home after the war to farm on the family farm was discussed.

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

SOUND RECORDINGS: 60 minute tape

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 1 hour

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: none

TRANSCRIPT: 15 pages

ORAL HISTORY
Dohrmann, Glenn
Interview Date: November 30, 2005

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Glenn Dohrmann (GD)
Tape 1 of 1
Side A

JS - Do you remember where you were, what you were doing when the war started in 1939? When the war in Europe started, you would have been about 20 years old, right?

GD - I can remember that I was on a trip when the war broke out in the Pacific. That is the one I remember.

JS - That's what you remember?

GD - That was in December of '41.

JS - Do you remember, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Did you think, then, that you would enlist? You must have thought so since you enlisted right after that.

GD - There were three of us boys that went through together. We enlisted at the same time.

JS - As soon as that happened, you just felt that you wanted to. Do you remember what your parents thought?

GD - They didn't care about me going, but it was all right after I enlisted and got there.

JS - The other two young men you had gone to school with and you all decided to go together?

GD - Yes.

JS - You wanted to go into the Air Force?

GD - Yes, they both went into the Air Force, too.

JS - We will probably return to see if you were able to stay with them.

GD - No.

JS - You couldn't?

GD - No.

JS - When you enlisted, where did you go to enlist?

GD - I think it was Liberal.

JS - You got your physical and were sworn in and where did you go to boot camp?

GD - We went to Wichita Falls, Texas. That's where we went to basic and that is where I was involved in maintenance on aircraft. I went to school down there.

JS - After the basic training?

GD - Yes.

JS - What do you remember about basic training?

GD - You got a lot of exercise is all I know. I can remember when we went into Wichita Falls that the group that I was in got along fine. Another group broke rank and got in a lot of trouble. Other than that, that's about all I remember.

JS - Was it hard to follow orders and obey?

GD - I got used to it.

JS - Were your two friends with you during basic training?

GD - No, we got split up. They went on different aircraft than what I did. I think when we left Wichita Falls they went to California. One was on B17s and the other was on another type of aircraft.

JS - Why did you want to join the Air Force rather than the army?

GD - My first thought was to crew an aircraft, but I got into a new outfit. Eventually, I got to crew one for thirty days and that didn't last very long. They put me in as flight chief and a short time after that as line chief.

JS - Could you describe what a flight chief and a line chief would do? What were the duties?

GD - We had to make sure that the aircraft was ready for maintenance in both areas and ready for flight. That everything was taken care of before they left the ground.

JS - When you were the flight chief, you had a crew under you?

GD - Yes, they had a maintenance list and they had to take care of what ever was written up on the aircraft.

JS - Was it a particular kind of aircraft?

GD - B24s for three and a half years and the last six months I was on B29s.

JS - So you know the B24 very well?

GD - Yes.

JS - After boot camp or basic training, you went to training for maintenance, right? What did that consist of?

GD - We worked on engines and got acquainted with what the involvement was on aircraft and aircraft engines.

JS - Was this at Wichita Falls, also?

GD -Yes.

JS - How long was that training?

GD - I think the school was six months.

JS - During the day you went to classes. In the evenings did you have liberty or time off?

GD - Very little liberty at that time, we had more later on when I went from there to San Diego to B24 School. After B24 School I was shipped to Utah. I was put in a squadron there then to Clovis, New Mexico, Tucson, and finally wound up in Chatham Hill, Georgia. That's about the size of it.

JS - Those places that you mentioned would have had airbases that B24s flew back to and then flew out?

GD - We trained combat crews especially when we were on the East Coast. We trained combat crews and I put myself on Cadbury different times to go out and they marked me off. They said we need you more in training as a chief. That's what we did then.

JS - When you trained a combat crew, what was the training?

GD - We kept the aircraft in shape so that they could fly their missions. They had so many missions to fly and when they were eligible, they were sent overseas.

JS - When you were maintaining the planes, did that mean maintaining the guns on that plane?

GD - No, what we did was take care of the aircraft itself, worked on the engines and whatever was on the aircraft. The guns were done by artillery and we had specialists like prop specialists and different specialists like that that took care of different areas.

JS - When you went to B24 School that was very particular training for that particular aircraft. Could you describe the B24?

GD - If I am thinking right it had a 1230 Pratt-Whitney engine, fuel engines and turbos that they had on them. We had a crew that changed turbos when they needed it. Other than that, there were specialists like electricians that took care of some areas. We were mainly maintenance on the aircraft itself.

JS - Was there a certain amount of time a B24 could fly and then they knew it was time for maintenance or did they have a schedule?

GD - They had a maintenance schedule. Certain things had to be checked in so many hours, but I don't remember what all that was.

JS - Would your work shift be during the day and was there just one shift of maintenance?

GD - They finally got to where we were on night or day. We were on maybe night 12 hour shift for a month. About the time you got to the point where you could rest, why, they would switch you. That is, basically, the way it was.

JS - You named several bases that you went to. Did you have a favorite or one location that you liked better than the others?

GD - The one I remember most about was Camp Chatham, Georgia. We were there, I think, longer and that's where I had more responsibility, too.

JS - Did you ask to be put in maintenance?

GD - Yes I did.

JS - Because before the war, you were raised on a farm and knew a lot about mechanics?

GD - Yes.

JS - The B24 was one of the most important planes during the war was that correct?

GD - Yes, that and the B17.

JS - Do you have any idea how many different planes you saw during your experience? In a given shift would you be working on one plane a number of days or how did that work?

GD - No, it just took a certain amount of time unless there was something different. There were times when it came time for an engine change. Of course, we didn't do that. That went to the central area where they changed engines. Other than that, it was just general maintenance.

JS - Would the crew of that B24 bring the plane in or would it be brought in by someone else? I mean, did the crew that flew the plane bring it to you?

GD - They would fly it in and land it and when it needed maintenance, we would take to the area where we did maintenance. We had tugs, etc., that we could pull it with.

JS - Were any of the planes coming from Europe or the Pacific?

GD - B24s were mainly in Europe. When B29s came in they went the other way.

JS - The bases we had in Europe could not do the maintenance so that is why they flew them back to the United States?

GD - They did maintenance on them over there. It depended where they were mainly. Our main job was to keep the aircraft in shape and train combat crews.

JS - Did you feel pressured to do the job in a certain amount of time because of the need for the crews?

GD - At times there was pressure; most of the time it was just general.

JS - You said you worked on B24s most of the time and at the end what?

GD - Last six months we worked on B29s.

JS - Which did you like best?

GD - B24s.

JS - Why?

GD - Because the B29s had Wright engines on them and they had a habit of leaking oil down in the lower cylinder. If you didn't turn it just so, somebody could go in and hit the starter and twist the cylinder off. They leaked oil down in there. They were good engines, but that was one bad thing about them that I didn't like. They did lots and lots of flying, though.

JS - Were they larger than the B24?

GD - Yes they were.

JS - Do you have a particular memory or story of working on a plane that maybe was a little unusual that you tell; maybe running into a particular person when you are talking about World War Two that you tell?

GD - Not that I think of.

JS - Let's go to the experience of joining the service. Was that the first time that you had left home and how did you feel about leaving home?

GD - It was something to get used to especially when they would come in early in the morning and have a stick or something inside of a garbage can to wake you up. Do you know how that would sound? The thing that bothered me more was line up and wait. Other than that, I didn't really have any problems.

JS - What about the food?

GD - The food was normally good.

JS - Would it have been what you would have eaten at home?

GD - No, but it was usually pretty decent. It kind of depends on the cook that was in charge. Some days were better than others.

JS - You were with young men from all over the United States. How was the experience of meeting all these young men from other areas?

GD - Most of the time it was pretty decent. We had one or two that I can remember that caused some problems. One of them would forget to shower. We finally put him in the shower and used GI brushes on him.

JS - I'll bet he didn't forget after that.

GD - No, he didn't.

JS - What is a GI brush?

GD - It's what you scrub the floor with.

JS - Was it metal?

GD - No, just a brush about that long with stiff bristles. He had some hurting areas on him. We had GI soap too.

JS - What is GI soap?

GD - It is kind of like my mom used to make.

JS - Like lye soap?

GD - Yes.

JS - So, you were issued the brush and the soap?

GD - Our barracks was full of them.

JS - What did you wear and were you responsible for taking care of your clothes? What did you wear when you worked on planes?

GD - We had regular GI clothes that were issued to us. Most of the time we could send them out and get them laundered.

JS - Did you have to pay for that or was that a service that was provided?

GD - I think it was a service that we had.

JS - Did you have a uniform that you wore?

GD - Yes.

JS - Where would you wear the uniform?

GD - On special occasions and to go off the base; you had to be in uniform to go off the base.

JS - When you went off the base, what did you do?

GD - Normally, a lot of times when I was off the base it would be on weekends and I would go to church. I had buddies that I ran around with and we might go and eat off the base and things like that.

JS - Do you remember how much pay you got per month?

GD - Twenty-one dollars I would have left and it finally got up to \$158. If I would fly four hours a month I got half base pay. When my wife was with me, I got a little more.

JS - Were you married when you enlisted?

GD - No, I enlisted in January and in April, I wasn't supposed to be more than twenty-five miles from the base and I came home. I got married in the middle of the night and went back. Later on she came with me. I think it was in Pueblo, Colorado.

JS - So you were in Wichita Falls and you drove up here and nobody ever found out?

GD - I didn't get in any trouble.

JS - Was that risky?

GD - Yes, it kind of was.

JS - Why couldn't you go more than twenty-five miles from base?

GD - That was the rule at that time. There were three or four of us that came home. I came home with another boy that had a car.

JS - How long were you off the base, like 24 hours?

GD - It wasn't very long.

JS - You had already planned to get married so you could get married and go right back?

GD - Yeah, she had the license and all.

JS - Where did you get married?

GD - In Dodge City, she got the license in Cimarron. She was in nurses' training. She wasn't supposed to marry while she was in training so she had to get it over there so they wouldn't find out she wasn't supposed to marry, but we showed them.

JS - It evidently turned out all right.

GD - Yes, we have been married fifty-three years.

JS - It was a good decision. So you went back and she continued her nurses' training?

GD - Yes.

JS - Then when you were in Pueblo, she joined you?

GD - Yes, she worked out there as a nurse.

JS - It was all right for her to be married then?

GD - Yes, as long as she passed her test as an RN she could go anywhere, then.

JS - Did she work on the base or in a regular hospital?

GD - She worked in Pueblo hospital.

JS - When you received your money, did you send that money home to her, save it or what would you have kept?

GD - When I got the money, she was with me.

JS - What did you have to buy when you were in the army, not food or clothing, but just personal items, like toiletries, etc.?

GD - No that was all furnished. If you lived on the base most everything was furnished.

JS - Were most of the men married or not?

GD - I'd say half of them were.

JS - The army really didn't frown on that. They just didn't want you to leave the base for long?

GD - That's right.

JS - When you said you flew four hour, you received what?

GD - Half base pay.

JS - And you would be flying, why?

GD - I would fly with a crew. One time we were down close to New Mexico and they flew me over the place here on their training flight. I got along real good

with them, especially the flight crew. If a maintenance man wanted to go with them, why, they were enthused about that.

JS - When you were doing the work, did you hear stories about the war in Europe and the Pacific?

GD - Not too much. We would hear through the news what was going on over there. Like the Rumanian oil fields, that was a bad time.

JS - Rumanian?

GD - That's where they went in low and didn't have things together and the bombs from the first plane would maybe blow up the second one.

JS - Do you remember what year that was?

GD - No, not really

JS - So you kept up with what was going on in the war. Did you listen to the radio or have newspapers or what?

GD - Oh yes, we had radios.

JS - You went in, in '42 and got out in '45. During that time did your feeling about the war change or what was your feeling about the war?

GD - The main reason I wanted to get out was to come home and help my parents, really. We had some problems on the flight line. We had three majors that were trying to tell us what to do and everybody had different ideas. That didn't set very well with me.

JS - Did you think the training that you received was sufficient?

GD - Yes.

JS - When you had to move from the B24 to the B29 did you have to be trained for that or could you just move to them?

GD - They brought them in there on the base where the B24s were and we more or less read up on what needed to be done to make an acquaintance with the aircraft. By having been around the B24, it wasn't too hard to change over.

JS - Anything else you can think of about working on those planes that would be important to record about the maintenance of those planes?

GD - I don't think so. We had good crews.

JS - Did you have any difficulty getting your supplies or equipment that you needed?

GD - Not really. I know one time when we were down in Georgia, I had told the engine officer that we needed to change an engine and he said, "We can't, they are too critical." They were flying to Cuba when the weather was bad up here for ten days to two weeks. On the way back it crashed. The bad part was, I had two good buddies on there and one of them was expecting a baby. When it was born, he never did know about it. That is just life, the way it happens.

JS - That sort of brings home the importance of maintenance in your job. You realized when you were doing maintenance on the planes, how important that was?

GD - Yes.

JS - Most of the parts and equipment that you were dealing with were made in the United States, right? Were the planes manufactured in the United States or other places?

GD - Yes, B29 was Boeing. Come to think of it, I think there was a school for Boeing in Washington. For two weeks, I took a crew up there. Other than that I went to B24 School and B29 later on. I had forgotten about that. About everything was taken care of here.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Glenn Dohrmann (GD)
Tape 1 of 1
Side B

JS - Some of the men I have talked to were overseas and their mail was censored. Was your mail censored that you wrote?

GD - No, my folks used to send us stuff, like they sent a washing machine when we were down in Georgia. They sent us cured hams and mother sent us cookies.

JS - Did you get leave to come home during that time?

GD - When we changed from Clovis, New Mexico, to the East Coast I got to come home. Besides getting married, that was about the size of it.

JS - Is there a person you worked with or an officer, maybe a good friend that you worked with that you remember?

GD - Yes, Luke was his name. He was a warrant officer and a real good friend.

JS - What is a warrant officer?

GD - It is more or less under a lieutenant.

JS - Did you keep in touch with any of the people that you knew after you got out of the service?

GD - Some boys up in the northwest, we kept in touch for awhile, but that finally just stopped. One friend I had, lived in the state of Washington. He stayed in the service for thirty years and ninety days. He was a warrant officer. He and I worked together for a long time.

JS - Did you ever think of making the service a career?

GD - Not really, if I hadn't had this farm to come back to it might have been different.

JS - Where were you when the war ended in Europe, do you remember that? It would have been in May of '45.

GD - I would have had to be at Chatham Hill in Georgia.

JS - Do you remember anything special about hearing about it or what the feelings were?

GD - Oh yes, we celebrated, but other than that I don't remember.

JS - What about the victory in Japan, VJ Day or the dropping of the bomb?

GD - That was quite a remembrance too.

JS - Did you have any idea that we had the atomic bomb before it was dropped?

GD - No.

JS - Was there any disagreement about it at the time?

GD - After what they did to us over there, I don't think so.

JS - How do you think joining the service and serving while the United States was in the war; how do you think that experience changed you and what was significant about it?

GD - The only thing it did to me was give me a nice bunch of ulcers and I had to have 65% of my stomach taken out after I got out. That's kind of how I paid for it.

JS - Were the ulcers caused from stress?

GD - Yes.

JS - What was the stress from?

GD - What we worked with. We had airplanes that crashed right on the base and we had to help get them out. Things were pretty tense once in a while.

JS - Even though you were not fighting, you encountered death and injury and crisis?

GD - Oh yes.

JS - I guess I wouldn't have realized that.

GD - We had one aircraft blow up at Clovis, New Mexico, and killed everyone, but one of the boys on it. What really got to me was to have to go out and cut the chutes off those boys, the way they were burnt. It opened and closed doors all over the base. It blew up right after it took off.

JS - When an accident like that would happen would there be an investigation? I mean, now, when anything crashes, immediately there is an investigation.

GD - There was, I guess, but I don't remember anything about it. Most of what we had was human error, too. We had one aircraft that came in and the tower called him and said, "You are coming in on top of another aircraft, pull up and go around." I said when he pulled up, "He's going to go down. He didn't have his turbos on." He wasn't full power and he did. One time another one of them took off and he pulled the lever on the landing gear too quick and it went down like that. It stopped two engines on one side and the other two were setting up in the air running. The fuel was that deep on the ground and I had a fellow put me up in the cockpit from the outside and open a window and pull the master controls to shut them down. I knew if they hit the battery switch we would all blow up. We had several others too.

JS - Those were difficult times and the way you handled it, you just felt the stress and it was exhibited in your receiving the ulcers. Were you treated for the ulcers at the time?

GD - I more or less had to put up with them till I got home and they kept getting worse and they finally had to operate. They kind of run in the family. My mother had ulcers, too.

JS - Certainly your experience didn't help it at all?

GD - No.

JS - Describe what you felt when you came home. You were coming back to a family farm, is that right? You were married and with your family; what did you think as you got out of the service about your future and the future of the world?

GD - Well, I was pretty much relieved to get home and get lined out. We had one daughter at that time.

JS - In your family was there a tradition of serving in the military? For example had your father fought in World War One?

GD - No, when he was five years old he ran into a barbed wire fence and stuck a barb in his eye so he only had one eye and that was the reason he couldn't go, but my wife's dad went. I think there were six boys in my wife's family. She is the oldest of twelve. They were all in the service.

JS - In World War Two?

GD - World War Two. The dad was in "One" and the boys in "Two".

JS - Were they in the same branches of service or did they serve together?

GD - They were different; I think one was in the Air Force and the others were in the army.

JS - I know, now, the government has sort of a regulation against so many brothers serving together.

GD - Yeah, they weren't together. They were in the service, but split up. I had two sisters and one had a husband in the navy. My older sister had a husband who was an engineer on a B29 and he was over in the South Pacific. We have seen a lot.

JS - It was just the expected thing to do. I know it is difficult to define what patriotism is. How would you define what being a patriot is or realizing or knowing or thinking it was your duty to fight?

GD - I feel like we want to keep things as calm as we can over here. I'd a lot rather be over there than here. I think it is our duty to take care of our home.

JS - Do you think there is anything else that future generations will want to or should know because it is possible that students will be reviewing this information or historians etc. Is there anything else that you think of?

GD - I don't really think so.

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END